

Prayer & Pugilism

Origins of Monks in the Iron Kingdoms

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The Order of Keeping

The Morrowan faith has been associated with martial traditions almost from its inception. The image of a knight of Morrow bravely fighting for light and justice is an icon across western Immoren. Common people in the Iron Kingdoms are only vaguely aware that the Church of Morrow's defenders do not all wear heavy, ornate armor or march to battle in rank and file. Preferring to serve in quiet obscurity, the Order of Keeping leaves the songs of bards and the adoration of the people to the knights.

In the days following Morrow's ascension, his followers began to wrestle with the implications of their leader's apotheosis and their persecution by the Menite priest kings. In these circumstances, the protection of Morrow's few materiel possessions was a matter of grave discussion. Chief among these items was the *Enkbeiridion*, the assembled collection of both Morrow's and Thamar's journals. Orellius I, who would become the first primarch of the nascent Church of Morrow, took the sacred tome into his own keeping, but another of Morrow's followers began the task of gathering Morrow's other possessions. Austa Gellon, a skilled swordswoman who had once fought alongside Morrow, saw it as her duty to preserve any remnants of Morrow's life for posterity. Morrow left no physical remains after his ascension, but Gellon believed that any item associated with him might provide insight into the path that led to godhood. Some of these items have in fact manifested miraculous properties, for reasons not entirely understood by theologians. Some believe these items were imbued with holy power as a result of their long proximity to Morrow,

while others believe they gained these attributes when exposed to the ascension event itself.

Morrow had wandered across much of western Immoren during his life, and Gellon spent years attempting to retrace his steps. It is believed that Gellon chronicled this journey herself, but those journals have been lost to time and it is not known if she succeeded in gathering Morrow's surviving possessions. What is known is that Gellon did unearth some of Morrow's ancillary notes and journals, which the early church found invaluable in providing commentary about the *Enkbeiridion*. Modern church scholars believe that Gellon also succeeded in acquiring a few of Morrow's other possessions, including the sword and mace he once wielded as a soldier.

Gellon eventually deposited the collection of relics at the Divinium, the first monastery devoted to Morrow, deep in the Wyrnwall Mountains. It was there, safe from the depredations of the Menite clergy, that the Church of Morrow began to coalesce from a group of lay followers into the dominant religion that it would become. Gellon herself spent much time guarding the relics that she acquired. As she grew older she became concerned with ensuring that the items in her charge would be guarded in perpetuity. It is believed that Gellon made several journeys in search of acolytes who would be worthy of protecting both the holiest Morrowan relics as well as the religion's nascent priesthood. These original guardians were mostly priests of a martial bent, some of whom went on to found their own orders within the Church.

As time passed and more men and women ascended, the order became increasingly dedicated to finding the relics left behind by the ascended.

Some acolytes walked the face of Caen, searching for the physical remnants of Morrow's life. Others among them dedicated themselves to protecting these relics. While the Menites continued to persecute them, the Morrowans found that others seemed to have an even less-savory interest in the holy relics of Morrow. A pair of acolytes had journeyed to the city of Fharin, where they believed that a bone from the hand of Ascendant Ellena had come to rest in a hidden cave. It was in this shallow cavern that the acolytes were ambushed and slaughtered by a group of Thamarites, who left their defaced bodies to be found months later by a group of acolytes sent to investigate. The ultimate fate—and even existence—of the relic is still a matter of debate within the Church of Morrow.

The group was a precursor to the Shroud of Thamar, who were intent on destroying Morrowan relics and preserving those of Thamar. Throughout the following centuries, they plagued the guardians of the Church of Morrow, and many shadowy battles were fought over the possession of sacred items. This new threat led to an increased number of Morrowan acolytes, who continued to explore and perfect the meditations and fighting stances passed down from Gellon and Taros.

