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PLACES OF POWER:
OLEANDER'S SANCTUARY



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PLACES OF POWER: OLEANDER'S SANCTUARY

Deep within a dense forest lies a well-hidden, secret path leading into the wood's wildest and deepest recesses. The only sign of civilization for miles on end upon the winding path is a distant thin finger of smoke wafting up through the trees. All manner of animals lurk in the surrounds seemingly drawn to the little hut and surrounding buildings hidden deep in the forest. Here dwells the so-called witch Oleander, a mysterious being possessing incredible powers she uses to heal and improve animals seeking her care.

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CONTENTS

Oleander's Sanctuary At A Glance.....	2
Notable Locations	4
Oleander's Transmutations	7
Support Raging Swan Press	9
OGL V1.0A	9

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OLEANDER'S SANCTUARY AT A GLANCE

Ruler Oleander

Population 5 (1 mysterious entity, 1 intelligent bear, 1 intelligent hamster, 1 intelligent owl, 1 intelligent wolf)

Alignments LG, NG, N, CN

Languages Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, Gnomish, Halfling, Sylvan

Resources & Industry Animal healing and transmutation

Protected to the south by massive cliffs, hidden deep within the forest and guarded by a plethora of grizzled old wolves, bears and worse, few visit the sanctuary looking for trouble. Oleander's Sanctuary is an obscure legend at best, and that is just how Oleander likes it. People in the closest town, regard the prospect of visiting the place with abject horror. Those that know of the sanctuary remember all too well Oleander's displays of power, whispering the witch in the woods has tapped into ancient and primordial ley lines. The sanctuary indeed seems to allow for unique transmutations, but it remains to be seen whether this is due to its mistress, a ley line or a stranger reason yet undiscovered.

MARKETPLACE

The following services are for sale:

- **Spellcasting:** Arcane and divine spellcasting of up to 15th level.

LORE

A PC may know something about Oleander's Sanctuary, its history and surrounds. A PC making a DC 20 Intelligence check knows one or more pieces of information from the list below. A successful check gains all the information revealed by a lesser check.

DC 20: Well-concealed in the wilderness, few know about this place, where pawed and taloned animal companions receive care and recover from all but the direst of curses. Oleander does not take gold, only favours in return for her service.

DC 25: The site is whispered to be situated atop an ancient ley line, struck by a stone from the skies in dark ages ill-remembered. The magic of the place can radically change creatures treated there. Some druids consider the transmutations to be abominable violations of the natural order.

DC 30: Oleander talks to the animals while treating them and has been known to punish cruel masters. More than one rich owner has left the sanctuary with a cursed cloven foot, a re-growing feather on the head or an annoying habit of bleating once in every seventh sentence.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

While in Oleander's Sanctuary, a PC may hear one or more rumours. A PC making a DC 10 Charisma check learns one rumour from the table below. A PC exceeding this check learns an additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10.

D6	RUMOUR
1	Old Garm was supposedly once a deadly companion of a particularly vicious raider.
2*	Oleander is a sentient swarm of squirrels, cloaked in illusions!
3	Oleander can be just as poisonous as her namesake. If you have exotic poisons to peddle, this is a good place to sell them.
4	Master Petz has an irrational hatred of lumberjacks and wyverns and has clashed with them more than once.
5	Syrouac has a spy network of mice, songbirds, spiders and scorpions. They are always watching.
6*	Never touch the tea or the food! That place has been touched by horrors from the void between the stars and seeks to spread a mutating contagion!

*False rumour

USING OLEANDER'S SANCTUARY

Oleander's details are deliberately kept vague to suit your campaign's needs and theme. Oleander could be one entity or a male and a female individual, posing as the same being. She could be fey, a creature from the stars, an eccentric spellcaster or something else entirely.

