

Transcribed by Sena Bryer.

A note for our readers: "Jess" is Jesse's in-game avatar's voice. "Jesse" is the voice of his internal thoughts.

[A wilderness. Birds caw and beasts screech, and behind, a low bass note reverberates.]

The Unknown Dryad: Han Tol's Upper Forest is an ancient wood. The Dryadlands are the eldest in the world of course, but even the wisest druids and the brightest scholars do not know just how old the trees of Southern Han Tol are.

Long ago, centuries before any high elf had graced the land, the woods held magical power. It was a wild, unsettled place at the bottom of the world where few ventured to tread. Some said the forest was holy, others said it was cursed, but the truth has since been forever lost to time.

[A burst of magic as rocky earth crumbles, and a discordant scream echoes.]

The Unknown Dryad: When the Tyrant ripped the continent in two, creating the Spine, it tore apart the forest as well. The woods to the west were eradicated entirely from the great titan's rage, and though those to the east survived, any magic from them was bled.

[The forest sounds disappear, replaced with an eerie wind.]

The Unknown Dryad: Today, the trees of old still remain, but if there was ever power within them, it is gone. Some say they still remember, still long for their glorious past, but their voices are mute, and the forest now is just a forest.

[Fade to silence. The main theme plays.]

Jess: From an untitled work, written by a dryad.

Episode Two: A Queer Ally.

[Rapid footsteps through a forest. Jesse's hurried breaths fade in.]

Jesse: This is not good. This is definitely not good. [Angry at himself] Damn it, Jess, calm down! Calm

down! You won't solve anything with a panic attack.

[He stops running and steadies his breath, calming down a bit.]

Jesse: Return to town first. You can figure out how to proceed from there. [Panicked again] Oh, but there are people in town. PEOPLE people. People who will talk to me and ask questions. What do I say to them? If someone asks me something like 'Why don't you log off?' what do I tell them? Agh! Damn it, Jess, I said no panicking!

[Pause.]

Jess: They WERE there. I know they were.

Jesse: So why are they gone now? And why would the developers make your ability to leave dependent on a stupid feature that could be— [A realization!] Wait a second. Maybe that's it. Maybe this is just a feature—albeit a really bad one—and I just need to progress a bit to get it back!

[A pause, filled with the backdrop of the forest.]

Jesse: Okay, it doesn't make all that much sense. But I've got nothing else to go on right now. I might as well go with it. [Pause] I should tell Ethan.

Jess: [Projecting] Ethan! If you can hear this, I'm going to see if progressing through the game a little fixes the problem, okay?

[Another pause.]

Jesse: Oh right. He can't respond. Well, back to Shin Hil it is, then.

[The forest fades out as the scene transitions back to Shin Hil. The background chatter has grown in volume compared to before.]

Jesse: Wow, it's crowded. And this is still only early access. I had better progress my way out of here before the storm hits tomorrow. First things first though—I need something to hide my hands.

[He opens the door to a shop and walks in, a bell ringing at his entry. The chatter from outside muffles somewhat.]

Jess: Cloth gloves please.

Clothier: One silver, twenty-eight copper.

Jesse: Ergh... I don't have THAT much.

Jess: Can I sell all this stuff first?

[A squish as a bag of loot is dropped onto a counter]

Clothier: [Mumbling] Mm... five, six, er... [Louder] I'll give you five silver for all of that.

Jess: Deal. Cloth gloves please.

[The "Cha-ching!" of a cash register. Jesse grabs the gloves and leaves the shop, the bell ringing once more, and the noise of outside returning.]

Jesse: [Sigh of relief] Yes. Good. Now to continue my quest. [Pause] Uhh... what was my quest again? I can look that up somewhere, right?

[Jesse opens his HUD and scrolls through the menu.]

Jesse: There we go. 'Tell the mayor of Shin Hil of your plight.'

[He closes his HUD.]

Jesse: Simple enough. And looking around I'm going to guess the mayor's house is the only three-story building in the village.

