Episode 10: His Best Self

# Land Acknowledgement

[00:00:00] **Esther:** This episode was recorded and produced on Lisjan Ohlone land. We give our great respect to the indigenous peoples of this land and the surrounding areas, and to the indigenous peoples of all the lands that you are joining us from. To learn more about how you can support Lisjan Ohlone land rematriation, please read the information in our episode description.

# Solidarity With Labor Actions

[00:00:21] **Esther:** This episode is being released as the Writer's Guild of America, the WGA, and the Screen Actors' Guild, SAG-AFTRA, are both engaged in historic labor strikes. While none of us are members of the WGA or SAG-AFTRA, we want to express our full support for these strikes. That's why we are including links to the strike funds in our episode description, and we encourage you to check them out.

# Rainbow Roll Network

[00:00:45] **Multiple Speakers:** Proud member of the Rainbow Roll Network. Rainbow Roll: our stories, our voices.

# Content Notices

[00:00:53] **Esther:** Content notices for this episode include: references to and portrayals of ableism; alcohol use; portrayals of incarceration; strong language.

# Welcome and Introductions

[00:02:22] **Esther:** Hello, everyone. Welcome to Chromythica. I am so happy to have you all here, both my wonderful friends and players and our audience. We are a Pathfinder 2e actual play campaign, and I am Esther Wallace, your GM. And I use she and they pronouns. And I'm going to ask our cast to go around and introduce themselves, the characters that they play, and to tell us something you're excited for in today's game, either you as a player or that your character is excited about.

[00:02:57] **David:** Hi, I'm David. I use he/him pronouns, and I play Oom, our party's gnome sorcerer. He uses any combination of she, him or they pronouns and Oom's pseudodragon familiar Nommie, who uses he/him pronouns. And I think I'm just excited to see where this next stage of the exchange with King DTF takes us. There's just a lot to unpack with all of the different bargains that he's made.

[00:03:27] **Alex:** Hi everybody. I'm Alex. I use they/them pronouns. I'm playing Professor Z, an academic inventor gnome.

I am most excited, today, I think about the potential for the party to reunite. I feel like we've been learning a lot in our separate journeys for the past couple episodes. And hopefully, we'll be able to bring that all back together and really, really make a scheme or a plan or something for how we're going to really mess up the Festival of Flight.

[00:03:54] **Justin:** I'm Justin. I use he/him pronouns, and I am playing our canine barbarian Ember, who also uses he/him pronouns for whatever a dog has limited perspective on gender is. I think I am excited to now have 50 whole hit points. Ember I think is very excited to sleep. So we'll see how long he can sleep this particular episode.

[00:04:21] **Fai:** I'm Fairuz. You can call me Fai if you like. My pronouns are she and they, and I play Temerity Vane, our party's rogue, who is a tief-elf and uses he/him pronouns.

I think the most excitement I have is to both figure out and see what happens to Temerity in his new capacity as king's advisor. I think that's what he's going to claim for himself. You know, you gotta, you gotta take the job that's offered and whatever you can put on the CV, baby. So that's where, that's where me and Temerity are at.

# Warm-up Question

[00:05:06] **Esther:** Awesome. Thank you. So in Chromythica, we have a tradition of asking a warmup question before the beginning of each game to help get into character, to maybe learn a little bit about everybody's characters that might not otherwise come up. And we're going to do that now.

And this week's warmup question, *questions* are: tell us about a time when you wound up in an unexpected place. What was that place and what experiences did you have there? What did you make of it in the end? This place could be a geographic location, an emotional or mental location, a professional position, et cetera.

[00:05:52] **Fai:** Okay. So one time, me and my cousin Zorzi, I know I talk about her a lot, but you know, we're like besties, you know, she's my best friend. We're very close. So when we were very young, we were exploring, you know, that's what you tell your moms, so that you can just like fuck off and go smoke in the woods or whatever.

And so we were exploring in the Mierani Forest, right? So neither of us is very good at like tracking and like foresty things, right, you know? She sings very well. I've got like sticky fingers. So we got lost... oh, it was -- we were traveling for, it seemed like forever! You know, even with our perspective, it seemed like a really long time. And ultimately we decided that--, and I mean, it was more than one night, let me be clear. It wasn't just a really long day, and you have to camp multiple times.

So one of the nights? One of the, you know, the sun is setting, it's very beautiful, but we're like, fuck, I want to go home, done with this forest shit by now. And so, you know, we were looking for a place to make ourselves, you know, camp or whatever, and we stumbled upon a party in the woods, right? And they're satyrs and, you know, like, of course, and I have met a satyr before.

I'm from the woods too, but these weren't ones that we already knew, so that was pretty cool.

And we just, you know, we frolic, we had a merry time, but that's how I met my friend Neriani. And so, ultimately, you know, it was very stressful being lost and not really knowing maybe what you're supposed to eat and what you're not supposed to eat, and if you find the cactus, should you drink what's out of the cactus, you know, the juice...

It was ultimately worth it because I met such a wonderful friend and well I haven't seen her in many, many years, but something tells me that we are soon to be reunited.

[00:08:02] **Justin:** There was a day in Brastlewark when the wild master, my master was giving people things in exchange for coin, and I was being a good dog, and I was waiting patiently, but then I smelled the maker of meat. And he was not where he typically was. So I followed the smell to a large building. I had not been in this building before.

But the meat maker was there behind a large table. And then there was someone very, very tall across from him. And this very, very tall person was talking very loudly and I-- it was a game. So I then talked very, very loudly and then they talked even louder. And so I talked even louder until eventually my master came and told me that we should probably go.

 Only once I gained sentience did I discover that this was a courtroom. And that perhaps that was not the best thing to do? I think I was a bad dog that day. A naughty dog, I should say.

[00:09:17] **Alex:** So this takes me back to when I had first joined the Scholarium. I joined the Scholarium, and I had sort of struck up a little bit of a friendship with Wolfbert Rumblebelly who we, we've all met. And there was one day where, you know, occasionally people from the Scholarium, they would, they would go out to lunch and Wolfbert invited me to come out to lunch with him, and I think a few other professors, and it was, you know, one of those moments of really feeling like I was finally joining the in club. But it didn't quite go as I wanted. Wolfbert Rumblebelly invited me to lunch at the Clockwork Inn, which I now know is, you know, a quite well-known place around town, but I was, you know, out walking to find it, and I stopped and I asked somebody and, and, you know, I, I think I had sort of gotten the name a little bit wrong.

So I, I knew it as the Cockwork Inn. And they sent me to an inn with a rooster on the front. But said, you know, 'Are you sure that's where you're supposed to be going? Because it, it's not really very lively in the middle of the day around lunchtime.' But I was like, 'Yes, but I'm meeting a friend there. So I, I think it will be just fine.' And so I went off to, to the inn with the rooster on the front and went inside and there were, there were, you know, not that many gnomes there, but one thing I noticed is that none of them were wearing shirts. And it was just a little bit, you know, dark, and there weren't many windows. And so it seemed like kind of an unusual place. But I got a table anyways and, you know, sat down to, to order some lunch.

You know, it strikes me that Wolfbert never, never arrived. So I think they must have actually gone to lunch somewhere else, and I really did get the name of the inn wrong. But I, I had a really wonderful time because this whole crowd of other people just came down and sat and had lunch with me.

And it was just really fun, and we had a great time, and we ended up drinking and singing and I stayed there really all afternoon and didn't get anything done, socializing and becoming friends. And you know, I still go back sometimes for lunch when I'm really, you know, want to see, see them again.

They've tried to suggest that I come much later in the night, but I've never made it because usually I get caught up fixing up my inventions. But I've heard it's quite the raucous place there. They keep saying that they could really use an inventor who can build some wonderful contraptions there.

So maybe sometime I'll go and help them finish their construction. But it just really wasn't, wasn't the lunch I was expecting.

[00:11:33] **David:** I guess we have a new place to visit during our downtime.

So, I guess I feel like I'm in an unexpected place, like, right now. Like, there's just a lot to unpack with King DTF. And, honestly, just drinking, I'm just trying to wrap my head around Temerity having dated Vroth'rien and so that's just going to have to be something we, we, we revisit later, maybe over more drinks with, with King DTF and more hanging out.

So I guess we're just going to have to wait and see.

[00:12:06] **Fai:** Excuse me. I believe that Temerity made a point at length that just because somebody takes you to the lake and rails you doesn't mean that your fucking dating. But I guess, you know, maybe Oom had a couple, too many. I don't know.

[00:12:23] **David:** I mean, things might get lost with drinking. So I guess we're just going to have to see for ourselves what, what lessons we learned.

[00:12:32] **Fai:** That's fair.

# Recap

[00:12:34] **Esther:** Well, on that note, let's remember where we left off, and we'll see where we pick things up again. When we were last in our story, Professor Z and Ember headed into the woods north of Brastlewark where you attempted and failed to set up a camp.

However, Professor Z managed to convert Buster into a beautifully working oven while Ember, you visited a nearby creek that you remember frequenting with Orianna. Shortly after this, a small creature with three eyes came to the edge of the clearing you were in. Professor Z, you recognized that this being was speaking Undercommon and was murmuring about your 'shinies,' which he wanted to procure for himself. It became clear that he wanted metal. First, Buster. Then, some of your odds and ends.

And then when Ember got back, Orianna's ring, which Ember wears on a cord around his neck. After some back and forth attempts at bargaining, the being became frustrated and whistled, saying that 'she' will be here and intimating that he and she would kill you for the shinies if you wouldn't agree to the terms of his trade.

'She' turned out to be a giant bat, and you engaged both of these creatures. And I don't think that you ever identified the first one, but you engaged both of them in combat. You were aided unexpectedly by a gnome who emerged from the forest. And after defeating this hostile being and the giant bat, you realized this gnome is a Bleachling, someone who is undergoing the effects of The Bleaching, which is a much-feared condition that only affects gnomes. Ember, you and this gnome woman remember meeting each other when Orianna would visit her and she seems to have very fond memories of Orianna.

Professor Z, you felt a little awkward around this person. The Bleachingis something that's a little fraught in gnome society. And it's something that is thought to not happen in Brastlewark. You've never met someone here who's experiencing The Bleaching, so you weren't quite sure what to say or what to think. This person, whose name I'm also not sure you got, invited you to stay in her home for the night.

She shared with you that since Orianna is no longer here, she watches over the woods now to guard against any who would harm them to the point of imbalance and to guard against creatures like the ones you just fought. She says that more and more of these creatures seem to be coming down out of the Asphodell Mountains.

You made it to her house, which is a half a living tree, half constructed from more regular materials. And you fell into a deep sleep.

Temerity and Oom, back in the city, in the palace of King Drum Thornfiddle, the two of you enjoyed a discussion over brandy with King DTF himself. Temerity, King Drum Thornfiddle explained his motives in asking you to assist with his heist of the research of Athervox, a Green dragon astronomer who lives in the Whisperwood.

He explained to you that, in exchange for the right to build the city of Brastlewark and to have a fair amount of autonomy there as ruler, House Thrune had asked him to steal Athervox's research and to construct an observatory. He doesn't know why.

He also shared with you that, in order to further his goals of uncovering the cause of The Bleaching and maybe figuring out how to stop its effects, he's continued making deals with powerful parties, but not with House Thrune.

He isn't too keen on extending that line of credit much further. And so he's turned to a powerful fey entity and to his long-sundered kindred the Svirfneblin, who are also known as the Deep Gnomes, who live deep under the ground. You learned that he's been kind of playing both sides of this equation.

He's promised the Deep Gnomes aid and information in their ongoing struggle against this Frilogarma entity -- and Frilogarma, who he also refers to as the ruler of the Court of Ether, aid against the Deep Gnomes. Frilogarma has told Drum that in return for information about the causes and means of prevention for The Bleaching, she expects him to bring her something called the Sword of Time.

Oom, this would sound familiar to you. Temerity, you recall that your fey friend, Neriani, knows Frilogarma and had mentioned to you that she would follow wherever Frilogarma goes.

Oom and Temerity, you both convinced DTF that he's made some bad choices born from good intentions over the past several decades and agreed to talk to the Svirfneblin he's keeping in comfy prison in the morning.

As we left things, Oom, you were confused and curious about Temerity's relationship with Vroth'rien, the man who held Ember captive for over a year.

Temerity, you felt like there's a lot going on. You truly believe that your friend King DTF can turn this around in some way. Whether he'll survive it, you don't know, but you believe he can make amends with the people he's imprisoned in a comfy castle.

Z, you were tired and wanted to just have a regular camping trip. Not to be attacked by a giant bat. You're feeling a little awkward at the moment but ready for a regular night's sleep.

And Ember, you were exhausted from a full day of fighting. Happy to be somewhere cozy and a little worried about Friend Temerity, but you trusted that he's good at sneaking and he's okay.

# Beginning of Play

[00:18:52] **Esther:** That's where we left things and where we'll come back in. You will all have a deep, wonderful night's sleep, unless you'd like to specify otherwise to me. Wake up fully rested and refreshed in the morning. And maybe we'll start with Professor Z and Ember.

So tell me about how you wake up in the morning. How are you feeling?

[00:19:25] **Alex:** I think Professor Z wakes up, like, I wake up really-- One of those nights sleep where I probably would have wanted to stay up longer the night before and actually talk to our host, but just after all the sort of commotion in the woods and the fighting, just really passed out and slept like a total log. And wake up the next morning, like maybe a little bit achy, but feeling much, much better and much more rested after so many intense things happening in the last couple of days.

And immediately in waking up, like, want to start to unwind, like introduce myself to our host and ask what she meant by like, balance in the forest.

[00:20:04] **Justin:** Ember will kind of stretch and yawn kind of get back on his-- like stand up, stand up with the hind legs first and like, you know, stretch and I think there was a fireplace, right?

Yeah. I imagine it's mostly embers by this point. Will head over and just kind of stoke it and, you know, breathe a little life into the fire. And then will want to go outside. Is the door open? Is there a door?

