

The Temple Cave

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Players: 3-5



System: Call of Cthulhu

(But you can play without using the system itself, using logical percentages when necessary)

Setting: 800's Tibetan Empire

Location: Lhasa, Tibet

Suggested background music: "Progeny" by Hans Zimmer

Plot synopsis:

A city high in the mountains living in peace and prosperity suffers a series of problems when a forbidden door is opened inside a cave.

Legends say it held in check a monster, a demon or a curse so that the city could exist at all. The people chosen to rule the city and oversee the ritual holding the door closed is now forced to make difficult choices in order to protect everyone.

Unless you are the DM, DO NOT read any further!

For the DM only (Reading past this will spoil the entire story for play!)

An entity so powerful that only a glance at it will shatter your mind and make you a slave to its will resides under the mountain. It slumbers by the force of a ritual spell that keeps it in check. This spell was made hundreds of years ago by a monk that wandered into the mountain. The spell itself is now broken by 2 of the guards that did not believe in the ancient legends and wanted to prove that the work they did guarding the cave was useless.

Anyone going down there without covering their eyes will become slaves to the ancient one. This means no saving throws! It might be harsh, but for a one session this part is tried and tested. People enjoy becoming slaves to an ancient one and serving its purpose! (They turn and become the bad guys of the story)

When the game start you are going to give them an introduction to the story and the legend behind the situation. This is the part where the clue to win is given. (The clue is not seeing/covering your eyes). Read the following out loud to the players and remember to emphasize on the bold part to make them "forget" a bit about the blind part and focus on the red herring in "Buddhist" instead.

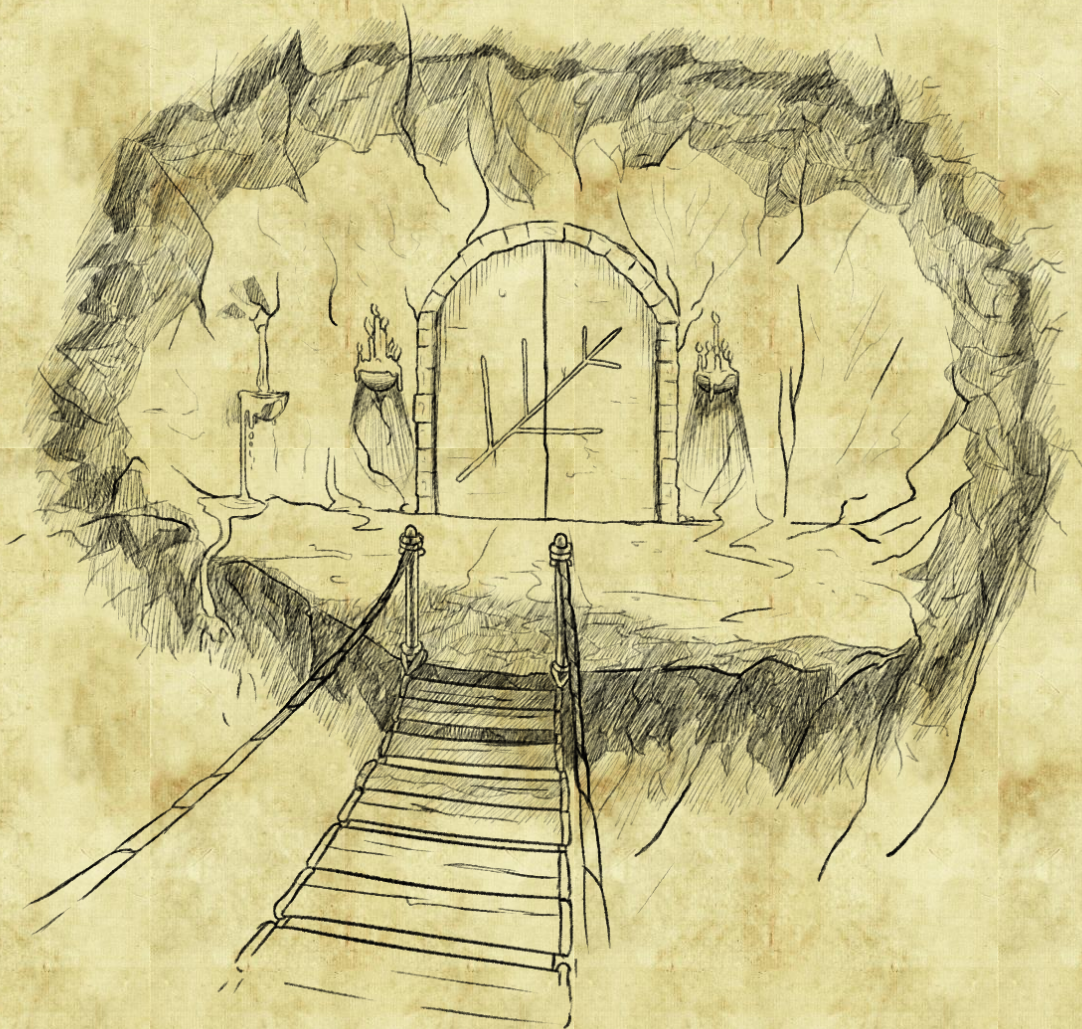
Consider practicing it a time or 2 on your own but remember to include the blind part so not to make it impossible. There are more to this "puzzle" and ritual after all. The number 5 will be important as well.

