

# Eastern Expeditions

## THE NINJA



A stealthy class reimagined for 0e games

By Joseph D. Salvador



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by Joseph D. Salvador

The ninja, black-clad spy and assassin of ancient Japan, has long been a staple of popular media, from movies and comics to role-playing games. The ninja class first made its RPG appearance in *The Dragon #16*, in 1978 (Price, Sheldon. “The Ultimate NPC – Ninja,” *The Dragon #16*, July 1978, p. 7-10). This early variant was intended for use with the original fantasy game and was presented as a “DM’s hitman” to be used against overly-powerful player characters. The class offered a broad repertoire of abilities and equipment including a talent to mask its alignment, disguise and assassinate better than the assassin. Price revisited the class with an article the following year (Price, Sheldon. “The New, Improved Ninja,” *Dragon #30*, October 1979, p. 13-15) to expand the ninja’s skills and equipment.

The ninja continued to make appearances in the first edition of the original fantasy game (and later editions) as an official class and as a variant. In general, the ninja remained a popular class but traditionally suffered from critical opinion of its over-powered nature.

This new interpretation hopes to correct historical inaccuracies and to offer a class principally for player use.

With thanks to Simon J. Bull for his guidance and invaluable in-put,  
and to Corey Ryan Walden for his thoughts and critique.

For followers of the original fantasy role-playing game and suitable for use with  
*Delving Deeper* and other 0e games.

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Original rules: E. Gary Gygax, Dave Arneson

Author: Joseph D. Salvador

Proof reader: Simon J. Bull

Cover art: Utagawa Toyokuni

Interior art & layout: Joseph D. Salvador

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# THE NINJA

Ninja are the spies, saboteurs and assassins of medieval Japan. They organize themselves in tight-knit family clans within which their secret arts are passed down from one generation to the next. Due to the ninja's secretive nature, outsiders greatly fear them and propagate legends about their uncanny abilities. Ninja follow strict rules and must never betray their clan and are expected to die before being captured..

Table 1: Ninja Progression

Ninja Level	Experiece Points Required	Hit Dice	Saving Throw Versus				
			Poison	Wands Rays	Paralysis Petrification	Breath Weapon	Spells
1	0	1+1	13	14	13	15	16
2	1,750	2	12	14	12	14	15
3	3,500	2+2	12	14	12	14	15
4	7,000	3	11	11	11	13	14
5	14,000	3+2	11	11	11	13	14
6	28,000	4	10	11	10	12	13
7	56,000	5	10	11	10	12	13
8	110,000	5+2	9	8	9	11	12
9	200,000	6	9	8	9	11	12
10	300,000	7	8	8	8	10	11
11	400,000	7+1	8	8	8	10	11
12	500,000	8	7	5	7	9	10

A Ninja requires 200,000 experience points per level beyond the 12th.

A Ninja adds one hit die per two levels beyond the 10th.

The ninja's prime requisite is Dexterity; having a score of 13 or better in this attribute allows for a bonus to experience. Her Wisdom score will adjust this ability for purposes of gaining experience. However, ninja must also be cunning and shrewd; thus those with an Intelligence score of 8 or less suffer a -10% penalty to all experience points gained. Though ninja are sworn and dedicated to serving their clan, the nature of their work requires ninja to be Neutral in alignment.

Ninja may employ *nerigawa* (leather) or *kusari* (mail) armor, however wearing mail armor incurs penalties to several of the ninja's abilities, as discussed below. Ninja cannot use shields but they may employ light helmets.

Ninja use clubs, daggers, hand axes, short bows, short swords, and staffs. Additionally, they employ a number of new weapons - blowgun, *bokken*, darts, *kama*, *katana*, *kodachi*, *kusari-gama*, *kyoketsu-shoge*, and *manrikigusari*. Ninja characters attack as clerics, but use those magic items available to thieves.

Like thieves, ninja are adept ambushers and gain bonus damage when attacking opponents from behind with surprise. This **backstab** attack is made with a +4 bonus "to hit." At levels 1-3, ninja roll two dice for damage; at levels 4-6 they roll three dice,

from levels 7-10 they roll four dice of damage, and at 11th level and above ninja roll five dice when backstabbing.