[00:20:35] **Esther:** There will be a little door. Actually, there's probably a couple entrances or exits. Like a regular door and then maybe something that like a Druid could cause to part. Like a bunch of branches that have grown very close together, like a thicket, like the kind of thickness that ivy that grows up the side of a building gets and sort of like a matted twisted, wall shape, but that a Druid could probably part pretty easily using special Druid powers.

The door is actually going to be ajar, and you would both wake to find her not in the house, but it would be safe to assume she's pretty close by.

[00:21:18] **Justin:** Is, is Professor Z kind of in the same room, or is it Professor Z-- Okay. Ember will acknowledge Professor Z and was going to nose his way through the door to the outside and is going to find a quiet spot and sit down and kind of stare out at, you know, the trees for a little bit in an attempt to emulate the way Orianna used to meditate in the mornings.

But without doing anything that actually would be considered meditation, just kind of staring in space for a solid five to 10 minutes.

# Zaelie Lilyfrost

[00:21:54] **Esther:** That's perfect because actually he could see that seated under a nearby tree is your host, who also seems to be meditating in the way Orianna would meditate in the mornings.

So she'll finish up, sooner rather than later, and will look up to see you, smile gently, then rise and make her way back over to the house towards you.

"Good morning."

[00:22:24] **Justin:** "It is morning. I am worried."

[00:22:29] **Esther:** " Why are you worried?"

[00:22:33] **Justin:** "Two more people did not arrive. Did they? In the night?"

[00:22:40] **Esther:** "No."

[00:22:41] **Justin:** "I do not smell them. I am worried."

[00:22:50] **Esther:** "These people... you are expecting them?"

[00:22:54] **Justin:** "They said we would come here. They said that the city was a bad place for us now."

[00:23:01] **Esther:** "Hmm. And why did they say that?"

[00:23:10] **Justin:** Just cocks his head.

[00:23:11] **Esther:** "I can tell that your spirit is troubled. Have faith in your friends. I will do what I can to help you find them."

[00:23:22] **Justin:** "Friend Tief-Elf is good at sneaking. Perhaps friend Tief-Elf is sneaking now."

[00:23:30] **Esther:** "Perhaps. We shall see in time." She'll go into the house. "Good morning."

[00:23:40] **Alex:** "Good morning! I'm really sorry, we didn't, I didn't properly introduce myself last night. I'm, ah, Professor-- Professor Z from the Scholarium in town. And I see that you've met Ember, the dog who has..."

[00:23:54] **Esther:** "I knew Ember when he was with Orianna. Professor Z, it is a pleasure to meet you. I am Zaelie Lilyfrost. This is my home."

[00:24:08] **Alex:** "It's wonderful to meet you. I'm really curious to know more about your time in the woods out here. We've been through, through quite a lot. And you talked about balance in the woods and I just, I feel like things are out of balance these days."

[00:24:23] **Esther:** "I cannot disagree with you. Things are imbalanced here at the moment. What would you like to know?"

[00:24:33] **Alex:** "Well, first of all, how, how did you know to come and assist us? And, and have you seen those kinds of creatures before? What are they doing in the woods?"

[00:24:45] **Esther:** "I often walk through the woods at night, both to commune with the spirits of nature, which give me strength and guidance, and to ensure that all is well for those who may wish to explore their curiosity here. It is becoming more and more common that such creatures appear. I believe they come from the mountains. From below the roots of the mountains."

[00:25:20] **Alex:** "Fascinating. I mean, I, I was a little bit, I don't know, things have, are, are a little bit-- I feel, weird with Brastlewark, too. Do you know about the observatory that they're constructing?

[00:25:34] **Esther:** "Observatory. This building upon one of the foothills?"

[00:25:41] **Alex:** "Yes. It just really seems to be like a somewhat unnatural place."

[00:25:49] **Esther:** "The ground was broken and disturbed long before I was born. The powers of Asmodeus gather there. I do not think these creatures, the ones that you fought, gather there."

[00:26:05] **Alex:** "Oh, fascinating. So you don't think the, the strange creatures in the woods have anything to do with the strange experiments, whatever, that's going on at the observatory?"

[00:26:15] **Esther:** "No. What happens there does not imbalance the forest, the river, the land here. The land itself, there feels the power of the Lord of Hell, but not so much that it spreads throughout the city."

[00:26:38] **Alex:** "Fascinating. As a, as an academic myself, it just seemed like a really unusual way to conduct, research at that observatory. But I'm curious, you talk about the, sort of the balance in these woods and the creatures coming from the mountains. Do you understand what's going on there? Like what, what is the phenomenon that is causing that to happen?"

[00:26:59] **Esther:** "I could not tell you. Perhaps they flee something they fear there more than they fear the bright world of the surface. Perhaps they are sent by some force. They grow more powerful. At first, only the mildest of beings that dwell below the earth appeared, as if they were looking for something, seeking a place. Now, they grow steadily in power. I expect that will continue until the reason they come is determined."

[00:27:38] **Alex:** "Do you work with other people to help determine the reason? Like how, how do you end up as the sort of keeper of this part of the woods?"

[00:27:47] **Esther:** She looks at you and she smiles and she says, "Do you think anyone would want to work with me?"

[00:27:57] **Alex:** "That's a very strange way to put it. I mean, collaboration is the heart of all curiosity and discovery, right?"

[00:28:09] **Esther:** "I tend to unsettle people. They forget their curiosity."

[00:28:19] **Alex:** "Oh."

[00:28:19] **Esther:** "They remember their fear. So none have come to work with me."

[00:28:26] **Alex:** " Is that, is that because of your complexion?"

[00:28:31] **Esther:** She, she has this look of someone who's like, 'I know he's really trying.' [laughs]

"I, I suppose, in their minds, yes. Is it because of the way I look, or is it because of their own fear?"

[00:28:57] **Alex:** "I see, I see. I mean, I guess I just... I'm surprised. It seems like there's a lot to, to discover and understand about the balance in these woods. And I feel like it would be important, you know, if not to the Scholarium, to the sort of civic society in Brastlewark that we ensure that whatever is, is off balance, doesn't eventually make its way to the city. I mean, I never thought I could, you know, in a day's walk, be camping somewhere and be attacked by such strange and, and foul creatures."

[00:29:33] **Esther:** "Well, in the absence of someone whose power used to protect these woods, they become vulnerable. The powers in the city care for protecting its streets, its towers, its libraries, its borders. They can forget what it takes to protect the areas around. Orianna knew."

[00:30:07] **Alex:** "Do you have special powers to protect the woods?"

[00:30:12] **Esther:** "I am learning."

[00:30:13] **Alex:** "Who are you learning from?"

[00:30:21] **Esther:** "The land teaches me. The river teaches me. The plants teach me. If you learn how to listen deeply, they can teach you a great deal. Sometimes, I call upon the powers of Gozreh. Sometimes, I call upon the powers of all that is green and growing and decaying and giving way to new life. It is all connected."

[00:30:51] **Alex:** "Fascinating. I'm really surprised you aren't involved with any of the academic institutions in town. It just seems like there's so much to be shared here, but I guess... I guess something that I'm, I'm learning and seeing here is that the edges of Brastlewark can be quite abrupt. I mean, I had spent so much time in the city and things were very different outside. I just thought, you know, a little camping trip would be pretty, well simple, and it really isn't."

[00:31:23] **Esther:** "Long did Orianna's power guard these woods. It will take time to grow in power until I am able to protect them as she did."

[00:31:37] **Alex:** "Would you tell me more about how she protected them? I mean, I knew Orianna from, you know, the, the Selestine Bakery, but that's--"

[00:31:46] **Esther:** "I did not know her well. She would come to visit me when it was realized... she would come to visit me. One of few who would. So I did not learn this from her, but I admired her. Perhaps those who would have troubled these woods knew that someone very powerful guarded them. Perhaps they did not always know when she would be away and so they did not chance it, knowing she was here. Knowing the, the strength of the wizards, the scholars, the inventors in town. And now that she is gone, perhaps there's an opening for more of that."

[00:32:38] **Alex:** " Oh my. Oh my. I mean, I really just-- has none of this been discussed with the powers of the city? I mean, it really seems like something that Brastlewark should take an interest in."

[00:32:53] **Esther:** Roll Diplomacy.

[00:32:56] **Alex:** I rolled a 21.

[00:32:59] **Esther:** Okay.

"Do you think that if I walked into the city, tried to discuss these matters with even the lowest of scholars, they would hear me?"

[00:33:18] **Alex:** "Well, I'm not the lowest of scholars. And, you know, I think that's a, that's a really important-- It's just-- it seems fundamental to our curiosity that we understand these things anyways. And I just-- you know, if I can be attacked in the woods like this, I just, I, you know. What of the students, if they venture out of town? It just, it seems like something that really the city should understand."

[00:33:44] **Esther:** "You have a good heart. You are very kind. Perhaps you do not understand that the king does not believe people like me should exist."

[00:34:02] **Alex:** "Oh. Do you mean... do you mean because of..." [Z gestures at his face and body]

[00:34:12] **Esther:** "Because of." [ Zaelie gestures at her face and body]

[00:34:18] **Alex:** "I-- oh my gosh. I had no idea. I mean, I guess... I guess it's true that all the gnomes in Brastlewark are quite brightly colored, but it... I guess I'd just not really thought about it much."

[00:34:36] **Esther:** "I find it's easy to not think about it until it happens to you."

[00:34:41] **Alex:** "Oh, well, I mean, you know, that's, Brastlewark is just a place brimming with curiosity and construction and, and that's why I continue to pursue my academic and invention studies. I really hope to find some amazing discoveries that help maintain my colors."

[00:35:07] **Esther:** "I wish you the best. You know, I was born here. And she just does this gesture again at you. [gestures at her face and body]

"You know, it's really not what everybody makes it out to be. So I would tell you if you want to research because you love making things, that is a beautiful thing.

Consider what it means to be a guest in someone's home, and then mention to them that you want to discover many things to keep yourself from becoming like them." And she gives you the warmest smile.

[00:36:09] **Alex:** "Oh. I see. I mean, I guess just-- I hadn't really thought of it like that. It's just so common in Brastlewark to, just as a greeting, you know, 'may your colors stay bright,' and I hadn't really considered. I guess I just don't know much about what happens when one's colors fade away."

[00:36:32] **Esther:** It's easy not to think about it until it happens to you. What happens is one's colors fade, and one keeps going. One keeps going. Less... what happens to me and... what happens to everybody else in response to me."

[00:37:05] **Alex:** "Oh, I just had no idea."

[00:37:11] **Esther:** "Perhaps you can think about it. And if we grow to know one another better, I will tell you more."

[00:37:20] **Alex:** "Okay. Is there anything that I should convey back to the city about what is out of balance in these woods? I mean, I feel that I really must tell somebody in town. Things are not quite right. It seems almost urgent, perhaps, if, you know, those creatures could attack the town next time."

[00:37:39] **Esther:** "If you know those who are skilled in the arts of magic or who have some knowledge of the natural world, perhaps convey to them that creatures from below the mountains are growing more common in these woods, and they do not all come with good intention. They seem as if they have a purpose, but I cannot determine what that purpose is. If you were to make the scholars aware of this, the king aware of this, perhaps measures could be taken to determine the cause."

[00:38:18] **Alex:** "Yes. Yes, indeed. I mean, I hope I can at least gather some colleagues to come, come with me and help study this phenomenon out here.

I mean, could we return to you when I have gathered some of my colleagues who are very knowledgeable in the, in the ways of creatures from under the mountains."

[00:38:42] **Esther:** She pauses for a long time and studies you very intently.

"We shall see. If you bring them into these woods and let me observe them for a while, perhaps I will feel more comfortable meeting them than if you were to bring them to my house."

[00:39:09] **Alex:** " Oh wait, you said you are a Lilyfrost. Do you know the owner of the Lilyfrost Inn?"

[00:39:18] **Esther:** "She is my mother."

[00:39:21] **Alex:** "Oh, well, I have been to the Lilyfrost Inn many times. She makes quite good food."

[00:39:28] **Esther:** "She does. I don't get to have it as often as I would like."

[00:39:37] **Alex:** "Oh, that's too bad. We should go sometime. It would be fun. I-- the least I can do to repay you for assisting us and offering us a place to sleep is take you, you know, buy, buy you dinner at the Lilyfrost Inn some time. It's quite the place there in town."

[00:39:57] **Esther:** "Usually when I'm there, I'm having very, very late dinner or a very, very early breakfast, or she goes, she will come here and bring a meal for us to share.

Should I be convinced that the king would be decent enough to allow me to walk through the streets of Brastlewark? I would be happy to accompany you to my mother's Inn and let you buy me a meal."

[00:40:28] **Alex:** "I clearly have so much to learn about this. I mean, I just had never, it had never crossed my mind that there would be gnomes who are not comfortable in Brastlewark.

This really, this really changes a lot of things. I mean, between this and a lot of the secret experiments. And I just, I just, I don't know. I really think maybe it's not what I thought it was."

[00:41:02] **Esther:** "Sometimes the things we love aren't, but it could change to be what you wish it was."

[00:41:12] **Alex:** "Change is good. I mean, you know, maybe with, with some new discoveries and inventions, we will, we will slowly shift the way Brastlewark works."

[00:41:28] **Esther:** "That would be nice."

[00:41:29] **Justin:** Ember would like to say something briefly, kind of. You probably would hear. So Ember is going to call out very loudly into the woods. "Friend Temerity and friend Oom, you are the best at sneaking, but it is time to stop hiding, now. It is time to come out."

[00:41:55] **Alex:** Professor Z is going to like poke his head out the door and say to Ember. "Can you smell them? Are they here?"

[00:42:03] **Justin:** "No, they are, they are also hiding from my smelling. I do not know where they are. They are very good sneakers."

[00:42:16] **Esther:** At this, Zaelie's going to open her mouth to say something. And at the same moment, Professor Z, you are going to hear a voice inside your head because a king is a king, he's got the money to do this. "Z, good fellow. Sorry about all this mess. Would love to see you at the palace today. Your friends are here. It's all good." And that is what you get.

