Decent: Journeys In The Dark
Fast Tactics Variant Version 2

About This Variant
Descent:JitD is an incredible game with a lot of depth and flexibility, and an experience that definitely should not be missed by fans of this genre. Fast Tactics was created as an extension of the official game rules, with the intent of speeding up the game while also offering greater depth of strategy for the Overlord in particular. The heroes also have a number of new options which both make them more powerful and reduce the time taken in simple logistical wrangling. In general, this variant is targeted at making the existing maps much more exciting while taking much less time. With Fast Tactics the heroes and the Overlord both gain the ability to engage in deep strategy without the game taking nearly so long as it otherwise would.

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Issues Addressed By This Variant

<u>The Extended Length of Play Time</u> is the largest problem in the base game rules. Play groups who want to really enjoy the deep tactics of the game by planning and executing maneuvers in a concerted way will find that this game's stated length of four to six hours is likely insufficient on later quests (especially those in the expansion). I decided to work on this variant after it took nine hours for my group to complete Well of Darkness Quest 7.

<u>Overlord/Heroes Balance Issues</u> are the second topic of interest. In the base Descent:JitD game, the heroes have far too much power for the quests to be of enduring interest to advanced players. In the expansions the Overlord becomes to overpowered that he has to continually hold himself back if the heroes are to have any chance. If this is done, this can curb the sense of accomplishment felt by heroes who complete a quest. The Overlord's card/threat income is cut in this variant, but new tactical options for the Overlord and new enhancements for the heroes balances this all out.

<u>Randomness of Hero Improvements</u> is the third issue to be addressed. While some degree of randomness is certainly appreciated in games of this sort, too much can wildly unbalance certain games. For instance, most of the base quests have apparently been designed with the notion that not all heroes will get chest items that will be useful to them. When heroes do all happen to get good items, the quest is too easy; when the heroes do not all get relatively useful items, the quest may be too hard (and the heroes may be frustrated by essentially not developing at all). This variant introduces a mechanism for making it more likely that the heroes will get what they need.

<u>Repetitive Segments of Quests</u> are another area of concern. Many quests in the base game in particular are built symmetrically, with multiple areas that are substantially the same. While these rooms may be interesting to play through once in a quest, twice becomes an exercise in tedium. This variant includes an autopilot mechanism for gracefully bypassing the uninteresting parts of quests.

<u>The Massive Number of Spawns</u> that the Overlord is encouraged to enact is another part of the base rules that can bog down the game without creating a substantial enhancement to the interest of the game. Instead of emphasizing hordes and hordes of monsters, this variant emphasizes confrontations with fewer-but-more-powerful monsters.

<u>The Long Lead-In Period</u> at the start of the game is the final area of concern. Until the heroes get copper treasures their options are extremely limited, and the monsters that they are able to fight at that level are typically repetitive and tactically uninteresting. The Overlord now has the option of putting fewer more powerful monsters in these (and all) rooms, and this makes for much more interesting game openings.

<u>The Overlord's Tactical Options</u> are often too simple. The heroes have a wealth of options to consider, but these options are considerably less deep for the Overlord. This variant adds a considerable number of options for the Overlord, and puts the Overlord in the situation of having to make hard choices between various powerful strategic routes. In the expansions in particular, the Overlord always had too much power and too few options on how to use it.

Changes To Overlord

<u>Number of Cards Drawn</u> by the Overlord can never exceed two. *This prevents the Overlord from gathering so many cards that they cannot use them all. This has been a major problem in the expansions when Evil Genius is in use, and this rule largely eliminates the issue. The (now-useless) Evil Genius card can either be replaced with Treachery cards, or can be discarded for threat.*

<u>When The Overlord Cards Run Out</u> the heroes now lose four conquest tokens, rather than the normal three. *This compensates for the reduction in the max speed by which the deck is traversed.*

