

CONAN®

THE DARK ALTAR OF KATAR

THE DARK ALTAR

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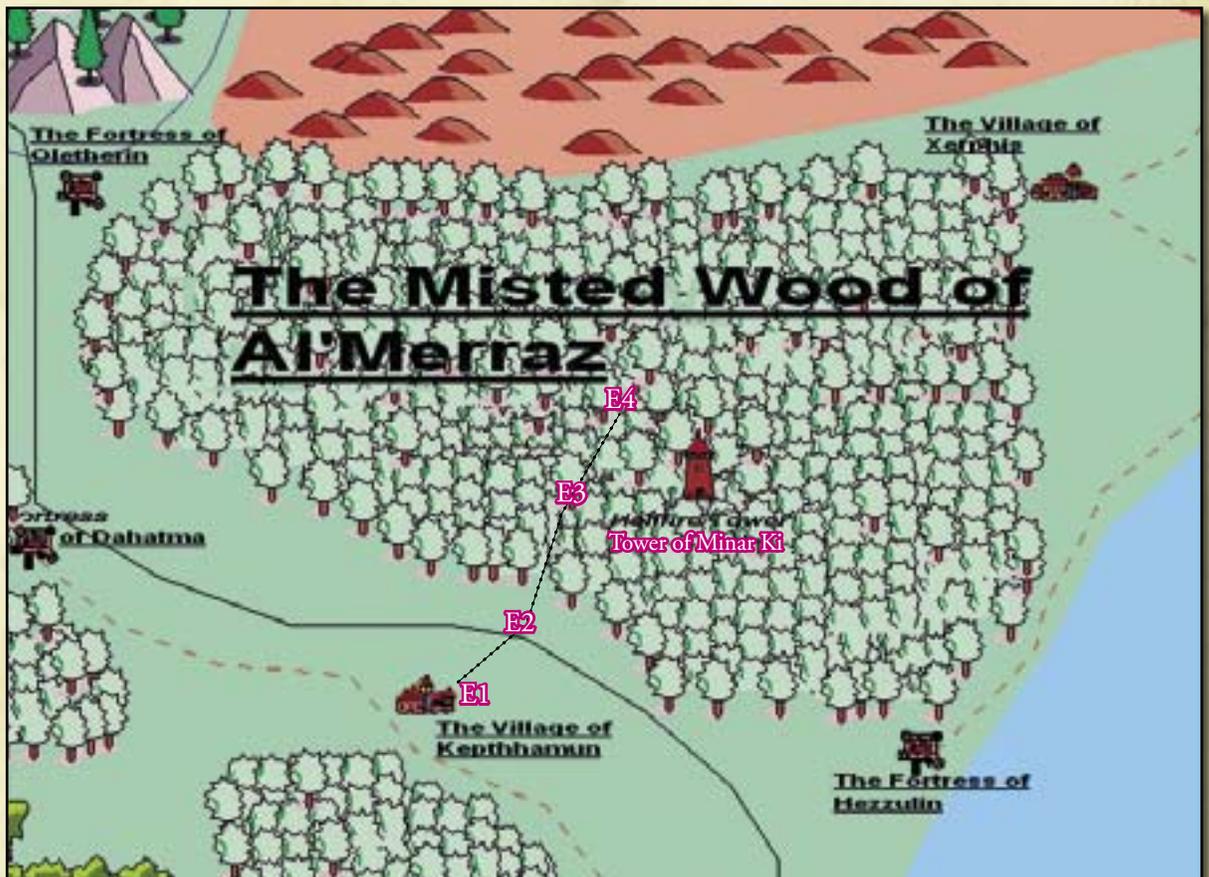
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The Dark Altar of Kazar

A *Conan the Roleplaying Game* adventure set within the dark jungles of Vendhya, bordering the mysterious land of Uttara-Kuru. Characters should be 4th to 5th level, with an average of 4 to 6 players. Any character type can be played, however a Noble type character (Kshatriyas) would be helpful to the adventure.



