



BORDERLANDS SURVIVAL GUIDE

The GM's resource for psychology, maladies, peril, relics, and monsters found in the wilds of the Iron Kingdoms: Requiem campaign setting.

DISEASES OF IMMOREN

Sometimes the biggest threat to your survival isn't the monster you can see, but the one that you can't. I'm no expert—that's why I've asked a guest to speak on the subject of illness, but I know what it's like to watch someone's flesh fall off because they stepped in the wrong pool of muck or left a devil rat bite untreated for too long. If you think you might have caught some kind of little nasty, then you probably already have.

—Affen of Shkley

My name is Doctor Henri Gateau, and I have spent my life in the study and treatment of a number of infectious diseases. My first word of advice is to take precautions. It is far better to avoid any infection vector than it is to pursue a remedy. Careful use of antiseptics, protective wear like impermeable gloves, goggles, and masks—especially when one suspects a pathogen is airborne—an illness can only occur when the practitioner of medical arts is clearheaded and not succumbing to the ravages of the illness they seek to treat.

—Dr. Henri Gateau, Shrouded One

Terrors abound in western Immoren, both seen and unseen. An indiscriminate killer, disease has shaped the face of Caen as much as war, with entire villages and cities decimated. Even the Orgoth, the brutal conquerors who ruled western Immoren for centuries, owe their defeat in part to the pestilent rip lung that raged across the continent, leaving thousands dead in the streets. Though the cities and towns of Immoren have made great strides to limit the spread of disease with highly organized sanitation practices, these silent killers can appear out of nowhere to ravage those who come into contact with them.

The contraction of diseases is silent and insidious, so a character is unlikely to notice they have caught a disease until symptoms appear. A character who is exposed to a potential disease transmission gains a d6 in their **infection pool**; prolonged exposure can add more dice. Once the **check interval** is reached, these dice are rolled and compared to an **infection threshold** based on the character's relevant ability score. Meeting or exceeding that number results in the character contracting the disease and experiencing the relevant effects. Thereafter, the character makes saving throws (typically Constitution) to determine the advance of the disease, and the infection pool resets to zero.

Additionally, some diseases can infect creatures without them knowing—these infected are known as asymptomatic carriers. Each disease has a length of time designated for these carriers, after which they no longer carry the disease. Anyone in contact with an asymptomatic carrier is considered exposed to the disease.

ADVICE ON USING DISEASES

Be careful not to trivialize the spread of infectious disease at your game. At the time of writing, the world has still not fully curtailed the spread of our own very real pandemic. It is wise to approach the subject of plague and illness with a measure of caution, and not to make light of the effects that such sickness has had on the real people sitting at your gaming table.

Disease can be a powerful plot device, but only if it can't be quickly removed by anyone wielding a bit of magic. At the end of this section are some alternative rules for curing and preventing illness that offer more immersion in the world—and offer a higher risk. Some of the rules are optional, and others deal with how spells and features that cure diseases function with the infection pool system.

Dealing with diseases provides as much challenge, threat, and resource consumption as confronting a monster. In most cases, consider a disease as having a CR equal to the player characters' average party level.

Type: This is the cause of the disease, such as bacteria, dragon blight (dragon name), parasite (name), plant/mold/fungus (name), virus, toxin, and so on.

Transmission: Transmission determines how a creature can become infected by a disease, such as waterborne, ingested, airborne, contact, bite, or injury.

Infection Pool Max: The maximum number of d6 in the infection pool.

Infection Threshold: When checking for infection, this is the number above which a disease is contracted, typically an ability score. So long as multiple dice are rolled, a maximum roll on the dice always results in an infection, even if the total is below the infection threshold.

Check Interval: How often a check for infection occurs. Slow-acting infections might be measured in weeks; more aggressive diseases might take only days or hours.

Asymptomatic Carriers: If the disease can infect someone without them experiencing the effects, this happens when more than one infection die is rolled and the minimum roll comes up on all the dice.

THE MIDLUNDS PLAGUE

In recent months, a new and unknown plague has been observed in the Western Midlunds and Thuria duchies of Cygnar. Efforts to stem the progression of this disease have met with mixed results, and the Brotherhood of the Bloody Shroud, a group dedicated to the study and eradication of illnesses, has not yet been able to find an effective treatment for it.

The spread of this plague is one of the major issues facing the southern kingdom at this time, and no one at present is certain the effects it will have on Cygnar in the long term.

BLACK TONGUE

Black tongue is a parasitic disease first observed among the inhabitants of the Scharde Islands. The disease is widespread among blighted trollkin kriels of the region, but some cases have been reported in coastal villages of the mainland as well.

