

Seven Plagues

A Compendium of Deadly Diseases

A Malady Codex Special
by Jason Bakos & Themis Paraskevas





Introduction

This supplement is written by medical students with a love for tabletop roleplaying games. Inspired by a wide array of ailments, and the medieval myths that once surrounded them, we embarked on a mission: to enrich other worlds with fantastic diseases.

Herein are presented a plethora of diseases, varying from magical to microbiological in origin. This volume takes a different approach, describing seven plagues that stem from some sort of personified cause of disease, meaning that they can be fought.

We feel that every disease is something to be feared. Deep in each civilization's roots, there are myths, remedies, and folklore, all revolving around the ailments that affect its people. This supplement will hopefully become a vital weapon in the arsenal of dungeon masters inspired by the grim, epic, or mundane conditions of the human body and mind.

Do not underestimate diseases. Part of the dungeon master's art is to be able to stir feelings up in their players, and there are few human conditions that could accomplish that better than illness. Used as a way to advance a storyline, to expand a character arc, or to incite conflict, the following stories can serve you well, but be warned! Use them too much, and they might lose their value.

Also bear in mind that these diseases are not simply a way to add mechanical complexity to your game. A paladin, a monk, and a cleric will have powers to overcome these maladies, but can one cleric heal a whole country plagued by a dragon's toxic fumes? Try to focus on the worldbuilding and roleplaying elements that a disease can bring to the table. Imagine describing a town plagued by a wave of sickness; bring to life a dragonborn whose scales are falling out one by one. Those evocative scenes are what we hope this book can provide. As for the locations described in this supplement, bear in mind that they are intentionally generic and intended to be placed as your needs require.

Credits

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This special edition of the Malady series takes a closer look at the Seven Deadly Plagues, diseases that stem from a specific source that can be fought or fended off. This makes these diseases powerful, as those who spread them do so with intent and with the help of their followers, but also manageable, as the enemy this time is not some faceless microbe, but a creature, a cult, or a sentient phenomenon.

Even though the diseases- especially those of the mind- in this book are only imaginary, we are painfully aware of the gravity of illness in the real world and the impact they have on everyday life. In no way do we wish to trivialize or stigmatize those suffering from such ailments, nor ridicule their conditions. Having said that, the diseases included within these pages should be used to add depth, gravity, and an increased sense of authentic humanity to any fantasy game.

This is a toolset for the dungeon master. There is no need to limit the utility of the tools we provide, so we kept them open ended and without boundaries. Explore the ideas presented here; include them in your own words, alter existing locations of known settings, or just use them for one-shots! The possibilities are endless, and that is part of why we play this game. We hope you enjoy.

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The Seven Deadly Plagues

TO ALL SCHOLARS AND MEDICAL SCIENTISTS;

THIS MANUAL IS A CATALOG OF THE MOST FANTASTICAL DISEASES I HAVE ENCOUNTERED OVER THE YEARS IN MY TRAVELS. I HAVE MET TYRANTS, CONVERSED WITH MADMEN, AND BARELY ESCAPED WITH MY LIFE FROM RATHER PRECARIOUS SITUATIONS, ALL FOR THE SAKE OF KNOWLEDGE. THE EXPERIENCES I HAVE GAINED CANNOT BE SIMPLY CAPTURED BY MY HUMBLE WRITING SKILLS, SO IN HOPES OF LEAVING BEHIND SOMETHING TRULY WORTH READING, I'LL JUST DO WHAT I CAN BEST: DESCRIBE THE MALADIES I'VE ENCOUNTERED.

I AM ACESIUS, A MAN WHO HAS SPENT HIS LIFE STUDYING THE HUMANOID BODY. I AM A CLERIC OF APOLLO, ONE WHO HAS MET GODS AND, IN MY PRIME, HELPED BRING ONE DOWN. AS I SETTLE DOWN, TOO TIRED FROM OLD AGE TO CONTINUE WITH MY ADVENTURING HABITS, I WRITE THIS TO PRESENT A PORTFOLIO OF THE MOST COMMON MAGICAL DISEASES THAT SAILORS MIGHT ENCOUNTER IN THEIR TRAVELS. IT IS MY BELIEF THAT EVERY READER WHO IS INTERESTED IN THE MORE..FANTASTICAL OF THE AILMENTS THAT TROUBLE US ALL SHOULD BE AWARE OF THEM. THIS IS THE REASON I CONTINUE TO WRITE THIS CODEx OF MALADIES.

This guide is a collection of diseases that are a mix of magical and realistic. Most are based on real world diseases; these should serve as an example of the power maladies hold as storytelling tools. First, some basic concepts are introduced. We then provide a basic template you can use to create your own plagues. Finally, the diseases themselves are described.

How to Handle Diseases

Contrary to the heading, this is not a guide for medical professionals. Here, we offer a few insights on how to handle the maladies presented in this codex. They were designed to be storytelling tools. Feel free to modify them as you wish, adapting them to fit your style and your worlds. To fulfil their duty as story tools, however, they have to have a mechanical aspect to them, as this is a game after all. This element is also highly adaptable. While we offer recommendations on how to infect creatures, on the symptoms they present with, and on how to cure diseases, we insist that you take these with a grain of salt. The biggest change you should think about making depends on your players. If you have paladins, clerics, or monks in your party, don't forget that their classes have been designed to give them an edge against all kinds of ailments. Don't take this away from them; encourage them. There are few things more satisfactory to a player than to suddenly realize that their high-level monk is immune to a disease, saving them and

proving how the long hours the character has spent perfecting their art was worth it. Apply a similar line of thought to healing. In this edition of the game, we feel that the rules have been intentionally left vague regarding the relationship between healing magic and lasting diseases. Ultimately, it is up to you as the DM to decide whether or not a paladin's Lay on Hands works, or if the disease is so powerful that it can only be dealt with using a special remedy.

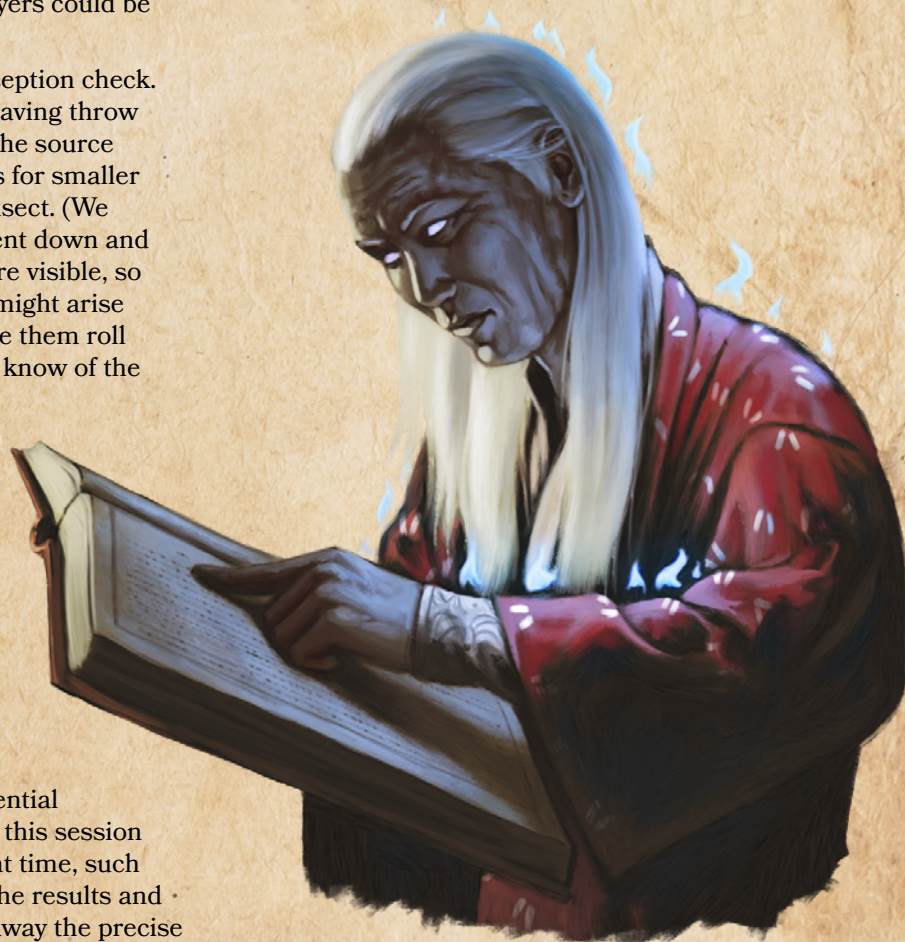



How to Handle Infection

We must now discuss an unfortunate truth: players metagame. When one of the player characters is injured or comes in contact with an infectious source, the DM must ask for a corresponding saving throw. Once they fail it, it's no tall task for the player to put two and two together and figure out that their character may have been infected with a disease. At that point, the players will do everything in their power to cure the disease, casting spells and calling in favors from paladins who can lay their hands on them and rid them of their ailment. This presents a problem both for the DM, who wants to use the disease, but also for the narrative, as it gets disrupted by this instance of metagaming. We have gathered a few ideas that we believe can help you deal with this phenomenon. It's also noteworthy that these could help you in other aspects of the game where the players could be prone to act on meta knowledge.

1. Ask the players to make a Perception check. If they fail, roll a Constitution saving throw for them, as they didn't notice the source of infection. This usually works for smaller things, such as the bite of an insect. (We advise that you write the incident down and keep the folded note somewhere visible, so as to avoid any confusion that might arise 5 sessions later.) Similarly, have them roll a Medicine check to see if they know of the disease.
2. Do not inform them about the outcome of the said saving throw.
3. Do not let them heal a disease their character would not be suspicious of.
4. Use different spells to cure different diseases. Lesser Restoration just might not be enough.
5. Have every player with the potential to be exposed to the disease in this session roll a saving throw at a different time, such as the beginning. Write down the results and explain that this is to not give away the precise moment of "an event".

