

Sangfielle 04: The Blackwick Group

Transcribers: Natalya (thanksnatalya#6132) Transcribed from 00:00:00 to 00:30:06
Aaron (goblinfootfall#6647) from 00:30:07 to 182:39

[Sangfielle Theme begins and plays under voiceover]

Austin Walker (as Narrator): [southern drawl] It has been one year since the folks of Eastern Folly put an end to a generations long curse and a few months fewer since a vote brought a new name to the town and its environs: Blackwick County. The name itself was a compromise evoking not only the darkening embers of the Triadic Pyre's ashen dogma but also the warmth and comfort of a night at home coming to its end with a little prayer to Slumbous. Name ain't the only thing that's changed in that town though as the days went on and the understanding that the curse had been broken was felt more firmly it seemed as if both miners and townsfolk let themselves dream of further futures than they had before. Some folks settled down to start families, others sent word to friends and relatives to move to this newly prosperous burg. New businesses sprung up, and not all of them made it through the year, sure, but more than you'd think. This was a community that was only just now starting to know itself the sort of town you heard about and thought was made up. A place really, truly on the upswing. Even the trains seemed to be reliable, more or less. But the powers that be, so to speak, they knew better than to rest on laurels no matter whose they were. I mean, skeletal emissaries, miners going deeper into the mountain, sounds below the abbey, the damned egg. Can you blame them for putting out the call? Can you blame them for bringing together the Blackwick Group?

[theme music swells and tapers off]

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

Andrew Lee Swan: Hey! You can find me on Twitter @swandre3000

Austin: Ali Acampora...

Alicia Acampora: Um Hi! You can find me over @ali_west on Twitter, you can find the show over @friends_table, and you can go to @more_civilized for a surprise.

Austin: Ah, that's true, Sylvi Clare...

Sylvia Clare: Hey, I'm Sylvi, you can find me on Twitter @sylvisurfer, and you can listen to my other show Emojidrome wherever you get your podcasts.

Austin: Janine Hawkins...

Janine Hawkins: Hi, you can find me @bleatingheart on Twitter.

Austin: Jack de Quidt...

Jack de Quidt: Hi, you can find me on Twitter @notquitereal and buy any music featured on the show at notquitereal.bandcamp.com

Austin: Art Martinez-Tebbel...

Art Martinez-Tebbel: Hey you can find me on Twitter @atebbel where maybe I've finally come up with the 'go X for a surprise' joke I was working on and couldn't finish in time.

Ali: [commiserating groan that turns to a giggle]

Austin: [chuckles] And Keith Carberry.

Keith J Carberry: Uh... hey you can find me on Twitter @keithjcarberry and find the Let's Plays that I do at youtube.com/runbutton. By the time this is out the whole Final Fantasy marathon that we did will be up... so... you can watch that.

Austin: [to Keith] Nice! It was fun, it was fun to watch. [to Ali] Alright! Today we are putting the final pieces into place before we begin our game and season of Heart: The City Beneath; which is a game by Grant Howitt and Christopher Taylor, it was illustrated by Felix Miall, it was edited by Helen Gould and Mary Hamilton, Mary Hamilton also produced it, and then layout and design was by Minerva McJanda. So, shoutouts to all of them. It's a very pretty book, it's a really fun book to read. I will note right here- Um- I'll just- I will say if there is any additional content warnings on top of what I'm about to say they'll be in the description below. Uh- But it is worth reading the content warning that is printed in Heart itself before we start: *Heart is a horror game and as such there are some unpleasant things in the text, these include but are not limited to: violence, drug use, addiction, ghosts, unwanted bodily transformation, and monsters that used to be people. We can assure you that there is no rape or sexual assault in this game-* I also do not believe there will be any conversations thereof in today's episode or this season. I put a- uh- a hard X card on that here- um- I will also note that we did talk privately about lines and veils ahead of the season. If you already listened to The Ground Itself worldbuilding game we did- um- you'll have heard some of that there too. Um- and again, as always, players should be comfortable, please bring any conversation to a halt telling that- saying if you wanna stop something or slow something down or talk through something more carefully or, of course, just playing the X card by saying it aloud, or putting it in the group chat, or saying it privately to me. Um- Before we continue, again, I'm just gonna say my goals for this season which are sort of adapted from a GM-ing section in the book that's called Tips for Running Heart that starts on page 109. Uh- *Instead of planning, ask questions, reuse details but always evoke the atmosphere, build and break tension, pay attention to what the players want both long term and short term*, and hey, why not, play to find out what happens. That's not in this book but we've been saying it for years and I think it's still basically true. Um- [clears throat] So- um but we are

here today to go over everyone's characters, to talk through inter-character connections, to finalize some Haven set up. Um- It is probably worth saying uh- just kind of reiterating what the situation is, I'm sure some people will not want to hear worldbuilding and just wanna jump into character stuff. High level: this is dark fantasy meets weird west meets gothic and-and cosmic horror- um- the world used to look like a more traditional fantasy setting, you know, there were-there was a vast and powerful empire that was run by literal devils and it was conquering the world and then, you know, there's this, like, classic stuff. Rival kingdoms and slave revolts and political schisms and probably some dragons out there somewhere. And I think that stuff is pretty cool, I think that I did a pretty good job building that part of the world out. You could do a game that's about the machinations of those places and-and the figures therein but that is not what this season is, this is not a season about countries going to war or factions backstabbing each other. Maybe there'll be a little bit of that based on character associations, like factions that the characters are from but that's not what the season is. Um- This is a season about part of this continent that has turned on its head, you know, the crops all shriveled up- um- nature turned, there are these wild storms now and reality itself sort of shuddered. Um- I've been saying that it's a haunted place, that it's a place haunted by past trauma, by unrealized present, and by potential mechanical futures. Um- Up until now we've been calling it the Heartland, not only meant to reference the game Heart: The City Beneath, but also to evoke the American midwest, you know, any place really- um- that-that has any-any continent where a once contested frontier has kind of turned into an imperial breadbasket. Um- Which is something that has happened for as long as there have been- [clears throat] for as long as there have been empires, unfortunately. But today we are not just calling it Heartland anymore, we do have a name for this place, it is Sangfielle which means- uh- which doesn't actually mean- but it means in our world "the blood fields". Um- It is a- it is a name that is hard to say without slipping into an accent, which I think makes it fun. Uhh- To be clear- uh- though parts of the world obviously-word obviously are referencing real human language, you know, "sang" is-is French for blood and also it has a, you know, a lot of romance languages use that; it's where we get the word sanguine and "fielle" sounds like field. [everyone laughs]

Austin: [over laughter] Uhm- and as such is connected to, like, it's fell, it's feld- but, you know, it's a big leap.

Janine: [cross] We couldn't call it-

Art: [cross] Mono is one, and rail is rail.

Austin: That's correct.

Janine: We couldn't call it Sangfeld cause it sounds like Seinfeld [**Austin:** It sounds like Seinfeld] and we hate that it sounds like Seinfeld and we couldn't do it.

Austin: We couldn't do it. Um- This is not, like-

Art: Jack had a great soundtrack for that though.

Austin: Yeah, it was a lot of slap bass.

[various bass foley]

Jack: I was stoked [deadpan] I've been robbed.

[laughter]

Sylvi: They figured out how to play slap clarinet.

[laughter]

Jack: [deadpan] I've been robbed.

Austin: That's- it's a shame. One day, [excited] maybe we'll do it for Bluff City, it'll be great- Ahh- C- Hmm- Okay, one day we'll come back to th-this conversation.

[laughter]

Austin: In general, I guess it's worth saying, we're gonna use a lot of languages that feel like mash-ups of existent languages. We did this with- actually with Marielda, Marielda comes from a kind of North Germanic word, "mareel" which-which we kind of like punched into shape until it became Marielda. We did the same thing here. I think fictionally it's worth saying that this place used to be called- it wasn't always called "the blood fields" which is a terrifying thing to name a place. They instead called it the other terrifying thing which is 'Sanfielle' instead of 'Sangfielle'- um- some people also probably pronounce the 'G' harder in 'sang'. It's-it's [spells out] S-A-N-G-F-I-E-L-L-E, is how we do 'Sangfielle'. But when it was 'Sanfielle' that was "the saintly fields", you know, "the holy fields"- um- but then the panic happened, everything went bad and this word, sangfielle, which had been used by some of the people here, who were being made to work here, the slaves here had already called it the blood fields, kind of in like gallows humour/sarcasm, and that name sticks to the people who end up stuck here after the ruins- the kind of ruin spreads here. We've already started telling you part of the story of this- of this world and this- this part of the world, town that was once called Eastern Folly but now has emerged from a two century long curse and adopted a new name, Blackwick, with the entire surrounding area being called Blackwick County. And if you wanna hear that story and haven't yet, you should go listen to it, like it's a dope story, we played Everest Pipkin's The Ground Itself which is a fantastic worldbuilding game, you know, there was, you know, there was a lot, I don't even know where to start there outside of like, there was a curse that was broken through some wild shit and also there were a lot of big trees and big fruit and strange plays and skeleton people showed up at one point and planted- **[Keith:** It-] Or did they even plant- **[Keith:** It honestly ruled. That whole thing ruled.] W-what, trolls? Tr- who planted those teeth?

Keith: It was- [cross]The Teeth Trolls planted the teeth.

Austin: [cross] Teeth Trolls. Yes. Okay. Different than the skeletons.

Keith: [cross] Well, they were- they planted saplings is what they planted.

Austin: Right. Right. Anyway, it's been a year since those- So those saplings have grown, maybe the harvest- the teeth harvest has come, um- w- who the fuck knows and- and, you know, your characters who we are going to talk about today are-are-are coming to Blackwick to answer a call. I think the kind of pitch that we've landed on is, "Hey, this place was cursed for a long time to the degree that they couldn't even directly talk about the curse." Now they can and it's probably a big- maybe it's not a big topic of conversation but for those who are taking care of the town one of the main topics of conversation is: How do we make sure bad stuff doesn't happen here again? How do we- how do we bring people in who understand the weird stuff out here? You know, as a reminder, Blackwick has these mines that kind of spit up stuff from the past, the present, and the future, ranging from, again, a nest for a giant egg to, you know, steam irons, to ancient artifacts um-and that's weird and so, like, there is weirdness all around you already. So you're a group of people who I think, again, we've kind of agreed- we don't have a name for this thing yet and it's not super central because it's fine but like some loose sort of adventurers guild in the broadest sense, you know, like, you're all card carrying members of a group of people who solve things for people, who investigate things- um- and that's lead you to cross paths a few times but you're not in, like, a hierarchy together before this. You've been brought in to- A-a call went out and you answered the call and so now the group of you in either here already or arriving to be a sort of- um- you know, I don't know if it's ghost hunting or curse fighting or investigative, like- this kind of blend of things. A big touchstone for the season is sort of like, supernatural, procedural storytelling, so again, I-I th-think about things like Hellboy and Witch Hunter Robin a lot here. Obviously there is a world in which- I think I pitched this show as like: what if Ghost in the Shell but-but magic and witches instead of cyborgs and stuff? And obviously you are not, like, state representative supercops so it's not Ghost in the Shell- [Dre chuckles] um- but there is that sort of- One of the things I wanna go for this season and I think this speaks to like how loose this has been so far is I don't have a big picture plan. Um- you know, I didn't- I didn't have one at the top of Partizan either but I- but I had enough- I knew the-the kind of gravity at play, to use a term that came up a lot in worldbuilding in Partizan, I understood where the orbits of things were and what sorts of conflicts I was interested in exploring and blahblahblahblah. Here I understand themes and ideas and like have some cool ideas for like one-off mission type things, one off investigations and delves and like, interesting places you can explore and some cool monster ideas but that stuff is not like Hieron where it was like, there's this grand idea. If anything this feels the most like starting Hieron from the jump. Um- And in general, like, I really wanna try to run almost like a-a string of procedural episodic oneshots, partly because we haven't been in that mode ever really? And it's a fun mode to-to try out, especially in this sort of like, campy- I guess it's not all the way campy, b-b- this has some campy-ness and my guess is we're gonna laugh a lot in a way that like talks about the campiness. Um-but this sort of like one off adventure style storytelling even though we're also- it's gonna be kind of a cursed Bloodborne-style Westworld. Um- So-so yeah, that's-that's like high-level where we're at and now we should talk a little bit about your

characters. Characters in Heart have a bunch of stuff going on; they have callings, they have ancestries, they have classes... Um- Janine, what is your name, your class, your calling, and your ancestry?

Janine: So, my name is Es, it is [spelling] E-S or the letter S, um, my class is witch, my calling is adventure, and my ancestry is a combination ancestry: heritrix and human.

Austin: Where to start here. Um. Let's start in reverse, let's start with what a heritrix is cause this is not- and I guess I should underscore here, that we've done a lot of work, kind of putting up our own wallpaper in this house, right? We've redecorated Heart to be our own world- um- you've already heard that in the intro, right? I should note that I never mentioned there is a Heart in the world uh-in our world because there is not one single place where everything resonates from unlike in-in Heart. Um- and likewise, a number of people have come up with their own ancestries, we've modified classes in terms of content, theme uh-kind of the-the again the wallpaper of it in some cases. Heritrix: completely new thing, uh- [spells] H-E-R-I-T-R-I-X. Tell me about- what a heritrix is.

Janine: Yeah, so, a heritrix is essentially, you know, to put it into the way that-that some people in the world might put it is a soul without a body or is, you know, a spirit without a body or, you know, any number of things you could call a being that has absolutely no physical presence on its own. Um- and the way that this, you know, being can interact with the material world is by making a contract with a, you know, a mortal being, a physical being. Um- and basically that contract, the terms vary from person to person and arrangement to arrangement- um- but essentially the heritrix then gets to assume control of the body for the duration of that contract. Um- And the person who originally, you know, was- the person whose body that is or who originally occupied that body- um- is still there, they still have a say, they're still sort of- you know, they're-they're- I guess, you could liken it to them being in a navigational seat versus in the driver's seat and then the heritrix takes over the driver's seat role. [Austin: Mhmm] Um, yeah.

Austin: Um- And so you are one of those, which means- which is to say you are-you are a heritrix who is currently engaged in a contract with a human.

Janine: Yes.

Austin: Um- Cool, and you're playing, presumably- and you've talked about this in previous things, I guess I should say that there is like, a lot of stuff that is going to go up on the Patreon around us talking through character creation um- in-in the broader sense not moves and ability scores and stuff but- um- you know, wh-wh-what're we thinking about? What's exciting to us this season etc. stuff like that and so there's a long conversation there in which we kind of go into different aspects of heritrix culture and stuff so we don't have to relitigate all of that. Um- But I think it is worth saying that like you are 1. Underscoring that this like, is a deeply consensual relationship between these two people. This is not like- you are not a ghost who has possessed

someone in the hostile way that like, shows up in horror films, right? You are a spin on that in some ways.

Janine: Yeah, that's very important to me, that this is, sort of, a partnership even if the heritrix who is the character that I'm playing is the one who is, by and large, acting and interacting with people, and all of that.

Austin: Right. Um- And-and that there is like, I guess, again one of the things that comes up in like, ghost stories is that ghosts kind of often feel like they are independent actors or something? But this is like a whole culture, there is- there are like cities of Heritrixes, [**Janine:** Yes.] and towns of Heritrixes and cultures that are closer or further away from integrating with heritrixes and-and all of that stuff. It's-it's-it's not just like- you're a supernatural being in the sort of creature sense, you're a person whose personhood happens to be non-physical except for when you're engaged in- [**Janine:** Yeah] -in a contract, right?

Janine: And also those, you know, again- like you said we talk about this at length but it's also important to me that that culture includes the host to a degree [**Austin:** Right, right.] like that's- it's not just the heritrix who is like, apart from whoever they're making the contract with it's-it's a thing that you kind of, get invited into that-that is a little more complex than just heritrix and that's it, you know?

Austin: Right. Rightright. Um- I should also just note quickly that tomorrow we are talking to a consultant about plurality and depictions of plurality, so thank you in advance to the Emphabet System, @cuddlepotato on Twitter for that consultation- um- because, you know, e-even though you didn't set out to make a plural character, that's still a clear reading for [**Janine:** Yeah] the way the sort of- kind of, fantastic, you know, uh-uh species you've invented here and culture you've invented here. That's still a very clear and obvious reading, it's one of the first things I-we kind of brought up when-when you first pitched the character, was like, "Hey, this is how I'm reading this, how do you wanna, you know, talk about that stuff? What i-" or actually, what I actually asked you was like, "What do you- what thematically actually excites you about the heritrix? What is the thing at the core of your idea?" But yeah, briefly do you wanna talk about what like, motivates the heritrix as like, an idea for you?

Janine: Um, yeah, so, for me, a big part of this, like the-the smaller part of it, and I think the more obvious part is that we're playing in a very like supernatural, spooky, [**Austin:** Mhmm] gothic, you know- we're-we're playing with like a lot of- a-a situation where there is also like, the explicitly supernatural but then there's also like the abandoned and derelict supernatural feeling kind of things. Um- And in that sense it felt like it would be good to have a sort of ghost-like, spiritual-like character involved. But the sort of bigger motivation and the thing that, sort of, spurred me towards the-the character concept before we had settled on a game and a- you know- um- tightened up the themes and stuff like that was- um- this idea of like, the-the kind of thought you can have when you feel like you're in a complete rut of like, "all the things that I have someone else could have done more with this or could have done better with this" and like, what if there was a place for you to put those feelings? What if there was a being who was

like, "Okay, we can try something," like, "Let's try some stuff." Um- And that was a, you know, a mutual agreement of like, "Okay, let's see how this goes," like, [Austin: Yeah.] "I've got nothing to lose", that kind of-that kind of- uh- thought process.

Austin: Totally. Um- So last thing is a question here, uh- obviously there are a bunch of ancestry questions in the book but we are- we do not have Drow, or Dark Elves, or Elfir, or High Elves, or Gnolls uh- uh- so that doesn't really map one to one for us so I'm kind of pulling from these more broadly. I guess, one question is, you're from Sangfielle originally, right? There are heritrixes across the world but you're from this place? Or are you- [Janine: I-I] Or did you move here?

Janine: I think it's more like- I- like- For me, I think, in my head the story is that Es has sort of migrated here [Austin: Okay.] like, in the way that like, for heritrixes it's a really big deal where they sort of spawn in- I say spawn, that's not really a good word for it but you know, they come into being in sort of concentrated pockets and then spread out throughout the world. Um- So I think she's probably spread out from her original- um-

Austin: So, I guess, the-the easy question here is, what brought you to a place like this, originally? What type of- How did you decide to come- to come to-to a place like Sangfielle?

Janine: Um- This is... I think- I think it's you know, the calling I've chosen is adventure because I think this is the thing of like, she has made a contract with a person who lead a life that they considered very boring and very unfulfilling and they really just wanted to be a completely different person. Um- So part of that in- is-is like okay well, you've played it safe or you've played it as safe as people can- um- let's do the opposite, let's swing wildly in the other direction and see what happens. [Austin: Mhmm.] So that's kind of the-the-the thing that-that brings her here, is this kind of... lust for-for danger but also like proving... proving something to- [Austin: Sure.] to- you know, to her host.

Austin: I-I see you've also pulled this question that is- that is: You came here with nothing but the clothes on your back and a dream looking for excitement and profit, what went wrong? [chuckles]

Janine: Yeah. [laughs] Um- the answer I-I wrote there is that: Things are in a slightly shabbier state in this place than I'd expected, you know, you hear a new stop's opened up on the train and you expect certain things, that's all.

Austin: Uh-huh. And now you're here, now you're- great. [Janine: Yeah] Um- Okay. Um- the- I guess you knew about this- you knew about the call for people to like work on curses and shit though right? [Janine: Mhmm. Yes.] That we've kind of, come to terms on? Yeah, Okay.

Janine: That's the lure. [softly] Definitely.

