A +10 TO WIN ADVENTURE

Blood in the Bramble

A level 1 dungeon designed for use with Shadowdark RPG



Something beneath Briar Hill is hungry again.

3-4 HOURS / 4 CHARACTERS

The Adventure

The old chapel beneath Briar Hill has vanished under a thicket of black brambles. Last night, the vines spread into the village graveyard. This morning, herbalist **Tamsin Vale** entered the chapel to find the source. She has not returned. The villagers offer **40 gp** to bring her home and end the growth.

The truth

Years ago, a priest drove an iron spike through the heart of the **Thorn Warden**, pinning it beneath the chapel. The spike has rusted through. The Warden is waking, and its roots are searching for blood. Tamsin is alive in room 8. She dropped the root-cutting shears in room 4 while fleeing.

Running the brambles

Every room and passage has thorn-covered walls. Ordinary movement down the center of a passage is safe. A character takes **1 damage** when shoved into a thorn wall or when forcing a way through dense growth without first cutting or clearing it. Given time and a tool, characters can clear growth without a roll. Fire works quickly but fills the room with choking smoke until it disperses.

The Warden senses fresh blood. After a character takes thorn damage, the brambles in the next room they enter stir visibly. This is a warning, not an extra encounter.



Keyed Locations

1. Chapel Door

> *A stone stair descends beneath a chapel swallowed by thorns. Black vines cover the walls so densely that you cannot see the mortar beneath them. At the foot of the stairs, a strip of bloodstained cloth hangs from a barb. Somewhere deeper inside, something drags slowly across stone.*

Tracks. The cloth came from Tamsin's sleeve. Drops of blood lead toward room 3. A less disturbed route leads toward room 2.

Clue. Scratched into a doorframe, almost hidden by growth: *"Iron holds the heart. Cut what binds it."*

Treasure. A loose stone beside the stair conceals **8 gp** and a spare torch.

2. Offering Hall

> *Kneeling stone figures line the walls, their hands extended toward an empty altar. Brambles have grown through their mouths and around their fingers. A faint tapping comes from inside the altar.*

Altar. A field mouse is trapped in a hollow beneath it. A small latch opens the hollow safely. Breaking the altar open makes thorns whip through the gap: the nearest character must pass a **DC 12 DEX check** or take **1 damage**.

Discovery. A chapel record in the hollow says the priest imprisoned the Warden with an iron spike. Special shears were kept in the vestry (room 4) to trim its roots.

Treasure. A silver offering bowl is worth **15 gp**.



The Growing Dark

3. Root Nursery

> *Pale roots dangle from the ceiling like sleeping worms. Beneath them lie cracked flowerpots filled with dark, wet soil. One thorn-faced creature peers over a pot's rim while another reaches up from its own pot toward the hanging roots.*

Monsters. Two thornlings (statistics on page 8). They attack intruders who approach the pots but do not chase them out. Offering water distracts them long enough to pass.

Terrain. Smashing a pot reveals a bare patch of floor away from the thorn-covered walls. Tamsin's blood drops continue toward room 6.

Treasure. One pot holds a wax-sealed purse containing **12 gp**.

4. Vestry

> *Robes hang from wall pegs, stiff with age and stitched through with thorns. An iron cabinet stands open. Its contents have been scattered across the floor, and a pair of long-handled shears lies beneath a fallen shelf.*

Shelf. Two characters or a lever can lift it easily. Reaching blindly beneath it causes **1 damage** from hidden brambles.

Root-cutting shears. These heavy iron shears can cut the three thick red roots in room 9. They also clear growth elsewhere given time. They count as an ordinary carried item, not a magic weapon.

Clue. Scratched into the cabinet: *"The red roots feed it. The black roots merely grow."*

Treasure. A robe pocket holds a garnet worth **25 gp**.



Voices in the Roots

5. Well of Tears

> *A dry well occupies the center of the chamber. Thorny roots descend into its darkness. From below comes a woman's voice: "Please. Help me up." The voice sounds close, then impossibly far away.*

Echoes. Nobody lives below. Roots repeat the last words of people who died here. If someone answers, the roots repeat their words a moment later.

Ledge. A body lies 10 feet below. A rope makes the descent straightforward. Climbing the roots requires a **DC 12 STR or DEX check**; failure means a slip, **1 damage**, and a landing on the ledge.

