

Worlds Beyond Number

The Wizard, the Witch, and the Wild One: Episode 16 "Everything" Final

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

Erika Ishii

This is the sound of Worlds Beyond Number

[A storm of strings crescendo into the ringing of a gong]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Miles tall, faceted crystal glass, flawless and completely clear. A spire in the center of a white desert, pointing towards the stars. Endless fine white sand blowing in the breeze under perfect, clear stars. No cloud nor vapor hangs in the air. So at night, the Tower of the Citadel, the Erien, is illuminated in a quality of light, silvery but as clear as broad day.

[Triumphant horns swell in the distance]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Small yellow lanterns flicker heatlessly in trellises of rose and vine in brick buildings, and a vast marble balcony with a mica-flecked balustrade overlooks the edge of Malacanth Court, one of the 24 courts of the Citadel.

[The horns grow louder, over a serene piano melody]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Each of the courts, timed to the hour, floats up and down, one helix spiraling down, the other spiraling up and pausing for the briefest of moments, when one court lands in Haverward at the ground and the other ascends to the apex at the very pinnacle of the Erien. The dance of the floating platforms of the Citadel marches inexorably to the steady beat of progress, innovation, exploration, discovery, learning; the secrets of a world of endless magic, unveiling themselves with the steady ticking of time.

[The music concludes with the ringing of a large bell]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Gazing out over the white sand, Ame the witch sits in a slender, shining wheelchair with a sleeping fox, his little black-socked paws splayed out off her lap in that way that cats will do when they're, like, on their stomach, and the legs shoot out on either side of their head and are completely straight, but they look somehow comfortable doing it. [Aabria Iyengar laughs]

In his glamour, the tall, red-braided hair and broad shoulders of Eursulon with Wavebreaker at his side, dressed in—Go ahead and describe, like, your martial cadet's uniform. Like, what does a wizard sword-wielder cadet wear at the Citadel?

Lou Wilson

I mean, I'm sure—I feel like it looks like a kind of downgraded version of Suvi's attire, like it lacks all of—it's all the same colors and tones, but lacks all of the kind of finishes. Like, it's pretty rough-hewn tunic with, you know, I feel like, kind of like little shoulder plates on top. I think you can tell Eursulon is maybe wearing the pauldron underneath it, but, yeah, with, I think maybe like, a little, a little one of those, like, half cloaks that kind of, like, hangs off the right shoulder.

Arabia Iyengar
[Laughs] Yeah!

Lou Wilson

And then I'm assuming I would have some kind of symbol that suggests that I'm the protectorate of someone as important as Suvi, be it either for her or for her patron, Silence.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

So one of your sort of half cape has a clasp of a brooch on it that simply just has the Tower of the Citadel on it. A simple symbol of a crystalline structure [the sound of steel striking plays] with a curving line behind it; the curved line representing the sand of the desert, and the ordered angular symbol of the Citadel, this geometric shape imposed over it.

It is the most simple symbol and form of saying, "This person is here at the invitation of the wizards of the Citadel as a guest." Like, the wizards themselves don't wear this pin because they have more refined delineations of their tasks and stations, so this most-recognizable symbol of the Citadel is actually what guests wear.

You've seen—I would say that somewhere under 10 percent, but over 5 percent of the people you run into at the Citadel do wear this. The Citadel is an important enough institution that there are some significant number of non-wizards here going about their business. Wizards have, you know, occasionally wizards will fall in love with someone who is not a wizard, as shocking as that may be to some. They will have representatives of the Imperium or other people here on official business. So you do see these emblems around from time to time.

And, yeah, your tunic, it sort of is like a one-quarter robe. It, like, ends—it doesn't end at your waist, but it does end above your knees still. So you look a little bit more athletic than someone walking in full robes.

Lou Wilson

You know, I could run and it doesn't—it's not going to get caught in my knees.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yes, exactly. And, Ame, I will also say you have been out for a month in a magical sort of coma. So you're being transported right now because you are—don't have your full strength returned to you yet.

But, as the doctors told you back in the infirmary, probably with, like, a little bit of time and recuperation, you should be back to your old self.

Erika Ishii

And I sadly look down and notice that my muscles are gone.

Aabria Iyengar

Aww...

Erika Ishii

The rings, when they were taken back, have left me not as swole as I once was. [Sighs] Right now, I'm just wearing a kind of a plain white shift to get from the infirmary, back to wherever we're going, and I have my things all in a little pack attached to the wheelchair.

Aabria Iyengar

Suvi is absolutely leading you less panically back to her home, dressed in sort of just nice green satin, like a little button down with matching flowy pants. [Erika scoffs in disbelief] Yeah, she looks—I look cool all the

time. Stop it. [Laughs] She's here and trying to impress you. And I think there is that sense of all of the panic of getting to you and seeing Ame and confirming with her own eyes that Ame is okay is now giving way to, like, the sort of mental super long list of things that Suvi wanted to go over with you once you were awake and she's getting lost in that immediately.

Like, ah, the dopamine of, "You are fine," is okay. And now it's like, "Okay. I have no idea. She'll probably want to leave right away because she didn't want to come here in the first place. And I don't know what mood she's in. She seemed really—I got to give her her gift before she leaves, and then we have to talk about these things, but she has things to talk about."

So, Suvi has gone sort of radio silent and is just pushing the wheelchair and leading you back to her place on autopilot.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Suvi, with your staff of the Citadel gleaming, a full apprentice archmage, as you wheel Ame off in the direction of your suite, [the sound of soft footsteps plays] moving silently through this place, you hear the soft little snores of the fox.

Fox [Brennan]

[Snorting and mumbling] Get away. Get away from it. Bite your hand.

Aabria Iyengar

Suvi, like, tenses up a little.

Ame [Erika]

Sleeping angel...

Erika Ishii

I say, sort of half paying attention. I just—there's so much here. I'm looking around at the beautiful marble and these floating wonders. [An ominous sound, like the call of a large whale, soars overhead, followed by a delicate piano]

Ame [Erika]

It's beautiful. This is where you grew up?

Suvi [Aabria]

[Surprised and taken aback] Oh! Um, yes. Yes. It is. This is... yeah. You've been here for a month. But welcome. Welcome to my home.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

It's amazing, Ame. You haven't even tried the food yet. Oh, the food is good.

Suvi [Aabria]

Oh, we got a... snow cone.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

I can wait. [Laughs] I can wait.

[Crosstalk]

Ame [Erika]

No, we can do that. We can do that now.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

It's alright. He comes once a week, and he'll be back next week.

Ame [Erika]

Oh...

Suvi [Aabria]

Uh, do you have quest—uh... [Suvi is at a loss for words]

Ame [Erika]

I have so many questions. But, I—I... Eursulon, you look so good!

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Thank you. It's, ah... I've been working with Steel and she is a great, albeit incredibly mean, trainer.

Suvi [Aabria]

[Laughs] That is... very true. Suvi is making the exact same face as you right now, like "Uh oh."

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

I have learned a lot, but it has come at quite a cost. A lot of early mornings and push-ups. Fucking push-ups.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah...

Ame [Erika]

[Laughs faintly] Aww... I missed you both so much.

Suvi [Aabria]

I—where... Do you have a sense of the time that's passed, or do you just remember a sword being swung and then waking up here?

Ame [Erika]

[Whispering harshly, through her teeth] I remember everything.

Suvi [Aabria]

That's so ominous...

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You arrive at Suvi's apartment, you see, as Aabria described, hanging, like, fabric, and again, there are, like, many different artifacts and, you know, objects of importance, papers spread out in a work area, an unmade bed. [Aabria lets out a disgusted gasp] [Brennan chuckles]

Aabria Iyengar

Ooh, yeah. I'm casting, like, a distance Prestidigitation.

Erika Ishii

[Excitedly] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah!

Aabria Iyengar

It's the one where you start casting outside of the range because you're waiting to hit the range [Erika guffaws] to clean it the moment you can, like,

Suvi [Aabria]

[Straining] "Oh... got it! Hey. What? Don't sniff. Don't, like, sniff."

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

His name is Silver. [Suvi sighs exasperatedly while Ame "ooh"s excitedly] He's very handsome.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah...

Ame [Erika]

[Teasing] Is he your boyfriend?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

[Excited] Yes! We've never... Is there a...?

Suvi [Aabria]

Wow.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Do you have other labels?

Suvi [Aabria]

There's, uh... no. No, labels are... We could all die, so...

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Ah.

Ame [Erika]

[Knowingly] Oh, of course. [Crosstalk] Tomorrow is never promised. So you got to just roll with how things are.

Suvi [Aabria]

[Awkwardly] It's so good—it's so good that you're back. Uh... um... let's go, one more step.

Aabria Iyengar

And I think there's some papers around in the suite, but the majority—and, like, Suvi's running around and kind of grabbing them, and then leads you to a door that just, I think it looks very plain, like just hewn wood in the side of a wall, but somehow just looks unopenable. And she draws a small rune across the frame of it [chimes ring, followed by the creak of a heavy wooden door] and unlocks it—and I think this is sort of the vestigial wizard tower where you hide all of your secrets and your true study—as she opens the door to her study. And it's just a big, sort of dark, oil, like, analog oil, lamp lit study with a big, dark desk and just built-ins all around, covered in books and vials and objects. And in the center of the floor, on top of a dark red rug, a big circular sigil made of salt spread in the center, like,

Suvi [Aabria]

Please don't kick that. Please don't kick it.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

You have to be careful in here.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yes.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

It's filled with delicate things that I have already—that I've broken many of.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah, it's fine. It's fine. We can fix things. Just try.

Ame [Erika]

[Rifling through the room] Wow... Ame's... [at a loss for words] Ah...

Suvi [Aabria]

You can touch whatever you want. You're fine.

[A mysterious, jaunty tune plays]

Ame [Erika]

Oh.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

She will fix it. She won't be happy that she has to do it, but she will.

Ame [Erika]

Oh, my gosh. There's so many limbs on this thing.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah, um, so they don't—so that's a spider that doesn't come with that many—but if you can find a spider with an eleventh, uh, sort of leg, it will lead you to... their webbing is actually, like, a very good component when you're trying to stitch in magical... It's a reinforcing—

Ame [Erika]

What's this formula?

Suvi [Aabria]

Okay, so we'll just form—oh, well, okay. So, you know how when you look up at the sky, and you kind of want to know—I was looking at the transportation circles—

Ame [Erika]

[Glass bottles can be heard clinking around] What's this powder?

