

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 mischievous theme plays, as students settle in for class. A teacher, Brin Gapri, taps a stick of chalk on the board to get their attention, and the students quiet.]

Brin Gapri: [Lecturing] Of the two Elvish languages--some would consider them distant dialects--High is closer than Dark to their common mother tongue, due to the Thaarian Conquest of the 15th century never reaching Han Tol.

The basic syntax of High Elvish is Verb-Subject-Object, but determiners such as 'the' and 'that', as well as basic pronouns, change depending on their position within a sentence, so the word order can be played with in certain circumstances, often for poetic effect.

The words themselves are never more than one syllable--the only exception being family names, which are always two. Some words may seem like compounds to us, but the high elves they are separate, simply used with one another very often. This is in stark contrast to Dark Elvish, where they are mashed together to form longer words. Regardless, they always follow a strict construction. Here are some examples of High Elvish words:

[He writes a quick symbol in chalk before saying each word.]

Brin Gapri: *Ti.* 'Six'.

Yaom. 'To cry'.

Shar. 'Death'.

Fei. 'Dream'.

Wul. 'Thunder'.

O vun. 'why'.

Zer in. 'Male priest'

[He writes a longer sentence.]

Brin Gapri: And when put together in sentences: *Em wa li far Brin Gapri.* 'My name is Brin Gapri.'

Wain ur Han Tol li pel Bao. 'The elves of Han Tol pray regularly to Bao.'

[Outside the hall, a bell rings. Students begin getting out of their chairs and leaving the classroom.]

Brin Gapri: Oh! Everyone, don't forget--test this Thursdays! All right, I'll see you tomorrow!

[The scene fades out, and the main theme plays.]

Jess: From the lectures of Brin Gapri.

Jess: Episode 10: Proto's Proposal.

[Fade in to a loud, bustling plaza in Soi Fen. A chime indicates Jesse has activated guildchat.]

Jess: Hey, Robin. You still there?

Robin: Ah! She returns! And how was the tower?

Jess: Sparkly. There's a thing here--

Robin: At the tower?

Jess: No, in the middle of town. It looks like the portal from that old movie with the space Egyptians. What was it called?

Robin: Stargate?

Jess: Yeah, that's it. Stargate.

Robin: The reboot or the original?

Jess: I don't know. The reboot, I guess. The original was made in like the 1980s, wasn't it? Do I sound like an old m-- [Pause.] ...woman?

Jesse: I definitely almost said man there.

Robin: Well, you do use very proper English. A quality most admirable!

Jesse: Again, kinda rude.

Jess: Sure. What does this portal do? Can I go from city to city with this thing?

Robin: You can! Or rather, once you've visited another one of its partners, you can. There's one in all the major cities.

Jess: Do I have to do anything special to use it?

Robin: I haven't a clue. I passed by the one here in Ostbenn, but I didn't take a closer look at it. Proto would probably know.

Jess: Hm. So I guess I'm stuck here for the meantime.

Robin: Unfortunately so. We shall have to remain apart ever longer! Alas, wherefore art thou high elf?

Sal: Yeah, real unfortunate. Stuck in some beautiful city where you can walk about freely and don't have to hide your pretty little face for fear of being killed. Absolutely dreadful, that.

Jesse: Oh, here we go.

Robin: Miss Salenia, my lady of the moon! So glad to see you! It's just not the same without your gorgeous face to brighten the night sky!

Sal: Robin, mate, you can't see me. You've never seen me before at all. I could be as ugly as an orc for all you know.

Jesse: Hey, wasn't that my line? [Pause.] Robin's right--Proto probably knows. I'll ask him later. For now, the First Temple of Bao. If it's the place I think it is, it should be right down this side street.

[The scene fades out as he walks away, and fades back in to a quieter part of the city.]

Jesse: This is the place. [Pause.] Very homey. And old.

Jess: Mx. Inquisitor, may I enter?

First Temple Guard: Of course, priestess.

Jess: Thank you.

[Jesse walks inside the temple, entering an instance.]

