
The Witches' Road
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GUILD

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Dungeon Masters Guild

The Witches' Road

Estimated Timeframe

This campaign is designed as a high-intensity, resource-draining one-shot adventure. The pacing is intentionally fast, with minimal opportunities for a long rest, forcing tactical choices and resource management from the PCs. **Total One-Shot Time: 4 – 5 hours.** This is the target for a single, focused session, including time for roleplaying, rules look-ups, and short breaks.

This campaign is best designed for a party of **four to five Player Characters at Level 8 or 9**, but is scalable.

Campaign Premise

The legendary **Witches' Road** is not a physical path, but a conduit of raw, untamed magic—a psychic scar across the realm that only appears when a magical convergence reaches its peak. A triumvirate of powerful witches known as the **Coven of the Black Star**—The Crone (Wisdom), The Mother (Force), and The Maiden (Charm)—have begun their pilgrimage upon this path. They seek to complete a dark ritual at the road's end, the **Crystal Apex**, which will grant them power over the very laws of reality, allowing them to dominate the land and twist its inhabitants to their will. The Player Characters (PCs) are the only ones close enough and bold enough to follow, navigating the terrifying, reality-warping dangers of the road to stop the coven before the final, cataclysmic ritual is completed.

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Core Themes

- **The Price of Power:** What horrors are one willing to endure to stop greater evil? The path itself extracts a psychic and physical toll.
- **Illusion and Madness:** The Witches' Road is fueled by nightmare logic, forcing the PCs to question what is real and what is a magical deception.
- **Embracing the Terrifying:** The PCs must utilize resources and abilities they might normally shy away from (dark magic, forbidden knowledge) to understand and combat the coven's power.

Group and Solo Play

Navigating **The Witches' Road** demands specific tactical considerations, both when playing as a unified group and when guiding a single hero accompanied by a necessary ally.



Group Play

Engaging in the pursuit as a group allows the party to mitigate the extreme toll of the magical hazards and exploit the Coven's diverse vulnerabilities.

- **Hazard Mitigation:** Success hinges on specialization. Characters proficient in Constitution and Wisdom saving throws should lead through the **Psychic Echoes** and **Suffocating Fog**, respectively, reserving the abilities of more fragile members. Teamwork is crucial in the **Sunken Marsh** where magical healing is unreliable; PCs must use abilities like Athletics and non-magical gear (ropes) to save those trapped by the Cursed Ground.
- **Coven Takedown:** In the Final Confrontation, the Coven members' weaknesses must be targeted immediately. **Hecate's Skepticism** means she focuses less on martial attackers. **Morwen's Empathy** can be exploited through dramatic acts of self-sacrifice or protection, drawing her attention. **Lyra's Truth** means players can force her to reveal weaknesses by asking direct, challenging questions (e.g., "What will truly destroy the road?").
- **Pacing:** The group must aggressively manage resources, as there are minimal safe rest opportunities between the three main locations.



Solo Play

Running this one-shot with a single Player Character (PC) relies heavily on the support of the NPC, **Elora Vanette, the Cartographer of Scars** (See Appendix). The campaign's difficulty is significantly higher, requiring excellent resource management and a defensive mindset.

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- **Ally Reliance:** Elora Vanette's **Inspiring Insight** is vital for the PC to overcome the high DC saving throws of the environmental hazards (Psychic Echoes, Suffocating Fog). Her **Canny Observer** trait should be used by the GM to subtly feed the PC clues and warnings about traps and the Coven's immediate plans.
- **The Pursuit:** The PC must treat every encounter as a severe resource drain. Instead of a direct fight, use the terrain and hazards to their advantage. For instance, luring the Lost Guard into a section of the Crossroads where the Psychic Echoes are strongest can soften the target before the PC engages.
- **Success Condition:** Since defeating all three Coven members might be too challenging for a solo PC, the core goal shifts slightly: the PC must focus all effort on **interrupting the ritual (destroying the central vortex)** rather than simply defeating the witches. Elora should emphasize this objective repeatedly.
- **DM Simulator / Guide:** Utilize a solo play guide, like **Kymera's Solo D&D Campaign Manual** or a similar manual, DM simulator, or AI chat to interpret the world's reactions, manage epic scenarios, and provide narrative direction based on the player's choices.
- **Streamlined Management:** Simplify the complexities of the campaign. Focus on pivotal decisions and their far-reaching outcomes rather than granular details.
- **Personalized Threats:** Tailor the encounters to directly challenge the solo PC's specific strengths and weaknesses, pushing them to their absolute limits.
- **Legendary Boons for the Cause:** Ensure opportunities for the solo PC to acquire truly legendary boons, artifacts, or direct blessings that grant them the power to overcome challenges that would be impossible alone.

