

Deadeye's Servant: A Guide to the Archer Paladin



By Michael Laakso

Preface

When someone tells you to picture a paladin, what do you see? A knight atop his noble steed? A warrior brandishing a sword and shield? A paranoiac ready to let loose at the slightest hint of evil?

What I'm betting you don't see is a pious marksman striking down villains from thirty paces. And that's a shame, because archery is easily one of the most powerful combat styles in Pathfinder. Although paladins lack the fighter's weapon training and the ranger's prerequisite-breaking bonus feats, they do have some handy healing abilities, excellent saves, and the devastating smite. This guide will go over how to build and play an archery paladin in Pathfinder, with an emphasis on Pathfinder Society play.

Like most Pathfinder guides, options will be color-coded as follows:

- **Blue:** [YES! YES! YES!](#)
- **Green:** Other good stuff, even if it's not the best.
- **Orange:** Not very good, but you could do worse.
- **Red:** [NO! NO! NO!](#)

Ability Scores

Dexterity: This is far and away your most important stat for obvious reasons. Humans and half-humans should put their floating bonus here.

Charisma: This is your second most important stat. It will affect your spellcasting, saves, smites, lay on hands, channeling, and diplomacy. Try to get at least a 14 or 15 to start.

Strength: This is important, but not as much as you might think. When building my archer paladin for PFS, I made the mistake of pumping strength at the expense of other stats. Although a high strength score will let you use a more damaging composite longbow, taking it past 14 or so starts to give diminishing returns. Grab a masterwork backpack or a handy haversack if encumbrance is an issue.

Constitution: This doesn't need to be very high. You have d10 hit dice, will be staying in the back, and can heal yourself as a swift action. I recommend a 12. Never, ever let constitution go below 10 on this or any character.

Intelligence: This isn't very important either, but paladins only get two skill ranks per level, so I would think twice before dumping it. 10 should be doable, though, especially if you're human.

Wisdom: Apart from Will saves and perception checks, wisdom does little for you. Feel free to dump it.

Here are some sample point buys after racial modifiers, using a human:

- 10 point: STR 12 DEX 16 CON 12 INT 10 WIS 7 CHA 14
- 15 point: STR 14 DEX 17 CON 12 INT 10 WIS 7 CHA 14
- 20 point: STR 14 DEX 18 CON 12 INT 10 WIS 7 CHA 15
- 25 point: STR 14 DEX 18 CON 12 INT 10 WIS 8 CHA 16

Race

Human: Humans can excel in any class, and paladins are no exception. The floating racial bonus will obviously be going into dexterity, the extra skill rank per level is nice since paladins don't have many to go around, and the bonus feat is great news for such a feat-heavy build.

Half-elf: Another great choice. The perception bonus is good since you'll likely be dumping wisdom (and it does stack with Skill Focus if you're so inclined), and multitalented will benefit builds that take levels in fighter. If you have the ARG, consider the dual-minded alternate racial trait.

Halfling: If you want to be small, this is your best bet. The strength penalty stinks, but you still get bonuses to your two most important stats. I'm not sure how useful sure-footed will be, but you can swap it out to get your movement speed up to 30.

Half-orc: The floating bonus alone brings half-orcs up to green. Darkvision is also a great thing to have and will save you some frustration. If you're looking for an unorthodox choice for your paladin, you could do a whole lot worse.

Elf: Elves naturally make good archers, but I'm not convinced they're the best choice here. The

weapon familiarity is useless since paladins are already proficient with martial weapons, elven magic won't be all that useful either, and the intelligence bonus and constitution penalty cancel out.

Gnome: The charisma bonus is nice, but the strength penalty hurts more than the constitution bonus helps, and you don't even get a bump to dexterity. That said, the ability to talk to animals could come in handy if you want to go the mounted route.

Dwarf: You don't get bonuses to either of your two most important stats, plus there's a charisma penalty. Pass.

I wasn't originally going to mention non-core races, but there is one race that's so good I'm including it anyway:

Aasimar (Azata-Blooded): A friend of mine made the case that aasimar might be the best choice of all, assuming you have access to the Blood of Angels player companion. You get bonuses to your two most important stats with no stat penalty, darkvision, a bonus to diplomacy, and a whole lot more. This is incredible.

Weapon/ammo

Composite longbow: No other weapon comes close. Damage is high, the range is long, nocking an arrow is part of the attack action (so no need to worry about reloading), and you can even use it while mounted. What's not to like?

DR/cold iron is relatively common and cold iron arrows are dirt cheap, so you might as well use those as your default ammunition. Blunt and alchemical silver arrows are also cheap, so have quivers of those on hand as well. It pays to be prepared!

Feats

Point-Blank Shot: Take this at first level. No excuses. You'll be doing a lot of shooting from 30 feet or less anyway, so take advantage of it. The real reason you should take this right away, though, is because it's a prerequisite for so many other great feats.

Precise Shot: Another feat that should be taken ASAP. Particularly in PFS, firing into melee is a fact of life as an archer. Grab this and avoid that nasty -4 penalty. Divine hunter paladins get this for free without needing to meet the prerequisite. More on that later.

Improved Precise Shot: The prerequisites are pretty steep, but not having to worry about your teammates providing cover for your attacks is totally worth it. Pick this up at 11th level.

