

AN INTERVIEW WITH DOUG KOVACS, DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS COVER ARTIST

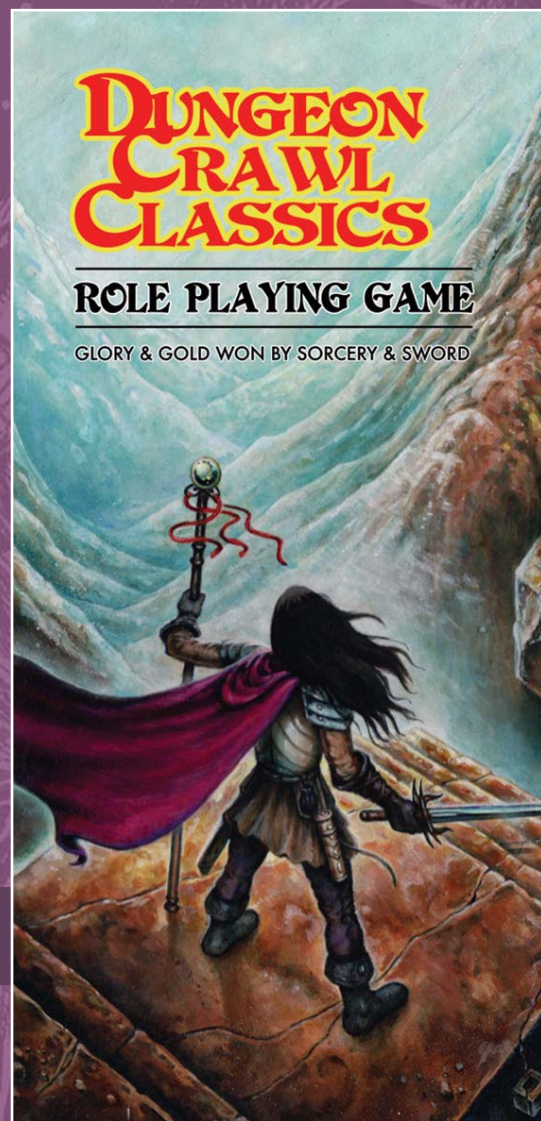
by Joseph Goodman

Doug Kovacs is the cover artist for the *Dungeon Crawl Classics Role Playing Game*, and associated line of adventure modules from Goodman Games. Doug's art has become the "face" of the game since it was launched in 2012. Since *Dungeon Crawl Classics* launched, Doug's covers have picked up steam. His iconic characters, like the bell-bottomed Hugh the Barbarian, have a life all their own. Although many think of *Dungeon Crawl Classics* as from the "old-school RPG" camp, both the game and Doug's art draw inspiration from much more than classic *Dungeons & Dragons*. Pulp literature, "Appendix N" fantasy novels, heavy metal, and obscure artists are all part of the eclectic mix that power both game and art.



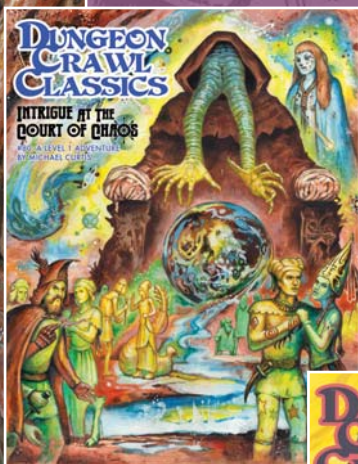
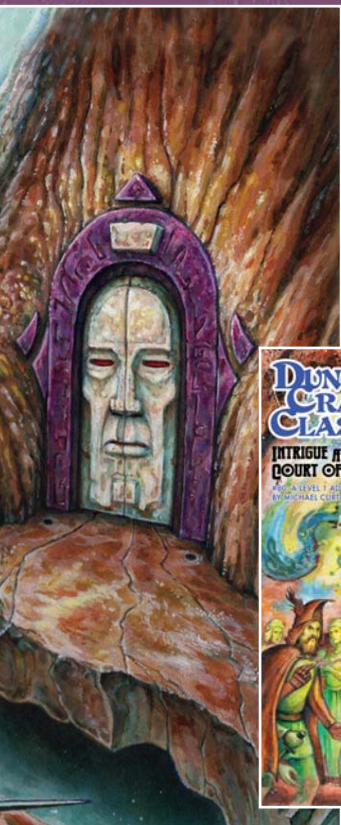
*Doug, I remember when we were working on the cover for *Dungeon Crawl Classics Role Playing Game* (DCC RPG). I had this idea that the main character should be unclassifiable by D&D character classes; you translated that to art perfectly. Can you tell us about that first cover image and how it came about?*

Ah. Well, Joe, I recall you specifically saying "wizards should have swords!" I replied with something like, "Well, of course! Even Gandolf had a sword." And that was set. It's also reflected in the character chapter start art, which was also one of the first illustrations done for the game. Additionally, I was specifically thinking of the character on the cover to be something of a combination of Michael Moorcock's *Elric of Melniboné* and Robert E. Howard's *Conan the Barbarian*. As for the face/door thing, it's been a motif in a lot of my art going back years, but specifically I know thinking of it as a metaphor for gamers of a certain age looking back at themselves in reflection.



