

Session 2

Missing 2 players, flashback session! This takes place a few years before the "present" set of events set out in [session 1](#) and depicts how Rua, Kiva, Esme, and Soren went on an expedition that marks the beginning of Rua's heroic journey and Kiva's discovery of ancient, powerful artifacts.

When Soren showed Kiva a map covered in runes she was able to tell it was in the northern regions of the steplands. The map depicted some Stone-Lords ruins, and the few runes Kiva could decipher along with comparing current maps of the area showed the way. Rua, a very impressionable teenager at this time, overheard the conversation and if Soren thought it was a good idea then Rua wanted to be there as well. When they proposed the expedition, Old Esme consulted the chronicle and found that there are some ruins in the area that the Hillfolk avoid it, and they try to stop anyone who attempts to explore the area. Knowing the potential dangers of dark, unexplored areas, she goes to Honoured Cutha and borrows an amulet that wards against the darkness. With this knowledge and protection she accompanied the youngsters to watch over them and make sure they came back safe.

They set out from Stonetop and travel across the Maker's roads, turning south at the crossroads. The wards that provide safety to travellers make the party feel secure and confident in the journey while beside the road the tall grasses ripple in the wind. Rua and Kiva provide a rapt audience for Soren's stories and he regales them with exaggerated retellings of his adventures. The first night passes uneventfully, with each of the party members taking turns on watch. The next day as they travel south a pack of dog-sized two-legged drakes shadow the party on the east side of the road, weaving in and out of the grasses. Only two or three of the drakes can be seen at any time, but the travellers know they hunt in large packs. Rua, feeling secure in the wards of the road, taunts them with "Neener neener neeeeeener" while laughing. Esme starts singing a song, an old song about travelling safe along the road and not straying off to the path. Soren sings along as well, and towards the end of the afternoon the drakes stop following them.

While Kiva is on watch that night she hears her mother talking out in the grass and feels compelled to go to her. While a small part of her raises an alarm, it is not enough to stop her from leaving the camp towards the sound of her mother's voice. Old Esme, who was sleeping lightly, wakes up in the middle of the night to find her gone and immediately rouses Soren and Rua and begins to search for tracks. Soren grabs a torch to provide some light and help out. Despite her lack of proficiency with tracking she spots a point at the edge of the camp where the grasses are bent unnaturally like someone pushed through them. Rua rushes forward, leading the way with Esme and Soren behind.

They find a small, burnt out area and in the middle Kiva sits with her head drooping to the side and a swarm of glowing lights dancing around her head. Esme jumps in and draws the lights to herself

while Rua drags Kiva away and starts shaking her and calling her to wake up. Soren jumps in with Esme, swinging his torch through the swarm of lights. It is effective, and after 30 seconds of wild swinging the lights disperse and bob out into the grass and some of them start winking out. When Kiva wakes up she feels like time is jelly, a slight headache but also a feeling of familiarity? However, the Nosgalau spirits have taken a treasured memory of Kiva and her mother baking Winterlude cookies shaped like snowflakes. Esme hurries to her and holds up the amulet while asking if she is OK. The amulet feels heavier in her hands, and between that and the care of her companions, Kiva is able to stand up and walk. They return to the campsite and Esme takes the remainder of the watch, singing a soft and almost wordless song that soothes the other party members into a fitful sleep for the rest of the night.

The rest of the journey on the Maker's road is uneventful until the party turns off the road to cut towards the location marked on the map. The grasses sway around them as they walk up and down small hills, taking a moment at the top of each hill to savour the beautiful view. The grass slowly gives way to rocky ground and small stands of trees as the hills gradually get larger and closer together. There is a moment as they come around the side of a hill where the party hears a sharp crack of shifting stone. Esme looks to Soren and he motions for the group to hide in some nearby shrubs. As they move in haste, both Esme and Soren slip on the way. Rua moves to help Esme and gets her to a good hiding spot but Soren's fall triggers a small rockslide and he drops some supplies. Drawn by the sound, a massive creature the size of a house rounds the corner of the hill. It is badger-like with long talons like a sloth, and it has brown and white patches of fur. It snuffles the air, swinging its head around, apparently not yet noticing Soren stuck out in the open. He tries not to make much noise and move downwind of the creature. At the same time, Rua pulls out his slingshot and prepares to fire a distracting shot. Before he does, Esme gives herself a small cut and smears some blood on the stone before he fires it off. It flies over the monstrous creature's head and clatters on the hillside behind it. After an agonizing 30 seconds, it's head turns toward the stone and snuffles and begins to lumber towards it. Soren waits until the beast is far enough away to not hear footsteps and he goes to join the others and they move on down the hill and make haste away from the beast.

