

CASTLES[®] CRUSADES

WHEN PRIESTS DIE



DAVIS CHENAULT



WHEN PRIESTS DIE

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Horror has befallen the people of Kitadel. A fisherman has returned from the nearby temple to tell everyone of a vile murder and slaying. The bodies of the three priests who resided in Akthamam were each impaled on a statue in front of the temple.

This is a 2nd-3rd-level adventure for a party of 3-4 characters.

INTRODUCTION

The salty lake is inky black so deep does it drive into the earth. Black, angular cliffs extrude from its edges, hemming it in like the walls of some chthonian fortress. Kitadil sits atop a cliff overlooking the lake. Its people gathered many generations ago to plumb the lake's depths for a rare clam's pearls.

Far from Kitadel, on the other end of the lake is a small landing. It is the only natural purchase around the entire body of water. A temple was constructed there ages ago to appease those deific guardians of the lake. Now horror has befallen the people of Kitadel. A fisherman has returned from the temple to tell everyone of a vile murder and slaying. The bodies of the three priests who resided in the Temple of Akthamam were each impaled upon a statue in front of the temple entrance.

FOR THE CASTLE KEEPER

A few days prior to the arrival of the PCs in Kitadel, a gromm wandered into the area. It descended the cliff carrying its three ever faithful ghoulish pets, the sons of rhealth. They descended the cliffs and snuck into the temple where they slaughtered all three of the priests. The corpses were placed on the statues out front as a warning for others to keep away. A few other pets, iron cobras, slowly followed the gromm to the temple. They are gathered there now while the gromm slowly consumes the priest's bodies. The gromm intends to leave afterward.

The PCs arrive just in time to find out about the slaying of the priests and the locals implore them to go investigate as they are simple fishermen and nothing more. A boat is supplied, some food and any other supplies the PCs may feel useful and which is available. The PCs will be awarded in magnificent pearls ranging in value from 1000-2000gp each should they discover the killers and bring them to justice.

Crossing the lake is an eerie experience as the cliffs surrounding it are 500 feet or more tall with no access out excepting the stairs leading up to Kitadel. Every morning a thick fog forms on the lake surface. In the afternoon winds whip the lake into a froth for several hours. Otherwise the lake is placid, dark and quiet with barely any activity. It takes about 45 minutes to cross the lake.

AREA 1: LANDING

This is less a beach than a ledge which is not submerged beneath the lake. It is approximately 120 feet long and 100 feet wide. The ledge sits only a couple feet above the water level, it rises in angular chunks five or more feet before the cliff face. Three tall, thin, amorphous statues rest on pedestals next to the water's edge. Each statue is faceless and sexless but resemble humanoids in general shape. One holds a trident, another

a spear and the final a gig with three prongs. On each of the weapons dangle the half-consumed corpse of a man.

On the left side of the ledge is a large opening in the cliff face. In the central portion of the ledge, along the cliff face, two small doors are open. One dangles on a hinge, the other gently creaks in the winds. To the right side of the ledge, about 20 feet up the cliff face are three narrow openings, windows carved into stone looking out over the ledge and the bay. A small iron rod has been pounded into the rock next to the water with a taut rope tied to it. The other end of the rope disappears beneath the surface.

