

Winter in Hieron 24: An Open Mind

Transcriber: coyote

ALI: Last time, on Friends At The Table...

AUSTIN: The city in front of you is dense, it's not as large as Rosemerrow, or even Velas, but it contains a diversity of places, styles, structures that is mind-boggling. It's actually hard to look at because so many types of buildings sit next to each other. There are cathedrals and towers, massive pagodas and strange stalks standing out of a sea that rests in the middle of this flat table city floating in the air. And in the middle of it all is a very strange sight: There is a tree, high in the sky, pine, and when you follow its trunk down, you see its root structure floating in the air, connected to another root structure that goes downwards connecting to another trunk and another tree, standing on its tip on the ground.

AUSTIN (as Awkward Inn-Keeper): [slow and labored] Umm, this is the Topgallant, it is the Buoy's premier inn and tavern, and it is also, uh, a church, to S-Severea. You could also visit the other...great religious institutions of the Buoy.

JANINE (as Adaire): Those are?

AUSTIN (as Awkward Inn-Keeper): The entire old...deep breath, okay...the entire pantheon is represented in the Buoy. In the southwest, there is...

And his voice drops a little bit.

(as Awkward Inn-Keeper): In the north, there is the House of First Light, the old lighthouse itself, hand-built by Samothos. In the northeast there are...those isolationists, who don't wanna be bothered. I-I really respect them, uh, and you can find their church to Samaantine herself there. And of course there is Greenperch, uh, for Samol, out on one of the islands in the northwest. And there's so much more...here on the Buoy...

[music starts playing: [Inside](#)]

JANINE (as Adaire): That's good!

AUSTIN (as Awkward Inn-Keeper): In the southeast, there is the Duke of Halted Expeditions and Unexpected Alliances. He's an orc, they call him the Gray Duke because his skin is graaay. And the Grand Temple to the Ghosts of Past and Future! I think it's really spooky, but lots of people seem to like it. And of course, in the Southwest, therwhoo...there is...there is the Rehmmm...

And his eyes, he dips, he's looking past you for a second, like this is really hard for him to talk about.

(as Awkward Inn-Keeper): The Rector, and the College of the Last Living Spirits, In Memoriam, for their service awarded the [stammering] grace and wisdom of our...of our protector, the Dark S...the Dark Son of Originality. Memoriam College, the cathedral of the Dark Son.

ART (as Hadrian): Do you know that, uh, there's a group on the surface that uses a very similar name to you?

AUSTIN: He, like, turns his head sideways a little bit.

(as Prelate Springe): What are they called?

ART (as Hadrian): Well they're Dark Sun, but they don't refer to a family member, they refer to, y'know, our Lord's greatest labor in the sky.

AUSTIN: He looks questioningly to you.

(as Prelate Springe): And you haven't met *our* missionaries?

[music fades]

AUSTIN (as Alyosha): It is getting late for...this sort of talk. We should resume tomorrow.

ART (as Hadrian): Sure, yeah, of course.

AUSTIN: And very subtly puts his hand on your back.

ART (as Hadrian): Yeah, uh, yeah, we'll be back.

AUSTIN: And he walks you out the front door, and it's getting late, and it's the first time in months that the sun has set and it's not just dark outside, which means that there's something in your biology that's just like "Oh man, it's bedtime, I forgot what it's like to go inside when the sun is still out, and then to come outside and it's dark outside! This is weird!"

ART: Well, that was wildly upsetting

AUSTIN: Yeah! Alyosha says,

(as Alyosha): We have got to find a place to stay. [nervous laugh] I did not get us anywhere to stay. We have to go.

ART: Didn't get—oh my god.

ALI (as Hella): Oh no it's—we'll just go back to the place, it's fine.

ART (as Hadrian): I mean, I hope it's fine. It's late.

JANINE (as Adaire): That guy said he didn't get a lot of, like, business, so...

ART (as Hadrian): Yeah, but that man was not in a good way, he might've said anything.

AUSTIN: [Laughing] Oh, buddy...

JANINE: I think it'll be fine.

AUSTIN: His name is Clement, nobody ever asked his name.

ART: Only one person was talking to him.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: Wait, didn't I? I thought I had his name...

AUSTIN: It's Clement.

JANINE: Oh, you just gave me a description, okay.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I just gave you a description. His name is Clement Haroldnews. So you go back to the Topgallant?

ALI: Umm, yeah. [hems and haws] Does it seem like there'd be anything useful, like sneaky-sneak, that we could do at night?

AUSTIN: I mean, what are you trying to do?

JANINE: Does the Lack House have hours?

AUSTIN: No, it's open all day and all night.

ALI: During the night, is the lines as long?

AUSTIN: No, lines are definitely shorter.

ALI: Okay...

JANINE: I kinda wanna go there.

ALI: I'd go there...well, no, Hella probably wouldn't.

DRE: Uh, Throndir will go with, because he's still very intrigued by that big tree.

AUSTIN: Fair. It's like, in the, not in the shadow of the big tree, because the sun is down and there's no light source behind the big tree, but...there are stars here, actually—oh wait, no there aren't, there are no stars here, we're too deep. Sorry.

ALI: [laughing] Okay.

AUSTIN: So, there's no stars here. I think the two moons are still here though, so there's that.

ALI: Is that an extra one cause someone has a bracelet they put in their fuckin'...

AUSTIN: No, no, there's no third moon, that's not how the moons work, obviously, jeez.

[ART laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah, the Lack House has a short line, probably a fifteen minute wait. One person goes in, and then a different person comes out, like, there's clearly a second line inside or something...you don't know what's inside, it's just like a door, and sometimes people come out.

ART: But over a long enough time, we're seeing people we recognize come out, it's not like some...

AUSTIN: Yeah, people aren't transforming. [ALI laughs] I guess, like, as far as you know. You'd have to stake it out to see how that works.

ART: Sure.

AUSTIN: But I'll say, like, you get an okay vibe. And again, there are two doors, there's one that goes inside the building and one that goes inside the garden, and both of them have about the same lengths. Who goes first, or which line are you getting into?

JANINE: Maybe we should split it up, like Throndir does garden and then I do the house.

DRE: Yeah, okay.

JANINE: Just in case there's, like, a difference.

AUSTIN: Sure, there is, there's a big one. Alright, let's do Thrandir first.

JANINE: Uh oh.

AUSTIN: Thrandir, you go into this garden and there are five other people in various forms of sitting, kneeling, cross-legged, there's a chair that someone's on, and they're all sitting under this tree with their eyes closed, or looking into the middle distance, or with their eyes like fluttering a little bit. And...I need to know for sure, right this second, what Thrandir believes his lack is. Not what it is, but what he believes it is.

DRE: Oh boy...umm...

AUSTIN: And again, to put the cards on the table here, this should be something that...when I refer to a lack here, it is very much like "What is the thing that this person forms part of their identity around not having?". And so in this case, in this part of it, it's "What does he believe it is?".

DRE: Umm...A lack of retribution against the people who...he thinks screwed up his life.

AUSTIN: Okay. You sit on that and close your eyes, and you get a very clean image of a life in which you had enacted justice on them, where you were the one who razed Auniq to the ground, and rescued the other snow elves who were aging differently, and you were the one who brought justice to it, and everyone cheers your name. And then it's another day...and you're the Ranger, and it's great, and it doesn't...the sad thing is, nothing is different. The good thing, maybe, is nothing is different. If you'd achieved that, you're not sure that you'd be happier. Take +1 forward on your next roll.

Adaire, eventually you go inside, and are led to a small room with, again, a chair, a pillow you could kneel on, a loveseat you could lay out on if you wanted to, there's a mirror, and there is a painting of this city. And there's nothing like, obviously magical about this place, but it does ease you into a reflective state, and suddenly you're not in that room at all, you're somewhere else, you're at a place that embodies what you do lack, whether or not it's something that Adaire believes she lacks. What is that thing that Adaire lacks? Is she right when she says she lacks a true connection?

JANINE: I think she is.

AUSTIN: Okay. What's the last true connection—

JANINE: Like, I think that's the most honest thing for her is admitting that.

AUSTIN: What's the last time she did have a true connection in her life?

JANINE: Uh...When she was at the farmhouse.

AUSTIN: With her family?

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: How old was she?

JANINE: Mm. Probably like eight. Seven or eight.

AUSTIN: Is there, like, an image of her doing chores with other people, or is it something less clear than that even?

JANINE: Probably, yeah...Either something like...filling animal troughs, or something like getting ready to go to service.

AUSTIN: Right. When did she lose it? She had it. What was the moment, whether or not she recognized at the time, that she stopped having a true connection.

JANINE: Um.

AUSTIN: It can be vague, you don't have to be like "on this Thursday".

JANINE: [laughing] It was probably pretty gradual, but it was when she realised that, like, her family couldn't provide for her.

AUSTIN: Mm. Like literally.

JANINE: And no one else in that area...yeah, like her family, and the extended family, like that community, couldn't or wouldn't.

AUSTIN: Which...which was it? Again, let's sidebar, whether or not at the time she believed it was one or the other.

JANINE: I think with her family it's couldn't, and with the community at large it was wouldn't.

AUSTIN: Okay, right. the Adaire of now has that, like, so cleanly in her mind, that specific moment of realizing she was not a priority for the wider community, and, like, probably even for her family, but that one maybe she could understand more, and now you're going to leave with a +1 to your next aid roll. Next time you aid somebody you're gonna get a bonus to it. And you're confident that is your lack. Like...it is so clear that if that was the thing you said before that was like "Yeah, this, I'm pretty, um, I'm being honest", now there's like this thing past honesty, that is so clear for you.

Alright, does everyone get some rest? Does anybody have other stuff to do with the night?

ART: No, but so much stuff to do overall.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: [laughter]

ART: There's so many interesting things here...and I'm so glad I didn't go to that Lack House.

