

A NECROMANCER'S HANDBOOK

BOOK OF THE DEAD



INTRODUCTION

Death. It's not always a comfortable subject, but it's impossible to avoid. Especially in fantasy, and therefore also in classic Dungeons and Dragons' universes, such as the Forgotten Realms. In a world where the realms of the gods await the passing spirits and the dead can be returned to life, either as living,

breathing creatures once more, or as grim echoes of what they once were, death and what comes after it is an integral part of the D&D experience.

This document seeks to allow you to delve deeper into the darkest parts of the D&D experience. It is for the player, who has a budding necromancer in their belly, but feel limited by the few options, that are available in the core rules. As it stands right now, only the wizard's necromancy school is really viable, if you want to summon the undead, and even then, it's hardly exciting (or logistically feasible) to command a horde of simple zombies.

On the following pages, we'll expand these options. Not all the subclasses presented will be able to summon efficiently, but all of them will deal in death and darkness. There'll also be advice for both players and DM's on how to handle a necromancer in your campaign, as well as a multitude of new options for undead creatures to command, such as the Young Dragon Zombie and the Unicorn Zombie (who doesn't want one of those?).

There's also new spells and items that deal with the undead - and the destruction of those. The list of necromancy spells is a bit shallow, so why not put more of those into your campaign? And you might not think that you need Zombieskin Shield or a Ghoul's Mask, but the truth is, you do. You really do. Trust me.

I hope you have fun with these rules, whether its your character that takes a delve into darkness, or you're a DM hoping to scare and shock your players with a little bit of darkness.

– Valeur RPG

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SUBCLASSES



While the wizard's school of necromancy option will always be the closest to a true a necromancer, there should be other options available for those who wish to pursue the art of necromancy and the mysteries of the afterlife. In this chapter you'll receive four new subclasses focused on death and the

undead: the College of the Dirge, the Circle of Blight, the Soulblade and the Blood Magus.

BARDIC COLLEGE

COLLEGE OF THE DIRGE

Bards of the College of the Dirge are neither numerous nor well-liked. Their music too sad, their stories too eery and their magic all too dark, most commonfolk can't help but feel uneasy in their presence. While the dark bards might sometimes play at a funeral, it seems their music isn't as much a farewell to the departed as much as it is a sinister welcome home. Shunned by some, embraced by few, the College of the Dirge doesn't much care. It continues to teach aspiring bards how to make their music guide their audiences in this life and beyond.

As a bard of the College of the Dire, your tune is one of bitter melancholy, but enchanting nonetheless. Like the moth that flies willingly into the flame, the somber notes compel both the living and the dead to perform your bidding.

NECROMANCY ADEPT

Starting at 3rd level and at each other level after that, you can replace one spell on your spell list with a necromancy spell from any class, including this one. A spell you choose must be of a level you can cast, as shown on the Bard table, or a cantrip. The chosen spells count as bard spells for you.

DARK VIRTUOSO

Also at 3rd level, you can spend a use of your Bardic Inspiration as a bonus action to have a creature within 30 feet that can hear you make a Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes necrotic damage equal to a roll of your Bardic Inspiration die + half your bard level, rounded down. On a succesful save, it takes half that much damage. You or an undead creature under your control gain temporary hit points equal to the necrotic damage dealt.

AUDIENCE OF THE DEAD

At 6th level, you learn the spell *animate dead*, if you don't know it already.

Whenever you create an undead using a necromancy spell, it has additional benefits:

- The creature's hit point maximum is increased by an amount equal to your bard level.
- The creature adds your proficiency bonus to its weapon damage rolls.
- When you expend one of your uses of Bardic Inspiration to inspire an ally, you can have one undead creature that is within 60 feet of you and under your control also gain a Bardic Inspiration die of the same size.

NECROTIC BOND

At 14th level, the profane bond between you and your undead minions become stronger. Whenever you take damage, you can use a reaction to have an undead creature under your control take half of the damage instead of you.