Since that first cover, you've painted at least a dozen more covers. How has your approach changed since 2012?

In context more than in technique or materials. I've been using some version of acrylic paint on paper the whole time. The actual steps to get to from idea to final seem to always be slightly different, because this always keeps art interesting to me, be it art for gaming or just straight paintings for the wall. Simply repeating myself does not make for good art, and is neither of interest to the viewer, nor inspiring to me as the creator. I've thought of the "this vs. that"—the "hero fighting monster" theme in fantasy art—as a staple in cover subject matter, but that can be departed from or expanded to include almost anything, yet always being a recognizable theme we can return to.



looking at a book,” which I think was your idea Joe, and the author Jobe Bitman’s idea to use green and black. I’ve kidded Jobe that just picking one of the three secondary colors is surprisingly simple for a brilliant idea, but it did work. After the rough sketch phase, I need to give you credit as well for suggesting the eyeball head, because we originally just had a crusty old mage in mind.

The cover to DCC #80: Intrigue at the Court of Chaos is also unusual by adventure module standards. It is complex and chaotic, yet at the same coherent and descriptive. It definitely conjures up the Court of Chaos. Tell us about that image.

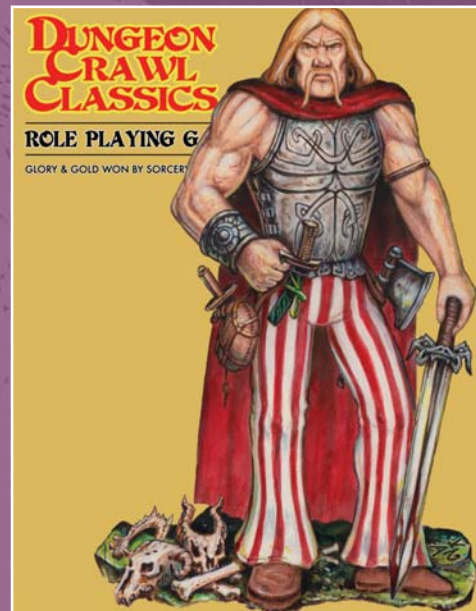
With Courts of Chaos, I wanted to try a color scheme that seemed strange and one I hadn’t used before at all, as befitting the title.



The most recent DCC module, DCC #82: Bride of the Black Manse, has cover art with an entirely different approach. It’s large, stark, direct, and frankly disturbing. The longer I stare at that image, the more it bothers me. That’s her own hand she’s holding! Tell us more about that image.

The simplicity of the single figure was my initial idea. With the intention to be in contrast with the previous two.

Fans of DCC RPG know about “The Band”, a group of characters led by the distinctive character Hugh the Barbarian. They are regularly battling enemies in the pages of



DCC modules, and Hugh, with his handlebar moustache and striped bell-bottoms, is a popular character. Why is that?

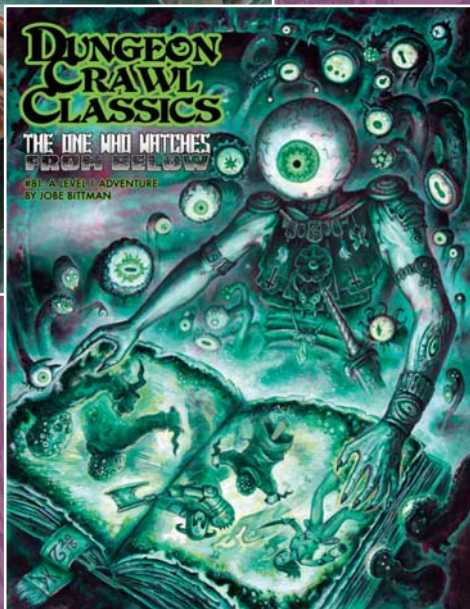
I think he just pushes a lot of nostalgia buttons while being somewhat new in the way I’ve rendered him.

So what are you working on next for the DCC RPG line?

The cover painting for DCC #83: *The Chained Coffin* has been recently finished. On the easel now are the multi-panel mega scene for DCC #84: *Peril on the Purple Planet*, as well as the foundational image for what will also be a multi-panel image of the DCC judge’s screen.

Thanks for sharing your insights, Doug.

No, thank you! ★



One of the most popular covers to hit stores recently is the one for DCC #81: The One Who Watches From Below. It’s definitely not the typical “D&D module cover,” yet some reviewers called it one of the best fantasy module covers ever. How did you come up with that image?

“Best ever” is flattering, but I hear that as hyperbole. There are just so many great pieces of art in existence. The basic ideas were handed to me, in the form of “a mage



Joseph Goodman owns Goodman Games. He loves games (and game art) in all forms, and has published more than 100 adventure modules in the last decade.