Suvi [Aabria]

Oh! Okay, that—

Ame [Erika]

Blue...

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah, don't...

Ame [Erika]

That's a really nice blue...

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Give me a dexterity saving throw.

Ame [Erika]

Oh!

Suvi [Aabria]

God!

[Erika and Aabria giggle]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

[Faintly, from a distance] 18!

[Aabria bursts into laughter]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

As you blow the sand, [a breathy whoosh reverberates] it circles back up and almost goes into your eyes for a minute, but you swat it out of the way, and the sand moves off and hides in one of the books on Suvi's desk.

[Wind blows through pages]

Suvi [Aabria]

Fuck! Hold on. Ugh.

Aabria Iyengar

And I walk away from the—

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

It's alright. I've done it before.

Ame [Erika]

Oh.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

I'm glad it didn't get in your eyes.

Suvi [Aabria]

[Frustrated] Ah!

Aabria Iyengar

Just shaking a book wildly trying to dump this blue sand out.

Erika Ishii

You're literally, like, pawing all around a little bit.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You guys watch the sand sort of fall out, go about halfway to the floor before it bungees and [slurps] goes back up into the book.

Suvi [Aabria]

[Forcefully] Stay down.

Ame [Erika]

Alright. Okay. Um, are we... is this... are we safe here?

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah. Flick of the wrist, [a heavy door slams] the door slams shut, and I think you can hear that, like, sound is dampened to just this room. We're good.

Ame [Erika]

Okay. I want to know everything about your protectorate and about Silver and about, like, snow cones and everything, but what does the term Acatator mean to you?

[An ominous sound swells and ends abruptly]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

[A strong wind blows] We move back to the night that Ame was first moved to the infirmary, and Suvi arrived at the Tower of the Sword, the tallest structure in Malacanth that overlooks the rest of the court and the vast deserts beyond the Erien. On a tall balcony, a small limestone bird bath sits in the wall, [birds chirp and titter] surrounded by flowers, burbling softly as a gargoyle's mouth conceals a small copper pipe, water gushing out from it.

And for one of the rare instances, you see Steel unarmored. She is in a soft, comfortable looking white robe, hemmed in gold, and with sort of a deep collar that comes down to show a small white pearlescent stone clasped in gold hanging around her neck from a thin gold chain. Her hair is partially let down, like, tied up a little bit on one side behind the ear. There's, like, a small braid there. White streaks on her face, the sort of partially whitened iris, the white through the hair.

She sits at a table acknowledging your arrival. You hear the voices of her children and husband inside. Her children are largely older now. Her eldest daughter, Cadilla, who is 18 years old, just a few years younger than you, who has, like, sort of soft brown skin, covered in freckles over the bridge of her nose and her cheeks with a kind of deep brown with little highlights of, like, dyed blonde and red and other things like that up through this very curly hair tied up in a bun. She's got a sword at her side. She smiles with these sort of hazel, intense eyes, like a little ring of gold around them. Comes out to you as you arrive and goes.

Cadilla [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Suvi, you're back!

Suvi [Aabria]

Hi.

Cadilla [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Hey, how was it?

Suvi [Aabria]

Oh! Ooh...

Aabria Iyengar

And I give a weird little look over at Steel and lean in.

Suvi [Aabria]

It was... intense. But good.

Cadilla [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Awesome. Did you—I heard you got, like, a protector out there and you came back with a witch?

Suvi [Aabria]

Oh, my God. Yeah. So they were friends from—yes. Yes. He's the strongest man in Silbry, and she's in a coma. But that's okay. She'll be better. It's fine.

Cadilla [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Oh, my God.

Suvi [Aabria]

It's wild out there.

Cadilla [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

I can't believe you got to go on an adventure. Mom said that you were supposed to be back after, like, a week.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah, it was—okay, so, literally, the first day, I see this, like, big monster, and it broke.

Aabria Iyengar

And I think this is the first time Suvi's like, "Uh-oh." Has not locked in a cover story for any of this yet.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see Steel on the balcony, says,

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

[Shouting] Cadilla, you need to be studying.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see that, uh, the...basically, I mean, Cadilla grew up.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She's your sister, essentially. She smiles and says,

Cadilla [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Okay. Um, well, listen, I'm about two months away from my final exam.

Suvi [Aabria]

[Whispering] Yes! Let's go!

Cadilla [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

So, if you have any time that, you want to help me get ready.

Suvi [Aabria]

Oh, yeah.

Cadilla [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Okay. Awesome.

Suvi [Aabria]

I'm around. That's great.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And she gives you a big hug and says,

Cadilla [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
I'm glad you're not dead or captured.

Suvi [Aabria]
Yeah. Oh, God. Yeah. Yes. Same? No. Thank you.

Aabria Iyengar
And I'm going to try to trip her as she walks away.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Success.

Cadilla [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
[Yells in surprise]

Aabria Iyengar
Yes! [Laughs deviously]

Cadilla [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Not fair!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And you see that, uh, yells out.

Suvi [Aabria]
The sword is keeping you off balance. Maybe take it off while you're in the house.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You see—Steel says,

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Suvi!

Suvi [Aabria]
[Surprised] Ah!

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Cadilla, that's good advice!
[Aabria and Erika laugh]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You walk out to the balcony, and you see there is a plate of fresh baked, like, small pastries and fruit tarts, some fresh strawberries, and a little bowl of whipped sugared cream. You see that there is a small bowl of, like, spiced green nuts and two cups of very small cups of coffee. It's like, just becoming evening, so this is like, a little, almost like a pre-dinner. Wizards stay caffeinated all the time.

Aabria Iyengar
All. Day.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

All day. Steel looks at you and says.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Well, I got word that Ame is all set up at the infirmary. Dr. Tamry's an incredibly proficient alchemist.

Suvi [Aabria]

Do they know anything? How long?

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Things... It's—the best people are working on it.

Suvi [Aabria]

Alright. I know that tone.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

We don't know how it's going to go right now.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah, we'll put that on the list of things I should have trusted to you.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

In life, there's usually the right way and the fast way. But I understand that you had worked very hard to recover Wavebreaker and... So that summer, I came up—that's the little boy.

Suvi [Aabria]

Now, I'm not trying to come for you as the Sword of the Citadel, but we have to agree that it was weird that the little boy that you met that looked a lot like me was running on all fours, right?

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

The running-on-all-fours actually didn't bother me as much as you might think.

Suvi [Aabria]

That's wild. You didn't have Ovi yet, like...

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

No, no, no, no. But I—I... it's Grandmother Wren's house.

Suvi [Aabria]

Fair.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

So, I saw a little boy run on all fours and I went, "Well, that's not a little boy. That's maybe a demon or some other kind of thing."

Suvi [Aabria]

Okay.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

But I assumed... I assumed it was Grandmother Wren's business. I didn't know that—in other words, I didn't know that he had a connection to you. I know that he looked like you. But I assumed that he looked like you

because he could disguise himself or something like that, and had chosen to look like you as a trick or a joke. But it's not a trick. It means something.

Suvi [Aabria]

It's his glamour. I don't think he gets to change it.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

No, but he did choose it.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah. It's kind of my fault that he's stuck here, so... feels like a very specific reminder.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

So he's fully wayshadowed, then?

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Does he have any idea of how he can get back? And this happened when you were children? This happened that summer?

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Okay. Well, he's welcome here. He'd be far from the only spirit at the Citadel.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah, should we introduce—is it weird to introduce a spirit to other spirits? Also, some of them are not great.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

There are spirits who are bound here. There are spirits who asked to come here for our protection. There are spirits who work here. There are spirits who visit just to say hi. The world of spirits is vast and broad, and there are many reasons to come to the Citadel.

Suvi [Aabria]

Got it. Well, I'm sure he'll find his way around. He's good at surviving.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

But he has no other connection to the business in Port Talon. He has no other connection to what happened with the escape of Naram or what—did Morrow know he was a spirit?

Suvi [Aabria]

Oh, God, no. Morrow is an idiot.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Yeah, I know that.

[Dark, orchestral strings begin to play]

Suvi [Aabria]

No, Naram got out. We did our best. Galani really, really kind of led the charge on... We tried to get as many of the Empire's forces working in the right way as possible, but Morrow's clique [sighs] didn't know when to cut their losses.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Yeah, that could be a real problem. Gambler's fallacy, good money after bad.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah. He spent years—I get it. It was a nightmare. What would you have done?

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

I would have listened to me.

Suvi [Aabria]

Okay. I meant, if you had arrived and everything had gone normally, what could you have done?

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

We would have freed Naram in such a way that it wasn't a crisis or an emergency. We would have freed him with the abjurations in place to just get him back out to sea without losing the derrick or the lives of the people who are working on it. Presumably, he wouldn't have flooded the witchfire plane if we'd been prepared. And then Morrow would have been tried, and we would have found his collaborators, and we would have found who in the Imperium had signed off on this, as opposed to where we are now, where we don't know. And because it's a catastrophe now, nobody will admit it. And everybody that would have had their ass hanging in the wind now has a chance to cover themselves.

Suvi [Aabria]

[Whispers] That makes sense.

Aabria Iyengar

Suvi is very subtly, kind of working her fingers to kind of remember this wasn't accusatory. She's trying to figure out what is the right protocol for when you see something wild out in the world.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Huge... Steel sees you sort of working this out and just goes,

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

When you encounter enormous horrors, the emotional response to destroy them makes a mess that often doesn't teach you how to stop it from happening again. And in a world where you can unravel something slowly and carefully, you can actually learn what happened.

Right now, all we know is that there was a guild mage named Morrow who had an idea. What happened to his research, we already—by the time I arrived, that chantry of the Scepter's Chorus had been cleared out.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

You know, that guild protected itself. Whoever they were working with in the Crown and the Imperium, no one will take credit for it. Maybe they'll clean house internally, if it occurs to them to do so, and I can put pressure on them to do so. I wrote a letter to the Imperium saying that the Citadel disavows magic this dangerous, and we've already received response back saying that they agree, it was a horrifying error never to be repeated. So, handling it fast and dirty got us a letter.

Suvi [Aabria]
[Laughs dryly] Okay. Alright.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
I don't mean to be oppressive in castigating, and I'm, and I'm not—

Suvi [Aabria]
It's fine.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
What was the jaunt out of Port Talon?

Suvi [Aabria]
[Pained] Ooh... Okay, so you know how you can't, [an ominous, marching snare begins] like—our honored friends, can do sort of whatever they want, and then we just sort of maneuver around that?

