

All Year Round, There is Work to Do 01

Transcriber: robotchangeling

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Opening Narration

[[“The Farmers’ Almanac”](#) by Jack de Quidt begins playing]

Jack (as **narrator**): Okay. Let’s see. The town of Nievelmarch lies beside a slow river in the foothills of the craggy Marchmont Mountains. Much is made of a Nievelmarch winter, when snow builds on those bewitched peaks above and falls softly into the fields below. Indeed, there are those who believe the town exists perpetually in a brumal chill, a perfect snowglobe of pitched roofs and icicles. What a convenient thing to think.

No, in Nievelmarch, the seasons turn with the year. In spring, meltwater rushes down the mountains and turns the fields green. Shepherds take their flocks up into the lower hills. The air is sweet. In summer, the water wheels turn slowly, and insects rise from the millponds. Evenings are long, and shadows are longer. The sun sets hot over the mountains. Autumn comes suddenly. Plum orchards heave with fruit. Yards fill with great snaring patches of pumpkins and gourds. Then, once the harvest is brought in, the festivals begin, first to the low gods of the deep earth, then to the high gods in the skies above. In my great

grandmother's time, these were festivals of blood; no longer, but that fact has not been forgotten.

And all year round, there is work to do. Who grows the apples for those delightful Nievelmarch pastries? Who digs the gems for the baubles? Who grinds the wheat into flour? Acres of fields that need to be plowed, harrowed, irrigated, kept free of pests; crops that need to be tended, harvested, sold; equipment to be bought and repaired. Maybe Nievelmarch is a snowglobe, but it sits atop a farmers' almanac.

Introduction

Ali: 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, Alicia Acampora, and joining me today, Janine Hawkins.

Janine: Hi, I'm Janine Hawkins. You can find me at @bleatingheart on certain social networks.

Ali: And Jack de Quidt.

Jack: Hi, I'm Jack. You can find me on Cohost at [@jdg](#), and you can buy any of the music featured on the show at [notquitereale.bandcamp.com](#). I would briefly like to describe a dream I had this morning, [Ali: Please.] in which we began this episode and I said, in the dream, "You can buy any of the music featured on the show, including the theme of this episode," and then both of you said, "Don't make work for yourself." That was my dream. [Ali laughs]

Janine: That could've actually happened, and I just would have forgotten.

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: I'd believe it happened.

Ali: That might've been a memory.

Jack: It might actually have been a memory that got rendered out through my sleeping— [Ali laughs] under my sleeping eyelids.

Janine: That happens sometimes.

Ali: Yeah. True. So, you—

Janine: Oh.

Ali: Hi. Yeah?

Janine: Oh, I just want to say— [Ali laughs] just a little tangent on the subject of dreams.

Ali: Okay!

Janine: I got a message earlier today from one Austin Walker: “Remembering now that I bought a brand new Kia from a tiny mall retail shop for \$32,000 without even test driving it, and like, on a whim basically. Like, in a ‘I need to go somewhere. Oh, the car shop in the mall. That’ll help,’ like I was playing GTA Online or something.” And I said, “Wait, in real life you did that?” [Ali and Jack laugh] And he says, “No, sorry,” and I’m like, “or in a dream?” and he’s like, “in a dream, in a dream.” “Okay, okay,” because he did not mention the ‘in a dream’ part, so I thought he went to a mall and bought a \$32,000 Kia, [Ali: Uh huh.] without even test driving it, in New York City.

Jack: Hmm.

Ali: Well.

Jack: Well.

Ali: I feel like—

Janine: Dreams. They can happen.

Ali: Yeah.

Janine: Or the opposite.

Ali: I'm trying to think. Like, I have been to...I've been to a mall that's had, like, a Tesla thing or whatever, or like a more...

Janine: Malls often just have a car inside of them.

Ali: Yeah, that's true! Like a prize car.

Janine: But it's like, can you buy the car there? No, it's just a car.

Ali: No, I think it's just, like, an advertisement for a car.

Janine: Check out this car.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: Sometimes there's a car outside a Costco that you can look at.

Ali: Oh, really.

Jack: Yeah, yeah, yeah, parked outside, and it says, like...its license plate says, like, "EZ2BUY" or something on it. [Ali laughs] I don't want to go to a Costco and buy a car.

Janine: No.

Jack: I want to go to a Costco and buy 36 Babybel cheeses.

Ali: Yeah. That's life.

Janine: Speaking of cheeses.

Ali: Speaking of cheeses and speaking of Austin Walker, you might notice today that I am your host as opposed to Austin. Today, we are playing *Grandpa's Farm* by Tyler Crumrine and illustrated by Evlyn Moreau, and this is our Patreon-supported actual play for the month. *Realis*—as you might have heard teased during the fundraiser for the

National Network of Abortion Funds a couple months back—is still preheating or is still baking. [laughs] The oven was preheated. We prepared the ingredients. It's in the oven.

Janine: Also, a couple of months back?

Ali: Yeah. Was that like a year ago?

Jack: When do you think we did that, Ali?

Ali: [laughs] I don't know. Wait. It was exactly a year ago, wasn't it? Because it would've been...

Jack: We did it on July 4 2022.

Ali: Yeah. Sure. That's a— well. A year and a month. Yeah. [Janine laughs] Anyway. So, *Realis* will be in the feed a little later, but instead, we are returning to a Live at the Table favorite? [laughs] A Live at the Table, uh, you know.

Jack: Staple.

Ali: Staple. Nievelmarch, which I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing correctly, [laughs quietly] and I don't know that I'm sure that I know how to spell, but if you—

Janine: I always think it's Nievelmarch, and it just isn't.

Ali: You're the one who named it.

Janine: I know. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Is it Niebelmarch?

Ali: It's— yeah.

Jack: With a B?

Janine: This is what I'm saying.

Ali: A B-E-L?

Janine: Austin says that too, and it's like, I guess it is.

Jack: Didn't we name it Niebelmarch? [laughs] I don't know. [Ali laughs] Well, one thing we know about Nievelmarch, if you are unfamiliar with it as a setting: it has appeared in two previous Friends at the Table arcs. One was a game of...ah, what was that first game called?

Janine: *Shooting the Moon*.

Jack: *Shooting the Moon*, in which I think just the three of us sort of conceptualized the setting [**Janine:** Mm-hmm.] and played a weird love triangle. And then it reappeared in *Good Society*, where we were joined by Austin. We played a more sort of Austen-with-an-E Austenesque sort of romance. It is a alpine magical town, magical in... [laughs quietly] I don't know. Would you say that the easiest way to describe it is that it is a chocolate box beautiful pastoral town that has had the misfortune of being created by Friends at the Table? [Ali laughs]

Janine: Yeah. Yeah.

Ali: Yeah.

Janine: I mean, look, sometimes you get a chocolate box, and there's a nice little house on it, and it's not too hard to imagine that a ten minute walk from that house there's a witch cottage.

Ali: Yeah.

Janine: It's within the realm of possibility.

Jack: And this witch is a normal witch, right? She's just like a regular witch? Or is she a witch that has cursed the production of a fabric line and/or [Ali laughs] turned someone's boyfriend into a tumbled down piece of landscaping?

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: I feel like I forgot the landscaping part, but it's coming back to me the moment that you said that.

Jack: Austin's boyfriend got turned into an archway.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Oh my god. That's right.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Ali: Well, all universes have hazards. [Jack and Ali laugh]

Janine: This is true. If the rise of the Marvel Cinematic Universe has taught us anything, it's that all of them have hazards. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Tripping over hazards left and right.

Janine: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Jack: Not to be confused with Sangfielle, which has Hazard, a marionette figure.

Ali: Oh, yes, of course, right.

Jack: Who cuts people's heads off.

Ali: But, you know, in my daily life, I'm worried about tripping, I'm worried about paying my rent; and in Nievelmarch's daily lives, [laughs] they're worried about curses and who they're gonna ask to the festival ball or whatever.

Jack: It's worth saying, as well, that both previous incarnations of Nievelmarch, we've seen it during the winter. We've kind of played it as a holiday game.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Ali: Mm.

Jack: And I think we have different plans this time around, which are kind of exciting.

Game Overview [0:10:08]

Ali: Yeah. We are indeed, because *Grandpa's Farm*, aforementioned, is a game that can be played a couple ways. We are playing it as a multiplayer game, because there's three of us here, and I think we're still undecided on how to figure that out, but it can also be a solo journaling game. It can be a, like, actual physical letter writing game that you play as sort of a...pen pal? Is the— [laughs] I haven't said the phrase "pen pal" in a little while. It's a game that you can play with a pen pal by writing physical letters.

But basically the setup is that you have a farm. You have taken over a farm. It can be your grandpa's farm. It can be somebody else's farm, but you've taken it over. You have an investment in developing this place. And what you do is you take a deck of cards and you draw them out, and depending on what you draw is your progress for that season, and then depending on your progress, you write a letter to somebody to say, "This is what's going on in my farms. I have a lot of pears," or whatever. [Jack and Ali laugh] And at the end of four seasons, which would be at the end of a year, you can make a friend, and then, optionally, you can host a festival, which I believe we are planning to do, because the festival rules are pretty fun, and we like to roleplay funny parties, especially here in Nievelmarch. And then the hope is that we'll play through four years, but I guess we'll sort of go through one year and see how long that takes us, and yeah. Do either of you have, like, any questions before we start digging into the rules or anything else you want to say?

Jack: I think my questions are mostly about the ways in which we are going to adapt this for multiplayer, but I think that after the rules, after looking through the rules is the place to start talking about that, probably.

Ali: Okay, sure. Yeah, so— well, I guess we can...because jumping into the game will require us answering some of those questions, so the way that the game suggests in writing that you can either do this is that we can either all share one farm and only do the, like, results cards drawing phase once, because we're all sort of sharing the progress, and then we can either decide if we all want to write one letter as a group or

all letters separately. Or we can each have our own farm and each have our own progress to keep track of and then either make up NPCs to write letters to or write letters to each other, depending on what happens and, you know, the results of our festival scene, stuff like that. Or we can even do it like two people are on one, and then one person's on another, which I feel like—

Jack: [gasps] Dueling farms.

Ali: [laughs] Dueling farms indeed. But I feel like...

Janine: I have an idea for what we could do.

Ali: Okay. Yeah.

Janine: And I guess this idea actually could also go either way. I was wondering if this could maybe be a, like...you know when places have, like, commons? Like common gardens.

Jack: Oh, yeah.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Like, where everyone gets a chunk of land— like a tract from a lot, and they can sort of garden and do stuff on it. Something kind of like that but at a slightly larger scale, right, where there's like a chunk of land, and— you actually see this a lot— you see the thing I'm about to reference a lot in, like, Quebec, in early sort of places where settlers made—you know, colonists—made farms in Canada, where it was like, everyone got this strip of land and was entitled to, like, okay, well, there's a river here, and everyone is entitled to X amount of land, but also they're entitled to a bit of the river bank, so you get these farms that are like these long strips alongside a source of water.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: And they're all, like, perfectly uniform and look very cool from a plane. So it could be something like that, where it's like we have these three sort of tracts of land on a river beside each other or something like that.

Jack: Yeah, they are next to each other?

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Jack: We're farm neighbors.

Janine: Yeah, so there's, like, a degree where we could still pool it or we could separate it, or we could say, like, "Oh, the thing that's affecting you is also kind of affecting me, because our land is right there."

Ali: Right, sure, yeah. That's definitely interesting. I feel like you see that setup even in, like, cities and stuff, in like co-op structures.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Where you have people sort of buy in to have the access to the produce but also, like, have to give a certain amount of hours to actually sustaining the farm.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Ali: I do like this idea. I will say that the game itself puts a focus on how isolated you are.

Janine: Mm.

Ali: As a...like, one of the starting questions is "How far away is your closest neighbor? How far away is the closest town? How often do you see other people?" and I don't...I mean, I don't mind us following this structure, because we've— I mean, Nievelmarch has been regency, and it's been, you know, the guy— you know, the rich guy in town is buying up all the small stores because there's a big mall, but it's also been, like, we have to go miles away to [laughs] see the witches on top of the mountains or whatever?

So, I feel like there's a little bit of a benefit of, like, seeing different parts of the map, almost?

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: But I don't want to, like, shut the door.

Janine: I do definitely think it should be, like, outside of town. Like, it shouldn't...

Ali: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Janine: That's why I kind of expanded it, was because like, it doesn't make sense for it to be, like, a little urban garden necessarily.

Ali: Yeah, for sure. So, we can still be, like, up in the green mountains or whatever, [Janine: Yeah.] but have characters that will interact with each other.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Ali: But, like, within a bubble instead of...

Janine: And we could answer some of those questions collectively, right? Like, outside of this group of farmers sharing this patch of land, like, you know, who are the nearest people?

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Like, that kind of thing, maybe. That's an idea. I'm not married to it.

Ali: Okay. Yeah. I do like it, though. Jack, what are your feelings?

Jack: I...something that might be...I can see what you're saying about having it be outside of the community so that we can get that sense of separation and sort of the different, uh...I'm using the word "biomes" here really sort of lazily. [Ali laughs] I don't think that's exactly what I mean, but you know what I mean. I wonder if, if we are going to do separate farms, it might be interesting to have those separate farms be in distinct places such that if we are writing letters, either to each other or somebody else, it could

be like, oh, I'm playing John and I'm down here in the flat plainland, and you're playing Katie and you're up there in the place where all the plants are made out of stone because you're on a mountain, or you know. Which is something that I feel like we might get less of if all three of our farms are sort of, like, butting onto one another? But again, I'm not tied to the idea of them being so totally separate.

I suspect it's going to come down to: what kind of a farming community do we want? You know, do we want this to be a story about three farm workers next to each other figuring things out together, or do we want this to be a story about three or maybe two farm workers geographically separate in different farming conditions trying to figure out things, you know, over letters?

Janine: Wait, I got an idea. [laughs quietly]

Ali: Okay.

Jack: Go. [Ali laughs]

Janine: So, what if...you know how, like, a farmer or someone can own land, but then they can sell the, like, mineral rights so stuff can happen underneath it?

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Oh my god. [Janine laughs, followed by Ali] Yes, Janine?

Janine: So—

Jack: Janine, I'm holding your hand. [Ali and Janine laugh]

Janine: What if, instead of sharing tracts of a plot of land, it's like a vertical sharing thing?

Jack: Janine!

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: So, there's like a person who's doing underground farming of some sort, a person who is doing [Jack laughs] ground level farming of some sort, and then a person who is above in some way, question mark? I haven't quite figured out the logistics of that one.

Jack: Cloud farming. Farming in clouds.

Ali: Cloud farming, yeah.

Jack: Big soft banks of...

Janine: Cloud farming. Ohh. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Because in spring in Nievelmarch, the way that the mountains are set up means that these great clouds form over the side of the mountains and drift slowly down—

Janine: Ohh.

