

Session 38 - Lowic's Flight to Stonetop

Quick flashback to do some Kiva winter scenes! Then springtime is here! New opportunities, new threats? Maybe even new friends!

Kiva has been really curious about Etherium, lightning in the stone is super interesting and she wants to figure it out. She spends many winter nights holed up in her study, reading old books and bouncing ideas off Esme and her Dad. She also consults the Mindgem, since this is knowledge lost with the Makers. As she touches the gem she sees a vision like a hall of mirrors, her face reflected back at her in every direction with the presence of the Mindgem suffusing the area all around her. Its slow, patient voice says "Speak" Kiva considers the question, then asks "How do we make Etherium?". It unfolds in its slow sonorous voice the complete history of Etherium from the first crucible created by a Thunder Lord named Voices like Thunder, through the complex socioeconomic impacts of its creation, detailing the many and varied uses and alloys, until finally it ends with the creation process. An Etherium Crucible is a fairly sophisticated technology in some ways and simple in others. It is a basin lined with Runes inscribed in a fireproof substance like stone or obsidian. The Runes are for capturing the lightning and slowing it down, making it stay in one place instead of shooting off. You pour molten copper into the basin with the lightning, or alloys of other metals for other uses. The Thunder Lords have means for storing lightning in crystals, and they would attach the crystal to the crucible to slowly leech the power into the metal as it cools.

By the time the Mindgem finishes it is well into the night. Kiva realizes it's been many hours since she has eaten and she can still hear echoes of the gem's voice in her mind. After hours of listening to it, her ears don't know how to not hear it. She places the Mindgem back into its box, which she appropriated when she found the Mindgem and has lined it with fabrics, yarn and an old pillow.

Also during the winter, Esme and Soren spend some time putting their heads together to try to find a loophole for the Hillfolk taboo against mining. They feel that the earth already gives people everything they need, and that digging for resources in the ground is exceptionally greedy and offensive to the mother earth. They prize obsidian and other stones that are easily sharpened, and the more rash and arrogant among them will loot metal weapons from slain foes. They aren't able to find any real exception to this taboo...

(Back to the present)

One frosty early spring morning Stella is out to soak up as much of the weak early sun as she can. As she walks past the stone in the center of the village she sees a crow take off from it, flap a few times then fall dead to the ground. Stella doesn't know what to make of this, its not an affect the stone has had in the past. She resolves to ask Honoured Cutha about this later, then moves on with her day. She is reminded again a few days later when a sleeting spring storm arrives with the usual booming lightning hitting the stone. However, its not behaving normally, usually the stone glows when struck but this time its just fitful flashes and they do not last. Cutha is made aware and is watching the stone from the eaves of the Pavilion of the Gods. Stella finds him and tells him about the bird that died after touching the stone. He looks down at her and rubs his chin worriedly, he does not recall this ever happening in the history of Stonetop. He would have to consult Esme for sure, but the Stone does not kill.

Stella asks if they have angered Tor in some way. Cutha doesn't think so, he is still sending the storms, but the Stone was made by the Makers and all mortals are fallible. I don't want to say it is broken, but maybe it is being interfered with? I don't know what to do to be honest, we can but wait and see. Stella asks if they could analyze the stone. Cutha sighs and says its possible, but he would like that to be a last resort. It has stood for a thousand years, perhaps this is a thing that just happens now and again. I fear that by meddling with it we might make it worse. He then looks around, then asks Stella if she could try to prevent Kiva from messing with it unduly. None of us knows what the Stone was built for or how it works. My task is to be a liason between Tor and the people who depend on his rains and protection. The mechanisms of the Stone are beyond me. Stella nods, and promises to talk to Kiva to keep her from meddling with it.

