The Complete Ninja's Handbook

By Aaron Allston
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Parts of Oriental Adventures designed by David "Zeb" Cook. In particular, portions of
The optional Advanced Martial Arts rules are drawn from Oriental Adventures.
What is a ninja? Everywhere you turn, you find a different definition, especially in the movies. Is the ninja a cruel supernatural assassin with godlike powers of invisibility, illusion, and teleportation? A modern, feeling Oriental man with family, job responsibilities, and an interesting double life? A stone-faced westerner who miraculously inherits the duties of an ancient ninja clan tradition when his adopted brother is slain? A martial arts practitioner celebrating hundreds of years of unbroken tradition?

In the AD&D® game, the ninja is a highly trained spy who is expert in matters of intrusion, sabotage, and elimination. He is part of a tight-knit clan whose profession and goals he shares. Some ninja are generalists, equally at home in matters of stealth and combat. Some are specialists, becoming adept at social skills, magic, or interaction with nature.

They're all exotic, secretive, and dangerous—just the thing for the player who's tired of stand-up fighters, clean-cut clerics, and nearsighted scholar-mages.

Ninja have been here before—in pages of DRAGON® Magazine and the Oriental Adventures supplement. Now they return, slinking into the game's shadows in their night-suits, learning the balance of weapons and tools made a little unfamiliar by adaptation to AD&D® 2nd Edition rules. We've missed them, and it's high time to welcome them back.

The Complete Ninja's Handbook is a supplement to the Player's Handbook. It consists of optional rules that are intended to round out and add color to a campaign.

The key word here is "optional." No DM is required to introduce any of these rules into his campaign simply because they're in print. Likewise, any DM should feel perfectly at ease plundering these guidelines for rules and options he likes, whether or not he introduces ninja characters into the campaign. Ultimately, the DM, not this rulebook, is the final authority on what appears in the campaign.

Arrangement of the Sourcebook

Chapter 1: The Ninja Class provides character class information for the ninja.

Chapter 2: Ninja Kits details kits that allow you to further customize ninja characters.

Chapter 3: Shinobi, Spies, and Killers introduces kits to create shinobi (adjunct members of ninja clans), spies (characters built with the ninja rules but employed by non-Oriental organizations), and killers (NPCs built with the rules of the ninja class).

Chapter 4: Proficiencies and Martial Arts details the roles of certain proficiencies used by ninja, adds new proficiencies, and expands on martial arts and weapon proficiency rules.

Chapter 5: Tools of the Trade describes weapons and armor available to the ninja character.

Chapter 6: Country and Clan discusses the role of the ninja character within his culture.

Chapter 7: Playing the Ninja provides information and tactics for the player who intends to play a ninja character.

Chapter 8: Campaigning the Ninja talks about secrecy, missions, duties to clan, and other details, and gives hints for placing the ninja in existing campaigns.

Chapter 9: Examples is full of easily customized ninja characters.

Players should familiarize themselves with chapters 1 and 2, and at least glance through chapters 3-7. Players should not read Chapter 9 unless their DM invites them to do so.

The Dungeon Master should become familiar with chapters 1, 4, 5, and 8. These should give the DM a good idea of what to expect of a ninja PC in the campaign.
In seventh century Japan, Prince Shotoku Taishi won a war against an enemy named Moriya. The prince's success rested on information brought to him by a spy named Otomo-no-Saijin, whom Shotoku Taishi honored with the name Shinobi, meaning "stealer in." It is probably from this incident that the use of the term shinobi has come to refer to highly trained, clan-based Japanese spies.

(In Japanese and Chinese, there may be two or more ways to pronounce the same written characters. An alternate pronunciation for shinobi is ninja.)

Japanese techniques of military intelligence, heavily influenced by espionage advisors from China and Sun Tzu's classic manual *The Art of War*, developed over a period of several hundred years.

During the Kamakura era, from the late twelfth to early fourteenth centuries, many samurai and their families fell out of favor with the court. Some of these families fled to distant Iga and Koga provinces and settled there in reduced circumstances to make their living as farmers. Among them were experts in military intelligence, who began selling their expertise to daimyo, Japanese feudal lords. It was in this setting that the modern idea of the ninja—an agent with espionage skills for hire but whose loyalty belongs first to his own clan—truly took hold.

