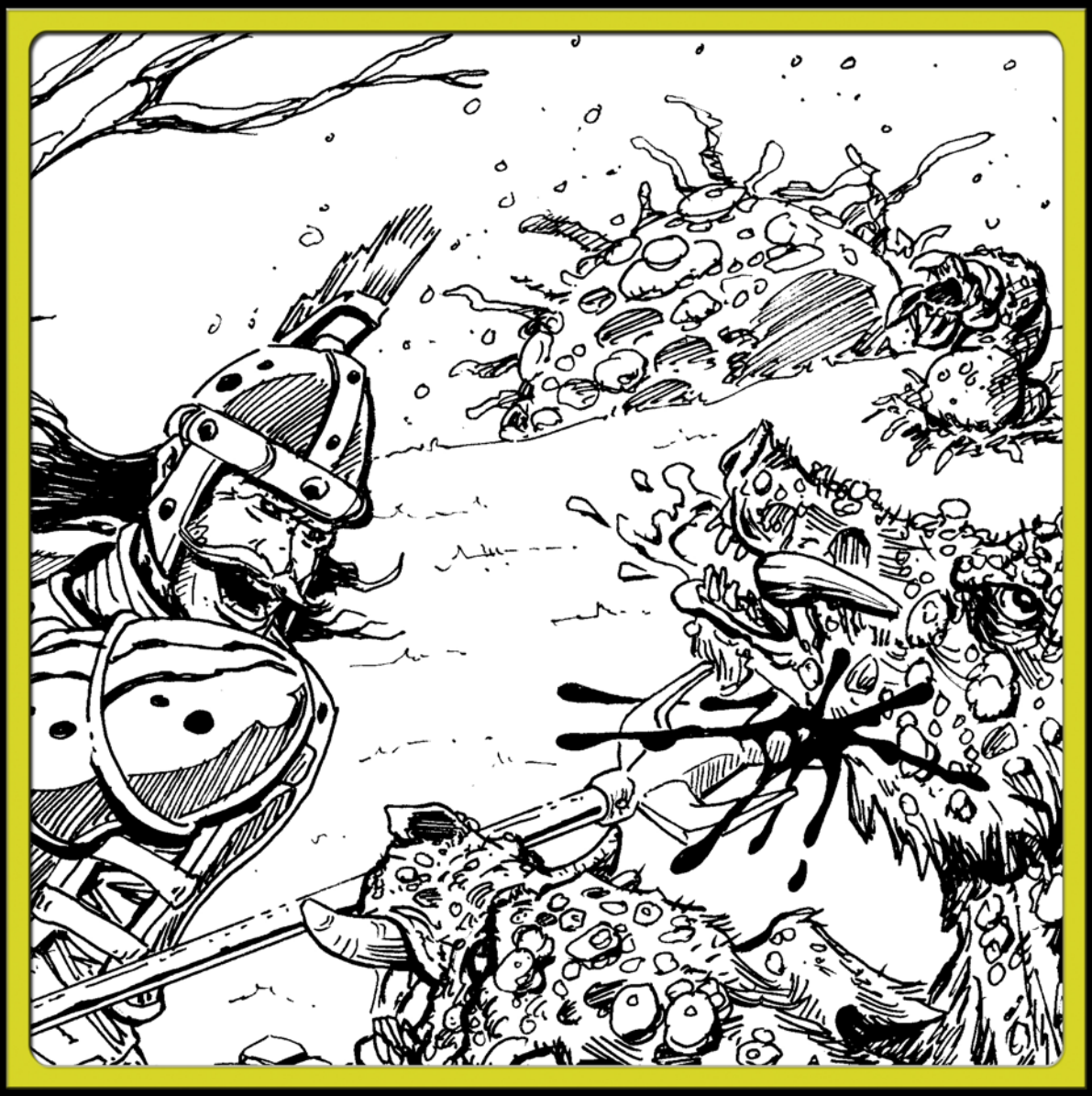
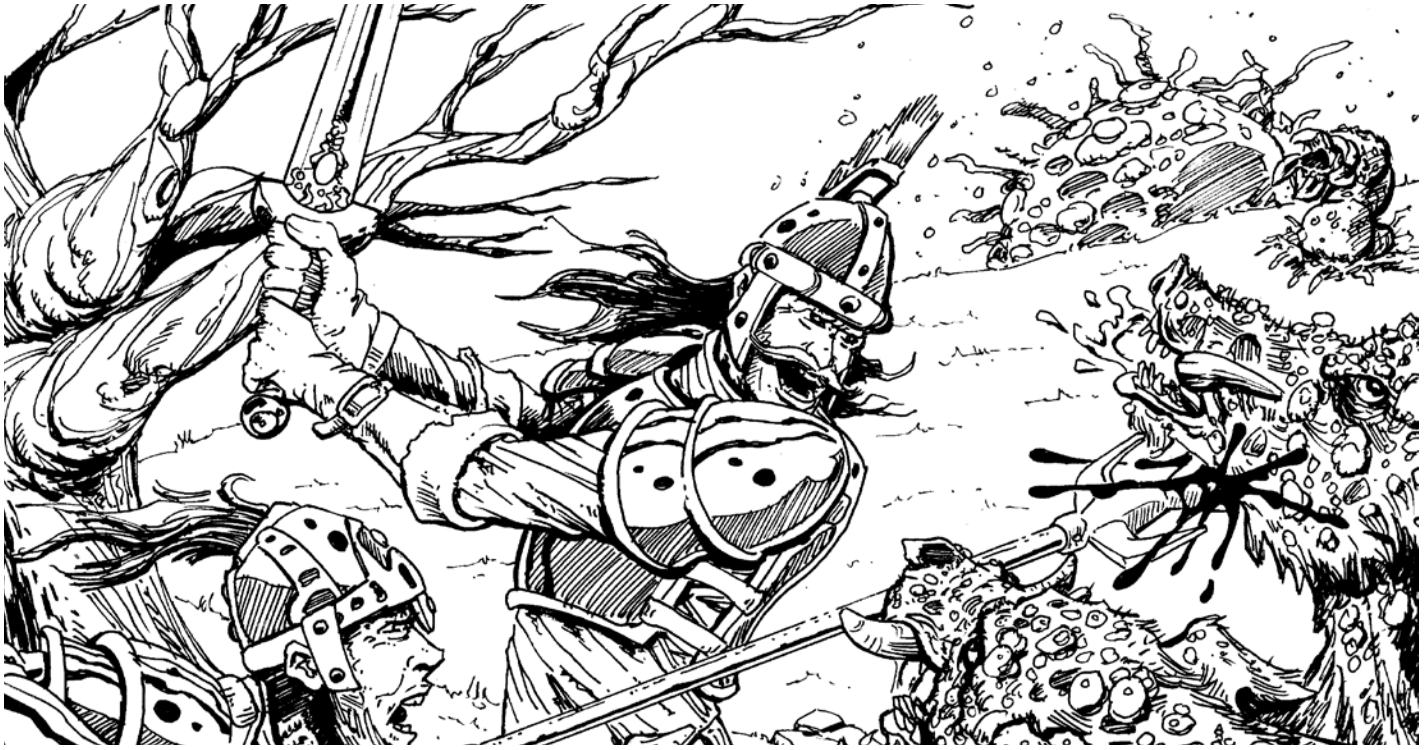
A Magical Society Aggressive Ecology: The Slaver Fungus



