

# Elves and Elements: An Edification for the Everyman

Samuel Fotherington-Smythe

Fifth of September, Eighth Year of the Second Era

## Abstract

Our esteemed colleagues have undertaken a number of fascinating observations of the people known as, to use the collective term originally given by our ancestors, ‘elvenfolk’. In this document, we attempt to unify and summarise their findings on the subject of these mysterious creatures, with the ultimate and noble goal of presenting both a succinct introduction to the topic for the gentle reader, and an easy reference for future academic endeavours.

## 1 Introduction

Remarkable recent progress in scientific knowledge has seen renewed attempts to study, understand and catalog the flora [1, 2], fauna [3, 4] and phenomena [5, 6, 7] of the world we inhabit. In response, the good public has become ever more inquisitive, instinctively seeking answers to centuries-old questions and conundrums that have previously gone without sufficient explanation. Of course, some of these unresolved issues are based on little more than superstition or an over-active imagination – do not underestimate one’s ability to confuse fiction and reality!

However, lest we appear overly eager to dismiss, we must keep in mind that particular works of fiction may contain some hint of unlikely truths within. In this paper, we will attempt to impart some much-needed illumination on the subject of elvenfolk, and since the oldest writings pertaining to the subject (at least, those of relevance) are fantastical storytales, we will begin our explanation in the realms of fiction and ancient hearsay and thence attempt to progress toward recent discoveries in an orderly and agreeable fashion.

## 2 The Current State of Affairs

Arthur Tarry’s classic tale [8] of heroes battling against seemingly impossible odds appears, on the surface, to be nothing more than a standard fantasy tale of the forces of light versus those of darkness. Beyond this, however, it is notable as being the first known written work to describe elvenfolk (one of the adventurer protagonists is an elf, or ‘ælf’ to use Tarry’s own word), at least insofar as matching the stereotypical impression we have of the race – there are older references to elves (or equivalent terminology in other languages), but as the creatures in those accounts bear little resemblance to the ones we are referring to, we will grant them no further consideration here.

Tarry’s mention of elves may appear to be of little importance, but the author himself always vigorously maintained that his writings were inspired by his actual life experiences – a stalwart position that earned him copious amounts of ridicule. Other individuals have told similar tales [9, 10] since then, some taller than others (the tales, that is; not the individuals!), of their own sightings of these creatures. These accounts were predictably met with much similar disbelief; elvenfolk are an elusive lot, and it is a difficult task for one to convince a sceptical audience of the existence of something they cannot directly witness for themselves.

Recently, the very notion of the existence of these creatures has been blessed with additional credibility, due to our newly discovered capability to record still images with technological wonders such as the portable dark chamber device [11] (or ‘camera’ as it is becoming informally known), and later present these recordings as pictorial evidence. Incidentally, no such pictures are included here, so one may wish to peruse some of the author’s other fine works [12] for gratification of this nature. Suffice it to say that, given the numerous similarities between the creatures surveyed recently and those described in past literature, one cannot help but feel that some of these storytellers were treated harshly in retrospect.

At this point we should note that, although it is often considered rather improper to refer to the arcane arts within a formal scientific paper such as this (a taboo which is slowly wilting away, much to the author’s

satisfaction), our subjects are inherently mysterious and magical creatures and we must give due mention to arcane considerations if we wish to present an adequately thorough account. With this in mind, we observe that while it may be feasible for an accomplished practitioner of the arcane arts to scry on remote locations through the use metaphysical portals, the difficulty of finding an elven subject coupled with their sensitivity to magical manifestations makes them incredibly hard to observe in this manner without scaring them off! Conversely, although technology and magic are disciplines that naturally oppose one another (and the usage of one often causes the other to inexplicably malfunction! [13]), in this particular scenario technological means are necessary to observe a subject that is inherently magical in nature – perhaps the reverse will hold true in certain future endeavours, with magical means being necessary to observe particularly uncooperative technological phenomena.

## 2.1 Classical versus Contemporary

Let us pause to consider elvenfolk as according to our predecessors. They are universally described as similar to human-beings in their appearance, albeit possessing elongated ears with a narrow tip, and a more delicate and slight frame. Other aspects of their physique are less consistent – for example, some accounts indicate that they are shorter than the average human counterpart, while others suggest they are taller. They are typically described as being often found in forests, and having profound respect for the plants and animals that reside nearby. Finally, they are almost always portrayed as a dignified, peaceful and respectable race.