Decades later, Gellon's former acolytes had further codified and expanded on her teachings, but it was not until the ascension of Katrena that the group was organized as an official arm of the church. Veneration of Katrena led the fledgling order to take a more active role in protecting Morrowan holy sites. Primarch Orestag I recognized these priests as the Order of Keeping in 1805 BR. The primarch expanded their responsibilities and authorities, allowing

them to establish monasteries for both the protection of Morrowan relics as well as to provide strongholds for others of their faith. Due to continued persecution by the Menite clergy, these first few strongholds were invariably in remote locations, not unlike the Divinium itself. These duties brought the order into close contact with the Morrowan artisans who helped design and construct their monasteries. The order has remained relatively obscure by choice, but this ancient relationship continues today: the order often maintains close relationships with lay followers who are masons, architects, or those who possess other skills relating to preserving monastic structures.

During the first centuries after Morrow's ascension, the scrutators of the Menite faith ruthlessly executed Morrowans on charges of heresy. Because of these dangerous circumstances, Morrowan clergy exhibited extreme discretion in their travels. Almost 300 years after Gellon's death, the order had effectively become another knightly order, simply one that emphasized the guarding of relics and clergy. It was at this time that one of the order's most expert combatants and bodyguards, Nallus Taros, set the order on a new course. A brilliant warrior skilled with sword, shield, and mace, Taros began to focus on his unarmed combat skills, discovering that without obvious weapons he could more easily escape the attention of Menite scrutators and other authorities. By his late 40s, Taros had walked the length and breadth of western Immoren, escorting the most important members of the Church of Morrow in secrecy.

Traveling unarmed and often alone across the wilds of western Immoren was dangerous even without the fear of religious persecution, and Taros walked hundreds of miles increasingly in meditation. In a few years, almost every waking moment of his life was spent in silent contemplation of both Asc. Katrena and Morrow. While walking along a remote road near the Bloodsmeath Marsh, Taros was assaulted by a group of bandits. In the aftermath of this skirmish, with the broken bodies of half a dozen brigands



before him and the survivors fleeing, Gellon realized that his meditation had not been broken by combat—his contemplation of Morrowan doctrines had become so complete that even battle could not interrupt it. Indeed, he had fought with incredible prowess, surprising even himself. Taros later described that it was as if Ascendant Katrena herself had guided his hands and feet as he struck down his foes.

When he next returned to the Divinium, his apparent enlightenment was startling even to the primarch of the day. There was no doubt in Taros' actions; it was obvious that his every thought and deed were in total accord with both Morrow's ideals and Katrena's battle philosophies. In the following years, Taros passed on much of what he had learned to the other guardians of the order. When he finally died of old age, his body was interred in a place of special reverence, adjacent to the holy items that had been of such significance to both Taros and Gellon.

The Order of Keeping slowly grew into its expanding monastic role. As more singularly holy individuals ascended, the

number of holy relics grew accordingly. Though few items were imbued with the true power of a relic, those that were often served as the kernels from which entire monasteries were founded. The threat of Menite persecution rose and fell over the centuries, and because many of these monasteries were founded in secrecy, the order maintained its emphasis on unarmed combat and weapons that could be easily concealed or justified. Despite their best efforts, some monasteries and early churches, known as basilicas, were found and destroyed by enemies of the church. Some of them seem to have been wiped from the face of Caen itself, and whatever relics they might have housed vanished with them. Early church records are incomplete in many places, and even in the today ruined Morrowan basilicas are sometimes discovered in the remote wilds or hidden deep beneath some of the older cities.

During these early centuries the order found itself as concerned with protecting relics from Menite authorities as they were with the rise of necromancy, particularly among

Thamarites. Necromancy is particularly abhorrent to the members of the Order of Keeping, who find the idea of a corrupted soul and body after death a true nightmare. That early Thamarite necromancers succeeded on several occasions in debasing Morrowan relics for their own purposes made the order one of the most radically anti-Thamarite groups within the early church.

The next major change to the order came in 1250 BR following the assassination of Primarch Loricharias. By this time the Church of Morrow had grown into a true religious and political power in western Immoren. The church counted followers among all the kingdoms of man, and its members began to worship openly. When Primarch Loricharias announced that the Morrowan Church would no longer tolerate religious persecution, the Menite Synod responded by dispatching Scrutator Khorva Sicarius on a supposedly diplomatic mission. Sicarius was the first Menite ever invited to visit the Divinium. In fact, Sicarius was no Menite at all, nor was Sicarius her true last name. Khorva



was, in truth, an assassin and enforcer originally from the criminal underworld of Korsk. The details of the plot that led to her arrival at the Divinium are lost to history, as is her true last name.

