

DICING WITH DEATH

A MINI-ADVENTURE FOR 2 TO 8
LEVEL 3-4 DCC LANKHMAR CHARACTERS

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INTRODUCTION

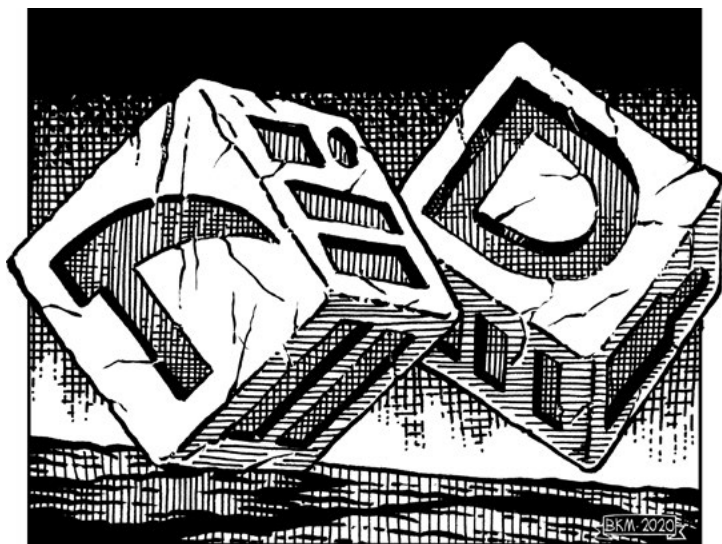


Welcome to the fantastic world of Nehwon, home to the crime-ridden metropolis of Lankhmar, the City of the Black Toga, and residence of its questionable heroes, Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser! Based on the legendary works of Fritz Leiber, DCC Lankhmar allows judges and players to experience their own adventures in Nehwon, ones to rival the tales of Fafhrd and Gray Mouser. If you've ever dreamed of dueling in the foggy alleys behind Cheap Street, negotiating with supernatural mentors for scraps of forgotten lore, or merely trying to survive one more night in the criminal underworld, DCC Lankhmar is for you!

This adventure is a Nehwonian take on characters returning from death. If you're a judge who wants an option for PCs to come back from the dead in Nehwon, this mini-module fits the bill in the vein of Harley Stroth's Punjar-set DCC #74: *Blades Against Death*.

This module also works great as a way to keep the gaming fun going during tournament play. A lesson learned during recent Gen Con DCC RPG Open Tournaments was that some players were not satisfied with paying for event time and having their PCs killed within the first hour of our characteristically lethal tournament adventures. One option for extending these players' gaming experience is to reset their post-death PCs to some degree, and let them play out the remainder of the tournament round (without counting it in the actual tournament results). *Dicing with Death* is one such alternative approach—it continues the narrative immersion in a flavor consistent with both the DCC RPG gaming culture and Fritz Leiber's world of Nehwon.

As a side game designed to engage players whose PCs have been killed at any point during a tournament, this adventure comprises a simple, timed survival point crawl in which the characters are trying to not get killed a second time before the amount of time allotted for the gaming session runs out. It can be run with any number of players and easily accommodates the frequent introduction of new PCs mid-game. It is designed to last 2-3 hours, but the full encounters can produce a longer session if desired.



BACKGROUND



Death—one of the supernatural Powers of Nehwon—agrees to spend an evening gambling with his sister, Pain, in the castle they share in the Shadowland. The stakes in their game are the lives of the PCs who've been killed in the tournament adventure. If Death wins, the PCs continue to their final rest; if Pain wins, she gets to keep the PCs alive—so they can experience more of life's pain, of course! There's nothing really in it for Death... in fact, he's risking his already-filled daily quota. But he agrees to entertain his sister for an evening.

PREPARING PLAYERS



Whether part of a DCC Lankhmar campaign or a tournament adventure, prior to continuing with this module, players whose characters have died should be given Handout A.

Summary of contents of Handout A:

- Introduction to the PCs' new state of limbo, appearing in weakened shade-form simultaneously in Death's castle and on the Bleak Shore.
- Specific guidance on the changes players must make to their character sheets to convert their PCs to shades.
- Rules for the variant of Rat-Snake being played between Death and Pain.
- Instruction for making side bets in the Rat-Snake game—and why PCs might choose to do so.
- An explanation of some differences in how fleeting Luck is awarded—and functions—within this adventure.

Once players have familiarized themselves with the handouts and converted their PCs to shade-form, they join the in-progress game. The judge narrates each new PC's entry into the action, whether it's happening at the Rat-Snake table in Death's castle or on the Bleak Shore.

Why are the PCs' shades appearing on the Bleak Shore? Well, on the one hand, Death fancies himself an artiste and likes nothing more than to insert a little dramatic tension in his work, as in this instance of volunteering to gamble with his already-filled quota. But, on the other hand, at the end of the day, Death does have a quota to fill and he isn't above cheating a bit to get the job done (see the Leiber story, "The Sadness of the Executioner"). So, while he has agreed to a game of Rat-Snake to mollify his pesky sister, Death is also hedging his bets against missing his quota should Chance favor Pain instead—by sending the PCs to face the perils he incubates on the Bleak Shore.

How can the PCs, who are by no means the equals of the Twain and much reduced in shade-form, expected to be able to survive the perils of the Bleak Shore? The answer lies in the Rat-Snake game being played between Death and Pain.

STARTING THE ADVENTURE

You open your eyes and find yourself in the long, low main hall of a mansion fashioned from black granite. Set into the center of one wall is a wide hearth. A blue flame nearly as bright as the sun blazes away in the hearth. In front of the fireplace sit two high-backed onyx-colored chairs. Between them is a small table set up for gambling with dice. In one chair sits Death himself, and in the other is his sister, Pain. Without gesture – using only their eyes – the two Powers beckon you over to the table to join their game of Rat-Snake. Somehow, instinctively, you know two things: that you are dead, and that whether you remain dead or return to life are the stakes being gambled for in this game.

