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The Shadow Cult

By Charles Rice

“Recently a series of grisly murders have gripped world headlines. The killer or killers move unseen, striking at will with a precision that has baffled police from London to Tokyo. What has gained the attention of the national media are the killers’ targets: world-class martial arts experts are being beaten to death. Quiet sensei found slaughtered in remote Buddhist monasteries. High-profile class instructors found dead in their offices before class. Special operations personnel found dead by their units while on patrol. The list goes on. Who is the killer or killers? The FBI task force heading the American stage of the investigation only had a terse ‘no comment’ for this reporter, but we will bring any updates to this bizarre case as soon as they are made available. For the Philadelphia Constitution, this is Brianna Riggs signing off.”

Sighing to herself, Brianna leaned back in her chair as the lights dimmed. She looked through her notes on the day’s news (which she never looked at during the broadcast thanks to the teleprompter) and tried to sort through what she knew about these killings. She hated these little moments when the camera was still on and she and Rex Arronson, her co-anchor were supposed to chat amiably about the news of the day. Like most things in the broadcast side of the news business, that appearance was an illusion.

Rex leaned over, smiling his plastic smile, “You’d have to be pretty upset if they caught this guy huh. After all your coverage of the local martial arts stuff led you to cover this story, which led to you getting the second chair on the big show.”

Brianna shrugged, still looking over her notes, “I have a feeling they aren’t going to catch him.”

In her mind’s eye she could see Lin Qi watching the matches at the Hanmei from his private box.

The sadistic enjoyment obvious in his eyes when a combatant was seriously hurt or killed. Could he be involved in this?

Her thoughts were similarly occupied on her way out of the office and to her car. Rex was right about one thing, this story (along with her undercover reporting of the Hanmei) *had* been the source of her high-profile status that landed her the co-anchor job. However, reporting on a story like this made her wonder if she hadn’t made the wrong choice. Maybe she should be out there looking for... whoever was doing these murders.

Set Up

The Shadow Cult is an adventure seed for modern d20 games. This adventure seed draws on elements from Blood and Relics as well as Blood and Fists to create a somewhat unique horror-martial arts role-playing experience. If you intend to play in this adventure you should stop reading now.

What’s going on?

Most people, even those who study ancient Japanese history believe the BlackShadow Cult to be a myth. Ninja of great power, reputed to be able to assume the form of a shadow and walk through walls. However the legend is real, and recently the enigma at the heart of that legend, BlackShadow, the man condemned to live as a shadow, dispelled and tortured during the day has returned and drawn a new group of followers to him. The world has changed much since he was last free in the 12th century but his consuming desire remains the same: to find the blood of a pure monk steeped in the ways of the martial arts and thereby dispel his curse and be human once again.

Adventure Hooks

Strange Bedfellow

If the PCs participated in the Hanmei they might find themselves aiding someone from the competition. Pick someone the PCs parted with on good terms in the competition (John Lee and Jing Choi make excellent selections here for most PCs) and have their brutal murder come to the attention of the PCs. When the PCs investigate, they will find a nemesis from the Hanmei, such as Marcel or perhaps even Lin Qi himself (written up in the pages of a previous dispatch article) investigating the murder as well.

After a brief fight (perhaps not so brief depending on how the PC and his nemesis parted company last) the NPC will explain that he is looking for the killer out of a fear that he might be next. If the PC is willing they could look for the killer together... but either way they will cross paths with someone they don't like during the course of their investigations.

The Sensei Slasher

A PC with an investigative background, such as a reporter or a private investigator might wind up looking for the man or men the tabloid media have dubbed "the Sensei Slasher." The FBI is treating the case like any other serial killer and getting nowhere. A PC able to accept that fact that there might really be an occult agency at work and not just a demented psychopath engaging in ritual murder might be able to track the killer down to his mountain retreat in Japan. Doing so unprepared might add the PC to the list of victims.

The Perfect Weapon

A PC employed by a government agency (especially a black ops agency) might be assigned to investigate the Sensei Slasher "unofficially". It seems that a decade ago the agency spent millions on treatments

to enhance the speed and aggression of martial artists in the hopes that an unarmed assassin might be the perfect way to kill those too paranoid to allow a weapon anywhere near them.

