

Session Recaps

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Day 1. For Whom The Bell Tolls

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The Town

The town exists.

It pays tythe to the Pale Compact, remembering the harsh winter that happened when the full tythe was not paid.

We belong here and all look to protect it.

Today begins as a normal day with the faint feeling that something is slightly off.

Then the Bell at the shore rings..... and some of us heard our name called.

Those who were called:

Aethswold - Orphaned at an early age and grew up with his "sister" Aethlwynn. Joined a local seminary as a Cleric and is still early in his seminary journey. Can be a little Grumpy but is tolerant of Aethlwynn. He's still in his 20s

Aethlwynn - Abandoned as a baby and was taken in by the same kind family as Aethswold. She's 19 so, for an Elf, is practically a baby. She had left the family to train with a small group of witches but returned from foraging one day to find the camp deserted but with traces of blood. She ran back to the town with nothing but what she was carrying

Guru - A Dwarf from the mountains. He was training to learn some magic, but was mostly pursuing his traditional weapons training. He is 214 years old. He had to flee after the calamity hit. Therefore didn't finish training and survived by using his smithing skills.

Sebastian - A Fisherman by trade. He has lived here all his life and his parents still live here. He's not very ambitious, the height of his ambition is to catch a bigger fish.

Salus - Has been here for as long as she can remember. She's in her 40s. She has a personal quest to learn as many magical scripts, scriptures etc as she can

The bell summoned us to the Elder Salin who gave us the following jobs for the day:

- The broken smokehouse (outside of town near some docks) Which looks to have been damaged over night. The Town is worried about food spoilage
- The missing net. A younger islander has gone east to find the net and has not returned
- the ice-tide beast. A strange beast has been seen on the edge of the ice

The broken smokehouse:

The smokehouse smells wrong and one side has buckled inwards. Initially we can see no blood or footprints

They speak with Dock Worker Bryn - who was nearby over night He did not hear dogs barking or gulls screaming. He confirms there shouldn't be any one at the smokehouse over night.

Guru checks the tool shed. He finds a narrow bench with one draw opened carefully but with the contents spilled. It looks like a knife is missing, but its probably just a normal villagers knife

Sebastian checks the snowy trail towards the woods. The snow shows something that heavy was dragged here and the wind hasn't been able to hide it. He gets the impression that the snow was deliberately used to try and hide the trail.

Sebastian and Aethswold think some sort of carcas was dragged but does not appers to have been dragged by a predator. Sebastian thinks something was stolen from the smoke house

Salus examines a blood stained cairn. She can see the snow is darked and compressed. The snow is blood stained as though something was dragged here. The cairn is new and is something the town's folk wouldn't have made. She thinks it looks like an old burial marker, but doesn't look like it honors the dead. The blood is new and seems to be from multiple different creatures. Sebastian believes that it was intentional and meant to be seen. Something large was dragged from the cairn to the shoreline

The fire pit is cold, but the fire is not long dead. Melted frost clings to the stones in unnatural patterns. Something was added to the embers; not fuel but it has been burned away. There is a faint smell of ash and sweet rot. It's unfamiliar to Aethswold. Guru can tell this is a necromatic residue and is very weak and unstable. The fire was disturbed after it had died down. The party feel the ash was used in a ritual

The collapsed wall and the smokehouse door

The smokehouse door is partially open, but looks it's been forced from the inside. There is a smell of fish, also of cold iron and fur. The hinge appears to have been bent by strenght. There is no splintering of the door and no bite marks on the fish which look like they have been disgured.

Bryn mentions the door is always locked

Salus sees a darker smear of blood behind one of the beams

Bryn is not sure what's missing

The party knows no creature hunts like this. Footprints by the door look as though someone stood there for some time. Whatever came through the door was by intention. Gura sees very faint marks scratched on the inside of the door frame, which seem to have been made by nails. Aethlwynn wonders if a caster was here. Guru disagrees and thinks it's ritualistic and could be fiendish or devilish. They either wanted us to see the ritual or didn't care if we did.

The party opts to repair the building. Bryn helps and they spend several hours to make it secure. Some of the smoking racks seem to have been snapped. One of the racks was deliberately pulled down and some of the racks have been arranged to make a crude sigil. Blood patterns nearby suggest that the fish were cut.

A single, bare human footprint is found near the racks, but it is bigger than normal footprint.

Found items:

Bryn says to take twine and a net repair kit, resin soaked kindling, soot stained cloths, bone shards, salt block, jar of rendered fat (looks a bit spoiled but usable), 3 smoke house hooks. Placed in the party stash

The missing net:

The party follows the path to the east in search of the missing net

They can see the normal nets hanging up, but one is missing. A single lantern burns.

There is disturbed snow by a tidal pool.

Salus notices small tracks leading to the water

The party hear crying coming from behind a boulder and find a small teenager - Tamsin, her leg is bloodied. She says she found the net something big with glowing blue eyes moved under the ice causing her to fall and to drop the net. She says the creature was about half her size. The net is now lost to the sea

There is no smell of cold iron in the area and Guru can't see any unnatural markings.

Guru took a torn net

The party head back to the village with Tamsin.

