



~ ASHRAMS ~

The ashrams, colloquially known as fighting schools, are the centers of Sujahnist activity in most of Naranjan. The first ashram was founded by the renegade priestess Sujahna on her return from the Amaranda jungles. At her School of the Leaping Amradha, she accepted all comers, regardless of caste, and taught her students what she had learned from the amradhas. A number of other such schools followed, as her students set out to study other psionic creatures on their own and develop new techniques and styles by imitating them. In the centuries that followed, Sujahna's students abandoned her early emphasis on perfecting both the mind and body and began to study the purely mental aspects of psionics.

In recent years, ashrams that teach disciplines other than psionics have appeared. Emperor Vasudha knows that, as in the time of the Great Rebellion, the ashrams are the only organized groups capable of assembling a force powerful enough to seriously threaten the stability of the empire. But he also realizes that an outright ban on them would be counterproductive, since it would simply force the ashrams underground and provide them with a reason to actively oppose his rule. Thus, he has instead sought to counterbalance their power by creating ashrams in opposition to their teachings. These Matyanist ashrams have one great strength and weakness compared to

the Sujahnist ashrams—they exist to buttress the caste system. With that goal in mind, each of these ashrams was organized around the study of a particular topic appropriate to the caste of its members. Needless to say, the ashrams set up by the empire for the sudras are still unpopular, since they refuse to teach anything that might elevate the sudras beyond their menial lots in life. From the emperor's perspective, however, the Matyanist ashrams have fulfilled their goals admirably as a whole, since they encourage the ksatriyas and brahmins who attend them to improve their skills and encourage their loyalty to the empire. In any future showdown, the Emperor's ashrams should offer powerful opposition to the forces of the Sujahnists.

ORGANIZATION

Sujahnist and Matyanist ashrams are organized in much the same way. First of all, most schools are located in urban rather than rural areas. Most are not centers of monastic learning, though exceptions do exist. Every ashram has one (and only one) guru as a leader. This individual cannot be removed from her position of authority, since her reputation is the reason that students choose to study at the school.

Only the guru and a handful of devoted students remain at an ashram fulltime. The majority of the students are part-timers who study the disciplines of the ashram and absorb its philosophical teachings on a weekly basis. The students pay for their studies, providing the ashram with enough income to keep operating.

A guru need not remain with a school for life if she does not wish to do so—she is always free to close up shop or retire as she wishes. On her retirement, she may leave the school to a successor from her own family or to a favored student, or she may close it down entirely. Most gurus keep a few techniques secret from the majority of their students, teaching them only to their intended successors, so that their favorites can defeat any other student if a challenge for leadership should occur.

Students may choose to remain with the ashram after completing their studies (particularly if the school's leadership is based around a family) or they may leave when they feel that they have learned enough to become gurus in their own right. This phenomenon is responsible for the proliferation of ashrams for the major psionic sects in Naranjan, since closely related ashrams devoted to particularly popular sects often create subsidiaries in

order to meet demand. Thus, students at the School of the Leaping Amradha can go to any Leaping Amradha ashram in the country and find a great deal of similarity in the teachings. However, there is no central authority that enforces dogma or curriculum among the schools of any given sect. Ashrams in different cities can and often do get into arguments over which branch has properly preserved the original teachings of the school's founder.

An ashram often features an open central courtyard. This area allows students to practice in the open air and also serves as a meeting place for those who wish to participate in the philosophical discussions that are so vital to a school. The style of such discussions can vary widely. Some ashrams espouse a relatively free-thinking approach, in which the guru portrays herself as merely the first among equals. Others enforce rigid hierarchies, and a few even take on the trappings of a cult, forcing students to live in the ashram and turn over all of their income to the guru.

SAMPLE ASHRAMS

The Black Sky Sect, the Red Moon School, the School of the Leaping Amradha, and the Vyala School represent various kinds of ashrams in Sudarsha today. See the New Prestige Classes section in Chapter 8 for some additional examples of ashrams.

Each of the ashrams described below has an associated fighting style. Anyone can join the school and adopt the style, but only those who meet the indicated prerequisites qualify for the style's mastery bonus.

BLACK SKY SECT

The Black Sky Sect is one of the most secretive and politically active ashrams in Sudarsha. It doesn't fit the model of the typical ashram as described above; rather, it began and still exists as a resistance group fighting Sudarshan rule and Matyanism wherever it appears. At present, achieving that goal requires a lot of fighting.

