

# ARCADIA



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# REFUGIA

# 1 LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

## James Introcaso

# James Introcaso

## ORGANIZATION

## THE PICKLING GUILD

# Sharang Biswas

*A delicious guild for foodies ... and secret heroes!*

## MAGIC ITEMS    SPELLS

# 12 WONDERS OF THE WILDS

Hannah Rose

*There should be more magic items for druids and rangers. And now there are.*

## NPCs ENCOUNTER

# 23 AETHELFAER

# Sara Thompson

*When you walk in his woods, you better respect the forest.*

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

When I was in college, my mythology professor gave us an unconventional assignment. He told us to go into the woods alone with a notebook, stay there for an hour, then start writing whatever we found ourselves thinking about until we had a three-page paper. Given the magazine I now edit, it shouldn't come as a shock that my essay was about monsters. Specifically, I wrote a paper that said I understood why people who were alive not that long ago believed monsters stalked the wilds. Even today many folks believe that a bigfoot, yeti, jackalope, jersey devil, or other cryptid hides somewhere deep in the wilderness rarely disturbed by humans. Even if you're a skeptic like me, your love of fantasy storytelling can't keep you from asking, "But what if here there *were* be dragons?"

Nature isn't just some component of fantasy. Yes, it serves as an evocative setting for adventures, but nature is much more than that. It creates stories and mythologies. The vast wilderness on this planet inspires us, terrifies us, and takes our breath away. When we think of fantasy wilderness, our minds may go to fey groves and unicorn forests, but vast deserts, wicked swamps, untamed oceans, and mysterious underground tunnels are all part of fantastical settings. Our real-life planet and worlds of high fantasy go hand-in-hand.

In fact, they go together so well that I didn't even realize this issue of *ARCADIA* is themed around nature until [Spencer Hibnick](#), MCDM's insightful lead playtester, pointed it out to me. I just thought we were putting out another three strong articles from awesome creators. But as the fates would have it, *ARCADIA* 7 is all about nature.

[Sharang Biswas's](#) "The Pickling Guild" presents a secret organization that searches the wilderness for delicious ingredients and cures for terrible diseases, [Sara Thompson](#) shows us a ranger who defends his grove like no other in "Aethelfaer," and [Hannah Rose](#), an editor who has worked on every issue of *ARCADIA* so far, finally gives druids and rangers the magic items they deserve in "Wonders of the Wild."

This issue is a good reminder that there is plenty of inspiration for our games and characters in the real world. While I personally think the best way to get inspired is to head on out into the wilderness, that's not always an option. Even if you do live close to an awesome outdoor environment and have the means and time to explore it, there are places all over our planet to check out that will make your brain burst with gaming goodness.

Luckily books, magazines, television, film, and the Internet make those places easy to explore. As a former National Geographic employee, I can tell you that the deep sea holds centuries-old [Greenland sharks](#) with poison flesh, that a natural gas field in Turkmenistan called the "[Door to Hell](#)" has been burning for fifty years, and that in [Tsingy de Bemaraha National Park](#) in Madagascar, the limestone formations that create the rock forest are so sharp that they cut through flesh and most equipment, making exploration of the place difficult. If those don't get your game brain going, there's a whole world out there to explore. Or heck, go beyond Earth and into the wilds of space. [Jupiter's red spot](#) is sure to inspire an adventure or two.

*Ex animo,*  
James Introcaso  
Managing Editor

# THE PICKLING GUILD

AN ORGANIZATION OF GOURMANDS AND HEROES

by Sharang Biswas

**MOTTO:**  
PRESERVATION IS OUR PURVIEW

**BLAZON:**  
PARTY PER PALE PURPURE  
AND VERT, A SERPENT NOWED  
AND COUNTERCHANGED



*This article describes a social organization that secretly enacts an altruistic agenda, along with associated membership benefits, magic items, quests, NPCs, and domain statistics. While the Pickling Guild is best suited for campaign settings that include at least one large city, elements of the guild can be cannibalized and adapted for other settings as well.*

The Guild of Pickling, Fermentation & Food Preservation, colloquially referred to as “The Pickling Guild,” is ostensibly a network of eccentric culinary enthusiasts who enjoy experimenting at the intersection of alchemy and gastronomy. Anyone can be a member—a modest annual fee grants some special privileges and access to any of the dozen or so chapterhouses located in major cities around the world. In these cities, members enjoy regular tasting events—meetings where recipes, ingredients, and techniques are swapped—and a shop that sells specialized equipment, rare fermentation components, and food created by master guild members. Wealthier chapterhouses circulate a colorful, informative newsletter.

Senior members carry a badge that identifies their membership, earning them hospitality from the group’s many solitary members in remote locations. Yet the mere existence of members outside major urban hubs perplexes curious observers. What benefits can these members possibly derive from what is clearly a social club?

The Pickling Guild is, in truth, a secret society that tracks the spread of magical maladies and plagues, working behind the scenes to cure and contain such afflictions. Their public-facing activities are a front, meant to throw off suspicion, cultivate useful contacts, and supplement the guild’s coffers for their more important work. In addition to brewing fine ales and preserving fiery pepper sauces, senior members dispatch agents to discover the source of a nasty infection, deal with a particularly virulent fungal outbreak, or tend to important personages who contract mysterious illnesses. Solitary agents in remote regions are senior representatives who investigate and research strange and deadly diseases. Only a small fraction of the guild’s members are aware of this greater truth.

These cloak-and-dagger tactics keep the agents safe and hidden from powerful adversaries. The guild has to fend off the moves and countermoves of a cult connected to demon lords of pestilence and fungi, a cabal of evil druids bent on spreading diseases to “restore the balance of rot,” and a mummy lord named Numha, who somehow got entangled with the guild a long time ago. These are just a few of the villains who want to destroy the organization—any agent of decay and malady is a deadly foe to the Pickling Guild.

While members deemed both worthy and useful to the greater mission of the guild are allowed to advance through its ranks and learn of the greater mysteries, they are all sworn to secrecy. Members who break this oath are removed from the guild and may have their memories magically modified to erase any recollection of the guild whatsoever.

## GUILD STRUCTURE

When people refer to the Pickling Guild’s intentions, goals, or actions, they (usually unknowingly) refer to those of the Directors, the mysterious leaders of the organization. Spread throughout the realm, the Directors meet in secret, sometimes in person and sometimes through magical communication devices. They make decisions about what missions need to be undertaken, who among the ranks should be promoted, and any other major actions the guild must take. They tend not to involve themselves, as a body, in chapter leadership (though individual Directors may take an interest in such matters). As the most capable members of the guild, they take part in special missions if a particularly dangerous or serious threat under the guild’s purview shows itself. There are very few Directors: about half a dozen, who masquerade as lower-ranked members of the guild.

At the opposite end of the guild hierarchy are the Annual Members, who form the majority of the membership. These are dues-paying hobbyists who enjoy the social scene and minor benefits membership provides. They are unaware of the guild’s secret mission.

Between these two ranks are the Fermenters, the junior members, and the Artisans, the senior members. Fermenters and Artisans are part of the guild’s inner circle. They’re in the know about the guild’s mission and undertake tasks and quests toward it. They may perform library or laboratory research, visit sick patients, investigate reports of illnesses, or collect rare ingredients. Fermenters might also work normal jobs as brewers, cheesemongers, cooks, and the like when they aren’t doing secret work for the guild.

Annual Members are tapped to become Fermenters if other members feel they could contribute to the guild’s

mission and a background investigation reveals no concerns. Senior members may ask candidates to perform a few “simple tasks” for the guild, tasks which end up testing their abilities when faced with danger. Promotion from Fermenter to Artisan is awarded for exceptional and reliable service to the guild and allows the agent to take on more dangerous missions. Once an Artisan proves themselves to the Directors as exceptionally talented and dedicated to the cause, they might themselves be elevated to Director, though this is rare.

There are additional volunteer roles, such as Secretariat, Treasurer, and Chapter President, which are held by Fermenters, Artisans, or even Directors. These roles are typically administrative in nature and members are locally elected to these roles within their chapters every year (all members have a vote). While these representatives handle mundane matters in the chapters, major orders relating to the guild’s secret mission come from the Directors, through the Artisans.

## MEMBERSHIP IN THE PICKLING GUILD

Anyone can become an Annual Member of the Pickling Guild by visiting a chapter, filling out some minor paperwork, and paying a sum of 10 gp. Climbing the ranks of the guild is a different matter (see “Guild Structure”).

### ANNUAL MEMBER

For the annual fee of 10 gp, a member gains the following benefits, in addition to useful social connections:

- A parchment certificate of membership with stamped expiration dates
- Discounts for any wares and services from any member (which is an informal benefit, with different members providing different discounts or special offers to others)
- A quarterly newsletter featuring news about the membership, requests for help, recipes, and interesting facts about plants and fungi. Adventurers have been known to find information about fungal or slime monsters innocuously spread among the pages.
- Advantage on ability checks involving the preparation of food and the identification of edible, medicinal, and poisonous plants, if up to date on the newsletter. (What “up to date” means is for the GM to decide!)
- Access to Annual Member meetings at any chapterhouse and free entry to special events organized by any chapter. Chapterhouses may also grant Annual Members access to lodgings, libraries, kitchens, and laboratories, depending on their accommodations.

## FERMENTER

Fermenters enjoy all the benefits of Annual Members, plus these additional benefits for no extra annual fee:

- A *guild fermenter's sickle* and a guild healer's kit (see sidebars)
- The Fermenter receives a copper guild badge keyed to their soul so only they can use it. The badge has 1 charge, which it regains daily at dawn. As an action while wearing the badge, the Fermenter can expend 1 charge to cast one of the following spells from it, requiring no material components: *detect poison and disease* and *purify food and drink*.

## ARTISAN

Artisans enjoy all the benefits of Annual Members and Fermenters, plus these additional benefits for no extra annual fee:

- A *guild artisan's scythe* (see sidebar) and a new guild healer's kit
- An Artisan can ask for a potion or other expendable magic item of common or uncommon rarity, secret information about a particular subject, or the services of a single NPC Fermenter as backup (use the *acolyte*, *scout*, or *spy* stat block) about once per month without anyone asking too many questions.
- The Artisan receives a silver guild badge that replaces their copper one. The new badge is keyed to their soul so only they can use it. The magic badge grants the Artisan advantage on saving throws against disease and has 2 charges that it regains daily at dawn. As an action while wearing the badge, the Artisan can expend 1 or more of its charges to cast one of the following spells from it, requiring no material components: *detect poison and disease* (1 charge), *protection from poison* (1 charge), *purify food and drink* (1 charge), and *lesser restoration* (2 charges).