The ice-tide beast:

The party head to the ice tide where they find a shallow cave on the way to the frozen fen. There are remnants of bone and a small battered wooden chest which look to have been here for a long time

Guru investigates and finds:

- A worn cane
- a worn and weathered set of chain mail
- a small iron hammer
- a rotted leather pouch with 5 silver coins
- a waterlogged journal of which only one line is legible "The tide did not recede, it waited we should not have opened the crate"
- A mostly illegible letter. The legible words are "If this reaches shore (fades) do not trust (fades) they knew, they always knew (fades)"

The bones look to be those of a baby mammoth.

Aethswold sees 2 sets of blue glowing eyes at the back of the cave which are

Frost-Touched reef stalkers:

They have:

- A frost nipped bite attack dealing piercing and cold damage
- A freezing flurry attack (2 actions - with reflex save on a hit)
- A death reaction to trigger an icy blood attack. The party member who killed it takes 1 cold damage

They are resistant to vitality damage

The party manage to kill them.

Examining the bodies the party find a strip of blood stained cloth has been carefully placed around their necks. The flowing blood of the frost touched reef stalkers steams unnaturally on the ice

Both cloths have the same smell of cold iron as around the Cairn, but no smell of ash. One of the cloths is stained, not with blood but a faint violet tinge. The other cloth is bloodstained but with the blood of the reef stalkers. The knots look like a noose.

Back at Moonrest Haven

Elder Salin listens to the party's findings, but only has time to nod her head once before someone runs in and rings the bell wildly crying "Elder, there is something on the ice". Elder Saelin charges the party with investigation and warns not to let the crowd trample the ice.

The tide is going out. Something lays about 30 paces out, dark above the snow. Bryn says it was not there before.

It's the figure of a man, face down. Not drowned and with no blood showing, he is clutching a fragment of black wax in his hand.

Guru sees a vertical dark silhouette above the ice line

To Be Continued

Day 2. The Ice Man Cometh

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The Ice

The body lies face down on the ice. No-one from Moonrest has dared to touch it.

Elder Saelin tells us "We do not let the tide take the dead but do not bury what we do not understand. Determine how the man died, take him to the fish house and examine him".

She tells us to record everything for the Moonrest archives. "Do this carefully" she cautions "Do not let rumours circulate" .

We see a well dressed human male, frozen stiff with the sea frost clinging to his clothes. They are of a very high quality; he is obviously not a fisherman. His boots do not look worn and have not seen much wear. He has bruising around his wrists, but no other signs of injury.

Sebastian sees the body didn't drift here as he sees faint drag marks partially covered by the drifting snow. A bag looks like it has been dropped next to him. There are no foot/boot prints.

Bryn suggest moving him to the fish house now so we make an A frame stretcher and carry him back there.

As we return to the fish house with the body, the villagers are outside watching. None help, they just watch.

As we get close to the fish house a man in his mid 40s stops us and says "Your'e not bringing that into the village. You don't know what he's carrying." Aethlewynn doesn't know the man but asks him if he knows who the body is. Tha man does not know him. He calms slightly when Aethlewynn tells him we are doing this on Elder Saelin's orders. An old lady tells the gathering crowd to let him pass - "If the sea gave him back we take care of him".

We continue on. Passing between two houses we hear a group of children playing and singing a rhyme we recognise. "I hear what you say. He walks where oaths are torn in two, And smiles like friends you think you knew. Lock your door when moon's gone thin, Don't let a traitor's shadow in."

We can hear the crowd asking if anyone knows him or what has happened, none do. Noone else stops us and we take the body to the fish house and lay him out.

We start to examine him, head to toe. He does not look panicked so we don't think he struggled. We check his chest and Guru notices water in his lungs, Salas thinks the water entered after death. Salas notices a small puncture wound in his spine which looks intentional. Bryn says he's not seen anything like that from the sea.

Salas and Guru sees his wrists are bruised and look like he was restrained. They see lavender marks under his finger nails which Aethlewynn and Sebastian believe is an alchemical residue His

hands seem to have reacted oddly to the cold.

His outer clothing are high quality and we think they are probably from one of the main continents. His jacket has reinforced seams, but in some areas they seem a lot thicker than you'd normally expect. Sebastian and Guru can see the stitching is deliberately reinforced with different thread and looks out of place with the rest of the jacket. Guru uses a knife from the fish house and unpicks the seams. Bryn comments the stitching was done to protect something, Sebastian thinks it was done to hide something quickly. Guru finds a wax sealed packet in the seam. The jacket pockets appear empty. The trouser pockets contain a scrap of cloth and a small piece of cord, but no coin. An inner pocket holds a small metal ring, wrapped carefully in some cloth. It seems to be a signet ring and to have been intentionally hidden. It's well crafted and not local. Aethlewynn doesn't think its cult based or magic. There is no inscription in the ring but Bryn thinks he's seen the insignia before on crates from the mainland.

Guru open the letter from the jacket. Most has been worn away, but he can make out:

"Moonrest Isle classified low activity."

"Threshold variance within tolerance."

"reserves stable."

"Knight oversight unnecessary at this stage."

Guru thinks he's some sort of courier from the mainland.

We take a closer look at the needle mark in his spine. We know of plants that could be ground down and would cause paralysis and stop hearts; that could be the cause of death. Then he was tossed into the water when dead. All ID seems to have been removed apart from what was hidden.

Bryn reminds us to write this down for Elder Saelin.

We record suspicious death, by persons unknow.

We record the suspicious puncture marks, the bruising on his wrists and the hidden items that we found.

We try to leave nothing out of the report.

Bryn covers the body as we head out to see Saelin. Bryn suggests we have a chat with the locals to see if any of them saw or heard anything.

