Session 20

Pasted by Nigel. Mwuahaha.

It's the Midsummer Festival! What fun, a celebration of the height of summer. But before that, wrapping up a couple loose ends from last session

Stella and Kiva patrol through the night on the lookout for the Dhool, but no eyes glow out of the alleys and no more assaults happen in the night. Stella had given the silver ritual knife to Kiva as she almost felt more vulnerable with the knife than without. Eventually the day breaks and they go their separate ways, and Kiva's mother, Mara, goes back to her normal vibrant self after a few days of rest and recovery. The rest of the week before the midsummer festival is a frenzy of activity as the village prepares to host and trade with the visitors who come far and wide for these festivals. Kiva has been embroidering a lovely scarf that she often wears around her shoulders on cool summer evenings, adding lots of erratic lines and angles to spruce up her look. Esme has been studying the tales of the Chronicle and finds, chiselled in the far history of the village near the front of the cave system, a story that tells of one of the earlier encounters between the Forest Folk and Stonetop. The stories of the Folk go back as far as the founding of the village and this one extolls the cooperation and synergies between the two peoples. Soren has been talking about his planned archery contest to everyone he meets over the next week, and showing off what will be the prize: A small hand mirror made of silver and an ivory handle, quite the luxury item

When Midsummer's day arrives it dawns in a perfect cloudless sky, promising good weather for the rest of the day. As the day gets going the central plaza is filled with booths and tables laden with food and other small items, giving and trading between each other and visitors from out of town(for coin of course). All the villagers are decked out in their best.

Soren notices in the morning when he is getting the archery rage setup a familiar cart that rolls into town. It is Stout Jakka, and upon seeing him Soren drops what he is doing and heads directly to where he is setting up his booth. Upon seeing Soren, Jakka calls out "Soren, my boy! It is good to see you!" Soren replies "Jakka you old fart! I was starting to think you weren't going to make it!" They share a big hug and spend a moment catching up, agreeing to go get a drink later at the public house. Soren also mentions the archer competition to him.

In addition to Jakka and the villagers there are several other travelling traders who have arrived in time for the festival. There is one vendor with a big chest of bottles in a cart that appear to be the only thing being sold. There is another person out front, a barker that is calling out "Dreams! Dreams for sale! Come and take a look all, it will truly be something you have never seen before!" Soon there is a small crowd gathering around and the crier catches Rua's attention. He grabs Betta's hand and heads over to their cart and immediately the eyes of the barker latch onto him and he calls out "You there young man, you look like the type who thrives in adventure. Would you like to try some bottled dreams? One drink of this and you will go on a fantastic adventure without

having to move at all!" Rua looks around curiously, checking if anyone else had tried some of the liquid dreams. He sees Stephan hand over a few coins to the vendor and gets handled a small bottle. Stephen tips it back and drinks the cloudy liquid. He lowers his hand, then stands perfectly still with a vacant look on his face. This goes on for several long moments, 30 seconds pass and just as people are about to grab and shake him he shakes himself and looks around. "Wow, that was something else! You should try it." This satisfies Rua that it is safe to drink and he happily

He is at a feast, sitting at a laden table with lots of people sitting around it that are missing their faces. They are making the motions of grabbing food and moving them to their faces but not actually eating any food. He is constantly provided a wide variety of exotic dishes that taste perfectly real in a constant sequence of courses. When he finally returns to Stonetop he sees the sun hasn't moved in the sky at all and he can still taste the food in his mouth. He looks around for a moment before grabbing Betta's hand and moving away from the dream seller. Betta asks him what is going on, he just stood there for a little while. Rua explains that is was very weird, there was a lot of food but the other people at the table had no faces. It creeped him out. Together they move on, and find Stephen having a beer and telling everyone around him about his dream. He says that when he drank the dream he found himself by a lake, and he just knew it was safe so he went swimming in it. He said it was really nice, and there were no evil spirits there at all. Rua counters with his creepy dream, but it doesn't sway the onlookers or stop Stephen from continuing to talk about his dream.

