KEEN MISUNDERSTANDING

by Karren Loomer

Creature: *Banshee* | **Level:** *3* | **CWs:** *Death of parents, of spouse*

SYNOPSIS

A small town by a forested hill—knowing nothing but peace—lies closed off from the world until a Banshee appears. The local priestess and her acolytes drive her off only to be attacked by specters the following day! When adventurers stumble in, the church turns to them for help. Everyone blames the Banshee, but fey folklore implies forgotten pacts over enchanted land.

ADVENTURE HOOK

An adventure for a party of 3-4 of the 3rd level.
In a simple town which is little more than a rest stop, a church acolyte begs for help dealing with monsters terrorizing a residence. Be it for heroism, coin, or promise of treasure, can the party solve this town's banshee problem?

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Long ago a pact was forged between human and fey. From that union, they founded Crainsol. Along with the establishment of the town, the fey put into place pact magic to keep it safe from monsters and detached from the outside world. Time passed; people forgot and, to the modern inhabitant, folklore is all that remains. Fifty years ago, the inhabitants built a church dedicated to familiar pantheons to celebrate their slowly rising tourism. However, once every century the magic goes wild, disturbing natural cycles of life and death, and time itself; one consequence is the inability for the dead to pass on, leaving behind bewildered specters. The Pale Lady, also known as The Banshee, is tasked by the ancient pact with the role of guiding lost spirits, calling them to their appropriate rest. With history muddled over time and the cultural shift, people misinterpret her call to the specters. They fear her and send the church clerics to drive her away. Everyone blames the deaths on her and are desperate for a solution.

This adventure begins with the adventurers entering the town and are directed to a house full of specters to defeat. The church offers a bigger reward for a more significant threat: the Banshee. Investigating the town leads to the forest to get help from the local witch, with a non-standard pixie encounter in the way. Once night falls, the final encounter concludes the adventure.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **Eilish Switchsid:** Young church **acolyte**. Curious about fey and old folklore. She was briefly the witch's apprentice before joining the church to be closer to her sick parents.
- **Cénne Smith:** Single dad of a young girl, widower; wife recently passed from illness. Blames the Banshee for killing her, wants vengeance.
- **Lily Smith:** The daughter. Friends with forest pixies. Believes the Banshee is a good person.
- **Nora Savton:** Middle-aged Priestess who heads the church. She is beloved by the town for her work keeping the townsfolk safe. She is frustrated with her inability to deal with banshee or protect her people. She's tired and overworked.
- **Úna Ó Crannefey:** A senior witch, living in the forest. She remembers history forgotten and is friendly to all except those who harm the fey or town. Pixies tell her everything that goes on in town.
- **One, Two, and Three: Pixie** trio who protect the forest. Always watching the town's events invisibly, occasionally playing tricks on people.

CHAPTER 1 – SUDDEN SPECTERS

As they enter the town, read or paraphrase:

> The sun shines from a clear blue sky over a small town at the foot of a forested hill. "Crainsol Welcomes You" is carved into the side of the second tallest building, clearly visible to any visitors. The largest building is the most recent looking—a church with a bell tower commonly used to host the region's most prominent pantheons. Arriving at the square, any semblance of peace is immediately disturbed by the cries of a wounded man: *"Please! Do something! My daughter is still inside!"* He begs a woman in church robes as concerned townsfolk circle around. Turning to you, he pleads, *"Monsters! They're in my home! Please save my daughter!"*

STRANGER'S HOUSE

If they agree to help, he leads them to his home. Read or paraphrase:

> From the outside, it's a house no different from any other. But within, it appears as if this man and his family are quite well off; art hangs on the walls, silverware set on the table, toys sit in a corner, an ornate dagger lays in a glass case, and everything is remarkably clean. The door to the cellar is ajar.

BASEMENT BATTLE

Lighting in the cellar is dim as sunlight barely pokes through a curtained window. Two **specters** are in the cellar. One specter floats in the room, searching for something. Another specter ambushes the party from behind the stairs. The specter doesn't notice anyone right away, but attacks on sight or sound. The man's daughter is hiding in a crate directly beneath the window.

Tactics: A third may appear, depending on party composition and encounter difficulty. The specters focus on whoever is closest to the girl.

DEVELOPMENT

Once the specters are defeated, the child runs to her dad. He invites the party for dinner. The acolyte introduces herself and insists everyone come to the church for a reward.

