

SHEYACK

- ▶ **Height:** Up to 3ft
- ▶ **Classification:** Eccentric
- ▶ **Life expectancy:** Over 100 years



This plant's name comes from the Anglicized version of the Arabic word for 'spiky' - shayik, which refers to the sharp, spiny tips of each leaf.

Physiology

The sheyack has a sturdy central stem which grows very slowly, and produces branches at regular intervals. Each branch produces a number of broad, succulent, angular leaves. The leaves are always purple in colour.



The angle and density of the leaves makes the overall plant develop into a cone shape.

The purple colour of sheyacks is considered to be an adaptation to draw attention to the plant, as it gets most of its water from being a landmark in the desert. The more visitors the sheyack gets, the more it thrives.

Reproduction

They also produce small quantities of sap, just enough to leak onto the underside of each leaf and pick up the spores that grow there. Animals find this sap delicious. When they lick it, spores get stuck to their fur, feathers, scales, or skin and drop off later.

Medical Conditions

There are no current medical conditions associated with sheyack plants. However, it is not recommended to eat its leaves as the flesh is bitter and can cause stomach upsets, which in turn causes dehydration, which can be particularly dangerous in the desert.



Geographical Distribution



Theyack thrive in arid environments within travelling distance of an animal population, sapient or non-sapient. They usually occur wherever animals travel by on their way to destinations such as watering holes, food sources, shelter, or settlements.

Position in Ecosystem

Sheyacks serve an important role in aiding navigation through the desert by serving as landmarks.

The sap provides a small amount of nutritional value and is hard to reach due to the density of the plant's leaves. The animals that benefit the most from it are small, warm-blooded animals, as they are small enough for the nutritional and energetic content of the sap to give them a noticeable boost.

Larger animals do not derive noticeable nutritional value from the sap, but enjoy its taste. They must prise the leaves apart to get at the sap. When they do, spores get stuck to their skin, fur, or feathers, which they carry much further away from the parent plant than small animals do.

Non-Apex Predators / Omnivores

The sheyack's sap is a snack for small desert omnivores.

Silt Jawagora

This swift creature sometimes leaves the riverside for a taste of sap. Early-morning forays are easiest for the silt jawagora, as the sheyack holds dew for a short while after sunrise, allowing this jawagora to run to the next one or two plants.

Technology

As ever, the technological level on Kaleida is primitive to the extreme so there isn't a great deal to say here. Nevertheless, there are a few notes worth making here about this plant's deliberate planting and complications around sanitation.

Agriculture

These plants are 'farmed' semi-deliberately by the desert tribes. They recognise that the plants grow along their favoured routes, although they did not know how until an offworlder botanist discovered and explained the process. Until then, the sheyack was considered to be sown by spirits. Despite the true nature of its life cycle now being known, this spiritual view of the sheyack persists.

Collecting Leaves

The sap produced by the leaves is delicious - sweet and reminiscent of red fruits - but the plant only produces this while the leaf is attached to the plant, and only in small quantities. It is therefore impractical to collect and store. Therefore, as this plant can only be enjoyed in the desert, it is appreciated on these terms and is considered a gift from the desert to travellers.

Language

Sheyack plants have a number of colloquial names: "Gift of the desert" and "Sweet-leaf" are the best known. Visitors from planet Earth sometimes call them "purple Christmas trees" or "sticky Christmas trees".

Sanitation

It is understood by sapient species that the sheyack gets most of its moisture from the urine of passing animals, but that urine can render the sap unappetizing or poisonous. Therefore, sapients who wish to water this plant in passing only do so at its base, in order to avoid spoiling the sap for other passers-by. To do otherwise is considered anti-social, and as most sapient species have a keen enough sense of smell to identify individuals from their urine, the culprit is often easy to trace.

History

Sheyacks are helpful to sapients and non-sapients alike, and have increased the chances of survival for many individuals. For this reason they have almost certainly had an impact on history, allowing certain individuals to survive when they may otherwise have perished. The young kasulam and mukash seeking new habitats are a likely example. See *Kasulam Lore Bible* for further details.

Evolution / Genesis

This plant evolved around desert oases, minor watering holes, and major rivers. Growing in these locations provided them with water. However, their range was severely restricted.

At some point in their evolutionary history, sheyack plants began to produce sap and leak it from pores in their leaves. This sap leaked to the underside of the plant and picked up the spores that grow on the underside of the leaves. Animals licked the sap, ingested the spores or got them on their muzzles and forelegs, left the watering holes to journey towards other locations, and shed the spores from their fur, feathers, or skin, or passed them in their dung on the way. Their urine watered the spores, which allowed them to germinate.

