

TG2

Fantasy Renaissance Adventure Module

# TONGUES OF THE SCREAMING TOAD

Written by "Weird Dave" Coulson

An Adventure for Character Levels 4-6



MEMORIES OF THE TOAD GOD #2

CASTLES  
CRUSADES



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**Fantasy Renaissance Adventure Module TG2  
For use with Castles & Crusades**

An Adventure for Character Levels 4-6

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## **MEMORIES OF THE TOAD GOD #2**

*The frontier outpost of Kraden's Hill has been having problems lately with people going insane. Signs point to long dead religious rites honoring a horrendous god of the jungle, but who or what is behind the madness? Can a brave band of adventurers face the utter horror of the ...* **TONGUES OF THE SCREAMING TOAD?**

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**Fantasy Renaissance Adventure Module TG2**  
**TONGUES OF THE SCREAMING TOAD**  
**MEMORIES OF THE TOAD GOD #2**

**For use with Castles & Crusades**

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# TONGUES OF THE SCREAMING TOAD

Buried secrets have a way of finding a path back to the surface to reveal themselves to the world again. Sometimes it may take a long time, and during that time it's likely that the world has forgotten about the secret. But if the secret is the loathsome Ibholtheg the Squamous Toad, an outer power of ancient evil, it certainly hasn't forgotten about the world.

**TG2 Tongues of the Screaming Toad** is the second scenario in the **MEMORIES OF THE TOAD GOD** Fantasy Renaissance Adventure Module trilogy. It is designed for a party of four to six characters levels 4 to 6. The GM should read the module thoroughly before playing to become familiar with the overall plot of the adventure.

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

## Adventure Background

Ibholtheg, a loathsome but powerful creature, cast its shadow upon the world thousands of years ago. In its time it was one of many outer powers that lived and ruled, coming from other realms to conquer and dwell on the Prime Plane. Known as the Squamous Toad, Ibholtheg's influence spread across the vast territories of the south, encompassing most of the ancient human society of Xilonoc.

Eventually, the people of Xilonoc fell to worshipping the foul creature, offering blood sacrifices in its name. Ibholtheg fed on the power of those sacrifices and offered boons to the high priests of Xilonoc. These boons included long life and magical secrets unknown to the world at large, and using these gifts the priests ruled Xilonoc.

Eventually, the society collapsed when Ibholtheg was banished by a band of jaguar knights. With the departure of the Squamous Toad's loathsome influence, cities fell to ruin and were claimed by the fierceness of the jungle. Many secrets were lost.

Over the centuries there have been many attempts to reclaim the lost treasures of ancient Xilonoc. Treasure hunters, fortune seekers, and more have plumbed the depths of the jungle in search of Xilonoc's lost secrets. But in a desert kingdom, one man has turned to more arcane sources to uncover the treasures of Ibholtheg's influence.

Natan il-Hasa Basswa was born into a rich merchant family in the desert kingdom. Given every possible advantage in life, Natan still craved more, and so he pursued arcane studies against his parents' wishes. The young desert nobleman was drawn to forbidden, dark magic, and learned that mastery over such power came easily to him. Natan studied in secret, but when he was discovered by his parents he accidentally killed them with the dark magic at his disposal. Already a young man, Natan easily masked the deaths as an accidental tragedy and took over the family's business.

He sought more and more dark power, and to that end he founded a merchant company called Novioirtum House. Natan quickly gained a reputation as a dealer in magical curiosities and historic artifacts, but secretly he traded in the blackest of black markets. He learned of Xilonoc and Ibholtheg and hungrily sought every scrap of information he could uncover about the Squamous Toad and the boons it could bestow upon worthy worshippers.

The research proved slow, but over the years Natan never gave up. He played the long game, never wanting to tip his hand to his real goals in purchasing books, scrolls, and trinkets. When a rival and more prominent merchant company, Grimden House, announced the opening of Kraden's Hill on the edge of the Great Jungle itself, it was too good an opportunity to pass up. Natan committed Novioirtum House resources and moved his own abode to the frontier town in order to move first hand on any information regarding Ibholtheg or Xilonoc that would be uncovered.

In Kraden's Hill, Natan used his magic to penetrate the mysteries of the Great Jungle in search of Ibholtheg's lost power. He stumbled upon a band of degenerate natives, ancient descendants of Xilonoc, who kept up the worship of the Squamous Toad. Natan learned more rites of sacrifice from these natives, who painted themselves in specially treated green pigment that provided a measure of the Squamous Toad's protection.

Natan began to split his time between his duties in Kraden's Hill running Novioirtum House and his new realm in the Great Jungle, which the natives referred to as the Swamp of the Screaming Toad. In the swamp, the merchant wizard has been researching a powerful rite called the Ritual of Rising that can be used to crush enemies and move the land. Natan has plans to use the summoned monster to help cleanse Xilonoc ruins, but he is growing paranoid. In Kraden's Hill, the more travelers and merchant arrive the harder it is for Natan to keep up his secret research.

He puts into motion a plot to use the shells of cipactli,

ancient jungle monsters descended from Ibholtheg's influence, to weaken Grimden House's influence and drive people away from the frontier town. The town's sheriff, a northern woman named Karolina Lomen, has had her hands full dealing with the influx of strangers, so Natan is not worried about investigations into the strange events.

Those that came into contact with the shells of the cipactli eggs develop a madness as their tongue blackens and elongates to a monstrous length. Already several people in Kraden's Hill have fallen victim to this malady, which Grimden House is trying to keep under wraps. Unfortunately for Natan, a band of adventurers happen to stumble into the mystery while slaking their appetites at the Thirsty Serpent Inn.

## Module Synopsis

The adventure begins with the characters in the frontier town of Kraden's Hill, which sits on the very edges of the dangerous and inhospitable Great Jungle. Perhaps they've come seeking fame and fortune in the borderlands, helping to fight off incursions from wild elves, shadow orcs, and cannibal natives, or perhaps they are in the employ of one of the three major merchant companies. The Thirsty Serpent is the only inn in town, so the characters start there.

The troubles begin when a man bursts into the Thirsty Serpent, grasping at his throat. He mutters and mumbles nonsense and the characters notice the man's tongue is black as coal. After a few moments the man flies into a homicidal rage, intent on inflicting as much harm as possible to everyone, forcing the characters to intervene. The sheriff of Kraden's Hill, an experienced northern warrior named Karolina Lomen, gets involved and tells the characters that things like this have been happening lately.

Karolina and her small team are pushed to their limits trying to keep the peace in Kraden's Hill. She offers to deputize the characters to bolster her ranks and to assist in tracking down whatever is happening with the madness that turns people's tongues black. The man who staggered in, Lambert Glover, is their best lead, and following his trail takes the characters to the warehouses of Grimden House and then to another outbreak of madness.

Theodric Grimden, de-facto town master and highest ranking representative of Grimden House's merchant interests, claims to know nothing about the outbreak. Investigation into shipping and receiving records shows that there are extra crates in Theodric's warehouse that should not be there. The crates contain egg sacks of cipactli, monstrous toad-bat-crocodile creatures who worship Ibholtheg.

The trail of how the crates appeared in Grimden House's warehouse takes the characters into the surrounding settlements of Kraden's Hill. There they learn that one of the settlements has been stripped of any inhabitants and is now occupied by native cannibal cultists of the Squamous Toad – working in league with Novortum House, a mystical merchant company with a strong presence in Kraden's Hill. An assault on Novortum House's warehouse turns up more cannibal cultists, but their leader Natan is nowhere to be found. Below the warehouse sits a sealed vault guarded by magical creatures, inside of which the characters find Natan's journal. The journal points the characters to a site in the Great Jungle called the Swamp of the Screaming Toad.

The characters must head out into the jungle and find the swamp in order to clear it of Ibholtheg's cultists and Novortum House saboteurs. Once located they face Natan, a powerful sorcerer, and a host of cipactli, along with monstrous swamp creatures who do the bidding of its master.

## Future Modules

The **MEMORIES OF THE TOAD GOD** adventure trilogy focuses on Ibholtheg, a loathsome outer power from an ancient epoch, who has decided now is the time to rise again. The trigger was the destruction of its Vestige in a golden temple (**TG1 Lost Temple of Ibholtheg**) which freed much of its essence. Now, in this adventure, its influence has spread to create a cult of the native cannibals and ensnare one of the powerful merchant companies in Kraden's Hill, Novortum House.

The third adventure in the trilogy, **TG3 Shadow Out of Sapphire Lake**, pits the characters against the machinations of Ibholtheg directly. A terrible entity rises out of Sapphire Lake and the characters must move quickly to defeat it. Tracking it back to its source reveals an underwater cavern system beneath Sapphire Lake. At its heart is a portal to the Pit of Black Gulfs, the prison where Ibholtheg currently resides, and to re-seal it the characters must venture into it, risking life and sanity to keep the Squamous Toad from rising fully into the world.

## Involving the Characters

The adventure starts with the characters in Kraden's Hill staying at the Thirsty Serpent. If they played through **TG1 Lost Temple of Ibholtheg** they are likely recovering from their ordeal in the jungle, but if they did not they could have arrived in the frontier town with the promise of gainful employment and adventure. Trouble soon finds them, regardless of why they came to seek it!





## Adapting the Module

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

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

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

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

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

**Noviortum House:** A merchant family with ties to mystical powers in faraway lands. Known for using magic to further ends with a keen interest in arcane locations.

**Ibholtheg:** Squamous bat-toad entity of ancient antiquity. Worshipped by mutant bullywugs, some of

which can fly on bat-like wings.

**Swamp of the Screaming Toad:** A section of the Great Jungle known for its loud toads, now the base for the cannibal natives who worship Ibholtheg and Noviortum House.

**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: CATCH THE FEVER

Strange things have begun happening in the frontier town of Kraden's Hill. For the past week, several people have gone insane and tried to murder their friends and family, and the only link between them all is the victim's tongue turns black just before the madness takes hold. So far the constable of Kraden's Hill, Karolina Lomen, has managed to keep the incidents wrapped up so as not to cause a panic, but things are about to get out of hand for her.

Luckily, a group of capable heroes happens to be in the middle of the latest incident.

## A Quiet Night at the Thirsty Serpent

The characters begin having already arrived in Kraden's Hill. The only place for travelers to stay in the frontier town is the Thirsty Serpent. In addition, it serves the cheapest ale and wine available – the twin elven siblings that run the place don't seem interested in making a profit.

Read or paraphrase the following, adjusting as necessary to fit the characters' backgrounds and reasons for being in Kraden's Hill.

Another day draws to a close in the frontier town of Kraden's Hill. You make your way through the cramped, mud streets, watching merchants close down their shops and people rush home. To the south, looming like a massive phantom, waits the Great Jungle, the tall boughs of its trees reaching over the one hundred foot wall that encircles the town. The hill that gives the town its name is situated near the center, and its flat top offers a good vantage over the surrounding area. You see a handful of guards, relatively unarmored considering the heat and humidity, make their way up the hill to take their watch for the evening. People have been on edge lately, it seemed – strange rumors have been floating around Kraden's Hill about dark dealings.

The only inn for travelers is the Thirsty Serpent, and you arrive with little pause in the crowded common room. The twin wild elves that run the place, Ereltris and Esysith Evenleaf, move about constantly, setting plates of meat, goblets of wine, and flagons of ale down at various tables as they wind their way around. On the back wall behind the bar are nailed dozens of snakes of various sizes, shapes, and colors – a curious tradition for the frontier tavern.

Allow the characters a chance to mingle in the Thirsty Serpent, soaking up rumors and asking around. Ereltris or Esysith comes by their table to take orders – the special for the night is a roasted boar flank and a mug of fermented viper fruit (a local specialty that resembles spicy apple cider) which sets back a traveler 7 sp. Mugs of fermented viper fruit and imported dwarven ale can be had for 3 sp each.

### Rumors in Kraden's Hill

Asking around the common room of the Thirsty Serpent (or cornering one of the Evenleaf twins) can turn up some interesting tidbits going on around town. Choose from the below list or roll randomly to see which clue a character picks up in their inquiries.

Bands of savage wild elves have been seen close to Kraden's Hill lately. These aren't the friendly kind – they seem intent on shooting first so far anyone that tries to get close.

### 1d12 Rumor

**1** The native men and women of the jungle say a terrible plague is coming as punishment for Kraden's Hill pushing too far into the jungle. [This is a common rumor in town and has no basis in actual fact.]

**2** The merchants of Grimden House, who own most of the town, are said to have uncovered a great treasure in the jungle and they're trying to find a way to get it out. A golden temple! [This is in reference to the events of **TG1**, when the golden temple was found and subsequently destroyed.]

**3** Adbrek Ironstar and his dwarves are planning on leaving Kraden's Hill soon. Apparently they're getting the short end of the stick, with Grimden and Noviorum House recently pledging an allegiance. [Clan Ironstar is on the losing end of the allegiance, which is far from sealed, but they're not about to cut their losses yet.]

**4** The wizards and sorcerers of Noviorum House have been seen moving around at night lately. Never trust a magic-user! [Noviorum House sorcerers have been moving around at night to make arrangements regarding the hidden egg sack that causes the black tongue.]

