

GAME MISTERY!

DEATH SHRINE OF THE NINJA CULT

COMPLEAT ENCOUNTER

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DEATH SHRINE OF THE NINJA CULT

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ANY SETTING • MID-LEVEL (6TH–8TH) • URBAN

The mysterious ninja cult strikes in the night, silencing its enemies with a quick twist of a dagger or a poisoned shuriken. The good folk of the land are afraid to walk the city's streets by night. The baron and many of the most important nobles of the area gladly buy their protection from the cult with gold and jewels. Even the thieves' guild dares not stand against the cult. Someone must put a stop to this menace, before the rule of fear and threats replaces law and order.

This Compleat Encounter uses the information found on maps and data cards in this set to create a mini-adventure. The cards include information and game rules for the ninja leader Eselda Nightstar, her chief lieutenant Feldren Thull, and the sinister doppelganger Kelzerin Thoughtstealer. You'll need the cards for the relevant game rule information and details on their unique weapons and abilities. See Card 4 for tips on how to scale this adventure to a variety of character levels.

Although the miniatures, maps, and plots in this Compleat Encounter can be used with any fantasy roleplaying game, the rules included herein are compatible with the Open Game Licensed rules of the world's most popular RPG. You can download a copy of those rules at dzosrd.org.

USING THIS COMPLEAT ENCOUNTER

The cards included for each member of the cult summarize the ninjas' plans, abilities, and goals. You can use them as individuals dispatched to defeat the player characters, a group of assassins that the party must contend with, or a sinister conspiracy that the characters must overcome. The PCs can find clues that lead them to the death shrine in a number of ways. They could track the ninjas, use magic to reveal their lair, and so forth. The ninjas likely operate in an area at the fringe of civilization or in a small town or city. Eselda Nightstar has big plans, and if the PCs aren't able to overcome her now she could become a continuing source of trouble for them.

The description of the death shrine is meant to include enough detail and ideas that you can use it as the setting of any other adventure involving ninjas, assassins, and similar opponents. You can use the map of the death shrine to depict the lair or hideout of any sort of criminal organization.

DEATH SHRINE ENCOUNTER KEY

The death shrine is hidden beneath a boarding house within the town's foreign quarter. To most observers, the boarding house is just another small building nestled within a residential area where merchants, adventurers, and other travelers rent living quarters. A trap door hidden in the cellar beneath the boarding house (Search DC 25) leads to a small grotto that holds the training hall. The grotto is barely 10 feet tall, and the shrine's walls reach to its ceiling.

The shrine has long been dedicated to the death god, and that deity's clerics have carried out many dark rites within its walls. Feldren uncovered its existence in his former master's journals. Long abandoned and forgotten, the shrine is the perfect place for the trio of killers to launch their reign of terror.

GENERAL TRAITS

The shrine is crafted from stone. Hooded lamps designed to cast only a dim, shadowy radiance light its interiors. Thus, unless the PCs bring their own light source into this place they may have trouble seeing. All of the areas within the shrine have shadowy illumination, granting creatures concealment. A ranged or touch attack against a lamp (AC 7) can either knock it over and douse it or knock aside the covering that muffles its illumination (attacker's choice).

Locks: The exterior doors all bear good quality (DC 25) locks.

Walls: Hardness 8, 90 hit points, break DC 35

Doors: Hardness 5, 10 hit points, break DC 13.

I. ENTRANCE

Hooded lanterns hang from the walls here, casting a shadowy glow that seems to conceal more than it reveals. This square chamber has a simple rug set before the double doors on the eastern wall. Two life-sized statues wielding longswords flank the double doors. The walls are covered with paintings of a grim, skeletal figure bearing a scythe, cloaked figures armed with strange, double-bladed daggers, and runes scribed in red ink. Single doors are set

in the north and south walls, while an entrance to the west opens into a second chamber.

The symbols on the wall are prayers to the death god written in Infernal. A Knowledge (religion) check (DC 10) reveals their connection to that dark entity. These dark blessings must be read aloud to deactivate a trap keyed to the various exits from this chamber. If this incantation is not made, opening the north or south door or passing through the west entrance triggers a trap. A grim skeletal figure painted on the south wall takes on a sickly green glow and sweeps its scythe over the PCs. The weapon and the skeleton appear to be made of light, and the scythe easily stretches to strike everyone in the room. As it swings, the skeleton screams a horrible keening that alerts everyone in the death shrine to the presence of intruders. Once it has made one attack, the form fades back into the wall and becomes a simple painting again.

