

**The Winnowers  
Ascension Dryads  
OFFICIAL ASCENSION RACE PACKET**

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Faruq Strongbough stepped into the clearing, drawing the attention of the creature he had been tracking for the last three days. He'd been observing it, monitoring its actions, trying to make a determination as to whether or not to cull it. It was dangerous, alright, given the remains of carcasses it had left behind, and fierce in battle... but if it could be calmed, be turned over to the Kutari to domesticate, it might be of use.

The creature bared its teeth, letting out a yowling growl that Faruq had heard many times over the past few days. He stood his ground, doing his best to not make any threatening moves. The creature twitched, settling itself to pounce, and Faruq sighed, This was not going to end well.

As the creature started to run at him - fast little thing, Faruq noted with a certain amount of respect - Faruq stepped back, placing his hand against a tree branch. A section of it separated at his touch, perfectly shaped, and at the creature leapt at him, he swept his new club to bat it from the air. It fell away, rolling to a stop, and struggled to get to its feet. He'd given it something to think about; hopefully that would be enough to stop it from attacking again.

It shook itself, yowled again, and launched another attack. Faruq dipped to the side, palm coming down on a flat rock, and as he stood up, a small, rocky shield was in his hand, large enough to block snapping teeth that had lunged at him. "Ah well," he thought. His decision was made, and it was time to fight in earnest.

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Lagu of House Silverflower paused in her weeding, silently watching the sleeping form of Faruq. Her family had guarded him for countless generations, raising their grove around him, tending to the food the Cairn while keeping him safe. As a child, she had played games near where he slumbered, giggling and laughing between the bushes. As a battle-scarred adult, she had raised her own family within sight of him. And now, as an Elder, pulling weeds with arthritic fingers, she

was finally blessed with what her ancestors had hoped for all these many long years. He had moved in his sleep - dreaming, she fancied - the smallest of movements, perhaps, but to one who had spent her entire life watching him, it was as noticeable as a scream in a silent room. Her heart leapt with joy where her body could not. The High Orcs' long vigil was nearly over. The Dryads were waking up.

### **Dryad Racial Basics**

Dryads were among the first races to walk to land, born at a time when ancient woodlands (which the Dryads have deemed the First Forest) dominated the landscape. Descending from a being known only as Autumn, these "Children of Autumn" served as guardians of the natural world. When the Fall occurred, the Dryads fell into a deep sleep, and have only recently begun to reawaken.

Dryads are classified into four different subtypes. There are the Thorns, the most common of the four, resembling flowers or leafy plants; the Barkskins, most akin to the trees of the forest; the Reeds, who dwell in swamps, ocean shores, and rivers; and the Spores, fungal types who prefer the damp darkness of caves. Spores are the youngest, living only a few mere decades. Thorns' and Reeds' average lifespans tend to be about a century, while Barkskins' lifetimes are closer to those of the Elves.

### **Dryad History**

Since ancient times, Dryads were the companions of the dragons, living as guardians of the world. Magic rose spontaneously from the dragons; life spawned in their wake. Dryads were tasked with the duty of evaluating what was born. What was good, was released into the world, or given over to the High Orcs to serve as caretakers. What was not, was put down quickly and mercifully.

For many years, the Dryads fostered their two main partnerships, growing strong ties with the dragons and the High Orcs. The Kutari, as their green-skinned allies preferred to be called, lived simple lives as farmers, raising their plants and animals in relative peace, providing food and a sense of calm stability for the Dryads, allowing them to balance the two halves of their lives.

When the Vreech attacked, the Dryads shifted focus to protect the dragons. This unfortunately left their other duties unstaffed, and as the dragons attempted to fight off the Vreech, the rate and variety of spawned creatures increased. Dryads knew that these creatures would need to be dealt with when the danger of invasion had passed, but they never got the chance to finish that task. During the last battle, as the crystal pillars of the Selunari shattered, the Dryads were struck senseless.

The Orcs acted quickly, carrying their friends to safety. Once they reached the Cairns, the Kutari established groves, and ensconced the comatose Dryads in the center of each. Having lost their longevity, generations came and went, with families taking on guardianship of the Dryads during

their Long Sleep. The Orcs kept their vigil, raising the food for the Cairn and watching over the sleeping charges, hoping that, one day, they would return.

### **Recent History**

The last few years have been a time of upheaval for the Dryads, and for all around them. After countless years lost to the Long Sleep, the Dryads have started to stir. At first, it was merely a single Dryad, who awoke lost and confused - and most of the Cairn considered that to be a hoax thought up by the Orcs, or perhaps some fluke. As others awoke, though, they became instant celebrities, a cause for gossip and optimism.

