

TREE OF TRUTH

A 5E-compatible mini-adventure for
3 to 5 characters of 3rd-5th level

Since the dying king not a single son did sire, his three nephews competing claims to the crown have called. And so it is that a struggle for succession is sure unless someone can verifiably validate the one true heir. The Royal Counsel suggests that a party of adroit adventurers could avert the woes of war, and perhaps enrich themselves, by presenting this enigmatic exigency to the Tree of Truth and returning with the reply. A noble notion indeed, but difficult to do, as the Tree of Truth stands in the nexus of the Gnarly Garden, of old overrun with howling humanoids and perilous plants....

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For centuries, the Tree of Truth has answered vexing questions of genealogy. But usurpers annoyed by this failsafe mechanism have gradually surrounded the magically protected tree with a vicious garden to prevent access. Most of those who try to trespass perish among the weeds, leaving their precious cargoes where they fall. Can the players reach the tree and escape with the truth to avert cataclysm?

BACKGROUND

Since the dying king of Rhangappa sired not a single son, his three nephews (Oigen, Seres, and Kymryn) have each asserted competing claims to the throne—a war of succession looms unless someone can validate the one true heir. The Royal Counsel suggests that a party of brave adventurers might avert the scourge of war by presenting this quandary to the Tree of Truth at the center of the Gnarled Garden. Completing this quest will not be easy however as the sacred site has been left to gradually suffer, and now evil surrounds it in a twisted maze of strangle weed patrolled by spider-riding goblins that kill most of those who dare to enter (leaving valuables aplenty where they fall).

CHARACTER HOOKS

The Church might order clerics or paladins to resolve this matter, druids and rangers could see it as an opportunity to “clean up” the Gnarled Garden or commune with the Tree of Truth, and barbarians and rogues just smell loot!

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BEGINNING OF THE ADVENTURE

An anxious gnome named Fidelwyn escorts the party several miles overland to the edge of the Gnarled Garden—which he doesn’t enter. Along the way he recalls legend to explain that the garden spans 24 miles across with the Tree of Truth under a dome of dagger-sized thorns at its center.

The twisted mass of thorny green foliage and dull yellow flowers before you reeks of rotting vegetables, reaches 30 feet high, and offers no clear path ahead though occasional gaps in the growth might allow for passage. Before he departs your gnome guide orients you toward the center of the Gnarled Garden—your goal.

Travel across the Gnarled Garden is at half speed unless the PCs are assisted by magic or led by a ranger with Favored Terrain (forest), and the entire area is lightly obscured. A ranger-led party can walk without error to the Gnarled Garden’s center with 4 hours of travel.

Otherwise adventurers require 8 hours of travel to reach their destination. In addition, at least one of the PCs must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom check halfway or get disoriented, returning to a random point on the Gnarled Garden’s outer edge to start all over again!

Random Encounters in the Garden

Once every hour the adventurers have a random encounter. Note that not all of these need to result in combat—the PCs might sneak around enemies, lure them out of the way, flee, or even make unlikely allies. See the table on the next page.

CENTER OF THE GNARLED GARDEN

After hours of trudging through the overgrowth the PCs arrive at the Gnarled Garden’s center where they find a giant jumble of monstrous brambles around the Tree of Truth. Monsters have tunneled through the brambles to form the complex within the vegetation. A creature can hack through the thorn walls (AC 11, 33 hit points per 5-foot square) but the

GARDEN OUTLYING AREAS ENCOUNTERS

d8 Encounter

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| 1-4 | 1d4+1 giant spiders each with a goblin rider (all wearing signaling horns). The riders fire short bows as the spiders creep into combat from 50 feet away. |
| 5 | An ambush by 2 ettercaps dropping from 15 feet above. |
| 6 | An awakened tree attacks the party from 5 feet away. |
| 7 | 1d4 deer are 30 feet away and startled by the adventurers, pausing then fleeing to safety. Clever spell use by a druid might garner directions from these animals. |
| 8 | Faint sound of a distant horn. |

thorns strike back, and with each melee attack deal slashing damage equal to 20 minus the attacker's AC. Any creature that climbs through the thorn wall with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check takes the same damage. The brambles are immunity to fire damage. Flying over the complex and directly to the Tree of Truth is impossible as the thorns mingle with the branches overhead to form a seal that completely conceals it.

