





# WARPERS OF FLESH

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Golarion is filled with practitioners of magic and alchemy, and the permutations and specializations within these fields are staggeringly vast. The extreme and often cruel practice of fleshwarping is dedicated to altering a creature's physical and mental form using a blend of alchemy and magic. Fleshwarping typically takes place in a specially prepared laboratory, where vats of alchemical reagents break down the subject's flesh so that magical manipulations can rebuild it into a new form. The precise proportion of alchemy to magic varies from practitioner to practitioner and depends heavily on whether the individual overseeing the process (called a "fleshwarper" in many versions of the practice) relies on scientific formulas or malevolent inspiration. A transformation might be partial—such as to give a subject new features like an insectile pincer—or might be a more complete and dramatic transformation. Some practitioners make a semantic difference between the two, calling partial transformations "fleshcrafting" and full-body transformations "fleshwarping," but either process is typically excruciatingly painful and often fatal. Full transformations usually render the victim wholly unrecognizable, not only as an individual but even as to the type of creature they once were. Fleshwarping can't be reversed—the process is permanent.

Fleshwarping is nearly always performed on unwilling subjects, as the terror and pain of the process can shatter the mind just as much as the body. Those who willingly submit are hungry for power or have been tricked. Depending on the fleshwarping tradition, prisoners or captives might be thrust into a fleshwarping vat as punishment, retaliation, or simply for being caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. Fleshwarping is a slow procedure, generally taking days or even weeks, so fleshwarpers usually rely on magical methods of enforcing docility, breaking down their victims' resolve as thoroughly as their bodies.

Most fleshwarpers are skilled in both magic and alchemy; others work in close-knit cabals of spellcasters and alchemists where each relies on the others' expertise. Fleshwarpers are almost universally evil, as they no longer respect the personhood of other sapient beings, and in many cases delight in preying on others to cause pain.

## Fleshwarping Traditions

Different traditions and forms of fleshwarping exist in Golarion, each having arisen more or less independently from each other. The three most prominent fleshwarping traditions are those of evil drow, ancient Thassilon, and Nex. These groups are each presented in more detail below.

Fleshwarping is best known in these societies, but its practice flourishes among many wicked groups throughout Golarion. Secretive cults that worship Haagenti or the fiendish deity Yamasoth practice fleshwarping in limited—but no less cruel and malicious—ways. Deep beneath the surface, xulgath priests use fleshwarping lore passed down from the ages when more magically advanced (but no less wicked) xulgaths ruled. In the Mana Wastes, twisted primal magic inflicts uncontrolled fleshwarping mutations upon those who lurk there too long. Cities with many alchemists working in close proximity might develop cesspools of carelessly discarded reagents, which can combine unexpectedly into chemicals that cause biological transformations.

## Drow Fleshwarping

Fleshwarping means many things in wicked drow society. Its existence serves as a sinister threat: that the drow actively pursue the utter transformation of their enemies makes those same enemies reluctant to move against the drow. Its practice is a deterrent: dissidents in drow society know the fate that awaits them if they attempt to subvert the status quo. Its prevalence

makes an arsenal: drow bolster their forces with battle-ready servants who are utterly expendable. But before fleshwarping could become any of these things to drow, it was a wicked gift.

When the elves who would become drow were suffering in the Darklands, they reached for any solution to stave off starvation and despair. Their desperation sang to the demon lords of the Abyss, who saw within these beleaguered people the resolve necessary to become zealous and wicked followers. Many demon lords meddled in the fate of the drow, but Haagenti gave them the horrific knowledge of fleshwarping. Skin, muscle, and even bone were utterly malleable, he taught, and could be formed into more useful shapes or warped to cause pain and misery. Alchemy and transformation were, together, a path to power. Once the drow accepted the process of dissolving, reforming and shaping their own flesh and that of other living beings, their connection to their original natures was severed and they were truly corrupted. Haagenti wrought not just a physical transformation among drow, but a cultural one, giving rise to a society where transformation is a source of terror that's wielded as a weapon and where others' personhood is disregarded.