Type: Parasite (tongueworm)

Transmission: Waterborne. 1d6 per day in which contaminated water is ingested

Infection Pool Max: 4d6

Infection Threshold: Dexterity

Check Interval: 24 hours

Asymptomatic Carriers: N/A

After black tongue is contracted, the infected creature's tongue becomes numb and begins to show black spots. At the end of each check interval, an infected creature must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. After the first failed save, the black spots increase in size, and numbness causes the creature to make all Charisma ability checks with disadvantage. On a second failed save, the tongue turns completely black and the numbness increases. In addition to previous effects, the creature cannot cast spells with verbal components or use abilities dependent upon use of the voice (such as bardic inspiration, fell calling, or the feat Inspiring Leader). A third failed save makes eating impossible due to swelling of the tongue. Further, the infected creature cannot roll Hit Dice during a short rest and cannot regain Hit Dice during a long rest. Unless the condition ends or the creature is fed through other means—requiring a DC 20 Wisdom (Medicine) check, with failed attempts dealing 7 (2d6) poison damage—the creature gains one level of exhaustion per day that cannot be removed while the condition persists. Three successful saves end the condition, though the discoloration of the tongue persists for about a month.

Special Treatment. Serpent rye is a potent liquor distilled with the blood of the bog constrictors found in Widower's Wood. It can help treat black tongue, granting advantage on Wisdom (Medicine) rolls to treat the disease or Constitution saving throws to resist the disease.

Don't kiss a girl from Blackwater, boy!

Hey hey, heave ho!

'Cause 'er tongue's as black a blightshark, boy!

Heave away, heave ho!

Find yourself a bog-snake, boy!

Tow the line, heave ho!

Bleed that snake and make a rye, boy!

Heave away, heave ho!

*from the sea shanty
"Blackwater Bay"*



BLOODY SWEAT

Bloody sweat is a highly contagious airborne fever, though the likelihood of transmission increases dramatically with direct fluid contact in the form of blood or saliva. The disease has a rapid incubation period, followed by a prolonged prodromal stage of many weeks during which the symptoms manifest.

After a few weeks, the disease becomes full-blown. Its major symptoms include dramatically increased fever, open sores, and frequent, heavy nosebleeds. Within days of progressing to this state, the infected frequently die—bloody sweat has a mortality rate of nearly 70 percent. The illness' final, lethal symptoms are a drastic spike in temperature followed by the flow of blood from the victim's pores in a gruesome sweat that gives the malady its name.

Type: Virus

Transmission: Airborne/contact. 1d6 per hour spent in same room as an infected humanoid; 1d6 per contact with infected humanoid's blood, sweat, or saliva

Infection Pool Max: 4d6

Infection Threshold: Constitution

Check Interval: 24 hours

Asymptomatic Carriers: 1 week

On contracting bloody sweat, a creature begins to suffer bouts of nausea and sweating. Thereafter, DC 12 Constitution saving throws must be made at the end of each check interval. Each failed save results in 7 (2d6) necrotic damage, and the creature's hit point maximum is reduced by the amount of necrotic damage taken, as capillaries near the surface of the skin burst and the creature begins to "sweat" blood. A creature dies if its hit point maximum is reduced to 0. It is cured if it succeeds on five saving throws.

Special Treatment. An alchemical remedy, first created by the Llaeles physician Doctor Henri Gateau, can be given to a creature infected with bloody sweat, granting advantage on Wisdom (Medicine) skill rolls to treat the disease, or Constitution saving throws to stop its progression.

Whether a merchant living in Bainsmarket or a warlord in the Wyrmwall Mountains, whether commoner or noble, it is blood that carries the very vital essence of our lives. Best to keep it inside our bodies and not mopping from our brows.

—Dr. Henri Gateau

BOGRIN BLIGHT

Falsely attributed to the oft-reviled cousins of gobbers, bogrin blight is a virulent infection spread most commonly among the wasteland tribes of the Bloodstone Marches.

Type: Bacteria

Transmission: Injury/contact. 1d6 per injury with an infected tool or weapon; 1d6 per contact with bodily fluids of someone infected

Infection Pool Max: 4d6

Infection Threshold: Constitution

Check Interval: 24 hours

Asymptomatic Carriers: 1 week

On contracting bogrin blight, an infected creature develops a fever, and the original wound reopens and produces pus. Additionally, stiffness in the creature's joints causes it to have disadvantage on Dexterity ability checks.

Thereafter, at the end of each check interval, the infected creature must make DC 13 Constitution saving throws to determine the advance of the infection. The first failed save reduces the creature's movement by half due to painful lesions all over the body. A second failed saving throw causes the lesions to spread, which deals 2 (1d4) slashing damage each round the creature both moves and takes an action, as well as when donning or doffing armor. On a third failed save, the creature develops pockmarks (treat as **Battered** on the Severe Injuries table) and acquires one level of exhaustion that cannot be removed while the infection persists. Each subsequent failed saving throw adds one level of exhaustion that likewise cannot be removed while the infection persists. Three successful saving throws end the affliction.

Special Treatment. The grim folk of the Bloodstone township Pierson's Pit are known to fashion a poultice made from crushed malachite that can help against bogrin blight, granting advantage on Wisdom (Medicine) rolls to treat the disease, or Constitution saving throws to slow its onset.

