

THE SPIDER QUEEN'S CARNIVAL



CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

Title: *The Spider Queen's Carnival*

Theme/Genre: Dark Fantasy with elements of Horror and Mystery

Tone: Suspenseful with fleeting moments of eerie whimsy

Target Level: Level 5

Expected Duration: 2 hours

Player Focus Preferences:

- Combat: Medium
- Roleplay: High
- Exploration: High

BACKSTORY AND SETTING

The once-peaceful land of Silkenmoor lies under an oppressive cloak of fear as townsfolk mysteriously vanish. Whispered tales of dark figures and webs spun by ominous spiders fuel the town's anxiety. This sinister phenomenon began after a flamboyant traveling carnival inexplicably arrived in Latchwood, a sleepy village nearby. The carnival professes to honor Arachnis—a goddess shrouded in forgotten lore, rumored in legends to desire worship, or perhaps vengeance.

What villagers do not suspect, however, is that the Spider Queen, Arachnis, has stirred from her ancient rest in the Feydark. Her carnival serves as both a snare and a veil, housing a pocket dimension where she slowly regains her strength. To thwart her resurrection, the people of Latchwood require the courage and valor of heroes willing to venture into the ominous heart of the Carnival, vanquishing Arachnis lest Latchwood—and the wider world—be consumed in eternal nightfall.

Setting Details:

- **Latchwood Village:** Nestled by a dense, misty forest, Latchwood is home to anxious farmers, occasional traders, and a superstitious mayor. The village green, where the carnival has taken root, has been eerily transformed into a surreal collage of vibrant tents and dimly luminescent lanterns.
- **Historical Context:** Long since dismantled by ancient paladins, the cult of Arachnis has used centuries in the Feydark to reforge its dark mission. The carnival, once a joyous celebration of the autumn harvest, is repurposed by her followers to ensnare victims.

Important NPCs:

1. **Mayor Arlenc Tomras:** An aged and apprehensive leader of Latchwood, caught between his yearning to liberate his town from the carnival's grasp and his paralyzing fear of supernatural forces.
2. **Madame Silvara:** The carnival's allusive fortune-teller, bound under duress to Arachnis, she dispenses cryptic forewarnings to the adventurers.
3. **Ringmaster Calidris:** Both charming and intimidating, this elven figure serves as Arachnis's mortal vessel and manipulates the carnival's illusions.
4. **Thaddeus "Thickfoot" Hardy:** A clumsy yet amiable farmer, driven by the disappearance of his wife, Lysanne. He assists in rallying the town but lacks any martial skill.

PLOT HOOK

Opening Scene:

The evening sun dips beneath the horizon, painting the sky with strokes of ochre and crimson. The enticing scents of roasted nuts and spun sugar linger in the crisp air. The adventurers receive an urgent summons to Latchwood by Mayor Tomras. Upon arrival, they find the mayor and Thaddeus waiting anxiously. The tension in the air is palpable as they explain the predicament: locals—including Thaddeus's beloved wife—have vanished after visiting the menacing carnival.

Those few who returned speak in confusing riddles and half-truths, as if entranced. During this heated assembly, a courier presents the party with elaborately adorned invitations from the carnival, bearing the scrawled signature of "Calidris." The courier ominously declares, "Your presence is expected. Do not tarry."

Primary Objective: Investigate the carnival, discover the cause of the abductions, and end the threat before the break of dawn.

KEY LOCATIONS

LOCATION 1: LATCHWOOD VILLAGE GREEN (THE CARNIVAL ENTRY)

- **Atmosphere:** The carnival floor is awash with vibrant yet unsettling energy. Forced laughter suffuses the air as shadows wisp unnaturally along the ground. Performers smile with unnerving mirth as they entice guests towards strange games and bizarre beasts. Though the lantern-lit avenue sparkles with color, the air holds an unnatural chill.
- **NPCs:** Enthralling performers offer games of skill and tempting treats to passersby. Madame Silvara offers the party a complimentary tarot reading, whispering obliquely, "The Spider Queen watches closely. Beware her mandibles of gold..."
- **Encounters:**
 - **Tug-of-War against a Mimic Chest:** Disguised as a prize, the mimic entices participants. Failure results in players becoming ensnared in its adhesive tendrils masquerading as a rope.
 - **Magical Card Game:** Partake in a deck of cards imbued with mystic effects — drawing brings either a boon (healing, beneficial conditions) or a bane (minor hallucinations, fatigue).

