

MONSTERS & MALADIES

A BESTIARY OF PLAGUES AND DISEASES

by
FEDERICO PILLERI



arts by

*Adolf Hering, Arnold Böcklin, Caravaggio, Caspar David Friedrich, Claude Monet, Earl Geier, Edmund Dulac, Francisco Goya, Fyodor Andreyevich Bronnikov, Gustave Dore, Ian MacLean, Michael Wolgemut, Miguel Santos, and Wilhelm Kotarbinski
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INTRODUCING THE MONSTERS OF PLAGUE

What makes vampires and werewolves so interesting and iconic enemies, fundamental in every proper fantasy bestiary and cornerstones of the horror genre itself? Tradition, surely, put a good effort in shaping our unconscious around those creatures: folklore, legends, literature, and more recently games had a strong influence on us all.

When I was a child, my worst nightmares always revolved around vampires – until with the reading of *D&D's Monster Manual* came the knowledge of how to properly fight them, but this is another story – and one of the most vivid dreams I remember revolved around a strange werewolf capable of diagnose Cooley's anemia – truly, I am a complicated person, even when I dream.

In my humble opinion, the success of werewolves and vampires is related to the origin of their legend, a dark and somehow confused legend – in Bram Stoker's works, there is no clear line of demarcation between the two monsters, and *D&D's* bloodsuckers are capable of shapeshifting into wolves.

At the origin of those creatures, there is an ancient fear, the fear of contagion and plague, the silent death dealt by unseen agents, the vile malady that transforms the infected in an unwilling agent of suffering against family and friends. Plague outbreaks were often “rationalized” as the cursed laid by a corpse that, in death, become an agent of death itself; to contain the spreading of the plague, one had to find the tomb of this plague bearer and defile it, destroying the undead corpse within.

Thus the vampire and the werewolf are, first and foremost, humans turned into monsters: they were not born as enemies of mankind, but a curse shaped them into (un)living nightmares that prey on their own kin. The plague that infected them can spread undetected, spawning endless legions of monsters: the very hero that defeats the werewolf or the vampire risks contagion himself. Children, lovers, caring parents... no one is safe from the taint that generates monsters. It isn't a coincidence if the most iconic monstrosity of contemporary horror

is the zombie, an undead that infects its victims with its own curse of unlife.

Thus, unnecessary essay aside, those considerations drove me to write this supplement, a short bestiary made of *Monsters & Maladies*, horrible creatures spawned by terrible infections that treat the adventurers themselves with the risk of becoming what they are fighting. Among the many new creatures, always accompanied by proper artwork, you will find an old acquaintance, the skum. Last but not least, this supplement contains even some monsterless plagues.

For good horror stories go beyond the single threat... but good monsters and threats certainly help, and I hope you will find this work of mine at least satisfactory.



Death and the maiden, or: "Death will come and have your eyes".

ATRA MORS, THE BLACK DEATH

The plague that scholars and doctors call *Atra Mors*, more widely known as the Black Death, is a vile and contagious disease capable of depriving entire villages of life... and fill the abandoned buildings with legions of foul monsters.

For, after passing, the victims of Black Death rise anew from their graves as undead abominations, monstrosities whose mere scratch spreads the disease even further. Those afflicted, according to the chronicles, are a relatively recent development of the plague: while the *Atra Mors* was always regarded as a deadly and vicious disease, the first instances of risen victims date back to three centuries ago. More disturbing is the fact that, while the first undeads generated by the Black Death were simple wretched corpses, with the passing of time the plague started generating new, more vicious forms of afflicted.

Scholars and priests are divided by the possible origin of those changes: some believe that the disease is evolving, slowly maturing into a virus capable of overtaking entire populations, while according to more spiritual theories some otherworldly entity, perhaps a god, a fiend or even a powerful lich, took interest in the *Atra Mors* and shaped the affliction into a tool to spread its own influence across the Multiverse. Finally, a few, shivering chroniclers point out that ancient Elven documents speak about a foul

disease called *Kalavyadhi* – roughly translated as Black Death –, whose symptoms strictly resemble those of the *Atra Mors*, and whose victims were said to rise from their death beds as vicious undead abominations.

BLACK DEATH

This malady is notorious for its virulence and its high death toll, as far as being regarded by many as the plague par excellence.

The contagion spreads through the body fluids of infected creatures, including the saliva – and so the bites – of fleas, rats and wild animals. When a creature comes into contact with the pathogen, it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become infected. Symptoms usually manifest 1d6 days after infection, and include a violent fever, fatigues and often cramps, nausea, and hallucinations; the body part through which the victim was infected soon becomes ulcerated, and as the illness progresses more and more of the characteristic livid swellings of the Black Death, called buboes by the doctors, appear over the afflicted body.

The infected creature gains one level of exhaustion that can't be removed until the disease is cured; furthermore, the creature regains only half the normal number of hit points from spending Hit Dice and no hit points from finishing a long rest; even magical healing restores only half the normal number of hit points if used to cure the infected, as the necrotic essence of the disease spreads further within the host's body.

At the end of each long rest, an infected creature must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the character gains one level of exhaustion; if the victim succeeds on two saving throws in a row, the creature's exhaustion level decreases by one level. If a successful saving throw reduces the infected



Outbreaks of Black Death destroyed the might of many great cities.

creature's level of exhaustion below 1, the creature recovers from the disease and, in the future, will gain advantage on Constitution saving throws against the same disease.

If the patient doesn't recover, however, as he or she suffers more levels of exhaustion the body is inexorably consumed by necrosis and gangrene, starting from the appendages and then infecting even the internal organs; at the very last, when the infected creature has reached 5 levels of exhaustion and is moribund, necrotic appendages and swellings turn bloody red, inducing many to think that the body is finally countering the plague. When he or she reaches the sixth exhaustion level, however, the infected creature inexorably dies with excruciating pain.

If the victim of *Atra Mors* wasn't a humanoid, after death its suffering finally ends. Humanoids slayed by this plague, however, rise 1d20 hours after death as undead aberrations. The process, if not magically halted, cannot be stopped: the endless sufferings of the infected were caused by their very body adapting itself to a new form of existence as an undead.

BLACK DEATH, AFFLICTED

The taint of *Atra Mors* originates many different strains of undeads; some of these monsters somehow continue to further mutate, evolving into true abominations that adsorb and reshape the flesh of their victims. The ones described below are the most common **Black Death afflicted**, but this horrid disease spawned many a unique, fearsome monster.

Unpredictable Mutations. *Atra Mors* reshapes into undead creatures all its humanoid victims, regardless of their size. While usually a small victim, like a halfling or a human child, is reborn as a small afflicted, no rule predicts the final form that a victim may assume, losing or gaining flesh in unnatural, certainly arcane ways in order to become a new, fearsome monster.

A Single Mind. Afflicted undeads are somehow capable of communicating among themselves, even when they know no intelligible language. They are thus capable of attacking as one, and often a stronger afflicted coordinates the efforts of its lesser kind toward a single objective, granting even to the nearly mindless wretched a semblance of strategy.

Take Over the World. While lesser afflicted monsters are lead by the basic instincts of avoiding risks and feeding themselves, the stronger and more intelligent strains seem to relish in harming and infecting their victims, and then letting them escape to spread the Black Death even further. This behavior suggested to some scholars that all the afflicted are in fact the detached limbs of a single, powerful entity, the *Atra Mors* itself.



Extreme caution is mandatory when handling the corpses of Black Death's victims.

AFFLICTED, WRETCHED

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 10 (natural armor)

Hit Points 19 (3d8 + 6)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	8 (-1)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	6 (-2)	5 (-3)

Damage Resistances necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages -

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Undead Mob. The wretched has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one other allied afflicted is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) piercing damage plus 2 (1d4) necrotic damage, and the wretched regains a number of hit points equal to the necrotic damage inflicted; furthermore, the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be infected by Black Death.

Bone Spike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be infected by Black Death.

Wretched are among the less powerful of the afflicted. Nevertheless, they can prove to be deadly enemies for the incautious adventurers that mistake them for zombies: those undead are slightly less resistant, but far stronger than the average walking dead, and not so clumsy nor slow.

The two monster are distinguishable thanks to the undead flesh of the wretched, that spots a peculiar red color and is stretched around twisted bones. While zombies slowly rot away, rotting in the afflicted is almost absent: the deformities displayed by a wretched are not a sign of decay, but a symptom of its continuous slow mutation. Typically, this form of afflicted develops one or more bone spikes to use in combat; however, the wretched prefers to feed

through its bite, adding the flesh of its enemies to its own undead corpse.

Usually, after some time an afflicted wretched mutates into a brute, but sometimes one of those monsters transforms directly into an abomination or a defiler; fortunately, many wretched never reach a new stadium, and many of them are eliminated when the treat they pose is still limited.



Sometimes, the face of a wretched shows the pain it suffered in life, agonizing under the Black Death.