Her transmutations, while benevolent and helpful for the subject, could be a source of conflict between traditionalist druids and Oleander. Think of what would happen if you'd cross animal rights questions with the central transhumanist conundrums—Oleander has only the best interest of the patients in mind, but does she have the right to "violate" the natural order? Tonally, this can be played for laughs, but at the same time, most aspects of this place and its inhabitants can have a sinister edge as well. The inhabitants deliberately evoke the tropes of childhood fairy tales and their visuals, but tints them with an uncanny valley edge that allows a GM to turn the proceedings strange, alien...horrific, even!

If your campaign has a down to earth tone, consider making this location a semi-real psychedelic hallucination generated by a non-carnivorous version yellow musk creeper. Alternatively, Oleander's could be a bridge between the fey realm and the Material Plane.

NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the residents are animals and magical beasts, but they share some general characteristics:

Appearance: Animals are well-groomed, unless contrary to the animal's nature, and they live in peace with one another

Dress: Oleander always has calloused hands, stained a vibrant green, but keeps her green-brown robe in immaculate condition.

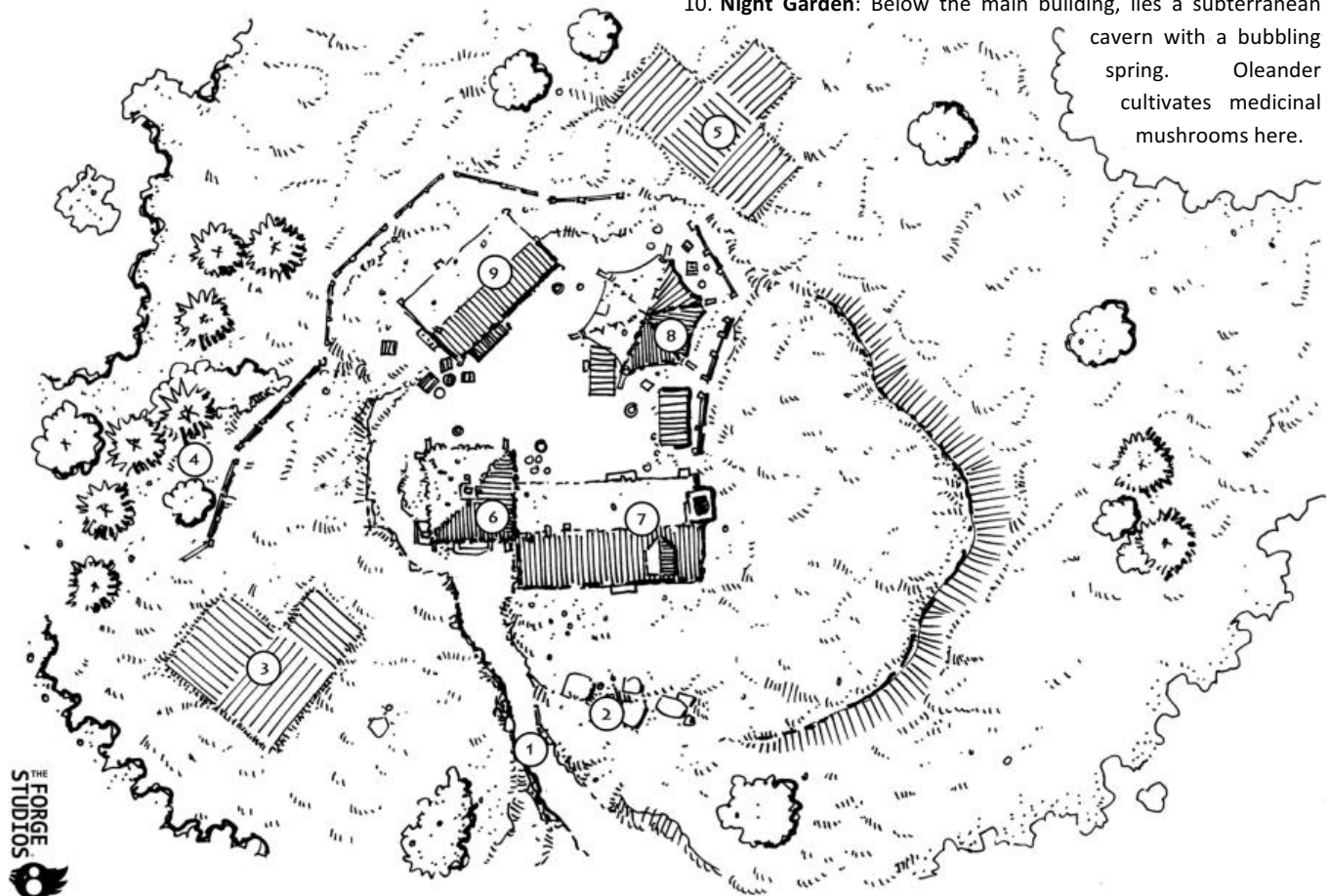
The permanent residents of the sanctuary comprise:

