Session 16

Summer has come, the party recovers from their adventure in the warmth and safety of Stonetop.

The morning after the party the village rouses for the morning chores, with a large number of residents feeling much worse for wear. Treasa and Esme are both approached by Murdoch separately and asked to join him for lunch with a meeting of the elders. Esme asks who's cooking, Murdoch replied that he will be and Esme replies "Ah, excellent!". When midday arrives they have lunch together and Murdoch updates them on the happenings in the village while they were gone. Emmer was put in charge of the militia, and while he was bothersome by ordering people around and being all full of himself. His mother even made him a sergeant's cap. However, he did make things happen and the watchtowers were fully staffed, allowing a Crinwin incursion to be spotted early. The village rallied some folks and a show of force was enough to drive them back into the forest. Murdoch goes on to update them on some other minor details of happenings in the village.

After lunch is finished Murdoch pushes back his plate and says "Well you have brought back 3 bandits and expect us to do something about it." Esme says "We brought back 3 people who have not been given many chances in life. One of them provided concrete assistance to our cause that certainly tipped the odds in our favour, and one of the others is a non-combatant." Treasa cuts in here and says "He made the most amazing soup, you have no idea how delicious it was." Offed, who runs the public house, strokes his beard and says "Hmmm, is that so, I might want to have a chat with him then."

Mairwen says "Still, these people were threatening to burn our fields and kill us if we resisted just a few days ago! How can you trust them?" Esme lays out that Grumman and others were hired in Gordin's Delve and were not professional bandits. They were hired to target us, and other travellers on the roads, specifically the Hillfolk and followers of Helior. They were hired by Mutra the teeth. Treasa says it seems like Gordin's Delve is coming after Stonetop, or at least one of their lords is. Esme Honoured Cutha rubs his brow and says "Yes, you could certainly say that. I would rather not get embroiled in it." Treasa counters saying we are already involved. Mairwen speaks up again, saying that the three bandits are killers, and some killers might change and be better people but eventually one of them won't, and people will die. She says that the safety of Stonetop is greater than any individual. She knows she is probably going to get outvoted but she has to voice her concerns that they can't be trusted. Esme says that it is her job to be untrusting, and will be watching them closely. Mairwen sighs and says that Esme is only human, nobody is perfect and she hopes that she will never have reason to say "I told you so."

Treasa lays out the situation when they captured Grumman, pinned on the ground with his companion swiftly deceased by her hand. She goes on to say that they had a choice, let him go and leave a bandit loose in the area, execute him, or give him a chance at a better life. What

would Mairwen have chosen, had she been in the same spot? Treasa doesn't know the right answer even now, maybe there isn't one. Mairwen stays silent at this, and Olwinn speaks up and says that it seems like they will be letting them stay at least in the short term, they should find somewhere they should stay. Esme suggests lodging them with existing families so someone can keep an eye on them. Olwinn opens his mouth to continue but looks down at his tea and sees that it is rippling. Shaking is felt throughout the room and a loud rumbling can be heard in the distance as another earthquake makes itself known. Nothing major seems to happen, and Honoured Cutha is unable to say if this is an Omen, the gods work in mysterious ways. The discussion winds down with the folks finishing off the bread with some honey.

Feeling the earthquake and hearing the rumbling noise Rua is curious and goes to Kiva's attic room and knocks on her door. Kiva opens the door looking dishevelled and still waking up with bedhead. Rua asks if she felt the earthquake and she looks at her "alarm clock" contraption she uses to wake up in the morning that triggers some stones to fall and wake her up. The shaking and the noise was way to much to be her device so Rua says that maybe something has been uncovered, like Maker's stuff, and that they should go looking. Asking around the village they narrow down the noise to have come from the north.

Heading out they quickly find a section of the cliff has shifted, with freshly moved earth and rock clearly showing a landslide that fans out into the forest nearly to the stream. Rua studies the slide and to him it totally looks like someone could be lowered down on a rope to take a closer look. He suggests this to Kiva who also takes a close look at the recent landslide. She sees that the top of the cliff appears to be pretty stable, there isn't much danger of a further slide being triggered. There is also no trees or fence posts or anything to tie the rope off to so if someone gets lowered on a rope it likely end with them falling as it would be one person's strength against the other's weight. She peers farther down the rockslide and she can see something glinting in the bright summer sunlight. She points it out to Rua and he can see it too. They plan to take the stairs to the base of the cliff and climb up from the bottom, but Kiva knows that there is likely still some loose rock ready to shift and its a great place to twist an ankle with the jagged rock and unsteady footing.

They head down to the stairs and after about 20 minutes they are at the bottom of the slide looking back up at where they were. They can see the glittering among the rocks more clearly from this angle, and Rua starts to climb up the slope to take a closer look. He carefully picks his way up the slope and as he gets closer the rock clearly has a greenish orange sheen. Kiva recognizes the colour and it is clear it is some sort of copper ore. Large metal deposits haven't been found around Stonetop in a long time, this must be some undiscovered deposit. Rua says "Oh is this some sort of mining? Dad really didn't like that kind of thing. Maybe we should just cover it up and never speak of it?" Kiva refutes this, saying it is likely very valuable and she really wants to take a closer look with her magnifying glass. She finds a fist sized chunk that has plenty of the shiny bits on the outside and says that she will inspect it, and once she has thoroughly inspected it they can show it to the elders. They make the trek back to the village and Kiva takes the ore to her room and starts to look closely at it, poking and prodding it to learn more about it.

