

Chromythica Episode 8: King DTF

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Esther: Content notices for this episode include:

Esther: strong language;

Esther: potential references to off-screen cruelty to an Awakened Animal as part of character backstory;

Esther: mentions of combat violence, including violence toward an Awakened Animal as part of combat.

Esther: depiction of a short interrogation and a dungeon used to imprison people.

Esther: Hello and welcome to Chromythica. We are a Pathfinder 2E actual play campaign, and we're so happy you're tuning into our story today.

Esther: I am your GM Esther Wallace, and I use she and they pronouns and hi, all of my wonderful players! It's so good to be with you again. I am going to ask you to briefly introduce yourselves and your characters to our audience. And then before we dive into playing, we will have our tradition of our warmup question. But first tell folks who you are and who you're playing.

David: So, hi, I'm David and I use he/him pronouns and I play Oom, our gnome sorcerer, who is polygendered and uses any combination of she, they, or him pronouns. And Oom's pseudodragon familiar is Nommie, who uses he/him pronouns.

Alex: I'm Alex. I use they/them pronouns. And I'm playing Professor Z, uh, an academic gnome from Brastlewark. Professor Z uses he/him pronouns and has an invention-contraption called Buster that he brings along with him everywhere.

Justin: I'm Justin. I use he/him pronouns. I am playing our canine barbarian, Ember, who is a two-tone copper and white Husky. And who also uses he/him pronouns, although he is a dog and has a limited understanding of gender.

Fai: Don't we all. I'm Fairuz, you can call me Fai if you like. My pronouns are she and they. I play Temerity Vane, our tief-elf rogue who uses he and him pronouns.

Esther: Thank you all very much. Okay. So our warmup question today to get into character and into the world of our story is this: who is your character's favorite author or storyteller, and what is their favorite book or story by this author or storyteller and why?

Fai: "The official answer to that question is the Elven bard Terevaniel Ilvaris is my favorite storyteller. I have seen her captivate audiences large and small with hardly an effort, bu-uu-ut... my favorite tales I heard told to me by a friend of mine in Crying Leaf, a beautiful Fey woman named Neriani. She would tell me of the strange realm she came from, the First World, and a place called the Court of Ether. Some of the things she would say were chilling, some were enchanting. It's always left me terribly curious about that place and those people, but distance, before I start, you know, like franchising."

Justin: "Friend Tief-Elf is the best storyteller. He has told me the story of Ailluin Vane, who is the best digger. She finds the best things in the best places. One time she found three wolves in one of the holes, so she must have dug a very big hole. And she became friends with the wolves because she is good. And the wolves showed her all the best things to bring back home."

Alex: Professor Z, considers a storytellers to really be the academics producing the great papers that come out of Brastlewark. But that's actually not the best storyteller around. Professor Z is, is really enthralled with the notions and the stories and the vision of King Drum Thornfiddle, who founded Brastlewark, and it's why he moved to Brastlewark.

Alex: So he really looks up to the narrative that King Drum Thornfiddle has crafted.

David: "Aunty Nia was my favorite storyteller. She had a way of collecting stories and liked to share them in a manner that really revealed the hidden complexities and depths to each tale. She tried to teach the value of choosing words carefully, and she always said that words evoke a special meaning in the hearts of both the speaker and the listener. When we're careful to pour our intentions into the words we choose, a gifted storyteller can often connect with their audience, sharing feelings that can sometimes even transcend lifetimes."

Esther: Every week I love what you all do with these questions. It's just such a delight. Also a delight: I don't know if people are going to be able to hear this, is that our dog just broke through the office door to come see me when Justin had Ember start talking. So I feel that was appropriate timing on his part.

Esther: So with all that being said, let's spend a moment remembering where we left things. When last we were in our story, you entered into a conflict in the secret observatory of King Drum Thornfiddle, which is located in the foothills of the Asphodell mountains outside Brastlewark. You had encountered two armor-clad individuals, a woman named Carden Audactus and a man whose first name is Alivance, who appeared to be Hellknight Armigers, although you were not able to determine the order to which they belong. After several moments of tension throughout the party's excursion to this observatory, Ember attempted to bite Carden when she raised her weapon at Professor Z, and you all entered combat. Although Temerity and Professor Z were a bit skeptical of the wisdom of fighting Carden and Alivance, you as a party managed to defeat both of them, knocking them unconscious, and then fled the scene of the scuffle. On your way out you heard the astronomers working at the observatory, Tildee, Beacon, and Aster, emerging to check on Carden and Alivance, and exclaiming that the party's visit seemed more serious than they'd understood, and that maybe "the king was right all along." You wondered what this meant. Accompanied by Miv, who had supported you in the observatory fight, you made haste back down through the foothills.

Esther: You all decided that since Professor Z had given Carden and Alivance his name, it would be best if you as a party lay low for a few days so as to avoid attracting undue attention. Temerity, you checked yourself, Miv, and Oom out of the Lilyfrost Inn and Tavern while Oom and Miv packed up and Professor Z waited outside. Vivi Lilyfrost, the proprietor of the Inn and Tavern, advised you that if she were going to look into more interesting goings-on in Brastlewark and wanted to lay low for a few days, she might make for the woods north of the city. She asked you, Temerity, if you happened to make your way to these woods at some point in the future, to deliver a message to someone you might meet there. When you asked the gnomes in the party to translate this for you, it turns out she said, "Your mother sends her warm greetings."

Esther: Oom... as you were gathering your things, Miv asked if they could speak with you for a moment. They let you know that they are aware you are carrying something very powerful. While they seem curious about whatever this thing may be, they told you that it's none of their business what it is exactly, and that they don't want or need it. They just want you to be careful.

Esther: You all headed towards the woods to the north of the city, with plans to swing by Professor Z's house to get his things. As we left, Oom, you were feeling very worried that someone knows you're carrying something. Temerity, you were all at once tired, wanting to chill, and wondering how you became the voice of reason in the party.

Esther: You're also very curious about what is going on with this individual, King Drum Thornfiddle, and dragons. It all seems connected, but you can't quite put the pieces together yet.

Esther: Professor Z, you felt frazzled in the kind of way that one does when they're on an adrenaline high. And Ember, you were feeling very confused while struggling with the duality of antitheticals.

Esther: That's where we'll pick back up. You're heading towards Professor Z's house. Fireday evening. And what would you like to do?

Fai: Well, we're heading to the house, but we have not yet gotten to the house, right?

Esther: Yeah.

Fai: I don't remember if we were in the midst of any conversation, but if there's anything else for us to say, surely, it's best to be said within a house, right? So maybe on to the interior as you pack whatever you feel you need.

Fai: And maybe we try to convince you you need less than you're trying to pack? I don't know. That's, that's my theory, but we'll see if that's about to come to pass or not.

Alex: You can put a lot of stuff onto Buster.

Fai: That's true.

Esther: You reach your, your small house that is packed with odds and ends and metal bibs and bobs. Z, do you have keys to your house or do you usually leave it open?

Alex: Does anyone in Brastlewark have keys?

Esther: Oh, many! Some houses are designed entirely around how many locks you can have in one place and how many keys you need to open the doors because it's fascinating. And it's a product of, you know, remembering exactly which key is matched to which lock. And it keeps your colors bright, but some people prefer just to go in and out as they please.

Alex: Professor Z's house, I think you open the door via sort of a Rube Goldberg machine. So it's not that there's any security to it, but it is that there are like, you know, 45 different moving parts to get the door to unlatch.

Esther: Beautiful. Okay. So, describe this Rube Goldberg machine a little bit, if you would.

Alex: Well, so you walk up to the door and you pull on a handle, which is attached to a chain, and that causes a ball to come rolling down and it hits four or five sort of frying pans, and starts the frying pans sort of, you know, rotating on their, their handles.

Alex: They all crash together in a big clanging noise. And as part of that clanging noise, it knocks a wooden spoon off the side. The wooden spoon falls down and strikes a, a piece of flint against something which lights a little fire with some kindling. And there's like, an extra spot for extra kindling if you want. The fire goes and it starts heating up some, some water in a, like very small, like, miniaturised steam engine, which starts chugging.

Alex: And, (sound effects) and as it goes, it causes the, the latch to sort of like inch its way along and get kind of three quarters of the way done. And then it actually gets stuck because the Rube Goldberg machine isn't great. At which point Professor Z goes (huffs) and is like, "Well, that happens about, you know, three quarters of the time."

Alex: He turns off the steam engine, puts more kindling back in so the next time it'll work again. And then reaches into Buster and grabs a big wrench and just whacks the latch and the whole thing flies open.

Esther: Beautiful.

Fai: I loved every moment of that. And I was also sitting here like, so it takes 94 seconds to get into your home every time? But the execution though, that's what really--

Alex: Oh yeah, it all is, it always takes at least 94 seconds. I mean, you got to keep adding more.

Fai: Um, and I mean, gnomes have time, right?

Alex: Yeah.

Justin: Ember unfortunately is not going to appreciate any of this. He will want to be the first one through the door though.

Esther: Okay. Z can you describe to me approximately how many chairs you have or like surfaces upon which one could sit in your home?

Alex: I mean, it's, it's very much a, like we talked about it, so there's like the, the front room and then there's the back room, which is like the bedroom, but the front room is like a workshop.

Alex: So there is like evidence that underneath all the piles of stuff, there's like the parts you would expect in a kitchen, like a cooking pot and a water sink or something like that. But mostly it's just like tables, piled high with parts and gadgets and gizmos. And there's like a couple of stools or like stepstools around that you could sit on kind of thing, but it's not a, this is not a like living room arrangement.

Alex: It's mostly just a place where one tinkers with stuff.

Esther: Ember, you're the first through the door. You're traveling with three gnomes, but you smell a fourth, and you will be able to see-- you actually probably won't be able to distinguish any of her colors-- but the rest of you will see an older-looking gnome perched on one of these footstools.

Esther: She has a shock of like neon yellow hair standing like straight up on her head and like a metal headband kind of going around; a lab coat that's a deep eggplant purple with some neon green patches all over it. And some hot pink pantaloons-style pants and a dark brown and white polka-dotted shirt and some adorable deep emerald green boots on. And she has like, a tool belt around her waist with little hammers and screwdrivers and like some eyeglass lenses.

And Z, you recognize this as your mentor Alcie Fifewinder. She says "Zeta, would you care to explain yourself?"

Alex: "Oh, I'm sorry, it's a mess. Let me just, uh, clean off the surface here."

Esther: She'll just look at all of you and say, "I'm Alcinora Fiefwinder, co-chair of the Scholarium and the Tinkerings. It's a pleasure to meet you all. You can call me Alcie. Zeta. I don't care about the state of your workshop. We were informed that you had taken a little trip into the hills today. As you can imagine, the king is not very pleased that you fought someone? Exploding Buster? You will not believe the political capital I had to expend to be the one to meet you here and say I would get to the bottom of it."

Alex: "Well, I don't know what to say. I mean, you know, we went for a walk in the hills and Buster exploded, but you've seen Buster explode! Like, think of all the colloquia in which Buster has just disrupted the whole room. He was banned."