Large, red drops of blood flowed down the mail corselet of Harsha, house guard to the Lord of Cuddapah province. Dropped silently to the ground, the body of Harsha exhaled its last breath and began to once again spill its lifeblood upon the marble steps of the garden entryway. The music of wind chimes and the smell of incense wafted through the air, giving the garden a semblance of serenity; and a feel of horror. The many candles set about the Lord of Cuddapah's mansion swayed with the shifting of the wind, that wove its path through the many trees set about the estate. The shadowy slayer of Harsha moved quickly, but silently through the gardens entry hall. The assassin's blade dripped bright red blood and left a trail as he glided up the staircase that would lead him to the living quarters of Lord Gopali and his doomed family.

As the assassin passed an open window adorned with vines and sweet flowers, the half-moon shed light upon the breast of the intruder. A small, black amulet hung about the chest of the intruder; an amulet identifying the assassin as a faithful of Katar. Hertus of Katar crept slowly up to the first marble landing and listened intently for sounds. His animal-like senses took in his surroundings; letting him know that all was as it should be. Suddenly he became aware of a flickering of candlelight, moving its way down the corridor toward the landing where he stood. His dark clothed body merged with the planters and statues that lined the marble landing, becoming more shadow than man.

A turbaned servant was walking toward Hertus' place of concealment; in his hands he carried a candle and bag of incense. With lightning speed and deathly silence, Hertus struck out at the servant as he passed. Like a deadly cobra, his dagger plunged into the servant's back, over and over again. No sound came from the servant's mouth, for Hertus had smothered it with a piece of his own dark outfit. Laying the dead body of the servant among the planters, Hertus made his way stealthily down the hallway toward the estates living quarters, his head swaying from side to side, similar to the deadly cobra that he emulated.

At the end of the corridor the passage way went left and right. The shadowy figure slowly turned to the right, noticing a large double door a mere 30 steps down another corridor. The left hand corridor gradually faded into darkness. Seeing the noble sigil of Lord Gopali upon the double wooden door, Hertus began to slowly move down the corridor, listening for any sounds. When he came to the double door, he put his head against the wood, straining to hear any sounds or movement. When none were heard, Hertus thought to himself how strange the Lord Gopali had not set guard at his bedroom door? However, it did not really matter to Hertus; he had come to kill the Lord and his family, for insulting the honour of another Lord's daughter. It did not matter whether Lord Gopali had been in the right or wrong or that the insulted Lord was a follower of Katar, Hertus had been paid and Katar demanded her due.

Slowly, Hertus pushed upon the doors. They opened silently, as if they had been well oiled. The room was very dark and silent as the grave; no candles were lit to reveal the room's occupants. Suddenly a fierce breeze blew through the windows, blowing aside the curtains and letting the half-moons light shine into the room. Immediately it became apparent that this was not the room of the Lord Gopali. The room was littered with boxes, bundles and sacks of grain. Hertus had been deceived; if this was not the Lord's room, then where in the estate was it? The midnight wind blew at the curtains again, bringing with it the sound of chimes in the distant. No, thought Hertus, not chimes but bells! He quickly turned around and fled through the double doors out into the corridor. He had barely travelled halfway down the hallway when a large door burst open somewhere along the previously darkened corridor, spilling out a flood of light as well as large group of armed house guards. The room behind him was a dead end; those little windows would not allow him passage. His only possible exit was blocked by Lord Gopali's house guard. There seemed to be no escape. Drawing a viciously curved scimitar, Hertus gave out a cry of rage and contempt, 'May the midnight blade cut my way to salvation!'

Knowing that today might be his last day among the world or mortal men, he then charged down the corridor into the wall of gleaming scimitars and warspears...

INTRODUCTION

For 30 long, dark years, the cult of Katar has kept itself hidden among the dank and haunted jungles of Vendhya. The faithful of Katar, mostly assassins and thieves, have secretly worshipped their goddess in the broken ruins hidden deep in the dark jungles or the underbelly of civilization. The king of Vendhya, Bhunda Chan, has placed the highest bounty upon any known members of this death-dealing cult, and has let it be known that any who harbour or help the followers of Katar, will face royal judgment. To this end, Bhunda Chan has assigned his spymaster, Dergith Vrul, the task of rooting out any nests of this dark cult and executing their members.

