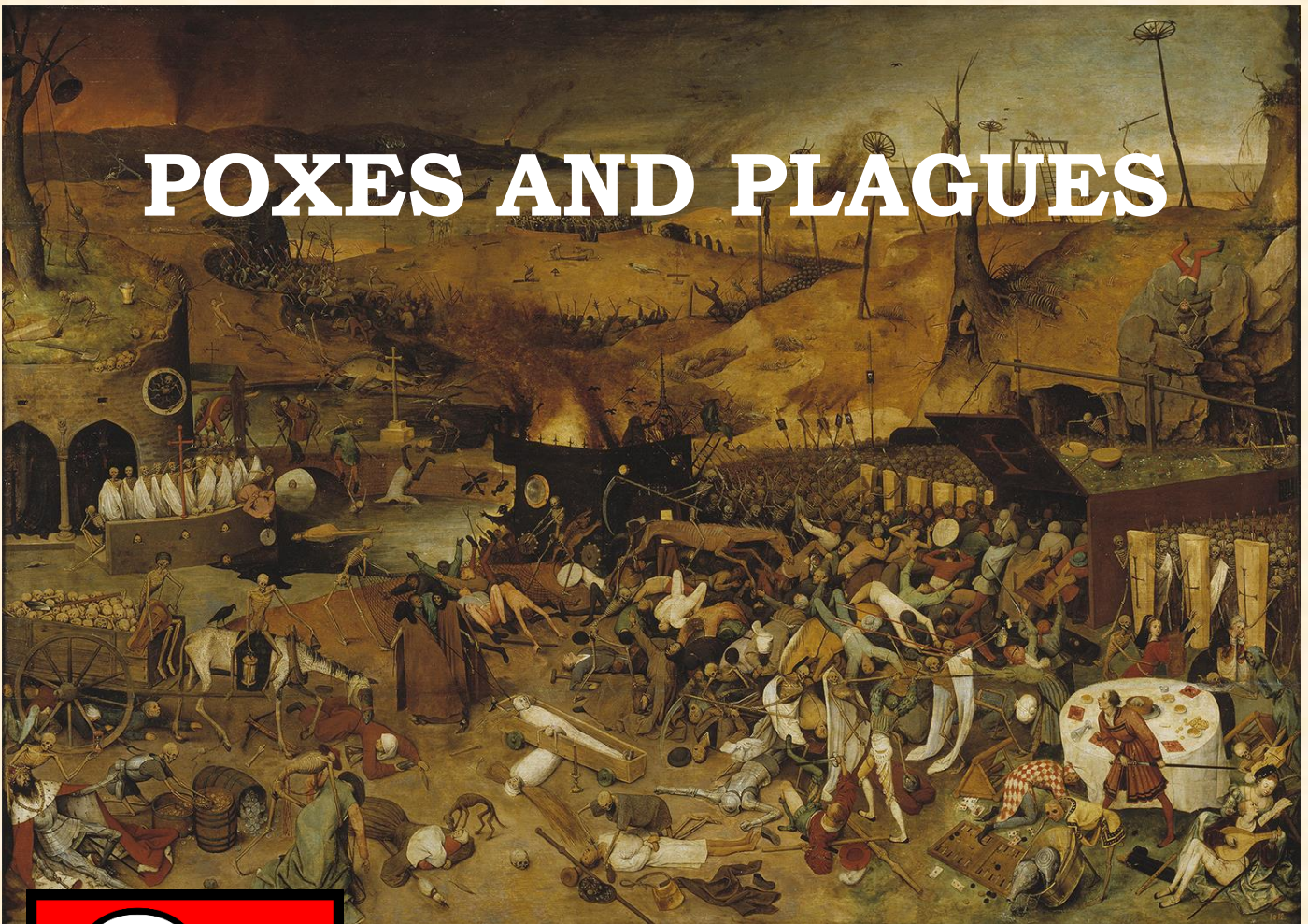


POXES AND PLAGUES



Illness in Dungeons & Dragons

The world can be a dangerous place; filled to the brim with treacherous villains, frothing beasts, and raging monsters. There are more insidious perils than just these foes. Prepare to battle the real enemy of mankind - disease.

by AUSTIN M JONES

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ILLNESS

'Sir Elren had slain the gryphon that harried the village of Oakbrooke; he had defeated the dread lord Oldabore and returned Queen Nesha to the throne; he was wounded in the Battle of Nerabonn, but rode again for the Siege of Ahlgin. But in the end, it was not a contest of strength or wit that ended Sir Elren's life, but hypothermia caused by a fall in a frigid river.'

