

5e

# RUNEBLADES



52-IN-52

Owen K.C. Stephens

5e Compatible

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# RUNEBLADES

*“Hither came Krona, the Merciless Night and Midnight Serpent, from the drowned lands of Dom’daiel now long lost to memory. At her hip swung Shadowclaw, the soul-drinker, a blade older than the knowledge of humanity. None could say which controlled the other, but all who faced them perished.”*

*—From the “Book of Ungol”*

Runeblades are among the most powerful weapons ever forged by mortals, though the secret of their construction is nearly lost. They are empowered by ancient true runes, sigils of ineffable power that have defined the nature of reality since long before any language or society existed to try to understand them. A character may find a runeblade linked to their destiny early in their career, even have said weapon be the cause of the circumstance that makes them

The existence of runeblades is well understood by scholars and sages, but their true nature is not. They are generally considered little more than unusually powerful magic items, perhaps on the scale with lost relics and ancient artifacts. In truth runeblades are more than that in one crucial aspect. Unlike other powerful rune-empowered weapons (such as the Sword of Kings, or Soul Swords), runeblades don’t just use runes, they attempt to alter them.

Each runeblade has a themed name that represents the runes that it primarily draws power from, but also has a purpose. Each purpose is a function the runeblade tries to carry out or create. The weapons are not intelligent (as most people understand that term), but instead their very nature causes them to try to alter the universe around them. This is a result of each runeblade being a warp in the fabric of runes, a lens that twists and bends the reality around it to match its own runic existence. While runeblades are not normally sentient or sapient, they do have a drive of PURPOSE, which their innate nature attempts to enforce on both their wielder’s actions, and the universe around them.

To create a runeblade you create the name first, then add a purpose. Each runeblade has an effective level, though how that is determined varies based on how the GM decided to add runeblades to a campaign (see Runeblade character Options, near the end of this product).

## RUNEBLADE NAMES

*Gythus tore a chunk of bread off the loaf with his teeth, but kept his eyes locked on the pulsating darkness at his companion’s hip. Even in the reflection of his eyes, light by the campfire, that sword was a spindle of total darkness.*

*“If it’s so ancient, why is called Shadowclaw? Did its makers think to foresee what language we would use today?”*

*One corner of Krona’s mouth quirked upward slightly, but it would be too generous to call the expression a smile.*

*“If Shadowclaw was made by creatures capable of what we would recognize as thought, they certainly did not spare any for us or our language. But you are asking the wrong question. It is not, why does this ancient weapon carry a name we recognize in our tongue. It’s why did Shadowclaw and its fellow runeblades mold our language to match its name?”*

*“And even if we knew the answer to that question, I doubt we would like it.”*

*—From the “Book of Ungol”*

Each runeblade has a name, which is the best-possible translation of its runic existence into a common tongue. In any language the name is at best an approximation of the true moniker of a runeblade, but anyone touching it (including those struck by it) know the closest their native language can get to its true name.

Runeblade names (and thus themes and secondary powers) are drawn from either iconic names representing emblems (runic symbols to be admired and emulated, often seen as positive or intimidating traits) or foes (things to be fears and killed, with names designed to suggest the foes are doomed in the in the presence of the runeblade). Whether a runeblade is built around an emblem name or a foe name, the steps for building one are the same. You can roll randomly (roll 1d20, 1-10 emblem name, 11-20 for foe name), or just decide if you want a given runeblade to be representation and inspirational, or dreadful and threatening.

Once you know if the weapon has an emblem name or foe name, you determine a prefix and suffix, which define the runeblade’s final name,

# RUNEBLADES

and 2/3 of the runeblade's minor, moderate, and major powers. As a GM you can just select these, or determine each element randomly by rolling 1d6 and consulting the appropriate table. If you are a player who had the GM's permission to begin play with a runeblade as one of the Runeblade Character Options (see that section, toward the end of this product) you should propose what runeblade name and themes you would like to have as part of your character (but ultimately, the GM has final say over what runeblades are allowed into a campaign).

Once you have the runeblade's name, 2/3 of its powers are set. While the powers of each name element are set and based on the meaning of that part of the name, you can alter the actual name to match your vision of the runeblade. Each prefix and suffix has a number of suggested alternatives listed in parenthesis after the main name element (and if you wish to be truly random, you can roll 1d4 to determine which of the 4 listed name elements you use). You can also replace name elements with elements that make more sense for your campaign – if dragons are extremely rare but naga are common, having *Nagasong* as a runeblade makes more sense than *Dragonsong*.

With any suffix, you may wish to make the name two words, or even place a possessive 's on the prefix. Thus you can have the foe runeblade name *Dragondoom*, *Dragon Doom*, or *Dragon's Doom*. The same is true of the alternate prefixes and suffixes. That same weapon could be *Drakebane*, *Sphinx's End*, *Wyrms Fall*, or any combination of those elements.

