

IN THE HEART OF THE FOREST

A DARK WOODLAND ADVENTURE

1-ON-1 OR PARTIES

LEVEL 5 OR 6



BY BETH BALL

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A Dark Woodland Adventure

Introduction: A huge thank you to Jeff Stevens for my scholarship to the RPG Writer Workshop that guided me through making this adventure. I appreciate it so much!

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A one-shot adventure for 5th-6th level characters.

The adventure contains two possible sidekick characters and leveling tables to aid one-on-one and small-party play.

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Synopsis

In this adventure, the characters gather information in the small village of Redvale on the outskirts of the Blackwoods Forest. They go into the forest in search of Adelle, a druid whose other eleven Circle members have disappeared within the last year.

Inside the forest, they discover several undead beings, including a wood woad, who guides them to Adelle. She and her Circle learned a year before of a sorceress's plan to extend her power beyond the forest, a death sentence for the village of Redvale and the lands beyond. Their only recourse, they decided, was to transform themselves into wood woads, eternal forest guardians, which would allow them to contain her influence. Adelle is the last one left.

She is suspicious of the party at first, but she might help them get to the center of the forest to investigate the dark sorceress and try to put a stop to her destructive plans.

How to Use this Adventure

This adventure is setting neutral and could be easily placed in the Forgotten Realms, at the edge of the Moonwood, for instance, or any homebrew location that has dark forests.

This adventure assumes that you have access to the *Players Handbook* (PHB), the *Monster Manual* (MM), and the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (DMG). Items or creatures that are not referenced in these texts will be referenced in the appendix.

Text box example: Text that appears in a box like this may be read aloud, paraphrased, or omitted as you prefer. It is intended to help describe scenarios and environments.

Sidebar example

Text that appears in sidebars is also optional and intended to provide extra background information or lore that may be helpful as you flesh out the adventure.

Creatures with stat blocks, magic items, or important tables appear in bold with reference information directly following in parentheses: **3x Goblins (MM 166)**. This means that the party encounters three goblins. The goblin stat block may be found in the *Monster Manual* on page 166.

Adventure Hooks

The most direct route to the party's next destination is through a dark part of the forest. They stop in the nearby town for supplies before continuing their travels and hear strange rumors about the forest they need to navigate.

The party reads a posting on a job board asking for a band of explorers willing to help a small village exact justice on a dangerous individual.

If the party has nature-based magic users present, they might sense a darkness or faultline in the Weave. When they pursue this feeling, they stumble upon Redvale to find out what's going on.

If the party is already in a town, perhaps they begin to hear rumors a druid woman in the forest whose entire Circle has disappeared, including a young local man, Cyrus. They're all presumed dead. A few who have gone into the forest recently haven't returned at all. It would be best if the party steered clear of the druid.

Adventure Background

In ages past, the village of Redvale made a pact with a sorceress: they would give her control over the heart of their forest in exchange for plentiful harvests. The sorceress has abided by this pact until now. Her powers are growing, and she's preparing to extend her reach.

Nearly one year ago, the local druid circle learned of the sorceress's plans as her power and dark influence began to spread.

Secretly, one by one, the druids have been transforming themselves into wood woads to spare the village and countryside from an expansion of the sorceress's control. The ritual requires a full moon, so they performed one ceremony each month. It has been eleven months and a few weeks, and the full moon is approaching.

The village remained unaware of the sacrifices until a local man, Cyrus, who left to join the druids a few years before, disappeared entirely one month ago. They think the final druid, Adelle, killed him, and they want justice.

They have no memory of the sorceress's bargain, and they have a deep distrust of the druids and their magic.

Characters

Adelle—The final druid of the Blackwoods Circle. She feels an enormous responsibility for the fate of the forest, the druids, and the village. She keeps a close secret: she is the descendant of the sorceress within the forest. *Adelle could serve as a sidekick character for 1-on-1 play. See Appendix D for her stat block and instructions on how to run a sidekick.*

Adelle enters the adventure in Chapter Two. Information about her personality and characteristics is detailed at the beginning of that chapter.

Cyrus—The last druid, besides Adelle, to undergo the transformation and become a wood woad. However, in an unusual twist to the ceremony, Cyrus has retained some of his own personality. This is perhaps caused by his birth outside the forest, unlike the other druids, or maybe his care for Adelle. He finds and helps the party on their journey and aims to assist them in bringing an end to the sorceress.

Lorelei—The village trapper and one of the few still willing to go into the forest. *Lorelei could also serve as a sidekick character for 1-on-1 play, especially as the party navigates Chapter One and before they meet Adelle. See Appendix D for her stat block and instructions on how to run a sidekick.*

Erayna—The shadow sorceress whose sights have expanded beyond the borders of the Blackwoods Forest. She has faced others who tried to remove her from power before, and she is not afraid to do so again.

Erayna enters the adventure in Chapter Three. Information about her personality and characteristics is detailed at the beginning of that chapter.



Prologue: Redvale

The following tables are meant to make the party's information-gathering in Redvale easier. Below, you will find some possible location names, townsfolk, and rumors. The preceding adventure hooks will also help with information for the villagers to communicate.

Villagers

Quincey—outgoing innkeeper of the Scarlet Leaf Inn and Tavern, he has lots of free-wheeling stories and his own fair share of forest lore.