Recent research paints a picture which agrees with the classical definition in some regards while starkly contrasting in others. In particular, we are beginning to find that the elven race is actually composed of many distinct subspecies, each with their own unique physical and psychological make-up [14]. Some of these subspecies are closer to the accounts in past writings than others. These subspecies are sufficiently diverse that, in extreme cases, the only obvious thing two elves may have in common with each other is the possession of a set of pointy ears!

The reasons for this discrepancy between our existing beliefs and recent discoveries are the subject of much lively debate, but there in essence two main schools of thought:

1. Past observations were either wrong (mayhap unintentionally, mayhap overly romanticised for the purposes of more engrossing storytelling) or formed from a simplified amalgamation of the different subspecies that we see today.
2. Today's elvenfolk evolved from the form observed by our forefathers, with subspecies branching away from the generic 'pure' elf based on some need to adapt or attune to their immediate surroundings.

Regardless of the exact reason for the disparity between our preconceptions of these creatures and their actual present state, it grows increasingly likely that the natural environment has had a profound influence on the development of elven subspecies. Put simply, elves that exist in a particular habitat for any extended amount of time gradually take on characteristics that reflect that habitat, presumably as a form of adaptation to their surroundings that resembles the evolutionary change that occurs in other living organisms, albeit a more exaggerated version thereof.

## 2.2 Elements derived from the Environment

Our colleagues' latest research indicates that there are no less than five environmental categories that elves inherit their characteristics from. These categories are henceforth referred to as elements, not through any great similarity to chemical elements, but rather because of a likeness they bear to certain concepts of elements within the arcane arts [15].

To simplify the naming process considerably, we refer to elves that exhibit the elemental properties of, say, water as 'Water Elves', wood as 'Wood Elves', and so forth.

### 2.2.1 Wood

Wood Elves are found in forested areas, harmoniously co-existing with the wildlife one would expect to find in such a habitat. Their physical appearance is fascinating, being of unusually tall and bulky stature and having a rough-grained skin that is akin to the bark of a tree! Their actions are slow and considered, as if it takes a great deal of energy for them to initiate any kind of activity – however, once underway, they are incredibly tenacious and require some significant obstruction to prevent their progress.

Amateur elf-spotters, take note! This subspecies is the most easy to observe, given that they are slow to flee from prying eyes; in fact, the only way they are likely to avoid being seen is by remaining motionless and blending in with their surroundings.

### **2.2.2 Fire**

Fire Elves are more commonly found in desert environments, although there have been reported sightings in proximity to volcanoes; presumably they may be found anywhere where there is a source of extreme heat. They are physically unremarkable, although their hair and eyes tend toward bright, warm reddish-yellow hues. Emotionally they are much more interesting, being incredibly complex and unpredictable even at the best of times. By default they appear timid and retiring, which is perhaps surprising when one considers that fire and heat are usually connected with outright aggression – however, when one considers the ease with which, say, a candle can be snuffed out, this behaviour begins to make more sense.

Some accounts suggest that, when angered or encouraged in some other way (accidentally or otherwise), Fire Elves can go into a berserk rage and become highly dangerous to all around them, friend and foe alike. Given the potentially destructive nature of the element their characteristics are inherited from, these accounts are likely to be at least partly true. As such, one would be well advised to exhibit caution in the unlikely event of encountering one of these creatures!

### **2.2.3 Water**

Water Elves have been witnessed both close to large bodies of water and also in places where there is a significant amount of rainfall. They are easy on the eye and, by comparison to certain of the other elf subspecies, have no notable physical abnormalities or significant traits, save for shimmering hair and eyes that possess uniquely aquatic hues. They have a soft and kind demeanour, showing genuine concern for the welfare of others; and, whether due to their pleasant appearance or warm personality, they have a unique radiance that draws others to them.

Unsurprisingly, Water Elves are extremely comfortable in the water. They are not water-dwelling creatures per se, although there have been scattered accounts of similar creatures with fins and a fish-like tail instead of legs. These sightings are unconfirmed, but could there be a connection between these creatures and the ‘mermaids’ typically found in fantasy literature, thus proving another mythical creature to be real in some sense?

