

# Dark Druids

THIS PRODUCT IS A CELEBRATION OF THE dark and dangerous side of nature. Where most druids are hermits and recluses, benign guardians of the wilderness and its creatures or silent avengers of the ravages of civilization, it is often forgotten that neutral EVIL is just as valid an alignment for druids as is any other flavor of neutrality. There are druids devoted to dark paths of destruction, who see nature as a ripe field ready for plucking, and they its true masters. They see nature as a tool for their own aims, a thing to be understood and mastered and turned to fell purposes, not some sentimental exercise in caretaking and husbandry. An evil druid may be evil first and druid second, or they may see their evil as a natural outcome of the savagery and primal ruthlessness of the wild. Mercy is weakness and hesitation is vulnerability. They are the hunters and every living thing is their prey, whether they choose to walk on two legs, four legs, or none at all.

## UMBRAE-TOKENS

The iconic *Shade of the Woodlands* feat is used extensively within this text as a prerequisite; in many ways, it forms the dark cornerstone to our book, acting as the poisonous “root” of feat-trees and as a bitter well-spring from which inhuman ideas take strange shape and begin to breathe in their obscene life. That feat, of course, has descriptive text that includes a special rule:





“Ordained as one of the sinister albino druids, you carry with you into the wider world a powerful effigy of hair, twigs, and blood that crawls with the deepening cold of the hallowed hunting grounds.”

“As part of this feat, you create a personal token that ties your soul and your doings to the fell power of the dark forest. This potent object is treated as a wooden unholy symbol that radiates faint *necromancy* magic. If your token is ever destroyed, your connection to the shadowy heart of the forest is severed and all benefits of this feat are lost until another is created. This process requires a journey to the same forest and an *atonement* spell cast by a fellow worshiper of your dark god.”

Many of the feats within this book directly modify a dark druid’s umbrae token in some way, causing it to radiate additional magics—or to become more subtle—as an individual worshiper grows in power, devotion, and flexibility. Moreover, there is no reason you could not add an umbrae-token requirement to the house-rules of any non-druid feat or archetype: perhaps a certain type of eerie, woodlands-touched warrior, hunter, or arcanist requires access to exactly such a device for her powers to truly manifest in full.

As a GM incorporating the ideas of this text into your game, you will find that you must decide several things, the first of which is the specific appearance of such an object. Is each token unique? If so, do their disparate designs demonstrate any recognizable pattern? Do the tokens incorporate writing, pictograms, or runes in any intelligible language? Are they crafted of particularly exotic materials? Are they formed of raw, untreated substances or are they painted, dyed, or colored in some way? Does the druid who carries such a symbol handcraft their own token, or is each such object a trophy given by higher-ups, long ago or dained to the cult in an unbroken procession back to the unknowable founding of the faith?

In addition to adding flavor and verisimilitude to your campaign, you will find that making such decisions aids greatly in rules-adjudication. For example: is the umbrae token a “common” or “obscure” religious symbol for purposes of the Knowledge: Religion skill? – <http://www.d2opfsrd.com/skills/knowledge>

Above all, the object should be unsettling: equal parts scarecrow doll from *Blair Witch Project* and creaking, nest-like devil’s trap from *True Detective*; it should evoke the deep woods of *Evil Dead* and the quiet, lonely dread of *Slender*.

## ON THE UMBRAL WOOD

Those who carry with them an umbrae token unanimously bear the sign of the Umbral Wood, a legendary and mysterious dark forest of pale and shifting shadows, stalked by unearthly and unseen predators, a place inimical to safety and sanity, life and light.

So ... what *is* this place? That a decision you’ll need to make within your own campaign world, and there are several options available.

It could be ...

- A real location, haunted and strange, called holy by a living and growing faith,
- A particularly wild section of the Plane of Shadow, co-terminus to the real,
- A blasphemous shard of the Realms of Faerie, oozing across unclean borders,
- An ancient and long-ago destroyed place, the ghostly home to a forgotten god,
- A wandering, spectral blot in the mist that appears only when certain stars shine,
- A possible future, reaching back through ages to a time when humans still lived,
- A floating prison-demesne to a particularly weird – and wicked! – demon or devil,
- A seed from another, more awful plane of existence, putting down thick roots,
- any of a dozen other intriguing possibilities. Perhaps it was once the home of a winter-worshipping assassin-warrior cult, uprooted and destroyed; yet the land itself had achieved a kind of sentience ... and with it, something that we might understand as lich-dom. Now, it appears again only when the full moon glares down upon fog-shrouded cedars and blood runs black into the hungry earth.

