

MALTHRAXIS

Malthrax is a nightwalker that is ancient beyond reckoning. It wanders within the dark wasteland of the Negative Plane of existence waiting for the moment when it can return to the Material Plane and feast on the raw nectar of the living. Malthrax is covered with arcane sigils carved into its body by some long forgotten archmagus. The sigils not only give Malthrax power, but they also contain long lost secrets of necromancy—no doubt put there to be guarded by the nightwalker.

SOUL TENDRILS

Unlike other nightwalkers, Malthrax has tendrils of thick smoke that endlessly cascade from its body. These are comprised of the souls it has devoured over the eons and they wail or laugh maniacally as they dissipate and dissolve into the air. Malthrax can lash out with this smoke to entangle its prey and drag them into its annihilating aura.

THE LITANY OF URD

The hide of Malthrax is etched with arcane symbols and glyphs known as the *Litany of Urd*. Translating these glyphs reveals necromantic secrets that are of great value to scholars, necromancers, and those who covet powerful magic. Comprehending the *Litany of Urd* requires intense study, a grasp of many languages, and a vast intellect, but it could reveal mysteries such as: the key to lichdom, how to kill a demigod, how to become a demigod, and other arcane secrets. It could also include ways to summon or banish a creature such as Malthrax and other powerful undead.

USING MALTHRAXIS IN YOUR GAME

Malthrax is either an apocalyptic threat for lower-level parties or a dangerous foe for high-level parties.

DECODING THE SIGILS

For a high-level adventure, the party is approached by wealthy patron who claims to have found a scroll that tells the story of a nightwalker named Malthrax. The scroll was written by an ancient archmage who claims to have etched a lifetime of their secrets into Malthrax's hide for safe keeping as few would dare to try and take down a nightwalker. The scholar believes that it's possible that some of these etchings could be the secret to controlling Malthrax, while the writings might also contain a missing chapter from the legendary *Book of Vile Darkness* known as the *Litany of Urd*—whether the patron reveals this to the party is up to the DM. The patron desires access to the sigils (however the party might arrange that) and is willing to pay handsomely for it. The patron could be a necromancer, archmage,



or a historian who represents a famous and well-funded museum or library.

How the party finds Malthrax is up to the DM. They could go to the Monastery of Shadows and have the monks transport the party onto the Negative Plane. The patron's scroll may even contain a rough map of where Malthrax's lair is situated on the Negative Plane.

TIME BOMB

If you have a low-level party, then the threat of having Malthrax summoned to the Material Plane is a major problem requiring all hands on deck. Having a town be the target of Malthrax is a great challenge to throw at your players and will test their creative thinking. Do they alert the townsfolk and risk panic? Do they keep the danger a secret and hope they can stop the nightwalker's arrival? Do they try to defeat Malthrax in a *Seven Samurai*-style standoff? Or do they try to find some arcane solution to banish the horror? Perhaps an order of doom cultists gets a whiff of this threat and emerges from the woodwork to cause mayhem?

Having a very overpowered enemy begs for a non-combat solution, and this can be an opportunity to

let the cleric, wizard, or warlock shine as they work in libraries and temple sanctums to uncover clues. What they discover may either prevent the coming of Malthraxis or banish the nightwalker once it arrives. They also might work with a ranger to rig an arcane trap that imprisons it like an ordinary beast but has the extra added magic of the wizard to make sure it doesn't escape.

With a "ticking time bomb" plot—the explosion being the arrival of Malthraxis—it's fun to place hurdles in front of the characters to get the pot boiling. Perhaps the magic item they need to retrieve is hundreds of miles away or maybe the wizard they need to talk to is long since dead and her tomb is unknown. Adding problems that must be solved while the clock ticks down and the lives of innocents hang in the balance makes for gripping roleplaying.

HIGHER LEVELS

With higher-level characters, an encounter with Malthraxis presents some interesting choices. Giving the players an opportunity to take a major risk as they seek to be heroes is always a fun option to have on the table. Be sure to offer a lower-risk path but if a party wants to push all the chips in and gamble, give them a way to do it. In the case of dealing with a threat like Malthraxis, they could be presented with a way to travel to the Negative Plane and hunt the nightwalker there—keeping innocents on the Material Plane from ever having to face such a monster.

Making powerful characters care deeply about less-powerful NPCs also builds vulnerabilities into a party, which can be used to create drama and tension. There's no better mechanism than to put an innocent gnome village; an orphanage; or a kindly, halfling baker in the path of a nightwalker to stir the emotions of your party of superheroes and draw them away from their original plan and into deeper and more dangerous waters.

LOWER LEVELS

For a lower-level party, defeating Malthraxis is a daunting if not impossible task. One potential option may be the cooperation or coercion of the Order of Shadows, and the applied use of their shadow blades (see the *Litany of Urd* and Malthraxis text in the Order

of Shadows document in *Dragon+ #37*). Another might be the investigation of symbols that seem to relate to Malthraxis carved throughout the monastery (see The Litany of Urd section of this document). With some deciphering, these symbols could contain the answer to banishing or controlling the nightwalker.

MALTHRAXIS

Huge undead

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 297 (22d12 + 154)

Speed 40 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	19 (+4)	24 (+7)	6 (-2)	9 (-1)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Con +13

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

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

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages -

Challenge 20 (25,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +6

Annihilating Aura. Any creature that starts its turn within 30 feet of Malthraxis must succeed on a DC 21 Constitution saving throw or take 14 (4d6) necrotic damage and grant Malthraxis advantage on attack rolls against it until the start of Malthraxis' next turn. Undead are immune to this aura.

Life Eater. A creature reduced to 0 hit points from damage dealt by Malthraxis dies and can't be revived by any means short of a wish spell.

Actions

Multiaction. Malthraxis uses *Energating Focus* twice, or it uses *Energating Focus* and *Soul Tendrils*, if available, or it uses *Energating Focus* and *Finger of Doom*, if available.

Energating Focus. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. Hit: 28 (5d8 + 6) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 21 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest.

Finger of Doom (Recharge 6). Malthraxis points at one creature it can see within 300 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw or take 26 (4d12) necrotic damage and become frightened until the end of Malthraxis's next turn. While frightened in this way, the creature is also paralyzed. If a target's saving throw is successful, the target is immune to Malthraxis's *Finger of Doom* for the next 24 hours.

Soul Tendrils. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 60 ft., one target. Hit: 17 (2d10 + 6) slashing damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 23), pulled into an unoccupied space within 5 feet of Malthraxis, and must succeed on a DC 23 Intelligence saving throw or be stunned until this grapple ends. Malthraxis can't use its soul tendrils on another target until this grapple ends.