



# THE SHADOWS OF THE TREES

You've uncovered something ancient, something evil, on the outskirts of a small village at the foot of the Galena Mountains. The people of Aetherglen have no other options and are beseeching you and your team to investigate the trail of defiled dead that leads deep into the Glumpen forest. The massive Gulthias trees tower over your passage into the forest, casting a deep shadow over the land.

*A 2-hour adventure for 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> level characters*

## GARY CON

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## Introduction

Welcome to *The Shadow of the Trees*, a D&D Adventurers League™ adventure, part of the official D&D Adventurers League™ organized play system and the *Gary Con* storyline. This module is the 2<sup>nd</sup> in a trilogy of modules that debuted at Gary Con X. It is not necessary to play the first module, but it will assist greatly in the continuity.

The town of Aetherglen was founded hundreds of years ago as merchants found the crossroads, and the surrounding forest, to be an excellent defensible location to stop on their travels and make some easy money. It's never been claimed by a nation or has allied itself with any organization, and the town leads itself through a self-elected mayor.

This adventure is designed for **three to seven 1st-4th level characters** and is optimized for **five characters with an average party level (APL) of 3**. Characters outside this level range cannot participate in this adventure.

## Adjusting This Adventure

This adventure provides suggestions in making adjustments for smaller or larger groups, characters of higher or lower levels, and characters that are otherwise a bit more powerful than the adventure is optimized for. You're not bound to these adjustments; they're here for your convenience.

To figure out whether you should consider adjusting the adventure, add up the total levels of all the characters and divide the total by the number of characters (rounding .5 or greater up; .4 or less down). This is the group's APL. To approximate the **party strength** for the adventure, consult the following table.

### Determining Party Strength

| Party Composition                | Party | Strength    |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------------|
| 3-4 characters, APL less than    |       | Very weak   |
| 3-4 characters, APL equivalent   |       | Weak        |
| 3-4 characters, APL greater than |       | Average     |
| 5 characters, APL less than      |       | Weak        |
| 5 characters, APL equivalent     |       | Average     |
| 5 characters, APL greater than   |       | Strong      |
| 6-7 characters, APL less than    |       | Average     |
| 6-7 characters, APL equivalent   |       | Strong      |
| 6-7 characters, APL greater than |       | Very strong |

Some encounters may include a sidebar that offers suggestions for certain party strengths. If a particular recommendation is not offered or appropriate for your group, you don't have to make adjustments.

## Before Play at the Table

Before you start play, consider the following:

- Read through the adventure, taking notes of anything you'd like to highlight or remind yourself while running the adventure, such as a way you'd like to portray an NPC or a tactic you'd like to use in a combat. Familiar yourself with the adventure's appendices and handouts.
- Gather any resources you'd like to use to aid you in running this adventure--such as notecards, a DM screen, miniatures, and battlemaps.
- Ask the players to provide you with relevant character information, such as name, race, class, and level; passive Wisdom (Perception), and anything specified as notable by the adventure (such as backgrounds, traits, flaws, etc.)

## Playing the Dungeon Master

You have the most important role—facilitating the enjoyment of the game for the players. You provide the narrative and bring the words on these pages to life.

To facilitate this, keep in mind the following:

**You're Empowered.** Make decisions about how the group interacts with the adventure; adjusting or improvising is encouraged, so long as you maintain the adventure's spirit. This doesn't allow you to implement house rules or change those of the Adventurers League, however; they should be consistent in this regard.

**Challenge Your Players.** Gauge the experience level of your **players** (not the characters), try to feel out (or ask) what they like in a game, and attempt to deliver the experience they're after. Everyone should have the opportunity to shine.

**Keep the Adventure Moving.** When the game starts to get bogged down, feel free to provide hints and clues to your players so they can attempt to solve puzzles, engage in combat, and roleplay interactions without getting too frustrated over a lack of information. This gives players "little victories" for figuring out good choices from clues. Watch for stalling—play loses momentum when this happens. At the same time, make sure that the players don't finish too early; provide them with a full play experience.

## Adventure Primer

This section provides the adventure's background, a list of prominent NPCs, an overview of the adventure in play, and hooks that you can use to introduce your player's characters to the action.

## Adventure Background

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The town of Aetherglen was founded hundreds of years ago as merchants found the crossroads, and the surrounding forest, to be an excellent defensible location to stop on their travels and make some easy money. It's never been claimed by a nation or has allied itself with any organization, and the town leads itself through a self-elected mayor. The mayor's role has been solely to present a face to the outside world, very rarely taking an active part in governing the people of the village. A common destination for refugees from surrounding wars, Aetherglen has grown somewhat over the years, but has never amassed more than a few hundred families.