- **Oleander** (anywhere, N androgynous mysterious entity) Oleander is always busy, tending to wounds, brewing strange draughts or drying herbs.
- **Master Petz** (location 3 or 9, CN very old intelligent bear barbarian 5) Master Petz is very strong, but very sleepy.
- **Old Garm** (location 6, NG venerable intelligent wolf sorcerer 8) The old wolf acts as Oleander's apprentice and assistant.
- **Syrouac Fortescree** (location 4, CN intelligent owl rogue 8) An owl clad in ill-fitting finery half of the time, Syrouac acts as the sanctuary's greeter and spymaster.
- **Aasic "Wooly" Movasi, the 13th** (location 4, LG intelligent hamster paladin 1) Aasic is an eccentric silver-grey hamster who claims to be a champion from outer space.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Most of Oleander's Sanctuary and its surrounds comprise locations of little interest to adventurers. A few locations, however, are notable:

1. **Main Approach:** This well-concealed trail leads to the sanctuary. Steep inclines flank the trail.
2. **Targeting Rocks:** Here animals suffering injuries to their fine motor skills learn once again to precisely strike their foes.
3. **Daylight Garden:** This field contains a variety of potent, exotic herbs that should not grow in these climates and soil.
4. **Aviary:** Here grow unruly trees and bushes, weaving a dense web of branches; the perfect spot to train aerial agility.
5. **Northern Field:** Here grows food for the sanctuary's guests and the ingredients for Oleander's spiced bread.
6. **The Witch's Tower:** The impressive annex of the sanctuary's main building contains Oleander's private quarters as well as a perpetually locked cellar door and acts as Old Garm's library.
7. **Main Building:** Here Oleander meets guests for herbal tea.
8. **Treatment Tent:** This massive gazebo, allows for the treatment of animals that are more confident outside.
9. **"The Stables":** This massive building is the home and living quarters for larger animals.
10. **Night Garden:** Below the main building, lies a subterranean cavern with a bubbling spring. Oleander cultivates medicinal mushrooms here.



NOTABLE LOCATIONS

1: MAIN APPROACH

Approximately four miles south of the nearest town, a nigh imperceptible trail meanders through the dense foliage of a sombre forest, leading slowly uphill to a small glade. A thin column of smoke beckons travellers closer, as the path winds its way in a semi-circle through the dense undergrowth, finally breaching the glade's perimeter from the south. Travelers straying from the path soon regret their decision, as a surprising amount of poison ivy, thorny bushes and irritated animals, including non-native serpents and arachnids, infest the area.

The approach to the main building is signalled well in advance by the melodious, almost symphonic chirping of a vast plethora of songbirds, making the trip surprisingly calming, though paranoid trackers can spot trails of various deadly animals. The steep inclines (DC 20 Strength [Athletics] check) flanking the final stretch can be scaled though those attempting the like invariably encounter hedgehogs, squirrels and similar woodland critters, eyeing them suspiciously.