Esther: "And I'm proud of you for it because you are really onto something. I believe in his potential. Zeta, why were you up there?"

Alex: "Well, you see, uh... have you met our dog?"

Esther: "It looks like the dog that used to be at Selestine Bakery."

Alex: "Yes. This is, this is Ember. And you know, we, we took Ember for, for a jaunt in the woods."

Esther: "Well, how did you get him? When have you... since when have you been an animal person, Z?"

Alex: "Get is a strong word. I, I met all these people and, uh, you know, Ember has some interesting, uh, abilities."

Esther: "Such as?"

Alex: "Ember?"

Justin: You, you said the Alcie is on top of something?

Esther: Yeah, she's like perched on a little footstool. Sitting on it.

Justin: Oh, a little footstool.

Esther: Yeah.

Justin: Okay. So not, like, out of my reach.

Esther: No, no, very much in your reach.

Justin: I will very much go up to Alcie and, and sniff Alcie to see if Alcie is a good person.

Esther: Alcie doesn't smell like a bad person.

Justin: That means Alcie must be a good person. That's how that works, right?

Fai: Justin.

Justin: Yes.

Fai: Have we discussed what bad people smell like, or just that that's a thing? Just curious.

Justin: There's a specific set of things that Ember would associate with bad people, I would say.

Fai: I follow. Thank you.

Justin: Ember will kind of look back at, Temerity and Professor Z and will just say, "I set bad people on fire."

Esther: Her eyes widen. She leans forward. "Well, that's not something you see every day."

Alex: "I know, right?"

Esther: "Zeta..."

Justin: "I see it most days."

Esther: "Are you learning magic, Zeta?"

Alex: "Well, I'm not learning magic, but I think it's important that we, uh, investigate and understand everything. You know?"

Esther: "I mean, he's, he's not your familiar? He talks on his own?"

Alex: "Oh yeah. No, he talks totally on his own."

Esther: "Well, well, well."

Alex: "And familiar... I mean, he doesn't, he doesn't obey me in the slightest."

Esther: "How did you learn to talk?"

Alex: "Oh, well, when I was a child..."

Esther: "Zeta, I'm talking to the dog."

Justin: Ember continues to look kind of confused, is like, "I know how to talk. I didn't know how to talk. And then I did."

Fai: I guess that one's on me, huh?

Fai: "Well, hello. Temerity Vane, a pleasure to meet you. It seems like... Ember was the animal companion to a druid who went into the woods..."

Fai: And I'm going to look around and wonder, considering the response I got when I told Keturah about when I, whenever I mentioned to them, like, I kind of consider whether, whether I should, uh, specify which woods. She didn't freak out about the, the fire thing.

Fai: So that's a good indication. She's... yeah, she's a, she's an academic. She wants all the info, she wants all the deets.

Fai: "Well, they went into the Whisperwood and there was a series of circumstances that Ember is unable to remember or recount. His companion died very tragically. And sometime thereafter he was able to speak.

Fai: So maybe it's magic or, you know, maybe... maybe the pain of this loss really Awakened him. I don't know how these things work, so... But he's a nice dog."

Esther: "You're telling me... what was her name? The druid."

Fai: "Oriana."

Esther: "Yes. I remem... I know her, her wife, Mira, the baker. The druid went into the Whisperwood. The Whisperwood... and her dog gained sentience there."

Fai: "Well... he gained speech. What is sentience? Was he sentient before? Is he now? Those things that are a little bit beyond me."

Esther: "Zeta. Did you tell anyone about this talking dog while you were giving them your name in the observatory?"

Fai: (muttering) " Well, I did tell him he shouldn't have used his name, but that's neither here nor there. You know, I can only give the advice that I can give. Whether people take it or not that's beyond me."

Alex: "You know, I still don't understand why they didn't want us in the observatory. I mean, it's an academic institution and I visit them all the time. I just..."

Esther: "Zeta! You... bolt-headed, pupil! That..."

Justin: "They were bad people, so I bit them."

Esther: "Oh dear."

Fai: "Ember, we're going to have to have another conversation about the whole 'bad people' thing. Because again, we don't know that they were bad people. We came to their place. They have every reason to believe that we are bad people, so... you know."

Alex: "Kinda suspicious to me though, like, an academic institution? You'd think they'd want to, you know, show us around and show us the research. Actually, speaking of that, Oom, didn't they show you the research?"

David: "Well, yeah. You know, when we were there, you know, I, I just said we were out for a stroll and we didn't know what was happening. So while the guards, you know, were collecting us, the people there seemed very open to chatting. So we just weren't really sure why it was, was secret."

Alex: "Exactly. I just thought we were visiting another academic institution."

Esther: Alcie looks curious. And she's going to say, "Setting aside all the pressing matters for a moment, what exactly did they tell you?"

David: "Oh, just the regular workings. That there was an observatory and they were helping install equipment."

Esther: "Yes. But what, what kind of equipment?"

David: "I'm actually not too familiar with how the stuff works, but it just sounded like they were doing, you know, astronomy-style equipment."

Esther: "You would never make it in the academy. Zeta, what kind of research are they doing there?"

Alex: "Well, you see, this is the whole problem with the secretive and frankly, rude guards is that we, we kind of had to leave in a hurry. And so I didn't really, you know, I didn't get to talk to the, the researchers like Oom did. But they were, uh, looking for stuff in the stars? For leylines? I don't totally remember. It was all kind of a blur. As it is, you know, when, when one's friend-slash-dog starts to maul people, it's, it gets to be a bit of a mess."

Esther: She stands up and she like, runs her gnome hands through her hair. And she's like, "You broke into the king's secret observatory, gave them your name, and didn't bother to find out what they're doing."

Alex: "Secret? Why is it a secret?"

Esther: "Zeta, you're never getting tenure."

Fai: I got a question. I just want to clarify what I'm seeing here. She don't know neither. She's not trying to determine if we found out the secrets that she's aware of. She's like, how the fuck did you do all of this dumb shit and then you signed your name to it and you didn't even get the fucking deets? She wants the deets too? Like, which one of those--

Esther: Roll Perception.

Fai: Okay. Happily.

Alex: In this moment, Professor Z is going to choose to not roll Perception because I think he has assumptions about her. Right? But like, he's not, he's not looking for that, if that makes sense.

Esther: With that roll, you get the feeling that she is legitimately curious about what's going on there and that she's not scolding Z for discovering secrets that she's in the know about. She's a little frustrated that he didn't bring her back more information about what is actually going on there.

Fai: Right to be!

Alex: I mean, I would have stayed longer to have a deeper conversation, but I think there was a, you know, somebody else who was suggesting that maybe we run.

Fai: Well, we were in a mortal peril situation of having to kill people or not. And it's, you know, Temerity has been around for a long enough time to know that when you first go to a town, you should not immediately start killing people, at least not like traceably.

Alex: I'm trying to remember, you know, who as they say... took the first bite.

Fai: [chuckles] Well, I think that was neither of us, so.

Esther: Are you having this conversation in character?

Fai: No! No, this is me talking. Okay. Back to character.

Justin: I want to head over to Temerity and say, "You smell... different," and I want to smell Temerity's bag.

Justin: And pull out the hand if it still exists there.

Fai: Oh, I forgot about the hand! [laughs] Temerity might've forgot about it too in all of this.

Justin: We're now like in relatively close quarters that I think Ember would smell it.

Fai: I mean, depending on how ripe it is, the rest of us might smell it. (Justin laughs)

Esther: It's preserved.

David: So I guess while Ember's doing this, I'll actually ask Alcie since she mentioned tenure: "Is this actually something that could help Professor Z with his tenure, figuring out more about what this all is about?"

Esther: "No, the king will kick him out if he keeps doing this, but I'm curious."

Fai: "I think what she was referring to about tenure is that he took a big risk with his name attached to it, and didn't really get a whole lot out of it. But let's focus on... maybe you got more information from the people who talked to you than you know. You said they were installing something.

Fai: What - do you know what it is? A telescope? Something else?" Like, that's, that's one of the things that they explained briefly, right? Like that it was specifically a telescope or were there other shits going on, or?

David: Yeah, they explained that it was the magical functions in the stars and they were tracking for major shifts.

Fai: But Oom has not said that to us?

David: Oh no, Oom said it to you, but didn't say it to Alcie.

Fai: Oh, okay. Great. Okay. Love that about Oom and for us. And in that case, Temerity won't ask such a thing aloud.

Fai: Thank you for the clarification.

Esther: Alcie's eyes flick over to Nommie. She says, "Bold of you to bring a pseudodragon here. And what is your name?"

David: "My name's Oom, but... why is it weird to just have a familiar?"

Esther: "Clearly you aren't from Brastlewark. Welcome, Oom. The king does not exactly encourage the presence of dragons in this city. It's permissible because this is the Festival of Flight and we are going to attract many varying souls in the coming week or so. You are lucky you arrived when you did. And you, I take it, took this familiar of yours to the observatory?"

David: " I mean, of course! Nommie is my friend. We go everywhere together."

Esther: She has this look on her face of like 'these damn kids'.

Esther: "Let me make it plain for you. The king would like to have a conversation with you about your purpose in bringing a dragon to his observatory. And Z, since you are the only named link to this person who showed up with a dragon and caused a fight and attacked the guards at the observatory, you are going to be called into his presence soon. So if you don't want to have that conversation Zeta, I suggest you get out of town for a little bit on a research trip, if you know what I mean."

Alex: "That sounds like a really good idea. It really feels to me like this kind of got away from us, didn't it? I thought a little a walk in the mountains with Ember would just... I mean, it's a dog walk."

Alex: It's not really, I don't know. I just, I feel like it all got away from us."

Esther: "Zeta. I thought you would have the sense to understand that if the king has a secret project that's not a part of the Scholarium, guarded by Hellknights, you wouldn't just wander in there, start a conflict, give them your name and come away with nothing."

Alex: "I figured they were just trying to prevent sabotage, but you know, the Scholarium has always been a very open academic institution. Everybody loves sharing their research."

Esther: "Well, Zeta... it's true--"

Alex: "That's what, that's what academia is all about. It's about collaboration."

Esther: "Well, Zeta, in an ideal world, yes, it is. In the world that Parmenius and I, and many of our colleagues would like to be a part of, yes it is. But this... the reality is we live in Brastlewark in Cheliox and whatever deal the king has made with House Thrune places conditions -- certain conditions on what we are able to achieve here."

Esther: And this observatory is not part of the Scholarium. It *is* the King's doing with House Thrune. Certain people aid him, but we are not involved in whatever is going on there, which is why I'm very curious as to any information you could give me about what's going on there, but..."

Alex: " Well, I mean, I'm sorry we didn't gather more information. I guess it's just, it's really coming as a shock to me. I... I mean, I moved to Brastlewark as

this beacon of academia and curiosity and figuring things out and you know, all of us folk in the town come together when an area burns down to build something creative in its place, and we all go to colloquia together and I just... This is all it's, it's been quite a lot over these past few days and maybe, maybe I should take a vacation out of town for a little while, but I just... it just doesn't seem very much in the spirit of Brastlework to keep secrets like that."

