

The Infected

It only takes one mistake. Maybe it wasn't even you that made it, but now you're going to pay the price: your life, indeed your very humanity. There's something working under your skin, or in your blood, or worming its way through the very fabric of your soul. It's going to kill you one day, or worse. There's no stopping it. But while you're still yourself, there's power to be found in the transformation that is slowly destroying you. Before long, you'll be gone, but the world will go on. You have until then to leave some kind of legacy. You're doomed, sure, but that doesn't mean you can just give up. Not yet.

You have leave something behind so they know: you were here.

History

The sun is gone. Most of the water is stagnant. The earth rots. The old magic has been used up, and where it hasn't, it's usually turned mad and sour. The plants and beasts that survive in this endless night are often wildly mutated, predatory things. Some of them used to be people. Human flesh, human souls—these were ubiquitous resources when the world fell, effective vectors for sustaining life. Now there are fewer and fewer people by the year. Deprivation gets a lot of them, sure, but many are dragged down by wild, monstrous things in the dark, taken as food or fodder. Worse, maybe, are those who become infected, who transform into roaming horrors themselves. Usually such a fate is at least mercifully quick, but sometimes infection proceeds by inches and degrees rather than burning through like a wildfire. Sometimes it takes months or years, with symptoms appearing erratically and out of their normal sequence. Who knows why? Nothing else in the world works right anymore either, after all.

Anyway, that's what's happening to you now. All that's left is to decide what to make of it.

Origin

The infected come from all walks of life, sharing only the commonality of a terrible and unavoidable demise or degeneration, which might come from one of any number of sources. Here are some possibilities:

- Your group hunted the hideous, shaggy red thing for days and days before cornering it in its awful garden. Only you survived in the end, clutching your broken spear over its twitching corpse. You hadn't eaten in four days, and snatched up one of the fruits of the garden to gain the strength to travel back home. That was a mistake. Now something is growing inside you, winding through your guts, your spine, twisting your hands and your back and your mind.
- You encountered the corpse on a scavenging expedition, pale and broken, with a towering mushroom-stalk thrusting up from its chest. It exploded when you called out, filling the air with spores. Your lungs have ached constantly ever since, and you sense a latent power in the tidal rhythm of your breath. It terrifies you. It feels as though it will split you apart if you should ever bring it out. But the white patches on your skin are spreading anyway, regardless of your restraint.
- You grew up with the old tales, the old warnings, but ignored them. You thought you knew better. You had a secret lover, once upon a time. She was beautiful, with scarlet eyes and tiny fangs, and fingernails of polished brass. You fell asleep beside her one night, and slept and slept, and when you awoke you were miles away from anything familiar, with a strange scar upon your

chest and a heaving heat racing through your blood. It keeps getting hotter, and it almost seems like there's a voice singing to you to from every flame you pass, calling you down, down, down. You can't shut it out forever.

- You've wandered for a long time, and encountered many strange things. But you think whatever happened to you happened while you slept beneath that ancient cenotaph. Nothing else seemed willing to go near it, and that should have warned you. Now you bundle up to cover your body, which has turned hard and cold as granite in places... places which are slowly growing. You're stronger every day, but you can't stop the nightmares about the day when your entire body turns to stone. Will you still be aware? Will you still be alive?
- The necromancer was a man of great and awful power, and he made your village the grist for his experiments until you couldn't take it anymore. His heart fluttered to a halt on the end of your knife, but not before he pronounced a final, blood-choked curse upon you. Now you're rotting by inches and degrees, and unnatural hungers have begun to plague your dreams. Already the condition has advanced so far that it's only the curse keeping you 'alive.'
- Something else—a tale of impending and unavoidable doom.

Gender

Choose one:

Man, woman, ambiguous, transgressing, or concealed.

Gender has no impact your character's traits. Depending on the communities you encounter, you may face certain societal expectations and pressures based on your gender, but your infection's progress is usually of greater concern to you.