**5** Recently, shadow orc tribes have begun to get restless. The word is that something deep within the jungle has been awakened and they want no part of it. Some of the tribes have actually fled into the mountains north of the Great Jungle! [The shadow orc tribes, perhaps more sensitive to the feelings of the jungle, know something is afoot. They don't have specific details about Iboltheg though.]

**6** A merchant who came in with the last caravan was murdered by his own brother two days ago. The sheriff has kept everyone quiet about it but something is up. [This is true – the merchant went mad and killed his brother and several guards before Sheriff Lomen arrived.]

7

Sheriff Karolina Lomen has been keeping busy lately with trying to keep the peace in town. She's understaffed though, and the merchant houses pretty much run their businesses the way they want, which means they get to push around some people. [This is sadly true – Sheriff Lomen doesn't have the resources to properly do her job to the town.]

8

The cannibal natives deeper into the jungle have been raiding some of the settlements along the border west of Kraden's Hill. Technically the settlements are under Sheriff Lomen's jurisdiction but she doesn't have the numbers to keep the peace. [Cannibal natives who have returned to Ibholtheg's worship are striking out with more frequency.]

9

Old Nordman, an accomplished woodsman who helped build Kraden's Hill, hasn't been seen for a week now. He normally hangs out at the Jewel in the Jungle but he just up and left. Where to no one can say. [The characters have a chance to find Old Nordman during the investigation into Lambert Glover.]

10

Bands of savage wild elves have been seen close to Kraden's Hill lately. These aren't the friendly kind – they seem intent on shooting first so far anyone that tries to get close. [The Shadow Watchers have been seeking signs of Ibholtheg's return around Kraden's Hill.]

11

Several of the cannibal natives from the jungle have been seen snooping around the borders of Sapphire Lake. The thing is – they're painted up with all sorts of green tattoos! Even the friendly natives don't seem to want to talk about that. [The green tattoos are marks of Ibholtheg's worship.]

12

A dragon lurks in the jungle and devours anyone who goes too far in. A friend's cousin's brother went in and never came back again, so it must be the dragon! [While there might be a dragon somewhere in the jungle, it is beyond the scope of this adventure!]

## Black Tongue

People come in and out of the Thirsty Serpent all night, but when Lambert Glover, a warehouse worker from the far northern lands, stumbles in and begins spouting nonsense and clutching his throat people take notice. Fortunately the characters are there to help put a stop to the madness.

Read or paraphrase the following about an hour or so after the characters enter the Thirsty Serpent.

You're just about to order another round of that spicy viper fruit drink when a gurgled choke catches your attention at the door. Night has fallen completely on Kraden's Hill, and in from the darkness staggers a man clawing at his throat. He leans heavily on the wall, gasping and muttering for a moment, as the rest of the Thirsty Serpent patrons turn to see. "Lambert?" one man asks in a concerned voice as the man – Lambert apparently – lets loose a choked cry and falls to the floor. He retches and black vomit hits the dirty floor with a sickening splash.

Lambert Glover is currently suffering from the end of the second phase of the *black tongue of Ibholtheg*. People around him back up after the black vomit hits the floor and Lambert begins to mutter incoherent words – "ozalko," z'dyrr'kuu," and "yongulluu," followed by a drawn out "Ibholtheg."

The characters can try to push through to get to him but by the time they arrive the curse has taken full effect. Lambert Glover stands up suddenly, now fully a **black tongue victim**, his elongated tongue pitch black and hanging out of his mouth. He lashes out at the nearest character (unless they did not approach, in which case he attacks a nearby commoner) with murder in his starry eyes.

*Tactics:* The black tongue victim wants only to cause as much death as possible. Lambert Glover kept to himself since his arrival but he would drink with a few of the other workers, one of whom recognized him at the beginning. If it looks like the characters aren't going to intervene (who invited them to the party?) Lambert slashes with his claws and paralyzes with his tongue until he gets to the coworker.

People for the most part are in a state of shock around the events, so the characters are on their own for the most part. The crowds part and get out of the way enough to give the characters room to attack, but it's clear that Lambert is giving no quarter. Because of the curse, nonlethal damage does nothing against Lambert.

The characters should have a chance to relax a bit and take in the local flavor before the door busts open and trouble comes strolling in.





## The Sheriff Steps In

After Lambert Glover is defeated, people glance around with dumbstruck looks on their faces. After a moment, though, Sheriff Karolina Lomen arrives from outside, having tracked Glover to the Thirsty Serpent.

Read or paraphrase the following.

The body hits the floor with a sickening thud, the great black tongue finally stopping to twitch a moment after the man stops his final death spasm. People look on in wide-eyed horror at the final scene before them. No one speaks and the eerie silence is nearly deafening. Suddenly the doors to the Thirsty Serpent bang open and you look to see a woman dressed in leather armor standing in the doorway, panting. Her curved sword is drawn and she glances around frantically for a moment before settling her gaze on the body on the floor. Her shoulders slump and she pulls out a metal badge. "Sheriff Karolina Lomen," she says in a steady voice, bearing the badge for all to see. "And I'm going to need to talk with some folks."

Sheriff Lomen asks to speak with the people responsible for putting down Lambert Glover, and if the characters don't volunteer themselves enough patrons in the common room point her to them. She asks the Evenleaf twins to close the common room for the night and assures everyone as they leave that this

is an isolated incident and no cause for alarm. The sheriff requests the characters stay behind to answer some questions.

### Chat with the Sheriff

Sheriff Lomen asks first for a detailed accounting of what happened. She nods at mentions of the black tongue, claws, starry eyes, and murderous intent. Once complete, she sits down and for a moment she lets her proud facade down and the characters can see weariness and worry in her young face.

"Something bad is happening here," Sheriff Lomen starts, "and I have a feeling it's only going to get worse. Lambert Glover is only the latest victim to succumb to this strange madness. There have been four others, but this is the only one that I've gotten to first. The big merchant companies do what they want when they want, and so far Grimden has gotten to all of the evidence before I could so much as gather statements." She looks at each of you in turn. "But I think this one is going to be different."

Sheriff Lomen imparts the following information bits to the characters over the course of their conversation.

- The previous four victims were all in the employ of Grimden House, but that's not unusual – Grimden House employs fully half of the town.
- As far as she knows, Lambert Glover was a freelance worker who sold his skills on a contract basis to whomever would pay the most. Previously he was known to work for all three of the merchant companies in town (Grimden, Novium, and Ironstar).
- From accounts she has been able to gather, the victims all spoke in a strange language. To Sheriff Lomen the words sounded like an old dialect of the native humans, but her questions into that have hit a dead end.
- Sheriff Lomen doesn't have the resources to track down the leads – she's busy enough trying to keep the peace in Kraden's Hill and the surrounding settlements on a daily basis.

Once she has laid out the problem, Sheriff Lomen gets right to the point. She wants to deputize the characters with the purpose of finding the source of this strange madness. Her hunch is telling her that something is behind it, some malevolent force, but the characters seem like the kind of type that can handle malevolent forces. She offers them each a star pin with the world "deputy" emblazoned on it – most people in Kraden's Hill are good, law-abiding citizens and respect the authority of the badge.

As far as a place to start, Sheriff Lomen suggests following Lambert Glover's trail – he's the only concrete lead so far. But she warns them that the merchant houses have their own private guards and

### **NPC Profile: Sheriff Karolina Lomen, Beleaguered Human Law Officer**

Karolina Lomen is an accomplished warrior, born into a military family far to the north and west. Her esteemed lineage were knights and soldiers in service to a great king, and Karolina distinguished herself early on as an exemplar of her traditions. She swore the oaths of a paladin and prepared to defend her king and country on the field of battle.

However, things went differently for her. Her father fell from grace in the eyes of the king, and though Karolina had no part in it, the punishment fell to her as well. She was sent to the fledgling frontier town of Kraden's Hill to act as the sheriff and keep the king's peace. It's mostly a token role – much of the peacekeeping occurs between the three merchant companies who want no part in the "king's pet" interfering with their duties. She has little resources and all of her requests have been denied for more soldiers and more authority, but as a paladin she refuses to back down. Karolina is stubborn, resourceful, and shrewd, with a good heart and a keen blade at her side.

their own jurisdiction. The law of Kraden's Hill can't protect them on merchant-owned property unless they can prove that there's a credible threat to the safety of the town.

If necessary, Sheriff Lomen requests an oath of service from the characters. She asks that they bring any evidence to her (she gives them her address but notes that just as often she's patrolling the town or taking care of some trouble).

### **WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: FRONTIER JUSTICE**

**MUCH OF THIS SCENARIO, ESPECIALLY THE FIRST PART, PLAYS OUT LIKE A WILD WEST MYSTERY. PLAY UP THE TROPES AS MUCH AS YOU SEE FIT - IT CAN BE FUN TO SWITCH UP THE GENRES A BIT FROM TIME TO TIME!**

## **Glover's Trail**

It's just before midnight when Sheriff Lomen leaves the Thirsty Serpent and heads back to her office. What follows are a series of locations and clues that can be gathered at that location by the characters. To gather a clue a character must succeed at a CL 5 charisma or intelligence attribute check, as noted by each clue. Ultimately, the characters should be lead to the Grimden House office, where they get stonewalled by Theodric Grimden.

## **The Thirsty Serpent**

The following clues can be learned at the Thirsty Serpent. All of these checks require the use of a Charisma-based skill (though 10 gold in bribes can work as well).

- Lambert Glover was good friends with Old Nordman, a grizzled and experienced woodsman who hasn't been seen for the past week or so.
- The two of them liked to spend their time at the Jewel of the Jungle, the other tavern in Kraden's Hill, which is run by a thin sneering man named Rocco Zangari.

## **The Jewel of the Jungle**

The only other tavern in Kraden's Hill, the Jewel of the Jungle tries to pass itself off as the more opulent of the two. The building is a single story with a tall ceiling, empty most of the day (it doesn't open until noon). Patrons come in around early evening and stay until late at night typically. The owner, Rocco Zangari, is a thin-faced man with slicked back black hair and olive-colored skin.

The following clues can be learned at the Jewel of the Jungle. All of these checks require the use of a charisma-based skill (though 5 gold in bribes can work as well).

- Lambert Glover was a regular, and in fact was in just the night before. Seemed pleased as a hog in mud, and bought everyone in the house a round of drinks to celebrate.
- Glover was celebrating getting a lucrative contract with someone in town. He wouldn't say who, but he promised to pay off all of his old debts when his coins started coming in.
- Glover owed money to several people in town, though no large amounts. It seemed the man was always short on coins at the wrong time.
- Glover and Old Nordman seemed to be good friends. The two shared an apartment on the east side of Kraden's Hill, #16 on Blue Lotus Way.

## **Glover's Apartment**

The apartment that Lambert Glover lived in is a tall building, with three cramped stories. The door to the building itself is open but Glover's apartment door is locked. The characters can speak with the manager to get it unlocked (CL 4 charisma check, with +2 if they show their badges) or they can unlock it themselves with a CL 5 dexterity check with thieves' tools.

The apartment is a simple three room layout, with a main room/kitchen and two separate bedrooms. One of the beds hasn't been used in over a week while the other seems like it was recently used (Glover's was recently used).

The following clues can be learned at Glover's Apartment. All of these checks require the use of Intelligence (Investigation).

- Paperwork in the used bedroom confirms that Glover had recently acquired a lucrative contract with Clan Ironstar to assist with loading and unloading of goods coming in on the next caravan. He was scheduled to start in a week.
- Glover's bedroom contains a piece of paper beneath the bed. On the paper is written a note to Glover from Old Nordman saying the grizzled woodsman was checking up on a settlement two day's ride west of Kraden's Hill and wasn't going to be back for a few days.
- Additional paperwork is found indicating that the most recent employer of Glover was Grimden House – it seemed their employees were paid in company scrip that can only be used to purchase Grimden House goods.

### Clan Ironstar Office

There isn't much to be learned from Clan Ironstar regarding Glover or the madness, but it's possible the characters seek them out just the same to tie up any loose ends. Adbrek Ironstar, head of the merchant company's interests in Kraden's Hill, is happy to speak with the characters though his time is short. He does acknowledge that they had recently hired Lambert Glover for top coin to help with the unloading of the newest shipment due in just under week, but Adbrek assures the characters that there's nothing unusual about this. He had heard good things about Glover's work from the other warehouse workers and thought that they could use the extra help.

### Grimden House Office

Grimden House has a large office on the north side of Kraden's Hill. A throng of people are standing outside waiting to get paid, so the characters must muscle past them if they hope to get inside to speak with someone. The characters are only allowed inside if they use their badges – the guard doesn't want any trouble and lets them in, though refuses everyone else.

Inside, Theodric Grimden greets the characters with a smile that drops quickly once he sees the badges. His normally good natured disposition drops and he demands to know what the characters want. He doesn't recognize the name of Lambert Glover (which is true) but asks a nearby secretary to check the employment records for the name, which she does and returns with a confirmation that Glover was on the payroll of Grimden House.

If they mention the black tongue, madness, or anything along those lines, Theodric Grimden gets a little angry. Read or paraphrase the following.

"You think you can just come in here and start throwing accusations around," Theodric Grimden grits from behind clenched teeth. "I'll have you know that Grimden House built this town, and that you and that nosy sheriff wouldn't even have a job if it weren't for us. Who keeps this town running? Who keeps coins and settlers coming into Kraden's Hill? It's –" The man is cut short by a sudden scream from outside.

