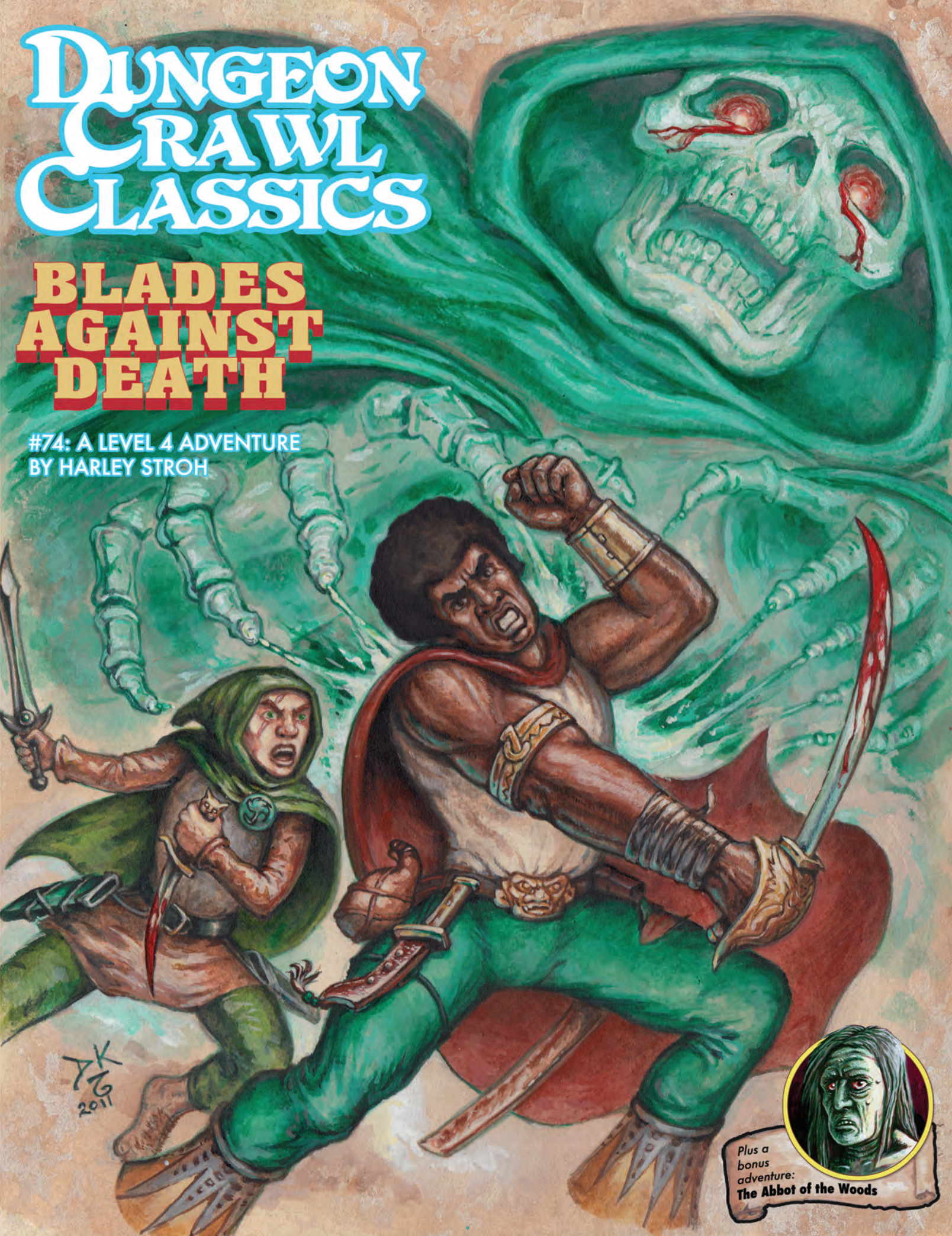


# DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

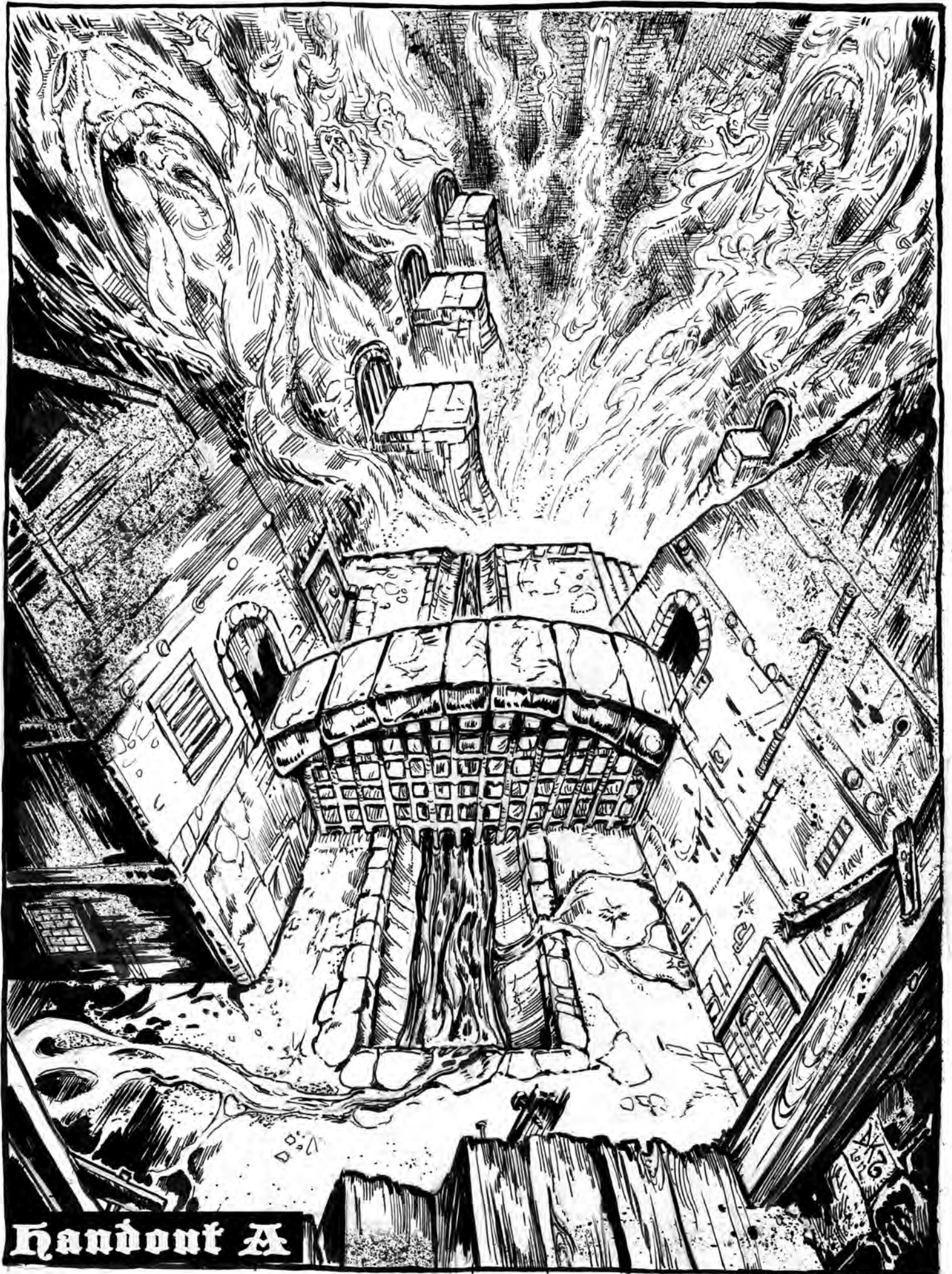
## BLADES AGAINST DEATH

#74: A LEVEL 4 ADVENTURE  
BY HARLEY STROH



Plus a  
bonus  
adventure:  
**The Abbot of the Woods**





Handout A

# BLADES AGAINST DEATH

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## A LEVEL 4 ADVENTURE

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*Harken to our tale, and bear witness to the folly of gods as they make fools of men.*

