

THE ORDER OF SHADOWS

The monks that watch over the Monastery of Shadows have undergone a ritual of undeath to become its eternal guardians. Each monk wields a unique weapon, a blade forged exclusively for them, which is imbued with necrotic energy and attached by a length of chain to a censer. The blade represents their new soul, which replaces the one sacrificed to the order. Both the blade and the censer serve as ritual objects in their religious ceremonies, but they are also effective and deadly weapons. The blade can inflict painful, festering wounds and the censer not only affects the mind with its intoxicating smoke, but can also lash out and crush bone.

ITEMS

There are many secrets within the Monastery of Shadows that the monks use to their advantage. Yet during their tireless pacing throughout the structure, it is their blade and censer that never leave their side.

SMOKE CENSER

The smoke from the censer that a monk uses is a special blend of olfactory allure and mind-altering substances. Being undead, neither are of any consequence or concern to the monks. But any living creature that inhales the censer's fumes has the possibility of being transported to a psychological dimension beyond normal understanding. Inhaling this smoke causes a variety of reactions—from confusion and terror to elation and euphoria. Some monks are known to interpret the reactions as cryptic messages from the Negative Plane.

SHADOW BLADE

A monk's shadow blade is a ritual object sacred to them. These blades are forged within the monastery using special ore mined on the plateau. Each blade is given a name and is chanted over while undergoing the annealing process that seals the monk's soul within it. Further incantations from the *Litany of Urd* imbue the blade with necromantic power that is activated when its name is spoken aloud. A cut from a shadow blade is no normal thing. Even though the wound knits, the chilling ache of it can linger on for months or years.



THE LITANY OF URD AND MALTHRAXIS

The monks are aware of the nightwalker, Malthrax, and its connection to the Monastery of Shadows. Whether the monks revere or revile Malthrax, they understand it is essentially a cosmic force to be respected and have found ways to protect themselves and their monastery should Malthrax desire their destruction.

By inscribing certain fragments of the Litany of Urd on their blades, they have created a potential way to banish Malthrax. If enough of the monks gather together and use their blades to chant the Litany of Urd, they can send Malthrax back through the portal. But this practice has never been tested and the monks hope that day never comes.

USING THE MONKS IN YOUR GAME

Although they are written here as an order of monks dedicated to a specific monastery and leader, a DM can use these shadowy, undead zealots in any way they wish. The monks might be led by a powerful necromancer, a mummy lord, or an elder god that speaks through an onyx sphere in a mountain temple. Here are a few ideas for how these monks can show up in your game:

RETURN OF THE MASTER

The monks have cowed a town into submission, and no one dare speak out against their edicts. Many of the townsfolk and even the mayor's own daughter has either been kidnapped or brainwashed and rumor has it that they are being prepared for some mass ritual of undeath to replenish their ranks.

As the adventurers get involved, there is an interesting turn of events. On meeting their foes, the monks rejoice. Apparently, they believe one of the adventurers is their reincarnated master who they have waited centuries for. They begin preparations at their monastery for an even bigger festival to prepare the PC to undergo the Ritual of Becoming—a process where the character's life force is bound into the body of a nightwalker—the greatest of honors among the shadow monks.

EXPEDITION INTO NIGHT

A powerful creature of undeath has captured a celestial being—such as a unicorn, couatl, or ki-rin—and has taken them into the Negative Plane of existence to undergo a foul ritual that drains their life force and leaves them a corrupt and twisted monstrosity. The characters are approached by a holy cleric who pleads with them to help return the creature to their order and back to the Celestial Realm from where they originated.

If they accept the quest, the holy cleric leads them to a death domain cleric, who then leads them to the Monastery of Shadows and its deathless host of

monks—experts of the Negative Plane. Although they are undead, the monks are not evil and are able to act as guides within the ghastly domain. The monks can provide information that can lead to a portal to the Negative Plane, and they might also provide a special potion that when consumed can withstand the life draining effects of the Negative Plane for 24 hours. One of them might also be persuaded to act as a guide. The monks know this undead creature and they are aware of the foul ritual that is about to take place.

SHADOW MONK

Medium undead

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 91 (14d8 + 28)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Int +5

Skills Perception +9, Stealth +12

Damage Vulnerabilities radiant

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 19

Languages understands the languages it knew in life but can't speak

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

Sunlight Weakness. While in sunlight, the monk has disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws.

Shadow Stealth. While in dim light or darkness, the monk can take the Hide action as a bonus action.

Ritual Smoke. Any creature within 10 feet of the shadow monk must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw to avoid inhaling the smoke. On a failed save, they are poisoned for 1d4 turns and see bewildering visions unless the condition can be removed. Creatures immune to the poisoned condition are immune to this mind-altering effect.

Actions

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

Shadow Blade. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) necrotic damage. Unless the target is immune to necrotic damage, the target's Strength score is reduced by 1d4 each time it is hit by this attack. The target dies if its Strength is reduced to 0. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a short or long rest. If a non-evil humanoid dies from this attack, a shadow (see the Monster Manual) rises from the corpse 1d4 hours later.

Censer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 14 (3d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.