Syrouac (CN intelligent owl rogue 8), if present to greet guests, wears a pince-nez on his beak and often perches here, berating newcomers for their lack of manners while fidgeting with his comically oversized noble's attire. He inspects potential patients in the entourage, all the while peppering visitors with questions, usually while Oleander watches from the distance and relative safety of the balcony atop the main building, her heterochromatic eyes stark pools of colour in the distance. Guests that look like trouble usually are cowed into cooperation by the approach of grizzled Master Petz (CN very old intelligent bear barbarian 5). Oleander seems to be awake at all hours and on the rare occasions when she is not present, she usually arrives within the hour. In such cases, Syrouac are all too happy to show visitors around.

2: TARGETING ROCKS

The rigors of adventuring and fighting horrid monstrosities require, nay, demand, those stalwart creatures following their masters in this foolhardy profession are skilled combatants. The rocks here are used for the swooping attack training of raptors, to help climbing creatures with broken or crippled limbs regain their mobility or just for target-practice. Web-covered dummies with acid burns, copious stinger marks, ripped off wooden limbs and the like are testament to Oleander's conviction that only creatures truly prepared should be pitted against the supernatural creatures adventurers frequently face. More comical for the onlooker are the cases, where Oleander has granted an animal a gag reflex to allow them to not swallow the undead's putrid flesh or the flesh-eating moulds and slimes haunting the corridors of ancient tombs.

3: DAYLIGHT GARDEN

This herb garden is the envy of even the most accomplished horticulturalist or druid. Although wild and untamed, the exotic herbs and spices growing here, in sheer defiance of nutrition requirements or climate, render this place a truly wondrous sight. Chilies grow next to exotic gentian and bay leaf, with spring time and summer providing a tantalizing blend of mouth-watering scents that never become overpowering. The herbs even seem to grow in a way that makes the colours of their leaves and flowers combine in the most aesthetically pleasing of ways. More than one noble scion's daughter dreams of being married in this lush little miniature paradise of delicious ingredients. Visitors are asked to stick to the furrow-like paths by Syrouac, though, for quite a few of the more exotic plants that grow here can be quite toxic.

4: AVIARY

A jumbled collection of trees and bushes, this part of the sanctuary is home to Oleander's avian patients and doubles as a kind of obstacle course for convalescent flying creatures. The staggering mass of entwined branches almost generates a feeling the different plants have been fused into a strange miniature version of the higher regions of the far south's most dense jungles. The constant bickering chirping of the birds makes this by far the loudest and most chaotic place in the sanctuary; a welcome respite for those restless souls unnerved by the sanctuary's peculiar calm and peace. Even visitors with the magical means to navigate the otherwise impassable underbrush are forbidden from doing so, though, as many rodents and other small creatures dwell therein.

This proximity of predator and prey, once noticed, tends to unnerve visitors. Here is also the home of one of the more eccentric beings in the sanctuary, Aasic "Wooly" Movasi the 13th (LG intelligent hamster paladin 1), a silver-furred, talking hamster. Those listening to his story, preferably while feeding

VISITING OLEANDER'S

An animal companion or familiar suffering a horrible curse or wound or any form of poison and disease could require Oleander's ministrations. Similarly, a master of magic who wants a different familiar, but to retain the personality of his ally may want his partner polymorphed into a new, more potent form. Alternatively, the unique benefits and modifications Oleander offers may be worth the trip. Of course, the enigmatic being has made more than her share of enemies—many of which would pay good coin to see this site purged from the face of the earth.

him sunflower or pumpkin seeds, are treated to an impossible yarn, as he claims to be sent from an otherworldly realm to guide a prophesied champion on a quest of utmost importance. The hamster is an odd fellow, though he does have a peculiar talent and seems to be able to cure certain types of insanity with a touch of his little, knobby fingers.

5: NORTHERN FIELD

An old, withered oversized ploughshare rests next to an immaculately kept field of grains, which provide much of the food for the animals resting at the sanctuary. Oleander does not answer any inquiries regarding how she feeds the predators among their charges and usually only flashes a disheartening grin. The grain seems to be free of mould and is not touched by any of the animals, unless prepared by Oleander.

