

REQUIRES THE DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS® PLAYERS HANDBOOK FOR USE

THE

ASSASSIN'S

HANDBOOK

MASTER
CLASS



d20
system

BY DAVID "ZEB" COOK
AND WOLFGANG BAUR



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THE ASSASSIN'S HANDBOOK

A MASTER CLASS SOURCEBOOK FOR THE D20 SYSTEM

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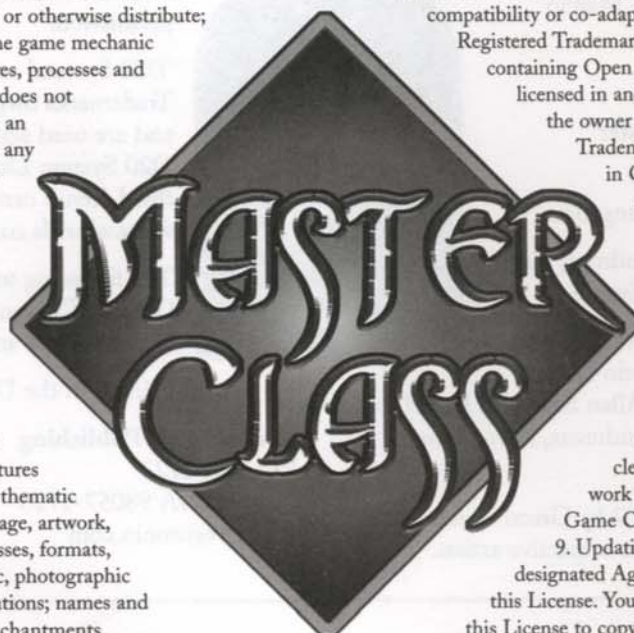
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- CHAPTER ONE: THE ASSASSIN CORE CLASS -

The assassin (abbreviated Asa) is a killer whose strength comes from the element of surprise and from his complete disregard for the rules of honorable combat. Assassins betray those whose trust they have gained, kill women and children for a few handfuls of gold, and strike terror in the hearts of kings, high priests, and archmages alike.

This base class provides an alternative to the assassin prestige class given in the DMG. Note that these two classes do not interact well, and a GM should not allow both in his campaign.

ADVENTURES

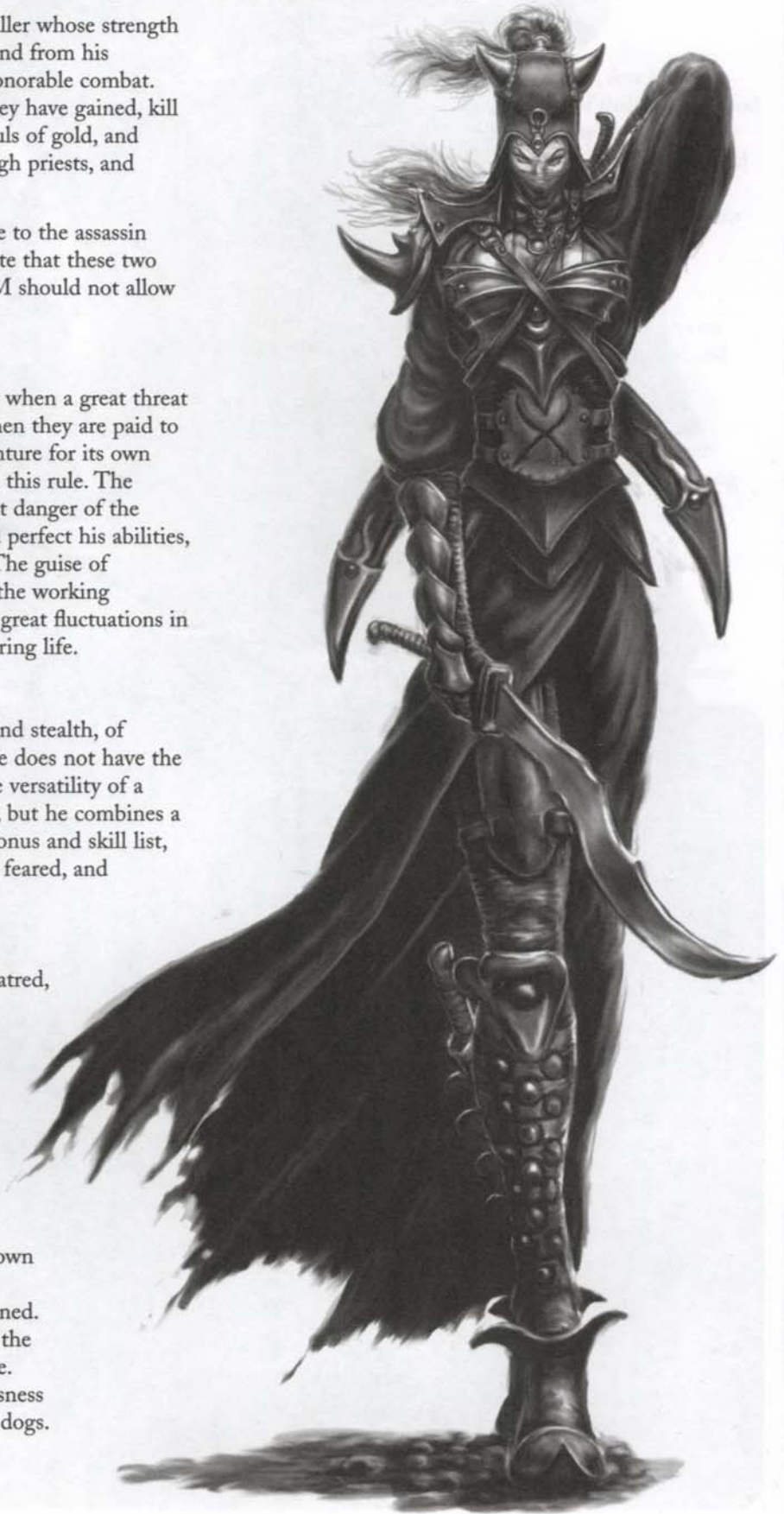
Assassins usually seek adventure only when a great threat comes against those they serve, or when they are paid to do so. While they rarely pursue adventure for its own sake, some assassins are exceptions to this rule. The adventuring assassin uses the constant danger of the adventuring life as a way to hone and perfect his abilities, and keep his skills at their sharpest. The guise of adventurer is also excellent cover for the working assassin, since constant traveling and great fluctuations in wealth are part and parcel of adventuring life.

CHARACTERISTICS

The assassin is a master of surprise and stealth, of cunning and underhanded tactics. He does not have the strength of a barbarian or fighter, the versatility of a bard, or the breadth of skills a rogue, but he combines a potent spell list with a solid attack bonus and skill list, and special abilities that make him a feared, and seldom-seen, opponent.

ALIGNMENT

Assassins follow a path of betrayal, hatred, and abject cruelty that would be unthinkable for any good creature. They are never good, and most are evil. Chaotic assassins are paranoid loners who are unable to keep their homicidal urges in check, and often ruin their own cover by acting on impulse. Lawful assassins follow a strict code of who may be killed and when. They despise slaughter for its own sake, and only kill outside a contract when they or their master are threatened. Assassins who are neutral are among the most dangerous characters imaginable. Their absolute amorality and faithlessness makes them as unpredictable as mad dogs.





RELIGION

Those assassins who practice a faith commonly worship the gods of thieves, but many also revere deities of death, murder, and vengeance. Of course, most assassins do not trouble themselves to revere anything beyond their own ability to cause destruction.

BACKGROUND

Some assassins are members of organized guilds that operate in major cities, and others are zealots who kill at the pleasure of their religious leaders. The majority, however, are self-trained in the craft and see no significance or honor in its practice beyond the inherent pleasure of killing.

RACES

Humans and half-orcs are the most common assassins. Evil humans take to the class with the same enthusiasm and focus they bring to all endeavors, while half-orcs seem to relish the particular cruelty of adding betrayal and surprise to an ordinary murder.

Elves and half-elves are exceptional assassins, but it is rare to find an elf so grim that he would abandon his long life to the practice of senseless killing. Most half-elves inherit a gaiety and love of freedom from their elven parent, and despise the sinister, single-minded

determination of the class. Likewise, the dwarves' cultural tendency towards good and law make them ill suited to the essentially evil path.

Despite their reputation as opportunists, few halflings follow the path of the assassin. Most of their race is good at heart, and they instinctively shy away from the dedication and bloody-mindedness required in a trained killer. Gnome assassins are extremely rare, but their innate talent for illusion and keen intellect makes them eminently deadly.

OTHER CLASSES

Assassins who serve in a guild often operate in teams alongside rogues, fighters, and arcane spellcasters; and zealots work well with clerics of their faith. Lone assassins get along with most evil characters.

Paladins and good-aligned rangers and clerics never knowingly work with assassins, and often seek to bring these characters to justice.

GAME RULE INFORMATION

Assassins have the following game statistics.

Abilities: Dexterity is crucial for many of an assassin's skills, but Strength is equally important to the assassin

TABLE 1-1: ASSASSIN

Base Class	Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells			
Level						1	2	3	4
1st	+0	+0	+2	+0	Bonus feat, bonus languages	—	—	—	—
2nd	+1	+0	+3	+0	Killing blow 1/day	—	—	—	—
3rd	+2	+1	+3	+1	Sneak attack +1d6	—	—	—	—
4th	+3	+1	+4	+1	Bonus feat	0*	—	—	—
5th	+3	+1	+4	+1		0*	—	—	—
6th	+4	+2	+5	+2	Killing blow 2/day	1	—	—	—
7th	+5	+2	+5	+2		1	—	—	—
8th	+6/+1	+2	+6	+2	Bonus feat	1	0*	—	—
9th	+6/+1	+3	+6	+3	Sneak attack +2d6	1	0*	—	—
10th	+7/+2	+3	+7	+3	Killing blow 3/day	1	1	—	—
11th	+8/+3	+3	+7	+3		1	1	0*	—
12th	+9/+4	+4	+8	+4	Bonus feat	1	1	1	—
13th	+9/+4	+4	+8	+4		1	1	1	—
14th	+10/+5	+4	+9	+4	Killing blow 4/day	2	1	1	0*
15th	+11/+6/+1	+5	+9	+5	Sneak attack +3d6	2	1	1	1
16th	+12/+7/+2	+5	+10	+5	Bonus feat	2	2	1	1
17th	+12/+7/+2	+5	+10	+5		2	2	2	1
18th	+13/+8/+3	+6	+11	+6	Killing blow 5/day	3	2	2	1
19th	+14/+9/+4	+6	+11	+6		3	3	3	2
20th	+15/+10/+5	+6	+12	+6	Bonus feat	3	3	3	3

* Intelligence bonus spells only. If no bonus, no spells gained at this level.

who prefers to work at close range. Charisma improves the assassin's ability to influence others, to gain information, and to bluff his way past obstacles. Intelligence is important for casting spells, as well as for crafting poisons and forging documents.

Alignment: Any nongood.

Hit Die: d6.

Starting Gold: 5d4 x 10

CLASS SKILLS

The assassin's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Alchemy (Int), Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Innuendo (Wis), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Perform (Cha), Profession (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), Speak Language (Int), Spot (Wis), Swim (Str), and Use Rope (Dex).

Skill Points at 1st Level: (4 + Int modifier) x 4.

Skill Points at Each Additional Level: 4 + Int modifier.

CLASS FEATURES

All of the following are class features of the assassin.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: An assassin is proficient with all simple and martial weapons, light armor, medium armor, and shields.

Bonus Feats: At 1st level, the assassin gets a bonus feat in addition to the feat that any 1st-level character gets and the bonus feat granted to humans. The assassin gains an additional bonus feat at 4th level and every four levels thereafter (8th, 12th, 16th, and 20th). These bonus feats must be drawn from the following list:

Ambidexterity, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Dodge (Improved Dodge**, Mobility, Spring Attack), Death from Above**, Deep Cover**, Eavesdrop**, Exotic Weapon Proficiency*, Expertise (Improved Disarm, Improved Trip, Whirlwind Attack), Glib Tongue**, Improved Critical*, Improved Initiative, Point Blank Shot (Far Shot, Precise Shot, Prone Shot**, Rapid Shot, Shot on the Run), Poison Use** (Extend poison**, Empower Poison**, Maximize Poison**, Quickened Poison**, Poison Focus**), Quick Draw (Quick Change**), Stone-cold Killer**, Two-Weapon Fighting (Improved Two-Weapon Fighting), Weapon Finesse*, Weapon Focus*, Weapon Panache**.

Some of the bonus feats available to an assassin cannot be acquired until the assassin has gained one or more prerequisite feats; these feats are listed parenthetically after the prerequisite feat. An assassin can select feats marked with an asterisk (*) more than once, but it must be for a different weapon each time. An assassin must still meet all prerequisites for a feat, including ability score and base attack bonus minimums. Those feats marked with two asterisks (**) are listed in Chapter 5:

New Skills & Feats.

Important: These feats are in addition to the feat that a character of any class gets every three levels. The assassin is not limited to the list given here when choosing those feats.

Bonus Languages (Ex): An assassin may substitute any language for one normally available to him because of his race. The assassin may even select a secret language (such as Druidic). Additionally, all assassins know a secret sign language that combines hand signals and subtle motions. The assassin sign language may not be learned by non-assassins, and is never taught to outsiders.

Killing Blow (Ex): At 2nd level, an assassin gains the ability to make a coup-de-grace attack as a standard action once per day. This ability may be used when the assassin's target would be denied his Dexterity bonus to AC (whether he actually has a Dexterity bonus or not), or when the assassin flanks the target, just like a rogue's sneak attack ability. During a surprise round, a killing blow attack can be made as a partial action. The assassin may make an additional killing blow attack every four levels thereafter.

Unlike a coup-de-grace attack against a helpless opponent, the assassin must roll to attack normally. If his attack hits, he scores a critical hit. If the defender survives the damage, he still must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 + damage dealt) or die.

Delivering a killing blow provokes attacks of opportunity from threatening foes (but not a flat-footed target) because it requires intense concentration. You can't deliver a killing blow against a creature that is immune to critical hits, such as a golem.

At 14th level, the assassin masters the killing blow and all such attacks receive a +2 attack bonus and no longer provoke attacks of opportunity.

Sneak Attack (Ex): At 3rd level, an assassin gains a +1d6 sneak attack. Any time the assassin's target would be denied his Dexterity bonus to AC (whether he actually has a Dexterity bonus or not), the assassin's attack deals +1d6 points of damage. The extra damage increases to +2d6 at 9th level and +3d6 at 15th level. Should the assassin score a critical hit with a sneak attack, his extra damage is not multiplied.

It takes precision and penetration to hit a vital spot, so ranged attacks can only count as sneak attacks if the target is 30 feet away or less.

With a sap or an unarmed strike, the assassin can make a sneak attack that deals subdual damage instead of normal damage. He cannot use a weapon that deals normal damage to deal subdual damage in a sneak attack, not even with the usual -4 penalty, because he must make optimal use of her weapon in order to execute the sneak attack.

An assassin can only sneak attack living creatures with discernible anatomies—undead, constructs, oozes, plants, and incorporeal creatures lack vital areas to attack. Additionally, any creature immune to critical hits is similarly immune to sneak attacks. Also, the assassin must be able to see the target well enough to pick out a vital spot and must be able to reach a vital spot. The assassin cannot sneak attack while striking at a creature with concealment or by striking the limbs of a creature whose vitals are beyond reach.

If an assassin gets a sneak attack bonus from another source (such as rogue levels), the bonuses to damage stack. Note that sneak attacks add into the damage of coup-de-grace attack (such as killing blows).

SPELLS

Beginning at 4th level, an assassin gains the ability to cast a small number of arcane spells. To cast a spell, an assassin must have an Intelligence of 10 + the spell's level. The DC for saving throws against assassin spells is 10 + the spell's level + the assassin's Intelligence modifier. Assassins must prepare their spells, but know all spells of each spell level, just like a divine spellcaster.

Through 3rd level, an assassin has no caster level. Starting at 4th level, an assassin's caster level is one-half his class level.

EX-ASSASSINS

An assassin who becomes good loses the ability to make a killing blow and cannot gain more levels as an assassin. He retains all the other benefits of the class, including spells, bonus feats, and bonus languages.

HALF-ORC ASSASSIN STARTING PACKAGE

Armor: Studded leather +3 AC, small wooden shield +1 AC, armor check penalty -2, speed 30 ft., 25 lb.

Weapons: Heavy pick (1d6, x4 crit, 6 lb., Medium-size, Piercing).

Shortbow (1d6, x3 crit, 2 lb., Medium-size, Piercing).

Skill Selection: Pick a number of skills equal to 4 + Int modifier.

Skill	Ranks	Ability	Armor
Bluff	4	Cha	
Climb	4	Str	-2
Disguise	4	Cha	
Forgery	4	Int	
Gather Information	4	Cha	
Hide	4	Dex	-2
Intimidate	4	Cha	
Listen	4	Wis	
Move Silently	4	Dex	-2
Sense Motive	4	Wis	
Spot	4	Wis	

Feat: Improved Initiative.

Bonus Feat (Assassin): Poison Use*.

Gear: Backpack with waterskin, one day's trail rations, disguise kit, bedroll, sack, and flint and steel.

Gold: 4d4 gp.

*Feats marked with an asterisk are found in Chapter 5: New Skills and Feats.

ALTERNATIVE ASSASSIN STARTING PACKAGE

Same as half-orc assassin, except

Race: Human, dwarf, elf, or half-elf.

Armor: Speed 20 ft. (dwarf only).

Skill Selection: Pick a number of skills equal to 5 + Int modifier (human only).

Bonus Feat: Alertness (human only).

ALTERNATIVE ASSASSIN STARTING PACKAGE

Same as half-orc assassin, except

Race: Gnome or halfling.

Armor: Speed 20 ft., 12 lb.

Weapons: Light pick (1d4, x4 crit, 4 lb., Small, Piercing) instead of heavy pick.

ASSASSIN CORE CLASS SPELL LIST

*Spells marked with an asterisk appear in this book.

**Spells marked with a double asterisk can be found in *Pocket Grimoire Arcane*.

1ST LEVEL

Change Self
 Detect Poison
 Distraction*
 Fast Escape*
 Forget*
 Ghost Sound
 Obscuring Mist
 Precise Vision**
 Shadow Hands*
 Sneaky Feet**
 Spider Climb

2ND LEVEL

Alter Self
 Blur
 Darkness
 Death Knell
 False Witness**
 Fog Cloud
 Part Crowd*
 Pass without Trace
 Shadow Selves**
 Static Veil**
 Undetectable Alignment

3RD LEVEL

Deeper Darkness
 Ghost Blade*
 Invisibility
 Keen Edge
 Misdirection
 Nondetection
 Phantom Steed
 Poison Food or Water*
 Shadow Bolt*
 Smoke Form*
 Silence

4TH LEVEL

Dimension Door
 Choking Shadows*
 Descent into Darkness**
 Force Armor*
 Freedom of Movement
 Gaseous Form
 Improved Invisibility
 Martyr's Death*
 Modify Memory
 Poison
 Poison Blade*
 Shadow Blade*
 Steal Identity*
 Void Armor*

- CHAPTER TWO: ASSASSIN PRESTIGE CLASSES -

The fida'i, houri, and shadow mage (Fid, Hou, and Shm) are prestige classes that specialize in different aspects of assassination. The fida'i is a ruthless holy warrior, while the other two use seduction and sorcery (respectively) to take down their targets.

FIDA'I

The zealous fida'i combine deadly skill with an absolute belief in the holy nature of their mission. As devout followers of the Straight Path of the Sirat, they know their cause is correct and that their actions are approved by their faith.

Because of its requirement for total devotion, the fida'i class is best suited for those assassins seeking ultimate truth, rogues who wish to enter into the service of a cause, and warriors seeking glorious martyrdom. Fida'i are almost always humans and half-elves, but a few elves are also known.

For more details on the fida'i and their beliefs, see Chapters Ten and Eleven.

Abbreviation: Fid

Hit Dice: d8.

REQUIREMENTS

Alignment: Lawful neutral or lawful evil.

Base Attack Bonus: +5.

Feats: Iron Will.

Concentration: 5 ranks.

Knowledge (religion): 5 ranks.

Move Silently: 10 ranks.

Special: Must be admitted by the Lord of the Mountain.

CLASS SKILLS

The fida'i's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Escape Artist (Dex), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Profession (Wis), and Spot (Wis).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int Modifier.

CLASS FEATURES

All of the following are class features of the fida'i prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A Fida'i gains proficiency with the kukri and short sword.

Conviction (Ex): At first level, a fida'i gains a +2 bonus on saves against mind-affecting spells and effects. This bonus improves to +4 at 4th level, +6 at 6th level, and +8 at 8th level.

Divine Ecstasy (Ex): Beginning at 2nd level, the character's faith admits him glimpses of the paradise that awaits him in the afterlife, and he gains the ability to enter a paroxysm of joy as a free action, during his turn. When in this state, he gains a +2 morale bonus to attack and damage rolls, saves, and skill checks, and gains damage resistance 5/-. This state lasts for 1 round, plus 1 round per class level.

The fida'i may use this ability twice per day beginning at 5th level, and three times per day at 9th level.

Spell-like Abilities: Beginning at 3rd level, the fida'i gains a number of spell-like abilities, each of which he may cast once per day. 3rd level: *protection from chaos*; 7th level: *magic circle against chaos*; 10th level: *shield of law*. These abilities are as the spells cast by a cleric of level equal to the character's class level (save DC 10 + Wis + spell level).

TABLE 2-1: FIDA'I

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+1	+0	+2	+2	Conviction (+2)
2	+2	+0	+3	+3	Divine ecstasy 1/day
3	+3	+1	+3	+3	<i>Protection from chaos</i>
4	+4	+1	+4	+4	Conviction (+4)
5	+5	+1	+4	+4	Divine ecstasy 2/day
6	+6	+2	+5	+5	Conviction (+6)
7	+7	+2	+5	+5	<i>Magic circle against chaos</i>
8	+8	+2	+6	+6	Conviction (+8)
9	+9	+3	+6	+6	Divine ecstasy 3/day
10	+10	+3	+7	+7	<i>Shield of law</i>

HOURI

Houri are courtesans and consorts who act simultaneously as lovers, killers, and spies among the powerful. They specialize in using rogue skills and bardic tricks to win sympathy and even love from their victims—and even those victims they betray are grateful for the houri's attentions. They combine their mastery of seduction, stealth, and assassination into a unique and deadly mixture.

Becoming a houri requires good looks, a strong personality, and an actor's ability to hide true emotions and intentions. This prestige class is popular among assassins, bards, and rogues. Elves and half-elves are the most common houri, half-orcs and dwarves the least.

The word houri derives from the Persian and Arabic tongues and means a voluptuous, alluring woman or, more specifically, one of the beautiful virgins of the heavenly paradise. Mata Hari and Salome are good examples of historical houri, but houri can be of either gender.

Abbreviation: Hou

Hit Dice: d6.

REQUIREMENTS

Alignment: Any nongood.

Bluff: 8 ranks.

Gather Information: 8 ranks.

Perform: 8 ranks.

Sense Motive: 8 ranks.

CLASS SKILLS

The houri's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Alchemy (Int), Bluff (Cha), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Innuendo (Wis), Knowledge (local) (Int), Knowledge (nobility and royalty) (Int), Listen (Wis),

Move Silently (Dex), Perform (Cha), Profession (Wis), Read Lips (Int, exclusive skill), Sense Motive (Wis), Search (Int), and Spot (Wis).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int Modifier.

CLASS FEATURES

All of the following are class features of the houri prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Houri gain no additional proficiency in any weapons or armor.

Pillow Talk (Ex): At 1st level, a houri gains a +2 competence bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy, Gather Information, and Sense Motive checks. This bonus improves to +4 at 3rd level, and +6 at 5th level.

Spell-like Abilities: Beginning at 2nd level, the houri gains a number of spell-like abilities, each of which she may cast three times per day. 2nd level: *charm person*; 4th level: *suggestion*; 6th level: *charm monster*; 8th level: *dominate person*; 10th level: *mass charm*. These abilities are as the spells cast by a sorcerer of level equal to the character's class level (save DC 10 + Cha + spell level).

Kiss (Su): At 7th level, the houri can add +4 to the DC of any enchantment spell or effect (including her spell-like abilities) by delivering it as a kiss. Any spell delivered in this fashion is treated as a touch attack, with a range of Touch.

Dance of the Veil (Su): At 9th level, a houri may add +4 to the DC of any enchantment spell or effect (including her spell-like abilities) by delivering it as part of a ritual dance. The dance takes one minute to complete, but any spell cast in conjunction with it affects all valid targets (by spell) within a 40-foot radius. For example, *charm person* cast as part of a dance of the veil would affect all humanoids within 40 feet of the houri dancer.

TABLE 2-2: HOURI

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+0	+2	+0	Pillow talk +2
2	+1	+0	+3	+0	<i>Charm person</i> 3/day
3	+2	+1	+3	+1	Pillow talk +4
4	+3	+1	+4	+1	<i>Suggestion</i> 3/day
5	+3	+1	+4	+1	Pillow talk +6
6	+4	+2	+5	+2	<i>Charm monster</i> 3/day
7	+5	+2	+5	+2	Kiss
8	+6	+2	+6	+2	<i>Dominate person</i> 3/day
9	+6	+3	+6	+3	Dance of the veil
10	+7	+3	+7	+3	<i>Mass charm</i> 3/day

SHADOW MAGE

Shadow mages combine knowledge of positive and negative energies into something entirely unique: a magic based on the patterns and true structure of the universe. They believe they are the only enlightened arcane masters; all others play with shadows of one form or another, but only shadow mages truly understand them. Shadow magic is often confused with illusion (which shadow mages consider a debased form of their Art) and also with conjuration and enchantments.

A certain flair for the neutral zone between absolute darkness and absolute light is required for shadow mages, making it a natural choice for assassins seeking to pursue the arcane. This also appeals to wizards who see past the Veil (see below) and for multiclass thieves with arcane ability. Drow and duergar are common shadow mages, as are gnomes.

Abbreviation: Shm

Hit Dice: d4.

REQUIREMENTS

Alignment: Any nonlawful.

Feats: Silent Spell, Still Spell.

Hide: 4 ranks.

Knowledge (arcana): 3 ranks.

Spells: Ability to cast arcane spells of 3rd level or higher.

CLASS SKILLS

The shadow mage's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Alchemy (Int), Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Knowledge (the planes) (Int), Profession (Wis), Scry (exclusive skill, Int), Spot (Wis), and Spellcraft (Int).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int Modifier

CLASS FEATURES

All of the following are class features of the shadow mage prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Shadow mages gain no additional proficiency in any weapons or armor.

Spells per Day: When a shadow mage level is gained, the character gains new spells per day as if he had also gained a level in an arcane spellcasting class he belonged to before adding the prestige class. He does not, however, gain any other benefit a character of that class would have gained.

Spells: Shadow mages have access to the assassin spell list (see Chapter 1) as well as the spells available to their base spellcasting classes.

Shadow Shift (Ex): Shadow mages gain a +2 insight bonus on Hide checks at 1st level. This bonus improves to +4 at 5th level, and to +6 at 9th level.

Spell-like Abilities: Beginning at 2nd level, the shadow mage gains a number of spell-like abilities. The following abilities can be cast three times per day. 2nd level: *darkvision*; 3rd level: *deeper darkness*; 6th level: *mislead*; 7th level: *shadow walk*. The following abilities can be cast one per day. 8th level: *teleport without error*; 10th level: *plane shift*. These abilities acquire the "shadow" descriptor, but are otherwise identical to the spells cast by a sorcerer of level equal to the character's class level (save DC 10 + Cha + spell level).