Clean your instruments well, Evlin—passing the blade through fire or wiping it with uiske works, in haste—for it is important that we do not introduce something worse than we excise.

*from the notes of
Shrouded One Gillian Reane to an apprentice*

BLACK LUNG

Immoren depends on coal for heat and industry, and a large number of Immorese folk are employed in coal extraction. In coal mining communities, a condition called black lung is a grim reality. The inhalation of coal dust scars the lungs, making breathing difficult.

Type: Toxin

Transmission: Airborne. 1d6 per day spent in space where coal dust is present

Infection Pool Max: 7d6

Infection Threshold: Constitution +20

Check Interval: 3 months

Asymptomatic Carriers: N/A

A creature afflicted with black lung develops a cough. The cough is infrequent but imposes disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks where the creature can be detected by sound. Thereafter, the infected creature must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw at the end of each check interval. The first failed save results in 1 permanent point of Constitution loss. The second failed save results in disadvantage on all Constitution ability checks. The third imposes one permanent level of exhaustion. Each

subsequent failed saving throw adds another permanent level of exhaustion. Three successful saves stop the advance of black lung, but all previous effects are permanent. The *greater restoration* spell can remove the Constitution loss or levels of exhaustion, with a separate casting required for each.

Special Treatment. Use of a gas mask or respirator while mining prevents an infection die from accumulating that day.

As much as we try to dig it up—it tries to bury us.

*from the journal of Dermot Hugh,
coal miner*

DEVIL RAT FEVER

This debilitating infection is carried by the bite of devil rats. It is not known if the illness is the product of a bloodborne parasite common among all members of the species, an innate quality of their physiology, or if they are merely asymptomatic carriers of this vile disease. What is known is that the bite of a devil rat can lead to a rapid onset of infection and, if not treated, a painful death.

Type: Bacteria

Transmission: Injury/contact. 1d6 per bite from a devil rat; 1d6 per contact with bodily fluids of someone infected; 1d6 per corpse handled of a creature slain by the disease

Infection Pool Max: 4d6

Infection Threshold: Constitution

Check Interval: 24 hours

Asymptomatic Carriers: 1 week

A humanoid afflicted with devil rat fever develops bleeding lesions that slowly appear across the skin, eventually covering the entire body. The lesions manifest at the end of the first long rest following contraction of the disease, causing the victim's Constitution and Strength scores to decrease by 1 each. Each day that the creature is diseased, more of the lesions appear: at the end of each check interval, an infected creature makes a DC 11 Constitution saving throw. On a success, it regains 1 point of Constitution and 1 point of Strength lost to the disease. If the infected creature regains all the points lost to the disease, it is cured. Other effects that raise ability scores do not cure the disease. On a failed saving throw, the infected creature's Constitution and Strength scores each decrease by 1 again. A creature dies if its Constitution score or Strength score is reduced to 0 as a result of this disease. Three successful saves end the condition.

Many a merc's career started in this basement, clearing out the devil rats. Sometimes the fever makes them reconsider their career prospects.

*from an interview between Dr. Henri Gâteau
and Quinn Donovan, proprietor of
Quinn's Taproom in Corvis' Undercity*

MAWG RABIES

The murderous frenzy of Molgur warriors was feared throughout western Immorten. For some Molgur this blood-maddened fury was more than just battle lust and adrenaline-induced ferocity; it was the result of mawg rabies, a parasitic disease that attacks the brain and the central nervous system, inducing mania and bloodlust.

Type: Parasite (mawg rabies)

Transmission: Injury/Ingested. 1d6 per bite or scratch from a burrow-mawg or another infected creature; 1d6 per raw burrow-mawg adrenal gland consumed; 1d6 from consuming the raw flesh of an infected creature

Infection Pool Max: 3d6

Infection Threshold: Wisdom

Check Interval: 6 hours

Asymptomatic Carriers: 1 week

On contracting mawg rabies, an infected creature develops a headache, which imposes disadvantage on Intelligence ability checks. Thereafter, it must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw at the end of each check interval. The first failed save results in 7 (2d6) necrotic damage that cannot be healed by any means while the creature is still infected. The second failed save results in another 7 (2d6) necrotic damage and imposes disadvantage on all Wisdom ability checks, as the creature develops paranoia. On the third failed save, the infected creature takes another 7 (2d6) necrotic damage and becomes compelled to attack anyone that comes near: when another creature moves within 10 feet of it, the creature must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or use its reaction to try to bite as an unarmed attack. A fourth failed saving throw results in another 7 (2d6) necrotic damage, and the creature gains the paralyzed condition as it completely loses control of its body to seizures. A fifth failed saving throw results in the creature's death. Three successful saves stop the advance of mawg rabies.

Special Treatment. An alchemical restorative brewed with a distillate of a burrow-mawg's adrenal gland grants advantage on Wisdom (Medicine) skill rolls to treat the disease, or Constitution saving throws to stop its progression.

