# CREATE-A-ROGUISH

A ROGUE ARCHETYPE CREATION GUIDE



WRITTEN BY MATTHEW GRAVELYN

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A how-to guide for creating a rogue Archetype in 5e



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# **INTRODUCTION**

First and foremost, I apologize for the name of this guide. It didn't occur to me until very late in this project that both the fighter and rogue subclasses are referred to as "Archetype", hence the odd naming of this guide. Trust me, I'm just as bothered by the blip in the naming convention as anyone.

With that out of the way, welcome to the subclass creation guide for rogues. These sneaky, slippery, and downright dangerous folks come packed with skills and abilities that make them extremely potent adversaries, both in and out of combat. For this subclass, we'll be focusing on creating more utility or improvement subclass features than other subclasses, which is an amazing opportunity to add flavor and engaging abilities to the rogue's toolkit.

I hope you enjoy this guide. Always remember to consult with your DM and other players before using homebrew at the table. In this way you can make sure your subclass is balanced and fits within the framework your DM intends to use during play.

#### USING THIS SOURCEBOOK

This book is meant to be a template, a guide to help you create your very own rogue Archetype that is compatible with virtually any 5e setting or campaign. In this way, you have nearly limitless potential to entertain yourself and find new ways to bring the rogue to life in your game.

Each section covers an area of Archetype creation, including an overview of existing options, concepts to consider during creation, and how to balance the features that go into an Archetype.

This book is based on research of the official rogue Archetype options as well as many other homebrew and self-published options. Using that research as a framework, I created this guide to help you create a Archetype as quickly and easily as possible.

#### **EXAMPLES**

Included at the end of each section are two example Archetypes that I have created following this guide. Feel free to use these Archetypes in your game, but their true purpose is to illustrate the practical application of the guide.

Examples are found in blue boxes at the end of each section and detail the choices of that section. Complete versions of Hawker and Surgeon can be found at the end of this guide.



# **CLASS OVERVIEW**

Before diving into subclass creation, it's good to take a quick look at the overall class. Knowing what base features a class will receive at each level will make sure you don't overlap or duplicate existing "free" features with subclass options. For example, since the rogue already has a number of class features that improve their ability scores, saving throws, and ability checks, a subclass feature that further improves on them is less impactful than one that adds new functionality.

I recommend checking the official source for the class to get all the details, but here is a quick list and overview of the rogue class features.

#### **EXPERTISE**

Starting at  $1^{\rm st}$  level, the rogue can double their proficiency bonus for two of their skills or one skill and their thieves' tools. At  $6^{\rm th}$  level, they can choose two more to improve in this way.

#### SNEAK ATTACK

Starting at 1st level, the rogue can deal bonus damage to creatures it hits with finesse or ranged weapon attacks if the rogue has advantage on the attack. This damage starts at 1d6 and increases by 1d6 on every odd level.

### THIEVES' CANT

Starting at 1<sup>st</sup> level, the rogue knows how to communicate through symbols, gestures, and jargon known only to other rogues, assassins, and thieves.

#### **CUNNING ACTION**

Starting at 2<sup>nd</sup> level, you can use a bonus action each turn to take one of either the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

#### ROGUISH ARCHETYPE

Starting at 3<sup>rd</sup> level, the rogue chooses an Archetype and gains the first features of it.

#### **ABILITY SCORE IMPROVEMENT**

Starting at  $4^{th}$  level, the rogue can increase one ability score by two or two ability scores by one. The rogue does this again at  $8^{th}$ ,  $10^{th}$ ,  $12^{th}$ ,  $16^{th}$ , and  $19^{th}$  levels.

#### **UNCANNY DODGE**

Starting at 5<sup>th</sup> level, when the rogue is dealt damage from an attacker they can see, they can use their reaction to halve the damage.

#### **EVASION**

Starting at 7<sup>th</sup> level, when the rogue is subject to a spell or effect that forces them to make a Dexterity saving throw, they take no damage on a success and half damage on a failure.

#### RELIABLE TALENT

Starting at 11<sup>th</sup> level, whenever the rogue makes an ability check that uses their proficiency bonus, any roll of 9 or less is treated as a 10.

#### **BLINDSENSE**

Starting at  $14^{\text{th}}$  level, as long as the rogue can hear, they are aware of any hidden or invisible creatures within 10 feet.

