

## Dark Dice, Chapter 11 - Scars

### Travis

The team continued their journey north through the ever-changing colors of the Roaming Forest. As the team passed the next hour of travel they'd been awake and traveling for 12 hours straight... Bodies sore and weak from the day's encounters, they strongly felt the affects of fatigue upon their bodies (not in a game-mechanics sense just yet but in a cinematic sense), and it was shortly after, this point in time that they noticed a cocoon, suspended five feet in the air, some 20 paces off the path. The cocoon contained a head at the bottom side belonging to Flygia, the blood gone from her face, a pallid complexion.

### Peter (Soren)

(a mix of seriousness and 'we need to rescue her') Five feet. That's pretty high for dwarves I guess... I think I can shoot the cocoon down.

### Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

*Well, we can't step off the path, but she seems fine out there. I mean we need to, to discuss the really obviously thing. She may be...*

### David (Iaus)

I did tell you something happened in those tunnels.

### Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

*Yeah.*

### David (Iaus)

She tried to kill me. We were fine, and then she just stabbed me, very nearly killing me.

### Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

*I know, we, we had to deal with it but. She stepped out of that forest: no weird fog appeared, no weird mist. And she didn't get teleported back with us, and we know we can't step off the path and she's twenty paces out. Even if we managed to get her down, someone's got to go get here. I mean, I might have some sort of magic to bring her here.*

### Eypór (Sindri)

I grab a tiny pebble from the path and chuck it at the cocoon... (shouting) Flygia!

### Travis

The stone struck the body of the cocoon, swaying it slightly. Flygia now needed to roll a D20.

### Kessi (Flygia)

15.

### Travis

Flygia remained unconscious.

### Hem (Speaking as Rowena)

*Sung: Wait a minute, wait a minute. It doesn't matter how bad you feel, with these words you*

*I'm gonna heal.* -And I'm gonna cast cure wounds on her, level 1. 8 Healing.

**Travis**

Flygia exploded outward in a mass of worms, beetles, and maggots. Which...

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Argh!*

**David (Iaus)**

(disgusted) Ugh!

**Eypór (Sindri)**

(disgusted) Awe..

**Peter (Sore)**

(disgusted) Ugh..

**Travis**

Which fell onto the ground and quickly scattered, chittering in different direction.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

I, I turn around covering my face.

**Kessi (Flygia)**

Am I awake now?!

**Travis**

Flygia could not hear their calls of disgust or vomiting, no. We are left to assume that she is still meditating on a path about 45 minutes ahead of the party...

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

I just turn around and cover my face. I just. Nah-uh

**Peter (Soren)**

(disgusted/upset) Alright good to know, let's ugh, let's get out of here.

**David (Iaus)**

Well that (vomit)... Ugh... That tells you what I think about her.

**Travis**

The team collectively failed their sanity saving throws, increasing their stress by 10 and shaking their trust in their senses.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

Oh I'll take the damage, I'm not even gonna, do I'll take that. That's grim.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

That wasn't Flygia, that was one of the tricks to try to, catch, catch us off the path.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*But now if we do meet her, we're not going to be able to trust it's her. Anyone we meet from this point.*

**David (Iaus)**

Welcome to my world.

**Eyþór (Sindri)**

I think most of us didn't trust her anymore after the incident.

**Peter (Soren)**

To clarify, Iaus did attack her.

**David (Iaus)**

I did not!

**Peter (Soren)**

From my perspective it looks like you were even using Father Westpike as a human shield.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*It doesn't matter we...*

**David (Iaus)**

I did, no I hadn't even pulled anything out! I, I was going to not fight her at all and never struck back.

**Peter (Soren)**

Then why was she wounded?

**David (Iaus)**

She was like that when she came back from the other side of the stones-oh. Nevermind, I realize how crazy that all sounds now saying it aloud.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*I saw it. I saw your hands stuck in the stone. We can't trust her, if we, even if we do meet her again. Even if that isn't her.*

**Eyþór (Sindri)**

Whoever gets the unfortunate task of staying up with her, keep an eye out. Don't turn your back.

**Peter (Soren)**

We all know how much I like to sleep walk and stab people in the chest. So trust is thinning, all around.

**David (Iaus)**

I'm maybe going to suggest that when we do go to sleep, we do it as a two and a three?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*I mean, Soren it's, it's not your fault we can't trust you, you understand that right?*

**Peter (Soren)**

I hope so.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Ok, so that leaves two people who can't do a watch. And that leaves three of us.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Can we put two people we don't trust on watch together?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*We can't. We can't have you both on watch. We can't do that.*

**Peter (Soren)**

Fair enough.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

This is a problem for when we sleep. Let us keep moving and hopefully find Flygia.

**Travis**

Rowena, who held the cursed map, moved to lead the party.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*We can't go anywhere but this path so there's no point having the map out, let's not make ourselves more insane.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Rowena get behind me, I'll, I'll take the front.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Well I'm pretty sure this path is wide enough for two of us.*

**Travis**

And so the team continued on for another half hour... And with Soren in the middle of the party, staring at the backs of Rowena and Father Westpike, silently fidgeting with his bleeding dagger, his grip on reality deviating further and further, he required a perception check.