AFFLICTED, SLASHER

Small undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 9 (2d6 + 2)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)	11 (+0)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Con +3, Wis +2

Skills Stealth +4, Perception +2

Damage Resistances necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages understands the languages it knew in life but can't speak, telepathy 30 ft.

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Shared Perceptions. While the slasher isn't incapacitated, and within 60 feet of it there are at least two other afflicted that are not blinded or deafened nor incapacitated, other afflicted within the same range from the slasher and the slasher itself have advantage on Perception checks and on Dexterity saving throws against effects they can see, such as traps and spells.

Undead Mob. The slasher has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one other allied afflicted is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.



Slashers typically further mutate into defilers.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage plus 2 (1d4) necrotic damage, and the slasher regains a number of hit points equal to the necrotic damage inflicted; furthermore, the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be infected by Black Death.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (2d4 + 1) slashing damage.

Slashers are the typical monster that one must not judge by their appearance. Those afflicted usually originate from a human child or a small humanoid, such as an halfling or gnome, but are far more vicious and deadly than a simple wretched.

The reason behind the risk they pose lies in the unfathomable ways of the Black Death, that gifted those undead corpses with a substantial glimpse of intellect and, most important, with the inborn ability to act as a beacon and a hub for the shared perception of all nearby afflicted. While not capable of truly directing the actions of its lesser kinds, the mere presence of a slasher makes the movements of the nearby wretched more coordinate, their efforts to avoid obstacles and detect enemies much more efficient. Smart adventures usually eliminate those little fiends before focusing on nearby wretched.

The eponymous claws of a slasher are what gives it its name, but while dangerous they are not capable of spreading the contagion of *Atra Mors*. The bite of the monster, however, while inflicting only minor damage, infects its victims with the tainted saliva of this afflicted. For some strange reason, slashers tend to bite the enemies at least once before using their deadly claws, and prefer to feed on dead corpses, often letting their infected enemies escape – only for them to surrender to the plague and be reborn as new afflicted.

AFFLICTED, BRUTE

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 76 (9d8 + 36)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	7 (-2)	11 (+0)	7 (-2)

Damage Resistances necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages understands the languages it knew in life but can't speak

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Brute. A melee weapon attack deals one extra die of its damage when the afflicted hits with it (already included in the attack).

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the afflicted to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the brute drops to 1 hit point instead.

Undead Mob. The brute has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one other allied afflicted is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The brute makes two attacks, one with its bite and one with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 5 (2d4) necrotic damage, and the brute regains a number of hit points equal to the necrotic damage inflicted; furthermore, the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be infected by Black Death.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be infected by Black Death.

Brutes are among the best known strains of Black Death afflicted. The corpses of those poor souls were twisted by the plague into abnormally large and powerful build, with bulky muscles crossed

with black veins. The fangs and claws of an afflicted brute constantly ooze highly infective fluids, but few victims survive the attack of this undead beast long enough to be infected by the *Atra Mors*.

While more intelligent than the wretched, the brute has no mind for strategy nor finesse: it exists as a simple machine of death and destruction, feeding on the corpses of its enemies in order to advance to the next stage of afflicted mutation.

Brutes usually originate from strong humanoids of medium size, such as orcs or muscular humans, but more often they are the evolved form reached by a wretched who fed on its preys long enough to achieve the body mass necessary to become such a monster.



Brutes are among the most bulky of the afflicted.

AFFLICTED, ABOMINATION

Large undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 126 (10d10 +50)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	13 (+1)	21 (+5)	9 (-1)	13 (+1)	7 (-2)

Damage Resistances necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages understands the languages it knew in life but can't speak

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)



Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the afflicted to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the abomination drops to 1 hit point instead.

Undead Mob. The abomination has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one other allied afflicted is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The abomination makes three attacks, one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage, and the abomination regains a number of hit points equal to the necrotic damage inflicted; furthermore, the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be infected by Black Death.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) slashing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be infected by Black Death.

REACTIONS

Impale. The afflicted interposes its claws to deviate one melee attack declared against it; the attacker suffers disadvantage for this attack roll, and the afflicted makes a claw attack against the attacking enemy.

Its four clawed arms make this afflicted a true master of carnage.

When a large humanoid succumbs to the Black Death, or when a brute or even a lucky wretched accumulates sufficient mass, the vicious plague that inhabits the corpse reshapes it into an **afflicted abomination**. The fleshy growths that protruded from shoulder blades become two bulky arms, and the hands of the monster substitute its very fingers. The reflexes of the resulting monster are surprisingly good, and all its appendages can be used to inflict deadly attacks.

Thanks to its evolved mind, the abomination is capable of elaborating basic strategies by itself. However, while other advanced afflicted often act in order to spread the plague rather than feed themselves, this monster has no higher objective than spreading death, devouring the still pulsating flesh of its enemies and becoming even larger and bulkier. Perhaps abomination are preparing to the next stage of afflicted evolution, a stage that thankfully no one of them reached yet.

AFFLICTED, DEFILER

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 142 (15d8 +75)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	21 (+5)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Int +6, Wis +6, Cha +5

Skills Intimidation +7, Perception +7, Stealth +6

Damage Resistances psychic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common plus any other language it knew in life, telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

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

Read Their Moves. The AC of the defiler includes its Intelligence bonus.

Regeneration. The defiler regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn. If the defiler takes fire or radiant damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the afflicted's next turn. The defiler dies only if it starts its turn at 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Shared Perceptions. While the defiler isn't incapacitated, and within 60 feet of it there are at least two other afflicted that are not blinded or deafened nor incapacitated, other afflicted within the same range from the defiler and the defiler itself have advantage on Perception checks and on Dexterity saving throws against effects they can see, such as traps and spells.

Undead Mob. The defiler has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one other allied afflicted is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The defiler can use its madness wave once and then makes two attacks either with its claw or one attack with its piercing strike.

Claw. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d10 + 3) slashing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be infected by Black Death.

Madness Wave (Recharge 4–6). The defiler sends a telepathic wave of madness towards a single target within 60 feet. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or suffer 18 (4d8) psychic damage and be stunned till the start of the defiler's next round; on a success, the target suffers only half damage and is not stunned. Creature immune to charm are immune to this effect, but creature infected by Black Death make the saving throw with disadvantage.

Piercing Strike. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 13 (3d8) necrotic damage, and the defiler regains a number of hit points equal to the necrotic damage inflicted; furthermore, the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be infected by Black Death.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The defiler 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. The defiler regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Claw. The defiler makes one claw attack.

Mental Shroud (Costs 2 actions). The defiler excludes itself or one other afflicted from the perceptions of those within 60 feet from the defiler itself; for its enemies within range, the afflicted is effectively invisible as by the *invisibility* spell; creatures beyond that range are unaffected by the Mental Shroud, as are those immune to charm.

Move. The defiler moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Defilers are the ultimate, horrific strain of Black Death afflicted that plague the world. In their corpses, the malady reached a new stage, reanimating the dead brain and gifting it with more than a resemblance of intellect: the mind of a defiler is far more brighter than the one of the average humanoid, as if marked by some otherworldly presence that removed its

boundaries. Those afflicted, thankfully very rare, display stunning telepathic capabilities, and are able to pollute the mind and perceptions of their enemies in order to halt them or even turn themselves or other afflicted invisible at the eyes of bystanders.

Nearly all the defilers are the result of a further mutation undergone by a slasher, the only other afflicted strain gifted with telepathy: the claws that both monsters show leave no doubts. The mouth of a defiler, however, transformed further, and so this creature is the only of its kind

incapable of feeding; it instead absorbs the very essence of its enemies' life through its claws, that can act as foul needles and siphon the body fluids out of the bodies as they infect them with the Atra Mors. Anyway, thanks to its mouth shape, a defiler is capable of speaking, an act that it does often in order to taunt its victims.

More than lesser afflicted, a defiler aims to spread the taint of Black Death rather than kill and revel in massacre; its intellect, however, makes the monster more than capable of recognizing a threat to its plans, such an

adventurers' party or a healer, and such obstacles are removed without hesitation.

Defilers are patient, and know when to play dead in order to fool their enemies: the essence of the plague inside their corpses constantly repairs them, and they can virtually go for months without feeding on the living. Thus the threat of Black Death can resurface months or even years after it was believed to have been vanquished, thanks to a single defiler that slowly infected lonely victims before launching an all-round attack against a city or even a whole kingdom.



"Hush, I'll give you a gift, but you will give me some of your life in return. After all, soon you won't be needing it anyway, would you?"

BURNING FEVER

Many accounts speak of spontaneous humanoid combustion, when a living being suddenly catches fire and burns to the ashes within a few seconds. Usually this episode shows the effect of some kind of magic spell, but in fact a rather uncommon disease exists that slowly rises the temperature of the infected, till its body heat rises so much that the poor soul literally burns itself out.

