

Introduction

There are as many schools of wizardry as there are stars in the sky. Conjurers who study the art of calling forth beings and objects, the elemental professors who master the dynamic powers of elementals, and of course the necromancer. Necromancers are often shunned or feared due to the taboo nature of their work and how they might use it. While death is a terrifying thing, it is natural. If something lives it must die, and the cycle will continue as nutrients pass on to the next organism. Even if they are just and moral in their practices, necromancers introducing themselves as the arcane scholars of death is an easy way to generate suspicion or land themselves in a spot of trouble. Which is especially ironic, considering how much worse the wizards of life are.

The Geschwulsters, also known as Flesh-Twisters or Vitaemancers, are a classic study of how anything can be twisted towards evil, regardless of how pure or virtuous it may begin. They supposedly originated from an obscure magical school in the foothills of a far-off mountain range, where the class of a mere fifty students stumbled across something terrible in their efforts to oppose the power of death. Something unceasing, that thrummed with an unstoppable heartbeat. Something that the students took into themselves, to study what secrets lay in the halls of ceaseless life. It is

presumably the introduction of this alien essence into their body that poisoned their minds, although they may have been driven to madness long before their breakthrough. You'd have to ask one of the fifty, if you could get close enough without having words drowned out by bloody vomiting.

Geschwulsters have unlocked the secrets of the body, and the true power of disease. Whereas necromancers may conjure forth blights and plagues that spread rapidly from person to person, vitaemancers use more narrow ailments that do not spread between victims. The tradeoff is that where other illnesses may be blocked by a healthy lifestyle, medicine and common sense, their diseases are nigh unstoppable, growing forth from within their target as opposed to an external source. With a single gesture and an arcane word, tumors erupt forth to grow out of control, tearing apart organs and draining vitality. Or perhaps the Geschwulster shall command another's body to such an extent that it begins turning its defenses against itself, the immune system bursting blood vessels and drowning out vital functions with a red tide.

Regardless of methods, these avatars of cancer and bodily sabotage are a horrendous force to be reckoned with. One can only hope that one's body is strong enough to live through the ordeal, or that the Geschwulsters

eventually die out. The former is the more applicable, as just like the stubborn cells within them the foul wizards just refuse to die, no matter the carnage they may wreak around them.

How and When to use it

In terms of raw combat mechanics, the Geschwulster doesn't deal a lot of damage for the CR it's at. However, its special brand of body horror also translates into mechanics to balance things out: any damage it does wind up dealing is a lot scarier. All of its attacks block healing in some way, and can have lasting effects if not dealt with. Normally, injuries in D&D are kinda something to shrug off. Doesn't matter whether you got impaled, burned, electrocuted or dunked in acid, just take an 8-hour power nap and you'll be right as rain. Even when a character is actively dying, they still get a bunch of chances via death saves to right themselves. Obviously in real life things don't work that way. Injuries and disease are *scary*, and the Geschwulster is based around that horror. Players will be used to being able to largely ignore the threat of damage aside from being brought down to low HP, but an evil cancer-wizard removes that option. Every incoming attack becomes a moment of panic, every dice of damage something to seriously strategize around.

Also worth mentioning is that the Geschwulster's attacks bypass armor, magical shielding and even dodging. This is great for pulling the rug out from characters that have been confident in their AC or imposing disadvantage in attacks. After all, how do you defend against something that's already inside you. Ultimately, the only real defense against it is the strength of the character's own body, which is something they can't react to to defend better. Even if mechanically it's just a change of numbers, that perceived removal of power is scary. Most characters will wind up pumping some points into CON just to get more HP, so while on average the effective AC will be reduced it shouldn't be too bad. As for classes that don't prioritize health, the Tumor attack scales with hit dice in order to make it a bit more balanced for them.

In terms of tactics, I'd advise not throwing the Geschwulster against a party alone if they're at a high enough level. Despite its scary tactics, it still doesn't deal a bunch of damage aside from Total Organ Failure, which is more of a shock tactic for taking down any characters with high enough CON to give it trouble. Its heal-blocking will be far more effective and frightening if there are multiple sources of damage for the party to keep an eye on. Try adding some random fodder around, as the perceived threat from even a weak attack will skyrocket if it's harder to recover from. In

addition, the Geschwulster is damn hard to kill. Play it off like the reckless regenerating madman it is, charging forwards and cackling wildly as its once-human frame bulges with excess body mass, slinging tumors left and right. The damn thing can even recover from dying if the cancerous cells it draws power from aren't totally annihilated, so when the party beats it, have it laugh to its last breath. After it pops up again to harass the party in a week, they'll likely be more thorough in disposing of the corpse, so you probably shouldn't give hints to burn/melt the body after the initial encounter.

In short, the Geschwulster is an evil wizard who gives you cancer. Make the characters feel unsafe in their own skin as their bodies turn against them, and force them to be a bit more aware of their own mortality. You never know what'll wind up killing you, after all. When a Geschwulster's around, *everything* is lethal.

Geschwulster

Medium Humanoid, Chaotic Evil

CR: 10

AC: 14 (Natural Armor) 144/144 HP

Prof. Bonus: +4

Speed: 30 ft

Languages: Common, Abyssal

STR: 12(+1) DEX: 9(-1) CON: 19(+4) INT: 18(+4) WIS: 16(+3)

CHA: 11(0)

Saving Throws: CON +7, WIS +7

Skills: Medicine +7

Senses: Perception 12

Damage Resistances: Cold, Necrotic

Damage Immunities: Poison

Condition Immunities: Poisoned, Exhaustion, Stunned, Petrified

Organ-Smith: Instead of using normal AC, all of the Geschwulster's attack rolls are made against the target's CON value. In addition, its attacks cannot be made with disadvantage, rolling normally instead. The Geschwulster's attacks have no effect on creatures without living flesh or other organic material.

Ceaseless Life: At the start of each of its turns if it has 1 or more HP remaining, the Geschwulster regains 5 HP. In addition, if the Geschwulster dies and the body is not chemically destroyed (fire, acid, decomposition, anything that turns it to something other than just flesh) it returns to life 1D8 days later with half of its HP.

Avatar Of Cancer: The Geschwulster is immune to disease.

Actions:

Multiattack: The Geschwulster makes one Tumor attack and one Hemorrhage attack.

Tumor: Ranged spell attack, +8 to hit, range 30 ft, single target. On hit, the target takes poison damage equal to 2 of their Hit Dice plus 7(eg. if the target's hit dice are D10s, they would take 2D10+7 poison damage).

In addition, the target's max HP is reduced by half of the amount of damage dealt until either the spells Heal or Greater Restoration or a DC 17 Medicine check is applied to them. Failing the medicine check results in the patient taking 2D10 piercing damage and gaining a level of exhaustion.

Hemorrhage: Ranged spell attack, +8 to hit, range 30 ft, single target. 2D10+7 slashing damage. The first healing the target receives between being hit and the start of the Geschwulster's next turn is negated.

Total Organ Failure: (1/Day) Melee spell attack, +8 to hit, reach 5 ft, single target. Target must pass a DC 17 CON save or be reduced to 0 HP and drop unconscious. On passing the save, they instead take 6D8 force damage.

In addition, upon failing the save the target has disadvantage on their first death save. A DC 15 Medicine check must be made to stabilize them if healing magic is not used.