

Winter in Hieron 29: Slow Justice

AUSTIN AS UKLAN TEL: Oh, dear. And he's coming—here? For the book?

DRE AS THRONDIR: Yep.

UKLAN: Oh, no. We have to—wait, [stammers] If the book is in danger, why did no one tell us this right away?

KEITH AS FERRO: I—listen. [*THEME MUSIC - INSIDE - BEGINS*] It didn't seem that important. To me. Until just now.

THRONDIR: Oh, God.

FERRO: What's so exciting about the Grand Tour?

UKLAN: Exciting is not the word.

FERRO (overlapping): Well, you got excited, you sounded excited.

UKLAN: I—well, to the east, the world is in tatters. But they keep it, more or less, stable. They're quite dangerous. They're like a, a *sewing needle*. But it's hot, and sharp all around.

AUSTIN: You are able to trace the path of your quarry by following the frozen people. There are a couple times you open a door and there's someone in there who's like, cleaning something, and that's how you know that that is not the way Arrell came.

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: You cut through the kitchen and you see, someone has a cleaver up in the air about to bring down on a fish, or something, um, and like, but it's—they're frozen in place. So yeah, you're able to make it to a room that is the, um, the kind of private library of the Illuminated Manor.

UKLAN: What should I do?

FERRO: I dunno. You should come try to take a look at the Heat and the Dark with me, up close. What is it gonna do, *swallow us*?

AUSTIN: He... nods his head. And says:

UKLAN: You're—you're absolutely right.

AUSTIN: The fire—your weird Heat and Dark fire—begins to flicker as the fog spreads up it. But there's still... you've talked about that blackest black before, right? The blackest black that's ever existed?

SYLVIA: Yeah, like, the Vantablack stuff.

AUSTIN: Vantablack, yeah. The fire freezes and cracks. And there's just the Vantablack left. And it's just like, it looks like there's noth—like, it's nothing. It's nothing, it's right there, it's nothing. It's on your arm, and it's not—it's not yours anymore. Whatever was keeping this thing, this purplish flame from being much more terrifying, actual Heat and Dark, that part of it has gone away. *[MUSIC - INSIDE - ENDS]*

--END RECAP--

AUSTIN: Fero.

KEITH: Hey!

AUSTIN: You and Uklan Tel have ridden out at this point, and, you know, we're probably actually a little bit in the future from where this fight is, but we're gonna bounce between the two, uh, for pacing reasons. You and Uklan Tel have found that little café I talked about before. That's been, that was like the starlight stuff on top of a crevice, a fissure of the Heat and the Dark. And, uh, and you can kind of sense it kind of broiling underneath. Um, and then you have the stuff that's in front of you that, again, is at once bright but only bright for itself. It doesn't light up the area around it, it just sort of, you can see it clearly as if it was internally illuminated.

AUSTIN AS UKLAN TEL (gravely, soft, a little bumbling): Remarkable. [sighs] Imagine, objects that are outside of the patter—we could—

AUSTIN: And he like, steps over to it and looks at it, and hasn't quite committed to stepping onto the brick and like, patio of this café that's been sprouted up from nothing. Or, to cover up Nothing, also. And then, yeah, underneath it you can see like, the edges have not been fully covered over. Or like, the fissure has continued to grow very slowly, and you can see the starlight trying to keep up with it. What do you do?

KEITH AS FERRO: This stuff is *bad!*

UKLAN: You're telling me! I-I'm telling you! It's bad!

FERRO: It's bad! Why didn't you tell me?

UKLAN: I—[stammers] It was the first time—

KEITH: [laughs distantly]

UKLAN: I was worried.

FERO: [sighs] Is there... is there anything that you can tell from up close about it that you maybe didn't realize before?

KEITH: And I'm also looking at it, trying to figure out anything about it.

AUSTIN: He shakes his head.

UKLAN: The work I do takes—months. I'll... take some sketches, and write some observations, and then, I—[exhales] Everyone else can flee, I'll stay and I'll set up camp nearby and I can keep studying it. But it's going to take me a little while.

FERO: But you have no immediate observations... based on...

UKLAN: Immediate observations are for... other sorts of folk.

FERO: I mean when you're looking at a pattern you can immediately know that you need four doves, an old hat, and someone's secret—

UKLAN (overlapping): Yes—

FERO: —but you can't look at this and have any... idea?

UKLAN: This is so different! This is not that. That's the whole reason why it's incredible. The starlight is out of the pattern entirely! It *blocks* the pattern. Uh, you see now, there is no longer a, an empty plain here as there once was. In Rosemerrow where the, where the starlight wall is now, there is no longer the Long Sand. But... it is not part of the pattern either. But it's not Nothing. It's not Nothing. It is something, it's just part of a different pattern, or—it's not... I don't see how it adds up. I can—

FERO (overlapping): Do you think it is part of a different pattern or part of no pattern? 'Cause you've said both.

UKLAN: I think the Nothing is part of no pattern, I know that, that is, I'm sure. But maybe there's a different pattern here. [stammers] The mind *reels* at the possibilities.

KEITH: Uh, I had rolled for, um, *Discern Realities*? I got a twelve.

AUSTIN: Yep. Ask me some questions.

KEITH: Um... uh. This sucks.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm! That's gonna be my answer a bunch.

KEITH: Yeah. Uh... What here is not what it appears to be?

AUSTIN: [inhales] The Heat and the Dark is... like, the purple and black like, magma, like, fire stuff?

KEITH (overlapping): Yeah.

AUSTIN: Is a facade. It is... it is, you don't know that it's a facade made by the Heat and the Dark themselves, necess—itself, necessarily. Um, but it is covering up the true appearance of the Heat and the Dark. Which we, as viewers, have just seen in Ephrim's blade. And Ephrim's burning brand.

KEITH: Right. The Vantablack.

AUSTIN: Which is this Vantablack, completely black, there is no light there, it does not reflect any light, it only absorbs—or, y'know, I guess the way vision works is that of course it reflects some light or you couldn't see it at all, I guess? I don't know how light works. In this case, there is nothing there. There is truly nothing there. It's nothing. It's not air, it's not space, it's, it's—nothing. It's nothing. There's no other way for me to describe it. And so I think there is a bit of, you can see the starlight pushing it out? Or like, paving over it? And you can see the starlight rip away the purple and black like, lava, like, surface? To reveal the Nothing underneath. And then the starlight like, drips inside? And falls inside of Nothing. Like, it's like a cartoon hole, y'know?

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: And then it's gone. And then it's gone. And then so instead, it just builds on top of the Nothing. Instead of trying to go into it.

KEITH: So does like, it's also a cartoon hole in that you can pick it up and move it?

AUSTIN: *No.* *You* can't pick it up and move it.

KEITH (overlapping): No?

AUSTIN: There's no, you can't grip it from the outside. Do you know what I mean?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It doesn't have an edge you could grab onto. It only has an edge that grows.

KEITH: Wh... um... What should I be on the lookout for?

AUSTIN: Um... getting too close. Or, maybe that's the wrong word. Um... trying to... like maybe this is a moment where Fero, I mean, again, you don't, I can't tell you what you think about this stuff. But... it, it isn't like, it truly isn't like anything else you've ever seen, where you could totally conceive a sword made of fire, you could conceive of a harp made of water. Right? The other materials of the world...

KEITH: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: You *are* them, you *become* them, all the time. You have no idea what would happen if you tried to become... this. And so, you should at least take caution with that in a serious way. Um, because you *don't know*. Success might look like failure. You know?

KEITH: Yeah. [clears throat] What here is useful or valuable to me?

AUSTIN: So I think... probably the star-stuff is?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's scary, also. Because it's not like anything else that you turn into. It does not speak, it does not have a spirit? [sighs] But it is *physical*. And it does seem to be able to at least cover up the Heat and the Dark? If it can't, even though it can't necessarily *stop* it.

KEITH: Is it artificial?

AUSTIN: What's that mean in this world?

KEITH: I don't know.

AUSTIN: Yes, I guess? It's not from Samol. Right?

KEITH: Right.

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AUSTIN: Like, if the world is Hieron, and Hieron is the god, Samol, and everything in it is some part of him in some way, or connects back to that ecosystem, that circle of life, this does not—this is outside of that. Or is adjacent to it, or something. And—

KEITH: Do we know where the stars came from?

AUSTIN: We, the players know—I think yeah, yeah. At this point Uklan Tel has said Samot built them. Samot made them, did not finish them, they don't have a history, they don't have a culture, all they have is their desire to stop the Heat and the Dark. And the ability to do whatever it is they're doing. So the other thing you notice here is the Heat and the Dark does not swallow the star-stuff. It doesn't—it can't, if the star-stuff goes *into* the Heat and the Dark it disappears, but it can't expand into the star-stuff either.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: And so, the star-stuff, which again is just trying to find some notion of, like—it's just repeating things that the stars have seen here on the planet—or not the planet, but on Hieron. Um, those things are not real, in the sense that they're not—[laughs] This looks like a café, but it's just kind of the shape of a café. They didn't make a café that has like, pastries inside of it.

KEITH (amused): They just made a café building.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Maybe there are pastries inside of it—

KEITH (overlapping): Does it look, does it look, like, material that I recognize? Or is it like...

AUSTIN: (overlapping): It's the star—It's the stuff that you saw in Rosemerrow. It's that stuff.

KEITH: Yeah. Right.

AUSTIN: It's also the stuff that they are made out of. That the stars are made out of. Um... so, so yeah.

KEITH: [groans] Here's, I... here's my first—I'm gonna, I'm gonna do my first step. Here's my first, I'm dipping my toe in.

AUSTIN: Okay. Okay...

KEITH: I'm going to go sort of as close as I safely think I can go.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

KEITH: And I'm going to... are we, what's like, the terrain here?

AUSTIN: It's a like, rocky plain. Like... or not rocky, even. Clay, you know. Long, clay plains.

KEITH: Are there any creatures around? Have they all gone—

AUSTIN: Many of them have gone, many of them have fled, um... There's probably, you know, a few birds of prey hunting for whatever's left. Scavenging, also.

KEITH: If there's one nearby, I'll talk to a bird. If not, I'll talk to the clay.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I'll let there be a bird.

KEITH (overlapping): Something that's really close.

AUSTIN: There's a vulture overhead. Let's say.

FERO (calling to the vulture): Hey—hey!

AUSTIN: It like, calls back at you. Um... what do vultures sound like?

AUSTIN AS VULTURE (suavely): Hello.

AUSTIN: He's a very smooth vulture.

FERO: Can we talk for a bit?

VULTURE: Of course.

AUSTIN: And it like, swoops lower. And it has like, it has like a—can you read expressions on animals?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It like, pities you.

KEITH: Hm.

AUSTIN: And it lands nearby, and like, waddle-steps over to you both. Uklan Tel is now like, has a notebook out and is taking notes, and he brought a little stool that he set up, also.

KEITH: Okay. Collapsible stool?

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

KEITH: Nice.