**Peter (Soren)**

19.

**Travis**

As he noticed a shadow, moving across the edge of his vision, immobile when he looked directly at it... It was his own shadow... But Soren was smart, smarter than a mere shadow, and he was able to trick it into a moment of laxity, looking quickly enough at it to see what it was doing...

**Peter (Soren)**

(mumbling quietly to self) Stupid shadow.

**Travis**

Soren was able to witness his shadow rise up from the ground, the shadow of their shared dagger clear in its hands, poised to stab Rowena in the back... But as it saw Soren notice it's bold action, the shadow turned to face him and silently laugh before a blink made it vanish... Soren reasoned that he couldn't have seen his shadow because... Because in this lighting they're right beneath you... He stopped for a brief moment, acting as if he dropped something and violently stabbed his shadow for a few moments until he's earned the attention of the rest of the party.

**Peter (Soren)**

(heavy breathing fading to normal breathing as Soren stabs his shadow violently a half dozen times) (to party, gradually coming to tears) I um... And I'm so embarrassed to say this, but um... I might just be a little low on sleep but I think I just saw my shadow threaten to stab you. And then it looked at me in a most unpleasant manner. Just watch me and my shadow as we go along if you wouldn't mind. I also think I saw something beckon me towards the trees again.

**Travis**

The faint light faded back behind the trees in the distance before the others could spot it.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*(super caring as his psyche is damaged) Ok, how about this, how about we all just hold onto each other? So that if you think you're about to go attack someone I'm... I'm not saying me, but if, if I feel your arm going to pull a dagger out and stab someone else then I'll, I'll know it in a second and pull you back. What we've got at the moment is clearly not working. And also you need to feel safe too.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Are you suggesting we hold hands?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Umm, yeah. At least then we know that the person we have hold of is person we can trust because they've not disappeared or gone on us and we can check other and make sure we're not about to stab each other or, or, or run off madly into the distance. This is like an improved version of the buddy system, I don't think we have much choice right now. And also randomly stepping off the path and disappearing, I didn't know where I was going when I jumped off the path. If I was holding on to you, I would have gone with you too.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

You're right. I grab Rowena's hand and look at the Iaus and Soren.

**Peter (Soren)**

Absolutely let's stay close and stay on the path. Cuddles? Anyone? Iaus?

**David (Iaus)**

Sure, why not... (sigh) We've gone from rugged independent types to the Wizard of Oz in like 10-seconds...

**Eypór (Sindri)**

You're just upset because you're not holding my hand.

**Travis**

The team traveled that way, hand in hand, for another ten minutes before they could see a figure up ahead, slow at first but gaining speed in a sprint towards them.

**Peter (Soren)**

It looks too small to be Flygia.

**David (Iaus)**

(disbelief, so happy) It couldn't be... Barrin?!

**Travis (As the Silent One, as Barrin)**

A young boy garbed in simple clothes ran at full speed toward the party, tears in his eyes. "Daddy, Dad!". The boy looked exhausted and tired but continued as his pace despite the condition.

**David (Iaus)**

It's my son!

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Iaus, it might not be.*

**David (Iaus)**

I know it might not be, but for the time being, let's... -let me at least hope.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I approach quickly to the small thing running towards us. Does it look like a dwarven child to me?

**Travis**

This was definitely a dwarven child of around 10 or 12 years old. Light stubble was already lining his face and though physically young the creases around his eyes spoke of hardships unspoken. His clothes and feet were covered in a mix of dirt and mud, his hair was matted and smeared as well, but he ran to give Iaus a big embrace that none could find the strength to step between.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I take a step back and I'm like, intently studying the situation.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

Me too.

**David (Iaus)**

Barrin, is it really you?

**Travis (As the Silent One, as Barrin)**

*"Of course, who else would I be? I escaped the cultists. -Kicked one of 'em in the nuts!"*

**David (Iaus)**

That's my boy.

**Travis (As the Silent One, as Barrin)**

*"So why are you here?"*

**David (Iaus)**

I came looking for you!

**Travis (As the Silent One, as Barrin)**

*"You did! Oh gods-be-damned! I knew you'd come! That so-, They took us, they... I think they used magic or something I only remember being in bed, and then in the woods. We were walking and walking and there were so many of them, the bad men and women. There was no opportunity to escape until just about 10 minutes ago. They've got my friends still... Maybe about six hours that way."*

**David (Iaus)**

Six hours? But you said that. -Ah... -oh no it's nothing. I'll let the others think about that. Come here. -I'll give him another hug.

**Peter (Soren)**

You saying the others and the children are just up ahead, but also six hours ahead. Yet you just escaped a few minutes ago.

**Travis (As the Silent One, as Barrin)**

*"Getting back is a lot faster. It's after you get through the gates that it gets more difficult to go back."*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Did the people who had you captive tell you that?

