

Session 18

One player has left the group, Treasa is now an NPC. How will her story go from here? We will find out together.

Rua is the first up to the stairs and he runs directly to Treasa's house but she isn't home. Without much time, he decides to go bring the box with the Mind Gem to the Chronicle himself. The potential cultists don't know who he is so he walks suavely through the village towards his home and picks up the crate, and with Stella he nonchalantly brings it back to the stairs and takes it down to the cave. At the bottom of the stairs he looks around and seems he was not followed. He then takes the crate inside the cave.

When Soren got to the top of the stairs he recalls that Orlando's house is in the north of the village, but he doesn't want to risk getting intercepted by the Order of the Three Bronze Stars so he goes south, the long way around the village keeping to the outside of the low wall. He makes it to Orlando's house without incident and knocks on the door. It creaks open and Orlando's face peeks out and he says "Oh, Soren, what brings you by?" Soren says he wanted to come by and see some of Orlando's stones and crystals. He welcomes him in, opening the door wide with a loud creak.

The house is dark and smells kinda weird with stuff piled all over the place. Orlando brushes some stuff off a chair onto the floor and gestures for Soren to take a seat. Soren picks his way across the floor and sits on the chair, and asks to see the biggest crystals he has. Orlando is more than happy to show off his treasures and brings out a dozen or so assorted shiny stones and chunks of quartz, the largest about 4 inches long. Soren asks leading questions about them and Orlando is more than happy to talk about them, where he found them and describes the different types. He also talks about some magnetite he has, it polishes up very well.

After some more chatting Soren takes a breath and says "Well, I do have a reason to come see you today. See, there's some outsiders from Lygos, real city folk, and they are looking for a giant magic crystal", he holds his hands in front approximating the size of a person's head. "They think someone in Stonetop has it, and they look pretty rough and tumble so we want them to leave. Can I borrow one of your crystals to use as a ruse so they think we don't have the one they are looking for?" Orlando winces when Soren says the word 'borrow' but after a moment he nods and says "well if its for the good of Stonetop I suppose I can lend you one. Make sure to always carry it wrapped up so it doesn't break, and I do expect to have it back." Soren thanks him wholeheartedly and safely couches the wrapped up 4 inch chunk of quartz into the crook of his arm. As he leaves Soren says "I will return this to you, and when I do you can show me that magnetite you were talking about." He then retraces his steps, moving along the edges of the village back to the Chronicle.

Kiva has been thinking about how to stay hidden and decides to make a disguise for herself. She goes home and gets some ash out of the fireplace and rubs it into her hair to stain it black and borrows one of her mother's scarves and wraps it around her head and face. She decides to look

for the rest of her friends so sneaks around the village looking for them while trying to stay out of sight. She doesn't see anyone following her and after a bit of time wandering around she sees Soren approaching the top of the stairs down the cliff face. She goes up to him and says "Hey Soren, what are you up to?" Soren starts a small amount on seeing Kiva's hasty disguise and says that its not much of a disguise, she is the only one around wrapped in a scarf at noon on a summer's day. Kiva brushes him off saying "well it worked, nobody followed me here I think." Soren then updates her on the current plan to use the crystal he got from Orlando to trick the Order members. They then go down the stairs together.

The Chronicle starts with a 30 foot tunnel that opens into a cavern, and from there another 5 tunnels branch out and it repeats this pattern deep into the cliffside. It is a maze for sure, but one who knows the stories can tell the way through the caves based on the progress of the ages. There is one cave somewhat near the entrance where the writing doesn't match the rest of the style of Stonetop and the walls are unnaturally smooth. It is fairly out of the way, and also defensible in a last resort. This is where Rua stashes the Mind Gem, and waits near the front of the cave to guard and watch out for the strangers. When Kiva and Soren arrive, Rua is fooled by her disguise and stands protectively in front of the crate while interrogating her. Once she speaks he recognizes her voice and relaxes. Kiva points this out to Soren to show her disguise totally works, and he is forced to concede the point.

Soren carefully brings out and unwraps the quartz before handing it to Stella and asking if she can work with it. Stella sits on the floor crossing her legs, holding the crystal in both hands. She bows her head and at first it seems like nothing is happening, but soon a small glow starts in the centre of the quartz and it grows and grows until it is the brightest light in the cave, casting shadows on the walls. She stands and hands it back to Soren, saying she doesn't know how long it will last. Soren is in awe at the display, he was expecting some subtle pulsing and not such brilliance. He cradles the quartz in his hands for a moment and lets the soothing heat it is emanating suffuse him. Slowly he turns to Kiva and before handing it to her says that he promised to bring it back to Orlando so please be careful with it.

The group begins to discuss how to trick the strangers, and Rua suggests Kiva plays as a fortune teller at the midsummer festival in a week, and when they see her with the fake crystal it will be obvious that its not the real Mind Gem. Its a good plan, but Soren thinks they can finish this today and Kiva agrees. They settle on Kiva going to her attic lab with the glowing quartz, and Soren will suspiciously walk through the public house to catch their attention and get them to follow him. Rua wants to go with them, but Eliam has been working hard on the preparations for the Midsummer festival and he has to go help him. First Rua finds Stephen and asks him to watch the crate in the Chronicle until he comes back. It doesn't take much persuading, this gets Stephen away from the summer heat and out of helping with the preparations for the festival.

