Session 003 - Cultists

The rats prove to be no threat as Thaniel quickly dispatches them with a single swipe, turning them into piles are contorted flesh and hides. The group continues to investigate the remaining houses, finding a trapdoor under rubble that seems to be locked from the inside. With no way to open it, a quick attempt is made to cover it again before they take shelter from the storm in the house they first entered and prepare for the ritual. Opalneria draws the ritual circle on the floor while Kat places the candles along the edges of the circle as Opalneria instructs. With a final check, Opalneria begins the ritual while the others take points throughout the building to look out for any interruptions.

After some hours, a child's voice calls to them and asks to play. They are unable to identify where the voice came from but the Austere recalls hearing this voice before in Riverton during the night. He surmises that it is an `Attic Whisperer` before the form of a skeletal child phases through the wall, proving him correct. When Kat answers the child but saying it is too wet outside and too cramped inside to play, the child begins to sob creating an unnerving aura that attacks their consciousness and stupefies them and subsequently interrupts the ritual as Opalneria falls to her knees.

Athe and Thaniel agree to play with the child, who chooses Laila for their name since their original name has been lost to time. Athe and Thaniel lead Laila to one of the houses where they had found an old `Varisian` nursery rhyme book and begin reading it aloud. Opalneria, the Austere, and Kat, meanwhile are recomposing themselves and discussing what they could do with the ghost. Before a final decision is made, Thaniel returns to tell them that he and Athe are going to play Hide-n-Seek with Laila.

Laila leads the two to her favorite hiding spot, the locked trapdoor that they had found previously. After learning that they cannot phase through objects like Laila, she phases through the trapdoor and unlocks it from inside. Athe and Thaniel descend the revealed stairs after Laila and encounter a large expanse of worked stones making many hallways and rooms. They promptly return to others and tell them about what they found while descending again with everyone.

In the first room they encounter, they find two skeletal warriors playing a game of cards (Golarian Uno). The Austere confidently strides up to them and speaks with them in `Necril` before joining them in playing for a round. The others join the Austere and the guards in the room. Athe surveys the room and notices banners depicting a rose growing from the blood-soaked ground. She remembers the image is often used for followers of `Milani the Everbloom`, patron mother for those that fight oppression. Before they go to explore more of the place, the guards warn them that most of the other guards are less welcoming.

They proceed down the connected hallway and meet Jon, one of the missing villagers from Riverton. He tells them that he is here willingly and he, along with the other villagers, are being

trained so they can protect themselves. Kat acknowledges that it's a good skill to learn and that everyone should be free to protect themselves and those they value. With a few more words, Jon directs them to their leader, `Eva`, that they can find down the hallway opposite the direction they came from. They thank him and make their way towards Eva while Jon returns to his bed to rest.

Passing the guards again, they look down the largest hallway and spy a large contingent of skeletal warriors lining the walls. Not wanting to risk anything, they proceed past and go down the hallway towards Eva. Athe lags behind, cautious of any potential threats and not wanting to reveal their full hand as of yet. Thaniel approaches a closed door to knock and easily hears part of a conversation between. Unperturbed, he knocks and gets them permission to enter. Inside the room, they meet Eva and another disheveled woman that she had been speaking with. Two skeletal guards stand at attention to their right. When they are asked how and why they are here and answer that they had been following a ghostly child, Laila phases through the wall behind Eva and makes herself known. Eva quickly hits her with a magical blast of acid that reduces her to a pile of corroded bones.

After speaking with Eva some more, she leads them further inside and into a large circular room where multiple villagers are fighting against bears while some hooded figures watch from the perimeter. Eva explains that they are one of many sects that have been training villagers to protect themselves from cruel and oppressive governors. She reveals that they have finished training before turning towards the villagers and saying, "It's time to go home." The villagers immediately stride out the room and through the hallway. The group receives permission to look around a bit more and agree to let the other villagers to know that it's time for them to go home. Backtracking to where they first encountered Eva, they use their potion of book theft to copy a letter addressed to Eva from someone named `Lillith`.

They find the disheveled woman they had seen earlier in a storeroom doing inventory. Kat talks her up while Athe sneaks in and grabs a ring that caught their attention. While Athe regroups with Opalneria, the Austere, and Thaniel to identify the ring, Kat learns that the woman's name is `Irene` and that she is quite incensed with Governor Karim for the excessive amount of time for him to review her mercantile application just to deny her. Kat offers to look through her stock of rugs if they meet again when she is a merchant. Worried that the returning villagers will immediately attack the governor when they return, they group hurriedly go to Jon and let him and the other remaining villagers know that it is time to go home. As if in a trance, he agrees and they all make their way back to Riverton.

On arrival, the villagers return to their houses while the group go directly to the governor. They reveal that they have successfully brought the villagers back but they have reason to believe they may destroy the Riverton in a similar way as `Novoboro` to the north had been destroyed. Kat convinces him to stay in Riverton and solve the problem instead of running from his station and being governor of nothing. After being paid but before they manage to leave, the governor tells Kat that they've received a missive rewarding any information about the missing person, Katerina Silverwing. Kat warns him to weigh his choices carefully before she leaves and waits for the others to join her. Opalneria decides it is time for her to depart and meet up with her friends again. She hugs them each before they all bid fare wells and safe travels.

As they move through the town, Athe questions Kat about her conversation with the governor. Kat promises to answer before avoiding the conversation and warning Zogla about the villagers and

their fear of what might happen. She reveals that she has family up north where she might move if things go poorly. Entering the inn, they find the seats filled with many of the returned villagers. Worried about their safety they agree to spend the night with Thorn. Athe discretely leaves a note with the inn keeper to warn him before they return to Sanctuary and spend the night consoled by the warmth of the Thorn and the pups.

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