

Session 37 - The Winterlude Festival

What's happening? I don't remember! Lets get to it.

Cutha does have a bit of Etherium leftover. "I bought some from a trader, was planning to make some sort of sacred object for the pavilion. It is the favoured metal of Tor after all, lightning as solid stone. However I am a better priest than craftsman and wasn't able to make anything out of it, and it sounds like you need it more than I do. They do say that quite a bit of Etherium can be found around the Ruined Tower. Its not the safest way to get it, but its been known to be scattered around there." The next day he brings a chunk of shining metal to Soren and hands it over, it feels like about a pound of the rare metal. Soren thanks him respectfully, saying this will be a useful template for replicating. Cutha frowns, and digs deeper "Wait, are you planning to make more Etherium? Nobody has crafted more since the Thunder Lords fell!". Soren nods and says "Well its lightning in metal form, right? We brought some copper back from the Delve and Kiva thinks she can harness the lightning. Cutha expresses his concerns, Kiva can be unpredictable and he doesn't want disaster to happen. Soren promises to keep an eye on the process.

Ridney is digging in the cracks of an old stump with a stick, looking for wood lice and doesn't hear Stella approach. "Ridney" Stella calls out. "Oh you are back!" Ridney replies happily and runs up to hug her leg. Stella tell her a bit about her adventure to the Delve, telling her about the bugs they found underground in the tunnels. Stella promises to draw her a picture of the bugs later. "Ridney, Eadna told me you have been talking to you friends more. Have you been seeing them more often?". Ridney nods seriously "Yeah, they have been kinda worried lately, been keeping me up at night." Stella inquires futher, asking if they have been acting any differently. Ridney says they are a little scared, they have been talking about a glowing man who wanders the village at night but when she asks nobody else has seen a glowing man. Stella offers to stay up and look for the glowing man and Ridney says she will let her friends know that she is checking for it. Stella then asks her to be careful, if her friends are worried then Ridney should stick near Eadna. Ridney nods and makes Stella promise to draw a picture of the bugs. When Stella agrees she claps her hands with glee and goes back to digging for bugs in the stump.

Stella comes away from the conversation a little concerned. Its not new for Ridney to talk about her imaginary friends, but saying that they are scared and specifically calling out a glowing man? This has Stella taking her seriously this time and plans to stay up that night to look for aforementioned glowing man. When the Eye of Helior descends below the horizon Stella wanders the streets of the village. She has her lamp unlit, keeping her eyes used to the darkness and doing rounds of the town looking for anything unusual.

On her first round she sees Emmer walk into a shadowed alley, then a few minutes later Offed walks out, adjusts his clothes and walks away. Stella cocks her head but can't think of why those two would be in the same alley so she moves on, not thinking about it any more. On her second round as she approaches the grain stores she sees a plate left by the door. The wise women of the village would have left a plate of milk out for the benevolent fae creatures, and it is wobbling like something was just sitting on the edge and it is freshly emptied. Stella can't see anything but feels like she is being watched. As she continues on she encounters Cutha who is surprised to see her out this late. Usually Stella is up with the dawn, so when he asks what she is about she lets him know about the potential glowing man. Cutha says he hasn't seen anything like that, it sounds like the fancy of an overactive imagination. He claps Stella on the shoulder and carries on down the street, contemplating the stars. On her third circle through the village she is just about to call it a night and head back home when she sees a crow fall out of the sky at her feet, dead. Stella jumps and has an involuntary shiver wrack her body. She raises her lamp and lights it to get a closer look, and just as the flame springs up it seems like its neck twists towards her and its eyes reflect the light dully back at her. Stella is creeped out and worried about dark things so she douses the crow in oil and lights it on fire. Once it is charred to the bone she stomps out the fire and scatters the bones. With this she decides to head back and go to bed, nothing to see around tonight.

A few weeks pass with mundane, daily tasks being done around the village until the first snow hits, burying the village in a foot of powdery white snow. Most daily activities grind to a halt, most people huddling around their hearths to keep warm and hunker down for the long winter. People really only go outside when required, with small tracks through the snow connecting houses to the barns and food stores. No traders visit, and are not expected until after the spring thaw. The winter is relatively mild, and the larders are well stocked so the general mood is positive. It is much less uncertain than some winters, and with the extra stores people are not holding back and eating full meals all winter.

With Asha spending more time in the Orphanage, Stella thaws a little bit in their interactions. She stops giving her the cold shoulder so much, and as time goes on starts to do small, kind things for Asha. She gets the feeling that Asha is a bit intimidated by her. Esme is able to arrange for Betta to be the Ice Princess during the winter, increasing her prestige in the village and by extension Gwann's as well. Esme subtly encourages Gwann to get drunk and is supremely successful. Gwann really lets loose during the festival, and afterwards is a little less stiff and judgy of everyone around her.

