

The Dripping Blade (S4, E34)

SFX:

INTRO MUSIC

Rev: Well hey, everybody. Before we get into today's episode, some of you might remember that about two years ago, Tass and I spent some time after one of the episodes talking about a book, Improv for Gamers. Well, I am joined by Karen Twelves today. Karen, how are you?

Karen Twelves: I am well. How are you?

Rev: Good. And we're actually gonna take a few moments to talk about a second edition of Improv for Gamers coming out.

Karen Twelves: Yeah.

Rev: What was the reception to the first book?

Karen Twelves: It was good. I was very excited, because I was very worried that no one would ever see it. So I was always very pleased to see it pop up on shelves. And we had picked — it's funny — we had picked such a vibrant blue color for it that whenever I did watch other people's streams or people were like showing off their game shelf, I could see it. I could just see it, by color alone. I was like, "That's my book there." But it did really well. And I was teaching it a lot also, because it is based on the series of workshops that I started like over a decade ago. And so I was still teaching those at conventions. And it was really fun to actually then be able to point people to the book in the vendors hall, because they would say, like, "Gosh, how can I do this?" And I'd say, "I have a book now."

Rev: So what prompted you to do a second volume?

Karen Twelves: I just really wanted to add more. I mean, as soon as the first volume came out, there were things that didn't go in that I wanted to put in. I was like, "Oh, I forgot about that one exercise, that would have been really cool." And also, I realized I wanted to make some changes about the language. Because the language was very ... In my mind, somebody who has not done a lot of online ttrpgs — and I'm not on Twitch or

anything. I had always very much envisioned it as something that people would do in person. And so the language really reflected that. It also reflected a lot of mobility. So I wanted to go back and really update the language so it was more inclusive and made it feel a lot less restrictive of you have to do this in a physical space.

Rev: Mmhmm. And you talked a little bit there about what are the differences. What all is different about this second volume of the book?

Karen Twelves: Well we have 50% more content, first of all, which is great. I was able to put in a lot of exercises that I really wanted to include. Because I'm still learning all the time, too. And as I'm teaching and as I'm taking classes myself, I'm learning new exercises. So I wanted to revamp some things and add some new stuff. And then we had a lot of contributors — like you — who gave us some of their favorite exercises. And we have some people that just shared some tips and tricks or gave some other kind of think pieces on how improv has really helped them. So we included a lot more from a lot more people, and that was really great to just give other people a voice, because I always felt very self-conscious about, "It's me, Karen Twelves, someone you don't know, telling you how to improv and how to game." [Laughs]

Rev: How did you go about picking the contributors to the book?

Karen Twelves: Well, it started with people I knew.

Rev: Yeah.

Karen Twelves: And a lot of kind of asking other people. Because, again, I know that my circle is limited to my circle, so ... And it is kind of hard to find other, as I call them, kind of dual-class improviser/gamers. Like people who are kind of actively teaching or performing improv or voice acting or in some way have that theatre background, and are active gamers. So it was — we kind of asked around with a lot of different people. And so with all the contributors, we also said, "Hey, if there's anyone else you know, let us know if they'd be interested." So we did find some other people that way.

Rev: Yeah. So for quite a number of years I taught on a college level, and I've also done workshops for acting and improv. How do you bridge this gap between the actual performance of improv and the elements of gaming?

Karen Twelves: Something that I always like to reassure people about the game is that it's not about performing. There is only a few exercises where you have to do scenes, and those are optional. You don't have to explore those if you don't want to. You can really pick and choose what you want to do in the book for what works for you.

Rev: Mmhmm.

Karen Twelves: And none of it is really focusing on performing. And as an instructor for improv for gamers, I would never give notes after a scene, because it's not about that.

Rev: Yeah.

Karen Twelves: It's really about practicing the skills. So it's the same types of warm up and kind of workout exercises that improvisers do to build those skills before we go and do the acting and the scene work. So I always like to reassure people that it is very beginner friendly and very low pressure, to just try out some stuff. And also it can be kind of silly. I have heard some of the exercises described as hokey, and I'm okay with that. Because that is part of the vibe of that series, is it's OK to be fun and lighthearted and silly and kind of get out of your shell, of your dark and brooding character, and just have fun. And so there's a lot of stress on we want to build a really good supporting environment for play, and if everybody's being kind of silly, then it's not really that silly.

Rev: Yeah. So if you're hearing this on the day that it's published, just yesterday, the crowdfunding for this book started. Where can everyone find *Improv for Gamers 2*?

Karen Twelves: We are funding on Gamefound, which is new for Evil Hat. Formerly we had always used that other crowdfunder. And so this is the first time that Evil Hat is trying out a different crowdfunding platform. So it is a little risky. We could probably do a little better and smash past all of our stretch goals if we were using a different platform, just for visibility. It is a new platform in itself. It has a lot of board games and it is based in Europe. So we're doing something new and hopefully it's successful and is a good kind of way of dipping our toes into other platforms. So yeah, it is on Gamefound. And our stretch goals are pretty simple, which I like as well. Because with Evil Hat, they're not so much kickstarters, they're kickfinishers. The book is done. Aside from some extra art acquisitions and the proofreading ground, everybody's been paid. So there's no question

of is this book going to happen. It is done and ready. So the first goal is to just to print the book. And the second stretch goal is we're gonna put in a little ribbon bookmark and some spot gloss on the cover, just to make it prettier. And bookmarks — you would not believe how more expensive a bookmark makes your book. Because I kept asking like, "Can't we just put that in to start with?" And they're like, "No."

Rev: Oh, no.

Karen Twelves: "No, we need more money for that, unless we want to raise the price of the book." I was like, "Oh gosh, I don't really want that." Because I still want the book to be pretty cheap.

Rev: Yeah.

Karen Twelves: So the second goal is we're just gonna pay everybody more. So, good news!

Rev: [Laughs]

Karen Twelves: So, you know, the artists, our art director, layout artists, the contributors, editing, proofreading, everybody's going to get a bonus. And that's always my favorite type of stretch goal, is just putting more money back into the project itself. Because it is not necessarily like a money making industry.

Rev: Right.

Karen Twelves: And people who do those jobs kind of know it and accept a certain level of rates that you would not get in different industries. So that was a requirement for me. I was like we need to have a tier where we just pay everybody who worked on the project more. And that's it. Those are the two goals. So bookmark, fancy cover, and pay everybody more.

