



The Dzaqtas

The Dzaqtas plague is unlike anything the Zhodani have ever experienced. Until it was unwittingly unleashed on the world, the worst disease (**ziltokpa**) they'd ever had to deal with were fungal infections and opportunistic bacterial infections from wounds.

The rapid onset of the plague took the Zhodani by surprise. It infected everyone who came into contact with it, without exception, and mortality was nearly 100% in the earliest days.

Before the Dzaqtas, Zhdant was a highly industrialized society. At least half if not more of the population lived in or near an urban center. Cities became death zones as it burned through the population. First the medical infrastructure, then the food distribution systems, then the water processing all collapsed. Tens of millions died of the plague in the first few months, and many millions more died from starvation or violence in the chaos that followed.

Those living in the rural areas were spared, but only for a while. When the cities emptied from panic, those fleeing the Dzaqtas brought it with them. Wherever humans went, death followed.



Particularly fearsome was the manner in which it killed. Three stages of Dzaqtas infection have been recorded, in increasing levels of severity.

INCUBATION

The incubation period begins shortly after initial exposure. This stage lasts 1D+2 days. Symptoms are usually mild and may include coughing, headache, fever, sniffles, mild diarrhea. Some victims have no symptoms at all. Roll End 6+ each day; fail, and you proceed to stage 2, Sickness. Reduce all physical characteristics by -1 for the duration of this stage.

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SICKNESS

This is the first active stage of the Dzaqtas. Now you're in trouble. Symptoms include all of the above plus increasing diarrhea and delirium. It is not unusual to have bloody stools. Contact with any bodily fluids results in infection; airborne contact can also cause infection - roll End 6+ to avoid.

The victim may feel an uncontrollable desire to wander; this is not impeded by sleep. Sleepwalking plague carriers are common. Roll End 8+ each day of this stage. Success delays it for another day; failure means the disease has progressed to the third and final stage, Walking Dead. A critical success (12 on 2D) ends the progression; congratulations, you're safe, you survived the Dzaqtas. Reduce all physical characteristics by -2 and reduce Int by -1 for the duration of this stage.



WALKING DEAD

In the third and final stage of the Dzaqtas the victim appears alive, but in reality he's in the final stages. The victim's blood is no longer functioning and many organs have begun to shut down. Lesions begin to form on the skin; these break and release pathogen-laden blood and pus. In this phase, any contact with the victim will result in infection as the body sheds pathogen in aerosolized and liquid form. Even as the muscles deteriorate, the victim continues to wander, spreading the disease to new hosts. Delirium from hypoxia are the major symptoms. Yet even in this late stage, it is still possible to survive the Dzaqtas. Roll End 10+ each

day of this stage. Success delays death for another day; failure means the victim crashes and bleeds out. A critical success (12 on 2D) ends the progression. Lose 1 point from all physical and $\frac{1}{2}$ point from all mental traits per day spent in this stage. Reduce all physical characteristics by -3 and reduce Intelligence by 1D + 2 for the duration of this stage.

PSIONICS

The Psionic talents of Awareness, Healing, Empathic Healing or Vampyric Awareness can be used to cure the Dzaqtas at any phase. Characters trained in the psionic talents of Awareness, Healing, Empathic Healing, or Vampyric Awareness can also use their skills to detect the contamination; those with variations of Healing talent can then use their skills to eliminate it. See the **Psionics** section for more details.

Detect Dzaqtas in Food or Water: Awareness or Healing (any), Psi 8+, 1D minutes, Cost: 1

Purify Food or Water: Healing (any), Psi 10+, 1D minutes, Cost: 2

Reduce timing to 1D x 10 seconds if the psion has previously detected and/or purified the Dzaqtas plague.

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HISTORY

The information in this section is strictly for canonical historical reference. The Zhodani of the Dzaqtas era do not actually know anything about how the plague was created and functioned, only its effects as outlined previously. For purposes of game play, it is provided to give Referees an idea of how to implement it as a continuing threat in the game.

The Dzaqtas was designed as a biological weapon hundreds of thousands of years ago by the Ancients, a long-dead species that once commanded technology far beyond that known by any of the Traveller universe aliens. Though it appears to have been engineered specifically to eradicate the Viepchakts and Qiknavrats and is now known to be a bivalent weapon (having two distinct genotypes tailored specifically to the Zhodani Chirpers), it is also capable of infecting and killing other sapient creatures including Humans, though with reduced lethality.

The Dzaqtas passes through several distinct states during its infection cycle.

Dormant: In the state the Zhodani first discovered it, the Dzaqtas had lain dormant for nearly 300,000 years. In this state the disease can lie at rest for as long as it takes to find a suitable host. The dormant Dzaqtas rarely produces symptoms and can be spread unwittingly through casual contact, usually by airborne transmission or via bodily fluids (blood, mucus, or sexual contact). It is likely that the rapid progress of the plague was due to nearly every sophont resident on Zhdant and Viepchakl being infected with dormant Dzaqtas virus.

Active: Once the Dzaqtas finds a host it becomes active. This is when the previously detailed progression begins, with the victim getting increasingly ill until either the disease passes, or death occurs. In this state, the virus is at its most active, being infectious at every stage.

Spore: After the victim dies, the Dzaqtas remains virulent. Handling the dead or even breathing the air near them can lead to a new infection, starting the cycle again in a new victim. However, if the body is undisturbed and the contaminated fluids dry up, or if the body is burned, the virus forms a protective shell that is nearly impervious to any damage. These spores can be carried on wind or capture by flowing water to find new victims thousands of kilometers away, where they can return to the *dormant* state for years or even centuries until reinfesting a new host.

In this state the Dzaqtas is at its most dangerous, hiding among grains of dust or floating inert in pools of water. It can also be carried by “lower life forms” without harm, since it only targets sophonts.

