

*Seipeal
de na
Nathrach*

Part 2

the shadow^{of} SERPENT

AN ADVENTURE FOR IRON GAUNTLETS

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SHADOW OF THE SERPENT



Shadow of the Serpent is the second part of the **Seipeal de na Nathrach** (*Temple of the Serpent*) story and occurs a few months after *The Hidden Temple*. Each adventure in this series becomes progressively more difficult and can either be played in order with recurring heroes or independently if you frequently game with different players.

If this adventure is used as part of the *Seipeal de na Nathrach* series, the characters find that the cult was not defeated after the events of *The Hidden Temple*. Over the course of a few months, information trickles in, providing small clues that the cult is growing. This information comes from merchants and traders—the characters may see the symbol of Riaghail in a shop or in a bazaar. It has been showing up more frequently, especially around frontier villages and wilderness forts. When found in larger cities and those closer to civilization, items bearing the symbol have been traded and brought to places where they generate a higher profit. Members of the clergy might also have information about the cult. In the more remote areas, small sects of a nature cult based on a serpent deity have begun to crop up, but most are short-lived or too small for them to be bothered.

There is one settlement in particular where the symbols and other small items of value bearing the Eye of Riaghail have been traded more heavily than the others. There are also rumors surrounding the settlement about people mysteriously disappearing in the night. There have also been a high number of deaths and illnesses caused by snakebites in and around that settlement. A large number of its citizens have even been rumored to have joined the cult freely, and are seen in the town every few weeks to purchase supplies. Sightings of unusual and elusive elves among the human cultists have also been reported.

If *Shadow of the Serpent* is used as a stand-alone story, the set-up is the same. However, the characters will not possess direct knowledge of the Eye of Riaghail symbol from *The Hidden Temple*. Holy knights, shamans, wizards, and high priests have the best chance to have come across it in their studies. They know that it is associated with an ancient reptile cult which vanished centuries ago or even longer.

The priests of the main temples are willing to pay adventurers to go into the settlement and try to stop the cult, or at the very least, gather information about it.

Players are encouraged to use the optional *Veteran Character* rules from the *Iron Gauntlets* book in order to give them a slight advantage. Some groups may need a bit more muscle to get through

this adventure and at least one hero capable of using magic is recommended. Additionally, a tactic of retreat and regrouping works well between gaming sessions, as a way to restore health and come back with better suited weapons or reinforcements (this is also a good way to introduce new players).

Creature statistics are included for most encounters in order to reduce the director's chores. Feel free to alter these should you need your players to face different challenges. Several new types of creatures are also included with this adventure. Generic ability ratings are presented for them so that they may be incorporated into the *Iron Gauntlets* bestiary and utilized with your own adventures. A few new creature gimmicks and styles are also provided, since they are required for these creatures.

If *Shadow of the Serpent* is used as part of the *Seipeal de na Nathrach* series, the director may reintroduce Suerte (see page 25), an extra originally from *The Hidden Temple*. Suerte is not a necessary part of the adventure, but can be used as a tool to add a different challenge to the characters. She may even volunteer her services to the characters if running a stand-alone adventure.

The Adventure

This adventure is best set up in a busy city or town, through which merchants or other travelers frequently pass. The characters hear rumors of disappearances and a strange cult devoted to a new deity gathering worshippers from a rural community or fairly isolated village. If the rumors are not enough to draw the characters to investigate, refugees from that community start filtering into the city, with tales of strange midnight rituals and an infestation of snakes and reptiles in the area. A few of them have lost family members to either snakebites or mysterious disappearances. On one journey through the town, a merchant happened to procure a strange brooch from one of the citizens, who found it in the wilderness. It is a stylized eye (Riaghail's symbol; see page 10).

- ◆ If the characters did not participate in *The Hidden Temple*, they can identify the symbol with a successful legends task at a difficulty of 6—it is from an ancient serpent cult, practiced by barbaric tribes and some humanoids.

