SOMETHING THIS WAY SLITHERS

by Paul Keiter

Creature: *Erinyes + Naga* | **Levels:** *10 - 12*

SYNOPSIS

Jalambad was once a peaceful village nestled between the Dirus River and the Vasha Forest, but peacefulness has been replaced by fear. It began with the disappearance of one of the villagers. Days later, a large serpent was spotted nearby. The village priest is looking for help to find the missing villagers and solve the mystery of the disappearances. Will the adventurers be able to free the village from the coil of fear suffocating it and prevent the serpent from striking again?

ADVENTURE HOOK

Something This Way Slithers is intended for characters of 10th-12th level. The party could hear a rumor about the missing villagers of Jalambad from tavern gossip, from a passing merchant, or by stumbling across Jalambad while adventuring. Alternatively, the party could hear rumors of an erinyes they are tracking.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Long ago, Mishara protected the village of Jalambad. Generations benefitted from her protection. Some thought Mishara was chosen by the gods, and a few thought she was a god. After years of longing, Mishara decided she wanted her own children and prayed fervently. The gods answered her prayers, and she birthed twin daughters, Dominah and Kelexa. Having a mother whose time was divided between them and the village impacted the two girls. Dominah considered the villagers as part of the family, while Kelexa felt neglected having to share Mishara with the villagers. As her daughters entered their teen years, Mishara worried about their safety. She prayed again for her daughters' protection. The gods offered immortality for Mishara's daughters if their hearts remained pure and they continued to protect the village. Dominah was willing, but Kelexa felt the deal stripped her of her freedom of choice. Mishara agreed to the deal without her daughter's consent, which Kelexa resented.

Years passed; Mishara passed away and Kelexa's resentment grew. Dominah tried to convince Kelexa to accept their duty but this deepened Kelexa's resentment, which became directed at Dominah. One day, Kelexa was approached by a strange man who offered her power and immortality without being bound to Mishara's deal. In return, Kelexa had to attack the village and break her mother's promise. With her resentment boiling over, Kelexa agreed. Dominah tried to stop Kelexa, but Kelexa turned her sister into a giant snake. Dominah drove Kelexa away and retreated to a nearby temple, where she protected Jalambad from afar. It wasn't long before Kelexa realized she had been tricked by the strange man. She aged, died, and found immortality in the Hells. Anger and hate fueled her as she worked to become an erinyes. She aimed to become as powerful as Zariel and Glasya so she could punish all who wronged her.

Generations continued to pass, and the story of the three women faded into legend even as Kelexa schemed. She formed a small cult near Jalambad by striking a bargain with Chhaya, a priest who shared in her rage. Chhaya agreed to help gather victims for a ritual which would allow Kelexa to gain power; in return, Kelexa promised Chhaya power and freedom. Their plan was working until Dominah disrupted their third kidnapping. Dominah took the villager to her temple to protect him.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Chhaya (LE female human priest)

- Pushed by parents who wanted higher standing in the caste system
- Resents the position
- Desires power and freedom
- Outwardly tries to fit the part
- Sometimes can betray true feelings through facial expressions
- Can promise special healing potions/salves in return for help (acts as *potion of greater healing)*

Lomash (NG male human)

He is a sadhu—someone who has surrendered all family, social responsibilities, and material possessions to pursue enlightenment by meditation, devotion, study of sacred texts, self-mortification, and pilgrimage.

- Dedicated life to studying history of Jalambad
- Knows the true story of Mishara
- Is wary of Chhaya, feels she is not devoted enough
- Older, balding spot on head, surrounded by long white hair
- Every time he ends a sentence, he trails into soft mumbling/chanting
- Returned from pilgrimage two days ago and has no knowledge of recent events

Preetha (NG female human)

Mother who approaches the party to ask for help.

- Grandfather is missing
- Traumatized, almost hysterical
- Suggests party speaks to Lomash
- Offers all she owns (family heirloom: hand-carved obsidian elephant)

CHAPTER 1 – JALAMBAD

You are travelling through a forest of neem trees which tower over you. The leaves shade you from the hot sun, and rustle due to a slight breeze, which helps cool you. As you travel, the forest thins and you see many circular stone homes with thatched roofs that extend a foot beyond the walls of the houses. Many have a smooth outer wall, while a few show the brickwork from which the houses were made.

Some of the villagers tend to aloe vera and ashwagandha, an evergreen shrub that stands a few feet tall and is thick with leaves that have reddish-orange berries scattered among them. As you enter Jalambad, the villagers stop their work and gather around you, talking excitedly and slowing your pace.

Suddenly, a woman bursts through the crowd and throws herself at you. Her face is tear-streaked and she cries, *"My Dada! My grandfather! He has been missing for days! Please, you must find him!"* The woman continues to cry and plead with you.

