

# Plague Banshee

## DEADLANDS BESTIARY

### Statistics

AGL d6, SMT d6, SPR d10, STR d10, VIG d8, PAR 7, TGH 6, PP 20. Rank: Seasoned, Wounds 3/I. Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidate d8, Notice d6, Taunt d12, Stealth d6. Attacks: 2 claws for 1d4+STR. Special Abilities: Enthral/Vigor Drain, Fearless, Shriek, Wall Walking.

### Background

Among the countless miseries wrought by the Blue Plague, there are few worse than the horror it visited upon certain female survivors. Most women who contracted the disease died along with their men, blinded by “bluesight” and cast reeling into hallucinatory madness. But a few simply refused to die, anchored to their accelerating sickness like drowning souls plunging into the unknown depths. As the disease twisted their bones and emaciated their flesh, these unwilling explorers began charting new territories of madness, alternating between phases of death-like catatonia and episodes of shrieking hysteria. Dubbed “Plague Banshees” by a callow reporter from *Harper’s*, most were mistakenly buried alive or treated to a merciful pillow in the night. Those who found themselves alone, abandoned, or exiled were forced to wander the wilderness and desolation of the Plague Year. In time, they discovered that their disease was not something they had contracted, but something they were *becoming*; and like insects under the possession of a Cordyceps, they moved inexorably further into the alien teleology of their strange affliction...

### Description

Robbed of all former memory, Plague Banshees barely appear human, and seem to communicate in a disturbing mixture of guttural sobs, anguished groans, and howling shrieks. Although some observers claim to hear a kind of “language” in their wailing, most believe that Plague Banshees are wholly insane, their wretched utterances merely the background music of their damned condition. Increasingly rare in post-Plague America, these wretched creatures are usually found roaming the deep woods of the East, inhabiting ghost towns along the frontier, or haunting the abandoned graveyards where they suffered premature burial. Plague Banshees are usually hospitalized when discovered, with Bureau Six making arrangements for their resettlement in a special sanitarium in Dunwich, Massachusetts. More often than not, however, locals take matters into their own hands. Whether this takes the form of a quiet injection administered by a compassionate country physician, or a “witch hunt” organized by an armed posse clutching at Bibles, who can blame decent citizens for acting on the Christian desire to see these lost souls finally called home?

### The Sleep of Reason

In the dispassionate view of contemporary science, Plague Banshees are simply starving cyananthrax survivors who have been driven completely insane. Indeed, Dr. Trajan Caspar Lambshead himself, one of the first observers of the Blue Plague, coined the term “cyanthrac displacement” to describe the phenomena, theorizing that the disease enlarges organs in the brain devoted to combativeness and destructiveness, which in turn forcibly reduces the size of

neighboring organs responsible for benevolence, language, and general civility. Lambshead also posits that these unfortunate survivors have undergone an “atrophic contraction and possible dislocation of the uterus,” which has resulted in a “severe case of hysteria coupled with total dissociation of all natural feminine characteristics.” Unfortunately, Dr. Lambshead’s efforts to cure cyanthracic displacement through a vigorous program of trepanning enriched by sessions of pelvic douche hydrotherapy have, to date, been woefully unsuccessful. Perhaps the physicians at Dunwich Sanitarium will have better results with Dr. Henry Annesley’s “electric isolation” therapy or Dr. Jules M. Christiansen’s exciting new “spiral cortectomy” procedure.

### **Ghost Stories**

Outside the ivy-covered halls of enlightenment, rumors persist of Plague Banshees behaving in ways that cannot be explained by natural philosophy. Travelers who have encountered these forsaken women sometimes return with wild tales of cannibalism, bloodlust, and seduction. Some claim to have seen Plague Banshees clinging to walls and ceilings like monstrous spiders; while other failed vigilantes profess that their bloodcurdling shriek left them paralyzed with terror. Some witnesses dispute the widely-held belief that Plague Banshees are solitary creatures, alleging that they cluster in groups of three, and communicate voicelessly with sounds that prick the ears of dogs and raise gooseflesh across the skin of mortal men. One bizarre story which recently circulated around the abandoned town of Sharpsburg tells of three Plague Banshees who, like a trio of mythical fairies, aided a wounded huntsman and nursed him back to health. Although this “local legend” lacks any evidence, several confused souls have gone missing in the woods of Occupied Maryland, victims of an unfortunate quest to find these so-called “Sisters of Mercy.” A few commentators have pointed to the recent resurgence among Indians in the belief of legendary beings such as wendigoes and owl women, suggesting that wandering Plague Banshees may be responsible for this disturbing trend of “pagan revivalism.” And finally, Dunwich itself is the subject of much rumor and speculation; and even the most level-headed skeptics wonder why Bureau Six keeps the sanitarium so closely guarded...