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Dread Mechanics: Sanity and Psychological Conditions

This campaign utilizes the Sanity mechanics detailed in *The Dungeon Master's Guide to Cosmic Dread*.

Select mechanics from *The Dungeon Master's Guide to Cosmic Dread* and *The Dungeon Master's Guide to Cosmic Dread: Supplemental* :

1. Initial Sanity Score

- **Determination:** A PC's initial Sanity Score is equal to their **Wisdom Score x 5** (Minimum 50).
    - *Example: A PC with Wisdom 14 starts with 70 Sanity (14 x5).*
- **Sanity Loss:** The Sanity Score decreases when a character is exposed to a **Sanity Trigger**.
- **Recovery:** Sanity can only be recovered through extended periods of safety and specialized care (long rest in a consecrated area, powerful healing magic), typically only restoring 1d4 points per recovery event.

2. Sanity Triggers and Loss

When exposed to a trigger, the PC must make a **Sanity Saving Throw** (DC determined by the trigger). On a failure, the PC loses the indicated amount of Sanity and develops a **Psychological Condition**.

Sanity Trigger	DC	Sanity Loss (Failed Save)
Minor Exposure (Ambient Witches' Road energy, unsettling visual)	10	1d4
Major Event (Witnessing a creature's reality-bending ability, extreme psychological trauma)	13	1d6
Cosmic Horror (Encountering a Coven Witch or a creature of pure Mire-energy)	15	1d8
Sustained Echo (Failing a check on Cursed Ground)	12	1 per failed check

3. Psychological Conditions

When a PC loses Sanity, the player must roll on the **Table of Psychological Conditions** from the Supplemental document.

- **Severity:** For every 10 points of Sanity lost below the character's starting score, the resulting condition is increased in severity (e.g., a *Short-Term Condition* might become a *Long-Term Condition*).
- **Coven Focus:** When rolling for a Condition, if the trigger was directly caused by one of the Coven Witches, apply a related thematic bias:
    - **Hecate (Illusion):** Focus on **Visual, Auditory, and Illusory Effects** (Supplemental p. 5-7).
    - **Morwen (Force):** Focus on **Psychosomatic Conditions** and **Phantom Pain** (Supplemental p. 9-10).
    - **Lyra (Charm):** Focus on **Paranoias, Anxieties, and Delusions** (Supplemental p. 11-12).

Arc Overview: The Journey of Terrors

This adventure is a linear pursuit focused on three major locations along The Witches' Road, each guarded by a remnant of the coven's dark magic and infused with an environmental hazard.

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Environmental Hazards: *(DM Note: For additional inspiration and detailed mechanics for environmental hazards, consider referencing Kymera's Guide to D&D 5e Environmental Hazards, which includes examples like quicksand, extreme cold, poisonous gas, and more, all of which can be re-flavored for The Witches' Road campaign.)*

I. The Call to Adventure: The Ballad & The Warning

The PCs arrive in a seemingly peaceful location, only to witness the initial, minor effects of the Witches' Road opening: strange magical phenomena, unsettling calm, or bizarre weather. They discover an ancient, etched stone or a crazed survivor who utters the chilling mantra of the Coven.

> Circle sewn with fate , Unlock thy hidden gate
> Blood and tears and bone, Maiden, Mother, Crone
> Down the witches' road, Follow me, my friend, To glory at the end

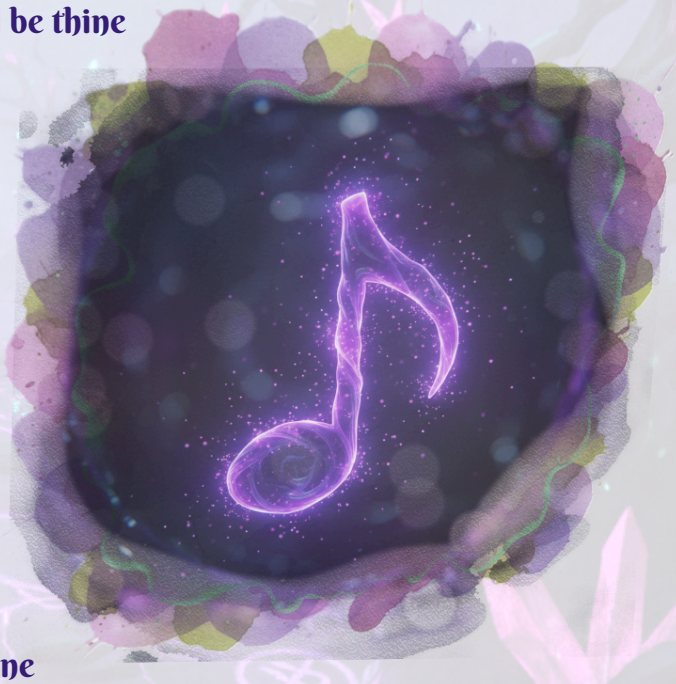
Before them, a swirling vortex of arcane energy begins to coalesce. As the magic intensifies, the distant, eerie, and strangely harmonious voices of the Coven of the Black Star echo through the air as they sing the ritualistic ballad required to fully open the gate:

Verse 1

Seekest thou the road to all that's foul and fair
Gather sisters fire, water, earth and air
Darkest hour, wake thy power, earthly and divine
Burn and brew with coven true and glory shall be thine

Chorus

Down, down, down the road
Down the witches' road
Down, down, down the road
Down the witches' road
Down, down, down the road
Down the witches' road
Circle sewn with fate
Unlock thy hidden gate



Verse 2

Marching ever forward 'neath the wooded shrine

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I stray not from the path, I hold death's hand in mine
Primal night, giveth sight familiar by thy side
If one be gone, we carry on, spirit as our guide

Chorus

Down, down, down the road
Down the witches' road (Down the witches' road)
Down, down, down the road (Down the witches' road)
Down the witches' road (Down the witches' road)
Down, down, down the road (Down the witches' road)
Down the witches' road (Down the witches' road)
Blood and tears and bone
Maiden, Mother, Crone

Verse 3

The road is wild and wicked, winding through the wood
Where all that's wrong is right and all that's bad is good
Through many miles of tricks and trials, we'll wander high and low
Tame your fears, a door appears, the time has come to go

Chorus

Down, down, down the road (Down, down, down, down)
Down the witches' road (Down the witches' road)
Down, down, down the road (Down the witches' road)
Down the witches' road (Down the witches' road)
Down, down, down the road (Down the witches' road)
Down the witches' road (Down the witches' road)
Follow me, my friend
To glory at the end

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The final notes of the chorus coincide with the vortex stabilizing into a massive, arching gateway of swirling purple and black energy. The PCs are warned that the Coven has already set off. The **Spectral Guide** (a ghostly, shattered reflection of an innocent traveler, a dark 'Glinda') appears, guiding them toward the starting point—the swirling vortex of arcane energy.

II. The Witches' Road proper

The path itself is a shifting, terrifying landscape: fields of shimmering obsidian, forests of razor-sharp glass, and skies perpetually twilight. The PCs must pass the major checkpoints.

III. The Final Apex

The PCs reach the Crystal Apex—a mountaintop spire of fractured arcane energy—where the Coven of the Black Star is moments away from completing their ritual.

The Journey of Terrors

The Crossroads of Lost Intent

This is the entry point, a field where reality is already thin. Objects and memories of those who failed to walk the road litter the ground. The Coven passed through here, leaving behind psychic residue.

- **Hazard: Psychic Echoes**
  - **Trigger:** Stepping into the Crossroads (a 40-foot diameter area).
  - **Effect:** A creature must succeed on a **DC 13 Wisdom saving throw** at the start of its turn or suffer one level of Exhaustion and take 1d4 psychic damage as the failure of others floods their mind. Succeeding on the save grants temporary immunity until the next turn.
  - **Mitigation:** A creature immune to being Frightened or that is already immune to psychic damage is immune to the exhaustion effect. Finding and destroying the source of the Echoes (e.g., a shattered mirror) ends the hazard.
- **Encounter: The Coven's Footprint (Crossroads)**
  - **Challenge:** The PCs find a creature—a twisted version of a 'Scarecrow'—a former adventurer whose mind was broken by the Psychic Echoes, now a Warlock of the Fiend (CR 7-8, re-skinned) guarding the area. The fight occurs within the **Psychic Echoes** hazard, forcing the PCs to manage exhaustion while fighting.
  - **Goal:** Defeat the guardian and find a protective charm left by the Spectral Guide that offers advantage on Wisdom saving throws against the Echoes.
- **Trial: The Unending Compliment**
  - **Setup:** A disembodied, sweet, feminine voice follows a single PC, relentlessly praising their appearance, strength, and skills. The voice requests the PC to pause and admire themselves.

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