

Worlds Beyond Number

Fireside Chat: Episode 21 - Taboo of Passage

[Crickets chirp, and a campfire crackles. A bright and sweet song is plucked on an acoustic guitar.]

Erika Ishii

Hello everyone, and welcome to the Fireside for episode 21, The Taboo of Passage. I am your host, Erika Ishii. I am here, as always, with Aabria Iyengar.

Aabria Iyengar

Ahuhu. Crackle crackle. Hello.

Erika Ishii

Ahuhu to you a-too. Brennan Lee Mulligan.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Ahoy hoy, croikle croikle. It's good to be here!

Erika Ishii

Oy, good to see you, guv'nor.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Guv'nah!

Erika Ishii

And our guest for today.

Edo Beige

Hey, what's up, everybody? It's Edo Beige in the building. [Brennan laughs until he's gasping for air]

Aabria Iyengar

Edo Beige...

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It's great to have you, Edo.

Edo Beige

Thanks for having me.

Erika Ishii

Your—This sort of neutrality of your name truly belies the colorful, flamboyant man that I see before me here.

Edo Beige

Yes. I mean, don't let my big 2024 New Year's Eve glasses and white top hat fool you. Edo Beige is a party animal.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

We're recording this in the week in-between, you know... So, you've been rocking those glasses for about a solid month now.

Edo Beige

Solid month, hey, it's a new year still. I don't think it's a new—

Erika Ishii

That's true, it hasn't stopped being 2024.

Edo Beige

I'm still saying happy new year.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah.

Edo Beige

Exactly. I don't think—

Aabria Iyengar

[Crosstalk] Wasting them.

Edo Beige

Yes. I don't think until September. At September, then it's just a year. But from January through August, it's a new year.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Wow.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

If someone said, mid-July, happy new year to me, I would be—You know what? I'd be pleased. I think that's friendly. [Aabria laughs] I'd be pleased.

Edo Beige

Hey. Because I think, for me—

Erika Ishii

Also, would you say “happy new year” or “happy 2024?”

Aabria Iyengar

Oh.

Edo Beige

I'd say happy new year because I'd like to think it means you still have time to get all those things done that maybe you've said, like, I'm not putting anything off until 2025 until after September. There's still time to get it done. Resolutions can still be set and acted on... until September. At which point, give it up, brother. [Erika laughs in rasps]

Aabria Iyengar

I feel like it's very cool that you hold on to hope much longer than most people.

Edo Beige

Yes.

Aabria Iyengar

But then really turn a corner in Q4.

Edo Beige

Then I kick it off the cliff.

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah.

Edo Beige
It's like, a'ight, If it doesn't want to pull itself up by then, then I don't think wants to—it doesn't want to be—it doesn't want to live. I let it go.

Erika Ishii
I love that commitment.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
I think Emily Dickinson said that “Hope is the thing you kick off the cliff.” [Aabria and Erika laughs] Yeah, absolutely.

Edo Beige
My girl E.D., dog.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Edo Beige and Emily Dickinson. There you go.

Edo Beige
There it is.

Aabria Iyengar
Thick as thieves.

Edo Beige
Thick as thieves—Like this, son! Like this!

Aabria Iyengar
Well, I am a little sad that—

Erika Ishii
[Singing] It is September that you must kick it off the cliff. Yeah. It's scans.

Aabria Iyengar
That's true. Oh, I was going to say I'm a little sad. Like, I understand that Lou is searching for Atlanta, but I am a little sad that he's not here so I can scream about Black History Month, because that's my favorite thing to do.

Edo Beige
Oh, gosh.

Aabria Iyengar
This is maybe my favorite week of the year? Even more so than birthday week?

Edo Beige
Mm. Without a doubt.

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah, I move through a lot of non-Black spaces, and it's very fun for these first couple of days to really kind of catch people off guard.

Edo Beige
Exactly. Lou was telling me there's nothing better than walking into a Pottery Barn and just, you know, everybody who works just. They look at you a little different because they know.

Aabria Iyengar
Yup.

Edo Beige
They know it's your month.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Aabria, do you really—do you confine it to the first week, though? Like, Edo here is wishing people a happy new year well into August. Do you, like, if anything, there's sort of a beautiful, I feel like, gift to take from that, which is, like, you could get deep into February and still have that energy of the first week.

Aabria Iyengar
You're right. I think it's a skill issue. It's a question of stamina on my end. [Brennan laughs] But I do think the element of surprise in the first three days is where most of the juice that fuels me comes from. Yeah.

Erika Ishii
Ah...

Brennan Lee Mulligan
I hear that.

Aabria Iyengar
So, anyway, happy Black History Month.

Erika Ishii
Well, speaking of juice...

Aabria Iyengar
And no one can be mean about anything. Any choice my characters have made this month.

Erika Ishii
Why would they? Why would they be? Why would they ever be?

Aabria Iyengar
Why would they?

Erika Ishii
So, speaking of juice, then, things really do kick off—get kicked off the cliff in this episode, where mom's back and we see that the Citadel is in turmoil and full lockdown is in effect.

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah, I just want to say, fuck you, Brennan. We were having a lovely time doing not important things, and then you decided to make it really really important that we get the fuck out, quickly.

Edo Beige
The beginning of the episode is so like, “Hey, it's not a fun time here anymore.”

Erika Ishii
Yeah...

Edo Beige
“You can't eat a clam here and have a good time. If you want to eat a clam, you have to watch people get dragged out of their homes. Welcome to the Citadel.” It's like, you took the funnest place and made it the saddest place.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

There's a truth—When I used to teach improv, I had a lot of metaphors that I would use to talk about game that I think do also align with storytelling, that was essentially like, an intuitive lesson about how you should think about either jokes or storytelling or comedy.