[laughter]

AUSTIN (as Topgallant Bartender): Four hundred pounds.

says the bartender.

(as Topgallant Bartender): Four-fifty on a good day.

[DRE laughs]

ALI: [laughter] Nice...umm...I kinda wanna do a thing that, I don't know if it's too much of an aside...

AUSTIN: What is it? Cause we can do it at different levels of abstraction, right.

ALI: Okay, I kinda wanna have Hella wake up early and go to the Temple of Ghosts of Past and Future?

AUSTIN: Sure, that's a totally fine thing to do. So, before we wrap up the night, is everyone else good for the night?

DRE: Uh. Yeah, I am.

AUSTIN: There will be other days, this place is not burning down tomorrow, is the thing I'll say, right, this place is bustling—

JANINE: That's the day after.

AUSTIN: It might be the day after, shit, I don't...clocks are moving, don't move in here and think you're just good to go for the next three months, but yeah, you have time here. Think about this place—if you remember in Counter/WEIGHT when I was like “I thought you guys would spend a month in September before things jumped off” and then you were like, immediately shooting

people? Think about this a little bit in that way, like I don't think we're gonna be here for a month, but like, this is definitely a place where doing legwork can get you interesting things about the world, can help you figure out what it is you're looking for specifically, all sorts of stuff like that. So we'll talk about the Grand Temple of Ghosts of Past and Future.

ALI: Yeah, I think the motivation here is that I think that she's overwhelmed by a lot of the stuff here, but also thinks that, like, the stuff that happens here isn't completely disconnected from the stuff above.

AUSTIN: Totally. So specifically, Rosemerrow has a Grand Temple of the Ghost of the Past. Y'all didn't go there, but on paper it might even be the case that that resonates inside of Hella's own head without maybe knowing it necessarily, like "Oh right, that's that place. Wait, how could it be that place I already knew about, I've never been here before, mm. I'm gonna go check that place out".

So as you go further southeast in the Buoy, you find that more and more of the populace is orcs and halflings, and the thing you learn about this zone, I'll give you this kind of in this abstract sense, is that the people here come from a stratum lower down. There's more to know here, I promise, but they come from one of the strata lower down, one of the lower lamina, in which the orcs and halflings—Oh, there's also some bird people here, and also some lizard people, and probably some people that have weird rock body situations. It's this like mess of races you've never really dealt with, except for orcs and halflings, there's a bunch of other races that you've had no interaction with—kind of conquered Hieron, and at some point spread out to this place from that previous lamina. And you're not quite sure if they conquered it while it was one of these weird sub-worlds, or if they conquered it when it was the world. It's not clear, it's been a long time, but that's what this culture is. And it definitely, visually in my mind has a sort of East Asian flair, or like, style, like we've done a lot of European-style castles and stuff, and this is, in my mind, definitely Chinese and Japanese and Korean, in terms of archways, and I mentioned their lacquered armor before. That's the sort of like touchstone styling that I want to bring to mind. Not exactly, it's not just lifted over, and I don't think it's culturally necessarily exactly like that, but one of the interesting things about it is that it's a metropolitan culture, but it's a metropolitan culture that doesn't have the touchstones that you're used to on the top world. Rosemerrow was what metropolitan looked like on strata zero. Here it's this.

The Grand Temple itself is, at first, just this top-level pagoda that has these columns, and it's open air, and you go into it, and then it does have a lower level, there's a stairwell down that takes you into a cave that is like this big beautiful cave that has, again, a number of places to sit and reflect. There are lots of, like, mosaics on the walls and ceilings, and there is one halfling woman who is currently washing the mosaics and taking care of them to make sure that they're not degrading, and there's like, one specific one she's working on.

She—again, we can kind of do this more abstractly—kind of explains what this place is about generally: In the old days, before, on the surface, the Church of Samothres moved into Rosemerrow, and before that, even, before they were really secular, it was a deeply religious culture. They worshipped the spirits of the dead. Here, in this place, they also worship the spirits of those who will die one day, and this is the root of the halfling faith or culture around family

lines and dynasties. It all tracks back to this religious belief, it's just that on the surface, they don't practice that side of this any more. The way you become divine in halfling culture is for your family to fully die out. If your family ever fully dies out, they become divine, because no one is allowed to be forgotten in halfling culture, however small they are. There are incredible records here. If Lem was here, he'd be fucking losing it.

But, there's also like, in this place, the highest gods aren't just other halflings, like you do see a mosaic of Rosalind Marroweater here, but there's also things that are, like, there's a large wolf person, there is Kindrali, is one of these mosaics, there are Cobbins here, little dog lizard people on the walls, and as you get all of this and take all of this in, people start to show up, and it becomes kind of a bustling place where people talk and reflect together.

Her argument for why this place matters, even in a place where time and space are all fucked up is, like "Yeah, death is everywhere, right? Like, there's just death everywhere". And she's happy to answer any questions you have. Her name is Ufre, Ufre Liddel.

ALI: Okay...So not related to Nacre and their belief system at all?

AUSTIN: There is...Down here, there is probably, among the mosaics, is Tristero, who you saw.

ALI: Cool...[laughter]

AUSTIN: But at this level, Nacre hasn't happened yet. Like, Nacre would still just be a place by the sea. Tristero hasn't made it the undead place yet. That's further up.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: But if you have questions about ghosts, this is the person to ask, let me tell you.

ALI: Oh boy howdy.

AUSTIN: I mean, after all, it is the ghosts of past and future, she would be interested in the ghosts look like in the higher levels.

ALI: Yeah, cause it's tough for Hella to not lean the conversation this way, even though learning that, like, this isn't fully related to what she wanted. I feel like for her this is kind of like a sterile place to ask questions about that, as opposed to the top. As far as the mosaics and stuff, are there, like, with the Tristero one, is there like an altar, is there any information about him?

AUSTIN: Yeah, there's a little altar, it probably says, in script, "Tristero: the first to kill."

ALI: [laughter]

AUSTIN: And like, she can talk about it, she's the information, she's the guide. They don't have printouts, they don't have, like "and here's your pamphlet about each of the dead people", cause

there are hundreds, right, some of these mosaics look like pixel art, they're like eight tiles, and like "Mmm, what is that? That's just...Oh that's Simon Belmont, uh, got it." Dre should stay away from Simon Belmont. Throndir, do not go near any of the Belmonts from now on, it's very dangerous for you.

DRE: Okay, got it. Yeah.

ALI: Um, yeah, I'm trying to think of...it's tough knowing what she'd ask when she wants to, like, keep a distance?

AUSTIN: Yeah, the other thing I'll say again, I've said this a couple times before, you can tell me the GM what you want to get, separate from how she wants to phrase it, and we can work out what that phrasing might look like.

ALI: Fair, yeah...Cause like, it's extremely curious to her that he's on this wall when she's known people from that line...

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: So I would like information about that, in terms of like, does she know the full family line, and like how that died off, and how they verify that sort of thing?

AUSTIN: No, no, because for her, she's kind of surprised to hear that there is a family line, a little bit. She knows that higher up, Tristero isn't really around any more, but at this point, and from here below, there is just the one Tristero, who doesn't have a family line, he's a divine being, he's always been a divine being. He's one of the rare exceptions to be on this wall because he hasn't died, right, like, he's just been around for all of this time. So I could imagine her being like,

(as Ufre) Oh wow, it's true the divines are able to touch reality in a very material way. It's amazing to hear that he would bless us with his presence like that. He sacrificed so much.

But she doesn't know anything about those people, because those people basically only existed ever on the top level, right?

ALI: Okay, yeah. Woof.

AUSTIN: Umm, I don't know if she has anything else here. You can Spout Lore and ask her for general things, you can ask me other questions that you're interested in, she's not hiding anything, there isn't anything hidden here, she'll tell you stuff.

ALI: Um, yeah, I...If we wanna like shift focus for a minute, so I can think...

AUSTIN: Okay, that's fine. What else are people doing in the morning?

ART: Umm, I'm not exactly sure how one would get there, but the House of First Light sure seems...relevant and important.

AUSTIN: Yeah, sure. You can go to a dock that's kind of west of the big tree, that is kind of connected to this, like, castle structure that's here. Is anybody going with you, are you going alone, is Alyosha going with you? Do you let other people know, I guess is the question really.

ART: Yeah, I think I would be pretty upfront about that, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah...Alyosha will go with you for sure, and you find yourself at the Cleanblade mercenary company. Let me tell you, that guy, he has boats to rent out. He'll take you somewhere. If you need to take a boat somewhere, Calhoun got you.

ART: I've heard that.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: I mean, unless he wants silken coins, though, I don't know that I can really get a boat.

AUSTIN: They can take silken coins here. It's the Buoy. Like, something has value somewhere, they'll find a way to do the exchange. This is probably the best place for everybody who has money held over from previous seasons. Buy whatever the fuck you want here with that money.

[laughter]

He says,

(as Calhoun Cleanblade): Where you goin? You going to Greenperch, you going to the Sonorous Academy? We'll go anywhere out here except the blocked path. People up there don't like us much.

ART (as Hadrian): Well, I immediately want to know everything about the blocked path, but we are going to the House of First Light.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun Cleanblade): Oh boy, religious tourist, huh?

ART: I mean, he can see me, right, he's like looking at my clothes while we're having this conversation?

AUSTIN (as Calhoun Cleanblade): We've met, we've met, I know, I'm just, I thought maybe you didn't need to go because you were like a...bluuu,

And he gestures up at you with his hands, as if to like, look at your stature.

(as Calhoun Cleanblade): Cause eeh, you're already the guy.

ART (as Hadrian): No, you always...you always have to keep working.

AUSTIN: Is anyone else going with you? Before we put you on a boat where it'd be difficult to get...more people here?

ART: I mean, what's Alyosha doing that's better than this?

AUSTIN: No, he's going with you.

ART: Alright.

