

A painting of a forest scene. In the foreground, a deer with large, dark antlers is shown in profile, looking towards the left. The background is filled with dense green foliage and dark tree trunks. The lighting is dramatic, with a strong light source from the left, creating highlights on the deer's face and the leaves. The overall color palette is dominated by greens and blues, with a dark, moody atmosphere.

DRUID DERKWUDS GUARDIAN

Aranthaen Sub-Class

DRUID – DERKWUDS GUARDIAN

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Druid Subclass: Circle of the Derkwuds Guardian

Subclass Overview

Circle of the Derkwuds Guardians are different to those who protect gentle woodland, sacred groves, or the ordinary balance of beast, root, rain, and soil.

They guard the **Derkwuds**.

This permanently mist-wreathed forest lies between Draktun Pass and the Aranthaes Fields, a valley of dense pine, shadow, old fear, and unnatural silence. Its trees grow thick enough to swallow roads. Its fog distorts sound and distance. Its pale lights lure travellers from safe paths. And at its heart yawns the **Derkwuds Tear**, a long black chasm filled with water said to be bottomless.

To most folk of Aranthaes, the Derkwuds are a place to avoid, curse, or cross only in the most desperate of haste.

To these druids, they are a trust.

The Derkwuds Guardian understands that the forest is **more than merely dangerous**. It is wounded, watchful, and older in places than mortal history. Beneath its canopy stand black, glass-smooth structures from prehistory, cold to the touch and wrong to the senses. Around them, beasts grow strange, whispers gather in the mind, and the boundary between natural instinct and ancient memory begins to blur.

A Derkwuds Guardian does not seek to tame the forest. Taming it would be arrogance. Instead, they learn its warnings, its moods, its silences, and its hungers. They read the curl of mist as other druids read weather. They listen for the difference between a wolf's howl, a raven's alarm, and a voice rising from the Tear that should not be answered.

This subclass is built around mist, ambush, endurance, territorial control, and the eerie half-conscious hostility of the Derkwuds itself. A Derkwuds Guardian is at once protector, scout, trap-setter, exorcist, and living warning sign. They are strongest when fighting in obscurity, defending threatened ground, or punishing those who ignore the forest's omens.

Unlike many druids, they do not draw their power from harmony. Their magic is defensive, suspicious, and at times deeply unsettling. Vines grasp like warning hands. Fog thickens around chosen allies. Roots trip the careless. Ravens burst from the canopy. The ground itself seems to resent intrusion.

To walk this circle is to accept that some places should never be opened, mapped, conquered, or understood too quickly.

The Derkwuds Guardian stands at the edge of the mist and decides who may pass. Those who come with reverence may find a guide. Those who come with greed, fire, axes, or bloodlust may find the forest has already decided their fate.

Lore & Origins

The Circle of the Derkwuds Guardian began long before anyone on the island knew it existed, let alone gave it a name.

The first guardians were hunters, charcoal burners, herders, scouts, and outcasts who learned, through fear and repetition, which paths through the Derkwuds could be trusted and which should be left untouched. They knew where mist gathered before dusk, where wolves refused to cross, where ravens screamed without visible cause, and where the forest floor rang hollow beneath moss.

In time, these scattered fragments of survival became a discipline.

Those who listened longest began to **hear patterns** beneath the fear. Paths shifted in memory as much as in place. Sound travelled wrongly. Fires guttered in still air. Travellers following pale lights sometimes returned days later with no wounds, no hunger, and no recollection of where they had been. But more often they vanished never to be seen again.

At the centre of these mysteries lies the **Derkwuds Tear**. The long black rift cuts through the forest like an old wound, its waters still, dark, and reputedly bottomless. Some guardians claim it is an opening into something beneath the island: an older layer of the world where stone, memory, and spirit have not separated cleanly.

The **black monoliths** scattered throughout the forest deepen this unease.

Smooth as glass and cold even in summer, these prehistoric structures predate any known settlement on the island. They bear no readable script, yet animals avoid them, dreams sharpen near them, and the mists thicken around their bases. Some stand upright like markers. Others lean beneath root and soil, half-swallowed by the forest as if the Derkwuds is slowly deciding whether to bury them or reveal them.

The guardians do not worship these stones as many outsiders suppose. They watch them.

Over generations, the Circle's purpose narrowed into three sacred duties: **guide** the respectful, **mislead** the reckless, and prevent **whatever sleeps beneath the Derkwuds** from being disturbed.