## DIRECTOR

Directors enjoy all the benefits of Annual Members, Fermenters, and Artisans, plus these additional benefits for no extra annual fee:

- A new guild healer's kit, and a free replacement about once a month upon request
- A Director can request up to three potions or expendable magical items of common or uncommon rarity, the temporary use of one of the guild's small stock of wondrous items of uncommon and rare rarity, and the help of one Fermenter (use the *acolyte*, *scout*, or *spy* stat block) and one Artisan (use the *bandit captain*, *druid*, or *priest* stat block) about once per month.
- Individual Directors tend to be powerful figures and often request favors from each other. At the GM's discretion, a Director can access other specialized benefits such as boons, charms, or magic items from other Directors. Such benefits might come at the cost of a favor, however!
- The Director receives a gold guild badge that replaces their silver one (though they may get a fake badge of lower rank to keep their status as Director secret). The new badge is keyed to their soul so only they can use it. The magic badge grants the Director advantage on saving throws against disease and has 3 charges that it regains daily at dawn. As an action while wearing the badge, the Director can expend 1 or more of its charges to cast one of the following spells from it, requiring no material components: *detect poison and disease* (1 charge), *purify food and drink* (1 charge), *protection from poison* (1 charge), *lesser restoration* (2 charges), *speak with dead* (2 charges), and *speak with plants* (2 charges).

### A GUILD HEALER'S KIT

This kit contains all the supplies of a healer's kit, plus additional vinegary salves and medicated bandages that smell strongly of spices.

The kit has ten uses. As an action, a creature can expend one use of the kit to attempt to stabilize a creature that has 0 hit points by making a DC 15 Intelligence (Medicine) check. On a success, the creature regains 1 hit point. On a failure, the creature is stabilized, but smells strongly of vinegar.

Guild healer's kits are awarded when members reach certain ranks. They are also provided to members undertaking dangerous missions on behalf of the guild. They aren't normally made available for purchase even to guild members, lest they be misplaced and betray the guild's true purpose to outsiders.



# THE PICKLING GUILD'S COMMEMORATIVE WEAPONS TOOLS

Fermenters and Artisans receive special, commemorative tools from the guild. Not only are these masterwork tools, they're also handsomely decorated symbols of their bearers' authority within the guild. Even those with little knowledge of the guild can tell that these tools signify something important. The fact that these tools are both magical and perfectly balanced for combat is not generally advertised.

## GUILD FERMENTER'S SICKLE

*Weapon (sickle), uncommon*

This beautifully forged sickle is made entirely of silver. A branching pattern reminiscent of the underground network of a fungus colony is etched into the hilt.

When you use this sickle to harvest ingredients, you can add your proficiency bonus to ability checks made to harvest and to saving throws made against poisons, enzymes, or inimical substances released while harvesting ingredients. If you are already proficient in these checks or saving throws, you add double your proficiency bonus to the check or saving throw instead of your normal proficiency bonus.

As a bonus action, you transform the *guild fermenter's sickle* into a weapon made of greenish slime. While in this form, all damage dealt by the weapon is poison damage, and you lose the bonus it grants to ability checks and saving throws. You can use another bonus action to change the weapon back to its metallic form.

## GUILD ARTISAN'S SCYTHE

*Weapon (glaive), very rare (requires attunement)*

This masterfully crafted scythe has a handle made of petrified wood and wrapped with rings of inlaid brass. Its blade is broad and flat, inscribed with an enameled blazon of the guild. You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

**Festering Wounds.** A creature that takes damage from the scythe must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, it can't regain hit points until the end of its next turn.

**Slime Form.** Once per day, you can use an action to lick the blade of the scythe and transform yourself into a black pudding for up to 1 hour. Your gear melds into your new form and you can't activate, use, wield, or otherwise benefit from any of your equipment.

Your game statistics are replaced by the statistics of the pudding, but you retain your alignment, personality, hit points, proficiency bonus, and Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores. You also retain all of your skill and saving throw proficiencies, in addition to gaining those of the pudding. You can't cast spells, speak, or take any other action that requires hands or speech in pudding form.

If you use the Split reaction, you control all of the new black puddings. When one of your black puddings moves more than 30 feet away from another or is reduced to 0 hit points while another one of your black puddings exists, it dissolves away and is destroyed. If one of your black puddings is reduced to 0 hit points and no others remain, you revert to your normal form with 0 hit points and must make death saving throws as normal.

You can revert to your normal form as a bonus action. When you do so, all the black puddings you control join together in a space one of them occupies and you have a number of hit points equal to the combined total of your puddings' hit points when you ended your transformation.

# SAMPLE FOODS

Members of the Pickling Guild experiment with alchemy and gastronomy to create marvelous dishes. The following foods are a sample of what members or shops connected to the guild might produce.

## ORDINARY

Shops associated with the Pickling Guild sell these creations, and the guild's newsletter includes their recipes. They are very rare, expensive delicacies; a single serving might cost 75 gp to 150 gp, depending on the quality of the ingredients.

- **Adrook.** A savory drink made from mashed, fermented root vegetables and spices
- **Sposs.** A cattle bone that is fermented and pickled until it becomes squishy and spongy, then cooked in sugar syrup
- **Velure Sauce.** The hair and nails of a specific combination of animals pickled into a spicy, tangy sauce

## MAGICAL

The recipes of these magical foods are known only to Artisans and Directors (see "Membership in the Pickling Guild"). High-end shops buy these from the guild and sell them at outrageous prices. Guild members on dangerous missions may carry these with them.

### SEPULCHEESE

*Wondrous item, very rare*

When a mixture of goat's and cow's milk is fermented using special techniques in the chest cavity of an animated zombie, a peculiar fungus transforms it over several months into *sepulcheese*, an orange and purple-veined, earthy, crumbly cheese.

You can eat this cheese as an action to gain the following feature: As an action, you shout with arcane power. Each undead that can see or hear you within 30 feet of you must make a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw. If the creature fails its saving throw, it is turned for 1 minute or until it takes any damage.



A turned creature must spend its turns trying to move as far away from you as it can, and it can't willingly move to a space within 30 feet of you. It also can't take reactions. For its action, it can use only the Dash action or try to escape from an effect that prevents it from moving. If there's nowhere to move, the creature can use the Dodge action.

You can only use this feature once after eating the cheese. If you don't use it before your next long rest after eating the cheese, you lose the feature.

Eating more than one cheese before using the feature doesn't increase the potency or frequency of the effect. In fact, eating too much in a short span can cause one's skin to wither, as though afflicted by terrible necrotic energies.



## SCARLET SAUSAGE

*Wondrous item, very rare*

The blood that dyes the eponymous raiment of a redcap, a wicked fey creature, possesses magical properties. When squeezed out of its cap, purified, and cured, the blood can be formed into a sausage. A *scarlet sausage* is an acquired taste, but it is the only known palliative—of a sort—for vampirism.

As an action, a vampire spawn can eat a single *scarlet sausage*. Alternatively, as an action, another creature can feed a *scarlet sausage* to an incapacitated vampire spawn. For 8 hours, the vampire spawn regains its former personality and memories. True vampires are unaffected by a *scarlet sausage*.

Vampire spawn can become inured to the effects of *scarlet sausage*. If a vampire spawn has consumed a *scarlet sausage*, the effect of each subsequent *scarlet sausage* it eats is reduced by an additional 1 hour until it can no longer be affected by a *scarlet sausage*.

## MEMORY CHOCOLATE

*Wondrous item, very rare*

If cacao beans are allowed to ferment under the influence of the new moon and certain fae rituals are enacted before they are turned into chocolate, the resulting confection becomes *memory chocolate*, an especially firm, pleasingly fragrant food.

When you melt the chocolate on your tongue for 1 minute, you can kiss or lick a willing creature as an action and transport them into a memory from your past. (Licking is considered more gauche than kissing.) This effect lasts until the next dawn.

You and the target are mentally transported into this memory and your physical bodies are locked in an embrace and a trance-like state. While you experience the memory, you can't move or take any actions, and you can't perceive anything with regard to your own senses.

You choose the memory and appear in it as you are now, but as an imperceptible observer unable to affect the memory. The target enters the memory as your past self and experiences the memory exactly as you did, but is unable to change the memory. Once the memory ends, but before the effect does, you can choose to initiate a new memory, repeat the same memory, or end the trance.

The memory sharing lasts until the next dawn or you end it. The target can choose to leave the memory at any point (no action required) and wake up.

## OTHER GOODS AND SERVICES

A chapterhouse or a guild-controlled shop may offer the following goods or services:

- The fermenting or pickling of specific fruits/vegetables — 1 gp per pound of food
- A cup of rare tea, coffee, or chocolate — 5 sp
- An exotic wine, beer, or liquor — 10 gp per bottle
- Alchemist's supplies specialized in pickling and fermenting — 50 gp
- Books on pickling and fermenting — 20 gp each
- A private lesson on the art of pickling for groups of up to 10 individuals — 100 gp for an hour

## INTRODUCING THE PICKLING GUILD

The characters might be introduced to the Pickling Guild in one of the following situations:

- The characters meet an eccentric Fermenter who sells interesting pickles and tells them about the marvelous guild he's part of.
- The characters stumble into a shop that features the guild's signature food items. Recognizing the party as a group of adventurers, the shopkeeper shows them one of the magical items for sale and tells them about the guild.
- A poster advertising a tasting event is posted in a town the characters visit.
- The characters hear rumors abound of a sick family that got better after eating some "miraculous pickled onions" sold by a little guild shop down the lane.

## THE GUILD'S TROUBLES

The guild is always on the lookout for competent new members, and adventurers skilled in combat and magic are prime candidates. Once the guild knows about characters, the leadership may decide to test their talents and moral character by asking for help with minor matters related to the guild's front.

You can use one of the quests listed here or one of the minor quests connected to an NPC (see "Notable Characters") to draw the characters further into the guild's story. As a reward, the guild might offer uncommon or rare potions, or one of the magical foods the guild produces. If particularly impressed, the guild may also offer free membership to the entire party for a year, as well as room and board at a chapterhouse for a short while.

