

flesh of the fallen

Poisoned Pages for Shadow of the Demon Lord

Among the more primitive and savage peoples haunting the lands of Rûl, some believe great power resides in the flesh of the fallen, power just waiting to be seized. The manner in which they take it varies, with some taking trophies from the dead and others devouring the flesh and bone. Such ideas fly in the face of the cultured and god-fearing peoples of the Empire. Even sampling the flesh of another sentient creature violates all that is good and decent, an act of such depravity that it invites swift justice from the gods. As everyone in the Empire knows, the gods forbid cannibalism, cursing mortals who consume the flesh of their own kind to become ghouls. Horrific appetite enslaves these degenerate peoples such that the need to gorge themselves on hot blood and slippery meat consumes their every waking thought.

Although the curse is real and permanent for those who succumb to it, the threat of transformation is not the reason most forgo this filthy practice. Rather, it is the understanding that to eat one's own kind is to be risk being eaten. Such an act transforms the predator into prey.

Despite cultural objections, despite the prohibition by the old gods, despite the tugs of conscience one might feel in eating another person, there have always been those who indulge in this terrible taboo. This Poisoned Pages installment reveals the risks one faces by indulging in cannibalism in the ghoul ancestry. Supporting this horrid choice are two expert paths. While well suited to ghouls, any character with an interest in stealing the strength of the creatures they slay might benefit from becoming a consumer or collector.

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GHOUL

The gods despise mortals who feed on their own and reward such despicable behavior with a terrible curse. The curse transforms people into wretched monsters debased by unholy hunger. Called ghouls, these vile souls haunt graveyards for easy pickings, digging up the dead to strip the rancid meat from the bones and gobble down reeking viscera crawling with maggots. Though their actions appall them, their hunger impels them, driving them to stuff their mouths with the most unthinkable fodder. Ghouls do take fresher fare where they can find it. The most corrupted stalk communities, snatching the old, young, and anyone else not nimble enough to escape their clutches. Despised and hunted, ghouls find enemies wherever they go.

Wrath of the Ancients: The First People comprised many tribes, some peaceful, others violent, and a few debased, little better than wild, mad beasts. One tribe took to eating the flesh of their enemies, believing they would gain their strength and knowledge. Although disgusted by the act, the faeries did not interfere until they themselves became victims. After tribal warriors descended on a peaceful village of fey folk and feasted on the bodies of the dead, the Horned King laid a terrible curse on mankind. If man would act as scavengers then scavengers man would become. Henceforth, whenever humans and others like them ate their own kind, they would become ghouls, slaves to their unspeakable appetites.

Divine Terror: Transforming into a ghouls wrecks a person's mind and imparts an abiding fear of the gods whose wrath they have incurred. Ghouls become nervous when around religious symbols and icons lest their proximity to such signs bring even worse down on their heads. Ghouls do not willingly enter areas of holy ground.

BECOMING A GHOUL

Only living creatures not immune to the diseased affliction can become ghouls. Humans are the most common, but it's possible for fauns, halflings, and dwarfs to suffer the curse. Characters with the Powerful Ancestry trait cannot become ghouls.

If you belong to an ancestry capable of transforming into a ghouls and you consume the flesh from a creature, alive or dead, who shares your ancestry, you must roll a d6.

On a 1, you become defenseless for 1d6 hours and then transform into a ghouls.

On a 2-5, you suffer no ill effect.

On a 6, you suffer no ill effect and you are not at risk of becoming a ghouls until after you complete a rest.

Upon becoming a ghouls, you apply all of the following traits to your character.

GHOUL

Attribute Scores Agility +2, Intellect -2

Characteristics Perception +2, Speed -2

Immune damage from disease or poison; diseased, poisoned

Shadowsight You see in areas obscured by shadows as if those areas were lit.

Dreadful Appearance When you attack a living creature that can see you, the target creature must make a Will challenge roll. The creature becomes frightened for 1 minute on a failure or becomes immune to your Dreadful Appearance until after it completes a rest on a success.