**Travis (As the Silent One, as Barrin)**

*"No. we've been walking for days though. And I passed all the places we'd walked in minutes."*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Bright child you have there.

**David (Iaus)**

Yeah, I know. Gets it from me.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

How many of the, how many of the children have survived this far? Do they have all of them?

**Travis (As the Silent One, as Barrin)**

*"They... -not all of us no. At the gate, the, the big one outside in the mist, before we went underground. The big scarred guy killed Gilly."*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

The scarred guy?

**Travis (As the Silent One, as Barrin)**

*"but he had a very important question..."*

**David (Iaus)**

(a bit emotional) Can I... Shit... Can I just make sure that this is actually my son?

**Travis**

As Iaus leaned back from the hug to take a better look at his son's face, rolling a 17 for perception, he could see nothing visibly wrong with his son's physical appearance, but the expression on Barrin's face was one he'd never seen before, something... sinister.

**David (Iaus)**

Oh bollocks. (sound of being stabbed) Ugh...

**Travis (As the Silent One, as Barrin)**

*"Feeling without a body. Yearning without a soul. Do you seek him?"*

**Travis**

The hairs on Iaus' neck rose as blood trickled from his chest, cutting open the wound that Flygia had created not more than a day ago.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Ooph.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*(energetic) ... Stay where you are, you're not going to get far! And I'm casting hold person on that little cretin.*

**Travis**

The creature pulled the knife from Iaus' chest, an ornate dagger, before dashing quickly off the path and into the woods with a delighted laughter that twisted into the horrid shriek. As it fled the boy grew taller more emaciated, it's clothing melding into its flesh, but the spell not taking hold over form of the Silent One. Those who followed its path noted the three glowing orbs staring back at the party, delighted, before vanishing fully beyond view, leaving the team in a defeated silence... His will breaking, Iaus gained 25 stress damage as he remained in place, kneeling, quietly shaking, a father on the edge of tears... Rowena and Soren glanced around the team, verifying that the immediate threat had ended.

**Peter (Soren)**

(very sad) I'm, I'm really sorry Iaus.

**David (Iaus)**

(shaking) I've... I've... been worse.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

(trying to help the poor man) "Have you?" I'm gonna reach toward his stomach and heal the wound. "By all that is holy please heal this man, show him the light of love, and the warmth of friendship. -Let's just get you talking again... You don't look so well. Tell me something that was worse."

**David (Iaus)**

(shaking/despondent) "A bear... It was definitely a bear."

**Hem (Rowena)**



(sad/confused) Bear? What do you mean?

**David (Iaus)**

(shaking/despondent) “It just came right at us and tore her throat open...

**Peter (Soren)**

Who’s throat?

**David (Iaus)**

(shaking/despondent) Rowena’s. When we found the body she was like that.

**Eyþór (Sindri)**

(trying to help/confused) But she’s... Um... She’s right here.

**David (Iaus)**

(shaking/despondent) It wasn’t a bear... It was me... (louder) It was me I killed her! I was going to kill her.... I’m sorry...

**Eyþór (Sindri)**

(trying to help/confused) Iaus I think you are not well-

**David (Iaus)**

Just shut up and let me explain! I’ve never had family before, never been this close to someone and had them taken away... And put back in my grasp like a gods-damned lure. I’ve endured some pretty horrible shit in my lifetime and I can’t think of a worse fate... So I won’t kill her because out of all of the shitty things that have happened here over the past few days, I don’t want *you* to have to go through that Sindri “Westpike”. Your fucking cousins may be sadistic bastards but you’ve proven to me one thing on this journey and that *you* are not one of them. You have been reliable, you have been faithful, you have been honest, and you are the only one of us who doesn’t seem to have any alternative motives other than to help me rescue the children... my son included...

**Eyþór (Sindri)**

(reasonably confused) You had plans to kill Rowena?

**David (Iaus)**

Yes... And I’m sorry... Despite everything she’s done thus far, she’s decent enough, and I have no plans to harm her anymore.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

(*Quietly, not too snarky*) *You both know I’m right here...*

**Eyþór (Sindri)**

(Cautious) Then... Then I suppose... Then I accept your apology. Pelor teaches redemption and forgiveness and I would be... -You are forgiven for your dark thoughts, Iaus. We all have dark moments, and so long as we do not act upon them, we are able to grow from them. Remember this moment... -Now, let me help you up. You are healed.

**David (Iaus)**

(composing himself) Thank you.

**Peter (Soren)**

Not to be a mood killer, but your promise of no murdering friends extends to me as well, right?

**David (Iaus)**

Let's get going. My son is out there, somewhere.

**Travis**

The team continued walking in a contemplative silence for a while longer, until eventually the shape of a figure meditating in the middle of the road appeared... Weapons at the quick-draw, still on edge, the group edged closer until they were a mere ten feet away from the figure that resembled Flygia.

**Kessi (Flygia)**

Finally, you're back. I've been waiting her the whole time. Where did you go?