In addition, you may wish to mix and match these options: you might decide that the Umbral Wood is a permanent fixture in the Plane of Shadow, sliding back and forth between points in the living realms and the far-off lands of the Fae with the turning of the moon, as steady as heartbeat. It may even be a transitive demiplane all its own, that grows within and through the Material Plane, the Fey Realms, and the Shadow Plane. Such a transdi-



mensional woodland might then contain the seeping essence of a particularly vile beast – one that might be called a god by mortals – chained in place but gaining strength with each murder made in its name.

Or it might be something else entirely. No matter your choice, it should be a place of mystery: beautiful and deep, foreboding and ominous, crypt-quiet and starkly terrifying by turns, never truly comprehensible to any mortal mind.

If you choose to make your own Umbral Wood particularly primordial, feral and aggressively untamed, you might select to make those who serve it chaotic: either exclusively or in addition to being palpably and overwhelmingly evil. If, instead, the dark forest is a cold, precise and clockwork domain as utterly devoid of joy as it is compassion, then you might choose to make it lawful. In either instance, you can choose to allow for Neutral, non-Evil druids to thereby serve the wood – a complication your players will likely not be expecting – or to open up the normal alignment limitations of druids as you see fit.

## ON DRUIDS AS VILLAINS

Druids make uniquely captivating and intriguing villains because they are, above all, familiar-seeming creatures who are also fundamentally *alien*; even the most bloodthirsty vampire-prince, tyrannical lich-king or cruel-hearted undying warlord is assumed to have some recognizable, sane and human-like desires, drives or emotions. Not so the wicked forest-dwelling wood-worshiper; she has devoted her life to something utterly incomprehensible, and her motives are – in all ways – quite a bit beyond the grasp of the unenlightened. And yet the dark druid was also once human, or something very much like it: as opposed to a dragon or demon-lord, elder god or aberration or nameless terror from beyond outer stars, the blood-letting servant to the shadowy wilderness was once a child ... and once counted other humans as her family and even friends. In theory, a dark druid is remarkably different from a “normal” member of her species for three specific reasons:

**Rejection of Technology:** Though your game presumably takes place in a fantastic world of elves and wizards, where physical laws are more mutable, it is assumed that most humans there still love what few comforts of civilization might be had: warm beds, thick blankets, hot soup and fresh bread on a mid-winter’s night. Yet the dark druid instead chooses shrieking wind, icy mud and gnarled black roots in the trackless wood, often preferring death to the loss of power which girding herself in steel would bring. In a realm where electricity, refrigeration, literacy and germ-theory are cutting-edge science, the dark druid is all the more horrifying for literally choosing to go without technology for the sake of magical might. When the light of all knowledge is extinguished, only the dark druids will smile.

**Rejection of Humanity:** The humanoid races are fundamentally corrupt, and like a weed, an infestation, or even a virus they must be exterminated, or at the very least the herd must be culled of its weak and sickly so that the strong may survive and assume their rightful place at the head of the pack. Dark druids are more at home among the feral beasts of the wild than in civilized society. They may seek vengeance for some real or imagined slight and engage their power over nature to bring ruin upon those who have wronged them. Alternatively, they may have little true antipathy for the humanoid world, but rather feel an amoral dissociation from it, the sense that humanoid concerns are no longer theirs and that they have become wholly one with the wild, its two-legged avatar, savage guardian, or terrible taskmaster.

**Rejection of Rationality:** Wizards and alchemists study and practice for their spells and formulae; warriors and thieves train with their chosen tools to achieve mastery. Even priests go about the performance of good works, spreading the name of her faith. The dark druid, however, gains greater insight only from the enduring of agony and awfulness. Though she may stoically contemplate the inhuman horrors native to places untrod by the sane and the civilized, it is only by stripping herself bare and indulging therein in naked, whirlwind abandon that her power grows. The most far-gone of dark druids cannot be bought or bullied, for she might have no desire unfulfilled nor precious thing to lose; she cannot be reasoned or negotiated with, for she has sacrificed reason itself on an altar of gore and respects only the most brutal of eternal, sadistic power-struggles.