A disclaimer is, of course, mandatory here. We do not assume that every party will metagame. We do not also condemn it, as it is a valuable part of the game in some ways. We are just trying to help DMs who may find themselves in a situation where, for any reason, meta-gaming could hinder the experience they are trying to provide through the use of a disease. It is also worth noting that sometimes it is within the bounds of reason and gaming etiquette for the player to assume they have been infected. Just imagine the typical scene of a nurse or a doctor in real life, accidentally getting themselves pierced by a needle that was used to draw blood from a patient. At that point, it's not metagaming. It's common sense to assume you have been infected.





How to Live with Infection

Realism is an important part of the Malady series. Keep in mind that even if diseases have never before been implemented at your table, they have existed in your fantasy world since the beginning of time. Both PCs and NPCs have seen their relatives die from maladies. A character might begin their journey already infected with a disease that is slowly killing them, and they're trying to hide it from their companions until they finish their quest. Your medieval society might be cruel and define a person by a disease they are carrying. A character might be deemed useless if they break their leg, and be left to die on a mountain. But, as always, we have added a more light-hearted malady that would be suitable for any table.

Plague Structure

Lore

Here, we establish a few things about each of these Plagues.

- Every Plague is the embodiment of an important aspect in medicine—medieval and modern. The Plague usually lives in a faraway place, perhaps the Underdark or another plane. Maybe it is in the Material Plane in some forgotten swamp or mountain, or deep beneath the surface.
- This is not a strict organization. Each of them has come to life after diseases have struck the world. They have not brought the diseases with them, but rather were born by the diseases as they slowly corrupted the world. Killing one of the seven deadly plagues will not eliminate the disease on a large scale, but rather in a nearby area, or stop its larger schemes.
- The seven deadly Plagues take different forms, but they all have some kind of physical manifestation that would prove to be a tough opponent, similar to a lesser deity perhaps.
- They are indeed revered by some as deities, and cults are created to help them rise.
- Each Plague has a goal. Does it need to claim lives to feed itself, does it have an evil scheme for world domination, or is the plague just a pawn of a greater evil?

Powers

We should continue by talking about its abilities. Firstly, we should focus on the way it spreads and how it affects common people. The plagues do not only gain power by fighting physically but also by spreading the diseases they are attached with, through machination and vile schemes. Plagues might corrupt the area around their physical manifestation or perhaps leak their negative energy through portals around the world.

We have created statblocks for the physical manifestations. After all, our adventurers must be able to fight something, and we will give it to them. Some Plagues might even need a lair, or stock art maps for their dungeons. Plagues will have characteristic combat powers that reflect the characteristics of their diseases.

Followers

Each plague has built an organization around it. Cults of mindless followers, religious organizations, or flocks of beasts, demons, and otherworldly creatures. Each cult should have a leader, a lower CR character with motives, based in the DM created adventures.

Plot Hooks

As every plague affects the world in a different way and craves for a different thing, the plot hooks for each one should also be different. We provide plot hooks for adventurers to encounter either the cults or the effects of the plague on a country.

Treasures

The plagues are creatures of great power. By beating them, the adventurers will not only gain gold for saving the common folk, but should also be granted new spells, magic items, rituals etc.

General Diagnosis

Unlike the Malady Codex, we have not included a separate "diagnosis" part for each plague. We feel that there is no need for a specific diagnostic procedure in any of these maladies. A creature proficient in Medicine knows about these infamous plagues.





he Plague of Swarms

TO UNDERSTAND HOW PLAGUES DIFFER FROM DISEASES, LET US FIRST STUDY A FAMOUS ONE. IN THESE SCRIPTS YOU WILL COME TO UNDERSTAND HOW THIS IS NOT ABOUT ONE PERSON, BUT ABOUT SOCIETY AS A WHOLE. STUDY HOW THESE SPREAD, TAKE HEED OF THE WARNING SIGNS, AND WHEN ONE STRIKES, JUST HOPE THAT YOU ARE PREPARED.

The Plague of Swarms is the result of the influence of a malevolent force of nature on a wide area. It manifests as a scarecrow and the millions of insects that follow, wreaking havoc under its command by destroying crops and carrying diseases.



Lore

Stories about the Plague of Swarms exist in most civilizations around the realms. The plague manifests through a plethora of insects or other tiny malevolent creatures that bring down villages or even nations, by destroying agriculture and bringing diseases with them.

It is believed that this plague exists in multiple places at once and that its embodiment was split into hundreds of tiny parts when it was first created. Then, they spread across the world, slowly gaining power and control over insect swarms, blessing them with their ancient power of disease.

The main power of the Plague of Swarms comes from its control over insectoids. Its schemes usually take place over years as it gathers more insects and sends them to attack a town's crops and animals. Each year the town's food supply is cut in half unless other measures are taken.

The goal of the Plague of Swarms is to destroy any kind of life and civilization from the face of the planes. It does not only attack humanoids, but any kind of living creatures: beasts, dragons, demons, and even the forsaken undead.

This plague is indeed based on one of the most recognizable historical disease outbreaks, the Plague of Locusts. Famous for its raw force, it is an unstoppable wave of insects that decimates the land. It is most famous as a biblical disaster, although the phenomenon still survives, plaguing us to this day. For readers with a keen eye and medical backgrounds, there is another plague hidden in this work. The disease these insects carry is the "Druid's Curse," a malady from the first codex based on the Bubonic Plague - the so-called Black Death.

Physical Manifestation

The embodiment of the Plague of Swarms usually takes the form of a scarecrow, with wooden legs and a pumpkin head. Inside the pumpkin, a billion insects buzz nonstop. It always moves to an area after the army of insects attacks a town.

The Plague of Swarms can fully control insect swarms, giving them long-term assignments and short-term orders. For every couple hundred of swarms that have a long-term assignment and are forced to leave the proximity of the Plague of Swarms, a matriarch is created. The matriarch is a humongous insect, the size of a bull, which wields great power over the swarms.



Disease

The Plague of Swarms does not cause a single disease but rather, it carries a handful of different diseases with it. Feel free to use any other diseases from the other *Malady Codex* supplements or create your own with the help of the *Malady Workshop*.

Causes

As the swarms travel across civilized lands, villages, and towns, they bring along diseases from far-away lands that harm plants, livestock and humans. Plants and livestock caught in the plague's path get infected at a rate of 50% per year. Unless actively being protected in some way, humanoids that stay in a town attacked by the swarm must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw each week or become affected by some kind of disease.

Symptoms

Plant Disease

Necrosis: A plant affected by the swarms is both affected by the insects' attack and the diseases they carry with them. Each attack of the swarms reduces the production of plants by a small amount. Additionally, the disease causes them to wither, become black and die. Any fruit created by a diseased plant is considered poisoned and a creature that consumes it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned.

Livestock Disease

Necrophorum: An infection by necrophorum can present as two distinct diseases; thrush and necrobacillosis.

Thrush is a disease that occurs on the hoof of horses, sheep, and other cattle. The infected area turns black 2 to 3 days after the infection takes place and releases a characteristic smell, like tar. If left untreated, it causes lameness within a week. The animal can no longer run, and its speed is halved.

Necrobacillosis (or calf diphtheria) is a potentially deadly laryngeal, or throat, infection that mainly presents as swelling in the throat. This results in coughing and difficulty in breathing, which begin 2 to 3 days after the infection. The animal is also catatonic, meaning they always appear sleepy and move slowly, making controlling a herd difficult. If left untreated, the animal will die within a week from heavy dyspnea, in other words, inability to breathe.

Human Disease

Druid's Curse: The symptoms start 5 to 6 days after a creature is infected, with them developing fever, nausea, and photophobia (sensitivity to light). The next day, the lymph nodes on the neck and the bubonic area (between the abdomen and the legs) become swollen and start bleeding. Most people die from severe bleeding in just two or three days.

Any creature affected by the disease has disadvantage on Perception checks while in sunlight. Bleeding creatures must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw every hour. On a failed saving throw, their maximum health is reduced by 5. The DC is increased by 2 every 6 hours.

Cure

Plant Disease

Each plant can be cured using a basic healing spell, but it would be literally impossible to cleanse them all as they will be continuously affected by the next wave of swarms. Burning the affected crops has been attempted many times in the past, but it was all in vain...

Livestock Disease

Treatment of Necrophorum is easy, as long as there is access to an herb known as flintleaf, known to grow in large quantities deep inside forests. Flintleaf is easily recognized by its most problematic property: if any sort of metallic item makes contact with its leaves, it spontaneously combusts. The fire quickly spreads to the nearby leaves, effectively burning the whole batch in one fell swoop.

Human Disease

The most effective way of dealing with the disease is to prevent it. Most villages prefer to keep their residents barricaded inside their homes.

A very rare herb known as sparkleaf can cure Druid's Curse if brewed and consumed as a tea. To brew the tea, a creature proficient in Medicine or with the herbalism kit must succeed on 3 or more out of 5 DC 16 checks with the corresponding skill. This leaf can be found on a special kind of **Shambling Mound**. For an in-depth analysis of these two diseases, refer to the *Malady Codex*.

Followers

The Plague of Swarms has no need of humanoid followers. Its vast armies of bumblebees, locusts, wasps, and centipedes could block the sun over a whole nation. Even among cults dedicated to deities of destruction and maladies, the Plague of Swarms is feared, as its thirst to wreak havoc is unmatched.

The Plague of Swarms is always followed by four matriarchs, one for each kind of swarm.

Treasures

When the pumpkin scarecrow is defeated, its body rots and disperses into small insects. The only thing left behind is its pumpkin head. This can be worn as a helm, which is the item described below. Defeating the Plague of Swarms grants the party the status of heroes, which may result in more rewards from the town or city they saved, such as gold, land, or other honors.

