
THE LAKE BELOW



The Lake Below

Rumours & Hooks

Two years ago, a church was erected on the frontier shores of *Lake Argos*. Unknown forces set upon the building, slaying or stealing away the priestesses within. Abandoned shortly thereafter, some say a great evil lingers over the site.

High Priestess Ulna is offering a handsome reward to investigate and reclaim an abandoned church. The resident clergy were killed or kidnapped by unknown forces two years earlier.

A few years ago, the faithful of Argona (goddess of hope, health and happiness, female clergy only), erected a frontier church on the shores of Lake Argos.

Unfortunately for the priestesses, a band of toadmen living in underwater caverns nearby took exception to the intrusion, and ate them.

Investigators from the nearest town were unable to determine the fate of the clergy, and ultimately chalked it up to bandits. When the second set of priestesses also disappeared however, the church was declared cursed and abandoned.

The adventurers might discover the abandoned church while exploring the great lake, or seek it out as agents of *High Priestess Ulna* (50's, heavily overweight, raven haired with streaks of grey), who offers 1,000 gp to unravel the mystery and secure the site.

Random Encounters

Depending on whether the adventurers approach by lake or forest, there is a 25% or 40% chance of a random encounter every eight hours. If an encounter occurs, roll 1d6:

Forest

1. 2d4 *Giant Spiders* (LFG p.125) are hiding in the trees. They drop massive webs (*Luck* (Dex) save to avoid), before pouncing, hoping to devour or cocoon their victims.
2. *Poisonous Scrub*. The adventurers pass through a patch of poisonous, thorny vines. An Int (Wilderness Lore) check avoids swollen and inflamed cuts (causing 1d4 Dex loss).

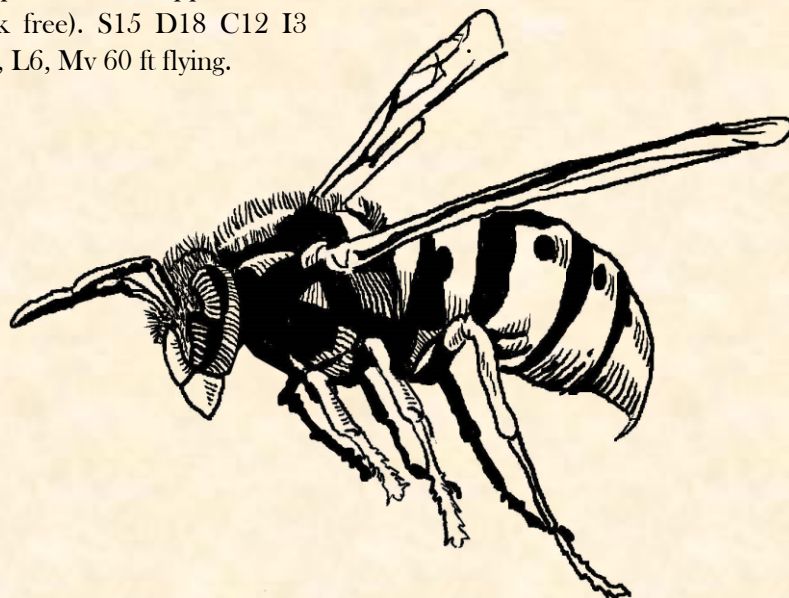


3. 10d6 *Beastmen* (LFG p.100) have made camp nearby; their drums can be heard clearly up to half a mile away. Roaming sentries (2d4) carry primitive horns to summon more of their man eating kin.
4. A large pack of 5d4 *Wolves* (LFG p.129) are prowling here, hungry for a meal. They will surround and target pack mules or horses before targeting humanoids, if possible. They might be placated with party rations.
5. A single *Giant Scorpion* (LFG p.122) has flattened itself beneath the undergrowth, hoping to take its prey by surprise (Dex (Stealth) v Perc (Detection) contest).
6. Awful, guttural speech can be heard beyond the next copse of trees (an *Ettin* (LFG p.108) arguing with itself).

Lake

1. 2d4 six ft *Giant Wasps* buzz down from the sky or nearby shore, hoping to paralyze and carry away a meal. AC 14, HD 3+4, Sting 1d6 + poison (*Luck* (Con) save or paralyzed for 1d6 hours), 19: grabs the target and flies away with it at a rate of 40 ft per round (Opposed Str check to break free). S15 D18 C12 I3 P13 W10 Ch5, L6, Mv 60 ft flying.