A few subjects gained the enhanced speed but their increased aggression (and a tendency toward psychotic behavior) made them uncontrollable. All but one have been successfully hunted down and killed. The one remaining subject had an intense need to be the best of the best and the agency thinks he might be the killer.

Although this "perfect weapon" has nothing whatsoever to do with the killings this red herring might be a good way to introduce him into the campaign. The GM might even combine this hook with strange bedfellows and have the super soldier cross paths with the PCs conducting his own search for the killer.

NPCS

Blackshadow

Over 800 years ago the Shadow clan was one of the most feared ninja clans in all of Japan. They accepted any assignment, used any means, no matter how dishonorable to achieve their ends. Children were abducted to lure warriors to their deaths, noble men were framed and forced to commit seppuku by their masters, tales of infidelity fed to jealous wives to get them to deliver the poison to their own husband's mouths were but some of the tactics used by this family, so ruthless that it was reviled even by other ninja clans.

They feared nothing and were willing to take any assignment. This was their undoing. One of the clan members accepted an assignment to do the unthinkable: assassinate the Emperor, then twelve years old. Preparations were undertaken for over three years but eventually the assassin schemed his way

into the divine personage's presence. The assassin had heard the tales of the Emperor's divine heritage and dismissed them as a story for children. But when he drew his knife he no longer saw the fragile young boy, but a god, glowing with the light of Amaterasu. As the assassin fled he heard the Emperor's words ringing in his ears: you are the enemy of the Sun and it shall forever be your enemy.

That was the day the human ninja died and was replaced by BlackShadow. A creature of shadow, living a half-life, able to penetrate any castle at night but forced to retreat into the deepest caves during the day.

Depending on the nature of the campaign this legend could be just that. The killer could be using it to carve an empire of crime and assassination for himself. The "Sensei Slasher" is just an elaborate ruse, done at the exact same time as a contract killing in the same city to distract and confuse law enforcement authorities.

A Blood and Relics campaign might cast BlackShadow as a Caeder dwelling in the Far East. In this case the Emperor was in fact a Sang Real. There is no curse; that is the stuff of legend. But the power of the creature to become shadow and the ability of the Sun to destroy it are both all too real.

A fantastic campaign might use the Blood and Vigilance rules to give BlackShadow a full set of powers with the Mystic Encounter origin (invisibility and desolidification would be called for here).

BlackShadow (Fast Hero 4/Ninja 10): CR 14; Medium-size humanoid; HD 4d8+8 plus 10d6+20; HP 81; Mas 14; Init +2; Spd 35 ft; Defense 24, touch 24, flatfooted 22 (+0 size, +2 Dex, +12 class); BAB +10; Grap +12; Atk +14 melee (1d4+2/19-20, Sai), or +13 ranged (2d6+0, Glock 17); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ none; AL BlackShadow; SV Fort +6, Ref +11, Will +4; AP 7; Rep +3; Str 15, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Occupation: Criminal (Disable Device, Disguise)

Skills: Balance +11, Bluff +15, Climb +7, Concentration +4, Disable Device +10, Disguise +16, Escape Artist +7, Forgery +4, Gather Information +3, Hide +22, Jump +5, Knowledge (Tactics) +4, Listen +3, Move Silently +23, Search +4, Sense Motive +3, Sleight of Hand +4, Spot +5, Tumble +11

Feats: Archaic Weapons - Japanese, Combat Expertise, Combat Martial Arts, Improved Disarm, Ninjutsu, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Power Attack, Shadow, Shadow Warrior

Talents (Fast Hero): Increased Speed, Evasion

Talents (Ninja): Shinobi-jutsu, Shichi-ho-de, Goton-no-jutsu, Chunin, Jonin, Silent Kill +5d6

Possessions: Sai (mastercraft +2 attack), Glock 17, box 9mm ammunition, disguise kit, climbing kit; Wealth +6

Shadow Cult Leader

High in the mountains of Japan a grisly cult has worshipped BlackShadow for centuries. The current head of this cult believes he has found a way to allow his master to walk free again and travels with his small cadre of assassins, performing grisly rites on fallen warriors.