Shadow Familiar (Su): The shadow mage gains a familiar (if he does not already have one); and his familiar gains a Charisma of 10 (if not already 10+) and acquires the ghost template (see MM), with the manifestation and corrupting touch special attacks. Note that although the familiar's type changes to "undead", the master does not suffer the penalty for his familiar actually dying.

TABLE 2-3: SHADOW MAGE

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per Day
1	+0	+0	+0	+2	Shadow shift +2	+1 level of existing class
2	+1	+0	+0	+3	<i>Darkvision</i> 3/day	+1 level of existing class
3	+1	+1	+1	+3	<i>Deeper darkness</i> 3/day	+1 level of existing class
4	+2	+1	+1	+4	Shadow familiar	+1 level of existing class
5	+2	+1	+1	+4	Shadow shift +4	+1 level of existing class
6	+3	+2	+2	+5	<i>Mislead</i> 3/day	+1 level of existing class
7	+3	+2	+2	+5	<i>Shadow walk</i> 3/day	+1 level of existing class
8	+4	+2	+2	+6	<i>Teleport without error</i> 1/day	+1 level of existing class
9	+4	+3	+3	+6	Shadow shift +6	+1 level of existing class
10	+5	+3	+3	+7	<i>Plane shift</i> 1/day	+1 level of existing class

- CHAPTER THREE: SPELLS -

The following new spells are available to assassins and shadow mages, though whether any of these spells are available to other arcane spellcasters is up to your judgment as a GM. In some cases, these spells are best reserved for assassins only, as secrets of the trade.

NEW SPELLS

1ST LEVEL

Distraction. Creates smoke and noise around you, making escape easier.

Fast Escape. Adds a +30 bonus to Escape Artist checks.

Forget. Target loses all memories of the last minute's events.

Shadow Hands. 1d6 cold damage/level (max: 5d6).

2ND LEVEL

Part Crowd. Crowds move aside to let you pass, and press back to block pursuit.

3RD LEVEL

Poison Food or Water. Makes food or water poisonous.

Ghost Blade. Gives one weapon the ghost touch special quality.

Shadow Bolt. You launch shadowy bolts of cold (4d6 damage).

Smoke Form. You become insubstantial, and can fly slowly.

4TH LEVEL

Choking Shadows. Freezing fog obscures vision and kills.

Force Armor. Gives you a +8 armor bonus.

Martyr's Death. You die, but take lots of people with you.

Poison Blade. Envenoms a weapon for one attack.

Shadow Blade. Make one attack with any weapon as a touch attack.

Steal Identity. Knock your victim out and assume his identity for 1 hour/level.

Void Armor. You are surrounded by unwieldy force armor that damages attacks.

SPELL DESCRIPTIONS

CHOKING SHADOWS

Evocation [Cold, Shadow]

Level: Asa 4

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Close (20 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Effect: Cloud spreads 30 ft. wide and 20 ft. high

Duration: 1 round/level

Saving Throw: See text

Spell Resistance: Yes

A blanket of shadows spills out from your hand, drenching the target area in frigid darkness. This effect obscures vision within the area exactly like *fog cloud*, but creatures inside the cloud also suffer cold damage each round they remain inside.

Living creatures with 2 or fewer HD die outright from shock (no save), and creatures with 3 to 5 HD must make a Fortitude saving throw or die. Living creatures with more than 5 HD, and creatures of 3 to 5 HD who make their saving throws, take 1d10 points of subdual damage each round while in the cloud.

The choking shadows move away from the caster at 10 feet per round, rolling along the surface of the ground. The cloud is neutrally buoyant, and does not sink or rise in air. It cannot penetrate liquids, nor can it be cast underwater.

DISTRACTION

Illusion (Figment)

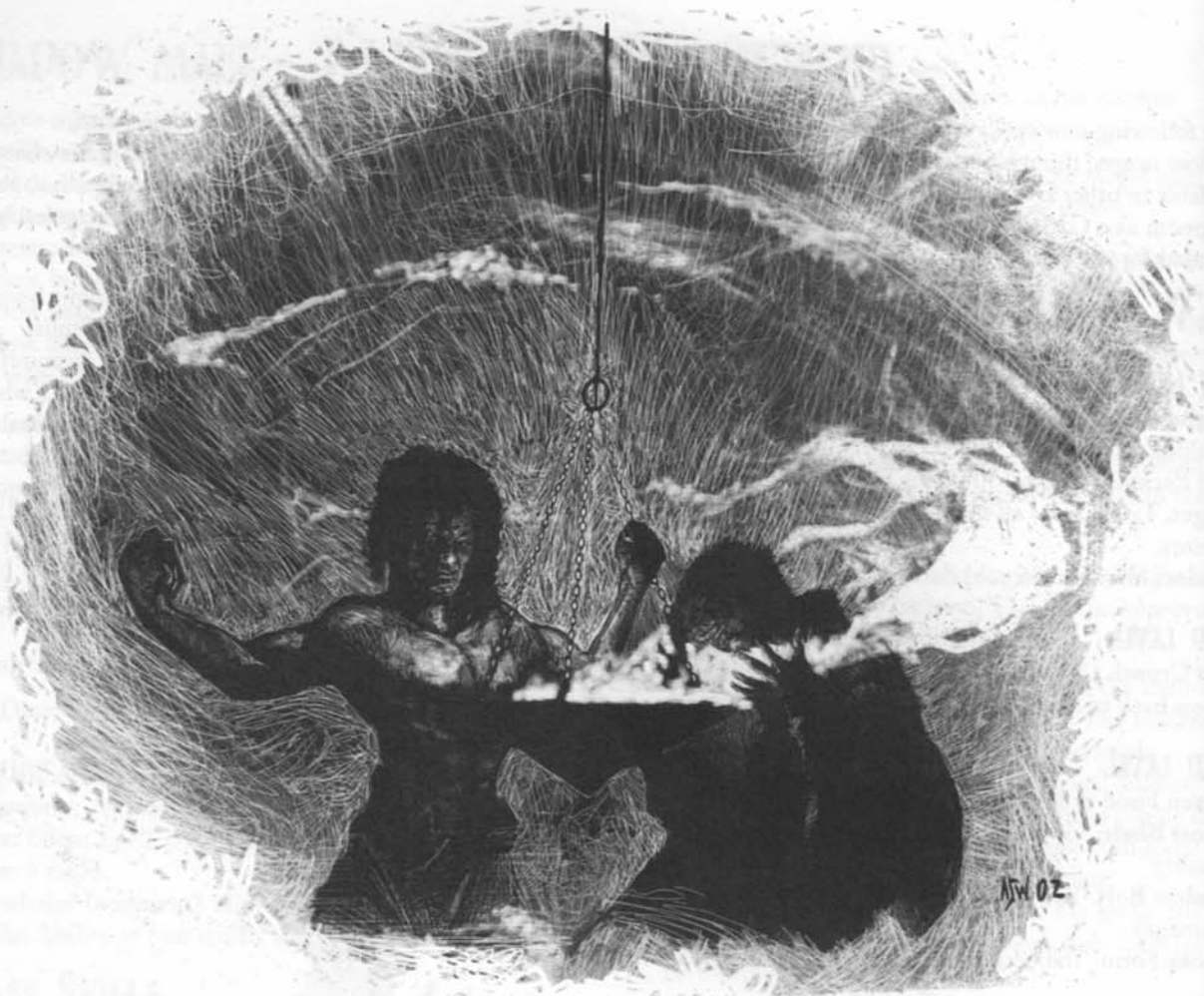
Level: Asa 1, Sor/Wiz 1

Components: V

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Personal





Area: 5 ft. radius around caster

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

With a quick verbal command, you create a bright flash of light, a thunderclap, and puff of smoke that completely obscures vision in a 5 ft. radius around you. You gain the benefit of full cover while within the cloud (which dissipates normally), and a +4 circumstance bonus on Hide and Move Silently checks for 2 rounds after the spell is cast, making it ideal for escaping from a tricky situation.

FAST ESCAPE

Transmutation

Level: Asa 1

Components: V

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Personal

Target: Self

Duration: 1 minute/level (D)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: Yes

You gain a +30 bonus on Escape Artist checks for the duration of the spell. Because this spell reduces friction on your person and clothing, you also suffer a -4 circumstance penalty on Balance, Climb, and Use Rope checks that rely on your ability to hang on, hold on, or remain standing on a narrow ledge.

FORCE ARMOR

Evocation (Force)

Level: Asa 4, Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S, F

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Personal

Target: Self

Duration: 1 hour/level (D)

Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

The caster is surrounded by a dimly visible field of force that grants a +8 armor bonus to AC. Unlike mundane armor, force armor does not impose an armor check penalty, arcane spell failure chance, or speed reduction. Since force armor is a force effect, it cannot be bypassed by incorporeal creatures the way normal armor can.

Focus: A pearl worth at least 500 gp, sealed inside a tiny steel locket.

FORGET

Enchantment (Compulsion) [Mind-affecting]

Level: Asa 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Close (25 ft. plus 5 ft./2 levels)

Target: One living creature

Duration: Permanent

Saving Throw: Will negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

You make the target creature lose all memory of the last minute. It does not remember what it has seen, heard, or discovered during the preceding minute.

Modify memory counters, and can undo the effects of, forget.

GHOST BLADE

Transmutation

Level: Asa 3

Components: V, S, F

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Target: One weapon

Duration: 10 minutes/level

Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless, object)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless, object)

The transmuted weapon fades in and out of reality, gaining the ghost touch special weapon quality as described in the DMG. It can affect incorporeal creatures without suffering the normal miss chance, and can be wielded by an incorporeal creature normally.

Focus: The weapon to be transformed.

MARTYR'S DEATH

Necromancy

Level: Asa 4

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Personal

Area: 30 ft. radius

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: See text

Spell Resistance: Yes

This devastating spell sacrifices the caster's own life force to make a death attack on every living creature within range.

Every creature within 30 feet must make a Fortitude saving throw or die. Even those who make their save suffer 1d12 damage per level of the caster (including



non-spellcaster levels). The caster is slain by completing this spell, and because his soul is destroyed in the reaction, he cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*.

Material Component: An edged weapon, which the caster plunges into his own throat to complete the spell.

PART CROWD

Enchantment (Compulsion) [Mind-affecting]

Level: Asa 2, Sor/Wiz 2

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Target: Up to 50 living creatures per level

Duration: 1 round/level

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: Yes

A crowd of up to fifty Small or Medium-size creatures part to make way for your passage, and immediately close ranks again after you pass. You can take up to one creature with you, plus one for every three caster levels.

The crowd parts with uncanny speed; you can move at a full run through them with no penalty. They also fall back into place rapidly, and any pursuers suffer a $\frac{1}{2}$ movement penalty, as if moving through thick undergrowth.

POISON BLADE

Transmutation

Level: Asa 4

Components: V, S, F

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: Touch

Target: One weapon

Duration: One hour/level, or until delivered.

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates (see below)

Spell Resistance: No

You can poison a weapon by touching it. The next time the weapon successfully strikes an opponent, the venom deals 1d10 points of temporary Constitution damage immediately and another 1d10 points of temporary Constitution damage 1 minute later. Each instance of damage can be negated by a Fortitude save (DC 10 + one-half caster level + caster's Intelligence modifier).

POISON FOOD OR WATER

Transmutation

Level: Asa 3

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Target: One gallon of liquid or pound of food per level

Duration: One hour

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates

Spell Resistance: No

You can cause touched foodstuffs to become poisonous. The food or drink delivers a potent ingested poison that deals 1d10 points of temporary Constitution damage immediately and another 1d10 points of temporary Constitution damage 1 minute later. Each instance of damage can be negated by a Fortitude save (DC 10 + one-half caster level + caster's Intelligence modifier).

When the spell duration expires, the poison becomes totally inert.

SHADOW BLADE

Transmutation (Shadow)

Level: Asa 4

Components: V, S, F

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Target: One weapon

Duration: One round/level

Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless, object)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless, object)

The transmuted weapon is infused with energy from the Plane of Shadow, and passes right through physical armor to strike its target. While the spell is active, all attacks with the weapon are made as touch attacks. A



target's armor bonus, shield bonus, and natural armor bonus do not apply to AC against a touch attack.

Focus: The weapon to be transformed.

SHADOW BOLT

Conjuration (Creation) [Cold, Shadow]

Level: Asa 3

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Target: One shadow bolt/four levels

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Reflex halves

Spell Resistance: Yes

You can create bolts of pure shadow and fire them at your enemies. You must succeed at a ranged touch attack roll to hit. The bolt deals 4d6 points of cold damage (Reflex save half). If you create extra bolts, all bolts must be aimed at enemies that are all within 30 feet of each other.

Material Component: An ink-blackened arrowhead.

SHADOW HANDS

Transmutation [Cold, Shadow]

Level: Asa 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 10 ft.

Area: Semicircular wave of cold shadow 10 ft. long, centered on your hands.

Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: Reflex half
Spell Resistance: Yes

A freezing blast of shadow leaps from your hands in a fan pattern. Any creature caught in the shadows takes 1d6 points of cold damage per your caster level (maximum 5d6).

SMOKE FORM

Transmutation (Fire)

Level: Asa 3
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Personal
Target: Self
Duration: 1 minute/level (D)
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

Your body and possessions dissolve into smoke, becoming dimly visible but insubstantial. You gain damage resistance 5/+1 and immunity to fire.

Your material armor becomes worthless, though size, Dexterity, deflection, and force armor bonuses still apply. As with gaseous form, you lose any prepared touch spells when you enter this form, as well as all supernatural abilities.

While in smoke form you can't run but you can fly (speed 10, maneuverability perfect). You can pass through tiny holes just like normal smoke, but can't pass through airtight spaces or through liquids.

STEAL IDENTITY

Necromancy

Level: Asa 4, Sor/Wiz 4
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Target: Creature touched
Duration: Until discharged, then 1 hour/level
Saving Throw: Fort negates
Spell Resistance: Yes

You steal another creature's appearance and mannerisms with a successful touch attack. You can assume the identity of any creature within one size category of yours. If the target fails his saving throw, he is placed in a coma-like stupor for the duration of the spell, and you immediately take on his perfect likeness.

You gain a +10 insight bonus on all Disguise checks made to impersonate the target for the spell's duration, though you do not gain actual access to his mind or thoughts.

VOID ARMOR

Evocation (Cold, Shadow)

Level: Asa 4
Components: V, S, F
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Personal
Target: Self
Duration: 1 round/level
Saving Throw: See text
Spell Resistance: No

A suit of shadowy plate armor appears around you, protecting you just like a real suit of masterwork full plate (+8 armor bonus, +1 max Dex bonus, -5 armor check penalty, arcane spell failure 35%, speed 20 ft./15 ft., 50 lb.). It is made from woven strands of pure shadow, and its seething black surface is anathema to attacks from physical weapons.

Any living creature that strikes you with an unarmed attack or is struck by your gauntleted fists must make a Fortitude save or suffer 1d10 points of subdual damage from intense cold. If a weapon is used against you, the weapon must succeed at a Fortitude save or shatter. These effects do not in any way reduce damage inflicted against you.

Focus: A suit of armor stitched of dusty black silk.



- CHAPTER FOUR: EQUIPMENT -

SPECIAL AND SUPERIOR ITEMS

Item	Cost	Weight
Marching powder	50 gp	1/5 lb.
Masterwork pry bar	52 gp	6 lb.
Opium	50 gp	—
Poison tooth	150 gp	5 lb.
Rope ladder belt	60 gp	5 lb.
Traveling chest	75 gp	25 lb.
Wedges	2 sp	1/2 lb.

MARCHING POWDER

This stimulant grants a +2 enhancement bonus to Wisdom and Constitution for 2 hours. Each time the effect ends, the user must make a Will saving throw (DC 15) or become addicted. If the addict does not receive at least one dose per day, he suffers 1d3 temporary Charisma and Dexterity damage each day that passes until he receives a dose.

Addiction can only be overcome by spells such as *heal*, *lesser restoration*, *neutralize poison*, and *restoration*, or by allowing the addict's Charisma to drop to 0 from withdrawal.

MASTERWORK PRY BAR

This hardened steel cousin of the ordinary crowbar grants the user a +2 bonus on Strength checks made to open doors and chests.

OPIMUM

This powerful painkiller creates a sense of lethargy and well-being in those who smoke, drink, or eat the drug. In game terms the user gains a +4 morale bonus to Will saving throws, but suffers a -2 enhancement penalty to Initiative checks and Reflex saves. Both effects last for 2 hours. Each time the effect ends, the user must make a Will saving throw (DC 15) or become addicted. If the addict does not receive at least one dose per day, he suffers 1d3 temporary Wisdom and Strength damage each day that passes until he receives a dose.

Addiction can only be overcome by spells such as *heal*, *lesser restoration*, *neutralize poison*, and *restoration*, or by allowing the addict's Wisdom to drop to 0 from withdrawal.

POISON TOOTH

These ceramic or bone teeth fit neatly into an empty socket. A Heal check (DC 20) is required to implant one correctly, but thereafter the tooth behaves normally and is indistinguishable from any other tooth in the user's mouth.

A single dose of contact, inhaled, or ingested poison may

be stored inside the tooth (the tooth price does not include the price of the poison). The user may take a move-equivalent action to bite down on the tooth, releasing the poison into his system. Poison released in this manner does not allow the user a saving throw against initial or secondary damage.

ROPE LADDER BELT

This is a fine silk rope carefully knotted into a rope ladder. Because it is so flexible and slim, it can be worn around the waist or over a shoulder (to create an artificial paunch or hump for a disguise). The rope ladder belt is 60 feet long and includes loops at both ends with which to anchor the ladder during use. It grants a +2 bonus on Use Rope and Climb checks.

TRAVELING CHEST

Used to sneak into secure compounds, castles, and palaces, the traveling chest is a large wooden or metal chest with hidden space for a single Small or Medium-sized character. The "rider" must succeed at an Escape Artist check (DC 20) to fold himself into the cramped space under the false bottom.

The rider may lock or unlock the chest from within as a free action, and may open a concealed side panel (Search DC 20) to exit the chest as a full-round action.

WEDGES

Wedges are a cheap, effective way to keep doors open or shut, and have been a part of many burglaries and assassinations. Hammering a wedge into a door requires a standard action, and adds +2 to the DC of any check made to force the door open.

MAGIC ITEMS

WEAPONS

SHADOW DAGGER

This +1 *dagger* is crafted from the essence of the Plane of Shadow. It is perfectly invisible in natural darkness and shadows, and can be placed and retrieved in the wielder's shadow, just as if the shadow was a sheath. An assassin's killing blow performed with a *shadow dagger* adds +2 to the target's DC to resist the death effect.

Caster Level: 7th; **Prerequisites:** Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *shadow blade*; **Market Price:** 3,000 gp.

SHADOW SWORD

This +2 *longsword* is crafted from the essence of the Plane of Shadow. It is perfectly invisible in natural darkness and shadows, and can be placed and retrieved in the wielder's shadow, just as if the shadow was a sheath. An assassin's

killing blow performed with a shadow sword adds +4 to the target's DC to resist the death effect.

Caster Level: 7th; Prerequisites: Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *shadow blade*; Market Price: 9,000 gp.

SUBTLE KNIFE

This +3 *dagger of sharpness* has a blade so thin it disappears entirely when viewed sideways. Besides its weapon properties, a *subtle knife* allows its wielder to use several spells as a 10th-level caster. They have 50 charges when forged, and cannot be recharged.

By taking a standard action and burning one charge, the wielder can slash a quick hole in reality, which acts as a *dimension door* spell.

By taking a full-round action and burning two charges, the wielder can cut a *passwall* in any surface, by literally cutting a hole in the fabric of reality. This hole seals up naturally after 10 hours, or the wielder can burn one charge to seal it up after his passage, as a free action.

Caster Level: 10th; Prerequisites: Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Craft Wand, *dimension door*, *passwall*; Market Price: 68,802 gp.

WONDROUS ITEMS

BLACK LOTUS INCENSE

This sweet-smelling incense temporarily increases the Dexterity, Strength, and Constitution of those who breathe its vapors, but it is highly addictive and potentially deadly. When the user inhales its fumes for at least ten minutes, he gains a +4 enhancement bonus to Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution for one hour.

When the effects fade, the user must make a Fortitude save (DC 15) or become hopelessly addicted, craving the incense and forsaking friends, alignment, and oaths to get more. If the subject fails the save by more than 5, he suffers an overdose, with the effects of a poison spell. This same effect occurs if exposed to the incense more than twice within a 12 hour period.

Caster Level: 7th; Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, empowered *bull's strength*, *cat's grace*, and *endurance*; Market Price: 4,000 gp.

CAULDRON OF POISON

The *cauldron of poison* grants a +10 bonus to one Craft (poison) check per day. It also grants a +5 bonus on all Alchemy checks made to brew antidotes.

Caster Level: 7th; Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *neutralize poison*, *poison*; Market Price: 9,000 gp.

CLOAK OF NIGHT

This cloak of black spider silk softens the wearer's silhouette and deadens his footsteps, granting a +10 circumstance bonus to Hide and Move Silently checks.

Caster Level: 3rd; Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *darkness*, *silence*; Market Price: 8,000 gp.

HASHISH OF PARADISE

This magic incense brings wondrous visions of paradise and joy, and a warm feeling of contentment and security. The subject gains a +4 morale bonus to all saving throws, and a -2 enhancement penalty on all Intelligence- and Wisdom-based skill checks. The subject also gains immunity to fear spells and effects. These effects last for 1 hour.

Caster Level: 7th; Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *emotion (hope)*; Market Price: 1,100 gp.

KING'S CUP

These silver goblets set with slivers of purple amethyst are a common sight at banquet tables and official place settings. If poison is poured into one of these cups, it gives a soft chime, like a silver bell.

Caster Level: 5th; Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *detect poison*; Market Price: 1,000 gp.

QUEEN'S PLATE

These ornamental gold platters typically feature emeralds or sapphires as decoration. If poison food is placed on them, or poison sprinkled on them at any time, they give a warm string note, like a crystal bell.

Caster Level: 5th; Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *detect poison*; Market Price: 1,000 gp.

SAFE CONDUCT PAPERS

These elaborately decorated vellum documents bear a bewildering array of stamps, seals, and official signatures. When used as part of a Bluff attempt against any creature that reports to a higher authority, the papers grant a +10 circumstance bonus to convince the creature of the wielder's official status.

Caster Level: 5th; Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *secret page*, *suggestion*, creator must have 5+ ranks in Forgery; Market Price: 4,000 gp.

TRICKSTER'S MASK

No sane mage will admit to creating one of these garish masks, and some sages hold that a deity of chaos or trickery is actually behind them. Whatever their source, they fuse with the wearer's features, granting him a +10 circumstance bonus to Bluff and Tumble checks, but imposing a -10 luck penalty on Sense Motive and Move Silently checks.

Any lawful creature who wears a *trickster's mask* suffers a negative level. This negative level never results in actual level loss, but it cannot be removed by any means, including restoration spells.

Caster Level: 7th; Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *confusion*; Market Price: 8,000 gp.

- CHAPTER FIVE: SKILLS AND FEATS -

NEW WAYS TO USE SKILLS

CRAFT (POISON) [INT]

The age-old craft of distilling toxic liquids and powders from plants, animals, and minerals is dangerous to crafter and victim alike, and is often highly illegal in civilized lands. This sub-skill includes all forms of poison preparation, from grinding mineral powders to milking serpents to deliberately concentrating the sap of toxic plants.

Check: Crafting a poison has a base DC equal to the poison's DC, plus the following modifiers:

TABLE 5-1: POISON CREATION DC MODIFIERS

Poison Type	DC
Contact	+2
Energy drain	+6
Ingested	-2
Inhaled	+0
Injury	+2
Permanent damage	+4
Two-stage*	+4
Three-stage*	+6

*Two-stage poison requires that the victim come into contact with two components rather than one, and three-stage poisons require that the victim come into contact with three components. The poison DC is equal to the most difficult component of the bunch.

Raw materials for most poisons are hard to come by, and cost at least three-quarters of the market price. At the GM's discretion, some raw materials (such as foxglove and hemlock) are actually very easy to obtain, and cost just one-tenth the market price for the poison.

Each successful Craft (poison) check yields one dose of poison.

Retry: If you fail the check by a margin of 5 or more, you ruin half the materials and have to buy them again.

Special: If you have 5 or more ranks in Alchemy, you get a +2 synergy bonus on Craft (poison) checks.

NEW FEATS

DEATH FROM ABOVE [GENERAL]

You can combine melee attacks with jumps.

Prerequisites: Jump +6, base attack bonus +4 or better.





Benefit: When you jump onto a melee opponent as part of a charge attack, you gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls for that attack.

DEEP COVER [GENERAL]

You have a special talent for immersing yourself in a role.

Prerequisite: Disguise +6.

Benefit: If you spend at least one day preparing your disguise, you gain a +10 competence bonus on opposed Disguise checks when you are impersonating a specific person.

EXTEND POISON [GENERAL]

You can delay the initial onset time of a poison.

Prerequisites: Poison Use, Base attack bonus +2.

Benefit: If you spend a full-round action to prepare a poison, you can delay its initial onset time by up to one hour. This has no effect on secondary damage, which occurs one minute later, as usual.

EAVESDROP [GENERAL]

Your keen ears and curiosity make you adept at soaking up local information.

Prerequisite: Listen +4.

Benefit: Apply your Wisdom bonus instead of Charisma bonus to Gather Information checks. You may choose which bonus to apply at will, as a free action.

EMPOWER POISON [GENERAL]

You can use poisons to greater effect.

Prerequisites: Poison Use, Base attack bonus +4.

Benefit: If you spend a full-round action to prepare a poison, all variable, numeric effects are increased by one-half. An empowered poison deals half again as much initial and secondary damage. Non-variable effects such as blindness or death are not affected.

GLIB TONGUE [GENERAL]

Few can talk themselves out of trouble better than you.

Prerequisite: Bluff +6.

Benefit: The first time you attempt to bluff a specific individual, you gain a +6 insight bonus on the opposed check. Subsequent attempts against the same target suffer a -6 circumstance penalty.

IMPROVED DODGE [GENERAL]

Your skill at dodging blows is greater than usual.

Prerequisites: Dodge, Lightning Reflexes, Dex 15+.

Benefit: During your action, you designate an opponent and receive a +3 dodge bonus to Armor Class against attacks from that opponent. You can select a new opponent on any action. Note: A condition that makes you lose your Dexterity bonus to Armor Class (if any) also makes you lose dodge bonuses.

MAXIMIZE POISON [GENERAL]

You can use poisons to maximum effect.

Prerequisites: Poison Use, Base attack bonus +6.

Benefit: If you spend a full-round action to prepare a poison, all variable, numeric effects are increased by one-half. An empowered poison deals half again as much initial and secondary damage. Non-variable effects such as blindness or death are not affected.

POISON FOCUS [GENERAL]

Choose a type of poison, such as ingested, inhaled, injury, or contact. All poisons you deliver from that type are more potent than normal.

Prerequisite: Poison Use.

Benefit: Add +2 to the Difficulty class for all saving throws against poisons from your preferred poison type.

Special: You can gain this feat multiple times. Each time you take the feat, it applies to a new type of poison.

POISON USE [GENERAL]

You are trained to use poisons with no risk to yourself.

Prerequisite: Dex 13+.

Benefit: You never risk accidentally poisoning yourself when applying poison to a blade, or using it in combat.