By Joseph Browning

Expeditious Retreat Press

A Magical Society Aggressive Ecology: The Slaver Fungus (OSRIC)



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Credits

Ecology Design by Joseph Browning
Artwork by Del Teigeler
Editing by Suzi Yee and Joseph Browning

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Introduction

Welcome to the second in the Magical Society: Aggressive Ecology series! This line focuses on how you can create an entire ecology of monsters to challenge your player characters as opposed to single foes. The idea of paring monsters together goes back to the very beginning, but aggressive ecologies tries to take that idea to the extreme by creating networks of association between different individual creatures. Some ecologies will be single-minded and driven (like this one!) while others will be quite competitive between themselves, but woe the character that steps into the middle of the normal balance of the ecology.

The next in the line is a little terror that could be found in jungled and swamp-infested wild coasts of any campaign world. There will be more whenever my devious little mind gloms onto something unique in nature that it can turn into a strange and dangerous adventure in the grand realms of fantasy!

Joseph Browning
Expeditious Retreat Press
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The Spore of Doom

Most aggressive ecologies are of a terrestrial nature, indigenous to a single planet, and found only in a particular location. But some few travel between the planets, hitchhiking on space-faring matter that eventually lands upon a new and unwitting location. The slaver fungus one such aggressive ecology that arrives on a new world via a meteoroid strike, and if conditions are favorable it expands outward from that location, feeding upon the local organic material until it grows large enough to reproduce, sending its exploding spores to the very limits of the atmosphere. In that instant, it becomes a new threat throughout the entire world.

The Science: Fungal Cycles

Before discussing the slaver fungus, a brief description of normal fungi should prove instructive. There are several different types of fungi, each with their own life cycle, but we'll focus on the life cycle of mushrooms, as that is what the slaver fungus most resembles.

Mushrooms start out as microscopic spores that can be either male or female. These spores travel on the wind. As mushroom spores have been detected at over 36,000 feet in the air, spores can travel great distances before landing. While they travel they group up with other spores to eventually create male and female hyphae (bundles of spores). When male and female hyphae meet, they combine and start producing the main mass of the mushroom, called mycelium, provided that the location where they land is suitable (dampness is a particularly desirable trait).

Mycelium is the first macroscopic part of the mushroom. It is a web-like, root-like structure that branches out into the environment searching for nutrients. Typically mycelium is encountered in the soil or just under a mat of detritus (such as fallen leaves) that covers the soil. Mushroom mycelium can be barely visible to the naked eye, but it can also grow to simply astounding size: there is a patch of honey fungus (*Armillaria ostoyae*) in the forests of Oregon that covers more than two thousand acres and it just may be the largest organism in the world.

Once the mycelium is fully-established, the mushroom begins producing fruiting bodies which are what we commonly think of as mushrooms. They start as tiny pinheads of mushroom-looking material and then burst from the ground into full-sized mushrooms. Mature mushrooms produce spores which then start the cycle all over again. Mushrooms come in a several basic forms: stalks with caps, puffballs (round balls that puff out sports), stinkhorns (stalk with a weak cap that smells foul), and sac fungi (mushrooms that look like tiny little bowls).

The slaver fungus is influence by several different real-life fungi, although two in particular are obvious influences. The first is the previously-mentioned honey fungus in that the slaver fungus also grows to massive size. The second is the horrifying *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*, a species that grows in the rainforests of Brazil and tropical forests of Thailand.

O. unilateralis is a parasitic fungus that latches upon ants. Once landed, it breaks through their exoskeleton via specialized enzymes and then invades the soft tissues via the bloodstream. Once in the soft tissues, *O. unilateralis* copies itself and builds up a mycelium-like network allowing the single-celled spores to communicate and exchange nutrients. It then starts to penetrate the ant's muscles (or grow around them) which drains them of nutrients while also interrupting the communication of the muscles to the ant's brain. Effectively the ant is no longer in control of its behavior, although it is still cognizant: well, at least as much as an ant is normally cognizant.

Once enslaved, the fungus forces the ant to leave the safety of its nest and climb a nearby plant. It stops at 10 inches off the ground: the precise temperature and humidity for the fungus to grow. It then forces the ant to grab the plant with its mandibles and eventually a long fungal stalk breaks through the head of the ant. The stalk turns into a mushroom and more spores are released, often right over a trail of ants below.