Until recently, very few leads or information about the whereabouts of the Katari assassins have come to the notice of Dergith Vrul. However, four days ago, the spymaster received a message from a mystical source. A Rakhsha named, 'Yurra', contacted Dergith Vrul through a *sorcerous news* spell and advised him that many men had been seen traveling to an ancient place of worship within the Misted Wood of Al'Merraz. Two problems immediately became apparent. Firstly, the Wood of Al'Merraz was across the border of Vendhya into the dark lands of Uttara Kuru; second, this ancient place that the Rakhsha spoke of was one of the last known locations of a Dark Altar of Katar. Believed to have been crafted over a millennia ago, the Altars of Katar were said to be imbued with their dark mother's power and that any faithful who spilled the blood of innocents upon the altar would be granted powers relative to their sacrifice. The cultists of Katar were hunted down and slaughtered and most of the remaining altars were buried or lost with the passage of time. However, the one truth that was not widely known was that the altars could not be destroyed by mortal men and must instead be hidden from the world so that none could call upon their dark powers.

Though the ruined temple is said to lie across the border into Uttar Kuru, Dergith Vrul cannot ignore this possible threat. Royal Vendhyan troops cannot be called upon to cross the border and deal with the dark cultists; subtlety and guile must prevail. Dergith Vrul, through his spy network, makes contact with several independent mercenaries or adventures and hires them for a secret mission. *(The Games master can easily incorporate player characters from other parts of the Hyborian world as mercenaries, or simply use Vendhyan characters as independent adventures.)* Dergith Vrul will use

one of his lieutenants, Bahu Dasa, as his intermediary and have the characters meet him in the village of Kepthhamun, which lies near the border of Uttara Kuru.

WHAT IS REALLY HAPPENING

Over two years ago, one of the last surviving priests of Katar found the destroyed temple of Shirma. Shirma, once a magnificent temple made of dark stone and obsidian, now nothing but ruins among the jungle overgrowth, was found in a lost grove just inside the border of Uttara Kuru. Vadavaa Sharman, faithful priestess of Katar, had been searching for the ruined temple of Shirma for over five years. Her quest had begun in the Vendhyan capital city of Ayodhya, where she had been taught the ways of Katar from an early age. Trading the lives of men for gold, Vadavaa earned a name and reputation as a skilled assassin. One cloud filled night; Vadavaa had killed and murdered a merchant and his entire family. It just happened that the merchant had been hosting a learned scholar from a temple of Asura, who Vadavaa most happily killed. After searching through the scholar's bags, Vadavaa came upon an ancient scroll, which spoke of a destroyed temple of the cult of Katar. Since that day, Vadavaa has dedicated her life to the finding of the temple and the raising of it to Katar's glory.

Vadavaa has slowly been gaining a reputation among the dark underworld of Vendhya. Many assassins and professional murderers believe her to be an incarnation of Katar herself. After discovering the lost temple of Shirma, Vadavaa has been slowly gathering her faithful to her. The Vendhyan village of Kepthhamun lies just across the border from Uttara Kuru and the Misted Wood of Al'Merraz. Vadavaa eventually discovered the Dark Altar of Katar, buried among the ruins of the temple. Once it was restored, Vadavaa began to send out the call to all the faithful of Katar, that they come at once and pay homage to the return of their goddess. Since that time, thieves, murderers and assassins have been migrating west, to the village of Kepthhamun. However, all are disguised and have done everything possible to keep their presence a secret. Vadavaa only had one obstacle in her way – a sorcerer named Yurra, resided within his tower a mere six miles from the location of the ancient temple. Not knowing whether the sorcerer would reveal her plans to the authorities, Vadavaa put together a team of assassins to strike at his tower and murder him in his sleep. Yurra, a powerful and skilled sorcerer and not some mere apprentice, was warned by his spells of warding that he had laid about his tower. Yurra was able to chase off the assassins and then sent a message to Vendhya to warn them of the danger.