*-Traditional Punjaran street play prologue*

## INTRODUCTION

**R**emember the good old days, when adventures were underground, NPCs were there to be killed, and the finale of every dungeon was the dragon on the 20th level? Those days are back. Dungeon Crawl Classics adventures don't waste your time with long-winded speeches, weird campaign settings, or NPCs who aren't meant to be killed. Each adventure is 100% good, solid dungeon crawl, with the monsters you know, the traps you remember, and the secret doors you know are there somewhere.

This adventure is designed for 6 to 10 4th-level characters aided by stout-hearted hirelings. The adventure can also be attempted by a smaller party of 5th-level characters and will prove no less challenging. The urban environs offer thieves and charismatic scoundrels the opportunity to shine, but before the adventure is complete the strengths of each core class will be called to the fore.

## ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

**C**ontrary to the words of scholars, the foul city of Punjar is far from godless. Wide-eyed madmen stalk the streets pronouncing the end of days, mail-clad priests crush the skulls of heathens underfoot, and timorous virgins are offered up in sacrifice within sooty temples. For while the capricious gods of Aéreth turn a blind eye on much of the world, they lavish Punjar with their attentions. It is no accident that the most wicked city in the Known World is also the most god-haunted.

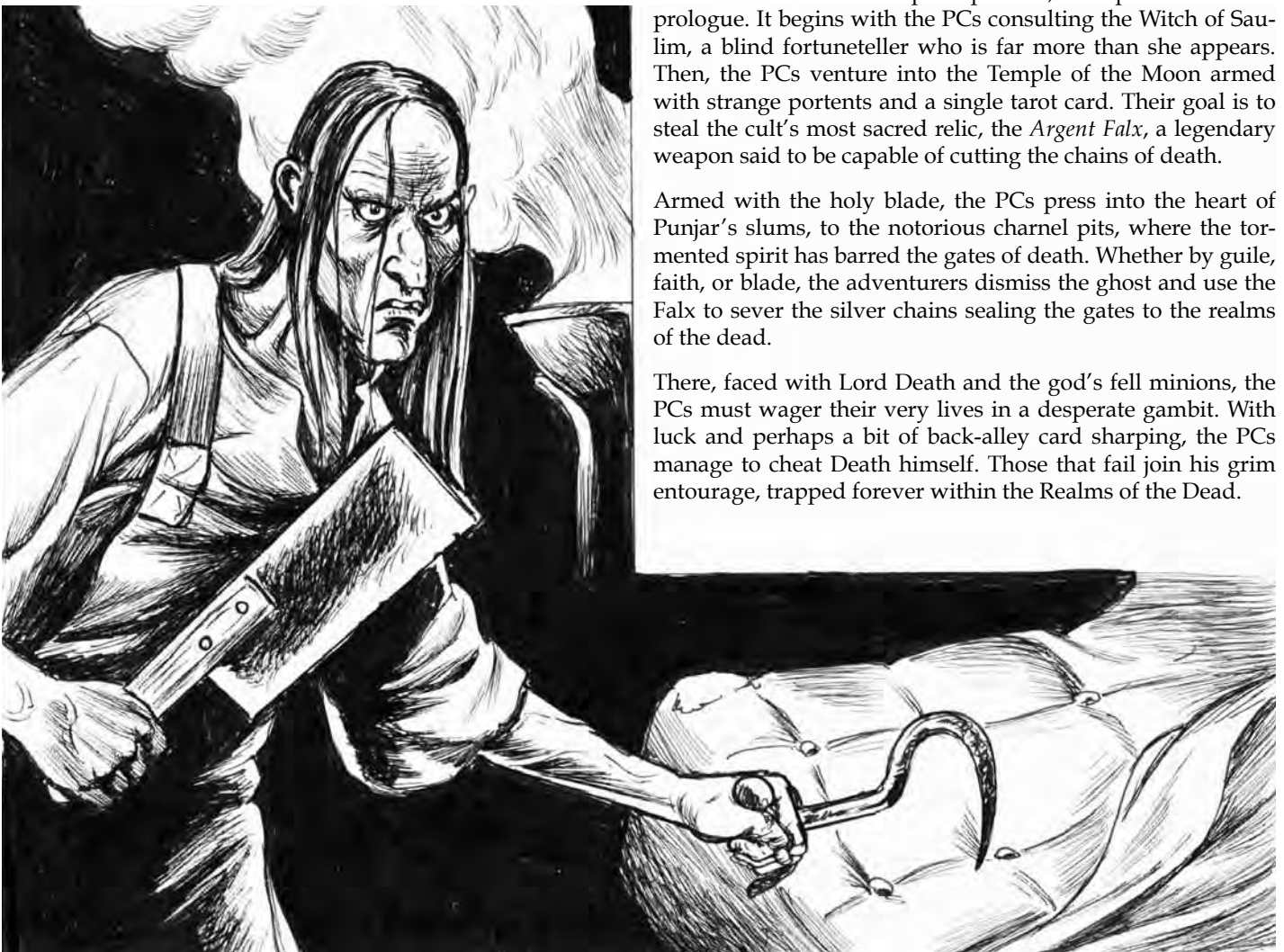
In *Blades Against Death*, adventurers dare the impossible: to cross between the realms of the living and the dead. Whether for kith and kin or at the bequest of Punjar's noble sons, the PCs seek to liberate a soul from death's hoary grasp.

