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lep·re·chaun  (lěp rĭ-kŏn', -kôn')

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n.

In Irish folklore, a mischievous elflike creature or fairy who grants wishes or reveals the location of hidden treasure when captured.

[Irish Gaelic *leipreachán*, from Middle Irish *lupracá; n*, *luchrupán*, *luchorpán* : probably alteration (influenced by *lú*-, small; see **leg^wh-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots, and *corp*, body, from Latin *corpus*; see **k^wrep-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots) of Latin *lupercus*, member of the *luperci*, a group of Roman priests who during the Lupercalia ran up the Palatine from the Lupercal, the cave where a wolf suckled Romulus and Remus (probably from *lupus*, wolf; see **w k^wo-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots) + Irish *-án*, diminutive suffix. For the semantic development from *luperci* to *leprechaun*, it appears that the accounts of the *luperci* in classical texts were misunderstood by early Irish scholars, who believed the *luperci* to be a race of wolfmen and interpreted their run up the hill to be an escape from the Biblical flood by taking refuge in Ireland. This conception of a race of nonhuman beings inhabiting Ireland evolved into the folklore of the leprechaun..]

lep re·chaun'ish *adj.*

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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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