

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS



PIERCING THE DEMON'S EYE

2023 FREE RPG DAY MODULE
A LEVEL 2 ADVENTURE
BY DANIEL J. BISHOP



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2023 FREE
RPG DAY
MODULE



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INTRODUCTION



Piercing the Demon's Eye is a Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG adventure intended for six to eight 2nd level characters. This is a deadly adventure, in which all classes will be tested, but those who venture herein without a thief are surely doomed. This adventure is a classic death-trap dungeon, and the judge is encouraged to allow monsters and deadly traps to do their worst. The adventure is also entirely survivable, depending upon the choices made by the players. Don't give your players hints about the right or wrong choices, but be fair about what their PCs would be able to see, hear, and smell.

The adventure is designed to take place over the course of four hours *in real time*. Once the PCs enter the Demon's Eye, they are outside the Lands We Know, and time runs differently there than it does here. When the four-hour run time of the adventure is up, the portal closes and the PCs are trapped. In campaign play, you may wish to make this limitation known to clerics, wizards, and elves. It is also possible to let exploration continue beyond the time limit, and then pick up events a decade later if the PCs have access to sustaining magic (such as *food of the gods*).

This adventure includes tie-ins to the Free RPG Day 2021 adventure *Tomb of the Savage Kings* by Stephen Newton, but is a stand-alone adventure.

BACKGROUND



Centuries ago, the ancient nation of Lys raised proud monuments in the fertile lands of the river Cheron and its bordering desert. They worshiped many half-forgotten gods combining human and animal aspects, and a few which were wholly bestial. Among these gods was the Old Serpent, Io-Set, whose chthonic worship consisted of unholy rites conducted in Stygian darkness. Although Io-Set was imprisoned beyond the world by those gods of Ancient Lys who looked kindly upon humanity, the Old Serpent was able to send his thoughts beyond his prison, and through the *Serpent Ring of Io-Set*, impress servants to do his bidding.

The last of these servants was the arch-wizard Monath Ot who, with his patron's tutelage, was able to breach the barriers between dimensions. Although Monath Ot could reach the Old Serpent's prison, he was unable to free Io-Set himself. He constructed a vault leading to Io-Set's prison, creating traps which would slay those who entered, their blood and souls feeding his ophidian god until the Old Serpent could gain strength enough to shatter his bonds and escape.

A century ago, disaster struck. Monath Ot lost the *Serpent Ring*, and with it his connection to Io-Set. Monath Ot yet lives, and long ago revenged himself upon the bold thief who stole the artifact from his finger while he slumbered in lotus dreams. Although they do not appear in this adventure, the *Serpent Ring* and Monath Ot may reappear to trouble the world—and the PCs—at a later time!

THE RIVAL PARTY



Another group of adventurers, led by the piratical Trocereo, has followed an old map to the Demon's Eye. These rivals can be used by the judge to spur the PCs onward, to add short skirmishes, or to trigger traps in the time-honored "red shirt" tradition—allowing the players to learn what dangers they cautiously bypassed. The rival party can also be used as allies, or as replacement characters as needed. In campaign play, consider introducing the rival party in earlier adventures to establish a friendly rivalry. Each of these characters has brief role playing notes, but if they become PCs, the players may adjust their personalities as they see fit.

Trocereo (2nd level thief, former jeweler): Init +1; Atk longsword +1 melee (1d8) or dagger +1 melee (1d4) or dagger +2 missile fire (1d4); AC 11; HD 2d6+4; hp 12; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP thief skills, luck die (1d4); SV Fort +2; Ref +2; Will +0; AL N; Crit II/d12. Str 9, Agi 13 (+1), Sta 15 (+1), Int 16 (+2), Per 11, Luck 13 (+1).

Thief skills: backstab +1, sneak silently +6, hide in shadows +4, pick pocket +6, climb sheer surfaces +6, pick lock +4, find trap +5, disable trap +4, forge document +6, disguise self +0, read languages +3, handle poison +0, cast spell from scroll 1d12+2.

Equipment: jeweled longsword (50 gp), dagger, thieves' picks and tools, very fancy hat.

Role playing notes: Trocereo covers his uncertainty with braggadocio. His fondest desire is to obtain a really big score so that he can retire in style, but his spendthrift ways make true retirement unlikely.

Jubal (2nd level warrior, former hunter): Init +2; Atk longsword +1d4+1 melee (1d8 + deed die) or shortbow +1d4 missile fire (1d6 + deed die); AC 13; HD 2d12-2; hp 9; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP deed die (1d4); SV Fort +0; Ref +1; Will -1; AL N; Crit 19-20 III/d14. Str 15 (+1), Agi 12, Sta 6 (-1), Int 9, Per 6 (-1), Luck 9.

Equipment: longsword, shortbow, quiver with 12 arrows, studded leather armor, backpack, piece of chalk, 3 days rations, holy symbol (Pelagia), pouch containing 17 cp and 26 gp.

Role playing notes: Strong and quiet, Jubal is devoted to Alariel and will always go to her defense. He laments the loss of Brother Vulmea more than his compatriots, and resents Trocereo's cavalier attitude.

Alariel (2nd level elf, former forester): Init +0; Atk mithril longsword +1 melee (1d8) or longbow +1 missile fire (1d6); AC 10; HD 2d6; hp 12; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP infravision 60', spellcasting (+2 to spell checks), heightened senses, iron sensitivity; SV Fort +0; Ref +1; Will +2; AL C; Crit II/d8. Str 11, Agi 12, Sta 8 (-1), Int 12, Per 13 (+1), Luck 11.

