

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

DCC DAY #3
A LEVEL 1 ADVENTURE
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CHANTERS IN THE DARK



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INTRODUCTION



Hunters in the Dark is a Dungeon Crawl Classics adventure designed for a party of 4-8 1st level characters. The characters find themselves trapped within a lost city, whose enslaved inhabitants see the PCs as potential saviors, comrades, or sacrifices. Escape is possible, but only for the daring. A good mix of character types is required for success, and a party without a thief might never see the surface world again.

This adventure makes use of both encounter locations and events. Events are listed in the text at the time they are likely to occur, but the judge may alter their timing to better suit game play. The goal of the adventure as written is to culminate in an exciting escape up a narrow bore hole while being pursued by an enemy well beyond the PCs' abilities to challenge. The players may find a way to avoid this final event; if so, the judge merely needs to determine what the ramifications of *not* sealing off the cavern complex will be.

Finally, while *Sailors on the Starless Sea* is probably the most iconic Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG adventure, the ending leaves two lingering questions: Where does the underground river lead, and how should a new judge handle PCs gaining their initial class levels? This adventure can be used to answer those questions. Note, however, that this is just *an* answer, and not necessarily *the* answer—if you already have answers of your own, keep using them! The judge is always right! Simply ignore the “Leveling Advice” sidebars throughout the adventure.

The author would also like to acknowledge the brilliant work of Harley Stroh, which inspired this adventure, and the support and advice of Michael Curtis, which made it possible.

BLINDNESS



PCs will probably have to deal with blindness in this adventure, due to darkness, injury, or both. Blinded characters suffer a -4 penalty to initiative rolls, attack and damage rolls, saving throws, and spell checks, and are easy to surprise. In addition, a blind character firing a missile weapon is at -8 to hit and any missed shot has a 50% chance of striking a randomly determined ally. They can only move at half speed. Under duress, or when lacking guidance, they move in a random direction. In addition, foes gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls against blinded creatures.

A cleric attempting to heal blindness must succeed on a *lay on hands* check for 4 dice of healing. This requires a spell check of at least 20 for those of the same alignment, a 22 or better for adjacent alignments, and is impossible for characters of opposed alignment. The Great Fungal Mound in Area 1-8 can also restore sight, albeit more slowly. Finally, a PC could use a pair of *calcinated eyes* from Area 2-4 to replace missing eyeballs, regaining sight almost instantly.

The judge should modify read-aloud text if no PC can see, giving the players only information visible to their characters.

BACKGROUND



Thousands of years ago, meteoric fragments from a distant world struck Aereth. Two of these fragments hit with enough force to drive deep holes into the crust. One of these fragments carried an alien proto-fungus which, landing in a deep pool, began to grow. It subsisted in the darkness for thousands of years, continuing to flourish, before it was discovered by the magician-priests of the reptilian Yuzz. The Yuzz founded the subterranean city of Quetat in caves over the pool of the growing proto-fungus, which they named *Yul-latet Garz*—in their language, the Corruption Below.

The magician-priests encapsulated part of the very soul of their chosen victims within their eyes, which were then ritually plucked out and sacrificed to the Corruption Below. As the proto-fungus absorbed the souls sacrificed to it, it developed self-awareness, and a form of alien intelligence. Soon enough, it learned to create splinters of itself around the fragmented souls, to create beings which would provide it with continuous worship, and beings which would provide it with endless sacrifices. Quetat was devastated, the Yuzz driven to near-extinction by the Corruption's hunger.

For centuries, Quetat housed only the dead. Explorers sometimes found the city, and sometimes left their mark, but always they fell to the creatures of the Corruption Below. Over the centuries, the many fragmented souls which lent sentience to the alien proto-fungus also drove it insane. Eventually, a large tribe of beastmen, fleeing the Chaos Lords who had created them, found Quetat and settled there. In doing so, they awoke the dead magician-priests of the Yuzz. The un-dead magician-priests worked to make Quetat sustainable, imbuing a splinter of the Corruption with the power to regenerate the body, if not the soul, and limiting the creatures which the Corruption Below created to steal the eyes and souls of the beastmen.

The Corruption Below now seethes with potential once more. The un-dead magician-priests of the Yuzz seek to control its power, potentially reviving the glory of their age-gone people. This is the cauldron the PCs find themselves in. There is potentially great wealth—and occult power—to be won, but if the PCs linger too long, they may become victims themselves.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

This adventure starts with the PCs travelling down an underground river in some kind of boat. This can be a river which plunges under the surface in a karst region, or it can be a watercourse discovered while exploring below ground. In either case, there are a number of ways that judges can tempt their players into hazarding the river. Some, or all, of the following may be used:

- The beastman shaman Glormug seeks to break her people's bond to the Corruption Below: *You see the spectral vision of a woman, her robes unable to hide her leonine legs and tail. "I beg you to come and deliver our folk," the ghostly woman whispers. "Pity us, for we are victims of a great evil. Great honor, great riches, and arcane might await you in Qu-*

LEVELING ADVICE

When PCs reach 10 XP, or finish a funnel adventure, they become Level 1. It is easy enough to explain how warriors gain their prowess; they have simply realized their natural ability to harm others. Elves become more elf-like. Similarly, dwarves and halflings simply become more of what they already were. Thief abilities don't stretch credulity; players can easily imagine how dangerous situations might cause a PC to rely more on stealth and luck. Some thief abilities, of course, rely on specialized thieves' tools, which the characters might not have available.