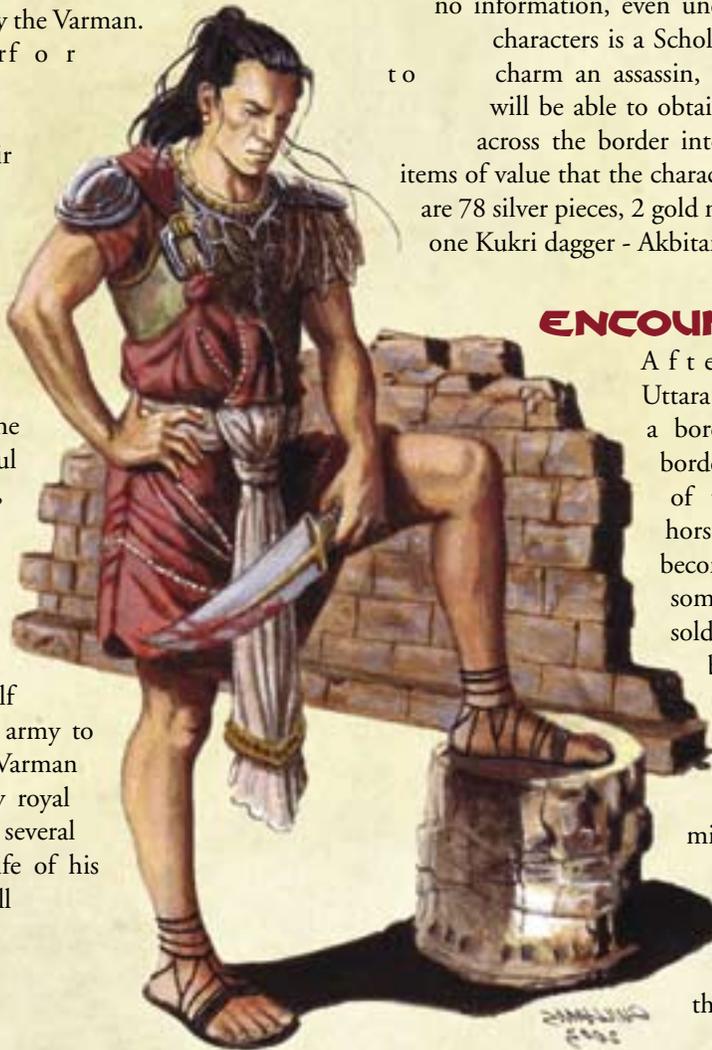
Having failed to kill Yurra, Vadavaa was left with no choice but to act immediately. Vadavaa ordered several of her faithful to sneak into the village of Kepthhamun and capture the unsuspecting townsfolk for sacrifice. The adventure starts with the group arriving in Kepthhamun in the aftermath of the abductions.

THE ENCOUNTERS

ENCOUNTER E1

The characters should arrive the morning after the mass abductions. The village is in complete chaos and armed militia and citizens are roaming the streets in mobs. The characters will have to make Diplomacy and Bluff checks to convince the angry villagers that they had nothing to do with the abductions. The Games Master might consider giving the player characters a royal writ or order showing that they have been sent by the royal government on an unrelated mission. After convincing the villagers that they had nothing to do with the abductions,

they will be approached by the Varman. An elected official speaker for the village, Varman Kohada will approach the group and ask for their help. Varman Kohada has already sent a runner north to the Fortress of Dahatma, seeking aid from the royal troops stationed there. Unbeknownst to Varman Kohada and the characters, Dergith Vrul has sent Prince Sullima, cousin to Bhunda Chan, and 500 Royal troops to reinforce the fortress and to aid in the eradication of the Katari assassins. It will take one and a half days for Prince Sullima's army to reach Kepthhamun. Varman Kohada believes that any royal help will not arrive for several days and fears for the life of his missing daughter, as well as those of the other 23 missing villagers. The village of Kepthhamun is not overly wealthy; however, the Varman is



willing to provide each of the characters with food and general supplies and offers a sack of 600 silver pieces for the safe return of the villagers. If any characters perform a successful Diplomacy check, Varman Kohada will reveal that the sorcerer Yurra is a distant relative of his and that if the characters safely return with the villagers, he would speak to Yurra on the characters behalf. If the characters agree, then Varman Kohada immediately supplies them with any basic supplies that they need and can give the group a list of the names of the missing villagers. After the group re-supplies and leaves the village, they will immediately be followed by one of Vadavaa's spies. The assassin, Ranjit and his six companions will be lying in ambush just two miles outside the village (Ranjit, 4th level Thief- Katari Assassin, (4) Vendhyan 3rd level Thieves- Katari Assassins, (2) Vendhyan 2nd level Thieves- Katari Assassins). Ranjit also has two Panthers (see *Conan The Roleplaying Game* page 307) who are trained to attack whomever Ranjit wishes. Ranjit and his assassins will not surrender and fight to the death. Even if the characters

manage to capture an assassin alive, they will get no information, even under torture. If one of the characters is a Scholar and is able to use magic to charm an assassin, the only information they will be able to obtain will be the route leading across the border into Uttara Kuru. The only items of value that the characters will find on the Katari are 78 silver pieces, 2 gold necklaces (symbol of Katari), one Kukri dagger - Akbitanan quality.