Treasure and clue. The body has a silver chain worth **10 gp**, a **healing potion**, and a journal: *"I thought it was calling for help. I think it was warning me away."*

Spell scroll. A waxed tube in the body's satchel holds a scroll of **Burning Hands**, a tier 1 wizard spell from Shadowdark. Use the spell scroll and spellcasting rules in your book.

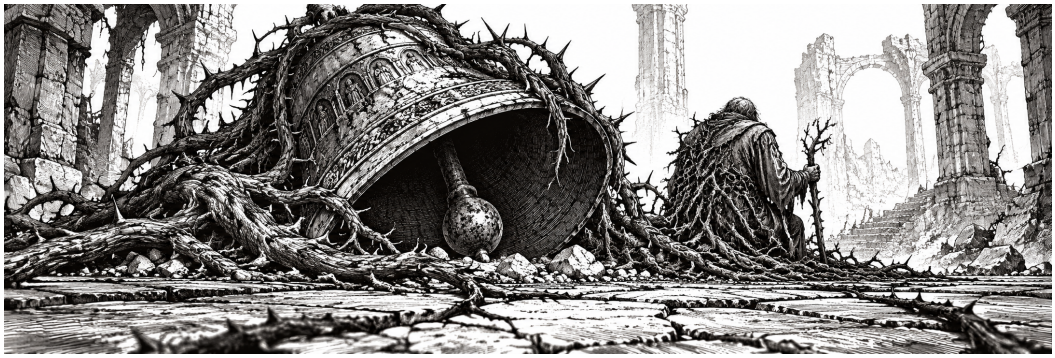
6. Buried Bell

> *A bronze bell lies half buried in roots. Each time a vine tightens around it, the bell gives a dull, strangled note. A human figure stands beside it with its back to you. Brambles pierce its coat and disappear beneath its skin.*

Monster. One rootbound caretaker (page 8). It faces the bell until disturbed. It recognizes its old brass name badge among the roots. Showing it the badge draws its attention to the bell and lets the party pass. If attacked, it fights until destroyed or until the party retreats.

Bell. Cutting away the roots lets it ring clearly. If rung shortly before confronting the Warden, the Warden has **disadvantage on its first attack**.

Treasure. The caretaker has **9 gp** and a key to the coffer in room 7.



The Old Answer

7. Reliquary

> *Thorn-covered arches frame a small stone coffer. Above it, a mural shows a priest driving an iron spike into a heart made of tangled roots. Someone has gouged away the priest's face.*

Coffer. The caretaker's key opens it. It may instead be forced with a **DC 12 STR check** or picked according to your table's rules.

Solution. The mural shows three thick red roots feeding the Warden. Cut them, then spike the exposed heart. Killing the creature by ordinary means also exposes the heart, but it regrows unless spiked or burned.

Treasure. The coffer contains the iron ritual spike, a small hammer, and **30 gp** in old coins. Another substantial piece of iron can serve if this spike is lost.

8. Gardener's Refuge

> *A barricade of benches and broken doors blocks half the room. Behind it, a woman with a torn sleeve holds a pruning knife in both hands. "Are you real?" she asks. "It knows how to use voices."*

Tamsin Vale. Exhausted but alive: **AC 10, HP 2**. She saw three red roots running into the Warden's heart. She can identify them in room 9, though she refuses to approach the creature. She will leave with the party.

Supplies. Her satchel holds ordinary bandages, a flask of lamp oil, and one torch. The bandages do not restore HP on their own.

Treasure. If brought out alive, Tamsin gives the party an amber brooch worth **20 gp**.



The Heart Chapel

9. Heart Chapel

> *The old chapel altar has split open. From it rises a figure of woven black branches, taller than any person, with a hollow where its face should be. Three thick red roots pulse beneath its feet. In the altar's broken stone, something dark and wet beats like a heart.*

Thorn Warden. Statistics on page 8. It speaks in stolen voices, including Tamsin's, using fragments such as "Hold still," "Don't let it wake," and "Help me." It attacks intruders approaching the altar. While attached to the red roots, it cannot leave this chamber.

