

THE DREADKNIGHT FIGHTER



A SUBCLASS FOR DND 5E



Argenthril Custom Subclass: The Dreadknight Fighter

Picture This: An unholy paragon of death, disease, war and malevolence rides atop it's undead mount which has been ripped from the grasp of death and raised into a life of undead servitude. Even the rider itself is a prisoner of the true source of the malevolent energy, the cursed sword which now rules the rider, the horse and the hordes of undead it enslaves.

The Dreadknights Curse

These undead and cursed warriors are created when a soul isn't ready to pass on to their afterlife; such warriors often have vendettas, missions or something that ties their soul down to the material plane. When an avatar of death attempts to claim such a soul, the warrior's soul writhes out of their grasp and tears itself back into the warrior's former body; a soul cannot remain in a broken and dead body forever, so the avatar binds the soul to the warrior's weapon instead.

This makes the body the former person and the dead body its vessel and is often seen as a death sentence for the soul since it's a fate much worse than death; in the weapon the souls uncontrolled willpower causes the now cursed weapon to bend, break, snap and twist into jagged shapes as the soul is tormented within the cursed steel.

It then imposes its immense willpower onto the vessel corpse and marionettes it like a puppet, causing it to rise again; thus a Dreadknight fighter isn't considered dead if their vessel is destroyed since their bound weapon is still intact.

When a bound blade is created, the soul loses all abilities to feel pain and their sense of emotion is greatly impaired; they often still feel negative emotions quite strongly, such as rage, regret and hate, but the loss of senses often causes positive emotions to become rare and somewhat muted.

Albeit that a true Dreadknight has experienced death, a sentient cursed weapon, a twisting of the mind or just a connection to a blade may cause a person to develop into a Dreadknight without dying; in cases involving death it may be as sudden as a jab through the heart, a fall from a great height or a death at the hands of eldritch magic which causes the Dreadknight to rise again.

Broken Body, Broken Mind

Having your body and souls link severed and thus all input of senses muffled often causes Dreadknights to spiral down into insanity, being bound into a piece of steel made for murder also causes ones mind to shift and often for the worse; this is done by the gods of death to literally torture the soul and to break its will faster, thus the different avatars of death preform the curse to speed up the progress of claiming the soul.

In general Dreadknights are either driven mad or cast aside their morals due to their own torment, it's hard to empathise with other creatures when you can't feel remorse or mercy. Yet, some still retain their previous morals and sense of honor or law as they turn into a Dreadknight; such a person is testament to the fact that their soul was too powerful to be claimed by death.

The Dreadknight Archetype Fighter

3rd: Bound Vessel

As a Dreadknight your ultimatum is balanced on a thin, sharp edge; this edge is your weapon and it is your prison and the essence of your soul is trapped within the weapon.

The blade has a body also known as a vessel which it controls, the blade can possess any dead humanoid body around it by being thrust into its heart; if done you switch your vessel to the new body and it revives under your command with 1 hit point, you cannot swap back to a body which you have possessed before since it crumbles into dust after the change.

It can also corrupt a person by acting like a cursed item, the blade when picked up is unable to be relinquished and can bind itself to the creature to slowly break it's mind to ultimately gain control of their body, thus making it the blade's new vessel; the creature must make a wisdom saving throw once a day vs your fighter level and is eventually possessed once it fails 3 times, until then it can rid itself of the curse with magic to be able to relinquish the blade.

This vessel is what you as a player control, it acts like a normal PC but looks gaunt and somewhat undead and always uses your rolled stats and other feats but changes the racial traits if you possess a new body; the vessel can be passed off as a normal human most of the time but has a visible sickening radiance of domination around it if it enters hallowed ground or holy buildings.

The vessel is considered to be undead, meaning you don't need food, drink, air or sleep and have a resistance to necrotic damage but a vulnerability to radiant damage; if your vessel dies but your *Bound Blade* is intact, you are alive but confined to your blade...

3rd: The Bound blade

The blade itself is a magical weapon in terms of taking damage, no ordinary weapon can destroy it and rust nor age affects its usability. It does take radiant damage and gets damaged by things like lava or lightning and other harsh effects; it has an amount of maximum hit points equal to 10 your fighter level times 5 and an AC of 20. It gets its hitpoints back during a long rest and if you're hit by an AoE the blade takes no damage if you succeed on the save and half damage if you fail the save.

If dispel magic is used upon the blade or you enter an anti magic area your vessel disconnects from the *Bound Blade* and goes unconscious, the blade itself can't move but can whisper in a strange language that everyone can understand if they are within 15ft of it.

If it drops to 0 hp you die instantly and if it's more than 30ft away from the vessel for more than a day you lose your control of the vessel.

In combat you must wield your *Bound Blade* and the blade heals itself for 10hp for every worthy creature it slays (DM discretion).

The blade can also morph itself into any melee weapon which lacks the special or thrown property as a bonus action, the metal creaking and snapping while bending itself into the form you want it to.

7th: Death's Grip

You've learned how to manipulate your soul and corral it outside your blade using your vessel as a conduit.

