

# BONDS OF STUDY

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BY ISAAC A L MAY



Everything you need to expand your warlock experience.

# BONDS OF STUDY

VERSION 1.2

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO EXPAND YOUR WARLOCK EXPERIENCE

**BY ISAAC A. L. MAY**

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YOU  
MAY  
TRY

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# WHAT IS A PATRON?

An Old One who speaks through the veil.

A demon that wishes to influence the lands of mortals.

Even a playful fairy prince could make for an interesting patron.

With the release of new content, the list of patrons has grown and so have the concepts they're involved with. Not every patron is something vile or dangerous; some are helpful, some wish to influence the warlock in a positive way. They also should be otherworldly, beyond either our sight or our perception.

Though a patron should be able to communicate with the warlock, this doesn't need to be through meaningful words. They could use a long forgotten language where only some things are understood, or even an empathic connection where the warlock needs to play a dangerous game of "Hot and Cold" to learn its patron's wishes. Communication doesn't need to be specific, in fact it can be more fun to have the warlock figure out what's needed on their own.

For clerics, power is gained through worship of their chosen deity. It is also possible to gain power through a similar connection to one's patron. Patron's are limited in their power, but unlimited in their focus, wants and needs. This gives the warlock more flexibility, as there is rarely a direct relationship between power and piety. While a patron could be a deity, a fallen god (or a demigod) allows for some separation between warlocks and clerics. A power trying to climb back up, or to gain favor, or a force who is not all powerful but instead simply shares fragments of their limited power, makes for a good patron.

As long as a patron is sufficiently powerful, there shouldn't be any issue as to what a patron actually is. A sentient magic sword or even a being that defies explanation could be a patron. Potentially, an epicly powerful warlock could become the patron of a much weaker warlock. Dungeon Masters and players should work together on what a patron should be and how they should act in order to avoid any unfortunate miscommunications. A warlock and their patron are a package deal, and while not another member of the group, a patron still has an indirect sway over actions of an adventuring party.



## UNUSUAL PATRONS

With the introduction of the Hexblade in *Xanathar's Guide to Everything*, the concept of 'what is a patron' was expanded to include intelligent weapons. This means that artifacts like the pieces of Vecna or *Orbs of Dragonkind* could have gained some measure of communication to connect with a warlock. A patron doesn't need to be "someone", it can be "something" as long as the object in question has power or a presence.

A *holy avenger* could make for an excellent celestial patron, and the will to destroy all unlife could be felt by the warlock as compelling. A book that is made from parts of human skin, the recordings of a long dead Old One, could contain pieces of its soul. The old artifact would communicate through passages in the book, or perhaps in mind piercing song. Patrons should not be fully understood, they are alien and unknown, and the warlock should have to piece some of that mystery together as they learn.

When deciding on a patron, make sure they are a sufficiently powerful being and are 'extra planar,' or at least nearly impossible to actually approach. Patrons can speak through vessels of theirs, but you shouldn't reveal them too quickly to the player, or they lose that all powerful mystique. You can, in fact, hide what a patron is behind the curtain; someone who may believe an ancient dragon soul is talking to them might be compelled through a kobold shaman who found an *Orb of Dragonkind*. Make sure to clear these things with your players if you're going to have a joke behind the scenes that strongly changes their character when discovered.

# ALTERNATIVE PATRON IDEAS

## THE ARCHFEY

- Several faeries have combined their powers and minds together to grow strong enough to fight off an ancient evil. This is a fun way to have lots of conflicting arguments about what to do in such a situation in your warlock's head.
- Moving through the woods, silent and beautiful, streaks a white stag. The white stag is a mysterious creature that may act as a patron for the sake of the wild itself. The stag will communicate through imagery instead of words or feelings.
- She fell out of favor with her people many years ago. Once considered one of the great fairy queens, this fallen courtier is looking for a measure of revenge for those that wronged her. This is a good way to make a morally ambiguous or even evil Archfey Patron.

## THE CELESTIAL

- A weapon designed to destroy evil has been cast into a far realm or broken into pieces. It calls a warlock to come and save it, reforge it, or deal with evil in its stead. Use the charts for sentient magic items (*Dungeon Master's Guide*) for dealing with the holy relic. The *mace of disruption* and *holy avenger* are some examples of a celestial aligned relic.
- Whispers come from an old shrine where the power of a deity has been fused into the stone and metal of the structure. Now this being, which barely still exists, is looking for a champion to further its cause. You can work with an existing pantheon or create something of your own, but make sure to consider what happened to this once powerful deity.
- A particularly powerful good aligned creature such a coatl or unicorn can act as a patron. Make certain they're an elevated form of the original to keep the power struggle between warlock and patron in check.