Haagenti derives malevolent satisfaction from the experimentation and improvisations of drow fleshwarpers, who act as his unwitting research assistants. Haagenti plants ideas for even more malign designs in their minds and then watches as fleshwarpers bring them to fruition—even if this work requires trial and error stretched over the lifespans of generations. Haagenti takes the work perfected by drow fleshwarpers as his own to create his own transformed legions, sometimes wiping the knowledge from mortal minds so none can undo or outdo his work.

Most drow consider fleshwarpers valuable practitioners of a craft that produces useful results and suitable punishments for their many enemies. However, they also distrust fleshwarpers, considering them erratic and treacherous, and assume they're always seeking potential subjects from among their associates. Indeed, the aphorism “a fleshcrafter's hospitality” means an invitation provided in good faith but that ends with disastrous or painful results. Suspicions aside, there is no shortage of work for fleshwarpers in drow society—there is always demand for more slaves, soldiers, and punishments.

The majority of fleshwarpers, in contrast, see themselves as skilled artisans, dedicated to advancing a useful science. They labor to discover refinements to make fleshwarping more painful, more powerful, or more efficient, as needs dictate. Even minor improvements generally give them a great deal of

satisfaction. These driven fleshwarpers are usually devotees of Haagenti. They improve their craft not only to expand its horizons, but because they believe doing so honors Haagenti and raises their estimation in their patron's eyes.

Other drow fleshwarpers see themselves not as artisans, but as artists; they seek not to methodically transform, but to dramatically innovate. They view their pursuits as a way to express their own vision and to expose truths. They are less likely to be heartfelt followers of Haagenti, as their motivation is their “art” and not their faith, but Haagenti prizes their work highly and frequently gifts them with insights and inspiration. Drow societies often consider these fleshwarpers the most dangerous, as they are unconcerned about controlling their creations, and care little if they endanger other drow in the name of their “art.”

The most infamous and potent fleshwarping occurs in the drow city of Zirnakaynin. House Parastric is distrusted by most other drow in the city and quietly reviled by the city's other nobles, but Parastric's twisted alchemists and Abyss-corrupted wizards produce the most numerous and durable aberrations. Countless driders (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 159) have skittered forth from House Parastric's terrifying halls. Many fear House Parastric's depraved geniuses, who practice their skills on themselves as well as others. Nearly every scion of House Parastric bears the mark of fleshwarping, from a single augmented limb to a radically reshaped body. The unnaturally beautiful Matron Astranovidova leads House Parastric, and she walks boldly through Zirnakaynin with her drider daughter Mardeis at her side. House Parastric openly promotes its techniques, even though the specifics are sufficient to make battle-hardened drow quail. Although few drow in Zirnakaynin have anything positive to say about House Parastric openly, the house's wealth and waiting list for work prove that the city's powers value its abhorrent work. It is impossible to miss the results in Zirnakaynin's streets: horrific guardians, fleshwarped soldiers, and cast-off survivors struggling to survive.

### HORRIBLE PREDICTABILITY

Although drow fleshwarpers can influence the process, the basic forms of their creations are dependent on the victim's ancestry. That is, every human subject to drow fleshwarping becomes a grothlut (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 158), while every surface elf becomes an irnakurse (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 2 118). By far, the most common victims of drow fleshwarpers are other drow. This transformation produces driders, which are the only fleshwarps sufficiently stable that they



can reproduce with others of their kind. The most common drow-created fleshwarps are listed here by the name of the fleshwarp, with the name of the base ancestry in parentheses.

**Dreshkan (morlock):** Dreshkans are made by twisting morlocks' flesh and infusing their bodies with electrically charged metal. Most dreshkans bear extra limbs that give them a spidery appearance.

