

## Winter in Hieron 20: Pulling You Further Down

Transcriber: Cy @vlasdygoth

ALI: Last time, on Friends at the Table.

AUSTIN: And you see a two-story, maybe one-story, like a tall one-story structure there on the, the top, above two wooden doors. There is a... a symbol that has been marked in the stone there, that has been carved there, there's an engraved stone, basically. A humanoid figure that has... very like, tree-like limbs, in that the limbs are knotted and twisted a little bit like, their knees look like tree knots. And then, at their fingers and at their toes, their, their appendages like turn into blooming flowers.

*[MUSIC — Inside]*

AUSTIN: (cont'd) And at the head, the head turns into a tree, like the branches of a tree, where its hair would be.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: You're at this thing, that's like a single floor high, and I think you were expecting a tower? *[cut]* The symbols you write are wrong.

JANINE: Oh.

AUSTIN: The thing that you write down, you write down, okay it's like a floor big, and it's the door's on the eastern side, and it's made of stone and wood, and then like, you like, you finish writing it and look over what you wrote and it's like, you've written the number that means like... infinity, basically. You've written like oh, it's the tallest thing that's ever been, you know? You write the number that basically means at this point it doesn't matter how tall it is, that's how big it is. And then you write that the door is on the bottom, and that the, that it is constructed out of, and then the word you write is "Hieron." Or the symbol that you make is like the world symbol.

JANINE: Hm.

AUSTIN: You've gone down a flight of stairs, and now, when you look around, you see what the other party saw when they went below, which is like a version of the surrounding area, cast in greyscale. And also seeing it from high above. It's like you're looking down at the forest you were just walking in. It's below you, now. And it's dark here, but the light that you brought is providing enough to walk on. And you're on a long bridge heading a direction that's kind of hard to judge at this point, cause there's not— I guess you could put it together that it's heading east.

*[MUSIC — Inside ends.]*

ART: I have something. If you need something.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* What do you have?

ART: Oh, this is... I take, I take the ring off the chain, I put the ring on my finger, and I drop the chain.

*[Ali gasps]*

AUSTIN: *[sighs]* It falls for... twenty feet, thirty feet, you can see it, it like, it flashes in the light of the, the torch. And then it catches something, and it's as if the air is... it's as if a curtain is being ripped. And suddenly it's not falling through the air, it's sliding down the side of a building. And the, the like, reality tears, and now in place of the empty air, is another set of buildings. It's as if you like, literally took like, the corner, like the top right corner of, of a curtain and like, ripped it slowly down to the left to reveal like, a set of tall buildings. And *they* are... built out of, I guess Hadrian did see the City of First Light. And they have that style of construction, the Marielda style, the kind of like midtown Marielda style. Of, of the... with like, the touches of obsidian and the kind of, the canopies that go between them. And then that's there now. And then the, at that point, there's just like this weird divide between one set of world where there is like, when you look to your left, you see the forests that go up into Rosemerrow, and when you look to your right, there's a version of the world that is, that looks like Marielda. Or at least that style of construction, as a city to the south. Not far to the south, near to the south. As if it was just like, like just south of where you are. Like, here-ish, you know, like this, these, where these trees are right now is just a city. This is really weird. I'm not, just to be clear—

ALI: *[cross]* Yep! Uh huh!

ART: *[cross]* Yeah...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: You're not like, it's weird they don't immediately understand this right? You're not?

AUSTIN: No, totally. Uh huh!

DRE: I don't like this and I wanna get off this bridge.

ALI: Yeah, I... God.

ART: You don't wanna see what's on the other side of this bridge?

ALI: I hate this!

DRE: No, I do, I want to, I want to cross so that we can get off of this bridge.

ALI: Okay.

ART: I hope we didn't Fantasma in another dimension.

ALI: Oh, stop.

AUSTIN: So you continue walking?

DRE: I, I do, yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay, Throndir walks off.

ALI: Like, under distress.

ART: Yeah, no...

AUSTIN: Fair. Throndir—

ART: And just as a bookkeeping note, Hadrian's keeping his fist clenched so his— if his ring decides to fall off again it can't go anywhere.

AUSTIN: Fair. I'm not gonna take that ring from you without a roll. I promise.

ART: *[cross]* Sure, but it's a character—

AUSTIN: But we could roll at this point, don't worry.

ALI: Boy howdy.

DRE: *[laughs]* Don't worry!

AUSTIN: Throndir, you're going first, and so you're the person who hears it. So, first, what you notice is the bridge stops and then, you realize it goes to stairs leading downward. And... then, you see the flash of light from... it's as if there's like, someone has another torch, and you're seeing like the, the... the light coming through a cave or something, do you know what I mean? But it's just in the air, like that's just a loose effect hanging in the air. Like, a hologram or something. As if it was like, light being thrown onto a cave wall. And the closer you get, the more and more like a cave— the cave wall almost forms in, and suddenly you are in another little cave. And you hear people shouting off to the left, basically. This cave like, turns, this this corner— the stairs drop, go into a little corridor that you don't see until you're right there. And

then to the left, you can see that they, they run like, into another set of caves and you can hear people yelling.

DRE: Okay...

AUSTIN: And the sound of metal hitting metal.

DRE: I want to try and like, creep forward and like, take a look at what it is without exposing myself. Like I basically just wanna like, kinda like, peek and try and spy on whatever's going on up ahead.

AUSTIN: Sure. Hm. I think that's a Discern Realities. Actually I think that, I'm not gonna— I think you getting caught, those people are very distracted, but I do think that the, what you're doing is discerning realities, so I can give you a little bit more detail. And I'll give you some base detail before you ask the questions.

DRE: That's a nine.

AUSTIN: Alright, so you get one question. So here's the basic detail: The little side, also everyone, hey Thrandir went off. And you're going after him but he's— you lose sight of him at this point. It looks like he goes down the— it *looks* like you're like, everyone gets to the top of the stairs that he's already at the bottom, he walks forward to where that hovering light is, and then turns left and is gone. Like, there's not, he's just, he doesn't fall off the bridge— it looks like he's gonna take a step that's gonna make him fall off the fucking bridge, and then he's gone.

Thrandir, you see a group of... five people. Six people, engaged in a melee. Nope, that's wrong, six people. Seven people? Seven people. Sorry, I had to look at my notes. Two of them are about three, three and a half feet tall, something like that? Very stout folks. One of them is like, a big four foot, for a dwarf, big four, four and a half foot tall dude with like a close-cropped beard and a ponytail, who has like a... a kind of, you know, I was talking about not having, most people not having really good armor in this world. He has what looks like, he has a cut of armor that you've never seen before. Like, it has pauldrons of a type you've just never seen before. And... there is someone almost as tall as him who is, who is fighting alongside of him, and it seems like it's those four people, to the, the two smaller ones, I don't wanna say cowering, necessarily, but they're not doing a great job of, of helping. And then there are three other people who are wearing... they're also wearing leather armor with hoods.

And the, the scene that this is happening in front of you is, is like, a little pond to the right? Gonna paint the frame for you, to the right is a little pond, the fight is happening on kind of a low grassy field to the left of that pond? And then the people who're, like, trying not to fight but still kind of feel like they should be contributing are to the left of that a little bit near a treeline, and they're doing things like throwing rocks at the three hooded figures. And all of this is lit by torchlight.

DRE: Okay, so there's basically four dwarves versus three hooded figures?

AUSTIN: And the hooded figures are also dwarves. Everyone here is a dwarf.

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: As far as you can tell? You don't know from dwarves. Throndir's never met a— maybe you've met a dwarf or two, you were just in, you were just in... Wharfhurst, so you've met some dwarves there, but you don't *know* a bunch of dwarves, you know what I mean?

DRE: Yeah, yeah. But it's, it's a group of four versus the group of three people in hoods.

AUSTIN: Exactly, exactly. But really, it's the group of two versus that group of three?

DRE: Yeah. *[laughs]* Oh shit, you know what? I just realized, that actually would become a ten because I had that plus one forward.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* You *did* have plus one, awesome, so you get three questions.

DRE: Okay. Um... what is about to happen?

AUSTIN: The... you catch a glint of steel in the dark. To the right, to the, the kind of like, right of the pond, there is a little rocky outcropping, and there is a fourth hooded figure who is drawing back a bow. And they are going to shoot and kill one of the other four people.

DRE: Okay, um, what here is useful or valuable to me?

AUSTIN: Um... the... hm. Trying to think if— it depends on what I mean, what you mean by useful or valuable. The... metaphor— or like, tactically, the position of that other, of that sniper, he is protected from the other two, from the two like warrior dwarves because they don't have any ranged weapons? And if you could have that position, you would also be able to like, get the drop on the three hooded figures. Or the two dwarves, if they were the two people who you wanted to fight. So that's one. I think the other thing is the two cowering people. Like...

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: When, whatever's happening there, those two people there are the ones who are of value here. They're the ones being protected, and anything being protected is valuable.

DRE: *[cross]* Alright. And what here is not what it appears to be?

AUSTIN: The... You catch a symbol on the leather armor of the hooded figures. It is a bright golden ring. It is the symbol of Samoths.

DRE: Hm.

AUSTIN: Everybody else, what do you do?

DRE: *[cross]* Are you— yeah, are you all coming after me?

ALI: *[long sigh]* Are we?

ART: I mean we, we were following, I, I assume we, we... we get there.

ALI: *[cross]* But he stepped off into nothing and presumably just disappeared?

AUSTIN: That is what looks like happened, hundred percent.

ALI: Can we hear the stuff behind the thing too?

AUSTIN: Not until you get down there.

ALI: Boy howdy.

AUSTIN: Hella, I feel like I wanna make you make a Defy Danger to do this. Or something, like, the way you're playing this is good, but also like, it doesn't feel like she would do this right now!

ALI: *[laughs]* Yeah, I... God. I'm not, I'm, I'm not leaving, but I'm definitely not being the one who's stepping forward, if that's like the question?

AUSTIN: It sounded like everyone else— Adaire are you going forward? Because Hadrian sounds like he is.

JANINE: I mean, here's the thing—

ART: *[cross]* Hadrian's going forward.

JANINE: If Hella turned to Adaire right now and said "Hey, do you wanna go?"

*[Ali laughs]*

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Adaire would probably be like, yeah.

ALI: I actually have an idea, though. Okay I think like, I'm gonna... I'm gonna do the thing that, like, moms do, I guess? Like, Adaire goes to follow Hadrian and Hella sticks her arm out to like, stop her? And is like... Like:

ALI (as Hella): Do you have any paper, or something that we can tear up?

