

Worlds Beyond Number

The Wizard, the Witch, and the Wild One: Episode 20 “Later Than You Think” Final Version

[World's Beyond Number intro music rises urgently with orchestral strings and flute]

Erika Ishii

This is the sound of Worlds Beyond Number.

[The other instruments fade into a lone flute and violin pluck. A charming violin and piano melody wafts in]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

On a small outdoor patio, partially shielded from the bright sunlight by trellises of jasmine and violet. A small cafe, with several Mr. Callums carrying drinks to and fro from a small rack of samovars, mixing stations, a silver tureen filled with ice, and a number of decanters of various and sundry lemonades. A small table seats Eursulon, Suvi, Ame, and a peevish looking Pomeroy who, even near sunlight, seems to wither—

[Charming melody becomes discordant and warped]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

—as you notice that the skin hanging from his temples, the tops of his hands, inflate and deflate slightly with his breath. A little bit of patchy work on his human Glamour.

Pomeroy (Brennan)

[Labored breathing, clears throat] Little bit of ruckus inside. The cafe is a nice [Swallows] place for us to engage in conversation. Witch of Toma, I understand you have some questions you would like me to answer, and I would be more than happy to end this interaction as swiftly and helpfully as I possibly can.

Ame (Erika)

[Coldly] I thank you for your graciousness. Well first of all, were you bound here by Grandmother Wren?

Pomeroy (Brennan)

Bound here by Grandmother Wren? No. I was not bound—ugh. Grandmother Wren knew my... Private business. And in so doing, I believe—if I am allowed to speak freely in front of present company?

Ame (Erika)

You may.

Pomeroy (Brennan)

[Starts out slowly, then grows more frantic] I believe, Archmage Apprentice Sky, that it might be of great interest for the Citadel to know that both the previous and current Witch of the World's Heart seem to see fit to have the knowledge of my private business give them a huge insight into the workings of the Citadel, which I believe the Citadel may well have been unaware of! And that I was forbade, on the COST of such private business, from ever communicating to them.

Pomeroy (Brennan)

In other words, your Witchiness, your mentor seemed quite happy to leave a little foothold in the vastness of the Citadel. Not exactly so kindly in that regard, was she?

Suvi (Aabria)

Interesting.

Ame (Erika)

Mmmm.

Aabria Iyengar

Suvi's very, like, tight lipped, and just pulls out a very small notebook and makes a note.

Pomeroy (Brennan)

Certainly believe that now that I am allowed to speak more freely, at least to present company, it might be worth mentioning to someone that this HUGE oversight in the defenses of the Citadel has been allowed to fester for seemingly quite some time.

Suvi (Aabria)

What's the nature of the information that you would pass to Grandmother Anne?

Pomeroy (Brennan)

Well, there's nothing worth passing to her, now, is there, that there is a new successor to her station? I mean, simply to say that the previous Witch of the World's Heart made FREQUENT USE of the fact that an IMPORTANT member of the Citadel's private business had fallen into her hand, and she visited many times and made such [Darkly] impressions on me.

Ame (Erika)

Like, good impressions?

Pomeroy (Brennan)

[Grimly] She used the power she held over me to do her own private biddings within the Collection and forbade me to ever speak of them. Until now, when the Witch of the World's Heart, yet again commands me.

Ame (Erika)

Yes, and now I would love to be updated on the sort of business that she had here.

Pomeroy (Brennan)

[Pained grunt]

[Discordant plucked strings]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see his shadows kind of squirm behind him.

Pomeroy (Brennan)

[Growl] On a number of occasions, the Witch of the World's Heart took business in the Citadel, and would have, under her intentions, once or twice stopped by, to remove certain paintings from the Collection.

Suvi (Aabria)

How would she know which ones to take?

Pomeroy (Brennan)

She did not share that information with me.

Ame (Erika)

Do you know which ones she took? Do you have a list?

Pomeroy (Brennan)

I can supply you with one, if you wish.

Ame (Erika)

I would wish so.

Suvi (Aabria)

When was the last time she took a painting?

Pomeroy (Brennan)

[Sighs thoughtfully] I would say it was not a frequent occurrence, perhaps seven years ago?

Suvi (Aabria)

Noted.

Ame (Erika)

Did anyone else know of this besides yourself?

Pomeroy (Brennan)

No. No they did not. In each instance that a painting went missing, the Witch of the World's Heart timed her efforts with some or other criminal act of punishment within the Citadel. So there are certain wizards, who were already set to be banished or dismissed for actual crimes that they had committed, that the former Witch of the World's Heart was clever enough to pay to also confess to the stealing or destruction of these paintings.

Ame (Erika)

[Impressed] Wow. Grandma Wren!

Suvi (Aabria)

Interesting.

Ame (Erika)

I believe that my companion also has some questions for you. Eursulon?

Eursulon (Lou)
The badger.

Pomeroy (Brennan)
Before my time, but I believe that the Spirit Kalaya was released from this place some 22 years ago.

Eursulon (Lou)
Released? By whom?

Pomeroy (Brennan)
As I've said, before my time. This collection used to be guarded by human conjurers, Wizards of the Citadel. One such wizard... Committed an act of extreme oversight and carelessness, and over several dozen Spirits were released from the Collection.

Lou Wilson
And I would know that is Soft?

Brennan Lee Mulligan
I don't think Suvi shared it.

Lou Wilson
I read the notes.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Oh, you did read the notes! You would know that's Soft, yes.

Pomeroy (Brennan)
[Sigh] It takes a Spirit—

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And this is the first time you've seen Pomeroy refer to himself as such.

Pomeroy (Brennan)
It takes a Spirit to think like a Spirit. And my gifts—

[Discordant plucked strings]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And here you see shadows of spider webs behind him.

Pomeroy (Brennan)
—of entrapment are many. It was a wise and benevolent offer to place me in the charge of these... Captives. No such mistakes have been made since, with the exception of those hateful times throughout the years that Grandmother Wren made her appearances here. Certainly no escape in an order of magnitude similar to when... Gifted and wise human wizards were placed in charge of the Collection. However, having

researched the escape, so as to shore up whatever holes caused it, I was able to discover how we came into the charge of the Badger Spirit. The Badger Spirit was discovered here at the Citadel, under a human Glamour. At the time, 22 years ago, she had been at the Citadel already for 52 years.

Ame (Erika)

Oh.

Pomeroy (Brennan)

Going by the appellation of the Wizard Stripe.

Suvi (Aabria)

Do you know how she was found out?

Pomeroy (Brennan)

That information was not deemed of significance to the Collection, or my previous human predecessors.

Eursulon (Lou)

So the badger, Kalaya, was a wizard?

Pomeroy (Brennan)

No, no. But certainly was gifted enough in those ways of the Breath that you and I possess... That she was able to pass as one. Pass as one under the watchful eyes of an entire Citadel of wizards for some decades.

Lou Wilson

I think Eursulon has been incredibly tense. And this, I think honestly, is the first time he, I think, softens and relaxes just a little.

Erika Ishii

I pass you a little tea cake.

Lou Wilson

I use one finger just to scoop a little bit of it.

[Aabria and Erika laugh]

Pomeroy (Brennan)

And to you, Bear, strongest man in Silbry.

Eursulon (Lou)

Mm.

Pomeroy (Brennan)

Have I given you the information you were seeking?

Eursulon (Lou)

At this time, yes.

Pomeroy (Brennan)

Mm.

Ame (Erika)

You don't have to answer this one if you don't want to. But why are you here? How did you come to the Citadel? Are you happy here?

Pomeroy (Brennan)

[Sinister] In a thousand years of waiting in the darkest, dankest places of the world of Spirits, I could have never hoped to have caught this many feasts within my web. And though I am not given to feed upon them here, the pride I feel sustains me more than blood ever did. To the humans of this tower will I be forever loyal. I am not BOUND here. I serve here, gladly, of my own free will, and know a pride brighter than the sun.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see he moves his hand back as the sun touches his skin.

Pomeroy (Brennan)

[Deep shuddering growl]

Ame (Erika)

Well I am glad that you have found your heart's desire. Please, if you could, send the list of paintings to the tower of the wizard Sky?

Pomeroy (Brennan)

It will be done, Witch of the World's Heart.

Ame (Erika)

You mustn't speak of this. I forbid you from speaking of this to anyone else.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

The shadow of legs moving thread [Breath] twitch in frustration, as a knot is tied in shadow across the neck of the humanoid figure of Pomeroy.

Pomeroy (Brennan)

[Choking gasp] Speak of what? What here has occurred, but an explanation of some of the most captivating pieces of the Collection. The research you've requested shall be sent. Am I free to leave?

Ame (Erika)

You may.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Chair squeaks, he gets up and walks away wordlessly.

Ame (Erika)

[Sigh]

Suvi (Aabria)

Interesting.

Ame (Erika)

How are you both feeling?

Suvi (Aabria)

A little out the loop, if I'm being very honest.

Ame (Erika)

I didn't quite catch everything myself.

Suvi (Aabria)

I heard nothing.

Eursulon (Lou)

You mean the painting?

Suvi (Aabria)

Yes. Whatever you were interacting with was silent to me.

Eursulon (Lou)

Mm. Is it your necklace.

Aabria Iyengar

And Suvi's hand reaches up, and she sort of strokes the necklace sitting under her clothing.

[Low thrumming drone and piano music]

Suvi (Aabria)

I don't know. Maybe.

Eursulon (Lou)

He told me of what you and the other wizards do here, in terms of trapping Spirits.

Ame (Erika)

Now, he told you his version of what it was, Eursulon.

Eursulon (Lou)

And then when you commanded him to speak truthfully, he reiterated it. Admitting he'd embellished, but suggesting that part of what he said was true, and that there WAS trapping against the Spirit's will.

Suvi (Aabria)

I don't wish to anger you.

Eursulon (Lou)

I'm not angry. That's what he said.

Suvi (Aabria)

I said as much when I asked if you wanted to come here. That not every spirit in the Citadel was there—was here of their own volition.

Eursulon (Lou)

Yes but you failed to admit that someone like [Choking up] my sister, Kalaya—

Suvi (Aabria)

I didn't know. I didn't know!

Eursulon (Lou)

[Sardonic chuckle] Oh, okay.

Suvi (Aabria)

I had no idea. I—I don't spend time here. If I had known, I would have come to you—the moment I read the name Badger, I ran to you with that information, and I am sorry.

Eursulon (Lou)

My anger is misplaced in you, Suvi, but... [Sigh] I thought what we saw, what Morrow did, I thought that that was of a different kind of wizard. But it seems that all of you feel some sort of entitlement, that makes me think perhaps I do not belong here.

Suvi (Aabria)

I respect that. But I think it's worth mentioning that the event 22 years ago that freed her—

Eursulon (Lou)

Was your father, yes.

Ame (Erika)

Your father?

Suvi (Aabria)

Soft was written up for an act of carelessness and recklessness.

Ame (Erika)

In allowing that great escape?

Suvi (Aabria)

In enacting it. [Chuckle]

Eursulon (Lou)

Suvi's affinity for spirits is very much in her blood.