#### SLIPPERY MIND

Starting at  $15^{\rm th}$  level, the rogue gains proficiency in Wisdom saving throws.

#### **ELUSIVE**

Starting at 18<sup>th</sup> level, as long as the rogue isn't incapacitated, no creature can attack them with advantage.

#### STROKE OF LUCK

Starting at 20<sup>th</sup> level, when the rogue's attack misses, they can choose to make it a hit. Alternatively, if they fail an ability check, they can choose to treat the roll as a 20. The rogue can use this feature once per short or long rest.

# ARCHETYPE CREATION

A rogue's Archetype can be thought of as a personal style for each rogue. Yes, they are often grouped into similar schools of thought or process, but there is no formal teaching of these Archetypes, save for the occasional mentorship or word-of-mouth exchange.

To that end, we can think of the Archetype less as a group of people and more of a descriptor for individual rogues.

#### NAMING YOUR ARCHETYPE

The naming of an Archetype is a relatively simple one. They are simply named for the type of person the rogue is. If they specialize in assassinating targets, they are of the Assassin Archetype. If they sneak and scurry and take what isn't theirs, they are of the Thief Archetype.

If a name for your Archetype doesn't jump to mind, or you want to go with something a little more eloquent, look for a thesaurus or medieval literature guide to give you a starting point.



#### Example: Hawker

Honestly the idea for this one came from the artwork on page two. I wanted to have a hawk or falcon companion help the rogue pull off their tricks, through distraction and raking talons. The name "Hawker" sounds cooler than the term falconer so, even though it's not technically correct, I'm going with it.

**Description**: While most in the roguish profession rely on their own blades, some know that another set of talons are always welcome. The hawker is a rogue who comes at problems from two angles, one above and one behind. It's hard to concentrate on the blade at your back when there is a rush of feathers and claws at your face. Hunting targets and creating opportunities for the kill is what raptors are naturally good at, just like you.

#### **Example: Surgeon**

This subclass idea came from Sam Messor on Twitter. This rogue is one who learned their deadly craft through study of anatomy. They know exactly where to place a blade to hurt, bleed, or outright kill their target. Their precision is subtle, cold, and much more terrifying than any barbarian or fighter.

**CONTENT WARNING**: this subclass uses specific language and thematic elements relating to doctors, anatomy, medical practice, and blood.

**Description**: It is hard to know how the entirety of the body works, to literally know how to grant or take life, and not lose some respect for life. Whether it's the detachment all doctors need to deal with failure or the cold lack of emotion of the hobbyist, they can place a sharp blade as easy as some put pencil to paper or shovel to dirt. There is no person, you see, only flesh, blood, and bone. When you can abstract those qualities from the life you take, you can become a very dangerous opponent indeed.

# **ORIGIN FEATURES**

Rogues choose their Archetype and gain their first subclass features at 3<sup>rd</sup> level. Rogues typically gain access to two features at this level, and in rare cases up to three. One of these features is usually a set of bonus proficiencies, but not in all cases.

The overall theme of the features gained at 3<sup>rd</sup> level is that they are setting the groundwork for a style of play. This will influence how and when they utilize their base class features and how they tend to approach social and combat situations.

When creating features at this level, consider who the rogue is. Think about what their basic instinct would be to get out of—or into—trouble. Keep those in mind to make sure these features are used often and happily by the rogue.

#### **BONUS PROFICIENCIES**

One of the simplest features to use here is granting the rogue bonus proficiencies. This can range from important or thematic skills to specialized tools to learning new languages. As these are often times situational and supplemental to the rogue's kit, be generous with them. You could do as many as two skills, one tool, and one or two languages all together.

If you want your rogue to feel more outdoorsy in their approach, consider proficiency in skills like nature or survival, or for a rogue steeped in political intrigue, they would likely know a few languages and might even know how to use a forgery kit.

#### **DEFINING A PLAYSTYLE**

The way I typically approach the first feature of a subclass is to think about how I want it to *feel* to play this type of character. I consider if I want it to feel fast and frenetic or slow and methodical. I think about whether the rogue will spend more time hacking and slashing or sneaking around, manipulating the flow of combat through manipulations and plans. Once I have a good sense of how I want the rogue to play, I start defining mechanics that will support that.

