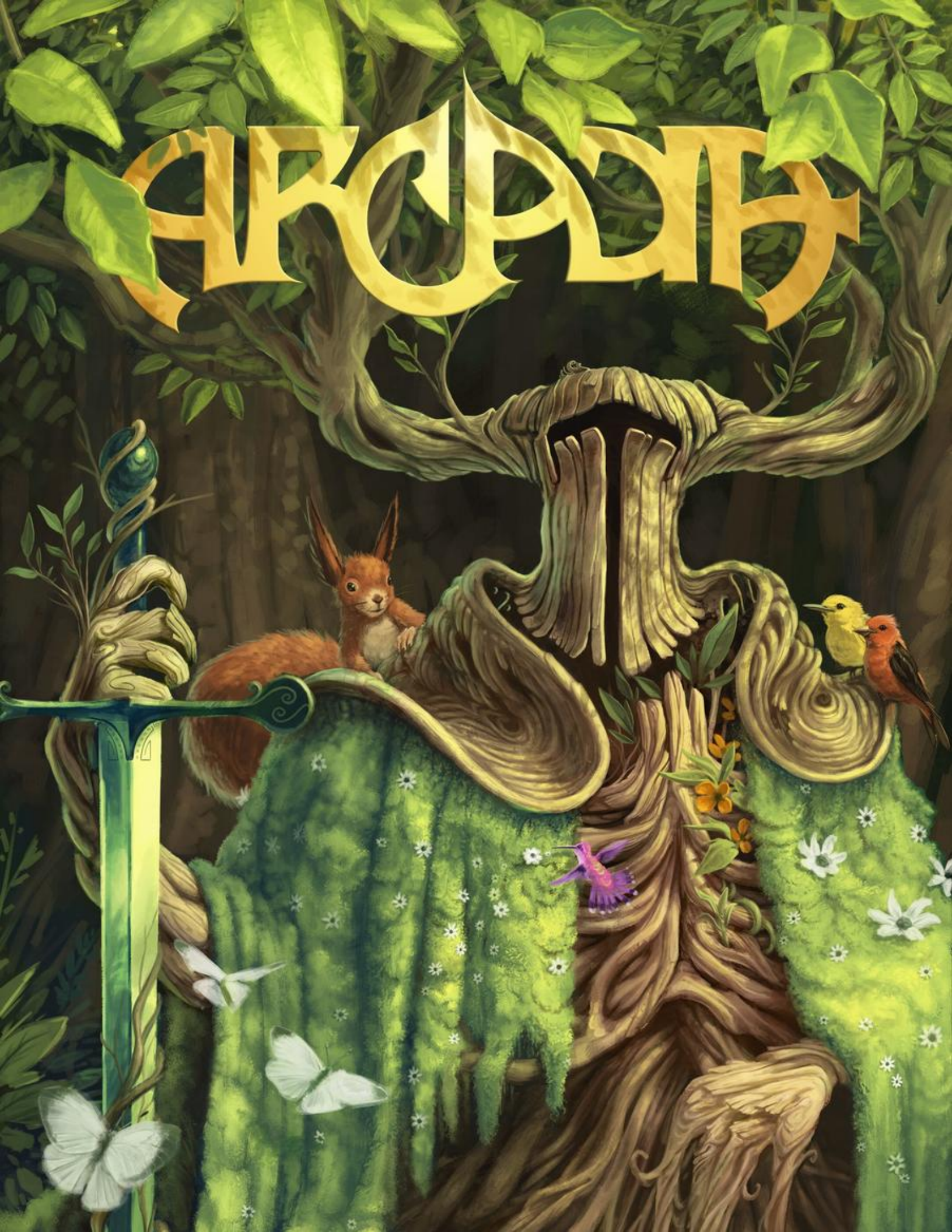


ARCADE



DESIGN & PRODUCTION

MANAGING EDITOR

Hannah Rose

LEAD DEVELOPER

James Introcaso

PRODUCTION & PLAYTEST DIRECTOR

Lars Bakke

EDITORS

Laura Hirsbrunner, Sadie Lowry

AUTHORS

The GM Tim, Hook & Chance,
Sam Mannell, Hannah Rose

LAYOUT

Jen McCleary

TITLE LOGO

Tom Schmuck

ACCESSIBILITY

Chris Hopper

COMMUNITY COORDINATOR

John Champion

CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Bobby McBride

ILLUSTRATION

COVER ART

Brett Bullion

INTERIOR ILLUSTRATORS

“Shieldbearer”: Alejandro Pacheco, João Phillipe

“Appendix NPC: Part 2”: Patrik Hell

“The Scribes”: Matheus Graef (Conceptopolis)

CARTOGRAPHER

Miska Fredman

MCDM CONTRACT QA

SENIOR TESTER

Spencer Hibnick

TESTERS

Nathan Clark

Cassandra “Dig” Crary

Alecson de Lima Junior

James Dewar

Anna Guimarães

Alex Hencinski

MCDM TEAM

Lars Bakke: Development & Production

Jerod Bennett: Technology

Grace Cheung: Art

Matt Colville: Writing & Design

Nick De Spain: Art & Art Outsource Management

Jason Hasenauer: Art & Art Direction

James Introcaso: Lead Game Designer

Hannah Rose: Managing Editor

PLAYTESTING

PLAYTEST COORDINATORS

Aaron Flavius West, Adam McLaughlin, AJ

Metzger, Casey Bell, Clayton Salamon, Harley

Kewish, ItsTheITGuy, Janek Dalkowski, Joel Russ,

John Bryant, Roman Penna

PLAYTESTERS

Áine Martin, apollosukulele, Archer, Austin Bush,

Ayden Birch, Ben Robertson, Brennen, Cory

Muraglio, EagleRuler, Eran Arabel, Gina Delvin,

Grumpy, Hazel Margaris, Iris Gorton, Isaiah

Smith, Jared “Jay” Busse, Josh Goodwin, Joshua

Barbeau, Karen Hill, Kayla Gleeson, Kit Valentine,

Kris, Lucas Chiesa, Marcel Theilig, Matthew

Donndelinger, Nicholas Renzetti, Nikola Ninković,

Phillip Ada, Rachel Cohen, Tim Skiba, Vincent

Cramer, William Pfeiffer

Join us on the MCDM Discord server, where you can chat with others about *ARCADIA* and more!

mcdm.gg/discord

Product Identity: The following items are hereby identified as Product Identity, as defined in the Open Game License version 1.0a, Section 1(e), and are not Open Content: All content which is not included in the Systems Reference Document version 5.1 or has otherwise been specifically designated as Open Game Content, including Shieldbearer, Appendix NPC, The Scribes, all Trademarks, registered trademarks, proper names (including the names of characters, place names, monsters, organizations, new spells, new abilities, etc.), dialogue, plots, story elements, locations, characters, artwork, graphics, sidebars, and trade dress.

ARCADIA

1 LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hannah Rose

SUBCLASS MAGIC ITEMS EQUIPMENT

2 SHILDBEARER

Hannah Rose

A martial archetype for fighters, plus new magical and nonmagical shields

NPCs

9 APPENDIX NPC: PART 2

Sam Mannell

Even more stat blocks to steal!

ORGANIZATION LOCATION

19 THE SCRIBES

Hook & Chance and The GM Tim

A unique organization to create rich stories

34 RESOURCES

ISSUE 20  SEPTEMBER 2022



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

If you look at the table of contents for this issue, you'll notice something weird—I wrote one of this month's articles. James commissioned me to write it back in the distant mists of time (also known as 2021), well before I approached the managing editor chair. But now that I'm here, I thought it'd be a fun opportunity to give a backstage tour of the inspiration, the design process, and how our MCDM playtesters make everything better.

We've published several subclasses for spellcasters in *ARCADIA*, but none for barbarians, fighters, rangers, or rogues—and James and my D&D groups were super into the idea of a shield-wielding fighter. Captain America is what most folks think of, but my own inspiration actually came from *Hades*, where I've spent many hours wielding Aegis, the Shield of Chaos, as I fight my way out of the Underworld. I also wanted something that would suit the shield-maiden archetype, which mixes history and myth into a top-notch fantasy aesthetic.

Armed with these concepts, I started scribbling down ideas for cool things to do with shields, as well as ideas for magic shields and new equipment. These early notes were like having a conversation with myself—there were a lot of question marks for things I wasn't sure about or hadn't solved yet. Early on, I thought the Shieldbearer might have a list of maneuvers, like the Battle Master, or that I'd design light, medium, and heavy shields, with different techniques available for each, but neither of those worked in practice. Designing character options is a lot like assembling a puzzle, except you're drawing the image and cutting out the pieces at the same time!

When I wanted to procrastinate on writing, I researched the history of shields, so I could represent more variety than the medieval European heater shield and more specificity than the generic shield in the core rules. I also looked for cool real-world battle maneuvers involving shields, like a more realistic version of this scene where a bunch of guys with huge shields become a human cannonball. I didn't find any such battle maneuvers, but I did gather some inspiration for a few of the magic shields!

Ultimately, the Shieldbearer subclass completely ignores two unfortunate real-world facts: shields don't actually make good weapons, and throwing a heavy, not particularly aerodynamic object is unlikely to be effective no matter how strong you are. A tricky game design

challenge is balancing consistency in a game world where the laws of physics are (by default) similar to our own with the need to set realism aside for the sake of epic fantasy. In the original draft, a Shieldbearer could only throw their shield a number of feet equal to 5 × their Strength modifier, but James and the testers talked me out of that limitation. Now the Shield Toss¹ feature gives you a normal range of 30 feet and a long range of 60 feet. More fun, less arithmetic.

Speaking of the testers, extensive and effective playtesting is at the heart of what we do here at MCDM. Everything we release goes through at least two full rounds of playtesting, where our amazing testers give the material an in-depth read, run games with it, and enter specific notes in a well-organized spreadsheet. As a managing editor, this is a dream, and as an author, I love getting feedback from the testers to catch issues, confirm or refute concerns, and help me deliver on my vision. For example, the first version of the Shieldbearer gave two features at level 3 that *seemed* substantial, but neither one was very impactful—something I wouldn't have realized without testing. Designing a good subclass is tricky, as no one typically has time to play it from level 1 to 20, but the testers' input helped deliver the right features in the right order so it's balanced and fun to play at any level. Having two rounds of playtesting is invaluable—it keeps us from overcorrecting and gives us the chance to actually test out more than one approach.

I'm delighted that the Shieldbearer shares an issue with two fantastic articles overflowing with creatures and adventure threads for your game. Sam Mannell's "Appendix NPC: Part 2" brings even more ridiculously useful stat blocks, including a protective auto-sentinel robot friend, a dragon priest who's a lot cooler than ye olde generic cultist, and a demigodly saint who'd make an excellent final boss. And "The Scribes" may sound like an order of dusty librarians who never leave the stacks, but these meddling Writers are here to make legendary, epic, important events *happen*, thanks to authors Hook & Chance and The GM Tim.

Thanks for joining me for this design retrospective! I hope you enjoy this issue as much as I do—and please tell me all about your epic Shieldbearer adventures.

De somnio ad itinere,
Hannah Rose
Managing Editor

¹ I talked *myself* out of naming this feature "Shield Yeet," but by all means, live your meme dreams at the table.

SHILDBEARER

A MARTIAL ARCHETYPE FOR FIGHTERS,
PLUS NEW MAGICAL AND NONMAGICAL SHIELDS

by Hannah Rose

“WHO NEEDS A PLAN? I HAVE A SHIELD.”

—PEGGY CARTER IN *WHAT IF... CAPTAIN CARTER WERE THE FIRST AVENGER?*

The archetypal warrior bears a sword, shield, and armor—the sword (or other weapon) attacks while armor passively protects. But the uses of a shield are manifold: to parry a blow, to block a projectile, to form a defensive wall with fellow warriors, to protect your comrades, and even to shove or bash a foe.

In real-world and fantasy cultures alike, shields also serve symbolic and ceremonial purposes: a coat of arms, a battle standard, or an indication of status as a warrior. They represent both individual resolve to defend something beloved and communal unity against a looming threat.

This article presents the Shieldbearer—a new martial archetype for fighters—as well as a shield-bearing retainer, magical and nonmagical shields, and rules tips related to these mechanics.

MARTIAL ARCHETYPE: SHILDBEARER

A Shieldbearer is a versatile warrior who uses a shield for both defense and offense. Amid the chaos of battle, they stand stalwart to protect their allies, smash their way through a legion of foes, or fling their shield through the air with extraordinary strength and accuracy. Even the simplest disk of wood or metal becomes a powerful weapon in the hands of a Shieldbearer.

If a feature requires a saving throw, your Shieldbearer save DC equals 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Strength modifier.

