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Dungeons and Devised Theatre: A Study of Tabletop Gaming and its Application in Playwriting
and Character Development.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Fine
Arts Performance Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by
Sabrina Elizabeth Becker
B.F.A Musical Theatre
Lees-McRae College 2019

Director: Dr. Jesse Njus
Associate Professor of Theatre Art
School of the Arts

Virginia Commonwealth University
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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of the connections and application of tabletop gaming in theatre. It looks at the initial process that was used in devising a play from tabletop gaming and also the applications of using tabletop gaming to further character development. This paper serves as a journal of first-hand accounts and interviews during this process so you may be inspired to build your own process either based in what you read here or discovering your own. There is a sample excerpt of the play to show what can be accomplished as well as other artistic works that came out of tabletop gaming.

Prologue and Annotated Bibliography

Dungeons & Dragons has been plaguing the tables of unsuspecting households since the early nineteen-seventies. The game involves nerds of all types creating a story full of infinite possibilities that are full of unexpected twists and turns. Over the past two years during Covid-19 pandemic the popularity of all types of table top games has been on the rise. My best inference as to why is to help maintain social connection with friends. This has brought to light many of the performative aspects of Table Top RPG's, on social media i.e., TikTok, Streaming Platforms i.e., YouTube, Literature, and podcasts. TTRPG is collaborative storytelling at its finest and I believe that it could be used as a method of playwriting to bring the gaming to the stage. Table Top Role-Playing Games value in theatre can be broken down into a few different categories. These being, collaboration, characterization, improvisation, and narrative.

Devised Theatre is all about collaboration. You are in a room with other artists that share a common goal and together you create the world of the play, decide the message and other aspects of the piece. Table top RPG is consistently so similar in nature that using it to create theatre seems to me the most logical next jump in development. When playing a game of *Dungeons & Dragons* it calls for an extreme amount of collaboration and teamwork, and through this collaborative storytelling with the right group of people you can frequently create a plot that is complex, well developed and captivating. A prime example of this is Vox Machina / Critical Role.

Critical Role will be a prime source for this project study that I am conducting. Critical Role is a company based in California. They are a group of voice actors that stream their *Dungeons & Dragons* games. The actors consist of Mathew Mercer, Ashely Johnson, Laura Bailey, Travis Willingham, Marisha Ray, Sam Riegel, and Liam O'Brian. They have been

streaming their games to hundreds of thousands of viewers weekly since 2015, and each episode published to YouTube has on average over one million views. Clearly there is a dedicated audience for this kind of storytelling. In the effort to better understand this unique situation I spent a good chunk of my winter break watching the entire campaign with over 120 episodes with each on being between three and four hours long. I found myself enraptured with the plot that these actors had created.

Back in 2019 The group announced that they would be running a Kickstarter campaign lasting 45 days in the effort to gain an audience backing of \$750,000 to create a single thirty minute animated special. Critical Role drastically underestimated the desire of an animated special by their fan base. The group in that 45-day time frame well exceeded that goal, breaking many records in the process. The fan base had donated over \$11.3 million to the project allowing the production to be picked up by amazon prime video. With the amount of anticipation that surrounded the show from it's very dedicated fan base amazon went ahead and renewed the show for season two before the first episode had even been released. Season two will be paid for by amazon rather than the fans. The show began releasing episodes in late January of 2022 two weeks earlier than the original announced date. They are continuing to release three episodes at a time over a period of four weeks for a total of a twelve-episode first season. The show in personal review, is very unique, as it boasts elements that call back to the original fans in a way that reeks of an air of fan servicing in the best way (i.e., the copy of Tusk Love, the infamous smut novel described in campaign two, seen in Gilmore's shop). The show also makes itself available to individuals who may not be familiar with its humble origins as a game played at a dining room table created simply for Liam O'Brian's birthday two years before they ever started streaming. For example, my partner, who knew very little about TTRPGs, Theatre, and Critical

Role enjoys the show and is able to easily follow the plot line. This unique ability to reach audiences outside the original intended group is why Critical role is my prime source for this project, as they have done it already, just for TV.

Another source I have drawn inspiration from focusing in devised theatre, is the article *More Than a Private Joke: Cross Media Parody in Role Playing Games* by Susana Tosca, this article discussing some of the mechanics of TTRPG with a focus on the role-playing aspect and how players build their characters. It is this idea that I believe if implemented into devised theatre could lead into a greater ability to further develop characters on a much deeper level than before, as those creating them will be building and focusing on one individual for long periods of time.

In terms of narrative the purpose of using dungeons and dragons to create narrative it creates an interesting question of how the plot will be followed through. As the head playwright on this project and an experienced D&D player, I know for a fact there is no real way to keep the original plot that I have laid intact. The players have almost total control over what happens. The story will follow them, regardless of what they do... which begs the question "how does one create a world that regardless of what a group of chaotic players does it creates a story worthy of being on the stage?" I have been influenced by the article *From Narrative Games to Playable Stories* by Marie-Laure Ryan. This article discusses the use of narrative and storytelling in digital gaming where the players actions can drastically change the outcome of the gaming experience. In their article they define narrative in the following quote.

"Narrative is a linear, casual sequence of events whose significance depends on their position on a temporal axis while hypertext is a network of textual fragments that can be read in

many different orders. Unless the user's choices are severely restricted it is highly unlikely that they will produce a sequence that respects narrative logic." (Ryan-44).

Now this quote is said in reference to digital games. This concept brings to mind video games such as Tell-tale gaming's *A Wolf Among Us*, and the recent release of Square Enix's *Life is Strange- True Colors*, along with the other games in that series. I mention specifically *True Colors* as that is the one I just finished watching my fiancé play, and can speak better to that one than the others.

The Theatre is built on improvisation. Whether it's the ability to riff in a devised theatre setting, in a club performance, or something has gone wrong on the stage and you need to think on your feet to keep the ball rolling. Improv is imagination at its finest. You create these worlds, scenarios, and this imagery with what you come up with on the fly with your friends. The same statement can be said for TTRPG's. They are so similar, but the difference in gaming improvisation is that the fantastical imagery is rather intense. With descriptions that could inspire some quite fantastical artistic designs for the stage. For this I would like to reference the article *Using the Imagination: Consumer Evoking and Thematizing of the Fantastic Imagery* by Brett A.S. Martin. This article looks at the use of fantastical imagery in *Magic the Gathering* through a series of interviews with several people who play the game ranging in experience. In the author's words "The purpose of this research is to describe the dynamics of how consumers generate the fantastic imagery during consumption." (Martin-136) We are looking at the natural expression and imagery that is evoked through such game play and I will then connect this imagery to the similarities in *Dungeons & Dragons* which will lead into that being used for devised theatre. Another aspect of imagery is the player's imagery, and how their own visualizations can shape

the world of the play and of the story. For this I will be providing artwork done by myself and players for a variety of games to demonstrate the depth of imagery that such play invokes.

Another group of key resources that will be used in this project that I believe I must discuss are the several source books that exist in *Dungeons & Dragons* lore that I will be using for this project. Wizards of the Coast, the parent company for *Dungeons & Dragons* has created a plethora of source books for those that are in the community. For this project I will be using several books that have been resealed, specifically source books made for the fifth edition of the game. *The Dungeon Master's Guide* contains many great resources for those running a campaign. There is a really great quote from the opening of this book that I would like to share.

“A Dungeon Master gets to wear many hats. As the architect of the campaign, the DM creates adventures by placing monsters, traps, and treasures for the other players’ characters (the adventurers) to discover. As a storyteller, the DM helps the other players visualize what is happening around them, improvising when the adventurers do something, or go somewhere unexpected. As an actor, the DM plays the roles of the monsters and supporting characters, breathing life into them. And as a referee, the DM interprets the rules and decides when to abide by them and when to change them. Inventing, writing, storytelling, improvising, acting, refereeing-every DM handles these roles differently and you’ll probably enjoy some more than others.” (*Dungeon Master's Guide* - 4).

This excerpt encompasses what it really means to run a campaign and the amount of work that really goes into it. It reads quite a bit like what it means to direct a show, or write a play. Other books I will be working with (This list is subject to grow) *Fizban's Treasury of Dragons*, *Volo's Guide to Monsters*, *The Player's Handbook*, *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything*, *Monster Manual*, and *Xanathar's Guide to Everything*. Each of these books provide beautiful

imagery and lore to use as inspiration or at face value in your campaigns. I personally choose to draw inspiration from them. They provide a lot of great clarification for gaming mechanics and how different encounters should be run.

My most important sources of all in this project are the players in my game. Logan Bryant, Katie Jackson, Sarge Sargent, and Shawna Basallo. These four individuals volunteered months of their life to participate in my little experiment. They spent hours building and perfecting their characters that they have contributed to the story that we weaved together. Throughout the project I have collected artwork, playlists, journals, notes, stories, interviews, and video footage from all of them that I will be referencing in this paper as the main bulk of my research. They also have graciously given me permission to further analyze other characters that they have created in other campaigns as well, as they have spent a significant amount of time developing these individuals.

Chapter One: Why?

So why is this idea and experiment/study so important? As a young professional in the industry, like so many others I have experienced extreme burn out. At one point I never wanted to walk into a theatre ever again. *Dungeons & Dragons* changed that for me. I was looking forward to theatre again. It brought back the spark. The idea of sitting around a table and letting fate and friends determine the drive of the story is really inviting. Its collaborative, and freeing. I then began to wonder why? Why did *Dungeons & Dragons* of all things bring me back to theatre? Where is the connection?

Starting back in May 2020, I joined a D&D group with some friends from my undergraduate years. In that campaign I have played two different characters. One was short lived due to a... well I don't drink and play anymore (most of the time); she was brutally killed. The second I have lived with for a long time. When thinking about how I function with her versus all other characters that I have worked with in a traditional theatre setting, there is no contest to the depth in which I have an understanding on how to work with her. It is second nature at this point how I run her, I flip a switch and I am in her head, switch it again and I am back to me. When going back into my acting life, this has rarely been the case. Doing the exploration of the character through gameplay has given me a deeper understanding of how she functions. Often in plays when play a character that contradicts my own personality in some way I have a difficult time handling it. For example, I was playing Margie in Lauren Gunderson's *Silent Sky*. Margie is quiet, nurturing, a mother figure in the show. She also has a bit more conservative views, and is religious. All of that is the exact opposite of who I actually am, the director had a hard time getting those traits out of me. I had zero connection to the character and she was, by a landslide, the most difficult role I have ever had to play. This is where the

connection to D&D comes in, and is a scary reflection. Nori, the character that I play and feel confident in. She is a mother, she is the moral compass of the group, she is religious, nurturing, feminine, and level headed. She has quite a bit in common with Margie. Yet I hated playing Margie with a passion but love Nori and play her with ease. Why? At their core values they are almost the same person, so I should either have had an easier time with Margie, or hate Nori, and neither are true.

My best theory to answer is that question is that I have lived with her longer. I created the dialogue and walked through her world through her eyes. The analysis of her has been far more in depth, it's a little methodist in a way through the roleplay. But unlike traditional method acting it's easier to step away from it, what happens at the table stays at the table. You are using it in a fictional world with others that are doing the same. With Margie this was not the case, at the time I used the character analysis tools I had been given through my education. Building her out from the information in the script. But approaching her knowing that was how she was going to be played was daunting. I don't have a maternal bone in my body. The way we explored characterization did not lend itself to getting into an exact opposite of myself. I sat with her and tried through music, but nothing I did ever felt truly genuine. The performance is one that I would never want to relive. The point here being that through the play and table work of D&D I was able to connect with an archetype that I would have never been able to prior. I feel that if I had been playing Nori at the time of *Silent Sky*, my portrayal of Margie would have been much less painful and awkward and far more genuine. That is where the connection of D&D and Theatre for me begins.

Playwriting is hard. Unreasonably hard. Creating authentic characters, with believable dialogue is something that I really struggle with. How does one find their way into another

individual's brain? I haven't figured it out yet. Yet when at the table a group of players and the DM are working together to build out these individuals, often people use their own life experiences with their characters. You have several people sitting there having real conversations. Now not all of it is good. There are mundane things, there are things that should never be heard or said again. In the case of my friends, it is the most horrible puns you have ever heard, but it is still diverse dialogue from multiple people with varied backgrounds. It creates a language and a story that is colorful and believable. This lends a lot of great moments that could be adapted to the screen, page or in this case the stage. If I could turn the campaign I have been in since May 2020 into a play I would, but we used a prewritten module so copyright is a thing. The ability to have a group roleplaying out various scenarios in character, I believe this would really assist with the issue of writing authentic characters that I struggle with. Perhaps not as full solution, but a major assistance. I also hope that this method could help others who also struggle with this as well.

This project, while also having quite a few practical purposes including, better developed characters, believable dialogue, connections, creating a collaborative environment also has a bit of a selfish motive as well. I believe that this experiment/study will be a lot of fun to conduct. It is allowing me to collaborate with my best friends for my thesis and that is one of the main reasons why I choose to do this project the other selfish reason is that it is combining my two favorite things Theatre and *Dungeons & Dragons*. We put on a play in a theatre and at home we play at a table, it is the same word. In both senses we play. It is in that way I choose to combine the two.

Over the past two years the popularity of Tabletop RPGs has been dramatically on the rise, Why? The answer to this question lies in your home, where you were stuck in a lockdown,

lonely, sad, depressed, and craving anything to get some kind of relief from all the doom and gloom that bombarded the media. This is the perfect breeding ground for people looking to games as a form of escapism. The rise in popularity is discussed by Sam Desatoff in the article *Dungeons & Dragons had its Best Year Ever in 2020*. This article is comprised of an interview with Chris Cocks, the president of Wizards of the Coast which is the company that owns and publishes all official *Dungeons & Dragons* materials. According to the interview the game has been growing in popularity since the release of its fifth edition back in 2014. As opposed to previous editions of the game, the fifth edition put role play, creativity, and fun at the forefront of its structure while mechanics and rules sat in the background of the game. The free form of this has allowed for so much creativity to blossom amongst both the Players and their Dungeon Masters (Desatoff). According to Cocks this consistent upward trend was greatly accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The game and its parent company, Wizards of the Coast, had been focusing on the ways to digitize the game since before the pandemic. The free and acting forward nature of fifth edition has made it ideal for creators, like *The Adventure Zone* and *Critical Role*, to stream their games and publicly share their stories with the internet. When everyone was suddenly stuck inside their home alone, the expansive world that *Dungeons & Dragons* provides sees like and excellent option for escape. The game, although classified as a Table Top Role-Playing Game, does not necessarily call for a physical table anymore in order to play. This is thanks to websites like D&D Beyond (which is owned and run by Wizards of the coast) and Roll 20 which is a third-party company. These sites allow you to sit in your home and play with your friends and family wherever they may be. It fills that social need and the need for community through creative collaboration, problem solving, and storytelling, basically the game was built to thrive under the current conditions of the planet. Even Cocks said –

“During quarantine and social distancing, D&D helped to bring people together, to bridge the uncanny divide that Zoom calls can cause and allow a group of friends and family to feel present and together facing fun fantastical challenges even if they couldn’t be physically in the same location. Speaking from personal experience playing D&D was my primary way to connect with friends.” (Desatoff).

In concurrence with Cocks, it was my primary method of connection as well, and still is my main way of connecting with my close friends that live all over the county. So, the once devil worshipping nerd game is now popular, how are people consuming it as a media source?

As previously stated Dungeons & Dragons Fifth Edition is very flexible and puts more of an emphasis on fun and roleplaying. This allows for games to be very entertaining, and it creates a market for artists and creators to publish versions of their games. A few of these games now full companies have gained immense popularity most notably Geek and Sundry’s *Critical Role* and the McElroy’s podcast *The Adventure Zone*.

