



FACES OF THE EARTHBOUND EVILS

A PATHFINDER'S GUIDE TO RAKSHASAS

“None dared accept an invitation to the Palace of Emerald and Ivy, the home of Vanswati Jhonancore, called the Rani of Cloves or the Krait Queen. Thrice yearly the jade gates opened, admitting all who had not heard the tales. Within, silk and spices and slender ankles danced a dream of imperial luxury, of heady scents, and of stirred passions. Long into the night, the royal madam showered her visitors in coins and boascare gems, rewarding those who sung like olive thrushes and spun tales of glistening thread. And with the morning, when those who remained were drunk on honeyed wine, greasy quail, and spiced plantain, the bitter Lady of Coils would remove her face, don her scales, and make a feast of her guests.”

—Translated from *Histories of the Impossible*

Rakshasas are born on Golarion, but they are not of it. Although they possess the powers and shapes of fiends, their fates are inexorably tied to the mortal world, and there they seek to rule. The reincarnations of manipulators, traitors, and tyrants obsessed with earthly pleasures, they are the embodiments of the very nature of materialistic evil. After dying violent deaths, these spirits are so tied to worldly decadence and selfish concerns that they take shapes better reflecting the baseness of their lives and are reborn as rakshasas. Thus, in Vudra, sages have come to know these fiends as the “earthbound evils.”

HISTORY OF THE RAKSHASA

Rakshasas are not natural creatures, born of neither the gods nor the whims of nature. Rakshasa legend traces the fiends’ existence back to a single progenitor, an incredibly powerful and greedy Vudrani sorcerer-king who sought to enjoy an eternal existence of hedonistic comfort and control. Although the exact names, times, and details of this legendary figure’s actions vary among the epic poems rakshasas tell of his exploits, the broad strokes are similar enough to outline a history.

The most common name for the arcanist who became the first rakshasa is Mahka Abihcara. At some point in his life, the sorcerer became obsessed with his own mortality. Because of his great love of food, sleep, and other physical entertainments, Mahka was unwilling to become an undead creature or transform himself into some spell-crafted abomination. He also rejected any idea of paradise in an afterlife, for any such existence required subservience to a god or similar entities. Instead, Mahka conceived of an endless cycle, of living lives of pleasure and power over and over. He called this idea the *dhruva jivita*, or eternal rebirth. The philosophy of the *dhruva jivita* remains common among rakshasas.

To accomplish this, Mahka concluded he must absorb so much life that his death would not destroy all of it. As he was already ruler of a large stronghold, he set about expanding his territory through a series of violent wars. Mahka moved with his army so he could enjoy each new sight, new smell, and new cultural entertainment of the people he conquered. He also began the practice of eating the mightiest heroes of his defeated foes, in great feasts to which he invited his greatest generals and advisors. Those who refused to partake were themselves served at the next event. Each feast was a complex ritual as well, as Mahka absorbed the life force of those he ate and tied together the lives of himself and his generals.

After a long lifetime of consumption, depredation, and greed, Mahka became too frail for even his mighty spells to maintain him. He was reviled as one of the most evil beings in all Vudra, but was also honored as a great patron of the arts and collector of wisdom and knowledge. Mahka

called his generals to him, and offered each an animal, saying these would be their guides on a great journey. In most traditions there are twelve generals, but what animals they were offered vary too wildly to form a conclusion. What all stories agree upon is that Mahka himself took a tiger as his guide. Mahka explained that as long as even one of them remained alive, any of the others could return and be reincarnated as a new living creature. Then Mahka killed and consumed his tiger, eating himself to death.

Most stories agree the generals were horrified and thoroughly convinced Mahka had gone mad, but each took his animal guide and went about trying to take control of Mahka’s empire. Of course, they fought among themselves, and instead tore the empire apart. Only one, Gopa Citrasena, a spear-warrior given a mongoose guide, decried the laws of Mahka as evil and turned to building a new kingdom instead.

Thus the story would end, if not for Purusav Vagbha, a young sorcerer who became prominent 20 years after the death of Mahka. Purusav was immune to weapons, could shrug off spells, and was a master of deception. He began to reconquer the empire of Mahka Abihcara and to teach the philosophy of *dhruva jivita*. Whenever he captured one of Mahka’s old generals, Purusav killed him and his spirit guide. In time, people came to understand Purusav was Mahka, reincarnated as he had claimed. Many thought Purusav was destined to prove a greater evil than Mahka.