Name

Select a sad name, a cruel nickname, a plain name, or let another player name you because your condition has taken away the memory of who you used to be. This is how others will know you in the long cold dark.

Appearance

Choose one of the following:

- **Ethereal:** Perhaps there's some truth to that adage about candles that burn bright and short. There's something fragile and unhealthy about you, yes, but your condition has given you a sort of... glow, almost as though your human imperfections are being burned away one by one. Later, it may get worse—it may become unspeakable—but for now, you seem almost radiant in your decline. Add +1 to rolls to seduce, manipulate, or set others at ease.
- **Terrifying:** Your infection has left its mark upon you, and that mark is inhuman. Perhaps your eyes do not belong in a human face. Perhaps you have begun to grow patches of matted fur. Perhaps your skin has become translucent, or is simply beginning to peel off. Add +2 to rolls to intimidate, threaten, or disgust others. Suffer -1 to attempts to appeal, seduce, or hide your condition.
- **Furtive:** You seem like anyone else at first glance, but there's something... off. Your infection has begun to mark your flesh, but you're still able to hide it, and you do, obsessively. Something about the way you cover up, about the way you never appear without your gloves, or that long

cloak you always have to hand even when sitting close by the fire... it makes people nervous, even if they're not sure why. Add +1 to rolls to fast-talk or dissemble.

Mysticism

Though you are unschooled in the ways of magic, eldritch forces have become an inextricable part of you, body and soul. Suffer -1 to attempts to enact rituals or operate magical apparatuses.

Doom

Your infection is of a particular character. If you're turning into something, what is it? If you're being undone by a curse, where does it end? Select one of the following, or let the MC pick for you:

- **The Beast:** You are transforming slowly into an animalistic monster. But until the transformation erases you completely, you gain the power of a deadly predator. Begin play with the *Natural Weapons* Symptom.
- **The Undead:** Your body is slowly becoming animated by something other than yourself, even as you continue to move and think. But until the last sparks of yourself gutter out, you can transcend the limitations of mortal flesh. Begin play with the *Undying* Symptom.
- **Cursed:** Some eldritch curse or infection is remaking or erasing you, nestling within your body. But until it destroys you, some element of the mystic arts becomes yours to command. Begin play with the *Killing Blast* Symptom.
- **Assimilated:** You are slowly losing your mind and soul as they are taken over, overwritten, or merged into some hostile force. But until the process is complete, you can tap into that force as well. Begin play with the *Survival Instinct* Symptom.

Torment

Your infection brings with it some burden you must constantly bear. Choose at least one:

- **Pain:** You are in chronic pain. You can function in the face of it, but it's always there, reminding you of the incipient doom gnawing away at you.
- **Disfigurement:** Your infection is slowly remaking or destroying your body. Whenever you look in a mirror, you see less and less of yourself staring back.
- **Urges:** Inhuman impulses or appetites throb in the darkness at the back of your mind. You've been able to keep them in check so far. You know that won't always be the case.
- **Alienation:** You've lost some part of yourself already, diminished or simply gone. Perhaps your sense of taste; perhaps your color perception; perhaps important memories; perhaps your capacity for joy; perhaps your empathy for others is slowly dwindling away. You'll lose more before the end.

Details

Choose up to two of the following details for your character:

- **Horrid Complications:** You can reach into the infection that's destroying you, and force it to serve you for a little while. During a hunt, you can temporarily manifest a Symptom you don't normally possess. Once the hunt ends, the Symptom abates and you must roll at +0. On a 10+, you're okay. In fact, you feel... good, and the next time you make this roll, take +1. On a 7-9,

you're horribly wracked by your Torment, but otherwise unscathed. On a miss, draw a line through your last two experience boxes. They're gone now, and your end is closer than it would have been otherwise.