AUSTIN: Okay, you get on a boat and, Calhoun himself doesn't go actually, he sends Alejandro with you. It's like a small sailboat, basically, that has enough room for probably five people on it, and it catches the wind, and it takes you a second, but you realise the wind is coming off of that central tower, and it takes a very certain sort of skill to get it to work right. Greenperch, as you pass it going northeast, has lots of birds at the top of it, flying around, and you realise that's an island of bird people, cool, okay. And then off to the far west there's that big, like, tower, near this other entrance, and Alejandro tells you that that is the Sonorous Academy, part of the university of mages. You eventually make it to the House of First Light, which is a lighthouse. It was not on last night, as far as you could see, anyway, and Alejandro tells you

(as Alejandro): Not too many people come out here. It's uh...out of the way, you got the cathedral already. It seems like a waste of time for most people.

ART (as Hadrian): That's so sad.

AUSTIN (as Alejandro): Anyway, you got the boat until midday, so...take your time, but don't take too much.

Art (as Hadrian): Thank you very much.

29:30

AUSTIN: And you find a lighthouse that is...maybe that's unfair, because it's much bigger than a lighthouse, there is a large stone wall, it's up on a stone platform, basically, that you have to walk up a set of stairs around the circumference of it, slowly climbing around the side just to get

onto the platform that it's on. And then it is this beautiful stonework, not just like "oh, it's plaster, it's painted white, it's got red at the top", it's this beautiful sandstone-looking structure that has all of these great, uh, really beautifully...what's the word I'm looking for, for when you like, etch into stone? There's a specific word for this, in buildings. What are those things called?

JANINE: A relief?

AUSTIN: I guess it's like a relief? ...Yeah, like a relief throughout, that you immediately recognize as being various stories of Samothēs: the time that Samothēs built the first bridge, the time Samothēs first put down a wall, and then a house. You see an image of Samothēs with another figure next to him, and in front of them is the First University. It's Samothēs and Samot building the First University, the first school. And it's just covered in those all around, with windows, the windows are like part of the reliefs in interesting ways, where Samothēs is directing people across a bridge that goes across a window, like above a window as if the bridge is on the top. It's just like, a really beautiful structure, and there is a door that you can go in, and inside is...empty, it's dusty inside, and there is a stairwell up if you want to take it up. And you can do other stuff here, but that's the first impressions.

[barking]

ART: Sorry, there's a barking dog over here.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: [barking continues] [distantly] Mabel...

AUSTIN: I hear it, is that Mabel?

ART: [distantly] Yeah.

AUSTIN: [wistfully] Hi Mabel...

JANINE: Kodiak went in the boat.

[AUSTIN makes dog noises]

[laughter]

ART: It turns out Mabel's a real jerk, that's what we've learned in the last week or so.

AUSTIN: Aw, no Mabel's good, actually. Disagree. I've never met Mabel, and I bet...like, all dogs...have their moments.

JANINE: She wants to protect her safe place.

AUSTIN: Yeah, see? Alright.

ART: I think that's over.

AUSTIN: It sound like it's over. So yeah, it's dusty in here, and there's stairwells up, and the reliefs are on the inside too. It's lit by sunlight, the sun is up again, and the sun bouncing off of, like, really reflective surfaces that are not mirrored, like you couldn't see yourself in them, but they're catching the light and spreading it through the interior of this tower in a way that is like, an incredible feat of engineering and design.

(as Alyosha): I don't know what I expected...

ART (as Hadrian): No, me neither, but it wasn't quite this.

ART: Who's...are there people here?

AUSTIN: No, not that you see, anyway.

ART: Sure...

AUSTIN: You were gonna ask something?

ART: I was gonna ask about people.

(as Hadrian): Should we go upstairs? I mean, if it's a lighthouse, people are supposed to in lighthouses...

AUSTIN (as Alyosha): Yes...

AUSTIN: Yeah, he takes the lead and starts climbing. And it takes you, like, a while to get up there, but you're both, you know, Alyosha is a traveling missionary, he has no problem busting a sweat, he's gonna get there. And when he gets to the top, he gasps, and he's above you, so you can't quite see what he sees.

ART: Okay...

ART (as Hadrian): What is it?

AUSTIN: ...And he steps forward and says

AUSTIN (as Alyosha): I don't know...

AUSTIN: And as you come up the stairs, you see a dark and craggy world. There is a castle in front of you, like down below, you've gone to a different place when you've come up the stairwell. You're at the top now, where there should be whatever the light is, but the light is not there. The only light that you see is partially from behind you, effectively east on this map that you're looking at, south-east ish, is a volcano...and then immediately in front of you is a volcano that has a black and purple sort of magma, lava dripping out of it, flowing into a sea that shimmers with this purple light, and goes upriver, like it's flowing upwards.

I'm just gonna show you this map, 'cause you can put this together in your own head. It's as if you are...let me make a mark. It's as if you are here? That spot, right—nope, I'm on the wrong layer. One second. Let's go here. Let's...this. It's as if you're like here, in this lighthouse, and you're seeing the volcano where the volcano is, right?

ART: Sure, which is like, here.

AUSTIN: Here. Yeah, and you're seeing like a long, purplish...gonna freehand this. It's gonna go great. You're seeing the lava drip out here, and then cut up through here, and it runs in a way the river should not run, across the continent and into that other island, where there is a castle, and you can hear the sound of metal striking metal, rhythmically.

ART: Huh...

AUSTIN: You feel...light, like weight-wise, you feel light. You feel what Hella felt on that other layer. It's hard to stand, it's hard to keep yourself grounded. In fact, Alyosha fails to do so and begins to lift upwards.

(as Alyosha): [gasp] Oh, haha....

And he reaches out to you, and misses. What do you do?

ART: Umm...I try to get him, right? I'm...spry.

AUSTIN: You're a spry guy.

ART: I'm not.

AUSTIN: Well, what's your, you've got something, right? You've got a 12 Dexterity, that's okay, I guess...And that's what this is, this is about reaching him quickly, I think. So gimme a Defy Danger, and the danger is if you don't get him he's going to float away...Oh, friend...

ART: Umm...Great...

AUSTIN: You have a bonus to this in any way? Take an XP, you rolled a 6.

ART: Hold on, I'm looking for bonuses.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ART: I'm looking for something that saves me here...no, no...no...

AUSTIN: Shoulda gone to that Lack House, there's all sorts of bonuses there.

ART: I'm not ready for that. I'm not.

AUSTIN: [snort] Kay, you're about to lack something, though.

ART: Well, now it's easy, my lack is Alyosha.

AUSTIN: Yeah...

JANINE: Also wait, have you already used...this is a shitty thing to, but did you already use your -1? Because if you're failing anyway, then...

AUSTIN: Mm! Use that -1, that's—no, totally—

JANINE: That's maybe worth reminding, then it wouldn't count against you later.

ART: Yeah, fair. Not getting any higher.

AUSTIN: That's not a shitty thing, take that XP.

ART: I did, and I leveled.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Good, good. Umm...Alyosha slips away into the sky, and he hovers there for a moment, and you can see that he's that being pulled between two places.

ART: Is there anyone else around?

ART: Can I call, can I call for help?

AUSTIN: No...You can call for help, certainly.

ART: Alright...

(as Hadrian): [politely] Help? Help? My friend is floating away? No?

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Give me...

ART: Yeah, what am I rolling for, loud?

AUSTIN: No, that's not what you're doing. Or maybe it is. Umm...I have a question about things, I have a question about how prayers work. Do prayers need to be directed or do they just need to be heard?

ART: Uhh...I think it really depends on who's hearing it.

AUSTIN: Oh, Samoths is hearing it.

ART: Yeah, and sometimes he's a bit of a dick, except to Ephrim apparently.

ALI: [laughs]

AUSTIN: No, but I mean he's physically hearing it, in this case.

ART: Yeah, I mean isn't he sort of physically hearing it all the time?

AUSTIN: Sometimes...It's a very complex thing that we've built here, in terms of who's hearing you when you pray.

ART: Yeah, I know, and it sucks.

[laughter]

ART: I think it's up to who hears it, right? The person who hears it decides if it's good enough, right, that's what divine intervention is?

AUSTIN: The literal thing for me is: you say a thing out loud. Is that a prayer if you're just shouting and a god hears it?

ART: I think it is when Hadrian does it.

AUSTIN: Okay. That's fine, I'm fine with that bit of worldbuilding...yeah, at your call, Alyosha stabilizes, and then instead of lifting away, lifts down across the sea, over that river of fire, towards that castle.

ART: [pouting] Well, I wanna go there too...Ugh, everyone gets to meet Samoths but me....

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Alyosha looks at you, and in the dark, in the purple light of this lava below...so two things, one, you notice that there's the purple light of the lava below, two, now that's he's crossing it under the sea, you can see that the sea also has that purple light, from deep deep below, and that there is nothing below it. It's also really dark here, just to be 100% clear, there is no sun here. And he says..

(as Alyosha): Protect your friends, be strong...

ART (as Hadrian): Always, yes...

AUSTIN: And he's trying to think of other positive things to say to you as he's lifted away.

(as Alyosha): Remember that nothing here is normal.

ART (as Hadrian): Come back to us if you're able!

AUSTIN: And he nods, and closes his eyes, and is lifted away, and then you hear the hammering begin again.

ART: Okay, but like, what, what if I went that way?

AUSTIN: You tell me! I'm not gonna tell you you can't jump off this thing.

ART: I mean, I was just told by the Exarch to protect my friends, and jumping off of a tower towards a river of lava feels like it's not protecting my friends, and feels like it's the exact opposite of that?

AUSTIN: We all rationalise.

ART: It's like, being selfish to do what I want to do—

AUSTIN: I guess he's, I guess he's...Mm-hm.

ART: —instead of what I was just told to do?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Look, some of us make that work, you can too, I believe in you.

ALI: [laughter]

AUSTIN: Let's go—you wanna turn this over—okay!

