

PAUL 'WIGGY' WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

WEB OF DECEIT





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BY PAUL “WIGGY” WADE-WILLIAMS

EDITING & PROOFREADING: SCOTT ALAN WOODARD

COVER, GRAPHIC DESIGN & TYPESETTING: ROBIN ELLIOTT

CARTOGRAPHY & ART: FRANK WALLS

FIGURE FLATS: JORDAN PEACOCK



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WEB OF DECEIT



● INTRODUCTION ●

This adventure is designed for a group of four Veteran characters. Most encounters are based on a number of antagonists per hero, and thus automatically allow for increased party size. Scaling for higher Ranks is easily handled. For each additional Rank the party is above Veteran, add one additional Extra of the most common type to an encounter. For instance, if the text says the heroes face one spider cultist per hero, a Legendary party of four members would face six spider cultists (four for the party size plus two for being two Ranks higher than Veteran).

The adventure takes place in the Hearthlands but can be set at any time of year. Except where noted in the text, the temperature is a constant 40° F below ground. See the *Savage Worlds* rulebook for the effects of cold weather and the *Hellfrost Players' Guide* for how the rules work in this setting.

A selection of pre-generated Novice characters can be found at our website, www.tripleacegames.com.

BACKGROUND

Situated only a few miles from Spiderfell Wood, Rushton is a self-sufficient farming community of little renown. With no river trade along the Woodrush, few folk ever have seen need to visit. Once known as Wood-rushton (meaning “the enclosure on the Woodrush”), the name has slowly been shortened to its current form.

For the best part of two hundred years nothing of interest has occurred in Rushton. It has avoided raiders and bandits by dint of having nothing of value, the lack of livestock has not attracted wolves, and expansion has been minimal due to it being located off the beaten track. Even the giant spiders of nearby Spiderfell Wood have been nothing more than a sporadic nuisance. Most families can trace their ancestry back to the village's

founding, though there are “newcomers” (families who have been there less than three generations). The most the farmers had to worry about in living memory was the nuances of Rassilon's weather.

But now a strange shadow has fallen over the village. Villagers have begun acting strangely, with neighbors seeming distant to their friends. Families began disappearing without notice for days at a time, only to reappear just as suddenly, though that has stopped of late. However, a small few families have literally vanished, leaving meals uneaten and their belongings and valuables abandoned in their deserted homes. Word of a sinister cult operating in the village is spreading, but with other problems besetting the land, few nobles have time to investigate. Truth be told, the culprit is actually an unearthly creature, part-human and part-spider.

For every civilized god there is at least one older, darker deity whose name is known only in vague legends or in stories designed to scare children into adopting good behavior. One such entity is Spidari (from whose name the word “spider” originates), a malevolent spider goddess.

According to many myths, her web binds the heavens, preventing the stars from falling to Rassilon and burning the world. Once, perhaps, she was benevolent, for skalds who know of her tell how she volunteered to support the heavens after the other gods failed in the task. Some even claim she was a child of Eostre, as are all the animalistic gods. Now, though, Spidari is a dark deity whose cult practices many fell rites, such as human sacrifice.

Dominating the central plains of Midmark is Spiderfell Wood, so named because of the number of giant spiders which haunt the boughs. Since the advent of the civilized races, Spiderfell Wood has been the site of a struggle between the races and the spiders, but that status quo is slowly changing, at least in one small area. The monsters that dwell there range in size from that of a man's clenched fist to horrendous fiends as large as a house. It is popularly believed that within the black heart of the wood there dwells a gargantuan “Spider-King,” a

sentient, malevolent abomination that is part-man and part-spider.

Until recently, the spider king was a reality, but he had grown weak and senile, and had failed to conduct reprisal raids on those who entered the wood with the sole aim of slaying the giant spiders. On direct orders from her deity, the king's young daughter, Arachni, a priestess of the cult, killed and devoured her father. She assumed the joint mantle of Queen of Spiderfell Wood and High Priestess.

Whereas her father's venom was deadly, Arachni's poison enslaves weak minds. At first, the high priestess kidnapped inhabitants from Rushton and subjected them to her venom in her lair. All told, the process took the best part of a week. As the number of disappearances grew, folk became concerned. In a bid to alleviate the problem, Arachni started issuing her trusted cultists with vials of her toxin, thus allowing them to convert villagers in a single night. Those unfortunates who prove immune to her venom are hauled off to her lair at night to serve as food for her offspring or as sacrifices to Spidari. Once the entire village is under her control, Arachni plans to send the inhabitants out into the world to convert more innocents.

GETTING THE HEROES INVOLVED

Exactly why the heroes are heading toward Rushton is left to the GM to fit into his campaign. They may simply be traveling through Midmark in search of a bed for the night and learn of the strange goings-on through rumors. In this version, the heroes stumble across the plot, rather than it being presented to them on a plate. Should they not talk to the locals during their stay (perhaps figuring the village is merely GM flavor text), a non-cultist takes them aside and asks if they are here to investigate the disappearances. Should they reply in the negative, the villager apologizes and tries to beat a hasty retreat.

Rumors of the strange activities in the village may have reached a powerful (and curious) personage or organization to which the heroes are indebted, so they were ordered to investigate. In an episodic game, the heroes may have heard stories of strange disappearances and have gone to investigate of their own volition.

Whatever method you choose, the heroes begin outside the main gates of Rushton, having spent all day on the road.

INVESTIGATIONS IN RUSHTON

Give the heroes an unmarked copy of the village map. Note that not every location is important to the plot. Houses simply marked "Cn" on the GM's map belong to cultists. The "n" designates the total number of people in the house. Of these, 1d4 are typically adults (with typi-

cal cultist stats) while the rest are young children. "X" indicates a deserted house. The owners were kidnapped but resisted conversion and were slain.

The GM has free reign to create names for incidental villagers, even cultists. Although predominantly Saxa, there are also Anari families in the village. No houses are mapped. The GM should invent descriptions for a two or three room house as required.

Locales of specific interest to the adventure are detailed below. When dealing with the general populace, the GM should draw a card, consult the Rumors and Opinions table (page 4), and roleplay the villager's dispensing of information.

The GM should endeavor not to rush this section so as to get straight to the action. The heroes need information before they can progress, and the only way to do that is to conduct a thorough investigation in Rushton.

By the time the heroes are invited to investigate the mystery it is midday. Walking between locations in the village takes only a few minutes and need not be tallied. For ease, assume that talking to anyone beyond a simple hello takes an hour. Citizens don't just blurt out their rumors or opinions—there is the formality of having something to drink, routine small talk, and lesser options and grumbles before the actual information the person has to share is made available. Even cultists take the time to try and pass themselves off as normal citizens and act accordingly.

1) MAIN GATE

Rushton has a palisade, but it lacks a true gatehouse. Entrance to the village is via a pair of simple wooden gates. These are closed between dusk and dawn. Day or night, four militiamen are assigned to man the gates. Strangers are not questioned during daylight hours, but are subjected to vigorous interrogation at night as to their reasons for visiting.

The dayshift guards are regular militiamen. Thanks to the head of the militia being a cultist, those on watch at night are cultists as well. The guards are informed if anyone has been kidnapped from the village and invent cover stories claiming they saw the missing people leave.

M Guards (4): All are Villagers equipped with militia gear (see page 22). Even at night, the cultists carry nothing that can identify them as converts.

2) CARL THRANDSUNU'S COTTAGE

The windows of this cottage are securely fastened, and no smoke rises from the chimney. The small garden situated out front is overgrown with weeds, and birds nest in the thatch.

Carl, his wife, and their four children used to live here. Carl was a farmer, one among many in the village, but was singled out by his neighbors for conversion a

HELLFROST ADVENTURE #10

RUMORS & OPINIONS

Draw a card from the action deck and consult the chart below whenever the heroes speak to a villager. Don't show the card to the players. The heroes may encounter key villagers during their investigation. Most have specific information to pass on, but some also gossip. If a location or personage is referenced, the speaker can provide directions to their abode. A (T) notation indicates the opinion or rumor is true, whereas (F) means it is false. Note that many rumors are part true and part false. In these instances the (T) or (F) are shown after the relevant text. Duplicated rumors/opinions can be reused—just change the wording but keep the intent. True information can also be reworded, but the basic facts should still be presented to the characters. Cultists *never* reveal true information. Either reword the entry into something believable but erroneous, or pick a rumor which is completely false. Naturally, the players should never be told which rumors are true and which are false—they must sort that out for themselves.

Card Rumor/Opinion

- 2 "My grandfather told me something like this happened once before, back when he was a lad (F). He said it was a demon, a hate from the old times (F)."
- 3 "I blame Old Steinkel. Everyone knows he's mad (T). I reckon he's murdering those folk who've vanished (F). Everyone else is just scared, so of course they're acting all strange (F)."
- 4 "I heard strange noises coming from Carl Thrandsunu's place one night back along. Come morning, the whole family had gone. (T) The neighbors reckoned they'd gone to visit a sick relative, but why did they leave in the middle of the night without their personal belongings? (T)"
- 5 "The priestess of Eostre has been crankier than normal of late (T). I think she's taken to drink, personally (F)."
- 6 "Strange things have been happening (T). Take Halfdan the carpenter, for instance. He claims his wife has gone to visit relatives, but I saw her with bruises on her face not a month back (F). I reckon she's left him."
- 7 "Best only drink wine. There's something bad in the water (F)."
- 8 "An evil cult is operating in Rushton (T). And who are the likely ringleaders? I'll tell you who, the priestess and the ridder, that's who! (F)"
- 9 "Folk who vanish disappear at night, always at night (T). I've taken to using herbal

month ago. The cultists came at night, kidnapping the entire family. Sadly, they all proved immune to Arachni's venom and met a grisly end. Since their disappearance the cult has removed all their clothes and personal belongings, though they made the mistake of leaving them behind immediately after the attack.

The door is locked (Toughness 10) but can be picked. The kidnapping occurred weeks ago, and there is no evidence of foul play. Even all the food in the cupboards has gone. A thin layer of dust coats every exposed surface.

During any search of the house, the neighboring family, Gardi Finnsunu and his wife, Mavis ap-Garrion, come over to the house to investigate. Both are cultists. If questioned, the couple repeats a well-rehearsed lie.

"Carl got a message saying his mother was sick. She lives down in Aith. They had to leave immediately and asked us to look after the house until they returned. That's why we're here now. We saw you entering and came to check it wasn't thieves."

The party may have learned Halfdan the carpenter's wife also "went to Aith." The couple merely shrug if this "coincidence" is mentioned, and reply, *"Aith is a big place. Lots of folk live there."*

Heroes with Knowledge (Area: Midmark) may make a roll. Knowledge of a wider area encompassing Midmark allows a roll, but at a penalty. For instance, Knowledge (Area: The Marklands) carries a -2 penalty, while knowledge of only Rassilon as a whole incurs a -6 penalty. With success, the hero recalls Aith has a population of almost 9,000 people. It is a major trading port downriver from Rushton.

If the party were led here by a rumor, they may ask about the family's possessions being left behind. Again, the couple has a lie already prepared.

"Yes, that's true enough. They left in rather a hurry. We packaged up the rest and sent it down with a visiting merchant. They left food behind but we took that away to stop rats getting at it."

The couple then bid the party farewell. Within the hour, word has been passed to the ridder's aide that the party has been snooping around the house and asking questions.

3) CARPENTER

The distinctive sounds of sawing can be heard from a small outbuilding located to the side of the stone cottage.

The village carpenter, wainwright, and cooper, Halfdan Eyjolfssunu, is a cultist. He and his wife, Katla Thjos-tolfsdohtor, were kidnapped at the same time. Halfdan succumbed to the spider queen's venom and became a

cultist, but his wife resisted. Her bones litter the spiders' lair. In order to conceal his wife's death, Halfdan tells folk she has gone to visit relatives in Aith (a large port town to the south).

While the village palisade is far from impregnable, it initially made life very difficult for cultists trying to smuggle out kidnapped villagers. To that end, Halfdan was converted and ordered to create a concealed door in the timbers. To help disguise his work, the carpenter ordered sections of the palisade to be replaced, claiming they were rotten and thus weak points in the village's defenses.

Heroes who casually stroll past the area of the palisade containing the secret door are allowed a Notice roll at -6 to spot the portal if within 3" of it—Halfdan did excellent work. Even a thorough examination requires a Notice roll at -2. The door is not hinged. Rather, an entire panel can be pushed out (as an action) to form a gap in the wall large enough for a crouching human (or giant spider) to pass through.

Should the portal be discovered and the carpenter confronted, Halfdan tries to pull his cultist ring from his pocket and consume the venom. Should he be prevented, or somehow survive the deadly toxin, he attacks the heroes with a carpenter's axe (Str+d4).

④ **Halfdan Eyjolfsson:** Treat as a Typical Cultist (see page 24) with Knowledge (Craft: Carpentry) d8.

4) HERBALIST

A sign outside this house displays a bunch of herbs, the traditional sign for an herbalist. On three sides of the house are herb gardens. A mixture of scents (some fragrant and others more noxious) assail your noses. A young lad of perhaps 16 summers sits outside, sharpening a sickle. As you approach, he stands quickly and calls for his mother. Moments later a plump, middle-aged woman emerges from the cottage, wipes her hands on her apron and enquires as to your business.

The village herbalist is Meredith ap-Gwilam. Both she and her husband Ogden are converts, as is their only son, Rhodri. Meredith was converted early on, having been selected for her profession. She aided in abducting and initiating the rest of her family. Ogden and Rhodri are both farmers.

Meredith maintains a sizeable herb garden of common (+0) plants. Typically, there are enough herbs for 1d4 batches of any brew with a purpose modifier of -2 or better. The herbalist also keeps 2d4 doses of dried herbs of each of these types inside her house.

She makes herbal remedies only to order and uses fresh herbs while they are available. Her rates are 50 gold scields per dose, plus 10 gold scields for each negative purpose modifier. For instance, a restorative brew (-2 modifier) costs 70 gold scields. Fellow converts pay half these rates, though never in front of non-cultist custom-

RUMORS & OPINIONS CONT...

brews to keep me awake. (T but irrelevant)."

10 "Times must be bad. I got served beer in a dirty glass at the Bough the other day. (T)"

Jack "The last harvests have been bad (T). It's a curse from Vali (F)."

Queen "Something sinister? No, I don't think so. Folk are just fed up and leaving (F). The ridder said so (T)."

King "Too many strangers in these parts for my liking! First that potter moves in to replace the one who upped and left, and then those merchants turned up (T). I preferred it when you knew everyone's face."

Ace "There's something bad around here, alright (T). Plenty of folk have spied a rider out near the fields, watching them (F)."

Joker The GM may either draw two cards or invent one completely fictitious but plausible rumor as a red herring.

ers. If questioned about discounts, she denies ever offering them—she has to make a living.

If Meredith is informed by a fellow cultist that the heroes are investigating the cult, she deliberately taints any antitoxin brews she concocts for the party, rendering them ineffective. Naturally, if the party survives to confront her she is very apologetic, and even offers to brew a second batch (of equally useless potions).

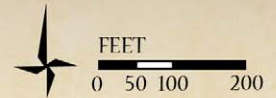
Special Brews: Arachni has provided Meredith with a special fungus, which the herbalist cultivates and turns into herbal brews. She grows these in her herb garden, concealed beneath leafy plants. Heroes walking past the plants won't detect them with a casual glance. A thorough search automatically reveals the presence of small, red puffballs with green dots.

