

Death Knight

Hit Dice: Change to d12s

Initiative: As base creature +8

Speed: 90

AC: 30

Attacks: As base creature

Damage: As per weapon.

Face/Reach: As base creature

Special Attacks: Fear Aura, Create and Command Undead, Spells, Turn/Destroy Undead, Smite

Special Qualities: Damage Reduction 30/+5 Holy, Spell Turning, Spell Resistance, Undead qualities, Feats, Turning Immunity, Unholy Blight

Saves: As base creature

Skills: As base, with Intimidate +20

Abilities: As base creature, with the following adjustments: Str +10, Int +5, Wis +5, Cha +5, Con -, Dex +5

Skills: As base creature

Feats: As base creature

Climate/Terrain: Any

Organization: Solitary or Troupe (see text)

Challenge Rating: As base creature +20

Treasure: As carried by creature

Alignment: Always evil

Advancement: By character class

The death knight - and there are only twelve of these dreadful creatures known to exist - is a horrifying form of lich created by a demon prince (it is thought Demogorgon) from a fallen human paladin.

A death knight appears much as it did in life. Its body is in a state of mild decay, much like that of a wight or similar un-dead; there is the obvious stench of death around him, and the uneasy chill of un-life pours out of his armor at every crevasse.

Death knights speak the same languages they did in life, in addition to their alignment tongue and 3 to 6 others (d3 x 2), usually Abyssal, Infernal, and the alignment tongue of the diametrically opposed alignment.

Armor: Death knights can be found wearing any variety of armor, but they are always treated as having armor



class 30, regardless of the actual armor worn. They still garner the benefits of any special qualities of the armor (glamered, etc) despite the loss of armor bonus. They do gain armor bonus from the use of a shield.

Attacks and Damage: The death knight is almost always found fighting with a martial weapon, given that they were usually created from fallen paladins.

The sword of a death knight depends on the deity and cleric responsible for its creation; but all are artifact weapons. A typical death knight's sword performs as a +5 Keen Vorpal sword of Speed, with the following additional abilities:

- *life drinking.* Upon scoring a successful hit, the victim must make a Fort save equal to 10+ the death knight's hit dice or permanently lose 5 levels of experience. These levels can be regained only through the use of a Wish or Miracle, or by slaying the death knight that inflicted them, **and** destroying his sword.
- *Negation.* Any magic item (excepting artifacts) struck by the death knight's sword must make a Fort save at 10 + the death knight's hit dice. Failure means that the item is permanently drained of all charges and enchantments, becoming non-magical. This drain is permanent and irreversible.

(This is not automatic; the death knight can turn the ability on and off at will, though the times when they don't use it will be extremely rare.)

- **Sundering.** When used to sunder another weapon, the death knight's sword gains a +10 bonus in the sundering attempt. On a sunder attempt, he may sunder or suppress the magical effect for a number of rounds equal to his hit dice, at his option.

The actual type of the sword (longsword, greatsword, etc) would depend on the creature's preferences and abilities before being turned, as well as on the deity creating the death knight. Any good creature handing a death knight's sword must make a will save equal to 10 + the original owning death knight's hit dice, or be killed, instantly. Presuming the save is made, the wielder must make another save at DC 30; failure means the wielder's alignment is instantly turned to neutral evil, and they are immediately transported to the location of the death knight's original creator, to take his place at their side (*NO SAVE*). If they make this save, then they are fine, but the weapon functions as a non-magical sword, and will actually take every opportunity to escape its captor to a new, evil owner.

Though the death knight can theoretically carry any weapon, this is very typical of their weapon choices, and the death knight always prefers melee attacks when spells are not possible. They will not use ranged weapons, preferring their spells when at range.

Fear Aura (ex): A death knight constantly emits a Fear effect in a 50' radius around him, as per the Fear spell cast by a 20th level caster.

Command and Create Undead (ex): The death knight can cast *Animate Dead*, as a free action; and the death knight can use *Create Undead* five times per day, and *Create Greater Undead* twice per day, as a 20th level cleric (incorporeal undead only!). The death knight can also control undead as an evil cleric whose level is equal to his hit dice. Lesser undead are often attracted to the power of a death knight, and so the death knight can often

be found at the head of undead legions, or at the end of some great citadel over-run with the living dead.

Spells (su): In addition to retaining any spell-casting ability that the creature had in life, a Death Knight can cast any spell from the Necromancy, Abjuration and Conjuraction schools, up to 3rd level, once per round, as a cleric. Further, the death knight has the following additional supernatural abilities:

- **At Will:** Wall of Ice, Wall of Stone, Passwall, Dominate Person, Dispel Magic, Magic Circle Against Good/Neutral, Wind Wall, Gaseous Form, Haste, Color Spray, Detect Thoughts, Darkness, Shatter, Blindness/Deafness, Silence, Levitate, Invisibility Purge, Bestow Curse, Cloudkill, True Seeing, Power Word – *Stun*, Power Word – *Blind*
- **Thrice Per Day:** Dimensional Anchor, Minor Globe of Invulnerability, Arcane Eye, Contact Other Plane, Bigby's Interposing Hand, False Vision, Magic Jar (*sword is treated as a pre-prepared jar*), Greater Dispelling, Planar Binding, Circle of Death, Disintegrate, Delayed Blast Fireball (maximized as per the Maximize Spell metamagic feat)
- **Once Per Day:** Insanity, Prismatic Spray, Shadow Walk, Finger of Death, Ethereal Jaunt, Plane Shift, Reverse Gravity, Discern Location, Trap the Soul (*treat sword as pre-prepared gem*), Harm, Time Stop
- **Once Per Week:** Wail of the Banshee

All innate supernatural abilities listed in this category are at the 20th divine caster level (disregard any rulings about some spells being unavailable to divine casters; death knights get their spellcasting ability directly from the deities that created them, and there is no distinction between types of magic at such a high level).