Stella goes to see Kiva at her home and finds her bundled up in a nest of pillows in her lab. Kiva sleepily invites her in, and Stella asks if she has noticed the disturbance with the Stone in town. Kiva says "No...Yes..I think, this Etherium it will really change for the better." Stella tries to refocus her, asking again about the Stone if she has seen whats wrong with it. Stella also tells her about the birds dying. Kiva nods slowly, she is still a bit out of it from her lengthy consultation with the Mindgem. Stella tells her that Cutha doesn't want her meddling with the Stone, they don't know how it works and they are worried that she could make it worse. Kiva says that if she doesn't want her to meddle with the stone directly that is fair, but there is always room for some investigation. "I know I have a reputation for meddling with things better left alone, but I have good ideas too!". Stella replies "I think it should be investigated too, but we should follow a proper procedure to make sure it doesn't get worse." Kiva reaffirms that this is something that needs looking at, and she wants to be involved. Stella says that Cutha already denied investigating the stone, so if Kiva wants to be involved she should talk to him. Kiva then thanks her for coming to visit and for spreading the good word. Stella is confused, "What about this was good?"... Kiva is stumped for a second then shrugs and says "I don't know, its something I have heard people say." Stella nods confusedly, then says that she needs to get some air and is heading out. Kiva waves gaily at her and wishes her and the children at the orphanage well.

Elsewhere in the village things are starting to pick up. The winter potatoes are being harvested and the fields are being prepped for spring planting. Rua has been planning to celebrate his 18th birthday and he invites the party to the barn where he lives to celebrate with him. He invites everyone that he is close with, and it turns into a lively time with about a dozen people attending. Angrad arrives with Betta, carrying a tray of honey cakes that are shared around with the others.

Soren arrives with a small cask of whisky that is also shared with everyone, though Stella doesn't partake. Rua stands up on a crate to give a speech. He thanks everyone for coming and calls out each of his friends kindly, but just as he is getting rolling on praising Betta the watchtower bell rings out three times, the signal for something is up. Everyone present quickly grab what is handy and head towards the southwest tower. Others have already arrived, some people have taken the time to grab spears and shields from their houses.

Nia, the understudy to Dove as the Blesses, is up on the tower with her spear and shield and is ringing the bell while looking out across the fields. Looking that way, the arriving people see there are several riders galloping hard towards Stonetop. There are two groups, one lone rider in front and another chasing them. Soren quickly directs those with spears and shields into a shield wall, covering the gate next to the tower. As they get closer all the riders are clearly Hillfolk, and the person in the lead is clearly injured, slumped over their horse and barely clinging to their reins. It looks like it might be Lowic, Garnuss' apprentice. Soren quickly directs the wall to open to allow his horse through. Rua is in the wall and quickly makes a hole. Stella is standing behind it and tries to cast her light towards the riders but is unable to. She sighs in frustration, but then turns to help the injured person who rode 50 feet into the town before falling to the ground and is laying there, heaving. Stella rolls her over and sees there is an arrow broken off in her side that is welling up blood. She immediately consecrates her flame again and moves to heal her. This time Helior's light answers her call and the fire spreads over the injury and begins to close as the stone arrow head works its way out of wound and clatters to the cobblestone. Stella has the arrow out and wound mostly closed as Dove runs up to help.

At the gate the shieldwall has reformed as the following four riders get close. They wheel to a stop and start to talk among themselves. Soren calls out "Who rised upon Stonetop with weapons drawn? Declare yourself!" One of the horsemen rides a bit closer. They lack the usual tribe markings, but have a red armband. He lifts his spear so it is pointing threatening upwards. "A wolf does not identify themselves to deer. Move aside, let us claim our prize and we will be on our way." Soren climbs partway up the side of the watchtower to gain some height so everyone can see him. "Even wolves need to be wary when they approach prey in their homes. If you bring violence to Stonetop be prepared to receive it in kind!". The man replies "I am Jano of the World Serpent tribe. That woman has committed crimes against our people, hand her over to us and no harm will come to you." Soren replies "The woman is known to us as a kind and honourable soul. What crime has she comitted?" The man says "That is none of your business." Soren scoffs, "So there is no crime and you are merely enforcing your will through violence." The man says "This isn't over, we will remember this!" Then he turns, kicks the sides of his horse and they ride off.