6: THE WITCH'S TOWER

Behind sturdy double doors of oaken wood, Oleander's and Garm's private quarters remain closed and private. In rare cases, a select few are granted admittance to the surprisingly cosy library beyond the gates. Here, Garm naps in front of a small stove or reads tome upon tome from the vast collection of treatises, herbariums and fables collected here. A small table with freshly baked spiced bread as well as herbal paste are available for visitors who receive the honour of talking to Oleander in this intimate space.

EVENTS

While the PCs are at Oleander's Sanctuary, one or more of the below events may occur. Choose or determine randomly:

D6 EVENT

1	A disgruntled noble in hunter's attire, hobbling with a cloven hoof, arrives with a retinue of men and demands satisfaction.
2	Aasic is convinced a PC is the champion of legend he has been waiting for, the destined one to thwart the cataclysm! He challenges the PC to a quest to prove his worth.
3	Master Petz has been prone to narcolepsy and fell asleep in front of the stables. He may well hibernate there, unless he can be moved.
4	A conservative druid arrives with his entourage, preaching that Oleander's transmutations are an affront to the natural order.
5	A creature from the subterranean realms has infiltrated the Night Garden, preventing access.
6	The strange calm that results in all animals getting along suddenly abates. The results are not pretty.

A steep stair leads to Oleander's private chambers and a balcony. Oleander has been known to take lovers to her private chambers—both male and female—for the androgynous entity does not seem to possess a fixed gender, changing it at whim.

Below the charmingly rickety stair, a massive door of black metal conceals steps of natural rock leading to the cellar. No one has ever been there, except for Oleander. The door sports a superb lock (DC 30 Dexterity check opens) and is reinforced with deadly runes that seem to alternate their precise effects on a daily, as well as seasonal, basis. More than one sage theorizes this cellar contains the source of Oleander's power...or a clue to the mysterious entity's identity. So far, no one who has attempted to breach the cellar has returned to tell the tale.

7: MAIN BUILDING

The main building is a picturesque dream of a witch's house in the most benevolent sense, and always unlocked. Over a large fireplace, three cauldrons of dented iron bubble at any given time, the pastes and soups filling the room with a muted scent to bring tears of envy to the eyes of even the most accomplished cook. Shelves are stacked with phials of glass, earthenware and iron, immaculately labelled in graceful handwriting. All kinds of dried herbs hang in bundles from the rafters and a cosy, very low table dominates the centre of the room, sitting amidst comfortable cushions, providing an easy way for the smaller animals and humanoids to talk eye to eye.

Once visitors have been invited here after passing Syrouac's inspection, they inevitably find delicious herbal tea ready for them, as Oleander personally interviews all visitors...and, much to the shock of many visitors, also the animals in question in their respective language. Only when the wishes of the animal in question mirror those of the master does Oleander contemplate whatever treatment is requested.

It is also here visitors who stay the night are expected to sleep, though warm blankets and furs of deceased animals who wished to remain of service, are provided—always accompanied with a brief story of the animal's life. Some claim disrespect or evil intent causes the rugs to come to life, strangling offenders in their sleep. Of course, Oleander only smiles enigmatically when questioned about this rather unpleasant rumour.



8: TREATMENT TENT

A fortified gazebo of fir wood stands around an out-of-place looking, massive, rectangular box of metal, held shut by a mithral chain (DC 30 Dexterity opens). Oleander always wears the key to this chain in her golden hair and only unlocks the box in the direst of cases, whereupon a soothing, green light cascades forth from within, enhancing the healing process. Most of the time, furs and blankets cover the metal box and provide a comfortable place to rest in the open air.

When the weather is bad, the gazebo can be transformed into a surprisingly weather-proof tent, as some geothermic heat seems to emerge from below the box. Songbirds, squirrels and other animals act as surprisingly capable assistants in medical procedures and more than one visitor has rubbed his eyes in shock as a swarm of songbirds by day, or even bats at night, bringing herbs, water or tools to help their enigmatic host.

9: "THE STABLES"

Nicknamed the stables by visitors due to horses, mules and similar animals resting in this hall-like building, it does not really look like a traditional stable—there are no boxes here and the hay covering the wooden floors is always fresh.

