

# ON THE NOBLE DUTY OF THE GUARDIAN OF CATHAY

*Our group had just reached the foothills of the Dragon Spine Mountains when the first winter snows began to fall. Traveling the Pass of Forgotten Life had proven to be the hardest trek we had undertaken. It had been almost a week since we last saw any others on the road, and the land had become more and more unforgiving as winter's grasp slowly tightened around Cathay. We made camp just off the road, hoping the fires would be enough to warm our bodies. I had just finished erecting my tent when a call went out, signaling that someone was near. My mind immediately conjured images of the mountain bandits of whom I had heard, or maybe an approaching enemy army. I rushed to the front of the camp and was relieved to see five men on horseback approaching casually. They trailed behind them their cargo and a line of prisoners counting no fewer than ten men. The prisoners were all bound tightly to one another with rope, their heads bowed and covered in large burlap sacks that were tied at the neck. One of the men on horseback, a large ork wearing blue crystalline armor that reflected the moon's light in a dazzling array, approached me with his sword drawn. And that's when I first spoke at length with a Guardian of Cathay.*

• DAYLEN JAGARO, HUMAN MERCHANT OF BARTERTOWN •

We are the sworn protectors of these fine lands, the Order of the Crane. I demand that you travelers provide for my men and me what you can, then we will be on our way. We are transporting these mountain bandits across the Dragon's Spine to face trial in the Name of his majesty, Sen Ma, for their crimes against the people of Feng Dei. Rest assured, you and your band are quite safe with the five of us in your camp and will not have to worry about brigands such as these making the remainder of your trip hazardous. Now, about that food. And tea; we require tea as well. Our travels have been long, and our throats are parched. Be quick about it!

The Guardians of Cathay had been a noble order of warriors in the past. Today, they're merely a shadow of it, hard to distinguish from mercenaries, thieves, and raiders...

—Yie Lam, Shui Dei Warrior

It all depends on the group you're meeting. Some Guardians are ruthless plagues on horses, while others are still noble Namegivers who take their oath seriously. After all, they had to make a decision when Cathay broke up into five kingdoms.

—Chin Do, Troubadour of Heng Na

## ON THE SWORN OATH

**W**e are the Order of the Crane, sworn to protect the king's lands from the increasing lawlessness that has gripped the kingdom. In these trying times of war, men such as these—

*[It was at this time that the ork turned his head in the direction of the bound men, and spat.]*

—have decided to dishonor themselves and their families by turning to lawlessness. It is the duty bestowed upon my kind to bring order to the kingdom, routing out this scum wherever they dwell and bringing them to justice. We provide protection to the people of this land, where the already strained military cannot. We are in direct service to our great and noble king, Sen Ma, and we answer only to him. We are not in the ranks of the military, though if our king requires that we fight alongside them in battle then it is our sworn duty to do so.

When I first came to the capital, Min Yan, I was enamored by the greatness of the order's temple. I knew that it was my calling to become a member of the order and protect our great land from the darkness that had spread throughout it. Until that point I had wandered the countryside in search of a purpose and led a meaningless life. I had traveled the borders of the kingdom and had seen the true victims of these endless wars: the innocent people who struggle to survive in the wake of these great and terrible conflicts. Their land, their homes, and their livelihoods were torn apart by the indifferent brutality and they were left behind in the chaos to fend for themselves. I knew that it was my path to walk

among the great order, bringing peace and justice to the people of Feng Dei. We have sworn an oath to our great king—an oath that has bound us into service to the land as long as that service is required. We are bound heart and soul to our king, and, more importantly, to our land—sworn to protect her borders from any threat, Namegiver or otherwise.

## ON THE ORDERS

**T**he land of Cathay has not always been divided as it is now. It was once one nation under the sole control of one man, the son of Heaven, and as such there was only one order that spanned the whole of the Empire. After the fall of the Emperor the land was divided into the five kingdoms that we have today. The Guardians of Cathay did not wish to fall into neutrality like many of the other orders, for a guardian without duty is a guardian with no purpose to live.

The order found itself divided, its members' loyalties lying in their respective regions. Five new orders arose, each loyal to one of the five contenders: the Order of the Phoenix for the Land of Fire, the Order of the Lotus for the Land of Earth, the Order of the Tortoise for the Land of Water, the Order of the Crane for the Land of Wind, and the Order of the Golden Lion for the Land of Metal. The Guardians roam their respective kingdoms, protecting their sovereigns' lands, ridding them of the threats that abound at every corner. My own order, the Order of the Crane, finds its home in this land, the Land of Wind, and is occupied with the ever-present threat of the gar to the West, and an ever-increasing number of thieves and raiders striking on roads such as these. All of the orders throughout the land have their numbers spread thin in order to deal with the seemingly endless flow of threats, each helping to prevent the land from plunging into darkness.

