

Wrath of the Righteous



Ecology of The Worm That Walks

Heed these instructions closely, my followers, for herein lies my greatest desire in life—and in death. When I live no more, bury my flesh in the graveyard next to the crypt. Bury me shallow, and scatter on my grave the contents of the atelier's jars: four neothelid tongues, eight seuçathi eyes, and a quart of dretch's bile. Do not bother with fell enchantments; these, I assure you, are already complete. Simply leave my body with its accoutrements, and then, above all, cover my grave in worms. Take these creatures' measures well, my pets, for you shall see them—and me—again. It will all be clear soon.

—From the will of Vladdon Bavonoda, mad wizard of Ustalav

Ecology of the worm that walks

Not all that dies remains dead. While most evil magic-users who meet their end find their bodies slowly returning to the clay and their souls judged by Pharasma, there are those so powerful and evil that the River of Souls itself seems to throw them back. These reprehensible beings poison the surrounding soil with their malevolent will, and when the worms and other vermin come to dine on the caster's corpse, its taint seeps into them, turning what was a collection of worms into a horrible rebirth of the dead caster: a worm that walks.

Though most inhabitants of Golarion believe them no more than myths and campfire stories, worms that walk are all too real, stalking the crypts and graveyards all over the world. Yet despite their horrific aspects, worms that walk are not undead, nor are they simply resurrected versions of the evil casters they once were. Instead, they are new life forms unto themselves, ones that straddle the lines between life and death, icy resolve and mindless hunger.

Worms that walk move, act, and even speak like the humanoids they were in their previous lives. They wear the same clothing, carry the same memories, and retain their spellcasting abilities. Their bodies, however, have melted into graveyard decay. In place of the spellcasters' flesh writhe hundreds of thousands of disgusting, slimy worms—or, on rare occasions, other minute vermin. Despite efforts to hide their true nature, worms that walk always give off a distinct grave-rot odor, enough to turn the stomachs of even seasoned adventurers. For most worms that walk, however, immortality is more than worth the price of becoming such an abomination.

Most worms that walk arise spontaneously from casters and circumstances that happen to meet the proper criteria. Unlike lichens, whose successful quests for immortality are often spoken of among evil spellcasters of sufficient skill, worms that walk are rarely idolized, and thus the precise conditions of their generation remain poorly understood. Still, a few casters do aspire to this particular form of immortality, undertaking the great sacrifices and planning necessary to ensure their success. Regardless of whether a caster intends to be reborn as a worm that walks, however, there's no question that for those who rise again, their new form offers an existence of considerable power and intimidation.

Becoming A Worm That Walks

The birth of a worm that walks always requires two distinct elements. The first is a recently deceased spellcaster of great power—one with a strong personality, an unrepentant evil nature, and reluctance to pass on into the next world. The other element is the burial site: a graveyard or other ground that has through mishap

or deliberate manipulation been infused with high levels of eldritch magic. (For those rare individuals intentionally fostering the process, a spell like *unhallow* or *desecrate* tends to suffice.) When the dead spellcaster is interred in the tainted ground, her soul is prevented from departing entirely for the River of Souls, and is instead drawn back, consumed, and redistributed among the very worms that feed upon her rotting flesh. These vermin bearing shards of her soul then swarm together, amassing into a single-minded entity that springs to sentience, complete with the “deceased” caster's memories and full magical capabilities, as if she never died in the first place.

In addition to all the knowledge and magical abilities it retained in its previous life, a worm that walks gains the senses, traits, and ability to disincorporate of the swarm of creatures that has consumed its body. Although the most common worms that walk are made of their namesakes, other creatures across Golarion have gained similar powers with different vermin. Mwangi tradition, for example, speaks of evil spellcasters who instruct their followers to suspend their lifeless bodies from trees over swamps or stagnant rivers. Their minions then enact dark magic that calls killer wasps, bees, locusts, mosquitos, or fire ants into the flesh of the dead one, reanimating it into a horrific, sibilant variant of the worm that walks. Some scholars believe that the King of Biting Ants, a powerful Mwangi sorcerer who was defeated by the legendary Ten Magic Warriors, might have in fact been a unique worm that walks (though others note that his involvement with the Doorway to the Red Star could hint at a much more complicated explanation). Similar traditions involving fetal bats, hordes of rats, and even newly hatched snakes circulate as rumors throughout communities in Ustalav, Varisia, and the Shackles.

