

# GRIMOIRE OF THE GRAVE

PROMO:  
EVOLVED UNDEAD



Produced by

**2CGAMING**



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# EVOLVED UNDEAD

Redesigning a monster to better suit your adventures is a time-honored tradition among DMs. While there are many methods by which one can improve and expand upon a monster, most are generic enhancements that can apply to anything, regardless of type or nature. While functional, this type of change rarely adds flavor or style to a monster, only power. When it comes to undead, style counts for a lot. These creatures are often lumped together both mechanically and thematically, sharing many of the same traits, actions, and effects across a wide number of monsters. How many heroes could tell the difference between a specter, wraith, or ghost by their features alone? To help diversify and stylize undead and how they appear in your game, this section details a concept known as “evolution.” While undead do not evolve the way living things do, they are capable of change and development. This can lead to new, thematic powers and abilities that can transform an ordinary zombie into a terrifying, thrilling enemy.

## Undead Evolution

Most scholars consider undead to lead a mostly static existence. Because undead are devoid of life and its many opportunities for growth and development, the leading theory suggests that most of these creatures cannot change or improve without consuming some aspect of life. Souls, blood, flesh—without them, many have incorrectly believed that undead simply exist, wither, and rot, but this is not so.

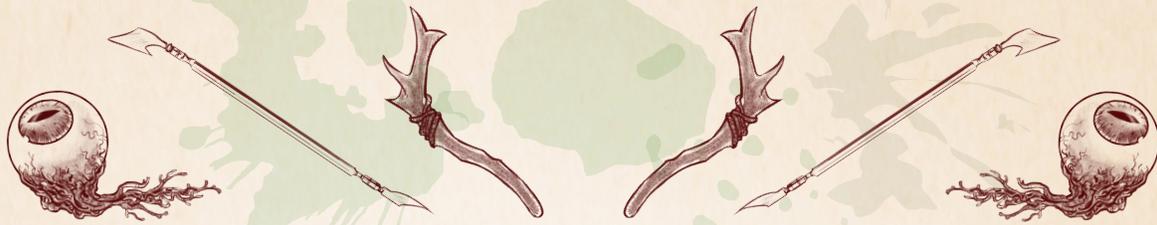
Given enough time and exposure to necrotic energies, undead are capable of startling evolutions. These “evolved” undead possess terrific enhancements. Some gain increased strength and durability, while others unlock hidden powers never before seen by mortal eyes. This process is poorly understood and evidently takes considerable time along with a nurturing environment, but the results are undeniable: formidable, frighteningly powerful creatures that can carve out a new existence that further transcends the limitations of life.

Undead themselves seem to have no explanation for their evolution. Those intelligent enough to describe their experiences note a peculiar urge to seek out strange locales and hidden refuges where life holds no power. Here they form a makeshift lair in which to begin their metamorphosis.

One of my favorite things about undead is how they inherently represent imagination. Think about it! Most of these fascinating beings were created from something else—sometimes multiple somethings! They are the very embodiment of creativity! If only I could get them to see it in themselves...



The process can take weeks or even centuries. What emerges from this pulsating cocoon of necrotic energy is almost a new being entirely with new powers ideal for its unique existence. A newly evolved undead instinctively understands how to use their new power as effortlessly as if they had always possessed it. Those who are hostile to the living find themselves with new weapons to wreak havoc, while more personally motivated and reclusive undead are further empowered to advance or achieve goals previously beyond their grasp.



## Evolving Undead Creatures

When you decide to evolve your undead, you have some important decisions to make. Because this process involves adding more features to an existing creature, consider carefully what you are trying to accomplish by evolving an undead and how that will impact your game. Naturally you should start by selecting an undead you wish to evolve. While evolutions do enhance a creature's features, they do not replace them. Your evolved undead will still function mostly how they always have, now with some spicy new tricks to make things more interesting. Additionally, evolving your undead absolutely increases their power. In most cases, adding just one evolution won't be enough to increase the creature's Challenge Rating significantly. If you evolve your undead further, it will certainly move up in CR. Use the Undead Evolutions by Challenge Rating table to anticipate the impact a typical evolution will have on your creature.

UNDEAD EVOLUTIONS BY CHALLENGE RATING					
NUMBER OF EVOLUTIONS	CR 0-5	CR 6-10	CR 11-15	CR 16-20	CR 21+
1	+1 CR	+1 CR	+1 CR	+1 CR	+1 CR
2	+2 CR	+1 CR	+1 CR	+1 CR	+1 CR
3	+3 CR	+2 CR	+1 CR	+1 CR	+1 CR
4	+4 CR	+3 CR	+2 CR	+2 CR	+1 CR

Some evolutions force affected creatures to attempt a saving throw. When determining a saving throw DC for such an effect, you should use the undead's highest saving throw DC. In the event your chosen undead does not have a saving throw DC, use the following formula to calculate it.

### Undead Save DC =

8 + (creature's Constitution or Charisma modifier, whichever is higher) + (creature's proficiency bonus)



My research in undead evolution is what led me to calling them "transcendent" in the first place. "Undead" is such a base term. These creatures are so much more than "not living" or "not dead." With the right neurobiological applications, they are beyond death. Isn't science riveting?