The Fantasy: Terror from Outer Space

When a star falls from the sky into a magical world it inevitably attracts the attention of intelligent creatures. All metal-working races know that fallen stars may contain the rare and precious metals needed for higher-level enchantments, and the value of those metals drives the search more than simple intellectual curiosity would. For the unlucky few, it also drives them right into a stage two slaver fungus.

Slaver fungus goes through five distinct stages, the length of which should be randomly determined. If desired, the GM can alter the speed in which it transitions from one stage to another depending on the ease of acquiring organic matter: when such mater is readily available it quickly transitions, but when it is scarce the slaver fungus takes longer. Options are given below in Environmental Modifications to guide a GM in such decisions.

Stage One

The slaver fungus begins as a small patch, no more than a few inches across, and it is most vulnerable in this stage. It has no defenses and must compete against

more mundane creatures at an almost equal level. It has a slight advantage over other fungi in that it is not only saprophytic, but also parasitic and mageophytic (both divinophytic and arcanophytic). Although magical energy provides additional fuel for growth, the majority of growth is based upon common detrital material while the consumed magical energy is stored until the fungus is larger. During this stage the fungus grows to a circle of about 1 foot in diameter. This first stage is very brief, lasting only a few days regardless the availability of organic matter, giving the slaver fungus just enough time to be ready for the arrival of some hapless meteor-metal searching creature.

Stage Two

The second stage of slaver fungus development is deadly serious. Although the mycelium is only a little larger than a foot in diameter, the first puffball grows from the tiny fungus at this stage. Within the puffball is a powerful spore. Whenever a living creature approaches within five feet of the puffball it releases its slave spores (save vs poison). At this point in its growth it can only affect man-sized or smaller creatures, but those it can affect undergo a hideous transformation. The magic stored through its growth turns against the hapless creature and transforms it into a fungal slave. The victim is first paralyzed and then patches of fungus appear on the skin. Within twenty minutes the creature is covered by a thick carpet of fungus (varies from one to two inches thick) and over the next hour, the transformation is completed. Very little of the original flesh and bones of the creature remains at this stage, for the fungus has consumed and converted it all. At the end a menial fungus slave rises to serve the bidding of the slaver fungus. During the transformation process the soul of the transformed creature (if it has one) is destroyed, providing more energy for slaver fungus growth.

A second stage slaver fungus has the reserves to create ten puffballs before it consumes all the energy in its limited stores. This means it has ten chances to create its first fungus slave: if it fails, it dies. As long as it has a single fungus slave, however, it can survive off the matter the slave feeds it.

It should be noted that the slaver fungus shares a telepathic connection to all of its thralls (fungus slaves as well as the other types of fungus creatures that follow). This telepathic connection provides the thralls with the same level of intelligence as the slaver fungus, and thusly it allows for extremely precise coordination in tactics.

Stage Three
The third stage begins with the creation of the tenth fungus slave and the slaver fungus begins rapidly expanding consuming all organic material it can find in the process. The fungus also forms its node in the third stage. The node is the "central processing" area of the fungus and where its intelligence resides. If the node is somehow destroyed, the fungus ceases being intelligent until the node can be reformed, a process that takes two or three weeks. The node is a circular elevated fungal mass that juts out of the soil to a height of about four feet. It is ten feet in diameter in stage three and gains another ten feet of diameter in each subsequent stage.

During its third-stage expansion the slaver fungus creates its first construct, using it to patrol the boundaries of its newly-acquired territory and to protect its node if needed. Constructs are formed out of whatever plant material the fungus can transform and typically look like stick-figure men constructed of dried purple fungus. They have a jerky walk, but are surprisingly fast and have tiny puffballs on their skin that constantly release spores that cause bloodlust and madness in most creatures that inhale them.

In addition to the constructs, a third stage slaver fungus can now create large-sized fungus slaves as well as fungus slave swarms of tiny creatures. The first large-sized fungus slave is usually transformed into a gatherer. Gatherers are large-sized fungal slaves tasked with acquiring meat. They can swallow large-sized creatures whole, pacify them via poison, and then bring them to the central node for sacrifice. Once the first gatherer is out and doing its job, the fungus starts creating large-sized fungus slaves interspersed with more gatherers.

Finally, third stage slaver fungus can create fungal flyers out of cobbled-together avian corpses. These fungal flyers patrol the skies, locating creatures for the gathers to grab, and defending the slaver fungus from aerial attack.

Stage Four
The fourth stage of the slaver fungus begins when the fungus is roughly half a mile in diameter and over the next four to nine months explodes with growth until it enters stage five 600% larger than it started stage four. A fourth stage slaver fungus can create two more types of slavers: conduits and worms.

Conduits are small flying fungal spheres that glide and bob as if borne on the wind. They have a leathery surface composed of hexagonal plates, and have a strong electric current around them that causes hair to stand at end. They can tap into the energy of the slaver fungus to shock any creatures between them and the ground in which the fungus lives, but more dangerously, they have a plethora of spell-like abilities they use in defense of the slaver fungus.

The second fourth-stage creature is the fugal worm. These huge snake-like masses of purple fungus erupt from the ground before intruders. They have quatrefoil mouths that belch forth a organic-dissolving breath weapon. From within the same maw two long tentacles tipped with vicious crab-like claws spring to attack. They, like the fungal constructs, patrol the boundary of the slaver fungus, ready to attack any who intrude, although their main task is to drive away creatures the slaver fungus deems as dangerous to its continued survival.

Stage Five
The final stage occurs when the slaver fungus is roughly a two miles in diameter. Once that size is achieved, all its energy is put towards protecting itself as it prepares for reproduction. To protect itself during this final stage, the slaver fungus creates its most-powerful defender, the node guardian. The node guardian never leaves the node, tirelessly patrolling around the center of the fungal infestation. A trio of constructs is permanently teamed with the node guardian at this task.

