

THE TRIALS OF THORNFALL



CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW:

Theme/Genre:

Fantasy with elements of Mystery and Intrigue.

Tone:

Heroic with moments of tension and danger.

Target Level for Players:

Level 5

Expected Duration:

2 hours

Player Focus Preferences:

- **Combat:** Medium
- **Roleplay:** High
- **Exploration:** Medium

BACKSTORY AND SETTING:

Thornfall, a small yet bustling village nestled deep within the Elderglen Woods, is known for its annual Trial of the Guardian—a sacred rite believed to maintain balance between mortals and the ancient woodland spirits. Legend holds that Thornfall was once protected by an ancient entity known as the Verdant Guardian, a benevolent creature composed of living vines and bark. When the Guardian's presence faded centuries ago, the Trials arose as a method for villagers to prove their worth and to ensure harmony with the forest spirits.

Recently, the Trial has taken an ominous turn. Contestants who entered the sacred glade to complete the Trial never returned, leaving behind only their bloodied belongings. For the first time in history, the village council has turned to outsiders—adventurers like the players. The weight of ancient tradition, desperate villagers, and a growing fear of what might be lurking in Thornfall's woods sets the stage for a dangerous and emotional journey.

LOCAL AREA: THORNFALL

- Thornfall is a lush, rustic village surrounded by towering evergreens and draped in mist. The air is damp, and the village square is dominated by a statue of the Verdant Guardian—a majestic fusion of beast and plant.

KEY LOCATIONS IN THORNFALL:

- **The Verdant Sanctum:**
A sacred shrine filled with offerings to the forest spirits.
- **The Whistling Timber Tavern:**
A popular gathering spot for villagers and a hub for local gossip.
- **The Elderglen Trailhead:**
The primary path leading adventurers into the heart of the woods.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Centuries ago, Thornfall prospered under the watchful eye of the Verdant Guardian. When the Guardian vanished after a climactic battle with a dark druid, the villagers began the Trials to disentangle their fate from the whims of the temperamental forest. The Trials are said to lead worthy souls to a place where the Guardian's power quietly rests.

IMPORTANT NPCs:

- **Elder Velwyn (Neutral Good, Human):**
Thornfall's wise leader. Desperate but wary of outsiders "defiling" their beloved ritual.
- **Finnick (Chaotic Neutral, Halfling):**
A brash young hunter who competed in the trial and barely escaped with his life, now traumatized and unwilling to openly discuss what he saw.
- **Lorelei (True Neutral, Elf):**
A quiet herbalist who suspects foul play and warns the party of unnatural disturbances in the woods.
- **The Dark Spirit (True Evil, Spirit Entity):**
The malevolent force corrupting Thornfall's Trial, with a dark connection to the Guardian's legacy.

PLOT HOOK:

OPENING SCENE:

The adventure begins on a stormy evening in the Whistling Timber Tavern. Villagers crowd the dimly lit room, speaking in hushed tones about the vanished contestants. Elder Velwyn enters, her cane tapping on the wood floor as she calls for silence. She pleads for volunteers to navigate the cursed woods, unravel the fate of those who entered the Trial, and stop the darkness before it consumes Thornfall.

Suddenly, the inn's windows shudder violently, and a booming feminine voice echoes through the room: *"Your doom was set long ago, little mortals. The Trial cannot save you now."* The lights flicker, frost creeps up the windowpanes, and then silence descends.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE:

Uncover the mystery behind the corrupted Trial and put an end to the growing darkness threatening Thornfall and its people.

KEY LOCATIONS:

LOCATION 1: THE VERDANT SANCTUM (STARTING AREA)

- **Atmosphere:** An ancient, overgrown shrine beneath an open sky. Moonlight filters through cracks in the canopy above, illuminating offerings of carved wood, flowers, and leather pouches of seeds. The area radiates a calm but expectant energy.
- **NPCs & Encounters:**
 - **Elder Velwyn** explains the Trial's history and asks the party to follow the path into the woods.
 - A *treant spirit* (neutral, non-hostile) tests the party by asking a riddle related to the balance between man and nature.