Austin: Right. Yeah. Um- Uh- So, part of your ancestry is that you get to pick some what they call Trinkets and Keepsakes. There's a huge list of these across the different ancestries, you can- I basically said, again, treat them as one big pool of them since we're not using these ancestries or come up with your own. You gonna tell me about your ancestry trinkets or keepsakes?

Janine: Yeah, um, one of these I'm very sure of and the other one I'm not a hundred percent sure of but I think I'm- **[Austin under his breath: Sure]** I changed it at the last minute like, right before we started recording because I was a little bit- I dunno. Um- Anyway, the one I'm sure of is a brooch and bracelet set made out of hair, um, like mourning jewelry so it's like braided. Um- There's some really beautiful ones where you can see the hair's been styled in these curls that look like little floral sprays. **[Austin: Ohh]** Um- So they have three different colours of hair and they're arranged and they look like a little **[Austin: Ohh, I see.]** bouquet. They're-

Austin: [cross] Oh, I've never seen this before! This is wild.

Janine: [cross] I'd never- I've looked at so much hair jewelry in my life **[Ali giggles]** and I'd never seen that style before. Um- **[realizing how that sounds]** That's a thing I just said.

Austin: Uh-huh!

Someone: [cross] What a sentence.

Someone: [cross] You did.

[All laugh]

Austin: [cross] Um- What're the other ones?

Janine: [cross] It's very unique though. Um- And the other one is a larkspur engraved blackened bone whistle. So like it's carved out of a bone that's been blackened and polished, um, and has sort of a... an emblem of larkspur probably in gold up along the side.

Austin: [cross] Gotcha.

Janine: [cross] Um- The reason I like it is, because... you know, larkspur has a lot of relevant meanings but also um...

Austin: [sarcastic] Yeah, absolutely, yeah, that's what I was thinking- **[Janine laughing: Uh-huh.]** too for sure. I was like, yeah, whoah, larkspur, what a pick! **[someone snorts]** That's definitely a plant and not a bird, I thought to myself. **[laughs]**

Janine: **[laughs]** Um- Look. So there's that but there's also um- I like the idea of something that communicates the way that- **[aside]** and again we go into this in the thing that we recorded -that

like, there are certain skills that a heritrix can carry from host to host and I imagine like, playing musical instruments and things like that, um, would be one of those things. So, it's just like a [Austin: Gotcha.] you know, a keepsake, a token, that-that is, you know, a skill that this host probably didn't have before but that Es brought along.

Austin: Cool! Um- The next thing here is your calling, you mentioned being- being- having the adventure calling uh- I'll note in advance that there are only five- technically six with one of the expansions but really five, I would say, callings available. Um- And so there is gonna be overlap here but I think there's still gonna be a lot of wiggle room. For people who have never seen Heart- Which I should note, system-wise part of the reason we chose Heart is because we wanted to try something that was not Powered by the Apocalypse or Forged in the Dark for a full season. It is- it is, I guess, called the resistance system. It was- it was- I don't know if it was *first* done in Spire but Spire is where I first heard of the system. It's a dicepool system, so it's sort of like, um- Blades in the Dark or Forged in the Dark games where you're kind of adding up how many die you have and then rolling them and looking for a success, um- uh- but it's a little different in some other ways, it's unique; we'll get to it. Um- But- the- uh- Adventure is one of the callings and one of the big things that makes this game exciting are these callings that have things called beats which are- you pick two of them at a time, they're like very explicit flags. I guess in some ways they're like keys from Lady Blackbird... Um- In which you say, for instance, one of the adventure ones is "Charm someone with tales of your exploits" and if you manage to do that you can check that box and take a minor advance. You get one of the minor abilities from your class. There are also major ones that are a little bit more difficult, like "slay a beast that's at least five times your size" or "have a landmark or connection named after you" uh- and if you do those you get a major ability et cetera. Um- the... uh- adventure ability is that whenever you fail one of these beats you get to, like, heal a little bit, which is fun. Um- but on top of that stuff there are these questions about who you are and how the calling works for you. So, we already kind of answered this first one "what drove you here?" basically um- so let's talk about the second one which is exciting because it's a connection to another character. "You and another player character barely escaped from a dangerous situation recently. Who was it and what happened?"

Janine: I've picked a character here but we haven't hashed out the details cause it kind of d-depends [Austin: Mhmm.] Um- I desperately want this to concern Sylvi's character [Sylvi: Mhmmmm.] very, very badly. I think-I think aesthetically and thematically that would be a good combo. [Sylvi: Yeah!] [cross] Um-but the actual- Sorry go ahead.

Austin: [cross] D-do you have- I was gonna ask, do you have- do either of you have any ideas what the dangerous situation could have been?

Sylvi: Uh- I had... like my vaguest idea was sort of like they went- like the-they were both at some sort of like nice event or something that went [Austin: Yeah.] really bad. Um, like-

Austin: I love that. [Janine: Mhmm.]

Sylvi: Like, I don't-

Austin: You both received invitations to some sort of you know, soiree maybe like a big... ball and then it turned out to be a ball of, you know-

Janine: Fire.

[30:00]

Austin: Fire, or- I don't- Something, something worse than either of you.

Keith: [laughing] Hey come to this ball [cackles]

Austin: Yeah, BOOM, fire. I was gonna say, "two different supernatural things," but then I had to remember your two characters, and it would have to be *really* bad, to be like "Uh, oh, we gotta get out of here!"

[continued laughter]

Sylvi: Yeah. Well that's the thing, maybe it's a negative reaction to *us*.

Austin: Oh, sure. It was a trick.

Sylvi: Or, like, something, like, 'cause we're both... I can do my character next, I guess. I'm volunteering now. **[Austin: Mhm]** But we're both -- have, like, sorta magic shit going on, too.

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvi: And, like, we haven't really gotten into how, like, everyone reacts to magic and magic users.

Austin: Maybe--

Sylvi: Like, I know it's, you know, not necessarily all going to be negative reactions. But it could be here!

Austin: Or, like, the place you went to. 'Cause, remember, this doesn't have to have happened in Blackwick County. This could have happened *anywhere* in Sangfielle, and Sangfielle's big. It's, you know, we're bad at distances and stuff, but it is the center of a continent, right? Or, it is that big. We're not just talking about, like, "Oh, yeah, this is the size of New York State" at this point, you know?

Art: [deadpan] It's a hundred billion miles across.

Austin: It's a hundred billion miles across. Train's gonna cross it in 4, maybe 5 days.

[Multiple people laughing]

Austin: [also laughs] But it does take days! Uhhhh. "We're bad at distances," is the joke. So yeah, what if it was that? What if it was a party that you -- and maybe some others -- got tricked to that's like, from the equivalent of White Wolf Hunters, people who try to hunt down supernatural beings, and the whole thing was a trick? [**Sylvi:** Oh my god.] And the snare closed but you managed to escape and, you know, had this good time? ...Well, not a good time, it was a bad time, but you know, you got to know each other a little bit.

Janine [cross]: Barely escaped from a dangerous situation!

Sylvi [cross]: An *exciting* time.

Austin: An exciting -- You're an Adventure calling! "The City Above holds no more excitement for you." So yeah, good time. [laughs] Welcome to adventure. OK, your next one is, "Recently, you and another character returned from a delve with an item for a wealthy patron. They wouldn't give it up. Why, and what was it?"

Janine: This is one that I really wanna do with Keith's character, I think, because it seems relevant [**Keith:** OK] to the class in terms of going to the delve, and then something cool turns up, and then you decide to keep it. Um, my suggestion was "a snuff box with something cool in it," like, I put "owl's wit," some sort of weird --

Austin [cross]: Hey, what's *that*?

Keith [cross]: What's "owl's wit?"

Janine: Just, like, the wits of an owl.

Austin: You talking about brains?

Janine: ["lunno" noise] We didn't open it! / didn't open it.

Keith [cross]: The disembodied "canny?" The box is full of canny!

Austin: I mean, that's *possible*, given some of the moves that the witch has!

[Laughter]

Janine: Yeah, look...

Art: We're saying "wit," right? W-I-T?

Austin: That's what's happening. Yeah, "wit," W-I-T. You like that, Keith? You good with that?

Keith: I would totally -- yeah, *I'm* keeping this? [seeking confirmation] I was supposed to give this over, but I'm keeping it?

Austin: Yeah, I mean -- OK. It was an item for a wealthy patron, but then you said, "Nahhhh, I'm gonna keep this instead."

Keith [cross]: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I'll have the wit of an owl.

Janine [cross]: You can have your reasons for keeping it and what not.

Austin: Do you know, um --

Keith [cross]: Look, I've never seen wit in a box.

Austin: Do you know who the patron was that you've screwed over here?

Janine: I -- no, I hadn't considered -- I just assumed it was some wealthy patron.

Austin: [suspiciously nonchalant] I'll just take a quick note.

Keith: [bark of laughter]

Janine: I'll invent a name for you.

Austin: Yeah, please do that. Figure out what's up with the patron that's mad at Es and Keith.

Keith [cross]: Yeah, figure out what enemy that we've made!

Austin: [gleefully] Yeah, uh huh!

Janine: Dayward, um...

Austin: uh huh?

Keith: Nightguy.

[General laughter]

Austin: No. I did write "Eve," though! I did write "Dayward Eve," so we had the same impulse!

Janine: Can it be "Eve" spelled Y-V-E, no S?

Keith: I think I was hearing a lot of support for Dayward Nightguy.

[Laughter]

Austin: I'm not naming a Dayward Nightguy.

Janine: [very quietly] It's a literary reference.

Art [cross]: That's what they *call* him. "Dayward Yves? Oh, you mean Nightguy?"

Austin [cross]: It's Night-*guie* [rhymes with "lee"], OK? French.

Keith: [giggling] Night-guie!!

Austin: Nightguie. Um, all right. [typing] "Mad - at - Es - and - Keith's - character." Uh... "Because - of - stolen - owl's wit." OK. "Stolen" I'm putting in quotes. You didn't steal, you retrieved it and then didn't hand it over. That's different. All right, do you want to just high-level talk -- oh, wait, there's still one more for you, huh. "What's the most dangerous beast or individual you've heard tell of and why haven't you defeated them yet?"

Janine: My answer for that... I have a creature name in here we do not have to keep. It is a suggestion.

Austin: Mhm.

Janine: There is rumor about a creature that is born only when an unrepentant murderer disappears on a moonless night, named a "kith-groom." This creature is only visible to those who loved the person it spawned from and will not stop until it has killed every one of them. I have not defeated one yet because my taste in people is inconveniently good.

Austin: [rueful laughter] Do we have moonless nights?

Janine: I mean -

Art: Well, yeah, right?

Austin: I guess "moonless" can mean cloudy, right? That's a moonless night.

Janine: Yeah, moonless just means there's no light on the moons. ...Moon?

Austin: One giant moon that never... [**Janine:** Right.] That gets really big. So it's only moonless once every two months. That's not too bad, I guess. Let the kith-groom live. Anyway. Finally, we should talk briefly: What's up with the witch? We don't have to go over moves and stuff, that'll

come out during play, but -- high level, what is the witch about? What type of shit do you do, so that the party knows what they can kind of rely on you for?

Janine: Uh... Friendship and body horror.

Austin: What's that mean?

Janine: That's kinda my read on the class.

Jack: [approving] Sick!

Janine: There's a lot of knowledge and community and... not team-building, um...

Austin: You: "Knowledge and team-building!" Me [listing class keywords]: "Exsanguinate. Implacable. True Form..."

Janine: [defensive] That's the body horror part!

Austin: Oh, OK, I gotcha.

Janine: There's a lot of knowledge and things like that. It's sort of that sense of being wise but also being horrific in a personal, physical way.

Austin: Right. You're starting, because of the moves you picked, with two skills and two domains. Skills... there are, like, ten of them I wanna say? Maybe it's nine. To do a roll in this game, you basically take the relevant skill and then add one die for that. You add another die if you have the relevant domain -- a domain is like the type of place you're in, so if you're in a big temple, that would be the Religious domain. If you're in a bunch of underground tunnels, that would be the Warren domain. If you're in a forest that would be the Wild domain. So you have two of those and two skills. Can you tell me what those are?

Janine: Yeah, um, my two skills are Compel and Endure, and my two domains are Cursed and Occult. I also should mention I have 2 Mind protection.

Austin: That's good to know. Yeah. All right, Sylvi.

Sylvi: Hello!

Austin: You are up. Tell me about your character. Again, ancestry, name, calling, class etc.

Sylvi: My character is named Virtue Mondegreen. Class is Deadwalker, calling is Enlightenment, and ancestry is vampire. [chuckles] Where should we start?

Austin: Let's start with Vampire, again, 'cause I think it helps set the stage for what we mean when we say "vampire." Though for you, specifically, I think it's a pretty straightforward one because of the type of vampire you described for me. Tell me, what are vampires like in Sangfielle?

Sylvi: Yeah, it's pretty classic. Well, so, I think we sorta decided that the unifying thing that classifies vampirism is taking in other beings' life force and using it to supplement your own. So this manifests in a bunch of different ways like dark magic, stuff like that. And also vampires doing typical "bitey" things.

Austin: Bloodsucking and life-drains and all that other stuff.

Sylvi: Yeah! All sorts of stuff. I believe we also talked about it as being like a gradual process less than being turned...

Austin: I guess you *could* be turned, but ... You're right, the way we talked about it, there's lots of people who are like, "I'm gonna extend my life by 20 years by doing this spell and sapping the life force of these people" or something. But I guess presumably there are Heartsblood creatures who have vampire traits, who are just like "Yo, when I drink blood, I live longer," and that switch has been flipped in a more serious or more unidirectional way. *Anyway*, but you are a classic vampire in all the ways that come to mind. [**Sylvi:** Yeah.] Dracula shit.

Sylvi: I guess I should mention, because we have nonhuman player characters as well, that she is a human vampire. Just to be clear on that. But yeah, no, the way I have sort of envisioned this is like, she found out about it through dark magic stuff, and then was like, "Well, it's just easier if I do this the classic way, y'know?" [Other players laugh] And now she's a vampire!

Austin: OK. What, um, are you -- and I know we're going to complicate this in a second when we talk about what your class is. So actually maybe that's -- let's save the ancestry question for after we talk about your class. Your class is Deadwalker. What's the deal with Deadwalker?

Sylvi: So, I guess the best way I could describe the Deadwalker quickly is as someone who is already sort of undead and uses death magic. Like, just in terms of what it is in the book. The main thing is that there is a manifestation of the character's death that follows them around and sort of supplements all of their powers. And because of that --

Austin: The major move you took, for instance, is something that lets you quickly enter into "the Grey," right? Or I guess we're going to rename what that is. What was your really good one, earlier?

Sylvi: I think we had... "The Residuum" is what we were going for?

Austin: The Residuum. Yeah. Totally. Which is like one of the many heavens, one of the death-realms of this world (that we can get to when we get to it), that is distinct from the Grey in

the book in a big way, kind of the inverse in some ways... So that's the sort of shit you can do. And then yes, the other big thing is, you are -- despite being undead, you are sort of haunted by the ghost of -- well, [hems and haws] You wanna just say what you're haunted by, here?

Sylvi: Yeah! So, I am haunted by the spirit of the vampire hunter who killed me. Um, specifically...

Austin: What was -- what was her name again?

Sylvi: Oh, Darling Malice.

Austin: [Appreciative noise] Love it. You love to hear it.

Sylvi: So, the thing is, Virtue's whole deal is that she's a vampire who has already been slain. When I saw "Deadwalker," that was kind of the whole idea for this. Um, and so now she sorta like -- I guess I can give this context? She's come back after having been, like, dead in the ground for a couple hundred years.

Austin: Yeah, so this was one of my big -- this was the thing that I was gonna ask as far as the ancestry question went. One question is, were you hunted -- slain -- by this Darling Malice, post-panic, post-things getting fucked up around here? Or was it pre- that?

Sylvi: I think I'm gonna go with post-panic. I think it happened shortly after.

Austin: So you'd seen it start to turn.

Sylvi: I think maybe it happened around that time period, yeah.

Austin: I like that. So my big ancestry question, then, is -- and I think this would work for any vampire -- Things have changed since you first turned, and since you first began extending your life. What is something that you miss, or something new that you like?

Sylvi: I think...

Austin: I should note! When you were slain you went into, like, a sleep state for years and years, right?

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: You were not, like, aware, you were not a ghost wandering around...

Sylvi: No. I think what we settled on was that I was sort of stuck in that Residuum place for that time. [quietly] Sort of... my consciousness, at least. [decisive] Yeah, I think my answer for what she likes about this new time is that there is so much more, like... One, there's a lot more weird

magical things happening now, obviously, but also there are a lot less people trying to do oversight on those magical things [**Austin:** Sure!] and that really is exciting to her.

Austin: [pointedly] Bunch of heroes we got here.

Sylvi: I think the thing she misses is a lot of the sort of, like... I don't think vampire society, like capital-S Society, is gone, necessarily, but I think that the one that she *recognizes* is.

Austin: Right. We had talked about this, that, like, you being killed was not just a one-off, "Hey, vampires get killed." It was like the hammer coming down on vampire society a little bit.

Sylvi: Yeah. It was like, part of a, like, "Oh, these people are doing, like, fucking necromantic magic on us, and we need to stop them."

Austin: Gotta Order 66 the vampires for sure.

[Laughter]

Sylvi: Kinda, yeah! Um, so yeah, I think it's a lot of just, like, missing that familiarity.

Austin: All right. Yeah. So while we are on class stuff, before we -- I'm gonna swing back down to calling -- can you tell me what skills and domains you have?

Sylvi: Yeah. So my skills are Delve, Discern and Kill, and my domains are Cursed, Desolate, and Warren. Um, and I also have 1 Echo protection.

Austin: OK! Um, I'm not gonna go over all of the domains and skills and what they mean here. When we get there in the game, we can talk about what those are, but for now, just saying those words, I think, is very evocative, and it's good for the other players to know what you -- what you're dealing with, what your specialties are. So yeah! Let's talk about Enlightenment, which is your Calling... Enlightenment, again, has a core ability, like all of these do. In your case, this is where you get the Discern skill from, I believe -- I don't think you got it from somewhere else, 'cause if you did, you'd have a Knack, right?

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: [reading from rulebook] "You blend together method and madness in pursuit of your goals. Gain the Discern skill. Once per session, before you roll dice to resolve an action, instead state that your result is a sucsix -- a success -- sorry, is a 6! You succeed, but take stress." A lot of "S" sounds in a row and my mouth just couldn't do it. So that's fun. You just, like, get a mixed success if you want one, once per session. Um, Enlightenment is all about *figuring out* something. It's about achieving something. The first question here says, "Something that people claim is impossible." So that's my first question: what impossible thing are you attempting to achieve in Sangfielle?

Sylvi: So, I guess to keep it as simple as possible... Virtue wants to be immortal again. I've written, like -- Personally, what she thinks is she can, like, gain dominion over death itself by somehow finding the energies that are in Sangfelle and the Residuum and using them together. Um, and she's got theories on how that would work, but we don't need to go into that yet.

Austin: Sure. Though, I will ask the next question, which is: "What's your first step on that journey?"

Sylvi: Um, so I think -- I was thinking about this pretty much up until recording, and then we talked about some stuff with the Haven, which we'll get into later -- but I figured out, like, I think her first step is to establish a point of contact with someone that can supply her with occultic objects and things that have that sort of --

Austin: Ooh, OK.

Sylvi: Like, magical energy. When she died, she lost a lot of her contacts with the mages and stuff, because... those people weren't immortal, and they got old! So I think she wants to set up sort of a supply line, so that she can get some weird shit.

Austin: Yeah, that sounds wise. Um, the next question is "Choose another player character. They have been invaluable in your journey so far. What have you learned from them?"

Sylvi: I think it could actually work with Ali's character. Like, basic survival skills is kind of a big thing...

Austin: Oh, 'cause you're not a vampire anymore, technically! Like, you are, but you're not.

