

Swamp of Toads

This is an extensive area of wetlands, marshes and mangroves in a valley ringed by low hills, through which flows the central stretch of the Toad Run river and some of its innumerable tributaries. The map shows only a selection of these lesser watercourses, which, like the main channels, shift and change frequently, so it becomes impossible to separate the swampy land from the waters very often. Ponds and small lakes abound too, with similar variability, and even the largest and more stable Golden Orchid Lake has edges that constantly shift.

The region is on Nibirum's equator, so the flora and fauna match that climatic regime, with the Swamp surrounded, and largely isolated, by sometimes very dense jungle. The hills are typically free from most larger vegetation other than grasses and some scrubby bushes. Locals say anything larger gets swiftly washed away downhill by frequent heavy rain. Mists and fogs are commonplace all across the Swamp and surrounding jungles, which, with the rain, help reduce visibility to mere yards/metres a lot of the time.

Within the Swamp is much monstrous flora, both in size and nature, and the place has been generally little-visited by outsiders for centuries, other than a few folk from Leechfort in the Leech Hills. A gigantic deity-like Swamp Elemental, commonly known as the Toad Lord, lives near the heart of the Swamp. Most of the other intelligent creatures here are humanoid Toadfolk, many of whom live in separate homesteads or small communities scattered widely in the Swamp, and nearby jungles (especially the northeastern Toadwoods). Such settlements are apt to move about frequently, partly depending on where the local ponds and watercourses pass at any given time, thus are not shown on the map, with only a couple of the larger, more stable, settlements so illustrated.

Features of the Swamp were randomly chosen, with adaptations, expansions and amendments, from a variety of the Story Engine prompt card sets, including the three main decks of "The Story Engine", "Deck of Worlds" and "Loremaster's Deck", with several of their fantasy and horror supplementary decks, plus items from tables in the main Shadowdark RPG rules, and the free PDF adventure pack "Shadowdome Thunderdark", both available from The Arcane Library. Shadowdark stats have been provided for GMs' guidance for the adapted creatures mentioned below, beyond those used as-is from their respective sources (the core Shadowdark rules, when not stated).

The decision to expand the Swamp of Toads into a complete, separate Atlas map was thanks to a chance comment by The Story Engine's creator Peter Chiykowski in response to a note of mine in the chat during the Free RPG Day 2025 Story Engine livestream, to whom this map is respectfully dedicated.

Features in the Swamp

Before discussing the labelled places on the map, a list of lesser items that may be found in the Swamp is given that GMs are free to adopt, adapt or ignore, when making use of this setting. Most have been reused or adapted from items in "Shadowdome Thunderdark" (SdTd) or the encounter tables from the core Shadowdark (SD) rules. The list has been numbered for those who may wish to use random selections from it.

1. Sticky, pale-coloured, carnivorous, small mushrooms covered in trapped flies (some may be glowing ones that explode on dying - see Item 9 below).
2. A small group of Toadfolk Skeletons wearing colourful bead jewellery. They will animate as undead Skeletons if certain of the beads are removed, until they are returned to them. Eerie music accompanies the Skeletons while they are active.
3. A small group of Toadfolk Death-God Cultists, with a Lizardfolk Shaman leader, carrying a tied Dwarf sacrifice on a pole, heading for a sacred site. (Note that Lizardfolk are a great rarity in the Swamp.)
4. A solitary Toadfolk fisher, looking for a quiet spot to fish from.
5. A Toadfolk Knight on a quest to destroy undead.
6. A Giant Snake, or a recently moulted giant snake's skin that could be mistaken for a living creature, or a fallen log that also appears similar to a giant snake.
7. A small group of Toadfolk speaking in an unrecognisable, babbling, language (no other Toadfolk from the Swamp know it). Their speech causes confusion, and perhaps madness, in those hearing it for more than a few moments. If killed, they will rise as undead Zombies.

