

Sangfielle 05: The Hymn of the Mother-Beast Pt. 1

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[MUSIC INTRO BEGINS - "[Sangfielle](#)" by Jack de Quidt]

AUSTIN (as NARRATOR): Out past the Ringed City, they say you only get one chance to make a first impression. Here in Sangfielle, we say it a little different: make your introduction good, 'cause it'll likely be your goodbye. It's why every issue of the serialized Almanac of the Heartland Rider starts with a story, reported vividly, but never fictive.

The thing is, stories make for good introductions, especially when they're attached to a collection of data and definition like The Almanac. The course of the stars, digests of successful crop rotations, tables of appropriate enchantments and conjurings—these are dull, sedentary things. They sit on the page, buried in it, dead like a corpse. But a story? A story moves. Literally. You study a diagram, but when a hero rushes from some hellion or ghoul, you *flip* through the pages, reading with speed and vigor. And it is selfish of me to say this, but it is honest: I think that by starting my issues with these stories—these true stories, I remind you—my pages capture some of the energy that you put into turning through. And it is *a hell* of a story this year, let me tell you.

Credit is where credit's due; The Blackwick Group just makes a good subject for matters of adventurous inquiry. They are a motley crew, but cultured somehow—curious in every sense of the word. Just enough like regular folks to make 'em relatable, and just different enough to make 'em mesmerizing. So turn the page and start reading, 'cause I can't wait for you to meet 'em.

[2:33 - MUSIC INTRO ENDS]

AUSTIN: Welcome to Friends at the Table, an actual play podcast focused on critical worldbuilding, smart characterization, and fun interaction between good friends. I am your host, Austin Walker, and joining me today, Andrew Lee Swan.

DRE: Hey, you can find me on Twitter [@Swandre3000](#).

AUSTIN: Ali Acampora.

ALI: Hi. You can find me over [@ali west](#) on Twitter. You can find the show over [@Friends Table](#), and you can find a Star Wars podcast [@More Civilized](#).

AUSTIN: It's also at [Patreon.com/Civilized](#). We took that one so no one else could have it.

SYLVI: Wow!

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. That's right.

DRE: Wow.

AUSTIN: [LAUGHS] This way it'll be assholes you know with it, instead of unknown assholes taking that one and making bad stuff. Also joining us, Sylvia Clare.

SYLVI: Hey, I'm Sylvi. You can find me on Twitter [@sylvisurfer](#), and you can listen to my other show, Emoji Drome, wherever you get your podcasts.

AUSTIN: And Jack de Quidt.

JACK: Hi, you can find me on twitter [@notquitereal](#), or buy any of the music featured on the show at [notquitereal.bandcamp.com](#).

AUSTIN: Today, we are doing the damn thing, we are kicking off our campaign of *Heart: The City Beneath*, an RPG by Grant Howitt and Christopher Taylor, which was illustrated by Felix Miall and edited by Helen Gould and Mary Hamilton, with layout and design by Minerva McJanda. An excellent game. I will probably only use author names going forward, but I wanted to shout out that whole crew because it's a really beautiful book that's been carefully edited and has great art and good layout and everything else.

My goals—which are sort of adapted from a list of tips for running *Heart*, on page 109 of the book—are: instead of planning, ask questions; reuse details and always evoke an atmosphere of wonder, horror, and humanity; build and break tension; pay attention to what the players want, both long-term and short-term; and play to find out what happens.

It's worth saying that the content warnings for *Heart* are—I'll just read this from the book again: "*Heart* is a horror game, and as such, there are some unpleasant things in the text. These include, but are not limited to: violence, drug use, addiction, ghosts, unwanted body transformation, and monsters that used to be people." If there are other content warnings, we will put them in the description of this episode. Please give that a look, just in case there's anything there you want to know about. I will say that—and I said this during our character creation episode—but we did do a lot of talking around lines and veils this season before we started. We knew that coming into something that was even horror-tinged meant stepping into some precarious positions. And so we do, you know, we are kind of aligned internally on the stuff that we want to include and don't want to include. So please know we've had those conversations, and as always, if anyone in the call wants to play the X card or slow something down, please let us know either directly, or through chat, or through a DM, or whatever, and we'll do that.

One more time, I'm gonna reiterate what the season is, just so that people who are hopping on here at the first game of *Heart* can get a quick feel for it. I know that's a little slow; if you've already heard this stuff, just jump ahead until someone else is talking. The long and short is we are playing a season set in this place called Sangfielle, aka the blood fields, aka the Heartland. This is a cursed and strange place at the center of a kind of fractured fantasy world, in which—that used to be conquered by this very powerful empire called Aldomina. Now it's a bunch of other places, and here in the middle of it, this territory, which had once been settled and colonized and turned into plantations and fields, has now begun to rot from the inside. It is haunted by, you know, buried traumas of the past, by presents that didn't get to happen, by futures yet to come, and by just an overall strangeness.

Unlike *Heart: The City Beneath*, we do not have a singular Heart. In *Heart*, it takes a lot of, you know, inspiration from stuff like *Annihilation*, or *Stalker*, or *Roadside Picnic*, where there is like a center point from which weirdness emanates. Here, it's a little more dispersed. We are still using a tier system, in which there are like Tier One, Two, Three, and Four places. Blackwick, the town in which everyone is from, is a Tier One place with some like, Tier Two-ness on its outskirts. But like, there are gonna be more than one place that are Tier Four, that would be very, very—beyond dangerous, beyond—just foolish to even get close to. We'll see if we end up close [CHUCKLES] to those by the end of the season. Who could say?

And so, this is a season about, you know, pulling on everything from Gothic and cosmic horror, to weird west stuff, to just more traditional dark fantasy. Inspirations for us include everything from *Bloodborne* and *Hellboy*, you know, to *Witch Hunter*

Robin and, you know, traditional horror writing. It's a real range. I know, Jack, you've been playing some *Darkest Dungeon* today to get yourself in the mood.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I've been watching some *Deadwood*. We're all around some stuff, you know, listening to soundtracks and everything else to get hyped up for it, so I think given that, we should probably just get into it. Are there any final pre-game questions or anything from anyone?

[PAUSE]

AUSTIN: Alright. So, there's I guess a couple ways we could jump into this. I'm going to try to catch it in the middle a little bit in terms of how in media res we want to be with this. Again, I guess for people who didn't listen, the players this year are playing a group of adventurers, occultists, you know, esoterics, people who have weird backgrounds, who have come to this town called Blackwick, formerly known as Eastern Folly, this place that had been cursed for generations to lose the miners that it has—M-I-N-E-R-S, not O-R-S—who go into a nearby mountainside to mine for *stuff*. They dig, and when they dig, what they hit is veins of, you know, relics from the past, or inventions not yet created from the future. Or just stuff from now, but like, not from here. Like, you'll just get a nice set of knives from Concentus, this kind of big ringed city on the outskirts of town, and it's just like, 'oh, it's in this mountain now. It's ours. Okay, cool.'

And it had been cursed to devour any of the miners inside of it once a generation. That curse was broken, and to be kind of preventative and get ahead of it, the city's kind of vague leadership—as far as we know, there's no mayor, it's just the powerful people in town who people listen to—put out a call for people to come kind of double-check everything. You know? It's like you had a fire in a house, and you've gotta have—you bring in the fire inspector to make sure that, like, the repair job was done right, and that there aren't any other lingering curses. And also just to get ahead of any other weirdness, and kind of ensure that the town doesn't fall apart again, kind of keep riding this positive wave. Your group of adventurers and weirdos is who answered the call.

[DRE LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Some of you have had interactions before. Some of you have not. But you're all kind of part of a loose organization of people who do this

semi-professionally, you know, sort of like having your, you know—you have a card to like, the adventurer's guild equivalent. We didn't ever name that. We'll get there at some point. But there's no hierarchy to that. It's more just like, 'yeah, we're all in the same line of work', you know? Maybe if you go to the fuckin', you know, society club in Concentus, you're all allowed to have one free drink a month or something, you know?

[10:16]

And so, you all answered it, and you were given a spot in town, a place to kind of be your base of operations. I don't know if there's beds there, I don't know if some of you are living elsewhere, but this is your, like—your headquarters. And it is a retail shop that has changed hands many times in the 200 years that Blackwick has existed. Sometimes in the past—and there are remnants of all of these things, right? It used to be a hat maker's, it used to be a wine seller's, it used to be some sort of, you know, music store. All of these businesses have failed, but there are the remnants of each of them, and there is the rumor that this place is cursed in some way.

But that is where you are. And I think that there's like a front, you know, like retail space, there's a back room that is like a storage room, and then maybe like a little side office for just like, someone to sit down and work the numbers or, you know, run the books. And that is your headquarters, and we find four of you here today. The rest of the party is off doing other stuff. This will be a season where we swap around the parties pretty episodically. In fact, episodic is a good way of thinking about this season, I think. There, you know, will probably be an emerging meta-plot, but we're going into this pretty straightforward as like, I want to just do some like, spooky ghost stories and—

[GROUP CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: —you know, fuckin'—you know, *Darkest Dungeon*, *Dark Souls*, *Bloodborne*-y bullshit. So like, we'll see how it goes. In any case—

ALI: Just fightin' some monsters, yeah. [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Just fighting some monsters, solving some mysteries, you know. I was gonna spoil something from this episode, but I won't do it.

ALI: Oh. [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: [CHUCKLES] Because it hasn't happened yet, and it would be spoiling it for you, the players. So where do we find you when someone comes in the door and the bell rings? What are you all doing in this, you know, turned-over retail space that is probably—you probably haven't fully moved into yet? What is our kind of first shot of your four characters? And with that, I'd love to also just get, not only that image, but your name, your pronouns, and your character, like, gist, and also your starting two beats, which are, for—again, for new listeners, beats in *Heart: The City Beneath* are like—they're like objectives that you choose from a list, and you can pick two of them at a time, and when you do them, you—that's how you level up, basically. So who wants to—who has an image in their head first?

ALI: I think that Marn is like unpacking stuff. Like, trying to organize. I don't know. Do we have shelves? What would we have in here? [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally. You tell me. Up to you. You probably have shelves, right?

ALI: You know. There's ghost hunting supplies, and if you're moving into an office, you want to have them organized and displayed in some sort of way. [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Up on the walls, yeah.

ALI: Yeah, so this season, I'm going to be playing Marn Ancura. Marn is a—[LAUGHS] where to start—Marn's gist is that they're a member of the Telluricist Union, which is like an organization of toolmakers and knife-sharpeners and researchers, and Marn has studied a lot, is something that is called Keen within that community, in saying that she has specialization in all parts of that organization, and her goal now that she has done that is to develop a homemade cure for curses. Why not? [LAUGHS]

My connections are that: "One player has been invaluable to my journey so far. What have I learned from them?" And for that, it is Pickman. Marn had to travel a lot while they were a student, so I assume that Pickman and Marn, you know, ran into each other—that Marn was like, 'hey, can you help me get from point A to point B on a train?'

And then my second one is: "Another player character is hiding secrets from you. Why do you suspect that they're doing this?" And my answer for that is Chine, Dre's

character. Chine and Marn are both interested in, like, things that have been touched by the Heart. But Marn is a little bit more studious than Chine is, [LAUGHING] I guess, which leads to some frustration there.

And my starting beats are “succeed at a task that someone else has recently failed to achieve” and “gain access to knowledge that someone has tried to conceal”.

AUSTIN: Okay. Who's next?

SYLVI: I think Virtue, who's my character, is sort of just like—maybe even like sitting on her own suitcase right now, waiting for someone else to be done with theirs so they can help. And like, reading through her notebook, very clearly ignoring that someone is ringing the bell. And yeah, so Virtue is my character. She's a vampire. Her pronouns are she/her. I guess—well, she's a vampire who's already been slain once—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

SYLVI: So she's like, not—not peak vampire right now.

AUSTIN: Mhm. [CHUCKLES]

SYLVI: Should I mention—

AUSTIN: But better than most other slain vampires, who are dead.

SYLVI: Who are dead, yes. Because I am a Deadwalker, which is very exciting. My beats right now are “gain access to knowledge that someone tried to conceal” and “gain favor with a faction that can help you learn more about your goal”. Should I go over anything else, or...

AUSTIN: What were your connections?

SYLVI: Yeah, so my questions are actually the same. Mine is also “someone's been invaluable in my journey so far. What have you learned from them?” And it's Marn, who has sort of been teaching me how to not get killed in the wilderness—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

SYLVI: —I believe is sort of how we described it. Like, I think Virtue describes it as like, “the martial ways of life”. [CHUCKLES]

[ALI CHUCKLES]

SYLVI: Yeah. She's very shitty about it, but it's been nice. For her. And then the person I am suspicious of is Art's character, Duvall, who isn't here. And yeah.

AUSTIN: [OVERLAPPING] Ah, yeah. Well, we can save that for the next time the two of you are in the same party, then.

SYLVI: So look forward to that, listeners.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

SYLVI: That's a teaser.

AUSTIN: Chine, how about you? Or, Dre, talk to me about Chine.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: What's Chine's deal?

DRE: I think right now Chine is probably out back, actually, and is making sure that everything is secure. Like, checking to make sure—

AUSTIN: As in, just like—

DRE: Like, 'hey, is there a way I could easily get through this wall?' Or 'is the lock on this door fucked up?' Or, you know, just like—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Going around the perimeter, checking things out.

AUSTIN: It seems safe as far as you can tell.

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: What is Chine's deal?

DRE: So Chine is a Cleaver. And he uses he/they pronouns. They are human, but as part of being a Cleaver and having the calling of Heartsong, the longer they are a Cleaver, they start to pick up animalistic traits in their appearance. Chine's active beats are "allow something dangerous of the Heart to live when you could have killed it" and "following a long ritual, name the Heart, and only refer to it by this name from now on". The only connection that Chine has now is to Duvall, who's in the other party, but we witnessed a unsettling event at another town previously.

AUSTIN: Right. And you have that Marn one, but it's from Marn to you, not the other way around, right? Yeah.

DRE: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: And that leads us to Pickman.

JACK: Pickman is sitting at—

AUSTIN: P-I-C-K-M-A-N, right?

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Just to be clear? Okay.

JACK: Yes. Not like the Captain Olimar.

AUSTIN : Not like the Ni—yeah. Okay.

[DRE LAUGHS]

JACK: The small—[CHUCKLES] the small leafy creatures.

AUSTIN: I had not even thought of this, Jack, because I had only seen this name written to me—or I originally saw this name written to me so I was like, 'ah, yes.

Pickman.' And then last night Janine was like, 'every time Jack says Pickman, I think of *Pikmin*.'

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

JACK: Of *Pikmin*. Yeah, no. I also thought about this early and I made the decision to just be like, 'fuck it. Let's go.' [LAUGHS] You know, like?

AUSTIN: Yeah. You're allowed. Yeah.

JACK: We get to decide. This character is called Pickman. Pickman is a very large, goat-headed Shape Knight, which is a kind of—a knight that hunts trains and deals with the cursed trains of Sangfielle. And right now, she is sitting at the front desk. She is rolling a load of cigarettes, and laying them out in front of her on the front desk. And just kind of sitting next to the bell and like, watching wearily outside. My beats are "to be rendered helpless in the Heart for an hour or more" —this is not something Pickman is anticipating as they are, you know—

[ALI CHUCKLES]

JACK: —[CHUCKLES] meticulously rolling cigarettes right now, and "see something from your dreams in the real world".

AUSTIN: [CHUCKLES] Perfect. And can you remind me of what those dreams are?

[20:02]

JACK: Yeah, totally.

AUSTIN: Or remind the listener.

JACK: So, Pickman has been—Pickman has a lot of recurring dreams, but there are three recurring dreams that happen a lot lately. The first is a tallow candle the size of a tower that is burning. Not burning like a building burns, burning like a candle burns. The second is a crowd of between 100 and 200 people carrying a huge sack on their shoulders and pitching it into a massive hole that they have dug for it. And the third is an image of a hand turning on what we, as the audience, know is a

television, but Pickman has no idea what it is. And on the television, kind of dimly illuminated, is the figure of an old woman eating honeycomb from a knife.

AUSTIN: Just great things.

JACK: So, just nice, normal dreams.

AUSTIN: Also, just to be clear, no one—you don't know what a television is. It's a weird glow box, right? Like, with an image on it, which is weird.

JACK: Totally. I mean, I think Pickman probably thinks it's some—like a strange window.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: Or, they're smart, they're like, 'this is a piece of technology that is doing something that I do not fucking know what it is.'

AUSTIN: Right, yeah, totally. Alright, so—actually, wait. No one told me what you looked like?

[GROUP LAUGHTER]

AUSTIN: [LAUGHING] No one said, 'this is what I'm wearing.' I didn't get a shoe breakdown, I didn't get a fashion update, and I know that y'all have clothes on, so...

[LAUGHTER CONTINUES]

AUSTIN: I need to hear what your characters look like. Who has like, a really good idea in terms of what their—what your vibe is—what your fashion vibe is?

