

Fantasy Renaissance Adventure Module

SHADOW OUT OF SAPPHIRE LAKE

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An Adventure for Character Levels 4-6



MEMORIES OF THE TOAD GOD #3



Fantasy Renaissance Adventure Module TG3
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For use with the 5th Edition of the First Fantasy RPG

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SHADOW OUT OF SAPPHIRE LAKE

In a distant extraplanar prison, the outer power Ibholtheg thrashes and reels, sending tremors into the Prime Plane. Those tremors are causing a split to appear between the planes, and from that gulf Ibholtheg stretches its influence out, attempting to widen it. Shadows lengthen in the nearby frontier town of Kraden's Hill, but is it too late to stop the return of the once-powerful Squamous Toad?

TG3 Shadow Out of Sapphire Lake is the third scenario in the **MEMORIES OF THE TOAD GOD** Fantasy Renaissance Adventure Module trilogy. It is designed for a party of four to six characters levels 4 to 6 (optimized for 6th level). The GM should read the module thoroughly before playing to become familiar with the overall plot of the adventure.

WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: THE FRONTIER

THE MEMORIES OF THE TOAD GOD SERIES TAKES PLACE IN A FRONTIER TOWN ON THE BORDERS OF AN INHOSPITABLE AND DANGEROUS JUNGLE. DETAILS OF THIS BLOT OF CIVILIZATION KNOWN AS KRADEN'S HILL ARE GIVEN, BUT NOT MUCH IS DETERMINED AS TO WHOM ITS MASTERS ANSWER.. FIND A PLACE IN YOUR CAMPAIGN FOR KRADEN'S HILL TO HELP ROOT THE CHARACTERS IN YOUR SETTING. YOU WON'T REGRET IT.

Adventure Background

In ages past, great empires now crumbled stood tall and proud across the ancient land. One of these was Xilonoc, with its pyramids of gold hidden in the deep jungles and its priest-kings who wore the dressings of their jungle gods. The people of Xilonoc venerated great, powerful beasts that rose to the status of minor gods as a result of the worship.

But slowly, a shadow from the deepest depths of the jungle crawled over Xilonoc and its people. The shadow was called Ibholtheg, the Squamous Toad, a creature not of the jungle but from a faraway place and time. Ibholtheg craved subjugation and hungered for the minds and souls of the Xilonoc people.

Ibholtheg whispered promises of power in the ears of the priest-kings, who were swayed by the allure of greater influence over the jungle kingdom. Temples to the jungle gods were torn down one by one over the course of hundreds of years, until Ibholtheg and its squatting brood were the only ones venerated across the breadth of Xilonoc.

Xilonoc became a cesspool of depravity, debauchery, and vile cruelty. Its armies plundered wherever they could, and the priest-kings laughed and held debased festivals in their pyramids of gold and stone before the idols of Ibholtheg. Corruption and power

were the rules of the day, but it would not last.

Eventually, while Ibholtheg's appetite grew greater and greater, several of the priest-kings saw that they were merely puppets performing the will of a loathsome god from beyond the stars. They banded together in secret, and alongside an order of loyal jaguar knights, they found Ibholtheg's jungle resting place and assaulted it directly with the intention of banishing the Squamous Toad forever.

They were partially successful. Ibholtheg knew of the plot, but he was blind to the powers the priest-kings and jaguar knights had wrought. Terrible and ancient sorcery clashed against the might and willpower of an empire, and when things looked their bleakest for the priest-kings the jungle gods themselves returned, turning the tide.

Ibholtheg was cast from the Material Plane into a lightless realm known as the Prison of Black Gulfs, relegated to an empty eternity. Xilonoc collapsed into ruin soon thereafter, its peoples returning to a simpler life in the jungle as generations passed.

But Ibholtheg saw that its time to rise would come once again. Key locations yet lingered in the Great Jungle tied to the outer power's influence, and through them the Squamous Toad could still exert some control over the Material Plane. The last golden temple of Ibholtheg squatted alone but the clever jungle gods used it as an anchor to hold the foul power within the Prison of Black Gulfs. A band of heroes searching for riches found the temple, inadvertently destroying it.

In Kraden's Hill, a frontier town built to push the borders of civilization and exploit the wonders of the jungle, Ibholtheg called out to a powerful merchant company called Noviorium House and used their influence to attempt to break the seal. The wicked Natan and his followers were defeated in the swamp, but the Ritual of Rising was enough to open a crack in Ibholtheg's dark prison.

Below the tranquil Sapphire Lake near Kraden's Hill, deep within a cluster of unexplored caves, the crack appeared. And from that crack Ibholtheg sent the Shadow of Ibholtheg, an extension of its vile power, to break wide the prison seal and release its master into the world again.

Module Synopsis

The adventure begins in the frontier town of Kraden's Hill, which sits on the border of the Great Jungle. The characters find themselves in the town, celebrating the Festival of the Night Bird with a friendly tribe of

shadow orcs that has come in. But this night is not going to end well, for the Shadow of Ibholtheg has risen from the depths of Sapphire Lake, an extension of Ibholtheg's vile will, and it moves to visit destruction upon Kraden's Hill.

The effects of the Shadow of Ibholtheg are felt immediately at the beginning of the festival. Bystanders stare into wells of darkness that consume the mind while winged, tentacled bat monsters fall upon them to feast on their flesh. The characters must move quickly to combat the Shadow of Ibholtheg and its effects on Kraden's Hill, during which they discover can be pushed back with strong light. With the aid of the residents, the characters must create a huge bonfire on top of the town's eponymous hill in order to drive back the shadow.

With the Shadow of Ibholtheg pushed back and dawn breaking over the horizon, the characters and their allies can take stock of their situation. A tendrill of darkness snakes its way to the east of Kraden's Hill, where it ends at a great mass of squirming black shadows squatting over Sapphire Lake. In order to find out what's going on and put an end to it, the characters must travel into the lake itself.

The source of the great shadow is from deep within the depths of Sapphire Lake so the characters must swim down to find it. There they uncover a series of caves inhabited by a tribe of degenerate toad-men overjoyed since the essence of Ibholtheg seeped into the world. Getting past the tribe on the upper levels of the caverns puts the characters in the lower levels, which were built by the ancients of Xilonoc and protected by their magic still against intruders (they did not ward it well enough from intrusions through the prison itself).

In order to seal the crack, the characters must venture into it, taking them inside the Prison of Black Gulfs, an extraplanar site that contains the physical presence of Ibholtheg itself. The characters are greeted by one of the ancient caretakers of the prison, an immortal jaguar knight now sick and wounded, who relates how to seal the crack and keep Ibholtheg and other powerful beings imprisoned.

A dangerous journey through the Black Gulfs awaits the characters, filled with madness and strange monsters, until they finally come upon the Realm of the Squamous Toad. In order to seal the crack the characters must obtain a piece of Ibholtheg's essence, a task that does not prove trivial, and then escape before the outer power can catch them.

Once the crack is sealed and the characters are on the other side, Ibholtheg's direct influence over the Material Plane wanes. The world is safe from the Squamous Toad for the time being.

Future Modules

This module is the third and final part of the **MEMORIES OF THE TOAD GOD** trilogy. It builds upon the actions of the previous two adventures. In **TG1 Lost Temple of Ibholtheg**, the characters unwittingly set into motion the return of the Squamous Toad, and in **TG2 Tongues of the Screaming Toad** they had to deal with a powerful sorcerer and his allies who wanted to bring about Ibholtheg's rise early. If the characters are successful in this module, they can rest easy – but other adventures are sure to come their way!

Involving the Characters

Characters who have already participated in the previous two modules should be familiar with Kraden's Hill and the dangers of the Great Jungle – and the things that lurk just below its surface. For a new group, however, it's easy to have them arrive with a caravan of merchant wagons that cross the mountains and resupply the frontier town on a semi-regular basis.

However they arrive, the characters find that Kraden's Hill has become host to a tribe of shadow orcs who have come in peace to celebrate the Festival of the Night Bird, a time of great celebration – a celebration destined to be interrupted by a terrible shadow out of Sapphire Lake.

Adapting the Module

This module tries to use as many generic location names as possible to make it easy to port to nearly any fantasy campaign setting. Below are the elements of the module that would need to be mapped out to an existing setting along with notes of how they fit within the adventure.

Great Jungle: A vast expanse of largely unexplored jungle wilderness on the edge of (or even just beyond) settled territories. Occupied by tribes of nomadic wild elves, savage shadow orcs, and native humans who were once part of a large Aztec-like civilization (Xilonoc) long ago.

Kraden's Hill: A frontier town settled a few years ago by enterprising members of Grimden House.

Grimden House: A powerful merchant family with trade connections across a great area. Interested in plundering the Great Jungle for valuables to be sold in other markets.

Clan Ironstar: Dwarven merchants with an eye for adventure and gold.

Ibholtheg: Squamous bat-toad entity of ancient antiquity. Worshipped by mutant bullywugs, some of which can fly on bat-like wings.

Xilonoc: Ancient society of humans that fell



mysteriously thousands of years ago. Descendants are now barbaric natives of the jungle, many of whom are cannibals.

Prison of Black Gulfs: An extraplanar site that holds a number of outer powers imprisoned for eternity. Perhaps located within the plane of Carceri somewhere. Current location of Ibholtheg.

PART ONE: THE SHADOW RISES

The characters find themselves in the frontier town of Kraden's Hill during a strange time. The Akanni, a local tribe of shadow orcs friendly to the settlers for over a year, have decided to share their annual Festival of the Night Bird with the residents of Kraden's Hill. It's a night of raucous celebration as huge flocks of pink and white birds take to the sky from the jungle to travel north to the mountains.

This year, however, a shadow has risen from Sapphire Lake to encompass Kraden's Hill with plans to ruin the celebrating with a night of death and madness.

Talk About Town

The characters are staying at the Thirsty Serpent, the only inn within Kraden's Hill, as the news about the Akanni tribe spreads around (though to begin with, the rumors are dark and people are already afraid of shadow orc raids on the town). This is a good time for the characters to pick up rumors as well, and if they've been through the previous adventures in the trilogy they can bask in some well-deserved hero worship as well.

Read or paraphrase the following to begin.

The mercilessly hot sun glares down on the town of Kraden's Hill, the frontier settlement you've found yourself in for the past several weeks. Located on the borders of the Great Jungle – a massive expanse of dense tropical forest hiding all manner of dangerous creatures – Kraden's Hill has become a destination for adventurers seeking to make their fortune in the employ of powerful merchant companies exploiting the jungle for resources. Lured by such golden promises, you made the long caravan trek from civilization far to the north, through the mountains, and now behind the high walls of the frontier town.

The only inn for travelers in Kraden's Hill is the Thirsty Serpent, owned and operated by the twin wild

elves Ereltris and Esythis Evenleaf. It's noon, and you've found yourself in the common room of the Thirsty Serpent avoiding the blistering heat of the midday sun. Several other patrons hang around the bar, and the wild elf twins move about, setting plates of meat and flagons of ale when requested. On the back wall behind the bar are nailed dozens of snakes of various sizes, shapes, and colors – a curious tradition for the frontier tavern.

The characters are assumed to have been traveling together, but if this is not the case now is the perfect opportunity for them to get to know one another. You can roll randomly or assign one of the rumors to the characters as well to represent what they've heard over the past few days in Kraden's Hill.

1d8 Rumor

1 Savage shadow orcs have been seen moving about the jungle just beyond the walls of Kraden's Hill. Some say they're preparing to assault the town!

2 Bands of wild elves have been moving in irregular patterns in the jungle, disrupting expeditions and causing panic among the merchants. What's got them riled up?

3 The sheriff of Kraden's Hill, Karolina Lomen, has been having a tough time lately. Since Novortum House, one of the three main merchant companies in town, was discovered to be harboring demons in their warehouse the sheriff has been absent from her duties of late.

4 The surrounding homesteads have reported increased shadow orc raids in the past few weeks, but there haven't been a lot of spare warriors to send out to protect them.

5 Unusually large bats have been seen around the walls of Kraden's Hill at night. Some people claim that the bats have eyes of emerald fire!

6 War drums have been heard in the jungle over the past few nights. Some tribe of shadow orcs are preparing to fight another one – or preparing to assault Kraden's Hill itself!

7 The last wagon to pick up fresh water from the nearby Sapphire Lake claim that the animals that normally frequent the site have left completely. A sign of bad things to come!

8

Grimden House, the most influential of the merchant companies in Kraden's Hill, has seen a spike in business since Novortum House was wiped out by a band of adventurers. Theodric Grimden is said to swimming in gold now!

Many of the rumors involve a mysterious tribe of shadow orcs that have been seen around Kraden's Hill. These are the Akanni, a tribe friendly to the town, but with Sheriff Lomen in solitude they have not had anyone to contact regarding the upcoming Festival of the Night Bird. People are scared and tempers are running high along with the heat and humidity.

WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: SHERIFF LOMEN'S ABSENCE
SINCE THE EVENTS OF TG2 TONGUES OF THE SCREAMING
TOAD SHERIFF KAROLINA LOMEN HAS BECOME DERELICT IN
HER DUTIES. SHE FULLY BLAMES HERSELF FOR NOT SEEING
THE EVIL IN NOVORTUM HOUSE AND HAS TAKEN TO LONG
PERIODS OF SOLITUDE TO ATTEMPT TO ATONE FOR HER
FAILINGS. WHAT SHE DOESN'T SEE IS THAT SHE IS FAILING THE
TOWN MORE IN HER ABSENCE. A PLAYER WHO WENT THROUGH
TG2 MAY HAVE STEPPED UP TO REPLACE HER, AND IF SO
ADJUST THE BEGINNING TO MATCH.

In Come the Orcs

After the characters have had a chance to share their rumors and perhaps gain a few new ones, the door to the Thirsty Serpent bursts open as the Akanni orcs arrive in town. Though they seem threatening, they are quite friendly and want only to share in the festival with the settlers of Kraden's Hill.

Read or paraphrase the following.

The saloon-style doors of the Thirsty Serpent slam open suddenly, drawing your attention in a snap. Standing in the doorway, backlit by the blazing sun, are four savage shadow orcs, daggers held in their great hands and feral looks upon their faces. They bellow and charge inside!

The scene and the rumors are meant to get the characters ready for a combat against shadow orc raiders, but the truth is that they are friendly and want only to share in their festival. Allow jumpy characters a chance to see the dead birds in the hands of the orcs that they use the daggers to cut and the looks of feral joy on their faces before taking any hasty actions. If a character gets a shot off or an attack before realizing, the orcs simply laugh it off as a misunderstanding.

One of the tribal leaders, a strong warrior princess named Kufika Akanni, announces to the people in the Thirsty Serpent that the time of the Festival of the Night Bird is upon them! It is a night of celebration and feasting, and the Akanni tribe wishes to share in the joyous night with the people of Kraden's Hill. Kufika speaks Common well enough, though with a

NPC Profile: Kufika, First Daughter of the Akanni

Kufika is the eldest daughter of the chief of the Akanni tribe, a powerful shadow orc warrior who sees peace as the best course of action with the settlers of Kraden's Hill. Kufika agrees with her father and has been the ambassador for the shadow orcs in the frontier town for well over a year – the merchants of Grimden House and Clan Ironstar along with Sheriff Lomen all appreciate her insight into local traditions and customs, and her knowledge of the surrounding jungle tribes is second to none.

As a shadow orc warrior of her tribe, Kufika is strongly built, with taut ebony muscles and a lean figure. She keeps her black hair pulled back in a ponytail most of the time, though for the Festival of the Night Bird she has it hung loose (along with the rest of the tribe). Her skill with a scimitar is well-recognized but it is her talent for diplomacy and negotiation that keeps the Akanni tribe well-liked in Kraden's Hill.

thick accent, and explains that she normally would send a runner to town to let Sheriff Lomen know of their arrival. However, it seems Sheriff Lomen was not informed in time.

The shadow orcs, friends to the Evenleaf twins, buy rounds of ale for everyone in the Thirsty Serpent before heading out to let the rest of the town know about the Festival of the Night Bird. Kufika explains that once every year, great flocks of night birds – pink and white birds that normally stay around the rivers of the jungle – migrate north to the mountains. They do so at night in one large group, timed to the rising of the full moon, and the shadow orcs view it as a time of great celebration.

Kufika invites the characters to participate in the festivities as well, and promises that this Festival of the Night Bird is going to be the most spectacular ever. Little does she know that the Shadow of Iboltheg moves even now invisibly in the air, rising from Sapphire Lake to blanket Kraden's Hill beneath its stupefying evil once and for all – unless it can be stopped by a band of adventurers.

Festival of the Night Bird

The shadow orcs of the Akanni tribe move about Kraden's Hill throughout the day, spreading word of the Festival of the Night Bird and inviting everyone to come out of their houses and wagons to witness the spectacle and take part in the celebration. The shadow orcs are friendly, even jovial, and their good nature sweeps through the frontier town quickly. People begin to excitedly gather together and talk about what kinds of things they can expect.

Kufika personally invites the characters to join in the celebrations, and tells them that Kraden's Hill is under the watchful eye of the Akanni tribe for the night so they don't have to worry about other orcs or monsters from the jungle. The shadow orcs are honestly excited to share in this yearly festival with the people of the town and are not hiding anything, though suspicious characters may wish to check things out just the same.

Night Falls ...

Read or paraphrase the following as the sun sets on Kraden's Hill.

The day winds down, with the entire town abuzz about the night's upcoming Festival of the Night Bird. The infectious smiles and good nature of the shadow orcs has turned around the attitude of Kraden's Hill entirely, and you feel yourself being caught up in the high spirits. Kufika, one of the Akanni tribe's leaders who speaks the best Common, lets out a bellowing yell as the sun sets, calling everyone in town to the center



to witness the beginning of the festival. People begin moving out of their houses and wagons and into the streets, murmuring excitedly to each other about the sights they are about to behold.

You follow the crowds and reach the center of town, where shadow orcs stand holding brightly burning torches. The sun has completely set and night has settled over the area like a warm blanket. The center of town where everyone has gathered is a short distance away from the hill that gives the town its name, upon which you can see guards standing in their vigil, though they too look to be fascinated by the orcish festival. Kufika steps on top of a pile of boxes and shouts for quiet.

Kufika starts the Festival of the Night Bird by invoking the spirits of the jungle, the ancestors of the Akanni tribe, and the gods of the settlers and people of Kraden's Hill to watch over the joyous night. She raises her hands, and a pair of nearby orcs blow on gigantic sounding horns. The sound echoes through the night, low and rumbling, and from the jungle a riotous squawking rises.

The squawking grows to a cacophony and fills the air, accompanied moments later by the flapping of great river birds' wings. A few minutes later, as the noises grow louder, the air over the town is filled with hundreds of white and pink birds with long necks and wings taking to the air, traveling north from the jungle. Great gasps go up from the gathered people and the shadow orcs cheer.

Have the characters can make DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) checks. Anyone that succeeds notices something is not right – the night sky is blotted out behind the flocks of birds. A character proficient in Nature recalls that there were no clouds in the sky in the evening, and the darkness that hangs over Kraden's Hill and above the birds does not appear to be anything like a cloud.

None of the revelers notice the strange phenomenon, which is the manifestation of the Shadow of Ibholtheg that rose from Sapphire Lake.

... Shadows Rise

As the birds wing overhead to the delight of the gathered people, the characters notice that the darkness that hangs over them all begins to roil and take shape (no check necessary). Suddenly, several shadows tear apart from the inky black mass and dive down, slicing birds in their way and heading straight for the gathered people. Shouts of alarm go up as **4 loathsome bat shadows** descend upon the town only 20 feet away from the characters. The crowd parts as the creatures – a horrible combination of shadowy bat and tentacled monster – begin to attack.

Tactics: Kufika and the shadow orcs are shocked beyond words at the sudden turn of events as the loathsome bat shadows focus their attacks on whoever is closest. If the characters step up and face the creatures, the loathsome bat shadows turn from their prey to attack, leaping into the air to strike down with sudden force.

End of the Festival

With the arrival of the loathsome shadows, Kufika and the shadow orcs call for everyone to head back to their homes quickly. Other parts of Kraden's Hill seem to be under attack by the massive shadow that hangs in the sky and as the characters watch as after the loathsome shadows are dispatched, the great flocks of white and pink birds are swallowed up by the darkness above them.

Shadow Pools

People scream and scatter around Kraden's Hill and some seek to escape the town, but the Shadow of Ibholtheg has stretched completely around the walls. An impenetrable black dome envelops the town just outside the walls, extending up to a height of 500 feet.

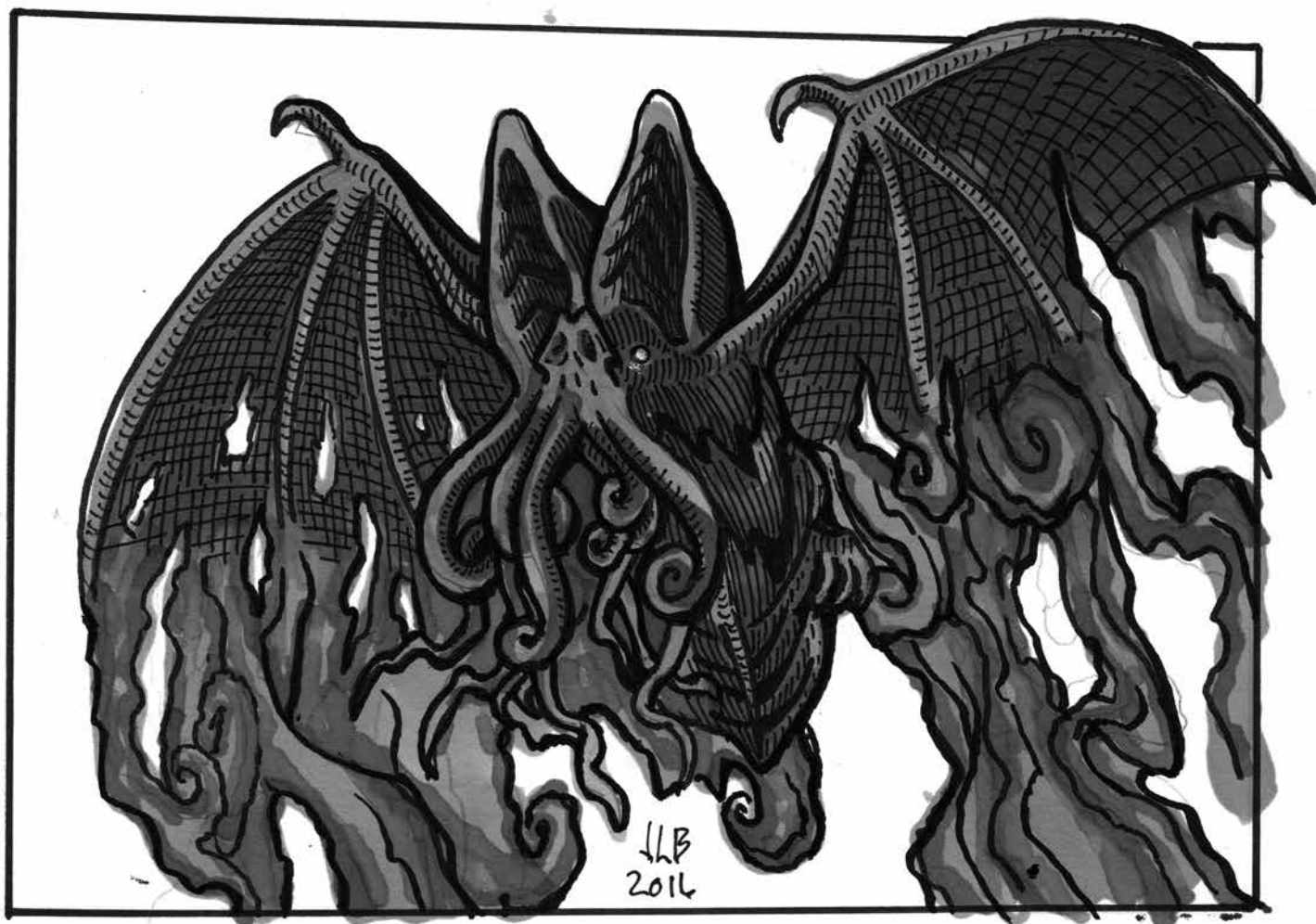
With the town so encompassed, the Shadow of Ibholtheg begins to create dangerous portals to extend its loathsome will. These manifest as shadow pools that appear around the town.

After the characters have dealt with the loathsome bat shadows, give them a few moments to try and assist with the herds of people that are panicking around them. Charismatic characters can make DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) checks to try and calm the mob. Kufika and the rest of the shadow orcs are just as bewildered, though they recover quickly. Kufika seeks out the characters and asks for details on their plan. She suggests making sure everyone gets inside but doesn't have much more to offer.

The First Shadow Pool Appears

A short distance away from the characters in an alley behind a nearby building, a chorus of terrified screams rises. Investigating the source finds a horrible scene – a pool of black shadows, 20 feet wide, has formed in the center of the alley inside which four people struggle. Two are stuck 10 feet into the pool while the others are only 5 feet in. The shadow pool holds all of them immobile.

Rising from the center are **2 hulking shadow mounds**, great piles of inky blackness intent on devouring the people caught in the pool. The shadow pool's mass is sticky and tar-like, and characters attempting to move through it must make DC 12 Strength saving throws (and the pool is considered difficult terrain).



Failing the save renders the target restrained.

Tactics: The hulking shadow mounds rise up ominously from the center one round after the characters arrive. They use their shadow tendrils to try and pull victims towards them – the pool instinctively releases captives who are grappled by a tendril. Unless the characters intervene the two creatures devour the four people in a matter of rounds.

