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HELLFROST

• FREE MATERIAL •

OF LICHES

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The following is a transcript of a briefing given by a senior paladin of Scaetha to subordinates about to enter the Withered Lands for the first time. It must be stressed that accurate information regarding lichens is virtually unknown, and thus much of the information must be taken as supposition based on the few recorded encounters betwixt mortal and undead prince. This information should be given to player character clerics of Scaetha, as well as members of the Deathdealer company.

ON THE NATURE AND POWER OF LICHES

We walk in the shadows that others may walk in the light!

Hail and well met, comrades in faith. As well you know from your training, the Withered Lands are a cesspit of evil, a damned realm inhabited by our greatest enemies—the lichens. Many brothers and sisters died to gather the information you are about to learn, so heed it well and remember their sacrifice.

The name "liche," given these undead long ago when our cult was formed, is by itself meaningless, at least in terms of describing our foes. It stems from the Auld Saxa word *lik*, which merely means corpse. The modern Anari word *lych* holds a similar meaning. As many of you know, the entrance to a walled graveyard or burial place through which the corpse is carried is traditionally known as the lychgate. Given that our cult would not name such a place after an undead, it thus follows that the epitaph was assigned based purely on the liche's physical appearance and unholy nature.

Exactly how a liche is created remains a mystery. Many legends speak of only the Liche-Priest having the power to transform his most trusted followers into these deadly creatures. Others tell of complex rituals which allow one to tether one's soul to one's body for eternity, though such knowledge must be very rare, hard to decipher, or fraught with peril, for lichens remain the rarest of our enemies. What is clear is that the status of liche is only inferred upon devoted servants of Hela, though whether they were all formerly clerics is as yet undetermined.

While there is some physical similarity between a liche and a zombie, the magnitude of evil separating them is a vast gulf. A zombie is naught but animated flesh, given false semblance of life by possession of a minor spirit drawn from Hela's cursed realm after its liberation from the Abyss. The spirit of a liche, by comparison, has never entered Hela's realm, nor was it freed from the Abyss. Instead, it is the soul the creature possessed in mortal life. That lichens are without question the most evil of Hela's creations is testament to the wickedness of the individuals in life.

If the Liche-Priest was the king of the undead, then lichens fill a position similar to princes. Do not think of them as powerful undead clerics—they are much more than

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that, and to underestimate their might and cunning is to invite death.

Unlike other undead, a liche is not a vessel for necromantic energy, but a conduit. Whereas clerics must pray to receive a minute portion of their deity's energy, lichs are surrounded by a shroud of necromantic energy drawn straight from Hela's lifeless realm. It is this permanent blessing that bestows them their greatest powers. Though Hela lost her position as goddess of death for her treacherous act, this power is magnified in places associated with death.

Though the paladins among you may be strong in arms, they must, do not seek to engage a liche in personal combat if it can be avoided. Not only have they had centuries to perfect the fighting arts, but the very air around them is anathema to life. Close proximity is often fatal for mortals.

Although often skilled swordsmen, many lichs prefer to fight bare-handed. Do not mistake this was lack of skill or weakness, for it is among their most potent weapons. The touch of a liche is of described as deathly cold, but this is a misnomer. A corpse may feel cold to the living, but it is no colder than a rock or piece of metal. The chill that will shiver your soul and wither your flesh is not one of low temperature, but the raw power of Hela's realm siphoning the life from your flesh. Many who die from this death touch will have their bones reanimated as an undead within moments. Such creatures may resemble your former comrade, and may appear as they did in life but seconds earlier. Some of these fell creations retain the power of speech. They will plead for mercy or attempt to fool you into thinking they were but stunned and have now recovered. Do not hold back from striking them down—their spirit, that which made them your friends and comrades, now rests with Scaetha, and what faces you is flesh inhabited by darkness.

The appearance of a liche is terrifying, yet it is not its physical looks along that quail the hearts of mortals and weaken their resolve. Many are broken by the scant knowledge they possess regarding lichs, becoming fearful that death at its hands will result in their flesh be used as home to an unholy spirit. While no man should endure such a fate, be mindful that the flesh is but a shell, and that physical death is nothing to be feared for those who have kept to the faith.

Unlike their mindless servants, lichs are not immune to fear. As true sentient beings, they fear for their survival in the same way as you or I. This is not to say their will flee at the first sign of danger, for their spirits are strong, but it is a weakness you can, and should, exploit.

Some of our kin have argued that as princes of the undead, lesser minions obey a liche's commands without question out of respect and fear. This is a fallacy. While many liche are capable military commanders, lesser undead appear charged within proximity to a liche because they are bolstered by its necromantic energy.

This necromantic energy flows both ways, though. Fallen undead may be reanimated by the presence of a liche, for the conduit draws unholy spirits to their side.

Thus, while one may destroy a liche's bodyguards and minions, do not tarry long, for they will rise again to defend their master. We among all others are blessed, though, for our miracles destroy the link between flesh and spirit, sending the fell soul back to its mistress, and preventing the corpse from rising again. Be strong in the faith and put your faith in Scaetha, for your miracles are your most potent weapons.

With regards its minions, no liche will be without a sizeable bodyguard. Although over five centuries old, lichs are religious fanatics and desire nothing more than to serve Hela in the mortal realm for eternity. To that end, they surround themselves with countless skeletons and zombies, not to mention more lethal servants. Whereas a mortal general may quail at ending his troops to certain death, a liche will sacrifice its followers without hesitation to safeguard its own continued existence.

A liche also has the ability to purposefully destroy a lesser undead in order to strengthen its own being. This destroys not only the physical body, but also the dark spirit. The unholy essence is drawn into the liche, allowing it to heal wounds. While a liche is not hampered by physical injury, it does have physical limitations in the amount of harm it can endure before destruction.

Destroying a liche is not an easy task, and many have rejoiced prematurely. While their flesh can be sundered as easily as yours or mine, physical death does not guarantee the spirit will be claimed by Scaetha's heralds. Unique among the undead, lichs have the power to transfer their souls to animated undead within close proximity. Do not think that destroying a liche's visible minions is enough to thwart this! These creatures have lived for centuries and have planned for such eventualities. Within their lairs they will conceal a plethora of mindless undead in hidden places. Should their flesh die, they can transfer their spirit to one of these concealed minions, renewing their existence and likely fooling you into believing they have been destroyed. Though you may think the battle over, be thorough—tear down every wall in your search for hiding places, lest your victory be proven false.

For all the power at their disposal, lichs remain cowards. They will not endanger their existence unless they are very confident of victory, especially against a servant of Scaetha. Most will hide in their lairs, protected by minions and traps, guiding their forces as a general commands his troops. To meet a liche in open battle is not to be celebrated, for odds are it has shaped the battlefield to its advantage long before your arrival.

Let it be known that the abilities of which you have learned today are those known to commonly exist. Every liche has possessed at least one or two unique abilities, and the Dark Triumvirate are more akin to celestial beings in their terrible and unholy might. They are the ultimate evil, and they are foe beyond comprehension, but you have all sworn oaths to take battle to them and to strike them down. Many of you will fall to their fell necromancy, but remember, while your flesh may die, your spirit will endure. Praise be to Scaetha!