LOCATION 2: THE SHIMMERING GLADE (INTERMEDIATE AREA)

- **Atmosphere:** A glade where the trees seem to whisper. Thin, silvery mist clings to the ground, and strange glowing mushrooms cast an eerie blue glow. The area feels alien, as if nature itself knows they do not belong.
- **Challenges:**
 - **Minor Combat Encounter:** Shadow-like creatures made of brambles and blackened wood attack the party. They were once contestants, corrupted by the Trial's dark forces.
 - **Puzzle:** A stone obelisk covered in glowing runes lies in the center. The players must use clues from the environment and NPC dialogue earlier to deactivate a force barrier blocking further passage. Incorrect attempts cause harmless but distracting illusions to flood their vision. Dialogue options with Lorelei's earlier suspicions may hint at a solution.

LOCATION 3: THE GUARDIAN'S HOLLOW (FINAL AREA)

- **Atmosphere:** A massive underground cavern where vines drip from the ceiling like chandeliers. A central altar pulses with green and black energy, surrounded by writhing roots. Atop the altar is a twisted form of the Verdant Guardian, corrupted and overtaken by the Dark Spirit.

ENCOUNTERS AND CHALLENGES:

COMBAT ENCOUNTERS:

- **Dark Spirit Guardian:**
CR 7 Boss. The corrupted Verdant Guardian now wields necrotic and nature-based attacks.
 - **Mechanic:** At 50% HP, the Spirit begins to spawn corrupted forest creatures every other turn.

ROLEPLAY ENCOUNTER:

- The corrupted Guardian briefly regains clarity at 25% HP. This is an opportunity for the party to persuade or connect, weakening the Dark Spirit's grip. A high Charisma (Persuasion/Deception) check can prevent further reinforcements in battle.

PUZZLE/TRAP:

- **Trigger Vines:**
Along the cavern floor, hidden vines will grapple a careless player (DC 15 Perception check to notice). Grappled players lose a turn unless freed (DC 14 Athletics check).

CLIMAX AND RESOLUTION:

FINAL CHALLENGE:

The party must decide whether to destroy the Verdant Guardian entirely (killing the Dark Spirit but also destroying its vessel) or attempt to purify and restore it, but at great risk of the Guardian succumbing mid-fight. Failure to act decisively could lead to the complete domination of the Dark Spirit over Thornfall.

STAKES:

- **Success:** Restores peace to Thornfall, reestablishing the Guardian's protective presence.
- **Failure:** Plunges the village into ruin as the Dark Spirit fully corrupts the woods, extending its influence.

REWARDS:

LOOT:

- **Staff of Verdant Renewal (rare magic item):**
Grants the wielder the ability to cast *Entangle* and heal an ally for 10 HP once per day.
- **300 gold each** (reward from grateful villagers).

STORY REWARDS:

- Favor of Elder Velwyn and the Thornfall Council.
- Reverence from the villagers for saving their home.

SUPPORTING DETAILS:

MAPS:

1. A simple map of Thornfall with major locations marked.
2. A winding path map of the Elderglen Woods, leading to the Guardian's Hollow.
3. A rough diagram of the final cavern for tactical combat.

ATMOSPHERE RECOMMENDATION:

- Forest ambiance with occasional animal calls (e.g., *Sirenscape's "Enchanted Forest"*).
- Drums and haunting vocals for the climactic fight (*Dark Fantasy Music - Battle Themes* on YouTube).

PLAYER HANDOUTS:

- A written fragment of Thornfall's history (offered by Velwyn).
- An engraved wooden medallion symbolizing the Trials, given to each player before they enter the woods.

FLEXIBLE OUTCOMES:

If the players attempt something unexpected, such as seeking allies from the forest or using untraditional rituals to channel nature's power, allow these efforts to succeed partially but still heighten the drama of the final confrontation.

POST-GAME WRAP-UP:

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS:

- "What was your favorite moment?"
- "Did you feel engaged in the mystery-solving aspect of the story?"
- "Would you want to continue the story beyond Thornfall?"

EPILOGUE OPTIONS:

- **If the Guardian is restored:** Thornfall thrives and the players may be called back in the future to face a new evil.
- **If the village falls:** Nearby regions face an ecological disaster, tempting players to investigate further into the Dark Spirit's origins.