SHILDBASH

3rd-Level Shieldbearer Feature

You strike your enemies with your shield as easily as any blade. You can use your shield as a simple melee weapon that deals bludgeoning damage equal to 1d8 + your Strength modifier on a hit. You can don or doff your shield on your turn without taking an action to do so.

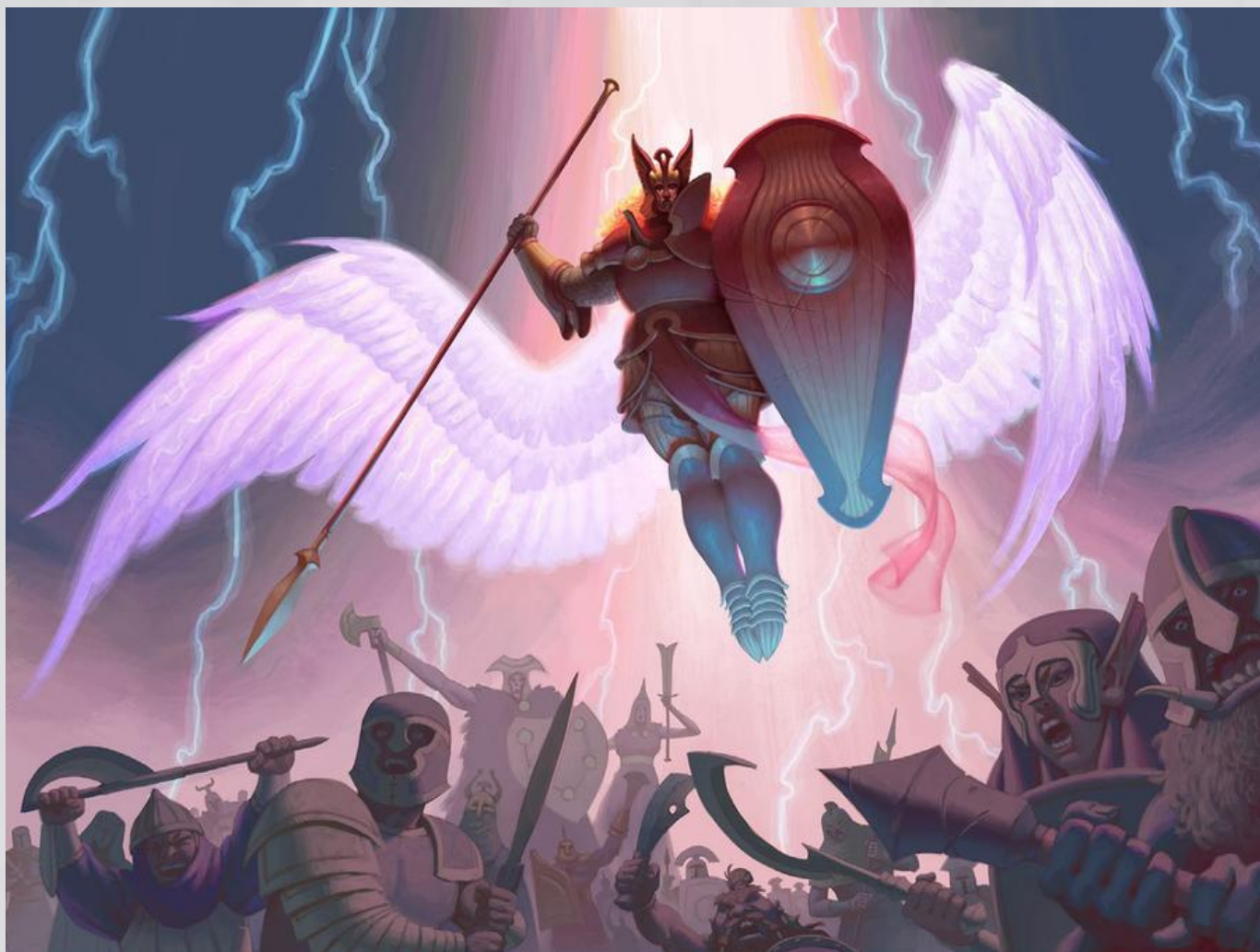
Your shield's damage die increases to 1d10 at 7th level, and 1d12 at 15th level.

COUNTERSTRIKE

3rd-Level Shieldbearer Feature

While a foe is distracted by their own attack, you can deal a mighty blow. When a creature within 5 feet of you attacks you or one of your allies, you can use your reaction to make a melee attack against them with your shield. On a hit, the attack deals one extra die of damage and the target has disadvantage on the next attack roll they make before the end of their next turn.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all uses when you finish a long rest.



SHIELD TOSS

7th-Level Shieldbearer Feature

You learn to hurl a shield with exceptional might and precision. For you, a shield is a weapon with the thrown property with a normal range of 30 feet and a long range of 60 feet. On a hit, it deals the same damage as a melee attack using your Shieldbash feature. If you roll a 20 on this ranged attack roll, the target is stunned until the end of their next turn. If the attack hits and you can make another attack this turn, you can use your next attack to bounce the shield off the first target and target another foe you can see within 10 feet of the original target, making another ranged attack roll to determine if it hits. You can bounce the shield more than once if each attack hits and you have attacks remaining on this turn.

At the end of the turn, your shield returns to you. You can catch it if you have a free hand; otherwise, it lands at your feet.

OPTIONAL RULE: MISSED THE MARK

If your group enjoys having meaningful effects on “critical failures,” you can add the following rule to the Shield Toss feature: if you roll a 1 on a ranged attack roll using a shield, the shield doesn’t return to you, but instead lands harmlessly in your target’s space.

SAFEGUARD

10th-Level Shieldbearer Feature

Following the rhythm of combat, you elegantly interweave offense and defense. When you take the Dodge action while wielding a shield, you can make a melee attack (no action required), then choose one creature within 5 feet of you to protect. Until the start of your next turn, any attack roll made by a creature you can see against the protected creature has disadvantage. The benefit ends early if you are incapacitated or if you are more than 5 feet away from the protected creature.

IMPROVED COUNTERSTRIKE

10th-Level Shieldbearer Feature

The extra damage from your Counterstrike feature increases to two extra damage dice, instead of one. Additionally, when you hit a creature with your Counterstrike feature, they have disadvantage on all attack rolls (not just one) until the end of their next turn.

AEGIS OF THE BRAVE

15th-Level Shieldbearer Feature

Your mighty attacks control the battlefield and smash aside your foes' defenses. Once on each of your turns when you hit a creature with your shield, you can force them to make a Strength saving throw. On a failed save, you choose one of the following effects:

- If the target is Large or smaller, they are shoved up to 10 feet away from you.
- The target drops one item of your choice that they're holding, which lands at their feet.
- The next attack against the target before the start of your next turn has advantage.

In addition, thanks to your practiced reflexes, ranged weapon attacks against you have disadvantage while you are wielding a shield.

STALWART GUARDIAN

18th-Level Shieldbearer Feature

You've tempered your skills in the heat of battle and emerged victorious. When you use your Safeguard feature to take the Dodge action, you can make up to two melee attacks as part of that action (instead of one). Moreover, when you hit a creature with your Counterstrike feature, they must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the start of their next turn.

NEW EQUIPMENT

Your character's shield is an opportunity to reflect your character's aesthetic, heritage, or affiliation. A shield's appearance might also serve a ceremonial purpose in addition to a martial one.

In the core game rules, every shield uses the same mechanics regardless of its appearance. This section presents new shield variations, which characters can purchase in shops that carry common adventuring equipment, at the GM's discretion.

NEW PROPERTY: CUMBERSOME

Some shields have a special property related to their use, as shown in the Shields table. A shield with the cumbersome property can't be effectively thrown regardless of its wielder's class features or other abilities.

SHIELDS

These nonmagical shields can be wielded by any character proficient with shields, not just Shieldbearer fighters. Their appearance can be customized as the GM or player desires.

A shield that lists a Strength requirement on the Shields table can't be wielded by a creature with a Strength score less than the listed score.

Buckler. Though this small round shield offers less protection than larger models, it handily obfuscates your movements to confuse your enemies. While wielding this shield, you can make a Charisma (Deception) check as a bonus action, contested by another creature's Wisdom (Insight) check. On a success, you make your next attack against that creature before the end of your turn with advantage.

Bladed Shield. The rim of this shield is fitted with sharp, curved blades. When you make an attack with this shield, you can choose whether the damage it deals is bludgeoning or slashing damage.

SHIELDS

SHIELD NAME	COST	AC INCREASE	STRENGTH REQUIRED	WEIGHT	PROPERTIES
Buckler	15 gp	+1	—	4 lb.	—
Bladed shield	15 gp	+2	—	6 lb.	—
Heraldic shield	50 gp	+2	—	6 lb.	—
Lantern shield	40 gp	+2	—	8 lb.	Cumbersome
Spiked shield	50 gp	+2	Str 13	10 lb.	Cumbersome
Tower shield	150 gp	+2	Str 15	20 lb.	Cumbersome

Heraldic Shield. This fine shield bears an emblem or coat of arms associated with an organization, such as a knightly order or civil guard, the faith of a particular god, or a location, such as your country of origin. While you visibly carry this shield, you have advantage on Charisma checks to interact with members of the shield's displayed affiliation.

Lantern Shield. This metal shield comes with a hooded lantern that can be hung from a hook on the shield's rim, allowing you to illuminate your path while keeping a hand free.

Spiked Shield. This shield is outfitted with formidable metal spikes. A creature who attempts to grapple you takes 1d4 piercing damage, plus an extra 1d4 piercing damage at the start of each of their turns while grappling you. Additionally, attacks made with this shield deal an extra 1d4 piercing damage on a hit.

Tower Shield. While wielding this heavy shield, ranged weapon attacks against you have disadvantage, but you can't add your Dexterity modifier to your Armor Class and you have disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

MAGIC SHIELDS FOR SHIELDBEARERS

The unique magic items in this article are fun and flavorful, but there's also something to be said for a good old-fashioned *+1 shield!* Normally, the magic shields in the core rules only grant a bonus to Armor Class, not attacks. However, Shieldbearer characters can use shields as weapons too! As a GM, you may wish to let a Shieldbearer's attacks made with a magic shield count as being made with a magic weapon. Additionally, you can decide that a magic shield that grants a bonus to Armor Class grants the same bonus to attack and damage rolls.

NEW MAGIC ITEMS

This section presents magic items that can be used by any character with the necessary proficiencies, not just Shieldbearers.

When using any of the following shields in a game, the GM can choose to grant it the additional benefits of one of the nonmagical shields presented in the previous section.

ARCANIST'S SHIELD BRACELET

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

This comfortable steel cuff bracelet is engraved with intricate geometric designs.

The bracelet has 3 charges. As a reaction when you would be hit by an attack or you are targeted by the *magic missile* spell, you can expend 1 charge to gain a +5 bonus to AC, including against the triggering attack, and you take no damage from *magic missile*. This benefit lasts until the start of your next turn.

The bracelet regains all expended charges each day at dawn.



BOOMERANG SHIELD

Armor (Shield), Uncommon (Requires Attunement)

This slim, circular shield is designed to be thrown with ease. You can use this shield as a simple melee weapon with the thrown property, with a normal range of 40 feet and a long range of 60 feet. On a hit, it deals 1d8 + your Strength modifier bludgeoning damage and 1d6 force damage.

Hit or miss, the shield returns to you either after you make an attack with it or at the end of your turn (your choice). You can catch the shield if you have a free hand; otherwise, it falls to the ground at your feet.



CEREMONIAL SHIELD

Armor (Shield), Uncommon

This simple oval shield, usually made of hardened leather or polished wood, has been blessed by a cleric or paladin. You can use the shield to perform one of the following 10-minute rituals, either alone or with other creatures:

Valor. For the next hour, up to six creatures of your choice that participated in the ritual have advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Honor. You touch one creature who participated in the ritual to celebrate their recent deeds. Once within the next 24 hours when that creature makes an ability check, they can add a bonus to it equal to the number of other creatures who participated in the ritual who wished to honor their deeds (up to a maximum of +10).

Clarity. You touch a creature participating in the ritual and end one condition affecting them.

Once this property of the shield is used, it can't be used again until the following dawn.

RAM SHIELD

Armor (Shield), Uncommon

This sturdy shield is inlaid with a motif resembling a ram's horns. Using this shield grants you advantage on Strength checks made to break through doors, barricades, and similar barriers. In addition, when you successfully shove a creature with this shield, you can choose to knock the target 10 feet away from you, rather than 5.



SHIELD OF THE SHIFTING MOON

Armor (Shield), Very Rare (Requires Attunement)

The edge of this round shield is inlaid with a delicate design showing the phases of a moon. The shield is linked to one of the moons in your campaign setting, and the respective designs glow slightly as that moon progresses through its phases.

