

The Swamp of Sorrows

Encounters Series - 003

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Encounter Specifications

Level - 5-7 (party of 4)

Best Terrain - Swamp

Best Climate - Temperate, Humid

Lair Composition - Swamp

Room Height - N/A

Doors - N/A

Illumination - Day (Bright in open, dim under Weeping Willow), Night (Dim in open, dark under Weeping Willow)

Backstory

The 'Old Swamp Road' is a dirt track that leads North West from the town of Breckenridge, skirting the edge of the swamp for several days before breaking into grasslands on the week long journey towards the next nearest settlement - a farm village called "Toil".

The road is compacted earth, rutted and overgrown, washed out in places by mud and silt. Traversing it by wagon or cart is laborious, and it's a slow slog on foot as well, with the viscous mud clinging tenaciously to boots and wheel alike.

Around a year ago an earth tremor caused part of the road to collapse into a watery sinkhole, forcing travellers to beat a new path to the north. This more recent track is narrower, and follows a hard ridge of earth that delves around a mile deeper into the swamp.

Unfortunately this has brought travellers very close to the abode of an insane dryad who has lost all sense of civility, given up her name, and thinks of herself now as only "The Dryad", scourge of humankind. This unfortunate creature has been given cause to hate humans due to the predations of bandits in the swamp, led by a dark druid that held her in thrall with nature magic. It was the earthquake that gave her the distraction she needed. Driven to extremes, she ruthlessly dealt with them, employing her connection to nature in new and disturbing ways to overcome her foes.

With the change in wilderness paths, the new influx of travellers has her fearful and aggressive, and she has taken to waylaying anyone that comes too close to her home, and making a brutal example of them by restraining them with vines until exposure and thirst end their 'threat' to her. She leaves the corpses displayed as

a warning to any who might encroach on her territory.

Recently, a local trapper ventured too close and has been ensnared. He lives for now, but will not last much longer.

Hook

1. Breckenridge, a township on the edge of a swamp has put out a call for help. Travellers and traders have gone missing on the old swamp road, and bandits are believed to be the cause.
2. A strange rippling effect has been seen in the streams near the town, though it swims away toward the swamp if anyone approaches. The townspeople believe they have a 'river devil' on their hands. No one knows what it looks like because it stays under the water.
3. An angry townswoman believes her husband has 'taken up' with a hussy who lives outside of town near the swamp. She has no proof other than her missing husband. He is a trapper and is constantly 'looking for excuses' to go into the woods. The trapper's name is Herrod, and is known to wear a fox pelt jerkin. Magda (his wife) asks the PCs to find and thrash this cur, and tell him he's no longer welcome home.

The Swamp of Sorrows

The Dryad lives in a huge vine covered willow on a small damp parcel of land surrounded by shallow waters (ranging from ankle to waist deep). The Swamp itself is thickly wooded, but this eases around her lair, as if nature itself retreats from her madness.

A) Approach

As you traverse the sod and trampled grass path the trees begin to thin to the north and you see an expanse of more open ground, beyond which is an enormous willow tree the likes of which you have never before laid eyes on. A hundred feet tall at least, the drooping branches are thick with tangled vines that reach out to nearby smaller trees, giving the impression of a plant based spider's web.

A small pool rests at the foot of the massive tree, and another lies to the west, both fed by inlets from the greater swamp.

On a closer look you see that the smaller trees form a ring around the great willow in a pattern that seems unusually ordered. Added to that they bear odd hanging objects that - while moss covered - are suspiciously unnatural looking.

Between you and the grove are two dead trees and a number of thin stone pillars, each sporting their own unnatural fruit. With horror you realize these are decaying corpses, or part thereof, bound and hanging from tree and pillar by ropey vines.

The expanse of water is knee to waist deep, rising at the banks and the islands. This counts as *difficult terrain*. Worse still, the area is patrolled by 2 **water weirds**, which attack as the characters reach the mid-point of the water at whichever point they cross.