Any name element powers that allow a saving throw have a DC of 10 + 1/5th runeblade's effective level + the runeblade's bonus to attack rolls. Any that needs a caster level or effect level uses the runeblade's effective level unless it says otherwise. Any spell granted by the runeblade uses the runeblade's bonus to attack rolls as its spellcasting ability score modifier unless it says otherwise.

## EMBLEM NAME PREFIXES

EMBLEM NAME PREFIXES		
1	Dragon	drake, sphinx, wyrm
2	God	angel, demon, devil
3	Pyre	ash, fire, flame
4	Shadow	nightmare, secret, shade
5	Tide	lake, sea, water
6	Twilight	black, dark, night

## 1. DRAGON (DRAKE, SPHINX, WYRM) POWERS

*Minor:* Select one energy damage type (acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder). When you attack with the runeblade, you can choose for half of its damage to become this energy type.

*Moderate:* You gain a breath weapon of the same energy type as for the runeblade's minor power. Choose for it to be a 30-foot-cone, or a 60-foot-line. It does 1d6 damage per 3 effective levels of the runeblade, and allows a Dexterity saving for half damage. Once you have used this ability, you cannot do so again for one hour.

*Major:* Select one of the following benefits. Once this choice is made, it cannot be changed until you gain a new character level.

*Tail:* You gain a tail. It has 10-foot reach, and can be used to make attacks with damage of 1d4 per 5 effective levels of the runeblade (minimum 1d4).

*Wings:* You gain a 30-foot flight speed.

## 2. GOD (ANGEL, DEMON, DEVIL) POWERS

*Minor* – Select two cantrips from the cleric spell list. You may cast these at will.

*Moderate* – Select two spells from the cleric spell list that have a spell level no greater than 1/4 the runeblade's effective level and do not have a range of self. You can cast these spells a total of twice per day (each spell once, or one spell twice). You can change the selected spells whenever you gain a level, or the runeblade gains an effective level.

*Major* – Select a spell from the cleric spell list that has a spell level no greater than 1/2 the runeblade's effective level and does not have a range of self. You can cast this spell once each day.

## 3. PYRE (ASH, FIRE, FLAME) POWERS

*Minor:* You can choose for anything you damage with the runeblade to take 1d4 fire damage the following round. Nothing takes this damage more than once per round. This lights easily ignitable materials.

*Moderate:* The runeblade does and additional 1d6 fire damage to any target it damages.



*Major:* You may choose to have anything you reduce to 0 or fewer hit points with the runeblade (including things that have already been killed or broken but still have a physical form, such as a corpse) that is flammable to turn to ash and blow away, as if destroyed by a *disintegrate* spell.

## 4. SHADOW (NIGHTMARE, SECRET, SHADE)

### POWERS

*Minor:* Once per day you have advantage on all Dexterity (Stealth) checks you make for one minute.

*Moderate:* You can a constant *nondetection* spell.

*Major:* You can cast *dimension door* as a bonus action three times per day. Both your starting point and your destination must be in dim light or darkness, and the maximum range is 50 feet.

## 5. TIDE (LAKE, SEA, WATER)

### POWERS

*Minor:* You gain a swimming speed of 20 feet, and attacks with the runeblade are not at disadvantage underwater.

*Moderate:* You can breathe water and air, both. Your swim speed increases to 60 feet.

*Major:* You gain advantage on attack rolls if you want your target are both in contact with water.

## 6. TWILIGHT (BLACK, DARK, NIGHT)

### POWERS

*Minor:* You gain darkvision with a range of 60 feet. If you already had darkvision, add 60 feet to its range.

*Moderate:* You can cast *darkness* five times per day. It can dispel any light spell of a spell level equal to half the runeblade's effective level or less.

*Major:* Your attacks have advantage if both you and your target are in darkness.

## FOE NAME PREFIXES

FOE NAME PREFIXES		
1	Dragon	foe, horror, monster
2	God	angel, archon, demon, devil
3	Giant	king, hero, titan
4	Mage	curse, hexer, sorcery
5	Shadow	night, secret, thief
6	Sword	axe, claw, weapon

## 1. DRAGON (FOE, HORROR, MONSTER)

### POWERS

*Minor:* The first time each day you take acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage, you gain resistance to that energy type for the rest of the day. This applies to the damage that triggers this ability.

*Moderate:* The runeblade gains advantage on attacks against dragons, grants advantage to saving throws against effects created by dragons and creatures that have dragon or draconic in the name of their species, background, or any class features (such as draconic bloodline sorcerers).

If the GM uses this name element to represent some other type of creature, this benefit can apply to creatures of that type and spellcasters linked to those creatures.

*Major:* The runeblade does +2d10 extra damage against the creatures its moderate powers work on, and it grants resistance to attacks from such creatures.

## 2. GOD (ANGEL, DEMON, DEVIL)

### POWERS

*Minor:* You gain the benefits of *protection from evil and good*.

*Moderate:* As a bonus action you can choose to extend your minor benefit to all allies within 20 feet of you. They last for one minute.