8. A Crocodile, half concealed in a nearby pool, or a dead log that looks just like one.
9. A swarm of small, glowing insects flits by. If swatted, each explodes, blinding the swatter for a short time.
10. Sir Riparian, a Toadfolk Knight, riding a Giant Toad, Paloop, either on a quest, or seeking adventure.
11. In a well-shaded spot, a small flock of Vampire Stingbats swoops down in an attack.
12. A modestly-sized group of Toadfolk are sharing a sumptuous feast. They welcome peaceful visitors and invite them to take part.
13. Crossing a patch of muddy ground causes a swarm of annoying, though harmless, flies to obscure the vision of all nearby for a short time. The incautious may slip and fall on the slippery mud as a result.
14. Moving vine tentacles, or skeins of hanging swamp moss, seem to be trying to snatch at passers-by (harmlessly, if distractingly).
15. A group of Exploding Toads crosses the party's path. They croak unusually musically, and each gives what seems a dramatic chord on dying/exploding.
16. A large group of Exploding Toads appears, croaking most unmusically loudly, and persisting annoyingly.
17. Luminous skeins of blue, green and/or yellow swamp moss or lichen hang from the nearby trees and bushes.
18. A waist-deep pond with a large mass of tiny toadlets in it contains water tainted by the poison on their skins. This is harmless to them, but not to others. (SD, from SdTd: **Water Toxin**. DC 12 CON or 1d6 damage per round in the water, plus DC 12 CON or dazed until out of the pond.)
19. An area of oozing quicksand pits. (SD, from SdTd: DC 13 CON or disadvantage on all attacks and checks in a pit.)
20. Large, carnivorous water-lily pads, able to support the weight of an adult Human for a short time. These wrap around the feet and ankles of anyone standing on one, doing minor harm (SD: 1 damage per round).

Exploding Toads (here presumed to feed on the exploding, glowing insects) and Vampire Stingbats were new monsters, with stats, in SdTd.

Toadfolk and Toadfolk Knights are adaptations of the Frogfolk and Frogfolk Knights also in SdTd. SD stats:

Toadfolk. *Short humanoid toads with thick, warty skins.* **AC** 12, **HP** 5, **ATK** 1 spear (close/near) +1 (1d6) or 1 bite +1 (1d4 + poison), **MV** near (swim), **S** +1, **D** +1, **C** +1, **I** +0, **W** +0, **Ch** +0, **AL** N, **LV** 1. **Poison.** DC 9 CON or 1d4 damage.

Toadfolk Knight. *Short humanoid toad in a tarnished breastplate & shield.* **AC** 17 (plate + shield), **HP** 14, **ATK** 2 bastard sword +3 (1d8) or 1 bite +3 (1d4 + poison), **MV** near (swim), **S** +3, **D** +0, **C** +1, **I** +0, **W** +1, **Ch** +0, **AL** N, **LV** 3. **Poison.** DC 9 CON or 1d4 damage.

The Giant Toad's SD stats, based on those suggested for the Huge Frog in SdTd, are:

Giant Toad. *Pony-sized toads with thick, warty skins and a long, sticky tongue.* **AC** 14, **HP** 20, **ATK** 2 bite +3 (1d8) and 1 swallow (near), **MV** near (swim), **S** +3, **D** +1, **C** +2, **I** -2, **W** +1, **Ch** -2, **AL** N, **LV** 4.

Swallow. One adult human-sized or smaller target in near, DC 12 DEX to dodge tongue. If tongue hits, DC 12 DEX or STR to escape, or swallowed. Swallowed creature takes 1d4 damage per round.

Labelled Place Notes

Blubberfins (Hag): On the eastern fringe of the Swamp, between the Eastern Hills and the Toad Run, is the rickety, wooden tower of the Weald Hag (SD p. 225), Blubberfins. Sometimes she rides into the jungle or the Swamp on a palanquin borne by six Toadfolk bound to her service. At others, she flies through the air in a great, blackened-iron cauldron (at double near speed), from which up to a dozen toads, or Exploding Toads (her choice), leap continuously (SD: 2d6 per round). She has a pet Mesmertoad that always accompanies her, called Stoppit, a plump, cat-sized toad with weird, ever-changing, multicoloured eyes that can hypnotize (like

the Naga's CHA spell power, SD p. 237, using the Hag's CHA bonus of +3). Folk hereabouts also know her as the Toad Witch, or the Swamp Hag.

Bog of Gold: In the southern depths of the Swamp, north of the Goldwood Hills, is a tract of swampland south of the Toad Run that was once considered a paradise by the local Toadfolk. There was a sacred druidical site here, a spring called the Portal of Prophecies, where oracles were sought. A strange enchantment has fallen upon it now, such that it has become a shunned place, with many deadly, carnivorous plants, and where the oracular pool regularly overflows its surroundings with stagnant water. If it can still prophecy (no one has tested it in years), it would likely be to no one's benefit here. The last folk to try are said to have suffered a terrible sleepless curse, until they died from madness and exhaustion.

