

Shadows over
VATHAK

TAPESTRY OF LIES



5TH EDITION HORROR

An Adventure for 3rd to 4th level characters for
Shadows over Vathak Horror Roleplaying Game

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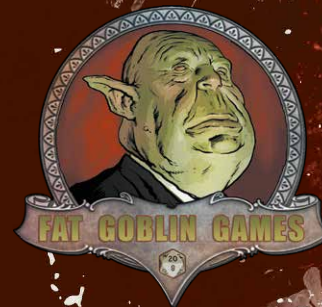
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Adventure Primer

Adventure Level: 4 characters of 3rd to 4th level

Estimated Duration: 3-4 hours

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

For many years, the village of Carrickmoor has been plagued every spring by an influx of giant vermin. So far, no one has been able to determine their source. The locals are frustrated enough with the situation that they are offering a reward of up to 100 gp to anyone who can do something about this seasonal threat. When the adventurers arrive, Carrickmoor is still in the grip of winter — a damp and dreary time in this part of Moorhaven — but there are signs that the seasons are about to change: The streets are muddy as opposed to slushy, and open water is no longer frozen but still very cold.

Carrickmoor rarely attracts people of note, so the arrival of outlanders, even those responding to an offer of money, will attract a lot of attention. The leader of the village, as well as the surrounding farms for several miles in every direction, is Lord Provost Tavish, a man eager to protect his village and people, as well as their greatest secret: They worship the Old Ones, in particular Ka'sogrotha.

ADVENTURE LOCATION

This adventure takes place in Carrickmoor, a village of roughly 240 souls blessed with decent soils as well as tin and coal in the surrounding hills. It is located in western Moorhaven, but can be placed anywhere in your campaign.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The GM is free to contrive any means necessary to get the characters to Carrickmoor. Some possible ideas include:

- The characters might be chasing a wanted criminal (such as the infamous Black Dougal, who is known to be active in this part of Moorhaven), and decide to spend the night at Carrickmoor's inn, since there is little else in the area. In this case they can either see the notice offering the reward, or they could be approached by one of the locals — perhaps even the Lord Provost himself, who is known to pop in for a pint now and then.
- The characters might be on the run themselves (it is easy to find oneself on the wrong side of the law in Moorhaven), and see the potential job as a means of getting some easy money as they plan their next steps.
- The characters could be passing through the region on their way to a larger settlement, and come across one of the notices the Lord Provost's men put up at roadside inns and neighboring villages. They might be curious enough to go to Carrickmoor to find out what kind of job is on offer.

CARRICKMOOR AND THE WESTWATERS

Carrickmoor is located in the Westwaters, the moorland west of the Trivian Lakes in the borderland between Moorhaven and Grigoria, where one can walk hours without seeing a homestead, let alone a village. Carrickmoor is built on the clear and cold River Carrick, which is wide — and treacherous — enough that fording it is a bad idea. Carrickmoor controls the main bridge, and is protected by a palisade. Communities in the Westwaters are insular, and everyone knows each other's business while tending to shun outsiders.



Welcome to the world of Shadows over Vathak, a realm of dwindling hope and despair. As players, your characters fight to survive in a land threatened with destruction by the rise of the ancient and evil Old Ones and their spawn. Your characters may represent points of light in the darkness or give in to wicked temptations. Most will fall somewhere in between — survivors struggling to eke out another day. Though the followers of the One True God speak of divine providence while battling the Old Ones, the sins of the Church often rival those of their enemies. In the world of Vathak, your character's perceptions of heroes and villains is a thin line drawn by their own personal morality and, of course, determined by the victor.

This adventure is set in the dark fantasy world of Vathak. As such there are references to the history, characters, and locations of that world. However, with a little bit of alteration, these adventures can be suited for any horror themed 5th edition game.

If you are new to Shadows over Vathak, make sure you join our [Patreon](#) and receive a free copy of the *Explorer's Guide to Vathak*.

RUNNING THIS ADVENTURE

To run this adventure, it is recommended that you have copies of the 5th Edition core rulebooks.

In this adventure you might come across spells, abilities, creatures, magic items, and other references to content from these corebooks. When this happens that item will appear in bold/red text, like this:

"The **goblins** are waiting to attack the caravan as it comes around the steep bend."

If the content is new (such as monsters or equipment) and not included in one of the corebooks, we will make note of the source or include the item in an appendix to the adventure.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following are a collection of common abbreviations that might be used in this adventure.

