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THE DARK DESCENT

A 5e Compatible Adventure Suitable for Levels 5-10

CREDITS

Developed by:

Bestiarum Games

Lead Game Designer:

Alexander Dovermann

Game Designer:

Giovani C. Fiorini

Graphic Design:

Katarina Popovici Alexander Dovermann

Cartography:

Giovani C. Fiorini Alexander Dovermann Katarina Popovici



ON THE COVER:

THE FLESHSMITH

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The Fleshsmith is both mother and maker of the Remade.

Sequestered away deep in her subterranean surgical theater, she is the twisted artist responsible for grafting together the horrors at her command.

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FOREWORD: THE WORLD OF DOADEN

relcome to Doaden, the dark fantasy setting of tainted lands and twisted monsters, where an ever-creeping affliction corrodes the very essence of existence. It is a world of decay and depravity where once-righteous men and heroes of glorious purpose now struggle to survive as cults and dark gods vie with one another to consume the last vestiges of humanity.

Doaden is filled with horrific scenarios and impossible decisions. Players will have their morals challenged, and often no outcome will feel "good" or "just". The heavy decisions these heroes make often leaves them disheartened, and it is important that players prepare themselves for this setting before starting any adventure through the realm.

Hope. Yet as dark as Doaden may be, it is important that your players, as human beings, are able to find respite from the darkness. Light may be found even in the darkest of places, and you should alleviate the mood at the table if you notice your players have trouble adjusting.

THERE IS LIGHT YET in Doaden, and though it may seldom come in the form of love or joy, it still shapes itself into a semblance of honor, purpose, and redemption.

- Dreyen Solius, Journal of the World's Ending.

Compatibility. This adventure is intended for use in conjunction with the D&D 5e Player's Handbook (PHB), Dungeon Master's Guide (DMG), and Monster Manual (MM).

Civilization & Trade in Doaden have crumbled. Only gold, silver, and copper are circulated, and only at 1/10th the amount suggested in D&D manuals. Magical items are extraordinarily rare.

Statblocks for Bestiarum creatures are included in the scenario appendix. These creatures will be written in bold text.

Narrative Scripts. Passages in this format are meant to be read aloud or paraphrased. They build atmosphere or reveal key information to the adventuring party.

Recurring Rules. These passages cover mechanics used to resolve situations in the scenario. The rule will be detailed in this format the first time it is used, but it may be referenced more than once.

Torment Mode. Adventurers in Doaden are designed for Normal Mode parties ranging from levels 5 - 7 and Torment Mode parties ranging from levels 8 - 10. Torment Mode modifications to encounters are written in this format.



ADVENTURE SUMMARY: THE DARK DESCENT

kittering horrors and hybrid monstrosities inhabit the lightless places below Doaden's surface. Subterranean caverns are infested with things so herrifying that we

infested with things so horrifying that we can only pray they never see the light of day.

In these dark places, these lightless realms of the Necro Spiders, the Broodmother reigns supreme. A nightmare monstrosity, her chittering swarms spill forth from every earthen orifice, every tunnel opening or darkened pit, or from the bodies of the unfortunate travelers that delve too far below the surface.

Be wary adventurer, keep your eyes open and ears sharp, lest you become the next meal for those things that dwell in the dark.

SCENARIO STRUCTURE

This is a dungeon-crawling adventure taking place entirely within an infested three-level mine.

STORY HOOK

One night, as the party camps in a darkened woodland, they are ambushed by unknown assailants, struck by unseen weapons and lose consciousness.

When they wake, the party find themselves in an abandoned mine infested by dark elves and arachnid monsters. They must learn to operate an old platform elevator to escape and return to the open air. But first, they must descend into the lightless depths where unknown horrors lurk.

This story hook may be used before, after, or even during another adventure, interrupting their journey until they find a way to escape.

CHAPTERS

Chapter 1. The party wakes on a pile of bodies deep in a lightless mine. They meet Grik, a strange survivor who knows how to operate an old elevator to return to the surface. But escape is not so easy. The rattling contraption draws the attention of spider swarms and the Broodmother, a giant monstrosity, attacks, overpowering the party and preventing their escape.