FERO: Um... you been here long?

VULTURE: Only since you have been.

FERO: Are you *following* me?

AUSTIN: He like, looks from you to him, to Uklan Tel, and then back.

VULTURE: I'm following one of you.

FERO: Wh... why?

VULTURE: It's *very dangerous* out here.

FERO (nonchalantly): Oh, you just wanna eat us if we die?

VULTURE: Mm. Hm.

FERO: Is that your game? That's fine.

VULTURE: Mm-hm!

KEITH: Is that all that is, is there anything else? Am I getting a vibe from this guy?

AUSTIN: That's all that it is. This is a vulture who wants to eat the flesh of Uklan Tel.

KEITH: Okay. Um...

FERO: Have you noticed the thing?

VULTURE: Of course. We all have.

FERO: What d'you feel—how do you feel about it?

VULTURE: Well, it seems like it's going to impact my life quite a bit and I'm going to fill my gullet until it ruins things.

FERO: That's not a bad plan. Um... I'm just sorta tryin' to get a sense of it—I feel, I dunno, I feel like I have my sense of it, I'm tryin' to get some other thing's sense of it—this guy tells me not to try to talk to it like I'm tryna talk to you?

VULTURE: Oh, we are very different. That thing, it—

FERO: You and the thing? Yes, yeah.

VULTURE: The dark or the bright?

FERO: The... dark.

VULTURE: Well, the difference between the dark and I is... if I eat a big meal, I'm satisfied. It *never* stops eating.

FERO: What about the bright?

VULTURE: Oh, it never gets tired. Not like me.

FERO: The bright never gets tired?

VULTURE: I've seen it building for days, now. It never stops. There's never a moment where it rests, there's never... it just keeps going.

FERO: But the dark doesn't rest either, right?

VULTURE: Oh, no. No. But it's not... the dark is at rest, even when it grows. Whereas the brightness... the glow, I can feel it flapping.

FERO: Hm.

AUSTIN: It's like, the vulture keeps eyeing Uklan Tel.

VULTURE: How much longer?

FERO: Oh, a while, for sure. Hey, I have, I have some of this—

KEITH: Can I just give him some food from my gear? Just give him some, I'll just give him some meat.

VULTURE (overlapping): [eating sounds]

AUSTIN: He like, snaps at it with a long neck, reaches out and rips it away from you.

VULTURE: [more eating sounds] Mm.

AUSTIN: And then like, begins to like, stretch-flap its wings a little bit? Y'know, it's not ready to take off quite yet, but it's just showing you its wingspan.

VULTURE: [exhales] If there's anything else... you know where I am.

FERO: Tha... thanks!

AUSTIN: And it like, lifts back up with a few awkward flaps and then is in the sky. Still above you.

UKLAN: You have a friendly chat?

FERO: Yeah...! He wanted to eat you.

UKLAN: [chuckles knowingly] Oh, vultures.

AUSTIN: Back in the library. [laughs]

KEITH: [laughs distantly]

SYLVIA: [exhales nervously]

AUSTIN: Um, so. Throndir, your hands are incredibly cold. And you notice—so are you just hanging from—where are you hanging from at this point?

DRE: Um... I think once like, once Ephrim got that good hit in I've kind of clambered the rest of the way up.

AUSTIN: Okay, so where are you, are you behind, where are you at?

DRE: Um... I guess that I'm kind of... I mean, I'm inside on this second floor.

AUSTIN: Yeah, just ping on the map where you are.

DRE: I guess like around here.

AUSTIN: Alright, so you're like, there. Okay. You notice, then, that your legs, your feet are freezing cold. You can also sense that about like, Morbash's feet are in fact frozen in place as this fog continues to spread across the ground level here. Um, and Zhan Kurr is already like, his back is stuck to the ground. Kall Fer has begun to run away with the book. She's like, sprinting

around the outside edge of the build—or of the library. And with a single hand Arrell's like, reaching out and throwing fireballs after her, basically? And they keep missing and hitting the wall where the—not fireballs, I don't think he actually, he's probably not a, he uses fire like, occasionally? He's done fire traps, he's done big fire blasts and stuff? But he's probably just magic missile-ing at her. And missing. But you have him pinned to the ground. The weird fog does not seem to be freezing him, though. And then Ephrim, yeah, your blade is now this strange blackness. Um, and you can sense that it is coming up your arm.

SYLVIA: Can I get *rid* of it?

DRE: [laughs quietly]

AUSTIN: How do you get rid of it normally?

SYLVIA: Ephrim usually can just dispel it when he needs to.

AUSTIN: Okay, what's that *feel* like, or like, what's the equivalent of a bodily motion you make.

SYLVIA: Um...

AUSTIN: Is it like blinking, is it doing a cough, is it like, you know what I mean?

SYLVIA: I mean, it usually is like, he almost kinda shakes it away? And it kind of just goes into the air?

AUSTIN: Okay. It does not go away.

SYLVIA: Okay...

AUSTIN: You know what, give me a roll. Uh—no. No, it does not go away.

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: Not, not through your usual method. You can try something else, though. But it's still there for right now.

AUSTIN AS ARRELL: You're a fool! Get off of me!

AUSTIN: And his face is just, like... badly burned and also, like, there's a bit of it that's just missing. There's like, a bit of his chin is just gone now.

DRE: Eugh!

SYLVIA: Ephrim is not moving, but also not speaking.

DRE: Like, is it Heat and the Dark gone? Or is it like—

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's Heat and the Dark gone.

DRE: O-kay.

AUSTIN: And that point on his chin is like, it's small. But... if you look really close, is slowly growing.

DRE: So... Ephrim is on top of...

AUSTIN: Yeah, he has him pinned.

DRE: Arrell? Okay.

AUSTIN: Morbash says, like,

AUSTIN AS MORBASH: [sighs] Take his staff away! Give him to me! He's going away for a long time.

DRE: How is he holding his staff, just in like, one hand?

AUSTIN: His left hand has the staff, his right hand was the one that was like, firing magic missiles across the room.

ARRELL: Just give me the book! It's our only—hope.

DRE: I take my sword and I shove it down on his left wrist.

ARRELL (in pain): *Agh!*

AUSTIN: Do some damage. [DRE rolls] Okay. He's like, bleeding really badly. Uh, he's not dead, yet. But the blade is like, do you leave it in?

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DRE: Uh, yes.

AUSTIN: Okay. He's like:

ARRELL (breathing heavily): Thron... Throndir. Thro—*Throndir*.

AUSTIN: He's like, looking for... you can't tell if he's looking for the Fantasma voice or if he's dropping into Fantasma, or if, like... he's hurt really bad. And, is like, pleading with you.

ARRELL (desperate, struggling to speak): [takes a shallow breath] I need... the book. I-it's our only chance. I think I ha... [inhales, tries to speak louder] I think I have a sp—I think I have a solution. [exhales] But I don't have the book!

DRE AS THRONDIR: You don't get to use *his* voice.

ARRELL: It's... *my* voice. He was *me*. He was *mine*... [breathes heavily, whimpers] It will *work*. Ephrim! You can't kill me, I'm the only one who can bring *Hadrian* his *son* back!

SYLVIA: There's like, a look in Ephrim's eyes that is like, he is not hearing any of this, he's just waiting for a go-ahead from Throndir.

DRE: Um, that gets Throndir's attention. [laughs]

SYLVIA (overlapping): It is a, it is like a almost uncontrolled rage, but just barely enough, there's enough, like... there's enough there to keep him from just ripping out this guy's throat right now, but barely.

THRONDIR: What did you do with his son?

ARRELL: He *gave* me him! He—

THRONDIR: You're lying.

ARRELL: Hadrian gave me Benjamin to put away safely. So that... when Ordena came, he would survive. He is safe. I held up my end. Let me go. Bring me the book. She should not have it! She wastes it. She sits here and reads it and does *nothing*.

DRE: Um, I don't, I don't wanna do damage, but I basically kick him in the side as like a, not to like, hurt him, but like, "Shut up."

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

DRE: And Throndir says:

THRONDIR: You're not arguing for the book, you're arguing for your life.

ARRELL: [sighs]

THRONDIR: If you bring the boy, you live. The book doesn't enter into this.

ARRELL: Throndir, there is no... *difference*. If I die here, we're all doomed. If you won't let me have the book, then end me now. It will be a better death than yours when the Heat and the Dark arrives.

AUSTIN: Kall Fer begins to whisper words in the corner. Reading from the book.

DRE (whispering): Oh, God. [sighs] Ephrim, if he has Hadrian's son—

SYLVIA AS EPHRIM: He doesn't get the book, he doesn't get anything from here.

DRE: Um, Throndir pulls the sword out of his arm.

ARRELL (overlapping): [hisses in pain]

DRE: [laughs]

AUSTIN: And he like, he covers—he like, does a, he says a short incantation and then dips it into the fog, which like, freezes the wrist, sealing the wound.

SYLVIA: I think Ephrim, like, he leans in real close and he like, holds his hand up to, not touching Fantasma, but like, close to his face—

AUSTIN (overlapping, amused): Arrell.

SYLVIA: Oh, sorry, Arrell. That's the thing, right?

DRE (laughing): Oh, God!

AUSTIN: Uh-huh!

SYLVIA (continuing): To Arrell, and he's just like:

EPHRIM: Don't. Move.

SYLVIA: And he gets up, and he starts walking over towards Kall Fer.

AUSTIN: You can see that the books around Kall Fer have begun to like, shake in their place. And then the rest of the building begins to shake, too.

DRE: Oh, boy, this is bad.

EPHRIM: Gonna need you to stop doing whatever it is you're doing right now.

AUSTIN AS KALL FER: You heard it from him, he thought I wouldn't use it. *I'll use it.*

EPHRIM: This is not the time. He's a—he's under control, there's no threat to you here.

KALL: It's not you, it's the things in the west, in the east, e-everywhere! I, I—I am sick of being a bureaucrat stuck in a mansion! I'm going to do something to help people.

EPHRIM: If you wanna do something to help people, stop what you're doing right now.

AUSTIN: Give me a roll of some sort. It sounds like it's just *Parley*? Um...

SYLVIA: Yeah, um...

AUSTIN: And the leverage is that you're making a threat.

SYLVIA: Yeah, I guess so. Like, it's not like a—

AUSTIN (overlapping): Unless you wanna do something else.

SYLVIA: I think it's more the threat of like, bad things are going to happen if you do this, not the threat that Ephrim is going to attack. If that makes sense. Does that make, does that work?

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. Though the thing there is, then you'll have to wait for it—if you get a 7 to 9 you need concrete assurance of your, of the thing? Which means you'll have to wait for something bad to happen before she agrees.

SYLVIA: Um... Could I... do this as a *Moth to the Flame*, actually?

AUSTIN: Sure, what's that, what's that like?

