

# FEVER DREAMS

## Poisoned Pages for Shadow of the Demon Lord

Death in battle can be glorious and frustrating for any player, but no demise is more demoralizing than one met by contracting a terrible disease. Stripped of agency, one player might begrudgingly pre-roll a new character, while another helplessly awaits a visit from Father Death. In short, disease sucks, and it's never fun when your character gets sick. It is for this reason the game gives player characters a fighting chance by offering the *cure* spell from the Life tradition at rank 1, which ensures player characters can encounter disease at lower levels of game play and insulates characters from their worst effects at the group's highest levels.

The disease rules presented in *Shadow of the Demon Lord* work well for casual play. This is good for player characters, but it creates some weirdness in the world. If such minor spells are commonly available to devotees of the gods, how do plagues march across the countryside, laying waste to entire towns and villages? Groups should be fearful as they navigate city streets in the grip of a plague, stumble across ghost towns on the frontier, the dead piled up in houses, or spot a plague ship drifting into port, rats spilling from the rails to swim ashore. Such scenarios fit in with the game's bleak atmosphere.

Thus, I want nastier options for the game, disgusting, demoralizing diseases suited to a world on the brink of ending. The collection of plagues, sicknesses, infections, and parasites presented here give diseases in *Shadow of the*

*Demon Lord* a "shot in the arm." Each builds on the basic diseases described in the main rulebook to make them more varied and complex. Here's how they work.

After the disease's name and description, you'll find the **transmission** entry. This tells you how the disease spreads and how to resolve exposure to the disease. Next, some diseases also include a **cure** entry, which describes something, if anything, a creature might use to help overcome the disease.

The disease's **stages** come next. Each has two or more. A creature that fails to resist the disease after exposure suffers the disease's stage 1 effect. Over time, the creature might move to a higher or lower stage as described in the **recovery** entry.

Should the creature reach stage 0 (if available), the disease is cured, however some diseases have **residual effects** that show how the disease ravages the body.

Since these diseases are especially nasty, as they should be, I recommend using them sparingly and only when the disease has a prominent place in the adventure.

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## BLOOD LUNG

People living on the shores of bogs and swamps in the Northern Reach frequently contend with a nasty disease known as blood lung. While locals boil their water to kill whatever lives inside of it, someone always comes down with a hacking cough, blood flecking their lips. Blood lung thrives in hot and humid lands, especially in the Bone Marsh.

**Transmission** A living creature that drinks contaminated water must, 1d3 days after, make a Strength challenge roll with 1d3 banes. On a failure, the creature suffers blood lung's stage 1 effect.

**Cure** Mother's mercy, an uncommon herb found in high mountains or purchased from a reputable apothecary for 1d6 cp, has proven useful in fighting the disease. Ingesting the leaves grants 3 boons to challenge rolls made to recover from the disease.

**Stage 0** The creature becomes immune to blood lung but suffers the residual effects.

**Stage 1** The creature is diseased. While diseased in this way, the creature heals half damage.

**Stage 2** As stage 1, and whenever the creature gets a failure on an attack roll or challenge roll, it becomes dazed for 1 round from a coughing fit.

**Stage 3** As stage 1. In addition, the creature is slowed and whenever it gets a failure on an attack roll or challenge roll, it becomes defenseless for 1 minute from a severe coughing fit.

**Stage 4** The creature takes damage equal to its healing rate and moves back down to stage 3.

**Recovery** Each time a creature diseased in this way completes a rest, it must make a Strength challenge roll.

- *20 or more:* The creature moves down one stage.
- *Success:* No change.
- *Failure:* The creature moves up one stage.
- *0 or less:* The creature takes damage equal to its healing rate and moves up one stage.

**Residual Effects** A creature that recovers from Blood Lung makes all challenge rolls to resist suffocation with 2 banes due to the scarring of its lungs.

## CREEPINGS

The death rot fungus thrives in the darkness, clinging to walls, floors, and ceilings of subterranean environments. While many fungi growing underground have luminescent properties, death rot emits a ghastly green glow, pulsing from within its fleshy mass. Patches of death rot can sense when a living creature draws near and react by releasing a cloud of spores so the creature can carry them to other locations and create new patches of death rot.

Soon after infection, strange glowing growths start to form all over the creature's body, growths that become mushrooms, puffballs, smuts, molds, and more. As the growths spread across the body, the creature can infect others, thus spreading the spores farther and farther from its source. Contracting creepings typically means death, as there is no natural cure.



