

Oryad



Excerpts from the treatise called 'Observations: Dryad, Phenomena and Nature' by Scholar and scribe Shi'uk Silvercrest XII

"I was the first of my kind to wake. I felt as if I had been thrown out of space, out of time. I wandered, dazed and confused, in a land unlike any I had ever seen before. I learned later I had woken in a place called a 'desert' – sand and sun that stretches for many miles. As I walked my mind began to clear and I could feel my brothers and sisters asleep around me. Slowly, they too began to stir. Four of us awoke that day: one Thorn, one Reed, one Barkskin and one Spore. And so it was that in your year of the Magi 608, the Dryad were reborn." — Asharah Thornbow

When Fortannis was one land, Asharah explained to me, it was covered almost entirely by Great Forest (now known as First Forest). It is said to be where all life on Fortannis began, a place of great magic and tranquility. From this Forest came the Dryad. Not truly plant, not fully animals, they have been dormant for many ages.

"...Long ago, we were born of the very first forest on Fortannis. We watched over the land itself as protectors. The forest grew and so did its power. The Dryad grew in numbers. We waded in the first streams even as those same streams cut their way through the land. We marched over mountains and through deep valleys. My brothers and sisters roamed wherever the forest grew. The forest was home to us..." — Pathal Reed

The people of Fortannis do not remember the birth of any race. Yet, now all that walk these lands can claim they have seen the dawning of a new age. The study of these creatures (I am sure of it) will become an obsession of mine for spans.

PHYSIOLOGY

"They asked if we were plants, or plant-people, and we laughed and told them 'No friends, we are like you.'" — Asharah Thornbow

Although the Dryad live together as one people, there are four distinct subtypes within their race. 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, oceans and rivers; and the Spores, fungal types who prefer the damp darkness of caves.

As the seasons fade and change from year to year, so too do their appearances. The vines of a Thorn may turn brown as the temperature turns cold, while the leaves of a Barkskin may turn from green in the summer to fiery orange in the autumn and withered brown in the winter.

Although they resemble plants in many ways, these creatures are made of flesh, blood and bone. Their skin and organs simply have organic plant material woven into the flesh itself, in the same way that one has hair or fingernails.

As the Dryad age, they resemble more and more the plants



to which they relate. When they permanently die, they become one with the Forest and reappear as that plant. The bodies of Barkskins will often become actual living trees after permanent death; a Spore may return as moss on a stone or a grove of mushrooms.

If in the woods one were to come across an expanse of trees growing in oddly straight lines, for example, this may very well be a Barkskin cemetery.

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; this is perhaps because of their affinity to the long-lived trees of Fortannis.

No matter what their longevity they seem to be here to stay. They have such similar metabolisms to the other races that ap-

plying healing arts or first aid, feeding potions as well as using earth magic works on them just the same. They have a special affinity to herbalism and easily learn to identify plants and their uses; they can also become resistant to binding, magical or otherwise.

SOCIETY AND RELATIONS

"The Dryad, we treat each other as Brothers and Sisters. We have great respect for one another and tend to avoid confrontation with those of our own race, preferring to agree to disagree in strained situations." — Krenel Oakshield

At their height, the Dryad were a plentiful people who grouped themselves into small unnamed tribes. Though many tribes chose the nomadic life, there was also a great number who settled in permanent tree-houses; if many members of a particular tribe were Spores, the camp would often be situated near a cave. Likewise, if the majority of the members were Reeds the camp's territory would often include a lake or swamp. The four peoples lived together without much dissent; indeed, as each related to a different area of the Forest it was beneficial to live peacefully. Reeds and Thorns frequently went into hibernation during the winter months while Barkskins and Spores stayed awake as bodyguards and protectors. Their leaders were chosen by the entirety of the tribe, separate from the selecting of the Elders.

The Dryad were an egalitarian people; aside from the Elders and the elected leaders, they did not see much need for further class distinctions. They were industrious and utilitarian, believing in using every aspect of an available resource and wasting little or nothing at all.

Due to their natural aversion to the material, metal use was almost nonexistent. Tools and weapons were crafted from wood, rock or sometimes bone. Clothing and armor consisted of cloth, furs and leather, tough bark and tightly-woven hemp or rope.

One curiosity to the Dryad is the concept of "marriage" – their people have no such ceremony, just the semantic shift from

having a “mate” to having a “true mate.” Dryad are the real celebration, and births are cause for great feasting and merriment. Young ones consider the whole tribe their extended family and if a Dryad’s true parents die, it is quickly adopted by another willing caretaker.