Screaming Scythe Trap: CR 7; magic device; proximity trigger (*alarm*); automatic reset; Atk +7 ranged touch (one attack per person in room); spell effect (*enervation*, 9th-level wizard, 1d4 negative levels for 9 hours, DC 16 Fortitude save negates); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 20.

2. DOJO

A thick, soft mat covers the floor of this chamber, while several crowded weapon racks are arrayed along the north wall. Two wooden target dummies, each studded with a few arrows and shuriken, are set up in the southern

portion of this room. The western wall is covered with an intricate painting that shows the various sensitive points and critical organs in the human body.

The ninjas practice their lethal arts in this chamber. Each weapon rack holds a greatsword, 2 longswords, 3 short swords, a light crossbow, a longsword, 10 shuriken, and an assassin's blade. If the ninjas fight the characters here, they use the weapons against the party.

3. WEAPONS AND ARMOR STORAGE

This L-shaped chamber has a number of suits of armor stored along its eastern wall, while the L's western leg is ringed with weapon racks.

This chamber contains the following weapons and armor taken from the ninjas' enemies: 2 suits each of leather armor, masterwork studded leather, banded mail, and masterwork full plate armor. The weapons include 5 longswords, 2 clubs, 3 longspears, 3 assassin's blades, 2 halberds, 3 light crossbows, 100 bolts, 1 longbow, 30 arrows, 2 daggers, a heavy mace, a masterwork heavy pick, and a light flail.

4. STUDENT'S ROOMS

This long, narrow room is bare of furnishings and decorations aside from a pair of short, hard beds.

This chamber is normally empty. As the cult expands, Eselda plans to recruit more killers and train them in the dojo. Both Feldren and Kelzerin keep lodgings in the city. If the cult manages to increase its power and gain recruits, they sleep here as they train in the assassin's arts.

5. ALTAR

An altar crafted from red stone stands along the eastern wall of this chamber. The stone is streaked with yellow. A silver statuette of a gaunt, skeletal figure holding a scythe is set atop the altar, flanked by a pair of silver daggers driven into cracks on the altar's surface.

A Knowledge (religion) check (DC 15) reveals that the statue and altar are dedicated to the death god, the bloody-handed prince of murderers. Luckily for the

PCs, the altar has not yet been fully dedicated to the death god. Desecrating this altar carries no curse or similar drawbacks.

The statuette is worth 2,000 gp, while the silver daggers are both masterwork weapons.

6. DINING AREA

A wooden table flanked by two benches sits in the middle of this room. To the south is a small stack of clay pots, crates, and sacks. A small keg of ale rests atop the stack of supplies.

The cult keeps its supplies here in case its members must remain out of sight for a time, or while engaging in long, intense training exercises here. The supplies are all in good condition and are high quality grains, fruit, and drink. The meats are salted and dried, as these supplies are meant to last the cult an extended period of time.

At the GM's option, the PCs might notice that the goods come from the same two or three merchants or trade companies. The cultists of the death shrine might be in league with a number of merchants who act as go-betweens and messengers for the death god's scattered followers. If the PCs follow up this investigation, they find a number of other cells of the cult across the region.

7. MASTER'S BEDROOM

This small, square room holds a bed along the northern wall, a wooden chest, and an armoire against the western wall. The simple, utilitarian furnishings are relatively new. A metal padlock holds the chest shut.

This room serves as Eselda's private quarters when she spends time in the training hall. She plans to recruit more cultists to her ranks, particularly those who show an aptitude for stealth, murder, and treachery. In time, she plans to usurp the thieves' guild in the city and establish a shadow government that manipulates the mayor through threats, intimidation, and blackmail. While such plans are far from fruition, Eselda has already taken the first few steps to bringing them to pass.

The chest is held shut with a high quality (Open Locks DC 25) lock. Within it are three emeralds worth 200 gp each, a silk bag containing 50 pp, and three scrolls that outline Eselda's plans for the city. At the GM's option, the scrolls contain clues leading to agents of evil hidden in the city, forgotten treasure troves, the lair of an undead dragon, and other threats that stand ready to ally with the death cult.