Jack: The Marchmont Mountains, and drift slowly down into the village, and sky farmers tether them above the plots of land, because the landowner has got claim on those clouds, and they send up cloud farmers to start cultivating the clouds.

Janine: I was actually truly just reading a thing the other day about...I think they call it cloud seeding?

Jack: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Janine: Yeah, about, like, how they put certain chemicals in the atmosphere [laughs quietly] to make— to change the climate, and they're, like, trying to stop doing it accidentally but trying to explore doing it deliberately right now.

Jack: Oh. [sarcastic] Oh, I'm sure that'll go well.

Janine: To see if it could help with the warming situation, because they've been— it's a thing where they noticed like, "Okay, as we're cutting down emissions, why is this getting worse? Why is it getting hotter? That's not good." And they're like, "Oh, because

the emissions were—” yeah. So it’s like a whole...there’s, like, a whole plan to send boats out onto the ocean spraying shit up in the air to make clouds and stuff? [Jack sighs] It’s, yeah. [sarcastic] It’ll go fine, I’m sure. Anyway, cloud seeding, cloud farming, that’s real. That’s a real thing, [all laugh] because we live in the worst universe.

Jack: How do you feel about layer cake farm, Ali?

Ali: So, it feels like what you’re suggesting is a setup where we can have— we can answer the questions of “Where is your farm located? What is your region’s climate? What are you raising or cultivating?” will be individual for each of us, but then we’ll share a progress? Or is the idea of, like, having farms that are close to each other in that way more appealing to you because it opens up more, like, actual roleplaying possibilities? Or something like that.

Janine: So, I think the thing that interests me about this is that, like, sure, maybe the farmer who’s underground has a way up that’s close to the farmer who’s aboveground, or maybe they don’t. Maybe they’re really far underground. Maybe the person who’s in the air is really high in the air. Like, they’re still far away, but at the same time, **[Ali:** Mm-hmm.] there is a connection of, like, “Hey, I looked down, and I saw that your shit flooded. Are you good?” or like, “Hey, you’re drilling and collapsed some thing I was doing.” Like, there’s a potential for, like, an interconnectedness that’s kind of interesting?

Jack: [excited] Oh my god, I’ve had an idea. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Uh huh?

Jack: Janine.

Janine: Yeah?

Jack: What if the deep farmer plants a very tall plant, and we see it grow through, you know, 500 feet of rock and then flourish in the ground farmer, [Ali laughs] and then the ground farmer has to tend it, and then it grows—

Janine: [laughs] That is very fun.

Jack: 2000 feet up into the sky farm? [laughs]

Janine: We'll have to play to find out what happens, of course, but...

Ali: Uh huh.

Jack: Oh, of course.

Janine: That is very fun. Yeah, I kind of like the idea that, like, it gives room to overlap but also to be distant. You know, it's like you're— [laughs quietly] it's kind of like you're neighbors in an apartment, but like, the room next door is, like, 40 feet in the air. [Jack laughs] So like, you kind of— you pass them in a sense. Like, sometimes you can see them doing shit up there. It's kind of like passing someone in the hall with your groceries, but... [Ali laughs]

Jack: Yeah. I like this idea a lot.

Ali: Yeah. This is Nievelmarch to me. This is... [laughs]

Janine: This is, at the surface level, it's totally normal. It's a cute farm, and then you look up, [Ali: Uh huh.] and then you look down, and weird shit's happening.

Ali: [laughs] Let's jump into— I've mentioned some of the questions here, but we can— I think we can jump into some of the questions here and find opportunities to develop our farms and our characters separately, and then I think once we get through that process, we'll have a better feeling of, like, how do we want to handle the actual card pulls. So, I— well, actually, [laughs] before we jump into that, should we claim levels?

Janine: I really, really, really want to be the underground farmer.

Ali: Wow. Okay.

Jack: Wow.

Janine: I'll let it go if someone else really, really, really wants to be the underground farmer. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Deep farming.

Janine: I just have a fun idea for what to grow down there.

Ali: Okay. Jack?

Jack: No, Ali, you choose. I'll take what's left. You brought this game to us, Ali.

Ali: Right.

Jack: You should be allowed to choose the...

Ali: Sure. I feel like I want to be cloud farmer?

Jack: Then I will be land farmer, otherwise known as farmer. [all laugh]

Setting Questions [0:25:00]

Ali: Okay. So, with that decided, reading from the book here: Once you've gathered these, which is one standard playing deck of cards per player with the jokers taken out and writing materials and a second deck of cards for solo festivals and a simple calculator, which we all have, because we're sitting at our computers and we have Roll20 here, we're gonna start— some of these we kind of answered. "What kind of world are you playing in?" We're playing in Nievelmarch. "Where is your farm located?" [laughs] My farm is in the clouds. Jack's farm is on the ground. Janine's farm is deep underground. "What is the region's climate?" [Jack sighs thoughtfully]

Janine: This is the beauty of this. I think it's different for everyone.

Ali: Exactly. [Janine laughs quietly]

Jack: Yeah. Okay, let's answer this. Uh, on the ground, it is temperate. It is— well, it's temperate in that there are wildflowers in the spring, cold streams from the meltwater coming down from the mountains. As it moves into summer, it gets hot. Mosquitos swarm; the trees sort of get choked with sort of rampantly growing summer vines and plants and flowers. In fall, it's beautiful. Everything is, you know, golden colored leaves.

And in winter, you know what winter looks like. You've seen Nievelmarch. It is, you know, it is on the surface a caricature of mountainous European winter. Strudel, condensation fogging up windows, kids looking through the window of toy shops as little toy trains go round and round. But at the same time, there's like witches chanting in circles up on the mountains. There are, you know, maybe sacrifices being made to old winter gods, things like that.

Ali: Sure.

Jack: I feel like that's the easy one that I just did. [Janine and Ali laugh] I just described Nievelmarch in four seasons. Good luck, fuckers!

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: Underground, it is always cold to varying degrees, and it is always wet to varying degrees, but it is just— yeah, when it's at the hottest at the surface, it is at best just like a weird old winter basement down there. Nothing— you can't keep anything dry, and I think my farmer basically has, like, year round outfits, not so much seasonal.

Jack: I'm so excited to hear about the outfits. [Ali and Janine laugh] What is it like in the dead of winter?

Janine: It's frozen. It's, like...

Jack: Oh, damn.

Ali: Ooh.

Janine: It's, like, frozen frozen. It is like ice caves frozen.

Jack: Oh, sick.

Janine: Because it's so wet down there, the water on the walls—that's sort of dripping down the walls and stuff—freezes, and you get just this layer of frozen, you know, moisture, and I think what earth there is down there is totally immovable. Like, it's not

permafrost, but it's, you know, frozen solid. [knowingly] Luckily, that's okay. [Ali laughs quietly]

Jack: Janine is growing popsicles. [Ali and Janine laugh]

Janine: Snaps suspenders. I'm a popsicle farmer. [Jack laughs]

Ali: Wow. Okay, so I feel—

Janine: This baby can hold so many...what are they called? Firecrack— what are the blue and red and white ones?

Jack: America popsicles.

Ali: Oh, sparklers?

Janine: Is that what they're— what?

Ali: No, you're talking about popsicles and not— I was thinking of a completely different thing.

Janine: Yeah, no. [Ali laughs] Do not eat a sparkler.

Ali: I think that is...I think that is a firecracker.

Janine: Yeah, those.

Ali: It might be a bomb something? A bomb pop?

Janine: Bomb pop?

Ali: Am I— is bomb pop a real term?

Janine: That sounds like some pre-2000s popsicle language.

Jack: They are called firecrackers.

Ali: No, they're a bomb pop. Look at this. I'm putting this in Patreon. Were you describing a completely different thing? [laughs]

Janine: No, that was it. That was it, yeah.

Ali: Okay.

Janine: Anyway, sorry, carry on.

Ali: [laughs] I think that, in the clouds, it is very humid. I think that the temperature is something that you really feel with the change of the seasons. Like, in the summer, it's really hot, because the sun is close, and you don't have the luxury of shade. And then, in the winter, it's cold, because, you know, you're standing on clouds that are cold and snowy, [laughs quietly] and you know, the sun is hiding a little bit. I think that maybe that changes how...like, it messes with, like, farm equipment and stuff like that, because I bet in the winter you get a lot of, like, icicles and stuff like that, whereas in the summer, you get a lot of condensation on things, so it's a lot of, like, I have to make sure my tractor— I don't know if I have a tractor, but if I have some sort of machine, I have to make sure that it doesn't rust or I have to make sure that I heat it up for a little bit before I start moving it, the way that you would a car, because you don't want to fuck up the engine or you don't want to fuck up the thing that shakes the tree or whatever. Yeah, that's my climate. [laughs quietly]

Jack: I have a question about the clouds.

Ali: Okay.

Jack: Are you farming on...hmm. How do I put this? Are you farming on regular clouds that have been blessed by magic; or are you farming on regular clouds, full stop; or are you farming on special clouds? [Ali laughs quietly] Follow up question: how do you make sure that the clouds don't go away?

Ali: Okay. This is a great...this is a great...I think that I am farming on, by Nievelmarch's standards, regular clouds.

Jack: Ah.

Ali: But obviously, for us, they would be special. And I think that the way that the clouds are farmed is that either, like, it's a situation where in— well, maybe it's like a boat-based sort of economy, where it's like you're moving from cloud to cloud or, like, floating landmass to drop stuff off or actually, like, hook up a big net and get water or, like, cloud creatures or something. Or it's like you have situations where, in the summer, like, the— you can create, like, a plank that floats in the sky, [laughs] like an aircraft carrier or something that's, like, floating in the sky that you put, like, next to or above but not completely covering the cloud, and then what you do is you spend the season taking your little scooter thing or whatever and going up and down the clouds to, like, plant something or catch something or whatever. [laughs]

Jack: Sick.

Ali: I looked in our chat.

Janine: [feigned ignorance] Why, what's up? What's there?

Ali: [laughs] There's some sick clouds in there.

Janine: [sarcastic] It's a very real vape trick, I'm sure, that actually happened for real.
[Ali laughs]

Ali: [sarcastic] You can tell from the slow-mo that it was not edited at all.

Janine: And the skull in the middle, yeah.

Ali: Yeah. Uh huh. But yeah, I feel like what I'm trying to do is, like, thread the difference between, like, clouds being actual water and making, like, a fish equivalent, or like Janine said before, of putting seeds in clouds and then it ends up being like a...you can do this with plants a lot, where you can, like, cultivate them in water instead of in soil.

Jack: Oh, right, yeah.

Ali: And that has its own benefits, but then, you know, needs to be more regularly, like, fertilized and things like that, because they don't get the nutrients from the soil that they would from water. That answer your question? I don't know if that answered your question. [laughs]

Jack: The only bit that is remaining is: how do you stop them from leaving? Like, does wind blow, or...?

Ali: Um, I'm sure it is very windy up here, yeah. I feel like that's something I meant to say before. How do I stop them from leaving? I do sort of think of, like, there has to be a certain amount of mobility to the structure, which is maybe where, like, the boat/airplane thing sort of comes up? Where, like, you have to move them as the clouds do.

Jack: Mm.

Ali: Because I'm trying to think of a way that you could, like, make a cloud stationary.

Jack: Spells.

Ali: Spells, true, or some sort of, like...I'm thinking of, like, an inflatable plastic pool but with no bottom, right? Where it's like, you're sort of like... [Jack and Ali laugh]

Jack: You corral them.

Ali: You carve out this space, yeah. You stamp into a cloud this, like, four by four section, and then...

Janine: Some kind of vacuum pellet? Like a...

Ali: Right, yeah. [laughs]

Janine: This is a *Baldur's Gate* item I'm thinking of. Just throw one of those in there. [Ali laughs] It just, like, sucks a little bit and holds it all in the middle. Easy.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Uh, an alternative: rope.

Ali: Rope. True. Yeah. I guess I do sort of like the idea of, like, because it sort of combines the idea of being in the clouds and being able to stay on a particular surface but also this almost fishing metaphor I was trying to make, where like, once per season or once per year or something, what I have to do is, like, find a dense thick cloud, fill... [laughs] fill my basket with it, essentially, and then this is sort of what I am working on for that year or that season or whatever else.

Jack: Yeah. That's great.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: That does answer my question. [Ali laughs] So, it's not that you are taking a whole cloud that comes in and then preventing it from blowing away. You are sort of taking a bit of a cloud as it comes in, [Ali: Mm-hmm.] making that into your zone, and working on that.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Great.

Ali: Yeah. Yes.

Jack: No further questions.

Ali: [laughs] Okay. With that said, what are you raising or cultivating?

Jack: I am growing a combination of vegetables for sale, a small amount of flowers for sale but mostly for fun, and then some magical plants that I have been contracted to make for the witches.

Ali: Mm.

Jack: So it's the classic combination: potatoes, roses, the plant that makes you see in the dark. [quiet laughter]

Ali: Okay.

Janine: I'm cultivating crystals.

Jack: Yeah!

Ali: Sure. Great. Wonderful. Okay, now that I've set up this thing where essentially what I'm doing is, like, creating these wetlands for myself, I...ahh. I don't know if I like— I'm really torn between being like, “Oh, I'm planting seeds, and there's a cool plant that goes there,” or I'm, like, raising a weird animal. [laughs]

Jack: Okay. What if—

Ali: And like—

Jack: No, no, no, no. Please. Please go ahead.

Ali: No, I'm just saying. It's, like, an impossible choice, right? It's really...both of them would be very cool.

Jack: There's something so compelling to me about the way you didn't pluralize weird animal. [Ali laughs] It's not that you're raising weird animals. It's that you are cultivating one really weird animal. It's like what if a cow could also be a pig and could also be a chicken and could also be some ducks and could also be some sheep and could maybe also be corn, question mark?

Ali: Wow, okay. I will say, not to immediately take that away, but I did say one animal, but in my head I was picturing many. I was picturing, like, a school of...

Jack: Okay, sure.

Ali: Of, like, fishies or something. [Ali laughs]

Jack: They do call them fish farms.

Ali: Yeah, because— yeah, farm fishing. I feel like, rather— I'm gonna have my cake, and I'm gonna eat it too, because I think that there are— in the way that, like, you know, Jack, if you have bad...uh, buh buh buh. What are the terms that this game actually

uses? If you have bad agricultural or infrastructural progress, you could say, “Oh, mealworms ate all of my vegetables.” I want to be able to say that, you know, there was some sort of mite or some sort of fish or something living in the cloud that I didn't account for when I planted on it and then plant something that is— maybe I'm planting, like, some sort of, like, really...like a watermelon or something. [laughs] I was thinking, like, “What if I'm planting some sort of melon that's, like, really watery?” [Jack and Ali laugh] and then I was like, oh, there's a word for that.

Jack: There's a famous kind of melon like that.