ALI: I can—I'll just go, 'cause I can just bang this out. Hi.

AUSTIN: Thank you. Thank you, Marn. Yeah.

ALI: So, Marn is a—isn't like a human, they're like a rodent person.

AUSTIN: Yeah. A little guy, yeah.

ALI: [LAUGHS] And the other day, you asked me, like, what color are Carpana fur?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: And I was like—it like, took me a minute to realize that you were asking me 'cause I could just say anything. So I was thinking that like—[LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: [LAUGHS] Yeah, you like, thought I was—you treated it like I had pop-quizzed you.

[ALI AND SYLVI LAUGH]

AUSTIN: As if I had been like, 'hey Ali, quick. Give me the right answer.'

ALI: I was like, 'you've seen a capybara, right? They're like reddish, I guess?' And then I was like, 'oh, wait.' So—[LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: 'Oh, wait.' Yeah.

ALI: I'm using this opportunity to say that I think like, among the race, you see the like, fur variation that you see with like, guinea pigs.

AUSTIN: Sure.

ALI: Where like, sometimes it's a little bit of the color over the eye.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Sometimes it's like a face situation, but then the rest of their body is one color. Sometimes it's just like, a whole mix.

AUSTIN: Hell yeah.

ALI: I think Marn, herself is a little bit more like—like what if a capybara was a siamese cat?

AUSTIN: Ohh. Okay. Sure.

ALI: [LAUGHING] Yeah, so, like—

JACK: 'What if Han Solo was Beyoncé?

ALI: [LAUGHS] So, yeah, like a little bit of black fur on the nose that like, goes up their snout towards her eyes. Like, black forearms, black—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: —like, calves.

AUSTIN: Wait, do carpana have tails? Or like, little—

ALI: I don't think so.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: They have—no, no.

AUSTIN: 'Cause capybara don't have tails, really, they just kind of have butts.

[SYLVI AND ALI LAUGH]

ALI: [LAUGHING] Instead of—yep, it just ends. Instead of—

AUSTIN: It just ends.

ALI: [LAUGHING] Like a, yeah—

JACK: [CHUCKLES] The animal just stops.

ALI: Yeah. They have like, the ear variation, but not the—I don't think that they have tails. Marn's ears are shorter, and I think that they're also like, black on the tips. I've—you know, I've been struggling with fashion for Marn. But I—you know, I keep going back to like, the [LAUGHING] cowboy aesthetics.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: You know. A lot of button-down shirts, the hat, most of the time. I think that they're—

AUSTIN: You have suspenders? Are you a suspenders person?

ALI: Suspenders, yeah, I think a suspenders person.

AUSTIN: Okay, okay.

ALI: I think I'm wearing, like, not a cowboy hat, but like a—one of those, like—what are those like—[LAUGHS] It's like a cowboy hat, but it's like, flatter. Is it just called a flat cap?

AUSTIN: A cowboy hat but flatter, like a—

ALI: Just like a, you know.

AUSTIN: No, a flat cap is like a newspaper boy cap, sort of.

ALI: No, yeah, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: That's not what you mean. You mean like a—

ALI: I'm looking at like a—is that like a boat hat? Isn't that what I'm thinking of?

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. That's—yes. Yes. Yes. Because I describe a character in my notes as having a—there's a character in my notes, who I don't think will come up in this session, who I think has a boat hat on. So—so, yeah, that's...

ALI: Okay, yeah. Marn has one of those. Holes for the ears. [LAUGHS]

SYLVI: Very important.

AUSTIN: Holes in the brim or in the interior? In the cylinder, or in the—or on the brim itself, or both?

ALI: I think on the brim itself, because the interior—like, [LAUGHS] you think of like the flatness of a person or like a rodent's head, right? And you think of the like, internals of the hat sitting against—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: —that part of it. And then—

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: The ear holes would be like, right where the rib meets the—the circle.

AUSTIN: I have a follow-up question. Isn't this going to mean you get your—that you get sunburned ears?

ALI: [LAUGHS] That's what—you know, wear sunscreen.

AUSTIN: It's the fur. Yeah, okay.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Yeah, okay. Sure.

ALI: But yeah, that's the gist. Maybe wearing like a necktie—not like a necktie, but like a handkerchief tied around her neck.

AUSTIN: Like a neckerchief. Yeah.

ALI: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: That's a good look.

ALI: Gloves. Boots.

JACK: You look like you're ready for a little expedition.

ALI: [LAUGHS] I mean, that's what I do.

AUSTIN: Yeah, do you have like a tool belt, or a pouch, or like a bag?

ALI: [OVERLAPPING] Oh, for sure. Yeah, this is a multiple belts situation.

AUSTIN: Yeah, okay. Love it.

ALI: I think that like, a lot of her equipment is like, in one of those like, roll-up bags.

AUSTIN: Mm. Mhm.

ALI: 'Cause those are just great. [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Yeah, those are good. Those are good.

ALI: And that has its own like little belt notch situation—

AUSTIN: That's like, hanging there.

ALI: And you attach that to like, a real belt and then—yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: And that's like, you get equipped to go out and do shit. That—that's when you do that. That makes sense.

ALI: Yeah. Uh-huh.

AUSTIN: Cool. Well, thank you Ali, for jumping in head first here.

ALI: [CHUCKLING] You're welcome.

AUSTIN: Who's up next?

DRE: I can go.

AUSTIN: All right. Tell me what's up with Chine.

DRE: Okay. So, clothes-wise, I think the main kind of articles of clothing for Chine are: they wear a gambeson—I had to discover this is the right word for what I was looking for—which is basically like a kind of padded armor with like, some studs on it.

AUSTIN: Oh, sure. Okay, I've seen these.

DRE: Specifically, his has an extremely high collar, and it goes actually, like, up to his nose.

AUSTIN: Oh. So like, covers—

DRE: So you can't see his mouth, yeah.

AUSTIN: Interesting.

DRE: And his nose is just kind of poking out.

AUSTIN: Yeah, okay.

DRE: Chine's nose is—you know, we talked about how he's like, in the process of kind of becoming more animalistic—

AUSTIN: Mhm.

DRE: So, I—his nose is definitely not, like—notice—eh, it's noticeably like, kind of like more long and protruding, but it's not to the point yet where people will be like, 'hey, what's up with *that* nose?'

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

DRE: You know? And his ears, similarly, are still mostly human-looking, but have started becoming very like, kind of knifelike and upturned.

AUSTIN: Sure. Okay. But not like, floppy or anything. They're still—

DRE: Mm-mm.

AUSTIN: Yeah, okay.

DRE: Yeah. As f—I haven't really thought much of hair. It's probably on the short-er side, but it's very much like, 'I don't know. When I get annoyed by it, I cut it off with a dagger or something.'

[AUSTIN LAUGHS]

DRE: It is not well-kept. The other main article of clothing that he wears is a kind of like, hooded poncho—

AUSTIN: Okay.

DRE: —that at this point has become basically more of like a quilt, just because of all the different things that he's used to like, stitch it back together and patch it back up.

AUSTIN: Right. Sure. Okay.

DRE: And inside of that poncho, he has also stitched like, pockets of various sizes. So instead of carrying any kind of like, bandolier, or like, knapsack, or utility belt, or something, most of the things that Chine carries with him or picks up along the way are kept just inside of this big, kind of flowing poncho.

AUSTIN: That's really fun. That's a good—that's a good touch.

DRE: Yep.

AUSTIN: Alright. Quick and easy.

DRE: Oh, and he's got a—his main weapon is a poleaxe. Specifically—I had to do a lot of Googling about what's the difference between a poleaxe, and a halberd, and a great axe, and all this stuff. As far as I can tell, a poleaxe is 'spear tip on the top-y side—'

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: And then an axe head on one side, and then like a blunt side on the other side.

AUSTIN: Okay, that is—whereas a halberd does not have the blunt side, the halberd has like a poke-y side, right?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's—okay.

DRE: So there's basically blunt, piercing, and slashing.

AUSTIN: All—everything you need.

DRE: If you want to put it in *D&D* terms. [LAUGHS]

ALI: Dang, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, sure. That's fun. Awesome. Is that just like, strapped along your back?

DRE: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Awesome. Alright. Virtue or Pickman, who wants to go next?

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: 'Okay.' [LAUGHS]

SYLVI: [LAUGHS] This is, you know, I don't know where to start here. I think like, the image I have of her here is like—I had to look up the specific like, type of jacket, too—it's like a cape-blazer situation where it like, is like a should—like, you basically hang it on your shoulders. And she's wearing like—I'm trying to stay away from the *Resident Evil 8* vampire lady, as out of character as that is for me.

AUSTIN: No, I understand. I get it. You want to make your own mark on the world this year.

SYLVI: [OVERLAPPING] So she's not like wearing—yeah. She's not like wearing the like—

[30:00]

SYLVI: [CHUCKLES] I don't even know how to describe it—the like, big titty Victorian lady dress or whatever. Like—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. That's what it's called. I'm pretty sure they call it that.

SYLVI: I'm pretty sure that's the technical term.

JACK: They call it that in department stores.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh.

SYLVI: It's fine. So I think she's actually kind of like—I have her in like, high-waisted pants, and like, sort of like a button-up shirt. She wears, like, high-collared clothing, typically, 'cause she has a decapitation scar on her neck.

AUSTIN: Ah, sure, good.

SYLVI: Kind of a thing that makes some people uncomfortable. Or like a necklace or something to cover it. But in this case it's a shirt.

JACK: It's a, 'don't remove the ribbon around my neck, dear husband—'

[ALI CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVI: Kind of? Yeah.

JACK: —and then one day he does and my dang head falls off.

[AUSTIN CHUCKLES]

SYLVI: Pretty much, yeah. So like, there's—[CHUCKLES] one of my—like, my two touchstones for this were like—like some of the like, women's fashion stuff in *Bloodborne*, and then also Brendan Fraser in *The Mummy*. Do you know what I mean by his outfit?

AUSTIN: Yep. Uh-huh.

JACK: Yeah.

ALI: Mhm.

SYLVI: And so this is sort of like, her idea of what an adventurer would wear, a little bit. She's got like—

AUSTIN: I see, so she's dressing up for the part a little bit.

SYLVI: Yeah. Like, it's all too clean to actually have been out in the field, really.

[ALI SCOFFS]

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVI: And then like, she's got like a—instead of a bag or anything, she's got like this, like—the belt that she hangs her sword off of also carries like, her notebook, and like, her spyglass. She's also like, always wearing her like, red-tinted sunglasses.

AUSTIN: Perfect.

SYLVI: And she has black hair. Oh, and gray skin, 'cause she's dead.

AUSTIN: 'Cause she's dead. Yeah, okay. Yeah.

SYLVI: I think that's everything?

AUSTIN: Is it like gray—what type of gray are we talking? Are we—when you say 'gray', are you saying gray the way you would describe a human person's skin as

gray in terms of being deeply pale, or are we all the way into like, 'that's zombie skin'?

SYLVI: I think it's like, not—I don't know if it's all the way zombie skin, but it feels like a little bit more—like, straight-up desaturated in some ways.

AUSTIN: Right, sure. Okay.

SYLVI: Just to sort of tie into the, like—some of the other stuff we've got going on with vampires.

AUSTIN: [INTERRUPTING] Uh, yeah-yeah-yeah-yeah-yeah. Sure. Uh-huh. This adds up to me.

SYLVI: Yeah, yeah, yeah. With some of the stuff we talked about before this.

AUSTIN: Play to find out what happens.

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Did I tell you I found out where the word "mondegreen" comes from today? I hadn't known that previously.

SYLVI: Oh, it's great. It's a very good word.

JACK: It's so good.

AUSTIN: Which is, it is—"mondegreen" as a word is—is now used to mean like, a misinterpretation—or mishearing of like, lyrics, or a phrase, or something. And it's like—

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Do you remember the exact line?

SYLVI: It's when you mis—oh, I don't know the exact thing, I just know the exact—like, the definition was like, 'when mishearing something gives it another meaning', specifically.

AUSTIN: Oh, I found it. It is—it's the end of a poem, or—yeah, it's the end of a poem from a 17th century ballad, where it is—was misheard "they had slain the Earl of Moray and Lady Mondegreen", but what it actually is is "and laid him on the green". But it was misheard as "Lady Mondegreen".

JACK: [CHUCKLING] This new character shows up called Lady Mondegreen.

SYLVI: Here she is!

AUSTIN: Right, well—right, they had slayed the Earl of Moray *and* Lady Mondegreen. They also—Lady Mondegreen was also slayed. Like no, well, no—[LAUGHS]

SYLVI: It just didn't take.

AUSTIN: Ours was. [LAUGHING] Yeah, it didn't take. Exactly. Any other fashion notes here, Sylvi?

SYLVI: I don't think, like—no, I don't think so. Like, shoulder-length black hair—

AUSTIN: [OVERLAPPING] What's up with your sword? Wait, what's up with your—

SYLVI: Oh.

AUSTIN: Maybe we can—maybe we'll get to your sword if your sword comes out. Maybe that makes sense.

SYLVI: [OVERLAPPING] We'll get to the sword. The sword will come up. I'm assuming the sword will come up. [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Yeah, prob—we'll see how it goes. [LAUGHS]

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Who could say? I'll just move my prep over here. Who could say if there could possibly be violence in your future?

[JACK AND SYLVI CHUCKLE]

AUSTIN: Alright. I think that leaves us with Pickman.

JACK: Pickman is a big goat-headed person who is wearing very heavy armor that has been sort of cobbled together. I've been thinking a lot about like, trying to avoid sort of classical steampunk imagery or—

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: Or even just like, medieval or Tudor plate armor imagery in Pickman's armor. And so I've just been thinking about like, this is—we know that this armor is made from a train, from a specific kind of train.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: And I imagine it's just, you know, bolted-together heavy scraps—Conner Fawcett was showing me World War I trench armor.

AUSTIN: Ooh. Sure.

JACK: Which was soldiers in World War I, who at the very end of that kind of era of fighting were kind of piecing together—if you just, let me see if I can find an example. [TYPING] 'World War I trench armor.' But I mention Pickman's armor—

AUSTIN: It's kind of like, ill-fitting. It's kind of like—it's so—from the images I'm looking at, are like, so thrown-together and bulky and round, but not round in an aestheti—not rounded in like, in a nice aestheticized way, necessarily.

JACK: Just—just like, absolutely armor of consequence, or of necessity.

AUSTIN: Right, right.

JACK: Where it's like, 'oh, we might not actually have the pipeline to construct armor in the way that you would like—'

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: '—so here's what you've got.' And Pickman's armor is—

AUSTIN: And also, 'we've left the age of armor, but you know—'

JACK: Yeah, exactly.

AUSTIN: '—you better put something on.'

JACK: 'Well, good luck.'

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: The 'we've been really focusing on trying to armor a tank. You'll meet one of those one day. Good luck.' [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: [LAUGHS] Uh-huh.

JACK: Pickman's armor is a color called British racing green, which is a particular kind of dark green.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: What a—that's the most British thing I've ever [LAUGHING] heard. Okay. Yeah, it's a nice green. Ooh, I like that green.

ALI: It's gorgeous. [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: I would go on a British race in this car.

JACK: It's just shredded. It's just torn apart. There are what look to be bullet holes in it, there are scuffs, there are marks. But all of this is almost completely covered by a large black poncho or shawl that Pickman wears, that covers the armor almost completely.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: You can see their armored feet and ankles, but otherwise it really is just like—they just look like an extremely bulky person that walks very heavily. They have dark gray fur, closer to a sort of black color. Shoutout to the greatest goat of all time, Black Phillip, from *The Witch*.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

JACK: There's a great picture of Black Phillip that I love, where he is—he's doing something that goats probably shouldn't do. I've put it in the Discord. He's standing on two legs and kind of leaning in a way that is—

AUSTIN: Eh. Goats can do that. Let goats do what they fuckin' please.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: That's the lesson that Black Phillip taught me.

JACK: I mean, that goat's the devil. Uh-huh.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh.

JACK: But, you know—slightly paler than black, but a very, very dark gray. They have these horns, that I described in the character creation episode, which is two horns that come out of the top of their head, straight up, and two horns that come out kind of where their ears are and curl downwards.

AUSTIN: How—how straight is Pickman's, like, fur or hair? Is it—are you more 'fluffy sheep', or are you more like 'wispy goat hair'? Not that—you know what I mean.

JACK: Wispy goat hair. I'm thinking a lot about, like—Pickman definitely has a big goat's beard, like a wispy goat beard.

AUSTIN: Right. Sure. Okay.

JACK: And, you know, like a shock of wispy fur up around the collar of their cape, or of their poncho. In terms of like, their silhouette—especially because like—really, Pickman is so obscured by their poncho and by their—the shape of their armor, that I think they have kind of a strange physicality and kind of a strange shape. And I've been looking at the way Mike Mignola draws Hellboy, and he tends to draw Hellboy in two ways: one where he has very narrow shoulders and is almost slouching, and just looks kind of tired and exhausted, and perhaps that's what Pickman looks like when we see her at the end of the day, when she's taken her armor off and she's

like, leaning on the bar and having a drink. But the other way Mignola draws Hellboy is that he's just, like—he's just like—

AUSTIN: The page.

