

Spring in Hieron 11: Cut Off the Head

AUSTIN (as BLUE J): So why don't we just go get 'em? Like if we know that there's Ordennans near here, like last time there was a big fight, and so [sighs] like we lost a lot of people, and...like why don't we just hit them first?

DRE (as THRONDIR): Well...I mean there's a lot of reasons. Do you—like there's a lot of tactical reasons, like we don't know how many of them there are.

[MUSIC - "SOMETHING"]

BLUE J: We could find out. We—uh, you could send me. I would go find out.

[ART laughs]

THRONDIR: Have you...Have you killed somebody before?

BLUE J: Yeah. And it was Ordennans.

[scene change]

ART (as HADRIAN): Why don't we just go take this fight to the Ordennans? Why are we...sitting around here?

AUSTIN (as RED JACK): You make a good point.

[ART laughs]

There was...fear in our hearts the first time we faced down the Ordennan scum. But...after two successes, certainly they should fear us by now.

HADRIAN: That's what I'm saying!

AUSTIN (as BENJAMIN): But if they fear us, they'll be way more dangerous. Right?

[scene change]

AUSTIN (as EMMANUEL): Do we cut it, or...?

SYLVIA (as EPHRIM): I'm not sure. My worry with cutting it is that we don't know how this thing spreads its seeds, and that might...

EMMANUEL: Mm.

EPHRIM: End up with more of them here. For now I just don't know...what the issue with this is. Um.

EMMANUEL: [slight laugh] Great.

EPHRIM: I—honest, I don't know what's causing it but I know...I think we can figure it out given some more time.

EMMANUEL: Okay, okay.

EPHRIM: I'm not gonna just leave you here with this tree and ignore it, trust me.

EMMANUEL: [laugh]

EPHRIM: This is something that is...very...you know...

EMMANUEL: It's funny you say that you won't leave me here with this tree.

[scene change]

JANINE (as ADAIRE): You know, at this stage of things I like to think of myself a little more as a...facilitator or a broker. Um.

RIX: You're like a fixer, you're like a middleman, you're like a—like a...

ADAIRE: A little bit.

RIX: Okay.

ADAIRE: I can do a little bit of everything at this point, if uh...

RIX: Well then, do you have any work for us? Because—these guys we're workin with right now, I think...I don't know. There's like church-y types.

ADAIRE: Yeah...[sighs]

RIX: But yeah, like when I meet them, they all have this real weird look in their eyes about just...everything. I wouldn't even work with them at except for this—you know, the Moonlighters made that connection for me, and I wanna get in with the Moonlighters? So. Ah.

[scene change]

HADRIAN: I bet—I bet I'd talk to Arrell again.

THRONDIR: You make that choice, we'll definitely never speak again.

HADRIAN: I think—I mean, I'm not saying I'm gonna go make a deal with Arrell, I'm saying...*I'm* saying I think we have—we might...That might be a thing that happens.

[AUSTIN laughs]

I wanna go back to my home.

[MUSIC - "SOMETHING" ends]

THRONDIR: Sure, and I'll go with you. And put a bullet in his head.

HADRIAN: Yeah, that could—that's a perfectly reasonable ending to that.

AUSTIN (as BLUE J): Hey! Uh, we're here. How's it goin...guys?

—says Blue J.

THRONDIR: Uh. Well, Blue J, I heard you walk in like five minutes ago, so.

BLUE J: [whispering] Fuck. [laughs]

THRONDIR: I mean, it's better. You're doing better.

BLUE J: Anyway! Uh...we found some stuff....Do you wanna talk about it?

THRONDIR: Yeah.

BLUE J: All right. So.

AUSTIN: And then Benjamin comes over with a map and lays it all out. And Blue J's like

BLUE J: All right, so. I know you told me not to go looking [amused] for the Ordennans.

THRONDIR: Oh, christ.

BLUE J: And I didn't. I didn't I didn't I didn't. I was looking at this cool...it was like a fox, but like made out of flowers? Um. And like. That seemed like a cool thing. So I was following that around. And it led me to...this encampment.

AUSTIN: Um, so. They bring out their—the big map of Hieron. And they mark a spot on the map...right...here. Right across the river. So the river [sighs] Benjamin says like,

(as BENJAMIN): So the river goes like southwest from the university, kinda like turns and goes past the big road that north. It goes like out into the woods and it dips into the woods a little bit, and then it kind of it elbows and comes back. And when I did the [sighs] the spell, to find the Ordennan steel, that's where it was. It was like right in the woods, right near this bend in the river.

That means that they could send troops like down the river, south, and then come up from below us? Or they could go north and come in from like the northwest or like where Hella's boat is, somewhere around there. I'm not sure. I don't even know if they're gonna send troops—I—you know. Blue J's the one who saw it.

And Blue J goes like,

BLUE J: Yeah, there's a bunch of them. It's a big...encampment. I don't know...I don't know what they're gonna do. But. I didn't get that close, so I couldn't count their number. But...it's a lot of people.

HADRIAN: Dozens? Hundreds? What are...

BLUE J: More. Ah—

HADRIAN: Thousands?

BLUE J: Somewhere like that.

THRONDIR: And Benjamin, does your magic...does it like show...I don't know, like does it say like there's a high amount of Ordennan steel?

BENJAMIN: Yeah.

THRONDIR: Or can it tell concentration?

BENJAMIN: It's a lot. That's how I could find it all—I mean, in fact—it was weird! Because...you know, the way it works is, I kind of have to...I'm trying to think of a good metaphor. Um. You kind of have to set a certain range. Right? Like, for instance, if I was like, "Oh, I wanna find stone!" Well, we're in a building made of stone, and so like it wouldn't—it'd be like okay, there's stone everywhere. But if I like wanted to find a quarry with a lot of stone, I'd have to be really focused on finding a *lot* of stone!

And so I was only focused on finding a little bit of Ordennan steel at first, or like a medium amount, like a camp or a handful of people, I don't know. Um. But I found something else, also.

AUSTIN: And they like. They have a second map. They do a cool magic map. I think they make a cool magic map of the university. They like—or he like sprinkles some dust on the map that's like the close up, or tlike around where the university is on the big Hieron map, and he lifts his hand, and the dust kind of filters up into the sky. Not the sky, into the air in the middle of the room, and kind of glows. And...part of it glows a lot, and it's underneath where the farm is. Deep underground. And he says like.

BENJAMIN: There's some sort of like...I don't know! Like there's a big collection of Ordennan steel down there, too.

And then he goes back to the regular map, where he like kind of dispels that, and on the regular map, it starts glowing again where I marked already on the big Hieron map. And he goes,

BENJAMIN: There's way more over there! It is probably like [sighs] thousands. But I don't know...I don't know if they're gonna attack us, or what.

And Blue J says,

BLUE J: They had some scouts around. None of them saw me. As far as I know. And...I don't know that they're...they didn't...I—I don't know. It didn't look like they were preparing to attack anytime soon at least, but...But who could say.

DRE: This is me out of character trying to remember.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: I know...Jerod Shiraz died.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Jerod Shiraz is dead. Unfortunately.

DRE: Did the...rest of the rebel Ordennans end up staying here, or did they leave?

AUSTIN: They...Good question! Let's find out. Um.

SYLVIA: They stayed, I think.

AUSTIN: Cold Winter. I think they stayed. I'm pretty sure they stayed.

SYLVIA: I'm looking at the scratch sheet and we don't have them crossed out.

AUSTIN: Yeah, then that means they stayed. Um, I think you know well enough immediately that all of the extra Ordennan steel is like, yeah, someone buried it. Right, to get rid of it, because remember y'all had—you realized that the Ordennan steel was communicating some sort of disease, to people. And so you buried it somewhere. And that is probably—between you and Ephrim, you could probably put together—Ephrim's not in this room, but. If Ephrim learned that, Ephrim could put together that is probably the fertilizer for this weird tree.

DRE: Gotcha.

AUSTIN: Um.

DRE: [laughing] Cool!

SYLVIA: Very good.

AUSTIN: Um!

BENJAMIN: So what do we do?

asks Benjamin.

THRONDIR: [sighs] What do we have to bring to bear against a thousand well-armed Ordennans?

BENJAMIN: Good question. Um.

AUSTIN: And Blue J's thinking, and Blue J's like,

BLUE J: Um...We could...we could cut off the head. Like I don't care how big a monster is—if you cut off its head, it dies.

THRONDIR: You need to study your bestiary more, but

[AUSTIN laughs]

98 percent of the time, that's correct.

AUSTIN: Benjamin gets a weird far-out look in his eyes? When Blue J says you can cut off the head. And is like—something magical is happening here. Something magical is happening here.

