Ghûl

I wait, crouched by the carcass. I sing the old songs, but
the old howls are too loud for the city, too loud for the
present.
I sing them in my head where no one can hear.
— Jess Hartley, “Eater of the Dead”

They are a restless people, prevented by the Dead from wandering as their ancestors did. Yet the ghûl—from the Ouazian narghûla; their name for themselves is unpronounceable by other species—maintain the discipline of nomads even within the walls of Redoubt. They own little, prizing reputation over material possessions. Unless hindered by danger, duty, or slavery, they follow their sacred charge wherever it takes them. Other peoples may wonder at the meaning of life and their purposes as individuals, but ghûl are free of such doubts. They live to eat the dead, and thereby purify the world. As such, ghûl feel no squeamishness around corpses and do not shrink
from charnel stenches. Any field of corpses is a garden to them as much as it is a place that inspires fear and disgust in outsiders.
This outlook is but one reason why ghûl are an isolated community within Redoubt. They are also separated from others by a matter of language; the ghûl tongue resembles that of coyotes, hyenas, and wolves, and cannot be spoken by outsiders.

Strong and Furred

Ghûl are large, loping, canine-like beings. They have short round or square ears on top of their heads. Their snouts are slightly truncated compared to many canines, and wider to permit complex speech. Childhood play and combat training often scar their snouts, and outsiders who have trouble telling ghûl apart may look to these scars to help identify individuals. Ghûl mouths are filled with bonecracking, flesh-ripping teeth. Ghûl have shaggy fur on their backs and the outsides

of their arms and legs, but a sparse, finer down on their faces, chests, and the insides of their limbs. Before the Dead rose, ghûl were creatures of the desert and savannah, and their thinner-furred patches helped radiate excess heat. Ghûl fur ranges from a light mustard to deep black. When a ghûl takes on a social role as a blackjaw or redwalker, they dye part of their fur the appropriate color to signal their affiliation. Underneath the fur, ghûl have tough, thick skin, adapted to the bite of sandstorms and assaults from competing scavengers and predators.

That thick, loose hide conceals powerful muscles. Male ghûl typically stand six and a half to seven feet tall and weigh between 230 and 300 pounds. Females are usually around five or six inches shorter and about 40 pounds lighter. The ghûl gait is a long, efficient stride where the upper body leans forward. Ghûl legs terminate in long appendages that can lay flat as human feet or be raised like canine hocks and paws to sprint. Ghûl hands have opposable thumbs and short fingers. Both hands and feet possess blunt, black claws. These are used for digging and traction, not combat. In battle, a ghûl might take a three-point stance, so that he can bite in concert with using a melee weapon.

Silent and Fearless

Ghûl do not turn from death. Dead creatures are their sustenance, and when they feast upon dead flesh, they believe they transform it from impure matter that sickens other creatures to life and power. Given that neither they nor any corpse they substantially feast upon can rise as one of the Dead or be similarly profaned, they have concrete evidence to support their beliefs. Yet despite their affinity for death, ghûl are loath to hasten it in another creature. It is not for their people to end lives, unless self-defense and survival make it necessary. They eat the dead, true, and do not discriminate between intelligent beings and animals when it comes time to take their meals, but it is their duty to eat that which has already fallen. They are scavengers, not predators. Thus, ghûl have never made war after the fashion of other peoples, though they have feasted upon battlefield carrion. Despite their fearsome appearances, they are predisposed to peace. The ghûl language is simple by measures of vocabulary, but contains a great deal of nonverbal nuance, and gains meaning through context. Thus, ghûl speak little, even to each other. Outsiders cannot speak the ghûl language and often have trouble understanding its subtler aspects, so ghûl use and teach a simplified form of the language—akin to shouting and gesturing wildly, by their standards—among non-ghûl. But when it is unnecessary to speak, they do not. Ghûl are notorious for ignoring the social niceties present among other peoples. If a ghûl believes it is necessary to do something, she does it, and sees how the noisy hominids react.

Septs and Initiations

Ghûl organize themselves in extended families, or septs. A sept usually has a small number of mothers and fathers. These pairs (and occasional arrangements with one mother and two or three fathers) have proven themselves the wisest, strongest, or otherwise most useful individuals in the sept, and are permitted and encouraged to produce offspring. Among ghûl, permission from the sept to breed

is a mark of high status, conferred by rough consensus. These chosen few have the authority to manage the sept's resources and receive the best food and quarters. Septmothers usually give birth to twins, though four, six, or even eight cubs are not unheard of. Giving birth to odd numbers of children is considered inauspicious. Lowstatus and renegade ghûl either strike out on their own or join with other ghûl to form a new sept. Septs do not like to share physical territory, but in Redoubt this is often unavoidable. Disputes are resolved through negotiation between sept-mothers and sept-fathers, or nonlethal ombat. A ghûl who kills another ghûl becomes pariah.

