

SPIRIT CULTS

In the warring age of The Crown Wars, kingdoms were culled from history in the wake of powerful and bloody monarchs seeking to claim the continent for their own. Even in such dark times, the nation of Kastivan was spoken of in hushed fearful whispers. For the coming of the Kastivan legion meant more than the horrors of war. Like a black incandescent omen rising over the horizon they would descend, free of mortal flesh and bone. Those fortunate enough to survive would claim hell itself had emptied. Fall not to the ghost legions of Kastivan they would cry, lest your soul join its undead ranks. A saying that held no truth, after all, the ascension from the flesh was not as simple as dying.

Kastivan was not the first to dabble in necromancy to fill their ranks, but they were the first to refine it. Unlike the skeletal rotting armies of Memnor, birthed from the dirt and quick to fall apart against the blade. Kastivan's use of the undead had originally been more purposeful in design.

The scholars developed a necromantic ritual to free the soul, giving their Kingdom's most renowned individuals the power to shed their mortal shell and ascend before true death, forever guiding Kastivan to glory as ageless spirits. Squabbles over succession and power became childish memories in the wake of true immortality. All those worthy would ascend into the Kastivan Council, governed by Queen Kastivan herself, first of the ascended.

Alas, though they were immortal, their kingdom was not. Despite its endless spectral legions, at the brink of victory Kastivan would fall like any other kingdom, with the defeat of their Queen. A monolithic Spire now marks the grave of mighty Kastivan, named the Black Thorn by those who remember its use in the Queen's vanquishment.

HEIRS OF KASTIVAN

Kastivan was brought low at last, the spectral court decimated, brought low by its own hubris. Those who were not destroyed spread across the lands and remained in hiding, dreaming of their nation's old glory as the decades turned to centuries. But these courtiers would not dream alone.

As Kastivan passed into legend there were those who sought out these ancient immortal spirits, necromancers seeking power and knowledge in exchange for servitude. And thus, the first of the spirit cults were formed.

With the destruction of Kastivan, much of its knowledge of necromancy was lost. The remaining specters, nobles and politicians, only holding a partial understanding of what their ancient scholars managed to accomplish. But the cults were not perturbed. They scoured the lands, acquiring any and all tomes and scrolls that bore the Kastivan seal. Through fragmented and incomplete knowledge of the ritual, and the guidance of the immortal specters, the spirit cults mastered an imperfect form of the Rite of Ascension.

Their teachings frame the body of flesh and mortality as a prison for the soul that must be freed. Like a butterfly hatching out of a cocoon, so will the human soul escape its body to rise to a greater form. And at each group's center sits a kastivan noble. To the cult, the spirits of Kastivan are holy advisors and keepers of immense power. The nobles are unified in their desire for the return of Kastivan's glory. Though they might not always agree on what the return of Kastivan will look like.

Despite the Rite of Ascension now being far from its former brilliance, every attempt is treated as a holy rite. Failures of these rituals create gibbering haunts, barely sentient ghastly apparitions. An easily dismissed sign of unworthiness for the soul that failed to ascend.



SPIRIT DISCIPLE

The ancient ritual allowed a soul to be freed from its flesh in an instant, but the spirit cults' understanding of Kastivan necromancy was crude, limited and incomplete, and thus was the recreated Rite of Ascension.

The followers who take part in this ritual, deemed worthy by the Kastivan specters they worship; are called spirit disciples. Individuals who have begun the preparations for their ascension from the flesh.

The disciples undergo special training to prepare their ascension, limiting the risks of the body falling apart or simply dying before the ritual's completion. They walk the edge between life and death, weakening the connection between body and soul by regularly drinking poison tonics that slowly destroys yet conserves the flesh. It is both a spiritual and physical endeavor, requiring a strong will and a zealous mind, until the separation of soul and body has become significant enough that they can control each individually.

Disciples farther along in their training can slip parts of their soul free of its flesh, granting them a second set of spectral arms, or partially stretching their soul out from their body. These members are usually high ranking in the cult, found in key locations, close to their undead masters and using their newfound powers to protect and serve them.



SPIRIT DISCIPLE

Medium Humanoid

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft., as soul: 30 ft., fly (hover) 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (0)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

Proficiency +2

Skills Perception +3, Religion +2

Damage Resistances poison (as soul: acid, cold, fire, lightning)

Damage Immunities (as soul: poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks)

Condition Immunities (as soul: grappled, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained)

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 13

Languages Common

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Deathbloom Poison. The disciple's ceremonial dagger is coated with deathbloom poison. A creature that takes poison damage from the disciple's dagger can't regain hit points until the end of the disciples' next turn.

