

Session 5

Downtime! Levelling up! Progression!

During the springtime Soren helps with planting and works on his distillery, always striving for perfecting in the art of brewing, experimenting with formulae and fermenting processes to produce a more refined whiskey. While tinkering at his distillery Fio comes to the door and knocks. She brings up that he asked to learn woodcraft from her, and asks if he is able to sit in silence for hours at a time. "There is a first time for everything!" he replies cheerily, "but first, I have a gift for you." Soren rummages around for a moment and brings forth a small wooden whistle he carved. He trills a quick few notes and it trills out "chickadee-dee-dee". Fio thanks him for the gift and says to be ready early in the morning. Soren forces himself up at the crack of dawn and meets her at the top of the stairs. "So, how does this work? Where are we going?" He asks. She nods down the stairs and states "Forest" and starts walking. Soren follows her and does his best to take in all her lessons. He doesn't make a complete ass of himself, but struggles with the extended periods of time spent waiting for game in the silence of the woods. As they return to the village he asks her to join him at the distillery so he can show her how it works and the proper way to drink whiskey. She doesn't spend much time in the village but she agrees.

Kiva and Dermud spend some time poking at the puzzle box. She picks his brain, using his different perspective and bouncing ideas back and forth. Their combined efforts yield results! The puzzle box folds open into a sheet, covered in strange runes and inscriptions. They spend a couple days poring over them and referencing some texts that Kiva has on hand. They can't decipher the runes with what is on hand so Kiva decides to go to her parents with advice and asks Dermud to come with her. He says he has to return home, he has already stayed days longer than initially planned and people will be wondering where he is. Kiva protests initially, but eventually relents and hugs him goodbye, wishing him safety and fortune on the road.

Rua helps out the community by doing odd jobs around the place, ones that always need to be done but nobody individually takes responsibility for. His efforts increase his reputation with the village elders a bit and Esme brings him lunch every now and then. One day Mad Gethin comes to him and says "You look like you've changed boy". Rua explains the search party into the woods and the encounter with Thistledown, emphasizing his decisive action to rescue Cayu while Treasa and Esme were slowed down by speaking with the creature. Gethin chokes his head at this and explains to Rua how the Fae feel a driving need to pay debts, or repay insults.

Stella is doing her duties as a representative of Helior and also helping out at the orphanage. One day, she is there with one of the kids who was throwing rocks at others and got grounded in the bunk room with no dinner. While watching over him Eadna arrives and hands her two towels and a large crock pot. "I promised Angrad I would make her a pot of stew" she explains and sends Stella

off to Angrad's house with a peck on the cheek. Stella goes to Angrad's house, it looks like it would be empty if not for a thin wisp of smoke rising from the chimney. Stella announces herself and delivers the stew. Angrad is grateful for the help, and when Stella asks how she is she goes on with a litany of complaints, about her joints, her stomach, and her no-good daughter who hardly visits. Stella asks what she can do to help and Angrad replies "Well there is not much you can do about age, it comes for all of us. But anything you can do to help would be welcome." Stella grabs a small clay lamp from the wall and lights it with a whisper. It bursts into cheery flame that doesn't let off the thick smoke that oil lamps typically do, and Stella then consecrates the light and tries to draw on Helior's power to transform the flame into a healing power. She is unable to grasp Helior's power, but Angrad is not put out. She pats Stella's arm and tells her not to worry about it, age comes for us all. Angrad then compares her to the previous lightbearer, Olwinn. She invites Stella to come back anytime if she wants to hear stories about him.

Esme has been spending more time than typical in the Chronicle, consecrating her shield. Treasa puts her large stature to use, helping plow the fields and putting her small experience with husbandry to help with caring for the animals. Throughout she worries, thinking of the bandits in the north that had threatened Stonetop. She surveys the defences in the town and finds them wanting. Esme had previously sent out messenger birds to the northern homesteads and the larger settlements, asking if they had any run-ins with a group of bandits. Some of the homesteaders replied that they had encountered the group, but no serious encounters so far. There have only ever been 3 or 4 bandits seen at a time, but they give off a dangerous aura. The bandits always say there are more of them though. Esme inquires deeper about the amount of food stolen, and while the farms in the area are not large they have been taking enough food for maybe 10 people?

One day a visitor comes to the Chronicle and coughs politely at the mouth of the cave. Esme finishes the last stanzas of her song, then grabs some pieces of bread and cheese as she believes in hospitality. Its Shan at the door, who inform her that Murdoch is requesting her presence for an elders meeting. Esme thanks Shan for the message and trades the bread and cheese for a small sweet and gives it to Shan. Old Esme takes the time to point out one of the stories on the wall of the cave, connecting it to one of Shan's ancestors. Shan receives the information thoughtfully, but seems to be more shy than normal. Perhaps she is still contemplating the consequences of Cayu's incident in the forest. Esme goes up the stairs, she is old and takes her time but doesn't need to stop to rest. She finds Treasa at the low wall and lets her know that the elders are meeting.