Note: This NPC will only appear in campaigns that take the Blood and Relics approach to the motivations for the Sensei Slasher.

Shadow Cult Leader (Smart 3/Cultist 7): CR 10; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d6+6 plus 7d6+14; HP 56; Mas 14; Init +2; Spd 30 ft; Defense 15, touch 15, flatfooted 13 (+0 size, +2 Dex, +3 class); BAB +4; Grap +4; Atk +5 melee (1d4+1/19-20, sacrificial blade), or +6 ranged (1d4+1/19-20, sacrificial blade); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ none; AL BlackShadow; SV Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +8; AP 5; Rep +3; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 15, Wis 13, Cha 8.

Occupation: Religious (Decipher Script, Knowledge [Arcane Lore], Knowledge [Theology and

Philosophy])

Skills: Balance +3, Climb +3, Concentration +7, Craft (writing) +12, Decipher Script +15, Gather Information +7, Hide +9, Intimidate +2, Knowledge (Arcane Lore) +18, Knowledge (Art) +4, Knowledge (Behavioral Sciences) +4, Knowledge (History) +17, Knowledge (Theology and Philosophy) +16, Listen +2, Move Silently +8, Read/Write Language +4 (Japanese, English, Abyssal, Akkadian), Research +12, Search +6, Speak Language +4 (Japanese, English, Abyssal, Akkadian), Spot +2, Tumble +3

Feats: Bloodletting, Conviction (Dark Power), Defensive Martial Arts, Educated (Knowledge [Arcane Lore], Knowledge [History]), Faith's Protection, Human Sacrifice, Ninjutsu, Profane Ritual

Talents (Smart Hero): Linguist, Exploit Weakness

Talents (Cultist): Control Undead, True Magic, Dark Initiate, Darkness' Embrace, Absolution, Dark Familiar

Possessions: sacrificial blade; Wealth +7

Elite Shadow Assassin

These elite assassins will usually comprise the "second wave" after the PCs have fended off one or more attacks by the Shadow Cult. Depending on the PCs' level there should be a maximum number of these ninja at the cult's disposal equal to 1-2 per PC.

Elite Shadow Assassin (Fast 3/Ninja 5): CR 8; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d8+6 plus 5d6+10; HP 48; Mas 14; Init +2; Spd 40 ft; Defense 19, touch 19, flatfooted 17 (+0 size, +2 Dex, +7 class); BAB +5; Grap +7; Atk +9 melee (1d4+2/19-20, Sai), or +8 ranged (2d6+0, Glock 17); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ none; AL BlackShadow; SV Fort +4, Ref +8, Will +2; AP 4; Rep +2; Str 14, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Occupation: Criminal (Hide, Move Silently)

Skills: Balance +9, Bluff +5, Climb +3, Disguise +4, Escape Artist +4, Gather Information +1, Hide

+19, Jump +3, Knowledge (Streetwise) +3, Listen +1, Move Silently +19, Read/Write Language +1 (Japanese, English), Sense Motive +2, Sleight of Hand +10, Speak Language +1 (Japanese, English), Spot +4, Tumble +13

Feats: Archaic Weapons - Japanese, Defensive Martial Arts, Ninjutsu, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Shadow, Weapon Focus (Sai)

Talents (Fast Hero): Increased Speed, Improved Increased Speed

Talents (Ninja): Shinobi-jutsu, Shichi-ho-de, Silent Kill +2d6, Goton-no-jutsu

Possessions: Sai (mastercraft +1 attack), Glock 17; Wealth +6

Shadow Assassin

These assassins are the main body of the cult and will comprise most of the PCs adversaries as they attempt to locate the cult's hiding place in Japan and/or prevent any further killings. Depending on the PCs' level there should be a maximum number of these ninja at the cult's disposal equal to 1-4 per PC (if the PCs are high level huge numbers of these attackers can be used to swarm the PCs).