Lorelei—village trapper, she knows about the three who went into the forest before: Cyrus's brother Delric and his close friend Neil disappeared a week ago. Her former assistant Julien was the first to investigate and has been gone for a month. She will go with the party to find him if they need a guide.

Eloise—capable village mayor, she's relieved the adventurers have arrived when they did. It's high time for law and order to be restored, even inside the borders of the forest.

William—Cyrus's cousin, one of the few willing to say that the three who went into the forest weren't necessarily the most capable. It never sat right with the village, Cyrus leaving town to settle in the depths of the Blackwoods with a bunch of hermits.

Buildings and Locations

Scarlet Leaf Inn and Tavern

Vale Market

Blackwoods General Store

Fireside Bookshop

Rumors

Lucia, one of the oldest women in the village: Legends tell of a fountain of youth in the heart of the forest, said to be surrounded by beautiful red flowers. It's for them that the town was named.

Martin, a middle-aged farmer: Most people won't say so, and some don't remember, but there was a time, several decades ago, when people disappeared into the forest and didn't come out again.

Evie, a dark-haired woman with symbolic tattoos on her hands and across her collarbones: She doesn't want to tell her fellow townsfolk as it would arouse suspicion, but the harvest moon bade ill for this season, warning of death. And, if they're looking for Adelle, she can be found in the eastern reaches of the forest, among the scarlet blossoms.

Chapter One:

Through the Fog

Careful of step, those yet living must be. Unimagined treasure, the discerning may see.

—Karylenn, Evie's mother

Against the advice of the townsfolk of Redvale, the adventurers make their way into the forest in search of the druid woman they've been warned about. Three other villagers have disappeared within the last month and may still be alive somewhere in the forest.

The Blackwood is an old forest. Almost from first entry, the dense fog that hangs about the tree roots obscures the light and sounds from the vale beyond. It's quiet here. Aside from your own footfalls, you hear nothing but the dark branches of foliage caressing one another or a raven's occasional cry.

Movement in the Mist

After an hour of travel, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check alerts the party to something moving towards them in the woods. After a few tense moments, a **wraith (Appendix B, MM 302)** appears. It screams at the party members and flies forward with its hands outstretched.

DM Encounter Tactics Notes:

If the fight starts to go very poorly and Lorelei isn't already with the party, she can emerge from the woods after a few rounds and help. Lorelei uses the **Archer** stat block (**Appendix B**).

It might be difficult for the party to flee as the **wraith** is fast, but it could be scared away by the **dryad (MM 121)**, **dire wolves (MM 321)**, or **giant elk (MM 325)** from the random encounters table in the next section.

You may wish to negate the "create specter" action to help the party if things turn more quickly than expected and/or to allow the party to roll death saves rather than having their character die if their hit point maximum is reduced to 0.

Curse of the Blackwoods

As the adventurers travel deeper into the forest, the mist thickens. All creatures whose passive Perception is below 13 must make vision-based skill checks at disadvantage.

Other Forest Forces

After the wraith encounter, the party continues on through the forest, unsure of what else might lie in wait in the dense fog.

As the horrible screams of the wraith fade away, the mist around you thickens. The swirling smoke has risen to waist-high, and a heavy silence presses in.

The following random encounter table serves to further set the mood of the forest and what watches them from behind the trees.

See "A Wood Woad in Waiting" in the next section if the party turns violent toward the forest or its peaceful inhabitants.

Possible Forest Denizens

d6	Creature or Effect
1	A dryad (MM 121) emerges from a nearby tree. She silently observes the party. While she does not speak to them, she does point the way to Adelle's glade if asked respectfully.
2	A dire wolf (MM 321) steps out of the mist on a rise a stone's throw away from the party. As they watch, it howls, and its pack comes to stand beside it. They fade back into the forest away from the adventurers.
3	Haunting giggles echo through the tree branches overhead. The party cannot find the culprits but eventually can conclude that pixies (MM 253) might be responsible for the sounds.
4	Everyone in the party needs to succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. Those who fail are tripped up by tree roots and come crashing to the forest floor.
5	Two beautiful glowing lights blink into existence ahead of the party but in a different direction from where they've been heading. The lights are will-o'-wisps (MM 301) and they attack the party if they draw near enough.
6	A giant elk (MM 325) with pale, pearlescent horns crosses in front of the party, appearing almost out of nowhere. Seeing such a rare creature, said to foreshadow a great event, heightens the gravity of the adventurers' quest.



A Wood Woad in Waiting

Shortly after the party's forest encounters, a **wood woad (Appendix B)** appears. It watches them from a distance unless they attempt violence against any of the peaceful creatures in the Possible Forest Denizens chart.

The wood woad cannot speak, and it approaches slowly, trying to judge if they mean it harm or not. So long as the party is calm and is not utilizing fire, it walks up to them and communicate, through simple gestures, that it can guide them to the place they're looking for.

Wood Woad Lore

Those in the party who are proficient in Intelligence (Nature) must succeed on a DC 15 check to try to recall how wood woads are created.

- A wood woad is a powerful plant in humanoid form invested with the soul of someone who gave up life to become an eternal guardian.

Born of Sacrifice. The ritual to create a wood woad is a primeval secret passed down through generations of savage societies and dark druid circles. Performing the ritual isn't necessarily an act of evil, if the victim-to-be has entered into a bargain that requires it to be a willing sacrifice.