GAMBLING IN DEATH'S CASTLE

When the PCs gather around the Rat-Snake table, they join the dicing game as both bettors and stakes. Death and Pain play a different variation of Rat-Snake than that played in the taverns in Lankhmar (see sidebar). In this version of the game, a portion of the life essence of one of the PCs – their maximum hit points, ability score points, or some combination of the two – is staked as the six-coin ante called the “vessel”.

When Pain is the Thrower: The players take turns rolling the Rat-Snake dice for Pain while she revels in their fear of being forever lost. Before each roll of the dice, the other players can place side bets.

- PCs can wager any combination of current ability score points and maximum hit points (max hp) as side bets at an exchange rate of 1:1 (one point per coin).
- A PC's winnings sit “in account” for use in side bets during this gambling session or in future ones. If they have a surplus over and above the total of max hp and ability score points, they can wager with surplus points instead.
- At the end of a round of gambling, as the action shifts to the Bleak Shore, players must restore their PCs' max hp and ability scores to their pre-wager levels. If they don't have enough points to restore scores to their original numbers, they must distribute the remaining points as evenly as possible. Scores that are still reduced after this remain reduced for the rest of the adventure.
- Whenever the game session shifts scene to the Bleak Shore, PCs' surplus winnings after restoration may be used as fleeting Luck. The exchange rate is 1:3 (1 point for 3 fleeting Luck tokens).

When Death is the Thrower: The adventure's action switches from the gambling to encounters on the Bleak Shore; this represents Death's turn as the thrower, gambling with the PCs' lives by subjecting them to the multiple dooms he is evolving there. If a PC's shade-form is killed on the Bleak Shore, they go to their final death, never to be seen again

“VESSEL”, NOT “SILO”: A FLAVORFUL NEHWONIAN METAPHYSIC

Death and Pain use different terms in their dicing game. Instead of the mortals' Rat-Snake, they call it “Fate-and-Doom.” The 1s on their six-sided dice represent Fate (and the single pip is replaced by a primal sigil or rune that symbolizes Fate). The fact that there are two dice and therefore two possible Fates as outcomes represents the influence of the god, Chance, on both the game and mortals' lives. The 6s (also sigils/runes instead of pips) represent Doom and the fact that there are many dooms that can befall a mortal. Death and Pain call the six-coin ante in this game the “vessel” instead of “silo”, and this stake being gambled represents the six aspects of a mortal life: vessel (body), destiny (fate), lineage (ancestry), passions (honor, ambition, lust, hate, etc.), self (uniqueness of character), and shadow (“oppositional self”). For simplicity's sake, and to enable the judge to use existing Rat-Snake game aids (such as the playmat available on www.goodman-games.com), the standard terms are used throughout this product's explanation of the game. But judges who wish to role-play the Powers as NPCs can use their Fate-and-Doom terminology to flavor any interactions that take place within the castle in the Shadowland.

THE BLEAK SHORE

This adventure is a timed survival point crawl that imagines the Bleak Shore as a long, arid, somewhat Y-shaped volcanic isle (see map) with the basalt crags described by Leiber comprising an extinct cinder cone – the highest point on the island – positioned at the very end of the base stem of the Y (area 1). Several topographic features characterize the other parts of the island, no less inhospitable and forlorn. The shoreline of the island is constricted, with tiny cove beaches and boulder fields perforating the shore breaks, where the flat terrain forms treacherous lagoons (area 2). The inland slope of the cinder cone and the flat, central spine of the island are matted with a low forest of thorn-ridden bracken (area 3), giving way to basalt slabs (area 4).

FLEETING LUCK ON THE BLEAK SHORE

Because the PCs are un-dead shade-forms rather than fully-living mortals, their luck has run out and they've already met their Fate. Thus, *their permanent Luck score is considered to be zero* and they cannot earn fleeting Luck in any of the usual Nehwonian ways. (Optionally, the judge may choose

THE BLEAK SHORE



to award fleeing Luck to PCs for instances of game play that embody the spirit of the Fafhrd and Gray Mouser stories or for exceptional instances of role-playing.) Fortunately, when the PCs are facing dooms on the Bleak Shore, they can spend surplus side bet winnings at a rate of 1 point for 3 fleeing Luck tokens. They can also spend fleeing Luck to heal wounds, restoring 1 hit point in exchange for 2 fleeing Luck points. Finally, in this adventure, the DCC Lankmar rule that all fleeing Luck is lost when a PC rolls a natural 1 is NOT in effect.

GAUNTLETS AND PERILS

Beyond the crater, encounters on the Bleak Shore come in two varieties: gauntlets and perils. **When the PCs enter areas 2, 3, or 4, roll d%. There is a 50% chance the gauntlet area will be encountered first; on 51-00, they happen immediately upon the peril.**

THE BLEAK SHORE

The Bleak Shore is the setting for Leiber's Fafhrd and Gray Mouser story, "The Bleak Shore," originally published in 1940. The story opens with the Twain winning at Rat-Snake in the Silver Eel tavern. The very first line of the story is a piece of dialogue spoken by a strange, small pale man with a bulging forehead wearing a black cowl. The man, clearly offended by the Twain's confidence in their capacity to cheat death, warns them that "death sometimes calls to a man in a voice only he can hear," and that man called to must then "go to whatever place death shall bid him and there meet his doom." When asked by the Mouser about the words in which death might call, the small man thrice utters, "The Bleak Shore."

From that point forward the Twain are under some sort of curse, geas, or compulsion. They muster their crew of Mingol slaves and set sail westward in their sloop into uncharted oceans. After many days they arrive at a forlorn shoreline of basalt crags rising up from a beach of pale sand littered with gray boulders—the Bleak Shore. Atop those crags, in a hollow of black sand, the Twain break the curse placed on them when the Mouser divines and destroys the curse's eldritch source.

Some literati view the odd little man that the Twain meet in the Eel as simply an unnamed wizard or sorcerer who places a curse on them to punish them for their boastfulness and hubris. Others have interpreted him as Leiber's first presentation of the anthropomorphized Nehwonian god, Death, who goes on to serve as an antagonist for the Twain in several later stories. This adventure takes the second view and treats the Bleak Shore as a sort of naturalistic laboratory, wherein Death experiments with various dooms and demises.

