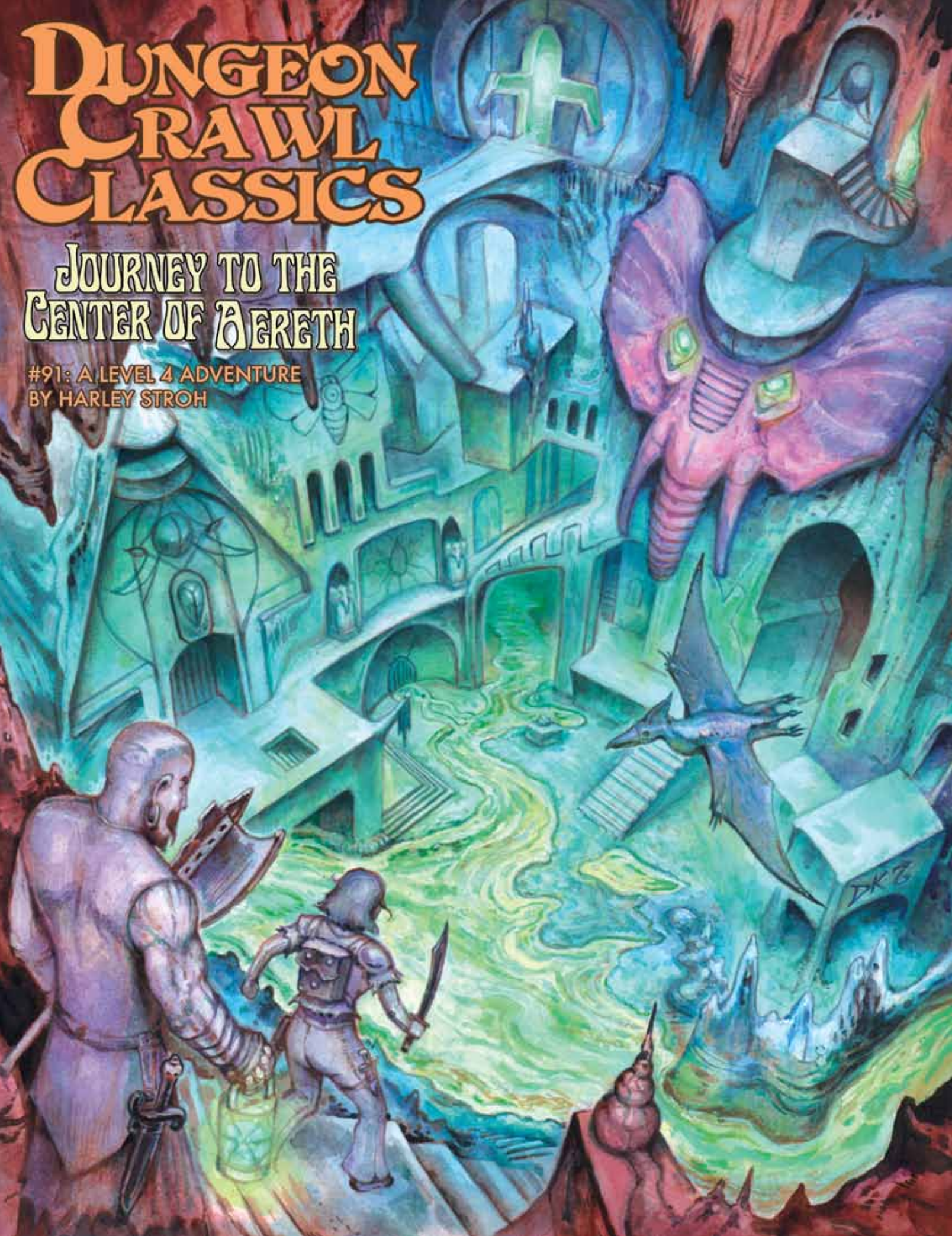


# DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

## JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF AERETH

#91: A LEVEL 4 ADVENTURE  
BY HARLEY STROH





# JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF AERETH

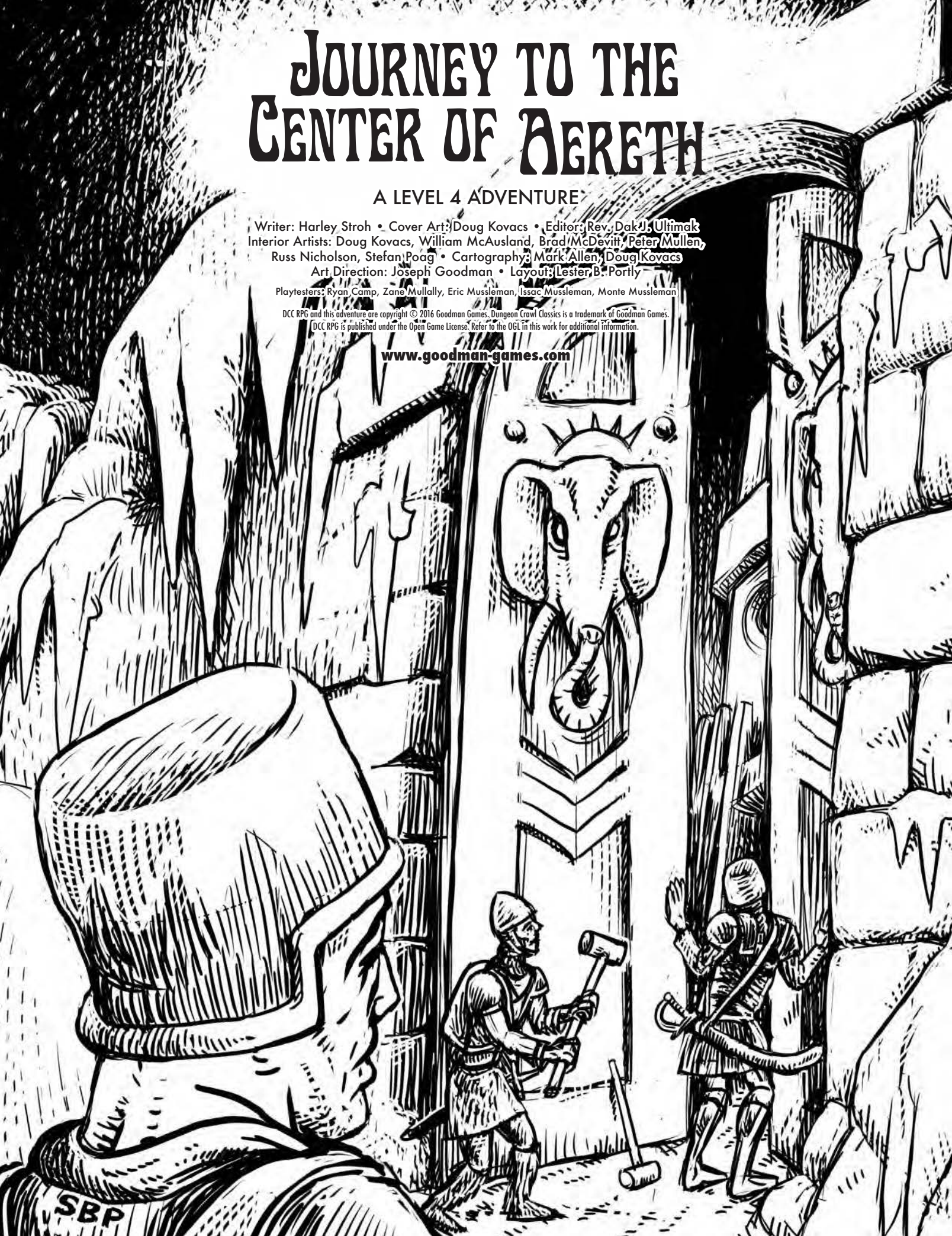
A LEVEL 4 ADVENTURE

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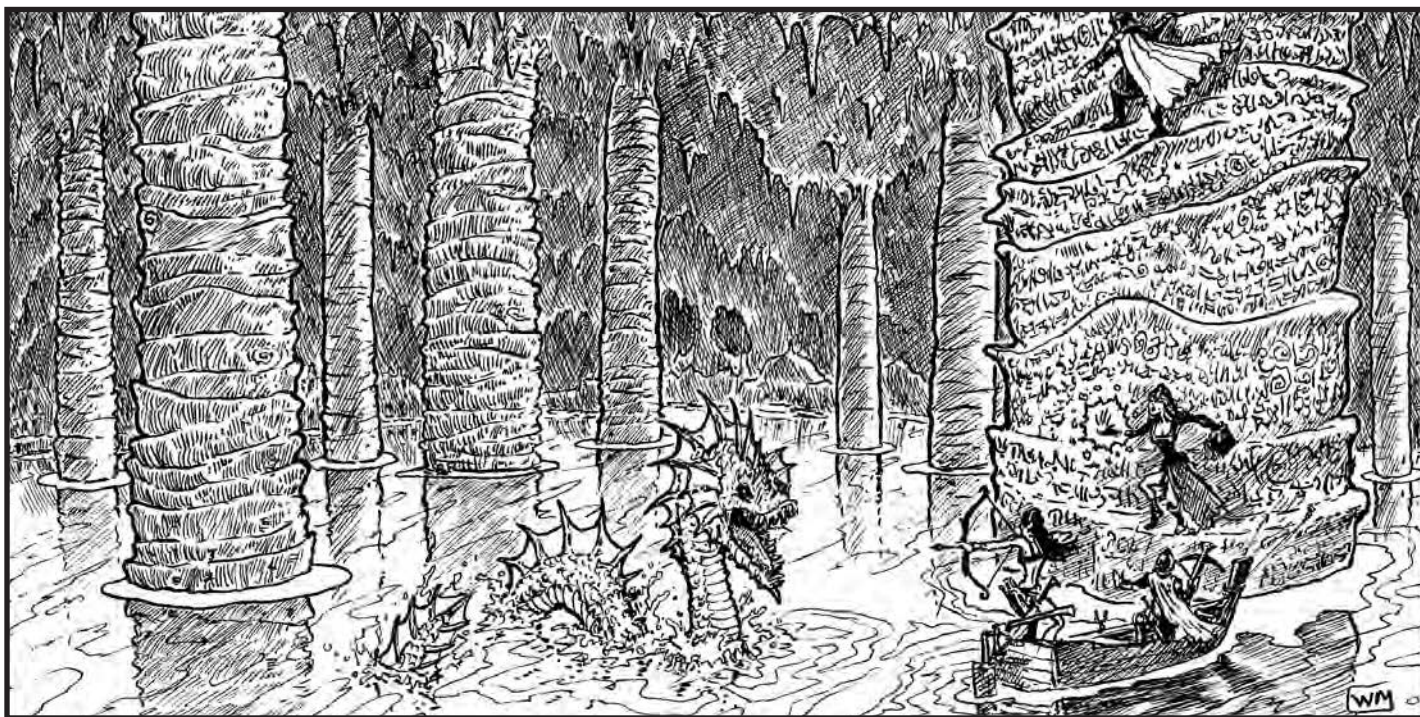
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## INTRODUCTION

**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.

Journey to the Center of Áereth sends the characters deep into Áereth's underworld, questing in search of the mythic cities of Lost Agharta. Weird foes, strange locales, and lost magic await explorers bold enough to dare the lightless realms. The focus is specific to the journey: what the PCs discover upon their arrival in Lost Agharta is left to the judge.

