

- CHAPTER TWO: ASSASSIN PRESTIGE CLASSES -

The fida'i, houri, and shadow mage (Fid, Hou, and Shm) are prestige classes that specialize in different aspects of assassination. The fida'i is a ruthless holy warrior, while the other two use seduction and sorcery (respectively) to take down their targets.

FIDA'I

The zealous fida'i combine deadly skill with an absolute belief in the holy nature of their mission. As devout followers of the Straight Path of the Sirat, they know their cause is correct and that their actions are approved by their faith.

Because of its requirement for total devotion, the fida'i class is best suited for those assassins seeking ultimate truth, rogues who wish to enter into the service of a cause, and warriors seeking glorious martyrdom. Fida'i are almost always humans and half-elves, but a few elves are also known.

For more details on the fida'i and their beliefs, see Chapters Ten and Eleven.

Abbreviation: Fid

Hit Dice: d8.

REQUIREMENTS

Alignment: Lawful neutral or lawful evil.

Base Attack Bonus: +5.

Feats: Iron Will.

Concentration: 5 ranks.

Knowledge (religion): 5 ranks.

Move Silently: 10 ranks.

Special: Must be admitted by the Lord of the Mountain.

CLASS SKILLS

The fida'i's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Escape Artist (Dex), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Profession (Wis), and Spot (Wis).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int Modifier.

CLASS FEATURES

All of the following are class features of the fida'i prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A Fida'i gains proficiency with the kukri and short sword.

Conviction (Ex): At first level, a fida'i gains a +2 bonus on saves against mind-affecting spells and effects. This bonus improves to +4 at 4th level, +6 at 6th level, and +8 at 8th level.

Divine Ecstasy (Ex): Beginning at 2nd level, the character's faith admits him glimpses of the paradise that awaits him in the afterlife, and he gains the ability to enter a paroxysm of joy as a free action, during his turn. When in this state, he gains a +2 morale bonus to attack and damage rolls, saves, and skill checks, and gains damage resistance 5/-. This state lasts for 1 round, plus 1 round per class level.

The fida'i may use this ability twice per day beginning at 5th level, and three times per day at 9th level.

Spell-like Abilities: Beginning at 3rd level, the fida'i gains a number of spell-like abilities, each of which he may cast once per day. 3rd level: *protection from chaos*; 7th level: *magic circle against chaos*; 10th level: *shield of law*. These abilities are as the spells cast by a cleric of level equal to the character's class level (save DC 10 + Wis + spell level).

TABLE 2-1: FIDA'I

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+1	+0	+2	+2	Conviction (+2)
2	+2	+0	+3	+3	Divine ecstasy 1/day
3	+3	+1	+3	+3	<i>Protection from chaos</i>
4	+4	+1	+4	+4	Conviction (+4)
5	+5	+1	+4	+4	Divine ecstasy 2/day
6	+6	+2	+5	+5	Conviction (+6)
7	+7	+2	+5	+5	<i>Magic circle against chaos</i>
8	+8	+2	+6	+6	Conviction (+8)
9	+9	+3	+6	+6	Divine ecstasy 3/day
10	+10	+3	+7	+7	<i>Shield of law</i>

- CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE FIDA'I -

If the Sirat was just a sect of fanatics led by a handful of priests, they would hardly be the threat to the Empire that they have become, even if they could field an army of followers ready to die for the cause. Ultimately, no rabble can stand against the Imperial Legions with their war-wizards, siege engines, and fierce judicars. The fida'i—the faithful—are the reason the Sirat have survived and even become a threat.

Among the Siratani, the fida'i are the most devout and dedicated believers, men and women willing to be martyrs for their faith. To the outside world, the fida'i are murderers and zealous monsters who kill by stealth and treachery. At the most basic, they are usually assassins, although other classes can become fida'i. They stalk and kill the enemies of the Sirat—imperial governors, priests, generals, senators, emperors, or any whom the Lord of the Mountain commands them to kill. It is a task for which they are specially trained, blessed, and promised union with the Divine for their sacrifices and successes.

It is a common mistake of non-believers to assume that all Siratani are fida'i. In truth, the fida'i are only a small part of the Sirat. Most Siratani are simple people—peasants, tradesmen, merchants, and the like. They observe the Law and obey the Lord of the Mountain, but they do not assassinate for him. That is a near-holy task left to the fida'i.