So he might have, if an aging Gopa Citrasena and his gray-furred mongoose had not slain him in a mighty battle atop the spires of his black, jungle-choked capital of Jayat-Von. At the end of their epic conflict, both were dead and only one of the city’s wooden spires remained standing. In his death, Purusav was revealed to be a tiger-headed monstrosity with backward-bending hands. Yet, by then, many of Mahka’s generals had been reincarnated, and it is believed Purusav was as well, shortly thereafter. According to rakshasas, so long as even one lives, all others will return in accordance with the *dhruva jivita*, and as knowledge of their foul philosophy survives and spreads, more wicked souls might be reborn as new and terrible rakshasas. Thus, like a disease upon the world, rakshasas are born and spread, the machinations of each bent on endless vice and domination of all Golarion.

ANATOMY OF THE RAKSHASA

Although the body of a typical rakshasa is essentially human in form, each has a head that takes the appearance of a creature native to Vudra. Great cats are common, especially the leopard, lion, and tiger. Snakes are equally standard, with cobras, pythons, and vipers being well represented. Canines are less common, but jackal-, fox-, and wolf-headed rakshasas are not entirely unknown. Most other rakshasas have heads in the forms of rhinos, elephants, ibex, or vultures,

although a rare individual might have a unique animal head or even—in rare cases—that of a creature foreign to Vudra. No rakshasa has a mongoose head, as mongooses instinctively hate the evil outsiders. Some rakshasas prefer to take the form of an animal-headed dwarf or elf, but their true forms have human bodies.

Rakshasas always have one reversed element of their anatomy, which gives away their fiendish nature. Common examples include having reversed hands (the most pervasive, with the palms being face-up when at rest rather than face-down), ears that face backward, elbows that bend outward, toes that go from the smallest on the inside to the big toe on the outside, or (rarely) even reversed knees.

Even when taking the form of another humanoid, at least one element of the rakshasa is backward from the norm, although they can control and change what this element is, and it need not match the reversal of their true form. Rakshasas are masters of concealing these characteristics, using body movements, loose clothes, and fake injuries.

Thus, only the most thorough scrutiny might reveal one of these deceptive outsiders' true nature.

Where their bodies are humanlike, rakshasas are always well formed and attractive. Similarly, any animalistic features they possess are always healthy and perfectly proportioned. Although rakshasas can take the shape of any humanoid, they very rarely choose forms that are less than amazing in tone and appearance. Rakshasas are not so foolish as to never use bent old men, scarred fisher-folk, or splotchy-skinned young women as disguises if they must, but when building a longer-term identity, they much prefer to be the most attractive person in a given village or city.

Older and more powerful rakshasas often have multiple heads. Each head is said to be a soul the fiend has subjugated completely, turning its eternal essence and spiritual vitality into just another tool. Such heads are grown as the rakshasa increases in power, summoned forth amid terrifying, soul-binding rituals.

Because rakshasas are the resurrections of evil mortals, they are forced outside the normal cycle of eternal fates, being neither sent to a final resting place nor returned to mortal life. Thus, they are outsiders, creatures of the boundless planes. Unlike those fiends that naturally exist in other planes of reality, rakshasas age, eat, sleep, and can be raised from the dead.

EARLY LIFE OF THE RAKSHASA

Rakshasas come into being in one of two ways: either they are born to a couple including a rakshasa parent or they are born to two non-rakshasas. It's not unusual for a rakshasa to be born to a single parent of its own species and one humanoid who has no idea she is in a mixed-species union. Such rakshasas are born appearing to be of the same species as their non-rakshasa parents, their natural gift for deception functional before they can even speak. As soon as they are old enough to understand their legacy, rakshasa children are told of their true power and form by their rakshasa parents. This rarely comes as a surprise to the young outsiders—rakshasas are the reincarnation of evil souls and come to understand their difference from their fellows at a very young age.

