

Session 32

Still in the city, what will they do next?

Rua and Betta were out on a date while the others were meeting Smiling Fransis. While they were out eating Rua ran into an old childhood rival and it took all of 30 seconds for old grievances to spill over into an outright brawl in the restaurant and they were summarily kicked out, ending the date early. Betta doesn't say anything outright, but is disappointed at how Rua acted. He spends the rest of the evening trying to make it up to her.

They get in touch with Garvan before turning in for the night, planning to go down into the mines in the morning. In the morning Soren goes out to buy a goat. He finds one that is older and a bit sickly and is able to haggle down the price a few silvers below what you would normally pay for a healthy goat. Rua volunteers to take care of it as they go and Soren passes off the lead to him. Rua quickly sidles over to Esme and says "psst, how do you take care of a goat?" Esme chuckles lightly and says that they will eat pretty much anything, so don't stick his hand into its mouth. Rua nods sagely at this, then asks why they got the goat anyways. Soren relates what Garvan said about beasts in the dark, and how the goat will be bait if needed. Rua gasps and crouches down and hugs the goat and says "No, don't say that in front of George!" Soren shakes his head, flabbergasted that he had already named the creature and says "I would rather feed George to the beasts than you, Rua" Rua speaks softly into the goat's ear "Don't worry George, I will protect you"

When they get to the Delve, as the locals call the mines, it is an intimidating sight. An archway is carved into the side of the mountain 30 feet high, the wrought stone is joined so artfully they can hardly see the seams and it appears like a yawning mouth opening into darkness. They light several oil lanterns and head inside. The floor is littered with the varied detritus of mining while the walls and ceiling are clearly crafted very well. After a bit of time they come to a place where the path forks in three different directions. Garvan plays tour guide, pointing to the three arches "This is First Delve, Second Delve, and Third Delve. We want the third one." and he leads them towards the third arch. Periodically in the tunnel there are holes in the wall that are clearly human made, not maker made as they are only barely taller than a person and rough hewn stone instead of artfully crafted stone. As they walk he talks to them about the history of various tunnels, where they lead and when they were dug out. After a while he turns down one of these person-sized passages where they are forced to walk single file. Time is hard to keep track of underground, but after some time the rough hewn stone stops and there is a narrow crevice in the tunnel that looks possibly natural and a faint breath of wind from beyond it blows across them.

"Alright, this is the first fun bit. I hope you can all squeeze real nice." and he turns sideways and starts to push his way through. Soren does the same and his gangly frame has no issues getting through while carrying his bags. Behind him Rua gestures for Betta to go ahead and as she gets

through he hands her George's lead and pushes the goat through as well. Kiva follows next, but gets her ankle caught in a snag of rock. She pulls a couple times and can't get it out and starts to hyperventilate a little bit. Rua notices this and calls Betta back and takes George's lead from her and gets the goat to gnaw at Kiva's pant leg until it tears free, letting her keep moving. She is uninjured, but one of her pant legs is now chewed/torn off just below the knee. She is able to get through the crevasse and on the other side takes some deep breaths to steady herself. Willem has to remove his armour and still scrapes his chest a little on the way through, and Esme sucks in her gut to get to the other side.

On the other side the air is very stale, a clear difference in the air and the darkness outside the flickering circle of light from the lamps is absolute. The awareness of the unimaginable tons of rocks above their heads rises within the party, with the realization that the sky is very far away. Kiva is feeling it the worst, her claustrophobia started peaking after getting momentarily caught in the crevice and she is a little jittery. Esme starts to softly hum a peaceful song and this helps calm Kiva a little bit and keep it together. Soren raises his lantern high and puts his arm around her shoulders to comfort her and they start moving again while Kiva whispers to herself "one foot in front of the other...okay..."

The next tunnel looks more natural, not carved by human hands. Garvan is moving carefully, counting his steps and making sure not to miss any side passages. At a certain point he turns into one of the passages, and soon they can hear the dripping of water ahead. The tunnel opens into a natural cavern, and a large pool about 30 feet across sits at the edge of the lantern light. The dark water makes Soren cautious, but his danger sense isn't triggering so he carefully moves up to the edge of the water and dips his hand in. When he does, bubbles form all over his skin and he removes his hand quickly. Garvan tells them the water is safe to drink and says they should fill up here, it might be the last water they find. "The miners here believe the water cures their dust coughs." Garvan shares, still doing his tour guide routine. "They come here sometimes, fill up a few skins to bring it back. The regular miners will only ever go this deep, only prospectors will go farther."