**Death Rot Patch** When a living creature moves to within short range of a patch of death rot, the patch ejects a stream of spores into a 5-yard-long cone-shaped area. Each living and breathing creature in the area must get a success on a Strength challenge roll or suffer the stage 1 effects of creepings.

**Cure** When a creature diseased by creepings takes damage from fire that equals or exceeds its healing rate, the creature moves down one stage (minimum stage 1).

**Stage 1** The creature is diseased.

**Stage 2** As stage 1, and while diseased in this way, the creature turns darkness within 1 yard of it to shadows and shadows within 2 yards of it to lit. As well, the creature takes double damage from fire.

**Stage 3** As stage 2, and the creature is slowed for as long as it remains at this stage due to the growths on its body.

**Stage 4** As stage 2, and the creature is impaired and slowed for as long as it remains at this stage due to the widespread growths all over its body. In addition, whenever the creature takes damage from a source other than fire, it releases a cloud of spores to spread out from a point in its space into a 1d3 yard radius. Each living creature in the area must get a success on a Strength challenge roll or suffer creepings' stage 1 effect.

**Stage 5** The creature dies and becomes a mindless **construct** under the GM's control. It uses the statistics box for a construct of its Size but is a plant instead of a construct. After 1d6 days, the construct stops moving and becomes a new patch of death rot.

**Recovery** Each time a creature diseased in this way completes a rest, it must make a Strength challenge roll.

- *20 or more:* No change
- *Success:* No change
- *Failure:* The creature moves up one stage.
- *0 or less:* The creature moves up two stages (maximum stage 5).

## GORGON'S KISS

An exceptionally rare disease thought to have been brought to Rûl from another land by sailors, gorgon's kiss ravages the body, causing skin to harden until it achieves the consistency of rock. As the disease progresses, it becomes harder and harder for its victims to move until, when they die, they transform into stone statues.

**Transmission** A living creature that touches a creature diseased with gorgon's kiss or touches an object such a creature has handled within 24 hours, must, after 1d3 days, make a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane. On a failure, the creature suffers the stage 1 effect of gorgon's kiss.

**Cure** Scrubbing patches of hardened flesh with acid, which causes the creature to take 1d6 damage per application, grants 1 boon to Strength challenge rolls made to recover from the disease for 24 hours.

**Stage 0** The creature becomes immune to gorgon's kiss. Roll 1d6, and on a 1, the creature suffers the Residual Effects.

**Stage 1** The creature is diseased.

**Stage 2** As stage 1, and the creature's Speed is 6 while it is diseased in this way.

**Stage 3** As stage 2, and the creature's Speed is 4 and the creature gains a +2 bonus to Defense.

**Stage 4** As stage 2, plus the creature's Speed is 2 and the creature gains a +4 bonus to Defense.

**Stage 5** The creature takes damage equal to its Health and turns into a stone statue.

**Recovery** Each time the diseased creature completes a rest, it must make a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane.

- *20 or more:* The creature moves down one stage.
- *Success:* No change.
- *Failure:* The creature moves up one stage.
- *0 or less:* The creature moves up two stages (maximum stage 5).

**Residual Effects** The creature reduces its Agility by 1 from the hardening of its skin.



### OPTIONAL RULE: NASTIER DISEASES

You can make disease nastier by altering the effects of the *cure* spell from the Life tradition. Rather than have the spell remove the diseased affliction, the spell allows the creature to make a Strength challenge roll. The creature moves down one step on a success and has no effect on a failure. This change is especially appropriate if you're using the Pandemic option for the Shadow of the Demon Lord.

## INFECTION

Minor scratches can kill if they become infected. Injured creatures who explore filthy, noisome places are at risk of infection, as are creatures who become injured from attacks by creatures that typically live in such places. Infection presents as redness around the injury accompanied by bloating and fever. Left untreated, the wound can turn septic and rot.

**Transmission** When an injured creature moves through a particularly filthy area such as a rubbish heap, sewer, or brackish swamp or when a creature becomes injured by a weapon attack made by a creature that lives in such an environment, roll a d6. On a 1, the next time the creature completes a rest, but before it heals damage from resting, it must make a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane. On a failure, the creature suffers infection's stage 1 effect.