In the same ways, a foul soul that spontaneously resurrects as the child of unsuspecting, non-rakshasa parents fundamentally understands that it is different from its parents, yet—for a time—dependent on them for survival. Tragic tales of rakshasa young being born to innocent parents, mauling mothers as they feed or cannibalizing their brothers and sisters, fill Vudrani lore. As such, new parents in the Impossible Kingdoms are ever watchful of their newborns and rely on the prognostications of priests and wise women to determine if their children's souls are clean. Sometimes even these thorough divinations fail, though, leading to the



occasional stoning or drowning of innocents as paranoid communities mistake destructive or otherwise “touched” children for *parivaka*—devil children. Even worse, occasionally, young rakshasas are not detected at all, and like wolves raised by sheep, they invariably destroy the families that sheltered them.

Rakshasas mature quickly, but often hide this fact from any non-rakshasas they grow up with. By the age of 14, a rakshasa is fully mature, although it can continue to take the form of a younger humanoid if it chooses. Rakshasas otherwise age like elves, giving them lives of up to 5 centuries to build personal empires and acquire vast wealth. Unlike most outsiders, rakshasas can grow old and die of age, but their ability to change shape allows them to look young for their whole lives.

In families comprised of multiple rakshasas, the relationship between parent and child is surprisingly similar to that of a normal family. There are strict rules, and punishment for violating them is harsh, but a strong loyalty also exists between the two. A rakshasa child sees the advantage of an older guardian to protect both the family’s identity and its position, while the elder rakshasa gains a future ally and aide. As for the non-rakshasa family members, most rakshasas have little regard for those not of their kind and rarely reveal their true identities. They are sometimes possessive of these non-rakshasas, but they feel no love—the attachment being similar to a human and a useful work animal. When finally they do leave a community they’ve hidden in, the rakshasas often kill and consume their non-rakshasa family members as an honor.

A rakshasa raised in a community of its kind leads a somewhat different childhood. Rakshasas are ordered members of a caste system, knowing from birth their place among their own kind. While growing up, they are trained and watched by older rakshasas for any sign of mercy or disorganization, neither of which is tolerated. They are also taught about their destined right to rule over weaker races, and the natural blessings granted to them by fate to accomplish this. If non-rakshasas are present, the young are encouraged to emulate and fool them as preparation for hiding their identities as adults.

SOCIETY OF THE RAKSHASA

One cannot understand rakshasas without understanding their belief in castes. Rakshasas believe that each and every creature in the universe has a proper role to play, and that success comes from understanding one’s role and working to improve it. Rakshasas don’t see castes as good or evil, but rather in purely pragmatic terms. To them, victory comes through rigid application of their racial and personal superiority over the lesser creatures of the universe. Fighting against those of a different rakshasa caste is a pointless waste of time and resources. Rakshasas

RAKSHASAS IN REAL WORLD

Mention of these shape-shifting demon illusionists dates back to some of the earliest Vedic texts in Indian history. According to legend, central India and Sri Lanka was rife with rakshasas in the times of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Most rakshasas were forest-dwelling cannibals who raided villages and devoured people as they willed. Supernaturally strong, they were nigh-invincible to mortals, although one particularly mighty hero named Bhima once killed a rakshasa in single combat (he later married a rakshasa wife and begot a son by her).

According to the epic *Ramayana*, King Ravana ruled over a kingdom of rakshasas. Ravana was a Sanskrit sage who worshipped Shiva, the ravager god. Legend purports that Ravana feared beheading and beseeched Shiva for a special blessing. He grew several heads so that no one blow could strike him down. The center of Ravana’s power was the legendary Lanka city located on the Nuwara Eliya hills of present-day Sri Lanka.

A report from the *Ramayana* by the monkey hero Hanuman, who secreted himself in Lanka, tells: “The Rakshasas sleeping in the houses were of every shape and form. Some of them disgusted the eye, while some were beautiful to look upon. Some had long arms and frightful shapes; some were very fat and some were very lean; some were mere dwarfs and some were prodigiously tall. Some had only one eye and others only one ear. Some had monstrous bellies, hanging breasts, long projecting teeth, and crooked thighs; whilst others were exceedingly beautiful to behold and clothed in great splendour. Some had two legs, some three legs, and some four legs. Some had the heads of serpents, some the heads of donkeys, some the heads of horses, and some the heads of elephants...”

of higher caste should be respected for their great power and those of lower caste should be pressed into willing service to expand the holdings of their betters as they seek greater wealth and influence for themselves.