LOCATION 2: THE HALL OF MIRRORED WEBS

- **Atmosphere:** Housed within the carnival is a vast central tent defined by bizarre, distorted mirrors that taunt the adventurers with twisted reflections of themselves. Glistening, silver webs lace the upper walls like a haunting lattice.
- **Challenge:**
 - **Puzzle:** Trapped mirrors obscure the exit, concealing clues written in reversed Common or Draconic. These riddles must be deciphered to dispel the "web" of illusions, by aligning light beams to illuminate a precise floor nexus.
 - **Combat:** *Phase Spiders* break the adventurer's concentration, utilizing their *Ethereal Jaunt* to traverse invisibly through mirrored reflections, aiming for surprise.

LOCATION 3: THE SPIDER QUEEN'S LAIR

- **Atmosphere:** The carnival's pinnacle, a grand tent transformed into a grotesque cocoon of throbbing webs and organic clusters. An eerie resonance hums through the air, compounded by a relentless stench of rot.
- **Climactic Encounter:**
 - **Boss Fight:** *Ringmaster Calidris and Arachnis Avatar*. Calidris reveals a hybridized elf-spider form, manipulating webs to control the arena's dynamic. During the battle, the Spider Queen attempts to manifest through a rupture, escalating combat into a desperate race to close it. Arachnis's avatar employs area attacks based on psychic and venomous energy, while Calidris spawns arachnid thralls.
 - **Environmental Hazard:** The arena periodically collapses in sections beneath adhesive webs, forcing *Dexterity* saving throws or the risk of entanglement and restraint.

ENCOUNTERS AND CHALLENGES

- **Combat Notes:**
 - **Phase Spiders:** Leverage Ethereal Jaunt to confound and divide party members.
 - **Ringmaster Calidris:** HP: 125, AC 16; Spellcasting: *Web*, *Fear*, and summon *Giant Spiders*.
 - **Arachnis Avatar:** Partial manifestation. HP: 200, AC 18. Legendary Actions: “Piercing Screech” induces stun, “Golden Mandibles” immobilize with venom.
- **Puzzle Mechanics:** Mirrors in the Hall of Mirrored Webs reveal true forms, demanding alignment to slice through ensnaring webs that guard the exit.

CLIMAX AND RESOLUTION

- **Final Challenge:** Should the party defeat Calidris and dismantle the rift, Arachnis’s influence wavers, collapsing the carnival’s mystic hold. Failure results in Arachnis’s full emergence, as her influence corrupts the material realm.
- **Narrative Conclusion:** Victory wards off doom from Latchwood, with townsfolk expressing gratitude through modest rewards. Madame Silvara slips away unnoticed. Defeat concludes with dark portent as Arachnis’s web of influence begins its invasion.

REWARDS

- **Items and Gold:**
 1. *Silken Cloak of the Feydark:* Bestows advantage on Dexterity checks and poison resistance.
 2. *Arachnis Fang:* A dagger dealing an additional 1d6 poison damage per strike.
- **Story Rewards:**
 - Recognition as the esteemed “Liberators of Latchwood.”
 - An enigmatic letter from an undisclosed patron cryptically referencing, “The threads of fate still interlace.”

SUPPORTING DETAILS

- **Maps:** Included are layouts of Latchwood, the carnival grounds, and the boss arena’s configuration.
- **Atmosphere Props:** Enhance immersion with eerie carnival-themed music (suggestions include dissonant circus melodies or music boxes).
- **Handouts:** Deliver players their carnival invitation and a fate-laden card from Madame Silvara.

FLEXIBLE OUTCOMES

- **Negotiation with Calidris or Arachnis:** Engage in chaotic bargaining, potentially sparing hostages in exchange for granting Arachnis’s full manifestation.
- **Side Objectives:** Tasked with recovering Thaddeus’s wife or dismantling summoning portals that fortify the carnival’s power.

POST-GAME WRAP-UP

- **Debrief:** Encourage player reflection with queries: What moment stood out? Which challenge was most engaging? Is there interest in pursuing Arachnis’s storyline further?
- **Epilogue Possibilities:** Pursue options like departing Latchwood, chasing Arachnis if she escaped, or delving into the lingering cult presence for subsequent adventures.