Unlike most fungi, slaver fungus has a definitive birth/death cycle. At the time of reproduction hundreds of thousands of puffballs grow out of the fungus body onto the surface. At the right time, they all explode, seeding the area and the winds. This reproduction kills the fungus body underground, atypical of normal fungi. This odd death occurs because of the hybrid nature of the creature. It expends all of its energy in the last days in the tremendous growth of puffballs and spore.

When the spores land a new slaver fungus begins, but of all the slaver fungi that make the transition, only one patch takes root into the third stage (the one that develops there fastest) and the energy of the others is transferred to it. This second generation of the slaver fungus is smarter, having a +1 point added to its Intelligence based upon its stage. It then goes through its life cycle, and if there is a third generation of slaver fungus, it as well is 1 point smarter than the previous generation. In this manner the slaver fungus grows increasingly intelligent until it reaches 18 Intelligence on its final stage one.

Woe unto the planet that allows a slaver fungus with an 18 Intelligence to reproduce! If such happens, all the spores released by the genius slaver fungus can grow into full stage slaver fungi, literally seeding the world with hundreds of slaver fungus infestations that each have the chance to achieve 18 Intelligence. It is truly an apocalyptic scenario.

Environmental Modifications

The above description is for a slaver fungus that lands in a temperate or mild continental climate. Using the Köppen-Geiger climate classification system, that would be any that begin with the letter C. This covers a large swath of most worlds and, more importantly, many fantasy settings feature mainly temperate or continental climates. However, the slaver fungus does not always fall to earth in such lands.

For GMs wanting more individualized slaver fungi, each code (including the C and D codes) are listed below with modification ideas for some areas.

Tropical

Af (Tropical Rainforest): There is no better place in the world for a slaver fungus than a tropical rainforest. Slaver fungi grow at twice the normal speed here and can have twice as many thralls, although large-sized creatures may be harder to find: 50% chance (if so half the number of large-sized thralls, but maintain a minimum of at least one.

Am (Tropical Monsoon): The tropical monsoon climate's period of extraordinary rainfall presents challenges to the slaver fungus. During non-monsoon rain periods, the climate behaves as Af above, but during the two or three months of monsoon, the slaver fungus growth stops as it spends all its energy in maintaining itself against the onslaught of torrential (1,000 mm or more per month) rain.

Aw (Tropical Savanna, Wet summer): Another beneficial climate to the slaver fungus, the Aw climate allows the slaver fungus to grow 50% faster than normal and have 50% more thralls. In addition, large creatures are plentiful in Aw climates, so a majority of the fungus slaves will be large-sized.

As (Tropical Savanna, Dry summer): As Aw above, but growth slows to the normal pace during the dry summer months. If the normally-dry summer turns into a drought, growth is reduced to 75% of normal until the beginning of the next rainy season.

Arid

BWh (Hot desert): Deserts are rough on the slaver fungus. The lack of moisture forces it to delve deeply into the earth to maintain its growth. Growth in a hot desert is five times slower than normal, and it's unlikely that there are many (perhaps even any) large-sized creatures available for fungus slaves. BWh slaver fungus thralls are tougher than average, however, having an AC that is 1 point lower than normal.

BWk (Cold desert): Cold deserts are a bit easier on slaver fungi, but still difficult environments. Growth in a cold desert is four times slower than normal and, again, there tend to be fewer large-sized creatures. BWk thralls are tougher as well, sharing the reduced AC of their BWh counterparts.

BSh (Hot semi-arid steppe): Although not as dry as true deserts, things are still rough for slaver fungi who find themselves in semi-arid steppes. They grow at half the normal rate, but there is usually a plethora of large-sized creatures for slaves.

Bsk (Cold semi-arid steppe): See BSh above.

Temperate

Cfa (Humid subtropical): One of the best climates for the slaver fungus, growth speed is 50% faster than normal and the number of thralls is increased by the same amount.

Cfb (Temperate oceanic): Another great environment for the slaver fungus, growth speed is 25% faster than normal and the number of thralls is increased by the same amount.

Cfc (Subpolar oceanic): Growth is harder in the subpolar temperate region slowing to half the normal rate.

Cwa (Monsoon-influenced humid subtropical): Slaver fungi behave normally in this climate.

Cwb (Subtropical highland, Monsoon-influenced temperate oceanic): Slaver fungi behave normally in this climate.

Cwc (Cold subtropical climate, Monsoon-influenced subpolar oceanic): A little better than Cfc above, growth speed is only reduced by 25%.

Csa (Hot-summer Mediterranean): Slaver fungi that land in a Csa, find little difficulty in growth except during the dry and hot summers, where growth slows to 75% normal.

Csb (Warm-summer Mediterranean): Slaver fungi flourish in Csb. See Cfb above.

Csc (Cold-summer Mediterranean): Life for the slaver fungus is a bit more difficult in Csc. Growth is slowed to 80% normal.

Continental

Dfa (Hot-summer humid continental): Slaver fungi behave normally in this climate.

Dfb (Warm-summer humid continental): Slaver fungi behave normally in this climate.

Dfc (Subartic): Although not as bad as ET (tundra, see below), Dfc is a difficult climate for the slaver fungus. It has a flat 25% chance of failure to thrive at stage one. If it makes it past that, it will survive to reproduction, but at a growth rate that is three times slower than normal. The node guardian in this climate in particularly tough, having an additional HD.

Dfd (Extremely cold subartic): As ET below. The node guardian in this climate is particularly tough, having two additional HD.

Dwa (Monsoon-influenced hot-summer humid): Slaver fungi behave normally in this climate.

Dwb (Monsoon-influenced warm-summer humid): Slaver fungi behave normally in this climate.

