

TG0

Fantasy Renaissance Adventure Module

DEPTHS OF THE CROAKING GROTTO

Written by "Weird Dave" Coulson

An Adventure for Character Levels 3-5



MEMORIES OF THE TOAD GOD #0





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For use with Swords & Wizardry

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*A missing amulet sends the characters on the last caravan of the season bound for the frontier. Tracking the thieves turns into a dangerous journey through rough mountains, where predators and monsters lurk in the shadows of craggy peaks. Can a band of characters recover the missing treasure and return from the **DEPTHS OF THE CROAKING GROTTO**?*

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MEMORIES OF THE TOAD GOD #0

For use with the Swords & Wizardry game

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DEPTHS OF THE CROAKING GROTTO

The isolated town of Kraden's Hill, located on the edges of the frontier in the shadow of the Great Jungle, requires caravans to regularly arrive with goods and then to depart with local commodities. The caravan route is perilous, however, winding through the dangerous Fell Mountains before coming through to the frontier town beyond. Some caravans are waylaid by orcs or mountain beasts, their wreckage discovered by subsequent merchants. Others are never heard from again. But one such merchant caravan carried something of great value that the owners desperately want recovered.

TG0 Depths of the Croaking Grotto is an adventure module for a group of 4 to 6 characters levels 3 to 5. The bulk of the adventure is wilderness-based, so at least a character is recommended with strong survival skillsets. The Fell Mountains hold many dangers especially for those who go poking into its deepest depths.

WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: THE FRONTIER
THE MEMORIES OF THE TOAD GOD SERIES FOCUSES ON
THE FRONTIER TOWN OF KRADEN'S HILL. THIS MODULE SERVES
AS A CONVENIENT TIE-IN TO THE REST OF THE SERIES,
INTRODUCING THE CHARACTERS TO THE REGION AND GIVING
THEM A REASON TO CONTINUE ON TO THE TOWN TO FURTHER
INVESTIGATE THE RUMORS OF CROAKING EVIL LURKING IN THE
JUNGLE WILDERNESS. ADVENTURE AWAITS!

Adventure Background

The frontier town of Kraden's Hill was established only a few years ago by Kraden Grimden, headstrong merchant from Grimden House, one of the most influential trade companies in the region. He saw an opportunity to plunder the natural wealth of the Great Jungle and expand the borders of civilization, lining Grimden House's coffers with gold and establishing stronger and deeper trade ties with other cities and kingdoms.

Or at least this was Kraden Grimden's motive on the exterior and the one for which he was known. Secretly, the merchant wished to find the lost treasures of Xilonoc, an ancient empire hidden away in the jungle, in search for greater personal power. The frontier town established in this way would prove a useful staging point for expeditions into the jungle and his strong ties to Grimden House would make smuggling recovered relics and artifacts relatively easy.

Kraden Grimden did not live past a year after the town walls went up, however. He and his secret expedition went out in search of ruins and were captured by a tribe of cannibal natives and subsequently eaten. His devotion to uncovering the secrets of Xilonoc got the

attention of another prominent merchant company, Novioertum House, who specialize in buying and selling arcane, religious, and historical items.

Natan of Novioertum House, a high ranking agent of the company, arrived in the frontier town shortly after Kraden disappeared. Wasting no time, Natan and his wizardly accomplices learned how far Kraden had gone to find Xilonoc's treasures and seized upon his research when they learned of his untimely demise in the jungle. The uncovered secrets in Kraden's notes and journals prompted Natan to request an item from Novioertum House's warehouse far to the north – a curious copper amulet bearing strange markings. These markings, he correctly presumed, identified the item as originating from Xilonoc.

Novioertum House worked with Grimden House to bring the copper amulet securely through the Fell Mountains to Kraden's Hill as swiftly as possible. Fate intervened, however, as a tribe of degenerate toad-men, long worshippers of Ibholtheg the Squamous Toad, learned that a certain copper amulet was passing through their realm. Blundubba, the shaman, was given a dream and told that the key to Ibholtheg's release onto the world was the copper amulet.

The degenerate toad-men and their allies swarmed the caravan as it passed through the Fell Mountains, claiming the item and other goods and taking it back to their lair in the Croaking Grotto. Furious at the loss and eager to cover the blunder, Grimden House sought out the last merchant planned on making the journey to Kraden's Hill for the season and requested a special job be completed by a team of adventurers on the way.

Module Synopsis

Baldred Invershaw, a merchant captain of some skill, hires the characters to find out what happened to the last caravan to pass through the Fell Mountains as it did not arrive in Kraden's Hill. Baldred's employer, Grimden House, was transporting something very valuable to the frontier town and they are willing to pay handsomely to have the item recovered. The characters accompany Baldred on the last caravan wagon through the Fell Mountains for the season, during some point they are expected to search for the missing goods.

The characters and the caravan arrive at the scene of the original attack, and though about three weeks have passed there are a number of things that can be learned. The trail of the stolen goods leads further into the Fell Mountains, a journey which Baldred does not join but assures them that he will wait for their return.