AC	Armor Class	GP	Gold pieces
CE	Chaotic Evil	HP	Hit Points
CG	Chaotic Good	LE	Lawful Evil
CN	Chaotic Neutral	LG	Lawful Good
cp	Copper pieces	LN	Lawful Neutral
CR	Challenge Rating	N or TN	Neutral, or True Neutral
d%	Two d10s die one as the 10s the other as the 1s	NE	Neutral Evil
d10	A die of 10 sides	NG	Neutral Good
d12	A die of 12 sides	NPC	Non-Player Character
d20	A die of 20 sides	PC	Player Character
d4	A die of 4 sides	pp	Platinum pieces
d6	A die of 6 sides	sp	Silver Pieces
d8	A die of 8 sides	Stats	The statistical representation of a character
DC	Difficulty Class	XP	Experience Points
EL	Encounter Level		
EP	Electrum Pieces		
GM	Game Master		



A PLAGUE OF VERMIN

Beginning the Adventure - The characters arrive in Carrickmoor and, at some point during their visit, make their way to the River's End Inn (the only place where outsiders can stay). There, they find the Lord Provost holding informal court and answering often heated questions. The mood is tense, and every seat in the common room is occupied by villagers whose attention is riveted on the proceedings. If the characters choose to listen, they will quickly learn that the locals are concerned about an infestation of vermin that is expected to come with the spring thaw. A Wisdom (Perception) check at DC 10 will give an indication that this coming infestation is worse than a run-of-the-mill rat problem.

If the characters express an interest in knowing more, the Lord Provost will tell them that the vermin show up "a week after snowmelt" every year, rushing through the village, digging under the walls, stealing food, and generally causing large quantities of trouble. If the characters have seen the notices and ask

about the posted reward, he will confirm it; otherwise, he will make the offer on the spot. The characters will also notice that they are not the only ones after the reward — there is a group of what look like trappers or huntsmen, with keen looks in their eyes.

The Lord Provost closes the meeting by noting that the vermin must have a lair somewhere nearby, but it is probably not in Carrickmoor as all the buildings have been searched top to bottom.

(A) HUNTING WE WILL GO...

Unless one or more of the characters is from Carrickmoor, they are going to need to find a local guide to show them where the vermin appear to be coming from. Fortunately, all of the likely candidates are already at the River's End, having a pint. Unfortunately, most of these likely fellows are also after the reward.

The characters can try to locate traces of verminous activity without the aid of a guide, but doing

GIVE ME THAT OLD-TIME RELIGION...

Although the religious practices of the people of Carrickmoor should be kept secret until the end of the adventure, the GM can (and should) play up certain details to give the players the impression that something seems a bit off about the village. The most obvious thing is that the locals do not seem eager to talk to the characters about anything outside of business, and express no interest in where the characters have been or what they have done prior to coming here. A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check will let them notice that some locals even cross the street to avoid being near them. Some locals also have a small runic tattoo on their shoulders (DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice), and if asked will say it is a personal thing.

The characters may also notice, if they specifically seek out the Temple of the One True God, is that certain architectural details and décor elements are different. The stone altar, for example, is larger and seems to have a gentle recess in its top, like a large font. If asked, the locals insist they are devotees of the One True God and acknowledge him as the creator and provider of all; although they call him “The Greatfather”. If asked about the altar they will say that during a time of starvation centuries ago, He came to them in dreams and told them to sacrifice all of their surviving livestock to him, and He would provide. They did as asked and made it through the harshest winter ever known, and in gratitude they made a new, symbolic altar.

The truth of the matter is that the Greatfather is a local incarnation of Ka’sogrotha, and at times they make sacrifices in His honor — sometimes, those sacrifices are human. Most of the locals worship the Greatfather, but the especially devout will have the runic tattoo.

so without the benefit of knowing the area can be a difficult proposition. The GM should ask the players to describe how they will go about finding the lair and then have them make a Wisdom (Perception) check at DC 20. This may be reduced if the proposed solution seems logical, or one or more of the characters is from the region or has travelled extensively within it — more so if there is at least one experienced tracker or ranger in the group.

The characters may also try to hire a guide anyway. They may make a Charisma (Persuasion) check at DC 15 to entice one of the locals to work for them, but may make the check at DC 13 if they offer at least a 10% share of the reward, or DC 10 if they also offer at least 1 gp per day in wages. If the characters offer a share and wages, this check is made at DC 10 with Advantage. A local hunter named Morag Elbridge agrees to work with them.

Early the following morning, the characters head out alone, or guided by Morag. Although there has been some melt, there is more than enough snow to still count as winter. If the characters have riding mounts, Morag will recommend that they wrap their hooves to keep the snow from balling in them and making them slip — this can either reduce riding challenges over rough terrain, or slightly improve movement rates, at the GM’s discretion.

