Click to verify

Most warlock patrons are otherworldly entities, demigods, or esoteric creatures of legend. The Undead, introduced in Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft, offers a gothic horror flair to the list. This is an ancient being that death has no power over, such as Azalin, Lord Soth, and even Strahd von Zarovich himself. A warlock with this patron can take on a terrifying form, destroy and recreate their body, and even project their spirit. Undead Warlock features Expanded Spell List: At 1st level, the warlock can begin choosing from an expanded list of spells themed around undeath. False Life, Phantom Steed, and Death Ward are strong contenders, providing a cushion of hit points, increased mobility, and a failsafe, respectively. Antilife Shell is also thematically appropriate for keeping living creatures from getting into melee range (though that includes party members, as well). Undead Expanded Spells Form of Dread: Another 1st-level feature, Form of Dread allows you to take on a fearsome appearance for 1 minute as a bonus action. This transformation grants temporary hit points, immunity to the frightened condition, and the ability to frighten a foe when you hit it with an attack (assuming they fail a Wisdom saving throw). You can transform a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus. You have a lot of flexibility in your appearance upon using Form of Dread, though it should be reminiscent of your patron. Imagine changing from a human to a ghastly skeleton akin to Marvel's Ghost Rider! Grave Touched: This 6th-level feature has a few perks. First, you no longer need to eat, drink, or breathe. (Better start placing bets on who can hold their breath the longest.) Furthermore, when you hit with an attack roll and roll damage, you can change the damage type to necrotic. If you're in your Form of Dread, you also get an additional damage die when determining the necrotic damage your target takes. Necrotic Husk: Granted at 10th level, Necrotic Husk gives you resistance to necrotic damage. If you are in your Form of Dread, this is kicked up to immunity to necrotic damage. But here's the fun part: When you're reduced to 0 hit points, you can cause your body to explode! If you do, each creature within 30 feet of you takes necrotic damage equal to 2d10 + your level. You can then horrify everyone in your adventuring party as you emerge from your remains with 1 hit point, 1 level of exhaustion, and all of your gear. Once you revive yourself in this way, you can't do so again until you finish 1d4 long rests. This ability reminds me of the supernatural healing factor possessed by gritty comic book heroes like Deadpool, Spawn, and Wolverine, but dare I say, more explosive? Spirit Projection: At 14th level, you can project your spirit for 1 hour as an Action, leaving behind your bothersome husk of a body. When you do, you gain a flying speed and can pass through objects. You also gain resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage, and you can cast spells of the conjuration and necromancy schools without requiring verbal, somatic, or material components that lack a gold cost. As a nice bonus, once per turn, you can regain hit points equal to half the necrotic damage you deal while in Form of Dread. The downsides to this feature are that it requires concentration and can only be used once per long rest. Pros The Undead patron offers as much flavor as function, and is a solid alternative to the Hexblade patron for melee-orientated warlocks. Combined with the Pact of the Blade, Form of Dread and Grave Touched can turn you into a resilient necrotic damage dealer who frightens enemies. If you enjoy the simple pleasure of casting Eldritch Blast from the backline, though, you'll still benefit from the subclass' features. Don't forget that the damage from Grave Touched stacks with Hex. Necrotic Husk scores bonus points for simply how cool it is to imagine exploding in a wave of energy, and the feature is a great last resort when the tides of battle have turned against you. Spirit Projection, meanwhile, has many flexible applications. Not only can it make you tanky on the battlefield, but you can also use this feature for scouting missions or to assassinate enemies in the dead of night. Cons Thematically, the Undead patron runs close to the Undying patron from the Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide. Both offer many of the same spells and ultimately create a warlock who doesn't need to eat, drink, or sleep. While the Undead patron offers more features for player characters who want to enter melee combat, the Undying focuses on stabilizing companions and combatting the undead. The Undead leans heavily into dealing necrotic damage, which can be a major downside depending on the enemies you face across your adventure. There's no shortage of creatures who are resistant or immune to necrotic damage. You also need to be careful with Mortal Husk, as the effect hits allies as well as enemies. Meet Shakan, the warlock pledged to Acererak The gaunt-faced warlock hacked away at the jungle vines with a sickle, an expression of grim disgust in his eyes. Once again, the lich had compelled him to come to a godforsaken corner of the globe to run a series of tests on yet another trap-infested labyrinth. How many poor wretches were going to die this time, their bodies skewered on spikes or smashed to bits by pulverizing rods that he had to foolproof? For a moment, memories of a past life penetrated the warlock's brain, and he was reminded of a time before his existence had become intertwined with that of an undead megalomaniac. Then the warlock emerged into a clearing and saw the catacombs entrance. A shimmering portal appeared on the door and a skeletal figure strode out, making the memories disappear as quickly as they had come. "Hello once again, Shakan," Acererak cackled. "Let's get to work, shall we?" Shakan Kain is a human whose patron is the notorious