NPC Profile: Baldred Invershaw, Independent Merchant Captain

Baldred Invershaw is a tall man with broad shoulders and a hefty girth, with a shrewd sense of style that keeps him up to date with the latest fashions in the region. This style sense is matched only by his business wit, which has allowed him to remain independent from the larger merchant companies that run most of the trade routes. He likes his freedom and was never one to shy away from an opportunity.

The journey to Kraden's Hill is one Baldred has made a number of times in the past year, mostly ferrying extra goods from Grimden House to supply the frontier town. He is a smart man, and beneath his jaunty stylish hat his keen eyes take in more than others think. And while he doesn't like the secrecy involved with whatever is in the black oak chest (he honestly has no idea what's in it), if the characters deal straight with him he is more than willing to repay the favor in kind.

Into the Fell Mountains the characters must travel, avoiding dangerous beasts and natural hazards, until they finally come upon their destination – a narrow valley holding a black pool leading into the Croaking Grotto.

The tunnels of the Croaking Grotto are occupied by a tribe of degenerate toad-men who worship a loathsome deity known as the Squamous Toad. Blundubba, a bat-winged toad-man shaman, ordered the raid on the caravan and had the stolen goods brought back to the grotto. The key item, a copper amulet emblazoned with ancient symbols, was foreseen by Blundubba as the instrument through which the Squamous Toad would be released onto the world. The characters must retrieve the copper amulet and return it to Baldred to complete their mission and get paid.

Future Modules

TG0 Depths of the Croaking Grotto leads directly into the beginning of **TG1 Lost Temple of Ibholtheg** and gives the characters a solid reason and adventure hook for traveling to the frontier town of Kraden's Hill. The copper amulet bears symbols from the ancient empire of Xilonoc who existed in the distant past in the jungle. It was the priests and Jaguar Knights of Xilonoc that imprisoned Ibholtheg in a golden temple, and one that the characters are destined to destroy if they continue with the **MEMORIES OF THE TOAD GOD** series.

Involving the Characters

The opening scene of the module assumes the characters have already negotiated a fair price for their service and have hired on with Baldred Invershaw and his merchant caravan.

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.

Fell Mountains: A mountain range on the edge of civilization, south of which sits the Great Jungle. A wild and dangerous place with only a single mapped route connecting to Kraden's Hill.

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.

Ibholtheg: Squamous bat-toad entity of ancient antiquity. Worshipped by mutant toad-men, 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.

PART ONE: TRAIL OF THE COPPER AMULET

The module opens with the characters accompanying Balder Invershaw and his caravan through the Fell Mountains bound for the frontier town of Kraden's Hill. However, the characters have a slightly different mission for which they were contracted – to find the contents of a missing caravan wagon that failed to arrive. The site of the original ambush provides some clues as to the nature of the attack and leads the party into the wilds of the Fell Mountains to face dangerous foes and unpredictable natural problems before they finally find the Croaking Grotto.

The Journey South

Read or paraphrase the following to begin the adventure.

The jagged peaks of the Fell Mountains loom over you like angry giants, a constant reminder of the wild territory you're crossing and the threat of danger. You were hired a few days to accompany Baldred Invershaw, a merchant captain, on the last caravan train for the season bound for the frontier town of Kraden's Hill on the other side of the mountains. Not only to accompany, however, but to investigate and recover goods on the previous caravan that hasn't arrived two tendays ago. The going has been swift, thankfully, with no problems yet.

The characters were hired for 75 gold each to find and recover the stolen goods on the previous caravan, with particular emphasis on a small black oak chest with an intricate silver lock that held a copper amulet.

WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: FLASHBACK OPPORTUNITY
AFTER INTRODUCING THE CHARACTERS TO THE MOUNTAINS AND LETTING THEM KNOW WHAT THEY SIGNED UP, YOU CAN USE THE OPPORTUNITY TO FLASH BACK TO THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH BALDRED INVERSHAW IF YOU WANTED. IT CAN BE AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR A DM TO USE, AND ONE THAT DOESN'T SEE PLAY OFTEN AT THE TABLE.

Baldred Invershaw, the caravan leader, knows the route quite well through the Fell Mountains and tells the characters that the journey shouldn't take more than a tenday to complete. However, he also knows that dangerous things lurk in the mountains – he's heard strange noises at night, especially in the last few months. Manticores are known to roam the area, along with tribes of mountain savages, orc bands, and wyverns. Rock slides can block paths and sudden violent storms are known to roll through the mountains.

Few of them seem interested in anything the wagons bring south or north, however—in Baldred's experience, the creatures simply seek fresh meat rather than to raid and pillage. This is why he suspects they'll find the ruins of the previous caravan along with the goods somewhere along the road, rooted through for food of course but otherwise intact.

The Ambush Site

After about ten days of travel, the characters and their caravan train arrive at the site of the ambush. This is the location marked on the map with an "X". Read or paraphrase the following.