Though Theodric Grimden is innocent of the problems he wants to make sure that his house's name is not smeared by potential scandal and murder. Unfortunately, things outside have taken a turn for the worse and several people have now fallen victim to the black tongue. He stands dumbfounded as another scream pieces the air followed by yelling and shouting and the sound of a loud, screaming toad. Just like the one from Glover at the Thirsty Serpent.



## Madness in the Streets

Outside the Grimden House Office, the throng of people have parted to give way to a grisly sight. Four workers, their tongues blackened and extended far outside their mouth, have descended upon a pair of fellow workers in a murderous frenzy, tearing at them with razor sharp claws and lashing with their ebony tongues.

The characters are the only ones with the capacity to take any action. There are **4 black tongue victims** in the city street, and unless they act quickly the two people being attacked die in two rounds.

*Tactics:* Once the characters stand up as a credible threat the black tongue victims focus their attacks on them, keeping the rest of the crowd safe. They otherwise fight until death.

*Development:* After the black tongue victims are dispatched, Theodric Grimden – shaken as this is the first time he's seen it actually happen – invites the characters into the office to speak more about the incident. He orders a squad of guards to clean up.

## PART TWO: THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

All signs point to Grimden House, but Theodric Grimden is actually innocent of any charges. The characters are going to need to dig into where all of the victims worked and find the clue that sends them out of Kraden's Hill and into the surrounding settlements, there to find the true villains behind the madness.

### Grimden Warehouse

Once he witnesses the black tongue victims in the streets Theodric Grimden becomes more willing to work with the characters to find the source of the problem. He pours everyone a glass of rich brandy from his private stock and asks that the characters share everything they know with him.

In turn, Theodric shares what he knows – that the people who have fallen victim were all employees of Grimden House. A few minutes later, the secretary arrives and hands Theodric a piece of paper, which he looks over and sighs. He lets the characters read it. The piece of paper is work orders assigning each of the victims, including Lambert Glover and the four who just died outside, to Warehouse #4 within the past week.

## Warehouse Secrets

Theodric leads the characters to Warehouse #4 on the south side of Kraden's Hill. The building is large but only a single story, and once inside Theodric calls for the warehouse manager to let everyone off for the rest of the day.

Though a proud man, Theodric is not afraid in this circumstance to ask for the characters help in finding the problem. He gives them a manifest of what should be in the warehouse and ask that they go through the boxes and crates looking for anything unusual. He assigns a guard to watch over them just in case, but can be persuaded against it with a CL 5 charisma check (attempts at Intimidation automatically fails).

Have the characters make CL 5 intelligence checks. If more than half of them succeed they discover there's an anomaly in the warehouse – there are supposed to be 24 crates but there are in fact 26. Theodric checks the numbers and confirms it as well, and after only a few minutes they find the two aberrant crates.

The two crates that aren't supposed to be in the warehouse are stuffed with so much straw that much of it pokes it from between the wooden slats. You aren't sure, but it seems as though these two crates are glowing with an unearthly, sickly green light.

Opening the crates, each of which appears to have been recently sealed, requires a CL 4 strength check. Inside sits a dozen yellow, pale, fist-sized eggs that pulsate with a green glow. Remnants of shells lay scattered about the unbroken ones – evidence that there were more eggs here at one point.

The eggs are from cipactli, toad-bat-crocodile creatures that worship Ibholtæg, placed here by Novirtum House spies. Unfortunately, the spies also placed a trap on them – if the crates are opened for more than a minute they release their guardians, **2 air elementals** that burst forth (one from each crate). The air elementals, once summoned, fight until all non-Novirtum House personnel are dead.

*Tactics:* The air elementals fling opponents around into boxes as much as possible, causing general mayhem and destruction. Theodric Grimden isn't a fighting man and keeps out of the way as much as possible.

**WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: DON'T EAT THE EGGS**  
EACH OF THE VICTIMS THAT FELL TO THE BLACK TONGUE DID SO AFTER DEVOURING ONE OF THE EGGS IN THE CRATE, AS EVIDENCED BY THE BROKEN SHELLS. THE CHARACTERS SHOULD NOT BE TEMPTED TO EAT ONE AS THE DISEASE IS QUICK-ACTING AND CURING IT BEYOND THE ABILITIES OF A GROUP OF 5<sup>TH</sup> LEVEL CHARACTERS. NO RULES ARE GIVEN IF THEY DO, HOWEVER, BUT IT SHOULDN'T END IN ANYTHING GOOD.

### Trail of the Crates

Once the air elementals are dealt with, Theodric Grimden recovers his senses (and tries to ignore any damage done during the battle) and has a guard fetch the warehouse manager. The manager explains that he was just promoted a few days ago after the previous manager disappeared, which Theodric groans and remembers as one of the first victims of the black tongue.

Theodric has the manager go through the records and finds that the last delivery to the warehouse was from a caravan that travels to the local settlements around Kraden's Hill. The timing of that delivery and the madness outbreaks lines up. Theodric provides a map of the caravan's route, which is done once per tenday to drop off and pick up goods and supplies.

Any character searching the crates can make a CL 5 intelligence check to identify some unusual clay deposits in the bottom. If shown to Theodric or Sheriff Lomen they can identify it as clay that comes from around the shores of Sapphire Lake, to the west of Kraden's Hill.

Theodric Grimden offers to pay the characters 200 gold each to track down the source of the crates and bring whomever is trying to ruin him to justice. He gives them the known route taken by the caravan before it arrived back in Kraden's Hill.

Sheriff Lomen also urges the characters to follow the trail to wherever it may lead. While she doesn't have much to offer in terms of manpower, she does have a small stash of *potions of healing* that she is willing to give them (one per character).

### Outside Kraden's Hill

The map that the caravan took before arriving at the Grimden House warehouse leads through three settlements outside of Kraden's Hill – the Juliano Homestead, the Einhorn Homestead, and the Carrico Homestead, in order of closest to furthest from the frontier town. The characters are expected to check each one in turn for any suspicions of illicit activity.

#### Juliano Homestead

Located only a half-day's travel east of Kraden's Hill, the Juliano Homestead is the first settlement the characters come across. Read or paraphrase the following as the characters approach.

The road east of Kraden's Hill is rough and little used, with the encroaching jungle just to the south threatening to engulf it seemingly at any moment. You travel for several hours with the relentless sun overhead beating down, causing rivulets of

sweat to run down your back and chests. The first settlement on the caravan's route is the Juliano Homestead, and up ahead you finally see it – a wooden house, small but well built, with a large garden and a field of nut-producing trees to its north. A burly man is working the field with a shovel along with three younger men.

The Juliano Homestead is run by Enzo, the patriarch of the Juliano family. He is assisted in the field with his three sons – Ariosto, Ivo, and Mortello – while his wife and two daughters work in the house. Enzo is a stubborn man, determined to make a new life for him and his family on the frontier of the Great Jungle. They harvest jungle nuts and fruits from the trees in their field to be sold in Kraden's Hill and other places.

Enzo is friendly if a bit reserved, and answers any questions from the characters as quickly as possible. He remembers seeing the caravan that came by about a week ago but he didn't have anything to sell at the time so the merchant driver didn't stay. It looked to Enzo as though the caravan wagon was not as full as it normally ought to be, but he thought it was just a sign of the times.

Enzo's wife, Iris, calls the men in for lunch (or supper if the characters come closer to evening), and the patriarch asks if the characters would like to join them. They don't have much but they're happy to share with deputies from Kraden's Hill. The meal consists simply of bread with fruits and butternut spread, with candied nuts for dessert.

#### Einhorn Homestead

About a half a day's ride east of the Juliano Homestead lies the next settlement, the Einhorn Homestead. As the characters approach, however, they find that things are not well and that the homestead is under siege by a band of savage shadow orcs from the jungle.

Read or paraphrase the following as the characters approach (the text assumes they arrive just at sunset).

The sun is setting low over the horizon behind you as you continue along the rough road that connects the various settlements outside of Kraden's Hill. The next on your list is the Einhorn Homestead, the closest settled location to Sapphire Lake and as you round the bend in the jungle you spot the lights of huge fires springing up from around the house that just came into view. A feminine scream splits the air and you see dozens of black shadows moving out of the jungle to swarm over the house.

The Einhorn Homestead is under attack by the Gabadi shadow orc tribe, who have been a constant threat to the settlements in the past year. Tonight is the night they chose to raid the Einhorn Homestead and burn





it to the ground, but thankfully the characters have arrived just in time.

The homestead is being attacked currently by **10 shadow orc warriors**. The fires are from their flaming arrows which so far have not hit the house and look to simply burn out where they landed. The Gabadi raid takes place in three waves – this is simply the first.

The house sits about 100 feet from the edge of the jungle and the characters arrive 250 feet away from the house.

*Tactics:* The characters have a chance to get to the house before the first wave of 10 shadow orc warriors arrive. The orcs fight savagely, bloodlust and rage shining fiercely in their ebony faces. Once the first wave is dealt with, the characters can rush to the house, where they find Leopold Einhorn and his wife Marion holding swords and shields and preparing to defend their land. Their children hide inside, all too young to hold a sword.

The second wave consists of **6 shadow orc warriors** and **4 shadow orc ragers**. The warriors hang back and shoot arrows at the characters while the ragers charge recklessly forward.

The third and final wave consists of **6 shadow orc warriors** and **3 ogres**, all of whom charge forward for the final assault.

*Development:* If the characters are not successful in repelling the attacks, they can persuade Leopold and Marion to flee with their children by making a CL 5 charisma check. The Einhorns are stubborn but seeing so many orcs from the Gabadi tribe coming out of the jungle should be enough to convince them to flee. In this case, the orcs do not pursue but burn the settlement to the ground.

If the characters are successful in repelling the attacks, Leopold and Marion are eternally grateful. They don't have much to offer in thanks except for a warm bed for the night (the Einhorns often have merchants and travelers from Kraden's Hill stay in their barn). Marion



and Leopold offer a family heirloom to the characters as a reward – a *mithral chain shirt* that Leopold was wearing.

If questioned about the merchant that came through a week ago, the Einhorns can confirm that they saw them arrive with two crates that gave Marion “the shivers.” Leopold sold several crates worth of silk they harvested from their crops at the time but nothing else unusual. Also if questioned the Einhorns confirm that shadow orc tribes are a constant threat in the area – the night’s full raid was long expected.

## The Carrico Homestead

The last spot on the caravan wagon’s trail is the Carrico Homestead, and it’s here where the characters find the clues they’ve been searching for. The Carrico family was killed two weeks ago by Novium House agents, who promptly took over the homestead with a force of cannibal natives in green paint. Now they work to prepare egg sacks of *cipactli* to overthrow all of Kraden’s Hill.

The journey from the Einhorn Homestead takes the characters past the tranquil Sapphire Lake, the nearest source of fresh water on the outskirts of the jungle. The lake is fed by a mountain river and it flows out into the jungle from a solidly moving stream. A low wooden bridge spans the stream to provide access to the settlements east of the lake.

It takes the characters another half day of traveling to arrive at the Carrico Homestead. Read or paraphrase the following as they approach.

The last stop on the caravan wagon’s journey (or the first depending on your perspective) is the Carrico Homestead, a half day’s ride east of Sapphire Lake. The single-story farmhouse comes into view as the sun reaches its zenith, but you notice that the fields north of the house are unattended and seem slightly overgrown.

The homestead is eerily empty and the shutters are closed on the windows to the house. The door to the house is closed but not locked and fresh footprints abound around it – some booted, some barefoot human, some webbed monster. There is a cellar door on the back side of the house.

Inside, the stench of death is overpowering. The Novium House agents have reanimated the corpses of the Carrico family so that they serve now as **6 zombies** in the house that lurch forward to attack anyone who isn’t affiliated with Novium House. Bells attached to the zombies alert the people downstairs to intruders. Searching the house turns up nothing more than clothing for a household of four – most of

the food has been eaten or taken recently.

### The Cellar

Below the farmhouse is where the real trouble is brewing. Once the zombies move and the bells ring out, the **Novium House agent** in the cellar sends a band of **8 green-painted natives** up to investigate and deal with any intruders. The agent moves further into the cellar to enter the Sanctum of Slime (see below).

The cellar is a simple 40 foot square chamber below the farmhouse. Most of the stored foodstuffs have been raided haphazardly, some torn apart by claws. A freshly dug tunnel exits the cellar to the southwest leading down. Three lit lanterns illuminate the cellar.

### Sanctum of Slime

The tunnel out of the cellar continues for 60 feet in darkness before ending in a round chamber, 50 feet wide. In the center is a shallow pool of green slime with a squat, 5-foot-tall statue of a horrendous toad-bat-crocodile monster in the center carved of green porous stone. The Novium House agent is likely here along with **3 cipactli**.

The slime in the middle of the chamber draws out the life force of any non-Ibholtheg worshipper that stands in it. Characters starting or ending their turn in the slime (which is only 2 feet deep at the deepest) must make a CL 5 constitution saving throw or suffer 2d6 necrotic damage as the slime eats away at their life.

**Tactics:** The Novium House agent keeps to the back, using his spells to incapacitate as many characters as possible, while the *cipactli* move forward to engage. They know about the slime pool’s effects and do their best to lure the characters into the green sludge to do battle.

