DRAGON

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A Dungeons & Dragons Roleplaying Game Supplement

Editorial: Open Window

by Christopher Perkins

Illustration by Howard Lyon

This month in *Dragon*® and *Dungeon*®, we offer a savory blend of Oriental intrigue and Halloween terror—two great tastes that, like chocolate and peanut butter, go great together. The latter makes sense given the season, and the former came about as a result of resurrecting the idea of monthly themes. Mike Mearls suggested the idea of a Kara-Tur theme earlier this year, and several freelance writers delivered kick-ass content to back it up. In November, we have articles tied to the theme of fey magic (to support *Player's Option: Heroes of the Feywild*™ and the next D&D Encounters™ season), and in December you'll see content tied to a theme we like to call "touch of evil" (in support of *The Book of Vile Darkness*™).

We have a few themes in mind for early next year ("romance & royalty" in January, "gods & primordials" in February, and "skullduggery" in March), and we're hoping to build future themes around the articles and adventures we receive from our contributors. In a recent poll, folks expressed interest in themes tied to classic D&D® campaign settings (Dragonlance®, Ravenloft®, and Planescape® being the three most popular), and we're open to

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seeing 4th Edition article proposals that hearken back to classic campaign settings, particularly if the articles can be adapted for a DM's home campaign with minimal effort. The extent to which we tie content to a given theme will vary month to month; sometimes it might be just three or four articles, and other times (like this month) the theme might carry the bulk of the content. Some other themes we've kicked around the office include "demons & devils," "anchor's away," "war," "undeath," and "the Underdark." The themes we choose are ultimately informed by what you send us. Which brings us to the topic at hand . . .

The submission window is now open! Until the window closes on November 30, 2011, we are accepting article proposals for *Dragon* and *Dungeon*. The next submission window doesn't open until March of next year, so if you've been sitting on a good idea for a D&D article or adventure, now's the time to write it up and send it to submissions@wizards.com. First, be sure to check out our submission guidelines.

We promise to reply to your email proposal no later than 60 days after the window closes, although chances are good that you'll hear back from us before then. We reply to email submissions in the order in which we receive them, and it's okay to send multiple proposals in a single email; in fact, we prefer to receive proposals in batches. However, we judge each pitch on its own merits, so volume is less important than quality.

Greg Bilsland and I are the first line of defense when it comes to proposals. It's our job (and pleasure) to sift through the submissions inbox in search of gems. We pull out the shiny ones and set up meetings with the staff to discuss them. After each of these meetings, Greg or I condense the group's feedback into rejection letters (boo!) or requests for complete articles (yay!).

Our readership has diverse tastes. Some subscribers prefer "rules lite" story content, in particular world development and character-building advice. Others prefer crunchy mechanical content—feats, powers, magic items, and the like. Still others favor something in between. We urge writers to err toward story-focused content, since heaps of new feats and powers end cluttering up an already cluttered system. And frankly, designing a feat or power that's both good *and* original is a lot harder than most people think. Consider articles that tackle a particular subject in greater depth than we're accustomed to seeing in a print product, or that takes something that exists in the game currently and recasts it in an interesting way (for example, an article we published last month took the artificer class out of the Eberron® setting and found a home for it in the Forgotten Realms® setting).

Pretty much the only thing we *don't* want to see are articles chock full of new mechanics with only a thin veneer of story to explain away their existence—that, and your 300-page campaign setting! We're unlikely to accept a proposal for a new class. Given the time and resources it takes to playtest a new class and program it into the D&D Character Builder, we prefer to design classes in-house. We're also wary about adding new races to the game, but we'll make an exception if it's thematically appropriate; the hengeyokai, which releases this month, is a good example.

Here's one recipe for a good article proposal: Take an idea you're passionate about. Run the idea past some of your gamer friends and see if they think it's cool. Do a bit of research to see whether the idea's been done before. Find a way to make the idea resonate with as many readers as you can. Then submit.

The best proposals are short and concise. You can usually encapsulate an article or adventure idea in a short paragraph. Be sure to include a title and estimated word count as part of your pitch, and let us know what new mechanical elements the article includes. For example:

Title: The Ecology of the Modron
Estimated Word Count: 5,000
Description: Modrons march to the beat of a different drum. This article explores their orderly, clockwork life and the mystery behind "rogue modrons." The article also includes statistics for a rogue modron NPC companion.

When we read a proposal, we're looking for ideas we haven't seen before (or in a good long while) or which address a perceived need or demand. Although we rarely have time to participate in forum conversations, we skim forums and message boards to see what folks are clamoring for. You can scour the forums, but be warned: *You are not alone!* Other would-be contributors are doing the same thing, and so the competition is fierce. Six months ago, after players on our forums clamored for more runepriest class support, we were bombarded by runepriest article proposals, of which we could only hope to publish one or two. If you're the type

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of writer who doesn't thrive on competition, your research time is better spent elsewhere.

Character themes are the new hotness. The concept was introduced in the *Dark Sun® Campaign Setting* and featured in the *Neverwinter™ Campaign Setting*, and we've published several character themes in *Dragon* (and have more in the pipeline). If you plan to submit a proposal for a new theme or two (or three or four), be advised that you're not alone. You'll be competing with lots of other folks for our attention.

If you're looking for the path of least resistance, consider submitting an idea for a "Backdrop" article (which explores a location in one of our published campaign settings), a "Bestiary" article (new monsters tethered to a clever theme), a "Bazaar of the Bizarre" article (thematically linked magic items), a "History Check" article (mechanics-light, edition-proof recounts of the classic stories of D&D), or one of our recurring planar articles such as "Domains of Dread" (all about the darklords of the Shadowfell), "Demonomicon of Iggwilv" (all about the Abyss), "Codex of Betrayal" (all about the Nine Hells), "Lords of Chaos" (all about primordials), or "Court of Stars" (all about archfey). We also have a popular series called "Channel Divinity," which explores various gods and their devout worshipers. Although we've pretty much exhausted the core deities at this point, we hope to explore more campaign-specific gods in future installments. If you're looking for a challenge, try pitching an "Unearthed Arcana" article (optional or variant rules). We've published several good ones of late, including jousting rules and 0-level character rules, and we have a few more in the works (rules for arcane duels, a different take on the Far Realm, and a way to track combat injuries using a print-it-yourself deck of cards). You could also try your hand at a "Class Acts" article (articles that show a familiar class in a new light).

Adventures are harder to write than articles, but our DMs can't get enough of them! You need to sell us on three things: the plot (what the villains are up to), the hook (how the heroes get involved), and the setting. We're looking for memorable villains and locations with character, particularly dungeon settings. (The magazine is called *Dungeon*, after all.) We're looking for adventures of all levels, and if you really want to get our attention, take something that's familiar to D&D players, like goblins, and put a clever spin on it. Goblins riding behemoths, for example, is something we've never seen before. Similarly, you might think bandits are boring, but that's probably because you've never considered a gang of treant bandits ("when nature attacks!") or a tiefling bandit who's stealing paintings of the Nine Hells for some fell purpose. A clever spin can do wonders.

We could use more Side Treks, which are single-encounter scenarios that DMs can use as interludes between longer adventures. If you're new to adventure writing, a Side Trek is a nice way to get your feet wet. That said, if you have an awesome idea for a longer adventure (between 5,000 and 15,000 words), pitch it. When it comes to adventures, the only proposals we don't want to see are for adventure *series*. Please, just send us one-off ideas. If we publish an adventure that turns out to be very popular, we *might* commission a sequel, but don't try to sell us on a 45,000-word adventure broken into three 15,000-word parts. We've had great success with series in the past, but we prefer to come up with those ideas ourselves and assign series adventures to freelance writers we've worked with before.

If the past is any indication, we expect to receive between 1,500 and 2,000 unique proposals over the next two months. Compare that number to the number of freelance articles we publish in a typical year (around 100 to 120), and you get a sense of the competition. The two most common reasons for rejection are (1) your idea is similar to another idea we liked better or (2) we've explored that idea to our satisfaction. For example, we don't need and can't afford to publish three different articles about runepriests in one year. If someone proposes a really cool runepriest article and we end up requesting a first draft, that doesn't bode well for the other runepriest proposals in the submissions inbox. We still read every proposal, because who knows—we might stumble upon a second runepriest article that's different enough from the first one and cool enough on its own to warrant publication. This did, in fact, happen—which is why we have a runepriest article this month and another one tentatively planned for December. But that probably means we won't be publishing any runepriest support in 2012, given the number of other classes in the game.

The realities of the publishing business aside, I look forward to seeing your article and adventure ideas over the next two months. I'm also anxious to flesh out next year's themes and pack the schedule full of articles and adventures that will surprise and delight our readers. *Dragon* and *Dungeon* remain, after all these years, the best ways to break into the RPG publishing industry. We pay well for the articles we publish, and we take pride in helping our freelancers develop as writers. If you're a struggling perfectionist like me, who sees rejection as an opportunity for improvement rather than a barrier, then you'll succeed one way or another. Best-case scenario, you might end up becoming one of our most prolific contributors if not a future employee. As someone who kick-started his gaming career by writing adventures for *Dungeon*, I know what I'm talking about.

If you're not interested in submitting article and adventure proposals but have opinions about this month's theme or issue themes in general, we'd love to hear from you. Feel free to drop us a quick note at dndinsider@wizards.com.

Class Acts: Assassin

Secrets of the Ninja

By Dave Chalker

Illustration by Kerem Beyit

Look into my eyes as your life slips away. You may be filled with terror. You may want to cry out, but find you cannot. You may be wondering what happens next. You probably hate me for bringing you to this point. But you are about to learn the ultimate secret, and go where even the gods fear to tread. You are about to experience the mystery that we spend our whole lives trying to understand; and in these final seconds, I wish to share it with you, as I have with hundreds of others.

The Ninja Assassin

Of all the warriors in the realm to draw steel in combat, the ninja is the most mysterious. The streets are full of whispered rumors about these silent spies and killers, who seem able to appear anywhere at any time. Some say that ninja can alter their appearances so skillfully that one of them can stand before a victim in the guise of a lifelong friend or trusted retainer, and awaken no suspicion; and that they can kill with a single sword stroke. Even mighty warlords in their castles are careful to never offend a ninja

NINJA IN D&D

The ninja appeared in the 1st Edition *Oriental Adventures* as a fully playable class for the Kara-Tur campaign setting. Such characters were required to have a dual class of ninja and a "cover class" to hide their true nature, and divided their XP between the two. In 2nd Edition AD&D, *The Complete Ninja's Handbook* presented the ninja as a complete class, with a variety of kits to further customize the ninja's abilities (while also opening up the option of an all-ninja campaign). A full ninja class appeared in the 3rd Edition *Oriental Adventures* handbook, for playing such a character in the world of Rokugan. This article brings the Kara-Tur ninja to 4th Edition D&D as an option for the executioner assassin from *Player's Option: Heroes of Shadow*™.

Most modern historians in the real world agree that the images of ninja in popular culture are pure fiction, from their style of dress to their choice of weapons and their purported abilities. In the mythical world of D&D, however, this may all be fact. And besides, what better way for the ninja to hide than to be dismissed as invention?

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clan, lest their offending tongues be silenced swiftly and permanently.

These rumors only touch on the truth, though the ninja make no effort to correct any falsehoods. Indeed, the mysteries that surround the ninja are part of their power. The secret of how one comes to be a ninja is guarded so closely that any who discover it without the consent of a ninja clan find themselves hunted. This and other secrets of the ninja are revealed here once and for all, for those who wish to join their ranks and adventure in Kara-Tur.

Origins of the Ninja

Before the forging of the Empire of Shou Lung, would-be warlords and conquerors warred against each other in constant struggle. Mercenary spies and assassins soon found that if they were good at discovering secrets and assassinating enemy leaders, they would be well rewarded by those in power. These original "shadow men" formed small companies for mutual protection, sold their talents to the highest bidder, and ensured that it would be well known when an assassination was their work.

Had this state of affairs continued, the shadow men would have become little more than a highly specialized variety of mercenary fighter. However, something changed with every assassination they performed. The assassins began to see something in the eyes of those they killed: a glimpse of what lay beyond the veil of death. As each life slipped away, the assassins met their victims' dying gaze and felt something reach out to them from beyond. A cold and powerful force seemed to draw away a portion of the assassin's soul, and in return gave a portion of shadow power to the assassin.

The assassins began to discover that the power they received from these deaths allowed them to manifest new abilities: commanding the darkness, enhancing their natural prowess, and allowing them to fade from sight. The mercenary assassins were gone. The ninja had arrived.

The Way of Secrets

The age of war in Shou Lung ended with the coming of the imperial dynasty. Though conflict did not end with the arrival of the empire, the ninja knew that their services as spies and assassins would not be as needed in the new age as they had been before.

Still, there were those who needed secrets uncovered and enemies removed; and the ninja wished to continue their shadowy way of life, especially their quest to draw power from the dying. Thus the ninja transitioned into civic life, dissolving their former mercenary companies and re-forming into clans.

The clans became central to a ninja's life, handling the business end of spying and assassination and providing protection from retribution. Secrecy was paramount, both for avoiding the clan's enemies and for making sure that no one would discover the source of their power. Some clans hid within businesses, others within remote monasteries in the mountains, and some within temples. Legend speaks of a shrine where a tithe given to the priest along with a slip of rice paper bearing a person's name marks that person as a target for the ninja.

The Honor of the Ninja

Most samurai believe that the ninja have no honor. Indeed, the code that governs the rigid life of a samurai has no meaning to a ninja. Instead, the ninja keep their own code that revolves around what they value the most: keeping secrets.

The most important tenet to a ninja is to keep the secrets of all ninja. Revealing anything about how the ninja came to be or the source of their power is the highest form of disgrace for a ninja. A ninja who drinks too much sake and reveals one of the ninja's secrets is likely to find himself hunted by all ninja clans, as well as putting in danger all those who were within earshot.

The secrets of one's clan are also sacrosanct. The location and operations of a clan are to be kept hidden, even under torture or in times of great need. Anything that threatens to expose the clan threatens all clan members, their allies, and their families. Sacrificing yourself to keep the clan hidden is considered honorable among the ninja, even when the clans are operating at cross purposes. Additionally, any mission undertaken by a ninja is considered to be an extension of the clan itself, so its details should be held to the same standard.

Finally, as a valued agent of a clan, each ninja is expected to keep the secret of his identity safe. This means performing most missions in the dark garments (*gi*) by which they are usually identified. Just as often (but not as widely known), a ninja will use a disguise to complete a mission. The only restriction in either case is that a ninja should never cover his eyes. The ability to see into the soul of the dying was the ninja's first gateway to power and thus needs to be preserved on every mission.

Becoming a Ninja

Ninja are recruited from all ages, races, and social classes. From the street urchin who has a knack for being in the right place to overhear important gossip, to the old man who runs the noodle house where the nobility like to eat, each has value in the eyes of the ninja clans. Some clans distinguish themselves by recruiting from certain races, while others recruit from certain geographical areas. There is even a clan dedicated solely to battling the yakuza, which recruits those who have shown themselves to be enemies of organized crime.

Joining a ninja clan usually happens in one of two ways. First, an individual might show promise in front of a ninja. Usually the individual does not realize that he is being observed by a ninja while performing an act of great skill or cleverness, or uncovering a valuable secret.

Then there are those who seek to become ninja. Whether such an individual is fascinated by the legends or is one of the rare few who have seen a ninja in action and lived, these would-be assassins set out in search of one of the ninja clans. It is said that one's first trial in becoming a ninja this way is discovering the identity of a ninja who could accept you into the clan: any who can do this are worthy, for one who can find a ninja is capable of finding an assassination target no matter where he hides.

In either case, the other members of the clan will abduct a promising would-be ninja in the dead of night, delivering a mild poison that knocks the recruit out so that the clan can bring him to the first training ground without revealing its location. There, the applicant undergoes a series of tests in a variety of environments, from the slopes of treacherous mountains to the high ledges above the city streets. Success on these tests proves that the applicant is worthy to receive the secrets of the ninja and willing to obey the clan's orders. The applicant is then instructed to kill a living being that has a soul and stare into its eyes, so as to see beyond death itself and begin to gain the true power of the ninja. If the applicant survives this process with his sanity intact, he is inducted into the clan, though it takes years of training in various weapons and techniques before he becomes a full ninja. If he fails, the applicant might find himself turned over to the city guards for murder, to be locked away forever babbling about phantom ninja. If the applicant proves especially unreliable, he may find himself seeing death firsthand.

Ninja Adventurers

The life of a ninja, with its strict clan obligations, might seem incompatible with many adventuring parties. However, a variety of ninja archetypes do fit well with an adventuring party in Kara-Tur (and beyond), though they often come from unusual backgrounds.

While many ninja missions of espionage or assassination tend to be short, some require a more long-term approach. Because of this fact, some ninja work toward a goal that requires many steps to achieve. Not all assassination targets are powerless or even humanoid, after all. A mighty lich lord might require extensive study in order to find his phylactery, disable his magical defenses, and undermine his undead empire—not a task that can be accomplished in a single evening. A ninja might find an adventuring party with a similar goal and join them in performing all of these steps, along with meeting whatever other challenges come up along the way. A ninja on such a long-term assignment will likely adopt a cover identity for the entire time he works with a party. Once the mission is complete, the ninja might petition the clan to remain with the party if the characters have proven useful. Otherwise, the ninja may vanish into the night, leaving no clue for his former companions as to his true intentions.

Some clans prefer to take a more proactive approach rather than receiving missions from those who can afford to pay. They seek knowledge in all its forms, addicted to secrets that no one else possesses. Some ninja are charged with discovering as many secrets as they can, no matter where the quest takes them. These seekers will join up with adventuring parties, especially those who do a great deal of exploration and traveling. The ninja reports secrets discovered back to his clan by means of trained carrier pigeons or other agents of the clan that he met while abroad. If anything particularly important is found, the ninja might be instructed to try to keep its existence hidden. This dictate might lead him into conflict with other adventurers, who are inclined to boast about what they discover. These seekers may even let on to their companions that they are ninja, though they still likely maintain a secret identity for traveling purposes.

The most dangerous type of ninja is the renegade, one who is hunted by his ninja clan (or all clans) for betrayal or disobedience. Such a ninja posses the deadly powers of his brethren but uses them to survive. Cut off from his resources with no one he can trust, a renegade ninja might join up with an adventuring party, offering his skills in exchange for mutual protection. Bringing to bear the powers of a ninja without their attendant obligations, a renegade ninja might find new challenges in the world beyond the clan. However, a life on the run can end in only one of two ways: Either the ninja will be caught and killed by the clan, or he will find a way to destroy the clan

NINJA OUTSIDE KARA-TUR

In Kara-Tur, ninja might be mysterious, but they are known to exist. In other settings, they might be spoken of only in the most obscure of urban legends. Other assassins might even regard them as myth. A ninja character's clan might be the only clan that exists, and so the ninja's reach might not be as extensive. In such a case, they must make up for their limited influence with deadliness.

In the D&D core setting, consider making ninja followers of Vecna who saw the Maimed God of Secrets in the eyes of the dying, and forged a pact with him in order to gain their shadow magic. In return, Vecna might have instilled in them the desire to discover new secrets to feed to him, as well as an urge to add more living beings to the ranks of the dead. There may also be ninja clans who follow Ioun, providing her with knowledge in return for magical power. They are less concerned with operating as paid assassins, though they are still fascinated by death in all its forms.

that hunts him. Successfully escaping from a group of highly trained assassins is very difficult, and thus the story of the renegade ninja usually ends in tragedy.

Alternative Class Features

Instead of one of the guilds discussed in *Player's Option: Heroes of Shadow*, you can select the Way of the Ninja as your guild.

The Way of the Ninja teaches that secrets are power. Use the secrets you have learned to strike in an unexpected way. Utilize all that you know to defeat your target, and to accomplish your mission. Keep safe the secrets of your clan, even if it means your death. Mixing melee, reach, and ranged weapons means that you will never be caught off guard no matter the situation, but your opponents will.

You gain the powers *ninja-to rush*, *poisonous shuriken*, and *whirling kusari-gama*. In addition, you have proficiency with shuriken and the kusari-gama, your Attack Finesse class feature also applies to kusari-gama and shuriken, and your assassin poisons that can be applied to ammunition can also be applied to your shuriken.

Ninja-to Rush — Assassin Attack

Coming from an unexpected direction, surprise and momentum combine to form a powerful strike.

At-Will ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Requirement: You must use this power with a short sword.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. AC. If you have jumped, fallen, or flown this turn, you gain combat advantage against the target for this attack.
Hit: 1[W] + Dexterity modifier damage.
Level 21: 2[W] + Dexterity modifier damage.
Special: When charging, you can use this power in place of a melee basic attack.

Poisonous Shuriken — Assassin Attack

Your foes barely feel it when the sharp metal pierces their skin. They certainly feel it after that.

At-Will ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Ranged** weapon
Requirement: You must use this power with shuriken.
Target: One, two, or three creatures
Attack: Dexterity vs. AC
Hit: 1[W] damage.
Level 21: 2[W] damage.
Special: If you deliver an assassin poison with this attack, it applies to each target hit by this attack, even if the poison would normally be applied to only a single piece of ammunition.

Whirling Kusari-gama — Assassin Attack

Though your foe is watching the chain, it really should be watching the sickle.

At-Will ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Requirement: You must use this power with a kusari-gama.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. Reflex
Hit: Dexterity modifier damage, and the target falls prone. You can shift 1 square and make the secondary attack with the secondary end of the kusari-gama.
Secondary Target: One creature
Secondary Attack: Dexterity vs. AC
Hit: 1[W] damage.
Level 21: 2[W] damage.

Assassin Utility Powers

This section includes utility powers for the assassin, designed especially for ninja characters.

Smoke Bomb — Assassin Utility 2

With an alchemical concoction mixed with a bit of shadow magic, you conjure a wall of smoke to cover your escape.

Encounter ✦ Shadow, Zone
Immediate Reaction **Close** burst 1
Trigger: An enemy enters a square adjacent to you.
Effect: The burst creates a lightly obscured zone that lasts until the end of your next turn. You can then shift up to your speed.

Feathery Tread — Assassin Utility 6

Even the sea cannot keep you from your target.

Encounter ✦ Shadow
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: Until the start of your next turn, you float an inch above the ground. You ignore difficult terrain and can both move across liquid and stand on it as if it were solid ground.

Veil of a Thousand Faces — Assassin Utility 10

You shed your identity as easily as you shed your clothes.

At-Will ✦ Illusion, Shadow
Standard Action **Personal**
Prerequisite: You must have the Flawless Disguise class feature.
Effect: You craft a new disguise. You gain a +2 power bonus to the Bluff checks made to prevent detection.

Tools of the Ninja

While the ninja pride themselves on being able to use a variety of weapons specific to the job they are undertaking, they have developed several tools that see widespread use.

Manual of Ninjutsu — Level 3+ Uncommon

The most basic manual of the ninja teaches the secret of using the shadows as a weapon.

Lvl 3	+1	680 gp	Lvl 18	+4	85,000 gp
Lvl 8	+2	3,400 gp	Lvl 23	+5	425,000 gp
Lvl 13	+3	17,000 gp	Lvl 28	+6	2,125,000 gp

Implement: Ki focus
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus

Property

When you use *assassin's strike* on a target granting combat advantage to you, you can reroll any of the power's damage dice that come up as a 1. Continue until all the dice roll higher than a 1.

Level 13 or 18: Reroll 1s or 2s; result higher than a 2.
Level 23 or 28: Reroll 1s, 2s, or 3s; result higher than a 3.

There exists a single tome that details how the first ninja gained their power, and how best to use the shadow power granted from the dying. Only the eldest ninja masters even know of its existence, and it is said that those who read it are allowed to recite its contents only in the minutes before their death.

The Ineffable Secret of Death — Level 15+ Rare

The original masters penned this tome with the intent that it be read in a time of dire need. It holds the secret of how to use the power of the dying as a weapon against the living.

Lvl 15	+3	25,000 gp	Lvl 25	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp	Lvl 30	+6	3,125,000 gp

Implement: Ki focus
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d10 necrotic damage per plus

Property

Any attack you make with this implement against a target granting combat advantage to you deals extra necrotic damage to that target. The damage equals to this item's enhancement bonus.

Attack Power ✦ Daily (No Action)

Trigger: You use *assassin's strike* on a bloodied target.
Effect: The damage from *assassin's strike* is maximized.

