



## NORGORBER

**N**orgorber (NOR-GOR-ber) is one of the Ascended, a mortal who became a god through the power of the *Starstone*. Little is known of his life as a mortal, for he conceals this information—or has murdered those who knew him—so others may not use it against him. He is a mysterious deity who rarely lets anyone learn much about his goals or interests. Only his most favored worshipers know more than the most general information about him so they may help bring about his plans in the world, and sometimes he wipes the knowledge from their minds when the job is done to better preserve his secrets. Beyond these basic ideas, he says little, as he does not want to disclose anything useful to his enemies. Some sages believe that if Norgorber's true nature were discovered, he would be undone—perhaps as a side effect of his passing the Test of the *Starstone*, or perhaps from some sacrifice he has made for greater power. He is also unique among the Ascended in that he is the only evil one, though he is not overtly malicious like Lamashtu or Rovagug, for his power relies on the manipulation of others, not their destruction.



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Norgorber has four aspects, all of them sinister. Those who call him the Reaper of Reputation venerate him primarily as the god of secrets and are typically spies or politicians. Thieves' guilds often revere him as the Gray Master, and look to his skills as a thief more than anything else. Many alchemists, herbalists, and assassins know him as Blackfingers and see his work in every poisoned meal and venomous beast. His most notorious and dangerous cultists, though, are the madmen, murderers, and maniacs who call him Father Skinsaw, and believe that with every murder, the future is sculpted according to their dark god's unknowable plan.

In artwork, Norgorber is shown only as a featureless, polished black mask, or sometimes as an invisible man dressed in the garb of a thief. Other depictions show him as a spectrelike figure with an obscured face and sinister black gloves. Those who try to paint or sculpt him as a recognizable figure, even if the image is purely from the artist's imagination and not based on any knowledge or insight, find their hands fumbling and their work increasingly erratic if they persist, until their motor control is permanently afflicted. Wiser priests of his church say this is because if the god only blotted out accurate depictions of him, mortals could deduce his true appearance by determining what they are not allowed to paint, so instead he simply hinders all attempts to portray his visage.

The Reaper of Reputation cares little for flashy displays of power. When he manifests to mortals, he appears to be a normal human dressed in brown and black, of average height and build, always with his face concealed or entirely invisible. Mortals in his presence always have the impression that he's actually behind them, even when he stands in full view of a crowd, and he is vaguely threatening even when speaking pleasantly.

Norgorber treasures secrets like misers hoard gold, whether the secret is his own or belongs to a mortal or supernatural creature. He counts and catalogs these secrets, and measures them by their value based on whether they are totally hidden, known to a few, in the hands of an enemy, or open secrets. He trades them for more valuable secrets, gives them away if such knowledge serves his long-term goals, and takes them from volunteers who can't trust themselves not to speak of what they know. He modifies memories or kills to preserve secrets. It is important to note that he is not a god of lies, but sometimes finds lies useful—in particular, if a secret is actually a lie and its existence protects the truth of the matter or makes it more

valuable. Still, he dislikes altering knowledge or fact to make a true thing false or a false thing true.

Norgorber understands that controlling something is having power over that thing, and having power leads to wanting more power. This desire can motivate people to commit illicit or immoral acts to obtain what they seek. Because he is subtle rather than overt, Norgorber knows there may be negative consequences for acting directly against whoever controls the thing you desire, which leads to deceptive, circumspect, and insidious methods like blackmail and poisoning rivals. Of course, some poisons are merely an inconvenience to the target, and some targets are easier to eliminate than to accommodate. Together, these ideas make Norgorber the god of secrets, greed, poison, and murder—four pernicious traits interwoven to create a treacherous whole.

Norgorber's realm in the Great Beyond is a network of sprawling tunnels and caverns beneath the perfect city of Axis. Its shadows and dark inhabitants hum silently with secret intent, bending the letter and spirit of Axis's laws but never going so far as to disrupt

the harmony upon which it feeds. The domain connects to various points in Axis, not always in a conventional manner or relying on normal perceptions of time and space. Norgorber's presence and that of his followers is like the grease in a complex mechanism: dirty, messy, and hidden away, but crucial to its overall function.