And I would say, like, I was talking about the comedic instinct in people and why their improv scenes, when they first start, tend to feel sort of hollow and fake. And I was like, when you're aiming for the punchline, you can often, like, overextend and telegraph and try to get to a punchline before you've earned it.

And the metaphor I would use is like, it's fun to kick over a sandcastle you've built. That moment of where creation goes to destruction and you get to unmake a thing that you've made.

I was like, for people that do that, what's the most gratifying type of sandcastle to kick over? And people would sort of—one of those bullshit rhetorical teaching devices where it's kind of like an open-ended question. And I was like, in my experience, beautiful sandcastles are the most fun to kick over, ones with perfect crenelations and ramparts and flying buttresses.

Like, if you just—if you're looking to kick over a sandcastle, you can make the mistake of just being like, “I got to kick this over!” And you just kind of pile up a mound of sand and you kick it, and it's not very pleasing. As opposed to, you've spent a long time building this beautiful, intricate structure, and then you're ready to say goodbye to it, you know, the tides coming in, and you go, “Alright, this is really gorgeous. I'm going to plant my foot right in the central gate in the keep, in the middle of the courtyard.” [Aabria laughs] Pow.

And I think in this one, this episode, I experienced a feeling that like—the things that were lovely about the Citadel, I think I had woven them a little too lovingly. All of you guys were like, “S'more sandwiches, churros, chowder!”

And I was like, “A big ol' foot is coming right for the middle of the sandcastle.” [Everyone laughs]

“Oh, no. Everyone's sad!” But, yeah, when those skyships—those skyships coming in, combining with the stuff we had heard about Fort Ciaran. And I think, too, to me, the idea of, like—a lot of illustrating the nature of the Citadel's relationship to the Empire.

And the idea, too, that there's this feeling of, like, I don't know, this feels to me like the louder echo, the more substantive echo of Obelfin's sort of threat to Eursulon in the Cassauv Collection.

When Obelfin is like, every sandwich you've eaten, every carnival you've attended, every show you've seen, every wonder you've beheld, you've been one wrong step away from having a painting of your own. And this is the—this is the sort of other shoe of that. Where Eursulon kind of sees, maybe that's true not only just for spirits, but for everybody here. Right? Like, that every one of these—

Erika Ishii

Yeah, the price of having the bloody carnival and the wonders is that you got to be okay with getting dragged from your home once in a while.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yeah. [Aabria laughs] That is the—there are these invisible but very direct connections between how good this chowder is and how wild these little jeweled grasshoppers are, and these mills where they're just making magical shields by the barrel full.

There's a direct connection between that and the fact that 40 ships can roll up and cannons fire and people get dragged out of their homes into the street. Right? These are not unrelated phenomena.

Aabria Iyengar

Ah, the price of empire. Fun. [Brennan laughs]

Erika Ishii

The thing that really, really jumped out at me from this episode was the exchange of, Ame asking, is this normal?

And then it's so fascinating to me of Aabria and Brennan sort of having this dialog in the world building itself, where Aabria says, "Ah, the justification machine goes into effect." [Aabria laughs] Which is the most chilling thing I have ever heard, because it means somebody is aware of the—that they need to justify something.

And it's insane because in a podcast and in a live play show, as opposed to a movie or a book or something, you can see the self-awareness of the author and see the moves that they are making for this unaware character.

And it's that—if you're important, you'll be safe. You're important. Pat, pat, pat. And, oh, this soldier knew who I was and didn't have any extra info for me, so I'm okay. And then immediately saying, oh, shit, it's the right message. This is how we are.

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah.

Erika Ishii
That was chilling.

Aabria Iyengar
And there's something interesting inside of who says that. Like, the idea of Suvi being aware of her own justification is less of a, like, sort of choosing and willing Stepfordness and more of Aabria as a player explaining how anyone that sits inside of a system that they directly benefit from will scramble to create enough actual reason to dismiss an occurrence that bumps up against their value—like, it's the values versus socialization and people's intense desire to remain okay.

Versus like Suvi going, I understand in this moment something's very wrong, and I will construct a cute little tower to preserve my thin sense of self.

But, yeah, there's something really fun, practically, about having the direct collaboration in that moment about Suvi's understanding of what the truth of the world is and how she would get to a point of okay.

Like, where, yeah, Brennan and I do not share a 100-page doc about everything in Suvi's backstory and her perfect understanding of the Citadel that she holds within herself. So there's, like, a practical reason to look back at Brennan and go like, hey, slight gray area in the lore. And I don't want to say something that's directly contradicted by something else important that's happened, but narratively, there is something really cool about having an externalization of that paradigm that sits—like having it sit slightly outside of me playing Suvi, Inside of Brennan playing Suvi is a really good way to like show that those are like parallel processes trying to like write themselves within a person.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
I love that so much—literally you saying that, Aabria, like, there's five things that you just said that I want to go off of response to.

Number one, there's always an interesting collaboration—there's an interesting thing in TTRPGs about, the player is responsible for the character and the DM is responsible for the world. But of course, not really.

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
When a player nails an Arcana check, a dungeon master usually has to describe something the player already knew, which means that dungeon masters are in some ways playing elements of a character. When a player

nails an Insight check, the dungeon master suddenly plays their unconscious sensibilities of a person they're regarding. When they nail a History check, suddenly you're playing a fraction of their knowledge. Right? These things are part of our identity.

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

So it's very interesting how that gets traded off—and I think the reverse goes for player characters too, right? Like, player characters world build all the time, even just in terms of what they ask for information about, which is the—that's what Boblin the Goblin is, right? [Aabria laughs] Players know that they can prompt an element of the world to be more multifaceted just by investigating it. So there's always a little bit of, you got your peanut butter in my chocolate, you got your chocolate in my peanut butter kind of going on, which is beautiful. I think it's amazing.