Spells: *invoke patron* (the King of Elfland), *color spray*, *magic missile* (luck distortion; -2 Luck for 1d4 rounds), *read magic* (rush of wind; torches go out 50%), *runic alphabet* (mortal).

Equipment: mithril longsword, longbow, quiver with 20 arrows, large sack, spyglass, gold ring (25 gp).

Role playing notes: Alariel is well aware of Jubal's feelings and Trocereo's insecurities, and is willing to use both to her benefit—after all, they are only human! In a pinch, Alariel chooses another elf over her human compatriots, although she does feel remorse for doing so.

The rival party also included a cleric of Pelagia, Brother Vulmea, but he succumbed to *lignum vitae* poisoning—or as Trocereo puts it, “He turned into a bush.”

SPELLBURN IN THE DEMON'S EYE

Once the PCs have entered area 1-1, any spellburn is partially powered by Io-Set, and partially works towards his release. When any character uses spellburn, roll 1d10 + the amount spellburned – Luck Modifier and consult the table below. Each mundane living creature that dies during the adventure contributes an additional +2 to this roll.

1d10 + Spellburn - Luck Mod	Result
5 or less	No additional effect.
6-10	A musk-like reptilian odor wafts around the caster, remaining for a number of rounds equal to spellburn + 1d3. Normal animals are made uneasy.
11-15	The caster feels the briefest touch of a cold, ophidian mind, draining 1d3 Personality in addition to any spellburn gained. This Personality drain doesn't add to the spell check, but it does add to any further rolls on this table (by any character).
16-20	There is something ancient and evil slithering in the darkness. The caster loses their next 1d3 actions (after the spell is cast), pinned by the entity's lidless emerald gaze before the vision fades away.
21-25	The caster is struck by 1d5 invisible serpents (bite +4 melee for 1 damage each, plus DC 12 Fort save or 1d3 Stamina damage). Add +1 to any future roll on this table (by any character) per successful attack.
26+	Io-Set is released. Go to The Old Serpent Rises! on page 11 for details.

ADVENTURE START

One night every decade, the Demon's Eye, the vault of the ancient wizard Monath Ot, opens. You have fought your way here to the cursed Island of Vilaya, past many dangers, following an old treasure map acquired over dice in a dockside tavern. Other copies of the map must exist, for you have been able to keep one step ahead of the pirate Trocereo and his band, which you suspect even now must be on the island somewhere in the thick jungle behind you.

An explosion of parrots heralds your arrival at the clearing indicated on your map. Before you squats an ancient stone platform some forty feet square, and at each corner, a plinth bearing time-worn runes rises. In the center is a structure like a stylized stone eye, its pupil a mere slit, but the whole structure being easily eight feet high. As you gaze upon this sight, a flight of steps becomes visible, leading upward beyond the previously-empty pupil. The stairway does not seem to exist in the mundane world at all – surely this is the portal you seek!

But be warned – although vast treasures are said to lie within, the portal only remains open for four hours before closing until another decade has passed!

Six plantmen guard the platform from the nearby forest. They are nearly impossible to see unless being explicitly looked for, and even then, a DC 15 Intelligence check is required. They are armed with blowguns dipped in their own sap, *lignum vitae*, a toxin capable of transforming a living humanoid into a plantman (DC 10 Fort save or 1d3 Personality damage per round; victim transforms into a plantman at Personality 0). Those transformed into plantmen immediately attack their former comrades. Note that a cleric who can successfully *lay on hands* for 3 HD can neutralize the toxin, but doing so does not reverse existing effects.

Plantmen were once humanoids, those who explored this area in times past and succumbed to *lignum vitae* poisoning. Hints of their former lives may be visible in their current forms, which are now more humanoid bramble than anything else.

Plantmen (6): Init -2; Atk claw -1 melee (1d3 plus toxin) or blowgun +0 missile fire (1d3 plus toxin); AC 10; HD 1d5; hp 3 each; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP plant (immune to most critical effects and poison), camouflage (DC 15 Int check to detect), toxin (DC 10 Fort save or 1d3 Personality per round); SV Fort +2, Ref -1, Will +0; AL N; Crit III/d6.

Each of the four plinths has different writing on it, in an ancient form of the common tongue. Each plinth requires a full round and a DC 10 Intelligence or Read Languages check to read (characters without relevant occupations roll 1d10). A character cannot both decipher a plinth and attack. The plinths read:

Northeast: “I do raise this passage for the glory of Io-Set and for his return.”

Northwest: “Seek thee then mine riches, paid for with thy blood.”

Southeast: “Here shall thy soul be devoured and thy bones lie forever.”

Southwest: “So sayth Monath Ot, Servant of the Old Serpent.”

Area 1-1 – Stairway Between Worlds: The stairs rise from the stone eye, broad stone steps fifteen feet wide without rails or guards on either side. At first, there is only blackness around the stairs, but as you climb upward, stars begin to appear, until it seems as though you are rising through the night sky itself. The trip seems to take forever, and yet no time at all. You have no idea how many steps you have climbed by the time you reach a heavy wooden door, set in a green marble arch, and with a stylized serpent's head for a handle. There appears to be nothing behind the archway.