Such ambitions can hardly escape the notice of Punjar's jealous gods. The PCs' answer to challenges sent by the divine will determine whether they are mere pawns in the games of gods or masters of their own fates.

The adventure has three principle acts, each prefaced with a prologue. It begins with the PCs consulting the Witch of Saulim, a blind fortuneteller who is far more than she appears. Then, the PCs venture into the Temple of the Moon armed with strange portents and a single tarot card. Their goal is to steal the cult's most sacred relic, the *Argent Falx*, a legendary weapon said to be capable of cutting the chains of death.

Armed with the holy blade, the PCs press into the heart of Punjar's slums, to the notorious charnel pits, where the tormented spirit has barred the gates of death. Whether by guile, faith, or blade, the adventurers dismiss the ghost and use the Falx to sever the silver chains sealing the gates to the realms of the dead.

There, faced with Lord Death and the god's fell minions, the PCs must wager their very lives in a desperate gambit. With luck and perhaps a bit of back-alley card sharpening, the PCs manage to cheat Death himself. Those that fail join his grim entourage, trapped forever within the Realms of the Dead.



# THE ABBOT OF THE WOODS

A level 1-3 DCC RPG adventure

By Harley Stroh • Cartography: Doug Kovacs • Illustrations: Stefan Poag

## INTRODUCTION



he Abbot's Hoard is a tale known to all would-be treasure hunters: rebuking the decadent cities of man, a high priest led his followers into the wilderness to seek a life free of vice and sin. They bore with them a treasure train of priceless relics: holy fonts chased with silver and gold; gem-encrusted croziers; liturgical books bound in plates of platinum and sewn with golden wire; censers of carved gold; and five sacred reliquaries, proof against the dooms that stalk every mortal man.

The tales all end there. The Abbot and his congregation vanished, never to be seen nor heard from again. And to this day, no treasure hunter has been cunning or courageous enough to return with the secrets of the Abbot of the Woods.

