

TALADAS

Angry Dead Gnomes and Sinister Walking Sharks

by James Jacobs · illustrated by Fred Hooper

Although the lands of Taladas share the same sun, moons, and stars as Ansalon, and many of the denizens of this huge continent are the same races that can be found on the other side of the planet, the cultures found on each landmass are markedly different. Presented in this article are the products of two of these cultures: the militaristic gnomes that comprise the Company of the Dead and the sinister leaders of the Shark Cult of the Fisheries.

COMPANION OF THE DEAD

Although the gnomes of Taladas are known for their obsession with technological tinkering, at least a few groups of gnomes that dwell deep in the inhospitable reaches of central Taladas have abandoned this love of all things technological. The most infamous of these groups is the Company of the Dead.

The gnomes that comprise this society come from a long tradition of highly focused warriors that have chosen to accept the inevitability of death so completely and wholly that they view themselves as kin to the dead. Upon becoming a member of the Company, a gnome cuts all ties with friends and family and gives his worldly possessions away. His family often holds a funeral service for him, a service that the new companion of the dead is welcome to attend. From this point on, his family and friends no longer acknowledge him as living.

A companion of the dead is instantly recognizable by his skull-like face paint and distinctive armor that bears an image of a skeleton on its surface. Members of the Company are strictly melee fighters; ranged weapons are forbidden to them. Most companions of the dead have several levels of fighter to help offset the significant number of feats required to gain entry into the organization. To this point, no non-gnomes have been welcomed into the Company, but this is more out of tradition than an intrinsic quality possessed by gnomes.

Class Features

All the following are class features of the companion of the dead prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Companions of the dead gain proficiency with all simple and martial melee weapons. As part of their vows, the companion of the dead forsakes the use of any ranged weapon. If a companion of the dead ever makes an attack with a ranged weapon of any sort (including thrown weapons and spells that resolve as ranged touch attacks), he immediately suffers a -4 penalty on all attack rolls, skill checks, and Will saving throws for the next 24 hours.

Death's Vow: Upon becoming a companion of the dead, the character severs all ties with any family or friends, and divests himself of all worldly possessions except for armor, weapons, and any magic items that directly augment his ability to fight in melee. He may still adventure with his companions, but any personal relationships he might have had with them before are now forbidden. The dead have no need for friendship or physical wealth. If at any time the companion breaks Death's Vow, he becomes wracked with guilt and suffers penalties for 24 hours as described above.

No Fear (Ex): A companion of the dead is immune to all fear effects.

Death's Visage (Ex): As long as the 2nd-level companion of the dead wears his traditional face paint (the image of a skull), he gains a competence bonus equal to his class level on all Intimidate checks.

Deathrage (Su): At 3rd level, a companion of the dead can enter a deathrage once per day as a free action in any round in which he slays an enemy with a melee attack. Upon entering a deathrage, the companion of the dead gains a +2 bonus to Strength, a +2 bonus to Dexterity, and 1d6 temporary hit points per class level. These bonuses persist for 1 minute before fading. Hit points gained from a deathrage are subtracted from the companion's total before his normal hit points when he suffers damage. A companion of the dead can enter a deathrage 2/day at 6th level and 3/day at 9th level.

No Sleep (Ex): At 4th level, a companion of the dead no longer needs to sleep. He is immune to magical *sleep* effects. If the companion has the ability to cast spells from another class, he no longer requires sleep to pre-

pare spells. He is still limited to preparing spells only once per day, and the preparation time still takes 1 hour of meditation, study, or prayer.

Dead Mind (Ex): At 5th level, a companion of the dead becomes immune to all mind-affecting effects. This includes all morale effects, even those that would normally be beneficial to the character.

COMPANION OF THE DEAD Requirements

To qualify to become a companion of the dead, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Race: Gnome.

Intimidate: 10 ranks.

Knowledge (history): 5 ranks.

Feats: Armor Proficiency (heavy), Diehard, Endurance, Power Attack, Toughness, Weapon Focus (any melee weapon).

Special: Must sever all ties with family and forsake all personal wealth and possessions (with the exception of armor, melee weapons, and magic items that augment melee combat).

COMPANION OF THE DEAD Class Skills

The companion of the dead's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are:

Str: Climb, Jump.

Con: Concentration.

Int: Knowledge (history), Knowledge (religion).

Wis: Survival.

Cha: Intimidate.

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int Modifier.

HIT DIE
D12

No Pain (Ex): At 7th level, the companion of the dead no longer feels pain or exhaustion. He is immune to all effects based on pain, and he no longer suffers the effects of fatigue, exhaustion, or stunning.

