Dragon Compendium Volume One Classes in Faerun

The Dragon Compendium Volume one is a collection of Dragon Magazine articles from over the course of the magazine's publication. These articles are presented in 3.5 format, and are compatible with that ruleset.

This article will deal with examples of the new base classes introduced in that work, which include the battledancer, death master, jesters, mountebanks (which should not be confused with the prestige class of the same name in *Complete Scoundrel*), savants, sha'ir (a class originally presented in the Al-Qadim setting), and urban druids.

Battledancers: Battledancers are warriors with a natural talent for turning their graceful movements and natural talent into deadly combat techniques. The cultures that produce battledancers are varied, and there are some members of races that have no tradition who still manage to learn these techniques.

The most famous battledancers in Faerun are perhaps the battledancers of Chult. Many Chultan warriors can stride into battle without a weapon other than their hands and feet, and then dive into a deadly, beautiful series of spins, rolls, kicks, and punches to defend their homes from the Batiri and other threats. Those that wish to become battledancers and make that wish known are never picked, only those that posses the natural talent and grace that are noticed by the master battledancers.

Among other cultures in Faerun to have developed the skills of the battledancer, the gnomes of Songfarla have a tradition similar to traditional battledancing. While certainly not a common profession, there are several gnomish families that still practice the tradition and pass it on to others.

Battledancers are also known in Chessenta. The tradition in Chessenta is common among the athletes that perform in Chessenta's tradition of games, and matches between battledancers are especially well attended events, though very few of the military units in Chessenta include battledancers, as it tends to be seen as less of a martial tradition and more of a performing art. Still, there are various Chessentan athletes that are struck with wanderlust that might pick up the adventuring career.

Perhaps the most surprising battledancer tradition that scholars have observed has been the tradition that exists among the orcs. Among orcs that revere the god Bahgtru, there are battledancers that practice the tradition as a form of worship to the orc god of strength. Orc battledancers of Bahgtru, known as Vrubushsk, charge into battle without weapons, trusting only in their training and their strength. These orcs are natural war leaders, if typically poor strategists.

The Death Master: Death Masters are in may ways the ultimate “traditional” necromancers. They have a natural affinity for necromantic magic, and they are also more hardy and less studious than the typical wizard. Their knowledge of the spells of the Death Master tradition are even more complete in some ways than the training of a traditional necromancer or that of a dread necromancer.

Death Masters are arcane spell casters, but all death masters must, before they can begin their training, pledge their souls to the demon lord Orcus. Death Masters may worship nearly any god whose interests fall in line with their own, but Orcus demands the souls of those that would learn the secrets that he has imparted to his cult. Each prospective death master is given a chance to escape his pact, however, a special service to Orcus that if they perform, they may escape their fate in Orcus' realm of Thanatos.

Several members of the cult of Orcus in Vaasa were indeed death masters, and most of those fled Vaasa when the cult fell to Gareth Dragonbane and his allies. Rumors abound that there are death masters that have insinuated themselves into society within Impiltur.

Death masters have also entered the service of the Cult of the Dragon, and these death masters are among the most active in trying to fulfill their obligation to Orcus in order to regain their rights to their own souls.

The price in souls is the biggest obstacle to most would be death masters. While those that manage to live long and delve deeply into Orcus' secrets manage to become liches, those who die before they are given the secrets of lichdom are doomed to a rather horrid new phase of existence in Thanatos.

Those death masters that work directly for the cult of Orcus are trying to rebuild the faith after the losses they suffered when Orcus was slain. They kill Kiaransalee's servants whenever they find them. At least one of these dark "evangelists" of Orcus arrived in Skullport a few years ago and has been actively trying to convert necromancers in the Port of Skulls to the study of the skills of the death master.

Jester: Jesters are found in many traveling troupes of performers across Faerun, and some rulers and important personages keep jesters around to entertain them. Most jesters are not members of the jester character class, but some are.

The actual tradition of jesters, including their ability to influence others and their ability to learn arcane spells, is an offshoot of those bards whose natural talents lent themselves to comedy and ridicule rather than epic oration or song. While bards often have a reputation as potential spies, Harpers, or Heralds, very few people worry that a jester might be a spy or information broker, meaning that they are actually quite valuable to organizations like the Harpers.

Gnomes and halflings are often drawn to this profession, and members of these races are the most likely to have very different "public" personalities versus their private personalities. Jesters of these races often have biting wits, and are often spies working to advance a cause they believe in. They are also very often quite negatively inclined towards those that work for them.

One group of jesters that are not spies or agents of any power were seen a Watedeep, the elite members of a confederation of performers who were trying to convince the Lords to grant them their own guild with which they could pass on their talents and skills. After a horrible disaster when trying to force the issue, the leaders of this group were censured by the authorities of Waterdeep, and the lesser members quietly moved from the limelight to train apprentices quietly.

Some jesters have joined the New Olamn bard college in Waterdeep in an effort to legitimize their trade as well.