Most plants that germinated as a result of this process died from the heat of the sun, but a few survived. This was because some of the animals that passed by the young sheyacks used them as messaging spots as they passed by marking them with their urine. This provided the plants with all the water they needed on an ongoing basis.

Changes in Standards of Living

The presence of sheyack plants along a route make travelling through the desert safer, so as such they improve the mesolithics' (and non-sapients') standard of living.

Trade Routes

While none of the mesolithics of Kaleida have trade routes, the sheyack plant would make pathfinding on a trade route easier.

👉 Culture 👈

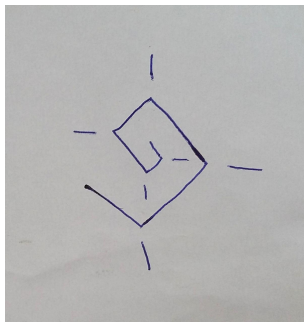
Overall, these plants have a positive image in the cultures of the intelligent species of Kaleida. They are considered to be guides, sources of a much-needed pick-me-up for travellers, and life-savers for the lost.

Food

Sheyack leaves contain large amounts of water, a desirable resource in the desert. However, they are unsuitable for eating as their flesh is bitter. By contrast, the sap is considered a delicacy. See *Agriculture* for more details.

Art

Sapient species enjoy the symbolism of this plant and its conspicuous appearance. Those who are able to produce colourful works of art sometimes draw sheyack. Such artworks are often used as a sign of welcome or hospitality to a settlement, burrow, cave, or other home.



The plant also holds symbolic value as a guide, landmark, or life-saver. Quarantine burrow entrances in kasulam-mukash burrows are often marked with a stylised spiked spiral to denote them as a place of respite. See *Kasulam Lore Bible* for more details.

Fables

The sheyack plant features in a fable told by the kasulam, often in the company of young pinno' grath, to reduce predation.

Traveller, the Hunter, and the Sheyack

On the dawn of one morning, a kasulam traveller walked from one sheyack plant to the next, to visit her mother's tribe to tell them that she and her brothers and sisters had found a safe place to live. The light was still dim so the sheyacks were covered in dew

from which she drank, but she could not see very far, so she was surprised when a pinno' grath found her.

"Aha!" the pinno' grath hunter said. "A kasulam, all alone. Now I can eat!"

The kasulam was terrified but could not escape, and was eaten.

Because she was eaten, she never reached her mother's tribe. Because she never reached her mother's tribe, the tribe thought that travelling that way was too dangerous and they never sent their youngsters there again. Because they never sent their youngsters there again, the spirits let the sheyacks die. The sheyacks withered and turned to dust, so the dew had nothing to rest on.

On the dawn of another morning, the pinno' grath hunter's children tried to find a drink in the desert. As the kasulam were gone, so were the sheyacks, and there was nothing for them to drink. They perished, and the sands became as featureless as a rock.

Religion and Spirituality

The mesolithics of Kaleida believe that the sheyack is aided by spirits to grow in the desert, as their positioning along favoured routes seemed so convenient as to appear deliberate. Since the arrival of the offworlders, botanists have discovered the true life cycle of the plant and explained it to the desert-dwelling locals, but most of them prefer to believe the spiritual explanation or to accept both.

In addition to this, the symbol for quarantine dens in mukash-kasulam burrows has become associated with shamans, who perform healing rituals.

Politics

The role sheyack plants play in highlighting popular desert routes means that predators can use these paths to locate prey. Historically, pinno' grath have caught travelling mukash or kasulam this way.

This ongoing dynamic prompted the fable of the Traveller, the Hunter, and the Sheyack. See the *Art* section under *Culture*.

Economy

Sheyack are valuable signposts, and can play a helpful role in keeping disparate communities in touch.

Business

Sheyack sap occurs in too-small quantities to be used as a commodity. The sparsity of the sap is a noted characteristic of this plant, and is the reason for it being considered a gift from the desert rather than a controllable - and therefore tradeable - item.

Education

To describe the sheyack's contribution to the intelligent Kaleida communities as 'education' would be distinctly stretching the definition, but they do represent knowledge by providing landmarks on popular routes.

Youngsters of most species are routinely taught about sheyacks, as a lost individual in the desert can use them to find their way to a (hopefully) hospitable community.

Healthcare and Medicine

Sheyack have no known medicinal value, but can shorten the length of time a traveller might spend wandering in the desert, so can be argued to be medically beneficial.

Travel / Transport

Sheyacks are helpful to travellers through the desert. Their deep purple colour makes them highly conspicuous, and their tendency to grow in toileting spots on desert trails, lends them the role of signpost, that a traveller is heading the right way.

Credits

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~Hayley, The Character Consultancy