Rev: Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about before we go?

Karen Twelves: Gosh, I just hope that people try the book, and I hope that people feel free to make changes as ever they need to. One of the things that we have as a pledge

level is we're making a workbook — a kind of bullet journal — which has just the trimmed down instructions, and room for you to make notes. Because we really want to encourage people to, again, make these exercises work for you. So if you decide that you want to change something, you now have a space where you can scratch out the rules and write in something new.

Rev: Nice.

Karen Twelves: Because improv always changes. Exercises always change as they travel from person to person. And so we really wanted to encourage that ownership, and allow people to, again, just really feel free to play and get the most that they can out of this resource.

Rev: All right. Well, if you are interested in finding Improv for Gamers Second Edition, again, you can go to Gamefound.com and search for Improv for Gamers, or just check out our show notes in this episode.

SFX: CRITSHOW STINGER

Tass: I had a dream that I've been giggling about for a while now, and I just — I needed to share it, because it involved all of us.

Kim: Oh, it was one of those dreams.

Tass: [Laughs] Whoa!

Jake: I told you to stop bringing these to me.

Tass: I'm sorry. I'm sorry. But I'm gonna tell it to everybody else. We were all at, like, some get together. Like, it felt very much like college, Rev. Like some of the theatre parties and stuff we used to go to. Like that felt like the setting.

Rev: OK.

Tass: But it was all people that I know now.

Rev: Yeah.

Tass: I was sitting on one corner of the room talking with a few people, and the four of you were across the room. And you were like huddled together, like two of you were on a loveseat, and like Rev was sort of kneeling down, and Megan was standing and talking very animated and looking concerned.

Megan: That doesn't sound like me.

Tass: And so I was talking with Jessie. And suddenly we look over like, "What is wrong?" Like, they seem flustered about something. And we see Megan just nod, and she looks determined. And I don't remember — one of you kind of like waves her on. And so Megan — kind of this weird like mix of sort of determined and awkward, but like upbeat and almost skipping over — comes over. She takes a knee and she, like, reaches her hand out to, like, take my hand. And I'm like, "What's up, bud?" And she's like, "Well, we've been talking over there, and I'm your little sister now."

All: [Laugh]

Tass: And we're just sitting there like, fucking what?

All: [Laugh]

Tass: But she was so just earnest about it. And I look up — and even like Jake in particular was just looking across the room, just nodding. Like, "Dude. Like, right?"

All: [Laugh]

Tass: And I look over at Jessie and she just shrugs. Like, "Yeah, that makes sense." And so I was just like, OK. And you're like, "OK, good. All right." And then get up and just skip back over. And we're like, "What has just happened? It feels right. But I'm so confused."

Megan: I love that it was like, and now it's time to inform you of this.

Tass: Yeah.

Rev: That there was some heated conversation.

Tass: Yeah.

Megan: I love, it's just like, "Yes, the decision's been made."

Tass: [Laughs] Yeah. It just that — I don't know why. I think it's the funniest, that "We've been talking."

Rev: Was dream you on the side arguing for or against? Since you were talking about it passionately to the group.

Megan: From the sounds of it, it seems like it was not a question of whether or not it was true. It sounds like it's a, "Is it time for him to know?"

All: [Laugh]

Rev: Oh, I see.

Tass: Oh, that makes — it was my dream, and you've just brought clarity to it.

Megan: [Laughs]

Tass: I appreciate that.

Megan: Well, this is great, because this saves me the trouble of, like, planning a big party to let you know in real life.

Tass: Oh, OK.

Megan: So now you just know I'm your little sister now.

Tass: OK, that works.

Megan: Now go buy me ice cream.

Tass: God damn it. All right.

Megan: This is great. I've never been the little sister before. I've always been the oldest, so.

Rev: What do you think's gonna be different? Like, what are you gonna try?

Megan: Um ... Just a lot of guilt.

Tass: [Laughs] Oh, no!

Megan: From what I've learned.

Tass: Oh, no ...

Megan: Also, you have to teach me how to skateboard. I think that's part of the rules.

Tass: Oh, I got that for sure.

Megan: And endless piggyback rides. I'm so sorry about your knee.

Tass: Oh, no. OK. Dammit.

Rev: Well, as this is the first Wednesday of the month, if you were listening to this at the time it drops, right now we have some slots open on our website for Megan, who is running a game of a Honey Heist.

Megan: Woo!

Rev: What date is that?

Megan: That's gonna be Wednesday, April 13th.

Rev: Yeah. So if you're interested in playing Honey Heist with Megan, you can head over to thecritshowpodcast.com/playwithus.

All: [Laugh]

Rev: And as it is the beginning of the month, we also want to take this opportunity to thank all of our new patrons who joined us in the month of March. Stephanie Fox, Justin Coovas ... [Struggles] Enguerrand Kirzin.

Tass: Would it help if I cough over any of these while you're ...?

Rev: This was the first time in a very long time where I thought maybe I'll try to look these up beforehand. But that defeats the spirit.

Tass: [Laughs]

Rev: Raucous Leviticus.

Kim: I think that one's like the Bible passage.

Rev: Yeah. Mark Fairchild, Aaron Parker, Eddy Webb, Steven B, Stephen Piasta, Divo Kaplan, and Ouroboros. Quick question for all of you: do you pronounce Stephen differently if it's V versus PH?

Jake: Yeah.

Rev: You say Steven and [With more of a 'f' sound] Stephen?

Jake: [Pronounces them the same] If it's a PH, it's Stephen. And if it's a V, it's Steven.

Rev: I see.

Megan: Stephen.

Tass: [Struggles]

Jake: Slow it — slow it down. Slow the recording down a lot, and you'll be able to hear the difference.

Rev: Yeah. So thank you for joining us on Patreon. Thank you to all of our patrons who join us every month over at Patreon.com/TheCritshow, where tiers start at just \$1, which gets you access to the most aggressively welcoming Discord on the Internet. And now the \$5 tier also comes with the ad-free feed, if you would like to support us, but not listen to ads. Because, you know, some people don't want to do that.

Tass: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Rev: I get it. I had a TiVo. I like to skip commercials.

Tass: Yeah. Shoot, yeah man.