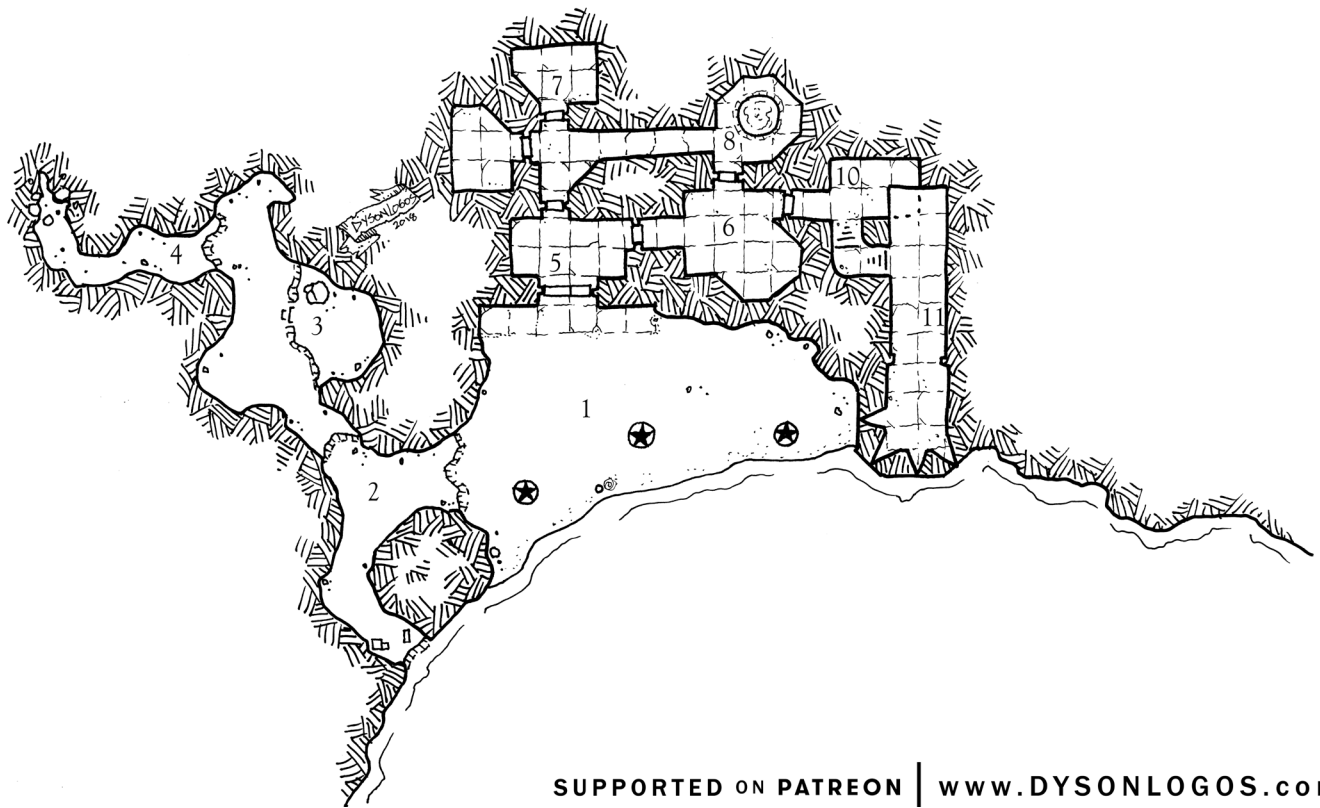
There is a son of rhealth at the end of that rope. It was placed there by the gromm. The rope is 50' long. As soon as someone steps on the ledge, the son of rhealth is awoken and it begins to ascend the rope at 10 feet per round. As soon as its head emerges from the water and sees any of the party, it lets out a horrifying groan, alerting the two other rhealth (see Area 4 below) that intruders are around. These come to attack the party as well.

It is possible for an observant character to notice the rope moving. Anyone within sight of the rope can make a wisdom check (CL 4). If successful they spot the rope moving. The creature becomes visible about 10 feet from the surface; however, someone has to be actively looking at the rope to see it.

SONS OF RHEALTH (*This is a neutral evil, undead whose vital stats are HD 4d8, HP 27, AC 14, and Move 20". Its primary attributes are physical. It attacks with a long sword for 1-8 damage and wears a ragged chain vestment and +1 helm. Amongst its rotting clothing is a belt with six gems still attached to it worth 50gp each. Its special attacks are disease and fear.*)



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AREA 2: CAVE ENTRY

The entry to the cave is old. It is also man made and not natural. It is just so old that erosion and calcification has made it appear natural. A close examination of the walls reveals this (CL3). There is a three-foot-high ledge leading to this room. There are two sconces in the walls opposite one another. The floor is covered in bloody streaks with non-human footprints crisscrossing through them. There are two small casks along the east wall.