Ali: [laughs] Yeah. Or, like, cactuses or something like that? Like, I think of it as, like, in sort of the...jumping ahead a little bit, one of the later questions is “How does the community rely on you?” and if, like, something I'm doing is, like, planting these plants like a cactus or something that are really dense with water, maybe what they're doing when it's being shipped down to the land place, it's like something that's being used to, like, extract the water or being used in a very specific sort of alchemy way, where it's like, I can't make my curse potion with land water. [Ali and Jack laugh] I need to get funny cactus and put it in, because it has all of these other properties.

Jack: I think that's great. Are you talking yourself out of a cool load of fishies?

Ali: I'm having both, because—

Jack: Oh!

Ali: [laughs] I think, like, a cool load of fishies is my mealworm or my worm or my weird invasive pest if I have a bad year.

Jack: Right, right, right.

Ali: But the thing I'm actually growing is plant-based.

Jack: Cacti is really, really good and really funny, especially because you describe it as condensation is a constant problem and it is constantly humid, an environment that I do not associate with cacti.

Ali: [laughs] This is true. I was just thinking of plants whomst has water inside.

Jack: Well, what if—

Ali: Which is many of them.

Jack: No, but cacti is great, because they do— they just make, like, little spiky pools of water, right, basically?

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Do they?

Jack: Yeah, cut a cactus open, and it will, like, be full of water.

Ali: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yes, yeah, yeah. I think that they retain more water than they do other— I don't know what else it would retain, but they retain water. [laughs]

Jack: They are the camel of plants.

Janine: Hot dogs? [Ali and Jack laugh]

Jack: Uh, watermelons.

Ali: Okay. I'm writing down. "What are you raising or cultivating?" I'm writing down, "alchemy cactuses." That's what I'm cultivating. So, that's general stuff about our farms, and now the questions are gonna be character focused based. So, "What is your name? What attracts you to the farming lifestyle?" So, we can all sort of...we can maybe look through these and answer them privately and then sort of...?

Jack: Yeah. That sounds great, and we're not livestreaming this, so we can...

Ali: We can take our time.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Yeah, for this little section, we can answer up until “The farm needs work. How much?” and then we can— because “How far away is your closest neighbor?” and everything else is sort of a different question category that we can hit after we summarize all these other ones.

Character Questions [0:43:30]

Ali: Okay, so, now that we’ve answered all of our questions privately, let’s introduce them to ourselves and the audience, starting with— I guess the one thing...I feel like the one thing that we did sort of skip by going over the beginning is one thing that the game says outright is: “The farm doesn’t necessarily need to have been your grandpa’s. This farm could easily have been named grandma’s farm, family friend’s farm, abandoned farm. Inheriting your grandpa’s farm is simply a common trope in the farming game genre. Feel free to invent whatever premise that you’d like that makes the most sense for the kind of story that you want to tell, as long as the following things are true: you got a farm for free; you’re motivated to revitalize it.” Which I don’t think that any of our answers, uh, that’s not true, necessarily, but I do just want to say, like, Tyler straight up said these are the rules of this game. But with that said, [laughs] let’s go over our answers. The first question is: what is your name? I’ll go first here, because I’m the first on the list, because my name starts with A. My character’s name is Sable Butter.

Jack: My character’s name is— oh, and what are your pronouns?

Ali: Oh, that is gonna be she/her.

Jack: My character’s name is Ernan Langerhank, and he has he/him pronouns.

Janine: My character’s name is Velvet Lunde, and she uses she/her.

Ali: “What attracts you to the farming lifestyle?” For Sable, the answer is: to have an intimate understanding of something developing over time.

Jack: For Ernan, it is that I am cursed. Plants consistently grow around me out of any surface, and I might as well work on a farm. [Ali laughs quietly] In fact, it's a good place for me to be.

Ali: Any surface?

Jack: Yes.

Ali: Oh.

Jack: Well, not people, but yeah. [Ali snorts]

Janine: Like a car? Like, if you drove an old timey car, it would be a plant car?

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: Hmm. [Ali laughs] I'm here to make money.

Jack: Oh, amazing.

Ali: Shout outs. Nothing wrong with it.

Jack: You know what you want. It's money, via crystals.

Janine: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Ali: The next question is "What are you leaving behind by moving to the farm?" For Sable, that is a former job at a magazine, which was focused on design.

Jack: For me, it is the ease of city life. I lived in a city called Canto. It was a— like, C-A-N-T-O, like the song. It is, like, the nearest biggest city. It is sort of Prague or Vienna if this is, like, a little thing. I worked in a mill, and after a while, when my station got kind of overgrown too much—because the plants don't grow instantly; they grow, you know, as I am inhabiting a space for a long time—I got fired from my job at the mill and had to leave the city.

Ali: Wow.

Janine: You had to take your bulbasaur with. [Jack and Ali laugh] A little Kanto humor for folks.

Jack: That's a little Kanto-based humor with a K. [Ali and Janine laugh]

Janine: I'm leaving behind physical slash bodily comfort, because it is always cold and wet down here, and it sucks. [Ali and Janine laugh] I just gotta live with it, you know?

Ali: Fair. Yeah, you know? Well, "What in your life will be easier while living on the farm?" For Sable, the answer is maintaining a routine.

Jack: For Ernan, the answer is: don't have to worry about the curse! [Ali laughs quietly]

Janine: For Velvet, it's staying out of the sun. [Ali snorts] You know, summer can be a rough season.

Ali: Yeah.

Janine: You know, I— personally, I would prefer to be cold than hot, so.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: I have a question, Janine, [**Janine:** Yeah.] and you can answer this, "No comment."

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Jack: You can say, "I do not comment on rumors or speculation." Are you a vampire?
[Ali gasps]

Janine: I do not comment on rumors— no, I'm not a vampire.

Jack: Okay. [laughs quietly] Okay, just checking.

Ali: [laughs] "What will be harder while living on the farm?" For Sable, the answer is keeping up with my writing.

Jack: For Ernan, it is growing to understand and become a part of a new community.

Janine: For Velvet, it is staying dry. [Janine and Ali laugh quietly] I mean, I think the less jokey answer is, like, keeping it together. There's a bit— I think being the underground farmer is a little bit of a lighthouse keeper situation.

Ali: Yeah. "How did you prepare for life on the farm?" For Sable, she ate a spelled porridge for six weeks beforehand to adjust her breathing. The air's gonna be thinner up here. It's gonna be difficult.

Jack: Spelled is a lot like spelt, the grain. [all laugh] Spelt porridge, except it has had a spell cast on it.

Ali: Uh huh. Yeah.

Jack: I set up purchasing contracts with the witches up in the Marchmont Mountains. I asked them what they need growing, and I bought seeds from them, and, you know, I've got witches ready to buy my produce.

Janine: I packed up all of my winter clothes and my home items, like blankets, a kettle things like that. The pan that you put the hot coals in and then you put it in your bed. [Ali laughs] All the good stuff.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: Ready to go. "What are you most excited about?" Sable's answer is wearing overalls.

Jack: [laughs] Great. Love to wear overalls. I am most excited about the unique plants I can grow in Nievelmarch that could not be grown in Canto. There is something special about Nievelmarch's ground? that was not accessible to me in a city.

Janine: I am most excited about retiring.

Jack: Oh no!

Ali: Shout outs.

Jack: I mean, that's sad, though.

Janine: I should clarify: Velvet's not old. Velvet's young.

Jack: But you also hate this.

Janine: She wants to retire very, very early.

Ali: [laughs] Velvet is, like, homie coded. [Janine laughs] Like, I'm hanging out with Velvet. "What are you most nervous about?" For Sable, she's nervous of heights, nervous about the heights.

Jack: Yeah. [Ali laughs quietly] For Ernan, he is nervous about dark rumors about this patch of land.

Ali: Ooh.

Janine: Velvet is most nervous about tomorrow, next week, and next month.

Ali: [laughs] "Are you living alone on the farm?" For Sable, that answer is yes or no. I have a pair of spelled puppets to help with maintenance.

Jack: Wow. Wow.

Janine: This is a spelt joke again. [Ali and Jack laugh] Puppets out of spelt. Whatever. Something like that.

Ali: Uh huh. Uh huh.

Jack: I have just written down, "Giant fish in pond gives advice."

Ali: Whoa.

Jack: I'm picturing, like, a real *Dark Souls* NPC type situation. There is, like, a pond made of bricks. It's not a pond dug into the ground. It's, like, a raised pond, and inside it is a gigantic koi fish who gives advice.

Janine: I have three Flemish giant rabbits down here. Their names are Gamble, Gambol, and Captain.

Jack: [laughs quietly] Any spelling differences there? [Ali laughs]

Janine: Yeah, Gamble and Gambol are homophones, and one is like when you're gambling at a casino, and the other's, like, when kittens are gamboling around.

Jack: Sort of frolicking around, yeah.

Janine: Frolicking, yeah. And Captain is just spelled like captain. Flemish giant rabbits are the ones that are about the size of, like, a medium dog.

Jack: Jesus.

Ali: They're really big.

Janine: Yeah, and I imagine Captain is, like, bigger even.

Ali: Wow.

Janine: Captain is probably, like, the size of a border collie or something.

Ali: Yeah, I Google image searched "Flemish rabbit," and all of the results are like, no, the "giant" is the most important part of the name here. [Jack laughs]

Janine: Yeah, yeah.

Ali: And there's this— the second image for me is this rabbit sleeping next to a border collie, and the rabbit is slightly bigger than the dog, so.

Jack: Oh my god.

Janine: I think that's a— is that a sheltie, actually?

Ali: Oh, is it?

Janine: I think I know the picture you're talking about. [typing]

Ali: Yeah. I'll show you. Put it next to these fat clouds!

Janine: Yeah, that's—

Jack: I do not believe that this rabbit is this big. [Ali laughs quietly]

Janine: I think that's a sheltie.

Jack: Despite the fact that all the evidence suggests it is.

Janine: I mean, they're— oh man, there's one here next to a rottweiler that's just, like, what the fuck?

Jack: What happened to produce this species?

Janine: Maybe they were on an island or something, you know?

Jack: Right.

Janine: Whenever an animal is, like, weirdly small or weirdly big, my first assumption is, uh, it was on an island for a bit. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Spent some time on the island of changing sizes.

Janine: That happens. That's how you got, like, super small wooly mammoths was because there was just a bunch of them on an island somewhere, for a really long time too. It was, like, Egypt was happening, and there were wooly mammoths on an island being small. This is just a fact.

Jack: What happened to them?

Janine: Well, they died.

Ali: Wow.

Jack: Humans or sort of...?

Janine: It just wasn't their time anymore, you know?

Jack: Yeah, too good for this world.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Uh, where did we— "The farm needs work. How much?" For Sable, that answer is: a lot; the farm lifter and materials were abandoned in my late mentor's storage.

Jack: For Ernan, the basic infrastructure is there but none of the planting.

Janine: For Velvet, the farm upkeep in general is very finicky, and the housing situation really lacks creature comforts. The last person who was running this place was just not...was, again, full lighthouse keeper, [Ali laughs quietly] in like a dire sense.

Ali: Cool, so that is our farmers, and then the next questions are going to be dealing with our community. So, the next question is "How far away is your closest neighbor?" [laughs] Actually, wait, mine is just— okay, wait. I fucked this up.

Janine: Yours is just down and down.

Ali: Mine is just down! Down and to the left. [Jack laughs] I was laughing at first, because I was like, "Oh, me and Jack both put 'up and down,' and then Janine put 'up.'" Sorry to spoil these questions. [Ali and Janine laugh] And then I was like, "Wait, I can't have up. I'm up. I'm the clouds." So, I have 'down and to the left,' and then...

Jack: Is the bit to the left Nievelmarch or is that me?

Ali: Uh...

Jack: Am I to the left?

Ali: No.

Janine: There's another thing.

Ali: There's— we're gonna move onto the next question here, which is "How far away is the closest town?"

Jack: Ooh, shit. [Ali laughs] So it's not "down and to the left," it's "down, comma, and to the left,"

Ali: Right. Yes.

Jack: I see.

Ali: Uh huh.

Jack: Mine is up and down.

Ali: Okay. [laughs]

Janine: And mine is up a few dozen feet, question mark?

Ali: Sure. Sure. Only a few dozen? I guess a few dozen is, like, 24, 32.

Janine: Yeah, exactly.

Ali: Okay.

Janine: I think you're just deep enough to lose count, you know?

Ali: [laughs] Sure. Yeah, I googled, like, how far away is a 20 minute drive? Which I don't know that, like, Nievelmarch lives by those rules, but anyway. So, in the clouds, there's a landmass of lakes and talking birds 20 miles away, and Nievelmarch is a one hour flight below me.

Jack: Please tell me about the birds.

Ali: [laughs] They're living! You know, maybe we'll see them, maybe we won't, but I think there's...there's like a floating island. We are doing floating islands. And in that

floating island, there's a bunch of birds that hang out and talk to each other. Maybe they cast magic. Maybe they...you know, engage in commerce. Maybe we'll see them at a festival. I don't know. I can't know. Didn't I play— wait, wasn't there— didn't my character from the last game turn into a bird or something? What was her deal? She was cursed, and she was from a far away city. Did she ever transform?

Jack: I, uh, let's see.

Ali: [laughs] I guess it's not important, but I feel like I remember her having feathers on her neck? Or am I just mixing these memories because I think we recorded that during Sangfielle? Or I was just, like, describing a dress or something?

Jack: Oh, I vaguely feel like maybe you did, but it's hard for me to search the transcripts, because we talk about birds— I don't know if you've noticed. [Ali and Janine laugh]

Ali: Can you search just feathers?

Janine: Or curse.

Jack: Okay. Well, I don't— hmm.

Janine: You had feathers. You, like, had feathers on your body, right?

Ali: I think so. I'm trying to just—

Janine: And you had, like, your body feathers became a dress or something? That sounds familiar.

Ali: Yeah, maybe. I'm trying to think if we've had, like, nonhuman characters in Nievelmarch. We had those funny kids, but those were all kids who were people. Our *Shooting the Moon* characters I think were all human. We've never had, like, a golem or like a rock guy moving around. But I guess an important thing to say, even though we sort of have not kept up with it: Nievelmarch was also supposed to be in the, um...

Jack: Oh, the Tableau, Grand Tableau.

Ali: Grand Tableau.

Janine: Yeah, that's— my character was from there.

Ali: Right.

Janine: My character, the ice dancer spy.

Ali: [laughs] So, that opens up us being, like, you know, like a really far away skeleton showing up, because I remember my Grand Tableau character was a skeleton guy. Or like, did Austin play a bird person in *Stewpot*, I think? Anyway, this is here nor there.

Jack: There's also bee people out there.

Ali: Yeah, I believe it. Okay. So yeah, there's birds. There's birds. They're talking birds. They engage in society. We will see them, or maybe we won't, and any sort of nonhuman entities I think are fair game for Nievelmarch. We can have pixies. We can have fairies. We can have dragons. This feels like a place that has that. Anyway, Jack, how far away is the closest town?