Gauntlets are designed to steer PCs towards the perils. If they first encounter a gauntlet, they can try to evade it, but gauntlet threats will only cease their pursuit of the PCs if they move into a different map area or an area of the nearby peril into which the gauntlet creatures will not venture.

Perils are created by Death upon the Bleak Shore with the intent of delivering death to those cursed to visit the shore. Each is custom-designed for a particular class of target—warriors, thieves, sorcerers, etc.—though individuals not of the type targeted may still find themselves unhappily suffering the receiving end of its perils.

In the original story, "The Bleak Shore," the Mouser was able to defeat the Bleak Shore executioners and dispel the curse that landed him and Fafhrd there by recognizing and destroying an eldritch, embryonic manifestation of Death contained within an egg similar to those the executioners had hatched out of. This principle of threats having a hive mind that can be destroyed or defeated is built into this adventure, with each peril encounter including such an embodiment or representation of Death. Finding and destroying a peril's hive mind will often be a better solution than fighting the threat itself.

All encounters are designed to adjust to the number of PCs in the party at any moment in time. The destruction of a hive mind signals Death passing play back to Pain, and the scene shifts back to the Rat-Snake game in the Shadowland.

Area 1—The Cinder Cone (Shadows of a Warrior's Doom Forestalled): The first PCs to rise up out of the ground on the Bleak Shore find themselves in the sandy hollow where Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser previously escaped the curse of the small, pale man with bulging forehead and cowl.

Your shade-form levitates out of the ground in a rock swale awash with black sand. The swale, in turn, sits at the bottom of a shallow basin hundreds of yards across. As you look about, you realize the basin is actually a long-extinct volcanic crater, filled in with solidified lava, fallen rock, and eroded sand. Immediately behind you is the lip of the crater. Beyond the lip is a steep, craggy cliff of basalt that falls away tens of yards below to a narrow, surf-stabbed strip of pale sand. Turning back to the swale, you note that it's perforated with 3-foot-tall, sedge-like stalagmites formed from a black, lava-like substance. Scattered across the sand and amongst the small spires are fragments of black, stony eggshells.

Give the PCs just a few moments to take in their surroundings. Then:

You hear a voice: toneless and thin, but clear, with an ethereal air, yet at the same time commanding. You recognize the voice from the gambling table in the Shadowland. It belongs to Death. He intones: "For shades: shadows of a 'doom forestalled'..." The stalagmites begin slowly but steadily thrusting upwards. Creatures are forming beneath pairs of stalagmites, compositing themselves before your very eyes from grit and granules of ash and cinder blowing in from the surrounding sand field, creating grainy golems.

Revenant Executioners (2 per PC): Init -1; Atk stone spike

Shimmer-gloams are a breed of will-o'-the-wisp engineered by Death and unique to the Bleak Shore. They are easily mistaken for shimmer-sprights; hapless victims may follow a shimmer-gloom hoping to find hidden treasure. Shimmer-gloams usually appear as flowing, shimmering wisps, cobalt blue in hue, but may also appear as humanoid figures with fine hair and shapely figures, clothed togas of gossamer, and bearing an alluring aura of sympathy-inducing melancholy or yearning. Any creature who glimpses one must make a DC 13 Will save or be overwhelmed by the desire to pursue the gloam wherever it leads. Only physical restraint will keep an affected individual from following; they can make another Will save every two hours to try to break the compulsion. Shimmer-gloams also bear a fragment of Death's blue fire within them. Those coming into physical contact with a gloam must make a DC 10 Fort save or suffer 1d6 points of life-sucking damage. Due to their necromantic nature, shimmer-gloams are immune to necromantic magic.

If a PC is beguiled by a shimmer-gloom, in 3d3 rounds the gloam will lead her into a quagmire containing a quicksand nixie.

Quicksand Nixie (1): Init +2; Atk grapple +4 melee (drown); AC 13; HD 2d10+1d5 per PC over 2 in the party; MV 20' or swim 40'; Act 1d20 per 4 PCs (round up); SP half damage from slashing weapons, water-breathing; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +2; AL N.

Quicksand nixies are believed to be a form of renegade elemental occasionally spawned in the fetid pools and moors of Nehwon. Death's version of this creature appears as a beautiful woman trapped in quicksand and covered in its mire. She attacks by grappling her foes and dragging them into their watery dens. A victim grappled by the nixie must make a DC 10 Fortitude save each round to avoid suffocation. The DC of this save increases by +1 every subsequent round, until the victim's lungs are permanently inundated with quicksand.

PERIL: WIZARD'S-BANE WEIRD SWARM

If any of the PCs try to swim away from the Bleak Shore, or enter the water to escape the shimmer-gloams and quicksand nixie, they will encounter the wizard's-bane weirds: a swarm of eel-shaped water weirds engineered by Death using an arcane alchemical synthesis of electrolysis and necromancy. The weird swarm inhabits the shallow water—lagoons, tide pools, and shore breaks—where the shore meets the sea. The weirds are drawn to the magical and necromantic energy that invariably emanates from cursed visitors traveling the Shore.

If the weirds are encountered, Death's toneless and thin, but clear and ethereally commanding voice intones: *"For wizards, a wizard's doom..."*

Wizard's-Bane Weird Swarm (1): Init +3; Atk necro-eldritch shock +2 ranged (2d4+2, 40' range) or swarming bite +4 melee (1d4); AC 14; HD 4d4 plus 2d4 for every PC over 2 in the party; MV swim 30'; Act 1d20 for every 3 PCs, rounded up; SP surprise, anti-magic biofeedback; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +3; AL N.