Ame (Erika)

Oh! I wish I could have met your father and mother.

Suvi (Aabria)

You and me both.

Ame (Erika)

[Sigh] Yeah.

Erika Ishii

Do I know when we spoke about Kalaya, did he say—so the timeline that he said was that, for 50 years she was living here in a Glamour. She wasn't trapped here she was passing as a wizard.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Correct.

Erika Ishii

But then she was released?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She was discovered—

Erika Ishii

She was discovered.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

—captured, and then released during that great escape of Spirits from the Collection.

Lou Wilson

And that escape was 22 years ago?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

That escape was 22 years ago. ALL of which is prior to Eursulon's second venture into the mortal world.

Lou Wilson

Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

The first one of which was three centuries ago, when you first met a human knight, Sir Curran. And then the last one of which was fourteen years ago.

Suvi (Aabria)

I don't understand. Did your sister—when did she come through?

Eursulon (Lou)

I don't know. She was chasing me. When I was a child and I'd come back to the Spirit World and told my father of Sir Curran and my desire for honor, he instructed me to bury the pauldron.

Lou Wilson

And I touch it, up on my shoulder.

Eursulon (Lou)

To bury it. And that it might grow a tree, and that I might find rest beneath it. Kalaya accompanied me as I went to do so. But then I—I ran, and ran back through the gate that had let me into your world. Kalaya, I believe followed me, but I—I lost track of her. So perhaps in that chase, she also crossed over, I—I'm not sure.

Suvi (Aabria)

So maybe she was looking for you.

Ame (Erika)

But now she's back in the Spirit Realm.

Lou Wilson

We don't know—above the table, we don't know if she's back in the spirit realm, right? We just know she escaped the Citadel.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yeah, Eursulon has explained everything as well as possible. When Eursulon came back, you leapt through the portal, and Kalaya was right behind you. Now, you leapt back into the mortal world, and were trapped within that rotting log, where the thing had been, remember when Ame's foot—

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah.

Lou Wilson

Yes.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

—came above you, when little Ame and little Suvi were playing in the woods during that summer? You kind of wonder how long you might have been in that log for. I mean, crossing over to the world, you know that something happened with time. But you've spent so long in the dark, coming back with the pauldron, hearing your father's voice saying you had—any future time would come with a price, you know, that you've been to the mortal world without paying a price for the final time. And you went back anyway. Kalaya was right on your heels. And you wonder, did she end up right behind you? No, because she would have come across Grandmother Wren's cottage. It was the nearest thing to that part of the world.

Lou Wilson

Mhm.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And then you wonder about all the other ways of crossing over from the Spirit to the Mortal World. You don't know what age Kalaya might have been when she got here.

Lou Wilson

Hm.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I mean, what did Eursulon say about the Mortal World when you were there? You talked about knights. You talked about the pauldron, and honor, and Sir Curran! Kalaya might have found a way to find Sir Curran! She could have been in the mortal world for 300 years! You have no way of knowing.

Lou Wilson

Mhm.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

But you know that at some point, in the last century, a badger Spirit bearing her name—which, goddamn, that's got to be her, right? Showed up at the Citadel, disguised herself as a wizard, and was able to live here for decades.

Lou Wilson

Mhm.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

What was she doing here? I would say the other thing you know, where Kalaya's thread goes—or where Kalaya's trail goes cold for you again is in this escape, where basically all these spirits got out of the Citadel, and if they made it somewhere findable, then they'd be back in the Collection. So, in other words, you know that they're not findable, and that's a good thing. They made it out far enough where the wizards couldn't track them down, which means that the trail has gone cold for you. BUT. That's not necessarily bad. It means that your sister, if she is still alive, at least made it out of the Citadel.

Lou Wilson

Mm.

Ame (Erika)

We have to find out what she was researching here.

Suvi (Aabria)

Fun fact. In an environment like this, competitive though it is, everything you research and look up is noted by others. So. We might be able to find out what she was looking up.

Eursulon (Lou)

Mm.

Suvi (Aabria)

But if—if there is a record still available of what the wizard stripe cared about, then us looking those things up is incredibly suspicious.

Eursulon (Lou)

Mmm.

Suvi (Aabria)

I don't want to put any kind of target on Bear's back.

Ame (Erika)

Isn't there some way to... Have somebody else's name down in the card at the libraries or—I don't know how it works. Can't we just take the books?

Suvi (Aabria)

Don't look—

Ame (Erika)

Woah!

Suvi (Aabria)

You went lawless incredibly quickly.

Ame (Erika)

Look. Laws are not always meant to protect you. They're meant to make people do things that the powerful people don't want you to do.

The Fox (Brennan)

Here here!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Says the fox.

Suvi (Aabria)

Alright, calm down, you compelled a spirit to silence, so I think we can all talk about volition all day long.

The Fox (Brennan)

[Musing] But he sucked, so.

[Aabria and Erika laugh]

Aabria Iyengar

And the fox again, flawless.

Erika Ishii

Hey.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah.

Erika Ishii

Hey!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

So, where do you head to next? Do you head to Cabani or Haverword, two of the—well, one of which is a court of the Citadel, and the other of which is the city at its base.

Suvi (Aabria)

What's the next bumper on our list, Ame?

Ame (Erika)

Well, it's your friend Hana's dad, Tilliver Mill?

Suvi (Aabria)

I do wanna do that, but it's at the bottom so, do we want to finish there, or go there next and then bounce back up to a platform?

Ame (Erika)

Oh, do you know Sly?

Suvi (Aabria)

No, but I just assumed any wizard with an S name would be up here rotating about.

Ame (Erika)

Oh, hmm.

Suvi (Aabria)

I don't know everyone that goes here.

Aabria Iyengar

I just give him a little, like, nod.

Ame (Erika)

I feel like everyone knows YOU, though.

Suvi (Aabria)

Yeah, ha ha.

Ame (Erika)

[Chuckle]

Suvi (Aabria)
Legacy!

[Aabria and Erika laugh]

Ame (Erika)
Eursulon?

Eursulon (Lou)
I wouldn't mind swinging by Chura's Chowder on our way back.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You see the fox goes

The Fox (Brennan)
Ooooooh, yeah.

Eursulon (Lou)
So perhaps we end in Haverword.

Ame (Erika)
Ooh, yeah, maybe we can—we can slip in a little bit of fun and food and friendship down there. You gotta make the most of all this time.

Suvi (Aabria)
[Unconvinced laugh] Yeah, fun.

Ame (Erika)
Okay, let's go to the Divination—or the apocalypse guys.

Suvi (Aabria)
Yeah!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You head over, and Xiao being the Conjunction Court, you don't even have to get a gallithopter, you walk up and you see that there are these guys that, for a small fee, there are these young wizards that are just dimension door specialists. They have these little circles of—so, it's a big stone platform at the edge of the court. These young guys that are just sweating, they're shirtless, they're like wearing aprons, they're like wiping their foreheads off.

Aabria Iyengar
[Laugh]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

They have these huge torches on long iron poles, and they're dumping bright red and orange sand into these kind of ash covered depressions in the stone [Pouring sound effect] whispering some words, lighting the sand on fire, and a fiery door appears to anywhere else in the Citadel.

[Rush of mystical energy]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And it looks like some very busy mages are like—you can hear people being like, "What's the—the gallithopter's not til 8 o'clock? God. Okay, well, you know what?" And the guys hold out hands and they seem to be making a killing, these young conjuration wizards. They walk up and they go,

Mass Transit Mage (Brennan)

Hi, where do you want to get to? Where are you trying to go?

Suvi (Aabria)

Cabani.

Mass Transit Mage (Brennan)

Okay, we can put you right where you want to go, is there an office you're trying to go to in Cabani?

Ame (Erika)

The Diviner's Court?

Suvi (Aabria)

Can you get us right up to Disjunction?

Mass Transit Mage (Brennan)

Yeah, gotcha. Hold on.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And they [Pouring sound effect] start pouring some sand, whispers a couple words. You see that he actually nudges a little circle of stone with his feet, rotating it like a little dial in the stone platform, lowers the giant sort of fiery staff. [Whoosh] This door appears. He goes

Mass Transit Mage (Brennan)

Okay, go, go go go.

Suvi (Aabria)

Yep.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You walk through. It's only open for about like 6 seconds. You gotta walk through as the door starts diminishing.

The Fox (Brennan)

Yip!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Fox leaps through, and goes

The Fox (Brennan)

Ah! That's wild! I don't like that!

Aabria Iyengar

Suvi immediately pulls out like a small jar of poultice and starts like—it's weirdly humid, even though it's fire, and her hair has gone incredibly frizzy, and it's just kind of pushing it back into place.

Suvi (Aabria)

I don't love that.

Ame (Erika)

[Giggle]

Aabria Iyengar

And then is like,

Suvi (Aabria)

Fox, come here, you're a little floof'd.

The Fox (Brennan)

Huh? Woah, I am.

Aabria Iyengar

Just gonna pat him down real quick.

The Fox (Brennan)

The fire's so wet, and still hot.

Suvi (Aabria)

Right?

[Imperious horns blare, heralding a bright and triumphant horn and flute song.]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

The court of Cabani is the court of divination, and you see this place is COVERED in astronomer's domes, and bridges everywhere. There are these beautiful clay buildings that have little sort of like, ramparts. It looks like the entire court is hanging out on a roof. It's like a whole dominion of roof parties. Just roofs everywhere, people drinking out on a roof, looking out on a roof. And you can even see that, insofar as there are buildings, the buildings almost all lead to courtyards. And the temperature here—there's, like, a lovely light breeze blowing by. But for the most part, this place seems really active and open.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

There's not that much oppressive architecture here. And you walk around and there's a lot of glass floors, so you'll walk under an arch or a bridge and be able to look up and at an angle, see people up through another place, having a party up on another ledge. The only sort of thing—it's very bright, like the white clay on everything is very bright, and the paintings, as you can see them, appear to be patterned. So there's like, jigsaw patterns, or seesaw patterns, rows of dots, rows of dashes, lots of—all in, like, bright colors, like greens and reds and yellows, primary colors.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you'll see the other big sort of architectural theme of Cabani is water everywhere. Fountains, waterfalls. You see there's, like, a 20 point waterfall stopping at the height of the architecture in the center of the court that comes down, races down like a mirrored slide, hits a fountain. The fountain pops across, making a watered archway that goes into another part of a building. Lots of aqueducts. So, the sound of burbling water is everywhere in Cabani.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Walking up to another courtyard, there's just a small, humble wooden door, and above it, in Imperial, you see that it says, the Office of Preemptory Catastrophic Deviation.

[Harp glissando]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

The courtyard outside of this is STUFFED with crates, enormous crates everywhere. Crates that are marked, like, private, confidential, top secret. There are things that like, clear—you see that there's one small crate that's been opened, and priceless rubies are just scattered on the sort of soft, yellow sand outside the doorway.

Suvi (Aabria)

This is why we put our rubies in a jar. It's so fucking messy.

Erika Ishii

[Laugh]

Eursulon (Lou)

So who—this is the wizard Sly?