Three ways to end it

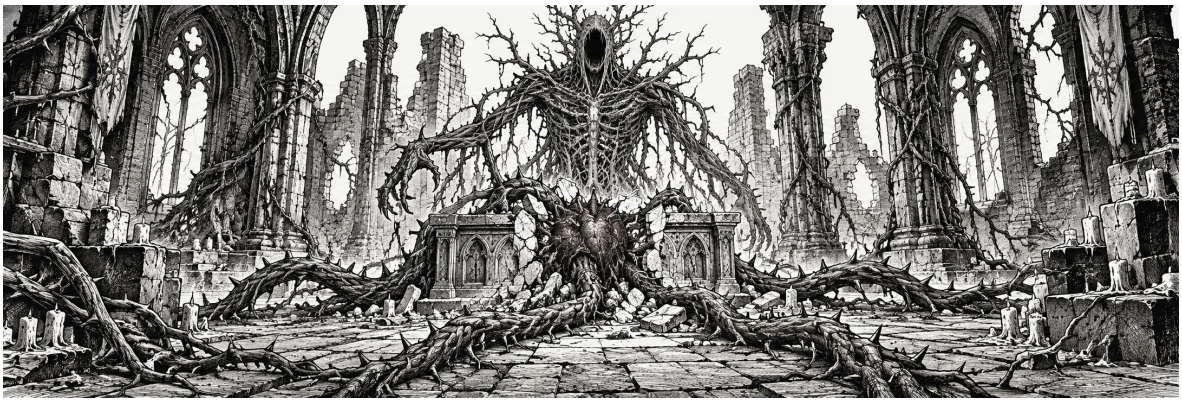
Fight. At 0 HP, the Warden collapses and exposes its heart. Spike or burn the heart to end the growth.

Cut the feeding roots. Each red root has **AC 10, HP 3**. A character with the root-cutting shears may sever one with an action instead of attacking. After all three are cut, the Warden collapses and exposes the heart.

Spike the heart. A character adjacent to the altar can take an action and make a **DC 12 STR check** to drive in the spike while the roots remain. Success destroys the Warden; failure leaves the spike caught in roots, ready to be pulled free.

The Warden guards the root approached most directly. Let the party draw it away, distract it, or use the two entrances to their advantage.

Treasure. Beneath the altar lie **45 gp** and a blackthorn ring set with a red stone worth **35 gp**. The ring loses its warmth when the heart is destroyed.



Game Master Reference

Original monsters

Thornling. AC 11; HP 3; thorn swipe +1 (1d4). Retreats into its pot at 1 HP.

Rootbound caretaker. AC 12; HP 7; grasp +2 (1d4). On a hit, may pull the target beside a thorn wall instead of dealing attack damage.

Thorn Warden. AC 12; HP 14; branch strike +3 (1d6), reach 10 feet. Each red root severed reduces both its current and maximum HP by 3. It collapses when all three roots are cut.

Award experience for treasure recovered, not for defeating monsters.

Adjusting the party

Three characters: one thornling in room 3; Warden has 11 HP. **Five or more:** three thornlings in room 3; leave the Warden as written so solving the root problem remains valuable.

Resolution

When the heart is destroyed, every thorn loosens. Brambles fall from the walls and the way to daylight opens. The villagers pay **40 gp** if Tamsin returns. If the heart remains intact, the Warden's body regrows by the following night, and the brambles continue toward the village.

Treasure at a glance

Room 1: 8 gp. Room 2: silver bowl, 15 gp. Room 3: 12 gp. Room 4: garnet, 25 gp. Room 5: silver chain, 10 gp; healing potion; Burning Hands spell scroll. Room 6: 9 gp. Room 7: 30 gp. Room 8: amber brooch, 20 gp, if Tamsin survives. Room 9: 45 gp; ring, 35 gp. Village reward: 40 gp.

Creature portrait art



THORNLING



ROOTBOUND CARETAKER



THORN WARDEN

Use the Western Reaches rules wherever they update the Shadowdark core rules. The creatures and challenges in this module are original adventure content.

