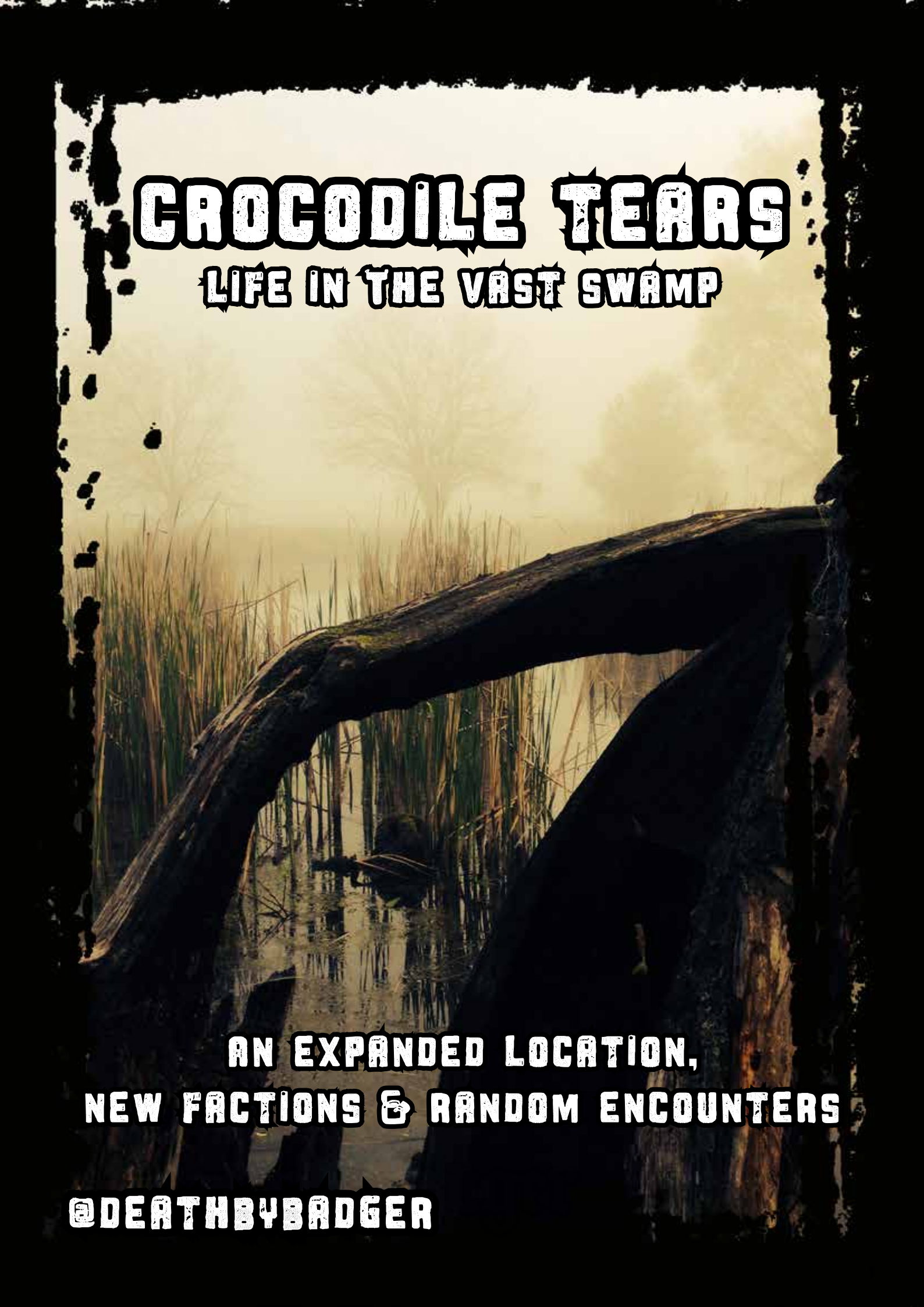




CROCODILE TEARS

LIFE IN THE VAST SWAMP

**AN EXPANDED LOCATION,
NEW FACTIONS & RANDOM ENCOUNTERS**

@DEATHBYBADGER

CROCODILE TEARS

The Vast Swamp is a pestilent canker on the face of Faerun, and a blight on the kingdoms of Cormyr and Sembia. Adventurers who must travel the swamps do so at their own peril, risking life and limb in the muck and the mud.

An expanded location for the Forgotten Realms.

BY OLIVER CLEGG
[@DEATHBYBADGER]

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CROCODILE TEARS

*If you wander in the water
Be careful, like your parents taught you
For underneath the riverbed
A smiling friend might raise his head
And crying ask you to come near
Crooning to abate your fear
You must not flinch, or even blink
Don't laugh, don't stop to pause and think
Or you too will join the little dears
Who gave their lives to Crocodile Tears*

This is an expanded location for the Forgotten Realms, covering the Vast Swamp, a bog which lurks on the edge of Cormyr and Sembia.