Chapter 2. The party escapes the Broodmother, plummeting back into the depths. To hatch a new escape plan, they must fight their way through ranks of spiderworshiping, dark elf cultists.

Chapter 3. Unfortunately, options for escape are running thin. The only hope is to descend to the lowest levels of the mine; the chamber of the Fleshsmith, a strange being who reshapes the fallen into hideous monstrosities. Her blood grants superhuman reflexes and agility, allowing the drinker to dance around the Broodmother's acid attacks. Drinking the blood is a gruesome act, but an act that must be done.

BALANCE

This scenario is balanced for 3-4 players, with **Normal Mode** levels **5-7**, and **Torment Mode** levels **8-10**.



INTRODUCTION

he scenario begins with the party being ambushed by unknown assailants. When they wake up, they find themselves in an abandoned mine infested with spider monstrosities and dark elf cultists. To escape, they must navigate the shadowy tunnels and learn to operate an old elevator, all while fending off the dark horrors and twisted nightmares that descend upon them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The following paragraphs discuss information that will be helpful to keep in mind while reading through and running this scenario.

THE INFESTED MINE

The mine in this scenario is occupied by a group of dark elf cultists and strange spider-hybrid monstrosities. It has three levels, each of which are connected by an elevator shaft.

The **Upper Level** of the mine is occupied by dark elf cultists known as the Remade. The cult captures victims above-ground and delivers them to the Fleshsmith's spiders below.

The **Middle Level** is a halfway point between the cultists and the spiders in the lower caverns. The cultists drop their victims down a hole into this level, after which the spiders take the victims to the lower depths of the cave.

The **Lower Level** is the heart of the Fleshsmith's spider nest and where she resides along with her spider monstrosities, constantly stitching together her children to bring them back to life.

History of the Mine

Decades ago, this was an active mine on the outskirts of the town **New Heldon**. However, one fateful day, the miners dug into a Cave Arachnid burrow. Giant spiders spilled forth, swarming through the mine and eating all of the miners, all except one lone survivor, a man named **Grik**, who has turned strange from his many years of isolation.

The Elevator

An elevator shaft connects the three levels of the mine and is the only way to reach the surface. The elevator is pivotal to this scenario. The rules for operating the elevator are as follows.

Platform Lever. The elevator has a lever on its platform that makes the elevator ascend or descend.

Platform Lever. Cranking the Platform Lever to the right makes it rise. Cranking it to the left makes it descend.

Control Console. Additionally, a control console is placed on each level of the mine, which can lock the elevator in place or call it to the level.

Console Right Lever. When the lever on the right is pulling it down, it engages a lock on the level. If the elevator is on the level or travels downward to this level, it will become stuck until the lever is disengaged.

Console Left Lever. When the lever on the left is pulled down, it calls the

elevator to the level, unless the elevator is locked on another level.

Master Console. The control console on the lowest level of the mine is special and acts as a master control for the elevator.

Master Console. The master control console acts similarly to the other control consoles. However, it has the ability to override all other consoles. The lever on the right, when used, engages or disengages the locks on all levels.

THE NECRO SPIDERS & REMADE

Years after the infestation of the mine, a group of dark elves moved into the mine. They formed a strange, unnatural symbiotic relationship with the cave spiders.

Fearing the extinction of their race, the elf cult, calling themselves the **Remade**, turned to the forbidden art of flesh shaping. When a Remade dies, their remains are taken to the Fleshsmith, a priestess who stitches them back together, replacing any missing limbs or organs with parts from spiders and other humanoids.

The stitched bodies are then wrapped in strange, acidic cocoons which meld the flesh and souls together, birthing a creature that is neither an elf nor a spider, but something more.

Over time, individuals lose themselves as they are reshaped again and again, their bodies turning ever more monstrous and their minds becoming crazed and bestial. In their twisted form, they lose all sense of identity and turn against those they once knew, now known as **Necro Spiders**.

More information about the Necro Spiders and Remade and is included in **Appx. A: Bestiary**.

The Broodmother

The Broodmother blocks the elevator's path to the surface. Her giant dome webs form a canopy over the whole mine. She was once the queen of the Remade but has become irreparably twisted over countless reshaping, now nothing more than a prowling monster.

