

THE TWILIGHT PEOPLE

Inject some new life into your tired campaign races. Introduce your players to the new breed of Elf.



NOTES

As both a player and a GM, I sometimes get a bit tired of the same old stereo-types which inevitably inhabit fantasy campaigns. From system to system and world to world, certain clichés crop up time and again. The most obvious is that of the Elf. Beginning with Tolkien, elves are always portrayed as the most god-like of races. They are beautiful, immortal and in tune with the world around them; free spirits, they are given as the model against which all other races are measured. Being naturally perverse, I want to change all that by introducing you to a new breed of Elf: The Twilight People; not perfect in any sense, they are both tragic and desperate. The Twilight People can be used as a starting background for new campaigns or something to slot into an ongoing campaign. It should at least provide some background colour to adventures, and might make your players give some more thought to the motivations of their flaxen-haired characters.

THE GREAT DYING

The Elven world has suffered a blow from which it will never recover. Never prolific, the number of elven babies born declined rapidly, each generation producing less and less offspring, until finally in what came to be known as The Year of The Great Dying, the last elven baby was born.

Elves are an immortal race, and so their population growth has always been slow, partly through choice; a certain equilibrium population was maintained as very few elves actually died of old age. Elders grew 'tired of life' and thus passed away through choice, leaving younger elves to take their places. Others were slain in battles or accidents. Part of elven culture is a belief in re-incarnation: elders are eventually re-born as their own ancestors, the number of elven souls is limited to a set number. At any one time it was believed that some souls were in a physical incarnation, the others in a limbo or heaven awaiting rebirth. This 'self-euthanasia' was a vital part of elven life. Their culture a constant celebration of youth and re-birth.

When the decline in elven numbers was finally noticed, it was too far gone to correct, even had the cause been known; all manner of sorceries and magicks were tried to no avail, nothing could lift the curse which had fallen upon the elves. Elven society went into turmoil. Elders began to be afraid to die, gripping dearly to life, their fear of the unknown



causing them to hold death as a terrifying reality. With no new births, the number of elves has gradually begun to diminish; the youngest elves are those born in the Year of The Great Dying. The shock waves which reverberated through elven culture has caused untold damage to the society; cherished beliefs seem as nothing, altruistic values are being rejected for more selfish self-preservation: without a prospect of re-birth an elf is now limited to a single life span.

THE YOUNG

The change in elven culture has affected the youngest members of society the most; traditional teachings hold little value and are rejected for baser drives. The Young (those born

in that fateful year) are distanced from the elders, they have no use for thoughts of re-incarnation, nor of building or expansion. Posterity no longer has any meaning. These elves live only for themselves, they will have no children to whom they can pass on great works of magic, art or law. They are faced with an eternity in which their friends all will slowly die. They hold nothing dear except the moment; it is all they can afford to believe in. Living moment to moment they have begun to regress to more barbaric values, giving rise to The Painted Ones, gangs of wild elves. As the last members of their race, the Young are forgiven much by their elders who turn a blind eye to their excesses. The elders cherish them, it is all they can do. Many transgressions which may normally

have brought swift retribution in bygone days, are now ignored if committed by the Young.

To these youngest elves is given the task of watching the whole of elven society slowly crumble and collapse, to fade away into history. Though immortal, no elf can hope to avoid danger long enough to live his full span. Dying, slowly but surely, the elves now call themselves The Twilight People.

THE ELDERS

Gripping hard to the life they have, no longer able to look forward to a future existence, the elders can no longer afford to spend their days teaching and lecturing; self-preservation is the only important work undertaken. If there are no souls being reborn into the world then what has happened to all those beings who inhabit the heavens, have they ceased to exist? The worlds beyond the boundary of death have been a dark unknown. Yet some still hold out hope and believe, against all reason, that eventually a new elven baby will be born. Some still cling to their lives, rocked to the core of their beings by the terrible events which have befallen them. Whether crazed by the thought of dying, or grimly accepting fate, these few continue to live life as before, ignoring realities.

