WARLOCK

17

Halflings

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Winterfolk Halflings: The Hidden People of the Plains

by Kelly Pawlik

The Small Folk of Domovogrod

The origins of the winterfolk are shrouded in mystery. Sightings of them are so rare in most parts of the world that some doubt they exist at all. Sages debate whether or not they were a distinct people prior to the Great Retreat or if they were once courtfolk or riverfolk halflings who broke away from their kin when the elves departed. It is assumed they were once loyal servants to the elves like the courtfolk, and they still bear a great deal of respect for elves and the elfmarked, though they have little love for the shadow fey.

Despite their scarcity, the winterfolk do exist. They dwell in the northern portions of the Rothenian Plains, particularly in the Duchy of Domovogrod, north of the Raven's Road. Before the fall of the Silver Mountain Kingdom, they lived in comfortable huts and burrows in the hills. When the giants sacked the kingdom, the winterfolk were driven from their homes into the rugged wilds. Because they are almost always encountered while they are hunting, many believe winterfolk are nomadic. They are not. Small communities of them hide their sod-roofed huts throughout the lowlands of the Tunturi Range, trusting the rugged terrain will keep intruders from finding them.

HEARTS OF ICE AND IRON

Winterfolk homes are devoid of comforts, befitting a people that has come to almost relish hardship. When their lives become too comfortable, winterfolk begin to fear they have upset their ancestors and the land. They seek out challenges with a zeal that appears suicidal to others.

Winterfolk rarely let their guard down because a lapse in attention can spell doom for themselves or their community. Like their courtfolk and riverfolk cousins, community means a great deal to winterfolk, and they will give no quarter to any creature that seeks to threaten the freedom and security of their settlement. Otherwise, winterfolk regard their southern kin with disdain and sadness. They view other halflings, perhaps erroneously, as frivolous, lazy, and selfish.

The life of a winterfolk child is as rugged as that of an adult. From the time they can walk, they are expected to keep up with their family. As soon as they have the strength to hold tools, fishing nets,

or weapons, they are taught how to use them. Children are expected to hold their obligations to family and settlement above all other considerations.

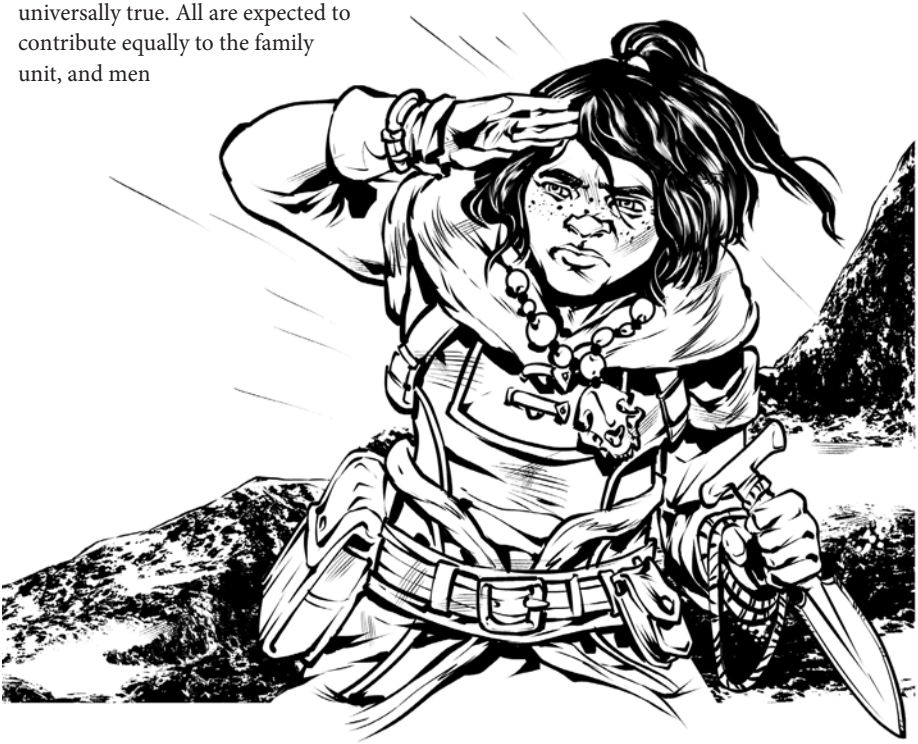
Winterfolk are superstitious. When a relative dies, they are cremated holding four stones, two in each hand, and the ashen remains are kept in an urn in a quiet place. A candle is burned in honor of a dead relative for four days following their death. On the fourth anniversary of the death, the winterfolk's cremated remains are divided into four parts and left to be scattered by the wind in four different locations. If these rituals can't be followed, winterfolk wisdom states that the dead will return as an ashen ghost to slay their still living family unto the youngest generation.

Women are held in slightly higher esteem than men within their settlements, and they tend to hold most positions of importance in their communities, though this is not universally true. All are expected to contribute equally to the family unit, and men are as likely to be found carrying young offspring with them in leather and fur slings while they work or hunt as women.

WINTERFOLK SETTLEMENTS

Winterfolk communities are most commonly found in the craggy foothills of the northern Rothenian Plains. Settlements are always small, rarely numbering more than two dozen individuals sharing a few huts. Most colonies are comprised of a few intermarried families, and rarely are more than two or three generations represented.

Whatever crops the winterfolk can eke out of the unforgiving soil grow amidst the structures of the settlement. Winterfolk never plant recognizable fields, nor do they prune trees or bushes in the hopes that creatures passing through the territory mistake the chaotic jumbles of plants for wilderness rather than cultivated orchards and gardens.



Tools of the Winterfolk

The heart of each community is the forge. Winterfolk metalworking is done at low temperatures and most communities have at least one member capable of creating masterful coldforged items. Tools crafted by the winterfolk serve double duty as weapons as well. Farmers and herders are loath to overburden themselves by carrying spears as well as spades, so the blades of shovels and trowels are keenly edged. Rakes, hoes, pitchforks, and picks are built sturdily enough to split skulls as well as stones.

The winterfolk have devised many tools that can be used to both work the land and fend off creatures that seek to harm them.

New Weapons

Many of the tools forged by the winterfolk can be used as weapons by simply substituting the closest approximation. A trowel acts as a dagger, a spade acts as a battleaxe, and a pitchfork acts as a trident, for instance. A few of the tools do not have easy approximations however and are detailed below.

Climbing Adze. This tool is made of a sharp, wide blade perpendicular to a short handle with a leather thong to loop over the user's wrist. In addition to peeling the bark from felled trees or removing buried stones from the soil, a pair of climbing adzes gives the wielder advantage on Strength (Athletics) checks made to climb.

Hand Trebuchet. The metal pocket of a hand trebuchet can be loaded with acid, alchemist's fire, holy water, or other small containers of liquid. See the appropriate entry for the ammunition used to determine damage and other effects. As a melee weapon, a hand trebuchet deals damage as a club.

Stone Rake. Settlers use stone rakes to remove rocks and other obstructions from the soil prior to planting or building temporary structures. In combat, a creature using a stone rake can make a special melee attack to trip a creature up to two sizes larger, knocking it prone. When tripping a creature, the attacker makes a Strength (Athletics) check contested by the target's Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check (whichever is more advantageous for the target). If the attacker is able to make multiple attacks with the Attack action, the trip attack replaces one of them.

Whipsaw. A whipsaw is comprised of razor-sharp teeth loosely riveted together and attached to a T-shaped handle at each end. Used as a tool, a whipsaw allows single winterfolk to cut down a moderately sized tree relatively quickly and effortlessly. Used as a weapon, a whipsaw leaves grievous bleeding wounds that require medical attention to stanch. A creature that takes damage from a whipsaw loses 1 hit point at the beginning of each of its turns for 1 minute following the injury. A successful

NAME	COST	DAMAGE	WEIGHT	PROPERTIES
Martial Melee Weapons				
Climbing adze	6 gp	1d6 slashing	3 lb.	Light
Stone rake	10 gp	1d8 piercing	5 lb.	Versatile (1d10), special
Whipsaw	15 gp	1d8 slashing	2 lb.	Finesse, special
Martial Ranged Weapons				
Hand trebuchet	4 gp	1d8 bludgeoning	3 lb.	Ammunition (60/240), special

DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check or receiving any amount of magical healing stops the bleeding. When not in use, a whipsaw can be coiled and hung from its wielder's belt or pack.

Hidden Places

As befitting a race that values its privacy, the winterfolk hold a special reverence for several difficult to find locations scattered about the Rothenian Plains.

