

LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE MODULE

# FIFTH EDITION FANTASY #19

## DENIZENS OF THE REED MAZE

BY CHRIS DOYLE







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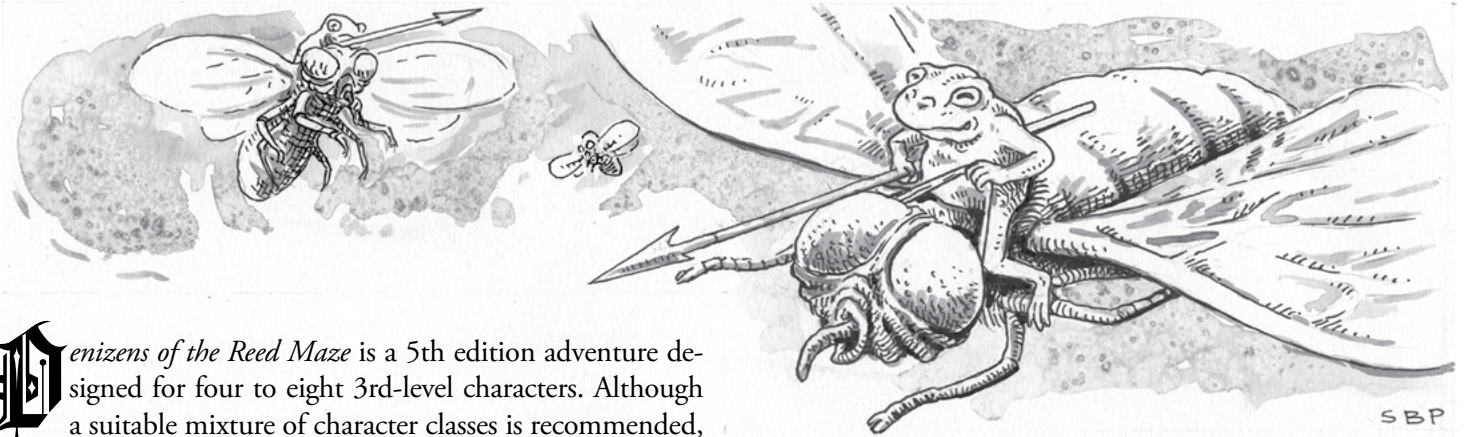
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**D***epizens of the Reed Maze* is a 5th edition adventure designed for four to eight 3rd-level characters. Although a suitable mixture of character classes is recommended, two or more stout fighter-types are recommended, along with one or two spellcasters, since many of the encounters result in direct combat. Most of the adventure occurs in the wilderness, so a druid or ranger (or both) would be most helpful. The reed maze is situated in a swampy fen south of a natural hill, which is surrounded on three sides by a wide river. Nearby are several forests as well as a wilderness fort, making the module easy to import into an existing campaign setting.

## ADVENTURE SUMMARY

**T**he characters are sent to investigate an aggressive tribe of frogfolk or locate a remote shrine on a hill surrounded on three sides by a swift-moving, difficult-to-cross river (the Notorc River). For ideas on the characters' actual mission, consult the Adventure Hooks section below. The southern end of the hill is bordered by a fetid fen with dense stands of high reed grass and several cut paths meandering throughout (similar to a corn maze). A tribe of frogfolk, recent arrivals to the region, created the maze at the behest of their shaman leader to protect the route to their village on the hill. The aggressive humanoids have already disrupted the locals, clashing with a tribe of lizardfolk, capturing an innocent fey for eventual sacrifice, and capturing local trappers for forced labor.

While the characters traverse the reed maze, they meet heavy opposition from the frogfolk under orders to defend their “holy land” from the invading humans. When the characters reach the shrine, they discover it has been despoiled by the frogfolk shaman. To discover the eldritch secrets of the shrine, they need to defeat the shaman and his allies. They might also discover a hidden stockpile of recently crafted (and stolen) weapons and armor—and the implications of an upcoming raid on a nearby human settlement.

## BACKGROUND

**S**hortly after arriving in the region, the frogfolk set their eyes on the fens and its bountiful resources. The frogfolk soon identified a hill surrounded on three sides by the river as an ideal location for a village. They also discovered a hidden shrine dedicated to the Earth Mother (a nature deity). Consult **Map 1** for a view of the region.

Soon after, there was a bloody confrontation between the frogfolk and a band of local lizardfolk that resided on a mound in the fens to the west. Although the frogfolk took heavy casualties, the lizardfolk were nearly wiped out. The frogfolk retreated to regroup, while the lizardfolk's druidic leader communed with the Earth Mother for guidance. His deity guided him to the hidden shrine to find answers for how to deal with the frogfolk incursion. On a solitary quest, the lizardfolk druid made the secret trek to the shrine and has not been seen since. Weeks have passed, but the normally aggressive frogfolk have hunkered down on their hill and created a maze in the reeds to defend the easiest route to their village.