Water Weird - HP - 26

Water Weird

CR 4

XP 1,200

CE large outsider (elemental, water)

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; **Perception** +12

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 11, flat-footed 14 (+2 Dex, +5 natural, -1 size)

Hp 26 (4d10+4)

Fort +2, **Ref** +6, **Will** +6

Defensive Abilities reform body, transparent; **DR** 10/bludgeoning; **Immune** elemental traits

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.; **Swim** 90 ft.

Melee slam +6 (1d6+4 plus grab)

Space 10ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Special Attacks control water elemental, drown (DC 15), water mastery

STATISTICS

Str 17, **Dex** 14, **Con** 12, **Int** 11, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 11

Base Atk +4; **CMB** +8 (+12 to grapple); **CMD** 20

Feats Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Perception)

Skills Bluff +7, Escape Artist +9, Intimidate +7, Perception +12, Stealth +5, Swim +18.

Languages Aquan

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Control Water Elemental (Ex) With a successful Intelligence check (DC 10), a water weird may control a single water elemental within 30 feet of it, as though it had summoned it with a *summon monster* spell. If the elemental is already under the control of another caster, the DC of the Intelligence check is instead 10 plus

Drowning

Any character can hold her breath for a number of rounds equal to twice her Constitution score. If a character takes a standard or full-round action, the remaining duration that the character can hold her breath is reduced by 1 round. After this period of time, the character must make a DC 10 Constitution check every round in order to continue holding her breath. Each round, the DC increases by 1.

When the character finally fails her Constitution check, she begins to drown. In the first round, she falls unconscious (0 hp). In the following round, she drops to -1 hit points and is dying. In the third round, she drowns.

Unconscious characters must begin making Constitution checks immediately upon being submerged (or upon becoming unconscious if the character was conscious when submerged). Once she fails one of these checks, she immediately drops to -1 (or loses 1 additional hit point, if her total is below -1). On the following round, she drowns.

the Intelligence modifier of the creature controlling the elemental. Control lasts for a number of hours equal to the water weird's Hit Dice.

Drown (Ex) A water weird who successfully grabs an opponent attempts to pin it under water. A creature unable to escape the water weird's pin who fails its Fortitude save (DC 15) begins to drown. The save DC is Strength-based.

Reform Body (Ex) When reduced to zero or fewer hit points, the water weird collapses. If it was on water at the time, it reforms at full strength 1d4+1 rounds later. A *purify food and drink* spell deals 1d4 points of damage per caster level (max 10d4), and any damage sustained

in this manner is not regained when the water weird reforms.

Transparent (Ex) A water weird is effectively invisible in water until it attacks.

Water Mastery (Ex) A water weird gains a +1 circumstance bonus to attacks and damage for every 4 Hit Dice it possesses if both it and its opponent touch water. If the opponent or water weird is on land, it instead suffers a -4 penalty to attack and damage. (The statistics block above does not include this bonus)

B) The Tree of Woe

Attached to this tree, crucified on taut vines is the remains of a dark druid, though that may not be apparent on first look. The bones are pulled tight, and covered with moss. All show signs of breakage, and a successful DC 14 Healing check shows these are fractures caused by slow but inexorable force, as if the body was slowly pulled to its limits. It is clearly a method of inflicting a very painful and lingering death.

Scraps of cloth hang limply from the remains, and an iron amulet dangles from the neck vertebrae to be suspended inside the chest cavity. The iron symbol is that of a staff and slave collar (though the DM is free to exchange this with a campaign appropriate symbol of a known dark druid sect). The corpse is that of the bandit leader, whose abuses with nature powers caused the Dryad to become a monster. He hangs here as a first warning to intruders and reminder for her why humans can't be trusted.

C) Warning Pillars

Each of the stone pillars is around 1 foot in diameter and 5 feet high. Vines ring each, extending like manacles to grip the wrists of the decaying corpses here. These are the remains of bandits and other travellers, and extend all the way around the grove - 14 in all. The corpses range from years to weeks old, but full decay and animal activity have reduced them all to bare bones. They have no possessions beyond a few clothing scraps.

