

GLD2 Death Cleric

By Dan Hass



Synth Grimsbane – a cleric of the Death Domain. From 1st level through 20th level – annotated.

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About the Author

Dan Hass has written D&D adventures for over thirty years. He has a reputation for a rigorous adherence to the rules and guidelines; complex NPCs with strong, realistic motivation; and storylines based on moral conflicts.

It is easy to find the wide variety of items written with a web search for the author's name and "DnD".

Supplement Summary

GLD2 Death Cleric is a supplement designed to be a tool for DMs. Players could use it as an example of character optimization, or even as a pregenerated character if the campaign allows the death domain for player characters. This supplement requires a *Player's Handbook (PHB)*, a *Monster Manual (MM)*, and a *Dungeon Master's Guide (DMG)*. It details Synth Grimsbane starting from a 1st level cleric with the death domain, up to a 20th level multi-classed character.

Treasure

Treasure is not included in Synth's advancement. The level of treasure a DM awards is a defining trait in her campaign (low wealth vs high wealth & low magic vs high magic) and this supplement takes pains to avoid imposing on that decision. Synth is equipped with level appropriate gear, but the DM gets to decide if there is a market for the used gear of a death cleric if the PCs defeat him in battle.

Using this Supplement

Synth Grimsbane is a cleric of the death domain with some multiclassing for optimization.

Each level presents a stat block for Synth at that level. Additionally, there are comments and recommendations for presenting Synth as the BBEG (Big Bad Evil Guy). Synth can be an additional creature for the DM to utilize along with other creatures, but he is designed to be a recurring villain who levels with the PCs over the course of time.

For players, Synth is intended as an example of combat optimization (often called "min/maxing"). Choices are made to prioritize his combat effectiveness with notes explaining each level's choices.

If the player is in a campaign that allows the death domain, variant human,

multiclassing and feats as player options, Synth can be a pregenerated character.

Building an NPC

In general, building an NPC using the same methodology as building a PC is not a good strategy. The *DMG* p.282 has one paragraph describing this process buried inside several pages explaining how to add traits to NPCs to customize them in a way completely different from building a PC.

The recommended method is to start with a base creature and then add traits. So if a DM needs a low level divine caster, and he doesn't want to use an **Acolyte** over and over, he can take something like a **Cultist** and give him a few 1st level spell slots or innate spellcasting, pick some first level spells, and viola – there is your low level priest or friar. This will be much less time intensive than using the PC classes.

However, it is a common desire of DMs to have certain special NPCs that seem to be on equal footing with PCs. In previous versions of the game, there were explicit methods for building NPCs using PC classes. And while this isn't the most efficient way to create opponents for PCs, it may be worthwhile for special opponents.

The *DMG* does reference this process, so it is within the RAW. And the *DMG* provides a couple of class options clearly labelled "Villainous Class Options", which likely refers to NPCs (although some PCs are definitely villainous).

Legendary Actions

There is no way within the player character's development process to explicitly add Legendary Actions, which are essential for a creature to be used as a solo opponent. But there are some mechanics that with some creativity could be used to add Legendary Actions to an NPC developed using class advancement.

For example, the *DMG* has a section on *supernatural gifts* beginning on p. 227. These *blessings* and *charms* are granted as rewards to any creature (including NPCs developed using class progression). Furthermore, the DM is encouraged to use creativity in developing *blessings* and *charms*, so granting Legendary Actions is within the scope of these rewards.

The cleric class has specific mechanics that could yield Legendary Actions. One is the spell *glyph of warding*. Inscribeing a *spell glyph* gives the caster the option of how the

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spell is triggered, and spells triggered by the *spell glyph* don't require concentration. The spell doesn't have to be triggered by Synth's action or even on his turn. So a reasonable source of Legendary Actions could be spells stored in a *spell glyph*.

The 10th level cleric ability: **divine intervention** could be interpreted as a mechanic for adding Legendary Actions. The benefit isn't restricted to a single effect, and it is similar to *blessings* and *charms* in the broad range of ways it could manifest.

Finally, Legendary Actions can be added by varying from the RAW in ways that are consistent with Synth's build. For example, there may be spells that Synth has gotten so comfortable with that he isn't constrained to casting them using his spell slots or even actions on his turn. Spells that seem particularly "fast" are ideal – spells with a casting time of a bonus action, or with only a verbal component.

Methodology

Synth Grimsbane's class progression is presented from a first level character through to cleric 17/fighter 2/sorcerer 1. He is developed as a PC, and then translated into a monster stat block.

While Synth uses many "min/max" techniques, he could have benefited from some variations of the methodology that were deliberately avoided. For example, he uses a point buy for ability scores (*PHB* 13), but a DM could use a 4d6 method and get a much better set of ability scores. Similarly, he takes standard hit points when he could have "rolled" higher hit points. If a DM decides to change this, it could easily change Synth's CR, so if a DM changes these the CR should be recalculated.

A variation involves heavy armor proficiency which is strategically important to his build. Multi-classing into fighter at second level does not give it; by the RAW he would need to take fighter at first level to get it. However, for thematic reasons, it is desirable that Synth be a death cleric all the way through, he is presumed to have "retconned" at 2nd level to have taken fighter at first level, but at a penalty of the 2 extra hit points he would have gotten as a first level fighter.

Further, as a player, Synth would be able to petition the DM for access to exceptional magic items to increase his effectiveness, but Synth's progression presumes a conservative magic item access.