In the ritual a living person's chest is pierced and the heart removed. A seed is then pushed into the heart, and it is placed in a tree. Any hollow or crook will do, but often a special cavity is carved out of the trunk. The tree is then bathed and watered with the blood of the sacrificed victim, and the body is buried among the tree's roots. After three days, a sprout emerges from the ground at the base of the tree and swiftly grows into humanoid form.

This new body, armored in tough bark and bearing a gnarled club and shield, is at once ready to perform its duty. The one who performed the ritual sets the wood woad to its task, and the creature follows those orders unceasingly.

It is unusual for a wood woad to have retained a sense of self as this wood woad has. While it cannot directly disobey Adelle's commands, it desires to save her from its own fate and to find a new way of protecting the forest.



Chapter Two: The Druid Grove

I'm not afraid. You're right. It's just another way of living. We'll all be closer, even than before.

—Cryus's final words

Adelle

Chaotic Neutral Female Elf

Long black hair, piercing hazel eyes, coppery skin

Ideal: Nearly anything is possible if one only has the courage to attempt it. The natural world provides, though not always in the way one expects.

Flaw: I can only rely on myself, and I owe my Circle a great debt for the sacrifices they made. It's up to me to ensure that their lives weren't wasted.

Secret: I know who lurks in the center of the forest: Erayna, the shadow sorceress. The secret I would like to take to my grave is that she is my ancestor, and we possess the same form of druidic magic.

Motivation: I want to prevent the spread of Erayna's power beyond the heart of the forest. I don't plan on the lives of her Circle being wasted.

Characteristics: I am confident and quick to answer questions, but I am suspicious of outsiders and cagey, especially about topics related to the sacrifices we've made and my ancestry.

Adelle's stat block and the druid grove's can be found in **Appendix B**.



After hours of traveling through the forest, you finally draw near to the glade you've been seeking. The trees open up ahead of you to show, at the bottom of the hill, a circle of pale silver trees surrounded by gorgeous scarlet blossoms.

A successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a small tent and fire pit in the clearing ahead.

As the party walks down the hill and comes upon the glade, a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check alerts them to a growing darkness: the forest is encroaching behind them as they walk forward. By the time they make it to the ring of trees, the area behind them is surrounded by ten feet of vines.

The clearing inside the trees begins to fill with fog, obscuring their sight into the grove. Adelle calls out to the party and questions who's trying to come into her grove. If the party can persuade her that they don't mean her any harm, she lets them enter.

Adelle receives the wood woad well and tells him, in Druidic, to continue his watch. Though she tries to hide it, Adelle is impressed that the adventurers caught the wood woad's attention and favor.

When the party enters, they see that she's preparing to leave.

The druid is stand-offish and suspicious even as she dismisses the gathering fog. Dark symbols and stacks of bones litter the space around her grove. Each of these is surrounded by a cluster of scarlet flowers.

Adelle keeps the protective vines around her grove while she and the party discuss what happened to Cyrus and her Circle. While she speaks with them, she plays with an acorn pendant on a chain around her neck. It contains **2 Blackwoods Seeds (Appendix C)**.

Adelle's Information

Adelle isn't keen to share very much about herself or her Circle, but she explains her fears for the sorceress's expansion of power.

- If the sorceress isn't held in check by the wood woads or defeated and prevented from rising from the dead again, she will wipe out the village and likely much of the surrounding area as she expands her horizons.
- Redvale's deal with her is the only enchantment preventing the forest from overtaking the town.

- Erayna is virtually immortal and has the ability to rise from the dead. Life and death mean nothing to her, and she uses their power to wield over others.
- She has a rough sketch of Erayna's courtyard that she can share with the party so they know what to expect. The courtyard lies to the northeast, amidst a vast collection of the scarlet blossoms. The map can be found in **Appendix A**.

Blackwoods Druid Grove

The stat block for Adelle's grove can be found in **Appendix B**. The previous description includes the flavor of these effects, but if the party finds themselves in a combat with Adelle or in possession of the **Seeds of the Blackwoods (Appendix C)**, that stat block may be useful.

Alternatively, if the party needs to flee during the combat in Chapter 3, Erayna may pursue them to Adelle's grove, which would have the protections she and the other druids established.

A Place to Rest

When the party reaches a satisfying conclusion to their conversation with Adelle, she suggests that they take a rest for the night.

As the final rays of light extinguish themselves among the branches, Adelle flicks her wrist and the small piles of stone in front of all but one of the grove's twelve trees ignites, casting a dim glow over the area.

The Druids' Burial Place

Each of Adelle's druid circle members are buried under one of the grove's trees. The twelfth tree is for Adelle herself. She snaps at anyone who attempts to disturb the piles of rocks that mark the druids' bodies' resting places.

Adelle assures the party that the wood woad will watch over them as they sleep and that the area is quite secure. She thickens the fog after she calls for everyone to rest for the evening and goes to sit in front of her tree to meditate.



Moonlit Scenarios

The following scenarios assume that Adelle grew to trust the party but still believes she will be more successful on her own. If they are very convincing in winning her over or express a strong desire to go with her to the heart of the forest, she may decide not to leave on her own.

- If no one in the party has been left on watch, Adelle leaves to handle the sorceress on her own.
- If the party does stay on watch, she waits and shows them the way the next day.
- If Adelle leaves, the wood woad tries to wake someone up to get them to go after her. If the party doesn't, they find the sorceress performing the wood woad ceremony on Adelle's body when they arrive.
- If they go after her, she can be stopped and saved.

