

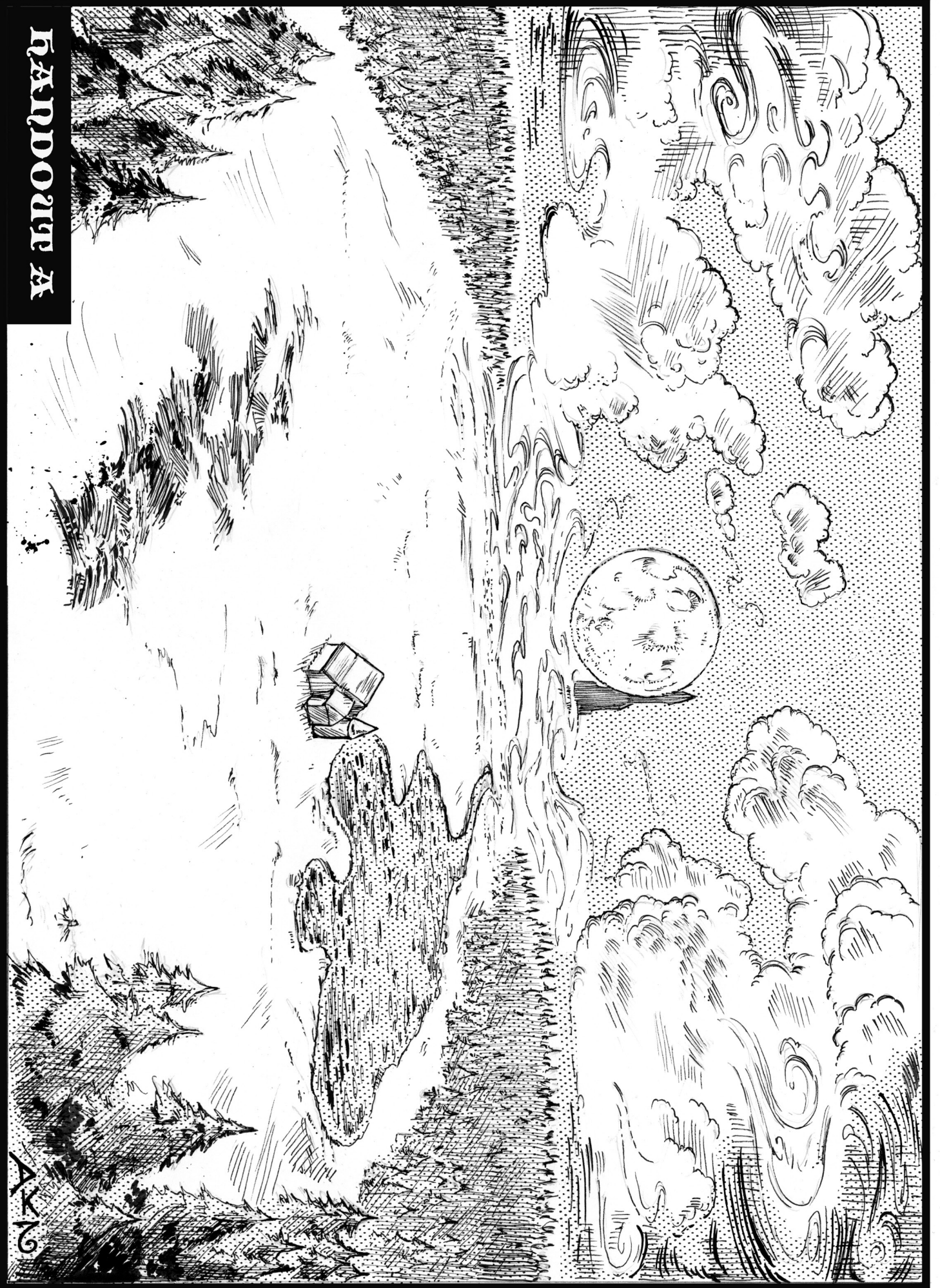
DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

FATE'S FELL HAND

#78: A LEVEL 2 ADVENTURE
BY HARLEY STROH



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FATE'S FELL HAND

A LEVEL 2 ADVENTURE

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INTRODUCTION

Remember 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.

In *Fate's Fell Hand*, the adventurers play the deciding role in a war of three wizards. Trapped within a demi-plane, the arch-magi and their vassals vie for their freedom, but with the coming of each new day all gains are lost and the game begins anew. The arrival of the PCs upsets this ancient balance, triggering a chain of events that will destroy the demi-plane and all trapped within.

To escape the shrinking realm, the PCs must do what the arch-magi cannot: achieve mastery over the Deck of Fates and its diabolic ward.