Sylvi: [ruefully amused] Like, *yeah*, but she... she wasn't really, like, going out on her own when she had power...

Austin: You were like a cool vampire queen.

Sylvi: Yeah, I had people to do this stuff for me. [mock-pouty] And now I *don't*.

[Ali laughs]

So I have to learn, like, how to use a knife in more than just a dinner way.

Austin: OK, gotcha.

[More laughter]

Keith: "Can you teach me to use the knife in more than just the *dinner way*?"

[Further giggling]

Sylvi: That's exactly how she asked it, too.

Austin: That's the name of a book, actually: *Using the Knife in More Than Just the Dinner Way*. Ohhh. [laughs]

Ali: Yeah, I think that works.

Austin: This is a big knife town, as I recall. I felt they were doing some non-dinner knife tricks already! [Composes himself] Anyway. So, uh, choose another player character. You know they are hiding secrets from you; why do you suspect they are doing this?

Sylvi: I'm going to pick Art's character for this, I was thinking, if Art's cool with that?

Austin [cross]: Ooh, OK.

Art [cross]: Yeah!

Sylvi: And I think it's like -- Art, you can explain your character's deal, but I think that, like, Virtue is convinced that there is something, like, great and powerful that Art's character knows about, and they're keeping from her just because they want to hoard it for themselves. Even though that's what *she'd* do. [laughs]

Austin: Does she think that has to do with, um, immortality in that same way?

Sylvi: Yeah, she -- she thinks it at least has something she can use for that. She thinks it's like... I don't wanna get into details, I don't wanna accidentally give away anything about Art's character.

Austin: We'll go to Art next to, like, to keep this train rolling. Is there anything else, did I leave anything out here...? Oh. Trinkets, keepsakes.

Sylvi: Yes. So, uh... Trinkets. I have glasses with red-tinted smoked lenses, and "a spyglass built by your ex-lover" -- I added the "ex" part to the character sheet, uh, character creation thing, I think that's a little better. Should I also go into the one that I got from my calling as well?

Austin: Yeah, totally. Did we skip that one for you, Janine? I just realized we also -- did we skip that?

Janine: Yeah, we just did the ancestry trinkets, we didn't do the other ones.

Austin: Let's get this one from Sylvi, and then we'll do the other ones.

Sylvi: Mine is “a book of handwritten theories and observations.”

Austin: That you’ve -- These are handwritten by you, presumably.

Sylvi: Yes, by her.

Austin: OK, um... Janine, what is your final, uh, trinket thing?

Janine: So I have my -- Well, I have my witch trinket, I guess, and my -- [reconsidering] wait, that isn’t really -- that’s a resource.

Austin: Resource, yeah.

Janine: ...and my Adventure resource. My witch resource is “velvet and gold leather mid-calf boots.” There’s a specific pair from the Bata Shoe Museum collection that I modeled these on, they’re very nice. Um, and my Adventure one -- there’s one that’s suggested that says “Expensive kohl eyeliner and pocket-mirror,” and I was like “I’ll do you one better.” Um, so it’s a metal makeup clutch like the kind that -- some flappers had these in the 20s -- it’s like a little metal purse that has all of your evening makeup in it. There’s a little slot for the eyeliner, there’s like a powder area, there’s a lipstick area, it’s all like packed in there in a little purse form. That’s for me, thanks!

Austin: [chuckles] It is worth saying that it is important to separate the trinkets from the resources in terms of how *you* think about them, because resources are things you will be trading away for [pauses] healing, effectively, or other gains. They’re not a thing you -- You will be coming in and out of resources all game, almost. It’s like, there isn’t *money* in this system, but there is stuff that has value. For instance, your boots are a d6 Haven resource, which means that if you’re in the right place, you can trade them to get some, like, healing on whatever track you want -- whatever track is available. It’s worth saying, I guess, for listeners that there’s a bunch of different -- this game has Stress similar to something like Forged in the Dark games do, but it happens across different kind of vectors. So there’s like Blood stress, which is like physical stress, and Mind stress, which is like “stress” stress, and Echo, which is like ghost stuff, and Fortune, which is like, just getting into worse and worse situations, your luck is running out, and Supplies, which is how much stuff you’ve got on you. Um, so, yeah, that is the -- whereas trinkets are like things you can talk about having -- I probably won’t threaten your trinkets. I will threaten your resources. What is your resource, Sylvi?

Sylvi: Oh, uh, my resource is “a bag of interesting teeth,” which has the Desolate domain.

Austin: OK. Art. You’re up.

Art: Hey! All right. Um, my character is Duval.

Austin: OK. Do you have a longer name? Do you wanna do the whole name?

Art: [scornfully] Of *course* I have a longer name.

Austin: [mock-resigned] OK.

Art: This is Meyer Leopold Duval -- M. Leopold Duval in polite society -- probably just "Leo" to people who are very close to them -- but "Duval" is what gets used. I'm leaning into procedural, and in procedurals, everyone gets called by their last names.

Austin: True, true. Real quick, I just realized, since I don't have pronouns for your character -- pronouns for Janine's and Sylvi's characters. I think I *have* them but we haven't said them out loud.

Sylvi: I'm just she/her.

Austin: Just she/her. Janine?

Janine: In the hosted body it's she/her, outside of the hosted body -- if that ever comes up -- it's she/they.

Austin: OK, cool. Duval?

Art: Duval is he/him.

Austin: You are -- so you gave me name, give me class, calling, and ancestry.

Art: Class is Deep Apiarist, calling is --

Austin: [sarcastic] Classic basic stuff, fantasy -- you know --

Jack [cross]: Doesn't sound like that's a problem at all!

Art: Linguists are way ahead of us right now. Linguists, or just people who have big vocabularies -- Calling is Enlightened, and ancestry is human.

Austin: OK. Where do you want to start? Is "human" the right starting place for you? Is ancestry the right start -- like, how'd you get down here?

Art: Human's probably the good place to start, because coming *back* to human is gonna feel silly.

Austin: Yeah, that -- you know what? yeah. [laughs] So, I would say -- and I guess we talked about this off mic a little bit -- you're not from Sangfielle originally, right?

Art: No, but did live here for a bit in the past -- the recent past.

Austin: Right. In fact you lived in Blackwick in the recent past, right? Before it was Blackwick.

Art [cross]: Pre-Blackwick, yeah.

Austin [cross]: Probably, yeah. Eastern Folly.

Art: Eastern Folly, yeah. Came to -- come here about that mine. Maybe even went in the mine a couple times, but wasn't like, a *miner*.

Austin: You were -- what were you? You were like a...

Dre: Tell that to Monster.

Art: Like a paranormal researcher slash wannabe adventurer.

Austin: A little bit of a layabout -- a little bit of, like, a trust fund ghost hunter.

Art: Living off of, uh, an inheritance -- although I wanna paint, like, a bookstore in the town that he worked at for pocket money, to kinda get that feel of...

Austin: Yeah. [softly] Write this down.

Art: Unless someone's like "Something about my character necessitates that there is *no* bookstore in this town."

[Laughter]

Art: 'Cause this is a really light thing -- I don't *need* this, you know?

Austin: No, yeah, I gotcha. That's fun, I like that. So, here, I'll ask you this question, which is similar to one that already came up once: You came to Sangfielle with nothing but the clothes -- Nah, that's not true, you did *not* show up with the clothes on your back and a dream! You showed up with the money from some uncle [laughs] and a dream, looking for excitement and knowledge. What went wrong?

Art: Um, I guess you'd have to say what went wrong was he got *a little too much knowledge*?

Austin: Mm, one of those!

Art: --and spent all of his money, struck off on an expedition to, like, a legendary place just out in the nothing, you know?

Austin: In acreage. Just out there.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: I think you pitched me this place as: “It exists between mile-markers 12 and 13.” Actually what you said was “between 14 and 15” but then you said we couldn’t use that.

Art: Yeah, we can’t use those two numbers anymore. Those are retired.

Austin: [giggling] Yeah, we rose the Fourteen Fifteen jersey to the rafters!

[General laughter]

Art: Yeah, that’s in the rafters!

Keith: It’s just one more way we have to be bad at distances.

Austin: [cackling] It’s true! No wonder all of our numbers are off. But like -- if you or I went there now, one: we’d be freaked the fuck out, because Sangfielle isn’t real, except we’re in it now, uh-oh! Two: we’d be like “Wait a minute, this says mile-marker 12, then immediately afterward it says mile-marker 13, or whatever the numbers are...”

Art [cross]: You at home, put in your own number.

Austin [cross]: And the intervening number -- Put in your own number. Maybe it’s 37, who knows, who knows how big this place is! Um, and it’s not, it’s not there. Except you got there.

Art: Right. And once every 13 years, this place called the Sleeping City awakens. And it’s just like, one day it’s not there and the next day it is.

Austin [cross]: That’s awesome.

Art: And it’s like, if you were staring at it, exactly when it happened, you might see the land, like, come up, like it was folded in and now it’s up...

Austin [cross]: Yeah. I see.

Keith [cross]: Stretched out?

Austin: No, no, no. Like a pop-up, like if you do like a -- God, I’m doing it like an upside-down put my hands together and then like raise -- BROOOP! It does like a BROOOP! sound.

Art: Like a Jacob’s Ladder crossed with a pop-up book, is --

Austin: Don’t say stuff like that. Annie will make it. You know that’s how this works! Um. And this place is called the Sleeping City. And you got there.

Art: I got there when it wasn't awake.

Austin: How'd that go?

Art: Badly.

Keith: Which is -- right, you're not supposed to be able to do that, is what you're saying.

Art: You're *not* supposed to be able to do that, but it turns out that one of the things it does is it has defense mechanisms.

Dre: It got mad at you.

Art: Right, it got mad. And what happened is, uh, little bugs got inside of, uh, of his body there.

Austin: Mm.

Art: And they sort of like set up shop.

Keith: [giggling] What kind of shop? Was it the bookstore?

[Explosion of laughter]

Art: A teeny tiny bookstore!

Jack: How many bugs are we talking?

Austin: [gleeful] Oh, *buddy*.

Jack: Two, three?

Art: Um... a lot. There are moves that gesture towards *more bugs*, so...

Austin [cross]: It's a lot

Art [cross]: We might have to start at a lower number...

Austin: "Innumerable," I think? Eventually.

[60:00]

Art: Dozens, certainly.

Austin: Oh, dozens, *easy*. Easy dozens -- easy dozens!

Art: I don't know about *hundreds* --

Austin: We'll find out. Play to find out what happens! Um... [flabbergasted noises] It's worth saying this is a city -- and I think it's worth saying this stuff outright -- that represents something that happens in Sangfielle, which is: one of the ways in which things broke is that a potential future has kind of invaded the past in places. We see this through technologies like steam trains and automation in factories that have shown up in some places and been found and utilized. This is probably also why there are more types of gun in Sangfielle than outside the walls of Concentus -- though, I think that was one of the first things that these big kingdoms took back was like, "We got a gun, we're going to figure this out. We're going to figure out guns! This seems important to us." And, you know, similar kind of early industrial devices. And this is a city that feels like -- if the rest of this world feels 1880s-90s, we're talking about this feeling like Harlem in the Roaring 20s, right? With streets that have urban planning and tall apartment buildings, y'know, normal kind of modern conveniences. *And also* lots of bugs. Because the Deep Apiarist has as a touchstone kind of... structure, and order, and infrastructure. Bees build things, right?

Art: Yeah, they're nature's second most brilliant bug, right?

Keith: Ooh, second! Who's first?

Art: I would say ants? Ants probably [unintelligible]

[General murmur of agreement]

Keith: Although I guess they *dig*... Bees, like, *build*.

Dre: They really build. They really build the fuck out of those things.

Austin: The "things" in this case are Art's character's *body*. [laughter] Are -- hm? [uncertain noises] Are they. Depends on what --

Art: Well, I haven't taken the *big* body-building move yet.

[Laughter]

Austin: [angry-laughing] You can't say "body-building" in this context! *Your body is filled with bees*.

Dre: Haven't taken the bee creatine yet.

Keith: [very proud of himself] *Bee*-atine.

Art: Biceps full of bees!

Austin: Ohhhhhh...

Dre: We're going to the gun show, but the guns shoot bees.

Austin: *Great.*

Sylvi: [quietly] I love Metal Gear Solid 3...

Keith: Termites build! That's one that builds.

Austin: We almost went termites! And, I mean, the book is written as bees, but we're being more broad -- in fact, the 13-year thing, Art...

Keith: *Bee*-ing more broad.

Art: Ohh, this is gonna be a long season.

Austin: See? See why I said we have to get off bees, Art? This is what I'm saying.

Art: Well, Keith wasn't in any of those calls.

Austin: He was in the chat. Uh... 13 years, 17 years are important numbers for cicadas. Cicadas? [pronounces "cicadas" several different ways] Uh, and so that's the sort of cycle that the Sleeping City has. We went with 13 for a couple of reasons. One is we're doing a horror season, and we gotta have a 13 in here somewhere.

Art: Yeah, 13's a good creepy number.

Austin: It is.

Art: [spooky] Ooooooh.

[laughter]

Austin: And we're coming up on the 13th year. That's an important note, right? You've been out for 13 months...

Keith [cross]: A whole year of Fridays. Every day is Friday in the 13th year.

Austin: [quietly] I don't think that's how it goes. Maybe I misremembered.

Keith: This is a fantasy world! We can do whatever we want.

Austin: 'Strue.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: But the 13th year the Sleeping City awakens -- Uh oh. I don't know what that means, we haven't seen it yet, but we might this year. We'll see. Um, big picture, what's this class do, Art?

Art: Um, [choking back laughter] lot of bee stuff...

[entire group laughs]

Art: We had a new name for these bugs -- I'm sure by the time we do episode 1.1 we'll have...

Austin: We'll not be making so many bee jokes.

Art: Well, I can see through their eyes, I can hear their voices telling me multiple futures so I can pick the right one... You know, normal bee stuff!

[more background giggling]

Austin: Uh huh! And so, like, a lot of that is about being maybe not *immune*, but like, your core ability is about managing Mind stress really well. It just doesn't get to you, because you -- you just give it to the bees, you know!

Art: Yeah, they can think about it.

Austin: Yeah! Let them fuckin' think about it. I'm logging off!

[Strangled laughter]

Austin: There is a "Log Off" move, I don't know -- you didn't take that move, did you? The one where you just --

Art: I did, yeah.

Austin [cross]: Oh, you did?

Austin [cross]: You get Delve and "While you delve, the bees can steer your body" and you --

Keith: Once again, this is Adam Sandler's *Click*.

Austin: Oh my g -- I don't... [outraged] No one knows what that movie is! Keith!

[unhinged cackling from **Keith**]

Dre: Unfortunately, I do. But.

Austin: [incredulous] Does Adam Sandler go to sleep and then bees control his body in *Click*?!

Keith: Almost literally, yeah.

Austin: *Hate* it.

Art: I'm gonna have to say, Austin, that I do think that's true, yes.

Keith: It's like almost exactly what it is. I mean, it's not bees, but he has like an autopilot thing, and he misses his life, and he's sad because he thought he wanted to skip the boring parts but actually he skipped the parts that were important, and now he's old and sad.

Austin: OK, but "autopilot" is a -- it's a *metaphor*, right? He's dissociating, is the thing he's doing. Right?

Keith: No, he has a magic remote control that literally --

Austin [cross]: Oh my god.

Keith: -- fast-forwards through his life. That's what he clicks on, is the remote.

Austin [cross]: Ah, I see. I gotcha. I see, I see.

Keith [cross]: What was the other movie that came out that was called *Click* recently?

Art [cross]: It was a movie that came out in the first years of the DVR.

Austin: I don't fucking know. I don't know, Keith. You gotta watch this movie and get it out your system. We can't -- we can't devote ourselves to Adam Sandler's *Click* for the rest of our lives.

Keith: [dead serious] It's Adam Sandler's greatest role.

[three long seconds of dead air]

[**Art** breaks the silence with a loud laugh]

Austin: OK.

Janine [cross]: None of us know enough to argue. We can't take a stance --

Keith [cross]: I didn't see the jewelry movie, but...

Art: [snorts] Jewelry movie!

Austin: Uh-huh. OK. Um, tell me what your skills and domains are, Art!

Art: Uh, my skills are Delve, Discern, and Mend, and my domains are Cursed and Occult.

Austin: We got some cursed motherfuckers out here. I don't mind it.

Art: It checks out.

Austin: It does check out. What is your resource?

Art: A heartsbloom rose in a glass jar.

Keith: [pleasantly surprised] Oh!

Austin: Oh, you're fuckin -- you're fuckin Mr. Freeze out here. [laughs]

Art: I believe you're thinking of the Beast from Beauty and the Beast.

Austin [cross]: Could be. I guess Mr. Freeze kept a woman...

Sylvi [cross]: If you were Mr. Freeze it would be his wife in the jar.

[Laughter]

Austin [cross]: You're right. I was thinking of Beast...

Art [cross]: They used "fridging" literally in that movie.

[Laughter]

Austin: Ooh, brutal. I mean, that comes from comics anyway, it was worse when... [disgusted noise]

Art: Yeah, that literally comes from comics. But, I mean, Mr. Freeze is basically a fridge, right?

Austin: [running out of patience] Yeah. Uh-huh. Anyway.

Keith: With a temper.

Austin: Other class stuff, I think we're good... Let's talk -- Tell me what your ancestry trinkets are. Have you picked those, Art?

Art: Yeah, my ancestry trinkets are "sporadically updated travel diary" and "a pop-up arcana book about humanity's ability to ascend to godhood and how YOU can do it!"

Austin: Love it. Great. That's one of -- that's one of my favorite ones in the book. It's such like a good, um, "here's what this culture is like" from their version of it, and I don't mind that being -- I feel like that's obviously referencing more contemporary scam-artist shit, but it's not that dissimilar from con-artist swill from this period of time that we're referencing, right?

Art: Yeah, I mean, humans have been grifters for as long as they've been around, and the grifts are always kind of the same.

Austin: Mm-hm.

Keith: Although, we don't know that the author didn't write that book and then immediately ascend to godhood.

Austin: [quietly] that's true.

Keith: It's written by "John Slumbous," so...

[Loud, unanimous laughter]

Jack: [quietly] Holy shit.

Austin: You should fucking follow what it says in that book!

[Laughter continues]

Austin: "Step 1: Good candle management." Um...

Keith: [mockingly] "Just pick one no one's done yet! It's easy!"

Austin: Enlightenment is your calling, as you said. What impossible thing, quote-unquote, are you trying to achieve in the City Beneath, or in our case, in Sangfielle?

Art: I'm trying to really discover the real -- the meaning of the self. I'm trying to discover if -- if it's him controlling himself or if it's the bees controlling him.

Austin [cross]: There's a way in which this character --

Keith [cross]: It makes it easy when you've picked the move that lets the bees control you.
[laughter] Cause it's -- the answer's the bees!

Art: But do I choose when the bees control me, or do the bees --

Austin: Right, we're all -- "are we already all bees?" is the question, in some ways.

Keith [cross]: I'm just being honest.

Austin: I love that you've built a walking, uh, kind of metaphor for like centuries, millennia of debate around determinism. Thank you, Art, for feeding me specifically.

Art: [nonchalant] Uh-huh. Yeah.

Austin: What is your first step on the journey to figure out what the Self is?

Art: I think the first step is trying to -- and this is a -- I guess I should -- I'm not sure this is a *good way*. But the first step is trying to re-create experiences from before, to see if the, like, how it affects -- How does it affect me now, you know?

Austin: Do I feel the same way?

Art: Right, do I feel the same way? I don't know that that's really good data, but, um...

Austin: No. But it's a thing you might do in this situation.

Art: Yeah.

Austin: Yeah. Um... Choose another character (player character). They've been invaluable in your journey so far. What have you learned from them?