[00:42:51] **Alex:** "Did you hear that?"

[00:43:00] **Esther:** "No."

[00:43:02] **Alex:** "Oh, I swear I heard a voice. It was, it was a message, I think. Am I just, am I hallucinating things?"

[00:43:18] **Esther:** You would probably know that this is something people can do. You could buy a scroll that allows you to send a message like this. You can have someone send it on your behalf, and the king is surrounded by enough magic users of the ability to do that, that he can-- he's got the ability to do that.

[00:43:40] **Alex:** I think that what I'm going for here though, is that I'm not sure that Professor Z would think that he would be the target of that. He's still like a little bit--

[00:43:48] **Esther:** Got it.

[00:43:49] **Alex:** Like, message directly from the kings seems awfully high up, so Professor Z would, might then respond and say, "Well, I guess it could have been a, you know, a magical message, but would he really want to speak to me? That just, this seems awfully, I don't know. Strange, suspicious?"

[00:44:15] **Esther:** "You did--"

[00:44:16] **Alex:** "Ember?"

[00:44:17] **Esther:** "-- just tell me that you are no low level scholar. I'm sure that an important person like you, the king must want to speak to."

[00:44:26] **Justin:** "Friend Professor Z is very smart."

[00:44:31] **Alex:** "Well, thank you. Thank you. Ember, do you think it's possible that Temerity and, and Oom and Nommie are at the palace with the king?"

[00:44:43] **Justin:** Ember's ears kind of go kind of sharp and there's like a look of alarm. And he is like, "Perhaps they did not sneak as well as I thought."

[00:44:55] **Alex:** "Oh, no."

[00:44:55] **Justin:** "Perhaps they were taken. That could be bad if they are--"

[00:45:00] **Alex:** "That could be really bad."

[00:45:02] **Justin:** "If they were taken, then we should rescue them."

[00:45:09] **Alex:** "Yes. Well, should we, should we head to the king's court, then and, and get them released? I mean, I think, you know--"

[00:45:18] **Justin:** "We are not supposed to go to the city. The city is bad for us now, but we must help them. I will do what you say."

[00:45:28] **Alex:** "Oh, well, I, I was just thinking that, you know, we could just... we could just get all this sorted out in the, in the court. I mean, the king didn't sound really very angry in the message and I just think we could probably sort this all out and perhaps we should do that.

I mean, I would love to stay here in the woods, but I just... I worry that our, our friends will at least, you know, need somebody from Brastlewark to really help them out of this."

[00:45:56] **Justin:** "We can go help them. I can protect you."

[00:45:59] **Alex:** "Well, okay. Yes, let's. Let's-- perhaps we should."

I want an honorific for Lilyfrost. Like Miss Lilyfrost? Like what would I, how would I refer in polite gnome society?

[00:46:18] **Esther:** Mm Hmm.

[00:46:19] **Justin:** Can't go wrong with Your Eminence.

[00:46:21] **Esther:** I was going to say like, what's a Druid honorific.

[00:46:26] **Alex:** Yeah.

[00:46:26] **Esther:** Your woodsiness. Your, your, your naturalness, your earthiness... miss is fine.

[00:46:33] **Alex:** " Miss Lilyfrost, it was really just wonderful of you to have such great hospitality for us and, and I hope we can visit again. And I, I'm very sorry that, you know, you wouldn't feel comfortable coming to town because I would just love to show you my laboratory and to collaborate with you. So maybe, maybe we'll be back in the woods. But I think, I think that that was a message from the king and I think our, our friends are, are, might be in trouble. So we should probably go and see what's going on."

[00:47:07] **Esther:** "I hope to meet you again, Z."

[00:47:10] **Alex:** "Yes, Professor Z. Come by the Scholarium anytime.

[00:47:18] **Esther:** "Come by my house. Anytime. You, the dog--" Ember, she would say Ember-- "You ,Ember, perhaps not your colleagues."

[00:47:34] **Alex:** "Okay."

[00:47:35] **Esther:** "Not yet."

[00:47:37] **Alex:** "Okay."

[00:47:39] **Esther:** "May your colors take you where they will."

[00:47:44] **Justin:** "Thank you for the rest. It was very helpful. And now I can protect people."

[00:47:53] **Esther:** "I have no doubt of it."

[00:47:54] **Alex:** "May, may your color-- I mean, may you be well."

[00:48:00] **Esther:** "Thank you. I appreciate that. Please tell the king of the imbalance."

[00:48:09] **Alex:** "Yes, certainly."

[00:48:12] **Esther:** She inclines her head to you.

[00:48:15] **Justin:** Ember is going to kind of like, you know, shake himself and can get like ready to go. Gather all of my many items in this game.

[00:48:25] **Alex:** Z is going to twist the knobs on Buster so that Buster starts moving and maybe bang something with a wrench.

[00:48:31] **Esther:** Would you like an escort to the edge of the forest?

[00:48:34] **Justin:** Ember is fairly confident for whatever that's worth.

[00:48:39] **Esther:** Okay.

[00:48:39] **Justin:** His little level three dog.

[00:48:41] **Alex:** "If Ember can keep us safe... I mean, do you think it would be better for us all to go together? Do you wish to travel with us? If not. I mean, I, I think, you know..."

[00:48:54] **Esther:** "I am happy to accompany you to the edge of the woods. No further. Not into the city."

[00:48:59] **Justin:** "You are good. I would not mind you coming with us."

[00:49:05] **Esther:** "If only more were like you. Orianna would be proud."

[00:49:10] **Justin:** "There are not... there are not many like me."

[00:49:16] **Esther:** "You speak the truth. Come, let us be on our way."

She will make her way through the forest. It's clear she knows exactly where she is and what she's doing. And you can find yourself at the forest edge where she will take her leave. Roll me secret Perception checks.

[00:49:39] **Justin:** Just going to make a gurgling sound.

[00:49:41] **Esther:** The expectation that it's going to be a bad thing...!

[00:49:45] **Justin:** Ember's perception has just typically not been great. There you are. Whatever that was.

[00:49:55] **Esther:** It seems to be a beautiful day. The dwarves are smelting in the large forge, like in the middle of the cobblestone square. And you can hear the sounds of the city. Looking back Zaelie has vanished.

[00:50:14] **Justin:** Ember knows that he is not supposed to be here, so he's going to go into mischievous dog mode and attempt to be sneaky.

[00:50:22] **Esther:** Excellent. Roll Stealth.

[00:50:24] **Justin:** Disaster will we incur?

[00:50:30] **Esther:** That's a good question. Hmm.

# Return To Brastlewark

[00:50:32] **Esther:** Okay. So are you going to begin making your way toward the palace?

[00:50:37] **Alex:** Yes, that's the plan.

[00:50:39] **Esther:** Okay.

[00:50:40] **Justin:** Ember is intending to, you know, kind of stick with Professor Z and like, keep an eye out for danger and also try not to be detected and do all the things.

[00:50:50] **Esther:** I am going to say we will-- you'll begin making your way through the city and seem to be fairly unnoticed until you round a corner and you hear a [Appalachian accent] "Psst. Psst. Ember. Z."

And you see Miv, who has their hood up, like trying to hide a very large instrument, like in the folds of a multicolored cloak, a little clumsily. Like, clearly trying to not be noticed.

"Hey, it's me, Miv."

[00:51:31] **Alex:** "Miv, it's so good to see you."

[00:51:33] **Justin:** "Ember is going to like-- pounce is a strong word, but do that kind of dog thing of like excited to see someone he hasn't seen in a while of like, you know, front paws up tail wagging. "You are all right. I was worried."

[00:51:48] **Esther:** "I was worried about y'all. I thought you made it into the woods okay. But, um, I was worried! And let me tell you: the king's guard got Oom and Nommie and Temerity. And, um, they took 'em into the palace and I ain't seen them since. I've been waiting, doing some recon. Don't know where they are. I have a plan, maybe, to help us get them out."

[00:52:17] **Alex:** "I got a message from the king. Did you get a message from the king?"

[00:52:21] **Esther:** "No, he don't know me."

[00:52:24] **Alex:** "Oh, I got a message from the king asking me to come, come to the palace and that everything was all right. And I don't know that I really trusted everything was all right. I mean, definitely not everything is all right everywhere. But I just think that, you know, we ought to go to the palace because that's what the king asked. And if the king's guard finds us and then it would just-- it could really spiral downhill, but like maybe we ought to go and see what's up. And I just don't know."

[00:52:48] **Esther:** "Have you ever known the king to try to trap you before?"

[00:52:51] **Alex:** " No, I haven't had many audiences with the king to be honest."

[00:52:57] **Esther:** "Well, tell you what. You want to take that risk, I'll be right there with you. Been a while since I had myself a good prison break. I'm, I'm interested to see what this king here has got as far as that goes, so."

[00:53:12] **Alex:** "Prison?"

[00:53:13] **Esther:** "Yeah! You know..."

[00:53:14] **Alex:** "You think there's prison involved?"

[00:53:15] **Esther:** "Well, I don't know. If he don't like dragons, and... [sighs] well, I'll worry about Oom and Nommie. I worry about what this king might... might be wanting, you know? But if, if all is above board and this message is what seems to be on the surface, then everything's okay.

If we get in there and we realize it ain't, as I say, it's been awhile since I had a good prison break. If he's going to try to throw us somewhere, do something, rob somebody... we'll just see what happens."

[00:53:53] **Alex:** "I just thought at most that the, you know, we'd need to put up some, some bail or some collateral for them. I mean..."

[00:54:00] **Justin:** "The king has ordered that Friend Oom and Temerity be taken and they did not want to go. This is... this is bad."

[00:54:13] **Alex:** "Well now, Ember, I mean, if we go into the court, we ought to, we ought to still be well-behaved, I think. You know, we don't want to start anything in the king's court. That might be really bad."

[00:54:23] **Justin:** "But talking is not for bad people. Fighting is for bad people. We should fight."

[00:54:27] **Alex:** "I was really hoping that we wouldn't do any fighting right now, just because I think that, you know, it was good in, in the woods when there was some hope. But I, I don't think we're going to be able to fight our way through the king's court like that. That's why we were headed into the woods in the first place. And if they got trapped, I think we're best just going and, you know, negotiating face to face."

[00:54:50] **Justin:** "Is this, is this like what happened at the observatory? Is this a time when maybe I should not fight? This where you said it is more complicated?"

[00:55:05] **Alex:** "Yeah. I think it is more complicated and, and we should try to not fight until we like really, really know what's going on."

[00:55:15] **Justin:** "You are smart. I will, I will not fight, but I do think that friend Temerity and friend Oom should be free to go where they want to and not be taken to large structures."

[00:55:28] **Alex:** "Oh, yes. Yes. I mean, we should, we should go and see if we can recover them."

[00:55:35] **Justin:** "Then I will go. We should go, but we still may not want to be seen. I think we are not supposed to be here."

[00:55:45] **Alex:** "Well, but the king did send a message asking specifically for me. So I dunno. I think we ought to be okay."

[00:55:51] **Justin:** "The king did not ask for me, so I will still be-- try to be out of sight."

[00:55:57] **Alex:** "Okay. Miv, are you coming?"

[00:56:00] **Esther:** "Oh yeah, I wouldn't miss this for the world. Dying to know about this King Drum Thornfiddle figure. Now, Ember, think everything that you and Z just talked about is very wise. Just simmer down. Don't be setting anybody on fire until it's absolutely necessary. And then you let them have it, but you will know when that time comes. I think."

[00:56:22] **Justin:** "So when I feel that I should set someone on fire, I should set someone on fire?"

[00:56:28] **Esther:** "No, no, no. I mean, if we start yelling at you, 'Ember set him on fire!' That's when you should set them on fire."

[00:56:34] **Justin:** "I can do that."

[00:56:35] **Esther:** "Yeah, don't don't do it until then. That'll be the signal or, you know, if we can't yell because they've got us somehow, and we're trying to get away, then that's another signal. But you know, until they start getting real aggressive with us, no need to do it."

[00:56:53] **Justin:** You can just absolutely see the like math GIF across Ember's face. [cast laughs]

[00:57:01] **Esther:** "Learning all the time. I'm proud of you. All right. Lead on. Let's, let's do this thing."

[00:57:08] **Alex:** "Yes, yes. Let's go to the palace."

[00:57:12] **Esther:** All right.

[00:57:12] **Justin:** Indeed.

# At The Palace

[00:57:13] **Esther:** Let's spend a little time checking in with the palace folk.

You both -- and Nommie-- have a very restful night's sleep as well if you so desire. And you will have been shown to lavish guest suites: big floofy, pillowy beds, bubble baths as I recall, in the case of Temerity. You will have access to equally lavish breakfast in bed if you would so desire. And yeah... tell me how you'd like to begin your day.

[00:57:47] **Fai:** I think that Temerity's day will begin, you know, with him waking up, stretching, washing his face, whatever, and being like, 'all right, now is the time for some brain work because we got to figure some shit out.' Temerity is very lost in the question of 'how are we going to pull this together? What am I going to say to these people?' Et cetera. So that's where Temerity is at. Just, kind of, in the room, I think.

I'm assuming that the king has king shit to do, and probably can't breakfast with Temerity. If he could, he would, but if there's king shit to do, then Temerity would just eat alone in the room while, you know, scribbling in his... what's basically a bullet-- it's a dagger journal, excuse me!

You know, like it, it has his different sections. It has the ledger that we've spoken of. And just notes on shit. So maybe he's just kind of like, taking notes, eating berries, and just being like, okay, so the king, he said this... we got to figure out how to pull all of these threads together in a way that ideally my friend survives. But if he doesn't, at least maybe his integrity can be reinvigorated and then survive? Temerity is having a-- he's having a morning is what he's having.

[00:59:19] **David:** I think for Oom it's, it's a little bit more feeling and not thinking. There's sort of a reset and reflect component to focusing. So it's kind of that, that emotional centering more than any thinking of what to do next. If it doesn't seem like there's like, a restriction to try and to go outside and figure out where Temerity is, that's, that's what she's going to try to do.