[Scene transition from Jesse walking away to in front of the Mayor's house. The chatter has intensified; it is much busier here.]

Jesse: Well, this is certainly the place.

[Jesse tries to worm his way through the crowd.]

Jess: Excuse me... Excuse me! I need to get through. I— Hey! Don't touch me!

[Jesse scurries past, makes it to the door, and hurries inside. The moment he passes through, an echoing whoosh of air is heard. He sighs.]

Jesse: [Relieved] Oh, thank goodness it's an instanced zone. I did not want to fight all of those people to get to talk to the man.

Zil Zharlei: [Sing-songy, from another room] I'm in here!

Jesse: Or woman. Whoops.

Zil Zharlei: Enter. But wipe the dirt from your feet please. I won't have you staining my rug.

[Jesse lifts his foot.]

Jesse: I don't think they can get dirty.

[He makes his way to the to other room, and Zil Zharlei's voice becomes clearer.]

Zil Zharlei: Falxtooth Tiger, imported all the way from Mothe Gisen. [Pause] So priestess, I hear you hold grim news from Yai Wen.

Jesse: What do I say to this woman? Will she understand whatever I say?

Jess: Y-Yes.

Zil Zharlei: Well? Shall I hear it? What tragedy has befallen the watchmen of the mountain? Bad crop? Landslide cut off a road? Hm? Come now, tell me.

Jesse: Sure, why not? Let's see how smart these computers aren't.

Jess: The town was destroyed.

[Zil Zharlei drops her pen and gasps.]

Zil Zharlei: What!? By whom?

Jess: The dark elves.

Jesse: [Quick] Oh crap, what was their name again?

Jess: Binésa.

[A moment of silence. Zil Zharlei leans back in her chair, and a quiet, somber piano melody plays.]

Zil Zharlei: [Remorseful, but not entirely surprised] I would be lying if I said I was surprised. Yai Wen was always a powder keg waiting to go off, settled so close to Binésan lands as it is. ...Was. [Pause] Personally, I thought its settlement was an unwise decision from the beginning. [She catches her slip-up] I'm sorry. Yai Wen was your home. I should not speak so rudely, and certainly not to a priestess of Bao.

Jesse: My home... I guess neither me nor my character can return home. At least not at the moment.

Zil Zharlei: Were there any others, or are you the lone survivor?

Jess: There are others. Seven of us. One is a baby.

Jesse: And five hundred other players with the exact same quest, but let's just leave it at seven before she realizes her entire existence is a game and goes cuckoo.

Zil Zharlei: Good. I will send word to them at once. They can't have gone far, if they have even left town. In the meantime, I would impart upon your shoulders a task, for the safety of Han Tol.

Jesse: [Relieved] Finally, the quest.

Zil Zharlei: One month ago, the Icewall orcs of the southern tundra set up a camp half a league to the east in a cave. They do not think we know they are there, and that is on purpose. But with this news you bring of Binésa's treachery, their little outpost needs be put down. While they would never admit it, the dark elves of the desert have always enjoyed an alliance with the Icewalls, if ever a fragile one, and we will not allow orcish raids along with dark elf sieges.

Zil Zharlei: I do not ask that you singlehandedly take on the entire camp, however. Merely slay their chieftain. You will know which is him by the cloak. Chieftains always wear a cloak ornamented with hawk feathers.

[A clinking of coins.]

Zil Zharlei: Here, something to buy you better gear for the job. Bao watch over you.

Jesse: Hmm. I want to ask more questions, but time waits for no man.

[His stomach growls.]

Jesse: Nor does my stomach it seems. Man, I'm hungry.

Jess: Thank you, Mayor... uh...

Zil Zharlei: Zil Zharlei

Jess: [Mispronouncing it] Zell... Shar... lee!

[The scene fades out. When it fades in, Jesse is outside, in a quieter environment. A dog can be heard barking far in the distance.]