The tracks are left from the two sons of rhealth who have come here. A successful tracking check by a ranger reveals two bipedal creatures moving this direction. The footprints are not booted. The two rhealth in Area 4 below were once orcs so the ranger may not recognize the tracks since they are skeletal (CL 7). The casks contain salted fish.

AREA 3: CHAMBER AND ALCOVE

This hallway continues into the cliff. There are two sconces in this area with unlit torches in them. The alcove to the east contains several reed mats and two long elaborately carved wooden benches. Between the benches is a broad bowl with cold coals in it. Next to this is a large hookah with three pipes coming from it.

The alcove is used for relaxation and meditation. The benches are oaken and weigh about 200 pounds each. The hookah is brass and, though well made, not unusual for this area. It is worth 25gp. The wad in the pipe, if smoked for an hour, allows a cleric, druid or other spiritual class, to cast all commune, divination or similar spells requiring deific communication at three levels higher than usual. There is enough for six hours of smoking. If examined by any paladin, cleric or druid its nature can be determined on a successful wisdom check (CL 6).

AREA 4: IDOL OF COLMUATH

The cave continues to the west where an idol to the deity of the lake is sitting. There are two sons of rhealth here if they have not yet been awoken by the rhealth in Area 1 and attacked the party. Otherwise the rhealth appear as skeletons lying on the floor until someone gets within 30 feet of them. At that point they both animate and attack those nearby.

At the end of the tunnel is a small ledge. On the ledge is an idol with amorphous features though of humanoid shape. It is nearly entirely mineralized, and no distinct deity can be discerned from looking at it.

The statue is to a deity that the locals have always believed lived in the lake. No deity resides in the lake. There are mermen and other creatures who live at the deepest portion of the lake. At one time they came up to terrify those moving into the area. They were successful and thus the temple was built and offers made to the mermen whom the locals came to believe were agents of some deity which lived in the lake. The mermen still kill anyone who ever tries to go deeper than 500 feet. Most of the clams with pearls are found between 50 and 100 feet beneath the surface. This arrangement has worked for centuries.

The statue is worth 1000gp in melted gold.

SONS OF RHEALTH x2 (These are neutral evil, undead whose vital stats are HD 4d8, HP 24 and 25, AC 12, and Move 20". Their primary attributes are physical. They attack with a spear and battle axe for 1-8 damage and wear ragged leather cloaks. Amongst their rotting clothing is a silver necklace worth 100gp, a gold armband worth 200gp and one has two silver capped canines worth 10gp each. Their special attacks are disease and fear.)

AREA 5: ENTRY CHAMBER

There are two wooden doors set in the cliff face. The doors are both very old and elaborately carved. One has been wrenched nearly off its hinge. The other dangles and creaks in the wind. Beyond is a small chamber with a door on its east and north side. The floor has smears of blood across it, shreds of clothing and other fleshy debris are scattered in it. There are tracks in the blood of non-human creatures (see above Area 2 for similar tracks). In addition, there is one other unusual smear on the floor, as if something were dragged through after everything else was completed.

There is an overturned brazier on the floor.

There are two poles crossing the room just below the ceiling and over the brazier. Octopus like creatures hang from the poles.

The second set of tracks mentioned above is that of an iron cobra. One entered through this chamber while the others entered through the windows in Area 12. The octopus-like creatures are a local breed from the lake that are much prized by the locales. When cooked they are dried over the brazier. The door on the east wall is locked with an iron bar on the other side (Area 10) and can only be beaten down with much effort.

To knock the door down requires a successful strength check (CL 8). It can be chopped down with various weapons, but this will take upwards to 5-10 minutes and be extremely noisy. This attracts everything in the complex.

