



## COLLEGE OF THE CROSSROADS

### BARDIC COLLEGE OPTION

At the center of a raucous tavern, a female halfling saws away cheerfully on a gleaming golden fiddle, sparks flying from the strings as she plays. Locals and visitors alike cheer and clap along with her skillful display, and a handful of drunken patrons lounging by the bar croon out the words that accompany one of her songs. Though none in the tavern could possibly tell, the halfling barely knew how to hold a fiddle just a week ago. After a chance encounter with a mysterious travelling merchant, however, she found herself as skilled as any professional bard. Still, something weighs deeply upon her, and though her music inspires elation in those who hear it, she can't help but feel a worrying hollow in her chest, a sense of something missing from all of this.

Leaning jauntily against a waypost, a male tiefling with hair as jet-black as his silken clothing idly plucks at the strings of his silver lyre. An upturned hat at his feet stands ready to collect currency from passing travelers, though busking for coin is hardly what brought the tiefling to the crossroads at dusk. A set of footsteps approach, and the tiefling looks up from his reverie to find a man in fine, fashionable noble clothing at his side, eyes lit with a subtle inner fire, a knowing smile written all across his face. The tiefling sets his instrument aside, returns the smile, and prepares to talk business with the devil himself.

Pounding a rhythm on a bejeweled battle-drum, a brass-mailed duergar marches in lockstep with his fellows, facing down a drow ambush. Rousing the spirits of those at his side, the duergar lets off a menacing drum-roll before striking forward towards the nearest drow

with one of his mallets. At once, a burning ball of brimstone-reeking fire strikes forward from the duergar, connecting with the hapless drow and engulfing it and its allies in blazing hellfire.

More than just a place where one road meets another, a crossroads holds deep symbolic meaning. It is a location where one can change their path in life, both physically and spiritually, for better or for worse. Often, a crossroads marks a place where the barriers between worlds are weak, and fiends, above all others, are keen to exploit this, slipping between the cracks between their worlds and the Prime Material, looking for travelers to accost and souls to steal.

Though many a warlock pact has been struck at a crossroads, fiends often search for a slightly different quarry among the musically-inclined. Either through bartering, salesmanship, or grandstanding acoustic show-downs, musical talent can be bought and sold easily at a crossroads, if you know the right place and time, and are willing to part with a rather personal currency. Far from a proper college, the "College of the Crossroads" is a





term of derision among properly-educated bards, many of whom scorn those who would deal with fiends for musical talent.

Fiends desire many different things when they deal with travelers at a crossroads. Work out with your DM what sort of trade you brokered, or roll on the Meeting at the Crossroads table, below.

**d6 Meeting at the Crossroads**

- 1 I sold my soul to a fiend for unearthly musical talent, and my instrument is a symbol of our pact.
- 2 I bested a fiend in a contest for my soul, and won their own instrument as a trophy of my victory. I worry that some day they may return to reclaim it.
- 3 I traded a fiend an unspecified favor for my talent and instrument, to be collected after a year and a day.
- 4 I was given my instrument, along with a nondescript satchel, on the condition that I carry the satchel with me wherever I go. The fiend specified that I should never open the satchel, and gave me a knowing wink.
- 5 I was trained and gifted my instrument by a fiend with the contractual expectation that I defeat a specific musically-inclined celestial.
- 6 I stole my instrument through trickery or sleight of hand from a fiend attempting to bargain with me. I am constantly on the move, knowing the fiend still hunts after me.

### PRECIOUS INSTRUMENT

When you join the College of the Crossroads at 3rd level, you are granted (by skill, fortune, or contract) a magical instrument forged of gold, silver, ruby, jade, mithril, or any other material precious enough to be used as currency, which can be of any sort held in one or two hands. This instrument weighs no more than a typical instrument of its type, and may be played normally.

As a bonus action, you may either dismiss your instrument to a secure extradimensional plane, or summon it to your grasp from wherever it resides.

While this instrument is on your person, you can read, write, and speak Infernal and Abyssal, and you have knowledge of the cantrips *fire bolt* and *thaumaturgy*. These cantrips count as bard cantrips for you.

This instrument becomes more elaborate and beautiful the more you use it, and is worth an amount of gold pieces equal to 200 times your bard level. If you sell the instrument, its buyer retains possession of it, and you lose access to any features granted by the College of the Crossroads. You may only re-acquire these features by re-purchasing the instrument, through currency or favors granted. If the instrument is stolen or freely lent out, it may still be summoned to your grasp as normal.