For the Dryads, this was an extreme shock. To them, the events of the Fall were still fresh - their last memories before falling into the Long Sleep was of the ritual failing, of Vreech tearing apart the dragon of the Earth, of an endless swarm rising up to assault their forces... to wake up and discover that so much time had passed, that their memories were clouded and their bodies were weaker, that everyone they had known (other than other Dryads) had long since died and passed to dust.... Most Dryads took this quite hard, but young Circle-born offered to listen, and a partnership was struck.

As time passed, and more Dryads slowly woke, the novelty wore off until only the Orcs considered an awakening a cause for celebration. Only a few Dryads still slumber, and their green-skinned caretakers anxiously await for them to rouse and be ushered back into society.

No one - least of all the Dryads themselves - know why they fell asleep, nor why they have finally started to wake. Some have speculated that this has to do with their long-lost progenitor, but none have heard even a whisper of them whilst locked away safely in the Cairn.

### **Dryad Culture**

Due to their duties as guardians of the dragons' clutches, Dryads are used to approaching things with an open mind, giving all creatures a chance to prove themselves. While this was normally directed towards animals, this left them with a somewhat diplomatic disposition in general. However, Dryads did not hesitate if a creature needed to be culled, and so tended not to suffer fools lightly.

Dryad culture has been forced to adapt greatly, almost overnight, due to the loss of the dragons and their groves, and the shift to Cairn living. Most Dryads report feeling lost, and are in the process of discovering their place in the world. While the other races (especially the Orcs) do their best to make the Dryads feel welcome, many feel a sense of estrangement. The Spore Dryads, however, seem to be thriving the most, and have shifted from being some of the quietest (in terms of Dryad society) to a position of prominence, being active and outspoken. Many of the other subtypes have some issue with taking this in stride, with some griping about trends of the Spores' dark, absurdist sense of humor or questioning their priorities.

Prior to the Fall, Dryads had the ability to shape items from the natural world to serve as tools and weapons, with things like wood and stone simply reacting to their touch to shift into the needed shape. While that ability was lost during the Fall, many Dryads still hold an interest in sculpture, carving, and similar crafts that involve shaping things.

### **Dryad Holidays & Celebrations**

Of all of the races in the Cairn, Dryads are the most capable of maintaining seasonal celebrations, simply feeling the change of seasons in their bones (and seeing it as their foliage changes, even underground). After countless years in the Long Sleep, those who awoke simply... picked back up their schedule, and continued on as if their celebrations had not stopped. This has caused some consternation to the other races, who don't quite know what to do with the Dryads, but the Dryads do not seem bothered by this.

Dryads maintain two major festivals, Shamanar and Zarkho. Shamanar is a spring festival, focusing on new growth and new potential. Dryads take this time to make resolutions for the coming year. Zarkho happens in the fall, and is a harvest festival that does double-duty as the "racial birthday" of the Children of Autumn. Zarkho is typically celebrated with a harvest feast, storytelling, and dancing.

### **Death Customs**

Dryads take an exceptionally practical view of death, as it is part of the natural cycle. When a Dryad suffers their permanent death (either in battle, or due to old age), the flesh starts to convert into plant material. Within a few hours, it starts to root itself to the ground (or, at the very least, attempt to, depending on terrain). Within a few days, the body have converted fully, with Barkskins becoming trees, Reeds becoming patches of vegetation, etc. Close examination of the plants will give a canny observer that it is no ordinary plant; hints of the person tend to live on in the plant, and there tends to be some lingering element that may leave some unnerved. A Dryad who nears the end of their natural lifespan knows their time is approaching; they can feel their coming end in their bones, and will often try to pick out a suitable location before the last of their life slips away.

Stories from the past claim that their leaders had all melded into the same tree as their times came, in ages long past.

### **Dryad Names**

Dryad names usually include a given name, and often a surname that references their subtype. Dryad given names include Suredar, Beran, and Zana. Dryad surnames include Greenleaf, Stinkhorn, and Brambleberry. Dryads who do not use a surname typically add honorifics they may have had before they slept. Such honorifics normally related to their specific job, such as "Culler of Rodents" or "Chooser of Beauty". The hard part with honorifics now is they may sound out of place. To those who know, though, these names carry great weight. Dryads are a people out of time, and some things did not survive that transition smoothly.