Death Ward (Su): At 8th level, the companion's close association with death infuses his body and soul with powerful energies. He is now immune to all death effects, energy drain, and negative energy effects (such as from *inflict* spells or *chill touch*).

Dead Body (Su): At 10th level, the companion of the dead has turned his back on life to such an extent that he has nearly become an undead creature himself. He no longer suffers additional damage from sneak attacks or critical hits, and he is immune to poison and disease. He can still be harmed by nonlethal damage and ability damage.

SHARK CULTIST

The southeastern reaches of Taladas (in particular the group of islands known as the Fisheries) have been plagued by a particularly insidious secret society of shark-worshipping cultists since the Time of Dragons. The shark cult spread quickly through the Fisheries, and chapters eventually began to appear in coastal cities throughout the continent. The cultists are particularly adept at infiltrating small villages and replacing the leaders and elders with their own people, effectively taking control of these settlements from the inside out. The cult is well known for its violent tendencies and willingness to murder and kill; their members resemble sharks in more ways than one.

When a shark cultist is not hiding her identity, she wears a large war-helm made from the head of a shark. Her



THE CREATION OF TALADAS

The TALADAS campaign setting has its origins in a rather innocuous question: What's on the other side of Krynn? The question was asked at Augie's, a Lake Geneva, Wisconsin bar and grill to which Jim Ward and Warren Spector had taken the TSR design department for a no-holds-barred brainstorming session.

The group was trying to come up with ideas for what the two new D&D boxed sets would be for 1989. "In those days," Jeff Grubb recalls, "it was always boxed sets. And we needed two new ones." Ideas were flying fast and loose—including the notion that would eventually become SPELLJAMMER—when the topic of DRAGONLANCE came up. DRAGONLANCE was TSR's most successful world to date, having both a successful game line and a series of bestselling novels. What the company was looking for was the next DRAGONLANCE.

That's when someone spoke up and said, "Well, we know about Ansalon, but there's got to be more on this planet. What's on the other side?"

No one is quite certain anymore exactly who asked the question (or, at least, no one is fessing up), but the results were the first official spin-off campaign. What people do remember is what good service they got at Augie's that day.

"It seems," Grubb says, "that someone told the staff that we were 'Hollywood people' who had come to scout Lake Geneva for a movie shoot." In fact, the area was used for several scenes in the Keanu Reeves, Morgan Freeman thriller *Cold Fusion*. "To this day, they still think Warren Spector was actually Stephen Spielberg."

by Stani

COMPANION OF THE DEAD Advancement

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+0	+2	Death's vow, no fear
2nd	+2	+3	+0	+3	Death's visage
3rd	+3	+3	+1	+3	Deathrage 1/day
4th	+4	+4	+1	+4	No sleep
5th	+5	+4	+1	+4	Dead mind
6th	+6	+5	+2	+5	Deathrage 2/day
7th	+7	+5	+2	+5	No pain
8th	+8	+6	+2	+6	Death ward
9th	+9	+6	+3	+6	Deathrage 3/day
10th	+10	+7	+3	+7	Dead body

HIT DIE
D8

SHARK CULTIST Requirements

To qualify to become a shark cultist, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Alignment: Chaotic evil, chaotic neutral, or neutral evil.

Craft (leatherworking): 1 rank.

Knowledge (nature): 5 ranks.

Swim: 8 ranks.

Feats: Exotic Weapon Proficiency (sharktooth gauntlet), Skill Focus (Swim).

Special: You must slay a shark of no smaller than Large size in single combat and create a war-helmet and sharktooth gauntlets from the body.

SHARK CULTIST Class Skills

The shark cultist's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are:

Str: Swim.

Dex: Hide, Move Silently.

Con: Concentration.

Int: Craft, Knowledge (nature),

Knowledge (religion).

Wis: Profession.

Cha: Bluff, Diplomacy, Disguise, Gather Information, Handle Animal, Intimidate.

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int Modifier.

face is framed by the shark's toothy maw, and a large cape (including the shark's dorsal fin) hangs down over her back. The cultists prefer to fight with sharkskin gauntlets that are studded with shark teeth, and many of them have learned to turn themselves into sharks.

Most shark cultists are evil, since their beliefs encourage murder, mayhem, and frequent bloodletting. The majority possess levels of druid, but a growing number are either rangers or clerics. There are even reports of some shark cult cells that have decided to focus their attention on worshiping sharks themselves as personifications of the destructive aspect of nature; these cultists have little interest in pursuing the more traditionally evil aspects of the cult. Nevertheless, the majority of shark cultists serve the will of the gods of evil, at least indirectly.

Class Features

All the following are class features of the shark cultist prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Shark cultists gain no proficiency with any weapons, but they do gain proficiency with all forms of light armor.