Jack: Nievelmarch itself is a cart ride away. That's where I go to get stuff. It is easy for me, because I am on the ground. Sorry to everybody else. [Ali laughs]

Janine: For Velvet, gotta walk to the shaft entrance first, and that's a whole thing, and then you gotta ask someone for a ride, because the thing—

Ali: Mm.

Janine: Whatever she's using for conveyance down there—maybe like little carts or something—it's not applicable to the surface, and you are you gonna, like, get a horse and just keep it up there when you never— use it like a few times a month? No.

Ali: Mm.

Janine: I mean, that's what neighbors are for, right, uh, Ernan? Ernan.

Jack: Right. Right. Wait, is your name Velvet?

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: Velvet...there is a history of velvet in Nievelmarch. [Ali laughs]

Janine: No, there isn't. No. [Ali and Jack laugh]

Jack: Just, uh...

Ali: It's a beloved, uh, you know, fabric.

Jack: And is it safe?

Ali: Usually.

Jack: Okay.

Ali: Depends on the season.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Ali: Okay, what is the process for asking someone for a ride? Because it's not a hitchhiker situation. Is it like, you send a little flag up, and then somebody has to come get you?

Janine: Um, I think it's like, you know when you want to cross a super, super busy road that has one of those overpass pedestrian bridges, and the thing you want to go to is directly across the street from you, but the road is busy and there's, like, cement barriers and stuff. You just have to use the crossing.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: So you have to walk all the way to the crossing and go through the crossing and then walk all the way back, basically, to where you were. Like, maybe you're like 10 feet from where you started. I think that's the thing. I think I have to walk to the, like...not necessarily a mineshaft, but you know, a mineshaft.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Go up, and then, like, walk back to Ernan's farm and be like, "Hey, are you going into town today? Can I get a ride?"

Ali: Ohh.

Janine: So it's, like, a process.

Ali: Okay.

Janine: And then if Ernan says, "No, I went yesterday," it's like, "Okay. Bye."

Ali: [laughs] I have to go. Do you have one of those little guys afoot who can send a message to town for me?

Janine: Yeah. One of those little guys.

Jack: [laughs quietly] By the "little guys," do you mean the unionized, uh, like, orphans?

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: The Odd Job Boys? Is that what they were called?

Jack: Sure, all the Odd Job Boys.

Ali: Odd Job Boys. [laughs] That is what they were called. Ah, good for us. "How often do you see other people?" For Sable in the cloud farm, my answer is: once a season, I drop off my harvest down below. Every two weeks, I go to ground for food supplies.

Jack: For Ernan, I go into town to buy supplies, and I am— I've written down "always connected to the farmers above and below." Not really always, in the sense that, you know...I have a relationship with the farmers above and below me is what I'm trying to say, I think.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: For Velvet, seeing other people is a few times a month, blanket. Like, I don't know that her shipment dates are super consistent, so I think it is just a

sometimes...sometimes maybe she'll see people a few times a week, and sometimes it's once or twice a month when she's, like, getting supplies.

Ali: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I was hesitant to answer the way that I did, because I was initially going to be like, "Oh yeah, every two weeks, I have to drop off my materials," but then I was like, what if I have a season where I make no agricultural progress? But I guess that's a thing of, like, I either skip that trip or I go down and I only have my two fruits when I should have, like, 20 or whatever. But yeah. Um, "How much do you rely on the community?" I've written here, "Heavily. I can't live off of what I grow, and I need access to the ground for food and supplies."

Jack: I have written, "I'm new here, and I don't know the community well. People help me get to know the place."

Janine: I've just written, "tremendously." [Ali laughs quietly] Ali, I think it's the same thing where it's just, like, I cannot eat crystals.

Ali: Sure.

Janine: I cannot grow anything down here that I could eat, other than, like, mushrooms and slime maybe?

Ali: Mmm.

Janine: [laughs quietly] So, I need to rely on people, and also for like, because I have, like, needs for...you know, I need warm clothes. I need, like, coal and stuff. Like, all that stuff has to come from somewhere.

Ali: Right. Yeah, if you, like, rip your sweater or something on a sharp crystal.

Janine: Yeah, this is not a live off the land situation.

Ali: Yeah. "How much does the community rely on you?" My answer is "Moderately. My harvest is used by a certain profession but common in most recipes." Once again, I am

making alchemy cactuses. [quiet laughter] I am making cactuses that are used in alchemy settings.

Jack: I have put, “I provide some but not all of their vegetables and ingredients for the witches.” I want to be realistic about the amount of produce that would be needed to sustain even a small community like Nievelmarch. You know, a couple of small fields of vegetables wouldn’t cut it, but I think I have almost, like, a little market stall, and I sell what I make, and then I do have these sort of contracts with the witches to provide... I don’t think it’s [Ali: Oh.] alchemy cactuses, but I have, like...I don’t know what I’m growing for them yet, but I’ll play to find out what happens.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: For Velvet, it’s a situation where, like, [sighs] you know, when we figured out how to make lab diamonds, people didn’t stop buying real ones. Or, you know, when people figured out how to grow tomatoes in a greenhouse, it didn’t kill the market for tomatoes grown outside. It’s just a thing of, like, well, this is a source of these things that’s closer and quicker in some senses than mining distantly in, you know, deep deep in the mountains and, like, mining things that took thousands of years to form. Like, this is a thing, like, well, you can kind of do it in seasons, and you can do it a little more on-demand, a little more custom, and it’s close, so you don’t have to ship it as long, and you don’t need all the manpower to, like, crack open the rocks and stuff. So, nothing I’m doing would disappear from the market if this farm didn’t exist, but the prices would jump.

Ali: Cool. Sure. Yeah. I mean, you know, there’s uses for crystals in fancy magic world.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Jack: People always need crystals. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Especially custom crystals. If you can just grow your orb crystal instead of having to cut an orb crystal? Oh my god, that changes everything.

Ali: Mm, yeah, it sure does.

Gameplay Discussion [1:06:35]

Ali: Okay, so with our individual farmers and our communities created, it seems like the way that we've set this up is that we should be tracking our progress together, because we all have such distinct farm— I mean tracking it separately, because we all have such distinct farms and produce. And like, we can have some overlap of, like, if I have a problem, Jack can roll that into, like, “There’s not a lot of rain,” or you know, things like that.

Jack: Right, right, right.

Ali: But yeah, so, I'm just gonna jump into the rolls here, which is, just to give everybody a heads up beforehand: this game involves a lot of math, a lot of decks of cards, letter writing, and then festivals, but sure. So, [reading] “First, establish the season you're starting your game in. Is it spring, summer, winter, or fall? If you want to use different seasons in your game, decide what they are.” I'm fine sticking with Earth seasons, so to speak.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: But I'm a little curious on whether we want to start with...I guess it would be— how do you end on winter? It would be spring, summer— no, it would be— no. It would be— [laughs] Would it be fall, spring, summer...

Janine: Spring, summer, fall, winter.

Ali: Oh, okay, yeah. Fall and winter is switched on this layout, which is why that keeps messing me up. So, it would be spring, summer, fall, winter, yeah. I kind of like that. I think, in my head, it was starting with summer, because it’s currently summer right now, but we’re going through years. It’s not like we’d have a thing of, like, the first episode of this would be a summer episode, and then the second episode of this would be a fall episode, or whatever.

Jack: Right.

Ali: So we're going through the year, and I think it makes sense to me to follow the Nievelmarch thing of having our festival be a winter festival. Do we like that? Or do we have other ideas?

Jack: Oh, right. So, the way the festivals work is that they trigger after a full year, right?

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: So the implication is that, if we were playing spring, summer, autumn, winter, it would always be a winter festival.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: I think I am fine with this, but I think we should do a different festival each time.

Janine: Mm.

Jack: It should be, like, a different kind of winter festival.

Ali: Okay. Yeah, I guess that makes sense, because, like, yeah, it wouldn't be the same organizers every time. It wouldn't be the same theme every time.

Janine: Wait, is there— what's the reason we need to end on winter?

Ali: So the festival we have would be a winter festival, which would, like, follow sort of the setting magic.

Janine: But we've...I mean, that's part of the thing we're doing now, right, is that we've only seen it in winter.

Ali: Right.

Jack: So that would be an argument for going summer, spring— fuck. [laughs quietly]
An argument for going summer, autumn, winter...

Ali: Or we could do, like, a spring festival if we wanted to. We could do a summer festival if we wanted to, which is interesting. I guess we could do...we could even—

since it's supposed to be— the way the game would like to be played is that you do 16 seasons of four years, and I guess we could sort of do, like, if we wanted to do it that way, we could do each year a different sequence, and then I guess we just sort of handwave whatever the gap would be. Like, we end on fall, and then instead of starting on winter again, we would start on summer, so we would end on winter the next time or whatever. You know what I mean?

Jack: Yeah. I don't think this would break— yes, it would necessarily mean that there would be a gap, but I don't think that it would break it. Unless we want to—and I'm just floating this—unless we want to do four summer festivals, which would mean that we would start in autumn. Autumn, winter, spring, summer, festival.

Ali: Mm-hmm. And I guess that sort of follows how it would work in reality, question mark? Because you would have your, like, autumn, setup; winter, going through it; spring, things are blooming; summer, you harvest and celebrate.

Janine: I have to look something up real quick. [typing]

Jack: Then a festival.

Ali: Okay. [laughs]

Jack: I always associate harvest festivals with autumn, with early autumn.

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: September, October.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Okay. This is the one I was thinking of. So, it's very common in *Harvest Moon* slash *Story of Seasons* games for there to be some festival at some point in the year. Usually I want to say it's autumn, but I think there are some where it's, like, spring and stuff like that, where there's sort of a hot pot thing, and like **[Ali: Mm-hmm.]** a weird chef guy from out of town will come up, **[Ali laughs quietly]** or sometimes it's, like, a...not a

mayor, but kind of a mayor. Sometimes it's, like, some sort of ruling figure, like a governor kind of thing. Sometimes it's just, like, a fancy cook. Will come to town, and then it's like, okay, we have to impress this person with the quality of what we've grown, and everyone brings their best ingredient and throws it in the pot.

This is also in *Stardew Valley*, and it happens to be...it's not a harvest festival. The harvest sort of thing in *Stardew Valley* is the fair, where you bring nine cool items or whatever and try and impress people, but the big fun cooking thing is the luau, which is in the 11th of every summer, where you bring an ingredient and you throw it in the soup pot, which that's a classic, like, many *Harvest Moon* games did that back in the day. And then, like, depending on the type and quality of the ingredients the player supplies for the soup, will get different reactions from the governor and Mayor Lewis. May increase or reduce friendship points. You can, like, poison the soup and stuff.

I bring all this up because doing something like that would be a fun way to have what's happening on the farms reflected. If it was sort of, like, a food related, like, bring a crop or bring, like, some kind of item, maybe not necessarily— you know, we're not all growing things that can be eaten easily, but something like that, where it's like a "show us what you've been doing" kind of thing.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: Yeah, I do like that. I guess the thing that that makes me think is that maybe the way that we should do it is we should have— we should maybe do what Jack was suggesting with the winter thing but have it be— have it end on— we'll end on summer or fall, depending on what makes more sense, but to your point of, like, sometimes in *Harvest Moon*, on the 11th, you have this big luau, and sometimes it's a different sort of festival. We can, like, switch between whether it's a potluck or more of a different sort of thing, so we can have sort of the fun of having a different thing each year? Does that make sense?

Jack: I think so, yeah.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Yeah, so maybe we can do two and two, in terms of, like, here's a big potluck for people who are actually doing the harvest, or here's, like, a bigger blown out sort of harvest market sort of thing.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Ali: Where it's also this, like, holiday festival where, like, crafters will come in. Like, you know, this is where our toymakers from *Shooting the Moon* might have a booth as well.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Okay. I like that. Yeah. We're sort of splitting the— we're getting both. [laughs] But in that case, so, do we want to end on summer then, or do we want to end on fall?

Jack: Let's end on fall, because opening in winter might actually fit well with the kind of way we want to show Nievelmarch here. We begin in a place we know, and then previously where the camera has cut at the end of every winter, here we see winter and then we begin to move into spring. I don't know. How does that sound?

Ali: I do like that. Yeah. I think it's kind of cute and sweet, and then we sort of get this, like, sort of returning to the status quo at the beginning of each year. Yeah.

Jack: Yeah, so we go winter, spring, summer, fall.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Ali: Yeah. Okay, cool. Okay, perfect. We've done it. [laughs]

Jack: Nailed it. We got there.

Ali: [laughs] Okay. Okay. [reading] "Decide what they are. Next, make sure you've removed any jokers that might be hiding in your deck." I've done this. "Shuffle and deal yourself cards face up, so you can see them all at once, until you hit an ace or a face card," which is a king, queen, jack. "Once you do, the current season is over. Players with their own farms deal their own spreads, while shared farms deal once. The individual suits of cards represent different kinds of progress throughout the season."

So, hearts is social progress, diamond is financial progress, a spade is agricultural progress, and is that just a clover? Is that what you call that?

Janine: Club.

Jack: Uh, club.

Ali: A club. A club is infrastructural progress. “Look at the cards that you've dealt and add up to each suit's totals, not including the ace or the face, and then be sure to keep a running ledger of each season's numbers over the course of the game. You might need them later for festivals or letters referencing any past seasons.” So, I have that. I've made this little— I've copied and pasted the chart from the book but deleted the numbers that were written in, so we have that as part of our Roll20. But yeah, basically what we're gonna do is we're gonna keep drawing cards until we see an ace or a face card, and then we're gonna add up the cards based on their suit, so I have a three of hearts, a two of hearts, a five of clubs, a seven of spades, whatever else, and then I would have six and seven and five.

And then, depending on that, depending on the...depending on what it adds up to is how we figure out our progress. I guess I'll just read this whole chart from the book here so the audience knows. So, a zero is no progress. A two to seven is barely any progress. An 8 to 13 is minor progress. A 14 to 19 is average. 20 to 25 is above average. 26 to 31 is notable. 32 to 37 is significant. 38 to 43 is impressive. 44 to 49 is amazing, and 50 to 54 is unbelievable. Also written here is, “Keep in mind that there are only positive numbers in this game. A zero means no progress, not negative progress. Some seasons might be slow, but your farm is always improving.”

And then, the reason why we don't count the face card—which is our, like, season ending card—as part of that total is because the face card determines what the focus of our letter will be. So, say, in my example where I had better agricultural progress than I did financial progress, my face card might mean that I have to write a letter about financial progress even so, so I would write a letter of, like, “Oh, you know, the cactuses really came up really well this season, but when I went to town, I didn't get

as good of a price as I usually did, and that sort of hit me really hard.” That’s the gist of this game. [laughs] Um...sure, okay. So. I’m sorry; I’m just looking at the rules to see what else I might want to read out loud before we jump into it.