As this malady is quite obscure, it is the perfect tool to eliminate someone and remain undetected, often blaming a spellcaster for the victim's demise: many assassins put great effort into obtaining sample of infective material, a rather complicate feat. The Burning Fever spreads through the excrement of infected creature, but is highly volatile and the pathogens quickly become inert while outside of a host body. Smart poisoners keep a stock of spiders, mice or similar vermin to progressively infect with this malady, in order to be always ready to collect a sample of infected faeces.



Death by burning fever is often an inexplicable mystery.

The real trick, as they say, is to force the target to eat animal droppings without being detected. Once the victim is infected, however, the chance of contagion with other humanoids is virtually nonexistent, and this make Burning Fever one of the best disease to employ as a weapon in subtle games of power. Smart detective, while investigating a case of spontaneous combustion, examine cesspools and sewers seeking for the remains of burnt animals.

BURNING FEVER

This painful infection is contracted by inadvertently ingesting the excrement of other infected creatures. After consuming the pathogens, a creature must pass a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or became infected; the first symptoms of the disease, however, manifest only 1d4 days after ingestion: the temperature of the infected creature strongly rises, and it suffers one level of exhaustion.

At the end of each long rest, an infected creature must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw; on success, the character's exhaustion level decreases by one; on a failure, the disease proceeds to the next stage and the infected creature suffers one further level of exhaustion. If a successful saving throw reduces the infected creature's level of exhaustion below 1, the creature recovers from the disease. Otherwise, the malady progresses.

When a creature has reached 3 levels of exhaustion and fails a further saving throw against the burning fever, its body heat becomes too much to bear: after 1d6 hours, the creature suddenly is reduced to 0 hit points and catches fire, being utterly consumed by it within 1d6 rounds. Those flames cannot be put out from the outside, unless magic is used, but while painful don't usually damage those who try to help the victim. What remains of the creature after the 1d6 round have expired is an anonymous pile of ashes, and the burnt mark of the interior flame that destroyed its body.

CONSUMPTION

With the rather vague name of “Consumption”, healers identify a strange malady, a curse more than a simple disease, that originates from an undetected undead and afflicts those who live nearby. While undead monsters are notorious for preying on life and defiling it to sustain their own existence, this malady doesn't originate from a conscious act of the bearer, but rather from its very presence that pollutes the balance of Life and Death within the area.

Sometimes, the carrier of Consumption can't even leave its coffin, existing as the very embodiment of undeath that slowly destroys the living without even the thinnest semblance of unlife. Often those monsters are called “shroud chewer”, for within their tombs they can't do nothing more than slowly chewing their own funeral robes. The bearer of the Consumption may even be an incorporeal undead, the pale shadow of a spectre that exists only as an image in the mind of those who suffer under its plague.

For, as long as living victims continue to suffer and die by Consumption, the pale existence of the undead is preserved: it unconsciously feeds on death and suffering, often choosing its victims



Victims of Consumption often dream of the rotting corpse of the undead that causes their suffering.

among those who the living being it once was held dear. This fact usually provides solid evidence to discover the identity of the deceases shroud chewer, whose corpse must be destroyed or at least prevented from feeding in order to halt the spreading of the curse. Otherwise, every morning one new creature living in the area around the tomb will contract the malady, until all the nearby population succumbs to Consumption or the survivors of the plague settle elsewhere. The shroud chewer, however, will not be vanquished: until destroyed, its corpse will infect those unlucky enough to rest in proximity of its unresting place.

CONSUMPTION

Infection from Consumption is automatic, as it is caused by a curse rather than by pathogens. At the end of its first long rest after infection, a creature suffering from Consumption gains one level of exhaustion, as if sleep drained up its vigor rather than restoring it.

At the end of each subsequent long rest, an infected creature must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw; on success, the character's exhaustion level decreases by one; on a failure, the creature suffers one further level of exhaustion. If a successful saving throw reduces the infected creature's level of exhaustion below 1, the creature recovers from the disease.

If a creature doesn't recover from the Consumption, and if meanwhile the undead carrier of the curse is not destroyed, death is unavoidable when the patient reaches 6 levels of exhaustion and its body is totally devoid of strength and life.



Sometimes, a weak vampire begins its unlife as a shroud chewer.

CRAWLING ROT

As unbelievable as it seems, the Crawling Rot is not a plague that brings death, but a malady that spawns new life. For the victims of this curse, at the end of its course, became the still quite living spawns of the Crawling Rot, joyful sacks of purulent flesh that try their best to spread the contagion even further.

Scholars believe that this affliction originated in some other plane of existence, perhaps the Abyss or the Far Realm, or even the Limbo. Theories suggest that there are whole Material Planes where all the population is made up by the spawns of the Crawling Rot, an endless parade of cheerful abominations that organize themselves as every humanoid would do.

Anyway, the threat that this curse poses to the world is quite real: for Crawling Rot spawns believe that their one is the only worthy life, and do their best to spread what they see as the ultimate gift, oblivious of the suffering and death they would cause along their mission.

CRAWLING ROT

Contagion by the Crawling Rot is usually caused by direct contact with a carrier, typically a spawn of the curse or another infected. Sometimes an enterprising spawn may hide its pathogens in the food stocks of its former community, in order to “gift” its friends with a new, “marvelous” existence.

Upon contagion, a creature must pass a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or become infected; the first symptoms of the curse manifest only 1d4 days after infection, when the patient starts feeling sick and the body appears to be literally rotting from the inside; the afflicted character is poisoned, and recovers only half the normal hit points from spending Hit Dice and from long rests.

Within 1d4 days, at the end of the subsequent long rest, an infected creature must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw; on a failure, the rotting and the gangrene seems to expand, but the creature gains resistance to both acid and poison damage. On a success, the creature recovers from the Crawling Rot. After a further 1d4 days, a creature that still suffers from

the Crawling Rot must make a final DC 16 Constitution saving throw; on a success the curse reverts to the previous stage: the creature loses its resistance against acid and poison damage and, within 1d4 days, has the chance to definitely fight off the Crawling Rot. On a failure, however, the malady has reached its final stage: rotting literally devours the body of the host, that slowly turns to a sick shade of green or yellow; the pain is nearly unbearable, as if the patient was suffering from 5 levels of exhaustion, and a nonhumanoid creature dies within the day. Humanoids, however, slowly learn how to live with this pain, and in a 1d4 days all the side effects of the disease are gone: their flesh is still rotten and deformed by the curse, they still appear to be very, very sick, but they never felt better. For they have become a crawling horror, the basic strain of crawling rot spawns.

CRAWLING ROT SPAWN

To understand the behavior of Crawling Rot spawns, and the reasons and thoughts behind their actions, one must realize that those aberrations don't perceive themselves as “monsters”. While they still keep memories of their former life, transformed spawns don't long for their previous existence, nor do they consider their new shape hideous or deformed; they rather picture themselves as the true incarnation of unlimited life energy, a life so irrepressible that it literally overflowed from their former, limited bodies.

A New, Carefree Existence. To be reborn as a Crawling Rot spawn, or as a member of the Cheerful Folk, as they call themselves, is to break many of the chains that hold mortal life: first of all, the bodies of those creatures don't decay with age, but instead they grow in size to the point that they can spontaneously engender new lives; thus no mating is required for the Cheerful Folk to procreate, as no food nor drink is strictly required to satiate the appetite and thirst of a spawn. All those acts that in their previous existence were necessary, for the members of the Cheerful Folk became simple pleasures to enjoy whenever one feels the urge.

Militant Missionaries. Despite their best efforts, the rest of the world sees Crawling Rot spawns as nothing more than despicable monsters, the miserable victims of a cursed plague that transformed them into foul aberrations whose mind is perhaps as rotten as their perverted body. The fact that every member of the Cheerful Folk feels the urge to spread the malady that reshaped it, strongly supports this opinion: for the spawns it is impossible to live among normal humanoids, and their communities are perceived as dangerous plague nests by rulers and common folk alike. Thus those creatures are forced to either live in seclusion, a fact that strongly clashes with their inborn hedonism, or embrace their cause and fight off, spreading the Crawling Rot among those that oppress them in order to make every last of them embrace their point of view, along with a new, carefree existence.

Elder Parents. While many crawling horrors are mutated humanoids, in established spawn communities the majority of them are in fact procreated by the elders, the so called incubators. As a member of the Cheerful Folk ages, the life energies that shaped it make its body progressively larger, till at last, after some decades, this life force spontaneously generates new little life within the host body of the parent. As there is no gender distinction between Crawling rot spawns, those incubators are known simply as Elder Parents among their people. Theologians around the world believe that this proves the corrupted nature of those foul spawns, as they are generated by overstepping matter and thus possess no soul. The matter is debated, as when not treated with hostility the Cheerful Folk as proven itself as a valid ally of more conventional races.

Anyway, among their kind the Elder Parents are highly respected, and they are treated as the true leaders of the community.



A crawling whelp sprouting from its Elder Parent.