<u>Spending Threat For Cards</u> The Overlord may spend five threat to draw another card. This may only be done once per turn, and may only be done during the draw phase of the Overlord's turn. *This allows the Overlord to recover from bad hands, but at a cost. If not playing with the Expansion, this also gives the Overlord an advantage that he did not previously have. This helps to counteract some of the hero improvements.*

<u>Spending Surges For Healing</u> During attacks, the Overlord can now spend three surges to restore two wounds to the attacking monster. This can be done multiple times per attack, surges permitting. *This provides slightly more tactical depth for the Overlord when attacking, and slightly increases the power of all monsters. Surges can still be spent to gain Threat instead, if desired.*

<u>Spending Surges For Range or Damage</u> During attacks, the Overlord can now spend two surges to add an extra +1 damage or an extra +1 range to that attack. This can be done multiple times per attack, surges permitting. *This provides slightly more tactical depth for the Overlord when attacking, and slightly increases the power of all monsters. Surges can still be spent to gain Threat instead, if desired.*

<u>Spawn Card Limit</u> Spawn cards can now only be played once per explored area. The start area and any minor areas (not given a fully unique numeric area number) do not count for this total. As each major area is explored, the Overlord gains the option to use another Spawn -- this can be done at any time later in the game, in any part of the dungeon following normal spawn rules. *This prevents the game from dragging on by having too many monsters clogging up individual rooms. The smaller spawns, such as beastmen and kobolds and skeletons, are also thus not used to excess as they previously could be. Fighting endless such monsters early in the game might well add to the difficulty of the early game, but it does nothing to make the early game more interesting and just drags the game out. The excess spawn cards are simply discarded for threat.*

<u>Upgrading New Monster Health</u> When placing a monster on the board, the Overlord can choose to increase its maximum wounds by five by paying five Threat. When this is done, simply place a 5x threat token under (or next to) the monster to denote this. When the monster is killed, the 5x threat token is returned to the threat tokens draw pile. The token cannot be returned to the threat tokens draw pile or shifted to a new monster until the first monster is killed. *With the reduced threat income of the Overlord, this becomes another powerful tactical option, but one that comes at the expense of other potentially valuable options.*

<u>Upgrading Existing Monster Health</u> When a monster is already on the board, the Overlord can choose to upgrade its maximum wounds by five by paying eight Threat. Place a 5x threat token under the monster, and the remaining three threat tokens back in the threat draw pile. The Overlord can only take this action on his turn, and only once per turn. *This can make the end monsters considerably more interesting if the heroes are powerful and the Overlord has excess threat that would otherwise be unused.*

Changes To Heroes

<u>Extra Card When Buying Or Collecting Treasure</u> The heroes now always draw one extra card when buying or collecting treasure. After reading all of the drawn cards, the hero must choose one to shuffle back into the appropriate treasure deck. (Note: When the hero would normally draw multiple treasure cards, this rule does not multiply. For example, when a hero would normally draw two silver cards they will instead draw three, and reshuffle one into the deck.) *This allows the heroes a somewhat greater chance of getting useful cards.*

<u>Trading After Collecting Treasure</u> This may only be done after each hero has discarded their extra card if playing with the extra treasure card rule. The heroes are then immediately able to trade treasure and other equipment/items amongst themselves. This does not have to be done evenly (i.e., one hero could wind up with two treasures, while another winds up with none). *This allows the heroes a much greater chance of getting useful cards, while keeping the game moving.*

<u>Selling Back Items After Collecting Treasure</u> After treasure is collected (and traded, if desired), the heroes are allowed to immediately sell back any treasure and/or other equipment or items they wish. They receive the normal value that they would when selling items in town (a.k.a. half value). *This keeps the game moving by reducing the need to go to town after collecting treasure.*

Town Trips

If no named monsters are presently on the board and the heroes do not have line of sight to any monsters, the heroes may declare a "town trip." This allows the heroes to do a fair amount of logistical wrangling in quick time. *This is a significant advantage for the heroes, but its primary goal is actually to just keep the game moving. When paired with the other changes to the Overlord in this variant, this advantage balances out.*

<u>Unlimited Turns</u> During the town trip, play as if the heroes are all simultaneously taking an unlimited number of turns. This means that heroes can move anywhere on the board, can restore all their fatigue (from resting), can buy/sell as much as they want, can consume as many potions as they want, and can trade as many items as they want. All of this can be done in any order, and the heroes should all see to their own affairs simultaneously to reduce the time required for this trip. All of the normal rules from the game must be followed during the town trip, unless an exception is noted in this section.