Ame (Erika)

Sly.

Suvi (Aabria)

Yeah.

Ame (Erika)

Mm.

Suvi (Aabria)

Hey, did you guys know—sorry, there's no way you would know. I just found out. My mom used to be a diviner.

Ame (Erika)

Oh!

Eursulon (Lou)

Previously to becoming an Abjurer?

Suvi (Aabria)

Before her name cloaking. She actually got kicked out—she got kicked out?

Erika Ishii

[Loudly] Your mom got—

Suvi (Aabria)

Shut up! Shh shh shh

Ame (Erika)

[Quieter] Your mom got kicked out of school?

Suvi (Aabria)

[Clenched teeth whisper] It's not a school.

Ame (Erika)

Oh.

Eursulon (Lou)

Is that hard to do? Or easy? Do people get kicked out often?

Suvi (Aabria)

Once you're kind of graduated through, I think it's kinda hard to do.

Eursulon (Lou)

Wow. So she really—she really stuck her foot in it?

Suvi (Aabria)

Yeah. But then was brought back in a different—

Ame (Erika)

[Excitedly] What did she get kicked out for?

Suvi (Aabria)

Okay, stop it, stop it. You're too excited. I don't want to tell you because you're too excited about it.

Ame (Erika)

Mmm.

Suvi (Aabria)

Yeah, okay, just really quick, hold on.

Aabria Iyengar

And I'm just, like, nudging the rubies. I hate mess.

Erika Ishii

[Laugh]

Aabria Iyengar

I'm just like

Suvi (Aabria)

Hold on. Let me just—

Aabria Iyengar

And I lean down, and as I'm picking them up,

Suvi (Aabria)

She accused her mentor of treason.

Eursulon (Lou)

Mm!

Ame (Erika)

[Grunting in wordless excitement]

Suvi (Aabria)

Yep. Yep.

Ame (Erika)

Against the Citadel?!

Suvi (Aabria)

Yeah.

Ame (Erika)

Did he do it? Did she do it?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You would actually know—

Ame (Erika)
Did they do it?

Brennan Lee Mulligan
—it was not against the Citadel. It was against magic itself.

Suvi (Aabria)
Yeah, weirder. Just against the platonic ideal of magic.

Ame (Erika)
[Laughing] What does platonic mean?

Suvi (Aabria)
Here it means something very different.

[Aabria and Erika laugh]

Suvi (Aabria)
No.

Ame (Erika)
Against—

Suvi (Aabria)
Treason against the very idea of magic.

Ame (Erika)
—magic?

Suvi (Aabria)
Yeah.

Ame (Erika)
Can you do that?

Suvi (Aabria)
I don't know. I mean, you can and then you get kicked out.

Ame (Erika)
Magic's not like a GUY.

Suvi (Aabria)
Well, yeah.

Eursulon (Lou)
Crazy.

Suvi (Aabria)

Wow.

Ame (Erika)

Firecracker. [Giggle]

Ame (Erika)

Big reaction from Bear.

Eursulon (Lou)

She clearly—immediately they—she was so good, she got brought back and continued to kick ass.

Suvi (Aabria)

Yeah, that's what happened. Anyway, sorry. We should go in the thing. What's this guy's name again?

Ame (Erika)

He's the wizard Sly. He is the head of the Preemptory. Catastrophe. Deviation.

Suvi (Aabria)

Yeah. It's the sign right here.

Ame (Erika)

Oh. Yes.

Suvi (Aabria)

Is there anything else about him that we should know about Grandma Wren—

Ame (Erika)

He's OOOOOLD.

Suvi (Aabria)

—like, is this another Spirit?

Ame (Erika)

No. I think this one—

Suvi (Aabria)

And he's gonna have attitude?

Ame (Erika)

Well, this one is a very old wizard, and I think she had said that he was a true friend.

Suvi (Aabria)

Oh!

Ame (Erika)
So.

Suvi (Aabria)
Yeah, okay.

Ame (Erika)
Yeah.

Suvi (Aabria)
Sure. Well, after you.

Eursulon (Lou)
Hopefully a better experience than this morning.

Suvi (Aabria)
Yeah. Don't push me again.

[Everyone chuckles]

Aabria Iyengar
Open the door.

Eursulon (Lou)
Don't get in my way.

Aabria Iyengar
[Laugh]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
As you go to open the door, the door opens.

Aabria Iyengar
Ha!

[Creaking door, soft piano and very soft trumpet over drums and a stand-up bass line]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And a kindly old man, you see there's an older black man, he's got a snow white beard, a long coat, which is un—you're not used to seeing wizards wear—there's a lot of wizards here that have robes. Deep crow's feet around his eyes—it looks like his eyes are kind of shut, like it's too bright? And you notice that his eyes are seemingly all pupil. Like they're just black. They look like he doesn't have any whites to his eyes, so he's just like focusing very intently, and sort of squinting against the light. This sharp looking cream colored coat, high collar, the collar banded in a little bit of like, gold embroidery, that's like a little bit like leaves curling or—

Erika Ishii
Ooh!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Crisp white shirt, sort of charcoal slacks. And you see that he has—matching his sort of cream, almost like camel hair coat—he's got a little matching flat cap that he puts on a shaved head as he looks out. And he opens it right as you're there. And he says

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
No one's going to take the rubies.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And you see he—

Suvi (Aabria)
Ah. Divination.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
He looks out and says,

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
Oh! Ohh, little Ame!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And he goes and just gives you a big hug.

Erika Ishii
Oooh! I return the hug!

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
I know you won't remember meeting me, but you were about this high. I had come by the cottage. How is—oh, I know. Sorry, just the moment I asked it, I knew it, he was dead. Nicholas, what a piece of work that goat was.

Ame (Erika)
Aww!

Suvi (Aabria)
You knew the—

Ame (Erika)
[Giggle]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
I forgot—I'm sorry, I never actually met Nicholas, but I knew him.

Suvi (Aabria)

No.

Ame (Erika)

Nicholas—wait, you never met him, but you knew him?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see, he points to his eyes, and as you look, you get, both, mesmerized for a moment as you see stars.

You're looking at a night sky.

Ame (Erika)

Ohh!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see, he goes, I see it all. And you see, he takes out some very funky little circular purple sunglasses and puts them on.

Erika Ishii

[Shriek]

Aabria Iyengar

Uncle, I love you. Damn.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see, he looks over and says

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Let's go!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see, he just leaves the door unlocked in a jar.

Suvi (Aabria)

No no no, I'm gonna close it. Do you have a key—

Aabria Iyengar

And I just do like, the most minor locking. It doesn't—

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

No one's going to try to break in for another year.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And, you see, he walks away.

Eursulon (Lou)

So these are—okay, diviners—

Suvi (Aabria)

I'll take a ruby. I'm taking a ruby. I want him to be wrong.

[Brennan and Erika laugh]

Aabria Iyengar

I lean down and take one.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You lean down and take a ruby. Go ahead and put a flawless ruby in your inventory.

Aabria Iyengar

[Laugh]

Erika Ishii

Oh my god. [Laugh]

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Does everyone here eat meat? Everyone eat meat here?

Suvi (Aabria)

Yes. Yeah.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Great.

Ame (Erika)

Oh yes.

Eursulon (Lou)

Very much so.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He says,

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Alright!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see, the Fox says

The Fox (Brennan)

I eat meat.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And you see, he goes

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
Great.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And he walks over, and you see that there is a small—it is just a circular hole in the wall that has a beautiful little broad red paint pattern around it, and inside there's just a small kitchen where you see Mr. Callum is making what look like some sort of pita, sort of doner sandwiches.

Aabria Iyengar
Ooh!

Erika Ishii
Awww!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And there's like a spicy, zesty kind of coleslaw thing going in them, and it looks like cabbage and different oils and some spices and things like that.

Ame (Erika)
Wow that smells amazing.

Suvi (Aabria)
That smells so good.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
He goes

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
Oh, this is good. I like to eat standing up, they don't have seating here, is that okay?

Suvi (Aabria)
Oh!

Ame (Erika)
Yeah!

Suvi (Aabria)
Yeah.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
Well, I'm happy you were able to stop by. The uh—oh! Condolences. Congratulations. I'm sorry. And welcome.

Ame (Erika)

Thank you. I appreciate it. Her memory is still such a light to me, and I'm so wonderful to be here. Do you know Suvi? Er—yes.

Suvi (Aabria)

Hi.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

The wizard Sky, of course!

Suvi (Aabria)

Hi!

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

It's a pleasure. [Laugh]

Suvi (Aabria)

So nice to meet you!

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Wizard Sly, meet Wizard Sky!

Suvi (Aabria)

Oh, look at us. We rhyme. This is nice.

Eursulon (Lou)

Bear.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Bear. Oh, unless my eyes deceive me, the strongest man in Silbry.

Eursulon (Lou)

Wow. Word has gotten around.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

It actually hasn't, but that's alright.

[Aabria and Erika laugh]

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

I have business later today, but I was holding off until you got here. Do you have anything you need from me? Or do you not know what you need from me yet?

Ame (Erika)

It's mostly that last one, yes. I think that I would love to hear some of your business with Grandma Wren and, she said you were a true friend and, I need anything that I can do to prepare for joining the Elders of the Coven. The Coven of Elders. The Elder Coven.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Mm. Well, that's going to happen sooner rather than later. I would say you probably only have about three days before it's too late.

Ame (Erika)

Three days!?! [Panicked wailing]

Eursulon (Lou)

Before it's too late?

Suvi (Aabria)

Too late for what?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Well, before the Coven meets without you.

Ame (Erika)

[Stammering and gasping] But—

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

This is just what I've seen is definitely going to happen.

Aabria Iyengar

[Laugh]

Ame (Erika)

Oh, is this one of those immutable prophecies? Or sort of, perhaps it could be uh uh uh some sort of monkey's paw like a wording situation is all screwy or—

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

No, no no no. This is right in the pocket of what I call prophecy and common sense, and where those two things meet, it gets hairy quickly.

Ame (Erika)

What am I supposed to do to prevent that from happening?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Well—

Ame (Erika)

Too late for what?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Too late meaning that they will meet in Conclave without you.

Ame (Erika)

[Hyperventilating] Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

I can give you the warning of what they're going to try to do.

Ame (Erika)

Yes? Yes.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Okay. They are going to try to destroy you, and in so doing destroy the station of the Witch of the World's Heart.

Suvi (Aabria)

What? What?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

One of your sisters is going to make the argument that your existence threatens the nature of magic in the world of Umora. And the only way—in the majority of cases where you win that argument, you win it because in order to get rid of your station, they would probably magically have to get rid of another.

Eursulon (Lou)

So Ame needs to defend herself.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Well, you will fail in defending yourself, but you will succeed in maybe convincing them that there's not another station that they can also get rid of.

Suvi (Aabria)

Wow. Uncle, your delivery is wild.

Eursulon (Lou)

Yes. I must say, for someone as wise, it would seem, as yourself, your ability to communicate this information doesn't seem like it's improved over the many years you've been divining.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

I'm getting a note on my bedside manner?