While wielding this shield, you gain a +1 bonus to AC. Additionally, the shield has different properties depending on the current lunar phase:

New Moon. You can cast the *darkness* spell at will, centered on the shield. When you cast the spell in this way, the magical darkness doesn't affect your vision. In addition, you can use a bonus action to become invisible, along with anything you are wearing or carrying as long as it is on your person, for up to 1 minute. Once you use this property of the shield, you can't use it again until the next night with a new moon.

Waxing Moon. You can cast *faerie fire* (save DC 17) at will. In addition, you can use a bonus action to choose up to three creatures within 30 feet of you. For the next minute, each creature is imbued with lunar power and can add 1d4 to their attack rolls, saving throws, and damage rolls (this extra damage is radiant damage). Once you use this property of the shield, you can't use it again until the next dawn.

Full Moon. You can cast the *see invisibility* spell at will. In addition, you can use an action to call down lunar radiance in a 20-foot radius centered on a point within 120 feet of you. Each creature of your choice in the area must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 8d6 radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Once you use this property of the shield, you can't use it again until the next night with a full moon.

Waning Moon. You can cast *pass without trace* at will without components. In addition, you can use a bonus action to choose one creature within 30 feet of you. For the next minute, that creature must subtract 1d4 from their attack rolls, saving throws, and damage rolls. Once you use this property of the shield, you can't use it again until the next dusk.

Eclipse. In the rare event of a lunar eclipse, your shield gains the following properties for the duration of the eclipse, instead of the properties of the current lunar phase. You can cast *sanctuary* at will (save DC 17). In addition, you can use an action to choose up to six creatures within 60 feet of you. Each creature must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or be blinded for 10 minutes. At the end of each of their turns, a target can make a Constitution saving throw, ending the condition on themselves on a success. Once you use this property of the shield, you can't use it again for the duration of the eclipse.

MOON PHASES

It can be fun to track moon phases in your setting, especially if your character has a connection to the moon or moons—but if you and your GM don't want to handle that minutia, your GM can determine the *shield of the shifting moon's* current properties by picking the current moon phase or rolling a d12. On a roll of 1, the moon is new; on a 2–6, the moon is waxing; on a 7–11, the moon is waning; and on a 12, the moon is full. The GM chooses if and when an eclipse occurs.

SPELLMIRROR SHIELD

Armor (Shield), Very Rare (Requires Attunement)

This shield is polished to a mirror sheen, but its surface shows iridescent flickers rather than any reflection. The shield has 10 charges. While wielding it, when you are targeted by a ranged spell attack or are in the area of effect of a spell whose area of effect is a line, you can use your reaction and expend a number of charges equal to the spell's level (minimum of 1) to reflect the spell. When you do so, the spell has no effect against you, and its effect is reflected as though it originated from you. You can either reflect the spell harmlessly, or you can target a creature of your choice within range (for a ranged spell attack) or reflect the spell in a direction of your choice (for an area of effect).

The shield regains 1d6 + 4 charges each day at dawn.



RULES TIPS

The following tips clarify possible questions and offer suggestions for using your shield creatively.

Attacking with a Shield in the Core Rules. Even if they aren't a Shieldbearer, anyone can use their shield as an improvised melee weapon. But while they can technically attack with it, they don't add their proficiency bonus to the attack roll, and it only deals only 1d4 damage. Shieldbearers, on the other hand, are proficient with attacking with a shield and can deal more damage with it.

Two Shields at Once. If you want to use shields and only shields, you can absolutely dual-wield two shields at once. However, you only gain one shield's bonus to AC, since bonuses from the same source (i.e., a shield) don't stack.

Bouncing off the Walls. Using your shield to ricochet between multiple targets is great fun, and so is bouncing a thrown shield off the environment. Even when you make a normal attack you can describe your shield rebounding off a pillar to hit a monster in the head for some awesome flavor. But at your GM's discretion, you might also use the environment to perform unusual moves. For example, your GM might let you bounce your shield around a corner to attack a target with total cover as if it had half or no cover, or throw your shield at a metal staircase to create a loud diversion. GMs are encouraged to lean toward the "rule of cool" and reward creativity when adjudicating such situations.

Shield Surfing. MCDM is not liable for any damage to your character or their equipment that results from using a shield to surf on any organic or inorganic surface. While we cannot officially endorse such an activity, a Dexterity (Acrobatics) check would theoretically be appropriate in such a circumstance. Also, our playtesters agree that shield surfing down a snowy mountain is "wicked cool" and shield surfing on a lava river is "inadvisable, but certainly memorable for the survivors."

RETAINER OF THE SHIELD

Retainers are unique NPC followers who pledge their service to player characters. The following stat block presents a fighter retainer who uses their shield to attack and defend.

The full rules for retainers can be found in *Strongholds & Followers*.

SHIELDBEARER ADEPT

ARMOR CLASS 17 (Medium, Shield)

SPEED 30 ft.

PRIMARY ABILITY Strength

SAVING THROWS Strength, Constitution

SKILLS Athletics, Perception

SIGNATURE ATTACK: *Shieldbash. Melee Weapon*

Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage. Beginning at 7th level, the shieldbearer can make this attack twice, instead of once, when they take the Attack action on their turn.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

3rd Level (3/Day): *Smash 'n' Bash.* The shieldbearer makes a signature attack. On a hit, the next attack against the target has advantage.

5th Level (3/Day): *Safeguard.* The shieldbearer makes a signature attack and assumes a defensive stance. Attack rolls against the shieldbearer and one creature of their choice within 5 feet of them are made with disadvantage until the start of the shieldbearer's next turn.

7th Level (3/Day): *Throw Shield. Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 20 ft., one or two targets. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. The shield returns to the shieldbearer at the end of their turn.



AP

APPENDIX NPC: PART 2

EVEN MORE STAT BLOCKS TO STEAL!

by Sam Mannell

Hi again! Sam here! Still as busy as last time. Maybe busier? This article rounds out the list from “Appendix NPC: Part 1” with seven new NPC stat blocks ranging from challenge rating 9 to 20.

Prep fast, game more!

CONTENTS

The stat blocks below are listed in order of challenge rating to make them easier to find.

Click a link to jump straight to the right page:

Auto-Sentinel	(CR 9)
Dragon Priest	(CR 10)
Dragon Slayer	(CR 10)
Gish	(CR 10)
Hero	(CR 15)
Polymath	(CR 18)
A Polymath’s Lair	
Lair Actions	
Saint	(CR 20)



DRAGON SLAYER

AUTO-SENTINEL

Typically made of magically animated stone, iron, or brass, these constructs are created to defend others. Constructs designed as personal security already exist in the game, but those are monsters, and this is an NPC!

This stat block can serve as a powered-up version of the **bodyguard**¹, but it also captures the essence of

[a type of character that I love to run](#). Players tend to fall in love with protective sidekick robots that can't speak, but who are clearly sapient and have a sweet personality wholly at odds with their incredible strength. It's niche, but effective!

AUTO-SENTINEL

Large Construct, Any Alignment

ARMOR CLASS 18 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 180 (19d10 + 76)

SPEED 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	9 (-1)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

SAVING THROWS Str +9, Con +8

DAMAGE VULNERABILITIES lightning

DAMAGE RESISTANCES cold, fire; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

SENSES blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 10

LANGUAGES understands the languages of their creator but can't speak

CHALLENGE 9 (5,000 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +4

Charge. The sentinel can designate another creature to be their charge. When a creature within 5 feet of the sentinel hits the sentinel's charge with an attack and the sentinel isn't incapacitated, the sentinel can immediately make a melee attack against the creature (no action required). The sentinel can only have one charge at a time.

Siege Engine. The sentinel deals double damage to objects and structures.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The sentinel makes three Pneumatic Fist attacks. They can replace one attack with a Grapple-Hand attack or a use of Reel.

Pneumatic Fist. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Grapple-Hand. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 50 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 17). Until the grapple ends, the target is restrained and has disadvantage on Strength ability checks and saving throws, and the sentinel can't use the same hand to attack or grapple another target. The sentinel has two hands.

Reel. The sentinel pulls each creature they are grappling 25 feet straight toward themself.

Beeline. The sentinel moves up to their speed in a straight line toward their charge. During this move, the sentinel ignores difficult terrain, can move through hostile creatures' spaces regardless of their size, and smashes through minor nonmagical obstacles in their path such as doors, windows, or walls less than 1 foot thick. Each prone creature whose space the sentinel moves through takes 44 (8d10) bludgeoning damage. Each creature who isn't prone whose space the sentinel moves through must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 16 (2d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage and is pushed 5 feet away into an unoccupied space of the creature's choice, or knocked prone in their current space if there is no unoccupied space within range. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't pushed or knocked prone.

REACTIONS

Life and Limb. When the sentinel is within 5 feet of their charge and a creature the sentinel can see attacks the charge, the sentinel can swap positions with the charge and become the target of the attack instead.

¹ See "Appendix NPC: Part 1" in *ARCADIA* 18!

DRAGON PRIEST

*“I wield the very flame of Corzivax-Baloroth!
Her power is mine!”*

Ancient dragons are so suffused with magic that they can impart a fraction of their power to their most loyal pawns. The dragon priest is one such servant—a cultist dedicated to the will of a powerful dragon, partially transformed by their patron into a quasi-draconic figure. The ancient dragon bestows “gifts” upon the priest that

typically take the form of sharpened claws, filed teeth, reptilian eyes, and patches of diamond-hard scale.

The dragon priest stat block assumes that the dragon priest’s master is a red dragon, which is reflected in its immunity to fire damage and the fire damage dealt by its actions. You can change this to suit another type of dragon by swapping the damage type.

DRAGON PRIEST

Medium Humanoid, The Alignment of Their Patron

ARMOR CLASS 17 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 178 (21d8 + 84)

SPEED 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	19 (+4)

SAVING THROWS Dex +8, Con +8, Wis +4, Cha +8

SKILLS Deception +8, Intimidation +8, Perception +8, Stealth +8

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES fire

CONDITION IMMUNITIES frightened

SENSES blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 18

LANGUAGES Common, Draconic

CHALLENGE 10 (5,900 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +4

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The priest makes three Claw attacks, and they make a Fire Bolt attack or use Spellcasting.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage plus 9 (2d8) fire damage.

Fire Bolt (Cantrip). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +8 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) fire damage. A flammable object hit by this spell ignites if it isn’t being worn or carried.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). The priest exhales fire in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 42 (12d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Additionally, a creature loses any resistance or immunity to fire damage for 1 minute if they take or would have taken damage from this action.

Spellcasting. The priest casts one of the following spells, using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 16):

3/day each: *dimension door, dispel magic*

1/day each: *eyebite, mass suggestion, true seeing*

DRAGON SLAYER

The inverse of a dragon priest, the dragon slayer is a powerful martial NPC that hunts and destroys great wyrms. Typically, this makes them heroes, but it depends on which dragons they slay. Your players might run

afoul of a dragon slayer by protecting a good dragon or by stealing the glory of killing a dragon from a particularly prideful dragon slayer.

DRAGON SLAYER

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

ARMOR CLASS 16 (breastplate)

HIT POINTS 195 (26d8 + 78)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)

SAVING THROWS Str +8, Dex +7, Con +7

SKILLS Acrobatics +7, Animal Handling +8,

Athletics +8, Perception +8, Stealth +7, Survival +8

DAMAGE RESISTANCES acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES frightened

SENSES passive Perception 18

LANGUAGES Common, Draconic

CHALLENGE 10 (5,900 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +4

Avoidance. If the slayer is subjected to an effect that allows them to make a saving throw to take only half damage, they instead take no damage if they succeed on the saving throw, and only half damage if they fail.

Dragonsbane. When one of the slayer's actions or abilities refers to creatures with the Dragon type, it includes creatures that have draconic ancestry, such as dragon priests, dragonborn, Draconic Bloodline sorcerers, and kobolds.

Underdog. The slayer can grapple a creature of any size and has advantage on Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks made to grapple or climb onto a creature that is of a size larger than themselves. While grappling or clinging to a creature that is of a size larger than themselves, the slayer makes attack rolls against that creature with advantage. If the slayer grapples a creature that is at least two sizes larger than the slayer, the slayer's

speed becomes 0 instead of the target's speed, and if a creature grappled in this way by the slayer moves, the slayer moves with them, requiring none of the slayer's movement.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The slayer makes three attacks.

Battleaxe of Dragon Slaying. Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit (or +10 against a Dragon), reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage, or 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage if used with two hands. If the target is a Dragon, they take an additional 10 (3d6) slashing damage.