SYLVIA: That is, so, what that is that—

AUSTIN (overlapping): I know what the move is, what's the—

SYLVIA: That is, the, um... I think it's similar, like, Ephrim's eye—what it looks like is Ephrim's eyes do that thing where they, like, almost light up and flash in a way that draw people to him. And then there's like, almost a connection of some sort that lets him influence them?

AUSTIN: Right. Okay.

SYLVIA: I think it is just him trying to get her to put the book down and stop reading it.

AUSTIN: Okay. Give me a roll.

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: That's a wisdom roll.

SYLVIA: Yeah. [rolls] It's a ten!

AUSTIN (overlapping): Hey, that's a ten! Alright, "On a ten their will is suppressed, they'll follow you and do as you desire, so long as nothing startles or surprises them."

KALL (quiet): I'll put down the book. Yeah, I'll, yeah.

AUSTIN: And she closes the book and places it down. And the rest of the books stop shaking in their place.

SYLVIA: Um, can I go over and take the book in my non-evil hand? [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yes.

SYLVIA: Okay. And then I'm gonna—

AUSTIN (overlapping): You're—go ahead.

SYLVIA: I wanna try and give it to Throndir when I can, 'cause I'm worried about how it's gonna interact with my hands.

AUSTIN (overlapping): Yeah, you can do that. Yeah. Morbash like, slides out of the way to let you pass. You know, you're basically able to walk past because no one's in combat anymore. It's a tight fit, but everyone's able to move around. Once you get off of Arrell, he looks to Throndir to see if he can stand up.

THRONDIR: [makes a "no" noise] Mm-mm.

ARRELL: [sighs]

DRE: I think Throndir kicks his staff away.

AUSTIN: Mm.

DRE: And basically just holds the sword over him.

ARRELL: [grumbles]

AUSTIN: He, like... opens one of his fists into a palm and slowly pushes it down into the fog, and like, keeps eye contact with you? What do you do.

DRE: Uh...

THRONDIR: Stop moving.

ARRELL: I'm just removing the fog. Otherwise Zhan Kerr will die.

THRONDIR: Fine.

AUSTIN: Then he does as he says, he puts his hand down through the fog, touches the ground, and then that fog—"ffsssh!"—comes back together and goes into, like, the vial reforms itself and slides back into his sleeve. And Zhan Kerr is like

ZHAN (slightly goofy voice): [shudders] Oo-hh, I'm co-old.

DRE: [laughs]

ZHAN: Oo-uhh, very cold!

DRE: [still laughing]

AUSTIN: Fero. How's it goin' at the Heat and the Dark?

KEITH: Uh, it's weird!

AUSTIN: Pretty weird.

KEITH: Um... it's... 'cause the problem with the Heat and the Dark is that if you make one wrong move, you're gone. Forever.

AUSTIN: You're gone. Or worse! I, y'know—

KEITH: Or, yes. Sure.

AUSTIN: I, y'know.

KEITH: You're gone and so is half the continent.

AUSTIN (amused): Yes. Or like—yeah. Yeah! No, there's lots of way this could go.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But, big stakes. These are like, the biggest stakes we've had, ever, in a game. Is what I'll say. Is like, the Heat and the Dark does not fuck around. Like, Rigor didn't fuck around in season two, but Rigor was a thing. Rigor was in a place, at a time.

KEITH: Yeah;

AUSTIN: That is not what the Heat and the Dark is.

KEITH: You can do, you can theoretically do something *to* Rigor.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: You—it seems like you can't *do* anything to the Heat and the Dark. You can just do stuff around it.

AUSTIN: Right. The star-stuff is doing stuff, I don't wanna undermine that.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But it's not—

KEITH: Right. Well, it's doing stuff *around* the Heat and the Dark, not *to* it.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Right? I mean, I guess it is dropping things into—

AUSTIN: Or like. Right. It's trying to do something to the Heat and the Dark, it doesn't seem able to. It can do stuff, it can do stuff to... Hieron? That seems to be *resistant* to the Heat and the Dark. That's the best way to think about it. Does that make sense?

KEITH: Um... yeah. I want to say... I want to have said that, that first bit out loud? That you—"Seems like you can only do stuff around it"—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

KEITH: And see if Uklan Tel has anything to add to that.

AUSTIN: He would add what I just added. Which is like:

AUSTIN AS UKLAN: Mm, yes, it's... even the star-stuff can't seem to touch it directly. But... it isn't being swallowed whole, not—the Heat and the Dark grows around it. It doesn't, it doesn't quite impede on it. It's a *race*.

KEITH: Hm... I think I know what is going to happen, but I wanna just see what it feels like when I try to talk to something made out of star-stuff. Or even, I could call down a star, even.

AUSTIN: You'd *call down* a star?

KEITH: Is there not a star around? They're like, around doin' stuff?

AUSTIN: They, no. There are no stars around here. No, I see what you're saying, no. They are around the world, but they—the stuff is almost growing on its own.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: From what you can see. You don't see where they are, though.

KEITH: Um... okay.

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KEITH: Um, I'm gonna try to talk, see what happens if I try to talk to something made out of the star-stuff.

AUSTIN: Totally.

KEITH: Especially something that is sort of near the border of the Heat and the Dark and the stars.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Um... given that, you should roll for it.

KEITH: Okay. Wisdom?

AUSTIN: Because it's dangerous to be near that border.

AUSTIN: Um, what's your, what's the, it's like, Wisdom is all your stuff? Druid stuff?

KEITH: Wisdom, yeah.

AUSTIN: Go ahead and give me a *Defy Danger* Wisdom roll, then.

KEITH: [rolls] That's an eight.

AUSTIN: Alright. Um... so, you... this is, can you read me this move again? This is...?

KEITH: *Defy Danger*?

AUSTIN: No, no, no, sorry. The one that lets you talk to things.

KEITH: Um... okay, yeah. So this is for *Spirit Tongue* but this now applies to all things that are in the world—

AUSTIN (overlapping): Yeah, yeah. Stuff.

KEITH: “The grunts, the barks, chirps, and calls of the creatures of the wild are as language to you. You can understand any animal native to you or akin to one whose essence you have studied.”

AUSTIN: Right, and then you have *Thing Talker*, which lets you talk to things.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: Um, yeah. So, you are able to hear something from the star-stuff? But it's a lot like what the original sound was of the star when you confronted it in Rosemerrow. Which is to say—

KEITH (overlapping): The garbled languages?

AUSTIN: It's a garbled echo of a reflection of a copy of, of... the language of Hieron. It is not something... You don't understand it, but also you're not convinced that if you did understand it that it would mean anything.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: Um, and it's not a spirit. It's again, it's a copy of a reflection of a spirit. It's like someone took the soul of a coffee cup, right? And like...

KEITH: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Sketched a copy, and then like, imbued it into this thing. “Oh, there's gotta be a soul, we put a thing in—yeah, it's a soul!” It's just another layer. It's like someone added a layer in Photoshop called “soul.”

FERO: I—Uklan, you seem pretty right about this stuff, it's not good either.

UKLAN: Mmm... no, but... It may be our only hope. Maybe a whole world composed of this...

FERO: But what—but a whole world compared of a shell of a copy of a thing.

UKLAN: [makes a skeptical sound] Maybe we could live on it. We'd just have to, hm.

AUSTIN: And he starts to think it through.

UKLAN: No, I guess, I guess, hm. Still, it, it—you wanted an answer to the Heat and the Dark, here it is! This is close as we may get, anyway.

KEITH: Who was it that heard the thousand thousand, horse... steps [laughs] of the Great...

AUSTIN (overlapping): That was you.

KEITH: That was me?

AUSTIN: Of the Grand Tour, yeah.

KEITH: How did I hear that, again?

AUSTIN: I think that was during your—

KEITH: That was in my vision.

AUSTIN: Your vision, yeah. Uh, you hear different horse-steps now, though.

KEITH: Where is that coming from?

AUSTIN: They are coming from... let's go back to that map. [messing with Roll20] The... based on where you are, no, I missed, I missed in Roll20. They are coming from the south-ish. Um, so you're like, here? And they're coming from the south towards Treaton.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: And it's the sound of Corsica Neue and the Unstill. Returning.

KEITH: Oh, that's something. Returning, where, where did they go to?

AUSTIN: They were on their way to Rosemerrow before.

KEITH: Um... I'm gonna call out to them all.

AUSTIN: And the, the collection of horses, like, comes to a stop. And then one heads towards you, um, but only goes halfway the distance to you. And then the, you can see like, it's bigger, the army of the Unstill is larger than it was when it left.

FERO: Uh... you guys pick up some... new folks at Rosemerrow?

AUSTIN: Uh, it's Fentil who's like, on a horse out near you, like kind of halfway—

FERO: Lentil!

AUSTIN AS FENTIL: Hey! Uh, Fero! Hi!

FERO: Yeah! Hey!

FENTIL: Come talk to me! We can't, you shouldn't be near, [AUSTIN moves away from his mic, calls louder] You shouldn't be near there, that's dangerous!

DRE: [laughs]

FERO (calling out in the same way): I've been even closer, it seems, I mean, it is dangerous, but, I think you can, it's safe enough! I'll come to you, it's fine!

FENTIL: It seems—oh, he's gonna come, [AUSTIN gets further away from the mic] He's coming, he's coming to me! He's gonna come over to me!

FERO: Yeah, I'm not married to just standing here, so I'll come to you.

UKLAN: Uh, should I come with you, or keep studying?

FERO: Um, you should come!

UKLAN: Hmm. Okay.

AUSTIN: And he stands up and picks up his little stool and walks out with you.

FERO: You seem disappointed, I promise there'll be stuff to study down that way, too.

UKLAN: [sighs] I've just got it in my head, this is it. This is, the star-stuff. If Lem and Sunder can't fix the pattern, then this is our only hope. Anyway—who is your friend?

FERO: Oh, this is Corsica—well, this is Lentil, Lentil works for Corsica Neue, and Corsica Neue—

FENTIL: Uh, it's Fentil. It's so great to meet you both.

FERO: Fentil.

FENTIL: Fentil.

FERO: Hi.

FENTIL: Hi. Uh, Fero, so good to see you. Mr. Tel, I've read some of your books!

UKLAN: ...Okay.

[AUSTIN and KEITH laugh]

FENTIL: Okay, uh, well, anyway. [quieter] Yeah, we found—there are a whole buncha people leaving Rosemerrow, and we figured they should come back with us.

FERO: That's not a bad idea.

FENTIL: And also... y'know, Ordena. They got a, they have a... There was an army there, and they were tryin' to fight something. I don't know. It. It didn't look good, and we decided not to get involved.

FERO: That's probably a good idea. Did you learn anything, or?

FENTIL: We mostly learned that if a battalion of Ordenan Anchor can't fight that thing, then maybe we should... be very careful with our battles.

FERO: Yeah.

FENTIL: With which battles we choose.