ART: ...No, it's not my time, if that's what he wanted, I would be the one floating away.

AUSTIN: You didn't say "bring me to you", you said "help me, my friend is floating away".

ART: Yeah, that's what I needed then. I can't just keep askin' for things.

AUSTIN: Okay!

ART: I don't think I can, at least.

ALI: [laughter] You're sure trying.

AUSTIN: There was a time when Samoths just gave everything to everybody, that was his deal, so. Umm...Let's sit on this for a second and go somewhere else. Throndir and Adaire, what are you two up to?

DRE: So, what was the deal with the blocked path?

AUSTIN: You're able to find this out over breakfast in this bar, which is just as rowdy, but it's like, brunch-rowdy [muffled laughter]. They are followers of Samaantine, who—and their read of them. Samaantine is a god all about protection and safety. They've realized that the best way to protect the world is to close off this whole place, and so they have begun to block off various pathways here. They're in the process of building a third tower. So right now there are two towers that are blocking off two different pathways into the Buoy, and they're in the process of building a third, is what you hear, and most people think of them as, like "Eeh, they're weirdos, don't even worry about them. They'll never cross the standing sea, they'll never come over here". But they are deep isolationists.

DRE: Okay, that sounds like not my jam...

AUSTIN: No, kind of like the opposite of what your jam is...

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So that's one thing you learn. Adaire, do you have any questions about the—

DRE: I guess—

AUSTIN: —city before we...we'll come back to you in a second, Throndir.

DRE: Yeah, no, you're good.

JANINE: I wanna go to the Gray Duke.

AUSTIN: Cool, okay, we can do that. Throndir, what's your other question, before we go to the Gray Duke?

DRE: I guess I would like to find some place whether it's like...Throndir wants to find something to try to figure out what the heck is, like, going on, after what happened in the theater, just to get an idea of, like, what to expect.

AUSTIN: In regards to what?

DRE: I mean, he knows he's a vampire, but he doesn't really know what that entails?

AUSTIN: Sure, okay, yeah! The place to go here is probably the Sonorous Academy, which is part of the old Mage's University.

DRE: Oh, great.

AUSTIN: So you can make that trip while Adaire heads towards the Duke of Halted Expeditions and Unexpected Alliances. Let's talk about the Duke, of Halted Expeditions. Actually, let's—yeah, let's go to the Duke. As you get closer and closer to this tall, like, it's probably the tallest non-tower structure in the Buoy...if you count the trees as a tower, at least. It's ten floors tall or something. And they're not, like, really high floors, but they're up there. You're not gonna just be able to go up and talk to the Duke, necessarily—like, maybe you are, I don't fuckin' know what your game is like, but you are received in a room with two people, an orc and a halfling, both wearing very fancy robes that have the symbol of, like a sword crossed with a...what's the sword crossed with, what does this symbol look like...one side's a sword and one side is...Duke of Halted Expeditions, that one's tough, what's a halted expedition look like, that's something you can put across a sword...I was gonna say a tent, but you can't put a tent across a sword...

JANINE: Like an astrolabe or something?

AUSTIN: I don't know that that reads on, like, the back of a kimono...

JANINE: One of those small ones?

AUSTIN: Yeah...

ART: Yeah, what looks like...you can't go any more?

AUSTIN: Or that you've chosen to stop, right?

ART: I mean like...like a house?

AUSTIN: Yeah, maybe it is just like a house, or whatever the orcish symbol is for a house, but it's on the back of a fist, like it's a fist with a house on it, almost just like a tattoo for whatever the orcish word for house is on the back of a fist. And there are two people in the, basically the lobby of the place that receive you, and ask you to wait, because you are one of many people that has things that have to get done in this place today. This place has a hustle and bustle that actually does feel a little like Rosemerrow, in that it's very administrative work, you're able to overhear them talk about, like such-and-such a person near the Topgallant has an issue with their neighbor's dog is being really loud, and hear somebody else has an issue where they want to open up a business, but they don't have the right zoning for it, and they want to get that taken care of. It quickly becomes apparent that despite the very exciting name, the Duke seems to be chief administrator, which maybe is still valuable, Adaire knows what's what. What are you here to do, you wanna meet the duke?

JANINE: I think it's like, a general interest in...in the kinds of things orcs do, and wanting to understand how that operates in that particular place.

AUSTIN: Totally. One of the receptionists, the orcish one, eventually calls you up and asks you what your business is with the office of the Duke. Not in a mean way, just literally like, what folder should I put you in, you know what I mean.

JANINE: Mhmm...trying to decide if I should make up a fake conflict to have like, a way to get some time...I don't want to get anyone in trouble [laughs]. So is it just like, conflict is maybe the wrong word, is it just like people come here to get various issues arbitrated and resolved.

AUSTIN: That's part of it, but there's also like, this is like city hall, effectively, for this place, even though it's not part of, like, what the dwarvish culture is, this is like the de facto central government of the Buoy. It's not necessarily clear right off the bat why that is, that's the sort of thing you could totally ask about or learn about through conversations here, if that's something you're interested in. So it's all sorts of, like, those sorts of things, zoning questions, making sure there are police in the right places, all sorts of budgetary junk...I think at some point somebody says, like

AUSTIN (as Somebody): Oh, you're one of the new arrivals, don't get many zeroes down here.

JANINE (as Adaire): Well, you know, they have to be some eventually, keep the new blood coming, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah, they nod.

JANINE (as Adaire): That's...how...it works here...too?

AUSTIN (as Somebody): Everywhere. New blood keeps the veins clean.

They say that as if that's a saying.

JANINE (as Adaire): That's a really creepy way to put it.

AUSTIN (as Somebody): Well, you know, old saying.

Weirdly, it's an old rock-person saying, and they don't have veins. Maybe they meant, like, ore veins?

JANINE: They have veins, but it's like ore—yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, so...They didn't quite get how it works.

JANINE: So I think the thing I want to ask for is...I wanna like, present as a map-maker, and say that I've been commissioned from the surface, or from above, to make some sort of map-making endeavors down here, because people want to...the people in the trade community want to have stronger lines, relationships, business things, some kinds of escort.

AUSTIN: This is definitely a...this might be a leverage, actually, or a parley, because that sounds like something they would want, connections to the surface world, this is not a Defy Danger, um, so, give me a Charisma roll. On a hit you can ask for something and they'll do it if you make a promise first, and on a 7-9 they'll just need some concrete assurance.

JANINE: I'm so bad at figuring out what that concrete assurance should be, okay...

AUSTIN: Yeah, 12!

JANINE: I still have that -1.

AUSTIN: God damn. 11, that's still a super-success, that's still, you're good, so clear that -1.

JANINE: Hooray...

AUSTIN: You know, maybe it's one of those things of like, "okay, right, businessy stuff, I can do this, I know how I do." You've got your head clear. They totally are like,

(as Orc Receptionist): Oh that's intriguing, we've met plenty of people over the years from the surface, but not many who bring an offer like this. The Duke will want to meet you.

And they lead you into a receiving room, it's not like the Duke's office, it's definitely like, a place to meet people because, like, I've described a couple places, this is just a thing about the Buoy is: almost everywhere has four different types of chair. The Duke will match whatever chair you sit in. So there's people who will come in and kneel, people who will sit cross-legged on the floor, people who will want a stool, or people who want a chair, and this building has all of those, in this receiving room anyway. So what do you sit in, what's your situation?

JANINE: Ah god, I don't...like just, the most average looking chair, like just a chair!

AUSTIN: The Most Chair? Okay, he definitely like, raises his brows at you when you do, like "Mmm, mmm, a chair, okay", and then drags one to his side of the table, there's a little table between the two of you. The walls have...It is this really interesting blend of what you would think of as orcish in the New Archives sense, where it is kind of a mishmash of different types of art, because it is a collection, it is based on all the different types they've interacted with, but it has this little extra bit of the halfling, like, looking back on better days-type stuff mixed in there. And the table is set out in front of you with a warm drink of some sort that someone comes in to serve.

The Gray Duke himself is...maybe not what comes to mind when you think of "Oh, an orc who's a duke, who's gonna be, like beefy." He's actually kind of thin, he has a balding hairline, he has big prominent tusks, but like, not intimidating. They're kind of like—if tusks could be nose hair, they would be this, like they're a little yellowed, and they're not, like, sharp. But he does carry himself—he's wearing a very nice robe and he carries himself with a degree of, like, prominence, like the room becomes more important because he is in it. And he offers you a hand, in a very like "this is what you do, right?" way, to shake it. Do you shake his hand?

JANINE: Yeah!

AUSTIN: He's very careful with the amount of pressure, not because he thinks you can't handle it, but because he's not 100% sure what's right, and then he sits down and pours himself some tea.

(as the Gray Duke): My name is Dral Faraday. I lack a good reason to leave.

Shakes his head...

(as the Gray Duke): You?

JANINE (as Adaire): I'm Adaire Ducarte. I...lack, um, true connection.

AUSTIN (as the Gray Duke): Mmm. That's a tough one...So I hear you're looking to make a connection with some merchants on the surface.

JANINE (as Adaire): And they're looking to make a connection down here.

AUSTIN: He nods.

(as the Gray Duke): It's a treacherous route. I sent scouts, years ago, to see if my armies could move to the surface. The roads are thin, brittle. It's hard to see how a merchant caravan could take that path.

JANINE (as Adaire): Well, there's a lot of different kinds of caravan, y'know, it's not always six mules and four wheels, sometimes you just have a big bag, or sometimes you get one of those little two-wheelers.

AUSTIN (as the Gray Duke): You're sure you're not a general?

JANINE (as Adaire): Oh god, no.

AUSTIN (as the Gray Duke): You should think about it.

JANINE (as Adaire): I don't like working with that many people at once, it's kinda like, part of the thing...

AUSTIN: He nods. What's Adaire want to get out of this exchange, like what sort of information is she looking for, about the orcs down here and the world down here?

