

## Character Backstory for Echo Woodsong, Written by Elyse Dunstan

Every time a child laughs or dreams, a tree is born. Some of those trees are lucky to be homes to children themselves: tree spirits, who grow and live and learn in the forest. They never quite seem to fully mature into adults, but instead eternally remain eternally exuberant and, inquisitive, and curious.

One such nymph belonged to a willow tree in a forest somewhere in Scandinavia. The hallow that housed the tree sat just a ways beyond a large meadow that travelers often stopped in and rested. The road the travelers followed ran alongside a small river, with a branch running off and forming a small pond next to the willow tree. Echo Woodsong was the nymph belonging to that tree, named for her love the songs that her beloved forest played to those who could listen for it. She often entertained herself by interacting with the mortals who stopped to reflect at her pond, and though she could converse with them and trade puzzles or songs, none could entice her to leave her forest.

But as such stories often go, there was one day a man who appeared beneath her tree. He was bearded and strong and handsome, and he unfortunately ate the mushrooms that sometimes grew between the roots of her tree. These mushrooms did not sate the men who ate them of their hunger; instead they caused those who imbibed strong visions and squelched their fear of pain and death. The mushrooms had become popular with the warriors of that time, who would eat them before battle and become nearly unstoppable. This man was easily identifiable as one of the Berserkers by his long hair and beard, and the symbol of a sword and lightning bolts adorning a swatch tied to his belt.

Echo waited for the mushrooms to make their effect, and then approached the man. He could not tell if this woman before him was real or if he was merely seeing her because of the fungi, and Echo did not tell him one way or another. But there was something about him that called to her and she felt ready to explore other forests in the world, so she left her hallow with the man, a piece of her tree in her pocket. She joined the group of berserkers and eventually started to help run it, leading the group of those who helped around camp instead of on the battle field. She and the bearded man fell in love, and the rest as they say in fantasy books, is history.