

THE CRIMSON CODEX

7 GOTHIC SUBCLASSES FOR 5E



7 Dark Victorian subclasses for 5e campaigns by OnixShu

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WELCOME TO THE THE CRIMSON CODEx COMPENDIUM

“POWER DEMANDS SACRIFICE. SOME PAY WITH BLOOD, OTHERS WITH SANITY, BUT NONE WHO WALK THESE PATHS EMERGE UNCHANGED.”

The Crimson Codex Compendium offers character options for those drawn to shadowy powers and forbidden arts in their campaigns. These subclasses explore the boundaries between life and death, blood and shadow, science and dark magic. They are designed for campaigns with gothic, dark fantasy, or horror elements, where characters might tread morally ambiguous paths in their quest for power and survival.

WHAT YOU’LL DISCOVER

Dark Archetypes: Whether harnessing predatory instincts as a Grim Hunter, manipulating blood as a Sanguine Arcanist, or communing with entities beyond the veil, these subclasses offer thematically cohesive paths for characters who find their power in darkness.

Balance and Risk: Each subclass balances mechanical power with thematic costs or risks. The power they offer comes with sacrifices, ethical dilemmas, or dangerous side effects.

Integration Options: These dark paths include suggestions for how they fit into various campaign settings, and the ethical challenges they present.

FOR PLAYERS

This compendium invites you to explore characters who embrace darkness without necessarily being evil. A Plague Doctor might use their knowledge of disease to heal the poor, while a Dirgeweaver may honor the dead and comfort the bereaved. Even the most unsettling powers can serve noble ends — or tempt good characters toward corruption.

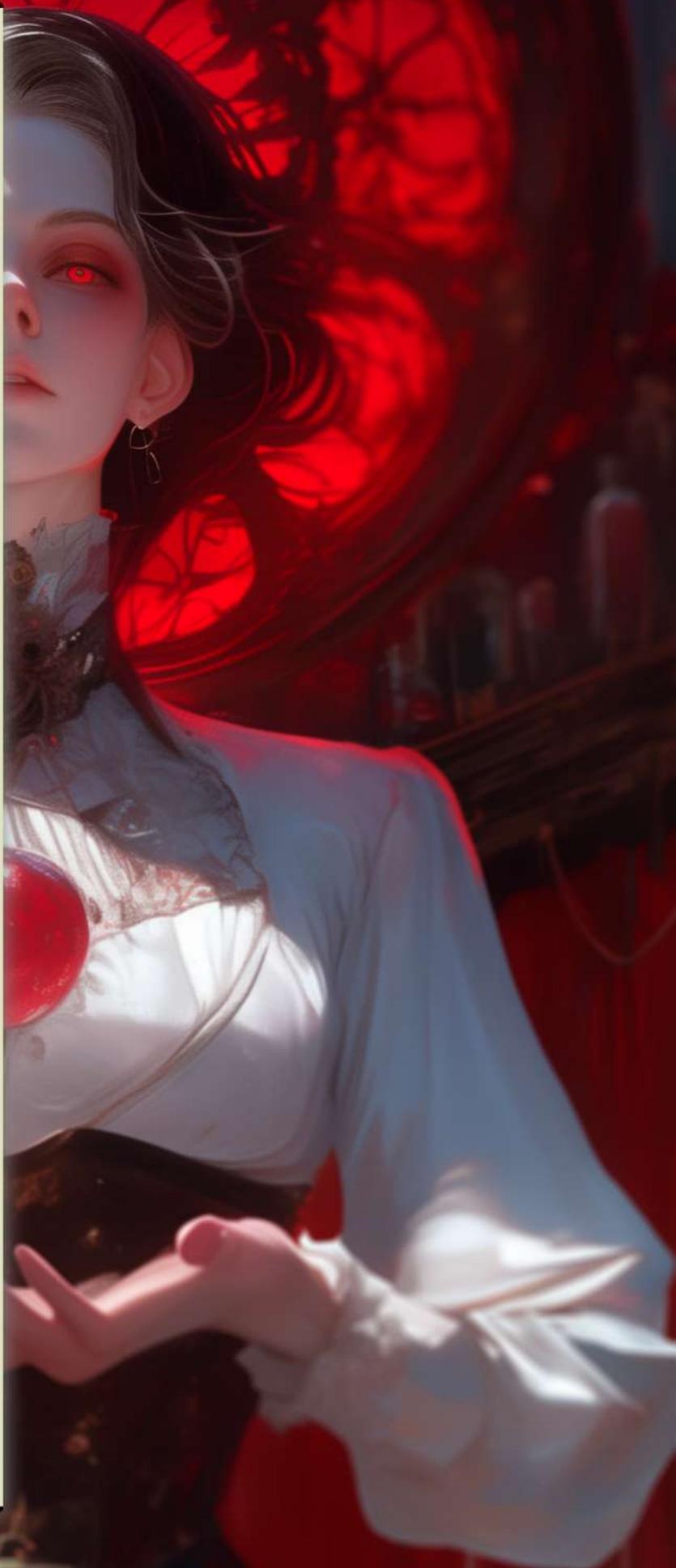
FOR DUNGEON MASTERS

These subclasses thrive in settings where moral ambiguity enhances the storytelling experience. Consider how these dark practitioners are viewed in your world — are they persecuted, tolerated, or even revered? Each subclass can inspire faction creation, plot hooks, and memorable NPCs who demonstrate the consequences of walking these shadowy paths.