Ghûl recognize two basic functions among their kind: blackjaws, who perform combative and other strenuous tasks, and redwalkers, who scout ahead for the sept. These roles are roughly delineated, separated by training and inclination. They do not restrict what a ghûl may do at any given time, but define what they are best at.

Due to their innate toughness and how different they are from Redoubt's other denizens, ghûl have long been enslaved, but once it was discovered that ghûl could not rise as Dead themselves and could prevent others from rising, they became even more valuable. Only their ancient relationship with the Ouazi people keeps ghûl from suffering indenture as often as the dwarves do.

Ghûl Names

As cubs, ghûl have child-names based on notable aspects of their appearance or behavior, such as Always-Bites, Bone-Stealer, and Big Eyes. Once a ghûl has been fully weaned, after eating flesh cut and torn by others for a time, he or she is invited to eat of a corpse that has not been prepared or fed upon. The young ghûl reverently takes the first bite. Sept-mothers and sept-fathers inspect it as an oracular aid (the shape suggests creatures, destinies, or the talents of the ghûl), and use it to decide the ghûl's adult name.

Ghûl do not have gendered names. Once the ghûl is initiated as a blackjaw or redwalker, the names "black" (hra) and "red" (sawth) are appended to this name, but this suffix is only used on solemn occasions. Finally, the prefix Ghaw is applied to ghûl who become sept-parents. These syllables are approximations, of course—human and human-like mouths cannot truly pronounce

them. Due to this and, frankly, because ghûl are often slaves, most respond to other use-names bestowed upon them by non-ghûl.

Adult Names: Aihur (“Sharp Wounder”), Arugh (“Strong Jaw”), Brehai (“Speech of Bites”), Cururro (“Walks Silent at Noon”), Dahru (“Clever Talker”), Drurr (“Thinker”), Eharr (“Swift to Judge”), Gaohu (“Protector”), Gorhai (“Interceptor of Enemies”), Grush (“Deep”), Hudai (“Keeps Own Counsel”), Kagh (“Brave”), Kairur (“Bold Thinker”), Marrai (“Preventer of Injury”), Murohur (“Will Visit a Distant Place”), Nrugh (“Keeper”), Phrush (“Generous One”), Paihu (“Moon”), Raifu (“Most Intelligent”), Sephur (“Secret Power”), Shrush (“River-Wader”), Wehauru “Old Walker of the Desert”), Yaiph (“Sly”)

Use Names: Big-Head, Fangs, Gray-Streak, Growler, Jumper, Lightning-Scar, Long-Jaws, Orange-Eye, Round-Ear, Sharp-Tooth, Sniffer, Starer, Torn-Ear, Yellow-Hair

Ghûl Traits

Your ghûl character has the following inborn traits.

Ability Score Increase. Your Strength and Constitution scores each increase by 1.

Age. Ghûl reach maturity faster than humans. A 10-year-old ghûl is already in middle adolescence, and a 15-year-old is a fully mature adult. Ghûl have strong instincts and quickly learn to imitate their elders and teachers, so this maturity is intellectual as well as physical. On average, ghûl live about 50 years, however, and typically start to slow down in their 40s, so their rapid maturity is matched by an early demise.

Alignment. Many ghûl are neutral regarding good and evil, and nearly all are neutral about law and chaos. They handle the bodies of the deceased and see how the just and unjust alike fall. All become lifeless bodies. All become food.

Size. Ghûl stand six to seven feet tall and have broad, muscular bodies that weigh anywhere between 190 and 300 pounds. Males are usually larger than females.

Speed. Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Darkvision. Ghûl are nocturnal hunters and scavengers, adapted to steal the remains of prey from diurnal species. Consequently, you can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and can see in darkness as if it were dim light. In darkness, you can only see shades of gray, but this is not especially concerning as the ghûl sense of color is muted compared to that of humans.

Corpse Lore. When you make an Intelligence (Investigation) or Intelligence (Nature) check while examining a dead person or animal, you are considered proficient when rolling to discover how long the subject has been dead, the cause of death, any unusual physical marks on the body,

or any clues to be found from its positioning. If you already have proficiency in one or both of those skills, you gain an additional bonus to the check equal to half your proficiency bonus for these purposes.

Ghûl Hide. You have tough skin that can sometimes turn aside blows from even sharp weapons. Your AC increases by 1.

Ghûl Jaws. Your canine snout and sharp teeth make your bite effective in combat. It inflicts 1d4 piercing damage and is considered a Light weapon. (Fighting with “two weapons” in the case of using your jaws entails biting and striking with a handheld weapon. Even the most skilled ghûl cannot split their attention to use their bite and two handheld weapons.) You are always considered proficient with your jaw as a weapon. Given time, you can eventually gnaw through thick rope, tough leather, and even some woods.