Though they are familiar with all of what they call the “young races”, in ancient times they held a special bond with the various Kin to roam the woods. It was said that the spirits of the Kin were connected to animals in the same way that the Dryad were connected to plants. The High Ogres they regarded as younger siblings; if the Dryad were the defenders of the Forest, High Ogres were the avengers. They also shared great friendship with the Elves, to whom they bequeathed stewardship of First Forest before the Great Sleep.

The Dryad seem to constantly marvel at how different the present day is from the old times. They are utterly fascinated with modern buildings; they claim to be familiar with huts and simple structures, but have never before seen anything as elaborate as a tavern or castle. They have an almost childlike curiosity and are quite intrigued by complicated devices.

They also seem to be consistently bewildered by the young races’ need for several names to describe themselves. Many have confessed they cannot tell the difference between the races of different lands and have resolved to call them by all their names at once (Sarr-Gorbe or MysticWoodElf-ChildofCamulous-Ansconi, for example).

Extra names have proven themselves useful in certain situations, however. There is a trend among the awoken Dryad of taking a travelling surname based on their subtype (“Reedsong” or “Whitebark”, for example) and of introducing themselves as being “of First Forest.”

ELDERS

“If the Dryad are brothers and sisters, the Elders are our mothers and fathers. The Forest has chosen them to protect and watch over us, just as we protect and watch over the Forest.” — Pathal Reed

Elders were chosen by First Forest itself. No one knew quite what prompted the Forest’s decision so it was rare to see a Dryad questing for the honor.

Once chosen, the Dryad’s connection to the earth deepened immensely, so much so that their very essences could channel that connection. However, this had its price: just as the earth suffers, the Elders suffered far more severely if attacked with necromancy. Their strength increased dramatically and, despite the differing lifespans of the Dryad, they were always long-lived, even perhaps immortal. While the Dryad could grow naturally resistant to binding, Elders could shrug it off altogether and even use it against their enemies. Elders were treated with great respect among the tribes and were frequently sought out by the tribal leaders for advice and direction. When faced with grave decisions, a Council of Elders would be called to handle the situation.

HOLIDAYS AND CELEBRATIONS

“The season changes are times of great joy, when we remember that we came from the Forest. They are the times that represent, to us, joining with the other races of Fortannis... At the same time they are remembrances of why we were drawn forth.” — Safad Thornyfish

Aside from births and minor coming-of-age ceremonies (usually celebrated each decade of a child’s life), they treat the equinoxes and solstices – the changing of the seasons – with great reverence.



Spring (The Waking): This festival is held after the Thorns and Reeds have woken from their winter hibernation. It celebrates the rejoining of the four peoples and the new cycle of the year. Often the community works together to rebuild any structures damaged by the winter cold and makes its plans for the year.

Summer (The Travel): While other races are never excluded from the Dryad’s celebrations, this festival specifically seeks to include them. It represents the Dryad’s connection to and friendship with the young races. It is at this festival that contests of wit (such as pun duels) or strength (such as warriors’ competitions) are held.

Autumn (The Birth): This is the most important holiday to the Dryad, as they believe it was during this season that Fortannis first brought them forth. It often commences with contests of herbal skill, such as perfumes or alchemical concoctions. The highlight of the festival is the Wizards’ Match, where only binding magic is thrown and the last contender still unbound is declared the winner.

Winter (The Sleep): This festival recognizes those who have passed into the world of the dead and seeks to remember their lives. It is not a festival of sadness but rather one of change and hope, when the Dryad look toward the future. After the conclusion of this holiday, Reeds and Thorns begin their winter sleep.

LORE

“The land was once one and the Forest was one with it, and in this forest there were many Firsts. It is believed it was the birthplace of magic, of life; particularly the life of my kind.” — Dendris Reedfire

In ancient times, when Fortannis was one land, the Great Forest stretched as far as the eye could see. The Dryad were its guardians. When it was time to sleep the Dryad made a pact with the Elves that they would continue to protect the forest in the Dryad’s absence. If the Forest ever again needed their protection, the Dryad would awaken once more. Having now woken from the Great Sleep, they believe all forests to be descendants of First Forest and will defend them to the last. It seems that the Dryad wake one another simply by wandering; the presence of one calls to any sleeping in the ground nearby.