Spellcasters can present a challenge. If the judge wishes to make the quest for magical prowess occur in a more narrative fashion, consider the following possibilities:

A cleric gains their powers from their deity, but this does not necessarily mean that the cleric chooses to serve a god. In a process called *divine election*, the deity may instead choose the cleric to act as their vessel upon the material plane. Note also that a cleric's ability to *turn unholy* specifies the need for a holy symbol.

An elf's magic, more than a human wizard's, is sustained by supernatural patrons. As such, all elves can cast *patron bond*, but whether or not they gain access to their other randomly determined spells before doing so is up to the judge. Remember that *patron bond* takes at least a week to cast, and that the desired patron may have stipulations regarding where it can be cast.

Wizard spells need to be learned, as discussed on pages 314-315 of the DCC RPG rulebook. The judge may choose to waive this, in order to allow the newly-minted wizard greater survivability, but the wizard having to spend time learning spells works very well from a narrative sense.

In any event, when the adventure starts, all characters should have access to their class's hit points, attack bonus or Deed Die, save modifiers, and all class abilities. A wizard or elf is capable of making a normal spell check, even if they have no spells to cast.

etat, where the river will take you." She points down the river before fading away.

- The *calcinated eyes* of the Caretaker's victims retain a sliver of their sentience, and call to characters, especially wizards and elves: *You have had the dream again, of eyes in the darkness, with the power to fuel your spells. They call to you from down the river, where they await within a dark temple, to either be recovered or lost forever, depending upon what you do.*
- Gods or patrons demand that the un-dead magician-priests be destroyed: *"Sail the wine-dark river to the lost city of Quetat. There you must destroy the dead magician-priests in their temple before they unleash their Corruption upon the world."*

- The *Eyes of Yuzz* (Area 2-4) can be required for spell knowledge, or as a component for a ritual: *"Seek ye the Eyes of Yuzz, which lie in the ruined city of Quetat, down the River of Darkness. They will provide the vision/power that you seek."*

Chanters in the Dark can also be used as a direct continuation of the events in *Sailors on the Starless Sea*. In this case, the ending scene in that adventure leads directly to the start of this one. Regardless of the hook used, eventually the power of the rushing water is so great that the PCs cannot turn back.

ADVENTURE START

The underground river rushes on through the darkness, drawing your boat with it in an irresistible current. There is no light save that which you bring yourselves, which reflects off the damp walls and glitters in the water spray as though the river tunnel hurtles you through a galaxy of stars. Ahead you can hear the crash of water on stone, and beyond that the roar of a subterranean falls. The boat sweeps around a bend in the tunnel, and dashes on a hard jut of black rock. You can just make out a beach of rounded pebbles to the left before your lights are doused by the river, and the shards of your vessel are swept sharply to the right, to thunder down what sounds like a deep cataract.

PCs without infravision are completely blind in the darkness, although they have a good sense of where the beach is. Every PC must succeed on a DC 10 Fort save or take 1d3 points of temporary Stamina damage from battering and water inhalation as they reach the beach. Worse, any PC who fails a Luck check loses any object they might have been holding, or one random object if they were holding nothing. These objects are swept down the cataract; there is a chance that they can be recovered in Area 3-2.

The jutting black rock allows the PCs to reach Area 1-1 without fear of being swept downriver to the cataract. However, should a character decide to try their luck that way, they take 6d6 damage from the pounding waters, and, if they survive, wash up at Area 3-2.

LEVELING ADVICE: DEALING WITH LIVESTOCK

While having a goat or a chicken may be useful in a funnel, taking a cow with you through a dungeon crawl likely has less appeal. Most animals the PCs have with them are, at this time, extra weight, and can be swept away by the river. The same thing is true of bulky items like sides of beef.