Rua has been getting up to no good with Steffen and Bedwyr. Once the snow gets deep enough they make a game of jumping off the cliff into the drifts of snow, getting stuck up to their chests and having to dig each other out. Its a dangerous game, but luck and sheer disregard for their own safety has them come out without injury. They also setup forts in the snow and recruit the younger kids into mock 'armies' and have great big snowball fights. Bedwyr does his best to keep up with his missing foot, but is mostly acting as team leader and crafting snowballs for the young ones. In an unguarded moment he talks to Rua about how you never really think about how much you need a foot for. You really take it for granted, and notice it when its gone. Rua nods sagely, he is well familiar with taking things for granted. Bedwyr goes on to say that he has been keeping busy, cooking in the public house or learning how to spin yarn. Rua gets sad at this, and apologizes for not getting him out the Crinwin nest faster. Bedwyr shakes his head, says hes just grateful he was

able to get out alive. Most people never come out of Crinwin nests until they are bones, but it has been tough trying to find a way to be useful. Rua opens up and says that he too is trying to find ways to be useful to Stonetop. Bedwyr looks at him a little confused, saying Rua does all sorts of useful stuff and goes on adventures. Rua nods and says that is stuff others would do anyways, but its really nice to know that Bedwyr thinks he is doing good for the village.

As part of his training with Esme, Soren has been spending more time with the other priests of the village. Honoured Dove handles distributing the stores, and Soren helps her out periodically through the winter. He spends time chatting with her, learning about Danu and also about the particular needs and wants of each of the villagers. Soren gets the impression that there is a whole world Dove has witnessed that Soren will never see. She talks about the spirits of hearth and home, spirits of plants and harvest, spirits of disease and afflictions. She talks about them as real, concrete things that she sees and not as abstractions or ideas. Soren finds it a bit overwhelming, but they establish a rapport as they work and grow a little closer together.

At the winter solstice every year there is the Winterlude festival. It is a much smaller festival than the others given there are no visitors from outside the village, and its distributed through all the houses and structures in the central square. People will go from house to house, bringing small gifts of food or trinkets. At the entrance of each house there is a simple rack and as people go from house to house they leave an ornament on the rack and take one with them. Each year they make a game of it, everyone trying to end up with the coolest ornament at the end of the night. It is generally split on generational lines, every few years the kids decide one of the trinkets is "the coolest", to the confusion of the adults who do not understand what they are seeing. There are some fun and competitive indoor games that are often enjoyed in the winter, jacks and tiddlywinks, and the play gets quite competitive sometimes.

Esme has been presiding in the smoke lodge, where burning herbs and 'special' tea is served. The smoke suffuses the air and intoxicates the nose, and the tea sets them adrift on the seas of imagination. The ritual is multipurpose, partly acting as a distraction from the cabin fever that invades the village during winter. Many families get sick of each other, making snide comments and this is a way to get away from all that. Some couples also take advantage of the heightened senses, often bribing whoever is running the ritual and others waiting to get some alone time in the hazy room. At its core though it is a spiritual ritual, where people can expand their minds and connect to the spirits around.

As the sun is setting on the shortest day of the year Stella gives the traditional sermon in the Pavilion of the Gods, telling the story of how and why the Eye of Helior is sometimes in the sky for shorter or more time. Since he cannot look through solid ground, to keep a lookout for the Things Below he spends time looking at the bottom of the earth, trying to divine their secrets so he can protect his devoted followers. However, he always comes back, and the days will lengthen when he is high in the sky and watching over his flock. Stella follows the tradition of doing a deep cleaning of the altar, bringing out all the relics and holy objects of coloured glass to polish and shine them. During the festival they are hung by the rafters so what sunshine does appear hits them and refracts coloured light all around the room. Oftentimes in the Pavilion while the coloured glass is out and the shrine is transformed people will come to sit and meditate.

Rua has been out having fun with Steffen but when he gets around to visiting Betta's house he sees her, Gwann and Angrad all sitting at the same table and in good cheer. With all the conflict recently it warms his heart to see them all getting along, and he doesn't want to disturb the moment so he blows a kiss to Betta with a big grin. Meanwhile Esme witnesses multiple times while moving between houses birds falling out of the sky. This is obviously a bad omen, and it starts concerned whispers in the people of the village. There is not much for them to do but show some extra devotion to the gods during their respective rituals but it is unsettling nonetheless. Elsewhere in the village Wickla makes a snide comment at Terrwen about how roughly he treats the militia equipment and how it makes extra work for her. He has had a bit much to drink and it sets him off, and he starts loudly bringing up every mistake that Wickla has made. She is not one to back down and soon it's a shouting match between them, with each tiny slight of the past months being dragged into the light. They go back-and-forth for a few minutes with a slowly gathering crowd, until Wickla spots her son Cayu looking at her with wide eyes. She suddenly realizes how childish they are being in their argument and quickly gathers up Cayu and they go into a nearby house, cutting off mid sentence leaving Terrwen puffing and mad in the street.

During the traditional story re-enactment Betta plays a very good Ice Princess but is upstaged by Fio playing the Ice Queen. Fio displays a remarkable ability to stage act, displaying a range of emotion that shocks everyone. Afterwards people congratulate Betta on a good performance, then completely gush over Fio and praise her act. Rua however only has eyes for Betta, he gives Fio a thumbs up but spends minutes gushing over Betta's performance. Soren is at the back, absolutely rocked by this new side of Fio. He knows her as being reserved but direct, and this has blown him away.

After the festival Esme spends a lot of time teaching Soren how to properly Chronicle, and he spends a lot of time re-carving some of the older stories that are starting to fade.

End of Session!

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