ART: That's you talking?

AUSTIN: This is Austin talking.

ART: Okay.

DRE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Like something...there is...Benjamin does not look like he is in control...of his mind right now.

DRE: Um. Is Kodiak reacting weirdly to this at all?

AUSTIN: Kodiak does like [bark foley] "Rarf! Rawr!" Yeah. At that moment.

DRE: Kay.

AUSTIN: Good call.

ART: Um, Hadrian like grabs Benjamin by the shoulder?

AUSTIN: Um. Like you touch his shoulder and his shoulder is wet with sweat. And he's like—

ART: Um. Oh.

BENJAMIN: [quiet, wheezy breath] Someone's gonna try to cut off the head.

[sighs]

AUSTIN: And he like rubs his temples.

BENJAMIN: [strained] Someone very important is in danger. I don't know who. [quieter breathing] Something's coming.

[upset] I think it's—I think they're gonna assassinate somebody. I don't know who. I don't know who's gonna—I don't know who's being killed, and I don't know—I don't know who's doing the killing. I just felt really...I just felt *really bad*. Like I was at a funeral.

[DRE sighs]

Blue J reaches over and also puts a hand on Benjamin's—on Benjamin's back. And like gives like a little side hug. Pulls him over.

BLUE J: This happens sometimes. Benjamin sees things.

THRONDIR: Do they always come true?

BLUE J: Most of the time.

AUSTIN: And Benjamin like nods a little bit.

HADRIAN: All right, well, we're not gonna have any funerals. We're gonna...we're gonna be fine here.

THRONDIR: Well, I mean, it's a good thing we don't have anybody very important on their way to visit us or anything.

HADRIAN: ...I didn't even think of that. If I'm being completely honest with you.

[SYLVIA and AUSTIN laugh quietly]

Um. You sure it's not Ephrim?

THRONDIR: It would be a leap for Ordennans to jump to attempted deicide, but...

ART: It's also like...I don't—no, I don't want to say this out loud.

[AUSTIN laughs]

Why would Benjamin be sad at Samot's funeral?

AUSTIN: He doesn't know what funeral he'd be at. He just knows he'd be at a weird funeral.

ART: Mm.

THRONDIR: Benjamin, have—when you've gotten these before, is there any way for you to like—I don't know, go deeper, or find more details?

BENJAMIN: I could try...I...

THRONDIR: I don't want you to hurt yourself.

BENJAMIN: Let me talk to Sunder and Uklan, and let me look at...let me...I'll look into it.

THRONDIR: Get some rest first. [gently amused] You look terrible.

BENJAMIN: [quietly] Thanks...

AUSTIN: Blue J's like,

BLUE J: I'll take care of him. Don't worry about it.

And like.

BENJAMIN: [strained] is there anything else?

[pauses]

All right.

And like again, hand on back. Benjamin like rests his head on Blue J's shoulder, and they leave.

Ephrim, how are you doing?

SYLVIA: Oh. Uh.

AUSTIN: Do we get you looking at this fuckin tree again? What do we get?

[SYLVIA sighs]

Dealin with something else right now?

SYLVIA: Um...I think right now it's like...Ephrim wants to be focusing on the visit. Like Samot's visit.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Mm-hm.

SYLVIA: But that *stupid* tree is just in the back of his head the entire time.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah. Um. Yeah, I think we just get the shot of Ephrim like at the window, and like you can see that tree grew overnight. That tree is bigger again.

SYLVIA: Oof...

AUSTIN: Like one of the...one of the the fence...or I guess the fence went up this morning, right, but you can already tell the fence is too small. [amused] So they're already moving the fencing back a little bit further to give it more room.

[Pause]

EPHRIM: All right. Okay. [laughs] We've gotta start solving that! Hey, uh—

SYLVIA: This is just Ephrim talking to like a random person, so like,

EPHRIM: Hey, make sure that when Samot's here he doesn't see us moving the fence. It needs to look intentional.

AUSTIN: [laughs]

(as RANDOM PERSON): Right away. Of course. Of course.

EPHRIM: Thank you.

AUSTIN: You have like a group of retainers, right?

SYLVIA: I do. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Who are they? 'Cause that's a move you have. You have a move that's like, "You have four to seven loyal retainers who will back you up, follow your orders—

SYLVIA: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: "—impress people, carry things, help you conduct your business. Choose what type of people compose your retainers." And so you've picked Stalwart Guards that help you fight. When they help you fight, you get +1 armor. That's cool.

SYLVIA: Yeah. Sh—do you want me to go them? 'Cause I have names for them now.

AUSTIN: Yeah, let's go through them. Let's go through them.

SYLVIA: I've only got four at the moment. There's like...

[15:00]

space up to seven, but i was like, I—four is a lot already.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: So we know about Highwater, who has served me the longest, and is a cobbin assassin...

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

SYLVIA: ...That's sorta like—she's sorta like my right hand... There's a—these are like—basically Ephrim's bodyguards, too.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

SYLVIA: Marigold is one of them, which I hope is not a name we've used before.

AUSTIN: I don't think we've used Marigold.. Great name.

SYLVIA: I checked every wiki we have. Who's the most reliable. She is an unstill soldier.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

SYLVIA: That um. Yeah. And she's just like, I picture her with like a big ol' shield. Is her thing.

AUSTIN: Nice. Nice.

SYLVIA: And then Summit, the most fearsome, is a halfling guard, because I really wanted a halfling that is an absolute unit.

AUSTIN: Nice. Hell yeah.

SYLVIA: So I want him to be a little mountain of a man.

AUSTIN: Hell yes.

SYLVIA: And then Brother Hue, who is a—that's H-U-E. Who is the most cunning of my retainers, and he—I don't know if I wanna say he's a former priest, or still like an active priest, but I think former works a bit better...

AUSTIN: Yeah I mean I—...Yeah.

SYLVIA: I don't know.

AUSTIN: I think faith is in a weird place, maybe.

SYLVIA: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Because it's like...*you* know about Samoths. Like how have *you*, in the last eight years, been practicing faith, or watching it be practiced, or whatever?

SYLVIA: It's one of those things where it's like...I feel it's very similar, in a weird way, but like obviously Ephrim does more important things than I did at the time, when I was like eight and went to Mass, and kinda went through the motions for my mom?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

SYLVIA: It's kinda similar to that, where Ephrim's like not—his heart's not in it, but he knows that if he doesn't seem like his heart's in it, people will worry.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: So I think he's still very involved in that, and is kinda just like—[laughing slightly] it's eating him away inside. 'Cause it's like—

ART: [wryly] I don't wanna like—

SYLVIA: Ugh.

ART: —overstate...the importance of my own character. But also like, known religious person...

SYLVIA: Oh, true.

ART: ...Hadrian, came back a month ago, and has also then like immediately distanced himself from the church a little bit?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

SYLVIA: Yeah. And also—

ART: It's probably not a great time.

SYLVIA: —*knows* about...what Ephrim did, right? 'Cause of Fero.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Blurtin that out.

ART: Yeah. [laughs]

AUSTIN: That conversation also hasn't exactly happened.

SYLVIA: Yeah?

AUSTIN: I guess it sort of did. And then we kind of talked about the temple, the cemetery temple being this kind of like neutral, like.

SYLVIA: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Almost Unitarian style vibe, so.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Cool. Um. So, are you—that's like the bulk of what you're doing at this point, you're telling one of your—

SYLVIA: Yeah, I think...

AUSTIN: —one of your retainers to like move the fences more, and also make sure—

SYLVIA: Yeah, I think I—

AUSTIN: —Samot doesn't see you moving fences?

SYLVIA: Um. Because this was something that like—I'm gonna only use the information that Ephrim knows here, unless someone wants to be like, "Benjamin told them about the Ordennan steel." But since we do know that Throndir's scout saw them in the west.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

SYLVIA: I think that Ephrim says to... Summit that he wants him particularly—like one, he wants like one—I want one of my right hand guys on the west guard.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: And two, that needs to be bulked up a little bit.

AUSTIN: All right.

SYLVIA: 'Cause. We're afraid of a force coming from there.

AUSTIN: Cool.

SYLVIA: I think that's kind like the big stuff he's handling at this po—it's a lot of administrative work, you know!

AUSTIN: Cool....Anyone else doing any big things, either this day or this week? We can mess around with timescale as much or as little as we want to.

JANINE: Um. I want to look into if there are any nearby Moonlighter contacts? Um.

AUSTIN: Yeah...

JANINE: It feels like there *should* be if Rix was thinking that the thing she was doing would be an in?

