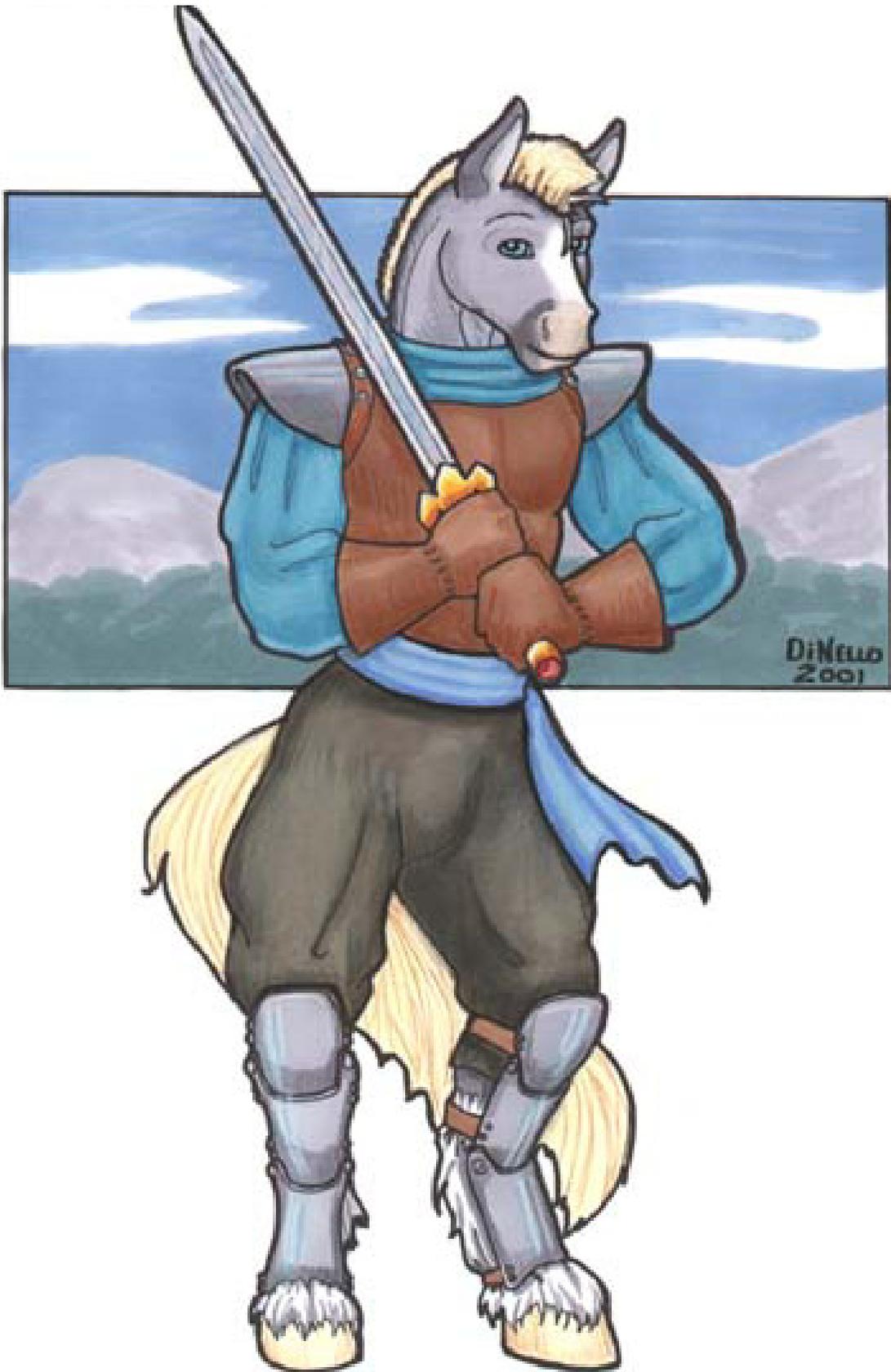


Wylderkin





It was clear that the weasel-person was following them.

Brin glanced over his shoulder, just glimpsing the red and white markings of the creature as it ducked back behind the bushes. He looked back to his companion Hanassi, but she was pointedly not looking.

"I wonder if it's going to attack us?" he spoke softly to the mage, trying not to be overheard by the humanoid weasel.

"I don't know, but I don't think so. It would have attacked by now, it's had several perfect opportunities."

"Then what does it want?" Brin adjusted the strap that held his shield over his shoulder. They had been out hunting for goblins most of the day, and he was starting to tire. From the look of it, Hanassi was feeling much the same way.

"I couldn't begin to imagine," she responded. "But you know, we are going to have to make a camp soon. It is getting dark, and I would rather not wander through the Groll Bramble in the middle of the night by mistake."

So, the two walked a bit farther, enough to locate a safe and secluded campsite. This stretch of woods was not known for heavy monster activity, but it was still a little unsettling to be so far away from a Ward or Permanent Circle when the goblins were known to be swarming in general. Besides, there was the fact of the weasel-creature that was most definitely following them.