Buildings in town are primarily one or two stories, with a combination of wood and stone building materials. Only the central Inn has three stories. The Innkeeper, Liam, is the current mayor.

Currently, the town holds tacit trade agreements with Phlan and most of the Moonsea city-states on this side of the water. Our story takes place sometime after the Mists receded from the Quivering Forest and the Glumpen Swamp, and Phlan regained its independence and self-rule.

After arriving in town, the characters discovered that branches of the surrounding trees are exploding out of the ground in the village and taking the lives of villagers by turning them into parts of the tree. While investigating the problem, the party found the village's graveyards covered in recently unearthed undead. An ancient druid by the name of Bonewits pointed them toward the oldest and largest Gulthias trees in the forest as the potential source for this evil.

## Adventure Overview

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The adventure is broken down into 4 parts:

**Part 1.** The party travels through the forest and comes upon an Elven encampment. While they're there, the encampment is beset by a zombie herd.

**Part2.** The party continues through the forest, encountering some of the subverted denizens.

**Part3.** The party enters the massive Gulthias Tree at the center of the forest, discovering that its gate guardian isn't exactly dead.

## Adventure Hooks

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**Trilogy.** The characters may have met and are continuing their adventure after playing through CCC-GARY-04.

**Wandering Strangers.** Aetherglen is a crossroads between neighboring nations and regions and is a natural wayside for wandering adventurers and merchants. As characters of means and power, they are roped into the events of the module.

**Genealogical Research.** Characters may have been hired emissaries from large families or may be members of families seeking long lost relatives. As Aetherglen was the destination for refugees from a variety of wars through the eons, it has long since been a melting pot for otherwise remote nations.

**Emerald Enclave (Faction Assignment).** The Druids of the Emerald Enclave have sensed a disturbance in the ancient grove of Gulthias trees. As an emissary for the faction, you are to document anything that presents itself as a part of the disturbance, and deal with whatever you're capable.

# Part 1: Rumble in the Forest

(Duration: 30 minutes)

Just as you feel like the forest is trying to swallow you whole, many tents come into view through the trees. Several tents are anchored at the bases of larger trees, while more are suspended into the larger branches near the floor of the forest. The smell of hearth fires calls to you. In the continuous rainfall, their promise of warmth draws you into the small settlement.

Several elven archers peer down at you along the shaft of arrows drawn and pointed your direction.

As you approach, an older elf woman stands up near a large central bonfire and waves her hands at the guards: "Lower your bows. Can't you see these are goodly folk? These aren't the creatures that have had us on the run these past weeks."

She approaches you swiftly and calmly, reaching out to you in friendship, bring you back to one of the larger tents encircling the fire. She offers everyone a hot cup of tea and some warm food. "No doubt you are either here to help us. Or, if not, your reasons for being here align with ours. Please, make yourselves comfortable. I will endeavor to recall the details of our ancestral home so that you might wonder at its beauty and seek it with us."

Nanny Phrex'dia is a Druid of immense power and age and is the leader of the remaining Wood Elven city-state that previously made their home underneath the largest Gulthias tree in the forest.

## General Features

Note that throughout this adventure, the party is subject to bursting, torrential rain, and low visibility. Any character caught in the rain for 10 minutes without a proper poncho or rain gear will be subjected to one level of exhaustion.

**Terrain.** The terrain resembles the Giant Redwood forest of northern California.

**Weather.** Torrential rain. Pooling water and extremely low visibility.

**Light.** Due to the canopy, all light is normally indirect and gloomy. The rain does nothing to improve this.

In their discussions with the druid Nanny Phrex'dia she will have the following information:

- The elves ancestral home was a city located beneath the grandfather tree in the forest. That was until something twisted the nature of the tree and they were forced to flee.
- Only a powerful evil spirit could corrupt the Heart of the Gulthias in such a way as to cause it to turn on them. Nanny Phrex'dia is not familiar with an evil so powerful.

- The touch of this evil comes from the root system. That is the reason that most of their sleeping tents are located up in the branches of the trees.
- This spreading illness has extended to the creatures in the forest, making the normally peaceful creatures become aggressive and cunning hunters - almost as if a higher intelligence was directing them.
- Only once the Tree has been released from this evil gripping it can the elves return to their homes and the forest can return to its pastoral and sheltering state.
- Nanny Phrex'dia will provide a detailed description on how to reach the tree and enter the undercity. She is not sure what state it is in, but her people left it when things started going bad and haven't returned since.