**Cure** An application of maggots—common item sold for 1d3 cp per dose—at the site of infection grants 1d3 boons to Strength challenge rolls made to recover from the disease for 24 hours.

**Stage 0** The creature is no longer subject to the effects of infection.

**Stage 1** Roll a d6 to determine the affected body part: 1, head; 2, left arm; 3, right arm; 4, left leg; 5, right leg; 6, torso. The creature becomes diseased. While diseased in this way, the creature cannot heal damage.

**Stage 2** As Stage 1, plus the creature is impaired.

**Stage 3** As Stage 1, plus the creature is impaired and takes a 3d6 penalty to Health.

**Stage 4** As Stage 3, and the wound becomes septic.

If an arm or leg, the creature cannot use the limb. If the limb is cut off (causing the creature to take damage equal to its healing rate), the creature moves down a step and removes the diseased affliction the next time it completes a rest.

If head or torso, the creature becomes defenseless.

If the creature completes a rest at this stage, it takes damage equal to its Health.

**Recovery** Each time the diseased creature completes a rest, it must make a Strength challenge roll with 1 boon.

- *20 or more:* The creature moves down one stage.
- *Success:* No change
- *Failure:* The creature moves up one stage.
- *0 or less:* The creature moves up two stages (maximum stage 4).

**Residual Effects** The creature might suffer the effects of limb loss. See the sidebar.

### MULTIPLE DISEASES

If a diseased creature is exposed to another disease, it must contend with the new disease in addition to the ones already affecting it. When a creature would remove the diseased affliction, it removes the effects of one disease affecting it—randomly determined if the removal sources from magic—and remains diseased until cured of the final disease.

## LIQUID SHITS

A vile disease, liquid shits causes severe abdominal cramping, vomiting, and, to no surprise, diarrhea. Unlike other diseases, the liquid shits strikes fast, often to embarrassing effect, and leaves its victims debilitated until it runs its course.

**Transmission** A living creature that drinks contaminated water or eats contaminated food must, after 1d6 hours, make a Strength challenge roll. On a failure, the creature suffers liquid shits' stage 1 effects.

**Cure** An apothecary can usually alleviate the symptoms of liquid shits with a common bright pink elixir sold for 1d3 cp. Drinking the elixir grants 1 boon on Strength challenge rolls made to recover from the disease.

**Stage 0** The creature is no longer subject to the effects of liquid shits and suffers the Residual Effects.

**Stage 1** The creature is diseased.

**Stage 2** As stage 1, and the creature is also impaired from the nausea.

**Stage 3** As stage 2, and the creature vomits and defecates with great force and frequency. Whenever the creature moves or uses an action, it must get a success on a Will challenge roll or become dazed for 1 round as a result from the sudden, messy expulsion.

**Recovery** Each hour, the diseased creature must make a Strength challenge roll with 1 boon.

- *20 or more:* The creature moves down one stage.
- *Success:* No change
- *Failure:* The creature moves up one stage.
- *0 or less:* The creature moves up two stages (maximum stage 3).

**Residual Effects** The creature is impaired until it completes a rest.

## LOVER'S LAMENT

Known by various colorful names such as Whore's Curse and Lecher's Doom, the drips is most common among people who work in, or frequent, dirty brothels or have sexual encounters with people who do. Shortly after infection, victims experience pain in their genitals accompanied by runny, green fluid that has a sickeningly sweet odor leaking from the affected area. Victims of lover's lament also experience delusions and possibly madness.

**Transmission** A living creature that fornicates with a creature infected by lover's lament must, 1d3 days later, make a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane. On a failure, the creature suffers lover's lament's stage 1 effects.

**Cure** Ingesting a measure of quicksilver, an uncommon substance available for 1d3 ss at any alchemist's shop, can weaken the disease but will poison the body. A creature that consumes the poisonous substance takes 1d6 damage and gains 1d3 Insanity as the quicksilver ravages the mind. For the next 24 hours, the creature makes Strength challenge rolls to recover from the disease with 1d3 boons.

**Stage 0** The creature recovers from lover's lament.

**Stage 1** The creature is diseased. While diseased in this way, the creature can spread it to other creatures through sexual contact.

**Stage 2** As stage 1, and the creature takes 1d6 damage and gains 1 Insanity.

**Stage 3** As stage 1, and the creature takes 2d6 damage and gains 1d3 Insanity.

**Stage 4** The creature takes 3d6 damage, gains 1d6 Insanity, and the creature's sexual organs are destroyed. The next time the creature completes a rest, it moves down to stage 0.