<u>Movement Restrictions</u> During the town trip, the heroes must follow the normal rules of movement except that they have unlimited movement points. However, heroes may not reveal new areas during the town trip. They also may not move within the line of sight of any monsters remaining on the map. If heroes are not able to access Glyphs of Transport without breaking one of the above rules, they may not perform any of the town-specific actions. If heroes are not able to reach each other without breaking one of the above rules, they may not trade.

<u>No Chests May Be Opened</u> In order to let the Overlord spring any traps that may exist, chests may not be opened as part of a town trip. If there are chests still present on the board when a town trip could otherwise be declared, those chests should be collected first (or ignored until after the town trip, if desired).

<u>Other Loose Items May Be Collected</u> Non-chest items such as rune keys, piles of gold, and potions may be collected during the town trip and distributed to any players. These items must all be accessible to the collecting heroes given the movement restrictions. Any inactivated Glyphs of Transport within range also become activated.

<u>Position Heroes</u> When the town trip is ending, the heroes should position their figures (and any familiars/companions) wherever they want (given the movement restrictions).

<u>The Overlord's Turn</u> When the heroes have declared that their town trip is complete, it immediately becomes the Overlord's turn. The Overlord collects four turns' worth of threat and cards instead of one. When the Overlord's turn is complete, the game resumes as normal.

<u>Special Note For Free Per-Turn Effects</u> The heroes may have access to equipment, items, or familiars (such as Sharr the Brightwing) that can normally be used once per turn at no cost, or which can be used with no cost except fatigue (such as Greater and Lesser Healing). The "Unlimited Turns" rule does not apply in these situations; instead, the heroes may only gain four turns' worth of benefit. In cases such as Sharr the Brightwing, assume that unlimited movement points can be used in each of those four turns.

Area Autopilot

If the heroes and the Overlord agree that they do not wish to play a specific area in the dungeon, then area autopilot can be applied. This might be done for any number of reasons--time constraints, a relatively uninteresting area in a quest (such as a mirror image of an area just played in that same quest), etc.

How to Declare Area Autopilot

Before declaring autopilot for an area, the Overlord must fully set that area up on the map. This includes any monster substitutions that the Overlord wishes to make. If the heroes and the Overlord agree that they do not wish to play through the area, they can declare that they will clear the area on autopilot. If a named monster is visible on the board, autopilot cannot be declared.

Latent Autopilot Calls

If the heroes get part-way into the room, an autopilot can indeed be called latently. The heroes can thus confront the largest monster in an otherwise dull room, kill it, and then declare autopilot for the rest. This avoids giving the Overlord rewards that are too great, or suffering penalties that are too severe.

Effects Of Autopilot

When autopilot is declared, all of the monsters in that area are removed and the heroes go into Town Trip mode (see rules above). Note that monsters in any other areas of the dungeon are unaffected. For each monster removed, the Overlord is receives bonuses based on the table below. If the Overlord has a half threat remainder, round down.

Hero Wounds

In some cases, the heroes also suffer wounds; when this occurs, those wounds ignore armor. If any hero would be killed by the damage they receive, they must roll a single black power die. If they roll a surge, they are not killed and instead are left with a single remaining wound. If they do not roll a surge, they are killed and all the normal consequences apply.