2. 2d4 canoes, each carrying 1d4 *barbarians* (LFG p.114) armed with bows and spears, appear from a small island or inlet.
3. 2d4 *Giant Crocodiles* (LFG p.103) are lurking in the waters nearby. If the adventurers are using a small boat, they might try to overturn or breach it. If the vessel is large, they trail along for a few hours, hoping for an opportunity.
4. A terrible storm and/or rolling fog sweeps in. There is a 50% chance 5d4 *Nixies* (water sprites, LFG p.125) sneak on board to cause trouble.
5. *Mutiny!* If the PCs have chartered a ship, the crew rebels, engulfing the vessel in chaos as the quartermaster attempts to usurp control!
6. Something truly colossal rises from the deep, sending gigantic tentacles slithering across the deck. A *Luck* (Dex) save is required to avoid being dragged into the water (crushed for 3d10 damage each round, drowning rules apply LFG p.159). A Str Contest (vs Str 23) is needed to break free.



Map 1



Area 1 - Entry Path

The approach to the church is on a moderate incline, the dirt path turning to stone steps, with a handful of gravestones spread about the area. The building is on a small rise and in poor condition (despite being a relatively new structure); the door is broken, as are the windows and the tower partially collapsed (leaning precariously to one side).

When the adventurers arrive, there may be one or more toadmen on sentry duty (50% chance at each of Areas 4, 5 and 6), concealed in the trees or lake (the church occasionally attracts humanoids that the toadmen prey upon). If present, they are well hidden, using their chameleonic ability to gain advantage on any Perc (Detection) vs Dex (Stealth) checks. Whether detected or not, at least one sentry makes haste to summon others from the underwater caverns.

Area 2 - Church

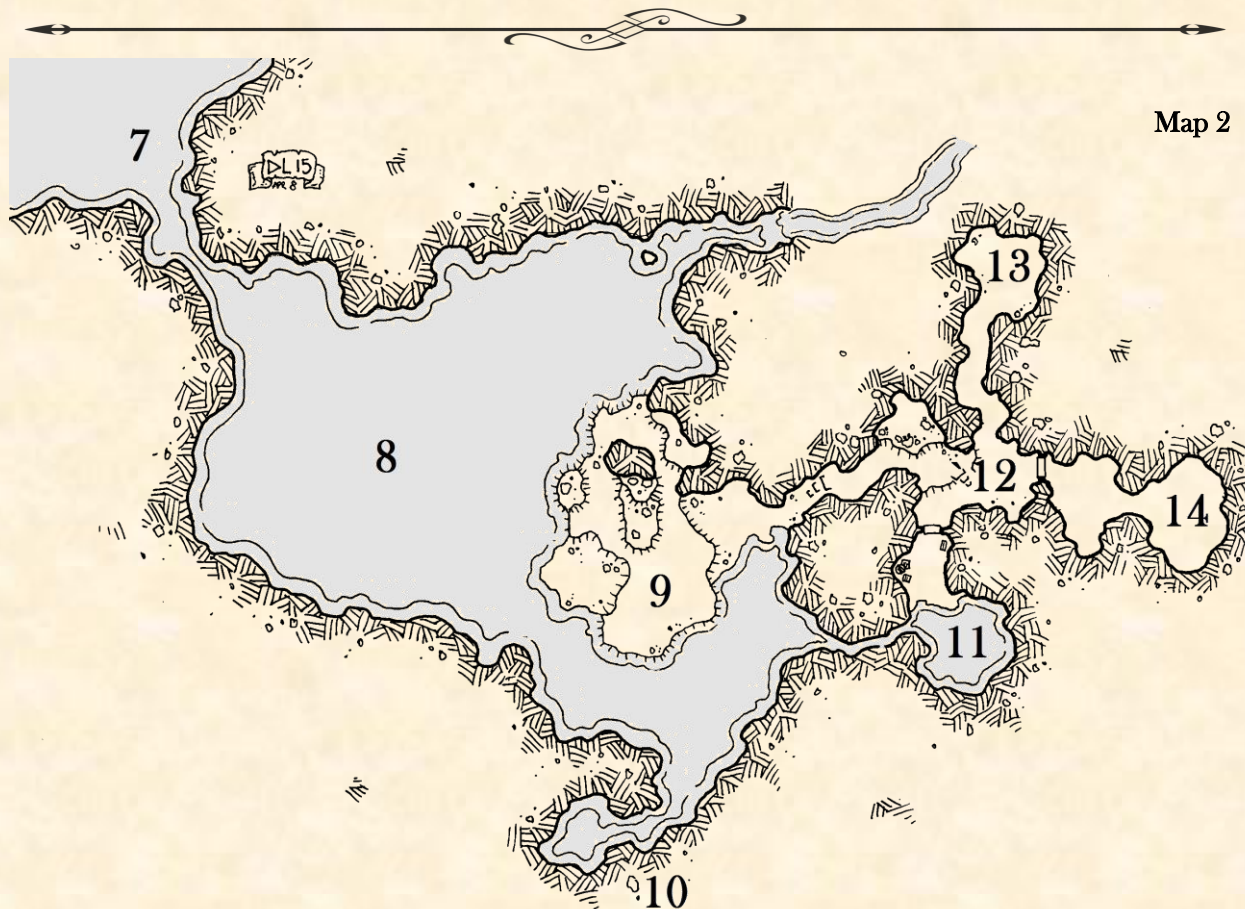
The church is wooden framed with plaster walls, the entry door and windows broken. Most dangerously, the roof and tower are collapsing.

