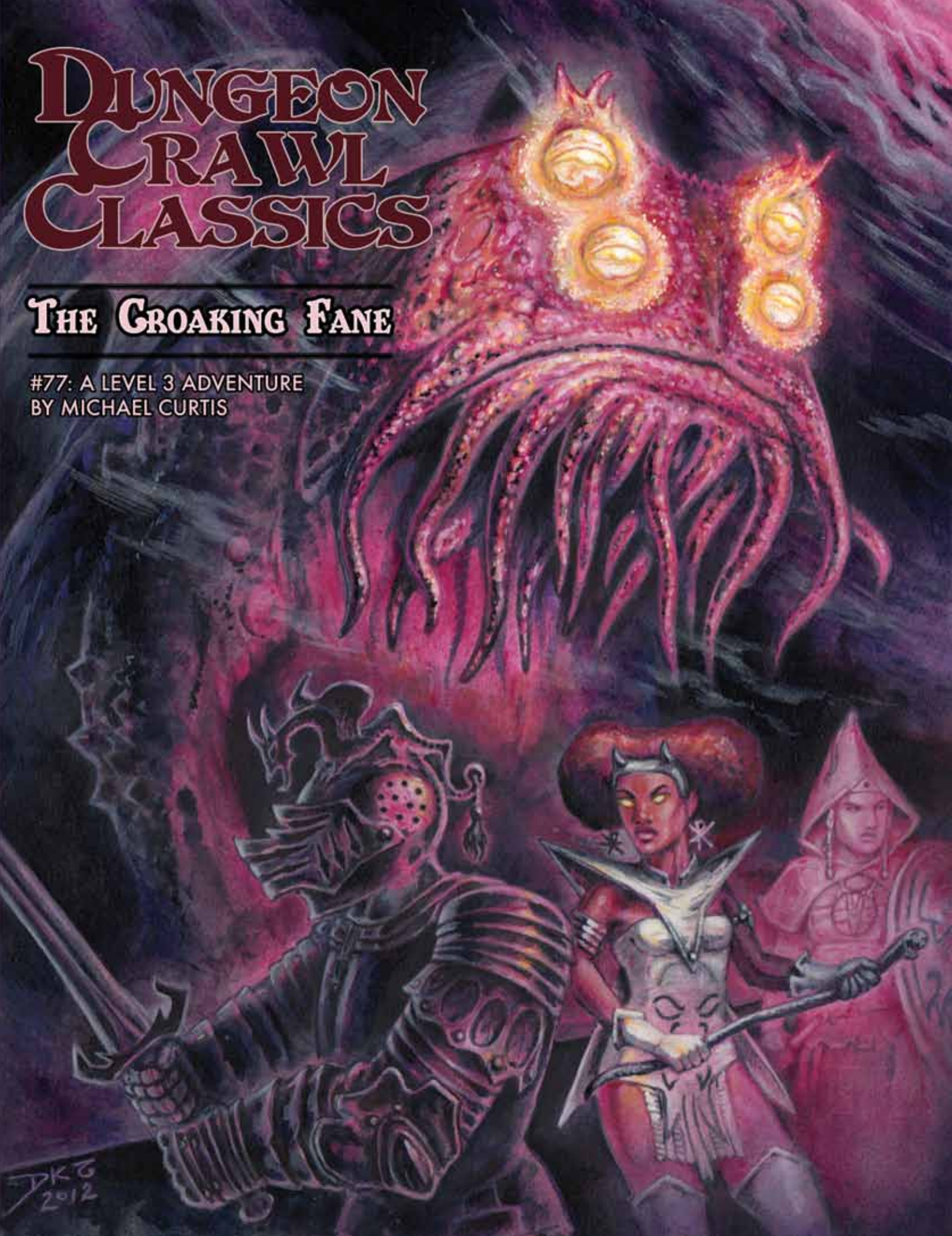


DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

THE GROAKING FANE

#77: A LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE
BY MICHAEL CURTIS



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A LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE

By Michael Curtis • Cover artist and cartographer: Doug Kovacs • Editor: Rev. Dak J. Ultimak • Interior artists: Jim Holloway, Doug Kovacs, Peter Mullen, Brad McDevitt, Stefan Poag • Art direction & layout: Joseph Goodman

Dedicated to Clark Ashton Smith and Dave Arneson.

Playtesters: (NTRPGCon 2012) Charlie Sanders, Jake Perker, Will Maranto, Ed "Toad Rider" Brewer, Norman Harman, Jimmy Simpson; (Anonycon 2012) James Carpio, Mary Lindholm, Ben Morgan; (TotalCon 2013) Paul Aparicio, Dan Berube, Neil Churchill, Ian Eller, TJ Howell, Chris Lopez, Eric Lucas, Michael Nocivalli; (CincyCon 2013) Rirk Hull, Christy Pnwell, Ed Stanack; (Gary Con 2013) David Bresson, Amy Horton, John Kidd, Jeremy Ligan, Kevin Moore, Jim Skach, Tim Wampler, Jason Warchol, Jay White; (Finarvyn's Fellowship of Foragers) Alan Bean, Anna Breig, Dardrae Breig, Kaylina Breig, Marv Breig, Ryan Breig, Paul Luzbetak

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For as long as men remember, the cult of Schaphigroadaz carried out unspeakable rites in its squatting temples situated far from civilization. Tales of human sacrifice, squirming servants, and rich but loathsome treasures were whispered of the cult. Now, unexpectedly, the cult has seemingly vanished, leaving behind their fanes to molder in the marshes. A brave band of adventurers gathers to explore one such tabernacle, eager to discover what riches – and terrors – the cult has left behind...