Art: I have picked Dre's character. And, um, a thing I've learned from them is that people tell stories about monsters... we had like an exact phrase for this... um, that hearing that there are horrible creatures everywhere and we dress them up as fairy tales, that, like, that's the thing that's a big part of that character, and hearing that, like, "Oh, maybe that means horrible creatures are, like, less common than I think, or that it's like -- maybe everything's a horrible creature."

Austin: Right, right, right, sure.

Art: And we're all just -- just dressing on top of that.

Austin: Mm-hm. Fun. [sarcastic] Fun and light. Good, simple stuff. Choose another player character. You know they're hiding secrets from you. Why do you suspect they're doing this?

Art: Uh, Es.

Austin: Mm. Why do you suspect --

Art: Es knows a lot about the nature of self --

Janine: Yeah. [laughs]

Art: --and it's weird that they won't just tell me.

[Keith laughs]

Janine: Yeah, I think... that's fair. This is probably a good opportunity to mention that, like, I don't think, based on how I think we've talked about the heretrixes so far, I don't think they go out of their way to be like, "Hey, by the way, I'm this."

Austin: Mm.

Janine: And, like, I think it's very likely that something will come up when we're having, um, consultancy talks about plurality that could affect this...

Austin: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Janine: But my initial feeling is that this is not a thing that Es presents, like, Es is fundamentally presenting herself as just a person. So it absolutely makes sense for someone to be like, "Hey, what's going on?"

Austin: This is like private knowledge for you, right? Um...

Art: And my Enlightenment trinket is, um, "heady incense sticks that burn dirty blue smoke." Significant because smoke is, of course, how you pacify bees.

Austin: Mm. Bees. Sure. Um, you referenced Dre. Dre, if you could talk about your character?

Dre: Yeah. My character is Chine --

Austin: C-H-I-N-E?

Dre: Yup, uh-huh. Um, he uses he/they pronouns. Chine is a Cleaver and their calling is Heartsong.

Austin: Um, let's just start again with human here. Are you from Sangfielle or are you -- did you move here?

Dre: Yes. I gotta pull up [mumbles] switch to the side where I've got my callings... [returns to normal volume] So, yeah, I think I was born, y'know, I took the question for human ancestry of "You were born down here." So I think that I'm probably originally from here, but have been away for a long time.

Austin: OK. Been away -- So you left Sangfielle.

Dre: Yeah.

Austin: Where did you go?

Dre: All over. Just doing Cleaver stuff.

Austin: Oh. So, you left -- you fully learned Cleaver shit and then left the Ringed City. You did not --

Dre [cross]: Oh, no, sorry, I'm getting things -- Yeah, no.

Austin [cross]: When I say *here*, I mean Sangfielle, the Heartland. Not Blackwick. But you were from Blackwick.

Dre [cross]: I have not left Sangfielle.

Austin: OK, so like Art's character, actually, like Duval, you were from Blackwick when it was probably still Eastern Folly.

Dre: Mm-hm.

Austin: Left it, and then returned. That's fun. You could have known each other back then. That gives some good color to, uh, to your previous interaction.

Dre: Yeah, and actually, Art and I had kinda talked about it, that there probably was overlap between Duval showing up out of, like, curiosity or interest, to things that I got called to take care of.

Austin: Sure. That's really fun. Yeah. Um, is there anything else on that question that you wanted to speak to?

Dre: Oh, yeah, sure. Because the other half of that question is "What image do you project to impress, surprise, or intimidate people?" and my answer was "Surprising people gets you shot. Impressing people makes you too available. Intimidation, though, that filters out the people who would waste your time. My polearm strapped to my back at all times is rarely clean."

Austin: Love it. Great. Fantastic. [laughs] Miserable.

[Dre laughs]

Austin: Very good. So you, again, like Duval, were just a human here, and you -- you had something *happen*, presumably, right?

Dre: Mm-hm.

Austin: What happened? How did we get from there to Cleaver? I guess here's a question: did Heartsong happen first or did Cleaver happen first? Or are they one and the same?

Dre: Cleaver happened first.

[75:00]

Austin: OK, so what happens with Cleaver? How do you get to Cleaver from human?

Dre: Um, so I'm still not specifically sure on how it happened for Chine. I think growing up he lived on a farm, and at a point where they were old enough, things were not going well. And I think in an attempt to try and find something that would make the -- the farm kind of turn around, that's how they got caught in that. We had talked about how a lot of cleavers are people who are just overly curious or reckless and don't know when to stop, and it's like... You fall down the rabbit hole where you don't realize until you're too far down to get out.

Austin: Yeah...

Dre: And I think that was the rabbit hole for them.

Austin: Going out to figure out "Hey, how do I fix this situation?" I mean, listen, you're from Eastern Folly, you're from this cursed place, right? We know that bad shit happens -- we know that trolls come out and plant teeth, we know that there are these big fruit that you have to count on, we know that sometimes fire emerges from the mine -- like, there's all sorts of cursed shit nearby that...

Dre: Yeah! Maybe I tried to plant a tooth in Ma & Pa's fields, and it didn't go great.

[someone groans]

Austin: It spoiled the field. Yeah, I love that. Listen, it works out near the lake shore, why wouldn't it work here?

Dre [cross]: ...or created some weird hybrid creature that just ate the whole field, I don't know.

Austin: Right, sure, sure. I love that, that's good. We've never seen the *regular* thing that's supposed to come out of one of those things, so we don't know what happens if you plant it in with tomatoes, either. Um, so then you become a cleaver. What is the high-level on a cleaver?

Dre: Yeah, so, a Cleaver is, I think, of all the classes, the one that is the most comfortable and the most at home with, you know, what the book calls the Heart, because their inherent domain is Cursed. So kind of what we've talked about is, a Cleaver is a person who is drawn to and almost feels most at home in the cursed and, like, most messed-up places of Sangfielle.

Austin: Right. There's like, a little bit of druid here... it's not, like, at one with the Heart, so to speak, but it is a non-antagonistic... non-openly antagonistic relationship. Though, also, you are one of the most adept at killing things touched by the strangeness here. Um, so that's an interesting thing. We've talked about your character as being like a defense mechanism for Sangfielle... or I guess here we should say, again, you're almost the other side of the coin. If Art's -- if Duval is, you know, not *sided* with but has been touched by the structure, that side of it -- you know, steam trains and all of that stuff, big city -- you've been touched by this other thing. Kind of "wounds of the past," sort of like "natural world," the kind of thing you can't pin down to logic -- you've seen behind the curtain and it's curtain forever. It's an infinite, endless hallway of doors and possibilities versus the kind of logical, "Things are either or they are not," everything is at a right angle, everything is efficient and it works -- and maybe it works for people, but it works. Yours is like "You can't guarantee that something works. It might break tomorrow. It might hurt someone tomorrow and help someone today, who could say?" And that's part of the kind of weirdness at the -- throughout Sangfielle that you are tied to. And that, again, comes through all of your moves. You have all sorts of shit. I think the go-to starter move that's fun is Red Feast, which is like, "When you eat something," including, like -- if you have a resource and that resource is "Fine Silks," and it has the Haven tag, and you eat it, you get the Haven tag. If you eat, you know, a side of beef from a wild cow, you get the Wild tag or whatever, the Wild domain. You get stuff from the things you eat, even when they're not "food" things [laughs], as long as they're Resource-class ...things. So that's a picture of... you.

[Dre laughs]

Austin: You've got some shapeshift-y stuff -- we'll get there when we get there. Um, what is your starting resource?

Dre: [deadpan] My starting resource is a heart that still twitches.

Austin: Love it. Great. Uh, what are your starting skills and domains?

Dre: All right. My starting skills are Endure, Hunt, and Kill, and my starting domains are Cursed and Warren.

Austin: Mm. And then we have some trinkets. What are your trinkets?

Dre: Yes. My trinkets are “a book of macabre fairy tales that I’ve jammed extra pages into with my own drafted stories--”

Austin [cross]: And this is like a Cleaver book, right? What Art was gesturing at before?

Dre [cross]: Yes, well, I think -- I think it is a book that is read by everyone...

Austin: I see.

Dre: ...but only Cleavers know that Cleavers write them.

Austin: Oh, that’s fun.

Dre: The pitch I gave to you was that like, at some point a long time ago Cleavers got sick of showing up when people were like, “I saw this thing, it had all the legs, and the teeth, and I don’t know...”

Austin: Right. And now they’ve written --

Dre [cross]: Fairy tale books!

Austin [cross]: --they’ve written fairy tale books, and now they go, “It’s a kith-groom, visible only to those who loved the person it spawned from, and it will not stop until it’s killed every one of them! I read that fairy tale.” Right?

Dre: And, y’know, some of ‘em are nice fairy tales. Some are fairy tales about the seemingly scary bog monster that is actually fine and won’t eat children as long as they carry a persimmon in their pocket whenever they walk by.

Austin: They should do that, probably.

Dre: Mm-hm.

Austin: Don’t run out of those. Um, all right, what else?

Dre: My second trinket is a locket I wear around my neck whose key went missing long ago. If I take it off when I sleep, I wake up with it back on.

Austin: Cool! Good! We should figure out what’s in there. At some point.

Dre: Eh. Ehhhh.

Austin: Finally, you do have a trinket tied to your calling, which is Heartsong. So what is that trinket?

Dre: It is “an ink-blotted dream journal with attempts to transcribe the language I see in my sleep.”

Austin: We should talk about -- You're a Heartsong. “When you sleep, you dream of the Heart. You are half-mad with knowledge, mad enough to go ever deeper into the undercity, looking for revelations.” You'll note that we did not know it said “mad” until we read it from the book. You probably won't hear much of it this season -- but, you know, it is pulling from cosmic horror, it is pulling from stories that play in that space, so, when we read abilities and stuff, it might come up, as a heads up. Heartsong has an ability that basically protects you from “ghost stress,” a little bit. It gives you a permanent +1 Echo protection, and when you get stressed from something else, you can be like “Nah, that's ghost stress. This is just ghost stress.”

[Laughter]

Austin: When you take stress to anything other than Echo, allocate it to Echo. Which I like to imagine as you being, you, someone shoots at you, and you're like “Those are ghost bullets. That's from a ghost, actually.”

[laughter and crosstalk]

Keith: That's blood -- no, there's blood coming out of you!

Dre: That's ghost blood.

Austin: “Yeah, the ghost fucking opening up! It's scary! But it's not that scary, I'm better with ghost stuff.” Um, all right, so. You have some questions. “Which three images, symbols, people, or creatures do you see repeatedly when you dream?”

Dre: A language I can never read and cannot recreate when I wake up.

Austin: Annoying.

Dre: An impossibly beautiful landscape, and the roaring sound of a river that crashes against my mind until I wake up in a start.

Austin: Buddy. That's a rough one.

Dre: You know. You get used to it.

Austin: Yeah. What signs do you look for to recognize where, uh, this thing is strongest -- the Heart, so to speak, is strongest -- We have a name for it, but I think we're saving it until your character learns the name.

Dre: Yeah.

Austin: I guess we can say it -- do we wanna say it here, or do we want to sit on it? We'll sit on it.

Dre: I think it's up to you, honestly. I'm fine either way.

Austin: [hems and haws] Let's just say it because that way we have it out. We can -- we know enough to play with your character not having this name yet. It's "the Course," C-O-U-R-S-E, thanks to Keith for -- Dre and I brainstormed this for hours and then we raised it in the groupchat and people had good suggestions, and Keith hit "Course," because it's like the course of a river but it's also like a lesson but it's also like a meal -- a course, like a meal you eat. It's something that you make but it's also something that is already made. Something that's on a course...

Keith: Something that moves...

Austin: Yeah. And so that is like the version of, yknow -- for me, it's like if the structure that Art's character and Jack's character have some connection to is raw logic and rationality, kind of modernist post-enlightenment move towards quote-unquote "rationality," this is like... I guess privately I talked about the Lacanian Real, this is the, like, [portentous] "The truth is there and it's overwhelming. It does not make sense. We make sense on top of it." Um, the world is not rational. We tell stories to position ourselves and create ourselves *against* or *along with* or *through* the world. Um, that is -- that is the thing that creates weird monsters here, partially. How do you recognize where the Course is strongest?

Dre: I have written here "A tension I had forgotten is released. Time moves slower and the fur on my back flattens against me like a warm blanket."

Austin: Hey, the *fur* on your back?

Dre: [innocently] Uh-huh.

Austin: You said "human."

Dre: Yeah, but --

Austin: I'm saying this like I don't know where this is going.

Dre: One of the other questions is, "Your connection to the Course has touched you in some way. How does that manifest?"

Austin: Mm!

Dre: Since becoming a Cleaver, my body has become less human and more animal.

Keith [cross]: You're fuzzy now.

Dre: My fingernails, even freshly trimmed, quickly grow back into sharp talons. Patches of fur have taken root across my back and down my legs, and the pupils of my eyes have expanded, taking up nearly all of the white.

Austin: Love it.

Dre: So, y'know, normal cool guy stuff.

Austin: [chuckles] Normal cool guy stuff! Um, all right, your final Calling question is "You recently witnessed an unearthly sight with another player. Who was it, how did it happen, and how did they react?"

Dre: Yeah, so this is with Duvall, and this is a story of one of those times when we crossed paths. Um, so I was drawn to investigate a town that was rumored to have a house that, once entered, people could not leave. When I arrived, I found that Duvall had also arrived, seeking to satiate his curiosity. In the night while we slept, someone set fire to the house, and in the embers we found a trap door. Inside was a basement where all of the townsfolk who had entered the house were peacefully sleeping. In the light of the moon I could see something moving in the darkness. I lowered myself down for a closer look, but one of the rungs on the ladder snapped, awakening the sleeping townsfolk. As soon as they awoke, a chorus of clattering could be heard as whatever was moving in the darkness fell to the floor. After evacuating the townspeople (who all proved to be fine), I returned to the basement with a torch and found slivers of wood, chunks of metal, and spools of ribbon strewn across the ground. Something was being created down here, but we would never know what. Duvall was uninterested and left town before I did. I figured he would want to tinker with these childrens' toys for days on end, but I guess we all grow up eventually.

Austin: [chuckles] Love it. Fantastic. [sarcastically] Yeah, yeah, I'm sure we'll never hear about *that* thing again.

Dre: It's probably fine.

Austin: It's probably fine. Obviously Art's OK with it -- you didn't just write all of that one-sided

[**Dre**: Yes, yes.] without any of Art's inclusion, obviously.

[**Art** laughs]

Dre: "Hey, can I shit-talk your character?"

[**Sylvi** laughs]

Art: [mock-outraged] "First I'm hearing any of this!"

Austin: [laughs] "I would have loved to play with those toys!" All right. I mentioned Jack's character, but I don't know if someone else wants to go -- Jack, are you ready to go?

Jack: Yeah, I could be ready to go.

Austin: OK. Talk to me about your character. Name, class, calling, ancestry.

Jack: So, my character's name is Pickman, P-I-C-K-M-A-N. They --

Austin: One name, what's that called again? Mononym.

Jack: A mononym, yeah. I feel like, historically, good people on this show have had mononyms. Mine's Pickman. My class is Shapeknight, my calling is Heartsong (like Dre's character), and my ancestry is -- here I've written "Forsaken Child of the Shape." Um, we can sort of get to that, I think.

[Laughter]

Austin: Yeah. Well, no, normally I start at the ancestry, because -- what? Are you -- are you -- I should say that, like, ancestry is like, "Hey, before all this popped off, what were you doing?" You weren't that *then*, right?

Jack: Well, I was that -- like 50 -- So, there's this thing called the Shape, which is a cursed railway that came spilling out of Sangfielle 200 years ago -- 180 years ago?

Austin: Yup. 200 years ago.

Jack: And it quickly established itself --

Austin [cross]: Which, fucking imagine it, you've never seen a train before --

Jack [cross]: Oh, yeah, no one has ever seen a train before, not even in the Cantons. This is the first time you've seen one.

Austin: And you hear -- you *hear* the whistle and the roar of it coming towards at town -- "Hey, what the fuck is that?" [laughs]

Jack: Everybody gets up and runs out of the cinema when they see the train coming towards them, and they were right! Yeah, the -- the Shape just spills out and establishes lines, it makes tracks. And I think at around that time, you know, much later, because I'm not a hundred years old [Austin: Mm-hm] Pickman, uh, was working as a sort of teen bootlegger for one of the northern cantons called the Pale Magistratum, which is where goat-people come from. Pickman

is a goat person. They are humanoid, they have the head of a goat like, um -- the touchstone I keep going for is, like, Baphomet or demons or really cool metal covers. I'm talking --

Austin: Classic shit.

Jack: There's like a classic image of Baphomet the demon where he, uh, he has sort of a shaggy beard --

Austin [cross]: One hand up, et cetera. I'm sure those signals mean something.

Jack [cross]: Pickman does not have wings.

[90:00]

Austin: No wings. Horns?

Jack: Well, yeah, absolutely. And I've got an image of a goat here, let me open this up...

Austin: I love you, Friends at the Table.

Jack: So here's the thing. This is [laughs]... what I'm about to show you is a sheep, but we're -- we're making a magical show, so we get to decide!

[Laughter]

Dre: It's up to us what counts as a goat.

Jack: Yeah, totally. So, what we're looking at here is a black goat [**Keith:** Wow!] [**Austin:** Love it.] although I guess it's a sheep -- although I think Pickman is kind of gray, Pickman's fur is gray in color... This goat has *four* horns, two huge spike horns that come out of their forehead and then two side horns that sort of come from where their ears are and curve downwards. I think where you can find this is by looking for a Hebridean six-horned sheep, which is great because it's wrong on several counts.

[Laughter]

Jack: A: Pickman is a goat.

[Laughter]

Jack: B: I can only see four horns here, so -- there are some bonus horns...

Keith: Two retractable horns.

Jack: Two secret retractable horns, but yeah, basically. Austin and I kept going --

Austin: Jack, can I tell you that this is -- we now -- you know how directors sometimes work with actors, and they're like "I love to work with this actor, it's like my favorite thing?" This is the second season in a row we've worked with this sheep.

Jack: [laughing] Is it really? When has this sheep -- *this sheep*?

Austin: Morningbride is this sheep.

[Laughter]

Dre: That's really funny.

Austin: Recast Morningbride from Partizan as--

Jack: As Pickman!

ART: [as imaginary director] "It's just a pleasure to work with you, sheep."

[Laughter]

Jack: We were going backwards and forwards on, y'know, how much of Pickman is goat
[**Austin:** Yeah.] and how much is human, and when we last talked it was, "Pickman has a goat head and a human body, human legs and everything..." *but* I've changed my mind.

Austin: OK.

Jack: Pickman has those kind of weird double-kneed legs that fauns do or satyrs do -- let me put another picture in here. This is a great picture of Doug Jones, the actor who plays the Faun in Guillermo Del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*...

Austin: A reference point for the season, for sure.

Jack: And this is an amazing photo of him in costume, showing how his legs work.

Austin: Oh, love it.

Jack: This is a photo of Doug Jones wearing a -- an incredible piece of prosthetic costume and also green screened legs, where his actual legs are.

Austin: [fascinated] Oh, I didn't see the green screened legs! I see it now.

Jack: Isn't that clever?

Austin: I was like, “Oh, yeah, his legs just bend like that now. Cool.” I didn’t do the work of looking for the green screen... leg.

Jack [cross]: Pickman has fantastic green screen legs.

Keith [cross]: Man, it had to hurt when they made him do that.

Austin: That’s commitment.

Jack: ...To power his acting, yeah.

Austin: Yes, Janine notes “digitigrade.” [tries to pronounce “digitigrade” several different ways] Is that how you pronounce that?

Keith: I think -- I think it’s shorter.

Austin: Digi-TIE-grade?

Keith: I think it’s like “digigrade” *[sic]*.

Austin: Digit-grade?

Keith: I think that that second “i” is, like, silent.

Austin: That’s... not true.

Keith: I think so.