- A local chapterhouse asks the characters to fetch rare plume-lace mushrooms, useful for divination potions, from a nearby cave. Unfortunately, a shambling mound has recently claimed the cave as its own. This particular shambling mound shows unusual signs of intelligence: it's been leaving beautiful floral arrangements at the mouth of the cave.
- Guard Maheera, a traveling merchant and Annual Member, asks the characters to accompany her on a trip to sell beer. Her planned route takes her through the All-Father Forest, where the eccentric druid Samira resides. Samira waylays travelers and turns the liquids they possess into water elementals (or beer elementals, in this case), claiming that she's tired of "trespassers messing up the forest."
- Luma, a gnome Annual Member and jerky seller, asks the characters to help her fend off a group of ruffians bullying her. The bullies are secretly sent by Luma's ex-lover Rolanda, who wants to make Luma so unhappy that she'll come running back to her ex-girlfriend seeking comfort. If Luma comes crawling back, Rolanda plans to call the ruffians off, but the bullies may have other ideas.

Once adventurers have proven themselves to the guild, they are invited into the fold and informed about the guild's ultimate goals. Even if the adventurers don't become members, the guild does have a history of working with powerful outsiders. The characters might be asked to help with the guild's real missions.

- Artur Pavel, the hereditary mayor of a nearby village, dies. The locals cite heart failure, but the guild knows it was poison. They ask the characters to discover the culprit. Investigations reveal that a rare toxin made from infernal secretions killed Pavel. Granny Sallowpus, a green hag living in the nearby woods, is the only one who knows how to make it. Pavel's seemingly distraught son, a seemingly himboish and innocent young man named Hugo, bought the poison from her to rid the town of an increasingly paranoid and cruel mayor.
- The signs from an old prophecy about an incursion of fungus demons are finally coming to pass. Few in the guild are equipped for such a battle, and the characters are asked to help prevent it. The prophecy hints at a "living vessel" who will "open the gateway" to the demons. Clues point to a small colony of plague-stricken refugees nestled on a windswept plateau, away from most civilization. The colony is under the protection of a powerful but aging cleric, Perviz, who has been holding the disease at bay but has found no cure. His sick 17-year-old son, Mazdak, who dreams of becoming a paladin, is destined to be the living vessel.

- A devil-worshipping cult known as the Mothers of the Fallen Fruit masquerades as a midwife collective. They attempt to recruit Shyma, a promising witch who was also tapped by the guild. She's of two minds about which to join, not knowing the true purposes of either organization. The characters are tasked with convincing her to join the Pickling Guild. Unfortunately, the cult has grown impatient and resorts to kidnapping. Shyma is descended from the green hag Granny Sallowpus, and even if she's uncooperative, her blood and organs are potent...

## NOTABLE CHARACTERS

A diverse set of people are interested in food preservation and public health! Here are a few well-known guild members who each have troubles or secrets to contend with.

### AKANGSHA SUNDARBANDAR (HALFLING, THEY/ THEM)

*"Rot: it is the cold fire that transforms a humble corpse into something marvelous. Once we conquer our fear of it, embrace the peculiar potency that death bestows upon a body—any body, all bodies—then death becomes another toolbox!"*

A stout, elderly wizard, Akangsha is a Fermenter, renowned in the Pickling Guild for their powerful curatives. However, the grandmotherly halfling has a secret: their cures are all necromantic in nature. They maintain a basement full of undead creatures from which to derive cures.

**Signature Look:** Akangsha keeps a pet toad with an enormous mushroom growing on its back by their side at all times. Akangsha considers the mushroom their pet, and the toad is merely the vehicle for it. They've named it Toadstool. (The toad has no name.)

**Personality:** Akangsha is cerebral, doting, and empathetic.

**Statistics:** Akangsha uses the statistics of a mage, but with the following spells prepared:

**Cantrips (at will):** *light, mage hand, mending, poison spray*

**1st level (4 slots):** *detect magic, false life, grease, unseen servant*

**2nd level (3 slots):** *acid arrow, gentle repose*

**3rd level (3 slots):** *animate dead, glyph of warding, vampiric touch*

**4th level (3 slots):** *blight, private sanctum*

**5th level (1 slot):** *hold monster*

## INVOLVING AKANGSHA

Well-meaning but risk-taking Akangsha might get involved in the characters' story with the following story hooks:

- An unknown enemy of the guild frees Akangsha's undead in an attempt to kill Akangsha. The elderly wizard is now trapped in a warded room in their house while undead roam the streets. If the characters get to the bottom of what's going on, they have to choose whether or not to reveal Akangsha's secret to the guild.
- Limiel the Wise, a zealous Fermenter, discovers Akangsha's secret and is convinced they're evil. They dispatch the characters to investigate the necromancer and either capture or kill them (whichever is easier). Akangsha, not knowing the characters, greets them with milk and cookies. Moaning from the basement might interrupt the tea party.
- Rai, a grieving baker, asks the characters to locate his great-aunt Jayatri's corpse after it goes missing before her funeral—oops, Akangsha has been fermenting it! Can the characters get it back before it's unrecognizable? Or can they figure out a creative way to mollify Rai?

## GLORIAN THE SECRETARIAT (DOPPELGANGER, THEY/ THEM)

*"You think an organization runs on people? Wrong! An organization runs on paper! Memos, hastily jotted instructions, circulars of policy, records of accounts and transactions... the form of true power, my dear, is crisp, white, and flat!"*

Glorian, one of the most influential Artisans of the Pickling Guild, handles much of its administrative affairs, both mundane and secret. This identity is a front: Glorian is a doppelganger named Tchilinfallorsh who seeks revenge against the unknown Director who "let" their elf lover, Cyril Twindew, die of disease a few decades ago. They care nothing for the Pickling Guild's mission.

**Signature Look:** Glorian's hands are always stained with ink, no matter their form. They appear as an elf.

**Personality:** Glorian seems fastidious and obsessive, but that is a ruse to hide their calculating nature.

**Statistics:** Glorian uses the statistics of a **doppelganger**.

## INVOLVING GLORIAN

Scheming Glorian might get involved in the characters' story with the following story hooks:

- Glorian, worried that another Artisan knows their secret, tells the characters that a guild member (pick one the characters know) is sabotaging the guild and pays

the characters to "deal with" them. Glorian planted fake letters from a made-up demon cult in this member's lodgings.

- The real Glorian, who knows nothing about the Pickling Guild and who the doppelganger thought dead, arrives in town. Tchilinfallorsh tells the characters that he is an evil spy sent to infiltrate the guild, and he must be killed before he can wreak havoc. The real Glorian, on hearing that the characters are adventurers for hire, approaches them to find and return some precious items that were stolen from him by bandits while en route to this city.
- Glorian believes that one of the characters is their reincarnated lover, and tries to capture them to "force the soul out."

## IVMAL ALEF HUMAN, HE/HIM

*"Why do I ferment? Consider this: you and I may separately follow the recipe for a cake and bake two identical desserts. But if you and I follow the exact same recipe for fermented cabbage, why, no power on earth will allow these two cabbages to taste the same. To ferment is to create art. To ferment is to be individual."*

Scrawny, redhead, and fresh out of his teens, apprentice alchemist Ivmal is an ardent Annual Member of the Pickling Guild who doesn't suspect its true purpose. He volunteers at a tiny, guild-controlled shop and is always on the lookout for new members.

**Signature Look:** Ivmal always wears one item of clothing or jewelry with a vegetable motif.

**Personality:** Ivmal is effusive, enthusiastic, and artsy.

**Statistics:** Ivmal uses the statistics of a **commoner**.

## INVOLVING IVMAL

Naïve Ivmal might get involved in the characters' story with the following story hooks:

- The Pickling Guild's leadership wants to evaluate Ivmal for promotion to Fermenter. They ask the characters to look into his alchemy master, Uma Tilothma, for signs of trouble. Tilothma, unfortunately, has become the target of a local necromancer known as the "Crypt Eater" who mistakenly believes that the old alchemist discovered the secret of returning intelligence to zombies and skeletons. Should anything happen to Tilothma, Ivmal would be devastated.
- Ivmal needs rare sky-spider eggs from a particularly intimidating rival alchemist, Greta "the Gorilla," the only known sky-spider breeder. He asks the character to fetch the eggs for him, knowing full well that she hates Ivmal and would never knowingly give him any useful

ingredients. Greta is looking for someone to act as a test subject for an experimental antivenom she's developing and is willing to trade eggs if the characters volunteer.

- As part of his studies, Ivmal has been experimenting with novel food preservatives. He accidentally poisons his master, Uma Tilothma, and petitions Glorian the Secretariat for help, who dispatches the characters to find an antidote. Glorian may use this opportunity to test the characters to see if they're candidates for guild membership, especially if Glorian feels they can manipulate the characters for their own goals.

## NUPITA & NUHARA MFALA (DRAGONBORN, SHE/HER)

*"Why should we waste our time praying for miracles when the real miracles are all around us? The gods don't need us to recite chants in a dusty chapel, they expect us to get into the dirt and dig up the ruddy weed that'll cure us!"*

Blue-scaled Nupita and her purple-scaled teenage daughter Nuhara are Fermenters who run a microbrewery in remote Radha's Grace, a village known for its profusion of fantastic insect life. The pair secretly collect samples of the local wildlife to use in new remedies, particularly the eggs, cast-off exoskeletons, and shucked-off chrysalides of

the rare insects that thrive there. While the two love each other dearly, they often butt heads over Nuhara's independence.

**Signature Look:** Their claws are exquisitely painted with floral motifs.

**Personality:** They are practical women, dedicated to their task. Nupita is somewhat anxious, while Nuhara is naturally curious.

**Statistics:** Nupita uses the statistics of a druid, and Nuhara uses the statistics of a commoner.

## INVOLVING NUPITA & NUHARA

The adventurous mother-daughter duo might get involved in the characters' story with the following hooks:

- As soon as the characters arrive in the village, they stumble upon a public accusation: a priest named Ona claims that the "dragon witches" have poisoned their beer supply. In truth, Ona himself doctored the beer (with powerful but nonlethal laxatives), as he sees the women's influence as a challenge to his own.
- On a surreptitious tryst with her paramour in the woods, Nuhara is waylaid by a hag. The pair is discovered by Nupita, who bargains her own life in exchange for her daughter's freedom. Now Nuhara is back in the village, guilty, distraught, and looking for a way to free her mother from the hag's clutches.



- Nuhara is possessed by a ghost that escalates her feelings of resentment and rebellion against her mother to an extreme degree. She approaches the characters with a fabricated story about the cruel, inhumane treatment she's experiencing at home and a plan to assassinate her mother.

## PICKLING VS. FERMENTING

Pickling is altering and preserving food by soaking it in vinegar or another acidic liquid. Fermentation similarly alters food, but uses naturally occurring bacteria, fungi, and other organisms instead. There are overlaps between the two processes, but they're not the same thing (as any member of the Pickling Guild can tell you)!