AUSTIN: Um, and, the group is gonna head back to the New Archives. It is the Unstill, all of them still here, and then a group of... refugees being led by Rosana. Hadrian's wife. Who are feeling Rosemerrow, some of whom are fleeing Velas. It's a group that includes all sorts of people. Um, there are Velasians, and halflings from Rosemerrow, there are a number of mothkin, as part of her group, there are a few gnolls, Chatterchin is there, it's a big group. And at the front of the, the very front of the group you see Corsica Neue speaking with familiarity—which is not necessarily a thing you see from her a lot—to a large, like, red... man. [you can hear AUSTIN smiling] Who has horns. He looks like one of the, like an oni from a sake bottle.

AUSTIN (CONT.): Back in the library. How's it goin', library friends?

DRE: Bad.

AUSTIN: It ain't good!

DRE: [laughs]

SYLVIA: Things have been better!

DRE: Maybe not bad, but complicated.

AUSTIN: Complicated's right.

DRE: It could be worse, we could all be frozen.

KEITH: Yeah, it could be worse, you guys could've *killed* the guy who now insists he knows how to stop this!

DRE: Yeah, I wanna hear his plan.

AUSTIN AS ARRELL: [sighs] Can I stand up?

DRE AS THRONDIR: Nope!

ARRELL: I'm very uncomfortable.

THRONDIR: Well, that's a problem you're gonna have to deal with.

ARRELL: The book. It knows how to give life to things. Hm? And, I believe that the things the stars are made of, it resists the Heat and the Dark.

AUSTIN: And he like, raises his eyebrows.

ARRELL: Are you following, Ranger?

THRONDIR: Yes.

ARRELL: The problem with it is that it does not live.

THRONDIR: The star, you mean.

ARRELL: Yes. It... it is not, it does not have the animation of a soul. I believe I can give it one.

THRONDIR: Hmmm.

ARRELL: Throndir, I know you want what is best for Hieron and for your friends. I can... [pauses] How is... Alyosha? You left with him, yes?

THRONDIR: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: He gulps.

ARRELL: He and I were old friends. We were... very close. And... if someone hurt him, as you believe I have hurt your friend, Fantasma, I would act with a very similar amount of rage. I understand where you come from, Throndir.

AUSTIN: And he like, finds his voice a little bit more.

ARRELL: You are not a fool. You are not the thing Fantasma thought you were. You are much more dangerous than that. But I need you to either decide to kill me, or else let me do my work.

THRONDIR: You get Hadrian's son, and then I'm going to do what's right.

ARRELL: And I'm supposed to trust you. I'm supposed to give up the one thing here you care about, and hope that you don't kill me.

THRONDIR: You don't have a lot of options—

ARRELL: I do! The Heat and the Dark is coming, I'd rather you kill me. Than live in a world where I don't get to... [sighs] Save everyone.

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THRONDIR: It sounds like the offer isn't that I kill you, it's that I don't kill you, but we keep you here.

ARRELL: "Here"! "Here" is going to be *gone*!

THRONDIR: Exactly.

ARRELL: [sighs] I have a place. Where we will be safe. Hm? It's further. It's further than, from the Heat and the Dark than this is, and it... There's room. There's room there. We could bring people. And... [sighs]

THRONDIR: [sighs]

AUSTIN: He's like, pleading, now, definitely.

ARRELL: I can *help*. I can build something, I can, I if I have the book, if I have the book, I can build us a place that will...

AUSTIN: And his eyes like, dart back and forth.

THRONDIR: It's Benjamin first, and then the rest of the discussion follows.

ARRELL: You have to give me my staff, then, and let me stand up.

SYLVIA AS EPHRIM: Give it to him, if he does anything we don't like, I'll take care of it.

ARRELL: Your arm is... very bad.

THRONDIR: So is yours!

SYLVIA (amused): Yeah.

DRE: [laughs]

SYLVIA: Ephrim doesn't even look at him when he talks to him, though. Like, when Arrell speaks, Ephrim just keeps looking at Throndir and getting in, like, standing to the side of Arrell, ready to do anything he needs to.

AUSTIN: Throndir, a voice appears in your head.

DRE: Hmm!

AUSTIN: It's Arrell's. Using the spell that Fantasma used to use to do this.

ARRELL (telepathically): His arm. He's touched by it. What has happened?

AUSTIN: And like, he starts to slowly stand up, and he's not saying anything out loud.

ARRELL: My staff?

AUSTIN: And he like, slowly leans down to pick it up, and is like, keeps one hand up, like he's picking up a weapon. 'Cause he is.

DRE: [laughs]

ARRELL (telepathically): His arm. It has him.

AUSTIN: And he picks up the staff.

ARRELL: I need more space. Come with me outside.

THRONDIR: Why do you need more space?

ARRELL: Because that's how the magic works! [scoffing] Why do I need more space. Hm?

THRONDIR: What would happen if you do it in here?

ARRELL: First, it would destroy half of the knowledge stored here. And second, Benjamin could come back... half made of wooden bookshelf!

THRONDIR: Okay, yeah, that's a good argument for not doing it in here.

AUSTIN: Arrell like, locks eyes with you, Ephrim.

SYLVIA: I, I stare right back at him. And I, like, are we going outside? 'Cause if Throndir's cool with that, I'm just following closely.

DRE: I guess so, yeah.

THRONDIR: Hold on. Before we go outside. You hand me the staff first.

AUSTIN: He nods and hands you the st—He nods, and and goes to hand you the staff, and then he's like "Oh! Hm—" And then he turns a ring on the staff, and then like, holds it to show like, "It's safe!" and then hands it to you, as if to like, "Oh, right, I have to make sure that someone else touching the staff won't kill them." [laughs]

SYLVIA (amused): He put the safety on.

AUSTIN: Yeah, he basically put the safety on.

DRE: [laughs] Alright, yeah, I take the staff.

AUSTIN: Alright, you take the staff. And he, like, turns in a huff and begins to walk out. Past all of the—as he passes the other, the people he’s frozen he like, taps them and they come back into being. Into like, into consciousness. Morbash and—Morbash comes out with you. Kall Fer and Zhan Kurr do not. They remain inside.

DRE: Yeah, okay. I was wondering, like, what Morbash was going to do. [laughs]

AUSTIN (amused): Well his feet had frozen to the ground until he fixed the fog problem.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN AS MORBASH: I don’t like this.

AUSTIN: Says Morbash.

MORBASH: Any of it.

THRONDIR: Yeah, me neither.

MORBASH: And what is up with your friend’s hand?

THRONDIR: Uh... I’m gonna let him figure that out.

AUSTIN: Alright. And Arrell like,

ARRELL (impatiently): Ahem. The staff. *The staff?*

THRONDIR: Can you take me with you when you go to get Benjamin?

ARRELL: I’m doing it right here. I’m not going anywhere.

THRONDIR: Alright.

DRE: I hand him the staff.

AUSTIN: He walks out into the, um, into the area in front of the gates where there’s like, a nice little bit of the plateau. And he opens up another vial he has inside of his sleeve and like, very skillfully tosses out a circle of salt around him. And then he draws a letter in the center with the base of the staff. It like, heats up and he etches it into the ground. Um, it’s a “B”. And he lifts the staff up above his head and there’s thunder and lightning. And he *slams* it down into the ground, and a flickering window opens into another world.

AUSTIN (CONT.): It is beautiful there. It is... Velas, at the seashore. And you can see off in a boat there is... your friend, Hadrian, with his wife, Rosana, and his child, Benjamin, and they're out fishing. And there are seagulls in the air. And there's the sound of the festival, and you can *smell*... you can smell the like, fried fish, that you always got at the Velasian festivals. Little too salty, but that's kinda the fun. And there he is. On that boat, with his dad. And like, the camera pans backwards and you can see the arcs of the Heat and the Dark and the star-stuff and you can see the dust of the Grand Tour growing closer and the world rumbles. And it's terrifying.

ARRELL: Do you see why I do what I do? Hadrian told me to put his son here. If you want to take him from this paradise, that is on you, not me. You face Hadrian and tell him that. Not me.

THRONDIR: Gladly.

AUSTIN: And he turns the staff just so. And inside, the... ship capsizes. And Benjamin falls into the water. And Hadrian and Rosana look over the side and toss the fishing rod away and dive in, and then the door begins to close, and when it's about the size of a little boy, Benjamin comes out, soaking wet. Crying. He like, looks around at all of these strangers and like, as this storm gathers overhead and it just starts pouring. And he just wails.

DRE: How old is Benjamin?

AUSTIN: Twelve.

DRE: Okay.

THRONDIR: Benjamin, it's alright, I'm a friend of your dad's. Just c'mere for now, okay?

AUSTIN AS BENJAMIN (tearfully): I was just with my dad! I... [breathes raggedly]

AUSTIN: And he's just gone to tears right now.

DRE: Throndir goes to kind of, put an arm around him and try to get him to at least walk away from Arrell.

AUSTIN: Yeah, he'll walk away. But he's not—this is a very strange thing that just happened.

DRE: Oh, yeah! No, this is, this is a traumatic thing that has probably happened.

ARRELL (quietly): It's not supposed to be like this. [louder] Now, Ranger. Before you kill me, let me tell you my plan. That way, even if you do, there maybe is some hope.

AUSTIN: And he places the staff on the ground.

ARRELL: The University to the south, it is empty, now. But it can house many people. It is further away from here. It is further away from the Heat and the Dark. It is out of the running distance of the Grand Tour. It will not be trampled. There are resources there. You could rebuild. And with that book, you could build a living wall. Of star-stuff. That keeps the Heat and the Dark out. It is not a perfect solution. But it would give us *time*. Now. What is your decision?

DRE: Throndir puts down his sword, and kinda holds Benjamin close, and like, covers his face. And—is it, so it's not storming, it was just thundering because of his magic?

AUSTIN: At this point it's a real storm, at this point it's pouring.

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: The storm had also been coming from the Grand Tour getting closer and closer, so I think him doing that magic siphoned a little bit of it and now those two storms have collided.

DRE: I think this scene is that as like, there's a lightning flash...

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

DRE: Kodiak's frame is illuminated behind Arrell.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

DRE: And Kodiak just lunges.

AUSTIN: Okay. Do damage.

DRE: [rolls] Oh, that's only two.

AUSTIN: That's enough, he has one HP. Um—

DRE: Oh, God! [laughs]

AUSTIN: He falls to the ground and Kodiak rips out his throat. And then Arrell reaches out and grabs the staff.

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ARRELL [hoarser, now]: I gave you a *choice*.

AUSTIN: And like. Oh, right, now he's an *undead* wizard! Good.

ARRELL: You'll see me *soon*.

AUSTIN: And another strike of lightning. And he slams his staff into the ground. What do you do?

DRE: Um... God, I, I take the sword and I just like, throw it at him.

AUSTIN (amused): Gimme a *Volley*. Give me a *Volley*.

DRE: 'Cause... it is Ordenan steel.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Totally. Um...

DRE: Oh, wait, should that be—*fuck*. I keep forgetting—

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah, 1d8 plus 1d6, yeah, yeah, yeah, totally.

DRE: I don't know why I keep forgetting this. [rolls]

AUSTIN: Oof!