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Mmhm.

Suvi [Aabria]
I have found in my time that witches are the exact same. That they kind of do things with good intentions, and because they have... it's their thing to... their balance. She went to the shrine of Orima to plead, sort of, for mercy on the city, and we went to go protect her.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Yeah, that checks out.

Suvi [Aabria]
Yeah.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Makes sense to me. Probably better that you went than not. I mean, I wish you had followed my orders, but in the end of things—like, what Ame did was very foolish, and she shouldn't have done that. But in the world where she did that, I still would have preferred you followed my orders and stayed, but it ended up being good that Ame came back to the city.

Suvi [Aabria]
Yeah.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
And Orima's probably where everything got hashed out with... I still... the whole relationship of—so the sword was from your childhood with Grandmother Wren?

Suvi [Aabria]
Yes.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Okay.

Suvi [Aabria]

Sword with Wren; small child trying to be very, like, here's a symbolic thing about our friendship; gave a sword that didn't belong to me to an honored friend who took it and kind of lost track of it over a very hard life in a very harsh world. And then we went to get it back, because it would break the curse, and it was hard to do that, but we did it, and it was fine. And then, yeah, so a witch sees, "Oh, there's witchfires and obviously an angry spirit, and then whatever the hell was happening on the derrick." And, ooh, they were like, "We got to do the right thing." And I was like, "No, I got to listen to Steel." And that didn't really—that wasn't great.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Yeah.

Suvi [Aabria]

But I think they did the right... [Sighs] So many people died.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

A lot of people died, Suvi. And you also attacked an Imperial soldier.

Suvi [Aabria]

[Softly] Okay, yeah, a little.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

So we're going to get your name cloak set up a little bit ahead of time. After that, by the way, I'd love to show you your parents' names.

Suvi [Aabria]

Really?

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Yeah. I can show you their names and where they're from, and...

Suvi [Aabria]

[Tearfully] I'd like that very much. Okay.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She touches your arm and smiles.

Suvi [Aabria]

Eoighorain.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Eoighorain. Eoighorain is a shapeshifter, and to the best of our knowledge, he's still alive. I know you remember him from childhood.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Your parents were incredible heroes of the Citadel. Their heroism in battle was very well known. 90 percent of the battles they fought on behalf of the Citadel are not well known at all. The battles that they participated in publicly were the tip of the iceberg, because your parents were some of the most effective double agents the Citadel has ever had.

Suvi [Aabria]

What?

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

To this day, there are entities within Gaothmai and Rhuv that believe that your parents were traitors to the Citadel, and those relationships are still providing dividends many years after your parents' heroic sacrifice.

Suvi [Aabria]

[In complete disbelief] What?

Aabria Iyengar

[A slam on the table and the clattering of cups is heard] I'm going to slam [Brennan laughs] both her and my little things of coffee.

Suvi [Aabria]

Okay. From the beginning. [Angry and flustered] What, ah, you have been burying the lede for years. Everything.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

The summer that we left you in Silbry, there had been an attack on the Citadel from Rhuv. The wards, not only around the Citadel, but the standing stones around Temen Rhuv, the crystal lake of Ket, which is, you know, near the capital of Gaothmai, the Cauntaranacht, all of the various castles of the royal family of Golvang; these far flung places, and importantly, the Citadel itself.

A movement was made in the relationship of the celestial paths to Umora itself that affected every single barrier for teleportation and the creation of gates. Throughout the history of Umora, times have come where magical travel was made more or less difficult.

And when you were born, we were in an age of incredible safety, in which teleportation was very easy to abjure. It was very easy to stop. And during the first three or four years of your life, all of that changed as the celestial path shifted ever so slightly. And that slight, slight shift meant that all of a sudden, you could teleport anywhere, pretty much unstoppably, very easily. So all of a sudden, this world that we had been living in—and this is similar to, if you study your history, you'll know that the first Gates of Star and Sun were created by the sorcerer kings of the Gaoth Dynasty, which created the first great travel. Those gates were set up all over the world.

So, there have been ages of teleportation within Umora's history for a long, long time. This was just the one that happened when the world was already at war, and so it was not an age of enlightenment and trade, like several hundred years ago. It meant that anything was possible, militarily speaking. So we moved from this position of deeply entrenched lines and huge battalions, to this incredibly violent couple of years, where small groups of wizards or sorcerers or warlocks could appear in an instant, inflict devastation, cripple logistical linchpins, and we had to figure out what we were going to do.

When you were six years old, an enormous group of powerful warlocks from Rhuv appeared and attacked the Citadel. They were wielding a type of power that we had some idea was coming, but it had advanced so rapidly. These were our first encounters with Chalices.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah. The captain that attacked us on the boat was a Chalice.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

They're extremely active. They had gone underground for some time around when you were, I think, seven or eight. The Abjurer's Hall figured out how to stop most of the teleportation, and we're in an age, once

again, where, for the time being, the wards are holding fast. But that couple of years was incredibly dangerous. That attack on the Citadel, where we had to leave very quickly, and we, you know, Eoighorain was here. Eoighorain... [sighs deeply]

Theoretically, Eoighorain is a revolutionary of Gaothmai. The Cauntaranacht, the great houses of Gaothmai that oversee the Protectorate are powerful sorcerers, and historically, the sorcerers of Gaothmai have always tried to eradicate shapeshifters like Eoighorain.

After that summer, I'm no longer certain. I mean, Eoighorain is a shapeshifter, but that ancestral feud between them... It is my belief that Eoighorain is responsible for the death of your parents.

Suvi [Aabria]

[Softly, almost inaudibly] Oh...

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

They died from an attack in Gaothmai, searching for a dangerous sorceress named Nahani. This was a type of mission they'd gone on many, many times before. The only difference this time was that instead of me tending to the safety and security of that mission, side by side with Eoighorain, it was left solely to Eoighorain. So the first time that it was just the three of them was their last mission.

Suvi [Aabria]

I'm going to ask the questions now that I think are why you didn't tell me this story earlier. You think he's still alive? You haven't found him? Do you know where he is?

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

I'm telling you now because I have come to the certainty that I cannot find him.

Suvi [Aabria]

Why?

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

I think that there are means that he has at his disposal to keep him hidden from the Citadel. Obviously, we have tremendous power at our disposal. But—

Suvi [Aabria]

Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. The thing—you sent me with stuff for Grandmother Wren. One of them was diagrams that looked like Eoighorain. Why? What were they? Why?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She takes a long drag of the coffee.

Aabria Iyengar

There's only a little at the bottom of the cup. I drank half of hers. [Brennan laughs in the background]

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

What happened to my... oh.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She looks and goes,

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

[Sighs] Several weeks ago, I made the determination that Eoighorain was still alive, something that I was unsure of up until recently. Realizing that he was still alive, it led me to—even when I believed him dead,

there was a part of me that thought he might be responsible. Learning that he was still alive, I became certain that he would—must be.

There's no world in which Soft and Stone would have died and he would have made it out alive, unless he wanted them dead. Not even because of any virtue on his part. Just because he's such a violent, deranged lunatic that I don't think he would have left a fight unless he'd won it. Does that make sense?

Suvi [Aabria]
Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
The diagram that was going with you to Grandmother Wren was me conceding defeat and asking for help from one of the world's most powerful witches to find him.

Suvi [Aabria]
Oh. So you think Grandmother Wren could find him? Or the witch of Toma?

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
If magical power could solve this, then the Citadel could solve this. What we're dealing with is something outside our sphere of understanding. He has some form of abjuration on him, but we have probed around the edges. We've talked to all of the Diviner's College. We've seen everything we can trying to go after him. We've found locked doors, which is not the same as finding a wall.

Suvi [Aabria]
Yeah.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
So it's just about who has the key. And to our knowledge... And Grandmother Wren, when she was still alive, there was a chance that she would tell me it was impossible. In which case, I never would have told you to have you go berserk with something like this hanging over your head.

Suvi [Aabria]
Okay.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Instead, with her gone, we're left with an open-ended question. Perhaps a witch could find Eoighorain. Perhaps a spirit could find Eoighorain. Perhaps Soft and Stone gave some ability to you to bypass these locked doors. I don't know. What I do know is this, and I need you to hear me, Eoighorain would kill you, as you are today.

Suvi [Aabria]
I hear you.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Okay. So I'm out of options. And there's elements of this left to explore, that we can explore when Ame is awake again.

Suvi [Aabria]
Well, put some more coffee on. I'm going to stay up. She should be up soon.

Steel [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Okay.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She gives you a kiss. And we come back to this present moment.

[A sound swells and ends, bringing us back to the present]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Suvi, Ame, and Eursulon, in the private study of Suvi's quarters. Small flicker of warm light from a lit lamp. There is a—maybe a little bit of incense or some flower petals. Rich smells of a wonderful dwelling place. Having come back from this memory, Ame, in the process of sharing what she now remembers with Suvi

Ame [Erika]

... and about snow cones and everything. But what does the term Acadator mean to you? I know that your parents were part of it, and so is Eoighorain and Steel and Grandma Wren, and that Grandma Wren believes that Eoighorain's loyalty was in question, and that...

Erika Ishii

I give a whispered rundown of everything that I remember about them.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

[Speaking as if in a reverberating void] ... Small group of self deputized individuals within the leadership of the Citadel... chasing, which I believe they jokingly referred to as the League of Whispers... was dedicated to the downfall of the Citadel... I believe there was a corruption within the Citadel that resulted in a prolonged series of secret violences across Umora... Suvi was brought here because they thought they were intending on... Steel has often asked me if I had any idea where Eoighorain was... I have my suspicions about him...

Ame [Erika]

It's all—it's all... And it's all a lot of... A lot to process right at this moment.

Suvi [Aabria]

Oh, yeah. Do you—I'm being a bad host. Do you need something to drink or eat?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Yes. I was going to ask, where is the dessert wine?

Ame [Erika]

Yeah, actually, I'm, okay, I'm really hungry. Yeah, I'm really hungry. I haven't eaten food in a month. I think they did some sort of tube deal. But that's not real food. I want to eat food.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah. Okay. We could just go get food. Let's go get food.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Let's—okay.

Suvi [Aabria]

Is that good?

Ame [Erika]

Well, what is there to eat around here?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Well, it depends on if we eat in Malacanth court or if we go somewhere else.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah, that's fair.

Ame [Erika]

Can we do both?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Um... I mean... [chuckles]

Suvi [Aabria]

Very hungry.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

[Amused] Okay. All right. Okay.