#### **COMBINING MECHANICS**

In terms of specifics, the sky is the limit here. To get started though, think about mechanics already in the game and how you can alter or combine them to create unique and exciting effects. For example, if we take advantage on attack rolls and initiative order, two existing concepts, we can combine them to get advantage on attacks against creatures who haven't taken a turn in combat yet. This offers huge potential to land a hit, but it also limits the available targets to those who are "slower" than the rogue.

#### **ADDING TO THE CLASS**

Another simple way to add great value to the rogue is to look at the base class features, like Sneak Attack and Cunning Action, and enhance them. Like before, you don't need to create new mechanics if the existing ones are already good. In this way, you can take what you know works and spice it up a little, like adding options to the Cunning Action bonus action list or augmenting when and how the rogue can use Sneak Attack.



#### Example: Hawker

The main point of this subclass is the hawk companion, so I needed to get that involved early. I went through several iterations, some very complicated, but ultimately simplified it to utilize the Sneak Attack class feature, much the same way the Swashbuckler subclass does. I also chose relevant skill proficiencies to round out this level.

**Bonus Proficiencies**: When you choose this archetype at 3rd level, you gain proficiency in the Animal Handling and Nature skills.

Raptor's Aid: Starting at 3rd level, you have befriended a hawk, falcon, or other small raptor. They are your companion and will create opportunities for you in combat. You don't need advantage on an attack roll to use your Sneak Attack against a creature if your raptor is within 5 feet of it, no other enemies of the target are within 5 feet of them, and you don't have disadvantage on the attack roll. All the other rules for Sneak Attack still apply to you.

#### **Example: Surgeon**

For our doctor-turned-killer, I had a lot of ideas that I ended up using for this level. First, for bonus proficiencies, Medicine and Poisoner's kit made a lot of sense. Next is the primary feature which allows the rogue to get advantage in specific circumstances, which works well with Sneak Attack. I also added a feature for helping poisoned allies, something that isn't super common outside a few spells and additional gear.

**Bonus Proficiencies**: When you choose this archetype at 3rd level, you gain proficiency in the Medicine skill and with the Poisoner's kit.

**Surgical Strike**: Starting at 3rd level, you have learned deft and precise use of the small blade on human subjects. Once per turn, when you make a weapon attack with a dagger against a humanoid creature, you gain advantage on the attack roll.

**Remedy**: Starting at 3rd level, your knowledge of poisons and their antidotes allows you to help your allies when they need it most. As an action, you can make a Wisdom (Medicine) check on a creature with the poisoned condition against a DC of 10. On a success, you remove the condition.



# **MODIFY FEATURE**

The rogue's next subclass feature will come at 9<sup>th</sup> level and will generally be focused on modifying or improving an existing ability. These will likely take the shape of an existing game mechanic and are relatively simple in their construction. That isn't to say these are weak or unhelpful; quite the opposite in fact. While simple, these modifications are aimed at abilities that the rogue will use often, especially given the theme.

#### IN AND OUT OF COMBAT

As a general rule for the rest of the subclass features, try to think of ways to improve the rogue's abilities both in and out of combat. This isn't to say you can't boost a rogue's attacks directly, but by instead improving on a skill check, the rogue can find ways to use that both during a fight and while they're skulking around. This adds additional value to the feature without having to create multiple rules or effects.

#### **ADVANTAGE FOR YOU**

Granting advantage on specific actions or checks is a great way to add value without drastically changing the form or function of an ability. This also still includes some randomness of the dice roll, so it's not imperative to worry about limiting this ability with rests or uses, making them even easier to write.

To start writing a feature to grant advantage to, think about what the rogue wants to accomplish and then think of interesting or nonstandard ways to get there. For example, rogues generally want to deal damage to targets, but instead of improving their attacks, you can instead give them advantage on initiative rolls. This still gives them the opportunity to deal damage first but could also allow them the chance to use their other abilities if they want.

If you get the feeling that your feature is a bit too powerful, you can create requirements for the rogue to receive the benefit. This can be requiring reduced movement speed to get the advantage or by limiting the types of situations they are operating in.

#### DISADVANTAGE FOR THEM

Another way for the rogue to come out ahead is to impose disadvantage on their enemies. Like before, think about the rogue's ultimate goal and figure out a way to help achieve that by hindering their enemies. This can be disadvantage on a saving throw or

contested skill checks, again being useful in and out of combat.

