

# Doorway to Darkness

M.T. Black



# INTRODUCTION

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*Doorway to Darkness* is a Dungeons & Dragons adventure designed to be completed in about 3-4 hours of play. The combat encounters have been calculated to present a tough challenge to four 2<sup>nd</sup> level characters. They will present a less difficult, though still enjoyable, challenge to higher level characters or larger parties.

Not every loose end is tied up in the following text, nor every possible action accounted for. Be ready to improvise, and do so with confidence!

Unless stated otherwise, assume NPCs have the stats of a **commoner**.



# LONG ODDS

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Read or paraphrase the following -

You have spent a couple of days resting and recuperating in the village of Longsaddle. This evening you're warming benches in *The Gambling Golem*, one of the inns that serve travelers on the Long Road. *The Gambling Golem* is aptly named and the flick of cards, roll of dice, banter and occasional argument make it all the more interesting.

As you contemplate returning to the road, your games and drinks are interrupted. A flustered, middle-aged woman approaches your table. She is tall and sinewy with flaxen hair, and wears a thick leather apron, grey with rock dust. She rubs her calloused hands together anxiously as she says, "Could I trouble you for a moment?"

The woman is **Katethra Frostlight**, though she'll introduce herself as Kat. She would prefer to speak in private back at her home, but will talk to the party here if they insist. If they do go back with her, she'll lead them to a big wooden shack with a cot, table and chairs on one side, and a fenced area with several sacks of *silver ore* on the other.

At present there are only a few sacks of ore in storage there. To the untrained eye, silver ore looks like glittering, grey rock. It is worth about **1gp** per 5 pounds on average.

Kat invites the PCs to take a seat, and then explains her problem -

"I'm a miner by trade, and have been my whole life. It's the only work I know. I'm with a group that has been mining up and down the Long Road for years.

"A couple of months back we reopened an old mine in the Starmetal Hills - it's about a day's travel from here. We are mining silver," she swallows and wrings her hands together. "The last few weeks it's been my turn to look after the storeroom here. Someone from the camp brings back the ore, I sort and store it, then sell it to merchants that pass through Longsaddle. I also buy supplies for the site, repair the tools, and do about a million other things too.

"The problem is, I usually hear from the site every two or three days, but it has been more than a week now and I've... I've had no word at all. I'm sure something must have happened to them - and I need *you* to find out what."

She is obviously desperate for the PCs to help, and is willing to offer them **200gp** to investigate. She can't go any higher than this as she simply lacks the funds.

If the PCs question her she can tell them there were roughly 30 miners at the camp. This includes her husband (**Gedd**) and son (**Brand**), which is one of the reasons she is so distressed.

Kat can give the PCs directions and a rough map that will show them how to get to the mine, but she won't accompany them. If asked why, she will unconvincingly say it's because she has to see a merchant who will be in town the next day. If pressed, she will admit the real reason is because she is pregnant.



## DEATH'S A DRAG

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It takes about a day of travel to reach the mines, which lie south-west of Longsaddle. As they get closer to the mine, anyone with **Nature** proficiency will notice it has become unnaturally quiet and still, with no signs of animal or bird life.

As the PCs reach the edge of the tree-covered hills, they'll run into a disturbing scene...

Just ahead, amongst the dry and twisted trees that barely cling to life in the rugged foothills, you catch sight of movement. For a moment you only see shadows, lurching stiffly across your field of view, but then one moves into the light and all becomes apparent. Ahead of you is a cluster of the *walking dead* - some 'juicy', some little more than bones. They appear to be dragging a still body between them.

With yellowed shrunken eyes they stare at you from the trees. A gleaming silver symbol on each undead forehead catches the scattered sunlight and reflects it across the ground, flickering like a butterfly made of tinsel.

There are **6 zombies** here. They vary in their state of rot. Three are very fresh, another bloated and clotted, the next old, dusty, festooned with cobwebs and the last one little more than a skeleton covered in ancient leathery strips of flesh. A moment after they spy the party, they will move forward to attack.