Suvi [Aabria]

I'm going to let you lead this, because I'm kind of a—I go to that, like, one little cafe, sort of at the bottom of this building.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Well, we'll start there because they do have nice treats there.

Suvi [Aabria]

They do.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

But it's not a real meal, you know. It's more like snackums.

Ame [Erika]

[Astonished] Snackums?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Yes. That's a word somebody else told me that I really like. [Ame laughs excitedly] So, we'll go start with snackums.

Ame [Erika]

Yeah. Okay. Also, by the way, I remembered everything that happened between when we last spoke and now. I've traveled the world and I know I'm the Witch of the World's Heart. And also, uh, kids are dicks.

Suvi [Aabria]

What?

Ame [Erika]

[Lets out a bewildered sound before calming down] Okay. Snacks first, though.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Yes, snacks.

Suvi [Aabria]

Hey, are you sure you don't need to—this is a big energy.

Ame [Erika]

Huh?

Suvi [Aabria]

Do you want to get this out while we're in this room?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Yes, that's what I'm trying to—

[crosstalk]

Ame [Erika]

Okay, here, hang on for a second.

Erika Ishii

I push you two out of the little room for a second, I shut the door—

Suvi [Aabria]

Hey, let me be very clear. You're not going to close the door. That's my room.

Erika Ishii

I start primally screaming.

Ame [Erika]

[Screams so loud that Fox starts screaming]

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Ah! Hi!

Ame [Erika]

Hi!

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Is everything alright?

Erika Ishii

I scoop them up and I squeeze them and I just don't want to let them go.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

[Suffocating] How's it going, boss? You're awake?

Ame [Erika]

Oh, you sweetheart. Oh, I love you so much, Fox. Yeah, well, we're unraveling a conspiracy, and also, we're going to go. Apparently, the eating's great here. I hear you were in my room the whole time, and so you didn't get to have any of the treats that the Citadel has to offer. So we're going to go get you some snacks and then—snackums.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Snackums!

Ame [Erika]
Snackums.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Snackums.

Ame [Erika]
And also, I'm going to tell you everything that I remember that was cursed out of me. Okay. This is a lot to process, and so I'm just going to kind of take it one step at a time. Food first. Food first.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Eursulon.

Ame [Erika]
Food first!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Malacanth Court is the, sort of, the uppermost—it is the highest clearance classified—it is the apex of the 24 floating courts of the Citadel. [A crowd of people hustle and bustle] What is Eursulon's go-to snack spot?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
Well, I think if I'm taking them to the one that Suvi likes, which is in the bottom kind of area, like right as you enter. It's cute and it's open all night. It's the kind of place you can always go, and it's a lot of grab-and-go options, you know. [Erika laughs] They have two tables out front, but nobody really sits and eats there. But it's a lot of stuff that you can take and carry to wherever you're headed to work and do those sorts of things. Like a lot of the bonbons and baguettes and things that I had been eating earlier were all from this spot that you can always—that is always open and always available.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Eursulon leads you to this all-night, 24-hour spot. The reason it's 24 hours is, you see, that there is a long stone pier that goes off with that mica balustrade that borders the edge of the platform. [Regal horns blare] The platforms of each of these places tend to be perfectly circular, with either two, four, or eight stone piers coming off of them, where you see there are these long, thin sky boats called gallithopters.

[The sound of heavy, spinning rotors pan from left to right]

They are about 30-feet long, but only at their widest, about, like, five- or six-feet wide, so that you can sit kind of like two to three people on a little bench. And that's if you're, like, squeezing in. And there are these long, gossamer dragonfly wings that come off the side of them. There's about eight of them, so four that are lined up on each side. Rather than being spaced out, they are all centered, but the wings joint out, so that when it flies, it almost is like a circle of buzzing, with this long gondola across the center, almost like, if you were looking down at a gallithopter flying, you would see a weird buzzing circle of dragonfly wings with like a long cat's pupil of a wooden gondola in the middle of it.

[A gallithopter soars overhead]

They have small lanterns hanging from the front and back, which is more of a safety thing, as you can see the night sky within the Erien has them sort of flying out, to and fro. But you also see that there are people waiting at them. Even at this late hour. It's probably like 10:00 p.m., or like 10:30. There are people waiting for them, who are waiting for the next platform to get closer to make the flight shorter.

So, it looks like they're not the most reliable for long flights up and down the Erien to faraway platforms. And that those are better served by waiting for one of the true, like, zeppelin or airships to happen. Or given that 95 percent of people in this place are wizards, just teleporting or dimension dooring, or flying under your own power, which seems very popular. These are much more, it looks like, for—it's like a public transportation option in a place where everyone has magical ways of getting around themselves.

Eursulon, you approach your favorite spot, or Suvi's favorite spot in Malacanth, Candle Street Bakery, which is the very first building at the end of the pier where the long avenue that circles Malacanth—so, Malacanth Avenue—takes off, that follows the balustrade around the edge of the entire court at the edge of the platform.

And then Candle Street is the little street that goes up into the heart of this place. The two tiny little tables, like little cafe tables outside, a standing counter with like a gold bar near your shoes on the inside to rest a drink and have a little baked good, or a snack, or a bonbon. And then a counter, big glass with gilded letters up on top saying, Candle Street Bakery. And you see that there is a warm wood, like that, kind of like, highly varnished orange wood counter, big glass showing the different bonbons and baked goods. And you see that there is a sort of smiling looking baker who is partially translucent behind the counter.

Ame [Erika]

... and that seems like our best bet for actually meeting up. But an injury of the wind and stars and she just walks the halls of her crystalline palace, and that's her job, I guess.

Suvi [Aabria]

I like that.

Ame [Erika]

Well, okay. And remember, everybody, that we only get one little treat each from here so that we have room for the other places. Hello.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see, this figure turns to look at you and says,

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

[Britishly] Oh, 'ello there. Ah, Mr. Bear! It's a pleasure to see you again.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

[Laughs heartily] Good to see you.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

This you recognize as Mr. Callum, who is one of the bakers here. You see that he is partially translucent, the only part of him that is opaque—and he is sort of a powdery robin's egg blue translucent—the only parts of them that are opaque are his eyes, his smile, a kind of decorated, sparkling orange mustache, and a little Van Dyke goatee.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

I have a type.

[The crew laughs and claps]

Aabria Iyengar

Yes!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

His clothing is opaque. So he's got a white shirt, a white baker's apron; he's got a little sort of, like paper hat, sort of like a little folded hat. And he has a sort of humble brass watch on his wrist. It looks like a real watch. But you see that the palms of his hands are opaque as well. But his skin, of his forearms, his fingernails, his face, and head are partially translucent.

When you look through a part of him that you can see, like, you look at his head, for example, you can see it's translucent in a way that you can see the back of his head as well, if that makes sense. So he's not like a vapor because you're like, "Oh! There's almost like a translucent glass at the front of your head. But I can also see the curve at the back."

Aabria Iyengar

Oh, yeah. Mmhm.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Like looking at a light bulb. Like looking at a frosted light bulb.

Erika Ishii

[Astonished] Ah...

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah. Dope.

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Mr. Bear and the Archmage apprentice!

Suvi [Aabria]

Hi.

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Time for a little cheeky late night treat.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yes, you know what I like. There's this—okay. Ame. So my favorite—if I have to pick one, so there's this cute little—it's like a baguette, and then there's, like, melon and cured meat and bone marrow. And that's my pick. That's what I get every time.

Ame [Erika]

Oh, every time?

Suvi [Aabria]

Every time.

Ame [Erika]

[Delighted] This is so fancy. I love it.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Well, it depends on your mood, but I like the croissant with chocolate and marshmallow. But then there's also the zucchini sandwich. It's light, so I need about three or four, but they're excellent.

Ame [Erika]

Okay, why don't we each get one of those, and then we'll share a little bit of each.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

That we can do.

Ame [Erika]

Okay.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see, the fox looks up and goes,

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

What's wrong with your head?

Suvi [Aabria]

Oh, no.

Ame [Erika]

Fox!

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

What's that? Why is your head so good? Is that better?

Ame [Erika]

Yeah, that's actually better. Why is your head so good?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see, uh, you see that, uh, [breaks into laughter] Mr. Callum turns...

Ame [Erika]

I'm Ame.

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Ame? Oh!

Ame [Erika]

Yeah.

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Up and about, the Witch of Toma! Well, welcome to the Citadel, Miss Ame. You must understand that the Archmage apprentice's friend, you know, there's a lot of studying going around here, so something as dramatic as a witch in a deep slumber has caused some bit of a stir. Happy to see you up and about.

Ame [Erika]

Yes, I'm very glad to be up and about. And I am starving.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Mr. Callum looks down at the fox and says,

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

And it need not trouble you that I am a little bit more translucent than some might say is normal of my type. I am a tamori.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And Suvi, you would know this very well. Mr. Callum is a living spell. He is a construct of pure magic. You would actually know him as a very common type of tamori here at the Citadel. He is a mage hand cantrip made ethereal.

[Erika yells and gasps in amazement]

Aabria Iyengar

That's so cool! Yes.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see those opaque palms on his hand. And he is working here as a baker at Candle Street Bakery.

Erika Ishii

Have I met sentient spells before?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You have never met a sentient spell before.

Erika Ishii

Well, then, that's wild.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah, I'm in your ear. Absolutely, just leaning down and being like,

Suvi [Aabria]

[Whispering] A tamori is like if you have a spell and you make it like a whole person.

Ame [Erika]

So do you have free will?

Suvi [Aabria]

Oh, my God.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

[Bursts out laughing] You see, the fox looks at you, Ame, and says,

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

That's got to be worse than my question.

Suvi [Aabria]

Hey, let me be clear. It super is. It is.

[Everyone laughs]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see that Mr. Callum looks at you and goes,

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

[Boisterous laughter] Do I have free will? Begs the question: do you?

Ame [Erika]

I don't know either, but my questioning it, I feel like, probably, you know, is a bit of an answer, right?

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Well, I'm interested in the same. Here's the issue. And I understand that you might feel sort of strange about this. I was born this age and of this temperament, and I love baking. I love to bake.

Ame [Erika]

I also love baking.

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Now, you may question whether being created to love baking is an abrogation of my free will. But my free will did not exist before my creation, so there would be no free will to abrogate. So it's complicated. You can feel about it however you wish.