Catacomb Abyss: Deep in the jungle southwest of Golden Orchid Lake, is the hidden entrance to this extensive subterranean Catacomb. Old tales speak of a doorway within it between the living and the dead, which most to consider the matter think is probably just a metaphor. More recent rumours concern a mistily-cloaked entity in the Swamp, asking about the Catacomb's whereabouts, and the truth of tales regarding this door - especially the occult warnings against opening it.

Cloister Summit: None of the hills surrounding the Swamp are particularly high or rugged, and the Leech Hills to the bog's northwest, where this minor peak lies, are lower than most. Leechfort is just a couple of hilltops to its east, and can be seen easily from the Summit, as can Cloister Summit from there. On the Summit is an ancient, ruinous, stone stronghold, the Cloister, with scattered rocky rubble and stunted thorn bushes set up as if guarding it against intruders still. Inside the Cloister's more intact part is a magical wellspring that enables the place to take on a less-ruinous form, as it once may have been, from time to time, albeit only in a ghostly, insubstantial manner. The place is also inhabited by ghostly figures at such times, and there are carved panels in some of the stones - over door and window holes especially - of a stylised Stingbat (SD p. 254) with outspread wings held high, set like an armorial design. Rare visitors have suggested these designs have sometimes shown signs of coming to life.

Eastern Hills: Longest of the low hill ranges surrounding the Swamp, these are notable for having a fresher, healthier atmosphere on their southern, and further eastern slopes. Those nearer the Swamp, rivers and Hag's dwelling are much less pleasant.

Frog Orchard: At the eastern end of the Leechwood, just before it runs into the Swamp proper, is a labyrinthine area of unusually large fruiting trees of various kinds. Reaching the fruits before they drop from the giant trees is not easy, but the fresh fruits are delicious, and fill the air here with a delightful scent, as do the blossoms on the trees in season. Unfortunately, the Orchard is also home to a hulking Toadhemoth, liable to take offence at fruit-thieves (that is, any creature except itself). SD stats:

Toadhemoth. *A carthorse-sized mutated giant toad with a thick, warty skin, head tentacles, and a blood-draining bite.* **AC** 14, **HP** 22, **ATK** 1 tongue (near) and 1 bite +4 (1d8 + blood drain) or 2 tentacle (near) +4 (1d8 + crush), **MV** near (swim), **S** +4, **D** +1, **C** +2, **I** -3, **W** +1, **Ch** -4, **AL** N, **LV** 4. **Blood Drain.** Target bitten is auto-hit for normal bite damage next round. DC12 STR on turn to break free. Toadhemoth heals 1d4 HP per round attached. It cannot use its tongue attack while attached, but can still use its tentacles. **Crush.** DC 12 STR or target takes 1d8 damage. **Tongue.** 1 creature in near, DC 12 DEX or pulled to close range.

Golden Orchid Lake: In the southwestern part of the Swamp, south of the Toad Run, is this large, usually three-limbed, Lake, although its shape and size fluctuates at times due to varying water levels in its surroundings. The vegetation is somewhat denser, with more trees, nearby, and the place overall seems healthier, with pleasanter weather, than many other parts of the Swamp. Swathes of golden orchids bloom around the Lake in season, particularly so nearer its shores. These plants are closely associated in tales with the nocturnal Turtle God, unsurprising, as the God inhabits this Lake, a highly intelligent, solitary, very ancient and rarely-seen being, capable of speech in many languages, and which feeds on magical energy. He particularly likes being sung to. His primary domain is the weather, and he is close friends with the Chameleon God, who may, or may not, be seen nearby at times as well. Even if present, the Chameleon God is of course often almost invisible against his surroundings.

Goldwood Hills: The clump of low hills immediately south of the Swamp by the Bog of Gold. It is likely their name is simply from the Bog, since as usual, few trees or bushes grow on them, none of which are golden.

Leechfort: Atop one of the higher Leech Hills northwest of the Swamp is this long-established, monastic martial arts school, founded to commemorate a great victory by the original leader and their followers. Just outside the school's outer wall stands the Obelisk of Wine, a tall, dark-red, stone pillar that was once a source of great chaotic magical power. The pillar was drained of that power long ago, and is the reason the school is here, as it was the source, and site, of the founder's victory. The "Leech" name derives from the persistent

giant Devil Leeches (standard SD Giant Leeches, p. 229, with red and black banding) from the Swamp that regularly climb the Hills here seeking food. The Fort itself consists of a high, gated, outer wall and several large, tall, buildings inside the compound, all stone-built, with regularly whitewashed walls and green copper roofs. When the mists thin enough, it is readily visible from much of the Swamp valley.