Utility Power ✦ Encounter Utility (Free Action)

Trigger: You reduce a creature adjacent to you to 0 hit points with an attack using this implement.
Effect: You are insubstantial and phasing until the end of your next turn.

Utility Power ✦ Daily (Minor Action)

Effect: Your next attack this turn is made against the target's lowest defense.

New Weapon: Kusari-gama

Originally a tool used by farmers and peasants to tend crops and for a variety of other mundane uses, the kusari-gama was adopted as a weapon by the ninja because of both its flexibility and its ability to pass unnoticed as a common item.

This weapon features a sickle (or kama) on one end of a chain and a heavy weight on the other, with the weight swung with great force and used to either entangle or trip a foe, and the kama used to slice at a vital part of the body.

SUPERIOR MELEE WEAPON

Double Weapon

Weapon	Prof.	Damage	Range	Price	Weight	Group	Properties
Kusari-gama	+2	1d8	–	10 gp	3 lb.	Flail	Defensive, reach
-Secondary end	+2	1d6				Light blade	Off-hand

About the Author

Dave Chalker is a freelance game designer and editor-in-chief of the award-winning blog Critical-Hits.com. His recent work includes the "Rumble in the Valley" adventure in *Dungeon* 193, co-writing the "Choose Your Fortunes Wisely" article for the D&D website, designing for the *Dragon Brigade Roleplaying Game* from Margaret Weis Productions, and creating the board game *Get Bit!* from Mayday Games. This is his first article for *Dragon*.

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Character Themes
Fringes of Kara-Tur

By Chris Sims

Illustrations by Tony Foti and S. C. Watson

Developing your character into someone who has a rich story can be a fun and rewarding process. You likely have an idea of what race and what class you want to play, but you might have only a general idea of what your character's life was like before you start playing the character at the gaming table. A theme can help you flesh out your character and provide some interesting options for developing his or her background.

This article details two character themes, Hordelands nomad and sohei. Both of these themes have a flavor that ties them to the Forgotten Realms setting, particularly a campaign that centers on or touches on the fringes of the far eastern realm of Kara-Tur.

Character Themes

Your character's theme is a career, calling, or identity that describes who he or she is in the world. Just as race and class create basic definitions about who your character is, theme adds a third character component to help refine your story and identity. For example, if you're a warlock who chooses the Hordelands nomad theme, you grew up on the steppes of the Hordelands as a student of the tribal shaman or someone innately in touch with the tribal ancestors or fey of the plains. You are a master rider who understands the arcane forces of the prairie, and you interact with the spirits your tribe reveres.

Each theme can encompass several unique stories within the same concept. For information on using themes as part of character creation and rules for how to gain and use theme powers and features, see "Heroes of Nature and Lore," *Dragon* 399.

Hordelands Nomad

Between Faerûn and Kara-Tur is a vast steppe, held through history by more than one ancient empire. Despite the area's turbulent past, the advent of the Spellplague, and the rise of the Tuigan nation of Yaï-munnahar, the folk of the Hordelands live as they have for centuries. Because the steppe offers few resources, all the nomads of the Hordelands—Taan, as they call themselves—are master riders and hardy survivalists. They rely on their mounts and livestock, as well as connections to nature and primal power, for survival.

People of the Hordelands venerate Teylas, the Sky Lord, who is called Akadi in Faerûn, and worship Etugen, Earth Mother, known among Faerûnians as Grumbar. Additionally, and to a lesser degree, the nomads idolize a plethora of other primal spirits. Some of these latter entities live in named places,

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such as oases, across the plains. Others represent important or fierce animals of the prairie.

Tribal customs among the nomads focus on pleasing the spirits as they seek to ensure that the elements remain in balance. Those living in the Hordelands believe that bad luck, such as an inability to find water, is the work of offended spirits. To aid them in their work with the spirits, the nomads use primal magic, and their familiarity with it grants them a sixth sense when it comes to spiritual influences. Not only do they gain closeness to the spirits that surround them, they can sense the presence of myriad fey crossings on the plains, which provides them with the opportunity to interact with fey creatures, too.

Creating a Hordelands Nomad

Nomads of the Hordelands are predominantly human, although a few have nonhuman blood. Every adult nomad is a warrior, though with varying skills, and all nomads respect primal spirits rather than deities. Martial practitioners and primal spellcasters are most widespread; only a few tribesfolk practice arcane arts. Fighters, rangers, and warlords are common, as are barbarians, druids, seekers, shamans, and wardens. Warlocks, especially those of the fey or vestige pact, and sorcerers are the usual wielders of arcane power among the nomads. These people consider a "shaman" to be anyone who has powers unrelated to weapon use, even if those powers are not primal.

HORDELANDS LANGUAGES

Adventuring nomads speak Common, but they also speak Tuigan, which uses the Thorass alphabet as Common does. Other common languages in the Hordelands include Shou, the language of Kara-Tur, and Primordial, the language of the "gods" of the nomads. Members of the shaman social class use Primordial and its Barazhad alphabet to communicate information not meant for common tribesfolk.

Starting Feature

Hordelands nomads are born to ride and shoot from the saddle. Fast travel, skilled riding, and accurate shooting are central to the nomadic way of life. As a nomad, you have spent more years in the saddle than not. Few can match your adeptness at fighting while astride a mount.

Benefit: You gain proficiency with the shortbow. You also gain the Mounted Combat feat.

Mounted Combat

Benefit: While you are riding a creature, it does not take the normal -2 penalty to attack rolls that is imposed on mounts. In addition, the creature can make Acrobatics, Athletics, Endurance, or Stealth checks using your skill check modifiers (not including any temporary bonuses or penalties) in place of its own.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

Hordelands nomads have a knack for interacting with the natural world, as well as for sensing the mystical and the elemental. Most tribesfolk use this ability to avoid offending the spirits. As an adventurer, you can use your aptitude to discern nearby supernatural influences or creatures.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to Nature checks. In addition, you can use the Nature skill as if it were Arcana to sense the presence of magic, and to make monster knowledge checks about creatures that have the elemental, fey, or shadow origin.

Level 10 Feature

Spirits favor those who show them reverence, and Hordelands nomads have an immense amount of respect for them. Your own deference to the spirits has granted you a small boon in the form of greater luck.

Benefit: You gain a +1 power bonus to saving throws. If you are attempting to avoid being knocked prone while mounted, your bonus is +5 instead.

Optional Utility Powers

Nomads of the steppes have to be skilled in combat and survival techniques due to the unforgiving nature of the Hordelands. These hazards hone survival skills and staying power, making nomads hard to kill. By remaining close to nature, humble toward primal spirits, and true to tribal beliefs, plainsfolk can develop uncanny abilities.

Level 2 Utility Power

A spiritual kinship with the plains ponies of the Hordelands is foremost in a nomad's upbringing. The horse moves with clever grace and sure footing. Riders of the steppes learn to utilize this ability in the saddle and draw upon their connection with Earth Mother to mimic their mount while out of the saddle.

Steppe-Horse Spirit Hordelands Nomad Utility 2

You draw deeply upon your tie to the land and leap into motion, avoiding retaliation with your first steps and moving with ease despite hindrances.

Encounter ✦ Primal
Move Action **Personal**
Effect: You move up to your speed, ignoring difficult terrain and suffering no negative effects for squeezing. If you are mounted, you can instead grant your mount this power's effect.

Level 6 Utility Power

Beneath the steppe's vast sky, a nomad can feel the awesomeness that is Teylas, the Sky Lord. The great sky spirit moves as the breath in every creature's lungs. He is life. When life is threatened, through Teylas it endures. When you are threatened, Teylas moves through you to support you.

Breath of Teylas Hordelands Nomad Utility 6

The wind is knocked out of you, but the breath of Teylas sustains you and carries you to safety.

Encounter ✦ Healing, Primal
Immediate Reaction Personal
Trigger: An enemy bloodies you or scores a critical hit against you.
Effect: You spend a healing surge and regain a number of additional hit points equal to your highest ability modifier. Then, shift up to half your speed. If you are mounted, your mount also regains a number of hit points equal to your highest ability modifier, and it can shift instead of you.

Level 10 Utility Power

The earth is a mother to the tribes of the Hordelands. She gives sustenance and shelter. Her body is a source of protection and solidity. Steppe tribesfolk keep their feet or the hooves of their horses firmly planted. Each nomad keeps his or her soul properly grounded by respecting the spirits of the earth. These spirits can reciprocate, providing stability when it is needed.

Hooves of Etugen Hordelands Nomad Utility 10

Earth spirits return control of your movement to you when an enemy tries to push you around.

Encounter ✦ Primal
Immediate Interrupt Personal
Trigger: You or a mount you are riding is subjected to forced movement or knocked prone.
Effect: Neither you nor your mount is forcibly moved or knocked prone. Instead, you or your mount can shift up to the number of squares you would have been moved forcibly.

Optional Attack Powers

Level 3 Encounter Power

Legends of the Hordelands nomads speak of the otherworldly nature of their ranged attacks. Those who have witnessed the nomads fight tell of the accompanying boom of thunder that resonates when their arrows strike home.

Sky Arrows Hordelands Nomad Attack 3

With a whispered homage to the storm spirits, you loose a ranged attack that rumbles with thunder.

Encounter ✦ Primal, Thunder
No Action Special
Trigger: You hit an enemy with an at-will ranged attack.
Effect: The enemy takes 1d8 extra thunder damage from the attack.

Level 13 Encounter Power

Some tales describe how a nomad whispers to an arrow or a wand before attacking. Such shots can carry the fury of Teylas in his storm form.

Storm Arrows Hordelands Nomad Attack 13

Calling upon the storm spirits, you send forth an attack imbued with thunder or lightning.

Encounter ✦ Primal, Varies
No Action Special
Trigger: You hit an enemy with an at-will ranged attack.
Effect: The enemy takes 2d8 extra thunder damage or 2d8 extra lightning damage from the attack.

Level 23 Encounter Power

Veterans among the Hordelands nomads send forth both a wave of thunder and the shock of lightning in each attack they make from afar.

Tempest Arrows Hordelands Nomad Attack 23

Thunder accompanies the crackle of lightning as you call upon the spirits of the storm to strike your foe.

Encounter ✦ Lightning, Primal, Thunder
No Action Special
Trigger: You hit an enemy with an at-will ranged attack.
Effect: The enemy takes 3d8 extra thunder and lightning damage from the attack.

BRIDGING CULTURES

The Hordelands and the Tuigan nation of Yaï-munnahar are part of the imposing expanse that separates Faerûn from Kara-Tur. Travelers from either territory must cross the steppes to access the other area. This makes Hordelands nomads valuable allies in Faerûn and Kara-Tur, and sometimes they seek adventure elsewhere. In either land, however, the nomads are considered to be barbarians and outsiders. They must work hard to gain respect among people who are not their own.

Sohei

In Kara-Tur, as in the West, grand shrines can be found in the teeming cities. However, those seeking a quicker path to enlightenment or total devotion to the gods prefer remote monasteries or temples. Such places of worship offer immersion in spiritual pursuits and isolation from the distractions of civilization. Most are hidden high in remote hills or mountains, making the very act of finding the place a show of one's dedication to the sacred.

An urban shrine's clergy can look to the local authorities for protection from monsters, bandits, and enemies of the faith. A wilderness temple's devotees cannot—most secluded places of worship are as much fortress as monastery. Just as such a holy place needs walls, it also needs guardians who share the spiritual values of their less militant fellows.

A sohei, sometimes called a yamabushi ("mountain warrior") due to the usual site of far-flung monasteries and shrines, is a monastic soldier trained as a temple guardian. Rather than focusing on intense religious instruction, a sohei receives training in meditation, body control, and martial techniques. Although devoted clergy of the same religion or sect might practice pacifism, a sohei warrior-monk does not.

The difference between a sohei and a fellow priest is type of duty. The warrior-monk looks out for the safety of the temple, allowing other priests to fulfill duties that are more spiritual. A sohei can also serve as the face of a religious order, going out into the world to spread the faith, strike against the temple's enemies, and seek objects and people important to the religion.

A sohei's superiors are figures higher in his or her religious hierarchy. Every sohei is a devoted combatant with mastery over preferred weapons, and each serves those higher in the hierarchy with obedience. As part of their service to the religion, they also learn to wield magical power. Often divine in nature, this power is a blessing of the sohei's commitment to a deity. However, legendary sohei—even those from the same religious sect—wield varying mystical capabilities.

A sohei can come from any walk of life. Children given into the service of a temple, whether orphans or nobles, can become sohei. Older initiates might be anything from outlaws to ronin. Requirements for becoming a militant priest include strength and willpower, as well as an abundance of energy and ambition that compels the individual to abandon the wholly meditative life.

An adventuring sohei frequently takes on a quest for his or her religious order. A few sohei go into the world to experience its mysteries, using worldly knowledge as part of a path to enlightenment. Other sohei, such as ronin, have been expelled from or have lost their temples. These wanderers search for a new purpose as much as any ronin does.

KENSEI

The kensei paragon path from the *Player's Handbook* is for those who have mastered one weapon to the exclusion of all others. Such martial perfectionists can become famous for their techniques and start schools of weapon mastery. Samurai and other warriors are the usual members of this path. An adventuring sohei might also seek such perfection, and you can ask your DM to allow you to take this path even if you are not a fighter.

Creating a Sohei

Sohei are religious devotees focused on martial practice. Although they might have different religions, purposes, and techniques, divine power unites them. Most of these warrior-monks come from among weapon-using divine classes, such as the avenger, cleric, paladin, and runepriest. Some sohei focus more on the martial aspect of training than on the supernatural, as fighters, rangers, and warlords do. Obscure religious orders that are devoted to primal or ancestral spirits could train barbarians, druids, seekers, and wardens to become sohei. Other cults might focus on the power of the mind over the body. Psionic practitioners such as ardents, battleminds, and monks could be sohei among these sects. Religious devotion can also involve arcane practice or shadow magic—a pious assassin, blackguard, hexblade, or swordmage might become a sohei.

Starting Feature

A key tenet of your early training is the importance of pressing your initial attack. As you finish off one successful strike and turn to confront a second target, your enemies get an idea of who they're up against.

Benefit: You gain the *sohei flair* power.

Sohei Flair — Sohei Attack

The blood you've drawn spurs you on, and you lash at other enemies around you with divinely inspired fury.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Weapon
Minor Action **Melee** weapon
Requirement: You must have hit an enemy with a weapon attack during this turn.
Target: One creature
Level 21: One or two creatures
Attack: Highest ability modifier vs. AC
Hit: 1[W] damage.
Level 11: 2[W] damage.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

A sohei must spot danger, overt or subtle. The quiet of the surrounding forest is a portent, and the furrow in a temple visitor's brow a warning. When a threat is revealed, a sohei acts without hesitation.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to Insight checks and Perception checks.

Level 10 Feature

Duty requires the sohei to maintain clarity of purpose and to avoid outside influences, especially magical ones. Meditation and religious devotion help a sohei develop a mind stronger than that of the typical warrior. When others might break under the strain of mental pressure, the sohei remains resolute.

Benefit: You gain a +1 power bonus to saving throws against fear effects and effects that render you dazed, dominated, or stunned.

Optional Utility Powers

Sohei are a diverse group, but lore about them indicates that they share a set of divine powers. Such tales tell of sohei parrying arrows, overcoming mighty magic charms, and fighting on despite a dozen wounds. In all the stories, the valiant sohei's combat prowess is that of a fanatic possessed of divine battle madness. What those unfamiliar with the way of the sohei see as insanity is really the outgrowth of finely honed skill and the lack of a fear of death. All sohei know that to perform one's duty well is worthy of any sacrifice, and death in the name of duty is the ultimate honor.

Level 2 Utility Power

The first steps toward weapon mastery are defensive—the wielder must survive in order to defeat the enemy. When a foe's attack hits, a sohei can steel his personal defenses against that attack in the instant before it connects.

Sohei Parry — Sohei Utility 2

Divine guidance helps you place your weapon in the path of an attack.

Encounter ✦ Divine
Immediate Interrupt **Personal**
Trigger: You are hit by a melee or ranged attack while you are holding a weapon.
Effect: You gain a +2 power bonus to the defense targeted by the attack until the end of your next turn.

Level 6 Utility Power

Sohei battle on in spite of adversity. When an enemy hinders that fighting spirit, the spirit rebels. A sohei's meditative exercises sharpen this ability, allowing the warrior to cleanse the body or mind with a single act of focused will.

Sohei Clarity — Sohei Utility 6

Your mind instinctively finds its center, ridding you of a hindrance to the performance of your duty.

Encounter ✦ Divine
No Action **Personal**
Trigger: You start your turn subjected to a dominating or stunning effect that a save can end.
Effect: You make a saving throw against the effect.

Level 10 Utility Power

Perfection in sohei training allows the soul to control the body when the mind is sapped. This unconquerable aspect of a sohei's spiritual being is related in tales in which a celebrated sohei would not be felled until his or her duty was done.

Sohei Invincibility Sohei Utility 10

Your conscious mind can no longer be relied upon, so your sense of self retreats to your innermost soul and keeps acting.

Daily ✦ Divine
No Action **Personal**
Trigger: You start your turn dominated, stunned, or unconscious and have at least 1 hit point.
Effect: You ignore the triggering condition and are instead dazed for the same duration as the triggering condition.

Optional Attack Powers

Level 3 Encounter Power

When foes threaten the temple or its allies, sohei charge fearlessly to the front. This initial advance allows the temple guardians to form battle lines and, combined with *sohei flurry*, deliver a vicious opening assault designed to break enemy formations and weaken the foes' resolve. An advancing sohei can do the same when leading the charge of a smaller group.

Sohei Advance Sohei Attack 3

Centering yourself as you move, you draw your weapon and rush to engage your enemies.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Highest ability modifier vs. AC
Hit: 2[W] + highest ability modifier damage.
Effect: You grant combat advantage until the end of your next turn.
Special: You can draw a weapon when using this power. When charging, you can use this power in place of a melee basic attack.

Level 13 Encounter Power

An experienced sohei can quickly draw his or her weapon and rush forward to open with a brutal, focused attack.

Sohei Rush Sohei Attack 13

You attack without consideration for your own safety, trusting in the power of the divine to see you through the fight.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Highest ability modifier vs. AC
Hit: 3[W] + highest ability modifier damage.
Effect: You grant combat advantage until the end of your next turn.
Special: You can draw a weapon when using this power. When charging, you can use this power in place of a melee basic attack.

Level 23 Encounter Power

With supreme skill and deep faith, a sohei steps into combat with a savage attack against multiple foes.

Sohei Supremacy Sohei Attack 23

More than one foe faces your attack, which you bring to bear with a swiftness granted by unshakable focus and the power of faith.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One or two creatures
Attack: Highest ability modifier vs. AC
Hit: 3[W] + highest ability modifier damage.
Effect: You grant combat advantage until the end of your next turn.
Special: You can draw a weapon when using this power. When charging, you can use this power in place of a melee basic attack.

About the Author
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Playtest: Ecology of the Hengeyokai

By Tim Eagon

Illustrations by Tyler Jacobson

This month, we're offering a playtest of a new race that ties in with October's Kara-Tur theme. We'll be following feedback on the article, and we will take time to make further revisions if necessary. Once you've had a chance to review and playtest the material, please send your feedback to playtesting@wizards.com with the subject line "Ecology of the Hengeyokai" by October 31.

Hengeyokai are a race of intelligent, shapeshifting animals native to Kara-Tur that can freely assume human form or a bipedal hybrid form; numerous subraces exist, each corresponding to a different species of common animal. They are the descendants of humans and shapeshifting animal spirits, and as such they have a strong connection to both the spirit and mortal worlds. Unlike the savage and bloodthirsty lycanthropes, hengeyokai are usually reclusive and do not become violent except when no other choice remains.

Hengeyokai live throughout Kara-Tur on the fringes of human society. They are secretive creatures that avoid prolonged contact with other races, the one exception being the spirit folk (see the sidebar). Despite their natural reticence, some good-natured hengeyokai become the protectors of human families or small villages. Scholars believe that the

OTHER RACES OF KARA-TUR

In addition to humans and hengeyokai, korobokuru and spirit folk are among the most prevalent races in Kara-Tur.

Korobokuru: These small, dwarflike humanoids usually reside in secluded villages far from human civilization and live simply as hunters, farmers, or artisans. They get along poorly with humans, who consider them backward and primitive. Korobokuru venerate the primal spirits that dwell near their communities.

Spirit Folk: The descendants of humans and various nature spirits, spirit folk are highly attuned to nature but typically live among humans. Three distinct kinds exist (bamboo, river, and sea spirit folk), and all resemble slender, comely humans.

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hengeyokai's supernatural heritage explains this seemingly incongruous behavior, since so many spirits are protective by nature. These creatures receive offerings of food, gifts, and services in return for their efforts, even though most beneficiaries never see their guardian or realize its true nature. For instance, the hare hengeyokai Xax Chung is called the hero of Koje, a small city in central Koryo. He perished defending his adopted hometown from a dragon that had smashed Jisziat's Tower, a prominent local landmark; until his death, few suspected that the elderly warrior was anything other than human.

On the other hand, evil hengeyokai often prey upon humans. More mischievous than malevolent, these hengeyokai delight in playing cruel pranks on their victims but will deceive, steal, and even kill to get what they want. Typically they extort offerings from terrorized locals, but few are ever satisfied with their gifts, often leading to unpleasant results.

Appearance and Physical Qualities

Hengeyokai are agile creatures, but their other physical attributes vary according to their subrace. Twelve subraces are known to exist: badger, carp, cat, crab, crane, dog, fox, hare, monkey, raccoon dog, rat, and sparrow. Legends abound of other subraces, such as frog, lizard, and weasel, in addition to larger beings such as tigers, dolphins, and pandas; however, no human has ever confirmed their existence.

The race is exceptionally long-lived, with an unusual life cycle. Hengeyokai can live for over 200 years, but for the first century they exist only as animals and cannot assume another form. Except for their extended life span and above-average intelligence, immature hengeyokai differ little from mundane animals. Once they reach 100 years of age, they can assume hybrid and human forms. At this point, they are the equivalent of human adolescents, but any memories of their previous existence are hazy and indistinct.

All hengeyokai can assume three distinct forms.

Animal Form: In animal form, hengeyokai are nearly indistinguishable from normal animals; only careful observation of their behavior can uncover their intelligence. They are exceptionally mobile in this form and often assume it for the purpose of exploration or reconnaissance. Hengeyokai cannot speak in animal form, but they can communicate with beasts similar to themselves.

Hybrid Form: In this form, hengeyokai stand at their human height on their hind legs or similar appendages. They assume an overall humanoid shape, with front paws, wings, or fins changing into hands that are capable of gripping and using weapons and other equipment, but retain their animalistic appearance, including fur, scales, feathers, tails, and other characteristics. They can speak any languages they know and are still able to communicate with animals. Hengeyokai prefer to assume this form among their own kind or trusted companions of other races.

Human Form: Each hengeyokai can assume the form of a unique human. While individuals' appearance varies according to the region in which they were born, on average they are shorter and slighter than their human neighbors. Even in human form, hengeyokai always display some animalistic features. For example, a sparrow hengeyokai might have a sharp, beaklike nose; a crab hengeyokai, larger-than-normal hands; and a rat hengeyokai, beady eyes or a long, thin mustache. Hengeyokai in human form can speak any language they know but can no longer directly communicate with animals, though they can still understand them.

Beliefs and Culture

Hengeyokai are a reclusive race. They rarely befriend other creatures (except for spirit folk) and are wary of strangers. However, if treated kindly, hengeyokai can become steadfast and lifelong friends.

Attitudes

Hengeyokai are wild and unpredictable, with a strong independent streak. They value their freedom above all else, and many also champion the freedom of others. They abhor slavery and shudder at the thought of chaining or caging an animal; restraining a hengeyokai in this manner is a grave insult. They also display personality traits similar to their animal forms. A badger hengeyokai might be aggressive and dour, a monkey hengeyokai playful and inquisitive, and a hare hengeyokai quiet but always alert for signs of danger.

Like most races, the majority of hengeyokai do not have a strong disposition toward good or evil, though some subraces have an affinity for certain alignments. Carp, crane, dog, hare, and sparrow hengeyokai tend toward good (however, few hengeyokai possess the discipline necessary to be lawful good), while badger, fox, raccoon dog, and rat hengeyokai tend toward evil or chaotic evil. Many humans treat the subraces according to these stereotypes; for example, they might be suspicious of fox hengeyokai and avoid them.