AREA 6: HEAD PRIEST'S CHAMBER

The door to this chamber is open. Within is a plain bed, a trunk, a table, chair and brazier. All the furniture has been knocked over and scattered. Bloody smears cover most of the blankets and sheets and floor. The bed has been upturned. The trunk is still closed.

There is an iron cobra resting underneath or behind the upturned bed. It comes out to attack as soon as someone enters the room and starts shuffling around.

IRON COBRA (*This is a neutral construct whose vital stats are HD 3d8, HP 21, AC 20 and Move 40'. Its primary attributes are physical. It attacks with a bite for 1d6 damage. Its special abilities are move silent, track, poison and spell immunities.*)

The gromm entered this room and slaughtered the priest while the sons of rhealth took the other two priests in their chamber (Area 7). Other than the bric-a-brac of daily living such as a drinking mug and chamber pot there is very little of value or interest in this room. The priest was an aesthetic and preferred a life of simplicity.

The trunk is not locked. Inside is a pile of woolen clothing, hats, gloves and similar items. There is also a simple book listing various rituals accumulated over the centuries people have lived here. There is a small staff that, when intoned, casts sound burst at 6th level (12 charges), a +1 flanged mace and one scroll with 3 spells on it; shield of faith, delay poison and spiritual weapon.

AREA 7: PRIESTS CHAMBER

The door to this room is slightly ajar. Upon entering one is greeted by a swath of dried blood, two beds, both of which the covers and bedding have been thrown about. An overturned table lies on the floor amidst a scatter of game pieces, a board, several drinking cups and scraps of food. Two small trunks sit against the wall, a brazier is in one corner.

The trunks are unopened and contain nothing but clothing and personal effects. Two of the rhealths entered this room and killed the priests as the gromm slew the head priest.

AREA 8: POOL ROOM

The hall to this room has a blood trail running down it. The trail is more spatter than drag. A successful track check (CL 5) indicates that whatever was taken down here was carried and not dragged.

The pool room is octagonal with a door just to the south side of it. The door is ajar. The pool takes up much of the room. The water is dark and frigid. A small lip surrounds the pool and a bench is located about one foot in the water.

This area is used for bathing and making sacrifices in gold, gems and jewelry to the 'deity' who resides in the lake. The well follows a natural chute that goes down all the way to the bottom of the lake. It opens into a chamber in one of the halls of the mermen. Here they gladly gather the riches thrown down.

AREA 9: SHRINE OF COLMUATH

Colmuath is the name of the deity the locals believe resides in the lake. The floor to this room is painted blue and the ceiling has a mural on it of a large man swimming in water bringing fish up to some fishermen. The southeast corner of the room is dominated by a large statue of a man sitting on a rock with a net in one hand. In front of the statue are several dozen wood and bronze bowls. Most are empty. Several contain ash, fish bones, incense sticks or other materials used in religious rituals. The door to the west is closed and has a metal bar across it. The door to the east is open. Blood spatter is spread across the floor leading to the east door.

There is an iron cobra curled up behind the statue. It waits until the party leaves to follow them or attacks if discovered.

IRON COBRA (*This is a neutral construct whose vital stats are HD 3d8, HP 21, AC 20 and Move 40'. Its primary attributes are physical. It attacks with a bite for 1d6 damage. Its special abilities are move silent, track, poison and spell immunities.*)

AREA 10: STORAGE CHAMBER

Its important to note that this room contains a dumbwaiter. On the map in the southeast corner of the room, Area 11 overlaps with Area 10. This is the location of a very large dumbwaiter, where the gromm is located (see below).

This room is a storage area for the priests. It contains half a dozen crates, boxes and casks. There is a rack and shelving with materials needed by the priests to survive here. In the southeast

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corner of the room is a very large opening about 2 x 2 feet in size with a door on it half broken off (the dumbwaiter).

The crates and casks contain foodstuffs (mostly dried though fresh oranges are found in one cask) one small cask contains watery beer. There are several brooms, fishing gear, bowls, cookware, eating utensils, wood, torches, lanterns, oil, candles, rope, blankets, mats, etc. There is little of significant value. One net has hooks on it.

