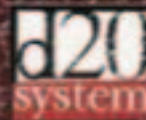


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THE QUINTESSENTIAL SAMURAI

Rising from humble beginnings, combining viciousness and ruthless tactics with a rigid code of honour and formidable willpower, these dabled warriors managed to transform themselves from elite combatants into a powerful social and political force. In this book you will find the information you need to follow the way of the sword and groom a samurai character of your own. Whether you choose to pursue the martial arts and become a master with the blade or engage in the tricky manoeuvrings of the Court with a tongue of acid and a razor-sharp wit, this book has the information you need.

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What You Will Find:

Introduction	Master and Servant
Character Concepts	Sword Schools of the Samurai
The Samurai and Prestige Classes	Amongst the Courtiers
Tricks of the Trade	Mythic Blades – The Katana
Samurai Feats	Shiro – Castles of the Daimyo
Tools of the Trade	Glossary

FOR GAMES MASTERS AND PLAYERS ALIKE
Requires the use of the Dungeons & Dragons® Player's Handbook,
Third Edition, published by Wizards of the Coast®

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T-R-#08-84



The Quintessential Samurai

Sam Witt

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INTRODUCTION

Rising from humble beginnings, the samurai grew to become one of the greatest powers of ancient Japan. Combining viciousness and ruthless tactics with a rigid code of honour and indomitable willpower, these fabled warriors managed to transform themselves from elite combatants into a powerful social and political force. In this book you will find the information you need to follow the way of the sword and groom a samurai character of your own. Whether you choose to pursue the martial arts and become a master with the blade or engage in the tricky manoeuvrings of the Court with a tongue of acid and a razor-sharp wit, this book has the information you need.

The Quintessential Samurai is designed to allow players and Games Masters to bring the unique character of these ancient warriors into their campaigns. More than simply a fighter, the samurai plays a unique role within the campaign – he serves a lord and must work to further the ends of his master. The samurai is also bound by a code of honour, which is inflexible and demanding. Honour is a harsh taskmaster, forcing the samurai to hold himself to a standard of conduct many find too demanding. Though the sting of death is not as great in fantasy campaigns where life can be restored by the gods, many samurai find themselves unwilling to return from the land of the dead when they fail in life, preferring instead to remain far from the world – and their shame.

Despite their great responsibilities and code of honour, the path of the samurai can be very rewarding. Their unique sword schools teach them techniques envied by less disciplined fighters and their position near the ruling elite has its own perks. Though a warrior may lead armies, a disciplined samurai may very well come to rule an empire through strength of arms and clever political manoeuvring.

THE COLLECTOR'S SERIES

The Collector's Series is a range of class and racial sourcebooks from Mongoose Publishing, all designed to greatly widen a player's options for his character within the d20 games system. Slotting seamlessly into any fantasy-based campaign, each will give a comprehensive view of one class or race within the game, allowing both players and Games Masters the chance to present old character types in a completely new way without overpowering or unbalancing the

game as a whole. The Collector's Series will not necessarily allow players to create better characters, but they will be able to do a lot more than they ever thought possible before.

THE QUINTESSENTIAL SAMURAI

Within the pages of this sourcebook, players and Games Masters will find all the material they need to bring the legendary samurai into any campaign. Herein you'll find information on the context of the samurai lifestyle, the environment in which samurai thrive and, of course, plenty of systems to govern the martial schools that give the samurai their renowned fighting skills. But you'll also find rules for interacting with political forces and a system for tracking the honour of a samurai and his lord. As samurai were often charged with overseeing portions of a lord's holdings, you'll also find information on running such a domain and protecting it from harm.

The prestige classes presented in this book are designed to allow a samurai to adopt them as he progresses through his career. In conjunction with the teachings of his martial school, some of these prestige classes give the samurai unparalleled ability on the field of battle. Others, however, bring out the other aspects of samurai life, giving them greater skills in leadership, social manoeuvring, and even spiritual enlightenment. The Way of the Warrior is a complex path, and these prestige classes serve to portray the samurai's many steps on this journey towards perfection.