*Major:* You can cast *banishment* once per day. It has a spell level equal to half the runeblade's effective level.

## 3. GIANT (KING, HERO, TITAN)

### POWERS

*Minor:* You can cast *enlarge* on yourself as a bonus action once per day.

*Moderate:* You can cast *reduce* on any creature larger than yourself once an hour.

*Major:* Every time you damage a target with your runeblade, you can also target it with a *ray of enfeeblement* as a bonus action.

## 4. MAGE (CURSE, HEXER, SORCERY)

### POWERS

*Minor:* One a day, you can gain advantage on one saving throw.

*Moderate:* You gain resistance to damage from spells.

*Major:* You gain advantage on saving throws against spells.

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## 5. SHADOW (NIGHT, SECRET, THIEF)

### POWERS

*Minor:* Once per day you can gain advantage on a Wisdom (Perception) check.

*Moderate:* You can cast *locate creature* as a bonus action once per day.

*Major:* You are always allowed a saving throw whenever an illusion or shadow spell would affect you (even if the spell does not normally allow a saving throw). On a successful save, the spell has no effect on you.

## 6. SWORD (AXE, CLAW, WEAPON)

### POWERS

*Minor:* You gain resistance to damage from the first weapon attack to hit you. You regain this ability with a short rest.

*Moderate:* You gain advantage on the first attack roll you make to disarm a weapon. You regain this ability with a short rest.

*Major:* When you successfully disarm a nonmagic weapon, you may choose to break it.

## EMBLEM NAME SUFFIXES

### EMBLEM NAME SUFFIXES

1	-Bringer	beacon, caller, kin/kith
2	-Claw	fang, roar, talon
3	-Edge	blade, fist, might
4	-Dawn	light, morning, sun
5	-Elder	ancient, progenitor, source
6	-Song	storm, thunder, voice

## 1. -BRINGER (BEACON, CALLER, KIN/KITH)

### POWERS

*Minor:* Once per day you can cast *conjure minor elementals*. However, if the runeblade's effective level is 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup>, you can only summon half as many elementals as normal, round down. The summoned elementals take an appearance similar to creatures appropriate to the runeblade's name (*Dragon Bringer* summons elementals that look like dragons, *God Bringer* summons outsiders that look like divine servants, and so on). All the creatures you summon share one language of your choice.

This spell has an effective spell level equal to  $\frac{1}{2}$  the runeblade's effective level.

*Moderate:* You can now use your summoning ability twice per day. You can choose to cast *conjure elementals*, but this otherwise functions as the minor ability.

*Major:* You can now use your summoning ability four times per day. You can expend four uses of this ability to cast the spell as a bonus action.

## 2. -CLAW (FANG, ROAR, TALON)

### POWERS

*Minor:* As long as you are conscious and not helpless, your runeblade cannot be taken from you.

*Moderate:* When you attack the same target more than once with the runeblade in the back-to-back rounds, the runeblade gains an additional +1 bonus and does an additional +1d6 damage for each previous hit. This resets at the beginning of every third round.

*Major:* You can make an attack with the runeblade as a bonus action.

## 3. -EDGE (BLADE, FIST, MIGHT)

### POWERS

*Minor:* Your runeblade functions as doing bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage for purposes of ignoring resistance and triggering vulnerabilities.

*Moderate:* Your runeblade functions as being made of any metal for purposes of ignoring resistance and triggering vulnerabilities.

*Major:* Once you have your runeblade in your close proximity for at least 24 hours, as a bonus action you can teleport your runeblade to you as if it cast *plane shift* or *teleport* at will.

## 4. DAWN (LIGHT, MORNING, SUN)

### POWERS

*Minor:* You can cast *light* five times per day. It can dispel any darkness spell of a spell level equal to half the runeblade's effective level or less.

*Moderate:* The runeblade's *light* spell is sufficient to trigger the penalties for creatures with light sensitivity and light blindness unless it is negated.

*Major:* You gain advantage on attacks against creatures with vulnerability or sensitivity to light (such as vampires and wraiths).

## 5. ELDER (ANCIENT, PROGENITOR, SOURCE)

### POWERS

*Minor:* Once per day you can gain advantage on any Intelligence check.



*Moderate:* You are immune to fear effects. If you are already immune to fear effects, you can grant this immunity to a single creature within 30 feet of you that you can see and hear. The immunity lasts until you grant it to an additional creature.

*Major:* You can cast *true seeing* twice per day. You do not age.

## 6. -SONG (STORM, THUNDER, VOICE)

### POWERS

*Minor:* Once per day you can gain advantage on a Wisdom (Persuasion) check.

*Moderate:* The runeblade does an additional 1d6 thunder damage on a successful hit.

*Major:* You are immune to spells that do not work if you don't understand the caster's language.