Um...yeah, I guess we can dig into the letter stuff once we get there, and for now, we can just start drawing our cards and see how we end up. I guess, for people who are looking at home and being like, “How do you...you just keep doing this? [laughs] You just keep drawing cards? How do you get a 52 in one of these?” The way that this game works is at the end of every year, you make a friend, and because of that friend, you can remove an ace from your deck, so over time, you will decrease your chances of hitting an ace card, which should hopefully, you know, make your farm more developed over time, because you’ll have longer card pulls to, like, maintain these numbers. But yeah, let’s go into it. I’ve sort of— I have three decks here. We can choose. I guess— [laughs] I made a blue deck, I made a pink deck, and I made a kind of gold-brown deck, and I feel like that looks like sky, earth, ground to me. [laughs quietly]

Jack: Which is which?

Ali: I feel like the blue deck is the sky, I feel like the pink deck is the ground, and I feel like the gold-brown deck is down below, is the rocks and the crystals, et cetera.

Jack: Down in the brown dirt. Yeah.

Ali: Uh huh. That being said, thinking of your own little square here as— or one of these three squares here, even though we have— [laughs quietly] we know where we are, relative to each other, so I’m sure we can guess. We have already— there’s already a crystal and a cloud drawn here, so these spaces have been claimed. Pretend like this green box is sort of your card mat. And I’m gonna draw from the blue deck, Jack is gonna draw from the pink deck, and Janine is gonna draw from the gold deck, and let’s just keep drawing until we see a face or an ace card.

Winter [1:21:22]

Ali: Um, okay! [laughs quietly] So, we have...we've drawn our cards, and we've gotten our results.

Janine: I think, for dramatic— I think, for drama's sake...hmm, no, I don't know. I was gonna say, for drama's sake, we should do this in such and such an order. Why don't you go first, Ali?

Ali: [laughs] Yeah, we'll go down the line. So, I drew a two of diamonds, an eight of clubs, a three of hearts, a five of hearts, and then I got a jack of diamonds.

Jack: Which represents financial progress.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: I drew a ten of diamonds, a four of clubs, and a jack of clubs, representing infrastructural progress.

Janine: I drew a seven of hearts and then an ace of clubs. [Ali laughs] which represents infrastructural development.

Ali: Uh huh. So, adding up all of that, [laughs] even though the two of you don't have very much math to do. My season's totals is my social progress was an eight, which is minor progress. My financial progress was a two, which is barely any progress. My agricultural progress was a zero, which is no progress, and my infrastructural progress was an eight, which is also a minor.

Jack: Okay, my social progress was zero. [Ali and Jack laugh] It's a cold winter. My financial progress is ten, which sounds good but actually only represents minor progress. My agricultural progress was zero, and my infrastructural progress was four, which is barely any progress. And I'm gonna be writing—right, Ali?—about my infrastructural progress, because my face card was a club.

Ali: Mm-hmm. And I'm gonna be writing about my financial progress.

Janine: Um, I got a seven of hearts, [Ali laughs] and the face card I drew—or ace card I drew—is not a heart. It's for a thing I didn't draw anything of, so I'm gonna talk about a whole boatload of nothing that happened, I guess.

Ali: [laughs] Well, yeah, so, this is an interesting thing. I'm gonna read from the book here about letter writing. So, just to clear up the, like, cards face. The final note about that here is: "Determine whether your development is positive or negative, reference the season's totals for the ace or the face suit you drew while considering the farm's story so far. Good or bad, development should always have a significant impact on your life or reflect some sort of change." So, we can keep that in mind and sort of narrativizing how this worked for people, but, da-da-da-da-da...okay.

"So, what does this mean for your story? Well, let's look at the elements. Let's say you drew a 27 of hearts, a 20 of diamonds, a 5 of clubs, and an 18 of spades before hitting an ace heart. Your infrastructural and financial progress are above average, despite barely any agricultural progress. Maybe you discovered gem deposits beneath your field. You were able to extract and sell all the gems while preparing your fields, but you weren't able to plant much as a result. We also know that you made notable social progress. Perhaps your gem discovery led to a blossoming friendship with a local jeweler. The ace you drew was also a heart. Because we made notable social progress this season, the social development the ace represents is likely positive. Maybe, while interacting with the jeweler's family, you met and developed a crush on their daughter. The letter you write will tell someone about your blossoming romance. You'll update them on your season's ups and downs to add context to this romantic development.

"Let's say you immediately drew an ace of clubs, ending the season with zeros in all categories. First, remember that a zero doesn't erase progress—it just means that you didn't achieve anything new. The question is what exactly prevented your momentum. Because you made no progress this season, the infrastructure development of the ace represents spades is likely negative. Perhaps you didn't make any progress because all your energy was spent making repairs around the house rather than farming. The letter you write, then, is to tell someone about the repairs that

you had to make. You'll update on how that work negatively impacted your productivity around the farm as a context for your venting.”

So, that's sort of the thing to keep in mind here is not, like, “Oh, I didn't do anything.” It's, you know, how did...making up a narrative structure for, like, why did these numbers turn out the way that they did? Like my mealworms examples from before. I could say that I, like, made great social development because I had to get an exterminator come through, and I made friends with this guy because he was up in the farm helping me get all these fish out, but it means that I didn't make any agricultural or financial developments because I had to pay him and because my farm was all fucked up. So, that's sort of, like, the space we're working in here. Going through some of the letter writing rules, continuing reading from the book here. [clears throat]

“These are the kind of things you'll be writing about. The only question remaining is just who you'll be writing to. The recipient of your letter should be someone you'd want to update on the details of your life and someone you're willing to be honest and vulnerable with. This can be a fictional recipient; your character's sibling out of the game, for example, or—” okay, we're not doing that. [laughs] “If you're not exchanging letters with another player, either create a fictional reason why your correspondence is one-sided or imagine what kind of response your letter may have received from its recipient. The letter you write can be as long or short as you like.”

Uh, we're not playing on the same farm. We could write letters to each other if we wanted to, or we can, like, choose NPCs out in the world that we think our characters at this point would be reaching out to based on the, like, sort of backstory that we set up for them. I guess before we write our letters and we start thinking of people in these people's lives, I would love to hear— we didn't say anything about descriptions. We didn't say anything about outfits. We didn't say anything about facecasts that we have.

Jack: Oh, that's a good point.

Ali: [laughs] If we have ideas for that, I would love to hear it.

Jack: Ernan Langerhank is a white man in his, uh, early 40s with a hard face. I think that he looks like American character actor Michael Shannon—

Ali: Michael Shannon?

Jack: Who you might know from the film *Midnight Special*. Oh, he plays General Zod in the recent *Star Wars* movies. He's in *Knives Out*. He's a man with a mean face, but he seems like a nice fellow. That's my impression of Michael Shannon. [Ali laughs] He looks like this.

Ali: Okay, yeah. I recognize this guy. I would not have known his name.

Jack: It's Michael Shannon. [Janine scoffs]

Ali: Michael Shannon. Okay.

Jack: That is Ernan Langerhank. Overalls. You know, overalls, innit? [Ali and Jack laugh]

Ali: You know?

Jack: Sometimes that's what it is.

Ali: [laughs] I think, for Sable, she is, like, a woman in her late 20s. I think that she has, like, long brown hair that she typically wears in, like, pigtails or up in, like, a braid situation.

Janine: What color?

Ali: Brown.

Janine: Okay.

Ali: [laughs] You know, I think that she's friendly. She used to be quite fashionable down in Nievelmarch. She, like I said, worked for a design magazine, and I said design kind of to be sort of vague there, because I was thinking, like, I don't know if I want it to be like a furniture thing or an architecture thing or like an art thing or a fashion thing. I think by

being design, any of those things would come up. It's just sort of a magazine that's, like, showcasing different artists in the Nievelmarch area, depending on practice. And yeah.

Jack: Is any of the art...kill you if you look at it?

Ali: You know, I don't think so.

Jack: Okay.

Ali: I don't think that we're at that point in Nievelmarch yet. [laughs] I would say that there maybe— I would— you know, there's probably been a really...um, what's the word that I'm looking for? There was, like, a big splash. There was a big scandal about the magazine once doing an issue about the development of curses.

Jack: Oh, wow.

Ali: And it went into some of the history of curses and, like, interviews with witches and, like, outlining different anecdotes or whatever, and I think that was part of— in *Shooting the Moon*, I had a character who responded to [laughs quietly] the plague of the curses by, like, creating this sort of, like, curse advocacy program, and I feel like there's, like, a political divide within Nievelmarch about curses in that way, and sort of like, there was a subsection of people who were like, "You're glorifying curses. [Ali and Jack laugh] You're making my kid want to grow up to be a witch. You shouldn't be covering this."

Jack: "Why don't you write about nice things?"

Ali: Right.

Jack: Yeah. The works.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Janine?

Janine: Um...oh, right, yeah. So, you know *The Little Mermaid*, when Ursula turns into Vanessa?

Ali: Yeah.

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: I've not seen *The Little Mermaid*.

Ali: [gasps] Whoa. It's a classic.

Janine: Oh, wow. Yeah. Hang on. Hang on a second. So, okay, so there's a part where... [laughs] There's a part where a witch turns into a hot lady.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: And she's like an evil hot lady but still good looking and cool looking, IMO. I always thought she was neat. And I think Velvet looks like that but, like, not as evil. [Ali laughs] Like, not super evil, but like, you know, she's pale. She has black hair, and it's sort of long and, like, flowy. And very intense almond eyes, probably a very pale blue color, maybe. Or no, it's, like, brown, and then she wears a lot of, like, purples and wine colors. So, like a little bit of a mix of Vanessa and then I guess Mother Gothel from Rapunzel. [Ali and Jack laugh] But again, not evil.

Ali: Okay.

Janine: Just like this.

Ali: It's incredible to me that you were like, "I'm playing this evil woman, but I want her to not be evil." [laughs quietly]

Janine: She's not evil!

Ali: She's not evil.

Jack: Let me follow that up with another woman. Oh, she's evil too, but I'm not evil. [Ali laughs] Only evil woman as my facecasts, but I'm not evil.

Janine: Yeah, they're cool.

Jack: And you're not a vampire, are you?

Janine: No. Uh uh.

Jack: [laughs quietly] Good to know.

Ali: Yeah, I guess I should say, for Sable, the facecast I've been thinking of is America Ferrera, who you might know from the recent Barbie movie.

Janine: Hell yeah.

Ali: She was in *Ugly Betty*, *Superstore*. She's, like, a comedian, and she's very good. But imagine her late 20s and with slightly longer than shoulder-length hair that she either wears in ponytails or in a braid. Perfect. Okay. Let's get to writing these letters. I will say there is one other thing in the game about— there's, like, rules at the end for speeding up play or slowing down play, and one of the suggestions for speeding up the play I read because it's kind of relevant to thinking about letters. We don't have to do this, but... "If multiple players are present during a session, you may not want to compose a full letter every turn. If that's the case, consider treating your correspondence less like letters and more like telegrams. After tallying a season, send a simple three sentence dispatch to another character that states the nature of your season's development, one hope and one fear, and a question." And then the sample is, "Dear Alice, coconuts are not selling like they used to. I hope to find a new crop soon but fear we have been replaced by bigger and better farms. How is Mom?" I don't know that we have to full "let's chop down the time on that" yet. I think we'll feel how we feel about that during play, but I do think that's a good way of thinking of structuring the letters if you're sort of unsure of what to include.

Jack: Right, yeah.

Ali: Okay.

Jack: Wow.

Ali: [laughs] I was wondering how, like, playing this game would feel, and we're in it now.

Jack: We sure are!

Ali: [laughs] We are in it now.

Jack: Okay. Let's see.

Ali: Are we all— do we all feel finished?

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: Okay. I'll start. I guess we can just keep going in the Ali-Jack-Janine order that we've been going in? That feels good?

Jack: We go top to bottom? Yeah. [laughs quietly]

Ali: Top to bottom. So, my letter writes— my letter reads. [laughs]

Dear Charlene,

Maintaining a farm was *nothing* like I thought! Here I was thinking I'd be enjoying green pastures, but all of my time has been spent repairing my farm launcher. Ugh! Thankfully, I've had a mechanic come through once a week to look over my equipment and make sure I don't *fall out of the sky!* But where's my cactuses? [Jack and Ali laugh] Since I'm up here and need to show something for it, I was able to bottle some cloud water and sell it below. It's not cacti, but the alchemists can still use it. Some money is better than no money, I guess, and I'll need to keep this in mind next year. I could barely afford gifts for my family!

I hope you and the girls enjoy these chocolates. I could never forget you all. I hope you and the writers' room are doing well. I've been picking up the new issues when I'm able to make it into town. I loved the new feature on carousels. I

cut out the pictures and pasted them on the walls in lieu of winter decorations.
Ugh. Here's hoping next winter is better.

Jack: Uh, what is a farm launcher?

Ali: [laughs] So, the thing that I was thinking of is that, like, what I sort of have is like an airplane that I launch into the sky, and it has that big square section that I talked about that, like, I find a cloud and I sort of land onto it, and the cloud sort of moves beyond me. But what I have is this sort of, like, homestead and this porch and sword situation which is, like, on this flat plank that hovers in the sky with this big empty square attached to it, and the cloud sits within the thingy.

Jack: Wow.

Janine: Oh.

Ali: So it's this, like, big mechanical device that needs its own upkeep so I don't, aforementioned, fall out of the sky.

Jack: Yeah. Critical. Critical.

Ali: [laughs] Uh huh.

Jack: Okay.

Dear Sister,

If there is any kind of social life in winter in this place, I don't know how to find it. Go to the coffee shop—with whom? Walk around the square—in the snow? It gets dark so quickly, and I wake up in the dark and get dressed in the dark. Landlord in the old place set the thermostat and always set it too hot, but at least I had heating. Here, the wood store operates on trust: put a coin in the box and take a bundle of logs, the woman who runs it nowhere to be seen. People are ice skating on the frozen lake in the park, but that's not for me.

When I left the city, Aunt Alice gave me a single gold coin. It had an image of a spring daisy pressed into it. "Don't spend this," she said. "Put it in a box with a candle, and in a year, it'll soon grow." She meant it literally. The coin was bewitched. I keep the candle burning overnight, and when I came down this morning, I found that it had a partner. A second coin had appeared alongside the first. Still, not to be spent. You were always thriftier than me, but I won't pass on a spelled coin so easily.

Other than money, nothing is growing. Nothing in the soil, either. Dead, dry grasses poking up from the snow, ground too hard to dig into. The path from my house to the garden is made from uneven stones pressed into the ground. This morning as I cleared it of snow, the shovel turned one on its end, pointing up sharply. Once I had cleared it, I set it right, then found other stones and replaced the uneven ones that I could. Now the shovel passes easily over them. It's not much, is it? Fixed a path that was already there. The stamp on this envelope has a rosy-cheeked man sipping cider on it. Ha ha ha. [Janine and Ali laugh]

Warmly,

Ern

Janine: To Margareth Hamperdown,

Care of Nievelmarch Department of Geoagriculture.

