D&D ADVENTURERS LEAGUE

THE DEATH BENEATH THE ROOTS

An ancient Gulthias tree contains the answers you're seeking to the questions of the ancient dead and the recently dying in the village of Aetherglen. Its roots are massive, but so is the massive echoing bole underneath the tree. Delving deeper on the well-traveled path, you discover an old Elven city, apparently carved and fashioned from the roots themselves. But, what you discover only leads to more questions and more danger. Do you dare to venture further, and deeper, into the darkness beneath the tree?

A 2-hour adventure for 1st-4th level characters

GARY CON

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Introduction

Welcome to *The Death Beneath the Roots*, 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 3rd in a trilogy of modules that debuted at Gary Con X. It is not necessary to play the first two modules, 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

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.

Travelling deep into the forest, the players encountered the surviving dregs of an Elven tribe that once made their home underneath the roots of the great heart Gulthias Tree of the forest. Battling their way through herds of undead and ancient guardians, the players found themselves in ground that hasn't been trod for centuries: The dusty remains of an ancient underground Elvish city.

Adventure Overview

The adventure is broken down into 4 parts:

Part 1. The party enters the ancient and abandoned elven city, encountering an ambush of roving undead.

Part2. Our heroes continue through the city, travelling over a bridge and triggering an ancient defense of the city itself.

Part3. Entering a temple at the apex of the city, the party discovers the source of this corruption, and battles another horrific symptom of the evil.

Adventure Hooks

Trilogy. The characters may have met and are continuing their adventure after playing through CCC-GARY-05.

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: Topside

(Duration: 30 minutes)

> You enter a city lost to time. Within the roots of a giant Gulthias tree stand buildings and structures carved lovingly and shaped from the wood itself. Tunnels and branches lead off into neighborhoods connected by common areas and pastoral parkways. Phosphorescent lichen and moss burble up out of fashioned sconces at every corner.
>
> And yet, and yet, no one has tended the parkways for centuries. The lichen and moss overgrow the sconces and add a smell of rot to the stale air. By their glow, you can see water damage from seeping pools and fire damage from ancient untended cookfires. Once elegant and majestic structures now sit toppled in morose ruin.

Anyone with a passive perception of 14 or greater will determine that they party is not alone as it passes through the tunnels. The characters who make that conclusion will not be surprised when the ambush at one of the tunnel intersections takes place.

General Features

Terrain. The walls, floor and ceiling of the tunnels through which the characters travel are all carved or shaped out of the tree's root system and heartwood. In occasional spots, rot and fire damage have damaged the natural weave of the wood. Free-standing structures have, for the most part, collapsed with age. The wood on all sides is covered with vines and ropy root systems.

Light. At every intersection of the tunnel, phosphorescent light dimly lights the party's path forward. Unfortunately, it's only able to project enough light to qualify as Low Light.

Sound. A near-constant quiet creaking of wood-on-wood can be heard in the distance. Accompanying this is the sound of dripping water.

Scent. The odor of rot permeates everything, originating at the sconces.

As the party travels through an intersection of tunnels, they'll be attacked by a party of 3 **Ghouls** and 4 **Zombies**. All undead appear to be prior residents of the city, and any character with Elvish blood will be able to identify their racial characteristics.

The two groups of monsters will attack from all sides, attempting to keep the party in the center of the intersection. During the battle, if a Zombie successfully lands a hit on a character, that character is additionally attacked by vines that are hanging down from the ceiling.

The vines will attempt to restrain the character, with the character completing a successful DC10 Acrobatics (Dexterity) check to avoid being restrained.

The vines can be cut (AC12, 16HP). Once cut, they can no longer effectively restrain any character. If they are uncut, however, they'll orchestrate their attempts to restrain party members with the zombie attacks. They can restrain up to 10 individuals at one time.