But if it does seem like we're still under comfy prison rules, it's perfectly fine to just sit and eat. So I guess it just depends, yeah. I think we would try to peek out first and see if there's a guard and to see if it's possible to see Temerity.

[00:59:59] **Esther:** No guard. No seeming comfy prison rules. Seems like you can go where you will.

[01:00:06] **David:** Did I get a sense from yesterday before we went to the sleep and bubble bath-y of where Temerity roughly was?

[01:00:13] **Esther:** Yeah. You're probably in, like, adjacent suites. Not too far from each other.

[01:00:18] **David:** I'll try to knock, then.

[01:00:19] **Fai:** "Enter!"

[01:00:25] **David:** "Hey, so just wondering if we should process a little bit more what happened?"

[01:00:30] **Fai:** Temerity will gesture at, like, you know, take a seat, 'cause yes, child, we got some stuff to process!

 "Yes, I... I think we probably have a lot to discuss. I want to go ahead and remind you that the offer that I made you last night, that if you want to like fuck off and never think about our bullshit again, was made from the bottom of my heart. I like you. Everybody has secrets. That's fine. So yeah, we--"

Let me ask an out-of-character question right quick. All, yeah. Oom was there for everything last session where he talked about Frilogarma and his twisty web that he wove and was like, 'It's fine. You just dig further! It's--' Okay, great. "So-- wait, before I go on, do you want to leave?"

[01:01:34] **David:** "No. I mean, I think that there's definitely a lot to unpack, and we're going to have to go through that a little bit more, but I think overall trying to make a safe haven for gnomes and trying to just make life better, that seems like a good enough goal. And if, if, you know, King DTF is a friend of yours, and you trust that, you know, he's at least on the level for, for what he's trying to do here and that his motives are good. You know, that's at least a good enough starting point for me to want to just help. Do you still believe that?"

[01:02:15] **Fai:** "I do. Truly, inside my heart, I believe that his motives were all for the greater good, but there's only so much you can justify for the greater good, man. And you know, he went way too fucking far. And so, I want to help these people. I want to help my friend because I-- the ship has gone awry and we need to right the course. And, you know, I don't know how we're going to figure this out, honestly. This is a fucking mess, but I'm concerned about whether he will survive the entire affair. But for me, personally, I think it's important for his, you know, for his moral compass to survive more than his, his life, you know?

We have the potential to live for a very, very long time. More than many other people in this world, you and I. And sometimes I've encountered people who-- they lose sight of the fact that the things that you can do in this life, they can endure past your expiration, right?

So we have to make sure that he pulls it together so that no matter how long his actual life is, the things that come out of it all bloom, you know. It's not rot. Do you follow what I mean?"

[01:03:59] **David:** "Yeah. I mean, my Aunty Nia used to have a saying to just never be afraid of the good life well lived. And I kind of believe that, too. That I don't really understand what this fear of, of losing your colors and the sayings from these, these areas. They just don't match up with what we do back home. I mean, is--" Sorry, out of characters, is that, is that-- would I know if this is just a thing specific to Brastlewark?

[01:04:32] **Esther:** You maybe get the idea that it's a thing specific to regions with more gnomes. Like, definitely Brastlewark, but it's not a thing you would have encountered a lot in Hermea.

[01:04:48] **Fai:** Clarifying question. When-- do you mean Bleaching's not a thing, or this attitude toward Bleaching is not a thing?

[01:04:55] **Esther:** This attitude. Yeah.

[01:04:56] **Fai:** Okay. Okay, cool.

[01:04:58] **David:** "Yeah. So, I mean, I definitely want to learn more about where everything is coming from or where this, where this belief is. It just-- it seems a little bit strange to me. Even the attitude towards Nommie, I mean, look at Nommie! Nommie's cute and harmless. I just don't understand why everyone was, was so freaked out. Do you understand? Or--"

[01:05:24] **Fai:** Okay, now I have another out-of-character question. What's the extent of my knowledge of Bleaching. Presumably I've heard of it from Drum in the past. Is his attitude the one that I'm, oh, like, can you paint me a picture, please?

[01:05:42] **Esther:** Yeah, can you roll Society secretly for me?

[01:05:45] **Fai:** Certainly,

[01:05:47] **Esther:** Okay. Your question is, what is your knowledge of The Bleaching, and is DTF's opinion the sum total, or would you have any more nuanced insights? Was, was that about it?

[01:05:58] **Fai:** Essentially, yeah. What level am I aware of his opinion? Other than what he has said today? Like from the past, have I heard of it from him?

# The Bleaching

[01:06:05] **Esther:** Yeah. You may have heard of The Bleaching before you got to know your friend Prinkle back in the day, but he was certainly the first person who shared with you, in any kind of intimate way, some of the inner workings of the gnome cultures he'd been a part of around the understanding of The Bleaching. And would have shared with you that it's a condition that only affects gnomes; that it causes the colors to fade; and that sometimes the end condition of this condition is death, basically. That it can be, it can be fatal. It isn't always, and people can survive The Bleaching and come out the other side and be known as-- in gnome culture-- what are called Bleachlings. People who are, are just living in this state of faded colors. It can be stopped.

Like, you can notice your colors start to fade and then go and do something to reinvigorate them, to experience new things, to respark your curiosity. But it's thought that that is sometimes progressively harder and harder to do. And the Bleaching is something that is often very feared by, by most gnomes, the idea that your colors can start to drain and you lose interest in things that gave you joy in life or that you feel curiosity for.

There's a real sense of impending fear, and a lot of people-- gnomes-- wind up pursuing things in life in order to stave off the Bleaching. And one of Prinkle's real areas of complaint and yearning in life was that gnomes would have a place where they could maybe not have to fear experiencing this thing.

And he would talk to you at length back in the day, about how in the old country that they had come from, as he calls the First World, it's something the gnomes didn't have to fear. And that it only started since they had come to this plane thousands and thousands of years ago, and that he wanted a place like that where gnomes could be at home in some way.

So you would know that's Prinkle's idea of the Bleaching. That's the way a lot of folks more or less tend to relate to it. Like, maybe some people tend to live a little bit more in fear of like, 'oh my gods, could this thing happen to me? I'm going to do everything I can to make sure it doesn't happen to me.'

Some are a little bit more like, 'yeah, I'm aware that's a thing that *could* happen to me, but I'm not super worried about it right now.'

And folks who might be considered a little bit more radical among gnomes are people who either don't fear The Bleaching or are in some ways welcoming of it. Like, the idea that this isn't a bad thing. This is just another thing that happens, and the gnomes who experienced this are still gnomes, and we should find a way to really welcome them and their experiences and build that into whatever gnome culture exists here. And there's not just like one gnome culture. There are many different gnome cultures, depending on the place where the gnome might be from. Depending on all the places they've lived. But yeah, this sense that, like, The Bleaching isn't something to be feared, and it's kind of a problem that it's so widely feared among gnomes.

[01:09:40] **Fai:** One further question is: have I ever gotten the information or the idea that this happened to someone he cared for, or is it just the kind of thing that, because it could randomly happen to any gnome, he is-- I don't want to say disproportionately, but he is actively fearful of, and that's why he's so preoccupied with it.

[01:10:14] **Esther:** I would say that's something you've always wondered about. He's never directly shared with you.

[01:10:20] **Fai:** And he's never directly shared with me where he's actually from either. Has he?

[01:10:25] **Esther:** No, he hasn't.

[01:10:27] **Fai:** Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. One final question. What was the last thing that Oom asked?

[01:10:33] **David:** Oh yeah, it was, it was just asking why he was so, or everyone's so freaked out about Nommie because Nommie is just cute and Nommie.

[01:10:39] **Fai:** Got it. Thanks.

"Okay. Well, first of all, you're right, Nommie is very cute. That's clear to anyone. Let me ask you a question. What's the, what's the-- a lot of gnomes are where you're from?"

[01:10:55] **David:** "Some. I mean, I wouldn't say a lot, but--"

[01:10:57] **Fai:** "There's more than just you. More than like a handful."

[01:11:00] **David:** "Yeah, yeah. There's more than a handful."

[01:11:02] **Fai:** "What's, what's the attitude to Bleaching in your culture where you come from?"

[01:11:07] **David:** "I mean, it can, it can vary based on perspective, but generally speaking, being raised by my Auntie Nia, she used to always just say that the greatest fear is really just the fear of not being able to be yourself and to trust in your own feelings and your own emotions.

And so, ultimately, that's kind of the same perspective for The Bleaching, that the greatest fear isn't necessarily death itself or Bleaching itself. It's, it's the fear of that unlived life. And if you've lived a good life and experienced things, and you're true to yourself, you shouldn't have to do things just out of fear of, of losing your colors. That, that's just part of your own experience."

[01:11:52] **Fai:** "I think that sounds very valid. Now, what... what is their point of view on people who, who have experienced The Bleaching?"

[01:12:06] **David:** "I mean, I think you just have to approach them as who they are, that it's the same as any other creature, any other individual."

[01:12:15] **Fai:** "So, in the culture you came from, it's not this big monster to be feared, is what you're saying."

[01:12:22] **David:** "Yes. I mean, it's just part of who you are."

[01:12:26] **Fai:** "So it's something that happens sometimes and if it happens, it happens, but it's another stage of life, and a life well lived is a life well lived regardless? Is that what you were kind of saying to me?"

[01:12:37] **David:** "Yep. That's pretty much it."

[01:12:39] **Fai:** "Okay, well that sounds very nice. You know, I think that my friend would have benefited greatly to have come from such a culture because I believe that this fear has driven him to places that he wouldn't have gone -- well, you know, maybe he would have gone and made sketchy deals, but you know, imprisoning his own people, his, his kinfolk? You know, that doesn't sound like something that he would do in his right mind. And I believe that this fear has driven him beyond himself in some ways."

[01:13:14] **David:** "A comfy prison's still a prison."

[01:13:15] **Fai:** "Exactly. I don't want to see him deceiving himself in such a fashion, but I, I don't know how to, to ease this fear of his. It seems, it seems very deeply held. So I guess what ultimately we have to figure out is-- basically one step at a time. So the first thing we have to do is, is let these people out. But how are we going to approach this, you know?"

[01:13:42] **David:** "Maybe we just have to see where they're currently at, and then maybe after talking with them we can try to talk to this friend of yours? I mean, if you truly believe that he's, you know, a good person and believes in doing what's right, maybe we can talk him out of the hole he's dug himself into."

[01:14:05] **Fai:** "I don't think it will take much talking at all judging by our conversation last night.

I-- I don't know how much about a conversation you would remember past the, the most interesting part, but I do think that he knows that he's, he's gone too far and he wants, he desperately wants help. It's just that he's been seeking it from the wrong places. And he... he thought it was best for all these years for us to keep our, our distance from one another.

Maybe if we had come together a little bit sooner, some of this could have been prevented-- just from having, you know, a friendly voice in his ear. But here he, he has, he has to portray a certain image. And so you know, I don't know that he had anybody who was able to speak to him as frankly, as I'm comfortable with doing.

So I-- oof, oof-- my friend, we have, we have some work cut out for us. My thought is-- I don't know-- maybe I come in and I say, 'Hello, I'm the king's new adviser.' Which is true, because I've been advising the king. And I tell them, 'Look, in his deep passion for healing the ails that he believes his -- he, he knows that his people are, you know, prone to-- he lost sight of the fact that you are also his people. And, you know, I've come in and I've spoken to him, and I've told him, look, you've been separated for so long. It makes complete sense that they don't suffer from the same ailments that you suffer from. So we have to, we have to figure something out. You've got people locked up, and they're your people. You want to go home. I would like to help get you home. However, if you're inclined to stay, not as prisoners but as honored guests, we are planning a party, and it is this Festival of Flight. So like, you know, if you're going to leave, leave, please, but you know, you've been here this long, there's this big fucking festival and you can just like party and then leave.'

What do you think? Do you think that's too-- do you think we should lead them a little more than that? Or like, well, where's your mind, Oom?"

[01:16:26] **David:** "I mean, I think however you want to tackle this issue as the king's new adviser seems great. But if I may suggest: sometimes, I guess when we have conflicts where I'm from, there's a sharing of viewpoints to start. Because we can't overpromise anything until we understand the situation a little bit better.

 And that's usually where we start, with trying to figure out where things are. Not necessarily sharing just where we're coming from, but, but really hearing what everyone has to say to try to reach that conclusion."

[01:17:00] **Fai:** "This is valuable input. Yes. This is something that I must consider and think upon, but you're right. We-- they need to be more involved, more directly involved in the process sooner than 'Hi, here's all of the information. Okay. Talk now.' Right?"

[01:17:15] **David:** "Yeah."

[01:17:16] **Fai:** "'I-- there's been a horrible that-- something has gone terribly awry, and I'm here to sort it out, so let's sit here and figure it out, please?'"

[01:17:23] **David:** "Yeah, I think there's, there's kind of just that back and forth exchange, just because we really don't know what's happened up to this point.

I mean, I guess you heard a little bit more than I did. My memory's a little bit fuzzy from yesterday. And there definitely was, you know, a lot to unpack. So yeah, I think part of it is just trying to figure it out with sober minds, what's happened."

[01:17:46] **Fai:** "You know, I think that sounds very wise. "

We'll have a chance to talk to the king before we go in, right? To consult with him?

[01:17:55] **Esther:** Yeah.

[01:17:55] **Fai:** Presumably?

[01:17:55] **Esther:** Yeah. I was actually going to say this would be a good moment for us to go to break, and we can come back and then talk about what happens next.

[01:18:05] **Fai:** Wonderful, love it.

# Break

# Return from Break/Temerity Perceives

[01:19:21] **Esther:** Welcome back from break. So let's start up again with Temerity and Oom.

[01:19:29] **Fai:** "Okay, so we're going to talk to the king first and, you know, he said he was going to send a letter or something to Z, so hopefully we'll see them today sometime.