JANINE: Umm...I mean, the thing she wants most is, right now, she doesn't like being this unfamiliar with a place and not being able to find footholds.

AUSTIN: Yeah, sure.

JANINE: Cause that's normally the thing, normally you go to a new place and you're unfamiliar, but then you find the footholds and you get in somewhere and, y'know, from there you sort of figure things out.

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

JANINE: And normally the first spot for that is like, the tavern, and that didn't super go...like that kind of helped, but not in the usual sense.

AUSTIN: Yeah. So I think one thing he's gonna do...So there's a couple things he that gives you in terms of having a foothold. One is, you end up having a good enough time talking small talk, right. He kind of tells you his story, and takes joy in being able to tell his story again. Everybody down here knows the Gray Duke, you don't, and you don't even know his story yet, so he gets to be the one who tells you about how he was from a lower tier, a lower strata where the orcs and halflings had joined forces, and then he joined up other cultures from other strata, or other

lamina, to his army, and then they marched on the Buoy, they marched upwards. And he uses the word, he catches himself when he calls them dwarves, and then he says

(as the Gray Duke): The wharvers...

And continues, and explains that, up until that point, they had been this group of people—they meaning the wharvers, the dwarves—were super obsessed with digging into their pasts, like they were...dangerously consumed by their desire to know about all of the different strata, they had a system of organization that never quite mapped it out correctly. He's probably doing some loose lecturing about the kind of...not the futility of maps, but that no map is ever truly correct, like "maps are useful, of course, but they aren't true." That sort of stuff. And he ended up being, by mistake, this thing that got them broken from that obsession.

Like, for years, they would spend, like...for centuries, literally, they would go down, the surface dwarves would send in a new group of explorers who would get lost, or get assimilated into a group of them from the past, or who would disappear, and no one would see them again, forever, and finally they ran across the Gray Duke, and he was someone they could focus on fighting, and the sort of open-ended exploration disappeared and was replaced by a sort of objective-driven exploration, like "hey, how do we get our ambush in place?" is a different sort of exploration than, like, "what were my great-great-great grandparents like?"

And so, they figured it out, they understood what was happening down here in fighting him, and in the end, they kind of reached a stalemate on the Buoy, and slowly but surely came to respect each other, and now, in the last 80 years or so, he's probably 130 or something, and is happy to have started his life in war and to be ending it at peace, but he kind of wishes he was back home and not at the Buoy. So that's his like "Here's your connection to me. You know a thing about me, add me to the list of politicians you know for some reason, Adaire". Lose a chancellor, gain a gray duke, you know?

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: The other thing he gives you is, after that meeting, he gives you a map, it's a replica of one of the maps his enemies used to ambush his forces deeper down, and it lays out what the past few lamina were, like it kind of lays out this strata and the next strata in terms of what's there and how to get from one to the next. He does say that the stratum that you're in now, Stratum 2, is kind of a confusing mess because of the nature of what's here. Part of what the areas above you are like have been ruined by, effectively, a big weird magical bomb that was deployed...you know, before the Erasure, that fucked up all that stuff and makes it confusing and weird, but like, you basically have the ability to go from where you're at now, which is Lamina 10, to Lamina 15 pretty safely, and you even have little notes about what each of those places is like, like Lamina 12 is one in which Velas has kind of expanded over all of Hieron. In Lamina 13, there was a version of the world where there was basically no civilization that built, like, highly populated settlements, it's all just like woods and small settlements inside the woods, and on the plains, nomadic tribes, stuff like that. And then you basically have a map that can get

you there safely, down all the way to Stratum 4. He kind of says like, “Oh, this is outdated, but it’ll do the job”.

JANINE: Sounds like it.

AUSTIN: Also, it’s a map, but it takes pages and pages and pages, it’s a map that has a coding, like you have to layer it in a certain way, in fact it’s probably like, clear...uuh...

JANINE: Vellum?

AUSTIN: No, like...

JANINE: Like plastic?

AUSTIN: Yeah, like a weird plasticity...thing that you have to overlay, one on top of the other, to get a certain sort of effect, to line things up in different ways based on where the sun is at, in order to figure out how to go there at this specific time, because that’s how it is down here. But it’s also good for you because, like “Oh, that’s how they map down here”, and suddenly you can actually start to think about how you would go about making a map.

JANINE: Hmm...Okay.

AUSTIN So that worked out.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Throndir.

DRE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: So you get a lot of people who are like “Oh, you’re gonna need to take a boat up there, you’re gonna have to rent a boat to go to the Sonorous Academy”. You’re a Ranger. You know there’s a bridge. Somewhere.

DRE: [laughter]

AUSTIN: And you find a bridge at the lowest, the, like, closest point, there’s a little bridge, and you’re able to cross it. You went into the future world, or the potential other world where there were mages who took over the world, right? At the Mark of the Erasure, you got that little orb there. Unless I’m misremembering, right?

DRE: Oh, yeah, yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: And it's sort of like that, because you've been to that world, you know what the university's architecture and stuff looks like. It's the most, like, high fantasy bullshit that we get. It's like big peaks, not peaks, but like the tops of all the towers have those big blue and red tops. I don't know anything about towers...

If I could take a year off to be a better GM, it would be to take an architecture class, 100%, and like art history, cause it's been years since I've studied that stuff. And just like, you know, very western medieval Europe, high fantasy, gray stone with huge archways and long flowy dresses, and like the way high fantasy does it, vaguely Renaissance when it wants to be, ya know? Sometimes someone has a puffy shirt when they probably shouldn't. There's way too much blue and purple for what actually was available in terms of coloring things. Stuff like that...Art in the chat says "that's our 80k a month Patreon stretch goal," sending me to architecture school, that's good.

DRE: [laughter]

AUSTIN: Uh huh. Good.

So yeah, you're here, and it was weird already doing that in the past, or in the weird alternate history, but here it's extra weird because...the university is supposed to be gone, you know what I mean? The Last University was the last one, it's gone, it's lost now, it's not...there, but this is one of the famous colleges of that university. And you're able to put together that it is one of the famous colleges of that university, of the modern university. This is not from some past world, this is like "Oh yeah, shame that college got shut down", and then finding out that one of the...kind of like...what do you call it when there's a school that's attached to a school, but isn't at the main campus?

DRE: Oh, a satellite campus?

AUSTIN: It's a satellite campus. "Yeah, this one's still open. Yeah, Rutgers got shut down but the satellite campus in...Camden is still open for some reason". And this is a school that's all about musical and auditory magical stuff. And it's still operational, but there are also just mages here, and there's a library here, which means that if you wanna research vampire shit, this is the place to do it.

DRE: Yeah, that sounds like, uh...a good plan.

AUSTIN: How do you go about it?

DRE: I was gonna say, would Sunder be useful to give me like an invite here, give me a little cred?

AUSTIN: Yeah, I'll handwave a little here, you know where Sunder is, she said she'd help you, she'll give you the thumbs-up on this. She's already made contact with them, and was shocked by it, did not know this existed down here, but now has good enough rapport with them. This

place just didn't know that the Last University got fucked up, they just kind of assumed that happened because they stopped hearing from them, but mages are really bad at being, like, in contact, and very good at doing their own work forever. And also they're in the most interesting place ever, where they can explore the past and do all this weird shit, so they just didn't ever poke their heads back up.

DRE: Yeah, you don't really need to do field work when the field comes to you.

AUSTIN: Right, exactly. And there aren't that many, I've mentioned that there were, like, ten to twenty thousand people in this whole city, there are probably a hundred people on this small campus. So Sunder gets you in, but what are you looking for and how are you looking for it?

DRE: Oh boy, I mean, do I ask the librarian for, like, the card catalogue here? Like I don't know how mage libraries work, but yeah, I think I'm looking for information about like...um...wait, I know the term "vampire", right?

AUSTIN: I guess? Yeah? But like, in my mind, vampire means the thing we think of when we say vampire.

DRE: Right. And that's also kinda why I want to look into this stuff, because I feel like there's still a lot of vampire shit we haven't talked about, like.

AUSTIN: Totally.

DRE: Can I not eat garlic bread any more? Does the sun mess with me? Like that kind of stuff.

AUSTIN: Umm...so the head librarian is named Deliver, Deliver Allbright, and Deliver...do you just say straight up "Do y'all have books on vampires?"

DRE: [laughter] Yeah, it's Thrandir, of course he does.

AUSTIN (as Deliver): Vampires, vampires...

So there's a tricky bit here, which is: this is the music school, which means that all of their stuff, all their books, still have to do with music? [DRE laughs] But there's enough here for you to answer this sort of question, and so Deliver brings you to a section of music, of like score and lyric sheets and all of that stuff, that is all about supernatural stuff, it's like the subsection.

DRE: So I'm getting Castlevania: The Musical here.

AUSTIN: Yeah, basically. Uh huh.

DRE: [laughter]

AUSTIN: Give me a Spout Lore.

DRE: Okay, is that WIS?

AUSTIN: That's...INT, I'm almost sure it's INT.

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: Take a +1...oh wait, you already get a +1, right?

DRE: Yeah. Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Use that, you got that +1.

DRE: Here we go, this is 0 modifier, so...
So a 9.

AUSTIN: Hey, that means I give you something interesting but not useful, it's up to you to make it useful. So you're able to put together lots of different things. There are lots of musicals about vampires, there are LOTS of musicals about vampires, and most of them are nothing like what you've experienced. Most of them are, there's always a castle, there's always a vampire, et cetera. And it's like, turns into bats, bites peoples' necks, sucks their blood, et cetera. And then you find one old musical that is from a place called Marielda, where it's called, it's not called "The First Vampire", but it's like—what's vampire mean for us, for real for us, like what's the etymology on vampire? I'm just curious...