Once they take their bearings and look around from the top of the next hill, Esme asks leading questions to Kiva and they are able to match a horseshoe hill on the map to the shape of a hill about a 2 hour hike away. They set off towards the hill and begin to hear the site before they can see it. There is a high, keen whistling and also a deep thrumming that is felt more than it is heard. As they approach they can see a side of the hill is cut almost perfectly vertical with various holes in the cliff face that make the sounds as the wind passes over them. There are also some ruins of buildings at the bottom of the cliff face. Esme tries to instill caution in Soren and asks him to decide who should go first and pick a safe path. Soren says "Me of course!" and points out a fairly straight path to the buildings, avoiding a couple small patches of loose stone. As they approach the buildings it is apparent that they are mostly collapsed, but definitely human-made. In the center of the town there is a stack of stone blocks, much too large for people to move. Soren and Rua move to search for stashes of booze or money that might have been missed, and Esme follows Kiva as she follows her sixth sense and is drawn to some of the less collapsed buildings. As they explore a feeling of suspense builds while the moaning of the rock-organ provides a creepy ambience. Soren and Rua find a burnt-out campfire, seemingly a week or two old. Rua, looking at the large remaining logs, deduces that they must have been lit via magic. There is no way such

large pieces of wood would have been lit by normal means.

After a couple hours of fruitless searching they are forced to stop and go back to the center of the ruins where the big blocks of rock are to meet the others. Esme looks to Soren to decide where they should camp and he says they should move some ways away so the sound doesn't disturb their sleep. She claps him on the back and Rua praises his wisdom, feeding his ego even more. While they prepare to sleep, Esme sings another old song, one of comfort and strength to prepare for the morrow.

They wake into a misty morning and head back to the ruins. As they move through the town they hear some scrabbling in one of the larger ruined buildings. Soren says that might be a rabbit or other creature they could catch for a celebratory meal. Hearing this, Rua dashes into the building with excitement and when his eyes adjust he sees a stone floating in the air, slowly moving to sit on top of another stone, but then falls and clatters on the floor. Rua is fascinated by this and moved to pick up the stone, but as he gets closer the temperature drops and there is an appearance of an outline of a person, with slightly glowing eyes. Rua says "Hello, is someone there? My name is Rua!". Another stone is lifted up, hovers for a moment, then place on top of a flat rock. It keeps doing this, stacking a few rocks but they keep falling over. The others arrive and see this as well, but Rua sees its trying to almost build...something. Rua tries to help, moving rocks to support the stack and help the spirit. It gets more animated, moving stones faster until it picks up a large rock that is much larger than the stack will support. Rua calls out to to it to stop! it won't work! but it doesn't appear to notice him and the rock causes the entire stack to fall over. After a long minute, another stone floats up and starts stacking again. Soren tries to pull Rua away, warning him of the dangers of ghosts but Rua shrugs him off. Soren looks to Esme and Kiva, not really knowing what to do in these circumstances. Esme softly places her hand on his shoulder and advises that this spirit doesn't seem malignant and appears to be seeking to complete a task, and says that if it was any of us who had an unfinished task she would hope a passer-by would help put our souls to rest. Soren asks Kiva to help him move some of the larger stones close together to make a good foundation and Rua and Esme sing a working song, to make the time pass with busy hands. We work together to build a pyramid of stone, and the spirit gets a bit more animated and starts picking up larger and larger stones and adding them to the stack. It appears to be building a wall around the raised platform in the building, like a rood screen in a church. As time passes, the sun moves and starts casting rays into the shadowed corner, and as this happens the presence of the ghost seems to vanish and the stones stop moving.

The party takes a break and rests from the hard work. After the rest, Soren goes to check out the stone-organ. There are bones and cremated remains in the holes, most too far back to reach, but some of the larger holes we can crawl into and there are full skeletons here laid out like a burial rite. There are also some larger caverns that lead to a series of rooms, containing some additional remains and pieces of decoration. In the back of the complex there is a room, almost empty except for one skeleton that has some interesting artifacts. Kiva finds here the puzzlebox, the copper-banded staff and the Mindgem. She picks it up and muses to herself out loud, "How did this happen?" Unexpectedly, the Mindgem answers! It shows Kiva the last moments of the its previous bearer, running from a group of cultists and finding no escape at the back of the cave. In desperation, he casts a spell on the Mindgem, cloaking it until the danger passes and the gem feels safe. Kiva is able to hide the puzzlebox, however she does show the staff and the gem to the

others after struggling against her cunning instinct since she feels suddenly very possessive of her *precious* new find.

While Kiva is exploring, Rua and Esme go back to the spirit and continue to build the wall. They work for the rest of the day, not able to do any shaping or engineering but are able to finish the small wall around the platform. When this is done, the spirit doesn't go away but starts moving more aimlessly. When they go to leave Rua says goodbye to the spirit and it flits to him briefly then goes back to moving stones around. Esme leaves some food and drink there as well.

The journey back was mostly uneventful, though we ran into Stout Jakka on the Maker's road and shared a camp with him, swapping stories and news.

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