It has recently been discovered that parts of First Forest still exist in their ancient form; it has not been determined whether

these “shards” are on this plane or perhaps their own. Elders must enter and reclaim guardianship of these self-contained havens, but once they have done so they can open portals to and from the Forest at will.

When asked why they are sometimes called the Children of Autumn, Safad explained that it was believed they were first created by the earth in the season of autumn. It is said that the race was first fashioned to protect Great Forest while it slept, during the early winters of Fortannis. It should be noted that though they are not directly related to fey Dryads, they do not protest being referred to as such.

CHAOS MAGIC

“I pity the fool who casts necromancy!” — Bloop Sporeface

While some Dryad take a more fanatical view with regard to necromancy, the majority find those who cast it worthy of great pity and disdain. They would first seek to reeducate someone charged with necromancy, but failing that would have little regret punishing or executing them.

“...The Elves did not keep their end of the bargain. The Kin are scattered and weak. The Ogres could not cleanse the land. You have failed, the Elves have failed, all the foolish young races have failed. The land is corrupted and vile and I am twisted with it. We will spread the misery that waited for us when we awoke...” — Nettle of the Malwoken (quoted by Asharah Thornbow)

In the recent events that have led to the Dryad’s awakening, many have found themselves not under pure land, but beneath soil heavy with the taint of necromancy. Dryad woken under these circumstances become so physically and mentally corrupted that they are no longer considered true members of the race. These beings are monsters with abilities that rival even those of the Elders. They believe the Elves failed in their duty to protect the Forest and bear great hatred toward them. They are nihilistic in nature, loving nothing and seeking to hunt the Elves as well as their former brethren. Even the Dryad’s connection to the Kin becomes corrupted in a Malwoken; they seek to feed upon the essence of Kin in the same way that a vampire feeds on blood. (Note: Malwoken are an NPC monster race only.)

There is also occasionally a Dryad that wakes entirely on their own, without the help of another. These Dryad are often disoriented, unaware of their nature though not physically corrupted;

they are called the Miswoken. Luckily, it seems that speaking to an Elder or entering First Forest reminds the wayward Dryad of their true nature; otherwise, it is feared that these Miswoken may be lost forever. Too long without guidance and with temptation from necromantic magic, it is believed that these Dryad might transform into Malwoken. It is not known whether a Malwoken can ever again become a true Dryad – no example of such redemption has yet been recorded.

(Note: A PC can decide that their character is Miswoken, as it pertains only to role-play differences. At any time a player may choose to have their Miswoken character become a normal Dryad. The transformation is not at all physical, but should represent a dramatic shift in the character’s outlook and personality. Miswoken PCs must still role-play an aversion to metal and physically represent the appropriate costume requirements for a Dryad. Miswoken characters are essentially orphans with no knowledge or affiliation to the other Dryad or to nature. They are in discordance with their bond to nature, and as such, are not happy people.)

RACIAL NOTES

Dryad can purchase Herbal Lore at half cost and can purchase the skill *Resist Binding*. Because of their aversion to metal they are limited to two points of armor per location.

The Dryad are not related to plants in the way that Wylder Kin are related to animals – they are *not* “plant kin.” A PC cannot play “a pine tree” or “a rose bush kin”; they would be a Barkskin or a Thorn. 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.

MAKEUP REQUIREMENTS

As long as it is nature-inspired, anything from floral designs on the face to full bark-like makeup is acceptable. Various colors may be used to accent floral patterns as long it is obvious the character is not of any other race (must obviously not be a High Orc, for example!). The player must have leaves/flowers/vines in their hair or on their body – a leafy prosthetic of some form is required. It is acceptable but not necessary to have vines and leaves wrapped around limbs, as long as it does not prohibit safe movement. These should also vary in color or pattern as the seasons change.

COSTUME REQUIREMENTS

The Dryad wear predominantly earth tones, as they tend to blend into their environment. 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 they often change their clothing to match. Their armor is made of natural (nonmetal) materials.

With regard to metal in armor, it comes down to the quantity of the metal and placement. Rivets holding leather armor together is acceptable, just as a few little coins in a pouch may feel only slightly uncomfortable, but a metal bracer wrapped around the forearm would feel extremely uncomfortable – distractingly uncomfortable. This is the reason behind the current rule that only two points of armor may be worn per location.

A better in-game understanding of this limitation can be gained from this description: It is not just the iron content of any particular metal that bothers this race. It’s 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.