Esther: She gives you a long affectionate look in the way that a longtime academic advisor can sometimes look a little motherly. She's going to say, "You're such an idealist, Zeta. I've always liked that about you. You really believe in what we do, and it gives me hope. Sometimes there are more to these institutions, the ways of doing things, than is immediately apparent, Zeta."

Alex: "Well, yeah, I guess I should probably get out of town for a little bit. I don't want to get on the King's bad side. And I know that he has, you know, sponsored some of my research before. And so maybe, maybe we can head out of town and then come back in the Festival of Flight when things are perhaps a little more chaotic, and so, so we'll be noticed less. But I really felt like we were sort of... there's opportunity and excitement and things to learn, and we've met a talking dog. It's all... it's quite a lot."

Esther: "Zeta. Let me worry about things with the king for a few days. I'll try to calm them down, make excuses that you're on some kind of research venture. Just lay low for a few days, Zeta. Don't... don't stay here, stay somewhere else. Lay low. I'll try to smooth things over. You are my favorite student, because you have such a pure curiosity. You're not tainted by your ambitions like Chaunsey or Jexilla, bless her, who are willing to scheme and convolute themselves and play games that one needs to play in order to get certain places. You... you're driven by the joy of all this. That is something very special about you, Zeta. I want you to keep that."

Alex: "Well, thank you. I guess we should start gathering up our things."

Esther: "Who's that?" She looks beyond you and points at Miv.

Alex: "Oh, that's that's Miv. We met Miv in a tavern."

Esther: "Yeah. Hi there. I'm Miv. It's nice to meet you. I'm just passin' through, just meetin' your student. Seems like he -- I agree with you ma'am, he is just a real, pure, curious soul and I respect that a lot. I'm just going to be with him for a while, I think all this is very curious indeed. And don't mean no harm, don't

mean no harm at all. Just gonna lay low with them in the woods for a few days. And I won't be in your King's hair none."

Esther: And Alcie is like, "Well, it's nice to meet you, Miv."

Justin: "Miv is a friend gnome," and Ember will pull out the decrepit hand.

Esther: "Oh!"

Justin: "I found a thing."

Esther: "What a, what's a dog like you doing with a Hand of the Mage?"

Fai: What's a Hand of the Mage? Does anybody know? Do I know?

Esther: I don't know if you've tried to identify it. You may do so, and you may roll me a secret Arcana check.

Justin: Ember is generally going to resist to the, taking it out of his mouth, but sure.

Esther: Temerity, it's just... your mother has brought back many different things in her days of cultural reclamation and she's trained you to do so too. And there's mummified hands and Mummified Hands. And it's weird that this is a mummified elf hand that gnomes had, and it's just difficult to say what it might be.

Fai: But having heard that it's a Hand of the Mage, does that mean anything to me? No?

Esther: You run it over in your mind for a little while, and as you're running it over in your mind through, you know, a couple of centuries worth of, of learning, and the gears are grinding a little slowly, Alcie's just going to say, "It lets you cast Mage Hand."

Fai: "Well, that's very good to know. It's also the hand of one of my people." So I'm just going to try to, you know, doop! She's holding it right?

Esther: I think Ember had it.

Fai: Oh, I thought she had taken it from Ember. Okay. In that case, I'll try to take it from him. "Ember, may I have that back please?"

Justin: Ember will playfully resist, but eventually will let you have it. Will kind of like, step up and wag his tail and expect you to throw it.

Fai: I'll make a mental note to keep other things in my bag for Ember if such an occasion arises again. "Alcie, may I ask you a question?"

Esther: "Well, why not?"

Fai: "I'm... I'm new here. I'm very curious about this deal the king made. It seems like nobody knows anything about it, which okay. But does anybody have any rumors about it? It's very curious to me that there aren't even rumors."

Esther: Roll Diplomacy. "Hmm. And why do you want to know this, exactly? What interest do you have in Brastlewark?"

Fai: " I, I have the same interest in Brastlewark that I think I have in most places, which is I come in and I see what's happening, what's going on. This one is very interesting. It's very beautiful, but the secret seems pretty big. And, you know, ultimately I don't think I really care. I'm just very curious."

Esther: "Well, I do have a respect for a healthy curiosity. You are correct. That we know of, no one knows exactly what deal was struck between the king and House Thrune. He recruited most of us after he'd done it. It is speculated that he owes them something. Now, some people think he sold his soul to Asmodeus. And some people think he sold his soul to Abrogail Thrune, the First.

Esther: We believe the observatory has something to do with his deal, the deal that gave him the right to this particular parcel of land, the right to call himself king, the right of gnomes to assemble here without so much oversight from House Thrune. He must owe them something pretty big. And we think the observatory has to do with that."

Fai: "This is very interesting, thank you. Is, is Brastlewark or the observatory itself in a unique position in relation to the sky, the celestial bodies? If the observatory is related to the deal that they made, it would be reasonable to assume that whatever the observatory is capable of finding or creating would have to be something really big to be worth such a deal, to be worth a kingship."

Esther: "Yes, you are right, Temerity. But we don't know what."

Fai: "I see."

Esther: "I mean, the stars are not a specialty of mine. You would have to go to, um-- oh, which one is it Virmor, Obscurae? They study such things, but as I understand it, there is a good view from up there, but I don't know that it's particularly special in any way."

Esther: "All I know is, the king is awfully upset there was a dragon there, and it may not have escaped your notice that there aren't exactly many draconic experts here in Brastlewark. Parmenius is kind of the person who does the most of that. And even he has to watch his step."

Fai: "So now we go back to some GM questions because I feel like we talked about, obviously we talked about the draconic connection before, if I formulated a theory about a dragon sex cult. However, I don't remember the extent to which we talked about why everybody was so.. like, why? We know that the king, like it's king-related. We know that the king--"

Justin: "I don't think we really know why it's dragon-related."

Fai: "Yeah, but that's part of the mystery is the thing, right?"

Justin: "Yeah. We know that there's some connection with this Green dragon astronomer, whose name was... so there was Athervox. Yeah."

Fai: "Ohh, Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay."

Justin: "Yeah. So we know about that, but that's kind of the only connection we have, was that name that was struck out of the various books that we found early on."

Fai: "Okay. Yeah. And so we found that the name was struck out and then we went to a draconic expert."

Justin: "Parmenius, yeah. Wolfbert as well. And we really freaked out Wolfbert."

Fai: "We freaked him out because it was information that was struck or because it was draconic information that was struck?"

Justin: "I think we were pressing, pressing this individual for a lot of, of very restricted information very quickly and..."

Fai: I'm just tryna put together all this dragon stuff in my head. This is weird, right? This is like, super weird?

Justin: Yeah.

Fai: Is there any connection between House Thrune and dragons, Esther?

Esther: Remind me what kind of Lore you have?

Fai: Think I only have Medicine right now.

Esther: Okay.

Fai: Surgery.

Esther: Lore - Surgery. Okay. Well that... I would take Religion, Society, or Nature.

Fai: Okay. Would you like it secret or not secret?

Esther: Secret, please.

Fai: Very well. We're going to go with Society.

Esther: To the best of your knowledge, there is no connection between House Thrune and dragons.

David: Based on, I guess my knowledge of Draconic Lore, is there any reason why I would know why the topic is so... or for how long this topic was so forbidden around here?

Esther: Go ahead and roll me, Lore: Draconic.

Esther: It would have been difficult to find such topics in books. House Thrune as the ruling family of Cheliox is only about 70 years old and they like to keep a tight lid on what gets written about them, certainly within Cheliox, and are no strangers to revising their own record when they want to. But in your mentoring sessions with Mengkare...

Esther: Can you ask me one more time, what it is you're... you're wanting?

David: Uh, I was just wondering if, from either a Draconic Lore or even Society standpoint, because previously it was shared that Mengkare had a lower opinion of the leader here, King Drum Thornfiddle... whether or not Mengkare also shared anything about to the extent in which draconic topics or dragons are forbidden in this area, or not talked about, or treated with distrust.

Esther: He would have told you about his dislike for the methods of House Thrune, first of all. They're a little too authoritarian for him, a bit too opposed on the axis of the way he approaches the world.

Esther: He would have had disdain for how he suspects Drum Thornfiddle went about getting a kingship, making a deal with House Thrune. Though I don't know if he would have discussed that with you in detail, but you could probably guess at that. And he would have said something cryptic. Well, first of all, he definitely would have told you about the many dragons who, upon the chaos after the death of Aroden and surrounding the ascendancy of House Thrune were a little bit opposed, and funded or, or took part in like, the rebellions led by the Church of Iomedae. And so to, to your question and Temerity's, it's not exactly like House Thrune had a thing against dragons. It's more like there were particular dragons involved in civil struggles against House Thrune.

Esther: So that is like, one thing you would probably know. And Mengkare would have certainly told Oom about, about those folks and that there were some very brave souls still out there fighting the good fight. And then he probably would have said something cryptic, along the lines of, "Once wronged, our kind can simmer long on the injustice, but we don't forget. And the young ruler of Thrune would do well to remember that."

David: I guess this is, this is information no one else knows about, but Zhemrin had previously shared with me that he took part in some Chelish rebellions. Does it seem like there's any connection between how dragons took part in the rebellion and the current, feelings towards dragons?

Esther: Zhemrin never mentioned going to Brastlewark. He never mentioned anyone named King Drum Thornfiddle, or that he'd been in conflict with gnomes, just his role in "seeking freedom from the tyranny of House Thrune in Cheliox."

David: Got it.

Fai: Okay. So now where were we, before I took us on several tangents to further understand what's going on about this whole dragon situation that's very confusing to me?

Justin: I think we may have lingered, tarried a bit long, and might want to get with the going.

Fai: Get the fuck out? Okay.

Fai: "Alcie, thank you so much. Obviously I'm very curious, and you are very curious. If I find out anything interesting, I'd be happy to tell you."

Esther: " Thank you Temerity. Much appreciated."

Fai: " Of course. I'm, I'm going to do my best to look after Professor Z, too. We'll see. Maybe a bigger job than I can do myself, but I'm going to try my best."

Esther: "He'll keep you busy. Keep your colors bright."

Fai: " That, that's very clear to me." Does Z look like he's got all of his wrenches and shit, or?

Alex: As you look over to Z, you know those like, the like drinking bird things that like, infinitely bob their heads up and down? He's putting one of those in Buster. He's got like a, a pair of calipers that he's putting into Buster.

Alex: He also has like, a little demonstration model of a solar system. That's got like, a star and some planets going around it and it's got a little engine attached to it. And so yeah, it can sort of like run itself.

Fai: This solar system that we're in?

Alex: Possibly? I think it's more about the mechanics of the thing that I think that he's interested in. It's not really like, meant to be a, to scale in that way. He's got also, like, some cast iron molds that you could like, pour molten something into and like make another metal object. So yeah, he's, he's, you know, getting the real essentials for camping stowed in Buster.