Slippery Soul. The disciple's soul provokes no opportunity attacks.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The disciple makes two weapon attacks; only one of it can be made with its spectral dagger. If the disciple's soul is split from the body, it makes two spectral dagger attacks.

Ceremonial Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 +3) slashing damage plus 9 (2d8) poison damage.

Spectral Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d8) necrotic damage.

Soul Split. The disciple expels its soul from its body which emerges in an unoccupied space within 30 ft. of its body and makes one attack with its spectral dagger as part of the same action. The disciples' soul is an extension of itself, so both body and soul are the same creature and if a game effect that effects one part effects the other unless it is immune to it (for example if one creature grapples the Spirit Disciple's body, its soul is not affected). The soul has its own unique resistances and immunities. The disciples's soul can move not further away than 60 ft. of its body and move through creatures and objects as if they are difficult terrain and takes 10 force damage if it ends its turn in an object. While the disciples' soul left its body, the body can't act or move and attack rolls targeting it have advantage. As an action the disciple's soul can return to its body and the disciple can attack with its ceremonial dagger as part of the same action.

HOLLOW

It is unsurprising that great necrotic energies are used in the ascension ritual to peel a soul from its fleshly prison. In the time of Kastivan such a process was refined and controlled to reduce unwanted animation of corpses. The cult has no such reservations.

Regardless of success, the flesh is not discarded upon the freeing of the soul, instead the flesh is animated by the residual magic. This undead body is called a hollow.

Hollows are truly empty shells, meat automatons drenched in necrotic energy. Easy to command and void of soul. However, though powerful these creatures possess an instinct to fill their own emptiness, conjuring a vortex-like pull to consume life from its surroundings.

The hollows are commonly deployed by the cults as useful minions, or a first line of defense against those who dare to intrude on their sanctuaries. Not all hollows are equal though, bodies left behind by powerful individuals will retain that strength. Some souls, if strong enough, will leave a negative imprint, giving its hollow a semblance of cognition, unlike its lesser ilk. But the greater the hollow the deeper the emptiness it must fill. Its very presence makes creatures feel as if their souls are being pulled into its gaping void.



HOLLOW

Medium Undead

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 39 (6d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	8 (-1)	14 (+2)	2 (-5)	10 (0)	3 (-4)

Proficiency +2

Damage Resistances necrotic

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 10

Languages Understands all languages it spoke in life but doesn't speak

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Vacuous. When a creature within 5 ft. of one or more Hollows regains hit points, it regains half as much instead.

ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 +3) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

VENERABLE HOLLOW

Medium Undead

Armor Class 17 (splint armor)

Hit Points 110 (13d8 + 52)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	10 (0)	18 (+4)	3 (-4)	14 (+2)	7 (-2)

Proficiency +4

Saving Throws Int +0, Cha +2

Damage Resistances necrotic

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 12

Languages Understands all languages it spoke in life but doesn't speak

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Turn Resistance. The hollow has advantage on saving throws against effects that turn Undead.

Vacuous Hollow. If another creature within 5 ft. of the venerable hollow regains hit points, it regains none and instead the venerable hollow gains temporary hit points equal to the hit points regained.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The venerable hollow makes two weapon attacks. Only one of which can be a slam attack.

Battle Axe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 +5) slashing damage, or 10 (1d10+5) slashing damage if wielded with both hands.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 +5) bludgeoning damage plus 14 (4d6) necrotic damage.

Soul Vortex (Recharge 5-6). The hollow syphons the souls of any living creature within 20 ft. of itself. Every living creature in the area must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 27 (8d6) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one. The venerable hollow regains hit points equal to half the total necrotic damage dealt.

SPIRIT BINDER

With Kastivan's knowledge of necromancy came the discipline of soul manipulation. As such, they knew how to trap and bind souls.

Having one's soul ripped from their body to become a ghostly minion of Kastivan was a fate that awaited criminals and captured enemies alike. It was reserved for those whose punishment was deemed too great to serve in their mortal life. In some extreme cases this punishment was eternal. Thankfully, the spirit cults have not yet rediscovered this method of undead enslavement. But their Kastivan leaders have given them the means to call upon those already imprisoned.

A person who finds access to these spirit slaves can summon countless servants bound to obey their every command. In the cults these are called spirit binders, magic users that specialize in calling upon the indebted souls, wielding them as mighty weapons doomed to fight for a long fallen kingdom.

Each padlock on a binder's tattered robes represents one bound spirit, eagerly awaiting to serve, as each act of obedience will bring the soul closer to the release of lasting death. To master the art of spirit binding one must prove themselves a capable necromancer in their own right. As such, one would be wise to not underestimate these mages.