This species does not grow on Rassilon. Unless a hero has the Knowledge (Area: Underearth) skill he cannot identify the fungi or speculate on what brews might be made from them. Those with the skill are allowed a roll to identify the effects of the puffball.

The spores of the puffball produce a powerful soporific effect. A thrown jar (Range: 3/6/12) explodes in a Small Burst Template. Anyone under the template must make a Vigor roll or fall into a deep sleep for 2d6 hours. A dose of smelling salts (treat as a stimulant IV herbal brew from the free download **Hedge Magic**) awakens a slumbering victim immediately, as does shaking someone vigorously (as an action). The converts use these in their abductions.

Meredith also brews a concoction made from tiny red spiders sent to her by Arachni. The resultant paste produces a weak version of the mind-control poison produced by the spider queen. By itself it is incapable of truly subverting anyone's will. However, converts are given a weekly dose, which serves to reinforce the toxin

Rushton



- | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 - Main Gate | 5 - Old Steinkel's Cottage | 9 - The New Pottery | 13 - Smithy |
| 2 - Carl Thrandsunu's Cottage | 6 - Village Store | 10 - The Ridder's House | 14 - Tailor |
| 3 - Carpenter | 7 - The Golden Bough | 11 - Shrines | 15 - Old Pottery |
| 4 - Herbalist | 8 - Temple of Eostre | 12 - Bakery | S - Secret panel in palisade |

already in their system and keep them subjugated. Non-cultists who ingest a dose must make a Vigor roll or suffer a -2 penalty to Spirit rolls, rolls to resist Tests of Will, and rolls to resist mind-affecting spells such as *confusion* and *puppet*, for an hour.

Ⓜ **Meredith ap-Gwilam:** Treat as a Typical Cultist (see page 24) but with the Hedge Magic Edge and Knowledge (Alchemy) d10.

Ⓜ **Ogden ap-Culhain:** Treat as a Typical Cultist (see page 24).

Ⓜ **Rodri ap-Ogden:** Treat as a Typical Cultist (see page 24).

5) OLD STEINKEL'S COTTAGE

Whoever lives here hasn't raised a hand to perform routine maintenance in long years. Paint peels from the low fence, the thatch is almost bare, and the weeds have choked all the plants in what was once a large garden. Although the shutters are in place and the door shut, a faint wisp of smoke spirals up from the small chimney.

This rundown house is inhabited by Old Steinkel. A former mercenary, Steinkel retired to Rushton to spend his latter years in peace and quiet, and to pray for the souls of those he had slain during his campaigning years. For the first few years of his residence he was hired as head of the militia, though his duties were only to train the men. It quickly became apparent the old man was suffering senility, and his duties were gradually lessened until he was finally removed from office. Given a small pension, Steinkel spent his days sitting on his porch watching the world go by.

Bad dreams had troubled the man for years, and his mind was fragile. While on his porch late one night, he witnessed a giant spider sneaking into the village and cultists smuggling out a kidnapped victim. His mind snapped, driving Steinkel insane. Now he just sits in his house, muttering and murmuring to himself. Thanks to his mental state, the cult has ignored him thus far.

No one answers knocks at the door and the windows are shuttered tight. The door is not locked and opens easily. Day or night, when the party enters, Steinkel is sitting on the floor, dribbling thick, black drool. He has carved dozens of spirals into the floor and walls with his dagger. In his mind they are spider webs. On hearing the party, he looks up and mutters.

"Have you come for me? I saw them, I saw them. Black in the night, all legs and eyes." He raises a clenched fist to his mouth and stuffs something inside. "Scuttling, scuttling, scuttling," he continues chewing quickly, more black goo dripping from his chin. "They walked through the palisade like ghosts. Did you see them on the porch? I eat them so they go away."

Anyone asking Steinkel what he is eating is shown a handful of small, black spiders—common house spiders. Just to add emphasis, Steinkel opens his mouth wide, revealing a saliva-soaked wad of mashed up spiders.

The only way to get a more accurate description of what Steinkel saw is to use *puppet* and force him to relive the night he went mad. Steinkel begins whimpering loudly.

"I...I was sat on my porch after dark, listening to the birds singing. It came past me, scuttling on hairy legs, as large as a pony. It never saw me. It never saw me. Then...then...men came, carrying something." Steinkel wrinkles his brow, as if trying to remember, or perhaps forget. "It was a body, all wrapped up in a shroud. They went through...no...not through like ghosts...but through the palisade nonetheless. Then it came back, clicking and screeching, eyes and legs! EYES AND LEGS!"

Steinkel screams loudly and collapses into a comatose state. Nothing the party does can awaken him. The *puppet* spell is ended automatically at this point.

Note that Steinkel's earlier rant and the fact he is eating spiders should be enough of a clue for parties without *puppet*. Those with the spell learn more, but those lacking the charm are not left lacking useful information.

If a cultist ever discovers what Steinkel told the party, Arachni is quickly informed by the ridder's aide. Orders are issued to silence the old man. The night following the party's chat with Steinkel he is murdered in his bed. His own dagger thrust into his heart. The murder is disguised to look like suicide. Everyone in Rushton knew the old man was mad and, while many mourn his passing, no one is particularly surprised he took his own life in the end.

If the party is keeping a close watch on the old man, he is killed as soon as their attention is distracted—they can't watch him forever. Even if the cultists fail to commit the terrible act, Steinkel passes away after three days in a coma.

Ⓜ **Old Steinkel:** As a Villager (see page 22) with Spirit, Strength, and Vigor d4. He has Toughness 4.

6) VILLAGE STORE

A faded wooden sign proudly proclaims this establishment to be Ozzik's General Store. The door is ajar. From within you can hear a man shouting at someone called Aud to get off her chair and prepare his dinner. The woman's reply is muffled, but full of vehemence. A low chuckle follows soon after, followed by the man's voice ordering people back to work.

The village store is run by Fridgeir Leifsunu. His wife, Aud Lodinsdohtor, lives with him but has no part in

HELLFROST ADVENTURE #10

THE GOLDEN BOUGH PRICES

All costs are in silver scields.

Food/Drink	Cost
Breakfast (meat, cheese, bread)	2
Cheap meal (one course)	5
Good meal (two courses)	10
Excellent meal (three courses)	15
Anari brandy, per mug	12
Imported beer, 4-pint pitcher	8
Local beer, 4-pint pitcher	2
Mead, per mug	3
Imported wine, 1-pint pitcher*	10
Local wine, 1-pint pitcher*	3

Accommodation/Extras	Cost
Space in stables	free
Shared room (2-person)	3
Bath (no soap)	2
Laundry service (per person)	1
Stabling, with oats, per horse	5

*Beetroot, elderflower, nettle, potato, pumpkin or strawberry

running the establishment. The pair has an on-off relationship, switching between total adoration and intense hatred in the blink of an eye. They've been like this ever since they were married and their strange relationship is well-known to the locals.

Aiding the shopkeepers are two of his wife's nephews, Lars and Ozur. Ozur is a cultist, but his identical twin is not. The cultists plan to keep it this way as long as possible, giving Ozur a chance to pose as his brother and stir up trouble if necessary. Ozur also keeps an eye on the orders his uncle is placing. Anything unusual is reported to the rider's aide.

Fridgeir is a skinflint by nature and seeks to squeeze as much profit as he can from every transaction. His small shop sells only gear with a V availability code. However, he never keeps primitive weapons, animals, or any unusual goods in stock. All prices are increased by 10% above those listed in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide*, rounded down to the nearest silver scield. For example, a pouch of pipeleaf (regular price 15 gs) would cost 16 gold and 5 silver scields here.

Unusual items or goods with T availability can be ordered from Aith, but take 2d4+4 days to order and ship. Fridgeir charges a premium on such goods. Increase costs by 75% (this includes the standard increase). City goods come from Hamna, Midmark's capital, and are ordered only by direct customer request. Delivery is within 3d6+4 days and goods are charged at an extortionate four times the regular price! Fridgeir insists on a 50% deposit before he will even place the order.

The store is the only place in town to sell equipment taken from slain cultists. When buying used goods, Fridgeir pays just 10%. A successful Persuasion roll op-

posed by the shopkeeper's Spirit increases the price to a maximum of 25%.

Fridgeir overhears a lot of conversations in the shop and has a knack for getting people to talk. He knows two rumors.

☛ **Fridgeir Leifsunu:** Treat as a Villager (see page 22) but with Persuasion and Streetwise d6 and the Greedy (Minor) Hindrance.

☛ **Lars Skaptisunu:** Treat as a Villager (see page 22).

☛ **Ozur Skaptisunu:** Treat as a Typical Cultist (see page 24).

7) THE GOLDEN BOUGH

A sign depicting a golden tree branch hangs outside the entrance to this large, single-story building. Smoke drifts lazily from a trio of chimneys. The faint murmur of conversation can be heard from within. A small stable block stands nearby, as does an outhouse and a larger building.

Rushton's only inn is the Golden Bough. The Bough is run by an Anari couple, Ozzik and Helga, and four serving staff from the local populace (all unmarried girls in their late teens). Helga is the chief cook, while Ozzik handles everything up front. Everyone involved in running the inn is a cultist. During the day there are 2d6 patrons present; all cultists. Men represent three-quarters of the crowd. At night, the number of patrons doubles, though the mix between sexes falls to roughly equal. Half of these are cultists.

"The Bough," as it is more frequently known, is a well-appointed place. Despite Rushton being off the beaten track and rarely visited, the owners once took great pride in their establishment. Glasses were spotless, the fire always roaring, and the service friendly. Since the staff joined the cult, standards have slipped. Ozzik and Helga blame this on worry brought on by the strange events, though in truth it is because they are spending a lot of time in the basement, where a secret shrine has been erected (see below).

The large outbuilding is a brewery. Ozzik brews beer and ferments several different wines here. Even after his conversion, he is happy to give visitors free samples in the hope they like it enough to buy several bottles worth. These days all his profits go to Arachni's coffers.

There are four guest rooms in the inn, all double-occupancy. One is currently occupied by two outsiders (see below). All the rooms have recently been modified. While villagers were told the work was a routine renovation, it was actually to install secret doors in the floors of the guest chambers so as to aid the cultists in kidnapping strangers. Visitors make ideal converts, as their sudden departure does not raise too many eyebrows. All guests are given two keys. One opens their bedroom door, while the other opens the guest door into the accommodation wing.

The two guests claim to be merchants exploring the possibility of creating a trade route linking the communities circling Spiderfell Wood. Both are, in fact, senior cultists, here to keep an eye on the village and oversee rituals.

Three of the guest rooms have secret trapdoors in the floors. These are barred from below. A secret passageway in the cellar allows cultists to climb ladders into the guest rooms and kidnap the occupants without having to open the bedroom doors. A secret door in the corridor leads to a makeshift shrine dedicated to Spidari. The cultists in the village worship here. The altar is carved to resemble a swarming mass of spiders.

🕸 **Ozzik ap-Matthiau:** Treat as a Typical Cultist (see page 24). Carries a dagger (Str+d4) for cutting bread and meat, and removing corks.

🕸 **Helga ap-Gwain:** Treat as a Typical Cultist (see page 24). Armed with a heavy rolling pin (Str+d4).

🕸 **Serving Staff (4):** Treat as Typical Cultists (see page 24). Each carries a concealed dagger (Str+d4).

🕸 **Thorbjorn:** Treat as a Wild Card Cultist Paladin (see page 22).

🕸 **Ivar:** Treat as an Elite Cultist (see page 24).

🕸 **Spider Swarm:** See page 25. Fills a Medium Burst Template.

Treasure: The special cultist gear owned by the staff is kept in two large chests in the basement. Both are locked (Toughness 10; Lockpicking -2). There is also a stash of 800 gs spread equally between the chests. The treasure is made up of coins, jewelry and other valuables taken from kidnapped victims whose conversion failed.

A third chest is trapped—it contains an egg sac. If the chest is opened by any means other than the key, the sac bursts, disgorging a swarm of hungry spiders. Also within the chest are several small vials. Three hold a sticky black fluid (Arachni's venom) while half a dozen others contain a powerful paralysis venom. Any foe Shaken or wounded by a weapon smeared with the venom must make a Vigor roll or be paralyzed for 2d6 hours. The venom is in very short supply, which prevents the cultists from using it in their kidnapping attempts.

Ozzik carries the only key to all three chests.

8) TEMPLE OF EOSTRE

This large, imposing wooden structure is decorated with engravings of plants and animals. Carved into the impressive double doors is the holy symbol of Eostre, goddess of agriculture and patron of farmers. A sign on the door in Anari, Saxa, and Trader reads, "Closed until further notice."

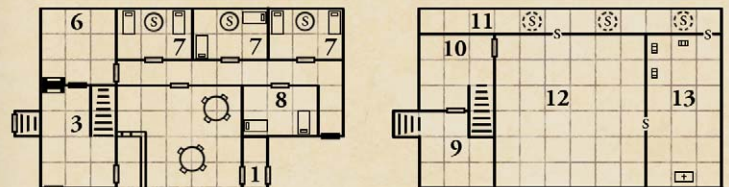
Although a small village, Rushton is actually the most prosperous settlement in the region. The temple to Eostre supports all the outlying villages, though fewer and fewer worshippers visit since the strange disappearances began. Normally there are three junior priests, but these are visiting other communities in the parish and are not due back for some time.

THE GOLDEN BOUGH KEY

1. Entrance and Cloakroom
2. Main Bar
3. Kitchen
4. Owner's Living Room
5. Owner's Bedroom
6. Guests' Dining Room
7. Vacant Guest Rooms
8. Cultists' Room
9. Delivery Cellar
10. Food Storage
11. Secret Corridor
12. Main Cellar
13. Secret Shrine

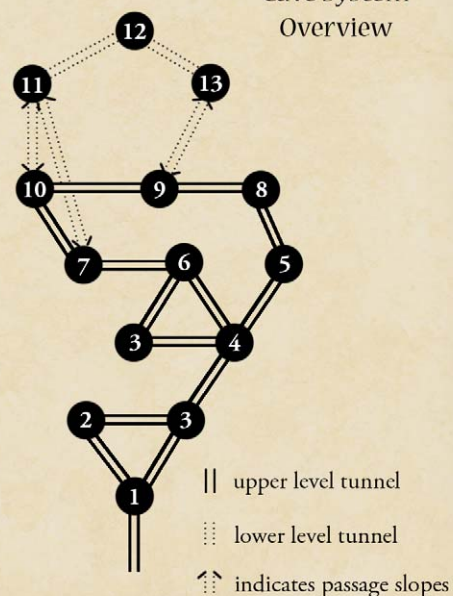
With the mood in the village changing and having noticed a strange alteration in her acolytes' behavior, Freda has become paranoid. She never leaves the temple at night, survives on *feast* spells (she falsely believes the water supply is tainted), and has overdosed more than

The Golden Bough



- Ⓢ secret door in floor
- Ⓢ secret door in ceiling
- 🛏 bed
- 🔥 fireplace
- 🔒 locked door
- 🗿 altar
- 📦 chest

Cave System Overview



HELLFROST ADVENTURE #10

KEY TO OTHER BUILDINGS

Rushton has several buildings which might, for one reason or another, be of interest to the heroes. Since these are largely incidental to the plot, no specific details are listed.

