

Varnek the Craven Necromancer – BBEG / NPC

written by CresthavenRPG Guru | June 10, 2024

Attention Dungeon Masters

This write-up provides comprehensive insights into Varnek, a pivotal NPC and main villain in the Cresthaven Outbreak quest. Varnek is a cunning necromancer who poses a significant threat to the adventurers, utilizing both his dark powers and psychological manipulation to challenge them at every turn. The provided tactics and interactions offer a roadmap for bringing Varnek to life in your campaign, presenting opportunities for engaging encounters and memorable role-playing moments.

Warning to Players

If you are a player in a campaign featuring Varnek as a villain, **do not read this write-up** as it contains key details about his abilities, tactics, and motivations. Discovering these elements through gameplay will enhance your immersion in the story and ensure that every encounter with Varnek is filled with suspense and surprise. Embrace the challenge of facing off against this cunning necromancer and prepare to test your skills and wits against his dark powers.

Varnek the Craven



Varnek is a young man in his mid-twenties, coming from a long line of necromancers. His father, a powerful necromancer, was burned at the stake by the fearful townspeople of Cresthaven. Varnek has inherited his father's knowledge and has taken it upon himself to continue his dark legacy. He believes that only he can save the world from its inherent chaos and corruption by controlling it with his undead army. Varnek operates from the crypts under the cemetery of Cresthaven, where he secretly raises and commands an army of the undead.

Varnek is obsessed with his mission and has a hero complex, believing that his actions, no matter how dark, are for the greater good. He is cunning and manipulative, often using his charm to deceive others. He believes the world is on the brink of collapse and that only he, with his mastery over the undead, can save it. However, this heroism is laced with cowardice. At the first sign of serious injury, Varnek will flee, using his undead horde as a

shield.

Varnek's Appearance

Varnek is a gaunt, pale young man with dark circles under his eyes. His hair is long and unkempt, often falling into his face. He wears dark robes adorned with necromantic symbols, and carries a staff made of twisted black wood. Despite his youth, his features are etched with worry and a deep-seated sense of purpose. He wears dark, simple robes that do little to hide the nervous tremor in his hands.

Varnek – Level 5 Human Wizard

- **Armor Class:** 10
- **Hit Points:** 12 (5 Hit Dice)
- **Move:** Walk 60 ft
- **Habitat:** Crypts under the cemetery of Cresthaven
- **Negotiation:** Yes
- **Morale DC:** 9

Ability Scores:

- **Strength (STR):** -1
- **Dexterity (DEX):** 1
- **Constitution (CON):** -1
- **Intelligence (INT):** 5
- **Wisdom (WIS):** 1
- **Charisma (CHA):** 2

Varnek's Spell Selection and Tactics

Zero Level Spells:

- Bleed
- Daze
- Detect Magic
- Ghost Sound
- Mage Hand

1st Level:

- Charm Person
- Color Spray
- Shield

- Sleep
- Unseen Servant

2nd Level:

- Darkness
- Invisibility
- Mirror Image
- Ray of Enfeeblement
- Web

3rd Level:

- Animate Dead
- Dispel Magic
- Phantasmal Force
- Speak with Dead
- Suggestion

4th Level:

- Charm Monster
- Confusion
- Dimension Door
- Fear
- Wall of Fire

Tactics

Varnek is a cunning necromancer who focuses on controlling both the living and the undead. His tactics revolve around manipulation, evasion, and utilizing his undead minions to their fullest potential. He is a meticulous planner and, possessing knowledge of the adventurers, can use his insight to engage them directly, adding an extra layer of psychological warfare to his tactics.

Here are some strategies for playing Varnek effectively:

Encounter Preparation:

1. **Gathering Information:** Varnek uses his necromantic abilities and spies to gather information about the adventurers, including their strengths, weaknesses, and motivations.

2. **Sending Messages:** He may send cryptic messages or warnings to the adventurers, subtly intimidating them and planting seeds of doubt about their mission.
3. **Animate Dead:** Varnek keeps his undead minions prepared at all times, using this spell to bolster his forces. He will often have skeletons and zombies guarding his lair.
4. **Speak with Dead:** He uses this spell to gather information from deceased enemies or former allies, enhancing his knowledge and planning.