Old Man: [Kindly] Welcome. Have you come to hold service or just to pray?

Jess: No, I'm here to find someone.

[A pause. The old man does not respond.]

Jesse: Did he not catch that?

Jess: I'm looking for someone.

[Still nothing.]

Jess: I'm looking for a person.

[Silence.]

Jess: [Sighs] To pray.

Old Man: Of course. I'm sure you'll be a most welcome sight here. Mother Ven is in the common room if you wish to see her.

Jesse: Hopefully Mother Ven has a larger vocabulary than you do.

[Jesse walks carefully through the quiet of the temple.]

Jesse: Lots of priests in here. Or maybe they're apprentices? [Pause.] Mother Ven's obviously not one of the men. And I doubt she's young. That still leaves like four old women to choose from. Here, I'll ask this kid.

Jess: Excuse me...

Ren: You... I remember you!

Jesse: It's the boy... The one from the carriage. Huh, what do you know-- that Lionet guy was right.

Jess: Yai Wen.

Ren: [Nodding] Mm-hmm.

Jess: I didn't know you were a priest too.

Jesse: Or is he? He's even younger than my character.

Ren: N-No! I'm just an acolyte, of course. Not a priestess like you... er--I mean priest. Wait no--I meant... [Pause.] I uh... I just joined, actually.

[A soft, somber melody begins to play.]

Jesse: Oh no. I smell a tragic backstory coming.

Ren: It's funny. If you had asked me a year ago... Not even that--just a week ago if I had ever thought of joining the faith I probably would have laughed, or called you crazy. But now... well, everything's changed for me. My older brother, Tao--do you remember him?

Jesse: Nod along, Jess, just nod along.

Ren: He was a leatherworker. After Yai Wen was attacked he told me he knew a man in Divide's End that he could work for, continuing his trade, and he even said I could learn there as well. I was so hopeful... my old home was gone, but here was a new one in a strange land, where every day would be an adventure and...

[Ren sniffles, and starts to cry.]

Ren: But things... didn't go as planned. We were on the road yesterday when a trio of dark elves ambushed us. I managed to escape, but... but Tao wasn't so lucky. The man in Lagan wouldn't take me without my brother, I know it, so... here I am. I've only been here one night, but I get the feeling that's how most of us came to be here. Nowhere to go, nothing to do but turn to Bao and pray, so why not make a living out of it? Is that why you joined?

[The music suddenly stops.]

Jess: Uh...

Jesse: Does my character even have a backstory? Should I know it? Do I get to make it up? She's supposed to be from Yai Wen--I know that much. Why would this little girl become a priestess?

[A pause. The music returns, this time a bit more uplifting.]

Jesse: All I can think of why I chose the class. I knew I didn't want to be anything whose job it was get to beaten up, so fighter, knight, and monk were out immediately. Minstrel might have been incredibly cute, but incredibly cute was Ethan's intent, not mine. And I can't sing to save my life anyway. Same went for hunter--I have no idea how to use a bow and arrow.

Summoner I remember I decided against because while controlling minions to do your bidding may be fun when you're sitting on a couch and can multitask, in a VR game I'd just be standing there waiting for the fight to be over already, and that sounded boring. Druids I figured were the same deal.

I did seriously consider thief, to play the game not to do battle with ferocious monster and win glory and all that fluff, but to be the silent player who wins his fights with cunning and with tactics. However, there was the chance the game might not let me play around that much, and instead I'd just be a dagger-wielding little dwarf with a lovely view of all the monster butt I could ever hope for as I backstabbed my way to victory.

So in the end it was between priest and wizard, and I chose priest. But now... Now I'm wondering why I did. What made me choose a healer over a damage dealer? I've never really had a preference between the two. Maybe... Maybe I...

Jess: I guess I just wanted to help people.

Ren: Maybe I will too.

Jess: The dark elves... Where did they ambush you?

Jesse: It's good to know the NPC boy found his purpose in life, but I need to get back to why I came here in the first place.

