



Character Themes: Born from Shadow

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Developing your character into someone who has a rich story can be a fun and rewarding process. You likely have an idea of what race and what class you want to play, but you might have only a general idea of what your character's life was like before you start playing the character at the gaming table. A theme can help you flesh out your character and provide some interesting options for developing his or her background.

This article presents two options that use the material in *Player's Option: Heroes of Shadow*[™] as a springboard: the student of Evard and the Gloomwrought emissary.

CHARACTER THEMES

Your character's theme is a career, calling, or identity that describes who he or she is in the world. Just as race and class create basic definitions about who your character is, theme adds a third character component to help refine your story and identity. For example,

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if you're a human wizard who chooses the student of Evard theme, you might have started your life as an assistant to a scholar, learning from every book that this scholar added to his or her library. Perhaps you lived among nobles and spent your time studying lore. When you started reading Evard's tome, you found it fascinating and started focusing more on the lore within it. Each theme can encompass several unique stories within the same concept.

For information on using themes as part of character creation and rules for how to gain and use theme powers and features, see "Heroes of Nature and Lore" in *Dragon* 399.

STUDENT OF EVARD

In many places, studying death, darkness, and peril is taboo. Most mortals fear what they cannot explain, including death. Those innovative souls who dare to actively seek out death's secrets learn that an entirely new realm of shadow awaits their discovery. Many temples and libraries include tomes on the subject of death. If someone had enough motivation and spent plenty of time researching, he or she could soon learn of the famed shadow mage Evard.

Evard, an enigmatic and potent practitioner of shadow magic, is a master of necromancy and nethermancy. His legacy is such that anyone who has spent time researching the Shadowfell has undoubtedly come across his most famous work, *Legendry of Phantoms and Ghosts*. This 800-page omnibus is one of the finest pieces of writing on the subjects of shadow magic, necromancy, and nethermancy. It covers everything from the creation of apparitions to details on their metaphysical construction and anatomy.

Those who learn of Evard and begin to study his work could become enthralled by all things related to the Shadowfell. Some who study Evard's works become recluses; others might seek to adventure in an effort to learn more of the Shadowfell and its inhabitants. On a research level, those seeking knowledge

on these topics try to understand the breaching of the two planes of existence and learn how both sides interact with each other. As Evard noted, "You can never come to appreciate the fabric and essence of life without first knowing in full detail the beauty of death."

Creating a Student of Evard

Students of Evard are introverted, analytical individuals who study death and the afterlife. The succinct and deliberate way in which Evard's *Legendry of Phantoms and Ghosts* was written makes it seem more like a school textbook rather than something read for enjoyment. Students of Evard are inclined toward the scholarly classes, such as cleric, invoker, warlock, and wizard. Some martial classes study Evard's writings as well. Additionally, primal classes have great interest in becoming students of Evard due to their interest in spirits.

Starting Feature

Your instinctive affinity for the essence of darkness and death is what drew you to become a student of Evard. Almost without knowing how you do it, you harness this strength and use it against an enemy's very life force. You bring suffering on yourself at the same time, but most often that's a small price to pay.

Benefit: You gain the *essence of death* power.

Essence of Death Student of Evard Attack

You call upon your inborn talent to drain the life from a foe, though it comes at a cost.

Encounter ♦ **Arcane, Necrotic, Shadow**
No Action **Melee 1**

Trigger: You hit a creature adjacent to you with an attack.
Target: The triggering creature

Effect: You take 1d6 necrotic damage, and the target takes 1d12 extra necrotic damage from the attack.

Level 11: You take 2d6 necrotic damage, and the target takes 2d12.

Level 21: You take 3d6 necrotic damage, and the target takes 3d12.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

Having studied Evard's grimoire extensively, you now have a greater understanding of necromancy, nethermancy, and the realm of shadow. You have proven that you are more than a mere dabbler in your chosen arts, and you now receive whispers of knowledge that accelerate your studies. From whom the whispers originate, you are unsure.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to skill checks involving necromancy, nethermancy, and the Shadowfell. In addition, you can perform the Last Sight Vision ritual, and you can perform it once per day without expending components.

Last Sight Vision

Level: 2 **Component Cost:** 25 gp
Category: Divination **Market Price:** 100 gp
Time: 10 minutes **Key Skill:** Arcana or Religion
Duration: 2 or more rounds

When you perform this ritual in the presence of a corpse or a skull, you witness an auditory and visual replay of the moments before the death of that creature, as seen from the creature's perspective. You cannot perform this ritual on a headless corpse. Once you have performed this ritual for a particular corpse or skull, you must wait until you have gained a level before using it again on the same remains.