Shadow Assassin (Fast 3/Ninja 3): CR 6; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d8+6 plus 3d6+6; HP 37; Mas 14; Init +2; Spd 40 ft; Defense 18, touch 18, flatfooted 16 (+0 size, +2 Dex, +6 class); BAB +4; Grap +6; Atk +7 melee (1d4+2/19-20, Sai), or +7 ranged (2d6, Glock 17); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ none; AL BlackShadow; SV Fort +4, Ref +7, Will +2; AP 3; Rep +1; Str 14, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Occupation: Criminal (Hide, Move Silently)

Skills: Balance +9, Bluff +3, Climb +3, Disguise +2, Escape Artist +4, Gather Information +1, Hide +15, Jump +3, Knowledge (Streetwise) +3, Listen +1, Move Silently +15, Read/Write Language +1 (Japanese, English), Sense Motive +1, Sleight of Hand

+9, Speak Language +1 (Japanese, English), Tumble +11

Feats: Archaic Weapons - Japanese, Defensive Martial Arts, Ninjutsu, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Shadow, Weapon Focus (Sai)

Talents (Fast Hero): Increased Speed, Improved Increased Speed

Talents (Ninja): Shinobi-jutsu, Silent Kill +1d6, Shichi-ho-de

Possessions: Sai, Glock 17, disguise kit, climbing kit; Wealth +6

Ninja Abilities

Don't have Honk Kong Knights? Don't fret; here are the various Ninja class abilities and feats.

Ninja Class Abilities:

Shinobi-jutsu: The “stealing in method” is the ninja’s primary source of power. His stealth provides him with the means of getting close to his target and escaping with his life. This ability allows the character to add his ninja class level to all hide and move silently skill checks.

Silent kill: The character gains the listed sneak attack damage against surprised, flat-footed, or flanked targets. If the victim of this attack is surprised and fails a Massive Damage Threshold saving throw, the character is eliminated in complete silence, requiring a Listen check (DC 30) for any nearby guard to notice something amiss. At the GM’s discretion, Ordinaries may not receive a MDT save against this attack. See the d20 Modern Core Rulebook for the definition of an Ordinary.

Shichi-ho-de: The “ways of going” provide another means of entry and escape for the ninja through the means of disguise. This ability allows the character to add his ninja class level to all disguise and bluff skill checks.

This ability also allows the ninja to prepare up to seven disguises before a mission (taking an hour

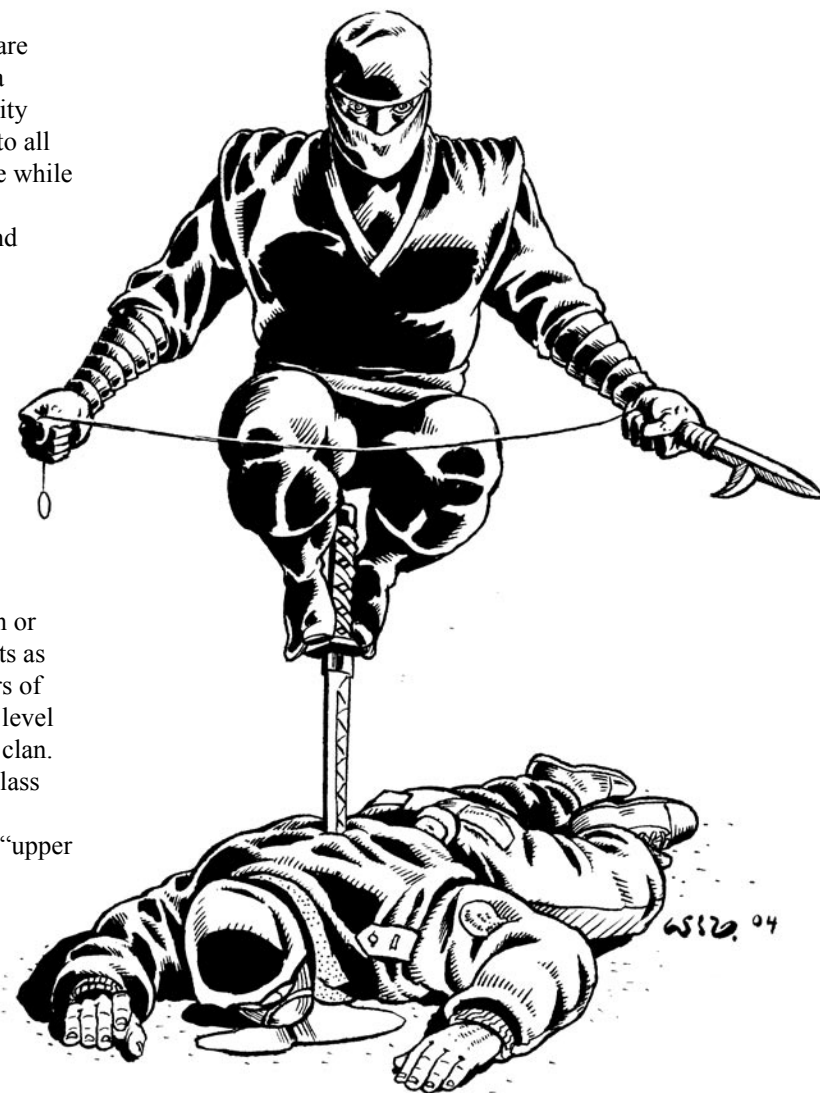
of preparation for each disguise) and then during a mission, assume that disguise as a full-round action. A character must have a disguise kit to prepare a disguise for this ability.

