

Three Suggestions for...

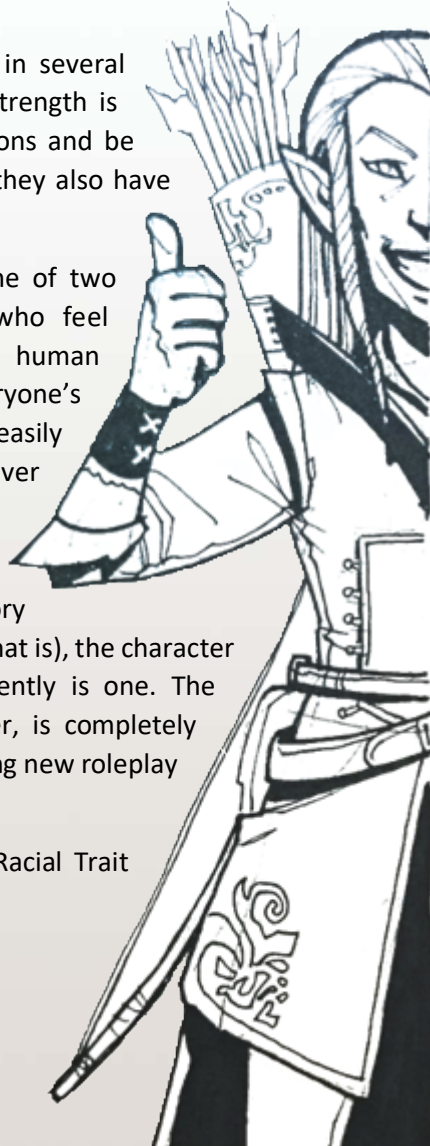
Strange Half-Elves

Half-elves are a pretty common race choice in several fantasy RPGs. Just like humans, their main strength is diversity - they can be taken in many directions and be effective in many roles - but unlike humans, they also have some useful supernatural abilities.

Culturally, half-elves tend to be placed in one of two boxes: “I belong to no nation”, outcasts who feel connected to neither their elven nor their human heritages; or the complete opposite, “Everyone’s friend”, likable and diplomatic people who can easily slip into *any* culture, feeling at home wherever they go.

Personally, I don’t like either of these – so here are a few new suggestions for the story behind the half-elf. Mechanically (rules-wise, that is), the character is built as a regular half-elf, since she currently is one. The *explanation* for her being a half-elf, however, is completely different than the one in the rulebook, providing new roleplay options, that bypass those two usual boxes.

The first two origins also come with a new Racial Trait variant.



Fairy-Touched Human

Maybe you ventured too deeply into the forbidden glades of the dark forest. Maybe you were kidnapped by fairies as a baby, and was returned to your village years later. Maybe you swore an oath to a powerful queen from the Realm of the Wilds, and that oath changed your body and soul.

Anyway, while at first you were human, now you’re half an elf. The elven heritage was injected into you sometime after you were born, maybe several years ago or maybe just moments before the game begins.

Here are a few points to consider:

- After the physical, maybe even spiritual, change you underwent, do you still “think” like a human? Still planning short-term, despite having a lifespan much longer than that of the average human; still preferring the artificial urban environment, with no special connection to Nature; probably more ambitious than an average elf, and generally, consider yourself part of Humanity. If you still see yourself as human, how do you face the fact that other humans probably think otherwise?
- What’s the connection between you and other half-elves? Do you see them as your people, or maybe as a completely different race from yourself? Maybe the question of identity isn’t important to you at all, or maybe it relates to a different race, elves: Maybe you wish to imitate them, to “complete the transition”? Or maybe the opposite, they remind you of something in yourself you consider alien?

One of Us: It’s easy for you to blend-in with human society. Being human is first nature to you, after all.

You gain proficiency with Deception, and once per day you can reroll a Deception check. You must take the new result. In addition, you have advantage on every skill check made to look human (not a specific person). This ability replaces Skill Versatility.