**Recovery** Each time the diseased creature completes a rest, it must make a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane.

- *20 or more:* The creature moves down one stage.
- *Success:* No change
- *Failure:* The creature moves up one stage.
- *0 or less:* The creature moves up two stages (maximum stage 4).



## PLAGUE

Plague describes a variety of similar diseases that strike down young and old alike with terrifying speed. Just when people think they have stamped it out, the plague flares up somewhere else with such virulence it can wipe out small cities in a matter of days. Few lands have escaped plague's cruel caress, and everyone fears its return. Luckily, once the plague strikes, it burns itself out in a matter of days.

Victims of the plague experience high fevers accompanied by soreness in the armpits, groin, and neck. Once black nodules appear at those sites, Father Death isn't far behind.

**Transmission** Plague spreads through the air. A creature moving into short range of another creature carrying the disease must, 1d6 hours later, make a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane. On a failure, the creature suffers plague's stage 1 effect.

**Stage 0** The creature recovers from the disease and becomes immune to plague.

**Stage 1** The creature is diseased. While diseased in this way, it cannot heal damage.

**Stage 2** As stage 1, and the creature takes 2d6 damage.

**Stage 3** As stage 1, and the creature takes 4d6 damage.

**Stage 4** The creature takes damage equal to its Health.

**Recovery** Each time the diseased creature completes a rest, it must make a Strength challenge roll with 3 banes.

- *20 or more:* The creature moves down one stage.
- *Success:* No change
- *Failure:* The creature moves up one stage.
- *0 or less:* The creature moves up two stages (maximum stage 4).

## SHRIEKS

Outbreaks of the shrieks typically begin in sanitariums. The screaming and self-inflicted injury that results from the infection are often confused with madness. A disease of the mind, victims of the shrieks experience high fever, intense anxiety, and confusion, all of which culminates in continuous shrieking that lasts until the vocal chords give out.

**Transmission** A living creature that touches a creature infected with the shrieks must, 1d3 days later, make a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane. On a failure, the creature suffers shrieks' stage 1 effect.

**Cure** Strong drink has proven effective at combating the disease. A creature that drinks enough alcohol to become impaired makes the next Strength challenge roll to recover from the disease with 2 boons.

**Stage 0** The creature becomes immune to the shrieks and suffers the Residual effects.

**Stage 1** The creature is diseased.

**Stage 2** As stage 1, and the creature gains 1 Insanity.

**Stage 3** As stage 1, and the creature gains 1 Insanity and becomes dazed for as long as it remains at this stage.

**Stage 4** As stage 1, and the creature gains 1 Insanity and becomes stunned for as long as it remains at this stage. The creature screams for as long as it is stunned or until its voice gives out.

**Recovery** Each time the diseased creature completes a rest, it must make a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane.

- *20 or more:* The creature moves down one stage.
- *Success:* No change
- *Failure:* The creature moves up one stage.
- *0 or less:* The creature moves up two stages (maximum stage 4).

**Residual effects** The creature gains 1d6 Insanity.





## SHUDDERING POX

The disease that laid low Nessus, the First City, shuddering pox has claimed more lives than any other disease that has ever torn through Rûl. The mere whisper of an outbreak incites panic, sending people fleeing for safety. The pox presents as a rash of bloody, red blisters that break easily to release streams of runny fluid. Broken blisters leave permanent craters in the flesh so that even people who manage to survive it bear its marks for the rest of their lives.

**Transmission** A living creature that comes into physical contact with a creature infected with shuddering pox must make a Strength challenge roll with 2 banes when it next completes a rest. On a failure, the creature suffers shuddering pox's stage 1 effect.

**Cure** The black cap mushroom is effective against the disease, though it is dangerous to consume. Found in cool, dark forests, ingesting one of the buttons forces the creature to make a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane. On a failure, the creature takes 1d6 damage and becomes poisoned for 1d3 hours. On a success or a failure, the fungus grants 2 boons to challenge rolls made to recover from the disease for 24 hours. This rare cure can be found for sale in fine apothecary shops for 1d6 ss.

**Stage 0** The creature becomes immune to shuddering pox and suffers the Residual Effects.

**Stage 1** The creature is diseased. While diseased in this way, the creature makes attack rolls in social situations with 1 bane.