As the old hive queen, the rest of the Necro Spiders continue to serve her. Her swarms are constantly at odds with the surviving Remade.

The Fleshsmith

The Fleshsmith was the Broodmother's priestess and aide in the past, but now tries to take control of the spider colony to save it from her madness. She will gladly help the party if it means slaying the Broodmother and allowing her Remade, who she refers to as her children, to live in peace.

Wave Combat Encounters

Use the following rules when running wavebased encounters during this scenario.

Spawning Waves. Spawn enemies at the beginning of their noted round, according to any rules which may be specified.

Initiative. If an enemy spawns at the beginning of the first round of combat, roll its initiative as normal.

Delayed Initiative. If an enemy joins the fight on any round after the first, it is added to the end of the initiative order.

Fast Initiative. If an enemy has a Dexterity modifier of +4 or higher, it is placed at the beginning of the initiative order instead.

Starting the Adventure

Start this scenario by determining what the players had been doing prior to this

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adventure. Completing any adventure or mission, or simply wandering from one place to another, will work. The nearest town is **New Heldon**, so this location would make a good link to the story.

To begin this adventure, read this script:

The night is dark and quiet. Your small campfire sends ashes floating into the air, barely illuminating its surroundings as the looming shadows of the woods suffocate the flickering light.

As you prepare to sleep, a sudden gust of air brushes across the camp. Your eyes dart back and forth, and you think you see movement in the bushes. You are about to reach for your weapon, but before you have a chance to move, something cold pierces your neck, sending a sharp pain echoing through your body.

In seconds, your vision narrows, and your hearing dulls. Your breath quickens with your accelerating heartbeat. You attempt to move but your muscles constrict against your will, bringing you to your knees. You watch with blurred vision as your comrades fall to the ground one after another and looming shadows emerge from between the trees. One of the shadows stops and turns to you, approaching you swiftly. But before you can identify it, the world fades to black.

After reading this script, the party will wake in area A1 of the Infested Mine Middle Level map. Turn to Chapter 1 to continue.



CHAPTER 1: A REVIVAL IN DARKNESS

pon awakening, the party finds themselves deep in an abandoned three-level mine. They begin on the middle level. However, they have no way to gauge how deep they are.

MIDDLE LEVEL BACKGROUND

This middle level of the mine was used to transfer materials from the lower to the upper level. Now, it serves as a dumping ground for offerings made by dark elf cultists to their Fleshsmith.

GRIK, THE LONE SURVIVOR

The players may find Grik in area A2. Grik is friendly and wishes to help the party with information, hoping to escape as well. Use Grik to provide information about the mines and elevator. Grik himself hides and does not fight. However, he should stay near the party in case they have questions or want someone to talk to.

Grik's Background. Grik was a miner in the cave decades ago, he was cut off from the surface and has been living inside the cave since the spider infestation, scavenging meat from the corpses that the dark elf cultists throw to the spiders. He will prefer not to go into detail about this gruesome necessity.

The Elevator. Grik knows the elevator is the only way to escape. He should direct the party to area **A7** and to control console at area **A6**.

Remade. Grik knows some weird people live in the upper level of the mine. They throw bodies of animals and people down into the pit in area **A1**. The bodies are

taken away by nasty spider things and stuffed into cocoons. After some time, the cocoons hatch into even more nasty spider things.

The Hole. The heart of the spider nest is down the hole in **A3**. It is a terrifying place and should be avoided at all costs. Grik will never go down here willingly.

REVIVING THE PARTY

To continue the adventure, read this script:

You wake up in complete darkness to the sound of dripping water and a soft, slimy sensation beneath you.

Your whole body feels sore and your muscles tight, as if rigid from paralysis. As you slowly regain control of your arms, you reach out in the utter darkness, feeling the shape of your backpack nearby. You draw a torch from the pack and with great effort fumbling with a piece of flint and tinder, manage to light it.

The yellowing light pushes back the darkness, revealing the walls of a shallow pit around you. The pit is filled with corpses; humans, animals, and strange beasts that you have never seen before. They are in various stages of decomposition, with clear signs of blunt damage from an apparent fall.

Climbing out of the pit, you find a cave system with a tunnel path leading forward. Cobwebs hang from the ceiling and the ground is strewn with small piles of bones.