DRE: Oh. Same thing. Same thing!

AUSTIN: Oh, right—I keep forgetting the 6 and 3 can backwards, or the 6 and the d8 backwards. Um, so yeah, you can do, what is it, on a volley—you can't pick the one where you lose ammo 'cause you're throwing a sword. [laughs] You of course would automatically—

DRE: [laughs] Right, yeah.

AUSTIN: So you can either do 1d6 less damage or you have to move to get a better shot, at which point he'd be gone. So. You do your damage -1d6.

DRE: Yeah, okay. So four.

AUSTIN: Okay. Which, at that point, his armor just like, ignores.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um, yeah. He bats away the blade—[laughs] He bats away the blade and it cracks, it doesn't break, but there's a crack in it now. And then, the, as he lifts the staff back up, it, there's a huge flash of light as lightning calls down and summons him away. You still have the book.

You've stopped him for now, at least. Everyone else returns. Uh, Fero included. Everyone's back in the city, now. Everyone's fled. Corsica Neue, Red Jack, Rosette, um, Rosana is there with the refugees. Blake is there, Chatterchin is there. Uklan Tel, Fero. Emmanuel is there.

SYLVIA: Can I try and fix my hand again?

AUSTIN: Sure, how are you gonna do it?

SYLVIA: I think part of it is recalling like, the feeling that happened when Ephrim died and was at Samoth's forge. Because that was when he experienced this flame, or not flame anymore. But this is when he experienced this, and that's how he knows how to control it. As much as he does, so. I'm not sure what that would be, but.

AUSTIN: I feel like it's another *Burning Brand*, right. You're almost trying to forge a new... You're trying to like, work on the Heat and the Dark, which is what Samoth's doing right now. Right? Like, you'd have to, you have to rebuild this shell that's around it. So I think that's Con.

SYLVIA: Alright. [rolls] Okay, I got an eight.

AUSTIN: Okay. Um, so I think it... you're able to contain it now, but it's in you. Like, you don't remove the Heat and the Dark. In the same way that like, uh, Arrell's chin is partially just gone now? There is, like, a hole through your hand. It's like you've been branded? Um... but all the way through. And it's just—nothing is there.

SYLVIA: Can I...

AUSTIN: This glowing black—or not glowing, this thrumming feeling of the Heat and the Dark in the center of your hand.

SYLVIA: Am I able to cover it with clothing at all, or does it bore through it?

AUSTIN: Um, if you're very careful you can cover it. But like, if you push in on that part at all it goes away.

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: And it's like, a clean cut.

SYLVIA: Alright. I think he tries to wrap it in bandages. Also, I kinda like the image of maybe it's the hand—'cause when I got the crescent sun it cut my hand.

AUSTIN: Oh, true.

SYLVIA: And I don't know if I like it more if it's the same cut or if it's on the other hand.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh, think about it. It's up to you.

SYLVIA: I think it's the same cut. I kinda like that a little more.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: But I think like, it's basically wrapped in bandages now, as best he can.

AUSTIN: Okay, cool. Everyone is back now. Everyone can be in the same place if they want. And also, the New Archives now have all of these additional people there. And there is not, there is not enough room or space for them. So they're kind of just brought out in the camp of Corsica Neue and the Unstill.

SYLVIA: Can I find Corsica?

AUSTIN: Totally. Fero's with her, and like, it's that camp.

SYLVIA: Is he with her like, right now when I go see her?

AUSTIN: Yeah, she's in a big room with all the other people. She's at a mess hall eating with Fentil and Fero and Uklan Tel.

SYLVIA: Uh, Ephrim's kind of a mess when he walks in.

AUSTIN: Yeah, sure!

SYLVIA: Like, he's like, hastily bandaged his hand and his hair's like, all over the place and he just looks really rattled.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: And he kinda just makes a beeline to her. And he's like:

SYLVIA AS EPHRIM: I need... I need the, the, the cre—the blade back.

AUSTIN AS CORSICA: What's wrong.

EPHRIM: I... [exhales]

CORSICA: You seem... frazzled, Ephrim.

KEITH AS FERO: Yeah, jeez, what happened?

EPHRIM: It's...

AUSTIN AS UKLAN: Did you find the wizard?

FERO: Yeah, what happened?

EPHRIM: Yes. He... it's a long story. Um, there's something... wrong... with me, though, and I need to see if this fixes it in any way. And to do it I need the [clears throat] I need the, I need the blade back.

AUSTIN: She like, nods slowly. And then reaches down and pulls up, like, a case that she has carrying, uh, she has it, that she's carrying it in. And flips the locks off of it and reveals this shining blade.

SYLVIA: Ephrim takes the sword hilt from his bag and he connects them. I guess, is there—these do go together, right?

AUSTIN: Yes. They don't look like they do, but they do.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So, two things happen. First, as you attach it, the blade straightens from a crescent into a straight blade. Um, and the design is familiar to the audience. It is the blade that Samoths built in Marielda. That dropped on the ground before he was killed. The second thing that happens is that as you clink it in, as it goes like, *clink!*, and you've connected the blade to the hilt, there's another, it goes like, *clink!* And then you hear again, *clink*, and then again, *clink*. And, for the moment at least, you are in front of Samoths again. In his forge. To be clear, Fero, Ephrim didn't vanish. This is all just, moment in his head as this connects.

SYLVIA: Can I speak to Samoths?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. And he like, stops what he's doing.

SYLVIA: Ephrim like, tears the bandage off and holds up his hand and is like:

EPHRIM (angrily): What did you do to me?

AUSTIN AS SAMOTHES: You have the blade, hm?

EPHRIM: [exhales angrily]

SYLVIA: And Ephrim's holding it in his other hand and he's like:

EPHRIM (angrily): Yes—yes! What—what's going on?

SAMOTHES (overlapping): Alyosha? Alyosha, bring him the hammer.

AUSTIN: And Alyosha appears. And his eyes are dead and empty the way that you made Kall Fer's. And he walks over with a hammer. And gives it to you.

SAMOTHES: Destroy the blade. And then you'll be fixed.

SYLVIA: I... Ephrim like, stops for a second. And then he throws the hammer, like, not at Samoths, but like, at his feet.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

SYLVIA: And he's still holding the blade, and he's like:

EPHRIM (furiously): I'm done being used as a *plaything* by gods who do not care about us anymore.

SYLVIA: And he's, like, gesturing with the blade. Like, he's almost pointing this at him. And he's like:

EPHRIM: I am *done* being told what to do, I am not—[exhales] I am not your *prince* anymore, I am—I will, I'm not going to be used as a tool by you!

SAMOTHES (softly): Oh, Ephrim...

EPHRIM: I don't know what this is, I know *you*—

SAMOTHES: Ephrim, please.

EPHRIM: *You're not him!*

SAMOTHES: I am me, and when you felt the fire in you, it was always me. And when you felt my heat guiding you, it was *always* me. I am me and you are *mine*.

AUSTIN: And he steps closer to you.

SYLVIA: [exhales] I am... debating doing a big thing here. Um... [sighs] I think Ephrim stabs Samoths.

AUSTIN: [exhales] Our good show.

DRE: [laughs]

SYLVIA: And when he does it, he's like:

EPHRIM: There comes a time when every prince becomes a king. And that's now.

SYLVIA: And then he digs it in deeper.

SAMOTHES: [pained, hoarse gasping]

AUSTIN: The blade lights up in your hand. And Samoths, like, pushes himself further through it until he's very close to you. And reaches down and grabs your, the bandage on your hand, and rips it free. And he's, like, coming apart from the blade. The blade is like, un-making him.

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AUSTIN (CONT.): And he's like, clawing at you and your hands to try to push away but he is not, it's not... And then he rips into the little hole and begins to pull at it, until it pulls him in and also the hole gets bigger and bigger. Until that hand is gone. And the blade falls to the floor. His hand is also gone, now, 'cause it was in there. Welcome to Friends and the Table, a show about losing hands!

SYLVIA: [laughs]

[KEITH and DRE laugh distantly]

AUSTIN: Don't ever tell me I don't know what the fuck we do. [laughs] He like... stumbles over to one of the faucets that lets out his like, special liquid Heat and Dark, and begins to like, scoop it up with his hand? And tries to like, patch himself up with it? Where the blade started to dissolve him. He falls to one knee, his hair changes color—it's golden. He like, flops back down on the ground, and like, kicks one leg out and has the other one tucked under and he's like:

AUSTIN AS MAELGWYN (whispering weakly): [exhales] I tried, I tried, I tr—I tried, I tr—[groans quietly] I... I tried *really* hard.

AUSTIN: And then he just stops breathing. In the room, again, both things happen. The second that you put that blade in its place, the sun appears in the sky. And its light shines so bright. It... *tears* through the blizzard overhead. Though it does nothing to the Heat and the Dark or to the large white arches that spiral through the skies. It might not be *the* sun, but it is certainly *a* sun. You feel it on your flesh and know it is true. You can feel it through the tent that you're in. It is a *spring day*. You also can feel that the hole in your hand is growing. It's not gone the way it was down there. But, the bandage is not enough to cover it up anymore.

AUSTIN AS [??]: Ephrim, are you... okay?

SYLVIA: [sighs] I think he drops the sw—like, the sword is still there in physical space, right? Or is it gone.

AUSTIN: It's still there.

SYLVIA: Uh, he drops it, and like, falls down and grabbing at his hand. 'Cause I imagine it hurts *a lot*.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

SYLVIA: And, um, after a second he's able to get up.

AUSTIN: There is blood on the sword. And it... as it hits the ground, you just see like, I guess Fero feels it. Remember I talked about there being multiple patterns, Fero?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: This is like, this is a third thing. Or a fourth thing. There's Hieron, definitely a thing. For real. Real thing. You know how to fuck around with things that are there.

KEITH: Yep.

AUSTIN: There, um. There is the Heat and the Dark—uh oh! That's not connected to the pattern at all.

KEITH: Yeah. Seems bad.

AUSTIN (overlapping): There's the star-stuff. Yeah—seems real bad.

KEITH: That also seems bad.

AUSTIN: Star-stuff also seems bad, has some sorta weird reflection-copy of a soul. Uh—but is not... exists, resists the Heat and the Dark, but you can't tell if it has its own pattern that's not understandable yet, or like, its own set of souls, but it's not the one that you know how to do anything with, and it's not the thing that Uklan Tel knows how to do anything with, at least not yet. This is a fourth thing. And it is more similar to the first thing than the last one? But it's not... it's just a little blood on the ground. It's just a little blood on the ground.

KEITH: But it's a new pattern.

AUSTIN: Yeah, or it's a new sorta feeling of life. It doesn't—the... sand covered in that blood, kind of like, the sand-ground inside of this mess tent, does not have a soul in it anymore? But it is safe, and it does... it, it doesn't feel... You couldn't talk to this sand, or this clay, or this dirt. But it, it is still *alive* at the same time. You could *become* this sand, you just couldn't talk to it.

