

JADE REGENT



WAY OF THE NINJA

“EVERY CITY HAS THIEVES. EVEN WITHIN THE MOST HONORABLE SOCIETY, THERE WILL ALWAYS BE THOSE WHO SEEK TO BETTER THEMSELVES THROUGH ILLEGITIMATE MEANS. AND WHERE YOU HAVE ENOUGH MEMBERS OF ANY PROFESSION YOU WILL EVENTUALLY HAVE GUILDS, BOUND BY SHARED PROFIT.

“IN MINKAI, HOWEVER, THERE IS A SECOND TYPE OF THIEF: THOSE WHO SHARE A GREATER PURPOSE, AND KILL AND STEAL FOR THE COLLECTIVE. THESE ARE THE SAME CUTTHROATS AND SECOND-STORY MEN, YET BOUND BY A CODE OF HONOR THAT MAKES THEM BOTH A THREAT TO SOCIETY AND AN INTEGRAL PART OF IT. SOME REFER TO THEMSELVES AS SECTS, OTHERS AS FAMILIES, BUT REGARDLESS, THE NINJA CLANS ARE UNLIKE ANY CRIMINALS YOU HAVE FACED BEFORE.”

—INSPECTOR TAKEDA OF ODA, TO A FOREIGN COUNTERPART

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Heavily shrouded in mystery and legend, the ninja clan is portrayed in various lights throughout the many lands of Golarion—most of which depict these collectives of guileful individuals as collaborations of violent rogues and assassins. Nowhere, however, is the mythos of the ninja clan so prevalent as in the birthplace of its tale, the nation of Minkai. Whether scheming within the sewers beneath a booming metropolis or huddled in the foothills of distant mountains, ninja hold sway in the underbellies of even the most ostensibly lawful societies, typically operating in shadows and under the guise of unified structures with larger goals.

NINJA CLANS

Ninja operate in a wide variety of circumstances, and under an equally diverse array of banners and goals. While many regard ninja as strictly evil entities who deal only in shadows and deceptions, the truth is that ninja can do as much to aid a society as to damage it, and that most of the time a ninja's motives are as elusive as the masked individual herself. Tales abound of vigilante ninja who assassinate corrupt dictators in the dead of night, yet more often ninja act as merciless mercenaries killing for the coin of powerful merchants and politicians. These masked individuals do not usually construct such elaborate schemes by themselves, however, and most subscribe to familial structures known as clans, which house members who share similar skills and motives. While ninja are commonly feared as glorified assassins, murder is merely a single facet of the shadow warriors' array of expertise, and they just as often possess the skills of spies, scouts, and informants. Each clan specializes in certain aspects of the ninja arts, such as espionage, kidnapping, or burglary, and a clan's particular realm of expertise is often a fair indicator of its larger-scale intentions and dealings.

The history of ninja clans in Minkai is almost as ancient as the nation itself, for the rogue organizations developed at the same time that Minkai warfare became a prominent driving force in the expansion of the empire, with small sects of shadowy warriors rising to power and functioning as soldiers of fortune for the wealthy warlords of the time. Clans' presences within Minkai society grew further as feudalistic principalities gave way to more elaborate governing forces, and open warfare became less viable than covert political dealings. As the Minkaians became accustomed to peace and a sense of calm within their governments, the need for ninja clans continued to expand, taking the fights from the crowded battlefields to the secluded shadows. While the samurai of Minkai—and the rest of Tian Xia—continue the tradition of honorable battle, no such over-arching strictures necessarily restrain ninja, allowing these warriors of darkness to infiltrate and thrive in countless communities.

Belonging to a clan offers a number of benefits to ninja characters, linking her to a cause and tradition. Advancement within the ranks of a clan may grant a character access to more tangible benefits such as the aid of fellow ninja, access to unusual items, or other boons, all subject to GM discretion. The following entries represent a handful of the most prominent ninja clans within Minkai, though other might exist in the country and elsewhere in Tian Xia. Each entry details a clan's founding, purpose, symbol, important members, weapons clan members seek to master, the clan's characteristic teachings, and any rivalries that may exist with other clans.

THE BLACK LOTUS

The Poison Ever Lethal

Symbol: A partially open lotus flower with sable petals.

Current Leader: Kinjo (LN male human ninja 7/ranger 2).

Favored Weapons: Dagger, shuriken, sickle.