Aethlewynn goes to talk to Edda. Edda saw nothing and doesn't recognise him. She believes "This one was not meant to come back, The sea does not often give back." Edda thinks he must be dangerous if the sea did not want to keep him and tells us "You should be careful not to invite the danger here."

Sebastain asks Bryn what he thinks about the dead man. Bryn hasn't seen him before and no official ships or small boats have landed. Bryn says it's been quiet for many weeks.

Aethlewynn asks Bryn about the drag marks, wanting to know if he knew of anything that could have dragged the body up but left no marks, he does not. Aethlewynn begins to remember the blue eyed fish had sharp teeth which could have caused a puncture wound.

Aethswold talks to the Lorekeeper, Tovin - his sister is a herbalist so will know the Aeth siblings. Tovin has heard rumours about the body, but ignores them. He has no writing or recollection of the dead man. When asked, Tovin checks his ledgers and confirms what Bryn has said about landings.

Sebastian talks to Mara, the bar keep. She says the whole village is talking about the investigation. Sebastian asks what whispers she has heard? She mentions that we don't normally get visitors in winter and outsiders never stay long. She says quietly that the official people who come never travel alone and they do what needs to be done and go quickly.

Tomas, a refugee says he is not sure if knows anything at all. Aethlewynn sits down and tries to engage him in conversation but Sebastian notices he seems afraid. He seems to be trying to avoid answering questions and his eyes keep darting to the shoreline. Sebastian reckons it is in the direction where the body was found. Aethlewynn asks Tomas where he was from originally, says from one of the main continents, but his family has been travelling the seas since before he was born. Born at sea, but grew up on the island once his parents died. He says he hates the ocean and would rather keep his feet on dry land. Aethlewynn asks if recognises the clothes on the man, he says he does not. He is hiding something. Aethswold asks if he was afraid of the body. He's evasive, but he eventually cracks and says he'll tell. He couldn't sleep and the tide was wrong when he went to the ice. Someone else was there, not using a lantern as though they knew where everything was. He saw a hooded, cloaked figure leaning over the dead body seeming to be checking for something. Tomas saw the figure walk away onto the sea then it vanished into the fog. Tomas doesn't know anything about the cloak or the dead mans clothes.

Aethlewynn thinks that would explain the lack of footprints. Aethswold has heard of ancient mythical creatures, but none that are humanoid figures.

We go to the Longhouse to see Elder Saelin and give our report. Guru gives her the letter and ring and she recognises they are from the Port Authority - i.e. The Pale Compact. Elder Saelin is wondering why they are watching Moonrest. Aethswold and Guru think he was undercover. Saelin says if he is Pale Compact then someone will come looking for him. She asks all of us for our opinion on whether we should contact the Pale Compact or not. All of us think there is more to uncover - except Sebastain who thinks we should tell the authorities right away. Elder Saelin decides to wait for the time being. She says Compact Agents do not die and certainly don't die alone. If that is the case then something has gone very wrong. She asks the other council members to leave. When they have gone she asks us if there is anything we didn't wish to say in front of the others. Aethlewynn mentions the hooded figure that Tomas saw. Guru mentions the odd, blue eyed sea creatures that seemed to be under control by something and the ritual at the smokehouse. The common factor in all these events is the archane violet residue. Elder Saelin summarises that the ring carries a lot of protection and events must be serious if he had hidden it. She wonders if the Compact have lost control and is now more wary of contacting them. Guru wonders if there is something here that could help The Compact. Saelin says that in all things The Comapct act in their own interest. She asks us to keep quiet and would like us to see things through as Moonrest seems

to be in danger. She gives us all an Adventurers' Pack as a gift.

Suddenly one of the Shorewatchers dashes through the door saying something is moving on the Western Shoals - the ice is breaking where it shouldn't. She sends us to investigate.

At the Shoals we see a single set of prints heading out towards the ice, We see drag marks heading out to the cracks in the ice and see more of the lavender residue. The wind picks up and tide seems to have been pulled back further than it should be. Then we see hands puncture the ice and a body pulls itself through the ice. It is a Zombie but seemingly the dead body we left in the fish house. How did he get here?

Drowned Messenger !

We defeat him causing the waters to still and the cracks to stop widening.

We see an indistinct shape of a ship on the horizon. Just for a fleeting second we see a single, hooded figure in the rigging before it fades into the fog...

To Be Continued

Day 3. A Light In The Dark

From The Ice To The Trees

Guru examines the body of the zombie, but there is nothing to be found. We decide it would not be a good idea to take the zombie back to town so Guru burns the body using fire from his hands while Aethswold prays over the remains of the zombie. Seb is impressed with the fire and tries to do the same. He cannot. Aethlwynn examines the ash, but can see nothing other than ash. We head back to town.

The return is quite quiet apart from a growing storm which feels wrong like it is watching and waiting. As we return Moonrest is shutting down for the night and the gates are only just open. The guards are surprised that we are still alive.

In the night there is a the cry of a great horn, which could have been mistaken for the storm.

The town is quiet in the morning, but rumours of what happened on the ice are circulating. Elder Saelin wants to see us immediatly, but we go via the fishhouse and the body has gone.