PRONE SHOT [GENERAL]

You are adept at firing from a prone position.

Prerequisite: Point-Blank Shot.

Benefit: You gain a +2 attack bonus when firing a ranged weapon from a prone position.

QUICK CHANGE [GENERAL]

You can change disguises in the blink of an eye.

Prerequisite: Quick Draw.

Benefit: You change between two previously prepared disguises as a full-round action with a successful Disguise check (DC 15).

QUICKEN POISON [GENERAL]

You can deliver a poison that deals its damage all at once.

Prerequisites: Poison Use, Base attack bonus +8, Killing Blow.

Benefit: If you spend a full-round action to prepare a poison, it deals both initial and secondary damage in the same round (immediately after exposure). The victim still receives a saving throw for both effects, as normal.

SHADOW FOCUS [GENERAL]

You cast shadow spells that are hard to resist.

Prerequisite: Spell Focus (any).



Benefit: Add +2 to the Difficulty class for all saving throws against spells you cast with the "shadow" descriptor.

STONE-COLD KILLER [GENERAL]

You place no value on life, and are trained to snuff it out quickly.

Prerequisites: Nongood alignment, Combat Reflexes.

Benefit: Once per round, you may make a coup-de-grace attack on a helpless opponent as a standard action instead of a full-round action.

WEAPON PANACHE [GENERAL]

Choose one type of light melee weapon, such as a short sword. You are so brash and self-confident when wielding this weapon that you gain a bonus on attack rolls.

Prerequisites: Proficient with weapon, base attack bonus +1 or higher.

Benefit: With the selected weapon, you may add your Charisma modifier instead of your Strength modifier on attack rolls.

Special: You can gain this feat multiple times. Each time you take the feat, it applies to a new weapon.

- CHAPTER SIX: POISONS -

REAL-WORLD POISONS

This section describes the game effects of real-world poisons for GMs who want to include an element of realism in their game.

Listed under each poison's description is its onset time, and in some cases a secondary onset time (if different than the standard). Standard D&D poisons inflict initial damage on contact, and secondary damage one minute later. Most real-world poisons have much longer onset times, and because of their relatively slow action they are not well suited to use in an adventuring or battlefield setting. By the same token, they are exceptionally suited to the subtle arts of undetected poisoning, and cases where the assassin wishes to be far away when the venom takes effect.

AMANITA

The destroying angel and death angel amanita mushrooms are found throughout the world in temperate and sub-arctic climates, typically alone or in clusters among mixed oak-hardwood and conifer forests.

The entire mushroom is toxic. Symptoms set in within a few hours after eating; they include severe abdominal pain, vomiting, and diarrhea that last for 6 to 9 hours.

After the onset of the initial symptoms, there is a lag of up to a day. This lag period is especially dangerous since it can lull the victim into a false sense of security. However, during this symptom-less period, the amanita toxins destroy the liver, leading to internal bleeding and kidney failure, and finally coma and death within 7 days after eating.

Initial onset: 6 hours; Secondary onset: 24 hours;
Craft DC 9.

ARSENIC

Arsenic is the poison of choice for many murders in reality and in fiction alike. In the 15th and 16th century, the notorious Borgias of Italy used arsenic for political assassinations. Some writers have suggested that Napoleon was poisoned by arsenic-tainted wine served to him while he lived in exile.

Symptoms of arsenic poisoning include a garlic smell to the victim's breath and bodily fluids. Ingestion of a large dose leads to vomiting and severe, bloody diarrhea, followed by weakening and eventual death.

Initial onset: 2 hours; Craft DC 11.

BELLADONNA

This plant poison comes from deadly nightshade, an herb with red sap and purple flowers. The fruit is a glossy, blackish purple berry, and this is the most poisonous part of the plant. It can be found throughout Europe and Asia.

The symptoms of belladonna poisoning include high fever, rapid pulse, dilation of pupils, hot and dry flushed skin, headache, dry mouth, difficulty swallowing, burning of the throat, hallucinations, and convulsions.

Initial onset: 10 minutes; Craft DC 11.

BLACK WIDOW VENOM

Soon after a bite, the black widow's venom produces pain and sweating in the affected region. If not treated promptly, nausea, vomiting, and fever follow. In severe cases, the victim may be paralyzed or even die.

Initial onset: 5 minutes; Secondary onset: 4 hours; Craft DC 12.

BOTULIN

Deadly even in tiny doses, botulin is a toxic bacteria byproduct that attacks the victim's nervous system. It is extremely foul smelling, and so must be hidden under heavily flavored foods, such as spiced meats, heavy sausages, or garlicky stews. Honey is a natural source of botulism bacteria and poison.

The symptoms of botulin poisoning include sleepiness, vomiting, loose bowels, and blurred vision. In its later stages, botulin causes fatigue and makes breathing difficult, and eventually the nerves that control the diaphragm fail and the victim dies of suffocation.

Initial onset: 3 hours; Secondary onset: 3 days; Craft DC 14.

COBRA VENOM

Cobra venom blocks nerve impulses, causing respiratory failure and death in its victims.

Symptoms include drowsiness, nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain. In addition, the effects of the bite include darkening and blistering of the flesh around the fang punctures and rotting flesh within 48 hours of the bite. The wound typically smells quite putrid within minutes of the bite or injection of venom by a poisoned weapon.

Initial onset: 10 minutes; Craft DC 16.

CURARE

The vine used to brew this deadly arrow poison is the curare plant, a South American canopy vine with tiny, greenish-white flowers. The toxin is found in the plants' bark, root, leaves, and stem, which are crushed and cooked down to a syrupy consistency.

Symptoms of curare poisoning include paralysis of the extremities, which gradually moves in toward the victim's neck, arms, and legs, and finally paralyzes the muscles of the chest and lungs, causing death.

Initial onset: None; **Secondary onset:** 10 minutes; **Craft DC** 19.

CYANIDE

Cyanide is a poisonous mineral that destroys the brain, liver, and heart; at high exposures, it causes coma and death. People who eat large amounts of cyanide may have symptoms including deep breathing and shortness of breath, convulsions, and loss of consciousness, and may die. Exposure to lower levels creates breathing difficulties, heart pains, vomiting, blood changes, headaches, and an enlarged thyroid.

The inhaled version is a colorless gas with a faint, bitter, almond-like odor. In its solid form, which may be ingested or delivered through injury, cyanide is a white solid with a bitter, almond-like odor in damp air.

Initial onset (ingested): 1 hour; **Initial onset (injury):** 5 rounds; **Initial onset (inhaled):** None; **Secondary onset (all):** 10 minutes; **Craft DC** 22 (ingested), 26 (inhaled), 27 (injury).

DIGITALIS

The source of the deadly poison digitalis is the foxglove, a biennial plant with beautiful long spikes of white to purple flowers.

Symptoms of digitalis poisoning include dizziness, vomiting, irregular heartbeat, and delirium or hallucinations.

Initial onset: 30 minutes; **Craft DC** 16.

DUMB CANE

An ornamental plant with large variegated or spotted leaves, dumb cane stems and leaves contain toxic crystals which if swallowed pierce the mouth, throat, and

TABLE 6-1: REAL-WORLD POISONS

Poison Name	Type	[Save DC]	Initial Damage	Secondary Damage	Price
Amanita	Ingested	[11]	2d6 Con	2d6 Con	180 gp
Arsenic†	Ingested	[13]	1d3 Str	2d6 Str	300 gp
Belladonna	Ingested	[13]	1d6 Con	2d8 Con	650 gp
Black Widow	Injury	[10]	1d4 Dex	1d4 Dex	100 gp
Botulin	Ingested	[16]	1d6 Con	1d6 Con	300 gp
Cobra	Injury	[14]	2d4 Str	1d4 Str	200 gp
Curare	Injury	[17]	1d12 Dex	1d12 Dex	1,500 gp
Cyanide	Ingested	[20]	1d8 Con	2d8 Con*	1,800 gp
	Inhaled	[22]	2d8 Con	1d8 Con*	2,500 gp
	Injury	[21]	2d8 Con	1d8 Con*	2,100 gp
Digitalis	Ingested	[18]	2d4 Con	2d4 Con	500 gp
Dumb Cane	Ingested	[12]	1d3 Con	1d8 Con	150 gp
Fugu Toxin	Ingested	[24]	1d12 Con	1d12 Con	3,000 gp
	Injury	[19]	1d8 Str	1d10 Str	750 gp
Hemlock	Ingested	[11]	1d12 Con	1d4 Con	250 gp
Poison dart frog	Injury	[20]	1d10 Dex	2d10 Dex	3,000 gp
Ricin	Ingested	[22]	2d6 Str	1d6 Str	700 gp
Salamander	Contact	[10]	1d6 Str	1d3 Str	100 gp
Shellfish Toxin	Injury	[22]	4d4 Str	2d4 Str	1,000 gp
	Ingested	[18]	3d4 Str	1d4 Str	650 gp
Stone Fish	Injury	[15]	1d8 Con	1d4 Con	300 gp
Tarantula	Injury	[10]	1d4 Dex	1d3 Dex	120 gp
Wolfsbane†	Ingested	[13]	1d3 Con	2d8 Con	200 gp

*These poisons inflict permanent ability score drain.

†These poisons appear in the DMG (arsenic) and MM (wolfsbane), but are listed here with interpretations of their real-world effects.

** In regions with access to jungle plants. Triple the price in temperate or subarctic climates.

digestive tract as they pass through, causing, at the very least, intense discomfort.

Eating or drinking the plant leads to severe swelling of the lips, mouth and tongue and even difficulty swallowing, speaking, and breathing. Conjunctivitis also results on contact with the eyes. In larger doses, the crystals cause severe digestive upset, breathing difficulties and- if enough is consumed- convulsions, coma and death.

Initial onset: 30 minutes; Craft DC 10.

FUGU TOXIN

This neurotoxin is derived from the glands of the puffer fish, and a dose of just 1-2 milligrams of purified toxin can be lethal. Fugu toxin is heat-stable and water-soluble, making it an ideal ingested poison because it can be served in hot foods or dissolved in drinks.

Onset of the first symptoms occurs within hours after eating poisoned food. The lip and tongue tingle and are anesthetized, then the face and hands are numbed. Severely poisoned patients may be very weak and have difficulty speaking. Stumbling, weakness, a blue tinge to the lips and skin, slow breathing, and speech difficulties then develop. A rapid ascending paralysis occurs over the next 24 hours. Extremity paralysis precedes paralysis of the brain, heart, and lungs.

Initial onset (injury): 30 minutes; Initial onset (ingested): 2 hours; Secondary onset: 24 hours; Craft DC 22 (ingested), 21 (injury).

HEMLOCK

Poison hemlock is native to Europe; its most famous role is as the poison Socrates drank to commit suicide in ancient Athens. Poison hemlock is commonly found along roadsides, trails, ditches and field borders.

Initial symptoms of hemlock poisoning include clumsiness, poor coordination and headaches. Soon after, the victim suffers abnormally fast heartbeat, drooling, abdominal pain, delirium, weakness, and seizures. As nerve receptors burn out, the victim goes from jumpy and energetic to fatigued and depressed, with a slowed heartbeat, muscular paralysis, slower reflexes and finally a cessation of breathing.

Initial onset: 30 minutes; Secondary onset: 1 hour; Craft DC 9.

POISON DART FROG TOXIN

These poison produced by these tiny frogs is among the strongest known. A single drop can block vital nerve impulses and stop a victim's heart. When the frog feels threatened, its poison glands produce the toxin. The toxin has a clear smell and bitter, peppery taste that immediately causes vomiting.

Initial onset: 5 rounds; Craft DC 22.



RICIN

Derived from castor beans, the poison called ricin is deadly and almost undetectable. The seeds from the castor bean plant contain a toxin that makes the blood thicken and clump up.

Just one milligram of ricin can kill an adult human. The symptoms of poisoning begin within a few hours of ingestion and include abdominal pain, vomiting, and diarrhea. Within several days the victim suffers severe dehydration, a decrease in urine, and a decrease in blood pressure that can lead to death.

Initial onset: 1 day; Secondary onset: 3 days; Craft DC 20.

SALAMANDER POISON

Some salamanders produce a potent neurotoxin that absorbs into the victim's body through the skin. Victims suffer strong convulsions, sometimes so strong that they can dislocate joints, and in very high concentration is potentially lethal.

Initial onset: 30 minutes; Craft DC 12.

SHELLFISH TOXIN

This poison is one of the few that can kill its victims within seconds. Only tiny amounts are required for a lethal dose, and the poison can be smeared on a blade or even a pin or needle for an attack. It can also be delivered in a lethal dose in food, though this method is slower and less reliable.

Shellfish toxin is derived from mussels or clams harvested during a period of plankton activity, one of the "red tides" that occur in subtropical waters during the summer months, peaking in July. The plankton generates the poison, and the shellfish filters the plankton from the water when it feeds, absorbing and concentrating the toxin within its body.

Initial onset (injury): None; Initial onset (ingested): 30 minutes; Craft DC 24 (injury), 16 (ingested).

STONEFISH

The poison of these fish causes excruciating pain within seconds of the sting. The pain peaks after an hour, but can last up to 12 hours if untreated. Subsequent mild pain may last for weeks. If the dose is strong enough, the victim may suffer shock, paralysis, and collapse within a matter of hours.

Initial onset: None; Secondary onset: 3 hours; Craft DC 17.

TARANTULA VENOM

The bite of a large tarantula causes severe pain, numbness, respiratory difficulties, and even heart failure. With a large dose, the victim lapses into a coma and dies within a few days.

Initial onset: 2 hours; Secondary onset: 3 days; Craft DC 12.

WOLFSBANE

The flowering wolfsbane (also called aconite or monkshood) is a perennial herb with hooded white or blue-purple flowers. It is found in mountainous climates, especially in forests, moist woods, and along creek banks. The entire plant is poisonous when eaten.

The symptoms of wolfsbane poisoning include burning of lips and mouth and numbness of the throat. Intense vomiting and diarrhea, muscular weakness and spasms, a weakening pulse, paralysis of the lungs, and convulsions, and death quickly follow.

Initial onset: 30 minutes; Craft DC 11.

FANTASY POISONS

The following poisons are entirely fictitious, and follow the standard D&D model for venoms: they inflict their initial damage on first exposure, and secondary damage after one minute.

ANGEL KISS

Angel kiss provides its victims with a peaceful, quiet death. Regardless of when the poison is administered, it does not take effect until ten minutes after the victim next falls asleep. Because the victim dies quietly in the night and the poison does not disfigure the body, many victims of angel kiss are assumed to die of natural causes, and the poison is very popular for just this reason.

Craft DC 17.

BITCH'S BREW

This clear blue liquid has a sharp, acrid taste and a scent that has been likened to moldy bread. It is too thin and watery to envenom a blade, but can easily be hidden in wines, in soups, and in starchy or spiced foods. The color is pale enough that it goes unnoticed even in white wine. Bitches' brew quickly destroys its victim's mind and senses.

Craft DC 15.

BLACKROT

This poison is a gritty gray powder with a smell of burnt hair. Made into a paste, it can be smeared on a blade; ground very fine, it can be made into a cloud of dust that a victim inhales or that can coat a victim's skin. Because it can act as a contact, ingested, injury, and inhaled poison, working with blackrot is quite dangerous.

The symptoms of blackrot poisoning resemble the plague for which it is named. Painful open sores appear on the victim's body, breathing becomes difficult, and the victim suffers an extremely high fever. Despite these

symptoms, the victim is not contagious and is not helped by *cure disease* spells or effects.

Craft DC 19 (injury), 13 (ingested), contact (15), inhaled (20).

DEMON'S BLOOD

With a stench like burning goat dung and a color so pure that it stains metal and stone bright red, demon's blood is hard to disguise. Its effects are similarly noticeable.

Demon's blood eats at a victim's soul, inflicting negative levels that may only be cured by *restoration* and *heal* spells.

Craft DC 30 (injury), 27 (ingested).

MUMMY DUST

Mummy dust is a nondescript light brown powder that has a faint scent of dried herbs and flowers. If injected, the poison destroys the body radially from the wound, as hands, arms, and legs rot away. If inhaled, the victim typically sneezes but notices nothing else suspicious until the lungs collapse. If ingested, it rots the victim's flesh from the inside out, causing the victim to "crash out" as his digestive tract becomes a paste and then a liquid.

Craft DC 20 (inhaled), 26 (ingested), 16 (injury).

NECROPOTENT ELIXIR

Necropotent elixir is a poison especially crafted to cripple spellcasters, or to destroy a leader's mind without actually killing him (and often done to muddy the succession or raise a regent to prominence). By leaving a victim's body intact, some killers exact an unusually nasty

revenge on both the victim and his or her friends and family. Necropotent elixir is a reddish-black liquid, darker than wine but not as dark as a stout beer or porter. Its smell has been likened to spoiled molasses or rancid rosewater—sweet, even cloying, with a complex undercurrent of earth and mold.

Craft DC 27.

NEVERMORE

This muddy gray poison is unusual as an ingested poison, since it negates all scent and flavor from any dish to which it is added. For this reason, it is often mixed simply in water or tea.

Nevermore does not kill its victims; instead it first kills the memory of the victim in all others. Those poisoned by nevermore simply do not register as a specific person. If the victim is dining with friends when the poison is applied, they no longer notice or remember him by the second course. They do not acknowledge him in any way: even a request as simple as "pass the salt" goes unheard, and only physical violence gets any attention—though observers take pain to attribute attacks and damage to another source.

Exactly one hour after the poison is administered, the victim begins to lose his grasp on the material world. He must succeed at a Will save each hour (DC 17) or lose all memories and become incorporeal. An incorporeal victim cannot materialize, and is completely unable to affect the material world. He must succeed at an Intelligence test (DC 15 + number of hours since taking nevermore) to

TABLE 6-2: FANTASY POISONS

Poison Name	Type	[Save DC]	Initial Damage	Secondary Damage	Price
Angel Kiss	Injury	[19]	2d6 Con	2d6 Con	1,600 gp
Bitch's Brew	Ingested	[17]	1d4 Wis, 1d4 Int	1 Wis, 1 Int	200 gp
Blackrot	Injury	[17]	1d4 Dex	1d4 Dex	150 gp
	Ingested	[15]	1d8 Dex	1d4 Dex	250 gp
	Contact	[13]	1d4 Dex	1d4 Dex	150 gp
Demon's Blood	Inhaled	[20]	4d4 Dex	2d4 Dex	1,600 gp
	Injury	[22]	1 level	1 level	4,250 gp
Mummy Dust	Ingested	[23]	1 level	1 level	5,000 gp
	Inhaled	[20]	1d6 Con	1d6 Con	650 gp
	Ingested	[24]	1d10 Con	1d6 Con*	1,250 gp
Necropotent Elixir	Injury	[14]	1d4 Con	1d6 Con	200 gp
	Ingested	[25]	Blindness*	3d6 Int*, deafness	2,000 gp
Nevermore	Ingested	[17]	Special	Special	5,000 gp
Prophet's Tongue	Ingested	[15]	1d3 hp, truth	Paralysis	275 gp
Sinner's Scythe	Ingested	[15]	1d10 Cha	1d10 Cha*	1,800 gp
Sword of God	Injury	[20]	1d20 Wis	1d3 Wis*	1,500 gp
Taint of Shadow	Injury	[20]	1d3 levels	Blindness	4,200 gp
Wine from Death's Goblet	Ingested	[25]	5d6 hp	10d6 hp	4,750 gp

*Indicates permanent condition or ability score drain.

remember even the most inconsequential details of his past life, such as where he lived or what his name was.

Nevermore is commonly used as a way of disposing of popular and well-known figures, whose deaths would otherwise arouse suspicion and alarm. Less well known is its use by assassins on themselves, as a way of avoiding detection and notice after they commit a murder. This dangerous use of the drug is always accompanied by a stash of reliable antidote, put up by the assassin himself for just such a contingency.

Craft DC 27.

PROPHET'S TONGUE

Prophet's tongue is a transparent yellow liquid that must be swallowed to be effective. The fact that it tastes like burning acid makes it difficult to administer the poison by stealth. It is usually administered by force or threat of force to an unwilling victim, and it inflicts 1d3 points of damage when drunk (Fort save negates this effect, DC 15).

For the next hour, the victim suffers a -10 penalty on Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, and Sense Motive checks. Additionally, each time he knowingly tells a lie during this time he suffers 1d6 points of subdual damage from wracking pains. At the end of the hour, during which time the victim is fully aware and "truthful", the drug paralyzes his extremities, and then his limbs, and finally his heart over a period of ten minutes. Because the poison's action is so slow and deliberate, even reluctant victims eventually come around, especially when an antidote is offered as reward for cooperation.

Craft DC 13.

SINNER'S SCYTHE

This pale brown paste smells like pears or apples, and it tastes as sweet as it smells. This makes it easy to add to soups, cooked foods, and even breadstuffs and baked goods. Sinner's Scythe kills only those of a certain alignment. This can thus be slipped into the food of a group and still only affect a single individual, despite how many others safely eat it.

Because it saps the vitality, energy, and leadership of those who eat it, it is sometimes also called "Sleeper's Poison." The survivors are often lethargic, lazy, and shiftless creatures who can barely fend for themselves. Targets at 0 Charisma are comatose, entirely withdrawn into themselves, and helpless without the assistance of others. In the worst cases, the victim dies from starvation if left alone.

Craft DC 17.

SWORD OF GOD

This milky white sap adheres easily to blades, but tends

to clot in foods and does not dry well enough to be blown as a powder.

The Sword of God destroys the Wisdom of targets of one particular alignment (to which each individual batch is keyed during its creation); it has no effect on all others. The versions typically found are shown on table 6-3. Ironically, using poison is considered an evil act, so good-aligned assassins or warriors using the Sword of God often damn themselves to an alignment change, even if they destroy their evil enemies in the process. The poison is typically used to target priests or other divine spellcasters, though nobles and political enemies are sometimes reduced to senseless lunatics using this poison as well.

Craft DC 26.

TABLE 6-3: SWORD OF GOD TARGETS

D20 roll	Targets
1-7	Good
8-13	Lawful
13-18	Chaotic
19-20	Evil

TAIN'T OF SHADOW

This thick, viscous black liquid can only be used as an injury poison; it floats on liquids and cannot be readily mixed with most foods without rotting them away. The Taint deals

1d3 negative level as initial damage, and blinds its victim as secondary damage.

A victim reduced to 0 levels or HD by Taint of Shadow becomes a shadow (see the MM) under the poisoner's control. This creature is not subject to the secondary blindness effect of the poison.

Craft DC 24.

WINE FROM DEATH'S GOBLET

This poison is a bright scarlet powder that can be dissolved in red wine without arousing suspicion. The poison destroys blood vessels and attacks the blood itself, leaving its victims covered in garish purple bruises, and always with red, bloodshot eyes.

If Wine from Death's Goblet slays its victim, it also breaks all spiritual links between his soul and his body, making *raise dead* and *resurrection* impossible.

Craft DC 23.

- CHAPTER SEVEN: AMONG SHADOWS & BLOOD -

"To kill a prince is nothing. To make him fear—that is something."

—Al-Zaris, Grand-Master of the Sirat

"I am only an instrument of politics. Your charge lies not with me, but with the state."

—The shadow-mage Odyrias, at his execution for the slaying of Lord Tarrant

Assassinate, *n.* to kill suddenly, premeditatedly and treacherously, for political reasons

As vile as all murder is, there is perhaps none more despised by those who fear it—and praised by those who bid it—than the act of assassination. Murders of passion can be excused as momentary madness. The robber who kills is degenerate, as he kills for what others have. The serial killer is perverse and evil, killing for unfathomable pleasures. But the assassin is a killer who acts out of principle. He may kill for money, but does not steal. He kills out of desire, but for ideals and not lust. He can be the most cold-blooded of murderers, a businessman who trades in the death of others. He can be the fiercest of zealots, a patriot who will risk even his own life for the cause.

In the portraits of killers, assassins are painted in three broad styles—the professional, the zealot, and the crazy. The distinctions are not absolute and one blurs into the other but they are a good starting place. This section of the book presents two groups—the Vultur, professional assassins who kill for money, politics, and honor; and the Siratani, killers for a cause. Information on organization, membership, methods, goals, bases, and NPCs for both groups allows the GM to integrate them into a campaign. The crazies—the lone assassins with deranged beliefs—are left to the GM to create.

But before plunging into the realms of the fantastic, let's take a quick excursion into the historical territory of assassins and the Assassin, in particular.

A SHORT HISTORY

Shortly after the invention of politics came the invention of assassination. No doubt some ambitious tribesman bushwhacked the tribal chief to clear the path to power and the art of assassination was born. With a few thousand years of prehistory, mankind had time to refine this basic technique. Since killing a popular leader might make you unpopular (if not dead), ambitious types figured out that paying someone else to do the job was a better idea. Soon the full-fledged business of assassins and assassination was born.

Although the term "assassin" did not come into use until much later, lack of a vocabulary hardly stopped the

practice. Judith decapitated Holofernes to save Bethulia. In the ancient world, Greeks and Persians were both familiar with assassins, while the Roman emperors made liberal use of the practice. They equally eliminated wives, children, siblings, and troublesome emperors, from the very public killing of Julius Caesar to the more discreet poisoning of the Emperor Claudius.

THE ASSASSINS

It wasn't until the 11th century that the legend of secret assassin cults truly begins. The tale comes from the Middle East where (by most accounts) an Islamic sect, the Ismaili, gained control a mountain fortress in northern Persia. The Ismailis were one flavor of Islam, but they were not the majority. Tolerated in some places and persecuted in others, they were not welcome in Persia, especially since they advocated the overthrow of its Seljuk ruling class. Given that, it was no surprise that the local Ismaili leader, Hasan-i-Sabbah soon became a hunted man.

The resourceful Hasan soon "obtained" a castle in the mountains, though just how he got the fortress is uncertain. Most stories say his followers infiltrated the fortress until Hasan's own men outnumbered the defenders. When the time was right, they seized power in a peaceful coup. A few stories say it was more a matter of business when the castellan, seeing the direction the winds blew, agreed to hand over his command in exchange for a fair payment. Whatever the means, Hasan and his Ismaili followers became the masters of Alamut, the Eagle's Nest. From here, they could threaten the trade roads between Persia and the Caspian to the north.

If this were the extent of his actions, Hasan might have disappeared into history as another bandit lord to be rooted out and forgotten. But the Ismailis were not bandits—they were believers in a religious cause. Outnumbered but dedicated, they turned to murdering the lords and generals who threatened them. Knocking off your enemies was a widespread practice and it was hardly a new idea, but Hasan and his followers gave the practice its new name—assassination.

Legend says that the Grand Master plied his *fida'is* (followers), those chosen to be *ashishin*, with drugs until they fell into a stupor. Out cold, the faithful were secretly moved to a special section of the castle, one filled with sensual, heavenly delights—flowing water, beautiful gardens, sweet fruits, and nubile concubines. Here they stayed for a time, tasting the delights of paradise until the Grand Master would come to them and say "Go and kill this man and you shall be forever entered into paradise." For the *fida'is* knew it was not enough to kill this man or that; they were expected to die in the attack,



too. This would prove their devotion to the cause. Needless to say, hundreds were just so devoted...

For over a century the Assassins, as they came to be known, ruled in the mountain of Persia and Syria. Moslem princes learned to fear them. Crusader nobles died under their daggers. Even Marco Polo heard the tales of their might. It took the remorseless might of the Mongols to finally exterminate the sect, but by then the word assassin was enshrined in the minds of men.

MEANWHILE, IN THE FAR EAST...