Destroying a Shadow Pool

The shadow pools can be weakened by bright light (such as a swinging torch or a *light* spell brought in close proximity). Against such a source, the pool retreats, releasing captives as necessary. Each shadow pool is a near-sentient thing, and against bright light its whole mass retreats – around corners or up the side of buildings if necessary!

The only way to destroy a shadow pool is by dealing 20 points of radiant damage to its mass. It is immune to all other damages, but for these purposes a *light* spell deals 1d8 radiant damage to a shadow pool each round it is in contact. A torch deals 1d4 radiant damage to the pool if used as a weapon (attacks automatically hit the pool if within range).

Shadow Pool at the Thirsty Serpent

The Shadow of Ibholtheg spawns the shadow pools around town in order to weaken the residents. The next one the characters encounter should be in front of the Thirsty Serpent where many townspeople fled to find safety. Instead, many are now trapped in the sticky tar-like pool in front of the doors to the inn. A group of **2 hulking shadow mounds** and **3 loathsome bat shadows** attack the stuck group.

Tactics: The characters arrive on the scene about 100 feet away, and there are eight stuck people in the shadow pool crying for help. Each of the hulking shadow mounds swallow whole one person a round while the loathsome bat shadows swoop down and eviscerate one stuck person a round. Engaging the monsters and posing a threat to them as quickly as possible can halt the devouring of the people.

Words from the Wise

After the characters deal with the shadow pool at the Thirsty Serpent, a band of Akanni shadow orcs led by Kufika charge around the corner. They relate their own experiences with fighting the shadow monsters, but Kufika wants a moment with the characters to

hear something. The band of shadow orcs part as a wizened old orc woman in gray robes shuffles forward, leaning heavily on a staff.

Kufika introduces the woman as **Lindelani**, the wisest shaman of the Akanni tribe, who may be able to assist in pushing back the shadows. Kufika and Lindelani move into the Thirsty Serpent with the characters while the rest of the shadow orc warriors stay outside, guarding the building.

Read or paraphrase the following.

Inside the Thirsty Serpent, the orc shaman Lindelani tightens her grip on her gnarled staff, her bony claw-like knuckles turning white with force and her blue eyes blazing with intensity. "A great evil is seeping into this world," she begins harshly, sweeping her gaze across the room. "This is only the beginning. The Squamous Toad, a horrible power from ages long past and stars long forgotten, has reached through a crack and now seeks to open it further. You must drive back the darkness, and to do that you must follow the shadow cord to its source." Lindelani sighs and her body sags as Kufika rushes to support her.

As far as pushing back the shadow, if the characters have not realized it yet Kufika explains that bright lights, such as that of a torch, affect the shadow pools. It stands to reason that the shadow that hangs over Kraden's Hill is vulnerable in the same way. They must somehow create a light bright enough to dispel the shadow before the entire town is consumed by pools of darkness.

If no character thinks of it, Lindelani says that the hill near the center of town would be a perfect spot to create a bonfire that might be large enough to drive back the shadow. But they must act quickly – people begin arriving at the Thirsty Serpent saying that whole portions of the town are being swallowed by pools of shadow and the lurking horrors that they bring.

The fire must burn bright and hot and for as long as possible to do the most harm to the shadows. Lindelani provides the characters with a handful of enchanted nuts (one for each character), each the size of a man's fist and covered in small fibers. The shadow orc shaman explains that these can be used to cause the flames to rise high into the air but the fire must already be started for them to work.

Fire on the Hill

Getting to the hill proves an easy if disturbing task. Many of the people have fled to their homes or have already been devoured by shadow monsters, so the streets of Kraden's Hill are nearly deserted. Arriving at the hill, the characters find that a band of watch guards still hold their position at the top but only barely.

Read or paraphrase the following as the characters approach.

The streets of Kraden's Hill are weirdly deserted as you leave the Thirsty Serpent. Where once were throngs of people in a mad rush to escape the horrors in the center of town you now find only empty alleys and deserted buildings. The night air is punctuated by the occasional scream or monstrous cry as you thread your way to the hill that gives the town its name. There, you see that the watch guards on sentry still stand at its crown – but only barely. A flock of loathsome bat shadows fly down and claw at them, and as you watch one man is lifted bodily from the ground and pulled up into the massive shadow that hangs overhead, his scream silenced in an instant.

There are **5 loathsome bat shadows** attacking the remaining **6 guards** on the top of the hill. The hill is 200 feet high with steep slopes on all sides and crudely carved steps leading to the top. The top is a flat surface 40 feet in diameter.

In order to create a fire big enough to drive away the Shadow of Ibholtweg, the characters must get wood to the top of the hill. A table, a handful of chairs, and a broken canopy are already there but more wood is needed. Character making a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check see a nearby building appears abandoned and in rough shape. The guards or a band of shadow orcs can be ordered to retrieve the wood.

Depending on the actions of the characters, you can have them hold off **loathsome bat shadows** on top of the hill or fight off **hulking shadow mounds** in the building (or both if they split the party!). The scene is meant to be dramatic so don't throw so much that a group can't handle, but they should be feeling the pressure of the moment.

WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: LEADERSHIP ROLES
THE SCENES IN KRADEN'S HILL ARE GOING TO HAVE THE MOST IMPACT IF THE PLAYERS SEE THEMSELVES AS TAKING THE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS THAT NO ONE SEEMS TO BE FILLING. KUFIKA IS AN OUTSIDER AND MOST PEOPLE WON'T LISTEN TO HER, AND THE SHERIFF IS AWAY SOMEWHERE. THIS IS A CHANCE FOR THE PLAYERS TO START MAKING SOME DECISIONS AND STEPPING UP IN A BIG WAY!

Light the Fire!

Once enough wood is piled on the hill, characters can light it however they see fit (with magical or mundane methods). Old wood catches fire quickly, and any remaining loathsome bat shadows shy away from the blaze quickly. Tossing one of the enchanted nuts from Lindelani on the fire creates an immediate effect – a pillar of raging fire cracks open from the nut

and spirals into the air.

In order to be effective, all of the enchanted nuts must be used (however many Lindelani provided to the characters). If used individually, describe how the shadow veil over the town weakens with each column of fire, but if they are all thrown in together the resulting inferno is strong enough to beat back the Shadow of Ibholtheg instantly.

Read or paraphrase the following once all of the enchanted nuts are used.

The roaring column of fire stretches up, higher and higher, licking at the surface of the great shadow hanging over Kraden's Hill. The shadow roils as if boiling, churning and heaving in great shuddering waves, as the flames dance around it and the light shines all upon it. Suddenly the flames turn black for a moment, plunging the entire town into darkness, but just as quickly as it happened it disappears – along with the shadowy mass that filled the sky. You see it receding quickly, drawing out shadow pools from around the town like a leech sucks out blood from a victim. It fades and you are left standing near burning embers, staring up at twinkling stars in the night sky once again.

The Shadow of Ibholtheg is pushed back and the immediate threat to Kraden's Hill ended. Kufika, the residents of the frontier town, the rest of the Akanni orcs, and everyone else slowly emerge from their homes and hiding places to see that the threat is gone. The characters are hailed as heroes though many lives were lost in the night.

Dawn Breaks

Dawn finally breaks over the frontier town, and as it does, anyone awake sees a strange sight. A tendril of shadows extends from the walls of Kraden's Hill heading east. Lindelani calls out the characters to show them and explains that this is the cord that must be followed to find the Squamous Toad, who is also known as Ibholtheg. Whatever crack has appeared between worlds must be repaired and the evil power sealed up once again.

Allow the characters a chance to rest and recover before they head out to follow the cord. It leads east for a day and half to the formerly tranquil Sapphire Lake, below which lies the source of the shadow cord.

PART TWO: DEPTHS OF SAPPHIRE LAKE

After the characters have had a chance to recover from the attack on Kraden's Hill they can follow the cord of shadow that leads east. Kufika and her band of Akanni shadow orcs pledge to protect the town while the characters are away, an offer that is heartily accepted by the merchants of Grimden House and Clan Ironstar. Once they arrive at Sapphire Lake the characters must dive deep into its waters to follow the cord, and then through submerged caves that hold a tribe of degenerate toad-men. The haunted, trap-laden catacombs sit below the caves, an ancient legacy of Xilonoc, and though the characters are of noble purpose they may find that the dangerous denizens of that submerged dungeon care little for their reasons.

The shadow cord leads to a crack in the wall in the deepest part of the catacombs where the characters must enter in order to seal it.

Tranquil Sapphire Lake

Sapphire Lake is located a day and a half east of Kraden's Hill along with a well-used trail that skirts along the northern edge of the Great Jungle. The cord of shadow, misty and insubstantial but visible nonetheless, snakes its way due east, following the trail (more by accident than design).

Read or paraphrase the following the following as the characters approach Sapphire Lake.

The shadowy cord, wispy and nearly transparent in the daytime, winds its way along the well-trodden path east of Kraden's Hill. You follow it for a day and a half, mindful of traps and dangers, but so far it has been an uneventful journey. At noon on the second day you crest a small hill and gaze upon a shocking sight. The tranquil, blue waters of Sapphire Lake stretch out before you, fed by a mountain stream, but the waters seem dull and grayer the longer you look. The shadow cord snakes up to the water's edge and then moves up to join a massive, roiling cloud of darkness that hovers over Sapphire Lake. The cloud is fed by a strong line of thick shadow smoke rising from the center of the lake itself. A friendly shout from a short distance away catches your attention where you see a well-built farmer walking towards you.

The man approaching is Leopold Einhorn from the nearest homestead. He saw the characters following the shadow cord earlier and decided to meet up with them to see what was happening. He is friendly and open, and says that the shadowy mass over Sapphire Lake appeared only about two days ago. Leopold

swears it's gotten bigger every day though.

If asked, Leopold can attest to the existence of caves beneath Sapphire Lake, though he doesn't know anyone who's gone into them recently. Two years ago a group of treasure hunters came to the area and went in the lake, but Leopold doesn't recall if they made it out or not.

Almost as an afterthought, Leopold reaches into his pockets and hands the characters a grimy talisman. He says that it was found by one of his daughters around the lake about a year ago, and though he's had some people in Kraden's Hill look at it no one has figured out what its design means. He wants the characters to take it for good luck and is quite insistent upon it. The talisman is the size of a man's hand, bronze, and depicts a stylized face on one side and is smooth and blank on the other. Using this talisman is the easiest way past the guardians in **area 10** of the catacombs. Leopold would be very upset if the characters did not take the gift and leaves it on the ground for them before leaving in disgust if they refuse his gift.

The shadowy mass is getting bigger, but the

characters have a few days before it strikes again.

WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: PENALTY FOR DILLYDALLYING
IF THE PLAYERS HEM AND HAW ABOUT WHAT TO DO, IT'S CERTAINLY REASONABLE TO THREATEN THE EINHORN HOMESTEAD AS A MEANS OF MOTIVATION. PERHAPS A SWARM OF LOATHSOME BAT SHADOWS PEEL OFF FROM THE MAIN CLOUD OVER THE LAKE AND DESCEND ON THE AREA, OR PERHAPS A SHADOW POOL APPEARS AND SPEWS FORTH A HULKING SHADOW MOUND. WHATEVER MOTIVATES THEM TO ACTION!

Going for a Swim

Sapphire Lake is cool and relatively clear, fed by mountain springs. The tangle of shadowy smoke that seems to feed the swirling cloud descends to the bottom of the lake at a depth of 80 feet. There it snakes through an underwater tunnel, twisting and turning, for another 100 feet before it finally comes up in a small cave (**area 1** below).

Characters are likely going to need to be able to breathe underwater in order to access the submerged caves following the shadow cord. If they have no means of doing so, they can travel back to Kraden's Hill and purchase a scroll of water breathing from an



arcane merchant for 300 gp.

Submerged Caves

The underwater tunnel breaks into an air-filled cavern system below Sapphire Lake. The upper caves are roughhewn, wet, and currently occupied by a tribe of degenerate toad-men. They've lived in the caves for a number of years, never daring to head out for fear of missing their opportunity to release Ibholtheg from its prison. With the shadow cord snaking its way through their caves, the toad-men are ecstatic and are preparing to launch an assault on the catacombs below.

General Features

Walls: The walls of the submerged caves are roughly carved stone, weathered smooth by centuries of erosion.

Air: The air is thick and humid, with moisture beading on every surface and a damp musty smell filling the caves.

Floors: Because of the humidity and the lake above, the floors of the caves are slippery and considered difficult terrain. Anyone moving more than their movement speed in a round must make DC 12 Dexterity saving throws or fall prone. The toad-men are immune to this effect.

Sounds: Constant dripping echoes throughout the submerged caves, but the cries of the exuberant toad-men and their pets rise loudly everywhere.

