

DARK WEAVINGS

AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS OF 2ND TO 4TH LEVEL



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DARK WEAVINGS IS A FIFTH EDITION adventure for three to six characters of 2nd to 4th level, optimized for a party of four 3rd-level characters. Spider-infested caverns, infused with the energies of a forgotten dark god, have been rediscovered centuries after they became lost.

Arachnid influence has begun to seep into the surrounding land, and some locals suspect that the cursed remains of doomed cultists still lurk within the caverns' depths. Can the party venture into its innards and uncover its secrets without becoming spider food? This adventure is set in Cartosia, but is flexible enough to be placed in nearly any other campaign world.

BACKGROUND

Centuries ago, a minor cult emerged dedicated to an ancient and forgotten god, whispered in dark corners as "Arak'thul the Unseen." Formed by a charismatic but estranged cleric exiled from their church, the cult was composed of a smattering of disillusioned priests and arcane scholars who believed that by understanding Arak'thul's forbidden powers, they might eventually unravel and rewrite the fabric of fate. With zealous if abortive determination, they practiced their rituals in the refuge in a secluded cave network and there erected an altar to honor their obscure deity.

The altar bore witness to countless sacrificial ceremonies, and the cultists catalogued their cryptic rituals and forbidden learnings in what they called Arak'thul's Codex, which became one of their most treasured possessions along with the Silken Reliquary, which held the desiccated finger of one they believed to be Saint Yuvakis, herald of Arak'thul. With the relic and grimoire in hand, the cult attempted a ritual of immense power, seeking to bind Arak'thul's presence to the mortal realm. The ritual, ever futile, backfired, cursing the altar and the cult, as well as the caverns in which they occupied. The cult's refuge became their tomb as vengeful spiders, believed to be Arak'thul's wrath incarnate, overran its chambers, sealing the cult's fate.

Time wore on, and any tales of the caverns became legends; stories told to caution the curious. Nature claimed more of the land, and the caverns' entrance was lost to dense undergrowth and time's erosion. Yet, the curse persisted. Fungal caverns within thrived, nourished by the dark residue of the failed ritual. The altar remained desecrated, the reliquary sealed, and the grimoire swaddled in spider web, waiting for a time when the curse might be lifted.

A recent earth tremor has now revealed the once-hidden entrance to the caverns. Alarmed by the growing presence of aggressive spiders in the vicinity and old stories being told about the caverns' origins, local interest in the caverns

has been renewed. Left undisturbed, there is fear of what else might spew forth from the caverns. Few, however, have so far elected to explore the caverns for fear of what they might uncover.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

There are numerous reasons the party may choose to investigate the caverns and deal with the spider threat. A few of these reasons are outlined below:

Terrifying Messages. A nearby village is plagued by an influx of aggressive spiders. At night, they weave intricate webs across the streets in the shapes of symbols that nobody is able to interpret. A local scholar believes they originate from the caverns and beseeches the party for aid.

The Lost Expedition. An expedition of archaeologists and scholars ventured into the caverns, lured by tales of an ancient shrine. They have not returned, and their last communication spoke of hoping to find "Arak'thul's Codex" and an associated reliquary. Their families hire the party to find them and uncover the truth.

The Weaver's Request. An elderly seamstress in a nearby town has been plagued by dreams of spiders weaving intricate patterns in a dark cavern. Within their webs, she sees symbols matching the design of a mysterious pendant heirloom passed down in her family. The seamstress believes these dreams hold a message and seeks the party's help to decipher their meaning. Having heard of the caverns, she asks the party to investigate.

ARAK'THUL'S CAVERNS

Left stagnant and undisturbed for centuries, the caverns once claimed by the Cult of Arak'thul have been roused by nature and now seep their darkness into the surrounding area. Fungal growths, vectors for the curse, coat its walls and nourish the arachnid enforcers of Arak'thul's anger. Unless otherwise stated, features of the caverns are described as follows:

Ceilings, Walls, and Floors. A naturally occurring rock formation, the caverns' ceilings vary in height from twelve to thirty feet. The ground, though rough and uneven in many areas, does not constitute difficult terrain.