CHAPTER 2 – UNDEAD INVESTIGATION

> Entering the church, you see rows of pews, an altar, and displays of reverence to just about every deity common to the region. An acolyte quietly sweeps around Eilish and a middle-aged woman in cleric's robes. Head Priestess Nora Savton's tired eyes meet each of yours. *"Eilish tells me you lot handled some specters. Think you can take a banshee?"*

Nora knows the following:

- A banshee showed up recently and has murdered three people, leaving specters.
- She and her acolytes have been able to drive away some evil spirits but not the banshee.
- She asks for their help in exchange for 200 gp and an assortment of treasure (See rewards section for "Conclusion B").
- DC 14 Intelligence (Religion), (Investigation): Iconography suggests ancient magical pacts between fey and the town followed by prosperity for everyone involved.

Eilish knows the following:

- Eilish is stressed, overworked planning three funerals, and worried about ailing family members.
- The banshee has been heard wailing on three occasions; one death discovered each appearance. Some townsfolk tried fighting but were lucky to survive. Nora drove the banshee off but could not defeat the monster.
- DC 12 Wisdom (Perception): Carries a fey relic kept from brief apprenticeship to the Witch. Gain advantage to (Survival) checks in the woods.
- Career change to cleric to better aid sick parents.
- Fears angered fey.

TOWNSFOLK TALKS

Characters may leave the church to speak with townsfolk. They know the following:

- Terrible screams keep people on edge.
- They are fearful and frustrated by monster attacks.
- They are hopeful about adventurers aiding the church.
- Word travels fast if the characters are rude.
- DC 12 Charisma: folklore about fey tricks and ancient spirits are on people's minds; they worry about angering the fairies and gods. Wild rumors float about the witch colluding with or being the banshee herself; she's a divisive topic as nobody's managed to navigate the woods to find her recently.

On a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Perception) check, characters notice time is passing too slowly for the amount of activity they have done thus far. This becomes more apparent should a long rest be attempted. The townsfolk seem oblivious to the slow passing of time. They will not know yet that the magic pact that generally protects the town is flowing wild.

DINNER WITH DAD

The offer to join Cenné for a meal still stands if he wasn't robbed during the specter fight.

> He introduces himself and his daughter as Cenné and Lily Smith, and welcomes you inside for a warm meal as thanks. The food is delicious, the atmosphere is delightful, and wine is shared freely. Lily thanks you for calming her mom's spirit. Cenné frowns, sends her off to her room, and explains his wife's recent passing.
>
> Awkward silence fills the room.

Cenné asks the party if they plan to fight the banshee if nobody speaks up first. If yes, he'll help however he can, even offering his family heirloom, the ornate dagger. Otherwise, he begs them to avenge his wife and slay The Banshee.

Cenné knows the following:

- A phantom rose out of his wife while paying respects at her wake on a night where The Banshee was heard. She must have turned her soul into a monster!
- Accuses the witch of conjuring The Banshee and claims fairies are stopping him from traversing the forest to find her.
- DC 12 Intelligence (Nature): Dagger is cold iron. +1 against fey.

Upon leaving, Lily accosts the party, warning against harming the fairies; they are her friends and will help if asked nicely. If a promise is made, gain advantage on Persuasion checks when dealing with fairies in the woods.

FEY FOREST

> Traveling through the woods to the witch's home is unsettling; you feel watched every step of the way. The sun hangs low as if it were permanently dawn. Time stretches endlessly as all paths circle back on each other - this is no simple walk in the woods.

- DC 14 Wisdom (Survival) or (Perception): Discover white flowers acting as landmarks guiding up the forested hill. Gain advantage on Perception checks in the woods.
- DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) or (Arcana): Magic is wild here and there is evidence of someone or something actively impeding progress. Gain advantage on Arcana checks in the woods.

Three **pixies** named One, Two, and Three hide invisibly casting spells to distract, annoy, or scare the party into leaving. Meanwhile, wild magic is affecting time and life, causing the forest to shift and die and regrow when unobserved. This encounter is solved multiple ways, either identifying the fairy tricks and persevering through the woods or making a deal with them and appealing to their natures. Defeating or scaring them off is also possible. These pixies can speak Common but prefer Sylvan.

Tactics: Each pixie has their own personality and favored spells but still casts any to meet their goals.