A NOTE OF CAUTION

While these options are balanced for gameplay, they intentionally explore darker themes than typical D&D content. The Grim Hunter’s predatory instincts, the Sanguine Arcanist’s blood manipulation, and the Hemomancer’s life-force magic all delve into territory some players might find unsettling. Before introducing these options to your campaign, ensure all participants are comfortable with these themes.

“THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN HEROISM AND DARKNESS ARE RARELY CLEAR. WHAT MATTERS IS NOT THE PATH YOU WALK, BUT THE PURPOSE THAT DRIVES YOUR STEPS.”



GRIM HUNTER MARTIAL ARCHETYPE

The beast within me howls, but I wield its claws. My prey bleeds, and I grow stronger.

The Grim Hunter embodies the primal predator lurking within civilization's veneer. These fighters don't merely battle — they hunt, stalking their prey with supernatural instinct and striking with merciless precision. Drawing power from an eldritch connection to ancient predatory spirits, they blend martial prowess with an almost bestial cunning.

In many cultures, Grim Hunters emerge from traumatic encounters with predators or from isolated communities where survival depends on hunting dangerous beasts. Some actively seek this transformation through forbidden rituals, while others find the predatory essence awakening within them during moments of desperate survival.

GRIM HUNTER FEATURES

Fighter Level	Feature
3rd	Bloodthirsty Pursuit, Hunter's Talons
7th	Frenzied Strike
10th	Echoes of the Hunt
15th	Bloodletting Mastery
18th	Embrace the Beast

BLOODTHIRSTY PURSUIT

3rd-level Grim Hunter feature

Your senses sharpen with predatory focus, particularly when blood is spilled. You gain proficiency in the Survival skill. If you already have this proficiency, you gain proficiency in one of the following skills instead: Perception, Intimidation, or Nature.

When you reduce a creature to 0 hit points, you gain temporary hit points equal to your Fighter level. Additionally, you can track creatures by scent as well as by sight, granting you advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to track wounded creatures (those with fewer than half their hit points) and allowing you to track even when environmental conditions would normally make it impossible.

HUNTER'S TALONS

3rd-level Grim Hunter feature

The predator within you manifests physically through your weapons. When you take this subclass at 3rd level, you learn to channel primal energy into your weapons, transforming them into extensions of your will.

Choose two different hunting styles:

- **Savage Claws:** Your weapon attacks can be made as slashing damage regardless of the weapon's normal damage type. Once per turn when you hit a creature, you can deal an additional 1d4 necrotic damage.

- **Piercing Fangs:** Your critical hit range with weapon attacks expands to 19-20. When you score a critical hit, the target bleeds, taking 1d4 necrotic damage at the start of its next turn.
- **Crushing Jaws:** When you hit a creature with a weapon attack, you can attempt to grapple it as a bonus action. Additionally, while you have a creature grappled, your weapon attacks against it deal an extra 1d4 damage.

You can change your active hunting style when you finish a short or long rest. At 10th level, you can use two hunting styles simultaneously.



FRENZIED STRIKE

7th-level Grim Hunter feature

Your predatory instincts allow you to exploit the weaknesses of wounded prey. When you hit a creature with a weapon attack, if that creature has fewer than half its hit points remaining, you can make one additional attack against it as part of the same action.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a short or long rest.

ECHOES OF THE HUNT

10th-level Grim Hunter feature

The primal forces you channel grant you supernatural resilience. You gain resistance to necrotic damage and have advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Additionally, you can enter a Frenzied State as a bonus action. While in this state, which lasts for 1 minute, you have advantage on attack rolls against creatures with fewer than half their hit points remaining, but you take 1d6 psychic damage at the start of each of your turns while maintaining this state.

This state ends early if you are incapacitated. Once you use this feature, you can't do so again until you finish a short or long rest.

BLOODLETING MASTERY

15th-level Grim Hunter feature

Your attacks draw vital essence from your enemies, strengthening you in battle. Once per turn when you damage a creature with a weapon attack, you regain hit points equal to your proficiency bonus.

Additionally, you can now smell fear as clearly as blood. You have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) and Wisdom (Insight) checks against creatures that are frightened or have fewer than half their hit points remaining.

EMBRACE THE BEAST

18th-level Grim Hunter feature

The primal predator within you manifests fully during moments of intense combat. While in your Frenzied State:

- You gain a +1 bonus to AC.
- Your movement speed increases by 10 feet.
- You can make an attack with spectral claws as a bonus action. This attack uses your Strength or Dexterity modifier (your choice) for the attack and damage rolls, deals 1d8 slashing damage on a hit, and counts as magical for the purpose of overcoming resistance and immunity.
- You can see invisible creatures and objects as if they were visible if they have blood.

When your Frenzied State ends, the sudden withdrawal of primal energy takes its toll. You must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or suffer from one of the following effects for 1 hour (roll a d4):

1. **Feral Rage:** You have disadvantage on Charisma checks and saving throws.
2. **Haunting Visions:** You have disadvantage on Intelligence checks and saving throws.
3. **Predatory Paranoia:** You have disadvantage on Wisdom checks and can't benefit from a long rest unless you're in complete isolation.
4. **Physical Aftermath:** Your Strength and Dexterity scores are each reduced by 2.

PLAYING A GRIM HUNTER

Combat Role: As a Grim Hunter, you excel at finishing wounded enemies, tracking evasive prey, and sustaining yourself through the ebbs and flows of battle. You can serve as a skirmisher who targets vulnerable enemies or as a relentless pursuer who prevents escape.

