

The Interview
Rev701

Fey (adjective)

1. Giving an impression of vague unworldliness.
2. Having supernatural powers of clairvoyance.
3. (*Archaic*) Fated to die.

The door to the interview room opened as the cat strode in with a small stack of envelopes in hand. "Good morning Director," she said with a nod to her boss. The Director looked up from his notebook to address his head of research.

"Ah, good morning, Doctor Azure. How was your weekend?"

"Fine. I'm making progress..."

"Don't tell me you spent your weekend here working on Astra again."

"I'd hardly call it working. At this stage I'm basically just baby-sitting some analytical models. I call in a few pizzas, stream some old sci-fi serials and wait for the calculations to complete with no one here to bother me."

The Director noted the lab coat fitting a bit tighter on the cat's brown-furred frame than he remembered. A few pizzas, indeed.

Azure tossed the stack of envelopes down on the table in front of where the Director sat and shifted the conversation to the task at hand. "Here, I grabbed your mail on the way up. I saw the candidate filling out waivers when I came in. They should be sending her up soon." She regarded the Director with her deep blue eyes for a moment before continuing, "So I assume since you're doing the interview personally, you think she might be 'the one' for your pet project?"

"It's much more than my pet project, but yes, perhaps. We may finally be able to get Pythia off the ground."

"I wouldn't get your hopes up. We're processing candidates from all power groups and so far, precognizance is by far the rarest ability we've found. We've only encountered a handful that even registered on the scale. The best of these barely rated a level one: Accurate, detailed foresight up to 10 minutes out, with vague premonitions up to an hour. If we want to get anywhere with Pythia, we need a level four. We should have the recruitment team focus on finding clairvoyants. At least until we have a larger sample."

The Director shrugged. "You have a valid point, but we've been over this. Project Pythia is classified and shifting effort will attract attention. Besides, there are plenty of other projects that need gifted individuals, so we'll continue to take all applicants."

"While we're on the subject, and a number of those 'gifted individuals' are highly unstable. You weren't here when that insane ferret hurled this table through the mirror into the observation room." Azure made a dramatic gesture toward the newly-replaced two-way mirror and continued, "I was stuck in

there for an hour. I couldn't budge the thing and he tossed it *with his mind*." She shuddered, "It would have squashed me like a bug if I had been in the way."

The Director's amber eyes peered over the spectacles perched on the end of his snout at the leg of the offending table, "I see it's been bolted down now. An excellent precaution, however, we have no telekinetic ferrets today." He shifted the stack of mail to the corner of the table, drew a chess set from his brief case, and began setting up the pieces.

Azure crossed her arms at the sight of the game board. "You know you could just use a set of flash cards or a random number generator and conduct a straight-forward test, right? We could have quantifiable results and everything."

The Director continued arranging the pieces. "Yes, but I want a look at how she thinks..." Further discussion was cut off by the intercom, "The candidate is on her way up, Director."

Doctor Azure took her place in the observation room behind the two-way mirror. After a glance at the significant dent in the back wall, she steeled herself and got to work, firing up a suite of sensors and dataloggers to capture as much information as possible during the interview.

The Director stood in preparation to greet his prospective recruit. He was tall, even for a wolf, though he did not possess the muscular frame commonly found in members of his species. He straightened the lapels of his charcoal-gray suit and waited for just a moment before the door gently swung open. He welcomed the newcomer, "Please come in. We've been expecting you, Ms. Fox."

The young fox closed the door behind her and strode lightly into the room with an easy grace, her bare foot paws hardly making a sound. "Please, call me, 'Fey'. You must be the Director." She extended a slender arm to shake his hand.

The Director obliged and had a look at his candidate. She bore the sandy fur and markings of a gray fox, but what struck the Director were her eyes: pale pupils surrounded by steely gray irises. "Pleased to meet you, Fey. Have a seat and we'll get started." He gestured towards the table.

The pair took their seats across from each other. Fey glanced around and took stock of her surroundings. The space resembled an interrogation room from the crime dramas she loved to watch, complete with a bright lamp hanging down over a hard, metal table and in the wall, what was obviously a two-way mirror.

"My apologies for the setting. I know this room is somewhat stark, but some of the candidates we process can be, let's say, 'volatile'. We find it beneficial to conduct these interviews in a minimalist setting."

Fey returned her attention to the Director then gazed at the chess board in front of her. "Oh, it's fine. Are we playing chess?"