D) The Woodcutter's Tree

This dead tree has five skeletal corpses hanging from it, suspended by their rib cages by vine ropes. Each has a large woodsman's axe buried in the spine.



The Dryad hates woodcutters more than anything. While most interlopers are left to the elements, woodcutters are struck by their own axes and hung to die. Four of the axes are corroded and useless, but one is actually shaped from obsidian, and bears delicate etchings on its glassy surface (worth 150gp).

E) The Whirling Pool

The centre of this pools twists clockwise in an ever-turning whirlpool, clouding the pool and causing ripples to wash up on the banks.

This pool houses a Water Elemental, but it does not show itself until the Dryad is attacked. Instead it continues to twist lazily, but in a forceful motion. Anyone entering the pool must make a DC 16 Swim check each round or be pulled below the surface and held in the centre of the pool. Poor swimmers may eventually drown if they can't break free (see rules on Drowning in sidebar). The Elemental is considered to have *Total Cover* in this state, even from those 'inside' it.

For fun the elemental has been swirling a set of 6 sapphires that the Dryad threw in to the pool as toys. Each is worth 50gp, but cannot be seen (or retrieved) by



anyone unless they are underwater or the elemental has been slain.

Large Water Elemental - HP - 68

F) The Missing Trapper

Tied to this stone pillar by vine ropes is a man in soiled clothes and furs. His head hangs limply, but he still breathes.

This is the missing trapper - Herrod - from Hook 3. He was taken days ago whilst checking his traps, and is close to death from dehydration. Aside from saving his life, the PCs - if they are so inclined - may still need to persuade his wife (DC 14 Diplomacy check) that his state is from mistreatment not carousing before she will take him back.

The Dryad will not allow the trapper to be freed without a fight. PCs approaching him before dealing with her will be ambushed (if possible) or attacked.

G) The Weeping Willow

The enormous willow looms above you, and you see that what once may have been majestic testament to nature now stands as a twisted and nightmarish goliath. The Tree's bark is black and craggy, and weeps a thick green sap from innumerable cracks and splits in the trunk. The branches twist and angle downward, reaching like monstrous claws, while the limp leaves are the yellow-green of rot rather than life. The willow is wrapped in thick, thorny vines that encircle the bole and extend down the branches and out the other plants nearby, as if this dark arboreal beast seeks to swallow everything around it.

At the base of the trunk the earth has been dug out, and a burrow of sorts delves deeply into the root mass below.

The Dryad lairs here, inside the Weeping Willow, and an aggressive Dire Bear has taken up residence in the burrow below, driven crazy by the insanity of the Dryad, and consumed by hunger for human flesh.

If the PCs approach the tree, or the trapper, the Dryad emerges, using her natural stealth and nature abilities to try to gain surprise, calling to the bear, the Water Elemental (from area E) and any remaining Water Weirds. Unlike a standard dryad she will **never** charm a human or humanoid (considering the practice a disgusting debasement) unless her life is in serious peril (reduced to 1/2 Hp or less) but has developed other abilities that she

can bring to bear in interlopers.

If she defeats the PCs she will try to ensnare at least one (and more if possible) to crucify and leave as warning. She will never retreat, preferring death to being driven off.

The Dryad - HP - 65

Dire Bear - HP - 95

Concealed in the Dire Bear's burrow is all of the possessions of the Dryad's victims. While she has no use for any of them, she is morbidly curious as to why humans kill each other for such trinkets, and has stored them for study at a later date.

Treasure

Secreted in the hollow is 223 cp, 154sp and 261gp in loose coins, as well as a handful of ornate rings (6 rings worth 20gp each), bracelets (4 worth 30gp each), necklaces (3 worth 25gp each) and brooches (3 worth 35 gp each). There are a scattering of semi-precious stones including jade (2 worth 20 gp each), agates 94 worth 15gp each), topaz (4 worth 40gp each) and a lapis lazuli (1 worth 40gp). There is a small bloodstone statuette, carved to look like a fierce wolf (the bloodstone giving it a blood-spattered look worth 150gp). There are a few rusty weapons (mostly swords), as well as a *spear +1* and a shining metal *shield +1* (actually *-1 cursed*). Lastly, there is a *ring of animal friendship*, still on the late owner's finger (severed by a dire bear bite).