KEITH: That's bizarre.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH AS FERRO: Hey—whose bl—uh, whose blood is there, now?

SYLVIA: Uh, Ephrim picks up the sword first before speaking. And he, like, puts it in his belt like you would, like, just a sword that you carry, right? Like how Hella probably keeps her's.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah.

KEITH: Mm.

SYLVIA: And... he takes a second before turning to you and saying:

EPHRIM: [sighs] Samothēs. He's gone now. He—I mean, [laughs a little] was he ever really here this past while? But, he's...

AUSTIN AS FENTIL (distantly): Corsica! Corsica! Something's wrong.

AUSTIN: And Fentil runs in.

FENTIL (out of breath): Hey everybody I'm sorry...

AUSTIN: And like, looks around, and whispers something to Corsica, and she shakes her head.

CORSICA: Was it *Ordenan*?

FENTIL: No, it, it... [exhales] It was just, he got caught under, he was...

CORSICA: Hmm. I have to go. One of my men has died.

EPHRIM: Cor—Corsica, wait, I need to talk to you.

CORSICA: I... Alright. But be quick. The Unstill might not be.

EPHRIM: There... I think there's a place where your people, all of your people,

SYLVIA: Like, gesturing to the refugees and stuff too.

EPHRIM: can go and be safe.

CORSICA: Where? 'Cause it is not here.

EPHRIM: South of here. The University.

CORSICA: The University... I did a semester there, once.

AUSTIN: Her like, cracked, purple, bruised lips smirk.

CORSICA: The University.

AUSTIN: She nods.

CORSICA: You three should come with us. Help us rebuild.

EPHRIM: I would love to.

CORSICA: Fero?

FERO: You have to explain what happened in your whole day, dude!

[everyone laughs]

EPHRIM: Okay, yeah. Let's talk.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Yeah!

DRE: [laughs]

CORSICA: Find Throndir and... make sure he comes with us. We will need a Ranger. Especially now.

AUSTIN: Throndir? What're you doing with Benjamin?

DRE: Um... I mean, I bring him to his mom.

AUSTIN: Um, he like, is in, again, he's sobbing. And then he sees her and just, like... tears, but, like, enough agency again, enough under control, again, to throw himself into her arms. And she picks him up and like, holds him with one arm? Like, he's like, his lanky arms are thrown around

her neck and she's just like, holding him with the strength of one arm. And reaches out to shake your hand.

DRE: Yeah, I'll shake hands.

AUSTIN AS ROSANA: He's bigger. And... I... I'm so happy to see him. I don't if this was the right decision, though. I hope you understand, Throndir. I just...

DRE AS THRONDIR: No, I don't know either, so...

ROSANA: [sighs] Hadrian. Hadrian told me so much about you.

THRONDIR: That's... I didn't, I didn't think I ranked that. That's kinda flattering!

ROSANA: He wanted to help you. Badly. He... saw so much potential in you. He sees so much potential in so many people. And he thought, maybe... [sighs] You had the will, but not the way. You wanted to do what was right. But that is not enough. It's a lesson I have learned in the last few months, especially. The people here... they want an easy answer so badly, Throndir.

AUSTIN: And she puts Benjamin down and he like, clings to her. Around her waist.

ROSANA: But again and again the best I could give was, a... a warm bed and a hardy meal, and the assurance that if Ordena arrived, I would hear about it first. And I would not let them hurt any of us. And those were cold assurances. But they are something. They think they want an easy answer, but what they want is a warm bed and a hardy meal and an assurance that they won't be killed. I'm not saying that you should take my path. But I am saying... people don't always like easy answers as much as they think they will. Sometimes... slow justice is preferable. C'mon Benjamin. Let's get a meal in ya.

AUSTIN: And Benjamin and Rosana turn to go back deeper into Corsica's camp.

DRE: Um, I think there's one other thing I wanna try and do, if I can. I wanna get that book.

AUSTIN: Oh, you have that book, don't you?

DRE: Oh, I do? Oh, okay.

AUSTIN (overlapping): Yeah, yeah, yeah, uh, uh, Ephrim gave you the book.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

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AUSTIN: You've got the book! You're good to go on the book. Um, the group of the Unstill, which now has come onto mean this whole separate thing, um... I guess news travels through the camp. People are dying again. Not just from Ordenan steel. "The curse is lifted!" they say. "The sun has arrived! Samoths blesses us!" And others say "No, no, no, of course this is The Archives working as they will," that's what Kall Fer says. This is, the Pattern has been fixed. But Uklan Tel knows that's not true. And... others still say that this is the work of the stars. Some whisper that that's actually the Heat and the Dark, and it is not a thing to fear, it's a thing to worship. No one knows what it is, really. Corsica and the Unstill are moving south. Are you all going with them? Fero?

KEITH: Um, have I, have I heard about all of the things that happened that day?

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah, you're all caught up.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

KEITH: Um, no, no, I think that Ephrim and Throndir are the worst, uh, and I can't believe that they let uh, all their petty personal bullshit get in the way of stopping the thing that's devouring the planet.

AUSTIN: Yeah, okay.

EPHRIM: I brought the *sun* back!

FERO: That was an *accident*, you did it by accident!

AUSTIN (overlapping): If we're gonna have this conversation, woah, woah, this should be a conversation, though.

KEITH: Yeah!

AUSTIN: Where are you guys having this debate?

KEITH: I, I assume it was, uh, you know, after we were at the picnic tables or wherever—

AUSTIN (laughing): Yeah, uh-huh!

KEITH: And I asked what happened in the day, and it was like “Yeah, we should get Throndir,” and then Throndir showed up and they explained to me that, uh, Arrell says “I can save the planet”—

DRE (overlapping): [laughs]

AUSTIN (amused, overlapping): Yeah, okay!

KEITH AS FERRO AT THIS POINT: —and uh, first of all he was almost *dead* before anyone asked him what he wanted the book for! And then, uh, you killed him anyway, after he said he said he gave you what you wanted, which was, by the way, seems like the wrong choice, even the kid’s *mom* was like “This probably wasn’t a good idea,” uh, and then, uh, it’s *insane!* You’re, you’re *crazy* people! What were you *thinking?!*

THRONDIR: I don’t know. You were taking a nap and looking at stars.

AUSTIN: [laughs uproariously]

SYLVIA: *Shit! Oh, shit!*

AUSTIN: Goteem!

FERRO (incensed): I was, *I was—I WAS SITTING NEXT TO THE FUCKIN’, I WAS SITTING THERE—I wasn’t—I was inches* away from the Heat and the Dark from tryin’ to figure out what to do and what it was, *meanwhile*, the *missing piece of the puzzle* was being explained by the man you *murdered* out of a *petty grievance!* *What’re you—what—wh—what d’you think is HAPPENING in the world?! What d’you th—This isn’t about Hadrian’s KID! Wh—are you kid—are you seriou—what’re you DOING?*

THRONDIR: You really think somebody who *bargains* with the chip of a kid’s life is really out trying to save the world.

FERRO: It’s—and even, even if he *was* using the kid’s life as a bargaining chip—it’s the who—we’re talking about the *whole world!* What’re you *doing?!* You people are *lunatics!*

AUSTIN: How’s Ephrim doin’, at this tirade?

DRE: [laughs] Yeah!

SYLVIA: Um... to be honest, I think Ephrim walked out a little bit ago.

AUSTIN: Fair!

SYLVIA: I think he just left the room once, like, it became about, like the bargaining thing, 'cause like—when that was going on, Ephrim was in a... trance, almost. And he's like "I can't add anything to this, and I'm not going to get dragged into this."

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. [sighs]

FERO: Give me the book.

THRONDIR: For what?

FERO: You—What're you gonna do with it?

THRONDIR: I don't know! But, I mean, I'm not saying no, I'm saying what do you want it for?

FERO: I—I'm going to try to find someone that can figure it out how to use it for the, for the thing that Arrell was trying to use it for.

THRONDIR: Yeah, no, that's what want to do too.

FERO: Th—why did you add an extra step?

THRONDIR: Because I don't... How're you supposed to trust someone like that?

FERO: Uh—what did—there was nothing about that situation that made him seem untrustworthy.

SYLVIA: [makes skeptical noise]

THRONDIR: Are you *kidding*? [laughs incredulously]

FERO: No!

THRONDIR: Someone who creates a copy of themselves because he wants to, 'cause he can't *learn* about the world like a normal person, so he creates a doppelganger of himself—

FERO (overlapping): Yeah, he's obviously a crazy, he's obviously a crazy person that, j—was doing things that I didn't agree with, trapping people in bubble universes, but he's essentially, he's working towards the same goal in a different way.

AUSTIN: I will say briefly, point of order, point of order! Uh, the reason that he gave for creating Fantasma was that the Cult of the Heat and the Dark knew about Arrell. That was his, that's what he said. Just wanna make sure that that's a clear, canon thing that y'all actually know about. So.

KEITH: He's still kinda crazy, though.

AUSTIN: No, no, no, I'm not sayin' he's, yeah, putting people in bubbles, especially against their will, not great. Bad.

KEITH: Not great.

AUSTIN: Terrible.

DRE: Yeah.

FERO: But we're still, we're talking somebody that is, about somebody that is try—that is trying to do the same thing in a way that we do not think is good. But it *seems* like he found a way to do it *without* doing those things. He didn't say "Oh, here's my plan, I'm gonna use the book to trap more people in bubbles." No, he said "I have a, I found a way to slow this down, to actually help."

THRONDIR: So why didn't he let them all out?

FERO: *It sounds like he was busy tryin' to get the book!*

THRONDIR: Fero, I can't believe your argument is "The ends justify the means."

FERO: It's not that the ends justify the means, it's that, that—the ends are super close right now!

AUSTIN: [laughs quietly]

FERO: We're real close to "*the ends!*"

AUSTIN: [laughs louder]

THRONDIR: I would rather this book be in the hands of Uklan, or someone else who can...

FERO: Well, give it to Uklan. Now he's sittin' out next to the, next to the Heat and the Dark trying—studying it. Or whatever.

THRONDIR: [sighs]

FERO: I can't do anything with the book, you can't do anything with the book!

THRONDIR: I don't know, Fero, it's a long trip.

FERO: You can go with the people to the uh, the University. Just give me the book, I'll give it to Uklan Tel or whoever.

THRONDIR: Wait, no, the whole point of his plan was to take the book to the University. If you're not gonna go to the University...

FERO: I mean, we could do it at the University—why not put the wall where the Heat and the Dark is already at? Why not, why not use the spell on the star-buildings that're already up?

AUSTIN: These are good questions for Arrell, the Wizard.

FERO: Yes, this would've been, some of this would've been great to go over with *the person whose PLAN IT WAS!*

DRE: Yeah, I think at this point Throndir just kinda shrugs and leaves, too.