There are seven castes in rakshasa society (from lowest to greatest): *pagala* (traitors), *goshta* (food), *adhura* (novices), *darshaka* (servants), *paradeshi* (rakshasa-kin), *hakima* (lords), and *samrata* (lords of lords). The rakshasa caste system encompasses not just all of rakshasa society, but all of life—although only rakshasas can attain the greatest stations. While rakshasas believe individuals are born with a destiny for a particular caste, they accept movement between the castes. A rakshasa who becomes a *hakima* was born destined to be one, and a failed *samrata* who is reduced to a *hakima* had that as its fate from the moment it first drew breath. Being acknowledged as a member of a higher caste than one was born in is a great honor, while losing one’s caste is among the greatest disgraces a rakshasa can suffer. Of course, all rakshasas believe they themselves are fated to become *samrata*, even if it is not obvious to others. This system means rakshasas believe everyone is born into

a station, but they themselves can change castes as they move toward their “inevitable” final rank.

The most disgraceful rakshasa caste is the *pagala*, who have become either chaotic or good as a result of magic or some unthinkable upbringing. Rakshasas do not blame *pagala* for their unfortunate status but also cannot allow it to go on. If the *pagala* might be useful, another rakshasa may try to return it to a proper ordered and nefarious state of mind. Failing that, rakshasas see killing a *pagala* as a necessity, so it might be reincarnated as a “true” rakshasa.

Any non-rakshasa is seen as *goshta* unless it is one of the rare *paradeshi*. The closest translation for *goshta* is “food,” which is an important part of rakshasa thinking. Absolutely any thinking creature that is neither a rakshasa nor an evil leader worthy of having rakshasas serve it is food. That is the cosmic role of other creatures, and rakshasas see nothing whatsoever wrong with accepting a *goshta* family’s hospitality, sleeping under its roof, and eating it in the morning. To the earthbound evils, that’s what such creatures are there for.

All rakshasas who are not yet fully adult fall into the same caste, the *adhura*, or “novice.” These young rakshasas are typically loyal to a parent or older sibling, though if that family member has a lord, the *adhura* reveres that master as well. An *adhura* is expected to be as serious and ordered as any adult, as these are innate traits of the species and not learned behaviors. An *adhura* is given some leeway for making mistakes, befriending those who cannot further their conquests, and showing insufficient ambition—behavior unacceptable for mature members of other castes. Upon reaching age 50, the *adhura* sheds this station and joins the caste of his lower-ranking parent.

The lowest caste of true, adult rakshasa is that of the *darshaka*, or “servants.” These base rakshasas are expected to improve their wealth and power through any means necessary. Most *darshaka* begin laying out long-term plans while seeking a lord worthy of their service, but some decide to strike out immediately on their own. These are both seen as valid means of acquiring wealth, power, and material pleasures, with no bias toward those who seek to serve another, as long as whatever master they choose is able to expand both their own holdings and those of their servants. Even these lowest of rakshasas are formidable and are the most likely to be encountered preying upon communities, hunting for lairs and power in ancient dungeons, or cementing power bases in criminal underworlds abroad. *Darshaka* must obey the will of higher-ranking rakshasas—either their lords or those more powerful than their lords, although such acts often prove beneficial and include rewards for service. Among *darshaka*, rank is determined by a precise accounting of slaves and displays of magical prowess.

The rare non-rakshasa who is powerful, organized, and ambitious enough to attract rakshasa servants is considered

to be of the *paradeshi* caste, or rakshasa-kin. Just because one rakshasa sees a non-rakshasa lord as a *paradeshi*, though, does not mean all rakshasas accept the rank. If a higher- or lower-ranking rakshasa decides a rakshasa-kin is actually just food, that rakshasa feels duty-bound to prove it, defeat the imposter, and eat the creature. Doing so allows the killer to claim all of that *paradeshi*’s rakshasa servants as his own—one of the few ways a rakshasa can improve his caste. Rakshasa-kin are typically devils, although some particularly malevolent dragons, hags, efreeti, and mortal wizards or clerics sometimes claim the title.

Above the *darshaka* and *paradeshi* are the *hakima*—the rakshasa lords. *Hakima* measure rank among themselves by the number of rakshasa servants they control (*paradeshi* servants might be useful, but they bring no rank). These rakshasas typically dominate sizable territories, including several communities or an entire city. Their works often stretch to manipulating non-rakshasa governments, corrupting religious bodies from within, or engaging in shadow wars against other *hakima*, with their servants ranging as far as their whims dictate.