Once you've read through the material contained herein, you'll be ready to embark on your own journey, charting the course of a samurai character through the trials of his life, increasing his martial skill even as he moves toward his noble destiny.

FACT AND FICTION

Though much of this book is based on research into the actual culture, tactics and history of the samurai, there is a great deal that is purely fantasy. In order to have elven masters of the katana battling next to halfling samurai, there were places where the 'facts' of samurai lore were tweaked, nudged, or even completely altered. The goal of this book is to provide you with the information you need to portray a character who *feels* like a samurai in a fantasy setting, not to create a completely accurate picture of the ancient samurai. Fact is fact, and fantasy is fantasy!

Irizowa knelt before the shrine of his ancestors, his lips moving slightly as he whispered his prayers to those who had come before. The sounds of men on the move came to him from across the river, the rattle of mail and the nervous whinnying of horses carried well on the breeze which wafted up to his hilltop shrine. At his back, a small band of loyal samurai waited for him to finish his preparations and tell them of their roles in the coming battle. Irizowa did not wish to tell them their daimyo's orders but he knew he could postpone his duty no longer. He finished his devotions with a short prayer for wisdom and courage, then released his breath in a single long exhalation. Irizowa rose from his shrine with the smooth and fluid motions typical of students trained in the Falling Silk school and turned to face his companions.

'There is little I can tell you that you do not know, my friends.' Shielding his eyes against the rays of the setting sun, Irizowa directed his gaze down at the gathering hordes of barbarians across the river. 'Lord Azumika is not yet ready to face the half-beasts. His armies are gathering but they will not reach us in time.'

Aluthien, the elven samurai from the distant lands to the south, tilted her head back and adroitly wrapped her hair around a pair of long jade pins, arranging it in an elaborate topknot. 'We have seen the writing, Irizowa. Our priests have warned of this time and it is the reason we sent the people of Akajini into the mountains, is it not?'

Haktan, the noble half-orc elevated by Irizowa after his honourable service at the Battle of Janyin Ford, hefted his massive katana and lowered his elaborate swan's crest helm over his head. 'We live to die, Irizowa, that is what you told me on the day you gave me this sword. Were it not for you, I'd still be a slave or, likely, dead at the bottom of the salt mines. Give me our orders so I may end my life with honour.'

The rest of the samurai nodded as well, a half-dozen strong men and women, trained killing machines with spines of iron and gossamer spirits. Irizowa bowed his head in gratitude and gripped the hilt of his katana with fierce determination. 'We will give a strong accounting of ourselves, this day. Though death waits with eager tongue to lap our souls from rivers of blood, what we do this day will make legends of us all.'

Wordlessly, the seven samurai turned and, as one, began their march down the hill, their blades hungry in their scabbards and their hearts filled with joy for the glorious deaths that waited for them. While they would certainly perish, they would live on as legends for giving their daimyo the time he needed to prepare his own armies. 'We live to die,' Irizowa murmured to himself. 'There is no greater honour than to die in service.'

CHARACTER CONCEPTS

It is truly regrettable that a person will treat a man who is valuable to him well, and a man who is worthless to him poorly.

Hojo Shigetoki

The samurai were a diverse lot and characters of this type should be, as well. From noble children born into families descended from dragons to loyal peasants elevated because of brave and devoted service, there are as many different backgrounds as there are samurai. The history of a character provides important clues as to why he chose to become a warrior destined for an early death and how he will react to the assignments and goals of the master he serves as a samurai. In this chapter, we will examine the possibilities found within.



the background of those characters who choose to become samurai.