Ceiling: Unless otherwise noted the ceiling in the submerged caves is 10 feet high.

1. Entrance

The underwater tunnel below Sapphire Lake snakes around for quite a ways before finally turning upwards and ending in a pool of water in a cave where you finally break free and breathe musty air. The shadowy cord hugs the wall and follows a rough cavernous passage that leads further in.

The degenerate toad-men do not use this entrance or exit very much (they have secret ways in through other tunnels that lead out into the jungle). Characters emerging from the pool can hear the sound of exultant croaking from further in.

2. Albino Cave Fish Pools

The tunnel exits into a large cavern with a rough pillar dominating the center. Shallow caves set within the east and west walls hold pools of water in which swim a number of large albino fish. The pools don't appear to be big enough for the fish to spawn naturally. The shadow cord wisps gently to the north where it follows a tunnel leading further on.

The degenerate toad-men enjoy the taste of albino cave fish and keep them in these pools to spawn during certain times of the year. As the characters enter a group of **6 degenerate toad-men** enter the cave from the north, croaking and talking to each other in their foul language, each carrying a crude basket. They were sent by the chief to fetch more albino cave fish to feast upon.

Tactics: If the characters think quickly enough they can hide before the toad-men notice them. If that is the case, the toad-men gather up albino cave fish for a minute, wading into the pools directly and tossing their catches into the baskets, before laughing and running back to **area 4**.

If confronted by enemies, one of the toad-men flees to **area 4** to warn the rest of the tribe while the others attempt to hold back the characters.

3. Spawning Pits

A horrible smell rises from this dead-end cave. Shallow pits are dug into the rock floor, each filled with squirming tadpoles in murky scum. Angry croaks rise up from the shadowy corners as large toads leap out!

The toad-man tribe spawns their giant toads in this small cave (or at least at the beginning of the spawning period). It is guarded by **5 giant toads** that leap out to attack intruders.

Tactics: The giant toads attack until dead to defend the tadpoles.

4. Chapel of the Toad-Men

While following the shadow cord, you come upon a great cavern, the ceiling stretching up 30 feet above you. Choruses of croaks and shrieks fill the air as you see a large number of the savage toad-men dancing and cavorting around a central platform. There a crude idol has been seated, made of porous green stone, very much unlike the rest of the caves around you. It has been carved to resemble a squatting frog about 10 feet high, but it has rough bat wings folded over its shoulders and a large crocodilian mouth. Two larger toad-men stand in front of the idol, raising their webbed hands and leaping into the air with frenzied abandon. The shadow cord winds several times around the green idol before continuing further into the cave to the northwest.

It is a time of great celebration for the toad-men. They view the shadow cord and the mass of squirming shadows above Sapphire Lake as a herald of

Ibholtheg's imminent return and they are celebrating non-stop. The cave holds **10 degenerate toad-men** and **2 toad-man shamans**.

Sneaking past the gathered tribe in this room should prove difficult if not outright impossible. The shamans have a good vantage point on top of the platform in front of the idol, and if they see anyone sneaking around they croak loudly and point to get the attention of the gathered horde.

Tactics: Any intruders within their sacred chapel are seen as affront to Ibholtheg itself and will be met with instant hostility. The toad-men launch themselves into combat with reckless abandon, fighting with spears to drive off the characters while the shamans use spells from the idol's platform in the center of the cave.

If combat breaks out, **Slubgup the Mighty** – chieftain of this tribe – comes out of his room in **area 6** along with a group of **4 elite toad-men**. Slubgup was resting in his chamber, but sees now that Ibholtheg has sent surface dwellers to test the toad-men's loyalty. He spurs his people on to greater attacks, joining in with feverish delight.

Treasure: Several fetishes have been thrown on the ground in front of the idol in reverence. One of these is a sprig of berries that detect as magical. The berries have the same effect as a *potion of invulnerability* for one person who eats them.

5. Sleeping Caverns

This large cave is where the toad-men sleep and rest. At any given time there are **8 degenerate toad-men** here, relaxing or sleeping. They spring to attack anyone who enters the cave that isn't a toad-man but they do not bother with any sounds of combat in other areas of the cave (they assume it's part of the celebrating).

6. Chieftain's Lair

The home of **Slubgup the Mighty**, chieftain of the degenerate toad-man tribe, this cave holds a pool of warm scummy water that the chief relaxes in when not ruling or participating in rituals with the shamans. There are **4 elite toad-men** Slubgup keeps near him as bodyguards at all times.

Treasure: Slubgup and the toad-men killed a party of treasure seekers that came into the caves several years ago. He took their stuff and hid it in a waterproof sack, which sits in the scummy pool in this chamber. The sack contains three ruby gemstones each worth 150 gp, a *headband of intellect*, three *arrows +1*, and a *cap of water breathing*.

7. Shaman Lair

The cavernous passage ends in three 15 foot long narrow alcoves. At the end of each alcove squats a crude idol, similar to the one in the main chamber but only representing a single aspect of the monstrous creature – a toad in alcove, a bat in another, and a crocodile in the third. They are all carved of the same green porous stone.

The shamans of the toad-men keep this chamber and worship at the three aspects of Ibholtheg. There are **2 toad-man shamans** in this area at any given time (the other two are in **area 4**).

Tactics: The shamans here croak and squawk at intruders, cursing them for befouling Ibholtheg's mighty presence, before launching spells at the characters. The shamans fight until dead.

8. Sacred Pool of the Squamous Toad

Following the shadow cord deeper into the caves leads you to a broad area. A pool of green, scummy liquid of indeterminate depth dominates the slick floor, but squatting in the center is a group of horrendous toad-like monsters. They spread their bat wings and let out a horrible ear-piercing croak!

This pool is sacred to the toad-men and it is where the tribe has called down **3 cipactli**, favored servants of Ibholtheg in ages long past. The cipactli leap to attack any non-toad-man that enters the area.

Tactics: The cipactli are straightforward combatants, but use their devastating croak ability to stun opponents before moving in to finish them off with claws and jaws.

9. Sealed Entrance to the Catacombs

The shadow cord moves through a long passage before coming into a cave similar to the others that you've been through. However, on the floor of this one is a round metal seal roughly 10 feet wide. Images are carved on its surface in rings resembling the animals of the jungle around the center, which features a blazing sun. The shadowy trail you've been following seeps through the edges of the sealed portal.

The priests and jaguar knights of Xilonoc sealed the entrance to the catacombs below to keep Ibholtheg's foul servants from breaching it and finding a way to release the loathsome creature. They did not anticipate that the Squamous Toad would find a way to break the seal on its prison itself, which has allowed the shadowy tendril of Ibholtheg's power to leak into

the Prime Plane.

The toad-men have not yet found a way to open the seal to enter the lower catacombs. It is warded against being opened by any amphibious creature, so if the characters attempt they can open it without issue (unless they are amphibious like a toad-man or cipactli). The portal lid twists open and reveals a small landing 10 feet down into darkness, which has a narrow winding staircase descending even further.

Catacombs of Mazatl

The powerful figures of ancient Xilonoc, led by the archpriestess Mazatl, created the catacombs after sealing Iboltheg away in the Prison of Black Gulfs as a means of deterring the loathsome creature's followers from finding a way to release it into the Prime Plane once again. She placed both undead guardians and traps in the corridors. Some areas in the catacombs have collapsed as a result of earthquakes and other natural phenomena, allowing natural monsters to move in as well.

General Features

Walls and floors: Unlike the above caverns, the walls and floors in the catacombs are cut stone and clearly manufactured by intelligent hands. Untouched for thousands of years, the walls bear striking colored murals depicting hundreds upon hundreds of people in elaborate headdresses and armor moving towards **area 18**.

Air: The air is stale and stagnant.

Ceiling: Unless otherwise noted the ceiling in the submerged caves is 10 feet high.

Light: There is no natural light in the catacombs.

Shadowcord: The shadow cord is not visible in the Catacombs of Mazatl until the characters reach **area 15**.

WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: XILONOC CULTURE
THE XILONOC EMPIRE IS BASED ON THE AZTEC CULTURE OF EARTH, SO PLAY UP THE SIMILARITIES AS THE PLAYERS INVESTIGATE THE CATACOMBS IN THIS SECTION OF THE ADVENTURE. WHATEVER DETAILS YOU CAN ADD TO MAKE THE CULTURE COME ALIVE IN THE MINDS OF YOUR PLAYERS IS GOING TO GO A LONG WAY TOWARDS THEM ENJOYING AND REMEMBERING THE MOMENTS IN YOUR GAME.

10. Guardians of Xilonoc

The hallway beyond the spiral staircase ends after about 40 feet in a chamber. The east and west walls hold deep alcoves, two on each side, and within each you see a sarcophagus standing upright. The lid of each sarcophagus is carved to resemble a man or woman in the prime of their life, decorated with feathers, with bronzed skin and closed eyes. On the south wall opposite the entrance a strange mural is painted depicting a huge stylized face. A groan of stone against stone echoes out as the dust of centuries is disturbed – the lids are opening!

The four sarcophagi each hold a guardian of the catacombs sworn to defend it against any intrusion. The **4 mummies** lurch out of their resting places two rounds after the characters enter, intent upon destroying the intruders.

The talisman given to the characters by Leopold Einhorn when they arrived at Sapphire Lake matches the engravings on the wall mural. If none of the players think of it, have them make DC 15 Intelligence checks to recall this information. If anyone presents the talisman, the mummies stop in their tracks as if waiting. As long as the talisman is held up in view of the mummies the creatures do not attack.

WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: MISSING TALISMAN
IT'S ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT THE PLAYERS MAY HAVE INSISTED LEOPOLD EINHORN KEEP THE TALISMAN RATHER THAN TAKING THE GIFT. THE STUBBORN MAN WOULD HAVE LEFT IT THERE TOO, SO IT'S POSSIBLE IT'S JUST SITTING ON THE GROUND ON THE SHORE OF THE LAKE. AS LONG AS IT'S STILL THERE IT'S STILL POSSIBLE FOR THE CHARACTERS TO GO UP AND GET IT - SOMETIMES THEY SHOULD JUST TAKE GIFTS OFFERED TO THEM!

Bringing the talisman to the mural on the wall triggers the opening on the secret door. The stylized face on the wall swings open revealing the passage beyond.

Tactics: The mummies fight until the intruders are destroyed, using simple and brutish tactics. They focus attacks on spellcasters; clerics first and then wizards.

Treasure: These mummies were not buried with their possessions so the sarcophagi are empty.

11. Wisdom of Quetzal

This square chamber contains intricate murals painted along the walls depicting the deeds and life of a priest in an ancient epoch. The priest depicted in the mural is represented by a life-sized statue, where he is holding a book in one hand and a curved sickle in the other, staring down at you with judging, cold, stony eyes. A golden circlet rests on the statue's head.

This room is dedicated to the life and times of Quetzal, a powerful priest devoted to the jungle gods. He is one of the five powers of Xilonoc who built the catacombs.

The circlet on the statue's head is required to bypass the Eyes of Mazatl in **area 15**. It is trapped, however, and anyone that removes it without deactivating the trap triggers a powerful *lightning bolt* (cast as a 6th-level spell for 11d6 damage) that blasts through the perpetrator and out to 60 feet (DC 14 Dexterity saving throw for half damage). Deactivating the trap is as simple as closing one's eyes while removing the circlet, a fact that examination of the mural shows (the circlet being placed on the head of the priest with his eyes closed).

Treasure: The circlet radiates strong magic but it is not a magical item. It is one of four items needed to enter **area 16** and dissolves if removed from the catacombs.

12. Strength of Tenoch

A square chamber sits at the end of the hall, its walls decorated from floor to ceiling with intricate murals. The murals depict the life of a strong warrior with muscled bronze skin in various stages of his life – as a young boy throwing a ball through a hoop, as a young man fighting in the jungle against shadows, and as a brave warrior defeating monsters in mountains. The man himself stands in life-like stone statue, his countenance grave and the studded club in his hands raised to strike. A belt of golden discs encircles his waist.

Tenoch was one of the mightiest warriors of Xilonoc and was instrumental in driving the forces of Ibholtæg back while his companions and the jungle gods imprisoned it in the Black Gulfs.

The belt around the statue's waist is required to bypass the Eyes of Mazatl in **area 15**. It is trapped, however, and anyone that removes the belt without deactivating it first triggers a powerful *flesh to stone* spell (save DC 14). Deactivating the trap requires removing the belt with bandaged hands, which can be seen in the mural (a priest places the belt on Tenoch while his hands are bandaged).

Treasure: The belt radiates strong magic but it is not a magical item. It is one of the four items needed to enter **area 16** and dissolves if removed from the catacombs.

13. Mind of Zuma

A chittering sound fills the air as you gaze upon this once square room. The southwestern corner has completely collapsed, ruining much of the intricate murals that decorate the walls. The murals show a thin bald man studying books and learning the arts of sorcery from various teachers, including what appears to be a tattooed elf, a rainbow serpent with feathered wings, and a well-dressed bipedal panther-man. A statue depicting the bald man lies on the floor, a victim of the same cave-in, and as you look around, a nest of large centipedes stirs from around the rubble.

