

Worlds Beyond Number

Fireside Chat: Episode 012 - Episode 12 "Prisoner's Dilemma"

Final Version

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

Erika Ishii

Hello, everybody, and welcome to the Fireside Chat for episode Twelve, Prisoners Dilemma. I'm Erika Ishii. Aabria, you got something for me?

Aabria Iyengar

No, nope, just had to clear my throat. Hi, I am Aabria, with... Just a little phlegmy today, it's great. Please move on.

Erika Ishii

Excellent. Brennan.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Oh, hello. I'm Brennan Lee Mulligan. Thanks for coming down by the Fireside for a lovely chat. We really appreciate you being here

Erika Ishii

Awww

Aabria Iyengar

Wait, why is he being sincere? Are we being sincere today?

Erika Ishii

When is he not sincere?

Aabria Iyengar

All of the other time...

Brennan Lee Mulligan

There's, I have two modes. Sincere—I have two modes: sincere, and pretending to be a made up person. And that's it.

Erika Ishii

[Laughing] You're such a treasure.

Aabria Iyengar

I'll protect you with my life.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Aww, that's very sweet. Wow. We started with a big lovely reaction to me. Wow, look at that. Oh my gosh!

Erika Ishii

Now, you might—

Aabria Iyengar

We're not done with our introductions, Erika!

Erika Ishii

That's true. You might notice that there are only three of us who are talking because our fourth is a silent partner in this episode of the Fireside Chat. But please still welcome Thelonious Rigel. [Lone clapping, wind blowing] Okay, very good. Well, this episode was—Well, I guess full disclosure, we haven't heard the finished one yet, it has not aired yet, right? Can we say that?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yes. So we're recording this Fireside Chat because we've listened to, we have not yet heard all of the glorious mustard that Taylor has absolutely slathered this episode in.

Aabria Iyengar

That actually is what GM stands for and I will never hear otherwise.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Glorious mustard? There's an author who would use names like Glorious Mustard. I'm trying to think of what world would that be? Is that like a Mad Max character?

Erika Ishii

Lemony Snicket.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Lemony Snicket?

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah.

Erika Ishii

Probably.

Aabria Iyengar

That's what that feels like.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

That's what it feels like. Glorious mustard. Love it.

Aabria Iyengar

The almighty Coleman's. What are we saying?

Erika Ishii

Even though, having just heard the vocal cut thus far, and thank you all for your patience, by the way. It's—so much happens and these discussions are so juicy and there's so much to dive into. We have the trio getting interrogated by Steel and then an agreement is reached. Steel says, Keep it on ice for another day while I'm on my way there.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah, how'd you guys deal with that?

Erika Ishii

Immediately Ame and Eursulon do exactly the opposite and just run out. And I just—

Aabria Iyengar

Now, can I throw something out there?

Erika Ishii

Yeah, please.

Aabria Iyengar

Have we considered that maybe there's something about Steel that makes us not want to listen to her? Maybe it's not us.

Erika Ishii

Steel is the man.

Aabria Iyengar

Maybe she's just hard to listen to.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Before we recorded, I said my favorite part of playing Steel, which is, I love playing a character who doesn't know it but is furious that we're playing DND. Steel is so—

Aabria Iyengar

It's perfect!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She's so fucking angry because you guys are like, well, we ran out into the forest because the spirit was and she's like, no one listen to me. No one else is doing this. When the spirit came, everyone left where the spirit was to come to the city where we build a huge wall to be behind. So I don't know what the hell you people are talking about! And it's so funny to watch—

Erika Ishii

Empire hates adventurers!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yes! She fucking hates adventurers. Why are you adventuring? What do we have an army for? What do we have fucking wizards for? What do we have all this magic shit for? The idea of, like it's literally what they say with first responders and stuff like that. It would be like, you see a car accident and someone's like, Call 911, and there's some fucking layperson who's like, "Fuck that!" And just sprints into the car wreck and is like, "I gotta help. I'm the closest!" The idea of "I'll do CPR. Let me breathe into your mouth!"

Erika Ishii

See here's the thing, is that that's an interesting story now, right? Like, look, you call 911, emergency responders arrive, the person's fine. They recover in the hospital. Where's the drama? Where's the beef? Whereas if one of us runs into a car wreck to pull somebody out, that's an interesting story for everyone.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yeah. It's true!

Aabria Iyengar

What's for the greater good?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yes, for sure.

Erika Ishii

Sacrifices must be made.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

This early scene where we were having Steel sort of interrogate the three prisoners.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah, let's talk about that telemet. Also, why was the Fox not a prisoner? If you can talk, you can be arrested.

Erika Ishii

Wow.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I don't think the fox talked before then. So I think—

Aabria Iyengar

It was very funny at the end.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I can't touch the ball. I couldn't reach the ball. No one lifted me up. But I love the idea of everyone—I think the Azure Battalion, if they had heard the Fox talk, would have put him under arrest? But just the idea of—I mean, that's always a great bit when a talking animal just picks their moment and it's just like "you've been able to talk this whole time?" It's like, yeah. "Why didn't you say anything?" I don't know. You didn't talk to me. You didn't say anything.

Erika Ishii

I didn't have anything to say.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Lot of people weren't talking.

Aabria Iyengar

The fox is a sniper. He's perfect.

Erika Ishii

Yeah. I love him so much. Yeah. You did the thing where you had all of us split up and had our conversations happen simultaneously and of course.

Aabria Iyengar

So we couldn't get our story straight. That's fucked up.