In the back, at least during the winter, a deep and sonorous snoring that softly send vibrations through the whole building, comes from Master Petz (CN very old intelligent bear barbarian 5). This snoring, while at first grating, seems to have a calming effect on even the most insomnia-stricken beings.

Master Petz does not react kindly to being woken, and his sleep-addled brain seems to be the one anomaly and exception to the sanctuary's calming effects. The bear has been known to lash out and reflexively fly into a dread frenzy when woken from his hibernation-like bouts of narcolepsy. Master Petz ends up

being inconsolable upon regaining his senses, but visitors should still beware his mithral-laced claws. To date, his rages have destroyed the stables no less than three times; Aasic and Syrouac have a standing bet on whether his rages or his snoring will make the stables collapse the next time.

10: NIGHT GARDEN

No less impressive than the Daylight Garden, significantly fewer visitors get to visit the Night Garden. Sometimes, though, Oleander moves away the central table in the main building and unveils the well-hidden trapdoor leading to this natural cavern.

Here, a truly gorgeous biome of phosphorescent fungi and moulds lights the darkness with unearthly colours. A crystal-clear spring bubbles up from under shrouding caps of majestic mushrooms, as strange creatures from the realms below skitter about in the dark.

Some visitors claim Oleander has contacts with the loathsome races dwelling below. Oleander's only reply is, "All patients are welcome, regardless of the race of their master." This could explain the surprising number of exotic spiders, scorpions and snakes encountered in the vicinity.

Oleander never lets unprotected guests linger in the cave for long, though, for there are poisonous fungi here and some of the spores perpetually shrouding the area in all colours of the rainbow are mildly hallucinogenic. All permanent inhabitants except Aasic are protective of the Night Garden and the hamster has, curiously, so far been denied access to Night Garden, which irks him no end.



OLEANDER'S TRANSMUTATIONS

Oleander's sanctuary is a means for the GM to reward players that care about their animal companions and familiars. The player with a crow familiar who wants a more capable familiar or companion as he becomes more powerful, but also wants to retain his familiar's character, thus gets a chance to retain his familiar instead of just dismissing him. Oleander's Sanctuary is intended as a way for a GM to say "yes" to the players who want to "upgraded" companion instead of just getting a new one.

Oleander offers many transmutations—boons—for willing animal subjects; none can be purchased. Oleander does not care for gold and thus only helps those she deems worthy...and only on a quid-pro-quo basis. PCs seeking Oleander's services must be ready to embark on a quest as a means of paying their bill. The more significant the boon, the more dangerous the quest.

Oleander provides a variety of lesser, moderate and major boons. Lesser boons provide mainly cosmetic benefits. Moderate and major boons provide tangible mechanical benefits and as such, modify the creature's CR. To avoid abuse when granting boons to a PC's companions, one can use a simple formula: the boons have a point value and a creature's point value should not exceed 1/5th of their total HD, rounded down.

LESSER BOONS (0 POINTS; CR +0)

- Transform a companion into another companion, retaining the original companion's personality and alignment.
- Healing a curse, disease or slow-working, potent poison.
- Exchange the physical damage type (bludgeoning, slashing, piercing) inflicted by one of the companion or familiar's attacks with another physical damage type.

MODERATE BOONS (1 POINT, CR +1/2)