Fai: Clearly, clearly .

Alex: He also therefore has missed the end of this conversation

Fai: "Professor Z, do you need some help? Because I think we should go ahead and get out of here as quickly as possible so that we can keep you out of the king's vision. Eyesight. Scope."

Alex: Let me think. I have almost everything I could possibly need. Oh, what about a tent? I'll grab a tent, too."

Fai: I mean, you know what, if a situation arises in which we could have used the tent and then I'm the one who said, no, leave that fucking tent at home. I'm not gon... we're not going to do all of that.

Fai: This is exactly what Temerity is thinking in his mind, but with a slightly different accent. So he's like, just going to nod. "Do you need some help -- do you need some help?"

Alex: " No, no, no, I got it. I got it." And so he grabs the like, blanket from his bed and a couple of sticks and sort of wraps them all up together and ties it to the back of Buster.

Fai: Okay, great.

Justin: Ember will carry one of the sticks.

David: So are we talking like, like legit big tent or like pup tent, or?

Alex: We're talking like, these are the materials that can make a lean-to, but it's, uh, not exactly, you know, official.

Fai: Ideal? Fancy?

Alex: Yeah.

Fai: "Shall we go then?"

Esther: "Yes. I think you'd best be skedaddling," and Alcie will lean down -- actually, there, she doesn't have to lean down that far -- to Ember and say, " You're very curious. The Whisperwood, that's a nasty place. I hope you've had a better life than it sounds like the place you came from when you were first woken up."

Justin: "It was a bad place, but this place is better."

Esther: "We like to think so. Shoo, shoo the king will be sending people any moment to check on me, to check on you. So off with you all! Don't want to be caught here." Though if you are fascinating, things will happen.

Justin: It will take Ember two attempts to get the stick through the door. [cast chuckles]

Fai: "Thank you, Alcie," as I am getting the fuck out.

Esther: "Nice to meet you."

Fai: "Likewise, likewise, looking forward to seeing you again."

Esther: "Yes. I hope so. Come to a Colloquium sometime."

Fai: Let's do it, friends. To the north. Is that it? To the forest? The woods in the north?

Justin: Yes. To the north past Dwarvenhold?

Esther: Dwarvenhold.

Justin: I want to say? Yes. To the north of Dwarvenhold to find the quote, "the individual who lives there."

Esther: So while you're making your way through Brastlework, are you just walking along or are you going to attempt to make yourselves a little less obvious?

Fai: I do not want us to be obvious because I think that we are on... clearly we're on multiple radars. So I will advise my friends that we should move as stealthily as we can, even if that means not being in a clump with one another, you know, kind of --

Alex: Professor Z will suggest that we take perhaps the fastest route out of town.

Fai: Which is? Oh--

Alex: I don't--

Fai: Will suggest whatever the fastest route--

Alex: Whatever the fastest route out of town is, and then make our way to the north, if that makes sense.

Justin: Ember was reprimanded last time he was not stealthy, so he will be stealthy so that he can be a good boy.

Esther: Mhmm.

David: I was wondering, is there any, is there any room to, in Buster, to store Nommie or is it just not big enough?

Fai: He has, Buster has the Nommie perch, right?

Alex: Yeah, there's the Nommie perch.

David: But not like inside or anything.

David: Yeah. Well, I was thinking too, like if, if, if the pseudodragon is freaking everyone out... to the extent of which Nommie could be hidden.

Justin: A little cloak for Nommie?

Fai: Oh, I have a disguise kit! I could disguise Nommie!

David: As like a cat or something?

Justin: I am all for this.

Esther: I will say, you haven't seen anybody except the guards at the observatory seem alarmed by Nommie. Most people are curious and excited to see something out of the usual in Brastlework, it's just another point of stimulation and newness. So it's, it's unlikely that walking down the street you are going to get like, lots of people being horrified.

Esther: However, if the King's folks are aware that there's a red pseudodragon and a person accompanying them, that were part of this observatory hit squad...

Justin: You could swaddle Nommie.

Fai: I was literally like, like I could just wrap him up like a baby and hold him.

Justin: Like a baby.

David: Yeah. I think that'll work.

Esther: How does Nommie feel about that?

Fai: If he's okay with it.

David: He's probably not thrilled, but I think he'll survive. He'll understand the emotions of why.

Esther: Okay. So you have Nommie swaddled like a baby, is it, is... who's holding him?

David: I'm kind of small, so if Temerity's willing to, to do that...

Fai: If you're kind of trying to figure it out, I will, I'll be like, "Um, Oom, Nommie, if you'd like some help, I'd be more than happy to carry him, but you know, if he prefers to be with you, I don't want to, uh..."

David: "Yeah, that would actually be a big help. Thank you."

Fai: "My pleasure. My pleasure." And I will hold him like a baby and it'll be very clear that I've held many babies before. Very comfortably, like, just like I'm just some dad walking down the street with my baby. That's what I'm making it look like. Also maybe kind of like a dad was with horns, but a dad nonetheless.

Esther: So whoever would like to be stealthy, roll me Stealth.

Fai: I'm going to be stealthy with a baby.

Alex: Do you want secret Stealth or regular Stealth?

Esther: Honestly it's okay either way right now for me, but if everybody's doing it secretly then you can go secretly. Wow. This is fascinating. Okay.

Esther: So Professor Z, the seriousness of this situation is perhaps beginning to sink in because you are so aware of the alleyways and every building in Brastlewark, and you're able to make your way, with a great familiarity, quietly

out of, out of obvious detection through the city. Everyone else... y'all have a bit of a time!

Esther: So... Temerity. Instantly upon walking through the streets of Brastlework you begin to attract attention as the caretaker of this small baby, and you get gnome parents and their children coming up to you and saying, "Oh, how adorable, how old are they?" " Oh, I remember when I had my first, isn't it just the best? Don't want to disturb them. They seem to be sleeping so soundly!" And occasionally a small crowd will gather around you because Tiefling children are extremely unusual here and someone's going to like tug on your pants leg and be like, (childlike voice) "You have a tail and horns. And I think I see your baby has a wing. Do all Tieflings have a tail or a horn or a wing?"

Fai: (cast laughter) I'll try to answer these questions and I'll be like, "Being a Tiefling is a bit of a blessing. And so when we come out, we don't always look like our parents. And my parents, I look very unlike them! They are Elves. And so, you know, my baby, he came out looking a little bit different too. I would show you him, but he's sleeping.

Fai: So, you know, like red skin, green skin, it's, it's all the rainbow and you never know what kind of Tiefling you're going to meet. You never know, sometimes they have horns, sometimes they don't. Sometimes they have a tail, but you know, if they don't have those things, you don't want to like, make them feel weird about it, or... so everything is normal, basically, like everywhere in the world. Variation is the standard."

Esther: This child, this little gnome child looks up at you with wide adoring eyes and is like, "Your colors are so bright. I want to be a tiefling!"

Fai: [laughs] " You know, maybe that's a conversation for your parents, but my colors are bright because I came to the brightest city in the world! So I think that, I think you're very lucky to be from here."

Esther: They just giggle and kind of blush and like hide behind the parent's trouser leg. And, um, well, you will be able to move on eventually, but you are rather hampered by this.

Esther: Ember. You, you, begin in earnest to go through this city, and you are so focused on being a good boy. You're determined to be a good boy. And suddenly you smell an aroma of meat. It's extremely good. And it seems like

maybe cooked meat that someone has put in a compost pile. It becomes rather over-powering.

Esther: And I don't know, it's up to you, whether you would want to woof about it or whether you would want to go rooting through this nearby compost pile to find the meat. You tell me.

Justin: It's been a while since I ate those sausages. Yeah. I'll absolutely go digging for some meat and I'll have to, I'll have a bit of a.... a bit of a moment where I'll have to think about putting down the stick. Eventually.

Fai: Like, oh, there's meat and then you try to eat the meat and you're like, oh no, my stick, but I have to put my stick down if I want to eat the meat. Like, is it a whole thing?

Justin: Yeah, it's a thing.

Fai: Okay.

Justin: It's a thing, he probably bangs the stick against a few things in indecision.

Esther: You do attract a bit of notice--

Justin: Knocks over a pail.

Esther: From this neighborhood (laughs) and gnomes are pouring out of their houses. One is like a square house made of brick and it's next door neighbor's kind of like, spliced onto it. And is a very twisty, towery building made of wood with its shingles painted purple, pink and blue. And this neighborhood is kind of coming out and being like, "Oh, what is this dog doing here? Do you know... whose dog is this?" "Oh, is it the inn's dog? Oh no, maybe it's, maybe it's the family who lives over there near Mysterium. I think they have a dog," like, and you're being speculated, where you've come from and who you might belong to.

Justin: Remembering that I am supposed to be a good dog and not attracting attention, I am going to try to very quickly get both the meat and the stick in my mouth and run away.

Esther: Roll Dexterity.

Justin: This is going to be bad. That's not bad. That's a 17.

Esther: Yeah. You do so. You are able to follow Professor Z and Temerity, making your way slowly through the crowds of people. You're, you're able to keep a line of sight on the two of them. Oom, describe to me your like, state of mind right now.

David: I guess still kind of frazzled, still kind of worried about what Miv knows about, you know, my secret or those things. Just mind wandering a bit.

Esther: With your mind wandering, you realize suddenly that you are in like the very middle of a wide street that's lit beautifully by street lamps and lanterns that are strung across from one building to another. And there are musicians out in the street playing evening music and groups of dancers who are just enjoying each other's company.

Esther: And you're kind of smack dab in the middle of all of this. And you have a couple people come up to you and say like, "Oh, you look new in town. I don't think I've seen you before. Who are you?" And you're very much being noticed and there's a bit of distance being put between you and the rest of the party.

David: I'll try to be polite, but hopefully I can catch up with them. Yeah. As I'm just being like, "Oh, hi. Yeah. Everything's so amazing." But you know, I'll definitely try to make my way to, to hopefully keep up even as I'm distracted.

Esther: Okay. Everybody give me one more round of Stealth checks.

Esther: Yeah. Professor Z, you got this. It is going so well. Like, you are making your way, like to Dwarvenhold, no problems at all. Buster, you've put some kind of like pads on his legs and he is making way less noise than usual--

Alex: I believe what you are looking for is, Buster is well-lubricated.

Esther: Buster is well-lubricated and making very little noise as he walks on his well-lubricated feet through the streets of Brastlework.

Esther: Everybody else, just -- just not your best day. Stealth-wise. Ember, you are able to keep up with Professor Z. And... there are moments where you brush past someone and like, people will notice that there was a large gold-and-white Husky there, but you won't be stopped by anyone. Oom and Temerity.

Esther: You're able to make your way through the first crowds, the initial crowds. And you can keep your eyes on Professor Z and Ember, up ahead of you, as you begin to enter a section of the city that looks a bit different. The

buildings are more dwarven in style, lower to the ground, made of stone with red roofs. And you can see this up ahead. And lots of wide courtyard areas, um, with a little less park space than a lot of other areas of the city.