You can use the advice from the previous section when considering limitations and restrictions to how the rogue imposes disadvantage on their enemies.

#### FLAT BONUSES

An even simpler way to boost a rogue's abilities is with static bonuses, either adding a value to their attack and skill check rolls, or by improving a base stat of theirs. Some things to consider boosting in this way is movement speed, duration of some effects, or a reduction in material costs to use their tools.

#### NON-COMBAT ABILITIES

You can also add whole new features at this level if they make sense for your rogue. These can be anything from crafting secret identities, studying their foes, or carefully laying plans that will come to fruition when they need it most. Again, remember to think about abilities that can be used in offensive ways as well as in social or political situations. The more versatile the feature is, the more impactful it will be for the rogue.

#### Example: Hawker

This feature gives the rogue utility both in and out of combat and gives them a little magical flair. Use of this feature can also set up the rogue to be a planner or find opportunities to utilize their other features.

**Hawk Senses**: Starting at 9th level, your raptor companion becomes an extension of your own heighted senses. You gain advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks when your raptor assists you with their keen eyes.

You have also developed a supernatural bond with your companion. As an action you can temporarily see through the raptor's eyes. This effect lasts for 1 minute, until you lose concentration, or are incapacitated.

#### Example: Surgeon

This feature helps tie the medical aspects of the subclass with the typical charismatic activities that rogues sometimes get up to.

**Medical Training**: Starting at 9th level, you know how to use your knowledge to impress, confuse, or convince others. When you make a Charisma check that relates to your medical training you can also add your Medicine bonus to the roll.

# **AUGMENT FEATURE**

At 13<sup>th</sup> level, the rogue learns a feature that further adjusts and improves their skills. While the previous feature focused on making an existing ability more potent, this feature looks to augment a feature, adding more versatility and options.

You can also utilize the advice from the previous section to help guide you here. Make sure consider how to improve or enhance existing abilities and, when possible, look to offer features that can be utilized in and out of combat.

#### **BONUS ACTIONS & REACTIONS**

In terms of structuring your feature, you can look to add more options to the rogue's turns by offering this ability as a bonus action or as a reaction to something in the game. This has the initial benefit of being used in conjunction with a primary action, but also gives the rogue the opportunity to mix and match abilities, creating more outcomes than any one feature can accomplish.

While bonus actions can be used for any class, the rogue has a special way of using them through their Cunning Action class feature. It is not strictly required to call out that this feature's bonus action is an addition to the Cunning Action list, but it is a helpful reminder for the player that the game only allows one bonus action on a turn. So, in short, if you create a bonus action feature, it becomes a choice to use it instead of using Cunning Action that turn.

#### SUPPORTING ALLIES

This level is a great time to think about whether the rogue would be one to aid their allies. Most of the time a rogue is a lone wolf, a solitary predator that maneuvers and strikes on their own. However, there are times when putting an ally in harm's way is more advantageous and helping them succeed from the shadows can ensure they live to help again.

A rogue's support can take many shapes but will likely be something done from a hidden place or involving misdirection. Rogues, by and large, are a sneaky bunch and aren't likely to let you know they're involved. In addition to flavor, this can also be used to help limit the power of this ability, by requiring the rogue to be hidden from a target or by positioning the rogue in a less-than-favorable spot.

#### **FURTHER ADVANTAGE**

If the subclass you're working on already has a significant amount of power and options, you can take this opportunity to add more modification in the form of advantage or disadvantage. Follow the same guidelines from the previous feature but ratchet up the power some to account for the higher level of this feature.

#### Example: Hawker

For this feature I wanted to add a little defense to the mix. Again, this is themed around the raptor, but ultimately is a vehicle for imposing disadvantage on attackers.

**Flurry of Feathers**: Starting at 13th level, your raptor can sense a threat to you and will intercede on your behalf. When a creature makes an attack against you, you can use your reaction to have your raptor distract them, imposing disadvantage on their attack roll.

#### Example: Surgeon

This is where the surgeon starts to expand their power and versatility. This feature impacts both the Surgical Strike and Remedy features from 3<sup>rd</sup> level, the Medical Training ability from 9<sup>th</sup> level, and, if you look ahead, also has implication for the 17<sup>th</sup> level feature Blood Letting.