All hengeyokai are mischievous by nature and value playing tricks on others without being caught or noticed, even if doing so doesn't endear them to their neighbors. They do this for a variety of reasons, often for amusement, but mainly to test the reactions of their neighbors and to prepare for dangerous situations. Most pranks are good-natured fun (snatching food, misplacing household objects, and setting animals loose are popular), but those of evil hengeyokai are frequently malicious and destructive—sometimes deadly.

Daily Life

Hengeyokai live as simply as possible and prefer to stay on the edges of human society, often in isolated rural areas close to the safety of the wilderness, moving whenever civilization encroaches further upon their territory. Given their itinerant existence, hengeyokai have little use for material possessions; they usually exchange whatever treasure they accumulate for practical items such as food or weapons. While in human or hybrid form, they typically adopt the dress, language, tools, and customs of their nearest human neighbors. Their diet is also similar to that of their neighbors, though they favor foods associated with their animal forms; for example, sparrow hengeyokai prefer grains while monkey hengeyokai eat fruit, and cat hengeyokai are exclusively carnivores.

Hengeyokai have little interest in land or social status, and they do not strongly value personal honor as their human neighbors do. They enjoy storytelling, horticulture, and all forms of physical recreation, especially swimming, running, and climbing. Few have the patience to learn a craft, but those who do are exceptionally skilled, and collectors eagerly seek out their *nishiki-e* (colored woodcuts) and *kongi rikishi* (carved figures that guard the entrances to temples).

Communities

Hengeyokai do not have lands of their own and rarely form lasting communities. They usually dwell alone or in small nomadic bands, constructing temporary shelters of wood and stone. Different subraces of hengeyokai can live together as long as they share similar habitats and beliefs; homogeneous bands are rarer, but not unheard of. It is proper to refer to homogenous bands by the collective noun associated with their animal form, such as pride, school, or flock; they often become part of local folklore. Some prominent examples include the lake folk of Nam Tso in Tabot, a school of beneficent carp hengeyokai, and the enigmatic "bird men" of Koryo, believed to be an unusually large flock of crane hengeyokai.

During adolescence, thrill-seeking hengeyokai overcome by wanderlust and curiosity sometimes choose to live among humans temporarily; many of those who do so eventually develop an instinctual urge to remain and protect their new neighbors. They especially favor those who treat animals well, are kind toward strangers, and tolerate their mischief. Such hengeyokai live in human form under an assumed identity (usually one that allows them to disappear for days without raising many questions) or pose as somewhat tame animals living nearby—but never as pets. A content hengeyokai might remain in its adopted home for many years, watching over several generations of humans.

Hengeyokai do not establish clans or have any strong familial bonds, to the point of rarely worshiping ancestor spirits. Adult hengeyokai seldom form lasting romantic relationships and typically mate only once or twice in their lifetimes. Such unions are passionate but fleeting, lasting only until the young can fend for themselves, which is typically a few months after birth; most couples part on good terms and remain friendly for the remainder of their lives. Some parents linger near their young for a few years to offer them protection, especially if hunters pose a threat.

On rare occasions, hengeyokai mate with animals, humans, or spirit folk (the former in animal form, the latter two in human form). The offspring of animals and hengeyokai are hengeyokai, but those born of hengeyokai and humans or spirit folk have the mother's race. Human children of these couplings are notable for their agility, longevity, and beauty; they also have a preternatural connection with animals, often becoming rangers or druids.

Religion

As the descendants of spirits, hengeyokai feel closer to the spirit world than to the world of mortals. They do not venerate spirits as other races do but view them as equals. Even hengeyokai that wield primal magic share this attitude. Their individualism often prompts hengeyokai to become followers of less rigid, more personal religions and philosophical traditions such as the Way (in Shou Lung and T'u Lung), the cult of the Eight Million Gods (in Wa and Kozakura), or shamanism. Hengeyokai rarely follow established doctrine and readily shrug off accusations of heresy; they believe what they believe and worship as they please.

Long ago, many hengeyokai in Wa turned to the worship of the foreign goddess Chauntea despite the shogunate's ban, viewing her as an immensely powerful, yet benevolent and easygoing, nature spirit. Most of these hengeyokai fled Wa after the suppression of the Juzimura Rebellion. Many ultimately migrated to Faerûn where they could worship her as they pleased, much to the annoyance of some orthodox churches there.

Hengeyokai Populations

Hengeyokai live all across Kara-Tur but are especially prevalent in three regions: Sheng Ti province in the heartlands of Shou Lung, the Ama Basin, and the islands of Shinkoku and Tenmei in Kozakura.

Sheng Ti Province

This province of terraced hills and dense forests has always been renowned for its large population of hengeyokai. Its cities are among the few places where hengeyokai openly assume their hybrid forms, even those normally viewed with suspicion by humans, such as the fox and raccoon dog subraces. The

province is also famous for the beauty of its people, and the Sheng are thought to owe much of their diminutive stature and elegance to the influence of hengeyokai, as well as numerous spirit folk.

Following the Spellplague, the connection grew much stronger between Sheng Ti and the portion of the spirit world that Faerûnians would call the Feywild. Though empowered by these events, the hengeyokai and spirit folk inhabitants of the province remained loyal to the Emperor and helped him restore order (the maternal great-grandfather of the ninth Emperor Chin of the ruling Kuo dynasty was a hengeyokai from Sheng Ti). Recognizing their contribution, in 2646 (1396 DR), the grateful Emperor decreed that all hengeyokai and spirit folk subjects residing in the province could legally take the civil service examinations and join the mandarinate, which had previously been an option available only to humans. Given their nature, few took the opportunity, but that fact hasn't stopped the formation of racist tongs that wish to restore the former status quo. These tongs plot in the shadows with tacit support from some nobles and bureaucrats, and sometimes act against prominent hengeyokai.

Nowadays, hengeyokai from all over Kara-Tur view Sheng Ti province as a refuge, and many have migrated to it by way of Lo'Shan, its main seaport. Hengeyokai who fled Wa after a wave of gargantuas devastated that country came to Sheng Ti but had trouble assimilating; many left to establish new homes in the Hordelands or even farther west in Faerûn.

Ama Basin

The Shou refer to this immense area of swamps and taiga around the Ama River as the Northern Wastes, a misleading name since it is hardly a wasteland. In fact, it is home to a wide variety of peoples, including several confederations of human barbarians, many korobokuru clans, numerous spirit folk enclaves, and the largest concentration of hengeyokai in all of Kara-Tur.

Hengeyokai thrive in this remote wilderness, and the barbarians that dominate the region accord them a great deal of respect (and sometimes fear and hatred), believing them to be powerful manifestations of the spiritual forces of nature. Traditionally hengeyokai, even evil ones, become protectors of human tribes, who have always been in desperate need of allies. The situation has only worsened in the decades following the Spellplague, for several powerful oni have enslaved the hobgoblin living in the nearby Land of Snow Demons. The human villages scattered across the region are now under constant threat from their predatory neighbors to the north.

Shamanism is the region's most widespread belief system, and the Ama River basin is home to most hengeyokai practitioners of primal magic, especially barbarians, druids, rangers, and seekers. Spellscars, which are otherwise extremely rare in Kara-Tur, are unusually widespread among the hengeyokai of the Northern Wastes. These strange markings manifest only on hengeyokai in hybrid or human form, engendering great respect (and fear) in their human neighbors. No one has been able to explain this mysterious phenomenon, though it has attracted the attention of sages and wu jen across Kara-Tur.

Kozakura

The mountains and forests of Kozakura have long been home to hengeyokai, who live in isolated enclaves far from the constant strife of the human-dominated coastal regions. Traditionally, monkey hengeyokai are the most numerous in southern Shinkoku, fox hengeyokai in northern Shinkoku, and rat hengeyokai in Tenmei. These demographics have largely remained the same over the centuries, though many rat hengeyokai left Tenmei following a bloody feud with the local korobokuru.

After the Spellplague, Kozakura lapsed into civil war. Much of the hengeyokai population, as well as their spirit folk allies, remained neutral and retreated deeper into the wilderness or fled to Shou Lung. However, several devoted themselves to protecting the populace from the warring factions and rampant banditry. The most famous was a female monkey hengeyokai named Aoi, a student of Onoye, a fellow monkey hengeyokai who had established the Monkey style of martial arts during the previous century. She single-handedly protected seven villages from a force of over 100 marauding ronin, and after the war ebbed, she established several dojos throughout the hinterlands of Shinkoku to teach her master's style to the island's peasantry. Now, many villages in southwestern Shinkoku defiantly display wooden or stone monkey carvings as a warning to bandits, evil spirits, and headstrong samurai.

Beyond Kara-Tur

The upheaval and disruption caused by the Spellplague prompted many to leave Kara-Tur for what they mistakenly believed was the relative peace of Faerûn. Numerous hengeyokai have emigrated westward in recent years. This migration actually began prior to the Spellplague; like their human neighbors, some fled before the Tuigan Horde, while others left following Tan Chin's subsequent invasion of Shou Lung. A few hengeyokai, motivated by curiosity and wanderlust, joined or followed merchant caravans traveling along the Spice Road and the Golden Way.

Some of the hengeyokai who left settled in the Hordelands, particularly in Yaimunnahar, along the Lake of Mists, or in the foothills of the Sunrise Mountains. They became self-appointed guardians of the Golden Way's many oases, much to the chagrin of the bandits and savage humanoids looking to prey on caravan traffic.

In Faerûn, the majority of hengeyokai settled near the Golden Way in Thesk and Rashemen, as

HENGEYOKAI OUTSIDE THE REALMS

The ancestors of the hengeyokai were inhabitants of the Feywild but fled to the world in the aftermath of an extraordinarily destructive war between the eladrin and the fomorians. During that long-ago conflict, evil hengeyokai served the fomorians as spies and assassins. After the eladrin emerged victorious, they took their revenge upon the survivors. This retribution was swift, brutal, and indiscriminate, and many innocents were slaughtered. To this day, hengeyokai fear and distrust eladrin.

The actual origin of the hengeyokai is a matter of dispute. They believe they are fey versions of primal animal spirits; however, most eladrin scholars dismiss them as awakened beasts infused with the magic of their home plane. Some eladrin, perhaps wishing to justify their race's pogrom, believe that the fomorians created the hengeyokai to act as their agents, and they point to the race's chaotic, unpredictable nature as a sign of this influence. The race's innate skill at assassination, infiltration, and espionage is also taken as a sign of fomorian interest.

Today, small bands of hengeyokai live in remote wilderness regions, occasionally interacting with nearby human, halfling, or elven settlements. In the Nentir Vale, they are relatively plentiful—though rarely seen—within the Harkenwold and Winterbole forests, the Witchlight Fens, and even the depths of Lake Nen. In Eberron, the Eldeen Reaches is home to the majority of that world's hengeyokai.

well as in the Great Dale and along the Dragon Coast. Any city with a Shou-town has at least a few hengeyokai inhabitants, who often live disguised as humans (especially in xenophobic Nathlan). They must be cautious to avoid being mistaken for lycanthropes—a particular concern for those with sinister counterparts such as rat hengeyokai. However, the crafty among them can turn such confusion to their advantage.

A few hengeyokai have left behind the familiarity of the Shou-towns and struck out on their own, relocating primarily to the Dalelands, the Western Heartlands, and the North. For example, a pride of cat hengeyokai has settled within the King's Forest in Cormyr. Cleverly taking advantage of their new home's favorable attitude toward cats, these hengeyokai protect the humans living nearby from rampaging beasts and other threats.

Example Hengeyokai

Hengeyokai are a diverse race that can fulfill a number of different roles in your campaign. This section provides three sample hengeyokai statistics blocks as well as a quick and easy method of creating new hengeyokai characters.

Badger Hengeyokai Chanshi

Badger, crab, and dog hengeyokai in particular embrace the way of the warrior, for they possess the requisite strength, temperament, and stamina. This badger hengeyokai is a fearsome and ornery *chanshi* (warrior); she sweeps the battlefield with her *guan dao*, a crescent-bladed broadsword with a long haft, knocking enemies prone and then hacking them to death.

Badger Hengeyokai Chanshi — **Level 4 Brute**
Medium fey magical beast (shapechanger) — XP 175

HP 64; **Bloodied** 32 — **Initiative** +5
AC 16, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15 — **Perception** +3
Speed 7, burrow 3 (badger form) — Low-light vision

Standard Actions

⊕ **Guan Dao** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Requirement: The hengeyokai must be in human or hybrid form.
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage, or 3d8 + 6 damage if the target is prone.

Slashing Arc (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Requirement: The hengeyokai must be in human or hybrid form.
Attack: Close burst 1 (creatures in the burst); +7 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage, and the hengeyokai pushes the target 1 square.

Minor Actions

Trip Up (weapon) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Requirement: The hengeyokai must be in human or hybrid form.
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +7 vs. Reflex
Hit: The target falls prone.

Nature's Mask (polymorph) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Effect: The hengeyokai alters its physical form to appear as a Tiny badger or as a Medium unique human or hybrid.

Triggered Actions

Savage Demise ✦ **Encounter**
Requirement: The hengeyokai must be in badger or hybrid form.
Trigger: The hengeyokai drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (Free Action): The hengeyokai takes a standard action.

Skills Athletics +11, Endurance +9, Intimidate +6

Str 18 (+6)	**Dex** 16 (+5)	**Wis** 13 (+3)
Con 14 (+4)	**Int** 10 (+2)	**Cha** 9 (+1)

Alignment unaligned — **Languages** Common, Shou
Equipment leather armor, guan dao

Fox Hengeyokai Wu Jen

As inherently magical creatures, hengeyokai often become wu jen: sorcerers and diviners who strive to master the arcane power of the five elements (air, earth, fire, water, and wood). Cat, fox, monkey, and sparrow hengeyokai have the strongest talent for magic. This fox hengeyokai has mastered the element of fire; in battle, he hurls fiery shuriken, burns opponents alive with his mesmerizing gaze, and augurs the future. He is also a member of the Iridescent Peacock Society, a secretive cabal of mercenary wu jen that fans the flames of conflict in Kozakura. Its members profit in wartime by selling their destructive skills to the highest bidder.

Fox Hengeyokai Wu Jen **Level 7 Artillery**
Medium fey magical beast (shapechanger) XP 300

HP 60; **Bloodied** 30 **Initiative** +6
AC 21, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 20 **Perception** +5
Speed 7 (9 in fox form) Low-light vision
Resist 10 fire

Traits

Elemental Mastery
When the hengeyokai hits any creature with a fire power, that creature gains vulnerable 5 fire until the end of the hengeyokai's next turn.

Standard Actions

Staff (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Requirement: The hengeyokai must be in human or hybrid form.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage.

Fiery Shuriken (fire, implement) ✦ **At-Will**
Requirement: The hengeyokai must be in human or hybrid form.
Attack: Ranged 10 (one or two creatures); +12 vs. Reflex. If the hengeyokai targets only creature with this power, it can make this attack twice against that creature.
Hit: 3d4 + 4 fire damage.

Blazing Eyes (aura, charm, fire, implement) ✦ **Encounter**
Requirement: The hengeyokai must be in human or hybrid form.
Attack: Close blast 5 (enemies in the blast); +10 vs. Will
Hit: Ongoing 5 fire damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends both).
Effect: The hengeyokai activates an aura 5 of bright light that lasts until the end of the hengeyokai's next turn. Each enemy in the aura takes a -2 penalty to saving throws.
Sustain Minor: The aura persists until the end of the hengeyokai's next turn.

Minor Actions

Augury ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: Roll a d20 and note the result. As a free action before the end of its next turn, the hengeyokai can use that result to replace the result of one d20 roll of its choice made by any creature it can see.

Nature's Mask (polymorph) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Effect: The hengeyokai alters its physical form to appear as a Tiny fox or as a Medium unique human or hybrid.

Triggered Actions

Fortuitous Wind ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Trigger: An enemy ends its move adjacent to the hengeyokai.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The hengeyokai pushes the triggering enemy 1 square.

Skills Arcana +10, Insight +10, Nature +10, Stealth +11
Str 9 (+2) **Dex** 16 (+6) **Wis** 15 (+5)
Con 12 (+4) **Int** 14 (+5) **Cha** 19 (+7)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Kozakuran
Equipment staff, bag of chicken bones

Monkey Hengeyokai Sensei

The monkey hengeyokai of southwestern Shinkoku, Kozakura's largest island, are renowned martial artists. Two of the best known are Onoye, founder of the Monkey style, and Aoi, his contemporary disciple. While in human form, this monkey hengeyokai appears to be an elderly farmer, though closer examination reveals a loping gait and abnormally long arms. He is actually an extremely agile warrior who can effortlessly deliver a staggering blow with a kick or throw.

Monkey Hengeyokai Sensei **Level 12 Skirmisher**
Medium fey magical beast (shapechanger) XP 700

HP 119; **Bloodied** 59 **Initiative** +14
AC 26, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 24 **Perception** +15
Speed 7, climb 3 (monkey form) All-around vision, low-light vision

Traits

All-Around Vision
Enemies can't gain combat advantage by flanking the hengeyokai.

Standard Actions

Flying Kick ✦ **At-Will**
Requirement: The hengeyokai must be in human or hybrid form.
Effect: The hengeyokai jumps up to 2 squares before the attack. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 + 9 damage.

Throw ✦ **Recharge**
Requirement: The hengeyokai must be in human or hybrid form.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d8 + 6 damage, and the hengeyokai pushes the target up to 2 squares.

Move Actions

Light Step ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: The hengeyokai shifts up to its speed.

Minor Actions

Nature's Mask (polymorph) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Effect: The hengeyokai alters its physical form to appear as a Tiny monkey or as a Medium unique human or hybrid.

Spring Up ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The hengeyokai stands up.

Triggered Actions

Stunning Blow ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The hengeyokai hits an enemy with a melee basic attack.
Effect (Free Action): The enemy is stunned until the end of its next turn.

Skills Athletics +15, Acrobatics +17, History +12, Insight +15
Str 19 (+10) **Dex** 22 (+12) **Wis** 19 (+10)
Con 15 (+8) **Int** 13 (+7) **Cha** 16 (+9)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Kozakuran

Creating New Hengeyokai

DMs can quickly create new hengeyokai by following these steps.

First, select an appropriate human from one of the *Monster Manual* or *Monster Vault* supplements. Then choose an animal form from one of those presented in Table 1-1 below. Badger, carp, crab, crane, and dog hengeyokai make ideal brutes and soldiers, while cat, fox, hare, monkey, raccoon dog, rat, and sparrow hengeyokai are excellent controllers, lurkers, and skirmishers.

Origin: The creature's origin becomes fey.

Type and Subtype: The creature's type becomes magical beast, and it gains the shapechanger subtype.

Senses: The creature gains low-light vision.

Speed: The creature's speed increases to 7; it also gains a special mode of movement while in animal form (see the table below).

Skill Modifications: The creature gains training in a skill related to the hengeyokai's animal form (see the table).

Special: The creature's attack powers gain the following requirement, unless they are appropriate attacks for an animal.

Requirement: The hengeyokai must be in human or hybrid form.

Finally, hengeyokai gain the following utility power.

Minor Actions

Nature's Mask (polymorph) ✦ **At-Will**

Effect: The hengeyokai alters its physical form to appear as a Tiny animal or as a Medium unique human or hybrid.

Animal Form	Special Movement	Related Skill
Badger	Burrow 3	Endurance
Carp*	Swim 7	Endurance
Cat	Climb 3	Acrobatics
Crab*	Swim 7	Intimidate
Crane**	Fly 6	Nature
Dog	+2 bonus to speed	Insight
Fox	+2 bonus to speed	Stealth
Hare	+2 bonus to speed	Athletics
Monkey	Climb 3	Athletics
Raccoon Dog	Climb 3	Stealth
Rat	Climb 3	Thievery
Sparrow**	Fly 6	Perception

*Carp and crab hengeyokai in animal form have a land speed of 1 and can breathe underwater.

**Crane and sparrow hengeyokai in animal form have a land speed of 1.

Playing Hengeyokai

Wily beasts with the ability to assume human form.

Racial Traits

Average Height: 4′ 10″-5′ 6″

Average Weight: 100-140 lb.

Ability Scores: +2 Dexterity; +2 Wisdom or +2 Charisma

Size: Medium (human or hybrid form)

Speed: 7 squares

Vision: Low-light

Languages: Common, choice of one other

Skill Bonuses: +2 Bluff, +2 to a skill determined by your animal form.

Animal Form: Select your animal form: badger (Endurance), carp (Endurance), cat (Acrobatics), crab (Intimidate), crane (Nature), dog (Insight), fox (Stealth), hare (Athletics), monkey (Athletics), raccoon dog (Stealth), rat (Thievery), or sparrow (Perception).

Elusive: You have a +1 racial bonus to Reflex.

Fey Origin: Your ancestors were animal spirits native to the Feywild. You are considered a fey creature for the purpose of effects that relate to creature origin.

Beast Nature: You are considered both a magical beast and a humanoid for the purpose of effects that relate to creature type.

Shapechanger: You have the shapechanger subtype.

Language of Beasts: While you are in animal or hybrid form, you can communicate with any natural or fey beasts that share your animal form or a form that is closely related (for example, a dog hengeyokai can communicate with a wolf). In human form, you can understand these beasts but cannot directly communicate with them.

You can communicate simple concepts and commands to such creatures, but they are under no compulsion to obey you, and their knowledge is restricted by their experience and mobility. Beasts you talk to are not necessarily friendly; your DM may require skill checks to influence their attitude.

Nature's Mask: You have the *nature's mask* power.

Nature's Mask — Hengeyokai Racial Utility

You swiftly assume the guise of either human or beast.

At-Will (Special) ✦ Polymorph
Minor Action **Personal**

Effect: You change into your human, Tiny animal, or hybrid form. The new form lasts until you change forms again. While you are in human or animal form, other creatures can attempt to discern your true nature by making an Insight check opposed by your Bluff check; you gain a +5 bonus to your check.

None of your game statistics change in human or hybrid form. While in animal form, you cannot use any attack powers, although you can sustain such powers. Your equipment becomes part of the form, and you continue to gain the benefits of the equipment you wear, except for shields and item powers. While equipment is part of the form, it cannot be removed, and anything in a container that is part of the form is inaccessible. You cannot speak. You otherwise retain your game statistics.

You gain a movement benefit based on your form.

Badger: You gain a burrow speed equal to half your speed.

Carp, Crab: You gain a swim speed equal to your speed, and then your land speed becomes 1. You can breathe underwater.

Cat, Monkey, Raccoon Dog, Rat: You gain a climb speed equal to half your speed.

Crane, Sparrow: Your land speed becomes 1, and you gain a fly speed of 6.

Dog, Fox, Hare: Your speed increases by 2.

Special: You can use this power only once per round.

Hengeyokai Adventurers

As hengeyokai come of age, they are overcome by wanderlust and an instinctual need to seek out new territory (older hengeyokai jokingly refer to this period as "the true Path of Enlightenment"). Most are content to investigate the wilderness near their homes or get into juvenile misadventures in the nearest human settlement, but for some, such high jinks are not enough. These hengeyokai become adventurers.

Greed rarely motivates hengeyokai adventurers. They have little use for treasure, believing that it weighs them down, so they carry only what they need. Instead, curiosity and the thrill of exploration drives them, as does the opportunity to make mischief on a wider scale or to redress social injustices. In their minds, such activities often go hand in hand; hengeyokai in Wa notoriously flout social convention by associating with the downtrodden eta, and those in T'u Lung court official displeasure for freeing slaves. Indeed, many hengeyokai adventurers begin their careers when they are forced to take up arms in defense of an adopted human village or family threatened by monsters, bandits, or evil spirits.

All hengeyokai have a knack for stealth, magic, and subterfuge; they are also incredibly mobile creatures and gravitate toward classes that emphasize these attributes.

Assassin

Despite its sinister reputation, shadow magic holds little stigma for hengeyokai, who treat the gloomy powers of the Shadowfell as any other spirits do. Manipulating the power of shadow appeals to their stealthy, trickster nature, and their ability to get in and out of a target's abode unseen makes them ideal assassins. Many ninja clans, realizing these benefits, have opened their membership to hengeyokai. Cat, fox, and rat hengeyokai are most likely to become assassins.