Erika Ishii

Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

For everyone listening at home. That's why cops do that. And never speak to the police without a lawyer present. And I think that's good advice.

Aabria Iyengar

Also, never talk to your mom without a lawyer present.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Never talk to your mom without a lawyer present. You should have an attorney present at all times. The things you say can and will be held against you in a court of law. There's a reason that they're required to say that, but no such Miranda rights in the world of Umora!

Erika Ishii

Well, they're not required to say that now. They don't need to Mirandize you anymore.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Is that something that actually? I read about that, actually. Is that a federal thing or is that in a certain state that that's true?

Erika Ishii

That's a good question. I don't know.

Aabria Iyengar

I'll get sad if I look it up, so I'm not going to

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I'll take one for the team and look it up!

Erika Ishii

Yeah. Well, if you're listening to the fireside here, consider your \$5 going towards the best bit of legal advice you can ever receive

Aabria Iyengar

If you live in the United States. Specifically,

Erika Ishii

Which is: shut the fuck up. When you are asked a question, like a cop, shut the fuck up. That being said, Ame spilled the beans immediately. Immediately.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Well, Ame—

Aabria Iyengar

No, I feel like you

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Aabria go for it, because I believe we have the same point here, which is that Ame was the first to spill the beans, at least about—Ame said Honored Friend first, so Ame was the one who revealed—allowed Steel to set up that very parental trap.

Aabria Iyengar

Oh, I felt it in the moment. I was just [Panting] Oh god, oh god. But I do want to say shout out to Ame for kicking up a little bit of dust in front of, I guess, the mirror of Steel, before actually committing to the telemet. Yeah, she's very cool. She's a little fighter. She's a little rebel.

Erika Ishii

Yeah.

Aabria Iyengar

But yeah, you did snitch first, so let's be very clear

Erika Ishii

It's true

Aabria Iyengar

I didn't say shit.

Erika Ishii

It's funny to think, in that, listening back to that conversation, it feels like Ame is very much self possessed in the conversation, if that makes sense? Like she's, you know, being very forthright, giving a lot of information. But she says, well, Grandmother Wren trusted you and thank you, and these are the things and these are my duties. But here's the deal. Yeah, which is interesting. I wonder, if she had known, if she knew more of the things that she doesn't know under the curse, would she have spoken the same way or been even more self possessed or even just been like, you can throw me in jail, but I'm not speaking until I have a witch lawyer present.

Aabria Iyengar

A witch lawy—Are there witch lawyers?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

[Brennan gets into Law & Order theme] Bum bum, ba-dadadadaaaa. [Witch cackle] There's a wild thing, too, in the interactions that Steel had with Ame and Eursulon that felt very like, I don't know if people have that experience with like a parent... Like there's nothing to me that's more reminiscent, that's more indicative of Steel and Suvi's relationship, than—you ever had a parent that was like, "I'm going to talk to him in a second. And hey, David, thank you very much for telling me—" like, your friends who you're with get a level of like, it's like, "okay. And Steven, thank you very much for letting me know and thank you." And then you just know, like, I'm about to get it! Yeah. With Ame being like, you know, Steel's, like, "Condolences, here are the resources we have available." And then for Eursulon being like, "I'm not going to spill the beans. And then poor Suvi. Oof

Erika Ishii

What do you mean poor Suvi?

Aabria Iyengar

That was fun.

Erika Ishii

It took Suvi five minutes to recharm Steel and to be—

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah! The first four minutes and 59 seconds were like full smoke, though. So maybe we give her credit for both because that shit hurted.

Erika Ishii

That's true. Also, Eursulon got a lot of shade thrown! Oh, yeah, where he's like, "I am the strongest man in Silbry. I am a great protector." And she's like, "I saw you practicing swordsmanship with the baker when you were little? And a broom?"

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And then stage combat? Yeah yeah yeah

Erika Ishii

Yeah stage combat. Brutal!

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah, it's very true that Steel is very cool when you're on her good side. And she's got that, like, I'm a parent, but also like, "Hey dogg, I know—" she's that perfect level of adult that can give you a hard time in a way where you're like alright well, come on now. Sweet. Hey, we both—this is rude.

Erika Ishii

[Mimicking Steel] "Big Scawey Spiwit"

Aabria Iyengar

You're in my brain. You're absolutely giving me the business.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Mhm. I also loved the interaction between Suvi and Steel, and I think Steel... There's a degree of—we're seeing a couple different sides of this here because Steel, fundamentally relistening to the episode, it's like the only thing Steel was actually pissed about was secrecy and lack of communication and, like, dishonesty. Where it all comes back to communication. It all comes back to information, the sharing of information, knowledge, more largely. And... But we see that in terms of her, like, almost right away, it's like Suvi firing a warning shot off at the soldiers is framed to Steel, as "you have done something which has inconvenienced me and caused me to use political leverage," there's actually not even really a real moment where Steel's, like, letting you seriously consider that you will get tried for treason.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

So I think there's a degree of the inner workings of that type of power and privilege, the inner workings of that type of authority, where it's like, "Oh, I would never let them touch you. Not even because I don't really care whether you did it or didn't do it or what the situation is, but for the power balance that exists here, the Citadel's authority cannot be questioned in this regard. Like, it's bigger than you. It's bigger than me. You're an Apprentice Archmage." Even when she says, you will be court martialed at the Citadel.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah. That's the big one.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

That's the big one. Right. Let me exert how this is going to go down. And there's a, you know—which is, which is a degree of, like, flexing on the people in this scene that like—and also, I thought it was a very wild moment when Suvi brought the dark feeling she was having about Spirits to—I have a question for you, Aabria.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Were you anticipating more of a resonant alignment with Steel in that moment? Was there part of you that's like, oh, maybe my wizard mentor is also going to be like—because I think Suvi's philosophy is deeply rooted in her feelings about the Citadel. So I thought there was an interesting moment where she's like, well, as a Citadel Wizard, I almost hate these beings. Let me talk to my Citadel Wizard mentor. And the fact that Steel kind of swerved on you there, was that surprising?

