SKIN STAR

🍄 **Height:** Up to 2in
🍄 **Classification:** Fungus
🍄 **Substrate:** Aquatic cob'li po-fea skin

The skin star is a carnivorous fungus that grows solely in the skin of aquatic cob'li po-fea. Its disturbing appearance and social stigma make treatment a delicate business.

Physiology

An aquatic fungus that grows in the skin of aquatic cob'li po-fea. Its fruiting bodies develop into 'volcano' shaped peaks that are notoriously painful or itchy, depending on the individual host. This unfortunate analogy stretches even further in severe cases when the host can bleed through the hole at the centre of the fruiting body, although blood loss is rarely serious.

Reproduction
The fungus releases its spores into the shaft of the 'volcano', and as the host moves, this draws the spores out of the fruiting body.

Medical Conditions

A skin star infection is a medical condition in its own right, but the fungus is not known to suffer any diseases in its own right.

Geographical Distribution

Rarely seen outside of tropical waters, although it can be seen in salt and fresh water. Ultimately its range depends on the range of its host animals.

Populations

Among sapient populations, the mukash-kasulam burrows who have the most contact with both the helicoid pinno' grath and water are the most likely to see an infection. It has been observed in pinno' grath visiting the Ocean Tribe, Coral Beach Supertribe, and the River Tribe.

🐳 Position in Ecosystem 🐳

The skin star grows in the skin of aquatic cob'li po-fea, so it can be observed in the following species. It should be noted that skin star infections are hard to catch, so they are far from ubiquitous.

Iskoss
The primary host of the skin star. Iskoss are relatively inflexible so are unable to groom their backs, and prefer to spend their time in water, which acts as a medium for the skin star's spores to find its way into scratches in the iskoss' skin.

Sammamimoss
Another animal at high risk of infection. Sammamimoss are solitary and lack limbs, which reduces their ability to groom their skin effectively.

Pinno' grath
The pinno' grath taxonomic Order is made up of many adaptable species. Some are better-equipped to hunt in water than others, but most will try in at least some capacity. This exposes them to risk. They also tend to be flexible, and grooming drastically reduces the risk of an infection taking hold. Helicoid pinno' grath will warn each other of skin star infections noticed in populations of prey animals.

Tannam-fago
These creatures are highly adapted to water, but also mate for life. Breeding pairs affirm their bond by grooming each other, and this reduces the risk of an infection taking hold. Widowed or otherwise long-term single animals are more likely to have an infection.

Khoricru
Most species of khoricru hunt on land, but a few venture into the water. Skin star infections are rare in these creatures, but have been noted.

Jawagora
The more aquatically inclined species of jawagora may catch a skin star infection, although much like the khoricru, they tend to prefer the land.

🚀 Technology 🚀

The skin star has contributed nothing to Kaleida’s technology.

History

The skin star has contributed nothing of note to Kaleida’s history.

Culture

The skin star fungus has an unenviable place in Kaleidan culture. The fungus bears the appearance of tiny volcanoes on the skin, and an infection bears a social stigma.

Food

Skin stars are most certainly not a food item.

Art

Most Kaleidans know what skin stars are and consider them distasteful, not only because this fungus amounts to a skin infection, but also because of the implications of the preventative impact of grooming: many infected animals are outcasts, so an infection carries a stigma.

The fungus' similarity to volcanoes is sometimes observed and recreated in art. The similarity is particularly notable in the faint trace of 'smoke' that can be seen if a skin star is observed in still, clear water, as is the occasional release of blood, reminiscent of lava.

Religion and Spirituality

Shamans perform cleansing rituals partly because of nasty infections such as this. This is all the more true because shamanic practices often involve care of the isolated as well as the sick, meaning that they are sometimes exposed to individuals with skin stars.

This is most often the case with shamans who come into contact with isolated or uneducated helicoid pinno' grath. See *Healthcare and Medicine* for more details.

Social Dynamics

There is a social stigma associated with getting a skin star infection. The implication (and often, the truth) is that the individual is isolated. Individuals with an unpleasant personality, a general hermetic approach to life, or windows, are the most commonly

affected. Whether the rest of the population is sympathetic depends on whether the individual is well-liked or not.

 Politics 

The occasional skin star infections suffered by helicoid pinno' grath have prompted the occasional spell of care provided by kasulam or mukash burrows towards their pinno' grath neighbours. While there are currently no recorded incidences of this being the primary reason for peace between the predator and prey species, the care of isolated individuals from pinno' grath communities has undoubtedly played a supporting role in nudging the two groups to form alliances.

Utopian / Dystopian Qualities

It would be hard to describe the skin star as anything other than a thoroughly unpleasant infection. It is not dystopian in the sense that it creates a systemic problem to anybody, in fact, it can be the catalyst for better relations between Kaleida's sapient predators and prey, but few individuals would choose to have to deal with it.

💲 Economy 💲

The skin star fungus contributes nothing to Kaleida's economy.

Education

Pinno' grath have greater reason to educate their young on the risks of getting a skin star infection, as they are the only member of the pinno' grath/kasulam/mukash trio who are at risk of it. As pinno' grath mothers do not raise their offspring, education is left to the community as a whole.

Kasulam and mukash make sure to educate each other about skin stars, but this is mostly to better understand the plight of infected pinno' grath and to better understand infections when noticed in other species, particularly the sammamimoss occasionally found in piassijada beds.

Healthcare and Medicine

Skin star infections are hard to catch, and are quite unusual. However, they require for the cob'li po-fea to have scratches in the surface of their skin which are not kept clean, and for spores to find their way in.

A skin star infection is either itchy or painful depending on the host animal. Either way, the infection is distracting and can last for a long time: the infection will eventually go away by itself but this can take around 12 weeks, by which time its distracting impact on hunting and hiding from predators can spell the host's death.

Hosts often seek relief in water, either cool for itching, or warm for pain, and this is where the skin star gets the opportunity to disperse its spores. The spores gather in the peaks of the fruiting bodies and will drift out when exposed to water, creating a subtle 'smoking' effect. More serious infections may cause bleeding, and the blood may also drift from the fruiting body when immersed in water. This can be disturbing to see, but the blood loss is not serious.

At a social level, other pinno' grath do not like to interact with infected individuals so will generally shun them. The stigma is often strong enough to overcome the knowledge that skin star infections only take in water, so infected pinno' grath are generally not allowed into the community's caves.

Notably, the kasulam themselves, while they will hunt in the water, are invulnerable to infection. This is believed to be because they are wabl'o poba and lack the specific skin composition that the skin star needs to take hold and grow. This allows shamans to treat infected pinno' grath in safety.

The most effective treatment involves quarantine, with the individual staying out of water for long enough for the fungus to clear up without spreading its spores. In time, the fruiting bodies dry out and fall off, and should be completely removed from the quarantine area. Dried skin stars should not be introduced to water as there is a risk of infection.

Credits

Skin Star is © The Character Consultancy
Artwork by RJ Nieto and provided with their kind permission
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