# DOMAIN STATISTICS

If you're using the domain rules from *Kingdoms & Warfare* in your game, the Pickling Guild could be an NPC or villainous realm in your game with the following statistics.

## TITLE

The Pickling Guild's leader gains the following feature:

**Poulstice Master.** The poultice master is immune to disease. Additionally, during a long rest, the poultice master can create a *spell scroll of lesser restoration* or two items chosen from the following list: antitoxin, basic poison, *potion of healing*. These items lose their potency and no longer work after 24 hours.

## THE PICKLING GUILD

*Mystic circle (secret cabal)*

**Skills:** Diplomacy +0, Espionage +3, Lore +4, Operations +2

**Defenses:** Communications 14, Resolve 13, Resources 13

**Size** 2 (d6 Power die, 6 domain turns during intrigue)

## POWERS

All officers of this realm get the following organization powers.

**Universal Energy Field.** As an action, an officer takes a power die from their domain's pool and recovers a number of spell slots with a combined level equal to the number on the power die. None of the slots the officer recovers can be 6th level or higher.

Alternatively, as a bonus action, the officer can take a power die from their domain's pool and charge one weapon they are holding with magical energy. The officer chooses one of the following damage types: acid, cold, fire, or lightning. Until the start of the officer's next turn, the weapon deals extra damage of the chosen damage type equal to the number on the power die.

**Verdant Summons.** As an action, an officer takes a power die from their domain's pool and conjures a plant with a challenge rating equal to or lower than the number on the die. The plant appears in an unoccupied space that the officer can see within 30 feet of them. The officer mentally controls the actions the plant takes. The plant acts immediately when it is summoned, then immediately after the officer on the same initiative count.

Plants summoned by this power disappear when they are reduced to 0 hit points or after 3 rounds, whichever comes first.

## FEATURES

**Curse of Vitiation.** If the Pickling Guild's Communications level is 2 or higher at the start of a combat against an opposed domain's officers, the Pickling Guild chooses one lieutenant from an opposed domain. That lieutenant has disadvantage on saving throws during the combat.

**Swamp Mother (Special Unit).** As a domain action, an officer makes a DC 13 Lore test. On a success, the Pickling Guild musters the Swamp Mother, a special unit formed of shambling mounds. (See the "Domains & Intrigue" chapter in *Kingdoms & Warfare*).

**Unravel Sorcery (1/Intrigue).** As a domain bonus action, an officer can make a Lore test against an opposed domain's Communications to learn about the magical abilities of one of that domain's officers. On a success, the Pickling Guild learns what spells the target knows and has prepared, and has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects used by that officer until the end of the intrigue.

**We Were Never Here.** As a domain action, an officer makes a Lore test against an opposed domain's Communications. On a success, the Pickling Guild's Communications level increases by 1 and the opposed domain's Communications level decreases by 1.

# WONDERS OF THE WILDS

NATURE-THEMED MAGIC ITEMS AND SPELLS

by Hannah Rose

A YOUNG MAN WEARING A CLOAK OF LEAVES RACES THROUGH THE JUNGLE, TRANSFORMING INTO A PANTHER MID-LEAP.

A BRONZE-SKINNED TIEFLING CROUCHES IN THE SHADOW OF A TALL SAND DUNE, DEEP IN CONVERSATION WITH A LONG-EARED FOX.

A STATUESQUE ELF RAISES HER ARMS TO GREET A SPRING RAINSHOWER AS PRISMATIC WILDFLOWERS BLOOM AROUND HER.

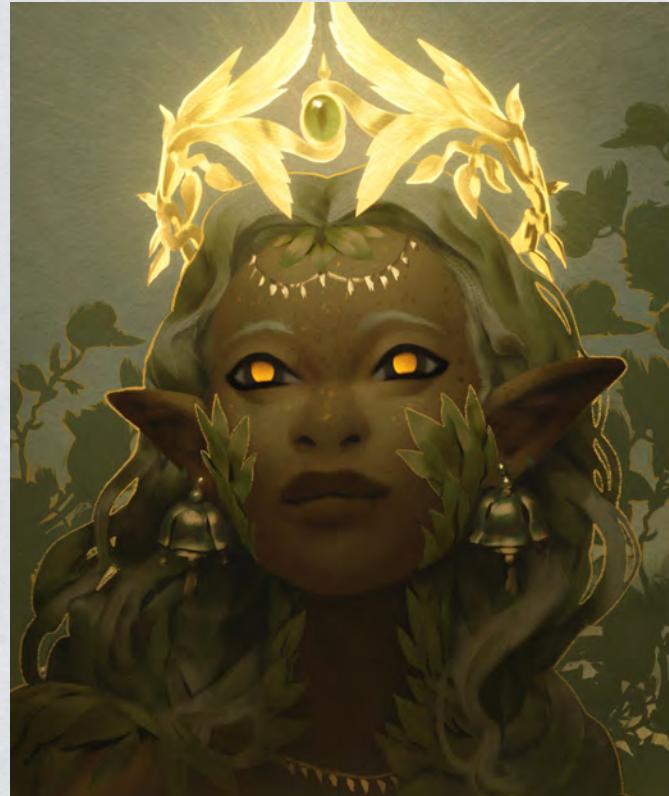
Characters with a deep connection to nature protect, nurture, and explore the world around them. As they wander untold landscapes in search of adventure, they seek out or stumble upon magic items to aid them in their quests.

This article presents magic items designed for druids, rangers, and other characters with an affinity for the natural world. At the Game Master's discretion, the class-specific attunement requirements for an item may be waived for a character who is deeply tied to nature in some other way.

While the items may be available for purchase in a shop—or a swamp witch's hut—it may be most appropriate for characters to find them in the wilderness from which they draw their power.

## NEW SPELLS

Most spells in the descriptions of the following magic items can be found in the fifth edition core rules, but spells marked with an asterisk (\*) are new spells presented at the end of this article.



# AMULET OF WOODLAND SPEECH

*Wondrous item, uncommon*

This small stone pendant is carved like an acorn and feels slightly warm to the touch.

The amulet has 3 charges, and regains all expended charges daily at dawn. While wearing this pendant, you can understand and speak Sylvan, and you have advantage on Wisdom (Animal Handling) checks made to interact with nonhostile animals. In addition, you can expend 1 charge as an action to cast the *speak with animals* spell from it.

## STORY HOOK: AMULET OF WOODLAND SPEECH

Humanoid loggers are destroying the habitats of many woodland folk, and when the loggers turn their sawblades to a flourishing grove, the animals of the forest send the awakened squirrel Quickpaw to ask for the characters' aid. If they can scare away the loggers or persuade them to take their tree cutting elsewhere, Quickpaw gives them an *amulet of woodland speech* from her winter store. "You can't munch it, but it's warm!"

## BAG OF SAPLINGS

*Wondrous item, rare*

This rough homespun bag appears empty, but reaching inside the bag reveals the presence of many small seeds. The bag weighs half a pound.

You can use an action to pull a seed from the bag and throw it up to 20 feet. When the seed lands, it grows into an awakened tree (see the core rules for its stat block). Unless it dies or you pull another seed from the bag, the tree remains animated until the next sunset, at which point it takes root if possible.

While animated, the tree is friendly to you and your allies. In combat, the tree shares your initiative count, but it takes its turn immediately after yours. You can use a bonus action to command how the tree moves and what action it takes on its next turn, or to give it general orders, such as to attack your enemies. In the absence of such orders, the tree doesn't act except to defend itself if attacked.

Once three seeds have been pulled from the bag, the bag can't be used again until the next dawn.

# BELT OF VINES

*Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement by a druid)*

This belt of intricately woven vines twists and tightens as you wrap it around your waist, entwining its tendrils to grasp you snugly. While wearing this belt, you can use your Wild Shape to transform into a plant, choosing from the forms on page 14.

## CHARM OF COMMUNICATION

*Wondrous item, uncommon*

This ceramic pendant bears the indent of a feline paw print. While transformed into a beast by the Wild Shape feature, the *polymorph* spell, or similar magic, you can communicate telepathically with any beast or humanoid you can see within 30 feet of you.

## STORY HOOK: CHARM OF COMMUNICATION

A druid named Issoire is trapped in the form of a lynx, and he needs the characters' help to return to his humanoid form. Luckily, the *charm of communication* dangling on a leather cord around his neck allows him to communicate telepathically with the party, and he offers to make another charm for them when he is returned to his humanoid shape.

## CLOAK OF THE GROVE GUARDIAN

*Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement by a druid)*

This magnificent cloak is fashioned of living leaves in a dazzling array of green hues. While wearing this cloak, you are always under the effects of the *speak with animals* spell, and you gain a +3 bonus to spell attack rolls and to the spell save DC of your druid spells. In addition, if you aren't wearing armor, your base Armor Class is  $11 + \text{your Dexterity modifier} + \text{your Wisdom modifier}$ .

As an action, you can magically animate up to two trees you can see within 60 feet of you. An animated tree has the same statistics as a treant (see the core rules for its stat block), except it has Intelligence and Charisma scores of 1, it can't speak, and it only has the Slam action option.



# KRAKENVINE

Large plant

**ARMOR CLASS** 12 + PB (natural armor)

**HIT POINTS** 30 + 10 × PB

**SPEED** 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	2 (-4)

**CONDITION IMMUNITIES** blinded, deafened

**SENSES** passive Perception 11

**LANGUAGES** —

*Plant Camouflage.* The krakenvine has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in areas with abundant plant life.

*Power of Nature.* The krakenvine's weapon attacks are magical.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The krakenvine makes two vine lash attacks, each of which it can replace with one use of Fling.

**Vine Lash. Melee Weapon Attack:** +3 + PB to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1d8 + 3 + PB bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 11 + PB). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained. The krakenvine can grapple up to two targets in this way at once.

**Fling.** One Medium or smaller object held or creature grappled by the krakenvine is thrown up to 30 feet in a direction of the krakenvine's choosing and knocked prone. If a thrown target strikes a solid surface, the target takes 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage for every 10 feet it was thrown. If the target is thrown at another creature, that creature must succeed on a DC 11 + PB Dexterity saving throw or take the same damage and be knocked prone.

# THORNBUSH

Medium plant

**ARMOR CLASS** 13 + PB (natural armor)

**HIT POINTS** 20 + 10 × PB

**SPEED** 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	13 (+1)	2 (-4)

**CONDITION IMMUNITIES** blinded, deafened

**SENSES** passive Perception 11

**LANGUAGES** —

*Plant Camouflage.* The thornbush has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in areas with abundant plant life.