You can launch a dark clawed tendril out of your vessel in an attempt to grab a creature or object within 30ft of you as a bonus action.

The tendril forces large or smaller creatures to succeed on a strength save against your athletics skill or be suspended in the air and able to be moved 30ft in any direction you want to within 30ft of you, the creature resisting any displacement on a success; a creature that succeeds on the save is immune to the abilities effect for 24 hours.

If the target is an unanchored object that is larger or smaller you can manipulate it without needing a check for it, being able to move or throw it up to 30ft away from yourself.

You can use this ability the same amount of times as your wisdom modifier before needing a long rest to use it again.

7th: Harbinger of War

You also learn how to exert your willpower into your vessel to give it supernatural human strength; thus allowing it to wield great weapons with one hand.

Your vessel gains the ability to wield two handed melee weapons and non light weapons with one hand and can dual wield said weapons provided that the *Bound Blade* is one of them; dual wielded weapons can't have the ranged, special or reach property and wielding a shield doesn't interfere with this ability.

In addition to this, any strike with an offhand weapon can add its ability modifier to its damage roll in necrotic damage as your vessel is empowered by your dark powers; your vessel also heals an amount of Hit Points equal to the damage dealt by this necrotic damage if you make the attack using your *Bound Blade*.

10th: Pestilent Strikes

You start to channel your sickening energies into those you strike and learn to imbue your *Bound Blade* with violent necrotic energies; when you use this feature you make a melee weapon attack against a target with advantage without needing any additional action and if it hits the target said target becomes unable to heal and takes 1d10 necrotic damage and cannot be healed.

The pestilent strike only applies on the first attack which hits the affected creature on each of your turns and remains active as long as at least one attack hits the target; the negation of healing effect also remains as long as you hit the afflicted target once during each round after applying it.

You can use this feature once per short or long rest and regain the use of this ability after any rest.

10th: Undying vessel

You learn to overpower your vessel to force it to continue fighting beyond its human limits. When you use this ability as a reaction the vessel you're currently bound to becomes unable to die.

The effect lasts for 3 rounds and makes you able to continue fighting as your Hit Points drop into the negative. Your vessel remains intact and functional until you reach a negative Hit Point threshold equal to your maximum health, you cannot be healed during this ability; the only thing that would slay you are effects that would kill you outright instantly, going unconscious or taking enough damage to reach the threshold.

Once the ability's duration is over, your vessel is either destroyed or resets its Hit Points to 1 if the survive during its duration.

You can use this ability once per long rest and may need to swap vessels depending on the damage the vessel sustains; a vessel can be decapitated, literally disarmed or have parts of it partly disintegrated during the ability and still "live" through it.

During this ability the vessel is surrounded by necrotic energies and looks like it's being puppeteered; the vessel itself can be heard screaming in agony during this ability's duration.

15th: Atop a Pale horse of Death

You learn you aren't alone on the brink, you feel other damned souls stuck in limbo all around you, specifically those of slain beasts with no god to claim their souls.

You gain the ability to summon a warmount, it can be either a horse, a giant lizard or another ground based mount (DM Discretion). It has identical stats to a "Nightmare" but cannot fly or enter the ethereal realm and instead hovers 5ft above the ground with a movement speed of 60ft per turn with the ability to jump up to 30ft horizontally, it takes an action to summon it and you can mount it as a bonus action.

When mounted you have advantage on checks to stay mounted and it doesn't act unless you command it as an action when not ridden; the mount also acts under your turn without requiring any action from you and has its own actions, movement etc.

If killed the mount cannot be summoned until the end of a long rest, you can dismiss it early as an action; when dismissed the mount can be resummoned with the same amount of hit points as when it was dismissed.

15th: Conquering Trespass

You gain the ability to drag your vessel to the brink between life and death with you as an action. Your vessel assumes a black ghostly form and its movement speed is doubled for your current turn, during your movement you can move through others' space and opportunity attacks automatically miss you.

If you move through a creature it must make a constitution saving throw which equals $8 +$ your proficiency bonus $+$ your wisdom modifier or take 4d10 necrotic damage, taking half damage on a success instead. You cannot deal damage to the same target twice during the same turn and the effect ends when the turn you activated the ability on ends.

During this duration, your movement speed is converted into a flying speed instead; thus allowing your Nightmare to fly during it.

You can use this ability once per short rest and regain the use of this feature after a short rest

18th: Army of the Famined

Your own will has defied the decree of gods, as your endless strife continues against their volition you gain the power to not only keep yourself out of their grasp... but to also temporarily pull other souls from their icy grip.

You gain the ability to raise any creature into undeath that's been dead for no longer than 10 minutes and is within 15ft of you that isn't a construct, undead, ooze, plant, fiend or an elemental.

The creature is revived as an action and is under your control and acts under your initiative and has its own actions, movement speed etc; it doesn't act during its first turn after their revivification and the creature comes back to life with half of its maximum hit points, a minus 10 penalty to its AC, halved maximum movement per turn, an intelligence of 4 and is considered an undead creature; meaning it has resistance to necrotic damage and a vulnerability to radiant damage.