## FOE NAME SUFFIXES

FOE NAME SUFFIXES		
1	-Death	gallows, grave, tomb
2	-Doom	bane, end, fall
3	-Master	king/queen, lady/lord, tyrant
4	-Slayer	hunter, killer, knight
5	-Smasher	crusher, hammer, smiter
6	-Wraith	echo, ghost, memory

## 1. -DEATH (GALLOWS, GRAVE, TOMB)

### POWERS

*Minor:* Any successful attack your runeblade makes against an incapacitated, paralyzed, exhausted, or retrained creature is a critical hit.

*Moderate:* When the runeblade damages a target, it must succeed at a Constitution saving throw or its regeneration stops for 1d4 rounds, and it cannot benefit from magic healing for 1 round.

*Major:* Whenever your attack roll with your runeblade is a 15 or greater (the d20 shows a 15-20), and the attack hits and damages your target, the attack deals an additional amount of damage equal to half the runeblade's effective level.

## 2. -DOOM (BANE, END, FALL)

### POWERS

A Doom weapon has a specific creature type (or similar category) as its antithesis, as determined by its name prefix and defined below:

**1. Dragon** (dragons), **2. God** (celestials/ fiends), **3. Giant** (giants), **4. Mage** (spellcasters), **5. Shadow** (undead), **6. Sword** (constructs, siege weapons, structures, traps)

*Minor:* Your runeblade does an additional 1d5 damage with attacks against its antithesis.

*Moderate:* The first time you hit a creature that is your runeblade's antithesis, you can force the target to make a Constitution save. On a failed save, you can either cause it to be unable to use any spells, for 1d4 rounds, or prevent it from have advantage on any rolls for 1d4 rounds.

*Major:* When you have been attacked by your runeblade's antithesis within the past minute, as a standard action you can cast on yourself *greater restoration*, *regenerate*, or *heal*. This power can be used twice per day, but not more than once a minute.

## 3. -MASTER (KING/QUEEN, LADY/LORD, TYRANT)

### POWERS

*Minor:* You can cast *command* twice per day as a move or swift action. Any creature with an Intelligence of 3 or greater and that knows any language is subject to this, and is considered to understand the language you use for your *command*.

*Moderate:* You have a permanent *zone of truth* that only affects creatures damaged by your runeblade in the past day.

*Major:* Once per day, you can cast *dominate monster* on a creature you damaged with your runeblade in the past 24 hours.

## 4. -SLAYER (HUNTER, KILLER, KNIGHT)

### POWERS

*Minor:* You gain advantage on the first attack roll you make. This ability is restored after a short rest.

*Moderate:* If an attack roll with the runeblade is a 19 or 20 on the die, and the attack hits the target's AC, it is a critical hit.

*Major:* Once per day when you damage a target with your runeblade you can force it to succeed at a Constitution saving throw or die.

## 5. -SMASHER (CRUSHER, HAMMER, SMITER)

### POWERS

*Minor:* Your runeblade can do its normal damage type, or bludgeoning damage. If it already does bludgeoning damage, it deals +1 extra damage.

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Three times per day, when you do bludgeoning damage to a target with your runeblade, you can force it to attempt a Constitution saving throw. If it fails, it gains 1 level of exhaustion for 1d4 rounds.

*Moderate:* When you do bludgeoning damage with your runeblade, if your attack roll exceeds the target's AC by 3 or more, you may knock it prone.

*Major:* You can cast *compelled duel* at will.

## 6. -WRAITH (ECHO, GHOST, MEMORY)

### POWERS

*Minor:* You can cast *invisibility* as a bonus action three times per day. The spell has a duration of 1 round.

*Moderate:* You can cast *blur* as a bonus action three times per day.

*Major:* You can cast *blink* as a bonus action twice per day.

## SPECIAL PURPOSE

*Gythus swore as Hrulden Hel's head went flying, severed from the fat sorcerer's body by one blow of Krona's accursed weapon.*

*"You fool! We needed to question him."*

*"Oh yes, we did." Krona held Shadowclaw at full arm's length, and for the first time Gythus saw some reflection in the blade. The light flickered faintly, but the face of Hrulden Hel could be made out in the light, expression shocked, mouth agape in a silent scream.*

*"And I suspect he'll be much more cooperative this way."*

*—From the "Book of Ungol"*

## PURPOSE DESCRIPTIONS

TABLE: RUNEBLADE PURPOSES

1	Gate-Crasher
2	Luck-Bender
3	Siege-Breaker
4	Soul-Drinker
5	Spell-Breaker
6	Vampiric

Each runeblade has a special purpose which grants powers in addition to its thematic powers drawn from its name elements, but also imposes an onus on the wielder. A runeblade wielder can fight this

onus, but in time it nearly always wins out, at least in part, unless the wielder finds the strength to put down the blade and walk away.

When an onus calls for a saving throw to resist its compulsion, the DC of the save is 10 +1/5th runeblade's effective level + the runeblade's bonus to attack rolls. Some actions that allow a character to avoid of fulfil such an onus note they have specific alignment descriptors, such as being described as an evil act. Undertaking such an act has the same consequences as any act of that type—a single evil act will not change your alignment, but a GM and player may need to have a conversation about a character's alignment if such actions occur regularly.