*Power of Nature.* The thornbush's weapon attacks are magical.

**Stickler.** When the thornbush hits a creature with an opportunity attack, that creature's speed becomes 0 for the rest of the turn. Creatures provoke opportunity attacks from the thornbush even if they take the Disengage action before leaving its reach.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The thornbush makes a number of thorny strike attacks equal to half your proficiency bonus, rounded down.

**Thorny Strike. Melee Weapon Attack:** +3 + PB to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2d4 + 3 + PB piercing damage.

An animated tree acts as your ally. The tree remains animate for 1 day or until it dies; until you fall unconscious or are more than 120 feet from the tree; or until you take a bonus action to turn it back into an inanimate tree. The tree then takes root if possible. Once you use this property, you can't use it again until the next dawn.

## HALO OF THE HEAVENS

*Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement by a druid)*

This shimmering halo floats slightly above the wearer's head, illuminating their features in a golden glow. While wearing this halo, you can expend a use of your Wild Shape feature to transform into a pegasus, or expend two uses of your Wild Shape feature to transform into a unicorn (see the core rules for these stat blocks). Additionally, while wearing this halo, you have advantage on Charisma checks made to interact with celestials.

### STORY HOOK: HALO OF THE HEAVENS

A wounded unicorn named Ciela staggers through a thicket, entreating the party with an urgent request: help her save her mate, Estelle, who was captured by a coven of **night hags** planning to slowly drain her blood to make new **heartstones**. If the characters defeat the hags, the unicorns reward them with a *halo of the heavens*. Alternatively, if the characters are already motivated to help the unicorns, Ciela gives them the *halo of the heavens* in advance to help them with their mission.

## STAFF OF THE DESERT SANDS

*Staff, very rare (requires attunement by a druid or ranger)*

This staff can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. While holding it, you have a +2 bonus to spell attack rolls. In addition, you don't gain levels of exhaustion from the effects of extreme heat or extreme cold.

The staff has 10 charges for the following properties. It regains  $1d6 + 4$  expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff loses its properties and becomes a nonmagical quarterstaff.

**Spells.** You can use an action to expend 1 or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier:

- blur* (2 charges)
- dust cloud\** (3 charges)
- faerie fire* (1 charge)
- gust of wind* (2 charges)
- meld into stone* (3 charges)
- speak with animals* (1 charge)
- stoneskin* (4 charges)

You can also use an action to cast the *create or destroy water* spell from the staff without using any charges.

**Spirit of the Sand.** You can use an action to plant one end of the staff in sand and expend 1 charge to cast *sandstorm*,\* centered on the staff. You and up to six creatures of your choice that you can see are immune to the effects of the sandstorm. Once this property is used, it can't be used again until the next dawn.



# STAFF OF THE ENDLESS PLAINS

*Staff, very rare (requires attunement by a druid or ranger)*

This staff can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. While holding it, you have a +2 bonus to spell attack rolls. In addition, you have advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in tall grass and Wisdom (Survival) checks made to track creatures across grassland.

The staff has 10 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff loses its properties and becomes a nonmagical quarterstaff.

**Spells.** You can use an action to expend 1 or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier:

- locate creature* (4 charges)
- locate object* (2 charges)
- longstrider* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th)
- pass without trace* (2 charges)
- plant growth* (3 charges)
- scrying* (5 charges)
- wind walk* (6 charges)

You can also use an action to cast the *locate animals or plants* spell from the staff without using any charges.

**Traveler's Blessing.** As an action, you can expend 1 charge and choose up to six creatures you can see within 30 feet of you. For the next eight hours, each creature's travel pace is doubled, it ignores the effects of any levels of exhaustion it already has, and it can't gain new levels of exhaustion from environmental hazards or tiring travel.

# STAFF OF THE FROZEN TUNDRA

*Staff, very rare (requires attunement by a druid or ranger)*

This staff can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. While holding it, you have a +2 bonus to spell attack rolls. In addition, you don't gain levels of exhaustion from the effects of extreme cold, and you have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks made to track creatures across icy terrain.

The staff has 10 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff loses its properties and becomes a nonmagical quarterstaff.

**Spells.** You can use an action to expend 1 or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier:

- create or destroy water* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th)
- flurry of icicles\** (2 charges)
- hold monster* (5 charges)
- ice sheet\** (4 charges)
- instant freeze\** (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th)
- wall of ice* (6 charges)
- water walk* (3 charges)

You can also use an action to cast the *protection from energy* (cold only) spell from the staff without using any charges.

**Igloo Form.** You can use an action to plant one end of the staff in snow or ice and expend 1 charge to transform it into an igloo that lasts for 8 hours. The igloo is a dome centered on the staff with a radius of 10 feet, AC 14, and 30 hit points. It can shelter ten creatures of Medium size or smaller, and the inside of the igloo is a comfortable temperature, regardless of the weather outside.

The igloo appears ordinary, but radiates a faint aura of transmutation magic if targeted by *detect magic*. While touching the igloo and using another action to speak the command word, you can dismiss the igloo early. If the igloo is reduced to 0 hit points, the staff returns to its normal form.

## STORY HOOK: STAFF OF THE FROZEN TUNDRA

In their travels across a snowy landscape, the characters discover a perfect shelter from the frigid arctic night: an igloo! If the party spends the night inside the igloo, a druid or ranger character dreams of a keen-eyed white fox who transforms into an old dwarf woman and whispers the command word *haribur* in their ear. This command word turns the igloo into a *staff of the frozen tundra*.

# STAFF OF THE GRANITE PEAKS

*Staff, rare (requires attunement by a druid or ranger)*

This staff can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. While holding it, you have a +2 bonus to spell attack rolls. In addition, you and creatures you choose within 30 feet of you are considered acclimated to breathing at elevations up to 20,000 feet.

The staff has 10 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff loses its properties and becomes a nonmagical quarterstaff.

**Spells.** You can use an action to expend 1 or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier:

- call lightning* (3 charges)
- jump* (1 charge)
- meld into stone* (3 charges)
- move earth* (6 charges)
- stone shape* (4 charges)
- thunderwave* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th)
- tremorsense\** (2 charges)

You can also use a reaction to cast the *feather fall* spell from the staff without using any charges.

**Bridge Form.** You can use an action to plant one end of the staff into the ground within 5 feet of a chasm or other gap and expend 1 charge to create a sturdy wood-and-rope bridge with a length of up to 50 feet, a width of 5 feet, AC 15, and 20 hit points per 5-foot section. The bridge appears ordinary, but radiates a faint aura of transmutation magic if targeted by *detect magic*. While touching the bridge and using another action to speak its command word, you return the staff to its normal form. Any creature on the bridge falls when it reverts to a staff. If any 5-foot section of the bridge is reduced to 0 hit points, the staff returns to its normal form.

## STORY HOOK: STAFF OF THE GRANITE PEAKS

While traveling in the mountains, the characters come across a perilous chasm spanned by a simple bridge. While crossing the bridge, a druid or ranger character who places their hand on the rope handrail hears the command word *haku'ar* ringing in their mind. This command word turns the bridge into a *staff of the granite peaks*.



# STAFF OF THE SWAMPLANDS

*Staff, very rare (requires attunement by a druid or ranger)*

This staff can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. While holding it, you have a +2 bonus to spell attack rolls. In addition, you have advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to move quietly in swamps and Wisdom (Survival) checks made to track creatures across swampy ground.

The staff has 10 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff loses its properties and becomes a nonmagical quarterstaff.

**Spells.** You can use an action to expend 1 or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier:

*entangle* (1 charge)

*fog cloud* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th)

*giant insect* (4 charges)

*insect plague* (5 charges)

*plant growth* (3 charges)

*spike growth* (2 charges)

*water walk* (3 charges)

You can also use an action to cast the *speak with plants* spell from the staff without using any charges.

**Bog.** You can use an action to plant one end of the staff in the ground and expend 1 charge to create a bog in a 60-foot radius around the staff. This area is difficult terrain for creatures other than you. Another creature that starts its turn in the bog must make a Strength saving throw against your spell save DC or have its speed reduced to 0 until the start of its next turn. The bog lasts for 1d4 + 2 rounds or until you pull the staff out of the ground, at which point the bog is sucked into the ground and vanishes.

# STAFF OF THE TIDES

*Staff, very rare (requires attunement by a druid or ranger)*

This staff can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. While holding it, you have a +2 bonus to spell attack rolls. In addition, you have a swimming speed equal to your walking speed, and when you are within 10 miles of a body of water with tides, you always know when the next high and low tides are.

The staff has 10 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff loses its properties and becomes a nonmagical quarterstaff.

**Spells.** You can use an action to expend 1 or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier:

*control water* (4 charges)

*create or destroy water* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th)

*fog cloud* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th)

*gust of wind* (2 charges)

*jet of water*\* (3 charges)

*maelstrom avatar*\* (4 charges)

*water walk* (3 charges)

You can also use an action to cast the *water breathing* spell from the staff without using any charges.

**Kayak Form.** You can use an action to place one end of the staff in water and expend 1 charge to transform the staff into a paddle and a kayak that can fit up to two Medium creatures. Only you can paddle the kayak. The kayak appears ordinary, but radiates a faint aura of transmutation magic if targeted by *detect magic*. While holding the paddle, you can use an action to speak its command word and return the staff to its normal form.

## SUBTERRANEAN STAFF

*Staff, rare (requires attunement by a druid or ranger)*

This staff can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. While holding it, you have a +2 bonus to spell attack rolls. In addition, you can't be surprised while underground.

The staff has 10 charges for the following properties. It regains  $1d6 + 4$  expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff loses its properties and becomes a nonmagical quarterstaff.

**Spells.** You can use an action to expend 1 or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier:

- faerie fire* (1 charge)
- meld into stone* (3 charges)
- pass without trace* (2 charges)
- protection from poison* (2 charges)
- stoneskin* (4 charges)
- tremorsense\** (2 charges)
- wall of stone* (5 charges)

You can also use an action to cast the *darkvision* spell from the staff without using any charges.

**Web Spinner.** You can use an action and expend 1 charge to shoot a thick strand of sticky webbing out of the staff. Make a ranged spell attack against a creature you can see within 30 feet of you using your spellcasting ability. On a hit, the target is restrained. The restrained target can use its action to make a Strength check against your spell save DC, bursting out of the webbing on a success.