Monk

Despite a widespread belief that they lack the self-discipline necessary to become monks, hengeyokai are attracted to the solitary pursuit of mental and physical enlightenment. In addition, they have a natural talent for martial arts and love to improvise, preferring to mix and match styles. Hengeyokai do not turn to temples or monasteries for instruction; instead, they seek out hermit-like masters who instruct only a handful of students in the depths of a bamboo forest or atop a snow-covered mountain peak. Carp, crane, dog, hare, and monkey hengeyokai are most likely to train as monks.

Rogue

Thievery, whether for survival, profit, or fun, is second nature to many hengeyokai. In animal form, they can easily slip in and out of the most well-guarded places undetected (even the most suspicious guard pays little attention to a sparrow). Hengeyokai rogues run the gamut from thuggish yakuza to scheming con artists to deadly ninjas, and no subrace monopolizes the class. Even hengeyokai that pursue other paths often dabble, and multiclassed and hybrid rogues are common.

Sorcerer

As the descendants of animal spirits, hengeyokai are inherently magical creatures, and many can effortlessly tap into their innate arcane energy. The raw, chaotic power of the sorcerer best reflects their natural capabilities and disposition; few hengeyokai care to devote the time necessary to become a wizard or make a pact with a "superior" being. They favor the volatile nature of the wild sorcerer above all others. Cat, fox, monkey, and sparrow hengeyokai frequently follow this path, but the potential lies within all the subraces.

Roleplaying a Hengeyokai

When creating a hengeyokai character, here are a few points to consider.

You straddle multiple realms. Hengeyokai embody several, often conflicting worlds. Are you more animal or human? Spirit or mortal? Do you feel more comfortable in the wilderness or amid the trappings of civilization? How you answer these questions largely defines who you are, but these inherent tensions tear you in different directions, causing you to act unpredictably by the standards of other races. Many adventuring hengeyokai do so to get a better sense of themselves. What do you hope to discover about yourself during your journeys?

Guardian, predator, or recluse? Most hengeyokai want to live alone in peace, but others interact with human society more frequently. How do you relate to your neighbors? Those who see themselves as more part of the mortal world will often live among humans and sometimes become the guardians of the families or small villages they encounter; even evil hengeyokai are occasionally forced into this role, though they're more likely to regard their charges as possessions or meal tickets. Hengeyokai who feel superior to their neighbors because of their heritage often become heartless predators, at best using humans for personal gain.

Your freedom is paramount. When you see animals caged in pens or tied to stakes, you shake your head in sadness. You would rather die than suffer such a fate. As a result, you are constantly on the move, even if you remain in the same area, and you strive to limit your attachments, since not all shackles are literal. Something or someone has to be very important to you to make you stay in one place for a lengthy period. What do you value as much as your own freedom?

Your wits are a weapon. You're not as big or as powerful as other races, but you make up for that with your wits. Be smart and fast, and make sure to

take advantage of opportunities as they arise, especially those of your own design. Hone this weapon with mischief; it's better for a merchant to catch you stealing now than for a daimyo's guard to do so later.

Hengeyokai Characteristics: Agile, chaotic, elusive, independent, mischievous, quick, protective, reclusive, secretive, unpredictable, wild

Hengeyokai Names: Hengeyokai adopt the personal names of their local human neighbors. They do not take clan names or surnames.

About the Author

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The Seven Styles

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The empire of Shou Lung is home to many dojos, temples, and sparring halls. Practitioners of rival martial styles compete in tournaments and on the battlefield, seeking prestige for their schools. The seven styles presented here are some of the largest and most notable martial arts styles in Kara-Tur.

The schools described here are not limited to monks. Martial arts schools welcome any who are willing to learn and dedicated enough to train. Any class and any power source might be found in any given school, though some combinations are more natural than others.

Dragon Claw

Other martial arts schools warn that practicing Dragon Claw will pollute one's spirit. They say its leader is a demon that desires power in order to spread his evil throughout the land. If that truly is the case, the demon's plans have worked. Dragon Claw began as a small order in the wild nation of T'u Lung, but has since grown into the second-largest school in Shou Lung.

The name Dragon Claw has three meanings, done deliberately to confuse the order's enemies and garble any divination magic that tries to discern the order's ambitions and history. Dragon Claw is the martial art, Dragon Claw is the leader of the school, and dragon claws are the two hooked blades used by each member.

Grandmaster Training

An adventurer who trains in one of the seven styles described here learns new battle techniques unlike any practiced outside Kara-Tur. These techniques appear here as grandmaster training, a type of alternative reward that first appeared in *Dungeon Master's Guide 2*. These techniques might be learned directly from a school's grandmaster or picked up from other experienced members of the school.

Typically, an alternative reward lasts for five levels of play and then fades. (This rule applies because characters normally sell or replace items as they gain levels. Alternative rewards occupy the same space in the game, so a similar process applies to them.) If a character wants to retain the skills learned from a school after five levels of play, you can skip assigning a magic item of a higher level and instead increase the power of the alternative reward. A character can also seek out training to gain another alternative reward from the same school. Training in more than one school is usually frowned upon in Shou Lung.

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Style: There seem to be no teachers in the Dragon Claw school. Instead, recruits are given two hooked swords (their "dragon claws") and forced to fight. After a few battles they know how to use the swords, but seem somehow diminished. They no longer care about any goals they previously had, but believe wholeheartedly in the tenets of the Dragon Claw. When they fight, their movement is rigid; it doesn't flow like many other styles do. Most maneuvers take advantage of both weapons, but one of the style's truly distinctive techniques goes beyond weapon use: A practitioner of Dragon Claw can steal the very life force from people nearby.

Master: A portly man known as Lung Jua leads the order and holds the title of Dragon Claw. His past is shrouded in lies and rumors. Some believe that Lung Jua was once a chamberlain for the true Lung Jua, and murdered his master to assume his identity. Others say the chamberlain was truly Lung Jua all along, pretending to serve a decoy in order to confound assassins. Some scholars claim to have found ancient texts that depict Lung Jua as a four-armed, dragon-headed demon. But despite warnings of the master's evil, the school still grows.

Temples: The school calls two places home. The first is the exalted ancient temple known as The Sunken City of Many Doors. It lies beneath the city of Durkon in T'u Lung, and only the most favored among the Dragon Claws can enter. The other, public temple of the school stands in the capitol on the grounds of a powerful school that was destroyed long ago by the Dragon Claws. The victors rebuilt the main temple and filled much of the surrounding grounds with slums, gambling dens, and brothels. At the front of the temple stands a monument of a dragon's head resting atop human shoulders. It appears to have once been part of a larger statue, the rest of it now smashed. Lung Jua forbids anyone to touch this statue. Dragon Claw students speak of some who broke this rule on a dare, only to scream and die instantly, reduced to desiccated husks.

Goals: Lung Jua does not reveal his plans. The only clue about his goals is the pilgrimage all new recruits must take, when they test the martial artists of other schools. In the early days many smaller schools were crushed by the Dragon Claws, who seized their holdings. The schools remaining today are large enough to give Lung Jua a fight, and he hasn't expanded for many years. Any time he senses weakness, he might pounce.

Tests and Trials: A recruit's untrained sword battles are his or her initiation into the Dragon Claw school. After that, a new student undertakes a pilgrimage to test other martial artists. After ten battles at different schools, the student is either victorious or dead. Once this pilgrimage is complete, a student lives a debauched life, only occasionally being sent out to do Lung Jua's dirty work.

Dragon Claw Techniques

The school's techniques can be used by classes that rely on two-weapon fighting, such as the scout ranger and the tempest fighter from *Martial Power*. Strikers and defenders are most common, depending on whether the student uses the two weapons for lighting-quick strikes or to attack and parry simultaneously. The Dragon Claws could be represented by a heavy blade, but the scimitar or the khopesh (from *Adventurer's Vault*) work best. Take Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus, and other feats that make your weapon attacks more powerful.

Suggested Skill Powers: *diehard, inspiring fortitude, ominous threat, reactive surge.*

Dragon Claw Life-Thief Strike — Level 6 Uncommon

Your claws cut deep, as you drink life from those around you.

Alternative Reward: Grandmaster training 3,400 gp

Utility Power (Healing) ✦ **Encounter** (Move Action)

Effect: You shift up to 2 squares. If your next melee weapon attack this turn hits, you regain 5 hit points. You can instead regain 10 hit points if a willing ally within 5 squares of you takes 5 damage when you hit. (This damage cannot be prevented in any way.)

Dragon Claw Fangs and Maw — Level 16 Uncommon

The bite of the blades makes you stronger, the better to cull the weak.

Alternative Reward: Grandmaster training 45,000 gp

Utility Power (Healing) ✦ **Encounter** (Move Action)

Effect: You shift up to 2 squares. If your next melee weapon attack this turn hits, you deal 2d6 damage to each enemy adjacent to you that wasn't a target of the attack. You regain hit points equal to the total damage dealt this way.

Five Stars

Five Stars is a pragmatic, eclectic school that encourages experimentation. Many of its students have traveled to the far west and seen things that few in Kara-Tur can imagine. Emphasizing speed and accuracy over raw power, the school has attracted many females as students because it gives them great power without requiring great physical strength.

Style: The Five Stars school teaches that there are five types of movement: speed, leaping, missile deflection, feinting, and stillness. By mastering each mode, students become highly specialized in hand strikes, able to snatch arrows out of the air and land a multitude of blows before foes have a chance to react. Stories of advanced techniques (often called the Seven Stars Path) speak of two additional modes that masters of the style strive to perfect: movement through time, and movement through life.

Master: Lojih te Chu, a slight man whose bright red hair and piercing blue eyes reveal his foreign ancestry, is the undisputed master of the style. His hands are never still, and he is said to frequently travel disguised as a woman to avoid notice.

Dojo: The location of the Five Stars dojo changes when a new master ascends to lead it, or when the school draws too much unwanted attention from rivals. Humble, unassuming places such as bathhouses and inns are always chosen for a new location. The current dojo is in a restaurant, where students are expected to serve as cooks and staff while learning the style.

Goals: Students of the Five Stars school strive to be inconspicuous and inoffensive, but they are rarely able to avoid becoming involved in the communities they live in. They seek to fight injustice and improve the lives of those around them, but have a tendency to get into situations they don't completely understand.

Tests and Trials: To join the school, a prospective student must convince another member to sponsor him or her, but there is no other trial. The final test for a student is to snatch an ancient blue stone from the hand of a master. This is a deceptively difficult task that many must attempt dozens of times before they succeed.

Five Stars Techniques

Classes that emphasize multiple attacks and mobility work well with the Five Stars style. Strikers and controllers are particularly appropriate, especially ones emphasizing Dexterity or Intelligence over Strength. There is no preferred weapon, though students tend to favor lighter weapons such as light blades. Any feat that improves accuracy is perfect for the style.

Suggested Skill Powers: *anticipate maneuver, agile recovery, battle feint, bounding leap, dirty tricks, dodge step, drop and roll, graceful maneuver, incredible stride, insightful riposte, mighty sprint, perfect balance, reflexive dodge, sudden leap, tumbling dodge.*

Five Stars Arrow Deflection — Level 3 Uncommon

Do not be fast. Do not be quick. Become the arrow before it strikes your flesh.

Alternative Reward: Grandmaster training — 680 gp

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Move Action)

Effect: You move up to your speed. If you keep one hand free, you gain a +4 power bonus to all defenses against ranged weapon attacks until the end of your next turn. If such an attack misses you while you have this bonus, you can redirect it to another creature within 5 squares of you as an immediate reaction.

Five Stars Five Strikes — Level 13 Uncommon

Do not stop moving simply because you have struck your target; let one strike blossom into five.

Alternative Reward: Grandmaster training — 17,000 gp

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Move Action)

Effect: You move up to your speed. If your next melee attack this turn hits, roll four extra attack rolls (using the same modifier as the initial attack roll) and deal 1d8 extra damage to the creature you hit for each of the extra attack rolls that hits.

Iron Hand

The body is weak, but can be made impervious. Studying the Iron Hand style means enduring pain and discomfort to become as hard as iron.

Style: Practitioners of Iron Hand absorb crushing attacks and respond with heavy fist, knee, and elbow strikes. The Iron Hand style teaches that conditioning the body leads to personal betterment, and that personal betterment is the true goal of martial arts. An Iron Hand student attacks only as a last resort, when other methods of resolving conflict have failed.

The school frequently competes in tournaments against other schools, and a friendly rivalry exists between Iron Hand and Five Stars students. This competitiveness leads to contests in which speed and quick strikes are pitted against durability and strength.

Master: The elderly Ling Li Te Hsi continues to practice and teach his family's signature style. Though his body has grown frail, he can walk calmly through a fierce hailstorm or split an anvil with a single strike. More than two decades ago the master made an oath never to fight a living person again, and he has not broken it. When he's not practicing Iron Hand style, he writes scrolls detailing his long family history—but he does not write about the Iron Hand style.

When an Iron Hand grandmaster dies, by tradition a male heir of the Ling Li family assumes the

role. However, despite having as large a family as any former grandmaster, Ling Li Te Hsi has no male heirs. To make sure the Ling Li family's style survives, the grandmaster opened the doors to many more students than the school has ever taught before. Instead of three to nine students, the school has dozens at a time. Ling Li Te Hsi plans for the dojo to close when he dies, but his youngest daughter, Shengyin, intends to keep the school open despite her father's wishes and the dictates of tradition.

Dojo: The heavy timbers and iron fittings of the Iron Hand dojo make the school as sturdy as its students. Every exercise serves to make students more resilient and fierce, and the structure of the dojo offers no softness or protection. Iron statues line the halls, and the air is filled with the din of students striking statues to toughen their bodies. When they spar with each other and are knocked down, they fall onto iron plates that cover the floor. The quarters of the Ling Li family surround the dojo. The family, once quite large, now occupies only a few buildings.

Goals: Ling Li has no greater goal than to teach the Iron Hand style to any who are willing to learn. To the master, political aspirations and a lust for wealth or power prevent one from perfecting the self. Ling Li desires to train as many students as he can before he dies, and some believe he has gone too far in the expansion of his school. His daughter Shengyin in particular thinks that too many students have been let in, and that her father is risking teaching the style to those who are not worthy.

Tests and Trials: The three Iron Spirits have guarded the school since its creation. These oni, armed with massive iron clubs, provide the school's final test: the Iron Challenge. Only by withstanding the might of all three oni in a ceremonial combat can a student truly be called a master of the Iron Hand.

Iron Hand Techniques

Adventurers from the Iron Hand school usually become defenders or strikers. Feats from the Enduring Stamina category provide benefits that suit Iron Hand students.

Suggested Skill Powers: *diehard, endure pain, inspiring fortitude, third wind, walk it off.*

Iron Hand Anvil Breaker Level 2 Uncommon

Move slowly to center the body. Find the weakness in your target that will cause it to crumble, and then strike.

Alternative Reward: Grandmaster training 1,800 gp

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Move Action)

Effect: You move up to half your speed. The next melee attack you make this turn deals 1d6 extra damage.

Iron Hand Unbreakable Form Level 12 Uncommon

Be heavy as the iron bell, sturdy as the barred gate.

Alternative Reward: Grandmaster training 13,000 gp

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Move Action)

Effect: You move up to half your speed. The next time you make a melee attack this turn, you gain 20 temporary hit points if you hit or 10 temporary hit points if you miss.

Mad Monkey

Only a few martial artists know the Mad Monkey style, so it can hardly be called a school. Its fame far exceeds its size, though: Stories abound of strange monks fighting off brigands while falling-down drunk. Those who seek to learn this style soon discover that its master is impossible to find. If a Mad Monkey student is asked about old Hu Sen, the student replies that one who is meant to learn Mad Monkey will someday, somehow, arrive in the presence of the master.

Style: The erratic, unpredictable movements of the Mad Monkey style combine dodging, misdirection, and improvisation. Students appear intoxicated or incompetent when fighting, but these tricks put them in a mind-set that makes their movements effortless. The style utilizes a naginata, a long polearm with a curved blade equivalent to a glaive or longspear. Attacks with the naginata swing wide, and are meant to throw a foe off balance rather than strike home every time. The polearm can also be used to lean on, to vault with for high leaps, to duck behind for defense, or to prop up the body when the practitioner is pretending to be drunk (or really is). The style doesn't have formalized moves or stances. Instead, students learn a few skills that practically become instinctual over time, and weave them together in the moment.

Master: Old Master Hu Sen must be more than human. For example, his home, Mad Monkey Island, doesn't appear on any map because Hu Sen can magically move it where he pleases, and he has no desire to leave it in one place and thus make him easier to find. Is he the mischievous demigod known as Monkey? When the question comes with the promise of free drink or praise, he says he is. But if the questioner asks for a blessing or help with a difficult task, he says he isn't. Hu Sen is wise and foolish, calm and temperamental, brave and cowardly. Only three things about him are certain: He is old, he is a martial arts master, and he always carries wine.

Dojo: Mad Monkey Island is less a dojo or a temple than it is a proving ground, a series of trials in the form of a small landmass. The old master is its only resident, and the cave where he lives is off limits to anyone else. An extinct volcano rises on the island, with a path leading up to its mouth. A few small huts provide shelter for the students Hu Sen brings here to endure weeks of training.

Goals: Hu Sen's goals are as contradictory as he is. He wants to teach his style to worthy warriors, but he doesn't want anyone to seek him out. He fights for what he sees as good, but refuses to form alliances and insists on doing things his own way. If all

these eccentricities add up to some overall plan, it's incomprehensible to anyone but the old master.

Tests and Trials: To learn Mad Monkey, a warrior undergoes a long, torturous, bizarre series of trials under Hu Sen's tutelage. The old man likes to sleep late and get raucously drunk at night, and generally sets a terrible example when it comes to discipline. His orders seem contradictory or nonsensical. One of his most aggravating habits is that he constantly repeats his "rule number one" to students, but keeps changing what that rule is. Still, all this oddness does reinforce the teachings of the Mad Monkey style, and former students consider it an invaluable part of the training. Over the course of weeks, Hu Sen runs initiates through ten trials, each teaching a part of Mad Monkey style in some peculiar fashion. The training culminates in a final test within Hu Sen's cave. No student who has undergone this test will reveal its nature.

Mad Monkey Techniques

Strikers and controllers choose Mad Monkey to make up for their lower defenses. Leaders who practice the style tend to be underestimated, giving the party a psychological advantage over their foes. Feats from the vigilant reflexes and quick reaction categories make you a tricky opponent to pin down. Choose a glaive or a longspear as a weapon, or pick up the Staff Expertise feat to gain reach with that inconspicuous weapon.

Suggested Skill Powers: *agile recovery, battle feint, confusing blather, dodge step, drop and roll, false bravado, rapid escape, reflexive dodge, stall tactics, tumbling dodge.*

Mad Monkey Wobbles Level 4 Uncommon

Rule number one is to not get hit. Stop getting hit!

Alternative Reward: Grandmaster training 840 gp

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Move Action)

Effect: You move up to your speed and gain a +4 power bonus to AC and Reflex during this movement. If the next melee attack you make this turn hits, you can use the attack result as your defense against the next attack made against your AC or Reflex before the end of your next turn.

Mad Monkey Falls Down Level 14 Uncommon

Rule number one is that you will fall down if you are struck. So just fall down and skip being struck.

Alternative Reward: Grandmaster training 21,000 gp

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Move Action)

Effect: You shift up to your speed and fall prone at the end of that movement. If the next melee attack you make this turn hits, you can push the target 1 square and knock it prone.

Nimble Hunter

As much a religious order as a martial arts style, the Order of the Nimble Hunter trains its monks' bodies, minds, and hearts. The school emphasizes learning in literature and the arts as much as it does physical training. Students are skilled debaters, known for being clever and well versed in a variety of topics. Its mastery of theological lore is second to none among the priesthoods. The order has a large number of female monks, more than any other sect, and reveres Ai Ching (the Mistress of Love and Fidelity, Goddess of Love and Marriage) as its patron immortal. The Order of the Nimble Hunter holds beauty to be divine, and grace as the greatest of virtues.

Style: Speed, mobility and elegance are emphasized in the order's catlike style of kung fu. Students' movements are fluid and graceful. They are trained to move in, strike, and retreat so they can strike again, all the while maintaining elegant poise. Students are constantly in motion in combat, impossible to pin down, and are stationary only in the instant before they strike. Detractors accuse Nimble Hunter monks of fighting the way they talk, but students take that as a compliment.

Master: The beautiful Huangchin Chichchu is the current master of the Order of the Nimble Hunter. However, she spends so much of her time in the halls of the Imperial Court that day-to-day activities (including training) are overseen by Szu Ch'üan, an immaculately dressed, elderly sage. His exacting standards demand that all students embody the ideals of grace and elegance.

Temple: Life within the order is organized around its opulent Temple of Persistent Grace. Every monk spars under the golden boughs of the halls, meditates in the meticulously tended gardens, and debates in the enormous Hall of Silk and Stone. The temple is renowned for its hospitality, and visiting dignitaries from across the land enjoy sumptuous feasts.

Goals: Students of the style consider themselves monks first and martial artists second, and strive to show the faithful the beauty of the Path rather than seek out opportunities for combat. The elegant monks are well spoken, well read, and highly sought after as advisors and court officials. The order expertly plays the games of politics, dancing its way through social circles and always working to increase its influence.

Tests and Trials: Only those who can appreciate the beauty around them are allowed into the order, and a debate against three sitting monks is required for induction. All masters must contribute to the lore of the order by presenting a dissertation while simultaneously sparring against three other masters.

Nimble Hunter Techniques

Mobility is paramount for the Nimble Hunter style. Strikers work well, but more stationary roles such as defenders are a tougher fit. Leaders work very well also, but can require careful building to emphasize mobility. Characters should also be trained in social skills (especially Bluff, Diplomacy, and/or Insight), and the order places a high value on Intelligence and Charisma. Consider social feats or Skill Focus, supplemented by feats boosting mobility (speed or defenses against opportunity attacks).

Suggested Skill Powers: *befriend, confusing blather, cry for mercy, incredible stride, indomitable ally, insightful comment, insightful counter, insightful riposte, false bravado, fast talk, faulty memory, haggle, master diplomat, noble sacrifice, serpent's tongue, soothing words, stall tactics, stirring speech, sudden leap.*

Nimble Hunter Pounce Level 7 Uncommon

Do not hesitate. Grace is simplicity and focus. Step in, strike, step out.

Alternative Reward: Grandmaster training 2,600 gp

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Move Action)

Effect: You jump a number of squares up to your speed. After the next melee attack you make this round, you can shift up to half your speed.

Nimble Hunter Grace of Eloquence Level 17 Uncommon

Words cannot be blocked. There is no defense against the beauty of logic.

Alternative Reward: Grandmaster training 65,000 gp

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Move Action)

Effect: You jump a number of squares up to your speed. If your next melee attack this turn hits, each ally within 10 squares of you who can hear you gains 10 temporary hit points.

Northern Fist

Few in number but broad in scope, the students of the school of the Northern Fist protect the common people. Should the empire ever collapse, the Northern Fist will make sure that the laws are followed and honor upheld.

Style: Northern Fist students prefer to capture their foes and turn them over to the authorities rather than kill them. As such, the style focuses on striking vital areas with the intent to incapacitate or paralyze. Students learn the pressure points of the body and can read the ki of their opponents.

More so than other schools, the way of the Northern Fist extends beyond merely learning to fight. Its philosophy exalts stewardship of the empire—or, more precisely, the people of the empire. A Northern Fist student should be willing to die protecting even the lowliest person, as long as that person does no evil.

Master: The small dojos of the Northern Fist have no central great school to link them. Each sensei operates independently and sends messages to the others only when there is news of victory or impending danger. The closest thing to a master the school has is Shouchang, and she is more a spiritual leader than a combat trainer. Her voice guides the school, keeping it on the correct path. She faces little opposition, for the way of the Northern Fist is clear.

Temple: Dojos of the Northern Fist are scattered throughout Shou Lung. These small dojos rarely advertise their presence; most operate from the back rooms of shops or out of caves. Only one location unites the dojos of the Northern Fist: The Hall of the Great Masters belongs to no one master, and no students train there. Two events bring disciples of the Northern Fist to the sacred hall: when a student becomes a master, and when the statue of a new master is placed within it to join those of previously inducted masters. The hall's location is a secret known only to the masters of the school.

