

SESSION REPORT:

FIRST FORAY INTO

THE HOLE IN THE OAK

The Party:

Fra 'Fingers' Vincensini, a nimble and resourceful thief. (JP)

Elmenor Goldlight, a quite rich and noble looking elf clad in heavy armor. (Niko)

Grudge, a weedy-looking thief, no doubt full of mischief. (Ian)

Marco Tuti, a more-brawn-than-brain fighter with bravery and blood alcohol to spare. (Mitch)

There stood our brave upstarts, in the middle of the starry night, under the canopy of the enormous tree. Everyone around here knew to stay away from the great Oak and the surrounding glade, where time seems to stand still; but not our merry band. They were out for riches and adventure and surely, they thought, here they would find at least one of these.

Examining the vast network of roots at its foot, being almost as wide as the canopy itself, Fra quickly found a three-foot wide opening into the earth. Looking into it with a torch, they noticed a twenty-foot drop down to a sandy floor, with rough and wet roots serving as the natural rungs of a ladder along the sides of the pit. Descending with the help of a quickly attached rope, they started examining the ensuing corridor, Elmenor scouting ahead with his infravision. The corridor came to a fork, with one branch going north, from which a distant rushing sound came, as of wind or water; the other going east, from whence came a faint green glow. After finding a mysterious leather glove, abandoned on top of some large root, the party decided to head east.

The eastern corridor appeared to be partially blocked by roots, which Elmenor passed successfully, though not before the roots animated, attempting to grab and restrain him. The rest of the party soon followed, uneventfully as well. Marco however,

the last to pass through, got caught up in the roots, one of which made off with his wine skin! In a valiant effort, the fighter lunged forward, attempting to catch his beloved beverage with his teeth, but only managing to get a hold of the cork, which popped open. The wildly thrashing root escaped, leaving only a narrow tunnel in the wall, barely two fingers wide; spraying delicious, delicious wine everywhere in the process.

Cursing the roots and their wicked gods for the tragic loss of his mama's favorite vintage, Marco rejoined the party, which now found itself standing in a strange round room. The atmosphere here was damp and warm. All over the walls and ceiling of this dome-shaped earthen space were root-faces, here of wrinkly old men, there of dashing youths, all clad in hair and beards made of glowing green moss.

"Look at what you've done!" screamed Marco. "That was mama's best vintage!".

In unison, the roots answered in a low, meandering grumble:

"We thank you... It was delicious... We do not get to enjoy wine... often...".

"Well", replied the fighter, "What have you got to give in return?"

"We will gladly provide... Information... If you feed us more...Delicious things..."

At this, Fra the thief placed some of his rations on the ground, which were quickly grabbed by some roots, dragging the food into the earthen walls. After a second of silence, followed by a low, thoughtful grumble, the root-voice answered:

"The horned ogre.... owns a treasure... whose value he doesn't... understand."

The party had indeed heard of a strange creature fitting this description inhabiting this dark place. Intrigued, they looked for more things to give the root-faces. They found only oil, inquiring aloud:

"Well, I don't suppose it drinks oil..."

"...Oil?" Replied the root-voice. "We... enjoy... oil."

Confused but undeterred, they poured the contents of one of their flasks onto the earth, the liquid being lapped up quickly.

"HMMMMMM... good... good..." said the root-voice.

After a short silence, and yet another thoughtful hum, it continued:

“Beware... the treachery... of the gnomes...”

Still angry at the root-thing, Marco threatened to feed it a brandished iron piton, at which point several of the faces disappeared into the walls. Diplomacy was maintained by the rest of the group, who decided to make their way into the eastward tunnel, from which came a cold draft of air, and a smell of ammonia.

Scouting ahead once more, Elmenor quickly found the source of the smell: The tunnel expanding in this direction was in fact a cavern, on the ceiling of which nested what looked like a hundred bats. Understandably, the floor underneath them was covered in stinking guano. Though the cavern continued to expand eastward, the party decided to head north, into a newly discovered tunnel, to avoid the bats.

The floor, walls and ceiling of this tunnel were of stone blocks, and the corridor led to a stone archway, sculpted in the fashion of a continuous, overarching pile of skulls. A skeleton wearing rusted chainmail was lying in a pool of dried blood, right under the archway. Poking at it with a ten-foot pole, and examining the surrounding walls, they discovered the mechanism triggering a deadly blade trap, no doubt the one which had sliced deep into the poor soul's side, leading to their untimely demise. Once discovered, the pressure plate was easily overcome though, and the party hopped over it quite easily, continuing on. But not before Grudge examined the corpse further, to find a hefty pouch filled with twenty-five gold pieces, and a bronze skull necklace.

The party now found themselves in a much larger room, with several openings and doors in many directions, and most visibly, a number of statues representing regal figures on the west side. Examining them revealed nothing of import though, and the party endeavored to listen at some of the doors leading out of the room.

Out of one of the eastern doors came the sound of loud snoring, and light streamed from the opening underneath. The adventurers spent some time debating whether it was best to kick down the door and assault whatever was behind using the element of surprise; or to politely knock, and have a civilized discussion with the room's occupant. In the end, after failing to pick the lock, they resolved to come back later, and instead went to examine the northernmost door.

Behind it, they found the corpse of an unfortunate dwarf, who had seemingly been strangled by some kind of black rope. Beyond it was another stone archway, carved

in the shape of tree branches. Resolving not to go in that ominous direction, the party instead headed to the single door that led westward.

Marco swiftly opened the door, and was immediately greeted by eight shiny red eyes, glinting at the edge of the torch's light. The creature hanging from the ceiling was surprised, and the party began the attack by throwing a flask of oil at it, which missed and ignited on the floor beneath it. Two arrows followed, both missing as well. Marco stepped forward, ready to meet the beast in *mano a mano*, hand-to-legs combat. The elf and the thief let loose another volley of arrows, this time hitting the creature: one half-severed one of its legs, the other embedded itself deep in one of its biggest eyes, which started oozing green blood. Seeing his opportunity, Marco thrust his halberd upward, cleanly shearing through the creature's head, spraying green liquid all over. The creature lost its grip on the ceiling where it had made its web, and crashed down belly first, its legs gruesomely snapping in the process.

It seemed that behind the beast was yet another archway, this time one carved in the likeness of three intertwined serpents. As the party debated what kind of trap was undoubtedly hidden near it, Marco simply jumped and dexterously tumbled past the arch, unharmed. Shrugging their shoulders, Fra, Elmenor and Grudge passed through it without incident.

The party entered a small room, in the middle of which stood the statue of a hunter and his two hounds. To the north and south of it, hanging from the walls, were large mirrors. Proceeding with caution, after examining the statue for any pressable buttons of any kind, they carried on westward.

They came to a large, circular room with a tall domed ceiling. In the middle of it lay an enormous crimson carpet, decorated with gold and green geometric patterns, all made of fine wool. From there, a corridor led north, a beautifully carved wooden door to the west, and a corridor to the south. Circumventing the carpet, the party went south, in an attempt to rejoin what they thought was the way they came in from. They were correct in that assumption, and soon they arrived back at the first fork in the road they had encountered.

Gleefully, and now richer by about a pouch's worth of gold, they headed out, up through the root-ladder and into the chilly night, back to the village where they would spend their hard-earned riches on all the pleasures the adventuring life is all about. They knew however, that this was not to be their last expedition to that dreamy forest glade, and to the strange complex under the Hole in the Oak.