Overview

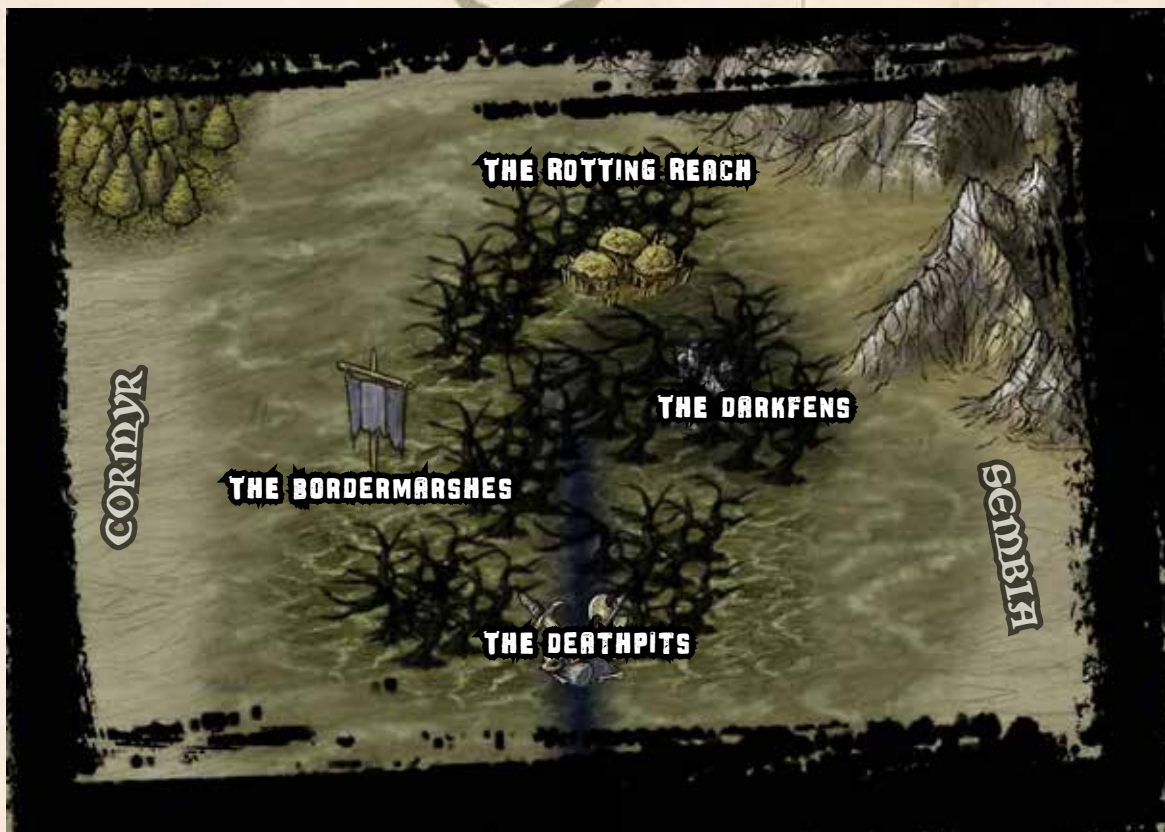
The Vast Swamp crawls with diseased orcs, guerrilla goblins and murderous hobgoblins. Behind the scenes, Illithids lurk in the swamps, keeping their existence a secret. Poisons fill the air, and muck coats the water. It will take a brave company indeed to dare the dangers of the Vast Swamp, and a lucky one to come out alive. *Crocodile Tears* contains information on:

The Bordermarsh, and the beasts that dwell therein.

The Rotting Reach, and the infected orcs seeking out new vectors for their contagion.

The Deathpits, where traps both manufactured and natural wait to drag you to your doom.

The Darkfens, where illusions of darkness conceal a nasty surprise.



The Vast Swamp lies on the borders of Cormyr and Sembia, a hideous canker on the face of both realms that neither has the stomach to claim for their own. Widely known for its evil and deadly reputation, the swamp originated in the long distant past after an unknown tragedy devastated the kingdom of Orva. The swamp encroaches year by year on the lands of its neighbours, and those unfortunate enough to live on the borders of the swamp often find themselves battling its errant children - violent animals, rampaging undead and barbaric humanoids. Since the devastating effects of the Spellplague, it has changed significantly for the worse, to the chagrin of travellers everywhere. The tribal boundaries set by orcs, goblinoids and lizardfolk have long since faded into obscurity, instead replaced by four regions that each exemplify an aspect of the bog's evil.

The Bordermarshes, closest to Cormyr, are a gloomy mess of water, mud and violent animals.

The Deathpits, abandoned wastelands of tribal war, remain a killing field of hobgoblins and goblinoids to this day.

The Rotting Reach has been entirely subsumed by disease and rot, a contagion which seeks to spread itself even further afield.

The Darkfens, closest to Sembia, are a misleadingly quiet hunting ground for Illithids, Grell, and those things which walk silently by night.

CROCODILE TEARS

THE VAST SWAMP

Factions

Many dangers lurk within the Vast Swamp. Some are intelligent, others merely feral. All have the potential to be deadly to the unwary, or the unwise. Though some less charitable scholars would condemn the entire swamp as a festering den of chaotic, senseless evil, it remains true that the populations in the swamp are divided into several independent factions, each with their own habits, habitats and agendas.

Orcs [The Rotting Reach]

Driven into the swamps in days long forgotten, the Blood Moon Orcs of the Vast Swamp have long since acclimatised to their existence in the dark and wet. The high prevalence of disease and rot has allowed the Chosen of Yurtruus, a filthy shaman known as Vanchu the White, to assume control over the tribes and marshal them into a hunting force for his cruel whims. Their tribal customs are brutal and unforgiving, largely involving ever-increasing numbers of Orcs being intentionally infected with deadly diseases to act as vectors when the tribe encounters any of the foes they share the marshes with.

Goblins [The Deathpits]

Nasty and thoroughly treacherous creatures at the best of times, the swamp goblins have become little better than murderous gremlins due to the evil influence of their home. When the hobgoblins began to destroy their villages, the goblins forsook their tribes and any semblance of organized structure. Since, the goblins have recently devolved into a hideous guerrilla war against any non-goblins in the swamp. Though weak individually, their endless crusade with poisoned weapons and crude traps has proven fatal to more than one careless explorer over the years.

Lizardfolk [Enslaved]

Several tribes of lizardfolk haunt the swamp like wraiths, almost invisible in the mud, fog and water. Enslaved to the ever-growing influence of the mind flayer colony infesting the Darkfens, lizardfolk thralls wander the darkness seeking out food for their betentacled masters.

Hobgoblins [The Deathpits]

Outcasts from their militaristic society, the Hobgoblins of the Vast Swamp have dedicated themselves to the worship of Cyric, god of madness and lies in the only way Hobgoblins know how - a prolonged

crusade and conquest. Moving through the swamp with a slow but inexorable tread, the Hobgoblins are one of the most dangerous combined threats that inhabits the swamps today. Having destroyed all the goblin settlements, the Hobgoblins found them unable to tame without the blessing of Maglubiyet, and take great shame in their failure to do so.

Illithids [The Darkfens]

Largely unproven, but increasingly suspected, is the rumour of an illithid colony buried in the swamp. The unfortunate truth is born out by the occasional body found with brain extracted, or by humanoids found wandering aimlessly, all trace of their personality erased. The illithids kept here have adopted many of the customs of their food, and stay camouflaged under the water, and hidden in mossy banks, where they wait for prey to come within reach of their psionic powers. The reach of the colony is far greater than any scholar has yet imagined, and the resident Elder Brain uses the network of mind flayers to gather information, foil attempts to pierce the swamp's interior, and destroy interlopers.