And specifically to this moment where Aabria has a couple times in the campaign turned to me and said, “What does my justification thing start doing?” First of all, it's beautiful. It's a beautiful choice. [Erika giggles] My whole life I've been hearing the rote cliché in narrative fiction of, like, “Good villains think they're the heroes.” [Aabria laughs] Or like—which is so fucking cliché because there's a part of me—and look, I think it's actually more nuanced than this. I think that there's a million types of people under the sun and in the world, but there's a big part of me on an intuitive, emotional level that's kind of like, “Nah, they know sometimes. They know.”

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah. [Laughs]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Like, “No, they know. They know it's not good.” You know, like, and they're justifying it because one of the first things in philosophy, going to school for philosophy that I was disabused of, was this idea of the supremacy of logic, where it's like, “Man is a creature of reason!” And you're like, “No! No, they're fucking not.” [Aabria laughs]

Your logic, your sense of logic, your ability to reason is a frightened consiglieri who is being shouted at by the mob boss of your values, needs, and desires, who is going, [in a mafia don voice] “I want this! Get in there and give me a way to get it!” And the fucking little logic consiglieri runs out and goes, [nervously] “Okay, here's five reasons why the thing you started as wanting is actually good for you to have.”

And the—and the last thing I'll say is just that, like, playing that with is a beautiful depiction of Suvi as a character because it is so clear where Suvi's heart is and the processes that go, “I've had a moral reaction. Can I put my logic to work to get us back to Terra Firma?”

Which in Suvi's case is the Terra Firma provided to her through an upbringing in the Citadel.

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Like, “Oops! This dissonance sure is cognitive. [Aabria bursts into laughter] Let's get back to something a little more stable. You know, logic, do your thing.” [Brennan rolls his tongue making a spell casting sound effect] And for me, every time Aabria hits me with that move, my exact emotion is the exact feeling on the Genie's face in Aladdin when Jafar gets the lamp, and he has to flick Aladdin away. [Aabria laughs]

Every time Aabria is like, “What would I think about this, Brennan?” I have the exact face of, “Well, I'm 200 feet tall, and I'm going to get rid of Aladdin now.” [As Aladdin] “Like, explain the saddest shit in the world. Explain that.” [As Genie] “Okay, you got it, boss!” [Aabria and Erika laugh and clap]

Erika Ishii
Oh, God.

Aabria Iyengar

It feels so cool because, like, the fact that we are this very specific age of like, not conceived of culturally as children anymore, but still before that real setting up of the Jello of adulthood that, like, yeah, I think it's a different story if we are 30 year-old characters. And all of that machine has time to settle and it kicks on without any more of a hum.

So it's really fun to play the slow turnover of the engine where you're like, "Oop, didn't get it on that one. A little more effort and we're in there, baby. Time to go drive."

Erika Ishii

It's like the don has a daughter that's like, "Daddy, you can't do it!" And the consiglieri is like, "Ah, ah, ah, ah. No, no, no, no, no. He's right. He's right. Get in there." [Brennan and Aabria laugh]

Aabria Iyengar
It is really fun.

Erika Ishii

Yeah, it was—it was just a really wonderful moment to see the process happening live. It's just a really unique insight into a world that you don't normally get without that above the table talk.

And similarly, seeing Eursulon, the externalization of Eursulon's sort of tactical moves in following them up the stairs, where he's like, "Oh, shit. I understand that this is—these people have the look and stance of people that can pounce at any moment. I have to protect my friends. I'm going to position myself accordingly." Yeah.

Aabria Iyengar

God, what was that phrasing? It drove me crazy. The feeling of right before people are going to put hands on you was so perfectly evocative because it is like, a sense of overwhelming and control and for both—like, oh, yeah, it's so good.

And having Eursulon, in that moment, lean in in such a nonverbal way to the protector paradigm that he both holds naturally and natively to these people that he cares about. But also, yeah, being given prophecy and shields and all of these things around, like, you are a protector, and you now have things from without telling you that that's your role. So having this really cool moment where Eursulon literally steps into that role was just such a fun, cool moment.

Edo Beige

And deeply potent because we haven't felt it one time for as many episodes as we've been in the Citadel.

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Yeah.

Edo Beige

Like, we have not been under threat since we got on the skyship and like flew here. It's been the good life. And so I think it just is so—it's a hell of a one-two to just be, like, we're, you know, all of Ame's feelings around feeling trapped in Eursulon's. This kind of—the return of this feeling from a life, a past life, is all those things creeping into this space that we knew could not be what it was forever. [Erika groans sadly and painfully]

Aabria Iyengar
Oof.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

There was a version of Eursulon when we were first starting the campaign, that I was, like, “Oh, you know, whether it be Lou or Edo or any of the other wonderful, talented performers who have played Eursulon, like, is going to play this character. It’ll be so fun to see a fish out of water, like a spirit trapped in the mortal world.”

And immediately that was dispelled when you realize Eursulon knows this world better than Ame or Suvi in a lot of ways.

Aabria Iyengar
Yes. Yes.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Like, he's not a fucking fish out of water. This is a guy who got a big, heaping helping of the world. And, you know, there's something really potent about that that I wonder if Eursulon is playing—especially from the nonverbal way that Eursulon moved.

Like, Eursulon's scenes in this one were particularly non-verbal, of making the shield, which we'll get into, I'm sure, in a little while, but especially in this scene of just, like, Eursulon doesn't talk, he moves his body, he goes, “Oh, I thought we were in a place of a kind of safety I don't recognize, but actually, this tavern is just impossibly big. [Aabria laughs] Like, I didn't see where the bouncers were. Like, this tavern is the size of a city, and—okay, there are bouncers, and actually, there's the most bouncers there's ever been and they're scarier than any bouncer I've ever seen.

And especially, I think there's something about the choice, Eursulon, to be mostly nonverbal in this scene compared with Ame speaking twice in a row. [Aabria laughs]

Erika Ishii
[Laughs] I'm just absolutely whiffing it.