Legends say that the mountain where the city Lhasa resides is cursed, and that anyone that tried to live there suffered accidents and ill fortune. Time and time again someone found the easily guarded mountain side with a lush area for farming by a river. But every time it went badly for anyone who tried to make it a place to live. In the end it was decided that the mountain was cursed and was to be left alone.

This went on until one day a blind BUDDHIST monk went up the mountain alone to commune with the mountain. The people that knew of the curse called him mad and suicidal. The weeks went by and he was supposed dead, lost to the curse. After 5 weeks, however, he returned and proclaimed that he had been inside the mountain and made a deal with it.

He had made a door inside a cave to contain the curse. This would lock away the evil and make the mountain habitable. People started moving up to live and thrive at the top. The monk taught the rules and the ritual to others so that they could keep the door shut. They set up a special honor guard to protect the entrance to the cave where the door was set. It was beyond a chasm inside a cave. Only a chosen few would be allowed to walk the bridge to reach it and perform the ritual.

As time went it faded into tradition. A chosen one was always practicing the ritual, and an apprentice was picked to learn the holy deeds to keep the city protected. Being a guard at the entrance was one of the most honored jobs in the city. A few others like the city ruler was sometimes given training to protect the ritual in case something happened to the chosen one.



There were 5 rules to be followed!

(Give them the handouts of the rules and the drawing of the door. Read each rule out loudly and point out some of the points at each rule written under as the player discuss them.)

- 1. The Temple door must always be closed and the symbol to remain intact.**
- 2. No one can come back to the surface and live if entering the cave without permission.**
(This presented a sore issue once as some children ran down into the cave. They had to stay there as coming up would mean killing them.
This did not go on too long sadly, as the risk of them opening the door was too great.)
- 3. Only the chosen one, followed by 2 guards may enter the cave every fifth day to perform the ritual.**
The guards had to stop at the bridge and let the chosen one go alone to the door. An apprentice may join on the day closest to New Year's Eve. (There is no rule that says the apprentice must be the same one each time, so now and then some other important figure would learn the ritual to keep it safe amongst more people. But most of the time, the apprentice is a person in line for the next title of "chosen one")
- 4. If anyone opens the door, they shall immediately be killed, and the ritual must be done anew at once! And it must be done every day for the next 5 days, once at sunrise and one at sunset.**
- 5. The Ritual is done as following. The holy water running from the hole beside the door is to be mixed 50/50 with blood and smeared on the door in a set pattern.**
(see handout 2).

Characters/investigators:

(Sorted by story importance based on number of players)

You can make character sheets if you want to, but really there are almost no rolling of dice necessary (except fighting) in my experience. It is important that you stress to the players that everyone surrounding this tradition and ritual takes the job seriously.