### Afterwards

Once the characters defeat the green-painted natives, the *cipactli*, and the Novium House agent they can look around and assess what’s going. Searching the slime pool with a pole or stick turns up more eggs just like the ones they found in the crates in Kraden’s Hill, smaller though and perhaps not quite ready. The Novium House agent has a house insignia ring on his hand, and a document in the cellar reveals that Novium House is planning on distributing more eggs around the frontier town in the next week. Another note indicates that more eggs are already in town awaiting delivery in the Novium warehouse.

The characters have the pieces of the conspiracy now and the major players revealed – Novium House is working with the *cipactli* and green-painted natives to tear down Kraden’s Hill.

## Raid on Noviorium House

The journey back to Kraden's Hill takes the characters a total of a day and a half. If they present their evidence to Sheriff Karolina Lomen she grows grim and asks that the characters help in taking down whatever lurks in the Noviorium House warehouse. She doesn't have much to offer in terms of immediate support but she demands to go with them (Sheriff Lomen is a 5<sup>th</sup>-level paladin).

Approaching Theodric Grimden with the evidence would also be a good approach. The wealthy merchant is angry and wants to see Noviorium House go down for the treachery, and is willing to offer a squad of **10 guards** to assist in the raid. He'll accompany them as well but stay well out of combat – he's a merchant, not a fighter.

Sheriff Lomen suggests organizing the raid right away so as to act with the most amount of surprise. With Theodric Grimden's backing she knows that, even if they're wrong, the town won't suffer for their mistakes. But if they're right they'll have rid Kraden's Hill of a cancerous evil festering at its heart.

### General Features

The Noviorium House Warehouse has the following general features.

**Ceiling:** The ceiling in the warehouse is 40 feet up.

**Walls:** The walls are made of thick wood that help insulate for sound proofing. However, there are vents along most of the walls to try and keep the heat and humidity down (which doesn't help much).

**Floor:** The floor of the warehouse is bare dirt and shows tracks very well.

**Heat:** The warehouse is incredibly hot and humid. Characters spending more than 1 minute inside must make a CL 4 constitution saving throw or suffer exhaustion (ability checks are at +2 CL for the next 8 hours).

**Crates:** Boxes and crates are piled high throughout most of the warehouse. Characters can climb a pile of boxes with a CL 4 strength check. Boxes can also be pushed atop victims with a CL 3 strength check, dealing 2d8 bludgeoning damage to an adjacent target.

### 1. Gate and Yard

The Noviorium House warehouse is big, one of the largest in Kraden's Hill, with a roof that stretches 40 feet up. The building itself is shaped as an L, with an inner courtyard surrounded by a ten foot tall fence in the crook of the L. Peering through the fence you can see two entrances into the warehouse itself. Four guards stand watch inside the courtyard.

The **4 guards** have orders to not allow anyone inside unless they are with an agent of Noviorium House. They do not recognize the authority of the sheriff either. The characters must either magically or physically secure their way into the warehouse.

The gate is locked with a key that one of the guards carries on his belt loop. Unlocking the door without the key requires a CL 5 dexterity check with a set of thieves' tools, but the guards try and stop the person using their spears at range through the gate. Alternately, the gate can be busted down with brute force – a CL 6 strength check is enough to push it down. Climbing the wall takes a CL 4 strength check.

The doors leading into the warehouse itself are not locked.

*Tactics:* If the guards see that the characters are coming in and have time to react, one of them rushes inside to **area 3** to warn the Noviorium House agents and other defenses (see that area for details).

### 2. Main Storage Area

Beyond the broad loading door a darkened warehouse looms before you. Crates and boxes are stacked nearly twenty feet high in seemingly haphazard piles around you. Magical globes of light sit suspended from the 40 foot ceiling, providing dim illumination inside.

At any point in the day or night the warehouse is occupied with **1 Noviorium House agent** and **6 green-painted natives**. The natives lurk in the southeastern corner of the warehouse, gnawing on bones, while the agent moves about the room making notes on a chart in his hand. The agent carries a small enchanted stone with him that can be used to summon an **air elemental** as an action if intruders enter.

*Tactics:* If a guard is able to get into the warehouse before the characters, the Noviorium House agent summons the air elemental first and then casts *stoneskin* on himself. He then mentally summons the green-painted natives in the corner and in **area 3** to wait in ambush around the doors for the intruders. If he has time the agent climbs one of the stacks of boxes to lob spells from above.

*Development:* The Noviorium House agent knows of the secret vault in **area 4** but only reveals that information under threat of death (or a magical charm). He knows that Natan, the master of Noviorium House in Kraden's Hill, uses the vault frequently but he hasn't seen him for about a week or so. The agent doesn't know what's in the vault.

### 3. Secondary Storage Area

Beyond the broad loading door a darkened warehouse looms before you. Crates and boxes are stacked nearly twenty feet high in seemingly haphazard piles around you. Magical globes of light sit suspended from the 40 foot ceiling, providing dim illumination inside.

This section of the warehouse holds **6 green-painted natives** drawing in the dirt in front of the rear entrance to the warehouse. That door is locked with a good lock (CL 6 dexterity check with thieves' tools to open) and tampering with it alerts these natives to someone trying to get in.

*Tactics:* If the characters use the back entrance the natives likely surprise them in combat, but the agent in **area 2** is used to them being noisy so he doesn't pay it any attention.

### 4. Vault Access

A trap door lays on the ground at this spot, covered by dirt to make it look like the rest of the floor. Finding the trap door requires a CL 5 wisdom check, which opens by pulling on the iron ring. The revealed chute leads straight down for 20 feet with a ladder clinging to one side. The ladder is safe.

## The Sealed Vault

Below the Novortum House warehouse, Natan built a secret vault two years ago to conduct rituals and experiments in, away from the prying eyes of Kraden's Hill. Now, it serves as the perfect location for Natan's newfound worship of Ibholtheg and the epicenter for his plans to destroy the frontier town. Most of the agents that are loyal to Novortum House know of the vault, though Natan is the only human to have entered it.

#### General Features

**Walls and floor:** The walls and floors of the vault are made of thick stone not native to this area.

**Ceiling:** The ceiling is made of the same stone as the walls and floor and reaches 10 feet high.

**Sound:** As part of its magic, no sound escapes the vault, and each room is magically soundproofed from the other rooms.

**Temperature:** Unlike the warehouse and all of Kraden's Hill, the vault is a comfortable temperature and bone dry. No humidity enters the vault.

### 1. Vault Door

The chute from the warehouse above ends in a square chamber 20 feet across. The walls and floor are bare stone of a curious quality, and the only feature in this room is a large circular portal door on the south wall. The iron door bears the carved image of a large face, grim and stoic, with a hood covering its eyes.

Opening the vault door and bypassing the trap requires speaking the password, a phrase which only Natan knows. The door opens by rolling and sliding it to the left. The trap on the door is magical, so unless the characters can detect magic traps they are not likely to find it (though they most likely suspect something!).

If the door is opened without the password being spoken, the mouth on the carved face opens up and billows poisonous gas that fills the chamber. It lasts for 2d6 rounds, and each round a character stays in the gas they must succeed on a CL 5 constitution saving throw or suffer 2d8 poison damage and gain exhaustion (all ability checks are at +2 CL for the next 8 hours). The gas dissipates after its expiration but the trap must be reset manually by Natan, so it is safe to enter after that.

### 2. Conjuring Chamber

This large chamber is mostly bare except for a curious circle drawn in white chalk on the floor. The nubs of candles sit around the edges of the circle, inside of which is drawn a myriad of symbols. As you enter the room, a pillar of smoke rises from the circle but it seems contained by some invisible confines. You see movement inside the smoke and a webbed, demonic hand pushes against the invisible barrier.

Natan was an accomplished wizard but had a tendency to summon creatures well beyond his ability to control. Using ancient magicks known to his order, though, he constructed prisons to hold the summoned denizens that would not do his bidding. As long as the chalk is not disturbed and the candles are not moved, the prison holds.

Currently, the summoning chamber holds a **toad demon** that Natan summoned to try and gain insight into Ibholtheg's teachings. Natan thought incorrectly that since the demon bore a superficial resemblance to the Squamous Toad that it would know more about Ibholtheg, but that route proved fruitless. In frustration the wizard decided to keep the demon pinned to the chamber until he decided to free it.

The toad demon, who calls itself Gadruhm, demands that the characters free it immediately. In return the

demon promises to kill them slowly, a deal which it quickly realizes the characters are unlikely to take so it switches tactics and offers a chest full of gold and treasure instead. Gadruhm is a consummate liar and releasing it would be a bad idea – whatever deal it swears to make it reneges on immediately and attacks the characters.

Talking with Gadruhm should prove an exercise in frustration and truthfully the toad demon doesn't know more than that he was summoned, asked questions by its summoner Natan about some entity he didn't know and doesn't remember, and then promptly left.

*Tactics:* If released, Gadruhm attacks the characters immediately, releasing all of its penned up fury.

### 3. Shrine

A foul odor rises from this large stone chamber. In the northwest corner squats a statue of green porous stone depicting a large, squamous toad creature on its haunches, with a pair of bat wings folder over its shoulders and a wide crocodilian mouth. Several humanoid figures lie prostrate before it, and as you enter they turn quickly towards you, their long black tongues slithering out of their mouth.

Natan experimented with the cipactli eggs on native slaves before unleashing them on Kraden's Hill, and the **5 black tongue victims** here were the first successful creations. They quickly fell to worshipping the statue of Ibholtheg the wizard brought here to study, a curious practice that Natan was studying to understand the effects of the black tongue better.

*Tactics:* The black tongue victims launch themselves at the characters in a righteous fury for invading their sacred place of worship. They fight until dead.

### 4. Natan's Private Chamber

The walls of this large chamber are lined with stout stone tables, eight in total. Each of the tables holds something different and exotic. The one that draws your eye contains the body of a human, laid face up with its arms and legs spread apart and its chest cavity open, revealing dried shriveled organs inside. The opening in the chest extends up to the neck and lower jaw, and you see a long black snake-like appendage stretched throughout. Other tables hold beakers, bottles, books, powders, minerals, jars of fluid, and other unspeakable objects.

This room is where Natan performed most of his experiments and research. However, in the case that anyone were to discover the vault, he placed a summoning trigger here. If anyone but himself enters

the room, a **fire elemental** appears and attempts to burn the contents of the room before they can fall into his enemy's hands.

*Tactics:* Once summoned, the fire elemental begins to set fire to documents on tables and boiling the liquids just by being close to them. If engaged in combat, however, the creature turns to defend itself, but the heat of it is enough to cause much of the brittle papers in the room to burst into flames.

*Treasure:* If the characters can defeat the fire elemental in 3 rounds they can save most of the papers and beakers. Each round after that has a cumulative 15% chance of destroying the following items (roll individually): *potion of haste*, *potion of fire giant strength*, *potion of fly*, *spell scroll of haste*, *spell scroll of stinking cloud*, *spell scroll of polymorph*, and a *spell scroll of dimension door*.

Regardless of the rest of the items, if the characters search around they find Natan's charred diary. Many of the pages are burnt (the fire elemental had instructions to destroy it first) but the last few entries are still legible. The entries are dated two days ago and speak of meeting the "green-painted savages" to complete the "Ritual of Rising" at the "Swamp of the Screaming Toad" along with a crude map showing the location of the swamp. There isn't a lot of surviving details about the ritual itself, but the characters should be sufficiently invested at this point to want to see it stopped.

## PART THREE: SWAMP OF THE SCREAMING TOAD

Armed with the map and the knowledge that something called the "Ritual of Rising" is going to occur in a far swamp, the characters prepare to set out. Sheriff Lomen and Grimden House clean up the rest of Novortum House's holdings in the meantime. Looking over the map, Sheriff Lomen suggests the characters get a guide to help get them there quickly – if they don't know of anyone she suggests Jabu, a half-shadow orc ranger.

**WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: A FAMILIAR FACE**  
**JABU WAS THE GUIDE FOR THE CHARACTERS IN TGI LOST**  
**TEMPLE OF IBHOLTHEG AND HOPEFULLY HE SURVIVED THE**  
**ORDEAL. IF HE DID NOT, FEEL FREE TO SUBSTITUTE HIM FOR**  
**ANOTHER SKILLED RANGER WITH SIMILAR STATS. IF THE**  
**PLAYERS WENT THROUGH TGI MAKE SURE JABU REFERENCES**  
**THEIR PAST DEEDS (WHICH WERE HOPEFULLY SUITABLY**  
**HEROIC!).**

Jabu can be found at the Thirsty Serpent, and once he sees the deputy badges he leaps to service with no charge. He looks over the map and laughs, saying that the journey there is going to take them 4 days of hard jungle traveling.

## Into the Great Jungle

The journey to the Swamp of the Screaming Toad from Kraden's Hill takes the characters 4 days of hard jungle traveling. It's a hot, sticky, miserable journey, potentially filled with dangerous encounters.

Every 12 hours, there is a 30% chance the characters encounter something in the jungle. Roll on the random encounter table below, and then roll 1d12 to determine the hour that it occurs.

d10	Jungle Encounter
1	Giant constrictor snake
2	Savage shadow orcs
3	Swarm of poisonous snakes
4	Giant boar rivals
5	Cannibal natives
6-8	Heat wave
9	Troll ambush
0	Giant ape attack

### Giant constrictor snakes

The jungle around the characters hides **2 giant constrictor snakes** eager for a quick meal.

