

TOAD OF HOLDING

*A Short Treatise on the Arean Toad
as Monster, Wallet and Gate*



Introduction

So I was thinking about the *Bag of Holding* as a way to sidestep or at least trivialize the trouble of having to choose between what to keep and what to leave behind. A hypermodern fantasy of non-friction, of obedient invisible porters, of work without workers. Very well, but what if the bag in question was a grumpy, demanding *toad*?

Which led to this mini zine. Use it as you see fit! Here's the table of content:

- 1 Origin of a Species
- 2 Monster/Dungeon entrance: Elder Toad of Holding
- 3 Somewhere Between the Twin Canals
 - of Thoth-Nepenthes
- 4 Adventure Location: The Quarry
- 6 Eggs of Stashing or *Sword Swallowers Delight*
- 6 Monster:Insatiable Tadpole
- 7 Monster/Retainer: Juvenile Toad of Holding
- 8 Class: Toad Tender
- 9 Retrieval Failure Table
- 10 1d6 Toad Rumours & 1d4 Toads and Tenders

Origin of a Species

The era which is not to be referred to as the Age of Decadence (The reigns of the Nth-Emperors, ending with the God-Queen Aelita, having been excised from Imperial annals) brought with it all the wonders and horrors of post-scarcity imagination. The Toads of Holding are such artefacts of dubitable practicality.

Most likely the result of a passing biomantic fancy, the migratory sexual drive of the common Arean toad was isolated and turned in on itself. Through this displacement of libidinal practices, love was forced to find another way – one that could be put to communicative uses. Turned introspective and sedentary, the amorous peregrinates of the toads were resumed as *internal longing*, the inside of the individual toad slowly expanding and – when reaching sexual maturity – forming spatial pseudopods, entwining and joining with the insides of others of its kind. This, in time, created a species-being spanning pocket dimension dominated by the *Sea of Acid*, stretching out under a pharyngeal horizon.

This *inner mating ball* enabled the autopoiesis of the species, while also allowing those willing to be swallowed to travel over great distances, maw to maw. For a while worlds grew closer: Ideas, dreams and passions flew through the Ether at an unfathomable speed. But like so many things conceived during those brief, feverish millenia, with Necessity seemingly exiled from the Red planet, the toads were soon put to new uses. Touring art exhibitions were muscled out by regiments of *terracottieri*, exotic food-stuffs by vehicles of destruction.

The Sea of Acid swarmed with the warships of would-be emperors, and a *War of Entrails* laid waste to most mature toads, closing down the amphibian network.

But some eggs remained. Now the remnants of the species are scattered around the Red Planet and, perhaps, beyond.

Cover illustration by Édouard Riou (Journey to the Center of the Earth, 1864) minus the toad. Ills. on pg 6 and 9 by Jessie Wilcox Smith (Water babies, 1916) and Alfred Walter Bayes (Stories for the household, 1889) respectively. All are public domain.

p. 4-5: Cartography by Dyson Logos, modified with details from public domain works.

Monster or Dungeon Entrance: Elder Toad of Holding

Size, intelligence and memory of an elephant. Half closed eyes, glazed over and distant. Sighs. Found in canals, caves and the estates of the powerful. Might speak or barter if approached in the right manner.

Mode of travel: If you cover yourself in appropriate food for an *ennui*-haunted ancient amphibian, you will be promptly swallowed and transported to the shore of the Acid Sea and the Tongue Lands.

No. Appearing: 1 **HD:** 9 **AC:** As chain mail

Attacks: 1 **Bite** (1d10, save or lose all **HP** permanently. If the damage > the character's **HD**, it is swallowed whole into the pocket dimension instead)

OR Trample (50% each round, **AOE**, hits all adjacent targets in melee distance, 4d8 damage).

Special: *Loud Croak*. Once per battle. Deafens other combatants (Save or permanent ear damage). Roll for random encounters.

Special 2: *Spew Reinforcements* (When **HP** is halved): Roll on a random encounter table not appropriate for the setting; the toad vomits forth lost travellers or monsters from within. Roll reaction for the newly arrived.

MV: Twice human in water, half human on land.