Unholy Feast You can use an action to eat one dead creature you can reach, which requires concentrating for 1 minute. At the end of this time, you utterly consume the target corpse, and you assume its living appearance until you complete a rest. While you have this appearance, you lose the Dreadful Appearance talent.

Accursed Compulsion At the end of each round that you are within short range of a dead creature, you must make a Will challenge roll. On a failure, you must move toward the dead creature and use your Unholy Feast talent when you are next able. Once you do so, you lose Accursed Compulsion for 1 hour.

Fear of the Gods Against creatures wearing or wielding religious symbols or icons you make attack rolls with 1 bane. In addition, you become frightened while on areas of holy ground (see *Uncertain Faith*) and remain frightened for as long as you remain there.

Powerful Ancestry When your group attains level 1, you do not choose a novice path. Instead, whenever the Advancement table indicates you would gain benefits from a novice path, you gain the benefits from your ancestry for that level.

If you already chose a novice path before you became a ghouls, remove the path and any benefits you gained from that path, starting with the benefits gained at the highest level and then working backwards. For each set of benefits lost in this way, you gain 1 Insanity.

LEVEL 1 GHOUL

Characteristics Defense +1, Health +2, Perception +1

Natural Weapons You can attack with your claws and teeth. Together, they count as a basic weapon with the finesse property that deals 1d6 + 3 damage.

Unwholesome Recovery Once per day, when you use your Unholy Feast talent, you heal damage equal to your healing rate.

LEVEL 2 GHOUL

Characteristics Defense +1, Health +2, Perception +1

Drink Blood When you attack with your natural weapons and the total of your attack roll is 20 or higher and exceeds the target number by at least 5, you can drink the blood of a living target. The target takes 1d6 extra damage and becomes fatigued for 1 minute. While fatigued in this way, the target is also slowed. If already fatigued, the target takes another 1d6 damage.

Gain one of the following benefits:

Magic Increase your Power by 1, discover a tradition, and learn a spell from that tradition.

Weapon Training When you attack with a weapon, you make the attack rolls with 1 boon.

LEVEL 4 GHOUL EXPERT

Characteristics Health +2

Gain one of the following benefits:

Magic Either discover a tradition or learn a spell.

Sharpened Teeth and Claws Your attacks with your natural weapons deal 1d6 extra damage.

LEVEL 5 GHOUL EXPERT

Characteristics Health +2

Gain one of the following benefits:

Magic Increase your Power by 1 and either discover a tradition or learn a spell.

Combat Prowess Your attacks with weapons deal 1d6 extra damage.

LEVEL 8 GHOUL EXPERT

Characteristics Health +2

Sense Flesh You make Perception rolls to find living or dead creatures that have physical bodies with 1 boon. As well, you reduce the number of banes to your attack rolls against such creatures by 1.

Gain one of the following benefits:

Magic Either discover a tradition or learn a spell.

Combat Expertise When you use an action to attack with a weapon, you can either deal 1d6 extra damage with that attack or make another attack against a different target at any point before the end of your turn.

PATHS OF HUNGER

The following expert paths offer characters ways to steal power from their enemies, either by wearing their body parts as trophies or by eating them.

CONSUMER

EXPERT PATH

Consumers break the taboo against eating the flesh of the fallen. Eating the body parts of their slain foes lets them gain a measure of their power and knowledge. Some consumers see absorbing the potency of the defeated as the fastest way to power, some are driven by long-ago trauma that manifests as a compulsion to dine upon their enemies, while others simply lack the empathy to understand why such an act repulses most right-thinking people.

To choose this expert path, you must be a living creature that can eat.

