DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

THE DREAD GOD AL-KHAZADAR

#90: A LEVEL 4 ADVENTURE
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INTRODUCTION

Know, O Beloved, that in those ancient days, when Punjar was no more than a village beside the great water, there fell a Shadow. This Shadow, Al-Khazadar, sought the souls of all within Punjar, and none could say him Nay. But there came to the Shadow a fishwife, wise in the ways of spirits, who bargained with Al-Khazadar. For with the far sight of a god, Al-Khazadar could see that the crude village had within it the seed of a thriving city, and that if he forbore to consume the meager souls before him now, a great feast would be spread before him generations hence. Thus it was that Punjar grew with a pestilence corrupting its heart, even from the first, and ever the looming Shadow of the Dread God Al-Khazadar's return.

— Jeren the Elder, *The Shadow Scrolls*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The setup for this adventure may be considered too railroad-y for some. I have tried to set up a situation, and then allow the players to determine how to deal with it. There is a lot of leeway for PC choices within the scenario but, in the end, dealing with the Dread God successfully is going to lead to the Cradle of Al-Khazadar. Some problems just don't have multiple solutions. I have done my best to ensure that player choices have a real effect on how the adventure plays out.

At its heart, The Dread God Al-Khazadar hinges on the players being forced to sacrifice one of their own in order to succeed, and how willing that would-be sacrifice is to die. There are no rules to help the players decide how to handle this. In my opinion, this is player agency at its finest. How do you deal with the unavoidable?

In most games I've run, the players are trying to move slowly and carefully, spending the time to heal and recover spells, while I am trying to offer some time pressure to keep them moving. In this adventure, it is the judge who attempts to delay the PCs, while the players try to move faster as soon as they understand the nature of their recurrent dreams. It makes for a fun change.

Finally, although guidance is given for encounters within Punjar itself, and dealing with the alien denizens of the distant world of Al-Khazadar's birth, Madkeen, ultimately these are only guidelines. These are areas where the judge should follow the players' lead, using those guidelines to flesh out whatever mad schemes the players may devise. If you find yourself at a loss, just ask, "What would Edgar Rice Burroughs do?"

I hope you have as much fun with it as we did.

— Daniel Bishop

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Thousands of years ago, the Madka traveled the galaxy in shining rockets. On many of the worlds they discovered, they were treated as gods. The Madka created gates allowing near-instantaneous transit from world to world. The Madka scientist-mage Al-Khazadar was not content to be thought a god, though – he wished to become one in truth. He created a device, the Cradle, to steal the power inherent in the planet Madkeen, creating a cancer that would, if unchecked, grow to consume the world. Little did Al-Khazadar care. He fled the world of his birth through a functioning Gate, seeking the souls of sapient beings in order to maintain his apotheosis.

Al-Khazadar came to Punjar when it was nothing more than a small fishing village. Convinced by the witch-wife, Marsulla, that Punjar did not yet have enough spiritual energy to sustain him, Al-Khazadar moved on to other worlds. But, before he did, the Dread God set his seal upon the growing village, so that all souls within it would belong to him upon his return.

Although parts of this adventure are written to take place in the city of Punjar, the judge can use any city with only slight modifications.

PROLOGUE: DREAD GOD'S SHADOW

Behind you are the eastern gates of the city of Punjar. Before you, dark against the rising sun of dawn, looms the Dread God Al-Khazadar – a man-like shape with two great, backwards sweeping horns that dwindle into infinity, standing 40 feet high. There is no light where the Dread God stands. Instead, He appears to be made of shadow itself, a titanic man-shaped hole of blackness, without even the glimmer of stars for eyes. It is as though a hole in reality itself has come to destroy you. Roll for initiative!

The PCs first encounter the Dread God Al-Khazadar in their dreams, at the start of this adventure. The dream ends when the second PC falls. The purpose of this encounter is to establish the main threat without crippling the PCs or causing a TPK. Although there are no consequences to dying in the initial dream, this nightmare encounter is repeated each time the PCs attempt to gain a night's sleep, regardless of where they are, with ever-increasing consequences. The same dream is happening across the city of Punjar. The Dread God feeds upon fear and despair.

Dread God Al-Khazadar: Init +5; Atk touch +8 melee (2d10) or ray +8 ranged (2d8); AC 10; HD 10d8; hp 60; MV 50'; Act 2d20; SP not affected by magic, not harmed by weapons, recover damage, ray of darkness, create spawn; SV Fort +10, Ref +0, Will +20; AL C.

Al-Khazadar can shoot a ray of utter darkness and cold up to 120', striking with a +8 attack modifier for 2d8 damage. When encountered in these dreams, Al-Khazadar cannot be affected by any spell or magic, nor can any weapon cause