Anguished Spire. This impossibly narrow stone spire stands in the southeast foothills of the mountainous region of the Rothenian Plains, approximately 215 miles from the Winter Tree. The near-constant wind, blowing from the north, causes the spire to emit a ghastly howl that has been described by visitors as the howl of a colossal banshee. Visitors who are 5–200 feet away from the spire are deafened by the buffeting winds. Creatures within 5 feet of the spire find the air is calm and silent, even the movement of cloth and the rustle of grass underfoot is silenced. The spire was erected by elven magisters shortly before the Great Retreat and serves as a seal imprisoning the rubezahl (see *Tome of Beasts*) warlord Ghurrich and his army of lesser demons and dark fey. If the spire is substantially damaged or falls completely, Ghurrich's army will be released to wreak havoc on the region. Malicious fey often bedevil mortals that visit this location.

Fingers of Forgetfulness. The water running in this series of five short tributaries is sluggish, black, and deathly cold. The River Lethe taints this water, which is located approximately 50 miles northeast of the Winter Tree. Creatures who drink the water of the Fingers must succeed at a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned. Such creatures forget everything they experienced during the week prior to drinking the water. An affected creature can make a new saving throw every 24 hours to overcome the effect and immediately remembers everything the poison caused them to forget. Winterfolk who have settled near the Fingers of Forgetfulness use the black water to poison their blades and arrowheads. A creature struck by a weapon treated with diluted black water must succeed at a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute.

Unseen Grove. Nestled beneath the ground approximately 2 days travel northeast of Olersheim, this copse of stunted spruce trees is only accessible via a series of narrow tunnels. That trees survive in this place at all is only due to the finger-wide beams of sunlight that penetrate the cavern ceiling. Penitent winterfolk travel here to confess their sins to the silent trees and sometimes bury evidence of their misdeeds. A narrow creek running with sweet, clean water bisects the grove like a fine silver thread. Sometimes the pilgrims visiting the grove aren't simply seeking peace of mind. Winterfolk who have fallen into banditry sometimes hide in the trees and victimize other visitors or simply wait for them to leave and dig up any valuable mementos left behind.

Vistag's Fall. Located at one of the highest points of the central Tunturi Range, over 10,000 feet above sea level, Vistag's Fall is rarely visited by civilized people. The accused winterfolk traitor Vistag Highbadger was executed for crimes he did not commit by being thrown from this cliff. Visitors to this location must scale a steep shale-covered trail lined by jagged rocks and hardy ferns. Climbers who examine the ferns closely can find skeletal evidence of people who failed the ascent or who have met the Falls' guardian. Vistag's wraith haunts this location every night, seeking to avenge his wrongful death by visiting his rage and malice upon any living creature he comes across.

New Feats

This section introduces a selection of feats that allow you to further explore your heritage as a winterfolk halfling.

GIANT-FOE

***Prerequisite**: Halfling (winterfolk)*

You are a bitter enemy of the giants and their kin that have conquered the Silver Mountain Kingdom. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Strength score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You do not have disadvantage on attack rolls using weapons with the heavy tag.
- When a giant scores a critical hit against you, it deals no additional damage.

PART OF THE PACK

***Prerequisite**: Halfling (winterfolk)*

The wolves of Domovogrod are never seem to be far from your side and consider you to be a packmate. As an action, you can howl to summon a **wolf** to assist you. The wolf appears in 1d4 rounds and remains within 50 feet of you until 1 hour elapses or until

it dies, whichever occurs first. You cannot control the wolf, though it will not attack you or your companions and will attack any creature you are engaging in melee combat. If you are level 4 or higher when you summon a wolf, there is a 50% chance you will summon a **dire wolf** instead. At the GM's discretion, you may not be able to summon a wolf if you are indoors or in a region that wolves are not native to.

Once you have summoned a wolf with this feat, you must finish a long rest before you can summon another wolf.

RIMECASTER

***Prerequisite**: Halfling (winterfolk)*

You have learned to adapt your elemental magic to reflect your northern heritage. You gain the following benefits:

- When you use your action to cast a spell, you can use your bonus action to change the type of damage the spell deals to cold damage.
- When you cast a spell that deals cold damage, you gain resistance to cold damage until the start of your next turn.

TUNDRA WALKER

***Prerequisite**: Halfling (winterfolk)*

You are inured to the extreme cold temperatures of your frigid northern home. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Constitution score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You are adapted to cold environments, allowing you to automatically succeed on Constitution saving throws to avoid exhaustion while traveling through regions where the temperature is at or below 0 degrees Fahrenheit.
- If the frostbite and hypothermia conditions (see *Midgard Hero's Handbook*) are used, you automatically succeed on saving throws against nonmagical sources of them.
- You can move on slippery ice as though it were normal terrain.
- You do not contribute to the total weight when calculating the weight tolerance of thin ice you are moving across.

New Background

The new Silver Mountain Kingdom scout background is suitable for winterfolk halflings who hail from Domovogrod, though human and huginn characters from the region may find it suitable as well.

SILVER MOUNTAIN KINGDOM SCOUT

When the giants of the Northlands sacked the Silver Mountain Kingdom, you were one of the lucky few who escaped into the wider environs of Domovogrod. What you were before the invaders came is inconsequential. Now you spend your time planning and executing strikes against your conquerors. The harsh wilds of the north have melted any softness from your body and spirit, leaving only a hard determination as unforgiving as the mountains themselves.

Skill Proficiencies: Nature, Survival

Language: Giant

Equipment: A hunting trap, a tent, a tinder box, a cold weather outfit, and a pouch containing 10 gp

Feature: Emergency Supply Cache

While you are traveling in the Silver Mountains, you can find and use small supply caches left by other scouts. Caches are small by necessity with a value that doesn't exceed 5 gp. A typical cache consists of enough rations for four people for one day, two full waterskins, two torches, plus a dagger, a quiver of 20 arrows, or a case of 20 crossbow bolts. You can find a cache by spending an hour searching. If you search for more than one cache in a seven-day period, the second takes two hours and a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check

to find. The Wisdom (Survival) check DC increases by 5 for each cache sought after the second. For example, if you are searching for a fifth supply cache in a seven-day period, you must search for two hours and make a DC 25 Wisdom (Survival) check. If you use the caches left by other scouts but never leave supplies for others to use, you risk gaining a negative reputation amongst your fellow freedom fighters.

Suggested Characteristics

Silver Mountain Kingdom scouts tend to be fatalistic with a grim sense of humor. When they allow themselves a rare respite from their struggle, they enjoy good food, strong drink, and other pleasures of the flesh. While they are executing an operation, scouts are focused and almost unshakeable in their determination to rid their homeland of the giants that plague it.

d8	PERSONALITY TRAITS
1	I will return my people to this land.
2	The giants and their minions have ruined everything. We must stand against them.
3	The people of the south are soft and decadent. They cannot endure the trials we have.
4	We might as well drink and enjoy ourselves today. Our lives may be taken tomorrow.
5	I am death's architect. My weapons are the tools of my trade.
6	My will is steel. I am not scared, no matter the size of my enemy.
7	This land sustains and preserves us.
8	I will not fall until all evil has been exterminated from the world.

d6	IDEAL
1	**Pride**. My skill at arms is enough to gain me all I desire. (Neutral)
2	**Hate**. My war starts with the giants, but it won't end until we slaughter all the savage races. (Evil)
3	**Service**. My obligation to my family comes first, then my duty to my people. (Lawful)
4	**Freedom**. I can do as I wish and roam where I may. No king or queen rules over me. (Chaotic)
5	**Piety**. The gods spin our fates. We are but pieces in their games. (Neutral)
6	**Partnership**. We must care for our companions and trust they will care for us. (Good)

d6	BOND
1	I will free my kin who are being held in Vellarsheim.
2	When I slay a giant, I keep one of its smallest finger bones.
3	My husband keeps the home fires lit while I ply my trade.
4	This spear has been handed down from parent to child in my family for generations. I will pass it to my first born when the time is right.
5	We are caretakers of the Winter Tree. If we preserve it, we earn passage to the Elflands.
6	Olersheim is the last bastion of civility in the region. I will protect it to the end.

d6	FLAW
1	I speak with contempt to people who are not from the north.
2	One never knows when they will be in need. I steal a small bit of food from every homestead I pass through.
3	I want to leave the north for warmer climates. We'll never reclaim the Silver Mountain Kingdom anyway.
4	I have killed travelers and made it appear as though giants were at fault.
5	I trust all the people of Domovogrod without question.
6	There is no law in the wilds. I will do as I wish with no fear of consequences.

Winterfolk Magic

Spellcasters are rare amongst the winterfolk. Most take up professions as rangers, wanderers, and warriors, though some few join a druidic circle or a bard's college. Fewer still take up the mantle of a wizard or sorcerer, and the odd individual who trades power for service as a warlock is destined to become an outcast of his community. Despite their lack of magical mastery, the winterfolk have developed a small number of spells which are usually passed from master to apprentice.

SPELL LISTS

The spell lists are organized by class. Each spell also indicates its school, tradition, domain, pact, or other origin. Check with your GM to find out which spells are allowed in your campaign.