# Types of Evolutions

There are two types of undead evolutions: traits and actions. Trait evolutions are generally passive or conditional interactions—like the traditional Incorporeal Movement or Undead Nature traits—that affect the overall design of the undead and how it plays rather than giving it a new weapon to wield or a new action to perform. Action evolutions provide a creature with additional actions the creature must choose to take and are designed to interface cleanly with its existing suite of options. These can be either an Action, Bonus Action, Reaction, or Legendary Action.

Additionally, all evolutions have a subtype—defensive, offensive, or utility—indicating how the evolution functions and what impact it is likely to have on your undead. Use this to better understand how adding the evolution might affect your creature’s Challenge Rating. For example, adding an offensive evolution to an undead that is not offensively strong is a far more dramatic improvement than adding a defensive evolution to an undead that already has strong defenses.

## Defensive Evolutions

**Dead Magic (Reaction).** The undead is suffused with “dead” magic that contaminates and destroys magical effects. As a reaction when the undead would be affected by a spell cast by a creature it can see within 120 feet of it, it can force the caster to attempt a Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the spell immediately ends.

**Deathly Body (Trait).** The undead’s body is held together by powerful necromantic energy and barely registers harm or damage. Any critical hit against the undead becomes a normal hit, and when the undead succeeds on a Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution saving throw and would suffer an effect on a success, it can instead choose to suffer no effect.

**Reanimator (Trait).** The undead rapidly recovers from harm or grievous injury. At the start of each of its turns, the undead rolls a number of d4s equal to its proficiency bonus and regains hit points equal to the result. If the undead is not incapacitated, it can forgo regaining hit points in this manner to use its action to reattach a severed body part it is holding or carrying. If the undead touches holy water, takes radiant damage, or is exposed to sunlight, this effect is suppressed until the end of the undead’s next turn.

**Undying Mind (Trait).** The undead’s mind is composed primarily of necromantic energy and is consequently difficult to influence. The undead is immune to the charmed and frightened conditions, and when the undead succeeds on an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throw and would suffer an effect on a success, it instead suffers no effect.

**Unholy Aura (Trait).** The undead exudes an unholy aura in a radius determined by its Challenge Rating (as detailed in the Unholy Aura Effects by Challenge Rating table). When a living creature within the aura attempts an attack roll, saving throw, or ability check against the undead, the living creature rolls a die and subtracts the amount rolled from the result.

UNHOLY AURA EFFECTS BY CHALLENGE RATING		
UNDEAD CR	AURA RADIUS	DIE SIZE
CR 1-5	5 ft.	d4
CR 6-10	10 ft.	d6
CR 11-15	15 ft.	d8
CR 16-20	30 ft.	d10
CR 21+	60 ft.	d12



## Offensive Evolutions

**Cursed (Trait).** When the undead is slain by a creature within 120 feet of it, that creature must succeed on a Charisma saving throw or be permanently cursed. While cursed in this manner, when the creature would regain hit points, it instead regains half as many hit points. (At the DM's discretion, they may replace the effects of this curse with those of another curse of their choice.)

**Death Touch (Trait).** At the start of each of the undead's turns, it rolls a number of d4s equal to its proficiency bonus. Each living creature within 5 feet of the undead takes necrotic damage equal to the result. A living creature that touches the undead for the first time on its turn also takes this damage.

**Executioner (Trait).** The undead is particularly adept at snuffing out the spark of life. When the undead reduces a living creature to 0 hit points, the creature must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or die instantly. Once a creature has succeeded on a saving throw against this effect, it becomes immune to this effect for 24 hours.

**Greater Necrosis (Bonus Action).** The undead's necrotic energies are particularly vile. When the undead would deal damage to a creature on its turn, it can use its bonus action to force the target creature to attempt a Constitution saving throw, becoming vulnerable to that damage on a failure.

**Life Drinker (Bonus Action).** When the undead deals damage on its turn to a living creature it can see within 120 feet of it, it can use its bonus action to reap the target's life force. The undead gains temporary hit points equal to half the damage dealt (rounded down). These temporary hit points last for 1 minute.

## Utility Evolutions

**Dark Ritual (Reaction).** As a reaction when a friendly undead creature the undead can see within 60 feet of it takes damage, it can sacrifice its own necrotic energy to heal the target. When it does so, the undead loses a number of hit points up to half its hit point maximum to cause the target to regain an equal number of hit points.

**Death Stalker (Trait).** The undead is invisible while in dim light or darkness.

**Hunter of Life (Trait).** The undead has a special sense that allows it to perceive living creatures out to a range of 120 feet. This sense is obscured by solid objects at least 2 feet thick.

**Might of the Grave (Bonus Action, 1/Day).** The undead calls upon the power of death itself to gain an additional action this turn.

**Shadow Armory (Trait).** The undead's weapons, armor, and equipment are magical and composed of shadows. At the start of each of the undead's turns, if it is not in possession of its weapon, armor, or equipment, they immediately vanish from their current location and appear on the undead's person.

