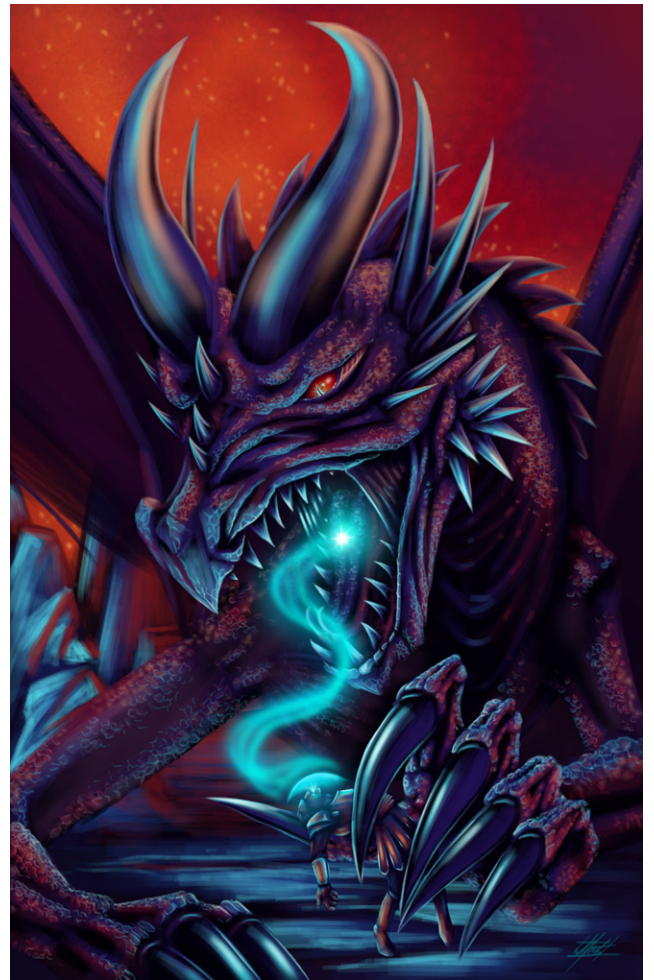


# VILLAIN SPOTLIGHT

## SYNDRATHRAX

**T**HE AVARICE OF DRAGONS IS LEGEND-ary. While most lust after gold, gems, or relics, others develop rarefied tastes as they age, focusing on particular objects like paintings, statues, artifacts from a particular culture or era, or powerful magic weapons. Some dragons take their avarice even further, acquiring collections of exotic creatures or individuals of note. The ancient red Syndrathrax has taken this penchant to a horrifying extreme: to those unlucky enough to be burdened with the truth of her existence, she is known as the Soul Hoarder, and as her moniker suggests she has a predilection for collecting the souls of mortals.



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## BACKGROUND

Like many of her kind Syndrathrax possesses a propensity for magic, manifesting for her in early adolescence as a powerful gift for necromancy. She initially pursued the material wealth that most dragons covet but over her first two centuries she also sought ever greater forbidden knowledge, quickly graduating to rarified works, seeking out the collections of master necromancers, the folios of aspiring liches, and the musings of extraplanar undead entities from beyond space.

The dragon's true obsession manifested when Syndrathrax and her growing network of minions ferreted out and slaughtered a hidden order of monks guarding a trove of dangerous relics and vile lore. Among the spellbooks and other magic items she discovered a quintet of perfect black sapphires containing the souls of a cabal of necromancers slain by the lich they had served in the hopes of wresting the secrets of immortality. This new acquisition captivated her and quickly became her prized position.

After years of study, the dragon mastered communicating with the souls trapped in the gems and took their knowledge from them. Hungry for more, she then located their lich master and destroyed him, taking his tomes of lore, reams of ancient secrets, and even his phylactery for her own. Though she was entirely uninterested in undeath, the power to bind, command, and otherwise manipulate souls absolutely captivated Syndrathrax. She spent decades hunting other liches to add their prowess to her own, eventually using the expertise that she gained to achieve what she desired—the power to control and bind souls.

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She began adding souls to her collection, identifying, killing, and trapping those that intrigued or interested her. While each acquisition brought her great pleasure she was unsatisfied with her limited ability to draw memories and experience from her knew treasures. Syndrathrax used the stolen lore to develop a means to take these souls into herself, using powerful necromantic rituals of her own devising to transform her body into a phylactery of sorts. In the beginning she could only hold a single soul inside herself for a brief period of time, but the act of confining life in its purest form was both profound and intoxicating, driving her to greater and greater heights. Over centuries she refined her technique, permeating herself with necromantic energy and transforming herself physically, spiritually, and mentally in the process.

