

TOOTH AND CLAW

Poisoned Pages for Shadow of the Demon Lord

We all wear masks. We wear them to conceal our true selves, to become what others expect us to be, navigating the murky waters of social interaction to forge relationships, find love, and avoid enemies. For most of us, masks conceal uncertainties and doubts, ambitions and desires, and all the little secrets that make up what we think of as our true selves. For a few, masks conceal darkness, a dangerous beast just barely restrained by the chains of self-control. Sometimes, the chains break, the mask slips, and the horror begins.

Skinchangers in *Shadow of the Demon Lord* encompass a variety of shapeshifting creatures, from werewolves to ratmen and everything in between. The animal form a skinchanger adopts can be anything you need it to be without having to alter anything other than how it's described.

For Game Masters, this approach provides a great deal of freedom, but from the perspective of players, especially those who contract the Skinchanger Curse, a bit more information can be helpful.

This entry into the Poisoned Pages series takes a closer look at skinchangers, revealing their secret origins, how they spread their curse, and everything else you need to know to play a skinchanger character. Unleash the beast inside you and bark at the moon!

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SKINCHANGERS

All kinds of creatures can adopt different forms. Students of Primal magic and Transformation magic can become animals, clouds of mist, or even other people. Changelings can mask their natural appearance with the guise of a person they observe. Hideous broodlings can become clouds of biting and stinging insects, while nisse can balloon into giants. The most notorious of the shapechanging creatures, however, are the skinchangers, sometimes called weres, scions of the Horned Lord, or lycanthropes.

What sets the skinchangers apart from other shapeshifters is that they all bear a weighty curse. The source of their affliction's origin varies with the telling, as revealed below, but in all cases it causes a beast to come forth, transforming the skinchanger into a wild and dangerous animal, or, sometimes something in between. The forms skinchangers take vary wildly, from wolves to leopards, ravens to rats, and just about everything else in between. If it walks, crawls, slithers, swims, or flies, somewhere in the world, there's a skinchanger that can adopt its form.

THE CURSE

The skinchanger curse has haunted the mortal peoples since they first spread across Rûl, leaving the stories about where it came from unreliable at best. However, the dominant religions have some of the most accepted explanations. Devotees of the Old Faith believe the Horned Lord laid the curse on mortals who poached sacred animals in his grove, causing those people to become the beasts they had slain. The Inquisition of the New God's cult claims the skinchanger curse is one more manifestation of the corruption on the mortal soul, indicating a sullied heart and diseased mind. All servants of the gods count skinchangers as dangerous foes that can spread their vile curse to their followers.

Not all view skinchangers as a menace. Among the Woad, a wild, nomadic people that live in and around the Empire, skinchangers within their ranks are believed to be favored by their tribe's patron spirit. That members of the tribe can sometimes adopt animal forms matching the spirit supports their claim, though even the Woad admit the rapacious, bloodthirsty skinchangers found outside their tribes are dangerous, possibly estranged kin driven mad by the loss of their custom and society.

All of these stories could be true, but in all likelihood, the curse's origin probably belongs to the faeries. Many early encounters between the mortals and immortals were peaceful, even supernatural given that the gods of the Old Faith bear a striking resemblance to many of the great fey who now rule over the hidden kingdoms, yet many encounters

ended in violence, clashes that ultimately contributed to the faeries decision to abandon the mortal world. Leaving a curse to transform their enemies into wild, destructive animals who preyed on other people is just the sort of vengeance angry faeries might concoct.

PASSING THE CURSE

Curses usually affect only the person on whom they are bestowed. In other words, they're not infectious. Once you become cursed, you remain so until you find a way to lift it. The skinchanger curse is the big exception to the rule, however, as skinchangers can bestow it onto creatures they scratch or bite. Any living, mortal creature that becomes injured or incapacitated from damage dealt by a skinchanger's natural weapons is at risk of gaining the skinchanger curse.

In addition, the curse can pass from one generation to the next. This is especially true for people with strong ties to the faerie or who live in or near lands steeped in faerie magic. Sometimes the curse passes directly from father to son, mother to daughter, or might wait one or more generations before a descendant discovers she carries the curse when, one night, she transforms in the light of the moon.