Mountebank: Mountebanks are rogues (in the true sense of the word) that have made pacts with dark powers to enhance their shadowy abilities. Mountebanks pledge their souls to a power of the lower planes that will aid them in their temporal pursuits. When the mountebank becomes especially skilled and powerful, they are claimed as elite servants of the power in question.

Graz'zt is the most common patron of mountebanks in the Realms (and he gained many of these from the ranks of fearful and disaffected members of the church of Waukeen), although Levistus of the Nine

Hells also sponsors quite a few mountebanks as well. While these two are the most common patrons of mountebanks, they are certainly not the only ones.

Among races other than humans, the fey'ri have several mountebanks that had pledged themselves to Malkzid, and indeed, Malkzid has actively sought pacts with elves of many different races, offering them power in exchange for service, and he is believed to have claimed at least a few sun elven agents in this manner, as well as a few moon elves and even a few drow.

Though recent examples are not in evidence, Impiltur has been home to many mountebanks, many of whom were sponsored by the Lord of the Hidden Layer, Eltab. Due to his rather nomadic existence at the moment, no recent mountebanks pledged to him are know at the moment.

Mountebanks can sometimes talk their way out of deals with their patrons, and among the halflings there is at least one legend of a mountebank that talked his way out of his servitude with one of the exiled arch devils roaming Avernus, by making a series of bets between various planar entities, and ultimately tricking a demon into accepting his burden, thus selling a demon into service to a devil.

Savant: Savants are characters that learn a bit about everything, and learn how to help other to understand that which they have learned. In general, these are exceptional individuals that have a drive to learn more and the ability to put this into action. Unlike bards, they don't learn these things in the context of ancient stories and songs, but through a dedicated pursuit of knowledge and a drive to become better at what they learn how to do.

Savants eventually learn how to cast divine spells, and for any savants that can cast divine spells must have a patron deity. This usually isn't much of an issue, however, since many of those that follow this path often already have a great deal of respect for gods such as Oghma, Deneir, or Savras. It also is not uncommon for inquisitive members of the church of Shar to seek to learn as many “secrets” as they can in pursuit of the glory of their goddess.

Savants are most common in civilized places that allow for scholars to both learn by tomes and stories, and still allow for the chance to put this knowledge into practice. With its many schools and colleges, many savants are native to Silverymoon, though its not uncommon to find them in Waterdeep as well. Many elves follow the path of the savant, and often elven savants are elves born on Evermeet that travel to Faerun to experience what they have learned about.

Sha'ir: Sha'ir are fairly rare in Faerun proper, but they are well known far to the south in the lands known as Zhakara. The most commonly encounted sha'ir in Faerun are indeed travelers from Zhakara, but from time to time sha'ir may take an apprentice from the northern lands of Faerun.

Among those lands where very small “native” followings of sha'irs have sprung up from Zhakaran teachers are the lands of Mulhorand, its nominal vassal state of Murghom, and even into the eclectic young kingdom of Kourmira, between Kara-Tur and Faerun. Sha'ir are specifically not welcomed in Calimshan, and native arcane spellcasters there will do whatever they can to drive out sha'ir among them, considering them fools that dabble with forces that are best left asleep.

Despite this, there are some tribes in the wastes of the Calim desert that are indeed interested in this particular arcane art.

Urban Druids: Urban druids are perhaps some of the least understood individuals among arcane

casters in Faerun. The most common term to describe their tradition, the term “urban druid” itself, can be confusing to those that assume that this refers to reverence to nature, and not a desire to preserve the natural ecology of an established city. Urban druids themselves rarely call themselves by this term, but the name, coined by a well read scribe of Candlekeep, is popular among scholars that study such things.

Like all arcane casters in Faerun, urban druids must have a divine patron to gain their granted abilities. No one deity is a perfect fit for urban druids, but several are more commonly seen as patrons of urban druids than others. Among cities with a strong noble class (such as the larger cities in Cormyr, as well as Waterdeep) Siamorphe is a popular choice (though she is only recently becoming popular in Cormyr). In cities often beset by outside forces, Helm is invoked often, and in cities that value knowledge and learning, Oghma might be a good fit. Bane, Mask, and Shar are also not uncommon in cities that have a darker feel to them (such as Zhentil Keep, Westgate, and Thultanthar).

Urban druids are individuals that revel in the natural ebb and flow of the life of a city, and as such, they work well with information brokers that know of them. In many cities of the north, urban druids work as informants and agents of both the Harpers and the Moonstars.

Urban druids are rarely part of the standard structure of the god's faith, and they tend to view their patron as worthy of worship because they help to strengthen their bond to the cities that they call home. From time to time they might take on apprentices, and urban druids may form circles (not unlike traditional druids) and members of this circle may or may not all have the same patron (although none will have opposing patrons, so a circle with a worshiper of Helm will not also include one that worships Mask or one that worships Shar).