## APPEARANCE

While technically an ancient red dragon, Syndrathrax's necromantic transformations and attempted apotheoses have forever altered her. Though she shares the massive size of her fellow red wyrms she is gaunt and skeletal, and her scales sapped of their red luster and now bone white. Thanks to the necromantic energy that permeates her body she radiates a faint spectral glow that she can mask when she chooses—the souls of those that she has swallowed are sometimes seen struggling vainly to escape in this light.

## PERSONALITY

Even by the standards of her duplicitous kind, Syndrathrax is a master manipulator. Her communion with so many mortal souls has given her astounding insights into their psyches, instilling her with surprising degree of concern, respect and, in her own way, empathy for lesser beings. She would never allow such sentiments to stand in the way of her plans however, given that she still shares the legendary arrogance of her kin. While she possesses the prideful narcissism of dragonkind, her nuanced understanding of other beings has broken

her of the staggering overconfidence of many of her kind. Syndrathrax has seen into the hearts of enough heroes to know what they are capable of so she rarely underestimates a threat, a failing that has doomed many other dragons.

## ACTIVITIES

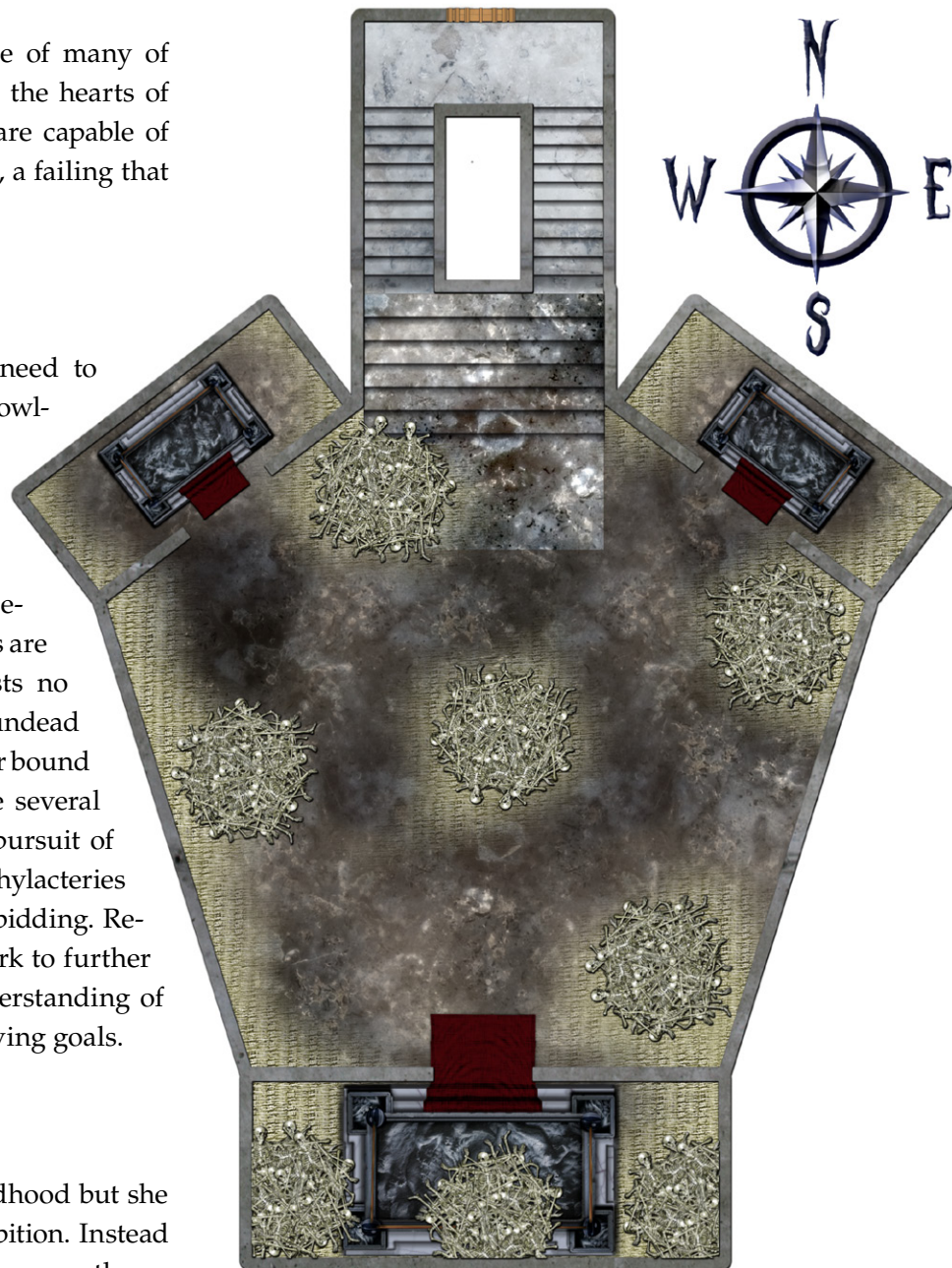
Syndrathrax is still driven by the need to acquire souls and necromantic knowledge relating to their manipulation, utilizing an extensive network of agents, spies, and minions she's acquired to aid her. Some are mages eager to gain a glimpse at the many secret works that she keeps while others are conventional criminals with interests no further than coin, and more still are undead beings that Syndrathrax has created or bound to her will. Chief amongst these are several liches that she overpowered in her pursuit of necromantic lore, holding their phylacteries hostage and forcing them to do her bidding. Regardless of their natures, they all work to further her ends, often with little or no understanding of her monstrous nature and her horrifying goals.