- One likes to watch slapstick, causing mayhem while giggling and hiding just within eyesight: favors *confusion*, *entangle*. Ceases her tricks after everyone's given her a good laugh.
- Two always looks for a bargain, which includes theft: favors *sleep*, *dancing lights*, *phantasmal force*. Ceases her tricks upon obtaining something worthwhile.
- Three whispers secrets and temptations to sow chaos, becoming visible only to cast magic from safety: favors *polymorph*, *detect thoughts*, *phantasmal force*. Ceases her tricks with a good show of drama or playing along.

WITCH'S ABODE

The witch's hut is in possibly the most pristine condition a hut has ever been. The wrinkle-covered face of a woman in layers of colorful fabric pokes her head out. With a glance, she motions everyone to enter.

Inside is a well-organized workshop complete with several cauldrons, a stewing pot, tea kettle, racks full of arcane and natural ingredients, and plenty of furnishings. It feels larger than it appeared from the outside. She sits down and sips some tea, *"Well? Whatdya here for?"*

Whether or not the pixies were injured and how well behaved the party was in town determines how helpful and sassy Ûna is.

- Characters gain advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks if the fairies were negotiated with.
- Characters gain disadvantage if harmed.
- Characters gain disadvantage if townsfolk dislike the party.
- A successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check to determine how helpful she'll be.

Ûna knows the following:

- Ûna warns against impoliteness once, but if shown rudeness a second time, attacked, or stolen from, she'll teleport both herself and her hut, leaving the party alone in the woods.
- "The Banshee" isn't the monster people call banshees. She's a fairy older than the town. Used to be known as "The Pale Lady."
- "The Banshee" is a guardian of the dead; she screams and wails to help their spirits pass on. It's called keening the dead.
- "The Banshee" shouldn't be killing anyone, let alone making specters.
- She recommends talking instead of fighting back.

Locked behind successful Charisma (Persuasion) check:

- If asked how to go about "talking", she teaches the ancient fey words of negotiation. Characters gain advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks with The Banshee.
- If asked for help and promise is made not to kill The Pale Lady—if lying, they must succeed on a DC 16 Charisma (Deception) check—she brews a *potion of psychic resistance* with warning that The Pale Lady might be too angry to talk right away.
- If asked why time seems strange, she tells them the magic that protects the fey and the town goes wild every century. This marks the arrival of the Pale Lady to help spirits and return things to normal. Without The Pale Lady, the magic will grow more unstable.
- If asked about the church, Ûna says, "Good people, good intentions, but stubborn and ignorant. Tell Eilish she should visit more."

When they leave, it is dusk instead of dawn; decreased light and unstable magic make returning difficult. DC 14 Wisdom (Survival) check: Success means a swift return to town and advantage on the next initiative check.

DEVELOPMENT

Once night sets in, The Banshee's wails echo through town.

CHAPTER 3 – THE PALE LADY

The screams lead to a cottage where a tall figure in white drifts towards the building. Her silver hair flows in the wind, pale skin shimmers in the moonlight, and her red eyes instill a primal sense of awe. While beautiful, she inspires sheer terror.

The fairy woman turns to face you, and for a moment, everything is dead silent before her wails turn to speech.

"Why do you mortals continue disrupting my work?!"

BANSHEE BATTLE

One banshee is enraged and attacks!

Tactics: She'll first try to eliminate as many as she can with Wail, followed by Horrifying Visage before attempting to focus down characters one at a time. Anyone brought down to 0 hit points is merely knocked out and won't die. Each round she is not attacked with the ornate dagger, she becomes noticeably less angry. After three rounds without using her cold iron weakness, she calms down, allowing negotiation.

FAIRY PARLEY

If not attacked at all for 3 rounds, skip to *Conclusion C*.

A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check at any time during the fight reveals the misunderstanding; she is trying to protect the town and sees you and the church as outsiders harming it. Characters gain advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks.

A DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check is available once calm. On success, skip to *Conclusion C*.

DEVELOPMENT

If the party is defeated, *Conclusion A*. If The Banshee is defeated, *Conclusion B*.

CONCLUSION A: CONFUSED AWAKENING

When you wake up, you're all being tended to in the church by Nora and an acolyte. The Banshee's screams echo in your minds, but somehow, you survived. Deep down, you know she could have killed you. She didn't.