Ghûl Resilience. You have advantage on saving throws against poison (damage or the condition), and resistance against poison damage.

Sacrosanct Death. You cannot be reanimated as undead, and your deceased body and parts thereof cannot be utilized for necromancy as a spell’s material component or as a target. If one or a group of ghûl devour a substantial amount of a corpse (at least half, by mass), they pass this trait on to the corpse, which also cannot be reanimated or used for other forms of necromancy. You acquire this trait upon eating raw, dead flesh for the first time in a childhood ritual. Very young ghûl, or those who have not been exposed to the ritual, might not possess this ability. Note that raise dead and similar spells that permanently restore authentic life are exceptions to this rule, for both ghûl and the deceased individuals they eat—but these sorts of magic are virtually unheard of in Redoubt.

Scavenger’s Feast. Rotting flesh and other forms of putrefaction cannot make you ill; in fact, you find the smell and taste of long-dead flesh sweet and pleasant. You cannot acquire a disease from dead and decayed things or become poisoned from the by-products of natural decay, though you can be affected by poisons introduced to dead flesh from another source. Even diseases that would be transmissible by a living host can no longer affect you if they’re present in a dead creature you encounter.

Languages. Ghûl cannot speak other languages, and most non-ghûl cannot speak their language, which consists of a series of growls, barks, and raspy hums. Ghûl throats and vocal cords are made for sounds that can only be replicated by canine-like species. All ghûl understand this Ghûl language and Common.

Ghûl-Friend-Speech. Due to the communication barrier posed by the ghûl language, the species has developed a simplified version of its language that, when combined with gestures, can be

readily taught to members of other races. The “ghûl-friend-speech” can be understood by any ghûl and conveys the basics needed for trade and cooperation. With their player’s consent, you may designate another character (a past companion or someone who has dealt with ghûl extensively) as having been trained in ghûl-friendspeech.

This does not “use up” any of their opportunities to learn languages from other sources. After a month of continuous contact with another character, you may teach them ghûl-friend-speech as well.

Initiation: Driven by an overall sacred mission to consume the flesh of the dead, ghûl culture does not recognize many specialized roles, but every ghûl develops a natural inclination for or, by dint of training, is recognized as belonging to one of the following initiatory societies.

Blackjaw

Blackjaws are stronger ghûl who take up heavy labor, fighting and, when necessary, hunting to turn the living into the dead upon which they feed. Hunting is a food-gathering method of last resort, for it is not in the nature of ghûl to kill prey themselves. As a blackjaw, you have darker fur (either ancestrally or dyed to mark you as a member of the society), more muscle, and powerful jaws, scarred by training.

Ability Score Increase. Your Strength increases by an additional 1 point.

Powerful Ghûl Jaws. Your jaws inflict 1d6 damage, not 1d4.

Blackjaw Combat Training. You have learned to use your jaws more effectively in combat. This has two effects:

• Other creatures provoke an opportunity attack from you when they attempt to grapple or strike with an unarmed attack. This opportunity attack must be a bite.

• Whenever you use a one-handed melee weapon but nothing else in your off hand, you gain a +1 bonus to AC, since you can keep enemies at bay by snapping at them with your jaws. If, for some reason, you cannot currently use your jaws as a weapon, you temporarily lose this benefit.

Redwalker

Before Redoubt, redwalkers were advance scouts who sought out carrion and water, warned their people of danger ahead, and negotiated with anyone they encountered using simple sign language. In Redoubt, redwalkers “speak” for ghûl work gangs and patrol the city’s byways for incursions of the Dead. As a redwalker, you tend toward the slender side of ghûl builds. You have reddish fur due to your ancestry, sunbleaching, or because you dyed it to mark your affiliation.

Ability Score Increase. Your Constitution increases by an additional 1 point.

Keen Senses. You have proficiency in the Perception skill.

Scent of Life. If you can smell them, you have advantage on Insight checks to determine the emotional states of living beasts, giants, and humanoids. You can smell their fear, anger, friendliness, and more. For instance, you may detect the smell of rage, indicating an intention to attack, despite deceptive friendliness. If the subject’s smell is masked or you can’t smell anything for your own reasons, you lose this benefit. Furthermore, if you successfully track a living beast, giant, or humanoid using Perception, you may make an Insight heck with the same DC as the tracking check to determine the emotions your quarry was feeling when they passed through the area. You do not have advantage on this check, however.

Scent of Death. You have advantage on Perception checks to detect corpses, putrefying flesh, or the undead. This applies to cases where undead attempt to hide from you or conceal their true nature with a disguise. Despite the name, this is a mystical attunement to death and decay, and functions even when you can’t smell anything.

Signing. You have proficiency in Intelligence checks to communicate without knowing or using the language of another intelligent creature.

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