Light. During the day, the sun's light manages only to penetrate a few feet beyond the mouth of the caverns' entrance. Otherwise, the caverns are shrouded in darkness.

Air and Sound. The air within the caverns is cool and damp, carrying with it the earthy scent of moss and the underlying tang of minerals. Sounds have a way of travelling within, with whispers echoing eerily and footsteps reverberating

through the chambers. The gentle churning of an interior waterfall resonates throughout.

Area read-aloud descriptions assume at least one character has darkvision or enough light to visually determine their surroundings. The following areas are keyed to the provided map of Arakthul's Caverns:

I. ENTRANCE CHAMBER

Characters approaching the entrance to the caverns with a passive Perception of 16 or higher can hear heavy, ragged breathing coming from within.

The smell of rot is overpowering in this chamber. To the west, a foul nest of fur, animal droppings, and bone fragments is cloistered within an alcove. Water pools in the east portion of the chamber, sourced from a small waterfall approximately ten feet in height. A passageway extends to the north.

Due to the curse, the water flooding this chamber is murky and carries a sulphuric scent. The waterfall in the east wall of this cavern can be climbed to reach the adjacent cavern, though doing so requires a successful DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check. Failing this check by five or more causes a character to lose their grip and fall awkwardly, taking 3 (1d6) falling damage in the process.

Encounter: Zombified Bear. A solitary bear who laired in this chamber died some weeks ago, but was resurrected by the dark magics persistent throughout the caverns. Portions of its skeleton peek through the decaying, stinking flaps of its flesh, and its eyes have rotted out of their sockets. The bear cannot see, but might sense any intruders by hearing and smell and attack anything it detects, fighting until it is destroyed or until the party flees beyond 30 feet of the caverns' entrance. Characters can sneak past the bear without detection with a successful DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check. Characters who conceal their scent make this check with advantage. The bear uses **polar bear** statistics, with the following modifications:

- Its type is Undead.
- **New Trait: Undead Fortitude.** If damage reduces the bear to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is

radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the bear drops to 1 hit point instead.

Treasure: Discarded Pack. Lying on the ground near the north wall of this chamber is a leather pack, its contents partially strewn about. A character who investigates this pack finds a map of the local region, several observatory notes about spider behaviour in the area as well as personal, vague musings on an obscure minor deity referred to as Arak'thul, and two potions of healing. This pack belongs to the lost expedition, three members of which are now spider food in area 3.

2. WEBBED CHAMBER

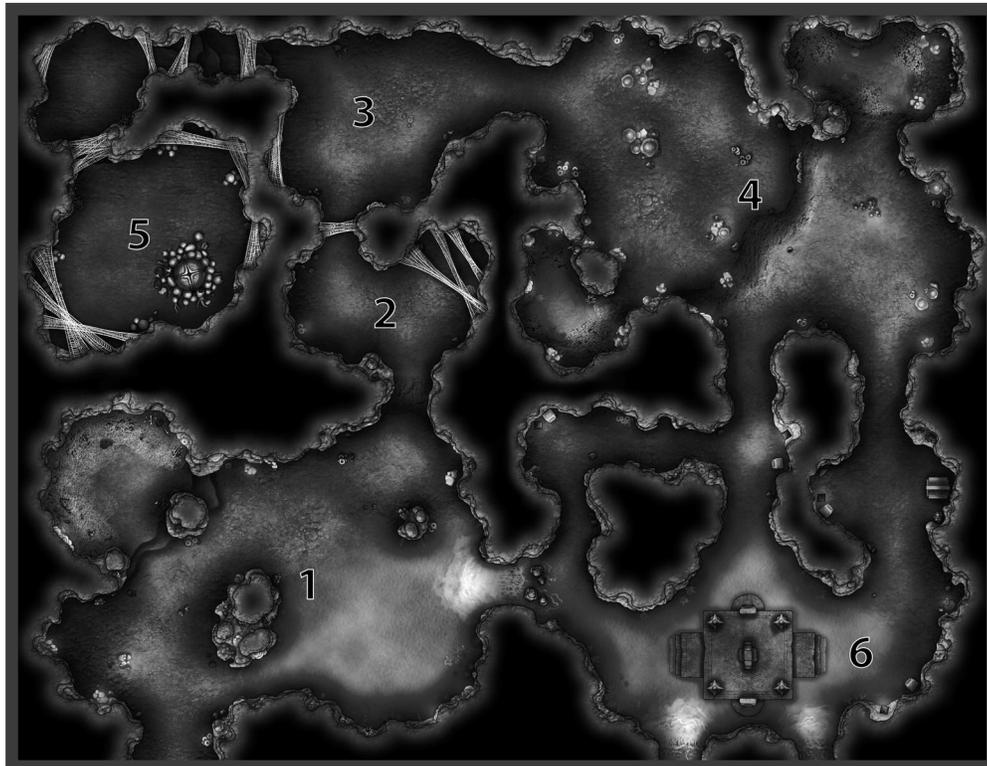
Thick, glistening webs coat the walls and ceiling of this small space, making it difficult to discern the cavern's true size.