The wizard's-bane weirds appear as a swarm of creatures shaped like giant eels with human-like skulls sporting protruding upper and lower jaws and prominent fangs. The weirds are covered in a taut, translucent gray membranous skin. This skin provides excellent camouflage in water, making it likely that weirds will surprise their prey, as well as making it more difficult to target them clearly with attacks. The swarm generates a necro-negative, anti-magic field. Once per round, the swarm can concentrate the field on one target that is emitting magical energy (wielding enchanted items, possessing spell-like abilities, affected by an active spell, or having cast a spell during the current round) in an attempt to shock the target. This field also disrupts magic, rebounding the magical energy back onto an enemy's central nervous system: if the swarm is targeted by a spell, spell-like ability, or enchanted item, it saves with 1d30 and receives a saving throw even for effects that would not normally grant one (e.g., being hit by an enchanted weapon). If the swarm successfully saves, it suffers no effects from the magic portion of the effect that targeted it (a magic sword still inflicts its normal weapon damage). Furthermore, the energy powering the magic aimed at the swarm feeds back against the caster/wielder, causing 2d4+2 damage (the same as the swarm's eldritch shock). A successful DC 14 Will save halves the damage and a saving throw roll of 18+ negates the feedback damage entirely.

Observant PCs will notice that each eel has a distinct and individual face. One eel in the swarm has a face instantly recognizable as the facsimile of Death himself—this is the hive mind of the swarm. After 1d2+1 rounds, the party member with the highest Intelligence may make a passive DC 13 Intelligence check to see if they take note of that eel. In any round, a PC may attempt to locate a particular eel by spending the round scanning the swarm and succeeding at a DC 15 Intelligence check. If the hive mind eel is destroyed, the swarm disperses and will not manifest again during the adventure.

Weird Swarm Hive Mind (1): Init +2; Atk bite +2 melee (1d3); AC 15; HD 1d5; MV swim 30'; Act 1d20; SP anti-magic biofeedback; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +4; AL N.

Area 3—The Bracken Slope (Thieves' Doom): On the inland side, the sides of the cinder cone are still steep, but not as sheer as its ocean-facing sides. The surface composition of this slope is a mix of volcanic gravel, sand, and a bit of loam from decaying plants and leaves; this makes for extremely loose footing. Blanketing the slope is a carpet of 3'-5' tall bracken and scrub brush. This makes for abrasive travel for hikers careless of the scrub's spiky, thorn-ridden branches.

GAUNTLET: FERAL HAUNTS

Feral haunts are a shade-form of ghost hound culled by Death from the scream-like "spirit echoes" of dogs who died from rabies. Feral haunts appear as vicious, slaving dogs with mottled coats of cobalt blue fur bespeckled with spotty patches of translucent, wispy, grayish-white ectoplasm. The first sign of pursuit by a pack will be a baying wail in the distance, indicating that one of them has detected prey.



+1 melee (1d6+1); AC 14; HD 2d6; MV 25'; Act 2d16; SP half damage from piercing and slashing weapons, immune to will-affecting spells and spell-like abilities, continual spawning; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +3; AL N.

Revenant executioners are the shade-forms of the executioners defeated by the Twain during their cursed visit to the Bleak Shore. When Gray Mouser destroyed the form that birthed and controlled the executioners, their essence dissipated into the sands of the extinct volcano. However, Death can call these essences forth to create simulacra of the original creatures. Revenant executioners are squat, golem-like versions of executioners—5' tall with stony spikes instead of scything claws, and grit-encrusted, stone spikes and nubs where claw or spine might have previously sprouted. Their former reptilian resemblance has given way in favor of their more crustacean-like characteristics.

If the PCs stand and fight the revenants, they will notice that even after the first wave finishes compositing from the grit of the basin, the constitution process continues. This spawns another revenant every two rounds.

The PCs can choose to flee the basin during the two rounds it takes the first wave to constitute. The revenants will not pursue PCs beyond the top third of the beachward crags, nor past the lip of the crater on the inland side.

Area 2—Seashore and Lagoons (A Sorcerer's Doom): The island's waterline is no less foreboding and inhospitable than anywhere else. The only beaches are at the cratered end of the island. But they are few and far between, dotting the shore with short, straight dashes of sand or fields of boulders jutting out from shallow stretches of rippling waves to form broken tide pools. Starting at mid-stem along the island's Y-shape and all along the shoreline to the forked ends of the island, instead of beaches there are lagoons encircled with sickly, skeletal, mangrove-like trees, dotted with quickmires, choked with kelp, and befogged with the miasmic stench of rot.