**Dridrer (drow):** These fleshwarped creatures keep the upper body of the drow and gain the lower body and facial features of an enormous spider. Dridrers retain their intelligence through the fleshwarping process, though their memories and minds are muddled by the process. They're usually cast out from drow society. The fact that they are the only fleshwarped creatures that can reproduce with one another leads a few drow fleshwarpers to speculate that driders are a "higher order" of fleshwarps and proof that Haagenti has favored them.

**Ghonhatine (xulgath):** The fleshwarping process causes xulgaths to grow considerable muscle and body mass. The resulting ghonhatines are vicious and twice as tall, but have animal-like intelligence.

**Gomnit (gnome):** Fleshwarped gnomes have their arms and legs absorbed into the bodies, making them resemble fleshy mushrooms. Their moist and porous bodies are ideal breeding grounds for all manner of dangerous molds and fungi. Gomnits are immune to any fungi grown upon their bodies, making them useful vectors to spread fungal diseases.

**Grothlut (human):** Fleshwarped humans are among the weakest of fleshwarps. Their rubbery, slug-like bodies are topped by stubby, clawed arms and a head with a widely gaping maw. The fleshwarping process makes them vicious, but only minimally self-aware.

**Gublask (goblin):** Goblins subjected to drow fleshwarping grow a tough carapace and faceted, insectile eyes, and their arms transform into stingers that deliver a hallucinogenic venom. They're very easily distracted, making them unsuitable for most tasks.

**Irnakurse (elf):** Drow rarely fleshwarp surface elves for utility. Rather, drow delight in fleshwarping surface elves because they've fine-tuned the process to be indescribably painful and to involve psychological torture that instills an overwhelming sense of self-loathing. The elven victim is transformed a pillar of tentacled flesh and exposed organs with extremely limited mobility. Drow love to put irnakurses on display as a depraved form of art.

**Jashoi (halfling):** Halflings subjected to drow fleshwarping become spiny, quadrupedal beasts that jitter and cavort with irrepressible energy. Their faces remain mostly intact and are immediately

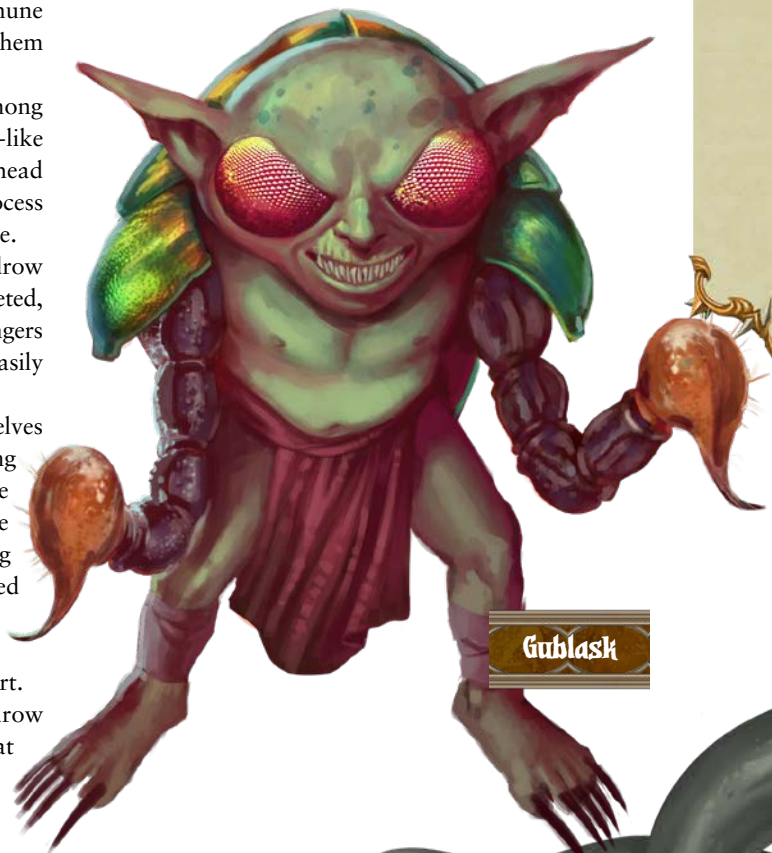
recognizable to former companions who meet them. As they are too jumpy to prove useful for much other than cruel entertainment, jashois are among the least common fleshwarps.