Aabria Iyengar

[Laugh]

Eursulon (Lou)
Very much so.

Suvi (Aabria)
But not your food recommendations, this is very good.

Eursulon (Lou)
This is actually delicious.

Suvi (Aabria)
It's so good.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
It's good.

Eursulon (Lou)
The zesty coleslaw especially.

Suvi (Aabria)
Yeah!

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
Yeah, the coleslaw—

Eursulon (Lou)
It really brightens it up.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
Brightens it up, it's a crunch Because the meat is heavy and musky.

Eursulon (Lou)
Yes.

Ame (Erika)
[Crying]

Suvi (Aabria)
Yeah, okay. Oh okay. She's kind of cry eating.

Ame (Erika)
[Crying]

Suvi (Aabria)
Okay. No it's okay! It's going to be okay. Look. We will get you there.

Eursulon (Lou)
We have three days.

Suvi (Aabria)
Yeah!

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
I've found that bedside manner doesn't actually make a difference.

Ame (Erika)
[Choking noises] That's true.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
People have the information or they don't, and once they have it, my job's done. I've been really sweet, and people haven't listened to me. I've been really brusque, and they have, and it saves more time and effort for me to be brusque. I got a lot of people to tell a lot of bad news to.

Ame (Erika)
Mhm.

Suvi (Aabria)
Can I have a piece of bad news?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
You're not ready for it.

Suvi (Aabria)
Uhhh.

Eursulon (Lou)
Can I have a piece of good news?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
Yeah, you're on the right track, kid.

Eursulon (Lou)
See, now, why can't it always be like that?

[Aabria and Lou chuckle]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
He just starts walking back towards his office.

Suvi (Aabria)
Oh! Okay!

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

I moved my office here three years ahead of when they opened up that doner spot. Nobody knew why I put in a bid for it.

Aabria Iyengar

[Laugh]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

As you walk into his office, you walk in. Funky smell in here. You see that there is an incredibly ugly—in a bird cage, you see that there is a gawky—

[Chicken noises]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

—lanky kind of pheasant with macaw colorings on it? Like, scarlet and royal blue kind of lanky pheasant hanging from a massive wicker bird cage. Its smell, the smell of like, cracked seeds and pungent bird waste, kind of fills the office in an unpleasant sort of way. This place is littered with treasures, there's a lot of ripped up arcana in here. There's, like, a lot of complex spell engines that are partially disassembled.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

There's also newspapers from all over the Empire, and in many languages. You see a straight up Rhuvian newspaper, you see that there is some kind of pamphlet like, mass-printing pressed thing for Gaothmai in here. They're sort of scattered around, there's a musty paper smell in this place. You see that there is a massive orrery used for complex divinations, that is lying sort of out of its packaging and looks like it's never been assembled.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And, in his office, everything is a fucking mess. Just stuffed drawers, unusable, so much workspace covered with stuff. There's just a tiny little clear space that has an arcane clay tile heating block, that just can heat up as a little ceramic block with a word of power. And there is a much beloved tea kettle on it. And the place is scattered with little teacups with leaves clumped in sort of different states of drying out at the bottom, all over the office.

Aabria Iyengar

Suvi looks like she's on the verge of a mental breakdown.

Suvi (Aabria)

I have to clean this.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Don't! Don't! Don't!

Suvi (Aabria)

Can I help?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

I know where everything is. I know where everything is.

Suvi (Aabria)

Right. Right.

Ame (Erika)

[Crying] Yeah, you can't just touch somebody's workspace.

Suvi (Aabria)

I'm ask—can I at least set up your orrery?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Why would—no, the orrery—I already got all the good parts out of there.

Suvi (Aabria)

[Desperately] Do you want me to get rid of the rest of the parts?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

No, it's fine. It's never going to come up again, don't worry about it.

Suvi (Aabria)

[Stricken with the vapors] I'm worried!

Ame (Erika)

Okay, so where are they meeting?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Huh?

Suvi (Aabria)

Oh, yeah.

Ame (Erika)

Yeah, where are they meeting?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

I think you good and goddam know where they're meeting, they're meeting at the North Pole, no thanks to you!

Aabria Iyengar

[Laugh]

Ame (Erika)

[Quiet high pitched wail]

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

They're meeting in a giant fortress of ice, which is going to be the second time in the century that they've met at the Witch of Wind and Stars' domain, which is throwing everything off balance, because you were out getting blasted at a biergarten after inheriting one of the most important witches stations in the world, an art form in a domain that is directly tied to whether Umora will survive the coming conflagration of magical elements, and if you don't do your part, and get it together, then there's nothing I can do!

Suvi (Aabria)

Damn.

Ame (Erika)

I just can't resist a cider, okay?

Aabria Iyengar

[Laugh]

Ame (Erika)

I am entitled to a little bit of fun occasionally.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Yes! On the days where something critical isn't going to happen.

Ame (Erika)

Isn't something—it's always dire times!

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Yeah, but you gotta get the days right.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He sort of begins to scrawl something on a little note of his. Anyone who wants to, give me like, an investigation or some other check in this space, if your attention's wandering anywhere.

Suvi (Aabria)

Mine's gone, can I use my passive?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yeah.

Aabria Iyengar

Thanks!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

What's your passive investigation?

Aabria Iyengar

21.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

21.

Lou Wilson

I'd like to make a check, why isn't this the most important man in the entire Citadel?

Aabria Iyengar

Truly, truly.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

[Laugh]

Lou Wilson

I think Eursulon has just watched this guy tell us essentially Ame's entire life story, and I—

Brennan Lee Mulligan

[Laugh]

Lou Wilson

this place smells awful, and I'm trying to figure out why does the guy who seems like he could tell everyone everything that they should be doing like that they're on the right track, kid, not the most important man to hear. It's a 13.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

[Laughing] Okay! Is Ame making a check or no? Or is she just having a panic attack?

Erika Ishii

[Panicked wailing] I'm fine! Okay so—okay. Okay okay. So—okay, I don't know. I am looking around the room. Okay, I'm going to look around the room, and I'm going to find six colors, and I'm going to find five textures, and I got to get four scents, and I got to get two tastes, and I got to get one—

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Ame, I'm going to need a wisdom saving throw from you.

[Aabria and Erika laugh]

Erika Ishii

A 19. A 19. I gotta—[Hyperventilating]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You start to calm down, what does not help you is you look down and see that your fox is bug-eyed with his ears flattened on his head. As the fox has not like, cracked a joke in a couple of minutes, you immediately intuit from your fox that he's like, a guy making the decision at a comedy club to not laugh too hard—

[Aabria and Erika laugh]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

—or the comic will roast him. Fox is like, "I don't want it. I don't want the smoke at all. I don't want any of it."

Aabria Iyengar

Another point for the fox.

[Brennan and Erika laugh]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

"I don't want this guy to tell me about my life!" Eursulon on a 13, you just have to ask that if you want to know.

Aabria Iyengar

[Laugh]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You just literally—as Sly, is like writing something down, you're looking around. Yeah, his office smells bad, it smells like bird poop. He's got, like, a bunch—there's a bunch of seeds. He's got tea everywhere. There's, like, little scraps of notes around. But most of it is, like, newspapers—you notice that he doesn't have big arcane tomes, his writing looks to be all of the world. You see, there's like, manila folders and dossiers, and there's different stuff—there's machine schematics for airships and stuff in here. It looks like—I think, on an intuitive level, you're like, a guy that can see anything, would have to know what stuff meant.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And if you get information and you don't have the knowledge to process it, that's when the heartbreak can happen. But, yeah, you don't know why he's in this little office getting doners on the street, you don't know why Grandmother Wren liked him, and you don't know why Suvi heard of this office as being kind of a waste of time.

Lou Wilson

Mm.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

As you consider whether or not you want to just straight up ask this guy, "Why is your life like this?"

Aabria Iyengar

[Cackle]

Erika Ishii

[Screaming] Why are you like this!?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Why are you like this? On a 21 investigation, Suvi. You look and see a report that has been preemptively approved from the Citadel, for a budget for a quarterly report from Sly, where Sly basically says, like, "I have

detected another anomalous event in the ending of the Saraz Family line that will occur in 213 years from this point forward. My solution, to avoid the vast majority of circumstances that would lead to this unfortunate result that is not in the interests of the Empire, would be the following set of rituals."

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see that he has a list of rituals occurring under the Office of Preemptory Catastrophic Deviation that he needs, like, 820 pounds of gold to pour into a runic inlay that would da-da-da-da-da. And he would need a bunch of rubies to do X-Y-Z, other thing, da-da-da-da-da. He would need this amount of whatever. And you're just looking around at this office and going like, where the fuck would this runic inlay even happen?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see that it just has a big stamp approved on it. The budget he's asking for for this quarter, he has, like—that's the big thing. And he's like, and there are these three smaller catastrophes, that like, a dam is going to break in eight years that's going to make this area harder to defend, when Gaothmai attacks here, da-da-da-da-da. It's just all this stuff that this diviner has ascertained, and he's asked for somewhere in the neighborhood of 85,000 Imperial Marks of resources, which, in the budget of the Citadel is almost like nothing?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

But you're looking at, it's 85,000 Imperial Marks, and I think on a 21 investigation, you're just like, "where is this—this guy's just like—" literally, there are loose rubies in the doorway of this guy's office. Something doesn't add up.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Cool. So Sly's finishing writing something out, Eursulon as your standing there

Eursulon (Lou)

[Sheepishly] The Wizard Sly?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Bear, strongest man in Silbry.

Eursulon (Lou)

Can I ask you a question?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Ask away!

Eursulon (Lou)

Now, do you already know what the question is, so will you save me the rudeness of asking it?

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You see he smiles and says

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
I didn't see this moment, which makes me think that I thought it would be funny not to see it.

Eursulon (Lou)
Oh.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
But—

Eursulon (Lou)
Wow you are—okay. You're—

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
Context clues.

Eursulon (Lou)
I take back the bedside manner thing. You're pretty great.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
You're pretty great, Bear.

Eursulon (Lou)
Why aren't you the most important man here at the Citadel?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
I don't do anything they like.

Aabria Iyengar
[Laugh]

Eursulon (Lou)
Mm.

Ame (Erika)
I can see that!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You see he looks at you and says

[Low horn music]

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

To answer your question honestly, stopping catastrophes is something I've dedicated my life to. And the biggest problems of the Empire aren't catastrophes.

Eursulon (Lou)

What are they?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

If you were the Empire, what would your biggest problems be? The existence of Gaothmai, the existence of Rhuv. Sorcerers, warlocks, witches, Spirits. I see the future. I see places far and near, and the things that my magic finds as problems...

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He looks at everyone here.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

My timing might be off on this one, but... I trained myself to see far and wide, to find problems, and try to solve them before they could happen. The Empire came to me and said, "These are our problems." And my magic didn't agree. So, I'm in an office, trying to stop catastrophes that never come. And when you stop catastrophes that never come, there's never any proof that you're important.

Suvi (Aabria)

I took a ruby. I'm sorry.