The false scrutator and the primarch met in the center of a large meeting chamber. The knights and guardians, Menite and Morrowan alike, were unarmed in accordance with ceremony. It was this ritual disarmament that prevented the numerous Morrowan paladins in attendance from saving the primarch when Khorva struck him with a ceremonial mitre. As the primarch fell dead to the floor, Ascendant Katrena materialized and smote Khorva, who was immediately claimed by Tamar during her own ascension, even as the slain primarch was taken into Morrow's reward as an archon. This event has been marked as one of the most notable manifestations of the divine on Caen in the last two millennia. It also clearly demonstrated to the church the vulnerability of its highest clergy and the need for additional protection.

In the days that followed, the Order of Keeping was charged with protecting Morrowan clergy in addition to their other duties. Experts at unarmed combat and subdual, the order was superbly equipped for this task, one traditionally given to the faith's paladins. These groups began to work in closer accord as different but equal guardians of those chosen to preach the words of Morrow. It was also later considered that the tragic death of Primarch Loricharias had served the greater good, for the holy manifestations surrounding this event had forced the Menite Synod to recognize the Morrowan faith as legitimate.

It was not until the Orgoth Occupation that the order experienced another important change in its philosophies. The ruthless Orgoth tyrants cared little for the culture of the region, and the monks of the order preserved a great deal of knowledge that would have been otherwise lost to antiquity during this dark age. The order's emphasis on subtlety and discretion served the Morrowan church well; in many places, the Orgoth forbade the Immorese from carrying weapons, a restriction that barely affected the monks of the Order

The Order in Khador

Though the Khadoran Morrowan Church has always had a smaller Order of Keeping presence, several of the order's monasteries in northern Khador have existed for centuries. By a coincidence of fate, most of the ascendants lived their lives in the southern part of the Iron Kingdoms, and there are simply fewer monasteries dedicated to Morrowan relics in the north. For the most part, the order is respectful of one another regardless of national origin.

A major exception to this amicability is the divide between Cygnaran and Khadoran Morrowans regarding the proper resting place of Ascendant

of Keeping from doing their duty.

It was during the occupation that the order gained its secondary patron. An Orgoth governor martyred Ascendant Rowan for protecting a group of beggars from execution. As the occupation went on, Rowan gained popularity as the protector of those seeking shelter from oppression. The Order of Keeping often worked to hide Morrowans during these times, and Ascendant Rowan's asceticism appealed to the monks. Many monasteries adopted her spare and simple lifestyle as their own. Some Morrowan monks have since gained a reputation for generosity and mendicant lives, giving what they earn from begging to the truly needy. Even those branches that do not so exactly adhere to Rowan's asceticism often donate time to their local communities to aid in projects that help the less fortunate.

Though the order has not undergone any radical changes as a whole since then, individual monasteries often develop their own unique cultures and philosophies influenced by later ascendants. Monasteries that are closely associated with a particular ascendant tend to develop monastic lives in keeping with their patron's nature. As such, two monasteries can be geographically close to one another but still vary significantly in outlook.

Katrena. Katrena was born in what would one day be Khador but spent the last days of her life protecting the primarch. When she ascended, her remains were interred within the Divinium itself. Given the place of her birth, the Korsk Vicariate Council claims that her body and associated relics are rightfully within the jurisdiction of a monastery in the northern mountains of their own nation. Due to the current state of near-open warfare between Cygnar and Khador, the issue is unlikely to be resolved any time soon, but the return of Katrena's remains is a point of national pride for the ranking members of the Khadoran branch of the church.

The Ordic Monastery and Tomb of Ascendant Markus located within the city of Midfast and the monastery on the site of Ascendant Gordenn's tomb 100 miles away outside Merin, for example, nicely illustrate these divergences.

The monks in Midfast are among the more blatantly militant Morrowan branches of the order. Charged with guarding the remains of Ascendant Markus, who died defending the city, the order has taken him as their patron over any other ascendant. To best honor their patron, the monks consider the defense of Midfast to be a holy duty. Abess Verona Rendasi (female Tordoran Mk14) emphasizes grueling drills and other combat training, a fact for which the Ordic Army is thankful. Monks of this order are almost an official part of the Ordic Army and Midfast's own militia. The quality of their combat training is so esteemed that the Caspian Sancteum often uses monks from Midfast when assigning bodyguards to the most important clergy. Several of the primarch's own protectors are from the Monastery of Markus.