It is during the night while the party is collecting information on the forest and the Gulthias Tree that the encampment is set upon by creatures only partially alive, the roots from the tainted trees animating them and directing them in their attack.

You sit quietly listening to Nanny Phrex'dia's voice as she describes the sublime peace offered by the giant trees in the forest. But, in the middle of her description, she stops speaking abruptly. All of you feel the urgency and panic in her stance as you see the guards in the branches overhead expertly moving as a unit toward one side of the encampment. Nanny quickly assists a few of the other elves in dousing campfires and picking up improvised weapons. Something approaches.

After the fires are doused, it's obvious to the party that are hundreds of humanoid figures passing near the campsite, seemingly staying inside the bounds of a dry riverbed that runs tangentially alongside the campsite. Characters attempting to Perceive (Wisdom) at a DC10 can determine that the "herd" of figures is a mass of zombies. The herd hasn't noticed the campsite.

If the party does nothing to attract the attention of the zombies, the herd will pass in peace, but a few individual zombies (4 **Zombies**) will stumble through the campsite and attack the party. If the party can dispatch the zombies without too much noise (aka "no fireballs or thunder waves", the success of this is at the DM's discretion), they won't attract the attention of the herd.

If, however, they attack the herd or have gotten the herd's attention in some manner, 6 **Zombies** will peel off from the herd and attack the party. In addition, every round will see an additional 2 **Zombies** reinforcing that group, for 3 rounds after the initial

round. If the party retreats from the camp into the forest, the Zombies will not pursue and will eventually be dispatched from the elven hunters, above.

It should be noted, and described by the DM, that any zombies attacking the camp have been seriously winnowed by the hunters above, as well as offensive spell casting from Nanny. Those zombies that do get through to the party are what remains of the attacking individuals.

Once the zombie herd has been driven off or defeated, Nanny Phrex'dia will urge the party to hurry on their way and investigate this threat as soon as possible. She fears for the safety of the other elves.

### Adjusting the Encounter

Here are the recommendations for adjusting these combat encounters. They are not cumulative.

If the party didn't attract the attention on the herd:

- **Very Weak Party:** 2 Zombies
- **Weak Party:** 3 Zombies
- **Strong Party:** 5 Zombies
- **Very Strong Party:** 6 Zombies

If the party attracted the attention on the herd:

- **Very Weak Party:** 2 Zombies, 1 Zombie reinforcement each of the first 3 rounds
- **Weak Party:** 3 Zombies, 1 Zombie reinforcement each of the first 3 rounds
- **Strong Party:** 5 Zombies, 2 Zombie reinforcements each of the first 3 rounds
- **Very Strong Party:** 6 Zombies, 3 Zombie reinforcements

## Part 2: Through the Woods

(Duration: 30 minutes)

You enter the deep forest with the directions to the tree by Nanny Phrex'dia, following old animal trails and reading ancient Elvish signals written into the branches and tree bark. Your brush with the zombie herd has left you cautious, muffling your armor and weapons and frequently halting as you hear sounds deep in the forest.

The ambient sounds of the forest are getting louder, however, and it is no longer difficult to perceive the angry chittering of the furred animals of the trees. Some of it sounds territorial, while some even seems to be directed specifically at you and your intrusion into the forest. At one short stop, one of you was even pelted with a few acorns from far up in the branches.

Further progress into the forest will cause the noise to grow louder until the party is attacked. Feel free to draw this out for as long as the DM likes (or as time permits) to build up tension with the players. If the party stops for a rest of any kind, they're immediately attacked. Otherwise, the DM can pick a moment when the party encounters 3 **Swarms of Squirrels**.

The swarms will have masked their approach with the general cacophony of the surrounding forest creatures, so anyone with a passive perception less than 14 will be surprised when the swarms attack. The squirrels will take advantage of this and will attack those individual party members first.

If a party member has been swarmed by squirrels, they, or another party member, can choose to attack the swarm. However, due to the burrowing and biting nature of the squirrels, the target of their ire may be underneath a plate or panel of armor. Any attack roll that is naturally under a 5 will *also* hit the swarmed player. If the hit was successful against the swarm, the player will take half of the damage. If the attack missed the swarm entirely, and hit the character instead, the character takes the full brunt of the damage.