After a few moments, the crowd parts and another woman approaches. *"I am Chhaya, priest for the village. Some of our people have disappeared. Could you help us find them?"*

Although similar on the exterior, each building interior has its own unique decoration including mirrors.

Around the village are large aloe plants, ashwagandha, turmeric, and other vegetation that can be used for healing. On a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check characters know aloe can be used to heal burns, ashwagandha can be used to help reduce anxiety, and both ashwagandha and turmeric powder can be used to make healing potions.

Three individuals (Suresh, Leela, and Madhan) have gone missing recently. If the party speaks with Preetha, she suggests they speak to Lomash. Preetha offers a small hand-carved obsidian elephant (value 100 gp) as a reward if needed. The party can speak with other villagers, but they give few clues, other than who was kidnapped and where. Roll a d8 on the table on the next page for a rumor. Although incorrect, each villager believes these rumors to be possible.

1. Snakes came out of the ground and carried them away
2. Eaten by tigers
3. Tired of village life and left for another village
4. Taken by the Nambe tribe who live by the Tansi Hills
5. Punishment by gods for secret transgressions
6. Carried off by giant eagle, which lives in Mount Buresh
7. Each of the missing left on a pilgrimage
8. Wandered into the forest at night and got lost

TALKING WITH CHHAYA

Chhaya is responsible for the disappearance of Suresh and Leela at the behest of Kalexa, but no one in the village knows this and she does everything possible to hide it. Madhan was protected by Dominah after she learned of Kelexa's plot. Chhaya takes advantage of this and accuses Dominah, helping Kelexa get vengeance on her sister. If the characters are willing, Chhaya brings them to the temple courtyard. The characters are given food and Chhaya tells them the following:

- There are three missing villagers
- The first (Suresh, the grandfather) went missing seven days ago, the second (Leela), five days and the last (Madhan) three days ago
- There are no witnesses for the first two kidnappings
- A large snake creature was seen near the third kidnapping
- She can give them general directions to Dominah's lair

DEVELOPMENT

Once the characters have spoken to people in Jalambad and decide to go to Dominah's cave or Lomash's hut, proceed to *Chapter 2*.

CHAPTER 2 – NAGA'S TEMPLE

Roll a d6 on the random encounter table below.

1. 2 **elephants** crash through the forest
2. A small herd of chital/spotted **deer** (white spots on body/fur), which will run when spotted
3. 2 **giant apes**
4. 6 **ankheg**
5. 1 **venom troll**
6. 1 **gnoll fang of yeenoghu** and 1 **shoosuva**

LOMASH'S HUT

You walk east through a lush forest of neem trees that stretch upwards over forty feet. Their long, green leaves shade you from the sun above. A small path branches to the north and the larger path continues to the east.

The path to the north leads to Lomash's (see *Dramatis Personae*) hut. His hut is similar to those seen in Jalambad, though a little more sparsely decorated. If the characters approach and are friendly, he welcomes them into his small abode and offers them tea. He relates the story of Mishara and her daughters if asked about the history of the village. If persuaded on a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or Wisdom (Insight) check, he says he thinks Chhaya should be doing more because a priest's duty is to the village and the priest should be the one protecting the village, not outsiders.

The journey to Dominah's lair takes another three hours from where the path splits.

OUTSIDE DOMINAH'S LAIR

You have walked for a few hours and the trees have thinned around you. Through the trees, the side of a small mountain rises to the east. As you approach, a structure appears to be carved into the side of it. Although the stone appears, you can see time has not erased all of the details.

Four stone elephants support columns spaced five feet from each other. Under the stone roof, about five feet behind the columns, is a carved wall decorated with detailed carvings of humans and animals. Centered in the wall is an opening.

If the characters search the outside, on a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check they find molted snake skin.

INSIDE THE NAGA'S LAIR

You enter into a large chamber, which appears to be the inside of an ancient temple. A large stone altar 10 feet long and 5 feet wide sits in the center of the room. The base of the altar has carvings of tigers, snakes and elephants on it. The walls of the chamber have bas-relief carvings as well.

You see a passage in the northeast part of the east wall. In the southeast corner of the chamber is a large serpentine figure. Its eyes lock with yours.

There is no lighting inside the naga's lair, which is a square, 90 feet to a side. Treat as darkness unless a light source is used.

Dominah, the **guardian naga** (modified to 175 HP) resides in this temple. To the northeast is a 10 feet long corridor that leads to a 10 feet square room. In this room, Madhan, one of the missing villagers, is resting.

Tactics: If the party attacks Dominah, she yells, "You won't harm my people as long as I live, vile c ultists!"

If Dominah wins initiative, she holds her action to see what the characters do.