JANINE (as Adaire): *[sarcastic]* Yeah, no, I make maps for a living but I don't carry paper.

*[laughter]*

ALI (as Hella): Like, paper that you're willing to get rid of, don't be a jerk!

JANINE (as Adaire): I've got this moth shopping list for some reason?

*[laughter]*

JANINE: I'm literally still carrying that, it's in my inventory!

ALI: Cause I feel like keeping a trail is probably a good idea? Like if there's really, like, if, what if, if behind this, this... If we step off of this thing and it's like, that whole like, city nonsense downstairs, if we have to come back out, I would love to know how to.

AUSTIN: Right. I mean, what, do you want me to, I? Are you gonna like?

ALI: *[cross]* Is that a roll?

AUSTIN: *[cross]* I could just tell you—

ALI: Can we just do that?

AUSTIN: Yeah, you can just do that.

ALI: Okay. Then let's do that and I guess go forward?

AUSTIN: Okay. The rest of the group, Hella and Adaire trailing, I guess, I mean like, Hella and Adaire, you see Hadrian disappear around that corner. And at that point, you can make, by the time you see that, you can make out that there is a weird— like, it kind of looks like he walked into a ghost cave or something? Like a... translucent cave? *[laughter]* But he like, he turns and he's just gone.

ALI: *[cross]* This is—

AUSTIN: And you don't get to keep seeing him walk through, you know what I mean?

ALI: Right, right, right. Yeah, but this is why you keep a trail, 'cause fucking ghost caves!

AUSTIN: Mhm. Welcome to the ghost cave. And then you finally walk in and you see what I described for Thrandir, who at this point has done something else. Thrandir, what did you do while they were approaching?

DRE: Oh god, I, well shit, I was gonna try and wait for Hadrian to get, to be like "Hey these are your people, get them to chill the fuck out!" But—

AUSTIN: *[cross]* No, there's a beat.

DRE: *[cross]* I suppose that's, that sniper won't like—

AUSTIN: He comes in to see whatever you're about to do, yeah.

DRE: Um... I have my bow out and I am lining up a shot on the sniper's arm.

AUSTIN: Okay, so you're doing... do you have a move that lets you specifically hit arms?

DRE: Yeah, I'm doing my, my Called Shot.

AUSTIN: Okay, how's that work?

DRE: When you attack a defenseless or surprised enemy at range—

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Sure.

DRE: You can choose to deal your damage or name your target and roll dex.

AUSTIN: And you're naming arms. Okay.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Gimme a roll. Ten plus. Or not ten plus, sorry, or you did, you got a twelve, so yes.

DRE: Yeah. So on a ten plus, they drop anything they're holding and I deal damage.

AUSTIN: Yes. So go ahead and do your damage.

DRE: I haven't dealt damage in so long...

AUSTIN: A d8.

DRE: Eh, one, that's fine, I didn't really wanna kill him.



AUSTIN: *[cross]* That's fine, right, that's almost ideal, right?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Cool. Uh, the... figure drops their bow and it, it splashes into the pond, at which point the two armored dwarves like, turn their attention to where the, the bow dropped and the other hooded figure like slinks away, back to the, like back behind the rock, and then like tries to lose— tries to make distance. And then the other door, and that's the point at which I guess Hadrian comes in.

ART: Oh, this is a lot, huh?

DRE (as Throndir): Hadrian, I don't exactly know what's happening here, but the folks in the hoods have Samoth's symbology on them.

ART (as Hadrian): Sure, let's see if we can, if we can stop this, huh?

DRE (as Throndir): That would be good, because I think that the two that are hiding over there— I don't know, I feel like they might know what's going on here.

AUSTIN: Also, while this conversation is happening, like clank! Clank! Swords! Maces! Shields! Clank!

*[Dre laughs]*

ART: Yeah, Hadrian calls out, and I'm trying to think of a way to phrase this that doesn't get me uh, killed?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ART: Yeah, um...

ART (as Hadrian): My name is Hadrian, I am Paladin of the, of the... the Creed of Samoth's, our Peaceful Lord Above, in His name stop what you're doing, stop fighting, and, and explain what's going on to us over here. *[laughter]* And, yeah, lay down your arms and, and I will aid in a peaceful solution.

ART: Oh, that's terrible.

AUSTIN: Gimme a roll. What's this ability? This is the one that always goes wrong?

*[laughter]*

ART: Yeah, this is the one that always goes wrong, they all have the option to... do what I say.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ART: Fight me, or run away. And if I hit this roll, I get a plus one forward.

AUSTIN: Nice.

ART: Yeah, seven plus, I get a plus one forward. I guess on six or less they can do whatever they want, but they could also just attack me anyway.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Correct. It's also a six or less, I get to make a move as hard as I want. Oh, that's a ten though! That's a twelve!

ART: That's a twelve!

AUSTIN: Alright, I actually need to read this move again. I am the Law... yeah, on a ten plus, so take that plus one forward, for sure. The... There is a break in the action, the two groups kind of split to their sides and the... the... two armored figures retreat back to where the two unarmored figures are and kind of form a little wall around them? And the, it's clear that the two unarmored dwarves want to fucking leave. But the, the tallest dwarf here puts his hand on one of their arms and like, holds them in place. And is like, peering at you, and he shouts:

AUSTIN (as the tall armored dwarf): What is your lack?

ART (as Hadrian): I don't understand that question.

*[laughter]*

JANINE: Is that your answer, or?

ART: That's, that's what my answer is in the Will Ferrell movie based on this adventure.

AUSTIN: Good, good.

ART: I don't know, what's the diplomatic way to say I don't understand... um, Hadrian holds his arms up, away from his weapons. And um...

ART (as Hadrian): I don't know, but I'd really be happy to talk about it with you.

AUSTIN: One of the hooded figures shouts:

AUSTIN (as the hooded figure): The two they protect are heretics against our Lord!

AUSTIN: And he like, pats the, the symbol of Samothres on his shoulder, and then opens his hand to reveal, to show it to you basically.

ART (as Hadrian): *[partially in character?]* Um, says who? *[in character]* Whose authority has branded them heretics? Again, I am, I am Hadrian, Sword of Samoths, Defender of the Undying Fire, Officer of the Order of Eternal Princes, and accompanying me is Exarch... Alyosha.

AUSTIN: Alyosha's here! Right. Whoops! I fucked up.

ALI: They've\* been here the whole time?

AUSTIN: Yeah, I forgot that we set that up earlier, I'm bad at my job. Um, they say, Alyosha's here and, and was also terrified of this and came in with Adaire and, and Hella. He like, peers at them with, with, what's that thing you do sometimes, Art? Senses that pierce lies?

ART: Yeah, I have that sometimes.

AUSTIN: Do you have that now?

ART: *[cross]* Senses that pierce lies. Let me, let me just double-check that wording for you. Yeah, senses that pierce lies.

AUSTIN: Do you have that right now?

ART: I don't, I thought that would be boring.

*[laughter]*

AUSTIN: Okay. They say...

AUSTIN (as hooded figure): We're here on the order of the Solarch himself.

AUSTIN: And... Alyosha seems like, he... puts a hand on, on your back and says:

AUSTIN (as Alyosha): Things are strange here, child. They're not lying, but I do not trust them.

ART: What here is evil?

AUSTIN: Hella.

ART: Yeah.

DRE: Wocka wocka.

ART: It's important to calibrate your tools.

*[Dre laughs]*

AUSTIN: Yeah, exactly. True. True!

ALI: Lord...

AUSTIN: They... I'm trying to think of how, speaking of tools, I'm trying to decide if they are tools or if they are evil. Do you know what I mean? Like, they're definitely true believers in what they're doing.

ART: Sure.

AUSTIN: And we haven't had the evil conversation in a while.

JANINE: *[cross]* And also, a tool can totally be evil.

ART: *[cross]* And who doesn't love it.

AUSTIN: Yeah, some tools are evil, absolutely, but some tools are... not. Not all tools are evil, not all tools are evil. Or aren't evil. Lots of them are. Which makes me feel like one of the three here is. Is how I'd break that—the one who's shouting at you. No, not that one, one of the other ones.

ART: Okay.

AUSTIN: And definitely the one who sniped before, but he's a little out of your range.

ART: Sure. Has Alyosha met the Solarch?

AUSTIN: You have no idea. Are you asking him that?

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN (as Alyosha): No. I... was given my title by another one of the northern exarchs.

ART: Okay, Hadrian calls out:

ART (as Hadrian): Are you willing to parley?

AUSTIN (as the hooded figure): For an officer of our Lord, yes. But do not let them flee.

AUSTIN: And he lifts up a mace and points it at them. And the other two guards, or the other two people who are with him, with their hoods and leather armor like pan out as if to like, keep a, keep the angles on them so they can't run away. Except that they could try to run away into this forest, but for whatever reason they are not doing that.

ART: Hadrian reaches his hand out, you know like, offering and says to the, to the other party,

ART (as Hadrian): If you— If you're, if you're good folk, true folk you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear here. Come.

AUSTIN: Hm. I'm gonna let it ride on that previous roll, and say that this is still an effect of your, your thing. And the two of them walk past their guards towards you.

ART (as Hadrian): What are your names?

AUSTIN: The, the woman swallows.

AUSTIN (as the woman): M— Miko. This is Sebastian. We lack a home. And you?

ART (as Hadrian): I'm. I'm Hadrian, I think I, I think I covered that. Um, I'm on a quest. These are my, these are my friends.

AUSTIN (as Miko): What are your names?

ART (as Hadrian): *[cross]* Do you guys wanna introduce yourselves?

AUSTIN: *[cross]* She says. She is, she has dark hair, and, and... kind of... brownish skin, with, with a wide frame, and dyed red hair that is, is cut short. But it seems cut short less for style and more for utility? As people who've been on the run before, it's definitely like, hair I don't have time to take care of super well right now. And that is, that doesn't match her clothing, which is... fairly expensive, it has colors that are hard to come by, like blue and violet in it— in them? Which suggests some degree of wealth and... her partner, the person she's with, Sebastian, is not dressed as well, but is similarly kind of a short broad dude, he's a dwarf, who is rocking a much bigger beard than the other, the two soldiers that were protecting them? With like, little like twisty bits coming off of his hair, which is like, long and unkempt, but he did not cut his hair short, he likes his hair a bunch. Oh they asked, she asked, Miko asked you for your names.