**Peter (Soren)**

Apparently walking off the path teleports most of us.

**David (Iaus)**

Flygia, we need to make sure it's really you. (to self) -Perception check, natural 20... -Okay, she looks pretty much the same, except that she's got a tattoo that appears to be glowing slightly. - What's with the tattoo?

**Kessi (Flygia)**

What?

**David (Iaus)**

What's that tattoo you got?

**Kessi (Flygia)**

What tattoo?

**David (Iaus)**

The one on your neck that's glowing.

**Kessi (Flygia)**

This one? I've had it the whole time, what are you talking about?

**David (Iaus)**

Anyone else notice that before?

**Eyþór (Sindri)**

I have no recollection of it but I never gave her... I didn't look her up closely when we met her. I'm assuming that it's some kind of pagan druid magic thing, that tattoo you have on your neck.

**Kessi (Flygia)**

This is from my nights of service with the Darkbloods of Merkiv's Hollow...

**Eypór (Sindri)**  
(sad) Oh.

**Kessi (Flygia)**  
I don't speak of it. I hide it. That is why you did not see it.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**  
*Iaus, are you sure?*

**David (Iaus)**  
I think deep in my memory recalling the *history* of that specific mark... Nat 1, fuck.

**Eypór (Sindri)**  
Ohh.

**Travis**  
Natural 1?

**David (Iaus)**  
Natural 1... Okay, so I'm still pretty sure it's from the Darklands, but I can't recognize it. I've seen my fair share of the Darkland's slave brands, and this has the signs of being one. I'm just not sure which one, so it checks out.

**Kessi (Flygia)**  
And you did not see it when I was in my wolf form...

**David (Iaus)**  
(scoff) Or your crazy murderer form.

**Kessi (Flygia)**  
... People usually don't pay attention to my neck as much as you do.,

**David (Iaus)**  
I happen to have a thing for necks, but you're just not my type.

**Kessi (Flygia)**  
Tall and independent?

**David (Iaus)**  
Female.

**Peter (Soren)**  
(interested) Hm!

**Kessi (Flygia)**  
Ah. That's fair.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**  
*Flygia, we...*

**Kessi (Flygia)**

Yes?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*...when we got put to where we were, they said that we should just keep walking on the path and go straight and if we go off it then really bad shit will happen. So why don't you lead the way. You seem to be here pretty fine on your own, so if you go ahead and we'll, we'll keep following you up. Pathways not really wide enough for three of us so.*

**Peter (Soren)**

Are we officially adding to the buddy system?

**Kessi (Flygia)**

You want me to lead the way, but you didn't even tell me where in the nine hells you went! You just left me here for two hours, or three or however long it was.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*You remember that thing we said about going into the mist makes bad shit happen off the path?...*

**Kessi (Flygia)**

Yeah what happened?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*... We got teleported back to the start, back to where we were. The white tree. That weird creepy little guy that was sort of hung in the tree.*

**Kessi (Flygia)**

So you just walked all the way back here.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Yeah.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Oh we hustled, we did our best.

**Peter (Soren)**

(amused) Actually we all held hands and sang a musical number or two on the way.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

We saw some things that tried to pull us off the path. Illusions and such. Do not trust your eyes while you're here. I believe anything we see until we reach that castle can be dubious at best.

**Kessi (Flygia)**

So we go on to the castle then?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Yup.*

**Kessi (Flygia)**

Good. Let's go.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*You've for whatever reason seem to be safer here than the rest of us, so you should probably lead the way.*

**Kessi (Flygia)**

I'm one with nature, Rowena.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

I, I give her a wry smile, which just hides utter terror.

**Travis**

Flygia grin and wink stayed with Rowena long into the walk, replaying over and over again in her head... Rowena had learned much today, from murder plots to ooze attacks, to bearing witness to some truly horrible events she would rather just forget... It wasn't until approximately 7 additional hours of walking that noticed the slowing pace of Father Westpike, aged, his hands shaking, holes lining his gloves and shoulder from his earlier encounter with the acid.. He'd now been awake for at least 20 hours.

**Kessi (Flygia)**

(cautiously) Up ahead! It looks like an archway.

**Travis**

Sure enough, perhaps a quarter mile ahead stood a large empty stone archway, the path passing directly through it.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Should we camp at the archway ahead?

**David (Iaus)**

It looks nicely inviting, so it's obviously the place not to camp.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*I agree with that.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

It looks like the archways from the tunnel right?

**Travis**

Yes, but not as intricate, it looks like the simpler ones.

**David (Iaus)**

Wasn't there something about time moving differently through archways?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Yeah.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

There was.

**Peter (Soren)**

Yes, time goes slower for those on the other side of an archway so when you pass through, things will change and we'll have to move faster.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

So we camp on the other side. Slower time means more time.