THE EFFECTS OF THE CURSE

The effects of becoming cursed by a skinchanger do not usually reveal themselves right away. The cursed creature often goes several days or weeks unaware of what will happen when the moon next rises full, although cravings for raw meat, fascination with the moon, and strange dreams of running with rats, wolves, or roaming about the wilderness under the cover of night are all common warning signs that something is wrong. Once the moon rises full, the cursed creature undergoes a painful transformation, joints popping, skin sliding, fur or feathers bursting from the pores until the victim becomes an animal in body and mind. This lasts until the moon sets, at which point the curse fades and the creature returns to its normal form, likely covered in blood, dirt, and grass stains. Henceforth, each time the moon rises full, the skinchanger transforms, and its mind shatters a bit more until it eventually becomes the monster it fears lurks within.



LIFTING THE CURSE

A few remedies exist for those who become enslaved to the moon. The best and most certain is to find the skinchanger responsible for passing the curse and kill it with a weapon made from silver. When the creature dies, the curse lifts from each creature to whom it was passed, but only from those who had not themselves passed the curse onto others.

Magic can also lift the curse. The *remove curse* spell from the Protection tradition (see *Terrible Beauty* for this spell) has a chance to remove it. The caster must cast the spell on a target while it is in its animal or hybrid form. The target instantly returns to its normal, humanoid form, but the next time the moon rises full, the target must make a Will challenge roll. A success indicates the curse was removed successfully, while a failure indicates the attempt fails, and the target transforms as normal.

Finally, belladonna, known also as wolfsbane, might lift the curse. An uncommon herb commonly sold for 1d6 cp by apothecaries and some witches, it must be administered as a tincture once each day for seven nights leading up to the full moon. Consuming the tincture causes the creature to take 1d6 damage and become poisoned until it completes a rest. However, when the full moon rises, the creature can make a Will challenge roll with 1 boon. On a success, the curse is lifted.

SKINCHANGER CHARACTERS

Skinchangers, like vampires, tend to be adversaries and their presence in a group can be disruptive, at least until the skinchanger gains some control over the curse. If permitted in the campaign, you can either create a skinchanger from scratch or become a skinchanger after contracting the curse.

STARTING ANCESTRY

The skinchanger curse affects only living, mortal creatures such as humans, dwarfs, fauns, halflings, and orcs. Other ancestries might also produce skinchangers at the GM's discretion, but such ancestries must be living and not created by magic—so no vampires, clockworks, or changelings.

You can create a new skinchanger character by first creating a character that belongs to a permitted ancestry. Once you finish, apply the following adjustments, traits, and talents to the character. You also apply them to a character who becomes a skinchanger in play.

SKINCHANGER TRAITS

Attribute Scores Increase Strength by 1 and decrease Intellect by 1.

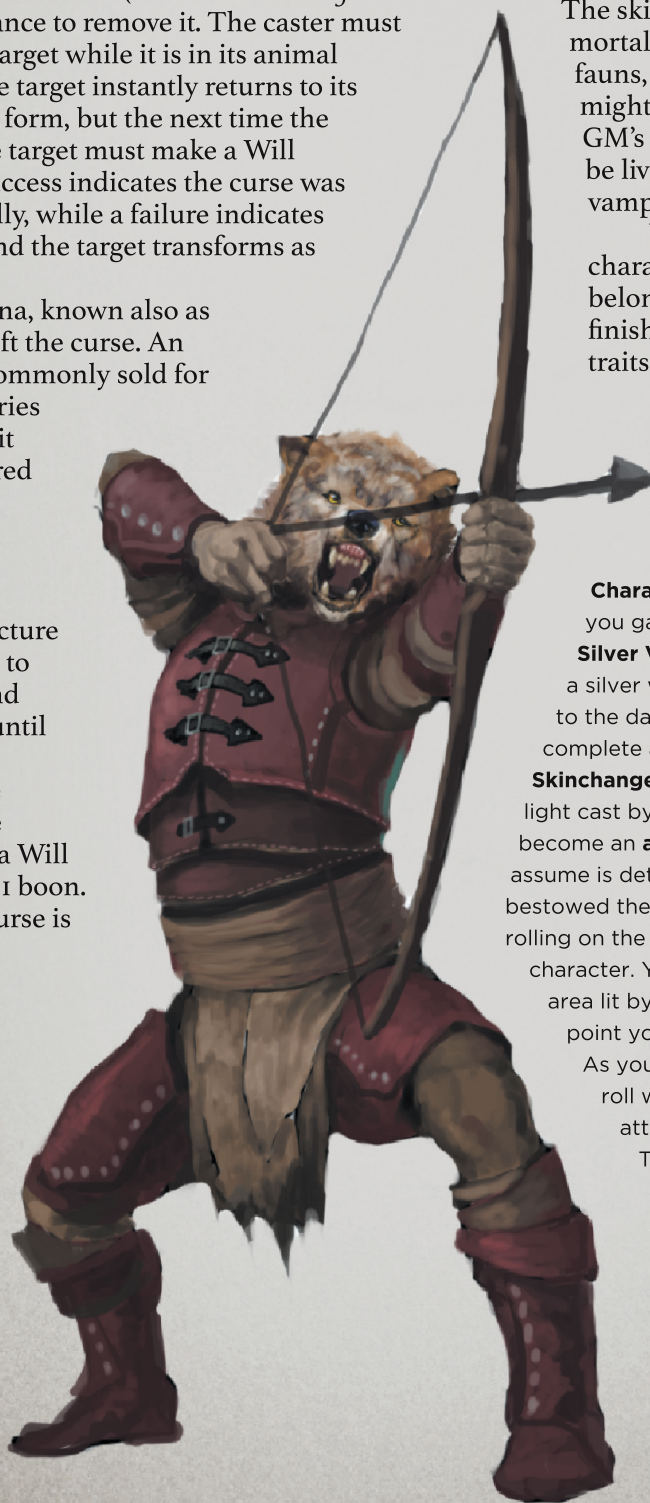
Characteristics Increase Perception by 1. As well, you gain 1d3 Insanity and 1 Corruption.