CONSUMER STORY DEVELOPMENT

d6 Story Element

- 1 You developed a taste for raw flesh after you ate the corpse of a friend or loved one to survive a terrible ordeal.
- 2 You spent a season in the wilderness, viewing the brutality of nature and learned the taboo against eating sentient creatures is a construct of civilization.
- 3 After unwittingly consuming part of a monster, you became addicted to the rush of power you felt from absorbing another's potency. This experience fills you with a need to recreate that first terrifying high.
- 4 You nearly starved to death while imprisoned by an enemy. You were left with a gnawing hunger as insatiable as your desire for revenge.
- 5 You were bested magically by a rival. Your new ambition to gain magical power as quickly as possible outstrips any compunction you might have about breaking society's rules.
- 6 Your teacher in the ways of magic slowly broke down your moral resistance to the dark paths of power before revealing him or herself as a Consumer.

LEVEL 3 CONSUMER

Attributes Increase two by 1

Characteristics Health +3, Power +1

Corrupted Development Increase your Corruption score by 1.

Magic You discover a tradition or learn one spell.

Devour Once per day, you can perform a ceremony over the remains of one living creature killed by you or a member of your group. You must complete the ritual within 6 hours of the creature's death, and the ritual takes 1 hour to perform. If you finish the ritual and spend 10 minutes eating the desecrated flesh, you gain a benefit depending on the body part you eat (see the Body Parts Benefits table for details). The benefit lasts until you complete a rest.

Resist Ghoul Curse The ceremony you perform as part of your Devour talent protects you from becoming a ghoul. If you use your Devour talent to consume a creature that shares your ancestry, you do not roll a d6 to see if you become a ghoul. However, each time you gain Corruption, you must roll a d6 to see if you become a ghoul.

LEVEL 6 CONSUMER

Characteristics Health +3

Magic You discover a tradition or learn one spell.

Great Hunger You can use the Devour talent twice. The benefits of doing so are cumulative provided they come from different creatures and different body parts.

LEVEL 9 MASTER CONSUMER

Characteristics Health +3, Power +1

Magic You discover a tradition or learn one spell.

Cannibalism When you use Devour to eat a body part from a creature of your ancestry, the benefit lasts until you eat a body part from another creature that shares your ancestry. Each time you do, gain 1 Corruption.

BODY PART BENEFITS

Part	Benefit
Blood	At the end of each hour, you automatically heal damage equal to the Power score of the creature you consumed (minimum 1).
Bone	You gain a +1 bonus to Defense.
Brain	You speak all languages known by the creature you consumed. As well, you gain access to some of the creature's memories, which grants you 1 boon on Intellect challenge rolls.
Eyes	You make all Perception rolls with 1 boon. In addition, if the dead creature had shadowsight, darksight, or truesight traits, you gain the trait.
Flesh	You gain a bonus to Health equal to your group level.
Heart	If the creature could cast spells, choose one spell the creature knew whose rank is equal to or less than your Power score. You gain one casting of that spell.
Liver	You gain one of the creature's immunities.
Tongue	In social situations, you make attack rolls with 1 boon. You can speak all languages the dead creature spoke, and can imitate its voice, call, song, or other vocalizations perfectly.

COLLECTOR

EXPERT PATH

Collectors take body parts from the creatures they kill, wearing them proudly as trophies and drawing strength from them. Many collectors come from primitive cultures, of which their warriors display trophies to show their combat skill or their kill count. Many squadrons of orcs developed unique trophy-taking traditions while fighting for the Empire, as have some elite human and dwarfen fighting forces. Collectors from different cultures display their trophies differently; an orc may wear a string of raggedly chopped ears still dripping gore, while a dwarfen collector is more likely found with polished, rune-carved claws set atop his helmet like a coronet.