ENCOUNTER E2

After crossing the border of Uttara Kuru, the group runs into a border patrol. The Uttaran border patrol seems to consist of ten soldiers mounted on horseback. It will immediately become apparent that something is wrong with the soldiers and characters should be allowed a Spot check (DC 15). Characters will notice that the patrols' clothing is unkempt and dishevelled. They might also notice that the patrol does not handle their mounts well or that there are

bloodspots on some of their uniforms. If by the second round, after making contact, the group does not take action, then the patrol attacks. The 'patrol' is actually dead, killed by Katari assassins who have taken their uniforms and mounts. When combat starts, most of the assassins will jump off their mounts and use their favoured weapons of choice; scimitar, Kukri dagger, garrotte, etc ('Badari' 4th level Thief- Katari Assassin, (5) Vendhyan 3rd level Thieves- Katari Assassins, (2) Vendhyan 2nd level Thieves- Katari Assassins, (2) Vendhyan 1st level Thieves- Katari Assassins). If a thorough search of the assassins and their gear is performed (Search check, DC 20) the group finds the following items: 55 silver pieces, 9 gold pieces, 13 semi-precious stones, a Khitain Amulet that gives the wearer the ability *Deft Hands* as per the feat and vial of luminous liquid that sheds light in a 5-foot radius, although only at night and in a pale green glow. As in previous encounters, these Katari fight to the death.

ENCOUNTER E3

After travelling into the Misted Wood of Al'Merraz for two hours, the group comes upon a small glade. There is a pomegranate fruit tree, as well as a small spring situated in a rocky outcropping. Whether the group decides to rest or not, almost immediately after entering the glade they will come under attack by the spring's guardian. The guardian is a 'Grey Devil' (see *Scrolls of Skelos*, page 88, hit points 55) and has been guardian of this spring for over 300 years. The Devil, 'Gushrul', is typical of his race, the only exception being that his fur has taken on a darker tone instead of the normal grey. Gushrul was a servant to an ancient sorcerer that passed this way over three centuries ago and was given the duty to guard over this spring until he returned. The sorcerer never returned and Gushrul has been bound to this glade ever since. The spring has a slight regenerative quality and anyone drinking from it is restored 10 hit points per day, however Gushrul gains no benefit from its healing power. No matter if the individual drinks a handful or a gallon; the result will never be more than 10 hit points of curative healing. Even if the group has a way of communicating with Gushrul, he will not ally himself with them, even if his freedom is promised. At the first opportunity, he will attack the group and try to kill as many of them as possible. When the characters defeat Gushrul they will find several torn and dismembered bodies scattered about. Vadavaa had come with a group of her assassins and had tried to bind Gushrul with a *Control Monstrous Humanoid* scroll in the hopes of using him in Katar's service, but the spell failed and Vadavaa barely escaped with

her life. If a character makes a Search check (DC 15), they will find some assorted treasure, left over from Gushrul's past victims, lying underwater in the spring (23 gold pieces, 88 silver pieces, 4 pieces of gold jewellery set with semi-precious stones, 2 silver amulets with royal Vendhyan symbols, 23 loose precious stones). A Scholar character that makes a Knowledge (arcane) check (DC 10) can determine that several valuable spell components can be taken from Gushrul's carcass.

ENCOUNTER E4

The characters should arrive at the ruins of Shirma sometime at night. Even if the group tries to sneak into the ruins during the day, they will definitely be caught. If the group decides to have someone scout out the ruins, they can get a general layout of the area.