NINJA TACTICS

The ninjas rely on the trap on the entrance door to alert them to any intruders. They grab weapons and hide to ambush the party. Feldren and Eselda lurk in the dojo under the cover of shadows while Kelzerin attempts to distract the PCs by adopting Eselda's guise. Once the battle is joined, Feldren uses his bow and spells to support Kelzerin. Eselda studies a PC, preferably a spellcaster, to use her death attack. She then swoops into the fray to deliver a killing blow. If possible, she then retreats to hide and repeat the process again. If the PCs move slowly or are unsure of themselves, Kelzerin waits a few rounds before attacking to give Eselda time to study the party and Feldren the opportunity to use his spells.

During the battle, Kelzerin knocks the coverings from at least one lantern to give Eselda and Feldren a clear view of their targets. Note that unless the PCs use magic to illuminate the area, Eselda and Feldren gain the benefits of shadowy illumination while the PCs are stuck in a fully lit area.

The ninjas fight until they are reduced to 10 or fewer hit points. At that point, they attempt to flee. If the PCs are an overpowering opponent, they head to a different city and begin their pattern of murder and extortion again. If the PCs were an even match, the ninjas attempt to spy upon them and gain their vengeance.

STOCKING THE TRAINING HALL

When the characters venture into the training hall, they might encounter a number of opponents depending on the place's current organization and preparations. In addition to the three NPCs detailed on the stat cards, you can stock this place with the following monsters based on the PCs' levels. You can use these creatures in place of or in addition to the ninjas.



SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

In place of the guardians listed in the area descriptions, the sanctum can feature different mixes of monsters to accommodate different party levels.

Beginning Parties (Levels 1–4): Area 1: 2 hobgoblin warrior 1 guards; area 4: 2 human monk 2 students; area 5: ogre zombie.

Low-Level Parties (Levels 5–8): Area 1: 2 ogre guards; area 4: 2 human monk 6 students; area 5: medusa.

Mid-Level Parties (Levels 9–12): Area 1: 2 flesh golem guards; area 4: 2 human monk 10 students; area 5: dread wraith.

High-Level Parties (Levels 13–16): Area 1: 2 barbed devils; area 4: 2 human monk 14 students; area 5: horned devil.

Heroic Parties (Levels 17–20): Area 1: 2 horned devils; area 4: 2 human monk 18 students; area 5: pit fiend.

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ESELDA NIGHTSTAR

Eselda Nightstar is the last person one would expect to lurk at the heart of the insidious ninja cult. Her family is one of the most respected merchant houses in town, but the promise of social prestige and a vast fortune has little appeal to Eselda. From a young age, she was fascinated with pain, violence, and death. As luck would have it, a member of her household's staff named Feldren Thull was secretly a cultist of the death god. Feldren noticed the young Eselda's morbid fascination and discreetly encouraged it. With the daughter of a leading merchant house on the cult's rolls, Feldren knew that the sect would gain access to wealth, power, and political connections far beyond its current means.

Eselda proved an apt pupil, and she quickly moved beyond Feldren's meager skills and ambitions. Where Feldren wanted to murder travelers and adventurers in the city's foreign quarter, Eselda insisted on more challenging targets. Minor nobles, prosperous merchants, and even acolytes of the various legal churches in town fell before her onslaught. Eselda came to love killing for its own sake, leaving Feldren to manage such details as extracting tribute, levying threats, and otherwise expanding the cult's power beyond simple murder.

Eselda's story has a tragic root. At a young age, a wizard her family cheated in a business deal summoned a minor devil and ordered it to possess the young girl

soon after her birth. While Eselda is murderous and cruel, she is merely an innocent victim. If the PCs can discover and remove her curse, they can convert a powerful villain into a dedicated champion of good.

Eselda Nightstar, female human rogue 5/assassin 3: CR 8; Medium humanoid (human); HD 5d6+10+3d6+6; hp 50; Init +8; Spd 30 ft.; AC 19 (+4 Dex, +5 armor), touch 14, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +5; Grp +6; Atk Masterwork assassin's blade +11 melee (1d4+1); Full Atk Masterwork assassin's blade +9 melee (1d4+1) and masterwork assassin's blade +9 melee (1d4) or masterwork assassin's blade +7/+7 melee (1d4+1) and masterwork assassin's blade +7 melee (1d4); SA Sneak attack +5d6, death attack (DC 16), poison use, spells; SQ +1 save against poison, uncanny dodge, improved uncanny dodge, evasion, trap sense +1, trapfinding; AL LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +12, Will +3; Str 13, Dex 19 (21), Con 14, Int 16, Wis 13, Cha 15.