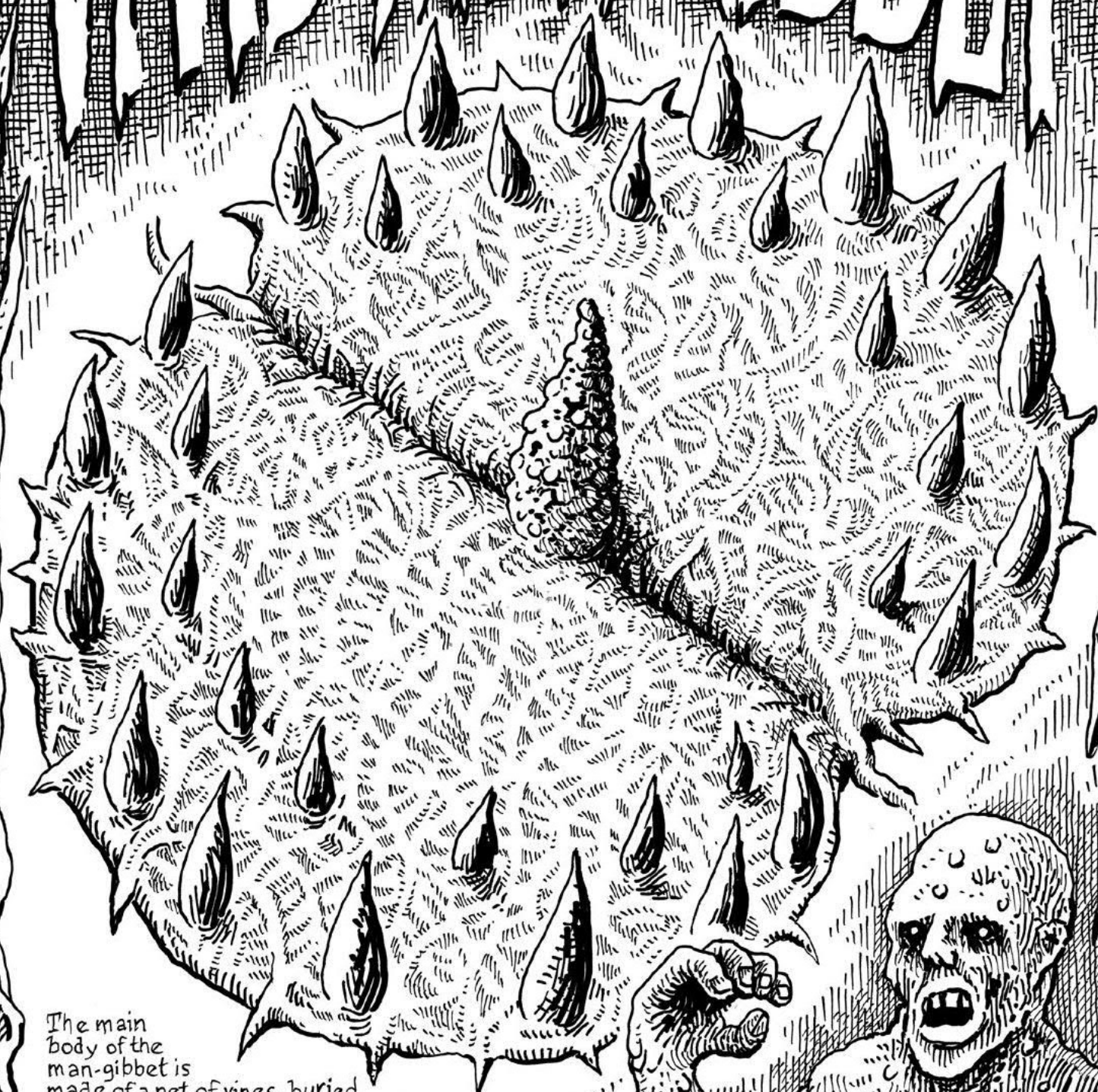
Every turn the party spends traversing the shoreline, a quicksand nixie will attempt to lure a PC into a mire.

GAUNTLET: SHIMMER-GLOAMS

Shimmer-gloams inhabit the island's beaches and shores of the lagoons. They lure visitors into quickmires to drown, empathically feeding on the terror their victims feel as they suffocate to death. Shimmer-gloams will not venture into the surf or lagoon waters because they are inhabited by the wizard's-bane weirds.

Shimmer-Gloams (1 per PC): Init +1; Atk none; AC 18; HD 1d20; MV fly 40'; Act 1d24; SP enticement (DC 14 Will save or become enamored), necromantic effect (DC 10 Fort save or 1d6 damage), immune to necromantic spells and spell-like abilities; SV Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +4; AL N.

WIDOW MAN-GIBBET



The main body of the man-gibbet is made of a net of vines, buried beneath a layer of sand. The plant's "teeth" and central pistil protrude from the sand that conceals the vines.

Feral Haunts (3 per PC): Init +2; Atk bite +3 melee (1d6+1); AC 12; HD 2d6; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP hunting pack wail (DC 14 Will save each round or suffer 1 point of Stamina damage), spirit-rending growl (DC 14 Will save or -1 penalty to attack, damage, and spell check rolls); SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +2; AL C.

Unlike many un-dead creatures, feral haunts are semi-corporeal, existing half-in and half-out of the physical world akin to the PCs' shade-forms, and therefore able to harm and be harmed by creatures in the physical world.

Feral haunts can detect prey at a range of a hundred yards or more, and bay and wail once per round for 2d3 rounds while it closes in on its prey. PCs who hear this baying and wailing must make a DC 14 Will save or temporarily lose one point of Stamina. Once the pack has closed in, they surround and slowly constrict the circle, emitting a spirit-rending, almost subsonic, otherworldly growl. Creatures who hear this growl must make a DC 14 Will save each round or be brought to the edge of panic, suffering a -1 penalty to attack, damage, and spell check rolls.

Feral haunts avoid the vivid man-gibbet, giving it a berth of approximately 30'. In this way, PCs trying to evade the pack might be unwittingly herded into the clearing which contains the plant.

PERIL: VIVID MAN-GIBBET

Death's necromantic version of a giant Venus flytrap awaits in a 40'-diameter sandy clearing within the scrub forest.

When the vivid man-gibbet is encountered, Death's voice is heard: *"For thieves, a thief's doom..."*

Vivid Man-Gibbet (1): Init +3; Atk necrotic nectar +1 ranged (1d6, 30' range); AC 15; HD 3d6 per PC; MV none; Act 1d20 for every 2 PCs (rounded up); SP surprise, necromantic pollen, umbiligüls; SV Fort +4, Ref -3, Will +6; AL N.

The main body of this plant-creature is a 30'-diameter cage-like grid of tough, interwoven vines. This body and the plant's roots are buried in the sand. The plant's teeth look like giant seed pods and are distributed in an 8'-wide band inside the first 15' of the clearing. (They form an uneven ring, but their broad distribution makes it so this is not readily apparent. To the casual observer, they appear truly scattered about the clearing.) In the center, a 7'-tall pistil—vibrantly-colored, slightly translucent, and studded with pollen nodules—sticks up out of the ground.

Players who are familiar with the Bleak Shore executioners from the Leiber story are likely to conclude that the pistil is the hive mind of this creature. It isn't. The pistil is a vestigial lure and any damage done by attacks that target the pistil is ignored by the man-gibbet. If the PCs advance into the circle to destroy the pistil in the hopes of preventing the ring of pods from "hatching" (or enter thinking it will help them evade the feral haunts), the cage-like jaws of the man-gibbet spring up like a bear trap and instantly form a clamshell framework prison of woven, woody vines. Sawing or



cutting a way out of the cage requires the same amount of damage as killing the creature. It is possible to pry apart the vines to make an opening, but it requires tremendous force (DC 25 Strength check).