SPAWN, WHELP

Tiny aberration, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 3 (1d4 + 1)

Speed 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
4(-3)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)	9 (-1)	12 (+1)

Skills Persuasion +3

Damage Vulnerabilities necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from silvered attacks

Damage Immunities acid, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Common

Challenge 0 (10 XP)

Smelly. Perception checks made to detect the spawn that rely partially or totally on smell are made with advantage.

Regeneration. The spawn regains 1 hit point at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point. If the spawn takes necrotic damage, or bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage from a silvered, this trait doesn't function at the start of the spawn's next turn.

ACTIONS

Claws. Melee Weapon Attack: +0 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 1 slashing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be infected by Crawling Rot.

Whelps are the quite diminutive prole of mature spawns, disgusting little things of soggy green flesh with a happy grin on their laughing faces. Despite their smell, the liquids they secrete are not dangerous, but surely contribute to the common perception of spawn whelps as foul monsters.

In fact, those aberrations act and behave like children, for a whelp is effectively a Crawling Rot spawn child: he is naive and insistent, usually joyful but prone to cry bitter – and foul smelling – tears if its supposed playmates treat it badly.

Among the Cheerful Folks, whelps are treated as the beloved offspring of the whole community, and their acute voices and silly laughter always delight their elder kin. The killing

of one or more whelps is a crime that will not stand unpunished, and the perpetrator will be at least forced to embrace the Crawling Rot in order to compensate for the life the Cheerful Folk was deprived of.



Crawling horrors came in many shapes. When they originate from a small sized humanoid, their bodies appear to be unnaturally bent and twisted upwards, as their flesh adapted itself to the new size.

SPAWN, CRAWLING HORROR

Medium aberration, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 11 (natural armor)

Hit Points 42 (5d8 + 20)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11(+0)	8 (-1)	19 (+4)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Con +6, Cha +3

Skills Perform +3, Persuasion +3, Perception +2

Damage Vulnerabilities necrotic

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered

Damage Immunities acid, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common plus any other language it knew in life

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Foul Fluids. Any creature that touches the spawn or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 3 (1d6) poison damage.

Smelly. Perception checks made to detect the spawn that rely partially or totally on smell are made with advantage.

Stench. Any creature other than a spawn that starts its turn within 5 feet of the spawn must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of the creature's next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the stench of all spawns for 1 hour.

Regeneration. The spawn regains 5 hit point at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point. If the spawn takes necrotic damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the spawn's next turn.

ACTIONS

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d6+1) piercing damage, or 5 (1d8+1) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) slashing damage plus 2 (1d4) poison damage, and the target must succeed

on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be infected by Crawling Rot.

Crawling horrors constitute the majority of the Cheerful Folk, as they are the stage reached by both mature whelps (usually at the age of ten) and transformed humanoids. Their very name says enough about the appearance of those aberration: they seem rotting sacks of bloated flesh covering a twisted skeleton whose bones sometimes extrude like horns from the body of the creature. Their skin, pale and unnaturally hued, constantly secretes a foul and smelly toxin, the mere touch of a crawling horror capable of destroying plants and killing small animals.

And yet, despite those traits, crawling horrors don't count themselves among the monsters that prey on the weak. True to their name of Cheerful Folk, they are lively fellows that enjoy good humor, good art, good food, and nearly any kind of pleasure. However, should an enemy deprive them of any of the latter, or declare itself an enemy of the whole Cheerful Folk by thwarting a plane to further spread the Crawling Rot, every horror will put down its joy and confront the adversary with pitiless courage, favoring what it perceives as the greater good of its kin over its own safety.

Anyway, when not treated with hostility – or with what they consider to be hostility –, crawling horrors prove to be quite excellent fellows, cordial with everybody and prone to humor and jokes... that is, if someone could bear their stench and the unnaturally kind, nearly mellifluous tone of the voices that come out of their monstrous bodies.

SPAWN, INCUBATOR

Large aberration, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 112 (9d10 + 63)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17(+3)	7 (-2)	25 (+7)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +9, Int +3, Wis, +3 Cha +4

Skills History +3, Insight +4, Perform +4, Persuasion +4, Perception +4

Damage Vulnerabilities necrotic

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered

Damage Immunities acid, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common plus any other language it knew in life

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Foul Fluids. Any creature that touches the spawn or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 10 (3d6) poison damage.

Smelly. Perception checks made to detect the spawn that rely partially or totally on smell are made with advantage.

Stench. Any creature other than a spawn that starts its turn within 5 feet of the spawn must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of the creature's next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the stench of all spawns for 1 hour.

Regeneration. The spawn regains 10 hit point at the start of its turn. If the spawn takes necrotic damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the spawn's next turn. The spawn dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

ACTIONS

Procreate (Recharges after a Long Rest). The incubator spontaneously generates a whelp spawn from within its body. The new spawn can then enter combat, escape, or act as it see more fitted, acting at the same initiative count of the incubator, immediately after it.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be infected by Crawling Rot.

When a crawling horror reaches a suitable age, usually after spending fifty or more years as a Crawling Rot spawn, its slow mutations and growth transform it into an **incubator**, one of the revered Elder Parents capable of spawning new members of their race without infecting a humanoid host. The unnaturally bloated body of this aberration is a testament of the unrestrained vitality of the Crawling Rot, as inside its swelling the incubator carries little embryos of whelp spawns, that slowly mature and are then given birth in the most unsuitable of times, with great delight of whole communities of the Cheerful Folk.

Thanks to their role as makers of new spawns, the Elder Parents enjoy great prestige among their kind, and act as the de facto leaders of their race, as long as a race of monstrous hedonists could abide by its leaders. Wise, smart and spirited, incubators nevertheless act with their fellow spawn as a benevolent parent would do with its children, protecting them from danger and praising all their efforts with their warm, high-pitched, paternal voices.



"Hello, kind sir. Please, don't bring your shiny silver near my children, you don't want to hurt them, do you? What, you do? You, dear sir, are a monster, a true, true monster."

IRON PLAGUE

This strange disease is a supernatural malady that slowly replaces the patient flesh with living metal, till at last the host's body dies and a new creature, a steel insect-like monster, emerges from the still warm corpse.

However, as the first stages of the infection prove to be quite useful, making the skin of the patient progressively harder and more resistant, few hosts treat the disease until it is too late. Only when the soft tissue of the body have been converted to organic metal does the incubation of the guest monster start, and it takes a surprisingly short time to reach its end.

Despite the threat that the steel beetles pose, however, ruthless warlords often prefer infect their conscripts with the Iron Plague rather than afford the cost to provide them all with a decent armor: the malady will grant them some protection without providing useful spoils to the enemy, and such clueless soldiers are not meant to survive the battle anyway.

Scholars, druids and doctors have inferred that, in fact, what is known as Iron Plague is the birth cycle of the steel beetle, whose larva uses the patient's body as a host before reaching its first nymphal stage: the metal that slowly consumes and replaces the body of the infected is in fact the cocoon progressively created by the larva.

IRON PLAGUE

A living creature of small or medium size becomes infected by the Iron Plague when a steel beetle egg is inoculated within its body; this typically happens after the attack of a plague carrier, but ruthless individuals breed those insects in order to use their eggs as pathogens.

After ingesting or being inoculated the egg, the host must pass a DC 14 Constitution saving throw in order to avoid its implant; if the save fails, the creature is infected by the Iron Plague. Within 1d6 days, the egg hatches and the larva starts creating its cocoon, converting the body tissues of the host into metal. The infected creature must then succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw in order to reject the cocoon and kill the larva. Otherwise, at the end of

the next long rest part of its body will be made of metal, granting it one point of natural armor, and thus an inborn Armor Class of at least 11 + Dexterity modifier. At the end of each subsequent long rest, the natural armor of the host further increases by one point, until it has 5 points of natural armor and an Armor Class of at least 15 + Dexterity modifier or better.

From this point onward the cocoon is ready, and within further 1d6 days the larva will evolve into its nymphal stage, slowly devouring the host's body from the inside. At the end of each subsequent long rest, an infected creature must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw; on success, the character's exhaustion level decreases by one; on a failure, the creature suffers one further level of exhaustion. If a successful saving throw reduces the infected creature's level of exhaustion below 1, the creature recovers from the disease. As the malady progresses, the cocoon enlarges and occupies the stomach of the host, hideously broadening it. When the patient reaches 6 level of exhaustion, a new steel beetle hatchling bursts out of its cocoon, rending the host's corpse and killing it on the spot.

If the disease is cured before the hatchling's emergence, the unborn steel beetle is destroyed along with its cocoon, and the tissues of the host regain their previous consistence as it loses any natural armor granted by the Iron Plague.



A mature steel beetle nymph, ready to shred its own skin and became a plague carrier.