Helm of the Pumpkin Scarecrow

Wondrous item, Legendary (requires attunement)

Properties: Immunity to poison and acid damage

Any insect swarm is friendly towards you and willing to follow you. The number of swarms that may follow you at once is equal to your Charisma modifier plus your proficiency modifier.

You also gain the following action:

Command: As an action you may command four swarms within 50 feet to attack as if using the *command* spell.

You may keep up to four swarms at once inside your helm.

Curse: The pumpkin helm is the home of a malevolent spirit that erodes your mind, slowly turning your alignment to chaotic evil. When you attune to the helm, your alignment is chaotic. Three months after you attune, it is evil. Additionally, your body changes, starting with your face, as it rots and melds with the helm, due to the constant effect of the insects on it.

Plot Hooks

The Plague of Swarms can affect any place, which is one of its greatest dangers. This means you can introduce it at any time in the story quite easily. One typical adventure that your adventurers could embark on would be to find the cure for the disease that has plagued a village they traveled to. However, to make the most of this plague, consider infecting a place that the adventurers are fond of, such as their birthplace or a village they once visited and have fond memories of. This can add a sense of urgency and personal attachment, raising the stakes for the adventure and leaving no room for failure. Note here that the plague is very characteristic, and you should monopolize on that. It appears suddenly, quickly, and in waves. It leaves destruction behind, instilling a sense of powerlessness to the affected. Indeed, the pumpkin scarecrow and its swarms of insects can haunt memories for years.



SCARECROW

Large fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 100

Speed 0 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +7, Cha +7

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities acid

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages none, communicates orders to swarms telepathically, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Carried by insects. The Scarecrow can use a bonus action to gain a flying speed of 30 ft. until the end of its next round.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Scarecrow can command up to four swarms to make separate attacks.

Command Swarm. Range 50 ft., one target swarm of insects makes one attack against a creature.

Swarm Shield. The scarecrow commands nearby insects to defend it. Its AC increases by 4 until the end of its next turn.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

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

Move. The Scarecrow moves up to its flying speed.

Cloud of Swarms (2 Actions). The scarecrow unleashes one swarm of insects from its head. They make an attack and then disperse. Each insect type has a different effect.

Consume Swarm (3 Actions). The scarecrow consumes one swarm of insects within 30 ft. from it, gaining its hit points.

INSECT MATRIARCHS

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 40

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	20 (+5)	17 (+3)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws –

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages –

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Keen Sight and Smell. The swarm has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight or smell.

ACTIONS

Centipede Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage and the creature must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or become paralyzed until the end of its next turn.

Bumblebee Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (1d10 + 5) piercing damage and the creature must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be pushed 10 ft. away.

Locust Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (1d10 + 5) piercing damage and the creature must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened until the end of its next turn.

Wasp Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 5) slashing damage.



The insect matriarchs are a centipede, bumblebee, locust, and wasp. Use the action which corresponds to that insect.

The different swarms the scarecrow can command are on the next page.

SWARM OF CENTIPEDES

Medium swarm of tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 22 (5d8)

Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	1 (-55)	7 (-2)	1 (-5)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages –

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny insect. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Bites. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 10 (4d4) piercing damage, or 5 (2d4) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

A creature reduced to 0 hit points by a swarm of centipedes is stable but poisoned for 1 hour, even after regaining hit points, and paralyzed while poisoned in this way.

SWARM OF BUMBLEBEES

Medium swarm of tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 22 (5d8)

Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	1 (-55)	7 (-2)	1 (-5)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages –

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny insect. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Stings. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 10 (4d4) piercing damage, or 5 (2d4) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

SWARM OF LOCUSTS

Medium swarm of tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 22 (5d8)

Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	1 (-55)	7 (-2)	1 (-5)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages –

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny insect. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Bites. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 10 (4d4) piercing damage, or 5 (2d4) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

SWARM OF WASPS

Medium swarm of tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 22 (5d8)

Speed 5 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	1 (-55)	7 (-2)	1 (-5)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages –

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny insect. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Stings. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 10 (4d4) piercing damage, or 5 (2d4) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.





he Plague of Blood

IT IS RARE TO MEET A SURVIVOR OF THE TOUCH OF AN OLD ONE, BUT IF THERE'S ONE PLACE THEY WOULD END UP, IT'S THE ACESION. WE TAKE SPECIAL CARE OF THOSE BEFELL WITH THIS MISFORTUNE, ALWAYS TRYING TO CONNECT THE DOTS AND PREDICT WHERE THE AVATAR WILL APPEAR NEXT.

The Plague of Blood is a disease wreaked upon mortals by the Avatar of an Old One and its army. The Avatar is a means to cause bloodshed in the name of the master, and through that, empower it. Few events that have transpired in this world are as gruesome and as vile as the visits of the Plague of Blood.

Lore

Many consider the Plague of Blood a story for kids told by their parents to scare them and lead them to their bed. Only a fool would believe it's just that. The Plague of Blood could not be more real, and few have lived to tell its tale.

The story goes like this. One dark night, dogs howled more than usual as if they smelled the stench of a fiend. The villagers were all locked inside their houses due to the winter winds. A hooded figure appeared in the village, riding on a three-legged horse. Behind it, five dozen soldiers followed the rider and finished off anyone that survived his deadly touch. In the morning no one remained, and the village was drowning in the blood of its citizens.

The Plague of Blood is personified in a creature bearing the curse of an Old One. The name of the Old One is not known but it grants its most devoted follower a cursed amulet that turns the wearer into its avatar. The only way to change the avatar is to win in a deadly battle and claim the amulet from the corpse of the previous avatar. Those who seek the right to fight for the amulet join the Red Army. Its headquarters are stationed in a defiled temple near the River Styx.

Once every ten years, this grand battle takes place, where anyone from the Red Army can fight the Avatar. The Red Army's goal is to feed the Old One by performing rituals that require blood

There is no real-life equivalent to the mass bleeding occurrences due to the visit of a harbinger of death. However, in an allegorical way, one could say it is a representation of the existential dread and fear of fatal diseases that discriminate against no one. The plague comes in the form of some...thing that was once human, personifying it, but at the same time it remains as inexplicable as its master and as persistent as diseases, which recur after they have been healed.

shedding. They travel the countryside, seeking remote, unguarded villages, and killing all their residents in a single night.

Physical Manifestation

The one who attunes to the cursed amulet becomes the Avatar. Their form changes, becoming fiendish, and their body emits the stench of death. They are also granted the three-legged horse, a creature powerful enough to defend the Avatar if needed, as their mount.

The Avatar still has flesh and can be killed, but the amulet may only be destroyed with divine intervention. As long as the amulet is not destroyed, the horse reanimates in the headquarters of the Red Army a week after it is killed, seeking a new host to spread the Old One's influence. The Red Army somehow always manages to retrieve the amulet.





Disease

The Red Army is swift and efficient, able to decimate their victims in a matter of hours, but the long-lasting scars they leave behind may prove to be the greatest burden on the local society trying to recuperate after the attack.

Causes

The disease of the Plague of Blood is caused by the presence or the special abilities of the Avatar. When it travels near a town, weird phenomena begin to occur. When it reaches the town, it is already too late.

Symptoms

The Avatar retains their previous stats and gains the following abilities:

Aura of Blood. Any creature within 100 feet of the Avatar must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a success the creature is unaffected. On a failure, the creature takes 6d6 damage and becomes frightened and deafened as his ears and eyes rupture and are filled with blood. Repeat this effect every minute a creature stays within the Aura.

Bloody Gaze. As an action, the Avatar may gaze at a creature forcing it to make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a success the creature suffers the effects of the Aura of Blood. On a failure, the creature's maximum hit points are reduced by 6d6. If this reduces the creature to 0 hit points, it turns into a pool of blood.

Touch of the Blood God. As an action, the Avatar may touch a creature unleashing the power of the Old One. (+8 to hit) The creature suffers 10d10 damage and becomes paralyzed as the blood within it freezes.

Long-lasting Scars. Anyone affected at any time in their life by any of the effects of the Plague of Blood also suffers the following effect: One year after the visit of the Avatar, its blood starts to boil. Every morning it takes 1d4 damage and anyone that comes in contact with its blood suffers from the same effect. Additionally, if it enters the nine hells, it is subconsciously driven to the headquarters of the Red Army.

Alarming Phenomena. Creatures within a one-mile radius of the Avatar may start coughing up or urinating blood. This mainly affects the older population.

Long-lasting Scars is the symptom that makes this disease a plague. Survivors of the attack of the Red Army, few though they may be, usually run away to seek comfort and shelter in big cities. When their one year is up and the symptoms start appearing, they might visit a physician or a cleric, hoping to be cured of this malady. This, of course, makes them the perfect disease carrier; they interact with people, and then spread the disease far and wide.

Cure

Once touched by the Avatar's influence, measures must be taken to heal a scarred body and soul. Magical means of healing dampen the effects of Long-Lasting Scars for a number of days equal to the spell's level. To heal the creature's soul and take care of the post-traumatic stress, the *calm emotions* spell must be cast on the creature every day for 30 days in a row and the creature must not be exposed to further stress. To heal the creature's body, leeches must be used to drain its blood for the same amount of time. Both treatments are required to fully cure a disease.

Followers

All the followers of the Avatar have joined the Red Army for the single purpose of acquiring the amulet. They are all seasoned soldiers, powerful wizards, and world-renowned thieves. All of them are evil and trying to acquire even more power and an army for themselves, to serve their personal agenda. This Army is not characterized by unity or the power of belief. It is brought together by fear and sick ambition, tied by the incomprehensible power of the Old One and its avatar. Anyone can challenge the Avatar, but in reality, only a select few have the guts to even come face to face with it.

Treasure

The main treasure for ending the Plague of Blood should be the Amulet itself. This invaluable magic item could either be used for vile purposes or brought to a good deity in order to destroy it. Performing such a deed should grant a major or epic boon from the deity to the whole party.