Jesse: Finally, I'm out of the town. It's pretty dark out now though. I wonder if I'll need a...

[A soft, yet unnatural chime tingles. Jesse stops.]

Jesse: ...light? Did someone just cast a spell on me? Why does everything look like it's glowing?

[He opens his HUD.]

Jesse: No, no spells. What other info can I look through in here? [He scrolls through the list] Stats, okay, looking good. Faction standing, yes, yes. Ooh, 'racial traits' sounds promising. Let's see...

[He selects it.]

Jess: Aha! Infravision! Sweet! I can see in the dark! Must be an elf thing.

[He continues onward, and the scene fades. Fade in to the wilderness. There is a low, resonating voice in the distance breathing heavily and grunting.]

Jesse: My God... You are so ugly, Mr. Orc. Mrs. Orc? Well, whichever, it doesn't look like I'll be able to

sneak by this one. [Nervous] So I'm fighting. All right, White Comet, let's do our thing!

[The spell begins to cast, but then slows down to a stop halfway through.]

Notifications: Out of range!

Jess: Of course. All right, let's get a little closer.

[Jess slowly walks closer, but steps on a twig, which snaps. The orc hears, gasps, and then starting growling heavily.]

Jess: W-Wait, wait, wait! It heard me!? But I'm not ready yet, I—

[The orc roars.]

Jess: Aah! Running away!

[He sprints away, losing the orc in short time.]

Jesse: Oh thank goodness. Monsters don't chase you down to the ends of the earth like in some games. All right, take two, and this time I'll be the one to charge and catch it off-guard! Let's go!

[He charges forward with a battle cry. The orc notices with the same gasp-then-growl routine, but at that point Jesse has already smacked him with his staff. The orc groans in pain.]

Jesse: Got you!

[Something pierces flesh. Jesse inhales sharply.]

Jess: You... stabbed me!

[The orc roars.]

Jess: Running away again! Running away!

[He runs away once again to safety, then casts a healing spell on himself.]

Jess: *Regenerative Wind!*

Jesse: Ugh... I'm so glad I picked a healing class. I did not need a trail of blood attracting every hungry mouth in this forest.

[His stomach growls.]

Jess: I'm sorry! I didn't mean to say the H-word!

[It growls once more, quieter this time.]

Jess: I'll get you some food, I promise. Just let me kill this orc real quick. [Pause] Okay. So! Approach until it notices me. Then stop and begin casting spells. Nuke with spells until it gets within melee range, then beat liberally with stick. Got it. Let's go!

[A lively battle theme plays. Jesse runs out once more, and as soon as the orc grunts, he skids to a stop and casts his spell.]

Jess: *White Comet!*

[The spell impacts with the orc, who roars in pain, but keeps charging. Jesse casts it once more.]

Jess: Again!

[And a third time.]

Jess: And again! All right, here he comes... Get ready... And...!

[The orc roars, and swings his spear, which clangs loudly with Jesse's staff. The orc snarls in anger. Jesse adjusts his footing, then emits a yell as he clubs the orc with his staff. The orc gives a death cry and falls to the ground. Jesse pants heavily, out of breath.]

Jesse: I can't believe I managed to pull that off! This is... going to be a difficult game.

[A sludgy, acidic, dissolving sound.]

Jesse: Aaaaand his corpse just melted. Guess that means he didn't have any loot.

[Pause] All right. No time to waste then. I still don't know how things respawn in this game, and I'd rather find out some other time.

[He hurries to the entrance of the cave, but two more orcs walk out. They spot Jesse with the same series of gasps and grunts.]

Jess: Oh, you've gotta be kidding me...

[The orcs roar.]

Jess: There's two more of them!?

[He flees away.]

Jess: Damn it! How am I supposed to do this on my own!? I mean, maybe if I was a fighter or some melee class, but this is impossible for a spell caster like me!

[Without any warning, a cloaked figure appears.]

Cloaked Figure: Nah, we can't do it either.