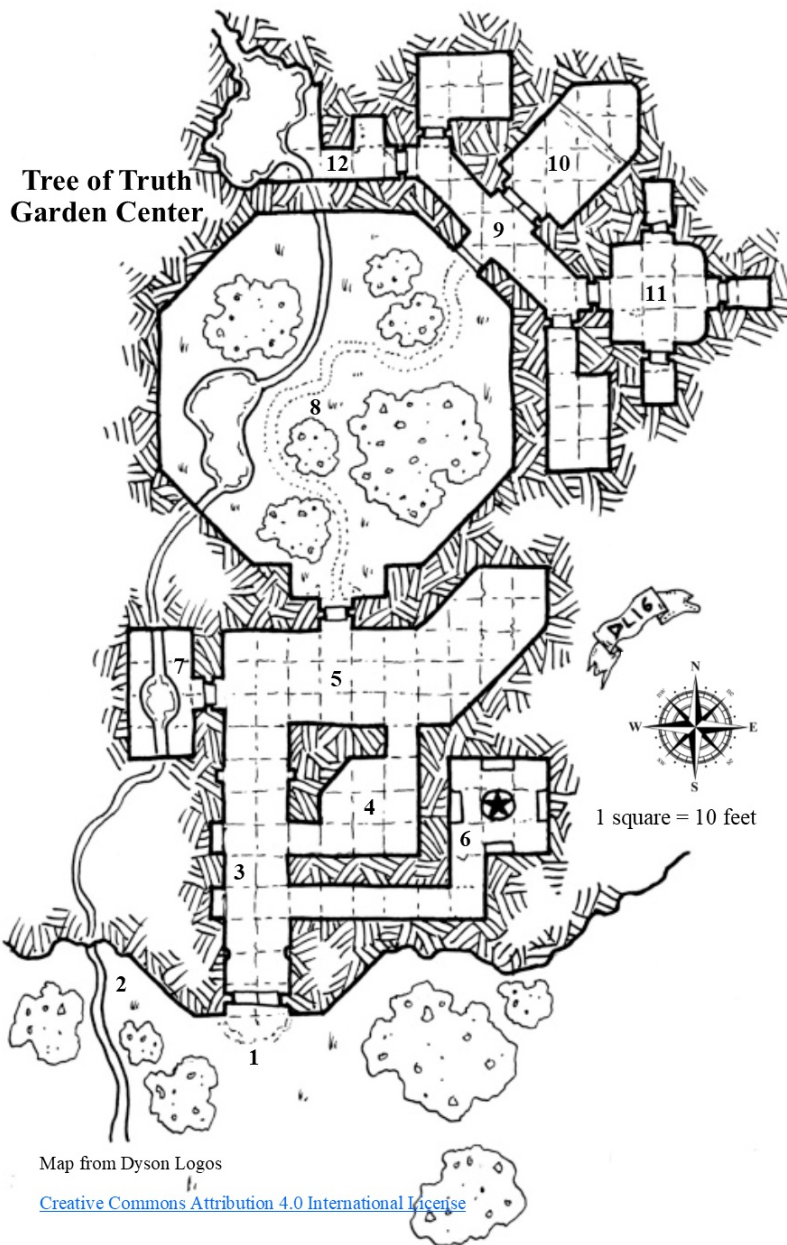
Unless stated otherwise, all doors in the Gnarled Garden are locked and require a DC 15 Dexterity (thieves' tools) or DC 19 Strength check to open. Attacks made against these doors (AC 13, 65 hit points) do not deal damage to the attacker.

Numbered Areas

1. Double Door

The entrance to the Gnarled Garden's maze is barred by sizable, sturdy wooden doors.

As the gnome foretold, you behold an enormous, dome-shaped mass of dagger-sized, oily, ebony thorns. The obsidian brambles form slick, spiked walls that seem impassable, but there is an oaken double door with a hefty brass lock before you and a stream running under the overgrowth on your left.



2. The Stream

Creatures can make a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check to swim or DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to crawl single file along the shallow stream from here to area 7. The thorn barrier overhead prevents the party from standing and all Medium-sized PCs are prone during combat due to the cramped quarters. Halfway to Area 7 the lead adventurer is attacked by a **giant constrictor snake**.

3. Guard Hall

Warned by goblin patrols, 4 **bugbears** wait in the alcoves along the western wall to spring upon intruders. Each carries a key to the doors for Areas 1, 5, and 7. One wears a *cloak of arachnida* and another wields a +2 *morningstar*.

When successfully interrogated with a DC 14 Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check, in exchange for its freedom a bugbear shares the password (“shocker”) for the *glyph of warding* in Area 6.

Some light seeps in through from overhead but more flows from the smoldering charcoal brazier at the center of this 20-foot by 100-foot hall. Animal-head trophies and buck racks line the greasy walls, and the pungent odor of fried animal fat wafts through the air.

4. Slumber Chamber

Wooden beds cushioned with piles of animal skins clutter this room. Under 5 of them are haversacks each holding sundries, flint and steel, as well as 3d10 silver and 2d10 gold pieces.

5. Work/Eating Hall

Crude workbenches with knives, handaxes, rawhide string, and wood chips litter the main part of this dogleg-shaped chamber. Around the bend are 5 chairs surrounding a sturdy wooden table covered with half-eaten cuts of meat, woodland greens, and a keg of ale. Underneath is a barrel of water with several tin cups.