This duty has made the Circle secretive by necessity. A few in Aranthaes and Draktun know of certain wardens, guides, and "mist-speakers" who can sometimes be persuaded to lead travellers through dangerous stretches of forest. Few understand that these figures belong to an older tradition, one that maintains hidden camps, raven-marked warning posts, and root-covered sanctuaries beyond the public paths.

Initiation into the Circle is rarely formal. A prospective Guardian is usually chosen by circumstance rather than invitation. A child survives a night lost in the mist. A hunter returns from the Tear speaking in two voices. A wounded scout dreams of black stones and wakes knowing the safe path home. A druid from another circle enters the Derkwuds and is permanently changed.

Those who remain are taught to read the land without trusting it too fully. They learn the calls of ravens, the warning behaviour of wolves, the language of bent grass, split bark, fungal bloom, and sudden silence. The Circle's oldest teaching is simple: **The forest remembers.**

Role in Aranthaes

Derkwuds Guardians hold an uneasy but important place in Aranthaes. Those who understand their work respect them. Those who do not, tend to fear them. Many quietly rely on them while pretending the need is only local superstition.

To the people of Draktun, the Guardians are guides, wardens, trackers, and omens made flesh. Farmers, traders, hunters, and caravan guards may not understand the Circle's deeper purpose, but they know enough to listen when a Guardian says the mist is wrong, the wolves are too quiet, or a path should not be taken after dusk. They are called many things by common folk: Derkwuds wardens, mist-guides, raven folk, and keepers of the old paths.

Their work is practical as often as it is mystical. A Guardian might find a lost child, escort a merchant caravan, investigate strange lights in the forest, identify whether a wolf kill was natural, or stand watch when ravens gather too long above the trees. Payment is rarely formal. Bread, arrows, cured meat, repaired boots, and whispered thanks are more common than coin.

The Church of the Mother treats the Circle with caution. Publicly, the Guardians are tolerated as useful protectors of the roads and forest-edge settlements. Privately, senior clerics know the Derkwuds contains things older than doctrine: black stones, psychic whispers in a forgotten tongue, and remnants of pre-history that sit uneasily beside accepted scripture.

Clerics may bless roads near the forest, but they rarely enter its depths without a Guardian. The Defenders of the Mother sometimes request their help when patrols vanish, criminals flee into the woods, or older magic stirs outside of the Derkwuds. Cooperation exists, but it is built on practicality rather than trust.

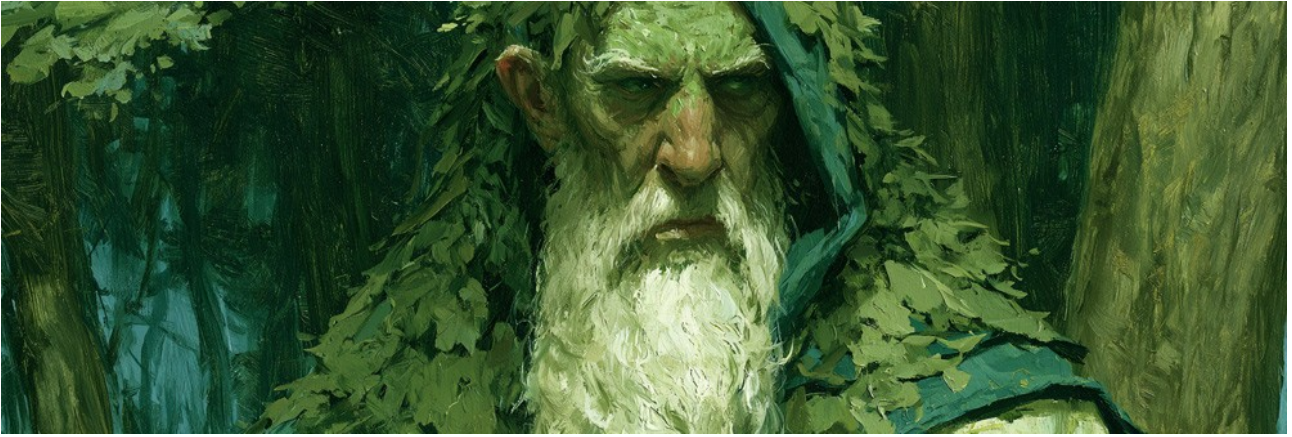
Merchants and nobles view the Circle through a more transactional lens – but no Guardian will ever reveal hidden paths, sanctuaries, or safe approaches to the black monoliths for mere coin.