Ninja cultivate a number of unique skills through incessant training, rigorous esoteric practices, use of special equipment, and *kyūki-kiri* meditation. The success of these abilities is determined with the throw of a six-sided die and achieving the required result.

- Ninja can **open locks**, **find and dismantle traps**, and **detect faint noises** with a result of 4-6. A ninja may not detect noises while wearing a helmet. Should the ninja fail to disarm a trap it will instead be triggered as normal.
- Ninja characters may **hide**, **move silently**, and **climb walls** with a result of 3-6. When wearing mail armor the chance of success for these abilities is reduced to 5-6.
- By dislocating their joints, contorting their bodies and using other techniques, ninja may **escape bonds**, slipping free with a result of 4-6. Escaping ordinary bonds requires 1-10 turns to accomplish. The ninja may escape more extreme captivity, including the *hold person* spell, in 1-6 turns. The ninja is allowed only one attempt and the feat may not be attempted while wearing armor.
- After observing the natural world for 1 turn, a ninja may attempt to **intuit the weather** for the next 24-hour period, achieving success with a result of 4-6.

As infiltrators and spies, ninja are trained in the manufacture and employment of disguises and can impersonate people of other classes and castes. The **disguise** is detected on a result of 1 on a six-sided die. The referee will check for detection each day the ninja is in disguise and may alter the chance of detection as he sees fit. A ninja may attempt to disguise herself as the opposite gender, but will be detected with a roll of 1-3.

Ninja clans each maintain a **secret language** that uses both code words and hand signals. These are passed down within individual clans and ninja of differing clans will not understand one another's secret language.

When traveling alone or with a group of ninja (and taking the proper precautions), ninja characters may achieve **surprise** on a throw of 3-6 on a six-sided die.

At 2nd level, ninja characters may **hold their breath** for twice as long as other characters.

Also at 2nd level, ninja begin learning the mysteries of *yogen* (**ninja alchemy**) which allows them to create special items not available to characters outside of the ninja clan. Each item requires a gold piece expenditure to acquire special ingredients and a certain amount of time must be spent for creation (see item descriptions). At 2nd level, the ninja learns to produce a *healing poultice* and *cover scent*; at 3rd level she is given the recipes for *smoke bombs* and *blinding eggs*; at 4th she learns to make *flash grenades*; finally, upon achieving 6th level, the ninja learns to produce injected and powdered *poisons*. Any ninja caught selling these items (or revealing the recipes) to individuals outside of the clan will be executed.

Upon achieving the 3rd level of experience, ninja can **see in normal darkness** to a distance of 30 feet. Magical darkness negates this ability.

At 4th level, ninja gain the ability to **feign death** by dropping into a deep meditation that lowers their heart rate and slows their breathing. Upon even close inspection the ninja will appear to be dead. The ninja, however, retains consciousness of his surroundings and can maintain the death state for one hour per level of experience.

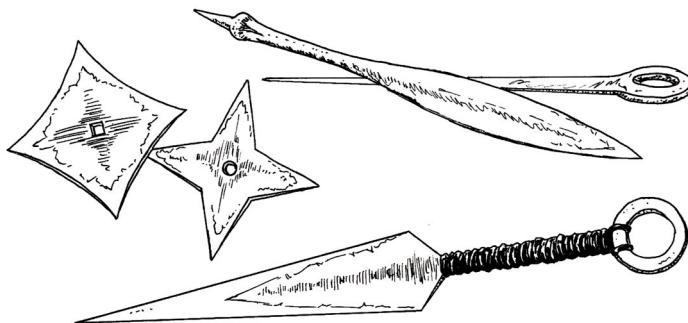
At 9th level, a ninja may be named *jonin* - leader of a ninja clan. In some cases, she may be named heir to take control after the present *jonin* dies; or the ninja may be sent with a retinue to establish a branch family of the clan in a new location. In some clans, it may be necessary to defeat the current *jonin* in single combat before assuming the position. There can be only one *jonin* in any clan.