Roleplaying Tips: Consider how your character balances their human rationality with the predatory instincts that now influence them. Do you embrace the beast within, or struggle to contain it? Your heightened senses might make you uncomfortable in crowded cities with their overwhelming smells and sounds. You might develop rituals to honor prey you've slain or boundaries you won't cross to prevent losing yourself to the predator within.



SANGUINE ARCANIST

SORCEROUS ORIGIN

My veins sing with power, a crimson melody bending life to my will.

The Sanguine Arcanist's magic flows through their blood — quite literally. These sorcerers have discovered that their innate magical essence is intimately connected to their vital force, allowing them to channel spells through their own lifeblood and manipulate the living essence of others. Their magic often manifests in visible ways: veins that pulse with arcane light, blood that crystallizes into crimson gemstones, or wounds that seal with faint whispers.

The origin of this bloodline varies widely. Some inherit it from ancestors who made pacts with entities of life and death; others undergo traumatic magical experiences that irreversibly bind their arcane talent to their vital essence. What unites them is the understanding that their greatest power comes with personal sacrifice.

SANGUINE ARCANIST FEATURES

Sorcerer Level	Feature
1st	Blood Magic, Crimson Essence
6th	Sanguine Surge
14th	Blood Pact
18th	Crimson Apotheosis

BLOOD MAGIC

1st-level Sanguine Arcanist feature

Your connection to the magic of life allows you to learn spells that manipulate vital essence. You learn additional spells when you reach certain levels in this class, as shown in the Blood Magic Spells table. These spells count as sorcerer spells for you, but they don't count against the number of sorcerer spells you know.

Blood Magic Spells

Sorcerer Level	Spells
1st	inflict wounds, false life
3rd	ray of enfeeblement, gentle repose
5th	vampiric touch, life transference*
7th	blight, death ward
9th	enervation*, contagion

Additionally, when you cast a spell of 1st level or higher, you can choose to sacrifice some of your vital essence to empower it. You can sacrifice a number of hit points up to your sorcerer level to gain one of the following benefits:

- Add +1 to the spell's save DC for every 2 hit points sacrificed.
- Add +1 to spell attack rolls for every 2 hit points sacrificed.



- Increase the spell's damage by 1d4 for every 3 hit points sacrificed.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

CRIMSON ESSENCE

1st-level Sanguine Arcanist feature

You can harness the vital essence released when you defeat a foe. When you reduce a creature to 0 hit points with a spell of 1st level or higher, you gain a Blood Point. You can have a maximum number of Blood Points equal to your proficiency bonus.

As a bonus action, you can spend one Blood Point to do one of the following:

- Heal yourself for 1d6 hit points (this increases to 2d6 at 11th level).
- Add 1d4 necrotic damage to the next damage roll of a spell you cast before the end of your next turn.
- Regain 1 sorcery point.

Blood Points disappear when you finish a long rest.

SANGUINE SURGE

6th-level Sanguine Arcanist feature

When you empower a spell with your Blood Magic feature, the infusion of vital essence enhances your casting. Add your Charisma modifier to one damage roll or healing amount of the empowered spell.

Additionally, when you or an ally within 30 feet takes damage from an attack, you can use your reaction to spend 1 Blood Point and reduce the damage by an amount equal to 2d6 + your Charisma modifier.

BLOOD PACT

14th-level Sanguine Arcanist feature

Your mastery over blood magic grants you greater resilience and control. You gain resistance to necrotic damage.

You can now spend Blood Points to influence the physical vitality of others. As an action, you can spend 2 Blood Points and choose one of the following effects:

- **Invigorate:** Touch a willing creature to end one disease or condition afflicting it from the following list: blinded, deafened, paralyzed, or poisoned.
- **Weaken:** Force a creature you can see within 60 feet to make a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC. On a failure, the target has disadvantage on Strength and Dexterity checks and saving throws for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

CRIMSON APOTHEOSIS

18th-level Sanguine Arcanist feature

Your blood becomes fully infused with arcane power. You gain immunity to the poisoned condition and advantage on saving throws against disease.

Once per long rest, as a bonus action, you can enter a state of Blood-Fueled Ascendance for 1 minute. During this time:

- When you cast a sorcerer spell, you can roll one damage or healing die again if it shows a 1, keeping the new roll.
- At the start of each of your turns, you gain temporary hit points equal to your Charisma modifier.
- You can use your Blood Magic feature without expending one of its uses.
- Your blood appears to shimmer with arcane energy, shedding dim light in a 5-foot radius around you.

When this effect ends, you must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion.

PLAYING A SANGUINE ARCANIST

Combat Role: You excel as a risk-taking spellcaster, sacrificing your health for devastating magical effects while sustaining yourself through defeated foes. Your magic blends offensive power with occasional support capabilities, particularly healing and protection from death.

Roleplaying Tips: Consider how your character views their unique connection to blood and life. Are you methodical and clinical about your sacrifices, seeing them as a necessary exchange? Or do you struggle with the constant temptation to push beyond safe limits for greater power? Your physical appearance might subtly reflect your powers — perhaps your veins glow faintly when you cast spells, or small wounds heal with unnatural speed but leave distinctive scars.



THE VEIL PATRON

Beyond the shroud lies truth, and I am its keeper.

Warlocks who form a pact with the Veil serve mysterious entities that dwell in the shadowy boundary between the living world and whatever lies beyond. These enigmatic beings — whether forgotten gods, primordial spirits of death, or collective consciousness of lost souls — grant their servants the ability to step between worlds and manipulate the essence of shadow and memory.

The Veil itself is not a single entity but a metaphysical boundary. Your patron might be a guardian of this boundary, an escaped prisoner from beyond it, or even a personification of the Veil's mysterious nature. Whatever its true identity, it shares with you glimpses of what exists beyond mortality's edge, forever changing your perception of what is real.