DRE (as Throndir): I'm Throndir, this is, this is my dog Kodiak.

DRE: Kodiak barks.

AUSTIN: Sebastian like, drops his guard and like, walks over to pet Kodiak? And then one of the, one of the, the... Samoth's soldiers is like:

AUSTIN (as the soldier): Don't—! Stop. You step back! No petting!

JANINE (as Adaire): *[sarcastic]* What's he gonna do, ride the dog to freedom?

AUSTIN (as the soldier): Are you sure you're with Samoths?

ART: I hold up the ring. Oh! I've, we didn't, we didn't cover this. When I leveled, I chose a new move called Perfect Knight, which is when I quest, you choose three boons instead of two, and one of the ones I selected was the, my new quest thing is, a mark of divine authority, so we should figure out what that is, and if it—

AUSTIN: The mark of Benjamin on your hand has changed. You just now noticed it. It is a glowing ring on the, the outside of your hand where he gripped you.

ART: Aw. So I, I hold that up.

AUSTIN: Mhm. One of the three kneels.

JANINE: Is it the evil one?

AUSTIN: No. It's the, it's the one who hasn't spoken and who isn't evil.

ART: This is gonna get really awkward at the end of this when I have to kill the evil one because I'm not allowed to suffer an evil creature to live? Just so everyone's prepared for that. *[laughter]* That's how this ends.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Some of us are definitely prepared.

ART: Great! I knew you had my back.

AUSTIN (as Sebastian): We, we— we're just trying to get to the Buoy.

AUSTIN: Says Sebastian.

AUSTIN (as Sebastian): We think we can find a, a home if we get past there. If we get to like, I don't know, strata two.

DRE (as Throndir): What's— what's the Buoy?

ART (as Hadrian): *[stage whisper]* Yeah, I don't know what any of that means like the, like the floating thing?

JANINE (as Adaire): I know what that means.

ART (as Hadrian): Why—

AUSTIN: Do you offer what that means, Adaire?

JANINE: Now's probably a good time to offer what that means, right?

AUSTIN: Mhm!

JANINE: When it gets spoken, and there's a shared look of confusion between people...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: So... the Buoy, or the Buoy. It's a—

AUSTIN: Or the Buoy, if you're Jack de Quidt.

JANINE: *[laughs]* I would say the Buoy! Is...

AUSTIN: It's wrong. They're wrong. All Commonwealth— what? The Buoy?

JANINE: Oh yeah, o-y, that usually makes an e sound. Totally. *[laughs]* So it's, it's like a weird dwarven encampment thing? Right? It's like—

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's a—

JANINE: It's kinda like a city but it's like really big and confusing and it's, it's like a, it's like a significant landmark that is very easy to find.

AUSTIN: Yeah, the thing that is—

JANINE: Or is said to be very easy to find.

AUSTIN: The phrase that you were taught, Adaire is... that you don't—

JANINE: "You never need a map to reach the Buoy."

AUSTIN: Yeah. You never need a map to reach the Buoy. You always, you'll find your way there. It's a crossroads, it's a, it's a settlement somewhere in dwarven, whatever the dwarves— wherever the dwarves live! You're all very busy with your own bullshit and you did not ever like sit down to figure out what was up with the dwarves, so.

ART (as Hadrian): Well, it's all gonna be fine now. Why, why are these soldiers angry with you?

AUSTIN (as Sebastian): I don't know!

AUSTIN: And the one who's speaking, has been shouting to you says:

AUSTIN (as the soldier): His ring. Look at his ring.

ART: Tell me about his ring.

**[30:00]**

AUSTIN: It is... you see it, and it catches the light of your torch such that it looks like it is liquid metal. And then it feels as if it is, Hadrian, the original on which your ring is based.

ART: Whoa.

AUSTIN: And... Miko says:

AUSTIN (as Miko): It was mine to give.

ART (as Hadrian): That's yours?

AUSTIN (as Miko): My family's. And as my spouse, it was my ring to give.

ART: I look, I look back at the soldiers like?

AUSTIN: He just shakes his head, like nah.

ART: Well, that's convincing.

AUSTIN: The, one of the... one of the, the two like, mercenary dwarves, the tallest one with the ponytail and the close-cropped beard steps forward, he has kind of a ruddy complexion.

AUSTIN (as the tall dwarf): You're not from around here, huh? Hadrian?

ART (as Hadrian): No, I'm, I'm from Velas. We're recently of Rosemerrow.

AUSTIN (as the tall dwarf): Which Velas? Lamina three? Lamina four?

ART (as Hadrian): Yeah, I don't know what that means?

AUSTIN: He like, covers his head and shakes his head.

DRE: Um, when he— what did he say? He said lam, what?

AUSTIN: Lamina three, lamina four.

DRE: Throndir kinda grabs on those words and like mentally pings it around in his brain? Trying to see if he can trigger a memory from Kindrali.

AUSTIN: Kindrali. Give me a Kindrali's Chosen.

DRE: Is that wisdom?



AUSTIN: I think it is.

DRE: I don't know why I'm having— yeah. It's wisdom.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: On a seven to nine it's basically like Spout Lore, so I get something interesting but not necessarily useful.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Interesting, but not necessarily useful, right. Um, Kindrali dealt with the dwarves... more often than most because he was in a position of power, so he dealt with delegates from, from their cultures. And you know that... they are very, Kindrali remembers meeting, it took him a while to put this fucking together. Which was that the... he would deal with a dwarf who would be like, oh yeah, I'm from such— I'm from Kanton. Right? Or like, I'm from, I'm from Wharfhurst, and he'd be like, oh yeah good, yeah, Wharfhurst, yeah, I know all about Wharfhurst. And then he'd meet another one a few weeks later who was like, completely different, who was wearing like, a different style of clothing, whose like, language felt a little weird and different? And then he came to understand that like, oh yeah, dwarves, like they live underground. And that means that there's different depths, and the different depths must have different cultures or something. Which is like, as far as he thought through it.

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: And so for you, you quickly understand like, okay, strata and lamina, those must be subdivision of depth of some sort.

DRE: Yeah.

DRE (as Throndir): Hadrian, I think he's asking if you live above ground or underground?

ART (as Hadrian): We live aboveground.

AUSTIN (as the tall dwarf): Oh, you're zeroes. Oh, hm. Alejandro, kill them.

AUSTIN: And at that point, Alejandro drives his body towards one of the, the soldiers of Samoths? With uh, with his blade drawn. And just like shoves it into the guy's stomach and drives him into the pond. And then, and then to be clear, the guy who's talking to you turns his back to go fight the other soldiers of Samoths. You were not the "them" in that equation.

ART: Did he kill the evil one?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: Great! What a good bit of housekeeping that was.

*[Dre laughs]*

AUSTIN: Sometimes— Yeah, sometimes things are convenient.

ALI: Wait—

ART: I don't know, is anyone interested in stopping this fight?

DRE: I mean... like, yes, but also I don't know like, which side of the fight is... I don't know. I don't like— Throndir does not like that like, these two seemingly nice people are being held up because a dude did something weird with a ring, supposedly.

ART: Yeah, I would love to see what Alyosha thinks about this?

AUSTIN: Alyosha's attention is on the ring.

ART: Yeah, I was hoping it would be!

*[Ali laughs]*

AUSTIN: He is transfixed.

ART: Hm.

ALI: I just wanna be clear— who's killing who?

AUSTIN: The mercenary dwarves who have like dope armor are killing the, the soldiers of Samoths.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Who have hoods.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Or, they're fighting again, now they're two on two. Right? And are pretty evenly matched.

ALI: Okay.

ART: Could I— Could I try to, could I try to defend... the soldiers? I want, I wanna try here, I wanna...

AUSTIN: Mhm!

ART: I don't wanna win, but I wanna like, this is my attempt to like, cool it, right, cause my first attempt to cool it is over, my new attempt to cool it is try and defend, let's say the soldier who was talking to me.

AUSTIN: Sure. Soldier's name is Candor. Give me a defend roll. So what's that look like, so you like jumping in the way?

ART: Yeah, I'm gonna try and like, just get between them, like I'm trying to break it up. But if I'm gonna get, but if I'm gonna get hit, I'm gonna get hit for Candor.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: Should I, should I do the move Defend?

AUSTIN: Yeah, you should do the move Defend. Yeah. That's a good one, I think it's a base one. Which is... "when you stand in defense of a person, item, or location under attack, roll plus CON, on a ten plus hold three, and then you can spend those one for one, any time the thing is attacked or you are attacked, to redirect an attack from the thing you defend to yourself, to halve the attack's effect or damage, to open up the attacker to an ally, giving that ally plus one forward, or to deal damage to the attacker equal to your level." Which is all pretty good. Defend gets good as you level up, cause once you can start just dealing damage to the attacker, like that's fucking great.

ART: Yeah. I'm, I'm a fan.

AUSTIN: So yeah, you're there at this point and are... and have like, turned the tides again? I will, I will tell you when it's, when Candor is attacked, what are the rest of you doing as this happens? As Hadrian rolls D.

DRE: Oh boy.

ART: I think the mercenaries are really the good guys, I'm really just honor-bound here you guys, you guys should really feel free to attack the soldiers if you, if you feel like it.

DRE: Um... Oh boy. I don't know, Adaire, Hella, I feel like I've been doing a lot here, so I wanna let you have a chance to do something?

ALI: *[cross]* Yeah, I just feel like I got into this late and I don't care about it, and I also don't like it.

JANINE: Yeah, Adaire's kind of along for the ride here, like she's not— obviously her, her leaning here is protect the people the church doesn't like, who seem sad.

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: *[laughs]* Good! Good way to live life, I guess.

JANINE: That's her angle there.

ALI: I mean it's tough not to spring to action if Hadrian is doing a thing?

AUSTIN: Yeah...

ALI: But also I don't care any of this.

JANINE: Okay so, okay, sorry to be like redundant here, can we get like a description of like, okay, so Hadrian is... is like, standing in front of Candor...

AUSTIN: Or like, he's near him.

JANINE: *[cross]* Or like, yeah.

AUSTIN: It's like a three on, yeah they're like exchanging blows back and forth and are like blocking and parrying and dodging and all that shit, right? Like, it's not a...it's not a situation of where like he's standing literally in front of Candor and is like, you know, I got you buddy! Stand behind me!

JANINE: It's like, two on two?

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's three on two, now.

JANINE: Oh, okay.

AUSTIN: Because Hadrian. Hadrian's the third.

ALI: Right.