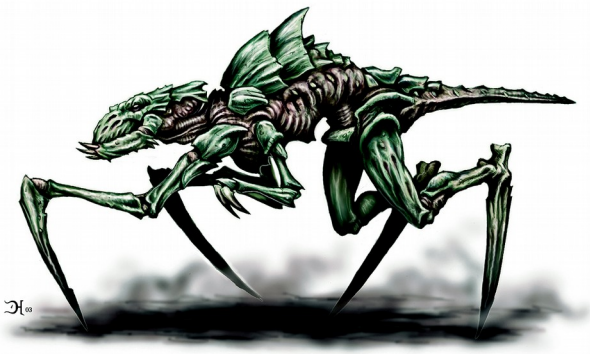
STEEL BEETLE

Steel beetles, sometimes referred to as the steel swarm, are a parasitic race of monstrous insects whose eggs require a living host in order to hatch, causing the disease known as the Iron Plague. Only after further growth, however, a hatched steel beetle is capable of reproducing, spontaneously producing fertilized eggs and then proceeding to implant them into living hosts.

Metal-Like Chitin. As their name suggests, steel beetles possess an incredibly strong exoskeleton, made by a bio metal whose properties compete with those of crucible steel. Their body is thus impervious to mundane attacks, and their natural weapons are capable of piercing even the strongest material.

Acid Maw. The diet of a steel beetle consists virtually of everything, stone and metal included. However, as its entrails are far softer than the exoskeleton, those insects produce a strong acid in order to melt their food before digesting it. This same acid, corrosive for every material except their own entrails and bio metal, is secreted even by the maws of the monster, making its bite its most dangerous attack.

Fly off. When a steel beetle reaches its adult stage, it shreds off its previous skin and emerges from the nymphal stage as a flying monstrosity, capable of procreating entire swarms. As nymphs and adults are quite different, usually only the most devoted of scholars know the truth behind the evolution of those monsters... along with those that suffer the deadly skin of a steel beetle carrier.



HATCHLING

Small monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 3 (1d6)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11(+0)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	3 (-4)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Stealth +4

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine

Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages -

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Metal Exoskeleton. A steel beetle weapon attacks are treated as adamantine.

Spider Climb. The steel beetle can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Sting. The steel beetle can make one sting attack as a bonus action against a prone target.

Swarm Tactics. The steel beetle has advantage on attack roll against a creature if at least one other allied steel insect is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) acid damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) slashing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 10 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 10). Until this grapple ends, the steel beetle can't use its sting attack.

Hatchling steel beetles, despite their size, are quite deadly opponents, especially for those that possess no magical means to harm them. They are capable of quite elaborate tactics, at least if compared with mundane insects.

ADULT

Medium monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 27 (5d8+5)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	5 (-3)	12 (+1)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4.

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine

Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages -

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Metal Exoskeleton. A steel beetle weapon attacks are treated as adamantine.

Spider Climb. The steel beetle can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Sting. The steel beetle can make one sting attack as a bonus action against a prone target.

Swarm Tactics. The steel beetle has advantage on attack roll against a creature if at least one other allied steel insect is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) acid damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 12). Until this grapple ends, the steel beetle can't use its sting attack against other targets.

Despite their name, **adult** steel beetles are still nymphs, an intermediate stage of the monster to be. However, they are much more deadly than hatchlings, and display a malevolent intellect

unheard of among common bugs. Their combat tactics are roughly the same used by younger steel beetle, but their stronger bodies makes them deadlier.

The priority for those monsters is to feed and survive long enough to evolve to the next stage, and so they are very cautious against strong foes, and yet merciless against weak enemies that could provide them with softer food to eat – namely, their flesh. A brood of adult steel beetle could infest the forsaken ruins of the village its inhabitants lived in before the infection, preying on the unwary traveler, or even organize raids against nearby hamlets, whose peasants stand no change against the metallic swarm.

The barracks of those armies that were infected with the Iron Plague will often become a nest of steel beetles, a crude but efficient trap to set against those who would invade a warlord's dominion.



Steel beetle adults often display metal spike on their thorax, an anticipation of their future wings.

CARRIER

Medium monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)

Hit Points 27 (5d8+5)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	7 (-2)	13 (+1)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +6.

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages -

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Bite. The steel beetle can make one bite attack as a bonus action against a grappled target.

Dive Attack. If the carrier is flying and dives at least 30 feet straight towards a target and then hits it with a melee weapon attack, the attack deals an extra 9 (2d8) damage to the target.

Flyby. The carrier doesn't provoke an opportunity attack when it flies out of an enemy's reach.

Metal Exoskeleton. A steel beetle weapon attacks are treated as adamantine.

Spider Climb. The steel beetle can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Swarm Tactics. The steel beetle has advantage on attack roll against a creature if at least one other allied steel insect is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be infected by the Iron Plague.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 14). Until this grapple ends, the steel beetle can't use its claw attack against other targets.

Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) acid damage.

Carriers are the final stage of steel beetle evolution, the adult bringers of the Iron Plague. They are born, already mature and soon capable of procreate, from a nymph that has finally reached full development.

While its metal wings are perhaps the most obvious of the changes undergone, the physiology of the resulting monster is totally different from the previous stages. First of all its sting, along with many acid secreting cells, is now located into one of the now bipedal monster's arm, in order to work as a primary weapon. The other arm specialized into a grappling claw, suited to immobilize the targets and then depose an egg into their body thanks to the maws, that now can act both as a mouth and a reproductive organ.



An Iron Plague carrier, a true monster unleashed.

KISS FROM THE DEEP

This affliction, rather than a proper disease, is the horrid result of aboleth's machinations and of their meddling with surface races.

Every adventurer that met those abominations of the deep knows how they wield powerful magic, capable of bending even the strongest will, and how their bodies secrete foul substances that twist and transform the living, but few know the true extent of those capabilities when combined together. In ancient times, when aboleths and other primeval, aberrant races ruled the world, primitive humanoids were their slaves; the lords of primordial oceans, however, required servants capable of assisting and revering them even in their titanic underwater cities. As it turned out, simple enslavement and mucus infection weren't enough to transform fearful and dull cavemen into worshiping slaves capable of acting on their own according to their master's slighter whims. A more radical mutation was required.

At last, after the lives of countless humanoids were wasted in vain, aboleth scientist found a way to permanently alter the body of their human slaves, transforming them into aquatic humanoids literally breed to obey. The process, among other disgusting procedures, required – hence its name – the insertion of an aboleth tentacle within the subject's mouth and deep into its lungs, in order to utterly reshape the body from the inside. And so the skum were born.

Aeons waded, ages faded, and now the aboleths prey no more on the inhabitants of the surface world. And yet, sometimes, they find a way to kidnap a few humanoids, and the poor souls are reshaped into skums in order to restore the stocks of their cruel masters.

As it is, there is no real transmission of this curse: the pathogens are produced by the flesh of the aboleth, and the monster itself must put great effort in transforming a humanoid into its subject. And yet the existence of the skums still remains as a testament of one of the cruelest sufferings that aberrations imposed to the mortal world.



SKUM

Skums exist as a disgusting hybrid of human and fish, the products of vile experiments by alien and cruel minds. They are large, muscular humanoids with scaled, dark green skin, webbed appendages, and fins; they usually possess a short finned tail, but some specimen lack any extra appendage. Their faces, however, are the most distinctive trait of the skum: an arrangement of thin pointed teeth sprouts from their thin lips, and the large eyes above their flat noses are round, vitreous, and as black as darkness itself. As skums don't die by old age, many of them are centuries old monstrosity, cruel underwater marauders that ended countless lives at the whims of their creators.

Slaves to the Past. Long ago, as the underwater empire of the aboleth crumbled to dust, the skums found themselves finally free from their cruel masters. Previously, their aberrant creators shaped and perverted their minds in order to predispose them to utter obedience and unspeakable vileness, and the same mindset still dictates the actions of free skums. This races lives by marauding both surface and subterranean races, exploiting long-forgotten systems of underwater channels and tunnels in order to move and attack undetected. When a skum meets an aboleth, it spontaneously pledges itself to the monsters, and many a skum

community devoted its best efforts to find a new aboleth master to serve.

Disgusting Half-Breeds. The first skums were created by aboleths as a true race, capable of reproducing and thus providing its master with a constant supply of slaves. However, breed skums proved to be much more resistant to aboleth's orders, to the extent of even conceiving riots and insurgencies. In order to prevent further rebellions, aboleth exterminated every single skum female, resorting to sterile but docile

servants. As it turned out, however, skums are capable of breeding with human females; this union usually produces a peculiar hybrid, sporadically destined to age into a full-fledged skum. However, if the mother spent enough time among skums before her child's birth, the resulting offspring will be a true member of this race of men-fishes.

The Secret of Matriarchs. What aboleths didn't know nor foresaw was that, much like themselves, skums would prove to be able to change their gender during their life. Old age, rather than debilitating their physique, makes those humanoid grow more and more, till they reach the size of true giants; therefore, the process of aging induces a spontaneous process of sex change, where a giant skum lives for roughly a century as a female and then reverts to male for another century before changing back and back again. Skum matriarchs and patriarchs, as they are referred to, are fully fertile and capable of mating, laying numerous eggs that will then produce a tadpole-like skum, the only non-hybrid skum that is born and not created. Needless to say, matriarchs and patriarchs lead the skum communities they live on, and are often violently at odd with aboleths.