Dwc (Monsoon-influenced subartic): As Dfc above.

Dwd (Monsoon-influenced extremely cold subartic): As Dfd above.

Dsa (Mediterranean-influenced hot-summer humid): Slaver fungi behave normally in this climate.

Dsb (Mediterranean-influenced warm-summer humid): Slaver fungi behave normally in this climate.

Dsc (Mediterranean-influenced subarctic): As climate Dfc above.

Dsd (Mediterranean-influenced extremely cold subarctic): As Dfd above.

Polar and Montane

ET (Tundra): The cold of tundra poses difficulties for the slaver fungus. It has a flat 50% chance of failure to thrive beyond stage one, and a 25% chance at stage two. If the fungus survives to stage three it will survive to reproduction. Growth at stages 2-5 is five times slower than normal.

EF (Ice cap): There is no worse place in the terrestrial world for a slaver fungus than an ice cap. Slaver fungus have a flat 75% chance of failure to thrive beyond stage one, a 50% chance at stage two, and a 25% chance at stage three. If the fungus survives to stage four it will survive to reproduction. Growth at stages 2-5 is ten times slower than normal. Additionally, GMs should consider the availability of local fauna to determine which thralls are appropriate: some places will have large-sized creatures (ala polar bears, seals) while others will be avian heavy (ala penguins). Who knows, perhaps the trudging pingu may finally take to the air as mobs of slaver fungus flyers!

The Slaver Fungus in your Game

Whew! Now that you've got the info on all the creatures what are you supposed to do with it? Well, that all depends on how you want to challenge your players. The most obvious challenge is a head-to-head encounter where the PCs are expected to destroy the slaver fungus infestation, but there are other options that could happen based upon where the fungus happened to land.

First, let's consider the head-to-head situation. The difficulty of a head-to-head encounter really depends on the growth stage of the slaver fungus, and the rapidity in which it responds to a threat. Generally speaking, smaller slaver fungi respond faster to threats as do more-intelligent slaver fungi. The danger to players can be changed based upon which thralls are encountered and in what order. When all is said and done, however, the real danger of the challenge is based on how well characters understand the threat and how well they can plan hit-and-run tactics. A low-level group can make a big dent in the growth of a slaver fungus, particularly if they are tactically clever—access to fire obviously being of primary utility, but also of high risk.

Story-driven solutions are also possible. It's easy to imagine that the PCs need to retrieve some ancient object from a nearby dungeon or tomb complex that will eradicate the slaver fungus in a way that doesn't require a full head-to-head melee encounter. Perhaps only a mad dash to the node followed by a quick application of said item is all that's required once the item is acquired.

But there are even more possibilities if you're willing to do a bit of extra GM work and make some modifications to the ecology. For instance, if you're in a particularly rat bastard mood and willing to really challenge your PCs, you could have the slaver fungus spawn strike teams designed to pillage inhabited areas several miles away from the border of its territory. This behavior could become typical for Low Intelligence (or higher) slaver fungi. And the most-obvious way of making things rougher for your players is new types of thralls. Perhaps there are puffball thralls that look like other thralls on the outside but which explode upon contact like gas spores. Perhaps there's a type of fungal worm that pops up under peaceful farms like ankheg, but which don't eat cattle, and instead turns them into uncontrolled rampaging large-sized slaver fungi. Let your imagination run wild and throw as strange or unusual creatures you can think of against your players.

An easier method of modifying the slaver fungus is to incorporate existing fungal creatures into the ecology. To make this easier for you, here's a brief list of fungal monsters from the monster books that are likely additions: (*Book 1*) brown mold and yellow mold, gas spore, shrieker, violet fungi; (*Book 3*) ascomoid, basidirond, myconoid, ustilagor, zygom.

But as you can now see, this isn't just my aggressive ecology any more, it's yours. Yours to make fit in your world, yours to supply a campaign-specific reason as to why it exists, yours to challenge your players, and yours to enjoy.

New Monsters

SLAVER FUNGUS THRALL

All the thralls of a slaver fungus share some similar traits. As fungi they are all immune to all forms of mental attack, including *charms*, *holds*, etc. as is the slaver fungus node proper. Cold-based attacks are saved against at +4, and damage inflicted is at -1 pip per die. Thralls suffer only half damage from acid, and half damage from fire. Thralls regenerate 1hp/hour when in the slaver fungus's territory, and 1 hp/round when within a hundred yards of the node.

Spells that target plants are effective against thralls and also against the slaver fungus. The slaver fungus is always allowed a saving throw, even if one is not normally allowed.

Lair probability is the chance of encountering the creature at or near the slaver fungus node.

Thralls do not intentionally collect treasure although there may be incidental treasure upon them composed of the belongings of the original creatures they were made from. Thusly, the treasure type of a slave fungus is based upon its stage.

Stage One: None
Stage Two: 1-8k cp (50%), 1-6k sp (25%), 1-4k ep (25%), 1-3k gp (25%), 1-8 gems (30%), 1-4 jewelry (20%), sword, armor, or misc. weapon (10%)
Stage Three: 1-12k cp (20%), 1-6k sp (30%), 1-4k ep (10%), 1-6 gems (25%), 1-3 jewelry (20%), any 2 magic items (10%)
Stage Four: 1-8k cp (10%), 1-6k sp (30%), 1-8k ep (15%), 1-6k gp (50%), 1-10 gems (30%), 1-6 jewelry (25%), any 2 magic items + 1 potion (15%)
Stage Five: 5-30k cp (25%), 1-100k sp (40%), 10-40k ep (40%), 10-60k gp (55%), 500-5,000 pp (25%), 1-100 gems (50%), 10-40 jewelry (50%), any 4 magic items + 1 potion +1 scroll (15%)

All thralls are as intelligent as the slaver fungus that controls them and are in continual telepathic connection with their slaver fungus provided the stay

