



## **BHEL RATH, THE FLAYED KING**

In the times of the endless wars fought among the Monarchs of Altland, each sign of weakness was an opening for the strong to exploit. Even in the rare times of relative peace, all it took was a small misfortune to serve as a signal for others to break the peace and strike. It was common wisdom that a true monarch needs to project strength and resolution to their people and the world to maintain peace and sovereignty, lest you will be consumed by rivals.

King Bhelrath was no stranger to this wisdom. To project strength to his people and enemies alike, the King took to grand examples of uncompromising harshness. In public displays of brutality King Bhelrath would dispense retribution upon his foes. Flaying would prove to be a most effective method of execution, due to its gruesome spectacle and drawn out agony. The King felt no joy when issuing these executions, but no one could deny their effectiveness. The Kingdom of Bhelrath was feared across its neighbours and realms would go to great lengths to foster good relations to avoid the kingdom's wrath. But while Bhelrath was feared among his enemies, he enjoyed the trust and adoration of his people who saw him as a strict, but just ruler who provided peace and safety. Content with his position, the Kingdom of Bhelrath flourished for years to come.

Alas, it was the nature of the reverence that gave the King his power that would change him. As reverence stems not just from respect and adoration, it also is infused with fear and scorn. Due to the fostered image of a ruthless and cruel tyrant that the King projected towards his neighbouring Kingdoms, the number of souls believing him to be a merciless monster outweighed the number of his own subjects.

The change came slowly. It started with King Bhelrath finding a fascination for the bloodshed he ordered. Continuously he demanded to be the one to exact the sentences each flaying performed by the King would surpass the last one in depravity. He then decreed that the same methods he showed his foes would be extended to his people. These acts began to sway the balance of his image further, as his very people now feared him as well. This only proliferated the King's descent and his name became equal to the very idea of cruelty.

In his bloodlust, the King would seek reasons to exact his unique justice. Small sleights against the King in his court were seen as grave crimes, laws were tightened to unreasonable lengths, and raids against neighbouring lands were issued. Anything to fill his dungeons and for the bloodshed to never end.

And as the King's desire for torment and blood grew, so too his taste became more refined. To match his demands he built extensive halls underneath the castle's dungeon. A place where he could frivolously follow his passion for cruelty.

Trapped in this downward spiral by his obsession, the King was now the very monster he sought to project to his foes. But this monster would prove to be the downfall of his very own Kingdom and become a cautionary tale of the modern times.

### **THE FLAYING CURSE**

As the tragedy of King Bhelrath's tyranny was in full motion, an outsider arrived at the kingdom's capital; a witch of the wild and a daughter of the hag Ethel, With Spiders In Her Hair. The daughter knew the Kingdom from the time in which the ruler was just, and expected to meet him on behalf of her mother. When she was brought before the King she found no King anymore. All that was left was a monster bearing a King's skin.

The King was not interested in her proposition. The only thing he could see in her was skin yearning to be released from its flesh. The daughter warned the King to not harm her, lest he would feel the wrath of her mother. But the King was deaf to her warnings and had her led to his sanctum underneath his castle. Within his crimson halls, the King would flay the daughter like the rest.

Ethel's fury struck the Kingdom at the next full moon. Her curse consumed the King, his court, and his castle. King Bhelrath would suffer the same pain that he and his decrees had inflicted upon others. Every moment, every heartbeat of suffering would have to be reexperienced by the King, one at a time, as the King's very skin peeled away. The Hag took his skin and until the King had not served his sentence, the curse would bind him to the crimson halls that witnessed the most deprived of the King's acts.

The King's now exposed flesh burned with the lifetimes of suffering he had inflicted. And as his court and knights were bound to him, they too, were ravaged by the curse, each of them flayed and subjected to an existence of suffering. The cursed castle was now a den of creeping horrors that converged around their fallen King. Without a rightful monarch to lead, the Kingdom of Bhelrath would soon fall as the neighbouring realms had no King to fear anymore. The only thing that would be left from the once proud kingdom was a single, decrepit castle, brought low by the Flaying Curse.