An Elf Who Lost the Forest

Maybe you insulted the Oak Lord, and he decided not to just banish you from his land, but also to *banish his land from within you*. Maybe during the transition from the Fairy Realm to the real world, a creature from beyond the planes stole from you some of that inherent attribute that made you a native of the Realm. Maybe “Elvishness” is a contingent attribute in this world, and in order to remain an elf you must remain within the elvish magical valleys and forests – but you’ve lived for so long in a human city that you just became less and less of an elf as time went on.

Anyway, while at first you were an elf, now you’re less elvish. This is based on a classical approach in fantasy games and literature, that treat elves as *actually better* than humans, somehow “more” than humans. Therefore, for an elf to become human-like, they must *lose* something. It can also be the other way around: Maybe you were a regular elf, and after a visit to the tomb of a human emperor, his spirit rose before you and its immense Human presence washed over you and gave you human attributes.

- Do you consider yourself lesser or better after the change? This decision can impact your adventuring life in big ways: trying to regain something that was lost, vs learning how to adapt to something new. What do your family members and other elves you meet think about your change? And if you try to settle into human society, what’s the common response you encounter from humans, and how do you react?
- What do you miss from your time as an elf? Which customs, types of foods or lifestyle choices did you have to leave behind, since you cannot participate in them anymore, or perhaps, don’t want to?

I am Myself: The day you stopped being an elf, you also decided to stop *trying* to be an elf. Or a human, or anything else – you are your own being, self-identifying as whatever you choose, not trying to fit yourself to the customs of other races.

You gain an advantage on Saving Throws made against magic that influence your mind or change your form. This ability replaces Fey Ancestry and Skill Versatility.

An Independent Race in a World with no Elves

In this campaign setting, there are no elves. So, what are half-elves? Probably a sub-race of humans. They are probably being treated as a distinct people or ethnic group, in a way that isn’t very different from the way other ethnic groups are treated – instead of a different skin colour, they have somewhat elongated ears, and are known for their longevity. Instead of feeling torn between the worlds of humans and elves, they are a natural part of the human world. However, since they still have the half-elf’s Racial Traits, maybe the members of this ethnic group see themselves as somewhat superior to the others, thanks to their natural resistances and longevity.

- What is the name of your people? Obviously not Half-Elves, since they don’t see themselves as half of anything. (Also, there are no elves in this world).
- Are you a separated nation, or do you live within other human communities? Is there some sort of common denominator between groups of half-elves beyond your physical appearance, such as an ancient historic origin, similar beliefs, or common customs?
- Where do you reside? Are you nomads, a hoard of conquering tribes, seafarers, empire builders, or something else? What are the customs and clothing styles that differentiate your people from others? In a world with no elves, there’s nothing to connect half-elves to forests and nature. They can come from anywhere and be anything, with a varied lifestyle like any human culture – but you should consider addressing the mechanical aspects that differentiate you from other humans, especially the resistance to charm and magical sleep, and the ability to see well in the dark.

No Such Thing as Elvish: In a world with no elves, there’s probably no Elvish language, and no magical items that are meant to be used by elves only. While it’s possible to just substitute all mentions of Elf for Half-Elf, that’s not recommended. You should try to keep the feeling that half-elves are just a part of the human race – or you might as well just bring back elves to the setting. If different human nations have different languages in this world, you can keep Elvish as the national language of the half-elf people. (And change its name according to *their* name, of course).



Three Suggestions for Strange Half-Elves is by Eran Aviram. Eran is the writer for Up to Four Players; the Lead Hebrew Translator for D&D and other games; produces the weekly podcast On the Shoulders of Dwarves, the main RPG podcast in Hebrew; and used to own a gaming store, it was awesome.

Drawing of a literal half-elf: Aviv Or (www.avivor.com)

Up to Four Players is a webcomic about tabletop gamers and games, by Aviv Or and Eran Aviram. Check it out: www.uptofourplayers.com

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