While the two sat and shared cold rations for dinner, Hanassi glanced up; following her gaze, Brin could see the creature squatting about fifty feet away.

"It's wearing clothes. It has to be intelligent." She kept a casual posture, more curious now than afraid. She didn't want to drive it off.

"That worries me more. It might rob us tonight, or try to kill us in our sleep. We'll have to set a watch."

It wasn't until nearly dawn that the creature was seen again, and under completely different circumstances.

Brin had nearly fallen asleep during the false dawn, when it was his turn to stay on watch. As his chin drifted toward his chest, he felt a sudden prodding. Instantly, he was awake, reaching for his sword...

...Which wasn't there. Panic ripped through him. Before he had time to berate himself for his stupidity, he saw the weasel; he also saw that it had the sword, and was holding it out so he could see it. The creature was more humanoid than he previously thought; it even smiled at him.

Hesitating only a moment, Brin stepped forward, hand out. "If you'd just let me have that back..." he began. The weasel-creature's smile widened, and it leaped aside in three happy

sideways bounds, then stopped, holding the sword out.

"Well I'll be ... it's playing." The realization crept over him that it was expecting a chase. He nudged Hanassi with his foot, and she awoke with surprising swiftness; she was prepared for a goblin attack, but just stared dumbfounded when her eyes found the silently laughing weasel-creature.

"It's not a danger, I think. It's just playing." Brin helped Hanassi up with one hand, but kept an eye on the creature.

"That's nice and all, but we'd better get your sword back." She quickly spoke words of power, and flicked her hand in a gesture toward the creature. It seemed quite surprised to find its left foot immobile; but rather than panicking or becoming aggressive, it sighed, shrugged its shoulders, and tossed the sword at Brin's feet.

Taking that opportunity to break camp, the two prepared to leave for the town as the first rays of dawn slipped over the hills. Hanassi kept her eye on the creature, keeping it Pinned; the creature had not fought against the restraint again, and simply squatted, picking brambles out of its fur. It was discovered that their food was gone, presumably eaten by the weasel-creature.

"Did you eat our food?" Brin demanded of the weasel. It merely watched him, not seeming to comprehend. He sighed in disgust, muttering to himself as he shouldered his small pack and slung his shield over his back.

"I think we should do something to keep it here," Hanassi said. "Games are great, but we need our gear to stay with us and we have enough real problems we need to pay attention to. And at this rate, I'm going to end up in a really bad mood -- it drank all the wine I brought."

Brin agreed, leaving the method up to the mage, who used one of her scrolls to web the creature. They left it there, frozen in place, looking vaguely annoyed.

Several hours later, they reached town, and relaxed in their favorite tavern. Now that they were in a safe and familiar place, the annoying incident made for a good story, which they told to the regulars. Finally, they retired to their inn room for the night, looking forward to a complete night's rest.

The weasel was there.

In fact, it had taken their gear and laid it out in a circle around the beds, which it had pulled into the center of the room. It was looking very pleased with itself.

Hanassi blinked, then exclaimed "Oh, for crying out loud! It took my scrolls out!"

Sure enough, the scrolls were dumped on one of the pillows, as were the coins and other bits from both their pouches. A glance at the window showed how the creature got in; it didn't seem to understand about closing the shutters again once they'd been somehow opened.

"That's it. I'll get the watch to take this thing back out into the woods." Just as Brin turned to the door, the creature spoke in a clear feminine voice; quite possibly, that was the most surprising thing of all.

"Woods aren't safe. Goblins everywhere. And look what I found." Proudly, the weasel-woman held out her hand, revealing a faintly glowing feather. "No use for it, you want it? I know where to get more."

Hanassi's expression changed to astonishment. "That's... that's a component!" The mage straightened, and smiled at the weasel. "What a lovely thing. Of course I could use that. You are welcome to stay as long as you like." She glanced at Brin, as if to quell any disagreement he might have.

"Well, sure, I don't mind if you stay. But stay out of my things."

The weasel nodded, but with such a smile of glee that Brin just knew things weren't going to be that easy...

RACIAL BASICS

Wylderkin are, in their way, very simple. They are usually solitary, although sometimes they may form small groups of similar creatures for mutual support. Even in these groups, their cultures are very rudimentary, since they cannot rely upon generations of tradition.

This is due to the fact that there is no one wylderkin 'race'. Their specific abilities and natures vary according to the animals they are related to; this makes it difficult for wylderkin of different qualities to band together into long-lasting groups.

It should also be noted that they do not refer to themselves as "wylderkin" but instead on the animal to which they are related: dogkin, rabbitkin, possumkin and so on.

Due to their lack of a social structure, wylderkin tend to look for security within themselves or perhaps within a small group of companions. They are likely to make little patterns of behavior concerning themselves or their group, to gain a sense of belonging and stability. The patterns and habits often make no sense to other people, but are comforting to the wylderkin.