**Advanced Anatomy**: Starting at 13th level, your study of anatomy and violence extends to a specific type of creature in addition to humanoids. Choose one of the following types of creature: Beasts, Dragons, Fey, Giants, Humanoids, Plants, or Undead. You have advantage on all checks concerning humanoids and your chosen creature type that use your Medicine skill bonus.

In addition, you can now use your Surgical Strike feature against creatures of the chosen type.

# **UTILITY FEATURE**

The rogue's final subclass feature comes at 17<sup>th</sup> level. Unlike most classes, where the final subclass feature is a sort of capstone or big one-shot ability, the rogue's Archetype culminates with a more utilitarian feature that can be used more regularly.

As with all features in the Archetype, consider how to improve upon the rogue's existing playstyle, augment or modify existing mechanics, and provide options that are versatile with regards to combat.

## **IMPROVE THE SUBCLASS**

As with the other features of the subclass, we can focus on improving existing abilities, but instead focus on earlier subclass features. Look back at the  $3^{\rm rd}$  and  $9^{\rm th}$  level features and think about how you could give them a boost. If you previous reduced the power of these abilities for balance, now's a great time to bring back some of that potency.

Some simple ways to improve on a subclass feature is to increase the number of uses, increase the bonuses or dice used, or add additional scenarios in which they can be used, like increasing range or triggers for reactions.

#### **BOLSTER THE ROGUE**

You can, as always, create a new ability here, again leveraging existing game mechanics or creating new ones. As with before, think about how you can create new opportunities and methods for the rogue to ultimately achieve their goals through supplemental actions. This can be something subtle, like protecting their thoughts from telepathy, or more overt, like gaining a bonus attack or increased damage.

#### **BREAK THE RULES**

When all else fails, a huge way to add value to a subclass is by allowing them to temporarily and specifically breaking the rules. One way to look at this is to think about something you wish would just happen and then write a feature that allows it. This can be something like hitting with an attack when you roll a miss, or simply choosing to deal double damage.

It goes without saying that these types of abilities are very powerful, so they should be limited accordingly. This can be requiring a short or long rest between uses or having a limited number of uses equal to a relevant ability score modifier.

#### Example: Hawker

This is a great example of utilizing an existing feature of a subclass but retheming it to work with your idea. Mechanically this works the same as the 17<sup>th</sup> level feature of the Insightful but is touched up to fit in my archetype. Work smart, not hard!

**Raptor Strike**: Starting at 17th level, you and your raptor work in beautiful concert, performing a deadly dance. While your Raptor's Aid feature applies to a creature, your Sneak Attack damage against that creature increases by 3d6

#### Example: Surgeon

I knew from the start of designing this subclass that I needed a big, showy feature around gushing blood and cold, surgical precision. Since that obviously is a powerful ability, it ended up at the 17<sup>th</sup> level spot. I also think setting the DC of this check equal to the remaining HP of the creature is a very interesting and unique way of handling difficulty that also allows the rogue to make some engaging choices during combat.

**Blood Letting**: Starting at 17th level, you know the literal ins and outs of the body, taking advantage of weakness and injury to deliver a fatal cut. As a bonus action you can choose a target and make a Wisdom (Medicine) check against a DC equal to their current Hit Points. On a success, your next successful attack against the target reduces them to 0 Hit Points.



# HAWKER

While most in the roguish profession rely on their own blades, some know that another set of talons are always welcome. The hawker is a rogue who comes at problems from two angles, one above and one behind. It's hard to concentrate on the blade at your back when there is a rush of feathers and claws at your face. Hunting targets and creating opportunities for the kill is what raptors are naturally good at, just like you.

#### HAWKER FEATURES

#### **Rogue Level Features**

$3^{\text{rd}}$	Bonus Proficiencies, Raptor's Aid
9 <sup>th</sup>	Hawk Senses
$13^{th}$	Flurry of Feathers
17 <sup>th</sup>	Raptor Strike

#### **BONUS PROFICIENCIES**

When you choose this archetype at 3<sup>rd</sup> level, you gain proficiency in the Animal Handling and Nature skills.