The interior is in ruins, pews shattered and the altar (which bears Argona's starmaiden icon; a beautiful woman with a trail of stars in lieu of legs) defaced, smeared with blood and a malodorous, translucent slime.

Wooden steps lead to the collapsing tower. Any attempt to navigate the upper level requires a *Luck* (Int) check to avoid inadvertently collapsing the entire roof (causing 8d6 damage to those below, and a Con check to avoid rolling on the *Injuries & Setbacks* table, LFG p.54).

Little of value remains in the church, but a thorough search reveals 1 x Trinkets & Curios (LFG p.141). A search also reveals clues to the toadmen menace: slime on the altar, a half eaten female skeleton with a large bite from the ribs (consistent with a giant toad/anuran), and a two ft

Map 2



length of shrivelled flesh (giant toad tongue), stuck beneath a broken pew.

If sentries have gone to fetch their kin, it takes 2d6 minutes for them to form a posse. After this time, 2d6+15 tmen (from Area 9) assault the church from all directions, hoping the trap the adventurers inside. If more than half are killed, the remainder attempt to flee into the lake.

Toadmen

No. Appearing: 2d4+1 (hunting party) or 8d10 (spawning cave)

Armor Class: 13

Hit Dice: 2+4

Attacks: Bite (1d8+1)

Nat 19: the toad's tongue snatches the target's weapon or shield from its grasp.

S:17 D:16 C:13 I:4 W:12 Ch:6

Luck: 5

Move: 30 ft including up walls, ceiling, etc

Toadmen are 5 ft humanoid anurans of animal intellect, often bulbous with dark green, noduled

skin. Their back legs are particularly strong and muscular, allowing them to jump up to 30 ft. Toadmen have sticky, prehensile tongues that reach up to 15 ft, helping them climb or grapple foes (gaining advantage). Some variants are known to have slow acting chameleonic abilities (gaining advantage on hide checks after 1d6 minutes of matching their skin colour to the environment). Toadmen see better than humans in darkness, but are still blind in the absence of light. They keep their underwater dens lit with luminous moss, plants and algae.

Area 3 - Vegetable Garden

This fenced off area was once a vegetable garden for the priestesses, now long since overgrown. A small patch of wolfsbane is growing here, enough for 3 doses. A properly brewed wolfsbane mixture (Int (Apothecary) check with proper instructions) splashed on an area or creature will discourage wolves, dogs and lycanthropes (*Luck* (Will) save or flee/delay for 2d6 rounds).

Area 4 – Lake Shore

The lake shore is in this vicinity, dropping away steeply into deep water. About 100 ft to the northeast, and 15 ft deep, is Area 7; the curiously luminescent entry tunnel to the toadmen's underwater caverns. There is a 50% chance of 1d2 toadmen sentries in this area, keeping watch on the lake and church. The edge of the shore displays obvious, humanoid sized, webbed tracks leading into the water.

Area 5 – Northern Trees

This large forested area has a 50% chance of concealing 1d2 toadmen sentries. Scouting here reveals strange, webbed tracks leading to the lake (Int (Wilderness Lore) or Perc check).

Area 6 – Southern Trees

This small forested area has a 50% chance of concealing 1d2 toadmen sentries. Scouting here reveals strange, webbed tracks leading to Area 5 (Int (Wilderness Lore) or Perc check).