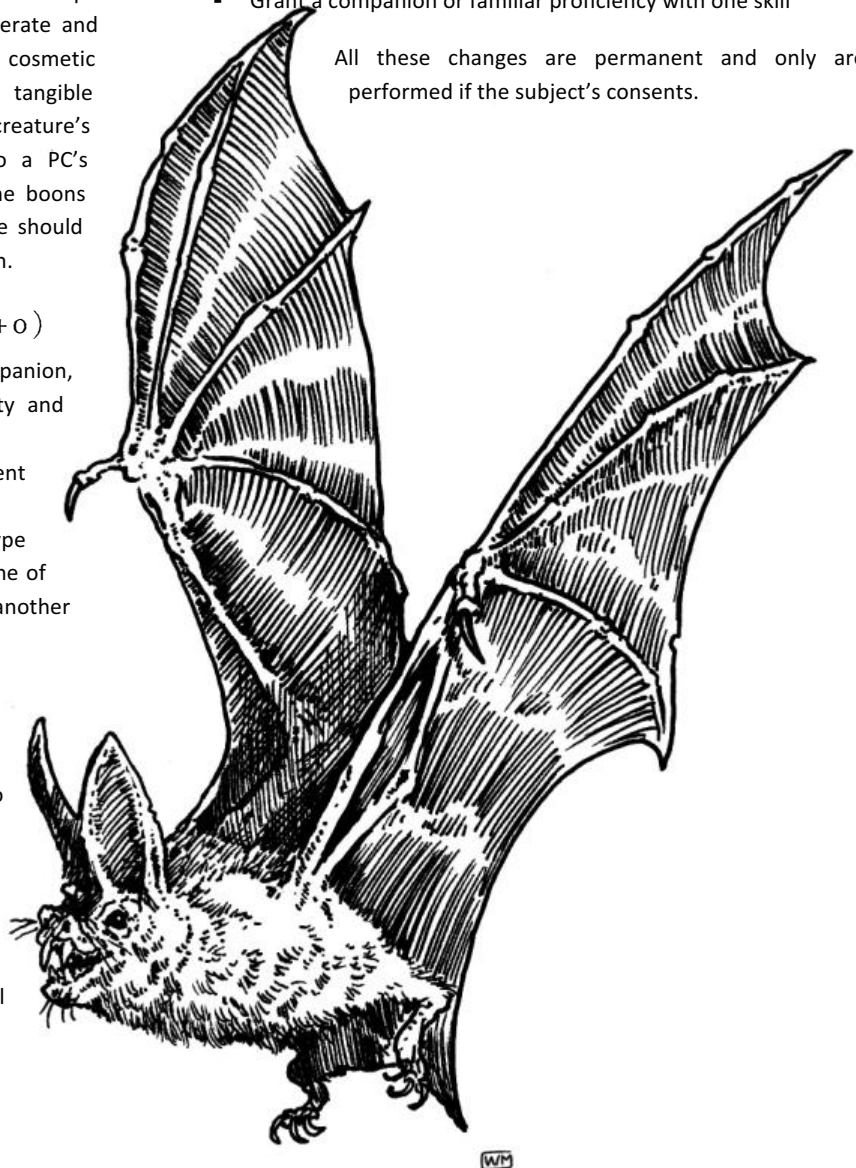
- Grant a companion or familiar the ability to breathe water as well as air.
- Exchange the values of a companion's or familiar's swimming and land speed.
- Replace an existing climb speed with swimming speed or vice versa.
- Coat a companion's or familiar's claws natural attacks with silver.

- Grant a companion or familiar low-light vision.
- Grant a companion or familiar darkvision 60 ft. or extend an existing darkvision by +60 ft.
- Grant a companion or familiar proficiency with one tool.

MAJOR BOONS (2 POINTS; CR +1)

- Grant a companion or familiar blindsight 30 ft.
- Grant a companion or familiar a 30 ft. swimming or climbing speed or increasing an existing swimming or climbing speed by +30 ft.
- Grant a companion or familiar a 60 ft. flying speed, but also reduce the base land speed by 10 ft.
- Coat a companion's natural attacks with mithral.
- Grant a companion or familiar proficiency with one skill

All these changes are permanent and only are performed if the subject's consents.



NPC GALLERY

AASIC "WOOLY" MOVASI, THE 13TH

Aasic is a paragon of his kind, a veritable demigod of his race, with ripped muscles, sparkling eyes that hint at a keen mind and...shining fur. He is, after all, a hamster.

Distinguishing Features: Aasic is perhaps one of the cutest hamsters ever seen, his grey fur shining like silver in the sun. Even the fact he can speak in a surprisingly sonorous, pleasing voice does not reduce his inherent Charisma. A particularly shining, comet-shaped strand of longer fur on his back is a sign of his royal bloodline, he claims.