Jake: I pay for Hulu Plus. I get it.

Rev: [Laughs] Yeah. And with that, it's time to get to the episode.

SFX: CRITSHOW STINGER

Rev: The next morning, we find ourselves in the subterranean lair. You've all gotten up and had breakfast and gotten around to depart to your various locations: Jake and Megan heading towards Illinois, and Tass and Kim also headed towards Illinois — just the northern part as opposed to the southern part.

Jake: We should have just set this thing in Illinois, probably. We should have just set the show in Illinois.

Rev: [Laughs] It's a nice background.

Jake: [Laughs]

Rev: And as you're all getting ready to depart, Margaret arrives.

Rev: MARGARET: I thought before you all took off, I'd show you what's come of the new digs. Well, the new old digs. And I do believe there's a little matter of Kim's initiation.

Kim: "Oh, right."

Tass: I think I'm just grinning. "Yeah, these are usually fun. This is gonna be fun."

Kim: [Chuckles]

Rev: MARGARET: Well, if you all follow me, I'll show you what we've got set up.

Rev: And she heads out of the subterranean lair, but she does not head back above ground. She continues through the sewer tunnels for a while.

Jake: I make Tass go first.

Kim: Yeah.

Rev: [Laughs]

Kim: [Groans]

Rev: And after a few twists and turns, you come to a door that has these very large boxes above it on the top, and you can see scanners on it. And a little node pops out and scans Margaret, and the door opens.

Tass: "Oh, fancy."

Rev: MARGARET: Well, this was the best that we could come up with in the moment. Magic's a little longer process, and Jingles was able to put together these turrets sentries pretty quickly.

Tass: "Nice."

Rev: And she leads you through the door, and it opens into the cavern where IPT fell through. And the first thing that you notice is as you start to look at the façade of the building, the bottom few levels are just as they were before. They're cracked, they're broken, they're crumbling, but they've been cleaned out and reinforced, and then additional floors have been built on top. And as your gaze goes up, you can see —

almost like you're looking at the bottom of a bridge — that the street has been capped over. So that this whole area has not been filled back in.

Megan: "Whoa. So this is just staying like this, huh?"

Rev: MARGARET: Yes. I really couldn't think of a good way to try and move us. And, well, with everything that happened, to an extent, our secret is kind of out, especially with some of the people who run the city. It seems after we started talking with the mayor, he had some old memories of running in with a few of you.

Jake: "Yeah."

Kim: [Laughs]

Jake: "How's he ... How's he doing? How's he feeling about all that?"

Rev: MARGARET: Well, he feels a little better, now that he knows the things that he thought he saw or experienced were real. So we've got a tenuous working relationship with the city, as opposed to hiding. They're going to build around us and over us.

Tass: "OK. I'm surprised, honestly. That's kind of a like unforeseen boon, right?"

Rev: MARGARET: Yes. Between, you know, a city block falling in and a giant monster attacking the capital, and ... There's a good cause for them to believe it's true.

Tass: "Fair point."

Rev: And I think mechanically this doesn't affect any of you anymore. But like, Tass, if you were still The Professional, the tags for the IPT would be changing right now.

Tass: OK.

Kim: "I feel like it makes sense that it's kind of out in the open now, because I'm not really sure how a repertory theater would operate if it was trapped inside of a sinkhole."

Rev: MARGARET: Attendance would be about the same.

Kim: [Laughs]

Jake: Got 'im.

Kim: Oof, sad.

Rev: MARGARET: Well, Megan and Jake, I know that you have got to get on the road, but that made me realize that you probably don't have a way to get anywhere.

Rev: And she digs in her pockets and pulls out a set of keys. And she pushes a button, and a door on the far side starts to open and she throws you the keys. And the garage door opens fully, and sitting inside the garage is the IPT cruiser.

Jake: "Oh, man!"

All: [Laugh]

Jake: "God!"

Rev: MARGARET: What?

Jake: "I just ... I've been traveling in increasing style for so long, and ..." [Struggling] "Now I get another rung up on the ladder. Thank you."

Tass: "Yeah. Your car didn't change color when you pass by in the light."

Jake: [Unenthusiastic] "That's true. Yeah. I got that cool chromatic paint job on the PT Cruiser ..."

Rev: And she lets you know the way that this works down here is you can get into the car, and inside of the garage space, if you back up, it'll take you up and into an alley.

Jake: "All right. Well, thank you. Megan, do you want to drive?"

Megan: "Oh, I can't be seen in something like this. Sorry."

Jake: [Laughs]

Jake: All right, cool.

Kim: She's just gonna take her moped.

Megan: Yeah, it's gonna take me quite a while.

Rev: A very long time to get there.

Megan: I'll be going maximum 40 miles per hour. [Laughs] "So how is the rebuilding going here? I see you've added on a little bit."

Rev: MARGARET: Yes. A lot of the bottom floors were lost in the collapse. So we've kind of reversed the layout that you knew before. All of the research and things like that will be done on the top floors, and the bottom floors will be the offices.

Tass: "That's quick work."

Kim: "Being known to the public, or at least a little more known than you were, how is that affecting things, security-wise?"

Rev: MARGARET: Well, we're not employing anyone from the city. We're not bringing anyone down here. It's ... Actually kind of similar to if you've ever seen Ghostbusters. We do have someone who we technically have to report to when something happens that could cause a large financial crisis for the city. But for the most part, it will be left alone. We're basically putting together a special team that will deal specifically with the things going on around Indianapolis. As far as the mayor's concerned, that is the team. But it's, for us, the Indianapolis team.

Kim: "Gotcha."

Megan: "So what is Kim gonna have to do?"

Kim: "Oh! Yeah, that's a good question. I know that, you know, I've read about Megan's telekinetic maze and guiding Jake through it."

Rev: MARGARET: Well, I can't tell you. I mean, if anything, you should be able to tell me what it is you're going to be doing.

Kim: "Yeah. OK, OK ..."

Jake: "That was the first test. Oh no."

Kim: "Stop — stop writing in that notebook. What are you writing?"

Jake: [Chuckles]

Rev: MARGARET: Well, if Jake and Megan would like to stay and watch, I suppose we could begin now.

Jake: "I do. I do want to see what's about to happen."

Megan: "Oh, definitely."