Aabria Iyengar

I cannot wait to get into the absolute diarrhea of Ame. [Erika cackles] It's so good. And my favorite thing, because like, of course, the selective flow of candor and expectation that that will be met in good faith and with all of the hope of your intention versus how that comes across is exactly where Ame is in that moment and not really optimizing for, while trying to plan an exit and what needs to happen in the next 72 hours was so good.

I do want to say, before we jump into that, though, all of that nonverbal positioning and realization of being next to—being close to caught was really really beautifully buttoned with the opposite of the coldest line in the episode of Eursulon's “Another time.” to Slate.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Whee!

Aabria Iyengar
Hoo...

Edo Beige

Gosh, I'll tell you, it felt cooler than it sounded. [Aabria laughs] I was like, in my head, I was like, “Another time...” And I just say “another time.” I say it very—I think there was something to how it felt. Not that it's not cool to say, but it was—I fully was like, I'm in my Clint Eastwood era. Hats low, fucking poncho blows in the breeze, and I say, “Another time.” That's how I, like, remember it. And then to listen to the episode, I'm like, oh, you just say another time. Which is spicy, but it's normal. And I—

Aabria Iyengar

The energy at the table was with you in your Clint East Eastwood moment, though.

Erika Ishii

Yeah, like, whoa.

Aabria Iyengar

Because I do remember freaking out about it while sitting there and then yelling about it after, when we finished the episode.

Edo Beige

Yes.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I can't—yeah, you can't downplay that moment, man.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It was so dope. And it's very like, hard to be that laconic. It's hard to be that—like, there's the story about Philip of Macedon, Alexander the Great's dad, who writes this threat to the Spartans being like, “If my forces cross the river and cross the river at so-and-so, we will burn your lands, take your women, kill your children, burn your temple to the ground.” Da-da-da-da-da.

And the king of Sparta responded with a message that was one word. And it just said, “If” [Aabria laughs] And you're like, [Aabria screams] “Ooh, there's something.” And there is a fucking thing. I think, especially in American culture, of the fucking, the like, lone cowboy thing that's like, “If I can rattle you—it has more impact, the smaller number of words I use.”

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Like that, just like [chef's kiss], “Another time.” Like, ooh, it's really good.

Aabria Iyengar

The smoke.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

The smoke.

[crosstalk]

Erika Ishii

Yeah. And that's where we got the word laconic from.

Edo Beige

Oh, Erika, we can't hear you.

Erika Ishii

Oh no!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Wait, Lou, what were you going to say? Sorry, Edo, what were you going to say?

Edo Beige

Yeah, Lou's not here. [Laughs] I'm Edo Beige. No, I was just. I think I was also primed because, at least from my—from where I stand, as, you know, as somebody who's eager to swing a sword. I felt like you had just introduced us earlier in the episode to the seven bosses [Aabria bursts into laughter and claps] that we fight throughout the next arc. I was like, "Oh, this is a room full of people. We will square off in—some mini bosses, some full bosses."

Erika Ishii

Yeah.

Edo Beige

"But after each one of these people, we'll get a heart container." [Erika and Aabria laugh]

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah, we're just kind of dividing them up, like, "Alright, dibs on that robot."

Edo Beige

Yeah, I got Gray. I got the Wizard Gray.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah yeah yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

For Edo and Aabria, when Ame like, I'm always interested—the relationship of consequences is always an interesting one. It's the most fraught element of what a dungeon master has in their relationship with PCs, because when you're navigating cause and effect, especially with something like a consequence, it really does come down to, "Do I and my actual friend and collaborator interpret the world in the same way?"

So if I'm going to come and smack you, I feel an extra responsibility to try and faithfully model how I think the world works, which I might not be right about. [Aabria laughs] I'm just some guy. So, when Ame pops off with, you're in Steel's home, slash the Pentagon, [Aabria laughs] and everyone's walking around and Ame goes, "Who are you guys looking for?" [Everyone laughs] And then goes—and then they're like, "What's the fox's deal?"

Erika Ishii

Oh, he comes and goes as he pleases.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He comes and goes as he pleases. Like, literally, you are like, "Grandmother Wren, I only talk to people in their kitchen, while we're all chill. How are we going to solve this potato blight?" [Everyone laughs] You know, like, and you're now talking to fucking the magic CIA and being like, "My fox is allowed to go everywhere." [Erika and Aabria laugh]

Like, for Aabria and Edo, in that moment, do you, like—with that consequence coming down, were you caught off guard by that? Or were you like, "This absolutely checks out. You may not do this."

Aabria Iyengar

For me, it was definitely a, like, yeah, this is exactly in line, and I can see what Erika is setting up for. And I can delight in Brennan following through on it. [Erika laughs] Because in both directions, it feels really good. It's a moment of like sort of tense, cringy levity for Ame as a character inside a really intense situation. But it's also very true to like where Ame's baseline is, if she's not being extra careful, which, of course she wouldn't, she's trying to, again, trying to juggle a lot of things, and this is the process that isn't natural to her, so she didn't turn it on in that moment. And I think having you step in with those consequences and the perspective the way you did also helps justify a little bit of, like, Suvi's like feeling about it and the ways in which they've bumped where you're like, "Cool. Suvi still remains a little bad on interpersonal stuff, but she comes from this set of consequences in this world, so it makes sense that it feels like this."

And that's why her expectations are what they are." Especially, like, in Arc One, when they were outside of it. So it was really fun to see and terrifying. And again, just another really good reminder of how out-of-water Ame was specifically in that moment. Trying to figure out how to get—literally how to get home and feeling the farthest from it right before trying to take action about it, is really fucking great. That's good story.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Specifically to this moment when Slate steps away, Suvi's response to Ame about her candor, I wanted—was actually really surprising to me because I thought this was actually a facet of Suvi I had not quite seen before, because Suvi tends to be soft and warm, and it's like Suvi has her summer mode [Erika aww's] where it's like, "My friends, my childhood friends, I love you. I would do anything for you. I will work, I will learn, I will research, I will find out, I will discover." Da-da-da-da-da. And then she has her—the rigidness, the glass mode [Aabria laughs] of, like, "Citadel. Like, fuck these people that are not letting me leave the walls of Port Talon. Spirits get what they get." Bam.