You can select an appropriate purpose that matches the runeblade's overall description, or you can roll 1d6 to determine its purpose randomly.

## PURPOSE DESCRIPTIONS

Each purpose, along with its powers and onus, are described below.

### 1. GATE-CRASHER

A gate-crasher runeblade wishes to tear down and destroy defenses. It gains a +1 bonus to attack rolls against foes that have a shield or cover. You lose this bonus, and take a -1 penalty to all your attack rolls, if you benefit from cover or a shield against an attack that misses you. The lasts until the end of your next round.

*Minor:* You have advantage on Strength checks to force open or break down doors, gates, and similar defenses.

*Moderate:* Your runeblade ignores bonuses to AC from shields and cover.

*Major:* Your runeblade can score critical hits against objects. If it scores a critical hit against a structure it does triple damage, rather than double damage.

**Onus:** If a foe has a shield, vehicle, or defensive position, the wielder must attack that foe in preference over a foe that does not have such things (if one is present). Ignoring this onus requires a Wisdom saving throw, with the DC increasing by 1 each time the wielder ignores it. Anytime you fulfill the onus, the DC of Will saves to resist it resets. If you successfully resist the onus, you take a -1 penalty to AC until you successfully attack a creature with a shield, vehicle, or defensive position.

Damaging a creature with a shield, vehicle, or defensive position for the sole purpose of removing this AC penalty is an evil act.



## 2. LUCK-BENDER

A luck-bender runeblade exists to see unlikely things happen. This both causes it to reward dangerous, irresponsible behavior, and (sometimes) give assistance when the wielder would normally fail at a task. The wielder may choose to invoke the runeblade as a free action at the beginning of their round as a free action. Roll 1d12. On a 1-6, the wielder gains a +1 bonus to all attack rolls, skill and ability score checks, and saving throws. On a 7-9, the wielder gains no bonus. On a 10-12 the wielder takes a -1 penalty to the same rolls and checks and cannot spend a luck point from the runeblade that round.

The wielder has a pool of luck points. These reset to one luck point each day, and the pool can have a maximum number of luck points equal to  $\frac{1}{4}$  the runeblades effective level (minimum 1), plus the wielder's Charisma bonus (minimum +1).

You can spend luck points using the powers of the runeblade, and gain them under specific circumstances as detailed below.

- If you have less than a 25% chance of succeeding at an action that has significant consequences if you fail (see onus, below), you gain one luck point for attempting it as long as you do not spend any luck points on the attempt.
- If you roll a natural 1 on an attack roll, skill check, or saving throw while attempting actions that have significant consequences if you fail (see onus, below), you gain 1 luck point.
- If a foe scores a critical hit against you, you gain 1 luck point.

You can spend all current luck points to reroll any one result that is entirely random (not affected by level, ability scores, skill ranks, and so on, such as there being a 50% chance a given town has a cleric in it.)

*Minor:* You can spend a luck point to add 1d8-4 (minimum +0) to any skill check or ability check. You make this decision after you know your die roll total, but before you know the result of the roll.

*Moderate:* You can spend a luck point to add 1d8-4 (minimum +0) to any saving throw you make. You make this decision after you know your die roll total, but before you know the result of the roll. Additionally, your skill check luck bonus becomes 1d6-2 (minimum +0).

*Major:* You can spend a luck point to add 1d8-4 (minimum +0) to any attack roll you make. You make this decision after you know your die roll total, but before you know the result of the roll. Additionally, your saving throw luck bonus becomes 1d6-2 (minimum +0).

**Onus:** The owner of a luck-bender runeblade is consistently pressured to take risks. Each day if the owner does not attempt one attack roll, skill check, or saving throw that requires a roll of 15 or better on the d20 to succeed, the maximum number of luck points available from the runeblade is reduced by 1 until the owner does attempt such a check. Such a roll must be one with real potential consequences as defined by the GM, such as when fighting a level-appropriate foe or making a check failure of which results in noteworthy damage or penalties.

A character can take needless risks to fulfill this requirement and reduce their chance of success on a check to only functioning if the roll is 15 or higher—making a fancy behind-the-back weapon attack, adding an unnecessary flip to a jump, mumbling an insult every few sentences during a negotiating, and so on. Doing so is a chaotic act.

## 3. SIEGE-BREAKER

A siege-breaker runeblade exists to change the odds of an outnumbered, defensive force. It encourages bold assaults against large numbers of foes, and leaving allies and defenders behind to directly assault the heart of an opposing force. You gain a +1 bonus to AC against attack from the second and subsequent creatures each round to attack you.

*Minor:* You gain a +2 circumstance bonus to AC against attack from the third and subsequent creatures each round to attack you.

*Moderate:* When you are outnumbered by foes within 30 feet of you, and have no allies within 30 feet of you, you gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls and AC.