Nothing else particularly interesting happens in the coming weeks, with each of the party members attending to their own personal projects. Esme focuses on learning more about the fey,

Thistledown in specific, as well as slowly introducing Soren to more civic duties and ceremonies of Aratis. She also keeps an eye on the three new members of the village to see how they are fitting in. One day she ropes him into helping her with introducing the ex-bandits and assimilating them into the village. She asks what his thoughts are about where they could fit in. He says that Borshu is the easiest, he would fit in well at the public house and Offed would love to have him cooking. Esme asks about Oliga, she is a hard read. Soren thinks about this, but asks her why she is going to him specifically. Esme starts to talk about how Soren is well travelled and a good reader of people, and is skilled in stories and people react to that. Soren puffs up a bit at the praise, but presses her further, asking why him specifically. There are many other people in the village more respected and capable of finding them a place. He does know people, and he knows that Esme always has a second angle, and he wants to know what it is regarding him that has her so invested. She explains that even back on their first journey to the ruined village with the singing stones that she can tell that Soren has that spark. He steps up when its needed and makes things happen. She has plans for everyone, but specific plans for him and they are good plans. Still not getting a super clear answer Soren sighs and says that if helping the ex-bandits fit in is part of that plan then he he is willing to help. Esme then tasks him with winning over Oliga, and says that he can user her name and whatever resources this requires, within reason. Soren leans back and strokes his chin, starting to think of angles to get her invested in the village.

Rua is interested in developing a skill for himself. Betta's previous words about him not having any prospects have stuck with him and his thoughts turn to woodworking as a productive trade. He approaches Elaim and asks him to teach him how to work with wood. Elaim says that they are getting low on lumber, they haven't made a trip to the foothills to gather wood in some time, but starts him off with splitting logs and planing them into planks. It is not creative work, nor is it easy, but Rua takes to it quickly and finds satisfaction from turning a lumpy cylinder of wood into straight and even planks.

Aside from his mission from Esme, Soren spends some more time with Fio, learning woodcraft and the hunters craft. In addition, Soren wants to be the BEST distiller in Stonetop, but right now he is not. Distilling liquor is fairly easy, but a big part of it that hasn't really been explored is the wood in which it is aged. Having barrels made from a wood that others don't have would be a clear way to make his brew stand out from the others. Right now oak, ash, and elm are most commonly used to make barrels. Maybe some apple or cherry wood would make a unique flavour? He decides to keep an eye out when he goes into the forest with Fio.

Treasa is thinking about the bandits and the Crinwin attack and wants to take action to have the village be more prepared for whatever may come. She has an idea to train the militia to work together as a cohesive unit, to be more confident in themselves and able to react quickly and effectively to future threats. However, this will take a decent amount of resources and time so she approaches each of the village elders to get their opinion and persuade them of the necessity of her plan. Mairwen is surprisingly on board, though it aligns with her goals of keeping stonetop safe. Honoured Cutha is a harder sell, but by pointing out the recent dangers and that this will keep the people fit and active through the summer months he comes to agree with her in the end. Treasa also approaches Esme while fetching water from the stream at the base of the cliffs. Esme does eventually agree, but not before extracting agreement from Treasa regarding designating a leader of future expeditions to forestall long debates in critical moments when decisive action is

required.

Later in the evening the bell in front of the public house starts ringing, calling a town meeting. As a crowd starts gathering it is apparent that there is an argument going on. Murdoch stops ringing the bell and steps between Emmer and Eliam who have been arguing about how they should gather lumber. "OK that is enough, lets put this to a vote." he says. Emmer speaks first, "It has been 10 years since we have seen one of the forest folk, a full decade! Sure we had a deal with them, but once someone dies that means you don't have to keep to the deal anymore. We can rig a pulley on the bluff to haul logs up to the village and sleep in our own beds rather than stay in a logging camp for weeks at a time." Esme gets a grim look on her face hearing this. Emmer steps forward to speak, his words coming haltingly "Its not just about wood, we had a deal with the folk and those of us who made that deal are long dead and we still keep to it." Esme speaks up as well, saying that the forest folk were doing them a favour by signing that compact. After a little more back and forth Treasa steps up and says "There appear to be 2 main questions, are the forest folk actually dead? And what is the original wording of the compact? Maybe there is a condition or stipulation we are missing. We talk about it a lot but knowing the exact wording would be useful. Esme, is it recorded in the Chronicle?" Esme replies, laying out the terms. "The deal was that no member of Stonetop would cut a living tree, and the Forest Folk would come to the village's aid in time of need."

Treasa nods, asking next when was the last time they aided us and held up their part of the deal. The Chronicle's last recording of assistance is a tough winter 13 years ago, where they left fruits and other food outside people's doors for a few weeks that let the village survive until spring. Rua speaks up and says that 7 years ago someone helped him and his mom when they were travelling before they came to Stonetop, he was young and doesn't remember much but she always told him that it was the Forest Folk. Emmer feels the crowd slipping away from him and brings up the blood plague of 5 years ago, where were the Forest Folk when we needed them? Esme prompts Soren to speak and he clears his throat before saying that overall he aligns with Emmer, Soren's parents died during the blood plague along with many other friends, families and loved ones. Where were the Forest Folk when Stonetop was in need? However, breaking a generations long agreement should not be done lightly. Indeed there was a reason the deal was made in the first place and they should seek more information before taking such drastic action as felling the trees of the Great Forest. Murdoch stops the discussion and says that an expedition to the forest will be planned to determine the fate of the Forest Folk and shed light on the compact and if it should be upheld. In the meantime they will need to undertake one more logging trip to the foothills to supply the village with the lumber required.

End of Session!

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