—Old Man by the Fire

While it is true that there are more threats in D&D than you can shake a stick at, why not throw another deadly thing at your players? Although some diseases are spread by infected enemies, most of the time players are stricken when a certain environmental condition is met or simply as a random 'encounter'. Sicknesses in Dungeons & Dragons range from the ever-present common cold, to disastrous maladies like plagues that can level entire countries. There are also supernatural ailments like vampirism and lycanthropy. I will also include the three diseases as described in the Dungeon Master's Guide (page 257) for convenience.

Role-playing Disease

While the illnesses featured in this supplement are somewhat self-contained, there is a lot of flavor and role-playing potential inherent in players bedeviled by sickness. Feel free to throw in some sudden, unexpected challenges: roll a DC 10 Dexterity check or sneeze loudly, alerting the enemies to your position; coughing frequently gives you a -2 to Performance. Have fun with it!

Cackle Fever (DM's Guide 257)

This disease targets humanoids, although gnomes are strangely immune. While in the grips of this disease, victims frequently succumb to fits of mad laughter, giving the disease its common name and its morbid nickname: "the shrieks."

Symptoms manifest 1d4 hours after infection and include fever and disorientation. The infected creature gains one level of exhaustion that can't be removed until the disease is cured.

Any even that causes the infected creature great stress - including entering combat, taking damage, experiencing fear, or having a nightmare - forces the creature to make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 5 (1d10) psychic damage and becomes incapacitated with mad laughter for 1 minute. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the mad laughter and the incapacitated condition on a success.

Any humanoid creature that starts its turn within 10 feet of an infected creature in the throes of mad laughter must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or also become infected with the disease. Once a creature succeeds on this save, it is immune to the mad laughter of that particular infected creature for 24 hours.

At the end of each long rest, and infected creature can make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a successful save, the DC for this save and for the save to avoid an attack of mad laughter drops by 1d6. When the saving throw DC drops to 0, the creature recovers from the disease. A creature that fails three of these saving throws gains a randomly determined form of indefinite madness, as described later in Chapter 8 of the Dungeon Master's Guide.

Common Cold

Every year, the most prolific disease is most assuredly the common cold. Flu-like symptoms, cough, runny-nose, mild fever, and general malaise. Although a character's performance can be hindered by the common cold, this disease is not deadly. Humanoids are exclusively targeted by the common cold.

Symptoms manifest 1d4 days after contracting the illness. The infected creature takes a -1 penalty to Strength and Constitution checks (other than Constitution checks related to fighting the common cold).

Characters are most often infected by the common cold by the DM simply declaring it. The common cold is very easy to survive and defeat, and is mainly story-fluff. Therefore, feel

free to dole it out whenever you feel is appropriate. A character must succeed on a DC 5 Constitution check when within 10 feet of another infected creature to avoid contracting the disease. If already infected, a creature must simply succeed on 2 consecutive DC 5 Constitution checks (made after each long rest) to defeat the common cold. However, if a character fails this check twice in a row, the common cold develops into a flu (described later in this supplement).

Flu

A flu is a common name for an infectious disease that includes fever, coughing, headache, exhaustion, and a sore throat. Only humanoids can pick up a flu.

Being within 15 feet of a flu-afflicted creature forces a character to make a DC 15 Constitution check. On a failed roll, the creature becomes infected. Creatures afflicted with the flu have two levels of exhaustion that cannot be removed until the disease ends. These symptoms occur after 1d4 days of infection.

An infected creature makes a DC 16 Constitution saving throw after a long rest. After each success, the DC decreases by 4. Once this save DC reaches 0, the creature recovers from the disease.

Gangrene

A debilitating rotting disease, gangrene is a violent infection of an untreated open wound that threatens not only the limb, but the life of the infected creature. Almost any type of creature can succumb to gangrene (only those completely immune to poison cannot become infected).

An infected wound may become

gangrenous when a creature has more than 2 x their Constitution modifier (or 2 if modifier is zero or negative) points of damage that is not fully healed within 48 hours. After this period, the creature will become infected with gangrene. The infected creature has disadvantage on all attack and spell casting rolls. Anytime an infected creature takes damage, they also suffer an additional 1d4 poison damage.