AUSTIN: Yeah, so the—I think you ask around, and I'll just give this to you, that like the...you know that I mentioned that there was the shipment that's going northward that was stopped. That was being operated by a Moonlighter Guild...group. The Moonlighter Guild is like equal parts Thief's Guild and Adventurer's Guild, you know? And so there are definitely people who just like do jobs for the guild. And there should—there will probably be at least one Moonlighter in that group. Like maybe it was other random—maybe it was other people from Canton, other wharvers from Canton. But the—there will probably be, you learn, at least one person who's there who is definitely associated with the Moonlighter's Guild. And who maybe that person as they travel past the University, they give—they're the contact who checks in or whatever, you know. So if you wanna move—if we want to, we can just cut to you talking to this detained...[huffs] this detained group of—detained shipment.

JANINE: Oh, is he detained?

AUSTIN: Oh yeah.

JANINE: Oh, right, the detained shipment.

AUSTIN: Yeah, Ephrim's guard—unless, Ephrim, unless you told them to go ahead and let them go. Or something like that. If you recall, this is the group was definitely travelling up to Velas with supplies and stuff, from Canton, the wharven city of Canton. Which is probably Dark Son aligned, is your guess.

SYLVIA: Yeah, I don't know if we had like...extra security there. I think we're a little...everyone's scared of the Ordennans right now. So.

AUSTIN: Right, so is that a situation where you're like, "Fuck it, let them go"? And so they rode on past?

SYLVIA: Uh...I think we [amused] have like two guys there. Like it's a very—it's risky, and we know...

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

SYLVIA: And it's like the caravan's like, "We could probably go whenever," but it's like, "We're still here. We're watching you."

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: From af—but like barely. Like.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: They could go if they really want to.

AUSTIN: Is it, but it would be like a...

SYLVIA: But it would be like they would be...

AUSTIN: A breach of. Right.

SYLVIA: A breach of the security there, yeah.

AUSTIN: I think they basically told you like, they sent word that was like "Deal with us within the next three days or we're outta here." And this is the third day. So, Adaire, you're there. If you wanna be there. And it is a caravan. It's like, you know, 12 wagons of stuff, basically, heading up towards Velas. With an armed guard. A bunch of horses. People of various races and cultures. But here there is someone who is—we'll have to figure out what the Moonlighter Guild like...iconography is? Maybe it's just like a crescent moon or something?

JANINE: [quietly] Hm.

AUSTIN: What's a way to make a crescent moon be about money? Um...

JANINE: Uh...You like put it in like a coin shape, so it looks like a moon, like a moon...disc, but it's like gold instead of like black and white?

AUSTIN: Yeah, sure! Yeah. They have that on like a cloak or like a cloak clasp has that symbol on it. And there is—it is an elf. It is an elf with—it is an elf from the kind of high elf race that we don't see that much of. What Fantasma and what Arrell are. They are—this person is tall, they have kind of almost like a black-blue hair. Kind of like black, but with a little tinge of blue in it. And it is like basically a fancy—like, it is like a slicked back mullet. And they have on like leather armor, and a cape, and are *very* anxious. This person's name is...Celador. And they see you approach. And they're like—

(as CELADOR): [sighs] Have we finally gotten an answer? Are we being kept longer? You're from this university, right?

ADAIRE: [amused] Uh, well. I mean, technically. Uh...not in an organizational capacity.

CELADOR: Well, then, what are you doing here?

ADAIRE: I was wondering if...if any...if any like Samoths weirdos have tried to...get you folks to do anything for them.

AUSTIN: How loud do you say that?

JANINE: Not super loud.

AUSTIN: Okay. So I think that they give you a look that's like,

CELADOR: [whispering] Shhhut up.

ADAIRE: Okay. All right, well that's good—all right, that makes sense.

CELADOR: [stammering]...Who are you again?

ADAIRE: I'm Adaire Ducarte.

CELADOR: Okay. Who is that?

ADAIRE: You asked.

CELADOR: What's that mean?

ADAIRE: I just answered.

CELADOR: Wh—[sighs] Oh, so you're just out here to like poke fun at us for being stuck here? What is the—what is this?

ADAIRE: I've been talking to someone who had some ideas...about the Moonlighters, and I wanted to see how accurate those ideas were.

CELADOR: The only ideas about the Moonlighters anyone should care about is that we do good work for fair pay.

ADAIRE: Mm-hm.

CELADOR: Now, if there's nothing else, can you please go tell someone in that university that we're getting out of here tonight if they don't give us the go-ahead?

ADAIRE: I don't really talk to the...uh, sure, whatever.

CELADOR: Oh, my god!

AUSTIN: He like climbs back up onto this wagon, is like...just ignoring you at this point, basically. [laughs]

JANINE: [amused] Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: He's like [sighs] and is like looking off into the horizon. You do anything else with this caravan?

JANINE: Uh...[sighs] I honestly don't think Adaire cares about this caravan. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Fair.

JANINE: So no.

AUSTIN: Okay....All right. Anything else going on this week?

JANINE: What's the like mail situation like? Is there mail?

AUSTIN: Like between cities, or internally?

JANINE: [rueful] I don't know.

AUSTIN: Internally—

JANINE: Like in general.

AUSTIN: In—right, but I mean, like, I suspect that there is postal service inside of the university.

JANINE: I mean, sure, but I could just drop a letter in someone's doorbox, like that's...

AUSTIN: Totally. So, that's what I'm saying, like, so, across Hieron, lots of independents. The Moonlighters will do that for you. You can hire independent couriers, to run messages. And there's lots of just like merchants who do that as they go from place to place. Right, where it's like, "Oh yeah, you know, on my circuit, I go from Canton to the City of First Light to the university, to Velas—or to Rosemerrow, to Velas, blah blah blah." And so you can like, once a

month, give someone something, and then hopefully they'll drop it off sometime later. You know. But it's not...that is nowhere near as predictable.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: As giving it to a single courier or whatever.

JANINE: Um.

ART: Oh, I really liked the like fake pattern magic answer we had in the first season for how Hadrian's letter got to Hella, that like, in Hieron, if you just write a letter, and leave it in a certain place, it always gets where it's going.

AUSTIN: [quiet laugh] That's good. Yeah, but like that's a thing Uklan Tel could have told you about, right?

ART: Sure.

AUSTIN: Not a thing that everybody has access to. So. So yeah, there's also that, right? Like there's also that Emmanuel and Lem are currently texting with each other via fidget cube.

JANINE: [quiet laugh] Uh.

AUSTIN: Badly.

JANINE: Before I—

AUSTIN: Also, Emmanuel doesn't know how those things work.

JANINE: Yeah. Um. Then I think before the caravan leaves, that Adaire would like, I think Adaire like writes a letter...

AUSTIN: Mm.

JANINE: ...to Blake?

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: And like...hands it off to Celador.

AUSTIN: Awesome. Celador is like,

CELADOR: All right. And, also, payment?

ADAIRE: Uh...Blake kinda owes me?

CELADOR: [annoyed laugh] Okay! So, also, payment?

ADAIRE: [sighs] Okay, what's your usual rate?

CELADOR: What's it worth to you?

ADAIRE: You're not great at this. Um...You know...Man, I d—this is [laughs] this is stupid. Um.

JANINE: I don't even wanna give this person money, is the problem.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh!

JANINE: 'Cause I'm like annoyed now. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh!

JANINE: Um. This is [laughs]

AUSTIN: You could hide it like—

JANINE: I have an idea that's like a bad idea.

AUSTIN: [slowly]...Uh-huh.

JANINE: It's like a bad idea, but I wanna do it anyway, 'cause I don't like this person. And that's where I'm at [laughs] right now with Adaire.

AUSTIN: [doubtful] Okay.

JANINE: You know those daggers I have?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JANINE: That Samoths made for me?

AUSTIN: I do!

JANINE: Are they like sitting in a wagon or something?

AUSTIN: Yeah. This person's—they're sitting in this wagon.

JANINE: Okay. What would I have to roll if the thing I wanted to do was slam one of the daggers into the seat like beside them? Just for a second.

AUSTIN: You can just do that.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: You could a hundred percent just—there's not a...that's not a thing.

JANINE: Cool, I'm just gonna do that then.

AUSTIN: [hesitant] Okay! You wanna read what those daggers do?

JANINE: Yes. "You may aim the daggers at a specific target or an area. If you choose a specific target, the target is affected as if by the Cause Fear spell. So long as they remain within the proximity of the daggers, their reaction is up to them: flee, panic, beg, fight. When targeting an area size near or smaller, inhabitants may panic or fight, but will not beg or flee."

AUSTIN: So this is just targeting Celador?

JANINE: Yes.