The poorly maintained road has been leading you through a series of narrow valleys for the past several days, though the path opens up a bit as you approach midday. Ahead you hear the caravan master call for a halt followed by a quick whistle calling you forward. Arriving at the front, you see why the caravans have stopped. Several hundred feet away lay the remains of three wagons in piles of split lumber and broken wheels. Large black carrion birds pick at the darkly stained ground around the wreckage.

The ambush happened roughly three weeks ago when the Grimden House wagons were set upon by the croaking hordes of Blundubba and his degenerate toad-man warriors. The toad-men killed the guards, stole the copper amulet, and destroyed the three caravans, hopping away into the mountains to the east.

Characters that approach the wreckage can identify the following clues with successful Wisdom checks.

- The dark stains on the ground are blood, quite a lot of it, from horses and men.
- There were three wagons on this caravan train, each marked with the symbol of Grimden House on their side.
- There are signs that the bodies of the horses and men have been picked apart by carrion eaters, including large scratch marks from some beast.
- It appears to have only rained once since the attack, and vague webbed foot prints can be found around the area.
- The webbed foot prints move east into the mountains though the trail quickly becomes lost amidst the rocks of the mountains.

Searching the wreckage itself turns up bundles of silk and cured leather, torn to shreds by claws and swords, along with a few cheap trinkets. Baldred Invershaw claims these and explains that this is what he was told to do (not a lie). A thorough search of the area turns up a black wooden box marked with the symbol of Noviortum House (a stylized N) with a velvet interior. The box is empty and clearly discarded after its contents were taken. The box matches the description given to the characters.

WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: USING BALDRED
BALDRED INVERSHAW SHOULD BE VIEWED AS A FRIEND TO THE CHARACTERS, OR AT LEAST A DISINTERESTED THIRD PARTY. HE WORKS FOR MANY MERCHANT HOUSES, THOUGH HIS MOST LUCRATIVE CONTRACTS ARE WITH GRIMDEN HOUSE, SO HE WANTS TO SEE THE CHARACTERS SUCCEED. HE CAN BE USED TO PROD THE CHARACTERS INTO ACTION IF THEY DON'T TAKE IT UP THEMSELVES.

Exploring the Fell Mountains

The characters must now explore the Fell Mountains searching for the copper amulet. The trail leading southeast should be easy enough to find to begin with, but after that the characters must traverse the mountains in search of the toad-men.

Provide the players a copy of **Player's Handout** showing the map of the Fell Mountains that they must search broken down into hexes. Each hex is 1 mile and divided into one of three terrain types – valley path, mountain slopes, and mountain peaks.

WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: A HEXCRAWL!
ROLEPLAYING GAMES HAVE A GRAND HISTORY OF HEXCRAWLS, WHEREIN THE PLAYERS ARE GIVEN A HEXED MAP AND TOLD TO GO EXPLORING. THIS SECTION OF THE ADVENTURE SHOULD CALL BACK TO THOSE EXPERIENCES OF PLAYERS FREEDOM AND CHOICE, EVEN IF ONLY IN A SMALL AREA!

The DM's map of the Fell Mountains includes numbered hexes, and these correspond to the sites listed below. Leave it up to the players to drive their progress.

A lot of the numbered hexes have a potential to effect adjacent hexes, so if the party enters a hex next to one of them make sure to check and see if something comes to investigate.

1. Abandoned Toad-Man Cave

Close to the ambush site sites a cave near the base of the mountain peak used by the toad-men after their attack. They came here to lick their wounds and rest up before returning to the Croaking Grotto with their prize.

Finding the cave requires entering the hex and making a Wisdom tracking check. If they are following the tracks from the ambush site give them +2 on the check. If they succeed read or paraphrase the following.

The jagged peaks of the Fell Mountains loom over you, but your eyes may have found a secret they were trying to hide. In between some boulders near the base of a tall peak you spot a cave entrance.

A dripping sound can be heard from inside but nothing else. The cave is currently unoccupied, but searching it turns up bits of bone, half-eaten flesh, and a crusty leather patch marked with the sigil of Grimden House. The dripping comes from a small pool in the back of the cave fed by stalactites clinging to the 10-foot-high ceiling. There are more webbed foot prints along the edges of the brackish pool, which is only about 5 feet deep.



Treasure: In the center of the pool, weighed down by a rock, is a waterproof sack made from the stomach of a large toad. Inside sits 120 gold taken from the caravan.

2. Lone Wyvern Peak

A nasty territorial **wyvern** keeps a nest towards the top of this peak. If the characters enter this hex or any adjacent hex during the day there is a 2 in 6 chance that the wyvern spots them and attacks.

Tactics: The wyvern is brash and hungry and sees anything living that enters its territory as nothing more than food. It tries to dislodge rocks from a higher elevation up the mountain to wound the characters. The wyvern spends a few rounds pushing boulders and rocks down on the party, who all must make saving throws or suffer 3d6 bludgeoning damage, half damage on a success. Once it has softened up its prey the wyvern flies in as fast as it can and stings whichever character seems to be hurting it, focusing on spellcasters and ranged attackers where possible.