It is, of course, unfair to place all credit for assassination at the doorstep of the Mideast. Other parts of the world can claim their share of fame in the business of killing, too. In China, Robin Hood-like characters—the legendary *wuxia*—were not above assassinating the corrupt and tyrannical...for the common good, of course. They lived outside the law, bound only by their own code of honor and duty, and had few qualms about using death to enforce justice. By their legends, they were masters of martial arts and often had supernatural powers drawn from their inner beings.

Most famous of all the eastern assassins were the ninja of Japan. What is true and what is legend about this is almost impossible to say. Incredible skills and magic powers were ascribed to them. Unlike the Assassins, who killed for a cause, or the *wuxia*, who sometimes killed in

the name of justice, ninja clans were both political and not. While clans tended to associate with noble factions—the shogun's ninjas, for one—they were not above undertaking a killing to protect their clan or hiring themselves out to those who needed their services.

Of all the assassins, the ninja are credited with refining the business of spying and killing. A variety of deadly devices are attributed to them—spring-loaded spears hidden in innocent bamboo canes, caltrops to injure pursuers, pepper bombs, smoke bombs, and throwing stars all come from ninja tales. They each mastered the seven disguises—wandering priest, monk, hermit, merchant, acrobat, street performer, and commoner. They were alleged to be masters of poison, mediation, martial arts, and even gunpowder. If caught, it is said they purposefully disfigured themselves to prevent identification.

Most important for a role-playing campaign, there were different schools of ninjitsu, each with its own specialties, techniques, and loyalties. A school typically owed allegiance to one noble faction or another. Many ninja stories revolve around secret battles fought between rival schools as they attempt to destroy each other, thwart the plans of their sponsors, or dishonor rival masters and promising students.

EUROPEAN ASSASSINS

The East had its anti-hero ninjas and the Middle East its mystic assassins. In the West, assassins were more practical-minded businessmen. Most were independent operators—ambitious and unscrupulous knights willing to murder in exchange for gold or an office or political favor in the king's eye. Such murders were known throughout Europe and the assassins sometimes gained and sometimes did not.

It was among the minor kingdoms and city-states of Italy that the business of killing loomed largest. With so many power-seeking dukes, doges, popes, princes, cardinals, counts, and rising merchants, there was a steady supply of employers and targets. Hedged in by so many enemies and rivals, open warfare was seldom the best option. Few states had standing armies, calling out the militia risked civil unrest, and *condottieri* (mercenary soldiers) were expensive and unreliable. Worse still, they could become powerful rivals in their own right. More than one *condottiere* captain tried to usurp his employer's throne, after all. Most found it far better to hire a killer and eliminate one man than go to war and risk destroying yourself along with your enemy.

Thus, assassins became common in Italy. While they did not form cults like the *Assassin* of Persia or raise their art to the schools of the ninja, there were always rumors and tales of secret societies and extended families where the practice passed down from a father to his sons and to

their sons and so forth. Nor were they limited to the criminal class. Noble families such as the Borgias often took direct action, although they usually favored subtle poisons over a messy knifing. Bound by blood, the families kept their secrets. Perhaps they were the forerunners of the Black Hand and the Mafia—*l'uccisore*.

All these assassins had their favorite methods: the dagger slipped between the ribs, the cord to strangle a victim in a dark alley, or a subtle array of poisons. Indeed, their alchemical skills gave them reputations as master poisoners. It is said that most adept dosed themselves with their own poisons until they developed immunity to the tools of their trade. While this may be little more than embellished legend, it is certain that poison was a constant peril for the powerful.

Over the centuries, the assassin has acquired an image of mysterious allure and danger, until the truth hardly matters. He might be a religiously inspired mystic, one who kills for the cause, fearless in business of death, and ready to sacrifice himself for eternal glory. He might be a master of mysterious powers, raised from childhood in the arcane schools of murder, and bound by centuries of honor, duty, and custom to serve the will of feudal lords. Or he might be the darkly urbane murderer, one of a close-knit family of killers, who serves no cause or single master, and who owes loyalty and honor only to his blood and trade.

For the here and now, for a game campaign in which assassins have a role, the image counts for far more than the reality.

THE WORLD OF THE ASSASSINS

While it is possible to have lone-wolf assassins in your campaign, generally allowing assassin player characters or even assassin NPCs in a world with no setting for them is an invitation for disaster. Think about it—most of the other character types have a background in the world. Knights have titles and ranks and sires to whom they need to be respectful. Thieves have guilds, and even if the PCs are members, the guilds can still make trouble for them. Wizards have universities, scriptoriums, secret fraternities, cabals, and conclaves. Clerics have churches, temples, fellow clergies, congregations, and above all gods to assign them tasks and interfere with their lives. Even mercenaries have employers and sides to pick in wars—and sides to betray when the pay gets poor.

A lone assassin is just that—a character without an anchor or reason to be an assassin. Bits and pieces of the world revolve around the lives of the other characters whether they are adventuring or not, but without an assassin's world to exist in, the lone assassin only has a purpose and a role when he is killing somebody. All the

rest of the time he is alone and sooner or later, he gets bored. And a bored assassin is a dangerous character, bound to sooner or later cause havoc in all but the most disciplined parties.

It would seem far better to give your assassin characters—PCs especially, but also NPCs—a life and function beyond the act of killing. Knowing there are other assassins out there, organized into allies and enemies, with their internal power struggles, court intrigues, powerful patrons, and secret feuds, binds the character to the world. Suddenly the assassin, even though he still might be a lone wolf, has an active role in the campaign, a source for a variety of adventures for the entire party.

VULTUR AND SIRAT: THE WORLD OF TWO BROTHERHOODS

To that end, presented here are two distinctly different assassin groups—the icy and professional Vultur and the mysterious and fanatic Sirat. Presented for each are their goals, organizations, means of joining, special benefits, locations, methods, notable NPCs and more, enough information to establish each group in a campaign.

Of course what is said here is not the be all and end all about each group. First, there is always room for more details. Second, the authors of this book simply aren't prescient enough to know all the details of your campaign. Throughout the text, there are references to "the Empire" or "the City." What empire, which city, and other such like are details you must provide, adjusting what we have given to suit the taste of your campaign. Of course, as in all aspects of your campaign, you are free to ignore what you choose and change what suits you.

That being said, welcome to the world of the Vultur and the Sirat. Theirs is a singular world wherein the two groups exist together. The Vultur, aristocratic and haughty, are ice-cold killers. They kill because it is a profitable business and they are very good at it. The Vultur is not a single enterprise—business breeds competition, after all—but is divided into different families, each with its own *amo* or master. These families of the Vultur are woven into a knotted net of competition, rivalry, alliance, and feud. Ancient debts, grievances, and bloodlines merge with ambition to create bloody skirmishes of interfamilial warfare.

The Vultur don't stand alone as the only killers, though. The Sirat, too, use the stealthy knife to good effect. The Sirat are a usurping kingdom within the empire. Clinging to their strongholds, their law is the law of the remote trade routes, country villages and distant mountain valleys. Their targets are those senators who lobby against them, the generals sent to wage war on

their fortresses, and the governors and proctors who do not show proper respect. For them assassination is not a business but a tool used to create fear, break armies, and spread their gospel.

Unlike the Vultur, the Sirat do not kill simply for business. They murder out of conviction for their cause—the overthrow of the Empire and the spread of the Siratani faith. While murder is a part of their existence and legend, it is not the Siratani reason for being. They are the fanatical followers of the Lord of the Mountain, their prophet and leader. According to him, the Siratani faith is the only straight path to enlightenment and all other temples and faiths are wrong and wicked. Someday, with the help of the faithful, their god will prevail over all others and those who do not welcome the true faith will be punished. But that time is yet to come and until then the Sirat must be ready to kill and die at the command of the Lord of the Mountain.

THE WHISPERED WAR

Now, these two groups, Vultur and Sirat, are so vastly different in their aims, they should hardly matter to each other, but their world is not that vast. Initially, the Vultur killed Siratani because they were paid to—the Sirat faith became a threat to the Empire and the Vultur were a weapon against that threat. The Siratani Lord of the Mountain countered, sending his faithful against the Vultur. Over the centuries, the blood spilled between the two groups has transformed from business and survival to war—a secret battle fought in quiet apartments, dark alleys, and lonely roads. It is the Whispered War.

Most good folk know nothing of it. There are no campaigns, forced marches, drumbeats, or triumphs. The battles are small and quick. The bodies, if they are found, are written off as random murders, the falling out of thieves, an accident, or mere banditry. Only those who know of the war can read the true meanings in these killings. It is a war of signs and symbols with subtle maneuvers, feints, and warnings. A scrawled symbol on a wall may be a death sentence for Siratani spies, a notice for them to leave before bloodshed begins. The massacre of an innkeeper and his family may be a warning to those who aid a Vultur family. The death of an *amo's* son becomes a declaration of war.

Nor is it a battle fought in a vacuum. There are other forces at play in their struggle. The thieves' guilds of the cities watch with interest, already suspicious of the Vultur for being too much like them and yet not them. The Imperial officials hate the Sirat but cannot trust the



Vultur, either. The lords ignore the Sirat until they are suddenly rewarded with offices in the empire. Indeed, it is an old ploy to reward one's enemies with offices on that murderous frontier where the Siratani are most active. As for the Vultur, they are dangerous tools in the political games of the nobility. Today, a family may be an ally, but tomorrow—who knows?

While often opposites and enemies, even the two sides are not wholly united against the other. There are many families within the Vultur that have rivalries amongst each other. The death of an *amo* might be the work of a Siratani assassin, but it might be the revenge of another clan, or it might even be a contract, legitimately commissioned by someone outside the Whispered War or inner-family rivalries. While the Sirat is more united, there are differences of interpretation and shadings of the faith. Some of the *fidai* believe the old ways are too slow and timid and argue that now is the time for open war. Others counsel caution and patience. For them, the day of ascension is not yet at hand. Who has the ear, eye, and attention of the Lord of the Mountain at any time says much about what will happen in the Whispered War.

- CHAPTER EIGHT: THE VULTUR -

Within the world of the Empire, when the powerful sleep unsound in their beds, fearful of daggers, it is more often than not the Vultur who stalk their dreams. The Vultur appear as killers in popular plays, grim ballads, and local tales. For those who want, everything bad can be laid on these shadowy killers. If a baron dies of a heart attack, the Vultur poisoned him. If a praetor's skull is split by the kick of a horse, the Vultur startled it. If shadows descend on a guardsman in the night, the Vultur summoned them. In truth, they probably kill far less than the reputations they have earned, but the Vultur seldom complain about their notoriety.

Although they are widely spoken of, few people actually claim to know anything of the Vultur. For the common folk, the Vultur are not their problem. No one is going to send an assassin after the miller's son, the farrier, or even the village witch. The common peasant fears the Vultur in the same way he fears dragons—they are a distant threat not aimed directly at him. When the local governor gets himself assassinated, the people whisper and worry, but ultimately go back to their lives. Soon, there will be a new governor and life will continue little changed from before.

Among the upper classes, the fear is more concrete. A powerful man has rivals, and rivals send killers. Still, even among the rich, there are few who can claim any direct experience with these murderers. Most of the gossip is just that, stories heard from a "friend of a friend." Those who have had dealings with the Vultur wisely tend to keep their mouths shut. And while no rich merchant or nobleman will ever admit to knowing an assassin, there is an invisible network of "friends of friends" who can somehow mysteriously connect an employer with his needs.

As a consequence, a fog of hearsay, lies, wild guesses, and superstitious beliefs has come to surround the Vultur and that is just the way the like it. The less others truly know about them and their dealings, the safer they feel. Let the commoners believe they can command ghosts, and let the nobles look in fear at their own servants—all these things suit the mysterious and deadly Vultur.

ORGANIZATION

Although conspiracy-minded officials of the empire claim it, the Vultur is not a single monolithic organization with commanders and soldiers, bylaws and regulations. It does not answer to one man or beast and isn't even united toward a single goal. The Vultur is a collection of loosely organized families—fathers, brothers, blood cousins, married relations, and loyal henchmen embraced into the fold. In many ways they are

like the real-world Mafia, existing somewhere between real, extended families and businesses.

Altogether, 19 families make up the Vultur, although no living man, even the *amo* of a clan, could ever give so exact a count. Each family tends to work in and sometimes control a specific region within the empire. Among their own, a Vultur *amo* knows the families he deals with and others he has heard of, leaving more than a few unknown to him. Though not by plan, this very vagueness of just who are the Vultur is a protection. Since no one can be sure to know every family (let alone every member), no one can be sure to seize total control. It also protects the Vultur from the outside forces, since it is impossible for one family to betray all the others.

THE KINGDOMS

The families of the Vultur are not completely isolated and independent however. They are united into 7 larger "meta-families" called kingdoms that are woven together through complex bonds of intermarriage, loyalty, obligation, power, and tradition. While all the families within each kingdom fiercely believe and protect their own independence, a single family in truth dominates each of the seven kingdoms. The *amo* of this dominant family is known as the regent, and he is recognized with the authority to speak for the other families of the kingdom in most matters. Quite naturally, the kingdoms are often referred to by the name of the leading family.

The seven kingdoms of the Vultur are:

- The Kingdom of Rassmin
- The Kingdom of Ordule
- The Kingdom of Varrangal
- The Kingdom of Daris
- The Kingdom of Carcosne
- The Kingdom of Imperios
- The Kingdom of Balant/Torrici (*The Kingdom of Balant/Torrici is either the Kingdom of Balant or the Kingdom of Torrici, depending on which side of the current power struggle you favor.*)

Being the leading family of a kingdom is no guarantee that you stay there forever. It's all about power, authority, and respect. A family remains in command only so long as the other families of the kingdom are happy with its rule—or as long as they are unwilling to challenge its might for control of the kingdom. All of the leaders need to be powerful because there are always ambitious upstarts among the other families. They need to be respected so the other *amos* will trust their judgments. Finally, they need the wisdom to show generosity and mercy, spreading the rewards among the other *amos* and not hoarding all the best for themselves.



THE REGENTS

The regent of a kingdom can call for a war against another kingdom or negotiate peace to end a war. He can ban a contract, forbidding any family under his command from carrying out the assassination. He is the final arbiter of feuds between the families of his kingdoms. He speaks for all the other amos of his kingdom on those rare times when the Black Council convenes.

Clearly, being Regent is a job of immense prestige and power. The job goes to the amo who can claim it through a combination of force and, more importantly, the earned respect of the other families. Generally, the process goes smoothly. By tradition, a new regent is proposed by the family of the previous regent but not always. More often than not, a successor is already waiting in the wings, hand-picked by his predecessor. Whether this chosen one becomes the new regent or not all depends on politics.

There are four reasons for needing a new regent. Some regents die of old age—especially since amos can be pretty advanced in years before ever becoming regents. Usually, there are few challenges against the new regent in this case, since most of the groundwork is laid before the old regent dies. There is always the chance that simmering resentments will boil to the surface, especially if the heir to the throne has lots of enemies or is seen as weak. The regent-to-be needs ensure the loyalty of the other amos in the kingdom. This requires favors, threats, and a little muscle. Tradition and blood bonds play a big role in this, so it is always wise for a regent (or an ambitious amo with hopes for the future) to marry off his sons and daughters well.

When a regent dies by accident, the first thing to remember is that there are no accidents in the deadly world of the Vultur. It is inconceivable that a person just dies by chance, certainly not in a world of killers who can make murder look innocent if need be. Thus, when a regent or even an amo dies unexpectedly, someone or something must have been behind it. Basically, someone must take the blame. Whether it was truly an accident or not hardly matters—the death is seized upon by those contending for power as an opportunity to settle old scores. If the regent-to-be has the power, he will use it as an excuse to break or weaken any rivals. If not, he may have to offer up an ally as a sacrifice or even lose control altogether. In all cases, accidental deaths lead to very messy business.

Third, a regent can get himself killed by enemy forces—i.e. the agents of another kingdom. He may be killed in an ongoing war or struck down as the opening act of a war. After all, what better path to victory is there than to strike off the head of the enemy? In these cases, who the enemy is seems straightforward—but is it? After all, it is a world of Machiavellian schemes and maneuvers. An

amo unhappy with his regent might cut a deal with a rival kingdom to eliminate his master so that he and his family can rise to prominence or change allegiances in the confusion. An amo who turns to another kingdom for aid had better reward his allies generously or they may reveal his schemes to the world.

Finally, there is death by official action. The Vultur may be useful to the Empire, but they are also an enemy. The assassination of a government official, no matter how minor, cannot go unpunished. Often those punished had nothing to do with the crime and are not even Vultur, especially if the assassins had the forethought to plant the blame elsewhere. At other times, the outrage cannot be diverted and the Vultur must pay. Like all other things, this is a time of schemes. Where possible, a regent will see to it that another family suffers the punishment. It might be the minor killers of a rival kingdom or even a rival family in one's own kingdom. It might be an amo who is too popular or a regent who is too aggressive. Or it might be himself, if the regent is outmaneuvered by his own rivals.

In the end, no death among the Vultur passes innocently or unnoticed. Like paranoiacs and conspiracists, every action must be examined and doubted, every deed questioned for its motive. All deaths are opportunities for action and revenge.

THE BLACK COUNCIL

Although Vultur families are independent, they are bound to the regents of the Seven Kingdoms and, likewise, there are times when the regents must yield to a higher authority. Among the Vultur, the highest of all power lies in the hands of the Black Council. It is the sole uncontested authority among the Vultur. If the Black Council decrees something shall be, then it will be.

The Black Council does not have regular sessions, chambers, or by-laws. It convenes only for matters of utmost urgency and only then when demanded by one of the regents. An amo, no matter how powerful, cannot summon the council. Since the decision of the Black Council is binding, regents never call it to settle internal disputes. That is their prerogative and not one they will surrender. Likewise, they are loath to call it to settle a war between themselves and another kingdom since the judgment could go against them. And although a third-party regent not involved in the war could call the council, they are no more willing to do so than the feuding parties. First, there is no limitation on the judgment of the Council. They could impose a peace and then add a punishment to the third regent for daring to interfere in matters that were not his concern. Second, there is the old axiom of what goes around comes around. The other regents will remember what was done, for good and for ill. In practice, there are only a few

issues worth convening the Black Council: regicide, crackdown and civil war.

REGICIDE

As contract assassins, the Vultur are often approached to kill people of importance—governors, senators, high priests, ministers, chamberlains, exchequers, and the gods know whom else. It is the choice of the amo and his regent to accept or decline these jobs, for it is their family and their kingdom that lies at risk. There is only one instance where the choice must be given to the Black Council—the assassination of the Emperor or one of his heirs. Since the repercussions from such an assassination could be catastrophic, no hand can be raised against these loftiest of targets without the explicit approval of the Black Council.

CRACKDOWN

From time to time, the Empire stirs its massive bulk and decides to deal with the problem of the Vultur, usually after the death of a popular figure (whether the Vultur was to blame or not). Assassins who had been tolerated, protected, and even employed suddenly become political or military targets. This is a time when the Black Council must decide how to react. Do they disappear, canceling all contracts and going underground? Do they fight, using their deadly skills to eliminate their inquisitors? Or do they yield, turning over to the authorities the assassins they seek?

CIVIL WAR

With its families and kingdoms, the Vultur is an invisible nation, existing inside the Empire. Like all nations, there are times when hatreds erupt into open war that threatens to tear the union apart. A war between two kingdoms may drag the other kingdoms into the cauldron until the entire Vultur is at war with itself. This is the most dire time for the Black Council, for if it cannot find a way to peace, the Vultur itself could be destroyed.

Twice in the past the Black Council met to prevent civil war. The first time it took the council five months to reach an acceptable peace and that peace created the *foranza*, who have tormented the Vultur ever since. The second time, the council was riven by dissension, and could find no peace. The results were the Years of Blood—a decade of assassins' wars when whole families were exterminated. Before the Years of Blood, there had been 34 families among the Vultur. In their aftermath, only twelve survived, and since that time, seven new families have come into being. If any good came from these events, the Vultur learned the hard way that civil wars are dangerous, costly, and should be avoided at all costs.

HOW THE COUNCIL WORKS


The Black Council of all the Vultur institutions is curiously democratic. One would assume membership is limited to the regents, but that not the case. Each kingdom is allowed two members on the council. The first is the always the regent. The second, however, is a special member—the second.

Whenever the Black Council is summoned, each regent must choose one other member of his kingdom to attend. This person is his second and can be of any rank—the regent's choice is absolute in this matter. The second has full rights to speak and vote at the Council. However, it is not as simple as the regent selecting someone favorable to his cause for the very first act of the council is the Lottery of the Seconds. The signs of all the seconds are placed in a pool and each regent draws a name. That second is forever thereafter the hostage of this regent. The regent can adopt the second into his family, return him to his old family, imprison him for life, or even have him killed. However, he can do none of these things until the Black Council is finished. So long as the Council sits, a second cannot be harmed.

The system creates all sorts of interesting dilemmas. Does the regent choose a trusted ally as his second, one he can rely on to vote for his cause no matter what? There is a chance the man could fall under the control of old enemies. Does he choose a rival from within his own family in hopes the second will come to a bad end after the council? Can he rely on the vote of such a second? Does he pick a person of eloquence and respect or a minor underling who will not be missed if things go badly? Should a second stand by his old family as a point of honor? Should he betray his old family in hopes of gaining favor with his new one?

Once the Lottery is complete, the Council can begin in earnest. By tradition, the eldest regent of the kingdoms presides, although there are no parliamentary rules or even a set agenda. Although the Council is usually convened to deal with a specific issue, it is the right of any member to bring up any subject. Any member may also call for a vote on an issue, although there is always debate before a vote. Typically, a council starts with the main arguments (the listing of grievances from both sides in a war, for example) which are quickly followed by a flurry of lesser complaints, many of which are unrelated to the main issue. The majority of these lesser matters are voted aside as being issues to be settled without the council's intervention. A few are dealt with as part of the politicking and jockeying for allies in the final vote on the major issue before the Black Council.

As can be expected, as much or more happens in back rooms as occurs in plain sight at the main table. Deals



are cut, promises made, and threats issued. By the time the final vote comes, the outcome may be a done deal, the final vote a mere formality.

Voting is done by simple majority and every vote is public. A vote can be yea, nay, or abstain. Whatever the outcome, the will of the Black Council is final. There is no appeal. This is hardly enough to enforce a decision, so by custom anyone who flaunts a council decision is an outlaw and can be slain by any person at any time without blame. Sometimes the process of settling a war at the Black Council has involved exterminating the families who refuse to accept the peace. Clearly, the regent who is heavily outnumbered in the vote wisely accepts the judgment and bides his time. He will remember and his children and their children will remember who stood for him and against him. After all, the Council changes over the years, as do its rulings, but hatreds and vendettas rarely do.

THE FAMILIES

At the heart of the Vultur, beyond the Seven Kingdoms, the Regents, and the Black Council, it is the family that matters. The family is the one thing every Vultur knows. A man may not know all the Seven Kingdoms or the families who comprise them. He may be ignorant of the affairs of the Black Council or the rivalries between distant kingdoms, but he knows his family. He knows who is a part of his family and who isn't and he knows where he ranks in the family hierarchy. The family is the center of his world.

As noted before, the most powerful member of any family is its amo. Just as the regent represents the kingdom, the amo represents his family to the regent. Within the family, he guides the business, settles disputes, and sees that his children are well trained. Much like the don of a Mafia family, the fortunes of the family are directly related to the strength and power of its amo. If he is ruthless but fair, he earns the respect and fear of others. His children will obey him, and the other families will leave him in peace. If he is weak or cruel, his family will suffer accordingly.

Generally, the amo is one of the elder members of the family. It is a position that must be earned over years of work in the assassination trade. It can pass to younger members who show exceptional ability as killers and sound judgment concerning family affairs. Sometimes a doting amo will appoint an unworthy heir, but these things sort themselves out over time. If the new amo does not destroy the family first, he is likely to be eliminated by one of his own kin for the good of the clan. It is, after all, an assassin's way of solving problems.

As is the Vultur way, there are no set rules about being an amo or becoming one. Generally who deserves to be

amo is understood by the rest of the family. If there is disagreement, there may be blood spilled. Infrequently, families have been known to split apart and the members forced to choose between two contenders for the title. This is natural; there is no fixed number of families. If the breakaway faction can survive, it can establish itself as a new family of the Vultur. Because of the animosity between the new and old factions, breakaway families usually ally themselves with different kingdoms, adding to the ongoing power struggles within the Vultur.

Although the core of any Vultur family is blood—fathers, sons, daughters, aunts, uncles, and cousins—they are not limited by genetics. A good number of any family's members are brought in by marriage, provided one has in-laws with murderous talents. Furthermore, a "family" member could be anyone who has the skills and has gained the trust and acceptance of the amo and those around him. Some are formally adopted into the amo's family—a sign of high trust and regard. Others become uncles, aunts, and cousins, these titles the needed sign that they are accepted as one of the Vultur.

Beneath the amo, there is no formal structure to the family. Each organizes itself as it sees fit. The amo has a few trusted advisors—brothers, uncles, and the like. They are his cabinet or council. There is usually a lieutenant delegated to handle the day-to-day affairs. Some of the families have a warden, responsible for the security and safety of the family, protecting it from Imperial Censors and rival assassins alike.

Finally, there are the children, the rank and file. They are not children per se (although there are child assassins), but rather this is the name for the everyday assassin with the Vultur. A man or a woman is a child of his amo, regardless of all else.

MASTERS

Separate from these advisors to the amo are the Masters. Every family has at least one Master, if not a handful. They are assassins *par excellence*, killers of refined skill and subtlety. Many could care less about politics external or internal and live only to improve their art. For them, killing is art.

Masters have two tasks within a family. First, they are the ones who undertake the most difficult and delicate assignments. Should, for example, a contract on the Imperial Household be accepted (which can only be done by the approval of the Black Council), then the assassination is assigned to the master deemed most skilled at the task. Likewise an amo can transfer a contract from one of his children to a Master's hands, if he deems it important enough. Masters themselves never seek contracts nor can they be hired directly. They are above the petty and demeaning world of business and money. All work comes to them by the decisions of others.

Second, masters keep and pass on the wisdom and skills of the family. They are responsible for teaching promising children in the family the specialties of the clan. The different families are known for their different skills. Some train killers who excel with the dagger, the garrote, or poison. Other families are magic-oriented or rely on clerical killers. And every family has its secret methods—a favorite poison, a unique spell, or the cut of a knife—that makes their handiwork known among the Vultur, if not among outsiders.

Much of a family's status comes from its masters, so within the feuding between the families, there is a special competition between masters. They strive for ever more impressive kills—more audacious, more subtle, more cryptic, or whatever, depending on the techniques of the master. Such kills send a message not lost on the other masters or their families. They also compete, sometimes, to kill each other. There is a great rivalry between masters, almost a friendly challenge to kill or be killed. If one master assassinates another, it is a grievance and dire but it is the only killing between families that is not a cause for war. This is tradition. No family, even in the same kingdom, will support a war simply because a master was killed. Sudden death is one of the risks of the title.

THE KINGDOM OF BALANT/TORRICI

Until recently, the Kingdom of Balant was the leading force among the Vultur. With four separate families, it is the largest kingdom and had power appropriate to its size. However, recent events have split the kingdom into warring camps. Just which family—Balant or Torrici—will prevail and claim the regent's title is still very much in doubt.