Once the plant's jaws snap shut, its pods—now positioned 15' high on the inside and outside of the roof of the trap—split open and spurt necrotic nectar. The central pistil also sprays a concentrated mist of necro-soporific pollen, targeting one creature within the interior of its vine cage. The mist forces the target to make a DC 13 Ref save or suffer -1 Stamina and a stacking -1 penalty to attack and damage rolls, saving throws, and spell checks (up to a maximum impairment of -4) as its mental faculties are impaired. A PC whose Stamina goes below 3 falls into a coma.

In the second round, umbiligüls—humanoid prey that the vivid man-gibbet has not quite finished feeding upon—crawl up out of the sand and attack anyone enclosed within the trap.

Umbiligüls (3 per trapped PC): Init -1; Atk tendril flail +0 melee (2d3) or garrote +0 melee (special); AC 12; HD 2d4; MV 20'; Act 1d18; SP garrote; SV Fort +2, Ref -1, Will +4; AL N.

Umbiligüls are creatures who died from exposure to necrotic nectar and are now being fed upon by the vivid man-gibbet. They are white-eyed with a distinctly dark brown complexion to their skin and large pustules dot their bodies. The umbiligül is connected to the plant by a fibrous tendril through which liquid nutrients are siphoned. When the man-gibbet has extracted all the nutrition from its prey, the tendril detaches and the umbiligül shambles out into the environs of the island to as a Bleak Shore ghoul (see area 4).

An umbiligül uses the tendril cord as a weapon, doubling it into a loop then swinging it like a flail. If there are more than two umbiligüls, the first two rise up and attack with flails while the others attempt to launch surprise ambushes from where they lie in the sand. If they are successful, these umbiligüls use their cords as garrotes. If a garrote attack succeeds, it inflicts 1d5 damage and the target is grappled. In subsequent rounds, the target and its allies may attempt to break the grapple with a contested roll. The umbiligül gets a +2 on this roll. If the grapple is not broken, the garrote automatically does 2d3 crushing and suffocation damage during the umbiligül's action.

The hive mind of this peril is the giant plant's root system. Digging down 8" near the plant's central, pistil stalk will reveal the top of the root ball, with the roots studded with knot-like nodules resembling silhouettes of human skulls. Destroying the root ball causes the plant to instantly die and wither to a husk, also destroying all umbiligüls.

Man-Gibbet Hive Mind (1): Init as main plant; Atk necrotic nectar -1 ranged (1d6, 10' range); AC 13; HD 1d5; MV none; Act 1d20; SV Fort +4, Ref -4, Will +4; AL N.

Area 4—The Tilted Hills (Compatriots' Doom): The steep angle of the inland slope of the cinder cone flattens considerably after it leaves the bracken forest and reaches mid-island. This stretch of land is composed of jumbled hillocks formed from tilted basalt slabs which are filled in with drifts of pale sand.

GAUNTLET: BLEAK SHORE GHOULS

Bleak Shore ghouls—umbiligüls released from the vivid man-gibbet (area 3) and now acting independently of their former flora-master—infest these hills. They feed on any living creature they can find.

Bleak Shore Ghouls (3 per PC): Init +1; Atk claw-like fingernails +2 melee (2d3 plus poison) or biotoxic breath +3 ranged (1d6 plus nausea, 5' range); AC 12; HD 3d5; MV 25'; Act 1d20; SP: necrotic insinuating poison, immune to Will-affecting spells and spell-like abilities; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +2; AL N.

Bleak Shore ghouls are silently savage, ghoulish creatures produced as a side-effect of the vivid man-gibbet's feeding process. They appear as filthy humanoid with rough, bark-brown skin marred by crusty, scabbed-over pustules. Their pale gray eyeballs have no iris but gleam with an inner, lunatic light. They attack with hooked, jagged fingernails caked with dried blood and viscera, which have fermented into a poison that causes nerve damage and necrosis to living flesh. Any creature struck with these nails must make a DC 12 Fort save or take an additional 1d4 damage. A similar process of fermentation of the remnants of the ghoulish meals stuck between its teeth creates a toxic breath weapon. Once per round, a ghoulish may forego its claw attack and instead direct its fetid breath at a target. If successful, the target must make a DC 14 Fort save or be overcome by severe nausea, preventing the target from engaging in its next action.

Bleak Shore ghouls will not enter the deep sand drift where the scree hydra lairs, but PCs attempting to evade the ghouls may be unwittingly funneled into the hydra's maws.

PERIL: SCREE HYDRA

The scree hydra is a symbiotic composite of a demonic worm and a vicious, carnivorous devil-insect akin to an antlion. It lairs in a deep well formed by a jumble of tilted basalt slabs and filled in with wind-blown drifts of sand. The worm-part of the creature consists of 25'-long snake-like, segmented pseudopods that radiate outward from the well.

If the PCs attain the lip of the scree hydra's sand well, Death's toneless, ethereal voice utters: "*For compatriots, a compatriot's doom...*" then the hydra's pincer-tipped segments burst from sand-hidden crevices!

Scree Hydra (1): Init +3; Atk pincers +2 melee (2d3); AC 13; HD 2d10+1d10 for every PC in the party; MV 25' (pseudopods only); Act 1d20 per PC; SP surprise, suffocation, mitotic re-segmentation; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +2; AL C.

Like some kind of hell-spawned antlion, the scree hydra is concealed in the sand at the bottom of its funnel-shaped well, with its segmented pseudopods threaded through cracks and crevices between the rock slabs. This sets the hydra up to achieve surprise as its pseudopods are positioned in unexpected vantage points. Each segmented pseudopod (1 per PC) has 2d6 hp and its own 1d20 action die, and each one ends in a pair of pincers. If a pseudopod attack hits with a natural roll of 18+, the target takes 2d3 damage and is caught in the creature's pincers. A DC 15 strength check or reducing the pseudopod to 0 hp will release the target from the pincers. Any round a target begins trapped in the pincers, it automatically takes 1d5 damage and the hydra can drag it under the sand. Creatures dragged beneath the sand risk suffocation and must succeed at a DC 13 Fort save or temporarily lose 1d2 points of Stamina each round the save is failed. Creatures whose Stamina falls below 3 go unconscious and can be slain at the hydra's leisure.