Ame [Erika]

It's true. I was born a witch because, you know, I had the powers, but then I love being a witch, but then is that my destiny or is that just how I was born? Or is it the thing that I love and that I just pursue? You know, it's—we have those questions, too.

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Yes, I understand that there are some, you know, there's, we have a lot of—they don't come up to Malacanth a lot, but my other friends who, my other friends who come by sometimes and have those—

Suvi [Aabria]

You have friends?

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Yeah. Have those interactions. There's always about, like, the 12 or 13 year olds come around and they always have a big thing. They're like, "Yo, it's your free will," da-da-da-da-da and it's sort of like, well, do our gifts define us?

Ame [Erika]

Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

You have a gift for magic. Is it really—was your choice to embrace the thing you were good at, really a choice? You know, that sort of thing. So, in other words, a good way to think about it, Ms. Ame, is that I struggle with the same things you do.

Ame [Erika]

Hmm... and that makes us very similar.

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

It does.

Ame [Erika]

I think that, um, yeah...

Lou Wilson

I'm going to lean over to Suvi.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

I forgot what it's like to hang out with Ame.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah, right?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

I don't think I've ever come in here and been here for more than two minutes. [Erika howls] I, like, got the food and walked out.

Suvi [Aabria]

It's a clean interaction.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Exactly.

Suvi [Aabria]

And then this.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

We're back.

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Chocolate marshmallow croissant, Mr. Bear.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

[Roaring] Yeah!

[The crew laughs]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see that Mr. Callum walks over, prepares a croissant with marshmallow and chocolate, looks over and says,

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

And Miss Suvi, what can I do for you?

Suvi [Aabria]

I'm not going to get the same thing I normally get.

Ame [Erika]

No, no, we should get it. I want to try the thing that you always get.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah. Can I get that melon? The melon prosciutto, baguette... that little sandwich?

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Absolutely.

Ame [Erika]

And can I get an extra little dish of the marrow for Fox here?

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You see the fox, says,

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Marrow?

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You see Mr. Callum goes off and takes out this huge, massive sheep's bone and cracks it open, [sounds of sawing and slicing and scooping] scoops the marrow out and puts a bunch of it on a plate. He says,

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Here you go, my fine, furry friend.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And puts it on the ground and prepares a melon prosciutto sandwich for you.

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
And for you, Ms. Ame?

Ame [Erika]
I'd like one of the light sandwiches?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
The zucchini fritter sandwich.

Ame [Erika]
Zucchini fritter sandwich, please.

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
A fried zucchini sandwich coming right up.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And you see he goes over and, yeah, you see, like, all of the tasks that Mr. Callum is doing here. They're all less than five pounds. It's just this, you know... [Aabria cackles] All of the things that—everything he's lifting is sort of in these places where he can lift and interact with it, as he moves around. And you do see, I think Ame, give me an insight check, if you would be so kind.

Erika Ishii
That's a 19.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
I think there's something interesting happening with Ame here. As you look at Mr. Callum. Mr. Callum is happy, clearly intelligent, clearly sapient, but you also do get the feeling from his sentience that he is more similar to a spirit than to a human.

There's a part of him where you're like, oh, you're talking to me about struggling, but I can kind of tell that you're not struggling. I can kind of tell that there's something that's like...

Erika Ishii
There's sort of primary instincts that you go with.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And I think it is okay for some parts of this to make Ame almost a little bit uncomfortable. You recognize that he is a spell, that there is something not human here.

Ame [Erika]

I just think about all the times that I've cast spells, and where did they go and did they create anything? Anytime I mended, was that somebody mending something? And then are they there? Are they happy doing the mending? And are they happy in doing the mending because I made them happy? Or because they just genuinely enjoy mending? Which I do.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah. Here's the thing. A bunch of us tend to meet our first tamori when we're, like, 10 to 12. Those guys throw, like, half of the first-years into crisis and they bomb out because they can't really reckon with what it means to... yeah. Has Mr. Callum been here, like, my whole life?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Give me a history check.

Aabria Iyengar

23.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

On a 23 history check, Mr. Callum, you've not only known your whole life, this is not the only Mr. Callum in the Citadel.

[Erika laughs in disbelief]

Aabria Iyengar

Do I tell Ame? Yeah.

Suvi [Aabria]

There's a couple Mr. Callums. I don't know if that makes it better or worse for you.

Ame [Erika]

A couple? Mr. Callum, are you friends with all the other Mr. Callums? Do you, or can you...

Suvi [Aabria]

Wow, immediately.

Ame [Erika]

What's happening?

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

How can you be a friend of anyone if you're not already a friend of yourself? And I'm friend with all eight dozen of me.

[Ame gasps]

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

They all have different mustache colors.

Ame [Erika]

Oh, wow!

Aabria Iyengar

Suvi mouths that answer along with him. Like, we all ask it, and we all get that answer. It's kind of on a loop.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I think that there is this world for Ame that's, like, a little bit of a task of expanding your own empathy to allow for a type of being and intelligence that is worthy of respect and empathy and consideration, but is a spell, a working of magic

Erika Ishii

Sure

Brennan Lee Mulligan

A little sort of, like, arcane construct. It sort of reminds you in some ways of Flicker, who was also deeply humanized by Ghost. But Flicker, of course, was not human. Flicker doesn't require sleep or a soft bed. Flicker doesn't need to eat food. So, it's basically about, like, what are the right types of consideration to extend to a thing that doesn't participate in the world like Ame?

Ame [Erika]

I guess I'll just have to ask.

Suvi [Aabria]

Every time?

Ame [Erika]

I guess. Well, I mean, all the Mr. Callum's might have—they have different mustache colors, maybe they have different preferences or joys, you know. Maybe some of them are better at making the prosciutto sandwich, and some of them are better at making the croissants.

Suvi [Aabria]

They're all the same spell.

Ame [Erika]

[Whispering] But then explain the different mustaches

Mr. Callum [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

And one fried zucchini sandwich.

Ame [Erika]

Oh, thank you. Okay, we'll each have, like, a little bite of each other's.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah, okay.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Alright.

Ame [Erika]

Thank you. Okay.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
Rip off a piece...

Suvi [Aabria]
Yeah, here we go.

Ame [Erika]
Exchange it a little bit...

Suvi [Aabria]
Can we get, like, a little knife—no, I could use magic.

Lou Wilson
So, Eursulon is considering—Eursulon's favorite place to eat at the Citadel is the Night Market in Haverford. Haverford?

Erika Ishii
[Gasps] Haverward.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Haverward.

Lou Wilson
How long will it take us to get down there? Is it worth, like, at 10:00 p.m...

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You're almost down there now. You're an hour and a half away.

Aabria Iyengar
Best timing.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
Suvi, we should get one of the...

Lou Wilson
What are they called?

Aabria Iyengar
Gallithopters.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
Yes. We should get one of those to take us down. I know you don't love to go there, but I feel like Ame should see it.

Suvi [Aabria]
No, it's so... It's busy.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
It's very busy. But, I mean, it's Ame's first time.

Suvi [Aabria]
You'd love it.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
You will probably love it.

Ame [Erika]
I really do like Night Markets.

Suvi [Aabria]
Yeah. Okay. Everyone should see everything once.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
Once, yes. But, yeah, let's get a copter.

Suvi [Aabria]
Yeah. Okay. I'll go get it. Stay here and enjoy your sandwiches.

Aabria Iyengar
And I just run off with, like, half of my weird sandwich, and I'm going to go figure—I know how to hail a gallithopter.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Yeah, of course. You run up to one of the gallithopters and you see that there is a lantern set into the front. And as you approach, you see small, illusory images of the various platforms of the Citadel appear, rotating slowly in space, and you need but interact with the lantern and gesture to where you wish to go.

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah, it's definitely the walk up and then turn back over the shoulder, like interacting with the same interface for years. You kind of remember where everything is. So, I gesticulate arcanelly at Haverward while looking over my shoulder and sort of seeing my friends in the light of the Citadel. Like, I have dreamt about this for a decade. It's very, very cool, and I can't believe it's happening. And then I look up and I actually hit the wrong platform. So I'm going to correct that, [the crew laughs] and we will go to Haverward like we were always going to.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You look back and see Candle Street Bakery, the bakery's exterior, it's small little patio with those two tables. It has a wall of wax, that kind of goes up where like a vine trellis would, of thousands of melted candles. And it's covered in little wicks that all are burning with different colors of light from the different wax of the candles. It just looks like a beautiful candle sculpture that's been going for like a hundred hundred years. And you see through the window Eursulon and Ame, happy, smiling, even a little contented Fox licking his lips as Mr. Callum, like, leans with his translucent forearms and sort of laughs and talks with them in the beautiful starlight. [A creaky gallithopter lands with a loud thud] Your gallithopter is ready to go to Night Market.

Suvi [Aabria]
Come on.

Lou Wilson
Pushing Ame's wheelchair way too fast.

[Aabria and Erika laugh delightedly]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You get up to the gallithopter, the wings kick up, and you look down. So, each of the platforms of the Citadel are enormous, but they are not so enormous that, like—so, if you think about the width of the Citadel as being probably, like, between a quarter to a half-a-mile wide. So, these various platforms do pass each other within the Citadel. So, each of these sort of neighborhoods is almost like somewhere between an eight to a quarter-of-a-mile wide. So, tons of buildings within them, you know, they are like small neighborhoods unto themselves. And Haverward at the base is actually like a city. You can see it fills all the way to the edges of the crystal tower of the Erien.

[Triumphant horns ascend]

There is one central place that you see has this huge number of spiraling towers, huge beams, and platforms, and you see that there are retracted bridges, almost like these platforms that have been wound up in huge spools. And as the gallithopter descends, you see that these towers are where the platform lands, that people can come up the staircases, and the bridges insert, and you see there are wagons and gondolas and terrestrial vehicles and all that stuff. And down in Haverward, you see that there are a number of enormous gatehouses. The gatehouses are glowing with a kind of scintillating orange energy that go to Carrow and the seat of the Imperium, and a number of enormous metropolises. These are permanent portals to go throughout the empire to other places. So, this is where all of the vast resources—it's like, yes, there are sky ships that fly and enter the Citadel, like, permeating through the glass magically, but that's a hard way to get, like, water and food and all this other stuff into the Citadel. So there's these permanent portal in these gatehouses. But the main thing you see is hard-packed white sand streets. So the streets themselves are pure white, glittering with a kind of crystalline diamond energy to them.