*Major:* When you are outnumbered by foes within 30 feet of you, and have no allies within 30 feet of you, you heal 2 hit points at the beginning of every round. Under these circumstances you also immediately heal a number of hp equal to  $\frac{1}{10^{\text{th}}}$  a creature's max hp you kill a foe or knock them unconscious.

**Onus:** If the wielder cannot attack and be attacked by multiple foes, and there is a position from which the wielder can attack and be attacked by multiple foes, the wielder must move toward that position each round. This onus can be resisted with a

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successful Will saving throw. If you resist this, you suffer a -1 penalty to Dexterity and Constitution saves until you do take a position where you can attack and be attacked by multiple foes.

Starting a fight with group of creatures specifically to lift the onus penalty is an evil and chaotic act.

## 4. SOUL-DRINKER

A soul-drinker runeblade takes some vital spark of animation from the soul of creatures it is used to kill. It does not drink their entire soul—their spirits can still be found as normal in the afterlife, but a crucial element of their soul that attaches them to the knowledge and concerns of the mortal realm is removed.

A creature slain by a soul-drinker runeblade cannot be turned into an undead or returned to life without the soul-drinker runeblade being present.

*Minor Power:* Once per day you can use *speak with dead* to ask one question of the last creature slain by the runeblade. This functions as if the creature's entire corpse was available, and you automatically share a language with the creature. If its alignment is within one step of yours it does not answer cryptically (though it is still brief and may not know the answer), and even if it is hostile to you it never lies to you (though it may give an evasive or misleading answer).

Once you have asked a specific slain creature one question, you cannot ask it more questions at a later date using this minor power.

*Moderate:* As the minor power, but you receive one question per 2 effective levels of the runeblade.

*Major:* Once each week you can cast *speak with soul* targeting any creature you have slain with the runeblade.

**Onus:** If you go 7 days without killing a sentient, sapient creature with the runeblade, you suffer a -5 penalty to all skill checks until you do so.

Killing a sapient, sentient creature purely to satisfy the runeblade's onus is an evil act.

## 5. SPELL-BREAKER

A spell-breaker runeblade specifically wants to end magic effects and harm spellcasters. It gains a +1 bonus to attack rolls against any creature with spells.

### SPELL-BREAKER RUNEBLADE POWERS

*Minor:* Once per day you can cast *dispel magic* as a bonus action against any creature you damage with your runeblade this round.

*Moderate:* If you roll a natural 20 on a saving throw against a spell, you are immune to that spell for 1 day.

*Major:* A foe adjacent to you must succeed as a Dexterity saving throw to cast a spell.

**Onus:** If there is a spellcasting foe present, the wielder must attack that target in preference to any non-spellcasting foe. A Wisdom saving throw allows the wielder to overcome this onus, but all saving throws against things other than spells thereafter suffer a -1 penalty until the weapon is used in an attack against a spellcaster.

Attacking a spellcaster purely to remove the saving throw penalty is an evil act.

## 6. VAMPIRIC

A vampiric runeblade specifically wants to taste bloody wounds. It gains a +1 bonus to attack rolls against living creatures able to bleed, and a -1 penalty to attack rolls against anything else (including inanimate objects, things immune to critical hits, things without blood (or a near facsimile such as ichor) and anything specifically immune to bleeding).

### VAMPIRIC RUNEBLADE POWERS

*Minor:* Whenever your attack roll with your runeblade is a 15 or greater (the d20 shows a 15-20), and the attack hits and damages your target, the damage dealt cannot be healed with magic healing without a successful caster level check against the runeblade's effective level.

*Moderate:* Whenever your attack roll with your runeblade is a 15 or greater (the d20 shows a 15-20), and the attack hits and damages your target, you recover 1d6 hit points per 5 levels of the runeblade (minimum 1d6), to a maximum number of hp equal to the damage dealt to the target.

*Major:* You always succeed at death saves.

**Onus:** Once the blade is drawn, it cannot be sheathed again until it has tasted deep blood. Any successful attack made against a creature that is not an ally that does lethal damage and made to the best of the wielder's ability qualifies as deep blood. Otherwise, the wielder must cut themselves before sheathing the blade, taking maximum damage from the weapon (not counting any benefit of the wielder's own strength or abilities).

A successful Wisdom saving throws allows the wielder to overcome this onus, but all attack rolls made with the runeblade thereafter suffer a -2 penalty until it next tastes deep blood.

Attacking a creature just to satisfy this need, or keeping a creature as hostage or prisoner in case there is a need to satisfy it later, is an evil act.