Ren: The road north that leads to Lagan, along the Sea of Nalia. We hadn't gotten far actually--I still can't believe the Binésans were so close to Soi Fen. [Pause.] Come to think of it, we weren't far from the Ar Sha Caverns. You don't think that's where they're hiding, do you?

Jesse: I absolutely do.

Jess: Maybe. I'm helping the Inquisition find the Binésan assassins, so I'll tell them where to look.

[A pause. Ren has no response.]

Jess: We'll avenge your brother.

Ren: Thank you! Thank you!

Jesse: 'Avenge'. 'Brother'. Just find the keywords, Jess.

Ren: I wish you the best of luck! O-Oh! I'm sorry... rather, I mean... [Pause.] Bao watch over you.

Jess: Mm-hmm. And over you as well.

[Jesse goes to leave the temple, passing by the old man.]

Old Man: Come again, priestess!

Jess: Learn some new phrases and I might.

[He exits the instance, stepping back outside, and takes in a deep breath of the air, pleased.]

Sal: [In guildchat] Hey, Racist. You still in Soi Fen?

[Jesse sighs, his pleasant moment ruined.]

Jesse: Ugh...

Jess: [Annoyed] Yes, I am still in Soi Fen.

Sal: Oh wow, I didn't think you'd actually respond to that. You must really be one, after all. Cheers for being honest. By the way, look behind you.

[Before Jesse can do that, Sal rests a heavy, gauntleted hand on his shoulder.]

Sal: [No longer in guildchat] Heya.

[Jesse shrieks and slaps the hand away, backing up from Sal. Sal laughs.]

Jess: I thought I made it clear--DO NOT TOUCH ME!

Sal: [Still laughing] Ahh, that's never going to get old.

Jess: You came all the way here just to torture me, didn't you?

Sal: If thinking that helps you sleep at night, sure. [Pause.] The bossman wanted me to relay a message to you.

Jess: 'The bossman'?

Sal: The chief, the leader fearless, the master of spells, the wizard of lizard, who do you think I'm talking about? Proto wanted the three of us to run a dungeon for, as he put it, 'bonding'.

[Jesse lets out a seething groan at the idea.]

Sal: Yeah, I'm not too happy at the prospect either. But maybe, just maybe, you could try to be a team player, short stuff?

Jesse: Oh shove off.

Jess: Well, it just so happens I have one I need to do. [Pause.] And it's even a damp, stinky cavern, just like I know you love.

Sal: Well, then we just need the big oaf to log on so we can get it over with. Where is he, anyway? He usually gets on much earlier than this.

Jesse: Gee, maybe he has, you know... work?

Jess: Who knows?

Jesse: Hey, Mx. Inquisitor? Feel free to kill my friend here. She's only wearing a hood and mask--it's really not hard to tell she's a dark elf.

Sal: You leave something in that old place? Your knitting needles, nan? Here, I'll go get them for you. Stay here.

Jess: I didn't leave anything.

Jesse: Though I kind of wish I had just so I could get away from this conversation.

Jess: You? Offering a kind gesture?

Sal: Am I not allowed to? Oh, right! I'm supposed to be evil and cruel and sadistic. Goodness, thank you--I'd almost forgotten my part. [Cutting the act] Bossman might have a change of heart if he sees us together without you blowing up in a tiny, little fury.

Jess: [Sarcastically] Of course, it's all my fault, isn't it?

Sal: Yes. You who upon taking one look at my lovely blue face transformed into the bloody National-- [Pause.] You know what, never mind. Not worth the effort.

Jess: It's not like they'd let you in there anyway.

Sal: They might. As long as I'm wearing this, no NPC knows I'm a--

Jess: [Sly] A what? Go on.

Sal: Oh, you would like that, wouldn't you, you little goblin? [Pause.] I was going to say they would know I'm such a beautiful woman, and seeing you we all can tell they don't allow beautiful women to become priestesses.

Jess: AGH! That's it! I've had all I can stand of you! Do whatever the hell you want until Proto logs on, but stay away from me! Okay!?