Silver Vulnerability When you take damage from a silver weapon, you take a penalty to Health equal to the damage. The penalty remains until after you complete a rest.

Skinchanger Curse If you are in an area illuminated by light cast by a full moon at the end of the round, you become an **animal**. The kind of animal whose form you assume is determined either by the skinchanger that bestowed the curse if you gained it during play or by rolling on the Animal Form table when you create your character. You remain in this form until you are in an area lit by sunlight at the end of any round, at which point you immediately return to your normal form.

As you transform, you must make a Will challenge roll with 3 banes. For each level your group has attained, make the challenge roll with 1 boon.

Thus, if your group level is 1, you make the challenge roll with 2 banes. You control your character on a success, and the GM takes control of your character until you return to your normal form on a failure. Under the GM's control, you behave as a vicious animal. In either case, you use the animal's statistics in place of your own, though if you got a success on the Will challenge roll, you use your Intellect and Will scores in place of the animal's.



When you cause a living creature to become injured or incapacitated by an attack made with your natural weapons, that creature must get a success on a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane the next time it's in an area lit by a full moon or it too becomes a skinchanger.

Upon returning to your normal form, you must make a Will challenge roll with 1 bane. On a failure, you gain 1d3 Insanity.

LEVEL 4 EXPERT SKINCHANGER

Characteristics As your base ancestry.

You either learn one spell, gain the level 4 benefit from your ancestry, or gain the Change Form talent.

Change Form You can use an action, or a triggered action on your turn, to adopt your normal form, your animal form, or a hybrid of your animal and humanoid forms. You remain in the new form until you use Change Form again or you become incapacitated, which causes you to return to your normal form immediately. The animal form must be the same as the form you adopt when under the effects of your Skinchanger Curse. If you adopt an animal form, use the animal's statistics in place of your own, except you retain this talent and your Intellect and Will scores. If you adopt a hybrid form, you make the following adjustments to your statistics.

- You gain the frightening (see Shadow, page 214) and shadowsight traits if you don't have them already.
- You gain a +2 bonus to Perception, a +2 bonus to Defense, +10 bonus to Health, and a +2 bonus to Speed.
- You make Strength and Agility attack rolls and challenge rolls with 1 boon.
- You gain Regeneration, allowing you to heal 1d6 damage at the end of each round if not incapacitated.
- You have natural weapons as appropriate to your animal form—teeth, claws, horns—that function as basic weapons with the finesse property and deal 1d6 damage.

SKINCHANGER TABLES

The following tables help explain how you came by the curse if you are creating a new skinchanger rather than becoming cursed in play.

CURSE ORIGINS

d6	Result
1	You were cursed by magic after offending a faerie, devil, or an evil witch.
2	You inherited the curse from one or both of your parents.
3	A distant ancestor was a skinchanger, but the curse lay dormant in your bloodline until it reached you.
4	You became cursed after barely surviving a skinchanger attack.
5	Someone you knew contracted the curse and passed it onto you the first time they changed.
6	You have no idea how or why you became cursed. One day, when the moon rose full, you changed.