Grell [The Darkfens]

Somewhat unique to the Vast Swamp is a variety of intelligent Grell not found elsewhere. Canny predators with greater stamina and psionic ability than their extraneous counterparts, they serve a gigantic and incredibly powerful grell known only as the Emperor. What relations these aberrations maintain with the Illithids is unknown, but for two such powerful aberrant colonies to remain in close proximity is unusual indeed.

The Undead [Everywhere]

Many have died in the Vast Swamp, slain by creatures fair and foul. Others died of starvation, of poisoning, or merely drowned in the bog. Many of these corpses have spontaneously animated, imbued with the dark malevolence that permeates the entire region. Many are mummies, lacking the characteristic wrappings but no less ghastly, and equally well-preserved by the bog through millennia of silent torture.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE SWAMP I KNEW?

Since the last time the Vast Swamp was visited, the world has undergone several catastrophes. The appearance of the Chosen, the Spellplague, various and sundry Sunderings...the ecosystem of the swamp has survived these changes, but the inhabitants have suffered, most devolving into destruction or evil. No longer is the swamp effectively policed by distinct tribes of humanoids, and no longer are the boundaries as identifiable as they once were. Evil left to itself will always devour its own tail, and the Vast Swamp is a good example of this.

TERRAIN: THE BORDERMARSH [BEASTS, ROADS, MARSHLAND]

The Bordermarsh

The Bordermarsh is as safe as the Vast Swamps get, which is to say, not at all. The trees are thinner here than elsewhere in the bogs

Lighting: The Bordermarsh is brightly lit during the day, and only occasionally impeded by fog.

Terrain: Waterlogged earth, occasional stone paths fallen to disrepair. Frequent lakes, ponds and small growths of spindly trees.

Navigation DC: 10

Foraging DC: 15

Special Rules; The Vast Swamp emits an aura of evil which drives lesser creatures to violence. See Tainted Resonance.

Navigation

A party traveling to a specific destination, or to another general part of the swamp must succeed on a Wisdom (Survival) check to find their way, even if they have a map. Characters not proficient in Survival automatically fail this check.

Bordermarsh Encounter Table

d12+d8	Darkfens Encounters
2	1d4 crocodiles
3	1d4 giant frogs
4	1d6 swarms of rats
5	2d6 stirges
6	1d6 poisonous snakes
7	1d4 zombies
8	1d4 skeletons
9	1d4 lizardfolk (hunting beasts)
10	1d4 orcs and 1 hand of yurtruus
11	1d6 swarms of insects (flies)
12	1d4 swarms of rot grubs
13	1 giant toad
14	1 vargouille
15	1d4 lizardfolk druid (crazed)
16	1 swarm of poisonous snakes
17	1d6 goblins
18	1 will'o'wisp (leading people astray)
19	1d4 death dogs
20	1 giant octopus (looking for food)

Tainted Resonance

The Vast Swamp emanates an aura of evil, which pulses outwards at random. These convulsions affect creatures near the swamp, driving them into bad moods and foul tempers. Beasts are particularly affected by this. Any beast with an intelligence of less than 4 that enters the Outer Swamp becomes hostile to other living creatures not of its species. Fey creatures, and creatures with the Fey Ancestry trait feel uncomfortable here, as if something is watching them.

Bordermarsh Tactical Terrain

The Bordermarsh can be relatively safely traversed by those following a map and sticking to the damaged roads. Elsewhere large water features block the path of those unwilling to swim or sail, and the mud threatens to drag careless wanderers underneath to their deaths.

Stay On The Road. Characters on a stone road are not susceptible to attack by lesser undead here, as ancient warding magics protecting the trade ways continue to repel creatures of darkness.

Bordermarsh Terrain

30 % crumbling fork in the road
10 % path leads into a dark lake or still pond
30 % large jagged stones dot the earth here
10 % 1d4 quagmire pits (see sidebar)
5 % abandoned campsite, evidence of violence
5 % flickering lights in the distance, further into the swamp

QUAGMIRE

A quagmire pit covers the ground in roughly a 10-foot-square area and is usually 10 feet deep. When a creature enters the area, it sinks 1d4 + 1 feet into the quagmire and becomes restrained. At the start of each of the creature's turns, it sinks another 1d4 feet. As long as the creature isn't completely submerged in quicksand, it can escape by using its action and succeeding on a Strength check. The DC is 10 plus the number of feet the creature has sunk into the quagmire. A creature that is completely submerged in quagmire can't breathe (see the suffocation rules in the Player's Handbook).

A creature can pull another creature within its reach out of a quagmire pit by using its action and succeeding on a Strength check. The DC is 5 plus the number of feet the target creature has sunk into the quagmire.

BIRD AND BEAST

The Bordermarsh, though imbued with the same lurking evil as the rest of the Vast Swamp, still plays host to a variety of animals driven feral and vicious by the taint. Included below are a list of animals or variants that call the Vast Swamp home.

Doom Leeches

Native to the Vast Swamp, Doom Leeches are an unfortunate blight on the already inhospitable landscape. Hiding in the waters of the Darkfens and the Rotting Reach, the Doom Leeches have thrived on the bodies of suicidal orcs tumbling into the water to find release from the Wormwood Plague infection. Though the size of a man's fist and incredibly ugly, the term Doom Leech is a misnomer, based on the mistranslation of roguish Gnome explorer Bimblefuzz Potterbee, who was heard to exclaim "Dumb Leeches" as he trudged back from his brief foray into the swamps. The Doom Leeches are harmless to living creatures, only feeding on dead materials and corpses.

Bog Bees

Corrupted from tame bees that once provided sustenance for the fallen Orvan empire, the Bog Bees are a dangerous nuisance to anyone who eats between midnight and dawn, when swarms of the insects rise from the swamps to pursue unlucky holders of sandwiches. Use the statistics for a **swarm of insects** to represent bog bees, with a flying speed of 90 feet.

Giant Enemy Hermit Crabs

Mutated into monstrous size by an overabundance of mussels, snails and protozoa in the Vast Swamp's ecosystem. The crabs of the Vast Swamp are particularly awful in that they like to skin any humanoid prey they manage to kill, and drape the skin over themselves as accessories. Precisely why they do this is unclear, but it makes for a gruesome spectacle.