Javelin of Dragon Slaying. Ranged Weapon Attack: +8 to hit (or +10 against a Dragon), range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage. If the target is a Dragon, they must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking an additional 33 (6d10) piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

The slayer carries four javelins. Once a *javelin of dragon slaying* deals its extra damage to a Dragon, it becomes a nonmagical javelin.

Wings of Flying (2/Day). The slayer turns their cloak into a pair of wings, gaining a flying speed of 60 feet for 1 hour.

REACTIONS

Sudden Strike (3/Day). When a creature the slayer can see moves within 30 feet of the slayer, the slayer can make a weapon attack against that creature. If the attack hits, the target's speed is halved until the end of the current turn.

GISH

The gish is a character with equal skill in martial might and arcane magic. The word gish comes from a certain group of creatures that shall not (legally) be named from a book published in 1980, but it has come to mean any eldritch-knight-type, sword-wielding spell-slinger. A spellsword!

I think that gish should be tough as nails—the perfect combatant, with few, if any, weaknesses—so that’s what you’ve got here!

The gish begins combat by casting *eldritch blast* or *fireball* to soften up the characters from a distance while piling on buffs for a few turns, like the *fire shield* and *haste* spells. After that, the gish can easily move into melee range with *Witch Step* and switch to attacking with their longsword. When reduced to half their hit point maximum (97), they start using the *vampiric touch* spell each round to regain some vitality. When the gish is reduced to 49 hit points, they use *Witch Step* to escape or they surrender.

GISH

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

ARMOR CLASS 17 (half plate)

HIT POINTS 195 (26d8 + 78)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)

SAVING THROWS Str +8, Dex +6, Int +8

SKILLS Arcana +8, Athletics +8, Investigation +8, Perception +7

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed

SENSES passive Perception 17

LANGUAGES any two languages

CHALLENGE 10 (5,900 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +4

Bodymind Trance. The gish has advantage on Constitution saving throws to maintain concentration on a spell, and is immune to any effect that allows other creatures to sense their emotions or read their thoughts, as well as any divination spell that they refuse. If the gish takes psychic damage, this trait doesn’t function until the start of the gish’s next turn.

Swordkeeper. If the gish is wielding a sword, their weapon attacks are magical and have a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls (included in the attack).

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The gish makes two Longsword or Eldritch Blast attacks, and they use Signcasting.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) slashing damage.

Eldritch Blast (Cantrip). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +8 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) force damage.

Signcasting. The gish casts one of the following spells, requiring no material or verbal components and using Intelligence as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks):

At will: *burning hands*, *detect magic*, *light*, *mage hand*
3/day each: *dispel magic*, *fireball*, *vampiric touch*
1/day each: *cone of cold*, *fire shield*, *haste*, *wall of force*

BONUS ACTIONS

Witch Step. The gish magically teleports, along with any equipment they are wearing or carrying, up to 45 feet to an unoccupied space they can see.

REACTIONS

Shield (3/Day; 1st-Level Spell). When the gish is hit by an attack or targeted by a *magic missile* spell, an invisible barrier of magical force appears and protects them. Until the start of their next turn, the gish has a +5 bonus to AC, including against the triggering attack, and the gish takes no damage from *magic missile*.

HERO

Heroes are fun to use as NPCs when your characters have become frighteningly powerful themselves! You can use this stat block to represent legendary NPCs in your world, on par with figures like [Conan the Barbarian](#) or [Xena: Warrior Princess](#), or demigods like Hercules and Gilgamesh.

The party might clash with a hero if they have a reputation for morally questionable decisions or if they've been set up! Or maybe the hero has fallen victim to the duplicitous mind control of a cunning villain? In any case, I wish your players luck if they wind up as an obstacle in the hero's way.

HERO

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

ARMOR CLASS 16 (breastplate)

HIT POINTS 294 (31d8 + 155)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	17 (+3)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)

SAVING THROWS Str +10, Dex +8, Con +10, Cha +9

SKILLS Acrobatics +8, Animal Handling +8,

Athletics +10, Perception +8

SENSES passive Perception 18

LANGUAGES any one language (usually Common)

CHALLENGE 15 (13,000 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +5

Action Surge (3/Day). Once on their turn, the hero can take one additional action.

Feral Instinct. The hero has advantage on initiative rolls and can't be surprised.

Impossible Arm. The hero can wield two-handed weapons with one hand. If a weapon has the versatile property, the hero always uses the two-handed damage die.

Magic Weapons. The hero's weapon attacks are magical.

Siege Monster. The hero deals double damage to objects and structures.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The hero makes two Maul attacks and uses Overwhelming Attack.

Maul. Melee Weapon Attack: +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Overwhelming Attack. The hero makes a Maul attack that targets any number of creatures within 5 feet of the hero and uses the same attack roll for each target. The hero deals an extra 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage to each target they hit with this attack.

Supersonic Yawp. The hero unleashes an ear-splitting battle cry in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area that can hear the hero must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 27 (4d10 + 5) thunder damage and is deafened for 1 minute. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't deafened. A creature made of inorganic material such as stone, crystal, or metal has disadvantage on this saving throw.

Seismic Wave (Recharge 5–6). The hero stomps their foot with the force of a falling meteorite. Each creature standing on the ground within 30 feet of the hero takes 26 (6d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage and must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone.

BONUS ACTIONS

Barbaric Leap. The hero jumps up to 20 feet in any direction and can land in another creature's space. If they land in another creature's space, that creature takes 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage and is pushed 5 feet away from the hero into an unoccupied space of the creature's choice, or knocked prone in their current space if there is no unoccupied space within range. Additionally, the hero has advantage on attacks made against creatures within 5 feet of the space they landed in until the end of their turn.

Hidden Strength (1/Day). The hero regains 57 (6d8 + 30) hit points.

REACTIONS

Think Again. When the hero is hit with a weapon attack that isn't a critical hit by a creature they can see within 120 feet of them, the hero can [catch the weapon with their bare hands](#), causing the attack to miss instead. If the weapon is nonmagical, it is destroyed.

POLYMATH

The polymath knows just about everything. These NPCs are geniuses who rely on the breadth and depth of their smarts instead of the strength of their sword arm. They're so intelligent there's probably only one polymath on a planet. Maybe two ... and those two are probably rivals.

A polymath almost always knows when they have enemies coming, and given time to prepare, they set traps throughout the battlefield, whether in their lair or not.

A POLYMATH'S LAIR

Most polymaths build a stronghold—a secret laboratory, a floating airship, or a forgotten island. The only common thread is that the polymath likes to keep their lair hidden so they can store the knowledge they have amassed without drawing attention.

A polymath encountered in their lair has a challenge rating of 19 (22,000 XP).

LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the polymath can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects; the polymath can't use the same effect two rounds in a row.

- The polymath activates powerful magnets in the lair's roof, attracting metal equipment and objects in a 10-foot radius cylinder, extending from the floor to the ceiling, centered on a point the polymath can see

within 60 feet of them. Each creature in that area must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, any metal weapon or object held by the target is wrenched out of their grasp and attaches to the ceiling. Additionally, if the target is wearing medium or heavy armor made of metal, they fall upward, taking fall damage as they would during a downward fall when they strike the ceiling, and become restrained. Affected objects and creatures fall back down at the end of initiative count 20 on the next round.

- Arrows fire from hidden traps in the walls, targeting three creatures of the polymath's choice within 60 feet of them. Each target must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a target takes 14 (4d6) piercing damage and is poisoned until the end of their next turn. On a successful save, the target takes half as much damage and isn't poisoned.
- A 5-foot-wide, 10-foot-tall hidden door opens in one of the lair's walls at a point of the polymath's choice. If the polymath is within 5 feet of the opening when it appears, they can move up to their speed without provoking opportunity attacks through the opening as part of this lair action, and the door closes behind them. If the polymath isn't within 5 feet of the opening when it appears, 1d4 + 1 **mercenaries**² or **veterans** loyal to the polymath enter the room, acting on initiative count 20 each round after the polymath takes a lair action.

² See "Appendix NPC: Part 1" in *ARCADIA 18!*

POLYMATH

Medium Humanoid, Any Alignment

ARMOR CLASS 23 (+3 leather, Calculated Defense)

HIT POINTS 201 (31d8 + 62)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	22 (+6)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)

SAVING THROWS Int +12, Wis +10, Cha +9

SKILLS Arcana +18, History +18, Insight +10, Investigation +12, Medicine +10, Nature +12, Perception +10, Persuasion +15, Sleight of Hand +15, Stealth +15, Survival +10

SENSES passive Perception 20

LANGUAGES all

CHALLENGE 18 (20,000 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +6

Avoidance. If the polymath is subjected to an effect that allows them to make a saving throw to take only half damage, they instead take no damage if they succeed on the saving throw, and only half damage if they fail.

Calculated Defense. While the polymath is wearing light or no armor and wielding no shield, their AC includes their Intelligence modifier.

Genius Intellect. The polymath always knows the exact time and their exact location while on their native plane, can recall any piece of information they have learned, and can instantly complete mathematical calculations in their head.

Practiced Hand. The polymath can use their Intelligence modifier, instead of Strength or Dexterity, for weapon attack and damage rolls.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The polymath deals an extra 17 (5d6) damage when they hit a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the polymath that isn't incapacitated and the polymath doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Switched On. The polymath always knows when they see an illusion, but can't see through the image without interacting with the illusion.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The polymath makes three weapon attacks.

Rapier. Melee Weapon Attack: +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 10 (1d8 + 6) piercing damage plus 28 (8d6) poison damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned until the end of their next turn.

Stunning Strike (3/Day). Melee Weapon Attack: +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 9 (1d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of the polymath's next turn.

Hand Crossbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +12 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. **Hit:** 9 (1d6 + 6) piercing damage plus 28 (8d6) poison damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned until the end of their next turn.

Spell Scrolls. The polymath casts one of the following spells from a *spell scroll* (spell save DC 18). After casting the spell, the scroll is destroyed and the polymath can't cast it again.

8th level: *antimagic field*, *clone*, *earthquake*, *glibness*, *mind blank*

9th level: *gate*

BONUS ACTIONS

Cunning Action. The polymath takes the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Stillness of Mind. The polymath ends one effect that is causing them to be charmed or frightened.

REACTIONS

Repartee. The polymath adds +4 to their AC against one weapon attack that would hit them. To do so, the polymath must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon. The polymath can then make a weapon attack against the attacker.

SAINT

When a mortal dies in service to their deity, they sometimes return as a saint: an incarnation of that god's power and will made tangible. When the faithful cry out to their gods, it is the saints who answer. This might not be true in your world, but if you're playing at higher levels, you can get mileage out of this stat block

regardless, as it can represent an avatar of divine fury or any being with a demigod's power.

The saint can utterly destroy most mortals with a wave of the hand, a quiet sigh, or a mere look. Only a party of the strongest characters from across the timescape could ever hope to stand against one, and even defeating a saint doesn't permanently destroy them.

SAINT

Medium Celestial, Any Alignment

ARMOR CLASS 19 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 402 (35d8 + 245)

SPEED 30 ft., fly 150 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	23 (+6)	25 (+7)	25 (+7)	26 (+8)	27 (+8)

SAVING THROWS Int +14, Wis +15, Cha +15

SKILLS Insight +15, Perception +15, Persuasion +15

DAMAGE RESISTANCES bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES necrotic, poison, radiant

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

SENSES truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 25

LANGUAGES all, telepathy 120 ft.

CHALLENGE 24 (25,000 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +7

Celestial Resurrection. A destroyed saint gains a new body in 1d10 days, regaining all their hit points and becoming active again. The new body appears on consecrated ground that is sacred to the saint's deity, such as an altar, shrine, or temple.

Cone of Awe. The saint's gaze creates a 150-foot cone that overwhelms mortals with a sense of shock, terror, and wonder. At the start of each of their turns, the saint decides which way the cone faces and if the cone is active. Any creature who starts their turn in the cone must succeed on a DC 20 Charisma saving throw or take 14 (4d6) radiant damage and become frightened of the saint for 1 minute. A frightened creature can repeat this saving throw at the start of each of their turns, ending the effect on themselves on a success.

Divine Awareness. The saint knows if they hear a lie.

Eternal Resistance. The saint has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Additionally, if the saint fails a saving throw, they can choose to destroy one of their hallowed weapons, if available, and succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The saint makes two attacks and uses Flaming Rain.

Inflict Wounds (5th-Level Spell). *Melee Spell Attack:* +15 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 38 (7d10) necrotic damage.

Flaming Rain. Bolts of flame-like radiance descend on up to three creatures that the saint can see within 120 feet of the saint. A target must succeed on a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw or take 18 (4d8) radiant damage. A target gains no benefit from cover for this saving throw.

Plane Shift (7th-Level Spell). The saint casts the *plane shift* spell, using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 23, +15 to hit).