THE VEIL FEATURES

EXPANDED SPELL LIST

1st-level Veil feature

The Veil allows you to choose from an expanded list of spells when you learn a warlock spell. The following spells are added to the warlock spell list for you.

Veil Expanded Spells

Spell Level	Spells
1st	disguise self, dissonant whispers
2nd	blindness/deafness, shadow blade*
3rd	phantom steed, hunger of Hadar
4th	phantasmal killer, shadow of moil*
5th	antilife shell, negative energy flood*

*Found in Xanathar's Guide to Everything

VEILWALKER

1st-level Veil feature

Your patron grants you the ability to step partially beyond the material world. You learn the misty step spell and can cast it without expending a spell slot. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Additionally, you gain the ability to see through magical darkness out to a range of 30 feet.

SHROUD OF THE FORGOTTEN

6th-level Veil feature

As a bonus action, you can wrap yourself in tendrils of shadow drawn from beyond the Veil. This shroud lasts for a number of rounds equal to your proficiency bonus.

While shrouded:

- You have resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks.
- Attack rolls against you have disadvantage.
- You can pass through objects and creatures as if they were difficult terrain, but you take 1d10 force damage if you end your turn inside an object or creature.
- Your form becomes indistinct, appearing as a shadowy silhouette.

The shroud ends early if you are in an area of bright light, such as that created by the daylight spell or direct sunlight. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.



ECHOES OF THE VOID

10th-level Veil feature

You can pull a fragment of a lost soul from beyond the Veil to serve you. As an action, you can summon a shadow that appears in an unoccupied space within 30 feet of you.

The shadow uses the shadow stat block from the *Monster Manual* with these modifications:

- Its hit point maximum equals your warlock level \times 3.
- It adds your proficiency bonus to its attack rolls and damage rolls.
- It gains a bonus to AC equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum of +1).
- It can speak languages you know and communicates with you telepathically while within 100 feet of you.

The shadow remains for 1 hour, until it drops to 0 hit points, or until you dismiss it (no action required). When the shadow is reduced to 0 hit points, it dissolves into whispers, and you take 2d6 psychic damage.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

BREACH THE VEIL

14th-level Veil feature

You can momentarily tear open the fabric between worlds. As an action, you create a rift centered on a point you can see within 60 feet. Each creature other than you within 30 feet of that point must make a Wisdom saving throw against your warlock spell save DC.

On a failed save, a creature takes 6d10 psychic damage and is frightened of you until the end of its next turn. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't frightened.

The rift persists for 1 minute. While it exists:

- You can use a bonus action on your turn to teleport to an unoccupied space within 30 feet of the rift that you can see.
- When a hostile creature starts its turn within 10 feet of the rift, it takes 2d6 psychic damage.
- The area within 10 feet of the rift is filled with whispers and spectral visions that only you can fully comprehend. This area is considered difficult terrain for creatures other than you.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

PLAYING A VEIL WARLOCK

Combat Role: You excel as a mobile controller and striker, using your shadow powers to reposition yourself in battle while debilitating enemies with fear effects and psychic damage. Your shadow servant can scout ahead or assist in combat, while your later abilities allow you to control the battlefield with fear and difficult terrain.

Roleplaying Tips: Your exposure to the Veil likely affects how you perceive the world. You might occasionally see glimpses of those who have passed beyond, hear whispers from the other side, or notice when someone's time draws near. Consider whether you sought this pact willingly or if it was thrust upon you during a near-death experience. Your relationship with your patron might range from reverential to resentful, depending on the circumstances of your pact.



HEMOTECHNIC SAVANT

ARTIFICER SPECIALTY

Blood and steel bend to my will — a symphony of creation and ruin.

The Hemotechnic Savant blends alchemy, engineering, and the study of vital essence into a controversial art that bridges science and forbidden magic. These artificers create devices powered by life energy, craft potions from purified blood, and often augment their own bodies with uncanny modifications that blur the line between flesh and machine.

Far from simple butchers, Hemotechnic Savants approach their craft with scientific precision and often genuinely seek to advance medical knowledge and healing techniques. However, their willingness to manipulate the vital essence of living beings places them in ethically ambiguous territory that makes many uncomfortable.

HEMOTECHNIC SAVANT FEATURES

Artificer Level Feature

3rd	Tools of the Trade, Hemotechnic Concoctions
5th	Vital Augmentation
9th	Synthesis Mastery
15th	Crimson Overdrive

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

3rd-level Hemotechnic Savant feature

You gain proficiency with alchemist's supplies and herbalism kits if you don't already have them. Additionally, you gain proficiency in the Medicine skill.

As part of a long rest, you can craft one of the following hemotechnic devices, which function until your next long rest:

- **Vitality Monitor:** A small device that attaches to a creature. While wearing it, a creature gains advantage on death saving throws and you can use your action to learn its exact hit point total if you're within 30 feet of it.
- **Hemotechnic Focus:** A modified spellcasting focus that, while held, allows you to add your Intelligence modifier to the healing done by any artificer spell you cast that restores hit points.
- **Vital Essence Extractor:** A small device that, as an action, can extract a sample of blood or vital essence from a willing or incapacitated creature. You can use this sample with your artificer abilities, granting advantage on any Medicine checks related to treating that specific creature.

HEMOTECHNIC CONCOCTIONS

3rd-level Hemotechnic Savant feature

You can craft specialized concoctions that channel vital essence. After finishing a long rest, you can create a number of concoctions equal to your



proficiency bonus. Each concoction is a tiny vial that remains potent until your next long rest or until used.