Like a thief in the night, Norgorber is subtle in his direct intervention. When he is pleased, a pickpocket finds a gold coin in an otherwise poor man's purse, a spy overhears a juicy bit of information from an unexpected source, a poisoned weapon retains its coating for a second attack, or a slain guard dies with merely a quiet gurgle. When roused to anger, however, his ire is carefully measured and meted out suddenly. A thief finds she's lost the jewel she was supposed to steal, a speaker completely forgets whatever important topic he was talking about, an envenomed blade nicks the hand of even a master assassin, or a skilled murderer finds himself downed by a lucky blow from an alley thug. Norgorber is disinclined to kill his own useful followers, even if they know far too much, and prefers to instead punish them with humiliation, sickness, or a crippling injury for a time, wiping key information from their minds to preserve his master plan. However, he has been known to kill those who are of no further use to him, especially those whose lives could be a threat to his objectives, and even more so if their deaths also serve as a lesson to surviving members of the cult.



**"THERE IS VALUE IN THE THINGS THAT OTHERS SHUN OR CONCEAL. A SECRET IS AN INTANGIBLE COIN WORTH MORE THAN A NOBLE'S MURDER."**

**—THE WORDS BEHIND THE MASK**





Norgorber is neutral evil and his portfolio is greed, secrets, poison, and murder. His weapon is the short sword and his holy symbol is a featureless black mask, sometimes polished to a mirror-sheen. Some cults represent his presence as a black masklike badge or an empty black glove, and are known to nail a black glove to a door as a warning to someone who has offended the cult. His domains are Charm, Death, Evil, Knowledge, and Trickery.

His faith is outlawed or at least persecuted in most civilized lands. Fortunately, the cult's reliance on secrecy allows it to thrive under these conditions, whether operating behind a facade of legitimate business or literally working underground with lairs and meeting-places in a city's sewers and basements. Many city-dwelling members of the cult lead double lives, reputable by day and murderous at night. Some gifted priests pretend to be members of a different religion, speaking false prayers and making false offerings to a different god with laypeople none the wiser, and only showing their true colors and allegiance when in the company of the Sons and Daughters of the Mask. A few—particularly among the crazed worshipers of Father Skinsaw—take this habitual dual identity to such an extreme that they develop a form of psychosis, living two lives separated by nightfall and sunrise, completely forgetting the existence of the other self except for brief moments of transition.

Norgorber's primary worshipers are thieves, assassins, and murderers, with alchemists, spies, and politicians a minority among the faithful. Common folk are rightfully suspicious of any who openly worship Norgorber, fearing them for being thieves, bandits, and liars at best and assassins or serial killers at worst.

Ceremonies to Norgorber are quiet, even in cities where his faith is tolerated. Typically, a masked senior priest leads a prayer, pausing for murmured assent from the faithful. Ceremonies avoid singing or using musical instruments, though some rituals are accompanied by the shaking of coins in a cup or the sharpening of a blade with a whetstone.

Norgorber has no opinion about marriage or families. He recognizes that some cults and guilds have strong traditions of marriage, forming powerful crime families that vie for control of a city's business, but doesn't care whether these marriages are political, romantic, barren, or fruitful. He does, however, recognize that marriage often leads to infidelity and secrecy, and relishes the opportunities this gives mortals to manipulate each other, for even an honest man can be corrupted if his lover puts his arranged marriage at risk.