The adventure is designed for 4 to 8 second level characters aided by stout-hearted hirelings. The party can be composed of PCs of any class, though wizards and their kith are sure to find the adventure's rewards most intriguing. Success in the adventure demands creativity and ingenuity, more so than the specialized skills of any one class. Parties hoping to cut a bloody swath to freedom may find themselves frustrated and doomed by a trap of their own making.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Known only to certain sages and witches of ill-repute, the Deck of Fates is a relic from another time; a collection of ivory plaques painted with strange personages and icons. Sullied with the soot and grease of a thousand different worlds and times, the lure of the Deck has brought ruin to many a soul.

The latest in the march of the damned is a trio of powerful magi: the wizard Darjr, the enchantress Erodiade, and the accursed scribe Al-Hazred. Allies in their quest for mastery of the occult world, they fell upon one another like feral dogs when they succeeded in bidding a minor devil to fetch a mere twelve cards from the fell Deck.

A three-way spell duel ensued and the wizards' world was rent asunder. Their manor, the magi's vassals and the surrounding lands, were pitched into the roiling seas of phlogiston. It took the combined might of all three arch-magi to wall off the roiling chaos, and what shreds of material reality that remained were transformed into the demi-plane: a small vale ringed by woods, a fractured manor, the magi's surviving liege-men ... and the devil, Mordax.

Awash in waves of phlogiston, the vale is suffused with weird, generative energy, the very stuff of magic. Each of the natives has taken on the identity of one of the twelve cards, and each morn the alliances of the vassals changes as they are dealt to the three magi.

As for the arch-magi, the effort required to hold back the phlogiston requires nearly all of their prodigious might, with scant remaining to effect their return to the material plane. Fearing (rightly) their fellows, the magi are locked away in separate vaults. From their protected prisons, each magus directs his vassals as best he can, hoping to triumph over the other two magi, by acquiring all 12 original cards, and winning mastery of the realm and freedom from the far plane.

THE DEVIL AND THE WORMS

In the guise of the Fool, the devil Mordax draws from the deck each dawn. Cards are dealt to the three arch-magi, thereby determining the loyalty of the realm's courtiers and warriors.

The loyalty of these retainers is abject and absolute. Allies the day before awaken as forsworn enemies, and former adversaries are taken on as brothers, all according the fall of the strange ivory plaques. Tabards, robes and raiments of office all change to reflect the owner's new loyalties - a sickly yellow for arrogant Darjr, blood-red for the jealous Erodiade, and star-blue for the unknowable Al-Hazred.

Each day the embittered wizards work their wiles, pitting warriors and courtiers against one another, in a desperate bid for freedom. But any gains are short lived: on the following morn the cards are drawn anew. Slain warriors and poisoned courtiers are drawn back to life by the power of the magi and the horrific cycle begins again.

This macabre and grotesque scenario might have continued for all eternity (or at least, until the devil Mordax grew

COLOR CARDS FOR 2ND PRINTING

For this second printing of *Fate's Fell Hand*, we have included this special insert of colorized versions of the cards. (The original black-and-white versions are also included elsewhere in this book.) If you have access to a color copier, permission is granted to photocopy these cards for home use. We recommend you copy the cards, then make a number of copies of the card back (the blue-gray image with mystical symbols). Cut to size, glue or tape the backs to the fronts, and use these cards in play! Also included are two blank card faces (one blue and one yellow) should you wish to design your own cards. Check page 3 to determine how many versions of each card are needed for play.

Additional, we've included the Magical Decks section below with further ideas for integrating magical decks of cards into your games!



MAGICAL DECKS



ainted decks – stained with wine and grease – are common in gambling dens, among mercenary companies and in the dusty, patchwork tents, littering the Souk. Noble folk and priests do well to eschew such company; the mere possession of a deck of plaques or cards risks being labeled as an itinerant gambler, or worse, a heathen diviner of fortunes.

Unlike other worlds, there is as yet no commonly agreed upon standard deck of playing cards. Gamblers bring their own handful of cards to a game, building a community deck of cards and plaques. Being able to recognize one's own cards is expected and respected. Only a fool or a farmhand sits down to a game with an unknown deck.

Rumors of haunted and magical decks are passed around dens of iniquity like jacks of cheap wine. Whether cards are – by their nature – predisposed to enchantment, or actively draw luck, is left to the whim of the judge.

THE DEVIL'S DECK

Alternately known as the Haunted Deck and the Luck-Eater, the deck appears in various cultures under any number of epithets and guises, but always functions in the same manner.

Firstly, the deck's possessor (not *owner* – the deck is only truly owned by its diabolic entity) receives +1d to gambling-related checks.

Secondly, the character may also bet against the spirit of the deck to receive a Luck bonus. The PC plays for 1d3 to 1d7 Luck points, against the same number of his own Stamina. Both the player and the judge draw randomly from the deck; high card wins. This is an instant, psychic transaction taking place between the PC and a fire-limned, horned devil seated upon a throne of sooty skulls.

If the player wins the draw, he receives the chosen die worth of Luck points, which must be spent immediately on his PC's next action. If the judge wins the draw, the PC loses points of Stamina.