Using burrow-mawgs for target practice is fun—right up until your best chum gets bit and tries to eat your face.

*from the journal of Private Milo Bancroft,
43rd Long Gunners "Rainmakers"*

PANNER'S POX

For generations, the people of Ternon Crag in the Bloodstone Marches have known of a regional ailment they call "panner's pox," so named for the number of prospectors who strike out into the northern hills and return with the condition.

What is known to only a few is the origin of the disease. Northeast of Ternon Crag, not far from the source of the Comb's Beacon River, lies the Castle of the Keys. This ancient fortification was for centuries the hiding place of the dragon Pyromalfic, whose blight spread into the headwaters of the

river and tainted it for miles downstream.

The “disease” is in truth a low-level blighting, the potency of the dragon blight diluted by the river’s water. Though the dragon has been dead and gone for years, Pyromalfic’s corruption still lingers and afflicts those who come into repeated contact with it.

Type: Dragon blight (Pyromalfic)

Transmission: Waterborne. 1d6 per day in which blighted water is ingested or in which 1 hour or more is spent in contact with blighted water

Infection Pool Max: 7d6

Infection Threshold: Dexterity + 20

Check Interval: 14 days

Asymptomatic Carriers: N/A

A beast or humanoid that contracts panner’s pox develops patches of skin that begin to itch distractingly, reducing movement by 5 feet while the infection persists. At the end of each check interval, the infected creature must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, it takes 5 (1d10) necrotic damage that cannot be healed by any means while the creature is still infected, and the creature’s skin starts to take on a deathly pallor and dark patches of scaly flakes. Failing a second saving throw has the additional effect of causing all Charisma ability checks except for Intimidation checks to be made with disadvantage while the affliction persists. Failing a third saving throw makes the speed reduction permanent. Failing a fourth saving throw makes the Charisma penalty permanent, but when the creature isn’t wearing armor, its AC equals 13 + Dexterity modifier as the scales thicken and bone ridges grow. Failing a fifth save completes the metamorphosis: the creature grows claws that give it a natural unarmed attack dealing 1d4 slashing damage, its speed is reduced another 5 feet, and it makes all Wisdom ability checks except for Survival checks with disadvantage as it becomes obsessive and develops hoarding tendencies. Thereafter, the necrotic damage from all previous failed saving throws can be healed normally. After making three consecutive saving throws, the progress of the disease is halted and damage can be healed normally, but the paleness and patches of scaly skin are permanent, as are the aforementioned effects.

I’m gonna warn you like the last kid. You might pan a fortune from Comb’s Beacon—I ain’t seen it yet, though maybe—but that panner’s pox chews them up and spits them out ugly.

from an interview between
Dr. Henri Gateau and
Nazariah “Naz” Acorsi,
Waitress at Santi’s Bastion saloon

RIP LUNG

Rip lung is the respiratory plague that ravaged western Immoren, and particularly the Ortho, during the Ortho occupation. Thought to be a mystic bioweapon of the druids of the Circle Orbos, rip lung was an indiscriminate killer that spread like wildfire. It is believed that the Ortho brought this disease back to their homeland when they fled Immoren following the Rebellion’s victory.

Though the illness was largely curtailed by the efforts of Ascendant Corben, who developed a remedy for the disease, a weaker strain still appears in some rural communities.

Type: Virus

Transmission: Airborne/contact. 1d6 per hour spent in same room as an infected humanoid; 1d6 per physical contact with infected humanoid

Infection Pool Max: 3d6

Infection Threshold: Constitution

Check Interval: 12 hours

Asymptomatic Carriers: 1 month

A creature that contracts rip lung develops red blotches over its skin and suffers extreme thirst. While infected, the creature must drink twice the normal amount of water per day or suffer the effects of dehydration. At the end of each check interval, it must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On the first failed saving throw, the creature begins spitting up blood and has disadvantage on all Strength and Constitution ability checks. After the second failed saving throw, the creature’s lungs begin filling with blood (treat as **Spitting Blood** on the Severe Injuries table). After a third failed save, the creature begins drowning from the blood in its lungs, gaining one level of exhaustion per hour. Two consecutive successful saving throws end the affliction.

Special Treatment. Ascendant Corben developed an inexpensive cure for rip lung made from common herbs. Alchemists belonging to the Brotherhood of the Bloody Shroud (see page 20), as well as anyone proficient in both Medicine and a field alchemy kit can craft this, requiring 1 gp worth of herbs and a DC 10 Intelligence check using a field alchemy kit to produce five doses in 8 hours. Use of this cure grants advantage on Wisdom (Medicine) rolls to treat the disease or Constitution saving throws to slow its onset. It also eliminates all dice in the character’s infection pool for this disease.

Upon taking the vows of the Brotherhood of the Bloody Shroud, you will become a Shrouded One. Following in the footsteps of Ascendant Corben, you will ensure the survival of his cure that ended the rip lung plague—and be vigilant, should it return. And you will seek outbreaks of other diseases, provide succor to the afflicted, organize a public response, and seek to contain and cure.

