

Fungal Bums

THEY SAY THEY'RE ONLY hitching a ride but can you really tolerate a grove of talking mushrooms sprouting from your back? It started as a little itch after defeating some mushroom beasts, an ailment no healer seemed able to cure. Then you started to feel stronger, better than before—so you're rationalizing, thinking you should tolerate or even trust the little bums. After all, they are a part of you now...



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A SUPPLEMENTAL ADVENTURE FOR 4–5 PCs OF 3RD–6TH LEVEL.

Background

Umamish are sentient parasites that siphon off nutrients while slowly integrating their fungal roots into a creature's nervous system until the infestation takes full control of the host, compelling it to seek out dark damp places and lure or capture others for infection. A local legendary swamp monster nicknamed 'Uncle Switchback' is suffering from the late stages of umamish infection, and the normally gentle giant has begun snatching local fisherman to deposit into her muddy cavern home to be further vessels for the insidious fungus.

Supplemental Adventure

This adventure is best played throughout a campaign, starting with the Local Legend encounter at 3rd level which results in a PC becoming infected with umamish. The infection should be allowed to progress over time (see the Umamish Infection sidebar) as the party continues pursuing other quests. Once the adventurers reach 6th level the threat of the umamish should be made clear, and *Fungal Bums* can conclude with the Mushroom Samba encounter.

Alternatively, this adventure can be a self-contained quest by using a hardened version of the Local Legend encounter while the party are 6th level, progressing rapidly through the infected PC's umamish infection and finishing with the Mushroom Samba encounter the next day.

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Local Legend

Fungal Bums begins in any town or settlement near a lake, river, bog, swamp, or other natural body of water that could hide a Large-sized creature. Bartholomew Skinner (a halfling **bandit captain**) has recently been attacked by Uncle Switchback and is looking for brave adventurers to go after the beast. Wherever he encounters the PCs, read or paraphrase the following:

A scraggly old halfling man runs up to you in a panic, "You lot! You lot look likes you can handle yourselves, what with all them armor and swords and things ya carrying. It's old Uncle Switchback, he's gone mad! Every sailor 'round here knows the old Uncle, 'tis a great big friendly thing...or it was. Something's got to him! Pulled both my mates right off the boat! Didn't kill 'em neither, drug 'em off to his lair. I know's where it is! I can take ya!"

Bartholomew owns a small fishing vessel named *Low Tide* that can take the PCs to Uncle Switchback's lair which is about half a day's sail from town. Bartholomew has little to offer in payment except a promise to take the party anywhere they'd like after this ordeal has passed—assuming his shipmates make it out alive. He drops anchor a few hundred feet from a roughly spherical cave about 40 feet wide, half of which is flooded with water 10 feet deep and the rest with thick mud that counts as difficult terrain. Bartholomew's trio of crewmates (halfling **bandits**) have been stuck up to their necks in the mud and are all infected with umamish spores. Uncle Switchback (a plesiosaurus suffering from 4th stage umamish infection) fights until killed.

Uncle Switchback is a sight to behold, covered in muck, moss, and mushrooms, and filled with the blind commands of rage sent directly to his brain by the umamish. If by chance or ingenuity the PCs manage to avoid infection, the adventurer with the lowest saving throw result against his Umamish Explosion becomes infected. One way or another, at least one PC should end this encounter infected

ALTERNATIVE CREATURES

If a dinosaur doesn't fit in with the rest of the campaign, after adding in the statistics of 4th stage umamish infection the following creatures can stand in for Uncle Switchback: **manticore**, **mummy**, **owlbear**, **wight**, **winter wolf**, **yeti**.

with umamish, though the symptoms take days to appear and the GM's discretion, their saves may be rolled secretly. The old sailors are somewhat sad that their local legend had to be put down, but thankful for the party's help. Bartholomew pledges his crew to aid the PCs, and from this point forward the adventurers can count on the motley halfling crew of the *Low Tide* to transport them across the local waterways.