Critical Role started as a twitch stream back in 2015. The stream at the start was an extension of a long running at home game that they played out of Dungeon master Matt Mercer’s dining room. The first campaign, titled *Vox Machina*, became an internet hit with their current streams now attracting tens of thousands of viewers every Thursday night. This is very interesting, as a long-time player and D&D enthusiast the average session can easily run upward of three or more hours and a single campaign can take years to complete. I personally have been in sessions that ran for well over six hours and have friends that are currently in a campaign that has been going on for well over three years at this point. This means there is a large audience base that is willing to sit down and watch three tables of actors with no visual effects, maybe a

few models and some mood music telling a story for three plus hours for years, largely of which is unplanned dialogue or combat. Combat in D&D can be long, it really builds out the bulk of sessions, it can be incredibly boring to watch if you do not do it right. Several elements that go into creating a Dungeons & Dragons campaign heavily overlap with those required of theatre. One key element being roleplay/improvisation. The cast of *Critical Role* are all professional voice actors and it really shows in their game play. Each character is incredibly well fleshed out. We see them put on that character mask and remove it when they are switching back and forth from themselves as people to these characters in an imaginary fantasy world.

With *The Adventure Zone* we see something similar to *Critical Role* in that it has a massive following, and to the outside perspective one might not understand why. The episodes run on average around an hour to an hour and a half, which in comparison to *Critical Role* is not as long but you are looking at the fact that unlike *Critical Role* there are no visual elements at all, it is all verbal story telling. For both of these groups the sheer amount of content that they created is expansive, the first season of *Critical Role* alone has over 400 hours. The connection is that the structure *Dungeons & Dragons* fifth edition lays out all of the tools and ground work needed to create in depth stories and worlds far beyond what anyone would think is possible at your kitchen table.

The Adventure Zone is where I will start with discussing adaptation as the content for their adaptation has been published at the time of writing this paper. Their first campaign *Here There Be Gerblins* was adapted into a graphic novel series, the first book being published back in 2018. In a compare on contrast of the content I can say that the graphic novel does a great job of capturing the essence of the story that was being told. The hundreds of hours of content that goes into a campaign is boiled down and then illustrated to give the audience/readers a peak into the

minds of its creators. When listening to the podcast personally, I struggled to really get into it, as someone with a bit of an attention span issue just listening and really digesting words with no visual input was a bit of a problem for me. The graphic novel really allowed the story to become far more accessible, and gave the visual accompaniments that I needed to really understand the depth and humor in the story the McElroy's were creating. The first book takes roughly ten hours of content and breaks it up into a graphic novel that I plowed through in a day, so the only downside to this is that I am sure that I missed out on several golden moments of wether emotion or comedy that were recorded in the live process, but left on the cutting room floor when putting together the novel. The condensing of the story is comparable to the process for writing a script in a writer's room or the construction process for a devised theatre piece.

This condensing of content is discussed more at length by the critical role production team on the development of *The Legend of Vox Machina*. This is an animated television series that will be airing on Amazon in February of 2022. The show is going to be an adaptation/interpretation of the first campaign. I would like to focus mainly on the artistic process of adapting a room full of deeply moving raunchy ass improve into an animated series. This is involving designers, actors, writers, directors (keep that list in your head, it should sound familiar as there are a bunch of people that fall into at least one of those categories sitting in front of me now). Even though the show has not yet launched there is a good amount of promotional content that we can look at. Specifically, *The Legend Of The Legend of Vox Machina* series. This is a collection of videos that talk about various production aspects of taking a table top game and adapting it to an animated series, what was different about this project verses others that the cast and crew had worked on and so on and so forth.

The interviews discuss the process of breaking down the material into its core elements music, animation, setting, story, and voice. Mae Catt, one of the writers on the show said this in the video, *The Legend of the Story of The Legend of Vox Machina* –

“An adaptation need not be beat for beat and so our job as the writers was to maintain the spirit of the story and the spirit of each character and the character arcs and what they’re going through and act as the translators from what it was into what it can be now in the animated form.” (Critical Role 4:17- 4:36).

One of the really positive aspects about creating media from a table top RPG is that you are working directly with the creators of not only the world but also the characters as well. It is not often when writes for a show are working with and interview the actors that also created the characters. This situation allows for the character’s to be as fully fleshed out in the animation as they were in the campaign. This same principle can also be applied to the voice acting as well, the main set of actors are voicing the character’s that they created and worked with for years. They are going into this job with years invested into this already, as opposed to only having the script for a few weeks or month prior to recording. What is happening with both The adventure zone and Critical Role are both incredible pieces of media that bring to life the stories that were created by a few friends and family members just dicking around.

This table top to media transition is one that I would like to propose we use in theatre. *Dungeons & Dragons* Fifth Edition is equipped with everything one may need to build complex and meaningful characters, plots, and stories. Allow me to dissect a few of the mechanics to explain. I will start with character creation and what it involves all further information on this can be found in the players handbook. So, when first starting to make a character you can either choose from the many races available to you, or you can make your own. The art of building

things that are outside of the official publications of the books are usually referred to as Homebrewing or third-party sources. The source books for D&D are numerous and they are coming out with more every day. When building the actual character, you pick their class which is essentially their job/skills. The class determines their powers, weapons proficiencies, and magical abilities (if applicable).

As you move through the process you continue to discover and decide what your characters values and beliefs are and their alignment. You may have seen the alignment chart floating around the internet in a meme at some point in your life. It's a little nine square grid consisting of the following: lawful good, lawful neutral, lawful evil, neutral good, true neutral, neutral evil, chaotic good, chaotic neutral, chaotic evil (Mearls et al.). The alignment chart is more of a baseline to consider in keeping you character consistent and true to their actual beliefs and not the player, does this always work? Absolutely not! It's like communism great in theory, iffy in practice. It's just something to keep in the back of your mind as you are telling the story.

Possibly my favorite aspect of creating the character is making up the backstory, it is basically a creative writing session where you can do whatever you want under the umbrella of the dungeon master's guidance of course. They can be as in-depth as you want them to be, the more in-depth the they are the more information you have that you can play with in game. This is where the role of the DM comes in.

So, at the head of all of this is the Dungeon Master, building and creating the world for their players. They basically are god to the players; they are responsible for literally everything that takes place in the world of the game, all NPCs (Non player characters), stores, customs, all the way down to if a player asks where the nearest bathroom is and then wants to know if the

toilet paper is one ply or two ply. The DM knows and creates all. The Dungeon master could be seen in a directorial like one might think. Okay now I think you all know where this is going.

The rise of *Dungeons & Dragons* in the media is something that the theatre industry needs to take in its stride, there is so much untapped potential in using the mechanics laid out but the game to tell some incredibly complex stories. You will have the main playwright/director as the Dungeon Master. They are the one that came up with the concept for the play, the world, the main issues that need to be resolved. Then you have the players, the characters in the play. They will explore the world create the dialogue, the comedic moments and the deeply emotional ones as well. They will explore the world in a way that just sitting down and writing a play could never really accomplish. As the campaign goes on the DM keeps a record of the action and the dialogue that is created pulling from it the key moments and together they boil it down into a stage play. The actors and director choose the framework of the story from the one they already have created. It has been done in books, and now a tv show, so why can we not do it with a play? D&D is primarily a fantasy game yes, but with the nature of homebrew and the freedom of the mechanics it is entirely possible to build any kind of world you so wish. The roll of the dice to determine what the outcome of nearly everything that happens could result in content that is unpredictable, new, fresh and something that the stage has never seen before.

I truly believe that making use of tabletop gaming and turning it into a method for the creation of devised theatre is a great path forward in the future of the performing arts. It is detailed, thoughtful, fun, and full of unknown moments that will grow into beauty from the collaborative work environment that it fosters.

Chapter Two: World Building in Tabletop Devised Theatre

So, you want to try and build a devised theatre piece through the use of a tabletop role playing game? You have come to the right manual. When creating a piece through these means there is a mountain of ideas that have to be considered. Place, time, characters, plot (this is subject and do not get too attached). Keeping in mind this bible is written from my experience in the field and what I have discovered so far in my journey developing this method, I am sure, as all things do, it will evolve overtime and grow as new ideas are discovered and better methods are explored. The practice of using table top roleplaying games as a method for creating devised theatre is very new so please take these findings with a grain of salt (do not discount your own experience, use it! You are valid!) and like in the actual playing of a TTRPG adapt and change to what is best for your players/cast/artists.

This first chapter will be exploring the development of the things that the gamemaster (another word that means the same as dungeon master) can control. The world that your story will develop in. What you will need first and foremost is an original idea. Tabletop gaming structures usually exist in a space where there are prewritten modules and campaigns. There are these things called copyright laws so as much fun as I think it would be to stage the version of the *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign *Ghosts of Saltmarsh* (Mearls et al.) that my friends and I have been playing for the past two years, that would be very illegal to do so. In relation to the process, I went through for creating *The Fall of the Timekeepers* and the subsequent play titled *Sixish Nerds and Their Cats* this is how I went about it.

To start with I will state this here and now, *The Fall of the Timekeepers* was wholly meant to be a campaign and only a campaign. I created the foundation prior to the idea of

Dungeons and Devised theatre, but one late night shower idea the night before the ideas for our thesis proposals were due later and here we are.

The plot for Timekeepers is actually an adaptation of what was an abandoned series of short stories I had worked on back in my junior year of high school. You can find stories anywhere though, old writings that you left behind, new ideas, anything really. Do not, under any circumstances, use a story or idea where you are attached to the story and or plot going in a specific direction. As the gamemaster you are responsible for the world and the events, and larger plot points. You will not be in control of anything that your players will do. They will bust through the door of your land and essentially turn it on its head. There is no limit to what they will destroy. You might have one idea for the plot in mind, and they will instead want to go to a strip club/karaoke bar to play truth or dare... you have to be okay with that (yes that did happen, no I did not feel the need to include it in the script but I felt that not including it would have been a crime against the cast).

The section of the campaign that will be placed in the pocket dimension of Ashabold is very special in a personal sense. Ashabold and the lore surrounding that world is a project that has been in development since my freshman year of high school. It is very near and dear to my heart, and because it is so fully developed it would be an amazing setting for a campaign. I however was not ready to allow my chaotic ducklings free range of it just yet. I would want to micromanage the whole thing plot wise and would have railroaded my players choices. That environment is not healthy for inspired collaboration. It would have been completely counterproductive to what I am trying to accomplish with this project. I will be running a campaign project solely based in Ashabold eventually though as a few of my players have expressed interest, just when I am ready to let go of it though. Being attached to the plot is

something that you cannot be. They will not follow what you have laid, and in fact they will throw everything off the rails in ways you could never imagine, not even in your wildest dreams. This is not a bad thing. This is in fact what you want.

The unexpected can create the most touching moments or the greatest humor. When doing a “normal” devised piece it is the unexpected that is the most interesting. We are now taking that principle and applying it to the whole plot. This method allows your players to determine how the plot will unfold. Which, as the head playwriter on the project, can be pretty unnerving in a way. I from the beginning of the project have had no clue what the ending of the play is going to be. Or the middle.... And as I found out later the beginning. As we were playing the game and improvising different character moments those relationships developed. My best example is the relationship between Cass and Rosella. When I had created her she was simply there because the group did not have a healer in the party and I did not want the main characters of my project to die. However, as we played and Bryant developed Cass more and more there was a moment in that development when I saw the potential for a shift in the main story/lore of the world.

This brings me to a key point in all of this, flexibility. The players will give you tremendous amounts of story to work with from their own imagination. A skilled and attentive gamemaster will take those backstories and little informational delights and then use them in the main plot. This is collaborative storytelling, so collaborate with the what you players give you.

I asked myself “why?” Why were each of their characters in this story? Where in the big puzzle do they fit? Each of them had to have a connection to Korith and the other worlds that they interacted with. As Bryant decided to change the base of the game by making a deal with the BBEG at the very start, I was able to dig a bit deeper into Cass and get more into the meat of

him as a pillar in the world. In the original short stories Rosella had a counterpart named Sammy. Sammy is not far off from Samiel, not my most creative jump but it happened. I will state that if you are planning to alter a player's character fundamentally, as what I proposed did for Cass, you need to have that conversation of consent with the player. A player might feel protective about what they have created and not necessarily be comfortable with you as the dungeon master making such monumental changes to their creation. Bryant was more than perfectly fine with it. Like with anything in life and the arts communication and consent is the key to a well-functioning project.

After deciding that Bryant's character was now going to be a reincarnated version of the original essence of dark magic, I decided to pull the fantasy realm of Ashabold into the game just a little but more than I had originally intended, not so much as I felt I would micromanage the story and players.

In designing each world for Timekeepers my main goal was keeping in mind the simple principle of what I really wanted from the campaign, options. I wanted the players to really have a massive effect on how the story played out. To do this you need to be prepared though. Having an open world adventure means being ready for them to do literally anything. You are god, you are the teacher, you must have the answers when they ask you. Ninety percent of it is making up that bullshit on the spot. Another one of my many mistakes and also shining moments in this project. I am a trial-and-error learner and I only had time to run one trial for this project, so I got a lot of errors to report.

Be prepared as you can be. This includes basically building entire continents and their contents from scratch. Each inhabitant has their own life, personality, hopes, dreams, way of making tea, if there even is tea in your universe. It's the small details that really bring the world

to life. Don't be afraid to sit down and take your time setting up the scene to your players. The descriptions you give them is like giving actors they given set of circumstances. It is the setting they are about to play in. They need to know what's going on in order to react in a manner that is in accordance to what is going on around them. If it's raining tell them. If there is a giraffe wearing sunglasses that is having trouble tying its roller skates make sure the players get a detailed description of the poor thumbless mammal fumbling with its laces. The following is an excerpt from my campaign notes. This is what I read to my players to set the scene at the very top of the campaign.

“Welcome to Korith, you stand at the gates of a patchwork city. The buildings are from every time and realm, some of them even combined. You see the streets are crowded and the pathways through are quite narrow. You are all standing in a line, those next to you are unfamiliar, you have never seen them before, nor do you know how you got here. Your gaze is drawn up to the mountain peaks off in the distance. The ridgeline is sharp with one peak standing above the others. Your attention is drawn back to the scene in front of you as a child's laughter fleets by you, but you see no child. The ground begins to shake, rumbling, quaking, you are all thrown to the ground. There is a large explosion and you look up to see it was the mountain. Spilling from it you see clouds of black smoke It begins to twist and take shape in the sky. The mass laughs and charges the city and you. I need you all to roll initiative.” (Becker)

Looking back in it, for a first attempt at world setting I think it was okay, but there are some edits I would have loved to do. I would defiantly gone more in depth about the circumstances of the apparition into Korith, second I would have spent a bit more time describing the nature and atmosphere of the city. When going through and playing in that world I felt that they truly had no idea as to how vast the city of Korithine actually was. The city is the

size of Washington D.C. it is massive. A rewrite of the opening would approximately read something like the following.

