

FEAST OF THE NIGHTWALKER

High up on a deserted altiplano lies a monastery dedicated to the study of the Negative Plane of existence. Residing in the monastery are a group of monks, all of whom have willingly entered into undeath so that they may eternally carry out their duty. Sigils of magical power—which were once used in ancient times to access the Negative Plane and bring forth a nightwalker to torment the world—have been etched into the mountain plateau. Knowledge of the monastery has slipped into myth and legend, with only a few sages and scholars still aware of the scattered tales of its nefarious past.

The question is, who are the monks that dwell in the monastery now? Are they noble guardians of a horrifying secret that must not see the light of day? Or are they evildoers waiting to wield the monastery's terrible power once again?

HISTORY OF THE MONASTERY

Eons ago, Urd, a lich monarch of the Negative Plane, left his crumbling tower and wormed his way onto the Material Plane. His plan was to bring forth a terrible entity known as a nightwalker and wreak havoc on the living. The lich had in his possession an ancient chart of planar motions, which foretold of a cosmic cycle that would bring the Negative Plane, the Shadowfell, and the Material Plane into alignment. From this chart, he knew the time and place where a bridge could be created, and a nightwalker could be summoned.

With the help of his undead minions, the lich built a monastery on a desolate altiplano within the Material Plane. There, he interred his library of arcane knowledge, known as the *Litany of Urd*, etching powerful sigils of necrotic magic into the surrounding earth and rock. This turned the area itself into a potent magical nexus that called to the nightwalker. The monastery became an omphalos, designed to observe celestial patterns and provide the exact time when the bridge from the Negative Plane could be made manifest.

The lich lord was successful. The planes aligned and a nightwalker crossed the shadow bridge, lured by the energy of the living, to be unleashed on the material world. For an age, there was darkness and misery as the nightwalker brought pestilence, famine, and death to the region, but the forces of goodness gathered and struck back, banishing the nightwalker and hunting down the lich lord.

THE MONASTERY TODAY

Centuries have passed, and the nightwalker's reign of terror has slipped into myth. The monastery still stands, as it always has, on a remote mountain plateau observing the ceaseless movement of the stars. It is now cared for by an order of undead monks who call it the Monastery of Shadows. It serves as a stellar observatory and as a school for those interested in the necromantic arts. Within its walls, the monks decode and study the lich lord's ancient library—star charts that show the paths of the planes and manuscripts dedicated to dimensional travel and undeath. When possible, the monks use the monastery's power to transport themselves to the Negative Plane to try and find the lich's lair. They believe if they can unearth further knowledge and clues about the monastery's function, they might discover even greater secrets.

THE LITANY OF URD

Around the Monastery of Shadows, cryptic symbols are etched into the stone. Some of these symbols have been decoded by the monks, while others remain tantalizingly unintelligible. Using the texts they have deciphered, the monks have revealed the secrets of moving through shadows and summoning the nightwalker Malthraxis, who previously wrought chaos on the Material Plane. But there are many more secrets yet to be revealed. Perhaps the secret to controlling Malthraxis awaits discovery, or the symbols will predict the focus of Malthraxis' destruction once it arrives on the Material Plane. The *Litany of Urd* can contain anything a DM wishes it to, and it's a perfect way to kick off another adventure entirely or deepen the mystery of the Monastery of Shadows for many adventures to come.

TWO POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

In this adventure you can choose two possibilities:

- The monks are an evil cabal awaiting the moment the stars to align once again to use the monastery's power for evil.
- The monks are good, protecting the monastery from those who would use its power to summon the nightwalker once again.

SCENARIO 1: CHOOSING EVIL

In this scenario, the monks are all in the service of evil and are waiting with deathless patience for the moment when the veil between the planes grows thin once again. When the time is right, they use the power of the monastery to punch a hole through to the Negative Plane and summon a nightwalker. But the monks need a sacrifice, a soul potent and vital enough to draw the nightwalker's attention. This could be an NPC from a nearby city, town, or village; a sacred creature such as a unicorn, couatl, or ki-rin; an object with a soul trapped in it; or it could be one of the PCs.

Defeating the Evil. If the party is on the weaker side, and the nightwalker is summoned, then it should feel like a catastrophe and everyone should run for the hills. DMs can avoid a TPK (total party kill) by having the nightwalker soar down the starlit mountainside to the valley below to wreak necrotic havoc on a nearby city, giving the adventurers some time to figure out how to stop it. To avoid a disaster, the party must work fast to banish the monster.

Here are a few suggestions of how the nightwalker might be defeated without direct combat:

- Recover the sacrifice or object who was sent into the Negative Plane to summon the nightwalker. This requires that a PC or the party be protected from the annihilating energies of the Negative Plane before they go there (see "Surviving the Negative Plane" below).
- Lure the nightwalker back into the Negative Plane with some creature or object that has a powerful lifeforce.
- Create a MacGuffin (like a helm, necklace, or portal) that, if destroyed, banishes the nightwalker and severs the bridge to the Negative Plane. This MacGuffin is guarded by monsters and evil monks that the party has a chance of defeating.