Rua thinks this kind of thing Kiva might know about so he walks with Betta while keeping an eye out for her, and finds her browsing a fruit stand looking closely at the tomatoes. She stands out from the crowd, her outfit heavily adorned with the custom embroidered scarf featuring front and center. Rua is amazed at this display of finery and compliments her on it. They exchange pleasantries and Rua quickly brings up the dream seller, asking her if she knows anything about this. She doesn't, but she is aware of the kind of snake oil salesmen who often are drawn to large festivals like this to prey on the uneducated and unwary. She asks Rua to show her where the seller is and they go there together.

When they arrive Kiva asks the barker about the bottled dreams and where they come from. He says they are the product of the Priesthood of the lygosi god of Dreams. He sends prophetic dreams and insights to those that please him. Among many other miraculous things these priests can extract dreams and distill them into these little bottles here. Kiva doesn't know much about this god, but Lygos is a polytheistic land that have gods for every conceivable thing. There is a temple there she has heard about that is an architectural marvel call the Temple of a Thousand Gods, a shared shrine where all gods are worshipped. It sounds completely believable to her, and her curiosity has been burning since Rua first mentioned bottled dreams so she hands over a couple of copper coins for a drink of her own. It smells earthy, and she chugs it down feeling a definite tingle of magic as this happens. There are many snake-oil salesmen in the world and this doesn't seem to be one of them. When the dream takes hold she finds herself in a covered garden with her Grandmother. They spend time together pulling weeds and Kiva catches her up on all the events that had happened since she dies. When Kiva wakes the feeling of warmth and comfort suffuses her, but she realized that the person in the dream looked nothing like either of her grandmothers. She makes a connection between the faceless persons in Rua's dream and the non-identity of the woman in her dream, but she doesn't know what to make of this knowledge yet.

Elsewhere, Stella is administering a friendly game of capture the flag between two groups of the village youth. At least, it starts out friendly but a dispute about where the team borders are quickly devolves into bickering back and forth "I was safe!" "No you weren't, I tagged you!" "Nuh-uh, I was totally over the line!" "Cheater!!" Stella intervenes as the argument escalates, trying to distract and deflect the issue but her efforts are in vain as tempers boil over and a brawl breaks out among the children, until Stella and some other nearby adults have to step in and pull them apart. There is a lot of glaring across at each other as Esme arrives and defuses the situation by taking both flags and challenging the kids to work together to take them from her as she stands mock seriously behind her shield up in a guard position. Stella is frazzled by this, and goes to a clear patch of the grass and sits and basks in the sun for a while. It helps center her, reconnects to Helior and restores her confidence and stability.

Rua is at the drinking tents out in front of the public house with Betta, enjoying a light drink together and enjoying each other's company. A little ways behind them he hears Gwann, Betta's mother, say "I am not surprised they are letting these bandits stay in the village, considering the trash they have let in from Gordin's Delve recently." Both Rua and Betta hear this and she winces, squeezing her eyes shut. Rua takes her hand and says "come on, lets get out of here". As they are just about to leave the square, Oliga, the ex-bandit, gets up from a nearby table and walks over to Gwann and decks her right in the face, one punch that sends her crumpling to the ground. Oliga shakes her hand then walks away. Seeing this Rua turns back to help Gwann, getting her back on her feet and steadying her, asking if she is alright. Gwann appears to take offense at this, asking Rua if he is implying that she is old and can't get up on her own? He replies "No, just trying to help. Cmon, lets go get you checked out". Gwann stays haughty but allows herself to be led away.

Rua takes her to Treasa, since Treasa would know what its like to get punched in the face and how to deal with it. Treasa inspects the injury, saying she got her bell rocked but no permanent damage, and provides a wet cloth to hold up against Gwann's face. Rua mildly admonishes her, saying that she shouldn't be surprised to get a reaction when she was just talking shit about Oliga, and Rua as well. "Well it doesn't give her permission to punch me in the face!" Gwann replies. Once she has been seen to, Rua offers to walk her home and again Gwann takes offense at his offer before drawing herself up and mustering what is left of her dignity and leaving on her own.