Even higher than the *hakima* are the rare *samrata*, the lords of lords, the most respected rakshasa rank. Rakshasa society expects *samrata* to take over kingdoms, lay waste to opposing empires, and make bids to control vast sections of the world. Failure to do so is proof the caste was not the rakshasa’s final fate, resulting in other rakshasas refusing to serve. Unsurprisingly, *samrata* are driven to expand far and fast, and often find themselves the foes of coalitions of neighboring rulers. *Samrata* are rare, and most keep the rank for only a year or two, but history has records of *samrata* who built vast, evil empires.

RAKSHASA RELIGION

While rakshasas are forced to admit the gods have powers greater than their own, most rakshasas scoff at the concept of divinity. The gods are among the most powerful beings in existence to be sure, but too many examples of powerful, ambitious, or merely lucky mortals attaining divinity exist for rakshasas to pay religious homage to such creatures. Rakshasas see their own transitions from mortals to otherworldly beings as marks of their own fathomless potential and the initial steps on the path to godhood. Thus, as a race, rakshasas deny the worship of deities, although they welcome alliances with the servants of such peerlessly potent beings.

Despite their racial heresy, some rakshasas are dedicated priests. Like many in Vudra, rakshasas often dedicate themselves spiritually to a concept or ideology rather than a specific deity. Unlike most others, rakshasas consider concepts such as greed, ambition, tyranny, and raw power to be worthy of religious veneration, and many meditate on the value of seeking such traits in themselves.

RAKSHASA WEAKNESSES

The skin of a rakshasa is remarkably resistant to physical damage, able to ignore or greatly reduce most weapon attacks. Even holy weapons only do significant harm if they can easily penetrate the rakshasa's skin and reach the less-resistant flesh beneath. Rakshasas are well aware of this, and target foes with bows, crossbows, or spears first. Of course, sages of Vudra—and, to a lesser extent, the world over—are aware of this as well, and more holy piercing weapons are created in this region than anywhere else in the world.

This "weakness," however, is only a removal of a rakshasa's extraordinary defenses. Unlike a vampire, rakshasas don't take extra effects from these weapon designs. Rakshasas often go to great lengths to disguise their true nature (easy enough given their shape-changing power) to prevent foes from seeking a weapon that can more easily hurt them. If a group of opponents seems particularly clever, a rakshasa might well take the form of some other evil creature, such as a fiendish humanoid, lycanthrope, or vampire, to misdirect efforts to discover its exact type.

The only other true weakness of a rakshasa is its ambition and greed. A rakshasa never has enough slaves, wealth, power, land, or magic. While other evil creatures can sometimes be satisfied with what they have, a rakshasa never is, and can sometimes be tempted into mistakes with the right material as bait. A rakshasa is not so foolish as to step into an area with gold scattered about, but it might be drawn to an old ruin with rumors of a recently discovered treasure, or enticed to lead its forces into a town supposedly rich with plunder. Taking advantage of rakshasa greed is a dangerous game, however, because the prize must be great enough to overcome their natural caution, and rakshasas are powerful enough that they often survive traps laid for them and walk free with the very lure that brought them, both richer and stronger as a result.

RAKSHASA ADVENTURES

Subtle and patient, rakshasas' quests for dominance and wealth can take them far from their native Vudra to nearly any land in Golarion. GMs interested in creating their own plots involving these earthbound evils might consider the following hooks.

Beachhead: A rakshasa *samrata* covets the exotic wealth of the west and sends his three *adhura* sons to establish individual bases there, funneling riches, magic, and exotic slaves back to his court in Vudra. When the artistic and beautiful scions of several noble families go missing—kidnapped gifts for the fiendish lord—the lesser local rakshasas must be discovered and dealt with before they send their captives all the way to the Impossible Kingdoms.

Betraying the Betrayers: A far-reaching rakshasa plot to topple a local government and replace its leaders is revealed—by another rakshasa. This turncoat claims to have turned from the malicious ways of his people, having even joined the church of Sarenrae, but can this tiger-headed menace truly change his stripes?

Faces of Evil: A local brigand lord puts out the call for skilled warriors to combat another underworld warlord moving in on her territory. In truth, those who answer become embroiled in a war between two disguised rakshasa rivals, each determined to claim the other's soul as its own.

