

Session 17

Whats going on with the Forest Folk? Only way to know is to go looking!

The next morning Kiva is nose-deep in books about rocks and ore, but her studying is interrupted by a knock on the door. "Hun, there is someone here to see you...? Strange folk at the door." comes her Dad's call. Kiva quickly brushes off her rumpled clothes and tidies herself up and opens the door, asking who was looking for her. Her father says that there are some friendly and rich people there who are asking to see her. Kiva is unsure about this, friendly and rich are not often seen together. She says she will wash and go to see them so he leaves to let them know she will be coming shortly. She cleans herself up and then heads to the Public House where she finds a crowd starting to gather. She spots Soren near the edge and goes to speak with him, asking what people are saying about the strangers. They are from Lygos, a place of prosperity and science, both natural science and magical science. They look the part with clean, square-cut beards and fine clothes Soren doesn't know, but they are rich and must be looking for something. Why else would they come to Stonetop?...His eyes quickly open wider, seeing this as an opportunity to test his whiskey on unfamiliar taste buds. He asks Kiva to talk to them while he runs and gets his latest brew, and when he gets back she can introduce him! Kiva agrees hesitantly and Soren dashes off to grab his whiskey and some cups.

Kiva takes a deep breath and studies the men before approaching. She knows that Lygosian's have a penchant for cunning speech, with a legal history that is much more detailed than anything around here and very good at twisting the truth to make it appear as something else. Keeping this in mind Kiva approaches them, introducing herself and asking them what they want. One man wearing a stained travel cloak introduces himself as Foruza. They have been looking for a colleague of theirs named Baraz. He was travelling north seeking knowledge and adventure and we fear he may have come to a bad end. He was a scholar and he might have consulted with other learned people, so we were hoping you can help us. Kiva asks for more details about this 'bad end'. They don't have any details. He motions towards his cloak which is emblazoned with a round shield of bronze studded with stars. "I am of the order of the three bronze stars. It sounds more musical in our language but its an organization that seeks to gather knowledge about the makers and things that were lost. Baraz also had an artifact with him that had some significance to us, if we cannot find him we could at least get the treasure back." Kiva humms and commiserates with them, it is a shame when someone goes travelling alone and meets a bad end, then bandits scavenge all they have.

Foruza starts to describe the gem, motioning with his hands about the size of a person's head and the colour and lustre match the looks of Kiva's Mind Gem she found years ago in the village with the moaning cliff. Kiva tries to hide her recognition and stammers out that she hasn't seen it, giggles interrupting her speech. Soren comes back at this time and steps into the conversation

and introduces himself and offers a sample of his whiskey in an attempt to cover for her obvious lying. Foruza is not distracted and stokes his beard, but does accept the offer of a drink, though only one. While Soren is laying out the cups and making small talk Kiva points at the bar of the public house to show off the stores they have and while they look away she slips some concoction she has handy on her belt into one of the cups. It is a laxative she likes to use to play pranks on people. Soren sees this and rearranges the cups to make sure its in front of Foruza when he settles down. Soren regales the quality of his drink, saying just one sip and they will know its the best around, then raises his cup with the others and Foruza gives a small toast and they all drink.

While talking to them Soren is analyzing the group and it becomes clear that Foruza is the only scholar, the other three are servants or bodyguards. They are dressed more roughly and are well armed. After a few sips Foruza starts asking if they know any myths or legends of the area and Soren is more than happy to tell some stories, like how the giant bones at Titan Bones came to be. Anytime his cup gets low Soren offers to top him up and he accepts the first time. By the end of the second cup he is starting to look very white, and suddenly he interrupts the conversation to excuse himself and quickly moves out the back door of the public house. With him gone, Soren continues to apply whisky to the remaining group. He asks about the liquor they have in Lygos and while two of them give non-committal answers one is happy to talk about the fortified wine, the barrels that have been used for aging wine can be used for other liquors later for a distinct change in flavour. He keeps feeding them booze and tries to get them to loosen up and give more details and while they do wax eloquent on their homeland and customs they glance at each other and change the subject anytime the Mind Gem is brought up. They do say that they have heard from people who have seen him pass through, people from their order are rare enough around here, however the trail ends at Marshedge. Soren warns them about the Claws and how they run the town and drown people who cross them in the swamp.

Sensing they aren't getting anything out of this group Kiva surreptitiously signals Soren that they should get out of there. He makes a show of draining his cup and bids them enjoy Stonetop's hospitality, he has other business to take care of. Soren is trying to make a smooth exit but as soon as he says this Kiva gets up and grabs his arm and practically drags him out of the door. They go some ways away from the public house and Soren asks her what she put in his drink, did she just kill him? He walked out so suddenly. Kiva explains it won't cause lasting harm, just keep him out of the way for a bit while they figure out what to do. Soren doesn't know, but decides to go to Esme for advice, and to let her know there are dangerous strangers in town. He suggests to Kiva that she should hide the Gem somewhere, maybe they can get the strangers to go look somewhere else if they can't find it here. She agrees and they split up.