Rev: OK. So I think in that case, Kim, why don't you roll your beginning of mystery move?

Kim: OK. Thirteen.

Rev: All right, so for the purposes of you getting to use your powers in this display, this is a mystery. But in the sense of the story —

Kim: No, I want full experience after this initiation.

Rev: Yeah, I'm sure you do. [Laughs] So the image that you get is Tass laying on the ground in the darkness. There is a cloaked figure with a large jagged knife to his throat, and you can see red starting to leak down his neck into the collar of his shirt.

Tass: And I'm just rattling off while she's doing whatever she's doing, "These are usually so fun. It's like ridiculous ..."

All: [Laugh]

Kim: Well, this might be an obvious one, but because I got a full success, I can ask a question from Read a bad Situation. What's the best way to protect the victim?

Tass: The way to protect the victim is to find the cloaked figure before they find Tass.

Kim: OK. So I was talking to Margaret about what this was, and then immediately my eyes flash white, and I stand stock still for a moment. With my eyes still white, I reach into my pocket and start flipping through my tarot cards, and then my vision clears. "Margaret, are you gonna have someone kill Tass?"

Rev: And as you turn to say that to her, she is escorting Jake and Megan inside. And you hear the door lock.

Tass: "What did you just say?!"

Kim: [Laughs]

Rev: And so right now, Megan and Jake and Margaret are inside, and the two of you are outside in the cavern. And all of the lights that are illuminating the cave cut out.

Tass: "What did you just ask her?"

Kim: "Calm down. This is ... This is going to be OK. The vision that I saw — the vision I saw is the worst case scenario. I saw a hooded figure with a knife and you on the ground bleeding out."

Tass: "Bleeding out?!"

Kim: "Hey, Tass? What have you kept saying to me in Chicago, right? Trust my visions. I will — we will find a way through this."

Tass: "I told you to trust your visions."

Kim: "Uh-huh."

All: [Laugh]

Kim: "I'm kidding. I'm sorry. I'm stressed."

Kim: "No, it's fine. Listen, listen. How do you think I feel? I thought we were gonna do fun maze times, not cloaked assassins!"

Rev: Somewhere out in the expanses of this cave and this network of tunnels that were dug by the ghouls. You hear ...

Rev: CLOAKED FIGURE: [Chuckles]

Kim: "Fucking hell. All right, OK. All we gotta do is just find this guy before they find us. And I, oof ... Do you have a light on you?"

Tass: "I mean, I have my head lamp, but is that breaking the rules?"

Kim: "I think anything that keeps you alive is not gonna break the rules."

Tass: "Fair point." Yeah, I'll fish that out and put it on.

Kim: Yeah, I think I just want to start looking up and down these tunnels, and trying to see if I can track like where I heard that voice coming from, and see if I can get a better — a better read on where this figure might be.

Rev: All right. Why don't you roll Read a Bad Situation?

Kim: Sure. Oh, and I can roll that with Weird now, because of my level up.

Rev: Nice.

Kim: Eleven.

Rev: All right, you get a hold 3.

Kim: Are there any dangers we haven't noticed?

Rev: Yes. As Tass turns this light on, you get the very quick impression that stealth is no longer on your side. You've now made yourselves all very visible in a game of find one person before the other person is found.

Kim: Well, that's true. What's the biggest threat?

Rev: The biggest threat here is the sound of you talking with each other and your footfalls. Like, all of the sound that you're giving off.

Kim: OK. And again, if the answer's different. What's the best way to protect the victims?

Rev: In this moment, the best way to protect the victim would be to maybe use this light source as a decoy. If you could use it to draw this person in and have you all not be there.

Kim: OK. I grab Tass's hand and whisper, "We have to throw the light source. The guy, he's gonna track that. If we can draw the killer to that light, then maybe we can sneak up on them."

Tass: "OK, let's get over to one of the tunnels then, and I'll huck it down the tunnel and then we'll backtrack and get into another one or something."

Kim: "Yeah. OK. Sounds good." And before we start doing this, because we're already illuminated, I think my eyes flash white again. And I would like to See Through Time.

Rev: All right, roll it.

Kim: Oh hell yeah. Ten.

Rev: All right, you get a hold three.

Kim: "OK, let's go."

Tass: OK, so as we're going and I still have my light up, like, can I see ... I guess what I'm looking for is like a tunnel above one of these ones at ground level. If there are even any left. I don't know what all they've done here.

Rev: Yeah, there are tunnels really all throughout. It's kind of a honeycomb.

Tass: "All right, I have an idea." And so I want to just track one of the tunnels that's, like, just up above, like, not too far up from, like, one that we're heading into. And as we approach the one that's, like, closer to our level, I want to kind of get in and give her a nod. And I will take off the lamp and huck it down that tunnel. And then I want to hold her shoulder and walk back out just a little bit, and try to pick her up and fly up to the tunnel above this one.

Kim: Oh, my god! I forgot you could do that!

Jake: [Laughs]

Rev: All right, so why don't you roll Act Under Pressure to kind of set this trap.

Kim: And roll that with advantage.

Tass: Oh, OK. [Laughs] With that, that brought me to a ten. Thank you, thank you.

Kim: Yes!

Jake: Nice.

Rev: All right. So you are able to huck this headlamp down into this tunnel, and then backtrack out and very quietly flap your enormous wings —

All: [Laugh]

Megan: Silently glide like an owl.

Rev: Silently glide like an owl ...

Kim: Did we say big demon wings? We meant soft, fluffy owl wings.

Rev: I meant just the power of thoughtful flight. Down below, you hear the sound of metal clanging on the ground.

Tass: "Oh, that was ominous."

Kim: "I fucking hate this."

Tass: "OK. Well, they passed underneath."

Kim: "Uh-huh."

Tass: "Do we dive bomb?"

Kim: "Yeah, maybe."

Tass: "OK. So yeah, let's go. Let's get down behind them."

Kim: "Yeah. OK. What was your initiation like? Did it involve this much potential murder?"

Tass: "No, not at all."

Kim: "OK."

Jake: It was written.

All: [Laugh]

Jake: It was a Scantron test.

Tass: "All right. Well, here we go." And I'm gonna pick her up again and just unfurl the wings, glide right back down in front of that tunnel.