During the Encounter:

1. **Taunting and Provocation:** Varnek directly addresses the adventurers, mocking their efforts and questioning their resolve. He may taunt them with knowledge of their past failures or personal vulnerabilities.
2. **Offering False Hope:** He may falsely offer them mercy or a chance to surrender, only to betray them at the opportune moment, playing with their emotions and sense of trust.
3. **Revealing Secrets:** Varnek may reveal hidden truths about the adventurers or their allies, using this information to sow discord among them or manipulate their actions.
4. **Negotiation and Bargaining:** Despite his villainous nature, Varnek may attempt to negotiate with the adventurers, offering them rewards or promises in exchange for serving his own dark purposes.
5. **Psychological Warfare:** He plays on their fears and insecurities, using his knowledge of their past experiences and personal relationships to unsettle them and weaken their resolve.
6. **Challenging Morality:** Varnek questions the righteousness of the adventurers' cause, presenting moral dilemmas and ethical quandaries to test their convictions and morality.

Manipulation and Control:

1. **Charm Person / Charm Monster:** Varnek uses these spells to manipulate key individuals, gaining temporary allies or turning potential threats into assets.
2. **Suggestion:** He can subtly influence the actions of others, making them act in ways that serve his plans.

Defensive and Evasive Tactics:

1. **Mirror Image:** To avoid direct damage, Varnek casts Mirror Image, making it difficult for attackers to hit him.
2. **Shield:** When under attack, he quickly casts Shield to boost his AC and protect himself from harm.
3. **Invisibility:** If he needs to escape or reposition, Varnek uses

Invisibility to disappear from sight.

Area Control and Battlefield Manipulation:

1. **Web:** Varnek uses this spell to create difficult terrain, slowing down or trapping his enemies while he and his minions attack from a distance.
2. **Darkness:** He casts Darkness to obscure vision and create confusion, using his knowledge of the area to navigate while his enemies are blinded.
3. **Wall of Fire:** Varnek can block off areas, trap enemies, or create barriers with Wall of Fire, controlling the battlefield to his advantage.

Debilitation and Fear:

1. **Ray of Enfeeblement:** He weakens strong opponents, making them less effective in combat.
2. **Fear:** Varnek casts Fear to scatter and demoralize his enemies, making them easier to pick off.
3. **Confusion:** This spell is used to create chaos among enemy ranks, causing them to turn on each other or become ineffective in combat.

Illusion and Deception:

1. **Phantasmal Force:** Varnek uses this spell to create convincing illusions that can mislead or terrify his opponents.
2. **Ghost Sound:** He uses Ghost Sound to create noises that can distract or mislead enemies, setting them up for ambushes or causing them to investigate false threats.

Escape and Mobility:

1. **Dimension Door:** If Varnek finds himself in a dangerous situation, he uses Dimension Door to teleport to a safe location, often deeper into his lair where his minions can protect him. He leaves behind cryptic messages or warnings, promising that their paths will cross again and that he will be prepared for their next encounter.
2. **Planning Revenge:** He vows vengeance against the adventurers, swearing to unleash even darker forces upon them in the future, ensuring that they will never forget the name of Varnek, the necromancer of Cresthaven.

Example Combat Scenario:

Preparation: Varnek animates several undead minions to guard the crypt entrance. He casts Mirror Image and keeps Shield ready for immediate use. Darkness is cast in key areas to obscure paths and create confusion.

Engagement: When adventurers enter the crypt, Varnek uses Phantasmal Force to create an illusion of a larger undead army, buying time and causing panic. As they advance, he casts Web to slow them down and uses Ray of Enfeeblement on the strongest fighter.

Mid-Battle: If the adventurers get too close, he casts Fear to scatter them and uses his undead minions to block their path. He maintains his illusions and control spells to keep the enemies off balance.

Retreat: If Varnek takes significant damage, he casts Invisibility and retreats deeper into the crypt, using Dimension Door if necessary to escape to a secure area where more undead await.

By utilizing these spells and tactics, Varnek remains a formidable and elusive foe, leveraging his necromantic powers and strategic mind to challenge even the most prepared adventurers.

Hook for Players

Rumors have spread about strange occurrences and sightings of undead around the Cresthaven cemetery. The townspeople are fearful, and the players are tasked with investigating the source of the undead outbreak. As they delve deeper into the crypts, they uncover Varnek's plot and must put an end to his necromantic machinations before his army overcomes the town.