Origin: The Black Lotus clan initially emerged within the underworld of Minkai as a band of poisoners with no alliances, willing to work for anyone and unified only under the banner of money. The ancient group's first leader, a ninja of myth known only as the First Lotus, severed ties to all patrons and rulers, knowing that the survival of his clan depended on its being an impartial tool of war rather than the captive weapon of one side or another. Now, the Black Lotus clan's connections and influences run deep in all realms of Minkai society. Their schemes dip into the affairs of every major city, though it is universally known that their aid can be bought for the right price, the clan pledging allegiance only to the highest bidder.

Outlook: Ninja of the Black Lotus clan are almost always lawful neutral, their morals dependent on what profits are to be gained. As long as it pays, no job is too despicable for the mercenaries, and when a sum is paid, the task's completion is assured. The only thing that binds a ninja of the Black Lotus more than the payment of a task is the pact itself, as each ninja stakes her honor on the agreement when it is made. If a ninja of the Black Lotus clan is paid to assassinate a wealthy lord, the ninja will see that the job is done, regardless of how much gold the sniveling victim offers the assassin to spare his life. Only after the completion of the task will she accept another mission. If this next task is the demise of a former employer, it matters not to an operative of the Black Lotus, for the members of the clan view each assignment as a singular loyalty in and of itself. Beyond this convoluted moral philosophy, the Black Lotus clan as a whole distrusts the use of brute force and powerful magic. A Black Lotus ninja may carry an enchanted sword or quaff a restorative potion in the heat of an unexpected battle, but will never stake the success or failure of a mission on anything less than precision and guile,

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seeing one's body and one's skills as the only things that are truly trustworthy.

Members: Though the ninja of the Black Lotus clan are often strictly devoted only to the accumulation of wealth and power, members of this clan remain consistently loyal to one another, knowing that dissent within the group is a sure path to the clan's demise. It is strictly forbidden within the Black Lotus clan to accept a contract that targets a member of the clan or would otherwise jeopardize the success of the group, and the punishment for disobeying this law is the swift and silent death of the disobeier. Recruits come to the Black Lotus through many channels, and leaders of the clan themselves never have to search for members. Black Lotus ninja often come from humble origins, with apothecaries, street urchins, and con artists being among the most common candidates. An initiate's ability to keep his word is more important than his history, and few make it past the initial screening stages without proving their undying allegiance to the clan.

Black Lotus ninja sometimes take levels in the ranger class, allowing them to learn the skills of a practiced tracker without jeopardizing their abilities to remain hidden. Of all the clans of Minkai, the Black Lotus has the fewest spellcasters among its members. The current leader of the clan, however, has broken with tradition, and has begun recruiting alchemists for their knowledge of magical elixirs and compounds, which he believes to be the natural extension of the clan's original focus on poison, and necessary if his clan is to hold its own against more overt magic.

Tactics and Training: While most members of the Black Lotus clan retain their traditional respect for poison, many of them have moved beyond the subtlety of poisoned meals or drinks and instead prefer to deliver poison directly via blade or dart. The clan is also known for its impressive skills in the art of infiltration, its members perfecting the arts of infiltration and striking from the shadows of a victim's own home. Such ninja leave no evidence of their ever being in a location, though the clan's trademark memento is a petal from a black lotus flower, a parting gift that every member leaves in her wake upon successfully completing a mission.

Rivalries: The mercenary stance of the Black Lotus clan garners few rivalries from other clans, who often view the members of the Black Lotus as simply dramatic blades for hire. The one rivalry the Black Lotus clan does bitterly carry is with the Ruby Crypt, who use dark magic to pry secrets from the dead and even resurrect victims of Black Lotus attacks, the latter acts often undermining the Black Lotus's reputation for effective assassination. With their magic, ninja of the Ruby Crypt prove that even the most potent venom can be reversed, and their dealings often reveal the Black Lotus's inexperience with magic to be a crucial failing. Though Kinjo seeks to fix this shortcoming

within the strictures of the Black Lotus by making magic a more prominent aspect of training, Black Lotus agents still revel in accepting contracts that disrupt or otherwise compromise the workings of the Ruby Crypt.

THE DRAGONSHADOW

Claws of the Dragon

Symbol: A black silhouette of a dragon's claw.

Current Leader: Keirako (N male human fighter 2/ninja 7).

Favored Weapons: Katana, tekko-kagi.