#### RAPTOR'S AID

Starting at 3<sup>rd</sup> level, you have befriended a hawk, falcon, or other small raptor. They are your companion and will create opportunities for you in combat. You don't need advantage on an attack roll to use your Sneak Attack against a creature if your raptor is within 5 feet of it, no other enemies of the target are within 5 feet of them, and you don't have disadvantage on the attack roll. All the other rules for Sneak Attack still apply to you.

#### HAWK SENSES

Starting at 9<sup>th</sup> level, your raptor companion becomes an extension of your own heighted senses. You gain advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks when your raptor assists you with their keen eyes.

You have also developed a supernatural bond with your companion. As an action you can temporarily see through the raptor's eyes. This effect lasts for 1 minute, until you lose concentration, or are incapacitated.

#### FLURRY OF FEATHERS

Starting at 13<sup>th</sup> level, your raptor can sense a threat to you and will intercede on your behalf. When a creature makes an attack against you, you can use your reaction to have your raptor distract them, imposing disadvantage on their attack roll.

#### RAPTOR STRIKE

Starting at 17<sup>th</sup> level, you and your raptor work in beautiful concert, performing a deadly dance. While your Raptor's Aid feature applies to a creature, your Sneak Attack damage against that creature increases by 3d6.

#### Alternative Companions

While this subclass is written specifically for those rogues who fight alongside a winged companion, it is possible for other beasts to be used here. Consider animals like cats, ferrets, or other small, quick creatures. To know if they will work in this context, think about how the creature will move quickly, distract targets, and inflict harm to the target. This subclass isn't meant to reflect larger, more deadly creatures like wolves or bears.

# SURGEON

It is hard to know how the entirety of the body works, to literally know how to grant or take life, and not lose some respect for life. Whether it's the detachment all doctors need to deal with failure or the cold lack of emotion of the hobbyist, they can place a sharp blade as easy as some put pencil to paper or shovel to dirt. There is no person, you see, only flesh, blood, and bone. When you can abstract those qualities from the life you take, you can become a very dangerous opponent indeed.

#### SURGEON FEATURES

#### **Rogue Level Features**

3rd	Bonus Proficiencies, Surgical Strike, Remedy
9 <sup>th</sup>	Medical Training
$13^{th}$	Advanced Anatomy
17 <sup>th</sup>	Blood Letting

#### **BONUS PROFICIENCIES**

When you choose this archetype at 3<sup>rd</sup> level, you gain proficiency in the Medicine skill and with the Poisoner's kit.

#### SURGICAL STRIKE

Starting at 3<sup>rd</sup> level, you have learned deft and precise use of the small blade on human subjects. Once per turn, when you make a weapon attack with a dagger against a humanoid creature, you gain advantage on the attack roll.

#### REMEDY

Starting at 3<sup>rd</sup> level, your knowledge of poisons and their antidotes allows you to help your allies when they need it most. As an action, you can make a Wisdom (Medicine) check on a creature with the poisoned condition against a DC of 10. On a success, you remove the condition.

#### MEDICAL TRAINING

Starting at 9<sup>th</sup> level, you know how to use your knowledge to impress, confuse, or convince others. When you make a Charisma check that relates to your medical training you can also add your Medicine bonus to the roll.

#### **ADVANCED ANATOMY**

Starting at 13<sup>th</sup> level, your study of anatomy and violence extends to a specific type of creature in addition to humanoids. Choose one of the following types of creature: Beasts, Dragons, Fey, Giants, Humanoids, Plants, or Undead. You have advantage on all Wisdom (Medicine) checks concerning humanoids and your chosen creature type.

In addition, you can now use your Surgical Strike feature against creatures of the chosen type.

#### **BLOOD LETTING**

Starting at 17<sup>th</sup> level, you know the literal ins and outs of the body, taking advantage of weakness and injury to deliver a fatal cut. As a bonus action you can choose a target and make a Wisdom (Medicine) check against a DC equal to their current Hit Points. On a success, your next successful attack against the target reduces them to 0 Hit Points.

# **ABOUT**

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Thank you for downloading this sourcebook! It was a lot of fun to create.

If you have any feedback or suggestions for this sourcebook, please send it to me via email at <a href="matthew@gravelyn.com">matthew@gravelyn.com</a> with the subject line "Create-A-Roguish Feedback". Your input will help to make this sourcebook even better for future players!

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