

Session 23

Starting from the cliffhanger, fighting the Crinwin!

Rua shakes himself after crashing through the ceiling onto the first floor of the hive. He can feel the floor below him is dented and weakened from the impact, thankfully it held or they would have dropped 15 feet to the forest floor below. He looks around, not able to see much with the torch gone, and he can smell smoke in the air. Next to him Bedwyr is stuck in a stupor, his head lolling around on his shoulders. He is trying to speak but he slurs so badly nothing is intelligible. Rua picks him up and hauls him towards the entrance, intending to climb down with Bedwyr over his shoulder. He sets himself up, finds a foothold, then a handhold to lower himself down, but then the prehensile tongue rolls out and grabs his wrist, trying to pull him back into the hive. Bedwyr slips off his shoulder, falling down onto a branch and then rolling off it towards the floor down below.

Esme catches the movement out of the corner of her eye and calls for Soren to try to catch him. Soren is not engaged in battle, having stepped back after taking some big hits so he dashes towards Bedwyr's falling form but misgauges the distance and Bedwyr's head knocks into his with the sounds of two coconuts coming together. Soren falls limply to the ground, dazed and unresponsive with Bedwyr crumpled beside him. Above, Rua grabs hold of the grasping tongue and plants his feet against the trunk of the tree to engage in a tug-of-war, starting to drag it out of the hive and drawing it closer to him. Rua uses his compromising hold to surprise the craven beast, pulling it forward while jabbing his fingers towards its eyes. He catches it off guard, getting one of his fingers hooked into its eye socket. It thrashes heavily, and when it finally throws off his grasp parts of its eye come with his finger in a goopy mess, splattering his face with ichor.

After directing Soren to help Bedwyr Esme calls for Kiva to assist Willem while she holds two more Crinwin at bay with her shield. Kiva thinks quickly, grabbing a handful of the loamy clay and flinging it in the eyes of the monsters attacking Willem. Her aim is impeccable, knocking one of the off Willem and causing the other to claw at its eyes in an attempt to clear the obstruction. She acts quickly, stabbing down into the heart of the fallen beast. In its death throes one of its legs scored a hit on Kiva's thigh, causing blood to well up in a line. Esme takes a defensive stance against her two foes. They show a surprising level of cunning by separating, circling around her to attack from both sides. Esme tries to keep her back to a tree and begins throat singing, taking a minor hit from one while countering the other with her shield, dazing it and causing it to stumble back.

The last Crinwin on Willem has climbed all the way up his back and is trying to claw his face while he holds its arms back from dealing critical damage. Kiva takes advantage of its distraction and spears it in the back, taking it down in one blow. As the Crinwin falls away, Kiva sees a cut with blood blooming around it on his back right where her spear had pierced through the Crinwin and

immediately starts to panic. "Ohhh my god, I stabbed you, I'm so sorry, I'll fix this I promise, I'm so so sorry!" she stammers out while rummaging through her things looking for bandages, eventually tearing a strip off her cloak to staunch the bleeding. She starts to push it into the wound to stop the bleeding, but stops and puts it in his hands saying "I have done enough already, oh my god, I thought I had it but I didn't". Willem chuckles lightly, wincing as his wounds make themselves known, saying "Well its better than the alternative!"

The Crinwin Queen is reeling after having its eye clawed out, giving Rua the opportunity to scamper down the tree. It is not the most graceful dismount but he makes it down. Esme covers for him, taking the hits from the other two Crinwin on the ground to cover him in his dash down from the nest. Soren is laying on his back with his vision blurred and seeing double, but it is impossible to miss the large, spindly Crinwin crawling down the tree as easy as walking, framed by the light of the burning hive above. His first move is to turn to the side, checking on Bedwyr's state. His eyes are open and moving, but he is still not mobile. Satisfied that he didn't mess up completely, he holds his sword out handle first to Rua while warning him about the incoming threat. As Rua turns to face the monster Soren stumbles up and grabs Bedwyr, dragging him away from the centre of the fighting.

Rua takes the sword and turns to face the Queen just as it launches itself from the tree towards him, bearing down with all of its fury as its home has been torched, its brood slain and has nothing left to lose. Esme is still there, covering him with her shield and helps him take it down as it lands but not before it claws Rua, scoring some deep cuts. The two Crinwin that were fighting her have used this opportunity to sneak up behind Kiva as she fusses over Willem, tackling her from behind. She tries to fight them off, but her wounds are mounting and is unsuccessful as they add to the cuts on her body. Rua sees this and calls for Treasa's support as he goes to help her without thinking, leaving Esme to confirm the kill on the Crinwin Queen. Still wielding Soren's bronze sword, he slices the back of one of them as Willem grabs the other, allowing Treasa to take its head off with one clean cut of her axe.

With that the last of the Crinwin has been slain, and the group gathers near the edge of the clearing. Soren has been trying to drag Bedwyr, but is not very strong and hasn't gone far. He calls out for Fio to help him, and together they haul him up, each taking one of his arms over their shoulder. Soren is still dazed from his collision with Bedwyr and pauses after they stand up, transfixed by the lines of Fio's face highlighted by the flames flickering above them. "You are so beautiful in the light of the fire..." he says quietly, almost without noticing before instantly shaking his head and saying "Oh shit, fire!! We need to get out of here!". They go to rejoin the others and they move a little ways into the forest away from the clearing. Esme has gathered the body of the slain Crinwin Queen and drags it away from the fire, calling out to Kiva "I have a present for you!"

They take a moment to gather themselves, and on closer inspection they see Bedwyr's left foot is mostly missing, with what looks like bite marks around what is left. He also has a few large lumps on him, two on his arm and one on his neck. Esme feels around them, feeling heat radiating off them with a minor wriggling. She says they need to remove them immediately. Soren backs her up, but Rua is not so sure. Healing people is more Stella's purview, and the thought of cutting into their friend disgusts him. Soren takes Rua's shoulder and turns him away, saying he should help Treasa with making the travois to carry Bedwyr back home while Esme and he take care of

Bedwyr. Soren turns back, pulling out a belt knife but his head still aches and his vision refuses to focus so he hands the knife to Esme and holds Bedwyr down, keeping him steady and positioning the parasitic lumps for her to operate on. It is a tricky process, especially around his neck, but they take it slow and steady and succeed in clearing him of the pests. Almost immediately he regains some lucidity. "Esme...is that you?" he mumbles, squinting up at her. "Yes, I am here child" she replies while brushing his hair away from his face. "Am I..Am I home?" he asks, and she replies "No, but we will be there soon"

After 15-20 minutes, they successfully lash together two travois and lay Bedwyr and and corpse of the queen on them, starting the hours long journey back to Stonetop. The trip passes uneventfully, the noises of the forest consistent but non-threatening. As the group returns there are people waiting at the creek and they quickly rise to their feet doing a quick headcount of the returning members. "By Tor above, they have all returned!" one of them cries, and the party is swiftly swarmed by welcoming villagers as they take Bedwyr from their care and rush him up the stairs to a healer. Rua follows shortly behind, running off to find Trahern to inform him of his return. Esme pats Soren on the back and says that she trusts that he can take it from here as she turns and heads into the Chronicle. As she steps into the cave she turns and where there is a stone basin that is filled with water during the day by the village children. She swiftly lights a small fire under the basin and takes off her clothes to step inside, settling down into the water with a resounding sigh. She retrieves a stitch kit she laid nearby and slowly stitches the cuts on her arms while relaxing in the hot water.

When Esme leaves, Soren shakes his head lightly and prepares to

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