Aabria Iyengar

I don't think it's a swerve, I'm going to disagree. I think what Suvi took away from that was, hey, it's not important how you feel. Like, Suvi learned a very important lesson, which is those feelings don't matter it's what you do with it. It's how you like—Suvi gets a lot of flak early on for othering people and doing a lot of us versus them. And Steel gave her another round of that, of like, yeah, and we don't worry about like—why would you shout at a storm? Like, don't worry about them. They are below or above your floor for notice. It's not a thing you can control. So hatred is a wasted emotion.

Aabria Iyengar

And that to me, that actually aligns really well with Suvi, which is: it doesn't invalidate any of her feelings, but it redirects her focus. And so I think that was an important thing. I don't think there was a moment where Suvi genuinely believed Steel was going to get geeked up and be like, yeah, you know, actually, fuck those guys. I think someone with that much control and that much long vision gave Suvi exactly what she needed, which was a little perspective without invalidating how she felt in the moment from what she had seen.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yeah.

Aabria Iyengar

So I really liked that. I have a little doc about things I wanted to talk about and that was on there.

Erika Ishii

Yeah, I loved that. I loved the reminding her that she was still the little dog behind the Big Dog of Empire and Citadel. Which is actually—leads me to a question from Rubyquill. Thank you. Rubyquill. What were Suvi's initial thoughts while exploring a forest for the first time, especially after living in the Citadel her whole life? Now, I will qualify this by saying that for those of you who listened to the children's adventure, which I guess most people who are listening to this right now have listened to the children's adventure,

but you can tell your friends who are not subscribed to Patreon that in the children's adventure Suvi spent a formative summer in the forest, in and around the forest. But I will expound upon this by asking what were Suvi's initial thoughts while exploring a forest and the edges of the Empire, after being in the seat of power for most of her life,

Aabria Iyengar

I think there's no wonder in it for Suvi. I would love to have a phrase of just like, oh, and she had a moment to stop and look around and see what life is like in a less controlled, sort of hierarchical environment. But no, what that 100% was, was her going into hyper focus mode. Like, we have to go find Ame, we have to find the Fox. The edges of the Empire are where dumb shit like this, like all of this kudzu, and a weird fucking spirit? That happens in dumb places at the edge of the world.

Aabria Iyengar

And look at me, look at my little raggedy ass trotting around here. I'm going to get in so much trouble. She better be like five minutes away. And I think Suvi did that for the day and a half they walked. "She better be around the next fucking corner. If I have to walk five more minutes, I'm going to get my butt handed to me by the sword of the Citadel. Oh my God. It just keeps going." So I don't think there was any time to appreciate. I don't think Suvi has that in her right now to be present in a moment.

Aabria Iyengar

She's very task oriented and in that moment was extremely stressed. So really wasn't stopping to smell the kudzu. But yeah, if you want like beautiful idyllic sous vide exploring of woods, pay \$5, listen to Children's Adventure.

Erika Ishii

Yeah, it's very sweet.

Aabria Iyengar

Do you think Ame had some fun time as she was exploring, looking for the fox?

Erika Ishii

I think she was really just so scared with the Fox and with getting dragged through the woods. But I think definitely—

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah! It's bad out there! Be on my side!

Erika Ishii

On the walk back and just sort of like during the temple cleaning, it's just, yeah, like a moment to at least passively take in how beautiful it is. I mean, I personally am a huge fan of urban decay. So like, when you see—

Aabria Iyengar

What a sentence!

Erika Ishii

—apocalyptic cities, and there's like deer walking around in there. It's like, yeah, THAT—

Aabria Iyengar

Erika loves a dead mall.

Erika Ishii

Yeah, oh f—I love a dead mall! There's like plants growing in there and just like water dripping and everything's returning to the earth. Oh God. Yeah. So I am so into that shit. And so I imagine that at least on the walk back, Ame was just awed by the power of... The pure power and fury of nature and the Spirits

Aabria Iyengar

Yeeaah.

Erika Ishii

Yeah.

Aabria Iyengar

There is one thing I want to point out before we get too far away from the end of that conversation, which was my favorite thing that Brennan as Steel included, which was Steel saying, my hatred I reserve for humans. People should know better. People get to choose what they do. And I think some of the fun for me for playing Suvi is getting to learn in real time and sort of set paradigms for thought and understanding. Especially when her mentor shows up and drops a fun little bomb like that. Because there was an earlier, I don't know if it was episode eleven, but at some point Suvi says to Ame, she tries to do the "humans, like us." And Ame is the one that says "like you." So now we are beginning to see the construction of a mental divide between human and Spirit and witch that is now "other" and not human. And I'm just very excited because that was just such a fun little set of things that lined up and I was like, oh, this is going to pay off later in a really fun way. [Erika does a guttural laugh] I love things.