Heal (3/Day; 8th-Level Spell). One creature that the saint can see within 60 feet of the saint regains 90 hit points. This spell also ends blindness, deafness, and any diseases affecting the target. This spell has no effect on Constructs or Undead.

BONUS ACTIONS

Hallowed Weapons (1/Day). The saint creates three floating, spectral weapons at three different points within 60 feet of them. The weapons can take whatever forms the saint chooses. These weapons last for 1 minute. The weapons have a reach of 5 feet and can each make one opportunity attack a round without using the saint's reaction.

When the weapons are first created, they can each make a melee spell attack (+15 bonus to hit) against one creature within 5 feet of the weapon. On a hit, the target takes 21 (3d8 + 8) force damage.

As a bonus action on later turns, the saint can move each weapon up to 30 feet and make one attack with it against a creature within 5 feet of the weapon.

continued on next page

VILLAIN ACTIONS

The saint has three villain actions. They can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy creature's turn. They can take these actions in any order but can only use one per round.

1. **Fiery Translocation.** The saint magically teleports, along with any equipment they are wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space they can see. Each creature within 15 feet of the space the saint entered must make a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

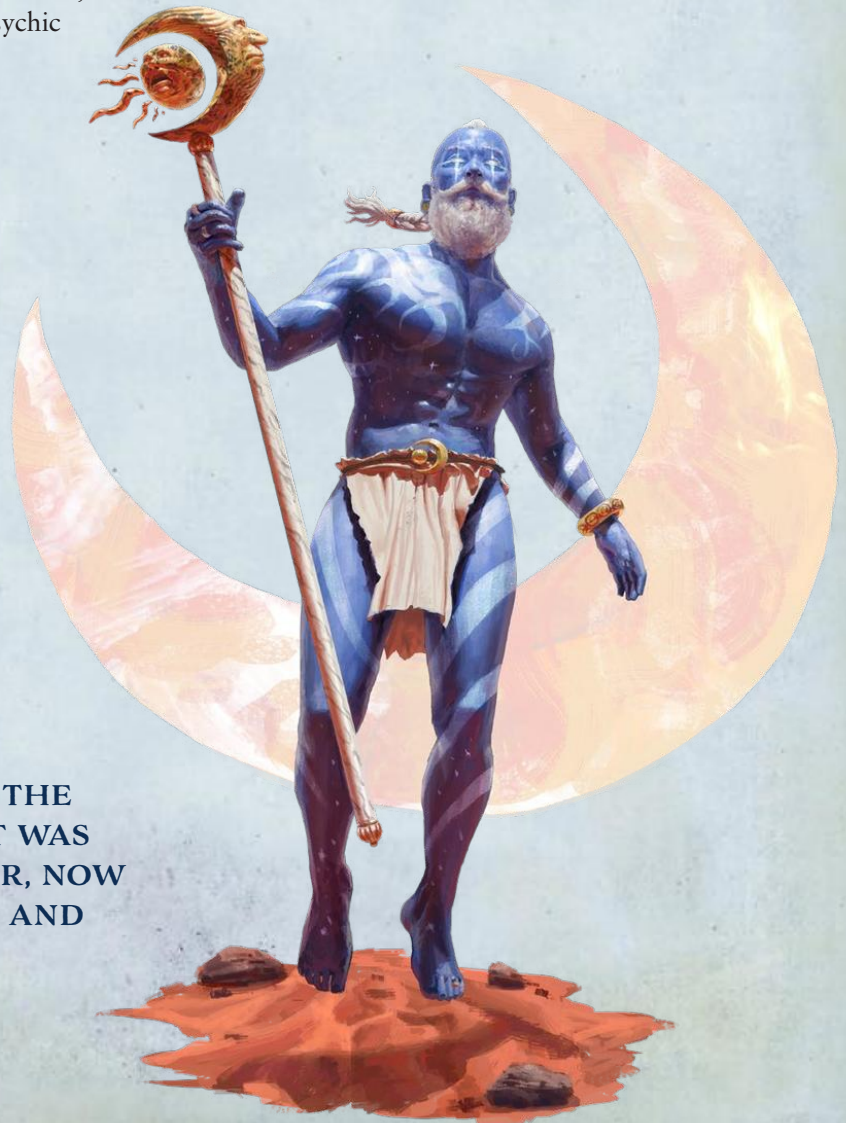
2. **Shackles of Judgment.** Glowing chains appear from beneath up to five creatures the saint can see within 60 feet of them. Each creature must succeed on a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw or become grappled by the chains (escape DC 20). Until this grapple ends, a target is restrained and has disadvantage on Strength checks and Strength saving throws. The chains have AC 20, 10 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage.

3. **Word of Unmaking.** A beam of bright light erupts from the mouth of the saint toward one target they can see within 60 feet of them. The target can be a creature, object, or creation of magical force, such as the wall created by *wall of force*.

A creature targeted by this action must make a DC 23 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the target takes 106 (19d6 + 40) force damage and becomes frightened of the saint and deafened until they finish a short or long rest. The target is disintegrated if this damage leaves them with 0 hit points.

A disintegrated creature and everything it is wearing and carrying, except magic items, are reduced to a pile of fine gray dust. The creature can be restored to life only by means of a *true resurrection* or a *wish* spell.

This ability automatically disintegrates a Huge or smaller nonmagical object or a creation of magical force. If the target is a Gargantuan object or creation of force, this spell disintegrates a 20-foot-cube portion of it. A magic item is unaffected by this spell.



“IT WAS GAED WHO DIED AT THE HANDS OF THE DEVIL SPY. IT WAS SAINT GAED THE CONFESSOR, NOW IMMORTAL, WHO RETURNED AND SLEW THE DEVIL.”



THE SCRIBES

A UNIQUE ORGANIZATION TO CREATE RICH STORIES

by Hook & Chance and The GM Tim

A TALE CAN DEFINE THE PATH OF A WANDERER.
A MYTH CAN INSPIRE THE DIRECTION OF A GROWING COMMUNITY.
A LEGEND CAN CHANGE THE TRAJECTORY OF A MIGHTY CIVILIZATION.
THIS IS HOW WE CREATE THE WORLD.

—THE LIBRARIAN

We all know the classics: *Flynn & the Gryffon*, *The Lament of Arcnolix*, or *The Fall of the Goblins of Yurt*. Those tales nearly never happened. Flynn was actually allergic to feathers. Arcnolix was destined to be a dish boy, not a great emperor. And Yurt was a forgettable goblin village on the outskirts of the Abadia Desert. Although world-changing events sometimes miraculously coalesce to create legendary stories, others need a push to become gripping epics of morality or triumph! That's where the Scribes come in.

The Scribes, an organization of meddling storytellers led by an enigmatic Celestial, turn the potentially dull into action, the boring into dramatic, and the uninspiring into legendary. This article presents lore for the Scribes, information on becoming an agent, details of the headquarters, ranks and role benefits, descriptions of key members, starter adventures, and a template for crafting quests related to the organization. The Scribes can be a good-aligned organization that recruits the characters or a villainous organization trying to manipulate events the characters are involved in.

FOUNDING OF THE SCRIBES

The Librarian is a Celestial who has existed since time began. She worked side-by-side with creation gods to write the world's first stories and give mortals faith in their creators. The creation gods, fearing the Librarian's ability to write new gods that could replace them, created the Vault, an extradimensional library and prison designed to hold the Librarian and appeal to her need to read and write. Each lifebook in the structure's endless shelves tells the story of a mortal's life as it is lived in real time, including their thoughts, emotions, and actions from an omniscient perspective.

But as she explored the infinite shelves, each lifebook was duller than the next. The Librarian couldn't let the mundane stand! She believes that by manipulating mortals' lives into exciting tales where good triumphs over evil, mortals will learn to care for themselves. Without her inspiring narratives, greed and hate would prevail over benevolence and joy.

Unable to directly influence events outside of the Vault, the Librarian magically reached out to three individuals to become the first Writers—her direct lieutenants who can enact her vision beyond the Vault. While Writers have come and gone since the Vault's founding eons ago, there are always three.

THE SCRIBES AS ANTAGONISTS

The Scribes can serve as an evil organization in your campaign instead. The Librarian could be manipulating the world for her entertainment, entrapping Writers to do her bidding. Or better yet, the Writers are fully aware of the situation, using the Librarian's power while she is imprisoned to manipulate world events for their gain.

SECRETIVE STORYTELLERS

The Librarian reads lifebooks to find small changes that could turn uneventful stories into epics, and the Writers deploy operatives to ensure that outcome. These quests are called conversions. The Scribes keep their conversions secret—a hero's rise and a villain's fall are far more effective if the audience can't see the hands pushing them toward their goal.

THE LIBRARIAN

Read or paraphrase the following text to introduce the Librarian:

A wrinkled, frail woman with billowing grey hair stands among piles of disorganized tomes. Her elegant purple robes glimmer with gold embellishments along the skirt, buttons, and collar. She holds a large open book in one hand, and faint gold lettering dances on the surface of her skin.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

You can use the following notes to help roleplay the Librarian.

Overview. An aloof professional whose storytelling is more an inherent need than a chosen vocation

Phrase. "Those who tell the stories rule society."

Traits. Oscillating temperament, curious, enigmatic

Motivation. The Librarian's greatest desire is to fill everything she reads with action, drama, and stronger plotlines than "Jard the guard made his fourteenth uneventful lap around the castle."

If presented with the opportunity, the Librarian may take revenge on her captors, but she doesn't actively seek retribution. She has relegated herself to the Vault and has found purpose in the Scribes.



GM TIP: A DIFFERENT LIBRARIAN

The roleplay details of the Librarian are provided in case you want to use her as an interactive character. Alternatively, she could be a mysterious figure who never leaves her books, contemplating aloud what she'd like to see in a particular story while the Writers convert the musings into conversions. The Writers could also have agendas that influence those interpretations, adding intrigue to your game.

THE LIBRARIAN

Medium Celestial, Neutral

ARMOR CLASS 18 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 266 (28d8 + 140)

SPEED 30 ft., fly 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	22 (+6)	20 (+5)	26 (+8)	24 (+7)	23 (+6)

SAVING THROWS Int +14, Wis +13, Cha +12

SKILLS Arcana +14, History +14, Insight +13, Religion +14

DAMAGE RESISTANCE bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES poison, radiant

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

SENSES darkvision 120 ft., truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 17

LANGUAGES all, telepathy 120 ft.

CHALLENGE 20 (25,000 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +6

Celestial Weapons. The Librarian's weapon attacks are magical. When the Librarian hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 3d8 radiant damage (included in the attack).

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the Librarian fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. The Librarian has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Protective Prison. The Librarian can't leave the Vault by any means unless the gods that created the Vault end her imprisonment.

Regeneration. The Librarian regains 20 hit points at the start of her turn if she has at least 1 hit point and is in the Vault.

Renewed. If the Librarian is destroyed, the Vault's magical operations cease for 1d10 days. At the end of this time, the Librarian reforms in the Vault, regaining all her hit points and becoming active again.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Librarian makes two Tome Smack attacks and one Tsk, Tsk, Tsk attack.

Tome Smack. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage plus 13 (3d8) radiant damage.

Tsk, Tsk, Tsk. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +14 to hit, range 120 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 34 (4d12 + 8) psychic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 22 Intelligence saving throw or be unable to make ranged attacks or cast spells

other than cantrips for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themselves on a success.

Spellcasting. The Librarian casts one of the following spells, requiring no material or verbal components and using Intelligence as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 22):

At will: *alter self, hold person, mirror image, prestidigitation, sending, silence, thaumaturgy, unseen servant*
3/day each: *mass suggestion, shield, spirit guardians*
1/day each: *prismatic wall*

This Needs Work (Recharge 5–6). The Librarian pulls a lifebook and a feather quill from the air, then rewrites the fates of those who dare attack her. All creatures of the Librarian's choice within 60 feet of her must make a DC 22 Intelligence saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 32 (5d12) psychic damage and is stunned until the start of the Librarian's next turn. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't stunned.

BONUS ACTIONS

Quick Edits. The Librarian pulls a pencil from her hair and writes in the air, summoning a distracting, illusory object within 5 feet of a creature she can see within 60 feet of her. The target has disadvantage on the next attack roll they make before the start of the Librarian's next turn, whereupon the object disappears.

REACTIONS

Choose My Own Path. When the Librarian is targeted by an attack, she can step into one lifebook within 5 feet of her and emerge from a second lifebook within 120 feet of her, appearing in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the second lifebook, potentially causing the attack to miss if the Librarian is out of range of the attack.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The Librarian can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Librarian regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Cloud of Pages. The Librarian calls books from the shelves and stacks around her, filling the air with whirling tomes and pages in a 5-foot-radius, 20-foot-high column centered on a point within 120 feet of her. A creature except for the Librarian takes 15 (6d4) slashing damage when they enter that area for the first time on a turn or start their turn there. The books fall to the ground at the start of the Librarian's next turn.