The leaders of the town show their support to the new religious fanaticism, though they try to keep it subdued. They have been told that the priests of the cult can stop the infestations and return the land to normal. The priests explain the disappearances as the people leaving town for awhile. Those who have accepted the cult's presence believe that the missing individuals left to be fully trained in the rites of the cult, while others say that an emergency of some sort took them out of town. They are against the idea of outsiders



AN ADVENTURE FOR IRON GAUNTLETS



arriving to investigate the problem, and side with the cultists if pressed—the leaders of the town have been influenced by the cultists, and promised greater power and political influence if they aid the cult.

The older citizens of the village side with the characters, because they feel that something sinister is occurring rather than just a congregation forming for a new deity. They do not know what exactly is brewing, but are suspicious of the town's leaders' excuses and of the cult itself. While everything seems harmless enough on the surface, there is something that does not seem right. The citizens of the town who have not been caught up in the cult (or bullied into accepting it) offer a reward of 200 gold pieces to anyone who can uncover the mystery. This reward is actually everything of value that they can pool together.

If characters choose to research the symbol and the references to the serpent-god, they find references to a barbaric cult that worshipped in the wilder areas near where the village is presently. Old legends speak of a horned snake with human arms that was

worshipped two generations ago in the wilderness. This deity once haunted the uncivilized parts of the area and was appeased with human and other living sacrifices. The settlers who came into the region formed hunting parties to track the abominations, and drove the cult from the country. The elders who remember these stories (which were handed down from their parents and grandparents) regard the stories as nothing more than fairy tales used to keep children in line. Some believe that the cult has started again because of the stories; if they hadn't passed the tales on to their children, the cult would not have sprung up.

Farmers and ranchers have found strange tracks in their fields and pastures, and a small number of livestock, over the course of the last few weeks, have turned up dead. The animals seem to be strangled or crushed, and it does not make sense why the carcasses have been left rather than eaten or carried away. The most recent attack on the livestock was a few days ago. A carcass was burned and the remains buried. If the charred remains are examined, it appears that the bones were snapped and crushed from the outside, almost as if it had been squeezed.

Level One the cultists' lair

About one mile from the settlement, in a relatively unexplored part of the wilderness, there is a stone ring built in a clearing. Four clay pots, painted with simple ribbon patterns, stand at the points between the cardinal directions (northeast, southeast, southwest, and northwest). One is half-filled with fine dirt, another shows signs of having held water (which has evaporated), yet another is slightly charred, and the final one is empty. There have been many creatures that have passed into, around, and through the circle. The earth is packed, but still dusty enough to see that some of the creatures were small and with reptilian feet, many were human-sized and booted, and quite a few were more serpentine.

A concealed trail leads into thick underbrush. At the end of the trail is a small opening into the earth, about three feet in diameter. A twelve-foot long constricting snake watches the entrance. It acts as the eyes of the shaman in Room 1.12, as it is the shaman's familiar. It simply observes any creatures wandering in or out of the cave, and will not attack unless provoked. The shaman sends a cultist to alert the guards near the entrance upon the arrival of intruders. The guards will attempt to ambush anyone entering the cave in Room 1.1.

- ◆ *The concealed trail is seen with a successful observation or survival task at a difficulty of 3.*
- ◆ *Roll one die: a random encounter occurs in the cultists' lair on a result of a 1 or 2—see Level 1 Random Encounters on page 11.*

1.1 Unfinished Rooms

These rooms are under construction. Some of the walls have been completed, though they are still rough-cut. The floors have a thin layer of dust, which is enough to show that creatures have moved through here. The tracks lead through room 1.1a into 1.1b. There is no evidence of movement through the corridors to the sides of the entrance. A thick stone pillar has been left in the middle of the room, and it is connected to the walls between 1.1a and 1.1b by short walls, approximately two and a half feet in height. On close inspection, the pillar appears to be in the process of being carved into a statue of a humanoid figure. Grooves have been cut, outlining the figure's torso and head, but the cuts are not clear enough to discern what the final figure will be.

Kobolds attack intruders from behind the short walls. There are two ranks of archers—the first hides behind the walls until a signal is given and then rises up, fires a volley, and steps to the side, behind cover. The second rank holds their actions for the first to move and then moves in and fires their volley. They repeat this until engaged in close-quarters combat or the intruders are

