Session 43 - Getting answers from Garnus and travelling home

Garnus speaks about what happened to him

It is evening as they are camping under a ledge of rock, gathered around the fire as Lowic holds Garnus's skull. His glowing outline forms in the air but it seems to be more defined this time, like he is getting better at appearing. He is a bit washed out by the fire but more individual features are visible now. He looks around and says "Well, good rescue everybody." Esme says "You are welcome." while Soren expresses his regrets that he is not here physically. Esme says they came as fast as they could, but Garnus says there was probably nothing they could do since it happened quickly after they lost their duel. Soren asked if there was a reason they turned him into a skull, or if it was just sadistic. Garnus shakes his head saying they are sadistic for sure, but he was just one of many skulls in Mael's laboratory. It seems like he used them like a library, asked them questions and used their knowledge. He has many dozens of skulls, and Garnus would just be another one on his shelf.

Esme laments that she wanted to kill Mael while he didn't have an army, and Garnus agrees. "I threw everything I had at him, but he still had a little more power." Soren asks if he found if Mael had any weaknesses he discovered in their duel or his time as a skull. Garnus says he had a very large book, like 2 feet tall that he has crafted like a custom carry bag for it. He keeps it with him all the time, and never has it opened in front of his apprentices. Esme muses about bringing a bucket of water when facing him, to dunk it over the book. Esme asks what it is like, can he see? Garnus goes on to say that he was always able to see parts of the spirit world, but now his normal perspective is the spirit world while it takes effort for him to see the physical one.

Esme asks him what his plans are and he sits cross-legged in front of Lowic. He reaches a ghostly hand forward and it passes through her shoulder. "It is your time to shine little sparrow. I need you to go see Broden and gather the tribes together. They need to prepare and fight against the World Serpent tribe. Leave the skull with Soren here, I have other things to set in motion and you need to do this alone. They will believe you, remember what you have learned and deal with them how I would." Lowic nods, says she understands and slowly hands the skull to Soren. Soren takes it seriously, holds it close then pauses. "Wait, this isn't another ploy to prank me is it? You aren't going to magic my arm into another horse's ass right?" Garnus laughs and says "Well now I have

one more thing to live for." Soren looks concerned for a moment, then says "well you know what, if that is what keeps you on this mortal plane then I will take it.

"I don't think there is much you can do to help. I can't tell you how grateful I am that you all came to help me, but the fastest way for me to complete this errand is for me to head east while you go north. But I will not forget you." Soren asks her who Broden is, and she says he is the warleader of the Yellow-spear tribe and he has a great authority in times of war. Between me and him we can probably talk the other tribes around. Its gonna be hard, getting the disparate clans to work together is like trying to train cats." Esme nods and says that, unofficially, Stonetop is in their corner. Can't commit more than that without consensus from the rest of the village, and we have already pushed it as far as we can coming here. Lowic smiles wryly and says "You have your politics as we have ours. I have a feeling you and Master will get along just fine." Esme nods at that, and Lowic says she is tired and heads to sleep.

Stella has been sitting staring into the fire the whole evening. Kiva takes the time to sit next to her and offer her a drink. Stella accepts without really looking and takes a sip before realizing it was alcoholic and immediately spits it out into the fire, causing a plume of flame to arise. Stella silently passes the cup back to Kiva who apologizes profusely before giving her some water and Esme hands her another sausage as well. They all head to bed, rising early the next morning to see Lowic off. As she is getting ready to go Soren approaches her, puts a hand on her shoulder and says "Garnus believes you can do this, and so do I. You have shown your strength these last few days and I know you will gather the tribes and find justice for Garnus." She nods and thanks him for his support, and as she turns he says "May Danu watch over you and see you safely to your people." She nods and wishes them safely home as well.

As they travel home Soren is spinning his usual stories. After finishing one there is an extended lull and he says "You know, I almost joined the hillfolk permanently. I really do respect their way of life, they may be a little rough around the edges but at heart they are good people who try to live in harmony with the world around them. Its why what Mael is doing makes me so upset, corrupting the Hillfolk with anger, hate and warmongering. I am glad we were able to strike a blow against him, small though it may be." As the journey goes on he tells other stories. Esme takes the opportunity to spin one of the stories into a song, which has Stella tapping her foot along to and it gets pleasantly stuck into her head as they travel. Esme and Soren pass some time by her educating Soren about her network of messengers and birds that she uses to keep in touch with the people around Stonetop. She goes into a lot of details into the aviary and the care of the birds, which is one of the ways she contributes to Stonetop that isn't strictly judge-related. Meanwhile Kiva and Stella bond over sharing cooking recipes, swapping tips and tricks back and forth about various cooking methods and hacks to get the most flavour out of meals.

It takes a couple days of hard hiking to get out of the hilly steplands and to the flats where they get back on the Maker's Road. They are able to go much faster on the flat and paved roads. They pass some other travellers without incident, but as they pass through the shadow of Titan Bones they hear a pained groan from the grass on the side of the road. They don't see anyone but they hear someone say "Hello? Help!" Soren and Rua want to quickly move to assist, but Esme holds them back knowing that this ruse is as old as time, to lure people off the road to ambush them. They look closer and don't see the telltale spots where people could hide in waiting, and the birds

and insects still sound out around them like there is nothing going on. Soren shakes his head and says it doesn't seem like there is any danger, just someone who needs help. Stella stays behind as they move out into the grass and soon encounter an area of trampled grass, with a man on the ground wrapped in purple robes and purple turban.