In stark contrast to its militant brothers and sisters of Midfast, the Monastery of Ascendant Gordenn is less concerned with fighting and more intent on Morrow's desire to help the common people of Caen, particularly in times of famine or drought. Located a few

miles east of Merin, the simple building commands an impressive view of Ord's agricultural heartland from atop a steep hill. Though the monks there take their duties as the guardians of Gordenn's remains seriously, they are also deeply involved in the lives of the neighboring farmers. The monastery is most famous for the excellent wine they produce from the "Santo Gordenn" vineyards they maintain. Some of the proceeds from these wines is spent to maintain the monastery's modest needs, but most is donated to various charitable projects, many of which directly benefit the farmers of the Merin region. The monastery also crafts some excellent beers, which benefit from the high-quality hops and fruits available in the area. In fact, the monks of the order have a reputation for enjoying the good life a little too much. It is perhaps an exaggeration, but many visitors to the monastery leave with the memory of an aged monk sitting beneath a tree, enjoying a beer and smoking a hand-rolled cigar.

The Order of the Fist

History will remember Hierarch Garrick Voyle as one of the most influential individuals to shape the Protectorate of Menoth. His legacy is enormous and no single one of his acts can be pointed to as most important, but certainly the founding of the Order of the Fist will be one of his enduring achievements.

Prior to Voyle's consolidation of power within the Synod, he spent several years seeking total mastery of his own flesh in order to best serve the Lawbringer. He had taken his first step on this path years earlier, when he studied the Canon of the True Law in its original words, written on the walls of the High Temple of the Canon at Ancient Ichthier. Voyle's research was thorough and long reaching. He found references to the early priest kings and their guards on ancient tablets. Some of these early testaments described the seemingly miraculous acts that these forgotten guardians could perform in defense of the priest kings. Traditionally, Menite scholars had interpreted these miracles as metaphors describing the will of Menoth made manifest on Caen. As Voyle peered further back into the earliest days of Menite history, he began to suspect that these acts were not

metaphors at all, but literal descriptions of individuals who moved within Menoth's will so effortlessly that their acts could only be described as miracles.

Voyle's time at Ichthier soon ended, but his studies drove him to bring this forgotten holy warrior tradition into the modern world. He foresaw that these unarmed fighters could carry out their violent duties without interference from Cygnaran authorities, who frowned on the idea of an armed military within the Protectorate. Years passed and Voyle rose through the ranks of the clergy. Following the execution of Visgoth Ozeall and the internecine feuding of the Synod, Voyle felt it prudent to retire from Protectorate politics, and it was then that he returned to the hints of miraculous prowess as described in the ancient texts. His elevated station within the clergy gave him increased access to the Protectorate's archives, where Voyle found new avenues of investigation open to him.

The trail ultimately led Voyle to the edge of the Bloodstone Desert and the centuries-old stone dwelling of Haveron Grayden. Grayden was another student of the most ancient Menite texts who had made discoveries similar to Voyle's. In an effort to better focus on these studies, Grayden had retreated into solitude. Voyle had heard of Grayden's research and suspected that he was following a similar trail. When Voyle arrived at Grayden's lonely home, he found the hermit deep in meditation. The details of their first meeting are unknown but it is believed that Voyle demonstrated to Grayden a surprisingly advanced knowledge of the ancient martial techniques of the priest kings' guardians. From this basis they began to build on the forgotten knowledge they had gathered, with Voyle leading the way.

The two men were much alike in personality, both uncompromising and sustained by faith. In a surprisingly short time Voyle internalized the sum total of their knowledge on the subject, filling in gaps with his own intuition. Though Voyle never discussed the particulars of this time, he implied that Menoth himself had provided guidance, perhaps in the form of visions and dreams. In fewer than two years Voyle

was satisfied that he and Grayden had mastered their techniques through Menoth's guidance, and he began to plan the foundation of an order of monks devoted to this training.