lich Acererak, constructor of the Tomb of the Nine Gods found in the Tomb of Annihilation adventure. An architect-turned-adventurer, Shakan and a group of friends dared to delve into one of Acererak's dungeons on a quest for magical weapons to defend their village, which was under attack by zombies. Unfortunately, nearly all of the party died in the trap-laden catacombs. Shakan only survived due to his intimate knowledge of construction. In the dungeon's final room, the devastated adventurer came face to face with Acererak. Impressed by Shakan's ability to circumvent traps, Acererak offered him a deal. Shakan would have all the magic required to save his village, but in return, he would have to foolproof the traps in the lich's future dungeons. Not wishing to die in vain, Shakan agreed, and a piece of his soul was bound to Acererak. Brimming with power, Shakan destroyed the undead in his village only to be shunned by his people, who were horrified by his choice to barter with a lich. Shakan was soon exiled. He now travels the world, improving the traps he finds in the lich's tombs. Shakan is riddled with guilt at the thought of causing harm to others through his work, and he hates Acererak for making him a glorified custodian. Shakan hopes to one day destroy his master's phylactery. Yet, he is still bitter for having been exiled for doing what he felt was right and necessary. Playing Shakan Shakan Kain is a lawful evil warlock with the Guild Artisan background. His highest ability scores are Charisma and Constitution. His Wisdom is also above average, while his Strength is below average. As a variant human, Shakan took the Prodigy feat at 1st level. He has proficiency and Expertise in the following skills and tools: In combat, Shakan relies on his Form of Dread, which makes his face appear as a demilich. When combined with Grave Touched, this form boosts the damage of his Eldritch Blast and Hex spells. Shakan's other spells all come in handy while navigating Acererak's death chambers. Eldritch Invocations like Armor of Shadows and Fiendish Vigor let him cast False Life and Mage Armor at will. The spells Blade Ward, Misty Step, and Spider Climb, plus the Spirit Projection feature, are useful ways of resisting damage and quickly maneuvering around a dungeon. Necrotic Husk can preserve Shakan's life in a pinch, such as if a deadly ceiling sickle or spiked floor takes him down. When Shakan needs further assistance to foolproof a trap, he either summons an Unseen Servant or calls upon his Pact of the Chain familiar, an unpleasant quasit named Vilius who frequently taunts the warlock for being a lapdog. Shakan Kain's name refers to Chakan the Forever Man, an obscure undead comic book character, and the austere pulp hero Solomon Kane. A grim combination of the two, Shakan can be a thorn in the side of any party navigating Acererak's dungeons, though he could potentially be redeemed. Strike fear into your enemy's heart Whether you hope to create a tortured soul like Shakan or a madcap mage who simply enjoys exploding in the midst of battle, the Undead is a chilling patron choice. For spell-slingers who dare to defy death, look no further. Jeremy Blum (@PixelGrotto) is a journalist, gaming blogger, comic book aficionado, and fan of all forms of storytelling who rolled his first polyhedral dice while living in Hong Kong in 2017. Since then, he's never looked back and loves roleplaying games for the chance to tell the tales that have been swirling in his head since childhood. D&D Beyond Desktop View D&D Beyond Desktop View Skip to main content Reddit and its partners use cookies and similar technologies to provide you with a better experience. By accepting all cookies, you agree to our use of cookies to deliver and maintain our services and site, improve the quality of Reddit, personalize Reddit content and advertising, and measure the effectiveness of advertising. By rejecting non-essential cookies, Reddit may still use certain cookies to ensure the proper functionality of our platform. For more information, please see our Cookie Notice and our Privacy Policy. Oh, what made your ancestors think making a pact with undead was a good idea?! Oh well, power is power, and you've gotten yourself a weird patron! Introduced with Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft, the Undead Patron is a powerful soul who was brought back after they died. Because of this, they could spend eternity gathering power and are now strong enough to act in a way similar to genies, celestials, and more. Liches, vampires, and mummies are popular patrons here. Will this Patron give your character the powers they crave? Or will this be another Undying problem? Find out in our Undead Warlock 5E guide! The Undead Patron is almost like a Wild Shape Druid, or a Barbarian. You are reliant on a limited resource "rage" mechanic to be most effective in combat. However, this mechanic consistently gets better, and you gain abilities outside of your Transformed state that improve your survivability and damage. The spells that you add to your spell lists are, shockingly, necromancy-focused. However, there are some legitimately cool utility spells that are worth considering. Undead Patron Expanded Spell List 1st Level Bane, False Life 3rd Level Blindness/Deafness, Phantasmal Force 5th Level Phantom Steed, Speak with Dead 7th Level Death Ward, Greater Invisibility 9th Level Antilife Shell, Cloudkill Bane scales quite well with your spell level, as does False Life. Bane is like Bless, but against your enemies… And lets them roll a Saving throw. A Charisma saving throw, which is nice, but a saving throw nonetheless. False life is a somewhat effective factory for Temporary Hitpoints, but does nothing other than generate temp HP. That might not be worth the spell slot every time. Blindness/Deafness is an absolutely brutal debuff, and as you cast it at a higher level, you can spread the misery. This can make it great for blinding