*Tactics:* Any character with a passive Perception greater than the snakes' Dexterity (Stealth) check notices the creatures before they attack, but everyone else is surprised. The snakes go for the smallest characters first, eager to crush their opponents quickly.

### Savage shadow orcs

The Great Jungle is filled with tribes of shadow orcs that are not friendly to outsiders. A hunting group of **8 shadow orc warriors** stumble upon the characters and decide to punish them for trespassing.

*Tactics:* Four of the shadow orcs charge forward while the other four hang back, shooting arrows at targets. The shadow orcs shooting bows have half cover where they are from the surrounding trees.

*Treasure:* The shadow orcs carry the bodies of five dead brockets (jungle deer) that the expedition can use instead of their own food for five days.

### NPC Profile: Jabu, Half-Shadow orc Ranger

Raised in the jungle as a member of the Moronkula tribe, Jabu cut his teeth and earned his scars hunting great panthers, huge serpents, and other beasts growing up. As a half-orc, the child of a human slave mother and a shadow orc father, he had to work extra hard to prove himself. He distinguished himself quickly as a skilled tracker, and could move as silently as a shadow upon unsuspecting prey. The Moronkula tribe were the first ones to make peaceful contact with the human settlers, who had up to that point only encountered the shadow orcs when they were raided savagely by them. A peace was offered, and soon several other tribes came to trade with the strangers in Kraden's Hill.

Jabu made himself available as a guide and liked the respect that came with his skill from the outsiders. He found himself staying in Kraden's Hill more and more, until he could finally afford a place to live there. Now he is one of the more experienced guides in town.

### Swarm of poisonous snakes

Giant constrictors are not the only serpent threat in the Great Jungle. Rustling in the nearby undergrowth alerts the characters to the presence of **3 swarms of poisonous snakes** that surge forward to attack and kill.

*Tactics:* The poisonous snake swarms focus on the least armored character available.

### Giant boar rivals

The characters come across **2 giant boars** who were fighting over a mate. They immediately turn upon the characters, seeing them as intruders.

*Tactics:* The boars charge in recklessly intent on killing the intruders to their turf.

### Cannibal natives

Like the shadow orcs, not all of the native humans of the Great Jungle are friendly. Many of the ones that lived in close proximity to Kraden's Hill were absorbed as slaves and taught the basics of civilization. But not too far deeper, tribes of cannibals – barely recognizable as humans anymore – still live to hunt for flesh. A pack of **10 cannibal natives** attack the characters, eager to add their skulls to their belts.

*Tactics:* The cannibal natives are capable hunters, moving quickly through the jungle and as silently as possible. They use their blow darts at range to try and drug the characters with the poison of the jungle tree frogs.



### Heat wave

The jungle is hot, but the characters hit a particularly bad spot of heat and humidity. Each character must make a CL 3 Constitution saving throw to avoid suffering from exhaustion (characters wearing 40 or more pounds of armor make the check at CL 5). Exhaustion imposes an additional CL 2 to any ability check until 8 or more hours of rest are completed.

### Troll ambush

Trolls lurk in the Great Jungle, feasting on the lesser creatures. They move in a wide area, and anyone or anything that comes into that territory they view as their own. Unfortunately, the characters come upon such a territory. A single **troll** moves to attack the expedition.

*Tactics:* The troll uses a wounded brocket (a type of jungle deer) to lure the characters into a pit trap. The brocket can be heard plainly, crying in the jungle a short distance away. Jabu wants to investigate but won't do it alone. Anyone that checks out the sound sees the wounded brocket lying against a fallen log, with a great gash in its side. Actively looking and CL 3 Wisdom check is needed to find the trap, which otherwise dumps unsuspecting characters 20 feet down into spikes. The fall deals 2d6 bludgeoning damage and the spikes deal 2d10 piercing damage.

The troll, hiding nearby and spottable only by a character actively searching for it with a CL 5 Wisdom check, leaps out to attack in surprise.

If the characters do not take the bait, the troll attacks a short time later by simply leaping out the jungle.

*Treasure:* Finding the troll's lair requires a CL 5 wisdom check, but in doing so the characters find its small treasure pile. The troll has accumulated a bag of 100 gold from various victims.

### Giant ape attack

There are only a handful of giant apes in this section of the Great Jungle, which is thankful as the beasts are ferocious and terrifying. The characters hear the **giant ape** bellowing a short distance before it shows up a few rounds later.

*Tactics:* The giant ape is not a subtle opponent, and bangs its massive fists down upon the enemy that deals it the most damage. If it is reduced to ¼ or less hit points, the giant ape retreats into the jungle to nurse its wounds. It does not pursue characters that flee more than 50 feet from it.



## The Shadow Watchers Appear

On the third day out of Kraden's Hill on their way to the Swamp of the Screaming Toad, the characters are confronted by a band of wild elves called the Shadow Watchers. This small band has been charged in ages past with the task of stopping the spread of Ibholtheg. They have been watching the swamp area, with its strange robed travelers, green-painted natives, and other horrors, and feel that the time is right to strike.

They don't know anything about the characters or their mission, however. At around noon on the third day of the party's journey, **8 wild elf watchers** led by **Duru**, their female wild elf leader, surround the characters. If they are not noticed, Duru calls for them to halt in an old dialect of Elven. Anyone that speaks Elven can understand their dialect with a CL 4 intelligence check.

Duru and her kind do not speak Common, so if no one in the party can speak their dialect of Elven Jabu steps forward as an interpreter. Duru demands to know what the characters are doing in this part of the jungle. She is straightforward and blunt, and doesn't believe that the party are worshippers of Ibholtheg (otherwise they would have attacked first) but she wants to make sure.

If the characters suggest it and more than half of them succeed at a CL 3 charisma check, the wild elves agree to assist in the attack on the swamp. Duru and her band have already performed preliminary scouting runs around the area and provide a rough layout for the swamp and its buildings. She notes that they have seen robed men (that match the description of Novortum House agents), green-painted natives worshipping at the idols in the swamp, giant toads, monstrous bats, huge crocodiles, and cipactli. They all seem to be led by a bald man the others call "Naa-Tahn."

If the characters don't suggest it, or they fail the check, Duru and her Shadow Watchers melt back into the jungle and do not impede their progress. They can be used to assist the characters in the attack, however, if things go badly enough.

**WEIRD DAVE'S NOTEBOOK: THE WATCHERS FROM TGI**  
THE SHADOW WATCHERS WERE FIRST INTRODUCED IN TGI AS GUARDIANS OF THE TEMPLE OF IBHOLTHEG, WHOM THE PLAYERS MAY HAVE HAD AN ALTERCATION WITH IF THEY WERE NOT FORTHRIGHT WITH SOME GOOD ANSWERS. IF YOUR GROUP PLAYED THROUGH THAT MODULE, MAKE SURE THE ELVES HERE REFERENCE THOSE ACTIONS (AND REPLACE DURU WITH ANOTHER ELF LEADER IF SHE DID NOT SURVIVE).

## The Swamp of the Screaming Toad

The Swamp of the Screaming Toad contains the base for Natan and his Ibholtheg-worshipping allies. The green-painted natives have been very useful in putting together crude shelters for Natan and his Novortum House agents to dwell in while they prepare for the Ritual of Rising.

Read or paraphrase the following once the characters arrive.

The thick underbrush that you've been moving through has slowly been getting wetter, and the ground softer as your path turns south and east. Up ahead you hear the gurgle of running water, but it is nearly drowned out by the sudden croaking of a multitude of toads. Hundreds, perhaps more sound their cry in the jungle in a horrendous cacophony that reaches to the sky. Then it dies down to a subtle sound and you find that you've arrived at the swamp as you push aside some thick leaves. Ahead you see three crudely built wooden buildings, two smaller ones on either side of a long open one, connected to each other by long lengths of wood cut and lashed together to form crude bridges over the swampy morass. Several trees grow up from the muck, exposing their tall roots and letting thick tangles of moss hang down from their grasping branches.

Two wooden bridges provide access to the swampy lair, one on the western side and the other on the south, and several of the bridges connect to broader platforms. One of the platforms sits against the river that forms the camp's eastern border, and upon that pavilion you see a great green stone idol, the same type you saw in the Novortum House vault but this one is larger and more ancient. Vines cling to its porous surface and its eyes are carved to resemble a night sky.

The swamp itself is small and situated on the banks of a small river. To avoid having to move through the thick mud, Natan ordered wooden paths be constructed between all of the buildings and sacred sites. There are three buildings in the swamp, two small platforms, and one large pavilion that contains the Idol of the Squamous Toad.

### General Features

**Swamp:** The ground beneath the boardwalks in the swamp is thick and difficult to get out of. It is considered difficult terrain, and any creature that falls in must make a CL 4 dexterity saving throw to avoid getting stuck and losing a round. Any stuck targets can make a new saving throw at the beginning of their turns to try and free themselves.

**Boardwalks:** The wooden boards that sit above



the swamp are slick and poorly constructed. Each is 5 feet wide. Moving more than 20 feet in a round requires a CL 4 dexterity check to avoid falling into the swamp.

**River:** The river that creates the eastern border of the swamp is slow moving and reaches a depth of 15 feet in the center. Swimming it requires a CL 3 strength check or no check if the swimmer is under no duress.

## 1. Jungle Access

The two points on the map marked as **area 1** give access to the boardwalks. They are each guarded by **3 green-painted natives**, keeping an eye on the jungle for any intruders.

**Tactics:** If the green-painted natives are not dealt with quickly, one of them pulls out a horn and gives a blow

that echoes throughout the swamp lair. The horn blow is the signal for Natan to begin the ritual (see **Ritual of Rising** below).

## 2. Open Shelter

A large open shelter sits on a broad platform suspended above the swamp. The shelter is held up by five sets of posts spaced ten feet apart with a broad leaf top that keeps out the rain. An alarm horn hangs on a vine-woven strap on one of the posts.

The shelter is used intermittently by the residents of the swamp lair. There is usually **6 green-painted natives** and **2 giant poisonous toads** that hang around beneath the shelter, eating or otherwise occupying themselves.

**Tactics:** The natives attack anyone whom they do not recognize on sight, sending the poisonous frogs in to deal with characters in melee. One of the natives rushes over to the horn and gives it a blow, alerting Natan in **area 8** to begin the ritual (see **Ritual of Rising** below).

## 3. Noviortum House Refuge

A crudely built dwelling squats just above the swamp at the end of the boardwalk. The door is closed and the window slats are shut. It looks like another door exits on the opposite side of the building as you can see more boardwalks extending from the back.

This building was built for the humans who have assisted Natan in Noviortum House to live and work. It holds **2 Noviortum House agents** studying or sleeping in shifts. They awaken to any sounds of combat in the swamp or to the bellow of a horn signaling the beginning of the ritual.

**Tactics:** The Noviortum House agents work to keep the characters occupied for as long as possible, which includes sacrificing themselves. They believe devoutly in Natan and the rise of Ibholtheg.

**Treasure:** Searching the building turns up the following items: a sack containing 150 gold and 250 sp, a *potion of invisibility*, and a *spell scroll of disintegrate*.

## 4. Crocodile Point

The boardwalk abruptly ends at this point, but anyone that approaches it gets the attention of the **2 giant crocodiles** that lurk in the river and nearby swamp.

#### NPC Profile: Natan, Master of Novioirtum House

The man born as Natan il-Hasa Basswa had a good life in his native homeland, a desert kingdom of riches and plenty. His family were wealthy traders and Natan was given every luxury a man could ask for. But he hungered for more nonetheless. Never satisfied with being given everything, Natan wanted to create a name for himself to show everyone that the worth of a man is more than what he is born into.

He studied magic in secret while his family thought he was learning the academics of the world, and when they confronted him about it angrily Natan lashed out in a rage. Though he was young in the art he was skilled, and his magic killed his parents outright. Fearing reprisal, Natan fled the desert kingdom and vowed never to return. He traveled the world, and with a keen business acumen he built a merchant company he called Novioirtum House. He gathered like-minded people to his cause, and eventually he discovered the long-forgotten name of Ibholtheg. The few words of the Squamous Toad he could find intrigued and excited Natan, and he bent every resource to uncovering greater truths about the outer power.

Word reached him of the frontier town of Kraden's Hill, and he knew that great secrets of Ibholtheg lay in the foreboding jungle just beyond its border. Using his wealth and influence Natan secured a place in Kraden's Hill for himself and his most loyal agents, setting up shop as simple merchants of curios, trinkets, and other minor charms. But he had his eyes on the jungle and the promise of releasing Ibholtheg upon the world once again.

**Tactics:** The Novioirtum House agents feed the crocodiles from here so the creatures know if someone is there they are getting fed. If several pounds of meat are not thrown into the swamp to placate them they lunge forward and attack anyone on the boardwalk.

#### 5. Platform of Dark Wings

The natives and agents are careful not to stay in this location for longer than 1 round. Any target that stays here after 1 round attracts the attention of **8 giant bats** that live in the trees on the other side of the river.

**Tactics:** The green-painted natives and agents try to pin characters in this location if fighting breaks out in order to attract the bats. The agents use *hold person* as much as they can while the natives occupy warriors as long as possible.