SPIRIT BINDER

Medium humanoid

Armor Class 14 (Mage Armor, 11 without)

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (0)

Proficiency +3

Skills Arcana +6, History +6

Resistances poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Enlist. When an allied living creature within 30 ft. of the Spirit Binder dies or a creature under the effect of its **Bind Soul** action dies, the spirit binder can use a reaction to bind the creature's spirit and refresh its use of Conjure Bound Spirit.

Spirit Veil. When the spirit binder begins its turn with more than 0 hit points, it gains 10 temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Staff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.

Ghostly Touch. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, range 60 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 13 (3d8) necrotic damage and the creature has disadvantage on its next attack roll it makes before the end of the spirit binder's next turn.

Bind Soul (Recharge 5-6). A creature within 30 ft. of the spirit binder must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save a creature is paralyzed for one minute or until the spirit binder's

concentration ends (as if concentrating on a spell). At the end of the paralyzed creature's turn it repeats the saving throw, ending the effect on a success. The spirit binder can use an action to deal 9 (2d8) necrotic damage to the paralyzed creature automatically. The creature is also no longer paralyzed if the spirit binder uses its action to do anything else.

On a successful save the creature takes 9 (2d8) necrotic damage and is not paralyzed.

Spellcasting. The spirit binder casts one of the following spells, using Intelligence as the spellcasting ability (Spell attack + 6, Spell save DC 14):

At will: dancing lights, message, mold earth, thaumaturgy

1/day each: animate dead, blindness/deafness, mage armor, silence

BONUS ACTIONS

Conjure Bound Spirit (1/short rest). The spirit binder can use a bonus action on its turn to summon one bound spirit in an empty space within 30 ft. of itself. The spirit is an immaterial and can move through objects and creatures. The spirit remains for one minute or until the binder is slain. When conjured the bound spirit can make an attack against a creature in reach with the following attack:

Bound Spirit. *Melee Weapon Attack* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 2d6 necrotic damage.

On each of its turns, the spirit binder can use another bonus action to have one or more spirits it has conjured move up to its speed and make another bound spirit attack.

ASCENDED NOBLE

When Kastivan fell, all that remained were the scattered fragments of their once proud leadership. These phantoms were members of the Kastivan Court. Counts, generals, concierges, given eternal spectral unlife through Kastivan's Rite of Ascension. With centuries of experience to fall back on, they lead their cabals with a single goal, Kastivan's return. Though, rumors tell of some growing disillusioned with time, and have plans of their own.

Powerful in life their strength only grew in undeath. The Council were creatures of nobility, possessing a perverted power of reverence that could suppress common deterrents against the living dead and rallying them into a frenzy.

But the true existential terror was not their leadership, but their eternal hunger for more power. A side effect of the perfected Ritual of Ascension allowed the ascended to sever the thin thread binding body and soul, allowing a specter to pluck the soul from the flesh, and devour it whole. It is not uncommon for a noble to feast upon those that fail the ascension, an unworthy soul being put to better use. And some forbid further attempts at perfecting the Rite of Ascension, in fear of worst results, or maybe their own gluttonous satisfaction. Or perhaps, they never intended for it to work any other way?

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The ascended noble makes two attacks.

Spectral Strike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (6d8) necrotic damage.

Phantom Bolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +10 to hit, range 60 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 18 (4d8) necrotic damage and the creature can't regain hit points until the end of the ascended noble's next turn.

Reap Soul (Recharge 5-6). The ascended noble makes a spectral strike against a living creature. On a hit the attack deals an additional 30 necrotic damage and the creature has disadvantage on attack and saving throws until the end of the noble's next turn. If this attack reduces the creature to 0 hit points the creature dies and the noble reaps its soul. The creature cannot be resurrected by any means other than a wish as long as the noble is not destroyed, or releases the soul as an action. A released soul does not ascend to the upper planes if it can find its body within 24 hours of its release. A soul that finds its body can enter it and the creature returns to live with 0 hit points.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Ascended Noble can take 2 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Ascended Noble regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Reappear. The ascended noble becomes invisible and moves up to half of its speed. At the end of the movement it becomes visible.

Phantom Bolt. The ascended noble makes a Phantom Bolt attack.

Rally the Dead (2 Actions). Up to 3 undead creatures within 20 ft. of the ascended noble gain 10 temporary hit points and are immune to being charmed, frightened, or effects that turn Undead until the end of their next turn.



ASCENDED NOBLE

Medium Undead

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 121 (22d8 + 22)

Speed 30 ft., fly (hover) 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	21 (+5)

Proficiency +5

Saving Throws Dex +9, Wis +9, Cha +10

Skills History +7, Intimidation +10, Perception +9, Persuasion +10

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

Damage Immunities cold, necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhausted, grappled, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 19

Languages Common, Celestial, Infernal

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The noble can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If the noble fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Turn Defiance. The noble and any allied undead within 60 ft. of it have advantage on saving throws against effects that turn Undead.