“You awaken in a cloud of swirling cold fog. This is not where you remember falling asleep. You are not home anymore. There is the faint chatter of voices off in the distance as you can just make out the various shapes of different buildings through the haze. As you look to your left and to your right you see beside you some unfamiliar faces, all equally as confused as yourself. You move through the damp haze towards the chatter the buildings become far more distinct. You and the others that have appeared can now clearly see where you are. You stand on the precipice of a great city. Unlike any you have ever seen before. The architecture looks to be a hodgepodge of every universe put together. Metallic shining towers clashing with wooden and stone spires. Thatched roofs mixing with rooftop gardens. None of this should be possible, not in the same place at least, yet, somehow, it is. The chatter becomes loud, shouting as people call across the street to vendors, friends, children. The hustle and bustle of the city is fast paced as everyone moves about looking to the next objective in this strange place. You cross the threshold of the gate taking in the city, you see that surrounding it are high cliff walls preventing anyone from leaving by conventional means at least. As your gaze continues to climb higher onto the horizon you see far in the distance the harsh ridgeline of a mountain range, with one peak standing far above the others. As you just begin to take in the abrupt vision of the mountains your gaze is pulled back to the city that lays before you by the sound of a child’s laughter as it moves past you. You look for the child but there is no one there. You begin to realize that the air has gone cold, the sounds of the crowded city have fallen silent. Everyone is gone, seemingly never there in the first place. What has happened to the city? You feel the ground below you begin to shake, growing more and more violent with each passing second. Then with a great

kaboom your gaze is once again drawn to the ridgeline of the mountains beyond the city cliffs. The once dominate peak standing above the others had been decimated by a great eruption, ash and lava rain down from the sky. Plumes of toxic gas and black smoke fill the area above. The smoke begins to gather and take shape into a great beast, releasing a great cry before you see its red ember eyes open and turn its gaze towards the city... and you. With a great rush of impossible speed, you see the monster barrel its way to you. I need you all to roll initiative.”

In this edit of the original opening, I very much take my sweet time laying out the scene in a way that I think would really connect better with the players. It puts them in that mental space of where they are. In descriptions you must set up what you are creating better than you would do in stage directions. There is only the imagination that is creating the visuals for the actors here. The more descriptive you are the more they can get in touch with the world they are interacting with. The more descriptive you are the better energy you will get from your players. The way you describe the setting is the tone for the scene they are about to create. Now granted, your players may not keep the tone you set, but it gives them something to go off of at the start. In this edit I made sure to very carefully describe to city, the children that lived there in a way that was vague enough so they would not start immediately searching for any NPC (non-player character) but also in a way that would be engaging enough to really raise the stakes when all of the people disappeared and the smoke monster came crashing down on the city destroying everything and anything in its path. You need that player engagement to bring out the heightened stakes in the role play. The role play that you get out of your players will create the dialogue of the play, the relationships they form, it is how they interact with everything it may just be the most important aspect of this process.

In table top roleplay gaming there are several different types of players. There are the mechanics gamers, the traditional players, the misogynistic gatekeeping jerks, the casual players, and the role-players. These of course are generalizations and there are several other types of players out there and there are some players that are a combination of many different facets of that are listed here and that are also not listed here. In terms of using table top gaming to create devised theatre, what you want in a player is one that is very heavy into the roleplay side of the game. There of course is nothing wrong with players that prefer to play the game in a more mechanical sense, but when writing a script and developing character relationships roleplay moments are going to be what translates better onto the stage. It is significantly easier to take a fireside chat with the players to the stage versus a massive fight with a giant fire breathing dragon, not that it can't be done, but in terms of in game things your players will face many monsters and budget for the stage should probably be kept in a realistic place. This of course does not mean "do not give you players the opportunity to fight multiple monsters" it simply means to be prepared to leave some of those fun plot points on the cutting room floor when actually writing the script.

The main take away from this chapter is get creative, hone your improve skills. Be prepared for your players to throw you off, mentally prepared anyway, you will never be logistically prepared. Be descriptive, the world you build and describe will not only affect how your players roleplay and interact with the world, but it will also affect the designers that will be taking the work you have done to the stage. Your descriptions will be what form the first impressions of designs for the staged adaptations. Take a walk outside and make note of all of the five senses and how they interact with the world around you. Take that information and translate it to the game, what sounds are around you, the smells, the textures, all of it.

Chapter Three: Building the Character because People are a Thing

Part 1. The Importance of People

So, you have now built a whole world! Congrats you are a god now. To fully ascend the heavens into gaming godhood you first need to fill your world with people. After all what is the point of being all powerful if there is no soul to rule over. Okay but seriously character creation is probably my favorite part of this whole process, also where my theory of deeper character connection comes into play. I interviewed each of my players about their experience and their process when creating not only the characters that they portrayed in Timekeepers but also a few of their other characters from different campaigns. I choose to include other characters as it is interesting to look at the habits that my group has during the character creation process. Earlier I discussed why I feel such a deep connection to my character Nori. That reason being that I have lived with her longer. This is a true fact across the board for all of my players. The longer you live in the mind of a character the deeper your connection to them grows. It would have been a crime not to have my players discuss other characters they have going in different campaigns as said campaigns have been running much longer and they, my players, have developed a more cohesive idea of who those characters are as people and how they function and interact in regards to the imaginary world they live in. Whereas in Timekeepers we are still quite early on in the process so they are still getting to know their player characters.

I noticed a few trends that they each leaned to that really do speak to their personalities. I have broken down some of the main features of character creation into a few different aspects. Those aspects being the artistic side meaning music and visual art, and the story and mechanics of the character. Each of my players had their own way of how they built and ran their

characters, and talking to them allowed insight into each of their processes. In discussing their unique methods, I also sat down and really looked at my own as well. In this section we will take a dive into a variety of characters that have created over the years, not just the ones that are used in *The Fall of the Timekeepers*. The purpose for the inclusion of these other characters is simple, many of them, them being my players are in a few long running campaigns. Some of them have characters that are over four years old from the time they were starting to be developed. The longer you are running a character the more it becomes fully fleshed out, the more it really comes to life. In the time constraints from when we started Timekeepers to the due date of this paper, for some of my players there is simply not enough time to settle into their new characters fully. Including their other works in this is to demonstrate the fullness that is possible when using these types of environments and methods to develop new original characters.

Part 2: Mechanics and Backstory Building in the Stylings of Five Semi Competent Nerds.

2.1: Sarge Sargent

Starting with the mechanics of the game and how we each go about planning our characters. First and foremost, this is a game, and that is how a few of the players went about making their characters. Starting specifically with Sarge Sargent. During my interview with Sargent, he discussed his approach to not only creating Noisy Boi but also his other characters and how working with them compares to how he works with characters on stage.

Sargent as a person is a very chaotic being, which is why his interview came off as such a shock. He is far more organized and pensive with how he creates his chaotic personas than I could have ever imagined. In the very start of my interview with him I asked him to discuss how he comes up with the ideas for his characters. He stated that all of his creations except for one,

Doomsday, all devolved from a meme. In regards to a Tabaxi monk named Thunder he plays, Tabaxi being an anthropomorphic cat race, he stated the following

“It started with the meme of cats knocking random stuff off of tables. It evolved from there. How would a sentient person handle that urge to knock stuff onto the floor, and I realized the general public wouldn’t appreciate that so he, and he knows this, so he takes things off of tables and sets them on the floor to satiate that cat like urge, while also not being the dickhead who walked into a bar and knocked the guy’s beer onto the floor.” (Becker and Sargent)

Another point he made sure to stress was how his characters tend to stand out so much, and this is a concept that he translates between both his work at the table with his gaming groups but also onto the stage and other performances in his theatre career. If his characters were to walk into a bar what is the thing about him that others in there will make assumptions on? What are those assumptions? Are they true? How does the character feel about them? From these questions he continues to build out the truth or lack of behind them. This process like all is ever changing. With thunder specifically it wasn’t until later in the game when he asked himself the question “What if this character had a wife and family?” (Becker and Sargent) from that question Thunder now has a wife and children.

Part of what makes Sargent a very passionate player is that his ability to deeply consider many factors that will apply to his character goes further. Sargent tends to write and create a lot of his own material outside of what is available through the official Wizards of the Coast canon. This includes gods, campaigns, classes, subclasses, and races.

2.2: Logan Bryant

During my interview with Bryant, we talked quite a bit about Cass. Of all of my players he seems to be the one that is the most settled into their new character. Cass as a character, from

my perspective is very reptilian in his personality, very calculated, pensive, he might just be my favorite character of the bunch simply because Cass is never afraid to make a bold choice, even if it seems like a horrible idea, for example Cass making a deal with the BBEG in a mini session the day after we had our first.

Bryant had stated that Cass was born from two different sources, one being a previously failed character concept that he had tested out in a one shot previously and also the character of Rumpelstiltskin from the ABC series *Once Upon a Time*. He had said that he had always been interested in a warlock who worked in deals, but until the new race of Hexbloods came out in *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft* it was not really a good fit for a character. I also gave him quite a bit of freedom in the deals he was allowed to make and what he could actually do with the character. (Bryant) I quite enjoy seeing my players get all excited about their backstories.

Bryant does something that seems to be pretty common among the tabletop community. Using your characters to explore parts of yourself you would never otherwise have been able to. With Cass it is looking at a darker side of himself that he would never allow to exist outside his head to the general public. Bryant as a person is the best kind of person, kind, caring, and always putting others before himself. In our six years of friendship, I have never seen him mad, ever, not even once. His characters on the other hand gives him that place to express emotions and feelings that I know he would never let anyone else see. It is a healthy exploration of a darker side. (Becker and Bryant)

Another point he made sure to mention was the subject of comfortability and healthy explorations of toxic traits in characters that he will more than likely have to play on stage. In further explanation on this Bryant is a cis-gendered straight white male from southern Appalachia. He is fully aware that he is going to have to play characters that are bigoted and

racist despite himself being further from that. In one of the campaigns, he participates in he has chosen to make his character racist against humanoids with scales, such as lizard folk and dragonborn due to the character having only negative interactions with the races prior to that. The ability to do this in a setting where he is not making anyone uncomfortable and he feels safe is a great way to explore this and be comfortable with this idea before every having to play this kind of character on stage. (Becker and Bryant)

Bryant is also a Dungeon Master for a variety of different campaigns. In my interview with him I wanted to ask him some questions pertaining to his process for building more than just his player character, I wanted to know his process for world building and running a campaign. As one of his players, Bryant was a major inspiration for me when creating this project, so in my eyes it was very much a learning from the master kind of experience. In terms of the countless NPS's that he has to play we talked about how he goes about differentiating them. Part of this system is knowing which ones really need to be fleshed out and which ones do not. The major ones, such as villains, honorary party members, family member, and ones that are clarified in the modules as being important Logan will put a lot of vocal and physical work into. The normal everyday people that we encounter are not as physical and more vocal, a bit of a baseline vocal. It is difficult to pull dozens of fully fleshed out people from thin air in seconds.

As I discussed before, there is an importance of weaving in the backstories your players give you into the main plot of the campaign. I asked Bryant how he was able to do this with his players, without giving to much away about the plot, as I am one of his players and we are still running said campaigns. Bryant for two of the campaigns uses prewritten modules. One being *The Ghosts of Saltmarsh* and the other being *The Curse of Strahd*, both of these are official campaigns published by Wizards of the Coast. For Saltmarsh, Bryant said that it was a bit easier

to work with as it is laid out with a bit more structure. He took each arc of the story and as he “homebrewed the heck out of it” to twist in each of our backstories and so each arc would be centered of a different character in the party. This changed a bit when one of the party members (me....) accidentally derailed the entire campaign but he has it very much under control. For Strahd, it is a bit more difficult to build in the backstories of a party as it is what we call a sandbox campaign. It is very much an open world, and the party has almost total control over what they do and where they go. Bryant told me that we could have walk in there at level one and have gone to fight Strahd, it would have been a very bad idea but we could have done it.

2.3: Katie Jackson

Of all of my players Jackson is the one that I believe is capable of the most vulnerability with her characters and her play style. As it is in theatre you need to have a sense of self and of vulnerability in order to bring another self to life. Vulnerability is also very important when it comes to working in an improvisational setting, often characters will find themselves in situations where they are forced to make decisions that they will regret later, or they must deal with the consequences of their own actions, or are faced with the memories and ghosts from their tragic backstory. All of these scenarios are necessary in order to further character development. The players must be ready and open to playing these vulnerable moments, and Jackson not only does a beautiful job of allowing her characters to be vulnerable but also herself as well.

In my interview with Jackson, she stated the following “D&D characters are very reflective of different facets of our personality.” This statement is something that she believes in wholeheartedly as do I. Jackson then went on to discuss her three main characters and how they each reflect her in a different way. Iduna is the first character she built and is what Jackson

identified as the “ideal”, what she wants to be in dreams. “Who wouldn’t want to be a pretty princess?” (Becker and Jackson)

Persephone is the second of her characters and is drastically different from Jackson. Persephone is a courtesan and a more sexual being, this character allows Jackson to explore that side of her personality and be in those situations, discovering more about herself in the process. Arabella is the character Jackson made for Fall of the Timekeepers, and is what Jackson described as a blend between her other two characters. Jackson believes that Arabella is a more mature version of herself and it who she would want to become. She described the character of Arabella as a rose with a thorn, she is a bit more grounded than the character of Iduna whom Jackson said was as flighty as a bumble bee. Each of these three women draw from a different facet of Jackson’s subconscious.

I wanted to know more about Arabella specifically as she is the character out of the three that I work the closest with for this project in particular. I asked Jackson to discuss her process of creating a backstory and where her inspiration had come from for Arabella. She told me about the subliminal messages she had received from the universe on our way to another campaign we are participants in. As we drive to our colleague’s house for the game we pass by Sherwood Avenue and Robinhood Road. She believes this is where she first discovered the inspiration for the character. As I have stated before I gave my players the knowledge of the different world they would be going to in the campaign. This gave each of them the option of creating a character from one of these worlds. Basallo chose The Realm of Faire, Sargent chose Korith, and both Bryant and Jackson chose the Fairytale Forest. Jackson really likes the idea of legacy, being the child of a famous character. From this point she then chose the Daughter of Robin Hood and continued on with her process for building.

A really happy accident that happened when creating her character is one that occurred with the NPC's. I had one requirement of my players for their characters, and that was they had to give me a list of at least five loved ones that are still alive, well, and that their character had a good relationship with. In building out the backstories of her characters Jackson likes to start with the relationships in the characters life and build out from there. She built out the relationship with the parents, obviously they have a great relationship, she incorporated the merry men and king Richard as guardians and mentors. The NPC that she worked the most with though, and I will forever feel guilty about this is Elwyn. In regards to this Jackson said the following, "Alright, I don't define myself by men, but part of creating her backstory the deepest I went into was her relationship with Elwyn. That is a big part of who she is, it's a more mature relationship." (Becker and Jackson) Elwyn is something that gives Arabella something to fight for I think. It is an urging factor to save the world but also do it on a time crunch.

Jackson also gives each of her characters a through line, something that connects all of them across each of their very different stories. The three things that bind Arabella, Persephone, and Iduna together are, that they are all noble, all have jewel tone eyes, and that all of them have the same favorite flower, which is a rose, which also happens to be Jackson's favorite as well. This is just something that Jackson does for fun as a player, it is not something that has a major effect on the story, but it is something that helps her stay engaged with each of the women she portrays.