**Peter (Soren)**

No. -If you're.... If you're on this side of the archway, and you look through to the far side of the archway ahead, you'll be watching things move slower on that side. Time dilates and shifts at different intervals here, but the arches are the one constant. We are pursuing the kidnappers, and running to beat the sundial for sure, but the reason we've had so much time afforded to us is because of these archways are slowing them down at every step... I suspect the results are cumulative, so whatever's at far end of these arches may only experience a few moments pass as hours go by on this end. So we'd want to camp on this side to sleep "faster" so to speak, then pursue our enemies through the archway.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*We wanna stay here.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Yes, so should we set up camp here? Everyone fine with that?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Well...*

**Kessi (Flygia)**

I would prefer that.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Any, any part of the pathway is all the same really so it doesn't really matter. Might's well set our beds down here and set a fire, get some food.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Okay, I'm going to sleep right on this particular patch of road. It looks extra soft... Who's going to taking first watch?

**Peter (Soren)**

I will.

**David (Iaus)**

Might I suggest, that lady of bunnies and Soren and Father Westpike have the threesome and me and Rowena take the other watch?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Why don't, why don't we overlap? Just do a series of overlaps, because we're not going to get enough sleep otherwise. So rather than having the troublesome twosome together, we'll split 'em out. Like, Father Westpike and Soren, me and pike, me and lady and then, oh no we don't want to put you two together, do we? Look, I'm I'm young and stupid, I'll I'll do a longer watch. I'll, I'll do double watch with Flygia.*

**Peter (Soren)**

Sure thing. You all get some sleep. We'll take it from here.

**Travis**

Father Westpike and Soren each sat down and made themselves comfortable while the rest of their number prepared themselves for sleep and had no difficult whatsoever finding unconsciousness. What did both men find themselves doing during this time?

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I, ah, uncomfortable way I'm kinda studying Soren. For like probably the first 30 minutes.

**Peter (Soren)**

And I will be primarily looking around for anything coming from the woods, or any sense of danger. And secondarily watching my own shadow.

**Travis**

There would be three hours in this shift...And while Soren began to unconsciously play with the cursed dagger and Father Westpike tried to rationalize the events of the past day in his mind, the two men required constitution saving throws to remain awake.

**Peter (Soren)**

16 looks like.

**Travis**

Both remained awake, sharing a muted hour together, then another, eating from their dwindling trail rations but not sharing a word between them. The bags under Soren's eyes told a story all their own as he stared up at the baleful constellations above and at one star in specific, while Father Westpike looked over the new scars on his hands... Until finally one broke the silence.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Soren, what did you call that star again?

**Peter (Soren)**

I believe it's part of a particularly baleful constellation...

**Eypór (Sindri)**

You had a name for it earlier I believe.

**Peter (Soren)**

Yeah, it's been sticking in my mind somehow. Iretea [eye + re (like **red**) + tea + uh], but I don't remember much more beyond the name and a certain... Elated feeling I get when I look at it. Maybe elated isn't the right word, but it's almost like an adrenaline rush, like I'm expecting something to happen at any moment... Like its very presence dares me to bold actions in the way that a song might call one to a dance they can't remember the steps to... I know there's something missing here and I

feel like I'm a part of it, part of something greater. I feel it's call, and it terrifies me.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

You have very, a very little memory of your past life, right? From before the monster hunts in the Bright Veil.

**Peter (Soren)**

I do. It's always been sort of a strange grey area for me.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Perhaps you were an astrologist? Your fascination with the stars seems to have no end.

**Peter (Soren)**

I'm not sure if the fascination is on my end with them or on their end with me.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

The call of the stars. I spent many nights wondering what the stars really look like. My home town didn't really let you look at the sky. Always covered in fog and smog. I envy you people that get to look at the stars from early age. To wonder about the universe, -the world we live in. I don't know where we're going, I don't know how things will turn out, but I hope the best for all of us.

**Peter (Soren)**

Me as well.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I want to trust you. Can I trust you?

**Peter (Soren)**

Most of the time. I, I can't say 100%. It seems I have a knack for going off.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Well, your honesty is something to be envied. Most people would say yes and just turn away. I thank you for that. I will do my best to get us all through this.

**Peter (Soren)**

I appreciate that, and truly, if it ever comes down to it, if it's either me or the rest of the group, I hope you'll know what to do.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I will keep the group together. And I will get us all out of this, the rest of us that is.

**Peter (Soren)**

Thank you, Sindri.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Thank you Soren. I lean back looking a little bit more peaceful than the first two hours of staring.