At times, members from separate orders are forced to battle each other in combat. This is a dismal duty, but one that we cannot forsake. It is the duty to our king that comes first, not loyalty to the other Guardians of Cathay.

*The Guardians of Cathay treat each other with respect in combat, no matter how fierce their enmity might be.*

—Tan Deng Lo, Elf Archer

## ON THE ROLE OF THE GUARDIANS

**M**embers of the orders have a number of duties to their kings and kingdoms, most of which are pertinent to the protection of the populaces and the sanctity of the kingdoms as a whole. Guardians have been used as personal guards to their kings, as well as guards of certain treasures and items that were of great importance to the kings or kingdoms. They have been used in the aid of towns that have fallen into despair, be it from disease, war, or any of a number of Nameless dangers that roam the lands of Cathay. They have helped build homes, dig canals, plant fields, and track down lost livestock. Often members are called upon to track lawless bandits into

the wilderness, such as we do now. At times members of the orders have been known to fight alongside the common military, joining their ranks for battle or providing the leaders with intelligence. They do all of these things in the Names of their kingdoms.

We walk with our king's authority, and only to our king do we answer. We have been known to root out treasonous lords, or merchants participating in black market trade to avoid sanctions and taxes. As such, Guardians are not always welcome by local authorities, because such people fear and resent our power, and are not always willing to cooperate. The treacherous curs have murdered some Guardians, but such are the dangers we face.

Likewise, peasants often loathe the sight of us, unless they require our help, of course. Some Guardians have been known to abuse their status and become nothing more than thieves and bullies. Those dishonorable swine are rare and are dealt with severely.

*Hm. The Therans have a similar occupation. Special envoys of high authorities, like the First Governor, fulfilling orders outside of the normal chain of command. I wonder if the old Cathayan Empire was so much different from Thera in respect to a secret police and spy network.*

—Kankarr the Tall, Troubadour of Ironfist

## ON THE MEMBERS OF THE ORDER

**I**t was nothing before I joined the Order of the Crane. I wandered the land of Feng Dei in search of work, though the only thing I ever could find was military service. I became a Nameless face within the ranks of the military and I wanted to be more. Upon finding the order, I discovered what I had been looking for: a noble cause for which I would be forever remembered. Joining the order changed my life, as it has for those who came before me.

The orders are comprised of Namegivers from all walks of life: tradesmen, soldiers, even members of the elite upper class who wish to make a change in this land. A large number of the members are soldiers who have grown weary of the endless conflicts yet still want to serve their kings and kingdoms.

## GAME INFORMATION

**D**uring the time of the Empire, Cathay was guarded by an order of dedicated warriors called the Guardians of Cathay. Loyal to the Emperor, the Guardians roamed the land to maintain peace and order. Today, the order is split into five distinct factions, each assured that their king is the only true heir to the Empire.

**Important Attributes:** Charisma, Dexterity

**Karma Ritual:** The Guardian performs his Karma Ritual by placing a weapon on the ground, stepping ten feet away, and sitting on his knees, facing it. The Guardian then begins to meditate. As he does, the weapon lifts off the ground and begins to float slowly over to him. The ritual ends once the weapon settles gently on his lap.

**Half-Magic:** The Guardian of Cathay uses half-magic for knowledge of military strategy and tactics, knowledge of his kingdom and its laws, and when taking care of his arms and armor. He also gains access to the Tactics skill via half-magic.

## DRAGON BROOCHES

Before the War of Wu Xing, the Guardians of Cathay wore yellow sashes to identify themselves to the populace, being permitted to use the Imperial Color as a sign of office, a representation of the authority granted to them by the Emperor. This sash, worn in any way the Guardian wanted, was either adorned or held in place by a brooch depicting the Imperial Seal. This brooch was enchanted with special powers granted by another group dedicated to guarding Cathay: the Dragon Protectors. With the formation of the five orders and their divided loyalties to the individual kings, all of this changed. The Guardians of Cathay chose to bear the colors of their individual kings, and the Dragon Brooches miraculously changed, no more showing the Imperial Seal, but only the Imperial Symbol of the land from which the Guardians hailed.