Treasure: The wyvern has a small lair in this hex discoverable with a Wisdom check. Inside is a skeleton of a toad-man picked clean by the wyvern no less than 3 weeks ago along with older skeletons of orcs, humans, and other toad-men. Scattered about from various raids are 10 semi-precious gemstones worth 20 gold each.

3. Shadow Orc Camp

Degenerate toad-men are not the only ones that live in the Fell Mountains. Bands of gray-skinned shadow orcs also hunt and gather around the area, feuding with one another and killing the toad-men when they encounter them. If the party enters this hex or any adjacent hex during the day they have a 1 in 6 chance of encountering a scouting party; at night the odds increase to 3 in 6.

The camp itself is little more than a dozen crude triangular tents made from animal hides between some boulders on the slope of one of the peaks. There are a total of **24 shadow orc warriors** led by a **shadow orc warband chief**, some male and some female, that live in the camp currently. They are the Pit Fury warband of the Sukkanmi Tribe charged with keeping this region under the control of their tribe.

Tactics: A scouting party consists of **8 shadow orc warriors** from the camp moving as stealthily as they can. If they spot the characters without being noticed themselves, they set a crude ambush, leaping out from behind rocks and boulders to hurl javelins before charging into glorious melee.

The camp keeps a lookout shadow orc warrior posted at the northwestern and southeastern edges of the hex. These lookouts are trained to spot movement and send out a bird call to the tribe, alerting them to trouble. The bird call can be identified as false with an Intelligence check by a ranger, druid, or elf.

What the Shadow Orcs Know

If the characters think to question one of the shadow orcs, they are going to have to break the language barrier – they only speak a guttural version of Orcish. They don't give up information willingly, even under torture, but if coerced with magic they can be made to reveal the following.

- The shadow orcs are many and lay claim to all of these mountains! They fight with the wyverns and raid the men that come through on their way to the "great jungle."
- There are toad-men in the mountains too, creatures that worship foul and loathsome gods in their caves.
- There have been increased activity from the toad-men lately, but the Sukkanmi have not yet been able to find their lair. They think it is somewhere to the southeast.
- The sacred cave to the northeast contains the shadow orc's sacred treasure. The warband chief is the only one that knows the secret word to enter the cave ("Sukkanmi").
-

- There are a trio of manticores that live to the east – the orcs would love to kill them but the warband chief has decided to appease them with offerings of flesh from captured merchants and toad-men.

Treasure: The shadow orcs in the camp keep a meager chest of treasure that they've managed to raid from caravans. They offer these up to the tribal leaders twice a year and the time approaches, so their coffers are full. One of the hide tents contains a wooden chest (unlocked) containing 425 silver, 200 gold, and six gemstones each worth 30 gold.

4. Sacred Cave

The shadow orcs made their camp southwest of a cave that has become sacred to their small band. The cave can be found towards the top of the peak with a Wisdom check. The narrow opening sits between two boulders, each carved with pictograms and symbols of orcish sorcery.

Inside is a steep staircase, crudely cut into the mountain, descending down about one hundred feet.

Trap: After a living creature descends the staircase a chill breeze picks up from below and a low moan escapes the darkness. The ghostly face of a long-dead orc warchief appears spectrally before the visitor, opening its mouth menacingly. If no one speaks the appeasement word ("Sukkanmi") the ghost lets out a shriek as the stairs melt away to create a steep chute! Any character inside the tunnel suffers 3d6 bludgeoning damage at the bottom of the tunnel and 60-foot-long drop, saving throw for half. The stairs only reappear when the appeasement word is spoken.

Climbing up the chute requires three separate Strength checks, each check representing 20 feet of slow climbing. A failure sends the character tumbling back down for falling damage (-10 feet because of the slope).

Treasure: At the base of the stairs (or chute if the word was not spoken) is a cave roughly 20 feet wide and long. The skeleton of an orc warchief sits on a crude stone throne in the corner, a sheathed long sword resting in his lap. The weapon is a *long sword +1*.

5. Orc Burial Site

The shadow orcs of the Pit Fury warband bury their honored dead on this slope. They bury them in crude, rocky cairns as the ground is too hard to dig graves. Each cairn is marked with a large white stone carved with Orcish symbols denoting the name of the fallen warrior.

6. Lazy Manticore Peak

A greedy group of **3 manticore** live near the peak of a mountain in this hex. They have carved out a nice cave for themselves and see this entire area as their own, though they have also become quite lazy. Nonetheless, there is a 1 in 6 chance of running into a flying manticore in adjacent hexes, and a 2 in 6 chance of encountering one in this hex. The manticores are just as active at night as they are during the day.

Tactics: If a manticore spots the characters, it flies immediately back to the lair to alert the others. The trio then decide that intruders must be killed (and the orcs haven't provided fresh meat for many days) so they wing out to attack the party as soon as possible. They use their tail spikes for several rounds before closing into melee with bite and claw.

The manticores are not interested in dealing with the party, but if they are made an offer of meat – especially horse meat – they stop to listen. They know the exact location of the Valley of the Howling Toad but haven't been there in quite a few months, as the toad-men cower and taste bad to them. They trade horse meat (one horse for each character if possible) for this information.