Morale: 10 **Saves As:** Fighter **Alignment:** Neutral

Treasure: 50% vomits random treasure at death. If in lair 25% chance of 2d4 *Eggs of Stashing*. Also:

Magic Item: Toad-stone (*Crapaudina*)

In the brain of an Elder toad, there is a small, reddish brown stone. If cleansed in strong wine, it detects and cure venom. Sought after by the prone-to-be-poisoned. Popular on wedding rings.

Somewhere Between the Twin Canals of Thoth-*Nepenthes*

The echoing sounds of stone cutting fill the still air. At the bottom of an enormous marble quarry, an elder toad lounges in the shady interior of a pavilion tent.

The tent is surrounded by scruffy guards dressed in exotic livery. They are tasked with keeping the toad fed, moist and happy. When the toad gets too hot, it takes a swim in the turquoise water of the flooded lower part of the quarry. The guards know that this is not allowed by their employer, and uneasily pass the time on the square-cut beach. The toad knows that the swims make its tenders nervous, which only adds to the pleasure.

Meanwhile, chain gangs of goblinesque workers cut up blocks of marble. The blocks are covered with maggots and snails, transported to the cart and promptly swallowed by the toad.

Rationale: An aristocrat of ill repute is amassing an army inside the toads. The marble is being used for repairing the ancient *Keep on Acid Beach* where s/he plots against the Throne. The pretender is trying to locate another maw; one hibernating somewhere under the Imperial residence on Phobos.

The chain gangs have been shanghaied from the driftwood labyrinth of *Bricolage*, an ad hoc settlement created by those marooned inside the toads generations ago. The sun is scorching their almost transparent skin. At least the work is better than being sent to the *Toadstone mines*.)

Three hooks:

- A way into the Sea of Acid and the places beyond
- Gathering evidence for a rival aristocrat
- Stealing eggs from the toad

The Quarry: Points of Interest

Note: The quarry is littered with blocks of marble and piles of rubble, thus obstructing line of sight.

1 Guards (2) in shade (view of road, quarry)

- Polearms and garish but dirty livery
- If battle, retreats, alerts camp (2)
- Sounds of cikadas, sledgehammers

2 Camp. Several large tents. Still air

- One fancy tent. (25% Shapash here)
- Table (open book, *Peerages of the Canal States*)
- Locked chest (Mineral wood)
- 500 gp in newly minted coins (with the pretender's likeness)

• Ad hoc kitchen

- Stove, lamp oil, beans, flamingos.

• Outskirts of camp, filthy, muddy ground

- Barrels (worms, maggots)
- Horrible smell

3 Chain gangs (3x8) cutting marble

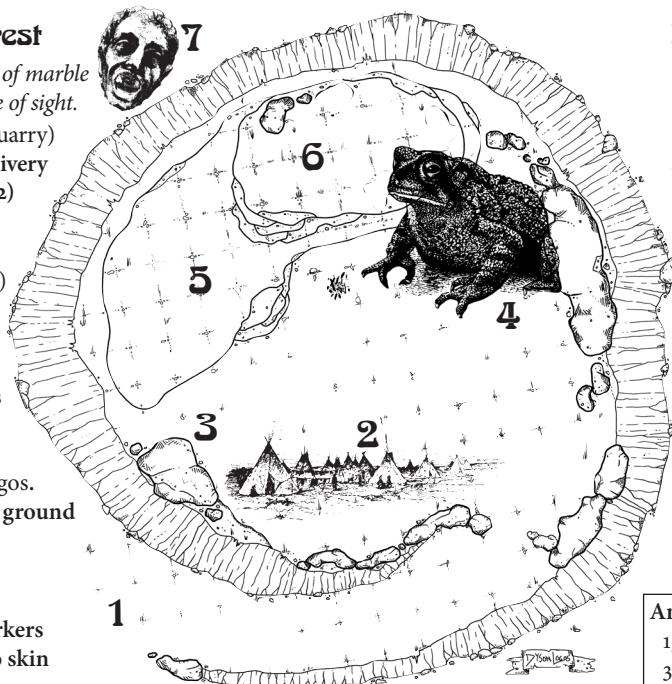
- Malnourished, badly burned workers
- Bulging, squinting eyes, albino skin
- Songs in outlandish pidgin
- Ready to fall on their captors
- 6 guards with whips and short swords
- Great blocks of marble (one on a smelly sledge)