BARD SPELLS

2ND LEVEL

Lure Prey (winterfolk)

CLERIC SPELLS

3RD LEVEL

Hearth and Home (halfling)

6TH LEVEL

Spirit of the Hills (winterfolk)

DRUID SPELLS

2ND LEVEL

Lure Prey (winterfolk)

3RD LEVEL

Hearth and Home (halfling)

PALADIN SPELLS

5TH LEVEL

Unerring Mark (winterfolk)

RANGER SPELLS

2ND LEVEL

Lure Prey (winterfolk)

3RD LEVEL

Hearth and Home (halfling)

5TH LEVEL

Unerring Mark (winterfolk)

6TH LEVEL

Spirit of the Hills (winterfolk)

SPELL DESCRIPTIONS

These spells are well-known among the winterfolk, but rarely shared with outsiders.

HEARTH AND HOME

3rd-level conjuration (halfling)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (two warm pebbles)

Duration: 8 hours

While under the effects of this spell, your body radiates a pleasant heat to a range of 5 feet. For the duration, you do not gain levels of exhaustion from exposure to extreme cold weather or from the effects of extreme hunger or starvation.

At Higher Levels: Casting *hearth and home* using a spell slot of 4th level or higher allows you to affect one additional creature per level of the spell slot used. For instance, if you use a 5th-level spell slot to cast this spell, you can affect three creatures you touch.

LURE PREY

2nd-level enchantment (winterfolk) [ritual]

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: 1 mile

Components: V, S, M (a wishbone)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

The location in which you cast this spell becomes too enticing for small game to resist. At the end of the casting time, the

caster breaks the wishbone in two and places both pieces on the ground. Within 2d6 minutes, 1d6 beasts of challenge rating 0 arrive at the spell location. The animals lured by the spell are all of the same type and are of species native to the region and environs in which the spell is cast. Creatures drawn to the location remain there for the duration or until attacked.

While usually cast to draw food creatures to a location, enterprising winterfolk just as often use *lure prey* to bring small creatures through locations they suspect are trapped or to use the summoned animals to distract or draw the attention of larger creatures.

At Higher Levels: If *lure prey* is cast with a 4th-level spell slot, at the caster's choice, it summons 2d6 beasts of challenge rating 0 or 1d6 beasts of up to challenge rating 1. If it is cast with a 6th-level spell slot, it summons 4d6 beasts of challenge rating 0 or 1d6 beasts of up to challenge rating 2.

SPIRIT OF THE HILLS

6th-level necromancy (winterfolk)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

Ancestral energies surround and fill you, transforming you into a paragon of the winterfolk. While under the effects of *spirit of the hills*, you have advantage on attack rolls and saving throws. You also have resistance to cold and fire damage as well as bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons.

If you fail a Constitution saving throw to maintain concentration on this spell, you can elect to take 1 point of exhaustion once the duration ends in order to maintain concentration on it. If you choose to stop concentrating on the spell, the ancestral spirits depart you in a rush, dealing 1d10 force damage per round remaining in the duration to all creatures within 15 feet of you. Creatures damaged by this use of the spell can make a Constitution saving throw to take half damage.

UNERRING MARK

5th-level divination (winterfolk)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (an arrowhead flecked with dried animal blood)

Duration: 1 round per level

You are suffused with the spirits of your ancestors, who guide your attacks. While under the effects of this spell, your ranged weapon attacks hit their target automatically with no attack roll. Targets with three-quarters cover or total cover are not affected by this spell. When calculating your ranged weapon damage, you subtract 1 from each damage die rolled to determine the total damage dealt. While under the effects of this spell, you cannot strike a critical hit against a creature with a ranged weapon attack.

At Higher Levels: If you cast this spell using a 6th-level spell slot, the decrease to your weapon's damage is negated, and you deal damage as normal for the weapon used. If you cast *unerring mark* using an 8th-level spell slot, all creatures standing within 10 feet of you gain the benefit of the spell when they make ranged attacks.

Riverfolk: The Scattered People of the Trade

by Victoria Jaczko

From ramshackle patchwork barges to the decks of fishing boats and smuggling vessels, riverfolk halflings are found along the greatest rivers of the Crossroads... and some of the less great. The gruff barge pilot in the wide-brimmed hat, predicting a river with near-prescient skill; the singer, stamping out rhythms on the deck while belting out bawdy songs; the charming huckster, swindling the big folk out of their savings for promises and trinkets with a gleam in his eye—all different but all riverfolk and all making their sometimes contentious homes wherever the current takes them.

Barge-Born

Riverfolk are, by their own description, not as "fussy" as the courtfolk, bowing in Arbonesse, or their stodgy winterfolk cousins, scavenging in the Rothenian Plains and farther north. Riverfolk laugh more, drink more, fight more, and by their own consideration, have much more fun. They have dark coloring all around, various shades of woody browns from hair to eyes to skin. They blend as well with a dark alley as a ship's deck. Men and women dress similarly in practical working clothing, mostly tough canvas or leather shirts and pants, and favor hefty, good-quality work gloves. Most riverfolk don some type of hat as a preferred accessory, from the floppy, wide-brimmed to caps bearing jaunty duck feathers. Riverfolk are small, as all halflings, a little stockier although more graceful than most.

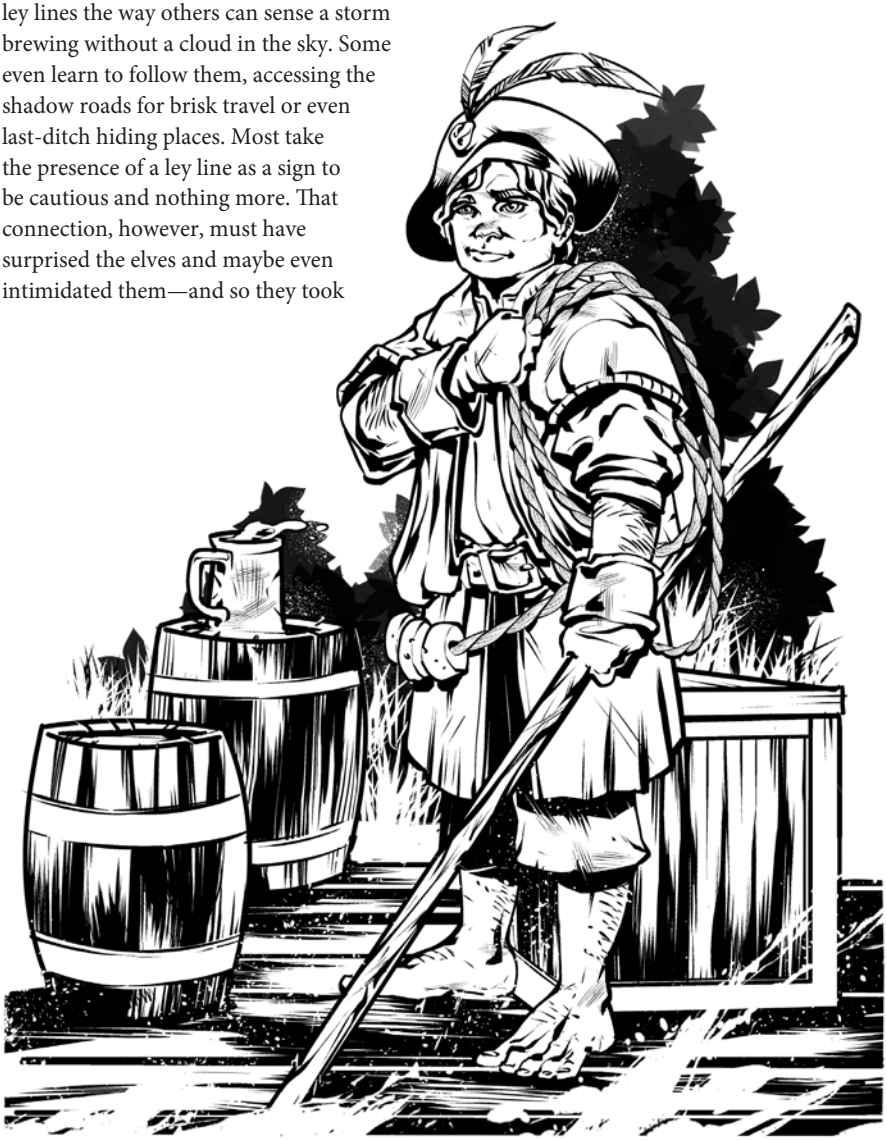
Most riverfolk are found along the River Argent, especially around Zobeck and its neighbors, but wherever river routes are good, they go. These halflings have made themselves a home in most every river port where they've been permitted to spread. Zobeck, Magdar, the Seven Cities, and even Krakova—riverfolk found they can do a brisk business with the dead if one doesn't get squeamish—regularly have riverfolk in their ports.