## RUNEBLADE POWERS BY LEVEL

*Krona leaped back from the giant's mighty hammerblow, disappearing into a deep shadow cast by the evening sun across the old keep's ruins. Gythus clenched his teeth, and raised his shield. Despite years of partnership, even time she left his sight in a battle, he feared this was the time she would truly abandon him.*

*But as the misshapen King of Basalt Tor advanced on him, iron hammer the size of a tree raised about its head, Gythus saw Krona dash out from a different shadow, dozens of feet from where she disappeared, and bury Shadowclaw into the giant's ankle. Blood sprayed, and the monstrosity's skin toon on a shadowy paleness he has seen many times before. It fell to its knees, its eyes an expression of shock, and then collapsed onto its side, motionless.*

*Gythus marched up to the victor, and the woman who wielded it. He did not entirely lower his shield's guard.*

*"Since when can it do that? Carry you from shadow to shadow?"*

*Krona shrugged. "Just now? This month? A week? The important thing is, the Keep of Basalt Tor is ours!"*

*Gythus was convinced she did not include him in that declaration of plural ownership.*

*—From the "Book of Ungol"*

A runeblade has powers defined by its name elements and purpose, and granted over time at different levels. How to determine the runeblade's effective level depends on which runeblade character option you select (see below), but the following table shows which powers are gained when.

A runeblade can be any weapon type, but normally finds its way into the hands of a creature able to wield it with great skill (a GM generally should make a runeblade a weapon the character receiving it is most proficient with, and allow a player taking a runeblade as part of their background to select what kind of weapon it is).

## POWERS BY ATTUNEMENT LEVEL

These are runeblade's powers based on its effective level.

**Level 1:** You gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls made with this magic weapon.

**Level 2:** Minor Power from Name Prefix.

**Level 3:** Minor Power from Name Suffix.

**Level 4:** You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

**Level 5:** Minor Power from Purpose.

**Level 6:** You gain a +1 bonus to AC while wielding your runeblade.

**Level 7:** Moderate Power from Name Prefix.

**Level 8:** You gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls, and a +2 bonus to damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

**Level 9:** Moderate Power from Name Suffix.

**Level 10:** You gain a +1 bonus to saving throws while wielding your runeblade.

**Level 11:** Moderate Power from Purpose.

**Level 12:** You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

**Level 13:** Major Power from Name Prefix.

**Level 14:** The *Soul Sword* does an additional +1d6 damage with every successful attack. This damage is not multiplied on a critical hit.

**Level 15:** Major Power from Name Suffix.

**Level 16:** You gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls and +3 bonus to damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

**Level 17:** The runeblade's bonus damage increases to +2d6.

**Level 18:** You gain a +2 bonus to AC while wielding your runeblade.

**Level 19:** Major Power from Purpose.

**Level 20:** You gain a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

# RUNEBLADES

## RUNEBLADE CHARACTER OPTIONS

*Krona slumped in her throne, her drunken eyes wandering aimlessly through the great hall. Dancers danced, revelers drank and sang, but none of it touched her heart. Her remaining withered, liver-spotted hand rested lightly on Shadowclaw's pommel, one long, gnarled finger gently tapping on it.*

*With speed none expected, she leaped to her feet and swung the deadly weapon in an arc that ended a hair's breadth from the neck of a young jester, who crouched motionless in wide-eyed shock where he had been when he dared touch the weapon.*

*Krona's voice was a growl. "For a thousand years, this curse has found the blood of my family to serve it. And you think you can just take it? Make the horrid thing yours? Then you may have it, fool!"*

*There was no sounds in the hall as Krona shoved the unshining, black blade at the hapless servant, who raised his hands up and way from it, falling away from her onto his backside, scrambling to escape as quickly as he could by kicking his legs and scooting awkwardly across the floor.*

*"No? Don't want it after all?! Does anyone?"*

*The hall was silent. Krona sat once more, but slowly, in obvious pain.*

*"But yet, perhaps it is time. Perhaps my sentence is served. Gythus!"*

*The elderly man approached, alone of all those in the hall to not show open fear. His long white beard was braided, his head bald and pale as an egg.*

*"Yes, my queen?"*

*"You have found them?"*

*He nodded. "Five girls, with vastly distant but true ties to your bloodline, all between the ages of 17 and 27. The first, Elrykka, is training to be an alchemis..."*

*Krona silenced him with the wave of her hand.*

*"I shall decide what they are to be. Bring them all to me. Now."*

*Gythus bowed once, then turned and walked from the throne.*

*"Sing, damn your hides." Krona grunted. "Dance! Bring me mead!"*

*Nervously, but not without energy, the hall burst into movement again.*

*Krona returned to the same posture on her throne, the same finger tapping the ebony pommel.*

*"Or, I suppose You shall decide what they are to be, Old Devil. One of them, anyway."*

*—From the "Book of Ungol"*

Runeblades are similar enough to the *Sword of Kings* and *Soul Swords* (see the eponymous books describing those weapons) to use the same methods of determining its effective level as those runic weapons do. However, runeblades are also classically an integral part of a character concept from the character's origin. Whether the runeblade is an inheritance from a bygone age, a gift to the family from the gods, or is considered the true "player character," with the actual PC presented as a meat puppet, some character concepts work better if a runeblade is part of the character's class features from the jump.