Aabria Iyengar

Keep your eye on the prize.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Keep your eye on the prize. Yeah. Ruv. Gauthmai. We're at war. Yeah. And I think there is something in that, I identify with steel a lot in this regard, of a certain—if you view the spirits as the natural world just given a kind of will and spirit and intellect and persona of them, then there's this thing where it's like, Steel has a fatalism. Where it's like, I start from a place of accepting that I might already be doomed. That's fine, it's just, you know like, that's fine. Look me in the eye and tell me that the whole game is rigged. I am given a rock and I am faced with a thousand swords?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It's my job to figure that out, as long as—but if I know that the sword has a person on the other end of it, that changes the math, for Steel at least, where it's like, I hold, you know—and I think there's a certain

degree to Steel, who's a very educated person as well, of understanding the philosophy almost, of, like, there's something deeply humanistic about wizards, about the idea of, "I wasn't supposed to have this magic, and we just figured it out and worked hard.— And that goes, "I am going to, like—I'm not going to make my morality prescriptive either."

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I'm not going to hold things that are not human to the standards of human morals. But if I don't do that, then they're also not in the in group of, like—it's like that thing of like, oh, her philosophy is like, we have to build our world around them. They're not going to move. So we got to figure out, in other words, very much not the witch's attitude of, like, there is a harmony here and we need to speak to both and understand both. Steel's like, "Hey, I'm not going to have moral conversations with someone who occasionally eats his kids, it sounds like?"

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And I understand there's some kind of poetry you want me to internalize about that, but I think I'm just going to make a giant castle out of glass in the desert and we'll call it a day. And you be over there and I'd be over here. But again, it's nothing personal, but it's like, if you're not human, you're not human for good or ill. I'm not going to hold you to a human standard. If you're not human, that's totally fine. But nor am I going to spend a lot of time worrying about you if my concerns strike you as trivial.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah, I think it made for a really fun point of symmetry, getting that understanding from Steel out in the open, to then see Quest Fever later in the episode.

Erika Ishii

Yes! Yes, and how Quest Fever hits different people.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah. Fuck!

Erika Ishii

Yeah. Like Eursulon? Full Quest Fever absolutely become—like loses his glamour the second he touches the water. Just absolutely in it. Ame just being like, Yeah! Yeah yeah yeah! Let's—look, I'm going to help. Oh, no, I'm not going to do that, which is that whole...[laughs] that whole interaction...

Aabria Iyengar

Ame's boat adventure is my favorite thing, because if you don't understand that Ame and Suvi are best friends, it's that—you just saw, we just got in so much trouble being fucking buck wild to authority figures. And then you went, "I've learned nothing. This time water's involved!" And then you went and did it, and I was like, that's my best friend.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

That's my best friend. You all but held up the jacket and were like, I stole this.

Aabria Iyengar
That's Crazy!!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Does this mean I can go?

Erika Ishii
No, I've got something for this. And they're like, no, that doesn't—even if you were already wearing that, that doesn't make any difference, like I can't... it's just—

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Yeah

Aabria Iyengar
Brennan getting to do his absolutely put upon authority figure voice twice in two episodes? It's my favorite.

Erika Ishii
But my favorite thing to do in the case of authority is just be like, no, it's okay, it's okay. No, it's okay. In real life, it is also very funny because at least 80% of the time, you can get away with it if you just say it with enough authority.

Aabria Iyengar
No! Erica, stop! Do not teach the children listening to...

Erika Ishii
You could be like, hey, it's okay. Don't worry. I'm supposed to be here. It's all right. You just grab a milk crate or something and make yourself look busy. And then like, nobody can question you!

Aabria Iyengar
We all know how to do a Hungarian fire drill. You just do a thing, and it looks like, "Hi, interacting with me is above your pay grade. Just let me go. I have to take my milk crates to this tour bus."

Erika Ishii
Exactly.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Oh, my god. I'm trying to think of any time—is there a time in real life where you've been able to effectively bamboozle an authority figure in that to just, like, raw confidence? Like, well, I pulled a stolen jacket out of my bag, so now you have to let me row to the derrick. I'm trying to think of a time in my life.

Aabria Iyengar
I was naming mine. I literally snuck back during Warped Tour and looked like I belonged there. And I got to go hang out with a bunch of cool pop punk bands in the mid 2000s!

Erika Ishii

[Exaggeratedly] Waaaarped Tooouuur.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah!

Erika Ishii

Damn.

Aabria Iyengar

We've dated ourselves a little bit in that moment.

Erika Ishii

Let's see. I don't know. Let me think of a specific circumstance. But there have been plenty of times, I think, for the first couple of years that I went to E3, I'd have somebody's badge, and normally they check ID, but just sort of like, walking forward with purpose and looking busy and concerned goes a long way to sneaking into places. Oh, yeah.

Aabria Iyengar

So true.

Erika Ishii

One time Talison and I were on a walk and we saw that there was some sort of corporate party happening at, like, a restaurant down the street. And so we walked in and they had all these candy stations, and so we just started taking candy there. And when somebody talked to us, we're like, [British accent] "Oh, yes, we're from accounting." And I don't know why we decided to be British, but we did. And then we met another British person, and they absolutely fell for it.

Aabria Iyengar

That's so good.

Erika Ishii

Yeah. And I don't know if they were just, like, being polite, they didn't want to be like "Oh your accent's so weird," but, you know. Anyway, go ahead. No, please, go ahead.

Aabria Iyengar

A flawless accent Erica.

Erika Ishii

Yes.