Esther: But then you hear a voice. The voice says "Halt." There's two, actually four gnomes in very official-looking garb, their uniforms each bearing, uh, the gnomish letters B and W and a little crown insignia. And they all have gnomish spears about their size.

Esther: "We're looking for someone who matches your description, you're going to need to come with us."

Fai: Who are they speaking to?

Esther: You and Oom.

Fai: Come with you for what?"

Esther: "We need to ask you some questions. There was an incident at a location outside of town today. We need to follow up about it. It so happens two individuals with, uh, your rough description were at this location."

Fai: Gonna look at Oom and see what kind of expression I see on their face.

David: I'll try to, I'll, I'm really just looking perplexed, cause I'll be like, "My description? Like, a gnome?"

Fai: Well, I mean, can-- (laughs)

Esther: "Gnome with wild red hair wearing the approximate clothes you are wearing with large green antlered tiefling, also an elf. I would say you fit that description."

Fai: "Very well." I mean, like, it would be one thing for Oom to be like, okay, there's a million fucking gnomes here with red hair, who the fuck cares? But there are not a million tieflings in this city, so.

Fai: Alright. Alright. I guess that, I'm just going to try to project when I speak so that if anybody who is ahead of us might want to notice that this is happening just so that they know, obviously this is something we're going to have to deal with. " Very well. Where will you be taking us?"

Esther: "You will be taken to the palace of King Drum Thornfiddle for interrogation."

Fai: "Lead the way."

Esther: Well, well, well, I didn't necessarily know that, that was going to actually happen.

Fai: Are we gonna try to run or not, Oom? They're going to lead. Will we go? I haven't decided yet. But it would suck of me to run with my much longer legs and Oom's familiar. Are they turning around to lead us away? Are they trying to --

Esther: They're closing in around you, there are four of them and they are going to make a circle around the two of you.

Fai: I think my best bet is to, I don't, like if we fight them, nothing -- we've already caused a ruckus. If we fight them, nothing good can come of it.

Esther: You can certainly try to run for it.

Fai: Okay. I'm going... I'm presumably standing next to Oom and I'm going to try to whisper? And if it works it works, but I will say, " Are we going, or are we running?"

David: I guess from Perception, just looking around, if they're circling us, I'm not really, it is not looking super good for running.

Fai: Hold on. Let me try and get a better picture of this. Are there a bunch of places to hide? You said they're, it's an, an area where the buildings are more dwarven and lower?

Esther: Yeah. You're, you're getting toward a slightly more open area of the city. So the, there will be places to hide, but like not as many twisting alleyways, you're kind of in a shifting architectural and cityscape design part of Brastlewark.

Fai: Oh, damn.

Esther: So if you, if you wanted to try to make your way through them, you can roll like Acrobatics checks. You could try to trip them. You could, you could try to do a lot of various things if you want to get away.

Fai: Okay. I have been rolling very poorly today, so I'm just kind of like, it seems like that might exacerbate my problem here. Uh, Oom. What are you, where are you at? What do you think?

David: I'm kind of worse for wear. But yeah, we can YOLO it if you want to try to try to book it.

Fai: I feel like that might turn out badly for us, but it could also turn out well for us. We're trying to get out of the city so things can simmer down for a little bit, but when we inevitably come back to the city, we're just going to be coming back to an even bigger shitshow because not only did we cause this scuffle and unconscious some fucking Hellknights, but then we fled from the law, you know? So I'm just unsure of how to approach that at all.

David: Yeah, I'm assuming if eventually we're going to have to do an audience anyway... maybe running the first time...

Fai: it's not gonna, it's not gonna, it's not gonna --

David: It's not gonna end well.

Fai: -- help our--

David: Yeah.

Fai: Okay. I feel like basically if Temerity is looking at Oom and they're having a very quick 'oh, fuck' conversation with their faces, the vibe is not running. Right?

David: Yeah, yeah.

Fai: Let's do it. Let's see what happens to us.

Esther: Alright.

Esther: They'll form ranks around you and say, "This way," and lead you back roughly the way you came towards the central part of the city. It's not too far away, towards the many-spired castle of King Drum Thornfiddle.

Esther: Ember, and Professor Z. You're a little ways ahead of them with Miv, who has blended seamlessly into every building and shadow that they've come across. What would you like to do?

Justin: Do we notice this happening?

Esther: Maybe Perceive that.

Justin: Okay, that's going to be a no, but let's roll it. We'll see what happens.

Esther: Ember, you do not perceive this.

Justin: Yeah, no kidding.

Esther: Professor Z, you do. You will notice that the guard have circled around them. And there seems to be a bit of a situation.

Alex: I think, as the person whose name is attached to this, that me going back and talking to the guards is not going to be super duper helpful. But I think Professor Z is going to like try to nudge Miv and be like, "Hey, did you see that? What do you think we should do?"

Esther: "Yeah. Mm. Oh, this aint, this ain't going to go well. Oh, give me a second Z. Give me a second. Um, I think you and Ember should go on to the woods. I'm either gonna foller y'all or foller them. I can't let Oom go in there alone. Not with what Oom has. I think you ought to go ahead. I'll foller them. We'll all regroup."

Alex: "Are you sure you don't want to take Ember with you?"

Esther: "You need him for protection. I'm alright Z, I've been around."

Alex: "Alright Ember, let's go."

Esther: Let's leave it there for now and take a break.

Esther: Before break, Oom and Temerity, you were surrounded by the king's guards and began to be led away towards the palace of King Drum Thornfiddle for interrogation. Perhaps unbeknownst to you, Miv is following, uh, extremely concerned about Oom. And Ember and Professor Z are continuing to head into the forest outside the city.

Esther: So: you will be, I wouldn't say marched -- uh, escorted, through the streets of Brastlewark and you're pretty close to the Palace District. It's getting to be late evening, so the stars are coming out; they're actually out and shining quite brightly. The street lamps are really glowing and you begin to be led into like the large circular region that is the heart of the city. Looming in the distance, you can see the outline of the tall, imposing spires of the red-and-black temple of Asmodeus and closer to you, you see the palace of the king, which is also laid out in a bit of a circular form. There's some like outer -- an outer ring stone wall with little turrets and then a bigger turreted building that's kind of like a series of like, cream puffs on top, or like, like, what are those things? Macaroons? Like, the little swirly, like, Hershey kiss, but with some swirl action going on, little turrets in this palace. It seems to be largely made of stone, but there are wooden elements and it's just painted like a candy castle in a holiday display.

Esther: It's brightly colored. There's like red dots on some of these little spires and other things are just painted these bright shades of pinks or greens. Some of it looks like a bit like a classic English castle, like very dignified. And then it just transitions instantly into this garish, completely strange conglomeration of colors and shapes.

Esther: It's a building that's really one with the rest of the city architecturally. You will be led into this palace through thick wooden doors and downwards fairly quickly. It's like you get the vibe of being led to a dungeon, but like, the world's nicest dungeon? That's also kind of like if you were led to the Brastlewark equivalent of a venture capital-funded tech office. It's really a slick -- there's beautiful furnishings and you feel like you're, you're being led someplace that's maybe going to be a little bit miserable and yet, so much thought has been put into making everything really nice.

Esther: So you will arrive, you'll get the feeling a fair ways below the inhabited part of the castle, but things are really well-lit. There are plush sofas and a series of murals all around on the walls.

Esther: You'll be in like, a large open space, almost like a common room or like a living room. And on the walls, you will see a mural of like a very beautiful, colorful realm with like, giant jellyfish floating in the sky and gnomes doing a bunch of things like inventing, baking, blowing bubbles, just living their lives.

Esther: And that mural continues a way -- it's very, very fanciful, whimsical. You'll see things like weird unicorn beasts and gnomes in like bubblegum bubbles like Glinda the Good-style, floating around in the sky. And all of a

sudden there's a break in this mural and it's just kind of like a swath of a gray paint with some shadowy figures in it.

Esther: And it transitions and the colors get a little bit more mundane after that. And you see scenes of what look like familiar sights in the Material Plane, where you're from. People building houses, people wandering around working on clockworks - all gnomes - and the colors are just a little bit more muted.

Esther: And eventually, the mural makes its way it seems like almost through time, and you see that still in progress is being painted, Brastlework.

Esther: So the guards will invite you to sit on very plush gnome-sized chairs or couches and Temerity, there may be like, one seat that's more your size. But most everything is like, is smaller in this place. They'll say, "It won't be too long now." Leave you to wait for a moment.

Fai: Can I retroactively roll Perception to see if I can see Z or like any of them notice us or Miv or anything happening? Like--

Esther: Absolutely. Yes.

Fai: Just to get an idea of whether our folks know that this is happening to us.

Esther: Absolutely.

Fai: Thank you.

Esther: You certainly catch a glimpse of Miv following along behind you. You don't see Ember or Z, but it's reasonable to assume they have not been apprehended. And that either they've communicated with Miv who like, catches your eye and tries to give you like a reassuring glance, but clearly looks a little nervous. But you're, you're aware that they followed you to the palace before, like melding into the shadows.

Fai: Okay, great. I'll attempt to like, return a reassuring, we're not trying to, I'm gonna try and have a reenactment of what happened earlier. This is going to try to be a chill situation.

Justin: The complex and subtle language of eyebrow wiggling.

Fai: Thank you. I'll go ahead and politely sit in the awkwardly-placed only seat that I can fit in, but delight in the fact that it's, it's way awkward from like where they're orienting and then just kind of do that and await.

David: So is the impression that we're getting that we're, we're probably going to be interrogated by King Drum Thornfiddle himself, or is it, does it seem like it's like a toss-up as to who we're talking to?

Esther: It wouldn't be apparent at first.

Fai: It seemed like they were going to call the king directly but like, are we that important? But we do know that... Yeah. I mean, yeah, we are. We did. We fucked up, we fucked up big time. Just gonna cradle my baby.

Fai: I have like a Baby Björn or whatever situation going on. So like, my hands can be free, but the pseudodragon baby is strapped to my chest. That's the vision that I have. I don't think I painted that and I wanted to give it to everybody.

Esther: I love it.

Fai: That's why everybody was stopping me, cause of how cute we were!

Esther: You're baby-wearing! You're baby-wearing the dragon. I love it.

Fai: I'm wearing the baby dragon, yes.

Esther: So. Tension is heightened in the first few moments, the guards are all very quiet. They, they let their faces go very solemn. And then one will say, "You will answer these questions, honestly. You will give us what we want to know. Is that clear?" "

David: "Seems reasonable."

Fai: "Absolutely."

Esther: Couple more moments go by.

Fai: He's not performing any kind of magic, he's just ordering us? He's just intimidating?

Esther: He's just ordering. He's just, yeah, he's just saying that. Couple moments go by. The lights in the room start to dim. You can hear like, almost like a grinding of a gear somewhere. Like... like there's a stage in the works.

Esther: The house lights completely go down. You hear something that sounds like a, a panel sliding open somewhere and you hear a "Well, well, well. Bringing a dragon to my observatory. That's a bold move, and I intend to find out exactly what you mean by it."

Esther: Temerity...