AUSTIN: Okay. Uh, Cause Fear, yeah, says target is afraid of the object so long as you maintain the spell. Their reaction is up to them: flee, panic, beg, or fight. So, um...so I think the thing that happens is—so here's my question: I wonder what—what do you think the fear is that hits Celador here? Is it a sp—I'm curious, is this a thing where it's like, "Oh, they're hearing something that's scary. They're seeing something that's scary, that's j—" or is it just an emotional response?

JANINE: I feel like it should be really highly personal and also situational?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Right.

JANINE: I think it's way less interesting if it's like, [sarcastically] "They hear a dragon!"

AUSTIN: Right, right.

JANINE: Like, that's...

AUSTIN: Unless they're really afraid—unless a dragon killed their family or whatever.

JANINE: Sure, unless we're like in a dragon cave, and [laughs] whatever.

AUSTIN: Right. Right, [laughs] exactly.

JANINE: So I feel like in a situation like this, it should probably be like a...one of those things that's like, isolation—

[30:00]

or like, 'cause right now they're sort of cut off, and they're running behind, and they're with—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: —people they don't feel cool about.

AUSTIN: Um, yeah, so I think the thing that they—I think it's a combination of like isolation, but it's also a feeling of like...They need to get this stuff to Velas. And if they don't, someone is going to be very mad at them. And that someone is going to be the Cult of the Dark Son. And so they go, they get very quiet, and they go,

CELADOR: [quietly] Okay...Okay.

And then they like pick up the reins for the horses, and they break away. And ride away. And all of the rest of the group is like, "Where—Where is Celador go—should we be—" and the guards, one of the guards that Ephrim had put on them like takes off after Celador, on a horse, and the other one like quickly rides over to like block the rest of the caravan from moving, and then like one or two of the wagons breaks off anyway, and continues on. And then the other groups, the rest of the bulk of the group just stays behind, and it's just like chaos among this group, this caravan.

This caravan has broken up now, and is that much more easy to be picked off by bandits, down the road. So, intentional or not, you've completely disrupted this shipment from Canton to Velas.

JANINE: Cool?

AUSTIN: Good hustle. Um...great work. [huffs] All right, what else is happening? In the lead up to Samot arriving.

DRE: Well, I think with...Thrandir being interested in Benjamin's vision, I think maybe he goes to Uklan and is like basically like asking Uklan, "Okay, where can I find some books in the old libraries that might help out Benjamin?"

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Just in general, like with—okay, you know what? Give me a...I think that's a Spout Lore, probably, in a weird way, right?

DRE: Mm. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Unless you have something about like finding cool shit, you know what I mean? Investigating something.

DRE: No. No. I mean, I've got Hunt and Track, but that's not what this is.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah. All right, so give me a Spout Lore.

DRE: Uh, sure.

AUSTIN: Oh, your Intelligence is a 0, is a 9, so.

DRE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: All right!

DRE: [pleased] Ah, it's a 7.

AUSTIN: The GM will only tell you something interesting, it's on you to make it useful. Um. So I think [sighs] are you looking for like a book on prophecy, or something like that? Is that kind of what you're looking for, or like...?

DRE: Yeah, or...is it like prophecy or is it like...

AUSTIN: Yeah, I don't know!

DRE: Divination?

AUSTIN: It could be either—um.

DRE: Like scrying?

AUSTIN: It could be any of those things. Right? And I think that's part of the problem, this is why it is only something interesting and not useful.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You kind of get this like breakdown of all the different types of things it could be. And it could be...a—um...a divine...you know, communication. It could be a communication in

general. It could be like, you know, Samoths is sending something into your brain. You know, Samoths is telling you what the future might hold. Or Tristero is, right, you definitely find some like, “Every now and then, you know, Death personified will speak to us, and give us a warning of what is to come.” But you also see that like yeah, there’s also sort of magical prediction engines, in the form of scrying pools and, you know, the ancient tower of Samot where now the Erasure is, is definitely in a sense a giant scrying pool about different potential futures. And so there’s all of this different versions of what it means to get a vision.

But I think that the one thing that is... The one thing that’s not useful, but I think that is clear is, by and large, none of these are about something just happening internally. When a vision is this clear and this clearly magical, there is some sort of external stimulus, whether that is the arrangement of things in a pattern to produce an effect, or a god’s whispering in someone’s ear, or the future—you know, some sort of catastrophic future event echoing back in time, it’s rarely just like, a person who does magic invents some bullshit in their own brain. Do you know what I mean? So, by that I mean, there is some truth to this, at least. There is some potentiality happening here—or there is some—it is not just Benjamin—this is not just Benjamin’s magic powers going awry.

DRE: Yeah. Somebody or something or some group of somethings.

AUSTIN: Or the future itself is communicating something into Benjamin’s mind, yeah.

DRE: Yeah. Okay.

AUSTIN: So, like does anyone have anything else before we jump ahead a few days here? Is anyone else doing any preparatory stuff? I’m curious, what is preparations for Samot’s arrival like? Are there conversations about it between y’all? Is there like a...[stutters] not a council, but like um—what do you call that, like when there’s like a committee. Is there like a committee, like the way you do a birthday party committee, at like a...

SYLVIA: Oh, man.

AUSTIN: Or like a holiday party committee at an office?

SYLVIA: [breathes in to speak] [amused] I feel like originally we called it a council, and then realized it became that? And it’s just kinda—

AUSTIN: Became a committee? Yeah.

SYLVIA: It kinda became like a party committee, when we were just like, “Well...we’re just kinda planning a visit. This isn’t...Hm.”

AUSTIN: Um.

SYLVIA: It's like, me, and my retainers, and Corsica...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: And like anyone else who wants to be there could be there...

AUSTIN: I think Rosana actually points out that, pretty early on, and maybe this is part of when it starts being taken just a little more seriously, [weakly] *maybe?* Is, she's like,

(as ROSANA): Listen. If we play our cards, we could maybe get a trade deal going with them that could address our problems with medicine right now.

EPHRIM: Uh, yeah, that is actually one of the main goals of this meeting, is seeing how we can—there's no reason us and Samot need to be...adversaries here—

SYLVIA: Ephrim lied—

[AUSTIN laughs]

There's at least one reason why Samot might not wanna be friends with Ephrim. Uh. You know.

AUSTIN: Yeah, sure!

SYLVIA: Some history there.

AUSTIN: There is some history.

SYLVIA: But yeah, no for sure—we wanna—I think the goal with this thing is like we wanna put forth the idea—not that we're like—we're trying to look like put together, for sure, but it's not like to show our military force, we're trying to show that like this is a community, and like an actual settlement here.

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: And not just some ragtag thing.

AUSTIN: Have you, um...Have you come up with a name for this place yet?

SYLVIA: [sighs] [weakly amused] Personally, no, I haven't. I feel like...[stammers] I have trouble naming places in general.

AUSTIN: Fair.

SYLVIA: But also naming one that's like the hub of our entire season is a lot of pressure.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm!

SYLVIA: So I've been struggling a little. I kinda just keep calling it the university.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: But um...we *should* probably think of something.

AUSTIN: Anyone have ideas here at the table? Anyone else thought about this?

DRE: Hm...I forgot that we still had to name this.

AUSTIN: Yeah, we do.

DRE: 'Cause I've just been calling it Last University in my head.

SYLVIA: Mm.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm!...You know, he's from the City of First Light, so it's not like...people are opposed to naming things things like that? But it's not a very like optimistic name. I think even Rosana is again pointing this out. She's like,

ROSANA: If this guy's gonna come and see this place, and...It's one of those things that will stick with him. If you sign a paper saying—or treaty saying—that you wanna trade with the Last University, that's not a particularly positive way of framing things.

SYLVIA: ...Yeah. Um...

[laughs] Fuck *off*, Dre!

[DRE laughs]

Dre just put Hollow Bastion in the chat. Really throwin' me off. Um. God. Yeah, I'm trying to think of something...you know.

ART: Book Town!

SYLVIA: There we go.

AUSTIN: Love it. Love Book Town.

DRE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Bookton.

ALI: Nah.

SYLVIA: Duckberg!

[AUSTIN laughs]

Hm, Duckberg!

ART: We're not callin it—...

[AUSTIN laughs]

DRE: What about—hold on, hold on. What about Gooseville?

AUSTIN: Oh my god. This is the worst.

JANINE: Um...

DRE: Uh...

AUSTIN: You had some direction before, Janine, right? You were lookin at like French words for school?

JANINE: Oh, I didn't know that was for this.

AUSTIN: What—yeah! For the name of the city, yeah!

JANINE: I dunno!

AUSTIN: I thought that was the whole thing!