A man cannot simply become a fida'i just by volunteering. The fida'i are specially selected from those who follow the Law by the Eye of Sacrifice or by the Lord of the Mountain. Candidates must be brave, strong, earnestly devout, sober in spirit and deed, intelligent (though formal education is not necessary), unmarried, and childless. Since supporting one's family is one of the highest principles of the Law, those people with children or younger siblings to care for must place that duty before the duty of serving as a fida'i. Those chosen to become fida'i are sometimes taken as young as twelve, but they can be of any age or class so long as they meet the requirements. Male or female, human or other races—these particulars do not matter, as the fida'i span numerous races and both genders. The only true stricture is they can have no one dependent upon them.

If a candidate meets these basic qualifications, he is put through a series of tests—grueling physical drills to test strength and endurance, mental challenges to probe their wits, and careful cross-examinations by the scholars to determine their devotion to the Law of the Divine. If the candidate passes all these tests (and many fail), he is chosen. Those who fail are still faithful Sirat, but they do not gain the benefits of rebirth as a fida'i.

From that point on, the life of the candidate is no longer his own or even free. During the training, he (or she) must live in the dormitories of the fida'i and is never allowed contact with the outside world except on holy days. The training covers the basic skills of the fida'i and intense studies in the Law. Discipline is rigid, and punishments are brutally harsh. Some candidates even die through accident or punishment. These things are expected.

REBIRTH

When a candidate has learned all that he can be taught, his time in the training halls is done. He has one last test to undergo—the Ceremony of Rebirth. This is the hardest challenge of all, for it does not rely on physical strength or cunning, but purity of heart and faith in the Law. During Rebirth, the candidate comes face-to-face (as it were) with the essence of the Divine. He transports across planes and enters the unfathomable presence of pure lawfulness. No motive, no weakness, no motive can be concealed from that burning resolve.

The ceremony takes place in the Garden of Ascension. After days or even weeks of fasting and prayers, the candidate, dressed in a coarse-spun woolen robe, is presented to the Lord of the Mountain and shown the first texts—the original sayings of the Prophet of the Mountain. From the balcony, the Eye of Purity prays for strength, protection, and wisdom to be bestowed upon the candidate and for the Divine to show its infinite mercy on this poor vessel. The candidate then steps onto the rock of Ascension and a high priest of the Sirat chants out the spell of Rebirth. As the final word is uttered, there is a brilliant flash around the candidate and in an instant the test is done. If he remains standing and is mentally sound, he is reborn as one of the fida'i. If he is dead or raving, he has failed.

The scholars and mystics of the Sirat have debated long and hard about just what happens during a candidate's Rebirth. Many of them have experienced it firsthand, but the mind of man cannot explain it. All agree that in that instant the Divine Lawfulness is revealed in all its order and perfection to the candidate. Some claim that the Divine judges the soul and smites those who are impure, killing the unlawful and destroying the minds of the weak. Other scholars argue the Divine cannot be so cruel—its perfection, revealed all at once, is too much for those whose training and dedication is less than perfect. Their minds cannot tolerate the glory and they snap or they die.

Whatever the cause, those who survive are now full fida'i, the faithful killers of the Sirat. Those who die are buried without honor—weaklings or traitors to the faith. The mad are considered holy. They are shown charity and

kindness, returned to their families and allowed the freedom of the land. Although mad, they have seen the face of the Divine and survived.

FIDA'I LIFE—AND DEATH

Once a man or a woman becomes a fida'i, he can no longer return to the normal world. He lives in barracks with other fida'i when he is not afield on missions. He does not work the fields or master a craft. He is held in high respect by normal Siratani worshippers, but is not allowed to identify himself as a fida'i when away from his barracks. He is not to fall in love, marry, or even form close friendships. Having seen the face of the Divine, he is assured rebirth after death and so is not afraid to die.

This does not mean that any fida'i is in a hurry to die. The image of the fida'i throughout the Empire is that of the suicidal assassin who charges in, heedless of the counterstroke that will kill him too. In truth, the fida'i's duty is to serve the Sirat and if he can do so by living, more power to him. When sent to assassinate a nobleman or a general, a fida'i will make every effort to return alive, gain more experience, and advance in level. After all, this makes him better able to serve the Law.

However, if a mission leaves only the choice between death or failure, then the fida'i has no fear of death. He has seen the perfection that is promised to him—so long as he remains true.


DEALING WITH OUTSIDERS

If asked, the Siratani maintain they are good and by all appearances this seems so. Their lives are ordered and their followers law-abiding. Their goals are three-fold: to live by the Law, to teach others to live by the Law, and to punish those who reject the Law. All three create problems with the Empire.

Living by the Law means the Empire and its laws are not the highest authority over any Siratani. A true Siratani will obey and respect the edicts of the Empire. This is right and proper, as obedience to authority is an important part of the Sirat belief, though only so long as imperial laws do not conflict with the Law. When that happens, a true Sirat is expected to follow the Law and ignore the less than divine imperial rules. Needless to say, authorities in the Empire have a problem with this.