Janine: I mean, it -- it comes from the fact that those legs are actually not -- it’s not that they have a knee that goes backwards, it’s just that they’re walking on their toes.

Dre: Right. Ankles.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: So, like, if you were walking on your toes, your legs would kinda look like that too.

Jack: Oh, that’s really interesting.

Janine: Kinda.

Austin: It is “digitigrade.” The “i” is pronounced. [**Keith:** Oh, OK.] That’s -- I get how you get there. It’s a weird word. Anyway -- you got those. You got those goin’ on.

Sylvi [cross]: All the furries just screaming at their phones... Shoutout.

Austin: They have wisdom! They're just trying to share their wisdom with us.

Jack: Yeah. Uh, up north is a snowy, rocky canton run by a group of goat-people called the Pale Magistratum. They are -- as I understand it, Austin -- very focused on a kind of holy law?

Austin: Uh, yeah. It's a pretty barren place, all said, and so they very quickly got into, like, "All right, nobody eat too much, nobody burn too much fuel. We're really doing it tough up here." And the way they decided to, like, make that -- make that REALLY happen was by instituting a hierarchy in which the most powerful people you'll ever meet in your life, for most people, are these magistrates. Who are like -- god, what was the pitch I made to you? Like, U.S. Marshals mixed with, like... wizards, basically, right?

Dre: Sorry, are we talking about Jedi? I spaced out for a second.

Austin: Yeah, *basically*. They're Jedi with guns, basically. Right?

Jack: And some sort of silver symbol on their chests, much like the Marshal rolls into town wearing, like, a sheriff's badge or something. Right?

Austin: Right, yeah. The image that I gave -- the image that I sent you was an image that I think you can find on the internet if you search for "U. S. Marshals." It's a picture of, like, Doc Holliday's crew from -- from whenever this picture is from. It's the Earps and Doc Holliday. I'll just copy this picture and put it in our chat right now. I said "This, but goats." [laughs] And they have, you know, guns and stuff blessed by a -- their goddess, and, um, they're not -- they're not great. But, you know. Not every goat person is one of these fucking cops.

Jack: Well, Pickman is definitely not -- and I can tell you who absolutely also was not -- Pickman's father. Er, he raised her alone, he was a single dad, and, uh, the Pickman family name was ruined. The book says "due to a cataclysmic social faux pas," but this is not a social faux pas. This is that Pickman's dad was a bootlegger, was a smuggler between the nascent Sangfielle and the, um, the Magistratum.

Austin: Pale Magistratum, yeah.

Jack: And the Magistratum was having *absolutely* none of this. Like, I think so much none of it that they imprisoned him and killed him. I think -- Just like --

Austin: That puts you in a tough place, Pickman.

Austin: Yeah, and so, as a teen, as someone who is maybe nine, between nine and fifteen, Pickman just sort of picked up where her dad left off, really. Consequences happen to adults. I am spry, I'm picking up where my old dad left off, and I'm gonna smuggle booze into the Pale

Magistratum, or I'm gonna smuggle people who need to escape or people who want to escape into Sangfielle, and I'm rolling with a crew... And then one day, these Shape trains, one of these Shape trains starts heading up north, starts making tracks up north, and Pickman thinks, "Wouldn't it be great to rob a Shape train! There's bound to be some really good stuff on there." But the problem with that is that the trains are alive. They are living entities. [Austin: Yeah.] And they do not take kindly to being robbed.

Keith: Oh, no, did you get bees too?

Jack: I didn't get bees, I got trapped on a train for between fifteen and twenty years.

Keith: [deadpan] Oh no.

Austin: [excited] Uh huh!

Jack: And it wouldn't let me off the train. The train just -- It would stop at a station... There were other people who were trapped on this train, and they kind of raised Pickman as a -- as a weird sort of, um "Nobody chose this, and sometimes..."

Austin: Right! "But here we fuckin' are, and you gotta eat, kid..."

Jack: Yeah.

Austin: "Watch your mouth around adults, stop cursing so much" et cetera.

Jack: And then, like, one of them just dies of old age. And maybe the train lets us stop to bury the body, or just throw the body out.

Austin: Probably just throw the body out. It probably doesn't let you off the train, right?

Jack: No. Otherwise we'd run. Or maybe someone tried running once, and we saw what a Shape train does when someone tries to escape it, so we didn't run. It's fucking grim. And it's -- it's a *long time*. It is being stuck on a moving vehicle for -- the number I keep coming back to is fifteen years. So the image that Pickman just has of Shape trains is "They don't stop unless they choose, and nothing can get on or off them unless they decide to let you."

Austin: Or -- unless someone intervenes.

Jack: Well, so there was an heiress on this train, some Aldomina heiress, some rich woman who had decided to have a taste of Sangfielle --

Austin: Which now we know was a devil. When we first came up with the story this was a human, now that we know it's, like, some rich devil heiress, it's a lot more color to this story.

Jack: Yeah, exactly!

Austin: The color is red, by the way.

[Sylvi laughs]

Jack: Yes. Nobody would send people to rescue a kid -- a bootlegger's kid -- from a train, but there might be a lot of money coming from Aldomina to rescue an heiress. So, out come this nascent organization who we're calling Shapeknights. Who are -- I think the easiest way to say it is "cowboys for trains?" They are, like -- what if instead of the cowboy riding alongside the train on his horse, he was corralling the train? Or he was trying to understand the train, or was trying to --

Austin: Or you could also do, like, "knights but the dragons are trains, right?"

Jack: Yup, absolutely.

Austin: Because the armor is such a thing for these knights.

Jack: Although they're called "knights" mostly sarcastically, because they wear armor. People are just like, "Wow, that thing looks like a knight!"

Austin: [chuckles] Like from the books.

Jack: So, out come the Shapeknights, loosely affiliated mercenaries, bound together mostly by their expertise rather than any kind of, um...

Austin: There's no -- there's no "King Shapeknight" out there.

Jack [cross]: No. Loose, loose hierarchies.

Austin [cross]: But there are -- there are Shapeknight facilities and crews.

Jack [cross]: There are crews. They're very regional.

Austin: Like train crews, like, uh... you gave me a bunch of very good names for them and I don't remember any of them. They were jokes, but...

Jack: I think we were just ad-libbing them, right?

Austin: Maybe you were. They're great, though, it's just like, you know, "The Southern Gator Boys" or whatever.

Jack: Yeah, and it's just like, four men on horseback who claim to have killed a train in the south, but they haven't. Anyway, the Shapeknights show up. They don't kill this train, because it's really hard to kill a Shape train. They bounce everybody from the train. Everybody gets off. And Pickman, I think, probably part traumatized and part in awe of these figures who have ended fifteen years of her -- of her imprisonment, promptly signs up with the Shapeknights and trains to become this kind of, this kind of entity.

Austin: Mechanically speaking...

Jack: Sort of a tank?

Austin: Yeah, a tank, sort of. You have this armor that's really powerful that lets you do some pretty wild stuff. You're the only character who has the Technology domain to start. Um, I believe, or at least before taking abilities. Maybe someone else took something that gave them Technology, but you started with it, just like a default thing. Yeah, what are your -- what are your -- What's the overview, I guess? "Is tough," right? "Is tough, knows how to go on delves," is sort of what I think is the big one.

Jack: Yeah. Wears huge armor that was -- that comes from an interesting place that we can get to another time. It's basically made of train.

Austin: They killed one, at least.

Jack: But I think as far as we know, the Shapeknights have only ever killed one train, and it was a *fucking trial*. It took them years to plan and execute how to even do this. You know, like, when our parents were children, we thought that our sun was the only one that had a solar system around it, or something. There's this great fact about, like, we were *really* wrong about how many planets there were in the solar system [*sic*], and then suddenly scientists were like, "Oh, fuck. There's not just one. There's like billions." And I love the idea that killing the Shape train is this paradigm shift, where the Shapeknights are like, "We didn't even think we could kill one, and now we've actually done it," and this sort of changes the map.

Austin: A year spent being like, "...Is it gonna get up?"

[Laughter]

Jack: Yeah, exactly. They, like -- they had to build earthworks and buildings to prep for killing this thing. It was like a group effort.

Keith: So, the reason you'd want to kill one is because it's got -- it's got people locked inside.

Jack: Not always. You know, who fucking knows what Shape trains are doing? [**Austin:** Yeah.] Austin and I were like, "What do trains want?" And the closest we got was "They like carrying

things from place to place. They like carrying people. They like carrying goods. They like moving.” Um. Shape trains are a whole fucking thing. Basically...

Austin: We’ll get into it when we get into it.

Keith: So, the reason you’d want to kill one is just ‘cause it’s like, “Well, fuck this big thing! Fuck you, train!”

Austin [cross]: Sometimes they drive through a community and kill hundreds of people.

Keith: OK — that’s one. That’s a good reason.

Austin: Sometimes you want to kill one because it’s -- all right, they’ve killed *one*, but sometimes you want to get on one and steal what’s in it, because it is the only place in the world that has a certain piece of technology on it that you could then flip for a lot of money.

Keith: Got it. Right.

Austin: Some of them have libraries in there. What’s in those libraries? [**Keith:** lunno.] What if there’s a book in that library that doesn’t exist outside of that -- that moving library, you know? Um. So. Yeah. Why do people want to kill dragons?

Keith: Bad discoverability.

[Laughter]

Austin: Yeah, that’s not -- no. Great curation.

[Laughter]

Austin [cross]: No algorithms here.

Keith [cross]: Yeah, it is a highly curated experience, at the expense of discoverability.

Austin: Yeah, exactly. There’s lots of reasons, but I think the big ones are: they -- they are -- at once, they disrupt the order that people have built here, but they do it by imposing their own order around it. And I guess it’s worth saying that, like -- some people do take these trains from place to place.

Jack: Part of why you’d hire a Shapeknight.

Austin: Right, totally, it’s like “Hey, you’re gonna guarantee my ability to get *off* this train at a certain point by slowing it down, if it decides not to listen to me at this point, or not to let me off at the stop I wanna get off at.” I would say that, like -- this is a big difference from the book. In

the book this is called the Vermissian Knight, and in the book, it's a subway system that doesn't have any trains running on it anymore. It's just an empty, tunnelous system. "Tunnelous" is a word.

Art [cross] : It's reversed. We flipped it.

Austin: We flipped it. We flipped it on its head. There's *lots* of trains, and they're building on themselves still, and it's bringing structure and shape and order to the world -- but in a way that does not necessarily account for the needs of regular people or local communities. What could this be a metaphor for? Who could say. [laughter] So, yeah. That's the Shapeknight. Now we know why your ancestry was "forsaken child of the Shape." I feel like we got our answers to any question I could come up with here. What are your trinkets, before we go forward?

Jack: OK! So, my trinkets are "a set of charcoals and a notebook for drawing -- for drawing in." Um... [sighs] I've written here, "The Shape has cast a symbol onto my horns."

Austin: [laughs] OK!

Jack: This comes from somewhere in the book.

Austin: I believe you. I believe it's from the --

Jack: Oh, it's from my Calling!

Austin: Yeah, there you go. "Your connection to the Heart has touched you in some way. How does that manifest?"

Jack [cross]: Mhm. "Cast a shape onto my horns" -- doesn't appear all the time, but in certain light conditions, almost like when dust gets caught in a shaft of light and you realize that the shaft of light was there?

Austin [cross]: And the answer is -- There we go. Great.

Jack: [giggles] Keith, exactly.

[Keith laughs]

Jack: [suppressing laughter] I was trying to work out -- Keith has posted a picture of some people trying to brick a train up in Thomas the Tank Engine...

[General laughter]

Austin: Perfect.

Jack: For a long time I was trying to work out, “How do you stop a Shape train that’s moving?” and the answer is kind of this. No, it’s just -- there is a symbol that hangs in the air above Pickman’s horns, seen from a certain light.

Austin: Oh! It’s not -- it’s not carved into your horns.

Jack: No.

Austin: It’s like, sometimes when I’m looking at you there is some sort of weird train icon hovering between -- ?

Jack: It’s not necessarily a train icon. I think it’s the basic shape, which we haven’t nailed down yet, and the shape has lots of little sub-lines that come off it, but it is -- **[Austin: Right.]** It’s a symbol, and that appears sort of above Pickman’s horns. [deep breath] The third trinket is sort of dependent on whether you’ll let me have a horse, which I don’t think you will. I think that’s a resource.

Austin: [skeptically] That’s not a trinket. If you had a horse, and you told me, “I lost my trinket,” I would be like --

Keith [cross]: Let’s say “keepsake.”

Austin: A keepsake cannot be a horse. A horse is a person.

Keith [cross]: Sorry, Jack, I tried.

Austin [cross]: A horse is a creature.

Janine [cross]: What if it’s a horse small enough to put in your pocket?

Jack [cross]: That’s kind of my other option here

Keith [cross]: There is a creature on the list. Are you saying that --

Austin [cross]: What is it? What’s the creature?

Keith [cross]: Are you saying that a “small, colorful fish...”

Janine [cross]: Pocket mouse. There’s one that lets you have a mouse...

Austin: [decisively] A pocket mouse is Not A Horse. Yeah, cause these are keepsakes, they’re not supposed to be valuable in utility.

Jack [cross]: Look, you miss 100% of the shots you don't take. I knew you wouldn't let me have a horse --

Keith [cross] Sorry, Jack, I tried my best.

Jack: Thank you, Keith, I really appreciate it. So I have the set of charcoals and a notebook, I have the horrifying shape hanging above my horns, and I have a harmonica, [**Austin**: Love it.] which has "Summer Court" carved into it. Pickman doesn't know what this is. They bought it -- they think it has something to do with faeries, and they are mistrustful of it as a result, but they like having a harmonica.

Austin: Don't play it.

Keith [cross]: Aw, I'll play it. We'll see.

Jack [cross]: No, they'll play it -- she'll play it! She's just like --

Austin [cross]: OK, then, good! You said that you -- you said that she found it -- She was distrustful of it.

Jack: I'm distrustful of my clarinet. That thing's fucking capricious.

[General laughter]

Austin: Fair enough!

Keith: [jokingly] What a spiteful thing!

Jack: I'm *looking* at it...

Austin: All right, so it's got some Heartsong questions here. "Which three images, people, or creatures do you repeatedly see when you dream?"

Jack: Let's go! Image 1: Hundreds of people carrying a huge bag on their shoulders and tipping it into a pit. I'm talking a pit the size of a field. I'm talking a hundred people carrying an immense, heavy sack.

Austin: Single bag.

Jack: Over their shoulders. Like it's crowd surfing, almost. And, uh, parading it to the edge of a pit, and --

Austin: Tossing it in.

Jack: Tipping it in.

Austin: Sure. Tipping, not tossing.

Jack: Number 2: A tallow candle the size of a tower, burning.

Keith: Tower candle!

Austin: OK.

Keith: Make sure to put it out at the right time!

Jack: Yeah. Uh, I have one here that I don't know if you'll like, Austin.

Austin: Mmhm?

Jack: We can keep this one or not.

Austin: [curious] Just pitch it!

Jack: Someone turning a television on.

Austin: No, I love it. Great. Fantastic.

Jack: Like a classic --

Austin: What's on the television?

Jack: Vacuum. Static. But Pickman doesn't know what that is. No one's ever seen a fuckin' television before.

Austin: Sure.

Jack: Pickman doesn't know how to interpret this. They're like: "Someone interacts with a box. It makes fizzing --"

Austin: Are you sure it's static? Because if you have this dream all the time, isn't it fun if it's a different thing?

Jack: Yeah, I mean, I wrote down a bunch of horrible things to see in dreams, so it could just be --

Austin: OK!

Jack: So I turn the TV -- it's someone turning a television on. On the television is a very old woman eating beeswax from a knife.

Austin: Love it. Great. And who knows what it'll be next time you get the TV dream! [chuckles]

Jack: Pickman's just like, she's like, "I do not know what that is. It's frightening every time."

Austin: Uh huh! Um, what signs do you look for to recognize where the Shape is strongest?

Jack: [hesitant] They're artificial. They're made of metal, or they're made of -- like, imagine if you were on a really well-made film set. You know, you sometimes see those film sets that are like, "This is a forest built inside a warehouse, and all the trees are fiberglass and everything, but they look really real." Sometimes a tree -- sometimes Pickman will just break away the bark and the inside will be metal. Or they will, um, they'll notice that an animal's foot is dragging in the dirt, and that is because it is made of stone, or because it's made of --

Austin: Or, like, imagine this could also be like, "Hey, there's a bark pattern that repeats if you look at the tree from a wide enough angle, even."

Jack: And if I swung an axe at it it would be hollow. It's this idea that, like, I don't know whether this stuff was put here or whether something is replacing it, but the stuff is not real.

Austin: And the answer could be -- and the other thing is, like, you could take a knife, jab it underneath the bark and pull it up and find a metal interior... or you could wind up your axe and cut through it as if it were wood, moments after, to find a hollow interior. That is how fucked up Sangfielle is.

Jack [cross]: That is really upsetting.

Austin: It can break like that. Especially in cursed places, high-tier places where, where the effect is really high. Thankfully, Blackwick is not as bad as that, you know?

Jack: You see five people go into a church. And she goes in and it's just a facade. There's nothing on the other side of the church door. There was -- you know, there was no church there.

Austin: Right. Great. Um, then your group one: "You recently witnessed an unearthly sight with another player character. Who was it? What happened? How did they react?"

Jack: I think I was, uh, I think Es and I have arrived on the train together to, uh, to Blackwick County. [Austin: Mm.] If that's still something you're up for, Janine?

Janine: Mm-hm!

Jack: And I think we saw something awful from the train as it was going by. Um, Janine described it as us being in the dining car and looking out of the window to see “an inside-out ghost show,” which -- I don’t know what that means but

[General laughter]

Jack: Immediately evocative of [chortles] something fucking awful! Um, I think it is -- I think it was -- Oh, we were on a bridge over a lake. And, uh, as we were crossing the lake, you know, the train tracks ran sort of *Spirited Away* style on a low bridge over the lake, and as we were crossing the lake, it just instantly drained. And there was a circle of people at the bottom of the water looking up at the train [Ali makes an unsettled noise] and just sort of waving at us. Do I get to say how Es reacts to this, or is this up to Janine?

Austin: You get to, but -- but Janine can veto it. You know, that’s -- that’s what seems to have happened in the past for this. Or you can just say, “Janine, how do you react?” That’s also acceptable.

Jack: Yeah, how do you -- how do you -- ‘cause, you’re like -- you’re kind of an inside-out ghost show yourself!

[Cackling]

Austin [cross]: You know, you’re sort of an inside-out ghost show yourself!

Janine [cross]: I have a power that is almost literally an inside-out ghost show. That’s an ability that I took specifically, so yes.

Austin: So Janine --

Jack: How do you feel about this?

Janine: I think the reason that I had suggested it would be in the dining car was that I just very strongly pictured Es, like, teacup in one hand, saucer in the other hand, maybe in the middle of making some polite conversation about, like, what color of silk is nicest in this daylight or some shit -- um, something completely, fully, meaningless and fun -- and then the conversation just like slows and stops as this thing is happening outside. Um, and I really strongly just pictured her watching and, you know, after a few very very long minutes taking a sip of her tea. And like, excusing herself, or something like that.

Jack: Is it like this real moment of Pickman and Es sort of independently looking out of the window and going “Huh?”

Janine: [laughs] Yeah, I think so.

Austin: OK. Um, really quick, what are your skills and domains -- and then beats, and then we can roll.

Jack: Oh, I think I have one more calling question.

Austin: Do you? Which one is it? We answered that, didn't we? "Your connection to the Heart touched you in some way. How does that manifest?"

Jack: That's different to my -- to my shape -- The shape above my horns is in my -- what do I carry with me, it's my keep... sake..?

Austin: Oh, that was... I see, I see.

