

APOCALYPSE SWARM

Deities show their wrath in many ways—storms, floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, disease—but few means are as viscerally terrifying as a plague. Locusts that devour a nation's crops, clouds of flies that clog people's mouths, hordes of rats that spread contagion—these are the so-called apocalypse swarms, the deadly messengers of angry gods.

An apocalypse swarm looks like a normal swarm of creatures until it engages in combat. Other creatures watching such a battle obtain a better understanding of what apocalypse really means—in the death of another being, they clearly see their own nearness to oblivion. Few can witness another creature's death by such a means and not find it chilling. Even creatures that were initially willing to stand firm and fight the swarm soon regret their bravery, for damaging such swarms only makes more of them. Thus, an apocalypse swarm grows in destructive capability even as foes succeed in diminishing its strength.

CREATING AN APOCALYPSE SWARM

"Apocalypse swarm" is an inherited template that can be added to any swarm (referred to hereafter as the base creature).

An apocalypse swarm uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Hit Dice: An apocalypse swarm gains 5 Hit Dice beyond the base creature's total. Recalculate the swarm's base saves, hit points, feat slots, and skill points (if applicable), plus the save DCs for its special attacks.

Speed: Each of an apocalypse swarm's speeds is double the corresponding speed of the base creature.

Damage: If an apocalypse swarm has fewer than 26 HD, the damage dealt by its swarm attack increases by +1d6 over that of the base creature.

Special Attacks: An apocalypse swarm retains all the base creature's special attacks and gains those described here.

Fear (Su): Each creature within 100 feet of an apocalypse swarm that witnesses it bringing down another creature must succeed on a Will save (DC 10 + 1/2 apocalypse swarm's racial HD + apocalypse swarm's Cha modifier) or be frightened for 1 minute. Success leaves the creature shaken for 1 minute but does not negate the need to make a new saving throw for each such incident. Fear is a mind-affecting fear effect.

Greater Distraction (Ex): A creature that fails its save against an apocalypse swarm's distraction special attack is nauseated for 1d4 rounds.

Special Qualities: An apocalypse swarm retains all the base creature's special qualities and gains those described here.

Fast Healing (Ex): The base creature gains fast healing 10.

Spell Resistance (Ex): The base creature gains spell resistance equal to 11 + 1/2 the base creature's racial HD.

Splitting (Ex): When an apocalypse swarm takes more than 10 points of damage from a single attack, it splits into two identical apocalypse swarms, each with one-half the hit points that the original swarm had when it split (rounded down). An apocalypse swarm with 1 hit point cannot be split, and one with 0 hit points is dispersed as normal.

Each piece of a split apocalypse swarm can heal damage normally, up to the number of hit points it had upon formation. Healing damage does not allow the swarms to recombine. For example, an apocalypse swarm with 50 hit points that takes 15 points of damage would split into two apocalypse swarms with 17 hit points each (one-half of the original swarm's remaining 35 hp, rounded down). Each of these two apocalypse swarms can heal 10 points of damage per round with fast healing, but it cannot exceed 17 hit points.

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Dex +4, Con +2.

Skills: If the base creature has an Intelligence score, it gains skill points for its 5 new HD as appropriate for its type. Assign these skill points as desired, treating skills on the base creature's list as class skills and all others as cross-class skills.

Feats: An apocalypse swarm gains Ability Focus (distraction) as a bonus feat. In addition, it gains additional feat slots according to its new Hit Dice. Alertness, Lightning Reflexes, Toughness, and Dodge are good choices for an apocalypse swarm.

Challenge Rating: Same as the base creature +3.

Level Adjustment: —



~ SAMPLE CREATURE: APOCALYPSE HELLWASP SWARM ~

Diminutive Magical Beast (Evil, Extraplanar, Swarm)

Hit Dice: 17d10+54 (147 hp)

Initiative: +12

Speed: 10 ft. (2 squares), fly 80 ft. (good)

Armor Class: 22 (+4 size, +8 Dex), touch 22, flat-footed 14

Base Attack/Grapple: +17/—

Attack: Swarm (4d6 plus poison)

Full Attack: Swarm (4d6 plus poison)

Space/Reach: 10 ft./0 ft.