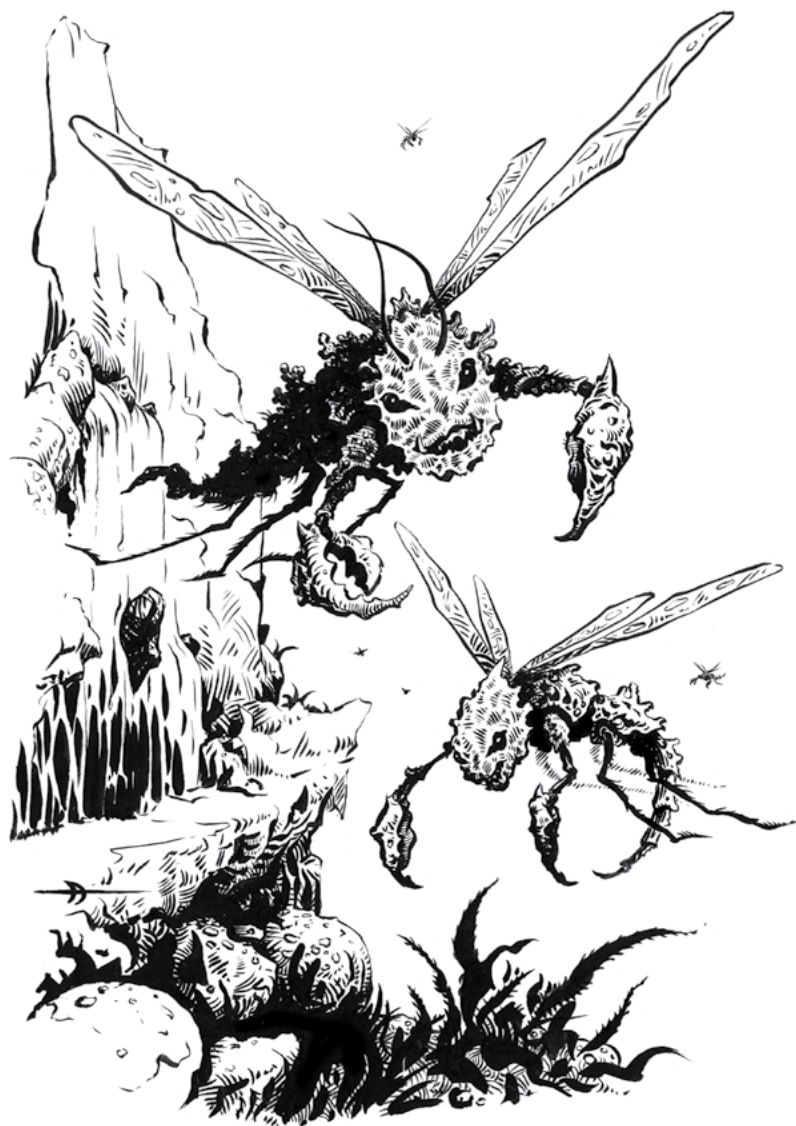
However, sometimes PCs become attached to those animals. In these cases, consider giving the animal an additional Hit Die every time the PC levels; usually 1 die lower on the Dice Chain than the PC's own hit dice. Nothing else about the creature needs to change; this just means that it can survive the adventuring life a little longer!

CHAPTER ONE: THE LOST CITY

Area 1-1 - The Beach: *The stones are smooth and hard beneath hands and bodies as you draw yourselves out of the water. The wetness of the stones is barely discernable after being spilled into the dark water, but their slickness is palpable. From what you saw before your boat crashed upon the rock, the beach looked like a large area, and you cannot be sure how far back it goes. You have not even caught your breath before you realize that you are not alone – stones clatter, small hard bodies brush yours, and sharp pincers bite.*

The PCs are attacked by a swarm of subterranean devil crabs. There are hand- and footholds carved into the rock to the south, leading to Area 1-2. Normally, the PCs could escape the crabs by taking this route, or defeat them easily enough by dispersing the swarm. However, only PCs with infravision can see at the moment, making this combat far deadlier than it would otherwise be. Blind PCs feeling the rock can find the route to Area 1-2 with a successful Luck check, while those with infravision can spot the handholds with a DC 10 Intelligence check. Without using the handholds, it is only a DC 5 Strength or Climb Sheer Surfaces check to reach Area 1-2, but characters who cannot see suffer a -4 penalty to these checks.

Because most of the characters cannot see, the judge should play up the feel of the slippery round stones, the scent of wet stone, the thunderous rush of the river. Any successful hit kills at least one crab, which gives off a pungent reek and cries out with almost-human screams.



Devil Crab Swarm: Init +2; Atk swarming attack +1 melee (1d3 plus shred); AC 14; HD 6d8; hp 25; MV 20' or swim 20'; Act special; SP attack all targets within 20'×20' space, shred (DC 10 Ref save or 1d3 extra damage), half damage from non-area attacks; SV Fort +5, Ref +2, Will -2; AL N; Crit M/d12.

Event 1, below, can be used by the judge to rescue a party in duress. This will also serve immediately to establish the beastmen as something other than just another group of adversaries. This is especially important if this adventure is being used to follow up *Sailors on the Starless Sea*, where beastmen were recurrent foes.

Area 1-2 - Higher Ground: *Rough handholds carved into the rock allow you to climb the black basalt, away from the stony beach. The ground here is uneven, and the air remains wet with spray as the subterranean river breaks on the rock. A low, narrow passage leads approximately to the east, sloping gently downward away from you.*