## THE FIEND

- The power of a demon has been transferred into a new vessel, such as a clay jar or a statue. The demon wishes to return to power but needs the warlock to make that happen.
- A fallen celestial is looking to form a pact with a mortal in exchange for power. They could use this as trickery to get a good aligned player to think they want to return to the light.
- A horn, claw, or tooth of a forbiddable demonic force has grown in power over time and now is looking for someone to do its masters bidding. Be certain to make sure the source of this item is a very powerful creature such a demon lord.

## THE GREAT OLD ONE

- A book covered in unknown flesh, the pages bound with sinew, and a singular eye remains closed in the center of the cover. This book acts as a herald for the end times or for creatures beyond the minds of mortals. It also makes a great patron!
- The Unknowable, the entire idea behind this patron is that they cannot be known by anyone, even the warlock. They are the absence of form and thought, a counterbalance in the cosmos which must be in order for all else to exist. An especially dark patron that wants to return all to the void.
- The Mirror of Opposition is a being that shows the 'other side' of something very powerful--a deity, a celestial, even a demon. This other side is a twisted entity equal in power to the original that acts as a counter balance. This patron exists only to create an opposite force for fighting chaos.



## THE HEXBLADE

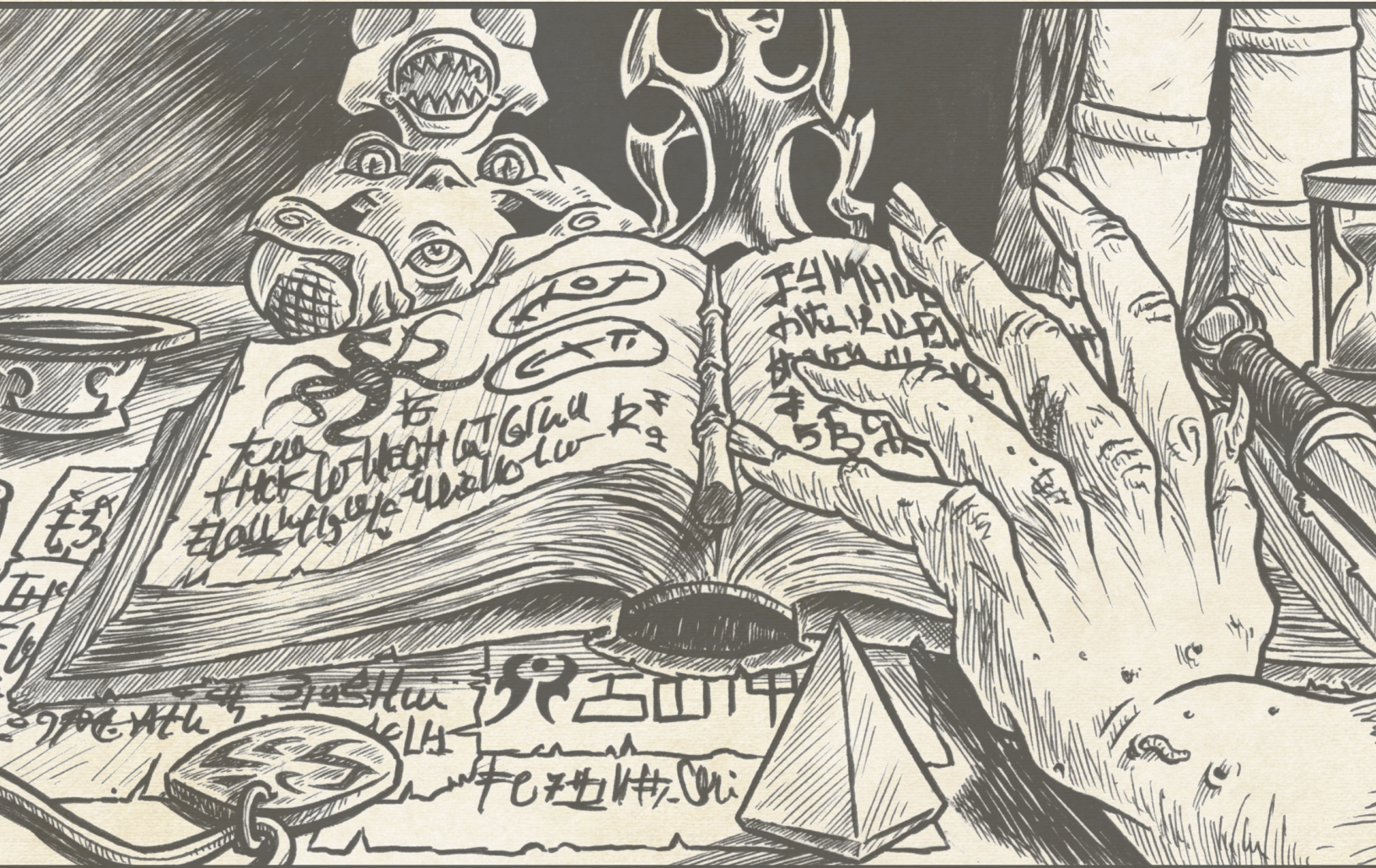
- An ancient shadow dragon has been trapped within crystals of the Shadowfell and wishes to get free. It grants the power of curses and martial prowess to a warlock.
- A deity has been trapped in the Shadowfell and is looking to gain enough power to return to its home plane. It uses the twisted magic of that realm to pick a champion in the warlock
- A demiplane has formed in the Shadowfell and gained its own desires. This demiplane wishes to grow in size and through the connection and acts of the warlock an entirely new plane could form.