JACK: He's like a box, almost.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh. Yes. [CHUCKLES]

JACK: I'm putting some images in here where he's—he's just gigantic.

[DRE LAUGHS]

JACK: And I'm also thinking of the fantastic way that Kingpin is portrayed in *Spiderverse*, where there—

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: The power and the strength and the physicality of a character that *big* sort of begins to defy how we think of human bodies as having shapes, you know, that they're much more like, blocky, or rectangular, or heavy, in that sense.

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's worth saying that that version of—have you seen the Bill Sienkiewicz version of Kingpin that the *Into The Spiderverse* version is based on?

JACK: No, I haven't.

AUSTIN: Oh my god. One second. Let me find you the image.

JACK: Also, if you haven't seen *Into The Spiderverse* or this character, I think the easiest way to describe it is that Kingpin is basically a square.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: He's just a slab of muscle.

DRE: Oh, wow.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I just posted one of the—one of the Kingpins.

JACK: Whoa! Holy moly!

AUSTIN: This is what I meant when I said, like, 'the page'. Like, takes up—is a square inside of a square page in a way that's just incredible. Yeah. It's—

JACK: And I don't think that Pickman is—you know, I think Pickman is probably very muscular and is very strong, but at the same time, this is somebody wearing armor designed to withstand fighting a train.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: And I'm sure that when they take their armor off at the end of the day, they are this slighter, more tired entity.

[40:04]

But yeah, I think that pretty much covers it. Dark black—dark black cowl. Oh, they don't wear a helmet. Pickman's armor—

AUSTIN: I was gonna ask. You don't—yeah, there's no helmet, right? There's no helmet situation.

JACK: Pickman—I was thinking about this, and I went into the settings menu 'Friends at the Table', and I selected 'helmet off—'

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

JACK: [CHUCKLES] —because I want to see Pickman's face.

AUSTIN: But you still get the bonuses, you still get the plus to defense.

JACK: [OVERLAPPING] I still get the helmet bonuses.

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh-huh.

JACK: Pickman does have a helmet. It's bolted onto the side of their armor under their cowl. And I know what that looks like, but I think we can wait until they are in a situation where they put their helmet on.

AUSTIN: [OVERLAPPING] But it's never been used. Yeah.

JACK: It's never been used that we've seen so far.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. [CHUCKLES] We've also—do we—just “Pickman” still, right? There's no first name?

JACK: Pickman has a first name.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: But I've been thinking a lot about Adaire and how Adaire has a name that is like, you know—

AUSTIN: Mm. Sure.

JACK: It's not necessarily like a secret, but it's like, Adaire's name is Adaire, and, you know, that's that. But yeah, they're—they are like—“Miss Pickman” is their name.

AUSTIN: Cool. Okay. I think that's everybody. Any final details? Anyone remember any—oh, is there a—there's a weapon that you—we'll get there. We'll get there on the weapons. We don't need weapon details at this point. No offense to Chine, who gave weapon details. That was a good detail. Glad we talked about it.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

JACK: Sick weapon.

DRE: Yeah. You know, it's—

AUSTIN: But yeah. We don't—we've already gone for a classic 20 minute long Friends at the Table fashion segment, so, [LAUGHING] we should move on so I can talk about my NPCs now, please and thank you?

[GROUP LAUGHTER]

DRE: Yeah, now it's time for 20 minutes of NPC fashion.

AUSTIN: That's *damn* right. Fuckin' remember the name. That's what that Fort Minor song is about.

[LAUGHTER CONTINUES]

AUSTIN: [GROANS] Anyway. So I think in, you know, in efforts of keeping it moving, you've known that someone was going to come lead you to your first, like, job today. Right? This is not news to you. You've all been briefed broadly that there is some shit that you need to come check out. You've been told that there's—that, you know. You know what the rundown of this town is. In fact, Chine, if I remember right, you're from here originally, so you know the deal, right?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You know, broadly, Blackwick is a town around this mining concern—excuse me, it's not a mining *concern*, it's more of just like—it's just like, there is a mine, and people come here as prospectors to go into it and come out with stuff. There is not just like a big company running it. And that that is built into the side of—or has been dug into the side of this mountain, where there used to be an abbey dedicated to an order of nuns who worshiped some sort of beast and its child, right? Or it was a beast and its mother? I can't quite remember how it was originally phrased, but—

SYLVI: I think it was 'beast and its mother'.

AUSTIN: Sure.

SYLVI: Was the way it was written.

AUSTIN: Totally. And, at that—that abbey is, you know, mostly turned to dust at this point, with the exception of a tower, the kind of—is it a bell tower is what it was? I don't remember, but that sounds right.

DRE: Yes. Yeah, that sounds right.

AUSTIN: Near the caves entrance, near the main mine entrance. And then during our game of *The Ground Itself*, a group of young folks found a hidden hatch, kind of off from where the abbey's main ground would have been—kind of into some brush, in my mind to the north of the abbey. And the abbey and the mountain entrance and all that are up on like a second tier, looking down on the residential part of the city—or the town, slowly growing city, I guess. And some people went down there, and when they went down there, what they found was a strange cathedral in the place of where—there shouldn't have been one. There just shouldn't have been an upside down cathedral in there, but they were there, and inside of it was a strange furred and elder beast-dragon-thing, with seven arms and—or seven limbs, and kind of scrawling runic messages on the walls, and also a weird egg sac. A kind of gooey egg sac on an altar, which they took. And, in the end, putting that egg sac into a weird nest that was recovered from—in pieces and then rebuilt—from the mine, seems to have broken the curse over the town. Weird for sure.

So, you know that that—that part—one of the early jobs that you've kind of signed up for is to go like, deal with that. So at some point you knew that was coming, right? And I think you probably got a note this morning that said basically like, 'urgent matters have forced us to move this forward'. Right? 'We need you to go in sooner'. And the person who comes in to the place is—Chine, I think you know this, 'cause you've—how long have you—you left, but here's a question: were you here when like, the Triadic Pyre first moved in, or—was the Triadic Pyre here when you were here?

DRE: How long ago was that?

AUSTIN: We haven't decided that. So—

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: I'm guessing for them to have the big church that they have, it's probably within—probably at minimum a generation, right? So I don't—how old are you?

DRE: Okay. Chine is like late thirties. So, probably. They were here.

AUSTIN: Okay. So then even at the very least, even if you just come in and checked in once every few years, you would have seen this grow, at the very least, right? Then you know the person who comes in. This is Proctor Wolff, W-O-L-F-F. Ekashi is his first name, Proctor Ekashi Wolff, and he is Ojantani. He's from Ojantan, which is this kind of Southern canton in the empire, or that's—that's his kind of

ethnic background. He is like a big buffalo man, and he is—the Ojantani are basically like various bovine people—I guess they're minotaurs, which are like, I didn't think of when I was like, 'oh yeah, I want to see this—what if this buffalo could be a person,' [CHUCKLES] which is where this starts, and like—oh, I guess that's—minotaurs are sort of that already. But in my mind, they all have a little bit more fur and hair and are not as like—they're not as like, berserker-aligned, you know what I mean? And in general, I think that they are more like buffalo and yak and oxen than like, 'that's a brown cow. That's a bull'. You know what I mean? I feel like there's some difference there. This one is like modeled after, in my mind, like an African water buffalo, because they have this incredible horn situation that looks like they have a center part—

JACK: Woah!

AUSTIN: —down their hair—

SYLVI: Oh my god.

DRE: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: —but it's not hair. It's like two big, curved-inwards horns, but then meet in kind of a bulbous mass of horn that makes it look like they've parted their hair down the middle.

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Which is kinda like, a herb look in my opinion, but I also love it. It looks great, and—

DRE: Listen. Gen Z all about that center part.

AUSTIN: I've heard this.

SYLVI: That's an e-boy buffalo.

AUSTIN: This is an e-boy buffalo. And this is an e-boy buffalo priest. Actually, I guess, you would know that this is—Chine would know—that Proctor Wolff is the representative of one of the kind of three leadership positions of the Triadic Pyre

here. The Triadic Pyre are a religion of fire. Basically it's broken into like three—there are three gods of the Triadic Pyre: one of them is kind of the flame's spark, and that is the god of Fulmina, who is—I guess, combination of God of Immediate Justice and the Flame's Spark. Then there is a train god, whose name none of us could pronounce. I have not even tried to write one down yet. Some sort of bizarre, you know, cosmic horror train, and that is the God of Fire Alight. And then there is Arinpata, the Smiling God of Death, which is an Ojantani god, who is also the deity of Ashen Remains.

And so that is—this guy, this proctor, Proctor Wolff, is the kind of leader of this town's Ashen Remains part of the Triadic Pyre, and he is also, per *Heart's* rules, the kind of caretaker of the status quo here in this Haven—here in this kind of sanctuary, where beyond the reaches of this town, things get weirder and weirder. And he is like one of the people who is like, meant to keep this place on an even keel. He likes that things are going smoothly most of the time. He's like, 'I'm glad the town is on an uptick'. Maybe he's glad about that because it means that, you know, when everything is standard, it just leads people through life, and eventually they turn to ash, and that's just good as far as the Disciples of the Triadic Pyre are concerned, so who knows what his motives are, but he's a generally affable guy. And he's big. He's like, you know, seven foot eight or something, and so he kind of crouches as he comes into the room, and looks down at everyone. And he has like a long black coat on, and underneath that he has, you know, a gray suit with a white shirt—you know, kind of a white dress shirt with a black bow tie, and he says:

AUSTIN (as PROCTOR WOLFF): I see you've all moved in. Are you ready to take on the commission?

ALI (as MARN): Uh, yeah. Hi.

AUSTIN (as PROCTOR WOLFF): Hello, you are, um—Ms. Ancura, yes?

ALI (as MARN): Marn, yeah.

AUSTIN (as PROCTOR WOLFF): Marn. Yes, I—it is—it is a matter of some urgency. If you could gather your lot and meet me by the Abbey, we've lost someone.

ALI (as MARN): Oh, yeah. Uh...

ALI: I guess I do that. [LAUGHS]

[50:09]

AUSTIN: Yeah? Does everyone hurry to—so I think what you get, basically, on the walk over is, he lays out the kind of thing that happened, which is: one of the young people who went down there to begin with this—in fact, it's the one that we kind of zoomed in on, the one who saw the runic writing, the kind of Drakkanic writing on the walls. That person went—he went back in. He is—he's from Kay'va, which is this kind of land of proto-communist seahorse-people.

JACK: Sick.

DRE: Alright.

AUSTIN: You should really go back and dig into some of the worldbuilding in this game, let me tell you that we—we did a fun job on it, I think. And he seems to have gone missing. People saw him running in this direction, and based on what—based on what Proctor Wolff says—seemed scared, ran in this direction, hasn't been seen since. That was two days ago. Normally, you know, people run off all the time, but given the history of—this is Janek, is the name of the person who's gone missing—given Janek's history, this is, you know. 'I hope you didn't go back down there! That's a place no one should go. There was a weird creepy dragon down there.' So that is like the gist. If anyone has questions for Proctor Wolff, you can ask, for sure.

SYLVI: I have a more general question, which is what time of day is it?

AUSTIN: What time would you like it to be? I think it sounds like it's daylight hours. The—

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Sounds like the suns are in the—in the sky. Also there's six suns, for people who don't recall, there are six suns. They have kind of a synchronized orbit. They match at noon and things get really bright, but otherwise they kind of go in ellipses. It's great. It's easy.

SYLVI: Okay. I think—first, she's complaining a little bit, because she wanted to do this when it was later in the day, and this means she has to bring out her parasol and her big coat—her like, coat that she wears to keep the sun off of her.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVI: And she's like:

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): I don't understand how important could one person be that this couldn't wait a few hours. [SIGHS]

SYLVI: Making a big deal about having to get rushed out of the base too.

AUSTIN (as PROCTOR WOLFF): Well, if there are—if there are matters of occult value down there, we are afraid that Janek may trigger something. We've only just come out of a long shadow, and we prefer a new one not be cast.

JACK (as PICKMAN): Okay. I wouldn't worry too much. I think this is something that we'll be able to just figure out. We can—we can head down there. We'll find this person. I have a couple of questions.

JACK: And Pickman, like—Pickman is wearing like a—Pickman is armored, a big thing about the Shape Knight is that they wear this very distinctive armor, and I think that most of the time you can't actually see Pickman's armor. They're wearing like a black cowl, or almost like a serape or a poncho over their armor, so you get this sort of like, glints of metal as they move, but they're mostly this like, sort of hulking, goat-headed metal object draped in black cloth. And they produce like, a little notebook from inside the black cloth and, you know, squinting down at the pen—I think they're long-sighted—they say:

JACK (as PICKMAN): Okay, I have a couple of questions. Number one, have you spoken to this, uh, this kid's friend? The other one?

AUSTIN (as PROCTOR WOLFF): Yes. We've—of course, we've spoken with all of them. They've all said that they have no idea what has caused young Mr. Polyte—Janek's last name—why he would be so afraid, but also said that he always seemed private. A little less sociable than his peers. But good-humored, generally.

JACK (as PICKMAN): Okay. Question two: did you secure the entrance to the, it says here, 'underground cathedral', brackets, 'beast'? Was that secured, or—

AUSTIN (as PROCTOR WOLFF): Yes. We have a number of—we have paid a number of miners to stand watch and ensure no one else goes in. I doubt—

JACK (as PICKMAN): [OVERLAPPING] And they saw nothing?

AUSTIN (as PROCTOR WOLFF): No. But if someone went in before we knew about this, of course, we wouldn't have seen that.

JACK (as PICKMAN): So you didn't post miners between the discovery of the beast and the disappearance of the child?

AUSTIN (as PROCTOR WOLFF): Certainly we did, but it's been months and there had been no issue.

JACK (as PICKMAN): Huh. Okay. Well—

AUSTIN: We—out of character, we have not ever just determined what the length of time it's been between the *Ground Itself* game and now. Certainly a matter of months, potentially a year. You know what I mean? I don't know—we haven't really zeroed down what that is.

JACK: It still is a fucking upside down cathedral down there. You'd think they'd have someone sitting on a chair next to it, but apparently not.

AUSTIN: They certainly have guards around the weird heart nest, for sure.

JACK: Oh yeah. That's true.

AUSTIN: But yeah, this they seem to have left alone. The—I think maybe he follows this up and says like:

AUSTIN (as PROCTOR WOLFF): You understand, we don't put guards across next to every fire that—that is lit in town either. Most people fear being burned.

JACK (as PICKMAN): Fair enough. Uh, anybody got anything else?

DRE (as CHINE): Did you check—did you check the kid's house?

AUSTIN (as PROCTOR WOLFF): Yes, we've—we've looked through everything. It seems as if he's taken some things. I wouldn't say that he had a life's worth of things in his abode, you understand?

DRE (as CHINE): Okay, but what's missing?

AUSTIN (as PROCTOR WOLFF): Basic things, writing implements, an empty bookshelf. There was not much in the way of food—non-perishable—and he had—he'd always carried very—according to his friends—well-made equipment, knives and a little booklet, and things like that, that seemed to be of strong make, perhaps Kay'van, and those are gone as well.

DRE (as CHINE): Okay, so this kid went camping and now it's an emergency.

AUSTIN (as PROCTOR WOLFF): [TERSE] We brought you in to do a job. Do it or don't. We'll find someone else.

JACK (as PICKMAN): No, we're prepared. We'll do it. Marn?

ALI (as MARN): Yeah, no. We're—the safety of—Janek, it was?—is, uh—

AUSTIN (as PROCTOR WOLFF): Janek Polyte, yes.

ALI (as MARN): Yeah. Important. It's a priority to us. We'll report back.

AUSTIN (as PROCTOR WOLFF): We will be waiting.

AUSTIN: And you make your way to this place.

JACK: [OVERLAPPING] Does he leave?

AUSTIN: No, he waits to see you go in.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: He's led you to this door in the ground, basically. This kind of basement door.

JACK (as PICKMAN): Well, we'll see you. I think—this seems like it's going to take us about 40 minutes, an hour. We go down there, see if anything's up. Alright. Well, you have a good day.

JACK: [CHUCKLES] Opens the trap door.

[SYLVI AND DRE LAUGH]

AUSTIN (as PROCTOR WOLFF): Go by their light.

AUSTIN: And nods to you and lets you go.

SYLVI: I'm gonna hand him my parasol and my jacket—

[GROUP CHUCKLES]

JACK: As you descend.

AUSTIN: Yes.

SYLVI: Yeah. It's a white jacket, is what I'm picturing. She doesn't want to get it dirty.

AUSTIN (as PROCTOR WOLFF): I will be very careful, Ms. Mondegreen.