Somewhere in the dark, you hear a stone fall to the ground. There is a soft





MAP A: AREAS

The following paragraphs detail the explorable areas of the mine's middle level, in which the party awakens.

A1) BODY PIT

The party wakes in this area, the dumping pit of living offerings. The pit lies beneath a hole in the upper levels, on **Map C: Infested Mine Upper Level**, area **C2**. Dark elf cultists in the upper level drop captured people and beasts down the hole and into the pit. The party, taken as offerings in the ambush, were dumped down the hole to give to the spiders below.

A2) TUNNEL INTERSECTION

Bones litter the ground in this area. If a creature steps on them, several **Cave Spiders** lurking nearby will be alerted and attack.

Enemies. If the spiders are alerted, spawn the following enemies near the party:

2x Cave Spiders

Torment. Add the following enemies: 1x **Swollen**

A3) BOTTOMLESS HOLE

There is a hole with a large wooden beam above it. A rope can be tied to the beam to descend. A 50 ft. drop leads to the lower level, the heart of the Fleshsmith's spider nest. In this area, the party is approached by **Grik**, the lone survivor of the mine infestation.

Script. As the party approaches, read:

You approach a wide hole in the ground, approximately 20 ft. across. You glance down as you hold out your torch. The walls of the hole are engulfed in several layers of slick white webs that thicken as the hole descends until it disappears into utter darkness.

Suddenly, you hear a shaky voice behind you.

"I... I wouldn't go down there... if I were you."

Looking back you see a hunchback figure, frail and malnourished, peering out warily from behind the tunnel corner. He is emaciated, his milk-white skin so translucent that you can see the blue veins beneath it. His hair has mostly fallen out, just a few long strands of silky gray left on his scalp. His form is misshapen and twisted, and it is impossible to tell his age.

He steps forth, shielding his wide eyes from your torchlight with one hand.

Conversation with Grik

The strange man is Grik. The party should speak with him now. Review his background and conversation notes in the **Middle Level: Background** section.

A4) INFESTED SECTION

This passageway is covered with webs, if any creature touches the webs, spiders will feel the tremors and attack.

Several broken wooden columns form a walkway to the other side over the webs. However, the wood is shattered, and creatures must carefully jump over the planks to avoid alerting the spiders.

Script. As the party approaches, read:

The tunnel here, including the floor, walls, and ceiling, are slick with white webs.
Looking up, you see several twisted spider monstrosities on the ceiling. Their bodies are still, folded into resting positions, and they do not seem to notice you or your torchlight.

Looking for a way to cross the webbing without touching it, you see that several wooden support beams have fallen over a section of the webs. However, the timbers have shattered, leaving a gap of several feet between the planks.

Crossing the Webs. A creature may walk onto the fallen wooden supports and jump across the webs. However, they must succeed on a DC 10 **Dexterity** (Acrobatics) check to cross safely. If a creature fails, it touches the webs and alerts the spiders.

If all party members successfully cross the webs without disturbing them, skip to the next area.

If a creature fails, read:

You fumble and touch the web, sending a vibrating wave through the silky material. You hear an inhuman screech as a grotesque thing launches itself from the ceiling at you, a withered amalgamation of humanoid and arachnid forms.

Enemies. If the webs are disturbed, spawn the following enemies near the party:

1x **Drider**

1x Fleshsmith's Daughter

Torment. Add the following enemies: 1x **Swollen**

A5) MINOR NEST

This area is a minor nesting ground for Cave Spider hatchlings.

Script. As the party approaches, read:

Thick cobwebs cover a cramped, lightless chamber. Clutches of silky, skull-sized round eggs pulsate in darkness. You can see a small opening at the other end of the room.

Accessing area A6. The party can safely access area A6 through a locked door to the side. However, to pass through this door, the party must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity (Lockpick) check or smash it down with a DC 18 Strength check.

If they fail, they must travel through the nest. If the webs are disturbed, they immediately hatch, spawning a wave of small spiderlings. Any creature within 10 ft. of the web is bitten by baby spiderlings, taking 3d4 poison damage, but the spiderlings move on into the darkness.

If the eggs are disturbed, read:

A ripple runs through the web.

