

Session 29

Back at Stonetop, the party rests while the village prepares for the autumn harvest.

The first thing that Rua did upon returning to Stonetop was find Betta and let her know that they have returned. She greets him warmly with a hug, and he fills her in on the happenings of the adventure. Stella heads to the orphanage to check in with Eadna and the kids, also to bathe to cleanse herself of the grit and grime of travel. Afterwards she heads to the Pavilion of the Gods and sees that all is well in order there, people have left offerings of heads of wheat and other summertime gifts at the shrines to each of the gods. She spends some time puttering around, dusting and tidying up, making herself feel at home once again.

With the summer coming to a close harvest is soon upon the village. It is a time where the community all comes together, every able hand helping with the harvest to do all the many and varied tasks. Even the very old and very young find ways to contribute in small ways. Soren isn't the strongest in the village, but he is out in the fields with the rest of the adults reaping the fields of wheat. Even through the sweaty summer heat he keeps telling stories and cracking jokes, keeping the mood high and the people working together smoothly. Rua has been putting his developing muscles to the test, threshing, baling and hauling with the best of them. Stella is multitasking, supervising the younger children in their minor tasks in the harvest while also subtly emitting a warm and bolstering aura of Helior's light to aid the villagers in their task. Esme's knees have been getting worse year over year, so she contributes by directing the work teams, making sure the ripest fields get harvested first and each task gets the right amount of hands to complete it in time.

Overall the harvest is progressing smoothly. One night, as people gather in the public house after the sun goes down for some quick drinks a trader arrives. Trixit Far-traveller comes into the building after putting her heavily laden mule in the attached stable. She comes in and asks for food and ale, before sitting down next to Soren. Soren greets her, welcoming her to the village and asks how her travels have been. She says she has been up at Barrier pass, mingling with the peoples there and is now heading south for the winter. Speaking of Barrier Pass, she says she has something interesting to trade. She goes out to her pack mule and comes back with a package, wrapped in cloth and puts it heavily on the table. She unwraps it slowly, revealing a brick-sized piece of what looks like dark glass. As soon as she reveals it the temperature in the immediate vicinity starts to drop. Stella comes over feeling the chill and is immediately distrustful of it. Soren is fascinated, his first thought is to use it to chill his whisky but also realizes it could be used for a cold room or ice box, to preserve the spoils of hunts and other perishable foods. Rua also points out that Kiva would be super upset if they let a unique find like this pass by.

Soren hides his excitement, analyzing Trixit subtly to see if she is hiding anything, but he has met her before and was always honest and straightforward in her dealings and he doesn't feel she is acting any differently today. He expresses his interest in the item, and they haggle back and forth for a few minutes before settling on bartering some of the surplus of supplies that was plundered from the bandit camp a few months previously. Trixit accepts this trade, those goods are a lot easier to move than on rare item.

Eafric from Marshedge arrives after the harvest to visit Stella specifically. When she sees Stella, Ifric bows to her before saying "I have news, chosen of Helior. Cahir, the lightbearer of Marshedge, has just passed away. It looks like he was ambushed by fen trolls." Stella nods sadly, saying "May his soul be like glass so Helior's light can pierce through." Eafric says he was a good man and will be missed. She is managing the shrine to Helior in the city, but if Stella was to meet a wandering apostle of the god of the sun to send them to Marshedge, or failing that to come herself to visit and perform the proper rights to keep the faith alive. Stella assures her that if anything can be done, she will do it. Ifric thanks her profusely, then excuses herself. There is much work to be done, taking care of the shrine and searching for his incarnation in the children of the city. Eafric bows again before leaving, staying one night at the Public House before heading back south to Marshedge.

The harvest wraps up, a bountiful one but not a bumper crop. Their stores were not close to empty though, so they are well prepared for winter. Once people have a day to rest, Esme starts talking about heading west to find the Ustrina. She had a vision before the harvest that if she went alone it would end poorly, so she bided her time but now she is pushing to travel west. She spends the next days poring over the Chronicle to see what is known about them in Stonetop.

There are not a ton of references to the Ustrina. They are known to the people of Gordin's Delve and come there sometimes to trade. There was an incident approximately 80 or 90 years ago where some people from Stonetop were visiting Gordin's Delve and encountered them. During that visit one of the villagers disappeared and they never heard from them again. It is said that Ustrina have been seen poking around the Ruined Tower, the great Maker's ruin the flats. It was once a great Maker's stronghold that has since collapsed, but it is hard to tell if this is confirmed or not. There isn't a solid location on where they live, but it is said they live under the mountains to the west. She can't find much more about them, they are a very enigmatic people.

Soren has spent time going over the books recovered from Viemrod, looking for any method for harvesting wood from the forest. He heavily relies on Kiva's help to decipher the complex Forest Folk language. They work together to narrow down which texts are relevant and direct their search. The Forest Folk seem to regard trees in different classes, there are some types of trees that are OK to fell in order to gather materials or carving supplies. There are others that are basically sacrosanct, any damage to them would be a great insult and dishonour. There are many types in between, with varying degrees of sanctity and utility. He doesn't grasp what the difference is, he knows that it's not by species as there specifically are runes that designate it and they aren't used in these passages. When they start planning to look for the Ustrina, he goes to Emmer and updates him that it looks like there are some trees in the forest the Forest Folk are OK with harvesting. They don't know which types yet, but that is one of Soren's priorities to discover on the trip. Emmer slaps his hand down on the table saying "Hot damn that is some good news! Maybe next

year we can start felling trees much closer to home." He wishes them well on their journey before giving him a friendly punch in the shoulder before leaving. Soren acts like this didn't hurt, but it did a little bit.