And what was so interesting is this is one of the first times I've seen. I don't know if you call it, like, a mixture of those modes. That's not what I would call it. I would call it more like, it would have been totally within the wheelhouse for Suvi to get the feeling of the Citadel everywhere, snap to Ame and be like, "Button it up, things are bad." And get into that mode like, "You are fucking up." But instead, I felt the reaction from Suvi was so warm and understanding, and it showed me a facet of Suvi that I was like, "Oh, she's showing this side of herself in this moment." Did you experience it that way? Or, it was—I thought it was lovely, yeah.

Erika Ishii

Well, for me, it was definitely in contrast to, like, especially in Arc One, when they'd bumped heads. It was that sort of dichotomy between a sort of Citadel hierarchy Suvi and summer Suvi. And this one was, she has also—Citadel Suvi has learned that she also has to be the advisor and true friend to Ame, the Witch of Toma and the Witch of the World's Heart. And she's seen that at play, where Steel and Grandmother Wren are clearly close, and her mother and father and Grandmother Wren are close. So she knows that there is this sort of interplay of that sort of friendship and care mixed with, you know, an understanding of the rules. But this is the first time I feel like she's really inherited it and taken that title of advisor on. It was really great! [Aabria laughs] Growth! We love growth!

Aabria Iyengar

I think in this moment, not to say it's not a growth moment, but very specifically the context of that situation. Like, yes, everything's going to shit. But, I also think that Suvi is inherently better in a crisis.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yeah.

Aabria Iyengar

That's when all of those things fall into place. Like, you were trained to be good when things are going wide. So she's already feeling good because everything's hitting a level of intensity. It's like the world's BPM is matching her brain right now, so she feels in flow. [Erika wheezes] She's also right outside her mother's sanctum.

She's at home in so many ways in this moment and doesn't have the need for the glass armor version of herself that she had in the world, because she's like, "I'm safe, and I understand what's happening, even if I don't know the details. I have the vibe of what's going on, and I know what I should be, again, that advisor to Ame. And in this moment, I can give her exactly what she needs." Which is not like, it's not a smack on the butt, it's like a pat on the back. Like, "Hey, it's okay. And also, maybe not this energy, but you're doing so good."

Brennan Lee Mulligan

There's also a mirror in that interaction where Suvi, operating from that place of comfort and safety, does a very witchy kind of thing of being like, "I'm going to really connect heart to heart with you and explain this exactly in its truth of why this moment matters." And Ame mirrors it with a kind of Citadel-esque response going, "Copy that, thank you." [Erika and Aabria laugh]

Ame comes back and is like, “You have so met me in my energy. Let me actually mirror back to let you understand that I get the other energy now that's in this space.” You know what I mean? It was like a really—

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
I love that moment.

Erika Ishii
Oh, my God. Yeah. We talk about how characters in our heads have these lexicons, and you're like, “You know, so and so would never say, ‘Hey, man.’” [Aabria laughs] And I would never expect Ame to say, “Copy that.” And so when I heard it, I was like, “Oh. Huh.”

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Yeah. Yeah. It is, it is a mirror—and it's not mirroring of you guys being the same. It's literally like an exchange. It's like, “I see the energy. You came to me with. Let me give back the proof that I have transitioned into a different mode than normal out of respect for how well you just communicated to me that I need to be a little different than I'm being.”

Aabria Iyengar
Ugh. So cool.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
It was great.

Aabria Iyengar
But Ame—Erika, please talk about, like, I just want to know what your thought process was going into this? Because, like, yeah, there are—there is that sort of, the gamer in your heart that's like, “Okay, this seems like a very difficult puzzle socially, and I could try my best to get it right, or I could come in with a big, different energy.” So, like, how did you approach coming into this scene?

Erika Ishii
Yeah, it's funny because I feel like, you know, the gamer brain in me and the min-maxer would be like, “Okay, be very diplomatic and let everybody say their piece and say all the right things.” But I think in that moment that Ame—and this surprised me, too, because I was like, “Yeah, how do we convince them? We have to be very clever.”

But I think in that moment, Ame just kind of laid it down, like, as you said, with full candor, which was not the time or place for it. But also, I think in the past, Ame would have full candor out of a sense of naivete. But I think in this case, it felt a little more like the energy was, “I am the Witch of the World's Heart. I have a responsibility. This is how Grandmother Wren—“

Because Grandmother Wren did what the fuck she wanted, you know? She has a contact—she has a compromised contact in the Citadel. She clearly lied and done what she wanted and come and gone as she pleased from the Citadel. And I think there's probably part of Ame that, now that she knows that, he's like, “Oh, this is my role as well.” She probably just hasn't grown into it yet.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
I love that because as a dungeon master, it's very much like, “Yeah, that's what Ame thinks.”

Erika Ishii
Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You know what mean?

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Like, Ame thinks—like, Ame's perspective on Grandmother Wren, even as she was basically an adult at the end of Grandmother Wren's life, it's still mediated through childhood.

Erika Ishii
Yes.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

So your perspective of Grandmother Wren is like, “This fucking baller did exactly what she said and didn't give two fucks. [Erika and Aabria laugh] I bet there were no structures she had to navigate. I bet there were no horrible compromises she had to make. I bet none of that shit ever happened. She just fucking rocked it doing exactly what she pleased with no horrible sacrifices fucking ever. We're going to live forever!”

Erika Ishii
We're going to live forever!