**Travis**

During this time, laus Innskeep's dreams were pleasant yet unnerving all the same. He found himself reliving the past few months of his life. However, things were not exactly as he remembered them. laus felt happier, more content. Yes, he remembered the game he used to play, cheating travelers, pilgrims, and adventurers of their coins with his lucky dice, taking from them with each



interaction. He was unsurprised to find himself slyly raise prices, he grinned almost subconsciously as his tail picked copper from pouches of a young dragonborn couple trying on matching sets of armor. He smiled, hellish inner fire almost visible in his eyes as he offered lone travelers a very special discount on the rare items he had locked away in his basement. He only let serious customers down there he told them. Slowly, with strange familiarity, laus watched as he sold them powerful relics at a great discount, patiently waited for them to settle in for the night in the room on the second floor. laus watched as he walked back to the basement, holding a small yellow and brown herb in his hand, staring at it until it began to smolder, burn. laus gently placed the herb into the sealed copper pipe in the basement, and waiting for a few minutes while he chewed grey root and moved his guests to the basement while his son slept. laus was surprised to see who it was this time, unconscious Kordalum dwarves posing as pilgrims, led by Rainar the supposedly noble paladin of Tempus. They were probably searching for the dozens who came before as more would come soon enough, giving laus the gold he needed to help his village prosper. laus embraced the thrilling moment when he sharpened his blades and unfolded his proper torture's kit. The sounds were familiar to his prey and he waited for them to come to before turning around and daring them with a wink. laus' thumb screws had been well prepared and everything put in a very proper theatrical place for their inevitable return to consciousness. He wanted to put on a show, wanted them to feel the fear that they'd made him-... No, best not dwell there... Not tonight.. That would spoil the mood... It was daytime. laus was back in his shop, placing new gear on the shelf, dwarven gear. It had taken some time, but every piece had been thoroughly cleared of any personalization and modified with false crafter's marks, just like the Kordalum had taught him. He was good at this. And he enjoyed being in control... Cracks suddenly began to appear in the memory, the dreams, and laus was not entirely sure if he was looking at his past or future. Then, just as suddenly as the dream started, it ended, and he slept dreamlessly, but not at peace.

#### **Eypór (Sindri)**

Sindri's gonna like let Soren go to sleep and I'm only going to wake up Rowena.

#### **Eypór (Sindri)**

He's sitting down, looking worse for wear. He has his hammer out, and he's polishing it a little bit. And he has Soren's sword to the side and he intends to work on it a little bit this night.

#### **Travis**

What did Rowena do during this time?

#### **Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

I think, I think she's probably like writing like a, probably writing a tribute song to the sister because that's something she's not really had a chance to sit and sort yet, so I think now that they're in a place which is full of nature and magic, and they've just seen a bunch of weird stuff, so it's probably about time I sat and did that. So I think she's probably just sitting there and writing and just having a look up at anything that like peaks off at the side of her hearing or anything or anything such. And she's kind of writing that and looking over at, at Father Westpike who looks somewhat worse for wear?

#### **Eypór (Sindri)**

Tired. Tired into his bones. There's a heavy silence. You can, Rowena can tell there's something if she's at all paying attention to the mood. Father Westpike, who usually tries to initiate conversations with her, is currently like very deep in thought and seems focused on the sword he's working on. I'm assuming he's polishing it with some kind of acid.

#### **Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

I think she's probably noticed. I think she's not only just used to it, but also relying on and if it's not there, I think for her it would be really uncomfortable. *Is everything ok?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Sorry, did, sorry I -my mind was somewhere else. Yes, everything's... no, not everything is fine. Everything is far from fine.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*This is... yeah, I know nothing here is ok, but you seem a little bit more worse for wear. Is there anything I can do?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

It's mostly, I'm, I have to ask you some questions and I need you to be completely frank and honest with me.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Ummm.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

This might change the future of our relationship, whether you are going straight home once we are done with this madness.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

She looks a little bit hurt and worried. *Well, I always try and be honest where I can it's, I guess owe you the truth whatever you ask, but I've got nothing to hide.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Previously you mentioned a man by the name of Sil'Yal, who apparently interacted with your family. Can you tell me anything more about him?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*What do you want to know? He went he left a little bit before I left. I mean what do you want to know about him?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

You left a few months ago.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Yeah, feels like a lifetime but I think it's only been like three months.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

And this man, Sil'Yal, do you remember his last name.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Yeah, it was, it was, he came, he's of Strathmann.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Yeah Strathmann, it's what I feared. It's very strange. Very very strange because this is a man from my past, since I was probably younger than you.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*That doesn't make any sense, he was defiantly human.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

that's the thing, he is human, and as we know they don't last as well as us.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*I know, you, you finally get round to knowing them and they pop their clogs. I mean..*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Not really worth traveling with them usually, they just stop halfway through.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Maybe it was just, I don't know, maybe a son, like name just passed down.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

No that's the thing, Sil'yal didn't have any children, he didn't have a wife as far as I know. And the last I saw him he was lowered, was being lowered into jail. For life.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Well I don't see how he could be the same person. What could I tell you about him. His face is just a mass of scars, he's middle aged.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Well he's undoubtedly seen much hardship since I saw him. He was a friendly faced lad when I met him. A trader back home in Frostiron Mountains.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Traitor?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

No, sorry, a (Icelandic for merchant), a merchant I think is the correct word for them.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Oh, ok.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Sorry, I don't have as much fluency in the Common tongue as I am often credited for it.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*What do you want to know about him?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

What did he do? What was he doing? He... he should be dead, by all accounts, not just because he was lowered into the crag which is a death sentence for anybody, but, the time also.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Well...*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

What was he doing, what did he do with...