Each level has explanations for the choices made, and there are sidebars to provide additional information (including suggested Legendary Actions that can be added outside the character progression).

The CR calculations use the method in the *DMG*'s section on modifying and creating creatures.

Excluded from the Statblocks...

The **ritual caster** trait of the cleric class is not replicated on the statblocks, because it won't play a part in combat. However, there are several ritual spells on the cleric's spell list that could have important ramifications when building an adventure which includes Synth.

Using the **Acolyte** background, Synth's randomly generated roleplaying characteristics are:

Personality Trait: Nothing can shake my optimistic attitude.

Ideal: Change.

Bond: I would die to recover an ancient relic of my faith that was lost long ago.

Flaw: I am suspicious of strangers and expect the worst of them.

Synth's origin story:

A trauma that he won't talk about left him without parents or even close relatives when he was a child. He was taken in by a monastery where he was raised by the stoic monks. The narrow range of personality types he encountered among the dozen or so aesthetics of the monastery caused him to develop an aversion to strangers and crowds that borders on agoraphobia. Even a single new person's presence agitates him.

It was presumed that he would enter the clergy himself and he began indoctrination at a young age. However, he had a natural affinity for macabre phenomena that made most people who encountered him uneasy. Over time he made contact with a few others who share his predilections.

He believes that the universe is due for a restructuring. He expects to help usher in a new order where the universe is populated by undead minions who obey the will of only a few mortals. There are cults that hold this and a common belief that there exists a lost artifact that can grant a living person immortality and unimaginable power to control and shape the universe.

Thus he sets out on his journey.

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1st level

Synth Grimsbane begins as a fighter with the **Acolyte** background. In addition to being congruent with the decision to be a cleric, **Acolyte** opens up many roleplaying options – a faithful member of an accepted religion swayed to the death domain for some reason and the Acolyte's **Shelter of the Faithful** provides connections to members of his cult/religious order.

First Level Fighter

When multiclassing is allowed, first level of fighter is a very strong choice for most casters. Although it requires a 15 Strength to use the heavy armor without slowing, it is usually worth it. First level fighter provides:

- AC20 with no magic items (plate + shield)
- Proficiency in Constitution saving throw (important for maintaining concentration on spells)
- Proficiency in Athletics and Perception (the two most important skills in 5th edition)
- Extra hit points (extremely important in tier 1 play)
- **Second Wind** (excellent bonus action ability at low levels)

He is a variant human. For his ability scores (point-buy) he spends 9 points on Wisdom (of course), and uses one of his +1 racial adjustments to increase it to 16. He chooses to spend 7 points on Strength and the other +1 racial adjustment to take it to 15 (so that he isn't slowed by heavy armor). He takes Constitution to 14 with 7 points for hit points and Constitution saving throws. This leaves him with 4 points left in his 27 point buy. Dexterity and Intelligence are dump stats (for this build), so he takes Charisma to 12.

As a human variant, he gets a feat. There are several good candidates. But he settles on Lucky. It is one of the strongest and most versatile feats, and from a DM perspective, while it will greatly increase Synth's effectiveness, it won't change his CR.

He has the starting equipment for a 1st level fighter (chain mail, shield, battleaxe) and used his starting 15 gp to purchase javelins and a whip.

His skill proficiencies are Insight and Religion from the **Acolyte** background. He takes Athletics and Perception as fighter proficiencies. The racial skill choice can be any skill. Animal Handling is wisdom based and has some implications for lair building.

Rounding his 1st level choices are languages (Common plus 3 others). Synth

has trans-planar aspirations, so he takes Abyssal, Celestial, and Infernal.

CR Calculations

Defensive CR: ½ (7-35 hit points; AC 16 with *shield of faith* which is 5 more than 13, so CR increases).

Offensive CR: ½ (6 damage per round, +4 to hit)

Synth Grimsbane

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

Armor Class 18 (scale, shield)

Hit Points 12 (1d10+2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15(+2)	8(-1)	14(+2)	8(-1)	16(+3)	12(+1)

Saving Throws Str +4, Con +4

Skills Animal Handling +5, Athletics +4, Insight +5, Perception +5, Religion +1

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Infernal

Challenge ½ (100 XP)

Fighting Style. Per PHB 72 (dueling).

Lucky. Per PHB 167.

Second Wind. Per PHB 72 (1d10+1).

Shelter of the Faithful. Per PHB 127.

Actions

Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8+4) slashing damage.

Javelin. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit. Range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4+2) slashing damage.

Usage

As a CR ½, Synth Grimsbane is appropriate to face 1st level PCs. As the aspiring leader of a cult, he might have **bandits**, **cultists** or some other CR 1/8 cohorts. He also has Animal Handling to set up beasts as lair guards.

He likely has a patron he is serving at this point. As a solo creature, his patron could have him under the effect of *aid*. Synth's Legendary Actions can come from *glyph of warding* to store spells cast by the patron, Synth's Animal Handling, and his sorcerous affinity for wild magic (a hint to his future multiclassing).

- **Command.** One creature of Synth's choice must succeed on a DC12 Wisdom saving throw, or flee (per the spell *command*).
- **Critter.** A trained critter (AC11, 1 HP cat, rat, toy poodle, etc.) rushes in and uses the Help action to aid Synth's next attack.
- **Wild Magic Surge.** Per PHB 103. This ability cannot be used again until a spell is cast or a magic effect manifests.