SCENARIO 2: CHOOSING GOOD

In this scenario, the lich lord (see *History of the Monastery* above) has taken centuries to reform, and is now a tattered, shambling version of his former self, bent on revenge and desperate to get back to his tower on the Negative Plane. Depending on the level of your party, you can have them face a full powered **lich**, or you can use the **archmage** stat block and give it undead immunities and resistances. You can also use the **necromancer** stat block below to make it an undead creature for a very low-powered lich.

Zashtii (if you choose to use her) and some of the other monks in the monastery are among the original fighters who helped stop the lich and the nightwalker centuries ago. Not willing to entrust their task of protecting the monastery to anyone else, they took a vow of undeath that eternally bound them to the monastery and their duty.

When the adventure begins, the stellar alignment is drawing near. The lich lord and his shadow horde are closing in, ready to reclaim the monastery from the monks and either unleash the nightwalker once again to devour the living world or use the planar bridge to return to the lich's tower so he can fully reform. Knowing what they are about to face, Zashtii is eager to accept help from any friendly PCs willing to aid her in their stand against the lich lord.

Just for fun, here are a few other ideas for who the enemy could be:

- A **mummy lord** with a horde of undead minions who wishes to turn the monastery into a mausoleum and rule over the living.
- Deranged former **shadow monks** (see the *Order of Shadows* PDF in *Dragon+ #37*) wish to reclaim the Monastery of Shadows and summon the nightwalker to be worshipped as a god.
- A host of **shadow demons** led by a demonic necromancer (use the **necromancer** stat block below) wish to cause mayhem and destruction.

- A **vampire warrior**, a former member of the monastery who commands vampire spawn, believes that Zashtii should be ousted, and the nightwalker unleashed.

THE NEGATIVE PLANE

Also known as the Plane of Death, the Negative Plane is the source of necrotic energy that destroys the living and animates the undead. Any living thing that enters the plane is instantly torn apart and consumed. Only living beings with the most powerful magic can survive for a short time within its colorless desolation. But the Negative Plane isn't devoid of inhabitants—liches, nightwalkers, death knights, and swaths of undead reside in the swirling decay of its bleak landscape, ready to destroy any who intrude on their deathless vigil.

SURVIVING THE NEGATIVE PLANE

If a party must enter the Negative Plane to rescue a person or steal an object, they must be protected from its annihilating energies. This can be accomplished by a powerful magic item of your invention (such as a ring, potion, or amulet), or by a *wish* spell.

A fun situation to create is to have the party be on a timer. This ticking clock counts down the time before their protection fails and they are exposed to the Negative Plane's necrotic energy.

Another option is to limit the bubble of their protection. Have the magic ring only offer a 15-foot diameter sphere of protection that the whole party must cluster inside of. As the bearer of the protection moves, the party must move with them. Anyone moving out of that sphere takes 36 (8d8) necrotic damage per turn until they are back inside the bubble.

RAMPING IT UP

If you want to make this a higher-level challenge for your players (if they are tough enough to take on a nightwalker), then you can remove the magical MacGuffins that the adventurers can find and use to avoid dealing with the Negative Plane and the nightwalker. Without these aids, the adventurers must have their own magical means to figure out how to banish (or go toe-to-toe with) the nightwalker before it destroys hundreds of villagers in its necrotic rampage. You can always throw a lich into the mix if your adventurers are itching for a real challenge.

For a milder ramp up, doubling monster hit points, adding tougher minions, and giving an NPC a cool magic item (like a +3 sword or an Ioun stone) are among a host of other tricks you can use to increase the punch of your monsters and give your players a challenge.

MONSTERS

All monsters in **bold** have stat blocks that can be found in the *Monster Manual* with the exception of the necromancer, which is included below.

NECROMANCER

Necromancers are specialist wizards who study the interaction of life, death, and undeath. Some like to dig up corpses to create undead slaves. A few use their powers for good, hunting the undead and risking their lives to save others.

NECROMANCER

Medium humanoid (any race)

Armor Class 12 (15 with mage armor)

Hit Points 66 (12d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +7, Wis +5

Skills Arcana +7, History +7

Damage Resistances necrotic

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages any four languages

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +4

Spellcasting. The necromancer is a 12th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). The necromancer has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): chill touch, dancing lights, mage hand, mending

1st level (4 slots): false life, mage armor, ray of sickness

2nd level (3 slots): blindness/deafness, ray of enfeeblement, web

3rd level (3 slots): animate dead, bestow curse, vampiric touch

4th level (3 slots): blight, dimension door, stonework

5th level (2 slots): Bigby's hand, cloudkill

6th level (1 slot): circle of death.

Grim Harvest (1/Turn). When the necromancer kills a creature that is neither a construct nor undead with a spell of 1st level or higher, the necromancer regains hit points equal to twice the spell's level, or three times if it is a necromancy spell.

Actions

Multiattack. The monk makes two Shadow Blade attacks and one Censer attack.

Shadow Blade. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 5 (2d4) necrotic damage.