## MOTIVATIONS

Long ago Syndrathrax aspired to godhood but she now views deification as a petty ambition. Instead she envisions a time when she has become the repository of all souls, supplanting the Outer Planes and transforming herself into a hellish netherrealm where all mortal beings are ultimately trapped. Whether or not this is possible cannot be said but she pursues her goal with the brilliance, ferocity, and ruthlessness only an ancient red dragon is capable of.

## LAIR

Syndrathrax prefers to lair in the ruins of great mortal civilizations, preferably in defaced and



desecrated temples devoted to gods of the dead. Inevitably the bones of her victims cover the floors of the primary chamber and congeal in great osseous dunes where she conceals herself in the rare event that such a thing should be necessary. Using her significant magical prowess, she sometimes creates skeletal or undead minions left buried until she has need of them. Her hoard is typically stored where the altar was positioned, sometimes hidden away inside of it.



Syndrathrax, the Soul Hoarder

Gargantuan dragon, neutral evil

Armor Class 23 (natural armor)

Hit Points 647 (35d20+280)

Speed 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

| STR     | DEX     | CON     | INT     | WIS     | CHA     |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 28 (+9) | 14 (+2) | 26 (+8) | 22 (+6) | 15 (+2) | 20 (+5) |

Skills Arcana +14, Deception +13, Insight +10, History +14, Perception +18, Stealth +10

Damage Resistances cold, radiant

Damage Immunities fire, necrotic, bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Senses darkvision 120 ft., truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 28

Languages Common, Draconic, any number of mortal languages

Challenge 27 (105,000)

**Consume Soul.** Syndrathrax can use a bonus action to drain the essence from one of the souls within her. Draining the soul in this way destroys it utterly, after which only a carefully worded wish or the direct intervention of a deity can restore it. Using the energy gained in this way, Syndrathrax either immediately regains 70 hit points and ends any blindness, deafness, and any diseases affecting her, she restores a spell slot of up to 5th level, or she automatically recharges her soulfire breath. Given that this ability destroys one of her most cherished possessions however, Syndrathrax typically only uses it under the direst circumstances, such as to avoid her imminent death.

**Legendary Resistance (3/day).** If Syndrathrax fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

**Magic Resistance.** Syndrathrax has advantage on saving throws against magical effects and spells.

**Spellcasting.** Syndrathrax is a 17th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 22, +14 to hit with spell attacks). Syndrathrax has the following spells prepared:

- Cantrips (at will):** *chill touch, mage hand, mending*  
**1st level (4 slots):** *comprehend languages, detect magic, false life, feather fall*  
**2nd level (3 slots):** *blindness/deafness, invisibility, misty step, ray of enfeeblement*  
**3rd level (3 slots):** *animate dead, counterspell, dispel magic, nondetection*

- 4th level (3 slots):** *black tentacles, blight*  
**5th level (2 slots):** *telekinesis, teleportation circle*  
**6th level (1 slot):** *circle of death, disintegrate*  
**7th level (1 slot):** *finger of death, teleport*  
**8th level (1 slot):** *feeblemind, mind blank*  
**9th level (1 slot):** *shapechange, time stop*

**Soul Reservoir.** Syndrathrax has transformed herself into a receptacle of necromantic and spiritual energy, able to trap and hold the souls of mortal beings within herself. She can hold up to 5 souls, though she constantly seeks to expand her capacity. While holding a soul in, Syndrathrax can access its knowledge and experience its memories as she chooses, a sensation that she relishes the way that a mortal might a fine wine. A trapped soul is aware of itself and fellow captives, and it can communicate with Syndrathrax and other trapped souls. Syndrathrax can also grant a trapped soul awareness beyond the netherrealm within her and the ability to communicate with beings outside, causing its likeness to appear in the spectral radiance that suffuses her.