The Croaking Fane is designed for 6-8 3rd level characters, although larger parties can be accommodated by increasing the number and power of the creatures encountered within the fane. The adventure can be set in any marshy area off the beaten path in the Judge's campaign.

BACKGROUND



Few know of the Toad War, a dark crusade that occurred eons ago in the primordial swamps of the world. In the dim days of history, Man bowed knee to myriad supernatural forces in hopes of fecundity, prosperity, and to assuage their seemingly insatiable desire to sow discord among mortals. Of the many entities honored, few were more loathsome than Schaphigroadaz, the Croaking Despot.

Schaphigroadaz was Lord of Evil Amphibians in those archaic days, and his church thrived in dank bogs and backwaters. His followers, the Salientian Knot as they dubbed themselves but feared as the Brotherhood of Warts by their foes, strove fervently to appease the Croaking Despot by feeding their captured enemies to Schaphigroadaz's children and glutting their treasuries with captured riches. Ironically, it would be the Salientian Knot's success that led to its undoing.

The clergy of Schaphigroadaz grew fat on the riches obtained from their vanquished foes and reveled in the power the Croaking Despot gifted them in return for their living offerings, all the while turning deaf ears to the pleas of the Croaking Despot's congregation. In this fetid atmosphere of indifference, rebellion blossomed and a schism wracked the Knot. Disgusted, the former worshippers of Schaphigroadaz directed their invocations to one of the Croaking Despot's innumerable spawn, the toadfiend known as Bobugbubilz.

As more and more followers of Schaphigroadaz paid homage to Bobugbubilz, the toadfiend's power grew while the Croaking Despot's crumbled. Schaphigroadaz, roused from his satiated sleep in the primeval mud of the cosmos by the ensuing calamity, was alarmed to see one of his own spawn usurping his power. Schaphigroadaz struck down his slothful clerics, but his ire came too late. In the mortal realms, the servants of Bobugbubilz marched against their former brothers and sisters, drowning those who refused to renounce the Croaking Despot in the Knot's own spawning pools and drenching Bobugbubilz altars with their blood. In less than a year, the Salientian Knot was broken, seemingly eradicated in what a few eccentric scholars still recall as the Toad War.

Unbeknownst to the children of Bobugbubilz, the Salientian Knot was not destroyed, and like the toad they venerated, it merely burrowed underground until the danger passed. In the passing centuries, Bobugbubilz assumed his progenitor's position as lord of evil amphibians and his church rose in power.

Proving that the sins of the father are repeated by his children, the followers of Bobugbubilz grew complacent, certain of their rival's defeat. Thanks to this atmosphere of indifference, the church of Schaphigroadaz never utterly died out and with each passing generation, a handful of new converts joined its ranks.

For several centuries, the Salientian Knot has grown slowly but steadily, working whenever possible to reassert the original position of their deity in the cosmic scheme. Recently, certain astronomical events, interpreted by the sect as a sign that Schaphigroadaz's ascendancy is nigh, caused the Salientian Knot to step up their efforts against the followers of Bobugbubilz. As the final strategy in their campaign, the Salientian Knot underwent immersion in their Spawning Pools, sacred baths bearing the waning vestiges of Schaphigroadaz's power. When their month-long baptism is complete, the Salientian Knot will emerge from those transmutative waters, horrifically altered and bearing power beyond the ken of other mortals.

In the weeks since the Knot entered the Spawning Pools *en masse*, rumors have spread of the sect's apparent disappearance. Urged on by these rumors, adventuring bands and devotees of Bobugbubilz are seeking out the Salientian Knot's remote temples in hopes of either looting them of whatever riches the followers may have left behind or to make certain that their arch-rivals are destroyed for certain. It is here where *The Croaking Fane* begins.

BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE



The Croaking Fane can be introduced as a side adventure in the course of an ongoing campaign, its events playing out when the party is enjoying "downtime" after a major success or is seeking an opportunity to replenish their depleted purses. A cunning judge can slip obscure mentions of the Salientian Knot in plundered religious tomes, stolen scrolls, or as tavern gossip earlier in the campaign, cultivating those planted seeds until the players take notice or he is ready to challenge them with this adventure.

Once circumstances are right for running this adventure, the judge should allow the PCs to hear word of the mysterious disappearance of the Salientian Knot and the seeming abandonment of its fanes. This can be done through tavern tales, one of the party's NPC allies (such as a mentor or a former adventuring companion), or from the muttering of a half-crazed beggar who haunts the local marketplace.

Parties investigating the rumors swiftly learn a little about the Salientian Knot (but not all the details of the Toad War and the Knot's immersion in the Spawning Pools) and that the entire congregation of this obscure sect has apparently vanished from the world. Gossip holds that the Knot's fanes were left intact and are ripe for the plundering by anyone who can locate these temples and is brave enough to venture within. A little more investigation by the party allows them to ferret out a local who once stumbled upon a fane in a nearby swamp while gathering exotic flora in the marsh. Although this NPC has no idea what lies inside the stony temple, he is willing to provide directions and a map to the fane in exchange for a few coins.

If the party consists of one of more PCs that have Bobugbubilz as a patron, the adventurers learn of the Croaking Fane in another manner. The Lord of Evil Amphibians, now aware of

LEVEL 1

THE TEMPLE