Aabria Iyengar

Suvi's just staring at everything.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Yeah?

Suvi (Aabria)

Yeah, I'm sorry. I'll put it back.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Then you sort of didn't take it, did you?

Erika Ishii

[Laugh]

Eursulon (Lou)

I'll tell ya, I hated the Citadel this morning? But now?

Aabria Iyengar

[Laugh]

Eursulon (Lou)

[Chuckling] I'm coming around.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

[Laugh]

Suvi (Aabria)

If I ask you about a thing, will you know?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

I don't know, maybe. Never hurts to ask, inquiring minds learn more.

Suvi (Aabria)

How's Fort Kieran doing?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Fort Kieran is faring pretty well. They should have it secured again, probably in the next 24 hours? The wizard Steel will be on her way back to the Citadel. After that, I would imagine. Fort Kieran is not a place that—I can't tell you about individual wizards, but that should tell you something in itself. Fort Kieran and the attack on it has never figured that much in my visions.

Ame (Erika)

[Snapping] Your boyfriend's going to be fine!! What do I need to do to prepare for this meeting? Who is the other witch that's going to get canned? How do I get there? How do I get to the North Pole? Is there, like, a gate or a portal or something? What do I—please help!

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh, don't worry, don't worry, it's all been handled.

Ame (Erika)

Huh?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Suvi, you see him walk over. He goes out into the courtyard with all the boxes, takes a crowbar. You see he actually takes his nice coat off and hangs it up nicely.

Aabria Iyengar

Ah!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And he's got his sleeves rolled up. He's got a big pocket watch and some suspenders.

Aabria Iyengar

My GOD!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see he puts a crowbar in, pops this crate open, looks inside and sees something wrapped from Haverword. And he rolls out this thing that is about as big as, like, a dinner plate. And you see, he hands it to you, Ame.

[Mystical bell rings]

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

That should do the trick. You'll hopefully have some time to get back to Toma and set your affairs in order, and then—you took the sand doors in from Xiao Court, right?

Suvi (Aabria)

Yeah.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Same situation, just drop that. How you get back from the North Pole, that I don't know, but that'll get you to it. Just drop that, and speak the words "I am the Witch of the World's Heart."

Ame (Erika)

Uh-huh.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

"I seek conclave with my sisters."

Ame (Erika)

Uh-huh.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

You'll be able to walk right through that, and you'll be able to take your entourage with you, so I would assume if your friends want to come, they can come. In all the versions of this, where you go without Suvi, you die.

Suvi (Aabria)

Oh!

Eursulon (Lou)

Straight up die?

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Oh yeah. Yes.

Suvi (Aabria)

Huh!

Ame (Erika)

Suvi, you want to come?

Suvi (Aabria)

How crazy of it would it be if I was like, eh.

Ame (Erika)

[Laughing] It'd be so crazy!

Suvi (Aabria)

Oh, you're having a whole breakdown!

Ame (Erika)

[Cackle]

Suvi (Aabria)

Yeah. I'm going. Hey, uncle—also, you're my uncle now. I've decided.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

I love that.

Suvi (Aabria)

Great. You knew we were going to come, the witch was going to melt down, and you had a platter ready.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Mhm!

Suvi (Aabria)

Did you requisition that last quarter?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He smiles, and there's a different energy in the air, this is a very glib and funny man who goes

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Treason abounds. And to set you at ease, so I don't seem like too wise of a wizard. Some of these things are due to what I have seen.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And he gestures at the plate and squeezes Ame's arm and goes

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

And others are favors done for an old friend because she asked.

Ame (Erika)

Thank you so much. I, you know—the shouting was obviously not AT you, more about the things that were said, and I assume that you get that a lot. Thank you so much, and thank you for the sandwich. And uh, I like your outfits.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Oh! That's very kind, thank you.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see he turns and looks at the rest of you. Says

[Soft sincere horns]

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

Wizard Sky, everything I've said is true to the best of my knowledge. The Witch of the World's Heart will not survive the Conclave with her Coven, if she does not have you as an advisor and counselor. You will not receive permission to accompany her.

Suvi (Aabria)

Understood.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

The Citadel is vast. So vast. In many ways, too vast. Who knows what creatures can accomplish with a hundred-hundred arms and legs?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He leans down, begins to scoop rubies with a shovel head into a little traveling bag. Takes it, you know from inside that these rubies are for a ritual that has not happened. He looks at Eursulon and says

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

You asked why I wasn't the most important person here. And I think you meant it in terms of great halls, and deeds, and accolades, and respect. But REAL importance lives equally, in every thread of the tapestry of existence. YOU are important, my friend.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And he squeezes your arm and says

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

No matter if you walk in field or forest, in great halls or high castles, your choices, you, your actions in this world, and all the worlds there are, they matter. Importance doesn't live on the lips of the powerful, but by our words and deeds.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see, he takes the bag of rubies in his hands and says

Wizard Sly (Brennan)

If you don't get a shield, both of them will die in the next year.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And he vanishes.

Suvi (Aabria)
Gah!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Flash of teleportation.

Suvi (Aabria)
Fuuuck!

Eursulon (Lou)
Wow.

Wizard Sly (Brennan)
[Echoing magically] Farewell! Leave it unlocked, I didn't bring a key!

Suvi (Aabria)
[Laugh] I liked him.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
[Laughing]

Eursulon (Lou)
I agree, of the two friends we've met today, I much prefer Sly.

Suvi (Aabria)
[Chuckle] Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
As you look at each other with your sort of sandwich wrappings here, his unlocked door to his office, some dust, some rubies, a crate opened up with this ceramic sort of little plate platform to stand on and get to the North Pole with, what is it that you do next?

Aabria Iyengar
Wherever we're headed, I am going to go return the ruby.

Ame (Erika)
Nice nice nice nice nice nice—

Suvi (Aabria)
Are you okay?

Ame (Erika)
—nice nice—no, I'm not—

Suvi (Aabria)
You want a little processing moment?

Ame (Erika)

Okay. Yeahyeahyeahyeahyeahyeahyeahyeah I just—nobody talk to me for two minutes.

Suvi (Aabria)

Oh!

Ame (Erika)

Otherwise, I will snap and say something that I will regret later!

Ame (Erika)

Okay okay okay okay.

Eursulon (Lou)

Alright.

Suvi (Aabria)

How are you doing?

Eursulon (Lou)

Honestly better. I'm on the right track.

Suvi (Aabria)

Hey! That was nice.

Eursulon (Lou)

It was nice.

Suvi (Aabria)

We gotta get you a shield.

Eursulon (Lou)

Well, I actually already have one.

Suvi (Aabria)

Oh!

Eursulon (Lou)

I made it, from the legs of a broken chair.

Suvi (Aabria)

Ah.

Eursulon (Lou)

So I'm not sure he had seen that. Perhaps he had not.

Suvi (Aabria)

Oh! Yeah. [Clears throat] I heard it's [Swallow] so fashionable to have multiple shields.

Eursulon (Lou)

Is it?

Suvi (Aabria)

Yeah. Because what if, different materials you would block, so maybe you have the chair, I'm assuming is made of wood?

Eursulon (Lou)

Yes.

Suvi (Aabria)

So let's get you maybe a metal shield, just to block some more metal specific things. Also.

Eursulon (Lou)

Fair. Two shields it is.

Suvi (Aabria)

I'm going to spend all the money I've ever had on your shield.

Eursulon (Lou)

And that's because it's tied to your very life?

Suvi (Aabria)

[Laugh] A little bit, yes.

Ame (Erika)

Okay! I'm better. I am still scared and unprepared feeling, and I realize that I have been really putting off going back to Toma because I don't want to leave you two, and because the place that I'm going, that I grew up my entire life with the only person who ever cared about me, who is gone now, is gonna—gonna be mine now, and I have to take over solving everybody's problems all the time. But! I have a purpose now, and that is to not be destroyed, and also have another of my sisters not destroyed, and you two get to come with me!

Suvi (Aabria)

I'm not equipped to help with what you're feeling in your heart, but I love you, and it's going to be okay.

Ame (Erika)

I'll take it!

Erika Ishii

They hug you around your middle.

Suvi (Aabria)

Yay!

Ame (Erika)

Okay, okay.

Suvi (Aabria)

Hey this isn't that hard, you can—that was good, I think I did good. I think I said good words.

Eursulon (Lou)

I agree. You'll make a great advisor.

Suvi (Aabria)

Ho ho. Yeah. Let me be clear. There is nowhere you need me that can keep me from you. Either of you.

Ame (Erika)

Aww.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You travel back to Haverword. It's—you can either go find Gult during the daytime at Tilliver Mill, or you can stop by his home if you want to—whatever you prefer, and then there's Chura's Chowder not far away, over in the night market. But Chura's Chowder probably won't be open for a while, so.

Suvi (Aabria)

I feel like food after?

Eursulon (Lou)

It feels fitting that it would come at the end.

Suvi (Aabria)

Yeah! Okay.

Ame (Erika)

Yeah. Let's have something to look forward to.

Suvi (Aabria)

Also maybe Hana's there.

Eursulon (Lou)

Mm!

Suvi (Aabria)

Let's go straight there. Do you guys want to go back to the Bloody—no.

Eursulon (Lou)

The Bloody Carnival?

Suvi (Aabria)
Yeah.

Eursulon (Lou)
To see Handsome Losario?

Suvi (Aabria)
He was handsome... I'm spoken for.

Eursulon (Lou)
Hoho!

[Aabria and Lou laugh]

Eursulon (Lou)
Well, yes. Let's visit Gult at work, and perhaps we can invite Hana out for chowder.

Ame (Erika)
Yeah!

Suvi (Aabria)
That would be great, you guys would LOVE her.

Ame (Erika)
Let's go do that. Eursulon, I have never known Suvi to not be speaking for herself, so I don't know what—

Eursulon (Lou)
Oh, in that she is spoken for?

Ame (Erika)
Yeah.

Eursulon (Lou)
I believe it's colloquialism.

Ame (Erika)
Well, I—

Eursulon (Lou)
Meaning that she is attached. It's not—I don't believe Silver speaks FOR her.

Ame (Erika)
[Grunt] Thank you for that elucidation.

Eursulon (Lou)
Did I answer the question?

Ame (Erika)

Yes, you did, that was fine!

[The whistle of a steam engine, rolling wheels on a train track, sounds of industry. Bright rambunctious horns.]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Down in Haverword, there are a number of large industrial buildings, brick and stone mortared together, tall chimneys. You see above the chimneys are, themselves, small hovering disks that banish the smoke and offput [Woom sound effect] off further into the desert, outside of the glass of the Irian. You see that in these massive mills there's a huge one that has, in bright silver, almost like chrome, this huge plaque above the door that says Tilliver above it.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And within, you hear the [The sound of sawblades and grinding wheels] of large machines, set to work polishing, carving, cutting, refining. There is a hiss of steam, the pouring of liquid metals. You walk in, and it is PIPING hot in here. This industrial factory is a small factory, so only about like, 20 to 30 people at a time can work in here, it's not this massive, yawning airplane hangar of a place. But you see that there are tall, arched windows of frosted glass that have sort of iron bands in between them. So there's panels of glass, but the windows themselves are quite large, letting lots of daylight into the factory. You see that there is a series of workstations where liquid metal is being poured out of 30 foot tall silver crucibles.