Dominah's strategy is to end the conflict quickly. She uses *command* to disarm the characters, *banishment* to send one away, and *geas* to order the characters to guard Madhen.

The sounds of battle alert Madhan, who arrives at the end of the second round. If Dominah is still alive, he yells at the characters, "Leave her alone! She saved me!" If the party has killed her, he cries, "What have you done? She was protecting me!" and rushes to Dominah's body.

If the characters speak with Dominah first, she tells them that Madhan is safe here and she took him to protect him after she heard some cultists planning the kidnapping. She explains her relationship with Kelexa.

Dominah is trying to find where the other kidnapped villagers are but has not had luck. There is a ritual she can perform to locate them, but it requires a magic item. The item must have at least a +1 enchantment (sword, armor, *ring of protection*, etc.) or be of equivalent power. The item's magic is consumed in the ritual, leaving it a normal item. If the characters give her such an item, the ritual takes an hour and Dominah is able to tell them the location of the other villagers. If they choose not to, she points them to the north of Jalambad, but does not have a specific location.

DEVELOPMENT

This can advance in one of two ways. If the characters kill Dominah and return Madhan to the village, Chhaya claims Madhan's story of the Naga saving him is due to a charm by Dominah. Chhaya rewards the characters with two potions of greater healing each. Continue to *Conclusion - Alt*.

If the characters talk with Dominah, they can look for the other villagers. Continue to *Chapter 3*.

CHAPTER 3 – ERINYES TROUBLE NOW!

If Dominah performed the ritual, the party can find the way to the kidnapped villagers easily, which is located roughly 5 miles north of Jalambad. Otherwise they are given a general direction and have to find it, which can take many hours. If desired, the random encounter table from *Chapter 2* can be used.

AMBUSH!

Kelexa (**erinyes**) has protected her lair. When the characters come within half a mile of it, they are ambushed by six **cultists**, led by a **cult fanatic**. On a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, the characters notice the ambush.

Every step you make through the forest seems to echo against the eerie silence. Unlike other parts of the forest, this one appears to be void of life. Suddenly, leaves and small branches shower you from above as many figures drop from the trees and attack.

Along the way, Kelexa placed traps. One quarter of a mile from the entrance, there is a 20 foot deep pit in the path. An identical pit is located roughly 500 feet from the entrance to the lair. The party notices either pit on a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check. Each pit is triggered by someone stepping on it. Anyone triggering a pit must make a DC 10 Dexterity save. On a successful save, the character avoids the

trap. On a failed save, the character falls into the pit, taking 11 (2d10) points of damage.

Once the party makes it past the last pit, they see the temple.

KELEXA'S TEMPLE

Neem trees towering over 50 feet tall cast shade over the forest. The light pink flowers of the Indian Rosewood break the monotony of green. Through gaps in the leaves, a rocky hillside peaks through. As you continue, the trees look less healthy and vines become more common, wrapping themselves among the branches, seemingly choking the life out of the trees.

The forest breaks and the hillside rises above you. Carved into the hillside, six stone columns spaced ten feet apart support a stone ceiling ten feet above it. Stone snakes and green vines encircle the columns, slithering to the top. The stone appears old and worn and needing repair in spots. To the north lies an opening into the structure.

If the characters enter the temple, they see the following:

The temple goes on for as far as the eye can see. In the middle of the temple, a hooded figure stands at the altar with six other figures surrounding it. Back along the north wall, you can barely make out a large cage with two figures in it. The floor of the cage is lined with straw.

Beside the cage is an armored figure who says, *"It looks like we may have more souls to offer after all."* The hooded figure looks at you. As your eyes meet, you recognize her as Chhaya. *"Kill them!"* she orders the others. *"Kill them, and I can be free of my shackles to Jalambad!"*

There are six **cultists** and **Chhaya**. If questioned, Chhaya is tired of being used by her parents to maintain their standing and tired of serving the village. She wants to make choices for herself instead of having them made for her.

The figure in the back is Kelexa. She fights, but because of her ultimate plans, does not fight to the death. Instead she flees if she falls below half her max hit points. If this happens, she summons 1d6 **bearded devils** to distract the characters while she escapes.

The characters can easily open the cage and free the villagers once combat is over.

DEVELOPMENT

If the party defeats Chhaya and Kelexa and rescue the villagers, they all return to Jalambad. Continue to *Conclusion*.

CONCLUSION

If the party defeats Kelexa:

Upon returning to Jalambad with the kidnapped villagers, you are greeted by a joyous crowd. As Suresh and Leela reunite with their families, Dominah approaches you. *"Thanks to you, the villagers accept me again. To express my gratitude, I would like to give you something. Madhan, would you bring it here?"* Madhan approaches and holds forth an amulet.