**Tactics.** These zombies fight with great intelligence, not acting with the customary stupidity of their kind. They will gang up on single targets, use cover, and stand in loose formation if the party begin using area effect magic.

In addition, future zombies that the party encounter will appear to have learned tactical lessons from these early fights.

**The Survivor.** Between them they were dragging the unconscious body of a dark-haired man. Once the PCs dispose of the zombies they will be able to revive him -

"Thank you... thank you," he leans over and coughs, rubbing the bruises on his head. "Please... do you have water?" He looks to be in poor condition, both exhausted and malnourished.

After the PCs give him some water, he will tell them his story -

"I'm... I'm **Rohan Greysmith** and I'm from the mine. I was trying to sneak out of the camp and get back to town for help. But *they* were waiting for me, lying on the ground like logs. I thought I was through, then they rose up in the dark and took me. I don't remember much more.

"These *creatures* have been attacking us for over a week now. They come in waves, and we beat them back as best we can, using shovels and picks mostly. They keep fighting until one or two of us go down; then - dear gods! - they drag the bodies back to the mine.

"But that's not the worst of it - not nearly the worst. A day or two later we find our *dead* have been raised again with one of those damned silver marks on their forehead, and are now fighting *against* us. Mercy! As we grow fewer, they add to their strength.

"I am so very weary, and I have no hope left."

He's not able to provide any more real information about the zombies. He tells the party that the other survivors, back at the camp, will be glad to get some help - even if it's just a handful of adventurers. He's dizzy and weak and cannot walk too well, but he'll be able to guide the PCs back to the mining camp.

**The Silver Mark.** Anyone examining the silver mark on the foreheads of the zombies and making a **DC 20 Arcana** check will determine it is a sigil representing the *Shadowfell*, a desolate place of negative energy and dark necrotic magic. Every zombie the PCs encounter will have such a mark.



## THE CAMP

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Rohan leads them to a path that connects the mine to the camp. It is fairly well beaten down from the pit-ponies and miners who walked back and forth on it daily - before the undead came. All of the pit-ponies either fled or were killed in the first wave of attacks.

As they follow the path back to the camp, the party will see various signs of scuffles - blood on the trees, drag marks in the dirt and disturbed earth. Occasionally there's movement in the distance, or a low moan carried on the wind, but nothing comes close to them.

Eventually they'll arrive at the camp -

The miner's camp is a mess. Several big canvas tents stand in a circle around a central fire pit, though it only barely smolders at the moment and there's little firewood to be seen. A few of the tents are torn, little more than big wet scraps clinging to their pegs.

An old brick wall, all that remains of some ancient structure, stands on one side of the site. The miners have piled up some sacks of ore and wooden beams in a semi-circle before it, forming a kind of half-hearted stockade.

As you approach, the miners themselves appear from their hidey-holes around the ruined camp. They are haggard and hollow-eyed, barely able to lift the picks and shovels they've clearly been using as weapons. They are unwashed, muddy and stinking - they look little different to the undead that they have been fighting.

Shrouded in damp blankets and shivering, they stare at you silently, even disbelievingly. There is only one left among them who appears to have a little iron left in his spine. He tightens his grip on his pick and steps forward.

"I'm **Gedd Frostlight** - are you here to help?"

Gedd is Kat's husband. He has been holding the miners together as they defend against the undead.

### **About Last Week**

Gedd is very pleased to see the PCs. He tells them that the attacks started ten days ago, and that the zombies appear to come from the mine. They are using 'hit and run' tactics - they retreat when they suffer too much damage, or when one or two of the miners are either killed or rendered unconscious. When this happens, the zombies always drag the bodies away to be raised again as the walking dead. From what Gedd has seen, they are acting in an intelligent and coordinated manner.

A few miners have tried to sneak out on their own, but no-one appears to have been able to

get through. On the third night after the attacks started, the entire group tried to force their way through the woods and back to Longsaddle. A large number of the undead converged on them, and the miners fled back to the camp.

Gedd is not sure why the creatures have not just used their numbers to “roll through” the camp. There are just eight miners left now - six humans and two dwarves (the company started with thirty people in total).