Fai: mmhmm?

Esther: This voice, there's something about it. It just sounds like, vaguely familiar to you. You can't quite place it. Oom, you've never heard this voice before. You hear footsteps of someone approaching.

Esther: "They all think they can get the better of me, but I'm about to tell you, whatever harm you intend to come to my city, the city of keeping the colors bright in Brastlework, we are not about to let that happen.

Esther: Now we can do this the hard way, or we can do this the easier way. What's it going to be?" He waits dramatically for a response.

Fai: Okay. He's in the darkness?

Esther: Yeah.

Fai: Talking to us?

Esther: Yeah.

Fai: We have yet to see him.

Esther: Yeah.

Fai: The dramz! I'm loving it, I'm feeling it. Sorry, what was his question? What's it to be?

Esther: "Will you cooperate by answering my questions by telling me what I want to know, and why you came here to make trouble? Or are you going to make us take it from you?"

Fai: "Well, personally, I'd be happy to cooperate. I'm just curious, you know? Nothing weird happening here. So, by the way, your presentation here absolutely just..." I'll start clapping. " The drama of it all! This city really has everything."

Esther: There is an abrupt stop to the footsteps.

Fai: How familiar does that voice sound?

Esther: A moment... and then you hear someone begin to swear in Gnome.

Esther: Oom, you understand this. And the person says, "By all the bright hues of Nivi Rhombodazzle... holy fuck." The lights come up And you see before you a gnome, about three feet tall, a little over. He's wearing a long robe trimmed in what looks like some sort of fancy... it's purple and trimmed very, very fancily, with dark royal blue stockings and a waistcoat with gold buttons.

Esther: He has deep green hair and even deeper blue eyes under long sprouting blue eyebrows and a rather angular face, long nose. Oom, again, you've never seen this person before in your life. You take it to be King Drum Thornfiddle. In fact, he has some initials monogrammed on like this, this fancy silk jacket of his, that say King or like D...DTF?

Esther: [uproarious cast laughter]

Justin: Canon!

Esther: Didn't even occur to me... canon though.

Justin: Canon!

Fai: I can't find my green card, goddammit!

Esther: Canon!

David: Can't unsay it!

Esther: Canon! DTF and a little crown. (continues laughing) Temerity.

Fai: This is a familiar face to me?

Esther: This is an extremely familiar face to you. You don't know this person by the name Drum Thornfiddle.

Fai: I didn't think so. Okay.

Esther: You know them by the name Prinklegus Figwort.

Fai: That is...

Esther: It's been several decades since you've last seen him. And he looks at you with--

Fai: At least 40 years, is that right?

Esther: At least 40 years? Probably, 70 years? Yeah.

Fai: Alright. I'm not going to say anything.

Esther: He looks at you.

Esther: "What brings you here... traveller?"

Fai: "Well, you see, I met a strange dog, and... Well, you know, you're the King, I better tell you everything. I met a strange dog..."

Esther: "Yeah. Yes, I am the King, the King of this entire city. THE King. Very powerful."

Fai: "The one and only King."

Esther: "Drum Thornfiddle."

Fai: "Drum Thornfiddle."

Esther: "Yes."

Fai: "My king," * coughs* " That cough was in character. "My king, I met a strange dog, you know, stranger than like, a normal, strange dog, like, one who could talk. And he wanted me to come well, he had this mission, his, his master, she died in the Whisperwoods and he had - it's very dramatic!! You know, he has her wife-- her wedding ring and she, he wants to bring it back to her wife. And so I came with him to here and then there's all these things happening! And we went, we just went to investigate and look around and frankly, I don't understand anything, but the dragon that wasn't like that, that wasn't intended as a slight, I think."

Esther: "I will ask the questions here!" He turns to the guards.

Fai: "My sincere apologies."

Esther: " I can tell this is going to really require a very firm hand with finesse, someone who knows exactly what they're doing. I'll take care of this. I'll show you how it's done. They'll be trembling when they come out." The guards are like, "Yes, my king, yes." And will all file out. The king makes his way to the door, listens at it for a moment, locks it. Comes back and is like, "Temerity, what the fuck are you doing here?"

Fai: "What the fuck are you doing here? I haven't seen you since--"

Esther: "What the fuck are you doing here?"

Fai: "Well, I just told you what I'm doing here. It's a dog. I wasn't making that up. That's true."

Esther: "How could you come here and talk about a dragon?"

Fai: "Well, you asked me why we brought a dragon into the-- and I was just trying to explain. It's not really a dragon, it's a psuedodragon."

Esther: "Oh, I asked you that. Oh, gods.... Temerity. It's good to see you in one piece."

Fai: "Likewise. You're thriving. I see. Are you?"

Esther: "I am."

Fai: "Are you thriving?"

Esther: "I am thriving, Temerity! This is everything I haven't talked about wanting to build. I bet you thought I couldn't do it."

Fai: Did he talk about wanting to build this, and then I just came to the city and was like, huh, my disappeared friend totally talked about this ages ago?

Esther: He talked about his love of gnomekind and his wanting to, his wanting to make a space for gnomes to be themselves in the world, but he wasn't like, 'I have this whole plan to build a whole city,' like, yeah.

Fai: Okay. All right. Cool. " Well, you, you certainly accomplished it."

Esther: "I, I, I... I couldn't have done it without you, which is why, Temerity, what is all this nonsense about a dog in the Whisperwood?"

Fai: "Okay. So..."

Esther: "Why were you getting a dog from the Whisperwood?"

Fai: "Okay. Well, first of all, um, I wasn't bullshitting about the fact that the dog talks, just to be clear, the dog does talk. I... (sighs) do you..." (groans)

Fai: I'm gonna like roll my eyes so dramatically. " I, you know, everything, it kind of blurs together. I can't remember which parts of my life are connected and who knows whom. Do you know some motherfucker named Vroth'rien?"

Esther: "No."

Fai: "Okay. Well, it's, it's not important."

Esther: "Wait."

Fai: "He's a fucking asshole."

Esther: "Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. That name, that name rings a bell. That name rings a bell, you, you were telling me about some, someone like that once."

Fai: "Oh, no, that's a whole... he is just some fucking guy, you know?"

Esther: "Was he? I mean, I thought--"

Fai: "We worked together, and--"

Esther: "I thought there something more there."

Fai: "Mm. Certainly not. Anyway. He... okay. So, over the course of the last, I don't know, hundred years? I don't know how long it's been, you know how it is. He he's, he's built himself some kind of little fucking shit kingdom where he's the king of shit. Not something like you have, like he's, he's just doing everything sketchy, not like normal, cool sketchy kind of things. Like really sketchy kind of things, right? And so I broke into his house because he has an item of mine that I would very much like back.

Fai: And when I was there and looking for, you know, assorted other treasures, because if I'm there, I'm going to take some other shit too, fuck this guy! I found Ember. And, um, you know, it didn't seem like it was a good situation. I know the other things that this motherfucker has going on, we don't have to get into it right now, but Ember was in a bad situation.

Fai: Even if I didn't want to fuck this guy over, I would have released him. But when I was in the process of releasing him, he thanked me, like literally with his voice. And so that's how I found out that his master was a druid and she took him to the Whisperwood and she died there. It's unclear how. And somehow Vroth'rien got in possession of him. And Ember has like, he has, he's very strong, he breathes fire, he talks he's very special. So if you're a certain kind of asshole, you will exploit this, right? And he did. And that's a pin that maybe we wanna return to sooner rather than later.

Fai: But, Ember told me that his master, Orianna, he didn't know her name at the time, but we found it out ever since... he had her wedding ring. And he, what he really wanted to do was come back to Brastlewark. I don't know if he really knew the name of the city, but... well, it takes a long time to get any kind of information out of Ember.

Fai: So, you know, like I was very patient and it took a while, but I figured out that he wanted to get to Brastlewark and. So I, you know, I didn't really have anything going on other than the fact that I really want to go back and fuck up Vroth'rien's life. This seemed a little bit more like, important or... you know, it seemed like the right thing to do.

Fai: So I said, okay, I'll help this dog get to Brastlewark. I get here, everybody's like, 'oh my God, this dog talks!' And I, you know, for a little bit, I was like, why are they so surprised? That's not - we live in a fucking world with magic,

you know what I mean? But then I understand because they knew him before, they knew him when he could not talk, but he can talk now.

Fai: And so everything just seemed like a mystery, and you know that I love fucking mystery. I'm not trying to cause any trouble. I just want to know the gossip, man."

Esther: "Why are you wearing a dragon?"

Fai: "Well, okay. Maybe you can explain to me why I'm wearing the dragon, because it seems like some people, not everybody, because there is a Festival of Flight and dragons fly, so maybe it's a little bit more cool, but it seems like a lot of people are kind of like, weird about dragons here. And I don't like-- well, I shouldn't say that he's not really a dragon. He's a pseudodragon. They're I guess kin, or something. I don't really know. I'm a fucking country bumpkin, you know? So I'm wearing him so that we could go through the streets without people being like, 'Oh my God, why is there a dragon here?!' Why is everybody so scared of dragons here?"

Esther: "Who is this?" And he points at Oom.

Fai: "This is my new friend Oom, and if you had not addressed me so familiarly with him in the room, I wouldn't have gone quite this far, but this is my friend Oom. They're also new in town. They came for the Festival of Flight because their friend here that I'm holding is a pseudodragon and they thought, uh, this might be kind of cool. Is that right, Oom?"

David: "Yeah. Hi?"

Esther: "Hello. My name is Drum Thornfiddle, and I am the king of this city. I would ordinarily welcome you and tell you that this is the best place to be a gnome in all of Golarion, in all of the Material Plane, but I'm not sure if you're here for ulterior purposes and so I'm not going to give you my normal welcoming spiel... yet. Temerity. Am I to understand that this ex of yours had a dog--"

Fai: "Excuse me, please don't call him that, that's frankly not true at all. Like, I don't know... maybe you understood some things that, from what I said, maybe you extrapolated, but, um, absolutely not an ex, firstly."

Esther: "You were telling me about some great weekend on the lake."

Fai: "Look... that's neither here nor there."

Esther: "Alright. I don't care what he is. This Vroth'rien, you're telling me he had a dog who belonged to someone who lived here, who then went to Whisperwood and then the dog came out and can breathe fire and talk and wanted to come back here to Brastlework. To my city."

Fai: "Well, he watched her die."

Esther: "And then you met up with somebody with this little dragon?"

Fai: "Which one you want me to answer first? He watched his owner die. I don't know that level of like, sentience or intelligence he has, but obviously he feels very bad about it and he feels very sad. And I think that you have to be, if you feel sad, you're I guess... oh. I guess that answers my question from earlier. If you feel sadness, you're sentient, aren't you? Huh. Well, anyway, he felt sad and so he wanted to bring the ring. Maybe she said something when she was dying. Anyway, he wanted to bring the ring and I think-- is that weird?"

