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INTRODUCTION

"Do not fear death, only the shame of defeat."

Bound by honor, driven by fierce passions, the greatest warriors of legend have always been born of dragons. Once their kingdoms vied for dominion of the Known World, but now the clans of the dragonkin are but a shadow of their former greatness. Hidden high atop wind-scoured mountains and in the hearts of dark jungles, a handful of ancient fastnesses and legends are all that remain of a sprawling empire that was once the scourge of the civilized nations. Today's dragonborn are heirs to a martial legacy unmatched by any of the races. Alas, the sun has set on the age of the dragonborn, and this generation's heroes might well be the last to cast their shadow across the storied thrones of the Known World.

This tome records the tales of this race of warrior-kings and sets heroes on the path to creating their own legends. Herein, readers will discover the codes of honor that define the dragonborn clans, their greatest triumphs and follies, their rigid paths to honor, and their dark paths to infamy.

For though all cowards hope to live forever, the legends told of heroes are immortal.

THE DRAGON BLOODED

Every dragonborn is a warrior, first and foremost. While the dwarves, elves, and humans might lay kin-claim to great warriors, dragonborn alone are born for the battlefield. Whereas other races take up arms in times of peril, dragonborn never put them down. Even the dragonborn that devote their lives to non-martial pursuits attack their goals with the single-minded devotion of mortal combat; to be stripped of weapons is one of the greatest dishonors a Northland dragonborn can suffer.

The second defining characteristic of their culture is the Code of the Dragon, a collection of tenets scored into the runic tablets by the first Dragon Kings, passed down through the ages by the masters of the Great Clans, to be seared into the heart of every young warrior. The original tablets are kept in the Forbidden City, warded over by holy warriors, and

every clan honors its collection of scrolls recording the Code. While other races might aspire to rigorous codes of honor, a dragonborn's life is determined by his relationship to the Code of the Dragon.

Finally, his clan defines each dragonborn hero. To some, it is a point of pride, to others, a shackle to be escaped, but even those that have forsaken kith and kin cannot escape the spirits of their ancestors.

Above all, honor to one's self and one's clan is paramount, for when the last dragonborn dies, all that will remain of their kind are tales of greatness. Even rebels and exiles judge themselves by impossible standards. Indeed, often, it is outcasts that flaunt death with the greatest abandon, driven to burn their own names and deeds into the sacred register of the Forbidden City.

CODE OF THE DRAGON

Universal to both the Northland and Southland clans, the tenets of the dragonborn are as fixed and unmoving as the mountainous highlands that birthed their race. The Code of the Dragon is the keystone of dragonborn culture, curbing and directing the chaotic passions that would otherwise rule the elemental dragonborn.

While warriors judge themselves by the same standards set by the Dragon Kings, in practice, each clan has its own definition of honor. Does it take more courage to sacrifice yourself in a hopeless battle or to flee – returning to strike the death blow when the time is right? A dragonborn's answer hinges upon his clan of birth.

Courage: Fear holds no power over the warrior. To some, this manifests as the embrace of death, freeing the warrior to live life to the fullest. To others, it is the absolute disregard for one's own well-being in the service of a higher good, no matter the consequences. Regardless of the clan, dying in the service of your lord and clan is the highest service any warrior can render.

Loyalty: Battle is the truest test of any soul, and a warrior that turns on his brothers is more dangerous than any foe. By extension, no warrior should ever question a command given by his lord. To question an order is akin to hesitating on the field of battle, and any warrior that cannot place absolute faith in his commander is a danger to himself and his allies. Fiercely loyal, the greatest dragonborn heroes were dedicated to a fault.

Integrity: A dragonborn's word is better than any oath of fealty, any sacred prayer, or any solemn pledge. There is a saying among other races that while the sun may or may not rise on the 'morrow, a dragonborn will surely live up to his word. Fully aware of their finite lives, dragonborn strive to ensure that every moment is lived in earnestness and unflinching honesty. Epic tragedies are sung of noble warriors that broke their ancestor-oaths – often for love, but sometimes for greed – and of the horrors that befell them.

THE LAST OF THE WARRIOR KINGS

Once there were scores of Great Clans and an untold number of minor clans. The armies of the dragon-blooded rode unchecked across the North, and every spring warlords led their vassals into battle, driving back the wilderness and returning with riches and slaves to support their ceaseless wars of expansion.

Today, only five Great Clans remain in the Northlands, and the Forbidden City's roster of minor clans grows shorter with each passing season. The great fortress-cities stand silent, and the citadels that once defied the world now crumble beneath the unceasing march of time. The time of the last warrior-kings grows short, and the knowledge of this spurs their heroes on to ever-greater deeds. There may come to pass a time when dragonborn no longer tread the Known World, but the stories told of their deeds will live forever.

CLAN KENGI

"Defeat yourself, and no foe can stand against you."

Flying the banner of the solemn kenku, the warriors of Clan Kengi are legendary for their single-minded dedication to the study of the blade. Regarded as sword-saints, these wandering warriors seek mastery of self through the discipline of the blade. Some wander the Known Realms, practicing their skills in defense of the weak, but others will fight for any cause – good or evil – so long the conflict promises worthy opponents.

CLAN KARKONUS

"All things fade with time, but the Legion is forever."

The warriors of Clan Karkonus are renowned for their discipline and nearly undefeatable tactics on the battlefield. Their grand army, the Blackspear

Legion, is perhaps the finest fighting force in the world. Karkonus dragonborn are proud and honorable, but cling tenaciously to their ancient traditions and the fading legacy of their once great clan.

CLAN DAIGO

"Death cannot deter me. Good will prevail."

Flying the banner of the Platinum Dragon, the sons and daughters of Clan Daigo stand watch over the Forbidden City, while their champions roam the Known Realms. The clan has no living bloodlines; instead, each member of the clan is handpicked from the finest, most virtuous warriors of the other clans. These champions forswear their old families and friends, taking the name of deceased clan heroes for their own. Paragons of honor, whose lives have no value save what they can offer up in the service of good, the scions of Clan Daigo are responsible for the bulk of the ballads sung of dragonborn heroes. Consequently, the most infamous of villains also hail from the ranks of this noble clan. The dread dragonborn anti-paladins, thralls of infernal powers, were all once heroes of Clan Daigo.

CLAN ARATOS

"The spirits of a thousand ancestors guide my blade."

All dragonborn look on their ancestors for strength, but only the warcasters of the Aratos clan fight beside the spirits of the dead. Bizarre mystics and unnerving mediums, these dragonborn walk with one foot in the material world and one in the world of the spirit. Sometimes mistaken for crude necromancers, nothing could be further from the truth, as the Aratos don't regard their ancestors as truly dead. Instead, the spirits of their kin inhabit the world around them, offering omens, signs, and, sometimes, direct assistance to their living brethren. The occult truths of Aratos are concealed behind elaborate rites of passage, in which initiates forswear ever breaking the clan's cloak of secrecy. This secrecy is needed, say the dragonborn, to protect those foolish enough to dabble lightly in the ancient magic used to contact the sacred spirits of the dead.