a room full of people… Or, you can deafen important targets to lower the chance that they panic. Options! Phantasmal Force is fun, but is there to deal a small amount of damage and scales awfully with spell level. Phantom Steed is hilarious, allowing you to ride away on a Ghost Horse. The horse is really fast, but can't take any damage. Might be better to leave that for the Wizard. Speak With Dead is similarly situational. That's also a spell better suited for a Cleric or a more flexible caster. Death Ward is a decent defensive spell that you can throw on at the beginning of a dungeon and then refresh your magic midway through the dungeon. Could be useful, since it… Keeps you alive. Good to throw on a Cleric, at least! Greater Invisibility is brutally strong, but this is around the point where anti-invisibility might start becoming a problem. Still, really great spell, especially if you want to throw it on a Rogue or other high damage melee character. Antilife Shell is situational, but you can use it to keep a theoretically infinite angry mob from doing anything but throwing stuff at you. Might be too situational for the Warlock's standard spell slots. Cloudkill is good, consistent damage. Good for gassing rooms and can be relatively high damage over time if you can set it up right. Overall, a fine spell list. Has quite a bit of Concentration, but it also has solid utility and debuff options. Scan through this list as you level up; this utility might come in handy in specific situations. At 1st Level, you can transform into something no longer quite living. You transform as a bonus action, and for a minute afterwards, you gain temporary hitpoints, can force a creature to become Frightened as a Saving Throw when you land an attack, and you're immune to Frightened. You can only do this a number of times per day equal to your Proficiency modifier. Your temporary hitpoints are fine, but not as high as Wild Shape. They are also no replacement for Rage's Damage Reduction to all physical damage. Still, this is a solid 1d10+Level max health that you can refresh with a Bonus Action. That's not bad durability at all! Don't rely on it to be the sole reason you stay alive. Frightening on hit is much better at keeping you alive! You can use this with Eldritch Blast to keep someone a hundred feet away from you. Or, you can use it in melee to basically force a target to only be able to attack you at disadvantage! That's great boss-screwing potential. You're also immune to Frightened, which is fantastic. You can focus down Fey or Undead targets without worrying about not being able to approach them. Frightened is a fairly common condition, so you're going to be very much using this immunity to Frightened. And, you can use this bonus action to basically cure your Frightened, which is extremely handy! You also get to transform based on your flavor, which is fun. You can finally play as a mummy! Well, kinda. Overall, this is a legitimately strong 1st level Warlock ability, but it is held down by it's limits. Make sure you pop this during dangerous fights, or when you're worried about taking damage. It's like Barbarian Rage, so don't waste it on nothing! At 6th level, you gain some Undying Patron features, hilariously enough. This time, it's a bit better. You don't need to eat, drink, or breathe, and once per turn when you hit an attack roll, you can replace the damage with Necrotic damage. While in your Form of Dread, you roll an additional damage die. This is actually pretty solid. Well, the second part. The first part matters aggressively little; if you're getting gassed or poisoned by food, then you don't need to eat? You might be able to avoid exhaustion due to thirst or hunger in a Desert arc of a campaign. Handy only when the DM specifically tells you that it is. Now, the Necrotic damage and damage buff of Form of Dread… Now that's neat. Necrotic Damage is a pretty likely damage resistance or immunity. This is next to useless while fighting an Undead. However, in most other cases, Necrotic is a standard, good damage option. Heck, against Celestials or Fey, it might be a Vulnerability! So you can choose between Force damage (rarely resisted) or Necrotic damage (often Resisted, but sometimes Vulnerability!). In addition, in the cases where your Necrotic isn't resisted or ignored, you can deal 1d10 more damage with Eldritch blast. That's honestly stellar. On average, you're outdoing the maximum damage buff that a Barbarian gets from Rage. However, that's only once per turn, so you're not going to outdo Rage on multiple swings. Still, good damage buff! Worth keeping in mind and abusing whenever you can. At level 6, you essentially swap 1 Eldritch Blast to Necrotic damage and it deals 2d10 while Transformed. That's… Okay, but not overly impressive. At 10th level, you become inured to undeath. You resist Necrotic damage; if you're in Dread Form, you're instead Immune. In addition, you can stop yourself from falling unconscious with a 1d4 Long Rest cooldown. When you do this, you are set to 1 HP, and you explode with 2d10 + Warlock Level necrotic damage in a 30 ft radius (you can exclude targets at your choice). You gain 1 level of Exhaustion as a result. This is an interesting defensive ability. The previous ability you got made you good against Living creatures, and now you're tanky against Necrotic damage. That's not great, but you're fairly likely to fight Undead, Liches, or other sources of Necrotic damage in a standard campaign. Being straight-up immune to Necrotic damage will come in handy at least once in most sessions. However, in general, you can stop yourself from dying once per 1d4 days. While useful, you're basically replacing 1 level of exhaustion to explode for a somewhat low amount of damage; 30 on average at level 20. The good news is that the damage cannot be reduced in any way. The bad news is that you're now unable to roll ability checks well. At least Warlock isn't great at that in the