#	Purpose	Annotations/Notes
12	Bakery	C5
13	Smithy	C3; smith has no skill at forging armor or weapons except spears
14	Tailor	Caters for nobility (the ridder) and commoners alike
15	Old Pottery	House is deserted (family kidnapped and sacrificed)

once on Stimulant I herbal remedies in order to avoid sleeping. She is a key target for the cult, but the appearance of the heroes has halted their plans to abduct her.

Freda answers the door to the party only during daylight hours, and then through a small hatch in the door. Reluctant to open the doors to anyone at all, yet alone strangers, it requires a Persuasion roll at -4 to convince the paranoid priestess to allow admittance. A +2 bonus is awarded if there is a cleric of Eostre or druid in the party, and +1 for clerics of any other benevolent faith.

On a failure, Freda simply says the temple is closed due to sickness. She then closes the hatch, checks the door is barred (which thwarts *unlock* spells), and scurries back to her chambers. Hacking down the door is not a wise idea.

On a success, the cleric allows the party to enter the temple. She leads them to a small side room. No refreshments are offered. During any conversation, Freda reveals the following information. She does so as part of role-playing, not just by blurting out the facts.

* Things are wrong in the village. Harvests have been bad before, but people have never left in the middle of the night.

* Many of the regular templegoers have stopped coming to service. Freda can identify three families who were once devout who now no longer acknowledge her in public. All are converted cultists (chosen at random from the cultist houses).

* Ridder Theinwald is next to useless. He deals with the public only through his servant, Frederick. Freda believes the ridder may be the mastermind behind the disappearances, though she cannot say to what end.

* The cleric is convinced the water and/or food supplies are being drugged. They are not.

☞ **Sower Freda Hapisdohr:** See page 22.

9) THE NEW POTTERY

Positioned away from the main village, this small cottage seems well-tended. The roses growing in the garden are especially beautiful, and small birds sing sweet songs from the rafters.

On a successful Notice roll, the heroes discover small glyphs etched into the porch beams. Any druid recognizes the signs immediately as special sigils used to denote places of interest to practitioners of the art. Earth elementalists and clerics of Eostre, both of whom have reason to mix with druids on occasion, are allowed a Common Knowledge roll to see if they recognize the symbols.

The owner of the house is Joxa Lonerider, a druid from Wald (a town on the opposite side of Spiderfell Wood). Many druids dedicated to cleansing the forest of giant spiders dwell in Wald, and Joxa is one of their number. When word first began to spread of strange happenings in Rushton, Joxa came to investigate. He bought a derelict cottage on the edge of the village and passed himself off as a potter in search of a quiet place to live and earn a living. He then began covert surveillance. Over the months he has built up quite detailed knowledge of the cult and its activities.

Unless the heroes can demonstrate practical knowledge of druidism, earth elementalism, or nature magic, Joxa is aloof with the party. He sticks to his cover story of being a potter by trade and claims, not having lived in the village for long, that he has noticed nothing amiss.

Whether the party approach Joxa early on in their investigations or not, the druid begins secretly watching them, fearing at first that strangers in town might be more cultists. Publicly rooting out any of the cultists in the village or helping defend the settlement in the event of a spider attack earns his trust just as well. Once convinced the heroes and he are on the same side, Joxa will approach.

He invites the characters inside for nettle tea and cake. Once everyone is settled he tells his story.

"My name is Joxa Lonerider," the man begins. "I am a druid, one of a small circle who operates from the town of Wald. Many months ago I heard strange rumors of disappearances in Rushton and I came to investigate. I have quietly watched the goings-on here, taking note of any strange behavior. It is my belief that a sinister cult is operating in Rushton, a cult which has its true headquarters in Spiderfell Wood."

"A few weeks ago I followed a party carrying two bodies leaving the village by night. They left via the main gate, seemingly with the aid of the guards. For three days they journeyed into Spiderfell Wood, until at last they reached a dark cave. Being alone, I waited outside. After several hours the party returned, though without the bodies."

"It is my opinion that whatever lies at the heart of this mystery lives inside that cave. If you are willing to help, I will gladly take you as far as the cave entrance. I shall then return to Wald as quickly as possible and summon further reinforcements in case they are required."

Joxa is willing to give the party his antitoxins and healing potions if they accept the task.

📌 **Joxa Lonerider:** See page 22.

10) THE RIDDER'S HOUSE

This grand house obviously belongs to someone important. Typical Saxa scroll work adorns the wooden panels, the windows have glass, and the garden is immaculately kept.

This is the house of Ridder Theinwald, Rushton's leader. Visitors first encounter Frederick, the ridder's chief servant. He enquires politely as to their business. Only if the party mentions the cult or the village's problems does he show them through to his master. Otherwise, he handles any problems they have.

Seated at a long oak table is an obese man. His dark beard and fine clothes are smeared with grease from the three roast chickens placed in front of him. The servant nods low. "Master," he says, "some strangers wish to see you about the...er...problems in Rushton." The portly man drops the chicken leg he was sucking and wobbles uneasily to his feet.

"Guests, eh? Frederick, arrange for more glasses immediately. Will you join me? I'm just having a snack before lunch."

Rather than a prepared speech, conversation with the ridder is handled through typical questions the party may pose and the noble's answers.

Q: What's happening in Rushton?

A: *"You mean the disappearances? It's very strange. Citizens just seem to be leaving without notice. Sometimes even their belongings are left behind. Others are changed, somehow, less friendly and open. But this talk I hear of a cult in the village sounds like nonsense to me. Times are hard. We're a small village with little wealth. Folk have likely just given up and gone elsewhere in search of a better life. Some return, yes, and they are somehow different, but that isn't unusual—folk who find the grass is no greener elsewhere get despondent with their lot in life."*

GM Note: This isn't truly the noble's opinion. Frederick has quietly been spinning the story to his master.

Q: When did this start?

A: *"Oh, about a year ago, I guess. The disappearances are very sporadic. It's not like we're losing a family a week. Like I said, it's just the recent poor harvests are getting to the populace. Things will likely pick up."*

Q: Have you done anything about it?

A: *"We're a long way from anywhere and of little importance in the grand scheme of things. I have at my disposal just the militia, and to be honest they're farmers, not investigators. We sent riders to our neighbors,*

but no one wanted to help. And there is little evidence anything is truly amiss."

Q: Who do you think is behind the events?

A: *"Is there truly anyone behind these events? I think it's a mountain being made out of a molehill."*

Q: Are you offering a reward?

A: *"Well, um, if, and I mean if, there is anything going on, then yes, I'll pay you 2,000 gold scields. Not each, of course. I'm not made of money. Keep Frederick," he says nodding toward the servant, "informed of your progress and he'll report back to me. Having you meet with me too often might start tongues wagging. And, of course, you're not to disrupt village life. That could make things worse."*

GM Note: The ridder can be haggled up to 4,000 gs maximum.

What the ridder does not know is that his aide and chief counsel, Frederick, is a cultist. Frederick was kidnapped while on a routine errand to a neighboring village and was converted by Arachni. He serves as the *de facto* head of the cult in Rushton, collating reports and deciding on suitable targets for conversion. If the party do as the nobleman asks and keep Frederick informed of their progress, then Arachni quickly learns the information.

📌 **Ridder Theinwald:** See page 21.

📌 **Frederick the Servant:** See page 21.

11) SHRINES

Rushton boasts only one temple, but it honors the others gods through shrines. Standing around the market square are carved wooden pillars, each dedicated to one of Eira, Hothar, Kenaz, the Norns, Rigr, Sigel, Thunor, and Ullr. A large pillar standing in the center of the square honors Var, god of merchants.

No specific services are held at the shrines. Villagers are free to make their own prayers and offerings as they desire. Before planting and after harvest a temporary shrine to Vali, god of vermin, is erected. Small offerings of food are left at its base to appease the ever-hungry god and keep rats away from the fields and stores. No one in the village ever prays to the god, though.

🌐 THE CULT & THE HEROES 🌐

Once Arachni learns the heroes are investigating activities in Rushton she sends orders to halt regular kidnappings. Her attention is switched to bringing the party under her control. The night after the high priestess learns the party has begun investigating the cult she orders her cultists in the village to kidnap the heroes.

If the characters stay in the Golden Bough the cultists use the secret doors to gain access to their rooms. Divide the cultists as equally as possible between the various rooms. Several doses of Meredith's soporific spores are thrown in to each bedroom before the cult-

HELLFROST ADVENTURE #10

ists attack, as is a *silence* alchemical device (cast with a success) to negate sounds of combat or cries for help. Those asleep are left unharmed, while those unaffected by the spores are attacked. The cultists seek to employ nonlethal damage—Arachni wants slaves if possible, not corpses. Cultists with nets use them before wielding their maces. The attackers are cultists from outside the village, and thus cannot be easily identified.

Should the party reside elsewhere, a young, female cultist from the village is employed. She tries to lure the party to the secret door in the palisade, claiming to have seen suspicious activity near the fence. Once the party reaches the spot, the cultists attack from concealment with webs and soporific spores. The elite cultist carries the *silence* charm on his person, and thus tries to keep the party in the Medium Burst Template as long as possible. Don't check for Surprise—the party has been informed something is up, so they'll be prepared for trouble.

In both cases, the cultists try to commit suicide by imbibing the poison in their rings before they can be captured and interrogated. This requires an action. Typically, when the cultists' numbers are reduced to fewer than 50% they take the poison.

Kidnapped characters are dragged to the secret shrine in the Golden Bough and subjected to Arachni's venom. Those who succumb to the toxin are released with a suitable cover story of how they managed to escape the clutches of the cultists and lose them in the forest. Due to the venom, the hero has absolutely *no* idea about where he was taken or what truly occurred. Have the hero make his Vigor roll to resist the poison (see Arachni's stats on page 22), but don't tell him why.

If the player can be *fully trusted* to roleplay a convert with orders to act as normal, but hamper the party without drawing attention, then you can reveal how he must act. Otherwise, his orders are to act as natural, thus allowing the player to remain blissfully unaware he is a sleeper agent. His servitor state only comes into effect during the encounter with Arachni, when the hero switches sides at a time the GM deems most opportune (and he *must* switch sides at some point).

Characters that resist the venom are kept securely bound and gagged in the cellar for 2d4 days. After this time, they are removed to Arachni's lair. Here they are cocooned in thick webs (no hope of escape without outside help) to await their fate. Because the character is temporarily out of the game, the GM should employ the player as his aide. Let him run non-Wild Card monsters in combat for you, shuffle the cards, and so on. By helping the GM he can earn his full share of the XPs, despite his hero not taking part in a section of the adventure.

● **Elite Cultist (1):** See page 24.

● **Typical Cultists (2 per hero):** See page 24. Half carry a single dose of soporific spores (see page 24). None carry egg sacs. They are armed with clubs (Str+d4) as well as their spiked maces.

THE SPIDER QUEEN'S LAIR

Arachni's lair, and thus the cult's headquarters, is located in a network of natural caverns deep within the gloomy depths of Spiderfell Wood. From here she and her dark brood dwell, plotting the rise of the spider cult and the downfall of the civilized races.

A trip through Spiderfell Wood wouldn't be complete without an encounter with a giant spider or two. GMs should note the aim of this encounter is not to rob the party of alchemical devices or try to induce excessive spellcasting before they reach the caves—Arachni's lair is dangerous enough without deliberately weakening the party.

As such, these two encounters are optional. If the party is healthy and loaded with alchemical devices, then the odd wound or expenditure of an item won't hamper them much. Parties low on resources should not be made to play through these encounters unless the heroes are spoiling for a fight—then they get what they asked for!

ENCOUNTER #1: INNOCENT TRAVELERS?

As the first day draws to a close, the party smells wood smoke upon the wind. A few hundred yards ahead, they encounter a group of travelers resting by the side of the path. The strangers are warming themselves around a fire and are dressed in long traveling cloaks to ward off the night chill. Stashed behind a log are a long carpet and a small strong box.

The travelers are, in fact, cultists heading back to Arachni's lair with a prize—a kidnapped engro merchant. He's paralyzed in the rolled carpet (part of his goods). Not expecting to find outsiders in the woods, the cultists quickly prepare a cover story to explain away their presence in this unholy realm. They claim to be merchants on the hunt for a lost mule. If questioned about the carpet and strongbox, they say it dropped off the mule as it ran. Being valuable, they saw no reason to leave the items behind for thieves and bandits.

Heroes making a successful Tracking roll find no signs of a mule, or indeed any other large animal. The cultists feign distress and pretend they must have followed the wrong trail.

Figuring the party might make good converts, they offer to share their campfire, proclaiming there is safety in numbers. They have meager rations of stale bread and dried strips of meat along with some water, but they do not offer to share. Since they make a living by poisoning and kidnapping, they are reluctant to accept food or drink offered them.

If the party accepts the hospitality, the cultists try to learn all they can about them. They enquire about spellcasters and faiths, and question the heroes about any battles they have fought in order to size up their potential prey. In return, they say very little. They claim to be from Hamna and were traveling toward Aith, visiting villages

around the wood on the way. However, their knowledge of the route is very sketchy and any heroes asking about Hamna are met with only vague replies—none of the men have ever been within 100 miles of the town.

Terrain: The trees provide Cover to characters hiding behind them and block line of sight. Treat areas of vegetation as difficult ground. Lighting is Dark (–2) beneath the dark canopy except around the campfire. The light fills a 6" radius with good lighting. From 7 to 12" the lighting is Dim (–1).

Monsters: If they feel their “guests” are growing overly suspicious, they attack immediately. Otherwise, they play their role and wait until the party sleeps before commencing an attack.

📄 **Cultist Paladin (1):** See page 23 but a Wild Card.

📄 **Typical Cultists (2 per hero):** See page 24. Each carries a mace (Str+d6) on their cloak belt. This can be used to inflict nonlethal damage without incurring a penalty.

📄 **Spider Swarm (2 maximum):** See page 25.

Tactics: The cultists are wearing their special gear concealed beneath their cloaks. Once combat begins, those with nets try to ensnare the most armored heroes and any they know to be spellcasters.

Initially, the cultists try to take the characters alive by battering them unconscious. Once half the cultists are slain, though, they switch to their spiked weapons and use the egg sacs. Typical of those faced with the choice of dying in combat or being consumed by giant spiders, the cultists fight to the bitter end—failure is not rewarded by a quick death.

The paladin makes use of his *entangle* and *fear* spells to ensnare and scare the party while avoiding his comrades. If pressed, he *summons* a giant blade spider (see page 24) to assist in the fight.

Treasure: The strongbox is locked. The lock can be smashed (Toughness 12) or picked (–2 to Lockpicking due to the locks complexity). Inside are 2,000 gold scields in coin.

Continuation: Wrapped in the long bundle is an engro merchant by the name of Tristram. He and his bodyguards were ambushed while making a routine trade visit to a village on the outskirts of the wood. The guards put up a stiff resistance and were slain, but Tristram was captured. The cultists plan to have him converted and, if successful, start a new branch of the cult in his home town, the bustling city of Drakeport. Tristram is paralyzed. He awakens with a successful Healing roll, the use of purgative herbs, or 2d6 hours of patience.

On awakening, the engro is naturally suspicious of the party, though showing him the dead cultists quickly calms his fears. He offers the party 500 gold scields if they tell him the way out of the forest and 2,000 gs if they actually escort him to civilization (Rushton is the nearest settlement). Both payments are taken from the cultists’ booty, which is actually Tristram’s personal coin. Agreeing to take him to Rushton earns the party both the gold and a Connection Edge.

Should the party decide to keep the gold and charge

KNOCKBACK

These rules are taken from the *Hellfrost Bestiary*.