Most of Norgorber's cults are associated with or run a thieves' guild, and the guildlike traditions have carried over into temple practices, even for the other three aspects of the god. Once a new member of the cult has established competency at basic tasks, she is usually given a mission

relating to the cult's more nefarious activities. Successfully completing this mission is a rite of passage within the cult and elevates the member to full (journeyman) status within the organization. For example, a cult of the Gray Master may require a person to steal goods of a certain minimum value, recruit an especially attractive person into prostitution, get a gambler into a specified amount of debt, or use violence to extort a significant protection payment from a merchant. In the cult of Blackfingers, membership is attained upon the synthesis of a particular poison, reverse-engineering a drug's components from its final product, or discovering a new alchemical use for an animal gland. For followers of the Reaper, typical initiations involve liberating a choice secret, defaming or defeating a key rival outside the organization, or accomplishing a political goal of value to the cult. Unsurprisingly, the challenges of the cult of Father Skinsaw involve murder, either of a high-profile target or a specific number of people in a short period of time.

## THE FOUR ASPECTS

Members of Norgorber's cult usually align themselves to one of his four aspects and ignore the others. Though the faithful are all "Sons and Daughters of the Mask" and the different branches of the church might work together toward some secret plan orchestrated by the god and his direct agents, in many respects they operate like four distinct churches of different deities.

### BLACKFINGERS

In his alchemist and poisoner aspect, Norgorber represents unethical experimentation for the sake of knowledge and the use of alchemical knowledge to harm others. His alchemists breed spiders and scorpions with stronger venom, invent paralytics and memory-fogging drugs to aid criminal activity, and practice vivisection and surgery without anesthetic to discover secrets of the flesh or create hybrid or altered monsters. By mastering the use of exotic drugs and toxins that duplicate the effects of food poisoning, dropsy, and dyspepsia, his assassins engineer deaths easily attributed to accidents. The god's followers prefer masks of smoked glass, ostensibly to protect the wearers' faces from chemical spatters but also concealing their identity when meeting with other cultists. Disciples of Blackfingers are not kindly folk and rarely use their knowledge for benign purposes. Good- and neutral-inclined alchemists usually worship Abadar, Gozreh, or Nethys instead, though all have at least heard of the secrets taught by Blackfingers.

### FATHER SKINSAW

The most dangerous branch of Norgorber's church is the Skinsaw Cult. It attracts the most extreme and dangerously insane folk, from bloodthirsty bandits to unabashed serial



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killers. Many of them wear magical masks made of human skin that allow them to detect the most vulnerable parts of their targets (see page 426 of *Pathfinder Adventure Path: Rise of the Runelords Anniversary Edition*). For these evil men and women, every murder is a prayer to their dark god and a step toward completing his mysterious plan. Their killings are not clean or gentle; bodies are mutilated and the scene of the crime left bloody. No good or neutral person worships Father Skinsaw. Those whose honest work is killing (such as executioners, mercenaries, or soldiers) normally serve Abadar, Gorum, or Iomedae instead.

### THE GRAY MASTER

Just as a predator hunts the weakest prey animal in a herd, worshipers of Norgorber's thieving aspect target the weakest and most vulnerable citizens in a society. Whether through burglary, gambling, prostitution, extortion, blackmail, or selling illegal materials, the guild profits at the expense of others and usually outside the allowances of the law. Individual thieves' guilds vary from evil thugs who would disfigure a merchant or his family members for not paying protection money to nearly legitimate organizations that don't allow drugs or the mistreatment of prostitutes in their territory. Masks of this cult are usually simple strips of gray or black cloth that create anonymity by concealing the face below the eyes, often a scraps of cloth or scarves that are easily discarded after a crime. Neutral and evil thieves worship the Gray Master; good individuals who like the idea of liberating wealth from evil folk usually prefer Cayden Cailean or Desna.