Adjusting the Encounter

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

- **Very Weak Party**: Remove the Ghouls
- **Weak Party**: 1 Ghoul, 4 Zombies
- **Strong Party**: 4 Ghouls, 6 Zombies
- **Very Strong Party**: 5 Ghouls, 8 Zombies

One of the zombies was an elven noble and is wearing a thick silver torque with intricate bone engravings (250gp). He also has a pouch holding 30gp and a *Potion of Healing*. Another of the zombies is a fallen cleric, wearing a rusted holy symbol around her neck depicting a tree of life symbol – the heraldic symbol of their faith surrounding the tree. The holy symbol is worth 50gp if cleaned up.

Part 2: Over the Bridge

(Duration: 30 minutes)

A wide landing stretches out before you. Near the exit to the tunnel from which you came there is a 10' wide bridge formed from natural wood and ropes, looking as if the tree itself had stretched itself across the 40' wide gap to the other side of the ravine it goes over. The sound of whistling wind comes from the crevasse below the bridge, the bottom of it stretching out past your visual range. The bridge looks solid, but has no railings.

On the other side of the bridge, you can make out several smaller huts formed from the same materials as the bridge. Each of them has a single door to it, seemingly made of stone. At the far end of the large underground cave, you can barely make out the shape of a temple beyond. The tower of which is glowing with a bright green light from within. From time to time, you spot a surge of slightly reddish light coloring it as well.

The low sound of chanting can be heard only slightly, the whistling wind masking most of it.

The city continues beyond the bridge, with the main path sloping upward toward the temple. The buildings here are of heartier construction and more elegant form and have weathered the passage of time. However, no signs of death are here: No ancient skeletons buried in the wood and no smell of rot and decay. It's almost as if everyone left or was forced to leave this area before they died.

From their vantage point, any character succeeding on a DC15 Perception (Wisdom) check will notice that there are some skeletons on the top of the small huts. Each of the skeletons appears to have been, at one time, a guard of some sort for the bridge, but the condition of the guard houses and the condition of the skeletons gives the air of a long untended final resting place.

Once the characters make their way half-way across the bridge, the 4 **Skeletons** (1 per building) will animate and attack the party with their longbows. The skeleton's arrows are weighted on one end with large rocks, sacrificing range for impact. Any character subject to a successful hit from one of these arrows must make a DC13 Strength save or be knocked prone. Any failure to make this save by 10 or more knocks the character from the bridge. If the party has made no precautions to keep members of the group from falling to their most certain deaths, then the inevitable happens.

After the first round of ranged attacks, 4 **Skeletons** wielding short swords emerge from the guard huts and advance on the party. They'll attempt to focus their attacks on any prone members of the party.

Part 3: Down Under

(Duration: 1 hour)

> The large building before you is the natural apex of the underground city, growing up out of the woodwork of the surrounding tree and fashioned into the design of a stepped pyramid. Vines and overgrown root systems cover every inch of the temple building, leaving only the main entryway free to pass inwards.
>
> A pulsing glow of sickly ochre light emanates from the main entrance. It may be a trick of the light, but it almost seems as if the vines and the roots on the building move in concert with the pulsing light, as if they were veins on the outside of a massive, diseased heart.

The entryway into the temple is 10 feet wide by 20 feet tall. It is free from vines and roots. For anyone approaching the entryway or looking in, read the following:

> The sanctuary of the temple is a large single room with only one original feature: The altar at the center. Bursting up and out of the altar is a huge black tree root. It appears to have continued its passage up and through the roof of the temple.
>
> Several smaller roots also emerge from the altar in an explosion of tangled wood. They stretch out from the altar and cover every available surface inside the sanctuary. This violent intrusion of roots has caused the floor to depress around the altar over the centuries.
>
> Evenly spaced around the depression are barely recognizable humanoid figures, wrapped and covered by vines and roots. They seem to sway to the pulse of the light that is emanating from the altar. Standing behind the altar, on the opposite side from the entryway, is an immense and motionless figure.

A DC10 Perception (Wisdom) check reveals that the figure is constructed from the bodies of elves. All of them appear to be alive, but their eyes don't blink, and they don't move independently of the figure. They appear to be lashed together by ropey vines.

The wrapped priestly figures around the depression are using the stats of **Vegepygmies**. There are 4 regular and one **Chief Vegepygmy**.