We head to the longhouse and see the Elder. She tells us that Yselle Marr says an unexpected thaw near the Whispering Woods may have exposed plants that can be gathered. As we head towards Yselle's with Elder Saelin she warns us not to touch anything! Yselle looks tired, but invites us in. She explains she'd normally send gatherers, but they are wary due to the recent unexplained happenings. On the table are lots of labelled samples and also a thick black root which looks to be alive. Yselle puts a cloth over the root then unrolls a map and shows us where to go. She gives us a list of things she wants and tells us to bring back a sample of anything growing where it shouldn't.

Yselle gives Salus a healers' toolkit and Aethlwynn

- a gathering satchel
- a herb knife
- waxed sample jars
- cloth gloves and chalk markers

We can still see the odd, thick black root so Guru asks what it is. Yselle says she doesn't know and she doesn't like it due to not knowing what it is. Guru describes the symbol on the messengers ring and asks if Yselle knows what it is. She thinks she has seen it on crates from the mainland.

Guru asks if there's anything to look out for in the woods and Aethswold asks what people have reported seeing. Yselle tells us not to go too deep into the Whispering Woods, if we find ourselves in an area of Old Growth Forest then we should leave immediatly. She's sure ancient things lurk there and sometimes noises can be heard from there.

She says to follow the hunter trail until the marker tree. She advises that if the woods become too quiet then leave immediately.

As we leave Yselle's house Salus looks back and for a brief moment she thinks she sees the black root move by itself. As no one else saw it Salus assumes it was a trick of the light.

As we head out to the woods it is cold and snow is falling lightly. We find the old hunter trail and follow it. We hear creaks of the branches, the wind, the caws of ravens. Noting unusual. We see prayer ribbons, old animal traps and axe marks on the trees.

Aethlwynn sees one of the trees is marked with old symbols and sees another where some of the marks have been deliberately scrubbed out. The path does not seem to have been used recently. Salus feels the air is subtly heavier here. As we press on the trail narrows but we find the split marker trees as Yselle described. We heard a sudden crashing sound then the cry of a lone animal. The sound is ahead of us and sounds like an animal in distress. Guru scouts ahead and finds a young elk caught in an old hunter trap. One rear leg is caught in the trap but black roots twist towards the creature. Aethlwynn tries to identify the roots but cannot. Aethswold hits it with a vitality lash. The roots react violently and immediately spasming and violently thrashing around on the forest floor. We see a black ooze erupting from the tendrils and a pale steam rises into air. Somewhere deeper in the woods something pulses. Aethswold casts light onto Guru's staff but the roots do not react. The elk is able to pull free itself from the tendrils but not from the hunter trap. Guru casts Ignition on the root which violently from the flames. Black sap bubbles on the surface of the roots but they grab the elk again. Aethswold kills the elk out of mercy and the roots let go of it.

The thrashing of the roots subsides and for a brief moment we see a blue light flicker deeper in the forest. As Aethlwynn fills one of the containers with the black sap Aethswold notices the tendrils seem to be paying more attention to the blood flowing from the elk. Aethswold channels the blood and the roots follow it. Aethswold releases the elk from the trap and asks if Salus can examine the elk and see if the body has been corrupted. She can't see much but thinks it's probably safe to harvest. Sebastian is able to harvest meat, elk hide and antler material.

We head on into the woods trying to find items on the list. Aethlwynn finds five measures of Blood Moss and a measure of Resin Sap. We follow the path further looking for plants when Aethswold suddenly feels the ground shift under his feet as the snow collapses. He sees an opening area under the roots; near the edge of the collapse he sees an old hunter's lantern which he recognises as being from Moonrest Haven. However we're not aware of anyone going missing. He prods the earth around the opening and finds that the roots are old and break apart easily. The area smells of old rotted wood and a cold wind blows from the opening. He picks up the lantern, it's rusted and beyond use but Guru takes it as metal is valuable. The woods are quieter than they have been, but not deadly silent. The path seems to have run out at this point and it's just us between the trees. We see a black root vanish back into the earth and we recognise that these are the same sort of roots that grabbed the elk. We carry on deeper into the forest where the trees look older. Aethlwynn finds more Resin Sap and some Pale Fern. We start to head back the way we came then hear wet, cracking noises as one of the black roots appears to be dragging something that looks like a dead rabbit. We head back to where we found the elk and Aethlwynn finds Frost Mint. Aethswold collect a couple of bundles of twigs to take back to town.

As we leave the woods Aethlwynn looks back; all looks fine and normal as snow continues to fall.

We head to Yselle's and give her the herbs we found. She gives Aethlwynn the blood moss. Yselle looks worried when she sees the black sap then clears most of the table asks us to show her where we found it. Aethswold explains how we found the elk and says the roots are invasive. He explains it didn't like the vitality lash and he mentions the blue light like a beating heart. Yselle puts on leather gloves before opening the glass container. We see thin dark veins shifting beneath the surface. Yselle says old stories spoke of things like this in the first winter after The Shrouding. She is worried that the vitality magic worked as living things shouldn't react badly to it. As the sap moves in the container she hurriedly seals the container back up. She says not to leave the container by food or herbs or sleeping places. Aethswold casts Vitality Lash on the black root on the table which causes the entire root to convulse. Thick black tendrils erupt out of the root, the lantern flames dim and several herbs are blackened. The root beats like a heart as Yselle hits it with a heavy iron tool. Thin rootlets head out of it and shrivel. The black sap bubbles and the room smells of wet rot and blood. The severed root drags itself towards a bunch of fresh herbs before collapsing again. Yselle is now in a panic.