### THE REAPER OF REPUTATION

Perhaps the most benign (if that is the word) aspect of Norgorber is his guardianship of hidden information, which makes him a favorite of politicians and spies. Secrets and manipulation are bread and butter to these folk, and even the most amiable politician or good-hearted spy is wise to master their use. Of course, most of the Reaper's followers have selfish interests at heart, using their knowledge or influence for personal gain, but those interests might benefit others as well. For example, the guildmaster of a crafting guild who manipulates market prices to drive out foreign competition enriches the wealth of the artisans he represents as well as his own. However, most of the Reaper's followers are simply corrupt politicians and informants for powerful tyrants or despots. Some followers of the Reaper take a more aggressive route to gathering information, most notoriously the mysterious Ustalavic assassins known as the Anaphexia, who collect esoteric secrets and slay all others who possess such knowledge. A typical mask for a worshiper of the Reaper is a domino or masquerade mask or a spiral that covers the mouth. Good folk interested in politics usually flock to Abadar and Iomedae instead, and nonevil spies usually follow Cayden Cailean, Iomedae, or Torag.







## TEMPLES AND SHRINES

Norgorber's temples are organized like thieves' guilds. A guildmaster (usually a rogue, assassin, or cleric) runs each temple, with lieutenants and lesser bosses in charge of various plans and controlling teams of followers. Temples to Blackfingers sometimes operate more like a merchant's guild with a legitimate front selling exotic substances.

Ceremonial clothing for the church is predominantly black and brown. Attracting attention to the cult by standing out from local fashion is frowned upon, so the clothing styles usually follow current trends to allow the wearer to blend in with those outside the faith.

Shrines are uncommon in the faith. Any place with a large populace supports a temple that operates in secrecy, leaving little need for another location that the public could discover. The Skinsaw cult may secretly bury the remains of murdered victims in public places and treat such sites as shrines, albeit shrines with no obvious markings. Followers of Blackfingers might designate one place in town as their dumping-ground for dangerous alchemical leftovers, creating a blighted space where nothing grows and treating it as a shrine to the god's secrets.



## A PRIEST'S ROLE

Norgorber welcomes people from all walks of life into his priesthood. Most are rogues, clerics, bards, assassins, or alchemists, but inquisitors, shadowdancers, illusionists, enchanters, and even more exotic types are not unheard of. A few druids and witches serve Blackfingers for his patronage of poisonous creatures, and particularly heinous barbarians venerate the brutal teachings of Father Skinsaw. Depending on which aspect their temples favor, priests usually have some skill in thievery, information-gathering, poison, or stealth.

Thievery, whether common or elaborate, is a typical profession for priests. Some are master imitators, stealing others' identities and using them to cover up dark deeds or simply take their valuables from homes and vaults.

Others use their knowledge of alchemy, poisons, and potions to keep villains supplied in deadly goods while keeping public personas of harmless apothecaries. More sociable priests work as diplomats, spies, or negotiators, buying and selling information and contracts.

Followers behave according to their chosen aspect of the god. Those who worship the Reaper of Reputation are coy and secretive, followers of Blackfingers tend to be bookish, those of the Gray Master are greedy and covetous, and those of Father Skinsaw are antisocial. Of course, these traits color rather than define a worshiper, and while some are caricatures of these qualities, most have the good sense to rein in their urges and present a normal demeanor to the outside world.

## HOLIDAYS

Norgorber's followers celebrate his Ascension in midwinter by snatching a random person from the street, bringing her to their temple, quietly murdering her with poison, then hiding the body where it will never be found. Cults that avoid killing might plant incriminating evidence on a target, drug a target and place him in a compromising position, or steal something valuable in a way that embarrasses its owner.

## APHORISMS

With four different aspects and countless individual organizations scattered across the Inner Sea region, only two phrases stand out as common to the entire religion.

**With One Hand I Give:** Used as a salutation, this is also a warning—the speaker's true motivations remain secret, and a gift in one hand may be offset by a threat in the other.

**I Wait for a Fair Price:** Something of little apparent value may be worth something in the right hands or whispered in the proper ear. A person who says this possesses some item or knows some secret that has not yet reached its full potential.



## HOLY TEXT

At least 17 short texts are associated with the faith, all given innocuous code names and often disguised as mundane books or encoded to prevent easy scrutiny. Among the faithful, the collected teachings of Norgorber are called *The Words Behind the Mask*, though any two cults may have very different ideas about how the chapters are organized, the specific wording of certain phrases, or which sections are the most important.