[A pause.]

Sal: [Low] And just what should I do until then?

Jess: I don't care. Level. You're two levels behind me, aren't you? Catch up.

Sal: [Quiet, angry] Yeah, fine. I'll do that.

[Sal walks away, leaving Jesse alone. He lets out an exasperated sigh.]

Jesse: Finally. [Pause.] I'm going to go back to that portal. Figure that out. Whatever it takes to keep my mind off of her.

[The scene fades out, replaced by a slightly busier part of the city accompanied by the ethereal, magical tones of a portal device. Fade in to Jesse's voice from quiet.]

Jess: Yes, thank you, I understand, the portals were created by the djinni who are now extinct and the secrets to their creation are lost. But we can still use them, right? How do I use it?

Elven Scholar: Oh, well, yes, hm, you see, it has something to do with the licenses, yes. Now, the license is not a piece of paper with some scribbles on it, no, but a magical item that rests within the soul, you see? Much like the voicelink. It's all very mysterious, hm, yes.

Jess: Okay, that's good to know. How do I actually get one?

Elven Scholar: Oh, get one? Get one, yes, well, you see, they come from each individual portal, so unless you have one's specific license, there's no means to use it. And the cities, they regulate who receives and who does not, so, well, there's no worry of, hm... undesirables... coming in.

Jesse: So it keeps players from going to every area right off the bat.

Jess: How much does one cost?

Elven Scholar: Oh, well, hm, I don't really know. It fluctuates, you see. Usually around two- or three-hundred gold, I believe, yes.

Jesse: Oof. Too rich for this kid.

Jess: Thanks.

Elven Scholar: Of course, yes, hm. Jesse and the scholar PART WAYS, Jesse heading towards the nearby bazaar.

Jesse: I'll just stick to what I can afford. Which means a trip to the bazaar. I'd been meaning to check this place out anyway, and it's not too far away from where I am now.

[The scene fades out, switching to Jesse walking through the bazaar. Hawkers shout their wares, bells ring, and crowds are on the move.]

Jesse: Gotta say, I really was not expecting to find so much stuff I could buy. Like, weapons, armor, potions and stuff, sure, but there was like furniture, toys, raw materials, all sorts of stuff. I'm not sure if this new robe was the smartest purchase out of everything I could have gotten, but it sure does look nice. Not too extravagant, but not too plain. Oh my god, but the food!

Jess: [Taking a bite] It's so good!

Jesse: But yeah, lots of stuff. And I am pretty sure that guy who told me I was too young to go into his store was selling NPC prostitutes. Which is kinda silly, 'cause there's no way the game would let you have... [Pause.] Wait. I just realized I have never seen my character naked. Do I have a-- No, never mind. Don't need to know. Tossing that thought aside.

[A pause. Jesse turns a corner, and the crowd gets a little louder.]

Jesse: Whoa. Big crowd.

Goldseller: Best deals anywhere! Twenty-four dollars for one-hundred fold! Forty for two-hundred! www.bestcash.club!

Jesse: [Snickering] They never give up, do they?

[Jesse walks a little further, then stops.]

Jesse: Hey, wait a sec. Is that... Yeah, that is--that's that guildleader from Southreach. Er... what was her name again? Did I learn it?

[He continues.]

Jesse: She's headed the same way I am. [Pause.] I'm not following her though. I'm just going back to my government-issued house. That's all. Because I'm not super curious about whatever she's doing. Not at all. So I'll leave her be. See? There she goes, off into a side street. [Inquisitive] ...with some mysterious hooded figure. [Back to normal] But I don't care about that. I'm just going to keep on down the main road, and... and I'm following her down the side street. You're hopeless, Jess.

[Jesse trails the two down the side street. The loudness of the bazaar fades into the distance.]

Jesse: It looked like she knew the person, but I couldn't tell who it was. Too short to be the priest or the fighter or the paralyzed guy. The hunter, maybe? Augh, but why do I care? I don't! Right?