Aabria Iyengar

No, you're good. I was just going to say, I used to hang out with a bunch of Blizzard people, and every year at their holiday party, I would just lie and say I was from a different team.

Erika Ishii

Yeah, well, the teams are all silo'd.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah. Just being like it's the exactly. So you can absolutely be like, oh, yeah, I'm in Breakables, on team four, and everyone's like, "Oh, yeah, that's a thing. For sure." So yeah, I'm from accounting absolutely works. It's very good.

Erika Ishii

Yeah.

Aabria Iyengar

I like lying to authority figures.

Erika Ishii

Yeah. Sometimes you can just do it as a little treat. You don't even need to have a goal in mind. It's just good to keep sharp. Yeah.

Aabria Iyengar

Brandon, have you ever lied to important people?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I parked cars at a wedding when I was like, twelve years old and—

Aabria Iyengar

What!

Erika Ishii

What?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I pretended to be Scottish and I lied to everybody there. And I just larped as a Scottish person. And then, when else did I lie?

Aabria Iyengar

Just "a Scottish tween parking my car" is the craziest shit I could think of.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And it was very much the thing of, like, question mark, question mark, question mark, profit? Because it was like I'll tell you what—it was like, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to trick everybody at this

wedding into thinking I'm Scottish. And then..." And there was nothing after the and then, it was just something to do when you are being young and precocious and figuring out what the hell is going on with your weird tween self.

Erika Ishii

Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

What's going on? We don't know. Let's be Scottish for a day.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah! Gotta try it on.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I'm trying to think any other time that I've successfully conned my way into something, and other than my whole life and career, I'm not really thinking of anything.

Erika Ishii

Oh, stop it!

Aabria Iyengar

No!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It all feels like an elaborate ruse.

Aabria Iyengar

Catch me if you can.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Catch me if you can! Oh! Well, I can confess to a bit of chicanery here. There was a group project in college that was supposed to be the work of myself and three other people. And the people I was put in a group with were people that I knew and have been going to college with for years and were so truly checked out and uninterested. And I had a scholarship that was attached to academic rigor or whatever, and I went, hey—

Aabria Iyengar

Pause! Hold on, pause, pause really quick. Hey, Erica, what's the over under on this being an absolute bummer?

Erika Ishii

Oh, I'm already prepared.

Aabria Iyengar

This is gonna be sad?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

No, it's going to be fun and funny. Fun and funny! I bet \$100 on fun and funny. I bet every cent to my name! Fun and funny!

Aabria Iyengar

All right, go on, tell your little story.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It was fun when so, in terms of a little bit of de-cep-cione, I talked to them because I was like, hey, my financial aid depends on me keeping my grades up. These people do not care about doing good at school. So I went to all them and I said, "Hey, the four of us are supposed to work on this project together. What if instead I did the entire thing myself and then you guys can kick it and I'll submit it to you for review if you want and then we'll submit it." And they went immediately, all of them were like, that sounds amazing. And I went, Great. And then I did it all! And we got an A. But it was a bit of a fib. It was not a true group project.

Aabria Iyengar

Brennan, you owe me \$100.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

[Yelling] Noooo! Why is it sad?

Aabria Iyengar

You did all the work!

Erika Ishii

It's... usually when—

Aabria Iyengar

You at least gotta like link up for a group project with the art friend that likes making a thing pretty. I was the "do the work of the project" and then my friend who had 37,000 markers could make the poster.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Oh, that is very nice. That is very nice.

Aabria Iyengar

I don't like the bright work.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yeah, I hear that. But sometimes there's too much at stake and you simply cannot leave things up to chance, you know? [Aabria wails] Isn't that—That's fun and fun to say.

Aabria Iyengar

That's so fun and funny!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Fun and funny! I hate opening my mind to let people look in and I'm like, look, it's fun in there. And they just see like screaming gears. Just... No? You don't like that. That's not good? We don't like that. Oh, no. Well, this was a very fun episode, gang.

[The cast laughs]

Erika Ishii

Oh, God. Speaking of repeating themes, though, Suvi deciding, realizing, okay, well, my friends are doing their thing again. It is the definition of insanity to keep trying to do the same thing and expect different results. So I'm going to stay here and clean up. And there were like, parallels between things, something Grandma Wren told her about, you know, there's nothing in this world that cannot be solved with care and hard work. And just, Suvi with just, paying the mother and doing the laundry and not being able to express herself and just instead tidying up. That's tragic.

Aabria Iyengar

Suvi doesn't have the comfort gene. Like, she understands help, but she doesn't understand comfort. I think there's something interesting brewing between Ame and Suvi on that because there was also that very fun moment where when we came out of the telemet and that whole conversation as things were kind of backing off and there was the awful, well not awful, but like the little moment with Galani that Brennan turned the knife with. And I was like, oh, I'm going to cry forever I think, in this studio—

Erika Ishii

Pretty rough!

Aabria Iyengar

—in east Los Angeles, on a Saturday. But like, Ame going to hug and comfort Suvi. Suvi doesn't want comfort. She's never chosen that. She just wants help. And when she doesn't get help, like that's when she—yeah, whatever. We're building toward a fun thing. And also, I did want to call out that tiny Galani moment that was like, uh oh. We've recontextualized a lot of things about Suvi's childhood, and the difference between the things that you'll get fired up about as a kid versus as an adult. Because, yeah, any of that like little, Suvi realizing that her place of privilege has afforded her more leniency than others, those were fighting words coming up through the meritocracy in The Citadel.