**Mulventok (urdefhan):** Urdefhans only rarely fall into the clutches of the drow, but when fleshwarped, they become powerful engines of destruction. Their clear skin grows rigid and develops a glossy sheen, and their minds are honed to pursue a singular focus above all others.

**Oronci (orc):** When the process of fleshwarping an orc is complete, the creature that emerges from the vat has a powerful, humanoid torso and the lower body of a giant centipede. An oronci is capable of spitting streams of poisonous saliva.

**Phrandus (kobold):** Phranduses are unique among fleshwarps in that they can't be created from a single base creature; they are instead made from two or more kobolds, and the more victims that are incorporated, the keener intellect the resulting creature has. Phranduses resemble jumbled amalgamations of limbs atop two stumpy, elephantine legs.

**Varchik (ratfolk):** Ratfolk rarely survive fleshwarping. The survivors' tails thicken and lengthen, their legs become scaled, and their torsos take on a swollen, barrel-like shape. Their face becomes a gaping hole that they use to latch onto foes.



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Dwarves don't appear on this list, as they are apparently immune to fleshwarping. Many dwarves have died agonizing deaths in fleshwarper laboratories, yet their flesh consistently resists the process. Transforming dwarves is considered a vaunted but nearly unattainable goal by most fleshwarpers, and the drow who first successfully fleshwarps a dwarf is certain to gain considerable prestige.

## Thassilonian Fleshwarping

Ancient Thassilon, which was located in what is now modern-day Varisia and the recently arisen New Thassilon, was divided into seven domains, each ruled by a runelord who embodied and embraced a specific sin. They focused the powers of their sins into their *runewells*. Alaznist, Runelord of Wrath, forged an alliance with Yamasoth and encouraged demon worship in her domain in return for learning the secrets of fleshwarping. Yamasoth had intended to dole out these secrets over time, but Alaznist was too impatient. She combined Yamasoth's lore with forbidden alchemical secrets stolen from the aquatic alghollthus. She used this reckless combination to reshape unwilling human test subjects. Alaznist warped their bodies, borrowing the shapes and natural weaponry of horrors from the deep sea and from demonic realms. These creations were powerful, but she felt generating them was too time-consuming. Alaznist sacrificed them all, placing their essences into a *runewell*. The power of wrath channeled through that same *runewell* animated the first sinspawn. In their fleshwarped forms, they vaguely resembled the humans from which they originated, but were entirely new creatures.

Further experimentation taught Alaznist how to create armies of sinspawn by commingling fresh blood with the latent psychic energy of beings slain while experiencing strong feelings of wrath. Because her sinspawn were powerful warriors and engendered wrathful emotions with their bites, they were able to create more of themselves with their attacks. Yet Alaznist went further still. She invested the sinspawn with free will and the urge to become more powerful and numerous. Sinspawn became a true ancestry unto themselves, with a drive to perpetuate themselves using wrath and blood.

When Alaznist set her sinspawn against the other runelords, they felt they had no choice but to obtain sinspawn of their own to counter her. Some undertook the hard labor of reverse-engineering Alaznist's creation, beginning with fleshwarping and ending with the spontaneous creation from their own *runewells*. Others took the shorter path of simply buying soldiers from Alaznist directly.

These experiments led to many failures, including misshapen lumps called fleshdregs. These smaller, bestial aberrations bear only a partial physical resemblance to sinspawn; their bodies consist of a merged head and torso with a gnashing mouth, supported by two many-jointed limbs. They have a sin-inducing bite like sinspawn, but are not sapient. The runelords considered fleshdregs nuisances and destroyed most of them.