UNCLE SWITCHBACK

LARGE BEAST, UNALIGNED

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 76 (8d10+32)

Speed 20 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +5

Damage Immunities poison

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Hold Breath. Uncle Switchback can hold his breath for 1 hour.

Umamish Explosion. When Uncle Switchback dies, his corpse explodes with a burst of spores. Each creature within 50 feet of him must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, becoming infected with umamish on a failed save.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d6+5) piercing damage plus 4 (1d6) poison damage and the creature must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become infected with umamish.

Umamish Infection

Umamish are unique amongst fungi as they are the only known parasitic fungus to have gained sentience. These parasites extract their host's nutrients while invigorating the victim to keep it alive long enough to spread further spores. When a beast or humanoid creature is exposed to umamish spores it must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become infected.

It takes 1d4 days for the infection's first symptoms to manifest in an infected creature. The umamish then grow slowly and their rate of growth varies greatly depending on their host.

Whenever the infected creature advances in a class level, their umamish infection progresses to the next stage (if running this adventure as a short self-contained quest, progress the infected PC immediately to stage 4 infection when they wake the following day.) For NPCs or creatures without class levels, umamish infection progresses to the next stage every 1d4 weeks. If the infected creature spends the majority of its time in a damp and dark environment such as a cave, swamp, or dungeon, it's infection progresses to the next stage every 1d2 weeks.

1st Stage Infection. 1st stage symptoms include warty growths and a persistent rash that covers most of the back and shoulders. The infected creature regains only half the normal number of hit points when spending hit dice during short rests as the fungal infection syphons off its vitality. The umamish also act as a blood filter for their host, giving the infected creature immunity to poison damage and all other nonmagical diseases.

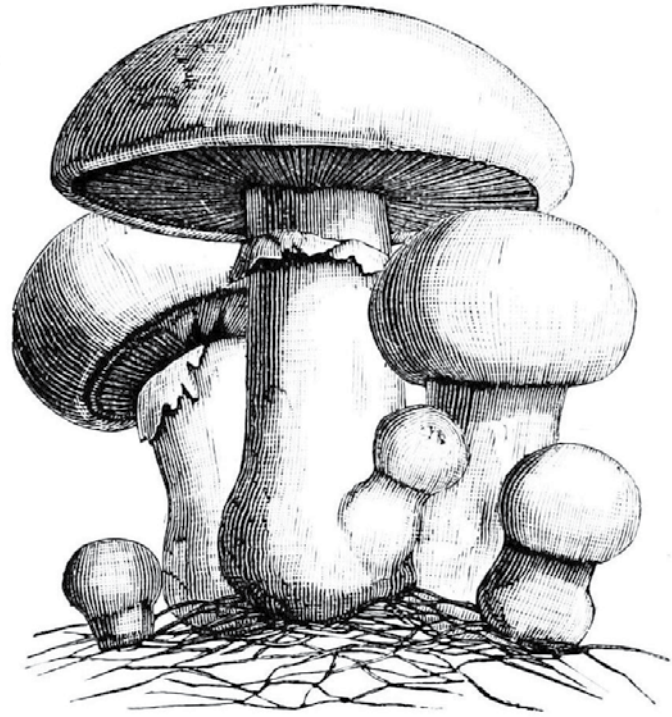
2nd Stage Infection. At the 2nd stage of infection the umamish sprout as full mushroom caps with eyes and mouths, gaining the ability to speak and understand any language their host knows. The umamish lie and plead with their host to keep them 'happy' about their presence, presenting themselves as 'symbiotic'.

The umamish make Charisma (Persuasion) and Charisma (Deception) checks with a +8 bonus.

As the mushrooms intertwine with a substantial amount of muscle tissue, the infected creature gains a +2 bonus to both its Strength and Constitution ability scores.

3rd Stage Infection. At the 3rd stage of the infection, the umamish fully integrate into their host's nervous system. The infected creature gains a +2 bonus to its primary spell-casting ability score (or Dexterity if the infected creature does not have the Pact Magic or Spell-casting features). The umamish also become constantly aware of the infected creature's surface thoughts as per the spell *detect thoughts*.