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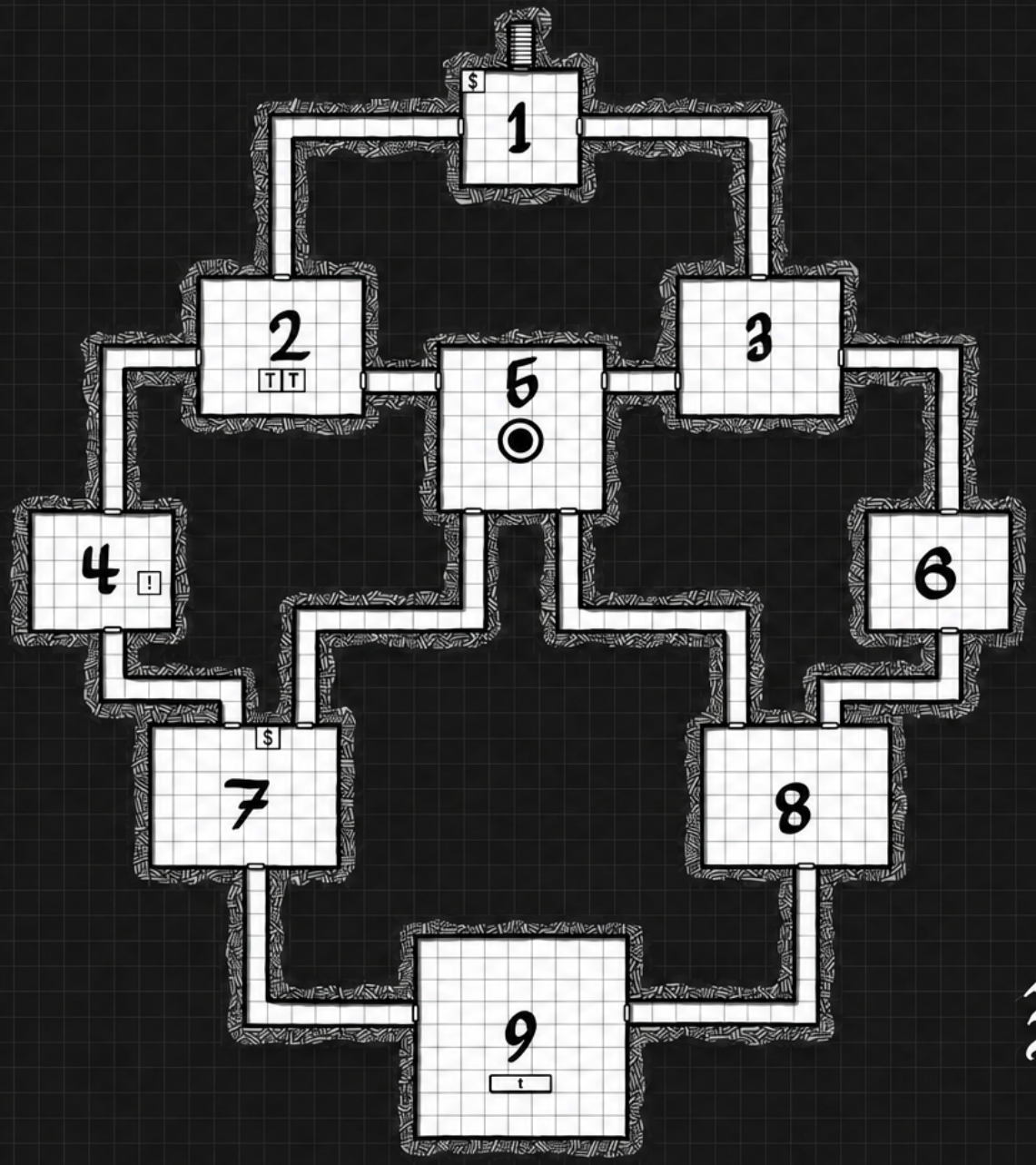
The chapel on Briar Hill has disappeared beneath a wall of thorns. Now the brambles are creeping into the graveyard, and the herbalist who went inside has not returned. Beneath the chapel, something buried is waking and it has learned to listen for blood.

A LEVEL 1 DUNGEON ADVENTURE

DESIGNED FOR USE WITH SHADOWDARK RPG

9 KEYED ROOMS / APPROXIMATELY 3–4 HOURS

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Map Legend

- $ — Treasure
- T — Thorn trap
- ! — Thorn hazard
- Well of Tears
- Heart altar
- Doorway
- Stairs
- Hatched walls Sharp brambles

1 square = 5 feet

Briar Hill Chapel