That's such a 20-year-old thing to do. [Laughs]

Aabria Iyengar
Fuck yeah.

Erika Ishii
It's like you really think you're invincible then. And especially if you model your behavior after an adult who seems like they have it all together, then, like, you make some dumb mistakes.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yeah. You watch your dad buy a slice of pizza and you go, “The world is unlimited to you. [Erika and Aabria laugh] You are the fucking god emperor of all you survey. You went up to that guy and you did something with a dollar bill, and now you have pizza. I couldn't do that. You must have the keys to the city.”

And you're like, “Actually, it's so much, vastly more complicated than that.” But you do—it takes a while of being an adult before you're, “Ah, there are constrictions on me that I couldn't possibly have articulated [laughs] as a child that are so potent.”

Yeah, I love Ame's perspective on that. Grandmother Wren came and went as she pleased, and she had the spirit's true name. [Erika and Aabria laugh] And it's like, you know, I could hear Grandmother Wren beyond whatever veil in the world of spirits being like, “What? What did you think about me?”

Aabria Iyengar

Like, Ame's assumption of universal deference to Grandmother Wren is also very close to Suvi's Arc One assumed deference in a Steel—like the Wizard Steel-like way to the soldiers. So it's just very funny that you're like, “They are best friends. [Brennan and Erika explode into laughter] They are best friends and they are 20. And truly, Eursulon is the only adult in the room.”

Erika Ishii
It's so true.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yeah, Eursulon being here—as you guys are talking to each other, being like, “Hey, these soldiers are going to grab us.”

Aabria Iyengar
[Laughs] Yeah!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
“We’re going to get fucking grabbed, guys.”

Wait. I know that we’ve been chugging along. The shield. Eursulon. The shield.

Erika Ishii
Ah, yes.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Kalaya, the wizard’s—

Erika Ishii
The highest roll of the campaign.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Yeah.

Aabria Iyengar
Oh, my God. I didn’t know dice could go that high.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Edo, in that scene where you’re, like, making that shield and we’re sort of describing that moment together, is there a—there’s something about in relistening to that scene that was just very wonderful—I don’t know. I feel like nonverbal scenes are—and we also have to shout out Taylor for the incredible scoring of that scene.

Aabria Iyengar
Oh my gosh. Yes.
Brennan Lee Mulligan
It’s very—

Edo Beige
Brought it home.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Yeah. It’s very cool playing through that moment together. Is there anything looking back on it that, like—because I feel like, looking, there’s the information—we knew that the Wizard Stripe was in the Citadel, but there’s almost like it didn’t land emotionally until that moment.

Were you, like—when you got that 31 were you sort of sitting—was there anything about that scene emotionally that was surprising or caught you off guard? Or was it like—or even with that inspiration that was in there, that came in, in that ending scene, did you see the scene going that way? Or were you very much like, “Oh, this is like a bit of business that I want to take care of. I just want to get the shield.”

Edo Beige
Of course not! [Brennan laughs] I didn’t think I was going to get a D10 of inspiration from my [laughs] ghost sister who’d walked these hallowed halls before. [Erika laughs] I was like, “I’m going to paint the shield. And then we’ll go on to the next scene.”

And then it turned—it became something else, which was beautiful and amazing and why we play the game the way we do, because it leads us to those places.

Yeah, I definitely thought of it as a bit of business. It’s funny relistening to it. I am like, “Why’d I paint this shield?” [Aabria laughs] And I think it’s almost entirely because you say the word undecorated in describing

it. And I think my brain went, “Well, it should be decorated.” Like I think that’s—in a weird way, I think I had the thought that it was like, “Oh, it would be nice—“ I think between you describing it being gold and me seeing my reflection in it and the word undecorated, I was like, “Oh, I think I’m going to put a little something something on it.”

And I think it also—that was drawn from—and relistening to the episode, I think that there’s this kind of moment of conflict between Suvi and Ame in the moments before we all kind of, before me and Suvi go to check on boo thing and make sure that he’s alive. And it’s like, I think there was this, like, the conflict was settled, and it was like, we’re all going to wait. Everyone’s on the same page. That I think there is this, like, I think that shield, for Eursulon, in a big way, is a small celebration that it’s all working. It’s all here. We have everything we need, and Ame is making space for Suvi. Suvi is making space for Ame. Like, I am their protector. [Erika aww’s] I have a shield now, so Suvi’s not going to die in a year.

I think that shield is a celebration of—I think with all of the tension in the episode, I think that moment of the two of them reconciling and making space for each other in their lives and their wants is, like, something that Eursulon thinks should be held up. And so I think that’s why—I think there’s a real connection between Ame agreeing to stay 12 hours and Eursulon painting what he paints on the shield.

Aabria Iyengar
Oh! Oh!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
I love that.

Erika Ishii
[Whispering] So good.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
I think there’s something too, to—that shield scene is an example of the thing I was looking for from this entire project, like Worlds Beyond Number, because I couldn’t—how could I have predicted that you would paint the shield? There’s no way to do that. Right?

And this is a cool thing for our wonderful listeners, and if you’re here by the fireside with us, thanks for being here, gang. We appreciate it. Thank you for supporting the podcast. And to give a peek behind the curtain. I don’t have anything in my notes that says Kalaya left a spell for... [Aabria laughs] Like, that would be so bizarre to just prepare that in abstract. So it all is of a part. Like, Lou makes the choice—sorry, Edo—Edo makes the choice to decorate the shield and then rolls this incredibly high roll. And in the moment of doing that, I was like, oh, my God, this is very near to being magic. And I think it was something like, you were very close to almost having a 30. And I was like, fuck it. It was almost me as the DM, wanting to push it over the top and being like, yeah, let’s do it. This has to be magic. It’s so beautiful. It means so much—the red and the blue of the tree, it needs to mean something. And all of a sudden, because we’re telling this long form story and it’s all collaborative and we’re telling it together, it’s like, it occurs to me in the moment that this must be true. Kalaya did walk this. She did leave this here for him. Like, you know, came to this world looking for you and would have left this for you because she loved you that much. And you are both of the spirit and of the world of spirits.