[He stops suddenly.]

Jesse: Oh crap, they've stopped. Hide!

[He hurriedly rushes to a hiding place and is quiet.]

[The hooded figure speaks, and their voice is pitch-modulated to disguise it.]

Hooded figure: Far enough?

The Guildleader: Someone could hear us. Best we find somewhere more private.

Hooded figure: It's a city. There will always be ears.

The Guildleader: You know what I mean. Real ears.

Hooded figure: [Soft laughter] You would be surprised. [Pause.] Don't worry--mine is the only mouth you need to silence.

[The Guildleader growls.]

Jesse: I shouldn't even be here. But it's too damned late now. If I move out from this spot they'll notice me for sure.

The Guildleader: You're lucky we're in a sanctuary or I'd--

Hooded figure: Or you'd what? Kill me? Wouldn't I just come back? It's just a video game, after all. That's how things work in a video game, isn't it?

The Guildleader: You don't know what kind of power I have now.

Jesse: She doesn't really think she can kill someone, does she? Like kill kill? I mean, I admit part of why I've been so fearful of dying is because of those stupid TV shows where dying in the game makes you die for real, but those were just TV shows, right? I've seen players die--if you kicked the bucket outside as well I would've heard about it by now and the game would've been shut down.

Hooded figure: I know exactly what kind of power you have, and I know exactly how you got it. And that's why you are going to do something for me, because otherwise I might have trouble keeping my mouth shut.

The Guildleader: [Snarling] And what would that be?

Hooded figure: A simple task. I just need you to--

Proto: [In guildchat] Hey, everyone! Sorry I'm late! There was an emergency!

The Guildleader: [Disbelief] That's it?

Hooded figure: That's it.

Jesse: Augh! Proto! I missed it! What did they say!?

Sal: If your mum's in the hospital, we're not going to make you get on, you know.

Proto: No, no! Not that kind of emergency. Emergency at work.

Sal: Okay, so your boss is in the hospital. Same deal.

The Guildleader: You're asking me to do something in conflict with my guild's interest. What if I say no?

Hooded figure: Do I really need to answer that?

Proto: Is Jess on?

The Guildleader: Right. So how should I go about doing it? Quietly?

Sal: Might be. She was on earlier.

Hooded figure: [Quiet] Anonymously.

Sal: Also, she *is* in the guild now, so you can ask her yourself. I think since she didn't say anything, that would mean the answer is 'no'.

Jesse: I'll say something in just a moment, just hold on!

The Guildleader: Very well. But since you know the reason behind my secrecy, it's only fair that I know the reason behind yours, because as it stands, you're making no sense. Why do you want me to do this? I thought it was 'just a video game'.

Hooded figure: Not for everyone. To some of us, It's become life or death. It's become our reality...

[A low, discordant note plays.]

Jesse: Oh my god...

Hooded figure: ...that we cannot escape from.

Jesse: I'm... I'm not the only one! He's also...

Proto: I hope she gets on soon. I really wanted to do this.

Jesse: No way. No, to hell with Proto's dungeon--this just became priority number one. [Pause.] But I need to let him know that I can't come.

[Guildchat beeps on.]

Jess: [Quiet whispering] I'm here, but I can't talk right now.

Proto: Oh hi! Why can't you talk?

The Guildleader: Who's there!?

Jesse: Crap!

Sal: If she can't talk, she can't very well answer you, can she?

Hooded figure: I didn't hear anything.

The Guildleader: I did. Someone is listening.

[Jesse's heart thumps loudly.]

Jesse: I can't let her find me! What if... what if she was really serious? She all but said she really could kill someone. And the other one, the one like me, they believed her. This... This is more than a just a game to them. Do I dare it? Do I play it safe and leave them be? The idea of waiting for a patch is still there... Agh, but he's right here! Right now! I could finally have an ally! A real friend who understands what I've been through! Jess, what the hell are you doing? Stand up! Stand up!

[Jesse stands up, but the two are gone.]

Jess: No...