### SPREADING THE CURSE

Experiencing entire lifetimes of agony flung the cursed King Bhelrath into delirium that flayed any shed of humanity the King once had and the legend of the Flayed King is all that remains. The only relief the King could find from the pain, or at least so he thought, was the touch of skin upon his flayed body. The poor unfortunate servants that were trapped within his castle became his prey. Soon though the King found himself out of skins after salvaging all that he could. Skins would rot away, while he and his agony would remain. The King tried to break the curse again and again with all of his regal power, but it was to no avail. Too much of his once magnificent power had left him, as reverence faded long ago and changed to an image of a defeated monarch.

While the King was unable to break the curse, he learned more about it and was able to change parts of its nature, with a malicious goal to either end the curse or himself in due time. It is not known whether the King was aware of the conditions of his curse. It was uncertain whether he was aware that his actions would just add more to the suffering he had to bear to be free from the curse. Too great was the agony for the King to endure any longer. The King split his curse to be spread from beyond his castle to the world outside and the Flaying Curse was released.

### EXCORIATED ONES

The pitiful wretches that slither in the dark corners of the accursed Castle of Bhelrath were once noble servants who failed their King. Even before the curse befell the King and his castle, Bhelrath at the height of his tyranny had little patience for failure. The King used his acquired proficiency of flesh forming and flaying to decimate courtiers in gruesome examples. This practice ran rampant within the castle once the curse arrived, as the King in his delirium saw anyone's presence with a whole body of skin as a grave insult to his changed form.

One would expect an excoriated one to harness hatred for their monarch, but as they were spineless sycophants in life, in this decrepit form they too yearn for nothing more than to return into their king's good graces. Desperate, they throw themselves at all intruders with fleeting bravado, hoping that their service could make the king restore their old noble self.

The curse preyed upon their desperation and desires for success, causing them to fall into agonizing pain and intense tantrums at any failure to re-earn their good graces.

### EXCORIATED ONE

*Small undead, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 16 (3d8 + 3)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	5 (-3)	7 (-2)	13 (+1)

**Proficiency** +2

**Skills** Perception +0, Stealth +5

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 10

**Languages** Understands Common but can't speak

**Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP)

**Agonizing Failure.** If the excoriated one misses both attacks of its multiattack or misses its corrupting touch attack, it takes 5 psychic damage.

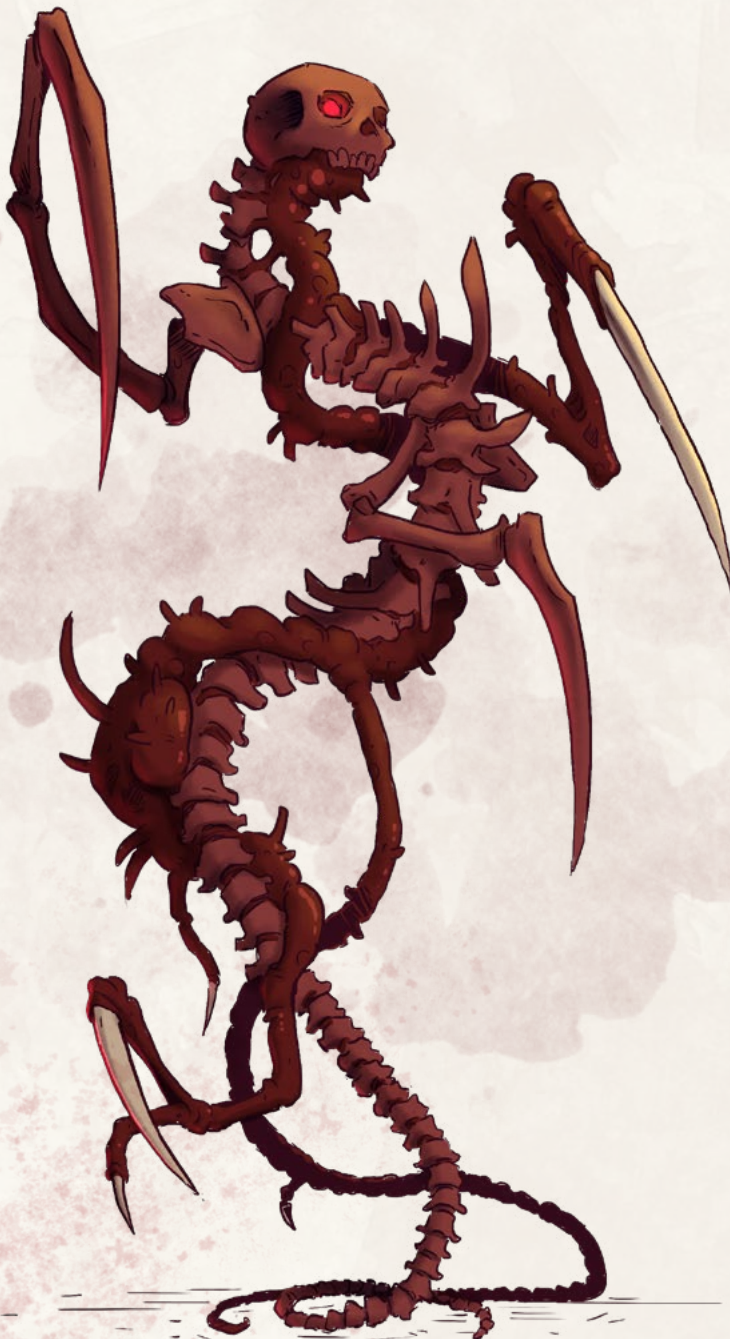
**Fleeting Conviction.** As long as the excoriated one is not missing hit points, it has advantage on Wisdom and Charisma saving throws.

#### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The excoriated one makes two attacks with its scythe claws.

**Scythe Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6+3) piercing damage.

**Corrupting Touch.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) necrotic damage and the creature must succeed a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or be afflicted by the Flaying Curse.





## BLEEDING KNIGHTS

The stalwart knights of Bhelrath were renowned warriors and feared for their ruthless efficiency by their foes. The knights only knew absolute victory with any semblance of resistance destroyed. Anyone that stood against them would be vanquished and made a gruesome example for others, as was the decree of their King. So feared were the knights that the mere announcement of their deployment would cause entire cities to surrender in droves to avoid suffering a bloody conquest by their hands.

The knights of Bhelrath, as all knights, are tied to their King. When their King was afflicted with the curse, so were they. Due to their bond with their armor, the knights had no skin to be flayed. As a result the Flaying Curse turned towards the knights' innards and liquified them. The wrecked bodies of the knights are only held together by their armor like a carapace. Crimson blood continuously escapes the armor where it is chipped, only to immediately coagulate and mend the knights' carapace.

Though nothing of their noble form remains, the wracked knights are still fiercely loyal to their King. These fallen knights patrol the castle and surrounding ruins in constant vigil of would-be invaders. Much of Bhelrath's Kingdom had fallen to the enemies, but the castle would remain. That is the bleeding knights' creed.

### VARIANT: BLOODLETTER KNIGHT

A few selected knight of the court were initiated in the sadistic art of torture by the King. The wickedness of these knights made them a host for the Flaying Curse.

A bloodletter knight has 85 (10d8 + 40) hit points and access to the the following additional action:

**Exsanguate (recharge 5-6).** The bleeding knight impales itself with its weapon and sprays its corrupted blood in a 15 ft. cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save a creature takes 28 (8d6) necrotic damage and contracts the Flaying Curse. On a successful save a creature takes half as much damage and is not afflicted by the curse.

A bloodletter knight has a **Challenge** of 4 (1,100 XP).

## BLEEDING KNIGHT

Medium aberration, neutral evil

**Armor Class** 16 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 59 (7d8 + 28)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	11 (0)	19 (+4)	5 (-3)	11 (0)	8 (-1)

**Proficiency** +2

**Skills** Perception +4

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Damage Condition Immunities** charmed, frightened, exhausted

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 14

**Languages** Understands Common but doesn't speak

**Challenge** 3 (700 XP)

**Clotting Armor.** When the bleeding knights starts its turn with more than 0 hit points and lost hit points since the beginning of its last turn, it gains 5 temporary hit points.

**Cursed Blood.** A creature that consumes or handles the blood of the bleeding knight is exposed to the Flaying Curse (DC 14).

**Death Throes.** When the bleeding knights dies it spatters blood wildly. Each creature within 5 ft. of the bleeding knight must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save a creature takes 7 (2d6) necrotic damage and contracts the Flaying Curse, on a successful save the creature takes half as much damage and is not cursed.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The bleeding knight makes two greatsword attacks and uses Corrupting Gore.

**Greatsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6+4) slashing damage.

**Corrupting Gore.** A creature within 5 ft. of the bleeding knight must succeed a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.





## PRIEST OF RAT'S FEAST

Representatives of the clergy were no strange sight in King Bhelrath's court. As it was common practice, the priests were spiritual advisors and assured the King's adherence to the Monarch's Virtues. It was not rare for the priesthood to object to King Bhelrath's harsh practices, but as they were targeted at the Kingdom's foes they would relent sooner or later.

Clashes with the priesthood became frequent though when the King descended into his cruelty and extended his methods to his people. The King's scorn for the priesthood grew, as they attempted again and again to deny him to indulge in bloodshed. These tensions came to a head when the King had the entire clergy of his court seized. The King had the priests fed to the dungeon's rats, but not before peeling their skin to allow the rats easy access to the tender flesh. The priests were consumed by the voracious rats in an unprecedented act of the King's malice.

When the Flaying Curse took hold of the castle, the hag's magic changed and mutated the dungeon's rats for within their bodies and blood lingered the priest's grudge and agony. The vermin formed accursed rat kings that carried the priests disdain, despair, and pain experienced in their final moments.

These monstrosities prowl upon anything lost within the castle's dungeons, may it be servants of the King, knights, or unaware explorers.

## PRIEST OF RAT'S FEAST

Large aberration (shape changer), chaotic evil

**Armor Class** 13

**Hit Points** 104 (11d10 + 40)

**Speed** 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	19 (+4)	5 (-3)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)

**Proficiency** +3

**Skills** Perception +6, Religion +3

**Damage Resistances** necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, slashing  
**Damage Condition Immunities** charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 16

**Languages** Understands Common but doesn't speak

**Challenge** 6 (2,300 XP)

**Accursed Mass.** A creature that touches the priest, hits it with a melee weapon attack while within 5 ft. of it, starts its turn in the priest's space, or enters the priest's space the first time in a turn must succeed a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be cursed for one minute. A cursed creature subtracts 1d4 from any ability check, attack roll, or saving throw. A cursed creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turn, but does not subtract 1d4 from the save.

**Shapeless Form.** The priest is a shape changer and can move through and occupy other creature's spaces and vice versa. The priest can move through any opening large enough for a tiny beast.

**Spider Climb.** The priest can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

**Vermin Mastery.** The priest can communicate with rats, giant rats, labyrinth rats, and rat swarms.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The priest of rat's feast makes 2 bite attacks.

**Bites.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.

**Grudgefilled Bolt.** *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, range 60 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 22 (4d10) necrotic and the next attack roll targeting the creature before the end of the priest's next turn has advantage.

**Rat Feast.** The priest of rat's feast makes a bite attack against each creature in its space. Each creature that is hit is exposed to the priest's accursed mass.

**Spellcasting.** The priest's casts one of the following spells, using Wisdom as the spellcasting ability (Spell save DC 14) and without material components:

1/day: *Bestow Curse*



Artwork by Ben Fleuter & DM Tuz



## THE FLAYING CURSE

A humanoid creature can be afflicted by the Flaying curse by a variety of means. Infection by fighting the courtiers in and outside of Castle Bhelrath, ingestion of corrupted blood, or exploration of Castle Bhelrath can all lead to an affliction of the curse.

The Flaying Curse is a growing curse, starting at stage 1 and progressing to stage 5, each stage representing a more severe state of the curse. Commonly when a creature becomes afflicted with the Flaying Curse, it starts at stage 1. A creature suffering from the Flaying Curse rolls a Constitution saving throw at the dawn of every morning. The DC for the saving throw is equal to the saving throw rolled when the creature initially contracted the curse. On a successful save, the curse does not progress and remains at the current stage. On a failed save the curse progresses to the next stage and the new effects of the curse are immediately effective. Each mechanical effect from the previous stage of the curse's progression still affects the creature at later stages until the creature is cured or dies.

**Stage 1.** The afflicted creature's skin shows spots of irritation and discoloration. The creature experiences discomfort and itching. This will cause the creature to scratch itself at a high frequency, causing sore spots or even bleeding to occur on some parts of its body. At this point of the curse, the creature suffers from no additional effects.