There are still little bits of sand that have blown in from other places that have sort of, like, piled up in various areas. And you see this multi-story neighborhood of wild, almost Seussian wizard towers that are, like, partially built, but maybe not stacked evenly. So, like, there's overhangs and there's roofs that come over on top with enormous trails of paper lanterns overhead with various arcane runes inscribed on the outside of the lanterns. You see this multi-story descending market built into various bridges of rope and plank. And there are, like hanging bars, and little creperies, and noodle shops that are being pulleyed up and down on ropes throughout the Night Market as these different platforms move both vertically and horizontally through this cluster of towers.

[The horns crescendo as the sound of pulleys working and the gallithopter landing is heard]

Ame [Erika]

I've never seen so much magic together before. I mean, it's just all so cleverly done. [Through clenched teeth] Wow, it smells incredible.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Oh, it only gets better once you're inside. [Ame lets out a tremulous "ooh"] There's a specific stand that I would like to take us to, that's a seafood stand that I feel like I go to probably after every training session with Steel.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Hell, yeah.

Aabria Iyengar

Nice.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

One second. We just have to find it because things are constantly moving around. That's the one thing I don't like about this place.

[Brennan laughs]

Ame [Erika]

Yeah. It's kind of more for show, and less for convenience, right?

Suvi [Aabria]

[Hesitant] No... yeah. [Ame laughs]

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

I mean, it is—because once you find it, there is a satisfaction. It's worth the journey.

Ame [Erika]

Everything's a quest.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Creaking ropes, swinging bridges, and you see suddenly as being pulled up to another level in anticipation of Malacanth making its landing to get all of its resources and various things and let people come and go. You see a big shop with a bright wooden sign and a kind of splashy—it looks like a huge paint brush was used to paint the words on the outside that says "Chura Chowder," and you see there's an enormous sea bass on ice behind them. There's some lobsters. There's like, multiple massive cauldrons brewing with different seafood soups and stuff like that within them. You see there is a small row of ice on the central counter. There's like five or six bar stools as it comes up. But you do see that they are stopping and just having little crowds of like, five to 10 people waiting to just pay them some Imperial marks real quick and just get a bag of something fried off the back of the counter very quickly. You see there is an older man here and also what looks like his sort of middle-aged adult daughter. You would know this as Anton Chura and Mariah Chura.

Anton has a sort of olive skin, white, peppery, long beard, a sort of balding head, but sort of wild white hair coming over his ears. His daughter, like sort of black brows, black hair tied up in a bun with sort of a bandana over it. They're both working. Anton looks up and says,

Anton Chura [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

[Italian-ly] Second time today, bear? Why you come back?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

I can't get enough, Anton. You have to meet my friends.

Lou Wilson

I'm going to pick up Ame's wheelchair.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

This is Ame.

[The crew laughs]

Ame [Erika]

Hi.

Erika Ishii

I wave.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He says,

Anton Chura [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Oh, you eat as much as your friend. You drive me out of business. I give you [inaudible].

[Everyone laughs]

Anton Chura [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

What you want this time?

Lou Wilson

I'm going to do, I think what Eursulon comes to eat here, which is not—the chowder is delicious, but I think they offer a weird, almost like, food challenge-esque kind of almost like massive clam that it's like a stew cooked inside the clam, and you get to break the clam open with your—I think they give most people a mallet, but I think Eursulon does it with his hands. But it's this giant, like, almost like maybe two-foot, like two-foot wide, one-foot tall clam.

[With great effort, Anton places a clam on the counter. Eursulon opens the clam with a loud, wet snap. There are gasps from onlookers. The stew inside is bubbling.]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Open it up. The smell of, like, rich, savory broth, like, salty, fatty; it's swimming with, like, spices and little scallions, and green shoots, and vegetables. [Ame, or Erika, groans hungrily] And this cut up—the actual meat of this massive ocean mollusk is in there. But there's shrimp in there, there's other little oysters and clams. It's like, basically this huge gumbo, but you can see the liquid that looks like rich ramen-y—I'm salivating so much, it's a little...

Erika Ishii

I know!

Aabria Iyengar

Why would you do this?

Erika Ishii

Oh my God.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

But you see, in that first thing that goes down underneath that layer of stew, you see rice that has been marinating. So there's like, a rich, risotto-esque, or like, it's this... [Erika lets out a tortured groan] down there, that's just soaking up—like, as you do the food challenge, the thing waiting for you is just the rice that has soaked up all of the goodness that they've been cooking in this massive stew.

Erika Ishii

Fox and I look at each other.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Fox goes,

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

I need it. I need a whole one to myself.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Mariah says that these are normally shared between families of four to six.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Yeah, but I'm like Eursulon. I eat as much as Eursulon, and I'm as big as Eursulon.

Suvi [Aabria]

You're the exact same.

Ame [Erika]

Okay, yeah. But right now, we're going to save room so that we can go to all the other places and try all the things.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Those other places might be gone. [Aabria laughs] You don't know that the other places will be there. This is the only real place, right in front of us.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Honestly, the fox is not wrong, because I have seen a place, wanted to go there, eaten somewhere else, and then lost it in the shuffle.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yes. Yeah.

Ame [Erika]

Oh, no.

Aabria Iyengar

Suvi's looking at the horizon, looking for, like, the big purple sign that is a bar, in motion, across...

Ame [Erika]

Okay, alright. Well, you eat as much as you can, but keep in mind that we're going to still have delicious things to eat later.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Okay, if you—

Ame [Erika]

Consequences.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Listen, I'm going to eat all of this, and I'm telling you right now. I would bet all of my money that there will be no consequences.

Ame [Erika]

Okay, how much you got?

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

I don't have any.

Ame [Erika]

Mm...

Suvi [Aabria]

I'm going to pass the fox three Imperial marks.

[Coins jingle]

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Three Imperial marks says there's no consequences.

Ame [Erika]

Okay.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

I'm about to get twice as many as three Imperial marks.

Ame [Erika]

Yeah.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah!

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

I know how betting works.

Suvi [Aabria]

How does he know how betting works?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

We've gambled before. [Aabria and Erika laugh]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Suvi, as you get distracted, you see a purple flash, as a massive—it looks like a fucking Viking longship, but instead of a dragon figurehead, there is like a painted wooden horse. And you see there's tents, you hear people screaming. A little rain of, like, gin cocktail falls on you all as this massive purple sign that says La Carousel moves around the corner, and it leaves a purple streak hanging in the air, fading behind it as it just swings down the street from ropes attached to something you kind of can't see.

Suvi [Aabria]

[Out of breath] I gotta go! I found it!

Aabria Iyengar

And then Suvi just takes off.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Two more enormous of these, like, massive ocean stews land in front of you. Boom. Anton asks for some exchange of Imperial marks here. Or we can probably put it on Suvi's tab.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah. Yeah.

Lou Wilson

I think I, yes. I come here often.

Aabria Iyengar

A hundred percent.

Lou Wilson

And just put a lot on Silence's tab.

[Lou and Aabria laugh]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yeah, on Mage Silence's tab. It lands. Fox goes to work, stops for a second, coughs, and a baseball sized pearl falls out of his mouth. [The pearl clatters on the floor]

[Erika laughs]

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

[Exclaims in surprise] That's good luck! [Brennan laughs] You get—your next one is free, Fox.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Good luck? Getting a rock is good luck? There was a rock in my food.

Ame [Erika]

It's a pretty rock that humans like.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Okay... congratulations to humans on loving rocks.

Ame [Erika]

What did a rock ever do to you?

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

So much. Rocks have been a constant problem for all of my life. Sometimes they shoot up out of the ground and you can't get past them. Sometimes they're in your way, when a rabbit's running... I say, no rocks.

Ame [Erika]

No rocks. I'll put that on the list.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see, you have this—Suvi, you take off running, and Ame, you find yourself here with Eursulon. The stew is rich and filling. You can feel yourself having the first real meal in a month's time. This is, like, extravagant.

Now, Eursulon, who's, like, physically exerting himself every day, eating one of these every day, feels like it makes sense. But for you, even, like, a few spoonfuls into this, you're like, it's like the feeling of, "I want to eat this whole thing, and I know I do not want this tomorrow." It's too much.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

You don't have to finish it, Ame. It's more about the spectacle. I just wanted you to feel—I mean, it's been amazing here.

Ame [Erika]

It is very spectacular. You seem so well. This place suits you.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Well, I understand now what Suvi was talking about. This place, every... The first couple of days once, you know, the doctors told us that you wouldn't be waking up anytime soon. I just kind of wandered. Just looking, moving around, and checking in with Suvi occasionally. It doesn't stop. It's the strange thing. It's

been a month, and I still feel like there are places and things I haven't experienced or seen. It is truly wondrous.

Ame [Erika]

It is. I feel like, of course, a whole city full of Suvis, like working overtime, full of caffeine, would absolutely create some marvels.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

[Laughs] Yes.

Ame [Erika]

But people are being kind to you?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Yes.

Lou Wilson

I gesture to the kind of pin on my chest.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

I think this goes a long way here. I haven't had to pull a Suvi with anyone and stamp around or anything like that.

Ame [Erika]

You don't have a staff you could slam on the ground, like, "Do you know who my father is?"

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

But you won't believe how often I hear that. [Aarbia and Erika laugh] I'll just be walking around, and then you'll just hear a kerfuffle and give it, like, five to 10 seconds before somebody goes, "Do you know?" And then fill in whatever proper nouns you'd like there.

Ame [Erika]

And still, I'm glad that that grace extends to you. Thank you for visiting me, while I was—I heard that you were there every day and that you were the only reason that the fox could catch a nap.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Yeah, well, it's weird because there are a bunch of other trainees, I guess, but because I'm training with Steel, I don't have to do all the normal stuff. So, I have a lot more time in my day than some of the other people who are kind of coming up.

Ame [Erika]

Is it because she knows? She knows?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

I think so? But I think it's also just the Suvi connection.

Ame [Erika]

Oh ho ho ho!

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

I don't have to—they do a lot of running here. It's unbelievable. And it's not even towards...

Ame [Erika]

Towards something, or from?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Running to run. I don't know. They all talk about some kind of high they get once they pass, like, mile three.

Ame [Erika]

A high?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

I just don't fucking get it, man. Like, they love it.

Ame [Erika]

At mile three? For fun?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Speaker 4

Right, exactly. Nothing is chasing them. I honestly asked Steel, because Steel was like, "You should start to work on your endurance and things like that." And I was like, "Well, can you give me any sort of stimuli?" And she was like, "Well, you should just want it." And I was like...