As an action, you can administer or throw one of your concoctions to produce one of the following effects:

- **Vitality Serum:** A creature you touch regains 2d8 + your Intelligence modifier hit points and gains advantage on saving throws against disease for 1 hour.
- **Corrosive Solution:** You throw a vial at a point within 30 feet. Each creature within a 5-foot radius of that point must make a Dexterity saving throw against your spell save DC. A creature takes 3d6 acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.
- **Hemostatic Compound:** You throw a vial at a creature within 30 feet. The target must make a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC. On a failed save, the target takes 2d6 necrotic damage and its speed is reduced by half until the end of its next turn as its blood thickens. On a successful save, the target takes half as much damage and its speed isn't reduced.

The damage and healing for these concoctions increases when you reach certain artificer levels: 5th level (3d8, 4d6, 3d6), 11th level (4d8, 5d6, 4d6), and 17th level (5d8, 6d6, 5d6).

VITAL AUGMENTATION

5th-level Hemotechnic Savant feature

You augment your body with hemotechnic enhancements. Choose one of the following:

- **Circulatory Enhancement:** Your bloodstream is reinforced with alchemical compounds. As a bonus action, you can regain hit points equal to 1d8 + your Constitution modifier + your artificer level. You also have advantage on saving throws against poison and disease.
- **Hemotechnic Armament:** You implant a weapon mechanism powered by vital essence. As a bonus action, expend one of your Hemotechnic Concoctions to charge your weapon for 1 minute. While charged, your attacks deal an extra 1d6 damage of a type based on the concoction used (acid, necrotic, or radiant).
- **Reflex Accelerator:** You enhance your nervous system, gaining a +2 bonus to initiative rolls. Once per turn, you can take the Disengage action as a bonus action.

You can change your augmentation when you gain a level in this class.

SYNTHESIS MASTERY

9th-level Hemotechnic Savant feature

Your mastery of hemotechnic principles grants you:

- Resistance to acid and poison damage and immunity to the poisoned condition.
- When creating concoctions after a long rest, you can enhance one with an additional effect: affect all targets in a 10-foot radius, maximize its damage or healing, or create a persistent effect lasting 1 minute.
- You can identify the properties of any potion or poison by touching a drop to your tongue without exposing yourself to its effects.

CRIMSON OVERDRIVE

15th-level Hemotechnic Savant feature

As a bonus action, you overcharge your hemotechnic systems for 1 minute:

- Your movement speed increases by 10 feet.
- When you take damage, you can use your reaction to use a concoction without an action.
- Your augmentation gains an enhanced effect:
 - **Circulatory:** Use your healing surge twice per short rest, healing an additional 2d8 hit points.
 - **Armament:** Your weapon deals an additional 1d6 damage and counts as magical.
 - **Reflex:** Take both Dash and Disengage as a single bonus action and gain a climbing speed.

When this effect ends, make a DC 15 Constitution save or gain one level of exhaustion. You can use this feature once per long rest.

PLAYING A HEMOTECHNIC SAVANT

Combat Role: You function as a versatile support artificer who can heal allies, damage enemies, and adapt to changing battlefield conditions. Your hemotechnic augmentations give you unique offensive and defensive options that conventional artificers lack, while your concoctions provide flexible solutions to various combat situations.

Roleplaying Tips: Consider your character's attitude toward conventional medicine and ethics. Are you frustrated by traditional healers' unwillingness to explore potentially beneficial techniques because of squeamishness? Do you struggle with ethical boundaries in your research? Your hemotechnic augmentations might be visible modifications that draw attention or subtle implants hidden beneath your skin. Think about how you explain your methods to those who don't understand your work — do you emphasize the healing potential or embrace the fear your techniques might inspire?



COLLEGE OF THE DIRGEWEAVER

My song is the lament of the lost, a chorus binding living and dead.

Bards of the College of the Dirgeweaver master music that resonates with grief, memory, and the thin veil between life and death. Their performances carry a haunting beauty that can inspire courage in allies by connecting them to ancestral strength, while striking terror in enemies by reminding them of their own mortality.

In many cultures, Dirgeweavers serve essential social functions — conducting funeral rites, preserving the stories of the deceased, and offering comfort to the bereaved. Their ability to weave emotion into melody allows them to help communities process loss and connect with their shared history.

DIRGEWEAVER FEATURES

Bard Level	Feature
3rd	Requiem of Shadows, Elegy of the Lost
6th	Wail of the Grave
14th	Phantom Chorus

REQUIEM OF SHADOWS

3rd-level College of the Dirgeweaver feature

Your music carries echoes of those who have passed beyond, offering protection to the living. When you bestow Bardic Inspiration on a creature, that creature also gains temporary hit points equal to the Bardic Inspiration die roll + your Charisma modifier.

If these temporary hit points are depleted by damage before the creature uses its Bardic Inspiration die, the creature can immediately use its reaction to roll the Bardic Inspiration die and deal psychic damage equal to the result to one creature within 30 feet that dealt the damage. This doesn't expend the Bardic Inspiration die — the creature can still use it as normal.

ELEGY OF THE LOST

3rd-level College of the Dirgeweaver feature

You learn the chill touch cantrip, which counts as a bard cantrip for you and uses Charisma as your spellcasting ability.

When you cast chill touch, you can expend one use of your Bardic Inspiration to add the value of the Bardic Inspiration die to the spell's damage roll. If the target takes damage from this enhanced chill touch, it has disadvantage on the next Wisdom saving throw it makes before the end of your next turn.