Origin: The Dragonshadow clan boasts an expansive network of ninja across Minkai whose agents are thought to be in service to a powerful imperial dragon. Much of the clan's origins are as steeped in mystique as the ninja themselves, and while many opposing factions regard the rumor of an imperial dragon master to be nothing more than a hoax, some are not so easily assuaged. Thus the clan remains one of the most feared in the Dragon Empires. Though leaders of the clan come and go with some frequency, members of the clan swear allegiance to a single imperial dragon known as Mikaruna, and it is said that only the current leader of the clan may seek a direct audience with the dragon, a tradition that has reportedly led to many disputes and rivalries within the group.

Outlook: The Dragonshadow clan is said to be heavily influenced by the goals of its patron dragon, and the actions of the clan often stem from obscure prophecies spun by its leader. All of the clan's activities work toward strengthening their draconic leader and expanding his horde, and so its members are often in search of powerful artifacts and vaults of treasure. Particularly audacious members of the Dragonshadow clan earn prestige and power within their ranks by means of assassination and subterfuge among their own kind, but most ninja in the clan content themselves with elaborate schemes to grow their master's hoard.

Members: Due to the sporadic and unpredictable bouts of infighting within the ranks of the Dragonshadow clan, turnover rates are often high, and new blood is continually being introduced into the legions of ninja. Rumors abound of Dragonshadow ninja having access to powerful spells and intricate magical items, and these myths drive many fortune-seekers and treasure hunters to join the clan's numbers. Only the most dedicated candidates survive the rigorous recruiting process, a series of trials whose specifics remain among the clan's best-guarded secrets. Dragonshadow ninja are expected to utilize both physical and arcane strength when completing contracts, and the most powerful members are often individuals who have been trained from childhood in the shadow arts. Sorcerers are prized among the Dragonshadow clan—especially those whose bloodlines hint at draconic origins—and the most powerful members of the clan often train later as dragon disciples.

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Tactics and Training: Members of the Dragonshadow clan employ both sorcery and stealth on their missions, increasing their intimidating reputation by barraging their enemies with fearful illusions while they silently destroy them. Using both magic and trickery, Dragonshadow ninja use destructive abilities such as alchemically produced breath weapons and enchanted claw weapons to perpetuate the tales of their draconic powers. While each member of the Dragonshadow clan emulates one particular kind of dragon, all training within the clan emphasizes speed and even flight (among those capable). Those who master such abilities are highly regarded within the clan's ranks.

Rivalries: Dragonshadow ninja possess a fierce pride similar to the dragons they exalt. While infighting is common enough, all members of the clan eagerly unite if it means shaming another clan and proving superiority. Few would call the Dragonshadow clan a direct rival, but fewer still would consider the power-hungry group an ally.

THE EMERALD BRANCH

For the People

Symbol: A cluster of bright green bamboo stalks.

Current Leader: Asahina Zetsu-kai (CG female human aristocrat 3/ninja 5/samurai 3).

Favored Weapons: Kama, bo staff.

Origin: Generally regarded as being composed of heroes of the common folk, the clan of the Emerald Branch is thought to have originally been founded by ronin. The first members of the Emerald Branch are said to have been honorable samurai who were duped by a manipulative and evil lord into performing atrocities against innocents. When the samurai discovered what horrors their master had made them do, they slew their lord in stealth and rededicated their lives to serving the common folk, renouncing their titles as samurai as penance for their crimes. Using the skills of deception and stealth they had gained while working for the evil lord, the ex-samurai formed the clan of the Emerald Branch, swearing to recruit any who prove themselves able and who are dedicated to the pursuit of good at all costs. Now, despite being labeled as instigators and rabble-rousers by their detractors, ninja of the Emerald Branch are often welcome in areas both rural and urban, and always sow their seeds of justice among the poor and fragile before lending any aid to the rich and powerful.

Outlook: Most members of the Emerald Branch are chaotic good, seeing the majority of laws—no matter how well intentioned—as a stepping stone upon which greater tyranny builds. Leaders among the Emerald Branch are often high-ranking members of other philanthropic organizations, using their influence to direct attention away from the clan's more questionable dealings. Their opponents often consider the clan's actions to be reckless

and without forethought, ideals which members of the clan claim are at the heart of true freedom.