Crocodiles

The crocodiles of the Vast Swamp have a particularly nasty reputation. Infected by the malice of the Bordermarshes, the crocodiles are far more cunning than their ordinary counterparts. They employ tricks and traps to catch food, from camouflaging themselves under mud to pretending to be wounded. Additionally, they've been known to work as teams by hounding prey into goblin traps or poisonous gas clouds, dashing in to retrieve the bodies when the target has been worn to exhaustion.

Critters Galore

The Swamp is a large ecosystem home to a wide variety of angry animals. A brief breakdown of the more frequent flavourful fauna in each region might include:

BORDERMARSHES

- Frogs & Giant Frogs
- Crocodiles
- Beetles
- Giant Crabs

ROTTING REACH

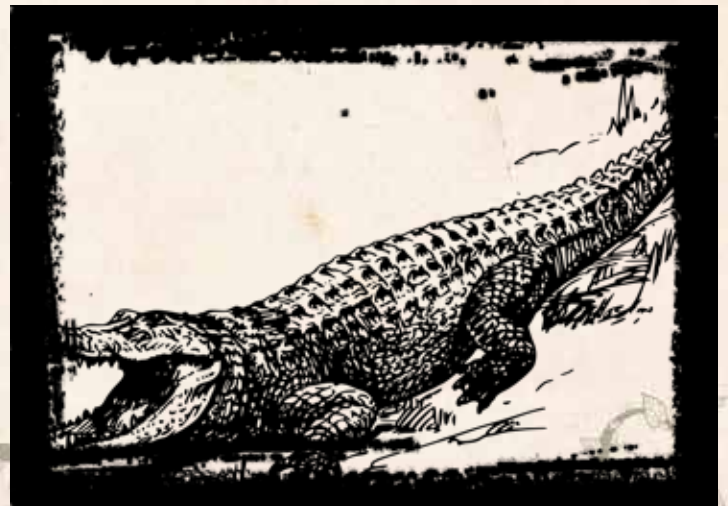
- Leeches
- Insects
- Snakes
- Lizards (poisonous)

DEATHPITS

- Flies, maggots, rot grubs
- Hyenas, death dogs, carrion eaters
- Crows and ravens
- Badgers

DARKFENS

- Quippers
- Leeches
- Crocodiles
- Sharks (inexplicably)



THE CROCODILE'S TEARS

CORMYREAN VANGUARD

HUMAN LEGION - THE BORDERMARSHES

Inspired by dreams of conquest, and haunted by errant dreams, a Cormyrean vanguard has been lured to the Bordermarshes by illithid minions of the Imperator, an elder brain of immense power residing deep in the swamp. Believing themselves on a sacred colonial mission, the Cormyrean vanguard has set up a palisade camp at the edge of the Bordermarshes from which to launch ill-fated sallies into the darkness with torches, salt and axes.

Appearance

The largest fortification of the Cormyrean assault on the Vast Swamp is a high-walled and newly constructed palisade encampment, trussed together from timber harvested farther inland. The ground here has been salted, stabilised and fortified by the magic of the War Wizards, and is comfortably steady underfoot. The camp is huge, large enough to house the entire entourage of knights-errant and their retainers, in addition to a full regiment of blades and telswords.

Key NPCs

Lionar Arthur Cormaeril (LN human **knight**) is overseeing the enterprise, and is thoroughly sick at the very idea of swamps. Middle-aged and only moderately successful, he is an estranged scion of a noble family and his weak blood has placed him far from the possibility of wealth or stature. His family (much diminished in fortune and fallen from favour) has pressured him to mastermind the crusade, but his heart isn't in it. Worse, he recognizes the assault for the futile gesture it is, and thus has very little to do with the day-to-day running of things, preferring instead to lurk inside his command tent and brood over outdated maps. Of late, he's been having strange nightmares he can't explain, something he keeps to himself, and this is responsible for much of his dour temperament.

Swordcaptain Lance Alabaster (NE human champion) is second in command, and handles many complaints that Lionar Cormaeril won't attend to. He is young, impetuous, and often seen about the camp giving orders and throwing about opinions noone asked for. His skin is deathly pale, and his eyes a peculiar purple colour. This stems from his parentage, as Lance was born to a Deep Imaskari mother in the gutters of Baldur's Gate, and has done much to advance his position since. He'll do almost anything to climb up the ladder of power, and whilst conscious of the dangers of the Vast Swamp, sees it as a challenge that will propel him further up the military chain of command.

Kettle & Black are tabaxi merchants. They are in fact, the only traders willing to bring their supplies

so close to the Vast Swamp (the risk of their entire stock mouldering away is quite high) as the twins are incredibly keen to take a look at the things people bring out. Originally from far-off Maztica, the Tabaxi have strong accents, and often gabble their words so fast that it's impossible to understand what they are saying. Kettle & Black sell alchemy supplies, herbs, healing potions, food and other consumables.

The Black Hand are a martial extension of the Church of Bane. Willing and eager recruits to the Vast Swamp have proved hard to come by, no more so than in the sorely needed cleric powers of healing. Temples of peace and forbearance have condemned the enterprise as foolhardy and wasteful. The expedition was largely saved by the arrival of the priesthood of Bane, to whom the military lifestyle comes naturally. High Priest Jandil (NE human **priest**) is a tall and imperious woman with a harsh countenance. She values excellence above all, and it is her peerless and ceaseless devotion to perfection that has gained her Bane's favour.

[Kettle & Black sell alchemy supplies, herbs, healing potions, food and other consumables, as outlined in Appendix A: Trades and Services]



THE CROCODILE'S TEARS

THE UNDEAD

WANDERING UNDEAD

The undead which haunt the Vast Swamp are of nebulous origin. Often called 'spontaneous undead', the skeletons and corpses of long dead adventurers, explorers and tribesmen frequently animate and assault the strongholds of the living. The preservative qualities of the swamp results in a higher than usual quantity of mummies, carrying with them the dangerous mummy rot disease. Precisely what evil touch results in these undead occurrences has yet to be discovered, but rumours of anything from necromancers through to an insane cabal of lichs have been mooted over the years to little agreement.

Appearance

The undead of the vast swamp have often been well preserved by the swamps, and even skeletons can commonly be seen with fleshy remnants dangling from their filthy bones. They often smell horribly, which can make them easier to detect as they chase down living prey. Bog **mummies** are rarely mummified, and instead present as pickled humanoid, though they are no less deadly.