Additionally, whenever you cast a spell that targets only yourself, you can have that spell also affect an undead creature under your control for the duration.



DRUIDIC CIRCLE

CIRCLE OF BLIGHT

Druids work diligently to preserve the life and balance of the natural world. As a druid of the circle of blight you do the same, except that to you, nature doesn't have to be alive in the strictest sense of the word. It just have thrive and dominate. You know that life and death are not opposites, but instead intertwined and carefully balanced - there can be no life without death and no death without life. Rot and decay destroys life, but like a wolf eating a deer, death is nothing but a natural part of life's cycle.

WITHERING TOUCH

Starting at 2nd level, your touch becomes infused with rot. As an action, you can touch organic matter smaller than a cubic foot, such as a flower or a loaf of bread and cause it to instantly wither, rot and die.

Additionally, you can use your withering touch on a creature by making a melee spell attack as an action, or simply touching it, if it is willing. On a successful hit, the creature takes poison damage equal to 1d8 + your druid level and must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC or be poisoned for 1 minute. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

You can use this feature a number of times per day equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum of 1). You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

BLIGHTFORM

Also at 2nd level, you can use your Wild Shape to gain traits normally reserved for the living dead. By expending a use of your Wild Shape as a bonus action, you can take on the Spores of Decay or Undead Fortitude feature. The transformation lasts as long as your Wild Shape would normally last, or until you drop it as a bonus action.

Spores of Decay. Your skin grows putrid and bubbly, filling with poisonous spores. When a creature within 5 feet of you hits you with a melee attack, the sacs on your skin burst. The creature must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or take 1d8 poison damage and be poisoned until the end of its next turn. The damage increases to 2d8 when you reach 11th level in this class and 3d8 when you reach 17th level.

Undead Fortitude. Your anatomy and internal organs change dramatically, allowing you to wade through blows that would fell most living creatures. If damage would reduce you to 0 hit points, you can make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, you drop to 1 hit point instead.

MASTER OF DECAY

Beginning at 6th level, you gain resistance to poison damage, and advantage on saving throws against being poisoned or diseased. Additionally, you learn the spell *animate dead* if you don't know it already.

When you cast *animate dead*, you can choose to animate a vine blight from a cluster of vegetation, instead of a zombie or a skeleton. You can also cast the spell to reassert your control over this creature once every 24 hours, as per the rules of the spell *animate dead*.

IMPROVED BLIGHTFORM

When you reach 10th level, you become immune to poison and disease. You also learn additional undead forms to use with your Blightform feature.

Dreadful Glare. Your eyes become empty pits of darkness. For the duration, you can target one creature you can see within 60 feet of you as a bonus action. If the target can see you, it must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw against this magic or become frightened of you until the end of your next turn. If the target fails the saving throw by 5 or more, it is also paralyzed for the same duration. A target that succeeds on the saving throw is immune to your Dreadful Glare for the next 24 hours.

Incorporeality. You gain resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons. Additionally, you can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. You take 5 (1d10) force damage if you end your turn inside an object.

WITHERED BEING

When you reach 14th level, your connection to the realm of the dead has been cemented fully. You no longer need to eat or drink, you gain resistance to necrotic damage and your hit point maximum can't be reduced.



MARTIAL ARCHETYPE

SOULBLADE

The soulblades are an ancient and mysterious order. Fiercely dedicated to the art of war, but with a hunger for something more. Whether it is to celebrate victory or to honor the sanctity of the kill, the soulblade ingests the essence of the departed, using their essence to fuel herself in combat.

SOULBLADE

Starting at 3rd level, you learn how to capture the essence of the recently departed. As a ritual that takes 1 minute, you can draw the life essence from any non-construct creature with a challenge rating of 1/8 or higher that has died within the last hour. You can hold a number of essences equal to your Constitution modifier + half your fighter level, rounded up (minimum of 1).

When you hit a creature with a weapon attack, you can spend one essence to deal an additional 1d8 force damage and cause an effect depending on the essence (see the Soulblade Table).