Rev: I don't think there's a roll here. You unfurl your wings again and you glide back down into the tunnel. And further ahead, you can see your headlamp illuminating the

inside of the tunnel. And right next to the lamp buried in like one of the straps that you would use to strap it onto your head is a dagger.

Tass: "Oh, beans."

Kim: "Oh, boy." Yeah. I'm gonna, as quietly as I can, walk up to that scene and touch the dagger.

Rev: All right, why don't you roll Investigate a Mystery?

Kim: Man, I'm rolling like gangbusters today. Twelve.

Rev: All right, you get a hold 2.

Kim: I not only get a hold 2, I get a question I can ask for free. So, what happened here?

Rev: You get a very clear vision of someone running down this tunnel inside of this cloak, seeing the light, sprinting through, and they slam the dagger down into the strap, and continue on through further into the tunnel.

Kim: Where did it go?

Rev: You think that they must be at the end of this tunnel. Because you can tell that further down it has been collapsed, that this is a dead end.

Kim: Gotcha. What sort of creature is it?

Rev: So as this vision plays through your mind again of the person in the cloak running through and slamming the dagger down, you get a very clear glimpse of black boots and green pants. And you recognize these clothes. They belong to ranger Dave Garmesan.

Megan: Oh, my gosh.

Kim: [Gasps]

Jake: I don't know why, but for a moment I was sure you were going leprechaun. The like giggling in the darkness and the black shoes and the green pants. I was — and it's March. I was like, he put a fucking leprechaun assassin in this, and I'm here for it.

Megan: When I heard black boots and green pants, I was thinking, yeah, like ranger clothes. I wouldn't have thought that it was him. But I loved that Jake's mind just went fanciful.

Rev: Leprechauns.

Jake: Yeah.

Megan: Black shiny boots.

Jake: It could have been a tactical leprechaun.

Rev: [Laughs] Tactical leprechaun.

All: [Laugh]

Rev: Time to deploy the tactical leprechaun.

Megan: Hey, I've seen those movies. That's terrifying.

Rev: Yeah, yeah.

Tass: They're gonna be wishing they never messed with us.

Megan: Nice.

Kim: "OK. It's ... It's not just some guy. It's ranger Dave in a cloak with a knife."

Tass: [Laughs] "What?"

Megan: [Laughs]

Kim: "I don't know if this is some sort of fucked up initiation where Dave's initiation into the IPT was to try to kill you."

Jake: [Laughs] If you if you win, he doesn't get to join. And if he wins, you die.

Megan: They told him, you have to clear your spot.

Rev: [Laughs]

Tass: I've got a new playbook ready for Dave Garmesan.

Kim: [Laughs]

Tass: "OK, so he's just down at the end of the tunnel?"

Kim: "Yeah, it's a dead end, so ..."

Tass: "OK. You're the boss. What do you think? Do we sneak in and try to take him down?"

Kim: "Oh ..."

Rev: As you're both standing here in the light trying to figure this out, a dagger comes flying end over end, towards Tass.

Kim: I push him out of the way.

Rev: All right. Why don't you roll Protect Someone?

Megan: A lot of dagger training in ranger school.

Jake: Who are you, Dave Garmesan?

Megan: [Laughs]

Jake: Who were you, before you were the ranger? "Oh, I was a member of the League of Assassins. Why do you ask?"

Kim: That's a four.

Tass: Oh, no ...

Rev: So as this dagger comes whipping into the light end over end, you get this vision of where it's going to be. And so you try to grab a hold of Tass and shift him away from it. And it's almost like you picked the most likely one, instead of the least likely one.

Kim: God damn it.

Rev: And there is a loud thud as the dagger hits Tass on the forehead and falls to the ground. And you see like a purple welt start to rise on his forehead, and it's ... It's blunt.

Tass: "God! Eat shit, Garmesan!"

Rev: At the sound of his name he comes stepping into the light with this wavy dagger, and he pulls the cloak back.

Rev: DAVE GARMESAN: Let's do this.

Kim: "What? OK, no. Hold on. What the fuck? Why are you doing this?"

Tass: "No, he said let's do this!" I'm gonna rush him.

Rev: [Laughs] All right. Are you trying to take him down? Are you trying to ... Like, what are you trying to do?

Tass: Subdue. Like, I don't want to physically harm him, but I want to take the wind out of his sails.

Rev: OK. So this is gonna be Act Under Pressure again.

Tass: OK.

Kim: "Go from the right!" Use that with advantage.

Tass: OK. That saved me from a fail. It absolutely did. That is an eight.

Kim: [Sighs in relief]

Rev: So Tass lunges at Dave Garmesan. You both go tumbling to the ground. And as the dagger hits the ground, Kim, you see that it is leaving red marks wherever it touches. And as you're rolling around on top of Dave, he starts to like laugh and he lets go of the dagger and kind of puts his hands up in surrender.

Tass: "Level with me, dude. Are you like Steven Seagal when he was like a, you know, whatever — he was like some SEAL Team Six or whatever, and then got bored and went to be a park ranger, because ... Jesus."

Rev: DAVE GARMESAN: No. I just had a lot of free time. And so I threw daggers at trees, and Margaret gave me those.

Tass: "Oh, my god." And I'll get up and offer him a hand.

Kim: "OK, but what about this knife? Did she give you this, too?"

Rev: DAVE GARMESAN: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Rev: And he picks it up and he grabs the blade and squeezes it. Blood just runs from the blade. You can tell that it's a fake — like a stage dagger that just has paint coming out of it.

Kim: "God, I thought it was some sort of cursed, magical item."

Rev: DAVE GARMESAN: Oh, no. No.

Tass: "That was cool. You did good."

Rev: DAVE GARMESAN: Thanks. You too.

Tass: "Kim, good work."

Kim: "Jesus. Stressful. More stressful than the draugr, and I didn't think that was possible."

Rev: And out in the cavern, the lights turn on again, and Margaret comes out.

Rev: MARGARET: Well done.

Kim: "OK. I need the full — like, how did you rope Dave into this?"

Rev: MARGARET: Oh, he's eager to learn. He's actually going to be the leader of our Indianapolis team.

Megan: Yes!

Kim: I can't wait for that spinoff podcast.

Rev: [Laughs]

Tass: I'm just sort of rubbing my forehead, but in good spirits about this.

Rev: Margaret looks down at the lump on your forehead.