[Bubbling molten metal]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

The crucibles themselves are inscribed with some sort of evocation rune, and you can see there's fire at the base of the crucibles and liquid metal pouring out, but around the bands of the crucible, the runes are producing frost that exists on the outside of them? So some wild bit of metallurgical magic is happening. You look out into the area here. A burly, gorilla looking guy with these huge—he has blonde hair, a blonde mustache, and these thick, blonde hairy forearms, many rings, thick leather apron, is walking around, BIG beard. He's got the classic of the age mustache over the beard.

Lou Wilson

Alright, I think I'm gonna like him!

[Aabria and Erika laugh]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Farther up from him you see that there is a raised platform over the sort of curing beds that are setting the molds for the liquid metal being poured out. There is a raised catwalk, but kind of a full, thick platform with multiple looms spinning at the same time, or almost like sewing machines or some kind of thing. But you see that they are weaving liquid metal.

Erika Ishii

[Gasp]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see that there are a number of young artificers up there. Each artificer is seated, pumping a little foot pedal in the metal spinning machine. And you see that each of them has a young wizard in academy cadet clothes who is layering in the spells as the artificers actually make the material good that is getting layered in with magic.

[Horns crescendo, a steam whistle blared.]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

The man you recognize as Gult, and up in one of the desks up there, you can see with a degree of like, with her bone white hair and a deteriorated musculature along one side of her neck and jaw, you see that there is like, an intense sort of withering there on the side of her face. But she has the same sort of like, steely blue eyes as her father Gult, and a little bit of a similar aquiline profile to him. Gult calls out, and he says

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Keep that hot, I don't want to see that needle dipping into the orange!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see that he turns around as the door opens up, and you see, he says,

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Thank god, get it into the back—oh! Oh!

Aabria Iyengar

What?

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Oh!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He looks and says

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Ey! Ah!

Suvi (Aabria)

Hi!

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Sky!

Suvi (Aabria)

Hey! Gult!

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Good to see you, good to see you, kid. How you doing?

Suvi (Aabria)

I'm so good. What was I supposed to be bringing?

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

You're not supposed to be bringing anything—to the side!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And he whips you to the side as just huge pallets of raw silver ingots begin to come in on a wheeled, sort of like, dolly behind you. He says

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Alright, get it in the back. Start dispelling it. Get it out of here.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see that there's a moment where he looks out and says

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Nope! No no no!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And he gets a huge bellows, he starts spraying this poison smoke. People start coughing, as a bunch of iridescent little gem—

[Chirping]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It looks like gems are springing out of it, until you see that they are crickets. They're these little gemlike insects.

Erika Ishii

[Gasp]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Get 'em out of the fucking factory! Get 'em out!

Ame (Erika)

What are those?

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

They're pests!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And he starts to poison them as fast as he can.

Aabria Iyengar

I got cantrips out, and I'm sending little Irulian bolts to light them up.

Ame (Erika)

No! What are you doing! I gotta catch one!

Suvi (Aabria)

No!

Erika Ishii

I pull out a little tiny cage out of my pocket.

Ame (Erika)

Wuh—eh!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Give me a little sleight of hand to catch. We'll call it DC 15.

Aabria Iyengar

[Laugh]

Erika Ishii

That's a 14.

Aabria Iyengar

No!

Erika Ishii

What can you give me for a 14?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I think you get a little jewelhopper right in your palm.

[Chirp]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You can squirrel it away. However, anyone with a passive perception above that notices Ame catching it.

Aabria Iyengar

I notice.

Erika Ishii

[Gasp]

Suvi (Aabria)

[Under breath] Put it away. Put it away.

Aabria Iyengar

And I'm just miming, like, get rid of it.

Erika Ishii

I put both hands and I flip it into a little vial. Is it alive?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It is, it's a little bug!

Erika Ishii

Okay!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It's a little bug—a little native bug to the Citadel!

Erika Ishii

Ooh!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Suvi, you would know that jewelhoppers are able to bypass enchantments to slowly sap the color out of different gemstones, which can absolutely change and warp the magical effects on enchanted jewel-based things.

Aabria Iyengar

Ooh. Yeah, those suck. I'm running around firing off cantrips, or trying to step on them.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

They're easy to step on, but they do make a sound like glass shattering when you step on them.

[Glass breaks]

Aabria Iyengar

Oh, I don't like it, ah!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see, Gult goes in and says

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

God. Loose crates. Get this silver out of here. Check every bit of silver for these jewelhoppers! Ah, kid. Busy day. What can I do for you?

Suvi (Aabria)

Hi. Yeah, more of a what can we do for—ah. Please meet Ame.

Ame (Erika)

Hello!

Suvi (Aabria)

The Witch of Toma.

Ame (Erika)

I'm the Witch of Toma, I am the new Witch of the World's Heart, and Grandmother Wren said that you are a true friend.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Ah. Oh yeah, Grandma Wren! How is she?

Ame (Erika)

Oh, uh, she passed. Three months ago.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Oh! Ah, I feel like a real heel. I hadn't stayed in touch with her I'm sorry. My condolences.

Ame (Erika)

That's quite alright, you seem quite busy here.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Yeah, we sure are. God, no you know what? One under the desk.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He goes and pulls a whistle and people start shouting and dismay like "Oh no!" And you he says

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

[Calling out] Work stoppage. Jewelhoppers getting into the mill. Everyone clear your station. Look around.

[To Ame] Let's talk for a second, we gotta shut everything down. One of these things hides somewhere and lays any eggs we're FUCKED.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Suvi, you see Hana approaching.

Aabria Iyengar

I'm going to do my best—if Hana—does she look sort of alert and looking around or mostly distracted before the whistle was pulled?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She was focused before the whistle was pulled.

Aabria Iyengar

I'm going to do my best to try to sneak up on her.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Mhm.

Aabria Iyengar

I think she also tends to hyper focus, and there is definitely a game of

Suvi (Aabria)

[Suddenly] Hey, whatcha doing?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She goes

Hana (Brennan)

Aah!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And fucks something up and she goes

Hana (Brennan)

GAH!!

Suvi (Aabria)

[Laughing]

Hana (Brennan)

Don't do that! Sky! What is the matter with you!?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She stands up and looks over and says,

Hana (Brennan)

[Sigh] Well. Congratulations I'm glad you're—I heard you were moved into the tower, you got your name cloak.

Suvi (Aabria)

Hi, thank you, you seem to be doing manual labor down here.

Hana (Brennan)

[Low chuckle] Very charming.

Suvi (Aabria)

I love you!

Aabria Iyengar

And I'm just going to give her a little hug.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She gives you a hug as well. You see that she looks and says

Hana (Brennan)

Yes, happy to be toiling away down here. Is there anything I can help you with? What are you looking for down here?

Suvi (Aabria)

Oh, your dad and my friends need to chat about some stuff, but how have you been? What have you been up to?

Hana (Brennan)

I don't know. Good.

Suvi (Aabria)

What are you working on?

Hana (Brennan)

Oh, we are getting a bunch of these prepared.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You look down and see that—actually, Lou.

Lou Wilson

Mm.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Give me a luck check.

Aabria Iyengar

[Gasp]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Let's say that you really want a 13 or higher.

Lou Wilson

I got a 17.

Aabria Iyengar

Ahh! [Claps]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see that she's looking down and saying

Hana (Brennan)

Staff caps, for the most part, but we actually just got in an order for a bunch more of these.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see that she lifts up one of the big industrial molds, that's in like a 30 foot long sheet. There's like a sort of massive stone press, almost like the cover of a piano, and she lifts it up and steam rises, and you see shining steel shields, a row of about 20.

Suvi (Aabria)

This could not be more serendipitous. May I introduce you to my friend Bear?

Eursulon (Lou)

Hello, Hana.

Hana (Brennan)

Hello. How's it going?

Eursulon (Lou)

Well.

Hana (Brennan)

I'm Hana.

Eursulon (Lou)

I'm [Chuckles] I'm Suvi's protector.

Hana (Brennan)

Oh!

Eursulon (Lou)

And was actually—I had gotten into shield making myself.

Aabria Iyengar

[Wheezing laugh]

Hana (Brennan)

Oh!

Eursulon (Lou)

But Suvi had hoped that—

Hana (Brennan)

Are you an artificer?

Eursulon (Lou)

No! I'm the strongest man in Silbry.

Hana (Brennan)

Oh! Where is that?

Aabria Iyengar

[Laugh]

Eursulon (Lou)

It's near Toma, on the Isle of Akham.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Not one of those words hits for her.

Eursulon (Lou)

It's alright, it's a place, and I'm strong there. But my proficiency in shield making is not up to snuff for my friend so, she was hoping you might be able to provide.

Hana (Brennan)

Oh. Sky, the—just for you to know—I mean, all of these are—we don't make anything that we don't get—everything here has been paid for, I mean this has all been requisitioned by the Citadel.

Suvi (Aabria)

Yeah, absolute—commerce! I'm here to also buy a shield!

Hana (Brennan)

Uhhh. You want to buy one shield?

Suvi (Aabria)

[Incredulously] Is there a bulk discount?

Hana (Brennan)

Well, we're a mill—we're an artificer's mill.

Suvi (Aabria)

I know. You always have to round up when you make them, though. Do you have an extra?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see, she looks down and says

Hana (Brennan)

[Sigh] Let me go talk to my dad.

Suvi (Aabria)

You can make a choice! [Calling] Make your own choice!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
She walks away and says

Hana (Brennan)
Always do.

Erika Ishii
[Cackle]

Aabria Iyengar
[Laughing] My friend's sad.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
She walks away. Aye, you walk over into a little office with Gult. Boiling hot little brick room with a bunch of papers. There's a bunch of small drawers that have like, contracts and order forms. There is nothing readable in here. Unlike the wizards places you have been that are, like lore, and histories, and narratives, and diagrams, and explanations, everything here is, like numbers, and sheets, and ledgers, and books kept, and amounts, and quantities, and transactions. This is a place of—these are the people that do the grunt work of wizards.

Erika Ishii
Mhm. On the way there, I am also looking at the wizards weaving spells into metal fabrics. I mean, this is somewhat akin to what I do, and I never got a chance to examine those matchsticks. Are these like, for realsies, permanent spells?

Brennan Lee Mulligan
It looks like they are for realsies, permanent spells. And what you see is it takes—you can make magical tokens. You look at these and see that there is a lot of work going into this. The first time you saw the matchsticks, I think part of you was like "How could you make this much magic?"

Erika Ishii
Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Like, "How much time would it take for me to do this?" And now looking here, you're looking at it and being like, every station has a wizard and an artificer and they are working hard. And the things that they're making this out of seem like they might already be magical. Like, the silver that they're putting in here already got enchanted somewhere else. So I think you're seeing this thing of like, the end result was so impressive to you—

Erika Ishii
Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
—where you were, like, I could never do that.