Great treasures and deadly dangers await the adventurer brave enough to venture underwater. And the skums are among the latter.

SKUM, MIDGET

Small humanoid (skum), lawful evil

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 11 (2d6 + 4)

Speed 10 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	9 (-1)	6 (-2)

Skills Perception +1, Stealth +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Deep Speech, Undercommon

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Amphibious. The skum can breath air and water.

Predator of the Depths. The skum has advantage on Perception and Stealth checks made while underwater.

ACTIONS

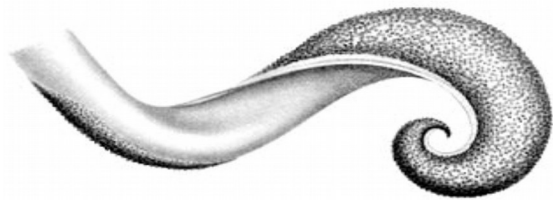
Multiattalck. The skum makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws.

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

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 slashing damage.

Skum youngster, commonly called **midgets** even by their own, strongly resemble small humanoid tadpoles, and typically stand 3 to 4 feet tall with a further 2 to 3 feet long tail. As matriarchs lay hundreds of eggs at once, individual midgets are treated in skum society as an expendable asset: only those that make it to adult age, the development requiring nearly fifteen years to complete, are accepted as part of the community.

Until them, juvenile skums must provide for themselves, often resorting to cannibalism in order to survive in the pitiless depths below the surface. This harsh upbringing ensures that only the strong survive, and often provides a farseeing aboleth with a new generation of servants.



SKUM, COMMON

Medium humanoid (skum), lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 45 (6d8 + 18)

Speed 20 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +2, Stealth +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Deep Speech, Undercommon

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Amphibious. The skum can breath air and water.

Predator of the Depths. The skum has advantage on Perception and Stealth checks made while underwater.

ACTIONS

Multiattalck. The skum makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws or trident.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage.

Trident. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage, or 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

The **common skum** is a fierce underwater predator, capable of realizing elaborate attacks by coordinating its effort with those of its kind. Whether a slave to the aboleth or an independent monster, the skum harbors a deep hate for surface-folk, as well as the vicious intellect required to devise nefarious designs against those that, deep within its souls, the creature recognizes as its fortunate brethren.

SKUM, ELDER ONE

Large giant (skum), lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 76 (8d10 + 32)

Speed 30 ft., swim 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Deep Speech, Undercommon

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Amphibious. The skum can breath air and water.

Predator of the Depths. The skum has advantage on Perception and Stealth checks made while underwater.

ACTIONS

Multiattalck. The skum makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws or trident.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d4 + 4) slashing damage.

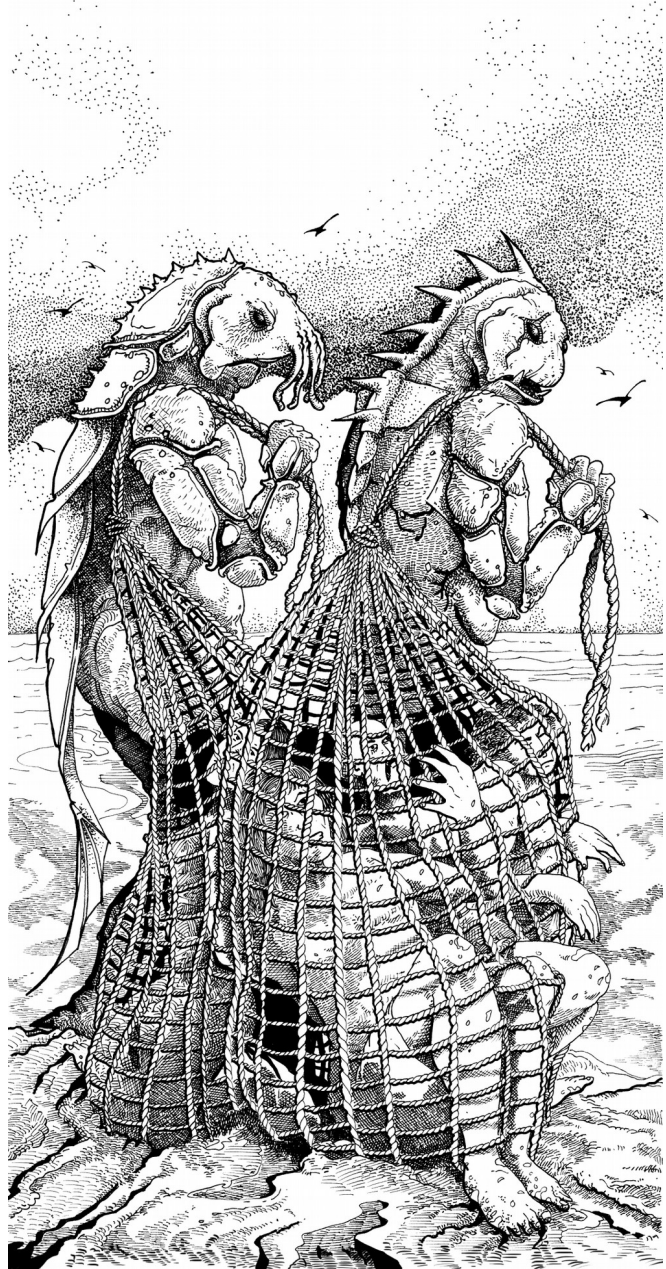
Net. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 5/15 ft., one large or smaller target. *Hit:* the target is restrained until freed (escape DC 10), or until the net is broken (AC 10, 5 hit points)

Trident. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or rrange 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage, or 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Those skums that reached the century of life and a large size are called **elder ones**, hulking brutes of inhuman strength whose teeth can shred even metal to pieces. They usually coordinate the efforts of their lesser kind, and are prized among aboleths as strong lieutenants. Despite their usefulness, however, elder ones that are slaves to their piscine masters are often executed after a few decades, for the aboleth fear the danger they

would pose should they reach the next stage of their life.

Elder ones often carry one or more nets, that they use to capture those who they consider worthy slaves.



Elder ones often lead skums raiding parties. Contrary to common belief, not all the skum resemble the same underwater creature.

SKUM, GREAT OLD ONE

Huge giant (skum), lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 196 (15d12 + 105)

Speed 30 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	11 (+0)	25 (+7)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)

Saves Dex +4, Con +11, Wis +7, Cha +6

Skills Intimidation +6, Insight +7, Perception +7, Stealth +4

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Deep Speech, Undercommon

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Amphibious. The skum can breath air and water.

Legendary Resistance (2/Day). If the skum fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Predator of the Depths. The skum has advantage on Perception and Stealth checks made while underwater.

ACTIONS

Multiattalck. The skum can use its Frightful Presence. It then makes three attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8 + 6) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) slashing damage. If the target is Large or smaller, it is grappled (escape DC 16) and restrained until the grapple ends. The skum has two sets of claw, each of which can grapple one target.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the skum's choice that is within 120 feet of the skum and aware of it must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is succesfull or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the skum's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The skum 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. The defiler regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Claws. The skum makes one claws attack.

Devour. The skum makes one bite attack against a grappled target.

Move. The defiler moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Skums honor their matriarchs and patriarchs with the title of **Great Old Ones**. Those monstrous giants stand more than 20 feet tall, with palpitating green veins over their hulking muscles. Their privates are obscenely displayed as a mark of pride, and their claws and needle-like teeth are stained with the blood of countless victims. Fierce and arrogant, Great Old Ones firmly pretend to be revered as gods.



"Hail Dagon, Hail Hydra! For you, Mother, we lust. To you, Father, we bow. Hail Dagon, Hail Hydra!"

OOZEBLOOD PLAGUE

This deadly malady undermines the patient's health by slowly thickening and acidifying its blood; as the blood coagulates, it becomes gradually more stagnant in the exterior blood vessels, making it difficult – and painful – even to breath properly. To fight the excruciating pain caused by this disease, many an afflicted resorted to cut its vein open, only for the blood to stick to the skin and flesh; furthermore, as its acidity corrodes veins and organs alike, the cursed, mud-like blood of the patient overflows and damages the entire body.

Those suffering of an advanced stage of the malady show bloodshot eyes and a red skin overflown by bloated veins, stretching over a grotesque flesh, unnaturally swelled by internal scars. The mud-like consistency of the disease's afflicted blood gave it the very significant name of Oozeblood Plague. For, when the patient finally succumbs to the malady, the foul substance that was its blood does not deteriorate and die with the corpse, but enters a new existence as some kind of ooze, a blasphemous monster that used the host's body as an incubator.

Those oozes, as well as the blood of those suffering from the disease, are capable of spreading the contagion, potentially infecting whole cities in a few days.