Stella asks Lowic if she is feeling OK, and Lowic is unsure, she is still scrambling to come to terms with what has happened. Esme asks her what is going on. "The chief of the World Serpent clan, Mael Forked-Tongue as he is called(not a metaphor, he has a forked tongue). He came to our tribe and challenged Garnuss to a duel among Spirit-Talkers. Soren jumped in, saying "Is this is Hdoor that Garnuss warned us about?" Lowic nodded, "He is very powerful. The terms of the duel were simple, if Mael won Garnuss would submit to be prisoner and if Garnuss won, Mael would be prisoner. I have never seen the like of this battle. There is a spot now in the hills where nothing will grow for decades, all the spirits of the land were gathered up and thrown at each other. I have never seen anything like it. I knew he was powerful, but we underestimated him. They bound

Garnuss, put him on a horse and took him towards the southwest." Esme asks "Is it possible he cheated, using some sort of arcanum?" Lowic shrugged, "I don't know, neither would let anyone close to the fight. After a couple days they noticed me following and I had to flee. They chased me to the Maker's roads where I would be safe. They followed alongside me, unable to strike but I was unable to get away. They shadowed me for three days until we came to your village where the road ends and I made a break for you."

Soren nods and says she is safe here, Stonetop will offer her safety and lodging as long as you need it. We owe you for healing Flossy, her help was crucial during the fall harvest. Lowic nods, saying she figured that was the case. She could have run to another allied tribe, but she didn't know who to trust. I got hit with the arrow and nearly lost my seat, I wasn't sure I was going to make it. Rua gives her a smile and says "You hillfolk are super tough!". Lowic smiles back, but it doesn't reach her eyes. She looks down and says "I just don't know what to do!" Then bursts into tears. Soren looks to Dove, and asks her to care for Lowic and get her some food and somewhere to rest. Dove nods and puts an arm under Lowic's shoulder, gently getting her up and leading her back to Dove's hut. As they enter, Dove points to the horse. Stella internally is like "Oh right!" and turns to Kinbel, asking him to care for the horse. He has been staring at the fields where the riders disappeared and is jolted out of his reverie, agrees and goes to the horse. It is spooked and very shifty, but he talks calmly to it until it settles down a bit and he leads it away to stable with the other four horses.

Rua is already raring to go on an adventure to fight the World Serpents. Soren agrees, but they should give Lowic some time to recover and deal with the fact her world has been turned upside down. Rua sighs and puts his pack down on the ground. Soren assures him that this isn't something they will ignore, and a few days for Lowic to get her bearings. We also need to determine exactly how we will be getting involved, what lengths we are will to go. Soren looks to Esme here, gesturing they need to talk. Dove returns from her hut, saying she gave Lowic a sleeping draft so she will be out soon. "Nobody is to bother her, got it?" She says sternly, casting her gaze across the entire gathered crowd. Soren nods seriously but says "We will have some questions for her tomorrow." Dove says that is fine, but she needs rest.

Esme tosses her barrel top down and says "No reason to ruin a good party! Lets get back and celebrate Rua." Rua is slightly surprised at this, but is happy to keep hanging out with his friends. They move the party outside so Stella can bask in the sunlight and restore her connection to Helior. It is a bit muted, people are talking lowly and there is a depressed feeling. Esme frowns at this, and makes an effort to liven people up again. Soren also works to bring up the mood, pouring everyone extra whisky and handing it out. Esme tells a funny and exciting story, and also badgers Gwann into giving Rua a simple present. Rua isn't very thrilled about this, he thinks Gwann is the best way to ruin a party, but she gives him a nice shirt so he can look more respectable. Rua takes it gratefully, a bit surprised but puts it on immediately. He goes to Betta and says "What do you think?" Betta sees the significance of the gift, Gwann is slightly more accepting of Rua and she tells him "You look perfect!" She hooks her arm into his and guides him back to the party. "Do you have anything else to say? Your speech got cut off." Rua blushes, "Well I was just gonna go on about how beautiful and awesome you are, but this is what I really want to say." and he leans in to give her a deep kiss.