**Stage 2** As stage 1, but the number of banes from the diseased affliction increase by 1 and the creature takes a -5 penalty to Health.

**Stage 3** As stage 1, but the number of banes from the diseased affliction increase by 2, and the creature takes a -10 penalty to Health.

**Stage 4** The creature takes damage equal to its Health.

**Recovery** Each time the diseased creature completes a rest, it must make a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane.

- *20 or more:* The creature moves down one stage.
- *Success:* No change
- *Failure:* The creature moves up one stage.
- *0 or less:* The creature moves up two stages (maximum stage 4).

**Residual Effects** The disease leaves the creature with hideous scars that impose 1 bane on all social attack rolls made against targets that can see the creature.

## SKIN WORMS

Stingflies, a breed of flying and biting insects infest hot, humid lands such as the Spider Wood and Bone Marsh. More bothersome than the welts their bites raise are the eggs they lay in their victims. It takes just a few days for eggs to hatch, at which point the larva burrow into the creature's body to eat it from the inside out. People who succumb to the parasitic infection are sometimes found as husks, little more than papery skin stretched over brittle bones.

**Transmission** At the end of each day in which a living creature travels through lands inhabited by stingflies, roll a d6. On a 1, the creature must, 1d3 days later, make a Strength challenge roll. On a failure, the creature suffers skin worms' stage 1 effect.

**Cure** Fire kills the parasites. When a creature diseased from flesh worms takes 5 damage or more from fire, it can immediately make a Strength challenge roll as if it had completed a rest.

**Stage 0** The creature recovers from skin worms.

**Stage 1** The creature is diseased.

**Stage 2** As stage 1 and, while diseased in this way, the creature is also slowed.

**Stage 3** As stage 2, and whenever the creature takes damage, it takes 1d6 extra damage.

**Stage 4** As stage 3, and the creature takes a -10 penalty to Health for as long as it remains at this stage.

**Stage 5** The creature takes damage equal to its Health.

**Recovery** Each time the diseased creature completes a rest, it must make a Strength challenge roll.

- *20 or more:* The creature moves down one stage.
- *Success:* No change
- *Failure:* The creature moves up one stage.
- *0 or less:* The creature moves up two stages (maximum stage 5).

## SLOW ROT

Colonies of the afflicted gather on the Empire's fringes, where those unlucky souls are doomed to pass their days and leave pieces of them behind as they wait for Father Death to release them from suffering. Slow Rot starts as a numbness in the extremities that gradually creeps inward until the victim loses all sense of touch. Decay soon after takes hold, leaving victims hideous and wretched.

Slow Rot can only be cured by magic.

**Transmission** A living creature that touches a creature infected with slow rot must, after 1d6 days, make a Strength challenge roll. On a failure, the creature suffers slow rot's stage 1 effect.

**Stage 1** The creature is diseased.

**Stage 2** As stage 1 and, while diseased in this way, the creature heals half damage and takes half damage.

**Stage 3** As stage 2, and the creature takes a -2d6 penalty to Health. The penalty is permanent. Whenever the creature becomes injured or incapacitated, roll a d6. On a 1, the creature loses an extremity of the GM's choice—nose, ear, finger, or toe. Once all the minor extremities are lost, a victim loses hands, feet, arms, and legs.

**Stage 4** The penalty to Health worsens by 1d6 and the creature moves back to stage 3. The effects of this stage are cumulative.

**Recovery** Once every seven times the diseased creature completes a rest, it must make a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane.

- *20 or more:* The creature moves down one stage (minimum stage 1).
- *Success:* No change
- *Failure:* The creature moves up one stage.

## LIMB LOSS

Characters who lose body parts find it difficult to continue their careers exploring dangerous places because the recovery time for a lost limb can be considerable. A character who loses a limb makes all attack rolls and challenge rolls with 2 banes. At the end of each month, the character can make a Will challenge roll. On a success, reduce the number of banes by 1 (minimum 0).

The effects of limb loss should be obvious—a character missing a leg or legs can move by crawling. Most prostheses have little benefit and are decorative at best, though a prosthetic leg, costing 1d6 cp, allows a character to walk. Such a character halves his or her original Speed while wearing the prosthesis.

More elaborate and useful prosthetics might be available as exotic items costing 100 gc or more. They might act as partial or full replacements.