Erika Ishii

Well, no, because it's an assembly line deal.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And I think you realize, like, oh, "I could never do that, and neither can they."

Erika Ishii

Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

As individuals, each part of them is only responsible for one small piece of the process, and even they don't seem to have eyes on the origin of the process.

Erika Ishii

Mmm.

Ame (Erika)

[Mumbling to herself] Oh, that's amazing. That's fascinating. I wonder if there's—interesting, interesting, because Grandma Wren could make things and make them permanent, but it took a lot of hard work. Oh, that's so cool. That's so cool. Oh!

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Ame.

Ame (Erika)

Yes.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Well, so you are the new Witch of Toma well, listen. I'm an old friend of Grandmother Wren's, an old friend of Soft and Stone.

Ame (Erika)

Mhm.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

And of course, of Sky, whatever I used to call her.

Ame (Erika)

[Laugh]

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

I didn't used to call her Sky, but I loved her all the same.

Ame (Erika)

Thanks for that. I have to leave for Toma soon, and then from there, I must go and meet with my sisters in—a Conclave. I am deeply unprepared, as I have only recently come into the inheritance of my knowledge, as the Witch of the World's Heart. I don't know if there's anything that you'd be able to pass on, that Grandma Wren told you, or any sort of advice that you could have. I wish that I had more time to sit with you and find out more about your connection to her, and some of your adventures together and, you know of course your time with Soft and Stone.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see he smiles and says

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

I—you know. I don't think I ever really "adventured" with Soft and Stone, so to speak. When I was a journeyman artificer, many years ago, I helped build the traveling door to Silbry.

Ame (Erika)

Wow.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

This was, I don't know, what, 25 years ago or something like that? And I met Grandmother Wren at that time—I was a punk kid, I didn't know my left from my right—

Ame (Erika)

[Giggle]

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

—but she was always kind, and she was a great help, because there were some kooky kind of things in Akham, where some of our—some of the engineers—the celestial engineering was a little bit off, and she helped us figure out a couple of different parts of building the door there and—

Ame (Erika)

Oh, what do you mean, "off?"

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Well, there were some interesting sort of hemispheric differences there. I mean, just some of our orbits were slightly off so, she helped us kind of figure out where our math had gone wrong a little bit, and make the doors travel to the right place. They just weren't reliable at first. But, she gave me a bunch of great information about it, and actually when that project started to go a little haywire, that's the first time I met Stone. She had come back and started working as an abjurer, was helping us figure out some of what might be going wrong. As an abjurer, she wasn't there to ward it, she was sort of about figuring out sources of magic, you know.

Ame (Erika)

Mm.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

And where the sort of source of the energy was coming from and that's when she first, I believe, befriended Grandmother Wren in those initial sort of meetings when we were expanding out and the Empire was having its presence sort of become firmer within Akham.

Ame (Erika)

Yes.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

She was a very kind woman, Grandmother Wren, and I remember she gave me a lot of information, and she gave Stone a lot of information as well. There was one—where was that? I don't have it here in the office, but—she talked a lot about the Taboo of Passage, which is some more witchy-discipline stuff than I'm used to.

Ame (Erika)

Mm.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

But it had a lot to do with magical definitions of roads, and what roads are.

Ame (Erika)

Yes. A road is a path that has felt the iron of a horse's shoe, or the wheels of a wagon.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Banded wheels. Yeah, exactly.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Here, give me an insight check.

Erika Ishii

That's a dirty 20!

Aabria Iyengar

Awoo!

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Ooooh.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see, he looks as he hears a little—

[Cricket chirp]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

—from your pocket.

[Cricket chirp]

[Unconvincingly mimics cricket]

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Are you making the noise of the jewelhopper—

Ame (Erika)

Yeah.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

—you have in your pocket?

Ame (Erika)

Uhhhh yep. That's what I'm doing.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He sort of thinks for a second here he says

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Eh, jewelhoppers. Look—

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see, Hana sticks her head in right before he's about to say something and goes

Hana (Brennan)

Dad, Sky's asking if we have... Shields, extra shields.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see he goes

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Extra shields?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see that—give me an insight check here.

Erika Ishii

14.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see that they quickly fade into a non-Imperial language. Each of them speaks a couple sentences of Tuscafi, which is another, sort of like a vassal state of the Empire. And there's a quick exchange back and forth where, you see Hana looks pretty... Bleak? And kind of like—you just see something kind of—a sort of smoldering something on her expression as she sort of argues with her dad in this other language for a second.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And her dad looks very quick, realizing that what they're doing is rude to you. And you see that there's a little bit of a desire for him to move on. And you see he does at some point, you hear him say, in this language, you do hear him reference the name Silence. He's like

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

[Mumbling] Silence [Mumbling]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see that she shrugs, and you see, he says

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Just get the shield, Hana.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And sends her out.

[Footsteps, creaky door]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He turns to look at you and says

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Sorry about that.

Ame (Erika)

No, no, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to intrude.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

No.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You can still hear the

[Cricket chirp]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He smiles.

Erika Ishii

Oh. I can get rid of it.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

No—well, you should. I mean, it'll eat up any magic gems that you have.

Ame (Erika)

Yeah, okay, yeah, that's true. I mean, it's in a little bug jar, usually it's pretty bug proof.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Oh. Well yeah, it'll be safe in a jar. Just make sure you get it some rhinestones or something. There was a period of time, when I was a younger fella, that Grandmother Wren was very kind to me. An artificers wages, especially as a journeyman, are not uh... Grand wages, and much of the material that we were required to provide at the time, we had to acquire ourselves.

Ame (Erika)

Oh.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

And Grandmother Wren was very helpful in that regard. Out of trust and respect for Grandmother Wren I'm just going to be honest with you, in that occasionally artificers that are on hard times will make the very stupid mistake of doing some work outside of their contracts with the Citadel, just to try to make ends meet, and honestly to fund the work they're doing on behalf of the Citadel. Grandmother Wren requisitioned some work for me, speaking of jewel hoppers of providing a—I provided a flawless sapphire to her. I don't know where it is, grandmother Wren had it, so it might be somewhere in your home, but—

Erika Ishii

Do I remember a flawless sapphire or do I remember what it might have been used for?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

No, not off the top of your head.

Erika Ishii

Huh.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

In any case, I owe a great deal to Grandmother Wren, who was an incredibly kind woman and—

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And I think Eursulon and Suvi, you guys are both led to wait, but you can see the office where Hana is telling you to wait. You're like, right near the office with Ame in it, and you can see her talking to Gult. So you see, Gult says

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Work here at the Citadel keeps me very busy. We need to make—these shields are going to be sent up to Gavril, to create more Shield Tomori. But if you have a spare one—you know, and I'm sure we do, um—

Ame (Erika)

Well, I appreciate that, because our protector Eursulon's ownership of a shield is apparently integral to Suvi's and my very survival.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)
Ha! Well, most shields are!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And you see that he smiles and says

Artificer Gult (Brennan)
I'm sorry I couldn't give you anything more substantive, but just know that if you're ever looking for the scuttlebutt and what's going on down here in the boonies of the Citadel, happy to give you a hand.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You see there's a whistle that goes outside and he's like

Artificer Gult (Brennan)
Okay, well, that's the jewel hoppers. Please keep that in that jar, don't let it out.

Ame (Erika)
Absolutely. Yes. Thank you so much for your time, and for your advice, and for the shield, and I'm sure that if there's ever anything that you need, that you can, of course, call upon the wizard Sky, and her mentor.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)
We certainly will.

[Door creak]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
He walks out and says

Artificer Gult (Brennan)
[Calling] Alright! You dogs, that was lunch!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And he walks out, he kind of nods to you, Suvi.

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
But as funny as it is, that was also lunch.

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And he goes out and you see a bunch of people kind of wince at the thought of having to work for another however many hours that they're going to be working down here, and they get back to it. Hana looks up at her station, opens sort of a vault door—

[Dragging metal]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

—and says

Hana (Brennan)

Look, we don't—"spare shields" is not really a thing, but we have some prototypes in here that at the very least were tests? You can check them—I can't vouch for any of them, they were prototypes. So these are first pancakes in the griddle. But you can go take a look.

Suvi (Aabria)

Yeah. Uh, yeah. Is that good?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Cool! Each of you go ahead and give me an investigation check.

Aabria Iyengar

15.

Lou Wilson

18.

Erika Ishii

21!

Aabria Iyengar

Let's go!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

15, 18, 21. Each of you describe a prototype shield you would find. You guys know about how good those numbers are. Give me a group of shields you would find. These are largely undecorated. And with each of them there is an incredible degree of craftsmanship and know-how put into these shields, but they remain unfinished. And there was something that made them not want to continue with making the shields in this way. Let's start with a 15!

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah! I'm going to look at some of the smaller buckler looking guys that would be a little lighter for me to interact with. Is there a chance I can stack a cast of detect magic on this to try to see what—

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Give me a detect magic. So casting detect magic on it, those runes appear in your eyes for a second.

[Magical ringing]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You can see that there are probably a dozen shields in here, and only about 25%—so about like three or four shields—are sufficiently well crafted enough that they are enchantable. But, because they were made by artificers, they are basically set here waiting to receive an enchantment that would settle into it and become permanent. They have been made with materials of high enough quality, and with enough skill and precision, to receive and store a permanent enchantment.

Aabria Iyengar

Perfect. The thing I wanted was the blank. So I'm just going to grab a little blank one, with kind of a smooth cover, and if there's—I mean, Gult runs a tight ship, but if there's just any sort of loose screwdriver, I'm going to go up and see how malleable the metal is? I actually am proficient with carpenter's tools.

Erika Ishii

Ohh ho ho ho!

Aabria Iyengar

So this bad boy is going to get decorated while I'm hanging out in the north!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Hell yeah. So you get a small blank buckler that is one of the three or four shields that is actually capable of receiving an enchantment.

Aabria Iyengar

Yep.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Cool. All of them would work as a normal shield, right?

Lou Wilson

Mhm.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

But only a couple of them are possibly enchantable. Eursulon, on an 18 what kind of shield do you find?

Lou Wilson

I think Eursulon finds a—these shields were meant to be used by Tomori that were the shield spell, so I think Eursulon finds several truly oversized tower shields, like, not for a normal sized person, not for a frail person. Like a true heavy—like a straight up steel door of a fuckin' shield.

[Aabria and Brennan laugh]

Lou Wilson

Almost like that kind of like wrought iron, it's got those, like—you could tell all these bolts along the side, that are being used to reinforce it. I feel like him holding it almost—it covers from his knee all the way up to his shoulder. It's just like a giant piece of metal. And I think is gonna like, pick it up and kind of work with it, and probably take it out to wherever Suvi is.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Hell yeah. A me on a 21, what kind of shield do you find?