Additionally, you gain proficiency in the History skill if you don't already have it. If you are already proficient in History, your proficiency bonus is doubled for checks you make with it related to historical events, genealogy, or legendary figures.



WAIL OF THE GRAVE

6th-level College of the Dirgeweaver feature

You can unleash a mournful cry that resonates with the anguish of countless departed souls. As an action, you emit a keening wail in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC.

On a failed save, a creature takes 3d8 psychic damage and is frightened of you until the end of its next turn. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't frightened.

The damage increases to 4d8 at 10th level and 5d8 at 14th level.

Additionally, when you use this feature, you can choose a number of allies equal to your Charisma modifier within the area to be unaffected by it.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum of once). You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

PHANTOM CHORUS

14th-level College of the Dirgeweaver feature

You can perform a haunting melody that summons the voices of those who have passed beyond. After performing for at least 1 minute outside of combat, you conjure a phantom chorus that occupies a 15-foot-radius sphere centered on you. The chorus moves with you and remains for up to 1 hour, until you dismiss it as a bonus action, or until you are incapacitated.

While the phantom chorus is present:

- You and friendly creatures within the chorus's radius gain advantage on saving throws against being frightened or charmed.
- When you cast a bard spell that deals psychic damage, add your Charisma modifier to the damage it deals.
- When you or an ally within the radius drops to 0 hit points but isn't killed outright, they automatically stabilize and gain 1 hit point. Once this benefit is used, it can't be used again until you finish a short or long rest.
- Hostile creatures that enter the area for the first time on a turn or start their turn there must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC or be charmed by you until they leave the area and for 1 minute afterward. A creature that succeeds on this save is immune to this effect for 24 hours.

The chorus appears as faint, translucent figures that sing in harmony with your performance. Their song is audible but doesn't prevent normal conversation, though it creates an unmistakable atmosphere of melancholy and reverence.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

PLAYING A COLLEGE OF THE DIRGEWEAVER BARD

Combat Role: As a Dirgeweaver, you excel at supporting allies with protective inspiration while using fear effects and psychic damage to control enemies. Your phantom chorus turns you into a powerful battlefield controller in extended encounters, creating a zone of safety for allies while hindering enemies who enter your radius of influence.

Cultural Role: Dirgeweavers often serve important ceremonial functions in their societies. You might be called upon to conduct funeral rites, compose memorial songs for fallen heroes, or perform at yearly remembrances for important events. Some communities consider Dirgeweavers sacred, believing they help guide souls to their proper rest, while others might view your connection to death with superstition. During times of plague or war, your abilities might be in high demand to honor the many deceased.

Roleplaying Tips: Your intimate connection with mortality likely influences your perspective on life. You might have a philosophical outlook on death, seeing it as a natural transition rather than an ending. Consider whether you sought out this path after experiencing profound loss in your own life, or if you were apprenticed to this tradition from a young age. Your performances might incorporate symbolic elements like ashes, memorial tokens, or instruments passed down from deceased mentors.

"My lament echoes through the void, warning the living of shadows past."



PLAGUE DOCTOR ROGUISH ARCHETYPE

I am cure and contagion, masked in shadow, bearer of life and death.

Rogues who follow the Plague Doctor archetype develop expertise in medicine, alchemy, and toxicology, often serving as physicians for those who cannot afford magical healing. Recognizable by their distinctive beaked masks — designed to filter “miasmatic” air — these enigmatic figures walk a fine line between healer and harm-bringer.

In peacetime, Plague Doctors might treat the ill in poor districts or research cures for endemic diseases. During conflicts, they apply their knowledge of anatomy and poison to devastating effect, using the same substances that heal in one dose to harm in another.

PLAGUE DOCTOR FEATURES

Rogue Level	Feature
3rd	Medical Expertise, Pestilent Craft
9th	Contagion's Grasp
13th	Plague's Herald
17th	Breath of the Black Death

MEDICAL EXPERTISE

3rd-level Plague Doctor feature

You gain proficiency with herbalism kits and the Medicine skill. If you already have either of these proficiencies, you gain proficiency with your choice of alchemist's supplies or poisoner's kit instead.

Additionally, you can create a miasmatic veil as a bonus action that lasts until the start of your next turn. While this veil is active:

- You gain half cover (+2 bonus to AC and Dexterity saving throws).
- Any creature that starts its turn within 5 feet of you must succeed on a Constitution saving throw (DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Intelligence modifier) or take 1d6 poison damage.

The damage increases to 2d6 at 9th level, 3d6 at 13th level, and 4d6 at 17th level.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

PESTILENT CRAFT

3rd-level Plague Doctor feature

During a short or long rest, you can create a number of medicinal compounds equal to your Intelligence modifier (minimum of 1). These compounds remain potent until your next long rest.

As an action, you can administer a compound to yourself or a creature within 5 feet of you, choosing one of the following effects:

- **Remedy:** The target regains 2d6 hit points and gains advantage on saving throws against poison and disease for 1 hour.
- **Affliction:** The target must make a Constitution saving throw (DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Intelligence modifier). On a failed save, the target takes 2d6 necrotic damage and is poisoned until the end of its next turn. On a successful save, the target takes half as much damage and isn't poisoned.

The healing and damage increase to 3d6 at 9th level, 4d6 at 13th level, and 5d6 at 17th level.

When you use Sneak Attack and choose the Affliction option, you can choose to deal all or part of your Sneak Attack damage as necrotic damage instead of the attack's normal damage type.