Additionally, as the followers of the Plague of Blood are all seasoned soldiers, they carry a plethora of magic weapons and armor that could be acquired by the characters.

Plot Hook

This is a plague that only high-level heroes can hope to defeat. It requires serious preparation, resources, perhaps alliances, and certainly sacrifices. This Old One and the Red Army are unstoppable, have no qualms and no brakes, and perhaps our heroes are the only thing between them and world dominion. We provide a few ideas about how a story of struggle against this plague could play out here:

- Focus on a battle between the characters and the Red Army as the characters defend a place that is important to them. They become locked in battle with the army, and if they prevail, they might acquire the amulet.
- Rumors of the Red Army's presence in the general area or a village or two destroyed as described in the lore should spark the characters into action.
- Add a double agent within the circles of the Red Army, a ploy perfect for a campaign with equal focus on political intricacies, deceit, and fantasy.







he Plague of Dementia

NO BOOK THAT STUDIES DISEASES CAN EVER BE COMPLETE WITHOUT A REFERENCE TO AN ILLITHID. THIS ONE IS UNLIKE ANY OTHER, A LOOMING THREAT OVER OUR HEADS THAT COULD STRIKE WITHOUT ANY NOTICE. I NEED YOU TO PAY HEED TO THE SUBTLE SIGNS.

The Plague of Dementia is a tool of war used by a special breed of mindflayers known as the rulers of the Crimson Empire. Their strategy is based on patience and corrupting as many people as possible by placing beacons of corruption in culturally important places. The end result is the annihilation of the minds of the conquered, and their addition to the Empire as slaves.

Lore

Illithids have always relied on the races they conquered to structure their society, and the very fact that the Gith rebellion brought the illithid empire to the brink of extinction is proof of that. Since their fall from power, some mindflayers have split up into separate hiveminds, ruled by a singular elder brain, that seeks to create their own, magnificent empire. Some have attempted to force themselves on other civilizations, while others have tried to conquer them by infiltrating them and slowly growing on the inside, like a malignancy. There are a select few elder brains, however, that truly live up to their name as masters of scheming. The hivemind they rule over usually tries to take over other civilizations through sly means, deploying nefarious strategies that take advantage of their superior intellect and psionic capabilities. It is one of these elder brains that created this plague.


Back when the Illithid Empire first fell, this hivemind was forced to find a new way to spread, placing it in an adapt-or-perish scenario. Thus, they created a special kind of psionic beacon that they would plant in an important location for the society they wanted to infect. At first, the infection occurred almost immediately, but soon, they realized that it was unwise to spread their influence too fast, and thus, they modified

The various symptoms described here allude to the experiences of patients with dementia. A fearsome disease, often associated with the coming of old age, dementia is usually severely underestimated but can truly be a debilitating disease. Perhaps, in an effort to vilify an inexplicable fear of loss, we have tied it to another concept that brings terror to mortals and that cannot be understood; mindflayers.

the disease one last time. Now, they plant these beacons at places of cultural importance and wait eighty years for the symptoms to arise. So, it was just a matter of time before every citizen in the area was ripe for the taking. The illithids had successfully conquered the land.

Physical Manifestation

The creator of this plague is an elder brain just like any other. However, the illithids under its control are anything but ordinary. For one, they are red, their skin having been affected by the psionic experiments they ran in order to create the beacon. Although they were ashamed of it at first, it has now become their trademark characteristic, going as far as to call themselves the "Crimson Empire." Their home base is located on the Material Plane, in the first area they conquered, which they subsequently made their lair. The elder brain has dug its tentacles particularly deep in the ground here, giving it control over the area but also binding it to this location.



As for the manifestation in the area the mindlayers are attempting to claim, they use a special kind of psionic energy beacon to channel the plague. This beacon can take literally any shape and form, but it always has one common characteristic: it is a beloved item which is integrated into the lore of the area so deeply that the idea of destroying it would infuriate most denizens. This beacon affects creatures with three characteristic types of one disease. Each one is created in such a manner that it leaves behind a creature capable of serving the Empire either as a Soldier, Worker, or Caretaker.

To permanently rid the planes of this threat, the elder brain must be destroyed. This is a tall task, of course, as the lair is heavily guarded by the soldiers of the Crimson Empire. An adventure like this requires serious preparation and only experienced parties are likely to be successful.

Disease

The disease of this plague is one that affects the mind and the psyche, breaking opposition and creating slaves with specific skills.

Causes

The disease spreads eighty years after the implantation of the beacon. At that time, it starts emitting a mind-altering disease that affects every humanoid creature within 10 miles. No creature at that time can avoid catching this disease, even if they have immunity against diseases. Any creature that enters this area after the first episode, must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw every day it stays within the effect or catch the disease.

Symptoms

The symptoms depend on which of the three types of the disease occurs: Caretaker, Worker, or Soldier. At the time of the infection, a creature must roll a d3 to determine which type of the disease it has. On a large population, use a rule of thirds.

After a creature is infected, a certain amount of time must pass until the symptoms show themselves. This time is equal to $(2 + \text{Wisdom Modifier})$ months. Every two months after that, the creature gains additional symptoms in three stages.

Caretaker

Stage 1: The creature has disadvantage on History checks to remember things it has learned in the last five years.

Stage 2: The creature cannot by any means remember anything it has learned in the last five years, including people, places, and special knowledge. This does not affect its combat skills. Any new memory that the creature gains is lost within a week.

Stage 3: The creature's Intelligence score is reduced to one-quarter of its current score.

Worker

Stage 1: The creature's speed is reduced by 5 and it has disadvantage on Initiative checks. Reduce the creature's dexterity score by $1d6 + 1$.

Stage 2: The creature always suffers from short-term memory loss, being unable to remember things 1 hour later.

Stage 3: The creature becomes delusional, seeing harmless illusions of people from its distant past. It has disadvantage on any Perception check or any Constitution saving throw to retain concentration.

Soldier

Stage 1: The symptoms start with aggressiveness and loss of control. The creature's alignment becomes extremely Chaotic, sometimes not even thinking or caring about the repercussions of its deeds.

Stage 2: The creature then loses the ability to speak any language and may only mumble. Reduce the creature's Wisdom score to 6.

Stage 3: Lastly, the creature loses its old memories beginning from its childhood and slowly reaching the present.

Final Stage

In the final stage of the disease, every creature loses its memory, combining the memory-loss from each one of the previous types. Additionally, the creatures become gullible towards illithid, practically marionettes in their hands.



Cure

This disease cannot be cured by any physical or magical means. Anyone affected slowly loses their mind to the illithid threat. Even the destruction of the beacon does nothing to halt the progress of the disease, as its victims are usually too far gone under the influence of the elder brain when it is destroyed. To put an end to the disease once and for all, the characters must find and destroy the elder brain responsible for its creation. Clues to finding the beacon could either come from someone that has been studying this plague for a long time (consider adding Acesius to your world) or by interrogating the disguised illithid that has been left to guard the beacon.

Followers

The elder brain that is responsible for this plague maintains a vast network of illithids under its command, the aforementioned red mindflayers that constitute the Crimson Empire. This empire's foundation is of course, the humanoids that have been infected with the plague, who turn into loyal followers of the illithids, ready to serve and adhere to every command. The elder brain's expansive strategy requires it to keep many followers in every corner of the world, which means that there are many villages and sometimes even towns that have already been infected with the plague. Travelers should be wary.

One specific follower is crucial for the DM, and that is the spy. This mindflyer has been handpicked by the elder brain as an elite manipulator, a master of lies and espionage, and has been tasked with infiltrating the target society in order to keep tabs on it and ensure the beacon remains safe and operating. It always disguises itself, it has the ability to transform itself to a humanoid form, and it usually takes up positions that are pivotal to everyday life, such as bartenders or shop owners. They cannot be distinguished easily by an average commoner, but perhaps adventurers could discern its behavior as eerie and un-human-like. One thing should be noted, however. The spy always wears red somewhere in their attire. Use this to both help your players, but also confuse them by giving red trinkets and clothing to more than one character in the story.

Treasure

The treasure for defeating this plague consists of anything the characters find on the illithid base when they raid it. Due to the nature of the research conducted here, exotic technological advancements from far-away realms are hoarded, waiting to be discovered. For example, weapons such as laser pistols, space traveling vehicles and gene-modifying mutagens. The greatest reward of all is the eternal gratitude the world owes them. Taking down the Plague of Dementia makes them heroes across the realms and common folk consider them equal to kings and demigods. Additionally, the beacons are invaluable items for many collectors.

Plot Hook

This plague is dangerous. It is not one you should throw around without thought. By its very nature, even the adventurers might become infected. If you wish to add this to your worldbuilding, then it is a powerful tool to instill a sense of dread and force your characters to realize the menace that mindflayers pose to the Material Plane. If you choose to have your characters face it, however, make sure they are powerful and experienced. Not only is it easier for them to survive, but they might also be powerful enough to actually deal with the problem instead of run away from it.

If you include the plague in your games, think of it as sort of a mystery. The adventurers enter a town where strange phenomena are occurring. Previously healthy people are losing their minds rapidly, young people become forgetful and have trouble even performing mundane tasks. Society itself is dysfunctional. This should put the heroes on alert, and they are probably going to investigate these strange occurrences. Try to give hints about the real nature of the plague, but also try to mislead them. One very useful asset for this scenario is the undercover mindflyer that has infiltrated this society. Have the players interact with them, and try to subtly hint that there is more than meets the eye with them, without making it obvious that there is a connection between them and the plague. Perhaps have them fake the symptoms after a while, which would seemingly absolve them of suspicion.





he Plague of Gases

THE SOUND OF LABORED BREATHING ECHOING IN A WHOLE VILLAGE STILL RINGS IN MY EARS. TERRIFYING TO THINK HOW SUCH A BASIC NEED CAN BE COMPROMISED.

