

# THE GODDESS WITHIN: PLAYING NYMPHS

BY JOSH GENTRY

Nymphs are a race of nature goddesses, the very souls of life-giving landforms in their multitude. The fey and the gods welcome nymphs into their courts, and mortals worship the nymphs for their grace and favor. Being the divine aspect of a specific landform, a nymph's beauty and health reflect that of her river, forest, or mountain. During a lifespan measured in geologic time, nymphs attend court with their divine relatives, defend and punish deserving mortals, and explore the world in physical form—perhaps even as adventurers.

## DIVINE BEAUTY

Nymphs in physical form resemble a human or elf endowed with the radiance of divinity. She can subdue her radiance to a mere glowing, or unleash it until her form and aura express her elemental affinity. All nymphs have female bodies, but as spirits of nature, they do not conform to concrete notions of gender. Even in bodies that appear female, nymphs drift from one identity to another, taking on male, female, or other identities at will. As capricious spirits, nymphs see mortal identities and emotions as curious clothes to change in and out of at will, and the choice to be reclusive, coy, fierce, or giving is practically a game. Her mode of attire may range from a sensible dress, to heavy armor, to nothing at all. She awakens with whatever hairstyle she desires.

## AVATAR OF NATURE

Nymphs and their landforms are one. At her option, a nymph emerges from her landform in a magically formed physical body. She can return to spiritual form by merging once again with her landform. She can do this as many times she wishes, unless prohibited by profound planar magic. While exploring the world, anything that happens to her landform—damage, growth, and gradual variations—



manifests in her appearance and health, and vice versa.

If the nymph in physical form dies, her body dissipates and her landform's vitality diminishes. Some say her spirit returns to the divine realms to recover, while others claim she goes to the Underworld like mortals. However, should her physical body fall under the curse of undeath, her landform suffers the curse in turn. And if foul magic annihilates her soul, then her landform is destroyed: her forest withers, her river evaporates, or her mountain crumbles.

## LEGACY & LOVE

As minor deities, each nymph can trace ancestry in a family tree filled with mortal heroes, horrific monsters, and the gods themselves. Whereas mortals worship gods from afar, nymphs have met divine figures face-to-face, such as during service in a major god's entourage or on a pilgrimage. Some nymphs keep their family ties quiet, while others preach and prophesy on their relative's behalf. Adventuring nymphs pass by innumerable sisters hidden in landform, but to point them out to mortals would be a breach of confidence.

In love, nymphs only fear other divine forces, but they are cautious of mortal folly. It is extraordinarily rare for a nymph to marry, but they do not hesitate to join body and heart with beings they deem worthy. Legend notes that nymphs choose individuals from the entire variety of being, but it is absurd for a mortal to judge a goddess. Pregnancy may occur from any such union, regardless of species or gender. The daughters of nymphs are always nymphs, but a nymph's son is the same manner of being as his father.

## Nymphs and the Gods

The nymphs presented here are modeled on Greek mythology, which works well for most campaign settings. If your world features a great distinction between the "gods of civilization" and the "gods of nature," then perhaps your nymphs would favor the druidic option. In settings where the cosmology is agnostic or mysterious (the gods may or may not exist), then it is fine for nymphs to keep their divine secrets to themselves—or to explain the truth in a white lie mortals can understand. In campaigns where fey are the focus, then this article uses the word "god" to roughly mean "archfey." If all else fails, perhaps a nymph can't access her divine memories while in humanoid form.

## DIVINE RESPONSIBILITY

A nymph is first and foremost the god of her specific locale. As a god, even one so minor, she has a cosmic duty to defend herself and to form relationships with mortals. In sisterhood, nymphs work together to perpetuate their beauty and the life of their inhabitants. The theoretically infinite multitude of nymphs join in undifferentiated chorus to account the needs of the entire planet, and oft make hard decisions to ensure the continuity of all lifeforms.

Individually, nymphs tend to honor mortals whose wishes are within grasp, and to bedevil those who would defile their natural splendor. The fates call some nymphs to greater destinies, like aiding a god in great need or overthrowing the cosmic order. Besides this, how consistent or capricious, kind or cruel, and giving or selfish a nymph may be is ultimately her own choice.

## INCARNATION AND ADVENTURE

Of all the gods, nymphs are the most likely to become adventurers. Nymphs may intercede in the mortal world on behalf of their divine liege lord. Others quest to earn honor or a favor from a major god. Many nymphs act on their own divine prerogative, taking to the world to defend her homeland and worshipers, or to punish offenders abroad. Others still explore because they are curious or enticed by the mortal world, and seek the exaltation of mortal peak experiences. No matter the motivation, few are more keenly aware than adventuring nymphs that small discoveries have cosmic consequences.