This is like the kind of moment where you create meaning that is totally emergent from improvisation, choices made in the moment and the dice telling a story is like, my favorite thing. Moments like this are why you play games like this.

Erika Ishii
Ahh.

Aabria Iyengar
Absolutely agreed. It just feels like there was something in that moment. And the way Edo, you held space for this ritual, and Brennan, you supported it and uplifted that moment in the narrative, that, like, if you

didn't have that—it's very easy to fall into traps of assigning buckets for, like, characters to sit in, like, no one is just sort of representative of a singular thing. That's what spirits do, and not people and characters and stories. But that idea of how very much in the moment and how deeply present Eursulon is as compared to Ame, whose love and duty to uphold tradition has her constantly looking towards the past and what should be venerated and carried through into the present. And Suvi, whose wizardly love of progress keeps her always out of where her feet are, looking into the future at what could be having this moment carved out exactly for Eursulon, who's always present and always, like, if our group has to suddenly scramble and take off, Eursulon has the least—fewest things to grab. That was a thing that was mentioned in the story of there's no packing or prep really necessary. Eursulon is always where his feet are.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yeah, wow.

Aabria Iyengar

And there was something so cool really honoring that moment and how important the few things he has are to him. And again, that idea of the care and love and crafting, and it was just such a moment of presence, and it was just very cool. I liked it a lot.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Do we have time for, like, one? Sorry, what's that, what was that, Edo?

Edo Beige

No, no. [Aabria and Erika laugh] I was just going to undercut the moment. Let's fly on to some questions from the audience!

Erika Ishii

Let's do one question. Oh God. That was, yeah. That was really—that was so true and beautiful, and it is such a lovely way to put it. And I remember early on in this campaign, like, when we were formulating these characters in this world, talking about the strength of a triad,

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah.

Erika Ishii

About past, present, future, and mind, body, spirit, and... God, this is, yeah. Wow.

Aabria Iyengar

Thank you.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I love it.

Erika Ishii

Anybody got a question that they could—

Aabria Iyengar

[Excitedly] Can I do a question? Yeah.

Erika Ishii

Yes. Yes. Aabria!

Aabria Iyengar

I got one lined up, because it's an amalgamation of truly thousands of questions that people asked, all circling the same idea. Yeah, the smoke's coming for you, Erika, because, like, 21st Century Fool, Amaya, Jackalope, Red Revelry, all of them had some version of why did Ame not drop the Wizard Sly's name when

talking to Steel, like, what was the thing inside of Ame responding to, and then suddenly being very withholding on that kind of information? And if you want to speak to that or not.

Erika Ishii

Ame's no snitch. [Aabria coughs laughing] Yeah.

Edo Beige

Clean. Clean.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

That's clean as a whistle.

Aabria Iyengar

So the implication then there, is, you believe that that would have been snitching and not simply giving context to a person who wanted it in order to help you? [Brennan snickers]

Erika Ishii

Yeah, it's, I—that is a good question. I, Erika, don't know that I know that. I think, like, yeah, as you said, wizards are defined by their secrets. And I think that probably is what Ame latched onto, the idea of this incredible uncle who is clearly using misappropriated funds and has sees all and is a true friend of Grandma Wren.

I'm sure she was a little hesitant to say specifically that it was him or to blow up his spot or to draw attention towards him or to have Steel go question him directly. Or maybe she just felt that she didn't need to justify that. She didn't need to provide answers.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah, I think that's very interesting. Like, obviously, it makes perfect sense. You're like, "Yeah, someone did me a favor, and I'm not going to throw any heat in their direction." But that does presuppose the idea that Ame's connections and the information that she holds and the things that the structures that Grandmother Wren had in place were in meaningful ways in opposition to the Citadel and the thing that Steel represents. And I think that is an interesting thing that, like, I don't know. I know that like me, as Suvi, in the moment, took a note about that and found that very.

Erika Ishii

I mean, I think, I can't—and I genuinely don't know. I'm pretty sure this is something that Grandma Wren has said, but I could be wrong, and this is just something that I, Erika, inferred from things, that Steel is a true friend to Grandma Wren and that she is trustworthy and does obviously care. And her response to Ame was, "We will protect you. There's no way that Suvi or I would ever let anything bad happen to you." But also, I think that when it comes to a true friend versus Citadel, the question is where—like, Steel would choose the Citadel first.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Grandmother Wren, I think, says something along the lines of, like, Steel—I think Grandmother Wren, at some point talks to Ame and is like Steel—like, being like, you can trust Steel to do right by you.

Erika Ishii

Yes.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

But her loyalty—basically describes her loyalty is with the Citadel. She will do what she can for the Citadel, right?

Erika Ishii

Yes.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And I think, too, I think there's a part of Ame that, like, it happened to be Steel in this moment, but if it had been Morrow, if it had been Will Gallows, if it had been fucking Pomeroy—anybody. [Aabria laughs]

I think there's something, like, Ame does have a fox familiar. [Erika and Aabria laugh] There's something about a direct question. You know, like, maybe wizards are known by their secrets, but maybe witches and wizards are known by their secrets. And it just varies on the type of secret that matters to them. Where like, yeah, a wizard doesn't want to let you look in their book, and a witch doesn't want to let you know who her friends are, like. [Brennan, Aabria, and Erika laugh]

You know, it's a vibe. There's something of, like, “You don't need to know who I fucking talk to. I'm telling you, I got to get the fuck out of dodge.”

Aabria Iyengar

[Laughs] Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I almost think the relationship to Steel is secondary. It's just like a person grilling you and being like, “Oh, we actually are in the thing that I don't want to show my cards about,” in a witchy kind of way. You know, like...