Chapter Three:

The Red Glade

Fire is immortal: even in death, it fosters new beginnings.

—Evelyn, the first phoenix druid

There is a glade deep within the forest where the scarlet flowers gather. There, the party finds the shadow sorceress. They have an idea of the glade's layout from Adelle, and the wood woad guides them to it if she has gone ahead. So long as they are with the wood woad, they won't have to worry about anything attacking them.

Erayna

Chaotic Evil Female Elf

Ideal: Immortality and rebirth are for the powerful, and it is they who should hold sway across the world.

Flaw: I see little difference between life and death. My powers are a force to bend others to my will.

Secret: I am bound, for now, to the heart of the forest by my own ancient vow unless my control over the undead increases enough to allow me to spread my influence across the land. Any allies of Adelle are frightening as my heir could take my place, though I find it unlikely.

Motivation: I want to prevent Adelle from completing the dark druidic sacrifice and turning herself into a wood woad. I wish to retain the most powerful position in my family line, and I don't want a collection of eternal trees to hold me back.

Characteristics: I am elegant and careful with what I say. I delight in the little twists that precise language provides and seek to use these tricks to my advantage whenever possible.

Erayna's stat block can be found in **Appendix B**.

Just as Adelle said, something is amiss in the center of the forest. Everything here is gray, as though it's been turned into stone or ash. Everything, that is, except the red flowers. They're lush and plentiful.

A cool breeze blows in your direction as you continue forward. Each footstep crunches against the frosty ground.

The Heart of the Forest

In a past age, Erayna made a deal with the populace of Redvale to provide safety and abundance so long as they left the heart of the forest to her. At the time, her courtyard was part of a grand castle, but the forest has reclaimed all but the central stones.

For the town's prosperity to continue, a member of Erayna's line must hold sway in the center of the forest. Adelle is not the first of Erayna's descendants to try to seize control from her, and the sorceress doubts she'll be the last.

Erayna's power is druidic in nature and operates between the forces of life and death, smoke and flame. Their family line, among communities of druids, is known as the Circle of the Phoenix, a rare lineage promising near-immortality.

Erayna's shadowy cloak and black antlers symbolize her power in the forest, a physical manifestation of her influence. If she is killed and another wears the cloak and red-flowered crown, Erayna cannot regenerate and return.

If the two articles are destroyed and no one controls the courtyard, the town of Redvale slowly dwindles and dies as the Darkwood reclaims its former domain.

Stepping into the Glade

A courtyard emerges from the mist in the clearing ahead. The red flowers drape like spilled blood over every vertical surface.

If Adelle went ahead of the party

The sound of muffled screaming reaches you just as the courtyard comes into view.

In the courtyard, a cloaked figure bends over Adelle's body, carving her heart out of her chest. The figure pauses when the party enters the clearing or if they shout or attack.

If Adelle is still with the party

In the center of the courtyard, a raised dais waits.

A smoky being walks out of the mist, body wreathed in shadow, and takes its place in the middle of the raised platform.

Erayna Addresses the Party

“Why is it you’ve come?” the figure asks. “This is not a place for mortals. We told Julien as much, but he refused to understand. We sensed when you dispatched him yesterday. That is very good.”

At this point, Erayna drops her shadowy cloak and allow it to fall to the ground. A fire pit on each of the four corners of the dais roars to life.

Standing before the party, they see an ageless, beautiful elven woman with dark auburn hair clad in gray armor, wearing a crown woven from the red flowers and bearing a set of black antlers.

Erayna’s Offer

Erayna is a reasonable ruler and doesn’t desire a great deal of fuss. If the party would be willing to turn Adelle over to her, or simply to walk away, she can offer them great riches and a powerful magical reward. She extends a ring carved from black antlers, bearing a ruby in the center.

The ring, called the **Phoenix Heart (Appendix C)**, has the ability to prevent its wearer from dying and to bring someone of their choice back from the dead.

They’ve chosen a noble but dangerous path. They should make sure to protect themselves.

Accepting Erayna’s Offer

If Adelle is not incapacitated and believes Erayna’s offer may be tempting to the party, she tries to persuade them not to accept it and warns them that it may be a trick.

If the party accepts the offer regardless, Adelle focuses her ire on Erayna and attacks her. The wood woad comes to her aid. After two rounds, Adelle and the wood woad attempt to flee and return to the Blackwoods Druid Grove to complete the final sacrifice and make Adelle the final wood woad.

DM Flexibility: This can be an interesting moment to challenge and test your players. As written, there is nothing wrong with the ring, but the party has no reason to trust Erayna, so a healthy doubt as to the ring’s magical qualities could increase the stakes in this instance.

The Encounter

Erayna is a powerful foe, and the balance of the encounter shifts significantly depending on whether or not Adelle is present. The wood woad helps the party, but it struggles against Erayna’s fire damage.

If you need to make adjustments, consider negating Erayna’s Fire Storm ability.

Possible Solutions

This is a breakdown of several possible outcomes of the party’s conflict, assuming they don’t accept Erayna’s offer. However, this list is not all-inclusive, and is meant as a guide. The party’s creative problem solving and unique solutions should take precedence over any of the listed outcomes.