first place. While the AoE might seem a bit unnecessary, remember that this is a get-out-of-jail-free card. You can be the one to save your party from disaster! And it starts with a bang. Honestly, this is a great ability, and might be worth taking the Archetype over. However… There's one more ability left to talk about. At 14th level, you can spend your spirit out of your body for an hour (or until Concentration breaks). Your spirit resists physical damage, can cast conjuration or necromancy spells without any signs, can fly and walk through walls, and can heal from Necrotic damage while using Form of Dread. This can only be done once per Long Rest. Okay, now this is interesting. It has great mobility and durability, and can even be used out-of-combat to cast necromancy spells. You can even let yourself tank; if you do this, then you might want a way to boost your Concentration saving throws. Afterwards, you can teleport your body there. That means you can leave your physical body in a vacuum (say, a bag of holding with a wide opening) since you can't die from lack of oxygen or food. Then, you can just send your spirit out and then take a big ol' nap when it dies! Or, you can teleport out and start working with your party. Now, when should you use this spirit? It's a great scout, being able to walk through walls and take less damage from reaction shots. It can set up traps in rooms ahead without being noticed. It doesn't even have a range limit; it's that good at scouting ahead if you need it to! However, it's also a great tank, since it takes so much less damage from physical attacks and can heal a ridiculous amount of health from Eldritch Blast alone! It isn't the most consistent tank, since it relies on your Concentration, but there are ways to remedy that. This can be used quite well as a Rage substitute, letting it tank for you and your party. However, it does ask you to use another resource (Form of Dread) if you want access to it's lifesteal. And that's good lifesteal, so you should probably at least consider it. This is another fantastic ability, and it has so much different utility and uses… It'll be fun to experiment with! Try to find the time to fit Warmage into your Feats if you want to use this ability effectively. As the first Warlock Patron that we've looked at since the Talisman came out, we have a few options here. However, one sticks out as being a touch more useful than the rest, especially if you plan on sticking to the Warlock for 20 levels. Two problems plague Pact of the Blade here. One, you don't gain any form of Armor. That means you're going to want a lot of Dexterity so you don't get smeared in melee combat. But, that means you're going to want to use a smaller melee weapon, like a Rapier… And then you're not doing as much damage as Eldritch Blast. The second is that you have no specific melee-based benefits. You don't do more damage in melee or anything like that, so there's no synergy that makes this work more than EB. That being said, thanks to Form of Dread, this is close to being fine. You are tanky enough that a high Dexterity build can function as a reasonable tank, especially once you get to Spiritual Projection. The Temporary HP helps a lot! If you absolutely despise making Eldritch Blast Warlocks, then the Pact of the Blade is not a terrible choice; just not quite optimal. Summoning a friend is always useful, and the Imp is especially deadly early on. The flavor is a bit off, but having a scout and a decent early-game carry is always nice. However, you will inevitably get to a point where you become a better scout than your Familiar. Then, it's usefulness lessens dramatically. This is worth considering if you don't have a Rogue or Divination Wizard to check ahead of the party for you all. That being said, you don't really need an early game carry. You are plenty durable yourself, and by level 6, you'll be doing good damage every round with Pact of the Chain. Pact of the Tome is the most simple and effective pact boon. This boosts your utility via learning new cantrips, and eventually will give you more spells. The Undead Patron has some utility, but it is mostly focused on damage and survivability. These cantrips won't solve your problems, but it will be more useful than your standard paths. And if you drop 1 Invocation, you can save your cleric from dying during a combat, which is incredibly strong! This is a good default path, if you don't think any other pact would work better for your specific character. It's also the one with least maintenance, since you don't need to worry about a Familiar or anything like that. Pact of the Talisman is great for the pessimistic Warlock. You can put it on someone before they attempt an important skill check to add a high chance that they succeed. That's useful, since you're not supporting them in many other ways. Bond and Protection of the Talisman are both legitimately strong Eldritch Invocations. If you want to be a good Supportive Warlock while blasting your enemies with Necrotic damage, this is a great choice! However, you're giving up some utility by not picking up Chain or Tome. The Undead Warlock relies on Charisma to deal damage and land those Spell Attack Rolls that they're so interested in. While a melee build could use Dexterity to deal damage, they will still want high Charisma to ensure that their spells are as effective as possible. The Tabaxi, from Volo's Guide to Monsters, are not perfect at handling Undeath, but they are an interesting choice. Their +2 Dexterity, +1 Charisma is good enough to ensure your spellcasting will be up to par. Much more interesting are their other abilities; Feline Agility allows you to outrun your opponents, making the Frighten on your Form of Dread much more impactful. Your Cat's Talents give you two skill proficiencies that you honestly needed, and make you a good scout at level 14. Finally, you have a climb speed, which is useful for repositioning before you get to