



by Sean Robson

Art by Dan Smith

Gulach staggered to the top of the dune and saw nothing but an unending sea of dunes extending to the horizon. He choked out a wheezing laugh -- as much as his parched throat would allow. He had entered the Great Desert on a fool's quest, and he would die here. An ordinary man would have died long ago, but Gulach was not a man, he was a half-breed bastard -- too stupid to quit and too stubborn to die. He stumbled on, each step an effort of sheer will under the relentless hammer and anvil of the blazing sun and desert floor.

He had heard rumors of the Daga-Shai while living as a pit-fighter in Megalos. The Daga-Shai were said to be a secret society of assassins, all of them Half-Orcs like him. It was whispered that they lived in a lost city in the Great Desert, and moreover, that they offered naraghash -- sanctuary -- to any Half-Orc with the will to seek them out. The tales struck a chord in Gulach's soul. Never in his life had he known family or community. His only acceptance was the roar of the crowd for spilling and shedding blood to amuse Megalos's wealthy citizens.

They said he wouldn't last three days in the desert, that he would never find his sanctuary, if it even existed. Gulach didn't care. He would rather die in the desert dreaming of sanctuary than continue to live without hope. He stumbled and fell face first into the sand, and knew he lacked the strength to rise again. As he stared into the face of the late afternoon sun, clawing weakly at the sand, four tan cloaked silhouettes rose up, seemingly out of the desert, before him. One of the figures grabbed Gulach by the hair, bent his head back and placed a gleaming knife blade at his throat. "What do you seek?" whispered the veiled figure.

"Sanctuary," Gulach croaked.

Gulach's head was released and he was lifted to his feet. The leader of the four gestured to a stone walled city in the distance. "Welcome brother," he said, "to the city of Naraghash."

History of the Daga-Shai

In the year 1929 a band of Half-Orc slaves fled from the Spleen-Eater tribe in the Orclands. Knowing they would fair no better in Caithness, they escaped into the wastes of the Great Desert. Led by Goresh Lekh, the strongest and wisest among them, they learned the ways of the desert - how to find water and food. After many months of nomadic existence, they came upon the

crumbling ruins of an ancient city. Where most of the band saw ruin and decay, Goresh Lekh saw the future. They settled in those ruins and slowly began to reclaim the city from the desert. As the women began to bear children, and more refugees from the Orclands found their way to them, the community grew and they finally had what they always dreamed of -- a home. They named their home Naraghash, Orcish for sanctuary.

Goresh Lekh knew that, for their society to survive, they must have commerce. In the resource-poor desert all they had to trade was their skill, and the skill they were best at was killing. And so the Daga-Shai -- the "night-shadows" -- were born. Goresh Lekh was born in Sahud and raised for a time by his human uncle who taught him to fight. After his uncle's death, Goresh Lekh was driven from Sahud and into the Orclands, but he never forgot the lessons of his childhood. In training the Daga-Shai, he refined and modified his Sahudese fighting techniques, blending them with the fighting style and weaponry the Half-Orcs were familiar with.

Under Goresh Lekh's tutelage, the Daga-Shai became peerless assassins. Their services were in demand in Megalos, and fetched a high price. As the Daga-Shai's reputation grew so did their ranks, as more and more Half-Orc refugees sought them out.

Politics

The Master of Daga-Shai is the leader of the society, and is known as The Goresh in honor of their founder. Under The Goresh a council of elders govern the city of Naraghash, leaving The Goresh to oversee the business and training of the Daga-Shai. Although the Daga-Shai society is largely secular, The Goresh is the closest thing they have to a holy man. His wisdom and authority are unquestioned.

When the Goresh dies, the most senior and experienced of the Daga-Shai assassins is chosen by the council of elders to replace him. If there is more than one eligible candidate, the issue is settled by sending the contenders to the Master's Alley, a convoluted maze of ruins. There the contenders stalk and ambush one another until all but one are eliminated. The survivor is named Goresh. There can be only one Master of Daga-Shai.