Preternatural Navigators

The courtfolk have it that the riverfolk and winterfolk were servitors like them but forsook their oaths following the Great Retreat and lost their connection to the Summer Lands. Riverfolk put no stock in this story; according to them, the riverfolk were once the only type of halfling there

was, and most riverfolk now are descended from the ones who didn't get wooed by elven promises. As to why the elves took interest is a subject seldom brought up to outsiders: the riverfolks' birthright, an inherent connection to the mysterious ley lines of Midgard.

Riverfolk don't claim any type of powerful arcane culture, now or ever, but they sense ley lines the way others can sense a storm brewing without a cloud in the sky. Some even learn to follow them, accessing the shadow roads for brisk travel or even last-ditch hiding places. Most take the presence of a ley line as a sign to be cautious and nothing more. That connection, however, must have surprised the elves and maybe even intimidated them—and so they took some riverfolk as favored servants in pretty cages and slowly warped that power into the glamour the courtfolk now possess. Those halflings who fled into their ranks following the Great Retreat regained their ley line connections over time but lost their glamour and longevity. According to the riverfolk, that's all the proof they need of the truth.



Rough and Tumble

Riverfolk love matching strength and wits against the big folk—and against each other too, if the drinks are flowing. Their favorite competitive game is barrel walking along their decks or on the piers, a display of physical prowess. Riverfolk excel at it, and they're glad to show off to romantic interests or challenge others, especially if money is involved. If riverfolk have a major weakness, it's money; they aren't attracted to luxury comforts so much as their frequent hobnobbing with big folk has taught them that money is the surest way to respect and freedom. This has given them a predilection to gambling, typically unable to resist a card or dice game. While halflings are notoriously lucky, they can push that luck to the limit. Once it runs out—well, there's more than one reason why riverfolk make a habit of crime.

Riverfolk have shrewd business minds, and they go where the risk-reward ratio is best. Smuggling proved a natural fit for them, especially once they sorted out that few non-halflings could tell them apart. Barges keep complex smuggling schedules that operate primarily through word-of-mouth with illegal cargo seldom being shipped on the same barge more than twice in a row. The patchwork barges the big folk deride as floating eyesores are perfect smuggling vessels: they are infuriatingly hard to search as they go against typical construction layouts and have many hidden pockets and secret trapdoors impossible to distinguish from the main ship. In the time it takes to search one halfling barge that may have no smuggled cargo on it, two more have time to load up contraband and leave.

Few dare suggest the halfling barges be outlawed altogether however. Despite the complaints against smugglers, riverfolk are more notable for their remarkable capability in forging rivers, and few others can with the same efficiency. They've been welcome sights in remote areas in need of food and common goods and in the larger cities and kingdoms for the rare goods and news they bring back.

Animal Ken

Most barges utilize draft mules to haul their boats upstream, but the going is notoriously slow and tedious. Riverfolk, however, enjoy a knack with animals that persuades their mules to work as part of the team. Riverfolk mules are efficient and determined, hauling their barges upstream faster with less goading and few mishaps. When asked if they use magic to get their animals to behave, riverfolk just shrug and say everyone works better when shown proper respect.

This knack extends beyond draft animals. Riverfolk fishermen enjoy bountiful catches, reeling in fish while big folk swear the river's gone barren. Birds like to roost on riverfolk boats and homes and tend to bring small gifts when they visit, ranging from seeds to shiny coins. This respect goes both ways; while riverfolk seldom farm or tend gardens, they regard rivers with reverent consideration. Anyone showing cruelty to animals or polluting the rivers with filth or garbage are quickly introduced to the business end of a riverfolk pole.

Some riverfolk explore these bonds further, leaving the hectic river-trade lifestyle for a while and becoming rangers and druids with special interest in river ecology. Stories circulate about a riverfolk barge being helplessly ravaged in rapids, only to have the waters separate around it with one wave from a halfling druid abord, and of greedy fishermen poaching fish in strained areas being overcome by schools of river sharks, the largest ridden by a riverfolk ranger.

River Workers

Away from the elven courts and Rothenian Plains, riverfolk are the most common halflings other races meet. They still labor under the stigma of being "little people" and get taken for servants, holdovers from their courtfolk cousins' dedication to indenture. As such, riverfolk have to fight for decent shifts in river docks across the big cities, and when they don't get overlooked entirely for crewing the barges and riverboats, they often get saddled with thankless cooking and cleaning work or used for their small size for hard-to-reach repairs. As much as they can, riverfolk prefer joining barges manned by their own kind, but riverfolk with the funding to run their own operations aren't common. The ones that do more often than not have patchwork boats put together with mixes of new material and those harvested from wrecked or decommissioned vessels—but if it floats, a riverfolk will make it work.

Riverfolk work hard on the docks, boats, and barges along the River Argent and the other major rivers through Krakova, Magdar, and the Seven Cities. The comings and goings of riverfolk from port to port means their population numbers are seldom counted, but they're there. They are fishermen, warehouse workers, shipwrights, carpenters, smugglers, hucksters, pilots, and more, almost all of them eking out livings from the river or adjacent to it. A smattering of riverfolk can be found making a go at other professions inland, but the reasoning for sticking to the rivers is simple: they're good at it, and it's one of the few places a halfling might find respect.

The dream of many young riverfolk is to own their own river barge one day, whether freshly built or pieced together from scrap and determination. The great barges on

the Argent are almost tiny kingdoms unto themselves with the captain as its monarch and where riverfolk rule is law. Not that most riverfolk have any interest in ruling anything, but it presents a unique opportunity to be able to live as they like and not be obligated to put up with any big folk nonsense. Other races finding themselves working on or with passage booked on a halfling barge ought to show a little respect: the riverfolk like to deal with rudeness by letting the river teach the manners.

Rivers of Shadow

As of late, new opportunities have been surfacing for the riverfolk barges. For those willing to move cargo down shadier corridors than even the most nefarious smuggling route, shadow fey coin is being spent, and they're being very generous with it. In exchange for shifting cargo—not all of it mere objects—between Zobeck and the Shadow Realm via the river-bound shadow roads, a riverfolk barge captain can come into significant wealth and power. Despite the temptation, many suspicious riverfolk judge such bargains as too good to be true—just a case of some other type of elf finding a way to make halflings serve. They closely observe those who've made such deals, waiting and watching to see how quickly their newfound success flounders.

Eye on the Prize

Riverfolk are among the most adventuresome halflings in Midgard. They can be impressed with tales of daring, valor, and—maybe most of all—promises of terrific wealth. It takes effort to woo a riverfolk away from their rivers, but with a notion of buying their own boat, buying their own dock, or simply elevating their kin out of criminal activity to survive, money makes a powerful lure. Their natural connections to the world make them potent druids and rangers, but their slippery, tough lot in life also lends them well to professions as a fighter, rogue, or scoundrelly bard.

Riverfolk Names

Riverfolk are an independent lot and often jostled about among other races, like it or not. To maintain cultural ties, they favor giving their children older names of their ancestors or clever riverfolk heroes (mostly smugglers and captains). These names give way to nicknames quickly, a means of maintaining some control in the world—big folk don't get the satisfaction of knowing their true names. Family names evoke a mix of natural themes and boat life and are combined elements from both mother and father. For example, if Margo Whitebottle and Rennie Halfknot have a son, they might name him Lothaire Halfbottle, called "Louie." Riverfolk believe honoring their ancestry is important and don't care if it makes their genealogy difficult for anyone else to follow.

MALE GIVEN NAMES AND NICKNAMES

Alain "Lain", Amaury "Murry", Augustin "Gus", Basile "Bas", Bertrand "Bert", Casimir "Cas", Corentin "Cory", Cyrille "Cy", Daniel "Dany", Diodore "Dio", Edgard "Eddy", Fabrice "Fabe", Francis "Frank", Gabin "Gabe", Ghyslain "Gish", Guillame "Guy", Honore "Rene", Jeremie "Remy", Jonathan "Jon", Leonide "Leo", Lothaire "Louie", Marcellin "Marc", Maximilien "Max", Nicodeme "Nick", Osric "Oz", Placide "Cid", Raphel "Rafe", Renaud "Rennie", Rodolph "Rudy", Sylvestre "Sly", Theophile "Theo", Valerian "Val", Yezekael "Zeke"

FEMALE GIVEN NAMES AND NICKNAMES

Amandine "Amy", Apolline "Polla", Beatrice "Trixie", Cassandra "Cassie", Doriane "Dori", Emilienne "Emma", Eveline "Evie", Florentine "Flora", Franseza "Frankie", Genevieve "Vivi", Giselle "Gigi", Gwendoline "Gwen", Heloise

"Ella", Isabeau "Izzy', Jacquette "Ketta", Jocelyn "Josie", Lilou "Lily", Lorette "Etta", Madeline "Maddy", Magalie "Mags", Majorlaine "Margot", Myriam "Ry", Nicolette "Nikki", Noemi "Em", Penelope "Penny", Rosemonde "Rosie", Roxanne "Roz", Syvilanne "Sylvie", Tiphaine "Tip", Victorine "Vicky", Zephyrine "Zee"

RIVERFOLK FAMILY NAMES

Argentford, Brookway, Craneship, Draughtbank, Eelprow, Finderfish, Greendrift, Halfeddy, Jetfrog, Knotreed, Loamford, Mistwood, Newtford, Otterflow, Prowflood, Quicknot, Riverbottle, Silverbrook, Turtlebarge, Underriver, Whitedrift, Youngwood

Riverfolk Halfling Traits

Riverfolk are city halflings, usually growing up on docks, fishing boats, and the patchwork barges. Most are more at home on a temperamental river than on solid ground, and riverfolk seldom fear drowning. Despite their urban natures, riverfolk maintain a strong connection with natural forces. Riverfolk halflings have the following two traits and one modification in addition to the standard halfling traits.