JANINE: You just ask for words and stuff, and then I give you words and stuff, that's all!
[laughing] That's all that is! I don't know what they're for.

AUSTIN: [amused] I'm pretty sure I said—if we check the—if you check the tape—

JANINE: [laughing] I probably didn't read anything before the line where you're like, "What are some words for this?"

AUSTIN: The thing that I said is, “Is there some sort of synonym for school or campus that makes a good town name?”

JANINE: Oh, yeah, I just didn’t associate that with this.

AUSTIN: With this school or campus, okay.

JANINE: [laughing] At all. No. No.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh!

JANINE: I really like the word lysée.

AUSTIN: [troubled] Yeah.

JANINE: And I know we don’t wanna just use—like there’s has to be something there—

AUSTIN: Wanna play with it a little.

JANINE: —but that’s just a nice word.

AUSTIN: Yeah. There’s another funny thing here, which is that Samot knows the name of this place in a way that none of you do, presumably? Because of building it?

DRE: Oh, no.

ART: But we’re not gonna guess that name. That’s just a...

AUSTIN: No! Um, but I bet it’s somewhere here. Or we could just wait [amused] until he calls it something on screen? And think, “Oh fuck, is that what this place is called?” [laughs]

[DRE and ART laugh]

AUSTIN: But I do like lysée as the like...the foundation. We had, I think I brought this up, that the basis for Marielda is the—is mareel, which is M-A-R-E-E-L, which is the milky seas effect, which is about glowing weird phosphorescent shit in the water, basically, bioluminescence in the water. So that became Marielda. And so I think lysée is definitely something like we could play to get to somewhere. Continue to turn it over in your heads, and put suggestions in the chat.

So yeah, what does preparation though look like? We know that he’ll be arriving from the south. Thankfully, I think at this point that most of that—[cheerful alarm begins playing] my alarm is going. Why is my alarm going off in the middle of the night? [turns off] I guess day. 5:45.

Um...it's dark outside, to be fair. It's very dark outside. So yeah, besides knowing that you want to negotiate for medicine, what else is going into preparation for this?

SYLVIA: I mean, I think my big question is that like—I have a feeling the answer's no, but like, Samot didn't like leave any like things that clearly belong to him at the university, did he?

AUSTIN: You could look for stuff! [sighs]

SYLVIA: I think that might be worth it, especially knowing that he's tied to this, it would be kinda like a goodwill gesture to just be like, "Hey, we may have taken this building, but, you know..."

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: "You built it. Here's your stuff back."

AUSTIN: Is that like an order you give, to look for stuff? Or is this a thing that Ephrim is doing personally?

SYLVIA: I think Ephrim's doing it personally.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: He wants to be personal. He wants a very—he wants to be like, "No I did—this—[stammers] listen, we're both rulers. We need to, you know."

AUSTIN: [meaningfully] Mm. Mm.

SYLVIA: "Build rapport."

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. Give me a Discern Realities. Tell me what that looks like, what looking looking for it through stuff, and then you can give me a Discern Realities.

SYLVIA: Okay. I think...I will say, I think while Ephrim says he's doing it on his own—

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: —he's like—at least a couple of his retainers are there—

AUSTIN: Yeah!

SYLVIA: Specifically the bodyguards are there.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

SYLVIA: Like doing—helping him like...

AUSTIN: You don't get a bonus for looking for shit with them.

SYLVIA: [hastily] No, for sure! I'm just mentioning it for like flavor reasons, but it's like...

AUSTIN: You just get it for combat, but yes. Yeah, okay, so you're like looking for the library.

SYLVIA: Yeah, no. I'm doing it on my own.

AUSTIN: You're looking through like—special like bedrooms.

SYLVIA: I think it's the central tower, is where we're focusing the search.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: Because that is kinda like...that was kinda like the hub, from my understanding, right?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

SYLVIA: And, um, maybe if there were like...I guess there are quarters in the building itself, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yep.

SYLVIA: Yeah, so probably looking through those as well. With permission, anybody sits in them at the moment.

AUSTIN: Right, totally.

SYLVIA: But yeah. I'll, uh—let me Discern Realities there. That's a Wisdom roll, correct?

AUSTIN: Which is—what is your Wisdom?

SYLVIA: My Wisdom is 14, so I got a +1.

AUSTIN: Hell yeah.

SYLVIA: [clicks teeth] I rolled a 6!

AUSTIN: You did roll a 6. Does anyone wanna help, here? Does anyone wanna Aid/Interfere?

ART: Yeah, sure.

AUSTIN: Does anyone else wanna happen to be here?

Hadrian, was that you?

ART: Yeah.

JANINE: I'd also be willing to, but...[trails off]

AUSTIN: So! Um...I always forget if multiple people can Aid or Interfere. [pause]

ART: Well, I don't know.

AUSTIN: I'm gonna find out.

JANINE: We only really need the 1 to push to a 7, anyway, right?

AUSTIN: Totally. Totally.

JANINE: Like pushing to a 8 or 9?

AUSTIN: My question is what happens if someone fails, but yeah, let's just do Hadrian here, given the Samot connection.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Um. Go ahead and give me 2d6+1, 'cause you have one bo—oh wait, do you not even have a bond? Hadrian, oh you don't have a bond.

ART: I don't have a bond.

AUSTIN: So 2d6 *flat*.

ART: Um. Did that work? Was that right?

AUSTIN: *Yo!*

SYLVIA: Yeah, it worked!

JANINE: Yum!

AUSTIN: You got a 12, you rolled 2d6 and got a 12, son! So you get that +1.

SYLVIA: All right. So.

AUSTIN: So, I mean, it's, you know, as the move says, it is Discern Realities, so you get one question, from this list. I could—there's a few here that would basically do the same thing.

SYLVIA: [amused] I mean, "What here is useful or valuable to me?" seems to be the quickest throughline to what we're trying to do here.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally. So...[laughs] um, I'm gonna give you a couple things. I think you find Samot's room. And it's like emp—it's not empty, but it's like, it hasn't been in use for...[stretches out word] aages? For—you know, before the Erasure? It's one of those things that's like, the door is locked when you get to it, but you're like—maybe Hadrian, do you just bust it open?

ART: Yeah! Uh-huh!

[45:00]

AUSTIN: [laughs quietly] And you go inside and—

ART: [amused] That sounds like the kind of thing I would do.

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's instantly clear—when you do, what I will say is like, as you approach it, *you* notice, Hadrian, that there is a door that no one else goes near.

Like no one else—you're with people. And everyone's like, "Oh yeah, I've got this floor." And like everyone clears out all the other rooms on that floor, and then they immediately start going up the other—the next-up floor, and you're like, "Did no one check the door right there?" And no one even noticed it, until you pointed it out.

ART: Hm.

AUSTIN: But *you* see it. And you like slam into it once, and it's definitely like...You feel like it's not just locked, but it's somehow magically locked. Right? Like, all right, you put enough pressure into that wooden door, you should have just splintered that thing in half. Then you did it a second time, and it's as if it's been opened for you. And it opens.

And inside is a very nice bed, and a painting on the wall, in a frame, very dusty. But you can see that it's a painting of...I think it should be a painting...it's a painting that Samot did of Samol's house, the little cabin in the woods. You find a collection of unsent letters. And a very nice pen that has...the inkwell has probably dried *completely*, but the actual fountain pen itself is fine. And also the letters are probably like, be careful touching them. [laughs] They're—they will disintegrate, if they haven't already.

And you find a cloak. You find a cloak made of wolf fur. It's not the same cloak, but it is one of those cloaks.

ART: Damn, I couldn't like just pretend I didn't...

AUSTIN: It's not the see—yeah. He knows. He knows that your—that that cloak is gone, but there's a new one here. Um. I'm trying to think if there's anything else that's like... Yeah, I think that those are the things you find. Um. [clicks tongue] What is like the equivalent of... I'm trying to think of something that's like [sighs]... the equivalent of like a pre-engagement ring.

SYLVIA: [puzzled] Like a promise ring?

AUSTIN: Like a promise ring. I mean, I suspect you find a lot of jewelry, you know.

ART: Sure.

AUSTIN: ...Samot is flashy as shit. Samot's got that wet wet, like, diamonds. Gold. The whole nine. Um... Yeah, so I think you find some jewelry. Some of which is simple, in a way that makes it feel more important.

Yeah, so you find Samot's bedroom.

SYLVIA: [amused] All right.

AUSTIN: All right.

SYLVIA: I think we're—like, the plan with that stuff is like...