## NINJA CLANS

Ninja clans are composed of one or more families who share a common lineage and are led by a person called the *jonin*. Mid-ranking ninja, called *chunin*, are the administrators who give orders, lead ninja teams, and act as sleeper agents. The rank and file of the clan are the *genin*, who perform most missions, either individually or in teams. Some clans maintain feudal loyalty to a particular daimyo, though many clans operate as mercenary organizations.

It must be noted that not all members of a clan are necessarily of the ninja class. The nature of their work requires a wide range of specialists; therefore members may be fighters, thieves, assassins, samurai, and even magic-users.

Ninja characters are sworn to life-long duty to the clan - it is impossible to leave the clan. Disobedience is dealt with harshly with the ultimate penalty being execution. Any ninja who flees his clan becomes *nukkenin* (fugitive ninja) and is marked for death.



## NINJA EQUIPMENT

The equipment listed below is only available to ninja characters and those within ninja clans. Each item has a level, cost and time expenditure attached, indicating the requirements for creating the item (the ninja's level, the gold piece cost, and the time allotted for manufacturing). The number of doses produced is also specified. These items may be subject to destruction by hazards such as fire or water, as determined by the referee.

**Blinding Egg:** A hollowed chicken egg filled with an alchemical mixture, sealed and lacquered. The egg allows blinding powder to be thrown (3") or launched with a sling (5"). The ninja must make a successful attack roll against AC 3 to hit the target's face. The victim must make a successful save versus paralysis or suffer blindness for 1-4 turns. If the victim's eyes are promptly flushed with water, vision will return in 2-8 turns. (Level: 3, Cost: 50 gp, Time: 3 days, Produced: 1 egg)

**Cover Scent:** This concoction includes powdered peppers and other harsh ingredients. When a ninja sprinkles this on her trail scent-tracking animals will not follow her. (Level: 2, Cost: 30 gp, Time: 1 day, Produced: 3 doses)

**Flash Grenade:** A small ceramic ball filled with a mixture of saltpeter, sulfur, and other strange chemicals. When thrown against a hard surface within 3" it explodes with a bright flash and deafening crack. 3-8 man-types within 3" must save versus paralysis or be blinded for 1 turn. Victims must be facing the point of origin and the nearest individuals are always affected first. The ninja also receives an additional benefit – if she so chooses, she may immediately hide herself somewhere within 3" of her location (if a suitable place exists), no amount of searching may reveal her location for 1-6 turns. (Level: 4, Cost: 150 gp, Time: 4 days, Produced: 1 grenade)

**Healing Poultice:** A sticky paste enriched with various herbs and ingredients. A character may benefit from the healing poultice only once per day. Upon application to a fresh wound, bleeding stops, pain subsides, and the recipient is healed 1 hit point. (Level: 2, Cost: 60 gp, Time: 1 day, Produced: 3 doses)

**Poison, Injected:** These poisons might be the extracted venom of poisonous creatures, the juices of poisonous herbs, or some other liquid concoction. This type of poison is applied to bladed weapons, darts, or arrows. One dose may coat one sword, two daggers, or three darts or arrows. The poison affects the first opponent struck by the weapon.

- **Death Poison (injected):** Affected creature must save versus poison or die within 1-6 turns. (Level: 6, Cost: 500 gp, Time: 1 week, Produced: 1 dose)
- **Paralysis Poison (injected):** Affected creature must save versus poison or be paralyzed for 4-9 turns. (Level: 6, Cost: 200 gp, Time: 1 week, Produced: 1 dose)
- **Damaging Poison (injected):** Those affected by this poison must save versus poison or feel their bodies racked by pain, as if their blood was afire. Victims who fail the save suffer 1-6 points of damage in addition to weapon damage. (Level: 6, Cost: 300 gp, Time: 1 week, Produced: 1 dose)

**Poison, Powdered:** These poisons are formed from dried ingredients and ground into fine powders. Ingested poisons must be mixed with food or drink, while inhaled poisons are delivered via blowgun. One dose may fill one blowgun or be administered to a single meal. If a particular poison may be either inhaled or ingested, the type must be chosen at the time of creation.

- **Sleep Poison (inhaled or ingested):** Affects 2-8 creatures within 2" (or who ingest the poison) who are allowed a save versus poison to resist (heroic-types receive a +4 to the save). Victims who fail the save fall into a deep slumber for 3-18 turns and will not awaken to normal noises up to and including the sound of

nearby combat. This poison only affects those creatures that normally sleep.