level 14. Hell, sometimes Jaguars can represent voodoo… That could work! The Glasya Tiefling, introduced in Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes, is a great choice for your Undead Warlock. Glasya blessed your Tiefling with +2 Charisma and +1 Dexterity; perfect. You also get Hellish Resistance to help you with magical duels. Legacy of Malbolge helps you become a reasonable scout, with both Disguise Self and Invisibility being useful in their own way… Though Invisibility is probably the stronger spell there. Undead Warlocks have a lot of the same wants and needs as their Warlock brethren. There are a few fantastic feats for short rests that a Warlock should consider scooping up, as well as a few ways to improve their Charisma before level 20. The Chef feat is a traditional standard for any Warlock wanting to improve the party's perception of a short rest. It's also great for the Warlock themselves, providing a +1 to a stat that you really want: Constitution. This is good for rounding out starting stats or starting to inch closer to your next modifier. You'll want to take Chef a little later anyways. Chef comes with three benefits that usually apply more readily to lategame content. Proficiency in Chef's Utensils is about as useless at all points. Admittedly, a clever DM and player can find ways to make good food into a powerful plot point. But, serving good meals to random undead in a crypt isn't gonna get you very far. The other two benefits are mechanically sound. The first is a mini-Song of Rest, healing allies another d8 if they spend hit dice during short rests. This usually doesn't matter too much, but you might be able to add a few hit dice to everyone's pools if rationed out correctly. The more prevalent benefit is your ability to make treats for the party. These treats are bonus actions to gain temporary hitpoints equal to your proficiency modifier, and you make a number equal to your proficiency modifier per day. This means you get between 4 and 36 temporary hitpoints, depending on your level. This is a great feat to get at level 12 or 16, where you're at least getting a good number of treats. Since you can just hand these out, you can make sure your frontline is as buffed up as possible. Alternatively, you can just have an okay bonus action for when you aren't hexing. Admittedly, these are better eaten out of combat; a bonus action for 6 temporary HP isn't exactly a game-winning play. Eldritch Adept is a feat that might seem a bit wimpy. But, the Undead Warlock has few needs and thus can focus on getting powerful situational invocations. There are a handful of Invocations that are difficult to take without wincing, especially in the lategame. Options like Witch Sight, Visions of Distant Realms, or Master of Myriad Forms are theoretically powerful, but you're only able to select a maximum of two at endgame. And that's not counting the fact that you may want to circle back and grab things like Otherworldly Leap or Sculptor of Flesh, invocations that provide good power but are usually only one extra spell learned. Eldritch Adept allows you to get these powerful abilities without worrying too much about how situational they are. You can trade this out once per level, just like your base invocations. So, as the environment changes, you have two whole abilities that are ready to help support you as you enter new content. The Undead Warlock needs this significantly less than any other Warlock, but still desperately wants to grab this as soon as possible. That's the strength of Inspiring Leader. This feat provides you with temporary hitpoints. And it's not a small amount. Level plus Charisma is a minimum of 25 at max level, given to most parties (as long as they are six people or less). And, since you can give yourself a handful of temporary hitpoints, you have the option to use this Warlock with a larger sized party. How fun! You can't underestimate just how much durability this provides. 25 HP is a free Fireball of damage that you eat for free. 100 HP to four party members every time you rest. And your party is suddenly going to be much more interested in short rests when they get to such a large shield above them every time they take one. Seriously, if possible, consider making this your level 12 feat. It's so much extra health and your party will be eternally grateful. Fey Touched is a fantastic spell for casters, albeit a bit weaker in this case. It starts off very strong by offering a +1 to Charisma, something that Warlocks are desperate to get their hands on. You're usually rocking a 17 by the end of character creation, so rounding that out at level 4 is a pretty solid idea. However, the real meat of this feat is found through its spells known. Misty Step is on the Warlock spell list, but its immense power is worth a feat by itself. The bonus action to reposition with no worries about being grabbed or attacked on the way out – without very specific anti-teleportation abilities – is good to have for free or even on a fifth level spell slot. Your extra 1st level spell is a bit more interesting. Warlocks can pick up Hex since it's basically a free cast, but they can also pick up some specific spells like Silvery Barbs or Command that can work out well enough in enough situations to matter. A free cast of Barbs is never going to hurt. And rerolling that critical hit on your Fighter might be worth a 5th level spell slot. Maybe. For those looking for a less spell-focused way to improve their Charisma, Telekinetic is here for you. The +1 Charisma is just as good as it is on Fey Touched. However, the alternative benefits are worth raising a brow at. The first is a special version of Mage Hand that can be casted silently and is invisible. This version can get a range buff if you have already learned, or will learn, the spell naturally, making it a 60 ft invisible and silent item manipulator. This is hilarious and extremely powerful. Mage Hand that can manipulate items