The only other sentient race living in the desert are the Reptile Men. The two races live in relative harmony, each preferring to avoid the other. In the early years of its settlement, Naraghash was occasionally attacked by Reptile Men, who feared the Half-Orcs were encroaching on their territory. Since the city walls were the first structures rebuilt by the settlers, the attacks met with little success, and as soon as the Reptile Men realized that the Daga-Shai wished only to live within the confines of their city and be left alone, the attacks stopped. On occasion the Daga-Shai trade steel to the Lizard Men in exchange for artifacts.

Many Daga-Shai, especially those born outside of Naraghash, harbor a deep resentment toward Orcs or Humans, depending on where they were raised, and many take great satisfaction in avenging themselves upon their former oppressors. The Goresh has strictly forbidden the indiscriminate slaughter of Humans, as it would damage the professional reputation of the Daga-Shai. Orcs, however, are a different story, as they seldom employ the services of the assassins. The Daga-Shai frequently conduct field exercises in the Orclands, as the area provides a limitless supply of training subjects on which to hone their skills.

Culture

The Daga-Shai live in a communal society. All resources are shared equally, and citizens are assigned living quarters with the city. All citizens work for the betterment of the whole, and it is considered the highest honor to serve as an assassin and help provide for the community. Half-Orc refugees are



welcome in Naraghash, but are expected to train as Daga-Shai and help provide for the community if they wish to stay. Women are allowed to serve as assassins if they desire, but if they become pregnant they are expected to return to Naraghash to bear their children and nurse them through infancy. Children aged two to ten are raised communally, and are given the run of the city and allowed to enjoy their childhood. All children in Naraghash, boys and girls, begin training as Daga-Shai at the age of ten, and enter service as trained assassins at age seventeen. At present there are approximately three hundred citizens living in Naraghash, and over one hundred and fifty assassins abroad.

At least one Daga-Shai is stationed in every major city on Yrth to take freelance assignments. A small percentage of the Daga-Shai's fee is kicked back to the local assassin's guild to avoid misunderstandings. Most guilds are happy to accept this arrangement since the Daga-Shai's contract fee is so high he doesn't really take much work away from the local talent, and eliminating a Daga-Shai is costly in terms of lost manpower. Freelance Daga-Shai spend two years at each posting. After being relieved, they return to Naraghash for a period of rest before being reassigned. Eventually, due to injury or age, an assassin will be forced to leave active service and retire to Naraghash. There, they continue to serve their people by performing less hazardous duties. Some take up a trade, while the best become Daga-Shai trainers.

Occasionally, The Goresh will accept a contract putting the Daga-Shai on long term retainer to a powerful individual or organization to serve as personal assassins and body guards -- who better to protect someone from assassination than a professional assassin? It is the responsibility of The Goresh to ensure that there are enough assassins available to meet the Daga-Shai's contractual obligations.

The laws of Naraghash are designed to protect and preserve its citizens and are strictly enforced. The Prime Edict of the Daga-Shai is to preserve the secrecy of the city. Goresh Lekh realized that if the location of Naraghash were learned, or even the truth of its existence confirmed by the outside world, the new homeland would be destroyed. Daga-Shai are expected to take their own lives before revealing the city's location. Anyone who does reveal the location is hunted down and killed, along with those he told. To prevent accidental discovery, Sentinels patrol the desert around Naraghash, killing all but Half-Orcs seeking sanctuary.

One of the most striking features of Daga-Shai society is their unshakable solidarity. The citizens of Naraghash are exceptionally loyal to The Goresh, and to each other. Theft is unheard of in Naraghash, and the incidences of betrayal have been few. Disputes are settled by a formal duel. For many Half-Orcs, the feeling of brotherhood and acceptance they find with the Daga-Shai instills fanatical devotion.