(Level: 6, Cost: 100 gp, Time: 1 week, Produced: 1 dose)

- **Sickness Poison (ingested):** Affects 1-8 creatures who consume the poisoned meal (or drink). Affected creatures must save versus poison or become violently ill, suffering from dizziness, vomiting, and fever for 2-12 turns. During this period they cannot attack or cast spells, move at only  $\frac{1}{4}$  speed, and have their AC penalized by 2. (Level: 6, Cost: 100 gp, Time: 1 week, Produced: 1 dose)

**Smoke Bomb:** A small ceramic ball filled with a mixture of slow-burning chemicals. When thrown against a hard surface it explodes and the powder inside begins to burn, creating an impenetrable smoke that fills a 2" diameter area in one turn. The smoke lasts for 7-12 turns, but may otherwise be dispersed with a light breeze. The cloud blocks vision from one side to the other and characters within the cloud have their range of sight reduced to 2 feet. All attacks directed into or made from within the cloud are made with a -4 penalty. (Level: 3, Cost: 100 gp, Time: 4 days, Produced: 1 bomb)

## JAPANESE ARMOR

Japanese armors are traditionally composed of leather and iron scales, intricately woven together with leather cord in the lamellar style. The scales are usually lacquered and the suits can be very colorful and artistic. Japanese armorers produced the equivalents of leather and mail armors but these were worn differently from Western types.

**Nerigawa gusoku:** This armor is made from hardened leather scales attached to a cloth backing. Nerigawa includes a cuirass (*dō*), from which tassets hang, and armored sleeves (*kote*).

**Kusari gusoku:** The Japanese version of mail, kusari gusoku consists of mail sewn to a sturdy cloth jacket (*kusari katabira*), thigh protectors (*baidate*), and greaves (*sune-ate*). The armor also includes short sleeves of mail.

**Ō-yoroi:** The classic Japanese armor, ō-yoroi is a full suit of lamellar armor, including protection for the chest, shoulders, arms, thighs, and shins. This armor includes a *kabuto* helmet.

**Shield:** Rarely seen in Japan, shields were typically only employed during siege warfare or from emplacements and required two hands to move.

**Helmet, jingasa:** An iron or hardened leather version of the peasant's conical hat, the *jingasa* is employed by foot soldiers and the armed peasantry.

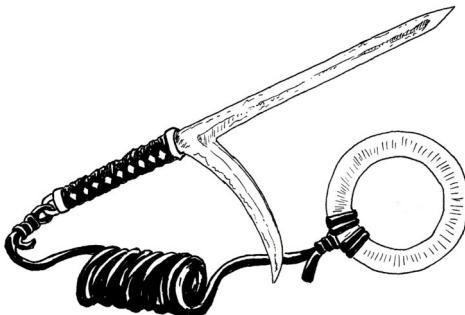
**Helmet, kabuto:** The classic samurai helmet, the *kabuto* has an iron helmet-bowl, a large, banded neck guard, and often includes crests and styling to identify the wearer.

Table 2: Armor

Item	AC	Cost	Weight
Unarmored	9	-	-
Nerigawa gusoku	7	10 gp	25 lb.
Kusari gusoku	5	45 gp	50 lb.
Ō-yoroi	3	100 gp	75 lb.
Shield	*	15 gp	15 lb.
Helmet, jingasa	-	4 gp	3 lb.
Helmet, kabuto	-	10 gp	5 lb.
Helmet, yoroi Zukin	*	10 gp	3 lb.

\* Adjusts armor class by -1.

**Helmet, yoroi zukin:** A heavy cloth hood covered over with chain mail and sometimes reinforced with plates, the *yoroi zukin* offers relatively flexible protection for the head and neck. Usually, the sides of the hood may be closed at the front to cover the throat and lower face.



## JAPANESE WEAPONS

Japanese warriors employ many of the standard weapons found throughout the world. These are listed below with the Japanese terminology. Those marked with an (\*) are described under “New Weapons.”