As Jackson put so much of herself into her characters, the characters each essentially being a concentrated essence of a different part of her personality, I wanted to know how, while in game, she is able to draw the line between herself and her character, and is it difficult to do so? She first talked about the relationship Arabella has with Elwyn, how she as Jackson in that

situation would just want to be with him and go back home to find him, but that isn't something Arabella would do. Arabella is less dependent on loved ones and can be very independent, and that is something that Jackson has to remind herself to pull back on when in game. Other than that, when playing Arabella, she voiced a similar opinion to the others. Arabella is still relatively new to her and she is working out where that character lives and how she functions still. She needs to live in her a bit longer. Jackson said a lot of the character for her is discovered in in game moments, but one trait she is hoping to develop with Arabella through the campaign is her bite, and sassiness. She did have this to say about playing Arabella though: "Playing Arabella is very freeing; I get to make choices that neither me or Iduna would make. I get to explore different facets of who I am through who this character is." (Becker and Jackson)

Some players, like myself participate in pregame rituals in order to get into the headspace for the persona you will be taking on for the next several hours. I asked Jackson if she had anything specific that she does when she is prepping for a session, she did not have anything specific actions that she does, her way of stepping into the mindset of her characters is more physical, although she did note that she has a music playlist for her character that she listens to on occasion, just not actively to get into character. What Jackson will do it style her hair in a specific way for her characters, with Arabella it is usually braids. I also made the observation that she wears a very specific article of clothing nearly every time we play. Jackson was not aware of this, so it was a subconscious choice. The article of clothing in question is a Vex'halia inspired sweatshirt from the first Critical Role campaign of Vox Machina. The character of Vex happens to be the same class as Arabella, a ranger. Jackson stated that when wearing the sweatshirt, she is able to get into that ranger mind set easier. The thumbholes in the sweatshirt specifically really get her in the headspace of her ranger. I should also note that when Jackson is

playing as Iduna she will don a tiara and a very regal hairstyle to match that of the princess she is playing.

Jackson also talked about in game actions, dialects, and gestures. In my observation of Jackson throughout the campaign it is very clear she uses these very heavily in her game style. When we discussed the separation of character and self she mentioned that in a campaign scenario it is very difficult to do so as we are in a situation that relies so heavily on improvisation. She believes that when using a dialect, it helps her distinguish between when in game she is speaking as Arabella and when in game she is speaking as Jackson. The dialect also helps her go into the mindset of Arabella just a bit further. While playing Jackson also is very physical with her movements, I will go into this further in the next chapter, but for now I would like to highlight the example Jackson gave in her interview. She talked about how when the party approaches what could be perceived as an unsafe predicament she will reach back and pantomime retrieving, knocking, and drawing back her bow and arrow. She will hold that position until she lowers her weapon, releases that arrow in a moment of attack, or she as the player forgets about. As her dungeon master I can say that she very rarely forgets about it, there is usually a moment of setting down the weapon before Jackson returns to her neutral position for Arabella. Her movements and gestures again are something I will discuss more in the next chapter along with everyone else's, although Jackson make the following statement which I think makes a strong argument for why characterization is very strong and very important in table top gaming. "In a game where everything is imaginary, body language, acting, and dialects are the only tangible and real things that you interact with." (Becker and Jackson)

2.4: Shawna Basallo

Shawna is the variant among my lab rats. The rest of my players are very much actors and have been on the stage extensively. Shawna was in the theatre program with myself, Bryant and Sargent. Unlike us though she minored the technical theatre with a major in comm arts. This difference is interesting, as it is what links my process and Shawna's but also separates her from the rest of the group. When I asked about how she goes about making a new character for a campaign she had the following to say on the subject. "Whenever I make a new character I like to try a different class, different combination of classes in this case, because I knew that we would be a slightly higher level." (Becker and Basallo)

Shawna made it very clear she has a preference for characters that have the ability to use magic, she has played martial classes before, such as Nin her half orc monk that she uses for Ghosts of Saltmarsh, but to her there is something very fun about working with a spellcaster. When creating Miri, she knew she wanted to stick with having a spellcaster and she had never played a Wizard before so that is why she chose that class while also multi classing into sorcerer. Controversial opinion here, I hate playing spell casters, with a passion, I have seen the mechanics for playing a wizard and I would never attempt it, I admire Shawna for one taking on a class that, in my ever so humble opinion, is irrevocably the most bamboozling class that Wizards of the Coasts have ever published.

Another aspect I can note about how Shawna goes about creating characters is thinking about the world they are about to be a part of and where that character might best fit. What is the thing that connects them and grounds them to this world? *Ghosts of Saltmarsh* takes place primarily on the sea, so when she created Nin she gave her a backstory that incorporated Nin

being a member of the Navy, giving her character a better understanding of the obstacles that we would commonly face during our time out at sea.

Fall of the Timekeepers presented a different challenge in regards to grounding the characters in the world. The players knew in advance that the campaign would not be isolated to just one world. Their characters would be plucked out of their reality and sent on a mission that might lead them back to their home town or it might not. Shawna grounded her character with a large family. As the world is in danger it gives Miri that motivation for staying with the timekeepers and helping with their mission.

Both as a player and a dungeon master I very much appreciate Basallo's consideration of the world when building the character. It is not something that every player does. I defiantly have not always this. My original character for Ghosts of Saltmarsh was a desert dwelling dragonborn who suffered from horrible sea sickness and was a cannibal. Not the best when you are playing a campaign that is almost exclusively on a boat. As the playwright/gamemaster of your project make sure you stress to your actors/players to consider the world. Also make sure you talk to them about the world beforehand. What is it like? What is the main focus of the game going to be? Are you going to be in the mountains? On the sea? Underground? Is there a class system, if so how does it work? What are the valuable commodities of the area? Why? All of those types of things. This allows the players to come into the devising/gaming process with a character that they will be happy with and you will be happy with. If you left them with no clue as to what they would be doing you might have someone walk into an underground campaign with a character that does not have dark vision. That would be a huge disadvantage for the player the entire time and it might be fun to see how they overcome this or work around it, but it also might just frustrate the player to the point where they don't like their character and want to change (which

in playwriting is something you do not want to happen), or they might grow to hate the game which is also not good.

In terms of backstory development Basallo discussed her fondness for creating and working with characters that are often the black sheep of their family. In regards to Miri Basallo said the following. "I knew that Miri and the other Timekeepers were going to be chosen for these roles so I wanted her to be like a small fish in a big pond back at home. So being chosen would be just.... Life changing, compared to how things were." This idea of the outsider character can also be seen in her character that she created for our Curse of Strahd campaign, Fiona. In this world, the people are ruled over a malicious vampire named Strahd von Zarovich. The people in this world are inherently not friendly to more monstrous races, individuals that are more on the vampiric side of things, and a band of travelers called the Vistani. Basallo's character Fiona's full name happens to be Fiona Von Zarovich. She is half vampire and the daughter of Strahd, and a Vistani woman, Fiona is very much alienated from society because of this. From a player's perspective in this game with Basallo, Fiona's backstory leads to some brilliant roleplay moments and really makes us think decisions through before jumping into something that could get us all killed.

During my interview with Basallo I wanted to make sure we discussed how art and music plays into her creative process when building a character. Basallo, as previously stated, is a wonderful artist and does quite a bit of artwork that focuses around their Dungeons and Dragons characters. This is very similar to myself I am not trained but I find that art help immensely with my process. In regards to Basallo's process she stated that she is very much a visual learner, she needs the image to be on paper to get a better handle on whatever is on said paper. In this case her characters. The ability to play with their clothing, hairstyle, color palette in a visual medium

helps drastically with their creative development process for the character. The process of creating the artworks and going through that process also helps with role play as well. The connection between deciding the look of the character and having that translate into how that character uses body language and their attitude. This visual and mental grounding is very important as Basallo, unlike myself and the others does not use character voices or accents when participating in roleplay. Yet as someone that plays with her each character has its own very distinctive personality despite Basallo not using much physicality or voicework with her characters. Along with the visual inspiration Basallo, like Jackson and myself creates catered playlists for her characters. She stated that it is not necessarily the lyrics that she listens for, more along the lines of the melody; although occasionally she does find a lyric that really suits a character and that can be a source of inspiration as well. She often, like myself listens to said playlist while working on her art pieces. (Becker and Basallo)

Basallo's approach to creating a character is a wonderful mix between artistic and creative vision and also mechanical gaming tactics for what combination will best suit their needs in the impending campaign.

2.5: Sabrina Becker (Myself)

Of course, it had become necessary to evaluate my own process, which was a little unnerving as my characters can be a bit odd. I am notorious for writing very long backstories for my characters, but all but one of them have been born out of some necessity. Rosella for example was created simply because none of the players decided to make a healing class and I didn't want to accidentally kill off the subjects of my play. I created a level ten healer to follow them around. From there she grew into something far greater than I ever intended her too. It was from her development that the rest of the plot of the story grew. Nori was made after I accidentally killed

off my original player character Ember for that campaign (why you never drunk drive your characters folks!). When creating her Bryant and I had discussed what was needed in the party at the time. We needed a strong presence to help contain another player's toxic behavior and a healer because the same player was not doing his job and so from that Nori was born, a motherly cleric capable of handling almost any chaos. Vitawny and Etta were made because we needed a Marshall class in the party because the majority of the others were all spellcasters. Each of them filled a gap in what was needed. This is where it parallels my own life. I become what I am needed in the situation. Regardless of it being emotional or physical in work or social life. I am a little lump of adaptable clay.

Their personalities are based on exaggerated points in my own, They are also a way that I get to live out different fantasies I have always had. Vitawney is my angsty teen who gets annoyed with elitist bullshit, but she also is that bit of me that always wanted to learn how to fence, and it would be so much fun to be a pirate. I play as Vitawney in my my friend Baylee Runion's homebrew Campaign titled *The Stone of Yfirbiod*. Etta is the know-it-all bit of me and also all of my impulsive self-sabotaging and anger issues, she also is the bit of me that wanted to be an inventor when I was little. Rosella is the connection I have to the fantasy world I created in the ninth grade. Nori is the closest to my actual baseline demeanor. She is the bit of me that is fascinated with the ocean and all of its creatures (in reality I am too scared to actually go in it though.) She also the part of me that wonders what it would be like to actually have kids, through her I get to live out that fantasy, (in reality that is something that I don't think is ever going to happen). Nori gets to be kind and respected because of her profession. Through all of them I get to express these different emotions through them that I tend to suppress in normal daily life.

In regards to how I create them and flesh out their stories a bit it all comes from source, music. This is not that uncommon as in Basallo's process as previously mentioned she uses music when she creates the artwork for her characters. I also do the same for mine. In a specific example in the creation of specifically my character Etta Klock I pulled my inspiration for her backstory from the song *Masquerade* and the song *Artemis*. Both pieces are off of Lyndsey Sterling's 2019 album titled *Artemis*. Sterling is a violin player, and this album focuses in what I would classify as a very steampunk style sound although it is technically classified as electronic. Steampunk is an aesthetic and style focusing on Victorian pieces mixed with the modernization and invention of steam engines. It gives off the same energy as a Jules Vern novel. A great example of this style is Walt Disney Animations *Treasure Planet*. Pulling from the music the different moments of gears clicking, steam hissing, the story of a struggle and a battle. It may not have been the story Lindsey had intended when she wrote it, but that is how I interpreted it and it gave life to Etta.

The connection to music is where my process connects to theatre. I am particularly fond of musical theatre specifically. When I am working on a show I will make a playlist for my character of a variety of music that I think they would listen to. I will listen to this as I am warming up for the show, doing makeup and whenever I can prior to performances and rehearsal. The music, like its use in D&D allows me to build a fuller picture of the character than I would be able on based on just the script and dramaturgy alone. Music can convey much more than words can. Tone, moods, innermost feelings, internal monologues. Music is fantastic for devising subtext and circumstance.

Another major part of my process is my artwork. I love illustrating moments that were created in game, moments that I want to happen, and just getting to the groove of planning when

I am building a new character. I take that music that I have found and with that either playlist or specific song I will create an art piece based on that emotion from the game. I draw not only my characters but the characters of my friends as well. The games themselves have inspired two separate animatic videos set to music. In the Illustrated works section in the appendix of this paper you will find a few examples of work that I have done featuring several characters from across many different campaigns.

Chapter 4: The In-Game Shenanigans and Analysis of 2.5 Hours of Improv Work

Part of this practice as research project was the documentation of the variety of different character that we all play, as well as a mini session to give a visible example of play style. Through the breakdown and observation of this footage we can discuss quite a bit about the power of imagination, player dedication, physicality, and absent potential through information at the table that not everyone has. In this chapter I will frequently be referencing the footage that was shot and discussing the players physicality with the characters. In the appendix of this paper, you will find a breakdown of each character mentioned both in this chapter and previous chapters (their race, class, and subclass), and the individual that created and portrays them.

Part One: Absent Potential

When working on a theatrical piece everyone has all the information. The playwright that created the piece has all the information, they will dream up the story and then do the research and decide what will happen on their own. This is not the case in a table top campaign. Very rarely does everyone have all of the information, and if someone happen to know all it is always the dungeon master/gamemaster. This is where we get to talk about absent potential in lack of information and decision making in gaming. To start in the simplest and most common situations the dungeon master knows where the monsters are, where the traps are, who is acting as a double agent, all that fun jazz. The players normally have no clue as to the reality of the danger they are in. They experience all of the events in the moment. They role play and create the dialogue in the moment. This creates very real and raw reactions. You can achieve sincerely heartfelt moments such as that which can be seen in the roleplay in the footage that took place between Bryant and

myself. In this moment we took on our characters of Nori Bellimus and Oceanus Aegean from both our ongoing campaigns of *The Ghosts of Saltmarsh* (Mearls et al.) and *The Curse of Strahd* (Perkins). In the campaign where they exist in they are together, there is an accidental pregnancy during life threatening stakes.

As we look at this moment we see Bryant move into the screen a bit more, become softer spoken and sincere and careful with his words. In his interview he discussed how he changes his voice, pitching it up slightly higher than his natural voice and also a bit more forward with this placement as well (Becker and Bryant). Nori is as wild as the sea god she worships. She is softer with her voice; it is significantly lighter than my natural placement. I also, to give her a more innocent sound, elongate her vowels slightly, not to the extent where she has a British accent, but enough for others around her to recognize that she is a bit more proper than the pirates and smugglers that run loose in saltmarsh. Nori and Oceanus are a very new relationship, they are a prime example of young love. This leads to some interesting and awkward situations. They haven't yet truly established how they function as a couple. As players we are improvising the entire conversation from their perspective. I am not a person who is awkward and unsure of herself in romantic situations, she is. Logan is not a solidier although he is very level headed and tries to look at the bright side of things. Neither of us have ever been in the position of a being pregnant or getting someone pregnant. I know that both Bryant and myself are fully invested in seeing Nori and Oceanus relationship build even further in the story we are creating in *Curse of Strahd* and *Ghosts of Saltmarsh*.

Players move through the world with the amount of random potential as the average person might in real life, although I will say that in a campaign often the stakes are quite a bit higher than they would be in our ordinary lives (Often apocalyptic or life-threatening

circumstances). As an example, in Timekeepers specifically, we can look at how the players go along with how the chaos is banished from each dimension. In the story I have designed the players are given an essence of time to thrust into the part that is infected when they arrive on the plane that has been corrupted. The essence is created by Jonah. They players have not questioned how they are made, how they work or anything like that and they really should have. The essences are created from the souls of their loved ones. To create a time essence, you must sacrifice what you hold dear. The chaos was created from hate and jealousy, only love and light can banish it. Jonah has taken the loved ones of the character from their homes and with each world they players repair he kills a few of them to create the essence. Each essence can only be held by their loved one. So, the players are essentially sacrificing the souls of their families and friends without realizing it.

Only one of the characters is aware of this, and that is Cass. In response to Cass finding this out I had Jonah make Cass become involved in the situation and is now responsible for choosing which of his friends loved ones die each time. This is how he killed of Arabella's boyfriend at the very beginning of the campaign. Katie does not know this and so Arabella is still behaving accordingly, missing him, talking about getting back to him, worried about getting back to him and the repercussions of her actions and missing time of their relationship. That man is very much dead.

Part Two: Physicality

I would like to now discuss physicality in improvisational roleplay. During these filmed moments I discovered many moments that really highlight how powerful these moments are for those that live them, and how deeply the players take on their characters mentalities, or how far they will go to stay committed to the moment.

