

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

BRIDE of the BLACK MANSE

#82: A LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE
BY HARLEY STROH



Plus a bonus adventure:
**The Floating Oasis of
the Ascended God**
by Stephen Newton

SEP

BRIDE of the BLACK MANSE

A LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE

By Harley Stroh • Cover artist: Stefan Poag • Cartographer: Doug Kovacs • Editor: Rev. Dak J. Ultimak • 2nd printing proofreading: Terry Olson • Interior artists: Doug Kovacs, Peter Mullen, Russ Nicholson, Stefan Poag • Art direction & layout: Joseph Goodman

Playtesters: Ron Kirkley, Jeremy Ligman, Erik Jensen, Caesar Bariccas, Ryan Moore, Patrick Seymour, Montana Sacóres, Charlie Sanders, Paul Apariao, Joan MacDonald, Ryan Simm, William "Stratochamp" Meinhardt, Mark Greenberg, Jon Hershberger, Matthias Weeks, Doug Keester, Connor Skach, Jim Skach, Haley Skach, Joe Connolly, Mike Daubenspeck, Branden Clark, Jobe Bittman, James Schweiss, Josh Dickey, Darik Rosser, Dave Rosser, Tresi Arvizo, Tom Lindgren, Camdon Wright, Daren Pocus, Wendy Reischl

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SBP

The wicked must always make quick work of the weak.

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 RPG 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.

A horror-murder mystery, the events of Black Manse take place in a single evening, and are designed to be played out in a single 4-hour session. It is unlikely that that PCs will have the time to investigate all of the locations within the Manse during a single session – indeed, entire levels of the manse may be left undiscovered. Choices as to how and where the PCs spend their time will prove crucial to their survival.

The adventure is designed for four to eight 3rd-level characters. Because much of the adventure can be resolved without combat, running the adventure for higher level PCs requires little work, though lower level adventurers may meet a grim end before the mystery can unfold.

The party can be composed of PCs of any class, while including at least one thief and one cleric. Clerics will find the adventure an interesting challenge, their abilities providing the difference between life and eternal damnation.

The adventure drew its inspiration from a variety of sources which the judge is encouraged to review prior to play. Works include Fritz Leiber's *The Howling Tower*, Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, and Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*.



ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

While their specific crimes have been blotted from the scrolls of the Overking, the flight of mad House Liis is well-known to scholars of royal madness. Cast out from the court, the exiles sought refuge on the low, cold moors.

Without court intrigue to distract them, the family quickly fell into infighting. The death of their matriarch, Lady Baethor, brought this bitter rivalry to a head, with each of the family's scions striving to secure his or her own place as master of the manse.

Lady Ilse, oldest of the brood, saw herself as the rightful heir. However, rules of primogeniture assigned that place of honor to the eldest son, Jost.

Desperate, Ilse sought aid from beyond this world and foul Mammon answered her call. In exchange for the promise of Ilse's soul and a diabolic betrothal, Mammon tutored the young regent in a ritual of horrific proportions.

On the appointed eve, Ilse transformed the entire manse into a magic circle. The moors were rent asunder, brimstone flared in the night, and – come dawn – Ilse stood as sole remaining scion of House Liis.

Ilse, now taking the guise of a male (thereby the rightful heir) and styling herself the Mad Prince, ruled for another 50 years, subjecting the surrounding hamlets and villages to her growing madness. The triumph of her reign proved hollow, for every year on the eve of her fell covenant, she was beset by visions of Mammon and her foul promise.

No longer satisfied with mortal power, and seeking to save her immortal soul, the Mad Prince withdrew to her manor. There, surrounded by a court of specters – some real and some imagined – she sought ways to buy her soul free from Mammon's hellish grasp. Gold, incense, and jewels were offered up to foreign gods, and serfs were burned alive in gruesome sacrifices, but the devil could not be appeased.

Nearing the end of her mortal life and laden with the wages of decadence and sin, Ilse built a secret vault into the House of Liis. Laying wards and traps against both devils and men, Ilse and a cadre of trusted servants retired to her hidden sepulcher. And there, amid the glowing mists of weird incenses and with a dozen holy symbols clutched in her withered hands, Ilse bid her body wrapped in blessed linens and placed inside a rune-scored sarcophagus. Buried alive, the Mad Prince spent the last days of her life weeping in terror and fright.

The Prince's desperate wards and rites were not all for naught. They bought her soul a few score years, long enough for memories of the Mad Prince to fade into legends, and then mere stories, and for the abandoned manorhouse to fall into ruin. But the specters of damned House Liis demand an accounting and a devil can afford to wait a very long time.

The anniversary of the Mad Prince's bargain is at hand,



PLAYER NAME

HORNED MASK

PLAYER NAME

CROW MASK

THREE FACED MASK

Jost

Melancholic, absolute, grim

PLAYER NAME

Sabian

Indecisive, lonely, cruel

Kethe

Jealous, foolish, determined

PLAYER NAME

Josef

Focused, proud, disdainful

PLAYER NAME

Ursula

Friendly, manipulative, cunning

LION MASK

PLAYER NAME

Demut

Fearful, impulsive, distractible

THREE FACED MASK

PLAYER NAME

Ilse

Fiery, decisive, hopeful against all odds

Lady Baethor

HOUSE LIIS FAMILY TREE

PLAYER NAME

Matias

Gullible, mean-spirited, defensive.

