

INTRODUCTION

Remember the golden days of role-playing, when adventures were underground, NPCs were there to be killed, and the finale of every dungeon was the dragon on the 20th level? Well, those days are back. Dungeon Crawl Classics feature bloody combat, intriguing dungeons, and no 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 must be there somewhere.

The Mists of Madness is designed for five 1st-level characters. The adventure is designed to test both the characters' physical and mental resolve. Each of the 4 roles is called upon in equal measure, but success hinges upon a party's ability to function as a team while under threat. Attempting to turn character against character, the Mists of Madness work to destroy the adventuring company, before picking off the individual heroes, one at a time.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

To the south of the city of Punjar, where the crumbling city walls meet the Great Black Salt Marsh is a nameless, muddy hamlet. The hamlet is home to wretched fishmongers and tanners, all characterized by strange abnormalities and wild superstitions. Of late, these superstitions have given over to even weirder rituals and blood sacrifices. Every full moon, the folk pole their rafts deep into the swamp, where they perform foul sacraments before a black stone spire.

On a quest to stop the foul rituals (see Adventure Hooks below) the PCs trek to the spire, facing the swamp's perils and uncovering clues hinting at the real power behind the nascent cult.

Arriving at the spire, the PCs discover a ruined keep, overgrown with thorny vines and poisonous plants. The keep, once a military outpost for Punjar, was abandoned decades ago as it slowly sank into the swamp. Turned to dire ends, the keep is being rebuilt to serve the cult. Exploring the ruined keep, the PCs interrupt a band of fanatical devotees in the midst of a performing a living sacrifice.

Scattering the cultists, the PCs press on to the maw-like cave at the base of the spire, known to the cultists as the Maw of Madness. Defended by ancient death traps and weird arcane seals, the caves conceal an antediluvian vault, the resting place of an archlich whose reign predates recorded history in the Known Realms. Undisturbed for untold eons, now the machinations of the cultists and their eladrin master threaten to awaken the archlich, to dire ends that none can predict.

The climax of the adventure pits the heroes against the cult's warlock master, in a race to foil his plot. Will the PCs emerge victorious, or will they succumb to the spire's curse and the fevered machinations of a mad priest bent on destruction?

GAMEMASTERS SECTION

ENCOUNTER TABLE

To help the GM prepare, we have included a quick reference table showing all encounters at a glance. The abbreviations used are: *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), *combat* (C), or *hazard* (H). *Encounter* — the key monsters, traps or NPCs that can be found in the encounter.

Location	Pg	Type	Encounter	EL
Player Start	6	C	Two Vicejaw crocodiles	1
S-2	7	C	Three Giant frogs	1
S-3	7	T	Block Deadfall	1
S-4	8	C	Ursula the Befouled	3
			Hiatha the Half-Ogre	
			Twelve human cultists	
S-5	10	C	Sagatha, Master of Scales	1
			Vicejaw war-mother	
S-6	11	C	Five Shades	varies
S-7	12	T/C	False Floor Pit	2
			Ochre jelly	
S-8	13	T/P	False Tomb	1
S-9a	13	T	Three Whirling Blade Traps	2
S-9b	14	T	Pendulum Scythes	1
		C	Two Rat swarms	1
S-10	16	T	The Greedy Maw	3
S-11	17	C	Ten Shambling Horrors	3
S-12	17	C	Malikai the Mad	5+
			Eight+ Decrepit skeletons	
			Skoulos the Undying (archlich)	

SCALING INFORMATION

The Mists of Madness is designed for 5 characters of 1st level, but it can be easily modified for parties of different sizes or levels.

Weaker parties (4 or fewer characters): Remove 1 swamp crocodile from Player Start; remove 2 giant frogs from area S-2; reduce the number of cultists in area S-4 to 4 and Sagatha does not investigate the battle; remove both normal swamp crocodiles from area S-5; reduce the number of shambling horrors to 5 in area S-11; reduce the number of starting decrepit skeletons to 4 in area S-11.

Stronger parties (6 or more characters, or higher than 1st level): Add 2 swamp crocodiles to Player Start; add 5 giant frogs to area S-2; double the number of cultists in area S-4 and Sagatha investigates on the 3rd round; raise the level of the shambling horrors in area S-11 by 2; in area S-11, double the number of starting decrepit skeletons.

GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

GMs should tailor the adventure hooks to their own campaign and the PCs' backgrounds, ensuring that each PC has a driving motivation to thwart the rising cult. Following is a short list of sample adventure hooks to use for inspiration:

- Gambling in the Souk late into the night, the party's rogue wins a strange clay idol depicting a squat eight-eyed god, with one hand raised as if to cast a spell. In the morning after, the PC awakens to discover one of his hands is webbed like a frog, having grown fleshy tissue in the night. (See The Curse of Skoulos Below).
- Renes the Fiend-Breaker, the mentor of a PC paladin or fighter, is dying. In his youth, Renes came across a broken tablet referring to "Skoulos the Undying." After spending a fortune in gold and decades in search of legends and tales, Renes has come to believe that the undead creature lurks beneath a basalt spire hidden in the heart of the Black Salt Marsh. With his dying breath, Renes presses his fabled bastard sword into the PC's hands, begging to complete this final quest in his honor.
- A newly formed priesthood emerges in the temple district, winning devotees with promises of gold and everlasting life. None can explain the cult's source of wealth or unexpected rise to power, but the cult's popularity threatens to drive the PC's temple from the district. Summoned before the high priest, the adventuring companions are sent on a mission to investigate the home of the cult, deep within the heart of the Black Salt Marsh.
- One of the PCs is secretly a descendent of Skoulos; the same eldritch blood that once ran through the archlich courses through the hero's veins. The PC awakens one morning with a strong, unconscious yearning for Skoulos' phylactery, and with one malevolent effect from the Curse of Skoulos (see below). Drawn toward the heart of the Black Salt Marsh, the PC helplessly pursues his fate...