Stage	Duration	INT	Slaves	Contructs	Gatherers	Flyers	Conduits	Worms	Guardians
1	2-5 days	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None
2	1-3 months (1d3)	1	1d10	None	None	None	None	None	None
3	3-7 months (1 + 1d4)	2	10 + 5d10	1d4	1d4	1d10	None	None	None
4	3-10 months (2 + 1d8)	3	100 + 10d10	4 + 1d10	4 + 1d10	8 + 1d10	4 + 1d10	1 + 1d4	None
5	4-16 months (4 + 1d12)	4	300 + 10d10	8 + 1d10	8 + 1d10	16 + 1d10	8 + 1d10	4 + 1d4	1 + 1d4

within half a mile of the territory of the slaver fungus. Because of this, thralls will behave with appropriate cunning whenever confronted. Outside of the indicated range, thralls have an animal intelligence.

CONDUIT

SIZE: Small (1 ft. wide)
MOVE: 90 ft. flying (AA: level V)
ARMOR CLASS: 7
HIT DICE: 6+2
ATTACKS: 1
DAMAGE: 2-7
SPECIAL ATTACKS: See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Slaver fungus thrall traits, immune to electricity
MAGIC RESISTANCE: None
RARITY: Very rare
NO. ENCOUNTERED: 5-18
LAIR PROBABILITY: 10%
TREASURE: None
INTELLIGENCE: Varies
ALIGNMENT: Neutral
LEVEL/X.P.: 6 / 1,025 + 8/hp

General information: One of the advanced slaver fungus thralls, conduits begin life as puffball fungi sprouting from the soil. Once sprouted it takes a day for their fungal plates to harden. During the hardening process the puffball detaches from the ground and begins its aerial existence. Conduits never go more than a few dozen yards from the territory of the slaver fungus.

Conduits can use the following spell-like powers at the 12th level of ability: *confusion* (1/day), *invisibility* (3/day), *mirror image* (3/day), *phantasmal killer* (1/day), and *spectral force* (1day). The efficacy of these spells depends upon the intelligence of the slaver fungus: the smarter it is, the cleverer the conduit utilizes its abilities.

Conduits are electrically connected to the mass of the slaver fungus and can use this connection to drive spikes of electricity through their targets dealing 5-30 points of damage per bolt. This ability can be used

once every three rounds. They can discharge smaller amounts (2-7 hit points of damage) once per round. Utilizing these abilities require the conduit be within 30 ft. of the ground. Creatures wearing metal armor suffer an additional 1-4 hit points of damage from these abilities.

In addition to the normal slaver fungus thrall traits, conduits are immune to electrical attacks.

Physical description: Conduits are small flying fungal spheres that glide and bob as if borne on the wind. They have a leathery surface composed of hexagonal plates, and have a strong electric current around them that causes hair to stand at end.

Variants: 25% of conduits may use *improved invisibility* (1/day) instead of *invisibility* (3/day).

CONSTRUCT

SIZE: Large (8 ft. tall)
MOVE: 120 ft. (90 ft. variant)
ARMOR CLASS: 6 (2 variant)
HIT DICE: 40 hit points (60 variant)
ATTACKS: 2
DAMAGE: 2-12, 2-12
SPECIAL ATTACKS: Bloodlust spores
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Slaver fungus thrall traits
MAGIC RESISTANCE: None
RARITY: Very rare
NO. ENCOUNTERED: 1-18
LAIR PROBABILITY: 20%
TREASURE: None
INTELLIGENCE: Varies
ALIGNMENT: Neutral
LEVEL/X.P.: 7 / 1,500 + 12/hp
7 / 2,400 + 14/hp

General information: Fungal constructs are the slaver fungus's shock troopers. They pick a single target and relentlessly attack until the victim stops moving or the construct is destroyed. Any intelligent creature that comes within 10 ft. of a construct is subject to its bloodlust spoors. If it fails a save against poison, it forgoes defense (surrendering all Dexterity and shield benefits) and mindlessly attacks whatever is before it with a +2 to hit. Bloodlust lasts for 2-12 rounds and the victim can only engage in physical combat during that period, this include fellow comrades if the situation occurs.

Physical description: This large automaton is constructed out of pieces of dried purple fungus. Its jerky walk is surprisingly fast. Tiny puffballs on its skin constantly release spores, creating a thin surrounding haze.

Variants: 25% of fungal constructs are tougher, heavily armored, and slower than their brethren.

FLYER

SIZE: Small (3 ft. wide)
MOVE: 10 ft., 180 ft. flying (AA: level IV)
ARMOR CLASS: 7
HIT DICE: 3+3
ATTACKS: 3
DAMAGE: 1-3, 1-3, 1-4
SPECIAL ATTACKS: None (explode variant)
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Slaver fungus thrall traits
MAGIC RESISTANCE: None
RARITY: Very rare
NO. ENCOUNTERED: 1-26
LAIR PROBABILITY: 5%
TREASURE: None
INTELLIGENCE: Varies
ALIGNMENT: Neutral
LEVEL/X.P.: 4 / 155 + 3/hp

General information: Fungal flyers patrol the skies above their slaver fungus looking for creatures for the gatherers to gather and defending the slaver fungus from any aerial threats. They are not physically intimidating, but their vantage point provides vital intel to the slaver fungus regarding the movements of potential threats. They attack with two claws and a bite.

Physical description: Fungal flyers are created out of cobbled-together avian corpses. Pieces of bone occasionally stick out of the fungal mats composing their bodies.

Variants: 10% of fungal flyers explode when destroyed sending flying bits of bone in a 10 ft. radius. This deals 4-16 hit points of damage to all non-thrall creatures in the area.