Jack: You know when you put the camera around an object in a video game that you're not supposed to see from behind and the object disappears? It's like -- you're not looking through the back of a chest of drawers or whatever, it's just the chest of drawers is completely gone? Um... there is like a hole in Pickman that is only visible from behind. [**Austin:** Great.] They just aren't there.

Austin: How close do you have to be behind them?

Jack: If you're like 180 degrees, if you're looking at them from behind -- a portion of their torso is just gone.

Austin: So *anybody* -- ? So if you're walking down the street, are people terrified of you??

Jack: [chuckles] No, they're wearing clothes and everything! [**Austin:** I see.] They're wearing armor and everything, but, like, it's as though their body is being rendered -- like a portion of their body, a dinner-plate-sized chunk of their body --

Austin: Right, right, but I'm saying, if I'm -- the clothes cover that up, or no?

Jack: Yeah, they do.

Austin: Gotcha, gotcha, gotcha. Great. Fantastic.

Jack: And from the front, perfectly there. That's a full --

Austin: Right.

Jack: That's a hitbox.

Austin: That's a goat, yeah. There you are. OK, so, skills, domains, and resources.

Jack: Skills: Delve and Kill.

Austin: Mmhm.

Jack: Domains: Cursed and Technology.

Austin: Mmhm.

Jack: Resources: I have train bones! uh, which gives me the domain Technology.

Keith: [strangled giggle] Do you have them inside you or outside you?

Jack: [laughs] Outside me. They're in a bag.

Keith: You carry them. Right.

Austin: Yeah, you're carrying them around. Got it. Um, the domain does not, um, give you that domain, to be clear -- **[Jack:** Oh, yes, you're right] That only happens when Cleavers eat resources, that's not just a default thing with resources!

Jack: I'm gonna eat these train bones!

Austin: Right.

Jack: Dre, do you want to eat these train bones?

Dre: Uh, probably, yes.

Austin: Get the Technology domain! [chuckles] Um, OK. We are left now with -- I think that's everything there with you, Jack -- with Keith or Ali, I think. Is that it? Am I right about that?

Keith: Uh...

Austin: Who wants -- who wants to go?

Keith: It's not -- it's up to Ali.

Ali: [laughs] I can go.

Austin: All right, Ali. Let's go.

Ali: Hi! Hello.

Austin: Same as everyone else. Um, name, class, calling, ancestry.

Ali: Sure. So I'm gonna be playing, uh, Marn Ancura. My class is the Hound, my calling is Enlightenment, and my ancestry is carpana, [laughs] which is the name of, like, the capybara/rodent people in this setting now.

Austin: Love it. Talk to me about the carpana. What is their deal?

Ali: Um, you know... [laughs] They're hanging out. Um...

[Sylvi laughs]

Austin: When you say they're capybara people, are they like -- How tall are they?

Ali: Um, I [Austin: They're humanoid?] I think they're humanoid, yeah. [Austin: OK.] Let's just talk about the evolution of them really quickly, I'm just gonna go through it really quickly --

Austin: Yes. Please! Yes.

Ali: I'm just gonna say. I wanted to be a bird and then I was like, "No." Then I wanted to be a hedgehog and I was like, "No." And then I was like [laughs] "Being a rabbit would be cool because you could have long ears," but then I was like, "I don't wanna do that." Um, but then I was looking at the Final Fantasy Tactics Moogles, and they're like little guys... And I was like, "There's something here," because they're wearing little clothes.

Austin: There *is* something here. Yeah. It's good.

Ali: [laughs] And I was like, "Let me look at the Moogles for a bit." Um, and I came across the Final Fantasy 9 character Stiltzkin, and, um, [laughs] I'm just gonna drop this picture into chat.

Ali [cross]: Please do it. Aww, look at this fuckin' guy -- look at this buddy.

Ali [cross]: And I was looking at him, and I was like, there's not a better version of being a little guy than this.

[General laughter]

Jack: Just living life!

Ali: Um, and then from there I was like, "Moogles are kinda like koalas," and then I was like, "Oh, I can go back to trees!" And then I was like, "The cool thing about birds is that you can live in trees, and the cool thing about other sorts of animals is that they can be near the water," 'cause I was like trying to think of a sea thing, too. [Austin: Mm. Yeah, sure.] And then I was like, "Capybaras. That's both." And that's perfect.

Dre: They love water.

Austin: They do love water.

Keith: There's nobody that appreciates a warm bath like a capy-- like *any* capybara.

Ali: Yeah, and they're like very social animals, and --

Keith: They're always friends with other things.

Ali: Yeah! They hang out in groups, and it's nice. **[Austin: Mhm.]** Um, the way that I was thinking of them in this setting is that, like, there are these big trees that grow out of lakes **[Austin: Ooh!]** across the S... ang... **[Austin: Sangfielle.]** Yeah, Sangfielle. Um, I was gonna say the Heartland and then I was like, "We're not saying that anymore."

Austin We can still *call* it the Heartland in conversation. That's still acceptable.

Ali: [laughs] And, uh, living in those trees are the carpana, which, like -- they build these treehouses, essentially, and, like, platform floors between the branches so you can hang out there, and then they live off of the tree and the water below it, and have their little 30-to-40-people communities, and kinda do what they... [laughs] you know, just live their lives.

Austin: Mhm.

Austin: So... you asked height. I guess like 5 feet? **[Austin: OK, sure.]** And they're, like, humanoid but not like... you know... **[Austin: But not, but not...]** [laughs] What's better than being a little guy?

[120:00]

Austin: I love to be a little guy. Sure. Totally.

Austin: Yeah. So, uh, that's my deal.

Austin: Um, so that is, yeah -- you're a carpana -- and on top of being a carpana, your class is the Hound? We're not calling you a Hound, right? We're calling you... is it "a Keen?" or is it...

Ali: I think it's just "Keen." The rest of them are all --

Austin: You're Keen.

Ali: Yeah. The rest of them are all kind of... adjective... s.

Austin [cross]: Names, yeah.

Ali [cross]: Sort of, yeah.

Austin: When you say “the other ones” you mean the other elements of this group...

Ali: Yeah. So the group that I’m in is called the, um, the [struggles to pronounce] Telluricists?

Austin: [confirming pronunciation] Telluricists, yeah.

Ali: The Telluricists’ Union. Which is a group of people who were originally living in the Heartland, um, who had been displaced, and because they were forced to live on, like, infertile land, essentially, they started, like, building tools and working with craftspeople and just trying to get by, basically. [Laughs] Over time, they learn all of these good skillsets, and, um, yada yada yada, something terrible happens [**Austin**: Uh huh] because there’s a horrible curse on this land, they almost lose all of that knowledge, and then they say, “Oh, hey. The organization of knowledge is really important, let’s make that a big organizational priority.”

Austin: Right, right.

Ali: I guess it’s worth saying that the Hound, as written in Heart, is very cop-y.

Austin: [ruefully] Yeah. [**Ali** laughs] It’s like, “They used to be soldiers, and now they’re police!”

Ali: Yeah! But, like, the moves are just like, “Oh, you’re a person who helps people, you’re, like, socially recognized as someone who can do these things. You have, like, a specific skillset, you’re good at certain things.” So I was like, “Let’s just make it toolmakers” [laughs]

Austin [cross]: Let’s just scoop that out -- so, yeah, like, you wanna talk a little bit about what that is, what your inspiration there was, et cetera?

Ali: Oh, sure! Um, I... hm.

Austin: Or, like, a touchstone, maybe, as even just like -- ? We could just jump to “What is a touchstone for this?” or what is... you know?

Ali: So, yeah. The touchstones for it were like, ancient Italian butchers, which would travel from city to city and just be like, “oh, hey, we can slaughter your pigs for you, because that’s” [laughs] “we’re good at that, uh, we have the skillset, and you wanna eat food!” And then because they were good at that, they would also do, like, surgeries and things of that nature. And then... I think... tool-building...

Austin: I think we just looked at a bunch of other things -- there were, like, *also* ancient -- or medieval Italian tool people -- like, knife sharpeners.

Ali: Oh, right, knife sharpeners, yeah, yeah, yeah. Which, like --

Austin: That, like, including a guild that came to America, and I keep reading articles about them, like, news stories -- **[Ali laughs]** and in the profiles about these people, they're like... "And unfortunately, when they got to the States, they had to rumble."

[multiple people laughing]

Austin: It's like every time! "The unity that so readily marked them back in the Old Country was gone" **[Jack:** Gone!] "and the knife-sharpener union kept having fights amongst themselves." Like, damn, I bet those were rough fights!

Ali: Well, like, when I was reading it kept being like, "Well, people would have territories, and then other people would be trying to, like," **[Austin:** Yes.] "sharpen the knives on that person's block..." **[laughs]** Or, like, the union had to start because there would be these small disputes and then there would have to be an organization that was like, "Hey, let's just figure this out..."

Austin: "Can we fuckin' not -- You get this corner, you get this corner, we're good."

Ali: **[laughs]** Um, the other interesting thing about these Italian butchers specifically is, like, they became that skilled because they were living in infertile land but also living in a place that, um, had a lot of acorns, which pigs like to eat -- and therefore, the pigs in that area were very healthy, and it was, like, easy for those people to catch and raise them, and **[Austin:** That's wild.] yada yada yada.

Austin: It's like, the same thing again with the knife people, where, like... They had lumberyards. **[Ali:** Uh huh.] The lumberyards didn't work in the winter because it was too cold and snowy. **[Ali laughs]** So what did they have? Because they had lumberyards, they had to learn how to sharpen blades for the lumberyards -- now they knew how to do that, so, during the winter, they would leave their village and go out into the countryside and go from village to village to sharpen people's knives to get extra income.

Dre: And I gotta say, it is *miserable* trying to do anything with a not-sharp knife.

Ali: Yeah!

[Austin laughs]

Keith: I feel like a lot of people live their kitchen lives with, like, dull blades forever, and it's just -- it just sucks, so good on them for sharpening --

Austin: Don't understand why things aren't going well?

Ali: **[laughs]** See? Skillset!

Austin: So then that is what the Telluricist Union is. It's a collection of people who develop -- who develop these sorts of utilitarian skills around tools and, and knives and basic devices and stuff like that.

Ali: Yeah. The name is a little bit based off of the idea of, like, living off the land or, like, studying geology or things of that nature [**Austin:** Right] because I think that they're just as interested in being able to make life more sustainable, especially post - "bad shit happening," but also, like... if we're going to keep all this information, we should try to organize it and actively seek it out, so that we can understand, like... what's the equivalent to diamond in this universe?

Austin: Riiiiight.

Ali: What metals are harder than others? Like, how do acids interact with this specific Heart-plant... yada yada yada.

Austin: Right, like, you know, we had that idea of the hollow tree that also has metal in it or whatever before -- and for, you know, someone like Pickman the Shapeknight, that's just a confusing weird mess. But for you, and for the Telluricists' Union, you're like, "All right, we're gonna study this and figure it out. We're gonna figure out how to cut it down, and then also, in a way where it won't be hollow, it'll be filled with very useful metal for us, somehow. [**Ali** laughs] And we can still cut through it. [**Ali:** Right.] You have to apply the right materials first, or use the right sort of tool, or wait until the right time of the day, or who knows what thing [**Ali:** Right.] but we're gonna figure it the fuck out.

Ali: Yeah, and it's a very practical, like -- "Oh, what's the cleavage of this tree-metal?" as well as it is, "OK, where does this come from? Let's actually try to figure out the, like, weirdness of this." So... I'm excited.

Austin: And so, in that group, there's a bunch of different, like, "Here's the Research & Development division --" They all have names I don't have in front of me, so I apologize that I'm butchering your thing --

Ali: Oh, yeah, no, I have it here if you want me to read -- 'Cause the [**Austin:** Go for it.] -- the way we got here is that, like, OK, there's the Hounds, who are really good, and there's 300 of them. Why are there 300 and do we want them to be 300?

Austin: Right, that's all from *Heart*.

Ali: Right, and I ended up really liking this idea that once we got into the, like, post- you know, losing material thing and, like, organization thing, I was like "Oh, it would be interesting if, like, there are these people who have these certain specializations, but within the organization they always want 300 people to know *all* of the things, so that if something horrible happens, there's, like, this foundation that, like, if 25% of them live, the organization can still live on. Um, so, the

four things are... The first one is Remedial, which is, they restore and fix broken things, it's basically just like remedies [laughs] which is why it's that, yeah...

Austin [cross]: Right, "I got this busted screwdriver, can you fix it?" "Yes, we can do that."

Ali [cross]: Right, yeah, I -- the thing that I've written down here is "You know, YouTube knife guys." Um...

[general laughter]

Austin: Yeah, I *do* know YouTube knife guys.

Ali: The second thing is Practical, which is just, like, mundane thing of like, "Oh, people do need to eat, we should butcher things for them," and "Oh, people do need basic medical care or surgeries or --"

Austin: That's like, you built these tools, that means you probably also learned how they work a little bit, and so you've developed that skillset.

Ali: Yeah, exactly. And that's as much medicinal as it is, "Can you fix this fence for me?" or "I have a leaky pipe" [**Austin**: Right.] or things like that. Um, then there's Foundational, and those are people who are still actively developing new tools. [**Austin**: Mmhm.] It's "Foundational" because that's how the group started. And then there's Material, which is the people who are out there, like, trying to find new Heart-stuff: like new leaves, new geology-type shit... [**Austin**: Right.] They are people who, like, carry around, like, uh...

Austin: Maps with leather belts on them.

[laughter]

Ali: Or the -- the acid that I need Keith to say for me again, because I still didn't write it down.

Keith: Hydrochloric.

Ali: Is it hydrochloric? Yes.

Austin: Yeah. You got it.

Ali: [laughs] But yeah, that kind of vibe. Just -- nerds. But doing very important work. [laughs]

Keith: Very important nerd shit.

Ali: [laughs] Yeah! But it's like, you know, you wanna understand the things around you, especially when it's like [laughs] [**Keith**: yeah, 'cause you're a nerd.] "My friend said that they

had a dream about a TV, and I found this thing that looks like an antenna, so what the fuck is this antenna about?" And then once you -- the people who know all of these things end up becoming Keen. Uh, which is what Marn is.

Austin: Right. Is what we're renaming Hounds, to Keens. You're Keen.

Keith: Is -- having all four of them is being Keen? OK.

Austin: Yeah. Uh, there's like a whole thesis project, it's a whole thing, but you're Keen now, so... Um, all right. I guess -- move-wise, how do you summarize the class, basically? So people know.

Ali: [sighs] How do I summarize the class?

Austin: You do a bunch of shit.

Ali: [agreeing] I do a bunch of shit that -- the, like, important things about the class, it seemed to me, is that I was like... socially recognized as somebody who could provide a benefit or help people...

Austin: Yeah, like, you have the Haven domain, which I think also might be unique among the group. [**Ali:** Yeah.] Important since this is a game that starts in a haven, right?

Ali: Right. Yeahyeahyeah. And then also just like -- there's like -- a lot of the moves are about, like, preparedness, or being able to... help other people be good at things you're good at. Or, like, being able to, like, repair things for people. So, that's... [**Austin:** Right.] gonna be a lot of what I'm getting up to! [snort-laughs]

Austin: That's a lot of it. Um, also luck is a big part of who you are, there's like... [**Ali:** Oh, yeah!] Your base move is so funny to me, because it's like, "Once per situation, when you would be stressed in anything other than Fortune" -- which is, like, the luck stress category -- "Mark it to Fortune instead." Which means, like, again, instead of getting shot -- you don't almost get shot, it's just like "Ooh, they're getting closer to me!" [**Ali** laughs] or like, "Oh, I can hear someone knocking at the door at an inopportune time," right? The -- stress is getting there on this -- on your luck track instead of other things. But then, when you suffer Fortune fallout, and fallout in this game is, like, when stress turns material... Stress is kind of abstract, but when a certain die roll goes bad, all that abstract stress becomes material in one of your kind of stress tracks. And so when you get Fortune fallout is like, "Oh, the door opens and the cop comes in at the most inopportune time" or whatever. But when that happens, then you start rolling with mastery -- with a bonus die on the rest of that scene. [**Ali** continues laughing] And so it's like you're both *unlucky*, because that's where things hit you, but *also* good when your luck breaks all the way -- and I love that, that's fantastic. That's so fun.

Ali: It's really fun. Um... yeah. It's a lot about, like, being skilled in that way, in both, like, the *Blades in the Dark* pre-planning the mission thing, and also, like, the "Oh! I know the thing for this situation!" [laughs] On top of being, like, "oh, people recognize me as being someone who can help them." That's how I got here. [laughs]

Austin: Right. Totally. Do you want to talk about -- just say what your skills are?

Ali: Um, sure!

Austin: Skills and -- I said domain already is Haven, but your skills.

Ali: Um, yeah, so my domain is Haven, my starting skill is Hunt [laughs], and then the skills that I got from moves are Mend, Delve, and Discern.

Austin: Gotcha. Do you, uh, wanna talk about your keepsakes and ...the other word... trinkets? Trinkets and keepsakes. Have you got those?

Ali: I sure do, yeah! So my starting class stuff is, um, a bottle of wisteria oil -- Wisteria is a type of flower, [Austin: Ooh.] It's like a tree flower that hangs down very --

Austin: Fuck, I thought it was a bourbon. God damn it!

[Ali trails off into giggles]

Austin: No, I knew what wisteria was.

Ali: Um, and y'know, I think that has a lot of applications in terms of like, "Oh, this is literal oil that can be used for like -- um -- tools and stuff, but it's also like a perfume, and also, like, oil pulling..." which is a dentistry thing, don't worry about it... [laughs] Um, a well-stocked haversack, which is a thing this game gives me, and a -- and a knife! And then my calling trinket is -- I adapted a, uh, "an alchemy set in a leather toolbox" or something to "a leather pouch of sanding stones, thin tools and a polished monocle."

Austin: Mm. You wear that monocle -- is that like -- are you... ?

Ali: Not *all the time*, but like, *sometimes* [laughs]

Austin: OK. It's like a reading monocle? Like, what's the use case? OK. Let's try to... That's great, I love it.

Ali [cross]: What if that was, like, a small set of magnifying glasses and I was like, "Fuck it, I could do both?" [laughing] I'm just only gonna have the one. My ancestry trinkets are [trying not to laugh] "an above average amount of fish jerky" and...

[General laughter]

Austin: [deadpan] Huh. Weird.

Jack [cross]: That's like a *lot* of jerky.

Ali [cross]: Yeah, we'll get into it.

Janine [cross]: I have questions.

Ali: "A vial of rain water from the southlands" which is an item that I just love in this game.

Austin: Love it. Yeah, that's a good one. Sure. Um, are you from this area, or--? [**Ali:** Um, so the--] Or did you hear the calling and come?

Ali: Yeah, so the thing I ended up landing that seemed to make the most sense is that I'm from the... the sort of sister city from the game that we did, that when the dragon...

Austin: Yeah! You're from Fish Jerky Town!

Ali: [audibly trying not to laugh] Yeah, I'm from Fish Jerky Town, which is why I have... "slightly more fish jerky than usual!" [giggles]

Austin: Oh, I love it so much.

Ali: Um, so yeah, that's my deal. Um, the way that I was thinking of it is that I'm a recent graduate from my Keen certification, which was not at that town, but I came back to my hometown to be like, "Hey, what's up, I passed" and then saw... [breaks into laughter again]

Austin: And they were like, [raspy Southern accent] "You showed up right after all these fish died!" [**Ali:** Mhm.] "Would you like some jerky?"

Ali: And I said yes. [laughs]

Austin: This is what they sound like.

Keith: Oh, OK.

Ali: And, uh... yeah, so I saw the ad for the Blackwick, um, group, and I headed on down. [laughs]

Austin: Aw, the Blackwick Group sounds great! That's a good name! Um, great, and now you're here, and you're like, "I can apply -- I can do some work here!" [**Ali** continues laughing] Cause that's the thing, it's like, you're Keen, which means you're not -- you're *post*- -- you're, that's the

other thing, right? The Telluricists' Union -- you don't have a *boss* in the Telluricists, right? You're like -- you have *certification*. You're part of a group, it's an organization, but it's not an organization where you're like, clocking in. You're an independent -- I mean, not an independent contractor -- you're a freelancer, right?