Aabria Iyengar

But as an adult, she has to reckon with that in a different way because, yeah, the playing field is different now, and what you owe to other people and how you stand on your own two feet and as an adult is different than the pressure pot that was the Citadel's feeding program. It was very cool and weird and hurt my feelings a lot. And I loved it.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It's great. It's great. I loved it, too. Our wonderful Eursulon. Oh, my gosh. Swimming to the bottom of the sea!

Erika Ishii

That moment, that speech about his clarity of purpose and about becoming, like—walking the path of danger so that others need not do so, I just—truly I started crying listening to all of that. That was so beautiful and just the most yeah, just like pulling all of those

Aabria Iyengar

[Yelling] are you crying now?!

Erika Ishii

Yees-uuuhhhh! It was, it's so beautiful.

Aabria Iyengar

Ew, Brennan! Erica's got emotions.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I love it. I love feelings. Feelings are so good and important. Heard it here first, folks. Feelings are good and important.

Aabria Iyengar

A controversial take.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

But one I'm willing to stand beside. I get very emotional listening to it, too, man. I know that Thelonious Rigel can't speak, but.

Aabria Iyengar

Is it can't or won't?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Shan't, maybe. He shan't speak!

Aabria Iyengar

That's powerful.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

The performance of Eursulon, it's so beautiful. And there's something interesting in this in terms of what motivates people to act. And there have been a lot of trials in this adventure in Port Talon. Will Eursulon act when it's frightening? Will Eursulon act when the chips are down? Will he act under this circumstance, right? And this final—weirdly in terms of this last episode, the test of like, you did it, you

have the sword, the promise is kept. This is that. Just wait a day. And it's weird because it's just, like, so reasonable. It's such a reasonable request.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And it's almost like the final temptation. Eursulon's had, all these temptations to not have a quest, both internal and external. And this last one was so reasonable of just like, there's a way to do this. My intention—like Steel said, my intention is to not only free the spirit, but apologize and heal and make right and all this other stuff and [Pause] Sorry—make all this stuff right. And it's so interesting to see that. It's very interesting, this little flashback of just like, first of all, the weird thing of the blood going into his—

Aabria Iyengar

God. Yes!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

The blood entering his system, and him getting the sort of the boon of Naram, him sort of having that aquatic ability to breathe underwater and swim. But seeing that little flashback to the Land of Spirits and just a memory—

Erika Ishii

[Yelling] The round little! If we don't get perfectly round little baby Eursulon plushies, then I don't know what we're doing.

Aabria Iyengar

Assume a spherical bear of uniform density. What a little guy. That whole flashback was so good.

Erika Ishii

It was so beautiful. And Naram is, uh! Oh!

Aabria Iyengar

What a god!

Erika Ishii

What a god...

Aabria Iyengar

Why would you do that? After I was like, I think I hate the spirits. And you're like, welcome to this incredibly reasonable, just super nice guy. And I was like, God damn it.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Well, that's the Spirits! Some of them are Naram and some of them are the Great Bear and some of them are Orima, and that's, you know? [Exaggeratedly] It's a lot like people.

Aabria Iyengar

Ooh!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Ooh!

Aabria Iyengar

A moral! I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Please continue to say your very good things. I just need to shout out the Great Bear asking if Naram was going to eat Eursulon. And that was just the—

Erika Ishii

And he's like, "uh no, not in the slightest!"

Aabria Iyengar

No, not in the slightest.

Erika Ishii

And people could not see. But in the room, Lou Wilson, doing cute little Eursulon faces, like [Ah, ah], and snapping [Mimics comical bite noises], he's biting Naram. It was the cutest thing I have ever seen. You can hear us screaming and freaking out in the background.

Aabria Iyengar

Taylor cut some of the screaming, he has to have, because we were loud. It was so good. But also just again, thinking about that recontextualization, having the entire scene with Eursulon in the room by himself destroying the ring and then destroying the room. Like, I think there was just that perfect question of what would you do if you were fully yourself? That was asked of Eursulon that sent him—it recasts all of the refusal of adventure to something that is like, what the world of Umora has put on him and the ways in which he has been diminished by his time here. That was just such a beautiful moment. So when he finally gets quest fever, you're like, screaming and happy about it because it is a return to self instead of just a "oh, you couldn't wait one more goddamn day! Weird flex!" But it felt right. It was just such a beautiful ramp up.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It felt really wonderful. Felt really wonderful. And then he dove down and he saw Naram and he planted his feet, let himself be trapped, turned invisible to move through the eyes. And then, the—and I think the thing too, there's the little thing Naram said, which, hearing it again in the episode, the whole thing about, you know because Eursulon really had a powerful negative reaction to those coral rings. He hated them because it's exactly what he's been afraid of his whole life with, like, you know, grabbed by a hedge mage on a dusty road somewhere and they chop you up and sell your parts to people and make potions out of you and all this other stuff, it's horrifying.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

But the idea of him being like, they've done this thing to you with your rings and he's like and yet... did they? Or was this always like—the part of him being like it was always the plan. I sent my blood out into the world to protect me. They thought they could stop it, but they couldn't. Even when it went into their clutches and they tried to shape it into something to help themselves, it still found you. And I don't know, there's something that in that that felt very—

Erika Ishii
Beautiful. So powerful.

Aabria Iyengar
It's so good!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Well, speaking of powerful, I have to ask, with the Naram scene that we had with Eursulon for Aabria and Erika: Naram or Will Gallows?

