

A 5e Adventure for Character Levels 8-10

Dungeons of Despair





SHADOW REALM ADVENTURES

You can chain me, you can torture me,
you can even destroy this body, but you
will never imprison my mind.

- Mahatma Gandhi

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Heart of Darkness - Dungeons of Despair 2025 adventure module is compatible with 5th edition.
Manufactured by ShadowRealm Adventures.

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Prologue

Plunged into an abyss of mystery and despair, the soul-sucking gloom of Blackstone Mountain Prison safeguards the island's most enigmatic secrets and darkest fears. Within the labyrinthine corridors, innumerable spirits have been sacrificed, their essences bound in service to the malevolent forces lurking within its stone heart.

PCs find themselves at the threshold of this abyss of doom through one of two paths. Some may be condemned to these dismal depths as a result of ill-fated decisions or fickle rolls of dice, stripped of their worldly possessions and thrust into a precarious predicament. Their lives hang by a thread, but what's truly at stake is the very essence of their existence.

Others may face the formidable front entrance, unwittingly stumbling upon a death trap of monumental proportions that will push their courage and resolve to the limits. Dungeon Masters, show no mercy here, for the denizens of this dreary domain certainly will not. With each twist and turn of these stone corridors, a deadly challenge rears its head.

From the guileful demons that skulk in the shadows to the ominous constructs, danger lurks at every corner. The deadly succubi from the Order of the Dark Vain orchestrate every movement within this prison with a puppeteer's precision, leaving no stone unturned and no secret hidden. Much will be illuminated within the dreary walls of this dark pit of despair.

PCs will find themselves pitted against formidable foes who will resort to manipulation, deceit, and sacrifice in their relentless pursuit to devastate their will. To stand a fighting chance against these horrors, the characters will need to form alliances, leverage their wits, and tap into every ounce of cunning they possess. For beyond their imposing prison walls, a myriad of deadly traps and challenges lie in wait.

Do not become consumed by the darkness and despair within these stone-cold walls. Fear not what lies before you, but that which lies within. Remember, the true prison is not the one made of stone and iron, but the one we build within our minds. Break free from the chains of fear and doubt, for while your body may be confined, your spirit remains unbound. Embrace the strength within you, and let your indomitable will be the beacon that guides you through the shadows.

Running This Adventure

Welcome to the world of sandbox-style campaigns, where your players have the freedom to explore every aspect of the game, uncover its secrets, form alliances, and shape its politics. In this expansive style of gameplay, every choice matters, every path can lead to a new adventure, and every storyline converges into an epic tale. This adventure, designed as the second part of the Heart of Darkness trilogy, can also be played independently as part of any seafaring adventure.

Compatibility and Required Resources

This adventure module, being the second in a trilogy, is designed to be compatible with the 5th edition (5e) Dungeons & Dragons system. To successfully run this adventure, the following resources are required: The Player's Handbook, The Dungeon Master's Guide, and The Monster Manual.

A Trilogy Adventure

Dungeons of Despair is a chapter within the second part of the 'Heart of Darkness' trilogy, 'King of the Sirine'. Players find themselves imprisoned on the ominous Blackstone Island. This adventure can stand alone or be included in any ongoing campaign. It can be the perfect solution for Total Party Knockout (TPK). The teleportation circle within the prison can serve as one of the escape mechanisms, leading to a location of the DM's choice, or the PCs can find their way out through the entrance to make their escape. If the PCs ever find themselves unfortunate enough to be imprisoned in the dreaded Blackstone jail, they will quickly discover the inescapable nature of its walls. Within its grim confines, their spell books, cherished equipment, and formidable weapons will be stripped away, leaving them defenseless and at the mercy of their captors, waking up to this predicament:

Rust-coated manacles and a neck restraint tightly bind you against the cold, damp stone wall. The feeble light from a few dim torches that line the outer hall do little to chase away the encroaching darkness, obscuring anything more than a few feet in front of you. Hard iron bars, rusted by years of moist air, line the entrance to your cell. While most of the bars stand three inches apart, a display of incredible strength has forced a few to widen to about four inches, a testament to the desperate struggles of those who came before you. The cells' doors have thick iron boxes obscuring their locking mechanisms. The walls are scored by former prisoners' nails, recording their last bleak thoughts before death. Spiked chains covered in rust, dried blood, and bits of flesh dangle over a fly-specked splatter of gore on the walls and floor. More rust-coated manacles and a neck restraint hang from the far wall, dangling in a shadow stained into the stone from the sweat, grime, and blood of those who previously languished within these very confines. A blood curdling scream echoes from a distance, a chilling reminder of the horrors that await those who dare to defy the dungeon's grasp.



Dungeons of Despair Map

Denizens of Blackstone Prison

Separated and placed in different cells, the PCs' surroundings vary. One PC finds themselves in an adjacent cell to Divora in area 13, a seductive succubus in human form, masquerading as another prisoner. She whispers promises of power and escape, attempting to lead them astray. Another PC observes the golem (area 9), an ancient constructs tasked with maneuvering the levers that control the prison gates.