If an effect caused by expending an essence requires a saving throw, the DC is 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Constitution modifier.

SOULBLADE TABLE

Essence	Effect
Aberration	The target takes additional psychic damage equal to your fighter level.
Beast	The target must succeed on a Strength saving throw, or be knocked prone.
Celestial	The target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw, or be blinded until the end of its next turn.
Dragon	The target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw, or be frightened of you until the end of its next turn.
Elemental	The target takes your choice of cold, fire, lightning or thunder damage equal to your fighter level.
Fey or Fiend	The target must succeed on a Charisma saving throw, or be banished as by the spell <i>banishment</i> until the end of its next turn.
Giant	The target must succeed on a Strength saving throw or be shoved up to 10 feet.
Monstrosity	The target takes additional damage of your weapon's type equal to your fighter level.
Humanoid	The target must succeed on a Charisma saving throw, or have disadvantage on the next ability check, attack roll or saving throw it makes until the end of its next turn.
Ooze	The target takes acid damage equal to your fighter level.
Plant	The target must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw, or be restrained until the end of its next turn.
Undead	The target takes additional necrotic damage equal to your fighter level.

Starting at 7th level, you can channel the primal essences you possess into magical energy. You can spend essences to create the effects described on the Soulcaster Table.

Any spell cast using this feature doesn't require material components. Your spellcasting ability for them is Constitution.

SOULCASTER TABLE

Essence	Ability
Aberration	You can spend an aberration essence as an action to cast the spell <i>detect thoughts</i> .
Beast	You can spend a beast essence as an action to cast the spell <i>polymorph</i> on yourself.
Celestial	You can spend a celestial essence as an action to cast the spell <i>lesser restoration</i> .
Dragon	You can spend a dragon essence as an action to cast the spell <i>fly</i> on yourself.
Elemental	When you take acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage you can spend an elemental essence as a reaction to cast the spell <i>absorb elements</i> .
Fey or fiend	You can spend a fey or fiend essence as an action to cast the spell <i>dispel magic</i> .
Giant	You can spend a giant essence as an action to gain the enlarge effect of the <i>enlarge/reduce</i> spell for 1 minute.
Humanoid	You can spend a humanoid essence as an action to become proficient with any skill, tool or language of your choice for 1 hour.
Monstrosity	You can spend a monstrosity essence as a bonus action to gain temporary hit points equal to your fighter level.
Ooze	When an attacker that you can see hits you with a weapon attack, you can spend an ooze or plant essence as a reaction to halve the attack's damage against you.
Plant	You can spend a plant essence as an action to cause you or a creature you touch to regain 1d8 + your fighter level hit points.
Undead	When you take damage that would reduce you to 0 hit points, you can spend an undead essence to drop to 1 hit point instead.

ESSENCE STRIKE

At 10th level, the damage dealt by your Soulblade feature increases to 2d8 force damage.

ESSENCE THEFT

Starting at 15th level, when a creature dies within 30 feet of you, you can use your reaction to instantly obtain its essence.

MASTER OF SOULS

At 18th level, you have reached the pinnacle of power as a soulblade. Whenever you obtain or spend an essence, you regain hit points equal to half your fighter level.

SOULCASTER

ARCANE TRADITION

BLOOD MAGUS

Your studies of the arcane have shown you a truth that most practitioners find uncomfortable: magic does not just stem from the mystical Weave or from intense study of moldy tomes. Magic is literally life and death, and therefore it is only natural that is strongest when it is mixed with a little of life's blood. Some might find this practice unsettling, unnatural or even unethical, but if you aren't prepared to bleed a little in your pursuit of power, then maybe you're just not cut out for power at all.

BLOODMAGIC

Beginning at 2nd level, you learn how to use your own blood as an arcane focus. When you cast a Wizard spell that has a component without a cost, you can use your bonus action and a sharp object to draw your own blood and cast the spell without providing that component.