In one of the first scenes, we did as a full group we jumped into our characters from Fall of the Timekeepers. Those characters being Miri Faelyn, Samiel Cass, Noisy Boy, Lady Arabella of Loxley, and Rosella Calinthrip. I, as the dungeon master, decided to set the scene in Calliope's Cantina, it is a favorite location of the group and I have found that some of most comedic roleplay can come out of players acting like their characters are drunk, also they can become quite vulnerable as well, so it is a win-win scenario either way. In my analysis of physicality in this scene I saw some very interesting moments pop up in the players. For example, in reviewing the clips once Rosella goes to the bar and comes back with the alcohol for the group when each player takes the imaginary cup they continue to hold onto. Specifically, the physicality displayed starting with Jackson.

Throughout the duration of the scene, you can see Jackson mime the cup in her hands, and occasionally taking sips of the drink. In speaking to her after the fact she said that this was subconscious, she was not fully aware that she was doing it that consistently. Bryant did something very similar with his imaginary drink as well, on top of that the way he was holding it was very light. Bryant moved it through the air as he spoke as Cass tends to talk with his hands all while keeping his pinky raised as Cass is a very classy guy. Sargent actually went and got a drink. I think it was just soda the first time (I know later in while filming he and Bryant both got actual alcohol for a separate scene). It was in a little disposable cup with a lid and a straw. Now this is one instance where the physical humor that Sargent is capable of came into play. While watching him hold onto the drink I saw this very tall man shrink down to the size of his two-foot-tall character, holding this cup, that he could have easily just palmed, with both of his hands gripping tensely onto the Styrofoam surface with his fingertips and his elbows out and raised making the cup seem much larger than his own person by comparison. On top of this already

wonderful performance when drinking Sargent made small quick movements both physically and vocally, he went to the straw rather than bringing the straw to him which added to the already building quirkiness of the character. Noisy's voice is high pitched, quick, and a bit through the nose. The icing on the cake for this instance with the cups was defiantly when I think I saw sarge nibbling on the straw he had in his drink, I don't know if that was just him doing it as himself or if it was an acting choice for Noisy, either way it was brilliant and from how Noisy is portrayed, completely appropriate to the character. This was one of the longer scenes that we did that night, lasting roughly between ten and fifteen minutes. Now in comparison to the two-to-three-hour sessions that we do, it is not really comparable. It is but a small sample of what they give consistently in sessions when they are asked to role play.

Another fascinating instance during the filming process was when I had Cass and Arabella together at Calliope's just at an earlier point in the evening in game. Arabella was having an existential crisis over the two-year time jump in her home world. In an attempt to get her to calm down and bond with her a bit for his selfish reasons Cass asked her to dance. Jackson, again, does not know about Bryant's alternative motives behind this. This discovery happened after the fact, if memory serves correctly, during my daily walk with Jackson the very next day.

We were breaking down what I had dissected so far in the video, and Jackson was telling me about her experience doing the project. She made a point to tell me during this scene she could feel the sway of the music, and the movement of the dance. When I went back and reviewed the footage from this scene I noticed that the internal swaying did not translate to an external presentation of the movement. This brings up the thought that there is even more going on internally than I initially realized with the players. If Jackson is feeling that movement

without externalizing what else could a player be feeling internally during a session? The most major emotional reaction I have ever had during a session of *Dungeons & Dragons* was when I accidentally killed Ember in session thirteen of *Ghosts of Saltmarsh*. I actually went into a form of mourning for a good chunk of time after her death. It was very visceral experience to say the least. I felt real but yet Ember was only a fictional persona I had devised in my head. I do not know if it was heartbreak from losing all of the progress I had made in the story with her, or if it was the heartbreak from coming to the realization that I would no longer be able to play her, the feeling that an actual part of who I am was brutally murdered unexpectedly or a combination of all three scenarios, but what I experienced in the days following her death was real and strong.

I would love to sit here and break down every single scene that we went through during the session, but sadly that would take far too long to break down the two-and-a-half-hour video in its entirety as everyone brought their “A” game to the role-playing table that day. I would like to mention a few moments that deserve conversation but would take far too long to do a full breakdown.

The first section being the scene between Des and Bubba, Sargent’s and Bryant’s characters in a campaign outside of what I do with them. These characters were contrived from the idea of what if an angel and a demon were college roommates? I believe this was another one of Sargent’s quandaries from which his characters are birthed. In this scene we see the versatility and range that these two have. Both gentlemen became increasingly more relaxed and interacted with each other in a manner that looked like I was spying in on a boy’s dormitory. This is quite different from the other characters that we had seen that day, Oceanus’ gentleness and attentive care, Noisy’s high twitch energy. Now we were seeing and hearing two completely different people. Sargent, for Des, took on an Australian dialect which I think he pulled off fairly well, but

I am not a dialect coach so I am no the authority on the accuracy, but he held the accent and the relaxed collage comedy. They both leaned back on their couch and spoke to each other, whereas in the other scenes the were leaning in, often intense.

The last scene I want to talk about is my favorite of the collective footage we shot and is something that I know our group will be talking about for a long time to come. With Bryant's permission and at his and Sargent's request Basallo and myself interacted and did a scenario as our characters from *Curse of Strahd*. In this campaign it is Fiona von Zarovich and Nori Bellimus. These two characters are almost at the emotional level where one could say that they hate each other and tend to fight a lot. Now, Basallo and myself in reality are very good friends and get a total kick out it, lately we have been playing it because it has really been adding so much drama to the game. These interactions in particular are the closest I have heard and seen to Basallo using a dialect with her character as when she is playing Fiona during a confrontation there immediately appears to be so much more bite to her voice and so much more sass in the character. Nori shows her emotions more visibly then, for example Vitawney who internalizes most of her trauma. In this interaction I, as a player, had to step in and ask if another character could separate Nori and Fiona as Nori was going to essentially tell Fiona that she was useless and the party did not need her so she should just shove off. Sargent did decide to have Garm step in and put both of the girls back into their place, although he did threaten to sit on them again, which he did have to do when Nori and Fiona started casting spells against each other before.

When Garm stepped in time stood still as Sargent gave one of the most in fully inhabited speeches I have ever seen from him. As he laid into Nori and Fiona, the omnipotent vampire king Strahd sent lightning crashing in the background, and without miss a beat Sargent turned to the sky and yelled "Fuck off you spooky bitch." He said this as a natural reaction completely out

of pure improvisational instinct, but it is something that he had been wanting to say in game for a long time. This line usage is what brought this scene to a full standstill as we all took a moment to laugh harder than most of had in a long time. We see the physical difference in everyone here between who they are, the player behind the character. You can see the fun-loving goof ball that is Sargent in comparison to Garm who is a very serious, let's get down to business kind of bear. This is my favorite moment in the whole filmed sequence because it is such a drastic break in character. The juxtaposition does a great job highlighting how much energy and passion all of us really put into these moments, and showing why they need to be taken to the stage. These moments are funny, raw, and unscripted. This to me is the best kind of collaborative writing.

Chapter Five: The Possibilities and The End

In the previous pages you can see the potential for Table top gaming's use in devised theatre and character development. There is so much more that can be accomplished by integrating gaming into theatre. In this chapter I would like to discuss the many possibilities that I can see for the future of this research and where I hope to take this project in the future.

Looking at a character sheet for *Dungeons & Dragons* fifth edition it is similar to something that an acting teacher might give a first- or second-year student in order to learn how to determine goals, tactics, and given circumstances. I am curious what would happen if we took the system for building characters and applied it to preexisting characters for young actors. It is just a theory of course but one that I would like to further look into. This could also be a great way for young actors to explore and sharpen their improvisational skills, and their collaborative storytelling skills. As it is true when working on a devised piece in this method it is also true in and circumstance because at its core table top gaming is just that, collaborative story telling.

Another concept I would love to try. Is getting together a cast for a play or musical and having that cast build versions of their roles in the *Dungeons & Dragons* fifth edition format. I think it would be very beneficial to the cast. Following the exploring of the characters inner mind by building them out in this system the intention would be to take these adapted versions of their roles and play them in a wither a short mini campaign or in a one shot. This would allow the actors to get comfortable making choices and impromptu decisions from the perspective of their respective roles. I can theorize that this would help the actor develop a better sense of who they are play, and give them the time and play outside of the world of the play to discover who the character is a deeper level and how they can connect with them, and how other actor and characters can connect with them and how they connect with their castmates. Developing those

relationships could really assist in building the foundation for a positive and fun rehearsal environment, while making those character discoveries together as a group. In circumstances such as these perhaps it would be useful to have the designers participate in the role play as well. By having them participate they can help discover and build the world that they will be responsible for taking to the stage. They will be able run around in the universe and interact with what the actor will interact with onstage. The designers could be a part of the world building getting different aspects put in that will be incorporated into the designs. For example, if the play/musical takes place by the ocean, they could cue into different things that everyone seems to focus on in the game. Is it the smell? The sound? The texture of the sand? The cold wind? What parts stick out most to the in-game characters? How would those aspects of the ocean translate to the stage? Would translating those aspects help illicit a heightened sensory response from the audience? Would it create a more immersive experience, or an experience that is more alienating? I do not the answers to these questions but I would like to.

Tabletop gaming is being used in popular media already, with the rise of Critical Role helming the front for its popularity. It is being adapted into so many different forms and becoming accessible to the general public more and more every day. We can find it slipping into Podcasts, Puppet shows, Movies, TV shows. My friends and I have even tried our hand at making our games available in media, calling our group the *Appalachian Adventurer's*. This resulted in several published sessions, private interviews with individual characters in the form of YouTube videos, some artwork, and a very creepy sock puppet show. A few weeks of gaming produced all of that content and fostered all of that creativity. It is time we take it to the stage. It is plain to see by the sheer amount of content that both myself and my players have produced outside of just the play that Tabletop gaming is a breeding ground of creativity. It heightens

character development, and creates works of art that are entirely facilitated by collaboration, and in my case collaboration with my best friends which makes it all the better. Tabletop gaming is ready to take its next step from the dining room table to the stage.

Appendix

A Dungeon Master's Guide to Love and Murder

Welcome to the journal aspect of my thesis. This is a chronical of the project is going in real time and what I am learning about the process, myself, and my players as the game goes on. This journal is an informal stream of consciousness on how the project went. I would like to emphasize informal. At the end of this, or well at least by the deadline of graduation I will be boiling down what I have learned so far and my conclusions from there. I can say with absolute certainty that this project and my interest in this study will continue well after graduation as this method of devised theatre will need significant more development and polishing, but as a concept in its early stages it had a lot of potential. The play will still be a work in progress as I won't know how it ends until the players get there. I may consider breaking it into multiple parts and conducting it as a multi stage story in a similar manner to radio dramas, I don't know yet but it is an option that intrigues me.

Entry 1: The Beginnings

I don't know how to even explain this. I thought I was prepared for anything. I had been building this world for months. The walk into it for five minutes and blow up all of my plans. Logan decided to try and talk to the giant smoke monster that was trying to kill them. Of course, he did. I honestly think that this is payback for what I did to empire. Regardless Had to fly that by the seat of my pants. Making up BBEG dialogue and motivation on the spot. "Not all is as it appears." That's the best I could do apparently. It was lame but that's how it happened. I brought them into the village with Rosella. She is basically the tutorial character babysitting them until they get the hang of everything, also until I get the hang of balancing encounters. She is a high-

level healer, I would rather not TPK the subjects of my play/thesis. That would be tragic. Moving on made up the personality of a little old lady on the spot. Told sarge that he cannot have bracers of defense when his AC is already 20. Really should have looked further into his homebrew shit before I okayed it. But oh well, besides Noisy might just be my favorite. They have zero interest in my aquarium. Yeaah, I built a whole ass aquarium for no reason and they want nothing to do with it, understandable really. They are on an “island” In the middle of a pocket dimension where all time and space intersect. Watching fish should be the last thing on their minds. They went on met Jonah and got their assignments. Describing this magic had to have been my favorite part of the night. Okay maybe second favorite I very much enjoyed looking sarge in the eye and trying to cast power word kill. The ass (Logan) who cast silence on the creature go blasted with poison gas multiple times. Back to the magic it was this gossamer mirror magic that created starry images of the different dimensions that the group would be going to. The destruction of the Fairy Tale forest is brilliant.

Entry 2: And So, Begins An Excellent Deal of Double Crossing

That’s it. I don’t even know what to do now. So Logan texted me and was telling me about how Cass wanted to try and talk to the giant smoke monster that dream killed them. First off, that giant smoke entity was made up of three different creatures two of which are not even on the same realm of existence as him right now. Second the one that is still trapped here with them, is Jonah who plot twist is not only Dionysus but also the plot twist the ending boss BBEG that they were not supposed to find out about for another few months. I in all my stupid glory decided to allow Logan to try and contact the creature. I set the DC very high because fate needed to be the one to do this. He succeeded and I bashed my head off the table. Cass got

basically all of the information I had. Well at least from Jonah. Cass is still unaware of how bad a guy Jonah actually is, but he knows how they are fixing the time continuum. To correct the time points that the chaos has destroyed you have to place a time essence in to the core of the abomination. The time essences unknown to all of the others are the souls of their loved ones. I am freaking brilliant. They are saving the world by unknowingly killing the people they love most in the world. Unsurprisingly Cass was relatively okay with this. His character has an evil alignment. Cass decided to work with Jonah to manipulate this to his advantage. Cass needs to produce an heir of Loxley blood to fulfill a deal he made with a coven, meaning he needs to have a kid with Katie's character Arabella. She has a boyfriend. Cass made a deal with Jonah to get Elwyn (The boyfriend) out of the way by having Arabella sacrifice his soul in exchange for the murder of another timekeeper that is far out of Jonah's reach, Ignis Firestorm. Ignis is an Ashabold dragon, Ashabold is a pocket dimension of my own design that exists just off of the mortal plane. It is the source of all original magic and the Dragons and Serpents in the world are essentially gods. They don't know how powerful they really are though.

Anyway, because Logan rolled extremely well he is now working with the BBEG behind the parties back. I was originally going to draw from a hat who gets murdered each level but as of right now I think I might have Logan/Cass choose who dies. 1. Because I know that he will get a massive kick out of it, 2. I don't enjoy choosing who lives and who dies like that. Katie gave me one rule, don't kill Elwyn... he is dead less than twenty-four hours into the game. I feel really bad about it. She was talking to me the other day about how she didn't make them engaged in case I wanted to do that in game. 1. That was never going to happen regardless of the death or not, their home lives are icing on the cake and the characters will have very little interactions

with their home lives, 2. I had to sit there with a straight face and smile and nod like he wasn't already dead in Jonah's basement.

Because of his deal he also got a lot of semi truthful information about Rosella and who she is and why she is so cranky all the time. He got a lot more information than I readily had available so this is going to go pretty well I think.

Entry 3: Beware of Strip Clubs.

The plan for this session was to get them to the fairy tale forest. Did that happen... NO. I decided to try and get Rosella out of there for the night by having her go to the local bar cough cough centaur strip club. The group wanted to do some bonding so they went with her. Calliope's was amazing. I very much enjoyed letting them roleplay being drunk off their asses while playing truth or dare in a strip club. I don't think any of that will make it into the play. But I do think that it was necessary both in an out of game. I have played with all of these individuals for a long time. Sarge Logan and Shawna in one group and Katie in another. I think that they all needed a night to just let off some steam and get used to each other's roleplaying styles. Katie's style is drastically different than what the other group is used to since the only other RP heavy player in that campaign is me (Logan runs this particular one) and I am running this bitch so can't really add to much in or it will just be me talking at them for hours on end. Highlights of this session were Noisy riding one of the Male Dancers, Thor, onto the stage and pole dancing with him. I can't wait for them to go back and cause havoc again. They were all failing their con saves and were beyond plastered by the end of it. So much so that even Rosella memory spell was glitching out giving Cass a peek behind the curtain with her.

