

BOTANICA MANDRAGORICA

GHOUL BEES

Though not intrinsically Mandragora, the relationship between flowers and pollinating insects is highly relevant. Bees are not the easiest of creatures to ghoulish but can demonstrate to be versatile servants. Owners of Ghoul Bees must beware for some might mistake them as being members of the Melissidae bloodline, who were almost wiped out of existence in the 19th century. As a consequence ghoulish beekeepers have learned to be discrete about their affairs, lest they be tarred with the same brush.

GHOULING BEES

Like any insect, ghouling bees is not an easy process. One does not ghoulish a singular bee, but instead one ghoulish an entire colony. Depending on the nature of the hive, and type of bee, this can be met with more or less success. Bees can be fairly fragile and certain species are unable to bear the curse. As a general rule, wild hives are more conducive to ghouling, as well as any species of bee known for its ferocity. Species like the African 'killer' bee is almost ideal, while the stingless Bumblebee has never been known to take.

The process itself is fairly straight forward, the Kindred in question locates the hive of his choice and once opening to provide access, proceeds to pour a measure of Vitae over the honeycombs. For those Kindred who have the inclination, it is better to pour the Vitae over the larvae or deposits of royal jelly. In doing so, it triggers the next generation of bees to be turned by the blood. The new queen bee, being augmented by the blood will easily overpower the current queen and take over the hive. From this point on a contamination spreads through the hive as the colony in its entirety is subsumed by the Vitae. The process can take anywhere from a week to a month, but the Kindred will know when the process has taken as the hive itself slowly turns a dull rust-like ochre, its golden comb suffused with the taint of blood. Some Kindred have likened the process to the ripening of fruit as they slowly watch the comb change its hue.

When the process is complete, the bees own coloration changes, as their yellow and black striping is also replaced with a dull bloody red. Their bodies become engorged and distended with the blood as the average bee grows to an inch. The workers and drones wings beat with a monotonous thrum with a deep resonance that puts many who hear it on edge. The queen bee herself develops a particular affinity with the Regnant and it is through her that the Kindred may control and compel the hive as a whole. Like bees their stings are barbed and will become lodged in their prey when they sting, leaving behind its venom sac. Unlike normal bees, ghoulish bees do not automatically die when they sting. Instead, the Vitae sustains them for a period of a few days, in which time their sting and venom sacs are restored through the Vitae. Furthermore, the nature of the Vitae augments the properties of the venom making it highly toxic. The venom in one sack is enough to cause the average mortal to be violently ill, being attacked by a swarm is almost certainly fatal.

Perhaps the most unique transformation bestowed by the blood, is turning them into predatory creatures. The drive for blood runs thick even in these little creatures, and while they will still habitually collect honey, but through a change in their mandibles

they are also able to rend a creature's flesh and collect some of the blood that pools. The blood collected is combined with pollen in their hives to form a strange blood honey. A canny Kindred can learn to harvest this blood honey and even learn to cultivate it deliberately. Yet the instinct does not stop with blood predation. Indeed, ghoulish bees can go into a frenzy similar to that of Kindred, though they do not have the beast to drive them, they can fall either to an anger frenzy provoked by territorial incursions or through wassail for a need for blood.

The Attributes listed here represent a swarm of ghoulish bees.

Attributes: Intelligence 0, Wits 1, Resolve 0, Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 1, Presence 0, Manipulation 0, Composure 1

Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Survival (collecting honey) 2

Willpower: 1

Initiative: 2

Defense: 2 (taking the higher of the two due to their swarm nature).

Speed: 8 (species factor 5)

Size: 3 (individual bees are 0)

Disciplines: Celerity 1, Vigor 1

Vitae/per Turn: 2/1 (ghoulish bees spend Vitae as a swarm, each of them containing a tiny little bit of Vitae, which collectively amasses to one whole measure).

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Sting	0*	3 (Dex + Brawl)
Bite	1 (L)**	2 (Str + Brawl)

Health: 4

* Though the attack itself does no damage, it does however leave venom in the body of the victim. The toxicity of this is 3 + 1 per success.

** Each point of damage represents 1 point of damage from accumulated cuts, and then every point of damage after that represents a measure of blood taken. The number of health points taken in this manner cannot be more than the Size of the swarm.

PRODUCTS OF THE HIVE

Blood Honey: The substance known as blood honey is thick and viscous and the result of bees incorporating blood into their honey production. Its golden color is dulled to a red and its taste is full and rich. Unlike other food, Kindred can in fact consume the blood honey, its simple structures being absorbed into the undead body. However, Kindred cannot derive any sustenance and will not yield up Vitae. Though for many Kindred, the act of eating alone can be somewhat invigorating. Mortals share a different experience when eating this honey, upon consuming it they feel some of the rush of drinking Vitae. Though this sensation muted and not strong enough to tempt a blood addiction, it is stimulating none-the-less.

Vitae Jelly: As normal bees, ghoulish bees produce Royal Jelly. However, like all aspects of fertility it is tainted with the curse of undeath. The Vitae Jelly is thick and sticky like a resin, its hue is a dark black with only a faint touch of red to it, giving it the color and consistency of tar. The properties of this substance are slightly

narcotic and hallucinogenic. Should a mortal consume the Vitae Jelly they go into a deep catatonic state like a torpor, in this state they dream torpid dreams, causing their memories to become slightly in fugue. They wake up after a number of days feeling disoriented and confused, unsure of their identity, though this eventually passes with some time, some cases demonstrate individuals who have lost major aspects of their identity. When a Kindred consumes it, however, they go into a trance-like state, their memories brought to the fore. Some developers swear that it allows them to separate true memories from the false, while others are convinced that it merely only exacerbates the false memories. Yet like strange epiphanies, the experience is intransient once there and then gone before it can be captured.