SCARIFICATION

Starting at 2nd level, you learn how to etch arcane spells directly into your flesh. As a ritual that takes 10 minutes, you can inscribe a spell of 5th level or lower from your spellbook on your body using a sharp object. The spell must take an action or less to cast, and you must pay the spells component costs when you inscribe it. The combined level of spells inscribed on your skin this way can't exceed half your wizard level.

Your hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the combined levels of the spells inscribed on you. This reduction of maximum hit points can't be reduced or negated, and can't be restored by magical means.

You can cast a spell inscribed on your body this way without expending a spell slot, as if you were casting it from a spell scroll. After you've cast the spell using this feature, the arcane markings disappear from your body.

FUELED BY DEATH

When you reach 6th level, you learn how to channel the energy of a departing spirit into your spellcasting. When a creature dies within 30 feet of you, you can use a reaction to harness its energy. The first spell you cast until the end of your next turn is cast as if you used a spell slot one level higher than the one you used to cast it.

INURED TO PAIN

When you reach 10th level, you gain advantage on Constitution saving throws made to keep your concentration.

BLOODWALK

Starting at 14th level, you learn how to use blood as an conduit for magical travel. As an action, you can attempt a melee spell attack against a small or larger creature. You don't spend your usage of Bloodwalk on a failed spell attack. If you hit, you can use the target's body as an entry point for Bloodwalk.

Bloodwalk functions as the spell *teleport*, except that it targets only you, and that you appear from within a random Small or larger creature that is at your destination or close to it. You can choose to appear from a specific creature, if you know that it is present at the destination.

You can choose that either or both of the affected creatures are damaged from your entry or exit. If you do so, an affected creature takes 3d8 + your Wizard level necrotic damage and must make a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC or be stunned until the end of your next turn.

Since this feature needs blood to function, most constructs, elementals and undead are immune to this feature, as are other creatures without blood and organs, at your DM's discretion.

Once you use this feature, you must finish a long rest before you can use it again.



SPELLS

ANIMATE DEAD, MINOR

1st-level necromancy

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: 10 feet

Components: V, S, M (a drop of blood, a piece of flesh, and a pinch of bone dust)

Duration: Instantaneous

This spell creates an undead servant. Choose a hand or foot severed from a dead creature or a corpse of a tiny vermin. Your spell imbues the target with a foul mimicry of life, raising it as either a crawling claw or a vermin zombie.

On each of your turns, you can use a bonus action to mentally command any creature you made with this spell if the creature is within 60 feet of you (if you control multiple creatures, you can command any or all of them at the same time, issuing the same command to each one). You decide what action the creature will take and where it will move during its next turn, or you can issue a general command, such as to guard a particular chamber or corridor. If you issue no commands, the creature only defends itself against hostile creatures.

Once given an order, the creature continues to follow it until its task is complete. The creature is under your control for 24 hours, after which it stops obeying any command you've given it. To maintain control of the creature for another 24 hours, you must cast this spell on the creature again before the current 24-hour period ends. This use of the spell reasserts your control over up to two creatures you have animated with this spell, rather than animating a new one.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, you can animate or reassert control over two additional crawling claws or vermin zombies.

CORPSE EXPLOSION

2nd-level necromancy

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

Choose a corpse of a creature within 60 feet of you. Each creature within 10 ft. of the corpse must make a Dexterity saving throw as the corpse explodes in a shower of boiling blood and bone fragments. Each creature hit by the blast takes 2d10 fire damage and 2d10 piercing damage on a failed save, and half as much on a successful one.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the damage increases by 1d10 fire damage and 1d10 piercing damage for each slot level above 2nd.

DECREPIFY

4th-level necromancy

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 120 feet

Components: V, S, M (a piece of burnt glass)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You place a curse on up to six creatures of your choice in a 40-foot cube within range. Each target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or be affected by this spell for the duration. An affected target deals only half damage with weapon attacks, has disadvantage on saving throws, ability checks and attacks that use Strength or Dexterity and its movement speed is reduced by 10 to a minimum of 5 feet, until the spell ends.