Skills: Bluff +13, Climb +9, Disable Device +11, Disguise +13, Hide +21, Jump +14, Move Silently +16, Open Lock +13, Search +11, Spot +12, Tumble +18.

Feats: Exotic Weapon Proficiency (assassin's blade), Improved Initiative, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Finesse.

Languages: Common, Draconic, Elven, Infernal.

Assassin Spells Known (caster level 3; 3/1): 1st—*feather fall*, *jump*, *true strike*; 2nd—*alter self*, *invisibility*.

Possessions: 2 masterwork assassin's blades, 4 daggers, +1 mithral shirt, *gloves of Dexterity* +2, *cloak of elvenkind*, thieves' tools.

Special: Eselda is possessed by a minor devil. A successful Spellcraft check (DC 20) made while viewing her with *detect evil* after three rounds of concentration reveals the nascent creature's presence. If the devil is

somehow driven away, her alignment becomes LG and she renounces her former ways. Feldren and Kelzerin might have other ideas, and they are likely to assassinate her after such a change to prevent her from turning traitor. A *break enchantment* spell or *remove curse* restores Eselda, though she is allowed a Will save to resist those spells. The devil has too strong a grip over her to relinquish its hold without a fight.

Assassin's Blade: This rare weapon is a dagger set with a second blade projecting from the bottom of its pommel. The blades vary from simple, straight cutting edges to curved, almost angular weapons. An assassin's blade is a double weapon. A character who wields two of these weapons can fight with both ends of the one in his primary hand and one end of the blade in his second hand. In this case, double the penalties he suffers for fighting with two weapons.

A monk may use an assassin's blade with his flurry of blows ability. If armed with two such weapons, the monk may accept a -2 penalty on his attacks to gain another attack. This attack is at the monk's normal flurry of blows attack bonus, but it (along with the rest of the monk's attacks) suffers the -2 penalty.

Light, Exotic Weapon: Cost: 10 gp; Damage: 1d4; Threat: 18—20; Critical: x2; Range Increment: 10 ft.; Weight: 1 lb.; Type: Slashing.



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FELDREN THULL

Feldren Thull entered the cult of the death god at an early age. A traveling acolyte spotted the young Feldren strangling an urchin in a dark alley. Feldren killed the boy for a few coppers, but even as his opponent died in his grasp he realized that the coins meant nothing compared to the sense of power he felt as he committed his first murder. The acolyte took in Feldren and taught him the basic precepts of the death god. Once Feldren mastered the basics of murder and divine magic, he killed his tutor and assumed his place in the cult of the death god.

Feldren has since traveled the land, seeking converts to his dread deity. He struck gold in the form of Eselda Nightstar. Her natural talents far surpass any of his previous pupils, yet he worries that she may prove too impetuous and powerful to control. If she strays too far from the path he sets before her (and already her predilection for murdering the rich and powerful goes against his wishes), he may have to slay her.

Feldren Thull, male human cleric 3/rogue 2: CR 5; Medium humanoid (human); HD 3d8+3+2d6+2; hp 33; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 15 (+2 Dex, +3 armor), touch 12, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +3; Grp +5; Atk Masterwork short sword +6 melee (1d6+2) or masterwork composite shortbow +6 ranged (1d6+2); Full Atk Masterwork short sword +6 melee (1d6+2) or masterwork composite shortbow +6 ranged

(1d6+2); SA Sneak attack +1d6, rebuke undead, spells; SQ Evasion, trapfinding; AL LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +6; Str 14, Dex 15, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 11.

Skills: Diplomacy +8, Disable Device +7, Disguise +5, Hide +7, Jump +12, Knowledge (religion) +7, Move Silently +10, Open Lock +7, Spellcraft +7, Tumble +12.

Feats: Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot.

Languages: Common, Giant, Infernal.

Cleric Spells Prepared (caster level 3; 4/3+1/2+1): 0—*cure minor wounds, detect magic, guidance, resistance*; 1st—*cause fear* (DC 13) (d), *obscuring mist, sanctuary* (DC 13), *shield of faith*; 2nd—*cure moderate wounds, hold person* (DC 14), *invisibility* (d).