DRE: Oh, do you mean like, in English?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Oh wow, it's witch, apparently, from the Turkish ubir...that's not it for us, for our world, but for Hieron I think it's probably something about, like...maybe it's actually just "Red House killer", right? And it's Tamsen's story.

DRE: Mm.

AUSTIN: it's Tamsen's story, from the worldbuilding episodes, the Quiet Year episodes of Marielda, about someone consumed by a sort of violent justice, a violent sense of justice, over and over in her life until it transformed her. And like, it's shaky on the details, it doesn't know why it changed her, it has no idea. Right, like, they've invented a thing, they've invented a thing like "and then she climbed a mountain and met a spirit of vengeance," like who the fuck knows what that means? But you then piece together from enough of those other things that like, okay, that's what being a vampire means here, is this thirst for vengeance or justice. Maybe the Golden Lance is trying to bend that towards justice and away from vengeance, like maybe that's

a way of codifying it so that it isn't so dangerous? Like "okay, we're gonna hurt people, we need to hurt people, it's what we do, but...at least it's gonna be bad people". And then the other details that you put together, these aren't necessarily useful at all, yeah, vampires have weaknesses. There's a story about one who didn't know what its weakness was until it killed it. In that case, it was...uh...what's a stupid thing to kill you? What's a stupid thing that you would just like, not even think about?

DRE: [laughter]

AUSTIN: And then like one day—it's, like, ale. Not lager, just ale. And like "oh yeah, he drank it, burned a hole right through him".

DRE: Oh man, I've got like a wicked hops allergy now, okay.

AUSTIN: Right, exac—but that's not true for you necessarily.

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: Vampires have weaknesses, each one has a weakness. Figuring out what it is is important. So yeah, that's the big stuff you get.

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: Umm...Hella?

ALI: Hi! Oh, hey!

AUSTIN: Got any ghost questions? Hashtag #GhostQuestions?

ALI: I don't know that I have questions, I can imagine the, like, full scene of this conversation, Hella kinda being more interested in it than she expected to be, being like "Oh this is kinda vaguely related to what Ordennans believe, but it's kinda like a whole bloodline thing, so I get it."

AUSTIN: Just kinda a nice day talking to this halfling about religion.

ALI: Right, yeah, and I think she kind of like, talks to her for a little while because I think when she brings up the whole Nacre thing that is kind of a long conversation, but realizes that she's taking her time and kind of excuses herself. And then I have a hard time not imagining Hella sort of still focused on the Tristero thing and umm...gripping her sword.

AUSTIN: Ahh, yeah. In this place.

ALI: Cause she's kind of upset?

AUSTIN: Yeah, okay.

ALI: And sort of considering the thing about the thing about what the line of Tristero is, and kind of the ins and outs of it and...et cetera.

AUSTIN: Okay...And give me one of those good rolls you do, as you use your move...your move "consult that thing in the sword"...

ALI: Yep. It's Heirloom.

AUSTIN: I forget what it's...Heirloom, yeah.

ALI: Don't even know what—oh, that's a 9, okay!

AUSTIN: That's a 9, you didn't fail it this time.

ALI: [laughter] Thanks Austin!

AUSTIN: Yeah. The—woof. Tristero's face in the mosaic changes to hers, it's Adelaide's, and she's looking at you.

ALI: Oh cool.

AUSTIN: Just eyes on you, very clear. So, when you consult the spirits that reside within your signature weapon, they give you insight related to the current situation and might ask you some questions in return. So...what sort of insight are you looking for, you're just looking for, like, hey, what's up with this place?

ALI: Umm...[sighs] Not so much what's up with this place, but like, if the line of Tristero is actually...

AUSTIN: Broken.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So, on a 10+ I give you good detail, on a 7-9 I give you an impression.

ALI: [weakly] Uhuh...

AUSTIN: The thing that happens that's weird is...so she has eye contact on you, and then her face begins to fade, and it's replaced with, like, another series of faces. There are a number of people who...like, her face grows a hood briefly, her face changes and then it's clearly the

rugged face of a warrior, and then it changes again and it's the face of an Ordennan bandit who was killed by this blade once, and then it changes again and it is the...the face of Samoths. Who's...The mosaics, like, push out of the wall and gain 3D texture. Just for you, no one else seems to respond to this. And he says...

(as Samoths): Hadrian is in great danger.

AUSTIN: ffft, and then it goes back to being a mosaic of Tristero.

ALI: [laughter] Everyone meets Samoths except for him!

AUSTIN: Iunno, you're the one with the fuckin' sword.

ALI: [laughter] Well, yep!

AUSTIN: Hadrian?

ART: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: What are you up to? What have you decided to do on that tower, on that lighthouse?

ART: Um, it feels really silly to try this...which is of course why I'm going to do it...but like, what if, what if I just prayed for guidance? What if I just tried to cast that spell? You know how great I am at spells.

AUSTIN: What does that look like? [knowing GM laughter]

ART: Umm...oh my god...I think in this place, at this time, it's a lot less controlled than it usually is, usually it's a quiet moment of reflection, i think here it's more of a, like...wait, no it's not that, it's not just Hadrian standing at the edge of a fuckin building being like "Should I jump?"

[laughter]

ART: That's not it.

AUSTIN: Nope!

ART: Not it. That's not what's happening. I just wanna...

AUSTIN: Oh boy. Yup, I appreciate it.

ART: But like, I think he does, he looks at the, he can see the volcano. He knows...

AUSTIN: He can hear it.

ART: He can hear it, and like, he's focused and he wants to know if he should go back down those stairs, back to the boat, see everyone, or if he should...if he should jump, and I'm gonna—

AUSTIN: What's this roll?

ART: —roll Wisdom for this. It's worth noting that Hadrian's Wisdom has gone up like 4 points over the course of this game, and I don't know if I'm playing him as like, 50% wiser than when we started, but we can think about this...really at another time.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Uh huh. So this spell is called Guidance, is that right.

ART: The spell is called Guidance.

AUSTIN: Ok.

ART: I've, like, basically never hit this roll.

AUSTIN: You've hit it once, maybe.

[gasps]

ART: Hey!

AUSTIN: Eleven. Boom. Read me the spell, is this divine guidance, is this...

ART: This is a cleric spell, Guidance.

AUSTIN: There it is, the symbol of your deity appears before you, and gestures you towards the direction or course of action your deity would have you take, then disappears.

ART: Yeah. Feels like it's super straightforward here.

AUSTIN: It's still gonna be, uh, a little conflicted.

ART: Cause like, five people are talking to me every time I try to do anything?

AUSTIN: Two here, but three, often. Ummm, the...

ART: Wait, that's super interesting.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

ART: I knew it was three, but...

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. The stairwell that was behind you is now in front of you, like it twists downwards, but instead of going back inside it goes outside and forms a bridge to Samoths, to his forge. And then, from behind you, where there is now a ladder instead of a bridge, going up instead of down, you hear the howl of a wolf. The last wolf.

ART: Wait, I need this just to be a little more...I need you, Austin, to clarify this a little bit?

AUSTIN: [amused] Sure.

ART: Where does the ladder go?

AUSTIN: It goes up, into the darkness.

ART: Up?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ART: Up.

AUSTIN: Into the dark, into the sky. It hangs from...you can't see what. And that's where you're hearing the wolf from.

ART: Well that's...intriguing...umm...

AUSTIN: Do you have any other abilities? I just want to make sure we've got all of our shit, we're not missing things, people aren't yelling "Hadrian, why aren't you using...whatever, the obvious thing you should use that would change the situation?"

ART: I really don't think so. But I'm gonna double-check, I'm gonna...I have a voice that transcends language, that isn't helpful right now. I have a holy symbol on my hand, I'm immune to Hella's blade, none of that is happening to me right now. I'm more impervious to harm than I've been.

AUSTIN: That's useful, I guess.

ART: I have a bonus to damage...There's always I Am The Law and Lay On Hands, neither of which are useful here. Umm...I'm better at laying on hands, and I can speak lawful, I think that's everything I can do. I can ask What Here Is Evil, but that fuckin' feels like a landmine right now.

AUSTIN: You're just not not...it is, but you're not near anything to ask right now, like there isn't a person that you could ask that about.

ALI: That ladder isn't evil. [laughing]

AUSTIN: Uhhhhh, you could ask it. You could ask it. I changed my mind.

ART: Okay.

AUSTIN: Uhhhh. Yeah!

ART: Okay. I'm asking, what here is evil?

AUSTIN: The...You're getting those mixed messages again, bud. They're fu—it's clear. It's so clear, you've been doing this for so long...Samothes doesn't sense anything evil here. For Samot, who speaks to you from above, below the sea, the black and purple Heat and the Dark, there could not be something more evil.

ART: Sure, I'm not gonna jump in the water and try to fight the heat and the dark through, that's definitely not the...

AUSTIN: But for Samothes, that isn't evil, it just is. It's something to be worked on, it's something to be hammered at, just like everything else.

ART: I can get behind that.

AUSTIN: Yeah? The man who said "Of course the wind can be evil?"

ART: Yeah, of course the wind can be evil, but like, and then we work on it. We go to work...

ALI: [laughter]

AUSTIN: Good. So what do you do?

ART: I mean I'm not gonna sit there and like, blow against the wind cause that's ridiculous, cause I'm just a...dude. I'm just a guy.

AUSTIN: Right, you're just a guy.

ART: But, y'know, if, if Samoths wanted to stop the evil wind he wouldn't be like "Well, the wind's evil, back to watchin' TV." Umm...ugh, fuck...I'm gonna cross that bridge.

AUSTIN: Okay. You climb down the stairs safely, and the bridge is going to take you some time.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Everyone back at the Buoy, neither Alyosha nor Hadrian have come back. It is midday, it is 2 PM, let's say.

ALI: I dunno if the scene is like, Hella running across the city, cause that's [laughter] that seems extreme...but it's definitely like, her very hastily telling Calhoun to hurry up getting her a boat.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Second boat, I already sent a boat out with your guy, he didn't come back, he's still at the—

ALI (as Hella): I don't care, I don't care, get me a boat. I'll do it myself, I know what to do.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): You can't swim across this water, jeez...