Rev: MARGARET: I'll take a couple of points away for Tass getting stabbed in the forehead, but I'm pretty sure that every member of the team has gotten Tass stabbed or shot at one point, so I can't hold that against you too much.

Tass: "Yeah."

Jake: I just pretend to be really focused on something else, somewhere in the room.
"Huh, oh, look at that."

Megan: I don't remember having done that, but I also would believe it. So ... [Laughs]

Rev: MARGARET: Well, congratulations. Welcome to the team.

Kim: "Thank you."

Rev: MARGARET: Now everybody get to work.

Tass: Nice.

Megan: Yeah. I give Kim a high five. "Good job."

Kim: "Thank you."

Tass: "You owe me a burger for the forehead thing."

Kim: "Yeah. I'm so sorry. We'll grab one on our way to Chicago. My treat. Though also, I don't have any money. Will you take an IOU?"

Tass: "For burgers? Always."

Kim: "OK."

Megan: "Well, good luck up there."

Kim: "Thanks."

Megan: "Can't wait to hear all about it. We'll see you when we get back."

Kim: "Yeah. Good luck with your stuff, too."

Megan: "What all do we need to take with us?"

Jake: "Two additional passengers? Where's Wallace and Aiden?" I call Wallace. Damn it!
No, wait!

Rev: No matter what you say!

All: [Laugh]

Jake: I call for Wallace. I get Wallace and Aiden to come down to the car, and we will hop in and get on the road.

Kim: "Wait. If this is the only car, then how are Tass and I getting to Chicago?"

Jake: "What if we just place the other portal we've got? So that we can go right through to the castle, and then you guys can take the car?"

Tass: Yeah. I actually want to ask Margaret. "With this place kind of being back up and running, like, what's the status with the underground lair? Like what are you using that for, or are you still?"

Rev: MARGARET: Actually, Anastacia And Jingles are kind of the last remnants of what we've got in there. So we're going to move them today into here, and after that it'll be all yours again.

Kim: Now that IPT is its own kind of little zone, we could maybe crack the yolk in the subterranean lair, depending on how we feel about that.

Megan: Now that the subterranean lair is not the sole base of IPT stuff?

Kim: Yeah, exactly.

Megan: Yeah. I feel like I would prefer it there to the IPT, based on the target that the IPT has been and is, just due to the nature of what it is and what it holds.

Tass: Yeah, if the original concern was we don't know if there's a mole, then I think that still stands until we find out anything new. So if it's subterranean lair, where only a few certain people that we definitely trust are going to go? Then, yeah.

Jake: OK. Yeah, I support that. I think we'll head back to the subterranean lair and go set up that portal, and then those of us headed to the castle can just go through the portal, and I'll toss the keys to Tass and Kim instead. It's great, because I don't have to drive the PT Cruiser either.

All: [Laugh]

Rev: All right. So Jake and Megan and Wallace and Aiden go through the portal that leads out into the castle. Is there anything that you all want to do at the castle before you head to Elnore? And is everyone going to Elnore?

Jake: I imagine Wallace wouldn't, because he doesn't really have anything to contribute on the Elnore side. He's probably —

Rev: Magical lands don't really seem like his vibe.

Jake: No, yeah. Not enough trench coats in the magic lands. He's probably staying behind and just like prepping the next steps, like where they're going to go and contingency plans and stuff.

Rev: OK.

Jake: I don't have anything particular I need to do while we're in here. I'd probably check in with Selina and let her know, like, this is what we're headed off to do right now, so I'll be in touch soon?

Rev: OK.

Megan: Yeah, I'll probably do the same with my grandpa. Just say, "Hi. Love you. We got some stuff we've gotta do really fast, but I'll be back later."

Rev: All right. Yeah. So you all come in, you touch base, and you head through the portal to Elnore. And I think we find the two of you and Aiden and Ferguson in the Room of Magic. Jake, as you are going through the various books that Ferguson has, the spells that he has collected, why don't you roll Investigate a Mystery to try and find these kind of missing pieces that you don't have — this half of the spell, that you're not quite sure how it works.

Jake: OK.

Rev: And Megan, while Jake is doing this research with the aid of Ferguson, what are you doing down in this space? Aiden's just kind of beaming. He's very excited to be seeing the things that he's seeing.

Megan: Yeah, I think I'm giving him a tour. And we're walking around, and I'm just kind of catching him up on what's going on in the world and preparing him to be a child in this century. "So how are you feeling about what we're about to do here?"

Rev: AIDEN CHAMBERS: OK. I think it'll be a little strange not to be able to feel when someone's upset. Like it's been a very useful tool in my life thus far. And having that cut off, I think, will be weird.

Megan: "Yeah, I ... I know what you mean. You know, nobody really has that strong of an idea of why it is exactly you can do the things you do, but it really feels similar to a lot of the things I can do. And I don't know why you ended up back here when you did. I kind of have a feeling if we hadn't returned, you might have had to deal with some of the things that I can do. But I'm glad that you don't have to have that burden. And I'm glad that you get an opportunity to be a kid."

Rev: AIDEN CHAMBERS: Yeah. I'm gonna miss going out. That probably sounds weird to say, but the best times of my life were spent with the crew solving these mysteries and hunting down these monsters. It's kinda weird to try to think about putting that genie back in the bottle and going to regular school and dealing with, like, bullies and stuff.

Megan: "Yeah. But, you know, there's always gonna be monsters. Now's the time for you to not have to really worry about that. And I understand what you mean about using the ability to tell what people are feeling to get through life. But also, that's not really your responsibility, and it's not something you should have to rely."

Rev: AIDEN CHAMBERS: Ah. Social cues?

Megan: "Yeah."

Rev: AIDEN CHAMBERS: Hmm.

Megan: "I'm just saying you probably feel like because you can pick up on what people are feeling, you have a responsibility to act on it?"

Rev: AIDEN CHAMBERS: Yeah, that's true.

Megan: "And it can help you navigate that, but it's not your responsibility. So Wallace is gonna take good care of you, and I think you're gonna be all right. And we're gonna take care of things on our end. And when you're a little older, you can join us and hunt down all the monsters you want."

Rev: AIDEN CHAMBERS: Promise?

Megan: "Promise, promise."

Rev: AIDEN CHAMBERS: Deal.