AUSTIN: I think Fero's like, yelling, like from behind him a cloud of dust rolls in. And the sound of a thousand, thousand hoof, uh... I keep saying hoofprints. A thousand, thousand hooves on dirt are heard. As the Grand Tour—

FERO (distantly): *Oh great, it's the, the hot needle's here! Great!*

AUSTIN: —arrives. And then like, in a *clap* [snaps fingers] of thunder, the, the dust like, hands in the air and then *fshhp!* Is sucked away? And then two people on horses come into the camp. Um, and you know immediately who they are, Fero. It is Severeia and Galenica, the—

KEITH: The walkin' rock.

AUSTIN: —two of the gods who uh, who, yeah. The, [laughs] what'd you say?

KEITH: Walkin' rock? Walk rocker?

AUSTIN: "Walk and rock"?

KEITH (amused): The walking rock?

AUSTIN (amused): The walking rock, yes. One of them is the walking rock-person. They are on one of the horses, who is also, which is also made of, um, living rock. And then the other one is Severea. Um, who, uh, is riding the first horse that there was? She's on the first horse. Um, and you can tell that 'cause it's like, its features are defined a little bit better than most horses, like—it feels like every other horse is stamped out of this horse, and the stamp is just never quite—

KEITH: They just get worse?

AUSTIN: They just get worse, yeah.

DRE: [giggles]

KEITH (amused): The first horse was so good! It was so much better than all the other horses.

AUSTIN (overlapping): It was so much better than all the other horses. Their horses go and like, stand next to Corsica Neue's at the trough. And they get off. So, reminder, Galenica is made of like, basalt-style like, rocks? Like, tall, very geometrical rocks? Like, very symmetrical? They look—not symmetrical, they look like someone drew them. They look *too* geometric. And not chaotic enough to just look like, "Oh, it's a rock." Um, and then has these glowing, like, fire opals for eyes. And then Severea has this thing where like, it looks like she's floating, like, she has hair that looks like it's floating around her as she moves, her dress looks like it's floating around. I think in the past she may have not had hair for a while, this version has hair. It's been a long time. She wants hair right now. Um, and they walk into the mess hall. Inside, past, so to where, um, Throndir and Ephrim, or so Ephrim is probably back in there already. Fentil is there. Uklan Tel is there. And they like, walk up to the front of the, of the like, line for food? Um, and Severea just says:

AUSTIN AS SEVEREA: The Grand Tour needs water. Bring it.

AUSTIN: And the, uh, chef is like, [stammers] "Uh—" And then, like, leaves, as if under a spell. Everyone else is kind of held back.

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AUSTIN (CONT.): Um, Galenica, like, looks over the people and as they do, there is a calm over, that goes over everybody. And they talk with a sort of, like—I guess like a little, not crinkly. But like, I imagine it as being a little metallic? Like, it's a metallic sound? But not a sharp metal, like a dull metal. Like an empty metal bucket being hit, and like, *bom!* [talking in a lower voice] *There's a resonance, it's down here.* And they say:

AUSTIN AS GALENICA (his voice edited to sound metallic and echoing): The Grand Tour comes west to save Hieron. You will all be safe, now. Be at ease.

AUSTIN: Fero, you can tell that they are not... they aren't *lying*. But... they aren't as confident as they seem.

FERO: I heard that you were barely hangin' onto it in the east!

GALENICA: Little sparrow. We should talk.

AUSTIN: And like, you get the image of the chef running out with like, a bucket of water. And Severea says

SEVEREA: We're gonna need more than that!

AUSTIN: And they go back outside, and we get like, the view of all of the Grand Tour? Like, *paused* in place? It's not stopped. Like, it's not like people are gathered outside. It's like someone hit the pause button. And the dust that got like, brought back, is just behind it now. But there are a thousand, thousand horses... running, but paused, in place. Just outside.

SEVEREA: [sighs] Things are bad here, Fero, huh?

FERO: Yeah! Which... one are you?

AUSTIN: This is Severea, I'm Severea, Severea's voice is like, light, and a little playful, but also, like, really wise? She figured out roads and also animals. And also commerce.

FERO: Wow! Which came first, roads or animals?

SEVEREA: Animals.

FERO: That makes sense.

SEVEREA: Animals first, yeah. They didn't need the roads. People needed the roads. So.

FERO (overlapping): Right, yeah.

SEVEREA: I don't do many inventions. Roads, one of the inventions. Money, one of the inventions.

FERO (overlapping): Roads is a really big one!

SEVEREA: It's a big one.

FERO (overlapping): Money's not so great—

SEVEREA: Eh! People needed—

FERO: It's caused like, a lot of problems. For me.

SEVEREA: Yeah... I tried it without money, a couple of times. Didn't go great, either.

FERO: That's fair.

GALENICA: Fero.

FERO: Yeah?

GALENICA: You have not been well.

FERO: What d'you mean?

AUSTIN: They look at Severeas, who like, gets, not like a pouty face, but kind of like, an angry face. Like a pouty angry face.

KEITH: Yeah.

GALENICA: There are no m—

FERO: Do you mean that?

KEITH: And I point at the Heat and the Dark.

GALENICA: Yes. I do.

FERO: Yeah. I dunno why that happened—

SEVEREA (overlapping): And the wolves! Also the wolves!

AUSTIN: Says Severeas.

FERO: I didn't do it on pur—I didn't know!

SEVEREA: [sighs] The gifts that we give are—you have to be careful.

FERO: Listen, a thing didn't work a buncha times in a row, and then the next time it didn't work everything went to shit. It's not my fault that it was not consistent.

GALENICA: Would you like us to take the gift back?

FERO: No, I can work around it.

GALENICA: Now that we are here, we need to know that you are ours.

FERO: What d'you mean?

AUSTIN: They look at Severea again, and Severea looks back and says:

SEVEREA: Well. You... have such... strong feelings.

FERO: Yeah.

SEVEREA: About the old world. Not a big fan. Hm?

FERO: No... I... it's very—turns out, it's very complicated.

SEVEREA: Yeah. And we try very hard to make sure that there is, ah, what would you say. A continuity. Between the old world and the current one. And, uh. Keep things together. Keep 'em sewn shut. We gave you this gift because we sensed something in you, and... because... you were in the right place at the right time, if I'm being honest. But, if you're gonna run around and wish everything was gone, then you don't need a... you don't need our powers. You can just wait.

FERO: I didn't—I didn't wish anything was gone!

SEVEREA: Well, I mean, you... We know you went to Nacre, we know you were there when all that happened.

FERO: Uh-huh.

SEVEREA: We know that you're not that fond of Rosemerrow, and now I look at Rosemerrow and half of it's... well. We just need to know that you're committed to keeping things around.

FERO: Oh! Yeah. No, I don't—sorry. I think what's happening is that you think that I'm trying to destroy the world.

SEVEREA: [inhales] No—

FERO: And that's not true.

SEVEREA: It's not just the world, Fero. It's...

GALENICA: It's the past. You have no respect for the past. But that's what we protect. As best we can.

FERO: The past?

GALENICA: The continuity. There is no present without past.

FERO: Pre—present? Or presence.

GALENICA: Present. Present.

FERO: Present.

AUSTIN: Severea gives you a smirk.

FERO: But probably *or* presence.

GALENICA: No. There is presence without past.

AUSTIN: And Severea points at the star-stuff.

SEVEREA: That is not a solution.

FERO: No. There's a book—um, that could bring that to life, kind of?

SEVEREA: There are lots of books, little sparrow. And... [sighs]

FERO: Are we gonna be vague, is that what we're doing? We're doing vague, now?

SEVEREA: No... Whose book do you think it is?

FERO: Um... Well, it was in a tower at first.

SEVEREA: Mm-hm. And do you remember which tower?

FERO: Um, Eventide. It was on Eventide.

SEVEREA: It was my tower, yeah.

FERO: Oh, it was your tower?

SEVEREA: Mm-hm.

FERO: No shit! It's your, so you know about the book, then?

SEVEREA (amused): I know all about, I know all about the book.

DRE: [laughs]

FERO: So we can, can we use that, that seems like my number one plan right now.

SEVEREA: Someone could use that book to do lots of things.

FERO: Yeah.

SEVEREA: It's... [sighs]

FERO: I'm just, what I'm saying is, is this a save-the-world kinda book?

SEVEREA: It's a save something kind of book. But it's not a save everything kind of book.

FERO: Is there a save everything kind of book?

SEVEREA: [sighs] That book and a few other key pieces were holding things in place as best that they could. The book in the northwest, the... mirror in the center of the mark of the erasure. The old man's guitar down below. [sighs] It was an old plan. A bad plan, frankly.

FERO: Were those not supposed to have been moved?

SEVEREA: No. They were not.

FERO: Eeugh...

SEVEREA: Shield still in place, Galenica?

AUSTIN: Galenica nods.

GALENICA: As far as I know.

FERO: Where's the shield?

GALENICA: East.

FERO: Got it. How east? Last University east, or east-er?

GALENICA (amused): Much east-er. The islands. Where I was first born. And that was a plan to save the world, once, too. But the book was moved, and even if it was put back in place now. Even if it had never been taken, there is no guarantee.

FERO: So what're you asking of me? What do you wanna do? You seem like you wanna stop... y'know.

SEVEREA: We are going west. And...

FERO: Mm-hm.

SEVEREA: We are going to do our best to keep this place from falling apart. We're happy to have you continue to be ours. Our agent in the wild.

FERO: Can you stop sayin' it like *that*, though?

SEVEREA: [sighs] You gotta get a little flair, bud! This is big deal stuff!

FERO: That doesn't sound like flair...

SEVEREA: People, people *give a shit*. You might not, you think my hair is just, does this? I do this to my hair, I walk into a room and everyone goes "Oh, that's Severea, I get it."

FERO: Oh, you're—this is like—you're saying people will buy my shit more if I go "Oh, I am... Galaxia and Silencimer's!"

SEVEREA: You can *be* Fero. But don't expect people to treat you like a bear when you bark like a chihuahua. Even if you can turn into a bear.

FERO: That's rude!

SEVEREA: I've been here a long time, I've tried it the other way, trust me!

AUSTIN: Galenica goes:

GALENICA: Trust her.

FERO: A *chihuahua*?

SEVEREA: It's like a little yipping dog, it's a little yipping—

FERO (overlapping): I know what—That's not the part that, that's not the, that's not the type of question that was.

SEVEREA: You're yipping right now, you're yipping at me right now, Fero.

FERO: Oh my God, you're the worst! No, I'm not yours!

SEVEREA: Oh. Okay. That's simple, then.

FERO: Catch more flies with honey, *god!*

SEVEREA: That is literally the point I was *making*, Fero. Sometimes—

FERO: No, it's the opposite! You said it works better to be rude!

SEVEREA: No! I said it was better to have some *flair!*

FERO: That's not honey, honey isn't flair, honey is being *nice* to people.

SEVEREA (amused): You should try that too.

FERO (overlapping): You're worse than Uklan Tel with metaphors, you know that?

SEVEREA: So we're done, then?

DRE: [laughing]

FERO: No! Restate your case.