Soren quickly approaches, kneeling down and offering him some water. He introduces himself and asks who this is "I am Zhiwa, I was set upon by bandits and they took my pack, including my food and water." Kiva wonders how long he has been there and he says he was unconscious for some time, but probably a day and a half. He has been calling out, but either people could not hear him or would not risk leaving the road. Seeing his state Soren calls out to Stella "Its okay, its just a man who is wounded and needs our help. Can you help him?" Stella nods and hurries over, lighting her lamp as she goes. She kneels beside him, consecrating her flame then passing it over his wounds. Her connection to Helior is strong, sitting in the fullness of his gaze. The fire burns brighter than normal, casting shadows even during the day and the colour of all the things it illuminates seem even more real, standing out like pastels. Zhiwa immediately exhales in relief as the light washes over him, his leg snaps back into place with a sickening crack and his bruises fade. He does not seem to feel any pain as his bone shifts, and soon he is fully healed. He pulls himself up into a sitting position and inspects his leg, moving it around to feel it out. He looks at Stella and says "You are very talented young one." She blushes a bit and thanks him for the compliment.

Esme asks him where he is headed and he says he is on a personal journey to Barrier Pass, but he got a little too careless. Soren offers for him to travel with them, he can re provision at Stonetop for the final leg of his journey. He is from Vaidar Khan, a province in Laigos that is a hard land of dry plains and deserts. He says he has no money or other belongings to barter, but he will repay their kindness ins any way that he can. Soren asks him what his profession is "I am a priest among my people, I bring several gods with my who could help. I am also fairly learned, perhaps there is some teaching I could do or otherwise." Esme nods and says we are always happy to hear stories and songs and get information about the wider world. Soren is mildly disappointed that he has no concrete skills, but references him towards Kiva and Stella as the people to impart knowledge upon. Stella has to hold herself back from pestering him, but inquires a lot about the faiths in the southern lands, specifically about Helior as his faith is more present there. Zhiwa is very familiar with Helior, His Burning Eye is ever-present in his homeland. They have a slightly more antagonistic relationship with Helior given how dangerous it can be to be stranded in his unblinking gaze. He talks about many other gods, speaking as if they are close friends or even families. He says Abun Raima, god of doors and hinges, is his personal patron. He doesn't get much recognition as a minor god, not like the priests of the water god who is highly regarded by all.

He is intrigued by the northern practice of venerating only four gods, he asks how they do it and Stella just shrugs, its normal for her. Esme goes on to tell him many stories and songs, simple ones but very old and foundational to their worship. Time flies as they travel, Zhiwa is a fine travelling companion telling them many stories. Soon enough they see Stonetop appear over the horizon and hear the bell warning the village people are approaching. As they walk through the fields where people are still out there planting they wave towards the workers, with Soren at the front calling people by name. They get to the village proper and a small crowd has gathered, with Murdoch leading them. He steps forward with his crutch and asks what happened with Lowic.

Esme replies

Anders has gotten into conflict with another kid because they figured out that he was lying about something that he saw at the edge of town. He is insisting what he saw was real and refused to back down and they got into a fight about it. He insists that he saw a giant bear outside of town, but nobody believes him.

The Stone in the center of the village has not been glowing as much as usual during storms and it has people on edge. Soren always has his ear to the ground and keeps up to date on the local gossip. There are tons of rumours about this, ranging from people aren't praying hard enough to the kids are spending too much time fraternizing behind the shed and not working. But the real rumour that is whispered during meals in the public hall or discussed quietly in the fields is that it is connected to the earthquakes they have been feeling recently. There is no consensus if the stone is causing the earthquakes or if the earthquakes have been causing the stone to dim and that is the focus of most of the discussion.

Kiva gets home to meet her parents and they have some big news. Her mom is pregnant! She is going to have a little brother or sister. Kiva is super excited.

Esme has been busy recently, and there are quite a few disputes and grudges waiting for her to deal with. The day after they returned she puts a sign out that she will be available after lunch, then works together with Soren to hear the disputes and judge them. They work together, Esme being the 'bad cop' and Soren the 'good cop' to hear each person's side and pass fair judgement. Its a lot of work, but all the supplicants leave thinking they got what they wanted so its a win all around. Afterwards Soren brings down a cask of whisky to the Chronicle and they share several drinks. As the night goes on Esme gets comfortable and starts to tell Soren about how she met Naia. They met when she was a teenager, before she was apprenticed to the previous judge. She had been all but promised to someone in Stonetop but then encountered Naia in the forest and that was it. They saw each other seldom but it was the most precious relationship of her life. Her betrothed in Stonetop was crushed by her refusal but had to move on.

Once they have some time to themselves Soren and Esme are eating dinner in the Chronicle and they set Garnus' skull on the table with a place set in front of him. Once they are settled Soren calls out to him and his outline appears in front of them. "So, seems that a couple days have passed. So this is where you live." Soren informs him its been a week actually. He pauses a moment, it seems like recognizing the passage of time is related to having a body. Esme says he could be placed in the Chronicle, he would never run out of things to read. He says that would be great, except he can't read so its a little wasted on him. I would like to be somewhere I can be around people, I don't want to sit in the darkness and have the time pass me by. Soren snickers at this, thinking of the perfect revenge for the horse's ass prank, and says "I have an idea. If we walk around with a skull its weird, but if we decorate you with some paints or something then its much better and you can be around people." Garnus groans at this and says "I should have make Lowic smash me, but I will bear it." They spend the rest of the evening talking to him and Esme wants to know more about spirit talking.

End of Session!

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