Battle axe ( <i>ono</i> )	Short bow ( <i>bankyu</i> )
Club ( <i>banbō, tonfa, yawara</i> )	Short sword ( <i>wakizashi, kodachi*</i> )
Dagger ( <i>tantō, kaiken, kozuka</i> )	Spear ( <i>yari</i> )
Flail ( <i>chigiriki, nunchaku</i> )	Staff ( <i>bō, jo*, shakujō</i> )
Hammer ( <i>ōtsuchi</i> )	Sword ( <i>bokken*, katana*, tachi</i> )
Hand axe ( <i>ono</i> )	Two-handed sword ( <i>ōdachi</i> )
Longbow ( <i>daikyu*</i> )	
Morning star ( <i>tetsubo, kanabō</i> )	
Pole arm ( <i>bisenbō, naginata, nagamaki</i> )	

Table 4: Weapons

## NEW WEAPONS

**Blowgun (fujita):** This blowgun is made of a hollow tube and fires small sharp darts by blowing through one end. The *fujita* is used by ninja and assassins to deliver poison, the darts do no real damage on their own. Short range is 3”, medium range is 6”, while long range is 9”. Blowguns may also be packed with special powders and powdered poisons. When the powder is blown out it creates a 1” long cone.

**Dart (shaken, shuriken, kunai):** Throwing blades. *Shaken* are dart-shaped, while *shuriken* are the more well-known, multi-pointed stars.

Item	Cost	Weight
Blowgun	18 gp	2 lb.
Dart	3 gp	1 lb.
Jō	2 gp	3 lb.
Kama	4 gp	5 lb.
Katana	75 gp	10 lb.
Kodachi	20 gp	5 lb.
Kusari-gama	10 gp	10 lb.
Kyoketsu-shoge	8 gp	5 lb.
Manrikigusari	4 gp	3 lb.
Tekko-kagi	18 gp	3 lb.

**Kunai** are small throwing knives. All of these thrown weapons have a medium range of 3".

**Jō:** A short wooden staff.

**Kama:** A short-hafted sickle originally used to reap grain.

**Katana:** A long, curved sword with a single sharp edge. The katana must be wielded with two hands, except by certain classes.

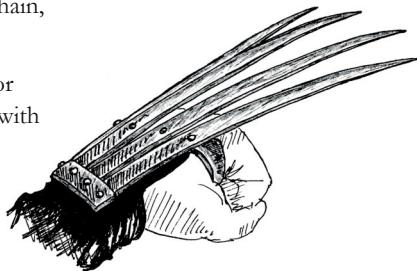
**Kodachi:** A short-bladed katana that retains the long handle, allowing it to be used two-handed.

**Kusari-gama:** A short-hafted sickle (*kama*) with a length of chain attached to one end. The metal weight at the end of the chain is swung and used to entangle an opponent's limbs or weapon.

**Kyoketsu-shoge:** Similar to the *kusari-gama*, the *kyoketsu-shoge* is a straight dagger with a second sickle blade near the handle. A long rope extends from the handle and has a heavy, circular weight attached. Used for climbing or entangling opponents.

**Manrikigusari:** A length of chain, weighted at both ends.

**Tekko-kagi:** Iron claws held or strapped to the hands, usually with three or four short blades.



## OPTIONAL RULES

**Holding One's Breath:** Characters can hold their breath for a number of turns equal to one-third their constitution score, rounded down.



**Two-Weapon Fighting:** Characters with a Dexterity of 13 or greater may choose to fight with a weapon in each hand. Both weapons must be single-handed weapons. One weapon must be designated as the primary weapon and may weigh up to 10 pounds. If the primary weapon weighs more than 5 pounds, the secondary weapon must weigh less than the primary weapon. Two-weapon Fighting grants the character a +1 bonus to hit. Fighters and thieves may instead choose to cause an opponent to suffer a -1 attack penalty, though this cannot be used in conjunction with parrying. Furthermore, a throw of an even number on the attack roll indicates that the right-hand weapon strikes, while an odd number indicates that the left-hand weapon has hit.

It should be noted that the character employing two weapons simultaneously is less likely to be disarmed when parrying and may be allowed to counterattack with either weapon (or both), subject to the referee's judgment.

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