"I was hoping to play a friendly game while we chat. Having some sort of activity going on during these interviews makes for a much more relaxed conversation. Do you play?" The question was purely for the sake of being polite since the Director had unfettered access to Fey's education records, including her time in chess club in middle school.

"Yes, but I don't play much anymore."

“Well that’s fine, I’m somewhat rusty myself.” The Director snatched up a black and white pawn, mixed them around behind his back for a moment, then extended his closed fists towards Fey to select a hand/pawn, and therefore color for the game.

“The white side is already facing me, so let’s make it easy.” Fey pointed at the Director’s closed right hand. He opened it, revealing the white pawn. He set the pawns in back place with a slight smile. This looked promising.

Fey opened with a very traditional move, advancing the king pawn two squares. The Director responded by pushing the queen’s bishop pawn as he launched into the interview topics. “If you would, please tell me about how you first discovered your precognizant abilities.”

Moves were traded back and forth, establishing position, as Fey relayed her tale. “The first time I really understood that I could see into the future was when I was 10. That was the year the big quake hit down south, where I grew up. It was a school day, just after recess, when I saw it coming. I started screaming bloody murder and hid under my desk, for what looked like no reason. Just the weird kid being crazy again. To my senses the ground was already shaking, windows rattling, and books were flying off the shelves. The teacher tried to coax me out from under my desk for five minutes before the quake hit. Then everybody screamed, and everybody hid.” Fey paused with a sad, faraway look in her eyes, regained her composure and advanced her bishop deep into the Director’s side of the board. “Check.”

“Interesting. So, you initially had trouble distinguishing the present from the future?” The Director opted to capture the bishop with his knight, dooming it.

“Right. Early on, things blurred together. I wouldn’t say it was continuous, but often my mind would wander forwards. It made conversations frustrating. I would get impatient with people – they seemed to take forever to get to the point and were always repeating themselves. I knew what they were going to say before they did...” she halted for a second, “No, I cannot read your mind.” Fey completed the exchange of pieces, capturing the knight with her queen. “Check.”

The Director looked bemused, “You say that, but I did just think the question, ‘Can you read my mind?’. How did you know?” He slid the king out of harm’s way.

“You just told me.”

He smiled, “Ah yes, of course. Fascinating.” The Director focused on Fey’s face as he asked his next question. “Has one of your predictions ever been wrong?”

“No.” Fey’s face betrayed no emotion as she castled her king.

“That’s it, just no?” The Director positioned his bishop to sacrifice for her knight.

“Yep.” Fey quickly captured the bishop, finding the trade acceptable.

“How does that work with free will? What if I were to ask you to tell me what I am going to say next, then I chose to say something else?” This concept piqued the Director’s interest as he continued the game.

"It would make a hole in my perception and give me a nasty headache, so let's not." Fey put a hand to her brow at the memory of the side effects of experimenting on her own. "Have you ever heard feedback from a sound system?"

"Yes, I'm familiar."

"It's like that, but for all of your senses. Like all of the possibilities keep falling back on each other and won't settle down into something that makes sense." Fey withdrew her queen to a position that threatened the Director's king on a diagonal. "Check."

"So, the way you describe it, it's as if the possible futures iterate in your mind until they converge into a solid event or diverge and leave a 'hole' of uncertainty as you described it." The Director moved his king out of check, subtly exposing Fey's queen to his bishop.

"That's a good way to describe it." Fey moved her remaining knight up from its starting position and absently toyed with her long braid of strawberry blonde hair, not seeming to register the threat to her queen.

The Director stared at the board and frowned. He had not expected to catch her off guard with this move. It was not lost on him that the whole point of this was that it should not have been possible. He considered that he was missing something that she would exploit, but there wasn't anything there. With disappointment, he captured her queen. Maybe she was playing the long game? He forced himself to display a more chipper disposition and pressed on with the interview, heading in a different direction. "Well then, how are your reflexes?"

"My reflexes?" Fey considered the board and how the tide of this game had suddenly turned against her before continuing. "Excellent by all accounts. I fenced in high school. Division champion three years running. Coach used to say that my reflexes were so fast, they should be called, 'pre-flexes'."

The Director began a campaign of attrition now that he was up a queen, whittling down the remaining power pieces. "So, you would say that your precognizant abilities have enhanced your physical reaction time."

"Absolutely."

