

## The Xekanosri

Following a school of thought known as Xekano, a word derived from the Old Tongue verb translating roughly as “to undo,” the Xekanosri—“children of Xekano”—are quite difficult to categorize. Technically, they comprise a mercenary group, because adherents do not pledge allegiance to any one nation; and, when hired to intervene in a situation, they do so with the understanding that they will be paid for their efforts. The similarities, however, end here.

Xekano is more than just a way of thought; it is a way of life. Adherents believe that violence and armed struggle are “flawed states of being” that can be defeated by studying and taking advantage of those flaws. As such, initiates must first learn to recognize the weaknesses in their own fighting styles, and then how to apply that knowledge to the study of other warriors, weapons, armor, and battlefield strategies, using it to defeat their opponents.

Specifically, adherents of Xekano despise the mindless violence, the dehumanization of the enemy, and the “conqueror’s mentality” that so often accompany warfare. Instead, they seek to destroy the ability and will to fight, honing their skill to shatter their opponents’ weaponry, shields, and armor. Thus, according to legends associated with the group, one adherent was able to ruin the entire armory of an opposing force in a single night, thereby preventing battle and sparing thousands of soldiers’ lives. They are taught to focus their energies on crippling appendages, breaking weapons, and sabotaging the instruments of war—including walls and fortresses, but not food, supplies, or unfortified shelters. The idea is to make warfare impossible without demeaning the enemy or stripping them of the things they need to survive.

Many adherents have dabbled in earth thaumaturgy, although some people have argued that Xekano also reflects the basic principles and skill sets of metal and water thaumaturgy.

In order to become fully-fledged members, the Xekanosri must take a blood-oath of two parts. First, they must swear never to kill an opponent; they are to use enough force to incapacitate opponents, and no more. Secondly, they must take a vow of poverty. Adherents are allowed to have only enough money to keep themselves fed and clothed; and individuals are not given the payment for their work. Rather, employers are asked to leave an offering to the gods at their local shrine on behalf of the Xekanosri as a whole. The value or sum of the offering is negotiated between adherent and employer before the Xekanosri act, and the employer must take a blood-oath that he or she will make the offering within one week’s time of making the oath. The penalty for defaulting ranges from person to person and is usually outlined in the original contract.

The Xekanosri have a long and rather fraught history, alternately subject to great demand and then to serious sanctions. It is believed to have its roots in Shayne the Conqueror’s rampage across what is now the country of Braelin; a master strategist and tactician, Shayne used a multitude of approaches to solidify control over his growing empire, including everything from trickery to outright slaughter. The Xiros who then lived and traveled in the region of what became Hawksworth were particularly affected by his more brutal tactics, and it is said that Islay Adalesri founded the school in honor of her grandparents, who had fought and died in the struggle against the Braelinese invaders.

As the group gained momentum and its ranks swelled with talented warriors from locations throughout Eras—it gained an impressive amount of support from Zikarians, then under the oppression of Serenite rule, as well as the grizzled individuals who managed to survive the grueling trials of a thysia’s life—the Xekanosri began to strike out preemptively in areas considered “precarious”; that is, anywhere that it seemed armed strife might erupt. Predictably, the targets of these surprise attacks were displeased with the Xekanosri’s presumption, and soon enough the group’s leaders had been assassinated as a warning. To this day it is uncertain which nation was responsible for the lethal attacks; the Braelinese blame the Serenites, the Serenites blame either Braelin or an internal power struggle between the “moderate” Xekanosri and certain Zikarian elements who wanted to pursue more aggressive policies.

Whatever the truth of the matter, the Xekanosri were initially crippled by the loss of leadership, and it seemed for several years that they would never recover. Finally, a young and respected Xiros shaman by the name of Peregrin Bladenesri took over the group, revitalizing it by bringing it back to Adalesri’s original teachings and establishing a set of rules to regulate the Xekanosri’s interactions with the outside world. He structured the group’s external logistics to mirror that of the Braelinese Crimson Tear Mercenaries, with significant differences in scope, practice, and philosophy to retain Adalesri’s initial intentions for the group. Though the Xekanosri would never enjoy the same kind of “freedom” that they did at first, Bladenesri’s changes made it possible for the group to continue functioning.

Emphasized skills include:

1. The ability to detect and exploit flaws in an item of war, such as a weapon, a shield, a suit of armor, or a fortress wall.
2. The ability to sense and understand an opponent’s fighting style, methods, and motivations; and therefore to manipulate the flaws in that opponent’s style in order to overcome him.
3. The ability to destroy an opponent’s capacity to fight by destroying weaponry and armor, crippling appendages, and otherwise incapacitating his body without resorting to unnecessary or lethal force.
4. The ability to frighten or intimidate others so that they will flee, possibly in combination with a flurry of destructive or stunning blows.
5. The ability to pacify or otherwise convince opponents to discontinue a fight.