Aethlwynn asks Yselle where she found the root while Yselle shoves a large metal bowl over the rest of the root. She found it near the outer perimeter of the pine forest a few days ago. That's where she first noticed the thaw in the snow, at first she thought it was rot, then it moved. She starts to compare the samples. Her's is smaller and less active than the sap we had collected but both are spreading in the same way. She thinks whatever we brought back is growing stonger. The tendrils spreading from the root starts to wither and the root looks like it has died. The lantern flickers blue for a second then returns to normal. The sap in the jar did not react.

Aethlwynn asks Yselle if the metal killed it or was it the vitality lash? Y says the bowl only contained it and suggests vitality hurt it. She asks is we tried any thing else? Guru says it didn't like fire and that it blistered, burned, boiled with black oil and was quite aggressive. He also told Yselle that it was more interested in the blood than the rest of the elk and suggests trying a drop of blood in the jar. Yselle says to wait until we are all somewhere safer.

As night falls a pale blue light pulses in the darkness of the woods, faster than before.

To Be Continued...

Day 4. Gone Girl

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Back Into The Woods

The night deepens and the storm starts to ease. The only lights showing belong to the harbour lantern and to Yselle's cottage. In the night the wind drops but the air is unnaturally still.

Deep within the forest a blue light pulses, the lights in Moonrest Haven dim in time with the pulse and the dogs begin to bark incessantly.

A strange sound rings out low and distant, long and mournful, not quite a horn, not quite the wind. The Harbour Bell rings out once, then silence returns.

In the morning Moonrest is uneasy, Down by the docks the dogs continue to bark. We are summoned by heavy, urgent knocking at the door and we see Bran one of the Palisades watchmen looking scared, but trying to remain composed. He says that Elder Saelin needs us now, something has happened in the night. He describes the blue light out in the trees at night and says that something seems to be moving under the snow.

As we head through the town we see people talking in hushed voices and that many homes have their eastern shutters closed. Sebastian notices that many of the fishing ships are still docked instead of being out to sea as normal. Even though it is cold there is an abnormal amount of smoke rising from chimneys. Ravens have gathered, sitting quietly on the roof tops. Frost rime on the windows resembles branching veins. One of the locals points at us and says, "This all started after you bought something back from the forest". We head to the Long House which is busier than normal. There are villagers, guards and hunters. There are maps over all the table and lanterns burn bright. All the people within look fearful. Elder Saelin is trying to hold everyone together, but she looks exhausted. The eastern side of the Long House is empty and we notice the people are avoiding it. The Hunters are arguing amongst themselves Elder Saelin says the eastern watch reported pale lights pulsing between the trees in the forest, and before dawn came, one of the lumber families who live near the eastern palisades realised their daughter was missing. Her name is Tala Venn and she is eleven years old. The hunters found tracks outside her home but are not sure what to make of them. One of the guards is sure he saw something black moving under the snow in the night.

Sebastian asks if we need to rescue Tala. Elder Saelin says yes but most of the town are too fearful to leave the village.

Aethlwyn asks to see Yselle before we set off but Elder Saelin tells her to wait as Yselle should be at the Long House soon. When Yselle arrives she rushes up to the table and says the pulses of light made the sample of sap activate. The jar itself tried to move to the warmth of living things and Yselle thinks it can sense them. Elder Saelin says "the oldest records of our land spoke of winters like this, where roots beneath the snow woke hungry. Be honest how bad do you think this is?" Aethlwyn looks to Yselle who says something strange is happening and it frightens her. Aethlwyn

asks Elder Saelin what the records say about how the roots were dealt with, but the Elder replies that the records are patchy. As we talk a towns person runs in shouting "There are roots by the eastern sheds, coming up through the ground!". Elder Saelin turns to us and says "You are the best we have, please investigate and try to bring TAla home".

We will do our best as these are our people. Aethlwynn is unsure about the best way to do this but suggests taking fire brands as the roots reacted to it. Sebastian takes charge and sends three hunters to get torches and meet us by the Eastern Pallisades.

We head to the Pallisades where we see the earth is shredded with thick black roots. Salus wonders what void damage can do, we agree to see what might happen. She casts Voidwarp. The moment the energy touches it the tendrils freeze unnaturally and the blue light flashes sharply beneath the surface. Salus thinks the darkness is drinking the void damage into it and seems to quite like it. Aethlwynn wonders if the roots are coming for the sap and root that Yselle found. We now think that vitality energy damages it, blood seems to draw it, fire harms it. Aethswold casts Vitality Lash at the roots which again react violently and recoil. Aethswold wonders about casting benediction radius which is divine protection but agrees to wait. Guru casts Live Wire to see if electricity has an effect. As the spell hits blue light arcs through the roots seemingly causing a chain reaction. The light gets brighter and brighter and the tendrils seem to seize violently. More roots erupt through the soil thrashing wildly. Eventually the light dies down and the roots quieten. The electricity didn't seem to damage the roots rather they seem to have woken up. We feel the roots carry the charge through the whole system which we think is all connected underground. Salus casts Divine Lance (spirit damage) which causes a pulse, spasms and a slight retreat and it feels like we've struck the corruption itself. When the Divine Lance struck, the blue light looks like it recoiled in pain and we hear cracking under ground as though ice is breaking. The hunters arrive with torches and drive back the roots that have come under that wall.