ACTIONS

- Multiattack.** Syndrathrax can use Frightful Presence. She then makes three attacks: one with her bite and two with her claws.
- Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +17 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (2d10+9) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage and 14 (4d6) necrotic damage.
- Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +17 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d6+9) slashing damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage.
- Tail.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +17 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d8+9) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage.
- Frightful Presence.** Each creature of Syndrathrax's choice that is within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of her must succeed on a DC 21 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 Syndrathrax's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.
- Soulfire Breath (Recharge 5–6).** The dragon exhales fire in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in that area must

make a DC 24 Dexterity saving throw, taking 91 (26d6) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

#### REACTIONS

**Swallow Soul.** When a creature is reduced to 0 hit points within 60 feet of Syndrathrax, she can use her reaction to swallow its soul. A creature whose soul is swallowed in such a fashion is instantly slain and its soul is drawn into her soul reservoir where it remains until she chooses to release it or place it into a specially prepared soul gem. Syndrathrax is not limited to absorbing the recently deceased and can also use this ability to swallow other unbound souls within 60 feet of her. This allows her to draw souls from nearby receptacles (such as a phylactery, of which she has 4–6) or (at the GM's discretion) any other soul bereft of a body.

#### LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Syndrathrax can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Syndrathrax regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

- **Cast Spell (costs 1 to 3 actions).** Syndrathrax casts a spell of up to 3rd level. Each spell level costs 1 legendary action.
- **Consume Soul (costs 1 action).** Syndrathrax uses Consume Soul.
- **Tail Sweep (costs 1 action).** Syndrathrax makes a tail attack.

#### LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing all initiative ties), Syndrathrax can use one of her lair action options. She can't do so while incapacitated or otherwise unable to take actions. If surprised, she can't use one until after her first turn in the combat.

- **Spawn Undead.** Syndrathrax wills the ambient necromantic energies to spawn 4 skeletons or 1 shade under her control. These undead act immediately and then again on her initiative. Creatures spawned this way last until destroyed.
- **Miasma of the Grave.** A miasma of necromantic energy flows out of the ground, forming a 20-foot-radius cloud from a point that Syndrathrax can see or sense.

### Using Syndrathrax in Your Campaign

Syndrathrax is an immensely powerful foe that works best as the mastermind and ultimate antagonist for a lengthy plot arc or even an entire campaign. She is ancient, vastly wealthy, and has an extensive network of servants, spies, assassins, and, in some cases, worshipers. Using these minions as pawns she constantly plots and schemes to acquire necromantic lore or locate and the souls of particular mortals, all in pursuit of her ultimate goal: eclipsing the afterlife of the multiverse. These schemes can easily draw in a party of adventurers. Perhaps a trusted ally, friend, or family member disappears, putting the party on the trail of a vast conspiracy with her at its heart. Alternatively, perhaps Syndrathrax believes that the party themselves may be a worthy acquisition but wishes to test them first by dragging them through a series of adventures of her own design!

Syndrathrax also has abilities that make her particularly dangerous in a direct confrontation. Consider allowing your players the means to overcome or disable some of her more powerful abilities through adventures. The party may need to discover the means to prevent Syndrathrax from using Swallow Soul against them, either by acquiring a potent magic item or spell or by earning the blessing of a particular god (or other benevolent and powerful supernatural creature). Adventurers might be made to race to uncover and acquire the means to prevent her from accessing her Soul Reservoir before her own minions can destroy it, thus denying Syndrathrax the use of Consume Soul.

GMs that wish to use Syndrathrax as a more conventional foe should consider reducing the effect of the healing component of Devour Soul, changing it to only heal 18 (3d8+2) hit points instead.

A creature beginning its turn in the cloud must succeed on a DC 21 Constitution save or take 18 (5d6) necrotic damage and gain one level of exhaustion. The miasma remains until dissipated.

- **Soul Absorption.** Syndrathrax draws forth a soul from one of her specially prepared receptacles and swallows it, increasing her soul reservoir by one. 