6. Worship Hall

An explosive *glyph of warding* guards the doorway (placed by the bugbear shaman who sometimes visits this outpost). A creature that crosses the threshold without first announcing the password (“shocker”) triggers the trap, and all creatures within 20 feet of it must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 5d8 lightning damage on a failed saving throw, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Inside there’s a bench and unlit torch on each wall, the center of the room dominated by a charred

wooden statue of the bugbear’s grizzly god with melted silver coins for eyes and a necklace of charred wolf teeth. Searching the base of the statue with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a secret compartment holding 750 sp, 500 gp, a pair of citrine gemstones each worth 250 gp, and the following magic items: two *oils of etherealness* and two *potions of greater healing*.

7. Snake Pit

The **giant constrictor snake** lives behind this door.

8. Tree of Truth

A **phase spider** waits patiently to immediately surprise attack anyone approaching the Tree of Truth.

Any creature that tries the Tree of Truth’s sap hears’ the thoughts of nearby minds. The adventurers can harvest one *potion of mind reading* from the tree in 3 hours. Any attempts to take more result in a second potion but the Tree of Truth, robbed of its milk, dies soon after.

You enter an octagonal garden that opens to the sky above. Several verdant trees, a meandering path, and clear stream seem to hold back the oily blackness that infects the rest of this strange compound. You feel the centermost tree calling you—it must be the legendary Tree of Truth.

If players use Sylvan (the only language it knows) to ask the Tree of Truth which of the three nephews (Oigen, Seres, or Kymryn) is the one true heir it drops a single leaf to the ground. The leaf’s pigments changing color to spell out “Oigen” in Elvish script. When a humanoid hand touches the leaf while in the octagonal garden, the guardians in Area 9 burst in to recover it.

No sooner have you grasped the leaf than a door along the northeast wall bursts open! In strides a foul, rotting man in tattered warden’s garb along with two shambling undead. The leader points a crooked finger at you and shouts, “Give me that leaf!” as globules of saliva burst from his mouth.

9. Ghastly Guardians

Three **ghasts** live here condemned to recover the Tree of Truth's leaves, their thirst for flesh sustained only by vermin that slither through the thorn barrier. When humanoid hands touch a fallen leaf in Area 8 they attack, but otherwise only defend their lair against intrusion.

This place looks like a forlorn dining hall divided down the middle by a 30-foot long table littered with squirrel carcasses, tarnished silverware, and copper goblets. Including the one you just passed through, there are six doors along its walls.

Adventurers can collect 10 pounds of silverware worth 500 gp. With a successful DC 11 Intelligence (Investigation) check among the clutter they also notice a set of rusty keys for the gaol cells and shackles at Area 11.

10. Outbound Tunnel

Broken blades and spades are strewn about this room along with several torches. The ghasts have gradually chipped to the northeast in search of an exit but none yet has been found.

11. Gaol of Past Trespassers

There's one door each on the north, south, and east walls. This area reeks of decay, and behind the north and east doors the party find shackled, rotting corpses. Beyond the southern door, however, is a shackled woman with matted hair and tattered leather armor!

This is actually a **succubus** posing as a captured adventurer named Elenora, pleading with the party to take her back to civilization. She claims to have entered the thorny compound 3 days ago from the northwest via the stream only to be captured by the ghasts while her companions fled.

If accepted by the PCs, she plays her role with patience seeking to charm the adventurer with the leaf from the Tree of Truth before they exit the Gnarled Garden. Elenora convinces them to give her the leaf and then uses Draining Kiss on her victim. Thus revealed, she sprouts bat wings and flies away!

If the party does not accept her, the fiend tries to immediately charm a PC into pleading her case and then attacks the other adventurers right there in the gaol—she's weakened the shackle so it releases easily. One of her pockets contains *dust of sneezing and choking*.

GMs should carefully contemplate how to play Elenora convincingly beforehand to ensure her deception is genuine, changing her illusory race and details to play against the party's sympathies. Remember that she does not live in the complex and was summoned in defense by a demonic intelligence when the PCs first entered the Gnarled Garden.

12. Lazy Lizards

Two **giant lizards** lair here. A shallow hole contains a trio of their eggs, each weighing 10 pounds and worth 250 gold coins apiece.

CONCLUSION

The players trudge back to the outer edge of the Gnarled Garden using the same mechanics from before (see "Beginning of the Adventure") but in reverse (including the random encounter table). From there, the PCs need walk only a couple of hours to return to civilization where they can present the Tree of Truth's leaf as proof of Oigen's claim to the throne, averting war while earning the admiration of local nobility. Should the adventurers return without the leaf, war ensues! 🐉