ALI (as Hella): [sigh] No, I'll fucking man the boat, I don't need one of your guys, I just need a boat.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): We can't just let people have a boat, that's dangerous.

ALI (as Hella): Oh my god, just get me a boat! [laughter]

JANINE (as Adaire): She's Ordennan, they do boat stuff, like, she'll do it...

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Oh, you're here too, great. [sigh]

JANINE (as Adaire): Yeah, she ran off, and I didn't want to just go get a cordial, I guess...

AUSTIN: [laughter] Throndir, are you here also?

DRE: Umm...I'd like to be...I dunno, does Hella let me be there, or does Hella like, grab Adaire and dip?

AUSTIN: The thing that's interesting here is that you're on the other side of Cleanblade Company, so like, you could have literally run into them, based on the way this map works. But if you [Ali] don't want Throndir to be there, he doesn't have to be there.

ALI: Thrandir can be there, I kind of, it was probably like a “Hey everybody, we’ll meet at, like, noon for lunch” and then Hadrian doesn’t show up and it’s like, oookay, we gotta go, I’m gonna go, if you want to come with me, you can.

DRE: Okay, then yeah.

AUSTIN: All right! Calhoun’s like

(as Calhoun): Fine, you wanna boat, you get a boat. Go.

And he gives you a boat. How do you...do you know how to pilot a boat?

ALI: [laughter] I...assume that I do, I’ll roll for it.

AUSTIN: Give me a roll.

[laughter]

ALI: Should not have said that...out loud...I think that history can say that I’ve been on boats.

JANINE: Oh boy...I vouched for you...

AUSTIN: You’ve been on boats. I think this is probably...Dexterity? Right? Could be Wisdom...

ALI: I was just thinking today, I was like, I’m on the cusp of getting a +2 Dexterity, but I don’t do any Dexterity rolls.

AUSTIN: Well, here we are. Give me a Dexterity roll.

ALI: [sigh] Man...

JANINE: I can aid her, also.

AUSTIN: You should aid her.

JANINE: I got that +1 to aiding.

AUSTIN: Let her roll it first and then we’ll...that’s how that works.

ALI: Okay. Do I get a +1 just for like, history?

AUSTIN: No.

ALI: Just for established fact about this character?

AUSTIN: No. I should give you a -1 cause it's a boat.

ALI: Ewww! [laughter]

AUSTIN: Give me a Defy Danger: Dexterity...ooh, that's a 6.

ALI: I got a 6...That's 6.

AUSTIN: So, now, give me that aid roll.

JANINE: What do I need to roll for that?

AUSTIN: Well, first of all, what's that 6 look like, Hella? So you're trying to pilot this boat, it's a little sailboat. What goes wrong?

ALI: Ugh...man...I dunno. [laughter] I personally don't know much about boats. I should, probably...

AUSTIN: Me either, but what would happen in, like, the TV show where no one knows anything about boats, obviously, but they still want to communicate that something bad happened. Like, does a sail rip, does someone get tied up in the cords?

ALI: Yeah, I think she pulls on something too hard, cause she's used to bigger boats, right? Maybe that's the thing, she's used to a ship where a bunch of people man it, and instead she has to do all the jobs by herself, and like, also, she's super stressed, so she like, yanks on a thing, and you just hear a cracking sound. it's like oh, fuck...

AUSTIN: Alright! Adaire, give me a 2d6 +2, one is from your bond with Hella, and one is from going to the Lack House and getting a +1 on your next aid roll.

DRE: I love that Hella's mistake is just being too...too buff. [laughter]

AUSTIN: Yeah, too many gains. So yeah, 2d...oh buddy

ALI: [exasperated] GOD.

DRE: [laughter]

AUSTIN: You rolled a 5...

JANINE: I tried...

AUSTIN: You did try!

ALI: Wait, is this HP?

AUSTIN: What? No.

ALI: Is this XP?

AUSTIN: Oh yeah, you both get XP from this.

JANINE: Okaaay...

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, you're gonna level! You...Aw, this is so...mmm, mwah [repeated kiss noises]

ALI: [laughter] Nooo!

AUSTIN: So...you...get caught up in the current. One second the sea is like glass, and the next it is a raging river. You go down southeast past the Greenperch, where the bird people are hover above squawking and shouting and living their lives, and then past the redwood tree in the center of the Buoy. And things look really bad. They look just terrible, because there is a waterfall on the southeast end of this city, a fact that I don't think I've made clear to the audience at home, because we've just been staring at it, and like "Oh yeah, there's a waterfall, clearly, that falls off of this fucking huge town that's in the sky." And then...the current turns, just so, and you see a garden.

[music starts: [The Wind Gets Warm](#)]

It's green and there's some beautiful trees there, and the wind gets warm and you can smell honey on the air. And you float into this little inlet right here near this house. It's the only house there. And you hear an old guitar. There's a few familiar notes, and you come to rest on that island.

Hadrian. You're in front of this castle, and there is a doorway down, there's the huge doors that open into whatever the castle is, but there's a second doorway to the side, that you can hear a hammer hitting metal, over and over and over on...and that's where he is. He's calling to you.

ART: I...I go forward, I...

AUSTIN: You walk down and it gets hot. It's so hot down here.

ART: Sure, yeah.

AUSTIN: And your ring on your finger, like, begins to burn as you get closer and closer, like it's physically burning.

ART: Hardian clenches his fist, that's how he wants to deal with that. He's...

AUSTIN: Okay. Take 1 damage. You have that second symbol now too, right? What's that from?

ART: Uh, on the hand, that's from the quest, but in fiction it's from—

AUSTIN: From Benjamin, yeah. I just couldn't remember what had put it on your hand. That remains cool to the touch. [sighs]

ART: Oooh. Hmm...

AUSTIN: You eventually come to a...a forge. You see him in the distance, hammering away on his anvil, lit from below by the black and purple of the Heat and the Dark, bubbling upwards, hungry. Above you is—

ART: Oh, it's like, *in here*.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah. This is, for the audience at home, this is the forge of Samothēs, in his mountain tower, remade down here. And...you get the sense that someone else was just here, that, like, the rhythm of the handiwork, the rhythm of Samothēs's hammering, is like, it just fuckin, he *just* stopped, like he just stopped and just started back up when you arrived. And he puts his hammer down again, and turns to face you, fifty yards away, and smiles a big toothy smile. What do you do?

[long silence]

[music ends]

ART: ...God, umm...I can't imagine what this is like, y'know? This is...and the dueling nature here is like, there's being Hadrian the dutiful, and there's Hadrian the, like, "what the *fuck*."

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Yeah!

ART: Uuh, I think I have to start with the former, and maybe we'll get to the latter. I think Hadrian, y'know, takes a knee, and averts his gaze downward, and just sort of waits. Says something like,

ART (as Hadrian): My lord, I can't believe...I found you.

AUSTIN: He says,

(as Samothres): My design is complex, but it is just as I've made it. You were due.

ART (as Hadrian): Thank you.

AUSTIN (as Samothres): [pause] Come closer.

ART: He does, he closes, I guess most of the distance, maybe he goes to the other side of the forge, I dunno, it's—he'll keep going until he's told to stop.

AUSTIN: You get to a distance that seems appropriate, which is probably still like, ten feet away.

ART: Sure.

AUSTIN: He steps towards you, just a few steps, which is like, now feels actually a little too intimate, not like you can step back, because you're where he told you to stand, in a sense, but when he steps forward, you feel inspected.

ART: Sure.

AUSTIN (as Samothres): Hmm...the cloak.

He says.

(as Samothres): A gift?

ART (as Hadrian): Yes. At the tower.

AUSTIN: He nods.

(as Samothres): How is he?

ART (as Hadrian): I honestly...I don't know. He's...he's fighting s...

AUSTIN (as Samothres): He stopped visiting...so long ago.

ART (as Hadrian): He's...

AUSTIN (as Samothres): You carry my blade with honor and dignity. It should be rewarded.

ART (as Hadrian): I am...I am nothing but a—

AUSTIN (as Samothres): You are a noble pala-din, hmm?

AUSTIN: Raises his eyebrows, just a little bit.

(as Samothres): [pause, sigh] There are things I ask of those who walk with me, that are hard to do. And you, more than my own prince, carry it out with fervor. Your hand of justice, and of faith, in a world that has no place for either...

The ring is just, ugh, it ain't good. It's like putting your hand on a stove and holding it there. Take another point of damage.

(as Samothres): What I ask of you next will be even harder.

ART (as Hadrian): Anything. Anything you ask.

AUSTIN (as Samothres): [scoff] I've heard many say "anything" before. Most do not live to see it through. I don't value the vocalization, I value the execution.

And he steps forward, a little bit closer, and you are, you feel compelled to kneel. You can not kneel if you want to, but it would be resisting that compulsion. Not a roll, but you would know that you were resisting.

ART: No, I think I'm still, I think I'm still good.

AUSTIN: [sighs] As he gets closer, he pulls his robe, he had his robe tied down at his waist as he was hammering, and like, he's a god, but he still wants to be comfortable. And he pulls that back up and ties that at the waist. Do you still have that golden blade?

ART: Yeah, I believe that's the blade I'm carrying.

AUSTIN: Okay.

(as Samothres): Give me the sword.

ART: Okay. He takes it out of the sheath and holds it.. y'know, like people give people swords, you know, with the two hands flat and the flat blade.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah. Umm...He takes it and it like, it burns his hand when he touches it, but he holds it the same way you're holding the ring, and he walks with it back to the anvil, and he lifts it up in the air and then breaks it in half at the blade, so that the actual, like, length of most of the

blade is gone. And then he pulls a little lever, a little pulley, and a bit of the black and purple flame drips from one chute, and this dark Marielda obsidian from another, and he begins hammering away.