The change in attitude by the frogfolk derives from a recent change in leadership. The lizardfolk druid sought answers at the hidden shrine but instead was lured to his doom by an eldritch crystal in possession of the frogfolk. The corrupting magic enslaved the lizardfolk druid and over time transformed him into an evil frogfolk. Nearing the completion of his transformation, the druid assumed control of the frogfolk and banished the previous shaman. Guided by the cunning evil of their new leader, the frogfolk now prepare for war. After wiping out the remaining lizardfolk, they plan to turn their sights to the nearby human fort and other settlements.



Map #1

# DENIZENS OF THE REED MAZE

1 hex = 300 feet

 The  
Fort

Road

Notorc River

N



2

1



## ADVENTURE HOOKS

It's the GM's responsibility to get the characters to traverse the reed maze and investigate the hidden shrine. How this is accomplished is up to the individual GM, but below are a few hooks to get the creative thoughts flowing. If the GM uses one of these hooks, refer to the Concluding the Adventure section for additional details on how to accomplish the characters' goals and any repercussions.

- The characters owe a favor to a local druid. Perhaps they caused a forest fire or released a creature that disrupted the delicate balance of the local ecosystem. To make amends, they need to locate a hidden shrine dedicated to the Earth Mother, cleanse it, and rededicate it to the deity.
- The characters are hired to collect thistlewyn, a rare herb that grows only on a hill once held sacred by an ancient sect of druids. The character's patron could be a local ruler that needs the herb for a powerful healing potion to cure an afflicted scion, an enterprising merchant hoping to turn a tidy profit, or an eccentric wizard that needs it as a spell component. Or this hook could be combined with the one above, and the characters are working for a local druid.
- The characters are hired to locate a hidden shrine dedicated to the Earth Mother. Secreted in the shrine is a magical fountain that dispenses enchanted water able to cure a disease or remove an enchantment. The characters are given a special electrum flask that can hold a limited amount of the water without losing its magical properties. This hook works best if one of the characters or a close ally needs magical healing or an enchantment removed.
- While travelling along the Notorc River, the characters encounter a patrol of naiads (see area 2-3b) that live in the river. The naiads plead for assistance, offering a cache of pearls, or resort to charming one or more of the characters if necessary. A headstrong daughter of the naiad queen named Elendiria has recently gone missing after investigating the frogfolk village on her own. The naiads are convinced that the frogfolk are holding her prisoner (they are correct) and fear for her life.
- A copper dragon named Cupria approaches the characters and offers them a chance to select an item from her vast hoard in return for completing an errand of the utmost importance. A local tribe of frogfolk recently stole the dragon's sole egg, and it is due to hatch soon! She fears that if she razes the frogfolk village, the humanoids will destroy the precious egg. But if the characters recover the egg via a clandestine operation, the dim-witted frogfolk would be none the wiser. She grants each character a *portion of healing* to aid them in their quest.

## RUMORS

Stute characters may want to gather some information about the frogfolk, the hidden shrine, or the local geography. By all means, let them! However, it takes a few silvers—or at least some complimentary ale at a tavern and/or a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check—to glean some of these tidbits from social interactions with NPCs. At your discretion, choose (or roll 1d10 to randomly select) one or more of the following rumors, depending on the characters' actions and the amount of silver spent. Note that it is possible to get the same rumor more than once, though perhaps slightly reworded.

### d10 Rumor

1. Frog-men inhabit the swamp in large numbers. (True.)
2. The land is cursed! The swamp is getting bigger and bigger each year. (False.)
3. A terrible monster lives in the Notorc River! (False.)
4. An ancient shrine is hidden on a hill surrounded by the sluggish river on three sides. (True). It is guarded by powerful eldritch wards. (False.)
5. A band of trappers hailing from a nearby fort have gone missing in the past few weeks. (True, see area 2-2e for details.)
6. An evil wizard/terrible demon/wicked witch (your choice) holds the frog-men captivated under a spell. He/She/It is preparing for battle to settle an old score. (Not exactly true.)
7. If you speak Orc to the frog-men, they cease their attack and flee. (False; in fact, just the opposite is true. The frogfolk hate orcs, and the Orc tongue incites them into a temporary rage, causing them to attack the speaker with reckless abandon and advantage on the next attack roll.)
8. The walking dead stalk the reed maze at night. (False.)
9. The Notorc River is enchanted. Don't drink from its frothy waters, lest you abandon all reason, enter the watery depths, and not return for one year plus one day. (Somewhat true, regarding the naiads.)
10. Some say the very reeds themselves whisper encouragement and information to those who are in desperate need. (True.)

## BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

Make a note of which adventure hook is used prior to beginning play, as this impacts the final encounter and conclusion. It does not matter which adventure hook is used, unless the GM wishes to harass the characters with wandering encounters, they eventually arrive at the only entrance to the reed maze (area 1-1) after a few hours trudging through the swamp.

# PART I: THE REED MAZE OF THE FROGFOLK

## GENERAL FEATURES

The reed maze is depicted on **Map 2**.

**Reed Maze.** Giant reed grass grows to heights of 10 to 15 feet, and its stems are densely packed together, making travel through it slow and tedious. The lines on the map depict crude paths cut down by the frogfolk, similar to a corn maze. Unless otherwise noted, these paths do not inhibit movement and are roughly 10 feet wide.

**Off the Path.** If characters choose to move off the path, it is considered difficult terrain, and all attack rolls and Dexterity-based skill checks and saving throws are at disadvantage. Unless the characters can get a point of reference from above or use a ranger's Natural Explorer (Swamp) trait, after they move 20 feet away from a clearing or path, their movement direction becomes random for each 10 minutes of travel (roll a d4: 1, north; 2, east; 3, south; 4, west). If the direction rolled is the direct opposite of the current direction traveled, reroll the random direction. For example, if the party is heading north, reroll any 1s, since it's impossible they would head backwards. Note that it's completely acceptable for the characters to continue heading in the desired direction.

**Blazing a New Trail.** The characters can cut down the reed grass with a sharp blade, such as a longsword or a machete, creating their own passages. This is time-consuming work that alerts creatures to the characters' arrival (no chance for surprise) at any numbered encounter area. Wandering monster checks increase to once per 30 minutes while cutting. It is possible to clear a 10-foot-by-10-foot section of the reed grass in 10 minutes. Thus, a 5-foot-wide path would be 20 feet long in 10 minutes.

**Interacting with the Frogfolk.** The frogfolk fear their new shaman, having borne witness to his terrible spells on too many occasions or observed others being fed to the giant python in area 2-3c. As such, there is only a 50% chance the frogfolk surrender or, more likely, flee an encounter, but only after 75% of them have been defeated. If interrogation is attempted, most frogfolk understand only about half of what is communicated in Common and reply with grunts, snorts, croaks, and guttural "ribbits."

**Wandering Monsters.** Wandering monster checks should be made once each hour. Roll 1d6. A roll of 1 triggers an encounter. If an encounter occurs, roll 1d8 and consult the table below.

### d8 Monsters

1-3	frogfolk patrol
4-5	giant frogs
6	giant poisonous snakes
7	giant toads
8	giant mosquitoes

**Frogfolk Patrol.** Numerous frogfolk patrols move about the reed maze and the hill. Roll 1d6 to determine the type of patrol encountered:

### d6 Patrol Type and Notes

- 1 Frogfolk — 5 (1d4 + 3) **frogfolk** (see appendix A) armed with scythes (+3 to hit, 1d10 + 1 slashing damage) perform routine maze maintenance. A **frogfolk croaker** (see appendix A) accompanies this group to inspire them with soothing croaking.
- 2 Mounted Frogfolk — 3 (1d4 + 1) **frogfolk** armed with lances (+3 to hit, reach: 10 ft., 1d12 + 1 piercing damage) mounted on **giant lizards** roam the maze or hilltop.
- 3 Frogfolk Hunters — 4 (1d4 + 2) **frogfolk** armed with shortbows (range: 80/320 ft., 1d6 + 1 piercing damage) are heading out of the maze or returning from a hunting expedition.
- 4 Frogfolk Flyriders — 4 (1d4 + 2) **gripfoot frogfolk** (see appendix A) riding **giant horseflies** (see area 2-1) fly overhead. If they spot the characters, they swoop down to attack.
- 5 Frogfolk Brutes — 2 **frogfolk brutes** (see appendix A) are on a special errand for the shaman.
- 6 Frogfolk Ghouls — 2 **frogfolk ghouls** (see appendix A) have buried themselves in the muck along one of the soggy paths. They attack with claws while buried, seeking to restrain targets.

**Giant Frogs.** The frogfolk have attracted a large number of **giant frogs** to the maze, and they feed them often to encourage them to remain. 3 (1d4 + 1) giant frogs are hiding in the reeds and use their Standing Leap trait to attack with surprise.

**Giant Mosquitoes.** Searching for their next blood meal, a flight of 12 (1d8 + 8) **giant mosquitoes** attack the characters from above.