#### 6. Sacrifice Platform

At the corner of two boardwalks sits a crudely constructed circular platform. The rain, heat, and humidity in the jungle have done nothing to remove the blood stains that mark its surface nor dull the stories of the claw marks dug deeply into the wood.

Natan orders slaves and especially wild elves to be sacrificed in honor of Ibholtheg at this location. The surrounding swamp hides **2 cipactli** who wait just beneath the surface in deep pockets, watching the platform for their next meal.

**Tactics:** If the horn is sounded, the cipactli leap out of the swamp and move to defend the swamp lair while Natan prepares the ritual (see **Ritual of Rising** below). Otherwise the creatures attack anyone that isn't a green-painted native or a Novioirtum House agent that steps on the platform.

#### 7. Toad Hollow

The incessant croaking of the swamp seems louder here, taking on an inhuman kind of language as the amphibians in the jungle communicate with one another. The boardwalk ends abruptly and you see the eyes of dozens of toads lurking around the exposed roots of a nearby tree.

The most sacred toads of the swamp that give it its name live here. Even the green-painted natives know not to linger for the toads are absolute masters of the lair, despite Natan's assurance. The roots of the nearby tree hide **5 giant poisonous toads** and a hideous **great slime toad**, which keeps its bulk hidden in the mud.

**Tactics:** Anyone approaching this area attracts the attention of the toads and the slime toad. The toads jump out to devour any intruders, but the slime toad waits for the horn to be sounded in **area 1** or **area 2**. In that case, it rises from the swamp and leaps forward to **area 2** carried by humongous hops.

#### 8. Natan's Study

A wooden building stands here, not very large but much better built than the others in the swamp. The door is of fine quality and the shutters are well crafted. The smell of incense and spices wafts through the air around the door.

When the swamp lair was constructed, the master of Novioirtum House made sure that his dwelling was the best constructed and best defended. This building is where **Natan** can be found, inside working on formulae and experiments. His bed sits in one corner along with a chest of his personal goods brought from

his desert homeland.

The chest inside is locked with a good lock (CL 6 dexterity check to unlock with a set of thieves' tools).

*Tactics:* If the horn is sounded in **area 1** or **area 2**, Natan rushes to **area 9** to begin the ritual that summons the power of the swamp to do Ibholtheg's bidding (see **Ritual of Rising** below). Otherwise the wizard does his best to immobilize powerful enemies and retrieve help from the rest of the swamp lair.

*Treasure:* The chest contains several sets of fine silken clothes fit for a desert prince (worth 300 gold). Below that is a small sack containing 5 small diamonds each worth 75 gold, and tucked below that is a *figurine of wondrous power* (silver raven) that Natan stole from his family.

## 9. Pavilion of the Idol

The most prominent feature of this broad flat wooden pavilion is the massive stone idol squatting on the edge. The idol is made of a porous green stone and is carved in the likeness of a toad, twenty feet tall, squatting down on its haunches. A pair of wings wrap around its broad shoulders and its mouth is more crocodilian than toad. But the eyes are not like anything you've seen before. They appear to resemble a night sky. The base of the idol shows clearly that it once sat for a long time in dirt.

This is the Idol of the Squamous Toad, which the characters may recognize from **TG1 Lost Temple of Ibholtheg** as the key for them to reach the temple. Natan had it moved with magic and the will of Ibholtheg to this location to help consecrate it in the Squamous Toad's honor.

There are **8 green-painted natives** worshipping the idol at any given time here.

*Tactics:* The natives view any characters or wild elves as trespassers on a holy site and attack savagely. If the horn has been called in **area 1** or **area 2** the green-painted natives move to block the boardwalks leading to the pavilion while Natan rushes towards the idol and begins the ritual (see **Ritual of Rising** below).

## Ritual of Rising

It is likely that at some point one of the natives blows the horn that alerts the camp to intruders. Natan has been preparing for the Ritual of Rising for the past several days in anticipation of some force trying to stop him (he knew the Shadow Watcher wild elves were preparing to strike).

If the horn is sounded or Natan is otherwise alerted to the presence of intruders, he moves quickly to **area 9** to finish the Ritual of Rising. The ritual takes him 3 rounds to complete, and during each round the ground rumbles and buckles as if a great force were pushing up from beneath it.

At the end of the third round, the **Swamp Avatar** rises on the opposite side of the river. Read or paraphrase the following if that happens.

The sky above takes on a dark timber as the ground buckles and shakes once more, this time more violently than before. On the opposite side of the river, the swamp rises like a great bubble, pushing trees aside in its rise. Suddenly the bubble takes form, growing massive arms and thick legs out of the swamp and mud that gave it form. A pair of emerald fire eyes spring to life on the swamp thing head, or at least what you approximate to be its head. It steps forward and the ground ripples beneath its titanic feet. The thing is 30 feet high and walking towards the pavilion that holds the stone idol.

Natan commands the Swamp Avatar to destroy the intruders, which it does so with all possible haste. Anyone making a CL 4 wisdom check sees that the eyes of the stone idol on the pavilion are lit with the same emerald fire as the Swamp Avatar.

## Stopping the Swamp Avatar

In melee combat, the Swamp Avatar likely crushes the characters in mere rounds, and it can spew poisonous mud in a line if no one is in reach of its long pounding fists. The easiest way to defeat the thing is to destroy the Idol of the Squamous Toad, which is the link that Natan used to summon the avatar in the first place.

The idol has an AC 10 and 50 hp, and suffers half damage from fire, lightning, bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage, immunity to psychic, cold, and necrotic damage, and double damage from acid.

Natan does everything in his power to stop the characters from targeting the idol, and orders the remaining forces of the swamp lair to do the same. If the idol is destroyed (or the characters manage to destroy the Swamp Avatar in straight combat), read or paraphrase the following.

With a horrendous cry that splits the air, the titanic avatar of swamp fury staggers backwards slowly, its blazing green eyes flickering for a moment with a brilliant light before stopping forever. The massive bulk of the creature swings around and it takes steps towards the other side of the river from whence it came, diminishing with each thud, until it finally collapses completely back to the earth.

Natan and any remaining forces are stunned for 1 round if this occurs, hopefully allowing the characters and their allies to clean up any further resistance.

## EPILOGUE

Once Natan is defeated and the Ritual of Rising stopped (or the Swamp Avatar put down), the characters can return to Kraden's Hill. The Shadow Watchers, whether they participated in the battle or not, keep watch on the party on the return journey and ensure that no other creature comes to harm them.

Sheriff Lomen is pleased to hear that the evils that lurked in the swamp were dealt with but is quite troubled that such a thing could fester under her own nose. She becomes sullen and withdrawn, her confidence in her paladin oaths shaken to their core. Characters who enjoyed playing the part of deputy can step up and take the mantle of sheriff while Karolina Lomen figures things out on her own.

Theodric Grimden is ecstatic to hear that one of his two prime rivals in Kraden's Hill was eliminated and he had nothing to do with it. He rewards the characters with 300 gold each as a token of his thanks and promises to pledge Grimden House support if any of them want to become sheriff in town.

## Rewards

In addition to the experience awards for defeating their foes in combat (or cleverly avoiding combat), the characters can also earn bonus experience points for accomplishing story-centered goals. The list below offers examples of some that can be used, but create your own as you see fit!

- Discovered Lambert Glover's fate
- Helped Sheriff Lomen keep the peace
- Uncovered Novortum House's true plot
- Destroyed the Idol of the Squamous Toad

## Next Steps

The events of the adventure shake the citizens of Kraden's Hill to their core. Novortum House's influence quickly drops, especially if the characters spread information about Natan and what happened in the swamp. Grimden House moves to consolidate more power, which sees them snatch up a number of Novortum assets and workers in short order. People begin to take note of the characters, especially Sheriff Lomen.

Once again, however, things are about to take a turn for the worst in Kraden's Hill. Ibholtheg shakes the confines of its extraplanar prison, and cracks begin to appear between the worlds. The characters are going to have to deal with those cracks in ...

### ***SHADOWS OUT OF SAPPHIRE LAKE!***

## TG2 Monster and NPC Information

**Giant constrictor snake:** Large Size Animal; Physical Saves; HD 6d8; hp 31; Move 30 ft., climb 30 ft., swim 30 ft.; AC 15; Atk bite (1d4) and coil (2d6); Special: constrict (the round after a coil hit, the victim must make a strength save or suffer 2d6 damage per round, -2 cumulative penalty to save after each round); AL N; XP 360

The **giant constrictor snake** is a massive predator, easily 30 feet long, with a wide mouth capable of biting nearly any creature in the jungle. This snake slithers through the lush underbrush, its green scales allowing it blend in easily with its surroundings, but it can just as easily be found in a tree waiting for a victim to walk by beneath it.

**Shadow orc warrior:** Medium Size Humanoid; Physical Saves; HD 1d8; hp 8; Move 30 ft.; AC 13; Atk crude axe (1d8) or javelin (1d6); Special: darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; XP 14

The **shadow orcs** of the Great Jungle have dark gray skin and keep their black hair cut into topknots. Ritualistic scarring is common among the various tribes, with each scar telling a story of the orc's deeds. Some tribes see peaceful relationships with the merchants of Kraden's Hill as a way to increase their standing in the jungle, while other tribes only concern themselves with which type of merchant tastes the best over an open fire.

**Swarm of poisonous snakes:** Large Size Swarm; Physical Saves; HD 4d8; hp 22; Move 30 ft.; AC 12; Atk bite (1d6); Special: swarm traits (occupies a 10-foot circular space, automatically hits any creature in its space each turn, can occupy same space as another creature, attacks against it that target individual creatures deal 1/2 damage), poison (bitten targets must make constitution save, 1d4 damage or half on success from poison, on a fail - suffer -1 to hit and on all physical attribute checks for 10 minutes, second save after 10 minutes, success negates poison, failure causes 1d4 damage and -3 penalty to attacks and physical checks, daily saves are required for 1 week, lose 1 constitution point each failure); AL N; XP 188

Great **swarms of poisonous snakes** are a common problem in the Great Jungle, as the smaller vipers have learned that they can live longer and feed on greater food by slithering together. A swarm encompasses an area 20' wide and wear down their victims with a dangerous venom.

**Giant boar:** Medium Size Animal; Physical Saves; HD 2d8; hp 10 each; Move 40 ft.; AC 16; Atk gore (2d6); Special: twilight vision, aggression (attack as 5 HD creature); AL N; XP 20

That snorting in the underbrush might be a **giant boar**, and if so you want to make sure you don't let it charge you. The beast's powerful gore attack at the end of a charge has felled creatures much larger than itself, and for this purpose many shadow orc tribes in the Great Jungle seek to tame and ride the boars. The boars are as large as ponies!

### NPC Profile: Sheriff Karolina Lomen, Beleaguered Human Law Officer

Karolina Lomen is an accomplished warrior, born into a military family far to the north and west. Her esteemed lineage were knights and soldiers in service to a great king, and Karolina distinguished herself early on as an exemplar of her traditions. She swore the oaths of a paladin and prepared to defend her king and country on the field of battle.

However, things went differently for her. Her father fell from grace in the eyes of the king, and though Karolina had no part in it, the punishment fell to her as well. She was sent to the fledgling frontier town of Kraden's Hill to act as the sheriff and keep the king's peace. It's mostly a token role – much of the peacekeeping occurs between the three merchant companies who want no part in the "king's pet" interfering with their duties. She has little resources and all of her requests have been denied for more soldiers and more authority, but as a paladin she refuses to back down. Karolina is stubborn, resourceful, and shrewd, with a good heart and a keen blade at her side.

**Cannibal native:** Medium Size Humanoid; Physical Saves; HD 1d8; hp 6; Move 30 ft.; AC 13; Atk spear (1d6); Special: tracking, pass without trace (in jungle terrain, can move without leaving a sign); AL CE; XP 15

Fallen descendants of once proud civilizations, **cannibal natives** of the Great Jungle are humans who have become dangerous and primitive. They communicate with grunts and gestures and generally don't have a sense of scale or self-preservation. A single cannibal native facing off against much larger or dangerous prey is undaunted.

**Troll:** Large Size Giant; Physical Saves; HD 6d8; hp 28; Move 30 ft.; AC 16; Atk 2 claws (1d4) and bite (2d6); Special: rend (if both claws hit, 1d4+1 extra damage), regeneration 2 (except fire and acid damage), darkvision 60 ft., twilight vision; AL CE; XP 438

The **trolls** that dwell in the Great Jungle are taller and lankier than their mountain kin, but their mottled green skin allows them to blend in with their surroundings easier. Generally hairless, a troll enjoys stalking its prey for miles before striking at the right moment.



**Giant ape:** Large Size Animal (12' tall); Physical Saves; HD 7d8; hp 49; Move 30 ft., climb 30 ft.; AC 14; Atk 2 claws (1d8) and bite (2d6); Special: rend (if both claws hit, 2d6 extra damage), twilight vision; AL N; XP 613

Few creatures in the Great Jungle can match the size and ferocity of the **great ape**. Standing around 20' tall, the great ape crashes ungracefully through the jungle and beats its chest as a warning to all that it's in the area. Its claws are capable of tearing boars and snakes in half, but if severely wounded the great ape is smart enough to flee to fight another day.