Jess: [Surprised] Gah! Who's there!?

Cloaked Figure: Another player stuck on this bloody quest.

Jess: [Leary] I was wondering if anyone else was going to show up. Five million people in front of the mayor's house and not a single one over here. I guess she gives us all different quests.

Cloaked Figure: Sure. [Pause] So, you gonna try once more?

Jess: That depends—are you coming too?

Cloaked Figure: I told you it's impossible.

Jess: Yeah, alone, but there are two of us.

Jesse: I don't like grouping up with this random person, but if it'll get me through the quest and possibly out of the game then I'll take the help.

Jess: What level are you?

Cloaked Figure: Five. You?

Jesse: I'll definitely take the help.

Jess: Just three. But I can heal.

Cloaked Figure: That could make things easier. But we aren't going to be doing much fighting.

Jess: [Distrusting] And why is that?

Cloaked Figure: Because! We're going to sneak in!

Jess: Sneak? Have you looked in there? It's too cramped to sneak through.

Cloaked Figure: Hehe, in there yeah. But did you think to look for a second entrance, little elf?

Jess: [Totally lying]!... well, I thought about it, yeah. [Changing the subject] Wait, what do you mean, 'little elf'? You're an elf too—I can see your ears poking through that hood of yours.

Cloaked Figure: Why, yes I am! And so are you. And so is everyone, really. We're all just a bunch of weird elves.

[A notification appears.]

Notifications: You have been invited into a party.

Jesse: Sure, yes.

[He accepts.]

Jesse: 'Salenia'. So I can read group members' names... I wonder if she'll comment on mine being hidden.

[The scene transitions as they walk along through the forest to a small waterfall. Its waters are loud, but their voices can still easily be heard.]

Salenia: There. Behind that waterfall. The cave's big and open in there. Plenty of room to sneak about.

Jess: CAN I sneak? I'm not a thief like you.

Salenia: I am a knight, thank you very much.

[She unsheathes her sword and shield]

Salenia: So if we do get in a scrap, stay behind me and keep me healed best you can, okay darling?

Jess: Please don't call me darling.

Salenia: Sure thing, love.

[Scene transition as they move past the waterfall and into the cave. The white noise of echoes, bats chirping, and faint dripping of water permeates the air.]

Jesse: Why is this taking so long? I feel like we should have gotten there by now.

[Pause] Maybe this was a bad idea. We should have just charged the entrance. With the two of us I'm sure we can do it. We're a tank and a healer after all. Yeah, I'm going to tell her that—

Salenia: BOO!

[Startled, Jess lets out a very girly scream. Salenia bursts into snarky laughter.]

Jess: What the hell's wrong with you!?! And don't touch me!

Salenia: Ahaha, sorry, couldn't help it. You were staring into space so hard you made such a huge target of yourself.

Jess: [Still angry] Are you sure this is the right way?

Salenia: Of course I am—a bloke back in town told me it was.

Jess: A...

Salenia: ...bloke. That's English for 'man'. You do speak English, don't you?

Jess: WOW. RUDE. [Pause] So you don't think he may have been lying? Or setting you up for a trap?

Salenia: No! No, not a chance. I know a trap when I see one. By the way, you probably shouldn't scream so loud next time.

Jesse: 'Next time'!?

Salenia: You'll wake the whole camp.

Jess: Well excuse me for not coming all in thief gear so I could be a little sneakier. Seriously, look—the wardrobe coordinates real well, I'll give you that, but what kind of a knight are you anyway, wearing a get-up like that? I can't even see your face.

Salenia: A knight who'd rather get the job done than get herself killed, that's what kind. And it's not 'thief gear'—I started the game with it.

Jess: Well, good 'job done' then, scaring the daylights out of me like that. You know, because we're trying to keep quiet here. You might as well just take it off. The stat difference is always negligible this early on in the game, and you don't look very 'knightly' in it.

Salenia: [Nervous] I'd rather not. I like it! And erm... it's my uh... well, my face.