Goton-no-jutsu: The “escaping techniques” are predetermined escape routes that allow the ninja to depart after completing his mission. This ability allows the character to add his ninja class level to all climb, escape artist, and swim skill checks made while making his escape.

This ability also allows a ninja to create a blind or screen at a predetermined location. The ninja can either use this blind to watch his target in preparation for a mission, or as an emergency bolthole to hide from guards if his escape is in danger. This ability requires an hour to prepare. After preparations are complete, the ninja gains a +10 circumstance bonus to hide skill checks while he is in that predetermined location. If a spot check discovers the ninja, the hide bonus is permanently lost at that location.

Chunin: You have risen to the rank of Chunin or “middle man” in your ninja clan. This ability acts as the Leadership feat except that all your followers of 4th level or above are ninja. Followers below 4th level are in training or are resources from outside the clan. If you already possess the Leadership feat this class ability grants you the Renown feat instead.

Jonin: You have risen to the rank of Jonin or “upper man” in your ninja clan. This ability adds +10 to your Leadership score. If this raises your Leadership above 25, double the number of followers for each full five points above 25. You also no longer suffer leadership penalties for the deaths of followers or cohorts. Finally, this ability grants you the Information Network feat as a bonus feat. Should you already possess this feat, this class ability grants you the Renown feat instead.



Ninjutsu

The history of Ninjutsu and its practitioners, the Ninja, is almost impossible to determine with any degree of accuracy. Every source seems to contradict every other source, and all claim to be the “true descendants” of the “true art of Ninjutsu.” The style detailed here is what *d20 Modern* players and GMs will expect to find in the hand-to-hand arsenal of a Ninja from popular books, movies, and video games.

Prerequisite: Combat Martial Arts or Defensive Martial Arts.

Effect: You are proficient in kick attacks and are considered armed while making such attacks. Ninjutsu, like Commando Training is an adaptive style, able to “borrow” moves from any other style. This feat adds Climb, Hide, and Move Silently to your list of class skills. Ninjutsu is an external style whose attacks are modified by Dexterity.

Shadow

The Ninja is able to vanish as though he were never there.

Prerequisite: Ninjutsu, Hide 6 Ranks, Move Silently 6 Ranks.

Effect: You may hide in plain sight at will.

Shadow Warrior

The Ninja leaves no trace; he becomes rumor incarnate.

Prerequisite: Ninjutsu, Shadow, Hide 10 Ranks, Move Silently 10 Ranks.

Effect: You leave very little evidence behind you. The DC of any Survival check to track you or any Investigate check to find fingerprints or trace evidence of your presence have their DC increased by 10 (so if an Investigate check of 15 was needed to find evidence you were there, the DC becomes 25).

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