OOZEBLOOD PLAGUE

Oozeblood Plague's contagion spreads through any contact with the blood of an infected creature, as well as through contact with a full-fledged oozeblood monster. Upon contact with the pathogens, a creature must pass a DC 12 Constitution saving throw in order to avoid contagion; if the save fails, the creature is infected by the Oozeblood Plague.

Symptoms manifest 1d4 days after infection: the infected creature gains one level of exhaustion that can't be removed until the disease is cured, as it suffers greatly from its caustic blood and finds it

difficult to breath properly. Until this malady is cured, the afflicted character gains vulnerability to acid damage.

At the end of each long rest, an infected creature must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the character gains one level of exhaustion; on a successful save, the creature's exhaustion level decreases by one level. If a successful saving throw reduces the infected creature's level of exhaustion below 1, the creature recovers from the disease.

Otherwise, the patient will slowly pass away, and when at last death will ease its sufferings a new oozeblood will born from its cursed veins within 2d6 hours.



Oozeblood infected are often treated as monster themselves, and shunned rather than cured or helped. Such is the fear of this malady.

OOZEBLOOD

Oozebloods are among the more dangerous of their kind, for even if a prey escapes their clutches the contagion will probably kill it anyway, soon creating a new monster and spreading the disease even further.

Three kinds of oozeblood are widely known, even if the third one is thankfully uncommon: the tendril, the common oozeblood and the fiend. All the three oozes share a dull red color and the same foul smell, a mix between the metallic taste of blood and the unpleasant stench of acid rotting.

Assemble. As all the oozebloods are born from the blood vessels of a deceased afflicted, the form they can assume is strictly related to the body mass of the infected: Large or smaller creatures generate common oozeblood tendril, while a true colossal monster would be required for its veins to spawn an oozeblood fiend. However, all the oozebloods are capable of assembling among themselves, adding up their mass till they reach the next stage. Thus even the single, weak tendril could pose a great risk, infecting more and more victims that will eventually spawn further tendrils destined to assemble into a more dangerous monster.

Obscure Origins. Many believe that a dark power of some kind, perhaps the Demon Lord of Oozes itself, was at work behind the birth of the Oozeblood Plague. Certainly a superior mind would explain how those mindless monsters are sometimes capable of coordinating their efforts, gathering in a single place to assemble into a greater ooze. Oozeblood fiends are among the few sentient oozes, and thus many scholars theorize that they are in fact the true incarnation of an extra-dimensional monstrosity that requires the sacrifice of endless creatures to be reborn in the Material World.

Ooze Nature. An oozeblood doesn't require sleep.

OOZEBLOOD, TENDRIL

Tiny ooze, unaligned

Armor Class 9

Hit Points 17 (5d4+5)

Speed 15 ft., climb 15 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	9 (-1)	13 (+1)	1 (-5)	6 (-2)	1 (-5)

Skills Stealth +1

Damage Immunities acid

Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning, poison, psychic

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned, prone

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 8

Languages -

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Amorphous. The oozeblood can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Corrosive Infection. A creature that touches the oozeblood or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 2 (1d4) acid damage, and must succeed on a DC 12 constitution saving throw or be infected by the Oozeblood Plague.

Spider Climb. The oozeblood can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

ACTIONS

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) bludgeoning damage plus 2 (1d4) acid damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be infected by the Oozeblood Plague.

Tendrils represent the less dangerous form of oozeblood, as well as the more common one: few creatures weak enough to succumb to the plague have enough blood in their bodies to spawn greater oozes. Formed by the coagulate essence of blood vessels, tendrils appear as a thick filament of contorting red slime.

OOZEBLOOD, COMMON

Medium ooze, unaligned

Armor Class 9

Hit Points 67 (9d8+27)

Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	1 (-5)	6 (-2)	1 (-5)

Damage Immunities acid

Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning, poison, psychic

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned, prone

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 8

Languages -

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Amorphous. The oozeblood can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Corrosive Infection. A creature that touches the oozeblood or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 3 (1d6) acid damage, and must succeed on a DC 12 constitution saving throw or be infected by the Oozeblood Plague.



Sometimes, the slime of an oozeblood mimics the features of its victims.

Spider Climb. The oozeblood can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The oozeblood makes two pseudopod attacks.

Pseudopod. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) acid damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be infected by the Oozeblood Plague.

The **common oozeblood** is typically formed by ten or more tendrils that somehow met and assembled among themselves. Only Huge creatures that succumb to the malady directly spawn such monsters. A common oozeblood resembles a puddle of slimy, boiling blood that crawls with surprising speed and agility, incessantly patrolling the warrens and caves where it was born. When this monster encounters another tendril, the lesser one is adsorbed within the bigger one, replacing lost mass and adding up till the final transformation, when the true blasphemous miracle of oozebloods will be realized: the birth of a conscious mind.

OOZEBLOOD, FIEND

Large ooze, unaligned

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 114 (12d10+48)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	13 (+1)	19 (+4)	8 (-1)	11 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4

Damage Immunities acid

Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning, poison, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned, prone

Senses blindsight 120 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 13

Languages -

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Amorphous. The oozeblood can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Corrosive Infection. A creature that touches the oozeblood or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 4 (1d8) acid damage, and must succeed on a DC 12 constitution saving throw or be infected by the Oozeblood Plague.

Spider Climb. The oozeblood can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The oozeblood makes two attacks.

Bloodneedle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage, and the oozeblood regains a number of hit points equal to the necrotic damage inflicted.

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 9 (2d8) acid damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 14). Furthermore, the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be infected by the Oozeblood Plague.

Adsorb. The oozeblood encloses one Medium or smaller grappled target within its viscid body. While

adsorbed, the target can't breath and is blinded and restrained, and takes 13 (3d8) acid damages at the start of each of the oozeblood's turns.

An adsorbed creature can try to escape by taking an action to make a DC 14 Strength check. On a success, the creature escapes and enters a space of its choice within 5 feet of the oozeblood.

Oozeblood fiends are among the most terrifying of all oozes, for the scattered fragments of consciousness inherited from the plague afflicted that spawned their components gifted them with a basic sentient mind. Dozens of common oozebloods are required to create a single fiend, but true to its name this monster combines the resilient build of an ooze with a simple yet cruel mind, capable of crude but effective strategies.

A fiend prefers to stalk its prey before attacking, and sages speculate that those oozes can perhaps learn from their mistakes, and thus they are potentially capable of creating in time a true society of true inhuman monsters.



Oozeblood fiends often mock the shapes of their preys.

ROTTING PAROXYSM

The creepy disease known as rotting paroxysm is in fact a strong necromantic curse, a vile contagion that slowly animates the skeleton of the afflicted while it is still covered by living flesh. The malady causes violent fever and spasm, but those convulsions and the resulting loss in mobility and dexterity are in fact caused by the already nearly undead skeleton that tries to burst out of its living shell.

While casual infection is unlikely, as it requires the consumption of the flesh of a previous victim, smart and ruthless assassins infect the food sources of entire communities in order to kill a single target. As this curse potentially infects every animal, cattle included, it is relatively easy to cause a true epidemic of Rotting Paroxysm.

And thus the unholy legacy of a now long forgotten necromancer still lives on, a testament of the vile power of its first creator and of the evil that mortals do to themselves.

ROTTING PAROXYSM

The infection is contracted by ingesting the flesh of an infected creature. After consuming the

pathogens, a creature must pass a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or become infected. 1d6 days after the infection, its symptoms manifest as violent seizures and spasm followed by fever and headache, as the infected creature suffers one level of exhaustion.

At the end of each long rest, an infected creature must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw; on a success, the character's exhaustion level decreases by one; on a failure, the disease proceeds to the next stage and the infected creature suffers one further level of exhaustion. If a successful saving throw reduces the infected creature's level of exhaustion below 1, the creature recovers from the disease. Otherwise, the malady progresses, as the paroxysm becomes more common and much more crippling: in the final stages of the disease the afflicted character cannot even move of its own will, as the convulsions shake its body beyond control.

Should the patient finally succumb to the Rotting Paroxysm, the seizures won't stop anyway, and this fooled many a healer – or loving relative – into believing that the death was only apparent. Despite their best hopes, however, the

spasms of a Rotting Paroxysm's victim don't result in a fortuitous resurrection, but in a horrific "birth", as 1d6 hours after death the skeleton of the deceased literally tears open the corpse's flesh from the inside, bursting free and often starting a carnage of mourning friends while its bone are still soaked in the blood of its former self.



The iconography of the dancing skeletons often alludes to the Rotting Paroxysm.

STONIFYING CURSE



Sometimes the best intentions lead to the worst results, as happened when a party of enterprising adventurers tried to immunize themselves against the petrifying curses of

medusas, basilisks, gorgons and the like. Through powerful magic and alchemical rituals, they finally achieved their objective, and the party raided an entire medusa lair without a single casualty. The heroes went to a nearby village in order to celebrate, and they enjoyed nearly every pleasure and company that their new-found treasures could afford. Within a few weeks, however, they were all dead, forever petrified by an unsuspected curse... along with the population of the hamlet. Traveling merchants and entertainers further spread the contagion, and thus even now the Stonifying Curse reaps the lives of the unlucky and the foolish.