Scholars and antiquarians are treated with particular suspicion. The Derkwuds attracts those who believe ancient mysteries exist to be uncovered, measured, catalogued, or possessed. Some arrive humbly and may be guided. Others bring maps, tools, guards, and arrogance. The Guardians know that a stone uncovered too quickly, a symbol copied without context, or a sound repeated beside the Tear can carry consequences far beyond curiosity.

In Aranthaes city itself, the Circle is known mostly through rumour: wolves with human eyes, ravens that follow the guilty, trees that whisper names, and guides who vanish into mist without footprints. These tales are often inaccurate, but they preserve a useful truth. The Derkwuds is dangerous, and those who serve it answer to older instincts than civic law or church command.

For adventuring parties, a Derkwuds Guardian may serve as guide, scout, protector, exile, warning-bearer, or reluctant investigator of disturbances beyond the forest.

Their presence gives a campaign a natural bridge between wilderness horror, ancient pre-history, local politics, and the deeper mysteries beneath Aranthaes.



Subclass Features: Derkwuds Guardian

2nd Level - Mist-Warden's Instinct

When you join this circle at 2nd level, the Derkwuds begins to teach you its first and most important lesson: danger is rarely where the eye expects it.

You gain proficiency in one of the following skills: Perception, Stealth, Survival, or Insight.

You also learn to read **unnatural signs** in mist, shadow, animal behaviour, and silence. You have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks made to track creatures, avoid becoming lost, identify safe paths, or recognise whether a natural area has been disturbed by magic, violence, disease, or unnatural influence.

In addition, you learn the *fog cloud* spell. It counts as a druid spell for you and does not count against the number of druid spells you can prepare.

When you cast *fog cloud*, you may choose a number of creatures you can see up to your Wisdom modifier. Chosen creatures can see through the fog created by that spell to a distance of 10 feet. At 10th level, this distance increases to 20 feet.

Guardian's Mist

Also at 2nd level, you can call upon the concealing mist of the Derkwuds to protect allies and confound enemies.

As a bonus action, you may expend one use of your Wild Shape to summon a 10-foot-radius sphere of magical mist centred on a point you can see within 30 feet. The mist lasts for 1 minute, moves with the chosen point if that point is a willing creature, and lightly obscures the area.

While the mist lasts, you gain the following benefits:

- You and friendly creatures of your choice within the mist gain half cover.
- Hostile creatures treat the mist as difficult terrain.
- When a hostile creature enters the mist for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there, you may force it to make a Wisdom saving throw against your druid spell save DC. On a failed save, its speed is reduced by 10 feet until the start of its next turn.

The mist ends early if you are incapacitated, dismiss it as a bonus action, or use this feature again.

Balance Note:

Mist-Warden's Instinct gives the subclass immediate exploration value, while Guardian's Mist provides battlefield control without replacing Wild Shape as a combat form. The feature is defensive and positional rather than a direct damage engine.

6th Level - Ravens of the Old Paths

By 6th level, the creatures of the Derkwuds begin to recognise you as part of the forest's warning system. Ravens watch from branches when you pass. Wolves pause before crossing your trail. Lesser beasts grow silent when your attention sharpens.

You gain the ability to **call spectral ravens**, shadowed birds, or living forest messengers to harry your enemies and warn your allies.

When a creature you can see within 60 feet makes an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, you may use your reaction to summon a burst of ravens around it. Choose one of the following effects:

Warning Cry.

If the creature is friendly, it gains a bonus to the roll equal to your Wisdom modifier.

Harrier's Omen.

If the creature is hostile, it must subtract your Wisdom modifier from the roll.

You may use this feature after the roll is made but before the DM declares whether it succeeds or fails. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus per long rest.

In addition, while your Guardian's Mist is active, the range of this feature increases to 90 feet if both you and the target are within the mist or if the target is within 10 feet of the mist.

Balance Note:

This feature gives the subclass a strong "guardian of the threshold" identity. It functions like a druidic warning system rather than direct control, allowing the Guardian to influence key moments without overwhelming the action economy.

10th Level - Memory of Root and Stone

By 10th level, your bond with the Derkwuds deepens beyond instinct. The forest's memory runs through root, stone, water, feather, and bone, and you have learned to draw warnings from that hidden network.