Goals: Every student of the Northern Fist school swears to protect the common people. If the Empire should collapse, these students are duty-bound to ensure that the people of Shou Lung follow the laws and honor one another. Until such a time—may it never come—they go where the law fails to reach, stopping bandit attacks, covertly deposing corrupt administrators, and defending the weak against the strong and privileged.

Tests and Trials: In the first of two tests, the Test of the Great Masters, the student enters the Hall of the Great Masters. It is rumored that one of the statues within then comes to life, animated by the spirit of one of the great masters, and the student must battle it in a fight to the death.

A victorious student must then complete the Test of the Inner Soul, in which another master poses a moral choice. There is no one answer, but the choice lays bare the true nature of the student. If the master believes that this nature fits the way of the Northern Fist, the student joins the ranks of the masters.

Northern Fist Techniques

Because they protect the people, most Northern Fist practitioners are defenders. Their abilities also work well for controllers who use primarily nonlethal attacks. Leaders, too, follow the Northern Fist, but they get more out of its philosophy than they do its combat techniques. The Northern Fists prefer weapons that can be used to subdue, such as quarterstaffs, clubs, hammers, and bare fists. The Disciple of Justice feat, and feats from the steadfast willpower category, fit Northern Star students.

Suggested Skill Powers: *anticipate maneuver, conviction, insightful comment, insightful counter, miraculous treatment, physician's care, prescient defense.*

Northern Fist Paralyzing Point — Level 8 Uncommon

Strike like the scorpion defending its den from the predator, and block the ki to stop your foe's movement.

Alternative Reward: Grandmaster training 3,400 gp

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Move Action)

Effect: You move up to half your speed. If the next melee attack you make this turn hits, the target is immobilized until the end of your next turn, and you can shift 1 square.

Northern Fist Distant Pain — Level 18 Uncommon

Just as the wind ripples the waves, your extended ki disrupts your foe.

Alternative Reward: Grandmaster training 85,000 gp

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Move Action)

Effect: You move up to your speed or shift up to half your speed. The next melee attack you make this turn has a range of 5 instead of its normal range, and one target hit by it takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends).

Southern Star

The mystical Southern Star school emphasizes the power of ki. Students shape their inner strength into deadly long-range strikes, defeating their enemies without physical contact. The Southern Star temple was destroyed generations ago, so the school has adapted to train in the empty places away from civilization.

Style: Students of the Southern Star are taught that the hardest target to hit is the one that cannot be reached, and the deadliest weapon is the one that the target cannot escape the reach of. They learn to focus their ki in their strikes, then to focus just beyond them, then further and further yet, until their attacks can reach distant foes. It takes a powerful will to punch beyond the physical reach of a fist, and Southern Star practitioners are often quiet, focused, and intent.

Master: The master of the Southern Star is a mysterious figure. Grandmasters reportedly have a secret technique to remove themselves from memory, and as such little is known about them, not even their gender. Long white hair flowing in the wind is the only image that remains in the minds of those who have met the master of the Southern Star. Most assume that this extreme secrecy is a reaction to the destruction of the school's ancient temple, but others claim that it is to conceal the fact that the school has not one master, but many.

Temple: The Southern Star school has no central temple or dojo. Its grand temple was destroyed and the Great Bell shattered long ago, and since then the school has lived like the wind, blowing all across Kara-Tur. Students practice in the forests and the mountains, far from civilization. Training grounds and "dojos of the earth and sky" are marked with boulders that have been split in two without any sign of tools or impact.

Goals: The master of the Southern Star is mysterious and aloof, and if he or she has any goals, they are unclear. However, other prominent members of the school are pushing for change. Huamu, who is said to be able to bend the winds to his will, calls for the creation of a new temple. His students travel the land looking for a suitable location. His detractors say that settling down in a temple again will just make the school a target for attack. "Make a

Using Martial Arts Outside Kara-Tur

These styles originated in Kara-Tur, but can be used elsewhere, including more traditional D&D settings. Feel free to adapt the flavor of a style to suit your setting, even if it does not have a strong Asian influence. Some ideas on how to do this are presented below, but you can change the details to suit your particular campaign.

The **Dragon Claw** school could be an ancient tiefling or drow fighting art, closely related to warlock traditions.

Halflings or gnomes might have created the **Five Stars** school to counter the advantages of the stronger races. Or perhaps it originated among half-elves who had to be pragmatic and learn what they could, where they could.

Iron Hand could be an ancient dwarven martial art developed during the dwarves' struggle for freedom from the giants, or it could have been invented by goliaths or half-orcs in a mountaintop retreat.

Mad Monkey's first student could have been a halfling, or a dwarf that shared his brothers' love of ale but not their foolhardy bravery.

The **Order of the Nimble Hunter** could be a monastic order of elves and eladrin dedicated to Corellon. Perhaps it includes some prominent devas as well.

Dragonborn could have created the **Northern Fist** style to maintain order as their empire fell. Or does the style keep alive the codes of honor that the ancient dwarf forefathers first articulated? Did half-orcs invent it to civilize their fellows?

The **Southern Star** school also fits well with halflings or gnomes trying to avoid making themselves a target for conquest, but its mystical associations could have been born of eladrin experimentation or deva enlightenment.

bell and someone will ring it" is a common saying among the Southern Star.

Tests and Trials: The tests of the Southern Star focus on action at a distance. Students move pebbles, then stones, then boulders. Their first trial is the traditional Test of No Wind, where they must snuff a candle's flame without moving. Masters must cleave a boulder as tall as themselves without touching it.

Southern Star Techniques

The Southern Star style focuses on ranged attacks, so almost any ranged class is thematically appropriate. Classes that do not use weapons, such as psions and sorcerers, could use their inner ki to focus their powers. Powers that enable melee attacks at a distance, such as *masterful spiral*, also suit the style well. Martial artists are usually in the middle of fights rather than at the edges, so feats that allow you to make ranged attacks without provoking opportunity attacks and feats that boost your defenses will help keep you alive there.

Suggested Skill Powers: *far sight, focused sight, guided shot, perfect sight, spot weakness.*

Southern Star Ring the Bell — Level 4 Uncommon

Don't deceive yourself into thinking your reach ends with your fists. Strike further, from within.

Alternative Reward: Grandmaster training — 840 gp

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Move Action)

Effect: You move up to your speed or shift up to half your speed. Your reach increases by 1 for all melee attacks you make before the end of your next turn.

Southern Star Cleave the Boulder — Level 14 Uncommon

You raise a fist and strike an enemy far from your reach.

Alternative Reward: Grandmaster training — 21,000 gp

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Move Action)

Effect: You move up to your speed or shift up to half your speed. All melee attacks you make until the end of your next turn can be made as ranged 10 attacks instead.

About the Author

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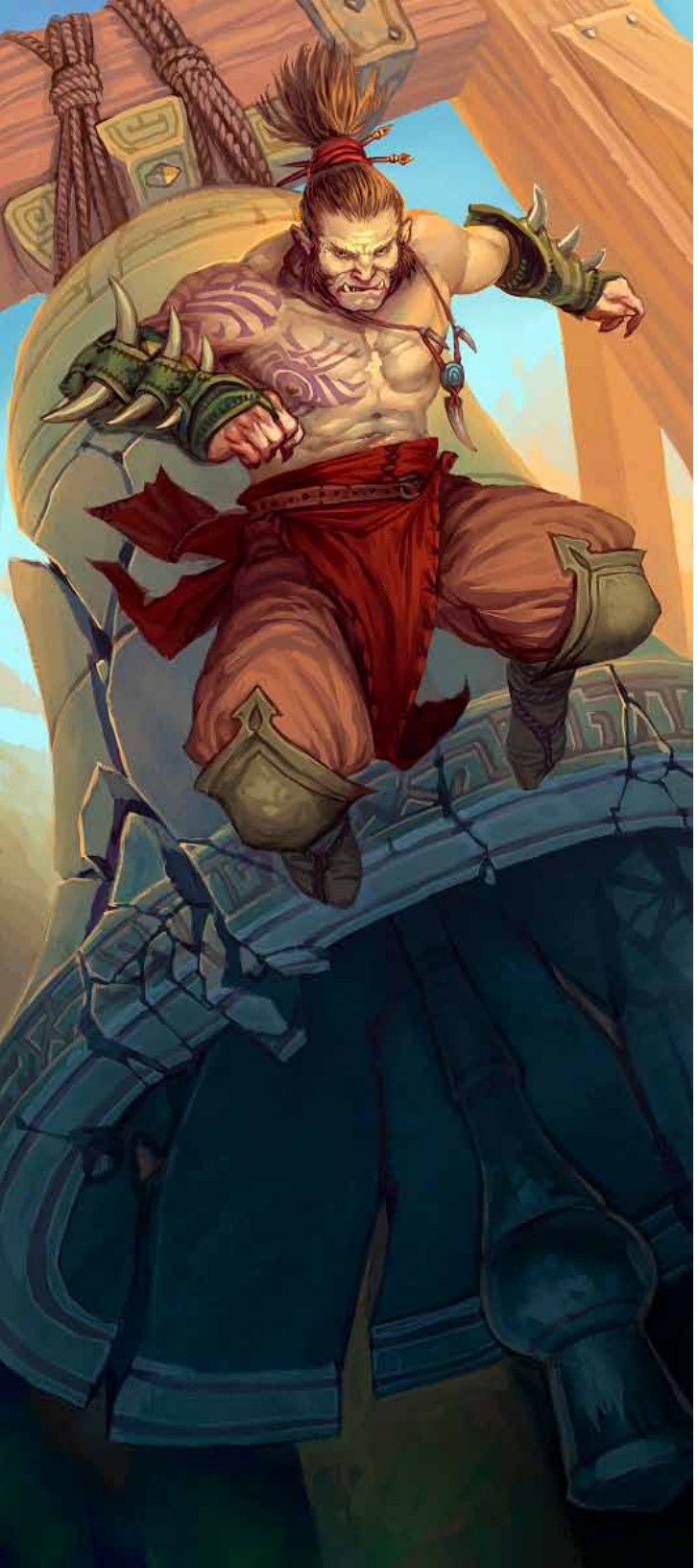

Monk Basics

By Jim Auwaerter and Galen Mullins

Illustrations by Alexey Aparin

Philemon ran down the dusty road until his legs could not carry him another step. Collapsing against a tree, he prayed that the orc raiding party had stopped pursuing him. He did not have the strength to leap up when a voice from behind startled him.

"You look tired, my friend. Won't you join me for some tea?"

With some effort, Philemon turned and saw an old man in plain brown robes sitting several yards away on a log. To his horror, the man was starting to light a small campfire.

"No! You mustn't! It isn't safe—"

Three orcs came barreling through the nearby brush, interrupting Philemon.

The old man sat unfazed as the orcs charged at him with swords drawn. His only reaction was to reach over to his walking staff. As the lead orc's sword came down, the man disappeared and then reappeared behind the orc. One quick blow from his staff sent the orc crumpling to the ground, and the return swing knocked a second orc backward over a fallen log. The third orc roared as it swung its blade at the old man's neck, only to have its weapon blocked by the spinning motion of the staff. Without pause, the staff dipped down, tripping the orc and then knocking it out. The fight was over in a matter of seconds.

"How did you do that?" asked Philemon in disbelief.

"Any person who can find harmony between mind and body can perform such acts," replied the old man.

With newfound resolve, Philemon asked the question that would change his life. "Please, would you teach me?"

Monks can be unassuming figures. They rarely wear armor or fight with anything other than the simple weapons that a poor farmer might carry. But woe to an enemy that interprets these truths as a sign of weakness. In the middle of a battle, trained monks exude serenity as they dodge fists and slide between foes. When any monk lashes out, an overconfident enemy learns a swift and brutal lesson.

This article explores the monk's abilities, takes a look at some interesting race and multiclass selections for the monk class, and provides new feats and powers for your monk character.

Class Features

At 1st level, with a quick series of flowing movements, a monk can wound several foes and nimbly avoid attacks. How does the monk do this? Let's answer this question by taking a closer look at some of the monk's class features.

Unarmored Defense and Defensive Features

Though your monk gains proficiency only with cloth armor and lacks shield training, your monk's martial training offsets your use of lighter armor by giving you the means to avoid a foe's attacks. This training is reflected with a +1 bonus to Fortitude, Reflex, and Will, plus your monk receives a bonus to defenses

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associated with the Monastic Tradition you choose. A Centered Breath or Stone Fist monk gains a scaling bonus to Fortitude or Will, respectively, and the Iron Soul monk adds to his or her AC with Mental Arsenal. Unlike the untyped bonuses from the other Monastic Traditions, Mental Arsenal provides a shield bonus, so think about watching for other ways to gain shield bonuses to AC if you want to focus on playing a shield-bearing monk.

Your monk has good defenses from class features that are equal to or better than those of other strikers, Because your monk is built to fight on the front line, and most other strikers work from ranged positions, your monk needs several options to make those defenses better than other strikers—and you have them. Even as a *flurry of blows* power encourages your monk to be adjacent to as many enemies as possible, several feats can bolster your monk's defenses. Take a look at feats such as Unarmored Agility (highly recommended for all traditions), Iron Parry (for Iron Soul monks), and Hafted Defense (for staff-wielding monks); each of these increases your monk's AC enough to encourage enemies to seek easier targets. At paragon tier, Eyes in the Back of Your Head and Uncanny Dodge can help protect your monk against the perils of being flanked.

Due to your monk's balanced non-AC defenses, Improved Defenses might be the best feat for protecting against uncommon attacks. If you have an Iron Soul monk, you might find Superior Will or Iron Will to be a better choice, because it can shore up your monk's slightly weaker Will. These three feats are helpful to all monks, but they're especially good for monks in parties that don't have a defender to draw away attention.

Unarmed Combatant

One of the monk's most iconic abilities is unarmed strike, and the Unarmed Combatant class feature makes your monk's bare hands as threatening as a ranger's longswords. Keep in mind that your monk unarmed strike requires at least one free hand, even if the attack is an elbow strike, a kick, or a head butt. Another thing to note with Unarmed Combatant: If you have a Stone Fist monk with a high Strength score, you can make best use of this feature to unleash a strong melee basic attack when charging or when an enemy provokes an opportunity attack.

Implements

Monks use implements for all their class attack powers, so it's important to choose the right one. You have two main choices for implements: You can pick a weapon with which your monk is proficient, or you can choose a ki focus. Monks have proficiency with most simple weapons, and some races get extra racial proficiencies, such as with an eladrin's longsword proficiency or an elf's longbow proficiency. Other races gain multiple weapon proficiencies with feats, such as dwarves, gith-zerai, and goliaths. Although your monk can use those weapons as implements and benefit from any enchantments that don't require weapon attacks, remember that your monk can't make use of weapon properties (such as brutal or high crit) on implement attacks.

A magic ki focus often comes with monk-specific benefits, such as an enhancement to a *flurry of blows* power or your monk's movement abilities. A ki focus's enhancement bonus can improve a weapon attack (such as a melee basic attack made with your monk unarmed strike), but remember that your monk gains magical properties from the ki focus or the weapon, and not both. The superior ki focuses available through the Superior Implement Training feat might give your monk more accuracy, improved forced movement, or increased reach with melee attacks.

Flurry of Blows

The key to your monk's effectiveness as a striker lies in your Flurry of Blows class feature—specifically, the *flurry of blows* power it provides. Your chosen Monastic Tradition determines the benefits your monk receives from this feature, though all the versions have common traits. Each version deals damage based on the build's secondary ability score, you can use it only on your monk's turn, and it gains targets as your monk gains experience. Finally, each power has greater effect when your monk uses it against a creature not targeted by the triggering attack.

Unlike other strikers' source of extra damage, a *flurry of blows* power doesn't do more damage to a target at higher levels. Instead, it targets more creatures. This means that when you improve the power's single-target damage, the effect is multiplied by the number of targets.

Several feats can improve a *flurry of blows* power when used in combination with a particular weapon. Crashing Tempest Style increases the power's damage while using a club. Pointed Step Style (spear) and Skipping Stone Flurry (sling) allow your monk to target distant creatures. At paragon tier, Starblade Flurry (dagger or shuriken) lets you add an additional target within 5 squares of your monk. Alternatively, if you want to focus on a single creature, Brutal Flurry is an excellent choice at paragon tier.

Equipment can increase the efficacy of your monk's *flurry of blows* power. Wielding a *ki weapon* adds 2 extra damage, and many ki focus enchantments, such as *blurred strike*, *mighty strike*, and *quick strike*, add extra damage to a *flurry of blows* power or allow your monk to use the power more frequently. The power can benefit from effects that cause an attack to deal extra damage (though not if the effect has a damage roll, since the damage from a *flurry of blows* power is not rolled).

Because a *flurry of blows* power requires your monk to hit a target, the power is a free action. The power's

timing restriction (it can be used only on your monk's turn) means that the power can't be triggered by an opportunity attack or an attack granted by another character. To have the greatest chance of triggering a *flurry of blows* power, you need to make as many attack rolls as possible on your monk's turn. The two ways monks have to do this are with close attack powers and with powers that enable them to make multiple attacks against separate enemies. Both kinds of attacks might encourage enemies to concentrate their efforts on your monk, either for revenge or to neutralize the threat your monk represents to them.

As noted earlier, monks are designed to damage creatures that they didn't target with their attacks. In fact, your monk's *flurry of blows* power becomes more effective when used against these untargeted creatures. You have to decide whether your low-level monk focuses attacks on a single target or gets an extra effect by spreading damage around. When your monk reaches paragon and epic tier, the decision becomes a little easier to make (do both when possible), but decide you must. As the *Player's Strategy Guide* says, focusing attacks is a strong tactic, since a dead or unconscious enemy can't hurt you. As for the other approach, here are a couple of situations in which spreading the love works well.

First, you can use the extra effect of your monk's *flurry of blows* power tactically so that it does more than damage one creature. A Centered Breath monk who can slide an enemy back toward (and perhaps off) a ledge or an Iron Soul monk who can move away from a threatening enemy without fear of provoking an opportunity attack are both examples of when the extra effect is more useful.

Second, you could attack the defenses of weaker enemies and still affect stronger enemies. For example, if a kobold is standing next to a dragon, your monk could attack the kobold, have an easier time hitting it, and then automatically damage the dragon.

Third, if an enemy is nearly dead, you can have your monk use his or her preferred attack against a hearty enemy, then finish off the staggered enemy with *flurry of blows*. Minions are good targets for the power for a similar reason.

Centered Breath

Centered Breath monks bring to life the calm, mystic variety of monk. Although inner peace doesn't lead directly to extra combat prowess, it can often help your monk avoid ambushes or notice things that don't quite add up in an informant's story by allowing your monk to be less distracted by personal matters and open to subtleties that might exist in external situations.

Your Centered Breath monk uses Wisdom as a secondary ability score, and the damage from the *centered flurry of blows* power (2 + Wisdom modifier) is based off that score's modifier. Your monk can slide any creature targeted by the *centered flurry of blows* power 1 square. If your monk targets the triggering creature, the slide must leave that creature adjacent to your monk. If you didn't target the triggering creature, the slide can go in any direction, which is useful when the target is standing next to a cliff or on some form of hazardous terrain. Having an at-will slide also gives your Centered Breath monk combat advantage if you took the Deadly Draw feat.

Iron Soul

Iron Soul monks are far tougher than most other monks. Although Centered Breath and Stone Fist monks have to be careful after spending a couple of battles on the front lines, an Iron Soul monk can remain safe over a longer adventuring day.

Your Iron Soul monk uses Constitution for the *iron soul flurry of blows* power. The power's damage is approximately the same as for the Centered Breath monk (2 + Constitution modifier), and any creature damaged by the power can't shift until the end of your monk's next turn. Because they can't get away safely, enemies are more inclned to stay near your monk (especially if your monk is accompanied by a defender or other character with a strong opportunity attack), which means that you should be ready to be attacked by angry and frustrated foes. Fortunately, the extra benefit of using *iron soul flurry of blows* against an untargeted creature prevents that creature from making opportunity attacks of its own. If your monk brings a defender along and then skips out, take advantage of both effects.

Stone Fist

If you play a Stone Fist monk with a high Strength ability score, your monk has a good melee basic attack, which allows your monk to make great use of opportunity attacks and charges. Although your *stone fist flurry of blows* can't be triggered by an opportunity attack, the extra damage is worthwhile without it.

Your monk's *stone fist flurry of blows* is based on Strength, and it is the most straightforward of the three variants. The power can deal more damage than either the Centered Breath or the Iron Soul variants (3 + Strength modifier at base), and the benefit for using this power against an untargeted creature is that your monk deals more damage (2 extra damage per tier).

NAMING YOUR STYLE

Here are a few suggestions to help you name your personal style. If you're having trouble, take a word from any two of the columns.

First Word	Second Word	Either Word
Awakened	Dragon	Diamond
Dark	Golem	Moon
Forbidden	Hurricane	Shadow
Iron	Monkey	Soul
Leaping	Serpent	
Silent	Step	
Stone	Tiger	

Full Disciplines

Monks have more mobility than any other class, thanks in large part to their full discipline powers. Your monk's at-will and encounter attack powers can have both an attack technique and a movement technique that offers your monk a better way to move than a simple shift or walk. Your 1st-level monk can have at least three different movement disciplines, and each allows for a variety of effects, not all of which focus only on moving around the area. *Steel wind* removes an enemy's mark before your monk moves, and *lion's den* gives your monk a defense bonus with a shift. Encounter powers have even more exotic effects, such as damage resistance (*eternal mountain*, level 3) or causing difficult terrain around your monk after a leap (*titan's step*, level 7).

Full disciplines do come with some drawbacks, however. A monk can use only one full discipline power in a round (though you can choose to have your monk use both its attack technique and movement technique) unless you spend an action point. Both of the techniques also have the same frequency as the parent power, so you can't, for example, use the movement technique of an encounter power twice, even with two move actions (though you could do so with an at-will full discipline power).

YOU KNOW THE FORBIDDEN DRAGON STYLE?

When you choose your monk's powers, give thought to how they represent your monk's fighting style. If you want to play a monk who prefers to line up a single powerful attack against an enemy, you'll make different choices than you would if you choose to play a monk who strikes out with many blows at each surrounding enemy. Is your monk's style pieced together from several traditions to surprise opponents, or is your monk a staunch believer in the efficacy of your chosen style, taught by the generations of monks that preceded you?

By the time your monk moves to epic tier, you might be creating your own disciplines. Perhaps you have the first monk to come up with dragon fist strike (". . . a simple continuation of the principles found in the leaping dragon strike . . ."). If so, your monk's teaching could form the foundation of a new school of monastic training, even after you have completed your Destiny Quest.

Racial Choices

Consider the following races when you're creating your monk character. Each one can give you some opportunities for fun rules options and roleplaying.

Dwarf

Dwarves make unconventional monks. If you choose to create a dwarf monk, your character lacks a bonus to Dexterity but gains bonuses to any of your monk's secondary ability scores: Strength, Constitution, or Wisdom. Your dwarf's speed is a slight detriment given the number of monk powers and abilities that are based on a character's speed, but you can make up for this lack in other ways. Your dwarf's ability to stand his or her ground and not get knocked over makes it harder for your dwarf monk to be removed from the front lines. Finally, your dwarf monk's ability to use a second wind as a minor action means you have to worry less about your character being overwhelmed before your party's leader can react.

Elf

Elves are natural Centered Breath monks. If you choose to make an elf monk, your character gains racial bonuses to Dexterity and Wisdom, making it easy to start with an 18 in both scores. Your elf's native quickness synergizes well with many monk powers that key off the character's speed. An elf's racial ability to ignore natural difficult terrain when shifting is highly effective when combined with monk powers that allow your character to shift multiple squares either as a move action or as part of an attack. Your elf's built-in proficiency with longbows means your monk can have easy access to a powerful ranged basic attack and can use the ranged weapon as an implement for your monk powers, creating an unusual form of close-range fighting. Finally, *elven accuracy* gives your monk one more chance to land a hit with a powerful encounter or daily power.

Human

Humans can excel at nearly any class, and monks are no exception. If you choose to make a human monk, give your floating ability score bonus to Dexterity, a monk's primary ability. Your monk is equally qualified for any of the Monastic Traditions. Gaining a third at-will power is especially appealing, since monks use their at-will powers for both moving and attacking. Consider Internalize the Basic Kata (presented later in this article) or one of the monk weapon style feats for your bonus feat.