They continued in silence as the pace of moves accelerated towards endgame. As they reached a point where the board was left with a melee of pawns and the Director's queen being the only power piece remaining save for the kings, the Director broke the silence. "How far can you see?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"I've never pushed myself to see just how far I can look. It takes a lot of effort and concentration to look ahead more than a few hours, and to be honest, the further I look, the more terrifying it is." Fey's options were winding down as her pawns were being taken one by one.

"Terrifying? How so?" The Director judged it was time to bring the game to a close and brought his queen to bear.

"If I see something horrible happen in the future, it's a fixed event, and there's nothing I can do about it." Fey advanced her remaining pawn in a futile attempt to reach the other side of the board and regain her queen.

"I see. That is a sobering thought. Check." One move to checkmate.

Fey considered her options, though there was only one valid move available to her. Checkmate was inevitable. Rather than resign, she slid her king over to the unthreatened square.

The director moved his queen a final time and sighed, "Checkmate... I must say, I've never been this disappointed by winning a game of chess. Thank you for your time, but I don't believe you have the abilities we are looking for."

"Oh, how can you tell?" Fey adopted a look of surprise; an expression that did not come naturally to her.

"There is no way I should have been able to beat you with the advantage of high-level precognizance. I don't doubt that you have some degree of ability. You might rate what we classify as level two, but not high enough for our purposes." The Director attempted to soften the sting of rejection by adding, "I would recommend taking your 'pre-flexes' into a professional sport. You could have a very lucrative career. Please close the door behind you on your way out. Good day."

Fey cast her eyes down and softly said, "But, I knew I was going to lose the game from the start..."

This statement rankled the Director. His hopes of advancing his project had been dashed, and now he judged that he had been lied to. "Oh, really?" His voice raised. "You 'knew' you were going to lose. You'll forgive me, but I find that hard to believe. Why would you bother playing the game if you knew you were going to lose?!" The question hung in the air followed by a deafening silence.

Fey said nothing. Keeping her head down, she rose and quickly strode to the door. Stepping through, she turned to glance back into the room at the two-way mirror. Doctor Azure would swear she locked eyes with her through the glass and winked at the unseen doctor before snapping the door shut and briskly stepping away down the hall.

The Director began to sullenly putt away the chess pieces when Azure stepped out of the observation room. "Well, that was something... You're right though, she's probably a level two. We'll keep tabs on her in case something comes up we can use her for."

"Yes, yes, fine." After an awkward silence he added, "Was I too harsh?"

"Yeah." The Director stood and was ready to head for the door when Azure continued, "Oh, don't forget your mail."

"Right, thanks." He snatched up the stack from the corner of the table and thumbed through the envelopes. "What's this?" He pulled out an envelope that had no return address. "Hmm, postmarked three days ago..." He opened it and pulled out a typed letter. His eyes scanned down the page getting progressively wider before he looked up, dropped everything he was carrying and bolted through the door crying, "Ms. Fox! Ms. Fox! Wait!"

As the sounds of the Director's cries faded down the hall, Azure stooped to pick up the letter from where it fell and chuckled to herself as she read:

"Because sometimes the game is still worth playing, even if you are going to lose, and sometimes the game you lose isn't the game that really mattered anyway..."

White – Me	Black - You
e4	c5
Bc4	d6
Qf3	f6
Nh3	f5
exf5	g6
fxg6	Nh6
Bf7+	Nxf7
Qxf7+	Kd7
gxh7	Bh6
O-O	Rf8
Qg6	Bf4
Nxf4	Rxf4
d3	Rf8
Qg4+	Kc7
Nc3	Bxg4 (Oh noes!)
Nd5+	Kc8
b3	Rf7
Bg5	Rxh7
Rae1	Qh8
h3	e6
hxg4	exd5
f3	Rh1+
Kf2	Rxf1+
Kxf1	Nd7
Bf4	Kc7
a4	Re8
Rxe8	Qxe8
a5	Nf6
Bg5	Qe6
c3	b6
axb6+	axb6
b4	Qe5
Bxf6	Qxf6
bxc5	dxg5
Kf2	Qh4+
Ke2	Qh2
Kf1	d4
c4	b5
cxg5	Kb6
Kf2	Kxb5
g5	Qh4+

Kf1	Qxg5
Kf2	c4
Ke2	cx d3+
Kxd3	Qe5
g4	Qe3+
Kc2	Qxf3
g5	Qc3+
Kd1	d3
g6	Qc2+
Ke1	Qe2#

<3 Fey"