KORINA, ROYAL HANDMAIDEN

Lacking physical bodies it was common practice for the nobility of Kastivan to employ living, or at least physical servants to handle material duties. Queen Kastivan was no different, commanding a large entourage of loyal retainers to maintain her seat of power. But one loyal servant excelled above the rest, and in return Queen Kastivan bestowed her greatest reward: immortality.

Korina the royal handmaiden was said to be Queen Kastivan's constant companion. Her devotion and loyalty so strong it was recognized by the Queen herself. Wishing to keep Korina by her side the Queen linked her own undead existence with her handmaiden's life-force, granting the royal handmaiden eternal life. For as long as Queen Kastivan continued to exist, Korina would never die.

For centuries, Korina faithfully supported her Queen as confidant, one who loved her above all else. But alas, the connection between handmaiden and queen would prove to be a curse. When the Kingdom fell and Queen Kastivan was banished but not killed, Korina was left behind, unable to die but without purpose.

Be it out of loyalty or her curse, Korina was still duty-bound to remain within the ruins of her home. Ageless and alone, the Queen's corrupted existence in banishment ravaged Korina's form, twisting her into an immortal monster.

It is said she remains there to this day, protecting the Queen's Halls from intruders. Even if struck down, this creature is unable to die. Her soul bound to a body that will always heal to continue her eternal service, until the end of time.



KORINA, ROYAL HANDMAIDEN

Large monstrosity

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 209 (22d10 + 88)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	22 (+6)	18 (+4)	11 (0)	15 (+2)	8 (-1)

Proficiency +5

Saving Throws Dex +11, Wis +7, Cha +4

Skills History +5, Perception +7, Stealth +11

Resistances necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhausted, frightened, unconscious

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Common

Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (2/Day). If Korina fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

From the Shadows. When Korina starts her turn in dim light or darkness, her movement provokes no opportunity attacks until the end of her turn.

Lair Awareness. Korina is magically aware of any creature that enters or leaves her lair.

Magical Attacks. Korina's attacks are magical.

Undying Servant. When Korina starts her turn with more than 0 hit points, she regains 10 hit points. When she is reduced to 0 hit points, Korina turns to mist and disperses. During the next new moon Korina manifests at full hit points within her lair. Only her Queen or the use of the *Wish* spell can release her from her service and allow her to die permanently.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Korina makes two melee weapon attacks, Korina can hide in place of one attack.

Scythes. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (6d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Woeful Wail (Recharge 5-6). Korina lets out a anguished wail. Each creature within 20 ft. of her that can hear her must make a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save a creature takes 18 (4d8) psychic damage and is stunned until the end of its next turn. On a successful save a creature takes half as much damage and is not stunned. A creature immune to psychic damage can't be stunned by this action.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Korina can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Korina regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Move. Korina moves up to half of her speed without provoking opportunity attacks. If she is in dim light or darkness, Korina moves her entire speed instead.

Hide. If Korina is in dim light or darkness, she hides.

Cutting Approach (2 Actions). Korina moves up to half of her speed towards a creature and attacks with her Scythes.

Scythe Dance (3 Actions). Each creature within 5 ft. of Korina must succeed a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or take 21 (6d6) slashing damage.

Forgotten Foes: Spirit Cults

LAIR: THE QUEEN'S HALLS

The capital of Kastivan was once known for its haunting beauty, but today little remains of its former splendor. In the center of the Capital lied Queen Kastivan's seat of power. These ruins that tangle along the sinister spire that marks the spot of the queen's defeat all these years ago are known as the Queen's Halls. One can only suggest the majesty this place held, but all that remains are decrepid arcades. While having fallen into ruin, the Queen's Halls are far from abandoned. Korina, the queen's ever-loyal royal handmaiden, still stalks this area. Intruders who dare to besmirch these halls with their loathsome presence are swiftly dealt with by this most lethal of predators.

LAIR ACTIONS

When fighting Korina, Royal Handmaiden, inside of the Queen's Halls, she can take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Korina takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects. Korina can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

Assassinate. Korina targets one creature she can see within the Queen's Halls that has no other creature present within 10 ft. of itself. Until Korina uses another Lair action, any attack rolls Korina makes against that target creature have advantage.

Kill Flames. Any non-magical light within the Queen's Halls are snuffed out.

Shadow Retreat. Korina teleports up to 30 ft. to an unoccupied space. If this space is in dim light or darkness Korina becomes invisible until the beginning of her next turn.

Unending Loyalty. Korina gains 30 temporary hit points and if Korina is under any effect that allows her to repeat a saving throw at the end of her turn to end the effect, she repeats the saving throw with advantage.

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