Your Arcana check or Religion check result determines the length of time prior to the target's death that you experience.

Check Result	Time Period
19 or lower	2 rounds
20-29	4 rounds
30-39	6 rounds
40 or higher	10 rounds

Level 10 Feature

Thanks to Evard's tome, you have all but mastered your studies of necromancy, nethermancy, and the realm of shadow. Scholars and knowledge-seekers alike flock to you for your expertise. Though your profession and choice of study is taboo in many societies, some find your research of great value. Whether their apprehension of you is justified or not, they acknowledge that your area of study can be important.

For your own edification, this journey has not been without consequence. The whispers you hear have grown more and more frequent. You have become concerned with studying Evard's works even more, and you have given fewer thoughts to your own affairs. Having become distant to family members and friends, you are infatuated with harvesting knowledge of the dead and the shadowy world beyond.

In addition to firmly cementing your influence as a scholar of the dead, you develop greater mastery of the shadow arts. Your comprehension and understanding of the Shadowfell have afforded you certain advantages.

Benefit: Your power bonus to skill checks involving necromancy, nethermancy, and the Shadowfell increases to +4. In addition, during your first turn of combat, you gain a +1 power bonus to attack rolls with shadow powers.

Optional Powers

The secrets associated with shadow magic are guarded closely. In all but the most rare of cases, a large cost is associated with any student desiring to learn more. This cost is attributed to the raw power of shadow magic and the forbidden lore surrounding its creation. Evard is a powerful sage. He knows that the fruits of his own life's work should not go unrewarded. Within the *Legendry of Phantoms and Ghosts*, Evard has imparted valuable knowledge that can unlock special powers and abilities for those who study it.

Level 2 Utility Power

The famed *Tome of Shadow* has greatly influenced Evard's own work. All throughout his writings, references to the tome are notated, especially when it comes to dark foci. These notations draw conclusions between the Plane of Shadow and its connection to each realm and elemental plane. If someone were to see how these pathways are connected, he or she could affect the outcome of reality itself.

Dark Focus Student of Evard Utility 2

You gain clarity through a dark understanding of life.

Daily ♦ Arcane, Shadow

Free Action **Personal**

Trigger: You make a d20 roll and dislike the result.

Effect: You lose a healing surge and reroll the triggering roll. You must use the second result.

Level 6 Utility Power

You have studied both darkness and light, and you have come to understand how your mind's eye processes each. As a student of shadow, you can enhance your vision to work in shadowed places.

Shadow Vision Student of Evard Utility 6

Your eyes see that which was previously hidden.

Encounter ♦ Arcane, Shadow

Minor Action **Personal**

Effect: You gain darkvision until the end of your next turn.

Level 10 Utility Power

You have learned how to bleed your essence into the plane of shadow, sacrificing a part of yourself in order to manipulate fate for an ally.

Dread Blessing Student of Evard Utility 10

You sacrifice your essence to overcome a friend's adversity.

Daily ♦ Arcane, Shadow

Immediate Interrupt **Close burst 5**

Trigger: One ally within 5 squares of you misses with an attack roll or fails a saving throw.

Effect: You lose a healing surge, and the ally rerolls the triggering roll with a +4 power bonus and must use the second result. If the new result is a miss or a failed saving throw, this power is not expended.

GLOOMWROUGHT EMISSARY

Gloomwrought, also known as the City of Midnight, is one of the few bastions of civilization within the Shadowfell. It is a place of treachery and subterfuge, where only the savvy survive. Unscrupulous political houses, whose special interests far outweigh the concerns of social needs, handle governance of the city while Prince Rolan the Deathless serves as the de facto leader. With all the political intrigue surrounding daily life within the city, many wealthy and powerful individuals ceaselessly work to expand their spheres of influence. One way in which they accomplish this is by sending out special envoys that work to further their interests and the interests of Gloomwrought. These Gloomwrought emissaries are crucial to the expansion of the city's political reach and are the eyes and ears of the noble houses.

Joining this elite corps of specialists can be difficult, and whom you know—not what you know—is important in most cases. In some cases, an existing agent of a house recruits emissaries passively by following them for some time and observing them from a distance so their skills and abilities can be gauged. This gives the recruiter time to evaluate and pass judgment before contacting the potential emissary and bringing him or her on board. In other cases, emissaries are cultivated from within the house and are trained from a young age, a method that has a high success rate in developing bright new talent.