(as Samothres): Join me as I work. See what it looks like.

ART (as Hadrian): Of course...

Hadrian, of course, knows nothing about blacksmithing, I don't know what...

ALI: [Laughter]

AUSTIN: As he hammers, each strike, you get this flash of you doing "I am the law" to somebody, or lecturing Jericho before you kill him, or giving someone a pep talk.

(as Samothres): I shape tools, and so do you. Yours just have names and voices.

And he keeps hammering away...
Boat people. Boat party.

DRE: Aw. [laughing] Went as well as the first one so far!

AUSTIN: So you're on this little island, and there is the sound of a guitar being played.

[music starts: [There is a Path](#)]

AUSTIN: What are you doin'?

DRE: Should probably go see who's playing this guitar, right?

AUSTIN: There's a door, and you open a door, and inside is a house that has a lot of polished wooden furnishings. And there is a little garden that you can get to from inside of that house, and there are paintings here of immense value, Adaire, they're...everything in here is worth a fuckin' fortune. Just an FYI.

JANINE: [laughter]

AUSTIN: And you can't quite pin down where that guitar is coming from. You think it's outside, but it's not...it moves. What are you doing?

ALI: Can we try to follow it?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Is it like, as if it's guiding us down a path, or is it just like...

AUSTIN: No, it's...there is a path, but it isn't meant to guide you, you know what I mean? it's like you're in a maze, where the way out is to track the sound...And it becomes like a maze, like oh, there were supposed to be four rooms in this house, there's five, there's six, wait, this bedroom has another bedroom attached to it, there's seven? wait, this house, you can go back outside pretty easily and see like no, there's definitely only six windows here, but inside you're counting thirteen windows, fifteen windows, twenty-two windows. And you don't ever get lost, you're always able to come back to that main room, where there's a map of Hieron laid out, where it's clear that there was just a meal here. Like, you're here, you're at that place. But you can't quite...pin it down. Without some sort of roll. I don't know what that roll looks like yet, I don't know if someone has a roll that makes sense for this.

DRE: I think Kodiak barks and takes off, and I try to chase after him.

[music fades]

ALI: Do—mm....

AUSTIN: Yeah? What's up, Hella?

ALI: I...cause I was just remembering the last time Hella felt like this?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: But I don't know that Adelaide would have any bearing here, or that she would interrupt.

AUSTIN: Right. Well. Um.

ALI: 'Cause that's the last time she was in a weird maze.

AUSTIN: True. I mean, you can all use your moves whenever you want, as long as you're doing—when you do it, you do it, you know what I mean? So...

ALI: We could tear up some paper, thank you, Adaire...

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Totally could. There's lots of paper here. I'm just now realizing that Ali in the chat said "Yo, rob him", which, good.

[laughter]

ALI: Yeah, and that move is specifically for combat, and is also sort of hard to evoke...cause it's hard to imagine...

AUSTIN: Oh you're doing...sorry, I couldn't tell which of those moves you were doing.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I didn't know if you were checking the sword or if you were checking...yeah.

ALI: I mean, if she has something to say...

AUSTIN: No...

ALI: Okay, yeah.

AUSTIN: Umm, no, in fact...suddenly, you realize...she has been a whispering presence for you, for months, and even when she's not talking, she is present. Like the line—she's kept the line open, do you know what I mean?

ALI: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: It's like you're sitting on a skype call at all times...and...you don't know if she hung up, or if she muted herself.

ALI: The one time...I was gonna be like "Hey, are you there?"

AUSTIN: Mm-hm!

JANINE: Aw boy...

ALI: It's fine.

AUSTIN: Throndir, what's your tracking situation?

DRE: Yeah, I think I'm working with Kodiak to track a path through this...bizarrely changing house.

AUSTIN: Umm, go ahead and give me that Hunt and Track...which is "when you follow the trail of clues left behind by passing creatures", in this case it is this guitar sound. And make sure you use...does Kodiak help you with that? Search.

DRE: Yeah, he gives me his Cunning.

AUSTIN: So on a 7+ you follow the creature until there's a significant change in its direction or mode of travel, on a 10+, you also gain one: gain a bit of useful information about your query...um...or your quarry, not query, your quarry, the GM will tell you what, determine what caused the trail to end. Um, in this case, it is just that you find the right...you end up finding—do people chase after Thrandir? Does Thrandir leave a trail of paper to be chased, or does Thrandir disappear into this house?

JANINE: Aaah...

DRE: I mean, I don't intentionally take off without people, but I think it's like "Kodiak's got something" and then I take off.

AUSTIN: There is...you all manage to find a second garden that's like a mirror of the first one. You realize that the house is multifaceted, and there are way more rooms inside than outside, but it is a mirrored house at the same time, and that there was a garden that was not on the other side, and in that garden there is an old man playing a guitar.

[music starts: [Samol](#)]

He's a black man, with dreadlocks that are...very clean and well-kept, but also his body is not. He looks emaciated. His face is receding into itself. You can see the sockets of his eyes, like you can see, the skin is pulled very tight against it. The pants that he's wearing are way too baggy for him, and most surreal of all, there is a chunk of him floating off of his shoulder to the right...I think I said right, all those months ago, I've forgotten at this point...off of his body, like it's as if his shoulder, it's as if there's a chunk of flesh, of like, wooden flesh, that's been removed and hovers nearby. Umm...and then, you can't see it necessarily, but the way he moves indicates really bad chest pain, and the way he like, sits. And he is humming a song underneath the guitar.

[music fades out]

AUSTIN: Hadrian.

ART: [pause] Yeah.

AUSTIN: Samoths stands...or I guess he's already standing, but he finishes hammering, and he takes the blade, and slips it under the latch of the cloak, and cuts it. And the cloak falls from your shoulders, unless you do something to stop this from happening.

ART: Umm...No, I guess not. [sighs]

AUSTIN: Oh buddy...

(as Samothres): There is a terrible weapon. The Blade in the Dark.

He turns his sword that he's made you around in his hand, so that he's holding the blade, that is this hot obsidian with little purple marks through it. The hilt is workmanlike, it's simple...or I guess no, the hilt is still the hilt from the blade you found, isn't it? It is. So there's still a little of that golden blade at the very bottom. And he hands it to you, and as he does, it cuts him just so, and some of his divine blood mixes in with the blade.

(as Samothres): An acquaintance of yours carries it. She does not know what she has. It corrupts her. It is too dangerous to exist. You know what I mean. Hm?

ART (as Hadrian): I do.

AUSTIN (as Samothres): [sighs] It's an incredible shame. She has a ferocity that...there's nothing like it. And I fear she will not want you to destroy that blade.

ART (as Hadrian): I can't imagine she would.

AUSTIN (as Samothres): But talk to her. Convince her. And if you cannot...it is just a blade, and yours is much sharper.

ART (as Hadrian): Okay...of course. Hella will listen to reason.

AUSTIN: Haha, ooooooh.

ALL: [brief laughter]

AUSTIN: He looks down at the cloak and picks it up himself. It's weird to see a god, like, he kneels very carefully so his back never bends, he never bends at the waist. So it's a very smooth motion, but at the same time very, like...stuck up, in a weird way. And he puts the cloak on, and shakes a little bit, and smirks.

(as Samothres): I am so grateful to have soldiers like you. I don't say it enough.

ART (as Hadrian): Thank you. When he gave it to me, he told me to keep an open mind.

AUSTIN (as Samothres): [slow, menacing laughter building]

And he can't fuckin' help it, he spits. On the ground.

(as Samoths): There are words that are not for your ears, Hadrian...but there is irony in someone like him telling you something like that. If anyone should know the dangers of an open mind, it is the boy-king.

[music begins: [Velocity](#)]

Faith...is not about an open mind. It is about velocity. It is about moving with speed and force, knowing that what you do is just, never stopping to give the other person a moment to make you second-guess it.

He reaches out his hand and touches you on the face.

(as Samoths): Faith is about confidence, Hadrian.

And he, like, squeezes your neck just a little bit. Maybe a little too hard. And then, like, pulls himself away.

(as Samoths): Those without it suffer. I am sorry about Alyosha.

ART (as Hadrian): Wha—is he okay?

AUSTIN: And he turns back to the forge and lifts his hammer. He shakes his head.

(as Samoths): He was not confident.

And he lifts the hammer in the sky...and then hits it down on another piece he's working on, and when he lifts up, you are in the house, a few steps behind your friends, and the guitar stops, and Samol looks up at all of you.

(as Samol): Appreciate the patience.

[music fades]

It's been a while since I could get a full song out like that. Now what is it you need?

ART: Uh, Hadrian looks with pleading eyes and says

(as Hadrian): Answers?

AUSTIN: Ahh, Hadrian is here! Kodiak goes [bark foley] "Huuah huuah huuah".

ALI: I think Hella turns arounds and like, gasps, and looks him up and down to see if he's okay?

ART: He's not okay.

JANINE: Adaire definitely swears a little.

DRE (as Throndir): Where's your cloak?

ART (as Hadrian): Not important. No one look at this sword.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: No, that sword is...super obvious, my dude.

JANINE (as Adaire): Do you have a non-fucked boat?

ART (as Hadrian): I don't.

DRE: [laughter]

AUSTIN: Oh boy.

ALI (as Hella): Are you all right?

ART (as Hadrian): Um, I'm really not sure, we're gonna have to talk about it later.

AUSTIN (as Samol): Strangers just come into my place, start havin' a get-together...

DRE (as Throndir): I mean, you've got enough bedrooms.

AUSTIN: He laughs...

(as Samol): That's a first...

[music plays: [Inside](#)]

[sigh] What sorta answers you need? I got answers.

ART (as Hadrian): ...Divine ones?

AUSTIN (as Samol): Ain't none more divine. Sit down. Let's talk. I got stories.

[music plays out]

[1:55:24]