4th Stage Infection. At the 4th and final stage of infection, the umamish attempt to control the mind of the infected creature and spread their spores. The infected creature becomes charmed by the umamish as per the spell *geas*, and it is compelled to infect other creatures with umamish spores and to take infected creatures to damp dark places. Whenever the infected creature hits another creature with a melee attack, that attack deals an additional 3 (1d6) poison damage and the creature must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become infected with umamish. In addition, when the infected creature dies, its corpse explodes with a burst of spores. Each creature within 25 feet of it must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, becoming infected with umamish on a failed save. For every size category larger than Medium the infected creature is, the radius of this trait doubles.



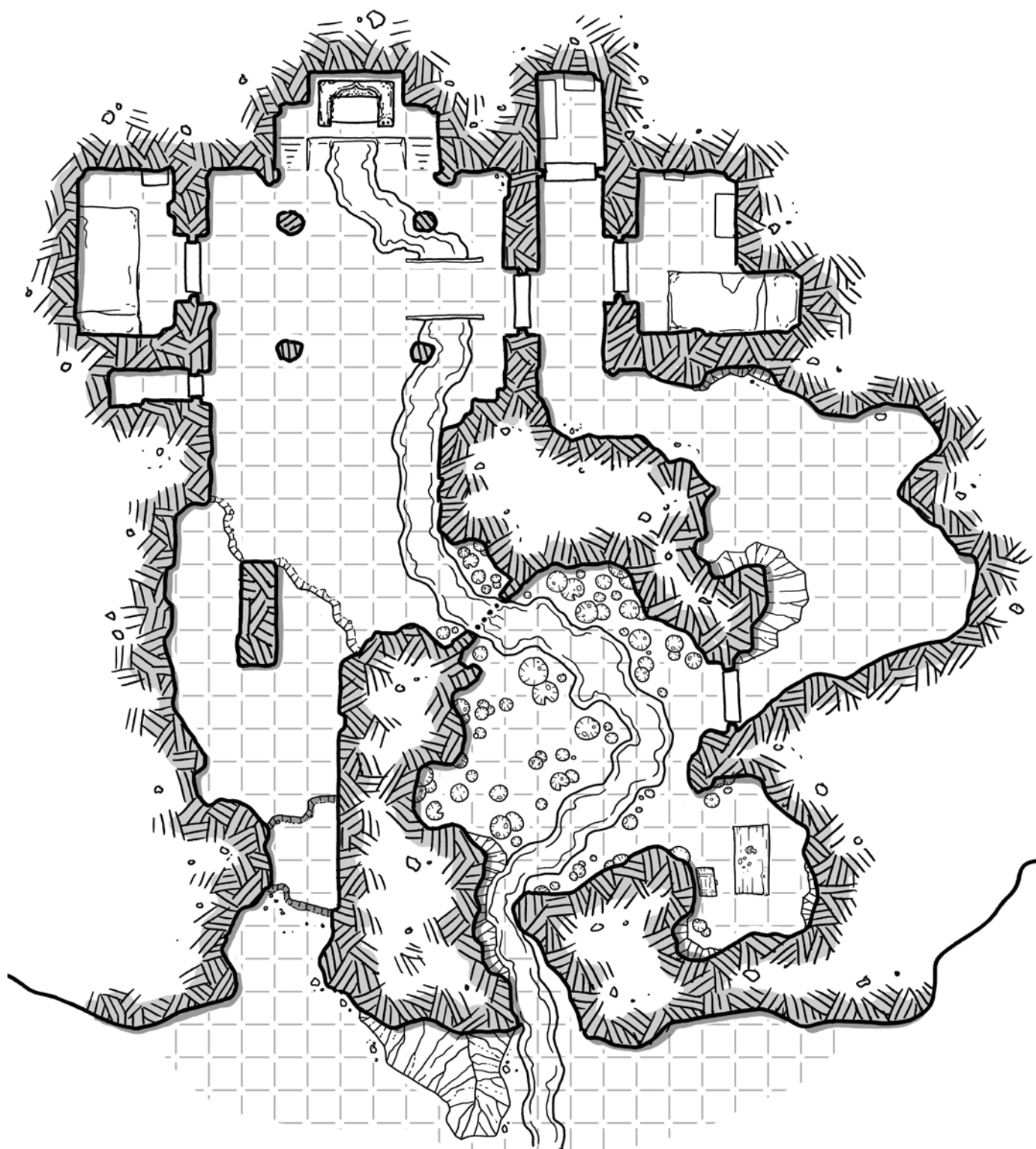
Roleplaying Umamish

Umamish are mischievous, mean-spirited, and manipulative. Having an umamish infection is like having a crowd of hecklers on one's back. An umamish infestation usually consists of about a dozen individual mushroom caps that all chatter away at each other and poke fun at their host when it fails at something. However, they're excellent at pleading for their continued 'partnership' and endlessly proclaim the many 'benefits' from allowing them to hang around.

Curing Umamish Infection

An umamish Infection is extremely difficult to cure and normal medical and magical means such as the *lesser restoration* and *greater restoration* spells are ineffective, as is a paladin's Lay on Hands.

Umamish are still acting as a blood filter for their host however and can be overloaded by particularly strong toxins. The infected creature is immune to poison damage, but when this immunity would prevent the infected creature from taking 20 or more poison damage from a single attack, the umamish infestation withers away and the creature fully recovers from the disease.



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Mushroom Samba

As the party progresses through 4th and 5th level, infected PCs deal with their unwelcome passengers throughout numerous encounters as their incurable infections continue to become more severe.

Once the adventurers reach 6th level, the infections are at the 4th stage and the umamish's true intentions become clear as they attempt to assert control.