BALANT

Amo: Louis Balant [human male Asa12, hp 53]

Masters: Sonia Godreau [human Asa12/Sor7, hp 80; see Chapter 12]

Specialty: Poison

Three months ago, the regent of the Balant kingdom, Herve Balant, died unexpectedly and under clearly suspicious circumstances before he could formally designate who should take his place. In the investigation that followed, Herve's brother (and new amo of the Balant family) Louis proclaimed himself regent and blamed the Torrici family for the assassination. The Torricis accepted neither the blame nor Louis as their new leader. Now the former kingdom of Balant is in open warfare with both the Balant and Torrici families claiming the right to rule.

Currently, the Balant family has the slight edge of tradition in the power struggle. The Balants have been regents for over a century and have formed strong alliances with the Kingdoms of Daris and Ordule. They

have also made many enemies in that time. During his time as regent, Herve and his decisions enraged the Torricis and slighted the Zavic family. While the Zavics have not declared war, they clearly lean against the Balants in the fight. The edge is starting to slip away from the disputed ruling family—recently, the Torrici dispatched the Balant's master, dealing a severe blow to the family's reputation. At the current time, they have not found a replacement.

As for technique, the Balants have always favored poison. They all excel at slipping it into food and drink, coating a door handle with a toxin to absorb through the skin, blowing a vaporous cloud of death out a straw, and even enchanting a word so that when uttered it releases death.

Allies: Daris, Ordule

Enemies: Carcossne, Imperios, Torrici, Zavic (minor)

KATRAIN

Amo: Dame Zedlas [human female Asa17, hp 76]

Masters: Dame Zedlas Katrain, Tara Katrain [human female Asa16, hp 58; see Chapter 12], Provos the Shifter [doppelganger Asa7, hp 53]

Specialty: Disguises

The Katrain family is a small, close-knit clan taking a careful stand of neutrality in the current struggle between the Balant and Torrici families. This is a dangerous game to play, almost as risky as choosing a side. Dame Zedlas has taken this course because her family is small and has never been political. The Katrains have always been dedicated to their art and, in particular, assassination through disguise [all members of the family are expected to achieve maximum ranks in Bluff and Disguise and have Skill Focus (bluff) as one of their feats]. Because of their dedication (and their abilities to hide in plain sight, even among other assassins), the Katrains are well respected (and a little feared) by the other families who know them. They currently have no active enemies among the Vultur.

Allies: None (but they are respected by all in this kingdom and many others)

Enemies: None (although the Balant are growing more suspicious of their neutrality)

TORRICI

Amo: Alvar Torrici [half-elf male Asa14/Ftr6, hp 82]

Masters: Blademaster Juerguns [human male Ftr11/Shd5, hp 114]

Specialty: Fighter/assassins

The Torrici are a proud and violent family, currently fighting the Balant for control of the regency once held by Herve Balant. Within the past decade, the Torricis feel they have been personally insulted by the Balant clan on more than one occasion. Among other slights, contracts rightfully due them were forbidden or else

THE SEVEN KINGDOMS OF THE VULTUR

THE KINGDOM OF BALANT/TORRICI



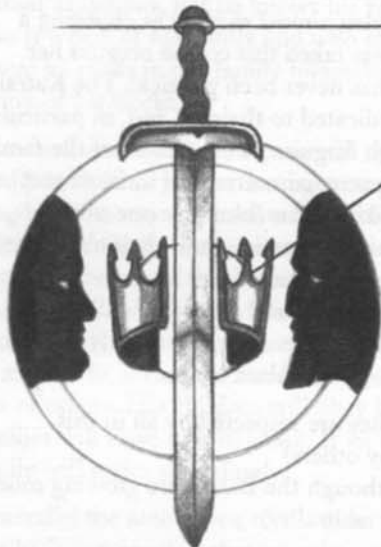
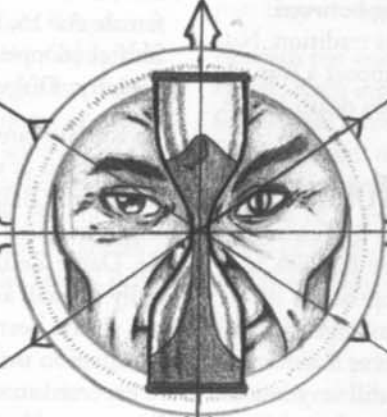
THE KINGDOM OF DAVIS



THE KINGDOM OF CARCOSSNE



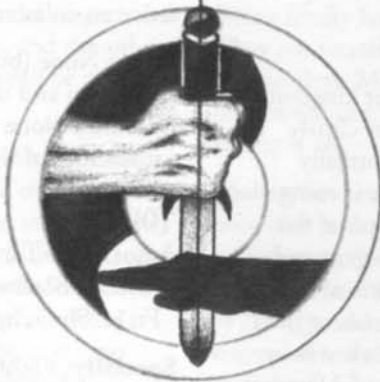
THE KINGDOM OF VARRANGAL



THE KINGDOM OF IMPERIOS



THE KINGDOM OF ORDULE



THE KINGDOM OF RASSMAN

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claimed by the Balant. Their master was disparaged as teaching an unfit occupation for an assassin. These slights finally reached a head when their overtures to marry the Torrici heir to Christiata Balant were ignored. Then Herve Balant suddenly died. While there is no clear proof of Torrici involvement, they made no secret of their delight. Louis Balant all but charged them with the murder as a justification for claiming the regency and with that final slight, open war was declared.

Although outnumbered, the Torricis have been slowly gaining the upper hand. The Torrici are simply more willing to get bloody in this fight, intimidating the Balants and their other enemies with their zeal and their bloodlust. While the Balants do things by the old ways and traditions (murders in quiet places where the public will not get alarmed); the Torricis are happy to strike openly and bloodily in a public square.

The Torricis are short of allies, at least those willing to act openly. The Zavics favor them in the fight, but so far have only offered covert assistance. The Katrain remain neutral, but have taken pains not to antagonize the Torricis. There is hope in the family that Dame Zedlas can be swayed to their side. Outside, the other kingdoms watch but have not intervened, although the kingdoms of Imperios and Carcoosne wouldn't mind a Torrici victory.

Allies: Zavic (minor), Imperios (minor), Carcoosne (minor)
Enemies: Balant, Daris (minor), Ordule (minor)

ZAVIC

Amo: Juehon Zavic [human male Asa18, hp 81]
Masters: Antonia Zavic [human female Asa8/Hou7, hp 58]
Specialty: Seduction

The Zavic family is an old family whose power has been on the wane for more than a century. A hundred years ago, they were the leader of a kingdom but fortune has not smiled upon them since. Their family lost the regency to the Balant (and the Kingdom of Zavic became the kingdom of Balant) and their numbers were decimated as part of that war. If not for the intervention of the Kingdom of Imperios, they would have been completely exterminated.

The Zavic trait has always been the use of seductive agents (male and female) to get close—*very* close—to their targets. Over the years, they have married sons and daughters into various noble houses (without being exposed) and have given themselves as concubines when necessary. These deep agents may wait years for an assignment against their in-laws or “patrons,” but such patience and foresight has allowed them to accomplish kills other families had dismissed as impossible.

Naturally, the Zavics have not forgiven the Balant for their treachery one hundred years ago, but they have

never been in a position to challenge them. Now they have sided themselves with the Torricis in the power struggle for control but can only offer limited assistance. The Zavics will be happy if the Torricis win, but they will be even happier if the Torricis are too weak to rule. In addition, the Zavics are under a heavy obligation to the Imperios family and, if circumstances require, they could defect to them, should all alliances turn sour within this kingdom.

Allies: Torrici, Imperios

Enemies: Balant

THE KINGDOM OF CARCOOSNE

With three families, the Carcoosne kingdom is the second largest of the seven. Many Vultur whisper that the kingdom is cursed, though, for it has never attained power in accordance to its size and population. Indeed, the specialties of the kingdom give it a dark taint that unsettles the other families.

CARCOOSNE

Amo: Theld Old-Beyond-Years [human male lich Asa9/Wiz11, hp 130]
Masters: Theld
Specialty: Oblivion

The Kingdom of Carcoosne is the most magic-oriented of all the kingdoms, which is directly attributable to the rule of Regent Theld, the only amo the family has ever had in its more than 300 years of history. That Theld is a lich is a closely held secret, known only to himself (obviously) and his two closest aides. To the rest of the family and the outside world, he is a Methuselah-like figure whose longevity is attributed to spells, *longevity potions*, mixed blood, and just plain good living. (Such long life spans are unusual but not unknown within the Empire.) Theld takes great pains to disguise his condition, even to the extent of sending his kin out to gather *longevity potions* when things are otherwise slow. Of course, sometimes people do learn the truth, but they have exceedingly short life spans after the knowledge comes to them.

Theld is perfectly aware that killing the body is no guarantee of permanent death and so his family specializes in oblivion—the utter and complete destruction of body and spirit. No resurrection, no afterlife, no undead revenge—just utter non-existence. Because of this thoroughness and the cost of the spells and magic items required, the family's services are as much as ten times the expected cost for an assassination. But then nobody has to worry about the dead coming back for revenge, either.

Allies: Varrangal, Hrin

Enemies: Ordule, Balant, Imperios, Erath

ERATH

Amo: Child Erin [enchanted human female Asa16, hp 72]

Masters: Tutor Valon [human male Exp10, hp 40;
Knowledge (undead) +18, Knowledge (religion) +18]

Specialty: Undead

The Erath are an odd family, to say the least. For thirty years, they have been led by Child Erin, an 11 year-old girl, at least apparently. Although physically immature, her mind is cold and cunning and she is more sophisticated and worldly than most adults. According to one rumor, she is actually a mature woman who wished herself perpetually childlike in form in order to better deceive others. Another tale is that she is really some type of supernatural creature. She does radiate powerful magic. Finally, she is always accompanied by a mysterious cloaked being she addresses as Jerol. He functions as an advisor, guardian and assassin. Some believe he is an enslaved aasimar, others a greater doppelganger, though no one can say with even moderate certainty who or what he truly is (save, of course, for the GM).

Equally odd, the Erath family specializes in the assassination of undead. They do not stalk and kill the mindless undead—skeletons, zombies or even ghouls; they are masters at dispatching the malevolently intelligent undead such as vampires, ghosts, and even liches. The Erath are not benevolent vampire-hunters, roaming about to do good deeds or eradicate the world of evil. Their clients range from rival vampires to devoutly good clerics. Who, what, or why does not matter as long as the job pays well.

The Erath value knowledge, it is for them a weapon against the undead they kill. Thus, their master is not a man of action but a scholar and specifically Erin's former tutor. He is learned in the all manner of things necromantic, religious and historical. He trains the assassins of the family how to find the weaknesses of a mummy king in the ancient scriptures or the potential lairs of a vampire lord in the dusty imperial histories. This knowledge becomes the advantage the Erath need in their missions against the undead. In fact, Valon's Library is envied across the Empire and all the Vultur kingdoms for its hidden secrets.

Given the natures of the Carcoasne and Hrin amos, the Erath family is not well loved or trusted within its own kingdom. Still no one has done anything to end the stalemate that exists among the three families and perhaps no one will any time soon.

Allies: Imperios

Enemies: Carcoasne (minor), Hrin (minor)

HRIN

Amo: Hectas the Elder [human male Asa14/Blk3, hp 82]

Masters: Tyron of the Well [female drow Wiz13/Shm7, hp 50]

Specialty: Planar travel

The Hrins have been a relatively non-descript family for many decades—which is not to say they have not been doing anything. Since Hectas came to power as amo, he has been guiding his family to explore and discover the under-used potential of the planes. This includes various forms of planar travel, exotic poisons harvested from other dimensions and special weapons and training to overcome the powers and resistances of celestial, demonic, or other outsider and planar targets. Hectas thinks big, and he is hardly content to merely assassinate targets within the Empire. He foresees the day when the Hrins will be feared as assassins across all the planes.

Unknown to even the closest members of his family, Hectas chose the path of the blackguard several years back. He entered into a deal with a demon and the two of them have been slowly building a plan that would make Hectas dictator of all the Vultur. The scheme is still years from fruition, but the first stages have already begun with the slow process of learning who all the other amos of the Vultur are. Hectas keeps busy forging the alliances he needs without revealing his ultimate goals.

The Hrins are close to the Carcoasne and ever-watchful of the Erath. The Imperios family has noted the recent diplomatic missions by the Hrins and is suspicious but not alarmed by this sudden stirring of interest.

Allies: Carcoasne

Enemies: Erath (minor), Imperios (minor)

THE KINGDOM OF DARIS

This smallish kingdom is home to many of the non-human assassins who have become Vultur. Its killers tend to fill niches the other families are ill-suited for, allowing them to peacefully coexist with most of the other kingdoms. The regent of the Daris has little interest in the politics of the Vultur so long as her own kingdom is not dragged in among the bloody frays.

DARIS

Kingdom: Daris

Amo: Seraffin Daris [elf female Asa10/Clr9, hp 75]

Masters: Chorac Charcoal-Stump [half-orc male Bbn11, hp 93]

Specialty: Wilderness

In the tightly tradition-bound world of the Vultur, the Daris family is one of the more unorthodox clans. Seraffin Daris is a full-blooded elf who married into the family decades ago. For years she lived in the shadows while her husband, Avio, was regent of the kingdom of Daris. Although she maintained a low profile, Seraffin's unique elven outlook made her a respected member of the family. When Avio died, Seraffin assumed the mantle of regent with virtually no opposition.

The Daris specialty is as unusual as the family—they hunt and eliminate targets in the wilds beyond the villages and even the borders of the Empire. Sometimes when a man learns he is targeted, he tries to cheat his impending death by hiding somewhere remote. Sometimes the target isn't a man at all—it might be a woodland elf, a satyr, or an ogre chieftain. These are the cases the Daris family specializes in, the ones where the other families would be as helpless as fish out of water.

Finally, even their master is unusual. Unlike many of the other masters who are assassins with specialized skills and knowledge, Charcoal-Stump is a barbarian through and through. He is also savagely loyal to Seraffin, a bond that defies the traditional hatred between the two races. Although not an assassin, he teaches assassins the secrets of the wilderness. It is a harsh training done in the field and Charcoal-Stump has no sympathy for his students—they either succeed or suffer. More than one has died under his tutelage.

Despite its peculiarities, the Daris are the most well-liked of all the families (if such can truly be said among the Vultur). They have good relations with the Balant and Ordule, thus presenting a strong bloc in the councils. They have skillfully allied themselves with the Imperios and Varrangal factions, too, giving them power as a potential swing in the votes. Very old hatreds mark their relationship with the Rassmin.

Allies: Balant, Ordule, Imperios, Varrangal

Enemies: Rassmin

BRUTTI

Amo: Little Foolscap [gnome male Asa10/Wiz7, hp 71; see Chapter 12]

Masters: Szergenblau Gottdricker [gnome male Asa5/Rog5/Wiz5, hp 62]

Specialty: Devices

The Brutti are the only pure non-human family in the Vultur. Each and every one of them is a gnome. How this group became part of the very inter-married society is less mysterious than it sounds. Originally the Brutti ran a small workshop that specialized in just those devices, tools, and weapons an assassin would find most useful. So useful were the Brutti devices that the Vultur became their only customers and in time the Brutti became Vultur by default.

Because of their gnome heritage, the Brutti are a close-knit family. Nearly all are related by blood—Amo Little Foolscap has sired a staggering number of sons and daughters over his long years. Others are related by marriage, and there are only three instances of the Brutti adopting a gnome into the family—making this rare but not impossible.

Recently, some of the family have been suggesting the clan loosen its strict requirements, to possibly allow select

dwarves in small place in the family. There has even been the rash suggestion that deep gnomes might be welcome. Neither was a suggestion that lasted very long in discussions with the amo.

Like the Daris, the Brutti are well-regarded among the Vultur primarily because their services are still valuable to the other families. Although they have made a name for themselves via assassinations through the use of intricate infernal machines, the Brutti still make and sell simpler equipment for other assassins.

Allies: Daris, Imperios

Enemies: None

THE KINGDOM OF IMPERIOS

This is the oldest of the kingdoms and the one most closely-connected with the authorities and the Empire. The Imperios kingdom is proud, even arrogant at times, but their regent commands respect. Although much smaller than the Balant/Torrici kingdom, the Imperios family leads a strong faction in votes on the Black Council.

IMPERIOS

Amo: Lord Jaco Gransignre [human male Ari7/Asa12, hp 92]

Master: Etiquette-Mistress Lyrac di Serbella [human female Exp15, hp 50; Diplomacy +22, Innuendo +22, Knowledge (nobility) +23, Knowledge (etiquette) +23]

Specialty: Imperial assassins

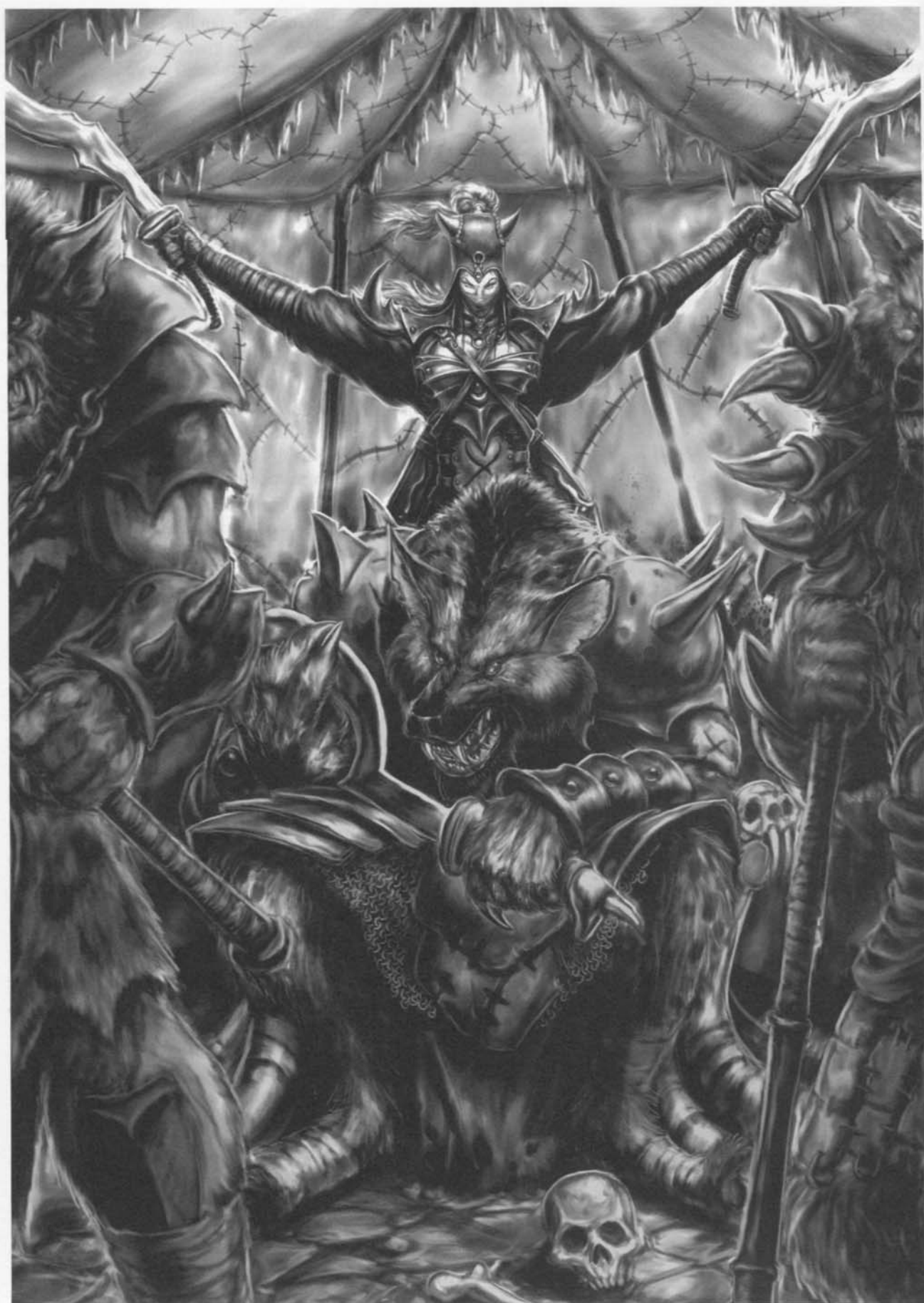
The Imperios is the only family not known by its surname, Gransignre. Instead, the family name derives from their less-than-noble ties to the Imperial household. The Imperios' are the assassins of the Emperor and they have been doing this job for over 100 years. For their service, the family was given an Imperial barony. They have let this go to their heads a bit, believing themselves socially superior to the other Vultur and equal to the old nobility of the Empire. The Baron has been trying to maneuver his family out of the working side of the business so that his hands will look clean to the other Imperial barons.

Consequently, the Imperios are not well-liked among the Vultur, both for their social airs and their powerful political connections. They are equally suspect among the aristocracy, where Baron Gransignre and his household are viewed with distaste (if not paranoia). No one would directly accuse them of being assassins, but everyone knows they are involved in the emperor's dirty work.

Liked or not, the Imperios have woven a powerful network of alliances and marriage bonds to become one of the major players on the Black Council. With the Balant/Torrici war, the Imperios are in a strong position to claim leadership within the Vultur.

Allies: Varrangal, Rassmin, Daris (minor)

Enemies: Balant, Carcoasne,



JABOUR

Amo: Grim John [tiefling male Asa14, hp 77]

Master: Andros Lightfoot [human male Asa8/Rog12, hp 90]

Specialty: Stealth

The Jabour are the Imperios' right hand, so closely allied that the two are practically one family. The Jabour do much of the dirty work for the Imperios family, particularly the since Baron Gransignre has started to take steps toward legitimacy and respectability within the Empire. This suits Grim John fine. The situation fills the family coffers, offers them inroads into power, and, sooner or later, may give them leverage over the baron.

Since their ally is nervous about detection, the Jabour have become masters of the stealthy kill. Nearly all in the clan are rogue/assassins, and many are equipped with magic items to conceal and silence their movements.

The other families who know the Jabour consider them to be lackeys of the Imperios household, a low and contemptible position for any Vultur. Grim John is keenly aware of how the others view his family, but does not protest too much. He is willing to let them underestimate him until it is far too late for them to act. Given his well-disguised tiefling nature, he plans on outliving and outmaneuvering many of the other amos over time.

Allies: Imperios

Enemies: Balant, Carcossne

THE KINGDOM OF ORDULE

One of the lesser kingdoms, this kingdom usually votes with the Balant on council issues. It is the newest kingdom, formed from a cadet branch of the Balant family and inter-married into the Daris. Its creation was as unprecedented as it was controversial. The rivals of the Balant considered it nothing but "colonization", a blatant attempt to create a second Balant kingdom, different only in name. Since then, the regent of the Ordule has had to walk a thread-thin line between his obligation to the Balant and the hostility of the other regents.

ORDULE

Amo: Richkreiss Ordule [human male Asa7/Mnk7, hp 58; see Chapter 12]

Master: Maeter Mordel [half-elf female Asa5/Clr15, hp 83]

Specialty: Religion

Although common wisdom holds the Ordule family was founded by the Balant to expand their power, in truth the Ordule exists as a separate entity due to religious conviction. Malec Ordule received permission to found a new family devoted to the spiritual aspects of the Vultur. The "family" is in fact a combined

monastery/convent/temple of lawful evilness. Unlike the other families of the Vultur, the doors of the Ordule are open to any who wish to apply—provided, of course, they are a cleric or monk and want to devote their life to this cause. As such, all the assassins of the family must have a religious class or calling—cleric or monk—in addition to (or sometimes in place of) their assassin skills.

The temple of the Ordule is dedicated to the spirit of Lawful Evil and not to any single god. Clerics who train there revere the domains of Law and Death and also have the opportunity to train as assassins. The monks of the family seek to become one with Death until they are the essence of Death in the living world.

The Ordule are naturally obligated to their parent family (the Balant) and extend that friendship to Daris since it is allied to their parent. The circumstances of their creation have made the Carcossne, Rassmin, and Varrangal suspicious of them. The Imperios are uncommitted, seeing a possible future advantage in peace with the Ordule.

Allies: Balant, Daris

Enemies: Carcossne, Rassmin, Varrangal

FERIS

Amo: Finehorr Thorhamsonn Feris [dwarf male Asa9/Ftr9, hp 134]

Master: None

Specialty: None

The Feris are a group of killers who have gathered under the protection of the Ordule family. In keeping with the philosophies of the Ordule, the Feris is not a family in the traditional sense. The brothers, sisters, fathers, uncles, and others are not related by blood or marriage. Instead the family is bound together by magic oaths and blood pacts to "stand ready for each other as brother to brother and sister to sister." Any assassin of accomplished skill willing to pledge himself by these pacts can join. Thus the Feris has a motley collection of members—elves, dwarves, halflings, half-elves, and other more exotic races. There are few humans in the Feris family since most prefer to be adopted into a proper Vultur family and avoid the stigma that comes with the Feris clan.

The best known of the Feris clan are the elven couple, Rebekh and Nivnee, also known as the Night Creepers. They have discovered a lucrative little trade niche in the killing for necromancers (as explained in *The Secret College of Necromancy*). Necromancers have constant need for dead flesh, often with exacting requirements that cannot be satisfied by simple grave-robbing. The Night Creepers exist to fill these orders. Need a 300 year-old elven wizard not dead more than 24 hours with no visible wounds? Rebekh and Nivnee are just the pair to call. Their contracts are outrageously expensive but to

date their work has been very reliable and so specialized as to be worth every copper.

So far the other families have tolerated the breach of tradition the Feris represents for two reasons. First the Feris family, strictly ruled by its amo, is very small and has been very well-mannered, taking pains not to antagonize the other Vultur families or give them a cause for their own extermination. Second, the Feris are useful, since most in their ranks are non-humans with special powers and abilities. Finehorr has wisely "loaned" his children to the other families for occasional contracts where regular assassins (i.e. humans) would find it hard to blend in.

Allies: None (though infrequently working with or for any Vultur families)

Enemies: None (though Finehorr has some old and apparently bitter scores to settle with Chorac Charcoal-Stump, the Master of the Daris family)

THE KINGDOM OF RASSMIN

The smallest of the Vultur kingdoms is the Rassmin, consisting of a sole family. It is a family unloved and mistrusted, a snake but one kept tight in hand so it cannot strike.

RASSMIN

Amo: Levic Rassmin [human male Shm5/Wiz13, hp 63]

Master: Helga of the Knife [human female Asa13/Shd5, hp 85]

Specialty: Assassinating assassins

The Rassmin are probably the most unpopular family among the Vultur, for they are the only ones willing to take contracts against other Vultur. It's not that Vultur will not kill Vultur, a maneuver which happens all the time. Families and kingdoms go to war with each other and killing a master is a way to make a name for oneself. However, these killings are not cold-blooded business but power and revenge. The Rassmin kill other Vultur because people hire them to do the job. They are in it for the money.

Why then are the Rassmin tolerated? They are a small family with few friends; it would be easy enough to wipe them out, if the other families pooled their efforts. The answer is, quite simply, they don't want to. The other families may despise the Rassmin, but they need them. By custom, if a Rassmin kills another Vultur for whom he has a contract, the Rassmin assassin is free of the blame for the death. He was merely hired to do a job—any claims for blood money or vengeance must be placed upon the person who hired him. Of course it is rare for a Rassmin assassin (or any assassin) to disclose his employer's identity, so often no blame can be surely placed. Thus, the Rassmin are useful tools in the wars

and intrigues of the other families. Need to strike at a powerful rival in your own organization? Eliminate the amo of a warring family? Seek out the Rassmin clan and pay them to do the job. True, they are despicable for what they do, but their actions let others keep their hands clean.