Zuma was a sorcerer of Xilonoc, a powerful being who was instrumental in summoning the jungle gods to the aid of the five companions when they faced Ibholtæg. Over the centuries, the earth has shifted enough to cause a partial collapse of the ceiling, attracting a number of creatures. There are **6 swarms of centipedes** that nest in around the rubble, and any attempt to search the area for the required relic disturbs them to the point of combat.

Tactics: The centipede swarms spread out, trying to engulf everyone in the room as quickly as possible. They live as absolute masters of their domain and do not back down.

Treasure: Searching the rubble after the swarms are defeated turns up a golden ring on the finger of the statue. The ring depicts a feathered serpent and is one of the four items needed to bypass the Eyes of Mazatl in **area 15**. It radiates magic but it is not a magical item. Whatever trap was on the ring dissipated when the statue collapsed.

14. Speed of Yaretzi

At the end of this hallway sits another square chamber, though in far worse shape than any of the others. The northeastern corner has collapsed entirely and much of the walls have fallen into ruin, though you can still see evidence of intricate colored murals in the rubble. Amidst the debris you can make out the hand of a statue and other broken features.

This chamber was built to honor Yaretzi, a thief and commoner with a knack for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. He went with the companions to face Ibholtæg by mistake, but he assisted nonetheless in defeating the Squamous Toad and is thus enshrined here.

Searching the rubble requires a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check to find the treasure item to appease the Eyes of Mazatl (a golden armband).

Unlike the ruined statue in **area 13**, however, this one still has its trap intact. The character that finds the armband triggers the *blade barrier* spell to fill the room with spinning, slashing blades (save DC 14). The spell only lasts 1 round. Disabling the magical trap requires dispelling the spell.

Treasure: The golden armband radiates strong magic but is not a magical item. It is one of the four items needed to enter **area 16** and dissolves if taken out of the catacombs.

15. Eyes of Mazatl

The hallway ends abruptly at a dead end, but it is decorated with a life-sized mural of a human woman dressed in regal garments. You recognize her face as the original representation of the stylized one at the beginning of the catacombs. She is painted on the wall with her hands outstretched and palms out as if waiting for something. Curiously, four golden items stand out amongst her garments – a circlet upon her head, an armband on the left arm, a ring on the right hand, and a belt of golden discs around her waist.

In order to bypass the image of Mazatl, the princess who led the humans of Xilonoc against the insane forces of Ibholtheg, a character must stand in the exact same pose as her adorned with the four golden items from the statues in the other rooms (circlet in **area 11**, belt in **area 12**, ring in **area 13**, and armband in **area 14**).

Once done, the image of Mazatl quickly bathes the room in radiance, and when the characters blink they find that the wall is gone, revealing the Gate to the Black Gulfs (**area 16**) beyond.

16. Gate of the Black Gulfs

A large chamber stretches out before you, diamond shaped from your perspective, though the walls and ceilings are hazy through thick tendrils of black shadows that slip lazily through the air. The tendrils writhe and twist before your eyes as if possessed of a living intelligence and you sense movement in the room as well. All of the shadow cords seem to be oozing out of the wall opposite you.

This room contains the gate that Mazatl and her companions sealed to prevent Ibholtheg from being released from the Prison of Black Gulfs. The Squamous Toad is currently exerting all of its influence to widen the crack that was created, which is why the shadow tendrils are stronger in here. There are also **3 cipactli** in the room that move to intercept the characters as soon as they enter the room.

The shadowy tendrils make movement difficult as they wrap around bodies and arms. On initiative count 20 (losing ties) the shadow tendrils attempt to ensnare up to 4 targets that are in the room. The targets must make DC 14 Dexterity saving throws to avoid becoming restrained. Restrained characters can take an action to try and break free, requiring a DC 14 Strength saving throw as the shadow cords become slimy black tentacles around their bodies.

Tactics: The cipactli focus their attacks on restrained characters first, targeting them with all of their melee strikes. There is no retreat for the loathsome creatures.

The Crack Between Worlds

Once the cipactli have been defeated in the Gate of the Black Gulfs, the shadow tendrils lose their potency and no longer restrain opponents. Characters can examine the crack in the wall, which is 6 feet long, 3 feet wide, and jagged; as if a horrible claw tore it open. Blackness and shadows ooze from the wall like blood from a festering wound, but anyone that looks at the mass sees an unusually thick cord in the center of the tangled mass.

There is no way to seal the crack from this side of the Prison of Black Gulfs – it must be repaired from within. Anyone that grips the thick black cord in the center and then touches the inside of the crack is instantly sucked inside, a transportation that looks like the character is transformed into a shadow and then pulled through the crack.

Once all the characters have gone through you can continue with the next part of the module. There isn't any other way accessible to the characters to enter the Prison of Black Gulfs.

PART THREE: PRISON OF BLACK GULFS

The Prison of Black Gulfs is a location on another plane of existence that holds the essence and form of Ibholtheg, the Squamous Toad, imprisoned there centuries ago by the jungle gods and the combined might of the greatest heroes of Xilonoc. They did not create the prison, however – they simply availed themselves of its services as an inescapable location. Other beings of power and stature have been banished to the Black Gulfs and its exact size and nature are largely unknown.

WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: PLANAR LORE

IF A CHARACTER HAS SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE IN PLANAR LORE, ALLOW THEM APPROPRIATE CHECKS TO RECALL BASIC INFORMATION REGARDING THE PRISON OF BLACK GULFS (IT'S AN EXTRAPLANAR PRISON, BEEN AROUND FOR A LONG TIME, MIGHT BE A DEMIPLANE OR A SEALED SECTION OF CARCER). SAGES VERSED IN THE WAYS OF THE MULTIVERSE WOULD LIKELY HAVE HEARD OF THE PLACE.

Having traveled to the Black Gulfs via the crack between worlds, the characters meet an ancient spectral jaguar knight, wounded and dying, who can help guide them on their journey. They must travel through the prison to the Realm of the Squamous Toad, the abode of Ibholtheg, and obtain a piece of the loathsome god's essence in order to seal the crack, thus preventing the terrible power's return to the Prime Plane.

The Prison of Black Gulfs Overview

The Prison of Black Gulfs is composed of realms where the powerful wills of imprisoned creatures have reshaped matter to suit their purposes. Some extraplanar force keeps the realms from mingling with one another though there are no active guards or defenses anywhere in the prison.

Between the realms are limitless gulfs of black shadows, swirling in a never-ending primordial soup of blackness. Great stone blocks, some a mile wide and others much smaller, tumble and move slowly about the shadows. These are the shattered remnants of previous realms, for while no prisoner has escaped the Black Gulfs many die or fade away, leaving their realms to crumble and be washed away like sand castles on a beach.

The shadowy mass that makes up the bulk of the Black Gulfs creates a sort of buoyancy that keeps the great stone blocks and platforms afloat. Anyone falling into the Black Gulfs plummets to begin with but then feels the shadows tug and pull at their form, lifting them and cushioning them. Movement after 100 feet beyond a gray platform becomes more like swimming through pudding, though the shadows leave no residue or marks behind.

This strange effect impacts ranged attacks after 100 feet as well, which simply lose momentum and are swallowed up by the shadows after such a distance. Spells that function as ranged attacks (such as a *fireball* or *magic missile*) lose their potency as well and only deal half their normal damage if they travel 100 or more feet.

What terrors lurk in the Black Gulfs for the too curious? Let your imagination go wild, but the characters should be cautioned against such foolhardy actions!

The Black Gulfs

The journey through the crack is disorienting and deposits the characters in an unfamiliar, alien land. Luckily, they do not find themselves alone, as an ancient jaguar knight named Teyatli is there to offer guidance as to what must be done.

Read or paraphrase the following after the characters enter the crack between worlds.

The world fades before your eyes, dissolving into misty shadows, and then you get the sensation of becoming insubstantial yourself! Your eyes become clouded and all sense of rightness goes out as you feel yourself being pulled through immeasurable lengths of time and distance. Colors, some completely foreign to you and others more familiar, pass and flash in a kaleidoscopic rainbow of random patterns but there is nothing solid about you, and you realize nothing solid of you! Then, with a lurch, everything comes back together in an instant – your body and possessions materialize in physical form once again and solid ground sits below your feet. But you are not where you were. You stand upon a massive gray platform, like stone, the edges of which drop off into swirling miasmas of unending blackness. The platform is rough with large edifices protruding at strange angles, and you get the sense that you and the platform are not anchored to anything solid, that you are floating through that abyss of yawning shadows.

The characters have entered the Prison of Black Gulfs. Allow them a few moments to take in their scene and figure out where they are before moving on.

The Ancient Caretaker

After a few moments, the characters see a spectral figure approaching from behind one of the nearby edifices on their platform. It is a man, tall and muscular, but hunched slightly and leaning heavily on a ghostly spear. A cloak made of a jaguar skin, complete with the jaguar's head serving as a hood, sits on the man's back. This is **Teyatli**, a jaguar knight from Xilonoc sworn to keep Ibholtheg in the Prison of Black Gulfs for all eternity and the only defense the world had from the Squamous Toad's evil – until the characters arrived.

Teyatli speaks in a thick accent, but over the centuries he has learned to speak Common from studying the other imprisoned creatures in the Black Gulfs. He introduces himself to the characters with no malice in his voice and welcomes them to the Prison of Black Gulfs. He knows they came through the split created by Ibholtheg and assumes they are here to help stop it.

The ancient jaguar knight has the following information to relate to the characters.

NPC Profile: Teyatli, Wounded Jaguar Knight of Xilonoc

A proud and noble warrior, Teyatli distinguished himself as a cunning strategist in the many wars Xilonoc waged with neighboring kingdoms and monsters. The princess Mazatl recognized the man's bravery, courage, and honesty, and raised him up to the ranks of the jaguar knights – a holy order sworn with the defense of Xilonoc from within and without.

Teyatli accompanied Mazatl and her companions on their quest to imprison Ibholtheg, but he fell in the final battle protecting the princess from harm. The jungle gods saw the sacrifice and chose Teyatli to serve as the immortal gatekeeper to the Squamous Toad's realm in the Prison of Black Gulfs. Proud beyond measure to be chosen, Teyatli served faithfully for centuries – until the rupture happened and Ibholtheg was able to pierce the wall between worlds. In doing so, Teyatli was wounded horribly and knows that he doesn't have much time left.

- He is one of the noble warriors of Xilonoc, a jaguar knight, charged with protecting the kingdom from all harm wherever it may lie. Ibholtheg's loathsome presence in the jungle was a threat to everyone.
- He accompanied the princess Mazatl and her four companions Tenoch, Yaretzi, Quetzal, and Zuma to banish Ibholtheg with the aid of the jungle gods. They were successful, but Teyatli fell in battle sacrificing himself. As a reward the jungle gods charged him with keeping Ibholtheg from escaping the prison.
- Something happened recently (time has no meaning to Teyatli) and Ibholtheg was able to shift, stretching out his squamous tentacles to pierce the wall between worlds.
- The resulting crack allowed the Squamous Toad to seep into the Prime Plane, and somehow it wounded Teyatli at the same time, preventing him from taking measurable action.
- In order to seal the crack and prevent Ibholtheg from returning, Teyatli needs the characters to travel to the Realm of the Squamous Toad and retrieve a piece of Ibholtheg's prime essence.
- Teyatli needs a piece of the prime essence found in the Eye Pools in order to seal the crack. The Eye Pools are the eyes of the realm, which Teyatli promises will make sense once they arrive there. He only needs about a jug's worth and offers a nearby ceramic jug as a suitable vessel.
- Once they have it, Ibholtheg will know of their



intent, so it's best the characters move quickly after getting it.

Teyatli explains the basic nature of the Prison of Black Gulfs as well if the characters did not know it already, but urges them to hurry. Every moment that passes Ibholtheg grows stronger and the crack widens, and soon he fears it will collapse entirely.

Navigating the Black Gulfs

Teyatli points out the way to the Realm of the Squamous Toad, made easy by the linking lengths of shadowy tendrils formed between gray blocks. The tendrils are 5 feet wide and thick enough to support the weight of all the characters – Teyatli explains that the tendrils are a sort of conduit back to Ibholtheg's realm.

The journey between the blocks is tedious and broken up only by the occasional crashing of a distant gray fragment into another. Occasionally the howling shadow winds of the Black Gulfs rise up in protest to some unknown activity but largely the characters feel alone and isolated in the prison. There are two



encounters in the Black Gulfs before the characters reach the Realm of the Squamous Toad.

Like Flies to Honey

After two hours of traveling the characters are spotted by sentient creatures of the Black Gulfs, the remnants of people who died in the shadows over the countless centuries. A pack of **4 wraiths** attack the characters while they prepare to move along another length of shadow tendrils. The wraiths hiss "Life" as they move forward, clawing and attacking the characters.

