

ROOTS OF RIVALRY

AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS OF 1ST TO 3RD LEVEL



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ROOTS OF RIVALRY IS A FIFTH EDITION adventure for three to six characters of 1st to 3rd level, optimized for a party of four 2nd-level characters. Deep within an ancient forest grove, a powerful dryad and his attendant pixies have been taken captive by rebel sprites who seek to claim his domain's most precious treasure—a mystical fountain whose waters enhance fey magic to extraordinary levels. Can the adventurers uncover the truth behind this fey conspiracy, break the enchantment that holds the grove's guardians captive, and successfully navigate the treacherous politics of feuding pixie courts? This adventure takes place in Cartosia, but the names of people and places can be changed to place this adventure in any temperate forest environment across a variety of campaign settings.

BACKGROUND

For centuries, the depths of the Dalwich Timberland have been home to two of the forest's most powerful fey courts, each safeguarding a Nectarwell—mystical springs whose waters dramatically enhance the magical abilities of fey creatures. These nectarwells, among the rarest treasures of the Material Plane, have elevated their guardian courts to positions of prestige and influence throughout the forest realm. The rivalry between the courts has simmered for generations, marked by territorial disputes, elaborate pranks, and political maneuvering, but their mutual dependence on the nectarwells' power has kept the conflict from escalating beyond petty feuds.

Six months ago, this delicate balance was shattered when human miners expanding their operations near the Chatspond Glade unknowingly destroyed the underground river that fed one of the nectarwells. Within days, the magical spring ran dry, leaving Razorbelle's court stripped of their enhanced abilities and vulnerable to encroachment from rival fey. Their pride wounded and their status diminished, the displaced court began planning to reclaim their former glory by seizing their ancient rivals' nectarwell.

Under the pretense of diplomatic overture, Razorbelle and her followers approached the grove of Korventhen, a powerful dryad who had served as guardian of the second nectarwell for over two centuries. His own court of native pixies had tended the sacred waters alongside him, maintaining the delicate magical balance that kept the grove flourishing. The visiting sprites claimed they sought to discuss mutual forest defense in light of increasing human encroachment, but once welcomed into the grove's heart, they struck with coordinated magic, overwhelming Korventhen's court with enchanted sleep and binding the dryad himself with powerful compulsion magic.

Now in control of both the nectarwell and the grove's guardian, Razorbelle's followers find themselves arguing amongst themselves about their next course of action. Some

advocate for simply taking what they need and departing, while others push for permanent occupation of the superior grove. In the meantime, they have compelled Korventhen's power to summon defensive blights and awakened plants that patrol the grove's borders, while the native pixies remain imprisoned behind the waterfall. Though bound by powerful enchantments, the stubborn dryad has managed to use what little magic remains to him, sending squirrels, rabbits, and other small woodland creatures beyond the grove's corrupted borders with desperate pleas for aid from any who might listen.

GETTING THE QUEST

Whether resting at a woodland inn, traveling forest roads, or camping beneath the canopy of the Dalwich Timberland, the party's journey is interrupted by an unusual encounter. A red squirrel, larger and more alert than typical woodland creatures, approaches the party with obvious intelligence gleaming in its dark eyes. Rather than fleeing at their presence, the creature sits upright and speaks in a clear, melodious voice tinged with obvious distress.

"Please, travelers, I beg your aid! My master, the dryad Korventhen, lies imprisoned by treacherous sprites who have stolen into our domain under false pretenses!" The squirrel, who introduces himself as Nutwhisker, wrings his tiny paws as he continues. "Three days past, they came claiming friendship, but now they hold both my master and his pixie court captive, and dark things prowl the grove's borders where once only peaceful creatures dwelt."

Nutwhisker explains that Korventhen is using the last reserves of his magic to grant woodland critters speech and send them beyond the grove's boundaries to seek help. The dryad remains bound to his ancient tree, unable to act directly against his captors, while his loyal pixies are imprisoned somewhere within the grove. The rebel sprites, led by one called Razorbelle, have claimed dominion over the sacred nectarwell and usurped the grove's magic to serve their own purposes.

If asked about the nectarwell, Nutwhisker explains that it is a magical spring whose waters greatly enhance fey magic, making its guardians among the most powerful creatures in the forest. Characters familiar with fey lore can recall this information with a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Nature) check.

"The master promises great rewards to those who might free him," Nutwhisker adds hopefully, "for his gratitude runs as deep as the forest's roots. But time grows short—I fear what these usurpers might accomplish if left unchecked."