The physical attacks of large creatures can knock over smaller foes. In order to cause knockback, the attacker must make a successful Fighting attack. The blow does not have to cause damage, however. The victim cannot avoid this—no human can hope to remain standing after being on the receiving end of a frost giant’s colossal war axe.

An opponent who is knocked back into a relatively solid object (hay bales and glass windows, for instance, are not solid) is automatically Shaken. This is treated as a separate attack, and thus a foe Shaken by an attack who is then knocked back into a solid object, suffers the effects of successive Shaken results. Opponents may try to Soak any initial damage from the attack or spend bennies to remove the Shaken condition *before* the knockback is applied.

- If a creature is 2 or 3 Sizes larger than its opponent, the victim is knocked back 1" and falls prone.
- If a creature is 4 to 7 Sizes larger than its opponent, the victim is knocked back 1d4" and falls prone.
- If a creature is 8 to 11 Sizes larger than its opponent, the victim is knocked back 1d6" and falls prone.
- If a creature is 12 or more Sizes larger than its opponent, the victim is knocked back 1d10" and falls prone.

extra, the frustrated engro sets off on his own. Whether or not he ever clears the dark boughs is left to the GM to decide.

ENCOUNTER #2: BIG SPIDERS

Sooner or later, the heroes reach an area of forest swathed in dense webs. No matter which route they take, they find their path blocked by webs. If they wish to proceed, the party must pass through them. The cultists are permitted through only because Arachni wills it, and the giant spiders have no wish to offend her in her role of high priestess.

Terrain: The webs run from the ground to the upper branches of the trees some 10" overhead. The only way past them is to fly or cut a gap.

Each 1" section has Toughness 8, but can only be severed by slashing weapons, such as swords, or fire/coldfire. A roll of 1 on a Fighting die (regardless of Wild Die) while cutting a web, indicates the attacker’s melee weapon has stuck to the web. It requires a Strength roll as an action to free the weapon. While the webs burn, they are not flammable. Fire or coldfire spells scorch away an area equal to the spell’s area of effect (assume a 1" square for *bolt*) but the fire does not spread.

A hero who walks or is knocked back into a web becomes entangled. He must make an Agility or Strength

HELLFROST ADVENTURE #10

RETREAT!

Should the party withdraw from the caverns without having killed Arachni, she realizes she seriously underestimated the heroes' resolve. Within a few hours she summons spiders and cultists from the surrounding woods and organizes a large raid on the village. Extermination of the humans is now her top priority (she can restart her cult later in a new settlement).

Unless the secret door in the palisade has been discovered and blocked, the spiders and cultists sneak through. Otherwise, they are forced to climb the palisade at that point. The fence is 2" high. Crossing it counts as part of the spider's regular movement. The cultists have consumed their potions of *wall walker* before reaching the palisade, and can thus scramble over as well.

Aiding the heroes in the defense of the village is the ridder and a number of villagers, men and women, all equipped as militia. With no orders for such an occasion, any cultists remaining in the village do not act to help or hinder either side.

🕒 **Cultist Priest (1):** See page 24, except the priest is a Wild Card.

🕒 **Elite Cultists (1 per hero):** See page 24.

🕒 **Typical Cultists (2 per hero):** See page 24.

🕒 **Leaping Spiders (1 per 2 heroes):** See page 24.

🕒 **Sword Spiders (2 per hero):** See page 24.

🕒 **Web Spiders (1 per 2 heroes):** See page 24.

🕒 **Ridder Haksuni** See page 21.

🕒 **Village Militia (4 per hero):** See page 22.

roll at -2 as an action to escape. Until he does, all physical actions are at -4.

The trees provide Cover to characters hiding behind them and block line of sight. Treat areas of vegetation as difficult ground.

Lighting is Dim (-1) beneath the dark canopy.

Monsters: The webs are home to an enormous blade spider and her young. The hairy fiends lurk high in the canopy, concealed by the dense foliage. Completely stationary and concealed by branches and leaves, they cannot be detected from the ground without the use of magic (such as *detect giant spiders*).

🕒 **Large Blade Spider (1):** As a blade spider (page 24), except this fiend is a Wild Card, has Size +4, the Large special ability, and Toughness 10.

🕒 **Blade Spiders (1 per hero):** See page 24.

Tactics: The spiders drop down from their positions and attack the party if any web is touched. Blade spiders are pack hunters and possess enough intelligence to Gang Up on foes. If the large spider is reduced to three wounds, she uses the Defend maneuver to retreat from combat and move vertically up a web.

CAVERNS OVERVIEW

Each cavern is connected by one or more natural tunnels, which twist and turn through the surrounding rock. The overview map is a guide to the overall layout and is not accurately scaled. The combat maps detail only the caverns where action occurs, not each individual section of tunnel, some of which run for hundreds of yards. Moving between two caverns involves walking over uneven floor and squeezing through tight spaces. It takes 1d6 x 10 minutes per tunnel traversed.

Should a wandering monster be encountered, assume a tunnel varies between one and two game inches wide and runs straight for no more than 2d6" before it bends.

Except for Arachni's lair (see page 20), the caverns are pitch black (-4). The only sounds are distant echoes—the drip of water, scuttling in the dark, small stones bouncing around, the occasional clicking of the mandibles of an unseen spider, and such. The sounds are distorted by distance and bouncing through multiple tunnels. This prevents the party from identifying the direction of the source.

WANDERING MONSTERS

While many of the inhabitants live in lairs and let prey come to them, others are more active. For each hour spent in the caves draw a card from the action deck. A royal card (Jack through Ace) indicates an encounter. On a Joker, the party encounters two creatures at once. Roll a d20 and consult the table below.

Since the spiders are quite stealthy and do not need light to hunt, it is very unlikely the party will ever be able to catch them unawares. Cultists, however, have to use torches to light their passage. Artificial sources of illumination can be detected at ten times the area they illuminate in a cavern and half that in a tunnel.

d20	Encounter
1-3	1d4 leaping spiders (see page 24).
4-6	1d4 blade spiders (see page 24).
7-10	1d6 typical cultists (page 24) led by an elite cultists (page 24).
11-14	1d6 typical cultists (page 24) led by a cultist paladin/priest (page 23).
15-17	1d4 paralysis spiders (see page 24)
18-19	1d2 poison spiders (see page 24).
20	Medium Burst Template venomous spider swarm (see page 25).

1) ENTRANCE CHAMBER

Water drips steadily down the walls of this cavern, forming pools in depressions in the uneven ground. Scorched patches of rock encircled by stones indicate where fires have been lit in the cave mouth in the past. What fate befell those who sought shelter in this of all caves? Tiny

WEB OF DECEIT

spiders, red, black, and white, crawl across the rock in search of their next meal. At the far end, two narrow tunnels lead off into thick darkness.

The spiders are harmless and serve only to indicate to the heroes that they have reached the right spot. The fires are indeed campfires left by successive travelers seeking shelter in the caves. Many never left, and their bones lie deeper within the network of caves. A lucky few were never troubled by the spiders and left none the wiser to the horrors lurking in the darkness.

2) TANGLE OF WEBS

Tall columns, formed where stalagmites and stalactites have joined, dot the cavern. Stretched between them at seemingly random intervals are lattices of thick web. The desiccated corpses of rats and large insects hang lifelessly from the webs, dark specks upon the silky gray-white. Tangled toward the center of the thick webbing and scattered across the ground are larger, easily recognizable bones and skulls.

Heroes who look up realize the ceiling 8" above them is completely covered in webs. Dark shapes seem to move among the webs, though the character cannot be sure the movement isn't a trick of the light.

The shadows lurking in the webs are not all spiders—some are just tricks of light. In order to even have a chance at harming a spider the character must nominate one of the squares in which they lurk. Any attacks suffer a -4 Cover penalty. The webs provide the spider's with +2 Armor.

The larger bones are predominately those of goblins, humans, and elves. The spiders that dwell here have picked the bones clean of flesh.

Terrain: Each 1" section has Toughness 8, but can only be severed by slashing weapons, such as swords, or fire/coldfire. A roll of 1 on a Fighting die (regardless of Wild Die) while cutting a web, indicates the attacker's melee weapon has stuck to the web. It requires a Strength roll as an action to free the weapon. While the webs burn, they are not flammable. Fire or coldfire spells scorch away an area equal to the spell's area of effect (assume a 1" square for *bol*) but the fire does not spread.

A hero who walks or is knocked back into a web becomes entangled. He must make an Agility or Strength

roll at -2 as an action to escape. Until he does, all physical actions are at -4.

The columns provide Cover to characters hiding behind them and block line of sight.

Monsters: Lurking high in the ceiling is a number of web-shooting spiders. Sickly gray in color, they blend in with their webs. This cave is off the main track through to Arachni's lair, and the spiders are allowed to devour anything foolish enough to enter. Every few weeks, a squad of cultists scours the webs for anything of value carried by victims.

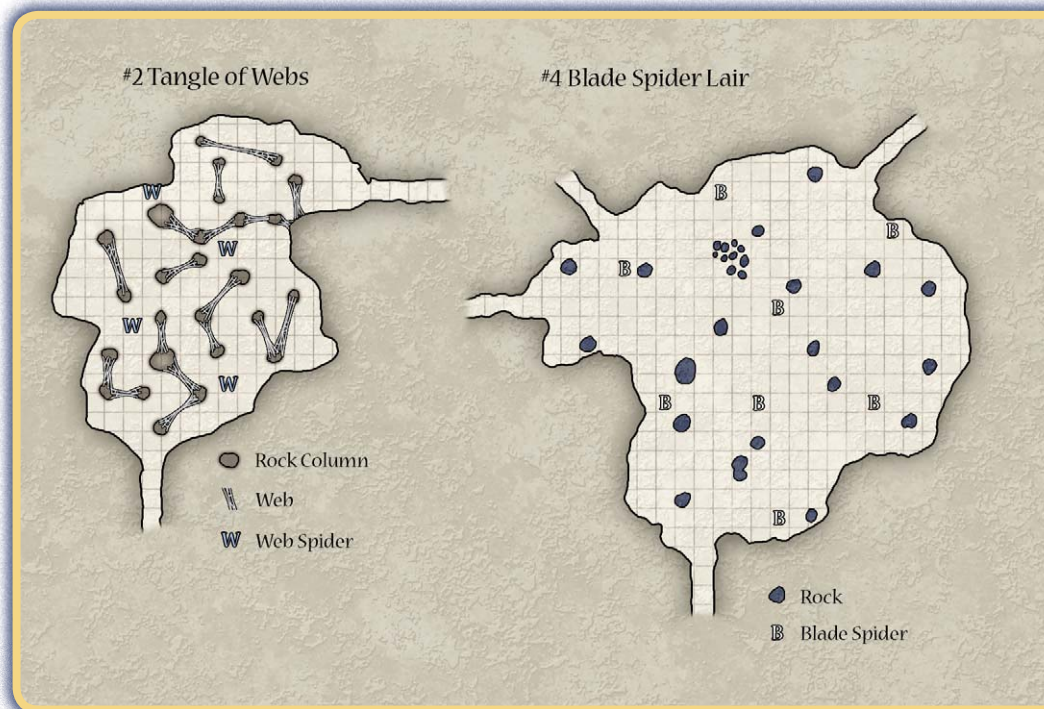
M Web Spider (1 per hero): See page 24.

Tactics: Although alerted to the heroes' presence, the spiders remain dormant until a web is touched or the party reaches the spot marked X on the map. At this point they lower themselves from the ceiling at the indicated positions on strands of silk and attack. (The GM should create more starting points if the party comprises more than four heroes). Check for Surprise—the party may know an attack is coming, but not from where.

Quick thinking heroes who avoid Surprise may try to sever a spider's rappel line before the beast hits the floor. The strands are very small targets (-4 to attack rolls) and Toughness 6. A spider that loses its line falls 4" (20 feet for convenience). If the spider is adjacent to a web marked on the map, it is allowed an Agility roll at -2 to catch itself and break its fall. If the roll fails or no web is nearby the creature suffers falling damage as normal.

The spiders launch webs at the nearest targets. Only when a victim is ensnared do they close in to melee and begin biting.

Continuation: Should their prey flee, the spiders give chase. Given the tunnels do not allow for instant



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movement between chambers, the action occurs in the narrow tunnels. The heroes suffer a -1 penalty to their Agility rolls. Once the party moves more than ten Range Increments ahead of the spiders, the beasts give up the hunt and return to their webs, though in different positions than before.

3) EMPTY CAVERNS

Many nooks and crannies line the walls of this cavern. Small pools of still water reflect your lanterns and cast flickering waves of light on the walls. A few white bones, long picked clean of skin and tissue, lie discarded.

There is nothing of interest to the party in this cavern, though it is a relatively safe place to rest up for a short while. Common Knowledge identifies the bones as a mixture of animal and humanoid. The bones are many months old.

4) BLADE SPIDER LAIR

Small black rocks and old skeletons lie on the ground of this large cavern. The walls are of dark stone, down which water trickles. High above, stalactites hang like gigantic spears.

As with other spider-infested caves, the cultists make regular checks for valuables carried by prey. To that effect, none of the skeletons have anything of value. Most have been here long enough for molds to begin growing on the bones.

Terrain: The black stones are only a few feet high and thus provide no Cover unless a hero is prone behind them (+4 Armor). They do not block line of sight, but passage through a square containing one is difficult ground.

Monsters: All is not as it seems in this chamber! Several of the black "stones" are in fact dozing blade spiders. They sleep with their legs tucked underneath their bodies.

Ⓜ **Blade Spider (2 per hero):** See page 24.

Tactics: The spiders remain asleep unless one is prodded or a living creature moves adjacent. At that time the spider rises up with a terrible screech! Check for Surprise.

Blade spiders attack by rearing up on their hind legs and using their front legs to impale their prey. They hunt in packs and are smart enough to employ deliberate Gang Up tactics. While they have no concept of magic, they quickly switch targets to whoever is causing them the most damage, whether this be a mage wielding *blast* spells or the humanoid swinging a deadly weapon.

5) A HOST OF SPIDERS

Numerous puddles of dark, still water sit in depressions on the uneven floor. Between them stand tall stalagmites, glittering with moisture. Cracks and holes, as yet devoid of water, dot the floor.

The holes and cracks lead to a chamber directly beneath this one. Peering into the holes requires a hero to put his eye directly over a hole. Beneath can be seen a glittering, writhing, black carpet. A Notice roll is required to deduce the true nature of the carpet—a host of tiny spiders! The viewer must make a Guts roll to avoid Fear if he works this out.

Terrain: The small pools are deep enough to count as difficult ground except to the swarms, which are light enough to cross the surface unimpaired.

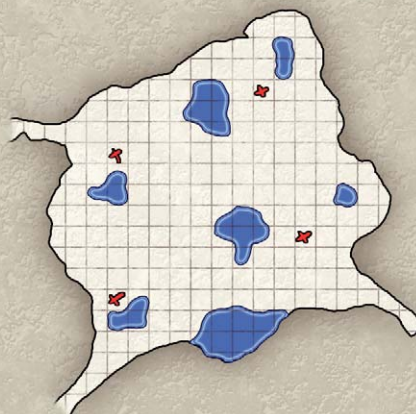
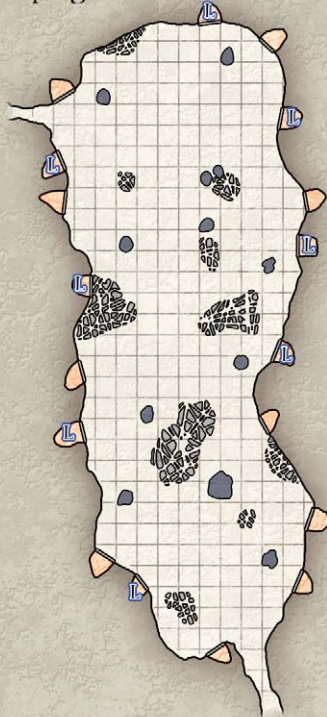
Monsters: The "carpet" comprises thousands of tiny but vicious spiders. They are in the lower cave and venture above only to hunt en masse.