—Abbess Analeigh Byrne
of the Cathedral of
Asc. Corben, High Shrouded One

STONE SICKNESS

A rare contagion suffered by mine workers, stone sickness affects the nervous system of the infected. It is contracted by breathing in toxic spores released by cidyne mushrooms that grow in some deep subterranean chambers.

Type: Fungus (cidyne mushrooms)

Transmission: Airborne. 1d6 per minute within 10 feet of a patch of cidyne mushrooms

Infection Pool Max: 5d6

Infection Threshold: Intelligence +10

Check Interval: 12 hours

Asymptomatic Carriers: N/A

On contracting stone sickness, a creature begins having mild visual and auditory hallucinations, suffering disadvantage to all Intelligence and Wisdom ability checks. At the end of each check interval, it must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On the first failed saving throw, the infected creature gains the poisoned condition from mild seizures that impair motor functions. On the second failed saving throw, the creature becomes incapacitated as the seizures get more severe. On the third failed saving throw, the creature becomes paralyzed, completely losing control of its motor functions. Three successful saves end the condition.

Even after seven of us ended up in the infirmary with stone sickness, the old foreman kept sending us down. So, we sent him down and collapsed the tunnel. I'm sure Empress Ayn will be just as happy with coal from a different hole.

*—Foreman Negomir Belardon
of Koorosh Hills Labor Camp No. 11, shortly
before his death at the hands of a shaft-dwight*

UMBRAL HEMOPHAGES

Umbral hemophages are deadly organisms from the Outer Abyss that were inadvertently brought into Caen by infernal horrors. When these stowaway organisms contact a surface, they form a mosslike lattice with small, mucus-covered buds that open and expel a small bit of ooze on anything in contact. When it contacts a sentient humanoid, a malign and alien intelligence directs these parasites to begin consuming its flesh from within. They rapidly form a bestial larva that, if left to feed, will eventually become a lamenter.

Type: Parasite (umbral hemophages)

Transmission: Contact. 1d6 per contact with ooze or tainted blood

Infection Pool Max: 4d6

Infection Threshold: Charisma

Check Interval: 3 hours

Asymptomatic Carriers: N/A

TAKING PRECAUTIONS

Characters who use creativity to take precautions should be rewarded. Clever uses of spells and equipment can slow or prevent accumulation of dice in an infection pool, for example. However, unless using a spell that specifically removes all dice from an infection pool, it's recommended that you not let a character bring an infection pool below 1 die. Diseases are dangerous and insidious, and any amount of exposure should be considered a threat.

A creature that contracts umbral hemophages suffers from intense hunger—it feels compelled to eat a full day's rations every hour, gaining one level of exhaustion at the end of each hour it cannot eat. It also sweats profusely as its body temperature increases. At the end of each check interval, the infected creature must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution save or take 7 (2d6) necrotic damage; these hit points cannot be healed while the creature is still infected. If the infected creature fails three consecutive saves, an *umbral larva* erupts from its abdomen, dealing 21 (6d6) slashing damage and ending the infection but leaving the character with the *Spitting Blood* status from the Severe Injuries table, should it survive. The umbral larva also emerges from a creature that is reduced to 0 hit points or that dies from exhaustion. Three successful saves ends the condition, and the creature spends 1 minute vomiting out an immature larva that immediately dies.

Special Treatment. Taking radiant damage or being the recipient of a beneficial Channel Divinity power immediately causes the infected creature to succeed on a saving throw against the infection's progress.

For more on umbral larvae, see chapter 4, "Bestiary of the Borderlands."

So there we were—not a one of those Khadorans spoke a lick of Cygnaran, nor we Khadoran, but they let us into their outpost to wait out that frozen hell of the blizzard. Things were better after Henge Hold, you know? At dinner, they served us the same beet-slop they were eating, shared their vyatka with us, and it seemed to be going well. But this one red keeps giving us the stink-eye—right up until he started convulsing and his guts exploded. What came out—this worm-thing—scurried off. By morning, that had played out several more times, and the things got bigger. The rest of my unit, and all dozen Khadorans were either ripped apart or killed for suspicion of having a monster in them. So I found the powder magazine and blew that whole place straight to Urcaen.

*—Sgt. Lorna Hurst, 7th Trencher
Commandos "Howling Mawgs"*

BACKGROUND: BROTHERHOOD OF THE BLOODY SHROUD

If you travel with a Shroud, keep 'em safe. Better to have 'em happy and healthy when you catch a spot of the sniffles or get scratched by a 'mawg than to try to cure yourself with bad hooch and your momma's soup.

Affen Ashley

The following background is well-suited to a campaign with a focus on the treatment of illness and is offered in addition to those in *Iron Kingdoms: Requiem* and *Borderlands and Beyond*.