If the party has a few questions, Nutwhisker is able to engage in some brief back-and-forth, however, it isn't long before his eyes suddenly glaze over and he shakes his

head vigorously. Korventhen's enchantment fades, and Nutwhisker loses the gift of speech—though he chatters excitedly at the party and seems eager for them to follow him toward the grove.

TO THE GROVE

Nutwhisker proves an eager, if silent, guide as he leads the party deeper into the Dalwich Timberland. The journey to Korventhen's grove takes approximately four hours on foot through increasingly dense woodland. As the party travels, they notice the forest gradually changing—birdsong becomes scarce, undergrowth grows thicker and more tangled, and an oppressive atmosphere settles over the trees like a heavy blanket. Characters who make a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Nature) check can intuit that these changes reflect the woodland's instinctive response to Korventhen's imprisonment, as if the very soul of the forest grows sick in sympathy with the dryad's plight.

Speaking with Nutwhisker. If any party member casts *speaking with animals* on their squirrel companion, Nutwhisker becomes quite talkative, though his knowledge is limited to a woodland creature's perspective. He can confirm that "angry flying folk" have taken over the grove, that his master "sleeps but does not sleep" near its great tree, and that "the bright ones who used to dance and laugh" are now trapped "where the water falls." He warns that "eight-legged hunters" now prowl paths that were once safe, and he grows increasingly nervous as the party approaches the grove's borders.

Encounter: Compelled Guardians. Roughly an hour from the grove, the party encounters three **giant wolf spiders** that drop from the canopy overhead, landing in the path ahead and behind the group. These arachnids have been magically compelled by Razorbell's sprites to patrol the grove's approaches, attacking any intruders on sight. Their eyes gleam with an unnatural purple light, and thin streams of silvery webbing occasionally spark with fey magic. The spiders fight until destroyed, as their enchantment prevents retreat.

I. KORVENTHEN'S TREE

When the party arrives at the grove, read aloud:

A massive oak dominates this section of the grove, its trunk easily twenty feet in diameter and its canopy stretching far overhead. Twisted roots emerge from the earth in gnarled spirals, creating natural benches and alcoves around the tree's base. The bark itself seems to shimmer with a faint green luminescence, and carved symbols spiral up the trunk in intricate patterns. Before the tree stands a stone altar, its surface bearing ritual implements and small offerings of flowers and carved wooden tokens. At the tree's base, partially merged with the living wood, stands a tall figure with bark-like skin and magnificent antlers.

This ancient oak serves as both Korventhen's home and the spiritual heart of the grove. The dryad appears to be resting against his tree, but closer inspection reveals magical bindings that hold him in place. Silvery threads of enchantment, visible only to those who succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check or cast *detect magic*, weave around his limbs and into the tree's bark itself.

Korventhen's Imprisonment. The **dryad** is bound by a modified *geas* spell powered by the nectarwell and woven with additional enchantment magic. The binding prevents him from moving more than ten feet from his tree, attacking the rebel sprites directly, or using his magic against them. However, he retains his ability to speak and can provide guidance to the party. The enchantment can be broken through one of several methods:

- A successful casting *dispel magic* (DC 18)
- A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check to unravel the binding, requiring 10 minutes of concentrated effort
- Destroying or incapacitating Razorbell, which automatically ends the spell
- Negotiating Korventhen's freedom with Razorbell

Korventhen's Information. Once approached, the dryad explains the situation with barely contained frustration. His deep voice carries the weight of centuries, though it trembles slightly with suppressed anger:

- Razorbell's court arrived three days ago claiming they sought alliance against human encroachment, but once welcomed, they attacked with coordinated magic and bound him with this imprisonment spell.
- His loyal pixies, led by Shimmerwind, are trapped in the cave behind the waterfall where the nectarwell is located. The rebels are using the well's power to maintain defensive enchantments around the grove.
- The usurpers seem divided in their goals—some want to simply take what they need from the nectarwell and leave, while others, led by Razorbell, advocate for permanent occupation of his superior grove.
- He desperately wants his pixie friends rescued before they are permanently harmed. If freed, he would be grateful enough to grant each party member a permanent magical boon.

Encounter: Compelled Guardians. Shortly after the party begins speaking with Korventhen, four **awakened shrubs** emerge from the undergrowth around the grove's perimeter and shamble toward the group. Their leaves are an unnatural purple-black color, and they move with jerky, unnatural motions. Korventhen watches in anguish as his own magic, corrupted by the rebels' influence, turns against potential rescuers. The shrubs fight until destroyed.