GATHERER

SIZE: Large (10 ft. sphere)
MOVE: 180 ft.
ARMOR CLASS: 4
HIT DICE: 10
ATTACKS: 1
DAMAGE: 1-12
SPECIAL ATTACKS: Poison, swallow whole
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Slaver fungus thrall traits
MAGIC RESISTANCE: None
RARITY: Very rare
NO. ENCOUNTERED: 1-18
LAIR PROBABILITY: 20%
TREASURE: None
INTELLIGENCE: Varies
ALIGNMENT: Neutral
LEVEL/X.P.: 7 / 1,900 + 13/hp

General information: Fungal gatherers sedate living creatures and bring them to the central node. Creatures 8 ft. tall or smaller can be swallowed by the gath-

erer on a simple melee attack. Swallowed creatures are subjected to the gatherer's paralyzing poison every round they are swallowed. Poisoned creatures are paralyzed for 2-12 turns.

In addition to their swallow whole attack, fungal gatherers can attack by rolling over a target, dealing 1-12 hit points of damage. Creatures of man-size or smaller are knocked prone by this attack.

A swallowed creature that resists the poison can attempt to escape. If 5 hit points of damage is dealt to the interior of the gatherer (only small weapons can be used in this attack, such as daggers), it involuntarily spits out the swallowed victim. This infuriates the gatherer and it enters a rage lasting 2-12 rounds in which it deals double normal damage. When enraged it seeks only to squash victims and it does not swallow any creatures until the rage ends.

Physical description: Fungal gatherers are spherical masses of fungi around which sprout hundreds of locomotive tentacles. When the thick black strands untangle, an inner compartment in the sphere is revealed, a compartment filled with needle-like spikes dripping a foul green slime.

NODE GUARDIAN

SIZE: Large
MOVE: 120 ft.
ARMOR CLASS: 0
HIT DICE: 12
ATTACKS: 2
DAMAGE: 4-24, 4-24
SPECIAL ATTACKS: See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Slaver fungus thrall traits
MAGIC RESISTANCE: None
RARITY: Very rare
NO. ENCOUNTERED: 2-5
LAIR PROBABILITY: 20%
TREASURE: None
INTELLIGENCE: Varies
ALIGNMENT: Neutral
LEVEL/X.P.: 8 / 3,300 + 16/hp

General information: Node guardians are the most powerful thralls of the slaver fungus. Node guardians never leave their slaver fungus's node. They attack with their two tentacles, either grabbing and constricting or launching an acidic spore (range 120 ft.) that deals 2-8 hit points of damage on the first round and then 1-6 points for the next 2-5 rounds.

A creature weighing less than 500 lbs. hit by both tentacles is thrown 60 ft. from the guardian, dealing an additional 4-24 hit points of damage upon impact and rendering them prone.

Physical description: When finally powerful enough, the slaver fungus infects a tree and splits its trunk into eight separate legs which then curl and bend allowing the new node guardian to crawl like a spider. Two large tentacles jut out of the mass that once was the canopy. The openings at the end of the tentacles glisten with a foul substance.

SLAVE

Fungus slaves are the mindless workers for the slaver fungus. Their only purpose is to gnaw and chew material (plant or animal) into a pulp which they regurgitate around the growing fungus node. They can range in size from insects to dragons and are created when the slaver fungus releases the proper spores on a normal creature. Fungus slaves that are smaller than three or four inches are incapable of causing any serious damage to PC's unless they group as a swarm.

Three different slaver fungus slaves are presented here. Small and man-sized slaves share the same traits, as do large and super-large slaves, while slave swarms have their own individual statistics.

A full-sized slaver fungus will have 310-400 slaves. This host is roughly composed of 60% small or medium sized, 30% large or larger, and 10% swarms. Each of the individual slave types have sub-variants as well, typically faster, tougher, or more dangerous than their fellows.

SMALL OR MEDIUM SLAVER FUNGUS SLAVE
SIZE: Small or Medium
MOVE: 60 ft. (90 ft. faster variant)
ARMOR CLASS: 6
HIT DICE: 1-3
ATTACKS: 1
DAMAGE: 1-2
SPECIAL ATTACKS: Acidic spores
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Slaver fungus thrall traits
MAGIC RESISTANCE: None
RARITY: Very rare
NO. ENCOUNTERED: 1-300
LAIR PROBABILITY: 5%
TREASURE: None
INTELLIGENCE: Varies
ALIGNMENT: Neutral
LEVEL/X.P.: 1 HD: 1 / 20 + 1/hp
2 HD: 2 / 50 + 1/hp
3 HD: 3 / 80 + 2/hp

General information: The small and man-sized fungus slaves form the majority of the thralls to the slaver fungus. They voraciously consume organic material until they are rotund from their consumption and then they waddle back to the central node of the slaver fungus to disgorge their "food" atop it. Task completed, they return to the hunt for more organic matter.

In combat, slaves can bash with a spongy fist, but they usually prefer to use their protuberance to shoots out a small globule of slimy acidic spores at a range of 40 ft. The slave can shoot three volleys without consequence per hour, but every volley afterward causes 1 hp of damage to the fungus slave. The fungus slave will not use this ability if possessing 50% or less of its starting hit points. Any creature hit by a small fungus slave's acidic spores suffers 2-5 hp of acid damage.

Physical description: This small mass of mottled green fungus is recognizable as once being a normal creature, but where once the creature's mouth was now juts a protuberance with a toothy orifice at its end.

Variants: Roughly 10% of small or medium slaver fungus slaves are faster than their brethren.