The Dryad

This creature appears as a woman covered in, or carved from wood, with vine tendrils for hair and glowing orange eyes

The Dryad, Unique Dryad

CR 6

XP 2,400

CE medium fey

Init +8; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +15

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 14, flat-footed 14 (+4 Dex, +4 natural)

Hp 65 (10d6+30)

Fort +8, **Ref** +11, **Will** +9

DR 5/cold iron

Weaknesses tree dependent

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee claw +9 (1d4 slashing +sap poison)
Ranged thorn volley +9 (1d6 piercing +sap poison)
Special Attacks deadly vines, persistent animal charm sap poison,

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 10th)

Constant - *speak with plants, speak with animals*

At Will - *entangle (DC 15), tree shape, wood shape (1lb only)*

3/day - charm person (DC 15), deep slumber (DC 17), tree stride

1/day - suggestion (DC 17)

STATISTICS

Str 10, Dex 19, Con 16, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 18

Base Atk +5; CMB +5; CMD 19

Feats Combat Casting, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Stealthy, Weapon Finesse

Skills Climb +9, Craft (sculpture) +15, Escape Artist +15 Handle Animal +14, Knowledge (nature) +15, Perception +15, Stealth +19, Survival +12; **Racial Modifiers** +6 Craft (wood).

Languages Common, Elven, Sylvan, *speak with plants and animals*

SQ tree meld, wild empathy, woodcraft

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Deadly Vines (Su) Each round a creature remains in an area of effect created by the Dryad's entangle ability they are automatically subject to 1d4 bludgeoning damage from either flailing or crushing. This damage is taken whether they are *entangled* or not, so long as they remain in the area of effect.

Sap Poison (Ex) The Dryad's attacks are coated in a sap that is poisonous. **Type** poison (injury); **Save** Fortitude DC 14, **Frequency** 1/round for 1d4 rounds, **Effect** 1d2 Str and Dex damage; **Cure** 1 save.

Thorn Volley (Ex) the dryad can launch a volley of tiny thorns from herself at a creature within 60', dealing 1d6 piercing damage and possible poison.