In their isolated villages, the ninja clans developed specific espionage and combat techniques. These are collectively referred to as ninjutsu, though that term is also used to refer to only their unarmed and weapon combat techniques.

Spies and ninja found many opportunities for employment in the great anarchic periods of the twelfth to sixteenth centuries. In the more stable Tokugawa shogunate of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, they were used less often, and it is reasonable to assume that their numbers declined. Some modern historians believe that the last of the true ninja died during World War II (or earlier), while others believe that the modern combat and espionage techniques now being taught under the name ninjutsu are genuine, linear descendants of the real ninja skills.

**Ninja and Rogue**

The ninja character class, like the thief and the bard classes, belongs to the rogue group. However, the ninja's similarity to other rogues lies not in temperament (ninja do not believe that the world owes them a living, and are not known as carefree, happy-go-lucky people) but in skills. (Ninja are proficient in matters of stealth, intrusion, and investigation.)

Like other rogues, ninja combine traits from several character classes. They have many of the skills of the thief and some of the combat options of the fighter. A few are able to learn some magical spells.

**Table 1: Rogue Experience Levels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Ninja</th>
<th>Hit Dice (d6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,250</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>110,000</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>160,000</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>220,000</td>
<td>10+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>440,000</td>
<td>10+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>660,000</td>
<td>10+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>880,000</td>
<td>10+8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1,100,000</td>
<td>10+10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>1,320,000</td>
<td>10+12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>1,540,000</td>
<td>10+14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>1,760,000</td>
<td>10+16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>1,980,000</td>
<td>10+18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>2,200,000</td>
<td>10+20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ninja Experience Levels

Ninja earn experience levels as other rogues do. Table 25 from the Player’s Handbook is reproduced on page 5.

One type of ninja, the Spirit Warrior (see Chapter 2) may learn magic spells and must earn more experience points to gain levels.

Ninja of experience levels 1-5 are genin, the lowest-ranking ninja. Those of experience levels 6 through 9 are chunin, the middle management of the ninja clan—sometimes getting their hands dirty and sometimes hobnobbing with the upper ranks. Those of experience level 10 and above are jonin, the upper management of the clan.

Ninja Class Requirements

Ability Requirements
- Dexterity 13
- Intelligence 10

Prime Requisite
- Dexterity

Races Allowed
- Human
- Dwarf
- Halfling

The ninja must have a Dexterity score of at least 13 (reflecting intensive training from childhood in ninja arts) and an Intelligence score of at least 10.

The ninja PC, regardless of race, must have been raised from youth by a human ninja clan. There are no demihuman ninja clans, and the DM and players will have to be very creative to account for a ninja clan’s fostering of a dwarf or halfling. For exceptions to this requirement, see the section on “Spies” in Chapter 3.

The DM has the right to decide whether a player can run a ninja character. Ninja bring new levels of secrecy and intrigue into a campaign. The DM who does not wish to complicate the campaign to this extent may forbid the use of ninja PCs.

Alignment

Technically, a ninja may be of any alignment. However, each ninja belongs to a clan (see Chapter 6), and each clan’s members are restricted to a range of alignments. A player might be able to choose the character’s clan but cannot then choose an alignment inappropriate for that clan.

The standard ninja clan allows its members to be of any lawful or neutral alignment (LG, LN, LE, NG, N, NE). The “lawful” aspect of the alignment applies to the rules of conduct of the clan, not those of the society or the nation.

Weapons and Armor

The ninja can use any weapon, giving a much wider range of choices than a thief has. Armor choices are limited to leather, padded, studded leather, ring mail, brigandine, scale mail, hide armor, and chain mail. The ninja can use a shield and fights as a rogue.

To avoid any adverse effect, ninja avoid wearing armor heavier than leather when they plan to use their thieving skills.

Thieving Skills

Like other rogues, ninja can learn thieving skills. They are not as proficient in most of these skills as thieves are, but a ninja who becomes very experienced and specializes in two or three thieving skills can achieve great proficiency.

Table 2 shows the base scores for ninja thieving skills.

To these base scores, apply appropriate bonuses and penalties for Dexterity (Table 3, reproduced here from Table 28 in the Player’s Handbook), for race (below), and for armor worn (Table 5, replaces Table 29 from the