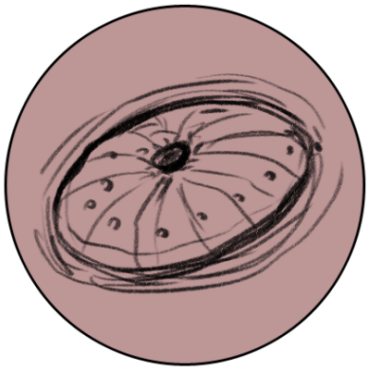
SCAB CAP



- **Height:** 1in
- **Classification:** Fungus
- **Substrate:** Land animals

The scab cap is a member of the sceptis Order of fungi. Much like its cousin, the tushma coin, it grows on animal flesh. Unlike its cousin, it prefers the flesh of land animals, usually social predators, that are more likely to spread the infection than their herbivorous counterparts.

Physiology

The scab cap grows exclusively from open wounds, and has a short lifespan. It may take a few weeks to develop to a point that it can grow fruiting bodies. When it does, it grows a mushroom with a wide cap that usually covers the whole wound and stands barely proud of it.

It differs in habits from the tushma coin fungus by feeding on blood, not fat.

The mushroom is off-white.

Reproduction
This mushroom distributes its spores by causing its host pain. Some animals react aggressively to this; these animals may lash out at other animals due to irritability caused by the pain. If they do, they stand a chance of injuring their opponent, creating an access point for any spores that may have floated loose from the fight.

For this reason, it's usually social animals with sharp teeth or claws - in other words, sociable predators - that get infected.

Medical Conditions

There are no known pathogens or parasites that infect the scab cap. Rather, the scap cap infects animals.

Infection lasts for around a month, with the reliability of this time scale probably due to the fact that the fungus draws its moisture from a reliable source - blood, unlike its ‘vegetarian’ cousins, which must wait for dew or rain.

The mushroom appears to have evolved specifically to grow large enough to cover the site of the original wound, although this may be untrue: larger wounds may be too life-threatening for the host animal to survive. The fungus causes its host persistent, sharp pain, which increases as the fruiting bodies grow through to the surface of the flesh.

Geographical Distribution

This mushroom is mostly equatorial, and mostly grows on sociable carnivore flesh.

Populations

Most predators are territorial and therefore live alone and avoid contact with one another, so this mushroom rarely shows up in any given area consistently. The few sociable predators, such as pinno' grath, are the most at-risk.

Pinno' grath Communities
As pinno' grath often live in communities (albeit loose ones), scab cap infections are moderately common there.

🐳 Position in Ecosystem 🐳

Scab caps are parasitic and feed off the blood of animals. While they can infect herbivores, sociable omnivores and apex predators tend to be the most common hosts.

Apex Predators
Apex predators are more likely than omnivores to live solitary lives, which reduces the likelihood that they will pass on an infection. However, those who have a territory adjacent to others of their species may fight a long-standing rival, out of frustration from the ongoing pain.

Younger animals are more prone to infection as they are likely to be in regular contact with their mother, siblings, or a companion; older ones tend to avoid other animals, including rivals, with the tell-tale white circles of scab caps.

Non-Apex Predators/Omnivores
Omnivores are relatively likely to interact with one another, whether they live in communities or gather to hunt in insect-rich spots. It is the omnivorous community in which the most scab cap infections occur.

Prey Species
Prey animals may be infected if an infected predator tries to catch them and succeeds in scratching them before they escape.

🚀 Technology 🚀

Scab caps contribute nothing to the technological advancement of Kaleida, nor its offworlders.

Agriculture

Scab caps are undesirable as a food item, so are unlikely ever to be farmed.

Language

[I think an insult along the lines of “scab cap infected” may be a good colloquial indicator that a predator is tetchy and irritable, but this would likely be quite a strong insult. I’ll come back to this and potentially build it into a conlang.]

Energy Usage

Like the other carnivorous mushrooms, scab caps draw their energy from their hosts’ blood.

Sanitation

It is recommended for any individual that has been attacked or in a fight to wash their wounds.

History

There is no significant history relating to the scab cap fungus.

Evolution / Genesis

There is no record of when the scab cap began infecting animals.

Culture

Scab caps carry such negative implications that references to them in culture tend to be gloomy if they are referenced at all. The natives of Kaleida tend to try to forget they exist if they can.

Food

It would be difficult to find a sapient who would be happy to eat a scab cap on account of this fungus' notoriety.

Art

Scab caps may or may not show up in Kaleidian art. It is easier to draw than the other carnivorous fungi due to its mushrooms appearing as white circles, but circles on a figure in art may represent other things.

For example, the mukash (and more rarely, the kasulam) use various clays and muds to decorate their skin. Limestone (ie., white) circles on a mukash body indicate that the individual has bold or generous friends or allies. Art of mukash or kasulam with white circles may suggest that the individual received tributes from admirers, benefitted from donations from others, came from a family of adventurers, or had a life-changing scab cap infection. If no story accompanies the art, the viewer must be left to guess.

Social Dynamics

Infected individuals are quarantined (or shunned, depending on the kindness and awareness of their community).

 Politics 

Scab caps are universally unpopular on Kaleida, and good community leaders try to keep them out of their communities.

Utopian / Dystopian Qualities

Kaleida is loosely presented as a utopia, albeit with non-utopian elements for the sake of plausibility. The scab cap is a notable non-utopian part of the ecosystem but is not intended to be an indication that Kaleida is a dystopia.

💲 Economy 💲

An interesting economy has arisen around the treatment of the scab cap fungus. See *Healthcare and Medicine* for full details.

Education

Sapient sociable predators may or may not warn each other about the risks of scab caps. Their capacity for forward planning for hypothetical situations dictates how likely they are to do so.

Sapient sociable non-predators also tend to inform their newer members about this fungus, as a close call in which they are scratched but not caught by a predator can lead to an infection.

Healthcare and Medicine

The treatment for a scab cap infection is much the same as for a tushma coin infection: quarantine to prevent spread, and offers of food until the individual has healed enough to find their own food again.

This type of help is patchy, given the instinctive nature of most of Kaleida's predators - most are not given to developing an understanding of medical interventions so are unsure what to do about an infection other than to exclude the infected.

Prey Helping Predators
The prey species have a higher success rate in terms of treating their infected group-mates than the predators do. In some areas the more socially aware predators notice this. When this happens it has the potential to shift the balance of power between predator and prey.

This is one reason why the mukash and kasulam have succeeded in creating a truce with their pinno' grath neighbours. The mukash and kasulam are aware that this is a fragile agreement given the lack of effective treatments on offer, but they use it and have developed a range of placebo treatments to maintain and build upon the facade.

Shelter

The question of where to house infected individuals, especially predators in prey communities, is one that requires careful handling, let alone arrangements for ensuring the guest is fed. Usually mukash and kasulam communities feed infected pinno’ grath with fish, which they are able to catch using their air-nets.

Credits

Scab cap is © The Character Consultancy
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Wording by The Character Consultancy

Want to upgrade to an Infographic or video, or expand your setting into a worldbuilding project? Email me on hello@thecharacterconsultancy.co.uk and I will be happy to help you!

~Hayley, The Character Consultancy