At the end of each of its turns, an affected creature can make another Constitution saving throw. On a success, the spell ends on the target.

SIPHON SOUL

7th-level necromancy

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet.

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, 1 minute

Choose a non-undead, non-construct creature you can see within range. The target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the target takes 4d8 necrotic damage and has disadvantage on all saving throws and loses any damage resistances it has for the duration. On a successful save, the target doesn't gain disadvantage on all saving throws and doesn't lose its damage resistances.

You gain temporary hit points equal to the necrotic damage dealt by this spell and you gain any saving throw proficiencies and damage resistances that the creature lost for the duration of this spell.



MAGICAL ITEMS

DEATH'S LETTER

Weapon (heavy crossbow), rare (requires attunement)

This magical crossbow is made from sleek, black zalantar wood carved with sinister runes. While holding this crossbow, you hear soft whispers muttering profane words in an incomprehensible tongue.

If you reduce a creature to 0 hit points with an arrow shot from Death's Letter, the target dies immediately and you can have a shadow (*Monster Manual* p. 269) rise from the corpse. The shadow is under your control and acts on your initiative. The shadow ceases to exist after 1 minute or when you create another shadow with this ability.

GHOUL'S MASK

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

While not worn, this mask looks like a simple wooden mask with two eyeholes and a slit for the mouth.

While attuned to this mask and wearing it, you take on the appearance of a decomposing, rotting corpse and gain the following benefits:

- You gain immunity to poison and you can't be poisoned.
- You don't need to eat or drink, and you can hold your breath indefinitely.
- Undead have difficulty harming you. If an undead targets you directly with an attack or a harmful spell, that creature must make a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC (an undead need not make the save when it includes you in an area effect, such as the explosion of fireball). On a failed save, the creature must choose a new target or forfeit targeting someone instead of you, potentially wasting the attack or spell. On a successful save the creature is immune to this effect for 24 hours.

THE NARR'MORI

Wondrous item, rare

The shell of this ancient drum is crafted from the skull of an elf and the drumhead is made from human skin. When played, the Narr'mori makes a hollow, eerie sound, like the sound of a muffled heartbeat.

As an action on your turn, you can make a Charisma (Performance) check and play the Narr'mori to cause one of the following effects.

- Each creature of your choice within 30 feet that can hear you must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against the result of your Charisma (Performance) check or be poisoned until the end of your next turn.
- Each creature of your choice within 30 feet that can hear you must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw against the result of your Charisma (Performance) check or be frightened of you until the end of your next turn.
- Each creature of your choice within 30 feet that can hear you must succeed on a Charisma saving throw against the result of your Charisma (Performance) check or be affected as by the spell *bane* until the end of your next turn.

ZOMBIESKIN SHIELD

Magical Shield, uncommon (requires attunement)

This half-rotten wooden shield seems to be covered in tattered and torn leather. The rancid odor of death that rises from it reveals that it is not leather that coats its surface, but decomposing human flesh.

While attuned to this shield, you can use an action to animate the skin on the shield as a zombie, as if you had summoned it with the spell *animate dead*. The zombie appears in a square adjacent to you and acts immediately on your turn. After 1 minute has passed, the zombie returns to the shield and becomes inanimate skin again. It can't be animated again until you have finished a long rest.

If the zombie is destroyed or can't return to the shield in time, you can recreate the shield's skin by placing the shield on the corpse of a dead humanoid for 1 hour.



GUIDE TO NECROMANCY

The necromancer is a beloved staple of high fantasy - exemplified in everything from classic D&D to popular video games like the Diablo franchise. Who doesn't want to send undead forces to slaughter your foes, in turn creating more able bodies for your army?

Unfortunately, the necromancer rarely sees play in 5th edition. The biggest problem the necromancer has is logistics. To be effective you need an army of undead minions under your control, but the bigger your army, the more clunky, cluttered and slow combat becomes. So while controlling a horde of zombies and skeletons might seem fun on paper, it will often cause frustration for the other players - and a headache for the DM.