Hazard: Ensnaring Canopies. Sections of the cavern ceiling are covered with nearly invisible, hanging web drapes. They hang loosely, waiting for any disturbance from below. A creature moving through this cavern must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or become restrained by the falling web canopy. Upon ensnarement and on the start of each of its turns, the creature takes 1d4 necrotic damage as the foul energies infused with the web leech into their life essence. A restrained creature can make a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check as an action to break free from the web. Alternatively, dealing 5 slashing damage to the webbing (AC 10) in a single turn also frees the creature without harming them. The webbing is exposed to fire, it burns away in a single round without dealing damage to any ensnared creature. Characters with a passive Perception of 18 or higher might notice a slight shimmer or the subtle sway of the canopy, providing them with a hand of the potential danger ahead. A successful DC Intelligence (Investigation) check is necessary to determine which strands of web to sever to neutralize the threat safely without triggering the collapse of other webs.

3. CULTIST CHAMBER

Suspended from the ceiling and anchored to the walls of this chamber are several cocooned forms swathed in thick, silken webbing, their shapes unmistakably

ARAK'THUL'S CAVERNS



humanoid. Some appear recent, while most others seem older, desiccated, and shrunken.

The spiders within the caverns have a preference for storing their kills in this chamber, where they occasionally return to feed. There are three cocoons which are more recent; these are the remains of most of scholarly expedition that ended tragically almost as soon as it began—they were felled by the zombified bear, after which the spiders collected the half-eaten corpses and stowed them away here for later feeding. One member of the expedition, however, remains alive in the spider nest further within the caverns. If the party is using “The Lost Expedition” adventure hook, they are quickly able to identify the remains after they cut the cocoons open.

Encounter: Zombified Cultists. The desiccated, zombified remains of the original cultists, infused with necrotic energies the curse, are kept dormant in this chamber until they are necessary to defend the caverns from intruders. Shortly after the party enters this chamber, the cultists (five **zombies** and one **ghoul**) break free from their cocoons with a throaty growl and advance upon the party, fighting until they are destroyed. Their clothing has long since rotted away, but perceptive characters are likely to notice that each bears a palm-sized tattoo of a stylized arachnid icon above their left breast. A character who makes a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Religion) check recognizes this tattoo as an icon of Arak'thul.

Treasure: Arak'thul's Codex. A character that searches the bodies finds a weighty magnifying glass with a gold handle worth 50 gp, as well as a sticky, leather-bound tome with iron clasps that bears an identical icon on its cover to the one tattooed on the cultists. This is Arak'thul's Codex; a character who spends time reading through its pages of prayer, scripture, and foul illustration can learn the following information:

- Arak'thul is a minor deity from the Plane of Shadow with domain over fortune, endings, shadows, and spiders.
- Ritual documentation within the codex suggests cultists believed they could summon an avatar of Arak'thul to the Material Plane and consequently pull at the threads of fate.
- Key to many of these rituals is the Thumb of Saint Yuvakis, one of the earliest worshippers of Arak'thul. Notes within the codex suggest this relic may be found within the caverns.
- Later entries within the codex document days in the aftermath of a significant ritual the cultists believed would summon the avatar. The cultists believed the ritual was disastrously unsuccessful—they began to see horrible visions, and had constant sensations of insects crawling over their skin.
- The final pages of notes detail a prospective remedial ritual to appease what the cultists believed to be Arak'thul's anger as a result of their previous summoning efforts. The notes are incomplete and end abruptly, but a critical component of this ritual would appear to be the consumption of the

Thumb of Saint Yuvakis (see 'Completing the Ritual' section).

4. FUNGAL CHAMBERS

An ethereal luminescence illuminates the expanse ahead. This chamber is split bilaterally by a pronounced ledge running along its length, creating a high and low-ground to the east and west, respectively. The floor is spongy underfoot, covered in myriad glowing fungi of various shapes and sizes. To the north and south, nestled within shadowy alcoves, are pools of water, their surfaces occasionally disturbed by the fall of a spore from a nearby mushroom. These mushrooms sprouting near the pools are distinctive—bulbous, blackish-purple reminiscent of bruised flesh, and smelling of death.

While much of the fungal growth in this chamber is entirely natural, the presence of Arak'thul's curse has tainted some of the growth here, as well as cause entirely new creations. The bulbous mushrooms growing near the pools of water are examples of this—unnatural, aberrant biology non-native to the Material Plane that release magical pheromones which attract and nourish any spiders in the vicinity. A character that makes a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Nature) check can identify these mushrooms as a species called bruisebloom, which is exceedingly rare to be found beyond the Plane of Shadow.

Hazard: Bruisebloom. Bruisebloom have natural defense mechanisms. When any creature comes within 10 feet of one of these mushrooms, it releases a cloud of spores. Any creature within range must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour. While poisoned in this way, the creature is also hallucinating, seeing distorted visions and hearing faint whispers. Another creature can use an action to help the affected creature snap out of it, granting them a new saving throw with advantage.

5. SPIDER NEST

The chamber before you is heavily obscured by dense layers of thick, sticky webbing, in some parts stretching from floor to ceiling and wall to wall, forming a suffocating canopy. Dominating the center of the room is a grotesque mound of glistening, translucent eggs, each pulsating faintly with an unsettling rhythm. Off to one side, a large cocoon twitches and writhes, suggesting a trapped creature within. Several sets of glowing eyes emerge from the enveloping silk, fixating on you with predatory intent.

This chamber is where Arak'thul's spiders lair. At the base of the mound of spider eggs, draped in webbing, is a small iron strongbox. This box is the Silken Reliquary containing the severed finger of Saint Yuvakis. The box is locked and its key was lost long ago; the box can be opened with a successful DC 12 Dexterity check using thieves' tools or if it takes at least 8 points of bludgeoning damage from a single instance of damage. Inside a mummified thumb wrapped in linens.

A casting of *detect magic* reveals a faint aura of necromancy magic emanating from the thumb.

Hazard: Egg Mound. If the mound of eggs takes at least 5 points of damage, directly or from an area-of-effect spell, hundreds of the eggs burst, spawning two **swarms of spiders** that attack the party and fight until they are destroyed.

Encounter: Arak'thul's Spiders. If the party chooses not to immediately attack the spiders themselves, they don't have to wait long for the action to start. Three Spiders of Arak'thul lurk in this chamber and attack the party moments after they enter the chamber. They fight until they are destroyed. The Spiders of Arak'thul use **giant spider** statistics, with the following modifications:

- Their size is Medium.
- They deal necrotic damage instead of poison damage.
- Ephemeral Webbing: When the Spider of Arak'thul uses its Web action, the targeted creature is also restrained by shadowy tendrils that emanate from the web. A creature restrained by the webbing has disadvantage on saving throws against necrotic damage.