### THE NECROWHATICON?

Books can be great vessels to hold any manner of Warlock Patron. Making these books nigh invincible and filled with an unknown language can keep the Warlock guessing on what manner of Patron they've encountered.

## THE UNDYING

- An unwilling immortal who wishes to end their life for good looks to the warlock for help and gifts them with power as their patron. This patron works well for any warlocks looking for secrets to immortality and could eventually take their patron's curse.
- The destroyer of all, the beast of destruction which seems to return again and again no matter how many times it's been destroyed. The tarrasque is an animalistic creature, and it wants only one thing: destruction. This patron represents a force of nature and its will is what gives the warlock power, not its mind.
- The Unlimited Soul is a creature that when killed, moves to a new body or object and lives on until it is once again destroyed. A once mad wizard that pushed the limitations of the reincarnation spell, the Unlimited Soul has lived many lives and has many voices. This makes for another excellent patron when your warlock wants to be a bit unhinged from the multitude of voices in their heads.





## WHY SHOULD I LISTEN TO YOU?

**S**ome warlocks agree to help their patrons out of a need for power, or even kindness. However, not all relationships between patron and warlock are positive ones. If the power of a patron saved a warlock, they could be magically indebted to a patron. Traumatic events can tie these two forces together, and while the warlock doesn't need to respect the bond between patron and warlock, they can be denied certain benefits if they "misbehave".

Much like earlier editions of Dungeons & Dragons and how they treated paladins, a warlock's power comes from the bond they have. A warlock cannot fall from breaking an oath like a paladin, but they could have parts of the power cut off from them, such as spells that no longer work or pact features that don't trigger properly. It's important to make sure a patron is flexible and that the DM doesn't just control the player and make them into a measure to further the plot. Have an open discourse with your player about their patron, and let them know up front how direct you'll be with the level of control.

Taking away the power of a warlock entirely is possible. Consider, however, how much control a patron has over the magic they have shared with the warlock. Once they give this power up, can they pull some of it back or just silence a part of it for a time? When considering what to take away from a

warlock, consider what they have shaped from raw power and what belongs to the patron proper.

Pact related features are the most obvious form of oppression from an angered patron. Limiting the access to these pact features will help the warlock respect the power they are borrowing. You could instead weaken the bond between warlock and patron by having a chance for abilities or spells to fail. Whichever option you decide, remember that few other characters can so easily be limited in their actions. A patron should only be a part of the warlock, not their entire life, goal and focus.

It can be fun to have a character who doesn't want their patron, but has to rely on it. This works great for a multiclass character who 'accidentally' connected to a differing force. Use this as a punishment for relentless curiosity, but never punish the player, always the character. There are few things more entertaining than a character who seems to argue with themselves while the rest of the party has to explain to the local innkeeper that their friend is 'just tired from a long journey'.

If you trust a player, give control of their patron over to them. This gives you less that you have to deal with and allows the player to decide the nature of the relationship. Patrons can be very interesting when played out with some disagreement between the character's morals. Enjoy these interactions and think about what kind of system there is between warlock and patron for ensuring the magic keeps flowing.