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): Thank you.

AUSTIN: He smiles at you—

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): Lady Mondegreen.

AUSTIN (as PROCTOR WOLFF): Okay. Lady Mondegreen.

AUSTIN: He smiles at you with too many—with like, too much teeth. You know what I mean? Just like—doesn't—does—

AUSTIN: Just eee! Big teeth smile!

JACK: Center-parting.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh, yeah, a hundred percent. Smiling God of Death.

JACK: What did he see in the show? Cow with a center-parting.

AUSTIN: Yep, mhm. Does anyone do anything as you make your way down this—

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —this kind of a stairwell?

JACK: As we descend the stairs, I want to say:

JACK (as PICKMAN): Alright, what's the bet?

[ALI LAUGHS]

SYLVI: Um... hm.

DRE (as CHINE): What, that like, we're going to get down there and we find the kid and he's like, 'oh yeah, I just came here to hang out', and then we just like, go home, or...

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): Oh, you still think he's alive. That's very optimistic.

JACK (as PICKMAN): I mean, uh, I think he's dead. I'm with Virtue. But, uh, I think we can just tidy this up.

[SYLVI CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Mhm. What are you using for light as you come down here? 'Cause it's dark. Like he—you closed the—I guess you—do you leave the door open so you get some sunlight for the first, like, floor, but then it's just dark. There's not lights down here. This is just a flavor thing. Like, what's it look like?

ALI: We can't like, declare a thing. Can we?

AUSTIN: You don't—yeah, totally. You absolutely—I'm just saying, what is it? Like, I'm not—

SYLVI: Yeah, like, we could have torches or something. Right?

AUSTIN: You don't need to have a resource to do this. Yeah, yeah, yeah. The way that—yeah, the way that this game works is like you have a supplies resistance, and I'll hit that if supplies—if your supplies get put under threat.

JACK: Oh, sure.

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: But just like, you have the stuff you need to be doing stuff, you know?

DRE: What's the name of the lantern where it's like, it has the door that you like kind of open and close to like—

SYLVI: Oh.

DRE: —focus the light more? I think that's what Chine has. I'm trying to remember what this is called.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I don't know what that is. I know—I think I know what the image in my mind is, but I don't—I getcha.

[1:00:00]

JACK: Is there this vibe as we descend of like, passing out equipment or something as we're going in?

AUSTIN: Totally. If that's what you think the vibe is, yeah.

JACK: Like pulling a torch from a bag and lighting it, and then someone else lighting the torch from the first one, and then like...

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Totally. As you get deeper and deeper, a thing I want to note is, when we saw the crew of kids who came down here during *Ground Itself*, the camera did this kind of flip, where it entered an inverted state to reveal this cathedral. It does not do that this time. Instead, you just get lower and lower, and in fact it feels as if these—it feels as if you could not have been—you could not have been climbing these stairs for this long. It feels like you are now, you know, a hundred—a hundred feet underground somehow, or maybe more, and it's like, 'is this how far these kids came?' Because none of the story was like, 'we'd been walking for minutes down the stairs'. It was like a flight down the stairs, or two flights. So already, I think there's already some strangeness. And then you are met with—I would call it a gut-wrenching stench. All of you know immediately, this is the—this is like the smell of rotting flesh. You know what this is. You know—

SYLVI: [CHUCKLES] Virtue looks at Pickman.

[JACK CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: And then there is a second smell, and that is a little sweeter? It's almost sweet and sour. It's like citrus-y. And that does not—you don't associate that with death, normally.

JACK: What—can we—what domain are we in?

AUSTIN: You are in Religion/Cursed. Domains, for people listening, are a major component of the way this game works. The Heartland—Sangfielle—is divided into a bunch of different domains, and each domain kind of—is a kind of starting point for, mechanically, how you interact with it. So if you're in a religious place, you can add your—and you have the religion skill—you can add a die to your roll because you know what these places are like, you know how to move around them, you know where things are, you're familiar with the vibe, almost. And so the two of these are Religion, which is, you know, religious places, chapels, you know, cult houses, cathedrals, temples, all that stuff; and then Cursed, which is spaces that are—I think the book says "places actively harmful to those who venture inside". Places where the kind of—the almost parasitic nature of what the game calls the Heart, but for us is just this mélange of strange otherworldly powers, is at its highest, and

is, you know, kind of flinging power in a way that is grotesque and dangerous. So this is Cursed and Religion.

SYLVI: Could I see—like, would it be like a Discern roll to see if I recognize the smell, or like anything sort of out of place while we're walking down here, or..

AUSTIN: You—I don't think—

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: What domains do you have?

SYLVI: The citrus-y smell specifically, sorry.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah, totally. Give me—just tell me what your skills and domains are.

SYLVI: So my skills are Delve, Discern, and Kill, and my domains are Cursed, Desolate, and Warren.

AUSTIN: I don't think you—I'm not going to make you roll for it, because—

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: —when you roll, you kind of open yourself up for risk.

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: In this case, I don't think you know—I don't think you could begin to know what this is quite yet. You'll get some more information soon enough. I'm not like 'and then you take another step and you're dead. Got you, 'cause you didn't roll Discern.'

[DRE LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: And also, I will just say really quick, for people listening, we are playing—this is a new game for us, and there will be some stumbling over rules and stuff. We're gonna do our best to explain those rules and to—while also learning

how to do them, so please be patient with us as we kind of wrap our own heads around the resistance system in *Heart*, because it's not quite like *PBTA* or *Forged in the Dark* games or many of the other games that we've played on Live at the Table or other campaigns, you know? It has some really distinct stuff. And one of those things that is actually very similar is like, not everything has a roll. So this is a moment where like, I don't think there's a roll here, you don't know enough from these two things to know what it is.

But as you get closer, as you get further down, the room itself does come into view. You push through the rotting smell. And what you see is—again, it's dark because you don't have much light here. It's less dramatic than the kind of vast and otherworldly cathedral that was reported to you. Based on the kind of width of it—you can't see the depth of it, you can't see the back wall from here—but based on the width of it, it is like, you know, a third the size of what was told to you. It's like the width of a basketball court, but they were telling you it was like the width of, you know, an acre or something. You know?

And there are like, large, dark stained glass windows that you can kind of see in the dark in the distance. They feature—some of them are broken—some of them feature like an image of—like a very stylized version of the beast that we saw down here, in *Ground Itself*, but like in a robe with hands out, you know. This version of it is eight-limbed, not seven-limbed. But it's like, you know. It's almost like there's stained glass windows laid across the wall—like, laid—like they're not in—there's nothing behind them. It's—the stone wall is behind them. Maybe there's like a candle holder behind them for like, projecting light down here, but there's no—none of what was reported seems to be here in the dark at first, at least. And this seems to be a smaller space.

There is—I think maybe what you do catch first, though, is that when your light hits the pews, you can see that some of them seem to be broken, and your light kind of—Dre, you have that kind of lantern with the focus, you kind of focus it down, and you do see the kind of tail of some sort of creature, kind of laying on the ground and rotting, and the smell down here has gotten worse. What are you all doing?

DRE: Do I recognize what type of creature it is?

AUSTIN: Again, I—here's a question for you, Dre.

DRE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Was that—Chine, had you ever been here before? Had you ever seen this creature?

DRE: Mmm. If it's something that's unique to this place, probably not.

AUSTIN: Then no, you don't.

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: You suspect—you know, you've seen things with big tails before.

DRE: Right.

AUSTIN: And maybe you're going down your list and being like, 'is it this? Is it this? Is it this?' and you don't really know, no.

DRE: Okay. I guess I'm gonna poke it with my poleaxe just to make sure that it's actually dead.

AUSTIN: It—when you do that, the tail gets like, pulled into the dark.

JACK: Uh-oh.

AUSTIN: And I say 'pulled.' I don't say that it pulls itself into the dark.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It feels as if something has yanked it away from you.

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): Well, that's always good.

JACK: I think Pickman spits on the floor and says:

JACK (as PICKMAN): Oh, that monster got killed by a bigger monster. Do we think that the bigger one—we think the bigger one also ate the kid? Do they want us to kill it? What's our primary—are we here on 'get the kid back', or—'cause, I mean—I think we could go upstairs now and say, you know.

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): 'Kid's dead.'

JACK (as PICKMAN): 'Kid's dead.'

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): Yeah.

JACK (as PICKMAN): 'Sorry.'

ALI (as MARN): We're not just going to go up there and say, 'Oh, we found a monster.'

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): Yeah. I—besides, like, look at this place; it'd be a waste to just leave without checking it out a bit, you know?

ALI (as MARN): This is like our first job. [CHUCKLES] We kind of have to like, be sort of nice.

JACK (as PICKMAN): I—I—yeah. I—I—yes. I see where you're coming from. It's just, you know how it is. Small town, they see one curse, they cure the curse, they think, you know. Now they think everything's cursed. Sometimes it's just a monster in the cathedral under your town. But I'm with you. We should, you know—we should see it through. I'm just saying we'll be done—we'll be done by like, dinner time.

AUSTIN: And you move a little forward? What do you—what do you do? What's that punctuation, what do you do?

JACK (as PICKMAN): Anyway, into the dark.

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

DRE: Yeah, I think while this conversation has been going on, Chine has just started like, walking away, towards wherever this thing got pulled.

AUSTIN: So as you get—yeah. As you move in deeper, your light traces up the body of the dead dragon that you described, Dre, during our *Ground Itself* game. Again, its corpse is rotting. Scales have fallen off. Fur has kind of degraded to dust. There are bones, still. The smell is brutal, but again, there is this other smell happening,

and you can hear now that you're further in, there's like a little bit of a sizzle, somewhere, that direction.

And finally, you get far enough down this cathedral for your light to catch something surprising in the distance. It's a little bit before the altar. I'd say it's like, you know, towards the front, you know—a few rows of pews. In the body of the beast, which is dead, is a sprouted tree. Brown bark, growing tall with, you know—lush with leaves and oranges. It's an orange tree that has grown from the body of this dead beast. And you've not seen that before, I don't think.
[CHUCKLES]

[1:10:18]

Actually, maybe you have. Here is a moment where maybe you could give me a Discern check. I would say, Chine, since you're the one in the front here, this is like—I guess anyone could do it if they're up there with Chine. I don't know who has what skills. I mean, I do know who has what skills and domains. I have a whole list of them in front of me.

[GROUP CHUCKLING]

AUSTIN: But I don't know who's taking the lead, so to speak. But again, this would be Discern and then Cursed or Religion. I would also give you Wild because of the big tree, so. So let me know.

SYLVI: I am very curious about the oranges, so I am also open to rolling on this, if Chine's not comfortable, but like, Chine has the lead here, so.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

DRE: Um... Yeah, I'll roll. I'll do it.

AUSTIN: You'll do a roll. Okay. First roll of the game. Here we fucking go.

DRE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: When you roll the dice in this game, you are building a dice pool from your skills, your—sorry, you start with 1d10, then you add any relevant skills, any

relevant domain—or not skills—one, if you have a relevant skill, you add another die; if you have a relevant domain, you add another die; and if you have a relevant Mastery, which can come from abilities or from having a Knack—which is a thing you get if you get a skill that you already had, you can get like a specialization almost—you add all those together to a dice pool. And then you roll those dice, and what you're looking for is—I mean, what you're really looking for is an 8, 9 or a 10. A 10 is a critical success, an 8 or a 9 on any of them is a success with no stress, a 6 or a 7 is a success at cost, and then under that, we're in failure and crit failure territory. Try not to get under a 6.

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: It'll be scary. So what are you rolling with here?

DRE: I don't think I have a relevant skill, 'cause I don't have Discern, and the closest thing I could think of here would be Hunt, but Hunt is not—that's not...

AUSTIN: I'll let you roll—what are you doing with this? What's—tell—show me the picture of China.

DRE: Gosh. I think... Okay. Yeah, let's be a Cleaver here. I think what it is is that China like goes up and picks an apple and like sniffs it—

AUSTIN: An or—please, an orange.

[ALI LAUGHS]

DRE: Or an orange, sorry. Please. My bad. Listen, I don't want to compare apples to oranges here.

AUSTIN: Thank you.

DRE: And I think he, like—they lick it and they're about to eat it. That's what Cleavers do.

AUSTIN: That is what they do. Give me... Do you have a case for Hunt here?

DRE: No, I don't think so.

AUSTIN: Okay.

DRE: I mean, if this is something that could kill me, I guess I could do Endure, but—

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Well, no, let's not talk about what could happen to you, let's talk about what you're doing.

DRE: Right. Yeah.

AUSTIN: You know what I mean? And so, yeah, it does not sound like—

DRE: I think what I'm doing is discerning. I think that's what I'm doing, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it does sound like discerning. So I'll give you—so, nothing from that. And then—so you have 1d10, then you're gonna get a Cursed d10 from Cursed, which you do have, so that's 2d10. Is anyone helping? Helping is a little dangerous in this game, I will say, because it opens you up, not just to like broad repercussions, but to stress. This is a game in which you have five kind of stress tracks: Blood, which is kind of physical stress; Mind, which is mental stress; Echo, which is like 'the Heart is doing things to you' stress; Fortune, which is good luck; and Supplies, which is the stuff that you have. And all of those go up, and every time you take stress, there's a chance that that kind of abstract stress kind of materializes into something very bad for you.

And so—why was I setting all that up? Oh, because if you help someone, what you're opening it up to is that you also will get the stress that they do, but you can, if you have a relevant skill, give them a die. And in fact, you can—as many people as is reasonable can give that in a single roll, basically. It's up to—it's kind of up to us. And so—so, yeah. What is—is anyone helping Chine as they try to discern this?

ALI: I can help.

AUSTIN: How are you helping? What's the skill you got?

ALI: This might be too forward, but I think in like a very annoyed sort of tongue click of the like, 'this already—' [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: Eating already.

ALI: 'We've been 20 minutes into this mission and the vibes are already rancid.'

[GROUP LAUGHTER]

AUSTIN: Literally, actually. Yeah.

ALI: Marn like, grabs the orange from Chine and then like, starts to peel and cut it, like, you know, the way that you— [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: [LAUGHS] Uh-huh. Okay. So then, Chine, that sounds like, what? Three? One, then a Cursed, and then a—and then this Marn one.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: 3d—3d10. You're looking for a big roll here. So here's a way to do this just in the thing—if you want, you could just roll 3d10. That's totally fine. But there is a thing in the sheets—

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —that you can open up and make it Discern plus, you know—

DRE: Cursed.

AUSTIN: Cursed, and then plus one—and then hit roll if you want to.

DRE: Would it be...

AUSTIN: Up to you, though.

DRE: Is it plus two because of the aid?

AUSTIN: What's the other plus one from? No.

DRE: Oh, I thought I got another—I thought I got—

AUSTIN: That plus—

DRE: Okay, yeah, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: That plus is on top of your already stuff, basically.

DRE: Gotcha. Okay.

AUSTIN: I believe.

DRE: Well, we'll roll and we'll see what happens.

AUSTIN: Let's roll and see what it says, yeah.

DRE: Okay, yeah. That did it.

AUSTIN: 8-4-7. Hey, that's a success. Take no stress. Okay. So, as Marn is—also, hey, that's promising, right? We opened on a real success.

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: First time ever.

SYLVI: Don't jinx it!

AUSTIN: [LAUGHS] As Marn is cutting the orange open, we get you kind of looking at it and then—actually, I think maybe Marn is—and this is the assist also, is like, Marn, as you're cutting it, you're looking up at—actually, I don't know, how tall are Marn and Chine respectively?

DRE: I would imagine that Chine is taller. I mean Chine's like—I don't know. What is like, average human height in this world?

AUSTIN: [UNCERTAIN NOISE]

DRE: Like 5'10"?

SYLVI: Don't ask me!

[GROUP LAUGHTER]

AUSTIN: Yeah, probably.

ALI: Yeah, Marn is in the small guy range. [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Oh, the small guy range. Right. Yeah, of course. Classic.

ALI: Like 4'8", maybe.

AUSTIN: Yeah. So then, Marn, as you're looking up, you see movement up above Chine. There is something up in the tree, above the tree? It is like a long—I think what you see at first is confusing. 'Cause you're like, 'oh, that's a flower in the tree.' And it is. It's just that it is moving and alive. It is like a closed, kind of rounded and then comes to a point, sort of closed flower. What's the word I'm looking for, for like a flower? What's the—what do we call the top of a flower?

ALI: The bud?

AUSTIN: Like the petals, like the bud, but it's like a closed—you know how flowers can close at night, for instance?

ALI: Yeah.

DRE: Sure.

AUSTIN: And so it's like, closed to a point, and it's a long white flower, and it's almost like—there's a degree to which it looks almost like, I would—I guess I would say something like an anteater or something? Like, it comes to a point like that. But

it's these kind of white petals. And it's big. The head—the flower bit is the head of a creature. And it is, I would say, like as big as a person, easy. Big enough to fit a person or two in there.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: If it was opened. And it's slinking through the trees, the branches of the trees above you. What do you do?