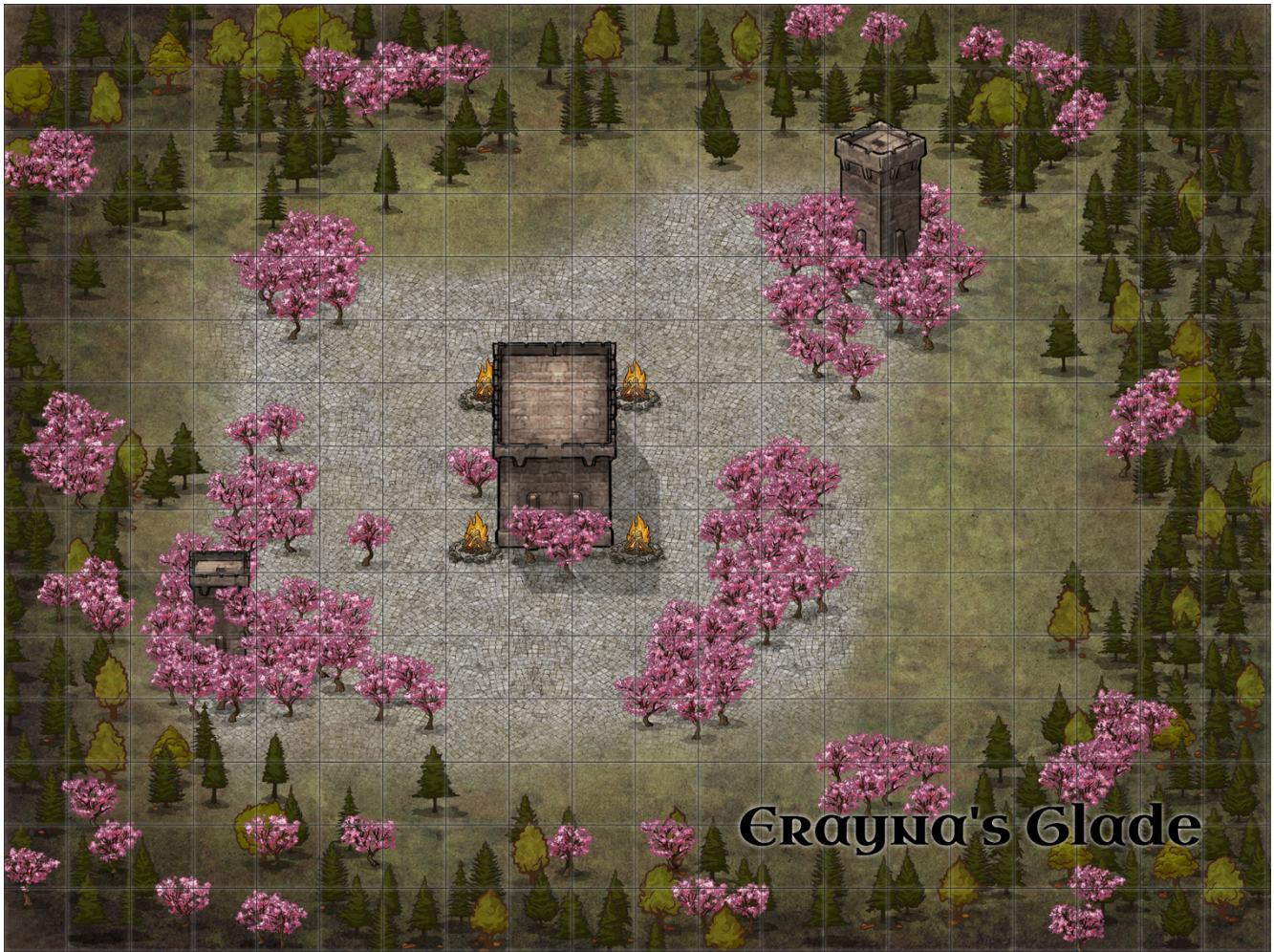
- If the party is unable to save Adelle *or* to stop the sorceress, they can return her heart to the tree in Adelle’s grove and try to perform the ritual. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check allows them to complete the ritual, and Adelle arises as a wood woad three days later. The druids are then powerful enough to contain Erayna.
- If the party is unable to save Adelle, they can help her to become the glade’s sorceress by wrapping her in Erayna’s shadow cloak. Since she is part of Erayna’s lineage, she can bear the mantle and wrest control of the forest’s heart from the sorceress. Adelle attunes to the cloak and flower crown and reemerge as a force of life within the forest.
- If Adelle and all of the party members survive, someone stills need to take Erayna’s place at the heart of the forest. Adelle is reluctant at first but does so. She can take on the cloak and crown as in the previous scenario.

Rewards

If Erayna dies, her body transforms into a ruby worth 1000 gp. She also leaves behind the Phoenix Heart ring. The town awards the party 200 gp for news of the three missing villagers. Adelle helps them understand that the wraith and two will-o’-wisps they saw were the men they were looking for.

Appendix A: Maps

Erayna's Glade



Appendix B: Stat Blocks

Adelle

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral

Armor Class 15 (leather armor, wooden shield)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Intelligence +3, Wisdom +6

Skills Insight +6, Medicine +6, Nature +3, Perception +6

Damage Resistances fire

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Common, Druidic, Elvish, Ignan, Sylvan

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Spellcasting. Adelle is a 9th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14; +6 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *control flames*, *create bonfire*, *druidcraft*, *produce flame*

1st Level (four slots): *detect magic*, *entangle*, *faerie fire*

2nd Level (three slots): *animal messenger*, *flame blade*, *warding wind*

3rd Level (three slots): *conjure animals*, *daylight*, *fire arrows*

4th Level (three slots): *wall of fire*, *wrath of nature*

5th Level (two slots): *reincarnate*

Blessing of the Phoenix (1/Day). Adelle can call forth the spirit of the phoenix to influence the world around her. As a bonus action, she can magically summon an incorporeal spirit to a point she can see within 60 feet. The spirit creates an aura in a 30-foot radius around that point. It counts as neither a creature nor an object, though it has the spectral appearance of a giant phoenix.

