

## Map 39 – The Dark Clearing (Patreon Exclusive Content)

Winter time has been officially announced in the realm, experts and maestres predict one of the coldest and longest winters in the last decade. The local farming town of Ederglad had a productive year. As it is done every year a part of its produce was sent weeks ago to the capital (as payment or tax). The road to the capital crosses a vast forest which can be dangerous sometimes. The shipment was escorted by hired sellswords.

A week ago, the town had a crisis, when they discovered that the grain house had been sacked during the night. The back wall of the wooden building was destroyed by something with big claws, so they townsfolk thought it had been a bear. But strangely enough, the grain sacks were moved out whole; nowhere to be found.

Edward Donneg, the spokesman of Ederglad, decided to hire sellswords or adventurers to track the animals or thieves and recover the town's winter reserves. Unfortunately, before hiring anyone, the royal messenger Ardenio Dulan arrived to inquire about this winter's payment. The shipment never arrived and was apparently lost before exiting the forest. Dulan was concerned about the town's welfare, so he decided to stay for a while to see the issue put to rest and to help pay for better sellswords.

The shipment and the town's winter reserves were stolen by a group of evil druids who recently settled in the northernmost part of the forest. They found a treant (or awakened tree for low level parties) living in the forest and through their druidic magic, made it their ally. Through magic, they have infused this tree with evil energy. It is the source of the malignant aura in that area of the forest. The druids can also command other animals like bears, owlbears and wolves.

This resource contains a map with and without a 5ft. grid.

Although the druids are evil and will fight to defend what they have. Their purpose is to have extra grain to feed all the animals through winter. They know well about the harshness of the next months. They don't care about stealing from people or even killing them, as long as it helps them feed the fauna and care for the forest.

This one-shot is very broad and can be easily adapted to different party levels. There should be around 2-4 encounters traveling through the forest and some survival skill checks to track the animals or druids. The number and particular creatures depend on party level. For lower level parties: wolf, druid, awakened tree and tribal warriors are good elements to build an encounter. If the party is around level 5-7 then you should consider using owlbear, wolf and direwolf, berserk, treant and for the last fight a high-level druid.

In the clearing, for the final fight, the tree (treant or awakened tree) in the center is immobile and indistinguishable from a normal tree. When the fight starts, only the chief druid and his lot (other druids, berserks, tribal warriors or bears) will be part of the fight. In round two or three, the druid leader will call the tree to battle.

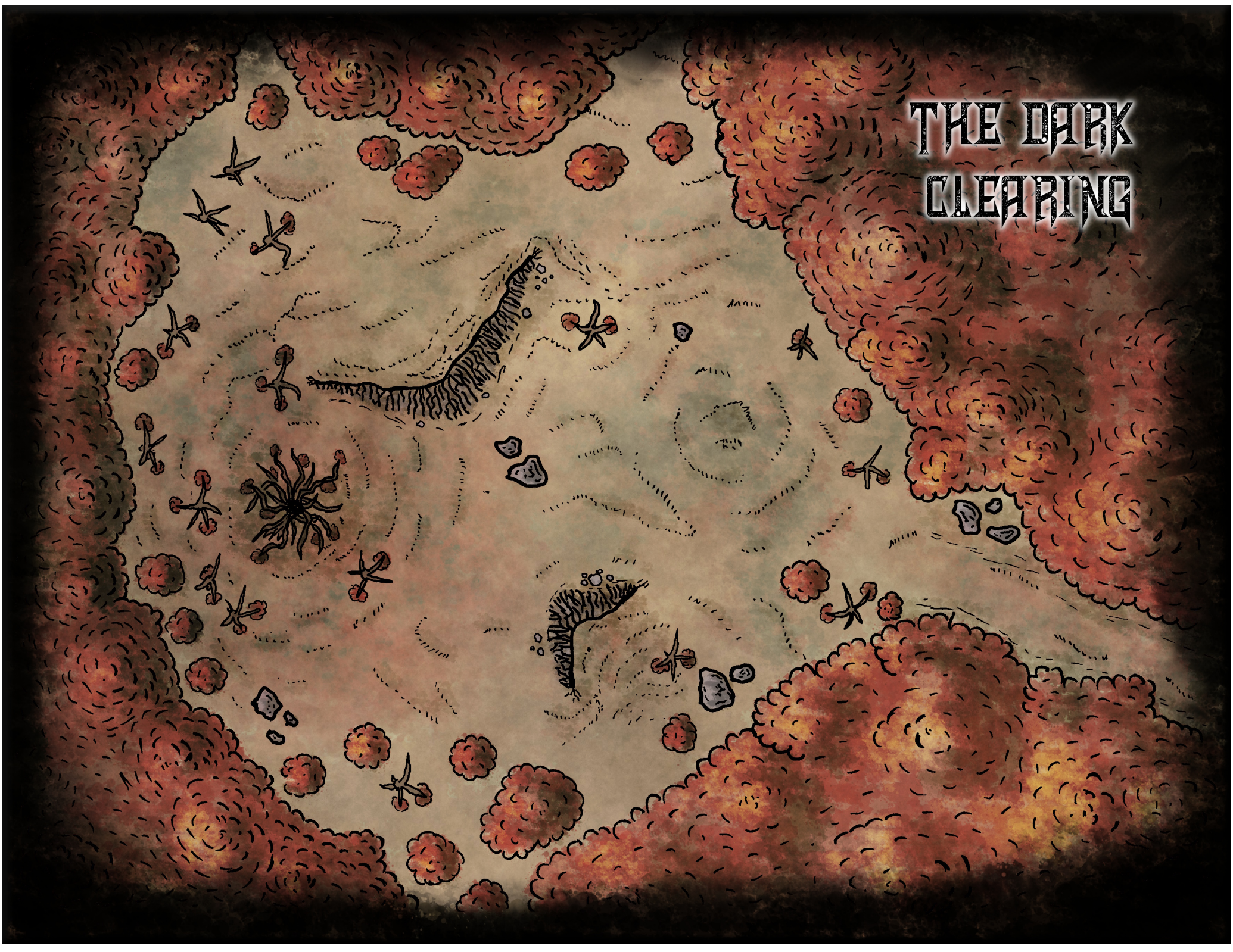
After defeat, the PCs will find the stolen goods in a grotto under the tree. Alternatively, you may allow the druids to surrender after a few rounds, to explain that they too have a problem with the coming winter. Maybe the PCs can make a deal between the town, the crown and the druids. That's a good idea for RP heavy parties.

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