### **The Old Wall**

If the PCs examine the old wall, they will find a brass plaque with the following inscription –

This chantry is dedicated to the great god **Lathander** in order to “keep the darkness at bay”. It was sponsored by **Lucien Harpell**.

A **DC 10 Religion** check will reveal that Lathander is the god of life, light, birth and renewal. A **DC 15 History** check will reveal that Lucien Harpell was an archmage who lived in this area hundreds of years ago - he had an evil reputation.

The miners do not realise it, but they have established their camp on consecrated ground. This has considerably weakened the power of the undead attacks on their site.

### **What Next**

Gedd doesn't want to leave the site now, even with the help of the adventurers. His son **Brand Frostlight** (who is sixteen) was dragged into the mine that very morning. Gedd believes that Brand might still be alive.

There may be time – if they are quick – to raid the mine and rescue Brand. They may even be able to stop whatever evil force is behind the undead - though Gedd is doubtful of that.

None of the other remaining miners can be persuaded to go to the mine – the mere thought fills them with terror. Gedd will plead with the party to go into the mine with him. If necessary, he will offer them another **100gp** on top of the fee that Kat has already promised.

Gedd can lead the party to the mine easily enough, and he knows the interior layout very well.

### **If they refuse...**

If the party refuse to assist Gedd, he will head off to the mine himself (and presumably get killed). If the party then make a run for the town, the eight remaining miners will go with them.

About half an hour after leaving the camp, they will be attacked by **15 zombies** who will converge on them from all sides. The miners will fight as **commoners**. At the end of every round, half of the remaining miners (rounded up) will flee the battle, never to be heard from again.

## **THE MINE**

A map of the mine may be found on the final page.

The mine is only about twenty minutes' walk from the camp. The twisted, low trees rapidly give way to rocks, scree and gravel as the path is followed, and the last few minutes are spent scrambling up the foothills before reaching the mine itself. While the walking dead are around, lurking at long distances in the trees, they do not approach the party.

Once they enter the mine, Gedd will wish to search every side tunnel for Brand. He will be very impatient at any delay, but will grudgingly follow the directions of the party.

### **Gedd in battle**

Gedd is a tough miner, but he's not really any sort of fighter. He's also exhausted after ten days of constant battles. For the purpose of combat, he has the statistics of a **guard**, though with an armor class of **12**. He fights with a pick axe, doing **1d4** damage. The undead, guided by a dark intelligence, will realise he is the weakest threat and will target him last in combat.

## 1. THE ENTRANCE

The entrance to the mine is a black hole in the side of the mountain, almost unnaturally dark. Cold air and a ripe, sweet, sweaty stink drift out of that hole. A stack of old, dried up and crumbling wooden boards lay in the weeds, thrown aside when the mine was re-opened.

Entering the mine is simple enough, but the unnatural darkness in there halves the range of any light source.

There is nothing protecting the entrance – they *want* people to enter. If the adventurers try to leave without dealing with the creatures in **location 8**, then **8 zombies** will converge on them, ready to fight.

## 2. THE CARTS

A chamber is carved out of the rock here, broader and wider than the tunnels. On stone rails cut crudely into the ground sit several mine carts, full of rock fragments and glittering ore. The chamber is otherwise as silent as the grave, and the air has a rotten, unnatural scent about it.

The rails run back out towards the entrance but don't go all the way into the mine. There are four carts, all apparently full of rock and ore. There is also quite a lot of “scrap stone” scattered around. The carts are made of wood and are crudely hewn; their wheels are not quite true and it takes some effort to move them.

Lurking inside the carts are **8 zombies**, each covered by a thin layer of rock and ore. Spotting them will require a **DC 20 Perception** check.

**Tactics.** The zombies are ready to ambush anyone who comes within 5' of them. If the PCs make a ranged assault, they will use the carts as cover and push them forward in order to advance. Anyone with proficiency in **Arcana** or **Religion** will notice that the zombies are

behaving much more intelligently than such creatures normally do.

## 3. CRAWLING CLAWS

As the party are heading up this tunnel, they will hear a noise ahead like the scurrying of dozens of tiny feet. They have one round to react, and then **14 crawling claws** will swarm down the tunnel and attack.