Though rarely sought, existence as a worm that walks is a gift that, once gained, is seldom refused—suicide among worms that walk is extremely rare, and most worms that walk quickly come to embrace their new abilities and the new lease on life granted to them. If anything, the creatures who become worms that walk often grow even more egotistical and vicious than those who planned their transformations, believing their new existence to be a sign that their self-aggrandizement is justified, and that they've been chosen by dark forces for further greatness.

Ecology

Worms that walk do not age, and in fact each worm that walks is no longer a single creature; rather, it's a distributed entity, with each worm serving as a vital part of the whole. When an individual worm dies, the eggs it has laid hatch and take its place; in this way, a worm

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that walks possesses a fully functioning, self-sustaining body. While this may strike many as grotesque, scholars who study various creatures likely this effect to other regenerative races, such as trolls—what a worm that walks regenerate isn't chunks of flesh, but discrete entities. A worm that walks' advanced control of its base units means that the creature can manipulate its body in a wide variety of ways, slamming enemies one minute, then collapse into a pile of writhing vermin the next, or effortlessly grappling a foe with its countless wriggling worms. Although a worm that walks is of a single mind, unless most of the worms that make up its body are killed, the worm that walks continues to live—usually to the horror and frustration of those who hunt such abominations.

As a living creature, a worm that walks must feed. To do so, it collapses into a squirming pile in order to ingest the flesh of its kills. It's exclusively carnivorous, and prefers the flesh of sentient beings, particularly humanoids. Some worms that walk find their own constant hunger and process of feeding disgusting, and instead find magical means of sustaining themselves; but for most, this initial revulsion passes quickly. Most, accepting that their existence has changed permanently, relish the bestial nature of their hunger and actively look for humanoids to nourish their bizarre physiques.

Although some worms that walk cling to their magic-using abilities and refuse to view themselves as abominations, living as a worm that walks requires certain sacrifices. For instance, their natural tendency is to become nocturnal. Worms that walk also, despite their more refined leanings, find ecstasy in nighttime rainfalls, especially those warm showers in spring and summer months. In these instances, it's most common to find a worm that walks outside a cemetery as an evening rain falls. On rare occasions during these events, worms that walk join together to feed and commune with each other, collapsing and merging their wriggling forms together in an undulating ritual where they share memories and thoughts. These disturbing gatherings are few and far between, however, as worms that walk don't commonly form near one another and typically keep their distance from others of their kind.

Society

Although worms that walk retain the identities they had in their previous lives—and therefore don't have a society in common—they do have a few social qualities that set

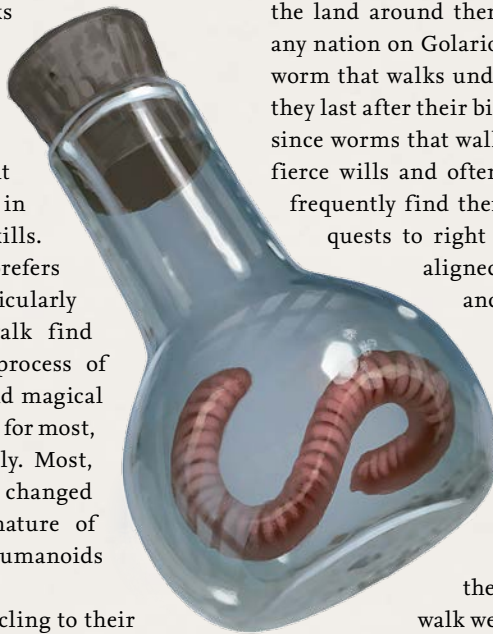
them apart. In particular, they are often found in places where evil has an easier time gaining power or going unnoticed. Some of Golarion's nations and regions, such as Ustalav, Nidal, the Worldwound, the Mana Wastes, the Darklands, Geb, and Nex, are prime candidates to spawn these creatures, yet the most important factor in determining whether an area proves a proper birthplace for worms that walk is whether it is infused with powerful magic. For instance, Ustalav's reputation for spawning worms that walk likely has less to do with that nation's particular character and more to do with the presence of locations like Gallowspire and Renchurch, which steep the land around them in dark magic. As such, almost any nation on Golarion could theoretically give rise to a worm that walks under the right conditions. (How long they last after their birth is, of course, a different story—since worms that walk always form from evil souls with fierce wills and often-grandiose plans, these creatures frequently find themselves at the end of adventurer's quests to right wrongs, and thus those in good-aligned nations generally keep themselves and their lairs hidden away.)

