

# CHAPTER 44 - ACALYPHA

## WILKESIANA

Carrying his new items, Shrublely looked for somewhere to rest. There were no undead left to threaten him and his familiar, and none of those centipede things had shown their ugly mandibles in this chamber once.

He limped away and found a cozy hollow between a couple of unmarked graves.

Then he sat down to rest, opening up his inventory to bathe in the nourishing sunlight and speed up the recovery of his health, stamina, and mana.

Shrublely looked into the hovering archway of golden light that was his [Verdant Inventory], finding a great amount of peace and comfort from the pristine section of nature.

It was his own private piece of home. He was certain that it was a reflection of a field he had visited many times with the Druid picking herbs and having a fine day.

*I carry a piece of the Druid's Light with me*, he thought to himself, and felt warmed by more than the sunlight of his private domain.

His various items were spread out amongst grass and flowers. The plants were healthy and colorful, without a hint of corruption from this twisted mirror realm.

It reminded him that his homeland was still within reach, with all its endless places and lands to explore. And it gave him hope that he wasn't going to die in this mirror realm, his only fame being that of a G-Grade adventurer that just happened to be a curious monster.

With his newly regrown arm from the [Graft] Nature essence ability, Shrublely pat his glowbug familiar resting on one of his many leaves.

“It’s a good thing I didn’t need to use [Recovery] to regrow a limb,” he admitted, unsure if it was even possible. If it was, no doubt it would take an extreme amount of mana.

Not that [Graft] took much less. Thankfully, it seemed unlocking the ability gave him a freebie. He hadn’t the mana, stamina, or health to support [Graft], and yet it had still worked.

Though he didn’t feel entirely alone anymore, he still sorely missed his friends, and worried for them greatly. So it remained nice to hear a voice, even if it was his own.

Some part of Shrubley had been greatly concerned he was going to have to be one-armed for the rest of his life. Even though he had a lot of branches tucked away inside his leafy exterior, they didn’t all serve the same purpose. Some were auxiliary and supplementary. Others were primarily for helping his arms and legs.

Like a child with a new toy, Shrubley practiced extending and retracting those crystalline bits out of his newly remade arm. It gave him comfort that some part of his [Practice Sword] remained a part of him.

Sentimentality was part and parcel of who Shrubley was. He didn’t like to see things thrown away or broken. The Druid had been a great recycler of things, finding new purposes for things that anybody else would claim were broken and useless.

He didn’t have quite the degree of awareness to realize how horrifying it would be if, instead of a sentimental sword grafted on, it had been the remains of a person.

Most of Shrubley’s imagination ran toward the bright and glittery fairy tales that he grew up on and the myriad adventurer stories he learned at the Druid’s knee.

It wasn’t in him to think, even for a moment, about [Grafting] hands and claws and all sorts of nightmarish implements onto his body in a bid for more attributes, abilities, or spells.

Shrubley was, at his core, a plant monster, and he wasn’t about to change that anytime soon.

Delicately and with great reverence, he took out the [Death’s Razor] and laid it across his lap.

[Death's Razor]

(Sword, Magic Focus)

(Copper Rank) (☆☆ Uncommon)

*Once the property of the [Bone Knight], now yours by rite of combat. The edge of the blade is darker than night and makes it difficult to see. Due to your inherent power over Nature, the blade has bent to your will and been remade as age-darkened iron oak.*

**Imprint:** Deals mixed physical slashing and magical nature damage. Serves as a focus for spellcasting, enhancing magic duration while equipped. Nature magicks are enhanced two-fold.

**Imprint:** Wounds dealt with this weapon apply [Death's Grasp].

**[Death's Grasp]:** A portion of the damage dealt absorbs all sources of healing and recovery magic or abilities. Repeated use creates additional stacks of [Death's Grasp].

"Iron oak, huh?" He looked over the blade's Shardscript and imprint closely. One told some of the blade's history and its reasoning for the fundamental change, and the imprints presented its direct battle capabilities.

Marked as Copper Rank with an Uncommon rarity, the weapon radiated incredible power in Shrubley's hands. Its damage, imprints and affliction were all more potent than what his Mundane Rank [Practice Sword] had been capable of.

Though, the wooden sword had dealt magical neutral damage, instead of [Death's Razor's] magical nature damage.

*Ah, that suits my Nature essence quite well!* Shrubley thought, his excitement dulled only some by his current predicament.

Wielding [Death's Grasp] would turn him into a formidable adventurer indeed.