### **2.2.4 Metal**

Metal Elves are perhaps the most difficult subspecies to describe, as they are found in the most unpredictable of locations and composed of the most diverse individuals. They are angular in appearance, with hair formed into sharp-looking clumps and skin of various unusual colours and unexpected shine. It appears that their exact appearance is influenced heavily by the type of metal they are individually influenced by; those that inherit their characteristics from, say, steel would take on a cool-gray hue and have great resilience, while gold- or silver-based variants would be suitably attractive but probably not useful for a great deal else – although one might not wish to say such a thing directly to them!

As a rule of thumb, Metal Elves are straight-forward and entirely dependable, but extremely socially awkward; they convey little emotion, demonstrate no empathy, and have no understanding of the notion of misleading others.

### **2.2.5 Air**

One has already read that elves have a reputation for being elusive, and Air Elves are perhaps the most elusive of them all (although not as elusive as any subspecies we have not yet discovered, obviously!). This is quite fitting if one considers that air itself is equally elusive, being all around and yet invisible to the naked eye. However, contrary to the difficulty one may have in locating them, Air Elves can pop up almost anywhere, although they are most prevalent in gusty locales such as open plains, beaches and waterfronts, and atop mountains and other undulous terrain.

Air Elves are physically quite unremarkable, although they are small and slight even by ‘normal’ elven standards. They compensate for this with their social presence, being extremely energetic, outgoing and, while largely friendly, they are also more than a shade mischievous. They display an uncanny aptitude for

stirring up trouble, and prove equally adept at being absent when the trouble actually starts! As such, when one observes the paradox that Air Elves are widespread and unusually bold yet remarkably hard to find, one should consider the possibility that this is another manifestation of their incessant desire to commit mischief.

### 3 Conclusion

In summary, we have presented a brief exhibition of the history of elvenfolk, at least insofar as humanity has witnessed them, and we have attempted to familiarise the gentle reader with the five known subspecies of elves.

One potential direction for future academic endeavours in this field is the further study of the interaction between these subspecies, although there are obvious difficulties with this – it is often sufficiently awkward to find and observe a singular subject, let alone attempt such a feat for several of them simultaneously!

### References

- [1] Deinhart Hetzer. Unusual plant-life of the shadow woods. In *Conference of Life and Environment Studies*. Greater Imperial University Press, May 2e2.
- [2] Ruddiger Remmington. The marshland’s flowery denizens. In *Horticultural Studies and Demonstrations*. Sizemore Scholarly Works, October 2e1.
- [3] Sir Roderick Trumpington. Understanding Grunts – “why the boxing-gloves?”. In *Conference of Life and Environment Studies*. Greater Imperial University Press, May 2e2.
- [4] Lady Louise Grey. Alternative sources of beef. In *Conference of Life and Environment Studies*. Greater Imperial University Press, May 2e2.
- [5] Sullivan Gifford and Ernest Kessler. Ghosts: Evil or simply misunderstood? In *Symposium of the Ethereal*. Memento Press, December 2e2.
- [6] Basil Rutherford esq. The Wrong Trousers: Replacing a Zombie’s standard diet with common items of clothing. In *Machines, Mysteries and the Macabre*. Greater Imperial University Press, December 2e4.
- [7] Sir Donald Appleby, Edgar Randolph Christie, and Giles Crenshaw. *Complete Encyclopedia of Magick and the Arcane Arts*. Guffingford-Royce, 1e916.
- [8] Arthur Tarry. *Run The Gauntlet*. Guffingford-Royce, 1e809.
- [9] Nigel Oscar Steppingford-Waterfield. *The Scandal of the Pointed Ears*. Underwood Classics, 1e883.
- [10] Trevor Broadshire. *Magic and Mischief*. Underwood Classics, 1e865.
- [11] Thomas Pepys. The portable dark-chamber: A means of presenting noteworthy visual images of past happenings. In *Forum of Technology*. Sizemore Scholarly Works, September 2e1.
- [12] Samuel Fotherington-Smythe. A revealing visual exhibition of elvenkind. In *Applying Modern Solutions to Ancient Problems*. Royal Archaeological Institute, March 2e6.
- [13] Endrax the Ancient. Why magic fails us: Technological comforts in the home. In *Discoveries for the Super-Modern Mage*. The Circle of the Five, February 1e977.
- [14] Cedric Fitzgerald and Samuel Fotherington-Smythe. Shattering one’s preconceptions of the elven race. In *Natural Revelations*. Sizemore Scholarly Works, November 2e6.
- [15] Endrax the Youthful. Alternative element systems: Moving beyond fire, ice, water and earth. In *Discoveries for the Modern Mage*. The Circle of the Five, February 1e892.