Alignment. Most riverfolk are somewhere between chaotic good and chaotic neutral. They are free spirits, independent-minded, and chafe beneath the rules and restrictions others place on them. Some emerge as underdog champions, climbing their way through society to make things better for others, while others prefer to enjoy what they can get from a society that doesn't want to give them anything.

Sure-Footed. You're tough and strong despite your small size, no stranger to hard work, labor, and working muscle against the will of a river. Your Strength score is increased by 1. Additionally, you are adept at maintaining your balance on wet decks; you have advantage on Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks to keep your balance. Slippery surfaces are not considered difficult terrain for you.

River's Child. You have advantage on Strength (Athletics) checks to swim. Additionally, you add twice your Wisdom bonus on your Wisdom (Animal Handling) checks with advantage if the animal is native to rivers or nests in riverbanks. You can sense ley lines that cross or run parallel to a river within 1 mile of you but gain no other benefit to tap into or unlock it.

Riverfolk Feats

Riverfolk halflings have developed the following feats.

CONNECTIONS

***Prerequisite**: Halfling (riverfolk), Charisma 10 or higher*

Riverfolk have many diverse kin scattered across river ports in the Crossroads. When you need something badly, you know if you just ask around enough, you'll find a cousin who knows someone who knows someone else who might be able to help you out:

- Increase your Charisma score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- Whenever you are in an area with a halfling population, you can make a Charisma (Persuasion) check (DC 15 in areas with 1,000 or more halflings in residence, DC 20 if 100–999, and DC 25 if less) to get in touch with distant kin who can provide you with a service. As long as the particular service or item is available in the area, you can purchase it from your connection with a 5% reduction in cost for every 5 you exceeded the DC on your check. In regions with more courtfolk and winterfolk halflings, you may still make the check, but these connections are far weaker; you have disadvantage on your Charisma (Persuasion) check.

- You can, at any time in a population center with halflings, make a Charisma (Persuasion) check against a DC 20 to see if you know anyone there. (Populations that are mostly courtfolk or winterfolk impose disadvantage on this roll.) If you succeed, you find someone you know who is friendly to you; they will not provide you aid of any significant gold value, but may share local information, directions, a free hot meal, or a place to sleep or hide for the night.

LEY FERRYMAN

Prerequisites: *Halfling (riverfolk), Intelligence or Wisdom 13 or higher*

All riverfolk can sense ley lines when they intermix with rivers, but most of your kin use this knowledge to show caution and respect. You prefer to refine this sense to take advantage of the paths that ley lines open up to you:

- Increase your Intelligence or Wisdom score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to avoid becoming lost in any realm that contains ley lines.
- You do not incur a penalty on your Intelligence (Arcana) checks on Shadow Road Lore.
- While traveling a shadow road on a river, you reduce your travel time to a destination by 1d2 days + your Intelligence modifier (to a minimum travel time of 1 day).

UNDERFOOT

Prerequisites: *Small size or smaller, Strength 13 or higher*

You excel at tripping up taller races and sending them to the ground:

- Increase your Strength score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- While wielding a quarterstaff or barge pole, you have advantage on Strength (Athletics) checks to trip a creature up to two sizes larger than you.
- If using the fighter class Trip Attack Battle Master maneuver with a quarterstaff or barge pole, your target has disadvantage on their Strength saving throw to avoid being knocked prone.

Riverfolk Equipment

Barge poles (or quant poles) are about 10 feet long with a cap at one end and a prong at the other. Primarily used to propel or steer barges through the water, the forked prong at one tip prevents the pole from sinking into muck in the riverbed. Barge poles can be wielded as a bludgeoning weapon or used to stab with the prong for 1d4 piercing damage. Barge poles are clumsy weapons at best, even in the hands of riverfolk who have learned to wield them. In the hands of anyone but a riverfolk halfling, a barge pole is an Improvised Weapon and deals 1d4 bludgeoning damage. Riverfolk may wield barge poles as simple weapons.

WEAPON	COST	DAMAGE	WEIGHT	PROPERTIES
Simple Melee Weapons				
Barge Pole	1 sp	1d6 bludgeoning	7 lb.	Heavy, special, two-Handed

Riverfolk Magic Items

Riverfolk halflings make special use of the following items.

RIVER TOKENS

Wondrous items, rare

These pebbles can be shaped like salmon, river clams, or iridescent river rocks. Regardless of the form, all give a distinctive shine in sunlight and radiate a scent of fresh, roiling water no matter how long it's been on dry land. These tokens seem sturdy with light handling but crumble easily if you attempt to crush them.

You can crush a token into a river to calm the waters ahead to a gentle current for 1 hour. Hostile creatures within the river or lairing on the riverbanks nearby (within 500 feet) are soothed by the power in the token.

They must make Wisdom saving throws (DC 15) to be able to take any hostile actions for 1 hour; attacking an affected creature ends this effect immediately.

Once crumbled, the *river token* is consumed.

SMUGGLER'S COAT

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

When you attune yourself to this coat, it conforms to you in a color and style befitting your race and local culture. It has no visible pockets, but they appear if you place your hands against the side of the coat and expect pockets. Once your hand is withdrawn, the pockets vanish and take anything placed in them to an extradimensional space. A *smuggler's coat* can hold up to 40 pounds of material in up to 10 different extradimensional pockets. Nothing can be placed inside the coat that won't fit in a pocket. You can withdraw a specific item at will; when reaching for it, the correct pocket appears.

If you desire, you can concentrate on keeping all pockets visible on the coat; there are four pockets, two on each side, on the outer coat, four on the inside, and two pockets in each sleeve. The pockets remain visible while you maintain concentration on doing so.

A *smuggler's coat* is resistant to most damage, but deliberately shredding it, incinerating it, or otherwise subjecting it to massive damage can obliterate the coat and everything in it, though an artifact inside a *smuggler's coat* will manifest elsewhere.

Detecting the magic of a *smuggler's coat* will not reveal the magical auras of any items it is containing.

Placing the coat with in another extradimensional space, such as a *bag of holding*, or vice versa will destroy both items and create a gate to the Astral Plane. The gate originates where the one item was placed inside the other. Any creature within 10 feet of the *gate* is sucked through it and deposited in a random location on the Astral Plane. The gate then closes. The gate is one-way only and can't be reopened.

Riverfolk Class Options

Riverfolk halflings have made certain classes all their own.

BARD: COLLEGE OF THE ARTS

Those who have been burned by a bard of "the arts" know exactly what sort of art is conveyed by the name: the art of the swindle, the con, and the huckster.

Con artistry isn't a profession all riverfolk claim, but the ones who do are very good at it. Halflings are an underestimated lot, and their happy-go-lucky dispositions, size, and apparent harmlessness makes them easy to trust. These hucksters take advantage of these traits to humble the big folk. The more noble ones among them are inclined to target haughty, greedy people who make life difficult for the lower classes, taking them down a few pegs to teach a lesson. Other hucksters, however, are more concerned with making money, and the only line they won't cross is swindling their own kin—if even that.

In seedy riverside taverns, on rollicking boat parties, or off in dens and bazaars of dubious repute, so often are bards of this college found. When one "artist" recognizes another, they are quick to swap tales and tricks and the names of previous marks and potential dupes they haven't gotten to yet. Unless of course the bards in question have made rivals of each other by lingering too long in a similar trade in the same place: then it can become a feud where one attempts to discredit the other before they *both* are found out.

MISDIRECTION

When you join the college of the arts at 3rd level, you learn the secret of keeping a target's eyes everywhere but on what your hands are doing:

- You gain proficiency in Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) if you do not have it already.
- You have advantage on any Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to engage in an act of legerdemain or manual trickery, such as to conceal an item, make it "disappear," or plant an item elsewhere.
- As a bonus action, you can conceal or draw a light weapon that weighs no more than 1 pound.