You are a member of the Brotherhood of the Bloody Shroud, a monastic sect of Morrowan alchemists devoted to studying the biological sciences and the eradication of disease. You might have lost a loved one to disease or are a survivor yourself. Whatever your calling, you follow in the footsteps of Ascendant Corben, who developed a cure to the rip lung epidemic. Shrouded Ones, as members are called, work tirelessly against the spread of disease in the Iron Kingdoms.

Ability Score Increase. Your Intelligence or Wisdom score increases by 1

Skill Proficiencies: Investigation, Medicine

Tool Proficiencies: Alchemist's supplies or a field alchemy kit, and choice of forensics kit or healer's kit

Languages: One of your choice

Equipment: A gas mask and two filters, alchemist's supplies, a talisman of Ascendant Corben, a small journal, a bar of soap, a set of common clothes, a priest's pack, and a pouch containing 10 gp

FEATURE: IMPECCABLE HYGEINE

Having seen the ravages of disease, you are always wary and careful. As a result, the infection threshold to contract a disease you or your party encounters increases by your proficiency bonus. Additionally, your experience with diseases makes it so that you receive a bonus to saving throws against disease equal to your proficiency bonus, whether or not you are proficient in saving throws for that ability.

SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

Shrouded Ones are practical individuals who trust in science, which they use to cure the sick and alleviate suffering. They tend to be reserved or even morose. Because they battle the unseen with science and alchemy, and often are not seen until a plague has befallen a community, they can easily be misunderstood.

d8 Personality Trait

- 1 I have a take-charge attitude, but I'm actually afraid that I'm unqualified to do what I do.
- 2 I have a purpose, and I find comfort in that.
- 3 I am fascinated by people and love to study their mannerisms and interactions.
- 4 I am direct and to the point. Life is too short for sugar-coated half-truths.
- 5 I have a solemn, quiet nature.
- 6 Science will save us—if we can throw off the chains of superstition and folk wisdom.
- 7 I strive to show compassion to others—even those who might not deserve it.
- 8 Sometime I'm a little too nice—I don't like to deliver bad news.

d6 Ideal

- 1 Science. The responsible use of science will better the world. (Lawful)
- 2 Responsibility. I have a responsibility to alleviate suffering in the world. (Good)
- 3 Truth. Our society must be preserved, even if it means the sick must be separated. (Lawful)
- 4 People. I believe people are worth preserving, not ideals or unfeeling laws. (Neutral)
- 5 Reason. Logic, not emotion, should guide my choices and actions. (Any)
- 6 Ruthlessness. Morality should not stand in the way of the pursuit of scientific knowledge. (Evil)

d6 Bond

- 1 I will discover a cure to the disease that killed the one I loved.
- 2 I owe everything to a mentor who saved me from death.
- 3 If the authorities found out about the “accident” then I might get put behind bars.
- 4 I cannot stand by when others are made to suffer.
- 5 I saved the life of someone who went on to do terrible things.
- 6 I constantly experiment with new herbs and substances.

d6 Flaw

- 1 My career creeps people out. I'm sure it's my career.
- 2 I am constantly washing my hands.
- 3 I am quick to anger when someone contradicts me on a scientific point.
- 4 The next Claiming will be a disease, and I must stockpile supplies before it's too late.
- 5 I see the bodies of people as machines, and I find it irritating when they don't defer to the judgment of a master mechanik like me.
- 6 Half the bottles in my alchemy kit are filled with liquor; I might have a problem.

CURING DISEASE MODIFICATIONS

Certain spells and features function differently when using the infection pool mechanics presented above. Since creatures with accumulated infection dice have not yet contracted a disease, even recipients of a lesser restoration spell might still become infected when making a threshold check. Consistent with other types of injuries or afflictions, the magic of western Immorten is not a universal fix-all, but more of a tool to be used with precision. Game Masters are encouraged to reward creative uses of resources, including magic (see the “Taking Precautions” callout on page 19).

If you would like your characters to face an even more challenging experience, use the alternative curing rules provided below.

SPELLS AND EFFECTS

Contagion Spell. No change—this spell affects only one creature and does not spread.

Greater restoration Spell. Add to the list of possible effects “potential diseases,” which removes all dice from all infection pools.

Any Other Effect. Characters can use spells and features to take precautions if they know they have been put at high risk of contracting a disease. Any spell or feature that cures a disease reduces the current infection pool of each disease the target is currently infected with by 1 die, but cannot remove the last die of the infection pool.



STRESS

Survivin' takes its toll, even on the hardest minds in the Iron Kingdoms. If you're stressed out, scared, and don't keep your wits, your mind can play tricks on you. Worse, it can make you forget what you know about how to survive and can make you do foolish things. Actin' the fool is a quick way to end up dead. Best to know when your mind starts to fray around the edges. Take some time, center yourself, and get back to bein' smart and makin' the right choices. Maybe drink some tea. Whatever helps you.