## STAFF OF THE SEASONS

*Staff, rare (requires attunement by a spellcaster)*

The spirit of an ancient eladrin druid inhabits this long wooden staff, which changes form to reflect the current mood of the spirit. Whenever you complete a long rest, roll 1d4 to determine what form the staff takes: 1 (autumn), 2 (winter), 3 (spring), or 4 (summer).

The staff has 10 charges. The staff regains  $1d6 + 4$  expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff turns to dry leaves and is lost forever. While holding it, you can use an action to expend 1 or more of the charges to cast certain spells from it, using your spell save DC and spellcasting ability modifier.

**Autumn Form.** Small red and gold leaves wreath the top of the staff in a dazzling fall canopy. While the staff is in this form, you can cast the following spells from it: *aid* (2 charges), *bless* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th), *create food and water* (3 charges), and *cure wounds* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th).

**Winter Form.** The wood of the staff is cool to the touch, and small sprigs of holly sprout from the top. While the staff is in this form, you can cast the following spells from it: *bane* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th), *blindness/deafness* (2 charges), *gust of wind* (2 charges), and *sleep* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th).

**Spring Form.** The knobby top of the staff is adorned with new leaves and budding flowers. While the staff is in this form, you can cast the following spells from it: *beacon of hope* (3 charges), *conjure animals* (3 charges), *enhance ability* (2 charges), and *goodberry* (1 charge).

**Summer Form.** Deep green leaves shade the top of the staff, rustling gently in an unseen breeze. While the staff is in this form, you can cast the following spells from it: *continual flame* (2 charges), *daylight* (3 charges), *haste* (3 charges), and *heroism* (1 charge per spell level, up to 4th).

## WILDFLOWER WAND

*Wondrous item, uncommon*

This slim wooden wand has tiny carved wildflowers twining around its length. While holding the wand, you can cast the *druidcraft* spell at will.

# SPELLS OF THE WILDS

At the GM's discretion, any spell can be made available to other classes or subclasses not listed below.

## DRUID SPELLS

### 1st Level

*Instant freeze* (evocation)

### 2nd Level

*Flurry of icicles* (evocation)

*Tremorsense* (transmutation)

### 3rd Level

*Dust cloud* (conjunction)

*Jet of water* (conjunction)

### 4th Level

*Ice sheet* (conjunction)

*Maelstrom avatar* (transmutation)

### 5th Level

*Sandstorm* (evocation)

## RANGER SPELLS

### 2nd Level

*Tremorsense* (transmutation)

### 3rd Level

*Dust cloud* (conjunction)

### 4th Level

*Maelstrom avatar* (transmutation)

### 5th Level

*Sandstorm* (evocation)

## SORCERER SPELLS

### 1st Level

*Instant freeze* (evocation)

### 2nd Level

*Flurry of icicles* (evocation)

### 3rd Level

*Dust cloud* (conjunction)

### 4th Level

*Ice sheet* (conjunction)

## WARLOCK SPELLS

### 3rd level

*Dust cloud* (conjunction)

### 4th Level

*Maelstrom avatar* (transmutation)

### 5th Level

*Sandstorm* (evocation)

## WIZARD SPELLS

### 1st Level

*Instant freeze* (evocation)

### 2nd level

*Flurry of icicles* (evocation)

### 3rd level

*Dust cloud* (conjunction)

*Jet of water* (conjunction)

### 4th Level

*Ice sheet* (conjunction)

# DUST CLOUD

3rd-level conjuration

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** 60 feet

**Components:** V, S, M (a pinch of dirt)

**Duration:** Concentration, up to 1 minute

**Classes:** Druid, ranger, sorcerer, warlock, wizard

You create a 20-foot-radius sphere of swirling dust at a point you can see within range. The cloud spreads around corners, and its area is lightly obscured. It lasts for the duration or until a wind of moderate or greater speed (at least 10 miles per hour) disperses it.

A creature that starts its turn in the cloud or enters it for the first time on a turn, including when the cloud first appears, must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or become blinded until the start of its next turn.

**At Higher Levels.** When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, the radius of the cloud increases by 20 feet for each slot level above 3rd.

# FLURRY OF ICICLES

2nd-level evocation

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** Varies

**Components:** V, S, M (a drop of water)

**Duration:** Instantaneous

**Classes:** Druid, sorcerer, wizard

You create a freezing volley of sharp icicles. When you cast this spell, you choose what shape the effect takes:

- **Cone.** The icicles fly from your hands in a 15-foot cone.
- **Line.** The icicles shoot from your hands in a line 30 feet long and 5 feet wide.
- **Cube.** The icicles fall from above in a 10-foot-cube centered on a point you can see within 30 feet of you.

Each creature in the chosen area must make a Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 2d6 piercing damage and 2d6 cold damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

**At Higher Levels.** When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the cold damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 2nd.

# ICE SHEET

4th-level conjuration

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** 60 feet

**Components:** V, S

**Duration:** Instantaneous

**Classes:** Druid, sorcerer, wizard

A sheet of gleaming ice spreads across the ground in a location you choose within range. The area of the ice sheet consists of up to ten 10-foot squares, which you can arrange as you wish. Each square must have at least one side adjacent to the side of another square. Each creature in the area when it appears must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or fall prone and take 2d6 cold damage.

In addition, a creature who moves more than 5 feet on a turn in the area must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw when it stops moving, or fall prone and take 2d6 cold damage.

Each 10-foot-square section of the ice has AC 12, 15 hit points, vulnerability to fire damage, and immunity to cold, poison, and psychic damage. Reducing a 10-foot section of ice to 0 hit points destroys it and leaves behind a puddle that is difficult terrain until it dries.

# INSTANT FREEZE

1st-level evocation

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** 30 feet

**Components:** V, S, M (a piece of saltpeter)

**Duration:** Instantaneous

**Classes:** Druid, sorcerer, wizard

You freeze a 5-foot cube of water that you can see within range. Any creatures in the water must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or become restrained. A restrained creature can use its action to make a Strength check against your spell save DC, breaking the ice around it and freeing itself on a success.

**At Higher Levels.** When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the size of the cube increases by 5 feet for each slot level above 1st.

# JET OF WATER

3rd-level conjuration

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** Self (60-foot line)

**Components:** V, S, M (a small hollow tube)

**Duration:** Concentration, up to 1 minute

**Classes:** Druid, wizard

You open a channel to the Elemental Plane of Water for a brief time. A jet of saltwater forming a line 60 feet long and 5 feet wide blasts out from you in a direction you choose for the spell's duration. Each creature that starts its turn in the line or enters it for the first time on a turn must make a Strength saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes  $4d6$  bludgeoning damage and is knocked prone. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone.

In addition, any creature in the line must spend 2 feet of movement for every 1 foot it moves when moving closer to you.

The jet extinguishes flames in the area. Medium or smaller objects in the line that aren't secured to anything and aren't worn or carried by anyone are knocked over or pushed up to 15 feet away from you.

As a bonus action on each of your turns before the spell ends, you can change the direction in which the line blasts from you.

**At Higher Levels.** When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, the damage increases by  $1d6$  for each slot level above 3rd.

# MAELSTROM AVATAR

4th-level transmutation

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** Self

**Components:** V

**Duration:** Concentration, up to 1 minute

**Classes:** Druid, ranger, warlock

You call upon the spirits of the wind and waves to transform you with their surging power. Until the spell ends, stormy winds swirl around you, small waves crash against the ground at your feet, and you gain the following benefits:

- Attacks against you have disadvantage.
- You make Strength and Dexterity saving throws with advantage.
- Moving through nonmagical difficult terrain doesn't cost you extra movement.

When you hit a creature with a melee attack, you can choose to channel a final surge of tempestuous might to deal an extra  $2d8$  lightning or thunder damage (your choice). The spell then ends.

# SANDSTORM

5th-level evocation

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** 120 feet

**Components:** V, S, M (a pinch of sand)

**Duration:** Concentration, up to 1 minute

**Classes:** Druid, ranger, warlock

You create a 30-foot-radius sandstorm centered on a point you can see within range. Medium or smaller objects that aren't secured to anything and aren't worn or carried by anyone are caught up in the howling winds. The area is heavily obscured.

A creature that starts its turn in the sandstorm or enters it for the first time on a turn, including when the sandstorm first appears, must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or take  $5d8$  bludgeoning damage and become blinded until the start of its next turn. In addition, a Medium or smaller creature that fails the save is pushed 10 feet in a random direction.

# TREMORSENSE

2nd-level transmutation

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** Touch

**Components:** S, M (a tiny pendulum)

**Duration:** 8 hours

**Classes:** Druid, ranger

You touch a willing creature to grant it the ability to sense vibrations in the earth. For the duration, that creature can detect and pinpoint the origin of vibrations within 120 feet, provided that the creature and the source of the vibrations are in contact with the same ground or substance. This sense can't be used to detect flying or incorporeal creatures or see invisible ones (though it can pinpoint the location of an invisible creature moving on or through the earth).

# AETHELFAER

A WARDEN OF NATURE AND A FOREST-THEMED ENCOUNTER

by Sara Thompson

*A figure stalks the forest, blending with foliage and underbrush, eyes locked on his target. The doe heedlessly chews on grass and moss, oblivious to the hunter lurking between the trees. Deft fingers crafted from elm and owlbear teeth notch an arrow, hooking it on the sinew of the bowstring and drawing back. The raven feather fletching kisses the hunter's cheek—a soft caress as he sets his shoulders, straightens his spine, and takes in a slow, deep breath. The forest pauses. All is still. The world comes down to this one moment. The arrow. The deer.*

*Release.*

*The arrow flies, the doe jolts. Large eyes opened wide, joints locked in fright. It's a clean shot, straight through the neck. The deer staggers, its cry sharply cut off, before keeling to the ground, lifeless. Its suffering was short, as intended.*

*The hunter approaches, the fingers of the elm wood prosthetic that forms his right arm flexing as he draws out a hunting knife, the blade serrated and hooked at the point. He thanks the spirits of the forest, for this kill shall serve him greatly, and kneels down, setting to work. None of this shall go to waste.*

**A**ethelfaer [pr. eθəlfəə: / EH-thell-fair] is a male wood elf, committed to the nomadic lifestyle of roaming the forests and grasslands, protecting the wildlife and offering aid to those in need. He's patient and calm, with an unflappable persona built on years of hunting and tracking.