The emphasis of their martial art was unarmed combat using the gifts the Creator had given a combatant's own body. Only three stances formed the core of the art, each named after a Menite virtue or commandment: Purity, Redemption, and Judgment. The Purity stance emphasized defense and the incorruptibility of the body. An acolyte using Purity could parry blows with great ease and even resist the effects of poison through the forbearance of Menoth. Redemption was concerned with turning an attacker's strikes against him by redirecting his motions and force. The more powerful the attack, the greater the damage was when this attack was redirected. Finally, Judgment was the stance of destruction and subdual. The final stance taught to an initiate, Judgment was purely offensive, and those deemed worthy learned techniques to paralyze an enemy with a single blow or shatter bones into dust. True masters of the three stances can effortlessly move among them.

Voyle returned to Ichthier in search of students. His first acolytes came from young clergy graduating from the Lyceum, handpicked for their liturgical knowledge and unbending loyalty. When they came with him to Grayden's remote home, Voyle proclaimed them the first initiates of the Order of the Fist. The initiates' training proceeded rapidly, and the upper limits of a given supplicant quickly became apparent. Those who lacked total commitment and faith simply could not perform the near-miraculous efforts required of them, and more than one initiate was killed during training. It was not long before Voyle and Grayden were satisfied with their surviving initiates, and they began guiding them up through the new ranks of the order. When the first monk achieved the rank of high allegiant, Voyle told Grayden that the order was now in his hands and that he must increase its ranks. Voyle returned to Sul to prepare for his rise within the hierarchy of the Protectorate.

By the time Voyle had readied himself politically and was confident that Menoth himself guided his course, Grayden had trained more than 100 allegiants of the Order of the Fist. When Voyle finally seized power from the Synod, the allegiants ensured compliance of the lesser clergy and populace, even as Voyle confronted the visgoths. Freed from the need for armor or weapons, the monks easily spread out throughout the population, listening for words of treason or dissent against Voyle's new regime. During the months that he consolidated his power, the monks of the Order of the Fist became known as Voyle's personal enforcers. Even after his official inauguration as hierarchy, he kept several bodyguards from the order with him at all times—an act that alienated the paladins of the Wall and even unsettled the Knights Exemplar, who had both previously contributed their best knights to this role.

Once Voyle was secure in his new position, he elevated Grayden to the rank of holy high allegiant to lead the order in his absence—though Voyle retained the esteem and veneration as the creator of the organization, and the ultimate loyalty of its members belonged to him alone. Voyle was not given to familiarity, but Grayden might have been the closest confidant he ever had. Grayden was honored by this responsibility; there was perhaps no greater sign of Voyle's respect than leaving to him to lead the monastic order he had founded and which had been instrumental in Voyle's rise to power. Grayden set about expanding and solidifying the order while Voyle turned to reforming the Protectorate and its broader military. The holy high allegiant's first act was to build a monastery on the site of his remote home. An immense fast was constructed, with an ominous tower crowning multiple levels of

subterranean barracks and training areas. No one but monks and the highest-ranking clergy have ever been inside, and the monastery remains the heart of the order into the present day.

Grayden and his most trusted subordinates personally choose and instruct each new initiate from among those who apply. In recent years, they have received a large number of skilled acolytes from among the Idrian tribes. Coming from a culture with a strong martial tradition, the converted Idrians found the order greatly appealing. It was not long before the fighting styles from their culture, inspired by the motion of desert sands and the flow of wind, began to blend with the order's own techniques, and Grayden found them highly complementary. He went so far as to incorporate some of their forms into the order's training regimen. The Idrian presence within the order has only increased in recent years.



The tribes have been greatly inspired by the figure of High Allegiant Amon Ad-Raza, an Idrian who is not only one of the highest-ranking members of the order, but who is also the first monk to demonstrate the talents of a warcaster.

Since Voyle's death the order relies more than ever on the guidance of Haveron Grayden. Grayden is only slightly older than Voyle was upon his death, but he does not boast the same singular blessing of longevity as did his former master. Though the holy high allegiant is still in excellent health and deadly fighting form, the years have slowed him, and he has begun to consider who will take his place when he is called to the Lawbringer's side in Urcaen. Though he has not yet chosen, some believe he is grooming Ad-Raza succeed him. If this happens, the warcaster might become a beacon to as-yet unconverted tribesmen, and the order's swelling numbers could allow it to take a more prominent role in the crusades abroad.