**Stage 2.** The afflicted creature's skin begins to become loose on its flesh. Some spots of skin, especially in the face area, appear drooping while the itching and discomfort intensifies, to the point that the creature feels like parts of its skin do not belong. These parts of skin are veiny and are sensitive to the touch. The creature's entire skin breaks easily, causing the creature to be covered in many scabs due to the itching. A creature at this stage of the curse has disadvantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks if the other party can see the creature, due to the cursed creature's unsettling appearance and involuntary scratching. Additionally, because of involuntary self harm, the creature takes damage equal to its character level (or hit dice) when it finishes a long rest. This damage cannot be prevented, but can be healed.

**Stage 3.** A singular line of irritated skin begins to manifest over the cursed creature's entire body. Some parts of this discolored skin features bloody scabs along the line. The creature's hair begins to fall out and its fingernails bleed frequently. The cursed creature's body becomes frail. Its maximum hit points are reduced by an amount equal to the creature's character level (or hit dice). Greater Restoration can reduce the lost hit point maximum for 24 hours or until the creature finishes a long rest.

**Stage 4.** The red line along the creature's body is pronounced and constantly bleeding. Some parts of the creature's skin are peeling off along the line, causing heavy bleeding. The creature's entire body is now incredibly sensitive and touching can cause excruciating pain to the creature. The creature's hair and fingernails have fallen off the creature and no longer grow. Whenever the creature takes damage it has disadvantage on the next ability check or attack roll it makes before the end of its next turn.

**Stage 5.** The cursed creature's skin peels itself off as it splits open along the red line on its body and magically takes flight towards Castle Bhelrath, leaving behind the creature completely flayed. The creature must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save the creature immediately dies of shock. On a successful save the creature is reduced to 1 hit point and is left without skin. No spell short of regeneration or wish can restore its skin. Until the creature's skin is recovered or the curse is broken, the creature must whenever it takes damage succeed a Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn. The DC is equal to 15, or half of the damage taken, whichever is higher.



## TREATING THE CURSE

- While the Flaying Curse is at stage 1 and 2, it can be broken with the use of the *Remove Curse* or *Wish* spell. Once the Flaying Curse moves to stage 3 and beyond, the spell *Remove Curse* can only break the spell when a creature expends a 5th level spell slot in addition to casting the spell and uses a white pearl that is worth 1000 gold as additional material component, which the spell consumes. At stage 5, the curse can only be broken if the lost skin is reattached to the creature, or its skin has been restored by other means.
- A creature can also break the curse by transferring it. To do so the creature must use the entirety of a humanoid's skin that has been removed no longer than 24 hours ago and etch a hag incantation into the new skin. The curse will then transfer to the skin and it will fly off to Castle Bhelrath. A character can learn the secret incantation to transfer the curse from a hag, or another source of occult knowledge.
- The Flaying Curse of any creature suffering from it will immediately break if the Flayed King is slain.



# THE FLAYED KING

Large aberration, chaotic evil

**Armor Class** 17 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 210 (20d10 + 100)

**Speed** 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)

**Proficiency** +5

**Saves** Str +10, Con +10, Wis +6, Cha +9

**Skills** History +8, Intimidation +9, Medicine +8, Perception +6

**Damage Resistances** necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed

**Senses** truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 16

**Languages** Common, Celestial, Infernal

**Challenge** 16 (15,000 XP)

**Bolstering Reverence.** The Flayed King gains 14 (4d6) temporary hit points at the beginning of his turn.

**Reverence Armament.** The Flayed King's attacks are magical and deal an additional 9 (2d8) necrotic damage (included in the attack). Additionally the Flayed King can use a bonus action to summon the Scepter of Bhelrath into his hand.

**Skin Cloak.** Attacks made with the Flayed King's skin cloak can not be impacted by disadvantage and can't gain advantage.

**Legendary Resistance (3/Day).** If the Flayed fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

**Innate Spellcasting.** The Flayed King's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 18, +8 to hit). The King can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *Bestow Curse*, *Command*, *Detect Evil and Good*, *Detect Magic*, *Sending*, *Thaumaturgy*  
1/day: *Geas*

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The Flayed King uses makes three attacks; two with its Scepter of Bhelrath, and one with his Skinning Claw.