Domains: Death, Trickery.

Possessions: Masterwork short sword, masterwork composite shortbow (+2), 20 arrows, *rope of climbing, dust of tracelessness, thieves' tools, holy symbol of the death god.*





KELZERIN THOUGHTSTEALER

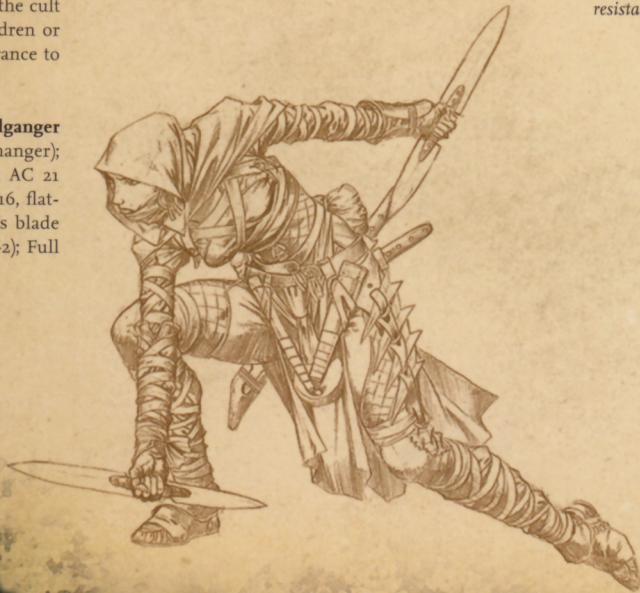
Most doppelgangers prefer to work alone, but Kelzerin has found that her association with the cult brings her steady work, interesting assignments, and access to training and weapons that she would otherwise be unable to gain. Unlike Eselda and Feldren, she cares little for the death god. Instead, she murders purely for the profit.

Kelzerin uses her shape-shifting abilities to confuse her foes. She may adopt the appearance of a common criminal in town to cast suspicion away from the cult while on a mission. If she teams up with Feldren or Eselda in a fight, she mimics her ally's appearance to confuse the PCs.

Kelzerin Thoughtstealer, female doppelganger monk 2: CR 5; Medium humanoid (shapechanger); HD 4d8+4+2d8+2; hp 38; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 21 (+3 Dex, +3 Wis, +4 natural, +1 armor), touch 16, flat-footed 18; Base Atk +5; Grp +11; Atk assassin's blade +7 melee (1d4+2) or shuriken +8 ranged (1d2+2); Full

Atk assassin's blade +5/+5 melee (1d4+2) or assassin's blade +3/+3/+3 melee (1d4+2) or shuriken +8 ranged (1d2+2); SA Detect thoughts, stunning fist (DC 16); SQ Evasion, change shape, immunity to sleep and charm; AL LE; SV Fort +9, Ref +8, Will +11; Str 14, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 12.

Skills: Bluff +13, Diplomacy +5, Disguise +11, Intimidate +5, Hide +12, Listen +7, Sense Motive +9, Spot +7.



Feats: Deflect Arrows, Dodge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (assassin's blade), Improved Grapple, Improved Unarmed Strike, Stunning Fist.

Languages: Common, Dwarven, Halfling.

Possessions: 2 assassin's blades, 6 shuriken, cloak of resistance +1, bracers of armor +1.







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COMPLETE ENCOUNTER

DEATH SHRINE OF THE NINJA CULT

A 6TH-LEVEL ADVENTURE SCALABLE TO ALL LEVELS OF PLAY.

WAYNE REYNOLDS • MIKE MEARLS • DENNIS MIZE • CHRISTOPHER WEST

No secrets escape the legendary death shrine of the ninja cult, a den of silent assassins and profane traditions. But at last a line has been crossed, and the cult must be brought to justice.

This Complete Encounter features three lead-free pewter miniatures suitable for use in any fantasy roleplaying game. 10 double-sided full-color cards provide a complete map of the Death Shrine of the Ninja Cult scaled for miniatures play, an adventure that uses the miniatures provided in this set, and complete statistics for the enemies and magic items encountered within. All game rules adhere to the Open Game Licensed version of the world's most popular roleplaying game.

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US \$15.95/CAN \$22.95

ISBN 0-9770071-2-X



5 1595 >



EAN

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