(as EPHRIM): Okay, we gotta clean the frame on this painting.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. [laughs quietly]

EPHRIM: To make it look nice. And get me like a nice box, to put all this jewelry in.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

EPHRIM: I don't wanna—him to think that we... I don't wanna shine it up. I want it to look exactly like he left it. I don't want him thinking we went into our business—

SYLVIA: This is all in-character Ephrim talking to someone writing this down.

ART: Uh-huh.

(as HADRIAN): Do you have a wooden hanger for the cloak? Like a nice hanger?

EPHRIM: We can make one?

AUSTIN (as HIGHWATER): Yeah, we got that! We can make one, we got—yeah yeah yeah.

EPHRIM: Okay!

AUSTIN: Says Hightower—Hightower? Highwater. Highwater.

SYLVIA: Highwater.

AUSTIN: [scornfully] Who's Hightower?

SYLVIA: And yeah—[sighs]

AUSTIN: Anyway. It doesn't matter.

SYLVIA: And then...it's just like,

(as EPHRIM): Yeah, just gather it all together. Make it...just make sure nothing gets damaged, is the most important thing here. And nobody touch the letters there.

AUSTIN: Mm.

SYLVIA: Is like a very like—that's like gone from Nice Host Ephrim to, "Hey, remember, I'm the Lord here. Nobody *fucking* touch those letters."

[AUSTIN laughs quietly]

'Cause, uh, I don't want one of the like—out of character—I don't want one of the gods knowing we read his outgoing mail.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh! His unsent letters to...

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: ...the husband he's at war with.

SYLVIA: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: Those are probably really interesting though.

AUSTIN: Oh, definitely.

SYLVIA: Oh, definitely! But also, I already stabbed this guy's kid. I don't wanna do anything else that might make him mad at me.

AUSTIN: [softly] Uh-huh.

SYLVIA: Hadrian is like free to do that behind my back, but I'm just saying.

AUSTIN: You probably—you know, now that I think of it, you also probably do find—we probably do get the shot of one of you or both of you finding—I think probably both of you—finding a small painting of the three of them, of Samot, Samoths and Maelgwyn, a young Maelgwyn. Like...being lifted up between the both of them, like swinging on their shoulders, you know. With a big grin on his face. It's also the first time either of you have seen Maelgwyn. Do you talk about this at all? Or do you just let it hang?

SYLVIA: I don't know if Ephrim's able to look at it once he knows what it is.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

SYLVIA: I think he tells someone like, "Yeah, get that too," but like isn't really paying—like he's trying to just ignore it.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

ART: I think Hadrian sort of sees that and just responds with,

(as HADRIAN): It's a good thing Adaire wasn't here when we found this room full of...priceless...

[AUSTIN snorts]

jewelry and antiquities, huh?

EPHRIM: Y—yeah! Probably for the best, there. Though, I mean...you know her better than I do. I guess I should—I feel like we could probably—we can trust her, right?

HADRIAN: Oh, yeah, I was just trying to lighten the mood. You see.

EPHRIM: Oh! Y—yeah, okay. Yeah. Right. Lot on my mind, Hadrian. A lot on my mind.

HADRIAN: [quietly] Yeah, I know.

EPHRIM: Uh, thank you for your help. Um. I—do you have anything here that you specifically wanna make sure you...present to him? I know...

HADRIAN: No, I'm confident that he knows this is a group effort.

EPHRIM: Okay. Cool. Just wanted to make sure.

HIGHWATER: Have you met him before?

AUSTIN: asks Highwater to both of you.

HADRIAN: Sort of.

EPHRIM: I haven't. I've met some of his family, and I've read about him. Uh. So it's. You know. It's a lot going on here. Don't worry, there's nothing to be worried about.

AUSTIN: She is worried.

HIGHWATER: [whispering] Is he really a god?

HADRIAN: Oh, yeah, when I said sort of, I meant he personally interceded in my impending death.

HIGHWATER: Oh. That's...[whispering] Why is he coming here?

EPHRIM: I mean...Clearly, he's coming here 'cause he respects all the great work we've been doing. Right? Obvious. Come on. It'll all be okay. We're all—he made the starstuff. He's surely trying to help us...in some way. Or not help us—help stop the Heat and the Dark in some way.

HIGHWATER: But the starstuff is...pretty scary stuff. And if he could help us, why hasn't he helped everybody yet? If he's a god, what...why is he even—why would he come to a place like this, instead fighting the Heat and the Dark?

EPHRIM: You know what, maybe we'll ask him ourselves.

HIGHWATER: All right. Okay. Yeah. Yeah!

SYLVIA: And like a hand on her shoulder. And like,

(as EPHRIM): Got this.

HIGHWATER: Okay.

AUSTIN: Like the hand like calms her back down.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: She was very much in the, I'm gonna give him a piece of my mind! Like a con—

SYLVIA: Like, okay, not that much.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Yeah, yeah, exactly. Ah...

HADRIAN: He's trying his best!

AUSTIN: [laughs quietly] [sighs] Adaire and Throndir. What are you two up to these days?

JANINE: Um, I wanna put those kids to work.

AUSTIN: [laughs] [sarcastically] Yeah, great!

[SYLVIA laughs loudly]

Oh, my god! How?

DRE: It's about time somebody put child labor back into Hieron.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: I'm just saying, "idle hands," you know? They're already—they're thief children. Adaire knows what goes on with that. Like it makes sense for her to be like, "Okay, you guys do odd jobs. I have an odd job for you."

AUSTIN: [chuckles] Uh-huh.

JANINE: And then that odd job is like...productive, and keeps them busy for a little bit, so they don't cause trouble leading up to stuff, and also maybe produce something good.

AUSTIN: Okay, so...So what is—

ART: Adaire became a Scared Straight montage so readily, I barely noticed it happening!

[Laughter]

JANINE: I mean—

AUSTIN: What is the thing you're making them do?

JANINE: Um...

AUSTIN: You're trying to make them do, at least.

JANINE: So I think the thing that Adaire wants to do is teach them how to make like...I imagine like in her childhood there was not a lot of—like to decorate for holidays and important events, birthdays, whatever, there was not a lot of material. She's not from a background where you could oh, just put up the tree with the things on it, and the whatever! Or where you could like put out a good tablecloth. There was probably like a tablecloth, and that was—you know. If you had it on the table, that was special, otherwise it was a bare table.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: So I imagine that's sort of the background there. So I imagine she sort of has a...history—or at least has in the past made like little dry-grass garlands and stuff like that?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Or like, you know, things with like pine boughs and whatever. Just like woven greenery that you can hang up. So I think the thing that...the thing that I'm doing is trying to sort of be like,

(as ADAIRE): Okay. I'll pay you to do this work for me. But I wanna have some stuff like this ready for...Samot's arrival, like hanging up, so the place looks a little nicer. It's a good skill for you guys."

RIX: How much are you paying? This doesn't sound fun!

ADAIRE: I mean...when you do anything in a group, it's pretty fun.

[Pause]

[ART laughs]

AUSTIN: They like look at each other like...

RIX: Rm...Listen.

ADAIRE: [brusquely] Okay, okay—

RIX: [pityingly] Adaire. That's sweet. But if we wanted to do group activities, you would see us hanging around Rosana more, not you.

ADAIRE: Yeah, that's fair. All right, look, the practical thing here is...[sighs] You can't—

RIX: [offended] We have skills! You can't make us do—you could get any kids to—whatever this is!

[AUSTIN laughs]

[ART and DRE laugh]

AUSTIN: [amused] I can't believe you tried to get them to paint the fence, like I can't believe you tried to—

ADAIRE: Okay, no no no—mm! Okay. One, I'm not gonna go to kids who don't know how to hustle to fuckin get anything done!

[AUSTIN laughs]

They don't know how to get things done! They know how to play with a ball in a yard. I'm not into it. Two.

AUSTIN: [laughs] [disbelieving] They do—they're better than any other kids, doing this stuff!

ADAIRE: Two, weaving is an activity that hones your dexterity, and dexterity's what you need if you wanna pick locks on doors, or disarm traps, or like do that thing where you show someone a thing in your hand and you make it look like it disappeared and then they like bet you money on something, and whatever! It's a whole—you could run a lot of rackets with good dexterity.

AUSTIN: They have good dexterity!

JANINE: You can always improve your dexterity!

AUSTIN: This is not interesting for them.

JANINE: Ugh...I just wanna keep them out of trouble for a fuckin week, you know?

AUSTIN: They're Trouble kids—you could pay them enough! I think that's what she said. She says—

JANINE: That's what I'm saying, I'm gonna give them money. Like that's—that was my—

RIX: How much money? How much you talkin about?

ADAIRE: I mean, look, what's reasonable? If I'm providing materials, or whatever.

RIX: 20 coins.