There is a string of crackling, popping sounds followed by quick scuttling of hard appendages on the rock.

A swarm of tiny spiderlings surges forth from under the webs, covering the floor and walls in an ebbing wave of tiny black bodies.

They crawl up your boots and drop down from the ceiling, stinging you with sharp fangs, their million black eyes glistening in the torchlight as you frantically swat them away.

But as quickly as they came, the swarm disappears past you and into the darkness.

A6) ELEVATOR CONTROL ROOM

This room contains the elevator controls.

Using the Elevator. The elevator is currently on this level and is locked in place. The party must unlock the elevator, then enter the elevator and pull the lever on the elevator platform to ascend.

Supply table. A table with old mining supplies lies in the corner of the room. The table has three torches, one 50 ft. piece of rope, and an empty backpack. However, if you would like to provide basic items to the party, you may place them in the backpack.

A7) ELEVATOR ACCESS

The elevator has thick metal chains attached to it on all sides. These chains are connected to engines that raise or lower the elevator up. However, they work automatically and do not need the party to interact with them.

Ascending. A lever on the elevator platform may be pulled to control it and make it go up. However, the elevator locks are engaged at the start of the scenario. Before it will work, the elevator must be unlocked from area **A6**.

ELEVATOR AMBUSH

Once the lever on the elevator platform is engaged, it will begin to ascend to the top of the mine. This begins an ambush encounter as swarms of spiders climb onto the elevator platform.

Script. Once the elevator starts rising, read this script and behind the encounter:

You pull the lever and the wooden platform below you begins to shake. Metal gears grind against one another, making a sharp whine as the machine begins a slow ascent. Looking up, you cannot make out the ceiling. The tunnel rises up into complete darkness.

As the elevator climbs, you notice webs on the walls, growing ever thicker, and hear skittering about in the darkness above. You draw your weapons.

Suddenly you hear a loud shriek as a mass of distorted monstrosities emerge from holes in the walls. They holler in a cacophony of high-pitched screeches and lunge toward you.



APPENDIX A: BESTIARY

earing the extinction of their race, dark elf cultists, now known as the Remade, turned to the forbidden art of flesh shaping. The Fleshsmith stitches together the bodies of the fallen, using genetic material from the cave spiders, beasts, and other humanoids to replace any missing limbs or organs. For the Remade, the reshaping process has become a way of achieving immortality, though the side effects that corrode the mind and twist the form are more than most would sacrifice.

Over time, as this process is repeated, the individual loses more and more of themselves, their bodies turning ever more monstrous and their minds becoming crazed. In their twisted form, they are known as the Necro Spiders.





SWARMS (CR 2)

CAVE SPIDER

Cave Spiders are found throughout the deep places of Doaden, fast and deadly beasts adept at hunting any prey of any size that are unfortunate enough to enter their caves. It was obsession with the Cave Arachne that first drove the Remade to intermix their genetics. Obsessed with what they perceived as the perfect biological form, they searched for ways to attain their agility and natural toxins.



CAVE SPIDER

Medium beast

Armor Class 11 Hit Points 38 Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	СНА
11	18	12	4	11	4
(0)	(+4)	(+1)	(-3)	(0)	(-3)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Spider Climb. This creature can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Web Walker. This creature ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

ACTIONS:

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage and 9 (2d8) poison damage.

Web (1/Day). As a bonus action, this creature throws a web at a target within 30 ft. The target must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or is restrained by webbing. As an action, the restrained target or their adjacent ally can make a DC 12 Strength check to escape.



DRIDER

Driders are the first of the more twisted forms serving the Fleshsmith. Brutally efficient in their attacks, they are capable warriors and ambushers. They go forth whenever needed, heeding their mother's direction, and protecting the Remade from the Broodmother's attacks.



DRIDER

Large abomination

Armor Class 14 Hit Points 92 Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14	18	16	12	14	10
(+2)	(+4)	(+3)	(+1)	(+2)	(0)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Spider Climb. Can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Web Walker. Ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

ACTIONS:

Multiattack (2). The Drider makes one Impale attack and one Pirouette attack.

Impale. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. Hit: 17 (3d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Pirouette. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., three targets. Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.