The runelords didn't think that sinspawn would outlast their empires, but that's exactly what happened; sinspawn can be found today in many ruins of ancient Thassilon, and in the intervening millennia, they have spread across Golarion. Fleshdregs persist as well, and often serve sinspawn groups as pets or guard animals.

Sorshen and Belimarius, the rulers of modern New Thassilon, have differing views on sinspawn. Sorshen considers their creation to be part of the campaign of reckless aggression that contributed to the runelords' fall millennia ago, and she's not eager to repeat that mistake. Belimarius, on the other hand, is actively creating sinspawn once again. Her actions are something of an open secret, as sightings of envyspawn are on the rise both inside New Thassilon and outside of it. Belimarius's agents are hurriedly catching her up on millennia of advancements in fleshwarping, and many fear what new creatures she might soon unleash.

## Nexian Fleshwarping

Nexians see fleshwarping as they do their other magical pursuits: as a science to be explored clinically and to its maximum potential. Members of the Oenopion Fleshforges guild have a saying that embodies their approach: "The flesh is frontier."

These practitioners believe that like magical energy, living flesh is a thing to be shaped and studied by those who desire to do so, and students of the science learn much about how to augment their research subjects. While it is tempting to look at Nexian fleshwarping as more benevolent than other kinds, its practitioners are very often entirely dispassionate in their practice. Their efforts to make the experience easier on their subjects are motivated by a desire to enhance survivability and produce better results, not because they wish for the process to be innately more humane. Nexian fleshwarper who express either untoward cruelty or unnecessary compassion are derided by their peers and accused of letting their emotions taint their work. They see their work as one of improvement, taking ordinary impoverished or convicted Nexians and transforming them into powerful warriors to defend the nation. Many of



these subjects are volunteers who know that the pain of transformation can grant them greater power, respect, and opportunities.

Fleshwarpers who work in Nex's laboratories prefer to be called "fleshforgers," which they feel differentiates them from what they see as the casual barbarism of drow fleshwarping. Most are impressed with the variety of shapes and transformations that drow can produce with fleshwarping, but feel that drow waste potential by embedding needless pain, misery, and cruelty into the process. While drow fleshwarping labs are almost indistinguishable from torture chambers, Nexian fleshforges resemble laboratories, with detailed diagrams and progress charts to illustrate their procedures, and frequently host lectures and demonstrations for students or interested experts in other fields.