Aethelfaer inherited a genetic condition called meromelia, a syndrome that causes the partial absence of limbs. As a result, Aethelfaer is missing the lower part of his right arm from just above the elbow and has no right foot. Though he can navigate his life just fine on his own, he chooses to wear and make use of prosthetics.

His right arm is crafted from red elm and owlbear teeth, with a hidden compartment inside the wrist where he stores a small container of poison for emergencies. His prosthetic foot is made of yew that has gone through the same magical strengthening and flexibility treatment as his longbow.

A formidable warrior and deadly archer, Aethelfaer takes desecration and disrespect of the forest as a grave offense, and hunts his enemies to the end of the world if he must. As an ally, he is loyal, fair, and a true friend. However, once his respect is lost, it is gone forever.



## AETHELFAER IN YOUR GAME

Though Aethelfaer is a good-aligned character, his interactions with the characters can vary. He could guide the characters through dense and wild forests, help them navigate the ruins of an ancient temple hidden in the trees, or arrive at a critical moment to aid them in a deadly encounter in the woods. He could seek out the characters to ask for their help ending a threat to his forest. But he can also act as an antagonist, a relentless hunter seeking vengeance against characters who, even unknowingly, slighted or dishonored the spirits of the forest.

If one of the characters impresses Aethelfaer—for example, if they save his life or show great admiration and respect for the forest—he grants them a boon by performing a magic ritual. He douses the character with water from a sacred forest spring and asks them to drink herbal tea made from moss, flowers, and the roots of ancient trees. A character who participates in the ritual gains the following boon:

**Friend of the Forest.** Moving through nonmagical difficult terrain in a forest doesn't cost you extra movement. While in a forest, you can cast the *spike growth* spell, requiring no material components. Wisdom is your spell-casting ability for this spell. You can cast the spell twice in this way without expending a spell slot, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

## AETHELFAER PLOT HOOKS

d12	PLOT HOOK
1	Aethelfaer finds the characters lost in the forest. He promises to lead them to their destination if they help him take on a local necromancer creating zombie versions of beasts and plants.
2	A rival group of adventurers challenges the characters to a hunt in Aethelfaer's forest. Whoever claims the head of the legendary silver hart wins a chest of gold. But it's a trap! The rivals don't intend to participate and know that a hunter in the woods stalks any who dare harm the hart.
3	The characters unknowingly trespass into a sacred domain deep within the forest. Aethelfaer appears, claiming that they have disturbed the ancient gods of the forest and the deities demand recompense. This must come in the form of an offering made by sundown the next day at an altar within an underground catacomb. If they refuse or fail to do so, Aethelfaer declares that they will be cursed for the rest of their lives.
4	Aethelfaer approaches the characters as they set up camp, seeking their aid in slaying what he calls a dark spirit that possesses an ancient redwood tree in the forest. Its presence poisoned the surrounding woodland, turning the creatures into zombie drones and making the trees aggressive. One such tree attacked Aethelfaer and he was lucky to get away with his life. He believes this dark power is something bigger than he alone can handle. He offers the characters a magical item from the forest gods (such as a staff of the woodlands or an item from "Wonders of the Wilds" in this issue) as payment for helping him end the threat.
5	Throughout the forest are ancient statues of old forest gods, all of them animal-esque in design. Somehow, they have become animated and are attacking travelers as they walk the paths. The players are attacked by one such statue as they pass through the forest. Aethelfaer appears after or part way through combat to lend assistance and explain the situation.
6	A nearby settlement started culling wolves in response to attacks on their farm animals. Aethelfaer is adamant that it isn't the wolves attacking and is saddened by the settlers' decision. He wants to prove the beasts' innocence and suspects there is something else going on. The ranger appeals to the characters for assistance.
7	A group of deserter soldiers set up a fortified camp in the forest, seeking refuge and the chance to live in peace with their families and loved ones, far from the horrors of war. However, a hidden hunter (Aethelfaer) stalks the woods around them, shooting arrows at them whenever they attempt to hunt a nearby herd of elk. Food is running short but the hunter is relentless; the refugees are growing desperate and beg the characters for help. What the refugees don't know is that the elk are an incredibly rare breed, almost extinct. Aethelfaer has taken it upon himself to be the protector of the herd, defending them from any and all threats.
8	A well-meaning but inexperienced witch recently moved into the forest, seeking respite from the overwhelming life of the city. Whilst planting a herb garden, they used magic to help the seeds stay safe from birds, but the spell backfired. The seeds are safe and growing, but the birds' appetites have changed to carnivorous. Now the feathered creatures attack other animals and any people who enter the forest. Aethelfaer promised to help the witch by finding someone who has arcane training enough to somehow reverse the spell. The characters might enact a ritual or know someone capable who they can escort through the forest of carnivorous birds.
9	A rich, spoiled noble is intent on building his "summer home" in the forest, uncaring that he will destroy a site sacred to the gods and wood elves. Aethelfaer discovered his workers disturbing the ancient structures and became enraged, confronting them. Weapons were raised and the noble drew a pistol, landing a lucky shot in Aethelfaer's shoulder and forcing him to retreat. Determined to stop this construction work, a wounded Aethelfaer seeks the help of the passing characters.
10	A group of unruly satyrs robs travelers as they camp in the forest, taking everything of value. The characters are their next victims and wake to find some of their belongings missing and an unimpressed Aethelfaer asking if they saw anything during the night.
11	Aethelfaer appears before the characters, dropping down from the trees as they travel through the forest. He warns them against leaving or straying too far from their campsite at night and to ignore any voices they hear calling out, even if they think they recognize them. Something evil amongst the trees is luring people in, and they are never seen again.
12	Carved arcane symbols and talismans keep appearing amongst the trees, all of them resembling sweets and baked goods, marking what the locals have taken to calling the Trail of Sweets. The surrounding settlements send children they can't afford to feed down this trail, and the children wander off into the forest, never to be seen again. The nomadic ranger, Aethelfaer, senses something dark lurking in the heart of the forest.

# AETHELFAER

Medium humanoid (wood elf), neutral good

**ARMOR CLASS** 18 (+2 breastplate)

**HIT POINTS** 65 (10d8 + 20)

**SPEED** 35 ft. (40 ft. while wearing prosthetic foot)

STR 10 (+0)	DEX 18 (+4)	CON 14 (+2)	INT 12 (+1)	WIS 16 (+3)	CHA 10 (+0)
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**SAVING THROWS** Dexterity +7, Wisdom +6

**SKILLS** Acrobatics +7, Animal Handling +6, Insight +6, Nature +4, Perception +6, Stealth +7, Survival +6

**SENSES** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

**LANGUAGES** Common, Common Signs (see sidebar), Elvish, Sylvan

**CHALLENGE** 5 (1,800 XP)

**PROFICIENCY BONUS** +3

**Archery Fighting Style.** Aethelfaer gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls with ranged weapons (included in the attack).

**Athletic Advantage.** Aethelfaer has advantage on Strength (Athletics) checks made to climb and jump while wearing his prosthetic foot.

**Cunning Action.** On each of his turns, Aethelfaer can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

**Fey Ancestry.** Aethelfaer has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

**Poison Application.** Aethelfaer keeps a container of poison in his prosthetic arm. As a bonus action, he can apply poison to one weapon or piece of ammunition. The poison remains potent for 1 hour or until that weapon or ammunition deals damage to a target. If struck by a poisoned weapon or piece of ammunition, the target must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Aethelfaer has twenty doses of poison.

**Spellcasting.** Aethelfaer is a 7th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). He knows the following ranger spells:

1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds*, *hunter's mark*, *longstrider*

2nd level (3 slots): *pass without trace*, *zone of truth*

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Aethelfaer attacks twice with his longbow or three times with his shortsword.

**Longbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

**Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

**Primeval Awareness.** Aethelfaer expends a spell slot to focus his awareness on his surroundings. For 1 minute per level of the spell slot he expends, he can sense if any creatures of the following types are present within 1 mile: aberrations, celestials, dragons, elementals, fey, fiends, and undead. He can't sense the creatures' location or number.

## REACTIONS

**Deflect (1/Day).** When Aethelfaer is hit by a ranged weapon attack and wearing his prosthetic arm, he can attempt to deflect the missile used in the attack. The damage he takes from the attack is reduced by 12 (1d10 + 7). If the damage is reduced to 0, Aethelfaer catches the missile and can make a ranged attack with it as part of the same reaction with a +9 bonus to the attack roll. The attack uses the missile's original range.

## AETHELFAER PLOT HOOKS

You can roll on the table on p. 25 or choose a plot hook to bring Aethelfaer into your campaign.

## AETHELFAER IN COMBAT

In combat, Aethelfaer aims to fight at a distance. If he works with the characters, Aethelfaer slips into the shadows to provide ranged support from the flank. If battling the characters, he casts *hunter's mark* on a foe with spell-casting prowess and then uses his superior speed to keep firing as he moves away from his enemies. The ranger uses poisoned arrows on enemies who get within 40 feet of him or who need to come down quickly. His spells are supportive and beneficial to both his allies and himself, allowing for stealth, healing, and enhancing combat skill sets.

### COMMON SIGNS

Unlike thieves' cant, which is a pidgin of borrowed signs, verbal words, and symbols from multiple languages, Common Signs is a complete sign language, borrowing from Dwarvish, Elvish, and Undercommon. It is considered a universal language and adapted by disabled communities, especially within cities. As such, most people across the realm can communicate using it.

Common Signs is designed to be easy to learn, and spellcasters can make use of it to cast their spells. Effects that prevent casting spells with verbal components, such as the area of silence created by the *silence* spell, are still effective against casters who use Common Signs. While affected by such a spell or effect, the caster forgets the important signs needed to cast spells with verbal components.

## ENCOUNTERING AETHELFAER

You can use the following encounter to introduce Aethelfaer to the characters when they are around 4th level.

As the characters travel a forest trail, they stumble upon a strange sight: a harried wood elf engaged with an enraged unicorn.

You step out from the trees into a small clearing where a tall elf stands with his hands raised, attempting to calm, of all things, a unicorn. It wails and screeches, eyes rolling and mouth frothing violently as foul-smelling demons surround the pair, gnashing their teeth. The elf wears a bow over one shoulder and a sword at his hip, but reaches for neither. The unicorn rears up, lashing out a foreleg, and he jumps back, barely dodging the heavy hoof aimed for his head. The small demons snarl, advancing to attack the elf.

Aethelfaer faces Onriel, a **unicorn**, and eight **dretches**. Unbeknownst to the characters and Aethelfaer, the unicorn was enchanted with a magical burr created by Granny Roachhand, a **night hag** who also summoned the dretches. She can cast the *giant insect* spell once per day with her Innate Spellcasting trait (and she carries a live scorpion for the purpose).

