

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

THROUGH THE
DRAGONWALL

#92: A LEVEL 3
ADVENTURE
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A LEVEL 3 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 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 fear, and the secret doors you know are there somewhere.

Legends are born from epic heroes and timeless adventures. While some are content to while away their lives wresting grubby pieces of copper from kobolds and goblins, a select few are called to high adventure. Many will rise and many will fall, but those that survive will have earned the fated title of Hero.

Through the Dragonwall is designed for 5 characters of 3rd level, but can easily be scaled to accommodate higher-level PCs or larger adventuring companies. The adventure assumes a balanced party, with at least one thief, wizard, cleric, and warrior...or non-human characters that can fulfill those roles! The inclusion of at least one elf PC will make the adventure more challenging, as elves find the Dragonwall extremely debilitating.

Caution: *Through the Dragonwall* is not recommended for first-time judges or players. The adventure is designed to reward intelligent play, just as foolish choices must surely be punished. New players, testing their characters' wings, may find the adventure unforgiving and harsh, while new judges may be challenged when the adventure calls for improvisation. There are many other excellent adventures eminently more suitable for beginning players and judges.

However, for players and judges looking for a challenging, dynamic adventure, or for those brazen enough to laugh in the face of danger, the Dragonwall awaits!

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Chasing an agent of Chaos, the PCs are lured through the *dragonglass*, a one-way teleport trap that brings them to a hidden valley bisected by a mystical barrier—the Dragonwall. The Green Land is the prison of the Elder Kindred Empress J'Aleth and her Court. The Black Land is ruled over by the Bone Dragon and his creatures. Each Land has its own denizens and challenges; the Green Land is a corrupted faerieland and the Black Land is a bleak volcanic wasteland inhabited by reptilian monsters.

Nothing can leave the Valley of Two Lands until either the Empress or the Bone Dragon is dead. The characters must decide who should live, and who should die...and then survive the consequences of their choice. The *dragonglass* opens again, allowing passage to the Lands We Know, but it doesn't remain open forever. In a final, deadly scrabble for the exit to the prison valley, the PCs must triumph or be trapped forever.

JUDGE'S SECTION

This adventure is a complex trap, requiring smart play and clever choices against superior foes to survive. The judge is given several ways to clue the players into the background story and the nature of the trap. The more of these you use, the more fun your players will have trying to determine a means of beating the scenario – and the more likely that they will achieve a satisfying triumph!

BACKGROUND



Long ago, the ancient ancestors of elves and men vied over the nascent world. The Elder Kindred used ancient pacts with occult powers to subjugate the early proto-humans, enslaving them, or hunting them like beasts through wood and field. Yet some among the subjugated devised pacts of their own with the dark gods of that long-ago age. Congress between the two species was strictly forbidden by the laws of both Elder Kindred and early humans, and the Powers who sustained them.

Through the machinations of the Courts of Chaos, the Elder Kindred Empress J'Aleth, favored of the King of Elf-land, captured Valgazur, the High Priest of the dragon-god Baphotet Khor. The two should be enemies by the laws of their people, by the demands of their patrons and by their very nature, but J'Aleth found something fascinating about the strength and determination of her captive. For his part, Valgazur could not help but find the Empress beautiful. For a time, the two became secret lovers.

Mortal hearts are fickle, and love knows no master...and the Lords of Chaos know no greater joy than the misery of lovers. The affair was exposed. The King of Elf-land demanded the life of the priest of Baphotet Khor. When the Empress refused, the dragon-god demanded that Valgazur serve her smoking heart at His table. The priest also refused. When their servants would not end their romance even under stern rebuke from both sides, the Lords of the Courts of Chaos sent an envoy to both Elf-land and the dragon-god, offering to resolve the dispute their subjects had caused.

The two were placed within a limbo-world, the Valley of Two Lands, there to remain until one or the other was slain by violence, with the Dragonwall keeping the lovers forever apart. The Courts allowed servants to each side in order to prolong the conflict, and offered a means for outsiders to be used as playing pieces in the great game they were devising. Baphotet Khor transformed Valgazur into the Bone Dragon in mockery, and his proto-human servants into pale reptile-men.