Ali: Well, basically what it is is that like, this thing was important to me. I spent a lot of time doing it. I've learned the skillset from this group, and this group has, like, a very strong focus on mutual aid, so... once I graduated I was like, "Oh, I know all of these things, the expectancy is that I should help people." **[Austin: Right]** The way that I've been thinking of it is that, like, you know, by being part of the group, you become a representative of the group. So there's a responsibility to actually, like, serve the purpose that people think that they do. **[Austin: Right]** Like, you wouldn't go through years of training to be Keen and then be like, "Well I'm just gonna fuck off!" [laughs]

Austin: Mhm. Right. Totally.

Ali: "And be a knife thrower in a circus --" I mean I'm sure there's somebody who did that, 'cause, like, their life took that turn... [laughs]

Austin: Quickly writing down **[Ali: Um...]** "Got their Keen certification, became a knife thrower instead..."

Ali: [Laughs, sputters] The way I went with Keen is because it means, both, um... like, being really enthusiastic, and it means being sharp. And, like, the idea is you get to that place because you have a passion for this thing and want to become skilled in all parts of it and then -- yeah.

Austin: Yeah. Like, I'm sure that a lot of people get to one of those -- one or two *or three* of those categories and then are like "Fuck it. I'm just gonna do the one. I'm fine." **[Ali: Right, yeah.]** "I'm fine being in Material forever. I don't need to also know how to do doctor shit, that's not what I'm here for."

Ali: Right. And I don't think, like, organizationally there's, like, real -- Like, I'm sure if you're really good at a certain thing, your instructor might be like, "Oh hey, do you want to go onto the Keen track?" or whatever, but there's not a pressure to be that thing, if the thing you want to do is Material.

Austin: Right. That makes sense. So, what about your calling?

Ali: Um, yeah, so, my calling is Enlightenment.

Austin: Ooh. OK, um, which -- what -- I guess there's a bunch of questions here for Enlightenment. **[Ali: Uh huh.]** Let me click back over there. Um, yeah, "when you create your

character, answer these questions.” And this is the big one. “What impossible” quote-unquote “thing are you attempting to achieve in the City Beneath” or in the Heartland?

Ali: Um, I am trying to develop a homemade cure to curses. [Laughs]

Austin: OK, yeah, OK. That’s like, in terms of it being, like, something that’s widely available, presumably?

Ali: Yeah. Both, like, accessible, not complicated to actually do, **[Austin:** Mmhm] and, like, y’know, if you’re at home and you’re in a pinch, and you have a curse, maybe this’ll work for you.

Austin: Right... When you say “curse” here, do you mean, like, a witch has turned you into a toad, or do you mean, like, the vivid truth of the Heartland has boiled your -- your soul? **[Ali laughs]** And also maybe transformed your flesh the way that like... The Cleaver is a class that can change its body and... Or let’s not even talk about the class, but like, the Heart has turned you into a werewolf, or into some sort of, y’know, beast. You know what I mean? **[Ali:** Right, yeah.] I think the game has a bit of a distinction there. Like in terms of Domains, Heart says there’s Cursed and there is Occult, right? And Occult is like, black magics and stuff like that, whereas Cursed is like [searches for words] “This shit just happens out here. It’s bad.”

Ali: [laughs] Right, yeah. I feel like Occult is a whole different category, because once you’re dealing with magic, I feel like you need to know magic stuff to know the, like, magic cures in that way. Whereas, like, curses is known to be a separate thing, and I feel like if you’re living in the Heartland you sort of, like, internally have that separation in your head.

Austin: Yeah, like, an example -- the way that I think about it as a GM is I think about it in the terms of Fallout, which are sort of consequences when you fail -- I’m gonna say fail *enough* rolls, just because it’s easy to say that [laughs] um, without getting into rule mechanics -- but for instance there is Echo fallout, which I think “curses,” the idea of the Cursed domain falls under. That includes stuff like “Strange Appetite. You crave unusual, taboo things rather than good, honest meat and drink. Rusted metal, living creatures, vermin, effluvia, used clothing, et cetera.” Uh, and so like -- yeah, that’s a fucking *curse* that the Heart -- that the Heartland has put on you. And that is not -- that’s not a spell, that’s just -- it’s twisted your appetite as it stands into this other thing. And so that sort of stuff does not have currently -- and I guess this is what you’re saying in some ways -- there is no natural way to to treat that stuff. You gotta go do some wild shit that is not a homespun -- you don’t get to open up your cabinets and put together a remedy for that right now.

Ali [cross]: [laughs] Right, yeah!, I mean we, we had a whole like nine-hour game of just like breaking the one curse, right?

Austin: Right.

Ali: And, you know, this is something that people pursue personally -- I think that the, like, organizationally, for the Telluricists, there's -- the way I've been thinking about it is, like... it's less like trying to find a cure for what happened to the Heartland, because I feel like with the history -- **[Austin:** That's --] With the history of that organization, like, just from the perspective of living somewhere, seeing it taken over, and then seeing it, like, *broken* in that way, it's like there's such a -- there's gotta be such a span of opinions on, like, what happened there. Why did it happen? Was it inflicted by these people who really tried to bleed the blood from the stone? So I don't know that it's 100% like "We're gonna cure the land." **[Austin:** No, no.] But it's the same --

Austin: It's more like "I'm gonna invent, like, penicillin or something."

Ali: Right, yeah, yeah. Exactly, yeah, yeah.

Austin: That makes sense. That's fun. I like that a lot. **[Ali laughs]** That's a good thing to try to figure out. Good luck with all that.

Ali: Mmhm, thank you.

Austin: Uh... **[laughs]** "I ain't reading all that but --" **[Ali snort-laugh]** "Congratulations. Or, I'm sorry." Um... What is the first step on your journey?

Ali: Um, so I feel like this is kind of a two-step, um, first step, which is that I did graduate Knife & Geology School, y'know, **[laughing]** I'm certified in that. I've done my studies.

Austin: You are -- you are, um -- what'd we say, what's the word for -- Keen?

Ali: I'm Keen, yeah.

Austin: You're Keen.

Ali: I'm a Keen Telluricist. And, um... **[laughs]** The second step is, like, seeking out a place that was recently... you know... cured a big curse, **[Austin:** Sure] while also being like, "Hey..."

Austin: Still curse-adjacent in some ways?

Ali: **[laughs]** Right, exactly. I feel like I'm gonna get a lot of really important fieldwork here?

Austin: Yeah. This is the thing of like, a doctor being like, "I'm investigating this, y'know, disease, and so I need to be around places where it's contagious, or where there have been, y'know, reports of this, this or that," or whatever, right. **[Ali:** Uh huh. Yeah yeah yeah.] That makes sense. That's fun. And that's perfect -- that also explains why you're here, right? **[Ali:** Mmhm.] Um, because they put out a call being like, "Hey, there might be more cursed shit here!" **[Ali giggles]** Um, all right. "Choose another player character. They have been invaluable in your journey so far. What have you learned from them?"

Ali: Um, so the character that I was thinking of here was Jack's character, Pickman. **[Austin:** Mm.] I feel like this is kind of an easy answer, 'cause I imagine in the process of being a Telluricist and, like, having to go through the certification there I probably needed to travel **[Austin:** Right.] and hire her to, to... y'know [chuckles] help me with the Shape.

Austin: Yeah.

Jack: And it's like -- I was the person you hired to make sure that the train didn't, like, ride off a cliff or into a lake or something.

Ali: Right, yeah. The thing that I was thinking about when you were saying your thing, actually, is that, like -- did the Telluricists help with the killing of the train? 'Cause, like --

Austin [cross]: Oh, probably!

Jack [cross]: [enthusiastically] Oh, yes, 100%! **[Ali laughs]** So, like, a big thing that I was thinking about when they're killing the train is like -- you look at how NASA gets people into space, and it's like, people from all kinds of disciplines show up to, uh, even begin to think about putting rockets into space. Where they're like, "OK, we're gonna talk about -- we're gonna talk to people who specialize in jet propulsion, we're gonna talk to people who understand fuel really well." Or even on another level, like when Pixar are making a movie about "X," they'll be like, "We're gonna bring in animation specialists for fur, or animation specialists for snow, or whatever." **[Austin:** Mhm.] And I think that -- that killing a Shape train was this massive cultural project on some level.

Ali: What I also linked in the chat is a -- I just did a search for a geology kit and it's a -- [breaks down laughing]

Austin: Great. Love these... *minerals*.

Ali: I'm just thinking of this exchange between the train people and the Telluricists where, like, "Here are these, like, small cubes of train pieces, because this is all we can spare!" [continues laughing]

Austin [cross]: So funny.

Jack [cross]: Yeah! Yeah! That's absolutely it. Some Shapeknight academic or whatever showing up with this huge box being like, "Is any of this interesting to you?"

Ali: Yeah. And they're all, like, the size of strawberries, but it's all, like. Little train pieces.

Jack: One of them is still vibrating angrily in its little -- **[Ali laughs]** -- little section.

Austin: Yeah. Love it. Um, all right, so there's one.

Ali: Um --

Austin: Choose -- oh, go ahead.

Ali: Yeah, "Choose another player character. You know they're hiding secrets from you. Why do you suspect they're doing that?" Um, the character that I was thinking of here was Dre's character, Chine. Me and Dre talked a little bit about, like, some character overlaps [laughs] **[Austin:** Uh huh.] when we were developing these characters. Um, and the -- the thing that I think makes sense here is that, like, they're both similar in, like, researching or being around Heart stuff, **[Austin:** Mmhm.] like, actively seeking that out, but I think for Dre's character it's like more of a personal thing. I think that there are times when Dre's character would, like, you know [laughs] eat something **[Austin:** Uh huh.] instead of taking it back to research it, or, like, dissect it, or, like, dissect it, or, like, put it in a jar and see what happens. And I think, uh, Marn is frustrated by that [laughs], so...

[Austin chuckles knowingly]

Ali: Quote unquote "hiding secrets from me."

Austin: Yeah, why -- But also I think there's even a world in which -- it's not just weird. And it is weird, definitely think you're right that you would think it's weird, but also like -- [indignant] "Hey, what are you *doing* with th-" **[Ali laughs]** "That's not how it works! That's not how it -- you can't just eat that and have it not hurt you." **[Ali:** Mmhm.] "And why is -- Why did you get better after you -- Why did you get better at, you know, hunting after you ate that? That's not how it works." [laughs] I don't know why I'm channeling Hannibal Buress yelling. **[Ali laughs loudly]** That's where I'm at.

Ali: There's a little bit of that. Like, I, you know, because Cleavers are established in this world **[Austin:** Yeah.] I think the Telluricists know what's -- not quote-unquote "know" what's up with that but are familiar with the -- so I don't know that there's, like, *that* much friction, but like, when you're -- **[Austin:** Sure, sure.] When you're in a professional setting with someone, and you're like, "Damn, I would have really liked to take that twig home!" It's annoying!

[Ali and Austin laugh]

Austin: Yeah.

Ali: Stop eating that!

[multiple people laugh]

Dre: [jokingly] It's for your own good!

Austin: Stop it!

[laughter continues]

Austin: All right, is there anything left on your thing? Did we skip anything?

Ali: Um, I feel like the one thing I didn't answer was an Ancestry question.

Austin: Oh, yeah, totally! So, I guess we know you're from the fish place originally, which means you've lived here your whole life, **[Ali:** Yeah.] so then, pick one of those things, right?

Ali: Yeah, the questions that I was thinking between were... da da da [paging through document]... Um, "Where does your family live?" and "Who or what do they worship?" which is a thing I can answer pretty easily, um...

Austin: Yeah, let's do that. Let's start with that one, at least, and if you wanna do a second one that's fine too.

Ali: Um, yeah. This lets me um, mention, uh, Felesta **[Austin:** Felesta. Love it.] is what I've decided to name the, um, the fortune-spirit in this. Um, I -- There's gonna be a move about this eventually, so I think we'll get into more of, like, the deep lore on what this is then. Basically, like, we talked about it in the worldbuilding game a bit, but there's like... the big church, the other big church, and then the church with a bunch of other little shit [laughs] and I think, Felesta's one of the smaller, like --

Austin: Is part of the Boundless Conclave, like the many...

Ali: Yeah. Yes. Thank you.

Austin: Sure. It makes sense.

[Ali laughs]

Austin: I mean, listen. We've never played this game yet, you know what I mean? **[Ali snort-laugh]** We're coming up with all this shit on the -- not on the fly, but damn near.

Ali: Yeah. Um, but just sort of like a minor saint, more of just like a superstition-type thing. **[Austin:** Mm.] The, uh, the sort of like social understanding of Felesta is that she's sort of like a -- a fortune spirit for, um, like, tool-workers. Like, not specifically the Telluricists, but like, people who work with their hands in general. **[Austin:** Right.] And she can kind of show up wherever she wants and can favor people, but the, um, the sort of quote-unquote "church" or origin of that is that [150:00] at the peak of one of the mountains next to the mine -- like, not the same mountain, but in that mountain range **[laughs]** **[Austin:** Mmhm.] -- there is an area where it is a

legend where if you break a tool -- and you have to actually break it by using it to its end, not just, like, "Well, I want a new one!" **Austin:** Right.] But if you go to the top of that mountain and you, um, bury it in the sand, and you spend the night at, like, a bed-and-breakfast nearby... [realizing what she just said] Not like a -- like a --

Keith laughs]

[Several people laugh]

Austin: [struggling to hold it together] No, I know what you're --

Keith: A little *vacation* with your tool!

Ali: [giggling] Well, the thing they're saying --

Keith: Draw a bath!

Ali: I don't think that it's like --

Austin: Settle in!

Ali: [calming down] I don't think it's, like, commercial in that way, but I was thinking that it was like, an interesting thing to have this resting place when the thing is that you go there once you've worked to your... end, right? You spend the night there, you chill, you wake up in the morning and you dig up your tool, and it will either be fixed or upgraded in some way. And that's what Felesta does.

Austin: Yeah! Shoutouts to Felesta.

Ali: Yeah. Um, so yeah.

Austin: Do people wait until they have, like, a number of broken things so they just have to make one trip?

Ali [cross]: No, that feels -- I think the spirit of Felesta would be like, "Hey, you can't --" [laughs]

Austin [cross]: And then like -- OK. No one's gaming Felesta.

Keith: [skeptically] Well... *no one's* doing this?

Austin [cross]: Well, you get *nothing* back. You get one different thing.

Ali [cross]: Well, I mean, like --

Austin: Well, it's not *working*.

Janine: You can do it at all, but what if the tools disappear?

Austin: Right, exactly.

Janine: One of the tools gets fixed, the others are fuckin' gone.

[Ali laughs]

Keith: Hmm, but what if that makes the tool that gets upgraded even better? 'Cause it ate the other tools.

[several people laugh]

Austin [cross]: [firmly]: No. It's not a gacha game.

Janine [cross]: That's not what gods generally do.

Ali: [laughs] I guess it's --

Keith: I'm trying out all the ways to game this tool system.

Austin: [ruefully] Uh huh.

Ali: Um, sure. And it's worth saying here that part of the inspiration for Felesta is the River Fairy in Silent Hill 3. Um, where, um, if you're honest to her she grants you a very great thing, and if you're not honest --

Keith: When does this happen?

Ali: It's a New Game Plus thing, so don't worry about it. [laughs] If you lie to her, a big monster pulls you into the sewer. [**Austin:** Ah.] Yeah, so don't go up there with other people's tools or a bunch of them. Like, do the thing. It's a ritual. You follow rituals for a reason. So yeah.

Austin: Yeah. So what's up with your parents? Are they back in Fish-town?

Ali: Yeah!

Austin: I don't know what the name of the place is.

Ali: I also don't know the name. I should know. Um...

Austin: We should name it For-a-vish. A-fish. A-vish. Did I say vish? A fish.

Keith: Fish-ville.

Janine: Tuna Town.

Austin: Random River Fish.

Jack [cross]: On a desert island... was the vish there?

Austin [cross]: Can't be tuna.

[multiple people laugh]

Jack: This motherfucker said "vish!"

Austin: Motherfucker said "vish!" "Was the vish there?" [ruefully amused] Oh shit... oh, *shit*.

[laughter continues]

Jack: Shoutouts to the Grink.

Austin: I will -- shoutouts to the Grink!

Keith: [croaking with laughter] Love that.

Austin: It's -- well, it's Vish now, so...!

[pause]

Austin: [much calmer] Your parents are good though? They're fine at... Vish, Vishville?

Ali: Yeah! I mean, I'm sure that --

Austin: Are they in the union? Or they doing other shit?

Ali: I don't think so. No, no, no.

Austin: They work the river. They do fishing. That's why you got all this jerky.

Ali: Yeah. They work the river. They work the river. Yeah, they maybe run, like, a general store.

Austin: All right. I think that's it. That brings us to Keith.

Keith: Hello!

Austin: Hello, Keith. Tell me what your name is, what your class is, what your calling is, and what your ancestry is.

Keith: Sure! Uh, my name is Ly Lychen.

Austin: *Great* name.

Keith: He's a Junk Mage. You can call him -- you can call him Lyke.

Austin: OK.

Keith: So, "Lychen" is misspelled -- Lichen is the stuff that grows on rocks. This is misspelled. L-Y-C-H-E-N, which happens to be the name of a German town that I think is also called, uh, *Flößerstadt*?

Sylvi: [faintly] Hell yeah.

Austin: [laughing] 'Kay.

Keith: I just know that now because I wanted to misspell Lychen. My calling is Adventure, and my ancestry is Human.

Austin: OK, let's start -- let's start with your, I guess, ancestry question, like we've been doing for most people.

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: Um, you're from here, right? You didn't come here, you were born in Sangfielle.

Keith: No, I came here.

Austin: [surprised] Oh, OK! I didn't know that.

Keith: Yes. I was -- I came -- the Uns -- [pauses]

Austin: Unschola Republica.

Keith: Unschola Republica, that's right.

Austin: So you're from, like, the mage school place, right?

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: OK. Um, so, this is the one -- "You came here with nothing but the clothes on your back and a dream, looking for excitement and profit. What went wrong?"

Keith: Um... "What went wrong?" What? [exasperated] Did I answer the wrong question again?

Austin: Yeah. Well, where did you -- what one did you pick?

Keith: "You were kicked out of a magical college thanks to your unorthodox beliefs and practices. What did you do?"

Austin: Oh, sure. Well, tell me that one.

Keith: OK, well, I didn't get in, I didn't even enroll, I definitely didn't pay, and I slightly destroyed a building trying to demonstrate a new way I found to start fires.

Austin: [laughs] Great. What was it?

Jack [cross]: What's the way?

Keith: Um -- Well, it -- I mean, it just looks like the normal way, but it feels easier.

Austin: [sigh] OK...

Jack: And it turns out --

Austin: [incredulous] And they kicked you out for that?

Keith: Uh, yeah, well, they said, "You -- you destroyed this," and I said, "Slightly destroyed it." And they -- they didn't like that, and then they were like, "OK, you're in trouble. What's your -- what's your, like, student information here?" and I said, "Um..."

Jack: [laughing] His student number.

Keith: "I don't know what you mean. I -- sorry. And -- bye." And I left.

Austin: Great. And you left and came here --

Keith: I left and came here.

Austin: -- and have been doing what since you got here?

Keith: Uh... figuring out magic... stuff? I learned about magic, and I said, "This stuff seems cool." Um, scammed my way into the university, got kicked out. Um, tricked my way into a

couple of libraries, uh, with some bribes. Uh, got run out when I tried to get deeper in than they allowed me to go. **[Austin: Sure.]** Um, and this is when I came to Sangfielle and to Blackwick.