Hold Breath (Ex): A shark cultist can hold her breath for a number of rounds equal to four times her Constitution score before she risks drowning.

Weapon Focus: At 2nd level, a shark cultist gains Weapon Focus (sharktooth gauntlet) and Weapon Focus (bite) as bonus feats. The Weapon Focus (bite) feat only applies if the character has a natural bite attack, such as from a wild shape form the cultist might assume or the cultist's sharkshape ability (see below).

Divine Spells per Day: When a new even-numbered shark cultist level is gained, the character gains new spells per day as if she had also gained a level in a divine spellcasting class she

belonged to before adding the prestige class. She does not, however, gain any other benefit a character of that class would have gained (improved chance of controlling or rebuking undead, bonuses to an animal companion, and so on), except for an increased effective level of spellcasting. If a character had more than one divine spellcasting class before becoming a shark cultist, she must decide to which class she adds the new level for purposes of determining spells per day. This ability cannot be applied to any arcane spellcasting class the cultist belonged to before taking levels in the prestige class.

Sharkshape (Su): At 3rd level, the shark cultist gains the ability to transform into a Medium or Large shark once per day, as a druid of the shark cultist's character level using the wild shape ability. At 6th level, the shark cultist can use this ability twice a day and can assume the form of a shark of up to Huge size. At 9th level, the shark cultist can use this ability three times a day and can assume the form of a dire shark.

Bloodscent (Ex): At 4th level, the shark cultist's senses become incredibly well honed to the presence of blood. She can locate wounded living creatures (that have either blood or some other sort of life-sustaining fluid) with this ability as if using the scent special quality described on page 314 of the *Monster Manual*. She also gains a +4 competence bonus to any Survival checks to follow the trail of a wounded creature that matches this description. Bloodscent allows a

SHARK CULTIST Advancement

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special	Divine Spells per Day
1st	+1	+0	+0	+2	Hold breath	—
2nd	+2	+0	+0	+3	Weapon Focus	+1 level of existing class
3rd	+3	+1	+1	+3	Sharkshape 1/day (Large)	—
4th	+4	+1	+1	+4	Bloodscent	+1 level of existing class
5th	+5	+1	+1	+4	Weapon Specialization	—
6th	+6	+2	+2	+5	Sharkshape 2/day (Huge)	+1 level of existing class
7th	+7	+2	+2	+5	Take to the water	—
8th	+8	+2	+2	+6	Improved Critical	+1 level of existing class
9th	+9	+3	+3	+6	Sharkshape 3/day (Dire)	—
10th	+10	+3	+3	+7	Blood frenzy	+1 level of existing class

SHARKTOOTH GAUNTLETS

The sharktooth gauntlet is the favored weapon of the shark cultist. This exotic weapon consists of thick leather gauntlets made from sharkskin. Numerous large shark's teeth are embedded in the backs of the gauntlets so that when the wearer makes a fist, the teeth splay outward from the knuckles. The cost and weight given are for a single gauntlet. An attack with a sharktooth gauntlet is considered an armed attack. Sharktooth gauntlets cannot be disarmed by an opponent. Sharktooth gauntlets are light melee weapons.

Cost	10 gp
Dmg (S)	1d3
Dmg (M)	1d4
Critical	18-20
Weight	1 lb.
Type	Piercing or Slashing

shark cultist to detect and track wounded creatures both within and out of the water.

Weapon Specialization: At 5th level, a shark cultist gains Weapon Specialization (sharktooth gauntlet) and Weapon Specialization (bite) as bonus feats, even if she would normally not qualify for the feats. The Weapon Specialization (bite) feat only applies if the character has a natural bite attack, such as from a wild shape form the cultist might assume or the cultist's sharkshape ability.

Take to the Water (Ex): At 7th level, the shark cultist is completely at home in the water as she is on land. She gains a Swim speed equal to her land speed, and she gains a +8 racial bonus to Swim checks. She may always take 10 on Swim checks even when distracted or threatened. She can use the run action while swimming, providing she swims in a straight line.

Improved Critical: At 8th level, a shark cultist gains Improved Critical (sharktooth gauntlet) and Improved Critical (bite) as bonus feats, even if she would normally not qualify for the feats. The Improved Critical (bite) feat only applies if the character has a natural bite attack, such as from a wild shape form the cultist might assume or the cultist's sharkshape ability.

Blood Frenzy (Su): At 10th level, a shark cultist that wounds a creature with her sharktooth gauntlets or bite attack can enter a blood frenzy as a free action. A blood frenzy infuses the shark cultist with supernatural speed and ferocity. She functions as if under the effects of a *haste* spell for the next 3 rounds. A shark cultist can enter a blood frenzy a number of times per day equal to her Constitution bonus (minimum of once per day). **D**