Beneath the Lake

The lake water is murky and freezing cold. Vision is poor, up to about 20 feet at best (reducing the further a swimmer descends).

Unless the party follow some toadmen to their lair, finding the 10 ft diameter entry tunnel requires searching and a Perc (Detection) check at a depth below 10 ft. Fighting underwater is difficult and risks drowning (LFG p.159).

Area 7 – Underwater Entrance

This 10 ft diameter tunnel is illuminated by faintly glowing lichen (as is all of the complex), cultivated by the toadmen to help guide them through the passages. The effect is eerie but provides 15 ft of cloudy vision (disadvantage on Perc checks). After descending southeast about 20 ft, the tunnel opens up into Area 8.

Area 8 – Main Cavern

This massive underwater cavern is approximately 130 ft x 110 ft, with a height of 15 ft. The entire

area is completely submerged until a swimmer nears Area 9, when the ceiling rises a few feet, allowing space to regain one's breath.

The north eastern tunnel flows deeper under the earth, to a destination of the GM's choosing. The toadmen tend to use it as a convenient trash chute (when they can be bothered with such things). Unless the party has a way to breathe underwater, any exploration of this tunnel will likely be limited.

There is a 70% chance of 1d8 *Claw Toads* residing here (100% if the toadmen have been alerted to the party). The claw toads are allies of the toadmen (well, they try to resist eating them) and attack intruders. Fighting underwater is particularly dangerous and GMs might wish to remind players of the Party Retreat rule (LFG p.45). One of the claw toads is missing part of its tongue (see Area 2).



Claw Toad

No. Appearing: 1d8

Armor Class: 14

Hit Dice: 4+2

Attacks: Bite (1d12) and Claw (1d6)

Nat 19: Special

S:19 D:12 C:17 I:3 W:14 Ch:2

Luck: 7

Move: 30 ft including up walls, ceiling, etc

Claw toads are 8 ft behemoths, fat and bulging with lumpy skin, an enormous toothed maw, and claws. They may make a special tongue attack up to 15 ft, dragging their target into melee range, and unable to move away without winning a Str contest. On a 19+ attack roll, a claw toad swallows a humanoid target whole. A swallowed target may attack the monster's guts with a small weapon such as a dagger, suffering 3d6 crushing and acidic damage on the monster's turn. Claw toads may spend their move action to jump up to 30 ft.

Area 9 - Dry Land

This 90 ft x 70 ft area rises out of the water with an average 10 ft ceiling. The ground is gritty and irregular, with patches of slick lichen and moss, making for slippery footing.

2d6+20 toadmen live here, mostly eating, sleeping and fighting. Carcasses and bones are spread about, including recent meals of lost barbarians and drowned beastmen. They attack any intruders with savage ferocity. The toadmen know what fire is, and are highly fearful of it, which the party might use to their advantage. A thorough search locates the discarded remains of past victims (1 x Carry Loot, LFG p.136).

Area 10 - Left Overs

This isolated corner is where the claw toads "bury" the indigestible remains of their meals - metals, gemstones, particularly hardy bones, etc. The giant toads are not dissimilar to cats, scratching the lake floor over any remains in a half hearted attempt to bury them before departing. Large numbers of sizable bones, weapons and other metallic objects protrude from the silty floor. 2d4 random weapons and armour (50% chance rusted through), and 1 x Carry Loot, may be scavenged with sufficient time.

Area 11 - Spawning Pool

A "door" of woven kelp and bark blocks the entry to this chamber (wedged in place,

automatically moved by someone with Str 14+, or else a Str check at advantage).

The 30 ft x 20 ft cavern is the toadmen's spawning pool. It has a 12 ft ceiling and is filled with 6 ft of lake water that is thick with white egg foam. There is a 75% chance *Vt'Sut, Boss of Brt'Mok* (toadmen), is here cavorting with 1d6 female toad(wo)men. None dare disturb *Vt'Sut* when he is in the spawning pool, and the croaking festivities within are loud; the adventurers might take him by surprise.

Either way, *Vt'Sut* is highly intelligent for his species, and speaks broken common (learnt from the prisoners in Area 14). His preference is to kill and eat the party, but he might attempt parley first; he did not become Boss of Brt'Mok by charging into every fight, especially when faced with obviously capable warriors.