Treasure: The cave the manticores have claimed as their lair is a filthy place filled with rotting carcasses and discarded bones. Scattered about are 200 gold pieces and a pair of *boots of striding and springing*.

7. Shrine of Iboltheg the Squamous Toad

Several miles from the Croaking Grotto the toad-men have erected a shrine to their unwholesome deity, Iboltheg the Squamous Toad. A band of **6 degenerate toad-men** live near the shrine, keeping it safe from orcish vandals and other vagabonds. There is a 1 in 6 chance of encountering a single **degenerate toad-man** in adjacent hexes out on patrol.

Read or paraphrase the following if the characters explore this hex.

The slope of the mountain is littered with broken boulders and shattered rocks, but an oddly clear area sits below a broad shelf on the eastern end. In the shadow of the shelf you can just barely make out a statue, roughly ten feet tall, depicting a squatting toad made of unusual green porous stone.

Tactics: If the toad-man on patrol spots the characters, it hops with all haste back to the shrine to warn the others. If the toad-men have time to prepare, they crouch in the shadows of the shrine behind the statue, waiting for the right moment to pounce and catch the characters by surprise.

Due to the proximity of the shrine, one of the toad-men can attempt to call upon Ibholtheg's favor in battle. By taking an action and croaking loudly to the sky, the toad-man channels the Squamous Toad's power. The eyes on the shrine glow brightly and all degenerate toad-men within sight of the shrine gain +2 on their attack rolls. They fight until death.

Treasure: The statue of Ibholtheg can be identified with a successful Intelligence check as an ancient god of intelligent frogs and toads from a long ago era. Inside the bulbous head of the statue (which smashes easily with a blunt weapon) is a large emerald gemstone worth 250 gold.

8. Valley of the Croaking Toad

The Croaking Grotto is attached to the Valley of the Croaking Toad, which contains a shallow pool of black water fed by the grotto itself. Read or paraphrase the following once the characters explore this hex.

The tall peaks of the Fell Mountains have hidden this narrow valley from prying eyes. An eerie silence falls over the area as you gaze upon the pool of black water at the base of the valley, fed by a narrow cave entrance on the eastern side. A single switchback zig-zags down the steep valley slope to the pool below.

As the characters descend into the valley, a series of loud croaks echo all around them, lasting for about a minute. The croaks are a natural alarm created by Blundubba's influence over the valley, and also how it got its name.

At the base of the valley, the pool is actually quite shallow, only about 5 feet deep, but its bottom is muddy and thick. It stretches about 60 feet wide and 100 feet long. There are **6 giant toads** hiding in the mud, alerted to the characters' presence by the croaking.

The entrance into the Croaking Grotto itself is marked on the map as **area 1**.

Tactics: The giant toads wait for the characters to enter the pool before leaping to attack, attempting to swallow opponents and then submerge beneath the water and back into the mud. The toads suffer no movement penalties from the difficult terrain of the pool.

PART TWO: THE CROAKING GROTTO

After searching the wild and dangerous Fell Mountains the characters finally arrive at the entrance to the Croaking Grotto where the trail of stolen caravan goods leads. Inside dwells the degenerate toad-men of the Howling Frog Tribe and their shaman, Blundubba. The toad-men do not give up their prizes easily and likely the characters face some tough scrapes in the mountain caves, but with luck and determination they recover the copper amulet along with other goods and make their way back to Balder Invershaw.

General Features

Ceiling: Unless otherwise noted, the ceiling in the caves is 15 feet high.

Slick: In areas where there is no standing water the floor of the cave is slick. Any non-toad-man moving more than 20 feet in a single round must make a Dexterity check or fall prone. A running character suffers -4 on the check.

Water: In areas where there is standing water, the water is about 5 feet deep and sludge-like at the bottom. Water-filled areas are considered difficult terrain because of the sludge.

The Depths of the Croaking Grotto

1. Narrow Entrance

The shallow black pool at the base of the valley enters or is fed by a narrow opening in the mountain wall. The water is still enough to the point where you're not sure if it flows out or in, but it doesn't appear to be any deeper through the ten-foot-wide, ten-foot-tall entrance.

The blackness of the water is a result of foul rites and rituals performed by Blundubba, but ultimately it is harmless to the touch. There's a point in the crooked path where the characters have to go single file before entering the wider Croaking Grotto. The sounds of dripping water and faint splashing can be heard from within.

2. Croaking Grotto

The narrow entrance widens greatly into a broad grotto easily one hundred feet wide. At the far end in front of you, slick rocks stand jumbled together to form a crude and slippery looking solid ground. The walls of the grotto are wet and far above hang dozens of stalactites dripping fetid water down. Amidst the rocks at the end a roaring fire dances, casting orange and yellow light across the entire grotto. Croaking and chanting can be heard from behind the slick stones.