**Scepter of Bhelrath.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10+5) bludgeoning damage plus 9 (2d8) necrotic damage.

## LAIR: THE CRIMSON HALLS

The Crimson Halls were constructed by King Bhelrath to be his private torture chamber. There he could explore his new found fascination with inflicting pain and suffering upon others undisturbed. The halls are a maddening expanse of crooked architecture. Spiked pillars and instruments of sadistic design are found within the blooddrenched halls that are still echoing with the screams of the King's victims.

## LAIR ACTIONS

When fighting the Flayed King in his Crimson Halls, the Flayed King can take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the Flayed King takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects:

**Call Sycophants.** The Flayed King summons 2d4 Excoriated ones (they arrive at the entrance of the area). They roll for initiative and use a reaction to move up to their speed.

**The King's Will.** The Flayed King casts *Command* targeting all creatures of his choice within the Crimson Halls.

## Forgotten Foes: The Flayed Court

**Scepter of Bhelrath (Ranged).** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d8) necrotic damage.

**Skinning Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6+5) slashing damage plus 9 (2d8) necrotic damage and if the target is a creature, it must succeed a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or is afflicted by the Flaying Curse. A creature that fails the saving throw by 5 or more is afflicted with the Flaying Curse at stage 2.

**Flaying Wave (Recharge 5-6).** The Flayed King unleashes a condensed wave of the curse that afflicts his body. Each creature within a 30 ft. cone originating from the Flayed King must make a DC 18 saving throw. On a failed save the creature takes 54 (12d8) necrotic damage and half as much on a successful one. A creature killed by this damage is immediately flayed. A creature afflicted by the Flaying curse makes the saving throw with disadvantage and on a failed save the curse progresses to the next stage.

**Skin Cloak.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) necrotic damage.

## LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The Flayed King can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Flayed King regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

**Move.** The Flayed King moves up to half of his speed without provoking opportunity attacks. If the Flayed King rides the crimson orb he flies up to half of his flying speed without provoking opportunity attacks instead.

**Skin Cloak.** The Flayed King attacks with his skin cloak.

**Relentless Claw (2 Actions).** The Flayed King moves up to his speed towards a creature the Flayed King missed with his Skinning Claw attack since the beginning of his last turn and makes a Skinning Claw attack against it.

**Proliferate Curse (2 Actions).** The Flayed King forces a creature afflicted with the Flaying Curse within 20 ft. of himself to make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save the creature's curse progresses to the next stage.

**Crimson Orb (2 Actions).** The Flayed King conjures an orb of blood and rides on it. Each creature within 5 ft. of the King must succeed a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. The King flies up to 20 ft. as part of this action and gains a flying speed of 60 ft. until the end of his next turn.

**Crimson Flood.** A flood of corrupted blood flows through the bloodsoaked halls. Each creature in contact with the ground must succeed a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or take 9 (2d8) necrotic damage and contract the Flaying Curse.

**Tortured Echos.** The tortured echoes of the King's past victims sound with intensity in a 20 ft. radius centered on a space anywhere within the crimson halls. Each creature within the area must succeed on a DC 18 saving throw. On a failure a creature has disadvantage on all ability checks and attack rolls until the end of its next turn. A creature that is immune to being frightened succeeds the saving throw automatically.

## EFFECTS

The Crimson Halls are the nexus of the Flaying Curse spread. Mere proximity to this accursed area has ill effects on creatures:

- A creature that finishes a long rest within Castle Bhelrath contracts the Flaying Curse (DC 13).
- Each saving throw a creature makes against the growth of the Flaying Curse at dawn has its DC increased by 2.



**LORE, CONCEPT, GAME DESIGN**

DM TUZ

**ADDITIONAL WRITING & EDITING**

J. ALICE BOWN

**ARTWORK**

DM TUZ (COLORING) & BEN FLEUTER (INKS)

**GUEST ARTIST - BEN FLEUTER**



Ben Fleuter is a US Webcomic Artist (Derelict, Sword Interval). If you enjoyed his contribution to this content update, consider following him on social media and perhaps support him on Patreon. He wrapped up his latest Webcomic [Sword Interval](#) this year and is going to launch his next webcomic later this year!

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