

COLLEGE OF DIRGES

BARDIC COLLEGE OPTION

Standing amongst the smoldering ruins of her village, a halfling female with raven-black hair and a gilded lute surveys the destruction, heart overflowing with sorrow. As she wanders, she happens with deadened surprise across the corpse of a friend, who died clutching a sword as several orcish arrows pierced his chest. She slowly retrieves several candles from her pouch, lights them, places them around the corpse, and begins to strum a haunting melody on her instrument. As she does so, the spirit of her friend stirs within him, gradually taking form and standing over his body to look her placidly in the eye. A few words more, that is all she needs, she tells herself.

A female dwarf, silver-grey hair tied back in a tight braid, rolls off a cadence on the blackened battle drum hanging from her belt. In time with her rhythm, she chants a solemn funerary hymn in a deep, sonorous voice, every syllable full of such mourning that it could bring even the greatest of dwarven thanes to sorrowful tears.

A maddened human male, his eyes rimmed red with anguish and rage, plucks a discordant scale on the strings of his lyre. The chord stirs the bones of the dead in the ground beneath his feet, who break free of the dirt and mire, and rise up to follow his will.

Most cultures have a complicated relationship with death, surrounded in rituals, mysteries, and traditions that help ease the suffering of loss while safeguarding the dead to their final destination. Bards of the College of Dirges are closely acquainted with these practices, them-

selves usually either coming from a culture with strong ties to death or having lived a life full of anguish. Colleges that foster these bards, known as dirgesingers, may be found in temples of death gods, and often train their dirgesingers to carry out last rites and remembrances for the dead, each in their own fashion. A skilled dirgesinger knows that even the most important among the deceased may be forgotten in a generation or two, but an elegantly composed dirge, full of emotion and memory, may well live on and be played for thousands of years.

Dirgesingers often have a deeply individualistic relationship with the dead, colored by past experience and the dogma of the deities they worship. To some, the bodies of the dead are sacrosanct, deserving only eternal rest and occasional vengeance for wrongs done. To others, the dead can be viewed as tools for the purposes of their gods and themselves, potential undying minions that are still able to affect change in the world. This relationship has very little to do with good or evil, but rather the individual teachings the dirgesinger has come to believe.



MACABRE MELODIES

When you join the College of the Dirgesinger at 3rd level, you begin to learn the subtle art of weaving deathly magic with your music. You know two of the following cantrips: *chill touch*, *spare the dying*, or *thaumaturgy*. Whenever you would gain a bard cantrip, you may instead choose the cantrip you did not select from this feature. Any cantrip you gain from this feature counts as a bard cantrip for you.

SORROWSONG

Also at 3rd level, you are able to evoke powerful negative emotions through music, expressing the sorrow that comes from living and the loss of life. You may use an action and expend a use of your Bardic Inspiration to play or sing a song of mourning and loss. If you do, choose a creature that is within 60 feet of you and that can hear you. You may choose to deal 2d6 psychic damage to the creature, which increases when you reach certain levels in this class. This damage becomes 2d8 at 5th level, 2d10 at 10th level, and 2d12 at 15th level.

The creature also must roll a Charisma saving throw against your spell save DC. If the creature fails this saving throw, it becomes overwhelmed with grief that lasts until the beginning of your next turn, and is incapacitated for the duration. A creature that succeeds on this saving throw automatically succeeds on all further saving throws imposed by this ability, until you take a short or long rest.

Creatures that are immune to charm effects are unaffected by any part of this ability.

Additionally, you may choose to perform this song as a 10 minute ritual instead of as an action. If you do, when the ritual is completed the song affects a number of creatures in range equal to your Charisma modifier, and the duration of the song's effects on a failed save increases to one minute. You only need expend one use of your Bardic Inspiration, no matter how many creatures are affected by this ritual.

GRIM REQUIEM

At 6th level, your musical sway over the power of death becomes ever more potent, granting you access to additional necromantic secrets. You learn the spell *speak with dead* (if you did not know it already) and any other two necromancy spells of 3rd level or below. These spells count as bard spells for you, but don't count against the number of bard spells you know.

In addition, you may cast *speak with dead* as a 10 minute ritual performance, playing a funerary dirge for the corpse you target. Cast in this way, *speak with dead* does not consume a spell slot. You may only cast this ritual once before you require a short or long rest to refresh its usage.

DEATH'S DEFIANCE

Beginning at 14th level, your music can placate death itself, allowing your allies to live to fight another day. Whenever a friendly creature within 60 feet of you is about to roll a death saving throw, you may expend a reaction and a use of your Bardic Inspiration die to allow the creature to add the die to their roll. If the creature succeeds on this saving throw, it instantly gains hit points equal to the result of your Bardic Inspiration die + your Charisma modifier + your bard level. When a creature benefiting from this ability succeeds on its death saving throw, you are then unable to use this ability again until you complete a short or long rest.

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