### **Special Abilities**

- **Enthrall/Vigor Drain:** Upon first encountering a human victim, a Plague Banshee may attempt to use Enthrall—providing she controls the setting, and has not been surprised. This attack costs 5 Power Points and requires three action rounds for the banshee to “prepare” her victim, during which time she gradually becomes more visible—a wisp of gown, a toss of her hand, some trailing hair.... Upon the fourth round, she fully reveals herself, matching her Spirit against her target’s Spirit. If the attack is successful, her victim apprehends the banshee as an idealized vision of the woman she was before being stricken with the Blue Plague. Her words are seductive and charming, and the enthralled victim wishes to please and obey her. If she can “win” a kiss or some other token of affection, the banshee absorbs one die of Vigor from her victim and adds it permanently to her own Vigor attribute. At this point, the spell is broken, and the victim is free to start screaming, giving the Banshee a surprise attack round. If her initial attempt to Enthrall was unsuccessful, the intended victim sees through her ruse, and may act as normal. A Plague Banshee may attempt to Enthrall multiple victims by spending additional Power Points; but combat always destroys the fragile spell, and Enthrall cannot be used on the same victim more than once.

- **Fearless:** A Plague Banshee is immune to Fear and Intimidation, and cannot be Shaken.
- **Shriek:** True to her namesake, a Plague banshee may attack with a horrifying Shriek that paralyzes mortals with fear and can even stop a victim's heart. A Shriek attack costs 5 Power Points, and may be used once per day—unless the banshee draws a Queen action card during initiative, which permits her to make an additional Shriek attack at +2! Anyone within 20 yards of the Shriek must make a Spirit roll vs. TN-4. Victims who fail this roll are Shaken and take one Wound Level; those who succeed are merely Shaken, with each raise granting a +1 on the subsequent roll to Unshake. A critical success allows the victim to ignore the Shriek attack altogether; but a critical failure immediately Incapacitates the victim and drains a permanent die of Spirit. This die is added to the banshee's Spirit attribute, which also grants her five additional Power Points. If more than one banshee Shrieks during a single action round, each Shriek adds a cumulative +2 to the Target Number of their victims' Spirit rolls, with TN-8 being the maximum for a trio of wailing banshees.
- **Wall Walking:** By expending Power Points, a Plague Banshee may adhere to walls and ceilings using only her bare feet and hands. This ability cost 1 PP/hour during normal conditions, but 1 PP/action round during combat.



The deviation of man from the state in which he was originally placed by nature seems to have proved to him a prolific source of diseases.

-Edward Jenner

Extreme remedies are very appropriate for extreme diseases.

-Hippocrates

## Sources & Notes

Plague Banshees are distinctly different from the banshees described in the *Savage Worlds Horror Companion*, or the Bean Síde of traditional Irish legend. Plague Banshees are neither undead nor spectral in nature, but are mortal beings who have acquired innate magical powers as they transform under the pressure of their unique affliction. In my own campaign, I try to keep them vaguely mysterious, symbols of the unspeakable horror of the Plague Year. Like backwoods sirens, Plague Banshees have entered contemporary American folklore, claiming a dark sisterhood with European rusalkas, selkies, and strigoi. Keeping with another aspect of the *Deadlands* milieu, the general appearance and capabilities of Plague Banshees are related to the Fear Level of a region. In civilized areas, Plague Banshees appear as feral women driven mad by their terrible fates, usually starving and homeless. As a region's Fear Level increases, Plague Banshees begin to manifest more supernatural powers, and behave like sentient creatures driven by some kind of sinister goals.

And by the way, Dr. Lambshead is just acting in the [normal fashion](#) of [nineteenth century medicine](#). Well, the trepanning may be a bit much...

**Image Credits**

The image used in this document was adapted from concept art for the Fable II video game.

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**Last Modified:** 2017 January 5

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