By accentuating the otherworldly, insane rejections of a dark druid, you can make her all the more memorable as a villain.



## DRUID ARCHETYPES

The following archetypes represent several paths that druids with a sadistic and evil bent might adopt.

### DARKWOLF (DRUID ARCHETYPE)

Darkwolves are druids that intentionally expose themselves to the curse of lycanthropy, attenuating its advance through eldritch rituals and allowing them to change slowly but surely into a special type of werewolf.

**Alignment:** Darkwolves can be of any non-good, non-lawful alignment.

**Argentum Allergen (Ex):** Darkwolves are sensitive to the touch of silver. Even momentary contact with silver causes a darkwolf to become dazzled for 1 round (DC 11 Fortitude negates). A critical hit with a silver weapon causes the darkwolf to become sickened for a number of rounds equal to the weapon's critical multiplier (DC 15 Fortitude half); this save DC is increased by 2 for every step of the weapon's critical multiplier above x2.

**Lycanthropic Empathy (Ex):** Darkwolves gain a +4 bonus on wild empathy and Handle Animal checks made with wolves and dire wolves. This ability modifies wild empathy.

**Nature Bond (Ex):** A darkwolf that acquires an animal companion must select a bird or wolf. A darkwolf that selects a domain must select one of the following: Animal, Arctic, Badlands, Mountain, Plains, Plant, Weather, Wolf.

**Limited Lycanthropy (Ex):** Unlike a true lycanthrope, darkwolves do not pass on the curse of lycanthropy with their bite, and they are themselves immune to the curse of lycanthropy. They are not forced to transform during the time of the full moon; however, when the moon is full darkwolves take a -2 penalty on saves against mind-affecting effects. If outdoors at night when the moon is visible, a darkwolf gains the blood rage universal monster ability. If the darkwolf is in human form when it activates this ability, he can activate his wild shape as a move action to assume wolf, dire wolf, or hybrid form.

**Wild Senses (Ex):** At 4th level, a darkwolf gains low-light vision and scent. If the darkwolf already has low-light vision, he can see out to triple the normal range rather than double. This ability replaces resist nature's lure.

**Wild Shape (Su):** At 4th level, a darkwolf can change into a wolf as if using *beast shape I*. At 6th level, a darkwolf can change into a dire wolf as if using *beast shape II*, or may assume the form of a medium-sized humanoid-wolf hybrid; this functions as *monstrous physique I*. In all of these forms the darkwolf's natural armor bonus to AC is increased by 2 and it gains DR 5/silver and the trip special attack with its bite. At 10th level, a darkwolf gains an additional +2 bonus to Strength and Constitution and DR 10/silver when in these forms.

At 8th level and above, a darkwolf can change into a plant creature as a standard druid and can change into animal forms other than a wolf or dire wolf as a druid 4 levels lower. A darkwolf cannot change into elementals.

**Wild Wisdom (Ex):** At 4th level, a darkwolf gains 2 points of Wisdom and loses 2 points of Charisma.

**Packmaster (Su):** At 9th level, a darkwolf can summon werewolves (using the standard werewolves found in the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*) with *summon nature's ally III* (or higher-level summoning spells). In addition, casting *summon nature's ally* to summon wolves, dire wolves, or werewolves is a standard action. A darkwolf can apply the advanced or giant simple template to wolves, dire wolves, or werewolves he summons, treating them as one category higher than normal if one template is applied or two categories higher than normal if both templates are applied. This ability replaces venom immunity.

### UNSEELIE OVATE (DRUID ARCHETYPE)

Unseelie ovates are druids that commune and cavort with the darkest and most fell of the fey, treading into beshadowed realms beyond dream and into nightmare, with a penetrating wildness of heart and raw and vicious spirit.

**Alignment:** Unseelie ovates can be of any non-good, non-lawful alignment.

**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** An unseelie ovate is not proficient with medium armor or shields.

**Languages:** An unseelie ovate can learn Aklo, Goblin, and Sylvan as bonus languages.

**Skills:** Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Diplo-