The phoenix represents rebirth and renewal. When Adelle casts a spell that restores hit points to any creature inside or outside the aura, each of her allies in the aura also regains 9 hit points.

ACTIONS

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage, or 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands, plus 4 (1d8) fire damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.



Blackwoods Druid Grove

90 foot cube of forest, neutral

Solid Fog. Any number of 5-foot squares on the ground fill with thick fog, making them heavily obscured. The fog reaches 10 feet high. In addition, every foot of movement through the fog costs 2 extra feet. To a creature immune to this effect, the fog obscures nothing and looks like soft mist, with motes of green light floating in the air.

Grasping Undergrowth. Any number of 5-foot squares on the ground that aren't filled with fog fill with grasping weeds and vines, as if they were affected by an *entangle* spell. To a creature immune to this effect, the weeds and vines feel soft and reshape themselves to serve as temporary seats or beds.

Grove Guardians. You can animate up to four trees in the area, causing them to uproot themselves from the ground. These trees have the same statistics as an **awakened tree (MM 317)** except they can't speak, and their bark is covered with druidic symbols. If any creature not immune to this effect enters the warded area, the grove guardian fight until they have driven off or slain the intruders. The grove guardians also obey the druid's spoken commands (no action required by the druid) that the druid issues while in the area. If the druid doesn't give them any commands and no intruders are present, the grove guardians do nothing. The grove guardians can't leave the warded area. When the spell ends, the magic animating them disappears, and the trees take root again if possible.

Additional Spell Effect. The druid can place their choice of one of the following magical effects within the warded area:

- A constant *gust of wind* in two locations of their choice
- *Spike growth* in one location of their choice
- *Wind wall* in two locations of their choice

To a creature immune to this effect, the winds are a fragrant, gentle breeze, and the area of *spike growth* is harmless.

Archer

Medium humanoid, lawful good

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Acrobatics +6, Perception +5

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Elvish

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Archer's Eye (3/Day). As a bonus action, the archer can add 1d10 to its next attack or damage roll with a longbow or shortbow.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The archer makes two attacks with its longbow.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 160/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.



Erayna

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 93 (17d8 + 17)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Int. +5, Wis. +9

Skills Nature +5, Persuasion +4, Stealth +6

Damage Immunities fire

Senses darkvision 60 ft., Perception +9

Languages Common, Druidic, Elvish, Ignan, Sylvan

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Fiery Death and Rebirth. When Erayna (a Circle of the Phoenix druid) dies, she explodes. Each creature within 60 feet of her must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 11 (2d10) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The fire ignites flammable objects in the area that aren't worn or carried.

The explosion destroys Erayna's body and leaves behind a large egg-shaped ruby worth 1000 gp. The ruby is immune to all damage, and after 1d6 days, Erayna's new form emerges so long as she controls the Blackwoods Shadow Cloak and the Scarlet Mantle. If Erayna is killed and the items are under the control of someone else, her spirit leaves the ruby, and it becomes a lifeless, valuable gemstone.

Spellcasting. Erayna is an 11th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *control flames*, *create bonfire*, *druidcraft*, *produce flame*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person*, *entangle*, *faerie fire*, *fog cloud*

2nd level (3 slots): *flame blade*, *flaming sphere*, *heat metal*, *hold person*

3rd level (3 slots): *call lightning*, *flame arrows*, *sleet storm*

4th level (3 slots): *blight*, *confusion*, *wall of fire*

5th level (2 slots): *antilife shell*, *conjure elemental (fire)*, *contagion*

6th level (1 slot): *investiture of flame*

ACTIONS

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage plus 9 (2d8) fire damage.

Phoenix Shape (1/Day). Erayna magically polymorphs into a **minor phoenix (Appendix B)** and can remain in this form for up to 5 hours. Erayna's equipment melds into her new form. Erayna reverts to her true form if she dies or falls unconscious. Erayna can revert to her true form using a bonus action on her turn.

While in a new form, Erayna regains her game statistics and ability to understand languages, but her AC, movement modes, Strength, and Dexterity are replaced by those of the minor phoenix, and she gains any special senses, proficiencies, traits, actions, and reactions that the minor phoenix has but that she lacks.

The minor phoenix's attacks count as magical for the purpose of overcoming resistances and immunity to nonmagical attacks.

LAIR ACTIONS

When fighting inside her lair (the Red Glade), Erayna can use lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Erayna can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects: Erayna can't use the same lair action two rounds in a row:

Fire Storm. A storm made up of sheets of roaring flame appears inside the lair. The fire erupts from the scarlet flowers within a 40 foot radius of Erayna's choosing. Each creature in the area and within 5 feet of one of the flowers must make a Dexterity saving throw. It takes 11 (2d10) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

The fire damages objects in the area and ignites flammable objects that aren't being worn or carried. The scarlet flowers are unaffected by this spell.

Scarlet Entangling. Red-flowered weeds and vines sprout in an additional 20 foot-radius square from existing patches of flowers in a 10-foot radius sphere. For the duration, these plants turn the ground in the area into difficult terrain.