At the edge of town the archery competition is about to begin. Soren has been leading the promotion of the competition for weeks so nobody questions when he starts drawing up the tournament bracket that will be used, with groups of 4 competing at a time, with the leader of the group moving to the next bracket, culminating in a one-on-one shoot-off for the final round. Before finalizing the bracket Soren takes time to study each of the competitors, looking to gauge their skill with the bow. Soren identifies a couple people that, to his eye, appear to be quite skilled, stringing and preparing their bows with grace and care. One fellow from Gordin's Delve named Paradur who is old and carbuncled from drinking but his fingers still seem sure on the bow, and a young woman named Rina who doesn't share anything about herself but Soren heard came with a carriage train from Marshedge. Fio has also joined, which is good because giving her a platform to show off and ultimately giving her the hand mirror as her prize was the whole point of this competition in Soren's mind. Soren puts Paradur and Rina in the opposite bracket as Fio, and seeded her early rounds with beginners

Before the competition begins Soren shows off the decorated hand mirror to the contestants and the crowd, saying "Those with the keenest eye and truest shot will gain the privilege of witnessing themselves in high quality anytime they please!" Fio struggles a bit in the first round but pulls ahead of the scrub that Soren matched her with regardless, and performs excellently in the second and third rounds. She even scored a double bulls-eye in the third round. Heading into the final round it is Rina who conquered the opposing bracket, and her and Fio line up to take 3 shots against a target placed at 50 meters. They trade shots, each showing remarkable skill in hitting the target. As the final shot thunks home and the accuracy is inspected, Rina has won the round with a margin less than an inch! Fio's face is a storm cloud as she begins to stomp away as Soren presents the mirror to Rina. However, Soren doesn't put nearly as much showmanship into the awarding of the prize, handing it to Rina with a quick "well done!" and a pat on the back before hurrying after Fio.

He catches up to her quickly, and she is muttering about all that practice wasted if she can't even win a simple competition. Soren tries to boost her spirits, saying he has seen Fio land her shots perfectly in the dead of night with only a flickering campfire to guide her shots, Rina can probably only shoot in a bright and clear field. Fio shakes her head at this, saying "What is the point of practicing and working every day on my archery if I can't be consistent with it?". Not knowing what else to say, Soren asks her to come with him, he has a secret 2nd place prize for the tournament. He leads her to Stout Jakka's booth and introduces Fio to him, saying "I was just telling Fio about how I asked you to hold on to the 2nd place prize for the archery tournament" while giving him a wink and wordlessly begging him to play along. Jakka may be getting old but he still catches on quick, his handle rummaging through his trinkets even before Soren finishes speaking. He pulls out a burnished bronze armband, embossed with celic knots and swirls and hands it to Soren, who turns and in an exaggerated bow he presents the armband to Fio. Fio stands there for a moment, then slowly takes it and puts it on. "Thank you." She says, "You didn't have to, but thank you. Do you want to get a drink?" Soren replies "Yes, definitely" and as they turn to leave he looks over his shoulder at Stout Jakka and mouths "I owe you". Jakka just nods with a smile, implying "Oh yes you do."

Esme is reviewing the story in her mind, going through the story beats and rehearsing the parts mentally when Treasa walks in, dragging Oliga in and telling Esme about the altercation at the drinking tent. Esme turns to Oliga and says "Well I'm just going to say it, Gwann is a bitch and probably deserved it, but reacting so harshly to her words only gives them more power. She is like a bellows, always spewing hot air and everybody knows not to listen to her." Oliga counters saying that words have meaning, and to let such insult go without reply didn't sit well with her. After a little back and forth, Esme can tell that Oliga still doesn't feel fully safe in Stonetop, like she is expecting something to happen and ruin the good thing she has going. Esme decides to have one of the village children to find Stella, and asks Stella if she would include Oliga in one of Helior's rituals. Not as like a central piece, but to bring Oliga into the village a bit more and head off any further deteriorating opinions. Stella agrees hesitantly, annoyed to be disturbed from her meditation for politics but realizes the worth of the idea. Oliga is surprised, she says she thinks she is getting off a bit easy for starting fights, but is willing to go along with it.

End of Session!

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