**Cipactli:** Large Size Aberration (10' tall); Mental Saves; HD 6d8; hp 31; Move 30 ft., jump 30 ft.; AC 14; Atk 2 claws (1d8) and bite (1d10); Special: regenerate 3 (as long as it has 1 hp it regenerates, stops regenerating when below 0), SR 8, immunity cold/fire/lightning (half damage, quarter save), pounce (if the cipactli jumps it can make a single claw attack, if it hits the victim must make a strength saving throw or be knocked prone and cipactli hits with bite attack); AL CE; XP 486

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

**Wild elf watcher:** Medium Size Humanoid; Physical Saves; HD 2d8; hp 9; Move 30 ft.; AC 15; Atk longbow (1d6, range 100 ft.) or long sword (1d8); Special: twilight vision, enhanced senses, move silently, sleep resistance; AL LN; XP 33

Sworn to protect the temple of Ibholtæg from intruders, the **wild elf watchers** serve Duru, their leader, and are honor-bound to obey his every command. The watchers are fearless in their duty and ruthless in combat.

**Duru:** Medium Size Humanoid; Physical Saves; HD 5d8; hp 27; Move 30 ft.; AC 17; Atk 2 longbow (1d6, range 100 ft.) or 2 long sword (1d8); Special: twilight vision, enhanced senses, move silently, sleep resistance; AL LN; XP 295

When Ibholtæg's temple was found, a secret order of elves took it upon themselves to make sure no one discovered the golden site. That mantle of responsibility has passed from generation to generation, and now rests with **Duru**, a stern elf who is not afraid to put down anyone that attempts to cross the mists.

**Great slime toad:** Huge Size Aberration; Physical Saves; HD 8d8; hp 45; Move 20 ft., jump 40 ft.; AC 15; Atk 2 claws (2d6, 10 ft. reach), tongue (1d10, 15 ft. reach); Special: twilight vision, swallow (targets hit by tongue must succeed on a Strength saving throw, small and medium creatures are pulled in immediately and suffer 2d8 damage each round, can fight out with small weapon to deal 10 damage to get out); AL CE; XP 860

#### **NPC Profile: Jabu, Half-Shadow orc Ranger**

Raised in the jungle as a member of the Moronkula tribe, Jabu cut his teeth and earned his scars hunting great panthers, huge serpents, and other beasts growing up. As a half-orc, the child of a human slave mother and a shadow orc father, he had to work extra hard to prove himself. He distinguished himself quickly as a skilled tracker, and could move as silently as a shadow upon unsuspecting prey. The Moronkula tribe were the first ones to make peaceful contact with the human settlers, who had up to that point only encountered the shadow orcs when they were raided savagely by them. A peace was offered, and soon several other tribes came to trade with the strangers in Kraden's Hill.

Jabu made himself available as a guide and liked the respect that came with his skill from the outsiders. He found himself staying in Kraden's Hill more and more, until he could finally afford a place to live there. Now he is one of the more experienced guides in town.

The most devoted worshippers of Ibholtæg are able to summon a **great slime toad** to wreak havoc on the toad god's enemies. This massive creature resembles a giant toad with a nearly translucent slimy body and skin. The creature is able to extend its front legs as slime-coated tentacles against foes, grabbing them and then slamming the hapless victims into nearby solid ground.

**Crocodile:** Medium Size Animal; Physical Saves; HD 3d8; hp 19; Move 20 ft., swim 30 ft.; AC 15; Atk bite (2d4), tail slap (1d12); Special: roll (on a successful bite, victim must make a Strength saving throw or be held, automatic bite damage each round and victim is incapacitated for 1d4+1 rounds, only usable in the water), twilight vision; AL N; XP 87

The Great Jungle hides many dangers, one of the most fearsome is the **crocodile** that lurks in the shadows of the shallow swamps and rivers that cross the terrain. They are known flesh eaters, and the tribes of shadow orcs and wild elves have learned to tread carefully around watery areas in the jungle.

**Zombie:** Medium Size Undead; Physical Saves; HD 2d8; hp 14; Move 20 ft.; AC 12; Atk slam (1d8); Special: slow (never gains initiative, always acts last in combat round); AL NE; XP 38

In his studies of the forbidden arts, Natan has learned to create **zombies** from the corpses of the living. He has passed this knowledge down to his most devout disciples, who in turn use it to make good use of fallen enemies. The ritual to create a zombies takes many hours, however.

**Green-painted native:** Medium Size Humanoid; Physical Saves; HD 1d8+2; hp 10; Move 30 ft.; AC 15; Atk spear (1d6) or blowgun (1 plus poison); Special: tracking, pass without trace (in jungle terrain, can move without leaving a sign), poison (constitution save or suffer -1 to physical attributes for 1d3 days, no effect on successful save); AL CE; XP 23

In the Great Jungle, the descendants of the once proud Xilonoc empire have devolved into cannibal savages. Natan made friends with one particular tribe, and taught them the long secrets of painting their skin to protect against harm. These **green-painted natives** are loyal to Natan and Ibholtheg to a fault, fighting to the death against the fiends who would stop the rise of the Squamous Toad. They speak only a handful of words in Common, and their own language consists of little more than grunts and gestures.

**Black tongue victim:** Medium Size Aberration; Physical Saves; HD 3d8; hp 20; Move 30 ft.; AC 13; Atk black tongue (1d8 plus poison, 10 ft. reach); Special: poison (Constitution save or suffer 1d8 poison damage), tough to kill (if reduced to 0 hp, the black tongue victim makes a Physical save at CL equal to its negative hp result, if successful it is reduced to 1 hp instead); AL CE; XP 105

People who consume the egg of a cipactli are doomed to become **black tongue victims**. The abominable process generally takes a day or so to manifest, but when it does it takes over quickly, turning the victim into a brute that can withstand the toughest hits. It uses its long, prickled tongue to lash out at anything living nearby.

**Air elemental:** Large Size Elemental; Physical Saves; HD 4d8; hp 22; Move fly 100 ft.; AC 17; Atk slam (2d4); Special: regenerate (2 hp per round while in air, stops regenerating when reduced to 0 or lower hp), +1 or better magic weapons to hit, air mastery (+1 to hit and +2 damage when fighting airborne creature), whirlwind (1/10 minutes for 2 rounds transform into a whirlwind 5 feet wide at the base, 30 feet wide at the top, and 20 feet tall, creatures in whirlwind must make dexterity save at +4 or suffer 1d4 damage, strength save at +4 or be picked up and held); AL N; XP 198

Natan has learned a great deal of magic in his travels, and over the years he has learned to bend elementals to his will. The **air elemental** bound by Natan is an angry spirit of wind and rage that rails against its supernatural cage though it has little hope of escaping on its own. It fights to its last breath as it knows that death returns it to the Plane of Elemental Air.

**Shadow orc rager:** Medium Size Humanoid; Physical Saves; HD 3d8; hp 18; Move 30 ft.; AC 16; Atk two-handed axe (1d12+1) or javelin (1d6); Special: darkvision 60 ft., rage (for 1 minute rager gains +2 to hit and damage but suffers -2 to AC); AL LE; XP 152

While some shadow orc tribes in the Great Jungle are friendly and trade with the people of Kraden's Hill, there are just as many that see the town as only a target to raid and pillage. These tribes have powerful warriors called **shadow orc ragers** that fling themselves into combat with a reckless zeal.

**Ogre:** Large Size Giant; Physical Saves; HD 4d8; hp 19; Move 30 ft.; AC 16; Atk greatclub (2d6+3); Special: darkvision 60 ft., twilight vision; AL CE; XP 116

Though rare, some **ogres** from the mountains north of the Great Jungle have been lured down to assist shadow orc tribes that promise riches and a slaking of the ogre's insatiable bloodlust.

**Noviortum House agent:** Medium Size Humanoid; Mental Saves; HD 5d8; hp 27; Move 30 ft.; AC 12; Atk quarterstaff (1d6); Special: spellcasting (5<sup>th</sup>-level wizard, see below), gear (30 gold, dagger +1); AL NE; XP 335

Spells (5<sup>th</sup>-level wizard) – 0-level: *dancing lights*, *detect magic*, *endure elements*, *mage hand*, *message*; 1<sup>st</sup>-level: *burning hands* (x2), *magic missile* (x2), *shield*; 2<sup>nd</sup>-level: *acid arrow*, *mirror image*; 3<sup>rd</sup>-level: *lightning bolt*

Among Natan's most trusted subordinates are the **Noviortum House agents**, who have studied with the sorcerer for several years and help to carry out his and his house's infernal agenda. Though he has only a few, Natan trusts these agents with great power and enough knowledge of his master plan to keep them from telling everything should they fall to enchantments or interrogation.

**Guard:** Medium Size Humanoid; Physical Saves; HD 1d8; hp 6; Move 30 ft.; AC 14; Atk longsword (1d8); Special: gear (ring mail, large wooden shield, longsword, 30 gold); AL LE; XP 11

The **guards** hired by Natan to protect Noviortum House's interests are mercenaries and lowlifes that came to Kraden's Hill seeking a better life – or an escape from an old one. They are as loyal as money can buy, though they are not above being bribed. The guards in Natan's employ are paid 25 gold a week to protect his interests, so a bribe would have to be substantial (more than 100 gold) to get them to leave his service. Most of their pay goes right into the coffers of the Thirsty Serpent or Jewel of the Jungle, though.

**Toad Demon:** Large Size Extraplanar; Physical & Mental Saves; HD 6d10; hp 40; Move 30 ft.; AC 18; Atk 2 claws (1d6) and 1 bite (1d8); Special: +1 or better magic weapons to hit, spell resistance 12, spell-like abilities (each 3/day – *darkness*, see *invisibility*, *levitate*); AL CE; XP 690

In his study of Ibholtheg, Natan sought out knowledge from every possible angle. The **toad demons** of the Abyss seemed to bear a superficial resemblance to the Squamous Toad, so Natan summoned and bound Gadruhm in his sealed vault below the warehouse. Unfortunately, Gadruhm knew nothing of Ibholtheg, but Natan kept the demon bound just in case.

**Fire elemental:** Large Size Elemental; Physical Saves; HD 4d8; hp 23; Move 50 ft.; AC 15; Atk slam (1d4 plus 2 fire); Special: burn (non-magical combustible objects ignite upon contact), darkvision 60 ft., immunity to fire, regenerate 2 (only while in fire), +1 or better magic weapons to hit; AL N; XP 192

Back in his native land, the summoning and binding of elemental spirits is considered a noble and respected art. Natan learned much from his sorcerous training in his youth, and he put it to good use in binding a **fire elemental** to protect the secrets of his vault from falling into prying hands.

**Giant poisonous toad:** Medium Size Animal; Physical Saves; HD 3d8; hp 14; Move 20 ft., jump 40 ft.; AC 16; Atk bite (1d4); Special: twilight vision, poison (any creature making contact with skin must make a constitution save or fall into convulsions for 1d6 rounds, returns 1d12 hours later for 1d4 days, cured with treatment and 8 hours rest); AL N; XP 68

The Great Jungle contains a breed of **giant poisonous toad** that are as big as large dog, with bright colorful markings on their back. The native tribe working with Natan specialized in training and keeping these dangerous animals and harnessing their venom for their blowguns.

**Giant bat:** Large Size Animal; Physical Saves; HD 4d10; hp 29; Move 20 ft., fly 80 ft.; AC 16; Atk 2 claws (1d8); Special: blind sense 120'; AL N; XP 176

The **giant bats** in the Swamp of the Screaming Toad are an oddity. They are huge, with ten foot wingspans and great mouths, but they were not summoned or brought to the swampy site by Natan or his associates. They simply appeared over a short period, and have taken to protecting the swamp base entirely on their own. Natan believes this to be a sign from Ibholtheg that they are doing the Squamous Toad's will in the jungle.

**Natan:** Medium Size Humanoid; Mental Saves; HD 8d8; hp 57; Move 30 ft.; AC 12; Atk quarterstaff (1d6); Special: spellcasting (8<sup>th</sup>-level wizard, see below), gear (*ring of force shield*, *wand of magic missile* (15 charges), 120 gold); AL NE; XP 825

Spells – 0-level: *dancing lights*, *detect magic*, *detect poison*, *endure elements*, *mage hand*, *message*; 1<sup>st</sup>-level: *burning hands* x2, *charm person*, *shield*, *shocking grasp*; 2<sup>nd</sup>-level: *acid arrow*, *darkness*, *invisibility*, see *invisibility*; 3<sup>rd</sup>-level: *fireball*, *gust of wind*, *lightning bolt*, *fly*; 4<sup>th</sup>-level: *ice storm*, *minor globe of invulnerability*

The information for **Natan of Novortum House** can be found in the NPC profile.

**Swamp Avatar:** Huge Size Elemental; Physical Saves; HD 10d10; hp 75; Move 30 ft.; AC 15; Atk 2 slams (1d10); Special: corrosive mud spray (3/day can release a line of corrosive mud, 5' wide and 100' long, anything in range suffers 8d6 acid damage, dexterity save for half), spell resistance 20, only hit by +1 or better magical weapons, true sight (sees through illusions and invisibility); AL N; XP special

#### **NPC Profile: Natan, Master of Novortum House**

The man born as Natan il-Hasa Basswa had a good life in his native homeland, a desert kingdom of riches and plenty. His family were wealthy traders and Natan was given every luxury a man could ask for. But he hungered for more nonetheless. Never satisfied with being given everything, Natan wanted to create a name for himself to show everyone that the worth of a man is more than what he is born into.