Others have turned to the other races in the hope that they can leave something behind, some trace of their existence by aiding the lives and futures of others. This has inevitably led to clashes; accused of interfering, the other races have rejected their help, perhaps through pride, perhaps through fear that the taint may spread. Maddened elven women have even begun to steal the babes from human mothers, pretending that the mewling infants are really their own. Relations with the other races have grown strained, unable to comprehend the disaster that has occurred, they see only a race gone mad. Turbulent times have ensued

THE PAINTED ONES

Young ones all, these gangs of elven youths have reverted to a shadowy ancestral way of life; becoming fierce hunters and killers, they live only for the thrill of life. Death is no longer a distant fear, it is inevitable. They choose to seek thrill after thrill in the attempt to experience in one lifetime what would normally be spread over many. The excesses of the Painted Face gangs (so called because of their use of ancient tribal warpaint) are horrible in the extreme. Roaming the countryside they attack and pillage one town, and carouse in the next. Unpredictable and dangerous, the fear they inspire precedes them across the countryside. Rejecting all societies they have become a force for destruction and of chaos.

If introduced at the beginning of a campaign, a character could be either from the elder part of society or the young. This will radically change that character's motivations and also actions. A player may even choose to play a member of a Painted Face tribe, this will need close supervision by the GM so that gameplay is not unbalanced. What I hope to achieve here is a new way of detailing elven characters, not a license for backstabbing by players. Ongoing campaigns into which the idea is introduced can develop it in a number of ways. The events may have been occurring in the background, with the players suddenly becoming aware of their extent. Introduced from the beginning, players may become involved in the search for a cure to the Great Dying, later events being added, if and when needed. For example, whilst scouring the lands for a mage that may be



able to help, the players may come across rumours of elves pillaging the countryside.

Another way of manipulating this idea is to have all these events many hundreds of years in the past, only a few solitary elves left to walk the planet. Would they have sought each other out, to live their final days together, or would they prefer isolation avoiding the added grief of watching yet another member of their once proud race fade away? A whole series of adventures could revolve around the search for one of these last few Twilight People, perhaps to seek ancient knowledge or to plead for their aid. Such elves are likely to be cowardly, they may still live for ages if they can avoid accidents, or perhaps they are whirling dervishes, berserkers who welcome battle in the hope that death will eventually take them.

The most interesting part of this new background is that the splits caused in elven society have given rise to two main bodies, which when looked at more conventionally can be seen as Light elves (elders) and Dark elves (the Young). The difference here is one of outlook. To my mind it is appealing as it emphasises that elves are 'only human' and have failings like all others. Muddying the waters, they can no longer be seen as a purely 'good' race, different elements in their society can be accused of different failings and different crimes. The Young can be accused of the worst excesses, and the Elders of leniency and unwarranted tolerance.

This background also allows for the creation of some very different elven characters. Firstly, the older elves (elders) may be seen as tragic figures, perhaps clinging to their lives as all around them fades away, perhaps they are desperate people, hell-bent on finding a cure for their race. Young characters may be maddened members of Painted Face gangs or sorrowful youths striving to live to decaying standards which are no longer

relevant. The effects on other races may also vary. The Great Dying may be a catastrophe known throughout the worlds, or a closely guarded secret passed on to few. All that any none elf may know is that strange behaviour has begun to be seen. If such a secret was discovered by ancient enemies (orcs, dwarves whatever) then they may seize the initiative and attempt to wipe out the remaining elves whilst they are disarrayed.

In terms of game mechanics, the new background will probably have very little effect on skills, character classes etc. However depending on your level of interest you may want to consider some ways that these elements may be affected. The actual details will depend largely on the system that you are using; for example in RuneQuest, where there are no character classes as such, skills will alter, whilst in AD&D changes may occur at the level of the character class. Again, the changes will be different depending upon which part of elven society the character comes from. A Young character is unlikely to have many knowledge skills such as history or crafts, simply because of their disdain for traditional schooling. Character classes for Young elves will probably be Warriors, or Thieves rather than suffer the long drawn out apprenticeships involved in becoming a Bard or Mage. These are only a couple of ideas, and you should feel free to adopt them or create your own depending on your campaign style.

Possessed of a hundred different uses, this new background for the elven race should slot easily into any and every fantasy gaming world. I've deliberately left the details vague so that individual GMs can adopt it according to style and taste. By the way the idea is adapted from the P.D. James novel 'Children of Men'; a very good book and worthy of a read. If you're looking for something a bit different then give this a try, it should prove to be a refreshing change.