ADAIRE: Oh, come on. You don't need to kill that many people.

RIX: 20 coins! 20 coins will buy us both, um...a riverboat.

AUSTIN: That's not true.

JANINE: [laughing] What the fuck!

AUSTIN: A river boat's 150 coins.

(as RIX): 20 coins will buy us...

I'm looking at the list of things that cost 20 coin...Let's see...adventuring gear. Uh...a [laughs]—peasant dowry! A hovel. Okay, this is actually it.

(as RIX): 20 coins. Listen, we don't have anything that's ours. 20 coins gets us like—you know that section out in the—near whatever that weird guy built, the Outhouse?

ADAIRE: [resigned] Yeah...

RIX: We can get a little land out there, and we can get like our own place. Like it's not gonna be a lot, but like a nice hovel. And that's 20 coins.

ADAIRE: [puzzled] Where are you guys staying now?

RIX: Around!

ADAIRE: Around?

RIX: Places!

ADAIRE: Places.. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Around places.

ADAIRE: Around places. [laughs]

RIX: There's lots of places to stay.

ADAIRE: This is...and lots of them around, so I get it.

RIX: Yeah!

ADAIRE: Uh...Mm. If I'm giving you 20 coins, I want more than garlands. This is—garlands are—that's a community benefit. You will indirectly—

RIX: Not my community!

ADAIRE: Um!

RIX: I'm not gonna benefit from garlands!

ADAIRE: If that fuckin wine guy really likes the garlands and shit, then that can make our situation better.

ROE: He sounds stupid!

AUSTIN: Says her younger brother.

ADAIRE: You don't—you've never met him...

ROE: Why would he like grass?! That's what a stupid person would do.

ADAIRE: One, okay. Don't call people stupid.

AUSTIN: Rix is like,

RIX: [quietly] Yeah, I told you, don't do that.

ADAIRE: You can say he's like a dork, or something. Whatever. But don't say—

ROE: He's a dork!

ADAIRE: Yeah, kind of. Most of them are. Um. [laughs quietly] Dorks can still be helpful. Dorks can—honestly, honestly, dorks are gonna be your bread and butter in life. [laughs]

[AUSTIN laughs]

So...Like...Okay.

RIX: 20 coin! We'll do it for 20 coin. You'll get the best weird grass whatevers in the world. There's good—we know where the best grass is.

AUSTIN: And the little boy is like,

(as ROE): [sniggers] Heh heh heh. And she's like,

RIX: Ha ha, funny—

ADAIRE: God—

RIX: I mean it.

ADAIRE: Um...Hm. 20 coins if it's a group effort, right?

RIX: Yeah!

ADAIRE: Not just you two? I want everyone in on it.

RIX: [resentful groan] Fff...Drive a hard bargain, Adaire. We'll do it.

[1:00:00]

ADAIRE: All right. I'll give you half now and half when you're done.

RIX: 15 now, 5 when we're done.

ADAIRE: No, I already gave you 6—I already gave you those 6 coins.

RIX: Those are gone. We spent those.

ADAIRE: As—sure! But that, I think, should count as goodwill.

RIX: We're talkin to you, aren't we? That's goodwill!

ADAIRE: [doubtfully] Mm.

RIX: We're not talkin to other people! 15 now, 5 when we're done. That'll give us enough to put down a down payment on this hovel.

JANINE: [laughing]

[DRE laughs loudly]

I don't think that's how hovels work! Fucking talking about—

[SYLVIA laughs]

That seems like bullshit to me. Um.

RIX: Final offer.

JANINE: I'm trying to see if I had a move.

[AUSTIN laughs]

I don't really.

AUSTIN: No, you don't have a move for tricking kids into doing hard work?

ADAIRE: 12.

AUSTIN: You can't just say that.

JANINE: Why not.

AUSTIN: You can't just say 12. [laughs]

JANINE: [amused but genuine] Why not?

AUSTIN: Oh, oh, I thought you were saying, "I rolled a 12." [laughs]

JANINE: [laughing] No!

AUSTIN: Like there's not a move—

JANINE: On a move I don't have? Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's what I'm saying!

JANINE: No, I'm saying 12.

RIX: 13.

ADAIRE: You're just bargaining for the sake of bargaining now.

RIX: That's one—

ADAIRE: There's no meaningful difference between 12 and 13.

RIX: Of course there's a meaningful difference between 12 and 13! We've already been over this! With that extra coin, I could pay for a month's prayers for the departed!

ADAIRE: Are you going to actually do that?

RIX: [outraged] No, but...there are things you can buy with that extra coin! There's always a—there's always a difference. A coin is a coin!

ADAIRE: But a coin now versus a coin later—

ART: Got you there.

RIX: [outraged] But who knows what happens later! Maybe you get killed! I want 13! I want insurance!

ADAIRE: Look, if I get killed, I give you permission to loot me.

RIX: Someone else is gonna loot you first, the person who killed you!

ADAIRE: Sh—mm. I'm gonna guess that they're gonna be in rough shape.

RIX: Maybe!

ADAIRE: Based on previous experience, I'm gonna gue—look. [sighs] Fine, 13.

RIX: 13. Now.

ADAIRE: 13. [patiently] 13 now—

AUSTIN: And she like pushes Roe to go pick up the 13 from you. And then, when Roe brings it back over, she goes like—

(as RIX): [dignified] All right. Now we have a hovel to inquire about.

And [laughs] walks away.

[JANINE sighs]

[laughs] Sylvia¹ in the chat says “It’s time to pay the price, Adaire!”

[SYLVIA laughs]

13 coins! Specifically. Rix and Roe are great. I’m gonna add their hovel to the map.

SYLVIA: Hell yeah.

AUSTIN: Um.

JANINE: Also, with their garland weaving skills, they’ll be able to make themselves a nice mattress...

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: And make sure their roof is thoroughly done...

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: And it’s a useful skill, it’s not square.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. I didn’t make it square, I made it a circle.

JANINE: [laughing] No, that was—

AUSTIN: Oh, you mean [laughs]

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: All right. There we go.

JANINE: There we—mm-hm.

AUSTIN: I was drawing on the map, for people listening, I drew a circle for [laughing] Rix and Roe’s hovel.

¹ The name in the audio recording is no longer in use, hence the audio/transcript discrepancy.

JANINE: You drew a circle. Yes.

AUSTIN: I drew a circle. All right. Uh, Throndir, what are you up to?

DRE: Man! [sighs] I don't know, 'cause I think Throndir is very nonplussed.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: About Samot visiting.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

DRE: Like I think he gets it's a big deal? But also does not care. There's a part of me that almost wonders, does like Throndir like set out to try to meet Samot halfway.

AUSTIN: Oh, interesting.

DRE: As like a...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Both because of, you know, Benjamin's vision and like wanting to make sure that like nothing goes down. But also just be like, I wanna see what this person is all about before like Hadrian and Ephrim get all weird and worship-y around them.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Um. Yeah, okay.

ART: [amused] You don't know!

[AUSTIN laughs]

[mock-outraged] You don't know me!

AUSTIN: Um, all right. So, you start heading south, then, on this road, I'm guessing. Right? There's this like ancient Roman-style road that goes south from the Last University to the City of First Light, and, as you can see, there's a point at which it crosses the river again, right, and there's a bridge there. And I'd say like...300 yards before you get there, you hear someone following you.

DRE: Oh, I hope it's Blue J, 'cause I'm not just thinking that I should have brought Blue J.

AUSTIN: It's Blue J.

DRE: Okay, good.

AUSTIN: It's Blue J, and Blue J has like a little like fox creature, made out of plants, up on...

DRE: Oh, hell yeah.

AUSTIN: ...on the shoulder. It's like, and it like yips at you. I don't know how a plant sounds when it yips. [plant fox foley] Ryyeap!

[DRE laughs]

Something like that, I think.

DRE: Sure!

AUSTIN: Um, Janine says "Like a Leafeon." Um. Maybe relook at a Leafeon. It's in that direction.

DRE: Leafeons are pretty good.

AUSTIN: Leafeons are cool, but I—

JANINE: That's a fuckin plant fox, is what—like it's right there!

AUSTIN: It is, it is, but that plant fox has too much fox and not enough plant....It's *all* plant.

DRE: Mm.

AUSTIN: It's like...Let me look at some plant Pokemon. [typing] Let me Google some pl—it's been Grass...

JANINE: I think the thing that actually look for is that person who made like a lion out of flowers.

AUSTIN: [typing] "Lion out of fl—" yeah, 'cause I specifically said this fox was made of flowers, right? [typing] I don't see them on—oh...[laughs] I hope you're not talking about this ugly-ass lion! Hold up. Not this. Right?