**Tactics.** If the party flee before combat commences, they may be able to escape. The claws will follow them if they run, but will not pass through the mine entrance. If the party *do* escape, the claws will return to their original resting place near **location 3**.

**Treasure.** One of the claws is wearing an electrum ring set with tiny emeralds, which is worth **30gp**.



## 4. THE RAW HEAD

This is, apparently, one end of a vein the miners were working. There are abandoned tools and sacks on a sloping pile of rubble along the north wall.

The ceiling, floors and walls seem to be throbbing and shifting. A moment later you realise they are covered with thousands upon thousands of crawling bugs.

There are **3 swarms of caterpillars** in this large cavern, covering just about every surface.

**Tactics.** If the party enter the cavern, the swarms will attack. If the party stay at the cavern entrance and have lights, the swarms will begin moving toward them after a few rounds and will attack.

**Treasure.** There are several nuggets of silver amongst the rubble, worth about **50gp**. It will take half an hour to locate all of them.

## 5. THE BROKEN BEAMS

Ahead, you can see signs of fighting. There are scraps of flesh and broken bone on the ground, rusty brown bloodstains on the walls and scratches and splintered wood on the support beams. A pile of rocks and broken beams block the tunnel - too large to move, though it would be easy enough to scramble over the top.

A fight between some miners and the zombies caused a minor cave-in here. Many of the support beams have been knocked out, and those that remain are loose - the roof is ready to give way again at any moment. A dwarf or PC with a mining background will spot the weakness automatically. Gedd will not notice, partly due to fatigue and partly due to his eagerness to search for Brand.

Any other PC will only spot the danger if they specifically look at the beams and make a **DC 20 Survival** check.

If anyone of medium size or larger tries to climb over the pile of rocks and wood, a 20' section of the tunnel roof will collapse. Everyone within 20' of the pile must make a **DC 15 Dexterity** saving throw or suffer **2d8 bludgeoning** damage.

Anyone struck by the rocks will then be trapped beneath them. Freeing them from beneath the rubble will require a **DC 15 Strength** check. Following the collapse, the area becomes *difficult terrain*, but can be passed over without fear of further cave-ins.

**Treasure.** On the far side of the pile are the remains of an ancient corpse, trapped under the mess. Around its wrist is a silver bracelet worth **50gp**. If the party take the trouble to excavate the whole body, they will find a **longsword +1** in an old scabbard attached to the body.

## 6. THE PIT

Ahead of you is a dark pit from which arises a nauseating smell. On the opposite side the tunnel terminates in a pile of rubble. There is nothing of interest there aside from a large, old, rusty toolbox.

This pit was created when a section of the tunnel floor subsided under the weight of several passing zombies.

The pit is 15' across and 40' deep. The bottom of the pit is a small natural cavern with water 3' deep. Anyone falling into the water must make a **DC 15 Dexterity** save or take **2d6 bludgeoning** damage. In addition, there are **2 zombies** lurking beneath the water, bloated and grotesque.

The far side of the pit is *difficult terrain* due to the rubble, therefore any PC jumping over will have to make a **DC 10 Acrobatics** check or fall backward into the pit when they land. A check will also be required on the return jump.

There are wooden support beams in the ceiling - it's possible the PCs may figure out a way to attach a rope to one of them and swing across. Climbing across the pit using the side wall will require a **DC 15 Acrobatics** check both ways.

**Tactics.** If a PC falls into the water, the zombies will rise up and attack.

**Treasure.** The old toolbox has been in the mine for many years, and contains rusty hammers, pick heads, wedges, shovels and crowbars. There is also a small leather pouch near the bottom, containing two *rough diamonds* worth **80gp** each.