- **A1** This part of the ancient temple houses Vadavaa's personal sleeping quarters as well as the Altar of Katar. Several bookcases line the walls and have many modern and ancient volumes. There is also a spiral staircase, made of well-worn stone, that descends into the ancient catacombs beneath the ruins. This stairwell has never been cleared of debris and even Vadavaa has no idea what lies beneath.
- **A2** This part of the ruins contains a serviceable well and gathering place for the faithful of Katar. A large, obsidian statue rests in the corner of this building and depicts Katar in all her evil glory. A Search check (DC 25) reveals a hidden chamber beneath the statue that contains miscellaneous gems valued at 2,000 silver pieces. Any character that manages to destroy the statue should receive a 1,000 experience point bonus.
- **A3** This part of the ruins use to be used to test Katar's faithful through tests of balance and perception. It is covered in deep crevasses, pitfalls and rotting bails of hay. This is where the Katari stable their horses or dispose of unwanted bodies.
- **A4** These ramshackle huts house the faithful that have answered Vadavaa's call. Each building can house 20 individuals and all their gear. Currently 49 Katari assassins, of various levels, dwell within the huts.
- **A5** The stink coming from this wooden building is almost unbearable. This building is the prisoners'



THE RUINS OF SHIRMA

barracks and houses over 30 individuals in its cramped interior. The building is surrounded by a wooden stockade that has been trapped with bells and other noise making devices to alert the Katari of any attempted escape. Characters that try to get past the wooden stockade must make a Disable Device check (DC20) not to make any noise. The prisoners' barracks is watched by no

more than two guards at any time. Most of the time only one assassins is ever present to watch over the 'sacrifices'. Most of the prisoners are at half strength and malnourished. Even if they were given weapons, most could not fight even if they wanted to.



The group has several choices available to them, but they should be aware that trying to take on the whole temple is almost certainly suicide. Characters should come up with various plans to free the prisoners and to stop Vadavaa, but two ideas should be foremost in their minds. First would be to sneak into camp and free the prisoners quietly and try to move the prisoners southeast toward Yurra's tower. Second would be to sneak into camp and try to make it back across the border to the village of Kephthamun. If the group decides to go with the first plan and they reach Yurra's tower, he will be willing to help the adventures, but would ask for a 'favour' in return. If the group decides to try the second plan, and they make it to the border, they will find Prince Sullima and his army waiting to ambush any Katari pursuers. If the group decides any other plan, the Games Master will have to improvise. Whatever choice the group makes, if they do not kill Vadavaa in six days time, she will have sacrificed a number of victims (her own assassins if needed) to the Altar of Katar and be granted the ability *Vampire Transformation* as per *Scrolls of Skelos* page 19. With her newfound powers, Vadavaa will begin a reign of terror and destruction about the region and will begin plans to strike back at the adventures that dared to interfere with her plans.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

VADAVAA SHARMAN, KATARI ASSASSIN

Medium Humanoid (7th level Thief/4th level Scholar)

Hit Dice: 7d8+3d6+31 (81hp)

Initiative: +14 (+4 Dex, +6 Reflex, +4 Improved Initiative)

Speed: 40ft.

DV (Dodge): 20 (+4 Dex, +5 Dodge, +1 Light Footed)

DV (Parry vs. Melee): 17 (+3 Str, +4 Parry)

DR: -

Attack: Kukri Dagger +12 melee finesse (1d8+3/ 19-20/x2, AP 4) or Scimitar melee +11/+6 (1d8+3/18-20/x2, AP5)

Full Attack: Kukri Dagger +12/+7 melee finesse (1d8+3/ 19-20/x2, AP 4) or Scimitar melee +11/+6 (1d8+3/ 18-20/x2, AP5)

Special Attacks: Sneak Attack style (Kukri/Scimitar) +5d8 damage, +1 hit; +5d6 with any other weapon she Sneak Attacks with.

Special Qualities: +1 racial Will saves bonus negated by Hypnotism, Trapfinding, Eyes of the Cat, Trap Sense +2, Light Footed, Sorcerous Protection +2, Knowledge is Power +8

Space/Reach: 5ft. (1)/5ft. (1)

Saves: Fort +6, Ref +10, Will +10*

Abilities: Str 17, Dex 18, Con 16, Int 18, Wis 16, Cha 16

Skills: Balance +16, Bluff +17, Climb +13, Concentration +17, Diplomacy +12, Hide +14, Intimidate +11 Jump +15, Knowledge (Arcana) +20, Knowledge (Nobility) +10, Knowledge (History) +9, Listen +17, Move Silently +18, Sense Motive +19, Spot +13, Tumble +16