You cannot be surprised while conscious. You also gain resistance to psychic damage.

In addition, when you finish a long rest, choose one of the following Derkwuds memories to carry until your next long rest:

Memory of the Mist

You move through fog, mist, smoke, and nonmagical darkness without penalty.

While you are in an area that is lightly or heavily obscured, opportunity attacks against you are made with disadvantage.

When you cast a druid spell while lightly or heavily obscured, you may move up to 10 feet immediately before or after casting the spell. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Memory of the Wolves

You have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) and Wisdom (Survival) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

When a hostile creature within 10 feet of you moves at least 10 feet away from you, you may use your reaction to reduce its speed by 10 feet until the end of its turn.

While your Guardian's Mist is active, friendly creatures of your choice within the mist may also move 5 feet as a reaction when a hostile creature enters the mist.

Memory of the Black Stones

You have advantage on saving throws against being charmed, frightened, or magically compelled to move.

When a creature fails a saving throw caused by your Guardian's Mist, you may learn one of the following about it: whether it has resistance to psychic damage, whether it has immunity to being frightened, or whether it is under the influence of an enchantment, possession, curse, or similar magical effect.

Once per turn, when you deal damage to such a creature with a druid spell, you may deal additional psychic damage equal to your Wisdom modifier.

Important:

You may change which memory you carry at the end of a long rest. Each memory supports a different style of play: stealth and mobility, pursuit and pack tactics, or resistance to mental influence and ancient magic.

14th Level - The Forest Answers

At 14th level, you no longer merely call upon the Derkwuds. In moments of great danger, the forest answers through you.

As an action, you may invoke the full presence of the Derkwuds for 1 minute. A 30-foot-radius aura of supernatural forest-mist surrounds you, moving with you and transforming the battlefield into a fragment of the ancient wood.

For the duration, the aura is lightly obscured, and you gain the following benefits:

1. You and friendly creatures of your choice within the aura gain half cover.
2. Hostile creatures treat the aura as difficult terrain.
3. You and friendly creatures of your choice within the aura cannot be tracked except by magical means.
4. When a hostile creature starts its turn within the aura, you may choose one of the following effects:
 - **Grasping Roots.** The creature must succeed on a Strength saving throw against your druid spell save DC or have its speed reduced to 0 until the start of its next turn.
 - **Ravenous Warning.** The creature must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw against your druid spell save DC or have disadvantage on the next attack roll it makes before the start of its next turn.
 - **Whisper from the Tear.** The creature must succeed on an Intelligence saving throw against your druid spell save DC or take psychic damage equal to your druid level.

A creature can be affected by only one of these options on each of its turns.

While this feature is active, your Guardian's Mist feature does not require concentration or a separate bonus action to dismiss. If Guardian's Mist is already active when you invoke The Forest Answers, its radius expands to match this aura for the duration.

When the effect ends, the mist collapses inward, and you may teleport to an unoccupied space you can see within 30 feet that is lightly obscured, heavily obscured, or adjacent to a tree, standing stone, natural rock formation, or body of water.

Once you use this feature, you cannot do so again until you finish a long rest.

Balance Note:

The Forest Answers is powerful, but it remains primarily defensive and controlling. It does not grant flight, heavy damage, or transformation into a superior combat form. Its strength lies in making the Guardian terrifyingly difficult to dislodge from contested ground.

Expanded Spell Options - Derkwuds Guardian

Druids of the Circle of the Derkwuds Guardian draw upon the mist, ravens, roots, wolves, hidden paths, and ancient black stones of the Derkwuds. Their magic favours concealment, warning, territorial control, strange perception, and the punishment of those who trespass too deeply.

At 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th level, you gain access to the spells listed below. Once you gain a Derkwuds Guardian spell, it is always prepared, and it does not count against the number of spells you can prepare each day.

These spells count as druid spells for you.

Derkwuds Guardian Circle Spells

2nd Level

- *Fog Cloud*
- *Snare*
- *Whispering Mist* †

3rd Level

- *Pass Without Trace*
- *Spike Growth*
- *Raven's Warning* †

5th Level

- *Plant Growth*
- *Speak with Plants*
- *Voice Beneath the Roots* †

7th Level

- *Divination*
- *Grasping Vine*
- *Black Stone Vigil* †

9th Level

- *Commune with Nature*
- *Tree Stride*
- *Mist of the Derkwuds Tear* †

Spells marked † are unique to the Aranthaes setting and are detailed in the appendix.