Only successful healing potions, spells, Medicine checks, or characters proficient with herbalism kits can attempt to treat gangrene. The care-provider must succeed on a DC 10 check (for Medicine or herbalism) or heal more than double the points of damage that became infected (infected creature's 2 x Con modifier, or 2). Once these other types of healing are successful, the infected creature must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution check to defeat the gangrene, or symptoms return in 1d4 days after treatment.

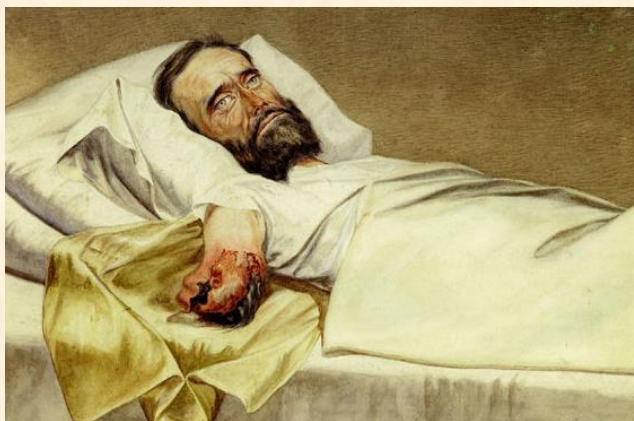
Without treatment, an infected creature must make a DC 15 Constitution roll in order to defeat the gangrene. If a creature fails 5 consecutive rolls (with or without aid), or falls to 0 or less hit points while infected, the limb must be removed for the creature to survive the gangrene. Removing a limb in this way cures the gangrene.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia and pneumonia (combined under one disease here) can be deadly to unprepared characters. These illnesses are categorized by shivering,

confusion, and impaired mental and physical performance that humanoids are susceptible to.

Hypothermia can only be caught from being in dangerous, exposed conditions. When a character spends at least 5 hours in an excessively cold,



damp, or thin-aired environment, they must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the character comes down with hypothermia.

A creature suffering from hypothermia has 4 levels of exhaustion that cannot be removed until the disease is defeated. After every long rest, an afflicted creature will make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw. On a success, the DC for the next roll will be reduced by 4. Once the DC is reduced to 0, the creature recovers from hypothermia/pneumonia. However, if the creature fails this roll 3 consecutive times, the creature is reduced to 0 hit points and begins to die.

Plague

Absolutely devastating to any populace, a plague is a disease that spreads without warning, ruthlessly killing whoever it can come into contact with. Bloody coughs, rashes, weeping sores, and more can be included in a plague. These virulent diseases are so impactful that they are often named by the survivors and recorded in history books. It affects beasts and humanoids exclusively.

All characters within 15 feet of a creature suffering from the plague roll any die; on an odd numbered result, that creature also becomes infected with the plague. Succeeding on the roll makes that character immune for 24 hours. When the plague symptoms first begin to appear (1d4 days after infection), the creature must make a DC 22 Constitution saving throw. On a success, the character manifests no symptoms, but is still a carrier of the plague, infecting others as normal. Otherwise, the creature suffers 4 levels of exhaustion and is vulnerable to all types of damage.

A plague is a highly resistant disease. Creatures infected with the plague must make a DC 30 Constitution saving throw after a long rest: succeeding on this roll subtracts 2 from the DC of the next roll. If the DC is reduced to 10 or less, the plague is cured in that creature (and is no longer infectious). Any creature that

survives this plague becomes immune to that specific type (or instance) of plague. However, if a creature fails this check 3 consecutive times, the creature is reduced to 0 hit points and begins to die.

Pox

A pox is a physical malady characterized by swollen lumps appearing either in concentrated rashes or all across the body. Poxes target humanoids and can be spread by physical contact. A deadly pox can destroy a close-knit village or small town. Poxes spread relatively easily and are hard for the average person to defeat.

A creature afflicted with a pox has one level of exhaustion that cannot be removed until the disease ends, and a -4 penalty to Charisma checks. These symptoms manifest 1d6 hours after infection.

If a creature comes into physical skin-to-skin contact with another creature infected with a pox, make a DC 15 Constitution check. On a failed save, the creature becomes infected with the pox. If any other physical contact occurs, the DC is 10 instead. Every time the character takes physical or force damage, their boils become agitated, dealing an additional 1d6 poison damage.