On the way Esme shares what she learned about the group of bandits. They go to Murdoch's cottage, arriving to find most of the other elders already present, in addition to Merwyn's son Kinbel. Murdoch starts by saying "We may have a situation". Honoured Cutha gripes "what now...". Kinbel shares that Flossy, one of the two horses in the village, is showing signs of serious sickness and it is almost time for plowing to start. Stella may be able to help, but if she can't there isn't much we can do but wait and see if she gets better. Esme suggests going to the Hillfolk for help, they have forgotten more about horses than we ever knew. The problem is how to convince them to help. Perhaps a cart of food, or other non-perishable supplies. They discuss further, talking about other options. Marshedge would have a horse doctor, but its 10 days each way. Flossy might not make it in that time, or might pull through on her own. The council of elders decides that if Stella cannot help, then the Hillfolk are the best second option.

After discussion completes, Esme brings up another piece of business. She proposes that the forest should be avoided by small groups, less than 5 people, as the Fae they encountered is probably looking for revenge. Cutha speaks up, he has been thinking about this as well. Wickla come to him and suggested that some iron amulets, blessed with what power of the gods they have, could help protect the children. He also pushes back on the group restriction on the forest, we will need hunters and trappers more than ever if planting is going to be slow this year. They eventually settle on pairs, as too many people gets in the way of hunting and trapping and introduces large inefficiencies.

Wasting no time, the elders go to find Stella and enlist her help with Flossy. They find her at the shrine of Helior in the pavilion of the gods, cleaning and polishing the stone to a shine. They approach her as a group with a grave demeanour, asking her if she has ever used her healing powers on a horse before. Stella replies hesitantly that she has not used her powers on any animal before, but goes with them anyways to give it a try. Stella takes a few moments to gather a good light source and draws one of the sacred relics from its somewhat hidden home. On the way Stella is unconfident and anxious, Esme notices this and gives her shoulder a squeeze and sneaks her a small candy with a wink.

They arrive at the barn, Bitey and Flossy in their usual stalls. Bitey eyes the group warily and Flossy looks gaunt and unwell, hanging her head low to the ground. Flossy looks up at their approach and Esme leads the elders in a gently hymn to calm the horse and aid Stella in her work. Stella slowly approaches the horse slowly, not having much experience with animals, whispering to a torch to light and consecrate it. She draws on Helior's power and this time the connection is formed with strength. The disease in Flossy manifests as a darkness that pushes back against the healing light and Stella has to put effort into burning it away as much as possible. The song of the elders helps lift her up and support her. By the time the invocation fades and the flame of the torch gutters out she feels like she was able to deal with a good chunk of the disease, not fully curing Flossy but at the very least buying her some additional time.

Treasa goes to find Soren at his still and announces herself. Soren offers her a taster of his current batch in a small clay mug, asking for her opinion. She swirls it in her mouth, commenting that it is still young but will make a decent batch with age. She then asks Soren if he knows any of the Hillfolk who would be able to treat a sick horse. Soren thinks for a moment then says "Garnuss would be the person. I have never seen a tribe with healthier horses! There is one small snag, we didn't exactly part ways on good terms. I caused a ruckus and startled the horses, a few of them panicked and ran off. I'm sure it took them some time to round them all up, and Garnuss would not appreciate that I put them in danger." They discuss options to make a peaceful overture to smooth over the grudge and decide on bringing a quality cask of whiskey and some treats for their horses. Finding the tribe is the difficult part though. Traditionally, when Stonetop wants to trade with the Hillfolk they light a fire atop Titan Bones. A small group would be best, with some small trade goods.

Treasa puts the word out that a short expedition to trade is being planned. She is leaning on a fencepost outside Kiva's house at the center of the village. Kiva steps out, bags under her eyes and lights up a tobacco pipe. Treasa approaches and lets her know about the expedition. Kiva says she has spent the last day hunched over her books, some fresh air might do her good. Also

the Hillfolk have deep oral traditions, she wants to ask them some questions. Rua has been tailing Treasa while she spreads the word. Treasa initially ignores him but eventually sighs and asks him if he wants to come along. He answers with an enthusiastic "Yes!" but she follows up by asking him why he wants to go. He answers "Well the vibe has been weird here this season, I want to get out of the village for a bit." Treasa goes to find Eliam to ask him along as well. She finds him chopping wood and joins him for a moment to speed the work along. After some time Eliam asks her what she needs. Treasa explains the upcoming expedition and says that she has a explainable hunch that he should come along. He agrees to come along saying "It's been a while since I walked the maker's road, and it doesn't do any good to ignore a hunch."

While they are preparing, Esme finds Soren while he is leaving the graveyard having just finished visited his parents. Esme remarks that she has noticed a change in him, being more serious and somber, and she sees it as an improvement. Soren shares that the mood in the village has been down, and speaking aloud to his parents helps alleviate the burden a bit. Esme then tells him that people look up to him and listen to his stories, and asks him to keep an eye on the group since he is seen as a leader. Soren feels pressured by this and thanks Esme for her words. As they part ways Esme says that Treasa is reliable, he can lean on her.

Session end!

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