And when we talk to the king, we will maybe try to glean a little bit more information about... you know, maybe if we ask the right question, the key to unlock this whole son of a bitch will open for us, you know? I don't believe it, but I certainly hope it. How about you? What do you think?"

[01:20:02] **David:** "Yeah, I mean, I'm also hoping the message got to them okay. I mean, I don't entirely remember what happened yesterday, but I mean, there always is that concern about, you know, things getting lost in translation. I mean, I'm sure Professor Z's great. But you know, sometimes, if Ember set something on fire or, you know, things, things have a way of getting lost in translation sometimes."

[01:20:26] **Fai:** I would like to perceive Oom in that sentence, "I'm sure Professor Z is great." May I? Secretly?

[01:20:36] **Esther:** Yes, that would be a Secret Perception check.

I would guess that Oom seems a little hard to read, but Oom, feel welcome to let Temerity know what he might be able to glean having known you as long as he has. For a few days. But like you've been through some stuff together.

[01:20:58] **David:** Yeah. I mean, I think, I think Oom kind of sees Professor Z as that guy still, where, where-- he means, I think, I think Oom's warming up to Professor Z where he definitely seems more, I guess better than the original way in which we first interacted. But even so I think Oom's just a little bit cautious of Professor Z and what he might do depending on what information was communicated via the message.

[01:21:24] **Fai:** Okay. Yeah, that's fair. "Well, you know, I guess in that case, like in many others, we can only wait and see, because it could really go either way, you know? You know, I think we all really had a good conversation after the, uh, observatory mess. And so, you know, he probably... he probably had a nice chat with Ember and reinforced some of the things that we said before about maybe don't set everything on fire just yet.

Or you know, like, like read the room basically. But you can't really tell a dog to read the room, he can't even read yet. We're going to get on that. But we're kind of busy right now, you know?"

[01:22:11] **David:** "Yeah, you know, one thing at a time. One thing at a time."

[01:22:14] **Fai:** "Our plate is full already. So I don't really have any room for y -- I mean, like, I taught kindergarten for like, at least four years, I think, but like, um, that was its own focus. And right now we have to like, save a kingdom and, um, prisoners and..."

Temerity will reflect upon some other things. "We've got a lot to do, basically."

[01:22:43] **David:** "Yeah, yeah. I mean, Ember's understanding of morality can come later."

[01:22:46] **Fai:** "Yeah. You know, I think that, I think understanding the morality is probably, um, a higher priority than understanding how to read. But it's also, you know, a lower priority than some things. So let's just, let's just see if we can get an audience with the king and go from there."

[01:23:05] **David:** "Sounds good to me."

# The Repentance of DTF

[01:23:07] **Esther:** You can find the king in his study, just chilling out, sitting in his big poofy chair, looking fairly pensive. But he'll, he'll notice you and he'll say, "Oh, Temerity, Oom, good morning." And kind of fingers go to temple like maybe he is nursing a slight hangover.

"Oom, Temerity! Good, good morning. I've sent a message to Z. Hopefully he got it. And uh, hopefully he'll show up. I told him to come here, everything's fine, that you're here. What can I do for you this morning?"

[01:23:48] **Fai:** "Well, good morning. I think we wanted to discuss our, um, let's say battle plan. Before we take any steps, maybe we should talk about it and, um, determine together what the best course of action is."

[01:24:08] **Esther:** "I, uh, I can agree to that. Yeah."

[01:24:11] **Fai:** "Now, you know, that Oom comes from Hermea, right?"

[01:24:17] **Esther:** "Yes. I think they mentioned that."

[01:24:20] **Fai:** "We were talking a little bit earlier about the culture there. You know, I think maybe there's a couple of interesting things that you could learn that if you had been taught in your culture, maybe would have changed your life, I think. But that's neither here nor there. What we discussed was the way that amends are made within this culture. Oom, could you, could you talk to us about it a little bit, please? I don't think, I don't think the king is aware of how they do things there."

[01:24:56] **David:** "Sure. I mean, I think of it as, it's really just trying to see from everyone's point of view before decisions are made as next steps. I mean, I think part of it that we were talking about was really just trying to figure out where everyone's coming from and what points of view they have and really what their expectations are moving forward. So perhaps if we had access to your forced guests, that we'd be able to learn a bit more about their situation and where we're currently at.

[01:25:35] **Esther:** "Well, you can certainly see them anytime you like. I feel like I've really messed up. I knew that maybe it wasn't the best series of decisions, but last night, Temerity, Oom you really helped me see that I think I've made some, some bad choices, and I'm not entirely sure how to get myself out of them?

I'm willing to go down there with you, hear them out, say my piece and we, we can go from there, it sounds like?"

[01:26:11] **Fai:** "I think that's, that sounds like a solid plan. I believe in you. I know the quality of man you are. I know that these decisions are not emblematic of what you are on your best day. But we are not always who we are on our best day. None of us are always who we could be on our best day, right? But we can spend our lives aspiring to that person. We can spend our lives trying to be that person. And the decisions that we make on some of our worst days are ones that we have to make up to the people that they affect. And we have to make up to that person to, to the best version of ourself. You agree?"

[01:27:10] **Esther:** "Yeah, I do. I do. Just out of curiosity, who would you say I am on my best days?"

[01:27:19] **Fai:** "You are one of my oldest friends. And you are that man on everyday. But what I want to think about is that, uh, our best days are not behind us. They're in front of us. And I think that this could be one of your better days because you are going to make amends for something that you did wrong. You're going to attempt to, and that's worth something. But you will have to keep in mind that you have, you really have wronged these people."

The question from me is: he agreed to Frilogarma to get her some kind of intel to fell these folks who, I can't remember what they're called, can you please refresh me?

[01:28:17] **Esther:** The Svirfneblin, the Deep Gnomes.

[01:28:20] **Fai:** He told her that he would get her the dirty deets on the Deep Gnomes to help her defeat them.

He told them he would try to make amends between them and her like, fix their relationship, or at least get them on the road to the fixing of said relationship. Is that right?

[01:28:41] **Esther:** It was more like he promised them intel on each other and maybe to try to screw the other party over a little bit with the hope that he could actually repair whatever was going on there.

Or like if one side came out on top, he'd be on top with that side. One of those two things. And Frilogarma--

[01:28:58] **Fai:** And that ideally it would be the, the Deep Gnomes who ended up on top, but as long as he's cool, he's cool?

[01:29:06] **Esther:** As long as he's cool, he's cool. And he also got in a little bit deeper with Frilogarma and wound up being asked for something called the Sword of Time in addition to deets.

[01:29:24] **Fai:** Did he tell us how he ended up deeper with her and the Sword of Time sitch?

[01:29:28] **Esther:** I don't believe there were a ton of specifics, just like maybe he kept asking for information and she promised him... I think you were told that she said she would reveal like, the cause and the solution to The Bleaching were he to bring her the Sword of Time. And that's the expectation.

[01:29:49] **Fai:** Okay. Got it.

"Let me ask you this: what do you know about their issues with one another?"

[01:29:58] **Esther:** Roll Diplomacy, secretly.

"Well, I know that apparently this tension between them has been brewing for quite a long time, longer than your lifespan or my lifespan. And, well, you know, she's an immortal being. Whatever history there is, goes back a ways is my understanding. You know, I was filled in on, on some details, but it was all this courtly lore, and... I try not to get bogged down in too many details, Temerity. You know how knowing the details of an operation can sometimes get you into deep? It's better to remain a little bit ignorant of a lot of them. As I understand it, there's just a lot of water under that bridge, as it were. Maybe she's done some nasty things to them. They've done some things that she doesn't appreciate. There's skirmishes, there's sabotage, there's intrigue, a lot of different social players going on down there in the Darklands. I'm not exactly sure what the whole story is, just that there's a tangled mess in between them. And, uh, it's a lot more complicated than I gave it credit for."

[01:31:12] **Fai:** "Do you have any information that you could give to them about her? Have you've given them information yet?"

[01:31:19] **Esther:** "Bits and pieces, bits and pieces. Nothing that would really help them get the jump on her, but you know, enough."

[01:31:29] **David:** I'm just trying to glean like, how honest this conversation just seems on its face.

[01:31:35] **Esther:** Yeah, go for it.

[01:31:36] **Fai:** I'm gonna go ahead and do that too. And not that I think he's being dishonest, but I just want to get a real zoom in on him if I can.

[01:31:45] **Esther:** Absolutely.

[01:31:46] **Fai:** I think he's out of his damn depth, but let's see.

[01:31:51] **Esther:** This is one of your oldest and most closely trusted friends -- associates -- even with all the time that's been spent away from each other, you are sure that he would never lie to you. He's been really forthcoming with you since you got here. He's told you a lot, and you and Prinkle, you're buds.

Like, yeah, there's nothing to hide here. Oom, you are not quite as sure. You feel like maybe he's being honest up to a point. Maybe he's holding a little back. Probably some of both.

[01:32:36] **David:** "So if I may, as, as part of, you know, conflict resolution, one of Mengkare's lessons used to just be where conflict comes from to begin with. And oftentimes, one of the favorite lessons is just about the values of caring for one another and trusting in the repairing of that fractured viewpoint.

And it just makes it harder, I guess, for us to reach a resolution which we're all satisfied with the outcome if we can't be honest with one another. And so I think part of it is just trying to get a bit better picture -- I know you said you didn't like getting bogged down in the details, and so I can understand if it's not necessarily your intention to hide anything -- but that's, that's where I'm coming from right now."

[01:33:28] **Esther:** "Oom, are you saying you think I'm lying to you?"

[01:33:33] **David:** "No, I'm saying that part of what Hermean culture is about-- is different from the other parts of the world. I think when we approach conflict resolution, there's that, that understanding that each individual brings a little piece of the truth to the table and that it's really hard for someone to see everything until we have that sharing of viewpoints. And so I think that's really what I'm coming from. Just trying to understand a little bit your perception of, of what occurred?"

[01:34:04] **Esther:** "My perception of what occurred is that I was getting nowhere with all these academics. I mean, you know, the, their research does great things for us, don't get me wrong. But as far as The Bleaching goes, it's been an impenetrable wall of papers upon papers and hypotheses and cross pollination, and they, they never get anything done. Now I founded this city so we could get something *done.* And I didn't want to go back to House Thrune because I'm already in deep with them and frankly, I'm not sure that after Abrogail the First died, the others are as receptive to the kind of deal that she made with me. So why try to pull water from a well that's already going dry, you know what I mean? I thought 'here's this other well!' I've always had an interest in lore from the old country, and I came across, through my contacts, this entity, Frilogarma, and I knew of our kindred in the deeps. And I thought maybe they can do something for us. Of course, I contacted the gnomes first. Really thought that maybe they'd have some clue as to why they're not affected by The Bleaching, but we are.

And they have been less than helpful, I might say. Then I contacted her. I mean, she's really something. And in her way, she's provided things. I just thought if I could get far enough, would really get something, you know?"

[01:35:41] **Fai:** "What does in her way, mean? Just out of curiosity."

[01:35:45] **Esther:** "Her messengers are all very..." and he, he like makes some hand motions, blushes a little bit, and also looks, like, a little confused. "They're, well, they, they're, they're very... Well, they just are, you know. They're, they're, they're intimidating in their own way. And when I've received messages from her directly, they're also a lot. You know, Temerity, it's it's-- You know, in the way that I think you were kind of into Vroth'rien for a while there. He's, like, intimidating, but also alluring at the same time. And you think, 'wow, this person might be kind of an asshole, but it's hot. There's something there he can do for me.' It's kind of how I feel whenever I talk to anybody from the Court of Ether."

[01:36:46] **Fai:** I mean, you know, it's fucking fair, right? Fair's fair. [laughs]

 Actually. I should've just done that in character. "You know, fair is fair. I get it. Obviously I get it. But okay, so she's given you some information in exchange. What have you given, you given to her?"

[01:37:07] **Esther:** "A few bits of locations of where I'm aware of some deep gnome outposts. A few names of people in their ministries that I've been in contact with and then their roles and such."

[01:37:28] **Fai:** "Okay, so here's my perspective. We obviously are not going to go lie to these people, but we do want them to view us agreeably. So it might behoove us to be selective about the way we present the story. Now tell me, is this true or false? You agreed with them to give them information about her and you have given them information about her, but you don't really have any more information."

[01:38:14] **Esther:** "Yeah, exactly."

[01:38:17] **David:** I'm also--

[01:38:18] **Fai:** I'm trying to figure out how much I believe that, yeah!

[01:38:20] **David:** I'm also just a little bit unclear about how we went from them not being entirely forthcoming about, you know, their own experiences with The Bleaching and being part of a forced prison sort of situation.

[01:38:34] **Fai:** "Okay, wait, here's a question. Are you sure they weren't forthcoming or did maybe your fear and paranoia allow you to believe that they weren't being forthcoming? You don't have a reason to believe that they're lying. If they say 'no, we don't have this affliction down where we're from,' and they appear confused by the fact that you have this affliction and then they work with you to try to figure it out, but they're telling you the whole time. 'Well, we don't know, but we'll help,' is that what happened? Because that's, that's what I understand happened."

[01:39:09] **Esther:** "Exactly! Until they were like, 'we think we've done about all we can, and we'd perhaps like to gather our end of the bargain.' I just thought, 'you know what would be really genius, is if they kept something from me!'

It might be what I would do if the situation were reversed! Not saying it *is* what I would do, but I could see the cards were on the table. And I just thought, why not see if they'll be persuaded to share anything more? Maybe there's something they're holding out on or something they've forgotten. You know what I mean?"

[01:39:46] **Fai:** "Yes, but -- well, to me it sounds a little improbable because well, if you think about it, if they did have something that they were holding out on you, they would have asked you for something in return. Other than their freedom, because they had already asked for that. If they were working and the whole time they're saying, 'we don't know, we don't know', you know,? Nobody has said, 'okay, well, like we know, bu-u-ut...'