## WHAT IS A BOND?



A bond is a connection between the patron and the warlock. It's the first connection made, the root of where the pact eventually comes from. You can say the rules of a pact are quickly formed out of that bond, or wait until a character reaches the level they receive their pact before giving them these 'rules'

You've fallen into an ancient temple. A statue of an alien creature stands in front of you. You feel it radiating energy, and that energy pushes into your mind, into your body, it wants something, only you can't tell what. You listen closer and give your mind to the statue because you are curious to a fault. A moment later, the two of you are connected. A stream of nonsense fills your head, growls and snarls, and yet still you understand. You have formed a bond with this creature, with what's left of it, and slowly you will learn what that means. Over time your actions are judged--the things you do, the people you help or harm--it reacts, and from that you start to understand what it wants in exchange for its power.

You've been searching for the blade of Alett-Kuroth, a dragon slaying sword. There is said to be only one in existence. You're looking for this weapon to get revenge for the destruction of your village at the paw, teeth, and claw of a red dragon. Finally, you reach the mountain where it's said to rest, you however don't find the sword, but instead just a few fragments of it. You gather them up and look to reforge the blade, but every smith you find says it's impossible. You wake one morning to hear a distant whisper. The blade is speaking to you. It wants to be reforged. You've made a deal with it: you will reforge the blade, and in exchange it will make you the instrument of its will through this bond.

You remember falling into the center of the grove, your head cracking off the stones so carefully stacked in the center. You awoke without a drop of blood and pain, and looking down at you was a glowing face, with long antler-like horns and curious feminine laughter. The fey princess Caederlie saved your life, but Fey magic comes at a price and this price is your friendship. She whisks you back to the world you were from and asks that you follow her directions, and in turn, your bond will grow stronger and perhaps you can meet again.

A demonic force has given you powers. You've asked for them and performed the ritual. The blood around you has grown cold and the scent of it lingers less in the air. The contract is formed and your bond is assured. This demonic force was very specific in what it wanted, outlined on a scroll that seems to never burn but always smell of ash. You have your rules to live by, your pact. You must refuse to work

with bringers of light. Use guile before destruction. Never trust. Fire solves all problems. Remember, you are mine. You've tried ignoring the pact and your magic has suffered for it. This creature wants its orders followed.

A bond can come in many forms, it can be concrete, or loose. The adherence to the bond can also vary from patron to patron. These are things you should discuss with your player. Come up with a way for them to enjoy this relationship even if it's adversarial in nature. Bonds are the first keys to figuring out what kind of connection we have with these creatures. Some warlocks may not even know what is informing their decisions or where their power comes from.

A bond can be as strong as the guidelines a paladin or cleric may follow--a patron may only be watching their instrument move through the world and have nothing better to do than judge or reward them. Take your time when writing your background to consider your bond. Decide if you want it to be something that makes up the core of your character or just a little flavor. Bonds are much more fun when the DM knows about them and can add plot elements or even play the patron!



## SHACKLES OF THE PATRON: THE BOND

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### THE ARCHFEY

Written rules don't mean much for archfey, they'd rather follow their whims and whimsy. This doesn't mean there aren't rules, simply that the rules are up to interpretation or evaluation (of the patron of course!). Think about the circle of influence an archfey may have and center their bonds around those. It's important to be chaotic with the whims of archfey, however they should still stay within a certain set of boundaries. It's best to have this set of rules in front of you, but never reveal them to the player. Perhaps even change a few over time to keep them guessing!

### THE CELESTIAL

The Bond of a Celestial should be thought of as the bond between a paladin and their deity in earlier editions of Dungeons & Dragons. These rules should be proudly displayed, even left somewhere on a tablet where the warlock can see them. It might even be mandatory for the warlock to carry this doctrine around with them. Not all celestials are going to have the same sets of rules. A celestial that believes in the destruction of all undead may have some very strict rules on how to handle their chief enemy, but offer nothing more in the way of instruction. A demigod or angel may have a bond centered around protecting the weak and healing the injured. Again, try to consider the sphere of influence or attributes that make up the patron to inform what would be within this bond.

### THE FIEND

Demons and devils will be wildly different in how they deal with their bonds depending on the type of creature that acts as a patron. A devil will be more likely to have a plan and idea of what they want from the warlock at any given time. They will construct a set of rules, a list or set of commands they expect their Warlock to follow to the letter. On the other hand a demon may simply instruct the warlock on what to do at any given time and eventually the warlock will understand the desires of their demonic patron. Consider the goals of the creature; once they no longer just see a warlock as their plaything, they may start relying on them to further their goals. If a warlock is seen as trustworthy and dedicated, it is more likely they will get a little leeway from their patron. A devil may suggest their warlock search for more power, to get them addicted to the energy inside them and therefore easier to control. While a demonic force is more likely to use threats and punishments as a way of keeping their warlock in line.