Unless the characters have managed to enter the valley without triggering the croaking, the shaman of the tribe, Blundubba, is in **area 3** here along with some degenerate toad-men. They hop and dance wildly around the fire, calling out to the Squamous Toad to answer their prayers. And, with the aid of the copper amulet, Ibholtheg answers.

A round after the characters enter the Croaking Grotto, the still surface of the black water ripples and breaks as a monstrous creature lurches to life. A **great slime toad**, composed of dark mud and viscous green slime, rises up with a croaking roar in the middle of the water.

Tactics: The water in the Croaking Grotto is no deeper than it was outside but it is deep enough to hamper movement. The great slime toad uses its tongue attack to lash at any character that deals it significant damage at a range before hopping forward to crush opponents with its mud claws. The **6 degenerate toad-men** from **area 3** engage in combat as well.

Once defeated, the great slime toad collapses in a bubbling black mass, mingling back into the mud and thick water. When this happens, Blundubba flees to **area 8**.

3. Altar of Slime

A horrid stench rises from the slick rocks at the eastern end of the grotto. Behind a pile of jumbled stones sits a shallow pit filled with the embers of the once blazing fire you saw when you entered. Next to the fire pit is a carved stone block made of a strange green porous material. It is coated in glistening slime that seems fresh.

This is the altar upon which Blundubba summoned the great slime toad with the aid of the copper amulet. It is marked with symbols of Ibholtheg the Squamous Toad, identifiable with an Intelligence check, though crudely carved by unskilled hands.

The slime that coats the altar is mildly acidic, dealing 1d6 points of acid damage to any living non-toad-

man creature that touches it. It can dissolve regular stone and metal as well, though in a matter of minutes through constant contact.

When the great slime toad is summoned, **Blundubba** and **6 degenerate toad-men** squawk and croak at the altar. The toad-men rush forward to combat with the great slime toad but Blundubba hangs back, careful not to be seen. When his forces are defeated, the high priest hop-flies down the tunnel to **area 8** to mount a defense.

4. Secret Pool

The narrow passage leading to this area is shrouded in shadows and well-hidden. It is visible only with a close inspection or a Wisdom check. At the end of the short tunnel sits a small cave where the bottom drops down 40 feet (still filled with the black water).

Treasure: At the bottom rests a waterproof sack containing a small treasure cache Blundubba was saving in case of an emergency – 250 gold, a *potion of flying*, and a *wand of hold portal* (10 charges).

5. Common Area

The passage from the rocky island in the grotto leads up slick stone steps in darkness. Croaking and webbed feet slapping against stone can be heard ahead.



NPC Profile: Blundubba, Winged Toad-Man Shaman

Toad-men born with bat-like wings are a rarity and have a life of luxury ahead of them in their role as spiritual communicators of a tribe. Blundubba was born fortunate, but also greedy and cowardly. He learned the ways of Ibholtheg the Squamous Toad and knew the incantations, but it was all just words to him – he didn't really believe that the Squamous Toad would ever be released from its prison, wherever that was.

Then Blundubba was given a vision one night, a vision of a copper amulet and a caravan wagon that was poorly guarded. Shocked into action by this vision and the following impulse, Blundubba gathered his meager tribe and led them from the Croaking Grotto to the site he saw in his vision. His vision did not lie, and the toad-men were able to overtake the three wagons easily. Amongst the possessions Blundubba found the copper amulet he saw in his vision and felt great power surging through it. The toad-men made their way back to the Croaking Grotto where they fell into great reverence of the winged shaman, who suddenly had real power in his clawed hands.

The toad-men of the tribe gather here to listen to the tales told by Blundubba about the power of the Squamous Toad. They listen and obey everything the winged shaman says. There are a total of **12 degenerate toad-men** in this area.

Tactics: If the shaman was able to escape after the defeat of the great slime toad, three of the toad-men are crouched in the shadows of the plateau on the northern end of the cave. The plateau is 7 feet tall. The other nine line in wait around the corners (three of them in front of the door to **area 6**, six of them in the tunnel leading to **area 7**). They attack savagely and with reckless abandon.

6. Cleansing Pool

The tunnel from **area 3** to this area is underwater, 50 feet long, and only 5 feet wide. The easier path is from **area 5**. The below description assumes the characters enter from the north. The door to the area is made of wood and closed but not locked.

An overwhelming stench washes over you as you enter this cave. A pool of water, thicker and somehow blacker than the larger grotto, fills the southern half of the cave. Along the cave walls leading up to the sludge-like pool are a handful of barrels and boxes, some marked with merchant house symbols.

The toad-men of this small tribe would bathe and be "cleansed" in the waters of this pool by Blundubba. Ultimately, the ceremony was nothing more than mummary and ancient phrases but it made the toad-men feel "holy."

Treasure: The barrels and boxes contain goods stolen from caravans over the past several months. Baldred Invershaw would pay 150 gold for them directly, though there are four barrels and three boxes to carry.

7. Sleeping Cave

The stench of this cave nearly makes you gag. Small puddles of black stagnant water rest in numerous indents and holes along the floor along with scattered spears and other mundane gear.