The PCs are offered a lifeline as Bartholemew Skinner tracks down the party to give them the good news—his crew came down with the same umamish infection that afflicts the adventurers and he found a solution. A druid named Pendlewine (who specializes in fungi living deep in the marshlands) was able to cure his crew, and he offers to take them to immediately see the healer.

Pendlewine (NG gnome druid 15) lives within a secluded grotto above a wide marshland. His cavernous home has a natural stream running through it and is coated in countless species of exotic fungi. Once the PCs reach his home, read or paraphrase the following:

The umamish chuckle and mock the recumbent gnome with jeers of “This is it? You think this pudgy thing will get rid of us? HAH!”

The gnome takes a puff of his pipe and says, “I see the problem, persistent little buggers ain’t they? Well young pilgrims you’ve found just the humble healer who can

silence them for good. Though I’ll warn you, the medicine for this particular little ailment is tough to swallow—are you absolutely sure you want the cure?”

Pendlewine is vague about the nature of his ‘cure’ and the umamish are quick to denounce him as a charlatan. Assuming that the PCs decide to accept the strange gnome’s cure, the druid instructs them to ‘get ready’ and begins preparing a spell. Pendlewine casts *transport via plants* and passes through a large mushroom, leaving the adventurers understandably bewildered for a moment before an even more confused **young green dragon** is unceremoniously flung back through the same portal!

The dragon is confused, angry, and fights until killed, starting with its *poison breath attack* that is conveniently a perfect cure for the umamish infection. The poison overloads the fungus that then withers away and dies. Pendlewine returns once the dragon is killed, smugly asking, “How do the patients feel? I normally whisk the dragon away after it breathes out that lovely cure but you all seemed to be having such fun.”

Resolving the Adventure

In addition to finally ridding themselves of the umamish plague, the PCs should now find themselves in possession of a valuable dragon carcass. The horns, scales, and teeth are worth a total of 1,850 gold once properly harvested. Pendlewine can also be counted on to help with any odd ailments in the future, though his ‘cures’ are usually as bad as the disease. Finally, Bartholemew and his crew still feel indebted to the party and can ferry the adventurers where they need to go for any future adventures. 🐉