Pen Is Mightier. The Librarian makes a Tome Smack attack.

Shhh! The Librarian casts the *silence* spell.



WRITERS AND DISCIPLINES

Though the Librarian isn't a deity, the Writers worship her with fervor and zeal. Each Writer also oversees a discipline within the Scribes. The disciplines are based on storytelling themes: action, drama, and plot. The plot-themed discipline is the Fallen Eye, the action-themed discipline is Chaos, and the drama-themed discipline is the Cracked Crown. The disciplines are not kept apart and it is rare to have a mission with operatives from only one discipline. They need each other, and the Writers encourage that.

The following NPCs are the Scribes' leaders who work and live at the Vault, though operatives can be found everywhere in the world on extended undercover conversions.

HOW DARE THEY

There has been only one group of Writers, the Forsaken, who tried to take conversions into their own hands. Remnants of texts from their time tell of a demon persuading them to release the Librarian, while other texts claim a Writer tried to overthrow the Celestial. While it is unlikely any of the Forsaken are still alive, the Writers are always alert for signs of them and other rogue operatives. If an operative questions the organization's purpose, they are removed from the Scribes. The typical procedure for removing an operative is a *modify memory* spell followed by abandonment on the Material Plane to live an unremarkable life, but the Writers have been known to get creative.

THE FALLEN EYE (PLOT)

Operatives in this discipline keep the story moving. The more efficiently an operative can pace the story, the more the other disciplines can be their most effective. Operatives of the Fallen Eye maintain a team's focus on achieving the desired outcome, including keeping the Scribes a secret. These operatives see the big picture of a conversion.

In conversions, a member of the Fallen Eye might create a cover story for the team so its other operatives can play their parts unnoticed, reveal the secret identity of the count at just the right moment, or encourage the hero to charge over the crest of the hill moments before the following army.

Guiding Principle. The timing of events is crucial. Too soon and you eat an apple before it was poisoned, too late and the thorn maze is too thick to cut through.

Symbolism. The fallen eye in the Scribe's symbol represents the world looking away from the Scribes and their actions, and putting the pieces of a story in place without anybody noticing.

DEBUT BRONZEBAND

As the Writer of the Fallen Eye, Debut Bronzeband is always the first with a plan.

Debut grew up on the streets committing petty theft. His brilliant mind for elaborate schemes led to masterful heists, and city officials overlooked his crimes in exchange for consultation on other cases. Finally, his brazen daylight theft of the memorial statue of local hero Tohmas "the Ashen Hound" got him thrown in prison. His arrest shook his confidence, and he spent the next few years formulating and scrapping brilliant escape plans. The Ashen Hound was a hero the Scribes had a hand in creating, causing the Librarian to ask the Scribes to free and recruit Debut.

When the characters first encounter Debut, read or paraphrase the following:

A bedraggled young gnome has a dozen chewed pencils jutting out of the pockets of his well-tailored, rust-colored jacket. His shoulders are already hunched despite his youth, evident from the patchy beard he tried to shape into a distinguished point.

Overview. An introverted perfectionist and scheming mastermind

Phrase. "You've got one shot to get it right."

Traits. Analytical, egotistical, risk-averse

Motivation. Although he feels indebted to the Scribes and masterfully manages their day-to-day operations, Debut intends to one day start his own story away from the organization—if he could only perfect his plan for the future.

CHAOS (ACTION)

This discipline's top priority is fomenting the chaos that makes a story eventful. Despite the discipline's name, operatives of Chaos are expected to thoughtfully apply the unexpected. Rather than whispering behind locked doors or subtly influencing a monarch's court, these operatives typically lean into action and fighting, have the best near-death tales to share, and are always ready to go.

The role of Chaos in a conversion could involve toppling a tower to ruin a wedding, starting a duel with a guard so the urchin can steal the loaf of bread, or causing a distraction that allows the other operatives to accomplish their tasks.

Guiding Principle. Make it memorable.

Symbolism. In the symbol of the Scribes, the eight arrows pointing in every direction represent the unpredictability essential in a captivating story.

SAMAAPT

As the Writer of Chaos, Samaapt focuses on creating the kind of shock that makes a good story irresistible. They speak with gravitas and the boisterous motion of a consummate thespian. Despite their cultivated intimidating appearance, Samaapt can win most over with a disarming smile and a welcoming gesture.

Samaapt rose to fame as a beloved celebrity prizefighter known for suspenseful matches, close calls, and dramatic victories. However, a fall from grace soon followed when they drunkenly revealed that they played down their skill to make bouts exciting and that their opponents were chosen for their lack of prowess so the tiefling could avoid danger. The story of Samaapt's deception spread overnight. They were an outcast, spat on in the streets and unable to draw a crowd. Recognizing their skill for spontaneity and theatrics, the Scribes recruited them, making all the world their stage.

When the characters first encounter Samaapt, read or paraphrase the following:

This broad-shouldered tiefling sports evidence of a hundred battles on their skin, most of which is covered by jagged black armor with ornate red detailing. Wide, flat horns start at their hairline and curl overtop and around the sides of their head.

Overview. An enthusiastic entertainer and passionate mentor

Phrase. "Give me a bloody good show."

Traits. Engaging, boisterous, impulsive

Motivation. While they seem content mentoring Scribes in the ways of improvisation and theatrics for

storytelling, Samaapt secretly seeks a conversion that will allow them to sacrifice themselves in the ultimate blaze of glory and win back the public adulation they lost.

THE CRACKED CROWN (DRAMA)

Operatives of the Cracked Crown want to deeply understand the key dramatis personae in conversions. By knowing who these important people are, operatives can better steer them toward impactful moments. Cracked Crown agents are often skilled at conversation, insight, and persuasion.

A Cracked Crown member in a conversion could uncover what caused the division between two warring rulers, heal or cause a rift between star-crossed lovers, or spread rumors to encourage a rivalry between friends or family.

Guiding Principle. Emotional journeys are always worth taking.

Symbolism. The cracked crown in the Scribes' symbol represents the flaws every good hero must overcome to be truly moving and memorable.

SERE'DINA ELSYS

As the Writer of the Cracked Crown, Sere'dina Elsys ensures conversions cause transformation in her targets.

Sere'dina was one of the greatest military advisors of her time, serving a warlord named Corym Nevermour. She organized countless bloodbaths, caring for little more than winning and disregarding the communities destroyed by her efforts. But every victory left her feeling hollow. An unseen force began souring her operations with incredibly implausible twists of fate, leading to Corym calling her skills into question. So she laid a trap and caught a team of Scribe operatives interfering in her war. Though she initially wanted to prove that others were responsible for her failures, the intrigue of the Scribes, the opportunity they presented to use her political and tactical mind, and the mundanity of Corym's military campaign swayed her to join the Scribes instead.

When the characters first encounter Sere'dina, read or paraphrase the following boxed text:

A tall elven woman with a supercilious expression and flowing golden hair wears dusky brown traveler's clothes with leather armor covering her shins, forearms, and shoulders.

Overview. A ruthlessly logical and efficient strategist
Phrase. "Make me care about it."

Traits. Rational, pretentious, brooding

Motivation. As the greatest strategist of her time, Sere'dina believes she is best suited to see the long-term impact of conversions and decide how the Scribes' actions will shape society. She's been in the role for nearly 600 years, but despite her desire to continue the work forever, the elf's life is nearing its end. Sere'dina knows that she needs to choose a successor, but so far she has found no one worthy of the role.

WRITER STAT BLOCK

When anointed, the Writers may choose to be granted a range of magic abilities by the Librarian if they lack their own. The current Writers use the **archmage** stat block with the following additional bonus action:

Channel Vault (2/Day). The Writer touches another creature. The target regains 15 (3d8 + 2) hit points or is freed from any curse, disease, poison, blindness, or deafness.

MORE THAN NUMBERS

If you want a stat block for a martial Writer rather than a spellcaster, use another stat block around challenge rating 12, such as a deva or an erinyes, make them a Humanoid, and re flavor the creature's features or change damage types as needed.

JOINING THE RANKS

There are two ways to join the Scribes. The first is akin to a divine calling. If the Librarian finds a glowing lifebook, she knows the tome belongs to a Writer candidate. She gives these names to the Writers, who ask the book's subject to join the organization. So far, all candidates have passed the interview and accepted. These chosen few are watched closely by the Librarian as potential Writer replacements, but are not treated differently by the Writers.

The more common form of recruitment is for a candidate to receive an invitation from a Writer or senior operative after performing an act that was impressive, amusing, or intriguing.

GM TIP: THE NEED TO KNOW MORE

You want to be secretive and seductive in wooing the players. This is meant to feel like a big "Oooh, I want in" situation, not an "OMG run away" situation. If your party is nervous, remind them you are in this game together and not you versus them.

CONDUCTING AN INTERVIEW

Regardless of how recruits are selected, the Scribes gauge a candidate's aptitude by testing the subject's ability to complete a task.

If the characters are approached to join the Scribes, a recruiter makes the following offer:

"I'm part of a powerful organization and you have come to our attention. We have an invitation for you, but first, we want to see if you have what it takes. Completing this task opens the pages to a life only available to the most extraordinary individuals. Edric Blackfern lives in this town, and it is your job to give them the most extraordinarily adventurous day. They must not know of your goal or motivation, and they must survive to tell the tale."

The recruiter gives the party 50 gp to cover expenses incurred in the task. The recruiter is open to questions about the task, but queries about the Scribes get only vague answers. The recruiter departs without providing a way for the characters to contact them, insisting, "I'll find you when you have completed the task." See the "Edric Blackfern" sidebar for more information.

Once the characters believe their task is complete, the Librarian reads of it and sends the recruiter back to them. For the recruiter to consider the task successful, Edric Blackfern must live through an extraordinarily adventurous day. If the characters succeed, the recruiter praises or admonishes details of the characters' individual performances in the task despite not being there. Then the Scribe reveals more of the truth:

"I work for the Scribes. We are an organization committed to filling the world with enticing stories and legends. There are riches to be had, though not in the monetary sense, with danger to match. It is well worth the risks for capable individuals such as yourselves. When you're ready, read this letter aloud in a private place with those that wish to begin your next chapter with you."

The recruiter leaves the characters with an envelope sealed with wax. The invitation inside reads, "Secrets, like a story, cannot be unheard. They leave you irrevocably changed. Follow the moth into the abyss and be transformed." Once it is read aloud by a character, all creatures within 30 feet of the letter are teleported to a small river (see "Dead Lake Entrance").

If Edric dies, the recruiter declines them at this stage. The next time the party does something heroic, a Writer

approaches them and asks, "I knew you had it in you—just took you a little longer than we thought. Are you ready to read your future?" The recruiter then extends the same invitation to join the Scribes.

EDRIC BLACKFERN

Edric is a humble dwarf potato farmer who lives with two dogs, Bently and Vinnie. Charming and hospitable, Edric sees everyone as a future best friend but lacks the confidence to venture out of their comfort zone. They are taller than the average dwarf.

You can use the following prompts to hook the characters into an adventure to help resolve flaws and drive change in Edric:

- Edric dreams of killing the beast that killed their sister, but lacks the skill to do so. They're afraid to even make the short but treacherous journey to recover her body or pay their respects.
- The local guard captain Ringwald Riverfist has long tormented Edric. They wish they could put him in his place just once, but Edric can't oppose a guard ... could they?

THE VAULT

The Vault is the Librarian's prison where she watches the world through her lifebooks.

DEAD LAKE ENTRANCE

A small river feeds into this lake with no outflow. Salt and other mineral deposits make the water corrosive, which makes it the ideal hiding spot for the stairs that lead to the Vault.

The shores of this lifeless lake are foreboding and gray. A thick, burning stench radiates from waters so still and dark they look like a stretch of obsidian. Calcified trees and animals sit motionless in and around the lake.

The area has the following features:

- The magical stairs leading down to the library are a step off the lake's shore. Their location is marked by a gnarled stump protruding above the water. A single twisted branch on the stump points toward the stairs. Atop the branch is an unusually large calcified moth that is clearly visible.



- The stairs lead down to a magic barrier that creates the atrium. The stairs could also be a ramp, or the characters could swim near the path.
- A creature not on the hidden path takes 3 (1d6) acid damage at the start of each turn they are in contact with the water.