## TALENTS AND ABILITIES

### INITIATE

**Talent Options:** Avoid Blow, Etiquette, First Impression, Tracking, Unarmed Combat

### FIRST CIRCLE

**Discipline Talents:** Fireblood, Karma Ritual, Melee Weapons, Maneuver, Parry

### NOVICE

**Talent Options:** Detect Weapon, Durability (9/7), Lasting Impression, Search, Sense Danger, Shield Charge, Tactics, Wound Balance

### SECOND CIRCLE

**Defense:** The adept adds +1 to his Physical Defense.  
**Discipline Talent:** Clay Skin

### THIRD CIRCLE

**Discipline Talent:** Air Dance  
Fourth Circle  
**Karma:** The adept may spend 1 Karma Point on Charisma-only Tests.  
**Discipline Talent:** Thread Weaving [Duty Weaving]

### JOURNEYMAN

**Talent Options:** Diplomacy, Direction Sense, Elemental Tongues, Evidence Analysis, Leadership, Lion Heart, Resist Taunt, Sprint

### FIFTH CIRCLE

**Emperor's Emissary:** Taking 1 Strain, the adept gains a +1 bonus per Discipline Status Level achieved as a Guardian of Cathay to an Interaction (Intimidation, Asking for a Favors) Test.  
**Discipline Talent:** Steel Thought

### SIXTH CIRCLE

**Karma:** The adept may spend 1 Karma Point on Dexterity-only Tests.  
**Discipline Talent:** Cobra Strike

### SEVENTH CIRCLE

**Karma:** The adept may spend 1 Karma Point on Damage Tests against an enemy of his kingdom.  
**Discipline Talent:** Momentum Attack

### EIGHTH CIRCLE

**Defense:** The adept adds +1 to his Physical Defense.  
**Discipline Talent:** Flowing Blow

## WARDEN

**Talent Options:** Champion Challenge, Detect Falsehood, Frenzy, Life Check, Pin, Rally, Shield Beater, Vitality

### NINTH CIRCLE

**Strength of the Realm:** Once per round, when fighting an enemy of his kingdom within the border of his kingdom, the adept may take 2 Strain to add his Duty Weaving Rank as a bonus to any one test.

**Karma:** The adept may spend 1 Karma Point on Recovery Tests.

**Discipline Talent:** Liquid Prison

### TENTH CIRCLE

**Defense:** The adept adds +1 to his Physical Defense.

**Karma:** The adept may spend 1 Karma Point on Strength-only Tests.

**Discipline Talent:** Metal Ward

### ELEVENTH CIRCLE

**Defense:** The adept adds +1 to his Social and +1 to his Spell Defense.

**Discipline Talent:** Fiery Blade

### TWELFTH CIRCLE

**Defense:** The adept adds +1 to his Physical Defense.

**Discipline Talent:** Airs of Nobility

## MASTER

**Talent Options:** Blood Guilt Weapon, Elemental Walk, Infuse Blade, Rushing Attack, Shield of the Innocent, Storm Shield

### THIRTEENTH CIRCLE

**Spirit Guardian:** At any time, the adept may swear an oath of ultimate service to his Order. If he dies, the oath pulls him back from the afterlife one week after his death or at any earlier time of the adept's choosing. The adept becomes an Ally Spirit with his Circle as the Strength Rating. He retains all of his Discipline's abilities in addition to the abilities available to all Ally Spirits. He cannot be summoned or controlled by a summoner by any means, though, as he is already bound to service: He is tasked to complete all his outstanding tasks, those he was ordered to do and those he took upon himself. Only when all his duties are fulfilled can his spirit rest. However, legends tell that in the old times, Spirit Guardians were sent to fulfill new tasks, eternal missions beyond the power of mere mortals.

**Defense:** The adept adds +1 to his Social Defense.

**Karma:** The adept adds +1 to his Karma Step.

**Discipline Talent:** Earth Armor

### FOURTEENTH CIRCLE

**Defense:** The adept adds +1 to his Physical Defense.

**Initiative:** The adept adds +1 to his Initiative Step.

**Discipline Talent:** Vital Strike

### FIFTEENTH CIRCLE

**Defense:** The adept adds +1 to his Social and +1 to his Spell Defense.

**Discipline Talent:** Multi-Strike



**Guardians from the Land of Fire**—the Order of the Phoenix—wear red sashes and brooches depicting the Imperial Ivory Sword. Their Dragon Brooches grant them the ability to gain a +2 bonus to a melee Damage Test.