Fast Tactics Variant Rules

Area Autopilot Table

Group	1x Normal	1x Master
A Kobold	0.5x Threat	1x threat
B Beastman Skeleton Bane Spider	1x Threat	1.5x Threat
C Ferrox Razorwing	1.5x Threat	2.5x Threat
D Hell Hound Sorcerer	2x Threat All heroes roll 1 power die; surges suffer 1 wound.	2.5x Threat All heroes roll 1 power die; surges suffer 1 wound.
E Deep Elf Dark Priest	3x Threat All heroes roll 1 power die; power/range suffer 1 wound (per die).	3.5x Threat All heroes roll 2 power dice; surges suffer 1 wounds (per die).
F Ogre Manticore Naga Blood Ape	3.5x Threat All heroes roll 1 power die; power/range suffer 1 wound.	4x Threat All heroes roll 2 power dice; power/range suffer 1 wound.
G Golem Troll	5x Threat All heroes roll 2 power die; power/range suffer 1 wound.	6x Threat All heroes roll 2 power die; power/range suffer 2 wounds.
H Giant Dragon Demon Chaos Beast	18x Threat All heroes roll 2 power dice; non-blanks suffer 3 wounds (per die).	20x Threat All heroes roll 3 power dice; non-blanks suffer 3 wounds (per die).

Monster Replacement
When revealing a new area, the Overlord can choose to replace the existing monsters on the board with more powerful monsters on using the following rules. These rules are grouped based on the monster to be added, and each line is a separate rule. Each row under each category is an individual option (i.e. you can substitute 1 skeleton for two kobolds, or you can substitute 1 beastman and 1 threat for a skeleton). When "or" is noted in the requirements, any combination of the noted groups may be used.

Tips For Easy Substitution
It is generally best to set out all the base monsters from a new area, and then start making substitutions. As base monsters are replaced, put them away. When new monsters are substituted in, put them in the pile immediately. Using this technique, multiple rounds of substitutions can be made if so desired (for example, two Ferrox could be substituted for six beastmen, and then a Naga could be substituted for the two Ferrox and three Threat. That Naga could then be upgraded to a Master Naga for an additional four Threat).

Upgrading Master Monsters
If you choose to upgrade a Master Monster, you can upgrade it to a Master Monster of a higher-level group by using the Normal Monster Rules for that group (for example, you can substitute a pair of Master Razorwings and three Threat for a Master Manticore).

Alternatively, you can treat a Master Monster as two Normal Monsters of its type for purposes of substitution (for example, you can substitute a single Master Kobold for a normal Bane Spider).

The Best Solution
The ideal solution to the problem of uninteresting rooms, however, is to simply play better quests. If there are uninteresting rooms in a quest you are about to play, have the Overlord make changes in advance to spice things up. Descent has very open-ended RPG-style structure with a lot of room for creativity beyond the base rules, so don't be afraid to experiment!

Monster Substitution Table

Group	1x Normal	1x Master
A Kobold	1x Group A, 1x Threat 0.5x Group B, 1x Threat	1x Group A, 4x Threat 2x Group A, 1x Threat 1x Group B, 1x Threat
B Beastman Skeleton Bane Spider	2x Group A 1x Group B, 1x Threat	1x Group B, 4x Threat 2x Group B, 1x Threat 1x Group C
C Ferrox Razorwing	3x Group A 2x Group B 1x Group C, 1x Threat	1x Group C, 4x Threat 2x Group C, 1x Threat 1x Group D
D Hell Hound Sorcerer	3x Group A, 2x Threat 2x Group B, 2x Threat 3x Group B 1x Group C, 2x Threat 1x Group D, 1x Threat	1x Group D, 4x Threat 2x Group D, 1x Threat 1x Group E
E Deep Elf Dark Priest	2x Group C or D 1x Group E, 1x Threat	1x Group E, 7x Threat 2x Group E, 1x Threat 1x Group F
F Ogre Manticore Naga Blood Ape	3x Group C or D or E 2x Group C or D or E, 3x Threat 1x Group F, 1x Threat	1x Group F, 7x Threat 2x Group F, 1x Threat 1x Group G
G Golem Troll	2x Group F, 1x Threat 1x Group F, 4x Threat	1x Group G, 8x Threat
H Giant Dragon Demon Chaos Beast	4x Group F or G, 15x Threat	1x Group H, 9x Threat