As they travel, Morag is willing to answer questions about Carrickmoor and the region. She was born here and loves her home, and has no desire to leave for the city or adventure. She knows relatively little about local history — her family has lived in the area forever, as far as she is concerned — and she knows almost nothing about events in the wider world. If pressed a bit on this, Morag will only say that her people have all they need. She will not talk much about religion (insisting it is a private matter), and if the characters look closely they may notice she has a runic tattoo like some other locals (see sidebar above). If the characters have been polite towards her, Morag will tell them to leave Carrickmoor as soon as they have their money. She will say nothing beyond that, if pressed.

At some point Morag (or the characters, if they are searching alone and are successful) will stop and point out some tracks. A moment later, a giant rat

will emerge from the underbrush and scurry across their tracks. The characters may pursue it, or let it go; Morag will say that what they saw is the sort of vermin Carrickmoor deals with, and if permitted she will suggest they follow it stealthily in the hopes that it leads them to the lair.

ENCOUNTER: GIANT RAT (1)

The giant rat was foraging, and has no desire to fight the characters. It will defend itself if cornered, but the characters should have no trouble.

THE SOURCE OF THE SCOURGE?

If Morag is guiding the characters, she will locate a growing number of animal tracks in the area that seem to come from one specific area. She will lead them through increasingly rough terrain over the next few hours to a low hill rising from the moors that has a cave entrance large enough to accommodate a human. If asked about it, she says she does not remember noticing the entrance before because the bedrock around Carrickmoor is porous and riddled with such features. Go to **Into the Depths**, below.

If the characters do not have a guide, the GM should have them attempt a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check. If they succeed, they notice the cave entrance described above. If they fail, they may make a second attempt, but if that one fails as well the characters end up wandering in the wilderness for an entire day without finding anything promising. There are no suitable campsites due to snow and runoff, and they will likely be forced to return to Carrickmoor for the night. The GM is encouraged to play up the tension in the inn when they return, as the Lord Provost sends a messenger to ask them about their progress, and many conversations about the state of various investigations can be heard in the common room. The characters, perhaps wishing to avoid spending another day fruitlessly stomping about the moors, can try to hire a guide for the following day, as outlined in **A-Hunting We Will Go**. If they succeed they can hire Morag at that time.

Whether the characters find the cave with or without Morag's help, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check will reveal the presence of a large number of broken and heavily-gnawed bones just beyond the entrance. Careful examination — either through spending at least half an hour sifting through the bones, or if the characters' check result was 25 or higher — will reveal the bones to be from small- to medium-sized mammals like foxes, beavers, and young deer. The gnaw marks are too numerous to tell with certainty whether giant rats are solely responsible for them.

INTO THE DEPTHS

1-ENTRY TUNNEL

The faint odor of wet fur and less identifiable smells greets you as you enter the cave, which turns out to be a tunnel leading deeper inside the hill.

It should be clear to the characters that something — or many somethings — has been living in the tunnel, which is about five feet wide at most, and a light source will be needed to see anything. Morag has a lantern if she is with the party. The tunnel quickly descends a natural staircase, and then forks after another 20 feet. The sound of rushing water can be heard from the left-hand branch; there is no need to roll.

If the characters proceed to the left, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check will allow them to hear scratching and squeaking sounds coming from behind. Within seconds, a small mob of giant rats comes rushing down the right-hand branch, evidently in a desperate bid to flee outdoors. If the characters do nothing in that moment, the creatures will escape into the moorlands and eventually make their way to Carrickmoor and plague it on schedule. Any creative or logical strategy by the players to block or hinder the giant rats should be considered by the GM; although if they are stuck Morag can be used to provide a hint — plausible tactics can include sudden noises or flashes of light to stun the animals, or even illusions to trick them into thinking the tunnel is blocked, or that something even worse lies ahead.

The wet odor, accompanied by additional hints of rot, is much stronger in the right-hand branch. If anyone is listening and succeeds a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, they can also hear the faint sounds of something large stirring. Seconds later, a mob of giant rats surges down the passageway towards them. The characters should have one round to prepare before the giant rats are upon them, and the GM is encouraged to increase or decrease the number of creatures as necessary, depending on the party's strength. The rodents will attack because the party is in their way, but Morag will assist in the battle.

If at least half of the giant rats manage to escape, go to the **Bad Ending** in the **Final Outcomes**; otherwise, go to the **Other Ending**.

ENCOUNTER: GIANT RATS (2D12)

These giant rats are panicking over the sudden stirring of the needful spider in the Lair (2), and are thinking only about fleeing to safety. They will not retaliate if the characters strike them unless they are blocked, in which case they will bite indiscriminately.