Entry 4: I Need To Make Harder Encounters.

They finally got to the fairy tale forest and I dropped the bomb on Arabella that there has been a massive two-year time jump between when she was there last and what is currently happening. I love tormenting my character internally. It created urgency and major internal panic. They got their destination, which I had to change last minute. I made the decision that Cass needs to not know something, for once. My friend Jacob is coming in and will be playing a guest character that is related to Arabella. With that I had to change the initial destination of Luxalvariant, the capitol of the Thrinlocke empire to, what was supposed to be the grand finale of this level, Neverland. That required redesigning some of the encounters and figure a lot of that out on the fly. To get to neverland they had to go through the portal in the Grenlin Swamps which was a good bit of distance from where I dropped them. Which meant a lovely hike through the wilderness with lots of fun encounters. I put in my favorite thing in Dungeons and Dragons, this monster is called a Mimic. I put in a whole ass mimic colony. They spotted it and snuck their asses around it. I was mildly annoyed. Then I put in some unicorns that they had to save from werewolves. They decided to not take the bait of a side quest and left the unicorns to die. They are now the reason unicorns will go extinct in this world. But they did harvest the dead ones they saw for spell components. Noisy learned that Unicorn blood is essentially crack. He is going to love the crash from that high when that happens. Love the “yes but” mentality of DnD because consequences (Insert my evil laugh here). I know this is supposed to be an academic paper but I still have a voice and a very large personality that if I don’t bring into this I will go insane. I can’t write boring. Anyway, they got to the Grenlin Swamps found all of the inhabitants petrified from the hoard of basilisks that has taken up residence in the village there. They also found

Jenny and Jasper a set of four-year-old twins. Originally in my design they were supposed to be alive and the group was supposed to use the kids as bait to get to neverland... but I realized very quickly that Arabella was not going to go for the idea of using the kids as bait.. so, I killed the kids myself and made them ghosts. In my version of neverland the island is an extension of the underworld, specifically built by Persephone, and it serves as the afterlife for children run obviously by Pan, the fairies, and a herd of copper dragons. The island is also guarded by Hades' minions, led by Captain Alister Hook, a pit fiend. I basically took the concept of Neverland and rewrote the lore to have it settle into the nature, of not only the world I have constructed but also the backstories my lovely players have gifted me. Anyway, back to the story at hand they got the village resurrected after fighting off the basilisk with ease.. I was a little mad about that but oh well. I made the conscious decision that as they were curing the village of its petrification that I was going to gloss over it. If I were to act it out with them they would have ended up interacting with more NPC's which is something I am trying to be cautious about in terms of adapting this thing into a play. The more NPC's the more actors we need to put this thing up. I don't need to be writing a show with a twenty-person cast when my intention was to have an eight-person cast. I would settle for at most having a ten or eleven person cast as a compromise. Anyway, they got past the Basilisks and then got to the portal. On the way there they proceeded to avoid my basilisk trap rude but clever. I threw a horned devil at them, almost killed off noisy then Cass decided to pull the "I am a warlock of hades" card and the encounter ended as peacefully as it could. The group went through the portal and were whisked away to Neverland where they found themselves falling out of the sky rapidly towards the island below. On their decent they caught a glimpse of a copper wing brushing past one of the mountain peaks. That is where I ended that session.

Entry 5: Showers Are Quality Places to Get Last Minute Ideas.

Woke up today with the brilliant idea for their first encounter on the island. I messaged all of them individually asking them to send me their characters best and worst memories of their life. Something they deeply treasured and something they deeply regret. This allowed me to get some high-quality ammo for not only this idea but also something I can put away for later. That is the key to DMing. Have a stock pile of notes, facts, little tid-bits of the characters to use, often against them. That is not a bad thing necessarily, it furthers character development. Starting off this session I dropped them all into a pool of water at the base of a waterfall. The original plan was to put some crazy ass monster inside of it or a ton of piranhas. But what could be more dangerous and scarier than their own minds. I called my new creation the Mirror pool as it reflects the most impactful moments of your life. I had them roll a straight D20 then depending on the roll they either saw the best moment of their life, or their worst. Logan and Sarge saw their best. Katie, Shawna, and my NPC Rosella all saw their worst. This resulted in the ladies all being trapped underneath the water paralyzed in fear and in high risk of drowning. The boys decided the best course of action was to jump back in a pull them out. Unfortunately, upon jumping back in one of them also got paralyzed. So, they played pool tag for a bit jumping in and out to save each other.

The biggest development here was that Noisy/Sarge was then one that pulled out Rosella. She was seeing the night that Korith fell and the death of the other apprentices, including Sammy. As such she was quite panicked and that translated to her screaming underneath the surface of the water. It also caused the memory spell on her to flash in and out so her eyes were flashing between their original blue color and their altered gold Sarge rolled a natural 20 for deciphering what she was saying and noticing the eye color flashes. Sometimes I really hate him.

Now Noisy is aware that something is off with Rosella. Which isn't a bad thing, I just need to be careful about how much information I give them or I might just derail my own damn campaign.

They went on to meet Tinkerbell and then decided to take a rest there for the time being

Entry 6: I Don't Know How But I think I Went Semi Viral on TikTok?

In the prep for this session, I had been inspired by my friend and dungeon master for her homebrew *Stone of Yfirbiod*. Baylee had run a one shot which she called Eldersgate, part of this one shot was several puzzles and challenged that we as players had to do out of game. This group plays in person so it is easy to do this. I really wanted to do something like this with my group, but the timekeepers group plays online as we are placed all up and down the east coast, it's great because you always have a couch to crash on when you travel, but sucky for not getting to hang with your besties in person. Anyway, I decided that the best way I could do this was give them the option of either going through a deadly jungle or tunnels through the mountains that is guarded by ancient copper dragons. They took the tunnel, which had a few select riddles in it. My friends are very smart, they are fantastic to work with, but I know players, I have been a player, sometimes we forget how our brain works. It's a pain I know all too well when I play a high intelligence character, specifically because they are usually far more intelligent than myself. Intelligence is the hardest stat to role play. So, in an effort to mitigate this with my players I looked up "Best Riddles for Young Children" on google (The shot of this screen is what went semi viral on TikTok). The first riddle was apparently the hardest, I sat there and watched the group debate the various different answers when the first one they had suggested was the correct one. I held it together. They completed the second one in a reasonable amount of time and

debating. I had, for the final riddle, looked up an actual riddle for adults online. The following is the one I had selected

“I look flat but I am deep. Hidden realms I shelter. Lives I take, but food I offer. At times I am beautiful. I can be calm, angry and turbulent. I have no heart, but offer pleasure as well as death. No man can own me, but I encompass what all men must have. What am I?” - the answer is the ocean.

Now I thought this would be pretty challenging and thought this would take up the rest of the session. NOPE. Logan cracked it in all of five seconds. I should not be surprised; he is really good with this kind of thing. It was a good thing I prepped for the next few sessions, and the group ended up getting to the wreck of the Jolly Rodger and the Sand Wurm encounter I had homebrewed the living shit out of. The group had been given warning about a monster under the sand, and they ran with it. They refused to step foot onto the sand and spent a good amount of time problem solving and planning how they would go about getting across the treacherous beach to the shipwreck. I named the wurm Bartholomew, the group got past him, Arabella and Miri didn't even leave the mouth of the cave the whole time. Cass teleported to the top of the ship and Noisy ran around and distracted the thing until Cass reached the Mast of the ship where he then had to use his essence to correct the timeline. A few select castings of silence and darkness later Bartholomew is useless and Cass banished the Chaos from Neverland, while also simultaneously feeling the heartbreak and betrayal from the loved one's soul he just sacrificed to do so.

Entry 7: A Last-Minute Side Quest to Buy Time is Okay

Today was the groups departure from Neverland. First I let them loot the hidden caverns under the ship. In the bottom of the cave, I put 15,000 gold pieces, gems, a bag of tricks, a spell scroll of greater invisibility, and a customized version of the deck of many things (No way in hell was I letting them have the real thing, that would break this whole experiment). My party knows me, and they know, that outside of the game my favorite monster is a mimic. They also know I have been dying to use the Hoard Mimic that was released in Fizban's Treasury of Dragons. I put a giant pile of gold in there just to fuck with them. Watching Sarge have Noisy throw things into the pile to make sure I wasn't going to kill them all then and there was hysterical. I love watching them be afraid of ordinary objects, I get so much delight out of it. They released a giant elk from the bag of tricks, and then one of the Copper dragons escorted them back to the mainland and dropped them off just outside the city of Nightlocke Grove.

I have been working on a lot of projects at once here and I have been putting of making a map for the main castle and dungeon crawl I have planned when they get to the capital city. Along with the complicated map I am also bringing in our first guest, my friend Jacob is coming in and they will be playing Princess Malice of the Thrinlocke empire, blood cousin to Arabella. This is one to throw Cass completely off track, and two to get in someone that has an emotional investment into the area and three Jacob has never played as a PC before and I could not let that stand in my presence. Jacob and I spent a good chunk of time sitting down and building out Malice, she is a Tiefling variant and a total bombshell. I am so excited to have her join the campaign.

Anyway, there was no way anything pertaining to the main plot was going to be ready so about thirty minutes before the session I grabbed my book of Grimm's fairytales off of my shelf,

reread my favorite obscure story “The Singing Bone” and threw together a simple one-session side quest. They would get trapped in the town, and the only way they could free themselves would be to get justice for the murder corpse in the bottom of the river. They had to kill the lord and swap the corpses. That was it. They then proceeded to run from the ghost, go shoe shopping (a spin off story of the shoemaker and the elves was improvised very well), go talk to the lord, go talk to the bridge ghost, find the body, then start to plan a coupe to overthrow the local government. needless to say, they did not complete the side quest in one session. The one time you need your party to be a band of murder hobos and they decide to go about doing things legally. That I defiantly did not see coming.

This was the last session that was had prior to the publication of this paper.

Player Character Reference Guide

I will provide a reference to characters that will be mentioned, their race class, and who is their creator. This will mitigate reader confusion as to which character belongs to which player.

Format Name/Race/Class

Logan Bryant:

Samiel Cass / Hexblood / Undead Warlock

Oceanus Aegean / Sea Elf / Champion fighter and Assassin Rouge

Bartholomew “Bubba” Wilhelem / Teifling / Collage of Spirits Bard

Sarge Sargent

Thunder Paw / Tabaxi / Kensei monk and beast barbarian

Doomsday / Teifling / Wild magic sorcerer

Noisy Boy / Mon-De-Ki / Shadow Monk

Desmond Greyjoy / Aasimar / Celestial warlock and abjuration wizard

Garm Blackstorm / Ursine / Rune knight fighter and fathomless warlock

Katie Jackson

Lady Arabella of Loxley / Human variant / Ranger

Princess Iduna Bernedotte / Half elf / Bard and paladin

Persephone Koranova / Human / Druid

Shawna Basallo

Nin Stormcal / half-orc / The way of the Sun Soul Monk

Miriam “Miri” Faelyn / Eledrin (Variant) / School of Enchantment Wizard and Shadow

Magic Sorcerer

Fiona von Zarovich / Dhampir / Warlock and Shadow Magic Sorcerer

Sabrina Becker

Nori Bellimus / Triton / Tempest Cleric, Warlock and Physician

Rosella Calinthrip / High elf / Life Cleric and Artificer

Etagere "Etta" Klock / Wood elf / Monk of the Colbalt soul and Artificer

Vitawney Talon / Tabaxi / Rouge Assassin and storm herald barbarian

Dottie Daxil / Gnome Pixie variant / Circle of the moon Druid and Rouge

Ember Ethilia / Blue Dragonborn / Arcane Archer Fighter

Sixish Nerds and Their Cats

By Sabrina Becker

In collaboration with:

Logan Bryant, Shawna Basallo, Katie Jackson, and Sarge Sargent

Characters

Jonah (Dionysus)

DM (Rosella)

(DM) Fem presenting human, graduate student early 20's, very sarcastic and stressed. Often unsure of herself and doing the best she can. Relies heavily on her friends for support as she struggles to navigate her new role in gaming.

(Rosella) Fiery, quick wit. Struggles to piece together the memories that she has lost. Feels a deep connection with Cass from the beginning, doesn't know why, is very confused and defensive and will not say anything.

Arabella of Loxley (Katie)

(Katie) Fem presenting human. Mousy quiet, very sweet. The mom friend we all deserve. Lacks a lot of self-confidence. Lives vicariously through her characters. The definition of a woman who embraces being a boss bitch but also enjoys dressing up like a princess for a classic Disney movie singalong night.

(Arabella) Very used to court rituals, proper lady, with a bite of the independence she has found in the woods. Sassy, and not afraid to speak out against something that she feels is incorrect. Takes shit from no one. Brave, and deeply in love with her man Elwyn back home.

Samiel Cass (Logan)

(Logan) Masc presenting human. Good ole' southern boy, has a slight NC Appalachian dialect. A literal cowboy. Not a mean bone in their body. Wild, incredibly charming and very smart. Puts others before himself even at his own detriment. He has a serious issue with bottling up his issues and suffering quietly. Very much needs to learn to rely on his friends, and that he is not a burden. They all love him and I don't think he realizes how much.

(Cass) EXTRA AF. Showy, Always ready to make a deal, looks out for himself. He is a warlock of Hades. Cursed by a coven when he was given existence. He is marked by scaly skin and a crown of bones that grow out of his skull. He is well traveled and seems to know everything and everyone. He has been alive for a very long time (There is a lot of lore shit with this but I can't put it in because my cast reader is Logan and He didn't want to know this)

Miri Faelyn (Shawna)

(Shawna) She has an aesthetic and she sticks to it. Loves cats more than people. She is an amazing artist and is always drawing new versions of Miri. Never afraid to make a pun or crack a joke. She is very soft spoken and needs to speak up because I always love what she has to say. Loves cats, squish-mellows and fairy lights.

(Miri) Nervous, quiet, not used to the spotlight. A gifted mage from a big family of gifted mages. She has always been the little fish in the big pond.

Noisy Boy (Sarge)

(Sarge) He is chaos incarnate, he has a freakishly encyclopedic knowledge of the game, and a story for almost every occasion. He should not be alive; I don't know how he still is. He has a soft spot for animals, specifically cats and horses. Behind his tough exterior he is an absolute sweet heart, you just have to push through the chaos.

(Noisy Boy) A two-foot-tall pigmy marmoset assassin. No further explanation needed.

Author's Note

Hi! So, this play is a passion project between a small group of close friends. I hope that your process with this play is as fun as ours was! Remember, have fun and collaboration is the key to this work. The stage directions are what was initially envisioned during the campaign, they are not law. Create your own interpretation of the story.

Break all the legs

Best Regards,

The Timekeeper's Apprentices

ACT ONE**SCENE ONE**

Lights up on an almost bare stage. We see DM sitting at a messy table on a platform upstage in front of a computer. They appear stressed.

DM

How do we create a narrative for live theatre? How does a playwright do it? I most certainly am not a playwright and therefore have no fucking clue. What I am though is a story teller, and a massive nerd. What better way to attempt to tell a cool story than through gaming? I have no idea how this will go but I present these fuckers. *(Enter in Arabella/Katie, Cass/Logan, Miri/Shawna, and Noisy/Sarge dressed in regular clothing. Each smiling and looking anxious to get on with the story.)* Shawna, we met in undergrad and after I graduated I was thrilled to be a part of a DnD group that let me get to know her a bit better, she is a crazy talented artist and I couldn't be more excited to have her in this project. Katie, one of my closest friends, we met in grad school and my family swears we are the same person. Logan, my best friend since undergrad, he has a gift for telling stories unlike any I have ever seen before. Last but not least Sarge, essentially my twin, bat shit insane, shocked he is still alive, and the officiant at my wedding. I love them all.