When the characters descend the steps, read or paraphrase:

The descent into the eerie lake brings a cascade of sights and sensations: rocky shallows plunging into a drop that ends on flat stone steps. Warm waters tingling against exposed skin, and burning acrid scents. Then, finally, deafening silence. The stairs descend until they break through a magic barrier at the lake's bottom. On the other side of the barrier is damp air, the lake water shimmering overhead. The stairs end at the cold floor of a grand atrium.

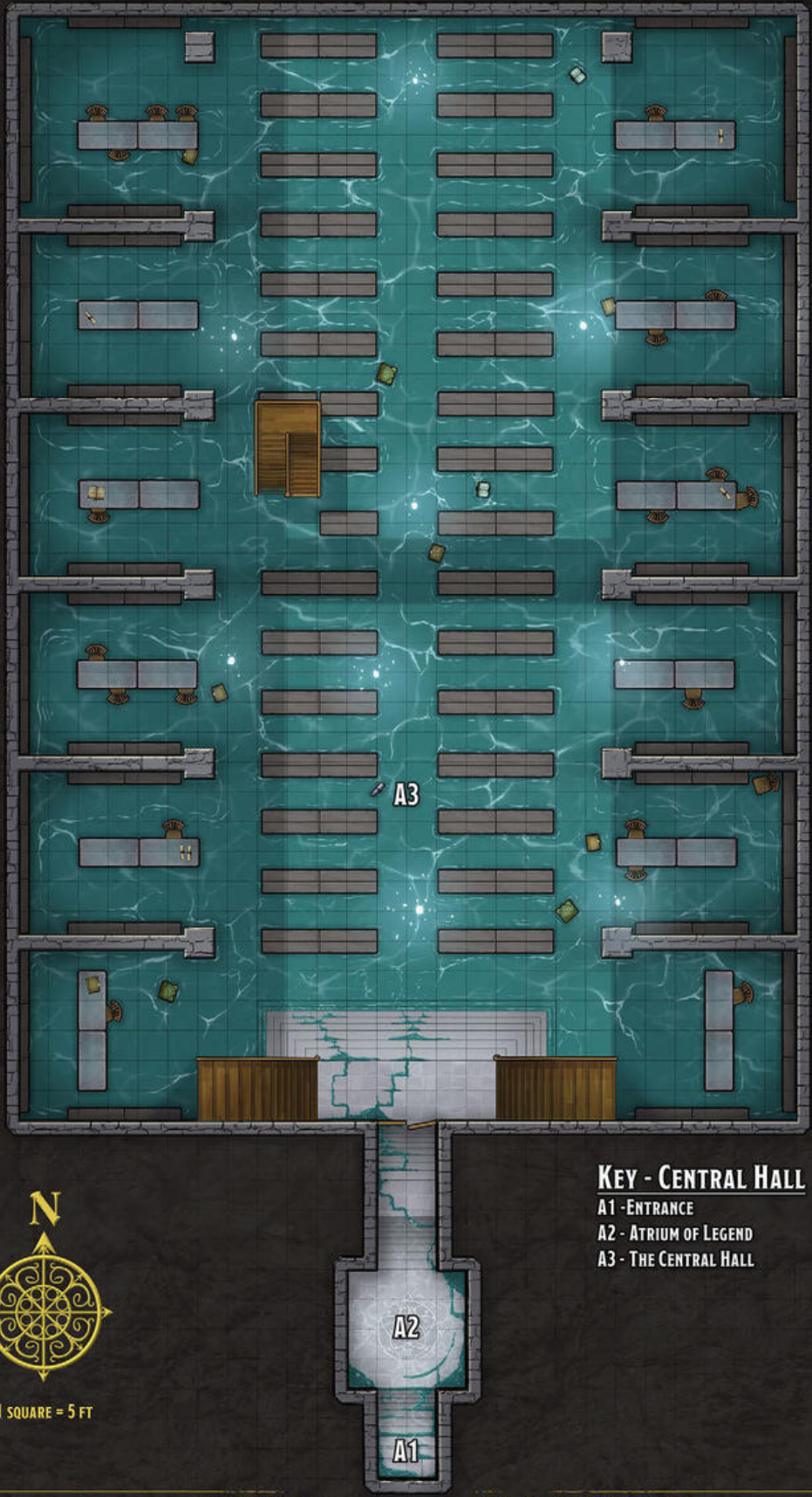
ATRIUM OF LEGEND

The atrium is a tribute to the Librarian's early work shaping the stories of legendary figures.

A small trickle of water defies the magic holding the lake up, running down the wall to form a small pool. The stone floor is inlaid with a massive silver circle surrounded by arrows pointing in every direction. Inside the circle are several simple depictions: a cracked crown, an overlapping moth and eye, and the numeral 3. Intricately carved wall reliefs depict ancient gods and heroic figures struggling against monsters clawing at their heels.

The area has the following features:

- The water hangs 30 feet above the floor.
- The inlaid silver on the floor of the room depicts the symbol of the Scribes. A character with a passive Intelligence (Arcana) score of 15 or higher knows the symbol is also a teleportation circle.



1 SQUARE = 5 FT

Key - CENTRAL HALL

- A1 - ENTRANCE
- A2 - ATRIUM OF LEGEND
- A3 - THE CENTRAL HALL

ENTER THE VAULT

Large stone doors sit slightly ajar, with water trickling between. Distant hushed whispers echo from beyond the doors. Sharp smells emanate from beyond, a mix of paper, mildew, and incense.

The Vault is a two-story structure that stretches back into the darkness infinitely. The bottom floor, partially flooded with briny lake water, houses the vast majority of lifebooks in the central hall and the adjoining alcoves on either side. The top floor consists of a balcony running the length of the central hall. Doors off the balcony lead to private rooms, many of which are used by the Scribes for work or as private residences.

The Vault is dimly lit by floating, glowing wisps. When a character is within 120 feet of a wisp, it seeks them and flits around above them for as long as they remain in the area.

GUIDED TOUR

An Apprentice (see “Climbing the Ranks” later in this article) meets recruited characters at the entrance and provides them a tour of the common areas. During the tour, the characters meet different operatives and the Writers, who may comment on a particularly clever moment in the trial the characters just completed.

GM NOTE

This is an opportunity to have a more roleplay-focused exploration of the grounds and a chance for you to hint at further adventures the Scribes may give the characters. If this doesn't work for you, don't feel obligated to use the tour.

CENTRAL HALL

Even whispers echo in this grand atrium. Even if she can't be seen, **the Librarian** is here, reacting to stories as she wades in the water.

- Moving the door causes a loud creak, which echoes throughout. The door can be barred and locked.
- The whole room is constructed of chiseled gray stone, including the bookshelves.
- The room is 70 feet wide and 110 feet tall. The balcony rises 50 feet off the floor.
- The room is flooded with 1 foot of water.
- Three **water elementals** that are immune to acid damage live within the water. They only make themselves known if the Librarian is attacked, in which case they fight at her command.

Vault Books. The lifebooks are written in real time, new pages and words magically materializing from nothing. If a lifebook is damaged or removed from the Vault, its words disappear and a new book appears on a shelf in the central hall to replace it. Stories not worth saving, typically cases in which the conversion wouldn't make a difference in the individual or push society toward greatness, are unceremoniously dropped in the water. A lifebook concludes when its subject perishes.

THE BALCONY

Doors on the balcony lead to living quarters, including workbenches, outfitting stations, and seating areas. There are infinite rooms on the balcony, most in disrepair. Notable rooms have had the doors inscribed. Vines and vegetation from cracks in the ceiling crawl over the balcony.

LIVING QUARTERS

Scribes live in these 30-foot-square rooms styled as barracks, though the Writers and accomplished operatives have private chambers.

THE STATEROOM

The stateroom is the Writers' private planning space. In the center of the room, a large, ornate table made of wood and rough steel is festooned with documents, maps, charts, and candles. The outer edges of the room have stacks of books, each related to an ongoing conversion.

ANCIENT ARCHIVE

This room contains the concluded stories of the Scribes' exploits. Stacks upon teetering stacks of lifebooks reach high towards the ceiling. When this room fills, the Scribes will start using another. Sere'dina Elsys is most commonly found in this room, critiquing ancient conversions under her breath.

THE TEMPLE

Racks and shelves line the temple's walls, each filled with various weapons, armor, and other adventuring gear. Wafting red linens and candles adorn the room. Debut Bronzeband acts as quartermaster, checking equipment in and out but bestowing it ceremonially.

STAGE OF HEROES

Dozens of candles cast flickering light around this room, which is decorated as an improvised tavern that contains large casks of the finest brews. Sarmapt is the informal bartender, often laughing over stories with other Scribes. Stools are arranged in a semicircle around upended bookshelves covered in ornate rugs to create a stage. Here the Scribes regale each other with tales of their conversions and learn from their collective experiences.



1 SQUARE = 5 FT

KEY - BALCONY

- B4 - BALCONY
- B5 - LIVING QUARTERS
- B6 - THE TEMPLE
- B7 - DEBUT'S QUARTERS
- B8 - THE STATEROOM
- B9 - SAMMPT'S QUARTERS
- B10 - THE RECORDS ROOM
- B11 - THE ANCIENT ARCHIVE
- B12 - THE STAGE OF HEROES
- B13 - SERE'DINA'S QUARTERS

RECORDS ROOM

This room contains the lifebooks of the Scribes. These books are used as a safeguard against rogue agents. Access to this room is entrusted only to Writers and the Librarian, and it is thus locked and warded. The key is required to deactivate the ward and the lock. The lock can be picked by a character who succeeds on a DC 20 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. If the ward isn't deactivated, it casts *feblemind* (spell save DC 17) on all creatures within 10 feet of the door.

If pressed about what is contained in the records room, the Writers are evasive and shrug off the questioning, since the room contains the personal details of every operative.

READING RANDOM BOOKS

If a character wants to read a lifebook, you can use the following suggestions to create the tome's contents. Keep a pen handy, It could very well be the basis of the next conversation.

Player-Driven. Ask the player to tell you, the GM, who the lifebook is about.

Fill-in-the-Blanks. Have the players take turns filling in the blanks: Once upon a time, there was a _____ named _____, whose flaw was _____. Their daily routine was _____. Everything changed one day when _____. That caused a huge problem: _____. Things got worse when _____. Things became overwhelming when _____, which forced the character to overcome their flaw by _____. This led to the outcome of _____.

Story Suggestions Table. Should you want to tie lifebooks into PCs or NPCs, you can use the Story Suggestions table to get you started.

STORY SUGGESTIONS

d12	STORY SUGGESTION
1	A merchant was beset by goblins but saved by adventurers, and now wishes to gain skills to protect themselves against future attacks.
2	An adventurer is embroiled in a quest to topple a pirate captain and their ruthless regime.
3	After missing a day of work, an accomplished miner returns to find their colleagues missing and a notebook filled with scrawlings of eyes in their place.
4	An accordion player in a traveling band comes across a rejuvenating pendant. Each band member covets the item.
5	A being made of wood gains sentience and seeks answers as to why they exist.
6	A demonic rift whispers promises of power to a homesteader in the woods. They wrestle between telling others of its existence or giving in to temptation.
7	A renegade wizard wants to make the <i>magic missile</i> spell accessible to everyone, while nobles who wish to keep magic restricted try to root the mage out of hiding.
8	An experienced hunter on a routine expedition is attacked by a slimy, gasping Humanoid wielding a sharp hunk of metal. As the hunter flees back to town, they see unfamiliar sets of eyes watching them from the trees.
9	An annual mountainside hog ride is about to begin, but a track scout just discovered kobolds pouring out of a cave halfway through the run.
10	A naive goblin accidentally alerted an elf to the presence of their community. The goblin is now trying to catch the elf and beg them to stay quiet before the elf reaches their home.
11	A haunted drifter settles into the corner of a tavern after a long journey, only to have the spirits that plague them bring psychic torment to the other patrons.
12	Dwarf explorers unknowingly tarnished a forest occupied by wood elves. To salvage their reputation, the dwarves must survive the Gauntlet of Groves, a deadly elven contest of strength and will.

CHOOSING A DISCIPLINE

After the characters tour the Vault, Debut Bronzeband asks them to choose a discipline and explains what each means (see “Writers and Disciplines” earlier in this article). The chosen discipline determines which Writer is the operative’s mentor and direct superior, as well as the unique perspective an operative might bring into conversions.

CLIMBING THE RANKS

Through successful conversions, the characters can advance in the organization. Doing so grants access to gear and magic items, more responsibility, and better living quarters as shown on the Scribe Rank Benefits table. When an operative achieves a new rank, they gain the general benefit and a benefit specific to their discipline. Recruits start with the Acolyte rank. When an operative achieves the Sentinel rank, they can recruit new operatives for the Scribes.