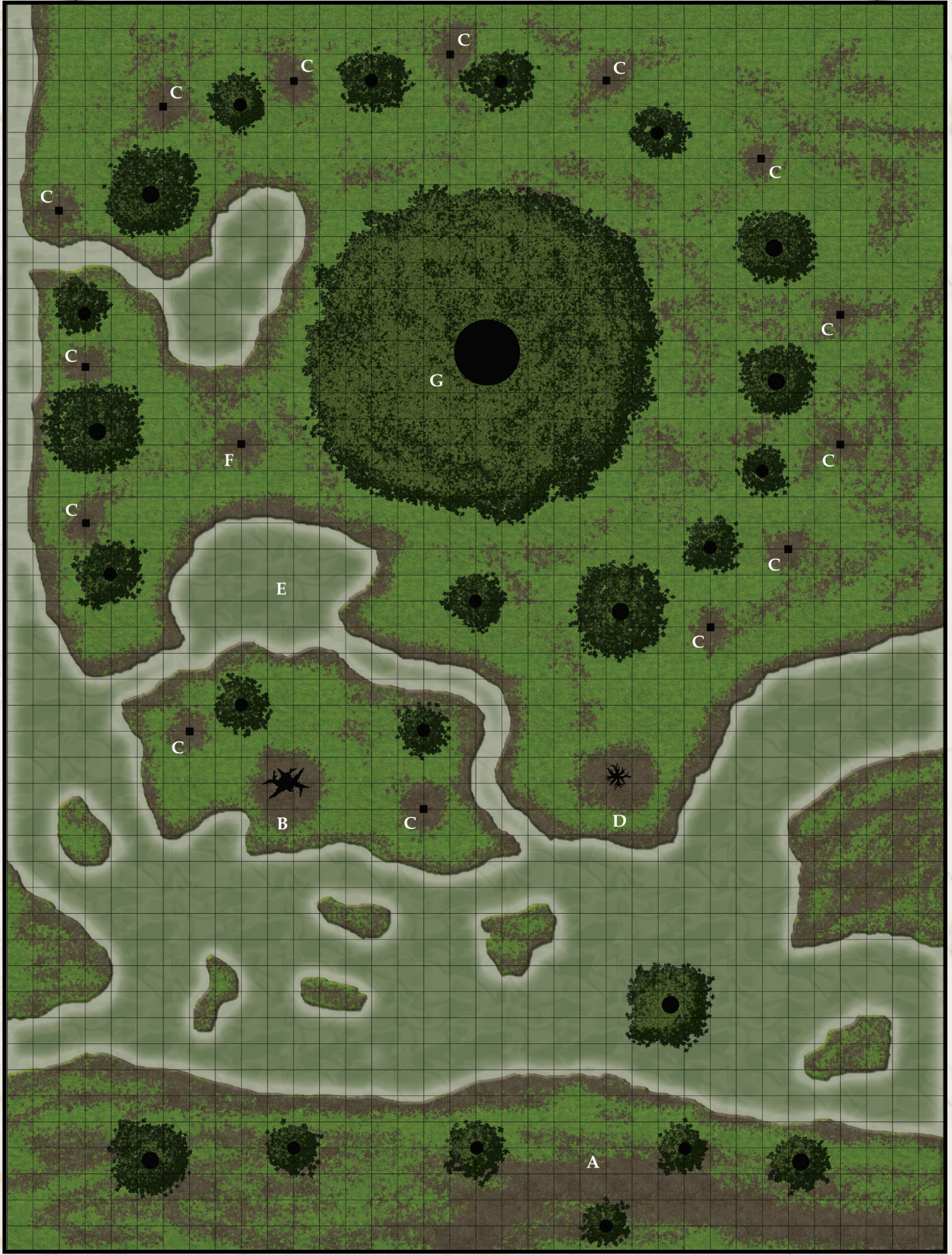
Tree Meld (Su) A dryad can meld with any tree, similar to how the spell meld into stone functions. She can remain melded with a tree as long as she wishes.

Tree Dependent (Su) A dryad is mystically bonded to a single, enormous tree and must never stray more than 300 yards from it. Most dryad trees are oak trees, but other trees function as well (often having subtle influences on a specific dryad's personality and appearance). A dryad who moves 300 yards beyond her bonded tree immediately becomes sickened. Every hour thereafter, she must make a DC 15 Fortitude save to resist becoming nauseated for an hour. A dryad that is out of range of her bonded tree for 24 hours takes 1d6 points of Constitution

damage, and another 1d6 points of Constitution damage every day that follows—eventually, this separation kills the dryad. A dryad can forge a new bond with a new tree by performing a 24-hour ritual and making a successful DC 20 Will save.

Wild Empathy (Su) This works like the druid's wild empathy class feature, except the dryad has a +6 racial bonus on the check. Dryads with druid levels add this racial modifier to their wild empathy checks.

Woodcraft (Su) A dryad has a +6 racial bonus to Craft checks involving wood, and is always treated as if she had masterwork artisan's woodworking tools when making such checks



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Missing in the Swamp!

Travelers and traders are going missing on the Old Swamp Road. There is talk of black magic or a monstrous predator lurking in the waters from the local townsfolk. Can you solve the mystery of the disappearances?

The Encounters Series is a range of scenarios and side-treks designed to be dropped in to existing campaigns with little effort on the part of the Game Master.

The Swamp of Sorrows is a short scenario for 5th to 7th level characters