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*He was, he was one of the really good friends of... -so this, this guy named Renaxe who was, someone I got involved with, and he was always, you know, -Sil'yal was always pushing for me to follow what I wanted to do and he was a fairly nice guy except for his outward appearance. He always dressed like an adventurer and always had a sharp quip for every occasion. He dealt in relics, and seemed to have connections deeper underground than any clans I personally had met with. -You know, underdark stuff, the great world below the world. -He also had a hatred for elves which he didn't exactly keep well-hidden now that I think it, but... ok, well, it didn't seem... It didn't seem weird at the*

*time and I don't if I knew exactly but... Okay, so he basically set me up with Renaxe, talked him up, and got me to go visit Renaxe. He had really great date ideas, very romantic suggestions, -but on one of my midnight excursions I get home to find him looking through my ledgers, like he'd just totally let himself into my office. I was right pissed but I kept my cool and played the long game, followed him, and watched him talk to some, some, I assume dwarf in a, -in a hood and the garb of nobility but I never really got to see the faces but because I didn't wanna get caught. I didn't say anything to him then, because it was just me, alone, and well, I figured it would be easier to talk to him in the morning with some guards at my side. And, well, he caught me. I don't know how he saw or heard me because I was watching him one minute and he was behind me the next, threatening to tell me old man about what I was doing with Renaxe, threatened to have my name torn from the Clan records. This is the weird bit, I don't, I don't know if what I saw is what I saw or what I heard, but, I just had that weird feeling when he was angry... Like I don't if I know what I was seeing was what I was seeing or if it was just a magic effect I don't know... But it was like he wasn't just man... But after our talk he kind of, disappeared, like he was never really there.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I'm sorry, who was Renaxe? And what was he, what was your dealings with him. If, I understand if you don't want to answer me but this is very important to me.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Renaxe, was a trading partner of, of, of me father and umm...*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

One of those.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Yeah. I didn't know how deep the Kordalum were in at the time, I, I didn't know any of that, I was trying to avoid that like the plague,. But Renaxe was always very kind to me, and well, we got along really well, and, you know how one thing can lead to another and he promised to take me away and marry me and... well me father found out...*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Ohhh.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*... after Sil'Yal disappeared and told me that Renaxe was a, married man with children. And that I'd brought disgrace on everyone and everything in our family, so, he sent me to you to see how living with people like you was not as good as living the life I had.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I'm sorry for your troubles. I wouldn't wish that kind of happenstance to anybody. But to tell the truth I, anybody whose dealing with Sil'yal at this point I believe them not to be of sound mind.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Well, what do you know of him?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I know very little. Well no, I know, I knew a lot of him. What he used to be. A trading man who came to the Frostiron mountains to trade for some metals, rare metals. Crossed by the Kordalum who had infected the political system of my town. Sentenced to death for simply wanting to buy. Lies spread about him. I, I tried to speak out for him, I was too young, nobody wanted to listen to me. And the last I saw him he was screaming for help being lowered into the Crag. He was a trading man, eh taught me many stories. He was the first one to tell me about a sun you can see for 12 hours a day.

Yeah. I don't know if you've ever been to the Western Frostiron Mountains, Westmann's hold. It's deep in the crevice near the Blackstone Forest and the sun doesn't shine there so much. And the few hours of day we do get the sun, there's usually heavy fog and clouds suffocating it out. He told me about places, big empty plots of land where you can see the sun for 12 hours a day, just bathe in it. Something magical to me, at the time.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Well if all you knew, was kinda of darkness, then yeah, a place with nothing but light sounds great, so...*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

At this point, I just kind of wish the sun would set in this forest so we might have any sort of regular cycle.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*It would be nice to see any sort of sky really.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Yes.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Underground's a bit, I mean it's not really that much of a problem, but this weather system's a bit odd. So Sil'Yal was your friend?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Yes. I believe he was actually my only friend when I was young. I was a strange kid, I couldn't really deal well with light Westmann's hold had, so it gave me constant migraines, I couldn't really focus. The only time I could really think was a night, and that's the only time I could meet him, I would sneak out of the time and meet him in his little camp. He'd tell me stories, told me about the old gods and the new. He told me about how to buy the metals, how to work them. And I told him stories about Westmann's Hold. I told him stories of the Crag, I told him stories of the Kordalum and the system.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Oh.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Yes. If only I'd understood how deep and corrupt the system was at the time, I would have warned, I would have told him to go away. It was his sacrifice that opened my eyes to the situation.