- **One of Us:** A certain kind of monster (such as devils, banshees, or zombies) will allow you—and you alone—to pass among them unmolested, so long as you make no aggressive move against them. They recognize you as incipient kin.
- **Craftsman:** As the horrors of the endless night labor to remake your flesh, so it only seems fair to return the favor. You may use certain salvaged body parts after successful hunts to craft special items.
- **Disquieting Feature:** Your transformation has granted you some new body part or organ, bringing with it inhuman capabilities. Perhaps your hands sport sticky pads that allow you to climb walls. Maybe you have gills for breathing underwater, or a prehensile tail.
- **Packrat:** You've amassed many things along the way. Select a second trinket, but remember that you can't take it with you where you're ultimately going.
- **Night Eyes:** You can navigate and act with perfect confidence in even absolute blackness. Perhaps your eyes have mutated, allowing you to see in the dark. Perhaps you have developed some other, more esoteric sense, such as echolocation.
- **Asymptotic:** You can suppress all outward manifestations of your infection... for a little while. While you do so, you can definitely pass for an ordinary person. But once you relax your vigilance, your Torment rushes in and it's twice as bad as usual, at the very least.
- **Infectious:** Your condition isn't confined to you alone. There is some method—perhaps your bite, perhaps contact with your blood, perhaps by reciting the broken words of an ancient curse—by which you can spread your infection to others.
- **Mystic:** Maybe you had some training or at least an academic curiosity in the intricacies of magic before your infection. Maybe your transformation is instilling a facility for the mystic arts into you. Ignore the normal -1 penalty for Mysticism; roll at +1 instead.

Weapon

You've found or claimed a weapon to accompany you through the night, unto the bitter end. Select one of the following:

- A pair of old but stout daggers. These allow for two attacks on your turn at +1 each, with each inflicting 2 harm.
- A spear. This allows for one attack on your turn at +1, inflicting 3 harm.
- A bow and a quiver of arrows. This allows for one attack on your turn at out to *long* range at +1, inflicting 1 harm. You are considered to have enough arrows to last out a fight.

Movement

When in battle, you have a base movement of one range band per round. You can take this movement before or after acting.

Defense

Though your life is running short, you cling to what remains with desperate ferocity. Add +2 to rolls to defend.

Intimacy

When you share a moment of intimacy with someone, be it physical or emotional, it gives you the strength to fight on. During your next hunt, you may select a single roll and, *before* rolling, replace its normal modifier with +3.

Trinket

In your journeys through the endless night, you may have come across an interesting curio. Select one of the choices below to begin the game with.

- **Spiral Skull:** This old skull is carved with a dizzying array of spiral patterns of necromantic enchantment. Words spoken into it will echo and echo within the skull until it is held up to someone's ear, at which point its message is conveyed in a chilling whisper and a new message can be implanted.
- **Heartseeker Fang:** A knife-sized tooth pried from the jaws of a terrible monster, which still lusts for blood and death. Unwieldy without a proper handle or balance, it may be used to make a single attack at -1, inflicting 1 harm. If this tooth inflicts harm to a living being on a 10+ it vanishes into the target's flesh and worms its way toward their heart. They take 1 harm on their next three turns, and die on the fourth turn as the fang reaches their heart and shatters into deadly fragments.
- **Old Shield:** A battered old shield, bearing the faded heraldry of a long-dead kingdom. Requires the use of a hand in battle. Up to three points of harm may be negated by use of this shield; this negation doesn't have to happen all at once. Once three harm have been blocked, the old shield shatters into useless fragments.
- **Fragrant Branch:** Petrified twig from an ancient magical tree. When held aloft, the air around this branch remains pure and breathable no matter what foulness may swirl about.
- **Old Seeds:** Carefully-wrapped seeds of a flower believed extinct. You've never seen or heard of soil retaining enough vitality to nurture them, but they could at least theoretically still grow if planted in the right place.
- **Silver Mirror:** A small hand mirror, its rim woven with enchantments once easily performed by even the most novice magus, now lost and precious. The mirror's surface will reflect human beings, and nothing else. It still shows your reflection, for now.
- **Nothing:** You have only your infection to weigh you down.