### THE GREAT OLD ONE

Interpretation is key when attempting to discover the bond of an Old One. When the creatures you deal with speak in riddles or loose interpretations of language, it's hard to suss out what they might desire. Old Ones will act using a game of hot and cold; in which the warlock will need to attempt various actions and look to their patrons for confirmation of good or ill will. It will be up to the warlock to understand how these hidden rules lead into the bond they share. Think about a situation where a town has many people dying of starvation; an Old One may see this as part of nature and wish to corrupt that nature by feeding the dying with poisoned food. Perhaps their sphere is madness and they wish to see the warlock leave confusing and terrifying markers in certain locations around the world. Unlike the archfey, the Old Ones do have strict ideas of what they want, but communicating it to weaker minds is difficult.

### THE HEXBLADE

Weapons of the Raven Queen are usually created for a singular purpose. That purpose is often destroying particular evils that travel across the multiverse, especially if those evils seek to pervert or distort life through the creation of undead. When using an entity from the Shadowfell or a weapon of the Raven Queen, make sure the rules are clear, if sparse. A weapon may seek the blood of a specific type of enemy, such as liches, dragons, or vile necromancers, whereas a creature of the Shadowfell could have more specific goals and intentions within their bond.

### THE UNDYING

The Undying is a creature that has lived for an incredibly long time. It knows many secrets of the planes and may wish to show these places to the warlock they've connected to. Seeing as many of these creatures have been alive so long, they may have a set of rules to follow, however they're more likely to have loose interpretations on how these rules should be followed. Consider very archaic ideas, old or out of fashion concepts that guide them. An undying patron may wish for an ancient ritual to be done every night before sun down, or they may want the warlock to speak in an old forgotten tongue in prayer.



## DEATH OF A PATRON: MOVING ON

No matter how powerful a being is, nothing can live forever. There have been times where archdevils and gods have fallen, leaving their servants wondering, what's next. For a warlock, this is a doubly difficult circumstance. The root of their power is gone and depending on how that connection was formed, the warlock themselves may be in great danger as well.

A patron may have planned for this and passed their power down to a like-minded individual. A family member, an avatar, even the warlock themselves could work as a vessel for the power. As well as all of these living connections, a patron may have barely seen their last moments and transferred themselves into a less fitting vessel. The way the patron extends their power should only cause a disturbance to the warlock, and they may not even know what's happened right away.

In the case that a patron was not prepared, or was slain outright, the situation becomes much more tricky. Patrons are powerful beings and their deaths should be felt by those inside their sphere of influence. A patron who is jealous and guarded would be more likely to keep their warlocks and servants close in order to facilitate a rebirth in future days. More giving patrons may pass a modicum of power onto the warlock to allow their continued growth.

When planning the death of a patron, make sure you have a backup plan for the warlock player. It's important to understand that without some form of similar power it wouldn't be possible for them to continue leveling as they are. Moving on to a new, but similar patron is an easy solution, though this new patron may have their own ideas of what bonds are shared.

Should the player of a Warlock wish to only take a certain number of levels in the class and have few ideas on why their character would stop, consider using the death of a patron as a way to stop the further flow of magic. The death of a patron should not be handled without care; work with your warlock players when the game begins so they have some expectation of what might happen. Also consider that many warlocks grow very close to their patrons and may go through breakdowns at the loss of someone or something so close to them.

## OUTPACING THE PATRON: THE STRUGGLE

The warlock has been adventuring for some time, they have grown very strong. They've traveled to different planes, have slain dragons and even felled demons. So what's stopping a warlock from growing so powerful that they're beyond their patron? This event is known as the struggle, the battle between patron and warlock coming to a head.

You can try to stop this issue by having very powerful patrons, archdevils, deities, or indescribable planar beasts. Keeping this balance of power will stall the character from questioning their patron, but it won't stop it entirely. Eventually all those that crave power will search for more.

Another way to look at this struggle is through the concept of immortality. A statue that contains the power of a once living creature might rebuild itself even if destroyed. If the patron is a concept, you cannot 'kill' it. Additionally, pure immortality for most godlike creatures can stop a naughty warlock from trying to steal their patron's power.