The sect's founder was Antulya Dharsi, a brahmin wizard who converted to Sujahnism in its earliest days. Before his conversion, he had been involved in the construction of juggernauts for the Sudarshan military, and he well knew their power. Realizing that a successful rebellion required a match for the magical power of the Sudarshan army's constructs, he made several attempts to build psionic juggernauts, but all of them failed. After some trial and error, however, he managed to build a different construct—a dorje golem. After perfecting the first one, he founded the Black Sky Sect to develop students who had the skills necessary to make more. In the process, he discovered many of the principles that form the basis for modern psionics and founded the first ashram specializing in the training of psions rather than psychic warriors.



The dorje golems were the first golems the Naranjani had ever seen, and their appearance on the battlefields caused considerable terror during the Great Rebellion. The immunity of the golems to the opposing brahmins' most powerful spells turned out to be a significant factor in several major battles. After the rebellion ended, the Black Sky Sect continued its attempts to eradicate Matyanism from Naranjan, leading attacks on prominent figures in the religious hierarchy and preaching overthrow of the caste system.

The rise of the new Sudarshan Empire has driven the sect back underground. Its members have returned to their former roles as resistance organizers, and they are currently attempting to build up an underground force that can lead the rebellion against Vasudha when the time is ripe. Each major city has a Black Sky cell, whose members meet in secret wearing masks to avoid revealing their identities, even to each other. By tradition, they also wear these masks whenever they act in the interests of the sect.

The Black Sky Sect is far more radical than anyone outside it realizes. Its members believe that both the gods and the asuras are enemies of humanity, and that the two sides are using the entire world as a recruiting ground and battlezone for their eternal war. The sect has no interest in taking part in this war, and its philosophy is that if the gods want to use humans and other races for their amusement, then it is only right for those beings to resist and seek a way to pursue their own destiny. But that goal is far in the future. For now, fighting Vasudha is enough for the sect.

BLACK SKY STYLE

The Black Sky style focuses on the creation of magic items for use by other psions.

Prerequisites: Membership in the Black Sky Sect, Craft Crystal Capacitor, Craft Psionics Arms and Armor, Craft Universal Item.

Mastery Bonus: You may reduce the XP and the gp cost to create a psionic magic item by 10%. This benefit stacks with that from the Metacreative feat. (Thus, if you also have that feat, the cost of creating psionic magic items with it is 65% of normal.) Bluff, Diplomacy, and Sense Motive are class skills for all your classes.

RED MOON SCHOOL ~ PARASAHNA

The Red Moon School, in the city of Parasahna, is one of the largest and most prosperous ashrams in the Sudarshan Empire. It occupies three large and elegantly outfitted buildings, and its holdings include two gymnasiums,

an extensive library filled with Matyanist, Pranaist, and Sujahnist texts, and a club where its members can meet, talk, and entertain. It typically educates about two hundred students at any given time, drawn from the most socially prominent families in the city. At present, the Red Moon School is preparing to open a number of subsidiary ashrams in other cities throughout the empire.

The Red Moon School's remarkable prosperity is due primarily to a secret deal that its current guru has made with the empire for funding and unofficial support. The Red Moon School is one of the ashrams that bases its philosophy and recruiting efforts around an essentially Matyanist philosophy. While it continues to teach psionics, it restricts its student body to the brahmins that make up the city's elite, rather than allowing members of all castes to study there. This change has occurred only in the last decade, and it has angered some of the students who studied under the previous guru.

The current guru, Zeva Ajimuda, is a Matyanist heretic. He continues to accept the Sujahnist belief that it is possible to exit the wheel of death and rebirth in a single lifetime through appropriate study of the psionic arts, but his goals are in line with the traditional Matyanist desire to achieve ascension into the celestial host, preferably as a contemplative deva (see *Monsters of the Mind*). His personal philosophy is a secret shared only with his top students. From the Matyanist point of view (the one that the empire is trying to restore), this viewpoint is in some ways even worse than Sujahnism, because it implies divine approval for escaping samsara. If it truly were possible to study one's way to ascension, then what purpose would the caste system serve? In choosing only brahmins to study at his school, Zeva appears to be serving the Matyanist cause, but success at achieving ascension for himself and his students would undermine the empire and the caste system still further. After all, if brahmins can shortcut lessons that are meant to be learned over lifetimes, why should others not also be able to do so?

RED MOON STYLE

The Red Moon style focuses on melding divine energy with psionic potential. Although the Red Moon students keep their true goals secret, their devotion to the gods is well known.

Prerequisites: Course of study at a Red Moon School, ability to cast divine spells, good alignment, 8 ranks in Autohypnosis, Psychoanalyst.

Mastery Bonus: You may add the good descriptor to any psionic attack or discipline you use, but you may not use evil ones. You get a +2 bonus on any manifester level checks (1d20 + manifester level) to beat an opponent's power resistance.