"Eilish found you outside her cottage. You're lucky to be alive," Nora lectures. *"Her family is dead and the banshee escaped. Good job. No sign of specters at least. Consider our treatment payment for the attempt."*

The party is free to stay in town, but they're considered failures. If they were kind to the pixies, Cénne's daughter gives a bag of items from the pixies.

CONCLUSION B: FEY FUNERAL

In dying breath, she warns: *"You have doomed this town,"* then with one final wail the Banshee calcifies and disintegrates into the wind. The town is finally quiet before Eilish bursts out of the cottage in tears as two specters rise from the roof and disappear into the night.

Eilish is unsure if killing the banshee was the right way and grieves for her family. An innkeeper offers free stay for defeating the monster, but unease fills the air. Come morning, Nora fulfills her end of the bargain (treasure below). Cénne also gives thanks, but Lily screams accusations of murder.

Without the Banshee, the fey stop protecting the town and it opens to the rest of the world—for better or for worse. Specters continue to be a problem as wild magic grows increasingly unstable.

Conclusion C: Keen Understanding

The Banshee ceases attacking and defines her contract: keen the mortal souls whenever lands grow unstable and disturb the natural cycle, lest their spirits haunt the earth—lost and unable to reach the afterlife.

Eilish then bursts out of the cottage in tears, chased by two specters. The Banshee looks to the party expectantly.

"*Let me fulfill my role,*" she demands.

Eilish tearfully witnesses and understands the events before her as the right thing to do. The Pale Lady resumes wailing and the specters fade away.

The Pale Lady's wisdom:

- Ancient pact between fey and mortal closed off Crainsol from the world with powerful enchantment and calmed land.
- Every century, the land's magic grows unstable; her job is to protect mortal souls during this period. Without her, souls become specters and cause further chaos to the land.
- She is drawn towards souls fated to die, hence her timely appearance.
- The enchantment has grown weaker over time, allowing outsiders. She perceived clerics as a threat, as Crainsol had barely opened up to the world last century.

The next day has Nora reluctantly paying at Eilish's request. Cénne refuses to speak, but his daughter thanks you with gifts from the fairies.

Rewards

Conclusion A may grant a bag of 33 gp, a *driftglobe,* and a barely legible note detailing one owed favor, signed Three. Instructions: *burn note to summon*.

Conclusion B gives 200 gp, two spell scrolls (1st and 2nd level), a *potion of healing*, a *wand of secrets*, a *philter of love*, and a *helm of comprehending items* (*DMG*). Alternatively, roll once from magic item table A and B per player (*DMG*).

Conclusion C gives both of the above and a good reputation among the Fey.

Adventure XP: 3,000, divided among players.

Author's Notes

Fairy mythology has been rewritten time and again. The banshee's origin as a fairy woman, guiding the souls with her keening was lost to popular media. This depiction offers an alternative to the weeping woman's ghost by focusing on the roots of the word "banshee," allowing more play with the underused fey in *D&D*.

About the Author

Karren Loomer aka @WhimsiKarren is a Canadian writer, artist, game designer, and GM for a wide variety of tabletop RPGs. Follow her on Twitter to see more of her latest creations!

Banshee (The Pale Lady)

Medium fey, neutral good

Armor Class **12**
Hit points **58 (13d8)**
Speed **0 ft., 40 ft. (hover)**

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (-5)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Wis +2, Cha +5
Damage Resistances acid, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities cold, necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Elvish, Sylvan
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Detect Life. The banshee can magically sense the presence of living creatures up to 5 miles away that aren't undead or constructs. She knows the general direction they are in, but not their exact locations.

Incorporeal Movement. The banshee can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. She takes 5 (1d10) force damage if she ends her turn inside an object.

Actions

Numbing Touch. Melee Spell Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 12 (3d6 + 2) psychic damage.

Terrifying Visage. Each non-undead creature within 60 feet of the banshee that can see her must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. A frightened target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, with disadvantage if the banshee is within line of sight, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a target's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the target is immune to the banshee's Horrifying Visage for the next 24 hours.

Wail (1/Day). The banshee releases a mournful wail, provided that she isn't in sunlight. This wail has no effect on constructs and undead. All other creatures within 30 feet of her that can hear her must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a creature drops to 0 hit points. On a success, a creature takes 10 (3d6) psychic damage.