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 ait 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 throught 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. The are villagers, guards and hunters. There are maps are over all the table and lanterns burn bright. All the people within look fearful. Elder Saelin is trying to hold everone 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 amonst 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 pallisades 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 rescure 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?" Aethlwynn looks to Yselle who says something strange is happening and it frightens her. Aethlwynn 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 townsperson 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 demage 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 benath 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 though the roots seemingly causing a chain reaction . The light gets brighter and brighter and the tendrils seem to sieze violently. More roots erupt throght 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 acpulse, 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 alonside 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 starnge 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 noone volunteers to joint 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 undergroud. 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

Tendril 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 ....

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