Jesse: They're gone. But when did they...?

[He walks down the alley looking for them, but they cannot be found.]

Jesse: Did I just make it all up in my head? No, that's ridiculous. You just lost them, that's all, Jess. [Pause.] You lost your shot.

[He sighs, and slumps to his knees. Guildchat beeps on.]

Jess: [Emotionless] I'm back. Ar Sha Caverns. I'll meet you there.

Proto: Hah! I told you, Sal!

Sal: [Admitting defeat] Yeah, you did.

Proto: I'm already there, and Sal's on the way. It's not a far walk from the city--just exit via the northern lifts and follow the Spine north, not even a mile. You can't miss it! Are you able to come now?

Jess: Yeah.

Proto: Great! Thanks! I know this'll be a ton of fun!

Notifications: You have been invited into a party.

[Jesse accepts, and the scene fades out. Fade in to the grinding of gears from the great lifts that go up and down the Spine.]

Jesse: I'm probably never going to see that person again. Or maybe I will, but I won't know it's them, since they were hidden. [Pause.] Ugh. That's what I should do. Hide myself instead of wearing flashy garbage like this. What was I thinking? Next chance I get I'm trading this in for something concealing. It works for Sal--it'll work for me.

I wonder what Ethan thought of that interaction. Well, if he was even watching, that is. He can't watch me all the time--he's in med school after all. Summer classes. And he's playing this game too. Although now that I think about it he probably has some bots running, listening for specific words and phrases.

[Jesse smacks his cheeks in frustration.]

Jess: Ugh! Stop! Thinking! About! Him! Jess! Just think on the task ahead. The dungeon. You're running a dungeon. Dungeons mean a lot of fighting, and a lot of fighting while plagued with anxiety and doubt means a lot of dying.

Jesse: And after the conversation I just witnessed, dying has become a lot scarier than it was.

[The lift stops, having reached the bottom. Its gate groans open, and Jesse steps out.]

Notifications: You are now leaving a sanctuary.

Jesse: Yes. Definitely no dying.

[Guildchat beeps on.]

Jess: You said follow the Spine north, right?

Jesse: No caves I can see from here, so it must be a bit further in. Past that wood.

Proto: Yep! Are you there now?

[Jesse begins to respond, but a tingling stops him. Static electricity builds in the air.]

Jess: I... Huh?

[It buzzes, crackles, and then a fierce bolt of lightning smashes atop Jesse's head, filling the air with thunder. Stunned by the attack, Jesse falls to the ground.]

Proto: [Worried] Jess? What was that noise?

[Proto's voice grows distant, muffled]

Proto: What happened? Jess? Jess!?

[All sound fades out, save for footsteps in the dirt, nearing.]

Attacker: Heh heh heh. Got her.

Credits, read by Sena Bryer: This was episode 10 of Dreambound. Dreambound is written, directed, produced, and edited by Sena Bryer. The role of Jesse was played by Brandon Acosta and Daisy Guevara. The role of Sal was played by Ta'Neal Chandler. The role of Proto was played by Kyle Nishimura. The role of Robin was played by Tarek Esaw. The role of the Guildleader was played by Cole Burkhardt. The role of Brin Gapri was played by Kyle Wallace. The role of Ren was played by Pavle Vasiljevic. The First Temple guard was played by Dallis MacKenzie. The elven scholar was played by Kevin Cutliffe. The mysterious hooded figure was played by Ken Vo. The also-quite-mysterious attacker at the end of the episode was played by Joe Cliff Thompson. The old man at the temple, the goldseller, and the notifications voice were played by Sena Bryer.

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

And if you like what you've heard, by all means leave us a review wherever you get your podcasts. [Whispers] They just added that to Spotify recently! [Speaks normally] Or follow us on Twitter @dreamboundpod. And we also have a Patreon if you'd like to help keep the show running. Eh? Eh? 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 that our actors, our editors, and everyone else involved in this show are paid for their hard work!

Stay safe everyone, and we'll see you in the game.