Code of the Daga-Shai

The Daga-Shai live by a strict code of personal and professional conduct: once coin is taken, a contract must be fulfilled, personal disputes are to be settled in a fair duel, die before revealing the location of Naraghash.

Half-Orc Racial Template (from GURPS Fantasy Folk) Cost: 0 points

Attributes: IQ-1 [-10], HT +1 [10]

Advantages: Extra Hit Points +1 [5], Acute Hearing +2 [4]

Disadvantages: Reputation -2 [-10]

Skills: Brawling (P/E) DX [1]

Daga-Shai Assassin Template

Cost: 100 points

Attributes: ST 11 [10], DX 13 [30], IQ 11 [20]*, HT 12 [10]*

Advantages: 20 points from: Alertness [5/level], Combat Reflexes [15], Fearlessness [2/level], Fit or Very Fit [5 or 10], High Pain Threshold [10], Literacy [10], Magic Resistance [2/level], Patron (The Goresh) [Varies], Toughness [10]

Disadvantages: Duty (12 or less) [-10], and an additional -20 points from: Bloodlust [-10], Callous [-6], Code of Honor (Daga-Shai) [-10], Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20], Fanaticism or Extreme Fanaticism [-15], Intolerance [-5/-10], Loner [-5], Sense of Duty [-10].

Primary Skills: Daga-Shai Hand-Hand [12], 10 points in the following Combat/Weapon skills: Shortsword (P/A), Pistol Crossbow (P/E), Garrote (P/E), Knife (P/E), Knife Throwing (P/E).

Secondary Skills: Armoury/TL 3 (M/A) IQ [2] -- 11, Camouflage (M/E) IQ+1 [2] -- 12, Climbing (P/A) DX [2] -- 13, Holdout (M/A) IQ [2] -- 11, Shadowing (M/A) IQ [2] -- 11, Poisons (M/H) IQ-1 [2] -- 10.

Background Skills: 6 points in any of: Escape (P/A), First Aid (M/E), Language -- English or Orcish (M/A), Survival -- Desert (M/A), Tracking (M/A), Traps (M/A)

* -- Includes racial modifiers

Notes

- **Attributes:** High DX is essential for an assassin. ST and IQ are also important attributes, and the Daga-Shai receive education to overcome their inherently low IQ. Half-Orcs are naturally robust so 12 was chosen to reflect this.
- **Advantages:** Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Fearlessness, Fit, High Pain Threshold, and Toughness reflect the Daga-Shai's training, and in order to function independently they need to be able to read (Literacy). Sometimes The Goresh takes special note of promising students (Patron), and many of the Daga-Shai who were born in the mana-poor Great Desert are resistant to magic (Magic Resistance).
- **Disadvantages:** All Daga-Shai are obligated to accept contracts assigned to them by The Goresh (Duty). Bloodlust, Callous, Intolerance, and Loner reflect the hardships and abuses suffered by Half-Orcs who grew up in either Human or Orcish society. The code of conduct and dangers of life in the Daga-Shai are reflected (Code of Honor, Extremely Hazardous Duty), as is the fervent loyalty towards, and willingness to protect their new home (Fanaticism, Extreme Fanaticism, Sense of Duty).
- **Primary Skills:** The Daga-Shai are killers first and foremost, and their primary skills reflect their ability in combat. All Daga-Shai are extensively trained in the close combat hand-to-hand style developed by Goresh Lekh, as well as in the Shatara -- the Daga-Shai shortsword, pistol crossbow, garrote, and knife.
- **Secondary Skills:** Included here are the skills necessary to get close enough to the target to kill him (Camouflage, Climbing, Holdout, and Shadowing), the ability to keep weapons in good repair (Armory), and knowledge of poisons. The Stealth skill is emphasized as part of the Daga-Shai hand-hand training (see below).
- **Background Skills:** The Daga-Shai live in the Great Desert, and Survival (Desert), Tracking, and Traps help them thrive in an inhospitable environment. First Aid is important in a high risk occupation, and Escape comes in handy in the event of capture.