Below are two optional rules, that allow you to either create greater undead minions or tools for you to enhance the one you already have.

GREATER MINIONS

The most obvious way to fix the necromancer's problem - too many minions make for slow and unbalanced combat - is to focus on quality over quantity. And what oozes quality more than an undead manticore or a zombie dragon?

In **Appendix A: Undead Minions**, you'll find fully fleshed statblocks for dozens of undead monsters - or new friends as a true necromancer would view them.

When using this variant rule, the spells *animate dead* and *create undead* doesn't only allow you to create zombies, skeletons, ghouls, ghaunts, wights or mummies. You can create nearly any zombie or skeleton version of a slain creature. All you need is the right corpse.

When deciding how powerful a minion you can animate, see the **Minion Conversion Table**. For example, if the spell *animate dead* cast with a 4th-level spell slot would normally allow you to reanimate three zombies, you could instead use it to reanimate a pegasus zombie (CR 1). And if you could create four ghouls with a 7th-level *create undead*, you could instead reanimate a bulette zombie (CR 3) to do your dark bidding.

Any time you cast *animate dead* or *create undead* to create a Greater Minion and have zombies or ghouls 'left over' (i.e. you could summon four with your casting, but a brown bear zombie only costs three zombies), you can create any remaining zombies, ghouls or skeletons as you normally would.

MINION CONVERSION TABLE

Greater Minion CR	Zombies/Skeletons	Ghouls
1/4	1	-
1/2	2	-
1	3	1
2	7	3
3	9	4
4	11	5
5	13	6



ENHANCING MINIONS

Another way to put emphasis on quality over quantity is to improve the capabilities of a single minion. When using this optional rule, you can improve the quality of your undead minion instead of creating more minions, when you cast *animate dead* at higher levels.

Instead of reanimating three zombies with a 4th-level spell slot, you could instead have a single zombie that is faster and stronger than normal zombies. For each additional zombie or skeleton you could've reanimated, you can choose two features from the list below and apply it to the undead minion you've reanimated.

BONESPIKED

Sharp bones envelop your undead minion like an exoskeleton. Your undead minion gains a +1 bonus to its AC and any creature grappling or grappled by it takes (1d6) piercing damage at the start of each of its turn.

You can select this feature up to three times, increasing the bonus to AC by 1 and the damage by 1d6 each time after the first.

DAMAGE RESISTANCES

Choose two of the following damage types: acid, cold, fire, force, lightning, necrotic, psychic, or thunder. Your undead minion has resistance to those types of damage. You can select this feature multiple times, choosing two different damage types each time.



FRIGHTFUL PRESENCE

Your undead minion gains the following action.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the undead minion's choice that is within 30 feet of the undead minion and aware of it must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the undead minion's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

You can select this feature up to five times, increasing the DC by 1 and the range by 10 feet each time after the first.

IMPROVED CONSTITUTION

Your undead minion's Constitution score increases by 4 and it gains 1 additional Hit Dice. You can select this feature up to two times.

IMPROVED DEXTERITY

Your undead minion's Dexterity score increases by 4 and its move speed increases by 10 feet. You can select this feature up to two times.

IMPROVED STRENGTH

Your undead minion's Strength score increases by 4 and its melee attacks deals an additional dice of damage. You can select this feature up to two times.

MAGIC RESISTANCE

Your undead minion has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

PHYSICAL RESISTANCE

Your undead minion has resistance to bludgeoning, piercing and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons.

PLAGUEBELCHER

Your undead minion gains the following action.

Plaguebelch (Recharge 5-6). The undead minion exhales poisonous gas in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

You can select this feature up to five times, increasing the DC by 1 and the damage dice by 2d6 each time after the first.

PROFICIENT

Your undead minion gains proficiency in one saving throw and two skills of your choice. You can select this feat multiple times, choosing two different skills and a different saving throw each time.