Two rounds after a segmented pseudopod is reduced to 0 hp, the hydra's mitotic resegmentation powers send forth 2 pseudopods in its place, each with 2d4 hp and 1d20 action dice. The only way to stop the hydra from regenerating is to destroy the hydra's symbiote hive mind.

The hub-like nob from which the pseudopods radiate is located near the bottom of the well, under 6' of loose sand. Attached to this knob is the hydra's hive mind—a 4'-long squat, oblong, legless tick with a pair of mandibles and a distorted version of Death's own face. To reach the symbiote, a character must half-dig, half-swim through the sand. A PC can move through 2' of sand per round. Each round that a PC moves through the sand or is under the sand fighting the symbiote, she must succeed at a DC 14 Fort save or temporarily lose 1d2 points of Stamina.

Hydra Symbiote Hive Mind (1): Init as main creature; Atk mandibles +1 melee (1d6); AC 13; HD 2d4; MV none; Act 1d20; SV Fort +3, Ref -2, Will +2; AL N.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

When the time allotted for the game session runs out, Death and Pain's evening of gaming also comes to a close. Any PC whose shade-form has been slain on the Bleak Shore has gone to their final death and helped Death meet his quota for that day. Any PCs who survived the Bleak Shore constitute Pain's "winnings" for the night. Those PCs return to life in Nehwon, where they can continue suffering the pains of mortal life, much to the delight of Pain herself!



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HANDOUT A: YOU'RE DEAD!

(BUT YOUR FATE STILL HANGS IN THE BALANCE.)

Condolences: your PC has been killed. But in Lankhmar, Death is simultaneously a god, a place you can visit, and an alternate state of being, so there's no reason for death to mean your PC has to stop adventuring! As part of joining this game, please familiarize yourself with the contents of this handout.

IN DEATH, YOU'RE A SHADOW OF YOUR FORMER SELF

When you sit down at this game, your PC takes shade-form. (Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser met the shades of their true loves Ivrian and Vlana when they journeyed to the Shadowland, in the story "The Price of Pain-Ease.") Your shade is pale and your skin and lips have a bluish tinge. Your voice is hollow. Your speed and vigor are gone. In shade-form you are a mere shadow of your living self... but at least it gives you a chance to return to life!

Please alter your character sheet to convert your character to shade-form:

- 1) If your maximum Luck score is higher than 8, reduce it to 8 permanently and adjust your Luck modifier to -1. This is now a *fixed* ability score for the purposes of Rat-Snake. (However, by being dead, you have lost your ability to burn Luck, and your Luck score is considered to be 0 when on the Bleak Shore.)
- 2) If your Stamina is 13 or higher, reduce it to 12 and adjust your hit points and Fort save modifier accordingly.
- 3) Subtract 5' from your speed.
- 4) Lower your initiative modifier by 1, regardless of your Agility score.
- 5) Drop all of your action dice by -1d (e.g., if it's 1d20 it becomes 1d16).
- 6) If you're a spellcaster, because you're dead, you've lost your ability to spellburn.
- 7) You do not acquire fleeting Luck EXCEPT in the Rat-Snake gambling game with Death and Pain, as described below. (Optionally, your judge can choose to award Fleeting Luck to PCs for instances of game play that embody the spirit of the Fafhrd and Gray Mouser stories or for exceptional instances of role-playing.)

Once you've converted your character, let the judge know. They will bring you into the game by having your shade-converted PC either rise up out of the ground on the Bleak Shore or materialize in Death's castle in the Shadowland—wherever the game's action is currently located.

RAT-SNAKE IN DEATH'S CASTLE: GAMBLING FOR THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE STAKES!

You open your eyes and find yourself in the long, low main hall of a mansion fashioned from black granite. Set into the center of one wall is a wide hearth. A blue flame nearly as bright as the sun blazes away in the hearth. In front of the fireplace sits two high-backed onyx-colored chairs. Between them is a small table set up for gambling with dice. In one chair sits Death himself, and in the other is his sister, Pain. Without gesture—using only their eyes—the two Powers beckon you over to the table to join their game of Rat-Snake. Somehow, instinctively, you know two things: that you are dead, and that whether you remain dead or return to life are the stakes being gambled for in this game.

By gathering at Death and Pain's Rat-Snake table, you become both gambler and stakes. When it is Pain's turn to throw the dice, one of the members of your party of adventurers must put up 6 total points of maximum hit points (max hp) and/or ability score points in any combination as the thrower's wager (converted 1:1 to coins). At the same time, other PCs may place side wagers of max hp points and ability score points in an attempt to win fleeting Luck.

RULES OF DEATH AND PAIN'S RAT-SNAKE GAME

Death and Pain play a slight variation of the Rat-Snake game played in the taverns in Lankhmar. Variant differences are marked with "***" before the description.

Step One: The six-coin ante and any side wagers are put on the table (see Player Character Side Bets, below).

Step Two: Players take turns rolling two dice on behalf of Pain as the thrower, generating one of the six results below. (If Rat-Snake dice are not available, remember: 1 = rat, 6 = snake, and 2 through 5 = pips.)



Step Three: Determine the outcome of the roll for the thrower.

- Two rats or “rat’s eyes”: The thrower loses their entire silo and play passes to Death.
- Two snakes or “a twist”: The thrower neither wins nor loses and they throw again. **Pain does not pass the dice on a twist.
- A snake on one die and a rat on the other: The thrower neither gains nor loses and continues to throw.
- A snake on one die and pips on the other: The thrower gains coins equal to the number of pips on the 2nd die.
- A rat on one die and pips on the other: The thrower loses coins equal to the number of pips on the 2nd die. If this reduces their silo of coins to zero, Pain’s turn ends and play passes to Death. If the thrower has coins remaining in their silo, they continue to play with their remaining stakes.
- Two dice with pips on both faces: The thrower must immediately roll a second time, known as “checking the silo”:
 - o If the result of the second throw is less than the first roll, the thrower loses coins equal to the result of the first throw (not to exceed his silo). If their silo is reduced to zero, they are out. Otherwise, the thrower continues to play with whatever stakes are left in her silo.
 - o If the result of the second throw is equal to the number of pips on the first roll, the thrower’s silo remains the same and **they throw again, starting a new round.
 - o If the result of the second throw is greater than the number of pips on the first roll, the thrower wins coins equal to the result of the initial throw. For example: Pain rolls a 3 and a 5 on her first throw, for a total of 8. She must roll again to check the silo, this time getting a 4 and a 5, for a result of 9. She wins eight coins – an amount equal to her first throw – and adds the coins to her silo.