Tactics: The wraiths are drawn to the characters' life essences and won't stop until either they or the party are dead. They relentlessly pursue if their targets attempt to flee.

The Voice of the Many

The Black Gulfs is a sprawling realm that has become the prison home of a number of creatures. Ibholtæg is one, but there are others, and one of them has noticed the characters as they travel through the shadowy place. This creature is the **Voice of the Many**, a mimic-like being that has grown sentient and quite insane.

A short time after dealing with the wraiths, the characters cross onto a block that is not unoccupied.

At the far end of the block rests what appears to be a normal treasure chest except for the obvious monstrous teeth where the lid meets the box. The Voice of the Many has no visible eyes but it can see within normal vision range, and unless the party takes extraordinary action to hide themselves the creature sees them.

The Voice shouts out a greeting in a foreign language, and it cycles through a number of random and unintelligible tongues before finally settling on Common. It doesn't want to hurt the characters, and tries to engage them in conversation, though its speech patterns and thoughts collide seemingly at random with one another. The Voice wants to learn as much as possible about the characters, and through disjointed sentences the creature imparts the following bits of information to them.

- The Realm of the Squamous Toad is "that way" (it points with several pseudopods at once in different directions). The shadow trail continues in only one direction, which is not the way the Voice points.
- Winged shadows flap in the shadows of the shadowy shadow under the shadowed shadowy shadow's shadow. Watch out for them!

NPC Profile: The Voice of the Many, Insane Mimic

The Voice of the Many (or simply the Voice as it refers to itself) is a strange creature imprisoned in the Black Gulfs by some powerful wizard in a far-off land. Did it have sentience then? Was it imprisoned on purpose or by accident? The Voice doesn't know, it only knows that it's been in the Black Gulfs for a long, long time. Or maybe only a short time. For the Voice, time is an abstract concept that doesn't mean much.

The Voice of the Many is so-named because of its ability to shift voices and dialects at random. Its speech patterns would suggest multiple personalities, and maybe that's what's happening in real time. But these personalities carry no memory of previous conversations, making each one a spontaneous creation of the moment before it slips back into the bubbling cauldron that is its brain.

Due to its adhesive slime, it can move about the gray stones from top to bottom without any issue, and its alien physiology is apparently of no interest to the other denizens of the Black Gulfs. It is curious and wants to learn more about the goings on of the characters, though its schizophrenic speech and untrustworthy memory make it a troubling companion.

- The herald of the Squamous Toad sees all, but it knows nothing. It knows that it doesn't like fire, but that it loves to dance, and the Voice knows that too. But the Voice isn't going to tell the characters that, the herald wouldn't like that.

The key piece of information to be gained from the Voice is the weakness of the Squamous Herald, which confronts the party when they return to Teyatli with their collected shadow essence to seal the crack between worlds. Feel free to sprinkle more random thoughts and nonsense to keep the characters on their toes.

The Voice is a coward, however, and if attacked at all with spells or weapons it flees. Fighting or defeating the insane creature should not be the goal, so if the party is set upon killing it the Voice leaps out into the gray twilight of the Black Gulfs and disappears.

WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: FUN WITH VOICES

THE VOICE OF THE MANY IS JUST A FUN NPC MEANT TO DRIVE HOME THE STRANGE NATURE OF THE BLACK GULFS TO THE PLAYERS. USE IT AS MUCH AS YOU WANT, BUT IT'S BEST NOT TO HAVE THE MIMIC OVERSTAY ITS WELCOME. ALTERNATELY, THE PLAYERS COULD TRY TO CONVINCE IT TO COME WITH THEM - IT'S NOT GOING TO HELP IN COMBAT BECAUSE OF ITS COWARDLY NATURE BUT IT COULD PROVE AN ENTERTAINING TRAVELING COMPANION!

Realm of the Squamous Toad

After 4 hours of traveling through the Black Gulfs, the characters arrive at the Realm of the Squamous Toad. Read or paraphrase the following.

It's only been a few hours, but you feel as though time is somehow distorted in this place of monolithic gray blocks floating in a sea of immeasurable black shadows. You step off the tendril bridge connecting two of the blocks and are startled to see a tremendous sight before you that you didn't see a moment ago. A titanic gray stone statue floats a short distance away made in the form of a squatting toad, with a pair of loathsome bat wings hung over its shoulders. The face is a mass of long tentacles which each taper off to a crocodile-like snout. The two eyes are filled with a roiling, liquid-like mass of black ooze. You note that the tendril bridges you've been following leads directly to this titanic statue's base.

Ibholtheg's will created the Realm of the Squamous Toad in its own loathsome image. Teyatli specifically requested a sample of the essence from the Eye Pools – the roiling black sludge in the eye sockets of the statue. In order to retrieve it, the characters must either climb or fly up the length of the statue.

The Eye Pools are located 1,000 feet up from the base of the statue (the statue itself is about 1,200 feet tall).

Climbing the Statue

Characters who decide to climb the statue find the gray stone an ideal climbing surface. Getting to the Eye Pools requires 3 successful DC 12 Strength (Athletics) checks. If the climber accumulates 3 failures, they don't fall but instead draw the attention of a group of **2 loathsome bat shadows** that wing out from around the statue.

Flying

Characters with the ability to fly can take the safer and more direct route but they are spotted automatically by **2 loathsome bat shadows** from the other side of the statue.

Retrieving the Essence from the Eye Pool

The roiling black sludge that fills the eye sockets of the statue defies the normal laws of gravity – the Eye Pools rest vertically within the cavity! While seemingly dangerous, the essence is simply cold to the touch and does no immediate damage (drinking or eating it, however, requires a DC 18 Constitution save to avoid death in an excruciating form as tentacles burst from the body).

The jug provided by Teyatli serves as a fine vessel and filling it requires no check. As soon as the jug is filled, however, a titanic croaking screech bellows out from the statue. The entire statue trembles as an untold number of things move from within it.

Shadow Chase

Once the characters get to the stone platform where they first witnessed the Realm of the Squamous Toad, read or paraphrase the following.

Another croaking shriek fills the air, terrible and unwholesome to behold. You look back at the statue and see cracks form along its surface and black sludge ooze from the resulting fissures like blood from a wound. Dozens of winged bat shadows form out of the sludge, dripping with their primordial parentage, howling and screeching to match the croak. They wing around in great clusters and begin moving inexorably towards your position!

The characters must now flee from the pursuers. It is best to run this as a cinematic chase rather than a round-by-round movement chase due to the nature of the Black Gulfs. The characters as a group must accumulate more than **10 successes** on their Dexterity (Stealth) rolls than the Wisdom (Perception) checks of their pursuers.

At the end of each chase round the characters make their DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) checks and the loathsome bat shadows make their DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) checks (roll a number of times equal to the characters). And then roll for a random chase complication for the characters on the table below. The results might take away successes from the characters if they fail a group check or impose



disadvantage for specific characters that suffer damage.

The key is to keep the chase moving and tense.

1d12 Chase Complications

1	The shadow tendril bridge is narrower than expected! Make a group DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or lose 2 successes .
2	A piece of the gray stone breaks apart as you step onto it from the tendril! Make a group DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or lose 1 success .
3	The stone platform is littered with broken debris. The characters suffer disadvantage on their Dexterity (Stealth) rolls this round.
4	A pair of stone blocks collides in the air above, raining down debris! Everyone must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw to avoid 2d6 bludgeoning damage. Anyone that suffers damage suffers disadvantage on their Dexterity (Stealth) check.
5	A powerful wind blows across this stone platform. Make a group DC 10 Strength saving throw or lose 2 successes .
6	A deafening croaking bellow rises out from the Realm of the Squamous Toad. Make a group DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or lose 1 success from being staggered by the sound.
7	A massive black shadow falls over the stone block, obscuring vision. Make a group DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) or lose 2 successes .
8	Something unwholesome moves in the shadows a short distance away and stares with multicolored eyes. Make a group DC 10 Intelligence saving throw to avoid catching the thing's gaze and losing 1 success .
9	The stone rumbles as something collides with it from below! Make a group DC 10 Dexterity (Athletics) check to avoid losing 2 successes .
10	A wraith moves from around a corner and attacks! It swipes at a random character, and if it hits the target suffers disadvantage on their Dexterity (Stealth) check.
11-12	No complication.

WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: VISUAL REPRESENTATION TO REALLY HAMMER HOME THE INTENSITY OF THE CHASE YOU CAN USE SOMETHING VISUAL TO REPRESENT THE SUCCESSES EACH SIDE ACCUMULATES. POKER CHIPS, GLASS BEADS, OR ANYTHING SMALLER AND COLORFUL WOULD WORK VERY WELL AND REALLY HELP TO ILLUSTRATE WHEN THEY SUCCEED AND WHEN THEY FAIL.

If the loathsome bat shadows ever reach the same number or more success as the characters a group of the monsters have caught up to them. The shadows don't make any checks that round but each character is targeted with an attack from one of the creature. Anyone that suffers damage suffers disadvantage on their Dexterity (Stealth) check for that chase round.

Once the characters have 10 or more successes than their pursuers they managed to shake the chase, but if they take a short rest the creatures find them and the chase begins anew! It would be best for the characters to simply move as quickly as possible to Teyatli and the crack with the jug.

Sealing the Prison

Once the characters arrive at the crack, Teyatli takes the jug in his hands and rushes over to complete the ritual, ordering the characters to go through before he begins. At that moment, a screech lets out as a dark shadow falls over the platform. One of Ibholtweg's servants, the **Squamous Herald**, appears, having tracked the characters on their flight through the Black Gulfs. This monstrous foe is of the same alien mind as Ibholtweg and it seeks only to stop Teyatli from sealing the crack.

If the characters simply leave the Prison of Black Gulfs as Teyatli insists, the Squamous Herald defeat the wounded jaguar knight and the seal is not completed. If this happens, the monstrous creature pushes through the crack into the Prime Plane and must be defeated by the characters there. Once defeated, the crack reduces in size but does not disappear. On the other side Teyatli is simply unconscious so he can be revived if the characters go back.

If the characters stay and protect Teyatli, he is grateful for the assistance and gets to work on the ritual with the Squamous Herald is dealt with. It takes the jaguar knight five rounds to complete the work, at the end of which he shouts for the characters to move through the crack before he places the final seal on it.

In this case, the last thing the characters see is the grateful face of Teyatli the jaguar knight, fully restored now that the crack is repaired. A faint "thank you" echoes in their ears as the world dissolves into shadow and they are transported back to the Prime Plane.

Return to the Prime Plane

Once the characters pass through the crack, they are assaulted by similar sensations as when they entered the Prison of Black Gulfs. Assuming they did not abandon Teyatli to the loathsome bat shadows, after they pass through the crack they turn around to see the wound on the wall fade from view after only a few moments.

The crack between worlds is sealed and Ibholtheg once again rages in impotent fury in the Prison of Black Gulfs. The shadow tendril and mass of shadows over Sapphire Lake dissipate immediately and the sense of dread that had settled over Kraden's Hill is dispelled.

If the characters helped Teyatli, he offers one more boon to them as a parting gift - access to the locked treasure vault in the catacombs. The ground in the chamber rumbles and a portion of the west wall slides away, revealing a hidden treasure chamber. The ghostly image of Teyatli the jaguar knight appears and bows before the characters before gesturing towards the chamber and disappearing. Inside, the characters find the following items: 2000 gold coins, 4000 copper coins, ten moonstones worth 100 gold each, five amethysts worth 250 gold each, and an emerald worth 1000 gold. The coins are all minted with the symbol of Xilonoc.

Any surviving toad-men in the upper caves become disoriented with the sudden loss of communication with their loathsome deity. The characters find that the caves have been abandoned by the survivors whom have slunk back into the jungle to nurse their wounds.

While the characters needed to gather the relics in the Catacombs of Mazatl the wards and protections placed there still hold (and doubly so if the characters return the relics to the statues).

EPILOGUE

The return trip to Kraden's Hill is uneventful and peaceful. The shadows are dispelled and the people the characters pass seem genuinely excited over the turn of events. Sheriff Lomen greets the characters at the gates personally and thanks them for stepping into leadership roles – she offers her badge to any of them that want it that shows a zeal for lawful behavior.

The merchants of Grimden House throw a town-wide celebration in honor of the characters return and the dwarves of Clan Ironstar urge them to tell their stories.

TG3 Monster and NPC Information

Swarm of poisonous centipedes: Medium Swarm of Tiny Beasts; AC 14; HP 36; Spd 30 ft., swim 30 ft.; blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 10; DR bludgeoning, piercing, slashing; CL charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned; Str 8 (-1), Dex 18 (+4), Con 11 (+0), Int 1 (-5), Wis 10 (+0), Cha 3 (-4); AL unaligned; Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Swarm: The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny centipede. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Melee Attack – Bites: +6 to hit (reach 0 ft., one creature), 7 (2d6) piercing damage or 3 (1d6) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer. The target must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

The **swarm of poisonous centipedes** native to the Great Jungle are a rare site, as they usually stay in the thickest of overgrown areas. They feast on rotting things but when startled are capable of quickly moving over foes much larger than them to overwhelm and eventually devour.