To what end would they be holding this information? Let me ask you this question. Let's say the roles were reversed and you were invited down there to their home. And you know, like obviously you would have to be a, maybe kind of a different dude, have a different skill set, you know, be kind of a nerd or whatever. But say you're down there and they say, 'Okay, we have a cave flu. Not everybody gets the cave flu, but eventually some people do. And when they do it's [distressed noise]-- it's all these things happen with the cave flu.' And you're like, 'man, what are you talking about? We don't have a cave flu. I'll help you if I can, you know, I'm pretty wise and learned, but we don't have cave flu. Like, I've never even heard of this affliction before. So I think there's probably only so much I can do for you, but let's get to work.'

And then they say, 'Okay,' and you work together. And then, you know, like after a few years, 'Man, I'm really sorry. But I think I've learned everything I can learn about this cave flu, and I don't think I have any information that can help you and I'd like to go home.' And they say, 'Hmm, you know, if I was in your position, maybe I would be keeping this information. So, no. I'm going to lock you up in very nice accommodations, but you're still going to be locked up and you can't go home.'

How would you feel?"

[01:41:35] **Esther:** "Honestly, I was having a lot more fun in this conversation when we were talking about who I am on my best day. Let's get back there. Tell me who I am on my best day."

[01:41:49] **David:** I would really like to Secret Perception that one.

[01:41:53] **Esther:** Go for it.

[01:41:57] **Fai:** "Drum, you tell me who you are on your best day! Because today could be that day."

[01:42:01] **Esther:** "I mean, I'm a genius, charming, planner, a strategist, someone who can make a bold idea into reality using my wits, my ability to network, my raw charisma, my intuition, my natural savvy. I'm a king. I am a king who made a place for my people. That is who I am on my best day. A bit of a scoundrel, a charming scoundrel. I can get away with things. Yeah. I'd say that's who I am on my best day."

[01:42:47] **Fai:** Did he just describe *me?!* But that's neither here nor there. [laughs] Oh my god, he's talking about me?!

Um, okay. " Then let's make today be one of your best days. Let's let's let's fix this."

[01:43:13] **Esther:** Oom, it seems like the king is maybe just a little preoccupied with himself, like little willing, willing, able and willing to get so far in this line of thought. And then, uh, not wanting to really think too deeply. Like he's, he's come to realize a lot about his own actions in the past 12 hours or so. And he's perhaps feeling a bit uncomfortable about that.

[01:43:41] **Fai:** "Okay, look. You're the guy who shit the bed. But you're the guy who can clean it up, and we're the guys who are going to help you do that, okay? So let's just try to take a deep breath. You made something incredible here. And you did make it with your wits, but maybe the strategy part was laying down a little bit on those days, okay? 'Cause some of these things, these threads did not, they didn't braid together, they're very knotted, and it's a mess. You are a man I deeply love and deeply admire and you've made something wonderful here, but you can't build something wonderful and just shove the shit underneath and think that nobody's going to smell shit one day. Do you follow?"

[01:44:30] **Esther:** "I follow. I do follow."

[01:44:34] **Fai:** "You can always smell shit, man."

[01:44:36] **Esther:** "Do you think there's any way I could get away with it? Like any way we could pull this off? Because I'm really thinking what if we get the smiths in Dwarvenhold to make a sword, have some runes on it or something that say the Sword of Time --"

[01:44:49] **Fai:** "Listen to yourself, man! Listen to yourself. No, no, no. Take a, take a damn beat, okay? This is a really serious situation. And I know that it's uncomfortable to look in the face of one's own shortcomings. But that day eventually comes to us all, I think, unless we are simply unable to. And if you turn away from this mirror and if you refuse to look into it, you are going to find that your legacy will be nothing.

You'll leave nothing for your people. It will all be destroyed. Man, what are you thinking?! You think that you can have the smiths make a fucking sword that will fool -- you just told me she's immortal beyond belief! She has a memory longer than our -- *our* -- lifetimes! Man, pull it the fuck together, bro! This is a serious situation we're in. And I told you, I'm going to help you and I'm going to help you. But come on, you got to give me something here.

Oom has, has agreed to help us against all reason. She should fucking flee! We even talked to this morning and I said, do you want to leave? And Oom told me 'nah, we got work to do, man.' And Oom was right. But you can't look for a shortcut out of this. You think you can fool her with a sword? You think you can etch some runes?! Come on, come on."

Like, this is a real, for realsies, serious plea. Like, there is no jocularity. There's no smile in the eyes. This is dead the fuck serious, man. Get it the goddamn hell together because we're in deep. Like really reflect on the fact that you see no amusement. None of the like good natured ba-da-da-ta-da-da Temerity is to be found. Like, this is dead the fuck serious shit, man.

[01:46:56] **Esther:** Roll Diplomacy with -- definitely with advantage.

[01:47:03] **Fai:** Thank you.

[01:47:03] **Justin:** What was the number?

[01:47:08] **Fai:** It's secret.

[01:47:09] **Esther:** It's secret!

 "You really think it's it's that bad?"

[01:47:14] **Fai:** "I know it is, man. There's too many threads here. There's too much stuff that leads directly back to you. There's, there's shit that we haven't even gotten to yet that we still have to deal with. And this one, I mean, this one is big enough, but that one, you know? You're spinning way too many plates, man. And some of them are really bad plates!"

[01:47:38] **Esther:** "Maybe I should have like, told you my whole vision for Brastlewark from the beginning before I got involved with House Thrune and the dragon. I just didn't want you to get hurt, you know? But then I, I kind of brought you into it anyway. I'm sorry, Temerity."

[01:47:59] **Fai:** "I accept that apology, but I want you to -- okay. Think about, think about that man, who had big dreams and who had a dear friend that you wanted to protect and think about all the people that you as king are in a position to protect right now."

[01:48:23] **Esther:** "[sighs] Okay. I trust you that I've really messed up like big, big time. And I trust you to help me figure out how to be a better version of myself. So what do I need to do right now to start fixing this?"

[01:48:47] **Fai:** "Right now? You need to make me a promise that you will not make any deals -- outside of if you're bargaining for a rug or something -- you know what? You are not going to make any deals that you don't talk to me about first. Make me that promise. Shake my hand."

[01:49:11] **Esther:** He takes a swig of something. Offers you his hand. Shakes it. "I promise you. I promise you my friend. No more new deals until I talk to you... my new advisor."

[01:49:32] **Fai:** What the... oh fuck, he has other deals in the -- goddamn it! Okay. We'll, we'll worry -- we'll talk about that when Oom's not around. Ugggh! I mean, in the back of my mind, I knew, but [long distressed noise] all of those thoughts are not coming out of Temerity's mouth, but they are clear upon his face for anybody who might be looking at them.

[01:49:58] **Esther:** "Oh, don't worry. It's, it's nothing like the depth of some of these that you know about. Just a few Sczarni contacts, a few people in The Shackles here and there. You know, a few, um, folks who are doing things, a couple of people in the Kyonin Underground, I met through you, actually! Not Vroth'rien, but you just, the people who are sometimes going here and there every few decades. Nothing nearly as bad as what we've been talking about."

[01:50:24] **David:** Can I Society that? Like, what a Sczarni is?

[01:50:27] **Esther:** Sure! That'll be a Secret society.

[01:50:30] **Justin:** Oh, dear...

[01:50:33] **Fai:** Do I presumably know, since he's talking about it to me, or...?

[01:50:37] **Esther:** Do you have a Lore: Thievery or Underground?

[01:50:41] **Fai:** I think I only have Lore: Surgery.

[01:50:43] **Esther:** Okay. Then it would also be a Secret Society.

[01:50:46] **Fai:** Okay.

[01:50:48] **Esther:** Oom, studying criminal syndicates is perhaps, not shockingly, not necessarily a huge thing in Hermea, the place where many people are trying to be the best version of themselves. You know such things exist. And there's probably knowledge on the island, it's just not something that you went deep into.

Temerity, I mean, you're, you're aware that there's some pretty major criminal syndicates out there. The Sczarni are one who kind of operate in like Varisia where you've spent a good deal of time, near Mierani Forest. You know The Shackles are where pirates be, and they got connections everywhere. You are yourself familiar with the Kyonin Underground.

So yeah, he's dropping some big names, but not on the level of Abrogail Thrune the First and contract with family House Thrune forever.

[01:51:51] **Fai:** Like the normal to high normal sketchy range?

[01:51:55] **Esther:** Yeah.

[01:51:55] **Fai:** Okay, cool. Got it.

[01:51:56] **Esther:** Some of these might be more concerning than others, but it's not on the level of like immortal- fey-being-Deep-Gnome-kindred-long- running-cold-war, or maybe not even cold war, maybe hot war... like, not on that level.

[01:52:09] **Fai:** "Okay, my friend, you know, like... well, I'll ask you about those at some future point when -- if and when we survive that long to get there and, uh, determine whether it's a concern or not. For now--"

[01:52:26] **Esther:** " And the rebels in Kintargo! You know, we were helping them out a little bit on the down-- don't worry. It's all good. I've got it under control, nothing like this."

[01:52:34] **Fai:** "I, you know, I think that's our levels of what we define as under control might be a little bit different, but we can talk about that, that difference in definition, another time I think."

[01:52:46] **David:** "Yeah, this is a lot to unpack and maybe you'll be better suited to talk to your advisor separately, but, you know, I think in the immediate we're kind of looking to what we can do about these, uh, guests of yours."

[01:52:59] **Esther:** "Well, let's, let's do it. Let's go and talk to them. I'm ready to be the best version of myself." Temerity, it occurs to you that maybe making a bunch of deals like this that are stretching his apparently really, really good luck are like an edge rush to your friend. Like, like maybe this is what he thinks keeps his colors bright. Like...

[01:53:32] **Fai:** Ahhh, well, you know, if you're terrified for your life all of the time, when do you, like, when do you have 10 minutes to... for your colors to dim? You know, I guess that works. All right. Okay. Noted. Thank you. Oh, wait.

[01:53:50] **Esther:** It's just a thought that occurs to you.

[01:53:52] **Fai:** "One of these days, we're going to talk about why you fear The Bleaching so much. But that's not today. Today, let's go be the best versions of ourselves we can be."

[01:54:09] **Esther:** "Let's do it."

He'll gesture towards the door. "I mean, I guess I should lead you there. It is my comfortable basement after all."

He will get up, make his way through the door, lead you to this... two doors and a box that seems to be connected to a lot of metal gears and some woven metal ropes that go up and down. And you can enter the box and by a system of levers and pulleys and buttons, it takes you down automatically and you will all reach the basement levels of his palace.

He will make his way to the same corridor where Oom was led the day before, and say "Ah! Good morning, good morning. Uh, I've got this. We've got this! Go about your business. There may be a few changes coming. Uh, you know, we got to keep the colors bright." And the guards will just like, kind of give a nod, like, 'okay, the king wants what he wants.' And he'll lead you to this room that was next door to Oom, and say "In here." He procured a key from the guards and kind of like hands the key to you Temerity.

# The Deep Gnomes

[01:55:32] **Fai:** Yeah, I suppose that it probably makes sense for someone else to go in before him. Temerity will take a deep breath and then take another deep breath and unlock the door and open it and step inside. What do I see?

[01:55:54] **Esther:** You see a large, spacious chamber with probably like, two little chambers off the side, which you might guess are washing facilities or, uh, food preparation facilities. Uh, luxurious, fluffy beds, big cushy chairs and a couch like you had upstairs. Many books, little objects or trinkets that were perhaps produced by The Tinkerings or The Scholarium. There's a lot to amuse oneself with here. I'm kind of getting, you know, like if you've seen Thor: The Dark World, Loki's cell in Asgard where it's like, kind of a plush place with some cool stuff. Like even way more than that. Like this -- this is, were it not a prison, a comfortable space.

There are two people sitting there. They look like gnomes and yet a little different than a lot of the gnomes you've seen. Like, long eyebrows, one of them has very curly hair, one of them has more, more straight hair. And their skin, if you've ever seen like part of a mountain cut away, or like minerals that come from the depths of the earth, their skin tones remind you of those. Like, beautiful grays and like sort of veins, or like places of almost like dark blue and dark brown as well. They really look like the earth itself in some way.

And they will look up at you and both of them be like kind of a little taken aback by this new stranger coming into this space and maybe look a little bit nervous, like sort of move near to each other on the couch. One of them will say "Hello? And who might *you* be?"

[01:58:04] **Fai:** In my mind, this is the picture I w-- I, I'm looking at, I would like to present to you. I would have gone in in such a way where nobody would be seen behind me. So, you know, like I'm not all the way inside, basically. I'm still kind of in the doorway, but in. So I'm going to gesture Oom inside with me and tell the king to wait.

And I will come in with Oom and say, "Good morning. My name is Temerity Vane, and I'm the King's new adviser. May I join you? May we join you?"

[01:58:56] **Esther:** "We're not in the habit of being asked here. Seems like if you want to, you probably will."

[01:59:08] **Fai:** "Well, you see I'm here and Oom is my advisor in this matter. Oom comes from Hermea, I don't know if you've heard of this place before, but, they have some really strong and wise ideas about conflict resolution. And this is the conflict that I dearly want to resolve. I believe the king has made a grievous error. And when I told him this, he agreed with me. And we would like to have a conversation with you. First of all, he would like to offer you his apologies. We would like to have a conversation with you about how to make this right.

In his zeal to cure or figure out or to prevent this affliction that happens to his kindred, he lost sight of the fact that you are his kindred as well. And you know, for me personally, I don't believe that you're hiding anything from him, but I don't care if you are. Because even if you are, he should not have done this, and this is what I've told him. So with all of that said, may I come in, or would you like me to leave? Or we can come back at the other another better time for you to prefer."

[02:00:47] **Esther:** Roll Diplomacy.

[exhaling]

[02:00:49] **Fai:** I'm going to Hero Point so I can double roll.

[02:00:52] **Esther:** Okay.

[02:00:53] **David:** I was also kind of wondering from a genealogy standpoint, do I know anything about how these gnomes differ from other gnomes?