2-LAIR

The stench of wet fur, mold, and an underlying rot fills this irregularly-shaped chamber. Two dark openings on the other side lead to a more distant chamber, but your attention is drawn to the thick tendrils of moldering webbing that festoon the rough walls and dangle from the ceiling like spectral chandeliers. In the midst of the webbing squats a many-legged creature with six glowing yellow eyes...

This part of the cave is occupied by a **needful spider**, an intelligent, abhorrent arachnid with a drive to dominate what it considers to be "lesser beings" (which means everything else, basically). It is many decades old and is aware of Carrickmoor and its people's devotion to The Greatfather (not knowing that the true object of their devotion is Ka'sogrotha). It has subtly brought the village under its own influence by sheltering the giant rats in its cave and feeding them generously enough that their population grows rapidly in time for the spring thaw, when it unleashes them. By orchestrating the rodent rampage, the needful spider

whips the villagers into higher levels of religious fervor... and occasionally the odd sacrifice to the Greatfather, which it collects in the dead of night and devours. The spider has come to believe that it really is a god in its own right, and is so assured of itself that it views the presence of the characters as an affront unto itself — a blasphemy punishable by death.

ENCOUNTER: NEEDFUL SPIDER (1)

There is nothing of value in the chamber, as the needful spider has no use for jewelry or money. If Morag is present she will help defeat the monster, but will insist on bringing back the carcass. It is essentially a cowardly creature, and if reduced to less than half of its hit points it will seek to escape, or failing that try to strike a bargain with the characters in order to spare its own life. Regardless of how the needful spider might be defeated, the party may decide that their work is done and return to Carrickmoor, in which case go to **Final Outcomes**.

Or, they may continue to explore the cave...



3-THE HIDEOUT

This section of the cave is accessible if the characters cross the underground stream from the left branch of the Tunnel (1), or if they go through one of the two exits in the Lair (2). Although there is no bridge over the stream, there are slippery stepping stones — anyone crossing the stream must succeed a DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or fall into the icy water. There is no risk of drowning, but the experience is highly unpleasant. The cave appears to be a dead end on the other side, but anyone can attempt a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check to uncover a hidden door. One clue that might give away the door's presence are a small pile of rotting floorboards resting nearby. Judging by the deteriorated state of the wood, it should be clear that it has been there for many years. The hidden door's mechanism has partly seized up due to years of disuse and moisture, but it can be slid open with a successful DC 18 Strength check — doing so creates a lot of noise, and the needful spider in (2) will hear it if the characters have not yet encountered it in its lair.

Beyond the door lies a cave containing rotting crates stacked against the far wall. A doorway to your right leads to another chamber.

The crates look like they might fall apart if disturbed. If the characters step fully into the room, the door will slide closed behind them with a loud clang that echoes throughout the cave. There are no handholds or other grips on the inner side of the door. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check will allow the characters to locate the door mechanism (a system of counterweights and gears). A successful DC 18 Investigation (Intelligence) check will reveal how to manipulate the mechanism to release the door. Otherwise, the characters can attempt a DC 20 Strength check to smash it open. If both of these options fail, searching the room can locate the key to the door with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check.

The adjoining room contains the rotting remains of a couple of beds, as well as a rickety table and chairs and a couple of empty lanterns hanging from the ceiling. It should be apparent to the characters that they may have stumbled onto the former hideout of a small group of bandits.

Most of the crates contain nothing of value, but two still have locks on them (requiring a successful DC 15 Dexterity check to open them). The first crate contains high-quality fabrics and exotic spices (worth 40 gp in total), while the second contains two excellent swords and three pistols of average quality (the GM should change the weapons to whatever the party is using). If Morag is with the party, she asks for a share of the trade goods and one of the pistols.

FINAL OUTCOMES

After the characters have attempted — successfully or not — to prevent the tide of vermin from sweeping over Carrickmoor, there are several things which can happen.

GOOD ENDING

The characters return to Carrickmoor, with or without Morag, triumphant! They can collect the 100 gp reward, and if they found the hidden treasure in the cave they can come out of this even wealthier. The Lord Provost is overjoyed over the party's success, and invites them to a special celebration at the inn in their honor. If Morag accompanied the characters, and they treated her well, she will quietly tell them to leave the village before morning. If they listen to her, they will leave as soon as possible.

If she did not accompany the characters, or if they treated her poorly, they may be surprised when the villagers come for them in the middle of the night, intent on taking them prisoner until the next festival, when they will be sacrificed to The Greatfather. If this turns into a fight, the GM should treat the villagers as Commoners, and throw as many at the characters as needed to make the situation dangerous. Alternatively, the characters can flee Carrickmoor, with a proverbial mob armed with pitchforks chasing them.