Those Who Came Before

The King That Was. Legends of fallen Orva have long since faded into obscurity for all but those bards who make it their mission to recall the songs of olden days. Precisely where Orva was, and what the people were like, is a fact simply lost to contemporary scholarship. Equally unknown is the fact that a relic of Orva still lives in the form of The King That Was, a death knight who stalks the swamp, meting out justice and murder as he sees fit. Word of his presence has never escaped the swamp for the simple reason that none who have faced him have ever lived to tell the tale. Should The King That Was ever be slain, his curse would return him to wander the bogs until such a day as he could make amends for his crimes.

The Queen of Drowned and Forgotten Things.

The kingdom of Orva knew many secrets, but now they all lie under the water, lost to all but those who would dare to dive down deep into the darkness. Shackled to her tomb, the Queen of Drowned and Forgotten things rages, spitting curses into the void. An ancient mummy lord, her powers extend to encompass all those who drown in the swamps, puppeteering their corpses as mummies and sending them to feed on the living.

Jack of the Lanterns. This lonely and hunch-backed caretaker of the swamps can be found tending to the dead, sending them back to slumber with a whisper. The light of his many lanterns can be seen from a distance, shimmering through the

trees in an eerie fashion. He hasn't been seen in so many years that he has become little more than a fairy tale. Some say that Jack is an avatar of Kelemvor, walking in the world of mortals to soothe the restless dead. Others say he is a servitor left over from a dead kingdom, following his master's last command over and over.

Old Habits Die Hard

The restless dead of Orva can sometimes be seen mimicking things they once did in life, or re-enacting scenes from their memories. To generate a random life event for randomly generated undead to be performing, roll on the Chewing The Scenery table below.

Chewing The Scenery

d10	Darkfens Encounters
1	Skeletons , performing a silent play.
2	A mummy looking for a lost child.
3	A zombie wife drowning her husband.
4	A skeleton smashing its head into a tree.
5	A shadow clutching at the water
6	A zombie pretending to drown
7	A skeleton walking endlessly in circles
8	A ghoul chewing on a tree.
9	A crawling claw stroking a skull.
10	A banshee singing a dirge

TERRAIN: THE DEATHPITS [TRAPS, CORPSES, WASTELAND]

The Deathpits

The Deathpits are a warground between savage hobgoblins and guerrilla goblins. This war has long since lost any meaning, and will likely endure until one side manages to exterminate the other, or drive them away. The ground is littered with dangerous traps and deadly pitfalls laid by the goblins, and patrolled by murderous hobgoblin kill squads.

Lighting: The trees in the Deathpits have suffered a lot of damage from excessive logging and from explosive traps or spells. The area is brightly lit in the day.

Terrain: The terrain here is less waterlogged than elsewhere, and in some places you can walk easily. Other puddles can range from ankle to waist deep. The earth is grey and ashen - occasionally goblinoid bones poke out from shallow graves.

Navigation DC: 10

Foraging DC: 15

Special Rules: The Deathpits are riddled with the eponymous goblin pit traps. See Traps.

Navigation

A party traveling to a specific destination, or to another general part of the swamp must succeed on a Wisdom (Survival) check to find their way, even if they have a map. Characters not proficient in Survival automatically fail this check.

Deathpits Tactical Terrain

The Deathpits, despite having been purged of most natural dangers by the goblinoid rampage, remains a treacherous battlefield thanks to the high number of goblin traps and the carelessly discarded tools of war lying all over the place.

Deathpits Terrain

60% filled with 1d10 goblin deathpits placed at random intervals
10% shattered blades and sharp edges scattered all over the ground
5% thick mud clogged with bones and blood, difficult terrain
5% unburied skeletons and bodies, carrion eaters everywhere
10% air thick with buzzing flies and stench of death
10% abandoned goblin or goblinoid campsite

Traps

The goblins here have long staged a guerrilla war against their hobgoblin oppressors. Traps are hidden everywhere, and the most common is the infamous Goblin Deathpit.

GOBLIN DEATHPIT

Simple trap (level 1–4, dangerous threat)

This 10 foot deep hole in the floor is concealed with a muddy blanket and dead leaves. At the bottom are poisoned stakes.

Trigger. Anyone who steps on the leaves or might fall into the pit.

Effect. The triggering creature must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. On a successful save, the creature catches itself on the pit's edge or instinctively steps back. On a failed save, the creature falls into the pit taking 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall, 1d6 damage from the stakes, and a further 1d4 poison damage.

Deathpits Encounter Table

d12 + d8	Deathpits Encounters
2	1d6 gnolls and 1d4 hyenas
3	1 giant badger , hungry
4	1 ghast and 1d4 ghouls
5	1 goblin (looking for food)
6	1d4 hobgoblins
7	1d6 goblins
8	1d6 goblin skeletons
9	1d4 hobgoblin zombies
10	1d4 hobgoblins (dying from wounds)
11	1d8 goblin corpses nailed to a tree
12	Prayer to Cyric etched into a tree
13	1d4 goblins and 1d4 pet wolves
14	1 goblin , running away from 1d4 hobgoblins
15	1d4 grey oozes , (looking for corpses)
16	1d4 hyenas (scavenging bodies)
17	1 vulture picking at a hobgoblin corpse
18	1 death dog (feral)
19	2d4 giant rats (diseased and scavenging)
20	2d6 gnolls , starving

THE BOGGARTS

SWAMP GOBLINS

The swamp goblins who live in the Deathpits have rapidly habituated to their guerilla lifestyle. Freed from the tyranny of the hobgoblins, they have developed hit-and-run tactics, a wide variety of pit traps, and move their small cells around the swamp day by day to evade the predations of their enemies. Despite the initial inconvenience of the move, the goblins have lost very little in terms of living standards, and gained much in personal freedom.

Appearance

The boggarts, or swamp goblins, have a pale blue skin which seems green in bright light. Their eyes are orange, and they retain the slanted ears and wretched forms that mark them out as goblins rather than halflings or gnomes. Lack of sleep often results in sunken eye sockets, and malnutrition can make them seem emaciated.