There are certain aspects of wylderkin that are consistent, however. Due to their solitary outcast natures, they are very uncivilized. This does not mean they are rude and obnoxious; simply that civilization is unfamiliar to them. Money seems highly artificial (although ratkin and crowkin think it's pretty) and social structures more complex than "I can beat you up, so do what I say" seem nonsensical.

Wylderkin are survivalists. Their bottom line is living from day to day; not gathering immense wealth or political power, or other things that people whose basic needs are looked after can contemplate. To the typical wylderkin, people from organized cultures are out of touch with what is really important; if such civilized folk fell into bad circumstances, and were not supported by their artificial network, they would starve and die. A wylderkin can always survive.

Due to the focus on survival and lack of interest in politics and wealth, wylderkin rarely find themselves in conflict with civilized races; at least, not in terms of skirmishes and warfare. Many civilized societies, if they notice the wylderkin on their fringes at all, are not sure what to make of them. There have been unfortunate incidents such as dogkin being mistaken for gnolls, but for the most part, wylderkin are left alone, and they prefer it this way.

Once in a while, a wylderkin might associate him or herself with civilized people. This is often due to loneliness, or one of many survival tactics. They never quite lose their 'backwoods' ways, and self-reliance remains their most cherished attribute. After all, when a person doesn't fit in anywhere, they have to be ready to look after themselves at all times.

MAKEUP AND COSTUME

This aspect is crucial to role-playing a wylderkin. You must make a serious attempt at resembling the creature in question, or your local campaign should not allow you your wylderkin abilities and may even take away your ability to play a wylderkin character. For example, only a person who actually wears an obvious turtle shell can gain a threshold ability as a turtle wylderkin. If people can't immediately determine what you are by looking at you, then your costume is not adequate. (For this reason, there are no cat wylderkin. They resemble sarr too closely.)

Clothing should be rough and rudimentary, the sort of thing a recluse living in the wilds or the fringes of society might be able to obtain.

This is not always simple and sometimes barely possible ("what does a bipedal four-limbed Octopus look like?" "Do I really need to make a "shirt of arms" for my centipede wylderkin?"), a



Lonnie DiNello

little attempt to add to the suspension of disbelief actually goes a long way. What you can't do with makeup or costuming can often be done with physical roleplay (an unusually stiff walk, odd physical mannerisms, etc), a unique accent (a songbird who "whistles" half their words), and a general sense of acting in a "not quite human" mentality (the dogkin who completely forgets the plan and starts yelling incoherent jabber when the sarr comes in the tavern).

There are a number of sites now which sell animal masks. A quick question or two on the out-of-game Alliance forums on our web page and players will quickly reveal their internet sources. If you prefer makeup to masks, that is possible as well. The advantage is a great range of vision and not having to worry about your mask slipping; the drawback is it is much longer to apply, and an accidental swipe of the back of your hand can ruin an hour's worth of makeup work.

Additionally, you need to consider the rest of the body. Hands can be gloved, and often it's not a bad idea since makeup will come off them quickly. Body suits can often be tailor made, as well as pieces such as underarmor can make your life easier.

When it comes to your specific costuming, try to keep in mind the culture and region your character is going to come from. Most likely, the costuming for a wylderkin is going to be something simple and nearly resembling homespun, however the cut of the fashion can vary widely depending on what culture your Wylderkin is representing.

ROLE-PLAYING TIPS

The most important part of roleplaying a wylderkin is in understanding the animal type you are emulating. Do research; look up the qualities of the creature, and find ways to incorporate that into your roleplay. Magpies and crows are notorious for stealing shiny things and hiding them; dogs love to go on a chase and need social company. Some animals are cunning, some are slow witted, some are solitary, some live in groups, some are nocturnal, some are playful.

Although survival is a core element of wylderkin roleplay, different animals survive using different tactics. Wylderkins are

the same way. A wolf wylderkin is very likely to enjoy cooperating with others to bring down prey, for example. Rabbits run and hide when in danger, while an armadillo hunkers down and relies upon its armor.

Although not every aspect of your wylderkin character will be represented in terms of game abilities or systems, you should play them anyway. A bear wylderkin will hibernate in the winter; as the fall game season progresses, he or she should be talking about the hibernation to come, looking for a safe place to do it, and munching up a lot of food so he or she can live off the bodyfat over the winter.

The more you act and look like the animal you are emulating, the more fun the character is to play and the more fun others have in playing with you. Trying to be too low-key and 'normal' in the human sense is a terrible waste of a roleplay opportunity.

RACIAL ABILITIES

Wylderkin are allowed under our rules to purchase two racial skills purchasable by other races, so long as it makes sense for the type of wylderkin. You cannot buy racial abilities that are not purchased through Build Points such as mental abilities or "half cost for legerdemain."

Generally, a wylderkin's racial abilities should make reasonable sense for the character. Giving "claws" to a guppykin smacks of sheer lunacy.

Exactly how to explain some racial abilities may, in fact, take some thought. Expect your Plot Team to be willing to work with you to make the game world as original and enjoyable as possible. It's probably best to consult with Plot first regardless before creating your character.