Aabria Iyengar
Oh, shit. It's gotta be Naram, because Naram can be both monster and just a nice guy.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Wow. And that's what we're all looking for. It's the utility of having the dual function. Yeah.

Aabria Iyengar
Find you a spirit that could do both.

Erika Ishii
I think it needs to be.

Aabria Iyengar
I feel like Naram would choke me if I asked him to,

Brennan Lee Mulligan
What's that?

[Aabria laughs]

Erika Ishii
I think that he would. But he would openly admit that he does not have the kind of temperament like that. He has too much in his brain to stop him from probably going as hard as you want.

Aabria Iyengar
I mean, yeah, probably.

Erika Ishii
That's my thought. I don't think he could quite get there, but I don't know. I think that Naram is... that's marrying material. That's a husband. No, that's not...

Aabria Iyengar
Did we ever consider that maybe Suvi was mad at Orima because she was sad that Orima got there first?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Wow, wow wow.. Beat her by a couple of millennia.

Aabria Iyengar

It was a near miss.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Near miss. Wait, then who's the kill? Okay, so if Naram is marry—

Erika Ishii

Do you marry—

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And that, I assume, leaves Will Gallows for fuck. Who's kill?

Erika Ishii

Finley!

Aabria Iyengar

Finley.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Finley!

Erika Ishii

Finley.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah. Never. Never. Truly? Not ever.

Erika Ishii

Gross. Gross.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I was going to say, we also had a very small little scene with Suvi and Guild Mage Morrow. Who—

Aabria Iyengar

Oh, my God. Morrow's my name.?

Erika Ishii

Morrow is my name!

Aabria Iyengar

My name! He's the sweetest! I just want to eat him. I love him, and I'll always feel that way about him. Probably.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Oh, I'll probably always feel that way about him. We have some other questions.

Erika Ishii

Yeah! We got lots of questions.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Lots of questions. This is a great question from Winnie YZ. Who asks—thank you, Winnie YZ—as a patreon extra, could we pretty, pretty please get Mighty Vibe style playlist posts for each character with a little non spoilery bit for why each song

Erika Ishii

Boy, funny you should ask! Uh, Aabria has already turned in her playlist for Suvi with liner notes.

Aabria Iyengar

I did my homework! The wizard did her homework.

Erika Ishii

Yeah, the wizard. Look, I'm almost done. I have so many playlists, okay! I end up writing too much about it. But yeah, we're going to do that. And also, Brennan is doing one for the Fox.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

The Fox has a little playlist. And I've seen Abrea's liner notes, and they're beautiful. I have not—

Aabria Iyengar

There's a lot don't do that.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I have not written such liner notes, but I'm trying to think how to write them in a way that respects the fact that the Fox would absolutely not write them.

Aabria Iyengar

You should make a parenthetical about what the Fox is thinking about instead of providing one of those. Like he's being interviewed, and what he dissociates thinking about instead.

Erika Ishii

Right. It's like the Doja cat Met Gala interview.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yes, yes, correct.

Aabria Iyengar

But I do also want to throw out that Taylor and I in the Slack were spitballing a migh-ty fine Will Gallows playlist.

Erika Ishii

Yes.

Aabria Iyengar

So we might also include that.

Erika Ishii

Wait, I have, yeah.

Aabria Iyengar

Just as respectful as you think it is, Brennan

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Good grief. Every time I try to make a scary bad guy, there's always one of my best friends coming out of the woodwork trying to fuck 'em.

Aabria Iyengar

Sorry!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Sorry, sorry!

Aabria Iyengar

I sorry 'bout it. [singsong] And we're taking a break. Erika left.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Taking a break, break break! Break break break break, break break! What's that?

Aabria Iyengar

Do you want to take a break or do you want to just talk about how good Erika is at stuff while they're gone?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Erika's soo good at stuff. That scene with the boat was so funny.

Aabria Iyengar

That was so funny.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It was very, very funny. Also, once again, love the—I thought Ame did a very good job in talking to Steel. We sort of saw the reverse, like, in terms of talking to whatever Great Spirits—if it floats your boat to think of humans and spirits as ends on a spectrum, then certainly Steel is to humans whatever Great Spirits are to Spirits.

Aabria Iyengar

Right.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

So there was sort of an element of, like, oh yeah, Ame's got both sides of this well covered. She knows how to talk to scary humans, which Steel certainly is an intimidating figure.

Aabria Iyengar

Nah, she's a big softie. I love her.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yeah, she's very sweet. I know she couldn't stay mad at you. How could she?

Aabria Iyengar

What do you mean, just a little guy?

Erika Ishii

There are many wizards in the Citadel, but only one princess.

Aabria Iyengar

It is very funny because going back and listening to it and knowing that that's one, a very fun and funny thing that exists in the story, but absolutely one of Suvi's like, berserk buttons, yeah. Hearing Ame twice try to jabber with it, and I was like, oh, man, if this was a different context, or if I hadn't spent so much time sort of being at odds with the group, Suvi would have absolutely torn into Ame about that. Like, oh, you think you're being fucking funny? You have no sense of context for this. What the fuck? You want to go? And obviously, just in the midst of, like, we're about to leave jail, but I will put myself back behind bars.

Erika Ishii

Oh, my God. Yeah, I don't know if we—

Aabria Iyengar

Very cute.

Erika Ishii

If there was the editing of Ame saying, we'll get you back to your pedestal—Citadel.

Aabria Iyengar

Oh, no, it was in there.

Erika Ishii

Okay.