Esther: "Temerity." He's just going to regard you for a long moment I've always trusted you, but this is asking a lot of me. You must understand the position I'm in. It's... I'm under a great deal of pressure. I've built so much here and I would do anything to keep it safe. And you're telling me this sentient animal emerged from the Whisperwood to find *you*, can breathe fire and speak, and this, this other gnome, and, and the dragon... find *you* to send you here to me. It's it's too perfect. It's too perfect. She... this has her fingerprints all over it."

Fai: "Okay. Well, well, answer me this. Do you believe that I'm manipulating you or that I am being manipulated by outside forces?"

Esther: "You are being manipulated, Temerity."

Fai: "Okay. Okay. Well, that's, that's troublesome to know but, I'm glad that I still have your trust because you still have mine. You know, even though you disappeared and created this whole kingdom and you never call, you never write. But, uh, yeah, I understand. We have a long time. It's only, it's only been 70 years, you know, it takes about 200 years for our people to be like, well, maybe you coulda wrote a fucking letter. So that's, that's, it's fine. But, um, that's neither here nor there."

Esther: "Temerity, it could have put you in danger. If I had tried to, if-- I haven't tried to find you because I didn't want her tracking either one of us down."

Fai: "This...does this have to do with the thing that I took to that place?"

Esther: "Yes. Yes. This has to do with the thing you took to that place."

Fai: "Well, tell, tell me what you want me to do here, man. My King."

Esther: "I was such a fool to think she wouldn't be able to follow us. I, why, why did you bring a dragon to the observatory, Temerity?"

Fai: "No, really the, the dragon is just her, uh, familiar. We really didn't know that this is like, a thing."

Esther: He looks genuinely terrified. Like you've seen Prinkle in some scrapes before. He looks terrified now, like he's going really pale. His eyes are casting around the room, anxiously.

Fai: "Have we endangered you by doing this?"

Esther: "I, I don't, I don't know. I would have to understand more about this creature she sent. Is it her? Is it her?! Can she turn into a dog? I wouldn't put it past her."

Fai: "Well, hmm."

Esther: "She's come here. She's come here. She wants her revenge. That must be what this is, Temerity."

Fai: "Revenge for what, my friend?"

Esther: "For what we did!"

Fai: " Well, as you know, I don't really know what we did, because it is very responsible when you do the kind of things that I do to not ask too many questions."

Esther: "That's why I love working with you!"

Fai: "I know, I'm--"

Esther: "You never ask too many questions!"

Fai: "Thank you. I'm a professional."

Esther: "You are!"

Fai: "I learned from the best! Literally!"

Esther: "I would never have trusted anyone else to do it. It was -- it was a job that needed precision and you, you are from Cheliox, you know it. I wouldn't have trusted anybody else. And you did an amazing job."

Fai: "Thank you."

Esther: "So my contact told me."

Fai: "But now that the job is done and that there-- the job is long done and obviously it has brought eyes of some sorts upon us. Would you like to tell me what I actually partook in?"

Esther: "Are you sure this one can be trusted, Temerity?" He looks at Oom very suspiciously.

Fai: "I like Oom, but I'm not sure because I... when we first met our other friend, Oom interrogated this friend in such a fashion that made me feel like she was trying to take the eyes off of her and put them on him. And so, but you know, like, is that true? Is that not true? I don't know. I feel like, I feel like Oom is hiding something, but everybody's hiding something."

Fai: "Oom, what do you have to say about this?"

David: "I mean, if you want me to go into another room, I'm perfectly happy letting you talk amongst yourselves or whatever you, whatever makes you most comfortable."

Esther: The king strides to a wall where like a giant golden tassel is coming down from the ceiling and like pulls it.

Fai: I want to Perception check Oom after what I just said, please.

Esther: Okay.

Fai: If I give you a Hero Point, I can roll twice, just in case?

Esther: Yes, you can roll with advantage.

Fai: Okay. Let's do it. That's Perception I asked for, right?

Esther: Yes.

Fai: Boom, boom.

Esther: Well, the second one was definitely better.

Fai: Not that much better?

Esther: You don't know Oom that well yet. It's been a relatively short amount of time, even though you've been through a lot together. I would say it's just difficult to read them.

Fai: Okay. I just had to try it.

Esther: The guards are going to come back in and the king will say, "Take this one to our... guest quarters here. And take the dragon as well, keep them separate."

Esther: You're going to be led down a corridor, not up to what you assume are actual guest quarters, but to spacious plush room with like a nice gnome-sized bed and an armchair and a small cozy fireplace. And the guards will say, "You will stay here until the king calls for you." And they're gonna take Nommie a little further down the hall, actually just into an adjacent room, which is tricked out in the exact same way.

Esther: And they're just going to put the dragon on the bed and say, "Stay here. I suppose one of us should stay and watch you." So one of them is going to like, sit in the chair, fix their eyes on Nommie, and just sit there watching Nommie.

Esther: We'll come back to Oom in a moment. So, once the door is closed again, your friend Prinkle is going to like, motion you very close.

Esther: "Seventy years ago, I had the opportunity to do a favor for Abrogail Thrune. In return, she promised me the ability to build a city for gnomekind, the way I'd always dreamed. She promised me autonomy. She promised me the title of king. I could be whoever I wanted to be, I could make a place for us, a place where we wouldn't have to worry about fading.

Esther: Part of her price was the job. I had to go to the Whisperwood, ingratiate myself to, uh, someone who lived there, someone who House Thrune had been friendly with before.

Esther: I had to get this person to trust me. And then I had to steal from her. And I -- I stole from her, Temerity. I stole the thing that meant the most in the world to her. And then, I got it to the drop site. And you picked it up. Well, I -- I knew she would be able to track me. And so I went far away. And I knew that you could deliver it. And you did.

Esther: And I -- I've never contacted you since, because I didn't want her connecting you to me, to this. She was so angry. I've never heard a voice like that in my head before or since, and every day, I worry that she's going to come here to get her revenge on us."

Fai: Hold on. I, me myself, am developing theories right now. And, um, I'ma try to separate me from Temerity for a moment so I can come down a notch.

Fai: "Who did you steal from?"

Esther: He gets even quieter if possible. And the first time, it's like, mouthed and he -- you might have a little trouble understanding it. So he's going to have to say it again. He's like "Athervox. Her name is Athervox."

Fai: That's not what my theory was.

Esther: Well, now I really want to know what your theory was.

Fai: Can I go ahead and tell you? Well, I was just like, holy shit, did I just talk about Neriani or whatever her name is at the beginning of this episode, and then do something that would bring about meeting, you know, like I thought that that was who it was going to be.

Fai: And I was like, oh shit, but that's even fucking worse! Okay. Temerity will be, will appear to be shooque. 'Cause I thought, you know, I thought things were all just kind of like, fun and games and it steadily started escalating. And this is

like a... we just went from like floor one to space in terms of escalation as far as I can tell. So. Okay.

Fai: "So, so you... shit. Okay. I understand why you're so fucking freaked out now, man. She, she knows that -- she knows that it was you who stole?"

Esther: "Well, obviously, I mean, I didn't tell either of these names, but uh, I mean she's, she's resourceful."

Fai: Either of these names? Who you're talking about, what do you mean?

Esther: His name, Drum Thornfiddle or Prinklegus Figwort you could--

Fai: Well, okay. What I mean is was it obvious that like, he left, the thing that he took left, he's clearly the one who stole it? Or could it have been... is he the only possible suspect?

Esther: "I wasn't... there, there were others. You remember some of the old crew, they were with me. Split up since then. She knows it was me."

Fai: "Okay. Well, are you, are you sure she knows it was you, or are you being paranoid because you're--"

Esther: "I mean, obviously she would know it was me."

Fai: "You just said that there were a bunch of other people. She doesn't know this name. She's just looking for some guy named Prinkle."

Esther: "Temerity. I think it's obvious that if I stole from her and then was tracked somehow, and then she followed what I've done here, it's pretty clear that I was working for House Thrune and I imagine she wants revenge. She told me so."

Fai: "Oh, so she... she sent a message to tell you, like, 'hey, I'm coming for you, motherfucker' or what?"

Esther: "All she said was, ' Let it be remembered. We don't forget.'"

Fai: "Okay. Well, yeah, that's pretty fucking scary. Okay. Um, Hmm. You know, I'm really asking myself whether I want to ask what you stole, but it's kind of like... well, my fucking dick's already in this, you know? If she comes to kill me

for it, it's not going to be like, 'oh, excuse me, Ms. Dragon, I didn't know what it was. I didn't know what was yours.' She doesn't give a fuck. Right?"

Esther: "I don't know."

Fai: "I mean, she's gonna... The... if I'm already in danger, I might as well have my curiosity sated, right? Let's hear it. What was it?"

Esther: " It was her research."

Esther: "Her father studied the stars and she studies the stars. Her most prized possessions were her notebooks, the notes her father made, the notes she made about her instruments, about movements of the heavens. Some were in Draconic ciphers. I could never read them, but we were sent there to train with her. She accepted us willingly.

Esther: But House Thrune had hired us to betray her. And that was always the job. I would go in, I would get what she knew. We would get it to House Thrune, and I would get my city."

Fai: "I see. So it's not something you took that went missing. It's like information that you passed along, or did you take the notebooks themselves?"

Esther: "Yes, that."

Fai: The latter?

Esther: "I took all of her note-- her research, her books."

Fai: "Okay, well, man, why wouldn't you just copy them? If you were there to study with her, you could have just copied them, sent it, the books would still be there. What, what, what were you thinking? What was happening? You don't have to be able to read a cipher to copy it."

Esther: "Well, I mean, we did copy some of them, but that takes a long time. It's just easier to grab it all and go."

Fai: "Foresight, my friend! You, you could still be there. You could have been there for so long and learned so much more and saved your own ass."

Esther: "Well, I mean, I was there for a matter of years, Temerity, we don't all have as long as you do."

Fai: "Let's be proactive. What do you want to do from here? It's entirely possible that this whole dog thing is just, you know, like a weird coincidence. It's not likely, but it's possible. So let's, hope for that, but plan for other."

Esther: "Yeah. Okay. Does the dog ever talk about the stars?"

Fai: He hasn't said anything about the stars, has he? Justin?

Justin: No, he definitely, he definitely talked about when we went to the observatory, we, he had talked about stars a little bit.

Fai: Can you please give me a slight refresher on what he said?

Justin: He said an observatory is a place where you look at the stars and this location, you can see the stars, so this is an observatory, was about all that he said.

Fai: Okay. So he knows what stars are and what an observatory is, but I don't have any further information.

Justin: Yes.

Fai: He has not talked to me about the stars in any of our travels as we... I don't know how long it took us to get here, but I think it was like, a while. I think it was like at least six weeks or something, so. Okay, so nothing.

Justin: You know who did do stuff with the stars? Professor Z looked at them in the Divination chamber. He looked at star charts.

Fai: Mmm.

Justin: Anyway, for what it's worth.

Fai: Thank you.

Fai: "Well, Ember, I, uh... he, you know, he knows that the stars exist. I think that's the extent of it. He hasn't talked about anything specific about them. You know, we were in the observatory and he said, 'This is an observatory. It's what you use to look at the stars.' Well, that's not a very good Ember voice, I can try harder if you want."