The adventure draws its inspiration from a range of Appendix N sources. The Aghartan slavemasters owe a debt to the tragic Yag-kosha from Robert E. Howard's *Tower of the Elephant*; while the befouled Aghartan slaves were inspired by the fallen creatures in *Worms of the Earth*, also by REH. Lost Agharta itself, hidden deep inside the world's core, echoes with traces of Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Pellucidar* and H.P. Lovecraft's *Beyond the Mountains of Madness*.

The adventure was designed for parties of 6 or more 4th-level PCs. The strengths of each class will be tested throughout the adventure, and wise parties will "double up" on critical classes like warriors, thieves, wizards and clerics, in anticipation of the death of their comrades-in-arms. Likewise, hirelings and henchmen are encouraged, if only to give players a pool of characters that can be advanced to full PCs.

## ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

**T**he Lost Cities of Agharta is a tale well-known to both sages and alehouse sots: A world beneath our own, lit by a brilliant sun and inhabited by wisemen beyond compare, where magic has replaced the spoken word, the weakest slave is like unto a superman, gems are used as cobblestones, and the domes gleam with hammered gold.

The grim truth is less fantastic. There is indeed a world mirroring our own, but it is lit by a smoky sun – often obscured by the roving, malefic, intelligent thunderstorms. The ancient, elephantine Aghartans do possess unmatched wisdom and psychic powers, but use their gifts for wicked, trivial ends. And wealth does abound, but no explorer has ever returned with his hard-won gains.

## ADVENTURE SUMMARY

**T**he Cities of Agharta once maintained contact with the surface world through a network of temples and trade routes, built and maintained by slaves. Though the temples are abandoned and the byways have fallen into disrepair, they still offer a point of connection from the surface to the underworld. However, after centuries of neglect, the Old Paths have become home to hosts of dangers.