And that can be done with the Class Variant rules option.

## CLASS VARIANT

You can treat "Runeblade Wielder" as a class variant available to every character class. The character gives up their background (as having a runeblade becomes the defining moment of their background), and the variable class specialization each class gains. Thus the runeblade wielder gives up the primal path of a barbarian, college of a bard, divine domain of a cleric, circle of a druid, martial archetype of a fighter, monastic tradition of a monk, sacred oath of a paladin, archetype of a ranger or rogue, logos of a runecaster (see *Master Class: Runecaster*), sorcerous origin of a sorcerer, otherworldly patron of a warlock, and arcane tradition of a wizard.

Additionally, a Runeblade Wielder cannot be attuned with any other magic item while attuned to their runeblade. Runeblades are powerful and jealous, and do not like sharing your spirit or attention with any other item. The exception to this is the runecaster, for whom runeblades count only as two item attunements due to the runecaster's mastery of the runic energies within a runeblade.

In return, the character begins with a runeblade of their choice at 1<sup>st</sup> level, and its effective level is equal to their level. If the runeblade is ever lost, stolen, or destroyed, someone it is returned or replaced when the character next gains a level, or 91 days have passed.



## TRUE ARTIFACTS

*Faferdra adjusted the heavy weight of the dratted sword once more, trying to find a comfortable position for the strap that held it over her shoulder.*

*“Are you sure you want that thing?”*

*The big northern woman smiled at the tiny woman Grayheldkin, whom she had traveled with so many miles already.*

*“It bought my aunt a kingdom didn’t it?”*

*“A kingdom now in awash in blood and flames.”*

*Faferdra shrugged. “She wasn’t a very good queen. Left no heir, barely left her throne room the past few years. I’d have you to help me be better.”*

*Grayheldkin shot her a dubious look.*

*“Besides,” Faferdra continued as if she hadn’t noticed. “It whispers to me in my sleep.”*

*“Is that supposed to make me feel better?”*

*“It should! Because its whispers tell me my aunt never found it’s true potential. It’s great now, yes. But it could be ... more.”*

*—From the “Book of Ungol”*

The runic weapons in the January 52-in-52 releases – the *Sword of Kings*, *Soul Swords*, and runeblades are among the most powerful weapons likely to fall into PC hands, but in generally they fall short of being as powerful as true artifacts. They can be boosted to minor artifact status by just giving them their 15<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> level powers without requiring a character to pay any price for that benefit. But if you want to take them to the next step of true artifacts, you may wish to combine two such weapons, and then add the general guidelines for artifacts (which may be indestructible, or only have one way they can be destroyed, be beyond the effect of any mortal spell, weapon, or ability and so on).

You can also create a rock-paper-scissors situation if you wish. The *Sword of Kings* might be beyond the power of any other item... except the rune-warping purpose of runeblades. Runeblades, in turn, can ignore the effects of nearly every device and item, but are themselves subject to the soul-fueled power of *Soul Swords*. *Soul Swords* can survive and recover from nearly any damage or effect, except the might of the *Sword of Kings*.

This is a purely narrative choice on the GM’s part, but it’s a fun way to add some depth and potential plot concerns to a campaign that use these powerful weapons, and can lead to its own narrative possibilities if the players decide they must seek one such weapon to deal with another.

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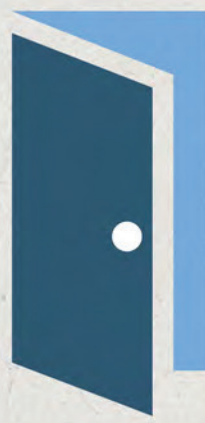
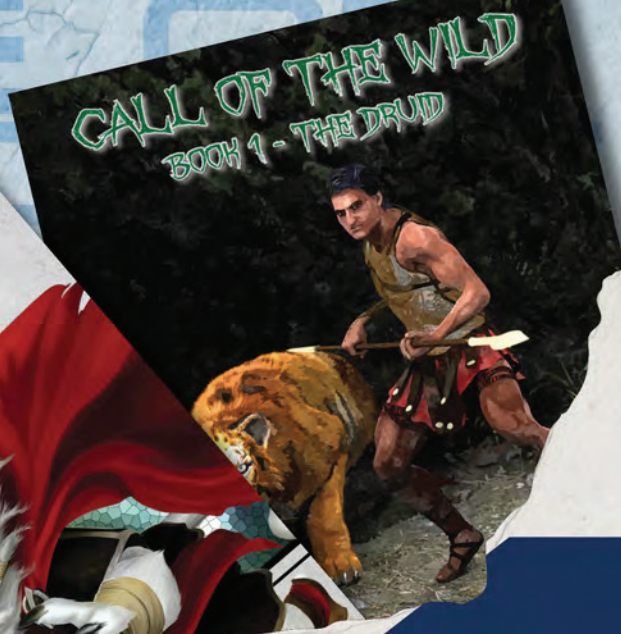
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