Once they have all filled up their skins he sets off again, heading around the pool. There are two exits from that cavern and Garvan takes the second and the tunnel meanders down until they come to another cavern, this one so large their lanterns are unable to illuminate the ceiling. The floor drops away, they can see the bottom of the ravine 20 or 30 feet below but it cuts right across the floor with only a 5 foot wide path along the left hand side of the chasm. They walk slowly and carefully along the ledge, keeping close to the wall and moving carefully. A few hundred steps along they hear a noise, like wind blowing through leaves. Garvan peeks over the edge of the chasm and says "ah hell!" then pushes himself back against the wall. Everyone emulates him, with Esme guiding Betta to cover herself with her shield as a tide of white beetles pour over the ledge and start crawling all over them. They aren't biting, but start crawling over and past them in their flood. They all squeeze their eyes shut to weather the storm but George starts to freak out and tries to dash away, but Rua wraps the rope around his wrists and plants his feet, holding the animal back while it bleats in fear and panic. Eventually the tide passes, each of them shaking out their clothes to dislodge the remnants of the insects. "That was unexpected" Garvan states "Something big must have died nearby". Soren gives a full body shudder from the experience, he was not particularly skittish around insects but the experience has given him a minor phobia.

"We call them Corpse Beetles, they are the ones that clean up anything that dies around here." Kiva grows concerned and asks if a lot of things die around here. Garvan relates that there are a fair number of people that go into the mines and don't come back. The upper levels are safe enough, but this deep we need to keep quiet and move swiftly and we should avoid most things. He leads them even further as the tunnels start to slope downwards. The initial chill of the mines is fading as the air gets more and more oppressive. After another indeterminate amount of time spent meandering through the tunnel until they come to another opening cavern. Garvan holds out his hand, stopping them from going further and says "This is where we see if Jenny is hungry. Get the goat, push it ahead of us." Rua clutches the rope possessively to his chest and says "No! We can't feed her to the beast!" Soren gently puts his hand on Rua's shoulder and says this is what they got the goat for, and the odds are good nothing will happen anyways. Rua hesitates, but slowly relents, and Soren takes the rope and leads the goat to the edge of the cavern and pushes it out. George resists at first, but Soren is able to push her out after a short struggle. Garvan is tense the entire time, but 10 minutes pass and nothing happens as George wanders in the open cavern at the edge of the light.

"Okay, it seems she is asleep or not hungry, we should be able to get through without trouble as long as we stay quiet" Garvan whispers, and each of the carefully moves out into the cavern. Rua clicks his tongue to George and she trots up and he takes her lead again. They are able to sneak through without any trouble. They come to another passage, and once they are a few dozen feet in Garvan breathes a sigh of relief that they got through without waking Jenny. They come to a spot where the passage starts falling down into a natural chute. There is a metal spike driven into the wall and Garvan says he drove that in 7 or 8 years ago, it will help them down. The group ties some rope to it and uses another length to craft a crude harness for George and lowers the beast down to the bottom, Rua unwilling to leave her behind. They do the same to help Garvan climb down with his injured arm.

Another thousand or so steps they come to one more cavern littered with stalagmites and Garvan says their destination is just on the other side. They pick their way through until Garvan pauses next to a smooth section of floor that has a tunnel dipping down and away. "Huh, this is new. This used to be a pool." Soren wonders aloud what could have caused that, and Garvan shrugs. "earthquakes? magma worms? who knows." Soren turns slowly and asks about the magma worms. They are an old miner's tale apparently, in one of the forges there is a giant beak mounted on the wall and they say that the tunnels down here were carved out by them.

As they approach the far wall there is a space where the stalagmites have been cleared away and there is a pagoda-like structure in the middle of the clear space. Hanging inside there is a bronze gong that is corroded and clearly very old, but still reflects their lantern light in flashes of orange and green. Esme walks up and looks to Garvan asking if there is some ritual to follow here. He shrugs, so Esme hefts her Makerglass shield and whams it into the gong as hard as she can. It sounds out in a loud, crashing noise that echoes around them. As the sound starts to die down it seems there is another gong that sounds in the distance, then another a few moments later another even fainter one, but it could have been echoes. soon enough the sound fades and the only thing to be heard is the occasional shuffling of people's feet. "Well, who knows how long this will take, may as well get comfortable". He puts down his pack and sits with his back against one of the pillars of the pagoda and blows out his light, leaving just one burning to conserve fuel.

They all get comfortable, sitting or laying in various positions in the area, all staying in the flickering light of the remaining lantern. They start playing cards to pass the time and casually talking to each other. Betta is sitting leaned up against Rua's shoulder, watching the cards move around and asks "Is it always like this? So boring, and also so stressful at the same time." Rua shrugs, "More or less, its usually days of walking and nothing and short bursts of excitement. But it will be really nice to get back to Stonetop." Betta hums uncertainly at this, "My mother is there, and she is NOT going to be happy about me coming along for this trip. I am tempted to not go back, just to not have to deal with her." Soren chimes in here, "You could. It is tempting to run away from your problems, that is what I did after all. But while I was gone, both my parents dies to the plague and I never got to mend that rift, or to say goodbye. It feels like a hard thing to do, to face your mother but I think it is something you should still do." Betta pulls her knees up to her shoulders and wraps her arms around her knees and goes quiet. Willem is wary, but after some time he is able to relax and starts swapping stories with Esme about their pasts. Kiva has been really uncomfortable down in the mines and it is really making her aware of her own mortality, and is worried about the hillfolk they ran into on the road. Soren shares her concerns, especially because the Delvers seems to be completely dismissing of the threat.