2. THE NECTARWELL CAVE

The sound of cascading water echoes through this spacious cavern as you step through the curtain of the waterfall. At the cave's heart lies a circular pool of crystal-clear water, its surface perfectly still despite the waterfall's proximity. The water itself seems to emit a faint, pearl-like luminescence. Scattered around the cavern are several glowing cages of woven starlight, each containing tiny, winged figures. Near the pool, a group of sprites argues in hushed but heated tones.

This cave serves as the sanctum of the nectarwell and has become the command center for Razorbell's occupation. The imprisoned pixies watch helplessly from their magical cages while the rebel sprites debate their next course of action.

The Nectarwell. The magical spring at the cave's center contains waters that enhance fey magic when consumed. For non-fey creatures, each dose of the crystalline water provides the benefits of a long rest, cures any disease or poison affecting the drinker (magical or mundane) and provides 20 temporary hit points. The nectarwell currently contains twelve doses, visible as faint swirls of pearl-like luminescence in the water. Under normal circumstances, the pool produces one new dose every three days, drawing its power from the intersection of ley lines beneath Korventhen's grove. However, the magical spring has limits—if more than six doses are drawn within a single week, the nectarwell's flow

becomes erratic and weakened. Taking more than six doses in that timeframe risks permanently damaging the spring's connection to the ley lines, potentially reducing its output to one dose per week or, in the worst case, causing it to run dry entirely.

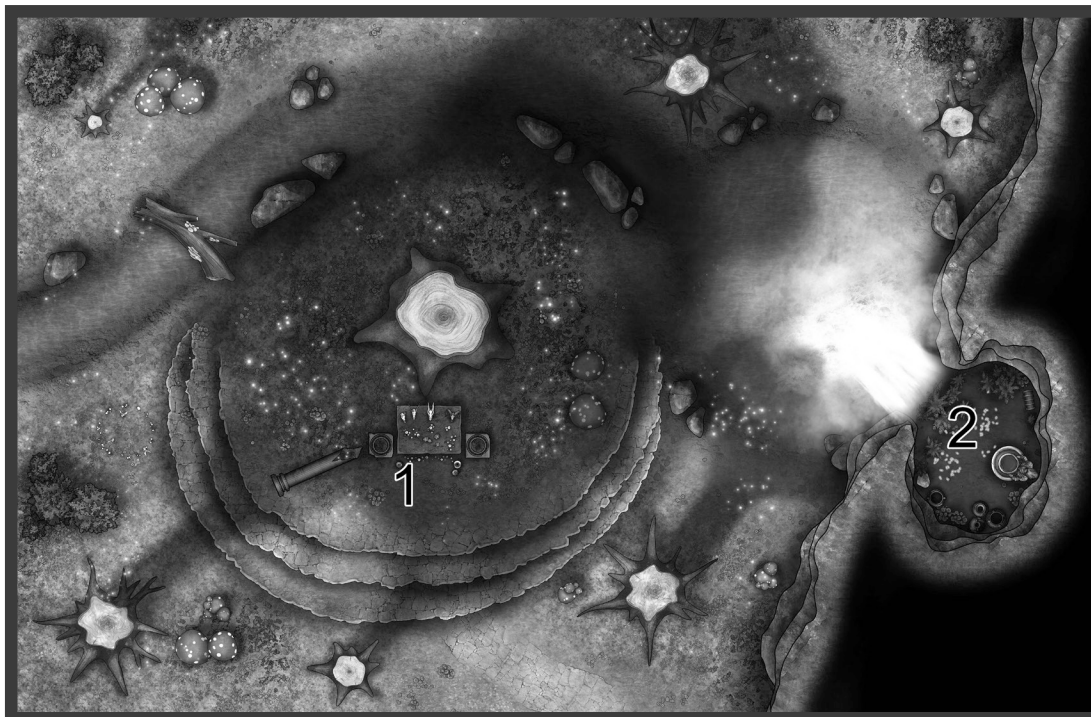
Encounter: Razorbell's Court. Five **sprites** occupy the cave, in addition to Razorbell herself. She uses **sprite** statistics but has 10 hit points, AC 16, and her shortbow attacks deal an additional 1d4 psychic damage. Razorbell is imperious and sharp-tongued, convinced that her court's survival and restoration to power justifies any means necessary. Her wings shimmer with an unnatural crimson hue, and she wears a crown of twisted thorns that marks her status as court leader. She advocates for eliminating the native pixies entirely and claiming permanent dominion over the superior grove.