Thri-kreen

Thri-kreen make amazing monks of both the Stone Fist and Centered Breath varieties because of their ability score bonuses to Dexterity and Strength or Wisdom. Like elves, thri-kreen have speed 7, which boosts the potency of many monk class powers. If you choose to play a thri-kreen, your character's *thri-kreen claws* power gives your monk a three-target minor action attack, which provides up to three more

PREFERRED BUILDS FOR RACES

Race	Build
Bladeling	Centered Breath
Changeling	Any
Deva	Centered Breath
Dragonborn	Iron Soul
Drow	Centered Breath
Dwarf	Any
Eladrin	Any
Elf	Centered Breath
Genasi	Stone Fist
Githzerai	Centered Breath
Gnoll	Iron Soul
Gnome	Any
Goliath	Any
Half-elf	Centered Breath
Half-orc	Iron Soul, Stone Fist
Halfling	Iron Soul
Human	Any
Kalashtar	Centered Breath
Longtooth shifter	Stone Fist
Minotaur	Stone Fist
Mul	Any
Razorclaw shifter	Centered Breath
Revenant	Iron Soul
Shadar-kai	Centered Breath
Shardmind	Centered Breath
Thri-kreen	Centered Breath, Stone Fist
Tiefling	Iron Soul
Warforged	Iron Soul
Wilden	Centered Breath

opportunities to trigger your monk's *flurry of blows* power on his or her turn. The Four-Armed Flurry feat makes your monk even better at the role of striker by boosting *flurry of blows* damage against a single target. Your thri-kreen monk's ability to draw a weapon or an item as a free action can allow you to quickly pull out a shuriken for a ranged attack or switch between two different monk weapon styles.

Revenant

Revenants make excellent Iron Soul monks. With the Past Life feature available if you choose this race, you can pick another race and have your monk qualify for all the feats, paragon paths, and epic destinies that require that race, allowing your monk to take advantage of any strong racial feats. You can also choose to replace your revenant monk's racial power, *dark reaping*, with your chosen race's racial power, giving your monk even more versatility. Finally, Unnatural Vitality keeps your revenant monk going when any other monk would fall down unconscious, giving you a chance to use your second wind if the leader can't heal you in time.

Multiclass Choices

Take a look at the three following classes to see some flavorful and interesting game play and roleplaying multiclass options.

Avenger

Avenger multiclass feats can give your character a divine flavor, and Centered Breath monks ought to have a Wisdom score high enough to qualify for either of these feats. The feats also give your monk access to *oath of enmity*, which allows you to roll twice and take either result when your monk makes melee attacks against the target and is not adjacent to other enemies. This might be counterintuitive for a monk, who normally wants to have multiple adjacent enemies to take full advantage of *flurry of blows*, but sometimes only one enemy is available. In that case, rolling twice is a great way to improve your chance of a hit. If you choose to have your monk multiclass into avenger, consider taking the Radiant Fist paragon path for more divine options.

Fighter

Fighter multiclass feats appeal to any monk who prefers martial prowess over supernatural techniques. Most of these feats require Strength, making them an excellent choice for Stone Fist monks. The Student of the Sword and Battle Awareness feats both give your monk the ability to act as a defender for a turn or two. Other fighter multiclass feats offer benefits such as attack bonuses or damage bonuses and temporary hit points. Any of these feats can be valuable to your monk, and taking them unlocks fighter feats and paragon paths.

Rogue

Rogue multiclass feats are a great way to make your monk into a stealthy ninja, and a monk automatically qualifies for most of them. Sneak of Shadows adds extra damage to the Sneak Attack feature once per encounter. Ruthless Efficiency requires Strength 13 and grants the Ruthless Ruffian feature, which also gives your monk proficiency with all one-handed maces. Twilight Adept grants the Cunning Sneak class feature for one turn once per encounter. This ability enables your monk to avoid penalties for moving while hiding, plus you can make a Stealth check with only partial cover or partial concealment rather than superior cover or total concealment.

Feats

So, you've figured out what type of monk you want to play. Or perhaps you've already started playing a monk and you want to see some more options that both round out your character in a rules sense and in a roleplaying sense. Take a look at the following feats to see if any suit your character's concept.

Flurry Resounding

Each time you draw upon your inner reserves, you gain more energy to renew your barrage.

Prerequisite: Monk, Flurry of Blows class feature

Benefit: When you spend an action point to take an extra action and you have already used your *flurry of blows* power during this turn, you can use *flurry of blows* a second time during this turn.

Internalize the Basic Kata

You practiced the basic motions of your discipline until they became as natural as breathing.

Prerequisite: Monk, Flurry of Blows class feature, Unarmed Combatant class feature

Benefit: You can use your Dexterity modifier instead of your Strength modifier for attack rolls and damage rolls when making a melee basic attack with your monk unarmed strike. In addition, your *flurry of blows* power can be triggered when you hit with an opportunity attack made with your monk unarmed strike.

Master of the Fist [Multiclass Monk]

You have trained with the masters of martial arts. While with them, you received instruction in the basics of how to use their unarmed style and how to channel ki.

Prerequisite: Strength 13 or Dexterity 13

Benefit: You gain training in Athletics or Acrobatics. You also gain the monk's Unarmed Combatant feature and gain proficiency with ki focuses.

Piercing Palm

You flatten your hand and sharpen it until it is like a blade, then plunge it into your enemy's weak spot.

Prerequisite: Monk, Rogue, Sneak Attack class feature, Unarmed Combatant class feature

Benefit: You can deal your Sneak Attack damage with your monk unarmed strike.

Shielding Whirlwind Style

You spin your staff in a blur of motion, knocking incoming projectiles aside and keeping nearby enemies at bay.

Prerequisite: Monk, Flurry of Blows class feature

Benefit: When you use your *flurry of blows* power while you are wielding a quarterstaff, you gain partial cover from ranged attacks and area attacks until the end of your next turn. In addition, you do not grant combat advantage for being flanked until the end of your next turn.

Slashing Kama Style

The simple farming sickle, or kama, is a peasant's tool to most. To you, it is a deadly weapon that cuts your enemies like grain during the harvesting season.

Prerequisite: Monk, Flurry of Blows class feature

Benefit: You gain proficiency with the sickle. When you use your *flurry of blows* power while you are wielding a sickle, choose one target of the power that is adjacent to you. The target instead takes ongoing damage equal to the damage that you would have dealt to it with the power.

Powers

Your monk might discover new attack forms as he or she wanders the lands, or perhaps your monk learned an obscure style. Consider using one of the following new powers in your game.

Deflect Arrow — Monk Utility 2

Your foe manages to strike you from afar, so you focus your energy and spin away from further attacks.

Encounter ✦ Psionic
Immediate Interrupt **Personal**
Trigger: You are hit by a ranged weapon attack.
Effect: Until the start of your next turn, you gain superior cover against ranged weapon attacks, and you can shift 1 square as a free action each time a ranged weapon attack misses you.

Wind Through the Willows — Monk Attack 3

You move like a furious wind through the line of your enemies, hobbling them.

Encounter ✦ Full Discipline, Implement, Psionic
Attack Technique
Standard Action **Close** blast 3
Target: Each creature in the blast
Attack: Dexterity vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + Dexterity modifier damage, and the target is slowed and cannot charge until the end of your next turn.
Effect: You shift up to 3 squares to a square in the blast or adjacent to it.
Movement Technique
Move Action **Melee** 1
Target: One creature
Effect: You shift 1 square and slide the target 1 square, swapping places.

Water Gives Way — Monk Attack 5

Like a stone passing harmlessly through water, so do your enemies' attacks pass by you.

Daily ✦ Implement, Psionic
Immediate Interrupt **Melee** 1
Trigger: An adjacent enemy hits you with a melee attack.
Target: The triggering enemy
Attack: Dexterity vs. Fortitude. If the triggering attack is a charge, you gain a +2 bonus to the attack roll and deal 1d10 extra damage if you hit.
Hit: 3d10 + Dexterity modifier damage, and you slide the target up to 2 squares and knock it prone.
Miss: You regain the use of this power but cannot use it again during this encounter.

Brilliant Counterstrike — Monk Attack 7

You ready yourself for the blows of your enemies and prepare a sudden counterattack.

Encounter ✦ Full Discipline, Implement, Psionic
Attack Technique
Standard Action **Melee** touch
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + Dexterity modifier damage. Immediately after any adjacent enemy attacks you before the start of your next turn, you can deal 1d8 damage to that enemy as a free action.
Movement Technique
Move Action **Personal**
Effect: Choose either to escape from a grab automatically or to end one mark on yourself. You then shift up to 2 squares.

Stone Warrior Training — Monk Attack 9

In a peaceful moment, you give your ally a brief lesson in the ways of your style so that he or she can draw upon your strength by imitating your actions.

Daily ✦ Psionic
Standard Action **Melee** 1
Requirement: You must have just ended a short or an extended rest.
Target: One ally who can see or hear you
Effect: Until the start of your next rest, whenever you hit an enemy with an attack, the target's next attack against that enemy gains a power bonus to the damage roll equal to your Strength modifier.

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Class Acts: Runepriest
Shan Zi of Kara-Tur

Written and illustrated by Claudio Pozas

The lands of Kara-Tur hold wonders that include the Great Dragon Wall and the Impossible Palace of Silver Domes. They also hold mysteries, such as the Ruins of Nanayok and the Temple of Saigai. Yet no place in all of Kara-Tur is wondrous or mysterious enough to rival the cliffs of Tanghai, because this holy site is the living symbol of the Celestial Heaven's existence.

The cliffs of Tanghai are great black basalt walls overlooking the mighty Hungtse River, which cuts through central Shou Lung. In ages past, red lightning sent from the Celestial Heaven inscribed three-foot-high words upon the cliffs' rough surface, proclaiming the teachings of the Path of Enlightenment. For centuries, pilgrims, monks, and scholars have endured an arduous journey so that they can meditate within sight of the cliffs and study the intricate script that decorates the walls. Over time, monastic orders were formed to focus on the words inscribed by the Celestial Emperor. Travelers from other lands call anyone within these orders runepriests, and the natives of the lands of Kara-Tur call them shan zi, or the "words of lightning."

The shan zi embody the importance placed upon the written word by the average inhabitant of Kara-Tur. Reverence for the past, one of the leading principles etched upon the cliffs of Tanghai, has also led to widespread literacy. Every province in Shou Lung has schools sanctioned by the central government, with the hope of finding new recruits for its bureaucracy. Much of the burden of teaching falls upon wandering monks and priests, who follow the Path of Enlightenment and the philosophy known as the Way. T'u Lung and more distant lands, such as Koryo, Kozakura, and Wa, have goals similar to those of Shou Lung.

Rune Magic in Kara-Tur

Common folk in Kara-Tur are more accustomed to rune magic than those who live in other lands. Tiny sutra scrolls bearing symbols of good luck adorn most homes. Runepriests are sought out to give these small talismans a more practical effect. These enchanted scrolls range in size from small strips of parchment to large hanging decorations. When one is focused on or read aloud, it burns with red lightning as the magic contained in the words is released (see the Scribe Sutra feat, below).

In most large cities of Kara-Tur, shan zi scribe scrolls for a fee. This activity serves as one of the main sources of income for temples and monasteries that train runepriests. Although most of these runepriests are junior acolytes, a few true masters can craft more powerful, and larger, sutra scrolls. As a rule, these masters live in distant monasteries. Though they accept payment for their craft, they work only for those they deem worthy to receive such a blessing. Many an upstart noble has failed at securing the services of a runepriest master, regardless of how much gold she offered in return.

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Runic Artistry Traditions

All traditions of Runic Artistry exist throughout the lands of Kara-Tur. Although any runepriest can follow the path most comfortable to him or her, some generalizations apply when it comes to the overall organization of these traditions. Most runepriests have a yin-and-yang symbol displayed somewhere on themselves, representing the two basic rune states that a shan zi masters: destruction and protection.

As with most ordained priests and monks of the Path of Enlightenment, Kara-Tur's runepriests garb themselves in red, be it a sash or a full set of robes, to represent the red lightning that carved the cliffs of Tanghai. The style of a runepriest's clothing and armor, as well as one's choice of weapons, varies based on the Runic Artistry tradition the character follows.

The three traditions discussed here are Defiant Word and Wrathful Hammer, both described in *Player's Handbook 3*, and Serene Blade, a new form of Runic Artistry detailed later in this article.

Calligraphy and Enlightenment

All lands of Kara-Tur use a variation of Shou Chiang, a 24-character alphabet that many claim was handed down to the first residents of Shou Lung by the Celestial Emperor. Written from top to bottom and left to right, it has intricate characters that writers can tailor to change the meaning and intonation of the words they form. The numerals in Shou Chiang are transported easily to the abacus, which is a vital tool in the day-to-day running of the bureaucracy.

Written communication in Shou Chiang is as much a work of art as it is a learned discipline. Presses that employ movable type exist, but they are used only for technical texts, such as those created by bureaucrats. For important declarations or works of verse, calligraphy is a must, and so it has become one of the most respected skills a native of Kara-Tur can have. A reader's reaction to a written message is greatly influenced by the beauty of the writing, and a capable poet who has superior artistic skills can defeat a more eloquent poet in calligraphic competitions.

Calligraphy in Kara-Tur is not only the art of writing beautiful ideograms. Although precise brush strokes are an essential part of calligraphy, the true master must decide which color to use, how much to dilute the ink, how fast to move the brush, and which paper to employ. All these factors depend on the intended use of the writing. Masters in calligraphy use red ink only for important scrolls, because the color symbolizes the red lightning that struck the cliffs of Tanghai.

A master scribe often becomes lost in the act, letting the words of the Celestial Heaven flow from the body and onto the writing surface. Mastery of calligraphic techniques enables a runepriest of Kara-Tur to reach enlightenment, which in turn affects all aspects of the runepriest's life, from personal behavior to combat prowess. This mastery forms the basis of a runepriest's magic.

Defiant Word

Defiant Word runepriests are common in Koryo, T'u Lung, and Tabot. They favor heavy armor with red accents, and they prefer to wield longspears and halberds decorated with red tassels. Most runepriests of this tradition who leave their monasteries either join the standing army of their homeland or remain in a monastery in the role of temple guard.

The general populace of Kara-Tur highly respects Defiant Word runepriests, and, of all the traditions, this one most commonly deals with the nobles. People see these runepriests as more reliable than those of the Serene Blade tradition and better behaved than those of the Wrathful Hammer. Their skill at arms is called upon to defend borderland villages.

The immortal associated with the Defiant Word shan zi is Chih Shih, lord of sages and patron of history, lore, and tradition. Following his lead, runepriests try to assemble the lore of the past into perfectly executed scrolls and books, which helps to ensure that knowledge is not lost.

Serene Blade

Serene Blade runepriests are the epitome of the runepriest's devotion to the words and sigils bestowed upon mortals by the Celestial Emperor, and they are the most commonly encountered runepriests in Shou Lung. Dressed in red robes, a Serene Blade runepriest gravitates toward the longsword or the glaive as his or her weapon of choice, and decorates that weapon with red ideograms and tassels. Most Serene Blade runepriests adopt the life of the wandering priest, spreading literacy and teaching the tenets of the Path of Enlightenment to the peasants of Kara-Tur.

A Serene Blade's flashy style and penchant for settling quarrels by dueling in the street makes these runepriests beloved by the common people. These same traits do nothing to endear them to most nobles, who see them as wild cards and troublemaking vagabonds.

THE PATH OF ENLIGHTENMENT

As inscribed upon the cliffs of Tanghai by red lightning, the Path of Enlightenment focuses upon honoring one's ancestors and upholding a stable and fair system of government that reflects the Celestial Empire. One of the main beliefs of the path is the concept of *li*, or righteousness, which must be upheld throughout one's life. The inscriptions of Tanghai are as follows:

- Honor that which has gone before you, because the past is eternal.
- Honor and respect your elders and the ancestors. Show honor in word, thought, and deed.
- Speak not false words, nor engage in false acts, because these are not righteous.
- Do honor to he who rules you, because the world is the Mirror of Heaven, and the Son of Heaven is the mirror of the Celestial One. Be obedient to your lord.
- Engage in no base activity, nor commit murder, because to strike another in the name of anger is not righteous.
- Do honor and be fair to those you must rule, because under the eye of Heaven, they are your equals.
- Know that all things are One under Heaven, even the lowliest of creatures.

The Path of Enlightenment is the official state religion in Shou Lung, and lords throughout Kara-Tur have used these precepts as a justification for their own status and power. Many runepriests, being devoted to the words of the Path, become guardians of these precepts, and they might turn against a ruler whom they do not consider righteous. This sort of zealotry has made the mandarins of Shou Lung and the daimyos of Kozakura and Wa wary of runepriests.

The immortal associated with the Serene Blade shan zi is Ch'en Hsiang, inspiration of poets and patron of poetry, music, and literature. Honoring his teachings, runepriests seek out the most beautiful of ancient works of art, especially written art forms, and they try to create ideograms that are not only perfectly reproduced, but that reflect the emotions of the scribe.

Wrathful Hammer

These hammer-toting runepriests are in the outskirts of Shou Lung, the Plains of Horses and Northern Wastes, and the hilly regions of Kozakura and Wa. A Wrathful Hammer runepriest often carries a red tetsubo (greatclub) or maul, and his or her armor is lacquered in deep crimson.

Wrathful Hammer runepriests have earned a reputation as boisterous hunters of the supernatural, traveling the countryside in search of evil spirits to banish and evil humanoids to beat. Some hope to inspire the commoners with their prowess, and others see each new threat as another rung in the ladder toward the Celestial Heaven.

The immortal associated with the Wrathful Hammer shan zi is Chan Cheng, mighty lord of heroes and patron of war, martial arts, combat, and bravery. Runepriests of the Wrathful Hammer sculpt enormous stone shrines or forge huge metal bells decorated with the words of the Path of Enlightenment. Emulating this patron, runepriests seek out legends of brave heroes to inspire the common folk and carve these heroes into stone markers that will last for eternity.

Playing a Shan Zi

Kara-Tur's runepriests are an educated lot. Unlike other runepriests, who seek out divine runes for the power they impart, shan zi are devoted to words that shape the lives of nearly all people in their land. Being immersed in the teachings of the Path of Enlightenment, runepriests of Kara-Tur find it hard to be as unceremonious toward the source of their power as their foreign counterparts.

If you want to reflect this devotion, you should try to create a character trained in the skills that reflect the teachings of the Path of Enlightenment: Diplomacy, History, Insight, and Religion (which every runepriest already receives). A shan zi should not have training in Bluff and should follow a lawful good alignment. Recommended feats include Scribe Sutra and Heavenly Halberdier (both described below), Disciple of Lore (*Heroes of the Fallen Lands*), and any runepriest feat. Skill powers based on Diplomacy, History, and Insight are also good choices, showing a deeper understanding of the past and a more harmonious nature.

Although you gain no mechanical penalty for disregarding these guidelines, they present an interesting roleplaying challenge for those willing to reflect the philosophies of Kara-Tur.

Runic Artistry

Although most shan zi in Kara-Tur follow the two major traditions of rune magic, Defiant Word and Wrathful Hammer, a sizable minority practices the tradition of the Serene Blade. When creating a runepriest, you can choose the following Runic Artistry option instead of those in *Player's Handbook 3*.

Serene Blade: You gain proficiency with all one-handed and two-handed military heavy blades. While you are not wearing heavy armor, you can use your Wisdom modifier in place of your Dexterity or Intelligence modifier to determine your AC. Once per round immediately after an enemy deals damage to you with an attack, you gain temporary hit points equal to your Wisdom modifier. The number of temporary hit points increases to 5 + your Wisdom modifier at 11th level and 10 + your Wisdom modifier at 21st level.

New Runepriest Powers

A runepriest of the appropriate level can choose from the following new powers.

Level 3 Encounter Power

By weaving your weapon around you, you can use it to scribe words that remove afflictions from your allies and strike terror into your enemies' hearts.

Words of Bravery — Runepriest Attack 3

You move your weapon as a brush, batting enemies aside and strengthening one of your comrades.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Fear, Runic, Weapon
Standard Action **Close** burst 1
Target: Each creature in the burst
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 1[W] + Strength modifier damage, and you can push the target 1 square.
Effect: You and one ally within 5 squares of you can make a saving throw.
Rune of Destruction: The first ally who hits the target before the end of your next turn can push the target up to a number of squares equal to your Wisdom modifier.
Rune of Protection: You and the ally each gain a power bonus to the saving throw equal to your Wisdom modifier.

Level 6 Utility Power

Moving your thumb quickly, you inscribe a merciful mantra upon thin air. Those words also appear on the forehead of a wounded ally, easing that person's pain.

Words of Compassion — Runepriest Utility 6

You write words that heal your ally with their inner warmth.

Daily ✦ Divine, Healing
Standard Action **Close** burst 5
Target: You or one ally in the burst
Effect: The target regains hit points equal to his or her healing surge value. In addition, the target gains a +2 power bonus to saving throws until the end of his or her next turn.

Level 9 Daily Power

Many who follow the Path of Enlightenment spread knowledge of righteousness but also teach about karma, which can be simply if incompletely described as the idea that one reaps what one sows. With a wide arc of your weapon, you scribe words of karma upon your enemies, so they know that whatever violence they use will be visited upon them.

Words of Reflected Karma — Runepriest Attack 9

Glowing red words appear upon your enemies' foreheads, heralding immediate retribution for any violent action.

Daily ✦ Divine, Lightning, Weapon
Standard Action **Close** blast 3
Target: Each enemy in the blast
Attack: Strength vs. Will
Hit: 2[W] + Strength modifier damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: The target takes 5 lightning damage whenever it uses an attack power (save ends).

Level 10 Utility Power

You have mastered writing that brims with celestial power. A few quick strokes on a strip of parchment can be more effective than a suit of armor.

Protective Scroll — Runepriest Utility 10

With masterful precision, you turn a small strip of parchment into a powerful ward.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Healing
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You spend a healing surge but regain no hit points. Instead, you create a palm-sized protective scroll that lasts until it is expended or until the end of your next extended rest. A creature carrying the scroll can use a minor action to expend the scroll and regain hit points equal to your healing surge value. The creature also gains a +5 power bonus to all defenses until the end of its next turn.

Level 13 Encounter Power

You trace words of love and loyalty upon your weapon, stoking the flames within your heart. These flames burst as you strike your enemy, and their warmth is a salve to your allies.

Words of Fiery Fidelity — Runepriest Attack 13

Your determination to protect your allies burns your enemy and heals your comrades.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Fire, Healing, Runic, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2[W] + Strength modifier fire damage, and you and each ally adjacent to the target regain 10 hit points.
Effect: The target takes ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends). Each time the target takes this fire damage, your allies adjacent to it regain 5 hit points.
Rune of Destruction: Both the ongoing fire damage and the regained hit points increase to 10.
Rune of Protection: Allies within 2 squares of the target benefit from this effect.

Level 15 Daily Power

Your weapon gleams with written sagas and poems of great heroes. As you strike your foe, it sees the long lineage of champions that came before you.

Words of Ancestral Bravery — Runepriest Attack 15

Epic poems appear on your weapon, and shades of past heroes lend you their strength.

Daily ✦ Divine, Radiant, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. Will
Hit: 3[W] + Strength modifier radiant damage, and the target falls prone.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, each ally who ends his or her turn adjacent to you gains temporary hit points equal to 5 + your Strength modifier and gains a +2 power bonus to saving throws that lasts until the start of his or her next turn.

Paragon Path

All across Kara-Tur, runepriests go from village to village teaching not only literacy, but also the lessons found in the Path of Enlightenment. Such selfless acts, in turn, bring these runepriests closer to their own enlightenment. Recognizing this truth, a few shan zi learn how to share their blessings with their comrades and allies, further pushing back the darkness so that the light of the Celestial Emperor can purge the world of ignorance and evil. The following paragon path is available to any honorable runepriest who strives to become the consummate leader, acting through his or her allies to vanquish the opposition.

Enlightened Word

"My calling could not be more sacred. I am the Word that lights the Path."

Prerequisite: Runepriest, any nonevil alignment

Level 11: Cloud Step

Your closeness to the Celestial Heaven gives you clarity unmatched by most mortals. By focusing on the core of your being, you impart this clarity to your allies, and you can briefly become a weightless cloud.

Benefit: Whenever you enter a new rune state, you can enter the rune state of the cloud step instead. While you are in this rune state, allies adjacent to you can shift up to 2 squares as a free action the first time they hit an enemy each turn. You can end this rune state as a minor action to fly up to a number of squares equal to your speed.