Spell List Notes

The Derkwuds Guardian spell list is deliberately weighted toward control, warning, and terrain mastery rather than direct damage.

Fog Cloud, *Pass Without Trace*, *Plant Growth*, *Commune with Nature*, and *Tree Stride* reflect the Guardian's connection to hidden paths, obscured movement, and the deep living network of the forest.

Snare, *Spike Growth*, and *Grasping Vine* represent the Derkwuds' hostility to careless trespassers, allowing the Guardian to turn the land itself into a defensive weapon.

Divination is included because the Circle's magic is strongly tied to omen-reading, raven-signs, mist patterns, and unsettling warnings drawn from ancient memory.

The unique Derkwuds spells draw on the forest's specific mysteries: psychic fog, raven omens, root-memory, black monoliths, and the terrible silence surrounding the Derkwuds Tear.



Appendix: Unique Sub-Class Spells

The following spells are unique to the Aranthaes setting. They are available only to characters and NPCs at the DM's discretion and are not part of the standard SRD spell list.

Whispering Mist

1st-level illusion

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You call forth a thin bank of pale mist threaded with half-heard whispers.

Choose a point you can see within range. Mist fills a 10-foot-radius sphere centred on that point. The area is lightly obscured for the duration.

When a hostile creature enters the mist for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there, it must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or hear a whisper meant only for it. Until the start of its next turn, the creature cannot take reactions and has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks.

A creature that cannot hear is immune to this effect.

At Higher Levels.

When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the radius of the mist increases by 5 feet for each slot level above 1st.

Raven's Warning

2nd-level divination

Casting Time: 1 reaction, which you take when a creature you can see within range makes an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S, M (a black feather)

Duration: Instantaneous

A sharp raven's cry splits the air, twisting fate at the moment of decision.

When the triggering creature makes its roll, choose one of the following effects:

- If the creature is friendly to you, it adds 1d4 to the roll.
- If the creature is hostile to you, it subtracts 1d4 from the roll.

You may cast this spell after the roll is made but before the DM declares whether it succeeds or fails.

At Higher Levels.

When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the die increases to 1d6. When cast using a spell slot of 5th level or higher, the die increases to 1d8.

Voice Beneath the Roots

3rd-level divination

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (a root, bone fragment, or stone taken from the place being questioned)

Duration: Instantaneous

You lower your awareness into root, soil, burrow, buried water, fungal thread, and old stone, asking the land what it remembers.

When you cast this spell, choose one location you currently occupy or can see. You learn up to three of the following facts about that location from the past 24 hours:

- Whether blood was spilled there.
- Whether a creature passed through while frightened, injured, diseased, cursed, or magically influenced.
- Whether fiends, undead, aberrations, fey, celestials, or elementals were present.
- Whether a spell of 3rd level or higher was cast there.
- The rough number of Small or larger creatures that passed through.
- The direction taken by the most recent creature or group to leave the area.

The information comes as impressions, sounds, smells, pressure, images, or fragments of instinct rather than spoken answers. The spell cannot identify individual creatures by name unless the land itself would strongly associate that name with them.

In the Derkwuds, this spell may also reveal whether the Derkwuds Tear, the black stones, or another ancient presence has influenced the area.

Black Stone Vigil

4th-level abjuration

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self (15-foot radius)

Components: V, S, M (a shard of black glass, obsidian, or dark volcanic stone)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You invoke the cold stillness of the Derkwuds' black monoliths, creating an area of watchful resistance around yourself.

For the duration, you and friendly creatures of your choice within the area gain the following benefits:

- Advantage on saving throws against being charmed, frightened, possessed, or magically compelled to move.
- Resistance to psychic damage.
- Creatures cannot gain advantage on attack rolls against affected creatures as a result of being unseen.

In addition, when a hostile creature enters the area for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there, you may force it to make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature's speed is reduced by 10 feet, and it cannot benefit from invisibility until the start of its next turn.

When the spell ends, the area becomes unnaturally silent until the end of your next turn.

Mist of the Derkwuds Tear

5th-level conjuration

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self (30-foot radius)

Components: V, S, M (a vial of dark water or a polished black stone)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You call forth a deep, cold mist reminiscent of the Derkwuds Tear, filling the air with damp silence and impossible depth.

