

PLANAR DISEASES

GMs know that hitting players hard can make them jump, but to truly get them quaking try infecting them with something! Fantasy heroes are well-equipped to deal with damage dealt by monsters, fireballs, or falling rocks. Recovering hit points is common and straightforward in most games. More importantly getting hit isn't usually dangerous in and of itself—only reaching 0 hit points has a real and visceral impact at the table.

Diseases tend to be unpleasant surprises and present a different kind of challenge, sometimes changing adventurers before a malady has run its course.



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This article takes that concept a step further with diseases from beyond the world of mortals. Most have debilitating effects that might sometimes have potential use, but more importantly they shake things around and make the party reconsider the dangers they might face in the future.

Note that just like planar travel itself, these diseases are more suited for higher-level PCs. While some can have effects that are relevant during combat most are designed with a wider-scope in mind, to be used as fun story elements or as a reminder that any dealing with the greater multiverse is dangerous and strange. Also remember that these ailments are not the result of bacteria or virus infection—but then again, who’s to say the germ theory of disease is true in all settings?

PLANAR DISEASES

Adverse Ascension

Being exposed to too much unfiltered godly glory is deadly to mortals, the simple matter of their flesh and their paltry souls too small to contain such radiance. The most common way to contract adverse ascension is by use of the *commune* spell, becoming afflicted once every time the caster does not receive an answer. A creature that takes radiant damage equal to triple its total Hit Dice from a celestial source can also cause affliction, but only if its alignment or beliefs are the same as those of the creature inflicting damage. For example, a lawful good paladin of 7th level that takes 21 or more damage from a planetar’s *flame strike* may become infected with adverse ascension.

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Any creature overexposed to the divine must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become infected with adverse ascension. In the first phase of adverse ascension the infected creature’s dreams and daydreams start featuring more of the deity’s aspects and iconography.

After 1d2+1 days of the disease’s first stage the infected creature must make a DC 12 Charisma saving throw or proceed to the second stage of infection, its alignment shifting one step toward the deity whose power it is infused with (or the god worshiped by the creature that caused the infection). On a success, the creature recovers from the disease.

At the end of each long rest, an infected creature must make a Charisma saving throw against a DC determined by infection stage (first stage DC 12, second stage DC 13, third stage DC 14). The saving throw is made with disadvantage if within the last 24 hours the infected creature witnessed divine spellcasting by any follower of the same deity as the one it is being drawn to.

On a success while suffering from the second or third stage of infection, the infected creature regresses to the previous stage of infection.

On a failure while suffering from the second stage of infection, the infected creature gains an ideal of, “All must know how great my deity is.” This can manifest in many ways, such as muttered whispered scriptures, or as proudly trying to convert everyone around, depending on the person. The infected creature begins to show a miraculous understanding of the Outer Planes that gives it advantage on Intelligence (Religion) checks. An infected creature that fails a second saving throw progresses to the third stage of adverse ascension.

On a failure while suffering from the third stage of infection, the infected creature can cast *shield of faith* once between rests. For the spell’s duration, the infected creature begins to gently fade into the Astral Plane as it is drawn to the divine. At the start of each of its turns, the infected creature makes death saving throws as if dying. The character still acts on its turn as normal but after three failures, the infected creature dematerializes into the heavens, never to be seen again. Other creatures can use the Help action to

grant the infected creature advantage on these saves by speaking encouraging words to it.

After a priest of the same or a similar faith has spent 7 days in one-on-one theology seminars with the infected creature, it makes a DC 12 Charisma saving throw, completely recovering from the disease on a success.

Fractured Rift Disorder

Every being is tied to the plane it is native to, both the realm's physical laws and the dimension's place in the multiverse. On rare occasions that connection can weaken, perhaps even be severed. Frequent travel beyond the Inner and Outer Planes dilutes a soul's tether to its original plane of existence. Spells such as *plane shift* and well-made portals are generally safe, allowing for a smooth transition between dimensions, but journeying by other means can have ill effects. Whenever a creature travels between planes using a naturally occurring portal or dangerous magical item (like a *well of many worlds*), it must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, it is infected with fractured rift disorder.

Whenever the infected creature suffers a level of exhaustion, its connection to the Material Plane is tested. The character makes a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or is teleported 1d20 feet away in a

random horizontal direction as its connection to the here and now shifts slightly.

Unless treated (see below) the rift continues to fracture and the infection worsens. At the end of every week during which creature with a basic or mild infection does more than rest, it must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the disease worsens. Consult the Fractured Rift Disorder table below. On a success, its infection reduces by one stage (from mild to basic, or basic to recovered).

All of this disease's effects manifest only while on the Material Plane.

Restoration and similar magic have no effect on fractured rift disorder since the problem can't be fixed with positive energy. Instead the infected creature needs to strengthen its connection to the world. A druid or similarly nature-oriented person can diagnose the disease with a DC 18 Intelligence (Nature) check and prescribe a long-term treatment, usually requiring a month of peaceful meditation in an ancient grove or cave at the end of which the infected creature recovers.

There are legends about living with fractured rift disorder as well, the most popular claiming that an old dwarven hero afflicted with it crafted a pair of magical iron boots to keep himself grounded.

