

A Treatise on the Worth of Shadow Blade for the purpose of conjoining it with updated SCAG cantrips.

Greetings friends,

In late 2020, Wizards of the Coast released Errata to fix the SCAG cantrips *booming blade* and *green-flame blade*. Among the fixes was an alteration to the material component cost of the required weapon: now the weapon must be worth at least one silver piece.

The optimizer community was consumed with uproar. Those smarmy bastards! They invalidated our favorite combo: *booming blade* and *shadow blade*! As a weaving-together of gloom, *shadow blade* is a weapon, but has no material worth, and is therefore ineligible for *booming blade* and *green-flame blade*.

Now, for what it's worth, Jeremy Crawford has said he would allow the combination. My guess is the rule rewrite was meant to prevent shenanigans, like using a spellcasting focus in place of the weapon, by adding a component cost. *Booming orb* is over, if it ever existed! But if your DM is a stickler, contained within this document is a treatise that will present a mathematical argument for the value of our favorite psychic gloom knife. If your DM insists that *shadow blade* is value-less and therefore ineligible, insist in return that they read through this document. Hopefully, by the time they make it to this point, they will have given up on the damn thing and let you have your stupid weapon combo. DMs are busy people! They have to prepare for next session, not waste time reading any more of this nerdy crap!

For those who've stuck with us, though, let's explore the value of the *shadow blade*.

Value

If we wanna be anywhere accurate with our assumptions—and this treatise will be built on a *lot* of assumptions—we should establish what the baseline cost of the *shadow blade* would be if it were a normal weapon. It's not normal—it only lasts up to a minute after being summoned—but let's assume a normal duration to establish a base value, and then we can take its temporary nature into account.

A base *shadow blade* does 2d8 damage—an average of 9. That's more damage than any base weapon in any sourcebook, not counting the crazy futuristic weapons in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. The *shadow blade* also has the light, finesse, and thrown properties, making it far, far superior to any—at least any *melee*—weapon. With the most expensive weapon in the *Player's Handbook* being the greatsword, which does less damage (7) and has the disadvantage of being heavy and two-handed, it would be more than fair—it would really be far, far, too modest—to price this weapon at 50 gold pieces.

However, let's go beyond fair. We have enough leeway here to be conservative in our estimate. The greatsword isn't the only weapon that does that much damage. A maul does the same amount of damage—though of a different type—and shares the same properties, but comes in at a far more modest 10 gold pieces. I dunno why the greatsword hefts such a bigger price

tag—maybe it's just that much more stylish. Anyway, let's be totally, totally safe and go with the price of a maul, ten gold pieces, for our *shadow blade*'s base value.

Let's remember, though, that our *shadow blade* isn't just a mundane weapon! It's a *magic* weapon, which offers you advantage on attack rolls against targets in dim light or darkness.

Magic weapons that offer advantage on attacks are relatively rare—more often they offer small numerical bonuses, or damage boosts, or effects on a hit, or they produce light. If the *shadow blade* were a normal magic weapon, it would be an exceedingly powerful one.

However, let's follow the trend we've established with the base weapon price and go modest.

We know the *shadow blade* is a magic weapon, but can't say its rarity with any surety. Let's assume it's Common! The lowest price for a Common magic item is 50 gold pieces. That price gets tacked onto our base weapon cost for a total price of 60 gold pieces.

This is a super, super conservative estimate. Even so, if we were to use it to prove our point about the weapon's value, it would prove it 600 times over!

Weapon duration

But wait; we're not done yet! The *shadow blade* isn't a normal weapon. It's temporary, lasting only one minute. A normal weapon will last at least twice as long before getting eaten by a rust monster. We do need to take into account that each individually conjured *shadow blade* will be of less use to you than an ordinary weapon would. So we need to figure out just how much value that longer duration adds to a mundane weapon.

Mundane weapons obviously last a good deal longer than *shadow blades*. The maul we used to set our base price could sit on a wall collecting dust for eighty years. If we take that time into account, our *shadow blade* is worth less than a copper piece.

I don't think that's reasonable, though. The time a weapon spends hanging on a wall isn't what gives it its value (unless you're a collector). The value you get from a weapon in D&D is from using it in combat to kill stuff. So in order to determine how the brief duration of a *shadow blade* diminishes its value, we need to figure out just how much combat use we'll get out of it compared to a mundane weapon.

Let's start with our *shadow blade*. It lasts for one minute. Sixty seconds is a long time in D&D combat. That's ten rounds. Of course, most combats will be over in fewer rounds than that. We can be sure that each *shadow blade* will be used at least once in combat, because it's summoned as a bonus action, which is presumably followed by the attack action. Usually, it'll be used more often than that. In the hands of a 5th level *eldritch knight*, for example; they could attack four times with the *shadow blade* on the round they summoned it, through Action Surge. Let's follow the trend we established with the value of the weapon, though, and be conservative in our estimates. Let's assume each individual *shadow blade* is used two times over its brief lifetime. Again, most *shadow blades* will be used more than that, but two total attacks is an eminently fair guesstimate, and sufficient for our purposes.