FAST-TALK

Starting at 3rd level, you learn the secret that *what* you say matters less than how you say it. You can expend one use of Bardic Inspiration and spend your entire action talking to a target. Whether feigning acquaintance, asking questions, or simply jumping from one non-sequitur to another, your target must make a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC. On a failure, the target has the charmed condition and disadvantage on Perception checks for as long as you continue talking, up to 1 minute (after the first round, treat this as maintaining concentration). Attacking the target breaks the effect immediately as does leaving the target's line of sight or rendering the target unable to hear or understand you. Potentially hostile actions the target notices allow another saving throw with advantage. The effect ends at the start of the target's turn once you stop speaking or lose concentration.

HECKLE

Beginning at 6th level, you can expend one use of Bardic Inspiration as a bonus action to heckle your target, a creature no more than 60 feet away from you, peppering them with insults, clever repartee, or actual rotten produce. Your target must make a Wisdom saving throw against your abuse. On a failure, the target subtracts an amount equal to your Bardic Inspiration die on their next attack roll, saving throw, or skill check, but the target gains advantage on their next attack roll against you. The effects only apply on the target's next roll.

MASTER OF LIES

Starting at 14th level, your lies and falsehoods have become so convincing that you yourself believe them half the time:

- Checks made against you to discern your deceits have disadvantage.
- You have advantage on all Charisma (Deception) checks.
- Magical divinations from spells or items that can detect falsehoods or elicit the truth struggle to pierce your deception. Against such methods, you have advantage on any such effect that grants you a saving throw, and against effects without a saving throw, there is a 50% you are determined to be truthful and a 25% chance the effect refuses to function at all.

Courtfolk: The Quiet People of the Covenant

by Victoria Jaczko

No creature epitomizes the art of graceful service like the courtfolk, an accomplishment these halflings take with great (but quiet) pride. Courtfolk are defined by their dedication and deference to the great elven courts of old, but their identities are in flux in the wake of the Great Retreat. Now their oaths are sworn to the variable moods and personalities of scattered elfmarked lords, to the humans in large cities who see halflings as a simple labor force, and to rare elves who are not quite what they once were. Centuries of elven absence have been difficult on the courtfolk, but they, like all halflings, have proven capable of adapting to a world that no longer needs them as they were.

Fey-Touched Finery

Courtfolk are as small in size and stature as any halfling. Their long proximity to elves and the Elflands shows in their complexion, usually pale and freckled with light-colored eyes and curly mops of hair. Courtfolk prefer neat, well-tailored clothing (most of which they make themselves) with touches of elven inspiration apparent without ever descending into gaudy imitation. Men typically wear baggy trousers and tight vests and women favor flowing skirts with bodices. Colors are pastel or forest tones and muted, befitting a servant, but never drab. Elven jewelry is common among halflings of any gender as are smoking pipes. Courtfolk women particularly favor pipes of unique design.

Courtfolk are not motivated by material wealth or luxury, finding genuine contentment in simple things, but what they *do* keep, they desire to be of fine quality. They take pains to care for their clothing, family heirlooms, musical instruments, work implements, and other valued possessions.

History of Servitude

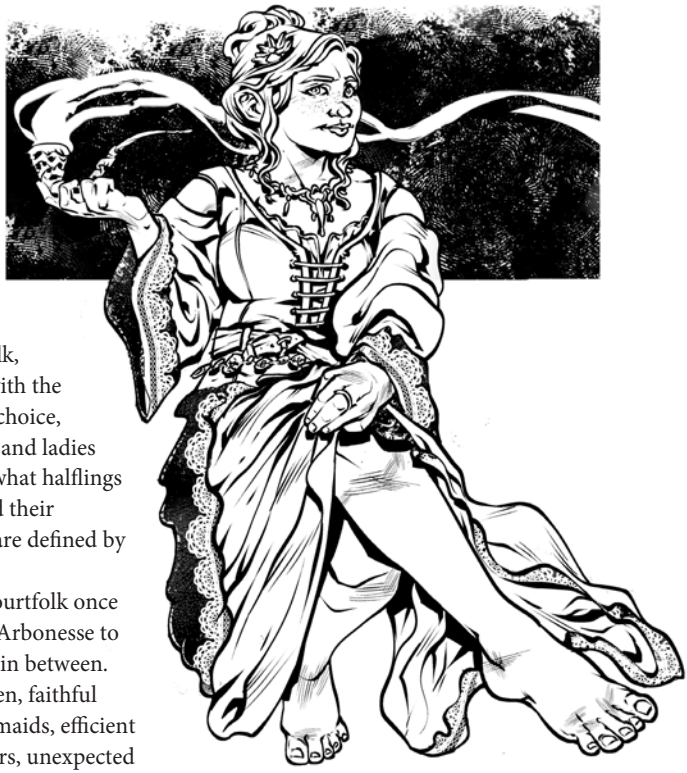
The provenance of the courtfolk—indeed, all halflings—is the subject of speculation, and one the halflings themselves are curiously unconcerned with solving. Some suspicious humans maintain halflings were once human servants, but frequent exposure to the Elflands and the magic there left them stunted and enthralled to the fey. An occasional mage postulates the halflings

were wholly created as elven servitors, made up partly of Midgard's substance and given life by fey magic.

The courtfolk themselves laugh off such claims. They maintain they are simply halflings, but unlike the reclusive winterfolk and sly riverfolk, they did not break faith with the covenant they forged, by choice, with the great elven lords and ladies of old. The courtfolk are what halflings should be, they claim, and their pitiable offshoot cousins are defined by their loss of purpose.

Numerous families of courtfolk once served elven courts from Arbonesse to Valera and every holding in between. They were expert craftsmen, faithful seneschals, discreet handmaids, efficient butlers, reliable messengers, unexpected bodyguards, and talented gardeners such that their elven masters trusted few others with their breathtaking gardens and courtyards. While never ostentatious, halflings whose families served since the earliest days of the elves' arrival bore a certain prestige among their own, respect owed for the lengths of their good service.

Most of these families disappeared in the Great Retreat with their lords and ladies, separated from friends and kin. Those remaining behind honored their oaths, lingering in the fading courts and subservient to elfmarked descendants of once-mighty rulers. Time wore on, and a seed of sorrow took root in the courtfolk, though hidden by deference and cheery service. The names of kin gone since the Last Horn are recorded among them from generation to generation and repeated in their private songs and stories.



Servants Without Masters

Courtfolk enjoy long lives, lingering in a pleasant old age for up to 350 years, a century longer than most halflings do. Most have a parent or grandparent who remembers the old courts and passed down their stories, mannerisms, and a keen sense of loss. As such, adapting to newfound freedom in only one or two generations has proven difficult for those who remained after the Last Horn. As observed with some small bitterness, those halflings who abandoned their duties and wandered away, becoming winterfolk and riverfolk elsewhere, seem to have had less trouble.

Only the secluded River Court and the Imperatrix's own Royal Court still maintain families of courtfolk servants in significant numbers. Outside of the

remaining courts, courtfolk struggle to maintain their family identities against their oaths, scattered as they are among elfmarked fiefs and baronies. Worse off still are the greater numbers of courtfolk in the young kingdoms, working as common servants to humans and other races without the mutually beneficial arrangements enjoyed under their old elven masters. Courtfolk families try to stick together in these circumstances, but kinship ties tend to unravel while serving those who neither understand nor are inclined to learn the necessities of courtfolk family relationships.

Courtfolk without holdings or patrons to serve sometimes find places to settle as families. Reywald, a popular destination, has so many halflings that it supports Little Reywald, a halfling and gnome village north of the city. It's not the elven courts, but for many courtfolk, it's good enough to serve in the city and come home to family. Others realize they are very much stuck—nothing more than leftover servants for others to use.

In recent decades—and virtually unheard of before then—some courtfolk, primarily castoffs from the still-functioning courts or the rare halfling who emerges from the military with exemplary service, spearhead a business enterprise with their family. These businesses number a mere handful in Dornig and less in the Crossroads. Still beholden to courtfolk nature, such business attempts orient toward hospitality and service: artisan shops, bakeries, inns, plant nurseries, taverns, and the like. Breaking from the mold as servants and underlings is difficult. In order to do so, courtfolk must overcome dismissive attitudes toward their role as servants, which is uncomfortable for them. They aren't predisposed to be ashamed by their lives of service. As a result, even successful courtfolk accept less than what they deserve and settle for subsistence.

Hospitality, Home, and Hearth

Courtfolk maintain servitude was never forced upon them but freely chosen. This belief, true or not, gives them a sense of agency and relevance to their servitude. The profound delight the courtfolk derive from being of service to others and in performing a job well stems from knowing they have controlled their destiny.