Soren goes down to the Chronicle and lights a torch to enter and calls out for Esme. He finds her a little ways in, hunched over a section of wall re-marking the letters that spell some ancient story. Seeing his haste and excitement she asks him what is going on and he fills her in on the details. They were both with Kiva when she found the Mind Gem in the unnamed ruined village with the stone cliff that sang with the wind. Esme deduces these might be the cultists that were after the Gem's previous owner, while Soren thinks they are his colleagues. Either way, they are potential threats to the village as either group would kill to get their hands on such a relic. They decide to spread the word, first going to Treasa to see if she can stay with Kiva in case they come looking before we are ready.

Elsewhere Rua has been going to everyone around the village who will give him the time of day and asking them about the Forest Folk. Many people are glad to share what they know and he is bombarded with stories and myths about the Folk, but nothing concrete or actionable to help search for them in the Forest. He is starting to think about giving up this approach when he sees Angrad at her house. He asks her and she tells a story about an affair she had with a Forest Folk man that went on for a little while but she eventually broke it off from feelings of guilt. He would still come back every now and then to check in on her, but the last time he came around was 12 years ago, and he knew something was wrong. Usually the Folk are so full of life it made you feel more alive just being around them but he was nervous and distracted by something. Rua tells her he had no idea, and expresses sympathy for him and promises to keep this story secret. Then he asks if he had left anything for her. She says yes and takes off an earring that is made of polished wood in a spiral, tapering down thin enough to pierce her ear and dangle there.

Rua has seen this kind of symbol before, not knowing their meanings, carved into trees and chiseled into rocks in the forest. He never said what it meant but he wanted me to have it. She told her late husband Rusa that she bought it from a passing trader. She didn't lie to him much, but she did here. After some more chatting Angrad they say their goodbyes and she sends him off with some scones. While he is walking away from her house he sees Kiva walking nervously towards her home. He offers her a scone and asks her what's up. Kiva catches him up on the situation and he immediately offers to help. She asks him if he has a bag or something that can hold the gem and help her hide it. He says he has just the thing and takes her to where he sleeps (it's a barn on the edge of town) and when they arrive he opens the door and shows off his first piece of furniture, a crate! It is next to his bed with a small candle-holder on top. He says they can hide the Gem in the box, surely the strangers wouldn't go looking for it in a barn.

Kiva likes this idea and they take the crate to her house and slowly lower the Gem into it. It glows when they touch it, and it feels like a heartbeat is coming from inside. The glow concerns Rua, the crate is not airtight and has many gaps light could shine through, but after they put it down the light dims and goes out. They hastily grab the crate and start carrying it back to Rua's barn. Stella sees them hustling through the village carrying a crate and this piques her curiosity and she follows them, not interrupting yet. When they get back to the barn they take the crate inside and Rua says that they should hide it in Esme's caves, surely they wouldn't go looking there at the bottom of the bluff. As they are making plans Stella knocks on the door. This startles Rua and Kiva, he tells her to go hide, he will check the door. He opens it nonchalantly, ready to lie his ass off but upon seeing Stella he ushers her inside and quickly shuts the door behind her. Stella asks him what he and Kiva were doing, carrying a crate around. Rua hums a bit and says that Kiva should explain it, and calls for her and tells her it's alright it's just Stella.

Kiva fills Stella in on the situation, and Stella wants to know what the Mind Gem is, she wasn't there when Kiva found it. Kiva pops open the lid of the crate and explains that she found it on a dead guy in a cave, and when she picked it up she saw a vision of him being chased by a deranged cult. She also explains that it can answer questions, not by talking but by showing her images in her mind. Rua is curious and wants to try asking a question, but Stella warns him about powerful magics like this and Kiva backs her up saying it's not a great feeling, it leaves you with a strange sensation after you ask it a question. Rua decides it's not worth it, and says he is going to Esme and Kiva should get out of the barn and be seen somewhere else so the strangers don't get

suspicious. He asks Stella to watch the gem until he gets back from Esme's.

Rua books it through Stonetop and runs down the precarious stone stairs to the Chronicle two at a time. As he is about to enter the cave he runs in to Soren and Esme coming out. At first Rua isn't sure if Soren knows what's going on, but Soren immediately tells him that strangers are looking for the Mind Gem and he should not mention anything about it at all. Rua says "Oh good so you know what's going on, we hid it in my place and Stella is there watching it." Esme questions this, asking if he left the Lightbearer of Stonetop alone with an ancient artifact when there are people in town possibly ready to kill for it? Rua stammers a bit at this, saying that Stella can take care of herself. They need to get the strangers out of Stonetop and allay any suspicions, killing them won't work if they truly come from a scholarly society they won't leave this sort of thing alone. She comes up with a plan to trick them, get a different crystal from Orlando who is a bit of an odd sort but has a decent collection of fascinating crystals. Soren adds that they can pull the 'dumb country bumpkin' approach and pretend they thought this fake crystal was magical and gave the good luck or something, and Rua pipes in saying that Stella can make things glow, that can throw them off too! Esme instructs him to get Treasa and go to his home and make sure everything is OK with Stella and the Gem, and Soren will go to Orlando to get a fake crystal while she distracts the strangers until everything is ready.

End of Session!

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