ANIMAL FORM

d6	Form
3	Leopard (as medium animal with Speed 12)
4-5	Snake (as medium animal with poisonous trait)
6-8	Rat of unusual size (as small animal with climber, pack fighting, and swimmer traits)
9-12	Wolf (as medium animal with darksight and pack fighting trait)
13-15	Boar (as medium animal with ferocious trait)
16-17	Raven (as small animal with flier trait)
18	Black bear (as medium animal with the brutal trait)

NEW TRAITS

- **Brutal** When you attack with a natural weapon, such as your fist, claws, teeth, and the total of your attack roll is 20 or higher, the attack deals 1d6 extra damage.
- **Ferocious** When the ferocious creature would become incapacitated, roll a d6. On a roll of 5 or 6, the creature instead heals 10 damage.

SKINCHANGER SIDE-EFFECTS

d20	Side-Effect
1	You only eat meat and then only when it's raw.
2	Your eyes change to match those you possess in your animal form.
3	You make animal noises when angry.
4	You do not sleep comfortably indoors.
5	You are exceptionally hairy, have feathers for hair, or possess scaly skin.
6	You have a strong animal odor about you.
7	You have unusually large teeth.
8	Right before you transform into an animal, a pentagram appears in the palm of each of your hands.
9	When you walk barefoot, you leave behind animal prints.
10	Your face changes slightly, resembling the features of the animal into which you transform.
11	Normal animals behave around you as if you were the animal whose form you can assume.
12	The shadow you cast has the shape of your animal form.
13	Silver has a strong, repellent odor to you.
14	You become uncomfortable and paranoid around people you haven't met before.
15	Your eyes shine in the dark.
16	You become a wild animal in your dreams, racing through the wilderness, hunting and killing.
17	You twitch, drool a lot, or have a weird facial tic.
18	You dislike water and rarely bathe.
19	You sniff strangers to see where they are headed and where they've been.
20	You tend toward impulsive behavior, given to acting on impulse.

CHANGING FORMS IN ARMOR

When a skinchanger adopts a hybrid or animal form, any clothing or armor worn tears at the seams and there's a 1 in 6 chance that the coverings are completely ruined. As well, a skinchanger wearing armor during the transformation takes 1d3 damage if wearing light armor, 1d6 damage if wearing medium armor, or 1d6 + 3 damage if wearing heavy armor.

GREATER SKINCHANGER

Master Path

With time and effort, skinchangers can overcome the curse they carry, so that it becomes part of them. This mastery rids them of their loss of control in the full moon's light and prevents them from passing on the curse to others. Making peace with the beast within allows them to combine the might of both forms to become something greater.

You must have the Skinchanger Curse to choose this master path.

LEVEL 7 GREATER SKINCHANGER

Attributes Increase three by 1

Characteristics Health +5, Perception +1

Tongues of Beasts You can communicate with animals as if you were under the effects of the *beast tongue* spell from the Primal tradition. In addition, you retain the ability to speak in animal form.

True Skinchanger You lose the Skinchanger Curse trait; however, you retain the talents and traits you gained from becoming a skinchanger.

LEVEL 10 GREATER SKINCHANGER

Characteristics Health +5, Perception +1

Keen Natural Weapons While in your animal or hybrid form, your attacks with your natural weapons deal 1d6 + 2 extra damage.

NEW SPELLS

The following spells expand on those presented in *Shadow of the Demon Lord*.

CURSE OF LYCANTHROPY

CURSE ATTACK 5

Target One living, mortal creature you can see within short range

You speak a bitter curse. Make an Intellect attack roll against the target's Will. You make the attack roll with 1 bane if the target has Health 50 or more. On a success, the target becomes dazed for 1 minute. At the end of that time, the target becomes a skinchanger and gains all the skinchanger traits.

REMOVE CURSE

PROTECTION ATTACK 5

Target One cursed creature you can see within medium range

Make an Intellect challenge roll. On a success, you remove one curse from the target. If the total of your challenge roll is 20 or higher, you remove all curses from the target.

QUICKSILVER

TECHNOMANCY UTILITY 1

Requirements You must have one coin made from silver

Target One weapon or 5 pieces of ammunition

Duration 24 hours

The coin disappears, and the target becomes covered in a silver patina that remains for the duration. The target counts as if it were made from silver.

Sacrifice You cast one rank 0 spell you have learned.

UNMASK THE MASKED

TRANSFORMATION ATTACK 1

Target Each creature you can see that you choose within short range

If a target can assume a different form without having to cast a spell such as a skinchanger's ability to become an animal or a changeling's ability to adopt a different appearance, the target must immediately use that ability without having to use an action or a triggered action to do so.

Sacrifice You cast one rank 0 spell you have learned.

BEWARE
THE
WOLVES