Austin: To Blackwick. OK, to Sangfielle. So, wait, have you been in -- have you been in Blackwick, since coming in, **[Keith: Yes.]** or have you been in other places? Like, out in --

Keith: Yes, I've been specifically in Blackwick. **[Austin: OK.]** I came to the mine **[Austin: Well, that was so --]** -- hearing about the mine, hearing about the cool stuff in the mine.

Austin: OK. That was *before* the curse was broken, so you, again, you came to Eastern Folly.

Keith [cross]: Yeah. Right. Eastern Folly.

Austin [cross]: Like, over a year ago, presumably? Or whatever.

Keith: Yeah. Around the time of the Ground Itself game.

Austin: OK, cool.

Keith: Like, right before that.

Austin: OK, so -- came in, much like Art's character, dug through -- went in the mines to see some weird shit, but were not a miner per se. And then what is your, what is your, I guess we should talk about what a "Junk Mage" is, then, because that colors so much of what you do moment to moment.

Keith: Yeah. So, Junk Mages are sort of a -- they're affiliated in their non-affiliation. They're sort of like professional magic enthusiasts who don't practice with a school, they don't belong to any specific organizations, but they're sort of like, um... We did our -- was it "Mapmaker?" What was the thing we were... **[Austin: We did the Drawing Maps conversation.]** Drawing Maps, we did the Drawing Maps thing, and you, uh, summed it up by saying that Junk Mages are sort of like magical gadflies **[Austin: Right!]** who sort of pester the magical community into giving them information, kind of correct people on things and figure out new ways of doing things, **[Austin: Right.]** and then those advancements are sort of quietly either adopted or discarded by the magical community as a whole.

Austin: And you originally pitched your version of the Junk Mage sort of as a hobbyist mage --

Keith [cross]: Yeah! Like a *pro-thusiast*.

Austin [cross]: Like, not in a negative way, not in a diminutive way. Like an expert in the way that you become an expert in something by that being the thing that you *do*. **[Keith: Right.]** Caring deeply about, in your case, the size of different vials and how that changes the way

reagents combine together [**Keith**: Right.], and having -- having a better, you know -- you think that one fabric makes a better mat for doing your alchemical work on for you.

Keith [cross]: Who says that this is the spell to make fire? My spell to make fire is so good it blew up a building!

Austin: Right. Did you blow up a building?

Keith: I *slightly* destroyed a building.

Jack: Slightly.

Austin: Yeah. Well, that's -- I'd kick you out for that, then. Um, sure, OK. So, I guess, mechanically speaking, what that basically means is that you have a bunch of spell-type things --

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: --which are spread out across a bunch of different abilities--

Keith: The spells make me good at -- They give -- It's kind of like the Hound, where you sort of end up with a lot of skills and domains.

Austin: Mmhm. Most classes have the thing of, like, "Pick up this skill to give you a little bit of a move plus also--" I mean, "Pick up this ability to give you a little bit of a move but then also a skill associated."

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: But I would say, like, the big thing -- one of the big things across your basic thing, besides, like, "knowledge," which I think is a big part of it -- is just, like, you can, (like the Cleaver, I guess, we said this before) destroy a resource to turn it into Protection against magic going bad on you, for instance. [**Keith**: Right, yeah.] And likewise, you are, like -- again, sorta like Art's character -- more resistant to magic messing with your mind, [**Keith**: Mind stress.] stressing you out, driving you to obsession and confusion and all that stuff. So, yeah, it's some fun stuff. You have, like, a spell that lets you heal -- I mean, it lets you heal Echo damage, but what it also does is, like, jets you away to one of the temples of the Boundless Conclave, which is fun. [**Keith**: Yep. Mmhm.] But that's not because you're a religious person, right? [**Keith**: Right.] That's like -- you just know a spell that does that.

Keith: Yeah. And it's tough to -- it's tough -- I'm not a religious -- obviously I wouldn't be able to do this if these religions weren't real, but I have figured out a way to use it without having to, I guess, care that much.

Austin: You're not a cleric.

Keith: No, I'm not a cleric or a priest.

Austin: You're not doing -- right, right.

Keith: But there's a lot of clerics and priests out there who'd love to trade a little trip to the temple for the opportunity that maybe you might become a more permanent resident.

Austin: [laughs] Right, sure, sure, right. Um, what are those skills and domains that you have?

Keith: Uh, sure. So, I right now have -- the ones that I start with are Discern, the Discern skill, and the Occult domain, and I picked up, through moves, the Mend skill and the Religion domain.

Austin: Cool. Yeah, those are both pretty good ones. The Mend one is really fun because it's like, you can just fix a thing in seconds, even if it would take hours of, like, careful work, which is so fun.

Keith: Yeah, yeah. Once a session, basically, is what it says?

Austin: Yeah. I guess it's not constant, but, like... That, again, feels very "hobbyist" to me, of like [talking very quickly] "Oh, yeah, you just gotta click this into here, push this here, add a little bit of -- one second, let me take something out of my pocket." [as a second person] "Like, what are you adding -- what are you doing to make this hole in this scarf disappear so quick? Did you --"

Keith: Or person!

Austin: Right, I guess -- does it say that? Is it --

Keith: Yeah, it does, it says, um...

Austin: Geez.

Keith: Uh, where is it --

Austin: "Someone or something," yeah!

Keith: Yeah, "someone or something," yeah.

Austin: Yeah, totally. Love that. Fantastic. Love to have some healers in the party.

Keith: "Your hands are covered in spiderweb ink," it says. I don't know how that helps, but it does!

Austin: Well, what is your resource? Your resource, speaking of weird ink.

Keith: My resource is “a vial of cursed ink” and that’s Occult, I forgot to write Occult there.

Austin: Great, fantastic. Um, and then we should talk about your calling, I guess, right?

Keith: Sure.

Austin: Your calling is --

Keith: Adventure.

Austin: Adventure?

Keith: Yeah.

Austin: OK, so: we already kind of talked about what drove you out of the Unschola Republica [Keith: Yeah.] and drove you into, uh, Sangfielle, but we got those other questions --

Keith: I felt unwelcome there.

Austin: [chuckles] Yeah, sounded like it. “You and another player character barely escaped from a dangerous situation recently. Who was it, and how did it happen?”

Keith: Oh, right! I was thinking... where....? OK. I was thinking that this might be Art’s character. I haven’t talked about this with Art, but since Art’s been around, I thought maybe that his character might have been showing me places that I was curious about around Blackwick that, like, I might not have known about. ‘Cause, like, Art is slightly more local, right?

Art: Sure. I seem to be the most local of the group, yeah. Works for me. Uh, post-Blackwick or pre-Blackwick?

Keith: Um... It’s been a year, so let’s say post-Blackwick.

Art: Alright.

Austin: So, then, what was the situation? Broad strokes, even.

Keith: Um, I imagine that if I’m going to Art, if I’m going to M. -- what is it? M... is it Doskvol?

Art: Duval.

Keith: Duval, Duval. Uh, if I’m going to Duval maybe a couple times being like, “Nah, show me somewhere cool,” I think that eventually means “dangerous.” Maybe almost even specifically, if

not explicitly. And, uh, I was trying to think of somewhere -- It's hard, in a place that's almost totally dangerous, like the sort of Heartland area. I wasn't thinking of anything specifically. But it might have been, like, a separate mine that they don't mine in?

Austin: Ooh, that's fun.

Keith: Or, like, a cave entrance, like -- this isn't where the mining happens, but there's another entrance further down.

Austin: Right, we talked about -- remember we did talk about there being other entrances, kinda throughout the mountains, where things came *out* of, but people didn't -- miners didn't go in there, because why would you go all the way up there to go into the mine?

Keith: Right.

Austin: And that could be a fun -- that could be a fun place, I like that. Ran into some stuff you didn't like, presumably?

Keith [cross]: Um, yeah, maybe something came out --

Austin [cross]: And had to get out of there, or was there just a magical -- ?

Keith: We've talked about people coming out of the walls sometimes?

Austin: We have talked about that, yeah.

Keith: So maybe it was one of those. Maybe something sp -- particularly unpleasant was working its way out of the walls of the mine.

Austin: OK, um, all right. Then another question: "Recently, you and another character returned from a delve with an item for a wealthy patron. They wouldn't give it up. Why, and what was it?"

Keith [cross]: So, this doesn't have to be --

Austin [cross]: You've been on the other side of this one!

Keith: This doesn't have to be what it is, but I thought maybe that the -- that Janine, it was the first thing that -- I think it was the first one of these that we did, the one where I kept the owl's wit, and I thought it might be funny and fun if that was supposed to be sort of an apology delve that we went on because we already did -- we already did this to that same guy, [**Sylvi** laughs] except that it was Es that kept the thing? [**Janine** laughs] Do we think this is fun and funny? 'Cause I like it.

Janine: I do think it is fun and funny, yeah.

Keith: OK. Is there something you want to have kept?

Janine: Um...

Keith: Owl's wit is so good. I didn't have anything that made as little sense but was as cool-sounding as that.

Austin: We can just for now say that happened before, also.

Janine: I'm so brain-fried right now, I'm just completely drawing a blank.

Keith: That's fine. No, you already came up with owl's wit, so I'll think of something and I'll put it in there.

Austin: Uh, all right, sounds good.

Janine: It should be something fancy.

Keith: OK.

Austin: So that's what you would want. It would be to hold onto something fancy. That makes sense.

Janine: Pretty, fancy, expensive probably... uh, like, 35-70% useless on a, like, practical level.

Austin: Mm.

Art: Like, a cuff made out of owl ivory.

[Sylvi laughs]

Keith: It could be -- it could be -- looking glass, but instead of a mirror it's just really nice glass. [really driving the point home] Looking glass. It's glass that you look at.

Art: Last chance for tusked owls, though. I'm just--

[laughter]

Austin: Um... yeah, OK, we'll figure it out. We'll figure out what -- something that is exciting. Um, all right, so, those are those two, and then -- "What's the most dangerous beast or individual you've heard tell of, and why haven't you defeated them yet?"

Keith: I cast a spell that briefly made me visible to something or someone tall and hungry. We have never met, but when I dream, I feel that they are looking for me.

Jack: [genuinely impressed] Amazing.

Austin: Love that. Uh, all right, do we have anything else? Did we hit all of your stuff? Oh, trinkets. Trinkets? Trinkets.

Keith: Uh, yes. Trinkets and keepsakes.

Austin: Trinkets. Keepsakes. Yes.

Keith: Um, my first one -- I have a brightly colored fish in a jar. His name is Tombo, and he's always arguing with me.

[**Dre** and **Sylvi** laugh]

Austin: Oh. Do other people hear the arguments?

Keith: Yes. Well, they hear at least my side. I don't know how loud the fish is.

Austin: ["we don't have time to unpack that right now" voice] I mean -- Sure. Uh huh.

Jack: [amused] Keith, did you come up with the name for Tombo before or after you came up with the name for your character?

Keith: [confidently] Way before. Hours before.

Jack: Great.

Dre: Excellent.

Keith: Like -- literally 12 hours ago I came up with Tombo.

Austin: Um, what else you got?

Janine: That's the name of the kid from *Kiki's Delivery Service*, right? The little weiner kid?

Keith: Also it means -- It also means "dragonfly" in Japanese, and they use it to describe tuna -- a specific part on a tuna. That's a coincidence. I thought of the name Tombo and googled it and that came up.

Janine: Also some really good brush markers.

Keith: And I said, “That works.” Uh, I also have a box of probably useless magical trinkets. I’m always testing and usually discarding these.

Austin [cross]: Great. Just little old charm bracelets and fancy-looking stones...

Keith [cross]: Yeah, the one that I was thinking of, I had a -- my original idea was that I had basically like a jar on a stick that caught vibrations. I don’t know what that means. But then I thought, “What if I just had a box of these always?” Like, different things like that.

Austin: Yeah, that’s fun.

Keith: And then my one for my calling is “an inaccurate map of the Heart that I bought off some guy in Concentus.”

Austin: [laughs] Yeah. Perfect, good. Um, cool. The magical trinket -- like, the magical things that don’t work -- remind me of in *Stalker*, both the film and the games, uh, people just carry around bolts or, like, mechanical -- like a bolt, like a screw, you know what I mean? And they hope -- they have those to throw at places they don’t trust [**Keith** cackles] to see if a strange anomaly [**Jack:** So good.] will, like, turn into a whirlwind or an electricity bolt or just, like, crush it into nothing. It’s such a good low-tech solution for “I’m walking through a place that’s going to try to kill me.” Um, *Stalker*, the game and the film, and *Roadside Picnic*, the book -- also good touchstones for this game. Um, that’s everybody?

Keith: *Roadside Picnic* is such a good name for a thing that eventually gets turned into a thing called *Stalker*.

Austin: [laughs] Yes. Yeah, uh huh!

Keith: It’s a very, uh -- *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* vibe.

Keith and Austin [in unison]: *Blade Runner!*

Austin: Right, uh huh. Yeah. Um, so that’s characters. We did it. I think that that’s everybody. [pauses]

Um. We’ve gone really long, and so instead of, like, debating a lot of this stuff, I’ll just go over kind of the Haven part of this pretty quickly. We talked about all this stuff off mic to greater or lesser degree, and I know we’ll continue to refine it, um, as we get closer to sessions -- or choose not to and just figure it out in play, which is also viable. That’s also a way that you can do this.

I guess, for people wondering, we’re using *Sanctum*, which is a, an expansion book, an extra little book for *Heart*, that is about how to play a game set in a domain, instead of the normal style of this game, which is... You know, normally you play this game and it’s like, you start up top, and you get missions, or, you know, adventure reasons, you follow your callings and your beats to drive you forward towards the center of the Heart. You’re kind of doing a

dungeon delve all the way through. Here, with a Haven-based game, you're instead kind of telling the story of a specific place as it comes under threat from within or without. Um, and again, I won't go into everything -- and also we've kind of already told the story of our haven, the story of the curse of Eastern Folly and it slowly becoming more and more like Blackwick, until it became Blackwick. And, uh, to that end there are some things here that this kind of Haven-building thing would ask us to do that we don't need to do, in terms of things like "threats." I think we have a pretty good idea about what threats are, or what local art and culture is like. I think, again, we've gone over that pretty well. So we will go over a couple of things just so we're on the same page going into the next session -- the first session.

Every tile of the Heartland has a tier -- for us that ranges from Tier 0, which is completely normal stuff, to Tier 4, which in *Heart* is the Heart itself, where things are just completely off the wall. Unpredictable, gravity's broken, physics, causality, it's all over the place, because you're staring at, you know, the living heart of a dead god, or you're staring at the eternal flower of life blooming and dying over and over again, or whatever your Heart is. We don't have a single Heart. We have a number of Tier 4 places across the map. Maybe we'll get to some of them, we'll see. But for Blackwick -- for what we've -- I know we were thinking about Tier 2, but I think Tier 1 for Blackwick itself makes more sense and it gives us a little more leeway in terms of dialing that knob up. If we start at 2, then a lot of the places you go to will be *less* weird than Blackwick. And that feels like not the vibe? The vibe should be getting into creepier and stranger places. Also, I think getting rid of the curse brings us from a Tier 2 to a Tier 1 in many ways.

Every place on the map, again, and the places between them, have Domains. We talked about Domains earlier with your character classes. The domains for Blackwick are Haven and Religion: Haven because it's a city, it's a town, it's a county that people are living in and managing to get by in; and Religion because of the ascendancy of Slumbous [chuckles], the centrality of the Triadic Pyre, the rest area and kind of market area that the Caravan of the Coin sets up shop at -- that's three big religions all in one place, plus the fact that this was -- there was a cursed abbey here, an abandoned abbey here -- you know, so you still have the old architecture of the religious stuff, um, so I think Religion made sense there, I think we kind of came to that. Um, again, we have unique qualities and local art pretty covered.

There are 3 main NPCs for any Haven, according to the book. You have a kind of a Caretaker who is -- your "status quo," like, I think for us "status quo" has such negative connotations, for obvious reasons, but "Caretaker" maybe is a little less negative, or more ambiguous, right? More ambivalent. And so I would say this is one, this is Proctor Ekashi Wolff, um, who is one of the three leaders from the Triadic Pyre. Then we have a Rebel, who I think is going to be the boss of a new kind of mining endeavor in the region, and that Rebel is someone who pushes against the status quo, who wants things to change, for better, for worse, or different, however you want it to break down. Um, and I have a good idea about who that is going to be! We'll figure it out for sure in the future. The third major NPC is the Voice, which is the character who, like, represents the people most directly -- maybe can't make decisions, but y'know, is the person who's aligned with the populace. And that is of course Stanislaka, the nun of Slumbous, who over the last year, I think, has probably continued to build support and community with the folks here in Blackwick County.

Next up is Threats, which I think, again, we've kind of established more or less. There are some threats out there. Go listen to the Ground Itself game to hear more about those! [chuckles]

Every Haven, in fact every location and every delve, has a stress die associated with it. This is sort of like "how much damage can the place do to you?" It's a good fallback for, let's say, as a GM I don't have characters started out, so you get into a bar fight: what damage do those people do? Uh, and that's tied to what the kind of local situation is. Um, I think we decided d6 stress die for that, which -- d4 is low, d12 is high, so d6 is lower, but it's not rock bottom. The other way I think about this is, like, how well can the people here take care of themselves? But also, like, if you bit into something terrible and failed a roll -- you bit into one of the teeth-fruit -- um, would that fuck you up? How much would that fuck you up? And now we know it's d6 stress to fail that roll.

Um, landmarks (which is what this is, it's a Haven-type landmark) have haunts, and haunts are kind of like -- I almost said resources, but resources are different -- they're special sub-locations inside of a landmark that are places you can buy or trade for goods or services, and what it really is like, it's a place to heal all of your different stresses and Fallouts. I'm talking to y'all and we don't need to go over particular names or whatever, but there's a doctor here who can heal Blood stress, a d6 Blood stress doctor, which I think is enough to heal Fallout. I'm not 100% sure, I'll have to double check. There's a Supply haunt here, d10, which are like a bunch of trade houses from the mines, like, the people who buy the stuff, basically, that the miners bring out. And I think that they have, because they're buying and selling the various shit that comes out of the mines, that's a d10, which means it's very high. They're very good. You can get really good stuff from them. And then there's a Mind stress haunt. A lot of the Mind stress haunts are tied to -- in the book, are tied to things like pubs, but I was listening to the podcast that features Grant Howitt and Chris Taylor, and one of the things that they kind of drilled down at was the idea that sociality is a big part of healing Mind, as much as anything else. Having a place where you can, to borrow a *Beam Saber* term, "cut loose" with your buds. And so we talked about there being an automat, like a dining hall with an automat -- which, if you're listening and don't know what an automat is, you should look it up. Basically it's a wall of, like, food dispensers -- and I think we've decided that the automat was built from pieces brought out of the mine. One of the things buried in here was this, like, early 1900s-style automat.

Um, finally there's resources, and resources are, instead of, like, healing stuff, they are what you can buy or steal or barter for around the Haven. And I think it's tools, which is a d8, d8 tools as a resource... And then, like, "religious stuff," d6 "religious stuff" -- we don't have specifics here, we'll figure it out when it comes time. But that's the sort of stuff that you can find here. So tools, I guess, would probably be Technology domain stuff. Or Haven domain stuff, that actually makes more sense.

Um, so, yeah. That is the mechanics of Blackwick. And I go over it quickly because otherwise you would be listening to a 40-minute conversation where we hashed this out, and we just did 2 hours and 40 minutes, and everyone was tired, and this is easier to just do this and let everyone crash and let me just quickly do this wrap-up tonight. That's the magic of editing.

[music starts and continues under narration]

Austin: You didn't even under -- we already said goodbye. Everyone else already left. It's just me here now. I'm looking out my window alone. Um, thank you all for listening. We will be back next week with the first adventure of Sangfielle.

[Chords and vocals of opening theme cut in]

[Music continues to end of episode]