

Keys the Kenku

Species: Kenku (humanoid crow)

Sex: Male

Age: Young adult

Height: 4ft 10in

Weight: 80lbs (when he's not carrying a generous amount of loot)

Keys is a kenku from the 5e-edition of Dungeons and Dragons, and a thief by trade. 5e kenku can't speak but are excellent ventriloquists, and usually name their offspring after sounds. As such, Keys' name is pronounced as for the sound of keys clinking together.

Additional Notes

Judgemental Side

Nurturing / Critical

Keys' mother, named Glass, was a proud mother from the very beginning.

He never knew who his father was and there was no way his mother would be able to remember and tell him. On the night he was conceived his flock threw a wild party in a manor, in celebration of the passing of a glorious storm. Much drink was had, and he was duly conceived in a riot of party spirit. Not knowing your father is normal for Keys' native flock so it didn't occur to him to feel as if he had missed out by this.

As Keys grew, Glass noticed that he had a talent for thievery, in particular for opening her locked treasures. She named him Keys, and decided that when he was old enough, she would teach him all she knew about thievery in all its forms. Her sister-figure, Whetstone, a kenku assassin, watched Keys' early development from a short distance.

However, that was not to be. Duke Sebus of the Ebahod citadel, whom Glass had been deceiving by masquerading as a reputable soothsayer for financial gain, finally uncovered Glass' deception and sent his army after the entire flock. Sebus didn't know who the culprit was so interrogated the flock members in turn. It was clear however that Keys was too young to be the culprit, a mere fledgling, so Sebus had him locked in his dungeon. Here, Keys found himself at the mercy of two manic jailers who fed him on bread crumbs and verbally abused him.

The jailers themselves no doubt did this out of cruelty, but the cruelty didn't hit home in the way they'd expected. Instead Keys developed a preference for crumbs, and rather than owning the jailers' insults, he occupied himself by remembering and mimicking the insults back to them.

He used his lock-picking skills to escape several times but was always caught and put

back. His imprisonment only ended when Whetstone infiltrated the citadel in search of Glass and him, and found him. She was unable to rescue his mother but rescued him. Keys soon discovered that he was the only survivor of his flock.

Whetstone longed to raise Keys, but as a gravely wanted criminal, was unable to guarantee that she would always be able to offer him the reliable parenting he needed. Instead she left him with a human she trusted, Gabriella Gates. Gabriella was an altruistic character and the leader of a group of adventurers called the Horizon Angels, which included a tiefling sorcerer named Laughter, a Dwarven Druid who went by the name Hickory 'Hics' Barkenstep, and a shady yet seductive Yuan-Ti rogue named Velindi.

Gates understood the nature of kenku well enough to recognise that Keys was a behavioural mimic, so since he was still just a fledgling, she made a decision to teach him behaviours that would reflect the values of the Horizon Angels instead of the traditional kenku behaviours of thuggery and thievery.

Additional Notes

Objective Side

Rationality

Keys, like other kenku, is a mimic who was born as part of a flock. Kenku are well-adapted to flock life in the sense that they copy their mothers and other kenku who take an interest in raising them, and so the flock's values and skills are introjected or learned, and never lost.

The flip-side of this is that Keys has a natural bias towards copying what 'the others' do ('the others' being the group he's running with at any given time) and therefore tends to have their goals rather than seeking his own. Although there are exceptions to this (for example, he likes baked goods crumbled up into crumbs, and he picks pockets and locks whether the others want him to or not because that's his main skill of which he's proudest), his mind is community-orientated. Psychologically he is one of a group rather than a stand-alone individual.

Additional Notes

Childlike Side

Free

It's difficult to describe Keys in terms of his Free childlike side, as he is a member of a community-orientated species and their awareness of their flock is all-pervasive. He has a preference for crumbs from baked goods, but even this was learned. He enjoys the thrill of stealing, cheating at games, and of bullying those he sees as oppressors, indeed, he often does all of these things for fun. Expression of one's own autonomy - and all of these things do that or something like it - is the closest any creature can get to freedom, so as such they count as him expressing his Free side.

Because he is a mimic, he often impulsively did or said things he had learned impulsively, rather than deciding for himself whether he personally wanted to do or say such things. That was probably more to do with seeking comfort and pleasure in the familiar, and we can all identify with that.

Compliant

As a natural mimic, Keys always had a bias towards being compliant, at least to the values of the group he was with, so long as he had been with them for long enough to learn their behaviours. Gates used this to her advantage to teach Keys the values of the Horizon Angels by demonstration. The biggest problem she experienced with this was that Keys had been encouraged to steal and deceive by his kenku flock, and kept reverting to this earlier influence. She tried rewarding him with the crumbs of baked goods, which he loved, and this helped to fix his new knowledge. However, he was at heart a mimic and often resorted to thievery, which often got the team in trouble.

Sometimes this got so out of hand that the other members of the Angels questioned whether it was wise to keep Keys around. Gates responded by threatening to throw him out of the group, in the hope that this would shake him into complying. Truly, she was fond of him and didn't want to throw him out. Over time this threat became less and less effective as Keys noticed her behaviour: she never actually threw him out. He called her bluff, and one day, she actually did.

He eventually redeemed himself by stepping into a brawl and saving Hic's life, and Gates allowed him back into the team.

By the time Keys was a fully-grown adult, Gates had achieved her goal and Keys had become everything the Horizon Angels could have hoped to aspire to.

Defiant

Because of the time he spent in the dungeon, and subsequently with Gates - both times when he couldn't exert his own will over a situation - when Keys wants to defy authority he usually does it by sulking, a relatively passive and low-intensity form of revolt that can be passed off as 'just not wanting to talk for a while'. The most intense his defiance will get is a spot of shouting and squawking, which was the most outspoken he could be during his days in the dungeon.

He does however like to steal, and he also likes to randomly shout insults that he learned in the dungeon when he is in crowds. Both of these, by the way, are rebellious activities, since he does them from an underdog position.

During his time exiled from the Horizon Angels, Keys observed children and pets in various villages. In particular, he noticed that they got their own way with their parents and owners by buttering them up. He learned how to make puppy eyes and cooing noises, and how to be generally loveable and impish. After he returned to the Angels, these tactics worked on Gates for a short time, until she realised that he was being manipulative. Then she made sure he knew she was having none of it.

By the time Keys became an adult, he had developed into an admirable member of the Horizon Angels. He still likes to play the occasional harmless prank and likes to indulge his wily and zany side, and in battle he occasionally demonstrates shades of the cruelty he learned in the dungeon, but there can be no doubt that he has become a loved and valued member of the team, thanks to Gates' patience and faith, and his mimicry.

Credits

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Berne, E., *The structure and dynamics of organisations and groups*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1963 (other editions: New York: Grove Press, 1966; and New York: Ballantine, 1973), chapter 9.

Want to organise your updates and talk with me about integrating them into your character? Email me on thecharacterconsultancy@gmail.com and I will be happy to help you!

~Hayley, The Character Consultancy