4 The Elder toad *Bufo* (17,000 years old, melancholic, p. 2)

- Under a pavilion tent (washed by attendant)
- Swallows anything covered in feed (To the Acid Beach)
- Might go for swim (checks on eggs in 6)
- 2 bored guards (Polearms, will alert the camp)

5 Turquoise lake (Reeds, opaque water, dragonflies, flamingos)

- 50 % General Shapash is here (pen behind ear, writing letter)



Encounters (2d4)

Encounters on 1 (*spoor on 2*)

2 Bofu goes for a walk/swim

(monstrous yawn, chattering of guards)
3 General Shapash (Crumpled drafts of letters, never reaching beyond "Most Honored...", "True Heir Apparent...", "Your Grace...")

4-5 Patrol of 2d4 guards (Sound of marching, smell of cheap tobacco)

6 Chain gang on break (8 + 2 guards) (Rattling chains, moans)

7 A transport arrives 1: toad feed from nearby swamp 2: liquor 3: pursued by Vacuum Nomad raid 4: with a gagged and bound imperial tax collector (Comotion in camp, shouts)

8 Aimlessly stumbling headless statue (Marble dust, heavy naked footprints)

Amounts and stat suggestions:

15 Guards as Bandits

32 Workers as Goblins

Marble Elemental as Living Statue

Condottiere Shapash as Lvl 5 Fighter

• Night: Phosphorescent eels (as torches if fed and kept wet)

6 Sludge island (Reeds, feet sink)

- Nesting flamingos. Easily disturbed and noisy
- NW: Hidden string of 5 *Eggs of Stashing* in reeds

7 Huge head of marble elemental (Classical features, seething)

- Broken by the condottiere. (Wants to be brought to body)
- Knows: Best place to climb down is right here
- Ungrateful (Unless formal contract is signed)

Magic Item: Egg of Stashing (Sword Swallowers' Delight)

Size of an ostrich egg. Translucent, with crimson yolk. Generally found in slimy strings of 2d4 in canals, waterfilled dungeons or drying lakes. Keeps moist for decades.

Effect: Eating allows you to stash an item, no wider than your outstretched jaws, in an extraspatial pseudostomach for 24 hours. If not retrieved during that time, it is lost.

Value: The Eggs are quite valuable to the right buyer. A dynasty, an ancient circus, a religious order or an elf. Anyone with the patience to care for a toad during the generations it takes for it to reach adulthood. If the right buyer is found: 3,000 gp per egg. (Or 500 gp per egg for more opportunistic buyers, such as cat burglars, smugglers or gourmands.)



Monster: Insatiable Tadpole

The size of pikes, perpetually hungry because of ever-expanding stomachs. Copper coloured, sometimes (50%) with a pair of legs.

No. Appearing: 2d4 **HD:** 1 **AC:** As leather

Attacks: 1 *Suck* (No damage on successful attack, but save or lose 1 permanent HP for every successive turn until removed. Feel free to use exciting grapple rules.)

MV: Twice human in water, 25% humans on land if legs.

Morale: 4 **Saves As:** Magic-User

Treasure: The flesh of a tadpole emaciates the consumer. A delicacy as well as a great way to signal wealth.

Monster/Retainer: Juvenile Toad of Holding

Once it grows out of its tadpole form, the toad's inside expands at a much faster rate than its outside, and soon disconnects from the latter almost completely. This petite *portmonnae* dimension forms a discrete space-beyond-space until the toad reaches adulthood.

This makes the juvenile toad a sought after beast of burden along the canals of the Red planet. Intelligence as a dog and temper as a goat.

If bribed with its food of choice, it holds up to HD x 3 items, and an experienced toad tender can massage its stomach to ensure that the right object is thrown up.

The wet, acidic environment of the stomach dimension necessitates the packaging of goods to protect them from being spoiled or corroded.

Likes: Grubs, water, silent reflection.

Dislikes: Snakes, harsh words.