Special Attacks: Distraction, fear, greater distraction, inhabit,

poison

Special Qualities: Damage reduction 10/magic, darkvision 60 ft., fast healing 10, hive mind, immunity to weapon damage, resistance to fire 10, low-light vision, spell resistance 19, splitting, swarm traits

Saves: Fort +13, Ref +20, Will +8

Abilities: Str 1, Dex 26, Con 16, Int 6, Wis 13, Cha 9

Skills: Hide +22, Listen +12, Spot +12

Feats: Ability Focus (distraction), Ability Focus (poison), Alertness, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Toughness

Environment: Any evil-aligned plane

Organization: Solitary, pair, fright (3–4 swarms), or terror (5–8 swarms)

Challenge Rating: 11

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always lawful evil

Advancement: None

Level Adjustment: —

Here is an example of an apocalypse swarm using a hellwasp swarm as the base creature.

A single hellwasp resembles a thumb-sized normal wasp, except that its carapace is gleaming black with ruby-red stripes, and its compound eyes shine an iridescent green color. In an apocalypse swarm, hellwasps form a collective hive mind marked by infernal cunning and bloodlust.

COMBAT

An apocalypse hellwasp swarm seeks to surround and attack any living prey it encounters. The swarm deals 4d6 points of damage to any creature whose space it occupies at the end of its move. The swarm can take over the body of its prey and infest both the living and the dead, using them as puppets to accomplish acts of wickedness that an ordinary swarm of insects could never attempt.

An apocalypse hellwasp swarm's attack is treated as an evil-aligned weapon and a magic weapon for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction.

Distraction (Ex): Fortitude DC 21; see the apocalypse swarm template.

Fear (Su): Will DC 17; see the apocalypse swarm template.

Greater Distraction (Ex): See the apocalypse swarm template.

Inhabit (Ex): An apocalypse hellwasp swarm can enter the body of a helpless or dead creature by crawling into its mouth and other orifices. This process requires 1 minute to complete. A single apocalypse hellwasp swarm can inhabit a Small, Medium, or Large creature, and four swarms working together can inhabit a Huge creature. The swarm can abandon the body at any time, but doing so requires a full-round action.



Any attack against the inhabited host deals half damage to the apocalypse hellwasp swarm as well, although its resistances and immunities may negate some or all of this damage. If an apocalypse hellwasp swarm is forced to split while it is inhabiting the body of a creature, both parts of the swarm exit immediately without needing a full-round action.

An apocalypse hellwasp swarm inhabiting a dead body can animate it and control its movements, effectively transforming it into a zombie of the appropriate size for as long as the swarm remains inside. If an apocalypse hellwasp swarm inhabits a living victim, it can neutralize the effects of its own poison and control the victim's movements and actions as if using *dominate monster*. The hellwasps soon slay a living victim, however, dealing 2d4 points of Constitution damage per hour that they inhabit its body. A body reduced to 0 Constitution is dead.

A creature inhabited by an apocalypse hellwasp swarm is relatively easy to spot, since its skin crawls with the forms of the insects

inside. The swarm is intelligent enough to hide beneath loose clothing or a large cloak whenever possible so as to remain undetected. It can attempt a Disguise check to conceal its presence within of a host, taking a –4 penalty on the check if the host is Small.

A *remove disease* or *heal* spell cast on an inhabited victim forces the apocalypse hellwasp swarm to abandon its host.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 23, initial and secondary damage 1d6 Dex. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Hive Mind (Ex): Any apocalypse hellwasp swarm with at least 1 hit point per Hit Die (or 12 hit points, for a standard swarm) forms a hive mind, giving it an Intelligence score of 6. When an apocalypse hellwasp swarm is reduced below this hit point threshold, it becomes mindless.

Splitting (Ex): See the apocalypse swarm template.