Service is an honor to the courtfolk. The halfling reverence for hearth and home is as strong in them as any other, but the courtfolk extend this reverence into the notion of powerful hospitality: as natives of this realm, they considered it a duty and a privilege to make the elves, guests from the other side of Midgard, feel welcome, comfortable, and cared for in a world not their own. Service comes to the courtfolk out of compassion rather than fear or awe (although certainly individual courtfolk may come to fear or worship their masters based on treatment), but it is deeply unseemly of a servant to point out what good service they provide. Courtfolk seldom discuss with others the importance of their role and find contentment in any reward, praise, or even an acknowledging nod from their patrons.

When exemplifying their role as perfect servants, someone could be excused for not noticing a courtfolk at all: they excel in drawing attention *away*, focused on their masters, and in moving through the world with quiet, unassuming grace. The same observer might be intrigued to discover courtfolk have rich private lives of their own.

Courtfolk have a practical, down-to-earth culture, appreciating simple things like healthy gardens, a good book, cheery music, and the company of friends. When the courts they served could support it, they made their homes in partially underground burrows, all part of a greater community. A courtfolk home needed to accommodate multiple generations under one roof. In

recent times, more courtfolk take their lodgings wherever available where they are serving or increasingly attempt to establish their own homesteads and villages as they carve out new places in the world.

Gatherings are important to courtfolk. Servitude is usually a year-round affair, and getting halflings together for stories, matchmaking, and reinforcing ties can be difficult. Family connections are vital for a courtfolk's well-being; no one but their own kin can truly understand the joys and sorrows of being called to service. All courtfolk are invited to gatherings, whether or not they can officially prove kinship. Unlike the stately and organized affairs they help orchestrate in elven courts, courtfolk gatherings are much more informal as details shift with the whims of their patrons and courtfolk adjust accordingly.

At a minimum, a courtfolk celebration must have lively music, excellent food and drink, the freshest flowers, sunshine, and as many kin, friends, and pets as can be gathered into one place. Most matchmakings are made at courtfolk gatherings as one of the few times when a couple can be in one place to receive blessings from both families.

In the Elven Courts

Within the courts of the River King and the Imperatrix, courtfolk serve elfmarked (or less commonly true elven) patrons with all the cheer and skill of their historical reputations. These are often the oldest yet remaining courtfolk families with the greatest prestige, but for all that, they have their hands full. Those with the Imperatrix's Royal Procession in Reywald have had no end of logistical and political nightmares thrust upon them since she fell into slumber. The maintenance of the Great Procession, politely redirecting petitioners and emissaries to other parties, and keeping alert eyes on suspicious characters who might see opportunities in the Imperatrix's indisposition consumes nearly all their time. What time they *do* have is taken up by their own kin who live in and around Reywald as common servants. The courtfolk in the Great Procession currently can't turn around without yet another distant cousin angling to be added to the Royal Court's servant retinue.

The River Court is largely withdrawn from most affairs as are now the courtfolk families who serve it. Here perhaps more so than anywhere, the relationship between courtfolk servant and elven master has continued with the least disruption. This idyllic existence has a complication however; as the elder generation of courtfolk have passed, the seclusion of the River Court has come into stark relief. The courtfolk here have had little contact with their kin outside of it, and many years pass without even hearing about a courtfolk gathering. Even if they did, many fear to leave and visit in case there is any risk of being unable to return. Courtfolk weddings and births have diminished here, and the families—among the eldest yet remaining on this side of Midgard—fear their current generation may be the last, yet setting off and away from the last true bastion of elven glory is even more terrifying.

These troubles compound the heartache courtfolk feel for their long-lost kin and way of life. Little news travels between the realms anymore, and what does is about elven politics and concerns, not servants. Whatever is transpiring in the Summer Lands, the courtfolk know nothing of how their long-vanished kin are faring. The recent resurgence of elves in Arbonesse has given them hope however that perhaps at last things may return to how they were. To some courtfolk though, beginning to flex newfound independence, this is more of a worry than a hope.

Into Darkness

Courtfolk are strongly tied to their elven patrons, even following them during the Great Retreat. When the elves proved corruptible during the Sorceress's Revolt and fell to shadow, many of their servants followed as proven by the gnomes and pixies serving in the Moonlit Courts. The courtfolk however were a notable exception; when their masters turned to dark powers, their courtfolk fled to the remaining elven lines. There is no record of any significant population of halflings serving in the Shadow Realm. While seldom investigated, it is surmised that the courtfolk dedication to hospitality and selflessness, combined with inclinations toward contentment, renders them immune to Shadow temptations of ambition and greed.

Despite this, they aren't incorruptible. While they cannot be swayed to dark powers with usual tactics, there is a growing population of courtfolk in Zobeck who have, since the Great Retreat and splintering of their families, been unable to find their own way. To them, serving the shadow fey—serving *any* elf—is preferable to serving no one. These courtfolk are faded reflections of themselves, their sunny attitudes and energy muted and buried beneath a jaded cynicism. They remain excellent servitors but have lost the spirit of hospitality: the shadow fey send them to infiltrate targets' households as mere servants, but they act as spies, rumor mongers, thieves, and in rare cases, poisoners with expert knowledge of deadly herbs.

Creating a Future

The courtfolk adventurer is less absurd than it seems, but their adventures tend to be motivated by one of two things: loyalty to an ally or generating money to look after their families. Service doesn't pay well, and forward-thinking, younger courtfolk see that without wealth their families are going to continue being splintered apart in service to those who seldom appreciate them. Courtfolk aren't motivated by greed but are shrewd enough to weigh the risks and rewards of adventuring and choose appropriately.

If unable to be with their families, courtfolk gravitate toward powerful personalities. They are picky in this, seeking good, benevolent people, but once they've chosen to befriend someone, that's it. A courtfolk is a dauntless ally and comrade-in-arms and never aims to steal the credit for their friends' derring-do. Their loyalty and practicality make them faithful companions in the heart of a dungeon as much as an intrigue-steeped noble court.

Courtfolk Names

Courtfolk names have an obvious elven influence, mired as they have been in elven culture for generations. Their given names are shorter than elves' but with a notably softer and lilting flair than other halflings. Family names are borrowed from the common names of the elf that the family first served as vassals and prefixed by *of*. The older the lineage, the more the family's prestige. Sometimes a courtfolk's primary role is added to the end of their name, especially since the Great Retreat as more courtfolk lose touch with their family lineages. A River Court courtfolk might be named Silla of Stars-Cook, but in Hirsh-Dammung, she is probably just Silla Cook.

MALE NAMES

Adan, Alis, Aran, Aus, Berri, Carr, Darris, Errian, Ervio, Galin, Immerin, Ivello, Luc, Pael, Perin, Rai, Ral, Ren, Rian, Soven, Taris, Tham, Thel, Van, Varr

FEMALE NAMES

Adie, Annas, Andra, Bethry, Cae, Dania, Elle, Felosa, Jelen, Keyle, Lathe, Lea, Merri, Mia, Naia, Netha, Phia, Quilla, Rynn, Shanna, Silla, Thea, Valla, Vara, Xan

FAMILY NAMES

Autumn, Brooks, Chase, Dances, Eyes, Flower, Gem, Hawk, Journey, Keys, Leaf, Moon, Night, Oak, Petals, Quick, River, Stars, Tower, Vale, Whisper, Young

Courtfolk Halfling Traits

Courtfolk are at home in elven courts and politics and have had generations to practice the art of remaining unnoticed until needed. They also care deeply for their companions and for the natural world, making them excellent in supportive roles. They make good rogues, though they care little for stealing, but also excel as bards, druids, or sorcerers, thanks to their innate glamour. Courtfolk have the following two traits and modification in addition to standard halfling traits.

Age. Courtfolk are the longest-lived of the halfling subraces, perhaps owing to their close association with elves. Courtfolk are elderly by their second century but enjoy relatively pleasant and unhindered old age well past 300 years.

Boon Companion. You are quick to step in and help your friends, and you have a knack for knowing exactly how to best do it. When you work with an ally to complete a task or take the Help action in combat, your ally adds a d4 to their check or attack roll (this includes the second roll made with advantage).

Wee Glamour. You are—ever so slightly—imbued with a bit of elven magic. You move with grace, your laugh is always pleasant, and colors are more vibrant on you. Your Charisma score increases by 1, and you have advantage on saves against spells of the enchantment school.

VARIANT COURTFOLK TRAITS: SHADOW SERVITORS

Those courtfolk who elect to serve shadow fey are usually broken spirits to start with, and over time, the cracks in their souls become filled with something darker.

Disquiet. You still look like your old self, but your mind is changed by the knowledge you've accepted—and you're not sure it's for the better. Your Intelligence score increases by 1. Additionally, something in your eyes makes people uneasy around you. You have advantage on Charisma (Intimidate) and Charisma (Deception) checks against humanoids.

Silent Steps. You've always been adept at evading notice, but now your own shadow seems to muffle the noise you make. You can cast the silence spell once per day centered on yourself, which you can end at any time by speaking. Additionally, you always have advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to be quiet.