JACK: I think Pickman says:

JACK (as PICKMAN): Ah fuck, that doesn't bode well. There's a fucking flower up there.

JACK: Has it seen us?

AUSTIN: I don't know. Marn and Chine, you're the closest to it.

ALI: We sure are. Can I like, throw a thing? To like [LAUGHING] distract it?

DRE: You gonna throw the orange at it? 'Cause I was also thinking we should do that.

[GROUP LAUGHTER]

ALI: A segment, at least. Oranges have those little pieces.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Sure. You going to do that? What's your goal for doing that?

ALI: I want to throw it like, slightly past it, to see if it'll be like—

AUSTIN: Yeah. Mhm.

ALI: '—oh, I'm looking left now 'cause I would like this orange', instead of looking at us, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah, I got you.

DRE: Yeah. Maybe that means it's not carnivorous too, which would be a nice thing to know.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: Oh.

AUSTIN: Mhm. I don't know that I need you to roll for it unless you—your thing is getting information here, right? So I'm going to give you the information. You throw it just past it, and you totally aim—your aim is right, and one of its many stamens kind of reaches out from inside of its long, weird flower mouth, like a tendril, and grabs it as it flies by. And then it goes like, [SOUND OF EXERTION], and coming down the side of the stamen is some liquid. And it's like adhesive or something, because it puts it back on the tree, and it sticks back to the tree, and the orange sort of shakes as if it's like, getting back into place where it was supposed to be. And it didn't—it's not from the place that you grabbed it from, it puts it much higher up, you know, further up on the tree.

[1:20:00]

DRE: Is there still like, stuff dripping off of the orange?

AUSTIN: Like the adhesive I'm talking about?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like the weird goo? Um, no. It like, reconnects to the tree and just stays there.

DRE: Ohh. Okay.

AUSTIN: Mhm. And then it hops down. 'It' being this thing, this creature in front of you, which now—I can imagine Chine knowing this. I can imagine Chine knowing this at this point. Because you're a Cleaver, this is the shit you do. This is—I guess this is the thing, that the system doesn't really have a like, 'roll for knowledge' thing. You know what I mean? But you've seen—now you see it, now you know what it is, this is—some people call it a white flower beast. Some people call it, I think, kind of like a white flower caretaker. These things come and—I don't know that you know the kind of full arc of it, but plants show up in particularly nutritious

bodies sometimes and produce trees like this. And along with producing the tree, which is going to blossom and produce more creatures is—it produces a defender. And this is that defender. And it lands on the ground, this white flower caretaker, and begins to prowl around the other side of the tree trunk opposite you between you and the altar at the end of the church. What do you do?

DRE: Hmm.

AUSTIN: And now its tendrils are kind of like—its stamen-like tendrils are reaching out from that—again, that kind of anteater-like mouth that comes to a point—and are beginning to like, just test the ground a little bit. It's like running over the body of the dragon corpse. And like, it's not getting—they're not getting too close to you yet, but you know, it's feeling things out. Also at this point, you know part of what—part of that smell is that it's, like—it's using a sort of citric acid, like a magical citric acid, to dissolve this dragon body and turn it into nutrients for the oranges that are on this tree. Which are also eggs, I guess.

JACK: Eggs for some other third creature, like—the way you described it is like a caretaker.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think so.

JACK: Does it make another third thing?

AUSTIN: I think so, yeah.

JACK: What's the kid's name?

AUSTIN: The kid's name is Janek, J-A-N-E-K, Polyte, P-O-L-Y-T-E. I'll put it in chat.

ALI: Just a question, like, the body language that you were describing there, it was like getting between us and the altar. Right?

AUSTIN: Um... you passed that Discern check. It is—yeah, I think it's much closer to a cat getting ready to pounce.

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: Given your proximity to it.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: But it's looking at you two. It's not looking at Pickman or, uh—why am I—Virtue, who are further back. It's looking at Chine and Marn, who are at the tree.

SYLVI: I'm taking notes on all of this, by the way.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

DRE: I think—ooh. I think Chine has his hand back on his poleaxe on his back, but is kind of doing the, like, 'keep staring at the creature', but like, taking a step back, like—almost like, 'alright, buddy, we're leaving your tree alone. We're all good here.'

AUSTIN: Mhm. As you take—as you're stepping back, I'm gonna give you a little bit more information, which is like, your lantern—as you're this close, and now you're looking in this direction, you can see the altar behind it, and there's a bunch of stuff on the altar. There is a backpack.

JACK: Hm.

AUSTIN: In fact, I would say that there are two packs, and they're quite different in design. One of them is kind of a workman-like leather satchel. And the other is—is Pickman originally from the Pale Magistratum, the kind of Northern goat place?

JACK: Their family was.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: Her dad was from there. I think, you know, Pickman was like, smuggling in and out of the Magistratum at a very young age, so—

AUSTIN: Right, right, right. Well, then—

JACK: They might not be as familiar with its cities, but.

AUSTIN: Would you be familiar with the kind of satchel of one of the magistrates, one of the Pale Magistrates?

JACK: Yeah, one hundred percent.

AUSTIN: Yeah. So like, that is a Pale Magistrate's bag also on this table, which is—

JACK: Oh, boy.

AUSTIN: —much more frightening. The magistrates are like terrible magic cops. They're marshals. They're kind of like, you know—in the kind of mythopoetic sense of, you know, lone gunmen, who go out into the world to, quote unquote, 'bring justice' and all of the various conflicting subtexts therein. Justice dealers, but who has the hand on justice, who could say? The person holding the gun, unfortunately, it turns out. So you know that that is—that there are some packs there, presumably. There's also an open book. And you can see, Chine, you can also see like—I'll give you, like, there is some writing on a wall, but you have to back away too quickly to read any of it.

DRE: Hm.

AUSTIN: And as you back away, it sort of then moves in front of the tree and begins to prowl. And again, makes that sort of like, '*Ker-ha! Ker-ha!*' weird bark that it's struggling to make, it doesn't have those parts. You don't know how it's making it, right? And again, under closer supervision, it is like a blend of—it's like very meaty vegetable parts, right? It's like—it's made of what a tree or a flower would be made of, but deep—like, dense and powerful. It seems like it has a great deal of musculature that it is ready to use on you.

JACK: Are there any visible exits to this room other than the way we came in?

AUSTIN: The stairwell you came in.

JACK: So it's basically like a single closed—they described it as a cathedral, but it's like more of a chapel? It's like smaller—

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's a hund—this is a chapel, yes. This is one hundred percent a little chapel that—I've called it a 'dark basement chapel' in my notes.

JACK: Hm.

AUSTIN: It's large for a chapel. I've been in tinier chapels than this, you know? But it is not—there was not a backing for—

JACK: 'I've been in tinier chapels.' [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: [CHUCKLES] I went to Catholic school as a kid. It happens.

DRE: Austin, are you saying that there's no other exits we can see, or are you saying definitively there's no other—there's only the one way in and out of this space?

AUSTIN: I mean, there are no other exits you can see, there's—I mean, Sylvi has a power that could take her into the realm of death at any whim. You know what I mean?

DRE: Yeah, sure.

AUSTIN: There's exits all around you all the time in the Heartland, so. But there are no doors that you see, or windows or whatever, yes.

SYLVI: I just have a quick, like, layout of the room question that I think is a detail I missed.

AUSTIN: Totally.

SYLVI: Is the tree and the like, body in between us and the altar or..

AUSTIN: Correct. That's exactly correct. Yeah. I can just do a very quick one for you here. Once I drag you over to this other place.

SYLVI: I figured we'd have to go through the weird plant dog to get to the altar, but I wanted to make sure first.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I mean, maybe you can sneak around. Maybe you can do something else. I don't know. You tell me what you want to do.

SYLVI: I didn't take that skill, Austin.

[GROUP CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: I see. No Prowl this time either, huh?

DRE: Okay. I think—does—so, Marn, you only threw like, a segment of that orange, right?

ALI: Yeah.

DRE: I think Chine kind of like, gestures to like, 'hey, give me the orange back'.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

DRE: And then kinda does the like, hand signals to Pickman of being like—like, basically like pointing and saying like, 'okay, sneak around, get to the altar, and I'm going to keep the dog busy'. And just keeps kinda like breaking off little pieces of this orange and kind of throwing it at the dog.

AUSTIN: Okay. This sounds like a roll to me. But are you doing the roll, or are you making Pickman do the roll and you're helping?

DRE: Um...

AUSTIN: What are you trying to—you're trying to distract this thing successfully, right?

DRE: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Sure. Hm.

DRE: Jack, do you have any feelings on this?

JACK: I am better at killing than I am sneaking, but I will sneak if needs be.

[ALI CHUCKLES]

JACK: I mean, you two are kind of like the point people on this dog situation. So I am prepared to back up however you decide to proceed. I would say that I am a large goat woman with a shotgun.

DRE: Fair.

AUSTIN: And lots of heavy armor.

DRE: Okay, yeah.

JACK: That being said, you know, [CHUCKLING] I'm always prepared to roll with something I don't have.

SYLVI: I can also give it a shot. I might be a little quieter, but I think statistically, we're similar.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I'm gonna say—what I'm gonna actually say is, I think it's risky if Pickman takes the lead and tries to sneak around.

DRE: Sure.

AUSTIN: I think that she's just too big and heavy and like, you know, the armor is just a big, loud, distracting thing, you know? Risky is very dangerous in this game. The way difficulty works is there's Risky, there's Dangerous, and there's Impossible. Impossible is impossible—

JACK: It's so good.

AUSTIN: —barring some very good equipment, basically, or a really good idea, Dangerous, or Risky, takes a die away after you've rolled the die. So if you roll 2d6, you've actually only rolled—you roll 2d6, and then I take your high die away. [CHUCKLES] So you get to see what it is. And then I go, 'no, sorry, that 9 doesn't count. You get the 4'. And then Dangerous is the same thing, but with two dice, so... yikes.

SYLVI: So would it be Standard if I did it, then?

AUSTIN: It would be Standard if you did it, yeah.

SYLVI: Okay. I'll give it a shot.

[1:30:00]

SYLVI: Since I don't have Sneak, I'm just marking Cursed here, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah. I'd say Cursed and then get the +1 from Pickman, who again is helping here. And I don't think you have any other—you don't have any—

SYLVI: No, I don't think I do. I don't have any items here that would help.

JACK: Do you mean Chine, not Pickman?

AUSTIN: Chine, not Pickman, sorry. Yes. Chine is helping, correct.

JACK: Pickman is helping by like, nodding at Virtue and going like, you know, thumbs up. 'Good luck.'

[GROUP CHUCKLES]

DRE: 'You got this!'

SYLVI: Okay, I'm gonna click roll. Oh, I clicked it twice.

AUSTIN: And you got an 8 both times.

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: One of them you got 1-8-1 and the other one you got 8-2-8. These are good rolls, honestly.

JACK: Warming up.

AUSTIN: Yeah, just getting warmed up a little bit here.

SYLVI: I'm really glad they were the same result. I would have been so heartbroken if it turned out it was a 1 on the first one.

JACK: That's a fortune dice situation.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Alright. You do the thing as we've described, the—as you keep throwing pieces of the heart, the white flower beast grabs them from the air and begins to reattach them as before. But it is getting closer with each one. It is taking—it is like, increasingly seemingly annoyed by this. And is moving down the kind of pews of this thing, stepping over the slowly dissolving body of this dead dragon. And I say dragon, but again, it's furry, its scales are strange. It has seven big, you know, frightening limbs of various shapes and sizes. And while that's happening, Virtue, what do you do? Do you—how do you do this? You've succeeded, we know this. What's that look like?

SYLVI: I feel like it's just sort of like trying to obscure herself behind different—like, there's a lot of—I'm assuming there's a lot of very big bones and such around here?

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

SYLVI: Like, yeah, just sort of—

AUSTIN: Yeah, that makes sense. Just sort of sticking to the edge of the walls and like—totally.

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So you get around back and the creature again is now, I'd say like halfway down the room. And you're able to now look at the altar and stuff. Are you looking for anything in particular? It's—again, like, at this altar is a bunch of supplies, there's notes written in Kay'va, in whatever we're going to call the Kay'van language, I'm going to say Kay'van. And that's like, in notebooks. There is—you find a—again, both of these back—these satchels, that have been seemingly emptied of what's in them. You find some chalk on the ground, you see the—whatever was written on the wall has begun to fade. And you recognize the sort of fading from your Deadwalker stuff. It's like—so you have access to this plane of existence called the Residuum, right?

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Where color goes, and life kind of drifts to. You've said that like, when paint fades, the Residuum is where it goes.

SYLVI: Yeah. It's like, it's where things that die, but not in like, a traditional way that we think of it go, as well as like, spirits and stuff.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Right. Totally. And you know that certain occult objects go there faster. It's like they've—you've kind of condensed all of its life into kind of a tighter time span. So you can get this magical reaction from it, but that means it fades more quickly. And so this writing that's on the wall, which you can see is a collection of words, is already fading. You catch a—you're able to read a couple of them. It seems like it's a poem or a hymn based on the length of it. It's a long, like—you know, there's like four stanzas. And so you're able to see like, love and glory and sin and, you know, Mother-Beast, just basic stuff. Basic hymnal things.

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: And then—there's like a bunch of stuff here for you to like, pick up and take if you want it, you know?

SYLVI: Oh, yeah.

AUSTIN: But before we give you—before I just drop these resources in your lap, what are you looking for in terms of—what are you looking for?

SYLVI: I think specifically, once I find that note, I'm looking for other things that seem to have that sort of like powerful occult energy, like—this is like the first thing that's like—like the tree is very weird, but you described that as something that sort of like, is known about. This is the first thing here that's really piqued her interest as possibly being related to her like, drive.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. Do you have Occult?

SYLVI: I do not. I have Cursed and Desolate, yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay, well, I think this is still—you're still in a Cursed place, so I'm gonna still let you do Discern and Cursed to make sense of this. So that would be two—3d6, 3d6. Make sure you get rid of that +1, because no one's helping you.

SYLVI: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I got it. And this is Standard still?

AUSTIN: This is Standard for sure, yeah.

SYLVI: That's a 9.

AUSTIN: Damn. Y'all are succeeding a lot. That's good.

SYLVI: I like this. Let's hope this stays.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Mhm.

SYLVI: Let's hope it happens when it's not just reading a note. [CHUCKLES]

[ALI CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh. So with this success, like, I'm going to give you kind of a lot here. First of all, let me just give you these resources as you're picking through stuff. And you can—I'm just going to drop them in chat so that we see them.

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: The first thing is, you recognize—you recognize that the kind of chalk outline on the wall, the chalk writing on the wall, was written by this piece of chalk that you find kind of kicked to the side, or fallen to the side, maybe, that is a resource called d6 Shape-touched Chalk that has the Occult haven, or Occult domain. That is—you know, I think the person, actually, who would recognize this type of chalk, would certainly recognize what is drawn with it on the altar, is actually Pickman. Though, Pickman, where you are now, you can't see this.

JACK: No.

AUSTIN: But I'm just saying, if you could see it.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: This chalk is like a sort of chalk that a lot of Occult practitioners use. Again, it has like a—it's one of those things where it's been—it's as if it's been—a lot of magical energy has been condensed into this, to give it a little extra oomph, but then it's what you draw with it that matters. And so on the altar, kind of opposite the wall where the hymn is, is a—and this is why you would recognize it, Pickman—is the Shape, is a picture, is an invocation of the Shape, which is to say the shape of the Shape, the rail system. Or at least the—not the entirety of it, right? If I'm understanding this, right, Jack?

JACK: Yeah. The Shape is like—the sort of breadth of the shape is absolutely massive, and Shape Trains are adding to it pretty regularly.

AUSTIN: Right. Like a spiderweb at a certain point.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Of just like, new lines, old lines disappearing, et cetera. But there is a core to it.

JACK: It's a very big core as well. I don't want to give the impression that this little shape is sort of the Heart. It's more like the big massive framework that stretches across Sangfielle—

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: —and the little bits that spiral off it are, you know—there's a mountain range in the middle of the Shape.

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah. We—I dropped it on—it's currently in Roll20 on the GM layer so that I can see it at all times.

JACK: [LAUGHS] Great.

AUSTIN: I'm looking at the Shape at all times when you're looking at the big map of Sangfielle, just so I can see it. Do you want to describe what it looks like?

JACK: Yeah, totally. So—

AUSTIN: If you can. It's kind of an interesting thing.

JACK: Yeah. I don't want to be coy about this, so I'm going to put a drawing of it on Twitter or something at some point.

AUSTIN: Yeah, good call.

JACK: I want people to—I don't want people to have to be like, 'what do they mean?' So, the Shape is—

AUSTIN: We can also just point to it, which is funny. If you want to—

JACK: Where can we—oh, yeah, we can point to it. Maybe—people can find it, I suppose.

AUSTIN: People can find it. Yeah.