The Plague of Gases follows the influence of a large mass of magical gas that spreads mindlessly, like a true natural phenomenon.



Lore

The Plague of Gases is a malevolent chaotic being that slowly corrodes and destroys civilizations. It is unable to complete its schemes alone, though, as its mind has been altered and is incapable of devising great schemes. If it is not controlled by a creature or an organization, it prefers to stay in abandoned druidic altars near swamps and lakes.

The plague consists of a specific amount of gaseous substance, so its form changes as it expands and contracts: It can expand into a light haze that covers vast areas or condense its mass and strength into a powerful semisolid.

This deadly plague has an unbreakable bond with nature and its ultimate purpose is to convert every corner of the Material Plane to a barren gaseous steppe.

According to legend, this plague was once an evil druid, whose spirit transformed into a vile creature after a terrible death. To this day, all druids have a strange connection to the plague, causing them to sense it when it approaches their territory. Some druids follow the plague's traditions, creating altars to attract the Plague of Gases and using it to their advantage.


Modern civilization has managed to surpass all expectations and achieve technological advancements no one could have imagined. As with everything, though, great power comes with a great price, and this is evident in the air pollution that plagues most large cities. Distortion of the air itself, breathing difficulties and illnesses are commonplace due to the smog. This disease tackles this concept in fantasy. It also attempts to portray one of the most fundamental symptoms known to humans, breathing difficulties, and the feeling of dread that pathologies such as asthma and breathing infections cause for us.

Physical Manifestation

The Plague of Gases assumes different forms. It may as a bonus action become one size larger or smaller.

The plague's tiniest form allows it to enter a creature's body for a brief moment and then instantaneously propagate, leaving the creature's body in a mess behind it.

When the plague enters combat, it assumes its large, semisolid form. The plague's attacks are fueled by its poisonous gases, dealing additional poison damage and suffocating its enemies. When the plague is heavily outnumbered or dealing with swarms of opponents, it prefers to enter its gargantuan, gaseous form, allowing it to affect the whole battlefield at once. Finally, when the plague desires to affect whole villages, its molecules disperse and cover a square mile area, but its powers are also reduced.



There is a way to actively force the gas to shrink from any size to its large form.

The Branches of Green Death cult has created a special material that absorbs any type of gas in an attempt to gather the power of the gas and store it. They call it Breath Catcher. However, the plague does not wish to be captured, so it attempts to escape by becoming more condensed. This material is used by the cult in many forms, such as banners, pendants, and flags, or just plain pieces of fabric. Acquiring this absorbent is the first step to dealing with the Plague of Gases, as it gives adventurers a way to control the gas.

Causes

The Plague of Gases uses its dispersed form to affect creatures over vast areas and it travels slowly to spread the effect to more creatures. While in this form, no door can stop it as it enters houses, underground caves and dungeons, even underwater regions. Any creature caught within this effect must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw the first time it enters the effect and every dawn it remains within it. On a failure the creature becomes diseased. The creature remains diseased even if it leaves the region covered by the plague.

Symptoms

A creature affected by the disease suffers from the following effects:

This disease causes relentless drowsiness; the creature gains one level of Exhaustion, which may only be removed by magical means. If the affected creature is free of Exhaustion upon completing a long rest, it immediately gains one level. This stops them from completing heavy tasks. Affected creatures have impaired thoughts, and the result of any Intelligence check or saving throw they make is reduced by 1d4. More importantly, a town affected by the plague is filled with the sound of people gasping for air. An affected creature must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw each morning or when they physically exert themselves. On a failure they take 1d8 non-lethal poison damage.

Cure

To cure a creature of the disease, several steps must be taken. First, one must travel to a rainforest and find some special healing herbs. They look like small white spheres that grow on a bright yellow plant, and people refer to them as Kumo. To harvest enough herbs to cure one patient, success on a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check is required and 1 hour of harvesting. Then the herbs must be extracted and volatilized into an inhalable gas. This can be done using alchemist supplies and succeeding on any justified DC 15 Intelligence or Wisdom check. Lastly one must administer the proper dose to the patient, requiring a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check.

Followers

This plague remains dormant for centuries, until it is awakened by evil druidic cults. The circumstances differ each time an outbreak happens, but usually consist of evil druids taking revenge on their former village or on humans destroying nature for profit. Attracting the Plague of Gases requires years of travel through pest-ridden swamps or other secluded areas affected by diseases. An altar dedicated to the plague can be erected by performing a sacrifice ritual in a place connected with nature.

Upon defeat, the plague is not destroyed, as a small portion of it escapes and slowly recuperates over the years. Instead characters that want to stop this plague permanently, should magically imprison it.

Plot Hooks

The adventurers tasked with combating this plague must deal with both the entity and the cult that aims to spread it. The cult probably has its roots buried deep in the place they want to infect, which means there is always tough resistance against those who try to foil their plans. An adventuring group might be called to deal with the disease by someone who is unaware of the cult, or perhaps by members of the cult who wish to bring more victims within their reach.

Treasures

By defeating the Plague of Gases, the party gains the respect of the residents of the affected area. Moreover, they earn treasures kept in the druidic altar, such as magic items, druidic potions, and magic mushrooms. Additionally, they can find the woven material able to affect gaseous creatures.



PLAGUE OF GASES

Large creature, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 180

Speed fly 40 ft., hover

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +7, Wis +6

Damage Resistances acid, fire, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned, restrained

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages none, understands Druidic

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Malleable Form. The Plague of Gases assumes different forms. It may as a bonus action become one size larger or smaller.

Tiny Creature. The Plague of Gases gathers all its substance into a tiny glob. It may maintain this form for up to 1 minute. While in this form, the plague is vulnerable to all types of damage except acid and poison.

Large Creature. The plague condenses all its gaseous substance into a semisolid form. Its attacks are fueled by its poisoned gases.

Gargantuan Form. The Plague covers the whole battlefield, becoming resistant to all damage. Weapon attacks have a 50% chance of missing and it has advantage on saving throws against spells. The plague may not attack in this form but rather has the following trait. On initiative count of 10 any creature inside the area covered by the plague takes 1d10 poison damage and must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or become paralyzed. Its speed is decreased to 10 ft.

Potion of Gaseous Poison

This vial contains a tiny part of the plague itself. As an action you may inhale the gas allowing it to enter your lungs. You may keep it within your body for up to 1 minute but keeping it longer causes suffocation. As an action you may exhale the gas and any creature within a 15-foot cone must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure they take 3d10 poison damage and are poisoned. On a success they take half damage and are not poisoned.

Poison Puff Mushroom

When you eat this mushroom roll a d4. On an even roll your size is reduced by one category, while on odd rolls your size is increased by one category. This effect lasts 1 hour.

Dispersed Form. While in this form, the plague covers a square mile area and affects a huge population. At the start of each day, any creature in this area must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or become infected by the plague. While in this form the plague is practically untargetable and does not take damage from any source. It is also indistinguishable from normal air except for the fact that the area it covers has a distinct smell. While in this form, it can move up to 0.5 miles per day.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Plague may take the Extending Limbs action twice each round.

Extending Limbs (Large Form). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* (2d6 + 5) poison damage. On a hit, the creature must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or start to suffocate. At the start of its turn it takes 1d6 poison damage and must repeat the saving throw. On 3 failures, the creature suffocates, dropping to 0 hit points and starts making saving throws. This effect lasts for 1 minute.

Headbutt (Tiny Form). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* (3d8 + 5) poison damage.

Invade Privacy (Tiny Form). As an action the Plague of Gases leaps on a creature's body. The creature makes a Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, the plague enters the creature's body and instantaneously propagates, leaving the creature's body and dealing 10d6 poison damage in the process.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The Plague can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Plague regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The Plague makes a Wisdom (Perception) check. It has advantage when trying to find a creature within the area it covers.

Dodge. The Plague takes the Dodge action.

Disrupt Concentration (Costs 2 Actions). One creature within 30 ft. of the Plague of Gases must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution check or lose Concentration.





he Plague of Madness

TO ANYONE WHO HAS HEARD THE SOUND OF MADNESS, KNOW THAT I UNDERSTAND AND THAT IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT. IT'S NO ONE'S FAULT.

The Plague of Madness is of demonic origin. It is the result of the influence of a powerful demon whose usual tactic for corruption of mortals is to use the sound it can create to drive creatures insane.



Lore

The Demon Suvaroch has long struggled to defeat his foes. By the time of his first fight with devils, he had come to realize that he is naturally weak. His skin is not rough like some others', his claws are brittle, and his physique, although somewhat imposing, cannot compete with that of some abyssal brutes. Suvaroch, like many others, resorted to a craftier approach to fighting. By harnessing the power of the abyss that runs in his veins, he creates a special sound that causes the affected to become overcome with aggression and bloodlust. Suvaroch takes advantage of this in many ways. When he fights, he usually turns invisible before using it, letting his enemies kill each other. When cornered, he will use the effects of the sound to cause his adversaries to attack fiercely but carelessly, striking back at them when they give him an opening.

On the Material Plane, Suvaroch strives to devour as much flesh as possible, hoping to grow stronger and eventually conquer the abyss. His tactics are borderline undemon-like, as he chooses to bide his time and wait for the mortals to fall into his trap and decimate themselves rather than engage in combat personally.

As with several calamities in this compendium, there is no specific disease that relates to this plague. It is true that people can be driven to a point where atrocities happen, even on a mass scale, but the cause can usually be attributed to a specific factor such as stress, a dire situation, or even the era. Still, there is a lot of material in media that paints the picture of a villain that profits by using some means to make people extremely violent. There is also the source of the name of the plague, which we hope some of the readers can appreciate.