Sewer Plague (DM's Guide 257)

Sewer plague is a generic term for a broad category of illnesses that incubate in sewers, refuse heaps, and stagnant swamps, and which are sometimes transmitted by creatures that dwell in those areas, such as rats and otyughs. Not to be confused with Plague as listed above Writer's note.

When a humanoid creature is bitten by a creature that carries the disease, or

when it comes into contact with filth or offal contaminated by the disease, the creature must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or become infected.

It takes 1d4 days for sewer plague's symptoms to manifest in an infected creature. Symptoms include fatigue and cramps. The infected creature suffers one level of exhaustion, and it regains only half the normal number of hit points from spending Hit Dice and no hit points from finishing a long rest.

At the end of each long rest, an infected creature must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the character gains one level of exhaustion. On a successful save, the character's exhaustion level decreases by one level. If a successful saving throw reduced the infected creature's level of exhaustion below 1, the creature recovers from the disease.

Sight Rot (DM's Guide 257)

This painful infection causes bleeding from the eyes and eventually blinds the victim. A beast or humanoid that drinks water tainted by sight rot must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become infected. One day after infection, the creature's vision starts to become blurry. The creature takes a -1 penalty to attack rolls and ability checks that rely on sight. At the end of each long rest after the symptoms appear, the penalty worsens by 1. When it reaches -5, the victim is blinded until its sight is restored by magic such as *lesser restoration* or *heal*.

Sight rot can be cured using a rare flower called Eyebright, which grows in some swamps. Given an hour, a character who has proficiency with an herbalism kit can turn the flower into one dose of ointment. Applied to the eyes before a long rest, one dose of it prevents the disease from worsening after that rest. After three doses, the ointment cures the disease entirely.

MAGIC ITEMS

Herbalist's Ring

Ring, uncommon (requires attunement)

While wearing this ring, you have resistance to non-magical illnesses.

Ilmater's Tomcat

Wondrous Item, uncommon



This (Tiny) brass tomcat statue makes Tiny and smaller pests leave an area of 150 feet centered on the statue and stay out of the area as long as the Tomcat stays present. This effect begins after the statue has been sitting still for 1 hour and lasts as long as it remains mostly undisturbed (wind, bumping, etc. do not end this effect).

Medicine Mask

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

A hollow-snouted mask which can be filled with medicinal herbs to protect against disease. While wearing this mask, you are immune to all non-magical diseases and have advantage on all saving throws to resist being infected by magical disease.

Perrier's Plaguebringer

Staff, legendary (requires attunement by a sorcerer, warlock, or wizard)

This staff can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. While you hold it, you gain immunity to all non-magical diseases and advantage on all saving throws to resist being infected by magical disease.

This staff can, as an action, be planted upright in the ground. If the

magic word is spoken as a bonus action on the attuned character's next turn, a plague is created as if with a 9th level *rampant infection* spell. The plague effects the surrounding 100 miles and radiates out from the staff at a rate of 10 miles per day. The character who is attuned to the staff has immunity to this plague, and it can speak another magic word over up to 25 other creatures that will also become immune.



SPELLS

Create Illness

1st level necromancy

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 45 feet

Components: V, S, M (the body of a dead cockroach)

Duration: varies

You create a disease that a target in range becomes infected with. You can choose the disease based on what level you wish to cast the spell as. The symptoms begin immediately, but the creature will not become contagious for 1d6 hours.

1st level: common cold, cackle fever.

2nd level: sewer plague.

3rd level: flu, sight rot.

4th level: gangrene, pox.

6th level: hypothermia.

Cure Illness

2nd level evocation

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (pure water and crushed up mint leaves)

Duration: Instantaneous

A creature you touch recovers from one disease specified by you during the casting. You can choose the disease based on what level you wish to cast the spell as. After being cured of an illness, a creature cannot become re-infected by that same disease for 2 weeks.

1st level: common cold, cackle fever.

4th level: flu, sight rot.

5th level: gangrene, pox.

7th level: hypothermia.

9th level: plague.

Rampant Infection

5th level necromancy

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: 150 feet

Components: V, S, M (250 gp worth of elixir-infused dead slugs)

Duration: varies

You create a disease that all targets in range become infected with. You can choose the disease based on what level you wish to cast the spell as.

5th level: flu.

7th level: pox, sight rot.

9th level: plague.

PARTING WORDS

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