Shrubley studied the blade's surface with awe and reverence. "Thank you," he whispered to the fallen [Bone Knight]. "Though your weapon harbors dark powers, I will treat them with caution and respect. The [Death's Razor] will protect me and those I care for."

With his fingers, he felt along the flat of the blade. Iron oak was practically fabled for its strength and flexibility. The Druid had once possessed a staff of the stuff and had batted away a bolt of lightning with it! There hadn't even been a scorch mark afterward.

Shrubley could feel the Nature magic within the core of the sword and he felt blessed by the Shard itself for this gift. It had been hard won, but Shrubley was never the sort of person who thought he was owed anything.

Every good turn came as a pleasant surprise.

For a long while, he sat and meditated, going over the past days in his mind and calming his weary soul. Everything from the training to the flight, being separated from his friends, and even his brush with death.

It was an old habit he had picked up from the Druid but hadn't felt he possessed the time to do it until just now. He breathed in slowly and exhaled softly. The cycling of breath was important, all living things breathed, even if they didn't have typical lungs.

Even Cal breathed, though it wasn't air that he breathed, it was mana.

As if spurred on by this meditation and rest, something suddenly changed within Shrubley.

His leaves began to shimmer with a coppery hue that sent tiny glinting reflections dancing across the graves.

**Rank Up!**

**You have advanced to Copper Rank.**

**+5 to all attributes.**

**+2 attributes gained per level.**

**Classes are now available.**

Immense power surged through Shrubley. Much more than those attributes were worth. It rushed through his mana channels, turning what had been a still pond into a whirling typhoon.

He rode the exhilarating waves of energy, struggling to hold on. It was almost too much to handle, especially since it caught him completely by surprise.

Even though Shrubley aspired to become the strongest adventurer, he began to firmly believe he was a weakling after the trials he endured within this mirror realm.

In some ways, he still was. A soul shrub wasn't as magnificent as a Noble Gold Dragon. Those dragons hatched with incredible strength and an evolved essence passed down from their brood.

For a shrub like Shrubley, he was the complete opposite. He started as among the weakest of monsters, inheriting nothing but the spark of life his father granted him.

He had a long journey to improve himself, and this was just the beginning.

Eager to see exactly how far he had come, he checked his Shardscript.

### [Shrubley]

**Race: Soul Shrub**

**Class: No Guidance Stone or Class Affinity Attuned**

**Rank: Copper**

**Level: 15**

### [Attributes]

**Strength: 25**

**Skill: 29**

**Hardiness: 32**

**Willpower: 41**

**Arcane: 32**

**Restoration: 34**

### [Essences]

**[Curiosity (Black)] (Copper III Rank)**

- **[Lifelong Student]**

## [Nature (Green)] (Copper III Rank)

- [Bark Armor]
- [Budding Barrage]
- [Graft]

## [Light (White)] (Copper II Rank)

- [Recovery]

He had to admit, it was pleasing to see the jump in attributes. He didn't gain very much per level, and now each level granted him twice that amount *and* his Advancement to Copper meant that he gained the equivalent of 5 levels in one go.

That was just a little less than half the levels he had before hitting Copper. It looked like the journey here, the fighting with the serpentii, and then battling the undead skeletons along with the [Bone Knight] had given him an extra 5 levels. Last he checked while they were still training, he was only level 10.

He wondered how his friends were faring.

Once the storm within his body had settled, Shrubley stood up and then immediately toppled to the side as something painful and nauseating hit his very soul like a mallet to a gong.

He shivered and as one, every single leaf on his body wilted and fell off, leaving him looking particularly naked and scraggly. Shrubley struggled to get to his feet, staring at the pile of green leaves in surprise as they melted into a foul-smelling muck.

His glowbug familiar buzzed nearby. It rubbed its legs together, making a sound remarkably like *whomp-whomp*.

Shrubley's body gave off a strange noisome steam that even the glowbug avoided.

*I think I will stay down here a while*, he thought to himself when it became clear that getting up would involve more strength than his body was capable of at the moment.

He didn't understand what was going on. It was scary and odd after having felt so powerful and refreshed only a moment ago.

Eventually Shrubley rode the waves of disorientation until he could sit upright, then stand. A look at his hands revealed more humanoid limbs than before.

They were still twiggy, but now there was enough definition to pick out a wrist, elbow, and even finger joints with tiny whorls patterned on the wood instead of "that bend in the wood looks a bit like an elbow" that he had before.

He felt a little taller, though that could have just been his imagination. Feeling his branches, Shrubley was delighted to find countless tiny red buds where his new sets of leaves were coming in at a rapid pace.

*Thank goodness.*