A thousand years or more the conflict has endured. Each side has long since forsaken the other. The Empress J'Aleth wants nothing more than to escape her prison and re-establish an Elder Kindred Empire in the Lands We Know. Valgazur wishes for only one thing more than the dissolution of his own unendurable life – a dragon-like desire to possess again his one-time lover!

GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

The adventure starts when an agent of Chaos lures the PCs to the Dragon's Maw. Judges can modify this agent to be (or take the likeness of) an escaped villain from a previous adventure. For instance, if the party has played through *Dragora's Dungeon*, they could easily be in pursuit of Dragora. Judges can also design story hooks specific to their PCs, or modify one of the following:

- A PC with the King of Elfland as a patron is sent to slay Valgazur and free J'Aleth.
- The final piece of some new spell is said to lie beyond the *dragonglass*.
- A cleric's deity sends her to ensure that the Chaos Lord Retrimax never escapes his prison (see area 3-2).
- Only the *Spear of Elfland* can restore a PC's damaged body to health.
- A patron allied to Retrimax wishes the PCs to free him from his prison.

Note: The agent of Chaos is a plot element, designed to lure the PCs to a specific place. As the judge, please adjust this to suit your campaign and players. The adventure is written to keep the agent always one step ahead of the characters, but that need not be the case. Even if your PCs catch and slay the agent, they will likely continue exploring into the trap that awaits them...

THE ELDER KINDRED AND BAPHOTET KHOR

The Elder Kindred, first described in *DCC#88.5: Curse of the Kingspire* as the *Elder Kith*, are ancient forebears of the elves, whose nature is even more closely entwined with the Elflands. They suffer an additional 1d6 damage whenever struck by an iron or steel weapon. The Elder Kindred all have the ability to use an action die to pass through the Hidden Ways – holes in the weft of reality that allow them to disappear from one place and reappear in another. An Elder Kindred can use this ability to effectively teleport up to 10' away per hit die of the Elder Kindred, but cannot use it to bypass the Dragonwall or escape the Valley of Two Lands.

Few Elder Kindred still dwell in the Lands We Know. Most passed into Elfland so long ago that even the elves view their time in the Known World as part of a semi-mythical past. When dealing with elves, the Elder Kindred tend to address them as "younger cousin."

The ancient dragon-god Baphotet Khor first appeared in *DCC#82.5: Dragora's Dungeon*. The judge may wish to emphasize the links to these previous adventures for players who have hazarded them both.

PLAYER BEGINNING

The adventure begins with the PCs tracking a thief through rough or mountainous country. The judge may devise details of this pursuit, or merely begin outside the Dragon's Maw. The thief is an agent of the Courts of Chaos, able to elude the PCs with supernatural powers prior to reaching the *dragonglass* (area 1-9). The thief will have stolen some item that the PCs rely upon often. The judge should alter any descriptive text as needed to convey the identity of the foe being pursued, or to match an alternate hook (as described above). Read or paraphrase the following:

At last you have brought your quarry to ground! The trail leads here – to a cave mouth carved to resemble a dragon's head! The path leads beyond stalagmite "teeth" into a maw a full 40' wide and half again as tall. The carving is too perfect to be natural, but it is ancient-looking, as though it were here long before men came to these lands.

SUMMARY OF KEY ELEMENTS

- Once the PCs pass through the *dragonglass*, they cannot escape the Valley of Two Lands unless either the Empress J'Aleth or the Bone Dragon dies.
- The Valley is bisected by a mystic and physical barrier, the Dragonwall, which makes it difficult for the Elder Kindred or the Bone Dragon to directly confront each other.
- The Dragonwall mystically weakens fey and reptilian creatures, and creates illusory phantoms to destroy those who enter.
- The Green Land is a faerieland ruled by the Empress J'Aleth.
- The Black Land is a volcanic wasteland lorded over by Valgazur, the Bone Dragon.
- Other creatures inhabit both Lands, and the Dragonwall itself. These creatures can be dangerous, but some of them may become allies or sources of information for the PCs.
- The Bone Dragon can be summoned to the Idol of Baphotet Khor. This gives a chance for the players to plan their encounter with the creature. If they fail to take advantage of that opportunity, some or all of the PCs are likely to die.
- When the PCs interact with NPCs, the judge should use the opportunity to seed information about the adventure background, and the key elements described above.
- If either the Empress J'Aleth or the Bone Dragon is slain, move immediately to the **Escape!** portion of the adventure (page 22).