JANINE: Right.

AUSTIN: Well I guess he's not like, fighting, he's not trying to hurt the other— or he might be, depending on how he uses those Defend holds. But uh, he's not like actively attacking, he's just... is basically protecting Candor.

ART: He's gonna try to, he's gonna try to verbally deescalate the situation.

AUSTIN: Okay. We'll see how that goes.

ART: It's not gonna *work*, but he's gotta try.

AUSTIN: Oh... *[laughs]* Lord. It's cool how we've transformed that phrase completely in our show. I definitely want us all to think about our, our, our alignments here.

ALI: Yeah. Fair.

DRE: What were the name of the two non-mercenaries?

AUSTIN: The two non-mercenaries are Miko and Sebastian.

DRE: Okay. I think Throndir goes up to Miko and Sebastian and is like,

DRE (as Throndir): Look, if we leave here now, will your people know where to find you? Like will they be able to catch up with you?

AUSTIN (as Miko and/or Sebastian): Uh... yeah. Yeah. Uh, probably.

DRE (as Throndir): Okay. Then we should go. Hadrian has— can handle this. We should get you out of here.

AUSTIN: They are like nodding, like yeah, okay, sure. And... point like past the, so like, the pond is on the right, the forest is on the left, and forward, they point forward, and are like, we've gotta go *that* way. And look to you to like, lead them.

DRE (as Throndir): Adaire? Hella? I'm, I'm taking them.

JANINE (as Adaire): Yeah...

DRE (as Throndir): You can come with me if you want or you can stay here.

ALI (as Hella): Yeah, who's we? Cause, no.

JANINE (as Adaire): I mean... *[sighs]*

JANINE: Adaire's probably gonna support like, I'm gonna support this, this exit, but like, probably not like running like, lagging a little bit behind, and trying to see if someone's gonna like, take notice and have a problem with what's happening?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: Kinda try and cover the exit.

AUSTIN: So you're gonna defend them, too? I'll let like—

JANINE: I guess, the way I was gonna, I was gonna like counter-play wasn't gonna be a fight thing, necessarily.

AUSTIN: Sure, sure. I'm just trying to think about how we can— just fictionally, that's where you're at.

JANINE: *[cross]* Like, an aid?

AUSTIN: Yeah, you don't need to roll anything for this, like you're just, you're in the back, you're making sure no one sneaks up on them, et cetera. So yeah, you manage to like, you two— or you four manage to sprint past them, Alyosha is staying with you, Hella? And like as they leave his sight, his eyes like, he like shakes it off, and is like *[mumbles]*.

ALI: Okay. Um...

ALI (as Hella): Adaire, paper, seriously. I'm staying with Hadrian.

ALI: And I guess I'm gonna help him break up that fight?

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: But like, in a much less elegant way, which is just like, literally grabbing someone and pulling them out of that fight.

AUSTIN: Alright, so first, one of the, one of the, mercenaries swings this big like, he's wielding like a... a bastard sword, right, so it's like he can hold it with one hand or two handed, and his fight style is to like, switch between those two very elegantly and like quickly between the two? Like, he'll like swing down with one hand and then swing it back up and around in a windmill motion, and then grab it with the other hand and then do a side slash? And he does that, finally, and it's coming in at Candor. Do you wanna spend one of your hold?

ART: Yes, I will spend one hold to halve the attack's effect or damage.

AUSTIN: Okay. Let me roll that damage.

ART: And I would like to, to say:

ART (as Hadrian): Please don't do this, we can settle this.

AUSTIN: And he does two damage, but you kind of deflect it as the blade kind of catches, Candor's shoulder instead of his chest. And then I guess Candor probably has armor, he has leather armor on, so it's another one down, so yeah, that's only one damage, nice work. And the, the mercenary says like:

AUSTIN (as the mercenary): You don't know what you're talking about, man.

AUSTIN: And like, pushes backwards and like takes like a high stance with the blade like way above his head. And just kind of like, breathes, and then Hella, is that when you wanna grab somebody?

ALI: Uh, sure, yeah. Just like a— yeah.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Just like a Defy Danger strength I think? To like, hold somebody down? Yeah.

ALI: Yeah, just like literally pick them up and take them out of this situation.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah. The danger is, the danger is—

ALI: *[cross]* That I'll get hit, yeah.

AUSTIN: That you'll get hit, yeah.

ALI: That was strength, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Okay. Oh my God I hate this. *Oh*, I hate this, I'm turning this off.

AUSTIN: Wow, you rolled a, you rolled a five, take XP.

ALI: Oh. Oh! Aaah!

ART: Whoa!

ALI: How did that happen?

ART: Snake eyes.

ALI: I've never—

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Uh huh! You rolled to ones.

DRE: *[cross]* You rolled two ones...

ALI: *[cross]* I was the, it was the 3D dice is what it was. And now I'm never doing that.

AUSTIN: It was the 3D dice.

*[Dre laughs]*

ALI: Fuck that.

AUSTIN: Were you trying to, were you trying to grab... the taller mercenary or the second taller mercenary?

ALI: Probably the taller one.

AUSTIN: Okay. That's, that's the one with the bastard sword. Um, you... completely failed to do that. How were you trying to grab him? *[Ali laughs]* Like, he has his blade above his head at this point like, he's a— you know like a samurai holding a big katana above their head, you know what I mean? That pose.

ALI: Right, so if his arms are up I think she was doing like the grab by the waist and sort of just like, yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: Cool. Ugh.

AUSTIN: Oh, okay, you just get one damage, though, that's fine. It's like, you grab by the waist and he, like, brings his blade across your back, like at the from the small of your back, topside? But like it just, you have armor on, right?

ALI: Yeah. That's...

AUSTIN: Yeah, so it's like, it just scrapes against the armor. But, what he does or what it does do is cut your belt. And you, the your, your belt snaps in two, and your blade falls to the floor. Or to the ground below you. So you were disarmed.

ALI: Does— mmm. Okay. I, okay. I was wondering if like—

AUSTIN: Or you could pick it up.

ALI: The ground reacts, but yeah I'll just pick it up, okay.

AUSTIN: No, no.

ALI: Didn't know if it was like...



AUSTIN: But not right this second, you'll have to spend an action to do that.

ALI: A magic floor that gets...

*[laughter]*

AUSTIN: We get a shot of... the four people who're fleeing running through the woods, and you realize the woods here, at first it's like, oh this is similar to the woods that were in the, the forest to the south of Rosemerrow in that there's a path that's cut into— that, that like seems like it's organically here. And then you notice a really strange feature, which is all of the tree branches stop at the exact same place? It's as if someone drilled like... it's as if there's like a picture of this going around have you seen this thing, the thing I'm talking about today? There's a, there's a specific thing in which, this is a real place, it's like a garden that has its trees cut such that like, the branches all stop at the same place that produces an effect that is the, there's a tunnel through the trees. It is remarkably creepy, as you might suspect! I don't think I can find this photo, I should've, I should've grabbed it as like a thing, and I didn't cause I'm, I'm a fool! Cause I'm a fool!

And so that's a thing you notice. The other thing you notice is that quickly, you're running down an incline. The third thing you notice is that other dwarf who had fled, or who had run away, Throndir? Adaire, you notice this because you have a thing called, called... what is it? It's, is it Shoot First?

JANINE: I do have that, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, you never get caught by surprise, when an enemy would get the drop on you, you get to act first. You... see the, or you hear the twang of a bow being drawn from the side, from inside of this really dense forest. And then you spot another one of these soldiers of Samoths with their hoods up, pulling back on this bow. What do you do?

JANINE: Uh... I'm going to throw a dagger, I think.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: That seems the most reasonable course of action.

AUSTIN: Sure. Give me a Volley.

JANINE: Is that dex? That's dex, I think.

AUSTIN: That *is* dex, yeah.

JANINE: It's a nine.

AUSTIN: That *is* a nine. Nine ain't bad, on a Volley when you get a seven to nine, you have to either move to get the shot, which places you in danger, or you have to take what you can get, which means you get minus 1d6 damage to what you roll. Or you have to take several shots, excuse me, several shots, which reduces your ammo by one.

JANINE: I'm going to.... Take several shots.

AUSTIN: Okay, so you reduce your ammo by one from your throwing, throwing dagger. Cool. Alright. So do your damage.

JANINE: Five.

AUSTIN: Alright. That goes into the, the shoulder of this, this guy, and he, this is like a shortbow, this is like his fucking backup bad bow? And he drops that and steps on it by mistake and snaps it, and for the second time, he's lost his fuckin bow. He's like, agh!

JANINE: Oh, bud.

AUSTIN: And then draws a dagger and begins trying to run through the woods towards the people on the road. At this point everyone can see that this guy is doing this. Throndir, what do you do?

DRE: I'm gonna tell the two dwarves—

DRE (as Throndir): Stay behind the dog.

AUSTIN (as Kodiak): *[barks]*

DRE: And I pull my bow and I fire at him.

AUSTIN: Okay. Give me a volley.

DRE: That's a nine.

AUSTIN: That's pretty good. Same question to you, which is, what do you, do you move into a worse place, do you do one, minus 1d6 damage, or do you spend an arrow, an ammo, rather.

DRE: I will, I'll spend an arrow.

AUSTIN: Okay. So do your damage.

DRE: Another five!

AUSTIN: Alright, and that does him in. He... falls to his knees and then falls flat on his face. And the, the two dwarves you're protecting like, sigh from relief and are like, *[sighs]* I'm so happy you're here with us. Back at the pond. How, how're things going? Hadrian, you wanted to try and de-escalate with words. Hella, you could also do a thing if you wanted to do something first.

ALI: Yeah, I just did a dumb thing.

AUSTIN: Mhm! This guy, like, steps back from you. You're, again, much taller than him. But he's still like, confident and imposing and like, takes a stance where he could be, where he can kind of have you at one angle and the others at the other one without having his back to any of you. And if you went to go pick up your, your sword it would be a roll to— It would be another Defy Danger, or else you'd get hit.

ALI: Can I try to do that but like... headbutt him while I'm down?

AUSTIN: I mean that could just, I mean that's just a fight. You could just headbutt him.

ALI: Okay!

AUSTIN: Like, that's just a Hack and Slash.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: But totally doable. Remember like, the thing about this game is you do your damage separate from whatever weapons you have. Your weapons can give you a cool bonus--

ALI: Okay...

AUSTIN: But that would be a— that would be an attack and you would just do your normal damage.