The adventure is designed for 5 to 8 players with 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup>-level characters. 1<sup>st</sup>-level PCs should be sure to travel with a retinue of hirelings. In playtests the hirelings served as a ready pool of potential 0-level PCs; as adventurers were slain by the horrors lurking within the abbey, courageous (or desperate) new PCs arose to take their place.

## BACKGROUND



he lure of the abbey is primarily one of looting and plunder: when the Abbot and his followers vanished into the wilderness, they carried with them a god-hoard of silver and gold. Every boastful drunkard and wine-stained mercenary can recount at least one fanciful tale of the treasure's fate, but no one has produced so much as a single silver candlestick. It stands to reason that the hoard remains undiscovered – or unclaimed.

Learned souls whisper of another, less terrestrial treasure hidden amidst the ruins. Alchemists, scholars of the occult, and their ilk, all affirm the belief that the Abbot had secured a means of immortality. Theories hold that he led his people into the wilds so that he could complete the esoteric rite far away from the prying eyes of the Overlord, confirming upon himself the mantle of godhood.

If the PCs consider themselves better than base reavers, consider seeding your campaign with hints at the Abbot's hidden purpose. Wizards will certainly have cause to discover the Abbot's key to eternal life, just as clerics and witch-hunters will have reason to stamp out the Abbot's heresy. Thieves and mercenary-minded warriors can expect the secrets to command a high price in the thronging Souk, for who among us doesn't want to live forever?

It is a question, perhaps, that only the Abbot can answer.



## THE ABBOT'S SECRET

For all its cosmological import, the story behind the abbey is tragically common. Approaching the end of his mortal coil, the Abbot turned his attentions to the question of eternal life. Scouring ancient texts of forbidden lore, he discovered what he believed he sought: a rite that would stave off each of the Five Dooms of Mankind.

But great magic requires great sacrifice. The Abbott led his people into the wilds, where he oversaw the construction of a chapel suited specifically to his purpose. Then, in the rock and stone beneath the abbey, the Abbot directed the construction of five reliquaries, each placed according to sacred ancient principles.

Finally, the Abbot commanded his people to complete the fell rite. His body was quartered; his four limbs and head were placed within the reliquaries and his torso – yet living – was set within the heart of the subterranean complex. His limbs and his head were each placed as an offering to a single doom. Captured by the individual offerings, none of the Five Dooms were able to reach the torso to claim the Abbot's life.

In this way, the Abbot was able to secure immortality...after a fashion. He lives within the stones and mortar of the abbey. Undying, yet trapped without sight, sound, or sensation of touch, the Abbot's soul has long since succumbed to insanity. Left alone, it will persist to the end of the universe, deathless and forever mad.

Of course, all this might change with the arrival of reavers bent on plunder. By removing parts of the Abbot's body from its reliquaries, the PCs free the Abbot to both act and die. In a fit of frenzied madness, driven by the approach of death's yawning gate, the Abbot will attempt to secure his life by reclaiming his relics, no matter who or what stands in his way.

For the judge's reference, the reliquaries and their dooms are listed below. Frustrated at their inability to claim the Abbot's life, each of the dooms has coalesced into a physical manifestation. These spirits are neither living nor dead, but rather the spirit realm made material.

- Madness – Area 2-1: A maelstrom of rotten wood and debris.
- Violence – Area 2-2: An enormous man-ape, with a protruding belly filled with the fruit of its sins.
- Disease – Area 2-3: A carpet of rats covered in weeping boils and surrounded by a miasma of rot.
- Hunger – Area 2-4: A mob of ghostly, hollow-eyed urchins.
- Age – 2-5: A withered crone, with leathern skin that hangs loosely from her old bones.

Animals are terrified of the spirits, doing everything possible to escape. Similarly, characters with 5 Intelligence or less are profoundly uneasy, suffering a -1d to all actions when in their presence.