Level 11: Shared Enlightenment Action

With quick movements of your weapon, you scribe a glowing rune upon a distant ally, sharing your divine blessings with that friend.

Benefit: When you spend an action point to use a runepriest attack power, you can choose for that attack to originate from the space of an ally within 5 squares of you, instead of originating from your space. If you do so, that ally gains temporary hit points equal to 5 + your Strength modifier.

Level 11: Celestial Lightning

The Celestial Emperor sent red lightning to inspire mortals into seeking enlightenment. With a quick weave of your weapon, that same heavenly bolt comes to the aid of your ally.

Celestial Lightning — Enlightened Word Attack 11

You call upon the red lightning that carved the will of the Celestial Heaven upon the cliffs of Tanghai to punish those who threaten your comrade.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Lightning, Radiant, Runic, Weapon
Standard Action **Area** burst 2 centered on an ally within 5 squares
Target: Each enemy in the burst
Attack: Strength vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2[W] + Strength modifier lightning and radiant damage.
Effect: Until the end of your next turn, the attacks of the ally on whom the burst was centered deal lightning and radiant damage, in addition to their normal types.
Rune of Destruction: Until the end of your next turn, the ally also gains a power bonus to damage rolls equal to your Strength modifier.
Rune of Protection: Until the end of your next turn, the ally also gains a power bonus to his or her healing surge value equal to your Strength modifier.

Level 12: Touch of Hope

The symbol for hope is deceptively simple. Those who master it know that no matter how bleak the situation, all will be well.

Touch of Hope — Enlightened Word Utility 12

With a quick gesture, you trace the sign for "hope," removing all afflictions from your ally.

Daily ✦ Divine, Healing
Standard Action **Melee** touch
Target: You or one ally
Effect: The target makes a saving throw against each effect on him or her that a save can end. The target also regains hit points equal to his or her healing surge value and can stand up as a free action.

Level 16: Radiant Cloud Step

By emptying yourself of all material concerns, you are not only capable of flying, you also ignore most physical threats and obstacles.

Benefit: During the flight granted by the rune state of the cloud step, you are insubstantial and phasing.

Level 20: Words of Celestial Heaven

As you approach ultimate enlightenment, you can call down the Celestial Emperor's red lightning to impart momentary clarity upon your enemies, so they learn—however briefly—the error of their ways.

Words of Celestial Heaven — Enlightened Word Attack 20

Your attack leaves your foe transfixed, as its life flashes before its eyes. When your enemy shakes off this effect, it tries to repent by turning on its former ally.

Daily ✦ Divine, Lightning, Radiant, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 3[W] + Strength modifier lightning and radiant damage, and the target is stunned (save ends).
Aftereffect: The target makes a basic attack as a free action against one of its allies.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, your runepriest at-will attacks deal 5 extra lightning and radiant damage.

New Feats

The following two feats are available to characters who meet the prerequisites.

Heavenly Halberdier

You have learned how to use halberds and glaives, the traditional weapons of shan zi temple guardians. You can break through enemy ranks easily with these weapons.

Prerequisite: Runepriest

Benefit: You gain proficiency with the glaive and the halberd. When you hit an enemy with a runepriest at-will attack power while using a halberd or a glaive, you can slide that target 1 square as a free action.

Scribe Sutra

You are a master of calligraphy, capable of unlocking the inherent magic of the words of the Celestial Heaven with precise brush strokes. You can create sutra scrolls to protect and heal.

Prerequisite: Runepriest

Benefit: You can master and perform rituals in the warding category, and the Brew Potion, Gentle Repose, and Magic Circle rituals, as if you had the Ritual Caster feat. Furthermore, you can create scrolls in half the normal time (that is, the same amount of time it takes to create a ritual book).

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Unearthed Arcana: A Matter of Honor

By Chris Sims

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Honor is integrity. It is a state of balance between one's values and deeds. A person of honor behaves according to what he or she believes is right, fulfilling duty and destiny in a quantifiable way. Therefore, honor can be measured. Personal or collective standards, or both, might define honorable behavior. In any case, what is expected is clear.

Yet honor is also relative. Different people and distinct groups define what is right and honorable in their own ways. Society might expect less than an individual does of oneself, but behavior that does not measure up to that expectation is labeled dishonorable. Those who hold to higher-than-normal standards might be regarded as paragons or fools, or they could belong to a subset of society that demands more, such as samurai and knights.

In the magical world of the Dungeons & Dragons roleplaying game, the devotion that honor requires can take on a supernatural scope. Strict adherence to a code of behavior might become a source of spiritual power for someone who is particularly honorable.

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This article explores honor as a social and mechanical force in the game. It provides an optional way for you to use honor as a tool for character creation, roleplaying, and situational advantage. An honor-bound character requires the player to be devoted to playing that character in a way consistent with his or her code, and having such a character in the game also demands more of the DM. The reward is more depth in play.

HONOR, FACE, AND RENOWN

Honor is not face (how one appears to society) or renown (how much fame one has garnered), but behaving honorably can win both. Deeds that cost you honor can earn you face and even renown, but the reverse is also true.

Such situations give rise to gray areas of personal interpretation. For example, a knight whose honor demands that she be loyal to her liege lord and that she protect the people might have to choose between the two if the lord seeks to harm the people. She risks honor, face, and reputation by opposing her lord but might gain trust and fame among the common folk. Which path will she choose?

Background Honor

Birth, social status, and other details of personal history can shape a person's outlook and, thereby, his or her honor. In some societies, persons of particular social ranks are expected to adhere to an existing honor code. Other cultures burden children with the sins of their parents so that dishonor passes from one generation to the next. Supernatural omens and events can tie someone to godly edicts, prophecies, or curses, or otherwise affect how others expect that person to behave. Consider these possibilities when you choose a background or a theme for your character.

Defining your background can influence the structure of your honor, as well as give you more opportunities to behave honorably or dishonorably. For instance, if you bear a martial heirloom, losing that item might cost you honor. Perhaps the misdeeds of an ignoble ancestor have worked against you from birth. The effort to rise above such an ill heritage offers many roleplaying opportunities. Alternatively, a quest for vengeance against another family, group, or individual could drive you.

Similarly, a character theme you choose can affect your honor code or even predetermine it. For example, a samurai is expected to follow bushido, a yakuza has a code not unlike that observed by thieves, and a chevalier should be bound to the principles of chivalry.

Defining Honor

Using honor in the game requires a character to abide by an honor code. Such a code needs three or more general ideals, which dictate behavioral guidelines for the code's adherents. Following these precepts increases honor, while failing to live up to them can cause a loss of honor. The more tenets an honor code has, the more likely an adherent's honor is to fluctuate.

The following are sample honor codes you can use in play or as models for one of your own creation.

Bushido

Bushido, the Way of the Warrior, is the noble code of feudal Japan, reflected in parts of Kara-Tur, to which samurai are the most numerous adherents. Other warriors in a society where bushido exists might choose to follow tenets of this code, but only samurai are expected to do so. A samurai is ready to die at any time for the sake of honor. The bushido code includes the following tenets.

Benevolence: Use your might to aid others, avoiding cruelty and abuse of power. Show your strength through compassionate use of your abilities. Give freely and take sparingly.

Courage: Caution and planning are wise, but fear is for the weak. Act without hesitation, unburdened by cowardice, when action is called for. Accept any fair contest, even one where you might be the underdog. Death is preferable to failure, but remember that throwing life away carelessly is foolhardy rather than courageous.

Justice: Be honest and live by your conscience. In any situation, right and wrong are clear. Reveal your true character by discerning wisely and acting rightly.

Loyalty: Obey your superiors and be faithful to peers and those in your charge. Avenge wrongs against you or against those to whom you owe loyalty. Betrayal and disobedience are the worst of crimes; perpetrating

such actions is acceptable only if necessary to otherwise uphold the tenets of the code.

Sincerity: Be unified in thought and deed. Your word is an oath. Make no claims unless you intend to back such statements with action.

Harper Code

Based on a larger organization that disappeared from Faerûn nearly a century ago, the Harpers of Luruar are dedicated to opposing the Shadovar. They also uphold older ideals attributed to their defunct namesake, which include the following.

Balance: Civilization should exist in harmony with nature. Fairness must temper authority. Reason keeps faith in line. The present can be clearly understood only within the context of history. Recognize your own shortcomings and shore them up. Extremes foster imbalance—seek equilibrium among forces, while always heeding the code.

Righteousness: Defend the innocent and powerless against wickedness and tyranny, especially from the Shadovar. Support fair laws and protect freedom. Keep the ranks of the Harpers free from those who are power-hungry or treacherous. Do what is necessary to uphold the code, without regard for personal sacrifice or reward. Wisdom and integrity are more worthy of respect than social rank, authority, and wealth.

Storytelling: Truth breaks the bonds of ignorance. Record the truth and spread it. Uncover the truth and share it. Write down the deeds and events you witness so that your accounts can serve those in the future. Never forget what you know to be true. Authentic lore is more valuable than gold.

Nerathi Chivalry

In the days of the Empire of Nerath, noble warriors served the crown and followed honorable ways. The greatest among these were the Knight Protectors of Nerath. These storied men and women upheld the ideals of the empire, and their code survives to this day as an example to modern warriors. The chivalric code of Nerath includes these principles.

Battle: Conflict is the flowering of the chivalric ideal. Battle is your ultimate testing ground. In combat, seek glory by displaying all the other virtues of chivalry.

Courtesy: Chivalry requires respect for one's superiors, courtesy to peers and priests, and civility if not kindness toward those of lower station or power. Honesty and generosity are part of courtesy, as is gentleness toward and respect for romantic partners. Graciousness and mercy to one's enemies is the greatest possible display of this virtue.

Duty: Your word is your oath, and you must fulfill anything you agree to do. Be judicious and prudent in this duty, but do not fail to act or to succeed. Work against evil and chaos wherever you find it.

Valor: In action, whether in battle or politics, be at the forefront. Act with courage and conscience, speaking truth to power. Never refuse a challenge from an equal or superior foe. Be willing to give up your life for your honor.

Thieves' Code

Thieves' guilds and other organized-crime gangs—such as yakuza, tongs, and mafias—have strict codes of behavior. Such policies ensure that dishonesty aimed at those outside the organization doesn't also infect the group. Honor among thieves also helps criminals work together better, making the guild's ventures more profitable. A guild code might include these rules.

Competence: Never appear weak or turn to legal authorities for help. Take care of your own problems, asking the guild for aid if needed. Repay your debts, whether in coin or in blood.

Equity: The guild's members prosper when the guild does. Look for ways to improve the guild's prospects and wealth. Pay the guild a percentage of the take, as determined when the job is set up. (The largest share goes to job's primary organizers, while helpers receive fair pay.)

Loyalty: Do what your superiors tell you. Be honest in dealings with fellow guild members. If you fail, tell the truth and pay the required penalty.

Silence: Avoid attracting attention to yourself and the guild. Evade capture. If you are detained, protect the guild's interests first, keeping silent even if it means your death.

Using Honor

Honor has several possible applications in the game, from roleplaying tools to mechanical effects. This section details those uses, with a focus on the rules elements you might add to your game to make honor an important part of play.

Roleplaying Honor

Like alignment, an honor code indicates aspects of morality and might say something about a character's personality. Creating or selecting such a code for your character helps guide your choices during play. Your code also allows the DM to set up challenges that can test your honor, adding drama to situations in which you have to decide between acting honorably or taking an easier path.

For added roleplaying possibilities, you could even choose a personality trait that clashes with your honor code. Doing so allows you to develop your character as he or she overcomes the clash or falls into dishonor. As with any roleplaying choice, though, be sure that your actions do not unduly interfere with the enjoyment of others at the table

HONOR AND ALIGNMENT

Honor is not decency or goodness. It is adherence to principles intended to guide one in personal morality or to ensure trustworthiness among members of a group. Its magical power is embodied in the honor-bound character's devotion to principled behavior, much as a cleric acquires divine power through faith in a god or a druid gains primal power from respect for nature spirits. Honor can be independent of alignment. An evil knight might faithfully follow a chivalric code, while a good one could violate the same code to satisfy a personal standard of good. An unaligned knight might outshine both in strict adherence to chivalry's tenets.

However, any alignment besides unaligned can describe an honor code. The lawful good alignment, as it is generally presented, is a set of principles that such a character is expected to follow. Someone who is evil—even chaotic evil—has a despicable morality system, but one that still might be quantifiable. Treating alignment like an honor code can also allow players and the DM to employ mechanics in this article to track and reward adherence to alignment. A character who fails to uphold the creed of one alignment might be forced to change to another.

Honor Rules

If your DM decides to add honor as a game element to a campaign, you can use this system by choosing an honor code or making one of your own. If you do, you take the Honor-Bound feat. This uses up one of your available feat slots, so if your character is above 1st level, you must replace one of your existing feats or retrain.

Honor-Bound

You adhere to an honor code. In sticking to this defined morality, you gain a spiritual advantage akin to good luck. This kindness of fortune is most powerful when you act honorably.

Prerequisite: Must have an honor code

Benefit: You gain 3 honor points and the *honorable action* power.

Honorable Action — Feat Utility

You rise to the challenge when honor is on the line.

Encounter
No Action — **Personal**
Trigger: While acting honorably or avoiding dishonor, you make an ability check, an attack roll, a damage roll, or a skill check and dislike the result.
Effect: You spend 1 honor point. Roll 1d6 and add the result to the triggering roll.

Honor Points

Notably honorable actions can gain you honor points. Acting according to your code in minor ways is expected, but whenever you act honorably in a manner that is heroic, daring, or risky, the DM can award you 1 honor point. If an act is extraordinarily honorable, the DM might award you 2 honor points. You cannot earn more than 3 honor points between extended rests.

You cannot spend honor points in excess of your current total.

Internal Measure: Your current honor points are a personal gauge of your attunement to your honor. This point total fluctuates even if no one witnesses your dedication or misdeeds. However, your honorable status might still be known to those who have an interest in it (see "Dishonor Points" below).

Gaining Levels: Each time you reach a new level of the heroic tier, your honor point total resets to 3. At the paragon tier, your honor point total resets to 4 at each new level, and at the epic tier, it resets to 5.

Dishonor Points

Whenever you willingly violate your honor code without upholding more tenets of the code than you break, the DM can penalize you with 1 dishonor point. A particularly despicable transgression might result in 2 dishonor points. You cannot earn more than 3 dishonor points between extended rests.

If you accumulate too many dishonor points, you might become dishonored.

Rebalancing: During an extended rest, you can rebalance your honor, spending honor points to cancel out dishonor points. This rebalancing of your honor might take the form of meditation, prayer, apologies, or whatever penance is fitting for your code.

Temporary Dishonor: If at the end of an extended rest you have more dishonor points than honor points, you are temporarily dishonored.

While you are temporarily dishonored, as an outgrowth of your shame, you take a -2 penalty to any Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, or Streetwise check made against those who know of and care about your honor. Other social and roleplaying consequences might also result, depending on the actions that caused you to lose honor and who witnessed those actions. Such penalties depend on the campaign and whether someone discerns your dishonor.

Atonement: Those who are truly honorable openly admit failure to live up to their code and face the consequences. Behaving honorably after becoming

temporarily dishonored can eventually erase your offenses. You might agree to undertake a worthy or daring task that is in accord with your honor code to regain your honor quickly. You should work with your DM to handle such a task in the context of your campaign. Seeking redemption in this way might be the only way to avoid lasting dishonor.

Lasting Dishonor: The higher your level, the more you are considered to be an exemplar of your honor code, and minor lapses rarely affect your honorable status. You can safely accumulate dishonor points up to a threshold equal to 5 + one-fifth your level (maximum 11). If your total ever equals or exceeds that threshold, your dishonor is lasting rather than temporary. The skill check penalty worsens to –4, and the social consequences can be severe.

Atonement: Only performing some great quest or a series of mighty deeds can regain you enough honor to atone for such grave sins. Your actions must award you enough honor points to cancel out all your dishonor points without gaining further dishonor points. Even if you succeed, your reputation and sense of self-worth are permanently stained. Each time you exceed your dishonor threshold, your maximum threshold is permanently reduced by 1, even if you atone. If that threshold ever reaches 0, you are permanently dishonored. Your dishonor also becomes permanent if you fail to atone for lasting dishonor, no matter what the reason.

Permanent Dishonor: Should your dishonor become permanent, it seriously damages social ties with others who hold your code dear. Such people might consider you to be an enemy worthy of exile, death, or worse. The skill check penalty with such people worsens to –6, and the DM is free to rule such checks impossible if the exchange requires trust or friendliness.

You cannot regain your honor or benefit from the Honor-Bound feat with your current code. Only a noble and permanent death in accordance with your code can remove the stain of your misdeeds. You must either change your code (see below) to something that better fits your new status or live without honor forevermore.

Insight and Dishonor

Someone who cares about or shares your honor code can use the Insight skill to discern whether you are dishonored. If you try to hide your dishonor, you oppose this discernment with a Bluff check (modified by your dishonor penalty). You can use *honorable action* to modify this check, but in doing so you use your perceived honor as a shield. Such obfuscation might be against your code, imposing dishonor points.

You can choose not to hide your dishonor in this way, allowing others to discern it with an easy Insight check. Such brutal honesty might even gain you honor, at the DM's discretion.

Changing Your Honor Code

Sometimes adhering to your chosen honor code proves too difficult, if you have a serious moral crisis or change of heart, or you become permanently dishonored and can never regain that code. In such cases, you can adopt a new code. Doing so signifies an enduring change in your moral mindset.

When you change your honor code, you are still stained by your past. You do not erase your dishonorable status under the previous code. The social consequences of losing honor continue to be a part of your character's personality and story. Indeed, frequent changes in moral outlook demonstrate a lack of commitment. Each time you switch to a new code, you must also reduce your maximum dishonor threshold under the new code by 1. If the switch was the result of permanent dishonor, you reduce your maximum threshold by 2 instead.

DMING HONOR

The honor point system is a tool for players to emphasize their characters' honor in the game. It's also a powerful way for you, as DM, to encourage roleplaying and build scenarios that put a character's creed to the test. How you dispense honor and dishonor points strongly affects how your players behave in the game. Don't hesitate to praise actions that deserve honor points, perhaps describing the character's sense of pride, increased willpower, and virtue. You should warn a player who contemplates an action that seems to lie outside the character's code. Give players the opportunity to act as they wish, as long as they understand the consequences. Honorable people know when they are about to stray and how badly their wrongdoing might reflect on them.

A character can act honorably but still suffer negative social and roleplaying consequences. Others who do not share his or her honor code might see the character as too strict or fail to recognize the character's behavior as honorable. For example, a samurai who follows bushido might choose to disobey the order of his lord. With no context, this act would seem dishonorable. However, if the lord is corrupt and the order is to perform a dishonorable act, disobedience might be the only honorable course. The lord will disapprove of such defiance, though, harming the samurai's relationship with him. In any event, the same samurai is unlikely to recognize a yakuza's behavior as honorable despite the fact that the criminal follows a strict code.

Honor Feats

The following feats expand the effects of honor points. Anyone who meets the prerequisites can take these feats.

Honorable Mind

Honor has strengthened your psyche against effects that might force you to act dishonorably.

Prerequisite: Honor-Bound feat

Benefit: You roll a d10 instead of a d6 when you use *honorable action* to modify a skill check or ability check based on Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma. You can also use *honorable action* to modify a saving throw against charm or fear effects.

Honorable Reputation

Your adherence to your code has set you apart among those who value your honor. People assume the best of you, even if you sometimes behave dishonorably.

Prerequisite: Honor-Bound feat, unreduced maximum honor threshold

Benefit: Once per encounter, you can reroll a Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, or Streetwise check made against or among people who know and care about your honor.

Whenever you gain a level, you gain 2 extra honor points.

Honorable Soul

Honor has become a part of your being. You can bend circumstances in your favor more easily without needing to tap your spiritual reserves.

Prerequisite: Honor-Bound feat, Honorable Mind feat, Strength through Honor feat

Benefit: You gain the *honorable soul* power.

Honorable Soul — Feat Utility

Honor is a spiritual force in your life, guiding you to the outcomes you desire.

Daily
No Action — **Personal**
Trigger: While acting honorably or avoiding dishonor, you make an ability check, an attack roll, an initiative check, a saving throw, or a skill check and dislike the result.
Effect: You spend 1 honor point. You reroll the triggering roll and use the higher result. In addition, you gain 10 temporary hit points.

Strength through Honor

Your sense of honor strengthens your resolve during physical trials.

Prerequisite: Honor-Bound feat

Benefit: You roll a d10 instead of a d6 when you use *honorable action* to modify a skill check or ability check based on Strength, Constitution, or Dexterity. You can also use *honorable action* to modify an initiative check.

About the Author

Chris Sims has played roleplaying games for thirty years, and he has helped produce games for nearly ten. Before he set up his freelance shop in the Seattle exurbs, he was an editor, developer, and designer at Wizards of the Coast. There, he worked on **Duel Masters**, Dungeons & Dragons, and **Magic: The Gathering**. You can read Chris's "Analysis Paralysis" blog at *critical-hits.com*, and you can follow him as ChrisSSims on Twitter.

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Character Themes: Samurai and Yakuza

By Jeff Morgenroth

Illustrations by S.C. Watson and Tony Foti

Developing your character into someone who has a rich story can be a fun and rewarding process. You likely have an idea of what race and what class you want to play, but you might have only a general idea of what your character's life was like before you start playing the character at the gaming table. A theme can help you flesh out your character and provide some interesting options for developing his or her background.

This article details two character themes, the samurai and the yakuza.

Samurai

Samurai are the elite warriors of the nations of Kozakura and Wa, trained since childhood in the arts of battle. Sworn in service to the powerful nobles who govern the empire, they are expected to live and die according to their master's command. Cultured and refined, samurai dedicate themselves utterly to the tenets of bushido—the warrior's code that teaches that one's life is not one's own, and that nothing is more important than honor, obedience, and courage.

Samurai are born into their class, enjoying social privileges second only to the ruling nobility. Many come from families that own land themselves, and thus grow up accustomed to a life of wealth and entitlement. The samurai's lofty place in society

Character Themes

Your character's theme is a career, calling, or identity that describes who he or she is in the world. Just as race and class create basic definitions about who your character is, theme adds a third character component to help refine your story and identity. Each theme can encompass several unique stories within the same concept.

For example, if you're a human monk who chooses the samurai theme, you might be a contemplative individual born into the warrior class even though you feel more at home chanting prayers at your lord's temple. Perhaps you loathe the horrors of battle, and you follow the teachings of the Way of Enlightenment so that you can overcome enemies without fighting them. Though you would prefer to leave your sword forever sheathed in its ancestral scabbard, you know that you must obey your master's command to fight if that order is given.

For information on using themes as part of character creation and rules for how to gain and use theme powers and features, see "Heroes of Nature and Lore," *Dragon* 399.

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sometimes leads individuals down a path of arrogance or brutality, since a samurai is above the law when dealing with those of lower station; however, true followers of bushido emphasize traits such as benevolence and politeness, as well as courage.

A samurai's training begins at a young age, when he is introduced to the rigorous demands of bushido. Young samurai are exposed to extreme heat, cold, and pain, enduring all with emotionless poise. They are steeled against the fear of death by being sent on errands through graveyards or near hangman's gallows at night. Each samurai-in-training is taught to read and write, contemplating classics of literature, religion, and art with which to refine his mind and spirit. Finally, all are taught the martial arts for which these warriors are most well known.

Samurai heroes are expected to fight and die at their lord's command, and their adventures reflect that. Samurai will undertake any quest their master assigns them, whether waging open war or avenging an insult to their lord's honor; a samurai obeys without hesitation. A samurai who proves worthy of reward will be honored with lands and wealth, and, perhaps most important, the lord's approval. This honor, and the perpetual striving toward one's perfection of bushido, is all-important for a samurai, who will go to any length to maintain and uphold it. Should a samurai bring shame to himself or his master, he is allowed to take his own life in an act of ritualistic suicide, allowing him to die with his honor intact. For a samurai, death is preferable to dishonor.

BUSHI OF KOZAKURA AND WA

Though samurai are the most renowned practitioners of bushido, they are not the only ones. Collectively, the title of bushi could apply to any martial character that lives by a code that follows some or all of the ethics of bushido. Samurai represent the social pinnacle of the bushi caste; thus, a samurai can always be referred to as a bushi, but a bushi need not be a samurai. Other bushi might put their warrior skills to use as foot soldiers, guards, mercenaries, or even outlaw thugs or bandit lords.