Tactics

Swamp goblins attack any hobgoblins they see, otherwise preferring to keep a safe distance and watch from afar. If a good moment presents itself, they attack creatures for their supplies, launching salvos of poison darts and arrows before retreating into the swamps. They will often then track their targets, attacking once their prey seems weary or complacent. In this fashion, they are capable of taking down much stronger and better equipped foes.

Swamp goblins travel in cells of four to ten. Half of these goblins are usually female, and some will be carrying young goblins strapped to their backs. Goblins old enough to walk are considered old enough to join the hunt, and contribute in battle.

Traps

The swamp goblins spend any spare time they have repairing and creating the endless series of Deathpits they are famous for. The simplicity of the pits allows for minor variations in execution, and the pits are usually filled with whatever the goblins have to hand, from spikes through to oozes, or giant badgers,

Boohyag

Though Swamp Goblins have as much reverence for Boohyag ("magic") as their landbound cousins, they owe their freedom to the swamps, and worship it as a deity. Calling it variations on the Great Maw, the more fervent amongst them sometimes receive druidic powers as a result. Use the **druid** statblock to represent these boggarts, adding the Nimble Escape feature common to all goblins,



Running A Swamp Goblin Encounter

When running an encounter that includes Swamp Goblins, keep the following ideas in mind:

- **Live to fight another day:** Boggarts are cowards, like most goblins, and will happily retreat if things go ill for them.
- **Fight dirty:** Poison, traps, disease. The goblins don't have care for concept of honor. A kill is a kill.
- **The True Enemy:** Swamp Goblins will drop everything if they catch wind of hobgoblins, making efforts to scatter or prepare traps as context demands.

THE LOST LEGION

CYRIC WORSHIPPING HOBGOBLINS

A relic from some long forgotten war, the Lost Legion were once a proud hobgoblin regiment dedicated to their tyrannical god Maglubiyet. As they camped near the Vast Swamp, the hobgoblins came under the influence of the Cyrinishad, an evil text which converts all those who read it to the worship of the dark god Cyric, lord of madness and lies. Order soon turned to chaos as Maglubiyet forsook his faithless children. The hobgoblins, bereft of leadership, blamed their lesser goblin kin for the tragedy, and have hunted them through the bogs ever since.

Appearance

Retaining the distinctive orange skin and proud bearing of other hobgoblins, the Lost Legion proudly bear the dark sun of Cyric tattooed on their foreheads and painted onto their equipment. They often leave the sites of their murders inscribed with mad prayers to Cyric and daubed in blood on every surface.

Tactics

Abandoned by their god, the hobgoblins of the swamps have long since given up their regiments and companies in favour of 4-man assassination squads. Even Cyric's influence could not entirely purge the competence from the hobgoblins, it seems, as the murder cells have proven dangerous and effective in the darkness of the bog. Able to move stealthily in smaller groups, the hobgoblins have largely remained a threat due to their ability to work together and adapt. Sleeping in trees, taking shift watches, keeping careful track of time and the feeding habits of swamp threats - each hobgoblin cell is a goldmine of knowledge about the swamp, something they use to their advantage when tracking down prey.

Four Man Cells

A typical four man cell contains four distinct roles.

- The first, the Striker, handles combat with dangerous foes, and uses his body as a shield for weaker members of the cell.
- The second, the Strifeleader, is a priest of Cyric, and uses his murderous magic to end fights quickly. If a member of the cell is close to death, the Strifeleader casts an augury to determine whether they deserve to live.
- The third, the Warcaster, is a relic from the regimental days. Using scraps of knowledge remembered from those days, the warcaster enchants, disables and controls the battlefield with arcane magic.
- The fourth, the Nightblade, scouts and spies for the cell, recovering information and silently tracking foes.

The Cyrinishad

It's unknown how a copy of the Cyrinishad ended up in the hands of the Lost Legion. Regardless, it isn't known where the copy vanished to after the Lost Legion disappeared into the swamps. It's been suggested that a sneaky goblin stole the book, bearing it off into the swamps, and that this is the reason the hobgoblins hunt down their erstwhile slaves so brutally and relentlessly. It's just as possible that the book has been lost in the preservative muck of the bogs, and that some unlucky soul could stumble across it entirely by accident.



TERRAIN: THE ROTTING REACH

[DISEASE, POISON, BOG]

The Rotting Reach

The Rotting Reach is dominated by the influence of the orcish general Vanchu the White, a Chosen of Yurtruus who has subjugated the Blood Moon orcs in the swamp and infected them with mind-adding pestilence. From his grisly throne in a fetid backwater, he directs his minions to mindlessly assault anything they encounter in the swamp, in an attempt to spread his infection (and thus his influence) farther afield.

Lighting: The Rotting Reach is dimly lit, as the thick & corpulent trees block out some of the daylight.

Terrain: Thick and stinking mud, riddled with vermin corpses, dying trees and decomposing plants. Tracks stick easily here, but food is almost impossible to find.

Navigation DC: 10

Foraging DC: 20

Special Rules: The unnatural aura of the Rotting Reach affects healing. See Yurtruus' Blessing. Also, the unholy influence has increased the pernicious nature of the pestilence that hangs over the area, see the Wormwood Plague sidebar.

Navigation

A party traveling to a specific destination, or to another general part of the swamp must succeed on a Wisdom (Survival) check to find their way, even if they have a map. Characters not proficient in Survival automatically fail this check.

Rotting Reach Tactical Terrain

The Rotting Reach is not as hard as other parts of the swamp to traverse, but it visitors are likely to be hampered by the stench of rot and death that hangs in the area like a pall.

Bad Air. The air here is tainted and foul. Wisdom (perception) checks based on smell fail automatically for any character that needs to breathe.

Rotting Reach Terrain

30 % Small 10 fee radius island, waterlogged
 10 % 2d6 withered trees, obstructing view
 30 % Thick fog, visibility reduced to 10 feet
 10 % Vines and creepers hang down from the trees
 5 % Poisonous mist - [DC10 constitution saving throw or poisoned for 1 hour]
 5 % Psionic Anomaly - [DC10 wisdom saving throw, or gain short term madness trait]

Yurtruus' Blessing

The foul influence of Yurtruus imbues the waters of the Rotting Reach. Characters have disadvantage on saving throws against poison and disease whilst in the reach. Characters who attempt to use an ability that cures the poisoned condition, or removes a disease, must succeed on a DC12 Charisma saving throw or expend that use of the ability to no effect.

