Session 41 - Exploring the Stone-Lords Ruins

Going deeper into the dungeon, the darkness beckons...

Kiva, after hearing from Soren about the ritual circle and the bags of fetishes along the wall, is interested and goes to take a look and see if she recognizes them. She inspects them closely without touching, first looking at the circle then the objects. However, this is not a tradition of magic she is familiar with and all she can tell is that something happened, but not what or anything else.

The group stands at the top of the stairs heading deeper into the ruins, but the stairs are unusual. There are two sets, on the left each step is nearly a meter high and wide, and to the right there are more human sized steps. Both descend together, curving to the right and into the shadows. Soren steps up to go first, quietly heading down the human sized set of stairs. Clearly other people have used these stairs recently, the Maker-sized stairs have a clear layer of dust while the human-sized stairs are clean of such signs of disuse. As he approaches the bottom of the stairs the sliver of light from Stella's hooded lantern reveals a long hall. The temperature has dropped even further, with the light flickering dimly revealing massive buttressed ribs supporting the ceiling. On the left is a human sized door, and two more Maker sized doors to the right. At the end of the hall there are two passages, but they are blocked by rubble and seemingly impassable. Piercing the darkness there is a low light coming from the door on the left. Rua sneaks up to listen to what may be beyond the door. As he pokes his head around the corner he hears a slight squeaking sound. "Rats!" Kiva whispers. There is a cloth hanging across the doorway, so Rua carefully peels back the bottom corner to see inside.

The light source is identified as a flickering lamp, it illuminates some stone blocks scattered around the room beyond. He can see someone's feet, sitting on the stones. He decides to take his chances and moves to knock them out. He pushes the cloth behind fully and moves into the room. The feet belong to a man in Hillfolk robes, and the room appears to be some sort of living quarters. There are bed rolls scattered around and various personal effects next to them. The man is carefully polishing a leather saddle, but immediately notices when Rua enters as his boot scrapes. Rua tries to act casual and his raised hand starts to scratch his head. The man looks up in shock "Who the hell are you?" Rua tries to bluff, saying "I wanted to know more about the World Serpent tribe!" The man is nonplussed and asks how he got past the guards. "What guards?" Rua asks innocently. He then explains that he is from Stonetop and have been hearing about the World Serpents and they are going to take down Gordin's Delve and you know its about time someone put them in their place. The man shakes his head, saying "You shouldn't be here, but if you truly

want to know come and sit. Help me polish this tack and I will tell you what we are about"

Rua goes to sit near him and takes a cloth and starts to polish the leather of a bridle. "Whats your name? Mine's Rua!" "Armul" the man replies. "The master has been working for years to bring us together. The traditions of the tribes are all well and good, but we are weaker when separate and no tribe can deal with the Delve on their own. It has been hard and thankless work, trying to get the tribes to work together as they bicker like wayward children. But the Master is the Parent they need." Rua is nodding along, adding some noncommittal noises and letting him continue talking. "I have been following the master for almost 3 years now and I have learned much in that time. But you, you are not one of use. You don't know our ways. If you truly want to help us there are safer places to do it." Rua asks "Is it true your master can talk to the gods?" Armul nods, "I have seen him do many things that are beyond explanation, yes." Rua's eyes gleam and asks "Can he make the trees move?" "He can talk to the spirits of the trees, but making them move is a completely different thing." Rua asks if the Master is here and the man says no, he was called away. "If he finds you here it will not end well for you. If you truly want to help us I can give you the name of one that you can go to to learn more." He goes on to say that Rua should seek out a tribe at "Rabbit Rock" in the steplands. "Tell him that Armul sent you and you want to learn, he will be happy to teach."

Rua nods and thanks him, then once they are done polishing he asks if Armul can guide him out, he forgot his torch and doesn't know the way back. Armul agrees, and says that if any of the guards bother you tell them that Armul says to grant you safe passage. Armul steps to the doorway and pulls back the curtain and steps out. Esme and Soren have been listening and are ready, Esme body checks him with her shield, knocking him off balance and Soren takes a swing with a large rock he found to knock Armul over the head. The man drops like a stone, falling to the ground in a heap. Unfortunately the clay lamp he was holding files from his hand and smashes into the ground, shattering with a loud sounds and spilling burning oil across the floor. Esme quickly moves to go near one of the other portals to stand ready while Stella hangs back. Rua pulls on Armul's robe and moves to pretend to put out the fire, stamping at it with his feet. A voice calls out from the farthest door "Dammit Armul, what have you done now!" Soren tries to impersonate Armul's voice "I didn't mean to I swear! I just wanted to stretch my legs and there was a rock and I tripped and now my lamp is broken. Just, just, I got this don't worry." There is a pause, but then two more hillfolk come out of the farthest door. Their mouths drop, then one shouts "Who the hell are you!"