Hiring & Wages: A toad and tender has a 3% chance of being found in any canal city, with a monthly wage of at least 600 gp (including toad feed, excluding hazard's pay).

No. Appearing: 1 **HD:** 4 **AC:** As chain mail

Attacks: 1 *Bite* (1d6, save or lose one HP permanently)

Special: *Loud Croak* (Once per battle. Roll for encounters).

MV: As human on land, double in water.

Morale: 7 **Saves As:** Fighter

Treasure: 25% that it vomits treasure from a random treasure table at moment of death.

Note: A toad in a toad breaks the world. Dissimilarly to Russian dolls, small toads do not fit neatly into larger ones. It rends reality as per any bag of holding worth its name.

Class: Toad Tender

Maggot bucket in hand, looking for a life-long companion

Languages: Lingua martia, Anurean (Frogs and Toads)

Armor and Weapons: Any but plate

Levels, Saves, Attacks, HD: As Cleric

Extra starting equipment: Toadlet of Holding (1 HD)

Abilities

Level 1:

- **Forage:** In wilderness, can forage edible worms and maggots (1d4 rations)
- **Hatred of Snakes:** +2 against snakes (including supernatural), ST or attack on sight. Reptilians always attack the character first.
- **Poison resistance:** +2 on all ST rolls involving poisons
- **Toad rearing:** The Toad Tender can spend a month and xp and gp equal to half her current level to grow her toad one HD (max current level).

Level 2:

- **Massage:** Target recovers one extra HP from rest. Can be sold as service during downtime to earn 2d100 gp.

Level 3:

- **Taming:** Can tame frogs and toads. An attempt takes a week and succeeds on a reaction roll of 9+ modified by level.
- **Croak:** Make a loud, startling noise. If unseen, roll morale for creatures of HD 1 or lower. Once per day.

Level 6:

- **Leap:** Can jump 10 ft. with run-up if unencumbered.

Level 9:

- **Business:** When toad reaches HD 9, s/he can form a bank or travel service. Joined by 1d6 apprentices of lvl 1-3.

Retrieval Failure Table

When attempting to retrieve items from an untrained or grumpy juvenile toad (hungry, exposed to the cold, too hot, too dry, hurt – there will be no doubt when a toad is grumpy), roll 2d6 + handler's CHA modifier:

- 2 Stomach acid! Save or 1d4 acid damage
- 3 Extremely loud croak. Roll for wandering monsters.
- 4 The toad starts to hibernate out of spite until its demands for food, moisture and care are met.
- 5 The sought after item is irretrievably lost.
- 6 Wrong item!
- 7-8 Nothing emerges.
- 9-11 The right item!
- 12 The right item, and the toad's mood brightens.



1d6 Toad Rumours

- 1 “*The toad, ugly and venomous, Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.*” (T, see p. 2.)
- 2 An ancient toad hibernates under The Sleeping City, caught in or causing its curse. (T)
- 3 Just before it dies, an elder toad is irresistibly drawn to the time and place of its conception. (F)
- 4 If it weren’t for the tadpole meat smuggled into his meals, the Steward of Xanthus would succeed at his life goal: Eating himself to death. (T)
- 5 The secret behind the unsolved *Burglary of Soils*, when the Five Physiocrats of Jamuna lost their wealth and power over night? Five Eggs of Stashing. (T)
- 6 A toad handler never starves. In the wild they forage for grubs and snails, in the city their massage skills ensure a comfortable lifestyle. (T, but they often end up the victims of violent robbery)

1d4 Toads and Tenders

- 1 **Dumuzi and Adapa**, smuggling abolitionist pamphlets for the exiled (all-human) *League of Elemental Equity*. **Wants:** A cover story. **Complication:** Price on their heads.
- 2 **Rumi and Ghazal**, looking for lost poetic spark, maggots. **Wants:** Rare books. **Complication:** Opium addicts, both.
- 3 **Croton and Philolaus**, fleeing the Pythagorean Civil War. **Wants:** To see Earth. **Complication:** Croton’s stomach is prison to a mathematical demon.
- 4 **Vesica and Piscis**, running a struggling bath house with medical massage. **Wants:** To swim in every canal on the Red planet. **Complication:** Has turned to burglary.