Given its long incubation, and the absence of any direct symptom, this curse can spread undetected, turning entire communities into a grotesque display of statues, men and beast alike petrified into hard stone. Through the years, different strains of the Stonifying Curse emerged, each turning its victims into a different kind of stone; recently, the vile influence of Elemental Evil started affecting the victims of this malady, randomly turning some of them into malicious gargoyles.

STONIFYING CURSE

This supernatural disease is contracted by the mere contact with the body fluids – including saliva and sweat – of an afflicted creature, and is capable of infecting every living creature. Upon contagion, a creature must pass a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become infected. While an infected character suffers no ill effects, its body fluids are capable of transmitting the Stonifying Plague. After 1d8 days, at the end of its next long rest, an infected creature must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw; on a success its body kept the curse at bay; on a failure, after further 1d8 hours the infected character will suddenly turn into a statue, its body – and often, but not always, its equipment – utterly petrified. Even on a success, the saving throw must be repeated every 1d8 days, until the creature

succumbs to the disease or until a proper magical spell, namely a *greater restoration* or *remove curse* spell, is cast to remove the Stonifying Curse.

Furthermore, when a humanoid character is petrified by this curse, there is a 20 to 50% chance (DM's call) that the statue suddenly turns into a new gargoyle, with no memory of its former existence.

Anyway, the primal objective behind the experiments that generated the Stonifying Curse was surely achieved, for all the infected creatures are immune to all the effects that would petrify them – with the obvious exception of the curse itself.



H⁰³

A former barbarian.

ZOMBIE PLAGUE

Usually, zombies are individually created by a necromancer or through some kind of dark ritual, that animates one or more corpses into the not so feared walking dead: for a single zombie is a dull, slow creature, effortlessly outsmarted and left behind, surely a dangerous monster but nevertheless an easy to defeat one.

However, a pack of zombies is a far deadlier danger, and a relentless horde of walking dead is a flood capable of crushing entire cities. Usually, a single necromancer can't channel the power needed to animate dozens of zombies, but from the darkness of ages past an ill testament emerges, an inexorable disease that turns the rotting corpses of its victims into slow, mindless, and countless undead monsters.

This malady, while sages and doctors discourse on more refined and elaborate names, is universally known as the Zombie Plague, for it is carried by zombies and mutates its victims into infected zombies. If left unchecked, this illness would treat whole countries, but the plague outbreaks can be usually limited before it is too late. The real mystery, anyway, remains how this completely mundane, unmagical malady is capable of animating the walking corpses, a feat that usually requires a considerable magical effort by a necromancer.

ZOMBIE PLAGUE

The contagion of this mundane but vicious disease spreads through contact with the body fluids of an infected zombie: despite common opinion, while still alive an infected isn't contagious, but many an afflicted were nevertheless brutally killed with fire by suspecting witch doctors. Thus, when not caused by some elaborate trick, contagion happens only when a living being suffers an unarmed attack from a zombie.

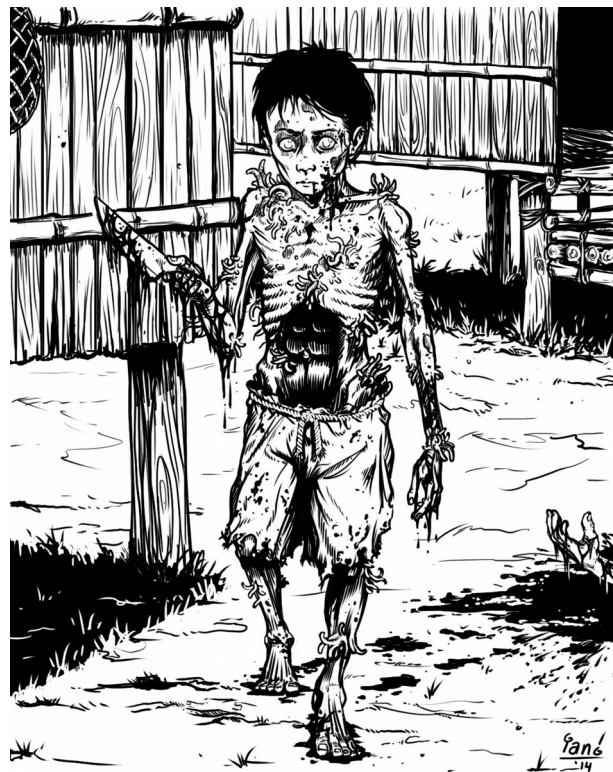
When a creature comes into contact with the pathogen, it must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or become infected. The progress of the malady is very quick, and it usually requires no more than a few days to kill its victims. The first symptoms manifest within 1d6 hours, with a debilitating fever; the infected

creature gains one level of exhaustion that can't be removed until the disease is cured.

After 1d6 hours, and every 1d6 hours thereafter, an infected creature must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the character gains one level of exhaustion; on a success, the creature's exhaustion level decreases by one level. If a successful saving throw reduces the infected creature's level of exhaustion below 1, the creature recovers from the disease.

Otherwise, as the malady progresses and the patient becomes increasingly weaker, its flesh becomes pale and covered in necrosis, and blood vessels explode further debilitating the sick character.

If the patient doesn't recover, 1d8 – 1 hours after death its corpse reanimates as a zombie of the proper kind. Many victims of the Zombie Plague were buried or – more often – burned to ashes before they could animate and infect new targets, but sometimes the undead animates instantly after the passing, a dangerous circumstance responsible for many plague outbreaks.



The zombie plague spares no one.

APPENDIX: MEMORY OF CARNAGE

*"You see us tied here, five, six:
As for the flesh, that we nurtured too much,
It is already long-time consumed, and rotting,
And we, the bones, become ashes and powder.
Of our pain let no one make fun,
[***]
Rain has unsmirched and washed us
And the sun has dried and blackened us;
Magpies and crows have carved out our eyes,
And torn off our beards and eyebrows.
We never sit for a moment;
Now here, then there, as the wind changes,
at its pleasure, without cease it tosses us,
More pecked by birds than thimbles."*

François Villon, from the *Ballade des pendues*
(*Ballad of the Hanged*)

Despite their differences, all plagues are equally pitiless in claiming their death toll: when the dead outnumber the living, funerary rites are soon forgotten, and the beloved deceased are hastily interred into common graves, fearing the contagion they still carry.

However, such an improper burial cannot pacify the suffering of the deceased, especially after their painful death. The spirits of the dead will hang around their potter's field, ultimately losing every memory of themselves, and remembering only the pain of their passing; eventually, all the suffering soul will coalesce into a single entity, a collective ghost formed by the **Memory of Carnage** itself. This true "undead swarm" nurtures a grudge against all the living, as it longs for its lost lives, and exists only to inflict to others the pain it suffered. Every other memory, every personality passed away long ago: only the pain remains.

Sometimes, if they are all buried in the same place or bounded to the same grim keepsake (such as the

gallows or guillotine that executed them), even the victims of a cruel justice or the casualties of war can coalesce into a memory of carnage; despite their origins, those undeads always share the same hate for the living, and the desire to kill them, to make them part of their cacophonous, suffering choir.

The only way to placate a memory of carnage is to finally grant a proper burial to the remains of its original spirits. Otherwise, even when destroyed, it will relentlessly reform itself within a few days.

Undead Nature. A memory of carnage doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.



MEMORY OF CARNAGE

Huge swarm of Medium undeads, neutral evil

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 102 (12d12 + 24)

Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	19 (+4)

Skills Insight +4, Perception +4

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

Damage Immunities cold, necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages any languages its individual components knew in life, telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Ethereal Sight. The memory of carnage can see 60 feet into the Ethereal Plane when it is on the Material Plane, and vice versa.

Incorporeal Movement. The memory of carnage 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.

One of Us. If a creature within 30 feet of the memory of carnage dies, its soul is instantly adsorbed into the undead, and the memory of carnage instantly regains 15 hit points.

Suffering Whispers. At the start of each of the memory of carnage's turns, each creature within 30 feet of it takes 5 (2d4) psychic damage.

Swarm. The memory of carnage can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the memory of carnage can move through any opening large enough for a Medium creature.

Untouchable Specter. The AC of the memory of carnage includes its Charisma bonus.

ACTIONS

Distant Cry. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 15/30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d8 + 4) necrotic damage.

Touch of Pain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (6d6) necrotic damage, or 10 (3d6) necrotic damage if the memory of carnage has half of its hit points or fewer.

Etherealness. The memory of carnage enters the Ethereal Plane from the Material Plane, or vice versa. It is visible on the Material Plane while it is in the Border Ethereal, and vice versa, yet it can't affect or be affected by anything on the other plane.

REACTIONS

Wail of Suffering. The memory of suffering emits a terrible wail, and every creature within a 30-foot radius must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, suffering 10 (3d6) psychic damage on a failed save, or half damage on a successful one.