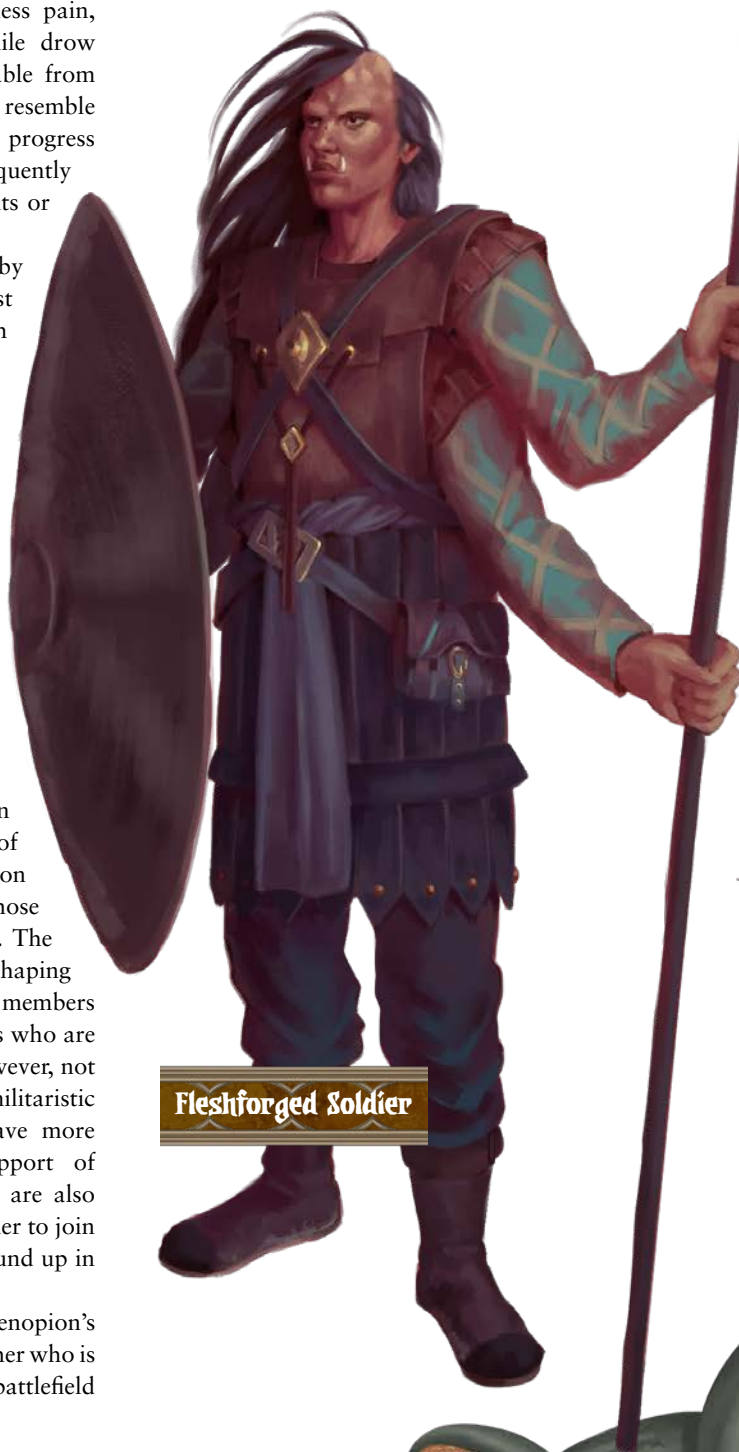
Nexian fleshforgers aren't directed by Haagenti's malevolent designs, for the most part, though cults of Haagenti and Yamasoth are present in Nex just as they are anywhere else. They have thus made advances in directions the drow would consider foolish or even useless. Nex's best fleshforgers have made great strides in reducing the physical and mental trauma of the transformation process and improving the rate of survival.

Numerous fleshforgers are fascinated by the sinspawn creations of ancient Thassilon. Some actively collect historical and modern records of Thassilonian *runewells*, hoping to discover the metaphysical "blueprints" used to create sinspawn. None have yet made any significant progress.

The most talented and well-known fleshforgers work in Oenopion, the city of alchemists in the heart of Nex. The Oenopion Fleshforges is a collaborative guild whose members share advances with one another. The guild's primary focus is designing and shaping fleshforged soldiers for the state, which members excel at. The soldiers are toughened warriors who are often highly regarded for their abilities. However, not all fleshforgers in Oenopion support this militaristic effort. Those who work independently have more freedom, but lack the collaborative support of the guild. As many fleshforgers in the city are also aristocrats or politicians, the choice of whether to join the guild often has multiple facets and is bound up in old rivalries.

Several pioneers have emerged from Oenopion's fleshforges. Mari Phinetak is a gnome researcher who is pioneering the use of fleshgrafting to repair battlefield

injuries to keep fleshforged soldiers in the fight longer, although claims she's fabricated her research results are just coming to light. Jahmal Kobrin has determined how to subtly augment the musculature of his latest fleshforged soldiers, dramatically improving their strength without telltale visual signs. Meanwhile, Zhane Faltrizan has been finding novel ways to apply fleshforging to undead creatures, potentially heralding new breakthroughs.



**Fleshforged Soldier**

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