Ame [Erika]

What?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

"What?" Exactly. Exactly!

Ame [Erika]

I don't necessarily, okay, well, and so... Oh! So you're, like, running towards this food.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Well, exactly. I would love that. I tried to get that going. I was like, "Can we put something at the end? Like, especially as a race that I do for myself?"

Ame [Erika]

Like a snackum.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Yes. But I don't know. Steel then started talking about discipline, and I just started dreaming about this fucking beautiful meal.

Ame [Erika]

Well, yeah. [Mouth full] It's so good.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

It's so good.

Ame [Erika]

Also, um, I think Suvi was there at my bedside a lot, huh?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Yeah, I mean, we both—Suvi's been more busy with the name cloak and all those sorts of things. But we came often.

Ame [Erika]

Yeah, but she—but I could smell the incense. I could smell it. There was, like, a spot on the bed that was just absolutely drenched in it.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

She always said that she did it because she could get away to read, but I think she also just wanted—we wanted to be there.

Ame [Erika]

Aww...

Erika Ishii

I hug you again.

Aabria Iyengar

I'm coming back over. Suvi's already a little drunk and has just, like, a giant purple bottle with, like, shot glasses stacked on top.

Suvi [Aabria]

I found it.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Oh, good.

Ame [Erika]

Wow. That's...

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

I never think it's worth the chase, but whenever Suvi's here...

Suvi [Aabria]

This is why we run.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Uh-huh.

Ame [Erika]

Oh... [laughs]

Suvi [Aabria]

And we are now adding alcohol to the equation. [Liquid is poured into glasses and they are clinked together]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Alcohol gets added. Are you having any of the stew?

Aabria Iyengar

I think I have one bite. I didn't know I was getting my own. I have, like, two bites.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Got you. So you give me a constitution saving throw as you guys start drinking, because the—for everyone with stew, that soaks up all of this.

Aabria Iyengar

Eight.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Eight. Suvi's feeling good.

Suvi [Aabria]

I'm great. This is so good.

Aabria Iyengar

I think there's a cigarette somewhere that comes out just like,

Suvi [Aabria]

Hey, yeah, we're good.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Yes.

Suvi [Aabria]

Night Market life.

Ame [Erika]

Whoa.

Suvi [Aabria]

It's got calm emotions in it. Calm down. We're great. [Ame laughs] This is so good. I love this. This is so nice.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

It's been a minute. Yes.

Suvi [Aabria]

God.

[A whimsical tune plays]

Erika Ishii

Hi, I'm Erika Ishii, known tabletop role-playing game enjoyer. All my life, I wanted to play in a Dungeons & Dragons game as a witch, a little studio Ghibli-esque cutie, a powerful enchantress in a tower, or just an eccentric old lady that fucks with the villagers' milk. I tried so many homebrews: a Hexblade warlock build, but that was just a violent sugar baby. Druids were too powerful. I even tried a wizard. But as we all know, wizards are nerds. That's when a friend told me to try the playtestable Witch Class from Worlds Beyond Number, designed by Mazey Veselak, Brandes Stoddard, Brennan Lee Mulligan, and Hannah Rose.

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[Whimsical lute music ends]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see... So as far as that night goes, Suvi gets a big meal. You hear the noise of music playing in the distance. [Sounds of a busy street, accompanied by a bouncy horn melody] You see a sort of, like, hovering party barge sort of moving through the air that has a club and some dancing going on.

Ame [Erika]

Dancing!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see there are people that are sort of—there's one that feels, like, very raucous. You see that there's another tall tower, though, where you can see that there are some people drinking, and there is an actual live band of musicians playing. And there people sort of slow dancing and waltzing.

You hear sort of rowdier noises as you go down into the darker recesses amongst the towers. You think you hear a sort of carnival barker for something that would be more like games of chance, and maybe even, you hear some rowdiness of people shouting at some kind of sport, like they're gambling or betting on something.

All of this unfolds here in Haverward, which is—Haverward has the most human, like, people can live in Haverward at the lowest level of clearance from the Citadel. So there's lots of humans that are non-wizards here, that are, like, just working and doing jobs and that go to-and-fro from the cities that the gates are connected to.

For all of you that are here, however... Ame, how are you feeling having just woken up from a coma? You've had a sandwich and a bunch of stew. You see that the fox looks up at you and goes...

Ame [Erika]

How you feeling, bud?

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

[Mouth full, choking] I—

Ame [Erika]

Yeah? Want to get some dessert? Get some ice cream?

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

[In a daze] Yeah. Yeah, I'm so hungry.

Ame [Erika]

Oh, great. I'm glad, because I still got so much room for other—maybe some more fried treats.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Well, I'm not done with my stew yet.

Ame [Erika]

Oh, okay, alright, well yeah. I said you can have as much as you wanted.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Yeah, you ate all of the fish, but the rice is still there.

Suvi [Aabria]

The rice is the best part.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

You need to eat at all the rice.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Can you guys tell me what rice is? What is that?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

The little bits of grain at the bottom.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Oh, it's plants.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Yeah.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

But it tastes like it has fat.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Yes, it's been soaking in the fat.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Okay.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

You know, some animals swallow little rocks to help with the digestion. If there's any chance you want to...

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Well, I don't like rocks.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Okay, well, look at that.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

And I said that. And something that feels like people do it is if they say something, people get—people make fun of them if they do...

Suvi [Aabria]

I would never. I'm going to pour some alcohol and just put a little shot glass in front of the fox.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

What's that? That doesn't smell like meat.

Suvi [Aabria]
It's not.

Ame [Erika]
Do you remember wine? [Suvi laughs]

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
[Intrigued] Oh...

Ame [Erika]
It's like wine.

Suvi [Aabria]
It's like double wine.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You see, he...

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
Yes, double wine.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
He laps up a bunch of it and goes,

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
That's not like wine. That's different than wine.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
It's way spicier.

[The fox pants, while Suvi and Ame laugh]

Suvi [Aabria]
Yeah. Hey, why the fuck did you bite me?

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Huh?

Suvi [Aabria]
You bit me.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Oh, I was cranky.

Ame [Erika]
Fox...

Suvi [Aabria]
Yeah.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
I was really cranky. I wasn't sleeping at all.

Suvi [Aabria]
No, I know why. I get it.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
[Sighs] Okay.

Suvi [Aabria]
You going to eat your rice?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
Or are you going to pay up?

Brennan Lee Mulligan
He looks down at the marks and he looks at the rice. His stomach is a ball, just a full ball. [Aabria and Erika laugh] And you see, he goes,

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Wait a minute. I'm going to lose because this gold—I can't eat.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And you see, he nudges the pieces across the thing and goes,

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
I don't even care about this.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And he falls over on his side and says,

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
If you'll excuse me, I'm going to be breathing hard. [Gasps strenuously]

Ame [Erika]
You did so good, little buddy.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Thank you. I know I did.

Erika Ishii
And I flood the three marks into one of my pouches.

Aabria Iyengar
Hell, yeah.

Suvi [Aabria]
Do you think I could teleport the stew out of his stomach? Because I feel like I could.

Ame [Erika]
Fox, how do you feel about maybe getting the food out of your stomach real fast?

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
No, it'll kill me. Don't get the food out of my stomach. I need it to live.

Ame [Erika]

No, no, no. There'll be more food later, I promise.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

No... no. I believe the promise, but what if something terrible happens and I didn't have food in my stomach?

Ame [Erika]

I get that fear. Yeah. Okay. You just lie there.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

I'll be here.

Ame [Erika]

Oh, okay. Okay. Yeah.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Wait, put me on your lap.

Ame [Erika]

Okay. Here you go. It's okay. It'll be okay.

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

No one look at me.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Well, Ame, I mean, are you tired?

Ame [Erika]

No.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

We can keep going if you want.

Ame [Erika]

I've been sleeping for a month. I'm fine. Yeah, let's keep going.

Erika Ishii

I had—when we saw one of the club ships pass by. I had stood up really quickly, and I was, like, dancing. Whoops! And I sat right back down immediately. My legs are still a little wobbly. And now we have a little fox asleep on my lap, and so I can't really move too much.

Ame [Erika]

But, yeah, show me some of your favorite places. Have you made any new friends?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Yes. Some of those places are only open during the day, so I could take you tomorrow. But, there's awesome shit we could do here. Let's go... uh, shit. What do we do? Mm... we could do that...

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yeah, actually, I will say this. Who is someone in Haverward that Eursulon has befriended and really loves, in the time that you've spent? Haverward is a very interesting place—I think there would be a lot to Eursulon

that appeals there, even though wizards are like, "Oh, Haverward, that's the industrial—there's griminess in Haverward."

But for Eursulon, Haverward is a friendly, lovely metropolis filled with interesting people—it's like, to you, in the places you've spent time, Haverward is actually kind of nice, because your appearance is never questioned there. No one ever, like, you walking around in Haverward are met in a friendly, nice way by everybody who's there. So, who's someone that you know in Haverward that you—handing the reins over to you for a second?

Lou Wilson

There's a boxing promoter who runs a pit fighting thing that is constantly trying to get me to go there and fight. I don't fight, but he does give me free drinks anytime I show up. So I think Suvi's provided alcohol. So now Eursulon is like,

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

I know a place, actually, where we can drink for free, and it's not even because of the badge.

Lou Wilson

And so I'm going to take them to this really scummy, scary pit fighting, illegal pit fighting ring where I hang out sometimes because the drinks are free.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You head to a place. [Crew laughs] This is—let me be clear, flying vehicles cannot get here because this place is so deep in the stacks of towers that it is effectively subterranean.

Lou Wilson

Eursulon just keeps going,

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

No, this is the way. Yeah, no, this is the right way.

Ame [Erika]

Looks like a dead end.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

No, well, see, this door opens.

[A heavy gate creaks open]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You walk into a door and arrive in an extra dimensionally large interior place within the Citadel. [Brennan's voice reverberates like he's in a cave] So this is like, if a catacombs was squatted in by a bunch of circus performers. [Aabria squeals joyfully] You see that there are tiles on the ground that are a steely gray lapis lazuli kind of color, and then a very light, creamy teal, all of them a little bit metallic, a little bit reflective as you walk. The arches are those kind of catacomb arches where everything is, like, domed, so there's not a flat ceiling anywhere, but just either square, or hexagonal, or octagonal, kind of like quarters and weird little places in between. Some of them get so large that suddenly there are lights, and tents, and strings. You see that there are stilt walkers and fire breathers moving around in this place. [Erika lets out an astonished gasp] There is a man who is about six-foot-four, enormously muscular. He has very baggy pinstripe trousers with suspenders, over what looks like a red and white-striped, like, swimming suit top.