Father Tom. The figure writhing inside the cocoon is Father Tom (CG he/him human **priest**), the last and only surviving member of the lost expedition. Father Tom, the priest of a local church to the sun god, is a homely, mild-mannered man in his mid-forties with a minor stutter and a single-minded focus on learning and exploration, which causes a reckless disregard for his own safety. He is motivated to learn as much as he can about the caverns and ideally, lift whatever dark force influences them. If freed, he thanks the party gratuitously for their help and explains his involvement with the rest of his doomed expedition and their search for Arak'thul's Codex. Needing only a few minutes to collect himself, he is quick to question the party on anything they've learned in the caverns. If the party has already recovered the codex and informs Father Tom, he excitedly requests to

review it. If the party has not recovered the codex or makes no mention of it, Father Tom requests that they remain in the caverns until they can be confident the codex cannot be found. If the party rejects this plan, however, Father Tom will disappointedly take his leave and return to the nearest local settlement. While Father Tom is with the party, as a result of his knowledge, the party makes all (Intelligence) Arcana, Investigation, and (Wisdom) Religion checks relevant to Arak'thul and the caverns with advantage.

6. ALTAR

The sound of cascading water fills this chamber. Two narrow waterfalls emerge from the south wall, feeding into a central pool. In the middle of this pool stands an altar, its dark stone marked by age and adorned with carvings of spiders and shadowy figures. The atmosphere is heavy and foreboding.

Countless rituals took place atop the stone of this altar, which hasn't been used in several decades. A casting of *detect magic* reveals a faint aura of conjuration magic emanating from the altar. A character who makes a successful DC 10 (Intelligence) Arcana check or a DC 15 Wisdom (Religion) check can sense that the altar still hums with magic, as if its presence still contributes directly to the dark energies present here.

There are two ways to permanently lift Arak'thul's curse over the caverns:

Destroying the Altar. If the altar is destroyed, the curse no longer has an outlet through which it can manifest. The altar has AC 18 and 50 hit points, though it has a damage threshold of 10. Attacking the altar attracts the attention of further Arak'thul defences. After the altar is reduced to 25 hit points or fewer, one **phase spider** spawns in the cavern and attacks the party. After the altar is reduced to 10 hit points or fewer, another two **phase spiders** spawn in the cavern and attack the party. All spiders fight until they are destroyed.

Completing the Ritual. Completing an appeasing ritual to Arak'thul is the alternative method to lift the curse. A character who has read the Arak'thul Codex and who makes a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Religion) check is able to determine the appropriate steps of the ritual, which include lighting three candles and placing them on the altar, chanting a specific incantation, and consuming a morsel of the Thumb of Saint Yuvakis. At least three individuals are required to chant the incantation together, and doing so successfully requires a successful group DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Religion) check. If this check is not successful, the candles are snuffed out, the ritual fails, and each speaker takes 8 (2d8) psychic damage. If this check fails by five or more, in addition to the above, two **phase spiders** spawn and attack the party. The ritual can be attempted as long as enough of the Thumb remains for a morsel to be consumed during the ritual. If no

party member is willing to consume the Thumb, Father Tom volunteers himself.

AFTERMATH

If the party was able to use the codex and the relic to unravel the secrets of the caverns and complete an associated cleansing ritual or destroy the altar, Arak'thul's curse afflicting the area is lifted, and any spiders that might remain alive wither and die over a matter of days. If Father Tom was saved, the party will have a local ally for life; one who is happy to offer them room and board at his church as well as scholarly research services upon their request. Father Tom does request that he be allowed to keep the Silken Reliquary and Arak'thul's Codex, but if the party insists on keeping the items in their possession, the priest does not press the matter. If the party simply eliminated the existing spiders but was not able to lift the curse, this is still an improvement, as the caverns and their surroundings will be safe for several months before new spiders are eventually birthed by the curse and their influence begins to spread again. The potential consequences of this development are left to GM discretion—the party may be long gone by the time this happens.

REFERENCES

This work includes material taken from the System Reference Document 5.1 (“SRD 5.1”) by Wizards of the Coast LLC and available at <https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/systems-reference-document>. The SRD 5.1 is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>.

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