**Guardians from the Land of Earth**—the Order of the Lotus—wear green sashes and brooches depicting the Jade Pendant. Their Dragon Brooches grant them the ability to gain a +2 bonus to an Attribute-only Test.



**Guardians from the Land of Water**—the Order of the Tortoise—wear blue sashes and brooches depicting the Imperial Dragon Seal. Their Dragon Brooches grant them the ability to gain a +2 bonus to a Resistance Test, such as against poison, disease, a spell, fear, or the like.



**Guardians from the Land of Wind**—the Order of the Crane—wear white sashes and brooches depicting the Imperial Phoenix Robe. Their Dragon Brooches grant them the ability to gain a +2 bonus to a Recovery Test.



**Guardians from the Land of Metal**—the Order of the Golden Lion—wear orange sashes and brooches depicting the Golden Crown. Their Dragon Brooches grant them the ability to gain a +2 bonus to an Interaction Test.

The Guardian of Cathay receives a Dragon Brooch during his initiation ritual. Only he can use this particular brooch, although the brooch can be returned and issued to another adept in another initiation ritual. The power bestowed by the Dragon Brooch can be used once per day for every Discipline Status Level the adept has achieved in the Guardian of Cathay Discipline, that is: once per day as an Initiate, twice as a Novice, and so on. The powers granted by the Dragon Brooch cannot be used against the guardian dragon who granted it, or against his representatives. The guardian dragon can further revoke the right to use the power at will.



## ROLEPLAYING HINTS

The Guardian of Cathay cares only about his duty to his kingdom. Anything that falls outside of this province is beyond his caring or concern. The Guardian also has a solemn duty to protect the weak and innocent, unless this is in direct violation of his principle tenet.

Guardians of Cathay are often haughty and arrogant, though they exhibit a great kindness to those who respect their authority and show loyalty to their king. Those who demonstrate this loyalty do not often suffer their wrath, while the reverse is equally, and terrifyingly, true.

## DISCIPLINE VIOLATIONS

The Guardian of Cathay faces a possible Discipline violation any time he betrays his kingdom or allows cowardice to interfere with his duties.

At the gamemaster's discretion, certain violations may render the powers of the Dragon Brooch useless until the adept atones for his actions. The loss of the brooch always represents a violation; recovering it is the appropriate deed of atonement. If the brooch is destroyed, convincing the appropriate guardian dragon of one's worthiness (often by fulfilling a dangerous task for the dragon) might constitute a deed worthy of receiving a new brooch.

## RITUALS OF ADVANCEMENT

The Guardian of Cathay's advancement rituals test his martial prowess.

**Recruitment:** Guardians of Cathay are chosen for their courage, strength, honor, and loyalty. Recruitment is often the order's recognition of a person's calling. Guardians must demonstrate their willingness to defend their homeland from enemies from within and without, even if this means sacrificing their lives for the lofti-

est of ideals. Guardians are normally recruited from Namegivers native to the kingdom of the respective order.

**Novice (2-4):** The Novice must display his skill with a blade in a variety of tests that increase with difficulty as the adept rises in Circle.

**Journeyman (5-8):** The Journeyman must track someone through a wilderness. The terrain becomes increasingly difficult as the adept rises in Circle.

**Warden (9-12):** The Warden must defeat a powerful enemy of his kingdom in close combat.

**Ghost Master Ritual:** The adept must meditate for an hour on his duties and responsibilities toward his kingdom, replaying in his mind all the times when he rose to bravely meet those responsibilities. At the end of the hour the ghost master appears and the ritual continues as normal.

## DISCIPLINE COMBINATIONS

The most common secondary Discipline for a Guardian of Cathay is the Cavalryman Discipline, as most Guardians of Cathay travel via horseback. Guardians primarily hunting criminals often pick up the Scout Discipline, while those investigating magical oddities often become Wizards. Guardians trying to bring down the most dangerous threats to their kingdoms often choose an additional combat Discipline.

Disciplines that do not add much to the Guardian's combat abilities, such as the Illusionist, Troubadour, or Thief, are rarely chosen. Disciplines that follow their own agendas or that cannot be practiced well during travel alone, such as the Purifier or Weaponsmith, are almost never chosen, despite the Guardian's dependence on weaponry; in the service of his kingdom, a Guardian must not pause to forge a weapon.