**Species Profile: Netterlings**

### **Quick Reference**

**Species:** Netterlings  
 **Average Height:** 4'0" to 6'0" (upright, foot to hat-top)  
 **Average Weight:** 80–140 lbs (dense exoskeleton, internal musculature)  
 **Lifespan:** 30–50 years in ideal environments; may vary based on climate and stress  
**Anthropomorphic Reference:** Semi-anthropomorphic arachnid analogues; resemble upright tarantulas, solifugae, or whip scorpions. Eight limbs—four used for locomotion, four as arms. Their upright posture reverses typical dorsal/ventral orientation, giving a “moving backwards” illusion. Large eye clusters and expressive arm movements give them a puppeteered, oddly endearing presence.  
**Pigmentation:** Dense chitinous exoskeleton in shades of brown, gray, ochre, and black. Males more vividly patterned; females duller and broader. Sparse body hairs with sensory bristles at joints. Eye clusters (6–8) in arcs atop the head—black or iridescent violet.

**Noteworthy Traits:**

* **Tams:** Woven reed-and-silk hats worn from birth; shield sensitive organs, serve as armor, tools, and identity markers. Silk-fastened, semi-rigid, slash-resistant, and uniquely patterned for recognition. Evolve over time.
* **Language & Expression:** Uncanny humanoid speech produced via concealed mouthparts beneath the Tam. Voices often feel displaced or ventriloquial. Communicate using a native language of pheromones, subsonics, gesture, and tonal buzzes—functionally untranslatable. Gesture dramatically to clarify meaning.
* **Mimicry:** Skilled audio mimics—can replicate speech, birdsong, ambient noise, and more with eerie precision. Used for comedy, storytelling, mischief, or art.
* **Reproduction:** Sexual dimorphism present, although barely. Pair bonding is lifelong. Reproduction occurs via chelicerae and spinneret-adjacent organs. Males carry offspring in silk pouches. Parenting is intensive, typically lifelong.
* **Silk:** Netterlings produce an incredibly strong and versatile silk from their spinnerets that they utilize in their daily life, as well in production of various, often valuable goods.

**Summary:** Netterlings are sapient, spider-like beings known for their reversed anatomy, dramatic communication, silk armor-garments, and striking mimicry skills. Though alien in form, they are emotionally expressive, family-centered, and deeply integrated into Halferth’s social and industrial ecosystems—especially the Hivelands and Twisting City. Their silkcraft, linguistic complexity, and nonviolent demeanor grant them wide respect. Each wears a unique Tam—part garment, part identity—through which they are instantly recognized. Though some feral populations remain, most Netterlings are neighborly, poetic artisans—not mere spiders in disguise.

### **Cultural Exposition: The Netterlings**

Netterlings are sapient upright-walking arachnid-analog creatures indigenous to Halferth’s warm, wet regions. While once found across the Seething Bayou, the Hivelands, and the Shrapnel Archipelago, they have since retreated from most of the world. The Shrapnels—once a vibrant node in their distribution—soured as humans grew too wild and irreverent for Netterling comfort. Today, Netterlings are most commonly associated with the Hivelands and its rich interspecies ecology.

A Netterling’s anatomy is inverted by humanoid expectations, yet deeply consistent with arachnid biology. To understand their appearance, one must first reframe orientation: a Netterling’s dorsal side is their anterior, the side they present to the world; their ventral side is their posterior, hidden beneath their garments and limbs. What most would think of as a “face” is actually a dorsal configuration—an arc of 6 to 8 dark eyes set into the top of the cephalothorax. These eyes glint with curious intelligence, framed not by fangs or mandibles, but by soft sensory bristles and fur. The mouthparts— including the chelicerae, a pair of incredibly dexterous and lengthy pedipalps, as well as a formidable and rather imposing set of fangs—are entirely tucked beneath the Tam, concealed within the garment that defines much of their visual identity.

Their abdomen is pronounced and bulbous, with a wide dome curving across the dorsal (forward-facing) side, and a gentler concavity along the ventral (rear-facing) plane. To most observers, this creates the illusion of a pot-belly underneath their typical oversized aprons—though in anatomical terms, this is simply their now front-facing back. A Netterling’s posture emphasizes this rounded form, with their upper four limbs—dexterous, three-fingered, and highly expressive—arched forward in a way that constantly gestures, signs, and pantomimes. Their lower four limbs, angular and spider-like, support them with surprising grace in an ambulatory setup reminiscent of human leg locomotion.