silently has such good roleplay potential, as well as can solve problems by carrying items without making a noise. The other benefit of Telekinetic is a no resource bonus action that can push or pull a target by 5 feet. This usually ends up being the most useful when used on an ally, who can willingly fail the save. That lets you get the ally out of a bad situation or push them right next to a target who would rather be far away from that Paladin with Sentinel. This can be used to target enemies as well, though this allows for a saving throw and thus is a bit risky. But, pushing someone away from you, in the line of an area-of-effect, or towards a trap is always fun. And it's just your bonus action, something that you don't have too many free uses for. Pop Form of Dread, use Hex, and then shove people around round three. The Undead Warlock has no unique synergies that make it particularly favored for any specific class over any other Warlock archetype for multiclassing. So, it just has the two really strong options to choose from and not many more. The Paladin gives the Undead Warlock a handful of ways to survive. It hands out Medium Armor (Heavy, if you start with it) and Lay on Hands, two tools that a Warlock can really benefit from. Shields can be nice, but you'll have to consider War Caster if you wanna go that far. Level two can be a healthy investment, just because a Fighting Style is so nice. The spells are middling, but there are a few options that are okay for emergencies, like Shield of Faith. You can also access Divine Smite, which makes the Undead Warlock Pact of the Blade build slightly more palatable. Use that temporary HP to your advantage. The Sorcerer Warlock is a natural build that gives you a huge number of spell slots and access to Metamagic, if you're willing to get to level three with the class. Sorcery Points are extremely nice, giving you access to additional spells and, eventually, the ability to augment those spells with options like Quickened or Distant Spell. In addition, the 1st level Bloodline ability can be nice for an Undead, though few bloodlines are exceptionally great at a one-level dip. Storm lets you hop around and Draconic is great for defense, and a few others give access to solid spells. While backgrounds are flexible enough to be tailored to character backstories more than mechanical power, there are a few backgrounds that synergize just a bit better with Warlocks. Mainly, backgrounds that give Warlocks proficiency with Persuasion or give them access to Perception are very handy. Preferably, a mix of additional social skills and dungeoneering abilities will offer the Warlock an edge over Warlocks with more traditional background options. The Guild Artisan is one of the best options for a Warlock in the base Player's Handbook. That is largely because of its skill proficiencies. Insight and Persuasion are, somehow, both off of the Warlock's list. If you want your Warlock to be a good conversationalist, then this is a really important start. Then, your tool proficiency is technically very open-ended, with any artisan's tool of choice. These are largely flavorful and all accomplish similar ideas, but choosing something that can help during adventuring – such as Alchemist's Supplies, can make you a further asset during character creation. Your free language is useful based on the campaign, but your equipment is pretty great. You get your artisan's tool, a letter from your guild, clothing, and then 15 gp. Admittedly, this great equipment is slightly offset by the material cost of your feature, which is 5 gold per month. That being said, this feature unlocks quite a few things for you. Your guild has your back, meaning that every city that you go to that your guild has any sway in, you're getting some backup in food, bed, and legal aid – within reason, mind you. This feature can be very strong, but only if your guild is well-traveled. Your DM has to throw you a bone there. The Investigator is for the Warlock who cares more about exploring dungeons than exploring meaningful relationships. It begins with a handful of incredibly strong choices for free skill proficiencies, though we recommend Insight and Perception. Your tool proficiencies are very strong, spanning from the social utility of the Disguise Kit to the more conventional strength of Thieves' Tools. Either way, you're going to have a pack with you that resolves outstanding issues. Your gear and feature are fine. Your gear amounts to fun horror gimmicks and 10 gp, which is completely reasonable. Also, your feature gets you some things you want quickly, as long as people understand that you're not trying to trick them. And, depending on how your DM treats your reputation, people can either like you or dislike you. Either way, you're still a cop, so watch yourself. The Urban Bounty Hunter from Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide is another good option for a Warlock, though closer in scale to the Guild Artisan. It begins with your choice of four separate skills, which is great. We recommend Insight and Persuasion, just like for Guild Artisan, but Stealth is a reasonable replacement for either of them. You also get your choice of tool, though we recommend the strong Thieve's Tools and Musical Instrument. Instruments are great for distraction or making money, and usually make better use of your high Charisma. Your gear is terrible, amounting to 20 gp. While high compared to most backgrounds, many of them offer better bang for your buck through tool kits or items. This still gets you close to a tool kit of your own, which is nice. You feature is very strong, giving you a path to get connections in most cities, as long as your DM works with you. Undead patrons are typically exceptionally powerful risen warriors, such as liches, demiliches, or dracoliches. They can also include Darklords or other entities who have shed their mortal flesh in a non-godly manner. Vampires are included as