—Athen Ashley

Western Immoren bears deep scars—the ravages of centuries of war, an incursion of unspeakable horror, nightmares made flesh. The physical toll has been harsh enough, but the psychological scars endured by its citizens are just as deep. While many have healed these unseen wounds, many have not yet—and never will. And worse, these are burdens that most face alone. Where horrors tread, broken minds are left in their wake. Even the strongest of soldiers can be pushed past the breaking point.

Most major cities have sanitariums, hospitals specifically for those suffering from these afflictions. At best, they are staffed by well-meaning and competent professionals who wish to cure their charges; at worst, they are prisons where cruel overseers strip patients of identity and hide them from the world—or treat them as a menagerie for the amusement of those willing to pay a few pennies for admission. Such institutions are notorious for attracting grymkin, whose ranks swell with those whose minds have shattered—and those wicked enough to prey upon them.

STRESS POINTS

Stress points are a measure of a character's mental fatigue. They accumulate when a character is subject to things that are troubling: death, pain, fear, and creatures that embody those things. Time and rest will eventually reduce a character's stress, but some wounds last longer. And some experiences are so scarring they cause a person's mind to break on the spot. Either the player or the GM can keep track of a character's stress points. A GM should assign a stress point to a character for each of the following occurrences.

- Encountering a dragon, dragonblighted, undead, grymkin, or infernal with a CR equal to or greater than their level
- Gaining the frightened condition
- Witnessing the death of someone close
- Failing a saving throw for a fear-based spell
- Being reduced to 0 hit points
- Participating in a battle resulting in mass casualties
- Each day spent under duress (such as forced labor), with constant threats (in trenches during constant

PLEASE NOTE

These rules are intended to showcase how minds are affected by the trauma of war and encounters with incomprehensible horrors—they are not intended to encompass real-world mental illness or neurodivergence. Should you decide to include them in your Iron Kingdoms experience, recognize that these conditions are often suffered in silence and by more than many realize. We encourage you to include these in your game only if approached with compassion, never as a punchline. A quick search online should uncover resources for writers wishing to portray these conditions without romanticizing, stereotyping, or stigmatizing.

bombardment), in a harsh environment (being snowbound in a Khadoran winter, or on a ship constantly storm-tossed), or in complete solitude

- If compelled to act against their morals, such as through an enchantment spell
- Restoring a number of hit points greater than their safe healing limit in one day (see "Alternative Curing Rules" above)

A character who gains a number of stress points exceeding their proficiency bonus in a single encounter must succeed on a Wisdom or Charisma saving throw (whichever is higher) with DC 10 + the number of stress points acquired in the encounter or develop a minor affliction lasting for 1d6 minutes. The effect is determined and applied immediately.



d8 Minor Afflictions (1d6 minutes)

- 1 The character becomes panicked and must use their move action to move away from the area where the affliction occurred but can make a DC 15 Wisdom or Charisma saving throw at the end of their turn to end the effect.
- 2 The character has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks as they avoid unseen enemies.
- 3 The character is gripped with despair and becomes stunned but can make a DC 15 Wisdom or Charisma saving throw at the end of their turn to end the effect.
- 4 The character is afflicted with muteness and cannot speak or cast spells with verbal components.
- 5 The character has flashbacks. They cannot distinguish friend from foe and must use their action to attack the nearest creature but can make a DC 15 Wisdom or Charisma saving throw at the end of their turn to end the effect.
- 6 The character's skin is suddenly uncomfortable from imaginary burning or itching, and they have disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks but can make a DC 15 Wisdom or Charisma saving throw at the end of their turn to end the effect.
- 7 The character is convinced they have succumbed to a mortal wound. They go unconscious and fall prone but can make a DC 15 Wisdom or Charisma saving throw at the end of their turn to end the effect.
- 8 The character hears an overwhelming cacophony—perhaps voices, or extremely loud noise—and is deafened.

If a character gains a number of stress points in excess of twice their proficiency bonus in a single encounter, they must succeed on a Wisdom or Charisma saving throw (whichever is highest) with DC 10 + the number of stress points acquired in the encounter or develop a major affliction lasting 2d6 days. The effect is determined and applied immediately; if the character acquired a minor affliction earlier in the encounter, the minor one is replaced.

d8 Major Afflictions (2d6 days)

- 1 The character becomes lethargic and is treated as if affected by the slow spell.
- 2 The character becomes extremely averse to a thing or person nearby, as if under the effects of an *antipathy* spell toward it.
- 3 The character develops crippling suspicion of everyone and has disadvantage on all Wisdom ability checks.

4 The character becomes obsessed with a creature or thing nearby as if under the effects of a *sympathy* spell toward it.

5 The character has an irrational compulsion to do something, and their life depends on accomplishing that specific task. Treat as a *geas* spell with the instructions assigned by the Game Master.

6 The character is compelled to perform a brief act—making a religious sign, uttering a string of numbers, tapping a specific rhythm—each time they want to do something. In combat, the character must forfeit either an action, a bonus action, or a move action to satisfy this need.