SEVEREA: No. I've made my case.

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SEVEREA (CONT.): You can face the world and yip at everyone who crosses your path if you want. And decide arbitrarily which pieces of the old world are worth saving, and which ones you despise, or you can commit yourself to life, like we are. You can go about it in the way that you go about it. I know who you are. We get that you have a certain... [sighs]

FERO: Flair?

SEVEREA: No. It's a different thing. A certain *attitude*. You have no flexibility. And that's... a way to go about it, and we're willing to let you do that. But. Let's say you wind up in... The First City of Light and you decide "Mm, no, this one's bad. Don't like this one. This is a bad one. Not, no great loss if we lose this." We can't have that. That's not what the Druid is.

FERO: I've never done that!

SEVEREA: You did it in Nacre. You had every opportunity to tell them about Ordena coming to kill them. To get people away from there. Or to stay and fight!

FERO: I was a prisoner!

SEVEREA: You have our gift, you are not a prisoner anywhere, you know that as well as I do.

FERO: They said, they said I can't leave! They kept sayin' it! And they had my friends, and they had, y'know, and then my friends killed my other friends, it was a very complicated situation.

SEVEREA: The maintenance of Hieron is as simple as it gets. We are here to keep it solid. To prevent the cancer from destroying this place. We do not have time to equivocate, or to judge subjectively which places are worth saving. The will of the people is to live. And I'm pretty fond of the things I've made, so, between the two of us, pal, you decide one way or the other, and when you decide you'll know if you have our gift or not.

FERO: Just tell me what you are going to go and do.

SEVEREA: The same thing we did out east. Keep the world *together* for as long as we can.

FERO: How? And while you're here, what's happening out east?

SEVEREA: Out east is... Out east had been bad for a while, and there are not that many people there.

FERO: Yeah?

SEVEREA: And there are way more here. And so we brought the ones we could, and the ones who would come with us, and now they are part of the Grand Tour too. And we will run up and down the coastlines and through the valleys and we will use our divine

might to keep things from falling apart. But this demands attention.

FERO: How's that work?

SEVEREA: Uh, it's magic, Fero, don't worry about it.

FERO: That's—not worrying about it has caused a lot of problems!

SEVEREA (overlapping): How do you turn into a *bear*? You turn into a bear by deciding to be a bear suddenly.

FERO: Yeah, and I didn't worry about it, and now there's a big blob of purple eating everything!

SEVEREA: Alright, so... [sighs] While we've lost the ability to reconfigure time and history, we can still enact some small amount of change over the physical body of Hieron and we do that. And we do it over and over and over and over. So that the Heat and the Dark does not consume everything. That's *it*.

FERO: Sounds like a stopgap.

SEVEREA: Yes. *It is*.

FERO: Yeah.

SEVEREA: It's not a solution. That's not what this is. You're not—we don't have a solution for you. If you want to go find one, you can. We've looked. Samot looks. We do everything we can to hold things back.

AUSTIN AS THE CHEF (meekly): I got all your water...

KEITH: [laughs distantly]

GALENICA: Thank you, chef. We're going now, Fero.

FERO: Okay.

AUSTIN: Galenica like, shakes their head and gets back on their cool rock horse.

SEVEREA: Find some center for yourself, Fero. We root for you. We... have checked in whenever we can, and we're closer now. So maybe you'll see some more of us. But there are others out there who will do what you won't. Who will stay and fight for people.

Who... [sighs] I'm not gonna convince you. No one's ever been able to convince you of anything.

GALENICA: That's why I thought he'd be a good choice.

SEVEREA: I know. I know. I know, it's very you, Galenica. [laughs a little]

AUSTIN: And Severea gets back on the First Horse.

SEVEREA: We'll give you some time to think. And, uh... y'know. We'll see how that goes. Travel safe.

AUSTIN: And then, like, she lifts up the reins of the horse and pulls them down and there's another thunderclap, and the dust comes back. And a thousand, thousand horses moves through the camp. Just—it's bad. There are tents everywhere, everything is thrown into disarray, it ain't great. [laughs] But they head west. Towards Rosemerrow. And towards the Mark of the Erasure, also. Um, it's a huge amount of people on, in the Tour.

FERO: Thousand thousand, that's a lot.

AUSTIN: It's a lot—it's, that's a lot.

FERO: It also seems like biblical forty days thing, where it's just a stand-in for an even bigger number.

AUSTIN: Probably. What's that, that's like a million? That's pretty big for this world. Eh, it's a million. That sounds right. A thousand thousand.

KEITH: Yeah?

AUSTIN: Yeah. So what's everyone doin'? As we wrap? Who's going south to The Last University?

SYLVIA: Oh, I am, for sure.

AUSTIN: Okay.

DRE: Throndir is, too.

KEITH: Um... is there, has, uh, has the Heat and the Dark reached the Mark?

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah. Definitely.

KEITH: Um.

AUSTIN: It's all through that snowy area and all that shit, yeah.

KEITH: I think I'm going... to the Mark.

AUSTIN: Okay. I guess that's kind of like, where we end. Or what, are you just walking there as Fero?

KEITH: I think I'm just walking.

AUSTIN: Okay. Okay, so I think we get just, a slow zoom out [*MUSIC - WESTWARD - BEGINS*] to a super wide, high-angled shot of you, miles and miles away, walking away, through the melting snow, back, westward. Towards the Mark of the Erasure, into the depths of the forest, where the snow is still heavy. And the camera slowly pans around and down until it's behind you, and you can literally see Samot's fallen tower in the distance. Which is now sort of cradled by the huge arches of the muted white star-stuff. We get a close shot of your face as you stop to look up and consider it, and then there is the loud sound of a roar, and then a shadow, covering you.

AUSTIN (CONT.): And then we cut to another face in shadow, and it's Arrell's. His neck is torn to shreds. His hair is long and messy, his face is dusty, his eyes are fallow. The camera zooms back slowly, and we realize we are looking at his reflection as he stands over a water basin in the corner of that little study that Fantasma had hidden in a friend's attic back in Velas. There's a quick montage of him cleaning himself, reaching a cloth into the water, wiping dust from his face and cheeks, stroking a comb through his hair. He steps past piles of books, covers up his neck and the wound there with a shawl, picks up his staff, and heads down the stairs to a bustling operation center. Robed figures, each wearing the icon of the Disciples of Fantasma, move here and there. Stopping to bow their heads at Arrell as he passes. He pauses at a window and we see what he sees: the ruins of Velas, now surrounded by a large, but thin wall, built from the star-stuff. [*MUSIC - WESTWARD - ENDS*] There is a flash of light in his eyes, then, a smirk.

AUSTIN (CONT.): Then we cut from his face to another. Eyes drawn tight with focus and simmering anger. It's your face, Throndir. And it's blocked, suddenly, by a brownish red shape. And the focus shifts, and it's revealed to be the book of life that you took from the Collector-Curator Kall Fer. Behind you, in the distance, is the caravan, resting for the night on its way towards The Last University. We then get a shot of Victoria Solomon and Doctor Gloria Lake. And Solomon nods her head to you, as if to say "I knew you could do it." She slips a small, carefully carved, milky, yellow crystal from a pouch, and hands it over. And we get a close-up of you as you lift it to your face. It glows slightly, with a dangerous energy.

AUSTIN (CONT.): And then, three more faces in quick succession, each lit up by a faint, wavering light of their own. First, the weathered, bearded face of Stornras Glasseye. Then, the

grinning mage, Sunder Havelton. And then the concerned, yet knowledgeable eyes of Vicerene Jerod Shiraz, leader of Ordena's Civic and Spiritual Institutions. The three stand in the captain's hold of Shiraz's temple-ship. A dimly-lit room of wood and Ordenan steel. The Vicerene's visitors have each placed a cloth-wrapped package on the table: One long, and thin, and the other a small square, and each emanates a shimmering light. It is the two parts of the Blade in the Dark. The hilt and the sword itself. We get shots of their faces, again, and a shake of Sunder's head as if to say "Welp. Here we are."

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AUSTIN (CONT.): Then we get a close shot of you, Ephrim, moving with purpose through the ruins of The Last University. But your focus breaks as you begin to run into people cleaning and organizing the central hall of the school's largest tower. We get soundless images of you catching up with the survivors, all of them hard at work. Devar and Fentil taking orders from Corsica Neue as she arranges the armory. Rosana leading a sermon for her flock. Red Jack nodding from behind the bar as he pours Thrandir a drink. Uklan Tel at an alchemical table, his own focus, his own obsession clear as he works carefully with samples of the star-stuff and the black and purple blaze.

AUSTIN (CONT.): And then, finally, *[MUSIC - WORK AWAY - BEGINS]* you find your way to your personal quarters. You stand in front of a mirror and you begin to unstrap your armor and then your eyes focus in on the sigil of Samoth's Holy Church etched into metal. You rip the armor off of you and you lift your unwrapped hand to it, ready to call forth a cleansing fire. But you hesitate. And instead, gather a torch from the wall, a hammer and chisel from the table. We see your face lit by this orange glow as you kneel on the floor, armor draped over your knee, lit by the fire of the torch as you work away his symbol.

AUSTIN (CONT.): And, finally, the camera cuts again. To another face. Just barely lit. This time by a very soft purple. In the eyes at the center of the shot look like Arrell's did: empty and lifeless. And then those eyes seem to catch something on the ground, and we get a shot of him kneeling. It's Alyosha. *[MUSIC - WORK AWAY - ENDS]* Reaching down to the body of Maelgwyn, and tenderly lifting up his hammer. *[MUSIC - THE BREATH AND FORCE - BEGINS]*

AUSTIN (CONT.): And as he does, blood drips from the metal head of the tool, and as it hits the ground it *glows* with a bright green. It blossoms upward into a flower. And then the second drop hits the pool of blood and a vine sprouts there. And then we get an image of Alyosha at the anvil, hand up in the air, the blood of Samoth's behind him, *blooming into a garden with each strike. Whoosh, clink.* A row of tulips emerge out of the forge's bloody floor. *Whoosh, clink.* And now a row of hedges, with bees and butterflies buzzing and fluttering to and fro. *Whoosh, clink.* And now the vines from before spread even further, pink and orange buds popping out down their lengths. *Whoosh, clink.* And from the anvil itself, a tree sprouts upwards, breaking the faucet where his now-dead god collected the Heat and the Dark to work on. And the oozing

black and purple evaporates as it touches the tree's leaves. *Whoosh, clink.* And then a wide shot of the entire forge, now a jungle. Floating in the nothing, and slowly, slowly, pushing back on it. Filling it with Samoth's own life, replacing the void of emptiness with the breath and force of Ingenuity Alive. *Whoosh, clink.* And then we see his face. His brow, furrowed. His mouth, turned. His eyes, *furious.* *Whoosh, clink. Whoosh, clink. Whoosh.* *MUSIC - THE BREATH AND FORCE - ENDS]*

[TIMESTAMP 1:43:45]