We head to Tala's home quite quickly. Her mother greets us, but is very frightened. She says the storm woke the family in the night and Tala was there, but when the harbour bell rang and awoke the family again she was gone. Her brother Harlan went to try and find her, neither have been seen since. There is no blood or signs of struggle, just small bare foot tracks heading east. Guru notices strange shallow furrows in the snow alongside the tracks, as though something was keeping pace with her. Aethlwynn checks for violet residue, but can see none. We see a separate set of tracks for Harlan, shod and larger and the furrows don't seem to follow him. Aethlwynn asks if Tala had injured herself wondering if blood had attracted the roots but her mother says nothing untoward had happened to her. Aethlwynn asks if they saw the blue light, but Tala's Mother says no, it was the harbour bell that woke them.

The dogs continue to bark in a spooked way, but there have been no more sightings of the strange ship. We follow Tala's tracks towards the lumber path, the Town gates opening against the snow. There are a number of town folk on the Pallisade, but no one volunteers to join the search. As we start to depart we hear Yselle calling, she brings a resin fire bundle for each of us and warns us to leave if the blue light pulses faster.

We follow the trail, and seeing old axe marks on the trees. The further we go the quieter the forest becomes, an unnatural calm as though it is watching us. We can still see Tala's footprints faintly.

Every now and then it looks like she was running and stumbling. The furrows still seem to follow her even though they sometimes dip underground. We see the roots and furrows avoided patches of sunlight In one place Tala seems to have hidden in an old log pile.

We notice that the roots seem to be generating heat and feel the corruption is spreading through a shared system which may have infected the whole forest. The pulses travel through the roots and seem to coordinate what the whole does. We've noticed that killing surface roots doesn't seem to kill what's underground. High in the tress we see a Conspiracy of Ravens silently watching us. Suddenly they erupt skywards from the trees.

Salus and Guru hear movement beneath the snow. Salus feels the movement is in parrallel to us as though following us. There is no sign of Harlan. As we continue the temperature drops . We suddenly feel vibrations which causes snow to fall from the trees and we see the blue light pulsing like a heat beat. We don't belive it's spell, more like a biological thing. Aa we continue to follow the paths thick black roots erupt from the snow and attack us.

Root Tendrils

Tendrill lash attack.

Aethswold casts Benediction. The roots take no damage from being within the Benediction aura, but appear to be unhappy in the aura.

The roots take all the piercing damage from Sebastian and all the bludgeoning damage as well.

Aethlwynn casts Caustic Blast and the acid causes the roots start to hiss and crack violently. The sap and root start to thrash and the pale blue veins start to pulse. It is weak 5 to acid.

Blood sense ability. The roots have +1 attack to a bleeding individual.

Guru casts Fire. It is weak 5 to fire.

Hide - the roots can retreat back underground.

As Sebastian takes damage a change comes over him and his eyes light up.

As we beat the roots the earth collapses and we see a pit filled with black roots and animal bones. We see the roots are extracting nutrients from the animal bones Aethswold notices that the corruption is feeding more on fresh meat than on the older bones.

We move about 100 meters before we find a shattered lumber sled leaning against a pine tree. One runner is shattered, supplies are spread about. A blue light is in the background.

To Be Continued

Day 5. Now We Are Six

A stranger in our midst

As we approach the sledge we see signs of a struggle and see that there is fresh blood and drag marks in the snow. We see one set of adult tracks in the area and another set of tracks that vanish under the snow. Aethlwynn suggests we follow the tracks, and we follow the obviously recent set that seem to vanish. We start to hear a weak cough in the forest silence which seems to come from under the sled. We see a man half covered by the sled; he looks very cold. One hand grips an axe, his clothes are ripped and he looks almost hypothermic. Guru puts his cloak over him, and he thanks us. Guru helps him up, and sees his shoulder is bleeding and badly injured. While Salus stops the bleeding, Aethlwynn asks him his name - Riteable is the answer. Guru asks where he is headed, Riteable replies that he was sent out to look for Tala last night as folk know he was in the army and now sells his sword.

Aethlwynn points out the other footprints and ask if Riteable knows who the footprints belong to, he thinks he saw Tala but heard her screaming a name like "arlan". Then there were blue lights, the earth shook and he lost his footing. He thought he saw something but passed out and the next thing he knows is seeing us. We agree we have the same goal and Sebastian suggests we follow the footprints. Riteable asks if we should back go to the village but we agree to press on as little girl is lost. The other footprints seem to vanish, but seem to be wearing some short of shoes. Salus realises the blood is recent and can see that they were dragged under ground seemingly alive, but can't be seen. The other prints leading away look like a small barefoot child. Aethlwynn wants to try to help who or whatever was dragged underground but we can't see a way underground. There are roots which look like a mix of tree roots and the corrupted black roots. We can't see the blue lights but can sense a general pulse. Aethlwynn says to the forest "You have one of ours if you let him go there is no need to set a fire". There is no response, but soon after the birds fall silent and the wind has drops. It feels as though like something is listening. The forest does not feel hostile or kind, and it doesn't feel like the forest itself doing the listening. Aethlwynn also has a strange sense of smoke within the general forest scents. As the scent seems to be coming from the direction of Tala's footprints we follow Tala's them.

We head north until we see one of the old camps. There is neither smoke rising nor voices in the distance. The watch tower has collapsed, and we can make out pale blue pulses from the ground.