Physical Manifestation

The Plague of Madness appears whenever Suvaroch is summoned to the Material Plane. He has cultivated a good relationship with his cult, and those who study demonology know him as a demon who is glad to heed the summons of cultists, acknowledging that both parties have something to gain from the act. His cult following is significant, which means that it is not a rare occurrence for him to spend even years away from the Abyss. He has managed to escape capture by the orders of paladins for eons, and his influence has spread so far and wide that his presence itself is considered to be a plague.

When he decides on his next target location, he makes a home base, usually deep underground, close to the portal from which he was summoned. He then orders his cultists to scribe special symbols everywhere in order to channel the Sound of Madness, and in the culmination of his efforts, he absorbs their life force.

To scale this adventure for different levels, you can use either the **barligura** or the **balor**, along with the following extra action: **Madenning Sound (recharge 5 or 6)**: Suvaroch emits a sound in the ultrasonic range. Each creature within 60 feet of it that can hear it and that isn't a demon must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of his next turn.

Disease

The Plague of Madness compels those who are affected by it to commit atrocities, lose all inhibitions, and become extremely violent without any reason, all for the sake of personal gain.

Causes

When Suvaroch uses his powers, a Sound of Madness that cannot be heard by humanoids echoes in the affected place. At first, the frequency does next to nothing to the inhabitants. However, slowly but steadily, the plague influences them, and they begin to exhibit signs of aggressiveness and impulsiveness. For a month or so, the demon spins his threat, trapping the mortals in his web of madness, and when he feels that they are about to break, he releases the biggest wave of the frequency. This event is the beginning of the end for the poor mortals, who suddenly lose themselves in this rage.

Symptoms

The symptoms differ based on the stage of the disease, which in turn is based on the influence that the Sound of Madness has had on each affected creature, as it takes time to reach deep into the brain.

Stage 1: The Demon emits low frequency sounds for the whole day. At dawn every creature in the area must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or become affected by the Plague of Madness. Every day increase the DC by 1. Those who fail the save do not immediately become aggressive, but their loved ones might notice that they have become more impatient, anxious, and suspicious, and their mood is usually foul and susceptible to change.

Stage 2: Once a large portion of the population is affected (two-thirds or so), the demon emits a mid-frequency sound once per day. Any creature affected by the Plague of Madness must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be driven to madness. For the next minute, the creature must spend its action to attack another creature. It chooses to attack the creature that it has the most reason to, or the closest one. If it has no creatures around it, it inflicts damage to itself. Its unarmed strikes deal $1d4 + 2$ damage to both its opponent and to itself, as it hits them with more force than it can handle. This effect does not apply if it is trained in martial combat. This damage is non-lethal and will only knock others or itself unconscious. A creature driven to madness can be intimidated to stop but not persuaded. Any spell that removes diseases will also stop this effect.

Stage 3: The demon rings the *final bell* when almost everyone is affected or as an emergency measure. Any creature in the area must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be driven to madness (as per Stage 2) for an indefinite amount of time. Creatures affected by the plague automatically fail the save. Damage is now lethal and creatures cannot be intimidated or healed from the effect.

During this time cultists emerge from underground or reveal themselves from the positions they had assumed, acting as though they are also in a frenzy (even though some actually allow themselves to enter this state of, as they call it, religious zeal).

You can make the save again at the end of each turn. A creature that breaks free from the *final bell*'s effects is immune for the rest of the day.



Cure

The best cure for this plague is to either destroy or at least expel Suvaroch. Contrary to popular belief, wearing ear protection only diminishes the abyssal effect on mortals, granting them advantage on the save. Divine protection such as from the spell *protect from evil and good* is effective against the plague. If any affected creature escapes death and the ritual ends, they have no remaining residual effect, and are free of the plague.

Anyone that has actively meditated for at least 2 hours without interruption is immune to the effects of the plague for a day. If by some superhuman effort every mortal in the range of the Sound of Madness has meditated, the effect completely fails, the demon is banished from the realm and has to be summoned again with a year-long ritual. Give your monks some love and do your yoga.

Followers

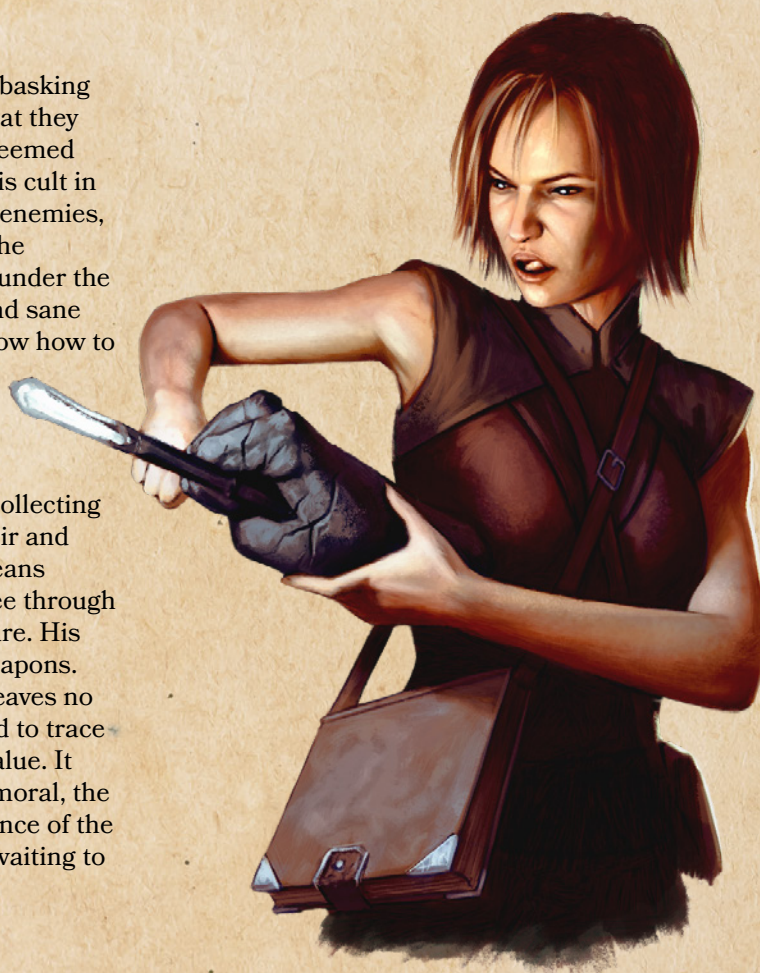
As mentioned before, Suvaroch enjoys basking in the reverence of mortals, knowing that they can use his power to attain goals that seemed impossible before. Many mortals join his cult in order to finally rid themselves of hated enemies, and others do it for thrill, indulging in the slaughter and later claiming they were under the influence of the disease. You will not find sane people in this following, even if they know how to mask their evil.

Treasure

Suvaroch is also a demon who enjoys collecting treasures and trinkets. If you raid his lair and manage to defeat him (whether that means actually killing him or forcing him to flee through his portal), you can find heaps of treasure. His cultists also usually carry items and weapons. Unfortunately, the Sound of Madness leaves no evidence behind, meaning that it is hard to trace and that its effects have no monetary value. It should be noted here, that for the less moral, the remnants of a village slain by the influence of the Plague of Madness is a treasure trove waiting to be harvested.

Plot Hooks

This is a typical story hook for a one-shot adventure or a part of a greater campaign. It can serve as the basis of a great mystery; one with leads everywhere and one that culminates with the unmasking of the cultists, the discovery of the lair of Suvaroch, and the inevitable climactic combat with the demon himself and his followers. All of that, while trying to save the affected from certain demise. Be advised, if the plague indeed sounds across the world, a vision most horrible will ensue, something some players might not be comfortable playing through.







he Plague of Lupus

THIS TIME, 'T WAS LUPUS.

The Plague of Lupus is the effect of a falling star's influence on the people close to its crater. It slowly ails them until they transform into a special kind of werewolf.



Lore

Lupus is a constellation appearing in the sky during the summer months. Many wild creatures revere it as a deity. The stars form a canine, travelling through the galaxy, blessing those who pray to the stars.

Every year, one of the stars of this constellation falls from the night sky and a new one appears in its place. This way, the wolf looks like it is moving, one star at a time. When the falling star hits the earth, it creates a magical crater, altering the area around it and causing the Plague of Lupus.

Knowing about the Plague of Lupus, druids dedicated to the moon actively search for the fallen stars in order to bring them to their altars and disable them. This hunt is usually successful but sometimes can prove difficult as the star may fall into hostile territory, the sea, or remote areas like mountains and deserts.

Easily recognizable references aside, this plague is based on Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, an autoimmune disease that creates inflammation, mainly in the connective tissue of the body like the joints. It is a disease that unfortunately affects millions of people, one that is tied to many other pathologies, and one that modern science has not yet fully understood nor healed.


Physical Manifestation

As the meteor, called "Starshard" by the druids, falls through the friction of the atmosphere, it burns a glittering silver. Once it has crashed, it begins to radiate small amounts of fine stardust, which fills the air around it, making it shimmer and shine. The sight is heavenly, but contact with the stardust-filled air is anything but a marvelous experience.

Disease

The plague of Lupus is a manageable one; it slowly changes those who are affected, causing them pain, although rarely causing immediate fatalities.





Causes

The disease affects those in proximity of the fallen star. Any creature within a 10-mile radius must succeed on a DC 4 Constitution saving throw every week or become infected with the Plague of Lupus. The DC increases by 2 for every mile (less than the maximus radius) a creature comes closer to the fallen star (9 miles would be DC 6, 2 miles would be DC 20, etc.). Coming in contact with the fallen star causes the disease, no save possible.

Additionally, as the Starshard slowly corrodes from rain or the body of water it has fallen into, it pollutes rivers and lakes. Any creature drinking the polluted water must succeed on a DC 4 Constitution saving throw or be affected by the plague.

Symptoms

The symptoms of the disease are a progressive and painful transition to lupus, a special type of lycanthropy.