Note: When rolling the second time to “check the silo,” rats and snakes do not cancel each other out as they do when they are otherwise rolled in the game. Instead, simply treat them as 1 (rat) or 6 (snake) pips.

Step Four: Determine if the current thrower passes the dice.

**In Death and Pain’s Rat-Snake game, a thrower cannot pass the dice because of losses until their entire silo has been lost (and then the scene changes to the Bleak Shore). **If Pain is winning, she may pass the dice: whenever a throw for Pain wins coins, the judge will roll 1d12. If the roll is less than what Pain just won, the player will pass the dice.

PLAYER CHARACTER SIDE BETS

Your PC can wager side bets on the Rat-Snake game. **Instead of coins, ability score points and max hp from current totals, in any combination, can be placed as side wagers at the exchange rate of 1:1 (1 points per coin).

- Your winnings sit “in account” for use in side bets during this gambling session or in future ones. If you have a surplus over and above the total number of max hp and ability score points you’ve wagered this round, you can wager with surplus points instead.
- At the end of a round of gambling, as the action shifts to the Bleak Shore, you must restore your PC’s max hp and ability scores to their pre-wager levels. If you don’t have enough points remaining to restore scores to their original numbers, you must distribute the remaining points as evenly as possible. Scores that are still reduced after this remain reduced for the rest of the adventure.
- Whenever the game session shifts scene to the Bleak Shore, your surplus winnings after restoration may be used as fleeting Luck at a 1:3 exchange rate (1 point for 3 fleeting Luck tokens). You can also use fleeting Luck tokens to heal wounds, at a cost of 2 fleeting Luck tokens per hit point healed.

There are six side bets. Betting that the thrower rolls:

- Two rats: she “rats out,” and you win 3:1 coins.
- Two snakes: she “twists a win,” and you gain 3:1 coins.
- A rat and a snake: she “guards the grain,” and you earn 3:1 coins.
- A snake and pips: she “fills the silo,” and you get a 2:1 payout.
- A rat and pips: she “loses the grain,” but you win 2:1 coins.
- Pips on both dice: she “checks the silo.” This result pays nothing, and requires you to move (**but NOT double down on) your bet, wagering whether her follow-up roll (“check”) will make you:

Lose: the check totals **less than** the first roll, resulting in a 2:1 payout.

Match: the check **equals** the first roll, resulting in a 4:1 payout.

Gain: the check is **greater than** the first roll, resulting in a 2:1 payout.



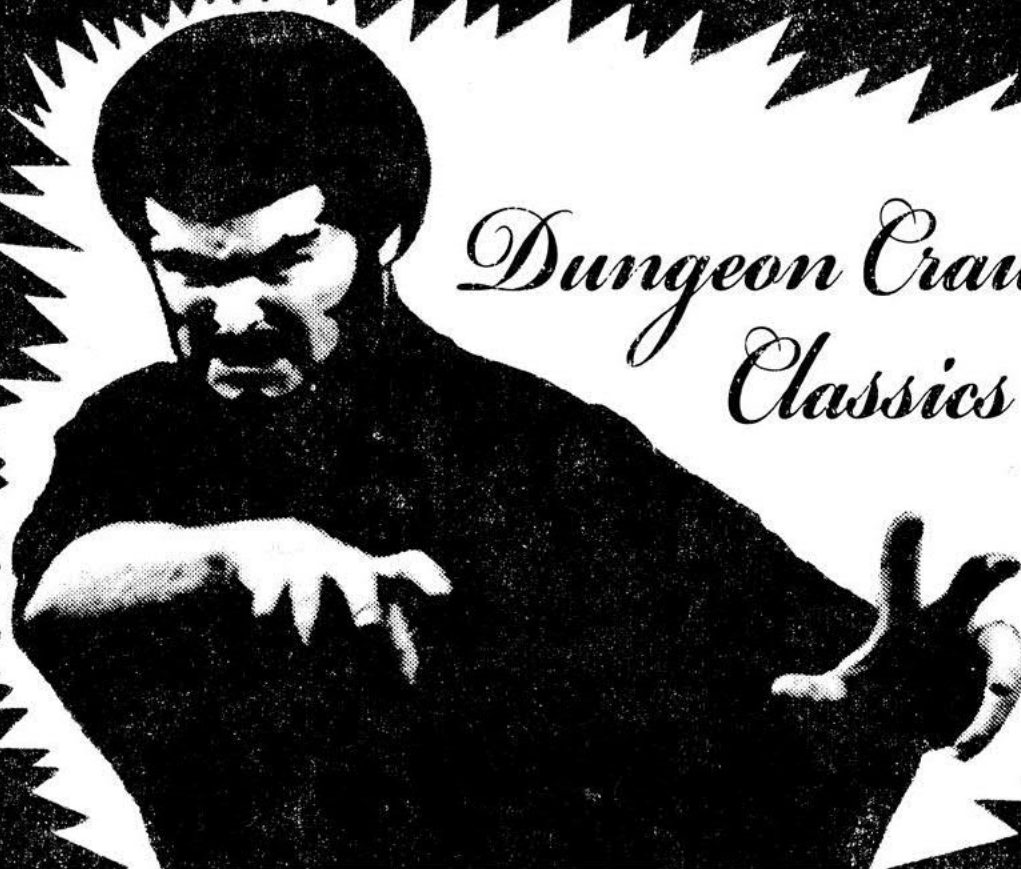
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