

DENIZENS OF MOUNTAINS & SEAS VOL. 3

THE SAPPHIRE FLAME CULT



A xianxia-inspired faction for the world's
greatest roleplaying game by

Daniel Kwan



DENIZENS OF MOUNTAINS & SEASONS VOL. 3

THE SAPPHIRE FLAME CULT

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel is a Canadian podcaster, game designer, and cultural consultant. He is the recipient of 2 Gold and 4 Silver ENnie Awards for his work in the tabletop gaming industry.

You might know him from the Asians Represent! Podcast or his independent game design work (Wicked Congregation, Ross Rifles, and the Chronicles of Spring & Autumn series). As a freelance narrative designer, some of his notable works include the New York Times Best Selling Candlekeep Mysteries adventure supplements for 5th edition Dungeons & Dragons, the Ultimate Micro-RPG Guide, and Dark Archive. As a cultural consultant, he has worked for companies like Dimension 20 and Critical Role Productions.

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ADDITIONAL CREDITS

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THE SAPPHIRE FLAME CULT

The Eternal Flame Emperor, he who was imprisoned by a false king and his conspirators in ages past, awaits our arrival. The Resurgence of the Flame draws near and the world will soon bask in the glory of his eternal light.

The Sapphire Flame are an ancient cult devoted to bringing about the return of the Eternal Flame Emperor, the avatar of the primordial Great Flame and banished king of the Land of Blades.

For centuries, they have searched for the Staff of Xing, a relic that sealed their master in a shard of magical ice at the bottom of the deepest lake of Monkey Valley. Obtaining the staff would allow the Sapphire Flame to lift the shrouds that obscure the location of this legendary realm.

The Sapphire Flame is organized into a strict hierarchy and is led by Hong the Firebringer, the current herald of the Eternal Flame Emperor's will. In order to achieve their master's goals, members of the cult work from the shadows to ruthlessly politic and kill their way into power across the Land of Blades. The most devout and skilled Sapphire Flame cultists are granted the title of Flamesworn and are anointed with the ash of those who perished during the Great War Under Heaven.

THE CIRCLE OF THE GREAT FLAME

To grow their influence, the cult operates in the open as the Circle of the Great Flame, a growing folk religion in the Land of Blades.

Circle of the Great Flame worshippers are often heard reciting the following verses from the Book of Embers, the scriptures conceived of by the Firebringer:

"The Great Flame is eternal, and so too shall our devotion to its wisdom."

"The Great Flame illuminates the darkness and exposes falsehood. In its light we find purpose and truth."

HONG THE FIREBRINGER

A giant among humans, Hong the Firebringer executed the illuminated will of the Eternal Flame Emperor. Through meditation and unwavering devotion, Hong is able to directly communicate with his master - forming a connection that has granted him incredible power.

Appearance: towering at 8 feet tall. Unlike the subservient Flamesworn, those with the title of Firebringer are clad in ornate plate armour and are often seen with a cloak composed of blue fire.

Voice: deep and breathy.

Morality: dogmatic.

Motivations: to convey the will and teachings of the Eternal Flame Emperor to the Sapphire Flame cult.

Secrets: the Eternal Flame Emperor is all knowing and his power is only given to the truly devoted.

THE FLAMESWORN

Flamesworn are elite warriors of the Sapphire Flame Cult who have sworn an oath to restore the rule of the Flame Emperor at any cost. Viewing him as a deity, Flamesworn are the most fanatical and dangerous members of the cult who will not hesitate to use violence to meet their goals.

Appearance: Flamesworn come from all walks of life. They are often seen wearing deep blue monks' robes and taotie (ogre-faced) masks; though some members may blend-in with the rest of society to advance the goals of the group.

Voice: varied.

Morality: unshakable devotion to the Sapphire Flame Cult.

Motivations: to free the Flame Emperor from his otherworldly prison and restore his reign over the Land of Blades.

Secrets: they keep no secrets from their master.

HONG THE FIREBRINGER

Medium Humanoid (any ancestry), Lawful Evil

Armor Class 18 (Plate)

Hit Points 153 (18d10 + 54 each) / 102 (12d10 + 36 each) / 51 (6d10 + 18 each)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws STR +12, CON +8, WIS +10

Skills Athletics +12

Damage Resistances Lightning, Radiant

Damage Immunities Fire

Senses Truesight 60 ft., Passive Perception 20

Languages any two languages

Challenge 16 (15,000 XP)

Proficiency Bonus +6

Legendary Resistance (2/day).

If the Firebringer fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Eternal Flame Emperor's Gifts (Spellcasting).

The Firebringer is a 9th-level spellcaster. They cast one of the following spells without the need for material components and using Wisdom as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 18).

Cantrips (at will): *Fire Bolt*, *True Strike*

1st Level (4 slots): *Burning Hands*, *Hellish Rebuke*

2nd level (3 slots): *Enhance Ability*, *Blur*, *Scorching Ray*

3rd level (3 slots): *Fireball*, *Gaseous Form*

4th level (3 slots): *Wall of Fire*

5th level (1 slot): *Teleportation Circle*, *Flame Strike*

Multi-Phase Adversary. Fighting a Firebringer happens over three phases - each with their own hit point totals. As it's hit points are depleted, it will undergo instantaneous changes to its appearance and available action options.