Personality: Aasic adheres to a stringent moral code. He has no tolerance for evil, selfish behaviour and his impeccable sense of justice is tempered only by a fervent belief in his important destiny. Aasic believes he was sent from outer space to guide a champion to thwart a cataclysmic evil. He does not take well to people laughing at his convictions. His one character flaw is his extreme curiosity.

Mannerisms: Aasic behaves like a cute little hamster and a knight in a shining armour, at the same time. He'd gladly give his last sunflower seed to the needy. He also has a knack for curing some forms of madness via touch. Aasic does not know why he has this gift, but believes he has it for a reason.

MASTER PETZ

Master Petz is a towering, savage-looking dire bear whose black pelt is now splotched with grey. The massive bear proudly wears a veritable crisscross of scars, bespeaking his untold battles.

Distinguishing Features: Oleander has treated Master Petz several times—his claws are laced with mithral and he breathes as easily underwater as on land—his throat's fur is hiding gills.

Personality: Master Petz is like a grumpy grandpa, if grandpa had the body of a massive, lethal, living engine of destruction prone to uncontrolled rages when woken. Master Petz can speak, but mostly communicates via threatening growls.

Mannerisms: Either due to a persistent infection, injuries or old age, Master Petz suffers bouts of narcolepsy and insomnia.

OLD GARM

Old Garm is a grizzled, ancient, one-eyed, grey wolf. He walks with a slightly limp. His eyes twinkle with deep intellect.

Distinguishing Features: Old Garm lost one of his ears in battle and his right hind leg was once badly mauled. Despite Oleander's prodigy-level-expertise, the leg has healed badly and bears horrid scars. He does not talk about the injury.

Personality: Old Garm loves telling stories (particularly fables and myths with strong morals and ethics). He is the

perfect narrator and a calm, deliberate being, shying away from needless exertion. Garm only gets riled up when faced with lupine monsters.

Mannerisms: Garm enjoys smoking a pipe and has had one custom-made to fit his muzzle. He claims the herbs help with the pain of his leg. He also tends to question visiting scholar regarding the transference of souls and astral projection, which can be unsettling, considering his impressive appearance.

OLEANDER

Oleander has long, gold-blond, braided hair with twigs of oleander and hemlock woven into its locks. She always has one green and one purple eye, both of which have a piercing and almost intoxicating quality on those meeting Oleander's gaze.

Distinguishing Features: Beyond her heterochromatic eyes, Oleander always wears a mithral key braided into her hair. Oleander changes her gender and body shape on a daily whim.

Personality: Oleander is a compassionate host for those that respect their companions, but a predatory capacity for violence always seems to simmer just beneath the surface. She does not suffer fools or those that breaching confidence lightly and has pronounced several violent curses upon transgressors. With animals, she is carefree and almost saccharine in demeanour.

Mannerisms: Oleander, when troubled, has been known to unconsciously use a completely wrong pitch, which can result in a thin female form speaking with the booming baritone of a chain-smoking sailor or vice-versa. Oleander also seems to derive some mischievous pleasure from addressing males as female and vice-versa.

SYROUAC FORTESCREE

Syrouac in the wild looks like an, unremarkable owl. When acting as Oleander's speaker, he wears an oversized noble's outfit and a pince-nez on his beak.

Distinguishing Features: Syrouac's eccentric dressing habits set him apart, but when not acting in his official function, he cultivates a look of deliberate inconspicuousness.

Personality: Syrouac is ambitious in the extreme. He knows he lacks Garm's magical talent or Oleander's otherworldly might, but he has managed to establish a surprisingly efficient ring of avian spies and allies. And he is not planning on living out the rest of his days in this backwater hovel.

Mannerisms: Syrouac is well-read and speaks over ten languages. However, much to his chagrin, an owl's screech escapes his beak, like clockwork, after every seventh sentence.

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OGL V1.0A

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