Members: More than perhaps any other clan, the Emerald Branch seeks to recruit members from the common folk. While the Oni's Mask clan trains ninja to pass as artisans or laborers before dealing a deadly strike, most members of the Emerald Branch actually are workers of this sort. In the towns and villages where they operate, even the strongest ninja of the Emerald Branch often practice a trade during the day, using their earnings and materials to fund the clan while maintaining a positive presence within the public eye. While it may seem a life of tranquility, ninja of the Emerald Branch are as prone to violent action as any other, knowing the end of a blade is sometimes the swiftest way to a desired result. Reflecting the story of its founders, the clan of the Emerald Branch also counts many ronin among



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its numbers, embracing those who seek to pledge allegiance to a valiant cause.

The clan's current head, Asahina Zetsu-kai, is a matronly but strong leader who runs a network of garment houses dealing in exotic silks. This cover allows Asahina to dispatch her most trusted operatives to even the most unlikely regions under the cover of textile merchants.

Tactics and Training: While opponents of the Emerald Branch do their utmost to spread rumors that the clan is no more than a band of amateurs, training within the Emerald Branch is as intense as any other ninja clan. In addition to the physical requirements placed upon a potential ninja, an initiate must prove apt at gathering the support of the people and making snap moral decisions under stressful circumstances. The use of symbols and signs is an important skill among members of the Emerald Branch, as communication between members is often discrete and swift. Emerald Branch ninja practice with a wide variety of weapons, making many members experts in using seemingly mundane equipment for deadly purposes.

Rivalries: The Emerald Branch usually seeks to combat the wrongdoings of tyrannical warlords and evil political figures rather than stimulate rivalries with other clans. The malevolent Oni's Mask clan often proves a thorn in the side of the Emerald Branch, and the two groups often find themselves on opposite sides of the same issues. Whenever the Emerald Branch and Oni's Mask clans cross paths, conflict is brutal and swift.

ONI'S MASK

Blood of the Fiend

Symbol: A snarling crimson oni mask.

Current Leaders: Genhara the Black-Winged (NE male yamabushi tengu ninja 6).

Favored Weapons: Katana, nodachi.

Origin: The clan of the Oni's Mask is a relatively new contender in the realm of ninja clans, but its expansion within Minkai has been swift, and those who know its name do well to fear it. The leader of the clan, a monster named Genhara the Black-Winged, formed the group after slaying the master of the clan he previously belonged to, an organization whose name the ruthless oni scoured from history. The cause of this feud remains unknown, but rumors suggest that the yamabushi tengu somehow absorbed the power of his previous leader and used it to fuel

his own efforts. Genhara makes no attempts to hide his ultimate goals, one of which is the death of a particularly powerful zuishin against whom the oni has long held a grudge. Using his highly skilled ninja to pursue and eliminate kami and other enemies of onikind, Genhara rules his clan mercilessly and with meticulous forethought. While it is usually difficult for casual outsiders to hire members of the Oni's Mask clan, those whose contracts involve the demise of significant kami may have an easier time of it.

Members: Genhara runs the Oni's Mask clan through precise and calculated cruelty, appointing trustworthy cronies to minor positions of power within the strictures of the clan. Though a few traitors have sought to oppose the yamabushi tengu and usurp his position of power, none have succeeded, and the punishment for dissent is both brutal and final. Lowly members rise among the ranks of the clan through unquestioning obedience and the slaughter of kami. Although some have thought to keep the skulls or other trophies from slain kami as proof of their annihilation, Genhara finds little pleasure in such vanity, being happiest when no trace of his enemies remain.

Members of the Oni's Mask clan value stealth above all other things, and followers are trained to shed all forms of pride in favor of fatal precision and skill. To leaders of the clan of the Oni's Mask, there is no room in a ninja's mind for what comes before or after a kill—only the kill itself matters. Most of the clan's recruits are abandoned children taken from the streets and trained as assassins from an early age. These recruits often prove the most loyal and the most skilled, and so Genhara personally sees to the capture of many orphans, urchins, and the young offspring of their victims.

Tactics and Training: Agents of the Oni's Mask typically target either kami or high-ranking government officials. By cutting off the heads of well-meaning factions, Oni's Mask ninja sow discord and darkness everywhere they strike, evils that Genhara assures are all part of his master plan. Since almost all of the missions assigned to ninja of the Oni's Mask come straight from Genhara himself, payment is distributed on a similar basis, riches acquired in heists and high-profile burglaries going to the clan's treasury before being split among its deserving members. Members of the Oni's Mask are dedicated to their master's



cause, and all wear fiendish red masks to conceal their identities. On the rare occasions where ninja of the clan have been caught, witnesses have said that the faces beneath the masks are those of monsters—disfigured beyond recognition, leading many to believe that the clan performs cultlike rituals of debasement upon its members in addition to their other evils.