Many worms that walk cannot fathom society with others of their kind. In fact, many of the far-flung creatures harbor egotistical beliefs that they're the only beings magically potent enough to have achieved their unique forms of existence—even if their transformations into worms that walk were accidental.

Because they are essentially augmented humanoid spellcasters, many worms that walk are drawn to associate with the same sort of creatures in their second life as they did in their first. They are solitary creatures, and most of their social interaction is with the minions who aid in protecting their lairs. Some of these minions are humanoids, or even former apprentices. As the abominations age and their mortal minions begin to die off, they replace their underlings with more powerful creatures. Many worms that walk end up leading cults of twisted devotees.

Lairs

When they arise as worms that walk, many spellcasters wish to continue building where they left off, and those in appropriately evil or isolated regions may continue their studies relatively unchanged by their newfound immortality. Their apprentices range from minions they create, such as homunculi, to evil beings they manipulate or with whom they join forces, such as bugbears, boggards, or orcs. To other worms that walk, the willfulness of the



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living is unacceptable, and the best minions are those who possess the glassy stare of undeath. These may stock their lairs with skeletons, ghouls, or mummies, or even ally with vampires (but rarely ally with lich).

Worms that walk build their lairs in a variety of places. Some lair in the places where they previously lived, repurposing the site with better defenses and perhaps forcing former associates and family members into twisted mockeries of their previous lives. Others, especially those greeted with strong opposition when they attempt to return home, instead find new places to settle—such as in underground locations far from the prying view of most humanoids. Some that emerge from the Worldwound call upon demonic powers and surround themselves with half-fiends and lesser demons. They fancy themselves potential rulers, and construct their lairs to accommodate their fiendish minions. Often, these worms that walk simply wish to feed on or study the pulsing power of the Abyss near the Worldwound. Cultists of Deskari particularly fall into this category, and some travelers to the Worldwound have reported worms that walk formed from hundreds of thousands of buzzing locusts.

Worms that walk who build their lairs below ground are frequently spellcasters who were obsessed with the Darklands in their previous lives. They might have spent that earlier time studying the world below the surface of Golarion that teems with horrid life. Not long after these spellcasters arise as worms that walk, they seep down into the Darklands in search of a corner of the lightless realm to make their own, and often ally with one or more of the civilizations below, such as the duergar or drow. Some of these worms that walk consider themselves militant protectors and like-minded allies of the neothelids. Instead of leading a reclusive life in the study of eldritch power, they lead armies of horrid, tentacled seugathi.

No matter where they are located, the lairs of worms that walk have one thing in common. Unable to escape their affinity for the earthen, or for the elements that bore whatever other vermin they are made from, worms that walk typically convert their lairs into shrines to the very writhing, slimy creatures that form their bodies. This fixation with worms makes for eerie homes, with mounds of earth replacing stone or rock walls, particularly in lairs refitted for the creatures' current forms. A lair created new by a worm that walks is normally even more linked to the earth, with hillocks, hollowed-out trees, or rotted-out mausoleums serving as places of worship, eldritch study, or diabolical learning. It might not always be clear where a worm that walks lurks, but the environments that typically harbor them tend to be the same: dark, moist, and full of crawling and wriggling creatures.

Worms That Walk In Popular Culture

Best known by many as a denizen of roleplaying games, the worm that walks has been used in literature and film for years to horrify and repulse audiences. According to some interpretations, the origin of worms that walk can be traced back to a 1925 H. P. Lovecraft short story entitled "The Festival." Others reference descriptions of creatures in "The Dunwich Horror" as inspirations for these wriggling monstrosities. Regardless of the exact inspiration, the creatures appeared in the Call of Cthulhu RPG and have since crawled their way into other games.

The worm that walks and its concept have been used in popular culture whenever a revolting, unexplained, and resurrected enemy is required. Creatures similar in form and function to worms that walk have appeared in the television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and in John Carpenter's film *Prince of Darkness*. Even the animated movie *The Nightmare Before Christmas* features a character named Oogie Boogie who is a mass of insects—and even a snake—contained within a sackcloth form.