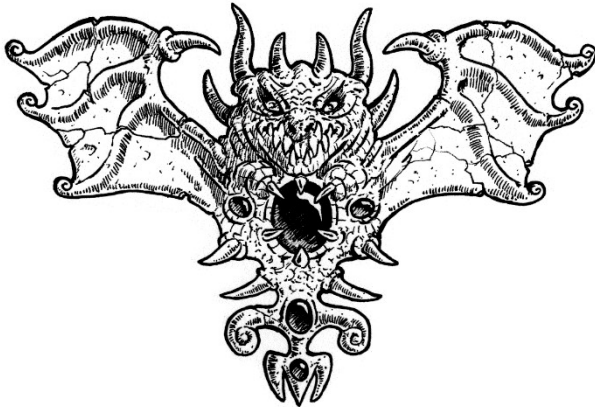
## 7. THE CRACK

You come close to a crack in the wall and briefly see through to a parallel tunnel. There is very little light, but you do see several shadowy figures and hear the call of a loud voice - "Stand fast! Hold together!"

Gedd's face lights up. "That's Brand! My son! We have to get there, right now! Follow me!"

He hefts his pick with renewed vigor and rushes ahead of you down the tunnel as the sound of clashing arms and the groans of the dead issue through the crack.

The crack is too small for any of the PCs to pass through, though smaller creatures or familiars could pass. If this happens, they will see two young miners battling against several zombies with a shadowy presence nearby.



## 8. THE SHADOW PORTAL

As you emerge from the tight tunnel, the darkness seems to intensify. The cavern you have entered is large and circular, with the ceiling supported by numerous beams and freestanding struts.

*Continued in the next column...*

One brave miner stands before you, surrounded by the walking dead. His pick drips with the congealed ichor of his foes, while he himself spits blood defiantly towards a black 'thing' that lurks at the threshold of shadowy emptiness.

"Brand!" gasps Gedd, struggling toward him.

The shadowy creature is painful to the eyes, the darkness seeming to suck at your very sight. Its silent cry of anger at your presence is felt more than heard. Behind the creature, faintly, you can make out a *silver door* set into the far wall. The door is open.

The shambling zombies around Brand turn their attention towards you, raising their arms and snarling in shared anger. Time to fight.

The dark creature is known as a **shadow wight**. It stands at the threshold of a dark portal leading to the Shadowfell. It is the shadow wight that has raised the dead and is trying to spread its evil influence beyond the cave. It is this creature that provides the guiding intelligence behind the zombies.

The shadow wight is accompanied by **8 zombies**. There are also 4 dead miners near **Brand Frostlight**.

**Tactics.** The zombies will attack using the intelligent tactics that have marked their behaviour so far. Brand has the same fighting statistics as his father. Both Brand and Gedd will throw themselves into the battle without hesitation.

The **shadow wight** has the same statistics as a **shadow**, though with *triple* the hit points. It also has the power to animate zombies. The creature will not fight directly - rather, each round it will hover over the body of a dead miner and trace a silver sigil upon their forehead with a shadowy finger. The miner will then rise up as a **zombie**.

If the shadow wight runs out of corpses to animate, it will instead hover over the body of a



destroyed zombie. The zombie will then be re-animated with just 1 hit point.

If all of the zombies are killed, or the shadow welt itself has lost at least half of its hit points, it will retreat through the silver door into the inky blackness. Any creature following it through the door will find themselves in the Shadowfell, and will be quickly destroyed.

**Treasure.** Amongst the detritus in the room are the remnants of an old magical lab. It's mostly broken trash, but there are enough surviving vials of reagents and rare materials to fetch **150gp** from the right buyer. There's also an old magical tome - the pages have rotted away but the cover remains and is marked with the personal sigil (decipherable by a Wizard or Sorcerer) of 'Lucien Harpell'.



### Brand's Story

Brand and his companion were both struck unconscious during a recent raid on the camp site. They awoke in the large cavern with the shadow welt hovering over them. They picked up a pick each (left there by the miners who most recently uncovered the cavern), and began fighting.

**Closing the door.** If the silver door remains open, the shadow welt will return from the Shadowfell within 1d6 days. Closing the door requires a **DC 15 Strength** check. This will seal

the portal to the Shadowfell and prevent dark creatures from coming through. However, the door can be re-opened at any time.

The only way to truly seal the portal is to bring down the roof of the cavern. Knocking over one of the struts requires a sledgehammer (easily found in **location 7**) and a **DC 15 Strength** check.