Ⓜ **Venomous Spider Swarm, Small (1 per hero):** See page 24.

Tactics: A single swarm emerges

#7 Leaping Death

#5 Host of Spiders



-  Leaping Spider
-  Boulder
-  Debris
-  Spider Cave

 Pool

from each of the four points marked X on the map as soon as the party reaches the center of the cavern. The swarms try to converge as quickly as possible, attacking everything in their path. If two Small Burst Template swarms overlap, they form into a single Medium Burst Template Swarm, automatically. The addition of a third Small swarm forms a Large Burst Template swarm. If two Medium Burst Template swarms converge, or a fourth Small swarm joins with a Large swarm, then the resultant swarm fills a Large Burst Template and can take *two* wounds before it shrinks again.

6) AN UNWHOLESOME LARDER

Dozens of large bundles, each around six feet long, hang from thick strands attached to the ceiling. The bundles sway gently in the breeze, like grisly, silent wind chimes. Several are cut open, though the contents cannot be seen without closer inspection.

The bundles are corpses wrapped in cobwebs. These are the mortal remains of the unfortunate souls who resisted Arachni's venom or innocent travelers captured by spiders. The chamber is a larder, where corpses are stored until the spiders desire a wholesome snack.

None of the corpses have anything of value. The cultists routinely cut open fresh bundles containing travelers and loot the bodies for valuables.

Any heroes kidnapped by the cult and dragged into the lair are suspended here. They are kept paralyzed by concentrated doses of spider venom injected into their system at regular intervals, but can be revived with a successful Healing roll. Alternatively, they recover naturally in 2d4 hours.

7) LEAPING DEATH

The light from your lanterns fail to find the ceiling of this vast cavern. All up the walls, from ground level as far as you can see, are many cave mouths, each a dark, gaping hole in the rock. A series of bluffs lead upward toward the rear of the cavern. A waft of cool air, tainted by the faint stench of decay, blows from a pair of tunnel entrances in the north of the cavern.

Most of the caves go back only a few yards. A small few run much further, though eventually they all come to dead ends. Many are littered with bones, though, as with other caves, the cultists make periodic sweeps to retrieve items of value. Fortunately, their last search was several weeks ago.

Terrain: The walls of the cavern are almost vertical and have virtually no handholds. Naturally, this doesn't concern the spiders much. The boulders block line of sight and can be used for Cover (ignore the standard

Armor rules—these things are big). The debris is difficult ground. The ceiling is 24" high.

Monsters: Lurking in some of the caverns are leaping spiders. Wary of living at ground level, where they might fall prey to other species of spiders or intruding predators, the spiders live only in the higher caves.

M Leaping Spiders (2 per hero): See page 24.

Tactics: The trapdoor spiders recognize the cultists on sight (by their unique armor) and do not (generally) attack, however other intruders are fair game.

The spiders lurk in their caves, patiently waiting for their latest meal to come within range. As soon as a party member moves within 4" of an occupied cave, all the spiders leap out at the closest target. Check for Surprise.

The spiders marked on the map indicate vertical distance along the cavern, not the height of their lairs. The occupied caves are 1d8" above the ground. Roll for each spider and subtract this from the distance it leaps on the first round. For instance, if a cave is 6" above the ground the spider can leap no further than 2" horizontally from its lair.

Treasure: The spiders' lairs are full of bones, many belonging to humanoid races. For each hour of searching the small caves, the party may make a Cooperative Notice roll. With success, they locate 1d10 x 10 gs worth of coins and jewelry. A maximum of 200 gs worth of treasure can be collected. On a raise, the party discovers a relic not yet found by the cultists or missed among the bones. Roll a d4 for each raise scored. Reroll duplicate results.

d4 Relic

- 1 *Small Gourd of Red Wine:* This is a *healing* potion. It heals two wounds when imbibed.
- 2 *Dried Frog Skin:* Counts as *leaping* cast with a success. To function, it must be eaten.
- 3 *Icy Cold Metal Flask:* Contained within is what appears to be an oily, icy slush. When poured over the body, an *aura* spell activates with a cold trapping.
- 4 *Vial of Oil Engraved with Tiw's Symbol:* Smeared on a weapon, the oil imbues it with *smite* cast with a success.

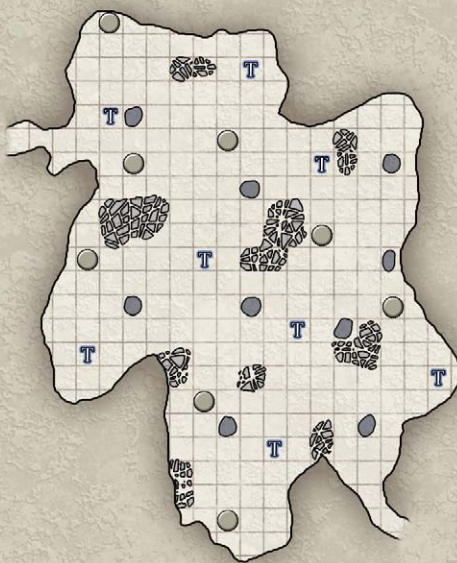
8) DON'T OPEN THAT TRAPDOOR!

The floor of this cavern is quite smooth, perhaps created eons ago by a quirk of nature or the passage of an ancient river. Large, flat stones dot the ground at irregular intervals. The air is thick with the smell of death, though the source is not obvious.

This cavern is greatly feared by the cultists and other species of spiders, for it is home to a number of trapdoor spiders. These stealthy predators attack anything they sense close to their homes, leaping out and biting first and then worrying about whether the potential meal is actually edible later.

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#8 Don't Open That Trapdoor



● Boulder 🍁 Debris ○ Slab T Trapdoor Spider

Terrain: The boulders block line of sight and can be used for Cover (ignore the standard Armor rules—these things are big). The debris is difficult ground. The ceiling is 12" high.

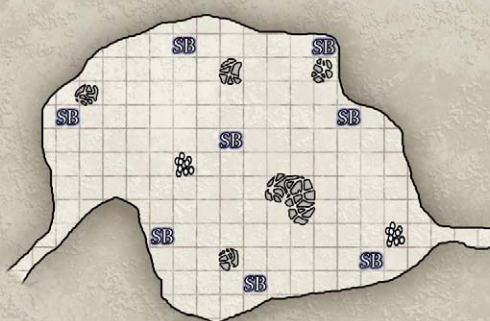
The stone slabs are actually doors to the spider's lairs. The stones can be lifted with a successful Strength roll as an action. Because of the way they are placed, the spiders can shove them aside from within the burrow as a free action.

Monsters: Each spider has its own territory around its lair and tolerates nothing entering, save for their queen. Even the cultists are unable to pass through here safely, and thus they never use this cavern to reach deeper parts of the complex.

🕸 **Trapdoor Spiders (2 per hero):** See page 24.

Tactics: Trapdoor spiders are ambush predators. Rather than engage in prolonged melee they burst out from their hidden lairs when anything moves within 3", make a melee attack, and then retreat. The latter counts

#12 Hatchery



🍁 Discarded Egg Sacs
SB Small Blade Spider

as Withdrawing from Melee only if the victim is not Surprised. All the spiders begin on Hold.

Treasure: With the cultists unable to search the nests, the trapdoor spiders have accumulated a few baubles from unwary victims who stumbled into the cavern. Each occupied nest contains 1d10 x 100 gs worth of assorted coins, jewelry, gems, and other easily sellable goods, plus 1d6 x 200 gs in the form of mundane equipment (nothing from the unusual items list). Unoccupied nests contain nothing of value.

For ease, assume the latter weighs 5 pounds per 200 gs worth. No specific lists are provided. The GM shouldn't worry about the specifics—treat the objects as miscellaneous goods, and assume anything within reason the party wants is there (such as replacement arrows or a chain hauberk, cost permitting).

The miscellaneous goods are valued at their *cost* price, not the resale value (which is typically a quarter to

one-half the full value). For instance, if a cache comes to 400 gs, a hero might declare he has discovered a great sword. Should he come to sell it, however, he'll get 100 gs, or 200 gs if he's lucky.

In addition, the GM should draw a card from the action deck for each lair searched. On a royal card, the hero has discovered something of interest. Check the value and suit from the table below. Shuffle the deck after each draw.

Spell names indicate an alchemical device. Unless otherwise indicated, the spells were cast with a standard success. The exact nature of the enchanted object is left to the GM to describe.

9) TIGHT SQUEEZE

This small chamber has two exits. One is a large tunnel running roughly in an easterly direction.

Value/Suit	Club	Diamond	Heart	Spade
Jack	herbal remedy: healing	Healer's Bag	<i>succor</i>	<i>smite</i>
Queen	herbal remedy: antitoxin	Norn Charm	<i>healing</i>	<i>armor</i>
King	herbal remedy: numbing	Tome of Learning*	<i>healing</i> (raise)	<i>deflection</i>
Ace	herbal remedy: berserk	Tome of Lore +1**	<i>greater healing</i>	<i>aura</i>
Joker	The hero has unearthed a true relic! The object grants a +1 bonus to a single skill of the GM's choice. Weapons apply the bonus to attack <i>and</i> damage rolls. Examples include <i>thieves' picks</i> (Lockpicking), a +1 <i>weapon</i> (Fighting, Shooting, or Throwing), <i>magic rope</i> (Climbing), or <i>knight's spurs</i> (Riding).			
	* The GM should determine the type using the table in the Hellfrost Player's Guide and then pick a single Novice spell from the appropriate spell list.			
	** On a subject of the GM's choosing.			

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The other is a narrow crawlspace that seems to descend deeper into the bowels of the earth.

The narrow tunnel leads directly to Arachni's lair, but is fraught with danger. It requires travelers to crawl on their bellies and in places is barely 6" (half a foot) high. Heroes wishing to take this treacherous route must make an Agility roll. Encumbrance penalties apply as normal.

In addition, each point of armor (ignoring any magical bonuses) gives a -1 penalty to the roll. For instance, wearing a chain hauberk (+2 Armor) incurs a -2 penalty. Using a dose of whale blubber grants a +1 bonus. Heroes with the Acrobat Edge are assumed to be naturally supple and gain the Edge's +2 bonus to their Agility roll. Furthermore, Obese characters and Brawny heroes who opted for a muscular physique, suffer a -2 penalty. Small adventurers gain a +1 bonus as it is easier for them to wriggle through. Creatures of Size +2 or larger cannot traverse the tunnel unless they are serpentine.

Traversing this tunnel takes 1d6 x 30 minutes. Failure means the hero gets stuck halfway down and cannot progress further. He must withdraw and use the larger tunnel. A critical failure means the spelunker has gotten wedged tight and can move neither forward nor backward. He must make a second Agility roll, with all the modifiers above. Each roll, whether successful or not, inflicts a level of Fatigue from Bumps and Bruises (to a maximum of Exhausted). One hero *behind* the stuck character may assist with a Cooperative roll using Strength to pull his comrade free.

Any sound in the tunnel echoes down to Arachni's lair, putting her and her minions on their guard for intruders. Heroes who get stuck or who have to withdraw are deemed to make enough noise to alert the spider queen.

Finally, any hero successfully making the journey to the far end must make a Vigor roll to avoid suffering a level of Fatigue from Bumps and Bruises.

There is one final problem heroes who use this route have to contend with if they have removed their armor—their journey takes them straight into Arachni's lair and they are unarmored!

10) REFRESHING WATER

The air in this chamber is cool, a refreshing change from the dank air of the other caves. A waterfall cascades down from high above, splashing into a crystal clear pool.

The water is extremely refreshing. Any hero who drinks a pint automatically recovers one level of Fatigue, regardless of the source. Unfortunately, it spoils quickly if removed; the effects last just a single day.

11) TRICK OF NATURE

A number of large storm lanterns bang from the

ceiling, casting an orange glow around the entire cave. Halfway across, the ground is rent by a wide chasm.

The chasm, which is six yards (3") across, is in fact an optical illusion. Staring into the void, the heroes appear to see a vertical drop of some 100 feet. In fact, this is a reflection of a chimney in the ceiling cast into a perfectly still pool. The "chasm" is only a few inches deep. A hero throwing a stone into it quickly realizes its true nature. The storm lanterns are shuttered so as to avoid casting a direct reflection on the still water, and instead highlight the ceiling.

12) HATCHERY

Clinging to the walls is a great number of red, slimy sacs. Each pulsates gently, as if something stirs within. Suddenly a number of the sacs split open, disgorging mucus-covered spiders about the size of a dog. Newly hatched and hungry, the spiders scuttle toward their first meal—you!

This is the queen's hatchery. When she spawns an egg sac, the globular sac is carried here and fastened to the walls. Each sac contains hundreds of young, but only one will hatch, having eaten its siblings to ensure its survival.

Terrain: Old egg sacs lie on the floor. They remain slimy long after being discarded and count as difficult ground. In addition, any hero who runs across a patch and rolls a 1 on his running die slips and falls prone.

Monsters: The bloated egg sacs contain a host of young blade spiders. The vile creatures are hungry for fresh meat.

Ⓜ **Small Blade Spiders (2 per hero):** See page 24.

13) THE HEART OF THE WEB

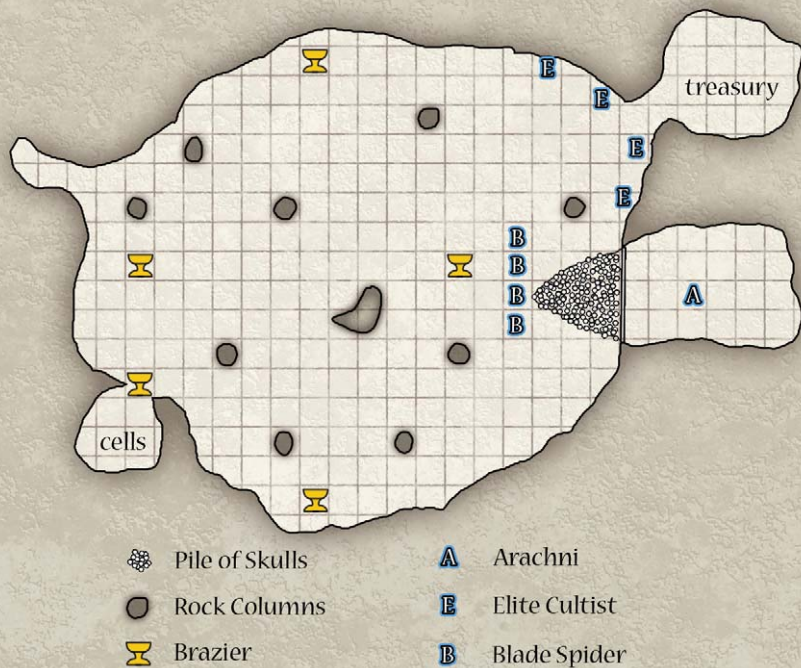
The heroes can enter this room either through the narrow tunnel or via the hatchery. Remember, any heroes who opted to take the crawlspace and stripped off their armor do not have time to don it before the attack begins.