If questioned about the missing priestesses, *Vt'Sut* admits they ate them ("*Vt'Sut eat loghairs, juicine, yerp*") because they invaded their lands ("*Vaders Vt'Sut placen, so Brt'Mok eat, yerp*"). *Vt'Sut* cares nought for any toadmen slain by the party, but is protective of his harem and himself. If on the losing end of combat, he will attempt to bargain for merciful exile, offering his "*beautimus*" belt, and promising to move the toadmen to a much more remote section of the lake. Whether he keeps such a promise is up to the GM.

Vt'Sut is a 6 ft toadman *Boss Monster* with all the usual benefits (LFG p.95), Int 5 and 4 HD (45 hp). He wears a wide girdle of soft leather, stolen from *Tulrok* in Area 14 (permanent magical object: LFG p.152)

Area 12 - Main Junction

This oddly shaped intersection is about 40 ft x 40 ft at its widest points. There is a 50% chance of 2d4 toadmen moving through here at any one time. The northern nook includes a raised section with a crude bed of bones covered with

luminescent moss (Vt'Sut's bed). A search of the bedding reveals 1 x Valuables (LFG p.147) entangled within and beneath it.

Area 13 – Croc Nest

This 30 ft x 20 ft chamber is home to an elderly 18 ft *Giant Crocodile*, the original inhabitant of the complex. When the toadmen arrived, they sought to oust her, but she killed so many of them they stopped trying. These days she mostly hibernates, occasionally venturing out into the lake when the toadmen forget to feed her. Vt'Sut has a spiteful respect for the giant reptile, and she appreciates his food offerings (including recalcitrant toadmen), so they tolerate one another. There is a 50% chance she is hibernating when the party arrives. Unless they disturb her, she will not bother them.

Giant Crocodile, AC 14, HD 6, Bite 2d6+2, 19: the target loses a limb (*Luck* (Dex) save resists), S20 D10 C19 I3 P10 W12 Ch5, L8, Mv 30 or swim 50 ft. On a 19+, the target is caught in the croc's jaws and rolled/drowned if water present (lose action each turn until successful *Luck* (Dex) save). The veteran reptile has *Off Turn Attacks*.

Area 14 – Prison

This 70 ft x 40 ft chamber has a heavy stone "door" that plugs the entry. A Str check at disadvantage is required to shift it enough to squeeze through.

Inside are two starving human prisoners in poor shape; (i) *Edori*, one of the original priestesses of Argona (40's, tattered rages, missing one arm,

half crazed with despair) and (ii) *Tulrok* (barbarian, diseased bite wounds, thin yet wiry with muscle, and a defiant gaze).

Edori's single wish is to be free of this nightmare. If she survives, she can confirm the toadmen attacks on the church, that she taught Ut'Sut to speak, and other harrowing tales.

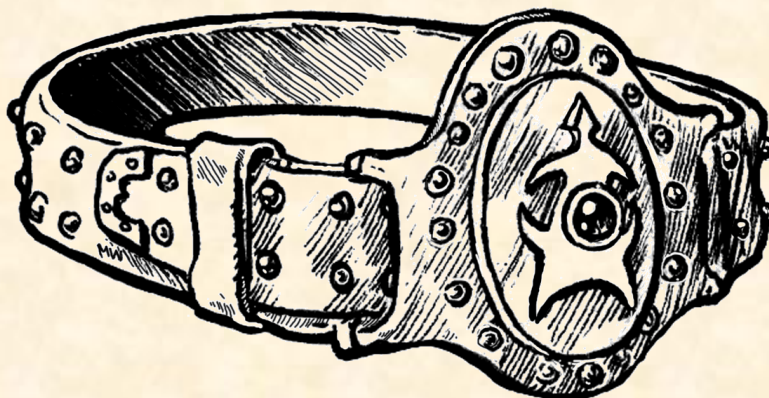
Tulrok wants nothing more than a chance for vengeance, and will gladly attack any toadmen he finds (Barbarian 3, hp: 7). Ulrok has been imprisoned for only four weeks, and does not speak common (only the rare tribal dialect of *Gum'non*). He insists the party keep his belt (see Area 11) out of gratitude for freeing him.

Aftermath

At the GM's option, there is a 50% chance 3d6 toadmen are returning from an unsuccessful hunt just as the adventurers leave the site, requiring one final showdown.

If the toadmen are not discovered, any further priestesses sent to the church are eventually eaten, much to the despair of High Priestess Ulna.

If Vt'Sut and his kin are killed and/or driven off, the church may be re-established, and further settlers attracted to the region. High Priestess Ulna will be very pleased and owe the party a favour.



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