Jess: Your face? What, did you mess up in the character creator and make yourself look stupid? It's early enough, just restart and—"

Salenia: It's not that! [Pause] Just forget it. [Sudden] And you've got an orc about to— [A loud thump. Jesse squeaks in virtual pain, as sound gets muffled and a faint ringing is heard.]

Salenia: [Fighting] Hyah! Hah!

[Weapons clang twice, then metal slices flesh and an orc cries out in death. Sound returns to him.]

Salenia: [Slightly out of breath.] Funny! I thought they'd be a lot harder than that. He went down pretty fast.

Jess: [Still a little disoriented] You... You mean this whole time you haven't fought a single orc?

Salenia: Sure haven't! That was the first one.

Jess: Then what was all this about [mocking Salenia's voice] 'nah, we can't fight them either'?

Salenia: Oh. Well... I don't know, they looked bloody tough. Don't you think so? Mean, ugly, piggy bastards. [Snorts]

Jesse: I really hope this gets me out of here.

Jess: So can we finally stop trying to sneak our way in and just clean house already?

Salenia: Sure!

[They hurry further into the cave as the scene fades out. It fades back in to the two already engaged in a fight, with the same battle music from earlier playing.]

Salenia: There he is!

[The orc chieftain roars, louder than all the others.]

Jess: [a little nervous] Oh... he's a big guy.

Salenai: I can take him!

Jess: Are you sure?

[A pair of war dogs arrive on the field, barking angrily.]

Salenia: Yes! You take care of those two!

Jess: O-Okay!

[Jesse casts a White Comet at one of the dogs.]

Jess: *White Comet!*

[A loud snapping noise echoes throughout the cavern as the spell hits, and the dog yelps in pain, dead.]

Jess: Whoa! A critical hit! Did you see—

Salenia: Little busy here!

Jesse: Right, duh. I need to—

[The second dog pounces on Jesse, pinning him to the ground, barking and snapping its teeth. Jesse drops his staff.]

Jess: Agh! Get off, dog! Get off!

Jesse: Not good, not good! I've only got a third of my health left! [Pause.] No, I am NOT going down! Not while I'm still bugged like this! If I can just... get it...

[Jesse casts another White Comet!]

Jess: There!

[The spell hits, and while this one doesn't crit, it still ends the dog in one hit. A loud DING! sounds from Jesse leveling up. He stands.]

Jess: Salenia! I'm out of mana! Will you be able to—

[Salenia's blade slices through the chieftain, splattering blood. The chieftain groans, then falls to the ground with a thud. The battle music fades out.]

Salenia: [out of breath] Well... that was fun!

Jess: [also out of breath] Yeah, but don't ask me to do it again anytime soon.

Salenia: [small chuckle] All right then. [Pause.] Let's divvy up his loot. Roll on the cloak?

Jess: Uh, sure. How do we do that?

Salenia: In your menu, all the way at the bottom,

[Jesse opens up his HUD and finds it. A twenty-sided die rolls along the ground.]

Jess: Three.

Salenia: Hah! Easy.

[She rolls a die as well.]

Salenia: Really? A two?

[The 'Item received' sound effect plays.]

Notifications: Obtained Hawk Feather Cloak!

Salenia: Well, all right. C'mon, you lucky girl, let's see it.

Jess: Later. I want to be out of here.

Salenia: Meh. Fine. Let's go then.

Jess: There's still one more item though. [Reading the name] Orcish Pot Helm. Level 4 headgear. Armor: 4. Attack +2. Defense +2. That's really great for you, isn't it?

Salenia: Yeah, it is, but...

Jess: But what?

Salenia: But I like what I'm wearing...

Jesse: Salenia, c'mon...

Jess: There, I passed on it. Now put it on. I'll even wear the cloak, see?

Jesse: Man, this would look way better if I were a guy right now.

Salenia: Fine.

[Salenia equips the pot helm.]

Jess: [Stunned] Y... You're...