The horror humanoid is using the stats of an **Ogre Zombie**. The characters may realize that cutting the ropes will disable the figure in specific sections of his "body". The ropes that are binding him together can be targeted for an attack: Ropes on his limbs are AC15 and have 20HP, ropes on his torso are AC18 and have 30HP, and the rope holding his head together is AC20 and has 50HP.

During the battle, any character that is knocked unconscious, fails to stabilize, and dies is re-animated in the next round by the vines as another **Vegepygmy**.

Adjusting the Encounter

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

- *Very Weak Party*: 75HP ogre zombie, remove the chief
- *Weak Party*: 90HP zombie, remove the chief
- *Strong Party*: 135HP zombie, 5 regular pygmies.
- *Very Strong Party*: 155HP zombie, 6 regular pygmies

Once the fight is over, if the party searches, they will find a small coffer from the altar that was exposed by the damage of the roots destroying the stone. The coffer contains 100gp, a pair of pearls worth 100gp each, and a small silver broach in the shape of a Tree of Life. It acts as a *Quall's Feather Token – Tree*.

Epilogue

The depression in the center of the floor reveals itself to be a pit of great depth. The vines and ropes on either side of the pit can easily be navigated to allow for a slow and safe passage down into the darkness.

    The smell of deep earth wafts up from the pit, reminding you of rotten peat and musty swamp. The origins of that massive black root that destroyed the altar are coming from down there. The path is open before you.

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.)

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
Ghoul	200
Temple Horror	450
Vegepygmy	50
Vegepygmy Chief	450

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

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
Silver Torque	250
Loose coin in Pouch	30
Holy Symbol	50
Loose coin in Coffer	100
Pearls	100 ea.

QUAAL'S FEATHER TOKEN - TREE

A description for this item can be found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide,* page 188.

Renown

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

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.

Ghoul

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 22 (5d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	7 (−2)	10 (+0)	6 (−2)

Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Common
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an elf or undead, it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Skeleton

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (armor scraps)
Hit Points 13 (2d8 + 4)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	6 (−2)	8 (−1)	5 (−3)

Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages understands all languages it knew in life but can't speak
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Actions

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Temple Horror (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.

Vegepygmy

Small plant, neutral

Armor Class: 13
Hit Points: 9
Speed: 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	14 (-+)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)	11 (+0)	7 (-2)

Skills: Perception +2, Stealth +4
Damage Resistances: lightning, piercing
Senses: darkvision 60ft., passive Perception 12
Languages: Vegepygmy
Challenge: 1/4 (50 XP)

Plant Camouflage. The vegepygmy has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks it makes in any terrain with ample obscuring plant life.

Regeneration. The vegepygmy regains 3 hit points at the start of its turn. If it takes cold, fire or necrotic damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the vegepygmy's next turn. The vegepygmy dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Actions

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5ft., one creature. *Hit*: 5 (1d6+2) slashing damage.
Sling. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 30/120ft., one creature. *Hit*: 4 (1d4+2) bludgeoning damage.

Vegepygmy Chief

Small plant, neutral

Armor Class: 14
Hit Points: 33
Speed: 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	7 (-2)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)

Skills: Perception +3, Stealth +4
Damage Resistances: lightning, piercing
Senses: darkvision 60ft., passive Perception 13
Languages: Vegepygmy
Challenge: 2 (450 XP)

Plant Camouflage. The vegepygmy has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks it makes in any terrain with ample obscuring plant life.

Regeneration. The vegepygmy regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn. If it takes cold, fire or necrotic damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the vegepygmy's next turn. The vegepygmy dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Actions

Multiattack. The vegepygmy makes two attacks with its claws or two melee attacks with its spear.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5ft., one creature. *Hit*: 5 (1d6+2) slashing damage.

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit*: 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage, or 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Spores (1/Day). A 15-foot-radius cloud of toxic spores extends out from the vegepygmy. The spores spread around corners. Each creature in that area that isn't a plant must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned. While poisoned in this way, a target takes 9 (2d8) poison damage at the start of each of its turns. A target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.