[02:01:01] **Esther:** So that would be... That would be either Lore: Gnomes, Lore: Genealogy, or Society -- Secret.

[02:01:12] **David:** Sure. I'll roll Lore: Genealogy. I got a 24.

[02:01:16] **Esther:** All right.

[02:01:18] **Fai:** I rolled mine Secretly, too.

[02:01:19] **Esther:** Got it. Cool.

They... look at each other. Look back at you. They're not smiling. The one who hasn't spoken yet says "That's a mighty nice speech. But we've been in here a long time and it might take a little more than 'I'm sorry' to convince us. Who are you?" Turning to Oom.

[02:01:47] **David:** "Uh, I'm Oom. I think there's not much to say about how we got involved in this -- more chance than anything. But like my companion says, we're really just trying to see how we can make things right with the both of you."

[02:02:02] **Esther:** " Your voice... you, you were in the other room last night."

[02:02:09] **David:** " Yes. we, we too were, um, originally, uh, shall we say forced guests of the king. But through, you know, some of -- some conversation and thanks to my companion, Temerity, we helped to procure our own freedom. And what we hope is the same for the both of you."

[02:02:30] **Esther:** "Well, I suppose could be an elaborate ruse of this King's, but some of this is the most sensible thing I've heard in some time." Roll Diplomacy, Oom. Doesn't have to be secret.

[02:02:49] **David:** I'll also Hero Point.

[02:02:51] **Esther:** Okay. And we'll get to your Genealogy roll in a second.

[02:02:55] **David:** So the first roll was a 20 and the second was a 29.

[02:02:58] **Esther:** Both of them seem to relax -- visibly relax -- as you continue to talk, and they actually will like maybe sigh a little bit.

"Well, I suppose, trustin' you is the best soundin' option we've had for some time, Oom. So... I guess we can try. What do we have to lose? My name is Irvikolirrit, but you can call me Irvik."

 "And I -- I'm Nimirril, but you can call me Nimi, Nimri... people do different things. Nimirill is my name, though.

And we are envoys from our various kindreds in the Deep Lands of Nar-Voth. Been here for quite some time, trying to at first work with this King Drum Thornfiddle. Hadn't gone so well for us as you met have gathered. Nice to meet someone who it seems like has been through a similar situation and has maybe talked some sense into this man's stubborn head."

So Oom, you're wondering what you know about the Deep Gnomes through genealogy?

[02:04:40] **David:** Yeah. And whether, I guess now whether Nar-Voth or, you know, anything means anything to me.

[02:04:45] **Esther:** So you would know that the Svirfneblin as they are called, the Deep Gnomes, are believed to have come to the Material Plane about the same time as the gnomes who live on the surface of the planet-- perhaps as part of the exact same migration, perhaps not. The details get a little fuzzy and there are several different myths about where they might have come from and why. They've been sundered for a long time, and you're aware that they typically don't make their way above the surface. You're also aware of one other thing.

And that is that the only deity who is a gnome, specifically a gnome deity, is called Nivi Rhombodazzle. And she was a Svirfneblin, she was a Deep Gnome, who rose and ascended to goddesshood. There, there's also many myths about her ascent-- and some of them are connected to why, perhaps, the Svirfneblin do not Bleach, some of them not. But she's definitely like, the most famous of the Svirfneblin and widely worshiped both underground and on the surface.

For Nar-Voth, that would be another Secret Society. I believe that you would be aware that Nar-Voth is a region of the Darklands, the underground inhabited regions of the planet you're on. Not too familiar with anything about it otherwise.

[02:06:27] **Fai:** What do I know about the Deep Gnomes?

[02:06:30] **Esther:** You know that such people as Deep Gnomes exist. That's about it.

[02:06:35] **Fai:** About it. I've never met one before?

[02:06:37] **Esther:** Never met one before.

[02:06:38] **Fai:** What language do they speak down there?

[02:06:41] **Esther:** Undercommon.

[02:06:41] **Fai:** Okay, cool. Hey, hey, hey, hey! All right. Noted.

[02:06:46] **Esther:** The one who said you can call him Irvik says, "What exactly would you like from us at this time? All we want is to go home."

[02:07:00] **Fai:** "Well, what I would like is to ask your perspective on what's happened so that we -- just so that we can have a full picture, but I want to know in what way we can, we can make amends between you and the king before we send you home. You're going home either way. But if you are amenable, obviously -- if you want to walk out now, nobody will stop you.

And you know, like, just to let you know, we do have the king waiting outside, and we can make him wait as long as you'd like -- or if you want, I can tell him, 'Hey, they don't want to talk to you yet. We're going to have a conversation and I'll send for you when I send for you.'" 100% for realskies, I will do this!

[02:07:45] **Esther:** They both look a little skeptical of you, Temerity. And they're going to look at Oom, and Irvik will say: "The king threw you in this adjacent room yesterday, and yet you seem to have given him a chance. You think we should?"

[02:08:03] **David:** " I think that I, I believe that he's trying to do good and he's trying to correct the mistakes that he's made. And so, like my companion said, I really do believe that, you know what we're really just trying to hope to avoid is any ill will moving forward. And so if we can do that great, but either way I think that what's right is to set you free."

[02:08:30] **Esther:** "Well, we appreciate that. I don't so much want to talk to the King as use a language that's not exactly dependent on words, shall we say. But I'm happy to tell you exactly what I've experienced here from my point of view, if you would like that."

[02:08:49] **Fai:** "I would like that very much. What would you like me to do with the king for now? Do you want me to make him wait? Do you want me to send him away? What would you like?"

[02:08:58] **Esther:** "He can come in here."

[02:09:00] **Fai:** "Okay. I just, you know, I want to make sure you're as comfortable as you can be."

[02:09:05] **David:** "Well, uh, may-- maybe -- [laughs]"

[02:09:09] **Esther:** You see her reaching for a big, heavy book, by the way.

[02:09:13] **David:** "Yeah, yeah. Maybe we shouldn't do that, um--"

[02:09:16] **Fai:** Maybe he deserves to be hit with a book!

[02:09:18] **David:** Was that in-character? [laughs]

[02:09:21] **Fai:** Okay. Alright. Okay, okay, okay. She's reaching for, okay. What's her name? Nimri?

[02:09:30] **Esther:** Nimirill.

[02:09:33] **Fai:** Nimirill -- um, is, is 'miss' an appropriate form of address?

[02:09:38] **Esther:** Yeah, you would guess?

[02:09:39] **Fai:** Like, I don't, like, I don't *know her* know her. Let me give her a little bit of respect. Shit, I don't know how long she's been here yet.

"Miss Nimirill, believe me, I understand that you want to pummel him. He deserves it, but *maybe* let's save that?

You know, like maybe make it a part of the negotiation. Maybe if you say, if you want to make amends to me, here's my list. And upon your list, you say, 'you have to let me punch you in the face three times.' You know, I'm willing to negotiate for that for you."

[02:10:16] **David:** "If I may suggest -- tensions are a little high right now and -- maybe, maybe some subtle diplomacy might be best now. You know, just, avoiding escalating to physical contact. So maybe if the king is amenable, then he could return at a later time and we could continue this discussion without the hitting of the books and the faces."

[02:10:45] **Esther:** "What I'm getting is you wanted my perspective until I was giving you my perspective."

[02:10:54] **David:** "I mean, unless you want to hit him with the book, I guess."

[02:10:57] **Esther:** "Oh, I do, very much so. Yes."

[02:10:59] **Fai:** "If I tell him, Hey, she's going to hit you with a book and then we're going to have a conversation, would that be okay?"

[02:11:08] **Esther:** Irvik is going to lay a hand on her arm and be like, "I want to hit him with a book as much as you do. Maybe now is not the time. We can revisit that later.

We'll talk to the king. We'll share our experiences here. And then we'll... we'll go from there. Refrain from throwing a book, hittin' a book, havin' a book make contact with the king. Show him on in, and we'll do this."

# Two Gnomes and a Talking Dog Walk Into A Palace

[02:11:48] **Esther:** But before we do that, let's go back to Ember and Professor Z, 'cause it's been a moment. You're making your way to the palace! Probably not going to set things on fire, unless stuff goes down, in which case: fire. Do you have a plan?

[02:12:03] **Justin:** I'm in mischievous dog mode. keeping to as many shadows as my very orange body can cling to.

[02:12:10] **Alex:** I -- Professor Z is like, a little bit trepidatious it's about this whole thing. Like doesn't exactly know what's going to happen, but just sort of plans to, you know, walk in the front door.

[02:12:21] **Esther:** You can make your way to the palace, to the main entrance where there's definitely like, four guards stationed, and a few people coming and going, but it's a Starday. And so it's a little less busy than it might be usually. So the guards will say "Professor Z?"

[02:12:49] **Alex:** "Yes. Uh, I, I'm, I'm here because I received a message from the king."

[02:12:53] **Esther:** " We were informed, yes. Yes. He's very eager to see you. Your friends, we were told to tell you, you are here. They're well and -- do come in, do come in."

You will be ushered in and not questioned. They'll sort of raise an eyebrow at Miv for a moment, but not going to push too hard. And you will be led to a very spacious drawing room. And one of them will say "I'll, I'll locate His Majesty, and hopefully he'll be here soon." The guards will disappear. A beat passes.

[02:13:31] **Justin:** Do I manage to sneak in with him?

[02:13:34] **Esther:** Yeah, absolutely.

[02:13:36] **Alex:** Do you manage to get on the couch?

[02:13:38] **Justin:** Is there space under the couch for a dog?

[02:13:40] **Esther:** It's a gnome-sized couch. Probably not for Ember.

[02:13:44] **Justin:** Coffee table?

[02:13:46] **Esther:** Yeah. Coffee table.

A beat passes.

Miv leans forward and whispers "All right. So I been casing this place as we walked through it. There's about two hallways branching off there's some winders [windows] and only four guards at that entrance, though I imagine there's more. So if we got to bust out of here, keep it in your mind."

[02:14:09] **Alex:** "Oh, I wish I had a paper to draw map down. I'm just not very good at remembering those things."

[02:14:13] **Justin:** "I unfortunately left the stick, so I cannot draw things."

[02:14:18] **Esther:** " Just remember we're one of them lawful deities closes a door, Nivi Rhombodazzle, always opens a winder [window], or a trap door... some kind of hatch... a porthole!"

[02:14:29] **Justin:** "That was a lot of words."

[02:14:31] **Esther:** "She's a very resourceful deity."

[02:14:37] **Alex:** " Well, I just hope, you know, nothing, nothing untoward is happening. I mean, Ember remember like the plan is, we're just going to talk to them and then they don't seem to want to do us any harm, you know?"

[02:14:46] **Justin:** "Yes, we will just talk, if we must, then we will, what did you say them out?"

[02:14:54] **Esther:** "Oh, break 'em out!"

It'll so happen is as the three of you are seated in this drawing room, the other two of you will hear footsteps and then a muffled voice out in the corridor and the king saying, "Oh, oh, well, that's -- timing could be better. Tell them I'll um, I'm doing some business right now. Will be there soon."

And then you hear just a clearing of throat. "Ahem! Temerity? [clears throat] Temerity?"

[02:15:26] **Fai:** I will ask them, "Would you excuse me for a moment before we continue?"

[02:15:34] **Esther:** "Again, I don't really feel like it's up to us. So you go do what you need to do."

[02:15:43] **Fai:** "Well, it's at least polite to ask, but you're right. I mean, if you tell me to stay here I will, but who even knows what's happening out there. And honestly, we're trying to pull things together, so let's just make sure nothing else is getting unraveled, right?" And I, and I go pop my head out. "What's up, man?"

[02:16:00] **Alex:** "Your friends are here."

[02:16:02] **Fai:** "Okay. Um, well that's interesting timing." Did we just come to the accord that the king was gonna come, into the room with us?

[02:16:15] **Esther:** Yeah.

[02:16:15] **Fai:** Like, right now? Okay. Well, in that case, I'm going to tell him, "You know what, man, unfortunately that's not very good timing for them because you have an appointment to be in here right now. They're going to have to like eat some cakes or something. 'Cause they don't even know what's happening! We don't need them in the mix right here, right now, before we have a moment to like, talk to anyone."

Do we? Should we just tell them? No, right? That would be kind of weird. I think it would complicate things too much to have Z here asking people --

[02:16:41] **Justin:** Bring the fire dog and the academic into the political discussion! Yeah, that's gonna work.

[02:16:45] **David:** Yeah, I think, I think this is the right mix of people!

[02:16:49] **Fai:** Yeah. You know, but if we want to rearrange time a little bit so that he can go talk to them beforehand, I'd be happy to do that. But you know, like I, as far as Temerity is concerned, they gon' have to wait.

[02:17:02] **Justin:** I'm just imagining in Temerity's mind, there's this thought of like, Ember coming into this meeting and then just... fire.

[02:17:10] **Fai:** Yeah. It's a -- Temerity's like, there's a lot of books in here. There's tapestries and shit. We don't need all that. Like we-- there's enough plates spinning. If that's cool for everybody, unfortunately Temerity will make wait, but if we want to rewind so that he can talk to them beforehand...

[02:17:27] **Justin:** No, this is far more interesting...

[02:17:29] **Fai:** Great. All right.

[02:17:30] **Esther:** You can always like, go through the King's palace and try to take some things. If you want to, so...

[02:17:37] **Fai:** Just go to a kitchen and eat, man. Feast! Okay. So I'm going to tell him, "Look, man, with love to my friends, we can't deal with that right now." I'm not even talking low. Like, I want them to hear me. "Look, uh, they're going to have to wait, you know, send them some cakes or something. Our friends here have invited you in to speak, and I'd like to remind you that that's an invitation, one that if they would like to revoke it, it would only be polite for you to listen to what they say, because you are in a great debt here."

[02:18:11] **Esther:** "I got it. I'm going to be the best version of myself."

[02:18:15] **Fai:** "Let's do it, man." And you know, like I, whatever our little secret handshake is, all this stuff?