Feats: Improved Initiative, Fleet Footed, Dodge, Knowledgeable

Corruption: 2

Possessions: +1 Kukri Dagger, Bauble of Bel (Grants *Poison Use* Feat when worn), Black Silk Robes, Mask of Katar (Grants wearer *Blind Fight* Feat when worn), sack of 4 Black Lotus Leaves, coin pouch (1,205 sp)

Spells: Curses: *Lesser Ill-Fortune*, *Gelid Bones*, Hypnotism: *Entrance*, *Torment*, Necromancy: *Raise Corpse*, *Death Touch*, Oriental Magic: *Calm of the Adept*, *Darting Serpent*, Summoning: *Demonic Pact*

Description: Vendhyan female, 35 years old, shoulder length black hair, dark skinned, 5'9 height, 160 lbs., tattoo of Katar on forehead, brown eyes.

RANJIT, KATARI ASSASSIN

Medium Humanoid (4th level Vendhyan Thief)

Hit Dice: 4d8+4 (24 hp)

Initiative: +12 (+4 Dex, +2 Dodge, +4 Imp Initiative)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: (Dodge): 17 (+4 Dex, +2 Dodge, +1 Light Footed)

DV: (Parry vs. Melee): 15 (+3 Str, +2 Parry)

DR: 4

Attack: Kukri +7 melee finesse (1d8+3/ 19-20/x2, AP 4); or Scimitar +6 melee finesse (1d8+3/ 18-20/x2, AP 5)

Full Attack: Kukri +7 melee finesse (1d8+3/ 19-20/x2, AP 4); or Scimitar +6 melee finesse (1d8+3/ 18-20/x2, AP 5)

Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/ 5ft. (1)

Special Attacks: Sneak Attack style (Kukri/Scimitar) +3d8 damage, +1 hit; +3d6

Special Qualities: +1 racial Will saves bonus negated by Hypnotism, Trapfinding, Eyes of the Cat, Trap Sense +1, Light Footed.

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +8, Will +3*

Abilities: Str 16, Dex 18, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 12

Skills: Balance +12, Bluff +1, Climb +9, Diplomacy +5, Disguise +7, Escape Artist +10, Hide +13, Jump +11, Knowledge (Nobility) +6 Knowledge (History) +3, Listen +7, Move Silently +13, Sense Motive +5, Spot +7, Tumble +12

Feats: Improved Initiative, Stealthy

Possessions: Black Silk Assassins garb, Kukri Dagger (Akbitanan Quality), +1 Scimitar, Khitain throwing stars (8), Vial of Cobra Venom (1), Wire Garrote, coin pouch (350 sp), Bronze symbol of Katar.

Description: Kosalan male, 25 years old, shaved head, dark skinned, 5'11" height, 176 lbs., tattoo of Katar on shaved head, green eyes.

KATARI ASSASSIN

Medium Humanoid (1st level Vendhyan Thief)

Hit Dice: 1d8 (5 hp)

Initiative: +5 (+3 Dex, +2 Reflex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: (Dodge): 13 (+3 Dex)

DV: (Parry vs. Melee): 11 (+1 Str)

DR: 4

Attack: Kukri Dagger +3 melee finesse (1d8+1/ 19-20/x2, AP 2)

Full Attack: Kukri Dagger +3 melee finesse (1d8+1/ 19-20/x2, AP 2)

Space/Reach: 5ft. (1)/ 5ft. (1)

Special Attacks: Sneak Attack style (Kukri) +1d8 damage, +1 hit; +1d6 with any other weapon Katari Assassin Sneak Attacks with.

Special Qualities: +1 racial Will saves, negated by Hypnotism, Trapfinding

Saves: Fort +0, Ref +5, Will +1*

Abilities: Str 12, Dex 17, Con 11, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 9

Skills: Balance +6, Bluff +0, Climb +4, Diplomacy +3, Disguise +3, Escape Artist +6, Hide +8 Jump +4 Knowledge (Nobility) +6, Knowledge (History) +3, Listen +4, Move Silently +8, Sense Motive +4, Spot +4, Tumble +6

Feats: Stealthy

Possessions: Kukri Dagger, Assassins black clothing, grappling hook and rope, coin pouch, leather weapons harness

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