The only Vultur willing to show support for the Rassmin is the Imperios kingdom. The alliance of the Empire (as it were) and the assassins of assassins is about power, not love or respect. With the Rassmin on their side, the Imperios figure they have a tactical advantage over their rivals.

Allies: Imperios

Enemies: Ordule, Varrangal, Daris

THE KINGDOM OF VARRANGAL

One of the larger kingdoms, the Varrangal is only now recovering from a string of disasters that plagued the kingdom for several decades. These included a series of weak or unpopular regents, squabbling amos, and a string of high-profile failures, including the botched assassination attempt on Emperor Gilsar III that created the infamous Plague Cloud Disaster. (During a gladiatorial performance at the Great Stadium, a Varrangal assassin clumsily broke a *plague jar* as he was attempting to smuggle it into the Imperial box. The resulting disease cloud killed over 3400 citizens before the ensuing plague could be contained. The assassin died but the emperor escaped unharmed.)

In the last few years, things have been improving for the kingdom. The new Varrangal regent has done much to wipe out the errors of his predecessors. There is hope that the curse of the past has been put behind.

VARRANGAL

Amo: Jura Varrangal [human female Shm7/Wiz13, hp 50]

Masters: Sarel of the Hourglass [yuan-ti halfbreed Wiz10, hp 111; see Chapter 12]

Specialty: Time

At 34, Jura Varrangal is the youngest amo and regent of the Vultur, an exceptional thing since the job tends to be dominated by old men. But then the Varrangal have had their share of old, tradition-bound leaders stunningly incapable of decisive leadership. Jura is the opposite—practical, energetic, organized and bold. Prior to her leadership, the Varrangal household was in shambles. The amos of the Gilberte and Nestore barely heeded their regent. There were factions within the Varrangal household that threatened to split it apart. Their Master was getting old and senile, and the training for apprentice assassins was laughable.

Jura has done much to change all this. After the sudden death of the Gilberte amo, she convinced the Nestore to toe the line and prevented a war among her vassal families. She has gathered capable advisors in her own

household while neatly sidelining her detractors. Now she is in the process of arranging a few spectacular contracts as a way of erasing the failures of the past.

The boldest of her moves was to replace the old master and bring in Sarel, an outsider with a unique specialty. The Varrangal are now learning the art of time manipulation. Suppose that by the time you realize you needed to assassinate a rival it was too late? What could you do other than wish you'd acted earlier? Hindsight is no help once the damage is done, after all. But, suppose there was a way to go back and eliminate your rival before it was too late, perhaps even before your rival knew you were his enemy? That is what the Varrangal are learning to do—assassinate the past and remake the present.

So far their applications have been rudimentary. Time manipulation is one of the most complex of magical theories and practical spells are few and very expensive. Still, Sarel and Jura are optimistic their ambitious plans will be well rewarded in the future. In fact, they hope to manipulate events and time to ensure that very outcome.

Because the Varrangal have been preoccupied with their own troubles, they have therefore been unable to interfere in the business of others. As a result, the family is actually well-regarded by most of the Vultur. Only the Ordule and the Rassmin actively dislike them. Rumor says Jura spurned Levi Rassmin's overtures, and his heart has never forgiven her since.

Allies: Imperios, Carcoosne, Daris

Enemies: Rassmin, Ordule, Gilberte (minor)

GILBERTE

Amo: Halred Varrangal [human male Asa12, hp 54]

Master: Arnae Gilberte [human female Asa4/Enc13, hp 52]

Specialty: Possession

As part of the housecleaning within her kingdom, one of Jura Varrangal's first acts was to replace the Gilberte amo. It is widely believed she ordered the assassination of the old amo, Don Marcos Gilberte. In an astoundingly bold move, she apparently engineered the elevation of a nephew, the son-in-law of Don Marcos, to the position of amo. Thus, a Varrangal presides over the Gilberte household. Most amazing of all was that Jura managed to do this without triggering a bloody war among the families. Still, there are resentments simmering below the surface. One bad move by Halred could be the match that ignites it all.

Halred is not the most astute amo, but he does understand the danger of his position. At the same time, his wife, Arnae Gilberte, Don Marco's daughter, is slowly trying to poison his mind against his Aunt Jura. She

wants to destroy the Varrangal, including her husband, for what they did to her father. She carefully masks her hatred behind love and affection. It is a hatred that even extends to her own children, tainted in her mind by Varrangal blood.

She is aided by her mastery of the family specialty—assassination through possession. The Gilberte use powers to manipulate the minds of others and make them the hand that strikes the blow. Indeed, the most successful Gilberte assassins are puppet-masters, possessing others and acting through their bodies.

Allies: Nestore (minor)

Enemies: Rassmin, Ordule

NESTORE

Amo: Caesar Nestore [human male Asa17, hp 93]

Master: Andrea Daris-Nestore [human female Asa5/Sor14, hp 87]

Specialty: Spellcasters

For the moment, the Nestore family is cautiously backing the reforms and initiatives of the new regent Jura Varrangal. The wise among the family know the kingdom has seen hard times and that pain is part of the cure for its problems. But then the Nestore have always taken the long view for they are a family filled with diviners, sages, and loremasters as well as assassins.

These talents are necessary for the Nestore specialty—the assassination of wizards, sorcerers, arcane rogues, and others with spellcasting talent. It is well-known among the Vultur that the most difficult targets are spellcasters. True, they are often physically weak, but they can have formidable invisible defenses and the ability to discover intentions. Contracts against spellcasters are hard to keep secret (one of the assassin's best advantages), and spellcasters have annoying ways to cheat death. So the Nestore family has special tools and precautions—magic wards to conceal contracts, chambers carefully sealed from detection, spells to hide memories from telepathic detection, and other spells to find clones and other contingencies. Most of the Nestore assassins are spellcasters of one sort or another, if only from the principle that the best way to know the enemy is to be the enemy.

Although they favor the Varrangal, the Nestore have long-standing ties and much sympathy for the Gilberte. They have acted as peacemakers between the two families, knowing it is for the good of all. Their master, Andrea, is a daughter of the Daris family, another to which they are closely allied.

Allies: Varrangal (minor), Gilberte (minor), Daris

Enemies: Ordule, Rassmin,

- CHAPTER NINE: THE VULTUR AMONG YOU -

This chapter discusses the opportunities of folding the Vultur into your campaign world in two ways—hiring them or joining them.

HIRING THE VULTUR

Hiring assassins is a crime—or it usually should be in your campaign. It should also be a crime to let your players do it, either. Letting them hire assassins to do their dirty work is essentially throwing away a perfectly good adventure—or a whole string of adventures—where a lot of the legwork is already done for your. You know the target—the NPC the players want dead—so it's a lot more fun to make the players get their characters in action, figure out how to sneak in, off the guy, and get out alive. Bingo—instant adventure!

That being said, it's also illogical and dumb to create a whole assassin society and then tell the players they can't use it. There's no point in creating an interesting subculture if you're not going to let the players explore it. So, how do you resolve these two problems? How do you make use of assassins without giving up your entire game to NPC actions?

First, you don't let players hire assassins to eliminate other player characters—not unless you're running an openly cutthroat campaign where this kind of behavior is expected. Second, if you're willing to let the players hire an assassin to kill an NPC, make it an adventure just doing that.

COMMUNICATION AND CONTACT

Clearly, the Vultur do not advertise. Hiring an assassin might be an accepted practice, but it is not a legal one. And besides, assassins work on the basis of secrecy. If everybody knew who they were, then it would be pretty easy to keep tabs on them and make sure they weren't coming after you.

Despite the fact that the Vultur do not advertise their existence, everybody knows about them. It's just that not that many people really know one of the Vultur. By far, most people have heard about them or claim to know a "friend of a friend" who knows an assassin by name. This is hardly reliable. By all means, if player characters start asking around, give them lots of dead ends, bad advice, and runarounds.

Make your players and their characters persevere if they truly wish to hire an assassin. They will have to spend a lot of time in seedy taverns sharing the company of less than trustworthy characters. During this time, any (or all) of the following bits of business could occur:

- The characters are induced to spend inordinate amounts of money on strong drink for complete

strangers, in return for which they get passed-out drunks and empty promises of "I'll check and let you know."

- Seeing that the characters are spending money freely, less reputable patrons make up stories of folks they know—in exchange for more drinks.
- Again, seeing money flow freely, a group of rogues (or assorted scoundrels) hit on a scheme to make some money. One promises he can take the PC to an assassin friend, insisting that only one person come, if necessary. The rogue guides him to the rest of his friends and they attempt to relieve the PC of his property—and maybe his life.
- An upright citizen (probably a paladin) decides the PCs are evil and must be dealt with either by turning them in to the authorities or smiting them himself.
- The Vultur hear of the PCs and send around an agent to check them out and make sure they're not the authorities.
- Or, the Vultur hear of things, decide they don't like the PCs asking so many questions, and send around some "friends" to persuade them to stop asking so many questions.
- Or, word gets around, and eventually a person presents himself as one of the Vultur.

So, is this stranger lying or telling the truth? Anybody can claim to be one of the Vultur. There's no membership card or secret sign that only they know. He could be one of the Vultur. He could be a freelance assassin. He could be an assassin-wannabe, someone who has never actually assassinated anybody but is looking to break into the business. He could be a nut. Finally, he could be an Imperial Censor, working to uncover the PCs' plots and arrest them all. There's no way to know by looking—adventurers have to rely on trust and instinct—two things too often in short supply.

Clearly there must be better ways of making contact. For starters, the PCs can inquire with people likely to know assassins—folks who have used them before. Decadent nobles, ambitious warlords, evil high priests, roguish guildmasters, and corrupt officials are good choices. With the right inducements—i.e. gifts more lavish than just drinks in a bar—such a person may set the adventurers up with the right connections.

Another method is to rely on one's own skills. Through the clever use of spells [such as *divination*, *legend lore*, *contact other plane*, and *vision*], a spellcaster can usually narrow the field to a few likely candidates or places to look. However, the best assassins are very often shielded from this sort of detection since it would hardly do for their enemies to find them this way.

Once a character has made contact with the Vultur, he must be patient. You just can't sit down and talk business

right away. The Vultur have no reason to trust the PCs so they must check to make sure they are not being set up. The PCs could be working for the authorities. They could be from a rival kingdom. They could just be those irritating crusader-types who take it upon themselves to rid the world of folks like assassins. Certainly if any of the PCs radiate a good alignment, then the business is over then and there.

The Vultur will take several days or even weeks to investigate the background of their prospective employers. The more mysterious the characters are about their identities, the longer the process will take. The Vultur are more comfortable dealing with well-known or at least upfront individuals because so many of the unknowns are already answered. If a PC is part of the local nobility, that fact can work to his advantage—the Vultur already know the character of the person they're dealing with in this case. The Vultur will investigate with whatever resources they have available, but the PCs should certainly expect to be watched the entire time. Only after the Vultur are satisfied that the PCs are what they claim they are will they be ready to do business.

COSTS

There is no set fee for an assassination. It all depends on the target and the haggling ability of the characters. A general starting point is 1000 gp per level of the target. If this seems low for taking out a high-level NPC, remember that life is cheap. (It takes only a few thousand dollars to hire a killer in the real world.) Of course the GM should never say "Oh, that character's 9th level, so it will cost you this," but pretend the world exists without levels. The assassin can quote a price to the PCs and justify it by listing off the target's accomplishments and current power as another way to reflect the character's levels without resorting to game-speak.

You can add more cash to the costs for special conditions—well-known or popular targets can double or triple the price. Powerful types—wizards and high priests, especially—are another doubling factor. Hard to reach targets—say the general of a foreign army—double things again. Special conditions about the job—from making a kill look accidental to making the target non-resurrectable—are three to five times the normal prices. Finally, special cases such as killing a king or prince defy all formulae. For such actions, the PC or PCs need to offer special inducements: land, titles, offices, pensions, or some combination of all of these.

CONTRACTS & EXECUTIONS

Finally, the employers need to decide if the job is an individual or open contract. For an individual contract, there are not extra charges. The PCs hire the specific assassin to kill the target. If the assassin fails, the contract is ended. For an open contract, the PCs are actually

hiring a Vultur family to do the job. This does double or triple the price, but it means that more than one attempt can be made if the first assassin fails or dies.

For example, eliminating a 14th level wizard with a known reputation for vicious magic wards is likely to cost 50,000 gold or more—14,000 based on his level, doubled for being a wizard, and doubled again because it is a particularly dangerous job.

Once the terms are settled, the Vultur gets half in advance. This fee is not refundable, regardless of success or failure. If the assassin fails and is killed, obviously nothing more is paid. Otherwise a Vultur is expected to make several attempts before canceling a contract. Again, no money is owed on a canceled contract. The Vultur do not like to cancel contracts; it is a great stain on the family's reputation. After all, who wants to hire an assassin who has repeated failures?


Once the assassination succeeds, the employer is expected to pay up the money quickly. This is a wise policy, since renegeing on the deal only angers a clan full of professional killers. If an employer refuses to pay, the Vultur don't go after him directly, at least not right away. A dead employer cannot pay. Wives, daughters, hirelings, henchmen, friends, and adventuring companions are all targeted first. With each kill, the Vultur make sure their former employer knows who did the killing and why. Their object is to get their money. Furthermore, they are likely to demand more money than the original contract required. This again is meant to be an object lesson.

So if a player character hires an assassin and then refuses to pay, first the assassins will come for his hirelings and henchmen. If that is not enough to persuade him, assassins will start attacking other player characters in the party. This is certain to upset somebody. Once all other potential targets are dead, only then will the assassins target the player character, assuming that any former friends of his haven't killed him themselves by that point.

JOINING THE VULTUR

A far better idea from a campaign standpoint is for a player character, most likely an assassin, to join the Vultur. The first problem is the same as hiring one—making contact. Just as the Vultur don't advertise, they don't actively recruit either.

The guidelines for contacting the Vultur are no different than if one wants to hire an assassin, although there are a few extra caveats. First, the Vultur are very human-oriented, mainly because all but a few families are human families. Non-human characters will have their best luck seeking acceptance in one of the more liberal families—the Feris, of course, but also the Ordule, Daris, or Varrangal. Second, the Vultur are even more suspicious



of people wanting to join them than of people just wanting to hire them. People looking to hire killers, they can understand. People eagerly wanting to be killers aren't always that sane and they often come with their own agendas and motivations which may or may not mesh with those of particular Vultur families. Finally, there is the Whispered War. The Sirat have tried, on more than one occasion, to infiltrate the Vultur so they can strike from within. A spy within any family is of great usefulness to the Lord of the Mountain.

The smartest approach is to find someone who has already done business with the Vultur and arrange an introduction. Since the matchmaker's reputation is at stake, he's not likely to do this unless he thinks there's a chance of a good match. The player character has to have a reputation. Good calling cards are to do a job other assassins would consider impossible (or at least very difficult), be the master of a unique and useful set of skills, or have lots of the right connections.

Once the introduction is made, the character undergoes the same scrutiny and more by his Vultur contact. The Vultur could be any rank in the family, all depending on who the matchmaker knows (although dealing directly with the amo of a family just isn't going to happen). It may seem that the introduction leads to nothing but friendly or at least neutral meetings, but this is a critical period. Being adopted into a family isn't about talent, although that matters; it is about personality. Those adopted must be assassins known and trusted by their contacts.

As the contact gets to know the character, he will start asking for small favors. These are intended to test the character's loyalties and get him slowly committed to putting the Vultur ahead of all others. He may ask an assassin character who his employers are. He could request a floor plan to his temple from a cleric assassin. A rogue assassin could be asked for a copy of the keys to the local thieves' guild. How much the character balks and how many questions he asks make all the difference. Too reluctant, and the Vultur decide you're not one of them; too eager to please, and they become suspicious that you're a spy.

If the player character can pass these small tests and gain the friendship and trust of the Vultur contact, he is offered the final test, the chance to help fill a contract. If the character passes, he is part of the Vultur—not necessarily adopted, but a trusted "cousin" of the family. Full acceptance will take more time and more successes.

A faster but far more risky method for gaining the notice of the local Vultur is to take business away from them. If

an assassin player character becomes active in the region, the Vultur are going to pay attention. The usual response is to send a warning. First will be a simple messenger to tell the character what's good for him. The next warning is likely to be fatal. Assassins don't fool around with beatings. If the player is charismatic and quick-thinking, he can use the messenger or the assassin hired to eliminate him to make contact. The Vultur will be more suspicious but also inclined to respect the character's nerve.

THE CODE

For all their bloodied and frayed morals, the Vultur believe themselves ethically honorable. There is an unwritten code that defines what should and should not be done and most of the Vultur agree and abide by it. Breaking the code is not a thing to do lightly, since much is made of tradition. At best, flaunting the rules of proper behavior will raise eyebrows and cause a loss of face. Even so, there are offences that almost always trigger bloody revenge.

Since it is an unwritten code, no Vultur can explain it exactly the same, nor can many even necessarily agree on all the fine points. That is what the amos and regents are for, to settle those disputes that the old traditions cannot. The main points of the code are as follows:

- Don't talk to outsiders about Vultur matters. The business of the families stays in the families.
- Don't boast about contracts to outsiders.
- Don't reveal your employer.
- In descending order of importance, don't betray your family, your kingdom or any other Vultur to the authorities.
- The murder of a family member must be avenged.
- Respect your regent and your amo, their words are law.
- If you take a contract, you must try to complete it.

Note that a few of these rules can lead to conflict. For example, your amo may demand vengeance for the murder of a son only to have the regent overrule him for the sake of the greater peace. Who do you obey—your amo or your regent? Only you and your GM know those answers...

All manner of punishments await those who flaunt these rules. Traitors to the authorities can expect death. Murdering a fellow Vultur can trigger a blood feud among families. Disobeying your amo can lead to exile. Giving up a contract is an immense loss of face for yourself and your family. In general, the punishment varies to fit the crime, the mood, and the status of the person flaunting the old ways. Whatever the decision, there is no court of appeal.

- CHAPTER TEN: THE SIRAT -

- FOLLOWERS OF THE STRAIGHT PATH -

A rocky wilderness of mountains cuts through the flank of the Empire like an uneven wound, a sword cut diverted a few hundred miles from the heart of power to taper away into vineyard laden foothills. This is the Scar, a place of emptiness barely settled after a thousand years. Most of the Empire clings to the roads that wind up through valleys and over passes linking prosperous and distant cities on either side of the Scar. Villages are small and isolated and the high valleys are havens for bandits and monsters. Lonely fortresses flying the imperial flag guard the trade routes. This is the birthplace of the Sirat and the center of their realm.

KAROL, PROPHET OF MURDERERS

The cult of the Sirat was founded several hundred years ago when a visionary, Karol, appeared in the temple of the God of Retribution. He was a prophet, inspired by divine powers, to preach against the corruption of the temple. According to Karol, the priests of the God of Retribution had lost the straight path, the proper way of living. They had sold themselves to the temporal world, letting the emperor decide what was just in the eyes of the temple in exchange for gold, fine buildings, and seats at the emperor's table. To his eyes, the temple was corrupt. Only those who listened to Karol would know the true way, the proper way to live one's life, and so obtain blessed rewards in the next life.

Naturally, Karol's preaching hardly pleased the priests of the God of Retribution. He was branded a blasphemer and a heretic. They prayed for the God of Retribution to strike him down but they didn't wait for their god to act. The priests planned to punish Karol and his small flock of followers for their crimes, but an agent of the divine appeared to Karol with a warning of their plans. Still, there was little time and only Karol and a handful of his followers managed to flee the city, barely escaping the enraged mob.

The years of wandering began as Karol traveled from city to city, refining his teachings and seeking out followers. Every place he visited, he found willing ears among the poor and oppressed who looked at the rich temples of the God of Retribution and saw and felt the injustice. Every place he went, the priests of the God of Retribution fought back by sending their agents to smite him. Yet in every instance, he miraculously escaped and each escape only added to the mystique surrounding him. Clearly, people thought, he was protected by some divine power.


Alarmed by Karol's increasing popularity, the high priests of the God of Retribution turned to the Empire. They said his teachings were rebellious, and they accused the Empire of corrupting the spirit. They reported that his followers attacked temples and the loyal priests of the God of Retribution, and if he was not stopped soon, his followers will turn against the Emperor too. It did not take much convincing to get others in power to believe Karol was dangerous and that he upset the order of the empire and roused the people to question established authority. The arrest order was signed and dispatched to all the posts of the Empire.

Karol had not previously blamed the emperor for the corruption of the priests, but it was clear the emperor had now become his enemy. Karol and his followers were driven out of the cities and towns. Many died, but always their prophet escaped, protected by the gods. Some of his flock were weak and surrendered, while others became fearful and disappeared into hiding. Despite those losses, Karol led the last of his followers high into the mountains.

There, it is said, Karol fasted and prayed for divine guidance and his prayers were answered by a miracle from the heavens. In a vision, he saw a golden beam of light that pierced the clouds of the mountains and touched a distant high peak. A voice, grander than any earthly one, called out to Karol to lead his people to this place and there they would find safety. It promised them that as long as they remained true and faithful, they would grow as word of their gospels spread throughout the land. Inspired, Karol brought this word back to his followers and they set out at once.

It was a hard journey, hunted by the Empire, and dogged by the killers sent by the priests of the God of Retribution. Eventually, the prophet led them to holy mountain and there another miracle occurred. On the mountain was a fortress called the Eagle's Eye, built by a bandit lord who welcomed this ragged band of "heretics" into his walls. Some say that Karol opened this lord's eyes to the Straight Path; others say Karol bided his time, letting his followers spread the faith of the Sirat through the guards until all followed Karol and not the chieftain. Whatever the means, Karol acquired the fortress intact and without bloodshed, and he even rewarded the bandit lord with a place of honor at his side.

Now with a fortress to protect them, Karol worked to rebuild his flock. Missionaries went out and secretly preached the Straight Path. Those who listened were guided back to the Eagle's Eye. As their might grew, the Sirat expanded their influence in the area. They claimed



or built new castles, spread their faith among the villages, and taxed the caravans that used the passes. These were actions the Empire could not ignore. First, they ordered the local governor to eliminate the threat, so he called out his troops and marched on the Eagle's Eye. He was overconfident, his troops were ill-trained, and the Sirat fortresses proved too strong. The governor fell back in defeat and disgrace.

Now the emperor grew concerned and ordered one of his generals into the field with three legions of troops. The general was careful, and he was not going to fail like the governor. He sent out spies, reconnoitered the land, and he built engines to smash the walls of the Eagle's Eye. Methodically, he dug trenches and settled in for a long siege.

The Sirat cause seemed doomed. There might be the strength to drive off an assault, but Karol's followers were too few to break a siege. Once again, inspired by divine guidance, the prophet saw the solution. Taking two of his most able warriors in hand, he raised them up to paradise where they saw the rewards of the faithful and the glory of their god. When they descended, they shone with the light of heaven. "Go now," he said, "and serve the lord of the Sirat."

That night the emperor's general and his best lieutenants died in their tents. The two *fida'i* also died for their actions, but they were at peace with heaven and their religion. Without its commanders, the army broke and the siege was lifted. In honor of their bravery, the Prophet of the Mountain, as he was now called, proclaimed the fallen killers *fida'i*—the faithful ones—and it has become the highest honor a Siratani can earn.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE SIRAT

The Sirat do not preach death as the goal of their faith. It is true that they make liberal use of assassination, but it is only a tool, not the core tenet of their beliefs. The teachings of the Sirat encompass every aspect of daily life in order for the Siratani to rigorously abide by what is lawful and therefore right. For this, the Siratani life is also known as the Straight Path. He who follows it will not fall into temptation or error because the Straight Path cannot lead a man astray. Men get in trouble only when they disobey or forget the teachings of the Straight Path, because men are prone to error no matter how noble their motives might be. The mere act of leaving the Straight Path is itself a sin against the lawful order of the world.

Initially, the followers of the Sirat claimed to be the only true devotees of the God of Retribution. The established church had lost its way, so only the Sirat could reclaim it. Over the generations, this tie to the God of Retribution has been cut. The Sirat revere only the principle of lawfulness, a divine being without form or any trace of mortal personality. In their eyes, the God of Retribution

CLERICS OF THE SIRAT

The clerics of the Sirat worship the essence of Law, commonly referred to by them as the Divine. It is not an abstract idea to them, but a real thing, albeit one that is beyond the comprehension of all but them most enlightened mortals. To reach this enlightenment, the Sirat dictate a comprehensive set of laws for all aspects of life that a person must follow. It is the duty of the clerics to guide the people in the understanding of the laws and interpret them as the world changes. Clerics of the Sirat must choose the Straight Path domain (see below), and may also choose either Destruction or Law.

Straight Path Domain

Deity: The Divine Essence of Law

Granted Power: Sirat clerics benefit from a constant *protection from chaos* effect, as the spell cast by a cleric of their class level.

Straight Path Domain Spells

1. **Command.** One subject obeys one-word command for 1 round.
2. **Hold Person.** Holds one person helpless; 1 round/level
3. **Dispel Magic.** Cancels magical spells and effects.
4. **Discern Lies.** Reveals deliberate falsehoods.
5. **Break Enchantment.** Frees subject from enchantments, alterations, curses, and petrification.
6. **Forbiddance.** Denies area to creatures of another alignment.
7. **Sequester.** Subject is invisible to sight and scrying.
8. **Anti-Magic Field.** Negates magic within 10 ft.
9. **Storm of Vengeance.** Storm rains acid, lightning, and hail.

has fallen to the status of a deceiver, a sly god who attempts to turn the faithful from the Sirat with false promises. Worshipers of the God of Retribution are treated as lost souls who can still be saved, while his priests are dire enemies not to be trusted, for they lead men away from the Straight Path of lawfulness. (According to the priests of the God of Retribution, the Sirat are evil heretics. As expected, there is no love lost between the two.)

The goal of the Straight Path is to lead a person to the Rebirth, when he at last sees the essence of pure lawfulness. This is greater than any joy that can be imagined. The way to reach enlightenment is to live your

life in a way that prepares the spirit to receive the essence of lawfulness. According to Sirat teachings, the people live amongst a sea of this divine essence, but their spirits are blinded by the chaotic natures of their bodies.

All tenets of the Sirat fall into two main practices: the temporal or the esoteric. The temporal tenets are all the rules that govern daily life, everything from modes of dress to the punishments for crimes. Virtually every aspect of a Siratani's day is guided by the words of the Prophet of the Mountain, endlessly interpreted and glossed by the lesser prophets—the holy men of the Sirat. Siratani are to be moderate with alcohol and spurn magical addictions. They know it is a deadly sin to possess or kill another Siratani. There are limitations when a man or woman may marry and instructions on how the household must be maintained. There are words to be avoided lest they breed chaos in the heart. Desires must be controlled, anger quelled, and fear banished. There are rules about handling money and making contracts. There are even rules about what to eat and when.

Of course, virtually no one can honor all these rules all the time, try as they might. The esoteric practices of the Sirat are intended to guide and purge the spirit towards harmony. These mystical practices include the repetition of holy numerical sequences, rigorous mental calculations

of complex mathematics, spells meant to structure and order the thoughts, and even movements and drills to clear the path of the body and the mind. The exact nature of these esoteric exercises is hidden from all outsiders, lest they corrupt them with impure intents.

THE VALLEYS OF THE SIRAT

Although the Sirat has small congregations that secretly meet in cities throughout the Empire, the physical heart of the sect is the Eagle's Eye, a fortress high in the mountains of the Scar. Perched on rocky cliffs, it commands the winding trade routes through the range. Since the vision that led the Prophet Karol here, the Eagle's Eye has been the seat of Sirat power.