ALI: Yeah. Cause I mean, I, I, she would recognize that she's opening herself up to damage there and like, is able to plan for that.

AUSTIN: Uh huh. Yep!

ALI: And that's just a cool vision.

AUSTIN: Yes. So yeah, go ahead and give me, give me a Hack and Slash.

ALI: Okay, which is... and that's a— how is this possible? I have a plus three!

AUSTIN: What are you— what are you doing with, yeah, why are you fuckin' up so bad?

ALI: *[cross]* Cause this is my fate. I'm making the wrong choices is why this is happening.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* You rolled a one and a three. Yeah, there's a, I wanna say something to you really quickly, there is a wrinkle to this that you just don't know yet that is very good.

ALI: Okay...

AUSTIN: Give me a, give me a damage roll. You're gonna deal your damage and they're going to make an attack against you at the same time.

ALI: Lord, okay, sure. Okay! That's an eleven?

AUSTIN: That's a lot of damage. He's okay, he's a... he's a tough boy, don't worry. He's a tough boy with good armor on.

ALI: *[laughs]* Okay...

AUSTIN: I mean it's still a lot, don't fucking get me wrong. You take three, which is gonna get reduced also.

ALI: Yeah, so nothing. Hadrian asked if these are, are dwarfen which I think?

AUSTIN: Ugh, bad. Bad! Not good.

ALI: I would like to call out that, and also say bad.

AUSTIN: Hadrian, are you saying something? Are you, are you doing something?

ART: Yeah, I guess I have a... no I don't, I don't, I just want them to stop fighting. But I don't know how to like— what's the, the general fight layout right now?

AUSTIN: It's you and Candor and... the other one remaining Samoths soldier, Anton, are pinned between, or like are on the road between the pond and the, the treeline to your left, or to like, in my head it's west, right, so the west is a treeline and a little field and a little dirt road. To the east is a pond that then, after the pond is a big rock and then more trees, to the north is the, is another treeline with the road running through it, then it becomes that weird geomet— geometrical like, tunnel, like tree tunnel. And to behind you is a brick, or not a brick wall, but is a stone wall. Because at this moment you realize there is no door out anymore.

JANINE: Where's the paper lead, though? Where does the paper lead?

*[Ali laughs]*

AUSTIN: Up. Literally up to the side of a mountain. *[Dre laughs]* Like up to a little outcrop, which is where Alyosha is still standing, there's a little piece of paper by his feet.

ALI: Fuck.

ART: And it's still, it's still both of the mercenaries.

AUSTIN: Yes.

ART: Okay, like, I position myself like, literally directly in between, as in the middle of opposing sides as I can.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ART: And, and it's just:

ART (as Hadrian): This is ridiculous, you're throwing your lives away for nothing here!  
Please stop this.

AUSTIN: Give me a roll.

ART: But I'm gonna roll badly...

AUSTIN: *[laughs]* Hey! Look at that! You got a ten! Nice job, buddy. The, the... two mercenaries like, step back and turn their heads back towards the like, weird tree tunnel, which they are now able to like, start stepping back towards. And they say:

AUSTIN (as a mercenary): He's right!

AUSTIN: That's the one who's been talking to you the whole time.

AUSTIN (as the mercenary): He's right. Our... the people we've been escorting have already moved on. The window's closed, boys. We won this one.

AUSTIN: And he does a little wink.

ART: To his boys or to us?

AUSTIN: To the, to the Samoths soldiers, the soldiers of Samoths.

ART: Oh, sure.

AUSTIN: And they like, shake their heads and Candor says:

AUSTIN (as Candor): We know where they're going. We just have to beat them there.  
Thanks for the help, Hadrian.

ART (as Hadrian): Hey, I helped.

AUSTIN: No, no, no, that was a serious, he was being serious.

ART: Oh, he was being serious, okay.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

AUSTIN (as Candor): We can count on you in the future, right?

ART (as Hadrian): Uh, maybe. *[laughter]* I'm always here for a good cause.

AUSTIN (as Candor): Is there any cause greater than the Undying Fire Himself?

ART (as Hadrian): No.

AUSTIN: Did you say it with *that* degree of conviction?

*[laughter]*

ART (as Hadrian): It's the greatest cause I've ever known.

AUSTIN: He just nods to you. And says:

AUSTIN (as Candor): Alright, well. If you ever need anything, just find me at...

AUSTIN: Let me figure out where he at— is actually at. He would be in, he says:

AUSTIN (as Candor): Stratum two, lamina ten.

AUSTIN: No actually sorry, he'd be in lamina twenty.

AUSTIN (as Candor): It's deep, but it's worth it. Closer to our Lord. I'm glad you came down from the surface, friend.

ART (as Hadrian): Yeah, me— me too.

AUSTIN: And he offers you a hand, for a handshake.

ART: Yeah, I shake his hand.

AUSTIN: He gives you like, a deep like, one of those, like, deep, like, Fast and the Furious handshakes that's all the way up the forearm?

*[laughter]*

ART: Yeah, I—

AUSTIN: And he does a reaching up to you, by the way, again, this guy is like, three foot eight or something? Strong as fuck, though, gives you a good squeeze.

AUSTIN (as Candor): Listen, whatever you do, don't let your friends trust that Calhoun guy. He's no good.

ALI: *[gasps] [whispers]* You fucking...

ART: Oh, man.

*[Ali yells(?)]*

AUSTIN: Throndir and Adaire, the two mercenaries have like, sprinted to catch up to you, and the one with the ponytail is like:

AUSTIN (as the mercenary): *[sighs]* Shit. That friend of yours is a... he's something, huh?

DRE (as Throndir): He's, he's not bad.

JANINE (as Adaire): He's not really my friend.

DRE (as Throndir): Look, before we go any— aw, come on, he's, you guys are fine. Before we go any further, I need to ask you guys two important things.

AUSTIN (as the mercenary): What's up?

DRE (as Throndir): Where are we geographically?

AUSTIN (as the mercenary): Right, right, you're zeroes. Uh, we are in... damn near the top, son, we're... Lamina one, strata one. Doesn't get much higher up than this.

DRE (as Throndir): I was about to say, do the numbers get bigger the further down you go? It's like if we went deeper it would be two?

AUSTIN (as the mercenary): *[cross]* Yeah, basically.

DRE (as Throndir): Okay.

AUSTIN (as the mercenary): I guess we're kind of in between... we're a little south of Rosemerrow?

DRE (as Throndir): Okay. This may or may— this is probably gonna sound weird. Um... the Erasure's happened, right?

AUSTIN (as the mercenary): Depends on how deep you go.

AUSTIN: And he gives you a little wink. Reaches out his hand and says:

AUSTIN (as the mercenary): Calhoun Cleanblade. This is my friend, Alejandro Evensteps. Mercenary unit. We haven't really figured out a name for ourselves yet, but we're doing good work.

DRE (as Throndir): Yeah, seems— seems like it.

AUSTIN: And he shakes your hand.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Now, let's keep going, we've gotta, I guess go forward for a while, and then probably take some turns, we'll end up at the Buoy, don't worry about it. Who're your friends again, what's, what're your names?

AUSTIN: I guess it's just you, Adaire, right?

JANINE: Yeah.

JANINE (as Adaire): I'm Adaire Ducarte.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Also from the surface?

JANINE (as Adaire): Yeah.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Mm.

JANINE (as Adaire): I mean, I've been on the not-surface, but mostly on the surface.

AUSTIN: Are you mapping while you walk? Or have you just given up at this point?

JANINE: Uh... I feel like that fight was, was fairly recent in a way where like, she might only just be getting out like a little bit of paper to get back to that.

AUSTIN: I think at this point he's like, walked up past, like at this point we're like, they were walking ahead of you to keep things, or one of them's ahead of you, one of them's behind you. And he like shouts back and he's like,

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): It's not that mapping won't work, it's that you're gonna need a lot of maps. Gets weird down here for your. Just not used to it.

AUSTIN: Hella and Hadrian, the three Samoths related dwarves have left, kind of taking a long way around the pond. And—

ART: Two, right? One of them...

AUSTIN: Sorry, yes, two, two. One of them is dead, and is *dead*, by the way, actually. Does not raise, is not a, a zombie or a ghost.

ART: Oooh.



AUSTIN: And you know that because you can sense that he isn't evil because he's gone. And then...

ART: Oh, I didn't know that it worked like that with the plague.

AUSTIN: Oh yeah.

ART: Oh... I've been underutilizing my talents all this time!

*[Ali laughs]*

AUSTIN: And uh, they're gone. And it's just you two and Alyosha.

AUSTIN (as Alyosha): We should head after them.

ALI (as Hella): *[cross]* Yeah.

ART (as Hadrian): *[cross]* Of, of course. Yeah. We can follow the, the trail. Is everyone just generally... aware that this is completely insane down here?

ALI (as Hella): Yeah.

AUSTIN (as Alyosha): I feel like I've been here before, once.

ART (as Hadrian): *Really?*

AUSTIN (as Alyosha): It must have been a dream. We should, we should hurry after your friends.

ART (as Hadrian): Okay... yeah, of course. Um, yeah.

AUSTIN (as Alyosha): You both did the right thing. You know, you, you both of you. I'm very impressed.

ALI (as Hella): Yeah, okay, let's go.

ART: Aw, Hella. *[laughter]* It's just praise.

AUSTIN: Yeah.. It's tough, sometimes. And you catch up. I'll get you all together again, it's easier that way. Alejandro's in the back, and he sees you approaching. He's like:

AUSTIN (as Alejandro): Calhoun. They're coming.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): You guys gonna fight us this time, or what?

ART (as Hadrian): We didn't fight you last time!

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Uh, disagree. One of you tried to headbutt me.

ALI (as Hella): Oh, that was you?

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): That was me.

AUSTIN: This is Calhoun speaking, sorry, I switched voices and didn't do it well enough.

ALI: Oh.

JANINE (as Adaire): That just means she likes you.

ART (as Hadrian): Yeah, Hella... Hella's a little excitable sometimes, it's gonna be fine.

ALI (as Hella): Don't give me a reason to fight you again.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Eh, you didn't seem that tough.

ALI (as Hella): *[groans]* I'm having an off day.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): I've been there. So what's your deal? Why are a bunch of zeroes down here? Every time this happens, it goes wrong.

[1:00:00]

DRE (as Throndir): You gotta quit calling us that.

ALI (as Hella): Yeah.