This is where most of the toad-men sleep. If Blundubba escaped **area 3** his croaks of warning are enough to rouse the **6 degenerate toad-men** that were sleeping here, who wait in the corners of the cave to ambush intruders.

Treasure: Blundubba did not allow the toad-men to keep worldly possessions so there is little treasure to be found here. However, one of the toad-men did manage to sneak away with a +1 dagger hidden amongst a pile of oilskin cloths.

8. Cave of the Winged Shaman

The door to this cave is locked and barred from the inside if Blundubba was able to escape from **area 3**. It takes three open door checks to break the door down.

A heady scent of incense fills your nostrils as you look into this small cave complex. The area appears to be divided into two forty-foot-wide caves with a ten-foot passage running between them. The first one that the door leads into is dry, unlike the rest of the grotto caves, with a crude straw mat laid out on the stony floor. Several pots sit in the corners with faint incense smoke curling up from them. The second cave is slimy and filled with all manner of discarded goods – cloth bolts, leather skins, and an assortment of other odds and ends sit in a moist pile.

Blundubba, the winged shaman of the toad-man tribe, keeps the wealth that his followers have raided in the second cave of his personal chamber. The shaman's **2 frogflesh golems** squat at the ready in the first cave.

Tactics: Blundubba is greedy and cowardly, a combination the characters can use to try and negotiate with him if they so choose. Otherwise, if they break into his cave he orders the wax golems to attack while he hangs in the back and casts as many spells as possible.

Treasure: Blundubba carries the *Amulet of the Servant*, the copper amulet required by the characters to complete their mission for Grimden House. The accumulated wealth of the tribe comes to 500 gold in heavy, sodden goods (roughly 200 pounds of trade goods) easily sellable in the frontier town of Kraden's Hill.

WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: AMULET POWERS
ULTIMATELY, THE AMULET OF THE SERVANT THAT BROUGHT
THE CHARACTERS INTO THE MOUNTAINS IN THE FIRST PLACE
CAN DO WHATEVER YOU NEED IT TO DO. IT IS ADVISABLE
TO HAVE ITS POWERS LOCKED AWAY FROM THE PARTY, BUT
PERHAPS IT CAN BE USED AS A TOOL TO COMMUNICATE WITH
POWERFUL PATRON BEINGS?

EPILOGUE

Once the characters defeat (or trick) Blundubba and take the copper amulet, they can return to Baldred Invershaw and the caravan on the mountain road. The merchant captain is happy to see the characters and reports that they didn't have any troubles while they were gone, though he is eager to get back on the road to Kraden's Hill.

Rewards

The characters should be rewarded in XP by encountering the monsters and hazards in the adventure. In addition, you can award additional XP based on these points or any other roleplaying factors you see fit.

- Found the Croaking Grotto
- Defeated the great slime toad
- Recovered the copper amulet

Next Steps

This adventure can lead directly into **TG1 Lost Temple of Ibholtheg** with the characters arriving in Kraden's Hill. There are rumors of a golden pyramid somewhere in the Great Jungle and the merchant powers of the frontier town are seeking experienced adventurers to accompany forays to find the treasure site. Shadow orcs, toad-men, ancient demons, and hidden treasure await the characters in Kraden's Hill and beyond!

TG0 Monster and NPC Information

Wyvern: HD 8; hp 47; AC 3 [16]; Atk bite (2d8) or sting (1d6 plus poison); Move 6, fly 24; Save 8; Special: poison (save or suffer -4 to attacks and saves for 1d4 days); AL N; CL/XP 10/1400

Shadow orc warrior: HD 1; hp 6 each; AC 6 [13]; Atk spear (1d6); Move 9; Save 17; AL C; CL/XP 1/15

Shadow orc warband chief: HD 4; hp 22; AC 4 [15]; Atk spear (1d6+1); Move 9; Save 13; AL C; CL/XP 4/120

Manticore: HD 6+4; hp 33; AC 4 [15]; Atk 2 claws (1d3) and bite (1d8); Move 12, fly 18; Save 11; Special: tail spikes (shoot 6 per round instead of attacking, 1d6 damage each); AL C; CL/XP 8/800

Degenerate toad-man: HD 3; hp 15 each; AC 6 [13]; Atk spear (1d6+1); Move 9, swim 12; Save 14; AL C; CL/XP 3/60

Giant toad: HD 4; hp 18 each; Atk 1 bite (1d10); Move 6; Save 14; Special: hop (30 feet); AL N; CL/XP 4/120

NPC Profile: Baldred Invershaw, Independent Merchant Captain

Baldred Invershaw is a tall man with broad shoulders and a hefty girth, with a shrewd sense of style that keeps him up to date with the latest fashions in the region. This style sense is matched only by his business wit, which has allowed him to remain independent from the larger merchant companies that run most of the trade routes. He likes his freedom and was never one to shy away from an opportunity.

The journey to Kraden's Hill is one Baldred has made a number of times in the past year, mostly ferrying extra goods from Grimden House to supply the frontier town. He is a smart man, and beneath his jaunty stylish hat his keen eyes take in more than others think. And while he doesn't like the secrecy involved with whatever is in the black oak chest (he honestly has no idea what's in it), if the characters deal straight with him he is more than willing to repay the favor in kind.