Four huge braziers illuminate this vaulted cavern. Immense columns of natural rock stretch up into the darkness. At the far end is a large cave entrance. A cascade of skulls spills out from the dark opening like a macabre, frozen waterfall. Scuttling around the base of the skulls are four giant spiders. Their bony forelimbs click on the stone as they move. Flanking the entrance to a smaller cave mouth are a handful of humans, each holding spiked mauls.

A female voice calls out from somewhere unseen. "We have visitors, my children," it purrs. "Show

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#13 The Heart of the Web



them what happens to unwanted guests." With that, the spiders and cultists charge.

Arachni's lair consists of the central cavern and three smaller areas. The first smaller area is a makeshift prison, blocked by a huge stone. Within are four members of the same family kidnapped from a nearby stead. All are suffering malnutrition but are otherwise unharmed. The second chamber is Arachni's personal quarters. Bedecked in black silk cushions, it has little of value. Finally there is the treasury. The contents are detailed below.

Terrain: The braziers can be tipped over with a Strength roll as an action. The character places a Small Burst Template touching the square containing the brazier in any direction he chooses. Anything in the template suffers 2d10 damage and has a chance of catching fire.

The columns block line of sight and provide Cover (Armor +8). Movement through the pile of skulls is difficult ground.

Moving the giant boulder blocking the prison requires a Strength roll at -4 as an action. Up to four heroes may Cooperate on this task.

Monsters: This is the lair of Arachni, the spider queen, and her minions. The great queen lurks in the cave above the pile of skulls. Flanking the altar are the queen's bodyguards—four blade spiders of unusual size. Flanking the entrance from the hatchery cave are four elite cultists, their weapons drawn and ready for action.

Only if the heroes are having an easy time does the

giant blade spider appear. The fight should be exciting and tense, a memorable occasion the survivors can justly boast of later, not a total massacre. It emerges from one of the side caves at a time the GM deems suitably dramatic.

Ⓜ **Arachni the Spider Queen:** See page 22.

Ⓜ **Giant Blade Spider (1 per hero):** As a regular blade spider (see page 24) except it is Size +8. It has the Huge special ability and Toughness 14.

Ⓜ **Blade Spider (1 per hero):** As a regular blade spider (see page 24) except they are Size +2. Each has Toughness 8.

Ⓜ **Elite Cultists (1 per hero):** See page 24.

Tactics: The blade spider and cultists immediately move to engage the heroes. While the spiders head for the nearest target, the cultists single out obvious spellcasters and heroes wearing heavy armor, since these are the most obvious threats to the queen.

Arachni's typical tactics are detailed below. However, the queen is intelligent and changes her plans to best suit the current situation. For instance, if a hero rushes into melee, the queen might respond with a Fighting attack using either her swords or stinger, casting *fear* in an attempt to drive off her assailant, or trying to catch the

hero in a web.

Round 1: Arachni begins the combat by casting *quickness* on herself.

If the spider queen has converted a hero, she calls on him as a free action to turn on his comrades at the start of the fight. The hero is allowed a single Spirit roll opposed by the queen's Spirit to break free of his conditioning. Otherwise, he is her slave for the duration of the combat. Note that this is not the *puppet* spell, and thus cannot be *dispelled* or *negated* and does not count as a Maintained spell.

Round 2: Arachni leaps from her lair. Since this is the first time the heroes see her, they must make Guts rolls to avoid Terror. Read the descriptive text below aloud.

The abomination has the body of a large, six-legged spider and the torso, arms, and head of a female human. Her upper body is covered in glittering black scales. Two of her eyes are human, though four times normal the size. Six smaller black eyes circle her head. Pulsating red sacs grow from her spidery body. Dangling beneath her abdomen is a long, wickedly-sharp stinger.

If she lands within range, she casts a three-segment *barrier* positioned to be adjacent to as many heroes as possible. If the heroes move away from the *barrier* she drops the spell (a free action). Otherwise, she moves as close as possible and hatches an egg sac this round.

Round 3: Arachni unleashes an egg sac containing a venomous spider swarm and fires a web (incurring

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a multi action penalty) at the nearest characters. The swarm scuttles toward the heroes.

Round 4: The queen leaps at the closest hero and attacks with both long swords.

Round 5 onward: Once engaged in melee, she alternates between her stinger and her long swords.

If wounded, she attempts to retreat using the Defend maneuver. Any surviving cultists or blade spiders move to position themselves between their queen and her attackers with the Defend maneuver. Arachni then hatches another egg sac. After this, the queen fires off a *fear* spell, followed by another three-segment *barrier*, this time between her and the heroes.

Treasure: The cult's treasury comprises 4,454 gs in coin and jewelry. It is stored in unlocked chests. Much of it was donated by cultists and giant spiders from throughout Spiderfell Wood. In addition, there are several valuable items. Each is detailed below.

- * A tome of lore +2 concerning Knowledge (Area: Spiderfell Wood). The book is written in Classical Anari. This belonged to a druid who was trying to cleanse the forest of its spider infestation. Unfortunately, he was ambushed and slain by giant spiders.

- * A *Short Sword of Spider Slaying*. This is a relic. The blade glows bright blue when within 12" of a giant spider. When wielded against giant spiders, it inflicts +1d8 damage on a raise instead of the usual +1d6. This also belonged to the druid. The druids in the town of Wald, on the northeast side of Spiderfell Wood, are engaged in a crusade against the giant spiders. They will pay 4,000 gs for this weapon.

- * Ten doses of antitoxin.

- * An alchemical wand imbued with a powerful *bolt* spell. It fires three 3d6 damage *bolts* with a fire trapping. It is engraved with the owner's name—Maegister Arklo. An elementalist who makes a successful Common Knowledge roll at -2 has heard the name before. Arklo was a fire elemental of some renown, famed for his offensive spell casting abilities. He apparently died in an explosion a decade ago, though no remains were ever found.

- * A book of instructions on how to build alchemical devices. It grants a +2 bonus to Knowledge (Alchemy) rolls, but only if the trapping for the spell is fire or heat. It too belonged to Maegister Arklo. The Convocation of Elementarists will pay 2,000 gs for the volume in cash or alchemical devices.

- * Two potions of *healing* cast with a success and one created with a *raise*.

AFTERMATH

With Arachni's death, the spider cult is shattered, though not entirely destroyed. Unless Meredith the herbalist is stopped, she continues feeding the cultists in the village the fungal potions. Once the supply of potion is stopped, the cultists shake off the effects of the venom

in a week. None can recall much except hazy nightmares and vague memories.

Spiderfell Wood becomes only slightly less dangerous, for there are still countless giant spiders and many willing converts to the cult at large. Within a few months a new high priest or priestess will emerge somewhere in the wood to continue the cult's goal. Still, a small victory has been earned, and for that the civilized races should be grateful.

BESTIARY



RIDDER THEINWALD HAKSUNU

Born and raised in Rushton, Ridder Theinwald is a country nobleman through and through. With his village never subjected to bandit or goblin raids, the ridder has largely lived as a country gent, though he possesses rudimentary combat skills. Much of his time is spent indulging in food and drink, and his weight has suffered terribly as a result.

Theinwald may not be in the upper echelons of Midmark's nobility, but he acts like he's a king, above mingling with the commoners. He makes public appearances only a few times a year, and then only at festivals where there is food and mead on offer, leaving the daily affairs to Frederick, his chief servant. However, he is obsequious to any nobles of higher rank in the party, offering them and their "servants" lodgings in his house.

So far Ridder Theinwald has not been targeted—were he to begin acting strangely, his behavior might drive the remaining villagers away, and that would hamper the spider queen's plans.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Riding d6

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 9 (2)

Hindrances: Clueless, Loyal, Obese

Edges: Noble

Languages: Anari, Saxa, Trader

Gear: Chain shirt (+2), medium shield (+1 Parry), battle axe (Str+d8), fine clothes



FREDERICK THE SERVANT

Frederick has served the ridder for many years. Although technically a servant, he serves as his master's chief counsel. He is naturally cautious and clear-headed, something the ridder values highly. Frederick is also the "face" of the household, dealing with routine village matters that don't require the noble's immediate attention. He is well-liked in the village. Although a cultist, Frederick's temperament has not changed much. He remains polite and attentive to his duties.

Frederick is not a fighter—he's a leader of men. Cor-

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nered alone he is no match for the party, but if he is able to lead cultists against them, the party will find him a dangerous opponent.

Unlike the other cultists, Frederick owns no special gear. Should his rooms be searched, there is nothing to link him to the cult. His alchemical devices were bought and paid for by the ridder so as to allow speedy communication with neighboring villages in emergencies.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d6, Healing d6, Knowledge (Heraldry) d8, Notice d10, Persuasion d8, Riding d8, Streetwise d10

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Anemic, Cautious, Loyal (the cult)

Edges: Charismatic, Command, fervor, Hold the Line, Level Headed

Languages: Anari, Orcish, Saxa, Trader

Gear: Leather shirt (+1), short sword (Str+d6)

Alchemical Devices: Four imbued scrolls with *voice on the wind* (100 miles range).



JOXA LONERIDER

Many citizens imagine all druids as wearing long robes and carrying staves. Joxa is a militant druid, sworn to rid Spiderfell Wood of the nightmarish inhabitants by any means. Part-woodsman, part-investigator, and part-warrior, Joxa has faced poisonous spiders on numerous occasions and lived to tell his tales.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d8, Druidism d8, Fighting d8, Guts d10, Healing d6, Intimidation d8, Investigation d6, Knowledge (Arcana) d8, Knowledge (Spiderfell Wood) d10, Notice d8, Stealth d8+2, Survival d8+2, Tracking d8+2

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8 (2)

Hindrances: Cautious, Code of Honor, Vow (Major: cleanse Spiderfell Wood)

Edges: Arcane Background (Magic), Combat Reflexes, Concentration, Sweep, Woodsman

Languages: Beastspeech, Fey, Saxa, Trader

Powers: *Armor* (bark skin), *bolt* (spectral stag's head), *healing* (use of herbs), *silence*, *smite* (sharpens weapon), *voice on the wind* (bird delivers the message), *wilderness step*

Gear: Chain hauberk (+2), medium shield (+1 Parry), long sword (Str+d8), three throwing spears (Range: 3/6/12, Str+d6), six doses of antitoxin.

Alchemical Devices: Four *healing* potions (each cures one wound), two pouches of salt imbued with *warding* (*spiders*) cast with a raise.



FREDA HAPISDOHTOR

Freda was born and raised in Hamna. Argumentative, and prone to temper tantrums, Freda was "promoted" to run the temple in Rushton because it was as far away as

her superiors could send her at the time. A city girl, barely in her late teens, Freda never settled into country living. She also lacks the maturity to be head of a temple.

Always considered an outsider by the locals, she quickly managed to alienate almost the entire population. Only the ridder tolerates her petulant manner, and then only because she is technically the highest ranking cleric in Rushton and therefore one of his advisors.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Faith d8, Fighting d4, Guts d4, Healing d8, Knowledge (Alchemy) d8, Knowledge (Religion) d8, Notice d8, Survival d8

Charisma: -1; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 6

Hindrances: Habit (Minor: argumentative), Stubborn, Vow (Major: vegan, never eats meat or dairy products)

Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles), Hedge Magic

Languages: Anari, Saxa, Trader

Powers: *bolt* (thorns), *entangle* (magical vines), *environmental protection*, *feast* (no meat), *healing*, *sanctuary*, *wilderness step*

Gear: Mace (Str+d6), holy symbol

VILLAGER

Rushton's inhabitants are mainly farmers, though there are a small number of crafters. Unless a citizen has a unique stat block, use this one. Individuals the GM wants to expand into more fleshed out characters can have higher Traits or a few Edges and Hindrances. Don't forget to roll on the Ally Personalities table as well.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d6, Guts d4, Knowledge (one Craft) d6, Notice d6, Throwing d4

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5/6; **Toughness:** 5/6(1)

Hindrances: —

Edges: —

Languages: Anari, Saxa, Trader

Gear: Farming implement (Str+d4 if one-handed or Str+d6 if two-handed). Militia duty: leather (+1), medium shield (+1 Parry), short spear (Str+d6, Reach 1), dagger (Str+d4)



ARACHNI, HIGH PRIESTESS

Whether this abomination was once fully human or not is unknown. If she was once a human, what terrible pact did she make to achieve her current form? The high priestess of the spider cult has the body of a large spider (though with just six legs) and the torso, arms, and head of a female human. Her upper body is covered in glittering black scales. Two of her eyes are human, though four times normal size. Six smaller black eyes circle her head, giving her all-round vision. Pulsating red sacs grow from her spidery body, each containing many hundreds of young spiders.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d8, Vigor d10

Skills: Faith d10, Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d8, Shooting d10, Stealth d10

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 11 (2)

Hindrances: Arrogant, Quirk (refers to humanoids as flies), Ugly (she's part spider), Vengeful (Major)

Edges: Ambidextrous, Arcane Background (Miracles), Command, Fervor, Improved Level Headed, Two-Fisted

Gear: Two long swords (Str+d8)

Powers: *barrier* (wall of spiders; adjacent foes take 2d4 damage per round as per a swarm), *beast friend* (spiders only), *entangle* (webs), *fear* (imaginary spiders burst through victim's flesh), *quickness*, *summon beast* (spiders only)

Special Abilities:

- * **Armor +2:** Tough skin.
- * **Egg Sacs:** Once per round, as an action, Arachni can release a swarm of tiny red spiders from one of the egg sacs clinging to her spidery body. She has a total of four sacs (and replaces one per day). The swarm begins adjacent to her at the start of the next round.
- * **Fear (-2):** Anyone seeing Arachni for the first time must make a Guts roll at -2.
- * **Leaping:** Arachni can move her entire Pace as a leap, thus ignoring intervening difficult ground. She cannot run while in the air, but may run before and/or after a leap.
- * **Size +2:** Arachni's torso is human-sized, but her lower half is that of a bloated spider.
- * **Stinger:** Str+d8, AP 2. She may not use this attack in any round she uses one of her long swords. Anyone Shaken or wounded by the stinger must make a Spirit roll at -2 or be subjected to *puppet* for an entire week. This cannot be *dispelled* or *negated*, but it can be cured with speedy use of *healing*.
- * **Wall Walker:** Arachni may move along any surface at her full Pace. She can also run without penalty, even when hanging upside down.
- * **Webbing:** Arachni can cast webs from her thorax the size of Small Burst Templates. This is a Shooting roll with a range of 3/6/12. Anything in the web must cut or break their way free (Toughness 7). Webbed characters can still fight, but all physical actions are at -4.

SPIDER CULTIST

The spider goddess has many followers among the civilized races. Whether willing volunteers promised power in return for unquestioning servitude, or venom-addled converts, the cultists are fanatical in their praise.

The cultists' gear list assumes they are dressed for battle. Alchemical devices are carried at all times, though the ring is only worn openly around fellow cultists. Those operating in the village are armed as villagers unless the adventure text says otherwise. See the sidebar for notes on unusual gear.

PALADIN OR PRIEST

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d8,

SPIDER CULTIST GEAR

The spider cultists carry an array of gear not commonly available to player characters.

Egg Sacs: Each pulsating red sac contains a Small Burst Template swarm of non-venomous spiders. Range is 2/4/8.

Spiked Weapons: Except for the additional +2 damage these weapons are identical to standard types.