If you acquire another musical instrument with magical properties, you may undertake an hour-long ritual that destroys the magical instrument and applies any special properties it had to the precious instrument you receive from this feature, in addition to the benefits already provided by this feature. Your precious instrument may only have properties applied from one magical instrument at a time, and subsequent uses of this ritual overwrite previous applied properties. A precious instrument requires attunement if the destroyed magical instrument would require attunement to access its properties. If attunement is required, you may attune yourself to your precious instrument as part of this ritual.

#### A PRECIOUS INHERITANCE

If the owner of a precious instrument dies (not just drops to 0 or less hit points), what becomes of the instrument itself?

This is a question intentionally left up to the DM to decide, though in most cases the instrument lingers for just over a week before being recalled (either through magic or a personal visit) by its previous fiendish owner.

With your DM's permission, your character may be able to leave their instrument, and the power within, to an individual of their choosing. This individual could be a relative, a person that reminded your character of their younger self, or even a passing stranger in need of a twist of fate.

The gift may come with a price; how the original fiendish owner of the instrument would consider such an inheritance is equally at the discretion of the DM.



## SILVER TONGUE

Also at 3rd level, the dark power in your instrument grants you a supernatural way with words. While your precious instrument is on your person, you may expend a use of your Bardic Inspiration to add a Bardic Inspiration die to any Charisma check you make.

In addition, when you are the target of an attack by a creature within 15 feet of you that can hear you, you may use a reaction and expend a use of your Bardic Inspiration. If you do, the creature makes a contested Wisdom (Insight) check against either your Charisma (Persuasion) or Charisma (Deception), your choice, plus your Bardic Inspiration die. If the creature fails this check, it may not attack you this turn, but has not expended whichever action it used to attack you and may continue with its turn, as normal. Creatures immune to charm effects may not be affected by this ability.

## FIENDISH TEMPO

Starting at 6th level, magical hellfire flows freely through your precious instrument, and fire sparks from your fingertips when you play. You gain knowledge of the spells *hellish rebuke*, *flame blade*, and *fireball*, which are always prepared and count as bard spells for you, and do not count against the total bard spells you may know.

## INFERNAL ORCHESTRA

Beginning at 14th level, you learn a final eldritch cadence on your precious instrument. Playing this cadence as an action rends portals through the fabric of the Prime Material, allowing six fiendish instrumentalists to appear in any available space within 30 feet of you. These instrumentalists follow any commands you give them to the letter (if not your actual intent), and in combat they act

### CREDITS:

Photoshop & design by /u/the\_singular\_anyone

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Art by Nemanja Stankovic, Minttu Hynninen, Kerem Beyit, and Sandara

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independently on their own turn that immediately follows your own. If you give the instrumentalists no instructions, they will defend themselves against creatures attacking them, but otherwise will take no actions aside from idly tuning and improvising with their instruments.

When you make a Performance check or a check with an instrument with which you have proficiency, you may order the instrumentalists to play an accompaniment, if they are present. For the duration of your check the instrumentalists will play music accompanying your melody, using the Help action each turn and conferring advantage on Performance or instrument checks you make.

After one hour or if you drop to 0 hit points, the instrumentalists and their belongings disappear in a puff of brimstone. Once you use this ability, you must complete a long rest before you may use it again.

## FIENDISH INSTRUMENTALIST

*Small fiend, neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 13 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 33 (6d8+6)

**Speed** 20 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)

**Damage Resistances** cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non magical weapons that aren't silvered

**Damage Immunities** fire, poison

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

**Skills** Deception +4, Performance +4

**Senses** darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

**Languages** Abyssal, Common, Infernal, telepathy 60 ft.

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Devil's Sight.** Magical darkness doesn't impede the instrumentalist's darkvision.

**Magic Resistance.** The instrumentalist has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

### ACTIONS

**Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d4+3) slashing damage.

**Fire Bolt.** *Ranged Spell Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) fire damage.

**Vicious Mockery.** As an action, the instrumentalist targets one creature within 60 feet that can hear the instrumentalist. The target must make a Wisdom saving throw with a DC of 12. If the target fails, it takes 2 (1d4) psychic damage and has disadvantage on the next attack roll it makes before the end of its next turn.