The Swarms of Squirrels automatically save against a spell casting of *Animal Friendship*. If *Speak With Animals* is cast, a wide variety of angry hissing and screams can be deciphered, with the only understandable and oft-repeated word from the enraged Swarms being "Mistress." They don't respond to queries and cannot be persuaded away from attacking.

When the battle is finished, have the players note that the sounds of the forest seem to have diminished. They are free to continue to the tree, and their travel is not further obstructed.

### Adjusting the Encounter

Here are the recommendations for adjusting these combat encounters. They are not cumulative.

- **Very Weak Party:** 1 Swarm of Squirrels
- **Weak Party:** 2 Swarm of Squirrels
- **Strong Party:** 4 Swarms of Squirrels
- **Very Strong Party:** 5 Swarms of Squirrels

At this time, the party can manage a Short Rest. A Long Rest, however, will see a repeat of the encounter detailed above.

## Part 3: Down Under

*(Duration: 1 hour)*

There is no mistaking the tree that stands before you. Its branches stretch up until it dominates the landscape around it. The root system at the base spreads out like it is the foundation of some great manor house. The bark around that base and root system is a darkening grey color, appearing more like stone than wood.

At the base of the tree, a crack wide enough for two teams of horses sunders the wood. A worn dirt trail leads down into the darkness within the tree.

Allow the players to search around the tree and look for signs of foul play. Should they spend enough time searching the outside of the tree, allow them to roll nature checks and perception checks. Add into their findings elements they would find based on the skill used that will add to the dread feeling of this area. Some suggestions are:

- **Nature:** The grey color to the bark is partially due to a strange moss you cannot identify on the bark. It has seemed to dig into the tree, past the moss and into the live wood of the tree itself.
- **Perception:** Up in the higher canopy of the branches you spot what looks to be a rope that is dangling from a high branch. You can't be sure, but you think it might have looked like a noose.
- **Arcana:** There is a strong stench of necromantic magic to the dirt and the moss growing on the tree. Not only does it not seem natural, it looks as if it is spreading.
- **Investigation:** You spot through the dirt leading out from the tree, thick roots that have worked through the soil out towards the trees around the forest. They seem to bear the same fungus as the bark on the tree.

Once they work their way into the tree's root system leading to the city below, read the following:

The further you walk down under the tree, the more the smell of moss, peat and dirt surrounds you. And while you can still see the natural light streaming in from the entrance under the tree, you would swear you were buried in a deep cave in a soggy swamp.

The tunnel opens into a chamber nearly 20 feet in height, but your way forward is blocked by the presence of a massive creature. Roots have shot out from the walls of the chamber and anchored into the flesh of the monstrosity standing before you.

Its eyes are clouded over in death, but still they turn toward you. It opens its mouth in a silent moan.

The creature uses the stats of the **Ogre Zombie** with the following changes: it has 115 hit points and 0 feet of movement.

In addition, on round 2 (and every round thereafter), roots will shoot out of the walls at a random player character. It strikes with an attack value of +4, and while it only does no damage, it will pull the PC to a space adjacent to the zombie and restrain them. At the beginning of each turn that a character is restrained, the character takes 2d4 piercing damage from roots attempting to enter the character's body. A character may use his action on his turn to attempt to Escape the grapple.

If a character falls unconscious while being grappled, the character will still be hit with damage at the beginning of each turn which will naturally result in a failed death save.

If the party kills the creature, it will release any restrained characters that are still alive. Dead characters must be forcibly removed from the root system, requiring a successful DC15 Athletics (Strength) roll. Additional characters may assist the character trying to extricate his fellow party member, thus giving advantage to that roll.

Once the players have dealt with the zombie and are ready to head further into the city under the tree, they will find a pair of elves strapped to the tree's root system with the roots piercing through them in multiple spots. The more alive looking of them has a green leather satchel hanging over its shoulder. While most of its clothing and armor were destroyed by the roots, the bag is in pristine condition.

Inside of the bag, the characters will find a small box containing 200gp and a pair of pearls (100gp each). In addition, the bag itself is magical and is an Elven-made *Bag of Holding*. And finally, they find a note from the priests of the temple in the undercity (see Player Handout A). It looks as if it was meant for Nanny Phrex'dia. It speaks of the fall of the altar room and the turning of most of the elves in the city.

Specifically, it marks the central altar room, where the letter claims a large glowing fruit was growing from one of the roots taking over the temple.