When Rua tells Betta that they are planning another trip away from the village she is shocked, "But you just got back! Why would you want to leave again?" Rua explains that he feels responsible to see through what they started in Viemrod, to find the remnants of the Forest Folk. She sighs and nods, understanding but not super happy about it. "Bring me something back from Gordin's Delve will ya?" Rua agrees, assuring her he will come back safe and sound. Esme hears through gossip that Betta is sad that Rua is leaving again and casually drops some hints to him that it can help one stay close to others by writing down how they feel and sharing that with them, to leave them something to remind them. Rua is only half listening, nodding along until suddenly realizing something. He approaches Esme, saying that he realized in the library that he couldn't tell the difference between the language the Forest Folk and the language of Stonetop. He asks Esme if she could teach him how to read and write so he could write letters to Betta. Esme agrees, they will spend a little time each day teaching him his letters.

Stella has been thinking about what she knows of the faith of Helior in Gordin's Delve. Yomar is the name of the Lightbearer of the town, but he was very old when Olwin was corresponding with him, so he must be ancient by now. Also, there are prayers and chants to Helior she knows that mention glass. One, The Litany of Glass, that she sings to herself often. She will be looking for any quality glass items, or ideally a glassblower that could make her things, but she doesn't know if there is one in the town. There are a few glass items in Stonetop, most notably the altar has bits of glass embedded in it that catch the light that hits it, reflecting it in spots around the shrine.

The Litany of Glass

"To forsake fear, one must be glass."

"Beholden to His sight, I allow Him to gaze through me and cleanse me of doubt."

"I must carve my truth into my glass.

So when His sight lands upon me,

I may keep my mind and self."

"When I am glass,

My self will not cast shadow, but colour."

"Then, I may see without fear."

They plan to bring a cart of trade goods, hitched to Bitey, on the way to Gordin's Delve to trade for things that the village needs. The night before Rua invites Betta along with them. At first she is hesitant, she knows her mother will not agree with this. However, she resolves to sneak away and deal with the fallout later. Rua gives her a jaunty smile, happy that she is coming along. She arrives in the morning, wrapped in a cloak and eager to leave. Soren raises an eyebrow at this, but trusts that she is a responsible young woman who would make sure things are arranged properly. Esme arrives just as they are ready to leave, and they head west along the Maker's Road.

The first day passes uneventfully. It is a bright, sunny day and they pass a few other traders on the road but there are no conflicts. Stella's mood is clearly content, and everyone soaks up the warmth of the sun after their last journey in the rainy forest. Betta is not used to this much

travelling, starting to develop some blisters on her feet and takes some breaks sitting on the cart Bitye is pulling. Esme gets her to catalog the goods they are taking to barter with in the town. Soren does his usual storytelling, exaggerating his exploits especially now Betta is there. He hasn't talked to her much, which means she hasn't heard his stories so he walks next to the cart when she is sitting on it and regales her with his adventures.

There is a group of travellers coming from the west on the 2nd day. These ones are notable in that they don't give the usual head nod as they walk by but approach the party directly. They are also wearing bright clothes of many colours. Their leader approaches to talk to the group, a bald man with a wispy moustache wearing bright yellow clothes. He bows slightly and greets them. Rua bows back uncertainly and Soren returns the greeting, asking how is the road? The man nods and says the road is clear and smooth. He introduces himself as Kunza of the Unmoved Mountain. We have come south seeking a particular person. Esme replies cheekily "Do mountains typically move?" He chuckles at this, saying it's really just a figure of speech. Rua suddenly snaps his fingers and says "I solved the riddle, earthquakes! Earthquakes would move mountains." Rua smiles, self-satisfied with figuring it out. "Right...yeah, uh, earthquakes could move a mountain if it was really big, I guess."

Small talk out of the way, Kunza says they are looking for a woman named Dawa, and he points to one of their companions, a woman with straight black hair. Her eyes are an unusual shade, orange tinged with red you see. She may have other unusual abnormalities as well. This woman is a criminal, and not to be dealt with lightly. Rua asks if we do find her, how we will let them know? They will be travelling south to Marshedge, and if they don't find her there they will be going back to Barrier Pass. They will be travelling these roads for the next few weeks at the least. Soren is concerned about the "abnormalities" comment and digs deeper, asking them to be more specific. They said she has an illness, she will have an air of madness about her, and a great hunger. "A hunger for what?" Esme asks. "Oh you know, normal human food." Kunza replies nonchalantly. Soren raises an eyebrow at this noticeably specific statement but doesn't say anything about it.

Esme inspects the group, they are dressed in what she recognizes are the garb of the Monks of Barrier Pass. She gets the impression from some of them for whom monastic life isn't about meditation or contemplation. They have an air of violence. She gets a feeling that, should they find this person, they will probably kill them. That being said, she knows as a whole they are honourable people, and respect the rules of hospitality. Esme tells them that she knows someone, Elsa in Marshedge, they can get in touch with her and she can provide lodgings for some work. Esme will send a messenger bird there if she hears anything. When they part ways Soren says he hopes they can find the person they are looking for and help them with their illness. As the group gets out of earshot Esme shares her thoughts, and Soren is shocked by this. He thought they were looking to cure her, and says they only know one side of the story so they should think twice before turning this woman in if death is what waits for her.

The rest of the trip is uneventful and they arrive to Gordin's Delve at the end of the fourth day of travel.

End of Session!