The Tam is not just clothing, but a living garment—a reed-and-silk funnel that originates beneath the head and wraps over the dorsal face and down their ventral abdomen, meeting and enclosing the spinnerets. It opens outward around their cephalothorax in a wide-brimmed “hat,” then flattens and extends over the posterior like a funnel-web spider carrying its funnel underneath it—or in this case, across its back. As mentioned, the garment attaches near the spinnerets, which are embedded within the layered silk and hidden from view. Its structure allows for flexibility, protection, and display. In rare cases, a threatened Netterling will bend “backwards” and vanish into the Tam, disappearing in a motion that mirrors a spider retreating into its webbed burrow—face-first, limbs tucked, posture reversed. The motion is swift, startling, and deeply disorienting to onlookers.

This visual composition gives Netterlings a paradoxical charm. They resemble lanky, fuzzy artisans with far too much facial hair and a belly like a mossy toolbox. Their Tam envelopes them like a great shawl or soft carapace, giving them the air of a traveling artisan, or a scarecrow. To some, they appear puppeteered. To others, theatrical. To most, they are simply unforgettable.

The Netterlings’ place in the Hivelands is foundational. Their unique sensory biology and layered communicative capacities made them the first to truly decipher the bees. This achievement initiated what would become the Keeper tradition, though Netterlings themselves are not typically referred to as Keepers. Still, their role is indispensable: translating tone, scent, gesture, and vibration into an interspecies bridge, and assisting the hive-speakers in their eternal work of recordkeeping and interpretation.

Netterlings are silk weavers of legendary skill. Their production of silksteel, an engineered compound of silk and mineral, is vital to Halferthian industry. While much is produced locally in the Hivelands, significant operations exist in the Twisting City, drawing many Netterlings far from their swamp homes. These urban migrants often seek distance from their tightly bonded families—either in pursuit of personal autonomy or a reprieve from their famously attentive, often overbearing parents.

Despite their spider-like anatomy, Netterlings are not viewed with fear in most parts of Halferth, though many find them uneasy. This unfortunate reality is not lost on the Netterlings, and they will often respect this unease, albeit often with outspoken remorse. Their cultural refinement, gentle disposition, and openness to cooperation have earned them wide respect. Their linguistic fluency—rooted in mimicry and aided by expressive signing—lends them a strange theatrical charisma. Though their voices issue from beneath their wide Tams, always slightly muffled, their grand gesticulations ensure they are both seen and understood.

Tams themselves are sacrosanct: spun by a parent at birth and worn for life, each is a blend of reed and silk, hardened and reinforced until it functions as clothing, armor, toolbelt, and shelter. A Netterling's Tam is a statement of identity and a literal extension of self. No two are alike, and their unique patterns are as recognizable to others as facial features are to humans.

While mainland Netterlings are communal, philosophical, and often playful, feral populations still exist in parts of the Seething Bayou. These solitary figures do not speak, do not gesture, and do not wear hats. They are not openly violent, but make no effort to communicate or integrate—existing in a liminal state between civilization and wildness, between spider and poet.

Socially, Netterlings form lifelong bonded pairs. Their reproductive process is intimate, involving coupling of specialized mouthparts to sexual organs located near the spinnerets. Males gestate the offspring in silk pouches and give live birth—usually to one child per pair, rarely two. Twins, though rare, prompt communal support; one child is often entrusted to another couple—frequently to a same-sex pair who cannot conceive. Parenting is intensive, often lasting two full seasonal cycles, and Netterlings remain deeply involved in their children’s lives even into adulthood. This tendency toward strong familial involvement contributes to the species’ psychological divergence: some Netterlings remain near family forever, while others flee across the continent at first opportunity.

Homosexual pairing is common, more so than in most sapient species save the nearly all-male Hillkin. This trend likely arises from the species’ cultural disinterest in gender roles and their broadly androgynous physiology and presentation.

Netterlings occupy an unusual place in Halferth’s social web. Their silk is essential. Their language is revered. Their poetry is untranslatable. They are considered strange but gentle, alien but neighborly. And though they resemble spiders, they find offense in being reduced to such. Their silk is not web. Their lives are not mere instinct. They are artisans, historians, caretakers, parents. They are Netterlings.