The creature itself looks famished and is barely held together by the remnants of necrotic energy which also keeps you alive and stays alive for a maximum of 12 hours before crumbling to dust; the creatures can only make their natural attack actions, can't use non basic attack abilities and can't cast magic (DM Discretion).

You can use this ability a number of times equal to your wisdom modifier each day; you regain 1d4 uses of this ability each day in the middle of the night and all current undead minions turn to ash at that same time...

Epilogue

-Playing an Argenthril Subclass

It is important to keep in mind that this subclass is designed to exist on a PC which is in my own setting known as the world of Argenthril, using the subclass outside of the Argenthril setting is definitely possible! But you should get the permission to do so from your GM to avoid conflicting thematics, lore or gameplay with said GMs own setting; if such conflicts do occur, observe the alternative thematics section in the Designer Thoughts section.

The two main things that change since the subclass is tied and based upon Argenthril are the early game abilities and interactions with the Argenthril custom rules; the Argenthril campaign starts at level 8 and thus the subclasses are not tested on levels below level 8, this may lead to balance issues for lower levels.

Some abilities may be considered under/overpowered in games which use the normal rules for DnD 5e since some abilities within the subclass may be dependent or designed with the Argenthril custom rules in mind; as a whole the Argenthril subclasses land in the above average for both power and complexity compared to normal subclasses.

Lore, locations and ability descriptions mentioned or described within the subclass may not be present within other campaigns that are not the Argenthril setting; such abilities may need to be changed or re-flavoured to fit within other settings which you should not be afraid to do.

In my opinion every part of a subclass which features in the Argenthril setting is malleable and should be re-flavoured, personalized, changed and re-themed to fit the players wants, wishes and fantasy; but beware of changing damage types or the function of abilities to fit said change due to balance reasons.

-General State and thoughts on current DnD combat

The class is made for the DnD 5e system and as such uses said systems rules for combat, with the exception of custom rules added in the Argenthril setting; the subclass is designed in accordance with these rules and is primarily focused on contributing to combat, not roleplay. There's certainly roleplay to be had based on the thematics of the subclass, but I wholeheartedly believe that every character is able to be roleplayed to a good extent regardless of class and subclass; as such the class is made with the philosophy that the current combat experience of the used system is somewhat... lagging behind the roleplay aspect of the game and should be more interactive.

The subclasses made for the Argenthril setting are made with said personal opinion in mind in accordance with the following goals in mind:

- Feature more active abilities that play off each other and allows for creativity in combat as opposed to adding static buffs
- Abilities gained through leveling should be designed to change the way the subclass is played and allows for new strategies once mastered
- A subclass can be advanced or difficult to play and require learning to be made efficient in combat; in contrast a subclass can also be simple and still be fun to play.
- A subclass should be distinct and noticeable different in the way they do combat or perform exploration from characters of the same class with a different subclass
- A subclass should have good strengths and some weaknesses.

Designer Thoughts

-Thematics

- **Accursed Blade:** The Dreadknight doesn't have to be necessarily dead, they can instead be the victim of an incredibly cursed weapon which has taken their soul and locked it within themselves; thus the *Bound Blade* is still the PC but doesn't require it to die.
- **Living Weapon:** A PC can also be made to be the weapon itself from the ground up, either being locked in the blade for so long it has become its preferred form or being forged into sentience by a cursed smith.
- **Celestial Domination:** You can also flip the thematic on its head and instead have the sword be a divine gift which preserves the wielder's soul if they would fall in battle and revive them in another creature's body when they die to continue their divine task.

-Inspiration

The main inspiration behind the Dreadknight are the Deathknight NPC creatures and the player class from world of warcraft; both of these inspired their own separate things. The Deathknight NPCs actually have a bit of lore detailing how they are bound to their blade and the wow Deathknight contributed with the general theme and some abilities.

Warlocks from wow were also inspiring, they possess the ability to summon their unholy steed; an ability which I included in the Dreadknight.

-Gameplay patterns and Tricks

+ Mechanics and Tricks:

- Go deep into enemies and deal damage until you have to rely on *Undying Vessel* to finish the job or get away safely; making the most of your time fighting in combat.
- Your hovering mount ignores difficult terrain and ground based traps which spring on contact.
- *Army of the Famed* can be used on ANY creature, this means that even the largest creatures can be brought back. Ever wanted to be an unholy warrior of death flying on a resurrected zombie dragon? Now you can!
- *Death's Grip* can be used to reposition or save allies from a sticky situation, they can willingly fail the save to be moved against their will.
- Keep your *Bound Blade* close to your chest, a Dreadknight might as well be considered dead if the bound blade is dropped into the deep ocean, gets flung into another dimension or dropped into some abyss; after all, if no one can find it the blade cannot move on its own.
- Swapping your vessel also swaps your appearance, use this to your advantage to confuse people or hide since you can also make your *Bound Blade* as small as a dagger.