Guru scouts ahead. Aethswold notices faint ripples beneath the snow which he thinks there are potentially weak areas. He also thinks he can see faint movements in the hut. He feels the safest way in is through a gap in the fence rather than through the main gate. He sees a small fire and lanterns outside the hut which the roots seem to avoid. Salus notices bare footprints leading into the shed she also sees drag marks and blood in the main courtyard as well as frozen black sap in the snow. Aethlwynn sees that the roots seem to be feeding on the warmth in the area and that the nearby plant growth seem to be corrupted. Aethswold thinks the watch tower collapse is recent and has been caused by the roots. Aethswold sees a long stick with a metallic blade leading against the shed. It's a scythe.

Riteable moves to the shed and kicks the door in. The door collapses and he hears a gasp, but he can't see anyone. He lights a torch and looks deeper into the shed. It looks full of old dusty items including an overturned cot in the corner where the gasp came from. He moves the cot and sees a panicing young girl. She looks in severe shock and points outside muttering "Roots are moving". She says Harlan told her to keep running -then she says something under the camp was talking. Aethswold asks what it sounded like, but she can't get her words out. She says she can't hear the voices any more. She tries to explain a blue light came from under the tower and that Harlan told her to stay in the shed. He tried to set the roots on fire but then he was gone.

Aethlwynn suggests we investigate the watch tower and Salus suggests we leave Tala in the shed. Before we can move Aethswold hears a faint cry of "Tala" coming from under the snow. The blue glow starts to intensify, the ground vibrates, the lanterns start to dim and glow blue pulsing in time with the blue glow. Sebastian and Aethswold realise the roots are now responding to the pulses. Aethswold senses something under the ground is coordinating the roots' movements. Suddenly the camp floor collapses as roots start to attack us.

Combat starts

One root uses a Root Glide Ability but we can't see what that does yet

Another vanishes underground

Sebastian casts Haunting Hymn which destabilises the tendrils which take full sonic damage

Riteable proves to be resourceful in a fight, using a burning torch to attack the roots

As we beat back the roots the last of the tendrils convulses violently. The roots all then collapse and turn in on themselves. We see the body of a young man over by the collapsed Watch Tower. His chest is covered in blood and he is very weak, but alive. It's Harlan, still holding on.

To Be Continued....

Day 6.

Day 6.

Home Again, Home Again

Harlan is still gripping a woodsman's axe with a dead man's grip, his fingers white and tense.

Tala runs to him and wraps herself around him. Harlan opens his eyes and realises his sister is here. He starts to cough up blood, but says "Told you I'd find you". Salus performs first aid on Harlan, she realises his wounds are catastrophic but somehow he has survived. Although in severe shock he is oddly strong. As she heals him she sees a faint blue light running through his veins. As he heals he finally lets go of the axe. Aethlwynn runs to Tala. Harlan looks to all of us, thanks us and asks what he can do for us. Guru asks what happened to him and Harlan replies that the roots came from below, up through the ground and that there were far many everywhere. Aethlwynn asks where this happens, Harlan replies "The watchtower; it started with the pulse". He looks terrified and says "Like the world's heartbeat". Guru asks him "Who else was here?" Harlan replies that Jon, Elias and Merrin didn't make it, that they were taken. Aethswold asks "Taken where?". Harlan answers "They went straight down like something underground. took them" Guru looks round the compound but sees nothing.

Aethlwynn reminds them of the pit near the sled; Harlan says "That's where they were taken".

Aethswold and Sebastian see Harlan's left hand begin to twitch, almost rhythmically, as though he's matching something beneath the ground, something that feels alive but alien to us. Something that doesn't seem like possession. Guru looks for a magical link with the hand tremor and can perceive that something is in Harlan, an incredibly brief blue flicker within him that fades. It stays the same as we move Harlan from the Watchtower. Guru continues to monitor using sustaining his detect magic, but this doesn't behave like a spell as the pulse originates in his chest but seems to answer to something far away.

Harlan repeats that he doesn't know how he got there but he felt something take him underground, then next thing he knows is that he was here. Guru is worried that he is transforming and is concerned about taking him back to the town.

Guru looks for Magic on Tala and sees nothing. She has no magical aura and he cannot detect any blue pulses. Guru then decides to investigate the small lodge by the Watchtower.

Aethlwynn gently asks Tala why she ran out from her house and what scared her so much she had to run away. Aethlwynn also reminds Tala that she said she heard voices and asks what they were.

Tala says that she can't remember leaving the house and the next thing she remembers is being in the hut and the door being kicked in. Aethlwynn gently asks again about the voices. Tala looks to the old forest but says she isn't sure, at first she thought it was Harlan calling her, then she heard voices of a woman and child crying for help. She can't hear anything now. Aethlwynn asks what

the last thing Tala remembers - it's being put to bed by her mum.

Aethlewynn looks at Tala's feet, but she seems to be physically fine. Perhaps a little too fine as she shows no ill effects after being barefoot in the snow all night. Her clothes seem only faintly damaged and there are no signs of her being taken under ground. Aethlewynn continues to watch Tala but sees nothing more than a frail, scared, little girl.

While Aethlewynn talks to Tala Guru looks in the hut. It has been damaged recently. He finds a flint and steel, 2 torches, 50ft hemp rope, a small kettle, dried venison (4 rations) 2 waterskins (but the water could be stale) and a wooden axe. There are 3 minor healing potions, unfortunately one is cracked and not usable. Under a broken bunk there is a locked footlocker which he drags outside. Guru and Aethswold use the wooden axe to open it find:

2 sets of quilted armour (DEX MOD 3) 1 set of leath armour, a heavy winter cloak bearing the Moonrest Insignia, a small pouch with 12 silver coins and 34 copper coins as well as sealed wax packed labelled "To Elder Saelin if we do not return".