In "The Festival," an unnamed narrator visits a New England town that seems centuries out of date. There, he learns the people have commanded their descendants—including the narrator himself—to maintain an ancient ritual once every hundred years. Taking part in the ritual, the narrator witnesses horrific things and flees, waking later in a hospital where he recalls a selection from the *Necronomicon* that states: "For it is of old rumour that the soul of the devil-bought hastes not from his charnel clay, but fests and instructs the very worm that gnaws; till out of corruption horrid life springs, and the dull scavengers of earth wax crafty to vex it and swell monstrous to plague it. Great holes secretly are digged where earth's pores ought to suffice, and things have learnt to walk that ought to crawl."

Worms That Walk On Golarion

Though they're rare, more than a few worms that walk have been recorded over the world's long history, from nations far and wide. Below are just a few examples of these foul abominations who currently stain the face of Golarion with their dark magics.

The Lurker of the Woods (CE female worm that walks sorcerer [abyssal bloodline] 11): Roaming the borders of the Shudderwood, located just south of Ustalav, is a heinous example of spellcasting gone awry. Once a proud member of a Sarkorian tribe, this sorceress—whose real name is now lost to time—emerged as a worm that walks after years of dabbling in fiendish magic. Devoid

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of her original humanity and reveling in her newfound form, this cave-loving worm that walks now calls Abyssal creatures to her lair and binds them for study and cruel experimentation, hoping to derive greater power by siphoning their otherworldly magic.

Malkay Enrili (LE male worm that walks conjurer 15): Thousands of years ago, Malkay Enrili was a powerful Thassilonian wizard who traveled far and wide in his search for new sources of arcane knowledge and power. Unsurprisingly, his searches led him to the city of Xin—yet this proved to be his undoing, as Malkay found himself among the countless others who lost their lives as the great city sank down into the sea. Unlike those others, however, Malkay was a conjurer of such great power that his violent passing in that magic-drenched place resulted in an unexpected rebirth as a writhing abomination. Effectively immortal, Malkay still walks the silent streets and halls of sunken Xin to this day, summoning allies from across the planes to educate him on the state of Golarion and the worlds beyond, as well as helping him increase his mastery over the arcane. Not all of his “companions” are satisfied with this arrangement, however—his most recent assistants, a group of four piscodaemons (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 72), were promised mortals to torture and souls to savor, but now they have grown bored, hungry, and agitated within the drowned city.

Rhenmari Thot (LE male worm that walks transmuter 14): Deep underneath Osirion, in the depths of Sekamina, lies the lair of this evil creature—an evil wizard who was obsessed with the strange magic used by some of the ghouls of Nemret Noktoria. Once he arrived, the scholarly ghouls were impressed with Thot’s single-minded devotion to his magical pursuits, and they welcomed him as a sage and formidable ally of their city. Unlike some spontaneous worms that walk, Thot spent his life learning strange rites and gathering forbidden information. He plotted his death thoroughly, hoping to emerge as a worm that walks—and his plans succeeded. His lab in the city of the ghouls is constantly abuzz with various arcane experiments, including an elixir that can recreate his condition in others while they still live.

Urca Namat (NE male worm that walks conjurer 13): Within the deadened lands of Ustalav lies the ruined monastery of Renchurch, a spiritual center of the Whispering Way. Within this place of unrest lurks Urca Namat, residing in a 2-foot-deep pool writhing with millions of maggots. While mostly left to his own devices, he guards the inner sanctum and attacks with impunity any who disturb his meditative slumber.

The Wriggling Man (NE male worm that walks transmuter 17): The personal advisor of the nymph queen Nyrrissa, this hideous creature remembers only that

he was a powerful human wizard whose final mission ended with his death in the First World. It was here that he spontaneously reanimated—to his delight—as a powerful arcanist who helps the nymph queen with her plans to one day rule the River Kingdoms’ Stolen Lands. Despite tales that heroes may have slain him, rumors of the Wriggling Man’s existence within the flickering First World persist, leading some to seek out this caster for his profane secrets.

Variants

Because of the odd and usually accidental circumstances through which worms that walk are born, the process of such birth is far from standardized. Thus, the worms themselves can take more shapes than simply the most common one. For purposes of clarity, all of the variants presented below are referred to as worms that walk, even if their main components are not actually worms. These variants are created using the same statistics presented in *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2, and usually the only changes are cosmetic in nature (though see locust variant, below).