Leech Hills: As noted for Leechfort, this range of low hills northwest of the Swamp takes its name from the Devil Leeches that crawl from the Swamp over much of them at times, seeking fresh food. Quite what attracts them here is uncertain, possibly some lingering effects of the old, departed chaotic magic associated with the Obelisk of Wine at Leechfort. They are equally common across the adjoining Leechwood jungle to the south, and the area of Swamp east of the Woods, bounded by the Toad Run and two of its major tributaries there. They are not seen elsewhere in the Swamp, however.

Leechwood: The tract of jungle sandwiched between the Leech Hills, the Toad Run and its easternmost mapped tributary here, and the northwestern edge of the Swamp. As noted under the Leech Hills entry, many Devil Leeches lurk here, apt to drop from the branches on unsuspecting travellers passing beneath. It is otherwise similar to many others of the rainforest areas in the vicinity.

Lilypad: Easternmost of the two main Toadfolk villages in the Swamp, often considered uncomfortably close to the tower of the Hag Blubberfins, despite being across the Toad Run from her lair. Primarily a fishing and fish-farming settlement, giant insect farming goes on here too, with some honey production from ordinary bees. However, the place is also plagued by oddities from time to time, notably Giant Frogs, which all the villagers help shoo and guide away using giant lily pads as baffles, shields and fences (some say this is the origin of the place-name). Other strange things include occasional Toadfolk that die only to rise as undead Vampire Spawn (SD p. 261), curious Giant Frogs and Toads with unusual coloration - purple and magenta are common among these - and many ordinary-sized, normal-seeming toads that appear, usually singly, and start croaking, but which are really persistent undead creatures, that are extremely difficult to get rid of. It seems likely the Hag's proximity has much to do with such weirdnesses, and occasional others, here.

Palace of the Toad Lord: A large, living-vegetation structure in which the Toad Lord Ssathrokkwa dwells most of the time, a gigantic Swamp Elemental creature, which if not a demi-god, is treated as one by the local Toadfolk. The Palace and Toad Lord are detailed by a separate Atlas map.

Pitriver: The other main Toadfolk village-sized settlement in the Swamp (with Lilypad), this one stands in the angle between two major tributaries of the Toad Run, where they connect into one, and flow south into the Run itself, towards the northern limits of the Swamp. Along with the normal fishing and insect-husbandry, the place is notable for the many water-filled pits about it, said to be the ancient footprints of some giant creature, which are now heavily used for fish-farming. Odd paranormal events cluster around the settlement at times, with ghostly forms and nocturnal Will-O'-Wisp-like lights among the commoner elements. Strange, sourceless whispering is often heard about the place as well, and there are persistent rumours that the local, supposedly secret, cult, called The Velvet Dragonfly, is planning to wake some ancient, slumbering behemoth spirit. The cult is named for the beautiful giant dragonflies that have crystalline bodies, and are believed created by magic, which are only found in this part of the Swamp. (Giant Dragonflies are described with SD stats in the free scenario "The Concealed Abbey of the Dragonfly Horde", available from the link in the description to this Arcane Library YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7pCRyEuZQA>.)

Toad Hall (Ruins): At the southwestern foot of the Toadwood Hills in the map's northeast, are some partly overgrown stone ruins in the jungle. Whether they were actually once a "Hall" in any established sense is unclear, although this is what the local Toadfolk call them. In the more intact interior can be seen still an old, rather worn, series of painted murals, showing Toadfolk worshipping a glittering, gigantic, catfish-like creature.

Toad Run: The major east to west flowing river through the heart of the Swamp. It has a great many tributaries across the whole swamp area, and far beyond. Its channels vary on short timescales in size, water level and location, but the main channel is always the best source for freshwater across this region.

Toadwoods: A general name given to the jungle areas north, northeast and east of the Swamp, along with the extensive, and relatively highest, hills there. Numerous small Toadfolk settlements are scattered over parts of this region, north of the Toad Run, away from the Swamp itself.

Twelvestones: Not far northeast of the Toad Lord's Palace is an important, ancient site, where twelve stone statues depicting Toadfolk in a successful war against Goblins still stand. Despite their age, the stones are regularly cleaned and maintained by the local Toadfolk, even if the war they commemorate is little more than a subject for, probably invented, legendary tales now.

Zealot's Lens: In the depths of the Leechwood, south of the Leech Hills, is an ancient standing stone with a large, weathered rune deeply inscribed into its southern side, which looks very like an inverted, angular, tuning-fork or chicken's wishbone. Invoking it brings the invoker's dreams magically to life. Who set-up the stone, when and why, are mysteries.