LARGE SLAVER FUNGUS SLAVE
SIZE: Large
MOVE: 90 ft. (120 ft. faster variant)
ARMOR CLASS: 4 (2 armored variant)
HIT DICE: 4-10
ATTACKS: 1
DAMAGE: 1-4
SPECIAL ATTACKS: None
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Slaver fungus thrall traits
MAGIC RESISTANCE: None
RARITY: Very rare
NO. ENCOUNTERED: 1-100
LAIR PROBABILITY: 5%
TREASURE: None
INTELLIGENCE: Varies
ALIGNMENT: Neutral
LEVEL/X.P.: 4 HD: 3 / 135 + 3/hp
5 HD: 4 / 200 + 4/hp
6 HD: 5 / 300 + 6/hp
7 HD: 5 / 465 + 8/hp
8 HD: 6 / 750 + 10/hp
9 HD: 7 / 1,200 + 12/hp
10 HD: 7 / 1,500 + 13/hp

General information: The large and larger-sized fungus slaves form about 30% of the total number of slave thralls to the slaver fungus. Like their smaller brethren, they voraciously consume organic material until they are rotund from their consumption and then they waddle back to the central node of the slaver fungus to disgorge their "food" atop it. Task completed, they return to the hunt for more organic matter.

In combat, the larger slaves can bash with fists, but they prefer to shoot a globule of slimy acidic spores at a range of 80 ft. from their protuberance. The slave

can shoot six volleys without consequence per hour, but every volley afterward causes 1 hp of damage to the large fungus slave. The slave will not use this ability if possessing 50% or less of its starting hit points. Any creature hit by a large fungus slave's acidic spores suffers 3 +1/HD hp of acid damage per hit. For example, a 10 HD slave deals 13 hp of damage with each hit while a 5 HD slave deals 8 hp of damage.

Newly-created large fungus slaves start at 4 HD, regardless their original creature's HD. Every month after their creation they gain 1 HD until achieving maximum HD 6 months after their creation.

Physical description: This small mass of mottled green fungus is recognizable as once being a normal creature, but where once the creature's mouth was now juts a protuberance with a toothy orifice at its end.

Variants: Roughly 25% of large slaver fungus slaves are faster than their brethren. In addition, 25% of large slaver fungus slaves have heavy fungal armor plates.

SLAVER FUNGUS SLAVE SWARM
SIZE: Large (10 ft. cube)
MOVE: 120 ft. flying (AA: level V)
ARMOR CLASS: 3
HIT DICE: 6
ATTACKS: 1
DAMAGE: 2-5 (+1 acid variant)
SPECIAL ATTACKS: See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES: See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE: See below
RARITY: Very rare
NO. ENCOUNTERED: 1-10
LAIR PROBABILITY: 5%
TREASURE: None
INTELLIGENCE: Varies
ALIGNMENT: Neutral
LEVEL/X.P.: 1 HD: 5 / 420 + 6/hp

General information: Slaver fungus slave swarms are composed of tiny fungus slaves no larger than three or four inches long. Individually they pose no threat, but collectively they are extremely dangerous for the unprepared.

Slave swarms attack by occupying the same space as their target. All creatures in the area suffer 2-5 hit points of damage per round. The attack is extremely distracting and spellcasting is impossible while under attack by a slave swarm.

Slave swarms share the slaver fungus thrall traits possessed by all thralls. They also cannot be injured by normal weapons. Magical weapons deal only their "+" in damage. For example, a +2 sword deals 2 hit points of damage, while a +1 arrow launched from a +2 bow would deal 3 hit points of damage. Slave

swarms are also immune to all damaging magics that do not affect an area. For instance, magic missile would not injure a slave swarm, but fireball would.

These area-affecting magics are more-damaging to slaver swarms than to normal creatures. For every hit point of damage caused by the attack, a d4 should be rolled for the final total of damage delivered. For example, a 6HD fireball is determined to deal 12 hit points of damage. The player would then roll 12d4 and use that total for the final amount of hit points of damage dealt to the swarm.

Physical description: Slaver fungus slave swarms look little different than any swarm of large insects until examined closely. Only then can their fungal nature be clearly seen.

Variants: Roughly 25% of slaver fungus slave swarms deal an additional hit point of acid damage per attack.

WORM

SIZE: Large (45 ft. long)
MOVE: 120 ft., burrowing 60 ft.
ARMOR CLASS: 2
HIT DICE: 10
ATTACKS: 2
DAMAGE: 1-8, 1-8
SPECIAL ATTACKS: See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Slaver fungus thrall traits
MAGIC RESISTANCE: None
RARITY: Very rare
NO. ENCOUNTERED: 2-8
LAIR PROBABILITY: 5%
TREASURE: None
INTELLIGENCE: Varies
ALIGNMENT: Neutral
LEVEL/X.P.: 7 / 2,400 + 13/hp

General information: Fungal worms are used by the slaver fungus to drive back or disperse forces that could prove strong enough to overcome it. They continually guard the perimeter of the slaver fungus from incursion.

Fungal worms can attack with their claw-tipped tentacles at a range of 40 ft. They typically do not, however, and instead rely upon the emanations of fear that surround them and on their breath weapon to drive away enemies.

Any sentient creatures that can see the worm and who are within 100 ft. receive mental images of themselves drowning under a wave of creeping fungus and gain knowledge of the terrible transformation that awaits them if they remain in the area. Creatures with fewer than 2 hit dice immediately flee in panic for 2-12 turns at the fastest speed possible; creatures with fewer than 4 hit dice must save against magic or panic. Creatures with 4 or more hit dice do not panic, but they fight at a penalty of -1 for the first 1-10 rounds of combat. Sentient creatures that are immune to fear are unaffected.

If the worm's fear doesn't make the enemies of the slaver fungus flee, it uses its breath weapon: a cloud of foul-smelling necrotizing enzymes causing 6-36 hit points of damage. The cloud is 50 ft. long, 50 ft. wide, and 20 ft. tall. A worm can breathe once every 2-5 rounds.

Physical description: Slaver fungus worms are huge snake-like masses of purple fungus that can travel belowground. They have quatrefoil mouths and belching dangerous gasses. From their mouths, two long tentacles tipped with vicious crab-like claws spring to attack.

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