Web Armor: Woven from spider silk, the armor is especially good against piercing weapons, such as arrows, daggers, and spears. Against such weapons it grants +3 Armor, instead of the usual +1. It protects just the torso unless otherwise noted.

Web Nets: Range 2/4/8. When thrown, a web fills a single 1" square. The cultist's Throwing skill roll is opposed by the target's Agility. Success indicates partial restraint. The target suffers a -2 penalty to Pace and skills linked to Agility and Strength. A raise restrains the target fully. He cannot move or use any skills linked to Agility or Strength (Parry drops to 2, but attackers do not gain the Drop).

Each following round, an entangled target may make a Strength or Agility roll to break free. Other characters may also attempt to free the ensnared person by making a Strength roll at -2. The webs only affect a single Small or Medium opponent. Once thrown, a web net cannot be retrieved.

Web Shields: The fronts of these shields are covered in sticky spider web. A Fighting roll of 1 (regardless of Wild Die) indicates the attacker's weapon has stuck to the shield. (A Wild Die success causes damage as normal, but the weapon is still stuck afterward). Pulling the weapon free requires a Strength roll as an action.

Vigor d8

Skills: Faith d8, Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Throwing d8

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (1)/9 (3)

Hindrances: Loyal

Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles), Command, Fanaticism, Level Headed

Powers: *barrier* (wall of spiders; adjacent foes take 2d4 damage per round as per a swarm), *beast friend* (spiders only), *entangle* (webs), *fear* (imaginary spiders burst through victim's flesh), *quickness*, *summon beast* (spiders only)*, *wall walker* (grows spider legs from torso)

Gear: Web armor (+1, +3 vs. piercing weapons), small web shield (+1 Parry), spiked mace (Str+d6+2), 1d4 egg sacs.

Alchemical Devices: Silk ball containing *entangle* (Thrown range 3/6/12), web wand imbued with *bolt* (three bolts, 2d6 damage each; uses Shooting), ring containing a single dose of poison (causes 3d6 damage to

HELLFROST ADVENTURE #10

the drinker and ignores all armor).

* *Only available to Wild Card priests.*

ELITE CULTIST

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d10, Guts d10, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Stealth d6, Throwing d8

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 6 (1)/8 (3)

Hindrances: Loyal

Edges: Combat Reflexes, Improved Sweep

Gear: Web armor (+1, +3 vs. piercing weapons), spiked maul (Str+d8+2, -1 Parry, 2 hands).

Alchemical Devices: Potion of *wall walker*, ring containing a single dose of poison (causes 3d6 damage to the drinker and ignores all armor).

TYPICAL CULTIST

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Throwing d6

Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 6 (1)/8 (3)

Hindrances: Loyal

Edges: —

Gear: Web armor (+1, +3 vs. piercing weapons), small web shield (+1 Parry), spiked mace (Str+d6+2). One in every four cultists carries a single egg sac. Half of the remaining cultists encountered carry a web net hanging from their belt.

Alchemical Devices: Potion of *wall walker*, ring containing a single dose of poison (causes 3d6 damage to the drinker and ignores all armor).

GIANT SPIDER

Giant spiders are typically of roughly equal size to an adult male human, including their legs. However, larger species are known. For each +2 Size, increase the Strength die by one step (above a d12 use d12+1, d12+2, and so on). Spiders of Size +4 are Large, while the monsters of Size +8 and higher are Huge.

All giant spiders share a basic stat block. Specific types of spider have unique special abilities. For instance, a spider listed in the text as a Sword Spider has the Sword ability in addition to Bite and Wall Walker. GMs may also wish to experiment with crossbreeds. A trapdoor spider with poison blades would make a deadly foe.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d6, Intimidation d10, Notice d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d10

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6

Special Abilities:

* **Bite:** Str+d6.

* **Darkvision:** Hairs on the spiders' bodies allow them to sense movement up to 10" away. They ignore all

penalties for dark lighting (or *invisibility*) within this distance.

* **Wall Walker:** A spider may move along any surface at its full Pace. It can also run without penalty, even when hanging upside down.

SPECIFIC TYPES

* **Blade:** Blade spiders are named for the sharp, bony tips on their front pair of legs. These inflict Str+d8 damage. Blade spiders may attack with both forelimbs in the same round, but suffer a -2 penalty to both Fighting rolls. They may not use a blade in any round they bite.

* **Leaping:** This species of giant spiders may move their base Pace while leaping, thus ignoring intervening difficult ground. They may run before and/or after a leap, but not during. Leaping spiders subtract their Pace when jumping down from heights.

* **Paralysis (-4):** Victims Shaken or wounded by a spider's bite must make a Vigor roll at -4 or be paralyzed for 2d6 rounds. Victims fall prone.

* **Poison (-2):** Victims Shaken or wounded by a spider's bite must make a Vigor roll at -2 or suffer an automatic wound. This counts as a separate attack for the purposes of Soaking.

* **Trapdoor:** Trapdoor spiders are ambush predators. They live in burrows with a concealed entrance. When prey passes within 3", they lunge to attack. When they attack from hiding, victims must make a Notice roll opposed by the spider's Stealth. If the creature wins, it gains +2 to attack and damage that round, +4 with a raise.

* **Web:** These spiders can cast webs from their thorax that are the size of Small Burst Templates. This is a Shooting roll with Range 3/6/12. Anything in the web must cut or break their way free (Toughness 7). Webbed characters can still fight, but all physical actions are at -4.

SMALL BLADE SPIDER

These spiders are newly hatched. They have lower attributes than their adult brethren and are not quite as deadly.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d8, Stealth d10

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 4

Special Abilities:

* **Bite:** Str+d4.

* **Blade:** Str+d4 damage. Blade spiders may attack with both forelimbs in that same round, but suffer a -2 penalty to both Fighting rolls. They may not use a blade in any round they bite.

* **Darkvision:** Hairs on the spiders' bodies allow them to sense movement up to 10" away. They ignore all penalties for dark lighting (or *invisibility*) within this

distance.

- * **Size -1:** These spiders are the same size as a dog.
- * **Wall Walker:** A spider may move along any surface at its full Pace. It can also run without penalty, even when hanging upside down.

SPIDER SWARM

Spider swarms have variable Toughness based on their size, though they retain the d10 Vigor die. The Toughness entry represents Small, Medium, and Large Burst Template swarms respectively.

Note: Spider cultists are not immune to the effects of spider swarms. However, such swarms avoid unnecessarily catching cultists in their template. If a swarm can take an alternate route to a target and still attack that round it does so. Otherwise, it takes the shortest route—cultists can always be replaced.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d12, Strength d8, Vigor d10

Skills: Notice d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5/6/7

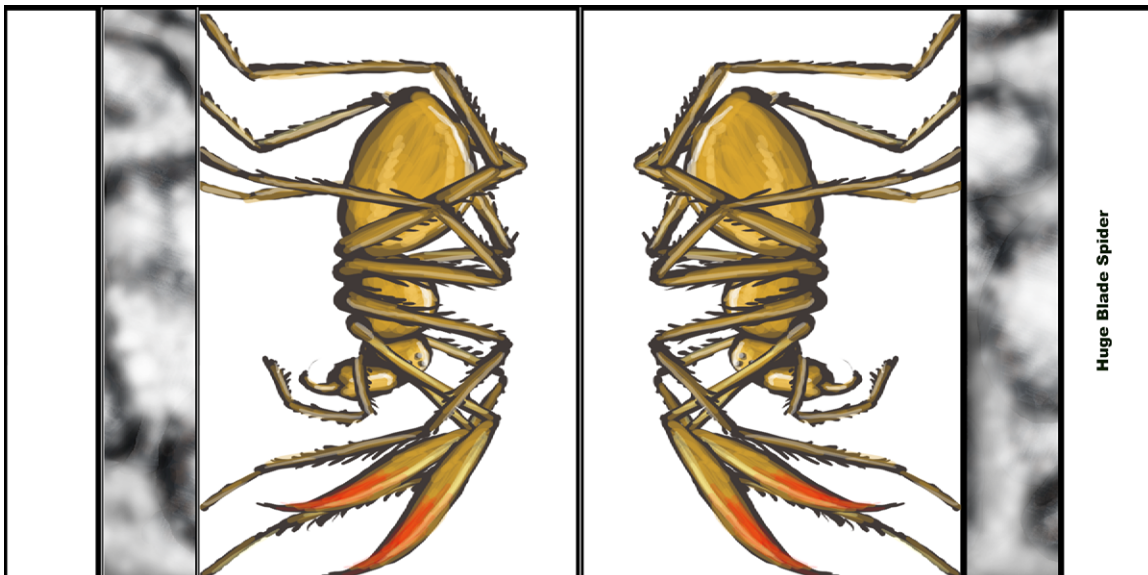
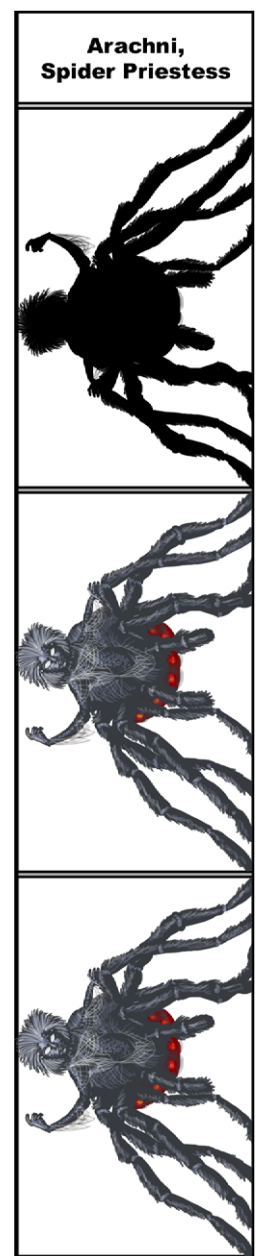
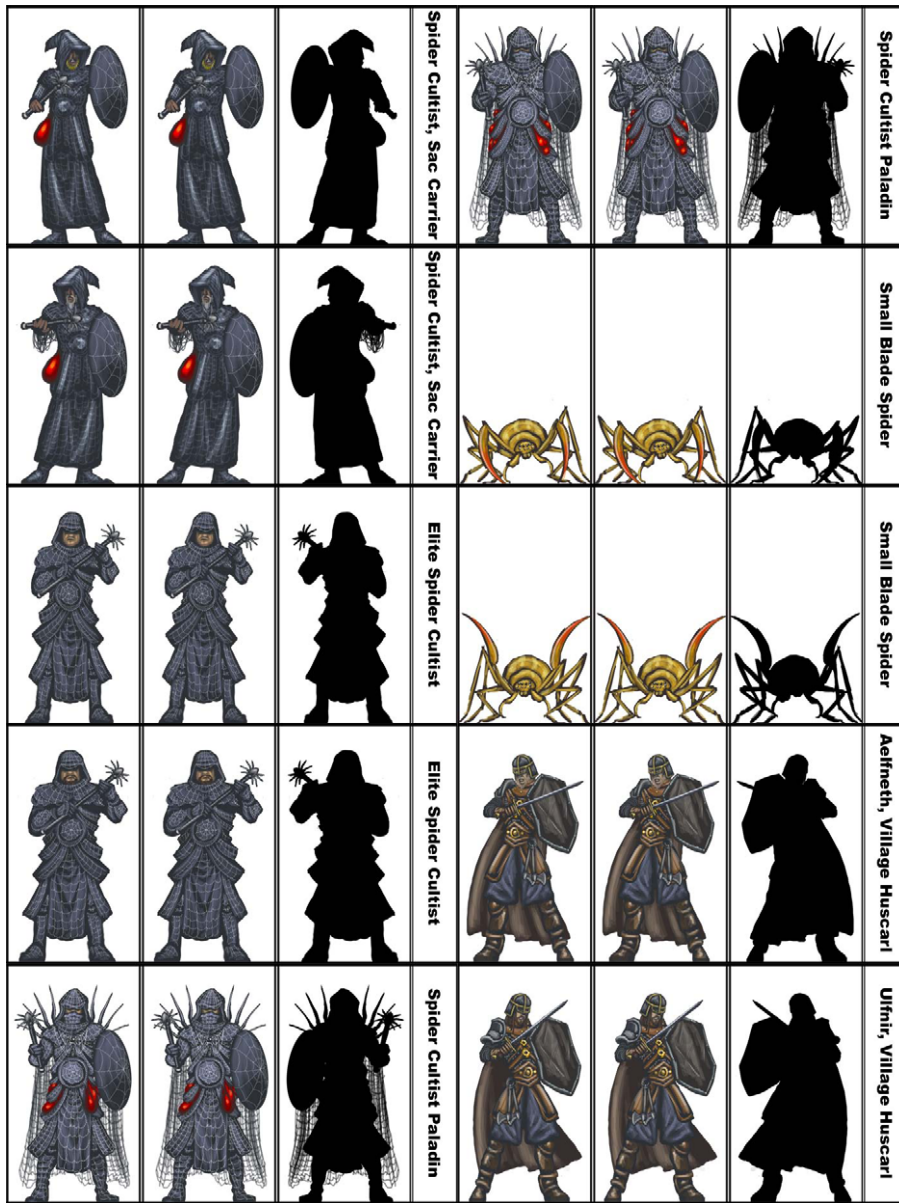
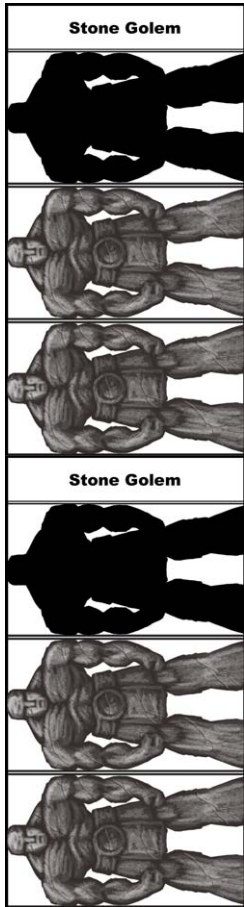
Special Abilities:

- * **Binding Webs:** Spider swarms coat their victims in sticky webs. A non-spider creature that begins its turn in or enters the swarm's template has its base Pace