FRACTURED RIFT DISORDER

Fracture Level	Cumulative Effect	Worsens on...
Basic	Make a DC 12 Constitution save after taking a level of exhaustion, or teleport 1d20 feet in a random direction.	Failing a DC 15 Constitution saving throw at the end of a week of adventuring.
Mild	Make a DC 12 Constitution save after scoring or taking a critical hit, teleporting 1d20 feet in a random direction on a failure.	Failing a DC 17 Constitution saving throw at the end of a week of adventuring.
Severe	Become ethereal (as the <i>blink</i> spell) whenever the infected creature rolls a natural 1 on a d20. Make a DC 12 Dexterity save to avoid dropping held items just before the transition.	Automatically worsens after several weeks unless spent resting.
Deadly	When the infected creature has been targeted by a magical effect that changes its form or location within the last round and it makes a Strength check, melee attack roll, or attacks with a thrown weapon, it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be transported to a random plane of existence.	—

Fey Longings

The Feywild is a wondrous realm, so enchanting that some start to long for it without ever having been there. After any personal, intimate interaction with a fey, a creature must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or contract this disease. Fey aware of this danger can take special precautions to prevent it using wards made from special plants and oils and though most know this, few care. Characters with fey ancestry (such as elves, gnomes, and half-elves) are immune.

It takes 1d4 days for the symptoms of fey longings to take hold. The infected creature begins to see fey wherever they look. At first it's the giggling sound of pixies just behind the next tree, but after several days it's not uncommon for the delusions to include being surrounded by thick vines, glistening psychedelic rains, or riding a colorfully-feathered frog (while in fact the infected creature might be tangled in ropes, showered in blood or standing on a swift-moving boat). While these vivid hallucinations are complete, they do not directly lead to a character being harmed or put into harm's way.

When the infected creature makes an opposed Wisdom (Insight) check or a Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check, it must make a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the character is charmed by one random creature it can see. This creature cannot be an ally of the infected creature. If there's no viable target, the character instead has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks as it sees and tries to interact with a world beyond the veil.

The best cure for fey longings is to bring the infected creature to the Feywild to interact with its denizens and environment. At the end of each day spent in the Feywild, an infected creature makes a DC 10 saving throw to recover from the disease. Otherwise fey longing naturally fades after a month.

Pastrasite

This chrono-active parasite is native to Limbo, a result of the ever-shifting environment in which even time is malleable. Unfortunately pastrasites are drawn to the Material Plane where the rigid temporal

structure of past, present, and future provides an excellent foundation to cling to, akin to a caterpillar climbing up and down a tree's bark. They are usually contracted in places of historical significance where they exist in a dormant state around the time of the event itself, looking into the future in search of visitors who have an especially interesting past—adventurers.

There's no certainty as to what a pastrasite looks like as they can only be detected by their symptoms. They never come in contact with the infected creature itself, instead consuming the character's background, subsiding on the temporal backlash that results when the timeline snaps back.

When a creature enters an area with pastrasites it must make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw as their psyche instinctively tries to maintain their personal timeline.

On a success, the pastrasite immediately retreats, choosing another creature to infect until there are none at which point it can no longer maintain its temporal existence, disappearing and leaving behind a strong sense of imminence within its would-be victims. For the next several hours these creature all have advantage on Intelligence checks made to recall information.

On a failure, the creature is infected with the disease. The pastrasite immediately destroys several years of the infected creature's past. If it has one, the character loses its background and gains a randomly determined background. This new background is now, and always has been, the infected creature's past. The character is vaguely aware of what happened with blurred recollection of things being somehow 'different' than before becoming infected. Only spells that contact other planes can reveal information from the infected creature's previous timeline. Most facts change as little as possible to remain consistent with the infected creature's new past, but some friction remains. Whenever an inconsistency between the old and new timelines is first spoken of in front of the character, it takes 10 (3d6) psychic damage.

The new timeline gradually settles, and the true past can only be restored through powerful magic

such as wish or miracle. Once a pastrasite has altered an infected creature's timeline, although its effects remain the creature recovers from the disease. Spells like remove disease or features like a paladin's Lay on Hands have no effect on pastrasites.

Spectral Thought-Worms

Spectral thought-worms are tiny parasitic creatures native to the Astral Plane. Their preferred habitat is a conscious mind where they subside on thoughts and ideals. When a creature interacts with the Astral Plane (via the astral projection spell or magic item mishaps) without the protection of a mind blank spell, or when it suffers prolonged exposure to the less stable areas of the Astral Plane's wild energies. Spectral thought-worms can also be carried along a detect thoughts spell, a telepathic connections, and similar effects. A creature exposed to a spectral thought-worm or an infected creature's mind must make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or contract the disease.

In 1d4 days the spectral thought-worm's symptoms manifest in an infected creature. The parasite infests the character's mind and eats the infected creature's identity, creating a mental space into which it will lay its eggs. An infected creature's background characteristics start changing. Roll 1d4 to determine what changes (personality trait, ideal, bond, or flaw) then re-roll the chosen characteristic. This is the infected

creature's new belief structure, which the character might not notice on its own. An infected creature that does not have these characteristics has its memories altered instead (as the *modify memory* spell).

When an infected creature finishes a long rest, it makes a DC 15 Charisma saving throw.

On a success, the character's mind fights against the spectral thought-worm and in the resulting struggle one of its characteristics change as above.

On a failure, the worm clears enough space to lay eggs that hatch in 1d4 days. These start eating the infected creature's personality, reducing its Charisma attribute by 1 until it reaches 0 and dies, at which point the spectral thought-worm escapes to the Astral Plane through the tiny planar opening created by the departing soul.

Spectral thought-worms are susceptible to psychic damage (thus their penchant to hide within minds as a shield against astral energies). When an infected creature is targeted by *lesser restoration*, or takes psychic damage equal to or more than its Charisma score, the parasite goes dormant for a week. A dormant spectral thought-worm is destroyed when the infected creature takes psychic damage equal to or more than its Charisma score. Upon destruction a spectral thought-worm dissolves into stray thoughts that are expelled throughout the next day as semi-insightful sayings that float through the character's mind. 🐛