They are both focused on him, so Soren tries to play the fool and distract for his friends to act. "Who am I? Who are you and what the hell are you doing here?" One of the hillfolk is confused with a confused look, but the other who is quicker on the uptake says "Oh friend, you have come to the wrong place." Suddenly the light from the shattered lantern seems to dim. The fires are still there, but the shadows are getting stronger. Patches of shadow seemingly get more solid and flow out from the walls and the floor and move toward Soren. Esme leaps from the side of the hall and brandishes her Maker's shield that catches the dimming light like a mirror and redirects some of the shadows back at the Hillfolk. Stella is seeing this, the moving shadows are anathema to Helior and her heart burns with fury. She collects her will and empowers her lantern, grabbing the flame and tossing it out across the hall and it moves to dance above the heads of the two Hillfolk. Kiva takes advantage of the chaos to cock her spear, moving to get a clear shot. She gets close to the fire and is able to send her spear out accurately, it flies through the air and punctures through the

robe and leg of the man just as he was raises his arm to do something, but is now clutching at the spear impaling his thigh. Unfortunately, Kiva has revealed herself and the shadows that were swarming Soren now also swamp Kiva. As the shadows engulf them its like they are inside a heavy cloud. They feel absolute, primal, irrational fear. Their minds are paralyzed, unable to think.

Rua has been sneaking around the edges of the hall, attention away from him as the fight continues in the center of the room. Once he gets close enough he surges forward, swinging his weapon and dealing a deep wound to her. She staggers, but catches herself by grabbing his shoulder and he feels some of his life essence be pulled out of him. His knees start to tremble as she leeches strength from him. Soren sees the shadows coming for him, grateful for Esme's presence but wants to pull his weight as well so he draws his sword and swings desperately at the shadow while yelling "Uhhh Stella! HELP!!" As his sword arcs through the shadow there is a slight resistance, and the shadow splits in half then dissipates into shards of nothingness. As the rest of them close in Esme begins a ritual chant, stomping her feet and banging her shield that begins to glimmer with a sheen that wasn't present just before. She draws on the connections of community and calls Aratis' power to create a zone of safety around her and Soren. She can feel the threads of connection between the Hillfolk woman and the shadows tense up, then a few of them snap under the pressue. They exude hatred for the one who summoned them and are now free to act upon it, and they dart towards the woman and latch onto her. They burn in Stella's holy light but persist, causing the woman to scream in pain and terror.

Kiva doesn't have this protection and as the shadows close in the terror strikes and Kiva flees, heading back up the stairs and beelines it towards the entrance of the dungeon. She runs right past Fio who is the rearguard and the shadows stick with her like leeches through her flight until she bursts out onto the terrace overlooking the lake. As she steps into the sunlight the shadows are immediately struck down, the ones in the light dissipate into mist and others that were following don't leave the safety of the shadows. The terror abates and Kiva catches her breath with her hands on her knees. Inside, Stella is slowly walking towards the fight, focused on her dancing light above their heads. She calls upon Helior once more, determined to bring his cleansing light upon these shadows. She infuses the dancing light with his power, causing it to emit a hypnotic effect while she stares daggers at the woman controlling the shadows, her eyes glowing with Helior's power. The woman is unaffected, distracted by fighting off the horde of shadows. The man however has his attention captured and stops his efforts to break off the shaft of the spear and stares up at the flame. Lowic is off to the side, also surrounded by shadows but is shrieking some unfamiliar language that seems to be holding them at bay.