A difficult religion check (DC15), or if the characters have played through The Sunless Citadel, they will know tales of magical trees that have been known to bear fruit of great power, and great evil. The druids of this temple, and the elves of the undercity seem to have fallen to this taint

### Adjusting the Encounter

Here are the recommendations for adjusting these combat encounters. They are not cumulative.

- **Very Weak Party:** 75HP zombie
- **Weak Party:** 90HP zombie
- **Strong Party:** 135HP zombie
- **Very Strong Party:** 155HP zombie

## Epilogue

The creature hangs from the roots, with enough of them now cut away that you think you can pass safely deeper into the tree and to the Elvish city you can see, further down the path.

You look closer at the creature as you make your way through and upon closer inspection realize that the roots weren't part of the creature to begin with. Their entry to this creature's body was violent and evil. It cannot be blamed for its actions long after it ceased to own the corpse it once called home.

Nanny Phrex'dia told you that it had been a long time since her tribe called the city beneath the tree their home. You're now reminded of how long-lived the Elves really are, and how her scale of a "long time" may be different from yours. A full three inches of dust cakes the tunnel and trail as it travels deeper into the tree.

There's no telling what might await you further in.

## Rewards

Make sure players note their rewards on their adventure log sheets. Give your name and DCI number (if applicable) so players can record who ran the session.

### Experience (Min/Max XP: 450/600 ea.)

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Total up all combat experience earned for defeated foes, and divide by the number of characters present in the combat.

#### Combat Awards

| Name of Foe       | XP Per Foe |
|-------------------|------------|
| Zombie            | 50         |
| Gate Guardian     | 450        |
| Swam of Squirrels | 50         |

The **minimum** total award for each character participating in this adventure is 450 **experience points**.

The **maximum** total award for each character participating in this adventure is 600 **experience points**.

## Treasure

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The characters receive the following treasure, divided up amongst the party. Treasure is divided as evenly as possible. Gold piece values listed for sellable gear are calculated at their selling price, not their purchase price.

#### Treasure Awards

| Item Name         | GP Value |
|-------------------|----------|
| Loose coin in Bag | 200      |
| Pearl earrings    | 100 ea.  |

### BAG OF HOLDING

A description for the Bag of Holding can be found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 153.

## Renown

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Each character receives **one renown** at the conclusion of this adventure.

**Members of Emerald Enclave** that send back information on the undead in the village and the attacks from the trees earn **one additional renown point**.

## DM Reward

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In exchange for running this adventure, you earn DM Rewards as described in the *D&D Adventurers League Dungeon Master's Guide* (ALDMG).

## Appendix A: Monsters

### Zombie

*Medium Undead, neutral evil*

**Armor Class:** 8

**Hit Points:** 22

**Speed:** 20ft.

| STR     | DEX    | CON     | INT    | WIS    | CHA    |
|---------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| 13 (+1) | 6 (-2) | 16 (+3) | 3 (-4) | 6 (-2) | 5 (-3) |

**Saving Throws:** Wis +0

**Damage Immunities:** poison

**Condition Immunities:** poisoned

**Senses:** darkvision 60ft., passive Perception 8

**Languages:** understand the languages it knew in life but can't speak.

**Challenge:** 1/4 (50 XP)

**Undead Fortitude:** If damage reduces the zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

#### Actions

**Slam.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d6+1) bludgeoning damage.

### Swarm of Squirrels (Swarm of Rats)

*Medium swarm of Tiny beasts, unaligned*

**Armor Class** 10

**Hit Points** 24 (7d8 – 7)

**Speed** 30 ft.

| STR    | DEX     | CON    | INT    | WIS     | CHA    |
|--------|---------|--------|--------|---------|--------|
| 9 (–1) | 11 (+0) | 9 (–1) | 2 (–4) | 10 (+0) | 3 (–4) |

**Damage Resistances** bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

**Condition Immunities** charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

**Senses** darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 10

**Languages** —

**Challenge** 1/4 (50 XP)

**Keen Smell.** The swarm has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

**Swarm.** The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny squirrel. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

#### Actions

**Bites.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) piercing damage, or 3 (1d6) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

### Gate Guardian (Ogre Zombie)

*Large undead, neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 8

**Hit Points** 115

**Speed** 0 ft.

| STR     | DEX    | CON     | INT    | WIS    | CHA    |
|---------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| 19 (+4) | 6 (-2) | 18 (+4) | 3 (-4) | 6 (-2) | 5 (-3) |

**Saving Throws** Wis +0

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

**Languages** understands Giant and Common but can't speak

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

#### Actions

**Morningstar.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

## Player Handout