Time passes and nothing has happened so Garvan gets up and says he is going to take a look at the drained pool. Esme decides to go with, leaving Rua sparring with Betta to train her shield skills. Kiva wants to stay with the group, she feels safer there and Esme asks Soren to stay so Rua isn't the face they show to the Ustrina. Garvan and Esme head to the drained pool and start to head down the gently sloping tunnel. It is not wet and slimy, and gentle enough to not require rope. There seems to be faint indications of stairs, but the limestone deposits covering the floor and walls make it hard to tell. After some time it levels out and Garvan lifts his light high. Its a cavern but it looks like the stone has been shaped like clay, columns of spiral stone and doesn't look fully natural. They start moving through and more of the moulded stone is revealed and soon enough they see old bones on the floor. Some are so old that the limestone has started to grow over them.

There is no smell of rot or decay, Garvan says "This is weird" looking at a large slab of stone that looks like it was chopped into a smooth rectangular plinth. Esme gets close, touching and inspecting it and finds one side of the plinth seems like ordinary rock at first, but on closer inspection it shimmers slightly under her gaze. The closer she gets to it the more it shimmers, until the illusion breaks and reveals a cavity within the plinth. Its a couple feet wide and one foot high, she reaches in and feels around and grabs something metallic and pulls it out to reveal a tarnished and scaled silver necklace, but clearly of high quality craftsmanship. She can tell there is more metal objects inside as well, and she kneels down to see an assortment of jewelry, a handful of silver coins, a polished human skull and a rosary of polished ceramic beads. Esme gently sifts through the items, the skull is cleaned and free of any tissue, with clear tool marks but feels otherwise fine. The jewelry and coins also feel normal, but as her hand brushes the rosary she gets a deep feeling of dread in the pit of her stomach that she learned long ago not to ignore. She pulls out the valuables, leaving the rosary and skull, and shows it to Garvan saying "This is a nice result of exploration." He whistles softly and says its a worthwhile trip if he can get a share of the loot, but before he says more he pauses and says "Do you hear that?" Esme tilts her head and it seems like very faint whispering in the distance. She immediately hefts her shield and says "Lets get out of here" and bundles her prize and they start to move to the entrance.

As they get close to the entrance of the tunnel Garvan slows then stops, the lantern he holds swinging gently and his eyes get a vacant look. Esme looks back, now hearing the whispers louder and she looks down at her hands and realized she is trapped in her body. She is so far away from everyone else, separated by fleshy prisons and it is a true shame. She shakes her head vigorously before hefting her shield and bonking Garvan on the head to banish the enchantment with her Makerglass shield and grabs his hand and starts to run up the tunnel, away from whatever malevolent thing lived in the darkness.

Back at the pagoda Kiva heads a faint rustling, scraping noise in the distance. Its hard to hear over the sound of Rua and Betta 'sparring' and Soren fidgeting but it doesn't side like its coming from them. She looks around in curiosity and holds her spear ready. After a minute or so Soren hears it too, and since they are expecting the Ustrina he calls out "Hello? Who's there?" The noise doesn't change in pace, slowly getting louder. Kiva grabs a nearby rock and throws it toward where she thinks the sound is coming from. It flies out of the ring of light and hits a stalagmite in the darkness and clattering around in the dark. A few moments later there is a glint of metal as three figures come out of the darkness, they are tall and wrapped in robes and wearing elaborate bronze masks. One walks in the front with the more elaborate mask, with two more just behind, and says in a strange, echoing voice "An unusual display of aggression **for one who summoned us!**" The sound is clearly not made by a human voice, it sounds alien and reverberates through the cavern.

Soren gestures to Kiva to calm herself and steps forward, making the sign of respect they learned from the Forest Folk ghost in the library and says "Thank you for coming to meet us, I apologize for the aggression we are not comfortable so deep within the earth." The one at the front says "This one is the Valorix, Art Keeper of the Sitrikeepa" It extends a hand in greeting to Soren, its movement is twitchy and rapid movements as the arm extends. "Let us bargain." Soren replied "Indeed, we are here to trade information and knowledge. The village of Viemrod has fallen, its inhabitants killed or driven away by a dark plague of bone growths. We found remnants there that spoke of the relations between the Forest Folk and the Ustrina, and have come to bring tidings of the fate of your cousins and learn what we can about the dark plague that brought them low." The Ustrina replies in it's strange tones "This one is aware of the fate of Viemrod, and the tragedy of its people. Let us bargain." Soren nods and says "Yes, we would like to trade knowledge and goods, to know more of what befell the Forest Folk and how to counter the bone plague."

End of Session!

Revision #1

Created 11 April 2026 01:43:55 by Garettv2_Bigger_Bolder_Badder

Updated 11 April 2026 04:36:26 by Garettv2_Bigger_Bolder_Badder