Your character might be a fighting adventurer who aspires to the code of bushido, yet has sworn no loyalty to a master. In this case, you can use some of the flavor in the samurai theme and apply it toward your character, but select a theme that will more closely match the character's profession. Such a character could go on to great renown, but will always be looked down upon by those bushi who believe that there is more honor to be found in the service of a noble lord.

Creating a Samurai

Samurai are overwhelmingly drawn to classes that emphasize weapon prowess. The fighter class has the physical fortitude and skill at arms that are the hallmarks of the samurai; however, cultural and environmental aspects of the setting are sometimes best addressed by the talents of other classes. For instance, in realms that wage perpetual war, samurai often become warlords, while those realms on the frontier find the resourcefulness of the ranger to be an important trait for samurai. Exceptionally cultured or mystical lands welcome samurai of arcane or divine classes as well, so long as the individual is able to wield a sword bravely when the time comes. No matter your class or race, as a samurai you are held to the strictest of behavioral standards.

SAMURAI AS RONIN

A ronin is a samurai who, because of death or dishonor, no longer serves a lord. Many samurai begin lives as ronin when their master is disgraced or killed, after which his retainers are cast adrift on the waves of the empire to live hand to mouth.

Viewed as outcasts by all but the lowliest of social castes, many ronin make their way in the world by selling their skills. A group of honorable ronin might become bodyguards for traveling merchants, or heroically defend a vulnerable village from bandits. Such bandits might be ronin themselves, having become ruthless in order to survive in a world that doesn't accept them. Thus, ronin walk the path between two rivers, becoming saints or blackhearts as the currents dictate.

If you decide to play a ronin character, you can still take the samurai theme, since the training and discipline of the samurai is something that all ronin gained and held during their years of service. Your life will take a very different turn, however, since you do not serve a master. You are liberated from the obligation of service, but at the same time viewed with disdain by those who consider themselves "real" bushi. As a ronin, you alone can decide whether you will continue to live your life by the codes of honor that meant everything to you when you served your lord.

Starting Feature

Honor, loyalty, and courage are an all-consuming obsession to the samurai, whose cultural purpose is to serve as a warrior. All choices concerning that service are placed in the master's hands, and a samurai who is given a command is expected to obey it without pause. A core ethic of bushido is that one should never deliberate when action is called for, and nothing exemplifies this outlook more than the frightening intensity with which you initiate combat. In the battle is when your weapon prowess makes itself known; when coordination, speed, and strength combine to execute a strike of great destructive potential. You might favor a quick-draw style of attack, wherein you draw your weapon and cut in a simultaneous movement. Or, you might prefer to adopt specialized postures that let you quickly close the distance to your foe.

Benefit: You gain the *iaijutsu* power.

Iaijutsu — Samurai Utility

While others contemplate, you act, loyal and resolute even in the face of death.

Encounter ✦ Martial
Free Action **Personal**
Trigger: You roll initiative.
Effect: You can draw a weapon and shift up to a number of squares equal to half your speed. If you end this move adjacent to an enemy, you gain a +2 power bonus to the next attack roll you make against that enemy before the end of your next turn.

If your initiative is higher than every enemy's initiative, any melee weapon attack you make during your first turn of the encounter can score a critical hit on a roll of 18-20.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

As a samurai, you are expected to conduct yourself with the utmost poise, dignity, and politeness. Doing so reflects your personal honor, as well as the disciplined social order of Kozakura. Thus, you are respectful to your superiors, and those of lower station can sense the unwavering intensity that you project.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to Diplomacy checks and Intimidate checks.

Level 10 Feature

Through a lifetime of practice, you have achieved an uncanny coordination of mind, body, and spirit, making your weapon artistry among the finest in the world. Whether your attack is embellished by a perfection of form or the application of ancient techniques, one strike often spells doom for your opponent.

Benefit: Choose a weapon group when you gain this feature. When you make a weapon attack with a weapon from that group and score a critical hit, the attack deals 1d6 extra damage to the target. This increases to 2d6 extra damage at level 21.

Optional Powers

Many samurai strive to improve their moral character by studying the mysteries of religion and philosophy. By gleaning truths from these ascetic codes, a samurai learns diligence, honesty, and veracity. If you pursue such enlightened studies, you might find yourself abandoning the trappings of temporal or scriptural mandates, refining your spirit in an unending quest for self-perfection.

Level 2 Utility Power

From an early age you have been groomed to withstand physical and emotional duress with stoic resolve, giving you a sense of confidence that is beyond reproach. No challenge is too daunting for you, and your devotion to bushido gives you the determination to withstand any foe.

Honorable Resolve — Samurai Utility 2

In the service of your master you know no fear, no weakness, and no surrender.

Daily ✦ Martial
Immediate Reaction **Personal**
Trigger: You are bloodied by an attack or damaged by an attack while bloodied.
Effect: You can use your second wind. Until the end of the encounter, you gain a +5 power bonus to saving throws against charm and fear effects, and enemy attacks never treat you as being bloodied.

Level 6 Utility Power

The singularity of your commitment to bushido can make you a terrifying opponent to confront. The confidence in your posture, the swiftness with which you strike, and the intensity of your presence are threats to your foes. With nothing more than a look, you can you can stop a charging enemy in its tracks, or command fleeing opponents to face you honorably.

Dauntless Gaze — Samurai Utility 6

You level an unwavering glare, projecting your focus with such intensity that your opponent is shaken to the core.

Encounter ✦ Fear, Martial
Immediate Interrupt **Close** burst 3
Requirement: You must have training in Intimidate.
Trigger: An enemy within 3 squares of you moves willingly.
Target: The triggering enemy
Effect: The target is marked by you and grants combat advantage until the end of your next turn.

Level 10 Utility Power

The most skilled samurai are often those who find serenity in meditation. A calm spirit allows you to separate yourself from pain, so while you are in a state of contemplation even fire becomes cool and refreshing. However, the rigors of your profession limit the amount of time you can spend in quietude. For you, meditation instead works best when you have a sword in your hand.

Riddle of Steel — Samurai Utility 10

In your hands, weapon and warrior are united in spirit, as your mind empties of the battlefield's distractions.

Encounter ✦ Martial
Minor Action **Personal**
Requirement: You must be holding a melee weapon.
Effect: You can make a saving throw. Also, until the end of your next turn, you gain a power bonus to Fortitude, Reflex, and Will equal to the highest enhancement bonus of a melee weapon you are holding.

Yakuza

Outcasts, renegades, folk heroes, and criminals—the yakuza are many things to different people, but without exception they are the rejects of a society that values conformity. There is a saying in Kozakura: "The nail that sticks up must be hammered down." The yakuza proudly view themselves as these nails, but refuse to be treated as such.

Although the true nature of the yakuza is hard to identify, most will agree that collectively they are scoundrels who live by their own rules and code of honor. Banding together in clannish groups, yakuza gain security and power by exploiting society through robbery or extortion. Most are viewed as criminals, but not necessarily with distaste; the unusual behavior of the yakuza makes them both loved and despised in the cities in which they operate.

Yakuza often work as street peddlers, smugglers, thugs, gamblers, or racketeers. They associate with each other through bonds of loyalty to their clan, which might include hundreds of members. Yakuza clans are highly organized using a hierarchical structure with the boss taking on the role of father and his subordinates the obedient children. Loyalty and honor are paramount to yakuza, though they eschew the ethics of bushido in favor of more pragmatic concerns.

In the view of most merchants and the officials of cities, yakuza are law-breaking thugs and criminals. The yakuza cultivate their image as iconoclasts, and purposefully commit robberies and vandalism to ruffle the feathers of authority. A yakuza clan often becomes the recognized face of crime within a city, wallowing in a self-made underworld; however, yakuza also realize that their livelihood depends on existing in the shadows of civilization, and they are not unnecessarily destructive of people or property in their criminal enterprises.

Yakuza Customs

Though yakuza clans have distinct personalities and goals, many share common customs born from their rebellious and ruthless nature. The first is the yakuza's love for tattoos—an art form considered scandalous by many Kozakurans. Most yakuza sport full-body tattoos that they conceal beneath their clothing, revealing the imagery only when in the presence of other yakuza or when doing so enhances one's intimidating presence. The other custom is a form of penance for disobeying the boss of the clan. A yakuza being punished must sever a joint from his or her little finger with each transgression. When you create a character using this theme, consider the personal meaning of the tattoos you conceal beneath your clothing, as well as what your mutilated hand represents in terms of lessons you have learned.

Some yakuza go so far as to actively attend to the needs of their communities, using resources to help those that the ruling classes have ignored. Many peasants view the yakuza as heroes standing up for the underdog against a society that treads on them. A yakuza clan might defend peasants from bandits or the brutality of an arrogant samurai. Some clans donate wealth to improving the infrastructure of their city. Yakuza have even acted as spies or assassins during times of war to protect their cities from the ravages of loot-hungry attackers. In some cases, these actions are viewed with a standoffish respect by authorities, who allow the yakuza to operate with impunity as long as their criminal activities don't get out of hand.

Creating a Yakuza

As outcasts in the society of Kozakura, most yakuza find themselves becoming rogues or assassins in order to survive in the underbelly of civilization. These characters quickly develop the skills and the mind-set that allow them to thrive in this cut-throat environment. Fighters also find a welcome place among yakuza, adopting roles as bodyguards or enforcers who do their bosses' dirty work. Yakuza clans are very inclusive, inclined to welcome anyone cast off from society who can be useful to their organization. As a result, unlikely characters such as clerics, druids, and wizards sometimes find a place within a yakuza clan's ranks. These characters often become vital assets to a clan, their talents giving it an edge over rivals.

Starting Feature

As a yakuza, you don't win battles by going toe-to-toe with enemies: You win by manipulating them into fighting you on your terms. A skilled yakuza will utilize deception, unfair positioning, coordination with allies, and every other dirty trick in the book to bring down foes. Though you are likely a skilled combatant, you know that the best weapon you have is the fear that your reputation is capable of creating in foes. Rumors of underworld assassinations, corruption, blackmail, and a penchant for violence surround you. Whether the rumors are true or not is irrelevant. What matters is that a menacing look from you stays the hands of enemies as efficiently as a mandate from the emperor.

Benefit: You gain the *ruthless demonstration* power.

Ruthless Demonstration — Yakuza Utility

The sight of blood and your threatening presence fill your opponents with dread, making them think twice before attacking you.

Encounter ✦ Fear, Martial
Free Action — **Personal**
Trigger: You bloody an enemy adjacent to you or reduce an enemy adjacent to you to 0 hit points or fewer.
Effect: Enemies that can see you take a -2 penalty to attack rolls against you until you are hit by an attack or until the end of the encounter. Also, if you bloodied the triggering enemy, you can immediately make an Intimidate check against it to force it to surrender.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

Yakuza know when the time is right to strike, and they are relentless in pursuit of an opponent. Because of your predator's instinct, your blade bites deepest when your enemy shows weakness.

Benefit: When you hit an enemy granting combat advantage to you, your opportunity attacks gain a bonus to attack rolls and damage rolls against that enemy until the start of your next turn. The bonus equals your Charisma modifier.

Level 10 Feature

Some yakuza make their living by deception and fraud, others through strong-arm tactics such as extortion. Regardless of how you conduct your illicit affairs, your wits have been sharpened by the harshness of civilization's underworld. You know the shadowy paths necessary to stay alive on the dangerous streets, and you are an expert at manipulation.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to Bluff checks or Intimidate checks (choose the skill when you gain this feature). Also, you gain a +2 power bonus to Streetwise checks.

Optional Powers

Living the life of a yakuza means forever dwelling as a misfit in an ordered society. As such, you survive by your cunning and through exploiting others whenever possible. You can't rely on help from a civilization that sneers at you, so you make your own luck by being opportunistic or cagey. You have no compunctions when it comes to taking what you want, and you are willing to use your talents to exploit others. Yet you are not without a sense of personal honor, something your enemies find out the hard way if they insult you.

Level 2 Utility Power

Though society considers them rejects, yakuza revel in their image as outcasts. Freed from the strict social demands of Kozakura's customs, you play life by your own rules, evening the odds of fate with your cunning or your audacity.

Life's Losing Hand — Yakuza Utility 2

Though fate has dealt you the hand of a misfit, you take loss and turn it into success.

Encounter ✦ Martial
No Action **Personal**
Trigger: You roll a natural 1, 2, or 3 on an attack roll or a skill check.
Effect: You can reroll the attack roll or skill check, with a power bonus equal to your Charisma modifier. You must keep the second result, even if it is lower.

Level 6 Utility Power

When you single out a foe for special attention by using this power, you show it the foolishness of its ways if the creature dares to confront you.

You Can't Hide — Yakuza Utility 6

No matter if your enemy tries to get away or stands and fights, it learns that either decision was a bad one.

Encounter ✦ Martial
Minor Action **Melee** 1
Target: One enemy
Effect: If the target ends its next turn in a square that is not adjacent to you, you can shift up to your speed to a square adjacent to it as a free action. If the target attacks you during its next turn, you gain a +5 power bonus to damage rolls against the target until the end of your next turn.

Level 10 Utility Power

Yakuza consider each other to be family, and an insult to one is an insult to all. If an enemy raises arms against you or one of your companions, you coordinate a retaliation that puts fear into the heart of even the most hardened warriors.

Underworld Vendetta — Yakuza Utility 10

Your opponent's insult will not go unpunished, as the overwhelming intensity of your counterattack promises certain death.

Daily ✦ Fear, Martial
Immediate Reaction **Close** burst 5
Trigger: You or an ally is bloodied by an attack made by an enemy within 5 squares of you.
Target: The triggering enemy in the burst
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, the target grants combat advantage, and whenever you hit the target with an attack, it takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of its next turn.

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Jeff Morgenroth is a regular contributor to *Dungeons & Dragons Insider*, the digital tome he uses to share inspiration and adventure with his fellow gamers.

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Europe Is for (D&D) Lovers

By Shelly Mazzanoble

Illustration by William O'Connor

I just got back from a two-week vacation in Europe. One might call it a "honeymoon." I called it "sweet salvation from everything with a vowel in its name." Except for the occasional (okay, often) check-in with Facebook, I was disconnected and deliriously free. No wedding planning, cranky pets, marketing plans, cross-functional team meetings, or after-work commitments. Just fourteen days of spontaneity and wine-infused lunches. We were leaving it all behind.

Or so that was the plan. But then, somewhere between hoisting a liter of Spaten Pilsner into my gullet and crushing hazelnut meringues like Godzilla tearing through a shantytown, that *other* life of ours (which my husband and I smugly believed could be forgotten) began to percolate up from the recesses of our minds. Oh, well—I guess you can take the girl out of the dungeon, but you can't take the dungeon out of the girl.

"I should be playing D&D Encounters right now," I said, enjoying my third mille-feuille of the day.

"*Madness at Gardmore Abbey* released yesterday," Bart mused. "Is it wrong to set up a play date with a bunch of guys while you're on your honeymoon?"

It didn't stop there. On our way to see Marienplatz in Munich, and again on the way to Notre Dame in Paris, we stumbled across game shops. We ran through the doors, giggling and slightly manic, like two freshly coiffed prom queens ducking out of a rainstorm.

Bart shoved past a couple of German teenagers. "Look! They have *Mordenkainen's*!"

Even though we both received copies a month earlier, it felt as if we were seeing these magical marvels for the first time. Oohing and aahing, we probably sounded like *normal* tourists seeing the Eiffel Tower for the first time.

We gave up our silly notion that we could forget about life back home and turned our vacation into a recon mission for our next D&D games. Fortunately, we were on a continent that is riddled with game fodder. You can't shake a crepe without getting Nutella on a place that looks like it was peeled off a Dungeon Tile.

Bart was no longer an American geek who forgot to pack socks, and I was no longer a perpetually hungry, sugar-fueled girl celebrating the end of dress fittings with brie and baguettes. We were an adventuring party of two, sent to mysterious lands on a quest. Everywhere we turned looked like a description right out of a campaign guide. This trip wasn't just a European adventure—it was a Dungeons & Dragons adventure. That's normal for your honeymoon, right?

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It all got me thinking. Life's most memorable moments don't have to just be *moments*. They can be epic campaigns. Why fight it? Here's how to do it in four easy steps.

Treat Everyone You Meet as an NPC

Confession: I normally hate nonplayer characters. Just ask New DM, who ruined them for me because of Elan the pig farmer and his wicked crush on Tabitha. Elan kept offering her slabs of bacon in exchange for a little quality time. Never mind that Tabby is an animal rights activists *and* vegetarian. Way to work her backstory into the campaign, New DM.

These characters certainly have a valuable place in D&D. Without them, we'd just be wizards and rogues and fighters hanging out in taverns with nothing to do but drink beer and eat tofu fries. Wait–why *do* we need them?

Okay, so we need the good ones–the ones, who, like my dad, know the value of a buck. Or at least how a few bucks can motivate a couple of greedy kids. Ten cents for every bag of leaves we raked up? We had five oak trees in our yard. Really, Dad?

One of the first NPCs we encountered on our trip was the British Airways ticket agent in Seattle. Everyone told us that if we played the "We're on our honeymoon" card, we'd be plied with awesome freebies like hotel suite upgrades and free meals. Well, either the people we encountered heard it all before, or they were going through nasty divorces. Needless to say, it didn't work. Or so we thought. When we boarded the flight from London to Munich, the ticket agent paused, stared at our boarding passes, and promptly tore them up.

"What the heck?" we asked. "We have a keg-tapping to get to!"

"Oh, I know." She smiled. "But it looks like you've been upgraded to our first class cabin. I hope that's okay."

Um, let me we think about that. My pea-sized bladder and I were kind of looking forward to a middle seat. I mean, aisle forty-three is close to the restroom and all, and nothing says bonding between strangers more than dragging your shins across some guy's kneecaps as you try not to wake him every fourteen minutes. So, yeah, I guess an upgrade was okay. So was the four glasses of champagne they foisted on us during the two-hour flight.

"I kind of want to take a nap," Bart said. "These seats are so plush, and I've got more legroom here than in our own bed."

I agreed. "Me too. But I don't want to miss our next meal."

Our next meal came about thirty minutes after the first one. "How long do you think this hummus will last in my purse?" I asked, taking great pains not to crush the marinated olives as I wrapped them in a napkin.

The flight attendant was at our row. Again. "More champagne?" We thought it was a question, but she filled our flutes without waiting for an answer. "You're on your honeymoon. Of course you want more champagne!"

Wasn't Oktoberfest supposed to be about beer? At this rate, we'd be asleep for the first two days. The flight attendant was really nice. Like, *really* nice. The kind of nice that makes you suspicious of a person's motives.

"Do you think she's going to ask us to smuggle heroin into the beer tents at Oktoberfest?" Bart whispered. "I mean, I don't see everyone getting this much attention."

"Oh, shush," I said, raising my glass to toast. "We're on our hunnymoonsh."

"Fine," he said, settling back into his oversized leather chair. "But if she hands you a balloon filled with powder and tells you to meet her in the lavatory, we're calling an air marshal."

Spend Time in Taverns

You don't have to imbibe anything with alcohol to appreciate a good pub or tavern. For the most part, pubs have really good food. They're also chock full of ambience and characters.

At every pub, we imagined running into an NPC who would give us our quest. Unfortunately, other than the occasional nod from a fellow North American or a quick explanation from the bar staff on which of the local beers was the hoppiest, we were left to our own imaginations.

Our favorite game was trying to guess what class and race the other patrons would be, and then putting together our ideal party. The short, mouthy gentleman who kept insulting the rugby team on TV, and who had an endless stream of ale coming to his table, was clearly a dwarf. The way he pumped his fist in the direction of the English Elite made it easy to envision him getting up in the faces of a team of bugbears. We loved that guy.

Then there was the Middle Eastern woman with long, dark hair, bangles up to her elbows, and a silk scarf that billowed behind her like a cloak.

"She looks like one of Tabitha's teachers from wizardry school," I said.

She clearly had a high Charisma.

One of the waitresses was deemed a cleric, because she must have asked us fifteen times in as many minutes if we were doing okay. Her bouclé sweater even gave the appearance of chainmail. We felt very safe (if also slightly inebriated) in her care.

The shifty-eyed loner in the corner freaked us out–the way he hunched over his pint, looking as if he were in a deep debate with the foam over the state of the financial industry.

"That's our rogue," I said, stating the obvious and pulling my purse a little closer to me.

Bart nodded. "I'd hire that guy in a second."

Be a Scaredy-Cat

I saw *Poltergeist* when I was ten and, like everyone else my age, came away from the experience with a healthy fear of clowns and those dreadful oak trees in my backyard. I also developed a love of horror movies. I created an awesome after-school game in which I hosed down our backyard and made my friends slip and slide in the mud, pretending we were in the swimming pool scene from the movie. And when they went home, preferring to play River Raid or watch Simon LeBon wax on about Rio from the bow of a sailboat, I stayed in the backyard pretending to be attacked by angry skeletons. See? I totally should have been playing D&D.

Bart shares my love of horror movies to a degree. When I mentioned that our hotel in Reims, France, could have been the sister property to *The Shining*, all the color left his face.

"Is Jack Nicholson standing by the elevator?" I asked, afraid to turn around.

"Give me your iPhone," he said. "I'm finding us a Holiday Inn."

Bart was traumatized after we saw *Paranormal Activity*. Poor Sadie didn't get a walk after dusk for three weeks. Sure, it was scary, but this is when my short-term memory issues come in handy. I usually forget I saw a movie before my head hits the pillow that night.

When we returned to our hotel in Reims later that night with a bottle of champagne, a brick of cheese, and a plastic knife we swiped from a *Mezzo di Pasta*, I *may* have started mumbling something that sounded like *redrum, redrum, redrum* under my breath. I will not confirm or deny this allegation.

"I swear, if you say that one more time, I will have this marriage annulled," Bart said.

Later, while in London (and still married), we went on a ghost tour. If you ever find yourself across the pond, I highly recommend taking one. Especially if you're a Dungeon Master. Cities such as London are rife with adventure ideas. The history alone could keep you questing for years. As we journeyed down cobblestone alleys, the breeze blowing from behind us and the streetlights flickering above, we felt less like tourists and more like characters who'd picked the wrong door in a dungeon.

Beheadings at the Tower of London, the Phantom Bus rumored to speed through North Kensington at 1:15 a.m., the abundant pub and church ghosts—all were great material for a D&D campaign. And I can't forget our favorite: 50 Berkeley Square—the most haunted house in London. We first heard about it on a bus tour earlier in the week, so naturally we asked our ghost tour guide to elaborate.

"How do you know about Berkeley Square?" he asked, his magnified eyes growing even wider behind his coke-bottle lenses.

"Oh, you know," Bart said, his eyes also magnifying behind lenses. "*We hear things*."

Our tour guide expanded on the story. The visitors were so terrified by whatever monster lived within the house's walls that they died frozen in fear almost instantly. And if they survived the night, it was only to throw themselves out the three-story window, proclaiming death to be a better alternative than living one more second with . . . *it*. See? Good stuff.

"I'm totally using that house in the next game I run," Bart said when we were safely back to the hotel. "But let's not talk about it anymore until morning."

Heck, even I was having delusions of DMing just to be able to use one of the stories we'd heard that night.

Let History Repeat Itself

Here's a great way to teach kids about historic events, such as the London Fire: Have them roleplay those events. The party needs to save a cherished relic (not to mention tens of thousands of townspeople) before the fire spreads and destroys the great city. There's even swarms of rats involved!

Need a villain? How about Jack the Ripper, Sweeney Todd, or Victoria Beckham? Need a patron? We've got centuries of royals to choose from. What about a damsel in distress? Just pick a princess. (And might I suggest England's newest duchess? Somebody give that girl a ploughman's lunch.)

In two weeks abroad, pulling the "honeymoon card" got us one first class upgrade, two glasses of champagne, three limoncello shots (the waiter did one with us), four sad tales of why marriage is a terrible idea, and a renewed enthusiasm for our favorite hobby. I'd call that a successful skill challenge. I guess it's true what I say: You can take the girl out of the dungeon, but you can't take the dungeon out of the girl. I think Lady Jane Gray, the protagonist in my new campaign, would agree.

About the Author

Shelly Mazzanoble is always looking for some good horror movie recommendations, so if you have any, please send them her way.

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