Thornwick, one of Razorbell's followers, represents the faction's internal discord. Unlike his leader, he argues for negotiation—taking a substantial portion of the nectarwell's waters to attempt creating a new magical spring elsewhere, rather than resorting to escalating violence against fellow fey. His normally bright sprite coloration has dulled to muted greens and browns, reflecting his growing moral uncertainty. He becomes increasingly vocal in his dissent if the conversation progresses. Thornwick's proposal to "split" the nectarwell involves taking six of the current doses plus magical techniques to attempt recreating a similar spring elsewhere. While theoretically possible, such an endeavor would require months of careful ritual work, rare components, and considerable magical expertise—with no guarantee of success. More concerning to Shimmerwind and her pixies, removing so much water at once would stress the current nectarwell significantly, potentially reducing its recovery rate for years to come.

The Imprisoned Pixies. Seven pixies (use **sprite** statistics) are trapped in cages of crystallized starlight scattered throughout the cave. Shimmerwind, their unofficial leader, serves as their spokesperson. Despite her confinement, she carries herself with the poise of nobility, her silver hair braided with tiny flowers that remain fresh despite her captivity. She maintains remarkable composure despite her circumstances, addressing the party with dignity while quietly assessing whether they might be her people's salvation. The pixies frequently interject during any negotiations, asking pointed questions about the rebels' true intentions and reminding all present of the ancient laws governing fey conduct. The cages can be destroyed (AC 15, 10 hit points, immune to nonmagical damage) or opened with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check. If Razorbell or her followers are present in the cave, a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check is required to attempt to open the cages without being noticed.

Negotiation Dynamics. Razorbell initially treats the party as intruders to be driven off, but may be drawn into dialogue if they demonstrate knowledge of fey politics or mention specific negotiation terms. Key leverage points include

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exploiting Thornwick's ethical concerns, proposing water-sharing arrangements, or threatening to alert other powerful fey courts to Razorbell's aggressive tactics. If Korventhen has been freed, the party gains advantage on all Charisma (Intimidation) checks, as his authority as an ancient grove guardian carries significant weight. Alternatively, clever characters might lure the debate out to the tree itself, allowing Korventhen to participate directly—his presence fundamentally shifts the power dynamic in the party's favor.

If negotiations fail or combat erupts, Razorbell and her sprites fight to defend their claim. Thornwick may hesitate or even switch sides if the party successfully appealed to his conscience earlier. Combat becomes significantly easier if the party frees either or both of Korventhen or the imprisoned pixies first, as both parties immediately join the fight against their captors. If the party is aided in combat by the dryad or the pixies, Razorbell and her followers quickly surrender as soon as two of their number have fallen.

AFTERMATH

The resolution of this adventure depends heavily on how the party navigates the complex politics between the feuding fey courts. If the party successfully negotiates a peaceful solution, both courts may find ways to coexist—perhaps through Thornwick's water-sharing proposal or by helping Razorbell's court establish a new grove elsewhere. Should the party broker an agreement allowing Razorbell's court to take half the nectarwell's current waters, the rebels depart to attempt creating their own magical spring. However, this endeavor proves far more challenging than anticipated—

establishing a new nectarwell requires months of complex ritual work with no guarantee of success, and the ambitious attempt may result in either a weaker spring or complete failure, potentially leaving Razorbell's court in an even more precarious position than before.

Should violence prove necessary, defeating Razorbell's court without unnecessary bloodshed earns the respect of both Korventhen and the wider fey community, potentially opening doors to future magical assistance or adventuring opportunity.

If the party rescues both Korventhen and his pixies without claiming any doses from the nectarwell for themselves, the grateful dryad offers each party member a permanent boon drawn from the ancient magic of his grove. This gift manifests as the ability to cast either *speaking with animals* or *speaking with plants* (character's choice) once per day without expending a spell slot, as Korventhen's blessing opens their minds to the voices of the natural world.

Conversely, if the party takes a heavy-handed approach—killing members of either court, stealing from the nectarwell, or failing to consider the long-term consequences of their actions—they may find themselves persona non grata among the forest's fey inhabitants. Word spreads quickly through the woodland realm, and future encounters with pixies, dryads, and other sylvan creatures may prove considerably more challenging. The party's reputation for diplomacy and respect for fey law will determine whether this adventure marks the beginning of lasting alliances or enduring enmities within the Dalwich Timberland.

REFERENCES

This work includes material taken from the System Reference Document 5.1 (“SRD 5.1”) by Wizards of the Coast LLC and available at <https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/systems-reference-document>. The SRD 5.1 is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>.

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