(The lights shift and everyone becomes their alter ego, DM pulls up a dark hood cloak and stands above the others menacingly ready to cause mayhem. The sounds of powerful gusts of wind are heard, as the player all fall into a circle reacting to the descriptions given.)

DM

You wake up surrounded by mists in fog in the middle of nowhere, around you, you see a group of strangers. You see a singular rope bridge, not moving with the wind just perfectly still, creepy Eerie.

NOISY

(To DM) Do I know where this is?

DM

Actually yes, it is the entrance to the city.

CASS

I am going to go to the rope bridge..

ARABELLA

Wait, let me check to see if it will hold

DM

Alright roll me an investigation

ARABELLA

Natural one.....

DM

You have never seen a rope bridge before in your life.

ARABELLA

Fantastic.

CASS

I am going to very carefully step onto the bridge to see if it will hold

DM

Yea it holds, very sturdy.

CASS

Great, I am going across.

NOISY

I follow and jump on his horns and ride.

DM

I'm sorry.....what?

NOISY

Yea! I am about two feet tall, and look roughly like a pigmy marmoset. *(Actor pulls out the puppet that will be portraying Noisy Boy for the remainder of the play. The puppet is placed in-between Cass's horns and holds on for the ride as the group crosses the rope bridge.)*

DM

As you cross the bridge you are berated by the forceful winds. Below you there are wings, flashes of lightning, There are monsters roaring, but leaving you alone for now. As you near the end of the bridge you see the shadow of a vast city through the mist.
(Lights shift as the players take over. They stand at the edge of the city looking out at the audience. We hear phantom laughter of a child echo hauntingly around the theatre.)

NOISY

Welcome to Korith everyone....

(The ground beneath them all begins to shake as they look towards a vast mountain range off in the distance, a loud blast is heard... the top of the mountain is blown apart, ash, toxic gas and lava spews. The stage darkens to mimic the effects of a volcano. We also begin to see the figure of a great smoke monster manifest around the group, a growl like gravel grinding under a pestle is present. As the creature forms near the group each tries in vain to hit the monster with each attempt passing though the smoke.)

SMOKE DEMON

(Struggles against themselves, like they are fighting multiple commands at once, their eyes flash to gold for a moment)

Beware... not all is as it appears.

CASS

(Muttering a spell under his breath)

Listen friend *(Provides a flourish.)* Perhaps we could come to some sort of deal, please tell us what you desire?

SMOKE DEMON

*(The eye flash between Red, Gold, and Purple as it struggles against its own mind. The demon proceeds to speak in a language that is unfamiliar to all, seemingly made-up gibberish. *this is Ashabolian* after it finishes it struggles it rages once again frightening all those around it. The monster turns its eyes to one small noisy boy, it begins to gather the power for a blast that will certainly be fatal and Noisy falls. The monster collects itself again and with a blast of poisonous gas the rest of the group falls).*

All we see are the flashing eyes of the monster as the stage fades to BLACKOUT

SCENE TWO

Lights up the stage is bare except for the fallen actor's still where they had been slain. ROSELLA ENTERS and stands in the center of them.

ROSELLA

Everybody up! *(she raises her hands and thunderclaps around the group startling them all awake)* Welcome to Korith.

NOISY

Where did the monster go...?

ROSELLA

What monster?

MIRI

The giant smoke monster... the mountain exploded...

ROSELLA

Worried but trying to hide it

It must have been a dream; the volcano is clearly still intact.

CASS
Volcano?

ROSELLA
Yes, Volcano. *Walking away the others follow almost jogging to keep up with her pace.* Korith is a pocket dimension residing outside of time and space. The island is built on a semi dormant volcano, as there is no real passage of time it's in a frozen state. The timekeepers prevent the island from destruction.
Everybody freezes except NOISY

NOISY
(To audience) That, my friends, is what we call a heaping helping of foreshadowing.
Action continues as if it had never stopped.

ARABELLA
I'm sorry but who exactly are the time keepers?

ROSELLA
Sudden halt to movement all then crashes into one another.
Here we are, the city center. These are the Timekeepers *(Gesturing to five statues of said time keepers)* or well they were before the chaos destroyed them all. They watched over the balance of time and space, interfering when necessary, and keeping our little dimension here running smoothly. In a more traditional setting when they felt the need to retire they would have chosen an apprentice. This is not traditional as there is only one left, Jonah, and you are now the apprentices.

CASS
Wonderful, and who, pray tell are *you* dearie?

ROSELLA
Rosella Calinthip, last chosen apprentice. I have been doing this for about two thousand years now. Let me see *(Walks up and down the line almost inspecting them.)* You are Arabella of Loxely, daughter of Robinhood, you specialize in tracking and hunting lycanthropes. You are Miri Faelyn, parents own a magic shop in Faire, you are learning to be quite the powerful wizard. *(Pauses and looks down at Noisy, roller her eyes with contempt)* Noisy Boi, you are from here, and the only one that by precedent is even qualified to be an apprentice but my gods I cannot figure out why you, of all the people in Korithine, why you? *(Shakes her head and moves on)*
Last but not least.... *(Settling on CASS).*

CASS
No, no there's no need. I go by...Cass.

ROSELLA
(Almost daring him in a way) Are you sure about that?

CASS

Yes yes, no need to go any further dearie. I get that you know all about us, you have done your homework.

ROSELLA

It's my job.. *(Under her breath)* One of the few Jonah will actually give me. Follow me. Jonah can explain more back in the village. *(She marches on leaving a very confused group scurrying after her once again)*
Blackout

SCENE THREE

Lights up. We see the demolished remains of a once beautiful village, clearly worn away by time but also there clearly was a catalyst to its destruction. There are scorch marks. There are three buildings that have been more or less repaired. One looks like a stone fortress; one is shabbily rebuilt from the rubble and the final is the largest and looks like a medieval frat house. At the base we see a masculine gentle-human. age and race are irrelevant cast as you see fit for your production. The group of idiots enter.

JONAH

Welcome apprentices. You have each been chosen for a spectacular mission that will determine the fate of the universe as you know it.
Arabella steps to the front of the group to greet Jonah

ARABELLA

It is lovely to be here, in your service, I am Lady Arabella of Loxley. *Arabella extends her hand in expectance of the court rituals that she has come so accustomed to. Jonah looks at it and brushes it and the rest of her aside.*

JONAH

Yes.... Well follow me.. all of you there is much to explain.

NOISY

Ya don't say!

JONAH

Rosella you are dismissed.

ROSELLA

Of course... thank you.

(The tension and contempt that exists between Rosella and Jonah cannot be understated they fucking hate each other, but due to circumstances they are stuck with each other)

As ROSELLA exits, the stage shifts around then cast as they are now on the interior of the apprentice keep. The keep is really a frat house with cauldrons and shit. This is comedy. Don't be afraid of that. Don't take it too seriously. The dialogue can continue through the transitions if you desire.

JONAH

In the past the timekeepers have been many, but through the years our number had dwindled leaving myself and four others to maintain the balance. Years ago, a great threat came to us trying to claim dominion over the control of time, the chaos. We fought him back, but in the release of this entity one of our own was tainted by its black magic. Marcos Seohatch. We locked them both away in the great Volcano deep in the Pestilene Peaks. In that battle all of the others were lost... except for me... that was two thousand years ago. Recently the monster was able to escape once again and has cause great damage to the timelines. *(during this Jonah is creating a stardust visual of all of events)* When the chaos takes over a timeline it distorts the creatures and land. the purest can become the evillest. It has crept through the seams of the fairytale forest, Arcadia, The realm of Fairie, the Marianas Trench, The mortal plane, Ashabold, and the Underworld.

NOISY

Well that looks downright delightful!

JONAH

(Deeeeeeeep sigh and facepalm moment) Your job is to go to these realms and cleanse the lands of this chaos and restore the balance. To do this you will need a time essence, plunge it into the heart of the darkness and the timeline should restore the rest on its own. Unfortunately, anything that has happened between the arrival of the chaos and the restoration is permeant. You were each chosen for your unique skills and connection to these planes. In regular tradition you would have been chosen by the timekeeper you would be replacing but as they are dead that won't be happening. Arabella you will be replacing Ariettie Michaels, Cass you will be replacing Ignis Firestorm, Noisy you will be replacing Fred Smith, and Miss Miri Faelyn *(Crosses to Miri lovingly and takes her hands)* you will be my personal apprentice I couldn't be more honored to have such a talented mage to take my place. *(Miri shifts uncomfortably, Arabella is annoyed as Jonah rejected her handshake earlier)* Return tomorrow morning and you will be given your first essence and transported to the Fairytale Forest.

NOISY

Ummmm... I think you are forgetting some numbers here. There is still one more Time according to your previous math here buddy.

JONAH

No. I did not. Rosella was the last timekeeper chosen in the traditional fashion. She was Marcos' apprentice. After his betrayal she continued to defend him, so she cannot be trusted, but as she was chosen by Marcos and can only be dismissed by him according to the laws of our organization we are stuck with her. Those same rules are what keep her from being promoted as well, Marcos is still alive just consumed by the chaos. Until he is officially dead she will stay an apprentice, to my good fortune. She will go with you on your first mission just to make sure none of you die.

MIRI

If you can't trust her, how can we?

JONAH

She won't harm you; she is bound by her oath.

ARABELLA

Well, that's reassuring.

JONAH

Yes... be back here bright and early. You have the rest of the day to explore the island at your own will.

CASS

Thank you, we most certainly will.

EXIT and BLACKOUT

SCENE FOUR

Lights up on DM at their desk. On the phone.

DM

Define started on..... Yea no I have zero clue what an artistic aims essay is...great.. well, I guess..... I swear when I turn this shit in I am screaming Leroy Jenkins and running away. *(Message ding, looks at phone and changes demeanor.)* I gotta go, I will see ya tomorrow! Good night!

(To Audience) I can only be prepared for so much here, this was the night one of my players broke the game. I was so proud of him but also so mad at the same time.

LOGAN ENTERS

(DM and Logan)

DM

Please for the love of all that is holy explain this idea to me.

LOGAN

Well, I feel like Cass at some point would have tried to contact the chaos or whatever creature was talking in the dream battle.... He would want to try and make a deal. *(laughs)*.

DM

Beat in stunned silence... DM is at a total loss for words. Thinks about it, and against their better judgement....

Ya know what... Let's fucking do it.

LOGAN

Wait...really? Right now?

DM

Sure! Why not?

LOGAN

Alrighty then!

DM

You sure you really want to do this? I can't make any promises about what is going to happen to Cass if you do this.

LOGAN

Let's do it!

DM

Perfect. (cue evil crazy laughter and Lights shift mimicking who wants to be a millionaire a little bit. DM flings up the hood of their cloak. LOGAN throws on the CASS coat. He does a little twirl in place to symbolize the transition into CASS) Alright, so all of the others have gone to bed for the evening and it's just you up alone in your room, What do you do?

CASS

First I would like to summon John and tell him to hide in the closet. Then I would like to try and contact the entity.

DM

(To Audience)

It was at this point I completely forgot that I had agreed to Cass having a little spectral informant servant friend thing that he can summon at will.

(To Cass)

Wonderful. John does so. What exactly do you say to try and get this entities attention?

CASS

Okay soo. (Insert monologue from logan here)

DM

Make me a...persuasion check, this is gonna be a pretty high DC.

CASS

Twenty-seven?

DM

(Bangs head on table in an extensional game derailing crisis.)

Yep....ooookayyyy. So.... here's what happens... You feel a chill in the back of your head... suddenly there is a knock on the door. What do you do?

CASS

Well, I obviously go open the door darling.

DM

Beautiful, as you open the door, standing there is Jonah....

JONAH

You called?

LOGAN

(pops out of CASS for a moment) NO FUCKING WAY!

DM

There goes my damn plot twist! Worked on this for months trying to figure out how to keep this from you all and you have managed to throw everything off in all of five minutes.

JONAH

(To DM) Honestly I am very impressed with it!

DM

Of course, you would be, you now get to collaborate with one of them. *(Rolls Eyes)* Can we please get back to business please.

JONAH

Yes of course, my apologizes madam.

DM

Thank you, now... Cass what do you do?

CASS

Sooooo..... you were the creature in our dream.....you are the one behind all of it.

JONAH

Partially.. I was one of three fighting to get to you. The chaos and Marcos where both there as well.

CASS

Why?

JONAH

So, the bastard would not turn you all against me before you even got here. Cass.....Dear..Dear Cass... (*JONAH is circling CASS like he's a whole ass meal*) I see why my relations like you so much.

CASS

Excuse me?

JONAH

I believe you know me better as Dionysus. (*CASS bows low*) Your reputation precedes you warlock. I think you and I can get along just fine.

CASS

Maybe we can help each other.

JONAH

Exactly.... So what do you want from me, before I ask anything of you, you always have a deal in mind.

CASS

Arabella..... I want Arabella.I have a bit of a score to settle with a coven. I promised them my firstborn child and that said child will be of Loxley blood. With the exchange my curse will be lifted and I might just become the human I was meant to be. I need her boyfriend out of the way. (*Pausing to reflect on a previous comment*) How would have Marcos turned us all against you?

JONAH

(*Laughs*) I seem to have chosen the wrong apprentice; you truly are a devil Samiel. This is perfect. Let me further explain this situation. He would have turned you by telling the truth. (*Lights shift as Jonah begin to create a story through stardust imagery again*) Two thousand years ago the chaos started corrupting the timelines. That much is true. We were able to restore them but the others had an issue with how it had to be done. The cost for that kind of magic is always high, as you know Cass. I was the only one among us willing to pay it. The chaos killed Ariette and Fred before they even had a chance to try and help. Ignis and myself stayed behind to protect Kortih while Marcos and Rosella took the essences out to restore the timeline. To create an essence, you must use the souls of living creatures. The soul must trust who is handling it so it must be a loved one of those that restore the timeline. I had taken the souls of Marcos' wife and daughter and split them up into many pieces creating multiple essences. They were unaware of what I had done until they had returned from finalizing their fate. He was furious and in his rage he fused with the chaos attacking the island. Rosella fought at his side. Ignis and I were able to

contain both the chaos and Marco's in the mountain. But only temporarily as it seems. Marcos is removing the essences from the original repairs to reassemble the souls of his wife and daughter. Ignis left.... He returned home to Ashabold ashamed of what we had done. He is still alive. I am now trying to correct the timelines using apprentices. This time I will not make the same mistake rather than soul fragments that are so easily removed I am using full souls this time. The repairs should be far more stable.

CASS

You are using the souls of our loved ones aren't you?

JONAH

Yes. Making it rather easy to get rid of this Arabella's boyfriend if you would like.

CASS

That is perfect... and she will never know it was me.

JONAH

Never. But there is something I need you to do in return for this favor.

CASS

Everything comes with a price... What is yours.

JONAH

On your journey you will go to Ashabold... This land is full of magic beyond belief, its ruled by the dragons that control this magic. They are virtually all powerful. I need you to kill Ignis. He knows about the timekeepers and our past. He is the last obstacle in the way before we can move to the future. Should he ever return it would end in disaster, especially if he is sympathetic to Marcos.

CASS

What about Rosella?

JONAH

She is under the influence of a very powerful memory charm. It's not perfect but she is not a threat.....anymore.

CASS

So, you want me to kill a creature from Ashabold, who is potentially all powerful?

JONAH

Yes. how badly do you want your rival out of the way Cass? (*A beat while CASS considers this option*) For good measure you will be choosing who from your friends' families will be sacrificed as a little insurance that you won't turn against me, because if you do they will turn against you.