There is nothing wrong with allowing the warlock to outpace their patron. In fact if you plan it for a long while, it's perfectly reasonable to say that the patron may pass on the whole of their power to the warlock, making them a kind of 'sorcerer' even if their mechanics remain that of a warlock. This works especially well for warlocks who have followed their patron closely and embody their ideals.

Higher level warlocks could become direct allies with their patron. Perhaps the magic the patron has been giving is something it cannot get back and they stand now as friends with similar goals. A patron may also be using the warlock as a vessel for their power, perhaps for their rebirth into the world at the expense of the warlock's life.

If a warlock hates their patron, they may wish to kill it and in doing so, steal its power and reshape it into something else. These are all plot hooks and points that the DM and player should figure out well in advance. The struggle may be the end of the warlock's journey, or perhaps, only the beginning.

# THE PRIMEVAL PATRON

There are creatures that live within the Material Plane that are older than all recorded history. Ancient dragon turtles, treants with far stretching roots, beasts that mindlessly destroy all in their path as an act of nature's rebellion. These beings reach out to make connections with worthy individuals, to fill them with lore and knowledge that surpasses the concept of recorded time. To know them is to know true wisdom. To channel their energy, is to weave magic long forgotten.

## EXPANDED SPELL LIST

Spell Level	Spells
1st	<i>entangle, witch bolt</i>
2nd	<i>misty step, moon beam</i>
3rd	<i>fly, protection from energy</i>
4th	<i>blight, stone skin</i>
5th	<i>commune with nature, insect plague</i>

## BONUS PROFICIENCIES

Starting at 1st level, you become proficient in the Nature skill if you are not already. If you are already proficient in the Nature skill, your proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check you make that uses that skill.

## ANCIENT ANOMALY

Also starting at 1st level, the raw, aged magic that courses through you begins to alter your physical form. Your hands grow powerful talons made of bone, wood, or stone depending on your patron's form. Your unarmed strikes now deal 1d6 slashing damage. When you attack with these natural weapons, you can use your Charisma modifier, instead of Strength or Dexterity, for the attack and damage rolls. When you reach 10th level, the damage for these claws increase to 1d8, and to 1d10 at 14th level.

If you later gain the Pact of the Blade feature, your natural weapons are considered pact weapons. You can have them vanish (no action required) and summon them as a bonus action. Also, these natural weapons count as magical for the purpose of overcoming resistance and immunity to nonmagical attacks and damage.

## SONG OF THE SOIL

Also at 1st level, when you use your Pact Magic feature to cast a spell that does cold, fire, or lightning damage, you may change the damage type of that spell to bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage.

## PRIMAL DESIGN

At 6th level, you now have a climbing and swimming speed equal to your current speed. Also, when you take the Attack action on your turn, you can make one unarmed strike as a bonus action. Also, you may let out a mighty roar to shake confidence. As a reaction to a creature within 30 feet making an attack, if the creature can see or hear you, it must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw (DC equal to 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Charisma modifier) or the attack is made at disadvantage.

## ASSURED DESTRUCTION

Beginning at 10th level, when a creature takes damage from a spell changed by your Song of the Soil feature, all damage from spells that creature takes until the start of your next turn is of the same element. For example, if you use Song of the Soil to change the damage of witch bolt to piercing damage, then a wizard's fireball will also do piercing damage to that creature until the start of your next turn. You may use this feature once and regain all uses of it after a short or long rest.

## PRIME CONNECTION

At 14th level, you have learned to bond the raw power of your patron to yourself. You gain a number of physical changes while maintaining this form.

- You grow until you are a Large size creature.
- Your body is covered in scales, stone, thick wood-- a form that reflects your patron. You may add your Charisma modifier to your armor class.
- When you make a weapon attack, you do an additional 1d10 damage of the same type as the weapon.
- If you cast a spell that does bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage, creatures have disadvantage on the saving throw against that spell, or you have advantage on the attack roll.

Using this form is difficult on your body and you may only maintain it for 1 minute. After using this form, you take one level of exhaustion from the strain. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

### FLAVORING SONG OF THE SOIL

To put it bluntly, a *fireball* that does piercing damage instead of burning its target makes little sense. However, the influence of a tarrasque as a patron may instead turn a spell into a whirling ball of teeth. Consider the ways a primeval patron may influence the appearance of spells and not just their statistical changes.



## SPECIAL THANKS

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To Brixx, thank you for the advice and suggestions, also thanks for being my first DM so many years ago and getting me into this mess.

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