## NYMPH NAMES

Mother nymphs lovingly grant their children names, but adult nymphs may go by that name or innumerable others. Some nymphs adopt the names mortals bestow their landform, or the name of an elemental phenomenon common to it. Others still go by the legendary names nymphs inspire throughout the land.

**Earth names:** Apalacha, Andrasteia, Cleodora, Citrine, Cyllene, Daphnis, Dune, Fissure, Echo, Hematite, Ida, Jade, Lapis, Marble, Magnetis, Nomia, Quartz, Rhene, Salt, Shale, Tundra.

**Forest names:** Anaguluskee, Aspen, Banshee, Chrysanthemum, Eratheis, Hesperia, Ivy, Karya, Kelp, Lantana, Laurel, Nandina, Morea, Mint, Minthe, Rhododendron, Shade, Willow.

**Water names:** Amicalola, Acrea, Brook, Cascade, Coral, Fountain, Frost, Galene, Glacier, Humidity, Lethe, Minnehaha, Mist, Nimbus, Rain, Rusalka, Sabrina, Selkie, Sireyna, Tide, Thetis, Undine.

## AGE

Nymphs usually enter the world as a physical body as a rite of passage once they reach maturity, which for plants is a matter of years, but for rivers decades and stones centuries. This body is magical and it does not age, but its health and life force are connected to the nymph's landform. Many nymphs are as old as the hills and seas.

## NYMPH TYPES

As the goddess of a specific landform, your mortal body inherits the following racial traits. Although innumerable clans of nymphs exist, they generally arise from one of three primordial elements. Choose one of these subraces.

### Earth Nymph

These nymphs arise from stone and soil in their many forms. The most common clan are the *oreads*, who embody mountains and caves. Earth nymphs can just as easily hail from valleys, particular stones, or underground mineral structures. Some even purport to be born of the stars.

**Size:** Medium; fey

**Attributes:** END +2, WIL +1, MAG +3

**Skill choices:** *Nature, religion, [magical], dancing, singing*

### Exploits

**Stone's Fortitude.** You have natural SOAK 5 to slashing damage.

**Stone Step.** Once per day you may pass through up to 30' of natural stone. Worked stone blocks this ability.

**Voice of Nature.** You know the *secret of earth*.

**Fey.** As a fey creature, you can sense the presence of (but not the location or type of)

magic within 10', and are vulnerable (1d6) to cold iron.

**Fey Grace.** You are immune to the Charmed condition.

## Forest Nymph

Forest nymphs occur from woodlands and vegetation. *Hamadryads* are the spirits of individual trees, and *dryads* are their aggregate forests. Whether they are distinct from or identical with the fey creature that shares their name is anyone's guess. Similar clans include flowers (*anthousai*), groves (*alseides*), winds and breezes (*aurae*), and even the cardinal directions.

**Size:** Medium; fey

**Attributes:** INT +1, AGI +2, MAG +3

**Skill choices:** *Nature, religion, [magical], stealth, climbing, dancing, singing*

### Exploits

**Tree Stride.** Once per turn, you can use an action to step magically into one adjacent living tree and emerge from a second living tree within 60 feet of the first, appearing in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the second tree. Both trees must be large-sized or bigger.

**Voice of Nature.** You know the *secret of plants*.

**Fey.** As a fey creature, you can sense the presence of (but not the location or type of) magic within 10', and are vulnerable (1d6) to cold iron.

**Fey Grace.** You are immune to the Charmed condition.

**Nature's Step.** You are not affected by difficult terrain caused by forest, brush, undergrowth, or similar natural features.

## Water Nymph

Numerous legends report water nymphs leading foolish men to early ends; indeed, they are the most spirited and mysterious. The kingdom of fresh water nymphs (*naiads*) include those who live in lakes (*limnades*), rivers (*potameides*), streams, and fountains. Various salt water kingdoms include the oceans (*oceanids*) and the seas (*nerheids*), each with clans unknown to landborne races. There are also clans of frozen water nymphs (icebergs, glaciers, snow) and airborne water nymphs (humidity, mist, stormclouds).

**Size:** Medium; fey

**Attributes:** INT +1, CHA +2, MAG +3

**Skill choices:** *Nature, religion, [magical], [social], dancing, singing*

### Exploits

**Aquatic.** You can breathe underwater. You also have a SWIM speed equal to your regular SPEED.

**Natural Allure.** You can spend two actions making a MAG mental attack at a humanoid creature within 30'. If successful, the target gains the Charmed condition. If unsuccessful, you may not try again with the same target.

**Voice of Nature.** You know the *secret of water*.

**Fey.** As a fey creature, you can sense the presence of (but not the location or type of) magic within 10', and are vulnerable (1d6) to cold iron.

**Fey Grace.** You are immune to the Charmed condition.

**Watery Step.** You can walk on water (but not on other liquids).

Illustrated by Tamara Cvetkovic.