I know you told me to follow the guide book for this placement, but it is winter. I cannot get the guidewire hooks into the walls; they are frozen. I cannot clear out the flue to the surface; it is frozen. I cannot run the bath; it is frozen. I can't do anything but set out candles to melt off the smallest portions of the walls in order to locate a handful of the holes the last placement drilled here. What should I do? Please get back to me as soon as possible. I am desperate. [Ali: Aw!]

Regards,

Miss V. Lunde

Jack: We're all having a bad time in winter. [Ali laughs] Oh my god, I just— with every return to Nievelmarch, I just love, like, hard cutting to the three lovers from the first game hanging out in the, [all laugh] like, Glacier Express coffeeshop with strudel.

Janine: Yes. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Fucking great.

Janine: They were the only ones having a normal time, turns out. [Ali and Jack laugh]

Ali: I mean—

Janine: Everyone else is cursed and freezing.

Ali: [laughs] Listen, the next time you go back to town, you can get a streusel if you want to. It's just, when you're on the farm life, the farm is your life. When you're on the farm. When you're in the farm life.

Jack: When you are farm— when you have farm life, [Ali laughs] the farm is your wife.

Ali: Uh huh.

Jack: And that's it.

Janine: Why'd they call it farm life when you put in the farm, [Jack laughs] and you put out on in the life?

Ali: Huh?

Jack: Of the farm.

Ali: [laughs] So, that was winter. That's winter. That's where we are. That's the progress that we made. We are now moving onto spring, right?

Jack: Mm-hmm.

Janine: Yep, that's how the seasons go.

Jack: That's what follows winter. [all laugh]

Ali: You will see, on the doc, that I had to write "winter, spring, summer, fall," just in case I forgot, [**Janine:** Mm-hmm.] because sometimes it's hard to keep track.

Janine: That's true.

Jack: The American writer Kurt Vonnegut counted six seasons. He calls them Locking: when nature shuts everything down. That's the first season of winter. "November and December aren't winter. They are Locking. Next comes winter, January and February. Boy! Are they ever cold! [Ali laughs] What comes next? Not spring. Unlocking comes next. What else could April be?" And I feel like we are firmly in the winter season of Locking right now.

Ali: [laughs] That is a way to hack this game. [Jack laughs quietly] Six seasons. But yeah, let's get to it. Let's see what our spring progress is.

Spring [1:43:12]

Jack: [sighs] Oh my god.

Ali: I'm starting to draw.

Janine: Fuck me! [Ali and Jack laugh]

Ali: You know, this is what you've set up. I'm just gonna say: you were the one who wanted to be in a cave, and you're facing some of the realities. [laughter]

Jack: Oh no!

Janine: Ugh.

Ali: Oh no! [laughs]

Janine: [sarcastic] Oh no, you only drew two other cards before you drew your face card. Whatever will you do? [Janine and Jack laugh]

Ali: [pained] Yeah. Yeah.

Jack: Okay.

Ali: This is funny. Do we want to go over what our results are?

Jack: Yeah, do you want to start, Ali?

Ali: So, I've drawn a three of spades, an eight of spades, and a queen of clubs.

Jack: I've drawn shit! [Ali laughs] Total, I've drawn an ace of hearts. My score is zero.

Janine: Yeah. I drew a jack of spades, and that is it, and my score is also zero.

Ali: So, I have made eight plus three is 11. I have made minor agricultural progress and zero in everything else.

Janine: My headcanon for what's happened to Velvet, based on the numbers we've got here, which again is a seven, a zero, a zero, a zero, a zero, a zero, a zero, and a zero. [Ali laughs] I guess this is technically seven, right, because it adds? My headcanon for what's happened here is she moved in, she met both of you, and then she went underground, [all laugh] and that seven is, like, you met the two people who are above you. That's it.

Jack: Oh my god. [chuckles]

Ali: I love this game, because, like, I can't write about my agricultural progress. I have to write about the fact that I have zero infrastructural progress.

Jack: Yeah. [laughs]

Janine: Yeah. Yeah.

Ali: [sighs] Y'all got nothing.

Jack: Ugh.

Ali: Janine, I would like to unfortunately correct you. That is not a seven in your second row there. That is all zeros.

Janine: Oh, I thought it, like, added. I thought it was, like, cumulative.

Ali: Oh, no, no, no. Yeah, season stays in season, and then at the end of the year, when we do the festivals, you add the whole row up.

Janine: Oh, okay. Okay.

Ali: So, if you— [laughs] for instance, if you got— if your social progress was seven, zero, zero, zero, then at the end of your season, your...

Janine: Ah, then it would be seven. Okay.

Ali: [laughs] It would be seven, but...

Janine: Gotcha.

Ali: Yeah. Uh huh.

Jack: Zero really is no progress. No progress.

Ali: No progress. You're still out and about. Let's put it in Tyler's words, once again. "Let's say you immediately drew an ace of spades, [laughs quietly] ending your season with zeros in all categories. Oh no! First, remember a zero doesn't erase progress. It just means you didn't achieve anything new." So. [laughs] We've...I am writing a letter about my zero infrastructural progress. Jack, you are writing a letter about your zero social progress. And Janine, [laughs] you are writing a letter about your zero agricultural progress.

Jack: But your letter should reflect a little that you managed to make minor progress in agriculture, right?

Ali: Uh huh, yeah.

Jack: It's just not the focus of your letter.

Ali: Uh huh, yeah. [laughs] God, this game is really funny. Good for it. [Jack laughs] All right, are we ready to read our letters?

Jack: Yes.

Janine: There you go.

Ali: Dear R.J. von Ronstein of Ronstein Mechanics,

I am writing once again about my shipment of wire insulation for my cloud farm station. As explained in earlier correspondence, with the warming of the months, I am looking for a material that will keep the heat *out* and not keep the heat *in*. Is there not a single method suitable for maintaining my pipes year round rather than having to change the covers twice a year—not season—twice a year? My first shipment was missing in transit, which I understand. The skies can be very dangerous in the winter months, what with all the ice bandits. Now, my package has arrived, but the water is starting to get too warm in the late season, and I'm concerned for the summer. Are you able to send another maintenance person to me so we can figure out a more permanent solution?

Thank you for your consideration. Despite my mechanical issues, with your team's help, I have a successful harvest this season. I've included a few extra plants as thanks. I'm really hoping that we can get this settled.

Thank you,

Miss Butter

Jack: Great. Sky bandits. Ice bandits.

Ali: [laughs quietly] I get ice bandits.

Jack: You know? But a successful harvest.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: Dear Sister,

How's Marco? Is he still working at the brewery? I bet the new spring beers have come in. How's Helen? Her son's started school, hasn't he? I remember he was really into those books about the stars. How's Leanna? Did she end up getting that horse? How's Robbie? Tell him he still owes me 500 francs from the card game. How's Elliot? I hope he's still practicing the violin. How's Melina? Did her potted plants make it through the winter? How's Arnie? Tell him I haven't forgotten about that book he leant me. How's Mitch? We should go bowling together if I can come back. How's Kara? Did she get that dog? How's Lee? Still fixing up that bicycle?

Spring has come. The woman at the wood store has taken down the sign that says "Leave what you can," and now there's no sign there was ever a person there at all.

Ern

Ali: Aw. [quiet laughter]

Janine: Oh boy. [sighs] Okay.

To Mr. Sarnmorton,

Care of Nievelous! Specialty Jewelers [Jack chuckles]

Hello. I'm Velvet Lunde, the new caretaker of source B38. I wanted to let you know that I received the molds and crystal forms you sent last week.

Unfortunately, seeding them has so far been unsuccessful. I'm told this may have something to do with the changes to the minerals in the meltwater and that once the season progresses it should resolve itself, but nevertheless I want to make sure you were informed in case your order was in any way time sensitive. If you have any questions, please reach out to Margareth Hamperdown at the NDGAG. I'm sure she will be able to explain the issue in greater detail and assuage any and all concerns. Thank you ever so much for your patience—

Janine: And it's been crossed out. It's been, like, hatch marked out, and it says:

Your understanding. [Jack laughs]

Warmest regards,

Miss V. Lunde

Jack: God, how are those crystals doing? Answer: they're not there at all. [Ali laughs]

Janine: None. None crystals.

Jack: None crystals.

Ali: Boy howdy. We had a rough time of it this spring.

Jack: What's this "we"? [Jack and Ali laugh]

Ali: I mean, I also got a bunch of zeros. Just because cactuses came up doesn't mean that I'm doing tremendously.

Jack: You have farm! We— [Ali laughs]

Janine: Uh huh. Yeah, you do.

Ali: Well, as we—

Janine: It's funny that the person who's like, "Oh, my horrible curse where everything I touch turns to plants." They move out to a farm, and they're like, "It'll be fine now. Everything will be good." And it's just...

Jack: Just no plants.

Janine: Curses be curses sometimes. [Jack laughs]

Ali: You know?

Janine: You can't just work with 'em. It's a curse.

Ali: You tried to find a curse loophole, and the curse said, “You know what? No.”

Jack: It doesn't work like that.

Ali: You can't be a farmer.

Jack: You can't be a farmer!

Ali: Yeah, you can't gain from the curse.

Summer [1:51:14]

Ali: But you know what, that is spring behind us. We're gonna brush off our hands. We're gonna put our troubles behind us, and we're gonna draw some new cards.

Janine: You said that last time. Like, word for word, almost. [laughs quietly]

Jack: Ah!

Ali: Did I? Oh my god. [laughs]

Janine: Oh, come on. Big money, no whammies. Okay! All right! Okay! Okay! Uh huh! Okay! Ehh, okay. [Ali laughs] Well, look, it's something. It's something. [sighs]

Ali: All right, let's go over our results here. I have drawn a five of hearts, a four of spades, and a queen of diamonds.

Jack: What have you drawn, Janine?

Janine: Uh, I have drawn a two of diamonds, a three of diamonds, and a queen of hearts.

Jack: Drawn fucking diddly, haven't I? [all laugh] What's especially cruel is I wrote this deeply sad letter about how he's extremely lonely because I drew an ace of hearts, and now I've drawn a king of hearts, and that's it! [Ali laughs]

Janine: Uh huh.

Ali: Mm. You know what, we're gonna get to the end of the year, and there's gonna be a mechanic that's gonna make everyone feel better about this.

Janine: How am I getting this money if I'm not farming anything at all ever? What happened?

Ali: [laughs] Well, I had that thing of, like, I couldn't get any cactuses, but I could get some water, so maybe there's, like...

Janine: You know, I figured out what it is.

Ali: Mm-hmm. But yeah, I'm writing a letter about my zero financial progress. [laughs, then sighs] Okay.

Janine: All right.

Ali: All right. Ready to read?

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Ali: Okay. So, I am gonna start with my letter here. Once again, I am reading— I wrote a letter for my— wait. I wrote a letter for my zero financial progress, and I had a... I guess this letter doesn't really— I had a five social progress, a zero financial, a four agriculture, and a zero infrastructure.

Dear Kitten,

Hello. Erm, well, I don't know. You're not gonna read this ever, right? Hello, even still. I miss you, even still. Farming is really difficult, isn't it? I'm beginning to realize why you put this farm lifter in an empty lot and kept it under a tarp. I think I'm beginning to realize you had a farm and *then* worked for the magazine, and I'm doing this backwards. If that's the case, why did you leave it to me? When I saw your cloud lifter for the first time, rusted and unloved as it was, I saw a dream sitting there unimagined. Is that why? I'm doing my best to love it, but my goodness does it take a lot of investment. No wonder you abandoned it. Why

spend your hard-earned cash on goggles and cooling or heating or dehumidifiers or fans or gas or shipping fees when you could live in the city and be amongst people and art and society like you did? Is that why you left the farm? I guess I'll never know.

You'd tell me if you became a ghost, wouldn't you? I've heard of some ghosts up in the mountains. Maybe you're busy there. Do ghosts think about farming, or do you think about the balls instead? I've been thinking of pools. Sometimes I stick my face in the clouds, and I think I can hear the sound of the waves.

Love,

Sable.

Jack: Aw. Sable's going through it. [Ali laughs] It's hard to farm.

Ali: It's hard to farm.

Jack: Expensive to farm too.

Ali: It's expensive to farm too. I've not made very much financial progress.

Jack: Dear Sister,

I think the bit of me that knows how to be close to people, knows how to make a smile or arrange my face, has curled in on itself or fallen away. Nothing grew. I let the candle in the box go out and spent both the coins on a bottle of plum wine.

Ern

Janine: Mama,

I know you said this wouldn't be easy for me, and I know I told you you were wrong and that I wouldn't mind it because I'd only have to do it long enough to save up. I don't want to hear "I told you so." I hate it down here. I feel like I am a dead body. I feel like I am in purgatory. [Ali laughs quietly] It is just me and the

rabbits, and the rabbits are so quiet. [Jack laughs] I can't be that quiet anymore. I talk to myself sometimes, because the echoes make me feel like I'm near other people, and then I can close my eyes and believe I'm on Main Street on a rainy day, standing under the chocolate shop's awning and waiting for Will to come by with his umbrella and save me.

Do you want to know the worst thing? When I was clearing out some rockfall from one of the hollows, I found a strange rock with the shape of an old fish in it. Collectors buy those up quick, right? All I could think about was how selling it would be a good excuse to talk about something other than groceries or crystals. I'll try to visit soon, but I'm at the mercy of this place, so I can't promise anything. Give Papa and Neil my best.

Love,

Vetty

Ali: Damn. The summer is tough. [laughs quietly] The summer ain't easy.

Jack: God, the summer ain't easy. [Ali laughs] The summer ain't easy, especially when you've had, like, a rough year.

Ali: Uh huh.

Jack: It's been a rough year.

Ali: Uh huh.

Autumn [1:56:46]

Jack: Welp, time to draw some more cards, I think.

Janine: Mm...

Ali: It is time to draw some more cards. I am shuffling the decks really quickly. Okay, your decks are good to draw from.

Janine: We'll see about that.

Ali: [laughs] Oh my god. Oh my god.

Janine: Oh my god!

Ali: [laughs] Oh my god.

Janine: [sympathetically] Jack.

Ali: Ah—

Janine: [hopeful] Oh.

Jack: Oh! Oh! [Ali laughs]

Janine: [gasps] Oh, finally!

Ali: [laughs, chanting] Go! Go! Go! Go! Go!

Jack: Go! Go! Janine! Janine!

Ali: Go! Go! Go! Go! Go!

Jack: Holy shit!

Jack: Sable! Sa— no. Vel—

Janine: Other one.

Jack: Velvet!

Ali: Velvet! Velvet!

Janine: Oh, wow.

Ali: [laughs] You have to actually do some math here.

Janine: It's amazing that the face card that I got is still for the thing where I have zero, zero, zero, zero. Unbelievable.

Ali: [laughs] Sometimes you can't see your successes in...

Janine: Yeah, it's true.

Ali: When there's one thing that you feel like you can't crack.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Jack: What have you drawn, Janine?

Janine: Why don't we go top down first?

Ali: Let's go top down. I have drawn an ace of diamonds.

Jack: Representing financial progress.

Ali: Uh huh.