Next in line for Captain

Name: Jing Wang

Age: 25-30 years old

The best fighter amongst the soldiers

If you should include yet another player, you can use an important NPC

Chosen one

Name: Wei Lau

Age: 45-50 years old

The current chosen one and ritual performer

Guard that knows the missing guards

Name: Min Chu

Age: 20-25 years old

Apprentice

Name: Gang Kwok

Age: 20-25 years old

Will be taking over as the chosen one in a few years

Captain of the Honor Guard

Name: Xinlan Sung

Age: 30-35 years old

City "Governor/Ruler"

Name: Chao Tzu

Age: 40-45 years old

He learned the ritual as a backup

The story starts with you telling that the players (who are really the tops/rulers of the city) have a meeting amongst themselves over tea. This is early in the morning when the guards shift who stands guard at the entrance. Very soon after they get contacted by a flustered honor guard telling them that the night shift guards were gone when the day shift came to relieve them. Most of the other guards are now flocking to investigate and search the area around the cave and the city looking for them. This is of course without success. The ritual has been done the day before, so no one is set to enter the cave in 4 days! The cave entrance is up a small road overlooking the city. It would be extremely hard for anyone outside the city to enter this area without going through the city itself. This means passing the regular city guards and the honor guards, both which have alarms and good view of anyone coming. Nothing has been disturbed, no signs of struggle and the 2 guards have simply just vanished!

Very soon after this has sunk in you can unleash the first sign of trouble to come. You are free to use any of the following, but I suggest you turn the heat up over time to make the players understand that things are not going to be easier. The curse of the mountain is free once again.

- Accident on construction site. 5 people got killed when a building collapsed while building.

- Stampede. The cows come loose and run amok, killing 5 people and stomping the rice fields.

- Fire, building catches fire killing 5 people.

- Wagon overturns, pinning people in the river, breaking bones and drowning them. 5 people die.

- Earth slide kills 5 when a small earthquake hit.

(You get the idea)

The cave itself goes inward about 20 meters then goes into a downward spiral stair made of stone. After going down a full 360 you see a chasm with a wooden suspension bridge leading to a door. This chasm is very broad and deep. The cave is too dark to see anything in from the stairs and onwards without a light source.

Fleeing the city will partly be blocked by more accidents, and as the players are leaders, they will see that moving a town full of people (lots of young and old people) is hard and next to impossible given the circumstances.

In my experience, someone often suggests checking the inside of the cave early. (This means breaking the rules, but how can one follow rule nr 1 if you cannot see if the door is closed?) Remember that even if the players are prone to breaking rules, the guards take their job seriously. Even the chosen one is not above the rules! (Guards will be hesitant to things that are clearly not covered by the rules though, so players have a lot of leeway considering they are the leaders and the rules a bit open for interpretation.)

After enough interrogation of people/guards or if the players do not go down to check the NPC guard "Min Chu" will come forward with information. (If this is a player, he does with it as he pleases). Min Chu is a good friend of the 2 missing guards, and lately they have been talking dangerously. The missing guards have been guarding this cave for quite the time and started talking that the whole door might be a scam and just superstition.

Nothing ever happened ever, and they were guarding a regular door that has stood for hundreds of years! The guard thought it was just talk like soldiers do.

What really happened was that those 2 were alone that shift and decided to open and check inside. After opening the door and instantly feeling that something was wrong, they regretted dishonoring their vows and jumped to their deaths

inside the chasm next to the door. Except one of them did not die and now lies unconscious at the bottom. The rules say to close the door and kill the one that opened it. But since one of them did not die and the door still stands open the rules are broken. (I have tested this one session 7 times, and no one ever checked the chasm for guards. Everyone assumes that they have entered.)

The door stands slightly open. It does not help with the fact that the door opens by itself if the one that opened it still lives. The entity that is now awake wants someone to come down. The deal is broken, and it can enslave someone foolish enough to behold it. If anyone goes inside the door it will shut itself close and not let them out until a new deal has been made or the person is enslaved.