Your life as a Gloomwrought emissary depends largely on the master you represent. You might serve as a crafty spy, or a hired assassin sent to eradicate an enemy of your house. You could serve Gloomwrought as a diplomat by using your silver tongue to help spur, or incite, bloody conflict. No matter how you choose to serve, you are an important part of the city's social landscape.

Creating a Gloomwrought Emissary

Most Gloomwrought emissaries are martial combatants: rangers, rogues, and sometimes fighters. These classes have the requisite skill and proficiency to engage opponents in close combat effectively. Because of their cunning and grit, many brutal scoundrel rogues are enlisted as information brokers. They can use their contacts to gain intelligence from others and pressure them into giving up information. Rangers are employed for their ability to traverse the dangerous landscape of the Shadowfell, seeking out other communities and conclaves. They are also adept at tracking those who might have fled the city, and they serve as respected bounty hunters.

For those characters who accept life as a Gloomwrought emissary, training begins immediately, and the path to completion is as dangerous as it is rigorous. Senior members of a house's diplomatic corps set up various trials and tests that must be mastered before a recruit can progress. Despite what is said otherwise, death and dismemberment are a cruel reality of some training missions that emissaries must undertake.

Starting Feature

Gloomwrought is a dangerous city where one misstep can spell your demise. You know that every advantage has to be seized in order to ensure your survival. You have learned to use the shadows to deliver a debilitating blow to an unwitting opponent. As quickly as the shadows ushered you in for the strike, you are able to shrink back into their cold embrace.

Benefit: You gain the *strike from the shadows* power.



Strike from the Shadows Gloomwrought Emissary Attack

You quickly dart from a hidden position and deal a debilitating blow.

Encounter ♦ **Shadow**

No Action **Special**

Trigger: When using a melee or ranged weapon attack power, you hit a creature that is granting combat advantage to you.

Effect: The creature is weakened until the end of your next turn, and you can shift up to 2 squares.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

You are a worthy agent of Gloomwrought and have established many connections that might help you along the way. In honor of your service, you have been given a platinum clasp with the emblem of your house etched upon it. Showing this clasp can aid you when you call upon else for a favor.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to Diplomacy checks and Streetwise checks.

Level 10 Feature

You have become one of the premier emissaries of Gloomwrought. Though you scoff at any mention of your exploits, explaining them away as exaggeration, you have an undeniably powerful reputation. Your house's master now uses your status to help shape the political landscape of the city and beyond.

Benefit: Once per day, you can reroll a Bluff check, a Diplomacy check, or an Intimidate check. You must use the second result.

Optional Powers

Becoming an emissary of the city requires a certain wit and bravado. You might have been mentored by another emissary in a similar position or could have learned a trick or two by studying those around you. Perhaps a house hired you because of your previous exploits and reputation, or maybe you earned status through dedicated service. Your master would have honed your skills and provided you with the necessary training that would assist you in a life as challenging as yours is.

Level 2 Utility Power

You distract an enemy just long enough for a friend to steal up on it and catch it off guard.

Jibber Feint Gloomwrought Emissary Utility 2

You can talk your way out of any situation, temporarily lowering the defenses of your opponent.

Encounter ♦ **Charm**

Minor Action **Close burst 5**

Target: One enemy in the burst

Effect: The next creature to attack the target before the end of your next turn gains combat advantage for that attack.

Level 6 Utility Power

With a whispered word and a single graceful leap, you can soar into the air. You can't stay airborne for long, but nothing is handier for ascending to a rooftop or getting away from threatening enemies.

Ghostwalker Gloomwrought Emissary Utility 6

You leave the temporal for but a moment, only to return to the flesh.

Encounter ♦ **Shadow**

Move Action **Personal**

Effect: You are insubstantial until the start of your next turn, and you fly up to your speed.

Level 10 Utility Power

You speak with the authority of your house's master. Your words carry the weight of an entire city, and you can sway how others view any given situations, whether through a honeyed tongue or a terrifying glare.

Noble's Decree Gloomwrought Emissary Utility 10

People listen when you speak.

Encounter ♦ **Charm**

No Action **Personal**

Trigger: You make a Diplomacy check or an Intimidate check.

Effect: You gain a power bonus to this skill check equal to your Charisma modifier.

About the Author

Matt James is a freelance game designer from the Washington, DC, area. His recent design credits include *Monster Vault™*, *Threats to the Nentir Vale™*. Matt is a disabled veteran, having been wounded during combat operations in Iraq during 2005. You can follow Matt's gaming insights on Twitter or on Loremaster.org.