Using the Eagle's Eye as a base, the Sirat captured and built a ring of seven small castles overlooking the four valleys surrounding their citadel. Within this ring, the Sirat (and not the empire) rules. A dozen small villages are scattered throughout the valleys, some existing prior to the arrival of the Sirat, others founded since. The villagers pay taxes to the Sirat and supply militia during emergencies. Crimes are judged and punished by Sirat law and by Siratani judges.

Many of the villagers are Siratani or have converted to the Sirat. Most non-Siratani are tolerated, although they



will never attain positions of power. Overall, the villagers are content with Sirat rule. The taxes are lower than those of the Empire, the officials are far less corrupt, and problems are dealt with quickly. Their sons and daughters are not drafted to fight in far-away wars, and their crops are not confiscated to for famine relief in another province. Only adherents of the God of Retribution are actively persecuted, generally being imprisoned and executed as a warning to others.

The lack of imperial authority also makes the valleys of the Sirat a popular place for fugitives from imperial retribution. Such exiles include murderers, bandits, rebels and some non-human tribes. It also draws peasants hoping to escape corrupt governors and oppressive taxes. The Sirat do not welcome everyone. Destroyers and other chaotics are not welcome, nor are random rebels who may not like Sirat rule any more than that of the Empire. Those fugitives willing to live by Sirat law and who are willing to work will find a home within the Scar, but otherwise, they are turned back at the borders.

Currently, in addition to the standard peasant villages, the valleys are home to two bandit camps and a small tribe of orcs led by a half-orc named Marlg (male barbarian 8). The bandits tithe the Sirat with a portion of their loot and refrain from robbery within Siratani borders. Under Marlg's leadership, the orcs have part of the loneliest valley for their own in exchange for which they fight alongside the Sirat during the periodic imperial or ecclesiastical campaigns to eradicate the cult.

THE EAGLE'S EYE

At the heart of this rebel holding lies the fortress known as the Eagle's Eye. This is the home of the Lord of the Mountain, leader of the Sirat, and is a holy site for the sect's followers. This fortress was the sign from the divine lawfulness that the Sirat would prosper and grow. It is the final refuge in times of war and the place where the *fidai* (the holy assassins) ascend to see the aura of Law.

The citadel sits on the slopes of Mount Ergli, its towers overlooking a small lake at the high end of the valley. An ancient quake sliced away part of the lower slope here and created a jagged rock wall that rises straight from the water's edge. About fifty feet above the lake, this gives way to a jumbled rock slope marked by granite towers. This is where the Eagle's Eye is built.

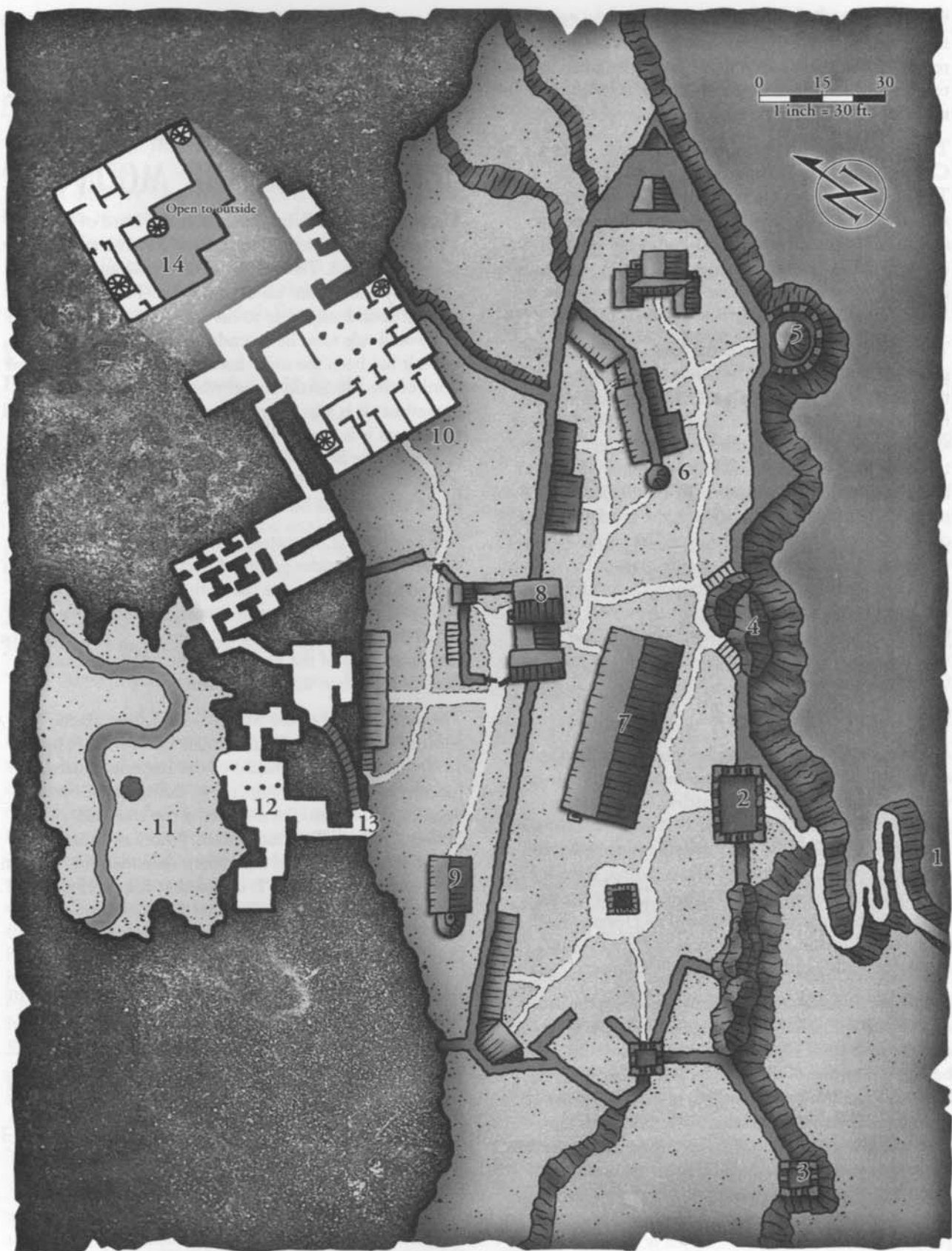
When Karol arrived, a simple fortress had been built by a local bandit lord. It consisted of a curtain wall that linked the natural granite towers and a single fortified blockhouse built into the back of the slope. A fortified tunnel gate emptied into a cleft in the cliff wall on the southern shore of the lake. A postern gate opened onto a secret trail that wound around the back of the mountain and into an adjacent high valley. Although simple in construction, the defenses were formidable. The



defenders had a clear view of the valley and sat high above any attackers. The path to the main gate was narrow, at points barely wide enough for a single rider, and the bandit lord had wisely built firing overlooks along its length. The lake provided abundant fresh water in case of siege. In short, it was virtually unconquerable. An assault would require massive magic aid, since conventional siege engines could not be brought to bear. So long as the secret path out the back of the fortress remained undiscovered, the defenders could not be starved out.

Since then, the Eagle's Eye has become even more formidable. One of the Prophet of the Mountain's first tasks was to expand the fortress and increase its already formidable defenses. The old curtain wall was raised to the height of the granite towers and those towers were hollowed out with staircases, firing loops, and galleries. A new curtain wall was built at the very edge of the cliff. A tunnel was carved to the lake to create a water port where a small pier, unreachable from the lake shores, juts into the icy water. Inside the walls, the keep has been expanded with a chapel, granaries, library, and assorted workshops.


Digging into the mountain, the Sirat broke into a cave complex. The caverns and passages have been integrated into the citadel and its defenses. Surface exits are now additional gates used by the Siratani to come and go far



1. Trail to lake
2. Main gate
3. Scholar's Watch
4. Eagle's Rock
5. Tower of the Eye

6. Prayer Tower
7. Fida'i Barracks
8. Inner gate
9. Baths
10. Main keep, 1st floor

11. The Garden
12. Tomb of the Prophet
13. Prophet's Balcony
14. Keep, 2nd floor



from the eyes of any spies. While most of the cave has now been explored, there are still sections deemed too remote or dangerous. Iron gates have been fitted in these tunnels and are guarded against the unlikely chance that someone or something might come from the depths.

The most important chambers of the Eagle's Eye are the Chapel of the Prophet and the Garden of Ascension. The chapel serves as the high council chamber of the sect. Here, the Lord of the Mountain addresses the faithful and the edicts of the faith are read by the Voice of the Prophet. On the holy days, the leaders of the Sirat gather here for prayers and devotions. During war, the Eyes of the Prophet gather here for their councils of war.

The Garden of Ascension is the holiest of holies, the place where the Lord of the Mountain communes with the Divine. It is where mere worshippers become the *fida'i*—the faithful ready to kill and die in the name of the Prophet of the Mountain. In the Garden, they are transported to the realm of the Divine and allowed to bathe themselves in the essence of Law. Located in a massive cavern discovered beneath the mountain, the cold dark rock has been transformed by magic into a lush and sunlit garden. Birds sing, gentle breezes blow, water flows from springs, the trees droop with ripe fruit, and the grasses are soft and cooling. At the center of the Garden is the Rock of Ascension, a gnarled piece of whorled stone, where the ritual of Ascension takes place. (For more on this ritual, see Chapter 11.)

THE SEVEN CITADELS

At the far ends of the valleys leading to the Eagle's Eye and along the two key roads that pass along the frontier, the Siratani have built seven castles. These border fortresses serve as the outer line of defense against the frequent imperial raids. The citadels are named according to the principles of the Sirat—Calm of Mind, Banish Fear, Perfect Clarity, Rock of the Faithful, Deadly Strike, Honor to the Prophet, and Reward of Heaven. Each is commanded by one of the Eyes of the Prophet and manned by *fida'i* and regular Siratani followers.

While not as formidable as the Eagle's Eye, the seven citadels are still solidly built castles. The natural terrain and distance from any sizeable town of the empire make besieging any one of them difficult. Furthermore, the Siratani have destroyed, blocked, or befouled most of the springs nearby so that attackers will quickly become parched. The paths and roads leading to the castles are enchanted with special warning spells to alert the defenders of anyone approaching. [*Protection from elements and guards and wards* spells have been made permanent on the structures. *Glyphs of warding* are strategically placed on the paths near the gates and the defenders have stores of stones enchanted with the spell ready to be cast onto the ground outside the walls.]

In the event a castle falls (which has happened in the past), the structures are riddled with traps, secret passages, and hidden caches of gear for use by *fida'i* assassins. More than one imperial general has discovered it's a fatally bad idea to use a captured assassin stronghold as your new headquarters!

THE LORD OF THE MOUNTAIN

The greatest of all living Siratani is the Lord of the Mountain, the spiritual descendant of Karol, the Prophet of the Mountain. The first Lord of the Mountain was chosen by Karol from his closest aides. The Prophet made it abundantly clear to his followers that his chosen one would rule after he ascended to the Divine. Ever since, it has been the unbroken tradition that the current Lord of the Mountain names who will follow him. Sometimes it is a brother or son of the current Lord, and sometimes it is one of the Eyes of the Prophet who command the Seven Citadels. The only consistent thing is that the Lord of the Mountain is always someone high in the ranks of the Sirat.

The Lord of the Mountain is the absolute authority over the Sirat. He decides points of doctrine, leads them all in holy day prayers, chooses the faithful who will ascend to *fida'i*, and sends them out to assassinate the enemies of the of the Sirat. Among his followers, he is believed to be the incarnation of the Prophet of the Mountain and to directly commune with the Divine.

The current Lord of the Mountain is Jehora alamai Mostarf bi Archtedin [human male Clr 14/Ftr 6, hp 139]. A former commandant of the Imperial Guard, Jehora was sent by the emperor to infiltrate the Sirat decades ago. Instead, he discovered the true faith of the Straight Path. Skilled and sincere, Jehora overcame the suspicions of others and has valiantly defended the Sirat on more than one occasion. It is said that the previous Lord of the Mountain had a vision that his predecessor would be a stranger to them all and knew upon sighting Jehora that he had been sent by the Divine.

Jehora is an ascetic with no apparent vices. He dresses in simple white robes, dines frequently on bread and water, and listens to the debates of the scholars every day. His greatest vice is a love for battle and he can often be found on the ramparts of the citadels during imperial raids, much to the dismay of the Eyes of the Prophet. The common Siratani say he is blessed by the Divine and that the imperials cannot harm him. In truth, his appearances are well-protected. When in or near battle, he is always guarded by protection spells and other abjurations to deflect harm. Jehora is no fool and knows the impact his death would have on the Sirat.

THE EYES OF THE PROPHET

Surrounding the Lord of the Mountain are the Eyes of the Prophet—the commanders of the Seven Citadels. The titles of the Seven are the Eye of Faith, the Eye of Truth, the Eye of Justice, the Eye of Purity, the Eye of the Law, the Eye of Sacrifice, and the Eye of Courage. Each of the Eyes has served the Sirat for many years and has proven himself a loyal servant of the Divine as well as a loyal lieutenant to the Lord of the Mountain. The Eyes of the Prophet serve as advisors to the Lord of the Mountain, commanders of the citadels, and administrators of the Sirat. Each Eye has a specific task:

EYE OF FAITH

Harat Manfari [human male Clr 11, hp 60]

Task: Spreading the true faith of the Sirat

Manfari is a portly older man, who always seems cheerful and friendly although his duties have made him more suspicious of non-Siratani over the years. He watches over the small cells of the sect that are scattered throughout the Empire, sending them teachers and missionaries to spread the true word.

EYE OF TRUTH

Jarod the Quick [human male Rog 12, hp 54]

Task: Gathering information and uncovering spies

Diminutive and lean, Jarod belies his physical appearance, as he appears to be a quiet, mousy man. It is a look he has developed over years of practice, and the disguise is one that serves him well in his profession, since behind the façade he is ruthless and calculating. Over the years, he has carefully cultivated a network of informers and contacts within the imperial capitol and virtually every provincial governor's office. Many don't even realize they are betraying trusts to the Sirat and think Jarod is nothing more than a harmless friend or an intriguing and useful rogue ally. Nonetheless, everything he hears and everything his agents learn makes its way back to the Eagle's Eye. Of all the Eyes of the Prophet, Jarod spends the most of time away from the Eagle's Eye, tending to his networks.

EYE OF JUSTICE

Ambor Reed-splitter [half-elf male Clr 9/Lor 7, hp 57]

Task: Chief Justice of the Sirat

Stooped, gray, and withered, Ambor is a half-elf well advanced in his years. While frail of health, he stubbornly refuses any arcane or divine restoration of his vigor. The cantankerous old half-elf is determined to die at his proper time for that is the right thing to do under the Law. His mind is still razor-sharp, even if he does sometimes doze during dreadfully dull arguments. As the

chief judge of the Sirat, Reed-splitter is the penultimate authority on all disputes; the Lord of the Mountain can of course overrule him if he desires, but this has not occurred in over 50 years. In court, Ambor has little patience for fools and the professional advocates but great kindness and understanding for the common man who comes before him. He is renowned for his stern adherence to the Sayings of the Prophet and his just application of the Law.

EYE OF PURITY

Thelissa of Southharbor [human female Clr 9, hp 59]

Task: In charge of the chapels and sanctuaries of the Eagle's Eye and oversees the observance of holy days

The Eye of Purity is a middle-aged woman with a perpetually fretsome expression as befits her obsessively meticulous attention to every minor detail. Ask any of the priests who have had to work under her and they will all sigh, roll their eyes, and agree she is the ultimate perfectionist, hard to work with but very, very good at what she does.

Although the tasks of this post are relatively minor, it is good training and there are many opportunities to catch the eye of the Lord of the Mountain or one of the senior Eyes. Many Eyes of Purity have advanced to greater things in the Sirat. Certainly, Thelissa hopes to, although she feels ashamed of this desire, since it is unworthy of the noblest aspects of the Law.

EYE OF THE LAW

Haackhande Stonesoon (dwarf male Div 13/Ftr 2, hp 88)

Task: Interprets the Sayings of the Prophet of the Mountain and guides the work of other Sirat scholars

Haackhande Stonesoon is one of the more unusual converts to the Sirat, a dwarf prince who turned his back on centuries of tradition, giving up his titles, mines, and warlike profession to immerse himself in the arts of divination and prophecy. Even then he did not follow form, for over the decades he has applied wizardly rigor to the contemplation and understanding of the divine. He is part of a rare but long-respected tradition of magician-mystics and gnostics who seek enlightenment through arcane formulae. Stonesoon has been working for years to formalize and extract the essence of the Sirat, applying his principles to the words of the Prophet of the Mountain.

The current Eye of the Law's work is controversial, and some of the more conservative Eyes would even say it is heretical. However, Haackhande has the support of the Lord of the Mountain, although there is the real possibility that the dwarf's teachings may become too extreme for even his protector.



EYE OF SACRIFICE

Nasour alamai Mostarf bi Archtedin [human male LE Asa 14/Ftr 5, hp 138]

Task: Master of the fida'i

The brother of the current Lord of the Mountain, Nasour is the second-in-command of the Sirat and the named successor to his brother. Like Jehora, he was a soldier in the imperial service. After his brother defected to the Sirat, Nasour (along with all branches of the Archtedin clan) was persecuted by the Imperial Censors. He was stripped of rank and imprisoned. His family's properties were all confiscated. His sons were killed and his wife and daughters were sold into bondage while the censors tortured him for information. It was a testament to his fierce will that he did not die before fida'i sent by Jehora rescued him.

Unlike many others, Nasour did not come to the Sirat out of pure faith. Saved by his brother, he joined the Sirat for revenge against the Empire that had wronged him and his family. He initially had no concern for the sect's doctrines. Jehora had rescued him and the Sirat offered a way to strike back at the Empire. Over the years he has absorbed the teachings of the Law and like a good soldier has accepted its way as his. No one will praise him for his less-than-subtle understanding of doctrine, but none will fault his determination and charismatic drive. The Sirat has become his cause. Nasour knows he is not a priest and leaves the finer points of the religion to them. He is a man of action, a warrior, and the most earnest of the fida'i. It is only natural that he commands the sect's corps of dedicated assassins. Most of all, he is utterly and absolutely loyal to his brother.

Like his brother, Nasour is a man of spartan, almost harsh, tastes. Tall, dark, scarred, and lean, he disdains comfort, luxury, and even the comradeship of others. His very aloofness and passion make him coldly charismatic. Should he become the Lord of the Mountain, the Sirat will become a terrible avenging force indeed.

EYE OF COURAGE

Ahcari Lion-Greeter [human male Clr 6/Ftr 13, hp 136]

Task: General of the Siratani armies, he manages the soldiers and defenders of the Siratani castles as well as the weapons of the Sirat

If any man would stand out in a crowd, it would be this former king. Black-skinned and stocky with a trace of ancient dwarven blood in his veins, Ahcari is the king of a tribe on the southernmost frontier of the Empire. It was there he heard the preaching of the Law and adopted the faith. His conversion outraged the shaman elders of his tribe and they rebelled against him. He and



his followers were forced into exile so the king led his people across the Empire to the Eagle's Eye. He presented his troops to the Lord of the Mountain, and all were welcomed into the ranks of the Sirat. Ahcari's tactical prowess was quickly recognized, since he led his kinsmen through thousands of miles of hostile territory to reach the Eagle's Eye. When the Empire next attacked the Eagle's Eye, his skills left no doubt as to who should be the general of the Siratani armies.

A proud man painfully aware of his sacrifice, Ahcari dreams of the day he will return in triumph to his far-away tribe. He plans to drive out the false shamans and install the rule of the Law over his and the other tribes of his homeland. In readiness for that day, he has a special company, the Spears of the Lion, formed mostly among his original followers and kinsmen. This black-skinned regiment has earned a fearsome legend on both sides of the Whispered War and among the imperial regiments often sent into the Scar to harass the Sirat.

Of all the Eyes, Ahcari is the fiercest rival to Nasour, Eye of Sacrifice. Both men are proud, driven and fiercely ambitious, and both are accustomed to command. Although he will not violate the law or betray the Sirat, Ahcari is ever-watchful for some chance to bring his rival down and become the next Lord of the Mountain.

- CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE FIDA'I -

If the Sirat was just a sect of fanatics led by a handful of priests, they would hardly be the threat to the Empire that they have become, even if they could field an army of followers ready to die for the cause. Ultimately, no rabble can stand against the Imperial Legions with their war-wizards, siege engines, and fierce judicars. The fida'i—the faithful—are the reason the Sirat have survived and even become a threat.

Among the Siratani, the fida'i are the most devout and dedicated believers, men and women willing to be martyrs for their faith. To the outside world, the fida'i are murderers and zealous monsters who kill by stealth and treachery. At the most basic, they are usually assassins, although other classes can become fida'i. They stalk and kill the enemies of the Sirat—imperial governors, priests, generals, senators, emperors, or any whom the Lord of the Mountain commands them to kill. It is a task for which they are specially trained, blessed, and promised union with the Divine for their sacrifices and successes.

It is a common mistake of non-believers to assume that all Siratani are fida'i. In truth, the fida'i are only a small part of the Sirat. Most Siratani are simple people—peasants, tradesmen, merchants, and the like. They observe the Law and obey the Lord of the Mountain, but they do not assassinate for him. That is a near-holy task left to the fida'i.

A man cannot simply become a fida'i just by volunteering. The fida'i are specially selected from those who follow the Law by the Eye of Sacrifice or by the Lord of the Mountain. Candidates must be brave, strong, earnestly devout, sober in spirit and deed, intelligent (though formal education is not necessary), unmarried, and childless. Since supporting one's family is one of the highest principles of the Law, those people with children or younger siblings to care for must place that duty before the duty of serving as a fida'i. Those chosen to become fida'i are sometimes taken as young as twelve, but they can be of any age or class so long as they meet the requirements. Male or female, human or other races—these particulars do not matter, as the fida'i span numerous races and both genders. The only true stricture is they can have no one dependent upon them.

If a candidate meets these basic qualifications, he is put through a series of tests—grueling physical drills to test strength and endurance, mental challenges to probe their wits, and careful cross-examinations by the scholars to determine their devotion to the Law of the Divine. If the candidate passes all these tests (and many fail), he is chosen. Those who fail are still faithful Sirat, but they do not gain the benefits of rebirth as a fida'i.

From that point on, the life of the candidate is no longer his own or even free. During the training, he (or she) must live in the dormitories of the fida'i and is never allowed contact with the outside world except on holy days. The training covers the basic skills of the fida'i and intense studies in the Law. Discipline is rigid, and punishments are brutally harsh. Some candidates even die through accident or punishment. These things are expected.

REBIRTH

When a candidate has learned all that he can be taught, his time in the training halls is done. He has one last test to undergo—the Ceremony of Rebirth. This is the hardest challenge of all, for it does not rely on physical strength or cunning, but purity of heart and faith in the Law. During Rebirth, the candidate comes face-to-face (as it were) with the essence of the Divine. He transports across planes and enters the unfathomable presence of pure lawfulness. No motive, no weakness, no motive can be concealed from that burning resolve.

The ceremony takes place in the Garden of Ascension. After days or even weeks of fasting and prayers, the candidate, dressed in a coarse-spun woolen robe, is presented to the Lord of the Mountain and shown the first texts—the original sayings of the Prophet of the Mountain. From the balcony, the Eye of Purity prays for strength, protection, and wisdom to be bestowed upon the candidate and for the Divine to show its infinite mercy on this poor vessel. The candidate then steps onto the rock of Ascension and a high priest of the Sirat chants out the spell of Rebirth. As the final word is uttered, there is a brilliant flash around the candidate and in an instant the test is done. If he remains standing and is mentally sound, he is reborn as one of the fida'i. If he is dead or raving, he has failed.

The scholars and mystics of the Sirat have debated long and hard about just what happens during a candidate's Rebirth. Many of them have experienced it firsthand, but the mind of man cannot explain it. All agree that in that instant the Divine Lawfulness is revealed in all its order and perfection to the candidate. Some claim that the Divine judges the soul and smites those who are impure, killing the unlawful and destroying the minds of the weak. Other scholars argue the Divine cannot be so cruel—its perfection, revealed all at once, is too much for those whose training and dedication is less than perfect. Their minds cannot tolerate the glory and they snap or they die.

Whatever the cause, those who survive are now full fida'i, the faithful killers of the Sirat. Those who die are buried without honor—weaklings or traitors to the faith. The mad are considered holy. They are shown charity and

kindness, returned to their families and allowed the freedom of the land. Although mad, they have seen the face of the Divine and survived.

FIDA'I LIFE—AND DEATH

Once a man or a woman becomes a fida'i, he can no longer return to the normal world. He lives in barracks with other fida'i when he is not afield on missions. He does not work the fields or master a craft. He is held in high respect by normal Siratani worshippers, but is not allowed to identify himself as a fida'i when away from his barracks. He is not to fall in love, marry, or even form close friendships. Having seen the face of the Divine, he is assured rebirth after death and so is not afraid to die.

This does not mean that any fida'i is in a hurry to die. The image of the fida'i throughout the Empire is that of the suicidal assassin who charges in, heedless of the counterstroke that will kill him too. In truth, the fida'i's duty is to serve the Sirat and if he can do so by living, more power to him. When sent to assassinate a nobleman or a general, a fida'i will make every effort to return alive, gain more experience, and advance in level. After all, this makes him better able to serve the Law.

However, if a mission leaves only the choice between death or failure, then the fida'i has no fear of death. He has seen the perfection that is promised to him—so long as he remains true.

DEALING WITH OUTSIDERS

If asked, the Siratani maintain they are good and by all appearances this seems so. Their lives are ordered and their followers law-abiding. Their goals are three-fold: to live by the Law, to teach others to live by the Law, and to punish those who reject the Law. All three create problems with the Empire.

Living by the Law means the Empire and its laws are not the highest authority over any Siratani. A true Siratani will obey and respect the edicts of the Empire. This is right and proper, as obedience to authority is an important part of the Sirat belief, though only so long as imperial laws do not conflict with the Law. When that happens, a true Sirat is expected to follow the Law and ignore the less than divine imperial rules. Needless to say, authorities in the Empire have a problem with this.

The second case of Teaching the Law doesn't please the authorities any more than the first. While the Empire



has a lot of religions within its borders, preaching the Straight Path of the Sirat is a treasonous offence. The punishment for being a Sirat missionary is death. This hardly endears the Empire to the Siratani.

And this leads to the third point of punishing those who reject the Law. It stands to reason that those transgressors are most of the officials of the Empire. Since the laws of the Sirat take precedence over the laws of non-believers, the teachings of the Prophet state that those who refuse the Law are evil. Therefore, the emperor and all temporal rulers not of the Siratani faith are corrupt. They have strayed so far from Straight Path, and so long as they refuse to embrace the Sirat, they are enemies of the faith. Since one of the goals of the Sirat is to punish evil, these wrongdoers must be punished. Since they are not Siratani, it is no crime to kill them. In fact, murdering an imperial official brings the killer closer to Rebirth. In the eyes of the Sirat, murder is good and right and holy.

To the emperor's ears and pretty much those of any other non-Sirat noble, all of this (especially the last part) is simple treason, incitement to rebellion, and just about any other political crime one cares to add. The Sirat is a traitorous secret society that must be exterminated by any and all means. The punishment for being Sirat is death and destruction of the body (to make resurrection near impossible). There is a bounty for the arrest of a Siratani and large prices on the heads of the leaders, as follows:

Adventurers of all stripes have tried to hunt down and kill the Lord of the Mountain, but so far none have succeeded.