7 The character refuses to bathe, resulting in disadvantage on all non-*Intimidation* Charisma checks and saving throws against disease.

8 The character develops an irrational fear of sunlight and will not venture out during the day without covering every inch of their body. The character has disadvantage on Dexterity and Charisma ability checks.

STRESS THRESHOLD

Each character has a **stress threshold** equal to the higher of their Wisdom or Charisma score plus their character level. Exceeding the stress threshold has severe repercussions. However, as a character accumulates experiences and develops greater awareness of the world, they build some mental resilience. Each week, a character reduces their stress points total by their proficiency bonus plus their Wisdom bonus (minimum 1).

If a character accumulates a number of stress points exceeding their stress threshold, they develop a long-term affliction (no saving throw). The effect is determined and applied immediately and persists until their stress points are equal to or lower than their stress threshold. A long-term affliction replaces an ideal, a bond, or a flaw. This alters their personality on a core level, and mechanical effects related to ideals, bonds, or flaws (such as gaining inspiration) are now tied to the new trait. If the character's stress points drop below their stress threshold, they may choose to restore the original trait or choose another appropriate one (with the GM's approval).

A character who accumulates a number of stress points in excess of twice their stress threshold gains another long-term affliction, and all stress points become locked in as trauma (see below). Return from this state is rare but not unheard of.

A NOTE ON CHARACTER ABILITIES

Some classes and subclasses have features that shield them from fear. However, they are not immune to stress. Afflictions described with panic and fear still affect them as described, since stress afflictions are based on the character's perception of the world, not on external forces trying to affect them.

D20 Long-Term Afflictions

- 1 (Bond) My very life depends on following the instructions delivered daily by a crow inhabited by an Orgoth spirit.
- 2 (Ideal) Civilization is a scourge. I cannot be in a city, and I must embrace my primal spirit.
- 3 (Flaw) An infernal visits me every night and implants me with an evil seed that I must dig out of my flesh each morning.
- 4 (Bond) Blight is growing within me. An agent of Blighterghast is targeting me, and I suspect someone close to me.
- 5 (Ideal) Everyone and everything in Caen wants what I have. I must protect it—preemptively, if necessary.
- 6 (Flaw) I have started to secretly commemorate my battles with a grisly trophy from each enemy, such as an ear or a finger.
- 7 (Bond) My shadow criticizes me harshly. Every time I accomplish something I feel I must justify my actions to it.
- 8 (Ideal) Infernals are looking for me specifically. Perhaps I can escape their notice by wearing someone else's face or hair.
- 9 (Flaw) My pursuit of perfection can make me practice something for hours upon hours, until dawn, my fingers are bloody, or I collapse from exhaustion.
- 10 (Bond) I have angered a water spirit—she is waiting for me to bathe to murder me. I will not allow her the opportunity.
- 11 (Ideal) Everything is a joke—a vile, bitter joke played on me by a malevolent force.
- 12 (Flaw) I have come to loathe the symbols of authority: flags, holy symbols, military insignia. When people are not looking, I spit on them—or worse.
- 13 (Bond) The specters of everyone I lost in the Claiming will continue following me around until I do a task for each.
- 14 (Ideal) Everything is futile; nothing matters. All goodness is but a dying gasp as the void claims us all.
- 15 (Flaw) I cannot help but steal something, however small, from each place I go.
- 16 (Bond) I have a friend and confidant who appears only to me. They offer...interesting advice.
- 17 (Ideal) There is a great conspiracy afoot—and I can prove it with these broadsheet clippings, spent shell casings, and rubbings of markings from walls. I must find the puppet master and kill them.

- 18 (Flaw) I am an archon in disguise and keep meticulous notes about the religious activities of those around me.
- 19 (Bond) There is a sniper following me, looking for a perfect shot. I must be extremely cautious.
- 20 (Ideal) If I start punishing the wicked, the grymkin will accept me as one of their own. Soon, I will rule over them all.

Every time a character suffers a minor or major affliction, one of the stress points becomes locked as trauma. Trauma cannot be removed through normal means; it lingers and reduces a character's capacity to handle more stress.

Stress points locked as trauma can be reduced in the ways listed below.

- A *greater restoration* spell unlocks a number of locked stress points equal to the caster's proficiency bonus.
- An *atonement* spell unlocks a number of locked stress points equal to the caster's proficiency bonus.
- A *calm emotions* spell suppresses the effects of trauma for the duration.
- Each uninterrupted week a character is cared for in a nonthreatening environment, the caretaker makes a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) ability check to reduce the character's trauma by 1.
- Each uninterrupted week a character spends in quiet reflection in a nonthreatening environment, they make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw to reduce their trauma by 1.
- Players, with GM approval, can voluntarily set a goal related to overcoming trauma and receive a reduction in trauma upon completion.
- Game Masters may reward players with a reduction in trauma as part of an adventure resolution, at their discretion.