Rotting Reach Encounter Table

d12 + d8	Darkfens Encounters
2	1 gas spore
3	1 mummy
4	1d4 giant poisonous snakes
5	1d4 giant rats
6	1d6 orcs, (poisoned)
7	1 orc nurtured one of yurtruus
8	1d6 skeletons
9	1d4 death dogs
10	1d4 orcs and 1 hand of yurtruus
11	1 orog (poisoned) and 1d4 orcs (poisoned)
12	1 carrion crawler
13	1d4 swarms of insects (leeches)
14	1 spawn of kyuss
15	1d4 swarms of rot grubs
16	1 eye of gruumsh and 1d4 orcs (poisoned)
17	1d6 goblins
18	1 wererat (feral)
19	2d6 giant rats (diseased)
20	1 troll

THE BLOOD MOON

ORC TRIBE - THE ROTTING REACH

The Blood Moon orcs, a tribe which have long dwelled on the outskirts of the Vast Swamp, have in recent years been decimated by an internal threat which threatens their very existence. A Chosen has risen in their ranks, dedicated to Yurtruus, Orc god of disease and rot. Under his brief and unpleasant stint of leadership, the tribe has fallen to pestilence and death, becoming a mere fraction of their former numbers. As the bodies begin to form mounds, Vanchu the White looks beyond his borders, dreaming of spreading his foul will across the entire swamp, and perhaps even into the lands of men.

Appearance

Blood Moon orcs vary in their appearance depending on how sick they are. All Blood Moon orcs are infected with the Wormwood Plague, and many have entered the later stages of infection. These orcs have entirely white eyes, and their skin is a pale grey/white.

Tactics

Most Blood Moon orcs, other than those few devoted to the worship of Yurtruus, have lost their mind to the sickness. They are violent, murderous and careless. Seeing another living creature is enough to drive them into a frenzy, the infection driving them to attack strangers in the hope of securing new hosts for the disease. Priests of Yutruus, allowed to keep a modicum of their sanity by Vanchu, can sometimes be seen guiding groups of mad orcs towards more civilized areas.

Vanchu the White

Rescued from a hideous death at the hands of a virulent swamp plague by Yurtruus, Vanchu the white is a young and thin orc with emaciated ribs. He leans heavily on a staff hewn from a white willow tree, and speaks in a hoarse whisper. His word is law to those orcs infected with Wormwood Plague.

Undying Sentinels

Orcs killed by the plague are animated by the infection, instead becoming **zombies** under the control of Vanchu. Whilst this is a useful tool which Vanchu uses to police the borders of his domain, these Orcs are no longer capable of transmitting the infection to a living creature.

Running A Blood Moon Orc Encounter

When running an encounter that includes Blood Moon Orcs, keep the following ideas in mind:

- **Mindless Vectors:** Most blood orcs are driven to spread their disease however necessary -tooth and claw can be especially scary.
- **No Fear:** Infected orcs are beyond fear of death or capture. They always fight to the death,



WORMWOOD PLAGUE

When a humanoid creature is touched by a creature that carries the disease, or when it comes into contact with filth or offal contaminated by the disease, the creature must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or become infected.

It takes 1d4 days for wormwood plague's symptoms to manifest in an infected creature. Symptoms include fading of the skin to a pale white, loss of colour from the eyes, and an intense desire to touch other creatures. The infected creature suffers one level of exhaustion, and it regains only half the normal number of hit points from spending Hit Dice and no hit points from finishing a long rest.

At the end of each long rest, an infected creature must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the character gains one level of exhaustion. A creature killed whilst infected with Wormwood Plague becomes a **zombie**.

TERRAIN: THE DARKFENS

[NIGHTMARES, DARKNESS, UNDERDARK]

The Darkfens

The Darkfens is a dangerous and treacherous area plagued by illithids, grell and the walking dead. The tribes of humanoids that inhabit other areas dare not wander here, lest they end up dinner for any of the horrors that dwell in the darkness. The plants here are invariably poisonous or rotting.

Lighting: The Darkfens is covered by a thick canopy, and pitch black.

Terrain: This area is completely waterlogged. Characters must swim or sail here. On the rare and occasional landmass, the tangled roots, trees and sinkholes make this entire area difficult terrain.

Navigation DC: 15

Foraging DC: 20

Special Rules: If the characters take a long rest in The Darkfens, roll on the Bad Dreams.

Navigation

A party traveling to a specific destination, or to another general part of the swamp must succeed on a Wisdom (Survival) check to find their way, even if they have a map. Characters not proficient in Survival automatically fail this check.

Bad Dreams

The Darkfens are filled with ambient psionic resonance from the large populations of Illithids and Grell that inhabit the area. Groups that try and rest here may fall prey to that influence. When a character finishes a long rest in The Darkfens, roll on the following table to decide if and how it affected them

d20 Result

1-10 No effect

11-14 Character forgets the events of the last 24 hours.

15-16 Character gains no benefit from the rest.

17-19 Character gains no benefit from the rest, and gains a level of exhaustion.

20 Character gains a Long Term Madness trait, [see DMG].

Darkfens Tactical Terrain

The Darkfens is an incredibly difficult place to traverse, filled with obstacles both living and dead. Attackers native to the swamps often attack from beneath the water using camouflage, or assault intruders from the branches of trees. Every encounter in The Darkfens is affected by the following attributes.

Fog. A miasma of sickly yellow fog grants light obscurement and disadvantage on checks that rely on scent.

Water. The water here ranges from neck deep to unknown depths.