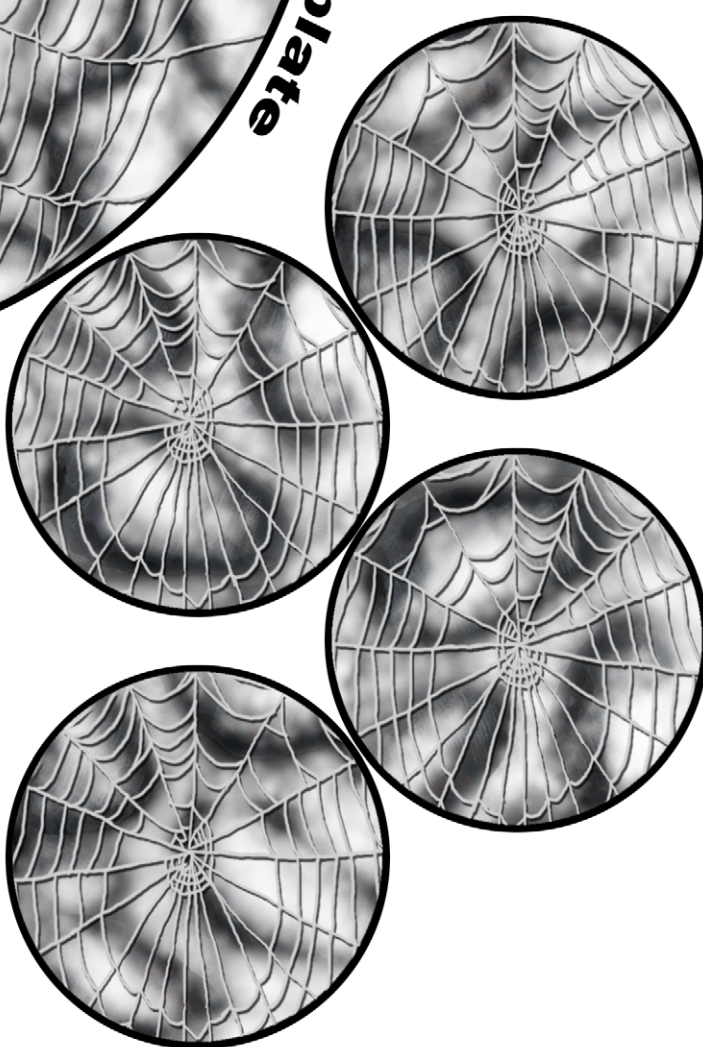
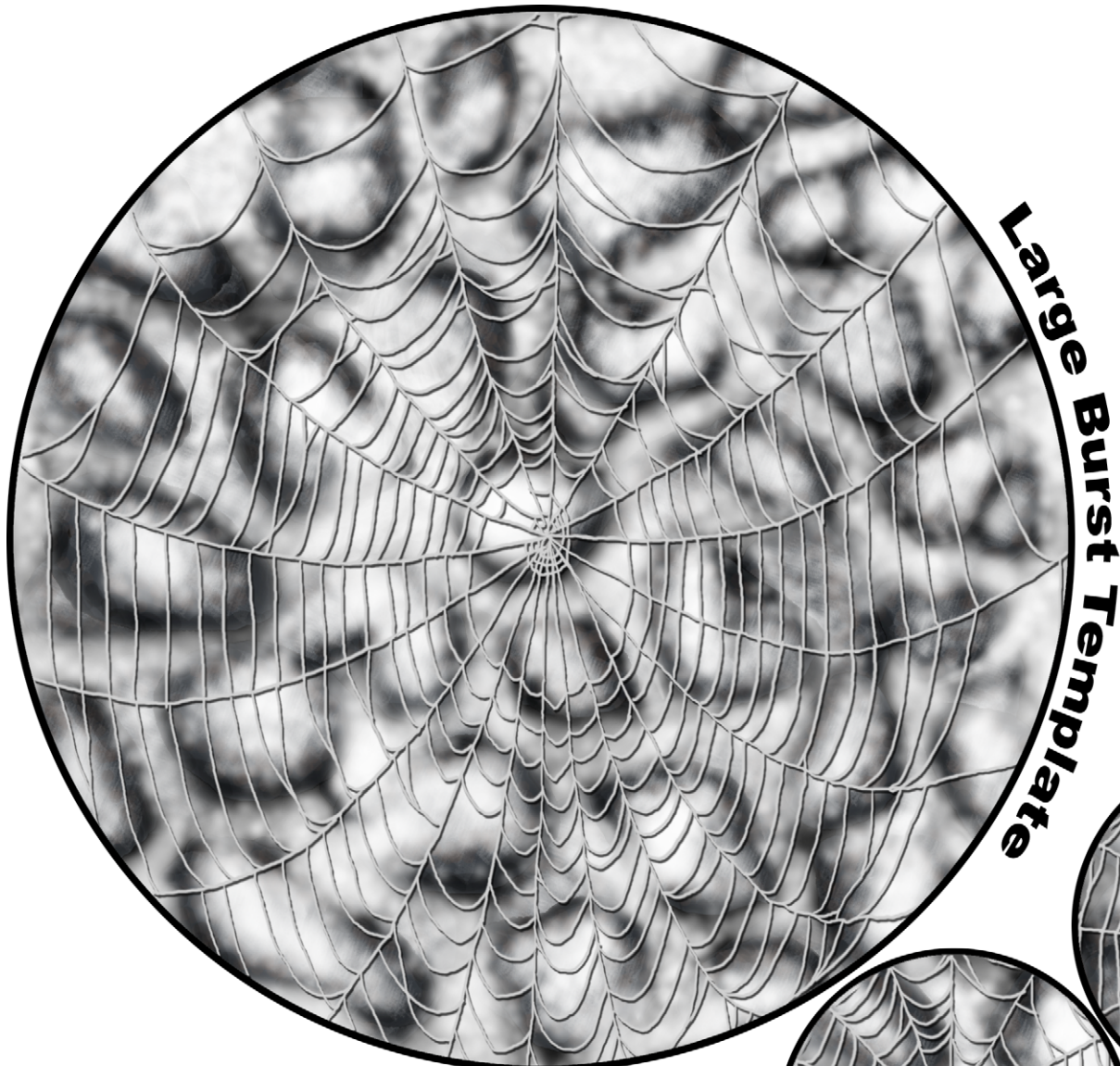
and running die halved until a Strength roll is made as an action. Multiple exposures to the aura (while already under the effects) do not produce a cumulative effect.

- * **Bite:** Swarms inflict hundreds of tiny bites every round to their victims, hitting automatically and causing 2d4 damage to everyone in the template. Damage is applied to the least armored location.
- * **Mindless:** Unaffected by Tests of Will, Tricks, or arcane powers like *puppet*. *Beast friend* works as normal.
- * **Poison:** Only swarms listed as Venomous in the adventure text have this ability. Anyone Shaken or wounded by a spider swarm must make a Vigor roll or be paralyzed for 1d6 rounds from the venom.
- * **Resilient:** A spider swarm larger than a Small Burst Template which takes a wound is not automatically destroyed. Instead, it shrinks to the next smallest template size. A Small Burst Template swarm taking a wound is destroyed.
- * **Swarm:** Parry +2. Because the swarm is composed of scores, hundreds, or thousands of creatures, cutting and piercing weapons do no real damage. Area-effect weapons work normally, and a character can stomp to inflict his damage in Strength each round. Spider swarms are foiled by jumping in water.

			Giant Blade Spider				Giant Trappdoor Spider				Citizen
			Giant Blade Spider				Giant Trappdoor Spider				Freda Hapsidohr, Cleric of Eostre
			Giant Leaping Spider				Giant Web Spider				Nobleman Ridder Theinwald Haksunu
			Giant Leaping Spider				Giant Web Spider				Frederick the Servant
			Giant Paralysis Spider				Joxa Lonerider, Hearth Elf Warrior-Druid				Spider Cuttist
			Giant Paralysis Spider				Citizen				Spider Cuttist
			Giant Poison Spider				Citizen				Spider Cuttist - Netter
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Spider Web Templates



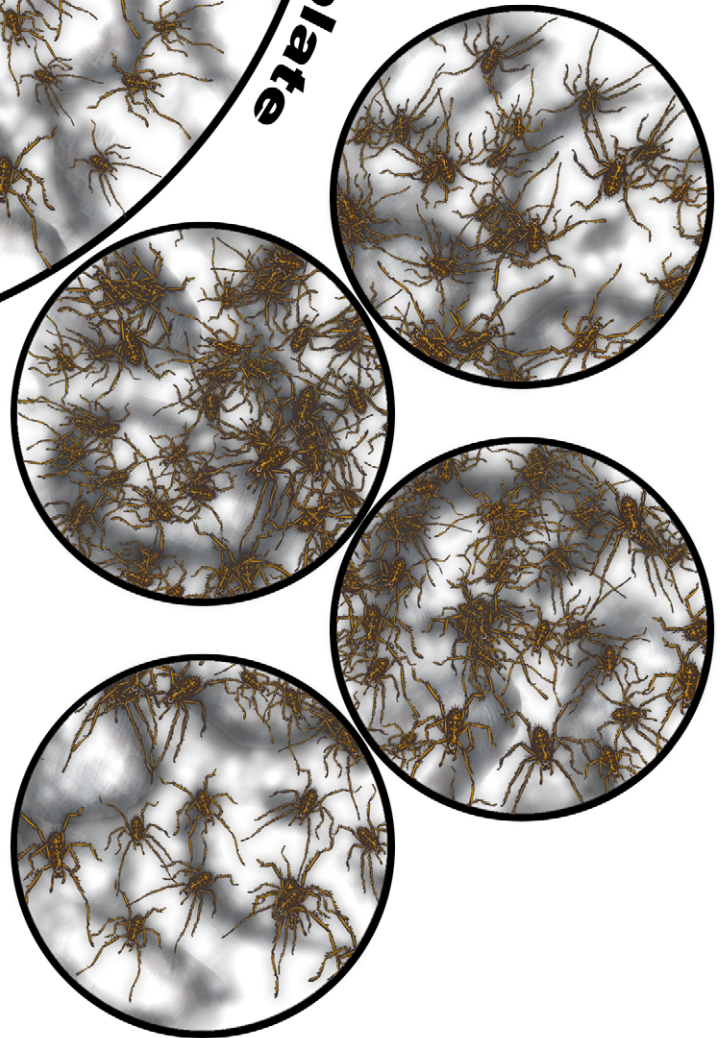
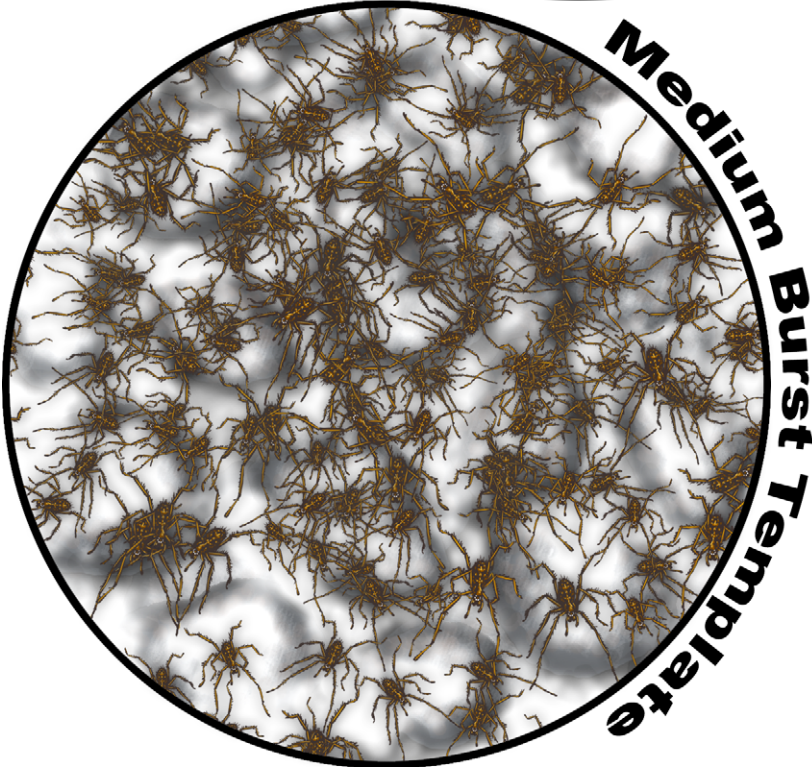
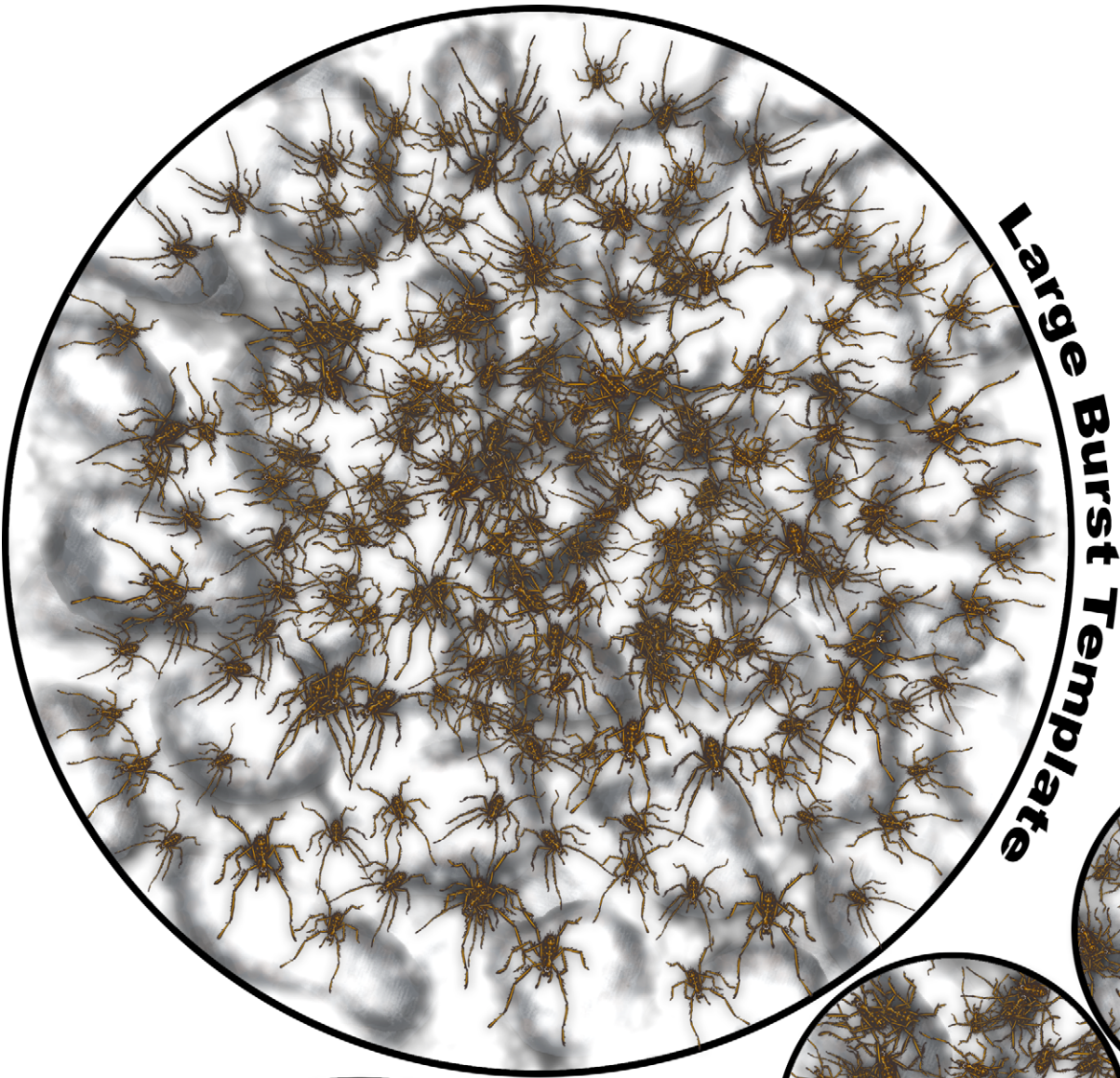
Small Burst Templates

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Spider Swarm Templates



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A strange shadow has fallen over the normally quiet village of Rushton. The villagers have been acting strangely, with some disappearing for days at a time and a few families missing entirely!

Behind these strange occurrences is an unearthly creature, part-human and part-spider. This creature's venom enslaves the weak minded and the it plans to enslave the whole of Rushton and beyond!

Can the heroes defeat this malevolent evil? In *Web of Deceit* the heroes will be fully tested in this exciting adventure for Hellfrost!

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