## RELATIONS WITH OTHER RELIGIONS

Norgorber is careful to maintain civil relations with most deities. When he must act against another deity, he does so through intermediaries or in ways that obscure his involvement, allowing him to appear innocent even under great scrutiny. As a master of secrets, he is often able to use his knowledge to leverage assistance out of those who dislike him, usually for the purpose of striking a common enemy. He has been known to unexpectedly assist those who dislike or oppose him, most likely to achieve a secret goal.

Of all the major deities, only six refuse to speak with Norgorber. Abadar opposes him, as the god of thievery represents an aversion to the idea of laws benefiting a society, and his actions directly undermine merchants and the acquisition of honest wealth. Cayden Cailean considers him a coward and a villain—and perhaps some of their rivalry is due to them being the only surviving males among the Ascended. Erastil has seen him and his followers ruin enough lives—whether through criminal activity or family-damaging secrets—to never trust him. Iomedae steadfastly believes Norgorber has evaded justice for far too long, and thinks the dark god was somehow involved in the death of Aroden. Sarenrae has given him enough chances to redeem himself and has been burned many times by Norgorber using false repentance to further some evil plot. Torag hates him because he is the cancer that destroys a city from within, despite the mightiest walls to keep out dangerous foes. Despite their enmity, even these deities have dealt with Norgorber in the past through intermediaries to obtain some of his valuable secrets.

Father Skinsaw has a unique relationship with Achaek. Both love the conception, planning, and execution of a murder, and the two cults have been known to work together. He has been known to consort with Gyronna and Sivanah as well, calling upon their aid directly or manipulating them for his own purposes, and withdrawing in silent amusement when they manage to manipulate him in turn.

## NEW SPELL

The unique magical abilities of a priest of Norgorber depend on which aspect is the priest's patron. Clerics and druids of Blackfingers may spontaneously cast *poison* as

## CUSTOMIZED SUMMON LIST

Norgorber's priests can use *summon monster* spells to summon the following creatures in addition to the normal creatures listed in the spells.

### Summon Monster III

Human natural wererat rogue 2\*

### Summon Monster IV

Choker\*

### Summon Monster V

Shadow mastiff (*Bestiary* 3)

\* This creature has the extraplanar subtype but is otherwise normal for its kind.

a 3rd-level spell. Clerics of the Reaper of Reputation may prepare *nondetection* as a 3rd-level spell. Clerics of Father Skinsaw may spontaneously cast *slay living* as a 5th-level spell. Clerics of the Gray Master may spontaneously cast *clairaudience/clairvoyance* as a 3rd-level spell, and his antipaladins may prepare it as a 2nd-level spell.

In addition to *poison egg* (see *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Gods and Magic*), his priests have access to the following spell, which they often cast on patsies to wipe their memories after they've magically compelled them to commit a crime.

## FALSE ALIBI

**School** enchantment (compulsion) [mind-affecting]; **Level** bard 3, cleric 3, inquisitor 3 (Norgorber)

**Casting Time** 1 round

**Components** V, S, M (100 gp of emerald dust)

**Range** close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

**Target** one living creature

**Duration** permanent; see text

**Saving Throw** Will negates; **Spell Resistance** yes

This spell functions similar to *modify memory*, except you can modify the target's memory only in a specific way. In response to a triggering condition you determine, up to the last 5 minutes of the target's memory are eliminated and replaced with a memory of your choosing (or no memory at all). For example, you could cast this on an assassin, set it to trigger when he completes his kill, and replace his memory of the murder with the memory of him discovering the body and picking up the murder weapon. You can cast this spell multiple times on the same target, even with the same trigger, affecting different memories. A single casting of false alibi affects a creature only until the specified condition has been triggered; once a condition has been triggered and the target's memory altered, that condition no longer triggers this spell unless the victim is subject to another casting of *false alibi* that specifies the same trigger.