Character concepts are a core idea for the *Collector's Series* of sourcebooks from *Mongoose Publishing* and provide a range of templates for each character class that will allow a player to quickly and easily provide a ready background for every new character he generates. As well as providing both a small bonus and penalty to his character's capabilities, each character concept gives a ready base for role-playing, thus greatly shortening the time taken during character creation, as well as granting that oft-needed inspiration so important for a player to feel 'at home' with his new character.

Any one character concept may be applied to a character as it is being created. The listed bonuses and penalties are applied, any role-playing description modified and adjusted to take into account the template and then the character is ready to play! From this point forth, both the player and the Games Master should be aware of the character concept chosen and take steps to ensure the character is played accordingly. It must be stressed, character concepts are a role-playing tool, not simply a method to gain lots of new abilities!

ANCESTRAL HONOUR

The samurai take their families very seriously and believe a samurai's true potential can only be measured by a careful study of his ancestors. Some noble families have such exalted histories it is believed that any samurai who comes from their ranks must surely become one of the greatest warriors of all time. Such projections of ancestral honour may, ultimately, prove to be untrue, however, and a samurai who fails himself and his honourable family in this way may never live down his disgrace. Children who rise from such lines find their every victory lavishly praised, but their failures are loudly and universally condemned as horrible personal shortcomings. This leads many samurai into cycles of elation and depression as their families alternately praise or condemn their actions.

Adventuring: Samurai with families rich in honourable traditions must strive to prove themselves again and again. While other samurai are content to perform the occasional heroic deed or submit an honourable service to their daimyo, those with this character concept are in a race against time to accomplish more than the previous generation. This can lead to a dangerous tendency to overestimate the capabilities of an adventuring party and following a

'I am nothing.' Karizawa threw himself into the motions of the kata, his blade flashing through the night air as he funnelled the frustration of his days into the dance of steel. Deft motions kept the blade dipping and diving through the Lightning Storm routines and the concentration needed to keep his place in the turbulent kata drove his thoughts far away.

His father, a weathered samurai with a wall of trophies taken from the fields of dozens of battles, watched as his son threw himself into the steps of the ritualised training exercise. From his vantage on the balcony, the older samurai could see the mistakes brought on by the impatience of youth, the rush to complete a movement or the drive to eviscerate an imaginary foe. Shaking his head with disgust, the veteran warrior turned away.

Karizawa finished his kata, flying through the final movements with a fluid grace and surprised himself with the ferocity and accuracy of his own movements. A ball of fire blossomed in his stomach, a flowering of knowledge and power, which surged through his limbs and crippled his thoughts with its all-encompassing awareness. Visions flashed through his mind, leaving him gasping on his knees. In a flash of cognisance, he understood, he felt, what it meant to be samurai.

Wordlessly, he rose from the earth and carefully sheathed his katana. Without pause, he walked from his father's land, his footsteps measured and relentless. He did not know what his destiny would be, but he knew he would never find it here, in the shadow of his family.

samurai from this type of family can be extremely hazardous.

Role-playing: Desperate to prove themselves to a demanding family, samurai with this character concept are hell bent on proving their worth to themselves and their ancestors. Ready to accept difficult challenges without pause, this samurai appears brave and confident to everyone. Inside, however, there is always the fear of not measuring up, of falling short of what is expected by his family and himself. Where others fall behind and reconsider their options, this samurai presses on, battling his own fears for the chance to become worthy of his own name.

Bonuses: The first time each level that a character with this concept gains honour, he gains an additional 1 point of honour.

Penalties: The first time each level that a character with this concept loses honour, he loses an additional 1 point of honour.

ASHIGARU

In times of war, lords must often rely on less-than-ideal warriors, arming their peasants as best they can in the hope of protecting their territory or assaulting the nearby domains of their enemies. Known as ashigaru, these peasants are poorly trained and horribly equipped, often operating without armour and using only the crudest of weapons. Still, those who survive long as an ashigaru are able to distinguish themselves amongst their peers, standing out as capable combatants. A few of these survivors come to