Esme's role this whole time has been to run interference, and when she finally crests the top of the stairs after the Soren and Rua she heads to the public house. There she plays the act of chatty old woman and goes on and on with roundabout stories about rocks and gems that never seem to end. The entire time she gets this feeling that there is a 4th strange presence in the room, other than the three in front of her. When she turns her head its like she can *almost* see it in the corner of her eye. She goes to the kitchen and boils a pot of water, and when she gets back to the hall

she pretends to trip and splash boiling water in the direction she feels the 4th presence. However, as she starts the feint her knee gives out and she falls for real, smacking her knee into the floor and scalding her hand and arm. Several people jump up to help her, and one of the strangers starts in his chair. They help her up and get some rags to mop up the mess, and she brushes off all concern and joins the table again to continue the conversation.

The chat always turns back to scholarly matters, with the strangers asking mostly about nearby Maker's ruins and any stories about them. Esme isn't able to get anything else out of them, and just keeps the conversation flowing. A little bit later Soren approaches the central square, checking to see if the Lygosans are outside. They are not so he proceeds inside, hugging the wall and glancing at the Lygosans waiting until he catches the eyes of one of them then quickly looking away. He goes into the kitchen and asks for a little bit of food to take with him. Auvan is more than happy to pack up some bread and assorted fruits for him. Borshu is also there, the chef from the bandit camp. He and Soren make some small talk, and Soren is glad to see he is fitting in well. Gathering the food, Soren suspiciously sticks his head out the kitchen door before hurrying directly to the back door of the building. Esme calls out his name and he raises his hand to his face to cover it from view. Esme tuts and says "that young man is always up to no good." 30 seconds or so one of the Order members says it is his turn for his stomach to unsettle him and leaves by the back door to visit the privy.

Soren doesn't know if the ruse worked or not but he keeps playing the part, shuffling from building to building and looking around before crossing the street, though he is careful not to look behind him. When he arrives at Kiva's he enters and her parents are there in the main room. He gives them the food and says he wanted to bring them something. Her parents have always been such kind people. After spending a bit of time having a bite to eat and a pleasant chat he thanks them for their hospitality and goes upstairs to see Kiva. As he leaves he lets them know to send up any of the Lygosans if they arrive, Soren and Kiva talked with them at the public house. Back at the public house, the stranger who left to use the bathroom returns after a few minutes and the day goes on without any further incident. They end up bunking at the public house for the night, sleeping on the floor by the hearth.

At the end of the day Rua returns to the Chronicle to spend the night watching over the Mind Stone. He sends Stephen home, and after some time Esme arrives as well. They settle in and soon Esme approaches the crate, opening it up to look at the Mind Gem. It is not every day you are protecting a magical artifact and she is naturally curious about it. Before she can reach out and pick it up Rua calls her out, saying it is Kiva's and she wouldn't appreciate Esme meddling with it. Esme is conflicted for a moment, but restricts herself to studying it visually.

Back in Kiva's room, her and Soren wait impatiently for one of the Order members to show up. They get more and more restless as time goes on, until at sundown the enchantment on the quartz fades and it goes back to normal. At this Soren accepts that the plan has failed, and it is at a loss for what he should do. Should he stay with Kiva in case they come for her at night? Or go guard the Mind Gem, their actual objective. He muses this out loud, and Kiva assures him she can handle herself, she has all sorts of traps and mechanisms prepared for something like this. Soren stops moving completely, still any stray fidgeting and glances around the corners of the room. "Alright if you think you'll be fine I am going to go to the Chronicle" he says as he carefully steps to the door

without touching anything. He heads to the Chronicle, meeting the others and the night passes uneventfully.

Kiva spends the time sitting reading in the corner of the room where she can clearly see the door, and she finds intrusive thoughts coming into her brain about how small this backwater of a village is, how she will never really amount to anything here. What interesting thing has come out of Stonetop? They export whisky and farmers for Tor's sake. She tries to brush off the thoughts but pervading feelings of doom and despair loom over her. However, in the back of her mind she realizes something is not right, something is pulling these thoughts out of her brain. She looks up and sees a shadowy spirit hanging above her in the room with a dark aura. It seems to be searching for something, rattling the shelves around the lab. As Kiva shakes herself she feels the connection between her and the spirit break, her mind stinging from the backlash. The spirit turns to face her and she sees two burning eyes in the centre of the miasma cloud. Seeing its focus on her she recognizes it from one of her books, its a Dhool spirit. It is not strictly undead, having never been alive, but is a being from the Other Side of the door. They cross the border to investigate and learn about the physical world. They are purely nocturnal, sunlight renders them weak and powerless. Like almost all spirits they are usually bound to something, and Dhool feed off fear. It is said that they can only be harmed by those who have mastered their fears.

CLIFFHANGER ENDING

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