ART (as Hadrian): I don't know what it means down here, but it, it just feels like a really negative connotation, and we're really just trying to help.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Oh my— you're from— you're from strata zero. It's just a shorthand, and also you don't really understand anything, it's not... your fault. But it's, you're tourists. You know?

ART (as Hadrian): I want you to know that I would love to understand all of this.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Well, you shoulda had the good luck of being born down here, I guess.

ART (as Hadrian): Fuckin rude.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): If you was from my side, you would feel the same way! It's like, I don't know, if I went to your... what's a thing that you guys have up there that we don't have down here?

ART (as Hadrian): I don't— what don't you have down here?

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Nothing, we've got everything down here. It's the best place to be in the world.

ART (as Hadrian): I mean, there's no mysterious staircases leading to other versions of the world above us.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): How'd you get here, then?

ART (as Hadrian): *[cross]* That was below us.

DRE (as Throndir): *[cross]* Wait, yeah, that is how we got here.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Mm, that's like a threshold thing. That's, those are how we get from strata to strata. The lamina's are a little bit more—

ART (as Hadrian): *[cross]* So no matter what direction you're going it's a down staircase?

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Eh, it's a down staircase.

ART (as Hadrian): This is weird.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): I didn't make the world, I just, I live in it, buddy.

JANINE (as Adaire): Do you have sunflowers down here?

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): It depends on which strata you're at.

ALI (as Hella): Yeah, is, is the sun down here?

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Not anymore. We had it... Listen we, we know— things have gotten weird lately. Used to be that only the bottom strata didn't have the sun. And then over the last couple of years, things have gotten... one by one. Each strata's losing it. Which is strange, because when I was growing up, I was taught there was one sun. And

then strata five lost its, and then strata six. And you can't even go down there anymore. And then it seemed to stop, finally? And now... stratum one doesn't have it either.

ART (as Hadrian): Neither does zero.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Oh, boy.

ART (as Hadrian): How many are there?

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): What, strata? Lamina?

ART (as Hadrian): Yeah, what's, what is the lowest one?

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): It gets fuzzy after six, man. And then each one is subdivided, it... This is what I mean. This is like... It's hard to even explain. You ain't from here. Every time I've tried, you just... I get dumb stares. And it's not an insult! It's just, you're not from a place, you don't know what the alleys are like. Y'all really get confused about how like, you could take a left turn and suddenly be in a different place. We just live that way.

ART (as Hadrian): Well, I'm glad we brought a mapmaker.

DRE (as Thrandir): Yeah....

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Speaking of left turns...

AUSTIN: And he like, holds up his hand to mean like, his like mercenary hand signal to stop, like a fist in the air! And no one responds except Alejandro, who's like 'huh!' And then he like steps over to the left, he's like oh we're, we've just gotta go this way now. And he pulls down one of the tree branches and again like a curtain, it reveals a different pathway. Again, into a little cave, and like a little cavern. And... you can see another staircase going down.

*[Everyone sighs]*

ART: I know this literally never works.

AUSTIN: Mhm?

ART: But I would, I would like to cast Guidance.

AUSTIN: Oh, what's that do?

ART: Um.

AUSTIN: *[sarcastic]* Don't think I've heard that one before.

ART: Why, it's a spell, it's a Cleric spell, and if it succeeds, the symbol of my deity appears before me and gestures towards the direction or course of action your deity would have you take, then disappears. The message is through gesture only, your communication with this spell is severely limited, and as a bonus for this spell, I always get an XP because I always roll like a five.

*[laughter]*

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Gimme a roll

ART: *[cross]* That's, that's not in the text, I'm just like telling like, for the listeners.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Uh huh! Yes, I understand. Yes. Who've heard you fail a bunch.

ART: Yeah. Um... are you kidding me? It double clicked and they both failed.

*[Dre laughs]*

ALI: Wow. Holy moly.

AUSTIN: Take an XP. Take an XP. Um, you get a symbol. The... ring on Sebastian's finger glows bright. And you see it shatter under your foot in your, in your head. You see it snap, and it is good. You should break that ring immediately.

ART: Oh.... kay. Um. Great? Oh, fuck. Okay! I don't know that I rolled a fucking six, I lunge for it.

AUSTIN: No... I— this dude is not ready for this. Are you just trying to rip it off of his hand?

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You pull it from his hand, and... Alyosha like gasps, and so does everyone else. Because the second it is off of his hand, a sun, maybe not *the* sun lifts into the sky here. And it is blinding. Because none of you have seen the light like this in weeks and weeks and weeks and weeks.

ART: Okay! I'm gonna take, I'm gonna take this opportunity to be stunned and drop it.

AUSTIN: Good call. It is on the floor.

ART: I mean it, it's metagaming a little bit, but.

AUSTIN: A little bit. I mean, I don't know. The vision was of you stepping on it and cracking it, right? So.

ART: It's gotta get on the floor for me to step on it.

AUSTIN: Gotta get on the floor. *[sighs]*

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): The *fuck!*

AUSTIN: Says Calhoun. And like, no one, this happened so quickly, and the only people who know what's happened is Sebastian and you. And he even barely understands. Miko knows, also. Miko knows immediately what she's fucking done, or what's happened here.

ALI: Oh...

AUSTIN: And I think Alyosha dives for the ring.

ART: Yeah, someone stop me. I need Throndir or Hella to just put a body on me.

ALI: I would, yeah. I'll do the arm out thing again.

AUSTIN: But is it clear that you've even— yeah, I guess it's, it's yeah. I think we're, man I wish, this is the only time I've ever wanted a... okay no, we can do this. This is an Aid/Interfere check. That's what this is.

ALI: Okay.

ART: Yeah. What am I roll— I need to, so I'm trying to do it, I'm trying to, I'm trying to smash it.

AUSTIN: Yeah. This is Defy Danger strength, and then Hella is doing... Interfere.

ALI: Okay, so that's just roll plus one?

AUSTIN: Is that, you have one bond with Hadrian?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: No, you have two— oh that was, that's Throndir.

AUSTIN: Throndir has two. Yeah.

ALI: Oh my god.

AUSTIN: Oh friend.

ALI: That is a five.

ART: Oh, what happens, then?

ALI: Oh, I've XP to take.

AUSTIN: You do— you should take XP, nice work!

ALI: There's like three XP I should've been taking? No, a seven isn't fail.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* You should've been taking all— seven is not a fail. Seven is a success.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: It's not a great success, but it's a success.

DRE: You failed another one earlier too, right?

AUSTIN: I think so. Um, so.... You fail, which is interesting. Let's figure out what happens after, after Hadrian rolls.

ART: Okay. I can do this. I can roll badly on this.

*[laughter]*

ALI: *[strained]* Oh God...

ART: Hold on let me, I wanna— I don't wanna see it happen.

AUSTIN: You gotta see those— that's a seven, friend. So I give you a... hard bargain, an ugly choice, or a, a third thing.

ART: This is Defy Danger?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Sorry, you stumble, hesitate, or flinch. I offer you a worse outcome, a hard bargain, or an ugly choice. Alright. So the thing you want, the thing *Hadrian* wants is to destroy this ring.

ART: Yeah, uh huh, he sure does.

AUSTIN: Um... I'm trying to think about how warm to be. *[sighs]*

ART: Well, the sun's back.

AUSTIN: Well, okay, that helps, certainly. You can do it, for sure. The only thing is... you will break Hella's hand. Like it, in a, in a way that you will not be able to repair. Like, something with the, breaking this ring on her hand will ruin her hand forever. But you can break it. I'm not like, saying that that means that you do that now, to be clear. Like, I'm, I don't know what's most

interesting here. I don't know where Hadrian and Hella are at. But if I can like, make the implicit explicit, I think I'm asking you what is more important. The thing that your Lord told you to do, or hurting your friend. Who is evil.

ART: But who I've sworn to... I've sworn to defend her.

AUSTIN: Mhm!

ART: To this same deity! Probably.

*[Ali laughs]*

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: Who even knows. Who knows who's talking to me anymore! Or who I'm talking *to*!

AUSTIN: Um, hm. Yeah. You've never been more sure that Samothos told you to do this thing. You haven't felt him like this ever in your life. There is a gravity here that you're now noticing. Like, as your foot starts to come down, you feel yanked downward. But also, who the fuck knows, right?

ART: Yeah, I've been— I've been wrong, I've been wrong literally every time. Go listen to season one, I'm a dope! *[Ali laughs]* I don't know.

ALI: Maybe on the—

AUSTIN: *[cross]* We haven't lost a hand in a long time, so I mean, I had to put it on the table. Hands on the Table, a Friends at the Table fancast.

ALI: Maybe on the way here, Hella was talking about how much she loves to have the use of her hands?

AUSTIN: I love having hands! Hands are great!

ALI: *[laughing]* Just like, stretched her fingers out—

ART: *[cross]* Hella was doing close-up magic.

AUSTIN: There is like the great, doubling of like, Calhoun Cleanblade using both of his hands in a, in a really effective way in combat, right? There's some nice setup.

JANINE: Is it, wait, is Hadrian hesitating with his foot over Hella's hand?

AUSTIN: No, this is— we are now hesitating because it's hard to write. And it's hard to judge what the most interesting outcome is? This is happening in a flash.

JANINE: Okay.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: This is happening in a split second.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: This is, this is not, we've done the Interfere roll.

ART: I...

AUSTIN: And I don't think any answer here is cheap, but I think it's substantial. I think this is the first clear opportunity of like, where, not first, this is a clear opportunity of... where Hadrian's heart lies in terms of his loyalties. And it's already interesting that the first thing he thought was how can I frame this so that I can be good to both.

ART: I wanna choose... Hella. I... I think that this is the, I guess what I'm— This is, this is the end of a crisis of faith one way or another.

AUSTIN: Yes.

ART: And the thing is, does Hadrian think this is his way back into Samoth's good grace? This is his way through, this is his way back to where he was? Or is Hadrian holding this grudge? Is Hadrian just, just so upset that he's been abandoned, that he's been abandoned and the person who hasn't abandoned him is the, the evil person who he would need to hurt. Samoth's hasn't been there. Hella has been. You know, when I look back and I see one set of footprints? *[laughter]* Is that Samoth's carrying me, or is that Hella carrying me?

AUSTIN: Fuck. A thing that happened earlier, this is an out of character thing that I fucking love is Art and I finally had to decide what Hadrian's wife's name was? *[Ali laughs]* Telling that we, we've fucked up with that character for a long time— we didn't fuck up, it's just the focus wasn't on Velas for a long time.