ENCOUNTER: COMMONERS (AS MANY AS THE GM NEEDS)

BAD ENDING

The characters failed to stop the vermin from pillaging Carrickmoor. If they hang around the village — either because they never received Morag's warning, or they never discovered anything to make them suspicious — they are cornered by the Lord Provost and a band of villagers, and told there is another way they can help the village survive the hard times to come. The mob then attacks with the intent of subduing the characters, and then imprisoning them until they can be sacrificed to The Greatfather that evening.

ENCOUNTER: COMMONERS (AS MANY AS THE GM NEEDS)

OTHER ENDING

The characters may have killed all of the giant rats, or they might not have defeated the needful spider. They will still be feted by the Lord Provost (and possibly still have to flee the village), but if the campaign continues they will hear that the vermin returned the following year. Rumor has it that the locals are not at all happy, and the characters will not be welcome in Carrickmoor anytime soon.



DL 17
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NEEDFUL SPIDER

2,900 XP TOTAL

Large monstrosity, chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Point 153 (18d10+54)

Speed 45 ft.

Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	5 (-3)

Skills Deception +7, Perception +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Condition Immunities charmed

Languages Common, Deep Speech, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 7 (2,900 xp)

Deception in Weakness. The needful spider treats its Charisma modifier as a bonus instead of a penalty when making Charisma (Deception) checks. The needful spider also has advantage on Charisma (Deception) checks made against creatures that have gained blessings or healing from the needful spider or its worshippers.

Produce Wonder. The needful spider can spin blood into wondrous creations. It can use 5 liters of blood to create an object no larger than 10 feet on any side. This object cannot contain any moving parts, and cannot cost more than 500 gold. Creatures that discover the dark secret of a needful spider's object creation must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, they gain a long term madness. If they fail by 5 points or more, they also gain a permanent phobia of spiders.

Impart Blessings. A needful spider can elect to have up to three creatures bound to it. Those creatures gain three charges, and can use those charges as follows:

- Touch a creature to cause it to regain up to 1d6 damage.
- Touch a creature to remove one disease on that creature.
- Touch a creature to give it advantage on its next attack roll or ability check within 1 minute.

A creature granted charges through this ability regains them after a long rest, as long as the long rest includes prayer to the needful spider.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The needful spider makes two bite attacks.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. **Hit:** 7 (1d8+3) piercing damage and 14 (4d6) poison damage. If this attack reduces a creature to 0 hit points, the creature is stable but poisoned for 1 week. A creature poisoned in this way is considered charmed by the needful spider. A creature can make a new saving throw if it is subject to an attack by the needful spider or one of its allies, and each time it finishes a long rest. A creature that succeeds on this saving throw is no longer charmed.



TACTICS

Before Combat The needful spider enjoys surrounding itself with worshippers. Initially, it will woo a small community by granting wonders and blessings, often through a proxy so that none are frightened by its appearance. Slowly, it will insinuate itself into a remote community until it can be viewed as a benevolent protector and provider. Given enough time, a needful spider will attempt to rule like a god, and amass worshippers and riches, often passing judgement on those that displease it, only to turn their blood into wonders so that it can reward its loyal followers.

During Combat The needful spider tends to let its minions do the fighting for it. When pressed into combat, it bites the weakest opponents and hopes to incapacitate them for use as hostage and eventually as charmed worshippers.

Morale The needful spider seldom wants to fight, and can even be pressed to abandon its worshippers if it believes a big enough danger would pose a serious threat. The vile creature can underestimate opponents, especially when surrounded by loyal worshippers. If reduced to fewer than half of its hit point total, it will abandon everything to flee. If cornered, it will promise anything to stay alive.

A needful spider is a dangerous and sinister creature that can infiltrate small and remote communities, and create a cult-like environment with the sole purpose of worshipping the spider itself. Needful spiders lack confidence, honor, and empathy. While they tread carefully at first, they become prideful and careless as they amass cultists.

When the resources are depleted, or another group or creature appears that is more powerful, the needful spider leaves as quietly as possible to start the process elsewhere, often leaving the community in shambles.

Some local lores warn of towns where the townsfolk are too friendly, and more than a few towns can be suspected of being "deceived eight ways".

Some tales tell of needful spiders being born of cowardly humanoids who plea with dark creatures for their lives to be spared. If the tales are true, the cowardly humanoids lives are spared and transformed into the disgusting needful spiders, living a life that sows chaos and suffering.

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