JACK: The Shape comprises five lines. The first line is a long horizontal line, like a child is drawing the ground in a picture, you know? Before you draw everything else, you put the ground in.

AUSTIN: You put down the ground.

JACK: And then on the left, rising upwards from it, are two vertical lines. One, the line on the left of the two, is slightly shorter than the line on the right.

AUSTIN: Okay. Wait, say that one more time? The line on the...

JACK: So—

AUSTIN: Two vertical lines.

JACK: Yeah, two vertical lines. The leftmost line is shorter than the righter line.

AUSTIN: Than the righter line. And that righter line is like—the leftmost line is like towards the end of the ground line.

JACK: Yeah, towards the left-hand side of the ground line, basically.

AUSTIN: And the one to the right of that isn't quite at the middle point.

JACK: Yeah, it's—

AUSTIN: It's tall.

JACK: Yes. It's—yes.

AUSTIN: At this point, it almost looks like—the point at which you're at, it almost looks like an F on its side, but with the second—

JACK: Oh, yes, perfect.

AUSTIN: The second line of the F is really tall—is really long, is twice as long or something as the top line of the F.

JACK: It's not quite twice as long. It's maybe a quarter longer. And also—

AUSTIN: Okay. My drawing of it is—I mean, this is the thing, right?

JACK: Everybody draws the Shape differently.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: I assume there is a—they figured out—you know, if you draw it and it doesn't exhibit the properties of the Shape, you haven't drawn it right.

AUSTIN: It doesn't work. Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. We'll talk about what it does in a second. So that's three lines. Ground—horizontal ground, vertical line one, vertical line two that's taller than vertical line one.

JACK: Yep.

AUSTIN: What are the remaining two?

JACK: Coming out to the right of the tallest line is a line at about 45 degrees to the ground line. It is diagonal. It is as though it has been pushed slightly to the right.

AUSTIN: Right. It's like—it's almost like, numbers go up. Stocks go up. Not, you know, like—

JACK: Yeah, exactly.

AUSTIN: It's just a—*boop!* Yeah. Uh-huh.

[1:40:06]

JACK: Yeah, totally. And then the fifth line is really easy. You just join the top of the shortest line with the very base of the diagonal line with your own diagonal line.

AUSTIN: I thought they don't actually—they don't join. They cross, don't they? Towards the base.

JACK: Oh yes, they do cross towards the base.

AUSTIN: As if producing a little triangle.

JACK: It's very—it's very small.

AUSTIN: But not a perfect triangle. Yeah. It's very small.

JACK: And if you don't draw that X, it will probably still function.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: But yes, Austin's right.

AUSTIN: Likewise, I like—my version of this has, the far left one is at the very top of the—at the very left end of the ground line. But I've also seen it drawn by some practitioners where that part of the line is over to the right a little bit, so there's like

a little overhang. Again, there's evidence of this all around you in the world. You just have to find this shape.

JACK: And I want to like, acknowledge that trying to describe a geometric shape that no one has ever seen before on the radio is really difficult.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: So please don't listen to this—if this is not making sense, that is not on you.

AUSTIN: Go [Twitter.com/notquitereal](https://twitter.com/notquitereal).

JACK: [OVERLAPPING] Go to [Twitter.com](https://twitter.com). There will be a drawing of the Shape.

AUSTIN: And look at the drawing of the Shape. You should draw a few of them, just to show the range.

JACK: Yeah, totally.

AUSTIN: You know?

JACK: We can get some variety.

AUSTIN: Anyway, the reason—yeah, let me explain why this would be drawn. You know, Virtue, you would understand this because of the kind of magical residue of it, too. You invoke the Shape to bring order to a space. In some ways this is like our version of something like the Elder Sign from the Lovecraftian Cthulhu mythos, or really it's from *Call of Cthulhu* the tabletop role-playing game, to be—that's where it kind of gets—it's separate from Lovecraft, thankfully, in some ways. Or—but like, this is also just a classic demonology thing, or a—you know, *Bloodborne* has the blood sign. And you see this a lot in all sorts of kind of occultist practice, real and fictional, right? The idea that symbols and shapes have power. And in our case, this one specifically invokes the sort of order-making power of the Shape, the Structure, et cetera, which is a double-edged sword. Because it means that you can, for instance, in a case like this, protect yourself from something magical and cursed, or monstrous, like, for instance—and you can kind of put this together as you put this together, a—what did I call this thing? A white—

JACK: White flower beast?

AUSTIN: A white flower caretaker, right? Protect yourself from something like that. Or it could go bad and draw the attention of one of the trains. You know, maybe the Shape decides *you* are the thing that is disorderly and chaotic. Obviously in a situation where there is something that it sees as dangerous, it's going to work to protect you from it. But misused, it can really go bad, and it's hard to know sometimes if you're misusing it. So that is what is here on the altar.

JACK: Also, underground in a weird underground chapel—I don't think that being underground makes you safe from the Shape Trains.

AUSTIN: No. No, of course not.

JACK: They'll get there.

AUSTIN: They'll get there.

JACK: They'll—[CHUCKLES] figure out a way.

AUSTIN: And they might not get—they don't have to get there to get there. There are ways, and there are ways, you know?

JACK: Oh, yeah.

AUSTIN: Again, the Shape is—I don't know if the Shape is itself—we don't know if—we've talked about the Shape and we've talked about the Structure, the Structure being what we've said in relation to Art's character, Duvall, who you can go back and listen to the character creation episode for more of that. We don't know if those two things are literally the same thing, if the Shape and the Structure are two words for the same thing, if they are joined, if one of them is, you know, superior to the other in relation, if they happen to seem like they look alike from the outside, but actually operate differently, we don't know.

JACK: Sangfielle, baby.

AUSTIN: But what we do know is that like the Structure—yeah [CHUCKLES]. Like the Structure, the Shape does not necessarily need to drive a train through your

house in order to ruin your day. It can also sometimes drive a train through your house, but it has this sort of ability to reshape things. So that's been drawn there, and is also fading. So you don't know how much longer this altar space will remain safe.

The—you find these notes, which are, again, these are d4 Religion - Resource, and those are notes on the Abbey, which are what you're, again, kind of looking for here. And you find this—a knife, and this is interesting. It's a knife with the symbol of the Kay'va, the Free Seas of Kay'va on it. Which is—there's like, it's kind of like on a little emblem, maybe on the hilt is what I would say. And that is kind of a golden sextant on a blue field with a machete that connects waves to stars. This is like the symbol of the proto-communist state that runs—that did a slave revolt in—on the islands to the Southwest, outside of the Heartland. And, you know, this should be in the hands of someone who perhaps is like, represents that place, or is not just from that place, but like, this seems to be like a—an agent's tool. You know what I mean?

SYLVI: Refresh my memory really quick. Was Janek Kay'van?

AUSTIN: Definitely Drakkan, which is the species. Whether or not he was from Kay'va is—I don't think we know for sure. Or maybe I said Kay'van before, but the thing you know for sure is he's Drakkan, which means he is this—the kind of seahorse-people. But national loyalty's separate, obviously, from, you know, species or ethnic identity.

Also this—I mean, as you pick it up, you can tell that it—it has a hole in it, one. Two, that hole is like spreading. It's like there's a crack—it's as if there's like a slow corrosive element spreading throughout this knife, which is why it has a Limited Use tag on it. You can only use this thing twice before it'll break. It's a good knife though. If only someone could repair knives one day and fix it, that'd be great.

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: But it was clearly shot by some sort of projectile, perhaps the weird fucking magistrate gun. And so I think you're able to kind of put together what's happened here to some degree. A Pale Magistrate was here. So was Janek. There must have been some sort of fight, they were protected by this ward, now they're gone. Based on what you're able to put together from the notes, doing as quick of a translation as you can—I'm guessing you're able to read Kay'van.

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You're hundreds of years old as a vampire lady, right?

SYLVI: [CHUCKLES] Yeah.

AUSTIN: You're able to put together that some sort of spell was done to connect this abbey to somewhere else, or this chapel to somewhere else. And you believe that the way that you do that thing is by writing this hymn on the wall, and perhaps doing something else, and you don't know what the other part is. But you know enough magic to try to like, feel your way through it.

SYLVI: Hm.

AUSTIN: Do you want the hymn?

SYLVI: Yeah, I definitely do.

AUSTIN: I will send you the hymn.

SYLVI: Alright.

AUSTIN: Let me just put it—I'm just going to DM it to you so you can read it.

JACK: Oh, is there a copy of the hymn in the notes?

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes, totally. And it's been like—the hymn has been translated from another thing, and then translated back. It's like translated from a local dialect, and then translated back into our—into Kay'van to like, read it, but then you also have the original text there, right? There you go. I've DM'd you this thing. I don't know if you want to read it or what.

SYLVI: Thank you. Yeah, sure. I can read this. I—hm. I'm debating whether or not Virtue would just start writing this immediately, too. Yeah, she would. Her—she's got to find out what happens, you know?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

SYLVI: So I'm going to read this.

"Her love is vast and nourishing.
Her glory does astound.
Thus in sin we're flourishing,
'Tis sin to which we're bound.

With words we weave her love and ours,
And with our voices breathe:
A halt to death, a halt to stars,
A halt to what will be.

But listen, Mother-Beast, please know:
'Tis love by which we've wrought
A world in which you're split in woe,
Instead of merely nought

Your love is vast and flourishing.
Your glory does astound.
Bless us with tears nourishing.
We'll drink until we're drowned."

AUSTIN: And you begin to scribe that on the back wall.

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Meanwhile, the beast draws ever nearer to the three of you, who are on this side of it. What are you doing?

ALI: That's a great question. [LAUGHS]

[DRE LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

DRE: I don't—I want to try and give other folks a chance to do something. I don't want to just like, take over this scene.

ALI: What's our goal [LAUGHING] here? Is it to continue to cover for Virtue—

AUSTIN: Good fuckin' question.

JACK: Like, buy Virtue enough time to like, complete the spell and then get through? Or—I don't know what's gonna happen when Virtue finishes writing. I think—yeah. Let Virtue finish writing, and then...

SYLVI: [UNCERTAIN] Hm...

ALI: [CHUCKLES] And then question mark. Okay, cool.

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

ALI: Like—okay.

DRE: I guess—I don't know what Chine's ultimate goal here is, but I know they don't want to fight and kill this thing if they don't have to.

ALI: Right. Same.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

DRE: I don't know how other people feel.

AUSTIN: [OVERLAPPING] That is one of your things, right?

DRE: Yeah.

SYLVI: My—just to like lay it all out there, Virtue is clearly just sort of interested in weird, magical shit here.

ALI: [LAUGHING] Sure.

[1:50:02]

SYLVI: That's why she's going after this thing, but I also don't think she has any qualms about killing the leaf, the plant thing, either. So just laying that all out, so we're all—no worries on where we stand.

AUSTIN: Yeah. If I can complicate this a little bit for Marn, I will say, like, both the plant thing and the dragon corpse are filled with materials you would love to look at.

ALI: Sure. Yeah. I—[CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: You can still decide, like, 'I don't want to kill things.' That's fine. But I do want you to know that like, dragon bone is like—it's like, better than gold. You know what I mean?

ALI: Sure. Yeah. I'm—yeah. I'm sympathetic to that. But also—[LAUGHS] It's tough. I keep looking at like, my Hunt skill and thinking like, if that's a skill that helps you interact with a beast that is aggressive, but that's not true.

AUSTIN: No. Well, you can—there are things you can do with Hunt that—'interact with' is—

ALI: Sure.

AUSTIN: You're thinking of Compel, I think, is what you—right? Mostly 'interact with' in harmful ways to the thing is Hunt, right?

ALI: Sure. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Hunt specifically is like, 'find someone who's hiding from you', which I should be using for the kid who's question mark. [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Hm.

ALI: Oh, wait. [LAUGHS] Maybe I have like, smelling salts or something to like, make this thing go to sleep? Like, is there like a—[LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Hm. That's interesting. That's the opposite of what a smelling salt does.

DRE: [LAUGHING] I was gonna say, you ever smelled smelling salts?

ALI: [LAUGHS] Yeah, I mean—

JACK: Sleeping salts.

AUSTIN: Sleeping salts. Sure. That's interesting. I think that the thing that I will say about that is that like, you can do—you can make a roll to do something like that, and it will basically do the 'damage', quote unquote, the stress to this thing that an unarmed attack would do. Do you know what I mean? Which is d4. That is—so the way—I guess I should just say this—the way that conflict resolution and combat work in this game is that everything has a resistance score. You have a bunch of them 'cause you're player characters. Again, you have Blood, Mind, Echo, Fortune, and Supplies. And you gain stress to those things. NPCs and Delves—we haven't gotten to a Delve yet, but NPCs and—which includes monsters—just have one track, and if you can do that full track of it, then you've won that encounter. They'll flee, they'll die, they'll do the thing that you want, basically. I forget, there is like, a literal breakdown of 'what happens when you fail the thing?' And the answer is you did it, it's done, like. And so, you can get to that not only by killing, you can also get to that by wearing them down, by scaring them off, by doing something that makes you end up, you know, holding the ground and getting what you want, however that goes. So, yes, I think you could start wearing down the resistances on that thing, the resistance on that thing, by doing something like deploying some sort of sleep salt.

ALI: [LAUGHING] Okay.

AUSTIN: What I'm not going to do is give you like—like, the thing is, you don't have a weapon that is throwable sleep salts.

ALI: No.

AUSTIN: And so we can just re flavor your basic improvised weapon, which everyone has, which is their fists, or if they pick something up from the ground, that is a d4. And so like, yeah, you can do a d4 thing with that, but it means getting close enough to like, get it in its grill a little bit, which, up to you.

ALI: Sure. Yeah. Yeah, my Well-stocked Haversack has the Mend domain. So I don't know that that's the—

AUSTIN: No, that actually—you know what? I'll take that, you can use that. You can use that.

ALI: Oh, okay.

AUSTIN: Mend, you can totally—one of the—so I've been listening to Grant and Christopher, who wrote this game, talk about this game, and they say one of the things that people don't understand—the two things people don't understand about the way combat works in this game is 'what does Kill mean?' And Kill means not just, 'hey, this is—you kill people with this', but it means you're good at doing murder. You're good at having the skill set it takes to wrap your hands around someone's throat. And that is a particular type of person that you are. And it's not just—and that means that when you roll Kill, like, you're not rolling to hurt someone. You're rolling to do for real damage to them. You are rolling to end the fight as hard as you can, as quick as you can.

But the other thing people don't get often is—and this is—and they say it, like, this is because the book doesn't lay this out maybe as clearly as it could as early as it could—is that you can roll just about anything for combat if you can justify it, right? And so like, you know, if what you're doing is stepping forward in your armor and letting them whale on you and kind of just taking those hits and then getting your stabs in, that's Endure. That's totally Endure, that makes perfect sense to be Endure. So if you can justify it to me as the GM, then it makes sense. Mend, I think totally works here, because it is about working with medical stuff, right?

ALI: Oh, sure, yeah.

AUSTIN: And so if you are going to do this, which like, a hundred percent includes using that haversack with a bunch of weird supplies, both medical and otherwise in it to apply this, I think that that's totally good. The note is you have to get close to do it, and that means you might take Blood stress if this goes bad, you know? And that would be d6.

JACK: I—could I distract it to enable Marn to get closer?

AUSTIN: That would be just an 8. I would give you an 8. That'd be an 8 as before. So you would open yourself up to stress.

JACK: Okay.

AUSTIN: But Marn would get a +1.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I think that's the simplest way of doing it. Give me that roll.

ALI: So I'm rolling Mend and Cursed here, 'cause we're in a Cursed domain?

AUSTIN: If you have Cursed, which I don't think you do, no.

ALI: [OVERLAPPING] Oh, I don't have Cursed. Okay.

AUSTIN: So just Mend and then the +1 from Pickman.

ALI: Here we are.

AUSTIN: So that's 3d6.

ALI: That's a 9.

AUSTIN: That's a 9. Look at that. So this is now, we do our first damage roll of the game, which is interesting. So let me just, again, read from the book. "Inflict stress: On a six or higher, inflict stress to a relevant adversary or Delve using the dice size of the character's equipment." This is a d6 because you have that haversack. Roll me a d6. Actually, you can just hit the little button next to well-stocked haversack.

ALI: I sure can, look at this.

AUSTIN: 1. [CHUCKLES]

[JACK LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: This makes sense to me.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You get—what's it look like? Tell me what it looks like as you're trying to apply this.

ALI: [LAUGHING] This is great.

AUSTIN: And also, that includes Pickman being a distraction however you want.

ALI: I was imagining it as like, a like, acorn-sized metal ball with like, punch marks in it. And then like, Marn rolls it across the floor, and as it's rolling, like, a dust comes out of it.

AUSTIN: You have to get close. It's not ranged. You have to—

ALI: Oh, yeah. I mean, yeah. [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Yeah. I just want to make sure you're—we visually have you in the right place for follow-ups.