Daga-Shai Hand-to-Hand

Goresh-Ka

12 points/15 points

This martial art style was developed by Goresh Lekh, the first Master of Daga-Shai, and incorporates elements of Sahudese martial arts with the fighting techniques familiar to most Half-Orcs. Goresh-Ka stylists use stealth to close to within grappling distance of an unsuspecting target,

then kill him with either knife, garrote, or bare hands. When unarmed, the Daga-Shai will always attempt to grapple and take down the opponent, preferably stunning them with a Head Butt, Knee Strike, or Pile Driver. Close Combat and Ground Fighting maneuvers are used to put the opponent at a disadvantage when defending or counter-attacking. The Goresh is considered a master of Goresh-Ka for the purposes of purchasing the Trained by a Master advantage.

Primary Skills: Brawling (P/E), Wrestling (P/A), Stealth (P/A)

Secondary Skills: Body Language (M/H)

Optional Skills: Breath Control (M/VH), Throwing (P/H)

Maneuvers: Arm Lock (Average), Choke Hold (Hard), Close Combat-Knife (Average), Drop Kick (Hard) Ground Fighting-Wrestling (Hard), Head Butt (Average), Head Lock (Hard), Hit Location-Knife or Knife Throwing (Hard), Knee Strike (Average)

Cinematic Skills: Immovable Stance (P/H), Kiai (P/H)

Cinematic Maneuvers: Piledriver (Hard)

Tactics

The Daga-Shai may shadow their targets for days before making their move. They like to familiarize themselves with their victim's routine, movements, and habits, and then set up an ambush, preferably when the target is alone. They prefer attacking at close range with small, easily concealed weapons. If forced to make a hit in public they will arrange a distraction to cover their escape. The Daga-Shai generally work alone on assignment, but will work in pairs or small groups for difficult jobs.

Weapons and Equipment

- **Ka-da (DX, Boxing, Brawling, or Karate)** -- Leather gloves reinforced with metal strips on the back and metal studs on the knuckles. Provides DR 3 to the hands and, like brass knuckles, adds +2 to damage with fists. Unlike brass knuckles there is no penalty to use weapons while wearing the Ka-da; however, skills requiring fine manual dexterity will be at -4 DX.
- **Sarash** -- A mottled, tan colored cloak with hood and veil worn by most Daga-Shai. Provides +2 to the camouflage skill when in a desert or sandstone environment.
- **Shatara (DX-5, Shortsword)** -- This primary melee weapon of the Daga-Shai is a sturdy single-edged shortsword with a sharp point for stabbing. Deep, regularly spaced slots are cut into the non-edged side of the Shatara. The Daga-Shai may attempt to parry at -4 to catch an attacker's weapon in one of the slots. He may then immediately attempt to either disarm the attacker by making a quick contest of weapons skills, or break the attacker's weapon, doing SW crushing damage.

Weapon Type Damage Reach Cost Weight Min ST Notes

Shatara	imp	thr	1	\$500	3	10	Can disarm or break weapon
	cut	sw	1				

Using the Daga-Shai

The Daga-Shai are intended as an NPC group that can be a serious thorn in the side of any PCs who run afoul of them. The template represents a novice, fresh out of training. An experienced assassin should be built on at least 150 points, while a veteran will have 200 or more points in skills and advantages. The Goresh should be at least a 500-point character.

The game master may also wish to allow the Daga-Shai as player characters. Although the template is expensive, it is still suitable for a 100-point campaign. The biggest obstacle to playing a

Daga-Shai character is the onerous Duty disadvantage, which requires the character to take assassination contracts on a frequent basis. Buying off the disadvantage would make the character a renegade, and she would be hunted down as a threat to the security of Naraghash. Alternatively, the character could be placed on retainer with the PC's. This would require that the Daga-Shai's share of income, treasure, etc., less living expenses, would be sent to Naraghash as her contract fee. Unless these payments are at least equal to what the character would earn taking assassination contracts, The Goresh will require that she terminate her partnership with the PC's and accept a new posting.