Lou Wilson

Again, I have a type. I have a type. I hang out with mustaches and fucking guys in wild outfits.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see this guy? I will say, mustaches are very common in this, like, this kind of facial hair is very in vogue. So this guy has a...

Erika Ishii

Oh, he's just changed the whole tenor of the campaign. Now you have to imagine everybody, like, Naram with a—

Aabria Iyengar

Naram with a little mustache!

Lou Wilson

Well, specifically guys with mustaches worth mentioning, alright? I don't go for any mustache.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

This guy has pure Salvador Dali, like, two big points coming off his face. [The crew exclaims excitedly]

Aabria Iyengar

Brennan, I'm so sorry. How hot is he?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He's incredibly—he looks like freaky Tom Hardy.

Aabria Iyengar

Oh no!

Erika Ishii

[Faintly] What! No!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

So he's got, he's got the little red and white-striped, A-frame, suspenders and baggy trousers, and a cocked forward top hat with a gold sash around it, mustache coming out, handing out flyers. He's got a lot of rings and bracelets on his hands. And you see, he goes,

Losario Racamanti [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

[Jason Statham-like] Come on up to the Bloody Carnival! Step up, one and all, to see the fight of the century!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

This guy's name is Losario Racamanti. And you see, he comes up and says,

Losario Racamanti [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Ah, here's a man who knows his way around a fight.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Oh, Losario, uh...

Losario Racamanti [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

The strongest man in Silbry.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

I'm going to, we're going to just, like, fake box for a second.

[Lou and Brennan make fake sparring noises]

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

Ho, ho! Hey!

Losario Racamanti [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Ho!

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

But not today. Not today, Losario. Not ever.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see, he says,

Losario Racamanti [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

A wizard of the Citadel, enchantée, Archmage apprentice.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see, he bows. He says, he says,

Losario Racamanti [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

I can feel the property values going up just at your mere presence.

Aabria Iyengar

Suvi is chain smoking these cigarettes to remain chill with the situation and now has clocked how hot he is.

And, like,

Suvi [Aabria]

I'm glad we're here, actually. It's so nice to meet you. I'm very happy to be here. What was your name again?

Losario Racamanti [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

This is Mr. Racamanti, but you can call me Losario.

Suvi [Aabria]

Fuck. Yeah, okay. Okay.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He says,

Losario Racamanti [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Have you ever been down to the Bloody Carnival before? I'd be delighted to show you.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yes please.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see, he says. He says,

Losario Racamanti [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Madame! With all of the sights...

Brennan Lee Mulligan
He says, gesturing to Ame, he goes,

Losario Racamanti [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Madame! With all of the sights and wonders around here, would you like a little bit more of a vantage point?

Ame [Erika]
Oh, I would love that.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
He hoists the wheelchair up onto his bicep [Erika screams] and just rests it between his like—so you're on his shoulder and outstretched arm, as the fox goes,

Fox [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Oh, moving too fast. [Crew laughs]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And he says,

Losario Racamanti [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Come in for the fight of your life! [An accordion plays a jaunty carnival song]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
He just tries to gesture you to a prize fight.

Suvi [Aabria]
Bear, the fact that you have not mentioned this man to me is a point of contention between us.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
Well, I feel like every time you come—I ask you to come down here you're like, you don't like the smells. You don't—you're too busy, the chairs are all plastic and not made of metal.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
It is a funky smell down here. There's the smell of the fluids that the fire breathers are using to breathe fire. It's like, "Oh, that's like a great smell of a snack somewhere." And then someone threw up, and then there's—okay, and then, it's—we're in a, like, all of the wonder of, like, "Oh, It's Candle Street Bakery, how incredibly charming." This is like, oh, no, this is. It's rowdy. We're in a rowdy spot.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
I didn't know you would be excited about this, but now. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I've been withholding

Suvi [Aabria]
No, it's okay. This is so good. I love this so much. I love you so much.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
Hey, I love you. You alright? Do you need a break?

Suvi [Aabria]
If you try to take this bottle from me, I will fight you.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
Okay...

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see that as it goes up—have any snacks survived with you throughout your trips? Any other stuff still here, like bonbons or anything else like that?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

I mean, I probably have just, even not from tonight, but just whatever pockets I have, have some snacks.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see that as you're going along, there's a flitter, and a tiny winged marmoset—it's about as tall as your thumb, flies in, grabs a crumb of something out of Eursulon's pocket and flies up towards a little thatched nest where a number of so small, little winged marmosets with these big, sort of dull, warm, brown, orangey eyes begin to pass and break out crumbs from amongst each other. You see those little scraps of popcorn bags up there with them. And you see Losario looks at you and says,

Losario Racamanti [Brennan Lee Mulligan]

Not cute. Not cute. Pests! Pests! Pests!

Suvi [Aabria]

They're so cute.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]

No, I'm sorry. I should have warned you guys. Yeah, you can't bring any food down here that you don't buy inside.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yeah. You see that? You look up, you would know these as imchin, which are some of the few—the vast majority of animals that you see up on the courts, especially—basically Haverward, being terrestrial for whatever reason, and the amount of food and work and stuff like that, has a whole little ecosystem of very weird, magical animals. There are more than 200 species of animal that are native exclusively to this one city, because of all the weird magical energy going on in this place.

You could be a biologist and just study animals of the Citadel, but they all live in Haverward. Most, because they maintain for pests very carefully amongst the hovering courts of the Citadel and all the animals up there...

Erika Ishii

Illusory, yes?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Are illusory. And the actual name for them is phonolog. They are phonolog animals.

Erika Ishii

God.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

But the sort of slang term for them is unfamiliars.

Aabria Iyengar

[Laughs] That's great.

[Very masculine voices cheer]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You watch a prize fight begin. There's popcorn. Life is good. [Carnival music begins to play] I think your evening continues with this, and much more adventure. What time of night is it when you guys finally make the decision with your freshly recovered friend?

Lou Wilson

I think we fully lose Ame's wheelchair. [A crowd cheers in unison] We're carrying Ame back up.

Erika Ishii

I'm, like, back on top of Eursulon's shoulder.

Lou Wilson

Like, a full kind of piggyback situation. We lost it in a fight. [Everyone laughs] You know, things got raw outside the Bloody Carnival.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yeah.

Erika Ishii

Oh, my God, and Fox is on top of, like, Suvi.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah. Oh yeah. I'm wearing Fox. Wearing a little stole, like, a overly full stole.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Wine and good cheer. Snacks and wonders. Music. You get back. The question is this: do you get back in time before Malacanth court takes off?

Brennan Lee Mulligan and Aabria Iyengar

[In unison] No.

Erika Ishii

No!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Is the Sun rising by the time you...

Everyone

Yes!

Lou Wilson

Of course. We lost the wheelchair!

Suvi [Aabria]

We lost the wheelchair.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You lost the wheelchair.

Aabria Iyengar

We will see the day star, and that will tell us to go home.

Erika Ishii
Yeah, we're like,

Ame [Erika]
Fuck that wheelchair!

Suvi [Aabria]
Fuck that wheelchair! We could get more. You could have 100.

Ame [Erika]
Yes!

Lou Wilson
Ame demanded I throw it.

Ame [Erika]
Give 'em the chair! [The crowd goes wild]

[A harsh sound, like tearing metal, shrieks, followed by the sound of birds]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Woke up at about 11:30 in the morning on a straight-up bench in a massive sky station airship terminal, as a voice projected magically from a central kiosk says,

Announcer [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
[Over a speaker] The 11:30 from Malacanth Court departs in five minutes from Platform Four. Please have your tickets ready.

Suvi [Aabria]
[Groggily] Uh...

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
That's us. That's us.

Suvi [Aabria]
Oh, my mouth tastes terrible.

Ame [Erika]
10 more minutes.

Suvi [Aabria]
We have to go.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
Ame, get your—I'll, I'll carry...

Suvi [Aabria]
We got to go. Where's Ame's chair?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
No, I threw it. Ame said throw it.

Suvi [Aabria]
Yeah. Yeah.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
Remember?

Suvi [Aabria]
Ame, you got to get up.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
Ame, you got to get up.

Ame [Erika]
[Sleepily] Carry me.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
I'm going to, but you have to put your legs over my shoulders, and I just need you to just hold on to my forehead.

Ame [Erika]
Just sling me over your shoulder. It's fine. Where Fox?

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
Okay. Alright. I got Ame. Do you have the fox?

Suvi [Aabria]
Yeah, I got the fox.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
Let's do it.

Suvi [Aabria]
I was on the fox.

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
Let's do it.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
At about 12:15, you arrive and see, in broad daylight, Candle Street Bakery and the mocking horror of busy wizards, mostly walking, some levitating, a few teleporting, some flying, all going about their busy day of work here in the Citadel, as you sort of harried and partially unkempt, stumble back to Alabast Hall. What are the final thoughts as each of you get into the cool, welcoming shade of Suvi's lovingly appointed abode?

Erika Ishii
As they carry me past, I see some wizard looking at me, what I think to be, judgmentally. And I say,

Ame [Erika]
It's not a walk of shame. I'm not walking. [Brennan and Aabria laugh]

Wizard [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
[Harrumphs haughtily] I'm busy myself with the important business of the Empire

Ame [Erika]
And I feel no shame!

Wizard [Brennan Lee Mulligan]
Well... [hems and haws]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
He wanders off. Before you drift off into unconsciousness, after—I'd say you probably got like 90 minutes at sunrise in the terminal and you get back either hungover or still drunk. What are your final thoughts before drifting off to slumber altogether here in Suvi's home?

Aabria Iyengar
I think Suvi's thought was just, "That was the best night of my life, easily."

Eursulon [Lou Wilson]
I think Eursulon's thought is that this was awesome and, "God, I hope it lasts."

Ame [Erika]
As I cuddle up, I think about, that this is everything that I ever hoped for and wanted, and I'm going to do whatever it takes to protect these people.

[Pleasant harp and clarinet melodies drift]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
The loving noises of illusory bumblebees on flowers that never lose their scent, in a deep, soft red home with sheets and cushions scattered across the floor and off of the bed. And a constellation of beloved friends sleeping restfully in the glorious day.

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

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

[Waltz fades out]