Let's look back at our maul, then. We'll assume it's a well-constructed maul that lasts pretty much forever, with that unrealistic level of durability common to video games and D&D campaigns with insufficiently nerdy DMs. We need to figure out just how many times our typical player will swing that maul.

Critical Role is a long-running campaign, and can serve us in this regard. Fans of the show who are even nerdier than I am have compiled detailed statistics on the characters. For the sake of our argument, let's rely on those statistics.

In the first campaign, which lasted 115 episodes (a little over two years of playtime, about the length of a decent campaign), there was a barbarian character named Grog. According to Critrolestats, Grog entered a rage 86 times over the course of all of those episodes.

Now, he didn't rage in every combat, nor did he always enter combat when raging. Let's make the math easier and round up to 100 combats. Let's further assume that each combat lasted five rounds—another generous assumption—and two attacks were made each round. That's about a thousand attacks to our *shadow blade*'s two.

That means a mundane weapon, under these assumptions, would be five hundred times as valuable as our *shadow blade*.

If we take our *shadow blade*'s sixty gold piece value and divide it by five hundred, we get a total value just over one silver piece. Huzzah! We're still over the component cost.

It gets better!

But wait! Grog wasn't using the same weapon all the way through, and your typical player won't, either. Grog relied on a cursed sword stolen from a vampire for a while, and toward the end of the campaign, was swapping between a *bloodaxe* and a *dwarven thrower*. For simplicity's sake, let's assume our mundane weapon is used for half a campaign. That jumps our *shadow blade*'s value up over two silver pieces.

I should re-emphasize just how generous our estimates have been during this treatise, too. We assumed that a mundane weapon will *last* for a thousand swings—given the kind of treatment a weapon in D&D goes through, suffering through dragon fire and pits of acid, I don't think we can make that assumption. We assumed too that the *shadow blade*'s base weapon type was equivalent to a maul's, which does less damage and has two debilitating properties to the *shadow blade*'s three beneficial ones. We further assumed that the *shadow blade*'s value as a magic weapon was equivalent to the magic of a *potion of healing*. Any rogue will tell you, advantage on attack rolls—even one attack roll—is worth a heck of a lot more than 2d4+2 points of healing.

Arguments dismissed

Below are a few arguments against the value of *shadow blade* which I considered taking into account, but ultimately dismissed.

1. ***Shadow blade* is created by magic, and is therefore valueless.** Stuff can be made by magic without being valueless. Many times in this game, spells and class features refer to the value of items you create. Is an item created using the *fabricate* spell or a warlock's Pact of the Blade feature worth less than one smithed in a forge? If you think so, I say that makes you a magic-ist. Magist? A magister. You suck, basically.
2. ***Shadow blade* takes basically no time or effort to make, as opposed to a mundane weapon, which can take days or weeks to smith in a forge. The work it takes to create a weapon is what gives it its monetary value.** Again, that's kinda bullshit. I can

reach up and pull a branch off a tree to make a makeshift club that does a lot less damage than a *shadow blade*, and a club is worth 1 silver piece. I can also craft a weapon using magic, as referenced above, which—while taking more time than it takes to summon a *shadow blade*, doesn't take a *lot* more time.

3. **An object's value—"value" itself being a construct to facilitate commerce—is based on the value of the material that created it. A mundane sword could be melted down and its component parts sold for scrap, which would themselves have value. The shadows used to create a *shadow blade* are worthless, both pre- and post-creation; therefore the *shadow blade* itself is worthless.** An interesting argument—one that certainly explains how a greatsword is so much more expensive than the functionally identical maul. There are plenty of things within the world of D&D, though, that are basically brought out of
4. nothing and still have value. The *wish* spell can create any object worth 25,000 gold pieces, using no pre-existing material. Obviously an object's long-term existence does contribute to its value, but we took that into account in the duration section. I also don't think that spells, manipulations of the fabric of the Weave, care about societal constructions that much. We should also keep in mind that there exist valuable things not constructed from any material at all. How many times has your bard sung in a tavern and raked in the gold? Think of a *shadow blade* as a song that kills people if you like.
5. **The spell slot expended and the spellcaster's concentration are of real value, not the weapon itself.** Just because valuable resources are used to create something doesn't mean the thing itself is worth any less. Think of it these resources as the labor expended creating the item, as in argument #2, above.
6. **This combination of *shadow blade* with the SCAG cantrips is too good! This can't be what the designers intended. They obviously saw it in action and released this errata to fix it.** Again, Jeremy Crawford has said he'd allow this combo, and he's 5e's lead designer. This *is* a good combo, but there exist a number of better ones in the game. This may be surprising to non-optimizers, but when it comes to optimizing battle tactics, full spellcasters far outstrip the martial classes that benefit from this combo.

Well, thanks for hanging in there! Wizards sure did create a lot of fuss in the community by patching up some substandard writing, eh? We love their game, though. Enjoy *your* game, whether you use *shadow blade* and *booming blade* or *green-flame blade* or not!