A creature in the area when the vines erupt (50-foot square maximum assuming a solid 10-foot radius sphere) must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be restrained by the entangling plants until the end of the lair's turn the next round. A creature restrained by the plants can use its action to make a DC 17 Strength check. On a success, it frees itself.

After a fire storm, the additional growth wilts away.



Minor Phoenix

Large elemental, neutral

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 90 (12d10 + 24)

Speed 20 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Ignan, Sylvan

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Fire Form. The phoenix can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing. Any creature that touches the phoenix or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 5 (1d10) fire damage. In addition, the phoenix can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. The first time it enters a creature's space on a turn, that creature takes 5 (1d10) fire damage. With a touch, the phoenix can also ignite flammable objects that aren't worn or carried (no action required).

Flyby. The phoenix doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when it flies out of an enemy's reach.

Illumination. The phoenix sheds bright light in a 60-foot radius and dim light for an additional 30 feet.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The phoenix makes two attacks: one with its beak and one with its fiery talons.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) fire damage.

Fiery Talons. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) fire damage.

Wood Woad

Medium plant, lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (natural armor, shield)

Hit Points 73 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Athletics +7, Perception +4, Stealth +4

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing

Damage Immunities necrotic, poisoned

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Sylvan

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Magic Club. In the wood woad's hand, its club is magical and deals 7 (3d4) extra damage (included in its attacks).

Plant Camouflage. The wood woad has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks it makes in any terrain with ample obscuring plant life.

Regeneration. The wood woad regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn if it is in contact with the ground. If the wood woad takes fire damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the wood woad's next turn. The wood woad dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Tree Stride. Once on each of its turns, the wood woad can use 10 feet of its movement to step magically into one living tree within 5 feet of it and emerge from a second living tree within 60 feet of it that it can see, appearing in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the second tree. Both trees must be Large or bigger.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The wood woad makes two attacks with its club.

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (4d4 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Wraith

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)

Speed 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with silvered weapons

Damage Immunities necrotic, poisoned

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages the languages it knew in life (Common)

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The wraith can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the wraith has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ACTIONS

Life Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 21 (4d8 + 3) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Create Specter. The wraith targets a humanoid within 10 feet of it that has been dead for no longer than 1 minute and died violently. The target's spirit rises as a specter in the space of its corpse or in the nearest unoccupied space. The specter is under the wraith's control. The wraith can have no more than seven specters under its control at one time.



Appendix C:

Magic Items

Blackwoods Seeds

Wondrous item, very rare

Held on a small golden chain, these two seeds are kept inside a magical acorn pendant. Possession of a seed allows its bearer to create a wood woad if the subject is a willing sacrifice who will serve the Darkwood Forest. So long as one seed is within the necklace, the wearer can control the Blackwoods **druid grove (Appendix B)**.

Phoenix Heart Ring

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

While wearing this ring, you gain the effects of the *death ward* spell. The first time you would drop to 0 hit points as a result of taking damage, you instead drop to 1 hit point. The ring cannot be used again in this way until two dawns have passed.

The ring's true life-giving powers can only be used once per year. The wearer can cast *raise dead* on one creature. After the spell has been cast, a year must pass before the ring is used in this way again.



Appendix D:

Sidekicks

Sidekick Mechanics

The *Essentials Kit* from Wizards of the Coast briefly outlines sidekick mechanics for adding an extra character to a one-on-one or small party game. You can also visit dndduet.com/sidekick for more information about including a sidekick in your party.

To add a sidekick, you'll want to decide if the DM or player will run the character, both in combat and in RP. For example, you may choose for the DM to do the role-play for the sidekick and the player to control them during combat.

For running the character during combat, choose if you would rather have them go on the PC's turn or if you would prefer they make their own initiative roll. If they go on their own turn, add their Dexterity modifier to your roll for their initiative.

Stat blocks function as a simplified character sheet, and everything you need for the sidekick's turn can be found under Actions.



Sidekick NPCs

Lorelei Mavrey

Neutral Good Female Half-Elf

Short brown hair, olive complexion, warm brown eyes

Ideal: Preparation and curiosity, in balance, provide enough excitement to make life interesting and enough wisdom to make it long.

Flaw: I become sulky when I miss a shot or feel that I'm not useful. I prefer to be active and on the move.

Secret: I am not as fearless actually inside the Darkwood Forest as I would like to be.

Motivation: I want to find my assistant, Julien, even though he was acting strangely before he left.

Characteristics: I am quiet when first meeting others. I like to observe them and understand them before making myself emotionally vulnerable.

Archer

Medium humanoid, lawful good

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Acrobatics +6, Perception +5

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Elvish

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Archer's Eye (3/Day). As a bonus action, the archer can add 1d10 to its next attack or damage roll with a longbow or shortbow.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The archer makes two attacks with its longbow.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 160/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Adelle

Chaotic neutral female elf

Long black hair, piercing hazel eyes, coppery skin

Ideal: Nearly anything is possible if one only has the courage to attempt it. The natural world provides, though not always in the way one expects.

Flaw: I can only rely on myself, and I owe my Circle a great debt for the sacrifices they made. It's up to me to ensure that their lives weren't wasted.

Motivation: I want to prevent the spread of Erayna's power beyond the heart of the forest. I don't plan on the lives of her Circle being wasted.