well, and someone like Strahd can make for a very strange patron in a campaign – though, preferably not the campaign where you plan to stake them. The Undead Warlock is a much better Warlock than the Undying Warlock, even if they share many of the same patron options. Many of the Undying Warlock's abilities amount to small heals. The Undead Warlock gets much easier access to survivability tools, temporary HP, and even a stronger spell list. The Undead Warlock is part of Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft. It is located on page 30, at the end of class options after the College of Spirits Bard. Before we can start building our Undead Warlock, it's important to know what our DM expects from us. And our DM is a bit of a tight-fisted one. No multiclassing. This is fine, although we'll be missing those Paladin levels for defensive capabilities. Warlock 20 is a reasonable character build, especially if the expectation is just early-on. No Lineage. This one is a bit harder, since we're not able to play any race that we want. +2 Charisma is almost required for a strong Warlock build. It'll also prevent us from locking in strong races like Fairy or Owlkin. Still, if you find a race you like with lineage rules, a lot of the choices we make in this build are still viable. Any book available. Thankfully, we can pull from any official Wizards book to find a race or background. That gives us quite a few options to work from, although the Reborn is out… Standard Array for ability scores. Our ability scores are 15, 14, 13, 12, 10, and 8, divided out however we want. That leaves us with awkward defensive scores, but that's reasonable. Standard Equipment. No average gold, unlike our Hexblade build. That's okay, since the Undead Warlock doesn't need equipment very much. Our party is a Druid, Paladin, and Tempest Cleric. We have area of effect damage and two tanks. Our goal is to deal single target damage. Perfect, since the Undead Warlock really focuses on doming people with Eldritch Blasts. That is quite a few restrictions, and leaves us with very few options if we want to start with 17 Charisma. 17 Charisma is great, since it opens us up for a level 4 feat to get to 18 rather than relying on two +2 ability boosts. We'll go with the Dispater Tiefling, a reasonable option that gets +2 Charisma and +1 Dexterity. It gets Darkvision, Fire resistance, and has a few okay racial spells in Thaumaturgy, Disguise Self, and Detect Thoughts. Effective enough to survive early on while having some actually solid lategame scaling. Our Dispater Tiefling is a Guild Artisan who has been brewing alcohol for a while. We left our town and made a pact with a Lich to go seek revenge for our murdered wife, but we'll certainly be bringing Brewer's Supplies with us. Our bonus language will be Elvish, since we'll deal with a lot of elves, according to our DM. We'll go with the fairly standard 17 Charisma, and 14 in both Dexterity and Constitution start. This gives us a 12 to throw in any stat we want, which we'll go with Wisdom. Wisdom saving throws are slightly more popular than any of the other remaining stats, so we'll just go slightly defensive there. As for gear, Undead Warlocks really don't care much about gear. The Scholar's Kit works great for low-combat scenarios but works fine in dungeons. And we're not going to be using this weapon very often, let me tell you. 5E Undead Warlock BuildRace: Dispater TieflingAbility Scores: STR 8, DEX 14 (13 + 1), CON 14, INT 10, WIS 12, CHA 17 (15 + 2)Proficiencies: Deception, Intimidation, Insight, Persuasion, Brewer's SuppliesStarting Equipment: Light Crossbow, 20 Bolts, Component Pouch, Scholar's Pack, Leather Armor, Three Daggers, Brewer's Supplies, Guild Introduction Letter, traveler's clothes, 15 gp.Languages: Common, Infernal, Elvish LevelClass BenefitsChoices1-Pact Magic -Expanded Spell List -Form of Dread We're not quite done yet! We have a few more things to take down before we continue on. Cantrips. We can't exist without Eldritch Blast, sadly. Most of our kit revolves around landing attack rolls and blasts allow for as many attack rolls as possible. We have Thaumaturgy for a generally useful cantrip in social situations, but Prestidigitation allows for significantly better non-social tricks. Spells. We have two first level spells, which aren't much. We'll go with two classics of level one Warlock bliss; Hex and Sleep. Hex is a lot of damage and will be our default bonus action to start fights with, perhaps even before Form of Dread. Sleep is a great knockout punch early on, not even allowing a save. That can lead to pretty easy kills immediately.2-Eldritch InvocationsAnother kind of busy level. Spells. Unfortunately, the two spells that the Undead get on their expanded spell list are pretty bad at level one. So, we'll just hook onto another solid level one spell, Hellish Rebuke. 2d10 damage is a good reaction and scales well, but plan to get rid of this early. Invocations. We also have some invocation options. Agonizing Blast is a must-have for any Warlock, since it's such a high boost in damage. For right now, Armor of Shadows boosts our AC by 1 or 2 every day. It'll have to go away once we find +1 Studded Leather, but for now, that's something in the distance.3-Pact Boon -2nd Level Pact MagicBig level for us! Pact. We'll go with Pact of the Tome to get a few additional utility cantrips as well as learn some very powerful ritual spells. This has the opportunity to grow out-of-control if you're on the lookout for scrolls and books during your travels – once you get to level five, mind you. For now, our Tome will get us Guidance, Message, and Mending. These are a few spells that are hard for a Warlock to access and improves our out-of-combat quite significantly. Spells. We need to keep a close eye on how our campaign is going. For now, because of how many humanoids we're fighting, Hold Person can instantly end a fight. Let's take it.4-Ability Score ImprovementAlrighty, we