Death Moves

When your death clock reaches midnight, choose one:

- Become *badly wounded* and erase all harm. You suffer -1 to all actions, and remain *badly wounded* until you have a period to rest and recover in safety, or are otherwise healed of the condition. You can't choose this option if you are already *badly wounded*.
- You die.

Symptoms

Your infection grants you preternatural strength on the way to your final fate. Select one Symptom to start with, in addition to the free Symptom granted by your Doom.

Natural Weapons

Your body has begun to grow killing tools—claws of some kind, for sure. Maybe fangs too, or a nasty tail. Horns, perhaps. These allow for three attacks on your turn at +2, inflicting 2 harm each. You are considered to have access to both your natural weapons as well as your other weapon at all times during battle, and need take no special action to switch between them, though you may still only attack with one weapon per turn.

Fortitude

Your body is unnaturally resilient. Perhaps you're growing some sort of awful carapace. Maybe your skin has become hard as stone, or is developing plates of brass. It could be you just don't need some of your organs any more. When you suffer harm, reduce the harm by 1.

Premonitions

It could be a predator's growing instincts, or a looming affinity with death. It could be that your senses are beginning to encompass things they shouldn't. Either way, you can anticipate the way violence flows around you like a river. Once per battle, you may look at the top three cards in an enemy's death deck, then place them back in whatever order you like.

Undying

Such is the cruelty of your infection that you may die a number of deaths before it is through with you. Replace the "You die" death move with the following:

- You die. Roll at +2. On a miss, you are truly dead. On a 7-9, you come back some time later, your infection returning your flesh to sufficient functionality to serve its needs. On a 10+, you come back immediately, though you are so wracked by your Torment that it costs your next turn.

Regeneration

Your infection mends your flesh with frightening speed, although it doesn't necessarily always put you back together... quite the way you were before you were injured. Erase one harm at the beginning of your turn each round.

Killing Blast

You are able to project some manner of powerful, killing force. Perhaps you can breathe a gout of flame, or acidic poison. Perhaps you unleash a shattering sonic wail. Maybe you can cast eldritch energy from your fingertips, or induce deadly seizures by lashing out with the power of the alien force slowly consuming your mind. Either way, roll at +3 to use this attack on a target at up to *medium* range. On a miss, choose none. On a 7-9, choose two. On a 10+, get all three.

- The attack hits, inflicting 4 harm.
- You haven't exhausted whatever reserves the attack draws on, and you can use the attack again during this battle.
- You don't suffer 1 harm as you unleash an attack the human body was never meant to channel.

Uncanny Speed

Perhaps your legs have changed into something more... efficient. Maybe your constant, awful insights guide you along the most efficient path to wherever you want to be. Perhaps you can even step from place to place by taking old, forgotten paths outside of space, built by wizards long dead. Either way—you are very, very fast. Every other turn, you can move 2 rather than the standard 1.

Death Waits Within

Your body brims with something horrible. Perhaps your blood is acidic, or volcanic. Perhaps some retributive curse lurks in your flesh, waiting to lash your enemies with frost or flame or creeping necrosis. Perhaps your very body has become a supreme poison, or brims with deadly spores. Whenever an enemy at *close* range deals harm to you, they suffer 1 harm in return.

Survival Instinct

Some new instinct or predictive power ticks away in you, warning you at the last moment when your actions are about to bring destruction upon you. When you draw an enemy's trap card, roll at +3. On a 7-9, take half damage (round down) and no additional ill effects such as penalties or being knocked down. On a 10+, avoid the trap card's harm and additional ill effects altogether.

Cold Mind

Even in the extremes of agony, you can shut out the pain. Perhaps it's an exercise of inhuman will. Perhaps your nerve endings are simply... going. Either way, you don't suffer the usual -1 penalty when you are *badly wounded*.

Unnatural Strength

You're strong, strong, *strong*. Maybe you're gaining the feral musculature of a beast. Perhaps your flesh is becoming something other than flesh. It could be that you're channeling power from beyond... or that something other than mere muscle animates your body now. Inflict one additional harm on attacks when you roll 10+, and when you attempt to perform some feat of strength, do so at +3.