Characteristics: I am confident and quick to answer questions, but I am suspicious of outsiders and cagey, especially about topics related to myself and my Circle.

Circle of the Phoenix druid

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral

Armor Class 15 (leather armor, wooden shield)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Intelligence +3, Wisdom +6

Skills Insight +6, Medicine +6, Nature +3, Perception +6

Damage Resistances fire

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Common, Druidic, Elvish, Ignan, Sylvan

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Spellcasting. Adelle is a 9th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14; +6 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *control flames*, *create bonfire*, *druidcraft*, *produce flame*

1st Level (four slots): *detect magic*, *entangle*, *faerie fire*

2nd Level (three slots): *animal messenger*, *flame blade*, *warding wind*

3rd Level (three slots): *conjure animals*, *daylight*, *fire arrows*

4th Level (three slots): *wall of fire*, *wrath of nature*

5th Level (two slots): *reincarnate*



Blessing of the Phoenix (1/Day). Adelle can call forth the spirit of the phoenix to influence the world around her. As a bonus action, she can magically summon an incorporeal spirit to a point she can see within 60 feet. The spirit creates an aura in a 30-foot radius around that point. It counts as neither a creature nor an object, though it has the spectral appearance of a giant phoenix.

The phoenix represents rebirth and renewal. When Adelle casts a spell that restores hit points to any creature inside or outside the aura, each of her allies in the aura also regains 9 hit points.

ACTIONS

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage, or 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands, plus 4 (1d8) fire damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Sidekicks

Archer

1st-level Medium humanoid

Armor Class 14 (studded leather)

Hit Points 13 (2d8 + 4)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dexterity +4

Skills Acrobatics +4, Perception +3

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Common, plus one of your choice

Eagle Eye. The archer gains a +2 bonus to ranged attack rolls.

ACTIONS

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Circle of the Phoenix druid

1st-level Medium humanoid

Armor Class 14 (leather armor, wooden shield)

Hit Points 9 (2d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Wisdom +4

Skills Insight +4, Medicine +4, Nature +4

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Druidic, plus one of your choice

Spellcasting. The druid's spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The druid has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *druidcraft*, *produce flame*

1st Level (2 slots): *entangle*, *faerie fire*

ACTIONS

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage, or 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands.

Sidekick Leveling Table

Archer Beyond 1st Level

Level	Hit Points	New Features
2nd	19 (3d8 + 6)	Hunter's Skill (2/Day). As a bonus action, the archer can add 1d8 to its next damage roll with a longbow.
3rd	26 (4d8 + 8)	Archer's Awareness (2/Day). As an action, the archer can focus its awareness on the surrounding region. For 1 minute, the archer can sense whether the following types of creatures are present within 1 mile: aberrations, celestials, dragons, elementals, fey, fiends, and undead. The archer cannot sense the creatures' location or number.
4th	32 (5d8 + 10)	Ability Score Improvement. The archer's Dex. score increases by 2, raising the modifier by 1, so increase the archer's Dex saving throw and Acrobatics bonus by 1, and increase the bonuses to hit and damage of the archer's melee and ranged weapon attacks by 1.
5th	39 (6d8 + 12)	Proficiency Bonus. The archer's proficiency bonus increases by 1, so make the following changes in the stat block: increase the bonuses in the Saving Throws and Skills entries by 1, increase the passive Perception by 1, and increase the bonuses to hit of the weapon attacks by 1.

6th	45 (7d8 + 14)	Extra Attack. The archer can attack twice, instead of once, whenever it takes the Attack action on its turn.
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		Spellcasting. The druid learns another cantrip: <i>shillelagh</i> .
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5th	27 (6d8)	Proficiency Bonus. The druid's proficiency bonus increases by 1, so make the following changes in the stat block: increase the bonuses in the Saving Throws and Skills entries by 1, and increase the bonuses to hit of its spell and weapon attacks by 1.
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		Spellcasting. The druid gains one 1st-level spell slot and two 2nd level spell slots. The druid also learns one 2nd-level spell: <i>flame blade</i> .
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6th	31 (7d8)	Fiery Core. The druid adds 4 (1d8) fire damage to all melee attacks. The druid also gains resistance to fire damage.
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Phoenix Druid Beyond 1st Level

Level	Hit Points	New Features
2nd	13 (3d8)	<p>Blessing of the Phoenix (2/Day). The druid can call forth the spirit of the phoenix to influence the world around it. As a bonus action, the druid can magically summon an incorporeal spirit to a point the druid can see within 60 feet. The spirit creates an aura in a 30-foot radius around that point. It counts as neither a creature nor an object, though it has the spectral appearance of a giant phoenix.</p> <p>The phoenix represents rebirth and renewal. When the druid casts a spell that restores hit points to any creature inside or outside the aura, each of the druid's allies in the aura gains hit points equal to the druid's level.</p> <p>Spellcasting. The druid learns another 1st-level spell: <i>healing word</i>.</p>
3rd	18 (4d8)	<p>Spellcasting. The druid gains one 1st-level spell slot. The druid also learns another 1st-level spell: <i>fog cloud</i>.</p>
4th	22 (5d8)	<p>Ability Score Improvement. The druid's Wis. score increases by 2, raising the modifier by 1, so increase the following numbers by 1: the druid's spell save DC and the bonus to hit of spell attacks, the bonuses to Insight and Medicine, the Wisdom saving throw bonus, and the passive Perception.</p>