Cipactli: Large Aberration; AC 14; HP 68; Spd 30 ft.; DR acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11; Str 16 (+3), Dex 12 (+1), Con 16 (+3), Int 6 (-2), Wis 6 (-2), Perception +1, Cha 7 (-2); AL CE; Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Magic Resistance: The cipactli has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Pounce: If the cipactli moves at least 10 feet straight toward and creature and then hits with a claw attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the cipactli can make one bite attack against it as a bonus action.

Regeneration: The cipactli regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point.

Multiattack: The cipactli makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Melee Attack – Bite: +6 to hit (reach 5 ft., one creature), 12 (2d8+3) piercing damage.

Melee Attack – Claws: +6 to hit (reach 5 ft., one creature), 7 (1d8+3) slashing damage.

When the kingdom of Xilonoc stood in the Great Jungle, offerings were made to the favored servants of Ibholtheg the Squamous Toad – **cipactli**. These deep jungle monsters have the head and scales of a crocodile and the hind quarters of a toad, and are able to heal from most wounds. They are intelligent enough to understand speech but are only able to croak out a few phrases.

Loathsome bat shadow: Large Aberration; AC 13; HP 59; Spd 10 ft., fly 60 ft.; DV radiant; DR acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder, bludgeoning/piercing/slashing from nonmagic; DL necrotic, poison; CL exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained; blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 11; Str 15 (+2), Dex 20 (+5), Con 17 (+3), Int 2 (-4), Wis 12 (+1), Cha 6 (-2); AL CE; Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Echolocation: The bat can't use its blindsight while deafened.

Keen Hearing: The bat has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing.

Multiattack: The loathsome bat shadow makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Melee Attack – Bite: +7 to hit (reach 5 ft., one creature), 7 (1d6+4) piercing damage and 5 (1d10) necrotic damage. Additionally, the target must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or have its Strength score reduced by 1d4. The target dies if this reduces its Strength to 0. Otherwise, the reduction lasts until the target finishes a short or long rest.

Melee Attack – Claw: +7 to hit (reach 5 ft., one creature), 6 (1d4+4) slashing damage and 5 (1d10) necrotic damage.

Servants of Ibholtheg, a **loathsome bat shadow** appears as a large black bat, with a near ten-foot wingspan. The creature's face ends in a mass of writhing tentacles, and when it bites the tentacles lash out to draw out the physical strength of the victim. The bat shadow's hind legs end in sharp claws it uses to rend flesh from the

NPC Profile: Kufika, First Daughter of the Akanni

Kufika is the eldest daughter of the chief of the Akanni tribe, a powerful shadow orc warrior who sees peace as the best course of action with the settlers of Kraden's Hill. Kufika agrees with her father and has been the ambassador for the shadow orcs in the frontier town for well over a year – the merchants of Grimden House and Clan Ironstar along with Sheriff Lomen all appreciate her insight into local traditions and customs, and her knowledge of the surrounding jungle tribes is second to none.

As a shadow orc warrior of her tribe, Kufika is strongly built, with taut ebony muscles and a lean figure. She keeps her black hair pulled back in a ponytail most of the time, though for the Festival of the Night Bird she has it hung loose (along with the rest of the tribe). Her skill with a scimitar is well-recognized but it is her talent for diplomacy and negotiation that keeps the Akanni tribe well-liked in Kraden's Hill.

bones of its target. The unearthly shriek let out by the monstrous beast is akin to no normal bat and resembles more of a wailing screech.

Hulking shadow mound: Large Aberration; AC 15; HP 136; Spd 20 ft.; DV radiant; DR acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder, bludgeoning/piercing/slashing from nonmagic; DL necrotic, poison; CL exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained; blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 10; Str 18 (+4), Dex 8 (-1), Stealth +6, Con 16 (+3), Int 5 (-3), Wis 10 (+0), Cha 5 (-3); AL CE; Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Multiattack: The hulking shadow mound makes two slam attacks. If both attacks hit a Medium or smaller target, the target is grappled (escape DC 14) and the hulking shadow mound uses its Engulf on it.

Melee Attack – Slam: +7 to hit (reach 5 ft., one creature), 13 (2d8+4) bludgeoning damage.

Engulf: The hulking shadow mound engulfs a Medium or smaller creature grappled by it. The engulfed target is blinded, restrained, and unable to breathe, and must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw at the start of each of the mound's turns or take 13 (2d8+4) bludgeoning damage. In addition, the engulfed target's Strength score is reduced by 1d6 at the beginning of the mound's turn. The target dies if this reduces its Strength to 0. Otherwise, the reduction lasts until the target finishes a short or long rest. If the mound moves, the engulfed target moves with it. The mound can have only one creature engulfed at a time.

The **hulking shadow mounds** that serve Ibholtheg as shock troopers appear as great piles of ropy black tentacles. Wisps of shadow dance around its form and it appears to have no eyes, though it can see without any problem with its unearthly vision. The creature moves slowly along the ground, leaving a trail of viscous gray slime in its wake, and it is capable of striking foes with suddenly created appendages from its bulk. Victims entangled by those tendrils are often engulfed wholly by the hulking shadow mound, where it feeds on the physical strength of the devoured.

Degenerate toad-man: Medium Humanoid (Toad-Man); AC 16; HP 18; Spd 20 ft., swim 40 ft.; passive Perception 10; Str 14 (+2), Dex 14 (+2, Stealth +5), Con 14 (+2), Int 7 (-2), Wis 10 (+0), Cha 7 (-2); AL NE; Challenge ½ (100 XP)

Amphibious: The toad-man can breathe air and water.

Speak with Frogs and Toads: The toad-man can communicate simple concepts to frogs and toads.

Jungle Camouflage: The toad-man has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in jungle terrain.

Standing Leap: The toad-man's long jump is up to 20 feet and its high jump is up to 10 feet, with or without a running start.

Multiaction: The toad-man makes two melee attacks: one with its bite and one with its spear.

Melee Attack – Bite: +4 to hit (reach 5 ft., one creature), 4 (1d4+2) bludgeoning damage.

Melee Attack or Ranged Attack – Spear: +4 to hit (reach 5 ft. or 20/60 ft., one creature), 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

Once, these foul creatures held a place of honor in the Great Jungle and commanded great respect. Now, the **degenerate toad-men** live in squalor in crude mud huts on the banks of jungle rivers, cowering in fear from the stronger shadow orcs and cannibals that have come to dominate the area. The croaking language of the toad-men is a very crude dialect of lizard-man so that people that speak that language can often pick up the words of a toad-man.

Giant toad: Large Beast; AC 11; HP 39; Spd 20 ft., swim 40 ft.; darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 10; Str 15 (+2), Dex 13 (+1), Con 13 (+1), Int 2 (-4), Wis 10 (+0), Cha 3 (-4); AL unaligned; Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Amphibious: The toad can breathe air and water.

Standing Leap: The toad's long jump is up to 20 feet and its high jump is up to 10 feet, with or without a running start.

Melee Attack – Bite: +4 to hit (reach 5 ft., one creature), 7 (1d10+2) piercing damage plus 5 (1d10) poison damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 13). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and the toad can't bite another target.

Swallow: The toad makes one bite attack against a Medium or smaller target it is grappling. If the attack hits, the target is swallowed, and the grapple ends. The swallowed target is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the toad, and it takes 10 (3d6) acid damage at the start of each of the toad's turns. The toad can have only one target swallowed at a time.

If the toad dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse using 5 feet of movement, exiting prone.

Among the toad-men, **giant toads** are revered as sacred beasts. These monstrous denizens of the Great Jungle are large enough to swallow a man whole and the toad-men feed them sacrifices on a regular basis to keep them well-fed.

Wraith: Medium Undead; AC 13; HP 67; Spd 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover); DR acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder, bludgeoning/piercing/slashing from nonmagical nonsilver; DI necrotic, poison; CI charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained; Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12; Str 6 (-2), Dex 16 (+3), Con 16 (+3), Int 12 (+1), Wis 14 (+2), Cha 15 (+2); AL NE; Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Incorporeal Movement: The wraith can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Sunlight Sensitivity: While in sunlight, the wraith has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Melee Attack – Life Drain: +6 to hit (reach 5 ft., one creature), 21 (4d8+3) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies and returns as a specter if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

In the Black Gulfs, victims that give in to the despair inherent on the plane are eventually transformed into **wraiths** – twisted, evil, shadowy apparitions of their former selves. These undead monsters seek only fresh life

NPC Profile: Teyatli, Wounded Jaguar Knight of Xilonoc

A proud and noble warrior, Teyatli distinguished himself as a cunning strategist in the many wars Xilonoc waged with neighboring kingdoms and monsters. The princess Mazatl recognized the man's bravery, courage, and honesty, and raised him up to the ranks of the jaguar knights – a holy order sworn with the defense of Xilonoc from within and without.

Teyatli accompanied Mazatl and her companions on their quest to imprison Ibholtheg, but he fell in the final battle protecting the princess from harm. The jungle gods saw the sacrifice and chose Teyatli to serve as the immortal gatekeeper to the Squamous Toad's realm in the Prison of Black Gulfs. Proud beyond measure to be chosen, Teyatli served faithfully for centuries – until the rupture happened and Ibholtheg was able to pierce the wall between worlds. In doing so, Teyatli was wounded horribly and knows that he doesn't have much time left.

to drain in order to fuel their own nightmarish existence.

Toad-man shaman: Medium Humanoid (Toad-Man); AC 16; HP 37; Spd 20 ft., swim 40 ft.; passive Perception 10; Str 14 (+2), Dex 14 (+2, Stealth +4), Con 14 (+2), Int 7 (-2), Wis 14 (+2), Cha 7 (-2); AL NE; Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Amphibious: The toad-man can breathe air and water.

Speak with Frogs and Toads: The toad-man can communicate simple concepts to frogs and toads.

Jungle Camouflage: The toad-man has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in jungle terrain.

Standing Leap: The toad-man's long jump is up to 20 feet and its high jump is up to 10 feet, with or without a running start.

Spellcasting: The toad-man shaman is a 4th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The shaman has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*
1st level (4 slots): *guiding bolt, inflict wounds, shield of faith*
2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness, hold person*

Melee Attack or Ranged Attack – Spear: +4 to hit (reach 5 ft. or 20/60 ft., one creature), 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

The most blessed of the toad-men are the ones born with wings, who become **toad-man shamans**. They worship at foul altars and are smarter than their degenerate kin, though they are prideful to a fault. They call upon the power of Ibholtheg to smite their enemies but are not above flapping away to safety when a fight turns against them.

Slubgup the Mighty: Medium Humanoid (Toad-Man); AC 16; HP 112; Spd 20 ft., swim 40 ft.; passive Perception 10; Str 18 (+4, Athletics +10), Dex 15 (+2, save +5, Stealth +5), Con 16 (+3, save +6), Int 10 (+0), Wis 12 (+1), Cha 15 (+2, Intimidation +5); AL NE; Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Amphibious: The toad-man can breathe air and water.

Brave: Slubgup has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Brute: Slubgup deals one extra die of its damage when he hits with it.

Speak with Frogs and Toads: The toad-man can communicate simple concepts to frogs and toads.

Jungle Camouflage: The toad-man has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in jungle terrain.

Standing Leap: The toad-man's long jump is up to 20 feet and its high jump is up to 10 feet, with or without a running start.

Multiattack: Slubgup makes three melee attacks.

Melee Attack or Ranged Attack – Spear: +7 to hit (reach 5 ft. or 20/60 ft., one creature), 11 (2d6+4) piercing damage for ranged or 13 (2d8+4) piercing damage for melee.

Parry: As a reaction, Slubgup adds 3 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, Slubgup must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

The toad-men tribe dwelling in the caves beneath Sapphire Lake are led by **Slubgup the Mighty**, a toad-man of massive girth and great strength. He has led the tribe for many years, but despite his impressive size he is a coward, which is why the toad-men have not struck out against the people of Kraden's Hill yet. Even with the crack in the Black Gulfs and Iboltheg's imminent return, Slubgup has placated his bloodthirsty tribe with promises of future slaughter in exchange for extreme patience.

Elite toad-man: Medium Humanoid (Toad-Man); AC 18; HP 52; Spd 20 ft., swim 40 ft.; passive Perception 10; Str 16 (+3), Dex 14 (+2, Stealth +5), Con 14 (+2, save +4), Int 7 (-2), Wis 10 (+0), Cha 7 (-2); AL NE; Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Amphibious: The toad-man can breathe air and water.