She wants to rule the forest and hopes to rid the wood of its wardens, Onriel and Aethelfaer, with this one curse. Granny Roachhand drank a *potion of invisibility* so she could watch the action in person. She silently stands nearby.

Aethelfaer is no coward and is capable of fighting back, but avoids harming creatures unless he deems it absolutely necessary. Unicorns are beautiful and proud celestials with generally gentle dispositions. Aethelfaer admires them as creatures of the old gods of the forest. He refuses to hurt Onriel, and can't abide anyone killing the unicorn. He is fine with killing the dretches.



## ONRIEL'S CURSE

Granny Roachhand's curse makes Onriel want to kill Aethelfaer and any other creatures that get in the way. The unicorn views the dretches as allies.

A character who casts the *detect magic* spell or who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check knows that Onriel is under the effect of an enchantment caused by a prickly burr stuck in the unicorn's mane. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that the burr has a slight red glow to it. The *lesser restoration*, *dispel magic*, *protection from evil and good*, or *remove curse* spells or similar magic end the enchantment. A character who makes a successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check as an action can remove the burr from the unicorn, ending the enchantment. Reducing Onriel to 0 hit points and stabilizing the unicorn ends the enchantment, though Aethelfaer reacts as though the characters had killed the unicorn (see "Aftermath") unless the characters succeed on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check to convince the ranger that it was the proper course to save Onriel. When the curse ends, Onriel enters a deep slumber as the magic leaves the unicorn's body, becoming unconscious for 1 hour.

**Aethelfaer's Hint.** If the characters can't decide how to approach the Onriel situation, Aethelfaer notices the glowing burr and asks them to remove it while he distracts the unicorn.

## GETTING INVOLVED

When the characters arrive, half the dretches rush to meet them in combat so the unicorn can kill Aethelfaer. The demons fight until destroyed.

Aethelfaer is surprised to see unfamiliar faces this far in the forest, but he won't turn help away. He makes it incredibly clear that the unicorn is not to be harmed, declaring that something must be wrong for Onriel to behave this way. If the characters rush to attack the unicorn, they make an enemy out of Aethelfaer, who fights to defend Onriel against any threat.

Subduing or killing the unicorn results in a frustrated Granny Roachhand revealing herself by attacking the characters for interfering with her plans. When she appears, Aethelfaer curses and calls out:

*Face me yourself, coward! No more tricks. Your kind is not welcome here.*



Aethelfaer joins the fight against the hag. She casts *giant insect* to create an enormous scorpion and then rides on its back, casting *magic missile* at enemies or attacking with her claws if the characters dare engage her in melee. Remaining dretches attack the unconscious Onriel or the characters if the unicorn is dead. At your discretion, four more dretches might claw their way up out of the Lower Planes if the characters already dispatched all or most of the demons before the hag appears. Granny Roachhand battles the characters until she is reduced to 30 hit points or fewer, at which point she casts *plane shift* to escape. As she disappears, she cries:

*You haven't seen the last of me, ranger. Flee my wode while you can.*

## AFTERMATH

If the characters save Onriel, Aethelfaer is in their debt. He could ask the characters for more help (see “Aethelfaer Plot Hooks”), offer to travel with them to the hag’s nearby lair to end her threat against the forest once and for all, or even offer to accompany them on their adventures as a retainer (see “Aethelfaer as a Retainer”).

If the characters fail to save Onriel, Aethelfaer leaves after the battle, slipping into the woods. He becomes their enemy, shadowing them whenever they enter the forest and intervening whenever they commit the smallest offense, ready to kill.

## GRANNY ROACHHAND

Granny Roachhand's coven of night hags in the Lower Planes exiled her for scheming against the other sisters. She recently came to Aethelfaer's forest and plots to corrupt the beasts and plants in the wode to create an army of loyal servants. Her goal is to claim the forest as her domain and torture unsuspecting travelers who enter the woods for fun, but Aethelfaer and Onriel keep foiling her plans.

## AETHELFAER'S DISABILITY

Aethelfaer was born with his disability and chooses to wear prosthetics to help him perform certain tasks when adventuring. Unlike someone who may have lost a limb due to injury, illness, or amputation, Aethelfaer doesn't experience phantom limb syndrome, as his right arm and foot were never there to begin with. This also means that nothing short of a *wish* spell could reform these appendages, but Aethelfaer doesn't seek to "cure" himself. In fact, he would be greatly insulted if offered or forced into a situation where such a spell is brought up as a means to somehow "fix" him. He has no need to be "fixed" or "cured" and little patience for those ignorant enough to think otherwise.

The ranger is open about his disability and happy to answer questions others may have, but he doesn't suffer fools. Aethelfaer is an expert in knowing who is being genuine and who is deliberately ignorant or rude.

## AETHELFAER AS A RETAINER

Retainers first appeared in *Strongholds & Followers* and are unique NPC followers who ally with the characters. These adventurers are easy-to-run secondary characters controlled by players. Below is a retainer stat block for Aethelfaer.

The full rules for retainers are explained in *Strongholds & Followers*.

## AETHELFAER RETAINER

**ARMOR** Medium (AC 17)

**PRIMARY ABILITY** Dexterity, Wisdom

**SAVES** Strength, Wisdom

**SIGNATURE ATTACK** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9

to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target.

*Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage.

### SPECIAL ACTIONS

**3rd-Level (3/Day):** *Poison Arrow.* Aethelfaer makes his signature attack. If he hits a creature, the target must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

**5th-Level (3/Day, Bonus Action):** *Cunning Action.* Aethelfaer takes the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

**7th-Level (1/Day):** *Multiattack.* Aethelfaer makes three signature attacks, then takes the Dash or Hide action.

## PROSTHETICS

Aethelfaer's prosthetic arm and foot slot over the stump of each limb and are further secured in place by leather harnesses: one around his shin and calf, and the other around his chest, sitting under his armor. It takes Aethelfaer 2 minutes to secure each harness and roughly 30 seconds to remove them.

To prevent chafing or bruising—especially when wearing a prosthetic for long periods of time—Aethelfaer's stumps are protected by "socks." These pieces of fabric are rolled up and folded down to cover the skin and protect the area where the stump meets the cup of the prosthetic. At the start and end of each day, Aethelfaer uses powdered talc to keep the skin dry and free from any rashes, uncomfortable chafing, and blistering, particularly on warm days or when the humidity is high.

When traveling or in an unknown location, Aethelfaer sleeps with his prosthetics on in case of an ambush or need to escape. However, if he is in a place he knows to be secure and safe, Aethelfaer removes his prosthetics to sleep and uses an underarm crutch under his left arm for support when moving around.

## HIDDEN COMPARTMENT

Aethelfaer has a hidden compartment in his prosthetic arm, running the length of the inside of his wrist. By pressing the heel of his thumb (which requires no action), this slot pops open and reveals a metal groove packed with a strange paste. This alchemical component is a personal

poison Aethelfaer has created himself, and exposing the compartment allows him to swiftly coat the head of any arrow or blade he draws with a toxic coating to deal extra damage.

### NATURAL GRIP

Aethelfaer's prosthetic foot is crafted to have the general shape of a deer's hoof. This allows for a greater range of motion in the ankle joint and enables that foot to take significant impact when running, climbing, or performing athletic or dexterous feats. The wedge of the prosthetic's foot provides a better grip on mountainous and rocky environments, as well as the typical underbrush of the forest and dirt of the grassland. The flexibility of this prosthetic is showcased greatly whenever Aethelfaer is running or if he is lightly bouncing on the balls of his feet—something he does often when nervous or agitated.

## AETHELFAER'S CRAFTSMANSHIP

If the characters don't make an enemy of Aethelfaer, he is happy to craft prosthetic limbs for characters who need them. However, characters need to find and provide him with the materials to do so. To craft a prosthetic arm or hand, Aethelfaer needs wood (any kind), leather straps, owlbear teeth, sinew, and resin. To craft a prosthetic leg or foot, he needs yew wood, leather straps, deer antler (ethically sourced), sinew, and resin. Aethelfaer knows a magical strengthening and flexibility wood treatment that is iconic of wood elf bow crafting and used in the creation of his prosthetics.

If a character supplies Aethelfaer with the components, he doesn't charge them for the service.

### PROSTHETIC STATS

A prosthetic limb presents no advantages or disadvantages whenever you are wearing it, and you can perform all typical motor skills from everyday to fine. Prosthetics require no attunement and are secured to your body using a harness that sits underneath your armor. It takes 2 minutes to don the harness and 30 seconds to remove it. Prosthetic limbs can't be knocked off unless the harness is somehow destroyed.

Custom-made prosthetics, such as the ones worn by Aethelfaer, can provide benefits to you. See "Hidden Compartment" and "Natural Grip" for ideas.

It is extremely important for Game Masters and other players to remember that disability isn't a punishment and shouldn't be held against a character.

### MISSING ARM

If you aren't wearing your prosthetic arm/hand, you have disadvantage on wielding two-handed weapons and on ability checks using fine motor skills if you are only using that arm/hand.

### MISSING LEG

If you aren't wearing your prosthetic leg/foot, your walking speed is reduced by 5 feet unless you are using mobility aids such as crutches or a wheelchair.

## MORE THAN A DISABILITY

Disabilities are very much a part of our lives, but aren't what solely define a person. Aethelfaer does and should have interests as a fleshed-out character, with his disability making up only a *part* of who he is. As such, it's important to note that Aethelfaer enjoys hunting, whittling animals out of wood, and gathering plants and herbs to produce potions and tinctures he then sells or trades for supplies. He is knowledgeable in the horticulture of forests and grasslands, and is exceedingly fond of ravens and other corvids.



**SHARANG BISWAS** has won IndieCade and IGDN awards for roleplaying games, and has showcased interactive works at institutions such as The Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, Pioneer Works in Brooklyn, and The Museum of the Moving Image in Queens. He has written for games such as *Spire*, *Sea of Legends*, *Jiangshi: Blood on the Banquet Hall*, *Into the Motherlands*, and *Dungeons & Dragons Live*, while his essays and fiction have appeared or are forthcoming in Dicebreaker, Eurogamer, Lightspeed Magazine, Fantasy Magazine and more. He is the co-editor of “Honey & Hot Wax: An Anthology of Erotic Art Games” (Pelgrane Press, 2020), and “Strange Lusts / Strange Loves: An Anthology of Erotic Interactive Fiction” (Strange Horizons, 2021).



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