The PCs' adventure begins outside a ruined temple-city, set in the distant north, and awash in the crush of glacial ice. However the city is not wholly abandoned – degenerate descendants of the former slaves still haunt the outskirts of the city, savages bent on ensuring that the ancient ruins are left undisturbed, lest they call back their ancient masters.





THE BAND RESISTS THE PSIONIC ASSAULT OF THE AGHARTAN MASTERS BELOW.

# APPENDIX A: RANDOM ENCOUNTER & EVENTS TABLES



Roll on the following table once per week during the PCs' exploration of the underworld. If the PCs send scouts ahead of the main party, modify the roll by the scouts' average Luck modifier. If the PCs are traveling in a single group, adjust the roll by the PC with the worst Luck modifier.

In general, low rolls indicate encounters where it is likely the PCs are surprised, whereas high rolls indicate that the PCs have the opportunity for surprise or can avoid the encounter altogether.

**Roll**  
**3d7**

## THE JOURNEY'S RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

**3** **Lava!** A seismic tremor washes over the passageway and the walls, ceiling and floor of the passageway are torn asunder by fiery veins of magma. Call for initiative; characters acting on a 10 or better are able to take action before lava sprays the passageway. Those that manage to make it more than 30' distant are spared any danger. However those that act on a 9 or less, or are unable (or unwilling) to flee, must attempt DC 15 Fortitude saves or take 1d20 damage from the spray of molten rock. On the second round, call for initiative again, with the same results, save that PCs that are unable to beat the initiative count are caught on the far side of the lava flow. Attempting to pass through the rupture without the aid of magic results in instant death.

**4** **Cave-in.** A tremor passes through the caves, causing rocks and rubble to fall from the ceiling. Call for initiative and actions; on the count of 1, massive blocks begin to fall from the ceiling, forcing all PCs that haven't taken an action to make DC 10 Reflex saves or suffer 1d10 damage. At the end of the second round, the entire ceiling collapses, blocking off the passageway. Characters caught beneath the falling rubble must make DC 15 Reflex saves or take 2d20 damage from the falling rubble.

**5** **Giant Slugs:** The PC are attacked by a pack of 1d3 giant slugs. One of the massive creatures blocks the passageway before the PCs, while up to two more attack from the rear. The slugs slide through the caverns with a stealthiness that belies their great size; the lead and rear PCs must take specific precautions (judge's determination) or successful Luck checks to avoid surprise.

**Giant Slug (1d3):** Init -6; Atk acidic touch +3 melee (1d4 plus slime); AC 18; HD 3d6; MV 10'; Act 1d20; SP slime; SV Fort +5, Ref -6, Will -2; AL C.

**6** **Remains of the dead:** The PCs discover the skeleton of a large quadruped. The bones of the skeleton are covered in a brittle, yellow crust. Experienced explorers (at the judge's discretion) recognize the crust as the remnant of a slime attack. Clinging to the ceiling, nearby, is a primordial slime, ready to drop on any creature coming within its range. The slime has been transformed by the wash of chaos magic, and is able to absorb spells with a DC 10 Fortitude save. The slime gains 1d12 hp for every level of spell absorbed (so a second-level spell would increase the slime's hp by 2d12).

**Ooze:** Init (always last); Atk pseudopod +4 melee (1d5); AC 10; HD 11d8; hp 50; MV 5', climb 5'; Act 9d20; SP half damage from slicing and piercing weapons, absorb spells with DC 10 Fort save; SV Fort +6, Ref -8, Will -6; AL N.

**7** **Man-Bats:** The PCs are set upon by a colony of 1d20+5 man-bats. Intrigued by the PCs' gear, the fell creatures try to abduct a smaller PC, and then ransom the unfortunate in return for shiny objects. If the ransom is surrendered even once, the PCs then are plagued by the man-bats.

**Man-Bat (1d20+5):** Init +4; Atk bite +6 melee (1d6); AC 12; HD 2d8; hp 9 ea.; MV 20', fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP carry off prey; SV Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +2; AL C.

**8** **Crystal trail:** The PCs discover handful of scattered crystals, with tracks leading down a short side passage. A hunting party of 2d8 mantis-men lies in wait down the corridor, hidden behind stalagmites and flowstone formations.

**Mantis-men (2d8):** Init +3; Atk forearm slash +3 melee (1d10+2); AC 15; HD 2d8+2; hp 10 ea.; MV 40' or leap 30'; Act 2d20; SP Invisible prior to attack; SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +0; AL C.

9 - 15 No encounter