built our character for this level. We'll be taking Fey Touched to get a +1 to Charisma, boosting us up to a +4 modifier. That also means we have to select a pair of spells. Silvery Barbs sounds good enough to me. Cantrip. Mage Hand is a great utility spell, so that's good for us. It's the last utility spell that a Warlock gets access to, so our level 10 choice is in a bit of trouble. Spells. This level will be where we lose Sleep, which has been quickly getting harder to cast. Blindness/Deafness will be the replacement for Sleep, and Invisibility lets us safely send our allies to scout for problems, since our enemies probably don't have the best solutions for invisible characters quite yet.5-3rd Level Pact MagicLet's keep it up. Spells. Phantom steed is pretty cute, but nothing that we really want. Especially since we can soon learn it in our book. Instead, Counterspell will help us keep our party alive during rough combats. Invocation. Book of Ancient Secrets is our choice for invocation. It provides us great spell access as well as the ability to copy down a theoretically infinite number of spells. We'll get down Find Familiar and Identify, two solid spells that give our party a lot of theoretical strength. Your Tome should be constantly filling with ritual spells, so keep an eye out while exploring. This is a very powerful ability to have, but is very campaign-oriented.6-Grave TouchedWhew! That was a very fast-paced early game. This gives us the opportunity to take a breath and just learn a spell. Spells. Dispel Magic works for problem-solving as well as for helping allies once spells have already hit them. Sometimes, you just need to purge a magical effect and Counterspell either fails or you aren't in range for it. 7-4th Level Pact MagicAlright, back to a few quicker levels. Spells. 4th level is here. Death Ward is a really good spell for a Warlock to learn. If possible, throw this on as many party members as you want and then take a short rest immediately afterwards. That can keep you around. We can also lose Hellish Rebuke for Greater Invisibility, a great aggressive spell with some scouting capabilities. Invocation. Eldritch Mind will be our choice. We don't plan on getting War Caster, so we desperately need an option that helps us succeed on concentration saves. This doesn't make you immune to concentration checks, but it's good enough.8-Ability Score ImprovementThis level is a little bit more boring for your Warlock. +2 Charisma to get to 20 is a very, very good idea. We can now settle into feats that keep us alive, rather than finding more aggressive stats. While we're here, let's look at our spells. Cantrips. Eldritch Blast, Mage Hand, Prestidigitation, ThaumaturgySpells. Hex, Silvery Barbs, Blindness/Deafness, Hold Person, Invisibility, Misty Step, Counterspell, Dispel Magic, Death Ward, Greater InvisibilityTome Cantrips. Guidance, Message, MendingTome Spells. Find Familiar, Identify Spells. Our spell list is largely in a good spot, with a lot of okay options that use concentration, some out-of-combat utility, and more. We'll go with Tongues at this level. Since our combat is relatively strong, Tongues can let us pass over all magical items that need it while dominating language barriers.9-5th Level Pact MagicFew additional choices at this level, and this is the last free spell that we get in a row. From now on, we get free spells every other level, so look for opportunities to trade out magic where necessary. Spells. Cloudkill is actually an excellent area denial tool that's worth scooping up. Just make sure you don't let it blow onto your allies. We'll also trade out Hold Person for Hold Monster. At this point, enemies tend to not be humanoids, so it's much harder to land an impactful Hold Person. Hold Monster doesn't need any target in particular, so it's worth keeping around. Invocation. Gift of the Protectors is a really strong defensive ability. You basically get free casts of Death Ward equal to your proficiency modifier. And, since it's precast on targets, you can put someone's name in the book and then go to another plane. They'll still survive! Though, it only lets them survive at 1 hp once.10-Necrotic HuskWe're at the point where spells come slower. Make sure you are willing and ready to slip a spell slot away if you need to! Do watch your Necrotic Husk exhaustion level, though. Cantrip. We don't really have much else that we desperately need, so we'll take Blade Ward. It lets you potentially hold down a hallway a bit easier, since you can pretty easily get a small pool of temporary hitpoints with a mere bonus action. Spells. We'll actually tag out Invisibility for Synaptic Static. Greater Invisibility doesn't cover all use cases for Invisibility, but it's close enough that you can safely lose it. Synaptic Static is a big area of effect, targets invisibility, debuffs all targets, and only does two less dice than a level 5 Fireball.11-Mystic Arcanum (6th Level)We now unlock Mystic Arcanum, once per day spells that you should try to cast every single day. Keep that value! Mystic Arcanum. Scatter is a personal favorite. The ability to reposition your allies 120 ft around a battlefield is so handy. It also has the chance to send enemies away or put them into terrible predicaments. And, worst case scenario, it's a method to teleport all allies 120 ft with a single action. Make sure your allies are ready for this with potential prepared actions. Spells. We have a lot of the spells that we need, so we can focus on rare use cases. Raulothim's Psychic Lance targets intelligence and incapacitates enemies. That's great, since you aren't going to run into many targets that are immune to incapacitation. Use this to strip away a turn and dome someone for 8d6.12-Ability Score ImprovementOur feat choices are going to be important. We'll go with Chef to start. 16 temporary hit points per rest, d8 bonus healings, and Chef's Utensils are a fun pile of stuff to have. We'll