CASS

That's fair. You can take one of mine next I have a 95-year-old nephew that will be expiring any day now, humans are disposable.

JONAH

Very well, it shall be done. Goodnight..... Samiel. *(Jonah Exits)*

CASS

Good....night.....?

(CASS stand there alone pondering his life choices for a moment before quickly jumping back into LOGAN)

DM

I can't believe you just did that.... I can't believe I just let you do that.

LOGAN

I can't believe you let me do that.

DM

Katie gave me literally one rule... Don't kill Elwyn. Thanks to you he's dead in less than 24 hours from when we started this bitch. She's going to kill me.

LOGAN

She won't kill you...

DM

You are right, she won't, she's too nice for that.... but this will crush her. I don't have the stomach for this shit dude. How do you do this.

LOGAN

Unlike you, Beans, I genuinely enjoy mentally torturing my players.

DM

Yea, as your primary target I am well aware of that.

LOGAN

You love it and you know it. *(DM acknowledges that he is correct in this fact a little reluctantly. There is a beat and a shift in energy)* You've got this. I believe in you.

DM

Thanks.

Blackout End Scene Four

SCENE FIVE

(We are in a darkened room ROSELLA is laying in her bed. We see the silhouettes of a young rosella with a man. This is her dream it is hazy. They appear as a couple, happy, young and in love. They kiss and dance under the moonlight. Sleep ROSELLA is humming in her sleep and then begins muttering the same name over and over again, Sammy. We see a version of the chaos appear and threaten the pair. There are flashes of lightning and we see the man become consumed by the Chaos. As he is dragged away ROSELLA tosses and turns aggressively, screaming for him we see the silhouette fighting but losing. Until the chaos disappears taking the man with it leaving the woman broken and sobbing) (at some point during this we see a CASS pass by the window out on a stroll pondering his horrible life choices. He takes notice of ROSELLA'S break down and listens in on what is happening).

ROSELLA

SAMMY! *(ROSELLA bolts up in a cold sweat crying in hysterics very confused she pauses..... reaches up and touches her cheeks feeling the tears... she does not know why she was crying... she has no memory of anything that just happened. She pulls the blanket around her shoulders and rises from the bed.. she looks toward the moon and then begins to wash her face in a basin near the window. Taking a deep breath, she approaches an alter she has set up. The alter is covered in flowers with a few bones. This is an alter to Persephone.)* It happened again.... I don't know what.....what's happening to me. *(Defeated)*

CASS

(Comes out of the shadows and crosses into her home) Are you alright dearie? You look like you could use a stiff drink. *(Lurks in the doorway like the weirdo he is)*

ROSELLA

(Doesn't move or look back at him) Go away Samiel.....

CASS

Ahhhhh..... we are using my real name now, that's not very fair there *(Crosses to her and sits down beside her)*

ROSELLA

You are in my house. Alone. I can use your real name if I want "dearie"

(CASS Pulls out a flask and offers it to her, there is a beat, then she reluctantly takes it. She takes a long drink from it and hands it back to CASS who does the same. CASS Studies the alter for a moment before realizing who it is for.)

CASS

My lady. *(Cass tips his head toward the alter paying his respects then turns to ROSELLA)* You know who I work for I presume.

ROSELLA

Yes.

CASS

May I just say you have wonderful taste in patrons.

ROSELLA

Deity, not Patron. I didn't need to sell my soul to earn her favor. *(Looks at him pointedly then gestures to the flask again CASS gives it to her and again she drinks.)*

CASS

Nothing wrong with having a deal in writing. I know where I stand, and as long as I hold up my end of the deal my powers can't be randomly shut off. Gods can be so fickle you know.

ROSELLA

At least she doesn't own me.

CASS

Hades does not own me. We have an agreement. *(CASS takes the flask back and drinks, until it is empty.)* I appear to be out.

ROSELLA

Don't worry about it...I tend to be prepared for this. Not the first time. *(ROSELLA gets up and grabs a bottle of hard liquor from under her bed)*

CASS

Care to talk about what happened? *(As she is walking away)*

ROSELLA

Not much to talk about. *(Crosses back with the booze, no glasses they are doing this grad student style. Out of the bottle.)*

CASS

You really are prepared. Nightmare I would assume, if it's reoccurring it probably has a deeper meaning dearie.

ROSELLA

I don't know what it was. I don't remember, I never remember. *(She unscrews the cap and drinks a lot. This is clearly not normal and she has a problem. You should not be able to drink vodka like it is water. If you are reading this and can please go get some help. I am looking at you Sarge.)*

CASS

Rosella... you were crying...practically screaming and you don't remember? *(CASS takes the bottle from her but does not drink)*

ROSELLA

It's the greatest mystery of life. I am a fucking fearless bitch and apparently some shadows in the night can scare my unconscious ass into hysterics but I don't get to know what it is *(She's getting a little roasty toasty.)*

CASS

Fearless huh?

ROSELLA

You don't get to be a timekeeper by being afraid of the mundane.

CASS

But you're not.. you're an apprentice, just like the rest of us.

ROSELLA

(Visibly annoyed and very drunk) Cass I have been doing this for two thousand years. I am not just like the rest of you.

CASS

And before that? *(Testing the memory spell)*

ROSELLA

I lived in the city..... *(the lights shift, the memory spell is fading in and out a little bit we can see it in her eyes, in the actual campaign her eyes changed color, but that's not happening on stage so use lightning, sound, have her go into a trance, whatever works for your show. On the alter there is a small gear she picks it up and mindlessly starts fidgeting with it.)* Sammy could you hand me the wrench please, I think Basil lost one of his gears again.... *(She holds her hand out to CASS out expectantly... then looks at him she tilts to head to the side... he doesn't register as CASS to her, he is Sammy in this moment.)*

CASS

(Playing along to get information) I'm sorry I don't remember where we keep the wrench, Rosella if you could be a dear and remind me.

ROSELLA

Wow... we are using my full name today; Jonah must have really pissed you off love. *(ROSELLA reaches her hand out to his cheek, pushing some of CASS's hair out of his face)* If he is that irritating just tell Ignis he can take you off portal duty and put you with me in machine repair. Marcos and I always could use an extra set of hands *(She stands up, wobbly as fuck, CASS has to help her keep her balance)* Thank you love. *(Kisses him on the cheek CASS is very confused)* Where the fuck did I put the wrench... it's probably in the workshop.... I thought we were in the workshop... where are we..... Sammy? *(Calling for him out to the ether CASS just watches)*

CASS

Rosella.... It's really late...maybe you should get some sleep

ROSELLA

You are right, Aeshadome my darling. Are coming to bed as well?

CASS

I am going to go talk to *(Making up this BS on the spot trying to fit into the world she is seeing.)*
.... Ignis first...then I will be along.... I will tuck you in. *(Leads her over to the bed)*

ROSELLA

Such a gentleman

CASS

Goodnight.

ROSELLA

Goodnight Sammy *(She drunkenly snuggles in as CASS pulls the covers over her.)*

(CASS blows out the candles and goes to the alter nodding in acknowledgement)

CASS

This is going to be very interesting.

BLACKOUT END SCENE FIVE

SCENE FIVE AND A HALF

(Put in because the group would be pissed if I left it out)

Disco lights going around we see a stripper pole and a single spotlight.

SARGE

I am chaos incarnate.... Not like the chaos in the story but like ya know... just feeckn chaos. I also happen to have encyclopedic knowledge of the game. I can be a rules lawyer but just not a dick about it. With this I am able to create the most impossible situations possible, leaving my DM's laughing and cursing my name to the skies.

KATIE

Yeaaaaaa

SHAWNA

That's what happened the night that we played out the centaur orgy situation.

SARGE

It was fucking fantastic. Pun *intended*

KATIE

Please enjoy this dramatic reenactment of that...event

SHAWNA

Performed by the individual that committed the role play crimes.

The lights dim on the stage as Sarge, with all the dramatic flair he can muster approaches the pole for the show of his life.

Terms and Definitions

TTRPG: this stands for Table Top Role-Playing game. A Table top Role-Playing Game

collaborative story telling hobby, often fantasy in nature but can be expanded to include anything you can possibly imagine. Usually, 3-7 players but can be more or less. Through team work and simple chance players will overcome challenges and solve puzzles creating in depth stories and characters. A campaign can run as long as you want, some are single sessions others can run for decades. Examples of games that fall into this category are *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Pathfinder*, and *Monster of the Week*.

DM or Dungeon Master: A dungeon master is the person running a TTRPG, they provide the descriptions, maps, encounters, monster and NPC that the Player characters will encounter. Some Dungeon Masters will pre written Module's others will write their own stories which is referred to as homebrew. Either way, this is a very intense and time-consuming job, if you have a DM in your life bring them a snack and say thank you.

PC: Often used as the was to say politically correct but in this paper it will refer to Player Characters, the characters that are made by the plays and controlled by them in game.

Campaign: A long running TTRPG game that can span anywhere from one day to 20+ years.

Homebrew: A term used in the Tabletop community referring to content that is outside of what is officially written in the official sourcebooks published by wizards of the coast. This can refer to something as small as a magic item, going all the way into an entire campaign and lore system.

Races: in DnD races is not referring to skin color or culture necessarily. It can borderline be used with the term species. The following is a list of different races that are mentioned in this paper that are both sanctioned through Wizards of the Coast and Homebrewed.

- Tabaxi: anthropomorphic cat people (Mearls and Crawford - 113) *Example seen in figure 4.*
- Triton: Amphibious humanoids that live in the depths of the ocean (Mearls and Crawford - 115) *Examples seen in figures 1, 5, 7, 8, and 14.*
- Elves: large race covering several different sub races including but not exclusive to wood elf, high elf, aquatic elf and eladrin (elves specifically native to the feywilds). Each one having their own unique style and powers. (Mearls et al.- 21) *Examples seen in figures 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, and 13 (thirteen is a variant).*
- Human: In D&D terms human is the same as our species, but just classified as a whole race. (Mearls et al.- 29) *Examples seen in 11, 12, and 13*
- Dragonborn: Humanoid individuals with dragoon ancestry leading them to have powers that correlate to the color of their respective scales. (Mearls et al.- 32)
- Hexblood: They are created rather than born by the influence of magic, usually from a hag. They are marked by this change in their body by some physical distinction. (Schneider - 18)
- Ursine: Anthropomorphic Bear, they are quite a large race, although their numbers are few. (Sargent)
- Mon-De-Ki: A primate-based race. Inspired by the lore of the Virginia Devil Monkey. They can take on the look of any primate-based species. Often living on the

outskirts of society, taking on a drastically exaggerated version of what they think is a normal life for that society. (Sargent)

- Gnome: A high energy being that is roughly about half the size of your average human. They are vibrant beings with an incredible enthusiasm for life and everything it has to offer. (Mearls et al.- 35) *Variant example see in figure 9.*
- Fairy; Tiny little creatures filled with the magic of the Feywilds. They resemble small elves with wings of an insect that can vary between individuals. (Allan - 12) *Variant example seen in figure 9.*
- Dhampir: A being caught between life and death. They have the thirst of their vampire ancestor, often being jaded towards the vampire that made them. They fight to control their thirst, fearing that by giving in they will lose control and become like the monsters that made them. (Schneider et al.)
- Half orc: The appearance of the half orc can vary wildly between individuals. They display both orc and human like features. Often they are proudly displaying their battle scars as in orc culture they are seen as a badge of honor. (Mearls et al.- 40)
- Aasimar: They are angelic beings, often the chosen champions of the various gods. They walk in the mortal plane filled with dreams serving as guidance from their gods. They are of a celestial lineage. They also can fall from the grace of their god turning into great forces of evil and chaos. (Mearls and Crawford - 104)
- Half-Elf: A race that is caught between two different worlds and never really belonging to either. They are welcomed amongst humans but often looked down on by their elven ancestor. They tend to combine the best aspects of both races. (Mearls et al.- 38)

- Tiefling: They have human characteristics, but that's about where the similarities end.

They are from an infernal bloodline think demons and devils. They can have wings, horns, tails. They have canine teeth that are so sharp they could almost be considered fangs. They are a very intimidating presence and not necessarily welcome amongst the general populace due to the stereotypes that follow them around. (Mearls et al.- 42) *Variant example seen in figure 10.*

Illustration Gallery

All artwork is original done by myself

Figure 1. Nori Bellimus and Oceanus Aegean, from "The Appalachian Adventurer's" "Ghosts of Strahd" Campaign



Figure 2. Rosella Calintrip / Nahanna Skyborn of Ashabold. Here we see the cracks in Rosella's memory. These characters are from The Fall of the Timekeepers Campaign.



Figure 3. Rosella Calinthrip from The Fall of the Timekeepers. Original Concept Art.



Figure 4. Vitawney Talon, official campaign portrait.



Figure 5. Nori Bellimus. Official campaign portrait.



Figure 6.. Miri Faelyn from *Fall of the Time Keepers*. Character created by Shawna Basallo, interpreted by Sabrina Becker.



Figure 7. Portrait study of Nori Bellimus, after a traumatizing run in with Strahd von Zarovich where she ended up losing most of her hair.



Figure 8. Oceanus Aegean and Nori Bellimus after Strahd attacked Nori in her sleep.



Figure 9. Polka Dot "Dottie" Daxil Official Portrait.



Figure 10. Malice of Thrinlocke. Guest appearance in *Fall of the Timekeepers*. Original Character by Jacob Leblanc, interpretation and official campaign art by Sabrina Becker.



Figure 11. Concept art of Nori Bellimus' oldest son, Thomas.



Figure 12. A second concept piece for Thomas, The oldest son of Nori Bellimus.



Figure 13. Concept art for the sons of Nori Bellimus. Thomas Bellimus and Finnley Aegean.



Figure 14. Concept art of a young Nori Bellimus as she encounters fire for the first time.



Figure 15. The gates to the Wilds of Korith at the edge of the City of Korithine, from Fall of the Timekeepers

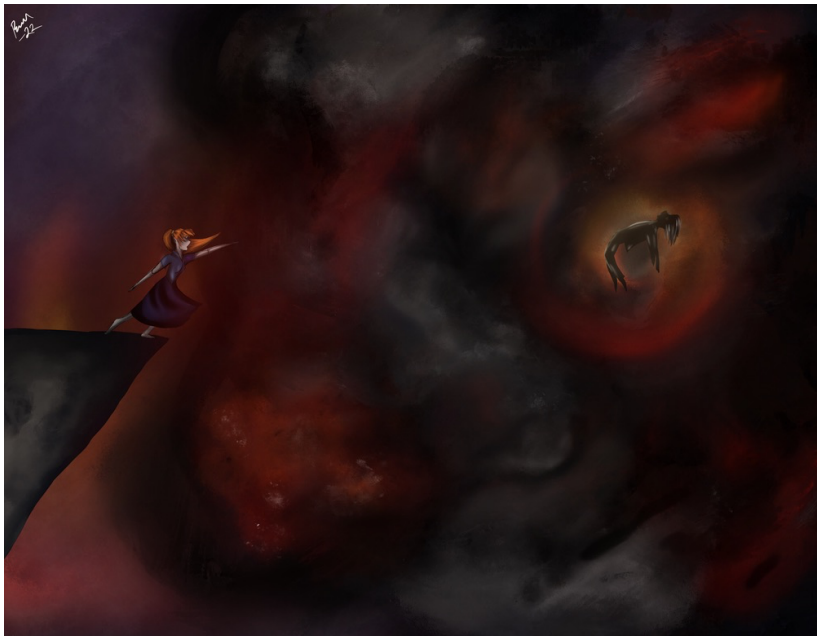


Figure 16. Rosella, The Chaos, and Sammy on the night when Korith fell, and the Timekeepers and their apprentices were killed.

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