ART: I had another name for her, and I forgot it, and I'm worried that I said it out loud at one point and someone's gonna be like, well.

AUSTIN: Rosana's what you call her. Whatever, fuckin, people have lots of names. People change names all the time.



ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But there's a bit in this conversation with you, where I go, what's her name, et cetera, and we go back and forth on a couple of different names, and then... I mention that most names in Velas were Portuguese, and you say, "Oh, okay, I've consulted a list of Portuguese girls' names, and I think I like Helena." And then you said, "Oh shit, no I don't," and I go "hahahahaha" and you say "Sharing a first letter is hacky as shit!" And I go "Man, oh, no, not even that, dude. Hadrian married Helena and then goes off to fight monsters with Hella?" And then you go "Oh. Ha. It has a good.... Yeah. Okay. Second choice name from this list, Rosana." *[laughter]* It's a good— that's a good one. Sometimes things are just a little too on the nose.

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Yeah. Good. And at that point—

ART: I do it.

AUSTIN: Fuckin' *what!?* Okay, you ste—

ART: No, no! I don't do it. I needed to see how it felt.

*[laughter]*

AUSTIN: I thought you gave that whole speech that was the end! I thought that was you deciding not to do it!

ART: Yeah, I need to see how it felt out of my mouth, it, it's not good, don't do it.

AUSTIN: Oh my God... Alright. And... This is like a frozen moment, do you just put your foot down slowly? Like what's—

ART: No, I think I miss.

AUSTIN: Oh, sure.

ART: Like, on purpose, like—

AUSTIN: Right, right right.

ART: I move like, I'm still, you know, I'm still stomping with all my might, but I see her hand, and I miss.

ALI: This is the fucking Fast 5 scene! *[laughter]* Sorry, I just have been thinking about that movie.

AUSTIN: Alyosha like, sighs out of relief. Everyone else like, can sort of look again? It's, like, It's tough to see. Going, I think for the next, for the little bit in the future, like, everyone's gonna be at a minus one forward for the next thing you do after this, because it's just— you haven't seen the sun in months! Eyes, eyes don't know how to, it's tough! It's bright, it's painful. Thankfully you can hide in this cave in a second, but like, Jesus.

ALI: Oh...

AUSTIN: Hella, you have a— you have this ring in your hand now. It's below you. What do you do with it?

ALI: Oh, boy howdy.

AUSTIN: Miko says—

AUSTIN (as Miko): Give that back. It's been in my family for— ever.

DRE (as Throndir): How long has your family had the sun in it?

AUSTIN (as Miko): It's not, it's not *the*, it's a sun, it's not the, it's an older, it's one of the lower ones. No one lives down there.

AUSTIN: She like grabs Sebastian's hand.

ART (as Hadrian): He— He told me to destroy it.

AUSTIN: Calhoun is like, draws his sword slowly?

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): He's hear— Alejandro, he's hearing voices. Who told you to destroy it?

ART (as Hadrian): Samoths did.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Yeah, that adds up. What do you think those other guys were gonna do with it? Goddamn Dark Sun, let's go. Leave the ring, take it, I don't give a fuck. I'm supposed to get these two people to the Buoy.

ALI: Ugh... I'm just gonna put it away, I'm wondering if it cheapens the scene if Hella just gives it to Hadrian, so I think I'm just gonna put it away.

AUSTIN: I mean I don't, I don't know, yeah. Okay. So then... Calhoun like, does like a little, like a little head shake, and Alejandro goes through the like, little side cavern that has opened up into the trees. And then... Sebastian follows, but Miko doesn't.

AUSTIN (as Miko): Give me the ring back.

ALI (as Hella): No.

*[laughter]*

AUSTIN (as Miko): Well, bring it, and we can talk, okay?

ALI (as Hella): *[sighs]* Are we gonna follow them or are we going back to where...

DRE (as Throndir): Also, what did he say about the Dark Sun?

ART (as Hadrian): Yeah, that's a great point, Throndir, and I think we need to just, let that lie and, and pick it up when we get the chance.

*[laughter]*

DRE (as Throndir): I mean, that's why we're here, right?

ART (as Hadrian): Oh, absolutely.

AUSTIN (as Alyosha): Things are much worse than I thought. Much, much worse.

AUSTIN: And he puts a hand on your shoulder— lot of hands on shoulders in this episode.

ART: It's a good gesture.

AUSTIN: It's a good gesture.

AUSTIN (as Alyosha): Hold still, Hadrian. Feel. Reach for our Lord. Pray.

ART: Hadrian does.

AUSTIN (as Alyosha): I feel at once... when we came down here. I felt closer to our Lord than I had in a long time. But now... *[sighs]* I... I feel drawn in two directions. He is very close.

AUSTIN: And like, he's looking around for something. And his eyes linger on you, Hella, for a moment. And like, shakes his head, like no... that can't be right. And Hadrian, you like, now that you're sensing for it, also feel like, you're... the divine grace of Samoths is both pulling you further down, which I mentioned momentarily, or a moment ago, but also that there is this second hum of Samoths near you that you have... been in the presence of. It's been a low hum for a long time, and you've just ignored it because it's just a background noise. But you also sense it, also coming from, from Hella. But you can't quite, it just doesn't— I don't know, it's a fuckin' weird feeling, right? Like.

ART: That is a weird feeling, right?

AUSTIN: And it predates her holding that ring.

ART: Yeah. But it— I mean... Maybe that's why I'm supposed to, to help her.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Who could say?

ALI: *[laughs]* Who could say.

ART: I don't wanna... oh nevermind.

AUSTIN: Miko finally walks in the side door. Who follows after her?

JANINE: Eh, Adaire does. Where's she gonna go?

AUSTIN: Alright Adaire.

ALI: *[cross]* Are— yeah.

AUSTIN: Adaire, you're, you're the first to see it, then. You kind of take another stairwell down. And you see... you know those bridges I talked about before? You see... a dozen of them. All converging on a single place. A rock floating in the air, with a little city on it. And, and that is the Buoy. there is, you know, it's smaller than Rosemerrow, it's probably smaller than Velas, but it's also much denser than Velas? Again Velas is a lot of empty space, and a lot of, a lack of activity. And you look down and see it there and one, the sun is in the air here too. Is in the sky. It's in a different place than it was in the strata above. It's like, sunset here and it was midday there. And the thing you notice immediately is that the Buoy is a weird mix of different cultures and different like, it's a, it is like a true crossroads and it feels like a crossroad of places that don't exist.

It, like... there's a building that you see that you... it's like a, it's like a pagoda or something, right? That is sort of orcish make, but not the orcs from today, but also definitely not the orcs you've heard about from the past, it's this like, other type of orcish like, architecture. And you know, you're looking down from probably like, 200 feet up the, the little stairwell you're on becomes one of these bridges that connects. And you know, you see people who're walking ahead who are like, little... also small like, dwarf-sized people that have weird scaly skin that you've never met before and long, doglike snouts. And then you see another version of, you look over past the rock floating in the sky, and below that you can see like, a bunch of different versions of Hieron. That are from this position, layered such that you get just glimpses of just... things are just different in each one. In one, you see Velas that stretches out for miles and miles and miles and miles. As if like, it never stopped expanding. And another, the entire northwest is covered in, in woods. The entirety of it. And the people you're walking with just walk on. This is just the way they live their lives. Does everybody else follow and also see that? And also Adaire, how's this make you feel?

JANINE: Um... we decided that Adaire had like, been here once before, but only this kind of like—

AUSTIN: Not this far deep. She's been to Wharf—

JANINE: Oh, not this far?

AUSTIN: She'd been to Wharfhurst and she'd dealt with the dwarves there who came up from here.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: Which was just like, oh yeah, the same thing that happened to Kindrali happened to you. Which is like, yeah sometimes they don't speak like common, they speak some weird other language that's like, a weird version of common.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And I think now you see why. Sort of. Right?

JANINE: Uh... Adaire probably like is fine, but also like, puts her paper away.

AUSTIN: Aw!

JANINE: Cause that's just like, a whole, that's gonna take a lot of energy and that's just not, that's not gonna happen right now.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: She's resigned to that, just like nah...

AUSTIN: Something else happens when you reach here, which is the weight of being pulled down stops? And you feel really at peace, like at equilibrium. There is no more weight pulling anybody down. In fact it, it... like, it's like there's a pain in your shoulders that's gone away, almost? Like it's lighter here than it has ever been on the surface for you at all. You're not like, moon jumping around but it feels like, oh yeah, okay, this is good.

ALI: It—

AUSTIN: Mhm?

ALI: So... as you're like, walking through the thing, there's a way to like, kind of have one one foot like, in the forest and one foot on like the, yeah?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Can I like... take out my sword and just try to like, scrape the wall a little bit?

AUSTIN: Sure.

ALI: Okay. I think I'm just—

AUSTIN: What are you trying to— yeah.

ALI: I'm kind of testing to see how, like, magical this is?

AUSTIN: Oh man... it is like... what's the resu— like, when you've done this before, what's the result?

ALI: I...

AUSTIN: Like if you, if you had like a piece of magical cloth and you touched it with your blade, does it like cut in a special way different than regular cloth? Do you know what I mean?

ALI: Yeah, I don't know, I feel like...

AUSTIN: I, here's what I'll say. This is real. This is not an illusion, this is not an illusion spell.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Things don't fall apart when you do this.

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: The... the thing that happened with the cloth— with the chain does happen, which is... remember when the chain fell?

ALI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And it cut through from one of these kind of one of these lamina to another lamina, you're able to peel back a layer with your blade, of whatever this is and see a different wall, but it's still a wall here.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: And it, it's weird, it's heavy like rock, the layer you pulled away is like a dense, heavy rock. And then below it is another layer of, of dense heavy rock. Maybe this one is gray instead of brown.

ALI: Right. Can I, while I have my sword in my hand and I am very confused, and disoriented and not having a good time um, can I like, kind of grip it a little harder and do that again?

AUSTIN: Yeah. That's a good image, too.

ALI: God, oh my God.

AUSTIN: Friend, you got a six.

ALI: Oh my *God*, is that a fail again?

AUSTIN: It's another fail.

ALI: Lord in heaven what is— I'm just, I'm shook is what it is, and I can't do anything and it's really bad, and I hate this.

AUSTIN: [*cross*] You're getting close to another level, that's pretty good. So you, you're, the thing that you are trying to do again was push a little harder, right?

ALI: I, well, not just push a little harder but like, kind of... she's doing the same action again, I think she's doing the same action like softer, but in a way that's like, hey, check this out, hey buddy, I need answers here.