Rapid Shot: More attacks. Do I really need to say anything else?

Manyshot: As if you didn't have enough arrows flying down range already, this feat adds more oomph to your full attacks. The only downside is that you spend more arrows per round, so bring plenty of them.

Deadly Aim: Basically Power Attack for ranged attackers. Remember how I said earlier that you didn't need a very high strength score? Here's why. Unless you need an exceptionally high d20 roll to hit your target, you should be using this feat every time you attack.

Clustered Shots: Not only will this feat significantly improve your damage when you're up against DR you can't bypass, but the mental image of a rain of arrows coming down on your enemy all at once is pretty cool. Great synergy with Rapid Shot and Manyshot.

Weapon Focus (longbow): A bonus on attack rolls is always nice. More importantly, it's a prerequisite for...

Snap Shot: If you want to get attacks of opportunity with your bow, look no further. The improved version is also worth picking up.

Combat Reflexes: Take this feat if you're going to use Snap Shot. Don't if you're not.

Critical Focus (longbow): Bow crits are amazing. Take this and get more of them.

Extra Lay On Hands: Although lay on hands is a pretty sweet ability, this probably isn't worth a feat slot.

Far Shot: How often are you going to be shooting from more than 110 feet away?

Traits

Magical Knack (Magic): Even if you don't plan on multiclassing, it's worth looking at this trait since it makes your caster level equal your paladin level -1 instead of -3. You don't have a whole lot of spell slots at your disposal, but at least you can make your buffs last longer. This used to be banned in PFS, but is now permitted.

Indomitable Faith (Faith): I know Will is supposed to be a good save for paladins, but with wisdom as a dump stat, it will probably end up as your worst (unless you're a half-elf with the dual-minded racial trait). Highly recommended.

Observant (Grand Lodge faction) / Tomb Raider (Osirion faction) / Eyes and Ears of the City (Religion, Abadar): Perception is arguably the best skill in the game and something I personally try to max on every character. Getting it as a class skill is well worth spending a trait.

Dangerously Curious (Magic): UMD is the other contender for the best skill in the game. You have a good charisma score, so if you think you'll have the skill ranks to spare, go for it.

Well-Informed (Race, Halfling): If you want to be a party face, this is right up your alley. Knowledge (local) is a nice skill to have.

Patient Optimist (Religion, Erastil): This is another trait that will help characters who expect to do a lot of talking.

Reactionary (Combat) / Elven Reflexes (Race, Half-Elf) / Warrior of Old (Race, Elf): Going first is

never a bad thing, but your high dexterity means you'll already have a good initiative modifier.

Multiclassing

If you're interested in multiclassing, the only class that jumps out at me as particularly effective is fighter. Your base attack bonus won't suffer by taking levels in it, and the bonus feats are an archer's best friend. Dipping a few levels could, for example, help you with a Snap Shot build since you need so many feats. However, keep in mind that taking levels in other classes will delay your paladin class features, including your already-subpar spellcasting. For what it's worth, I went straight paladin in my PFS build.

Divine Hunter

Divine hunter is an archetype from Ultimate Combat, and it's the only paladin archetype I recommend for this build. At first glance, it seems tailor-made for the archer paladin. Let's break it down line by line:

Precise Shot: If you're not a human and don't want to dip into fighter, you can still get this all-important feat at first level. Besides, it's not like you were planning to wear heavy armor any time soon.

Shared Precision: It sounds cool in theory, but I think I can count all the times this has been useful on one hand. If there are other ranged combatants in the party, chances are they already have Precise Shot. Also, the radius of the effect is rather small and you still have to hit the target once before it works.

Divine Bond: This is, at least in my mind, a straight downgrade from the standard divine bond. If you wanted a mount, this will probably be a deal-breaker.

Distant Mercy: Seriously? You should be spending your standard actions putting holes in monsters, not doing combat healing.

Aura of Care: Now this is more like it! The only reason this isn't blue is because your allies can't be more than 10 feet away from you, so you'll still probably want to pick up Improved Precise Shot.

Hunter's Blessing: Like with Shared Precision, allies who would benefit from this ability probably already have these feats. Aura of Justice is much better.

Righteous Hunter: If you don't already have the Holy enchantment on your longbow, here's your answer to DR/good. Your fellow ranged combatants will love you for the shared effect.

To summarize, there are some decent perks in this archetype, but whether they're worth what you give up will depend on your build. I would say divine hunter is worth taking if you're not a human and/or are only planning to take a few levels in paladin. The first-level perk is worth its weight in gold and you're not giving up a whole lot for the first five or so levels. Human paladins

who don't plan to multiclass should think twice.

Conclusion

Thanks for reading my guide. This is a build that's very dear to me and I hope I can help someone out there enjoy it. I could not have done this guide alone, though. One person I absolutely have to give a shout-out to is Bodhizen on the Paizo boards, for his phenomenal paladin optimization guide which helped me when I was first starting out. I also want to thank all the people who have played alongside me in the Austin and San Antonio PFS scenes for giving me build advice, helping me learn how to play Pathfinder in general, and putting up with my constant blathering about my characters' backstories. God bless all of you.

If there's something you think I should add to this guide, or that you disagree with, feel free to leave a reply in the discussion thread. This is my first guide and I would love to hear feedback on it.