Courtfolk Background: Court Servant

Courtfolk are a long-lived race, and old habits have been hard to shake. The majority of courtfolk, even independent now, were once servants at some point in their lives. These halflings are experts in complex social dynamics and knowledgeable in elven history and customs.

Skill Proficiencies: Insight, Nature

Tool Proficiencies: One artisan's tools set of your choice

Languages: Elven

Equipment: One artisan's tools set of your choice, a unique piece of elven jewelry, a set of fine clothes, a handcrafted pipe, and a belt pouch containing 20 gp

FEATURE: SERVANT'S INVISIBILITY

The art of excellent service requires a balance struck between being always available and yet unobtrusive, and you've mastered it. If you do not perform a visible action, speak or be spoken to, or otherwise have attention drawn to you for at least 1 minute, creatures nearby have trouble remembering you are even in the room. Until you speak, perform a visible action, or have someone draw attention to you, creatures must attempt a Wisdom save (DC 8 + your Charisma modifier + your proficiency bonus) to notice you. Otherwise, they will conduct themselves as though you aren't present until either attention is drawn to you or one of their actions would take them into or adjacent to the square you occupy.

d8	PERSONALITY TRAITS
1	Unless I must speak, I hold my breath while serving others.
2	It takes all my effort not to show the effusive emotions I feel when I help others. Best to quietly serve.
3	It's getting harder to tolerate the prejudices of those I serve daily.
4	Though the old ways are hard to give up, I want to be my own boss. I'll decide my path.
5	Serving my family and friends is the only thing I truly care about.
6	City life is killing my soul. I long for the old courtly ways.
7	It's time for my fellows to wake up and be taken advantage of no longer.
8	It's the small things that make it all worth while. I try to be present in every moment.

d6	IDEAL
1	**Family**. My family, whether the one I come from or the one I make, is the thing in this world most worth protecting. (Any)
2	**Service**. I am most rewarded when I know I have performed a valuable service for another. (Good)
3	**Sloth**. What's the point of helping anyone when we've been discarded? Our existence is an elven joke. (Chaotic)
4	**Compassion**. I can't resist helping anyone in need. (Good)
5	**Tradition**. Life under elven rule was best, and things should be kept as close to their ideals as possible. (Lawful)
6	**Joy**. The pursuit of happiness is the only thing worth serving anymore. (Neutral)

d6	BOND
1	My family needs me to provide for them. They mean everything to me, which means I'll do whatever it takes.
2	My kin have served this holding and its lords and ladies since before the Great Retreat. I serve them faithfully to make my lineage proud.
3	I can't read the inscriptions on this odd elven ring, but it's all I have left of my family and our history of loyal service.
4	I'm with the best friends a halfling can ask for, so why do I feel so lonesome and homesick?
5	I've found a profession where my skills are put to good use, and I won't let anyone bring me down—I'm already short enough.
6	I found peace in a special garden filled with beautiful life, but I only have this flower to remind me. Someday I'll remember where to find that garden.

d6	FLAW
1	I would rather serve darkness than serve no one.
2	I'm afraid of taking risks that might be good for me.
3	I believe elves are superior to all other races, and I'm not afraid to share that truth.
4	I always do as I'm told, even though sometimes I don't think I should.
5	I know what's best for everyone, and they'd all be better off if they'd follow my advice.
6	I can't stand seeing ugly or depressing things. I'd much rather think happy thoughts.

Courtfolk Feats

Courtfolk halflings have developed the following feats.

ADAPTABLE MAGIC

***Prerequisite**: The ability to cast at least one spell*

You possess great finesse with magic, either by virtue of generations of ancestral service in elven courts or potentially knowledge gleaned from service to the Shadow:

- You learn one Metamagic option of your choice from among those available to the sorcerer class.
- If you already have sorcery points, you gain one more. Otherwise, you have two sorcery points, which recharge after a long rest.

Courtfolk Magic Items

A few specialized enchanted items circulate among courtfolk families, either created by them or created *for* them, and most are intended to make their jobs more pleasant and efficient.

SENESCHAL'S GLOVES

Wondrous item, rare
(requires attunement, see below)

These white gloves have elegant tailoring and size themselves perfectly to fit your hands. A pair of *seneschal's gloves* must be attuned not only to a person but to a specific, habitable place with walls, a roof, and doors. To attune to a place, the gloves must be left in the location from one dawn to the next. The gloves cannot be attuned to a creature until they have attuned to a location although they can still be worn.

While you wear the gloves, you may unlock any nonmagical lock within the attuned location by touch, and any mundane portal you open while wearing these gloves will open silently.

As an action, you may snap your fingers and every nonmagical portal within 30 feet of you will immediately close and lock itself (if possible) so long as it is unobstructed. (Obstructed portals remain open.) Once used, this ability cannot be used again until the next dawn.

STORYTELLER'S PIPE

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

This long-shanked wooden smoking pipe is etched with leaves along the bowl. It is serviceable as a typical pipe, but as an action, you can blow out smoke and shape it into wispy images and manipulate them as *silent image* with a range limited to the 10-foot cone in front of you and images no larger than a 5-foot cube. The smoky images last for 3 rounds before fading, but you can continue blowing smoke to create more until the pipe burns through the smoking material in it.

Additionally, if you use the *storyteller's pipe's* command word, you may blast a cloud of hazy, choking smoke in a 30-foot cone in front of you. Creatures within the haze have half-cover and must attempt DC 15 Constitution saving throws or be afflicted with debilitating coughing and wheezing, unable to speak or cast spells with verbal components and gaining one level of exhaustion, for 1 minute.

Courtfolk Spells

Of all halflings, the courtfolk are the most magically adept.

WHISPERING GARDENS

2nd-level transmutation

Casting Time: 10 minutes

Range: Self (120-foot radius)

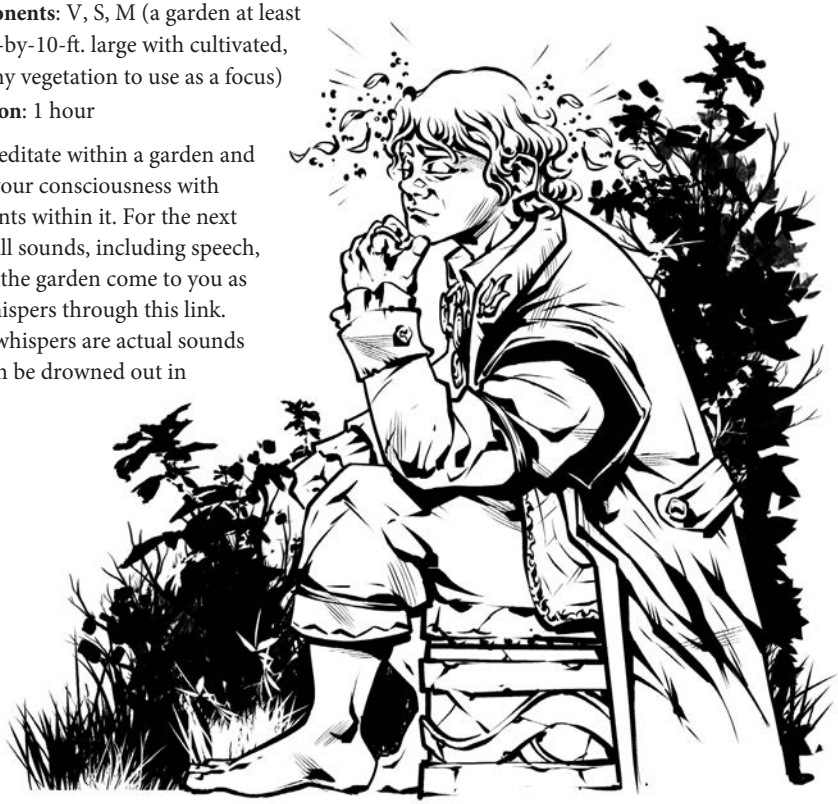
Components: V, S, M (a garden at least 10-ft.-by-10-ft. large with cultivated, healthy vegetation to use as a focus)

Duration: 1 hour

You meditate within a garden and share your consciousness with the plants within it. For the next hour, all sounds, including speech, within the garden come to you as soft whispers through this link. These whispers are actual sounds and can be drowned out in loud environments, potentially requiring a Perception check (DC 15 for a noisy tavern equivalent or DC 20 for combat). In a quiet environment, it is possible for others to hear the whispers if they are within 5 feet of you and make a successful Perception check against your spell save DC. Only sounds inside the garden's boundaries (determined by gates, fencing, hedges, or where cultivated plants give way to wild growth) are transmitted. The boundaries of the spell are set at the time of casting. After that, you may leave the spell's area of effect and maintain your link with the garden.

This spell transmits sounds with as much accuracy as possible while remaining a whisper. It does not convey individual voices or identify the source of the noise.

This spell cannot be cast within range of sentient plants.



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