Domianah says, *"This amulet was worn by my mother, Mishara. I would like you to have it. You have made it possible for me to continue to watch over the village."*

If the party killed Dominah:

As you return to Jalambad, you are met by Chhaya. *"Well done! I see you have rescued one of the villagers! Here is the reward I promised you."* Chhaya hands you each two vials.

Chhaya is courteous but tries to send the characters off while answering as few questions as possible. The vials contain the equivalent of a *greater healing potion*.

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS

Add the total XP of creatures defeated by the party, then divide by the number of characters to determine individual rewards.

Obstacle	XP
Ankheg	450
Cultist	25
Cult Fanatic	450
Elephant	1,100
Giant Ape	2,900
Venom Troll	2,900
Gnoll Fang of Yeenoghu	1,100
Shoosuva	3,900
Dominah (Guardian Naga)	5,900
Kelexa (Erinyes)	8,400
Chhaya	1,800

Amulet of Mishara

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

While wearing this amulet, you gain a +2 bonus to AC and saving throws. Once attuned, the amulet has the Guardian minor property and the Blissful quirk (*DMG*, "Treasure").

AUTHOR'S NOTES

One of the themes of this adventure is predefined roles. Historically, women have been looked at as the caretakers of family. Related to this, oftentimes people are forced into paths or roles. Although in this adventure, some characters are defined as "good" vs. "evil," this should not be taken as comment that accepting predefined roles is good and not accepting them is bad or evil. Instead, my hope is that it makes one consider the unanticipated effects of forcing people into predetermined roles. Even if done with good intentions, it might have unintended consequences.

Thanks to Kathryn Kovalcik, Elizabeth Merritt, David Cutler, Heather Johns and Matthew Johns for playtesting, and Kathryn Kovalcik, John Tetzlaff, and Cameron Blair for helpful feedback.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul has been a fan of *D&D* since the boxed set/1st edition days. He is in awe at how widespread *D&D* is now and hopes to help contribute to the community. This is his first publication, and he is extremely honored to be part of this collaboration.

Chhaya

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

Armor Class 17 (chain shirt, shield)
Hit Points 68 (9d8 + 18)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Wisdom +7, Charisma +4
Skills Religion +5, Medicine +7
Senses passive Perception 17
Languages Abyssal, Common
Challenge 5

Spellcasting. Chhaya is a 9th level spell caster. Her spell casting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks).
Cantrips (at will): *light, sacred flame, thaumaturgy, resistance*
1st level (4 slots): *guiding bolt, command, shield of faith, healing word, charm person, disguise self*
2nd level (3 slots): *hold person, spiritual weapon, silence, mirror image, pass without trace*
3rd level (3 slots): *spirit guardians, meld into stone, bestow curse, blink, dispel magic*
4th level (3 slots): *guardian of faith, banishment, stone shape, dimension door, polymorph*
5th level (1 slot): *flame strike, dominate person, modify memory*

Channel Divinity. Chhaya can use her channel divinity (2/rest) to create a perfect illusion of her or to become invisible until the end of her next turn. (PHB, "Classes")

Divine Strike. Chhaya can infuse her weapon with poison once on each turn to deal an extra 1d8 poison damage to the target.

Actions

Attack. Mace +4 to hit, *Hit:* 1d6 bludgeoning damage + 1d8 poison (from divine strike)

Shoosuva

Large fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 110 (13d10 + 39)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)	7 (-2)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Con +6, Wis +5
Skills Religion +5, Medicine +7
Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical Attacks
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Abyssal, Gnoll, Telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 8

Rampage. When it reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack on its turn, the shoosuva can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

Actions

Multiattack. The shoosuva makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its tail stinger.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 26 (4d10 + 4) piercing damage.

Tail Stinger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 15 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned. While poisoned, the target is also paralyzed. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Venom Troll

Large giant, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 94 (9d10 + 45)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	13 (+1)	20 (+5)	7 (-2)	9 (-1)	7 (-7)

Skills Perception +2
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Giant
Challenge 7

Keen Smell. The troll has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Poison Splash. When the troll takes damage of any type but psychic, each creature within 5 feet of the troll takes 9 (2d8) poison damage.

Regeneration. The troll regains 10 hit points at the start of each of its turns. If the troll takes acid or fire damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the troll's next turn. The troll dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Actions

Multiattack. The troll makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) poison damage, and the creature is poisoned until the start of the troll's next turn.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage plus 4 (1d8) poison damage.

Venom Spray (Recharge 6). The troll slices itself with a claw, releasing a spray of poison in a 15-foot cube. The troll takes 7 (2d6) slashing damage (this damage can't be reduced in any way). Each creature in the area must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 18 (4d8) poison damage and is poisoned for 1 minute. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't poisoned. A poisoned creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.