IRON MASK

HANDOUT A

THE FLOATING OASIS OF THE ASCENDED GOD

By **Stephen Newton** • Editor: Rev. Dak J. Ultimak • Cartography: Brad McDevitt • Playtesters: Terry Olson, Maxwell Spann, Jessica McMillin, Ava Newton, Cori Newton, Amanda Rajchel, Sean McGuire, Farah McGuire, Mike Masuda, Tina Masuda • Special Thanks: Game Kastle (Santa Clara)



The *Floating Oasis of the Ascended God* is designed for 4-6 1st-level characters. It sends the players to a floating island where they will encounter bizarre underlings to an absent deity busily judging the mortal accomplishments of recently-deceased followers. Given the mystical nature of the location, there are other-worldly treasures which can be recovered, but not without first facing significant peril.

BACKGROUND

The Floating Oasis of the Ascended God has stopped high in the noon sky—4000 feet high to be exact—as it does once every 77 years. The Oasis, a floating cloud island, provides respite for both divine ethereals and avian servants of the Ascended God—a goddess of air, weather, and magical flying creatures. For the past several centuries, the island has been occupied by Momoaa, a mid-level servant in the Ascended God's celestial bureaucracy, who has been using the Oasis as a station to pass judgment on the Ascended God's recently deceased human and humanoid followers. Those followers will either be granted additional years of life (via partaking from the Basin of Immortality) and bestowed the gift of flight, or will be stigmatized as "flightless birds" and be sentenced to additional years of servitude back on earth.

Meanwhile back in the PCs' village, Raa-Zhel, a fledgling low-level wizard, has misinterpreted ancient scrolls describing how rain clouds from the Floating Oasis once filled the divine waters in the Pool of Immortality. However, Raa-Zhel does not understand the Oasis' true nature and mistakenly thinks the humid clouds of the Oasis are the source of the Pool of Immortality. She has recklessly provided the means for the PC's to travel to the Oasis via a charmed sky squid to collect a sample of these priceless, life-giving waters.

About the Oasis, Crits and Fumbles: The Floating Oasis is a collection of clouds, platforms, and tunnels fused together by a loose collection of thin magical fibers. The fibers allow mortals to walk upon the clouds, but only *very carefully*, for each step needs to be carefully taken to ensure secure footing on the spongy "ground." Thus, the judge should keep the following in mind when navigating the tricky terrain—falling to the earth below always results in 12d6 damage:

- *Discarded Items:* any item dropped or placed on the ground must make a DC 15 Luck check (applying the PC's Luck modifiers) or become lost in the clouds.
- *Fumbles & Crits:* if a PC fumbles, or a foe scores a crit, the PC must make a DC 10 Reflex save or plummet through the clouds.

- *Running & Jumping:* or acrobatic Mighty Deeds are similarly risky. PCs must include an additional DC 5 Reflex save to these maneuvers to prevent falling through the clouds.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The default hook described in the *Player Beginning* involves the fledgling wizard Raa-Zhel recruiting the PCs, but that's not the only scenario that could get the players to the Oasis. The judge should feel free to mix and match from the following ideas or come up with one of their own:

Festival of the Ascended God: The party stumbles across a small gathering of religious fanatics, absurdly dressed in cloaks covered in feathers and helmets fashioned with beaks constructed of dried leather. This "bird cult" is engaged in a bizarre ritual—bobbing and strutting like chickens—to celebrate the arrival of their "Avian God." Squinting upwards towards where they point, the PCs can indeed see an unusual bronze-colored cloud in the otherwise clear sky. Suddenly, their squawks and hoots grow to howls of panic as the PCs realize the cult has lost control of their magic ritual. Without warning, the PCs are suddenly sucked into a violent whirlwind and carried thousands of feet upwards toward the mysterious cloud island.

Flight of the Golden Falcon: A haggard warrior approaches the PCs with a stuffed falcon whose gold-plated feathers shimmer with magic when exposed to the sun exactly at noon. She describes how she collected the macabre trophy while plundering the crypt of a fallen priest of the Ascended God, the deity of harpies and griffons. She offers the PCs 10 gp each if they will stand with her at high noon and help her decipher the meaning of the magic bird. During the ritual, the bird comes alive, transforms into the size of a great wyrm, and devours the warrior woman in a single gulp. The now giant falcon then gives the PCs a choice to be devoured or to be judged within the Floating Oasis.

Patron Favor: A PC's patron (or deity) is underwhelmed by the meager tokens which have recently been offered. The offending spellcaster is given an ultimatum by his patron: if he wants the magic to continue to flow, then the party must travel on the backs of invisible companions to collect the elixir of immortality rumored to be under the control of rival patron who lairs on a floating island.

PLAYER BEGINNING

Hovering high in the noonday sky, an unnatural, bronze-colored cloud with a rainbow spilling from its edge sat motionless, just as it had since it spontaneously appeared a week before.

More concerning, however, was the giant sky squid which do-