

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.

Thrones of Punjar is designed for five characters of 7th through 9th level. A good mix of character classes is recommended to handle the challenges presented herein, and having a rogue in the party would prove particularly useful. Diplomacy and Insight are of great use in this adventure.

The setting of this adventure is the city of Punjar in the Known Realms. If you do not own the *Æreth* campaign setting, we recommend you locate the adventure in a large city in an arid locale.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

A rash of strange disappearances has overtaken the Devil's Thumb ward in the teeming city of Punjar. The populace is gripped in a wave of fear, and recent sightings of a frightful apparition in the area of the disappearances have only increased their apprehension. Days ago, the relative of an important ambassador went missing, and unless she can be returned unharmed, the city's reputation will suffer a terrible blow. The player characters must investigate the scant clues available, a trek that will expose a hidden cult of enthralled humans working at the whim of an abomination lurking in the dangerous sewer tunnels beneath the city. Yet another puppet master lurks behind this latest crime, pulling the strings, and if they are to be completely successful, the player characters must discover the involvement of the Punjar nobility in these crimes.

Loc	Pg	Type	Encounter	EL
1-3	11	C	<i>The Scarlet Dogs</i>	6
1-5	13	C	<i>Haroun and Jarib</i>	7
1-6	14	P/C	<i>The ghost of Jeya Furei</i>	5
2-1	16	T	Rusting Rungs	1
2-2	16	C	Mighty Otyugh	9
2-3	17	T/C	Green Slime Advanced Gelatinous Cube	5
2-4	18	T	Tilting Trap	1
2-6	18	C	Eight Thralls The Blacksmith	7
	20	C	Diplomacy Skill Challenge <i>Jacober, Apprentice</i>	6
G1-3	22	C	Bloodweb Spider Swarm	1
Incursion	24	C	Four Doomcreepers Two Thralls	6
Ambush	25	C	Three Doppelganger Thugs	5
Drink	29	T/C	Beluth	7
P2-3	32	T	Bolt Statue Trap	5
P2-6	33	C	Eight Alligators	7
P2-7	34	C	Seven Skum	8
P2-9	34	C	Eight Skum	9
P2-10	35	C	Four Elder Thralls	7
P2-11	36	P	Door Puzzle	1
P2-12	36	C	Nine Thralls <i>Callota</i>	9
P2-13	37	C	Two Wizard Thralls Six Advanced Dire Rats	8
P2-14	38	C/T	<i>Beluth</i> Thrall Barbed Net Trap	9
P2-15	39	C	Three Thralls Mutated crocodile	8
P2-17	40	T	Rolling Death Trap	5
P2-18	41	C	Mutated Thrall	6
P2-19	43	C	<i>Churldtyrch</i> , Albino Aboleth Four Skum	10

GAMEMASTER'S SECTION

ENCOUNTER TABLE

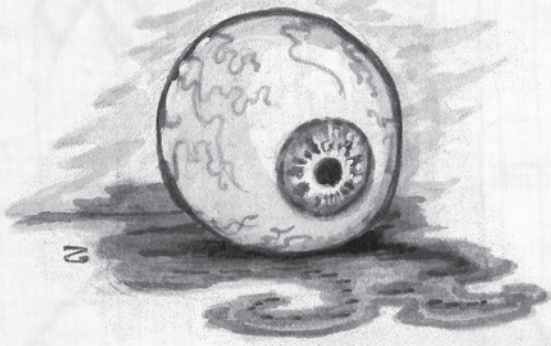
To help the GM prepare, we have included a quick reference table showing all encounters at a glance. **Loc** — the location number keyed to the map for the encounter. **Pg** — the module page number that the encounter can be found on. **Type** — this indicates if the encounter is a trap (T), puzzle (P), or combat (C). **Encounter** — the key monsters, traps, or NPCs that can be found in the encounter. Names in *italics* are classed NPCs. **EL** — the encounter level.