CONTAGION'S GRASP

9th-level Plague Doctor feature

Your extensive work with toxins has granted you resistance to poison damage and immunity to the poisoned condition.

When you use the Affliction option of your Pestilent Craft feature and the target fails its saving throw, you can impose one of the following additional effects on the target:

- **Fever:** The target's speed is reduced by half until the end of its next turn.
- **Delirium:** The target has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn.
- **Contagion:** The poison damage from your miasmatic veil spreads to one creature of your choice within 5 feet of the target.

You can use these additional effects a number of times equal to your Intelligence modifier (minimum of once), and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

PLAGUE'S HERALD

13th-level Plague Doctor feature

Your understanding of disease and anatomy reaches new heights. Your miasmatic veil becomes more potent and versatile. When you use this feature, you can choose to expend one of your medicinal compounds to enhance the veil. If you do so:

- The radius of the poison damage effect extends to 10 feet.
- Creatures that fail their saving throw against the poison damage are also poisoned until the end of their next turn.
- The veil provides you with three-quarters cover instead of half cover.

Additionally, while your miasmatic veil is active, you can move through the spaces of hostile creatures, treating them as difficult terrain, and those creatures cannot make opportunity attacks against you.

BREATH OF THE BLACK DEATH

17th-level Plague Doctor feature

You can release a devastating cloud of disease-laden miasma. As an action, you exhale a 30-foot cone of deadly vapor. Each creature in the area must make a Constitution saving throw against your rogue DC. On a failed save, a creature takes 8d8 necrotic damage and is poisoned for 1 minute. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't poisoned. A poisoned creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

If you expend one of your medicinal compounds when using this feature, you can choose one of the following additional effects:

- The damage increases to 10d8.
- Creatures that fail their save are also stunned until the end of their next turn.
- You regain hit points equal to half the total damage dealt.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

PLAYING A PLAGUE DOCTOR

Combat Role: As a Plague Doctor, you excel at controlling the battlefield through strategic use of your miasmatic veil and medicinal compounds. You can alternate between supporting allies with healing and debilitating enemies with poisons and diseases. Your mobility features allow you to weave through combat, positioning yourself for maximum effectiveness.

Roleplaying Tips: Consider how your character balances the healing and harmful aspects of their knowledge. Perhaps you follow a strict ethical code about when to use your poisons, or maybe you're more pragmatic about eliminating threats "for the greater good." Your experiences treating the ill and witnessing suffering might have hardened you or instilled a deep compassion. The mask you wear might be both practical protection and a psychological barrier, helping you maintain professional detachment in challenging situations.



SCHOOL OF HEMOMANCY

Blood is the ink of my spells, life my canvas.

Wizards who study hemomancy delve into the arcane properties of blood and vital essence. Unlike necromancers who focus on death and undeath, hemomancers explore the magical potential of living blood — its capacity to store energy, connect beings, and serve as a conduit for powerful spells.

Their research often places them at odds with conventional magical academia, which may view their work as dangerous or ethically questionable. Nevertheless, hemomancers argue that their understanding of blood's magical properties yields valuable insights for healing and protective magic alongside more offensive applications.

SCHOOL OF HEMOMANCY FEATURES

Wizard Level	Feature
2nd	Vital Siphon, Crimson Scroll
6th	Sanguine Strike
10th	Vital Dominion
14th	Bloodlord's Mastery

VITAL SIPHON

2nd-level School of Hemomancy feature

You learn to draw power from the vital essence of fallen foes. When you reduce a creature to 0 hit points with a spell, you gain temporary hit points equal to your wizard level.

Additionally, you add the following spells to your spellbook at the wizard levels specified. These spells count as wizard spells for you but don't count against the number of wizard spells you can add to your spellbook when you gain a wizard level.

Hemomancy Spells

Wizard Level	Spells
2nd	ray of enfeeblement, false life
6th	vampiric touch, life transference*
10th	blight, enervation*
14th	contagion, hold monster

*Found in Xanathar's Guide to Everything

CRIMSON SCROLL

2nd-level School of Hemomancy feature

You master the art of storing spells within your own vitality. Once per day when you finish a short rest, you can sacrifice hit points equal to $2 \times$ the spell's level to prepare an additional wizard spell from your spellbook.

This additional spell remains prepared until your next long rest and doesn't count against the number of spells you can normally prepare.

At 10th level, you can use this feature twice per day.



SANGUINE STRIKE

6th-level School of Hemomancy feature

When you cast a spell that deals damage, you can sacrifice a number of hit points up to your wizard level to empower the spell. Choose one damage roll of the spell and add a number of d4s equal to half the number of hit points sacrificed (rounded down, minimum of 1d4). These additional dice use the same damage type as the spell.

Additionally, any creature that takes damage from a spell empowered this way suffers a bleeding effect, taking necrotic damage at the start of its next turn equal to your Intelligence modifier.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

VITAL DOMINION

10th-level School of Hemomancy feature

Your mastery over blood grants you supernatural resilience and control. You gain resistance to necrotic damage and can add your Intelligence modifier to the amount of hit points you regain when a spell or magical effect heals you.

Additionally, you can cast vampiric touch once without expending a spell slot. You regain the ability to do so when you finish a short or long rest.

BLOODLORD'S MASTERY

14th-level School of Hemomancy feature

You achieve profound control over the vital essence of living beings. Choose one of the following features:

Bloodlord's Grasp: As an action, you can target a creature with blood within 60 feet. The target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC or take 8d8 necrotic damage and be restrained for 1 minute as its blood solidifies and restricts movement. On a successful save, the target takes half damage and isn't restrained. A restrained creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Constructs and undead are immune to this effect.