Esther: "He went to the observatory, oh my goodness. Did, well. Did, did you glean anything of what we're doing there?"

Fai: "I think that the conclusion that we came to was that you're looking at the stars, but we don't really know why and that there might be some kind of dragon sex cult."

Esther: " No, no, definitely not the latter. Not, not here, not here, Temerity, obviously not. I'm terrified of them."

Fai: "Well, you know, I didn't know you were terrified of them. For all I knew, you had made a deal with a dragon and so that's how you got all of this and the Queen what's-her-name wasn't even involved. Excuse me, Her Infernal Majestrix Queen Abrogail Thrune, not what's-her-name."

Esther: "I... I guess it would be a bit far-fetched for a dog to wake up in the Whisperwood then make it to Kyonin in some asshole's house. I don't, I don't, I don't think Athervox would go... I don't think that's her style."

Fai: "Well, it's rather twisty, isn't it? I mean, she wants to kill you, she's going to come fly in and fuck your whole city up, no?"

Esther: "Exactly. That's what I've always thought, but they're also incredibly cunning, but I think that's too cunning, I don't think she would have... Why, if you were a powerful dragon, would you shut yourself in some asshole's home? I, I'm willing to believe you on this dog for now."

Fai: "Oh, okay. Let me, let me clarify, like... there was some not-good stuff happening to this dog. So like, I, really don't think... if you think that she has taken the form of Ember, um, hmm. It will be like, it would be a whole other level of method acting, man, because like, some really bad shit was going on over there. Like, yeah... I get the impression that he was there, like for a while. So it doesn't seem too put together that she would put herself through this much just to, and you know, it's a little bit too much, man. Is it possible that she's, that she has machinations in, in play right now and everything? Of course, but that level, that one's a little bit, it's too far, I think."

Esther: "Well, that's reassuring to hear. I think that makes sense. And I'm willing to go with it for now. I want to meet this animal, but I believe you."

Fai: "Okay. Well, um, we're working on the complexities of morality with Ember right now. So, sometimes he smells people and he tries to see if they're

good or bad. And you know, we're talking about how you can't really smell if someone's good or bad but the, complexities of what good and bad is, it's, it's too much for him right now. You know, man? So yes, you should meet him, but he breathes fire, so, like be chill, man, okay?"

Esther: "I'm very good at being chill."

Fai: "Okay. Well, he's, he's also a dog. So if you're threatening to his friends, like, you know, me or anybody else, he will attack you. And that's what happened at the observatory. You know, I was just trying to see what's happening. And then my friends were with me and they were trying to see what's happening. Not, you know, nothing bad, just curiosity."

Fai: "But your knights, they kind of were threatening... And so Ember had to attack and uh, that's what happened. And I'm really very sorry about it. I did my best. You know, it's not good business for me to come to a new town and start fucking killing knights."

Esther: "I completely agree. Temerity, those-- those Hellknights are dangerous. They... I'm so relieved that they didn't hurt you, but they really could have. I don't like to go up there myself. They make me uncomfortable."

Fai: "If they make you uncomfortable, why are... So, so what's the observatory about then?"

Esther: "It's part of the deal."

Fai: "You don't know what it's for."

Esther: "Not really, no. I mean, I know that House Thrune and I seem to have a mutual interest in detecting draconic presences, but I have no idea why they want it built. I have no idea why they wanted her notes, nor do I care to. Should she come and ask me I want to be able to honestly say I have no idea why I had to do it."

Fai: "Well, you know, I think that's fair enough. So this, this observatory, it's to it's to track the dragons? To, to anticipate dragons coming? To creep on dragons?"

Esther: "I would certainly like to use it to be able to discern if Athervox is up there flying our way, but I don't know why they want it built."

Fai: "You are my friend. Whatever you need, I want to help you with. I don't want to get you in trouble. Even if I wasn't directly implicated, I would still want to help you. You have made something amazing here and you know, where we come from, sometimes you gotta make a deal to make something happen. I understand it. Maybe this deal might turn out to be more expensive than you thought it was going to be in terms of how much of your life gets sacrificed."

Esther: "It already has been, but it was worth it."

Fai: "What do you mean?"

Esther: "Temerity, so much has happened. I don't know if I can tell you all about it in one evening. Tell you what: be my guests. Stay here. You'll be lavishly treated, I have really built quite a life for myself."

Fai: " You clearly have, my friend."

Esther: "I'll, um, after perhaps ascertaining a little bit more about them, let your friend out of our guest quarters. And if there's other folks like the Professor, Z, that fellow, if he's involved in this kerfuffle as well, he can stay here or go back to his home. The dog can stay with us. And I'll tell you a little bit about what I've been up to. You can have the grand tour of the palace, of Brastlewark, anything you want."

Fai: "I would dearly like that. That sounds wonderful."

Esther: "Things are complicated. I'm trying to do so much and I have gotten a little over my head, but there's time for that. We'll get there. It's good to see you again, Temerity."

Fai: "Oh, it's good to see you, my friend! It's so wonderful to know that you've worked toward what you want, and you know what? There's risk in all endeavors. You did only what you had to do."

Esther: "And I did it with the best." he just like gives you if you had a secret handshake back in the day.

Fai: [laughs] Yes, definitely.

Esther: He's going to like, do the secret handshake. "Temerity, remember: Prinklegus Figwort, that's not a kingly name. Drum Thornfiddle. Call me Drum."

Fai: "That name will never pass these lips again, my friend."

Esther: "You're the best, Temerity."

Fai: "Well, I try. Now let me tell you, I wasn't joking when I was talking about your entrance earlier, it was everything. Come on, the darkness, the cranks, it, it was really a performance that you put on, and it was very intimidating."

Esther: "Well, you know, my friend, you've got to give them a show. I mean, it's not that often I have to use this room, but I did dream it up myself for the occasion that I might have to interrogate someone and you know, it does my heart good to know that I nailed it."

Fai: "You used it to its utmost effect. I have to tell you, I have to tell you."

Esther: "Let's get you settled. I'll um, I'll see to your friend and then see she's comfortable."

Fai: "Go easy on her. I do believe that she's just in town for this festival and you know, I absolutely understand that the dragon is a little bit of a like sensitive issue to you, but Oom did not know that when they came to town at all. Not everybody has appreciation for the art of stealth, you know how it is."

Esther: "Oh, gods, do I know. The guards? They sound like a herd of elephants in the night... so glad you're here, my friend. I wish I'd been able to give you a proper welcome from the beginning, but now it'll be like old times."

Fai: "You know, I, I think that was a pretty good welcome, actually. It had style and that's really the cornerstone of a proper welcome, I think."

Esther: "Well, if you think that's good..." and he's going to like go off on some of what he's accomplished since he's been here and he'll like, walk you upstairs through something that is rather like a modern-day elevator, except it's operated by a very complex series of like clockwork gears and levers and steam somehow.

Fai: Is this the kind of thing that I've seen anywhere or is this like a sort of technology that they have invented?

Esther: This would be a pretty, a pretty rare thing. It's something that like is very unique to Brastlewark I think.

Justin: There is one in the bakery, right? Maybe similar.

Esther: There is one in the bakery, yeah, similar one, like it's -- but it seems, it seems unique to Brastlewark.

Fai: We climbed stairs in the bakery and they had like a dumbwaiter. Is that not what happened there? Okay. We're being elevated right now.

Esther: Yes, you are elevated.

Fai: Okay. Okay okay okay.

Esther: I think we should maybe leave things here-ish for today. We'll leave Ember and Professor Z heading into the woods, which is going to be really fun.

Esther: Temerity, you're getting shown to like a lavish suite, like the presidential suite next to the king suite for the very finest guest.

Fai: Movin' on up in the world.

Esther: Yes. And Oom. You're actually going to be in a very comfortable room and you may be able to hear from the room on the other side of you, not where Nommie is, but a slight knocking sound, just a tapping. You hear, "Hello. Is someone in there?"

David: I'll lean closer and be like, "Hello? Who is, who is this?"

Esther: And you just hear -- like, can't quite make it out. And then the door opens and one of the king's guards is standing in front of you is going to say, "His Majesty would like to see you upstairs in a parlor to ask you a few questions over evening brandy, if you will."

David: "Sounds lovely. Should I dress in nicer clothing is... what--"

Esther: "This will be sufficient."

David: "Alright."

Esther: "Your pet may come as well."

David: "My friend, yes."

Esther: "Your friend."

David: "Okay."

Esther: The door to Nommie's room will open and you just see like this guard, like staring directly at Nommie, who might be doing something really cute, up to you.

David: Nommie will probably just, yeah. Be chilling out if the bed's comfortable.

Fai: Nommie like, just relaxed, not even looking?

David: Yeah. (laughs) Nommie's probably not paying attention, honestly.

Esther: Laser- focused on this little pseudodragon, like just relaxed to completely on the bed. Uh, and then Nommie can get up and make their way up with you. But as you also ascend this elevating contraption, those voices are going to echo in your mind. You weren't alone down there.

Esther: Let's leave things there for today.

Fai: Wowie!

Esther: So... how are all of your characters feeling right now?

Justin: Ember is feeling like he did a good job at sneaking. He's thinking that Temerity will be very proud when they meet up at the, at the individual's house to the north. That is pretty much where he is right now.

Fai: Temerity is... thrilled on multiple levels. Thrilled to see an old friend, to know that he's well... ish. Um, and also because who doesn't love getting the fucking gossip dump? I mean, he just got the tea to end all tea served to him.

Fai: And, you know, it's also tea that, you know, he might die from, so that makes it extra interesting.

Fai: So, yeah, Temerity's doing great right now in the like plush bed. Definitely wasn't sleeping in a bed this nice last night, definitely hasn't done it in quite a while because he's spent a long time sleeping rough and traveling with a dog. So, you know, taking a bath, if there's a facilities of some sort available.

Fai: Yeah. Temerity's taking a bubble bath right now, fucking chilling.

David: I think Oom's just confused AF right. I mean, you know, we went from, we went from preparing to get interrogated to, I don't know what all that was with, you know, Temerity and, and, you know, the king that went by multiple names as, as he was, uh, chatting back and forth with him. So I think, yeah, I think Oom is just uh... cautiously confused.

Fai: Oom didn't hear any alternate names, did she?

David: I thought at the beginning, they, right before I was excused for them, for them chatting, there was, or I don't know, maybe it could have been mistaken.

Fai: I think Esther said I know him as, but I don't think, I don't think anybody said his other name.

Justin: I, I do think there was a not-so subtle Drum Thornfiddle, Drum Thornfiddle, that is the name you know me by, Drum Thornfiddle, which I don't think was--

David: Yeah there was definitely a lot of weird, like hidden communication going on. Like there was some sort of subtext, yeah.

Fai: There was, there was, there was a couple of conversations that were happening and you could only really hear one of them.

David: Yeah.

Justin: It was very, it was very, uh, from Cinderella, Kit, Kit, my name is Kit.

Esther: Legit to be confused AF.

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