- The Firebringer begins combat in the first phase, appearing as a heavily armored soldier with burning eyes obscured by a heavy helmet. They will rely on the **Flame Surge** legendary action to reposition between combatants and to use the trails of fire to zone out melee characters. They will primarily attack using their **Zhanmadao**, using spells to target ranged characters out of reach of Flame Surge.
- The Firebringer's second phase begins once the first 153 hit points have been depleted. At the start of this phase, the **Inferno Blaze** ability triggers as a legendary action, shrouding them in intense flames. During this phase, the Firebringer's **Infernal Aura** becomes an active ability until its defeat. They now have access to **Wave of Sapphire**, which they will use to damage clustered melee characters.
- The Firebringer's third phase will see them at their weakest with 51 hit points. They have a significantly lower hit point maximum and will show signs of damage, with torrents of fire spewing from wounds inflicted by the characters. They will rely heavily on **Flame Torrent** and **Spellcasting** during this phase in a desperate attempt to defeat the party. If it has not completed its objective, it may use *Teleportation Circle* to flee with any surviving Sapphire Flame cult members.

Infernal Aura (2nd phase). At the start of each of the Firebringer's turns, each creature within 5 feet takes 9 (2d8) fire damage. Striking the Firebringer with a melee attack causes the attacker to take 9 (2d8) fire damage. The Infernal Aura ignites all flammable objects in the area that aren't worn or carried.

HONG THE FIREBRINGER (CONT.)

ACTIONS

Zhanmadao (all phases). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d10 + 7) slashing damage plus 9 (2d8) fire damage.

Wave of Sapphire (2nd phase). The Firebringer imbues their sword with the power of divine fire before slashing it in front of them, unleashing a wave of magical blue fire that sweeps through all enemies and evaporating all water in the area. The wave consumes an area up to 25 x 15 x 10 ft. Each creature caught in the wave must make a Dexterity saving throw (DC 18), taking 27 (6d8) fire damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one. This attack ignites all flammable objects in the area including those that are worn or carried.

Flame Torrent (3rd phase). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +10 to hit, 30 ft. line, multiple targets. The Flamebringer unleashes a stream of fiery energy from their sword that scorches enemies in a line, dealing 36 (8d8) fire damage. The attack passes through multiple targets, dealing 1d8 less damage to each subsequent target in the line.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The Firebringer can take 2 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Spent legendary actions are regained at the start of the Firebringer's turn.

Flame Surge. By channeling the power of the Eternal Flame Emperor, the Firebringer turns into dashes up to 20 feet forward, passing through creatures and objects while leaving behind a 20 ft. line of fire that last 1d4 rounds. Any creatures in the flames must succeed a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or take 2d8 fire damage. This saving throw must also be made when entering the fire's space for the first time or ending a turn there. Flame Surge does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Inferno Blaze (once at the start of the 2nd phase). The Firebringer radiates intense sapphire blue flames from their body that engulfs anything around them. Each creature within 20 feet of the Firebringer must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) fire damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful save. This effect causes widespread destruction and intense heat in the surrounding environment. Each turn after the initial effect, all characters must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or suffer one level of exhaustion from the smoke, ash, and heat. A successful save mitigates additional rolls for this effect.

Cast a Spell (Costs 2 Action). The Firebringer uses the **Eternal Flame Emperor's Gifts (Spellcasting)**.

FLAMESWORN

Medium humanoid (any ancestry), any non-good alignment

Armor Class 17 (Unarmoured)

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 40 ft.

STR **DEX** **CON** **INT** **WIS** **CHA**
11 (+0) 18 (+4) 15 (+2) 13 (+1) 16 (+3) 10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Wis +7

Skills Acrobatics +8, Stealth +8, Deception +4

Damage Resistances lightning

Damage Immunities fire

Senses passive wisdom (Perception) 15

Languages any two languages

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +4

Unarmored Defense. While a Flamesworn does not wear armor, their AC equals 10 + their Dexterity and Wisdom modifiers.

Fire Stealth. When standing in fire (medium size or higher), a Flamesworn is invisible.

Blaze of Glory. When a Flamesworn dies, they burst into flame. Each creature within 10 feet must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 18 (5d6) fire damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one. This effect ignites flammable objects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. A Flamesworn makes two Blazing Strike attacks per turn. The stats below are for unarmed strikes, but this can be substituted for melee weapons.

Blazing Strike. Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning + 8 (2d6) fire damage.

Set Ablaze. As a bonus action, a Flamesworn can set a target ablaze after successfully striking them

with Blazing Strike. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be set on fire. On a failure, they take 1d6 additional fire damage immediately. In each subsequent round, the burning character must make another Dexterity saving throw. Failure means they take another 1d6 points of damage that round. Success means that the fire has been extinguished.

Ashen Veil (once per short rest). A Flamesworn can conjure a shield of swirling ash that lasts one minute. For the duration of this ability, creatures have disadvantage on all ranged attacks against the Flamesworn. This effect can be neutralized by strong winds (ex. Gust of Wind).

REACTIONS

Deflect Missile. In response to being hit by a ranged weapon attack, a Flamesworn deflects the missile. The damage it takes from the attack is reduced by 1d10 + 3. If the damage is reduced to 0, the Flamesworn catches the missile if it's small enough to hold in one hand and they have a hand free.