Gate: A death knight can open a gate to the Abyss, and call forth demons to his assistance. Twice per day he can summon a Balor with a 20% chance of success, or a Marilith with a 35% chance of success, or two Nalfeshnee's with a 50%

chance of success. He can summon any demons of CR 13 or less with 0 chance of failure, though he may still only do it twice per day.

Spell Turning/Resistance (ex): The death knight has spell resistance equal to 20 + hit dice. Furthermore, any spell cast at a Death Knight has a 50% chance of being reflected directly back at the caster, even if the spell penetration check succeeds.

Undead Qualities: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

Turning Immunity: Death Knights CAN NOT be turned, period. Not even a deity can turn a death knight; only a demon or devil more powerful than the death knight's creator may subjugate the will of the death knight. All others must destroy it or learn to live with it (e.g. : die).

Turn/Destroy Undead: A Death Knight may control/destroy undead as a cleric whose level is equal to his hit dice.

Smite: A Death Knight may smite opposing alignments as a cleric whose level equals the Death Knight's hit dice.

Unholy Blight: The death knight's existence is so unnatural, so unholy, that the very earth itself cannot stand their presence, and their unholy aura is felt long before – and long after – they have come and gone. Within one mile of a death knight, water becomes tepid and unsafe for drinking (random chance for contraction of disease if it is drank); green plants (including mistletoe) wither and die, or are diseased and die slowly, writhing and twisting themselves over years into horrifying masses of dead plant matter; animals will fall silent at their approach, some fleeing, some preferring to hide until the death knight has passed ; children are plagued by nightmares; babies are miscarried or born deformed (50% chance for either, check once per pregnancy); cows and goats will give sour milk; chickens cease to lay eggs; the nights grow longer and the days grow shorter until it seems like the night lasts forever (a psychological effect of the death knight's presence weighting heavily in the night); etc. The very presence of a death knight's evil can be enough to destroy small towns

(and its effects are one of the only signs that betray a death knight's presence!). Some death knights have learned to control these effects by a combination of powerful spells granted them by their deity that create illusions and limit the range of the death knight's presence; still others prefer to have their disaster proceed ahead of them.

Feats: The death knight gains the benefit of the following feats, regardless of their ability to meet the requirements, or what their profession was in life: *Power Attack, Cleave, Great Cleave, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Maximize Spell, Lengthen Spell, Heighten Spell, Quicken Spell, Silent Spell, Still Spell, Toughness, Dragon's Toughness, Giant's Toughness, Track, Ambidexterity, Two Weapon Fighting, Improved Two Weapon Fighting, Quick Draw, Unarmed Combat, Great Smiting, Improved Metamagic, Improved Critical (with sword), Overwhelming Critical*


Abilities: When the nether powers create a death knight, if the bonuses to their abilities would not raise their abilities to those listed below, the power creating the death knight will grant them these ability scores:

Str 30, Int 20, Wis 20, Con -, Cha 20, Dex 20

The Tragedy of the Death Knight

All death knights were, at one point, human Paladins of extremely high level. All are of the highest value to their deity and their liege lord; but all it takes is one slip, one fumble of faith, for the dark powers to sink their claws in. And once they do, turning back is difficult if not impossible.

Death Knights retain all memory of their past lives, unless the power creating the knight chooses to wipe it clean. This results in huge emotional turmoil for the first hundred or so years of a death knight's existence. This is used by the powers responsible for his rebirth to exert control over him; to prove that a god so cruel as to give all of that and wrench it from them is not worth serving. That their only true loyalty now lies with their only true family and their only true Lord. Slowly, over time, despite the inner conflict of the death



knight's human conscience, the inner light of all new death knights are snuffed out, leaving only empty, thick, inky blackness. The pain from the process is unbelievably pleasing to those who create death knights, and they do all they can to encourage the suffering of the Death Knight during these periods; this serves to increase their rage, their cruelty, when they finally accept their fate and turn inward, becoming enveloped in their hatred and sorrow.

There is no hope of saving one who has already become a Death Knight. Whether tricked into the ritual with lures of power or forced into it after capture and defeat, the ritual is permanent. Any attempts at resurrection or reincarnation upon a death knight will fail (tho a successful attempt at a True Resurrection would kill the death knight, so long as the knight was physically present at the ritual for the Cleric to lay hands upon). However, during this initial period of turmoil, death knights will often attempt to seek out family and others who might be able to help them; but unaware of their new self, and the dark evil implanted in their breast, they bring only misery and sorrow – and, ultimately, death. Thus they begin to learn that this is their fate. Lord Nerillus, a death knight of Orcus, once remarked to a wayward traveler who had – terrified – crossed his path on the prime material:

I am not Malevolent. I simply Am! I must persist in the face of myself. Thus I march upon my road to hell. I fear not for my soul, for it is already destroyed; I paid my fare to Cheron with my greed and my blasphemy against Almighty God, who has not heard my cries since that fateful day. Now I am bound to my service by my blasphemy; a fate that is impossible to break, but one that I have come to accept. And in the dark shadows of the absence of my savior's forgiveness, I have become a cold, heartless thing. A creature of no remorse, no regret. For if he has no sorrow, no pity for Me, then it is absurd for Me to have it for Them. My new Lord will care for me, and preserve my body unto eternity, tho my soul is long departed. My concern is not for the welfare of my Soul anymore, but for the welfare this twisted, blasphemous mockery of what I once was. This shell which not even my own family would recognize ... Their shrieks still ring in the

ears that I have long since carved and cast from me...

I was wrong. I am Malevolent because I am Miserable. And now you die.