Aabria Iyengar

Very good. It was very good. I also super loved Ame trying to disperse Steel's perceived anger by calling Suvi a child, which is such a cute, like, oh, baby, you're also a baby, baby. You've just been a wise baby your whole life. And you did the thing of, like, I'm going to refer to another child as a child.

Erika Ishii

Yeah, you're like, a year younger than—

Aabria Iyengar

Little High Wisdom, baby.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I love it. But also very easy as Steel to be like, you're 20. You're 20 years old. You're an adult. You are of the youngest kind of adults. But let's be super clear. The clock has started. You're in the game. Your practice round was 17. That was the practice round, and the game starts at 18. And now here you are with the consequences of your actions.

Aabria Iyengar

What's the drinking age in Umora, Brennan?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Well, it depends on where you are. The drinking age—

Aabria Iyengar

The imperium. Obviously the only good place.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I think the Empire does not have rules about drinking age. I don't think, I think that would be anachronistic. Now watch what happens in the comments of the Patreon post, because someone's going to tell me that the drinking age in Rome was 44 or some crazy thing. Someone's going to be like, actually, historically, empires restricted drinking to the priest caste. And you're like, well, there's no way to know all the things. There's no way to know all the things. [To the tune of NBA theme Roundball Rock] Basket-basket b-basket-ball! This I think it's important for the listeners to know that this is the 13th thing I did today, so that's why I started singing basketball.

Aabria Iyengar

But you're doing a really good job holding it together. I simply would have perished by now.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yes, [Sing-song] you shouldn't do 13 things in a day, but sometimes you do. What do we think? So the party is well and truly scattered. Ame.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah, we did it!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Ame at the coast, Eursulon, deep under the waves with Naram having hit that 23. Oh, that's a fun thing to talk about, is that roll, as well.

Erika Ishii

Yeah. Okay.

Aabria Iyengar

That roll, [unintelligible]

Erika Ishii

Brennan, what would have happened. The world as we know it would be different if he hadn't made that roll.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

No battle sets, no episode limits, no mercy. And there's a degree of, like... For me, in planning out this... the world, the campaign, there's an element of—I use that as a filler phrase. There's an element of. There's an element of what was going to happen that I planned that joyously, because I was like, this is my first moment that I only get to do in a long form theater of the mind campaign, which is, this could either work or not work. And depending on whether it works or not works, this is going to fundamentally alter the course and trajectory of the campaign from this moment forward. And I knew what the other path was, and we haven't even really gone down the path that the role resulted in yet. But it's just one of those things where that's really hard to do when you have a limited number of episodes or you have a set timeline that the ending is in sight. With this one, the ending is not in sight. So I get to do stuff and be like, oh, let's change the world forever with no idea what the long term ramifications will be.

Erika Ishii

Wild.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It's very fun. It's really fun. That was a good time to roll high. It was a good time to roll high, let me tell you.

Aabria Iyengar

Oh my goodness. That's so good. This game is so fun. This story fucking slaps.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I really like playing this game with you guys.

Erika Ishii

I love it. It is one of my favorite things in the world and I'm so excited to see what's going to happen next.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Speaking of which, should we let people know that there's some cool stuff coming in the next couple weeks? And feel free to cut this out Taylor, but I think people can feel that this arc is ramping up, the adventure in Port Talon. We're down there with Naram right now, it's heating up. So this arc will conclude, I think this is episode twelve that we're discussing. And the arc will conclude with episode 14. So at the end of this month, the first chapter of The Wizard the Witch and the Wild One will conclude. I'm going to let you know

Aabria Iyengar

Is that because you TPK'd us?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It's because I TPK everybody in episode 14. But plenty more where that came from. Pleeenty more, never you fear. But! We have some cool stuff to drop on y'all at the end of the month that we're really excited about. And it's going to be a hoot and a holler.

Aabria Iyengar

Should we say any of it or are we leaving secrets?

Erika Ishii

[Whispering] Secreets...

Aabria Iyengar

Secreeets...

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Let's keep it secret. We're going to drop some cool stuff at the end of this month to celebrate the conclusions for starters, and as always to our listeners. By the fireside. Holy smokes. We're so freaking grateful! Thank you so much.

Aabria Iyengar

[Sharply] language!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Sorry. Ahhh, Cock ass. Thank you so much for being here. It's really meaningful. The incredible comments of appreciation and support from all of our patrons here by the Fireside. You guys freaking rule. Thank you so truly. What a gift that we get to tell this story and share it with all of you. And it's an honor and a dang privilege. Cock ass.

Erika Ishii
Gosh darn privilege.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Whoa, Erica! Erica, the language!

Erika Ishii
I can be bad!

Aabria Iyengar
It's too much.

Erika Ishii
I can be bad too!

Aabria Iyengar
She nasty. Enjoy, y'all.

Erika Ishii
Yeah. Well, thank you so much to everybody for joining us for this episode of the Fireside. I'm your host, Erica Ishii. Aabria?

Aabria Iyengar
Hi. I'm Aabria. Uh... Ahuhu. And a crackle crackle to all of you. Love you so much.

Erika Ishii
Brennan

Brennan Lee Mulligan
This is Brennan Lee Mulligan coming at ya LIVE from inside this recording that you just finished listening to. I am so sleepy. And... uh

Aabria Iyengar
we got to let him go.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
I'm so sleepy.

Erika Ishii
Let. The Man. Sleep.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Ahuhu. Crackle crackle. Take it away, Thelonious Rigel.

[Two ENTIRE minutes of the Law & Order theme plays, ending in a witch's crackle]