ALI: Oh, sure. Yeah. I mean, I think it's the thing of like, Pickman's trying to do like a distraction thing, but I think it's like the 'oh, I'm like, you know, walking in a circle while getting near it and then close enough to like, actually drop this thing'.

AUSTIN: Right, right, right. Alright. Well, you do 1, which means it—one of its tendrils kind of comes out and like, sniffs at it, and then like falls flat for a moment, and then again, feels like it's been pulled—you don't see anyone pull it. You don't see like, the other ones come out and pull it back. But from inside of its own kind of mouth shape, it pulls it back. You've done 1 damage to this thing, 1 stress to this beast that has more than that. It has more than 1, unfortunately. Hardness—actually, wait, no, you don't even do 1 because it has protection. It pulls it back and then it steps back from all of you, because this—it senses this is a hostile action.

And all of its petals open up until it is like a wide open orange blossom, which is this kind of white flower. And inside, you can now see its face in all of its glory. There's these kind of, again, little stamens that have the little yellow tips on them, and then deeper inside are rows and rows and rows of teeth made of wood. Like, just bark deep in its gullet, kind of.

JACK: [CHUCKLES] Oh my god.

AUSTIN: And it goes like, "*Ke-ke-kahr!*" And kind of begins to like, step forward more. And now all of its tendrils have come out and are kind of like, wavering around in the sky, in the air around you to kind of like, look at and pick at you, try to pick you off one at a time. And when it does that kind of weird howling cough, it spits some of that citric acid on the ground between Pickman and Marn. And it begins to dissolve the ground there a little bit. So you've kind of pissed it off more than anything here. [CHUCKLES]

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: It hasn't hurt you. No stress, no fallout, you know, but you have engaged it a little bit more. What are you doing? I guess, let's jump back over to Virtue. How are you doing the spell? What's the—what's the play, right?

SYLVI: I think, yeah, I mean—

AUSTIN: Just writing the hymn on the wall where it was written before?

SYLVI: Yeah. I think, you know, if there's signs that that worked, you might as well try and recreate it so we can, you know, just so we can understand what happened here—

AUSTIN: Oh, of course. Not—yeah.

SYLVI: —and hopefully find that poor missing child, you know?

AUSTIN: Ah, of course. Yeah, definitely.

SYLVI: Yeah.

[2:00:00]

AUSTIN: I think this is probably Delve - Occult—

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: —is my read on this. I don't know that you have either of those.

SYLVI: I have Delve.

AUSTIN: Oh, you do. Okay.

SYLVI: Deadwalker comes with Delve, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think that that's probably right.

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Again, I guess you could use Cursed, because the book says—the book says that you can always use, or just about always use, the domain that you're in, I believe.

SYLVI: Okay. Well, sick, I'm gonna do that.

AUSTIN: Let me, let me—I'll just quickly double-check it, but—

SYLVI: Make sure, but if that's an option... [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Da-da-da, "Domains are not intrinsically linked to action types, but to areas of the Heart, broad subjects of knowledge, and connections you might have with people..." I would say—I would say go ahead. This is still a Cursed place. And I think that there is something about like, you know how to do—you know that doing magic in a place that is Cursed like this means doing it carefully. It means not rushing it. You know what I mean?

SYLVI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Like there's a smaller, um—there's like a smaller, uh, what's the word I'm looking for?

SYLVI: Margin of error.

AUSTIN: You know, margin of error. Yeah. Thank you. And so you gotta really make sure you do this right. Which also means you're doing it a little slower, but so yeah, Delve and Cursed.

SYLVI: That's a 10. [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Oh my god. Y'all are rolling so well. I guess you're rolling a lot of dice, which helps. Right?

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's our first critical success, believe it or not.

SYLVI: I like this game so far. [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Yeah, weird. "Succeed dramatically and increase outgoing stress dice by one step." That's interesting. Go ahead and give me d—give me a—roll me a d6 really quick.

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: I'm gonna apply this in a weird way.

SYLVI: It's a 2.

AUSTIN: It's only a 2, but that's fine. Okay. You are—you are sketching this hymn out on the wall—are you using the same wall that it was written on before?

SYLVI: Yeah, I was actually going to say, I think she's even trying to almost trace over it a little bit.

AUSTIN: Totally. So as you do that, you get like halfway through, and you see that the top bits are fading by the time you're in the middle bit. And it strikes you that perhaps you cannot do it on the same place that it was already done. And so you need to find somewhere else to do it. And so that is why you've made some progress here, but you're not—it has not succeeded to the—

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: I guess it was a critical success. So here's what I'll say is—you then realize that you could actually probably just do this on the floor, is this next—is the closest

space that gives you enough of a situation there. And so you drop—I'm guessing you drop down and immediately start writing it?

SYLVI: Oh, yeah.

AUSTIN: As you begin to write, not only do the words stay, but every time you finish a stanza, they start to light up with like, a spark, as if it's like a fuse. Do you know what I mean?

SYLVI: Hm.

AUSTIN: And again, you wouldn't necessarily know this, but Pickman would, that any time—it's one thing to draw the Shape or to use chalk infused with the Shape's energy. It's another thing to then make something move on it, because not only is the Shape powerful, it's extra powerful when something runs on it. That's what makes the trains so powerful to some degree. And so like, this kind of spark that's lit it is enhancing the power here. Let's come back over to the white flower—the white flower custodians group.

[DRE LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Not custodians, caretaker. What are y'all doing as this thing now has seemingly been angered?

ALI: I don't know. [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ALI: I think at this point I feel more confident in actually just trying to kill it, but I don't know that I'm like, spiritually at that place yet, so if anybody else has any ideas?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: Hello.

[ALI LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: 'Hello', says Pickman, stepping forward.

JACK: Yeah, I think Pickman just steps forward and shouts like, 'get close to me'. Because I have moves that work if people are within arm's reach of me.

AUSTIN: Wise.

JACK: And then just starts walking towards the beast. And I am just gonna try and—so Pickman's weapon is something called a Barbed Espingole. And I think we see them sort of shrug this off their back. And this is—an espingole is an early French shotgun. I think it might actually still be the word for shotgun or blunderbuss. Something that Austin and I realized about this is that it does not have the Ranged tag.

AUSTIN: Mm-mm.

JACK: It's a—it is a fairly powerful weapon—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: But Pickman has to be basically within arm's reach to fire it.

AUSTIN: It has Kill, Brutal, Loud, and Tiring, [CHUCKLES] which all mean fun things that both make it better and worse depending on how things go.

JACK: Yeah. So I think Pickman just shrugs this weapon off their back and shoots at the beast. Just tries to unload into the beast from a distance of about a foot away.

AUSTIN: Okay. That sounds like Kill to me. And again, you can use Cursed, Religion, or in this case, Wild, because that is the domain of this beast.

JACK: So I'm going to take one dice from Kill.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: And I'm going to take one skill—and I'm going to take one dice from Cursed.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: Do I add an extra dice because of my gun—

AUSTIN: No.

JACK: Or is that only used to calculate the amount of stress that has—

AUSTIN: That is calculated to use the stress, correct. Some notes real quick. If you fail using this, the size of its stress dice decreases by one for the remainder of the situation, that is how heavy it is to fire or use in any capacity. So don't fail this roll. Otherwise it's worse for the rest of this fight, or this situation as the book says. And it's loud. When you inflict stress on this item and roll the maximum amount you're going to—you would end up marking stress to fortune. So just letting you know that those are things that could happen here, for instance, on failures. [CHUCKLES] Is anyone helping or are both of y'all committed to the, like, 'I don't want to fight this thing in this way'.

DRE: Mmm.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

DRE: I mean, I don't want to fight it, but I will help.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: I mean, standing as close as I am to this thing and—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: —having a bunch of knives, [LAUGHING] I feel like—

[JACK AND AUSTIN LAUGH]

JACK: There is a moral obligation at this point.

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

ALI: [CHUCKLES] It's sort of a—a team-building...

AUSTIN: Yeah. That's fair.

SYLVI: It would be a waste of knives otherwise.

ALI: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: [LAUGHS] Are you both helping, then? Are you both opening yourselves up to stress and also giving Jack some extra dies? Dice? Dies. Jesus christ.

DRE: Mhm.

JACK: That's great. I stand by Austin.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

DRE: Here's the purple die.

AUSTIN: So 'yes' was the answer. The answer was both of you were going to help?

DRE: [OVERLAPPING] Yeah, I am down for that.

ALI: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I'm in.

AUSTIN: Okay. Okay, so that's two bonus dice.

JACK: How dangerous is this, Austin?

AUSTIN: This is—you're still in Standard territory.

JACK: Oh, boy. Things are gonna get way worse. [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: It could. It might could. We'll see how rolls go. You got a lot of dice here, though, so. That's a 9, in fact. 2-4-4-9-9, lot of dice. That's a success. This is a Brutal weapon. So, "when you roll for stress against an adversary when using this item, roll two dice and pick the highest. Multiple instances of this tag stack. If you managed to get it three times, you'd roll four dice and pick the highest." So go ahead and give me two dice. Two—what is it? It's a d6? Or it's a d8. Jesus christ.

Give me 2d8. Alright, 5. That's not too bad. What's this look like, Jack? Look and sound like, let's say.

JACK: I think that, you know, Pickman says 'stand next to me' as they're moving.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: And it's just this very quick motion of this large hulking entity, um, sort of walking at a brisk pace towards this thing that snarls, and pulling the shotgun off her back and just unloading into it. And as the shotgun recoils, which it does, you know, massively—to such an extent that I think that probably the armor is what's protecting Pickman from the recoil of her weapon. The cape—Pickman's black cape, just like—what's the word—flows—

AUSTIN: Billows?

JACK: Billows, flourishes. And we just get like, the briefest look at this like, dark green, not quite rusted, but like pockmarked or scarred or marked idly with someone who's got a knife and is trying to draw a tree into their armor while they're waiting or something.

But we just see it for like a single motion, as their cape billows and as their shotgun discharges into this beast.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

JACK: And just reverberation, like, dust falls from the ceiling.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think some of those oranges also fall from the ceiling, or from—not the ceiling, from the tree, just the loudness and the echo of it just shakes the room such. We get a shot of Proctor Wolff, you know, a mile above, and like the whole fucking door shakes for a second. And he's like, 'hm, I see.' And yeah, I think some of those oranges on the ground now seem to begin to roll around under their own power. So that's a thing. Some of them don't, some of them are not ripe enough to do that. Those are just oranges. You know, Chine, that like, if they don't—if they fall off the tree and are not ripe enough to turn into the creatures they will turn into, then they're just oranges. They didn't get to that stage yet.

JACK: If the oranges stay, you're doing okay. If the oranges roll...

AUSTIN: You gotta goll. Which is get out of there.

DRE: [OVERLAPPING] Oh... no... ll.

[GROUP CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: 'Oh noll.' [CHUCKLES] You'll pay the toll. Okay.

JACK: [CHUCKLING] The orange toll.

AUSTIN: So, yeah, I think having—you know, and at this moment there is this shot of this thing that has now been, you know, shot through with this close range blast of this gun—which by the way, does not need to reload, which also makes it very strange. I think that's a distinct and weird thing about it. I think this is train magic. I think this is the Shape. This is a gun made from a Shape Train, and that allows it to do—there's a furnace in there or some bullshit, I don't know. [CHUCKLES]

[2:10:20]

But again, not a ranged weapon despite being a gun. You see this thing now shot through—the petals are like, have holes in it now. If you felt for this thing before, you really feel for it now, and it goes like '*ke-kah!*' and then leaps up into the darkness. It's still here. And you know that because some of the citric acid is like dripping down from the ceiling, but it is out of sight in this moment and prowling. What do you do?

JACK (as PICKMAN): How's it going, Virtue?

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): [DISTRACTED] Hm? What? Oh, uh, yes. Just keep doing what you're doing.

AUSTIN: Virtue, this thing needs a finishing touch. You've written it all out, the sparks are flowing, but there is something missing. And you don't know what. What you do know as an expert in matters magical and otherwise is that this is a common thing. You're a wizard, you're a mage, you're a sorcerer. You don't write down the whole thing. Because if you did that, all someone would need to do to capture your magic and become as powerful as you is to get your books. You always have some aspect that is not written down anywhere. Or maybe it's written in code, or there's some sort of, you know, mnemonic device that you've set up. Do

you know what that is here? Do you have ideas for trying to—how to figure that out? I'm putting this authorship in your hands.

SYLVI: I actually do have kind of an idea. Because it's been—I'm assuming—like, it's been written here before, but it's faded, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah. And, well, so—it's been written here—your suspicion is it was written here very recently, a day ago, two days ago, right?

SYLVI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And then—maybe even more recently than that, who could say?

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And then there is the—you imagine maybe it was written here long ago before that, but that would have been completely faded, you know?

SYLVI: I guess my idea here is like, what if I slipped into the Residuum to see if there were any traces of that still around this area?

AUSTIN: Oh, I love that. I love that. That's *fantastic*. Do you want to explain what that—how you do that and what that means?

SYLVI: Yeah, so, sort of the—I guess, just to talk about like the mechanics of the Deadwalker, one of the big things about it is you can step into this alternate plane of reality, this sort of like, death plane. And the one—like, we explained it a little, what we came up with, our one's called the Residuum. In the book, if you're like, curious about this game, it's referred to as the Gray. And basically whenever—originally, the skill is like, it takes 10 minutes of preparation to do a ritual to enter into it. And I've taken a skill that lets me do it instantly. So there's no need for the ritual or anything like that.

AUSTIN: Totally. You do have to roll, right? There is a roll for you to do, so.

SYLVI: Yeah. It's a Delve plus Religion, which I don't have.

AUSTIN: You have not—you have Delve, you just don't have Religion, right?

SYLVI: I have Delve, but I don't have Religion. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah. Well, you should do it. I love this idea.

SYLVI: Okay. So I'll just roll Delve.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVI: That's a 9.

AUSTIN: Yeah, so what's this—you—what's it look like when you step into the Residium, both for you and for people looking at you?

SYLVI: I think—I've been trying to think of a way to sort of like, tie this into sort of some of the other abilities that I've got. And I think just—and like, trying to find a way that communicates what that place looks like a little bit. And I think it's like this sort of like, almost like an explosion of color, and these hand-like things kind of come up and like, almost completely surround her, and then she's gone. Like, they have like—

AUSTIN: 'How's it going over there, Virtue?' [LAUGHING] Hands emerge.

SYLVI: Yeah, it's like—and when I say like, they have like—when I say like colors and stuff, it's like patterns are flowing through them. It like, looks like there's, like—it's almost like an image has been projected onto them, but—and is like playing over top, but it's not, it's just coming from them.

AUSTIN: Love it.

SYLVI: I don't know if I'm explaining that the best I can.

AUSTIN: No, that makes sense. We sent some notes back and forth on that and like—I talked about the—what's the *Count of Monte Cristo* anime called again? Does anyone remember—

SYLVI: The...

AUSTIN: Guns—gun—hm.

SYLVI: I remember I was talking about *Mononoke*, but.

AUSTIN: Also *Mononoke*, *Mononoke* does this all the time and it looks sick. It's like—yeah. Yeah. They're both really good, and they both have—well, they're both very beautiful at the very least.

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: [CHUCKLES] So. In any case, you disappear, you go to the Residuum, which again, is this realm of death but life, it's this realm where all of the things and also spirits pass through at the very least, and here you see a version of this place—it kind of mirrors the world, right? That's the gist of it, or it's like, laid on top of it.

SYLVI: Yeah. It is like, laid on top of it, and sort of like, almost feels like layers on layers on layers of itself, because of the—

AUSTIN: Yeah. Copied and pasted over and over—

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Because it's everything—here's the thing that's probably worth saying though is, this place, for instance, I think is simpler than, for instance, a town or a city where there's been so much change over time. This place had been the thing it was for so long, but you do—there is some stuff that you immediately pick up being here. One is, you see droplets of dried blood around you from where there was this fight, and the red of that blood has kind of come into the Residuum at this point. You see the colors of the dead dragon as it's dissolved, and you can kind of see that mapped out and in front of you. Not mapped out, but you know, drawn into the world here.

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And you can also see the like—even that is layered in ways. There is an eighth leg here that wasn't there, but that leg is like a different color than the other seven legs. It's almost as if—it's almost as if there were original legs and then replacement legs and both have died now, except there was never any replacement eighth leg, as far as you can see, if that makes sense.

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's like if the original legs were tan and furry or whatever, now the second ones glow a different—you know, whatever it is. However we want to paint that.

SYLVI: And everything else is sorta like—the stuff that sort of represents with the seven legs we know of, where—they're still sort of in the same position, and this is in a new spot? Or are they sort of spread out?