AUSTIN: This time, you cut another layer, and you slip. Through it.

ALI: *Fuck* you!

[*Dre laughs*]

AUSTIN: And... You are in... you hear, um, no you don't hear anything, because it's still today, it's an important thing, I'm trying to remember how this worked, there's a whole metaphysics of this place in my head. Alright, so. Hella disappears, everybody, there's a hole, she's gone, she fell into a hole. The, the blade just kind of like, it, it, last time it felt like you were scraping against rock, and so you pushed the same amount of power, and this time it's like whipped cream. And... you just fall through it. And you are in... The shadows of, of towers. Are on your flesh.

ALI: God!!

AUSTIN: And behind you is the pearlescent city of Nacre.

ALI: I'm having the worst time.

AUSTIN: And you see a statue. Of... a woman who has many of your features. The same nose. Her hair up like yours. There's differences, this isn't you. This isn't you, this isn't another version of you.

ALI: Okay. *[laughs]* Okay.

AUSTIN: But there is the sense of familiarity here, for sure. *[Ali groans]* There are people here. Not that many, like, it is emptier than the real Nacre by quite a bit. And... how deep are you? There is— there are no undead people here.

ALI: Oh!

AUSTIN: There are humans here. Or, you know. And again, when I say there are not as many, I mean that you know, it used to have a few thousand people, or whatever? Now it has like, a few hundred. It, this place feels like Velas did. And also it is light here, it is hard— you're having a hard time stepping. You're like, you have to push down, you have to— it's like you're a little bit underwater, you have to force yourself to stay on the ground here. And... the statue underneath it, so it's, it's a statue of this woman who looks sort of like you, and it's facing out to the sea. And it has a... a hand on a sword that's like lifted up in the air. And it says underneath, it's a sword one hand, and the other hand has a staff, and it says "Wander Advise."

ALI: Do I recognize that name at all?

AUSTIN: Uh, give— what's your weird book thing, is it a Spout Lore? Gimme a Spout Lore.

ALI: Yeah, right, I have those books and I've been reading them... and... I...

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Gimme a Spout Lore.

ALI: I have a negative one in intelligence...

AUSTIN: Uh huh!

ALI: I've been having a very bad day and I roll a two, I roll a two.

AUSTIN: You rolled a two.

ALI: So I'm gonna take the XP on that, and I'm just gonna be a... person having a bad day.

AUSTIN: You're very close to a level, that's cool.

ALI: I am just, I'm gettin' up there.

AUSTIN: You are just, I... you li— okay so you're like, trying to think of, of... hm. Do you look in the book itself?

ALI: Um.



AUSTIN: Are you like, Oh, I know this name from somewhere, or are you just like, trying to keep your, like, just trying to like, run through the thoughts in your head?

ALI: I think probably just like, this is just like a, I don't think she's reaching for it.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah, okay. So, you're like thinking like, *[mumbles]* what the fuck is that... and then you realize you are not on the ground anymore, and are floating upwards.

**[1:30:00]**

ALI: Austin Walker... Okay! Okay. I'm doing that. Um...

AUSTIN: What is everybody else doing, Hella disappeared.

ART: I mean, I'll tell you what my instinct was to throw myself at the point she disappeared through?

AUSTIN: Okay. Do you do that?

ART: Uh. Yes?

AUSTIN: You tumble through a hole into a city you've never seen before.

ART: Hm. I was really, really hoping for you hit the ground like a, like a, like an idiot.

AUSTIN: I mean, you do. That's, you tumble through a hole into a city you've never— I'm just gonna, I mean I could roll damage but I don't wanna be a dick. Hadrian disappeared Thrandir and Adaire.

JANINE: Oh, ugh, okay. Okay. Okay.

DRE: I mean, do we— do we, just commit to this bit and all of us just run through this hole?

JANINE: *[cross]* I, no, no, no. Okay.

*[laughter]*

DRE: Yeah, no, Thrandir does. Thrandir goes in after Hadrian, for sure.

AUSTIN: Do they all just—

JANINE: I'm tying a rope to your dog.

*[Ali laughs]*

AUSTIN: Aw! Good! And you? Like, where's the other half of the rope go?

JANINE: Oh, I mean, I was gonna, I was gonna like, tie the rope around the dog and then anchor it on me and then like, send the dog to like, grab, I don't know.

ALI: Just put the rope down and then whoever's down there can grab it. Right?

JANINE: What?

ALI: So— *[laughs]* You tie it around—

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

ALI: You tie it around—

JANINE: Here's the thing is like, I don't know if you guys have, like, fallen or what, and I figure Kodiak is probably smart enough to get the rope into a hand?

AUSTIN: You're trusting Kodiak over all of these other people, which is good and true and pure.

JANINE: What other— I— what other people? Who am I gonna send into the weird?

AUSTIN: You, but also just the people who're already there.

JANINE: *[cross]* I don't wanna go!

AUSTIN: I just, I appreciate that you're like oh, they all fucked up, I'll send Kodiak in. *[laughter]* He'll take care of this.

JANINE: He usually does.

DRE: He's a good dog!

AUSTIN: Alyosha goes like,

AUSTIN (as Alyosha): Does this— is this? Is this normal?

JANINE: Who's he asking?

AUSTIN: You, Adaire. He's the only one up here with you. The other ones are— everybody else, Calhoun and Alejandro and Sebastian and Miko are all heading towards the Buoy, so.

JANINE (as Adaire): I mean, we've never been here before, so we don't have an established normal.

AUSTIN (as Alyosha): No, I just mean do they all just jump in like this?

JANINE (as Adaire): Well...

AUSTIN: And then Kodiak jumps in, with the rope.

JANINE (as Adaire): Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um, Hella's floating away, Hadrian and Thrandir. Kodiak just appeared, he, like came in askew from— there's a hole in space that you can only see if you move your head to the exact right position. Otherwise you can't see it. The rope helps. Having the rope come through helps. Also, spend a dungeoneering kit, whoever used that rope.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Okay. Or, adventuring kit.

JANINE: I, I marked it on my adventuring gear.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that works. There's a rope now. Hella... is floating away.

ALI: Am I like, w— when you say floating...

AUSTIN: It's like you're in— it's like a, hm. It's like you're in a 1950s musical, and you're just deeply in love. And just lifted away off the ground.

*[laughter]*

ALI: I'm meant am I still in Nacre or am I in some in between, but that's a great descriptor.

AUSTIN: You're still— you are still in Nacre.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: And... are floating high above it, actually, and are looking like out across the city and it's like, very weird to see it pristine and not, not bustling, but like filled with people who are just going about their lives.

ALI: God...

DRE (as Throndir): Hella, what did you do!

ALI (as Hella): [*whines*] I don't want to be here!

DRE (as Throndir): Can you, can you float this way?

ALI: Is the rope near me?

AUSTIN: You could try to reach for it?

ALI: Okay...

AUSTIN: Give me a—

ALI: I'm terrified of rolling it!

AUSTIN: You can reach for it. You're able to grab it, you're able to grab it, the rope is good enough fictional positioning, you can grab the rope.

ALI: Okay. God, and then what?? Like...

AUSTIN: That's a good question. Adaire, you feel a tug.

DRE: Is Kodiak just carrying you around like a people balloon?

AUSTIN: Like, she's stuck between the rope right like, half the rope is Adaire has it, right?

JANINE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And the other half is on Kodiak?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So it's like— It's like, hung between the two and Hella is holding onto it. Right. Yes. Good.

ART: Yeah, I don't, I don't know how we fix this.

JANINE: Just like, hand over hand it Tomb Raider style.

AUSTIN: Yeah, like you can get back in.

DRE: Yeah...

AUSTIN: You could climb this rope back.

DRE: Yeah let's, let's leave? I don't like this.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Or you could stay, this is alright. Tell you about this—

JANINE: Is it?

AUSTIN: Are y'all alright? Shouts a voice from Nacre— from the streets of Nacre.

ART (as Hadrian): No!

AUSTIN (as Nacre citizen): What's your lack?

ALI (as Hella): *[cross]* Oh, we're getting out of here, I'm not—

ART (as Hadrian): *[cross]* Why do people keep asking that?

ALI (as Hella): Fuck this!

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: Everyone's using the same word-a-day toilet paper in this place.

*[laughter]*

AUSTIN: And you're all able to climb back out of that fucking disaster. And at this point, Calhoun is like:

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): See why we call you zeroes?

ALI (as Hella): *[under her breath]* Fuck off, fuck off...

JANINE (as Adaire): I don't think you should call *me* a zero, I'm the one who— I didn't... I didn't, that was them, I didn't... jump into the tear.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Mapmaker did okay I guess.

ALI (as Hella): I *fell*.

JANINE (as Adaire): Thank you.

ALI (as Hella): Also thank you.

ART (as Hadrian): You don't help people in trouble down here?

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): What's the trouble? You would've found your way back.

ALI (as Hella): Yeah, I don't know...

JANINE (as Adaire): They wouldn't have found their way back. Let's, let's go.

ART (as Hadrian): Hey, what's a lack?

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): Oh, right. *[deep breath]* What— it's, it's a thing you don't have. And you know it.

*[MUSIC — Inside]*

ART (as Hadrian): Why is that a greeting?

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): It's good to know where you stand with someone.

JANINE (as Adaire): What do you need?

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): What do you need. Exactly. She gets it. Everybody needs something down here.

ART (as Hadrian): So is it— do you answer with what you need at that moment or like, what, what your, you don't have like, existentially?

ALI (as Hella): Hadrian...

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): One or the other.

ALI (as Hella): You shouldn't go shouting that second one out, Hadrian, let's just go, let's just go.

JANINE (as Adaire): Yeah, probably depends on who you're talking to.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): But you gotta admit it. Whatever it is, it's gotta be true. Only way— it's the only way to make it down here is to admit what you need.

ALI (as Hella): Yeah, and my lack is to keep walking right now, so let's just maybe go?

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): That's an easy one, you could just keep walking, no one's stopping— okay. Let's go.

ART (as Hadrian): That's not even— that doesn't even make sense.

ALI (as Hella): I just— *[laughs]*

JANINE (as Adaire): Someone can't give you that.

ART (as Hadrian): Yeah.

AUSTIN (as Calhoun): It's not really about how you get—

AUSTIN: And I think we close on the shot of all of you heading into the Buoy, this strange underground dwarven city. Filled with... things you've never seen before.

*[MUSIC — Inside ends]*