Army Ants: Common in Garund’s deserts and lush, tropical jungles, army ants swarm over the land like a living carpet, devouring everything they come across. A worm that walks composed of army ants likewise consumes everything in its path—including the body of the spellcaster it once was. Disturbingly, these worms that walk spend little of their time in humanoid-shaped form, preferring to crawl as a biting swarm of legs and pincers. This form of worms that walk is mostly likely to be encountered in underground-dwelling; these horrific creatures are said to include one who calls the dangerous sands of Thuvia home.

Cockroaches: Cockroaches can be found in great numbers anywhere civilization stains the landscape with its refuse. Worms that walk composed of cockroaches are more likely to be found in urban areas, especially in large cities where they can go unnoticed by most, usually arising when both corpses and magical effluent are deposited in sewers and garbage dumps. A worm that walks composed of cockroaches is a creature of stealth and guile. Frequently keeping to the shadows and sewers of the city, these worms that walk broker information and engage in blackmail, augmenting their unnatural talents with strong illusion and enchantment magic. Some say that a powerful enchantress worm that walks made of cockroaches runs a guild of thieves in Absalom, but no reliable sources can say they’ve met her.

Locusts: Found in any area that sports—or once sported—verdant plant life, this worm that walks variant has plague-like nuances and can be particularly hard to kill. Made up of ravenous locusts, these worms that walk make meals of any creatures weaker than they, and are

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particularly attuned to their animalistic instincts. One of these particularly appalling worms that walk is said to threaten the agriculture-rich lands of Geb, and due to the influence of Deskari in the Worldwound, a few of these creatures have been spotted in the ruins of Sarkoris.

Wasps: Typically found in warm, moist regions, these worms that walk are made from hundreds of thousands of buzzing, swarming wasps. Aggressive and cruel, these worms that walk favor poison and other debilitating substances, and commonly focus their arcane knowledge on creating potent toxins. Rumor has it that one of these horrific creatures rules over a tribe of hunters along one of the winding tributaries threading throughout the Mwangi Expanse.

Locust Variant

Hordes of swarming locusts coalesce to make up the form of a humanoid woman carrying a scythe, a demonic symbol emblazoned on her chest.

THE PLAGUED ONE

CR 8

XP 4,800

Female human worm that walks cleric of Deskari 7
CE Medium vermin (augmented human)

Init +2; **Senses** blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 60 ft.;
Perception +15

DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 19, flat-footed 16 (+1 deflection, +2 Dex, +1
dodge, +5 insight)

hp 77 (7d8+42); fast healing 8

Fort +9, **Ref** +4, **Will** +10

Defensive Abilities worm that walks traits; **DR** 15/—;

Immune disease, paralysis, poison, sleep

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee mwk scythe +8 (2d4+1/x4) or
slam +6 (1d4+1 plus grab)

Special Attacks disincorporate, channel negative energy
6/day (DC 16, 4d6), destructive smite (+3, 8/day),
squirming embrace, tenacious

Domain Spell-Like Abilities (CL 7th; concentration +12)
8/day—touch of evil (3 rounds)

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 7th; concentration +12)

4th—*air walk*, *divine power*, *unholy blight*^o (DC 19)

3rd—*contagion* (DC 18), *dispel magic*, *magic circle against
good*^o, *protection from energy*

2nd—*cure moderate wounds*, *darkness*, *hold person* (DC 17),
shatter^o, *spiritual weapon*

1st—*command* (DC 16), *cure light wounds*, *doom* (DC 16),
obscuring mist, *protection from good*, *shield of faith*,
true strike^o

0 (at will)—*detect magic*, *guidance*, *read magic*, *resistance*

D domain spell; **Domains** Destruction, Evil

STATISTICS

Str 13, **Dex** 14, **Con** 18, **Int** 8, **Wis** 20, **Cha** 12

Base Atk +5; **CMB** +6 (+14 grapple); **CMD** 29 (33 vs. grapple)

Feats Diehard^o, Dodge, Extra Channel, Improved Channel,
Toughness, Weapon Focus (scythe)

Skills Knowledge (planes) +6, Knowledge (religion) +5,
Perception +15, Sense Motive +13, Spellcraft +7, Stealth +10;

Racial Modifiers +8 Perception, +8 Sense Motive,
+8 Stealth

Languages Common

Gear mwk scythe, *headband of inspired wisdom* +2, *ring of
protection* +1