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's the same—oh, maybe that's the way to do it, right? It's like there's actually, you know, 15 legs—or I guess it'd be seven. And then—yeah, seven and eight would be 15. There's 15 legs here. And there are the first set of eight, the full set of eight, are maybe a more vibrant color or texture, a smoother texture. Maybe there's something on them that has this like—I don't know if it's like just a beautiful pattern or what, but then the more recent one is more like stitched-together and patchwork in its patterning. It literally just feels like stuff has been stitched together. So there's like a circle, and then a square, and then a flower, and then—you know what I mean? Like it does not—it's not a well-made pattern here.

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Then the thing that you pick up here is that there is a vocal component to this. The hymn must be sung. And you hear multiple voices singing it, both from the voices that sung it recently, but also from—you hear like a choir singing it from forever ago. And that is—again, you don't hear the words, but you hear the color of the words, the color of the tone. Do you know what I mean? And—

SYLVI: Yeah. There's like—sort of the melody, is it like in my head, but it doesn't really make sense that it's there? Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yes. Totally. Exactly that. Yeah, exactly. And you can read the kind of, you know, the sense of it, the emotional sense of it, but that's about it. And then you come back to—or, sorry, you don't, it's up to you. I guess when you—the Residium is not a thing you dip into—you can stay here as long as you want, I believe.

SYLVI: I can stay here for one situation and any additional ones can cause stress.

AUSTIN: Okay. Gotcha, gotcha, gotcha.

SYLVI: If we're keeping that part of the Gray, then...

AUSTIN: Yeah, we should. Yeah.

SYLVI: Okay, cool. Yeah, I think that's like—I guess my other thing here, actually, is I'd like to check for any signs of Janek to see if they've died. He/him pronouns for Janek?

AUSTIN: He/him on Janek, he/him on Janek, yeah.

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Does not seem to have.

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: There's blood here, there's recent blood here, but there's no body, there's not enough blood for it to be, you know, death. You do find the part of the color of the knife that got shocked by the corrosive, and that corrosive bullet seems to have actually hit the Residium here.

SYLVI: Oh.

JACK: Oh, dear.

AUSTIN: You can like, dispose of it if you want to, or do some sort of little ritual to cleanse it, but like, that bullet would kill heaven. If—bullets like that hurt the heavens, you know what I mean?

SYLVI: Wait, so is the bullet like, physically lodged in here? Or is it just like a thing I can make...?

AUSTIN: I think the color of the bullet is—

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: It's this deep pulsing red that is like spreading in the area that it's in.

SYLVI: God, I want to find a way to keep that. [CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: That's a thing you could try to—give me a roll. What do you—how do you do that?

SYLVI: I think, so—also, the domain is Desolate here now, I'm assuming? If we're sticking with the—

AUSTIN: Is that what it—I feel like it can't be Desolate.

SYLVI: Yeah, this was my problem with when I came up with this thing.

AUSTIN: No, the Gray is Desolate. We are not Desolate. This is not—we can totally reflavor it.

SYLVI: For sure.

[2:20:03]

AUSTIN: We can totally rebuild. We don't need to match the Gray. I think it's probably Wild based on what you've said, which I don't think you have either, but.

SYLVI: Okay, cool. I don't, but that's—like, I still want to know for going forward.

AUSTIN: You—yes. You absolutely can get Wild, and also have a good move to get Wild. So let's say Wild. It's Wild here.

SYLVI: Okay, cool.

AUSTIN: But like, to get rid of this thing—you tell me. What do you have, Delve, Discern, and Kill?

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Make a case.

SYLVI: I was going to say, like, this might be a Delve thing, but like, I still am trying to, like—because it is related to like, exploration and like, recovery of stuff. But also I understand if that's a little flaky.

AUSTIN: Yeah. No, I—Delve is very flexible. Delve is about moving into unknown places, it's about doing dungeon-y stuff. It's really broad. I would let you use Delve for this.

SYLVI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Like, I had already planned, for instance, on letting Marn roll Delve to do materials stuff today, for instance, right?

SYLVI: Okay, cool.

AUSTIN: I think Discern would also work for that to some degree, for Marn, for if you want to look at materials and stuff later, if you ended up with like, a Discern knack, that would be a fun one, you know?

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But Delve would work for this, for sure.

SYLVI: Okay. And is this also Standard, or?

AUSTIN: This is Risky.

SYLVI: Okay. I thought so.

AUSTIN: Which means you're going to get rid of your highest die after you roll it. I think you can just choose that, right? That's a thing in the drop-down?

SYLVI: Yeah, that's fine. I'm ready to be a little risky here. So, okay. I think that's all I've got here, then, is just the Delve, and...

AUSTIN: It's just Delve, yeah.

SYLVI: Alright. That's a 9! Oh my god! [CLAPS]

AUSTIN: That's a 9.

SYLVI: I rolled a 9-10!

AUSTIN: You rolled a 9-10. Fuck off. I'm never going to give stress or fallout to anybody. What an incredible crew. This is—this is going so well. Yeah, what's it look like as you dispose of this corrosive, like, effect? God, it's so good because it's literally called the Pale Magistratum, and so like, I think what it does is it re-pales the area here, right? Like, it literally is draining that life away. It's trying to turn it into the Gray. You know?

SYLVI: Yeah. I'm—hm. Part of me is wondering—like, I'm looking at just like, the stuff I have, partially as like flavor stuff, but also like, I'm wondering if using this knife that has some of the residual energy of this thing to sort of dig it out and like, see what happens with that would work.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Here's what I'll say is, you can—I mean, you got a success, so you can come up with a way that—I think that that just works here, right? Maybe what you do is you almost recapture it inside of the knife, you know? It's like you—it's like using gum to pick something up. Do you know what I mean?

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, you kind of stick it back onto the knife before you leave the Residuum, yeah.

SYLVI: And then I'm going to pop out after that.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh? And what do you say as you pop back out?

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): Well, so he's probably not dead. No evidence of that right now. Also, how—hm. Please don't react strangely if I begin singing in a moment.

JACK: Thumbs up.

[SYLVI AND DRE CHUCKLE]

JACK: The same thumbs up—

SYLVI: I am, by the way, saying this now out of character, I'm not singing that hymn.

AUSTIN: No, you're good. But I did say it does require multiple voices.

SYLVI: Oh, true.

AUSTIN: It seems like it required—the most recent thing were these two people singing, which if both of them are singing and also they fought, it's probably the case that—they weren't just both singing 'cause they liked the song. You know what I mean?

SYLVI: Okay, good to know.

AUSTIN: So you're gonna have to get someone else to sing with you if you're gonna sing.

SYLVI: Yeah. Okay. Then maybe I won't mention the singing thing yet and just sort of stew on that for a minute. Just because it's weird magic stuff doesn't mean I'm not still very proud of myself, you know?

AUSTIN: Yeah. The rest of you, as you now are passing under the tree, or near the tree? Where are you passing? This beast is on the ceiling, so you kind of have a moment to breathe here.

JACK: I want to get as close as I can to the writing on the floor. I think Pickman is sort of working with the assumption that when the spell is completed, something will happen there.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: So that's the place to be. And so I'm going to take this opportunity to close the distance.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Chine and Marn, you're sticking with Pickman as she crosses the rest of the room?

DRE: Yes. I would like to scoop up one of these oranges on the ground.

AUSTIN: You can get a couple of them, I'll say.

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: Give me a—actually, I'm just going to give you this as you pass through. This is worth grabbing. This is a—take a d6 Wild Fallen Oranges, bag of—it's like a bag's worth—not a bag's worth, but like a little satchel's worth, you know?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You get like, four of them. That's a d6 resource.

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: Wild. So yeah, you grab those and you—the rest of you manage to make it up to the altar. At which point the white flower beast lands in front of the tree, between the tree and the altar, basically. And again, begins to kind of pace back and forth. But for now, at least—maybe I'll just illustrate this as clear as I can. It spits acid at you, but the acid seems to like—it's almost as if the acid itself dissolves or like turns to steam, and evaporates as it nears the altar. And you can feel the presence of that Shape sign that's been drawn onto the altar—

JACK: Oh, great.

AUSTIN: —still protecting this space for at least—for at least a few moments? It is fading. You know? You got a little—you got a beat here, basically. But you're all here, you're all here at the altar. And what do you do?

SYLVI: I mean, I would like to point out the Shape sign to Pickman at the very least and sort of get their opinion on what—if they know what's been going on, like, here.

JACK (as PICKMAN): That's a Shape sign.

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): Thank you so much. Didn't figure that out yet. Great.

JACK (as PICKMAN): People will put 'em all over. I think it's—people think it's protection, and, you know.

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): Yes, well, this one seems to actually be doing its job, which is what surprised me so much.

JACK (as PICKMAN): Oh, it does its job. Yeah. I mean, the Shape has to take care of itself. We should be careful, keep an eye out. That spark—

JACK: Pickman, just like points, jabs, a finger at the spark.

JACK (as PICKMAN): You know, that thing's taken care of us, but uh, I don't much like the look of it. I don't think it's anything to be worried about, but I said that before we came down here.

[SYLVI LAUGHS]

JACK: Can I—the bag that belonged to the Pale Magister?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Is there some kind of—do I just recognize the style, or is there like a mark or a badge, or a...?

AUSTIN: There's definitely a symbol. There's definitely a hundred percent a symbol, and I don't quite know what it is, because I am—surprise, I spent more time coming up with a cool symbol for the slave revolt communists than I did the fucking supercops.

JACK: [CHUCKLING] The fucking religious cops.

[DRE CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think that it is probably—let's think here. They're holy marshals given weapons blessed by Fulmina, Goddess of Immediate Justice, and the right to use that power as they see fit. Like, how do you reinvent the sheriff's badge? You know what I mean? And I'm open to suggestions, because—because, I mean, one, your character is a goat person. You're closest to this culture, Jack. But anybody who has thoughts here on like, what is the symbol of—this group of people, I guess, to reiterate for people who don't have this, but the Second Canton of Aldomina was a place that is covered in ashen snow, and is like hardscrabble and miserable, and

there was heavy rationing, and that rationing was harshly enforced by this group of kind of judges and executioners called magistrates. And they are, again, kind of holy marshals. And they are—you know, there is a complex hierarchy of them, but even the lowest-ranking ones are still kind of fearsome. You know, this is your, like—your man in black rolls to town with a badge and a gun. And the—someone, somewhere says that, you know, he's allowed to issue justice. And that is what these magistrates are like. Fulmina is also part of the Triadic Pyre, or the Triadic Pyre took her as part of their kind of trio of deities, the same way that they did with the Smiling God of Death and a big train, they just said, 'ah, yeah, these three are together. These three? These three are basically one church as far as I'm concerned.' So there's a way in which maybe there can be some fire symbolism here. Maybe it is just like the lick of a flame. That's kind of fun.

JACK: Yeah. I was thinking, is it like a circle, or like a hollow circle with a flaming sword in the middle of it?

AUSTIN: Love it. Sure. Totally.

JACK: Where it's just like—it's classic scary. We've got a fiery sword. What I'm wondering is, can I pull the symbol off this bag and pocket it?

AUSTIN: Totally. Absolutely. Let me decide how big of a resource that is. It's something, though. A badge like that, that can get you into places. You know what I mean?

JACK: I'm a goat person. I have a big gun. People might not have met a magister before.

AUSTIN: Totally. Magistrate. I don't want to use magister because that is super used in *Dragon Age* in a way that is like—

JACK: Oh, sure. Right.

AUSTIN: —we will just be doing magisters at that point. People will just think we ripped it off.

JACK: Fair enough.

AUSTIN: I think that this is—I think this is a d8 resource. Like these are pretty—it's a real fucking badge, right? So d8, and I would say... Haven? Haven or Religion. I think it's Haven. 'Cause it's about people. It doesn't do shit in a temple. You know what I mean?

JACK: Yeah.

[2:30:00]

AUSTIN: It's about, quote unquote, you know, 'culture and civilization'. Someone who believes that your god is full of bullshit is not going to yield to your badge. You know? The Wilds are not going to yield to your badge. The Occult is not going to do that.

JACK: No, they'll eat you.

AUSTIN: And so it's—yeah, exactly. So fuck that. Yeah, it's Haven. So d8 Haven, Magistrate's Badge. Alright. Y'all are still here. Anyone else doing anything at this altar? Presumably Virtue is about to ask you to sing, but.

SYLVI: Yeah... okay. It's time to do—I'm going to actually ask it in character.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Good.

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): Alright, so, this is... hm. A bit of an unorthodox request, but I think it could help sort of illuminate some things around the... the case we're investigating, the missing, uh, John or whatever his name is. Um, so—

ALI (as MARN): Janek?

SYLVI: [CHUCKLING] I know what his name is, by the way. Like, out of character.

AUSTIN: [LAUGHS] As you're slowly walking, absolutely this beast is like prowling around the altar, like in a semi-circle, to try to test to find if there's a weakness, tendrils kind of trying to snatch or like kind of snap in that direction, and being kind of pushed back each time.

SYLVI: I guess I could try and kill that really quick. Ehh.

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): Okay, so, the thing is, I've been led to believe that some sort of spell was cast here, and that the way it sort of activates its energies is a group of people—

SYLVI: Sort of gestures to us.

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): —needs to sing this hymn. And I would love some help with that. Hm?

DRE (as CHINE): Yeah. Okay.

ALI (as MARN): Uh-huh. How many?

JACK (as PICKMAN): You got a hymn sheet?

AUSTIN: 'How many.' [CHUCKLES]

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): You know, I think four should be enough, but I appreciate the concern. So, don't worry. We've got more than enough people as long as everyone joins in.

[AUSTIN AND JACK LAUGH]

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): I don't—I kind of—I can hum the tune now, and then you can look at the words that I've written on the floor here—

SYLVI: And she points at the...

AUSTIN: And it's written, again, in a dialect that you could pronounce, but you don't speak it, right?

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: The original—it's in the original. So it's not—you know. It's again, like, looking at a particular written dialect from a hundred, 200 years ago, basically. 150 years ago is what it is.

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): Now, of course magic isn't an exact science, so I'm sorry if this doesn't, you know, do anything, but maybe—you know what? Music sometimes soothes the savage beast.

SYLVI: And she sorta like, gestures at the plant thing.

SYLVI (as VIRTUE): So maybe it'll help all around, you know? So are you singing with me or not?

DRE (as CHINE): Yeah.

SYLVI: If she still had blood, she would be blushing right now. [LAUGHS]

[ALI CHUCKLES]

AUSTIN: [LAUGHS] Alright. This is some sort of Occult—or again, Cursed or Religion, because we're here—check for sure. Who's taking the lead here?

SYLVI: I feel like it would be shitty of me to not take the lead here.

AUSTIN: Yeah. After all this? Yeah, definitely.

SYLVI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Go ahead and take the lead.

SYLVI: Would this be Discern, you think?

AUSTIN: Yeah, you're trying to—yeah, yeah, yeah. You're trying to make sense of the note on the ground. That makes sense.

SYLVI: Okay. [LAUGHS]

AUSTIN: And, yeah. Anyone who wants to, again, put themselves out there can add dice to this.

JACK: Like—

AUSTIN: You have enough people.

DRE: Yeah, I'm in there.

SYLVI: Okay. So that's two? Okay.

AUSTIN: That is—yeah. Pickman not—Pickman singing, but not contributing.

SYLVI: I got success at a cost. Oh, I rolled Risky still. I'm assuming it's still Risky though?

AUSTIN: No, you're safe here.

SYLVI: Okay. Then it's an 8.

AUSTIN: So we can keep that 8. That's a success. Yeah, totally. Alright. The thing that happens is, as you are beginning to sing this thing in this kind of old Sangfielle dialect, it's—I mean, is it embarrassing to sing with people? What's the feeling of singing with these people you just met?

SYLVI: I mean—

AUSTIN: Singing a weird old hymn about sinning against your god, I guess.

SYLVI: I think the thing that's embarrassing is that she doesn't like, confidently know all the words, and like, having to show that she does— isn't an expert on something is *killing* her.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Mm.

SYLVI: I think that's actually the main embarrassing thing here.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Everyone else, how's it feel?

JACK: Pickman's got her hands behind her back. Like you're doing—like you're singing in church, standing very sort of, like—and is just sort of singing in like, a rich baritone.

SYLVI: Beautiful.

JACK: Like, picking out a faltering harmony.

AUSTIN: [CHUCKLES] Marn and Chine?

ALI: This is chill. [CHUCKLES] I don't know. What's the problem? [LAUGHS] Let's sing.

AUSTIN: Yeah, you're good with it?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: What's the problem? People sing together sometimes.

ALI: It's a fucking spell, we got to get through the altar, I guess. Question mark?

SYLVI: I appreciate your professionalism.

[AUSTIN AND ALI LAUGH]

AUSTIN: So, as the song—as the hymn comes to a close, the ground itself beneath you turns into a doorway, and it is an open doorway, and you are standing, at one moment, here, and at the next moment—

[2:35:30 - MUSIC OUTRO - "[Sangfielle](#)" by Jack de Quidt]

AUSTIN: —at the edge of a vast cathedral, looking out onto a kind of sand-blasted—salt-blasted, really—canyon that you were inside of.