Megan: "Cool." And I think kind of having that talk with Aiden, that's kind of how I'm helping Jake with this, is telling him about how I think Aiden's powers are connected to my powers and possibly having to do with The Empath, and if that helps him narrow down the kind of protection that needs to be put around Aiden.

Rev: OK. So Jake, I think you get a additional +1 to this roll for the information that Megan gives you.

Jake: Good. That is a seven.

Megan: Oh, boy.

Rev: Wow. All right. You get a hold 1.

Jake: I think, in terms of like the different spell effects that I'm looking at and trying to figure out how to combine, I'm going with, what can it do? What is the potential of the combination of these effects?

Rev: Yeah. As you go through all of the various spells that Ferguson knows, as well as even going back and forth between this place and the castle, and checking through the

tomes that are there, you start to piece together spells that seem like they could work in tandem. That they wouldn't necessarily draw from the same energy source, or that they wouldn't conflict or interfere with one another. So you find something that can block the use of blood magic. You also find a spell that can stop people from scrying on you. You find some spells in one of Ferguson's books about using items that belong to a person to track them. You really just kind of run the gamut of all of these different spells. And you're trying to find a way to pare them down onto something smaller. You need something that can hold a whole lot of energy. I think this is gonna be the weird or rare material. Like, you need something that can hold a lot of capacity, because there's gonna be a lot of spells generating. It's not going to be a spell — you're almost firing off multiple spells at the same time, but none of them will conflict with each other.

Jake: All right. So I'm gonna need a very high capacity external hard drive.

Rev: Yes, yeah. Solid state.

Jake: OK. I get on Newegg.

Rev: And he just wears it around his neck.

Jake: [Laughs]

Rev: You get it gold plated, and he fits right in with the kids today.

All: [Laugh]

Jake: I wish everybody at home could see the look that Rev gave me at the end of that sentence, of like, "I don't know. Is this true?"

Megan: Hello, fellow kids.

Rev: Hello, fellow kids.

Kim: If we have any Gen Z listeners in the audience, please let us know if we're completely off the mark. Thank you.

Jake: Not me. Please don't tell me. I don't want to know.

Rev: [Laughs]

Jake: Boy, I'm trying to think of things I've utilized or interacted with in the past that would fit that bill.

Rev: Yeah. Either something that can hold a lot of power, or even something that is like compartmentalized?

Jake: The first thing that comes to mind is Willem's Fortune, but I don't know how that would resolve, with it being like intrinsically linked to multiple other pieces.

Rev: Yeah.

Kim: We also have a pretty good inkling that probably Nash has one of those right now.

Jake: Oh ... That's fine.

Rev: [Chuckles]

Jake: Actually, do I think that I could distill this down into no more than eight discrete ongoing magical effects?

Rev: Yes.

Jake: OK. Then I want to ask Aiden for his little communicator that they all have — that little d8.

Rev: Oh, like the messaging gem.

Jake: Yeah. The thing with eight faces of different gemstones.

Rev: Yeah. He takes it out of his pocket and holds it up.

Jake: I want to kind of scrutinize it, and see if I think this thing could do the job.

Rev: Yeah. Like this thing probably wouldn't hold enough power on its own if it was a single giant spell going off. But because it's magically charged on all eight sides and set to run individually, this could absolutely work.

Jake: All right. "Well Aiden, good news. I think we can just use this, which means basically nothing about your everyday carry needs to change at all."

Rev: AIDEN CHAMBERS: Nice.

Jake: "Yeah. I mean, the downside is it won't do the job it was originally built for anymore. But you'll be with Wallace, and his will still, so."

Rev: AIDEN CHAMBERS: All right.

Jake: "All right." I'm gonna set to work on this thing.

Rev: All right. So Megan, as Jake is implementing the spell, what are you gonna do? Cause this is gonna take him a couple of days, still.

Megan: Well, what I want to do is I want to do some research. You know, ever since talking to Aiden about The Empath, I want to try and find out more about what happened to The Empath, and what happened to these other gods that died, and who they were. But I'm not quite sure where to start with that. Like, where can I look that wouldn't have already been looked at?

Rev: Yeah. So you do have additional pieces now that weren't had before. So I think you could probably go between the castle and the IPT, now that you've got a quick route there, and do a little research in both places with the new information that you've got. So that'll probably take you a day or so. Why don't you roll Investigate a Mystery?

Megan: OK. Ten.

Rev: All right. You get a hold 2.

Megan: What is being concealed here?

Rev: So the thing that's being concealed here: you know who the living gods are still, and you know two of the ones that were killed when they tried to imprison Death. There's always a ... I don't know if vessel's the right word, but someone who is imbued with the power, specifically of that missing god. It doesn't take them over. It's just kind of an energy that exists in the world, and it finds the most appropriate candidate for those powers. But you know that there are other people in the world who seem like they could be a vessel for them. There are empathic people all over the world who can sense when someone is in pain, have glimpses of people's thoughts. And there's also creatures, when it comes to The Devourer — you've run into a number of them that can feed off of pain. And not just monsters, but people who can feed off of various things. And so you start to make that correlation, and you start thinking about all of the gods and what it is they represent and what they do. And you do start finding things that correlate, of people throughout time who have progressed the world because of the things that they were able to create. People who had thoughts for things far advanced, compared to everyone else around them. And you do find that the source of this, when it comes to the ancient gods, was The Builder.

Megan: OK, cool. Where did it go? Is there any way I can maybe track down who is the vessel for this?

Rev: You're able to track down pretty quickly likely candidates throughout history who very clearly had the powers of The Builder. You can't find any clear sign about The Builder now, but it is very clear to you, after going through some of the files at IPT, seeing some of the things that he created, that TJ was the last Builder.

Tass and Kim, we find you parked outside of what Kim recognizes as The Vault in Chicago. But at this time, Strohm only owns the penthouse. What are you both doing?

Tass: "Looks a little different than what you're used to, huh?"

Kim: "Yeah, it's nice to see it." And I think this whole car ride, I've just been, like, sitting pretty silently in the passenger seat, and just holding the two pieces of amber in my hands. "What if she doesn't believe us?"

Tass: "I don't know. I think with whatever she already equipped you with, I don't think she would have sent you back here if she thought that was possible."

Kim: "Mmhmm."