[02:18:21] **Esther:** You do it.

[02:18:22] **Fai:** And then he follows me in.

[02:18:23] **Esther:** Okay. He follows you in.

[02:18:25] **Fai:** "Um, Irvik, Nimirill... I present to you: Drum Thornfiddle. I know that you are acquainted in a rather unfortunate way, and this is going to be very awkward in many ways. So while we all acknowledge that nobody can force you to accept an apology, you are *owed* one, and so let's start there. And after that--"

Looking at him like you better, you said, you know how to plan, here's the plan! Fuckin' follow it. You want the strategy? Here's the goddamn strategy.

"So we're going to start with an apology and then we're going to listen to everything that they have to say to us. We're not going to argue with them. If they tell us something from their point of view, I -- it's not the time for you to say no, but wait, you know? Let us know how we can begin to mend the relationship between you... *if* and how. Ms. Nimirill, Mr. Irvik, does that sound good to you? Does that sound acceptable to you?

[02:19:34] **Esther:** [as Nimri] "Well, we might as well try it."

[as Irvik] "It is agreeable. We'll try it."

[02:19:46] **Fai:** "Drum, will you begin with your apology, please?" Realizing that maybe what I should have asked him what he was, what his apology was going to sound like, oh fuck!

[02:19:55] **Esther:** "There comes a time in every great leader's life when they have to take stock, reflect on the achievements of their life, their vision, and really reflect on whether those achievements measure up to the heights of their ambition, or whether they've really messed up the plan in some way. And not just the plan: messed up the lives of the people they claim to want to lead, to want to serve.

Now I think of myself as a very skilled leader, I made this city out of my own dreams, my own wit, my own ability to get things done.

But... my dear friend Temerity has helped me reflect on the choices I've made, which I felt for a little while were getting a, a bit fraught, but I've realized that... I made some very bad choices and I've really let down the people that I claim to want to lead. To want to get to know. The businesses I've been in, it's not great to treat one's associates the way I've treated you. I realize that now. I... I put my own gain, my own ambitions, my own fears above the wellbeing of other people. That was not me being the leader I want to be. It was me failing.

So I understand that you, you don't owe me anything. You've already been here, locked away this very comfortable room -- that I've done everything I can to make very comfortable for you -- a long time. And you have every right to be very angry about that. I admit to you that I have thoroughly and completely fucked this up.

If you want to go, you can go and you will never so much as hear from me again. If you would like to stay through our city's Festival of Flight, which is happening within the next 10 days, you would be honored guests. You can stay at any establishment you want in town on my, my money if you don't want to stay here -- in other quarters! Quarters which you can leave at will!

You have my deep apologies and my word, for the very little I'm sure that's worth to you, that I will do my best to be a better version of myself than I have been to you."

[02:23:11] **Fai:** You know, that was not half fucking bad. That's me, not Temerity. But it is what Temerity is thinking though. Like it was a little self-aggrandizing and a couple of places, but maybe he caught all the gestures and the eye faces and everything. Like I think, I feel like Temerity thinks that was a pretty damn good -- that was better than I feared.

I hope they think so too. I guess we'll see.

[02:23:36] **Esther:** Irvik is going to nod along.

" I will be completely forthcoming with you. We have no reason to trust you; to want to interact with you at this point. We just want to go home. I understand you have your own interests, the interest of your people at heart. We have truly given you all the knowledge we have. We would have been willing to keep partnering with you in a deeper way if perhaps you hadn't taken it upon yourself to imprison us in this very cushy room. Maybe there's still room for collaboration with someone. Maybe not *you*, but someone.

That being said, I haven't really spent that much time up here. I could be induced to see things that fly. *Maybe*. Not a promise."

And Nimirill just sighs deeply. [sighs]

"I loathe you. I do not accept your apology. I do not forgive you. I want to throw the book at you, quite literally. But if Irvik insists on staying here against all reason, I will stay with him. But you *owe* us. You owe us for our time here. You owe us for any machinations you have been engaging in without our knowledge, and you owe our leaders for your duplicity. That's what I have to say on that." That's what she has to say on that.

[02:25:39] **Fai:** "Thank you. Thank you for listening and thank you for offering these terms and this information. Tell me, in what way can he pay both you and your leaders? Are we talking monetary or are we talking in a different fashion? Just clarifying, not negotiating right now."

[02:26:08] **Esther:** "Oh, I would happily accept gold for my time here."

[02:26:11] **Fai:** " Well, you know, I just wanted, I just wanted to make sure the gold was acceptable. You know, if that's not, then we have to figure out what is, but if it's gold, you want, then, you know. You were held here, you were working and -- you weren't working, but you were held. So yes, of course you should be compensated. And your leaders were, you know, like your expertise they had to go without for this time. So of course they should be compensated. So I personally, I, I think that sounds incredibly agreeable. King?" "

[02:26:40] **Esther:** "Yes. Yes! Gold. Name your prices, name, name what you would like, I will give it to you. Yes. Name, name what you would like. It's yours."

 [as Nimri] "I'll have to do some calculating: gold for my time here. What you have promised to our leaders, you must make good on. We would like the information about the Court of Ether and Frilogarma. Things were getting quite dire the last time we communicated; it could be a matter of our people's survival. *You* promised us information."

[as Drum Thornfiddle] "Yeah about that... that information?"

[02:27:21] **Fai:** "Allow me -- "

[02:27:24] **Esther:** "You will get it!"

[02:27:27] **Fai:** [sighs] Shoulda interrupted him when I had the chance!

[02:27:32] **Justin:** Long sigh...

[02:27:35] **Fai:** You were doing so good, my bro. "Okay, let's take a step back here. Because the payment you are able to-- I believe you are able to promise-- but let's put some cards on the table. I don't believe that you have information, any more information that can help them. And I -- what I personally believe is that our best use here would be to see what we can do to begin some sort of diplomatic relations between their people and her so that we can... the truest way to make amends would be, this would be the way to, to fix their problem. Wouldn't it?"

[02:28:15] **Esther:** Actually, one of them is going to jump in and say, [as Irvik] "I'm sorry, are you laborin' under the impression that we want to be friends with Frilogarma?"

[02:28:24] **Fai:** "No, not friends, but you know, negotiate a ceasefire or something. You know, like not a friendship, but a get-the-fuck-out-of-each-other's-life-shit. Do you think that's unreasonable, un-possible?" Like, like full honest, earnest...

[02:28:42] **Esther:** [as Irvik] "The situation is very, very complicated. Might take a while to explain it. And frankly, we don't know you. You seem to know the king fairly well." And they, they really look rather suspicious of you. And they're going to look at Oom and say, "We would value your perspective on this."

[02:29:11] **David:** "Well, I think it's, it's fair to be distrustful given where you're at. But I truly believe that there's a lot to be gained moving forward if we try to be a little bit more honest with each other. Whether that's doable right now at this very moment, that's perfectly fine to not feel that it's, it's, we're in the best mindset to negotiate. But it's worth considering if not for you folks in the immediate, perhaps other people at a later date."

[02:29:46] **Esther:** [as Irvik] "Perhaps you might help us learn the customs of this place you come from that has unique approaches to conflict resolution. Perhaps we could be let out of this room to a place that may not even be located in this building. Perhaps we could meet there to discuss our perspectives on what has happened, to hear more of the King's perspective on what has happened. If our weapons and equipment were returned to us, I would be willing to assure you in good faith that I will stay here until the time at which we agree to talk. Such gestures would give me confidence that any information we share will not be used immediately against us."

[ as Nimri] "I will agree to this. I want to be let *out* of this room. I want my things back. I am willing to try for the sake of my people . For the sake of understanding what this king has and has not promised us and has and has not done. Willing to try staying here for a few more days to build these relationships, but I make no promises. And I make no promises about our people making peace with that woman."

[ as Drum Thornfiddle] "Sounds good to me. I really just want to prove to everybody that I am being the best version of myself. Be free, with my blessing. You may stay here -- you can go anywhere you want. I'll, I'll give you a pockets full of gold right now. You name however much gold you want as compensation for your time in this room, and I will give it to you before you leave this castle. Really just hope we can, uh, we can... I really just hope we can!" And he stops there.

[02:31:55] **Fai:** "Well, um, you know, I think maybe you probably owe them more than they can easily just take in pockets when they are going to find accommodations that are away from here. So, you know, let's keep that in mind, but give them whatever they want in the full knowledge that it's, you know, it's, it's not going to be probably carryable for them.

So you're going to have to give them a, a cart to go with it on their way home. You know, let's remember that. The logistics, you know?"

[02:32:23] **Esther:** "Yes. Yeah. We'll work it all out. We'll work it all out."

 [as Nimri] "May we leave this room?"

[02:32:30] **Fai:** "Please, please." We would have to fetch some guards to get their stuff or what?

[02:32:34] **Esther:** Yeah. The king will dispatch the guards to, to get their stuff. It will be fairly easily brought to them.

She's going to walk out, shoulder the king as hard as she can on her way out the room. And Irvik will walk behind her and just give like a withering " You, sir, are no gentleman!" And he walks out.

Drum is just going to look at you and say, "You know, I think that would pretty well. I think that went pretty well. All things considered, I think I nailed it."

[02:33:04] **Fai:** You know what, honestly, I think that went pretty well too, considering. You know, they, they listened to what you had to say. They told you what they expect of you and they walked out the door."

[02:33:20] **David:** "You didn't get hit by a book!"

[02:33:21] **Fai:** "And you didn't even get punched. You know, I told her that if it w-- if it's what it would take, I would negotiate with you to let her punch you in the face .And you didn't, we didn't even have to do that. So I think, well done on all of us, actually."

[02:33:38] **Esther:** "Thanks, Temerity."

[02:33:41] **Fai:** "Thank you for listening. I, you know, every day is a new day and we... you can be a new man, every single one of them, okay? I'm really proud of you for what you've done today. And I want you to, want you to hold onto this as as an example of, of one of your best days. Of you being your best self and aspiring to be your best self. We've done something good today, you know? It's, it's a seed we've planted and we have to keep watering it.

But the thing is, you have to remember in life there's -- you know, I know I'm going to sound like an elf, and sometimes it happens, but-- you can't speed up the growing process of a seed. You just have to let it sprout and you tend to it. And some stuff just has to happen, you know, the sun or whatever, but there's -- in life, there's only so many places that you can take a shortcut."

[02:34:28] **Esther:** He, as you're speaking, his face just starts lighting up and he looks from Oom to you to Nommie back to Oom. And like, is like "Temerity, you are a genius. I mean, yes. All that's true here. But what it really started me thinking of is, you know, in the Old Country, they say things don't happen like that.

You can put a seed in the ground. Suddenly it's a giant tree! Two seconds later. I am definitely being my best self today. I've had a genius idea. Everybody stay right here!" And he just like rushes out the room --

[02:35:00] **Fai:** "No deals!"

[02:35:01] **Esther:** You, you hear him exclaim "Z!" At the top of his lungs. And like, he runs to this box with levers, which start floating up, and, um, he will shortly-- I mean, like you could all attempt to follow him, but he left. He took off. He's like, " Wait here, wait here. Genius idea, genius idea." And as he's like passing, his guests, he's like, "I'm really going to sweeten the deal. Don't you worry. My apologies forthcoming... genius idea!" And in a moment, he will arrive in this drawing room where Professor Z and Ember and Miv and probably Buster are.

And he's going to say -- fling open the doors -- "Z! Good old chap. So glad to see you! And, um, all of you too. I am King Drum Thornfiddle, if you don't know who I am. Z, I need your presence now. I'll explain all the way down. I've just had a genius idea. And you are exactly the fellow to help me." And that we're going to leave things.

[02:36:05] **Justin:** I think Ember is definitely going to want to start just like, sneaking around the castle to find Temerity and Oom and whatever that leads to.

[02:36:15] **Fai:** I mean, you might not even... like I'm, I smell completely different from all these bubble baths. You know, we've been living on the road for a long time. Finally got a chance to air out my britches and shit.

[02:36:28] **Justin:** That's true.

[02:36:30] **Esther:** So, how are all your characters feeling right now?

[02:36:35] **Justin:** Ember's still totally worried.

[02:36:37] **Fai:** Temerity is cautiously optimistic. I think Temerity feels as though he was able to underline the gravity of the situation and that the king did a surprisingly good job on the apology because literally in the moment before introducing it, both of me and Temerity were like, 'oh shit, we should have asked him about this before. This is, is this going to be a fucking Notes app apology?' But I wasn't, and I'm blessed for it. So I'm really proud of him. And I kinda, you know, I think that just like from the point of view, it, of it being like a story beat, I think it's nice for him to have issued a genuine apology of some sort, you know. Even if he's being him about it, he's -- it still seems like there's genuine -- he does acknowledge that he done wrong and is willing to say it to the people he did and to try to make those amends. And I think that's nice.

[02:37:42] **David:** I think there's definitely an emotional whiplash component to this where it was like, "huh, maybe we had genuine growth" to "I have no idea where he's running to." [laughs] So there's definitely some anxiety there for sure for, for Oom.

[02:37:58] **Alex:** I think Z is mostly, uh, flattered, befuddled, and it's a bit of a whirlwind to just have the king come rushing in and want to whisk him off. I don't know. Hasn't really had a moment to figure out what's going on.

[02:38:15] **Esther:** How does he feel about the conversation he had with Zaelie?

[02:38:19] **Alex:** Like, I think there's a lot in that conversation where Z, before that conversation just genuinely had not considered things, right? Like as a gnome, he definitely knows that like The Bleaching is a thing and keeping your colors bright is a thing and stuff like that. But hadn't really thought about-- because there aren't Bleachlings in Brastlewark -- what the impacts of that are. Definitely seen them before and not, you know, not like, 'oh no, what's going on?' at all. But hasn't had a lot of time in like, social situations to interact. Definitely opened his eyes and was like, genuinely confused about why she just wouldn't come into Brastlewark.

[02:38:58] **Esther:** That was a fun moment for me. It was really fun. I'm excited to see if you run into her again.

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