Salenia: I'm... what? Hideous with this thing on? I did try to warn you.

Jess: [Terrified] You're a dark elf! You're here to kill me! Just like...

[Salenia growls, and starts walking towards Jesse.]

Jesse: Just like that other guy! This was a trap! All of it! I should've known! She even hinted that it was and I was too stupid to catchon!

Jess: G-Get back!

[Salenia flicks Jesse's staff away with her sword. Jess recoils in fear.]

Jesse: She's in my party, right? She can't harm me because of—

Notifications: Party disbanded.

Jesse: [Sobbing] AAAHH!! She's going to kill me! [Pause] Wait. I just leveled up. Did I get a new spell? Oh please, oh please, oh please...

Salenia: It's just S—

Jess: *Flash of Light!*

[An instantly cast spell goes off with a magical pop, like a flashbulb. Sal shrieks, and Jesse wastes no time in running away.]

[Fade in to Jesse reaching Shin Hil once again. He sits down to rest, catching his breath.]

Jesse: How stupid can you be, Jess!? If you hadn't lucked out with that spell, you'd be dead! [Pause.] But you're safe for now, so that's what matters. You can't be harmed within sanctuary zones—that's what they said. [Pause.] Of course... they also said you could log out.

Jess: I can't trust anyone...

Credits, read by Sena Bryer: This was episode 2 of Dreambound. Dreambound is written, directed, produced, and edited by Sena Bryer. The role of Sal was played by Ta'Neal Chandler. The role of Zil Zharlei was played by Bonnie Bogovich. The Unknown Dryad was played by Saoirse Connolly. The Notifications voice and the clothier were played by Sena Bryer.

Dreambound's main theme is "Blue Light" by Pinofas. Other music used in this episode was by Austin Miller, Rafael Crux, and Kevin MacLeod. Proper attribution can be found on our website at www.senabryer.com/dreambound.

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you'd like to help keep the show running. Check us out at www.patreon.com/dreamboundpod for more information. With your support, we can continue producing more episodes of Dreambound by making sure our actors, editors, and everyone else involved are paid for their hard work!

I also, of course, have to give an extra special shout-out to everyone who helped out in donating to the Season 1 fundraising campaign we ran through Seed & Spark. It wasn't an easy time for anyone back in the summer of 2020, but you all pulled through and made this silly dream of mine a reality. So.. with that being said... [Clears throat.]

[Record scratch.]

Cue music.

[A lofi hip-hop beat starts.]

[Singing] Yeah! All right! This is for everyone! Seed & Spark! Y'all know who y'all are, heh.

Stanley Sitzman, starting us off! Much love to you...

Caroline Mincks, most definitely seen, ha ha...

Claudia Elvidge, a beacon for us all!

Megan Carnes, my partner in crime, much love...

Lisette Alvarez, with the magic, couldn't do it without you!

Tal Minear, a ray of sunshine! Much love my friend...

Austin Miller, with the beats! Who y'all think y'all listening to? Hah!

Whitney Johnson, too much to say and not enough time to say it...

Phoebe Shalloway, no rage, just love...

Jorien Hattink, you were there for me, much love to you...

Quinn Desai, my friend, we'll get through this, you know we will...

Cass McPhee, keep on shining man, much love!

Evan Tess Murray, the man, the myth, the legend!

Veronica A., couldn't have done without you...

Cousday, much love my friend! Stay strong!

Alex Durham, man, you know I gotta say thanks!

Graham Reid, my brother, I'll see you soon...

Richard Roberts, the supervillain himself, bringing it in!

Garrett VanValkenburg, the brains of this outfit!

Michael Hudson, I appreciate everything you've done for me... Much love...

Daniel Axelrod, every day with the support! Ha ha!

Leslie Joyce, too much love, not enough time...

Preston Williams, closing it out, bringing us home!
And of course, Seed & Spark, and everyone that helped.
Stay safe in the game, my friends, and we'll see you there.