The dumbwaiter has been destroyed by the gromm and the debris accumulated and piled at its bottom. There is some material from Area 11 at the bottom of the dumbwaiter to include a chair and a large cloth and tapestry. Although one could try and look up it, nothing will be seen except several feet of broken debris. Removing it will take a while. The gromm is resting in the chute of the dumbwaiter. The noise down here alerts the gromm and the remaining iron cobras in Area 11 intruders are in the complex.

AREA 11: GATHERING ROOM

This room was used for eating and cooking food, gatherings or for discussions or other events involving large numbers of people. A large oaken table dominates the center of the room, stretching nearly ½ its length. A dozen chairs are scattered around the table. On top of the table scattered amongst cooking vessels and tableware are the bloody remains of a recently eaten feast. Torn and ragged priest's vestments lie in crusty pools of blood.

A torn tapestry dangles from hooks on the west wall and the shreds of a tapestry dangle from hooks on the east wall. There are three narrow windows on the south wall overlooking the lake. Beneath the windows are three pot bellied stoves each with piping leading to the top of the window adjacent to it. Sundry cooking gear is scattered around on the floor. On the north end of the room in the west corner is an opening in the wall about 8x8 feet wide. There is no door.

The gromm came in here to rest and feast. It eats over the table and rests in the dumbwaiter. This is where it is currently located. He tore it apart and dumped all manner of debris into the hole leading to Area 11 to block that entry so that no one can see up it. The gromm will have become aware of the intruders by this time and informed the remaining iron cobras to hide at the south end of the room awaiting the intruders.

The gromm waits for the iron cobras to begin attacking and engage the party before rising from the dumbwaiter and attacking a party member from the back.

There are 2 iron cobras at the south end of the room. They are trying to hide themselves amongst the scatter of chairs and stoves - though likely very unsuccessfully. Anyone who makes a successful spot check (CL 3), spies them. If they are seen, they attack. If more than 3 people enter the room, they attack.

IRON COBRA x2 (These are neutral constructs whose vital stats are HD 3d8, HP 21, AC 20 and 19 and Move 40'. Their primary attributes are physical. They attack with a bite for 1d6

damage. Their special abilities are move silent, track, poison and spell immunities.)

GROMM (This is a neutral evil, aberration whose vital stats are HD 5d8, HP 37, AC 16 and Move 30'. Its primary attributes are physical. It attacks with 10 tentacles for 1d4 damage and a bite for 1d6 damage. Its special abilities are paralysis and restrain. It has eaten, quite by accident, a diadem of iron cobra control allowing it to control the iron cobras. This can be found in the skull.)



WRAPPING UP

Should the PCs survive the encounter with the gromm and return to Kitadel, they are welcomed and thanked for their services, given several weeks of lodging and their reward. The town leaders offer the PCs a place of residence as well in return for service and protection. The town leaders even go so far as to offer the temple as a place of residence should they guard it and ensure the deity who rests in the lake is appeased. It is up to the CK to proceed from that point.

The experience garnered from the adventure is as follows.

Sons of Rhealth x220xp each

Iron Cobra x110xp each

Gromm x500xp

Successfully clearing the temple 1700xp

Gold and treasure: Helm +1 250xp, pipe wad 300gp, diadem of iron cobra control 2000xp (once its use is discovered), sound burst staff 250xp, flanged mace 250xp, and treasure as exchanged for gold or at CKs discretion. No experience points should be awarded for the pearls the town offers as a reward

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Horror has befallen the people of Kitadel. A fisherman has returned from the nearby temple to tell everyone of a vile murder and slaying. The bodies of the three priests who resided in Akthamam were each impaled on a statue in front of the temple. Someone, or something, has taken up residence in the temple.

This is a low level adventure for a party of 3-4 characters. It is a short dungeon adventure designed for a single night's play



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