## **Dryad Racial Notes**

Dryad can purchase Herbal Lore at half cost, and can purchase the skill Resist Binding (for 4 XP). Because of their aversion to metal they are limited to two points of armor per location, and cannot use primarily metal armor.

They can use any weapons, but should avoid using primarily metal weapons - alternative materials (such as obsidian, bone, etc) should be used in weapons that would normally be metallic. The Dryad are not related to plants in the way that Wylderkin are related to animals – they are not “plant kin.” You may not play a “pine tree Dryad” or a “sunflower Dryad.” Think more in terms of the natural environment the Dryad comes from or the general type of plant to which the Dryad has an affinity. Before the Fall, the Winnowers were those that chose. They were the beings who took the wild life created in the mystical vortexes of the dragon clutches, and decided what had a place and what did not. They could even summon the powers of nature itself. They were very powerful, and communed with the land itself. Now, that is all gone. For most, that would cause melancholy and hopelessness. The Winnowers, however, believe that, like many things in nature, during their hibernation they went through a chrysalis to survive what is next and remake their way into the world. It is those who people should pay attention to, the ones who have lost everything and still find hope and passion in the smallest of things.

## **Dryad Dress**

The Dryad tend towards predominantly earth tones that blend into their environment or complement their plant sides. Black, greys, browns, greens, ruddy reds and rusty oranges are common. This can vary greatly from event to event, as their foliage changes with the seasons and, when possible, they prefer to change their clothing to match. Even with the limitations within the Cairn, small accessories - medallions and other jewelry being among the most common - are frequently used to mark the changing seasons.

Dryad armor is made of natural (nonmetal) materials. Rivets holding leather armor together is acceptable, as is a few little coins in a pouch. However, a metal bracer wrapped around the forearm would feel extremely uncomfortable – distractingly uncomfortable. It is not just the iron content of any particular metal that bothers the Dryads. The manipulation of the mineral through heating, melting and forging that throws off its ‘energy’, generating discord to any Dryad who is near it. The level of discord becomes unmanageable when the quantity of metal is large enough to serve as armor.

## **Dryad Racial Makeup**

Dryads must use makeup appropriate for their subtype. All must have some sort of plant-like prosthetic, such as flowers in the hair or vines around the body. Makeup can be as simple or as creative as you wish, as long as it is nature-inspired. The makeup can (but does not have to) change with the seasons, as appropriate to the subtype; thus a Barkskin Dryad could be primarily gray in the winter, green in the spring and summer, and orange in the fall.

## **Interactions with Other Races**

Dryads are still trying to acclimate to all of the changes that occurred during the Long Sleep, and that includes how they interact with other races.

Dark Elves, Stone Elves, Harbinger Elves: Dryads are unhappy with the Elves of the Protectorate, as the events of the Fall are still fresh for the Dryads. Many harbor a suspicion that the failure of the ritual was the Elves' fault, and that the failure is the reason their race was splintered.

Forest Elves: Dryads are happy to see their old friends survived the Fall, though the Jade Pact have changed greatly since the olden days. Dryads hope that the Forest Elves did not make a bad choice when they bonded themselves to the Primal Fae.

Humans: Dryads delight in Humans as well, hoping to see what develops from the youngest of the races..

High Ogres: Dryads are endlessly fascinated by the Circle-born, though that occasionally manifests as the curiosity you'd show a bug that crawled across the table.

High Orcs: The Dryads are eternally grateful to the Kutari for standing vigil during the Long Sleep, though they lament the changes in their friends. They hope that they can guide the High Orcs back to their connection with the land, and help return them to their pastoral ways.

Wylderkin: As with the High Ogres, the Dryads are fascinated with the Kin as well. Their connection with the natural world is respected, though, and they seek to learn more about this younger race.

Sylvanborn: Few are as old as the Winnowers, save the Incarnate. These Sylvanborn are as old - if not older - than the first of the Dryads. Ancient tales said that when the first Dryad woke, the Incarnate were there to help them to their feet and brush them off. The Dryads saw firsthand how the Elder Fae had manipulated and hurt the Incarnate. They stood with the dragons when they helped separate the Fae's hold over the Sylvanborn.

They are old friends, even if neither of them remember it.

Hoblings: These people are so industrious and solid.... The Dryads have memories at the corners of their thoughts, tugging at them, about these good hearty people. They are always welcome, and always lend a hand. It almost feels as if they have always been around.

The Librahms: We do not know them. They are not who they were before. They have so many secrets that only they can access. They seem to be using it all for the betterment of others - but their own self-interests have to play a part. They are not natural. They are not who they were... who... were they...?