After one quick look round the site we prep to leave the wind drops instantly and the snow starts to fall silent. All bird song drops. Harlan stop speaking, looks towards the deep forest. Without warning there's a thrum, which is more of a sensation, we feel the pulse under our boots. SOMething huge has moved under the earth Harlan's eyes widen as he screams "No" another Thrum burst out. Ha makes a dash for Guru, he feels much stronger than he should be he cries "its here" and the blue veins ripplar across his body.

A again adresses the forest again. S Ayas we have found our own, it looks like one of ours is also one of yours, can we leave in peace? This isn't coming from the forest it's coming from below. Harlan regains himself for the moment. He looks at Tala and muttrs her name, he kneels beside her ans says ",..... as he coughs more blood up. "he says don't follow the then looks down as he says its's waking. The ground under Harlan explode s up with black roots and they rip Harlan apart pushing his body into the frozen air. A tries to protect Tala from seeing this. He hangs suspended in the air, his body convulses and his hand start to claw at his stomacje and chest at first his blood runs red, then turns black. Salus tries to hit him with a divine lance. Guru also embraces Tala. The divine lane is topped by the roots, but they recoil violently. Tala tries to reach Harlan, we try to pull her back. She cried "Please don't" and for one moment everything stops. Harlan reagins focus. He says "sorry, please save my sister" He looks at peace, but the roots ontinue to hold him aloft, but the draw him deep into the darkness.

Guru picks up Tala. A says "you have taken back your own". The roots drag Harlan into the ground, it's about a minute before he is envolped and is no more. The clearing falls silent again ans snow falls, the ground trembles like slow bretah. The forest exhales and deep within the forest something answers, deep and seems to be from every direction at one. Again the blue light begins to pulse agian, racing away live veins fromt he clearing in every direction. A small narrow wound remains in the soild, the black roots weave around themselves and we see a blue light pulsing throught thme. Aeth sees the pulse reseml magical engery but though living tissue. Salus sees it is like arteris , so seem to reseble human blood. She seems it seems to reseml no know faith. the energy seems more lbiological. the roots are not like a tree roots seems more like a nervous stsem.

Aeths notices the roots are not still, they move very slightly like shallow breathing. Guru's detect magic shows the entire clearing its radiating primal and occult energy as well as an unknown energy. Tala is crying and muttering he promised he'd bring everyone home. She falls quiet and whispers its listening because its stopped making noise. A also hears this.

We head back towards the town. About 100 yds out we hear a deep low note, ancient. The trees seem to carry the sound, the mournful call almost like a long horn call. Guru feels Tala freeze instantly and she turns to the forest gaps "no not from the old growth, not one goes in there any more". We follow the path back feeling oddly unfamiliar, the silence in the forest is overwhelming. Seb glances back to the watch tower, for a brief heartbeat the tower seems higher than before. Seb wonders if he's seeing things. We go past the sled, and keep heading back. Back at the previous site of a root attack the remaining thick black roots seem to give under our boots as though alive. We continue back.

We are close to Moonrest Haven and we hear a distant ringing of a bell 1-2-3 pause then repeated. It's obviously Moonrest. Tala starts to panic as she hears Elder Saelin's emergency bell. She says it "hasn't finished". We leave the forest and follow the hunter's path, we see one of the hunter marked stones has cracked and the roots are running through the stone.

The bell continues to ring as we get closer. The woods distant silent watching in the distance.

Closer yet we, the gates are open and all faces on the palleads turn towards us. We are greeted by Bran as we enter through the gates. He asks "where's Harlan?" Aeths replies he was taken by the evil in the forest. He bows his head towards Tala. The news spreads - parents pull their kids towards them ES and 2 council members run to us. She already knows but asks "no-one else" She sighs and says "then the forest has claimed them" Tala is still quite determined, but runs to ES and collapses in front of her "She sobs" I'm sorry it's all because of me> Harlan tried to save " Me ES places a hand on her shoulder.

The bell stops ringing, but the silence feels heavy. Yselle runs up to us and starts to examine us, she sees the black marks and asks if any of it came back with you " A says not that I know of . Y whispers this isn't over. A whispers to Y "Tala said that too" ES says " best we go somewhere quieter" we head to the LOnh House with Y. ES asks for a debrief A will tell everything she knows. One starts to pray at the transformation. At the mention of the horn sound from the woods one of the older council members mutters "haven't heard that since I was a boy. ES says "enough for tonight, we will mourn those that have not returned. No one will enter the whispering woods" You have done more than we have asked. ES asks all the other council members to leave,, "she says she's never had to bury a man the forest refused to give back" she asks Y is she can tell anything from what's on our clothes. Guru hands over the sealed package. She reads the few lines legible as it's been soaked in blood. "She says she knows the handwriting, and opens it carefully. She quietly reads "the pulse beneath the old pines is not an animal. If the bell rings again burn the lower paths. She says "This was written by Garrick one of the leaders at the watch tower, not a man to panic. If he wrote this then he truly believes there's no coming back " the lower paths have not been used for years, burning them would mean cutting off anyone who is still out there.

She asks us - before I condemn half this island to the flames is there anything that can be done. Y runs her finger over the blood and says, This was not written after the attack who wrote this had time and knew something was coming.