For now this task is still largely left to other groups like the Temple Flameguard and the Knights Exemplar. The majority the order's monks maintain their traditional vigilance on the streets of the Protectorate as the hidden eyes, ears, and threatening fists for the leading priests and scrutators of the faith. After lives of rigorous training, deprivation, and focused piety, they have no patience or tolerance for Menites who neglect their duties to the Creator, let alone heathens who will not properly acknowledge the god. Such is their ominous reputation that the monks of the Fist have few friends outside their order, but they do find kindred spirits among like-minded of the faithful, particularly devoted clergy and the uncompromising Knights Exemplar. At times their interests will coincide with paladins of the Order of the Wall, even as each of these orders has distinctly different interpretations of the True Law. Bands of such zealous adherents are formidable adversaries to enemies of the Protectorate, and sometimes they enter those foreign lands on difficult missions to advance the cause of their righteous faith.

New Feats

Sense the Divine

Prerequisites: Wisdom 15, Concentration 4 ranks, Knowledge (religion) 8 ranks, *still mind*, membership in the Order of Keeping

By intense prayer and by remembering the lore and teachings regarding a specific item of sacred significance, such as a relic, the monk can sense the divinity emanating from that object. Three times per day a monk with this ability can use a standard action to discern such an object's direction. This feat bestows a spell-like ability that functions identically to *locate object*, using the monk's level to determine the range but with a duration limited only by concentration. The ability functions only on items the GM deems to be particularly holy or of substantial historical importance to the monk's religion. This ability is used by the keepers of relics to ensure these priceless items are where they are supposed to be, as well as by those searching for lost relics to be restored.

Righteous Guardian

Prerequisites: Spot 8 ranks, Improved Initiative

Monks with this feat have focused their training to protect the leaders of their faith, and their fighting prowess is at its greatest when they are fulfilling this role. This feat allows the monk to apply the Deflect Arrows feat and Snatch Arrows feat to ranged weapons that hit a cleric, paladin, or exemplar of his religion within 5 feet of his position. All other conditions of these feats apply. Furthermore, the monk gains a +2 circumstance bonus to attack and damage rolls against a target that previously targeted a cleric, paladin, or exemplar of his religion within the same or the previous round with any sort of hostile action, spell, or ability. Monks of the Order of Keeping with this feat can also apply this bonus when attacking a target that has stolen and is holding a sacred relic from the monk's religion.

Strike of Judgment

Prerequisites: *Ki* strike (lawful), Stunning Fist, Sense Motive 11 ranks, membership in the Order of the Fist

The monk has become a precise instrument of punishment and can deliver appropriate retaliation against those who have wavered in their faith. This ability is reserved as punishment against those who have disrespected the monk's faith, including heretics and former members who have lapsed in their piety. Before using this feat the monk must take a standard action to confront the offender and question his attitude toward his god. If a successful Sense Motive check (opposed by the target's Bluff check, if they are attempting to feign piety) determines the target is not a pious member of his religion, the monk can make a special unarmed attack. Strike of Judgment forces a foe hit by this attack to make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 10 + 1/2 monk's character level + WIS modifier). Instead of suffering normal damage, the target suffers from one of the following conditions, determined by the monk: blinded, deafened, or sickened. This condition lasts for 1d6 days. Strike of Judgment can be attempted only once per day per target.

Clarifying Existing Feats/Abilities

Deflect Arrows and **Snatch Arrows** are feats that do not allow those who possess them to intercept bullets fired from a firearm attack in the Iron Kingdoms. Because of their velocities, these projectiles are usually treated identically to unusually massive ranged weapons. At 11th level, when a monk gains the Diamond Body ability, these feats can be applied to firearm attacks.

Ki Strike has limited usefulness in the Iron Kingdoms due to the scarcity of damage reduction of these types. At 4th level, Ki Strike can mitigate serricsteel-based damage reduction by 5 points; at 10th level by 10 points; and at 16th level by 15 points.