Once six struts have been knocked over the cavern roof will buckle and collapse, sealing the silver door and the dark portal forever. Anyone in the cavern when it collapses must make a **DC 15 Athletics** check or be caught by falling rock and take **3d6 bludgeoning** damage. They will also be trapped and must be dug out - it's at your discretion to decide how much effort that requires, or if it is even possible.

Clever PCs will look to use a rope or a fire to remove the struts and collapse the tunnel roof safely.

### Filling in the gaps

Your players will have formed a rough idea of the backstory from the clues provided. You can decide if (and how) they learn any of the following additional detail.

Hundreds of years ago, a young mage named Lucien Harpell was tracking necromantic ley lines through the Starmetal Hills. He followed one of the lines into the old silver mine, and caused his servants to dig a tunnel to a natural cavern where a nexus of the ley lines had formed.

Lucien set up a simple laboratory in the cavern and used the nexus to perform dark and obscure research. One of his experiments went terribly wrong, however, and caused a rip to open between the natural world and the Shadowfell. Through this rip entered the shadow welt.

It took all of the young mage's power to force the shadow welt to retreat back through the portal, and many of his servants were killed in the process. Lucien temporarily closed the rip, then fashioned the silver door to seal it more

permanently. He then collapsed the entrance of the narrow tunnel leading to the cavern, and later funded a chantry dedicated to Lathander to discourage the dark creature from ever emerging again.

For many years the silver door and the dark portal beyond lay undisturbed. But then Gedd's company began working the mine again and after a few months a pair of miners excavated out the entrance to the troublesome cavern. To their astonishment, they discovered a silver door set into the rock, and one of them reached out to open it...



## THE JOURNEY HOME

As the party leave the mine, read the following -

Emerging from the tunnels and back out into the light is exhilarating. You only realise how cloying, choking, suffocating the darkness was after you step out into the light. It reinvigorates you and returns hope to your hearts.

If Gedd and Brand survive, read this -

Gedd and his son whoop and holler with joy to breathe clean air and bask in the sunlight. "We're alive! We're free!"

Presumably the party will go to the mining camp to retrieve the surviving miners before returning to Longsaddle. On the trip back they will notice that the animals, birds and other creatures have slowly begun to return to the area. There are a number of zombies still roaming the woods, but they are no longer guided by the shadow welt, and so are much less of a threat.

As they approach the village they'll be greeted by Kat. *If Gedd and Brand survive*, read this -

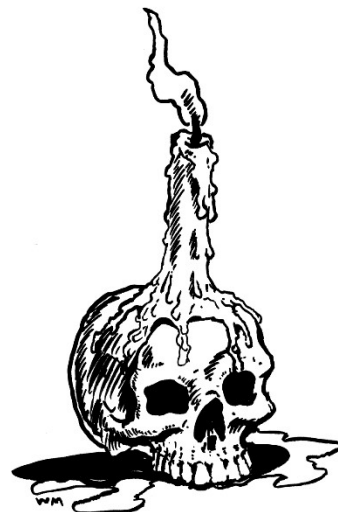
Ahead of you, running out of the village, comes Kat. Her hair streams behind her and tears run down her cheeks. She flies into the weary arms of her husband, kissing him over and over again before she drags her son and her husband together into a rib-cracking crush.

She raises her tear-streaked face towards you. "Thank you, thank you so much! Anything we can help you with, ever - you just ask. We owe you our lives."

She will happily pay them the agreed fee. If Gedd promised them additional money, she will honor his commitment, though it may take some months to do so.

*If Gedd or Brand were killed*, the meeting with Kat will be much more difficult. She will be extremely distraught, but will still pay what she promised.

The Frostlight family (whoever survives) elect to stay in Longsaddle. They give up mining altogether and become metal merchants instead. In due course, Kat gives birth to a new child and names it after one of the PCs. And from that day onwards, the party will always have a friendly hearth in Longsaddle.



# CREDITS & LEGALS

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**Design:** James Desborough and M.T. Black.

**Acknowledgement:** This adventure is loosely based on an idea by Patrick Benson.

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