Soren is protected by Esme, and looking around he can see the two hillfolk are preoccupied but shadows swarm all through the room. He decides to grab his last torch from his pack, quickly lights it from the burning puddle in the middle of the room and starts to swing both his shining bronze sword and the flaming torch through all the shadows he can reach from Esme's protection. The light clearly drives them away, and his sword continues to meet phantom resistance before scattering the shadows into a dark mist that drifts around him. As he breathes this mist his mind slows, his movements become sluggish and his spirit falters. As he continues to breath their essence it becomes harder and harder to force himself to move. Rua staggers back from the woman who drained his mojo, his legs shaky and mind clouded as he creates some distance between them. Stella starts to slowly move her flame, dancing it slowly away from the Hillfolk

shadow caster to let the shadows at her fully. She moves the flame around, the man limping after it slowly the whole time until it floats near Esme and Soren, driving back the shadows surrounding them. After Stella's light leaves, the woman gets covered more and more by the shadows until she is fully obscured and her shrieks of pain and terror abruptly end.

Outside Fio has run after Kiva and puts a hand on her shoulder "Are you OK? What happened in there?" Kiva is still catching her breath and pants out "Demons I think, something made of shadows. gods it was terrifying, I feel like I just ran a dozen miles." Fio hands her some water and as she drinks she thinks about the shadows. Clearly, sunlight is anathema to them, but she doesn't get the sense they are mindless agression. They are under the control of their summoner and would likely leave anything with a light source alone. She looks around the terrace and entrance hall for anything that could help her and her friends. She gets interested in the scrollwork on the walls, inspecting the stylized patterns for any meaning.

Back inside, the only light sources in the room are concentrated around Soren and Esme, with the enraptured Hillfolk man still staring at it and reaching for it limply. Rua is outside this light, and feels something moving near him in the dark. He waits for it to get close, then quickly tries to tackle what he assumes in the woman. He slams into the person who gives out an "Oomph!" and they both tumble to the floor, spinning into the darkness. His target is lying on the ground next to him, groaning in pain. Rua says "Surrender now or face the consequences!" The woman coughs, then says "Heh, consequences." Then starts to stagger to her feet. Rua sighs, then goes to get her into a chokehold to take her out of the fight. She resist and they flail at each other in dark, batting each other's limbs away and Rua is eventually able to get and elbow around her neck but her whole body suddenly feels ice cold, the heat of Rua's body being sucked out of him, more of his mojo is leaving him. He bears down, not releasing his grip until her struggles stop and she is unconscious. However his arm feels like it is frostbitten and hurts to move. As she slumps to the floor the shadows stop crowding the edges of the light, but are still lingering at the periphery of the room.

Now that there is no direct urgency in the fight Soren drops to one knee, barely able to keep himself up while the miasma of the shadows poisons him from within. He gasps out "Where's Lowic?", but is unable to move. Esme checks in on him, she isn't familiar with the ailments shadows might cause but heat and light would probably be helpful. She tells him to head towards the sunlight. Rua steps towards the circle of light, dragging the unconscious body of the hillfolk woman "Here's another one for you Esme." The shadows have stopped churning and seem to be drifting around the edges of the light with seeming curiosity. Rua nods at them, since they didn't attack him as he moved through the shadows.

Back in the entryway Kiva has successfully deciphered the scrollwork and understands it as below:

Welcome, guest, to the manor of the house of Wainoac, Seventh Catena of Tierstered.
If ye bring evil here, evil ye shall find, yet strangers are welcome here.
All shall prosper who obey the precepts of Ulaweyen Aalz and of this house.
Praise to the Founders and their Foundation!

Now that she has satisfied her curiosity she notices the sounds of fighting below has stopped. Her and Fio start to head back down towards the others and find Lowic at the bottom of the stairs. Her hands are shaking and look white, and she is inside a ritual circle inscribed into the dust of the floor. She is trying to rub life back into her hands but seems fine as she gets back to her feet. Kiva's hands are plenty warm, having just come in from the sunshine so she steps forward and rubs her hands over Lowic's to help her warm up. Kiva wants to tie up the shadow caster and learn from her, but Esme warns of her dangers even when tied up. Stella admits that if she was tied up it wouldn't stop her from doing much. Kiva finally relents, but complains about it a bit and Rua finally has enough. He asks for a knife from Esme and finally finishes her off. "Can we move on now? I don't like it in this room." Esme spots his frostbitten arm and does a double-take before asking Stella to heal him. Seeing his arm, Stella waves away the dancing light and takes the time to refill and light her lantern, consecrating the flame and filling with Heliors benevolent light, passing it over his arm. The gentle heat fights back the frostbite, but the spider-webbed scar remains.

The party decides to head back to the terrace, they all need some sunlight after that harrowing experience. Stella finds a clear spot and lays on her back, eyes closed, basking in Helior's light.

End of Session!

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