JANINE: No, no no no!

AUSTIN: [laughs] These are terrible! [typing]

JANINE: None of these are right. Maybe it wasn't a lion, maybe it was like a panther or something?

AUSTIN: "Cat made of flowers." None of these are good. [shocked] Oh my god!

SYLVIA: Ooh! Ooh! Ooh!

AUSTIN: Is it this?...This is too scary.

JANINE: Nn...Yeah, yeah, yeah! It's that.

AUSTIN: Oh my *god*! That's so scary-looking! Is—

JANINE: Only 'cause its mouth is open, and its ribcage exposed [laughs]...

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's why. Well, I guess this one doesn't have a ribca...Oh, maybe it would, actually! This is, um, for people who are listening, ["Caustic Cover Critic: A Cat Made of Flowers."](#) This isn't bad, but it like, that but a fox. You know? Aw, this one that's like red is really good too. Um.

[excited] Ooh, Dre, what is *that*? Where'd you find that?

DRE: I just Googled "animal sculptures made of plants."

AUSTIN: "Animal sculptures made of plants." I love that. That's sick as shit. I think it's like a combination of both of those. Like. All right, so, describe this one for me...uh, Throndir? The one that you linked, and then Janine, describe the one that you linked.

DRE: Um, so I think the one you're wanting me to talk about is the one it's like—it's partially made out of like twigs and coral, it looks like?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

DRE: And then it has like, you know, some leaves and stuff like kind of interspersed amongst the twigs.

AUSTIN: Yeah. And the last one you linked has like straight up birds and stuff flying, and like some of it's budding with flowers?

DRE: Yeah, like little like nesting and stuff also in the twigs and...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

[amused] Um, Janine, tell me about this real creepy one. That's a cat.

JANINE: Yeah. That one is like...it is like a cat...

AUSTIN: [whispers] Oh, man.

JANINE: It's mostly like a cat skeleton, made out of like orchids and stuff?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: And like bits, but then the cat's face is like fleshed out, but also like open, and it has big eyes, but no eyelids, so it's like the full eye.

AUSTIN: Ohh, right. And there's like—

JANINE: And then very big ears and then like big teeth and it's like screaming.

AUSTIN: And the ears are like open flower petals also.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And like the top of the fur.

JANINE: They actually, the ears to me look like...[sighs] Is it—what kinda lily is that? It's not—is it lily of the valley, or like the lily that's just like a big white tube?

AUSTIN: I...No, not lily of the valley, those are the little ones.

JANINE: No, yeah, those are the little ones. I always forget what they're called.

AUSTIN: "Lily big white tube."

[DRE snorts]

[typing]

Uh, the calla lily?

JANINE: Yeah! Yeah.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Shout outs to Google Image Search, 'cause I typed in "lily big white tube" and it was like, "yeah, I got you, homie."

[DRE laughs]

Yeah, those are cool. So yeah, something like that. Something like that—do some searches for animals made of plants and you'll find the things we're talking about.

...And so yeah, that is what it looks like, and it's up on Blue J's shoulder. And when it sees you...I think—I don't have a name for this creature yet. But it's—makes eye contact with Kodiak, and Kodiak goes like [growling dog foley] Rrrrrr. And it goes like [growling and then relaxing] hrrrr hrrr hm...And then Kodiak goes [barking] Rarf! Rarf! Rowr! And like steps out in front of you, Thrandir, and starts to go towards them. At like kind of a—not a fast rate, but like at a trot, you know?

DRE: Mm.

AUSTIN: Picture Kodiak, now picture Kodiak trotting. [amused] And it's adorable.

DRE: Yeah, yeah.

JANINE: Mm!

AUSTIN: And it's kinda like, [dog grunt] Hr! Hr! Hr! Hr! like to that rhythm, in front of you. And Blue J's like heading towards you, and is like waving, now that you've seen them. And Blue J's like,

(as BLUE J): Hey...um...This is Leafeon, my favorite Pokemon—

[DRE laughs]

No, they don't say "This is Leafeon."

DRE: See, I bought the new Let's Go Eevee version.

[AUSTIN laughs]

'Cause I heard you bought the Pikachu version?

AUSTIN: And I thought we could do a trade? [laughs] They both evolve if we trade them.

JANINE: You can't...[emotionless] you can't evolve Eevee in the game [mumbling]...

AUSTIN: I know, it's a whole thing. [laughs] I should—I wanna get that game. Anyway! Um. Uh, Blue J's like,

(as BLUE J): Sorry, I wish you would've—I. [sighs] What's up? Why are you out here this far?

DRE: [laughs]

(as THRONDIR): I'm glad you came!

AUSTIN: The flowers on the fox thing like bud an orange, a kind of a warning orange, and it moves over to Blue J's other shoulder, and is like, doing the kind of like cat high arched back thing, looking at Kodiak. They're kind of feeling each other out.

(as BLUE J): It's okay.

And Blue J calmly whispers to the fox, and like very carefully pets certain flowers and branches, and it seems to calm down a little bit.

THRONDIR: Kodiak, chill out!

AUSTIN: Kodiak's like [growling] Hrrrrarf. And then sits down. And is like [friendly dog] Rrrwwrr! Okay, like [happy panting] Hh! Hh! Hh!—Yeah, a hundred percent, Janine! 100 percent.

[DRE laughs]

Janine just linked the Nausicaa in the Valley of the Wind, with like the little—

DRE: Oh, hell yeah. Yeah...

AUSTIN: —[the little flying creature](#). Very much so. I think a little bit bigger than that, you know? But very much that vibe.—Because like Blue J is big, right, Blue J is like almost six feet tall, so. So, this creature is a little bit bigger too, but v—that whole vibe, a hundred percent. Like, Blue J definitely got bit by this thing and just held their hand out while the biting happened.

And Blue J is like,

(as BLUE J): You're going to meet Samot, aren't you?

THRONDIR: Yeah.

[BLUE J sighs]

You wanna come?

BLUE J: [excited] Yeah! I—yeah! We could like stop something if something happens, right, or like, we could just like know, like what if Samot's secretly gonna attack us, we'd be the ones who know first. And we could like stop him.

[THRONDIR laughs]

C'mon! What! It could happen!

THRONDIR: [mildly] Yeah, no. Hey.

BLUE J: I've read books! I've heard! Benjamin told me all sorts of stories.

THRONDIR: You're right. Well. You're the Ranger. Lead the way.

AUSTIN: Blue J's like, grinning from ear to ear, and is like, doesn't wanna say anything about it, but spins around, and then says, stops and is like,

(as BLUE J) Hey, Throndir, I wanna talk to you about something really quick. And just like, it's not a big deal, but like, it's kind of a big deal. Um.

And is like—doesn't know how much to get into it. But is just like,

(as BLUE J) It's small. I already talked to Benjamin about it, it's not a big deal. But just, when you talk about me, can you just say they/them, with me?

THRONDIR: Oh!

BLUE J: For now on.

THRONDIR: [gently] Yeah, totally.

BLUE J: Instead of like—it's just like—I'm working through like—I'm just feeling some stuff out. So. Um. That would mean a ton.

THRONDIR: Yeah.

BLUE J: But also, keep calling me the Ranger, 'cause it's sick.

THRONDIR: [laughs] You've earned it.

BLUE J: Hell yeah. Let's go.

[MUSIC - "ON A WHITE HORSE"]

AUSTIN: And takes off running, like sprinting to the bridge. And you see, over the bridge, from the river, the...the—again, a caravan, almost it's a small parade of Samot's entourage,

appearing over the horizon, and beginning to cross the bridge. There is Samot out front, on a white horse, and it's been a decade since you've seen Samot, but you saw Samot, all those years ago, right? At the Mark of the Erasure. And recognize him immediately. All white everything. His hair is so much longer than you saw it then. It's like down to his hips, now? This just like incredibly long, carefully brushed, you know, almost like a cape of hair, at this point.

And flanked on both sides by people wearing his colors, white and gold. And behind him march about a dozen pala-din. You know, again, you've run into those before, you saw them with Tabard, back at the Mark of the Erasure. And then behind that is another—is like a set of wagons, some of which are carrying supplies, and some of which are carrying people.

And you can hear just the edge, the sound of music, because wherever Samot goes, it is a party. And so there is like—it's not fanfare, it is actually like a rolling party behind him. And you can hear the drums, and they're building, and they're building, and they're building. And you get just this brief moment of Blue J, right at the edge of the bridge.

And then you hear the drums smash, incredibly loud, and then you realize it is not the drums. Something has destroyed the bridge. And Samot and his entourage begin to fall.

[MUSIC - "ON A WHITE HORSE" ends]