COLLECTOR STORY DEVELOPMENT

d6	Story Element
1	You lived for so long with nothing to your name that you developed a compulsion to collect as many things as you can, measuring your worth by how much you own.
2	You derive pleasure from examining physical reminders of your victories, but each memory eventually grows stale, forcing you to seek new trophies.
3	You trained in a warrior tradition that emphasizes the collection of trophies as a way of displaying prowess and experience.
4	You joined a death cult that commands you to wear something taken from every creature you slay, out of respect for their sacrifices, to show your dominance over death, or to ward against the restless spirits of your victims.
5	You are part of a loose confederation of fellow collectors, and enjoy comparing your collections, boasting over your rarest pieces, and trading for new trophies.
6	You place no value on material possessions, caring only for the power your trophies grant you, and gladly discard an old piece as so much rubbish to replace it with something stronger.

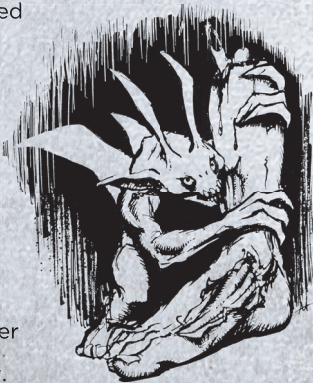
LEVEL 3 COLLECTOR

Attributes Increase two by 1

Characteristics Health +5

Devour You can perform a ceremony over the remains of one living creature you killed. You must complete the ritual within 6 hours of the creature's death and the ritual takes 10 minutes to perform. If you finish the ritual, choose a body part from the Trophies table. The process of collecting a trophy, a combination of ritual preparation and careful excision, can only be performed once on a given creature.

To derive any benefit from the trophy, you must wear it somewhere it is visible. You can benefit from up to two trophies at a time. You can replace a current trophy with another, but if you do so, the power of the old trophy is lost, and you cannot use it again. If a slain creature does not possess a certain body part— for example, humans do not have claws, while a lash crawler does not have a breastbone— it cannot be taken as a trophy.



LEVEL 6 COLLECTOR

Characteristics Health +5

Impressive Display You can benefit from up to three trophies.

LEVEL 9 COLLECTOR

Characteristics Health +5

Complete Set You can benefit from up to four trophies.

If you have three trophies or more from creatures who share the same ancestry (for example, human, wolf, dragon, troll, and so on), the trophies grant you 1 boon on attack attacks rolls against creatures of that ancestry. As well, while your trophies are displayed they impose 1 bane on attack rolls made by such creatures. Finally, the trophies grant you 1 boon on attack rolls to intimidate and taunt such creatures in social situations.

TROPHIES

Trophy	Benefit
Breastbone	When you take damage from a single attack and that damage would incapacitate you, you can instead choose to have the breastbone trophy shatter and take half damage as a result. Using the breastbone in this way destroys it.
Claw	Your attacks with your unarmed strike or natural weapons deal 1d3 extra damage.
Ear	Each ear trophy you own grants you 1 boon on attack rolls made to intimidate and taunt in social situations or 2 boons if you make the attack roll against a creature sharing the ancestry of one of these trophies. Ears rot and become useless after 7 days.
Eye	You gain keen eyesight and your senses sharpen. For each eye trophy you display, you make Perception rolls with 1 boon.
Hand	When you take damage, you can use this trophy. Roll a d6. On a 3-6, you reduce the damage by the number rolled. On a 1-2, you take extra damage equal to the number rolled. Each time you invoke this trophy, one of the fingers on the hands curls inward. Once all the fingers and the thumb have curled inward, the trophy becomes useless.
Fang	Each time you deal damage with a weapon, you can make the next attack roll before the end of the next round with 1 bane to cause the attack to deal 1d6 extra damage.
Foot	For each foot trophy displayed, you gain a +2 bonus to Speed.
Jawbone	When you prepare a jawbone trophy, roll 1d6 to determine the number of teeth clinging to the bone. When you or a creature within short range makes an attack roll, you can use a triggered action to grant 1 boon on the triggering roll. Each time you invoke this trophy, one of the teeth crumbles to powder. Once all the teeth are gone, the trophy is useless.
Rib	You have a +1 bonus to Defense against ranged attacks.
Skullcap	This trophy imposes 1 bane on attack rolls against your Intellect or Will.