Jack: I have drawn a jack of diamonds.

Janine: I have drawn... [Janine and Ali laugh] a two of hearts, a six of diamonds, a ten of hearts, a three of spades, a ten of diamonds, a seven of diamonds, a three of diamonds, and a king of spades.

Jack: It's all coming together.

Janine: This is where the real math starts.

Ali: Mm-hmm. [laughs]

Janine: At least I'm rich. At least that's happening for me, you know?

Ali: We love that, yeah.

Janine: That's what I wanted.

Ali: Oh boy. Ern! [Ali and Jack laugh] You know what, we're gonna have four years.

Jack: Mm-hmm.

Ali: We're gonna see Ern's life over those four years.

Jack: Yeah, this is an arc. We're going on a journey here together.

Ali: [laughs] You know, you would think that the ground farm would be surefire, right?
[Jack laughs]

Janine: Hmm.

Ali: You'd think that would be the one.

Jack: And Tyler is very specific about zero meaning no progress, so when I look at the thing that says "agricultural progress," the spades, and I have zero winter, zero spring, zero summer, zero autumn, [Ali laughs] I can only interpret this as no plants.

Ali: Yeah. [reading] "First, remember that zero doesn't erase progress. It just means that you didn't achieve anything new."

Jack: But I never had anything to start with, so.

Ali: Yeah, this is true. Yeah, that's... [laughs] That's a tough one.

Jack: [singing] It's a hard knock life, for me. [Ali laughs]

Janine: I feel like I'm maybe kind of bending the subject rules here, but it was a thing of, like, well, the idea works. I'm just gonna go with it. But it's mostly what it should be.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Janine: You know. [sighs] Okay.

Ali: Okay. Are we ready to read our letters?

Jack: Yep. Yep.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Ali: Okay. [sighs] Season four letters. So, I am reading about my zero financial progress in a season with zero progress at all. [clears throat]

Dear R.J. von Ronstein of Ronstein Mechanics,

I've received your invoice for the services and equipment for this past season. I'd like to thank you and your team for working on such short notice. I wasn't expecting how warm it would get in the summer. Don't you always think of the sky as beautiful and cool like a refreshing breeze? Well, I suppose you don't. You're much better at this cloud stuff than me. The heatstroke I suffered left me unable to progress much this season, but to you and your company's credit, my lodgings on the lifter have been mostly cool. I am truly in your debt. I am also literally in your debt. **[Jack: Ha!]** I've included what I can cover for this season and some cloud water that I've been able to bottle from the awnings, the freshest water you can get. It's not cash, but well, we can work out a payment plan, can't we? With the festival coming up, I think I can make up the difference in the coming weeks.

Miss Butter

Jack: Dear Sister,

Why did I spend those coins on plum wine? Why did I let the candle go out? What was I thinking, spellcraft like that? If I'd waited, I could have had a hundred coins, a thousand. Now they're in the pocket of some Nievelmarch wine merchant or in a church collection plate or who knows where. Autumn winds took the roof off the shed, and replacing that took the last of my savings. All over town, people are bringing the harvest in, and I have nothing. Nothing! I used to be wreathed in plants—choking the mill, climbing up the apartment walls—and now there's not a green shoot. I am going to sell the farm and move back to the city. I do not think I have been sadder or more deflated in my life.

See you soon,

Ern

Ali: [sympathetically] Mm.

Jack: Agh! [Janine laughs]

Janine: To honorable Gorbet van Vermillion: [Jack laughs]

You have my deepest thanks for the chest of supplies your valet delivered to me recently. He did get somewhat lost on the way, as I'm sure he explained, so I hope his delayed return was not too much of an inconvenience for you. Regardless, the impermeable boots and woolen socks in particular have already been put to good use. As to your proposal, I regrettably am not in a position to approve it. My agreement with the NDGAG [Ali snorts] only covers crystal farming, and regardless of my success or failure at this endeavor, every hollow is meant to serve this end. Of course, you will have right of first refusal on any other fossils that are unearthed through the normal course of my work here. That agreement in no way conflicts with my previous commitments. Hopefully this answer is satisfactory for you. It isn't an ideal situation, but I believe we can make the best of it.

Regards,

Miss V. Lunde

P.S. I hope your wife found the nautilus pleasing. [Jack laughs] It was the largest specimen I've seen yet. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Oh, it's so sweet. Just, now she's making deals. It's great.

Janine: Yeah. Listen, money. The thing is: money?

Ali: Money.

Janine: Money!

Ali: Yeah. Okay.

Janine: 26 money, too. That's notable money. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: Yeah. That's the highest number we've gotten so far.

Janine: Uh huh.

Jack: 26 might be the highest number.

Festival Discussion [2:03:31]

Ali: [laughs] So, we've reached the end of a year. So, the festival is what we do next, but it's getting kind of late, and instead of going into, like, all of these complicated rules, I think it might be best if we just, like, set up the festival? I have an idea of, like, where we'd like to start, especially because...have y'all, like, worked at any conventions or, like, in a thing like this?

Jack: Yeah, once or twice.

Ali: Because I think the, like, pre-opening day before, the like camaraderie and, like, nervousness of getting set up is, like, a special thing. [laughs quietly]

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: Right.

Ali: It's a unique experience.

Jack: The sort of, like, empty...there are obviously a lot of people there, because the amount of effort it takes to set this up is immense, but the sort of festival spaces are designed to allow for huge amounts of people that aren't there yet.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Jack: So it feels kind of desolate, despite the fact that people are all, you know, busying themselves around.

Ali: Right, yeah, it's such a— like, the two things I have in my mind for this are, like, I've done a bunch of Black Fridays when I was working retail, [**Janine:** Right.] but I've also done, like, merch booths and stuff for conventions, like PAX and things like that, and it's actually two completely different things, because it's like, "Oh, I'm going to the store that I work in all of the time, and you know, I know I'm gonna have a longer day than usual," but like being in this separate place and exactly the thing you were talking about, Jack. you know, walls slowly coming up, like decorations slowly coming up, but also these, like, wide open spaces that you have to cross path.

Janine: It's a place that exists for...exists for people to be guests versus a place that exists for guests and work to be done. Like, it...

Ali: Uh huh.

Janine: There's something— all those booths being so temporary, like, makes the act of buying stuff— it puts that in the foreground in a way that you don't get in a real store, because a real store has, like, built-in stuff and is in one place all the time and all that stuff. [Ali laughs quietly] Like, it's a...like a weird transience? A commercial liminality, perhaps, even?

Jack: Oh.

Ali: Ooh.

Janine: Don't tell KB I said that, because I don't think it's a good use of the word "liminality," [Ali and Jack laugh] but I like the way it sounds.

Jack: It does sound good. So, do you think it's the night before, or do you think it's, like, very early morning of?

Ali: Um, I could do either. I think, like, evening before is kind of fun, but I'm willing to be outvoted here I guess is... [laughs]

Jack: I think evening—

Janine: I like evening before.

Ali: Okay.

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: Beautiful.

Janine: Or were you gonna say something else, Jack?

Jack: Yeah, I think that especially because Ern has...let me just check my notes here...brought no— nothing. [laughs quietly] Nothing to display at the festival.

Ali: [sympathetic noise]

Jack: I think that he has sort of told himself that if he goes into town the day before, it's like he's giving himself a little gift. He can make it worthwhile. He can scrounge up some money and, like, go to a bar in the town rather than stay in his, like, awful house.

Janine: I mean, I think that's kind of the joy of doing it in the evening is, like, I think about...so, I've never worked at a convention, but in high school I was, like, really involved in— not real student government but, like, the student arts government. [Ali laughs] Like, we had—

Jack: The what?

Janine: We had student council, and then we had athletic council, and then we had arts council.

Jack: Huh.

Janine: And I was really involved in arts council, and we would run, like, coffee houses where people could, like, perform and stuff, and it would be in the school in the evening, and we did, like, a gala where people who were involved in the arts at the school could get little awards and stuff. So there was a lot of, like, setting up for those events, and it was always, like, after school, and then there was the sort of tear down in the evening and stuff like that, and there is such an interesting feeling when you're working in a place like that in the evening, because it feels like...it feels like you should be at home, [Jack: Mm.] but you simply aren't. [Ali laughs quietly] Like, it's...there's a sort of weird...especially when you're young, I guess, there's a weird freedom to it, but I think when you're a little older, there's this sense of, like, "Wow, we could go out for dinner right now, but also, we should get some more work done." [Ali and Jack laugh quietly] Like, it's...I don't know, there's a weirdness to it. There's, like, a...there's a feeling. It's so hard to describe. Like, I can feel it? [Ali laughs] Like, I can feel, like, cold— I can feel like pushing open a fire escape door to let some cold air in, you know? It's like that kind of...

Ali: Mm.

Jack: Yeah. Yeah. Definitely.

Ali: Okay, and that is where we find our characters. Who arrives first? I think Sable could arrive first, or...but also, who meets Sable first, I guess?

Janine: I mean, who's Velvet getting a ride with is where my answer's gonna be here.

Ali: Ohh.

Janine: Because if it's with one of you, it'll be when you arrive, but also—

Jack: Oh my god. I'll give you a ride.

Janine: Okay. [laughs]

Ali: [laughs] Yes!

Jack: I'll give you a ride, but I would like a tiny...like, I would like to know what that ride is like. [Ali laughs quietly]

Janine: Um...hmm.

Jack: Is this the first time we've met?

Janine: No, it couldn't be.

Jack: No, because I've given you a ride before.

Janine: Yeah. I think I probably, like, often— I've described it as, like, asking like, "Are you going out to town today? No? Okay." But I also imagine, like, Velvet just occasionally shows up on your doorstep like, "Hey, I don't want to go to town just for jam, but also I need jam so bad."

Jack: [laughs] Cave jam. [Ali laughs]

Janine: You know? Do you have jam?

Jack: God, when you're down in the cave, and the only light and hope in your life is when you can enjoy some jam. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Yeah. Or being like, "Can I pick the timothy hay you have growing in the back here? The rabbits need timothy hay."

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: It's the only kind they want, you know?

Jack: God. Hay blessed by someone called Timothy. It's like holy water blessed by the pope. That's why it's called timothy hay.

Ali: Wow.

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: I also like the idea of Velvet and Ern just, like, sharing mutually miserable looks but never talking about it. [Ali and Jack laugh] There's just a sense of, like, "This fucking...I hate it. Do you hate it?" [Ali and Jack laugh]

Ali: Well, this introduces something really important that, like, all of these interactions have happened, but Ern has had a zero social for a year straight.

Janine: Yeah, yeah. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Yeah, I don't consider you a friend.

Janine: No, we're not opening up. Like, that's the thing, right? We're sharing a look, and that look is probably like, "I am miserable. I don't know if this is— do you just look like that? I don't know. We're not gonna talk about it, because I need to go back to my rabbit hole."

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: You know?

Jack: This is a mostly silent ride, the sound of the bridle, the horse's bridle; the sound of the, like, cart wheels against the gravel road. There are, like, cicadas. It's summer, right? Or is it fall? It's fall.

Ali: It's fall. Yeah.

Jack: Yeah. There are, like, you know, frogs in the ditches on the side of the road. There's leaves. Just winding down the road towards Nievelmarch, mostly in silence. [laughs quietly]

Janine: I think so.

Jack: God.

Janine: I think every now and then, maybe Velvet, like, points something out, just because there is, for her, some novelty to being aboveground at this point.

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: Of like:

(as **Velvet**): Oh, that tree got...the branch broke off, huh? That sucks.

Jack (as **Ernan**): Yep. Came down in a storm. Mm-hmm. [quiet laughter]

Janine: Wheels grinding on the road. [Ali laughs]

Jack: [laughs quietly] At some point, there's like the sound of someone playing a violin, and a cart comes past us absolutely fucking laden with pumpkins. [Ali laughs]

Janine: And just, like, lively conversation. Everyone's having a great time in there.

Jack: Yeah, "And then I says to him, the—" [all laugh]

Janine: "And then I says to him, 'Why even bring that pumpkin? It's smaller than a person's head. Who cares?'"

Jack: One of the pumpkins rolls off the back.

Janine: [cont.] "Throw that pumpkin in the trash." [Jack and Ali laugh]

Ali: Well, your cart finally comes to, like, a big parking lot but that's just, like, a dirt lot.

Janine: Okay. [Ali laughs] I was gonna ask for a second.

Ali: Next to...I guess, is this like a field, or is this a little, like, courtyard park area that is converted once a year?

Jack: I think it is a town square that looks— like a town square that would generally have the, like, weekday market in, [Ali: Mm.] but one side of the town square opens onto a local farmer's fields, and the farmer has leased these fields for the festival.

Janine: Mm.

Jack: So, the square is sort of like the entrance to— like, I saw this a lot in the, like, village fairs and festivals where I grew up, of like, there is kind of yearly infrastructure that's there, but also it gets bolted onto, like, some other kind of arrangement that's been made. So I think it's the square and then some connected fields, and then in one of those fields is this, like, roped in area where people are pulling up and unloading.

Ali: You make your way to the tower. We have a tower, right? We said that we had a tower that was a representative of our...

Jack: Right, of the vertical farm.

Ali: Uh huh. Is this, like, a three story thing [**Jack:** Yeah.] where people are gonna be walking up and down?

Jack: No. Well, hmm, okay. [Ali laughs]

Janine: It could be.

Jack: Let me draw what I imagined in MS Paint.

Ali: Please.

Jack: Because this is a— because we're not streaming this, as we discovered last time, we could take the time to just share my screen.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Here we go. Okay. So, this is the ground. Y'all can see okay?

Ali: Mm-hmm. A tree. Important. The sun. [laughs quietly]

Janine: That. Uh huh. Chicken? Sky chicken.

Ali: Okay. Okay. It's a nice warm day.

Janine: Sky mouth.

Jack: It's a cloud.

Ali: It's a little cloudy.

Jack: That's a cloud, yeah.

Ali: Okay.

Jack: Those are some birds.

Janine: Some butts?

Ali: Beautiful.

Jack: Birds! [Janine laughs]

Ali: The trees are here. Oh, birds, sorry, right.

Jack: This is a cart. Okay. [laughs quietly] Right. Okay. So, the tower.

Janine: Are you drawing functionally a siege tower?

Jack: I think it kind of is kind of a siege tower.

Janine: It's kind of a siege tower, right? [Ali laughs quietly]

Jack: Except these are, like, open to the front. [chuckles]

Ali: Okay.

Jack: It's like this whole front area is open, and there's, I guess, like, a staircase up the side? [laughs]

Ali: So it's like a siege tower cut in half.

Jack: Yeah. Yeah, because it—

Janine: It's an open face siege tower.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: It's an open faced siege tower. As the constant argument goes on Twitter: is a siege tower a sandwich? [Ali laughs]

Janine: Only if you put a hot dog inside of it.

Jack: Only if you put a hot—

Ali: What's Twitter?

Jack: What's Twitter? [Ali laughs]

Janine: X. You mean X-er? "Zer"? "Sher"?