**Travis**

Father Westpike stared at Rowena, who looked somehow weaker than just a few hours before... Her sunken eyes catching glints hope as their conversation continued... His eyes also fell to her back, and the mended cloth that once held a cloak.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Rowena, I'm sorry, I am so sorry. Can you please let me see your shoulder? I saw the blood when that cloak ripped from your shoulders and have not treated you to any extent. It's the least I can do to ease your burden.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*No no, it's ok. I mean, these are things I've done, I have to live with them so... I'm ok with that. Besides I've had plenty of sleep. Well.. we're trying to get plenty of sleep.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Neither of us have slept really well since we left, have we?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*No. Neither of us has really settled down at all. Are you gonna go find him? Are you gonna go find your family?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I have to find Sil'yal. I have to find out what happened to him. I have to figure out... this can't be, it's too long... Sil'yal is both the reason I have a wife and why I can't return to her. I have to find him. I have to get some answers. I have to understand what happened in the crag.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Well when we get out of here, we'll go find them. I mean, I still got pull here and there with the clan, they don't know what I got involved in, they just know that I went on a bit of a sabbatical. Maybe, we can find them, maybe we can figure out what happened and get your wife back.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I'm so sorry, I, I don't talk about this but you've clearly taken the wrong idea from what has happened to my wife and my children. I know exactly where they are, I just can't return.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Why not?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Because they'll kill them.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

...

**Eypór (Sindri)**

They will be killed if I show my face in Westman's Hold.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Not if I...*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

-Which is why I have, which is why I have to ask you this, and I'm, I'm very glad to hear we're on the same page here. If I don't manage to return from this forest, from this expedition, you have to return to my wife. You have to tell her I was a good man and I left to protect them. I only got to leave them a letter, I...

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*I'm going to put my arms around him. You don't even have to have asked that. I will go find them, but you're going to get out of here too. Right? There's, there's no reason for you to not get out of here, I mean, we've been walking a bit, our foods a bit low but you there's a chance we can find other things and other people and, don't give up hope. Cause if you give up that then I've, I've got absolutely nothing. If you do that. Alright, so you keep your head up and you keep smiling and you keep doing what you have to do, but you're not. You are going to see her again, one way or another. And I'm, I'm, if it'll make you feel better I promise I'll go find her and your kids and what not, but you are getting out of here. Ok?*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I hope that's true. I hope that's true for both of us. This place is hostile. It screams at me every time I look into the forest stares back at us. The Silent One, the unnamed one, everything here, it wants us dead. I, I've been, my luck is about to run out I feel it. I've been so lucky for so long.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Well, I've said it before, but I don't know how you got on without me before, and I'm here now. So, if your luck is changed it's because I'm here. So you're gonna be more lucky and you're getting out. So, we're just gonna do our best to ignore the Silent One the horribleness that's in here, and we're gonna get those kids and we're leaving.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

We're getting out of here.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Yup. ok. So no more of this misery talk. None of this just in case, I'm to having that "just in case" conversation with you, alright. I don't want that.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

But just in case, you'll stand by your words.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Of course I will. I mean, I don't exactly do a lot of responsibility, I really don't like it but, that's one thing you do have my word on.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

You are in no way, your father's daughter.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

She looks down and just, smiles a bit. *Well, that's all I can hope for.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

When we get out of here, I'm gonna go see my wife. I'm gonna show you my daughter. Show her somebody to aspire to be... other than my wife. -How do I speak? :p

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*I can just say, that maybe we ought to practice that speech before you see her.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

She's knows how bad I am with words. She gets the meaning, not the words. She's a beautiful woman.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*You're a good person, I'm glad I met you.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I'm glad you, I'm glad I met you too. There's truly hope for the future of the Kordalum if more of you, if more like you are being born.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

She shrugs, rolls her eyes like... *you should get some sleep, you look like death warmed up.*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

And I feel like it too.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

*Go to sleep, I've, I've got this. We've not got long left anyway. And if things go wrong, just blame this one on me, I mean that's how it normally goes. Seriously get some rest, you look terrible!*

**Eypór (Sindri)**

He's leaning into the, the shoulder hug you were giving him earlier, at this point, he feels small at this point. Well he feels smaller than he actually is.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

Aww, yeah she'll just keep him around him and just like refuse to let go until he goes to sleep like 'nope you're not doing anything so'. Picking up that acid nope, just put it away get some rest.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Can we please just do one last thing before I go to bed... Just in case I don't awaken?

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

What's that?

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Can we sing the prayer for Tsavorite Cavernsfall? I know it is a sore topic, but I miss her dearly and prayer is perhaps the closest I will ever get to her again...

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

Sure... But this time we'll do a slightly happier version, okay?

**[Funeral Prayer, Happier Version]**

**Eypór (Sindri)**

I'm assuming Westpike at this point is just done. And he's just falling asleep in you, like as you like laying him down, helping him.

**Hem (Speaking as Rowena)**

Yep that's good. I tuck him into his little bed roll, put his nightcap on.

**Eypór (Sindri)**

Alright, alright.

**Travis**

A little dwarf burrito... (cough cough)... I mean - Rowena put her aging cousin to sleep, each of them recovering 15 Stress Damage from their emotional, yet freeing conversation... The watch was only half over, and the according to words carved into flesh – The Greatest Trial had still yet to come...