The players often try to do the ritual as they should, but the door will keep on opening after they try to leave it alone. (Try to make this spooky, as if someone is standing behind the door pushing it only slightly open.) This often make the players think the missing soldiers are just inside the entrance. Remember that peeking inside the door instead of closing it, is breaking rule nr 1 and 4. An important factor here is that the "holy water" running from the hole outside the door is starting to run out. It seems it has started to dry out after someone opened the door. Giving yet another reason to go inside and check if things are ok inside. The "holy water" is in fact a small piece of the god beneath the mountain, a token of its flesh to mix with blood for the ritual. It is a bit thick, like syrup/oil.

Only 1 person is allowed inside the door if they go inside. And the guards will try to fire with bows over the bridge at anyone trying to open the door unless they are given sufficient reason by the players not to do so. Going inside if the door opens by itself is technically not breaking the rules. The person opening the door might be inside, and therefore must be killed. Barring/blocking the door

is impossible, and its likewise impossible to open the door if someone gets trapped inside or goes inside by their own free will.

(Time to send everyone else out of the room except the player foolish enough to enter. This is important as the player might change sides to the dark side. I suggest that you might even remove all light sources except a single candlelight as well. Change music into something more ominous!)

Suggested song: "Catacombs of the Forgotten" by Atrium Carceri.

Once inside they see a long dark tunnel going down into the heart of the mountain. After walking downwards for about 15 minutes they see an opening to the right with a strange light emanating from it. The feeling the light gives is wrong in all ways possible. It is a light source devoid of any warmth or proper illumination! It is a dead gray hazy light. Inside the entrance it goes from natural cave to fixed stones. Ahead in the misty dead light there can only be seen a pathway leading out into nothingness! Neither bottom or roof can be seen, nor walls. The pathway can barely hold 2 persons at width. It might be apparent when going ahead that the road here is built like the symbol at the door. With a middle path and splits here and there. At the end of the symbol resides the entity.

If anyone goes there without blindfolds etc., they see only an enormous shape up ahead, and you will tell them:

Your mind cannot comprehend what you are seeing, and you lose yourself to the madness and become its mindless drone.

You are now a being of its will and you have one mission and one alone. To bring EVERYONE down here to gaze upon it.

(They remember everything they previously know and can talk however they want to. But their sole mission is to convince everyone one up there to go down and look. Tell them they have 1 minute to think about what to use as a lie then fetch the rest of the group back in the room.

Probably not a good idea to use the god as an excuse for everyone to go look. In my experience, turned players often manage to either lure another down to follow up on one of the lies. Or they do not believe the turned player, kill him and send another one down anyway because the accidents do not stop.)

If anyone should kill this person and look at their brain, they can clearly see that the brain is now a black, rotten mush.

IF, however, someone should manage to get to the end of the cave without looking at anything they will be met with a conversation. Try your best to sound menacing and mighty like that of an angry (eldritch) god.

"Who dares disturb my slumber?!"

After they answer:

"The pact has been broken by man. This mountain will not be protected anymore."

They will probably want to make a new deal, but the god wants them to look. A character will have to deny this entity 5 times and not to peak at all. (you can even use blindfolds in real life, if they ever peek, they lose).

Use 5 of these (or make new if you want) as you see fit as ways of making them peek:

~ Do you wish to seal a new pact? Then fall to your knees, lift you gaze and behold my glory!

~ Open your eyes and behold the master you have been serving your whole life! Your GOD!

~ I want to reward my faithful servant. Choose between the riches in front of you, anything that pleases your eyes will be yours.

~ Then read the words of the pact in front of you out loud.

~ Reveal your eyes to me, so that I can see that you are of true intention.

~ Why do you hide your gaze? It is not wise to insult a god in his presence.

(If everyone in your party figures everything out by now, you can up the difficulty one more step and have them draw the symbol of power while blindfolded as a last task, in the right order based on the drawing. You can say that they cannot remember that clearly down here if they ask to see the handout) If they succeed in every step the eldritch entity will say:

"Very well, a new pact will be made. Carry this token of my flesh to the entrance of the door and put it in the revealed alcove. Close the door and continue the same ritual as before. This mountain will once again be protected."

Handout 2