Erika Ishii

The shield that I find is a little bit tucked away in the corner. I look over, and it's behind another one of the shields. I pull it out, cobwebs come away with me. I blow the dust off of it [Blows air] and it has a metal—a golden metallic sheen to it—it's still a little dusty—but it feels lighter than what I imagined a shield might be of this size. And it's a little—it looks older. It's in a sort of unfashionable style. It has a heraldic vibe to it, with the point at the top, and the sloping bottom edges. I pull it out, and it looks like it can hold an enchantment. I bring it out to Eursulon and Suvi.

Suvi (Aabria)

Ooh! Nice. These are all shields that can shield.

Eursulon (Lou)

Great. Though—wait, they CAN shield?

Suvi (Aabria)

Yeah, I'm not really—yes. I'm nervous now, again, the whole no shield and you'll die.

Eursulon (Lou)

Shields that can shield.

Suvi (Aabria)

Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I'm gonna roll—I said three or four enchantable shields. I'm going to roll one for the Fox just to see if the Fox—I'll say the Fox—

Erika Ishii

OHH!!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

The fox has to be able to beat a—I'll say the fox has to be able to beat a ten. Otherwise there's only three enchantable shields in here. That's a two. Fox doesn't do it.

Erika Ishii

Awww!

Aabria Iyengar
Awww!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
There's only three enchantable shields in here.

Aabria Iyengar
Poor bud.

The Fox (Brennan)
[Snuffling]

Suvi (Aabria)
Whatcha doing?

The Fox (Brennan)
Huh? There's no food in here.

Suvi (Aabria)
Oh.

Ame (Erika)
No.

Suvi (Aabria)
Okay! Hana, we will take these three. Give me a number.

Hana (Brennan)
Oh, you want—you want all three of these?

Suvi (Aabria)
Oh, is that weird? Should we not—should it only be one?

Ame (Erika)
Maybe you should just try one, because I'm not going to use one. And I think Eursulon, he already has his wooden one so he can't need more than—

Eursulon (Lou)
Well Suvi made a good point earlier that two shields is important.

Ame (Erika)
Two shields—

Eursulon (Lou)
For different—or multiple shields is important for multiple effects.

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah, yeah!

Ame (Erika)
Ohhh.

Suvi (Aabria)
Okay, I don't need mine. We could just get the one. How much will one shield be?

Hana (Brennan)
My father would consider it an honor to donate a shield to the cause of the wizard Sky.

Suvi (Aabria)
[Quietly] Hana.

Erika Ishii
Can I roll a quick insight check?

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Yeah, give me an insight check.

Erika Ishii
18.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
What is Suvi feeling in this moment—like, what has Suvi been able to communicate to Ame about her relationship to Gult and Hana?

Aabria Iyengar
Ooh. Uh.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Maybe it's nothing, or maybe there's just—whatever an 18 insight could get off of Suvi in this moment.

Aabria Iyengar
Oh wait, it's off of me?!

Erika Ishii
Just the interaction.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
The interaction, yeah.

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah, uh. That Suvi has not clocked the sort of difference in our status in a meaningful enough way. That Suvi's casualness is now pointing downward in a way that she's not engaging with.

[Somber ethereal music]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Hana. Her posture is like a kicked dog, and there is an element to her relationship to Suvi, which is a source of incredible pain for her. Suvi had mentioned her hair, that had been discolored by an accident in one of the aereith depositories. Hana's injuries from that are not redecorated. They have, like, partially withered her body. And this place is hot, and loud, and it's interesting to be in here for this small amount of time that you're all interested to be here. But you will walk out of this door, and Hana will spend a hot, noisy lifetime in this room. She cannot get out of this room, or this life, or this friendship.

Ame (Erika)

Hana, I deeply appreciate your father's generosity, but it is the custom of Witches to return such gifts with boons. We—it would be the honorable thing to do. Is there anything that we can do for you? Or perhaps it is a boon to be held in reserve, in time of need.

Hana (Brennan)

Oh, a boon from a Witch is great payment, indeed. I will let my father know.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see she runs out, grabs her dad. Gult comes back in and says

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

A shield for a boon?

Ame (Erika)

Yes.

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Oh, take all three! Yeah!

Ame (Erika)

[Laughing] No! I think one would suffice.

Eursulon (Lou)

Two will do.

Ame (Erika)

[Laugh]

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Two shields for a boon.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see, he extends a hand to you, Ame.

Erika Ishii

I take it, and give a little curtsy.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He smiles, he bows. Says

Artificer Gult (Brennan)

Thank you again for visiting the Tilliver Mill, Wizard Sky.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see Hana says

Hana (Brennan)

It was wonderful to see you, Sky.

Suvi (Aabria)

It was good to see you, too. Thanks!

Hana (Brennan)

Well, back to work. Stop by anytime.

Ame (Erika)

We were going to go get dinner after this, would you care to join us?

Hana (Brennan)

What time were you planning on going?

Suvi (Aabria)

Oh, gosh—

Eursulon (Lou)

Right after sunset at Chura's Chowder!

Suvi (Aabria)

[Gasp] Oh, they've got this, like, big—you have to go, it's so good.

Ame (Erika)

Yeah, no pressure, no pressure.

Suvi (Aabria)

Pressure!

Hana (Brennan)

If I'm out in time, I'll send a messenger your way. I'll send a little cantrip.

Ame (Erika)
Ah, thank you.

Hana (Brennan)
I wouldn't—I wouldn't hold your breath.

Ame (Erika)
[Courteous laugh] Okay. Well, hope to see you there, but if not, it was an absolute pleasure, thank you.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
She smiles and you walk out of there. Suvi, on a passive investigation, you see crates being packed in the corner. And as you walk out and see—it looks like an order got doubled last night. And as it got doubled, their timeline is still the end of this week. And you look at a clock up on the wall, that ticks slowly by.

Suvi (Aabria)
[Whisper] She's not going to make it.

Ame (Erika)
Well, we can send—I mean, those clams, you can just pick up and send anywhere, it's the perfect to go container. We can—we can send her food.

Suvi (Aabria)
[Somberly] Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
As you guys are leaving Tilliver Mill, you see that young class of wizards that were up there that were actually laying spells, all looking kind of exhausted, you guess they've cast, sort of, their spells for the day. You see, they walk out as a new group of about twelve wizards walks in, kind of shaking hands and being like, "Oh, yeah, I'll see you on the next one." And you see, they walk in, you see no such replacement for the artificers as you all head off to Chura's chowder.

Aabria Iyengar
[Scream]

Eursulon (Lou)
I might have two clams!

[Aabria and Brennan laugh]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
It's so sad—we had so much fun in the Citadel in the earlier episodes—

[Aabria and Erika laugh]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
—and now we're slowly discovering that it's not always great here! It's bad in parts.

Aabria Iyengar

[Crying] Can I make an insight check just to clock how bad it is, actually?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Give me an insight check. It's a DC 20 insight check.

Aabria Iyengar

It's a 17, I make it with the dirty 20!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

[Joyous screaming] Oh, wow! You got exactly what you needed?!

Aabria Iyengar

[Wailing] I wanna know!

Erika Ishii

This is another one of those bad knowledge roles.

Aabria Iyengar

[Wailing] It's bad!

Erika Ishii

Why do you do this?

Aabria Iyengar

I wanted the dice to tell me it was okay to not notice!

Lou Wilson

Yes.

Erika Ishii

[Cackle]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I think what happens is this. Because you've graduated, you got your namecloak, you're an adult, you have been putting things on Silence's tab. And the idea of a tab starts arriving to you as you think about fuckin' Sly shoveling rubies, and a court filled with paintings, and the paintings need to be restored, and it all just occurs to you that this is not the world. This is—it's not "happening," it's "being done." Childhood is the experience of the world happening, but big parts of the world happening are the world being done.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Someone restores those paintings, someone sends those rubies, someone signs off on the rubies getting sent, someone puts an order in, and someone puts time up on the wall, and I think that for the first time, you walk out of there going like—you put things on Silence's tab and it's never a problem. But you also think

for a second and go, "Well, all I ever put on there is big clams at Chura's chowder, and then I rent out books that I'm allowed to rent out. I wonder what could go on that tab that would make someone come talk to me."

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And then you think about the idea of you being like, "Let me get a shield!" And an artificer looking at you like you had just asked her to do the impossible! And the idea of a person living at the base of the Citadel, for whom every minute, every second, every pound of silver, every gem on every hilt of every sword, counts.

Suvi (Aabria)

Oh.

Aabria Iyengar

The shiver that goes through Suvi, as she walks outside, she is grateful that she can blame on the evening air, and the difference in temperature between inside the mill and outside.

Suvi (Aabria)

Uh, um. I'm glad we got that handled.

Eursulon (Lou)

And I hope you don't mind, Suvi, I did not choose your shield.

Suvi (Aabria)

It's fine.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

What were the two shields that you chose?

Lou Wilson

I'll take my shield and Ame's shield.

Aabria Iyengar

Beautiful.

Eursulon (Lou)

Suvi's shield is too small.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You guys go to Chura's Chowder.

Lou Wilson

[Chuckle]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Have a lovely dinner. I think that you've been here with Ame awake at the Citadel for like, a week. Ame—what's going on with Ame, emotionally, the second time, you eat at Chura's Chowder. It's the—and I think you realize, Ame, this is the first time you've done something at the Citadel for the second time.

[Soft comfortable clarinet music]

Erika Ishii

I'm no stranger to routine, I mean, being at a farm, and also being a witch, your life is full of ritual and repetition, and little details, and taking the time to perfect things. This feels like—to visit a place like this again feels decadent. And I have [Scoff] I have been putting everything off. All of the ritual, and the repetition, and the hard work of being a witch and living in Toma.

Erika Ishii

I've put it off, while I explored with my friends—and yes, did some research, but I knew what I was avoiding. And now that the novelty is over, I think I know—even if the wizard Sly, had not so deeply impressed upon me, it's time to go. But I still—ah! I still am so happy with this stew, it's so good! But I definitely try a little bowl of chowder as well.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You enjoy your chowder, you enjoy the stew, and spend some wonderful time walking the streets of the night market in Haverword, in time to join Malacanth as it touches down at midnight—

[Low droning horn]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

—and begins to head back up. As it ascends, slowly pulling away from the ground, you clear the tops of the buildings of Haverword and look up into the nighttime sky. Over the desert, lights appearing in the sky.

[Reverberating horns]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Rippling in the side of the glass of the Irian [Thrumming inhalation] Iridescent like soapy water. Skyships, enter. One, two, three, a dozen, two dozen, four dozen.

[Grim Imperial music]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You have never seen this amount of military presence at the Citadel. This many soldiers or skyships coming, you didn't even know there were this many in the fleet. And at the head of them is Steel's flagship, coming home to her Citadel.

[A waltz of strings, bowed and plucked, underscore the credits]

Taylor Moore

That was Lou Wilson as Eursulon, Erika Ishii as Ame, Aabria Iyengar as Suvi, and Brennan Lee Mulligan as Everyone and Everything Else. Worlds Beyond Number is edited, designed, and scored, by Taylor Moore at Fortunate Horse, with additional sound design from Michael Ghelfi Studios. For even more like this, join us on our Patreon. We'll see you there.

[Waltz fades out]