Stage 1: The first symptom is peculiar; a creature suffering from the Plague emits an odor that attracts butterflies. Butterflies gather on the creature in an aggressive manner, biting it, not dealing damage but causing a rash to appear, known as the Butterfly Rush.

Stage 2: Then the body starts changing from the inside out, causing severe pain and swollen joints and muscles as well as abdominal pain and headaches.

Stage 3: Lastly, the creature's body hair falls out and a new, harsh, beastlike fur appears, finally completing the transformation.

Any creature that completes the transformation gains the following traits:

- You are driven by your instincts to live in the area around the fallen star and protect it.
- Your claws are magical weapons dealing 1d4 + Dexterity Modifier slashing damage.
- While not wearing armor, your AC is equal to 10 + Constitution Modifier.
- You may no longer cast divine magic, and lose any associated cleric or paladin features.

Cure

To cure those suffering from the Plague of Lupus, some physicians have tried a revolutionary method. It has been found that were-creatures cannot be affected by Lupus. This has led to many physicians preferring their patients to suffer from something like "wereratism" rather than Lupus.

Followers

The druids that revere the constellation of Lupus have the sacred responsibility of disabling the fallen star every year. Most of these druids belong to the Circle of the Moon, but it is not uncommon to find druids of other circles willing to embark on this journey to help. Many others who have heard of the effects of the Starshards are also touched and join the druids in their efforts.

To the contrary, creatures affected by the Plague of Lupus travel the lands to find the next fallen star and protect it. It is an instinct they cannot suppress, one that they do not even realize they have. Once they have found the Starshard, they make the area around it their home, inviting more creatures to the influence of the plague and thus strengthening their protective circle. When anyone attempts to attack or steal the Starshard, the defenders attack and do not stop until they draw their final breath.

Treasure

Pieces of the fallen stars of the Lupus constellations can be found occasionally in underground markets. These pieces are encased in a special silver box which contains its powers within. The silver does not particularly do anything against the magical powers of the star but contains whatever small dose of stardust it emits. The smaller the size of the Starshard, the lesser the effect.

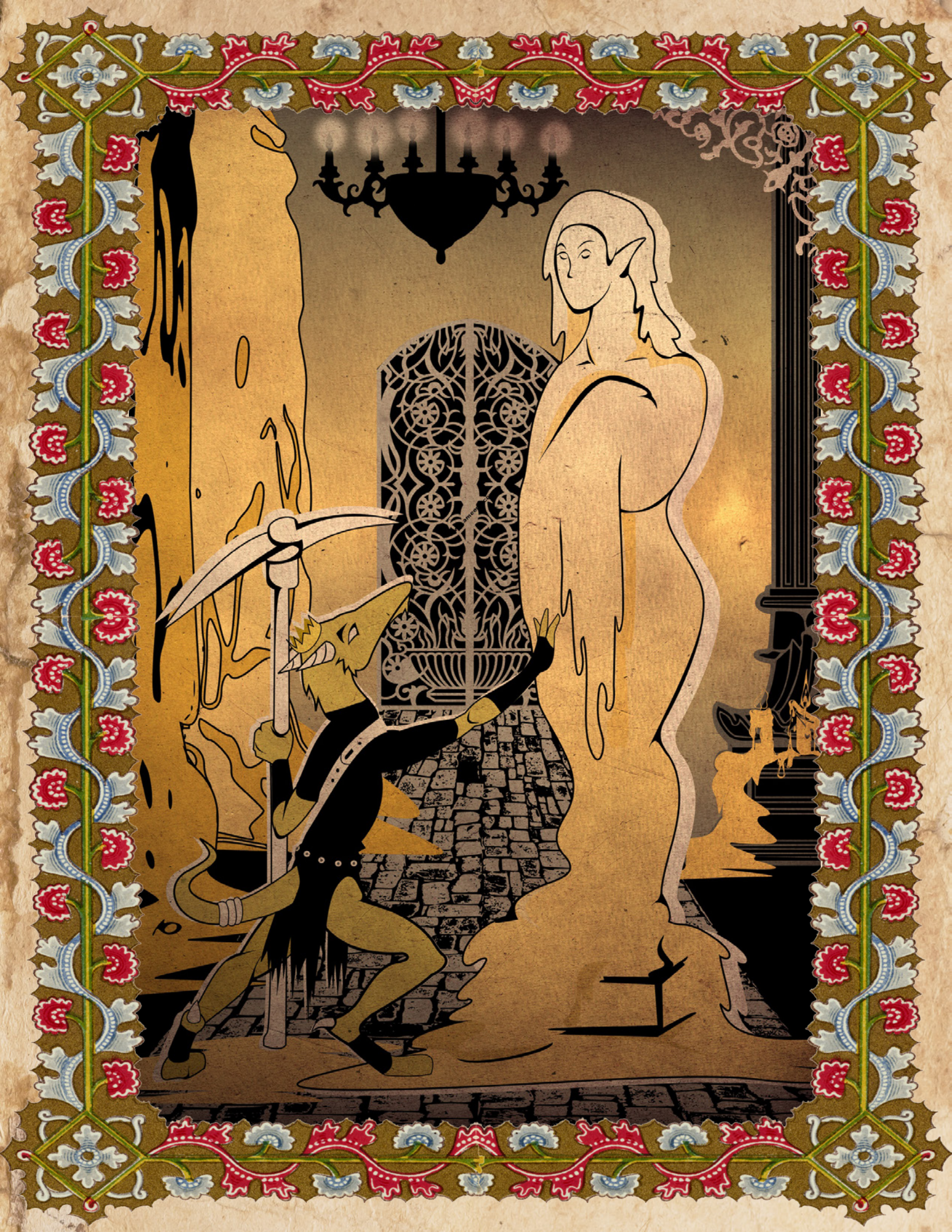
Finally, the extracted claws of creatures affected with Lupus are considered to bring luck in the days of a full moon. However, in most modern cultures where medicinal sciences have advanced, this superstition has been superseded by sensitivity for the patients infected with this plague. Thus, most healers and educated people would find it repulsive that you would cut off the claws of the afflicted.

Plot Hook

This plague is perhaps the mildest in this compendium. It does not cause the fall of civilizations or the death of thousands. It is simply an interesting plot device that can be inserted into any story as a side quest or as a flavorful detail. With enough creativity, you could turn this into a higher stakes game. For example, an evil druid could have harnessed its power, condensed it, and now plans to create a kingdom of Lupus creatures under their rule. Alternatively, this could very well serve as a refreshing adventure for your party, hired by druids or accompanying them on their sacred mission this year.

There have been times when druidic circles have had their hands full with other matters of grave importance. In those times, it is not unheard of to hire adventuring parties to aid them in their sacred yearly mission. They also hire adventurers and other willing creatures whenever the plague's influence has spread too far and the army that has been amassed is particularly strong. Whatever the case, the parties for hire are first interviewed, to make sure their hearts are in the right place and that they will perform their duties with the respect such a mission demands.







he Plague of Statues

MANY CONSIDER THIS TO BE A PSEUDO-PLAGUE, BUT AFTER CAREFUL EXAMINATION AND DEEP THOUGHT, I'VE COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THE EFFECT THAT BEFELL THESE PEOPLE QUALIFIES AS ONE. WATCH OUT FOR WAX KOBOLDS.

The Plague of Statues is the aftermath of a yearly attack from an army of wax kobolds. Those afflicted by the touch of these cursed critters become wax themselves, trapped in a prison of their own body.

Lore

The summer solstice was coming to a close and the Yellow Kobold Tribe was mining faster and faster. These weird creatures, abandoned by their kin decades ago, had formed their own tribe. Their mad leader, Gud the Leader, a charismatic and powerful kobold wizard, had persuaded the whole tribe to start digging in the Old Elven Ruins in order to find a wax artifact.

This idea had come to him, when he found a treasure map, covered with elven symbols, speaking of an item that he believed would make him the most powerful kobold that ever existed. But the inscriptions on the map made it clear; only if you find the artifact on the longest day of summer would you be able to touch it.

So, year after year, the Yellow Kobolds waited patiently for the summer solstice to start digging under the ruins.

Finally, one year, they found it. At the center of a great hall, stood a marvelous Elven statue made from wax. But it was a trap. When Gud touched it, the wax embraced him, the Leader himself turned into a statue, and the whole tribe after him, as the great hall became their grave.

But that is not the end of the story. A year later, and every summer solstice thereafter, the Yellow Kobolds return to their previous form to attack nearby villages, kidnapping more creatures to bring to their leader. Should any of the kobolds be killed, they are reborn from the wax inside the great hall.

There aren't any diseases that transform the human body into wax, but in a sense, there are two medical conditions that could mimic the touch of the wax kobolds. On one hand, there exist some conditions that trap the afflicted in their own body, unable to move or speak but fully conscious. On the other hand, there are diseases that affect the skin, changing its thickness and texture. The combination of those two is just arbitrary, and to be honest as creators, we just thought this particular plague would be a fun addition to the book.

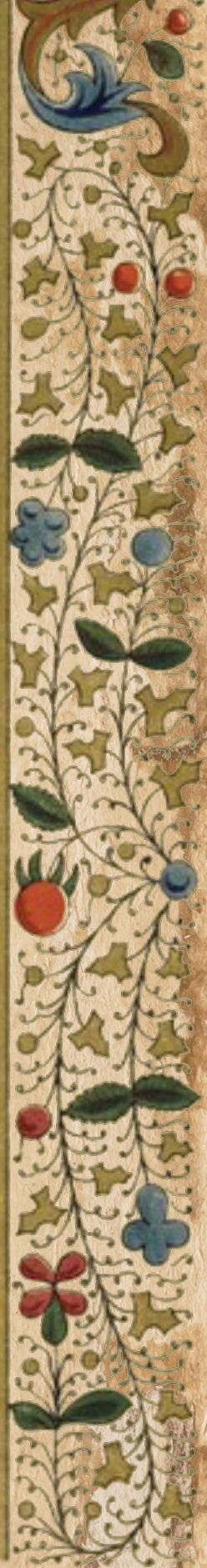
Physical Manifestation


The physical manifestation of this plague is the elven statue. Gud has become one with it, and for one day every year he wields its powers. The statue contains the life force of a powerful elven wizard, an outcast of her people who wished to wreak havoc upon the world and was banished for her practices.