SCALING INFORMATION

Thrones of Punjar is intended for 5 characters of 7th through 9th level, but it can be easily modified for parties of different sizes or levels. Using characters averaging 4th level or below is not recommended. Consider adapting the adventure as follows:

Weaker parties (4 or fewer characters and/or below 7th level): Remove one level from Haroun and Jarib in area 1–5. Remove two levels from the mighty otyugh in area 2–2. Remove two skum from the encounters in area P2–7 and P2–9. Remove two thralls from area P2–12. Remove two advanced dire rats from area P2–13. Remove the barbed net trap from area P2–14. Remove two skum from area P2–19.

Stronger parties (6 or more characters and/or higher than 9th level): The adventure should still be a challenge for stronger characters, but you might consider the following minor changes. Add a level to each of the Scarlet Dogs in area 1–3. Add a level to Haroun and Jarib in area 1–5. Add two more levels to the advanced gelatinous cube in area 2–3. Add another elder thrall to area P2–10. Add two more advanced dire rats to area P2–13. Add one level to Beluth in area P2–14 (and anywhere lese he appears in the adventure). Add two levels to Churlydytyrch in area P2–19.



A NOTE ABOUT CITY ADVENTURING

A city presents a unique adventuring environment—a combination of both unusual freedom of action and constraint for the player characters.

The environs of a large city offer the PCs (and players) a multitude of options for investigation and exploration, and any city adventure typically requires a more-experienced GM to “keep the players on track” from time to time. This should not daunt the GM, as the city environment also presents an unparalleled opportunity for role-play and NPC interaction. A city such as Punjar is filled with a profusion of interesting people, from the humble streetsweeper to the haughty noble. Each has his or her own unique agenda and mind-set... and each could introduce the PCs to yet more adventure!

A civilized city also presents some constraints, in the form of a system of law and order the like of which rarely exists deep in the average dungeon, ruin, or wilderness expanse. PC actions are limited, and those individuals displaying fierce magical power in public, or engaging in wanton destruction may well find themselves incarcerated. Good players will learn to balance the freedom a city offers with a bit of restraint. Often, the best-laid plans in cities are the subtle ones, and often, a well-voiced word can be as effective as a sharp sword.

THE LONG ARM OF THE LAW

The player characters may, at times, be tempted to approach local enforcers for help. Enforcement of the laws in Punjar is handled on a district-by-district basis, each ward having its own enforcers loyal to the ward's syndicate boss, or *Meh'a* (“braggart” or “boastful” in the city cant) and its own separate set of laws. As the wards reach outward, they get poorer and increasingly desperate, and the acceptance of the code of civilization gets weaker. Justice in the Devil's Thumb is particularly tricky, as the ward is filled with lower class citizens. However, it has a mixture of both high- and low-class establishments, as well—many of which are frequented by city nobles. For commoners and visitors, the laws are applied loosely, and those who have made generous “donations” to key city officials gain the best service... just as the poor gain little at all. Strangers are the least regarded, unless they represent something valuable to the true rulers of Punjar. The enforcers, known commonly as the *marfud* (“the rejected”), patrol and harass, but dislike intervening in street fights and similar situations. They do not enter the alleys in the more dangerous wards unless in large, well-armed groups.

In short, approaching the *marfud* for help wastes precious time (something the PCs do not have in abundance in this adventure), and may actually put them in greater danger. Those living in Punjar know the one immutable fact that governs the city: No one helps anyone without good reason, and no one is ever to be trusted.

GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

The following hooks can be used to get the players involved in the adventure:

- The characters are directly contacted by a slumlord and asked to help solve the mystery of the disappearances and to recover the ambassador's daughter. The lord is aware that the adventurers have made a name for themselves doing dangerous work, and he asks for aid while appealing to the PCs' honorable reputation.
- The player characters have been hired by the ambassador himself to uncover the truth and rescue his daughter. Fearful that the nobles of Punjar were moving too slowly and trusting them little, he decided to take action and send in his own group of investigators.
- The player characters overhear conversation in the streets regarding the disappearances and the sighting of the ghostly figure. When they are observed showing interest, the speakers direct them to parchments hanging about the Devil's Thumb asking for brave adventurers to help the city solve the mystery. The citizens state that if the characters are indeed "real heroes," they will get involved without hesitation and defeat this evil that plagues the city.
- If a good-aligned paladin or cleric is among the group, a local good-aligned cleric visits the PC and asks them to investigate the dangerous haunting of the Devil's Thumb and put the spirit to rest. The cleric provides holy water with which to cleanse the area after the deed is done. (If this option is used, the PCs should overhear talk about the disappearance of the ambassador's daughter from street vendors or the like.)

BACKGROUND STORY

DISAPPEARANCES

In the last few months, the citizens of the Devil's Thumb ward have grown suspicious and fearful. A number of strange disappearances have taken place in the alleys and streets of the ward, usually after nightfall, and rumors are rife. If these disappearances do not abate, the ward constabulary may be forced to impose strict curfews or other sterner measures to maintain order.

THE HAUNT

Adding to the complication of the recent disappearances, a spectral figure has been seen in the alleys near where at least one disappearance has taken place. This ghostly figure has made at least three appearances, the last to a fishmonger in the Devil's Thumb named Crudell. Exact descriptions vary wildly, but the figure is always described as transparent and fearsome in appearance.

THE OUTCAST

In the deeper recesses of the Lirean Sea, a freakish birth occurred, an aberration among aberrations. Churlydtyrch was a true rarity—an albino aboleth. The ghostly white aboleth was born physically weak, but is strong in the powers of magic and mental domination. The creature toiled in the study of magic, endlessly seeking ways to supplement its strength while enslaving creatures to act as its servitors. Despite the pale one's great talent for magic, it was an outcast in aboleth society, and soon found itself driven out of the aboleth-held areas.

After a period of wandering, and several near-fatal encounters with hostile members of its own kind and other creatures of the underdark (principally dark elves), Churlydtyrch plied the coast of the Southern Province and discovered an entrance to the deep sewers of Punjar. Initially hesitant, the evil creature soon discovered that dwelling beneath the city gave it access to both food and new slaves. Soon, with the assistance of its skum servants, Churlydtyrch soon secured a lair within a less-used area of the waterways and quickly set about enslaving every intelligent creature that stumbled upon its home. In a matter of months, the aboleth was comfortably encircled by servitors. Anxious to increase its personal power and discover further forms of magic, Churlydtyrch carefully enslaved some humanoids, but left them able to breathe air—so much the better to act as the creature's eyes and ears aboveground.

HOUSE ROHAMARI

Among the many competing noble houses of Punjar, House Rohamari sits on the lower end of the power scale. The House has depleted much of its wealth—indeed, they are far poorer than the other nobles would guess—and many of the Rohamari nobles consider the House to be in desperate straits. Other noble houses occupy positions of power in the Trader's Cabal or in the other official Punjar ruling councils, but House Rohamari is known only for its ownership of the Palace of Fortuity, a gambling establishment of some renown. The so-called Palace is little more than a tavern-sized structure, but the place turns a handy profit by catering to wealthy gamblers willing to brave the Devil's Thumb ward for a chance to win a tidy sum. By keeping a healthy share of the bets placed and charging excessive amounts for food and drink, the Palace has helped keep the members of House Rohamari living in the manner to which they are accustomed.

Unfortunately, the Palace of Fortuity is not the only gambling establishment in the Devil's Thumb. Approximately one year ago, House Malhaven established the House of Fate, a gambling establishment that soon threatened to rival the Palace for popularity. Needless to say, the panic among the Rohamari nobles was great. The elders of House Rohamari quickly grew to hate the Malhavens and seethed for revenge.