The second case of Teaching the Law doesn't please the authorities any more than the first. While the Empire





has a lot of religions within its borders, preaching the Straight Path of the Sirat is a treasonous offence. The punishment for being a Sirat missionary is death. This hardly endears the Empire to the Siratani.

And this leads to the third point of punishing those who reject the Law. It stands to reason that those transgressors are most of the officials of the Empire. Since the laws of the Sirat take precedence over the laws of non-believers, the teachings of the Prophet state that those who refuse the Law are evil. Therefore, the emperor and all temporal rulers not of the Siratani faith are corrupt. They have strayed so far from Straight Path, and so long as they refuse to embrace the Sirat, they are enemies of the faith. Since one of the goals of the Sirat is to punish evil, these wrongdoers must be punished. Since they are not Siratani, it is no crime to kill them. In fact, murdering an imperial official brings the killer closer to Rebirth. In the eyes of the Sirat, murder is good and right and holy.

To the emperor's ears and pretty much those of any other non-Sirat noble, all of this (especially the last part) is simple treason, incitement to rebellion, and just about any other political crime one cares to add. The Sirat is a traitorous secret society that must be exterminated by any and all means. The punishment for being Sirat is death and destruction of the body (to make resurrection near impossible). There is a bounty for the arrest of a Siratani and large prices on the heads of the leaders, as follows:

Adventurers of all stripes have tried to hunt down and kill the Lord of the Mountain, but so far none have succeeded.

Common Siratani	500 gp
Fida'i	1000 gp or more
Eyes of the Prophet	10,000 gp each
Lord of the Mountain	100,000 gp

The situation at hand is the Empire on one side trying to hunt down and eradicate the Sirat. The Sirat, on the other hand, remain dedicated to changing the ways of the people to the Law and removing the sinful tools of error. They stay focused on the people who make and enforce the laws, not the common folk who obey those laws. After all, the commoners have been led into error and can be redeemed. In other words, the diametrically opposed viewpoints only lead to lots of death on both sides.

METHODS

To achieve their goals, the Sirat have the fida'i. Unlike the Vultur, the fida'i are not obsessed with the art of killing, nor are they obsessed with the need to survive any counter-attacks. As such, their assassination methods tend to be much more straightforward and simple.

Although they are known throughout the land as killers, the Sirat use killing as a last resort. Because they spread fear, the Sirat do not have to strike to kill. Often the threat of death accomplishes more than the death itself. No one forgets waking up beneath a Sirat dagger in the headboard or in the back of a favorite concubine. The message is clear—"We can get to you easily."—and convincing to less-than-dedicated imperial officials. Often such 'messages' result in anti-Sirat edicts getting rescinded, crackdowns lifted, and suspects swiftly released from custody.

When fear alone is not enough, the Siratani have no hesitation about striking to kill. Some officials refuse to be terrorized while others are too powerful or dangerous to let live under any circumstances. Fear needs examples, too, so sometimes officials die as a warning to others. When Siratani assassins strike, they favor public places where there are plenty of witnesses to what they have done. They favor the knife, a small easily concealed instrument. The knife is a direct and clear link between the assassin and his victim. Magic items and spells are avoided when possible for this very reason. The act of killing is a religious act after all. Usually, immediately after an assassination, the fida'i loudly announces, "So die the enemies of the Sirat!" or some other such cry, just to erase any doubt as to who and why the deed was done.

Just because their assassinations are very public, the fida'i are in no hurry to die. Escape is often an essential part of the plan (unless there is no other recourse). The fida'i have learned to use the very public nature of the assassination to their advantage. Generally they stage their attacks in the largest possible crowds and strike at the point where there is a close exit nearby. If possible, the fida'i uses a *ring of recall* or another spell to escape the scene. If spells cannot be used, the crowd may be seeded with fellow fida'i or Sirat followers who create confusion and panic, rather like shouting "Fire!" in the theater. Diversionary devices—smoke bombs, traps and magic devices (and here the fida'i have no qualms about using magic)—are used to create cover. During the ensuing panic, the fida'i makes his getaway.

Not every fida'i escapes. Sometimes bad luck prevails and it is impossible to escape capture. Captured fida'i are notorious for their determined refusal to talk. While they will freely admit what they did or were trying to do, few if any have ever named their accomplices, contacts, or other details about the Sirat. This reticence, combined with their resistances to scrying (for details see the Fida'i prestige class in Chapter 2), make them an interrogator's nightmare. Confident that they will gain Rebirth in the essence of the Divine, the fida'i do not fear death. Moreover, most jailors have learned it is wise to closely watch these killers who may willingly kill themselves rather than risk the pain of torture.