Disease

Every year, once the kobold wax statue re-animates, it commands its kobold forces to spread and attack nearby kingdoms and settlements. The huge army of tiny warriors rushes to battle, attacking any civilized place they find.

The kobolds use two tactics to kidnap their victims, one of which results in what is known as the Plague of Statues.





The simple attack plan is to hit their enemies in the head and drag them to the temple. When this seems too hard or there are many creatures, the kobolds use the ace up their sleeve—their daggers of wax. They sneaky-sneakily stab them, wait a couple of hours for their victims to turn to wax, and then come back to get them. Since they only have one day to act, it is usually impossible to take every statue to their den. As a result, the rest remain there, left alone as statues that decorate the streets and homes of the ruined place. A true plague has hit these people, leaving behind a ghost city filled with motionless citizens.

Causes

The cause of the statue-fication is a puncture wound made from the dagger wielded by a wax kobold. These weapons have this effect only if they are wielded by the followers of Gud. A creature that receives piercing damage by a wax kobold must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become infected and begin turning into a wax statue.

Symptoms

Stage 1: After the pierce, wax enters the blood. The victim is paralyzed, allowing the kobolds to escape and infect others. The victim repeats the saving throw every turn for one minute, after which, if repeatedly unsuccessful, the victim enters stage 2.

Stage 2: During this stage of the disease, the creature's tissues waxify, becoming stiffer but still malleable, disabling them from taking physical actions. The mind and consciousness are left untouched. This mechanically translates to a declining movement speed, disadvantage on attacks and Strength and Dexterity saving throws. This stage lasts for a number of hours equal to their Constitution modifier x 2, at a minimum of 1 hour.

Stage 3: Wax on, wax off. The creature is permanently transformed into a wax statue. While in this form, the creature does not age, nor suffer from environmental conditions. The creature is considered paralyzed and is vulnerable to physical and fire damage. For the first tenday, the creature retains consciousness and can reply to any attempt at telepathic communication, such as replying to a *message* spell.

Stage 3, alternate: Creatures with a Constitution score of 18 or more, immunity to the poisoned condition, or black dragon heritage will not fully transform into a wax statue. Instead, it will suffer local waxification, which may cause them to lose a limb or some organ function. For example, they may lose the ability to wield a sword, speak, or see, as the respective body part is turned into wax.

Cure

While a creature is still in stage 1, 2, or 3 (alternate), a healing spell of 2nd level or higher cures the disease and reverses its progression. For creatures in stage 3, which means for fully waxified creatures, two uses of the *regenerate* spell are needed for the creature to fully recover. The first spell heals its limbs while the second returns the rest of its body to normal. Instead, a *ring of regeneration* may be used, but it is stripped of its powers in the process.

Followers

The followers of the Plague of Statues are the kobolds that died following Gud the Leader in his quest to recover the ancient elven artifact. The Yellow Kobold Tribe consists of fifty **kobolds**, 10 **kobold wax sorcerers** and 5 **kobold waxshields**.

Features

Malleability: Wax kobolds may as an action transfer 1d6 hit points to another wax kobold with touch by reducing its maximum hit points by the same amount.

Melting Point: Wax kobolds have fire vulnerability.

Unkindled: Unless a wax kobold has taken fire damage this round, it regains 1d4 hit points at the end of its turn.

Reborn in Wax: Should a wax kobold die, it is reformed inside the hall of the elven statue in 1d4 days.

Kobold waxshields are **kobold dragonshields** with resistance to cold damage, and kobold wax sorcerers are **kobold scale sorcerers**.

GUD THE LEADER

Small humanoid (koolid), lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 27 (5d6 + 10)

Speed 0 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	9 (-1)	14 (+2)

Skills Arcana +2, Medicine +1

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

ACTIONS

Waxbolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +4 to hit, range 120 ft., one target.
Hit: 6 (1d10) force damage.

Waxball (Recharge 5-6). Each creature in a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on a point you can see within 150 ft. must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw. A target takes 6d6 force damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Gud can take 1 legendary action, 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. Gud regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Teleport. Gud can teleport to any place within the palace.

Wax wall. Gud can cast the *wax wall** spell in an attempt to encase a creature in wax. DC 14 Dexterity save, on a fail restrained. If the creature is already restrained it becomes paralyzed.

*Use the *wall of water* spell from *Elemental Evil Players Companion* (p23) for additional details.

Treasure

Any treasure found inside the great hall is made of wax and holds little to no value other than the value of the wax.

In the course of the encounter with the Plague of Wax, the adventurers may come in contact with the statue of the elf that sparked it. If they touch it, they will not become cursed like Gud and the kobolds, but instead gain some minor “waxomatic” powers.

Waxomancy

Once per day, you may as an action remove all hair from a creature. An unwilling target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw with a DC equal to your spellcasting DC, which is based on Wisdom.

Spell: Consume Wax

As a bonus action, you may consume a candle or other handheld item made of wax to gain temporary hit points equal to your level.

An Unethical Option

The party, having discovered an area plagued by the kobold's attack, might be tempted to just take everything. Keep in mind that this could become rather troublesome for your campaign, as they suddenly have access to an enormous amount of gold and other treasures.

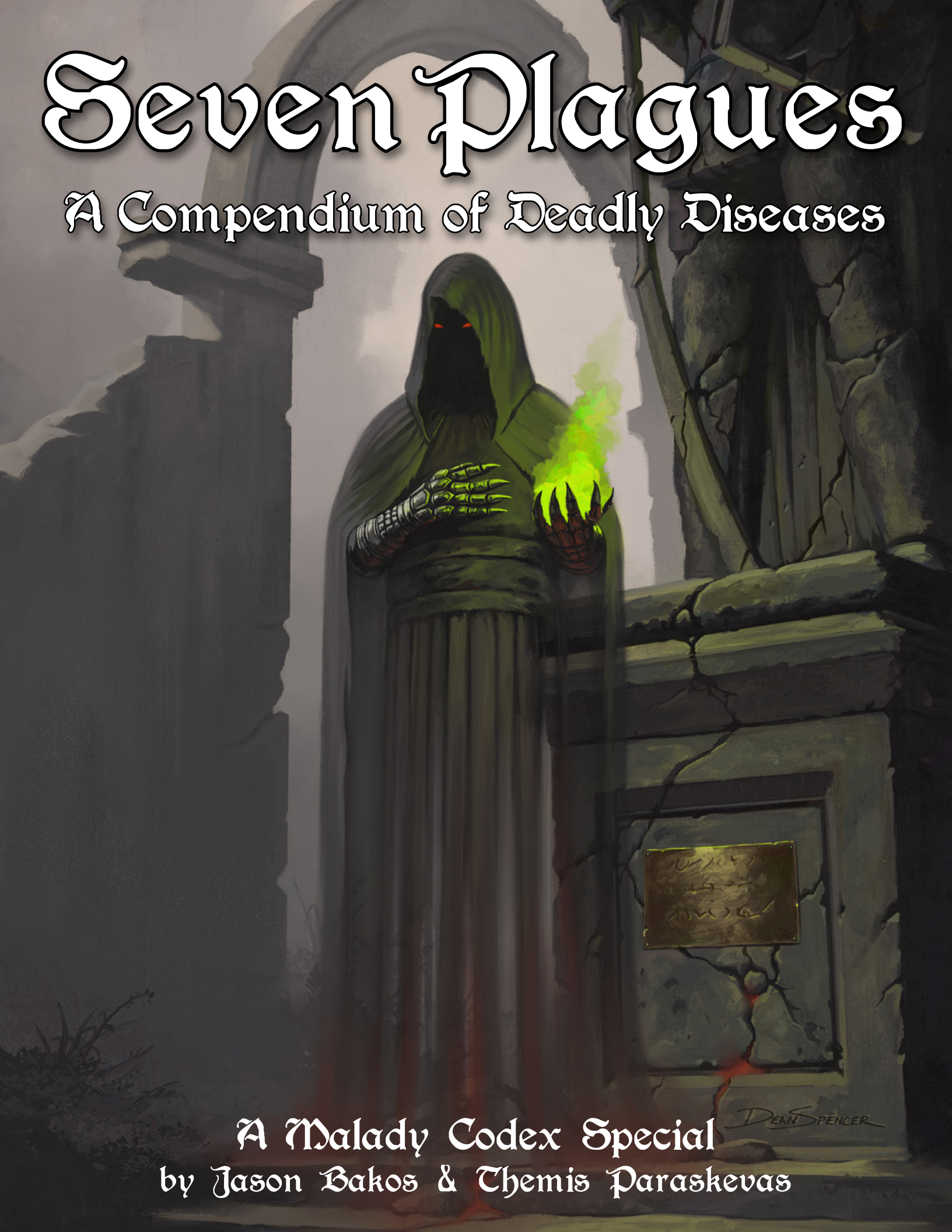
Plot Hooks

The Plague of Statues is the perfect candidate to inflict on a low-level campaign. The adventurers may come across a village struck with this catastrophe, filled with the horrifying visage of statues that used to be alive, or be unlucky enough to become the targets of the Yellow Kobold Tribe's summer solstice raid. While it should prove challenging enough for a low-level party, the plague of statues is no match for experienced adventurers and should not be used against them unless the point is to make them feel powerful and heroic. Saving a village from such a disaster would grant the adventurers fame, curry them favor with the locals, and provide an emotional connection with the populace. Use this to your advantage to also introduce other plot hooks and quests to your liking.



Seven Plagues

A Compendium of Deadly Diseases



A Malady Codex Special
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