Common Siratani	500 gp
Fida'i	1000 gp or more
Eyes of the Prophet	10,000 gp each
Lord of the Mountain	100,000 gp

The situation at hand is the Empire on one side trying to hunt down and eradicate the Sirat. The Sirat, on the other hand, remain dedicated to changing the ways of the people to the Law and removing the sinful tools of error. They stay focused on the people who make and enforce the laws, not the common folk who obey those laws. After all, the commoners have been led into error and can be redeemed. In other words, the diametrically opposed viewpoints only lead to lots of death on both sides.

METHODS

To achieve their goals, the Sirat have the fida'i. Unlike the Vultur, the fida'i are not obsessed with the art of killing, nor are they obsessed with the need to survive any counter-attacks. As such, their assassination methods tend to be much more straightforward and simple.

Although they are known throughout the land as killers, the Sirat use killing as a last resort. Because they spread fear, the Sirat do not have to strike to kill. Often the threat of death accomplishes more than the death itself. No one forgets waking up beneath a Sirat dagger in the headboard or in the back of a favorite concubine. The message is clear—"We can get to you easily."—and convincing to less-than-dedicated imperial officials. Often such 'messages' result in anti-Sirat edicts getting rescinded, crackdowns lifted, and suspects swiftly released from custody.

When fear alone is not enough, the Siratani have no hesitation about striking to kill. Some officials refuse to be terrorized while others are too powerful or dangerous to let live under any circumstances. Fear needs examples, too, so sometimes officials die as a warning to others. When Siratani assassins strike, they favor public places where there are plenty of witnesses to what they have done. They favor the knife, a small easily concealed instrument. The knife is a direct and clear link between the assassin and his victim. Magic items and spells are avoided when possible for this very reason. The act of killing is a religious act after all. Usually, immediately after an assassination, the fida'i loudly announces, "So die the enemies of the Sirat!" or some other such cry, just to erase any doubt as to who and why the deed was done.

Just because their assassinations are very public, the fida'i are in no hurry to die. Escape is often an essential part of the plan (unless there is no other recourse). The fida'i have learned to use the very public nature of the assassination to their advantage. Generally they stage their attacks in the largest possible crowds and strike at the point where there is a close exit nearby. If possible, the fida'i uses a *ring of recall* or another spell to escape the scene. If spells cannot be used, the crowd may be seeded with fellow fida'i or Sirat followers who create confusion and panic, rather like shouting "Fire!" in the theater. Diversionary devices—smoke bombs, traps and magic devices (and here the fida'i have no qualms about using magic)—are used to create cover. During the ensuing panic, the fida'i makes his getaway.

Not every fida'i escapes. Sometimes bad luck prevails and it is impossible to escape capture. Captured fida'i are notorious for their determined refusal to talk. While they will freely admit what they did or were trying to do, few if any have ever named their accomplices, contacts, or other details about the Sirat. This reticence, combined with their resistances to scrying (for details see the Fida'i prestige class in Chapter 2), make them an interrogator's nightmare. Confident that they will gain Rebirth in the essence of the Divine, the fida'i do not fear death. Moreover, most jailors have learned it is wise to closely watch these killers who may willingly kill themselves rather than risk the pain of torture.

JOINING THE SIRAT

If player characters want to join the Sirat, the GM should bear in mind that it is as much a way of life as a religion. As with characters associating themselves with other temples and gods, there are no hard and fast rules for this. The GM should stress to the player the commitment expected of his character, one no less than what the temple of God of Valor might demand of a warrior sworn to its cause. Likewise, the player should understand the consequences of turning his back on that duty, should he later change his mind. At best, he will be shunned by true followers; at worst, he will have succeeded in angering a sect filled with killers!

The biggest trick to joining the Sirat is finding them. While they do not seek to be as invisible as the Vultur, imperial persecution does not encourage a high profile. The best approach is for the player character to publicly express an interest in the tenets of the Law, let it be known that he is seeking "something more in his life." The PC should wonder if there are like-minded souls out there, and possibly even start to grumble about the abuses he sees all around him. In other words, he needs to sound like a person spiritually dissatisfied with his current status quo. Showing a little humility, curiosity, and devotion won't hurt either.

At this point the GM can have great deal of fun introducing the character to competing faiths. Priests of all stripes may take an interest in "saving" the character. Decidedly odd fringe cults may attempt to pull him into their nets. All sorts of things to the character at the GM's discretion—send him to midnight ceremonies or revival meetings, make him endure fastings and mortifications of the flesh, and offer him bizarre (and dangerous) quests to prove his devotion to this cult or that sect.

Eventually, a missionary from the Sirat will find the character. After careful scrutiny of the character's personality (no chaotics are welcome after all) and a sounding out of his views, the Siratani may invite the character to a meeting of friends. There he is slowly and carefully introduced to the precepts of the Law. After only a few months or so, the character can be considered one of the Siratani. As for becoming one of the fida'i, see the information in the prestige class (see Chapter 2).

THE WHISPERED WAR

While there are infrequent campaigns by the Empire to break the Eagle's Eye and eradicate the Sirat once and for all, there is a constant battle being waged between the fida'i and the Vultur. To say that the two groups do not like each other is a sad understatement; they are locked in a death grip vendetta to the bitter end.

For the Sirat, the reasons are simple. First, the Vultur are agents of the empire. That alone is enough to make them the enemy, though the Vultur are worse than most sinners. Second, the Lord of the Mountain and the Eyes are constant targets of Vultur attacks, most of which fail. Most of these Vultur assassins are hired and sent by nobles and government officials. A few are opportunists, hoping to claim a bounty and make a name for themselves. Third, when spies are caught attempt to infiltrate the Eagle's Eye, they are more often than not Vultur. Sirat law gives death as the penalty for spying.

Knowing it is better to take the battle to the enemy, the Sirat seek out and kill Vultur when and where they can find them. This in turn does not please the Vultur. They can accept the idea that assassins who are captured get killed. They charge double fees to spy on the Sirat for just that reason. What they cannot accept is that their target has decided to come after them. For the Sirat, killing Vultur is part of the Law. For the Vultur, it is a blood feud. Neither side will retreat or surrender. There are no truces, no parleys, and no Black Councils to make peace. It is a holy war to the death.

Since both sides are highly secretive, neither can mount an organized campaign against the other. Both are watchful for any hint of the players on the other side. They both constantly use their contacts, bribes, spells, and unique forms of persuasion to gather information. Once a name is learned, the assassins (be they Vultur or Sirat) move into action, gathering information on the target—location, habits, guards, protections, and abilities. Because the Law abhors unjustified assassinations, the Sirat take the time to be certain the target is Vultur. The Vultur are not quite so fussy, although they try to avoid murdering too many innocents. There are never any attempts to warn or terrorize the target. Death is the only option in the battles of the Whispered War. Like all their assassinations, the Sirat mark their kill so there is no question of handiwork. The Vultur prefer to remain secret, but it is usually not too hard to deduce who had a hand in a fida'i's death.

Player characters of all stripes, but particularly assassins and rogues, can be drawn into this struggle any number of ways. They can be hired to gather information for either side—which can be dangerous if discovered by opposing agents. They can be hired to act as bodyguards. They might get attacked by mistake or on purpose, if one of the group is Sirat or Vultur. They might even get hired as "independent operators." The best part (from a campaign standpoint, if not personally felt by the PCs) is that once they get involved in the Whispered War, they are part of it forever.

- CHAPTER TWELVE: ASSASSIN NPCS -

Following are a number of assassins tied to the Vultur and Sirat groups for use in your game. Use them as models for forming your own masters and amos of the other families, or assassin nemeses for a player character.

SONIA GODREAU

Master Assassin of Balant Family, Kingdom of Balant/Torrici

Female Human Asa12/Sor7: CR 19; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 7d4+12d6+19; hp 80; Init +10; Spd 30 ft.; AC 31; Atk +17/+12/+7 melee (1d6+4, +4 *keen humanbane scimitar*), +20/+15/+10 ranged (1d10+2, +2 *heavy crossbow of speed*); SA Killing blow (3/day), sneak attack +2d6; AL NE; SV Fort +17, Ref +26, Will +20; Str 11, Dex 22, Con 13, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 14.

Possessions: +2 *heavy crossbow of speed*, +4 *keen humanbane scimitar*, +3 *glamered leather armor of shadow and silent moves*, *winged shield*, *masterwork poison kit*, *ring of protection +5*, *amulet of natural armor +5*, *cloak of resistance +5*, *gloves of dexterity +6*.

Skills and Feats: Alchemy +19, Concentration +26, Craft (poison) +15, Disguise +21, Hide +36, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Listen +18, Move Silently +32, Scry +13, Spellcraft +13, Spot +18; Alertness, Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Improved Critical (scimitar), Improved Initiative, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Weapon Focus (scimitar), Brew Potion, Maximize Poison, Poison Focus (deathblade), Poison Use.

Languages Spoken: Common, Dwarven, Elven.

Spells Known (Sor 6/7/7/4): 0—*detect magic*, *detect poison*, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *open/close*, *prestidigitation*, *read magic*; 1st—*cause fear*, *expeditious retreat*, *feather fall*, *jump*, *spider climb*; 2nd—*alter self*, *darkvision*, *invisibility*; 3rd—*fly*, *vampiric touch*.

Spells Prepared (Asa 2/2/2): 1st—*fast escape*, *forget*; 2nd—*death knell*, *fog cloud*; 3rd—*poison food or water*, *silence*.

Physically, Sonia is hardly imposing: short, brown-haired and rather plain. This makes it just that much easier for her to play the part of a faceless servant, to become one of many figures in a crowd, or to escape notice at a city gate. Despite her nondescript appearance, her reputation carries much weight, and her word, her craft, and her plans will influence the outcome of the war with the Torrici.

Sonia is a master alchemist and poisoner—and she plans on using these traditional talents to destroy the Torrici. Naturally, the Torrici fear the poisons of the Balant, but Sonia's plan is to use a three-part contact poison, rarely suspected because of the difficulty of creating and delivering it. It is perfect because of the difficulty of counteracting or even detecting it. This will secure her reputation as the new master of the Balant. All she must do is perfect the formula.



TARA KATRAIN

Master Assassin of Katrain Family, Kingdom of Balant/Torrici

Female Human Asa16: CR 16; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 16d6; hp 58; Init +6; Spd 30 ft.; AC 20; Atk +19/+14/+9 melee (1d4+4, +4 *unholy defending punching dagger*), +15/+10/+5 ranged (1d8+1, +1 *light crossbow of speed*); SA Killing blow (4/day), sneak attack +3d6; AL LE; SV Fort +5, Ref +12, Will +7; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 18, Wis 14, Cha 17.

Possessions: +1 *light crossbow of speed*, +4 *unholy defending punching dagger*, *ring of invisibility*, *bracers of armor +8*, *masterwork disguise kit*.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +22, Concentration +19, Disguise +26, Gather Information +22, Hide +21, Intimidate +21, Listen +23, Move Silently +21, Sense Motive +21, Spot +23; Alertness, Combat Casting, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (disguise), Weapon Finesse (punching dagger), Weapon Focus (punching dagger), Deep Cover, Eavesdrop, Poison Use, Quick Change, Quicken Poison.

Languages Spoken: Common, Celestial, Draconic, Gnome, Infernal.

Spells Prepared (Asa 3/3/2/2): 1st—*change self*, *obscuring mist*, *spider climb*; 2nd—*alter self*, *pass without trace*, *undetachable alignment*; 3rd—*poison food or water*, *smoke form*; 4th—*dimension door*, *steal identity*.

Tara is the master assassin who serves Dame Zedlas, and maintains the family's tradition of disguise.



LITTLE FOOLSCAP

Amo of Brutti Family, Kingdom of Daris

Male Rock Gnome Asa10/Wiz7: CR 17; Small Humanoid; HD 7d4+10d6+17; hp 71; Init +7; Spd 20 ft.; AC 29; Atk +12/+7 melee (1d4+1, +1 dagger), +16/+11 ranged (1d8+2, +2 repeating crossbow of speed); SA Killing blow (3/day), sneak attack +2d6, spell-like abilities; SQ Low-light vision; AL NE; SV Fort +6, Ref +12, Will +9; Str 10, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 22, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Possessions: +2 repeating crossbow of speed, +3 animated large steel shield of arrow deflection, ring of protection +5, ring of regeneration, amulet of natural armor +5, masterwork poison kit.

Skills and Feats: Alchemy +31, Concentration +24, Craft (poison) +18, Craft (metalworking) +16, Forgery +19, Innuendo +10, Intimidate +13, Knowledge (the planes) +16, Knowledge (arcana) +16, Listen +18, Move Silently +16, Scry +16, Spellcraft +16, Spot +16; Alertness, Combat Casting, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (repeating crossbow), Improved Initiative, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Weapon Focus (repeating crossbow), Brew Potion, Scribe Scroll, Eavesdrop, Poison Use.

Languages Spoken: Common, Gnome, Abyssal, Celestial, Druidic, Draconic.

Spells Known (Wiz 4/6/5/3/2): 1st—animate rope, cause

fear, change self, charm person, color spray, magic missile, silent image, spider climb, true strike, unseen servant, ventriloquism; 2nd—alter self, blur, cat's grace, detect thoughts, fog cloud, invisibility, knock, levitate, minor image, mirror image, misdirection, protection from arrows, rope trick, Tasha's hideous laughter; 3rd—displacement, flame arrow, fly, gaseous form, haste, illusory script, major image, secret page, shrink item, water breathing; 4th—arcane eye, bestow curse, contagion, dimension door, hallucinatory terrain, ice storm, locate creature, minor globe of invulnerability, phantasmal killer, polymorph other, polymorph self, Rary's mnemonic enhancer, scrying, stoneskin.

Spells Prepared (Asa 3/3): 1st—detect poison, fast escape, shadow hands; 2nd—darkness, death knell, undetectable alignment.

Even as amo of the Brutti family, Little Foolscap is often underestimated. He enjoys this; after all, he has been an assassin long enough to remember the grandfathers and forefathers of most of the other amo—he is almost 333 years old. He remembers things most other families' amos took to their graves. And unlike the others, his family is almost entirely composed of his children and grandchildren and great grandchildren, so it is both loyal and predictable.

That's not to say that all is perfect among the Brutti. Little Foolscap enjoys seeing well-made devices work correctly, and he has several promising tools that he hopes to unleash from his workshop. Some of the younger Brutti, however, are grow more restless just as Little Foolscap grows more cautious with age. Sometimes he disappears for weeks into the Shadowlands, leaving the administration of family affairs to one of the master assassins. All Brutti fear that one day he may not return—and then the struggle for succession would be truly bloody, as Little Foolscap has never named an heir in his decades-long rule.

RICHKREISS ORDULE

Amo, Family and Kingdom of Ordule

Male Human Asa7/Mnk7: CR 14; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 7d6+7d8; hp 58; Init +5; Spd 30 ft.; AC 28; Atk +15/+10 melee (1d8+5, unarmed attack), +14/+9 ranged (1d4+3, +3 hand crossbow); SA Killing blow (2/day), sneak attack +1d6, stunning attack (7/day); SQ Evasion, purity of body, slow fall, still mind, wholeness of body; AL LE; SV Fort +10, Ref +14, Will +13; Str 20, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 17, Cha 11.

Possessions: +3 hand crossbow, ring of protection +3, ring of water walking, amulet of natural armor +3, belt of giant strength +6, bracers of armor +5.

Skills and Feats: Climb +23, Concentration +10, Disguise +10, Escape Artist +11, Hide +21, Intimidate +10, Jump +13, Move Silently +21, Tumble +11; Blind-Fight, Improved Trip, Improved Critical (unarmed



attack), Improved Initiative, Deflect Arrows, Power Attack, Cleave, Great Cleave, Weapon Focus (unarmed attack), Poison Use.

Languages Spoken: Common, Terran.

Spells Prepared (Asa 2): 1st—*obscuring mist, spider climb*.

All the Ordule are religious, but the amo of the family is more than just pious—he is fanatical. Richkreiss lives a life of denial, training, and self-perfection. He is a powerful monk as well as an expert assassin, and his prayers to the God of Death and the God of Night seem to be answered more often than not.

Richkreiss spends half of his waking hours in prayer and training; the remainder of the day he spends in consultation with the leading monks and clerics of the family, planning assassinations, promoting the worthy, and dispensing funds for supplies and salaries. Those who disagree with him sometimes find they must defend their opinions with a quick sparring match. In this way, the amo asserts his authority, maintains his own edge, and trains his followers. His word is very well respected, and not just because it is backed up by his powerful fists.

SAREL OF THE HOURGLASS

Master Assassin, Family and Kingdom of Varrangal

Male Yuan-Ti, Halfblood (legs and snake tail) Wiz10:

CR 17; Medium-size Monstrous Humanoid; HD 7d8+10d4+51; hp 111; Init +2; Spd 30 ft., Swim 15 ft.; AC 26; Atk +15/+10/+5 melee (*1d6+3, staff of power*); SA Constriction, psionics, poison, spell-like abilities; SQ Spell resistance; AL LE; SV Fort +10, Ref +12, Will +20; Str 13, Dex 14, Con 17, Int 27, Wis 23, Cha 19.

Possessions: *Staff of power, rod of negation, bracers of armor +8, ring of protection +3.*

Skills and Feats: Alchemy +21, Concentration +26, Hide +18, Knowledge (arcana) +31, Knowledge (nature) +27, Knowledge (religion) +31, Listen +22, Scry +21, Spellcraft +21, Spot +22; Combat Casting, Point Blank Shot, Brew Potion, Craft Rod, Craft Wand, Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Craft Wondrous Item, Scribe Scroll, Empower Spell, Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Heighten Spell, Maximize Spell, Quicken Spell, Silent Spell, Still Spell, Poison Use.

Languages Spoken: Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Elven, Giant, Gnome, Goblin, Infernal, Orc, Undercommon.

Spells Known (Wiz 4/6/6/5/5/3): 1st—*alarm, burning hands, charm person, color spray, comprehend languages, endure elements, enlarge, erase, expeditious retreat, identify, magic missile, obscuring mist, ray of enfeeblement, shield, shocking grasp, silent image, summon monster I, tenser's floating disk, true strike, unseen servant*; 2nd—*arcane lock, darkness, endurance, fog cloud, invisibility, knock, levitate, locate object, Melf's acid arrow, protection from arrows, see invisibility, spectral hand, summon monster II, web, whispering wind*; 3rd—*blink, dispel magic, displacement, explosive runes, haste, hold person, magic circle against good, sepia snake sigil, slow, wind walk*; 4th—*bestow curse, charm monster, detect scrying, dimension door, enervation, fire shield, minor creation, Otiluke's resilient sphere, polymorph self, Rary's mnemonic enhancer, shadow conjuration*; 5th—*animate dead, contact other plane, dismissal, dream, magic jar, nightmare, permanency, seeming, sending, summon monster V, telekinesis, teleport.*

Sarel was brought into the house of Varrangal by Jura, the young and energetic amo of the house. Sarel has been promised great hunts, great wealth, and great power among the assassins in return for his loyalty and ability. He worships the God of Time, which he sees as a great serpent biting its own tail. He studies the philosophies of many species, and he seeks to stop, twist, and bend time to his own ends. Despite much progress, Sarel's demands on the house are growing increasingly heavy, and the cost is more than Jura had expected. So far, all Sarel has produced are wands of haste and slow, a few longevity potions, and tantalizing hints of what a time stop and related magic could do to help the family accomplish astounding things.



Some of the assassins begin to grumble that Sarel stands, snakelike, doing nothing, for hours at a time; in fact, Sarel contemplates time. And one day, it will obey him completely.

JEHORA ALAMAI MOSTARFI BI ARCHTEDIIN

Lord of the Mountain

Male Human Clr14/Ftr6: CR 20; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 14d8+6d10+40; hp 139; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 35; Atk +28/+23/+18/+13 melee (1d10+13, +5 brilliant energy spell storing heavy flail; or 1d8+13, +5 keen thundering heavy lance), +16/+11/+6/+1 ranged; AL LE; SV Fort +16, Ref +6, Will +16; Str 23, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 21, Cha 12.

Possessions: +5 brilliant energy spell storing heavy flail, +5 keen thundering heavy lance, +5 full plate of invulnerability, +5 large steel shield of spell resistance 19, ring of protection +5, belt of giant strength +6, periapt of wisdom +6, rod of rulership.

Domains: Law, Straight Path.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +19, Diplomacy +17, Jump +15, Knowledge (religion) +17, Ride +9, Spellcraft +17; Improved Critical (heavy lance), Improved Critical (heavy flail), Mounted Combat, Trample, Ride-By Attack, Spirited Charge, Power Attack, Cleave, Weapon Focus (heavy lance), Weapon Focus (heavy flail), Weapon Specialization (heavy lance), Weapon Specialization (heavy flail).

Languages Spoken: Common.

Spells Prepared (Clr 6/7+1/6+1/5+1/5+1/4+1/3+1/2+1):
 0—detect magic (x2), light (x2), purify food and drink (x2); 1st—bless, cause fear, command (d), cure light wounds (x2), detect good, protection from good, remove fear; 2nd—cure moderate wounds (x4), hold person (d), lesser

restoration, silence; 3rd—cure serious wounds (x2), dispel magic (d), protection from elements, searing light, wind wall; 4th—cure critical wounds (x2), dismissal, freedom of movement, giant vermin, order's wrath (d); 5th—break enchantment (d), dispel chaos, flame strike, greater command, true seeing; 6th—blade barrier, forbiddance (d), greater dispelling, harm; 7th—blasphemy, destruction, sequester (d).

A former commandant of the Imperial Guard, Jehora was sent by the emperor to infiltrate the Sirat decades ago. Instead, he discovered the true faith of the Straight Path. Skilled and sincere, Jehora overcame the suspicions of others and has valiantly defended the Sirat on more than one occasion. It is said that the previous Lord of the Mountain had a vision that his predecessor would be a stranger to them all and knew upon sighting Jehora that he had been sent by the Divine.

Jehora is an ascetic with no apparent vices. He dresses in simple white robes, dines only on bread and water, and listens to the debates of the scholars every day. His greatest vice is a love for battle and he can often be found on the ramparts of the citadels during imperial raids, much to the dismay of the Eyes of the Prophet. The common Siratani say he is blessed by the Divine and that the imperials cannot harm him. In truth, his appearances are well-protected. When in or near battle, he is always guarded by protection spells and other abjurations to deflect harm. Jehora is no fool and knows the impact his death would have on the Sirat.

NASOUR ALAMAI MOSTARFI BI ARCHTEDIIN

Eye of Sacrifice, Eye of the Prophet

Male Human Asa14/Ftr5: CR 19; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 5d10+14d6+57; hp 138; Init +7; Spd 30 ft.; AC 27; Atk +21/+16/+11 melee (1d6+9, +5 vorpal scimitar) and +21/+21/+16 (1d6+8, +5 defending short sword of speed), +18/+13/+8 ranged; SA Killing blow (4/day), sneak attack +2d6; AL NE; SV Fort +16, Ref +18, Will +10; Str 14, Dex 16, Con 17, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 16.

Possessions: +5 vorpal scimitar, +5 defending short sword of speed, +5 studded leather of shadowy silent moves and fire resistance, ring of protection +3, amulet of natural armor +3, cloak of resistance +5, masterwork poison kit.

Skills and Feats: Climb +10, Craft (poison) +11, Craft (metalworking) +9, Handle Animal +11, Hide +30, Jump +10, Listen +17, Move Silently +30, Ride +13, Spot +17, Use Rope +19; Ambidexterity, Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Improved Critical (short sword), Improved Critical (scimitar), Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Cleave, Two-Weapon Fighting, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (scimitar), Weapon Focus (short sword), Weapon Specialization (short sword), Weapon Specialization (scimitar), Poison Use.

Languages Spoken: Common, Infernal.



Spells Prepared (Asa 3/1/1): 1st—*obscuring mist*; 2nd—*pass without trace*; 3rd—*ghost blade*.

The brother of the current Lord of the Mountain, Nasour is the second-in-command of the Sirat and the named successor to his brother. Like Jehora, he was a soldier in the imperial service. After his brother defected to the Sirat, Nasour (along with all branches of the Archtedin clan) was persecuted by the Imperial Censors. He was stripped of rank and imprisoned. His family's properties were all confiscated. His sons were killed and his wife and daughters were sold into bondage while the censors tortured him for information. It was a testament to his fierce will that he did not die before *fida'i* sent by Jehora rescued him.

Unlike many others, Nasour did not come to the Sirat out of pure faith. Saved by his brother, he joined the Sirat for revenge against the Empire that had wronged him and his family. He initially had no concern for the sect's doctrines. Jehora had rescued him and the Sirat offered a way to strike back at the Empire. Over the years he has absorbed the teachings of the Law and like a good soldier has accepted its way as his. No one will praise him for his less-than-subtle understanding of doctrine, but none will fault his determination and charismatic drive. The Sirat has become his cause. Nasour knows he is not a priest and leaves the finer points of the religion to them. He is a man of action, a warrior, and the most earnest of the *fida'i*. It is only natural that he commands the sect's corps of dedicated assassins. Most of all, he is utterly and absolutely loyal to his brother.

Like his brother, Nasour is a man of spartan, almost harsh, tastes. Tall, dark, scarred, and lean, he disdains comfort, luxury, and even the comradeship of others. His very aloofness and passion make him coldly charismatic. Should he become the Lord of the Mountain, the Sirat will become a terrible avenging force indeed.

ALLED MASSOON

Male Human Asn2/Rog9: CR 11; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 11d6+11; hp 52; Init +6; Spd 30 ft.; AC 18; Atk +11/+6 melee (1d6+1, +2 *short sword*), +9/+4 ranged (1d4-1, thrown dagger); SA Killing blow (1/day), sneak attack +5d6; AL LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +11, Will +3; Str 9, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 16.

Possessions: +2 *short sword*, +2 *leather armor*, *ring of protection* +2, *dust of disappearance*, *masterwork thieves' tools*.

Skills and Feats: Appraise +5, Balance +15, Climb +14, Disable Device +15, Disguise +17, Gather Information +17, Hide +17, Listen +14, Move Silently +17, Open Lock +16, Spot +14, Use Rope +14; Alertness, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Quick Draw, Run, Weapon Finesse (dagger).

Languages Spoken: Common, Goblin.

Born into the poverty of the streets, Alled was destined for a short life and quick hanging until he heard the fiery preaching of a Sirat recruiter. Within months, he had left the cities of the Imperium. Though he has since abandoned the pickpocketing, whoring, and gambling of his youth, Alled is considered all the more valuable for his experience in the fleshpots of the Imperium. He knows the slang and the ways of the streets and has skills valuable to the cause.

Physically, Alled is a 24 year-old man with dark black hair, a thick beard, and a set of startling green eyes. His clothes change frequently, but his gleaming and well-oiled +2 *short sword* is his constant companion, marked with the insignia of the Sirat. His daggers are unmarked, as he also uses them for cutting up bread, meat, and other food.

Alled Massoon's only real weakness is his relative lack of muscle; he's quick as a striking cobra, but his early poverty and famine stunted his growth. He'll never be a huge warrior carving a path across a battlefield—but he doesn't have to be.

Recently, he has been employed as a runner, carrying messages from the mountain retreats of the faith to the front lines in the towns and cities. He can run across hills and mountains for days without tiring. The player characters may encounter him disguised as a priest, as a merchant, or even (somewhat brashly) as an Imperial courier.

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