The next day Lowic is sitting on a bench in the town square, nodding at the people who are passing by. Kiva strolls up and takes a seat next to her and strikes a casual conversation with her. Lowic asks "You are the scholar, yes?" Kiva says its more her parents that are scholars, but she hopes to be one some day. Lowic nods, "Stonetop is lucky to have you." "Well, I feel lucky to be a part of Stonetop to be honest. Everyone needs a home. Where are you from?" Lowic says there isn't a place really, but their tribe has been in the hills for many years. Its not the land she is worried about, its the people. "Without Garnuss they are vulnerable, and I am not sure I am ready to take on his responsibilities." Kiva commiserates, filling the shoes of our predecessors is very hard. "Is there anything I can do to help you?" Lowic sighs, then asks if there is any way for Kiva to find out where Garnuss is. Kiva exhales loudly, but says that she doesn't know much about the hillfolk. At most she could do some reading, but it is doubtful to have anything useful. Lowic signs and says that she wishes she knew what to do, those riders are probably watching the village. I want to find Garnuss, but what can I do alone? Kiva tells her not to give up hope, there is some really talented people here and I think we can help you.

Soren walks by at this time and approaches. Lowic asks him about Flossy, and he says that she is doing well, getting along with the two other horses they won as spoils of victory. Her horse is stabled there as well, if she wants to check in on her. Lowic nods, saying she will do that later. Soren then says he has some questions for her, if she is feeling up to it. She nods. Soren then asks her if there are any major landmarks to the southwest, where Mael was taking Garnuss to. She says the Three Coven Lakes is there, but its a large area. Soren then asks if there are any other tribes that would be against the World Serpernts, whom they could contact for help. Lowic says its complicated, he says lots of things that the Hillfolk like to hear. Like rallying them against Gordin's Delve, calling out their blasphemy and stoking anger against them. Rua has arrived during the questions and pipes up at this "Is it really blasphemy though?" She replies "It is a blasphemy, tearing mother earth apart and looting her bones. Multiple tribes have banded together in the past to raid them an their outlying farms. But its difficult, they are up in the mountains behind switchback passes. Its not good terrain for horses, our usual tactics don't work well. He promises he can change all that, and having seen him wielding his power I think he might actually be able to do what others in the past could not."

Soren asks her to think about any other tribes that would be against the World Serpents that they could ally with to go against him. Lowic wants to go rescue Garnuss straight away, but Soren is concerned the World Serpents are too strong to fight directly with just them. Rua asks if the World Serpents were a very big clan. Lowic says its complicated, he founded it only about eight years ago. Its formed with outcasts of other tribes, those he has swayed with his honeyed words and the absorbed remnants of clans they have defeated. They are a little smaller than the Yellow Spear tribe, but have a greater proportion of fighting capable people. Esme has also been there, and asks if there is some area of spiritual significance where Mael would bring Garnuss to break him down and consume him. Soren's eyes go wide, and he looks at Esme like she is crazy for being so graphic. Lowic's jaw quivers at her words, but says that Three Coven Lake is probably the place. It is an acursed region, but a spirit talker of power would be safe there. Esme nods, "then it sounds like there wouldn't by too many people with him." Esme asks if Lowic could guide them to it. Soren says that maybe Lowic should rest first, but Esme says that the more they wait the worse Garnuss would be. Lowic stands shakily and says she is willing to go any time, but her horse may need more time to rest.

End of Session!

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