Vital Cascade: As an action, you can target up to three creatures within 30 feet. Each target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC or take 4d10 necrotic damage. You regain hit points equal to half the total damage dealt to all targets. On a successful save, a target takes half damage, and you regain no hit points from that target.

You can use your chosen feature once, and regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest.

PLAYING A HEMOMANCER

Combat Role: As a hemomancer, you excel at efficient damage dealing and self-sustenance, using your Vital Siphon and Vital Dominion to maintain your own hit points while Sanguine Strike allows you to maximize damage against key targets. Your access to both offensive and healing magic makes you versatile in extended encounters.

Cultural Role: Hemomancers occupy a controversial position in magical communities. Your research may be conducted in secrecy, shared only with trusted colleagues who understand its potential benefits despite taboos. Some societies might view your work as necessary but distasteful, like surgery, while others might outright ban such practices. You might find yourself called upon to develop treatments for rare blood diseases, create protective wards keyed to bloodlines, or serve as a specialized investigator for crimes involving blood magic.

Roleplaying Tips: Consider how your character justifies their interest in blood magic. Are you a pragmatist who sees blood as simply another magical component, or do you approach your studies with solemn respect for the power of life essence? Your spellbook might be unconventional — perhaps written with special inks derived from your own blood, or containing unusual material components like crystallized blood samples. Think about how you explain your methods to those who might misunderstand or fear them, and whether you have ethical boundaries you refuse to cross in your research.

"Blood flows through all, and I hold its reins — yet I fear its path."



CONCLUSION

In shadowed corners of taverns, whispers speak of forbidden paths to power. Some say these arts were born of ancient curses, others claim they emerged from bargains with entities beyond the veil. What is known is this: for those willing to sacrifice, to embrace the darkness within, power awaits... but it never comes without cost.

The Crimson Codex presents subclasses that explore the darker aspects of heroism and power. These options are designed for campaigns where moral ambiguity, personal sacrifice, and gothic themes enhance the storytelling experience. While mechanically balanced for general play, they thrive in settings where their thematic elements can be fully explored.

When introducing these subclasses to your campaign, consider:

1. **Cultural Context:** How are practitioners of these arts viewed in your setting? Are they feared, respected, or misunderstood?
2. **Personal Cost:** Each subclass involves some form of sacrifice or risk. How does your character grapple with these costs?
3. **Ethical Boundaries:** Where does your character draw the line between acceptable and forbidden uses of their power?
4. **Visual Representation:** Consider distinctive visual elements that make your character recognizable — a Plague Doctor's mask, a Hemomancer's blood-inked grimoire, or a Grim Hunter's predatory mannerisms.

These dark paths offer rich roleplaying opportunities alongside their mechanical benefits. They invite players to explore complex characters who navigate the shadows while pursuing their own definition of heroism.

Be conscious that these subclasses intentionally explore darker themes than typical D&D content. Before introducing them to your game, ensure all participants are comfortable with the gothic and sometimes disturbing elements they contain.

Whether your character seeks redemption through these powers or embraces their darkness fully, may your journey through the shadows be compelling and memorable. Remember that even in the darkest paths, the choice of how to use such power remains yours.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This compendium represents a labor of both shadow and light — an exploration of darker themes within the familiar framework of TTRPG's mechanics. Its creation would not have been possible without the inspirations that came before it.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

In crafting these subclasses, I adhered to several core principles:

- **Thematic Cohesion:** Each subclass explores a unique facet of dark fantasy while remaining true to its class's core identity.
- **Balanced Mechanics:** Power comes at a price, creating meaningful choices rather than simple optimization paths.
- **Narrative Integration:** These options aren't just mechanical choices but story elements that shape how a character interacts with the world.
- **Ethical Complexity:** No subclass is inherently evil, though each presents moral dilemmas worth exploring.

CREDITS AND INSPIRATION

These subclasses draw inspiration from gothic literature, dark fantasy, and the rich traditions of folklore that dwell in the shadows between heroism and horror. Special thanks to the countless tales of plague doctors, blood magicians, spectral bards, and hunters who walk the knife's edge of their own humanity.

Thank you to my playtesters who provided invaluable feedback, balancing suggestions, and memorable character stories that helped refine these concepts.

USING THIS CONTENT

All content in this compendium is designed for use with the 5th edition of the world's greatest roleplaying game. The mechanics are balanced for integration with official content, though as always, the Dungeon Master has final say on what options fit their campaign.

Consider this compendium a starting point — feel free to adapt these subclasses to better fit your campaign world and the stories you wish to tell. The darkness takes many forms, and these paths are but a few of the myriad ways characters might embrace shadow in pursuit of their goals.

THE CRIMSON CODEx

Step into the shadows with **The Crimson Codex**, where power awaits those willing to pay its price. These seven meticulously crafted subclasses explore the darker side of heroism through blood magic, spectral connections, and forbidden knowledge.

This compendium includes:

- **Seven Complete Subclasses** - Each with unique features, balanced mechanics, and rich thematic elements
- **Cultural Context** - Insights into how these dark practitioners fit into various campaign settings
- **Character Guidance** - Tips for roleplaying these complex character options
- **Stunning Artwork** - Atmospheric illustrations that capture the gothic aesthetic

Whether hunting as a predatory Grim Hunter, wielding vital essence as a Sanguine Arcanist, or walking between worlds as a Veil Warlock, these paths offer both mechanical depth and narrative potential.

Perfect for players seeking morally complex characters and Dungeon Masters crafting campaigns with gothic horror elements.