Rivalries: Genhara's clan and its activities are known and feared by nearly all kami within Minkai, who seek mortal allies in their constant struggle against the menacing force. Beyond these natural rivals, the rampant fear spread by the clan has earned it the eternal enmity of the benevolent Swallowtail Clan, and its violence against peaceful and kind rulers also garners the scorn of the Emerald Branch. However, try as they might, few—if any—have ever pinpointed the hideout of the Oni's Mask, and the elusive ninja are known to seemingly disappear for months or years before striking.

THE RUBY CRYPT

Fates Worse than Death

Symbol: A ruby behind four vertical bars.

Current Leaders: Ranessa (LE female human ninja 7/ sorcerer 5).

Favored Weapon: Kusarigama.

Origin: Members of the Ruby Crypt embrace death in all its forms, and its most zealous members maintain that even death cannot accomplish what more sinister forms of manipulation can reveal. The history of the Ruby Crypt is cloaked by rumor and misinformation. Most origin myths take the form of some kind of riddle, and suggest that the Ruby Crypt clan was once no more than a small collaboration of otherwise unaligned ninja. These ninja joined together to accomplish the difficult mission of silencing a rich noble. While the ninja had little trouble completing the task, they found that the noble was so powerful that he could resurrect himself, and did so every morning after the ninja killed him. The ninja eventually managed to capture the noble, and they imprisoned him deep beneath this city so that though he lived, he was silenced. This story, whether true or merely a fable, aptly illustrates the Ruby Crypt clan's most powerful ideology: that death can be reversed, but imprisonment at the hands of a patient and cunning captor can be made eternal.

Outlook: The members of the Ruby Crypt are usually neutral evil, and they excel at both abduction and torture, performing such wicked deeds for anyone if the price is right. Ninja of the clan maintain that the acquisition of secrets and knowledge are tantamount to power, and that both can be achieved far more readily through coercion than murder. The merciless detachment clan members must possess in order to perform their work usually draws only the most wicked to their fold, with lawful

evil members rising to levels of leadership and others mastering techniques of capture and restraint.

Members: The clan's current leader is a mysterious woman named Ranessa, a ninja said to possess necromantic powers and a diabolical bloodline. Using her abilities to summon extraplanar allies and bend the will of even fiends, the sorcerer encourages the use of magic to augment the guile of individual clan members. Those who join the ranks of the Ruby Crypt often possess magical talent, encouraging numerous clerics, sorcerers, and wizards to join the clan. Yet more valued than all other spellcasters are inquisitors, those who perfectly blend magic and martial ability with the unique skills and demeanors required to wring valuable information out of victims. The most powerful members of the Ruby Crypt are those with the power to speak with the dead or even bring them back to life, though these abilities are only used when the dead in question possesses knowledge truly worth siphoning. Often, agents of the Ruby Crypt seek such subjects in jails and prisons, looking for magic users condemned for the darkest workings of spellcraft. These recruiters offer such criminals freedom in exchange for binding service to the clan, an offer that most happily accept.

Tactics and Training: The members of the Ruby Crypt train in the shadow arts like all other clans, but specialize in abduction over assassination, often using sleep-inducing poisons or nonlethal weapons to knock out targets before dragging them back to a designated holding area. Later, a captured foe is usually imprisoned more permanently within one of the myriad dungeons the clan maintains throughout Minkai. Ninja of the Ruby Crypt keep their prisoners alive as long as possible, drawing secrets and potent knowledge from the victims via prolonged torture, both physical and psychological. Only those seeking extremely well-kept secrets or who otherwise wish to see rivals suffer hire agents of the Ruby Crypt, for its members demand exorbitant fees for their intricate labors.

Rivalries: Ninja of the Ruby Crypt primarily concern themselves with individual targets of great importance that provide access to equally important secrets. Benevolent ninja clans abhor the doings of the Ruby Crypt, not only for their crimes, but also their incessant meddling in the affairs of mortality. More than once have the ninja of other clans been hired to infiltrate Ruby Crypt bastions in the hopes of freeing select prisoners, though few such missions have ever succeeded. In addition to reviling these good-natured clans, the members of the Black Lotus hold particular hatred for the Ruby Crypt, as its dealings often result in the undoing of previously settled contracts. Although the two once fought much more fervently in times long past, the smirch to the Black Lotus's honor has neither been forgiven nor forgotten.