Erika Ishii

Yeah. I think that's an accurate read on it. I think that Ame—yeah, I think Ame does trust Steel, but that at the end of the day, maybe witches keep their own counsel.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

If to the degree that a familiar is your soul. You said the Fox comes and goes as he pleases.

Erika Ishii

Oh, shit. [Laughs]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And I think Ame for being a friendly, lovely, kind-hearted character, some people's problems with authority are purely ideological, and some people's is interpersonal, and sometimes it's both.

Erika Ishii

Yeah... [Aabria laughs]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And I think that there's a part of Ame that is just like, I think that there's a thing where you have a picture of the anarchist, which is like, “You're coming down on me and I'm rising up against you!” And I think Ame meets people as equal status, where it's like, “We're all in the kitchen together. All of us are in community together.”

So she doesn't read as an anarchist. [Erika laughs] But I think there is a part of Ame that's like, “If you stand over me, I will bring you low onto this kitchen stool next to me for us to have a cup of tea.” [Aabria and Erika explode into laughter]

“I'm going to bring—I'm not going to be questioned. You're in the kitchen with me, motherfucker. We are spirits on the Earth. We are of a kind. You and I are bonded, motherfucker. And you are not above me.”

Erika Ishii

“Sit the fuck down, would you like cream or sugar?” [Brennan laughs]

Aabria Iyengar

But it's so funny that Ame will volunteer her life story to a stranger and answer none questions. [Erika and Brennan laugh] And I fucking love that.

“Like, yeah, you're nothing? Cool, Let me tell you every thought I've ever had. I'm sorry, was that a direct ask? You can go fuck yourself.”

Erika Ishii

Oh, my God. That is really such a...

Aabria Iyengar

And I love it.

Erika Ishii

Oh, man. Lot to unpack here.

Aabria Iyengar

I love witches.

Erika Ishii

I love witches.

Alright, I think that's all we've got time for. But thank you so, so much. There's so much more that I want to talk to you guys about, about this episode in particular, because things are really feeling hot now in the Citadel. Thank you so much, Aabria.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

[Singing] The heat is hot, hot, hot.

Edo Beige

What song is that, Brennan?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It's Buster Poindexter. [Aabria stifles laughter] Something, you know, me soul on fire screaming hot, hot, hot. I think it's this thing about him being hot. It's a song about a man who's hot. He's feeling hot. Let's see here. Hold on. Edo, let me get this for you.

Buster Poindexter, whose real name, I guess, is David Johansson. Hot hot hot lyrics. [Erika laughs]

Aabria Iyengar

The hardest thing..

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Oh, Hot Hot Hot is the name of the song.

Edo Beige

Oh, yeah. Yeah, okay, I'm caught up.

Aabria Iyengar

The hardest thing I've ever dealt with is trying to tell when Brennan has dropped into a bit. [Brennan laughs]

Erika Ishii

Yeah.

Aabria Iyengar

Okay, okay, hold it together. It is a song, but is he making up any details?

Erika Ishii

Either way, even if he has not, we are still going to get information.

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
It might not be real, but you will get information.

Erika Ishii
Yeah.

Aabria Iyengar
I'm not convinced he actually has a kid. [Brennan laughs and claps] I don't know if that's just really good audio stuff that Taylor added in for the like, is it a Panaba bit? I don't know. I don't know.

Edo Beige
Yeah. There was no—there was no baby in this episode, so who's to say the baby, where's the consistency?

Erika Ishii
Who's to say...

Aabria Iyengar
Who's to say.

Erika Ishii
What's real?

Brennan Lee Mulligan
[In a baby voice] Goo goo, ga ga. Baby! Goo goo, ga ga.

Edo Beige
He blew all his budget on that first episode. [Everyone laughs] Now this is all he's got.

Erika Ishii
Yeah. That and our Bag It or Tag It theme song.

Aabria Iyengar
Yeah.

Edo Beige
Oh, God.

Erika Ishii
Well, Aabria, thank you so much. I appreciate and I love you. Ahuhu.

Aabria Iyengar
I appreciate and I love you so much. Ahuhu, crackle, crackle.

Erika Ishii
It's so good to have you back, Brennan.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
It's so good to be back. I love you guys. This is great. I love this. Ahuhu. Crackle, crackle.

Erika Ishii
Ahuhu.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Great to be by the fireside. It's nice and warm and toasty and we can make s'mores.

Erika Ishii

S'mores!

Edo, thank you so much for joining us today.

Edo Beige

Hey, it's a thrill to be know. I know you guys probably won't see me again, but it's been special. Ahuhu.

Erika Ishii

Well, we never know. We've had some recurring guests.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah, we put you in the good spreadsheet of the like, yeah.

Edo Beige

Wow, you guys—wow, there's a spreadsheet?

Aabria Iyengar

Oh, of course.

Erika Ishii

There's two!

Edo Beige

I'm going to tell everybody else there's a spreadsheet.

Erika Ishii

There's a good one and, you know...

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah.

Edo Beige

Oh. Okay.

Aabria Iyengar

We could have done this with a pivot table.

Edo Beige

Who's in the bad one?

Aabria Iyengar

Oh, you don't want to know.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And hey, happy new year, man.

Aabria Iyengar

One of them is dead now.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yeah.

Edo Beige
[Laughs] What?

Aabria Iyengar
What?

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Happy—[singing] should auld...

[They all begin singing For Auld Lang Syne but completely out of sync with each other]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Goodnight, America.

Edo Beige
[Loudly] To all acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind. [Everyone laughs] Should auld
acquaintance be forgot and auld to auld lang syne. [A choir singing For Auld Lang Syne begins to swell]
Happy New Year!

Erika Ishii
Happy New Year!

Edo Beige
Yeah!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
[Begins singing Axel F while everyone laughs]