Tass: "So I just refuse to be worried."

Kim: "This sounds really silly to say, but it's been on my mind, so I'm going to ask it. Just don't judge me. What if she doesn't like me?"

Tass: "Why in the world would I judge you for a question like that? I get it. This is wild in every possible way. This is someone that you loved. This was practically your mother. Like, it's OK to not be OK right now. But again, it's still her. It's still her. I don't think there's anything to worry about."

Kim: "OK, let's do this."

Tass: "All right." And I will lead us in.

Rev: As the two of you approach the front door, Al actually takes a step to the side and blocks it and points at you, Tass.

Rev: AL: Just you.

Tass: "Oh! OK. I'll be right back."

Kim: "OK."

Tass: "Don't worry."

Rev: He pivots a little bit so you can get past him, and you head into the lobby and into the elevator. And the door opens in Strohm's penthouse, and she's standing there waiting for you.

Tass: "Can't say I'm surprised you were waiting for me."

Rev: STROHM: Yes, well, it's been quite a day. I would love to have you explain to me exactly why it is you have shown up with someone that appears as static to me when I saw the day.

Tass: [Chuckles] "You know, I can tell you — and I will. It would all be a lot better coming from her."

Rev: Tass, roll Manipulate Someone.

Tass: Eight.

Rev: She looks at you for a long moment.

Rev: STROHM: Why don't you give me the CliffsNotes version?

Tass: "OK. I have brought her to speak with you, because in 100 years from now, this is a person that you care about enough to literally sacrifice yourself, for her. We brought her back, and we've got a lot of explaining to do."

Rev: STROHM: Well, with a pitch like that, how can I say no?

Tass: "Thought you might like that."

Rev: Kim, back in front of the building, Al raises his hand to his ear and steps aside.

Rev: AL: You're free to go in.

Kim: "Thanks, Al."

Rev: I think we see his kind of surprised look at someone knowing his name, as you pass through into the lobby and into the elevator.

Kim: I just wave at him as the elevator doors close.

Rev: The elevator doors open, and Tass and Strohm are standing there.

Rev: STROHM: So, Tass tells me that the young woman standing before me, who to me appeared as what I can only describe as television static when I saw the day, is someone that in 100 years from now, I'll know.

Kim: "It's so good to see you again."

Rev: And as you look at her, she does give just a little bit of a smile. And she looks almost identical to the way that you remember her from 100 years in the future. The only slight difference, and I think you notice this because you have had so many long conversations with her, is just a very slight gold rim around her eyes is not there.

Kim: "Hi. My name is Kim, and I can't tell you how wonderful it is to see you again. Before I get too far into this, the Strohm that I knew imparted a story to me. And I'm going to tell it to you, to prove that everything else that I'm about to say is real and is coming from her." And I want to hold to the two pieces of amber in my hand. "When you were a girl, you were playing in your father's office with a coin, throwing it and catching it, and you dropped it and it rolled under a rug. But you didn't know that at the time. And your father accused a servant of stealing from him, and put that woman to death. Only after that did you discover the coin underneath the rug, and you sent money to that woman's family for the rest of their lives."

Rev: There's a long silence in the room. As you told this story, her eyes slowly lowered to the ground and got a little wider. And then she recomposes herself and looks to you.

Rev: STROHM: I've never told that to anybody.

Tass: "Not yet."

Kim: "I come from a future where Grigori Nash's ritual was successful and everyone became supernaturally gifted. And the Chicago that I am from was divided up into several powerful factions. And you headed one of them. Two, actually. But that is a longer story. I'm an oracle. I can see the future. And I first met you when I was 17 years old, and you were searching across the world for young, powerful oracles to add to your faction, the House of Strohm. And I had the great honor of living in this building and learning from you and working with you. And in time, I came to think of you as not only a mentor, but a mother figure and a best friend. And I know that that is a whole lot to put

on someone that I have just met, and I apologize. But it's important for context. In the timeline that I came from, I had a vision of Jake, Megan, and Tass arriving in my present — their future. And I learned that they were in the future to try to figure out exactly how Nash had been successful, what alternate worlds he used to fuel his ritual, so that they could go back to their present — right now — and try to prevent that from happening. And I started helping them get the information that they needed. At first in secret, and later, with your blessing and direct aid. And when it came time for the three of them to go back to their original time, you told them to take me with them. To save me from a future that was about to be unwritten, yes. But also because you knew that these three needed the help of the Strohm from their timeline — from you — in order to have any hope of success against Nash. And you knew that, or I guess maybe hoped that meeting me would give you another reason to care and want to help. I'm sorry. I know that this is a whole lot. And I've probably blown your vision for the rest of the day, and I really apologize. I know how frustrating that is for you."

Rev: As you have been saying all of this to Strohm, you felt your emotions building up, and all of the memories of her that you had experienced in your life. And it's not until you get towards the end where you start apologizing that you realize that your two hands are trying to pull themselves towards each other.

Kim: I'll look at the pieces of amber.

Rev: As you open them up in your hand, they start sliding across your palm towards each other.

Kim: I'll let that happen.

Rev: These two pieces of amber connect back together, and there's a faint flash inside. Six little legs come out, and it crawls up your arm and down your leg, and over to Strohm's leg, and up into the palm of her hand. And she looks at it for a long moment. And then you hear this very faint chittering sound coming from it.

SFX: SCARAB BEETLE CHITTERS

Rev: STROHM: Really? A hundred years?

SFX:

SCARAB BEETLE CHITTERS

Rev: STROHM: Yes, I suppose that would be best then.

Rev: And she turns to you, Kim.

Rev: STROHM: And you say this was the future, not another world. This was our future?

Kim: "This was our future."

Rev: She looks back down at the scarab.

Rev: STROHM: Very well. I agree.

Rev: The amber scarab pulses with a faint gold light, and then it melds into Strohm's palm. And we see that gold glow travel up her arm, and her chest, and her neck, and into her eyes, where it spirals for a moment and then settles as a gold ring around her pupils. Her posture shifts slightly and she takes in a breath, and she smiles with a sigh.

Rev: STROHM: Oh, it's good to be back.

Rev: And then her eyes settle on you, Kim, and she takes a step towards you and embraces you.

Rev: STROHM: It's so nice to see you again, my dear.

SFX:

OUTRO MUSIC

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