Daga-Shai Adventure Seed: A Little Too Much Information

The PC's are approached by a very nervous Half-Orc who desperately wishes to hire them to protect him from assassins. He tells the characters of a lost city in the Great Desert that is home to an evil death cult, and that he was kidnapped and brainwashed by the cult but has managed to escape their clutches. Now they want him dead. He offers the characters \$4000.00 to get rid of the assassins on his trail.

What the Half-Orc doesn't tell the PC's is that he is a renegade Daga-Shai who grew tired of sending his contract fees to support the citizens of Naraghash and thought he could cut his ties, establish himself as an independent assassin, and keep the profits for himself. He figured the Daga-Shai would never miss him. That was, until a pair of his former brethren showed up in town and made the first attempt on his life. His hope is that the PC's will either eliminate the assassins or at least distract them long enough for him to get out of town and cover his trail.

Regardless of whether they accept the job or not, the characters will now be marked for assassination. If they accept, they will come into direct conflict with the Daga-Shai. If they refuse, the Daga-Shai will catch up with the renegade and make him talk before dispatching him. Because the renegade told the characters about Naraghash, they will be considered a threat that needs to be eliminated. If the characters kill the two assassins in town, more will arrive, and in greater numbers. The characters will be followed wherever they go and will encounter ambushes at the most inconvenient times.

The character's only hope of permanently ending the Daga-Shai threat is to convince The Goresh that they are no threat and swear to keep the secret of the Daga-Shai. To do this they must find Naraghash, brave the dangers of the Great Desert, and get past the sentinels and into the city without being killed. That's the easy part. The difficult part will be to obtain an audience with The Goresh and convince him of their sincerity.

Daga-Shai Character Example

Gulach

Gulach is a former Megalan pit-fighter, now Daga-Shai assassin. His exploitation as a gladiator by the wealthy elite of Megalos has left him contemptuous of humans, and that brutal lifestyle has made it difficult for him to open up to others and make friends. He considers his service in the Daga-Shai to be his salvation and redemption, and feels that it is the first worthwhile cause he has ever fought for.

Though he is a consummate professional, old habits from his past life often resurface and may bring him to a bad end some day. He likes a straight fight man-to-man, and will engage his opponents in a duel unless the mission requires a quick, silent kill. When he fights, the showman in him comes out, and he taunts his opponents, and opts for flashy, crowd pleasing maneuvers.

Gulach is a 150-point character.

ST 12, DX 13, IQ 12*, HT 12/13*

Speed: 6.25 Move: 6

Dodge: 7# Parry: 9# Block: 8#

Advantages: Acute Hearing +2*, Combat Reflexes, Extra Hit Points +1*, Literacy, Strong Will 1.

Disadvantages: Duty 12 or less, Fanaticism, Intolerance (humans), Loner, Reputation -2*, Stubbornness.

Quirks: Likes Duels, Taunts Foes, Showoff, Impatient, Smart Mouth.

Skills: Body Language-12; Brawling-15*; Buckler-14; Camouflage-12; Crossbow-14; Fast Draw (Knife)-14; Fast Draw (Sword)-14; First Aid-12; Garrote-14; Holdout-12; Knife-15; Knife Throwing-14; Performance-11; Poisons-11; Shadowing-13; Shortsword-16; Stealth-14; Survival (Desert)-11; Tracking-13; Wrestling-15.

Maneuvers: Arm Lock-15; Choke Hold-13; Close Combat (Knife)-14; Drop Kick-14; Ground Fighting (Wrestling)-13; Head Butt-11; Head Lock-12; Hit Location (Knife)-14; Knee Strike-14.

-- Includes Combat Reflexes

* -- Includes Half-Orc racial template

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