For the duration, a 30-foot-radius aura of supernatural mist surrounds you and moves with you. The area is lightly obscured. Hostile creatures treat the area as difficult terrain.

When a hostile creature starts its turn within the mist, it must make an Intelligence saving throw. On a failed save, choose one of the following effects:

- The creature takes 3d8 psychic damage.
- The creature's speed becomes 0 until the start of its next turn.
- The creature cannot take reactions until the start of its next turn.

A creature that succeeds on its saving throw is immune to this spell's effects until the start of its next turn, but still treats the area as difficult terrain.

While the spell lasts, you and friendly creatures of your choice within the mist have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks and Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

When the spell ends, the mist drains downward as though falling into an unseen chasm. A creature of your choice within 30 feet of you may immediately move up to half its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Balance Note

The Derkwuds Guardian spell list reinforces the subclass's core function: control, warning, protection, and terrain dominance.

Its unique spells are intentionally eerie and useful, but not built around raw damage. The Guardian's strength comes from making the battlefield feel hostile to enemies and strangely protective to allies, much like the Derkwuds itself.



Roleplay Hooks – Derkwuds Guardian

Druids of the Circle of the Derkwuds Guardian are shaped by suspicion, patience, and long exposure to a forest that remembers too much. Many remain within or near the Derkwuds for life, serving as guides, watchers, and quiet defenders of places most travellers should never reach.

A Guardian who joins an adventuring party is usually doing so for a reason too serious to ignore.

Reason for Leaving the Derkwuds

- Something escaped the forest, and you have been sent to track it.
- You saw the party in a mist-dream before ever meeting them.
- The ravens began following one of your companions, and you need to know why.
- A black stone showed you a place far beyond the forest edge.
- You were exiled for entering a forbidden path, opening a sealed place, or asking the wrong question.
- You believe the Derkwuds Tear is connected to a wider wound beneath Aranthaes.

Relationship with the Forest

- Do you serve the Derkwuds willingly, fearfully, or because no one else understands it?
- Do you believe the forest is alive, haunted, wounded, or merely ancient beyond mortal comprehension?
- What part of the Derkwuds unsettles you most: the mist, the wolves, the ravens, the Tear, or the black stones?
- Have you ever ignored a warning from the forest? What happened?
- Do you speak to the Derkwuds as a presence, or do you refuse to give it that much power over your mind?

Public Face

- Do people see you as a guide, hermit, healer, witch, omen-reader, or threat?
- What name do the people of Draktun use for you?
- Have you ever saved someone who still fears you?
- Do you accept payment for guiding travellers, or only offerings made respectfully?
- What visible sign marks you as one of the Derkwuds Guardians?

Oaths and Boundaries

- What place in the Derkwuds have you sworn never to reveal?
- Is there a path you would rather die than let outsiders walk?
- What kind of trespasser angers you most: hunters, loggers, scholars, priests, soldiers, nobles, or treasure-seekers?
- Have you ever led someone away from the truth for their own safety?



Why DMs Should Allow This Subclass

The Circle of the Derkwuds Guardian is designed to bring a strong sense of place to the druid class without disrupting normal play. Its features support exploration, scouting, battlefield control, and protective positioning rather than overwhelming damage or excessive transformation options.

For campaigns set in Aranthaes, this subclass gives the DM a natural way to connect player characters to the Derkwuds, Draktun, the Derkwuds Tear, the black stones, and the island's deeper pre-history. A Guardian can serve as a guide into the forest's mysteries, a warning voice when ancient forces stir, or a reluctant protector forced to leave the woods because something dangerous has crossed the boundary.

For DMs, the Circle provides:

- a wilderness-focused druid with clear identity and limits
- a strong connection to ancient ruins, forbidden places, and environmental mystery
- an easy reason to introduce omens, animal behaviour, strange weather, and unsettling dreams
- a character who can guide the party without automatically solving every problem
- a built-in tension between protecting secrets and helping companions

The Derkwuds Guardian is particularly useful in campaigns that include exploration, horror, ancient magic, survival, political tension around sacred sites, or the consequences of uncovering buried history. Its powers help the party survive dangerous places, but they do not remove the danger. Mist can conceal, roots can hinder, ravens can warn, and old stone can resist intrusion, but the forest's deepest truths remain under the DM's control.