He studied magic in secret while his family thought he was learning the academics of the world, and when they confronted him about it Natan lashed out in a rage. Though he was young in the art he was skilled, and his magic killed his parents outright. Fearing reprisal, Natan fled the desert kingdom and vowed never to return. He traveled the world, and with a keen business acumen he built a merchant company he called Novortum House. He gathered like-minded people to his cause, and eventually he discovered the long-forgotten name of Ibholtheg. The few words of the Squamous Toad he could find intrigued and excited Natan, and he bent every resource to uncovering greater truths about the outer power.

Word reached him of the frontier town of Kraden's Hill, and he knew that great secrets of Ibholtheg lay in the foreboding jungle just beyond its border. Using his wealth and influence Natan secured a place in Kraden's Hill for himself and his most loyal agents, setting up shop as simple merchants of curios, trinkets, and other minor charms. But he had his eyes on the jungle and the promise of releasing Ibholtheg upon the world once again.

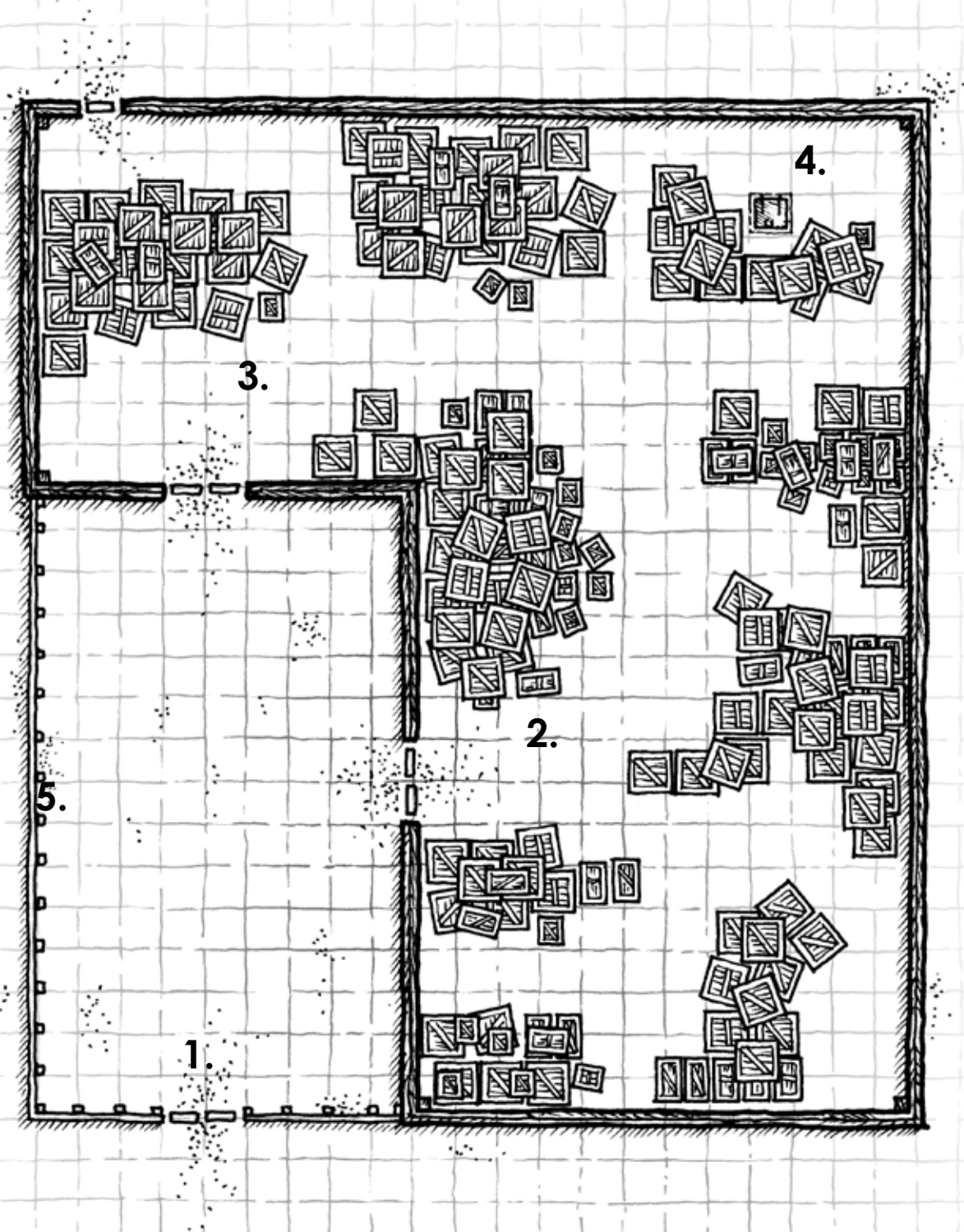
The culmination of the Ritual of Rising spurred on by Natan and his degenerate followers is the creation of the **Swamp Avatar**, a primeval force of destruction with an insatiable appetite for death and carnage. It resembles a 20-foot-tall mass of jungle vines and rotting vegetation, with a vaguely humanoid shape. It does not speak, but when summoned it obeys the words of Natan to the best of its ability. It is truly a terror that must be stopped before lurching out of the Swamp of the Screaming Toad, where it will grow larger as it consumes more and more of the jungle around it.

# Kraden's Hill



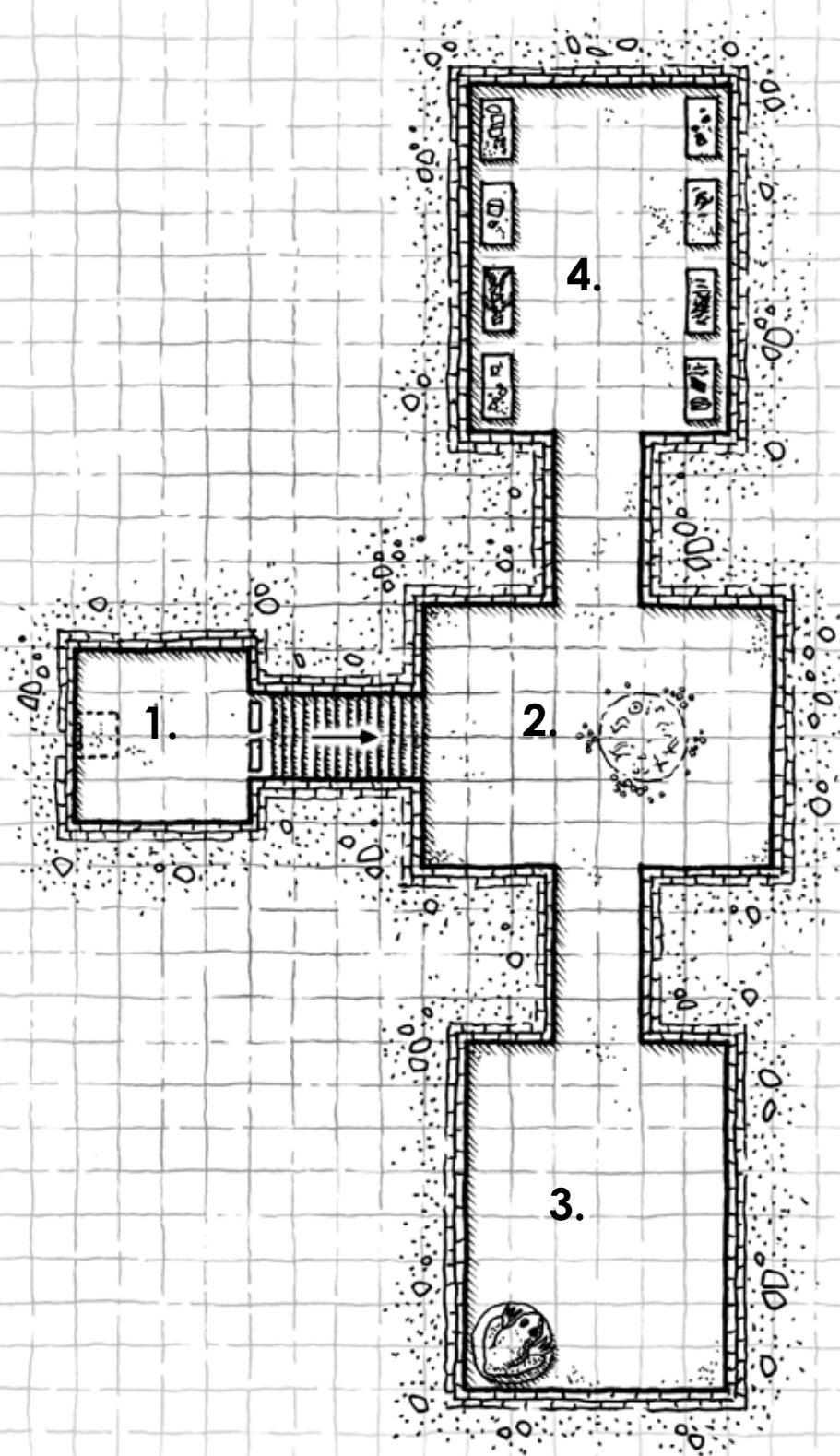


# Noviortum Warehouse



One Square = 5 feet

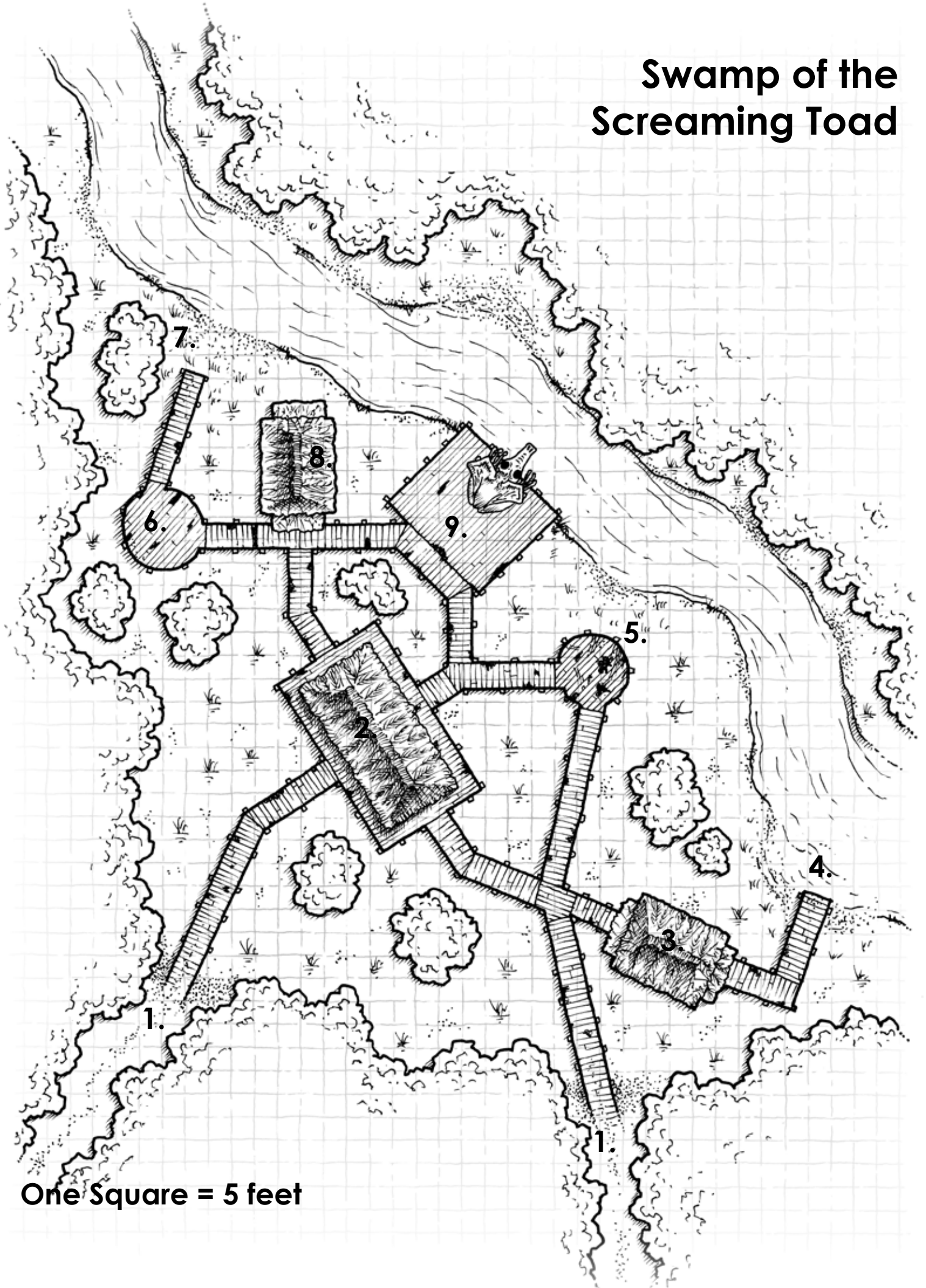
# Sealed Vault



One Square = 5 feet



# Swamp of the Screaming Toad



One Square = 5 feet

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