Great slime toad: HD 7; hp 37; AC 3 [16]; Atk 2 tentacles (1d8) and bite (1d4+1 plus disease); Move 6; Save 9; Special: disease (save or death in 3d6 days unless cured); AL N; CL/XP 8/800

Blundubba, winged toad-man shaman: HD 4+4; hp 22; AC 6 [13]; Atk spear (1d6+1); Move 9, swim 12, fly 9; Save 13; Special: spellcasting (cleric, 2/1 – *cause light wounds, hold person*); AL C; CL/XP 5/240

Frogflesh golem: HD 6; hp 30; AC 9 [10]; Atk claws (2d8); Move 8; Save 10; Special: magic items to hit, slowed by fire and cold, immune to other spells; AL N; CL/XP 10/1400

NPC Profile: Blundubba, Winged Toad-Man Shaman

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Fell Mountains

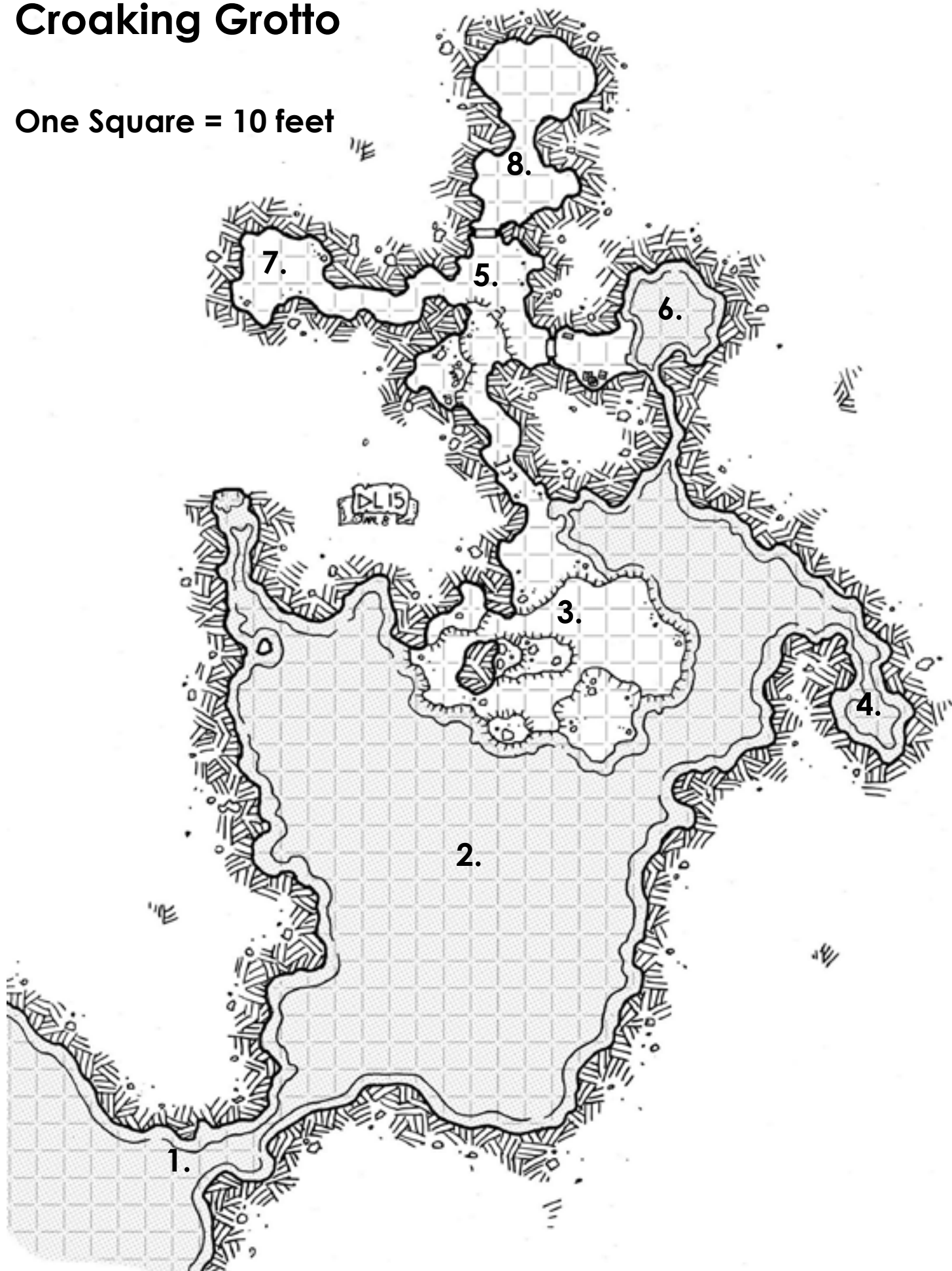


Fell Mountains



Croaking Grotto

One Square = 10 feet



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