Brave: The elite toad-man has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Speak with Frogs and Toads: The toad-man can communicate simple concepts to frogs and toads.

Jungle Camouflage: The toad-man has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in jungle terrain.

Standing Leap: The toad-man's long jump is up to 20 feet and its high jump is up to 10 feet, with or without a running start.

Multiattack: The elite toad-man makes two melee attacks.

Melee Attack – Greatsword: +5 to hit (reach 5 ft., one creature), 10 (2d6+3) slashing damage.

Melee Attack or Ranged Attack – Spear: +4 to hit (reach 5 ft. or 20/60 ft., one creature), 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

Parry: As a reaction, the elite toad-man adds 2 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the elite toad-man must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Slubgup earned his position as leader of the toad-man tribe below Sapphire Lake mainly because of his innate talent at picking out the best warriors and training them to be loyal and strong. The result are **elite toad-men**, fanatically loyal to Slubgup and armed with large swords stolen from jungle crypts and the people of Kraden's Hill.

NPC Profile: The Voice of the Many, Insane Mimic

The Voice of the Many (or simply the Voice as it refers to itself) is a strange creature imprisoned in the Black Gulfs by some powerful wizard in a far-off land. Did it have sentience then? Was it imprisoned on purpose or by accident? The Voice doesn't know, it only knows that it's been in the Black Gulfs for a long, long time. Or maybe only a short time. For the Voice, time is an abstract concept that doesn't mean much.

The Voice of the Many is so-named because of its ability to shift voices and dialects at random. Its speech patterns would suggest multiple personalities, and maybe that's what's happening in real time. But these personalities carry no memory of previous conversations, making each one a spontaneous creation of the moment before it slips back into the bubbling cauldron that is its brain.

Due to its adhesive slime, it can move about the gray stones from top to bottom without any issue, and its alien physiology is apparently of no interest to the other denizens of the Black Gulfs. It is curious and wants to learn more about the goings on of the characters, though its schizophrenic speech and untrustworthy memory make it a troubling companion.

Mummy: Medium Undead; AC 11; HP 58; Spd 20 ft.; DV fire; DR bludgeoning/piercing/slashing from nonmagic; DI necrotic, poison; CI charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned; Str 16 (+3), Dex 8 (-1), Con 15 (+2), Int 6 (-2), Wis 10 (+0), Cha 12 (+1); AL LN; Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Multiattack: The mummy can use its Dreadful Glare and makes one attack with its rotting fist.

Melee Attack – Rotting Fist: +5 to hit (reach 5 ft., one creature); 10 (2d6+3) bludgeoning damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with mummy rot. The cursed target can't regain hit points, and its hit point maximum decreases by 10 (3d6) for every 24 hours that elapse. If the curse reduces the target's hit point maximum to 0, the target dies, and its body turns to dust. The curse lasts until removed by the *remove curse* spell or other magic.

Dreadful Glare: The mummy targets one creature it can see within 60 feet of it. If the target can see the mummy, it must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw against this magic or become frightened until the end of the mummy's next turn. If the target fails the saving throw by 5 or more, it is also paralyzed for the same duration. A target that succeeds on the saving throw is immune to the Dreadful Glare of all mummies for the next 24 hours.

The practice of mummification was common in Xilonoc, and priests and other leaders often enchanted loyal guards as **mummies** to live forever guarding a sacred site. These mummies are usually dressed in ornate garbs, insect-ridden from the years and virtually worthless, but they remain as dedicated to their protective tasks as ever.

Squamous Herald: Huge Fiend; AC 19; HP 85; Spd 30 ft., fly 40 ft.; DR cold, fire, lightning, bludgeoning/piercing/ slashing from nonmagic; DI poison; CI poisoned; darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 12; Str 18 (+4), Dex 14 (+2, save +6), Con 18 (+4), Int 13 (+1, save +5), Wis 15 (+2, save +6), Cha 15 (+2, save +6); AL CE; Challenge 7 (2,900)

Magic Resistance: The Squamous Herald has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Multitask: The Squamous Herald makes two attacks, one with its claws and one with its stinger.

Noxious Aura: Any creature that starts its turn within 5 feet of the Squamous Herald suffers 5 (1d10) poison damage.

Melee Attack – Claw: +8 to hit (reach 5 ft., one creature), 11 (2d6+4) slashing damage and 10 (3d6) poison damage.

Melee Attack – Stinger: +8 to hit (reach 10 ft., one creature), 15 (2d10+4) piercing damage and 14 (4d6) poison damage.

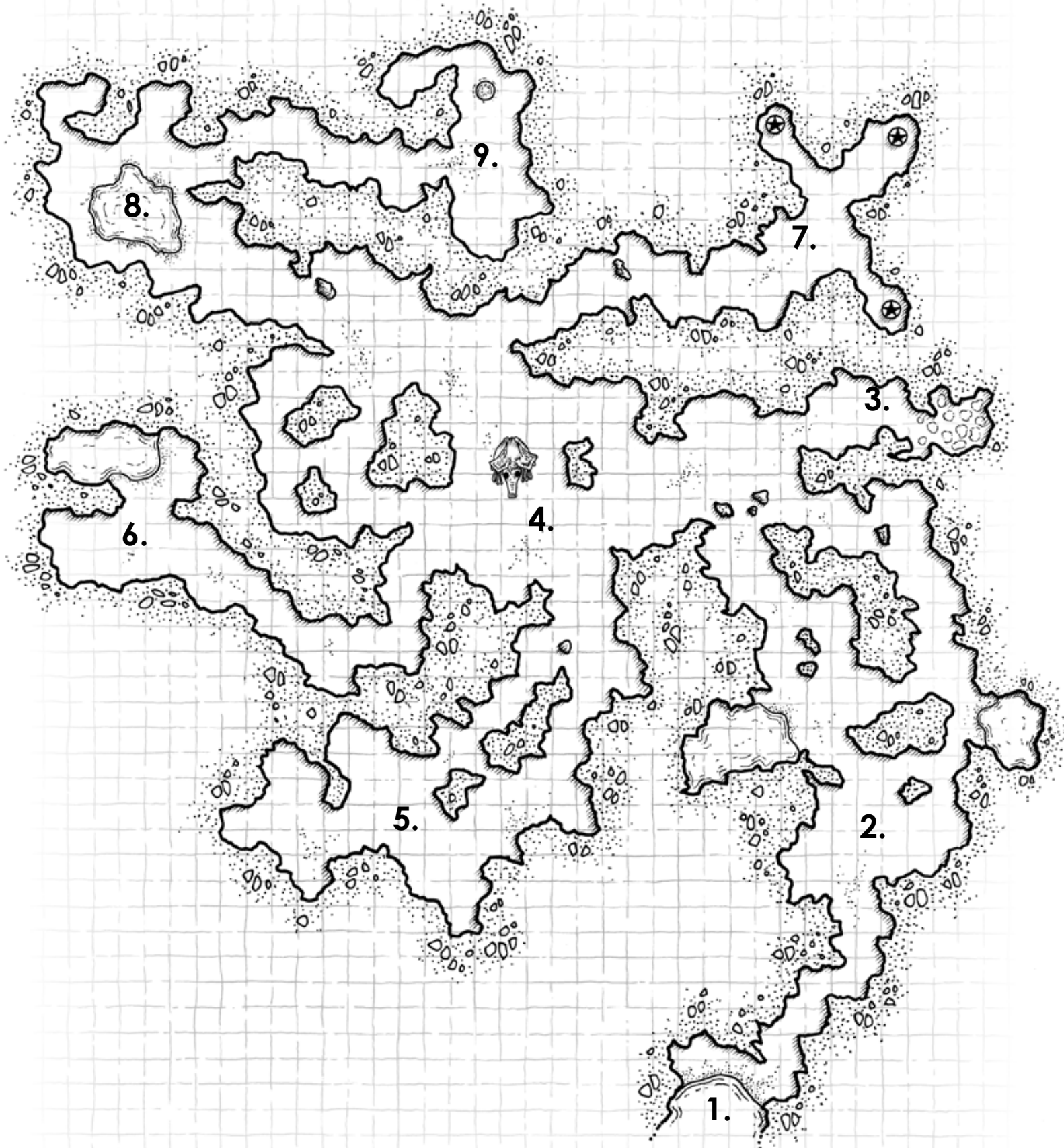
Noxious Breath (recharge 5-6): The Squamous Herald can release a noxious cloud of poisonous gas in a 30-foot radius around itself as an action. Living creatures that start their turn inside the area suffer 21 (8d6) poison damage, or half that with a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw. Unless dispersed, the noxious cloud remains in place until the start of the Squamous Herald's next turn.

Ibholtheg commands a number of powerful servants, and one of them is the **Squamous Herald**. This creature resembles a large serpent with heavily plated armor-like skin covering its twisting bulk. It can slither on the ground or fly through the air on its great bat-like wings. The Squamous herald's massive crocodilian head is capable of delivering powerful bites, and its long tail ends in a stinger holding lethal poison. It does not speak Common but does hiss and croak in an alien tongue it shares with Ibholtheg and its kin.

Kraden's Hill

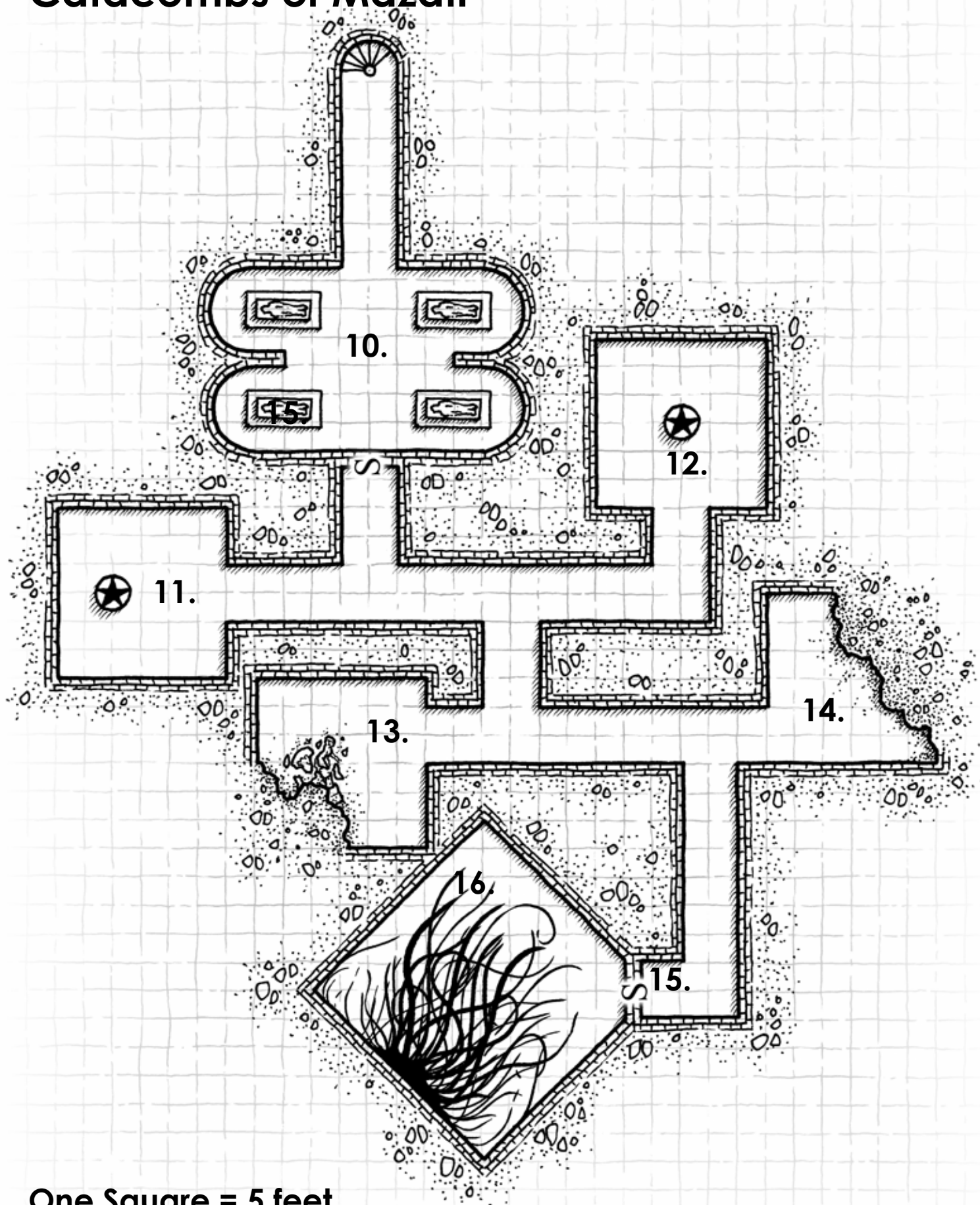


Submerged Caves



One Square = 5 feet

Catacombs of Mazatl



One Square = 5 feet

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