Confined within the cells, the inmates represent various factions of political intrigue. The Crimson Syndicate, masters of covert operations, share their time in prison with their ruthless adversaries, the Brotherhood of the Blade. Their alliances and fractured relations will shape the PCs' journey, for in this twisted realm, they will receive all the help they can get.

This encounter demands a well-prepared DM, ready to role-play and bring together the pieces of what has transpired in the campaign thus far. DMs are encouraged to provide the PCs with opportunities to leverage alliances and test their party's ability to use every resource at their disposal to escape their captivity.

Moreover, for traps lurking beyond the prison walls, intricately designed to test the wits of even the most seasoned adventurers, the heart of Blackstone Prison, a terminus of evil, teems with countless succubi from the Order of the Dark Vain, always ready to toy with any intruders strong enough to challenge their dominion.

In this atmosphere of darkness and despair, the PCs must rely on their cunning abilities, form unlikely alliances, and navigate the treacherous web of manipulation and sacrifice. Only then will they have any hope of surviving the horrors that await.

As you pass the gloomy prison corridor, your eyes are drawn to another cell. There, leaning against the cold iron bars, stands a figure of such intoxicating allure that your breath catches in your throat. Her ethereal beauty, so stunning and surreal, seems to eclipse the grim reality of your surroundings. It's as if she's a celestial being trapped in this worldly realm, her radiance making your heart flutter erratically.

You can't help but imagine her perched on a throne, commanding respect and adoration. This captivating mystery woman possesses an aura that would make anyone willingly brave the harshest trials for her sake.

Her hair, black as a midnight sky, cascades down her back, shimmering with a blood-red hue that dances in the flickering torchlight lining the prison walls. Her skin, as pale as moonlight, is unblemished, the perfect canvas for her full, ripe lips, painted a succulent shade of strawberry red.

She's dressed in a form-fitting black corset that accentuates her curvaceous figure, paired with sleek black leather pants that cling to her like a second skin. Adding to her enigmatic charm, she wears an amulet around her neck, its black heart-shaped stone nestling seductively in the valley of her breasts. Attached to the slender belt cinching her waist is a petite cage, intricately forged from a mysterious black metal. The contents of the cage remain elusive, shrouded in mystery, yet they emanate a gentle glow of pale red essence, casting an aura of dim light around her.

Beneath the veneer of bewitching beauty and exotic allure lurks a creature of cunning and chaos – Divora, the formidable succubus of the Order of the Fallen Vain, the Dark Vain as it is ominously known. Her captivating allure is not mere aesthetics but a well-honed weapon, a tool of manipulation designed to ensnare the unsuspecting. Her guise as a hapless prisoner is a meticulously crafted façade, a ruse purposed to breed discord amongst the PCs. Her enchanting charisma isn't just for show; it's a tool for control, a means of exploitation, especially when the PCs are most vulnerable. Divora is a captive of the Blackstone jail; her ability to shift into an ethereal form allows her a freedom her fellow inmates can only dream of. She plays the victim until her true nature is unveiled.

Divora will be located in area 12 on the dungeon map. The DM should place the imprisoned PC in an adjacent cell in area 10 on the map, enabling them to peer into Divora's cell. This illusory imprisonment offers a unique role-playing encounter where she can delve into the driving philosophies of the PCs. Her own philosophies are not to be overshadowed; she will share them in the course of exchanging tales of adventure within her prison confines. She brazenly challenges the common dichotomy of good and evil, asserting that these are not universal constants but subjective constructs.

To Divora, those who align with chaos, who embrace creativity in art and storytelling, who are open to new experiences and adventures, and who value freedom, are often unfairly opposed by the staid, law-abiding, and orderly archetypes who are as drab and colorless as the grey skies. This clash of natures, this divergence of archetypes, she argues, is the root of what one perceives as good or evil. It is this polarity and disagreement, she states, that ultimately determines one's alignment with good or evil.

Divora contends that souls cannot be reserved for a benevolent deity. She perceives the prime material realm as a mere reflection of the Blood Wars, replicating the chaos and disorder of demons and the order and regulations of devils in a parallel reality. She believes that inherent flaws predispose every creature to certain sins and struggles in the prime material realm. These shortcomings, she argues, determine the value of souls auctioned off in the markets of Hades (see Appendix A - The Blood Wars: Order and Chaos).

Divora, a fervent advocate of liberty and a misguided follower of the Goddess Lady Morravain, finds herself ensnared in a paradox. Her thirst for supremacy has ironically become her shackle. Once a denizen from hell of modest magical prowess, Divora harbored a burning ambition to command the mystic forces. In her frantic quest to manipulate the tapestry of reality, she seized an opportunity to align with malevolent forces. The repercussions of that pivotal day were unexpected, altering her destiny profoundly.

Divora's contractual agreement within the Dark Vain did not endow her with the wizardly might she desired, but it did enhance her powers. Despite savoring her newfound abilities, she detests her subservience to the demonic order. The Heart of the Vain, a cursed onyx amulet she wears around her neck, has corrupted her to such an extent that she is compelled to invoke the Soul Cage spell, imprisoning souls in a metal cage tied to her belt. These captive souls are vital for infusing Divora with additional magical strength.