Darkfens Terrain

30 % Small 10 feet radius island, waterlogged

10 % 2d6 withered trees, obstructing view

30 % Thick fog, visibility reduced to 10 feet

10 % Vines and creepers hang down from the trees

5 % Poisonous mist - [DC10 constitution saving throw or poisoned for 1 hour]

5 % Psionic Anomaly - [DC10 wisdom saving throw, or gain short term madness trait]

Darkfens Encounter Table

d12 + d8	Darkfens Encounters
2	1 Illithid (spying)
3	1d4 giant crocodiles
4	1 roper
5	1 Otyugh
6	1 Giant Crocodile (crazed)
7	2d6 swarms of quippers
8	3d4 lizardfolk (mindless thralls)
9	1 Catoblepas (grazing)
10	1d4 black puddings
11	1 wood woad (guarding a tree)
12	1 beholder zombie
13	1 wraith
14	1 spawn of kyuss
15	1d8 crocodiles
16	1 mindwitness (patrolling)
17	1d4 gibbering mouthers
18	2d6 lizardfolk thralls and 1 mind flayer
19	1 shambling mound and 1d4 will'o'wisps
20	1 Hydra (territorial)

THE EMPEROR

ILLITHID COLONY - THE DARKFENS

Evidence of illithid influence deep in the Vast Swamp has been hard to acquire, but many scholars have long posited the possible existence of a colony based on the anecdotes of alleged swamp survivors. The truth is in fact far worse than many have guessed. The Emperor, an elder brain augmented with grell mutations, sees the Vast Swamp as its domain. Nothing has yet challenged the Emperor sufficiently as to make it reconsider this assertion. Buried deep beneath the abandoned Orvaskeyte Keep, it reaches out using both aberrant minions and illithid servitors to ensure that it remains hidden for as long as it takes to ensure the survival of the colony.

Appearance

Illithids and grell under the influence of the Emperor are unusually large, and often coloured a dark blue/grey to blend in with the water and rot. All Illithids and Grell in the Vast Swamp are directly controlled by the Emperor, which has a much larger radius of control than a newborn Elder Brain due to its incredible age and puissance. The Emperor itself is gigantic elder brain with a sharp beak and tentacles buried in a secret brine-filled chamber deep below Orvaskeyte keep, a nightmarish place shrouded in illusions of fiends and dark magic.

Tactics

The Emperor has two main goals. The first, to ensure the survival of the colony by acquiring food whilst leaving no proof of illithid interference. If an illithid is discovered, it must kill all who saw it or flee before it is killed. The second, the Emperor's pet project, is the augmentation of its own body to enhance what it considers to be the 'next stage' in mind flayer evolution. Thus, it collects strange creatures, and attempts to graft their body parts onto itself. This invariably fails, with the exception of the grell, who have been subsumed into the colony as a result.

Augmentation

The Emperor is quite mad, even by the standards of Illithid. It fears the ascension of an Ulitharid from amongst the ranks of the Illithids, for such a successor might recognise the Emperor's obsession with improving itself as an admission of weakness. Thus, it keeps rigid control of all the illithids in the colony, even to the edges of the swamp. The effort has strained its sanity and made it occasionally display erratic behaviour. Thus, illithids found in the swamps can sometimes be heard psionically projecting scraps of doggerel, or counting random numbers over and over.

Thralls

The colony has lately suffered from a lack of suitable thralls. The infected orcs of the Blood Moon tribe are too dangerous to keep in close proximity, and the scattered goblin/hobgoblins prove too tricky to track down on a regular basis. Instead, the colony has taken to kidnapping the native lizardfolk, finding that their emotionless brains are both receptive to thralldom, and a delicious foodstuff (if an acquired taste).

Running An Illithid Encounter

When running an encounter that includes the Emperor's colony, keep the following ideas in mind:

- **Safety first:** The emperor fears discovery, and unless it has dire need, is usually content to spy on intruding humanoids until they come too close to Orvaskeyte Keep.
- **Enthralling:** Mind flayers of the colony almost always have a contingent of lizardfolk thralls nearby.
- **Leave No Trace:** In the case that an Illithid is seen, its preferred solution is to incapacitate the culprit and enslave/kill them. If this isn't possible, the illithid disappears as quickly as possible, and reports to the Emperor. The might of the colony will then track the offender through the swamp, assailing them with nightly terrors and manipulating the other denizens of the swamp into confrontations.

ORVASKYTE KEEP

Orvaskyte Keep

The ruin of Orvaskyte Keep is buried deep in the Darkfens, away from prying eyes. The mutant Elder Brain otherwise known as the Emperor lurks in the darkest lowest room of the keep, where Faerzress from the Underdark begins to seep through to the surface.

Lighting: Orvaskyte Keep is dimly lit by the faint purple radiance of Faerzress,

Faerzress:

- A creature in an area suffused with faerzress has advantage on saving throws against any divination spells. If a divination spell doesn't allow a saving throw, the caster must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw to cast the spell. Failing this save means the spell is wasted and has no effect.
- Any creature attempting to teleport into, within, or out of a faerzress-suffused area must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 1d10 force damage and the teleportation attempt fails. Even if the save succeeds, the teleportation attempt can suffer a mishap as if the destination was known only by description, regardless of how familiar the destination actually is. See the table in the teleport spell for more information.

Special Rules: Orvaskyte keep is mired in complex psionic illusions and defences. Creatures have disadvantage on saving throws and ability checks against illusions whilst within 1 mile of the keep.

The Emperor

The chief danger resident in Orvaskyte keep is the Emperor, an elder brain mutant of unusual power. The base statistics for the Emperor should include those of an **elder brain**, in addition to the lightning immunity and paralytic tentacles of a **grell**.

The Colony

Orvaskyte keep is swarming with mind flayers, all of whom act as the eyes and ears of the Emperor. An unusual number (roughly 100) of lizardfolk thralls are present, performing manual labour and repairing external damage to the keep.

The colony is occupied by 3d10 **mind flayers** at any one time, with more dispersed throughout the swamp. In addition, 3d8 **grell** float about the perimeter looking for food. Some mind flayers have **intellect devourer** pets which they unleash on dangerous intruders if the illusions which shroud the keep fail to deter interlopers.

Illusions

The Emperor relies on the lethal reputation of Orvaskyte Keep to ward off intruders. In case adventurers should come too close, the elder brain has cast psionic illusions over the entire keep, causing it to appear haunted by terrifying demons such as **balor**, **hezrou** or **yochlol**.

A successful Intelligence (Investigation) check against a DC of 21 allows a character to treat these illusions as faint, ephemeral echoes for 1 hour. Otherwise, these illusions seem very real to every sense. Damage caused by the illusions always deals psychic damage instead of the usual type, and can only knock characters unconscious.

Tricks & Traps

The illithid colony guards itself with psionic illusions and variants on *glyph of warding* or *symbol*. These do not appear (in this case) to conventional detect magic spells unless they specifically detect psionic activity. Several illithids are the psionic variant introduced in Volo's Guide To Monsters, which gives them more spells and enchantments to abuse. The colony has fitted the keep with secret doors that only open to telepathically transmitted passwords