GM TIP: SECRET AGENTS WITH A SPECIALTY

Encourage the players to pick the discipline that fits their characters and goals. While these disciplines have a theme, they are not set in stone, nor are they absolutes. The operatives are expected to work as a group to accomplish any conversion they are sent on. As a GM, your job is to create conversion adventures with opportunities for the disciples represented by the players.

SCRIBE RANK BENEFITS

RANK	COMPLETED CONVERSIONS	GENERAL BENEFITS	CHAOS BENEFITS	CRACKED CROWN BENEFITS	FALLEN EYE BENEFITS
Acolyte	0	Free nonmagical armor and weapons worth 10 gp or less	<i>gem of sending</i>	<i>gem of sending</i>	<i>gem of sending</i>
Apprentice	3	Free nonmagical armor and weapons worth 50 gp or less	Choice of a <i>deck of illusions</i> , an <i>immovable rod</i> , or <i>boots of striding and springing</i>	Choice of a <i>cloak of elvenkind</i> , <i>eyes of charming</i> , or a <i>hat of disguise</i>	Choice of <i>boots of elvenkind</i> , a <i>broom of flying</i> , or a <i>medallion of thoughts</i>
Sentinel	7	Free nonmagical adventuring gear worth 100 gp or less and free nonmagical armor or weapons of any price	Choice of a <i>portable hole</i> , a <i>ring of free action</i> , or <i>slippers of spider climbing</i>	Choice of <i>dimensional shackles</i> , a <i>helm of teleportation</i> , or a <i>rope of entanglement</i>	Choice of a <i>cape of the mountebank</i> , a <i>cube of force</i> , or a <i>gem of seeing</i>
Fabulist*	12+	Individual private quarters in the balcony area	The operative gains proficiency in the Athletics or Acrobatics skill and the choice of <i>marvelous pigments</i> , an <i>oathbow</i> , or a <i>ring of shooting stars</i> .	The operative gains proficiency in the Intimidation or Persuasion skill and the choice of a <i>ring of telekinesis</i> , a <i>robe of scintillating colors</i> , or a <i>rod of security</i> .	The operative gains proficiency in the Insight or Perception skill and the choice of a <i>carpet of flying</i> , a <i>crystal ball</i> , or a <i>rod of alertness</i> .

*An operative who already has proficiency in both skills offered at this rank can choose a different skill at the GM’s discretion.

GEM OF SENDING

Wondrous Item, Uncommon

This gem is emblazoned with the symbol of the Scribes. While holding the gem, you can use an action to cast the *sending* spell from it. The target is another creature carrying a gem of sending. Once *sending* is cast through the gem, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

CHARACTERS AS WRITERS

Should any of the Writers step down, a Fabulist character can take their place and receive the amulet bearing their discipline's insignia. While wearing the amulet, a character can cast the *teleport* spell from it. Once *teleport* is cast through the amulet twice, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

CONVERSIONS

This section helps the GM create open-ended conversions for the Scribes. What follows is a conversion template, three sample conversions, and a small collection of conversion briefs that the GM can expand upon.¹

CONVERSION TEMPLATE

This template helps a GM create and run conversions.

Brief: A summarized version of everything that a Writer tells the characters before they take action.

Problem: The obstacle or challenge that prevents a target (an individual or group) from becoming the center of a dramatic story.

Change: The change that the target must go through to grow and rise to the challenge they face. There are three categories of change:

- *Worldview.* The target's understanding of the world changes. The target must mature, find new meaning, or gain a new perspective.
- *Status.* The target's social standing changes. The people around the target must see and treat them differently, like in a typical rags-to-riches story.
- *Morality.* The target's moral compass changes. The target must challenge their opinion or actions, usually from selfish to benevolent or evil to good.

Solution: A way that the Scribes can affect the change needed in the target.

Recommendation: A course of action that can set the conversion on a fun path for the players. The Writers might recommend this course of action during the briefing.

Sub-Objectives: While not crucial, giving each discipline a secret goal can add fun and chaos into the mix and give individual characters secret motivations.

Complication: A secret complication that occurs mid-conversion.

GM TIP: LET THE PLAYERS DO YOUR PLANNING

If you have players that love to plot and plan, you can have the Writers provide the conversion brief and the Librarian's preferred outcome. From there, let the characters plan exactly how to accomplish this task as you make notes of complications they might encounter—easy session planning.

SAMPLE CONVERSIONS

Here are three conversions that follow the template.

MURDER BY MOONLIGHT

Brief: Foil and expose a rotten king's murders so that a folk hero has the chance to overthrow him.

Problem: The king, Aldrost Zhubzall, has been murdering his political rivals for years. A virtuous folk hero named Jartall Mcdhanna knows about the murders, but they are actively losing support because the king maintains a benevolent public image. King Zhubzall has sent an assassin after Jartall due to their meddling.

Change: *Status.* Jartall's social standing is plummeting, and they need the king to be exposed to regain what they had.

Solution: Stop the assassination and expose King Zhubzall for arranging this and other assassinations, allowing Jartall to rise and overthrow the king.

Recommendation: The assassin's identity is unknown, but they are likely staying at an inn, waiting to strike one of the king's rivals.

Sub-Objectives:

- *Chaos:* Try to ensure the assassin is foiled in a public place.
- *Cracked Crown:* Get a crowd to chant Jartall's name, building their confidence.

¹ Authors' note: For more examples of story writing and adventure templates, [check out our podcast](#).

- *Fallen Eye*: Turn public opinion against Zhubzall and spark a rebellion.

Complication: The assassin is a werewolf and they strike during the full moon, which makes each murder look like a random werewolf attack.

THE DRAGONSLAYER DESTINY

Brief: Show a newly recruited cultist that the cult is evil and start her on the path to becoming the hero that stops them.

Problem: Lyalis Greyat, a young villager who wants to see more of the world, has been initiated by a dragon-worshipping cult whose plan is to resurrect an ancient evil dragon.

Change: *Worldview.* Lyalis must go from seeing the cult as a powerful source of community and purpose to a manipulative organization that must be stopped.

Solution: Show Lyalis the evil deeds that the cult undertakes and encourage her to oppose their cause, creating a dramatic tale of a hero who toppled an evil cult or died trying.

Recommendation: The cult recently brought in a group of three recruits to one of their secret outposts located in a cave. They will be presented with the same choice Lyalis was: join or leave unharmed. Gain Lyalis' trust and show her that they don't actually leave unharmed—the cult throws those who don't join into a pit containing several black dragon wyrmlings.

Sub-Objectives:

- *Chaos*: Cult leadership being fed to the wyrmlings would be juicy.
- *Cracked Crown*: Lyalis saving more than just herself from the cult would certainly improve her chances of being hailed as a hero.
- *Fallen Eye*: The cult being completely disbanded would likely elevate the triumph.

Complication: The cultist presenting these three recruits with the choice is Lyalis' mother, and Lyalis has no idea.

ROTTEN LUCK

Brief: Stop an inheritance from reaching its undeserving recipient so the heir becomes a cautionary tale of excesses and selfishness.

Problem: The irresponsible heir and child of a wealthy merchant, William Herritus-Prince ruined his family's reputation through gambling, lavish living, and indebting himself to others. His debtors are catching up to him, but a delegation has been sent to inform him that he's just

inherited a recently deceased aunt and uncle's fortune. If this money reaches William, he will start the cycle again and create more trouble for his family.

Change: *Morality.* If William faces serious repercussions (and isn't killed by the debtors), perhaps he will finally turn to a more altruistic lifestyle.

Solution: Stop the inheritance from reaching William.

Recommendation: Steal, stop, or donate the wealth. It doesn't matter.

Sub-Objectives:

- *Chaos*: Spill the money in public to cause a scene.
- *Cracked Crown*: Convince William to walk away from his assets and make his own way.
- *Fallen Eye*: Recruit a bard to witness William's journey of self-discovery, providing the best chance his story endures.

Complication: The inheritance was to be split between William and his brother Heviam, who leads a group of bandits and outlaws in the area. If Heviam finds out his half is being withheld, he will interfere.

OTHER CONVERSION IDEAS

Use the following ideas to inspire conversions:

- Create the moment that a perfect couple meets for the first time.
- Encourage a lover to make their affections known before it's too late.
- Convince the villain that they're the villain so they can reform themselves.
- Create a common enemy or challenge for a community to overcome to bring them together.
- Push the guard past their comfort zone so that they can save their family and the city.
- Become a farmer's mentor and put them through an incredible series of trials that train them to fight.
- Rescue the tied-up rebel from the villain's lair so they can have a final showdown.
- Reunite missing members of a team of misfits, so they can come together and save the day.
- Put someone specific in real danger so they are saved by a local hero, intertwining their stories.

In addition to conversions, threats can also arise for the Scribes themselves:

- Someone discovers the Scribes or finds the entrance to the Vault.
- A Writer dies, leaving a vacuum of power. Who should fill that role?
- A defector starts a competing organization.

RESOURCES

THE SCRIBES

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202209/TheVaultMaps.zip>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202209/TheVault-40x55-140pps-balcony-GM.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202209/TheVault-40x55-140pps-balcony-Grid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202209/TheVault-40x55-140pps-balcony-NoGrid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202209/TheVault-40x55-140pps-balcony-NoGrid-NoProps.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202209/TheVault-40x55-140pps-Hall-GM.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202209/TheVault-40x55-140pps-Hall-Grid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202209/TheVault-40x55-140pps-Hall-NoGrid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202209/TheVault-40x55-140pps-Hall-NoGrid-NoProps.jpg>

You can find all issues of *ARCADIA* on [Patreon](#) and in the [MCDM shop](#).



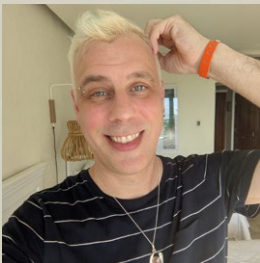
HANNAH ROSE is a game designer, editor, and professional nerd—and, as of this summer, the new managing editor of *ARCADIA*! Previous credits include *Tal'Dorei Campaign Setting Reborn*, *Critical Role: Call of the Netherdeep*, and *Journeys Through the Radiant Citadel*. She is assisted—or hindered, depending on the day—by two feline familiars. You can find her talking about games, cats, and more on Twitter at [@wildrosemage](https://twitter.com/wildrosemage).



SAM MANNELL is a writer and designer based in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa, a distant place known to some as Auckland, New Zealand. When not running or playing games, Sam is writing, making music, drinking coffee, or playing chess badly. You can find more of Sam's work in MCDM's *Kingdoms & Warfare* and the upcoming *Flee, Mortals!* You can be made psionically aware of his location and movements by following him on Twitter [@crypticparlour](https://twitter.com/crypticparlour).



HOOK & CHANCE is a community and podcast by a team of two Canadian brothers. Together Travis and Jordan Bonnough produce system-agnostic resources and frameworks for character and campaign creation based on real storytelling best practices. They have 150+ episodes focused on D&D spells, monsters, classes, systems and approaches for GMs and players to play their best games ever. If you want to learn more about how to leverage great storytelling for your games, you can find their work anywhere there are podcasts and at hookandchance.com.



THE GM TIM is a rule-of-cool, theatre-of-the-mind heavy, professional game master who runs many games in a month. When not running tabletop games: Tim streams Star Trek Adventures games on Twitch, writes adventures and content on the DMsGuild and for the D&D Adventurers League, hosts Appendix: Lit Book Club, and is a featured dungeon master at D&D in a Castle. Find more at thegmtim.ca.

OPEN GAME LICENSE VERSION 1.0A

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, LLC. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

1. **Definitions:** (a) "Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) "Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, License, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) "Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, Spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and Special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, Equipment, magical or supernatural Abilities or Effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the OPEN Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to Identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement.

2. **The License:** This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or Conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.

3. **Offer and Acceptance:** By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.

4. **Grant and Consideration:** In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, nonexclusive License with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.

5. **Representation of Authority to Contribute:** If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original Creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.

6. **Notice of License Copyright:** You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game

Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.

7. **Use of Product Identity:** You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a Challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

8. **Identification:** If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.

9. **Updating the License:** Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

10. **Copy of this License:** You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.

11. **Use of Contributor Credits:** You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.

12. **Inability to Comply:** If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.

13. **Termination:** This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.

14. **Reformation:** If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

15. COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Open Game License v 1.0a Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, LLC.

System Reference Document 5.1 Copyright 2016, Wizards of the Coast, LLC.; Authors Mike Mearls, Jeremy Crawford, Chris Perkins, Rodney Thompson, Peter Lee, James Wyatt, Robert J. Schwalb, Bruce R. Cordell, Chris Sims, and Steve Townshend, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson.

ARCADIA Issue 20, Copyright 2022, MCDM Productions, LLC. Authors: The GM Tim, Hook & Chance, Sam Mannell, Hannah Rose, and James Introcaso