Jack: What's Twitter? And so, down here, we have crystals, [Ali: Mm.] and they've set up like a little crystal— oh! What if it's like— okay. What if the towers, the— what does Steven King call them? The, like, fucking levels of the tower are, like, decked out almost like stage sets to represent the three layers of the farm. So yours has, like, birds, [Ali and Jack laugh] like model birds hanging from little pegs in the roof, and the ground is, like, a white shag carpet or something.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: There's, like, little cotton candy clouds up here. And then in the middle, there's like, you know, a wooden stage set tree and, like, plants and a little backdrop flat of the farm. And then, down below, there's, like, glowing crystals and, you know, bats also hanging from the ceiling. [Ali laughs] How does— is this making any sense? How does this sound?

Ali: I am loving this. This is making— it does answer my question about stairs, so thank you for that. [laughs] And it's really funny to, like, imagine...because it's not us setting this stuff up, right? But we could've, like, put in forms months ago when we felt differently about the work that we were doing. [laughs]

Jack: Yes, totally!

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: God, being like, “Of course I’ll have something to show.”

Ali: Yeah, “you should put little bats up. That would be really funny.” Or is it the, like, farmers organization that we work with being like, “This is this year’s farm tower.”

Jack: I think it’s the latter, because the vertical farm is, like, a thing [**Ali:** Uh huh.] unique to Nievelmarch, but I do think that we had to, like, fill in a form saying what we were gonna bring. [Ali laughs quietly] You know, we were told, like, “Oh, because you have the lease on this land, you know, you have to— or rather, you have this space available to you if you want to show something off.”

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: And we were all like, “Absolutely. [Ali laughs] I’ll give it a go.”

Pre-Festival Scene [2:17:45]

Ali: Okay. Well, in that case, I think that you...when the two of you walk up to the tower together, Sable is on the third floor and kind of calls out from you over the railing and is like:

Ali (as **Sable**): [brightly] Hey! Welcome! There’s aprons downstairs. I thought it would be good if we wore aprons.

Jack (as **Ernan**): What?

Ali (as **Sable**): You know, so we match.

Jack (as **Ernan**): [stammers]

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, and there’s some pastries too. Hi!

Jack (as **Ernan**): Uh, who are you? [Ali laughs]

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, I’m Miss Butter. From the sky. [Jack laughs]

Jack: “I’m Miss Butter. From the sky!” [Ali laughs] A single line better than any of the Disney Corporation’s output of the last 45 years. [Ali laughs]

Janine: Miss Butter-From-The-Sky. [Ali and Jack laugh quietly]

Jack (as **Ernan**): Oh! Oh! Right! Yes. I guess we’re neighbors. I’m Ern. This is, uh, this is Velvet.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Hi.

Ali (as **Sable**): Hi!

Jack (as **Ernan**): Uh, yeah. I’d have offered you a ride, but I guess you made your own, uh...can you fly?

Ali (as **Sable**): Yeah, uh huh! [Jack laughs quietly] Well, me, no. I have a little ship that I take.

Jack (as **Ernan**): Whoa! [Ali laughs] Uh, okay. Right. Okay, give us a second.

Jack: What do these little aprons look like? And are you gonna wear one, Janine?

Janine: Yes. [Ali laughs] I think Velvet is wearing...at the risk of wearing a band t-shirt for the band that you’re in, I think she’s wearing, like, a velvet a-line dress, probably like a...I kind of want it to be, like, a goldenrod, like a really rich yellow color.

Ali: Ooh.

Janine: With like— and it’s, like, a little— it’s got the little, like, shoulder strap things, like suspender straps, and like a little white shirt underneath. So the apron is a little bit, like, kind of overkill, because her dress is already a little bit apron-like, but yeah, she goes for it. [Ali laughs quietly]

Jack: Amazing. I think Ern is wearing, you know, like a work shirt and, you know, heavy trousers. It’s starting to get a little chilly, especially with not being able to afford the firewood and taking the free stuff from that lady. And yeah, also takes an apron and kind

of puts it on. I don't think I'm mad about this, but I do think I am completely wrongfooted by your demeanor [Ali laughs] and don't really know what to do. In fact, yeah, I think I'm gonna ask you about it. I think I, you know, climb up the outside to my layer and then sort of call up to you and say:

Jack (as **Ernan**): Can I come up?

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, yeah, sure!

Jack: Climbing up.

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh, just mind the carpet. You know. It's so pretty, isn't it?

Jack (as **Ernan**): You have carpets in the sky? Or is this, like, a representation of something?

Ali (as **Sable**): It's clouds.

Jack (as **Ernan**): Oh, it's clouds, sure. Yeah.

Jack: I think I sit down with my legs, like, dangling over the lip of the thing.

Ali: [laughs] Wait, there's—

Jack: Yes, Ali?

Ali: There's railings, right?

Jack: I mean, there can be if you want. [Ali laughs] Something about it just being, like, looking exactly like a...

Ali: Just open? [Ali and Jack laugh]

Jack: It's an open faced farm tower, siege tower.

Ali: Oh, that's so scary. [laughs]

Jack: I mean, are there railings on the inside of a dollhouse when you open it up? No.

Ali: No.

Jack: The dollies just have to be careful not to approach the front of their domain.

Ali: Yeah, this is true. Uh huh.

Jack (as **Ernan**): [sighs]

Jack: Just a heavy sigh. I'm so excited to be able to be in communion at last with other farmers, and I say:

(as **Ernan**): Ah, it's been a hard year, hasn't it? How did you cope?

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh. Yeah, it's...it gets warm up there.

Jack (as **Ernan**): And nothing grows, does it?

Ali (as **Sable**): [awkwardly] Oh, well...um. Well, I've had some successes in that area. [Ali laughs]

Jack (as **Ernan**): What?

Ali (as **Sable**): Um, the cactus fruit. Yeah, there's a big barrel of them over—

Jack (as **Ernan**): The what?

Ali (as **Sable**): I grow cactus up there. The alchemists use it? The water is very, uh, conducive.

Jack (as **Ernan**): Oh.

Ali (as **Sable**): I brought some bottles, if you want, too.

Jack (as **Ernan**): No, I'm good. [Ali laughs quietly] Wow. Yeah. Mm-hmm. Do you think that they'll, uh, judge us for our work? Is this, like, a competition?

Ali (as **Sable**): No. No. I mean, well, um, you kind of want to have a story written about you, and then I think, at the final day, the visitors get to vote on their

favorite booth? But that just affects investments and stuff, so it's not something you have to worry about.

Jack (as **Ernan**): [disheartened] Oh. It affects investments and stuff.

Ali (as **Sable**): Uh huh.

Jack (as **Ernan**): Okay. Well, you know, let me know if I can help. Bye, now.

Ali (as **Sable**): [cheerily] Bye!

Jack: How are you doing, Velvet? [Ali laughs quietly]

Janine: Um, I think Velvet has a big...has two big boxes with handles.

Jack: Oh.

Janine: And she has pulled them out of the cart and has moved them to her area and opens them, and one of them is packed with straw, probably, and is full of, like, weird fossils.

Jack: Oh.

Janine: It's not crystals, but it's still rocks, and if someone's— it's rocks and minerals, and if someone's gonna call her on it, she'll fight that fight. [Ali laughs] So, she's setting up just these— it's fossils of, like, weird little shellfish and stuff, and then the sort of pièce de résistance is, like, this big...I think it's probably, like, a griffon skull. Something like that, you know?

Jack: Whoa!

Janine: Or, like, part of a griffon skull. And the other box that she opens has a big rabbit in it.

Ali: [gasps] Yes.

Janine: I'm not sure which rabbit it is. I don't remember their names. I gotta find them. Uh, I think this is Captain.

Jack: Whoa. Oh, right, right.

Ali: Ah.

Janine: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Yeah, what are your rabbits' names? It's Captain— do you have two or three?

Janine: Gamble, Gambol, and Captain.

Ali: [chuckles] Yes!

Jack: Right. Gamble, Gambol, and Captain.

Ali: Do they talk, or are they just large?

Janine: They're just rabbits. They're just big—

Ali: Okay.

Janine: They don't talk. They're just— [Ali laughs]

Jack: I have the fish that talks. You might be thinking of that, Ali.

Janine: What a weird question.

Ali: Okay, okay, yeah, yeah. Okay, okay. You know? [Janine chuckles] Possibilities are endless. But just having a rabbit there is such a fun...I love it.

Janine: If I was down there with three talking rabbits, I'd have no problems at all socially.

Ali: [laughs] True.

Jack: God.

Ali: Well, they could be really annoying or cliquey.

Janine: I guess it's possible that they do talk, but they don't talk to Velvet, so. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Right.

Janine: I'm not gonna close the door.

Jack: It's the Toto in *Wizard of Oz* situation.

Ali: Mm-hmm. [chuckles]

Jack: Okay. Is there any other prep that we want to do or conversations that we want to have before it gets started?

Janine: Does Ern set anything up at all?

Ali: Aw. [laughs sympathetically]

Jack: I don't have anything! [Jack and Ali laugh]

Janine: But, like, a...I don't know, like a notecard that says, "Sorry, maybe next year"?

Jack: Oh.

Ali: Is that what we need? Like, do we need Velvet and Sable coming into the middle floor, like, just as we're all about to leave? [Jack and Ali laugh] And being like:

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh.

Jack (as **Ernan**): What?

Janine: I bet Velvet would not judge. Velvet would be like,

(as **Velvet**): [understanding] Ah.

Janine: You know?

Jack: Yeah.

Ali (as **Sable**): Are you bringing your produce tomorrow?

Jack (as **Ernan**): No produce.

Janine (as **Velvet**): It's— the land's been weird this year. I gotcha.

Jack (as **Ernan**): Yeah.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Like, it's off, right? It's just off? I don't know what it is.

Ali (as **Sable**): Huh. Looked okay from up there.

Jack (as **Ernan**): Well, it wasn't. [Ali laughs quietly]

Janine (as **Velvet**): [quietly] What would it look like if it was bad...?

Jack (as **Ernan**): Yeah, I don't...I don't know.

Ali (as **Sable**): Well, you know, you look down, and sometimes it's green, and you look down, and sometimes it's red, and you look down, and sometimes it's all brown.

Jack (as **Ernan**): [sighs]

Ali (as **Sable**): [hesitating] I guess I didn't see much green.

Jack (as **Ernan**): Nope.

Ali (as **Sable**): [cheering up] Well, that's great. People will have so many questions.

Jack (as **Ernan**): What? What k— what?

Janine (as **Velvet**): Is that great?

Ali (as **Sable**): Well, about— yeah, about farming.

Jack (as **Ernan**): Oh.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Yeah, like “Why are you bad at it?” Questions like that? That’s not fun.

Ali (as **Sable**): Well...well...well, they’ll, you know, about your experience.

Jack (as **Ernan**): [sighs]

Janine (as **Velvet**): Mm...

Jack (as **Ernan**): [moping] Yeah, I mean, yeah, I’ll be able to tell them about my experience. I don’t know. I was just gonna— I wanted to just show my face. When I moved here, people— the first day that mail was delivered on the farm, I got a note, and it was unsigned, and it just said, “It won’t be good.”

Ali (as **Sable**): My goodness!

Jack (as **Ernan**): And it wasn’t, so, uh, you know. But I just want to show my face, let them know that I’m...that I’m doing okay, but I think I’m gonna sell up after this and, you know, head back to the city.

Ali (as **Sable**): Oh. Well, um, at least, this weekend, we’ll be a team, so, um, [Jack laughs quietly] if you need anything, just holler. Right, Velvet?

Janine (as **Velvet**): Wait a minute. Aren’t you the guy where the plants always followed you?

Jack (as **Ernan**): Oh god.

Janine (as **Velvet**): I think I saw you in the newspaper. [Ali laughs quietly]

Jack (as **Ernan**): Ugh.

Janine (as **Velvet**): How did I not place this before now?

Jack (as **Ernan**): No, don’t...do we have to do this?

Ali (as **Sable**): You're the guy with the plants?

Jack (as **Ernan**): Do we have to do this?

Ali (as **Sable**): I heard somebody hasn't had that for 20 years.

Jack (as **Ernan**): Yeah, and I tell you: I haven't had it for the last year either. You get cursed—

Janine (as **Velvet**): Well, but that's good, right? You're fixed.

Ali (as **Sable**): I'm sorry, is that a weed next to the, um, picture of a bird?

Ali: [laughs] I forget what was on your floor.

Ali (as **Sable**): Next to that fake tree? Is that a real weed next to that fake tree?

Jack (as **Ernan**): [sighs] I don't— [sighs]

Jack: Yeah, I'm gonna reach over and pluck it, and it is, and it is a real weed. [Ali and Jack laugh]

(as **Ernan**): Yep. Yep. Just, I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to talk about it!

Janine (as **Velvet**): You can't just, like, think really hard of carrots, and then some carrots would grow?

Jack (as **Ernan**): It's a curse! They don't call them that because they're pleasant.

Janine (as **Velvet**): Okay, well, think really hard about turnips then.

Jack (as **Ernan**): It doesn't—

Ali (as **Sable**): Speaking of turnips, I think that the people at the broth booth...
[Jack chuckles]

Ali: Broth booth? [laughs]

Jack: Brooth? [Ali laughs]

Ali (as **Sable**): Said that we could swing by after 9.

Janine (as **Velvet**): If they're selling turnip broth, I would rather not. [laughs]

Ali: I think I wanted to say stew, and I got to broth. [laughs]

Janine: Stew booth?

Jack: The stew crew and the broth booth.

Ali: They call it— yeah, uh huh. [laughs]

Janine: We used to be the stew brooth— stew booth, but there's, you know, a lot of people have been having a rough year, so this year it's broth. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Ah. Right, it's a hard time.

Ali: The stew booth was counting on your vegetables for the year. [laughs]

Jack: No! [laughs]

Janine: Oh no!

Jack: The guilt! The specific guilt that I feel. I do not know this, because I have not opened any of the mail that I've received for the last two and a half months. [Ali laughs]
All the mail that I get goes straight onto the compost patch.

Janine: Oh no. There's just letters in there, like, "Hey, really looking forward to those potatoes! Just let us know when they're ready. Thanks!"

Jack: Well, and it's also— especially because I've had such a terrible social year as well, I'm sure it's letters from people in neighboring farms being like, "Hey, are you Ern Langerhank, the person who's moved in? Would be so excited to get to meet you," or whatever, you know?

Ali: [laughs] Aw.

Janine: Aw.

Jack: Onto the compost. But yeah, I will— I am excited about the possibility of some broth, if only to get out of the barren, uh— well, it's not barren anymore, because the fucking curse has decided that, [Ali laughs] since I'm not on the farm, it's gonna kick in.

Ali: And we'll come back next time with the festival.

Jack: Okay. What a jolly time on the farm. [Ali laughs quietly]

[["The Farmers' Almanac"](#) by Jack de Quidt plays]