

Compelled Dual

Season Two Episode Twenty-One: Family Portrait, Part Two

Cast:

Barry: DM, NPCs and voice of Leo

Al: DM, NPCs and voice of Phi

A: Hey Barry.

B: Hey, Al.

A: What mountain do players scale to gain a level?

B: I don't know.

A: Experience Point. It's time for Compelled Dual.

[INTRO MUSIC]

A: Hello everybody, and welcome back to Compelled Dual. I'm Al.

B: And I'm Barry.

A: And we are a single-player, co-DMed, D&D 5E actual-play podcast.

B: Previously, on Compelled Dual.

[RECAP STARTS]

B: You hear, from the door, a metallic rattle.

Mia: Well, shit fire, I guess this thing is really stuck. Alright, stud, do your thing.

Fen: Hey! Long time no see, lot of stuff has changed. Uh, the world's on fire, I thought you died for a bit, I figured out that I also like men, now?

Kalessa: Someone will have heard that, so we need to get all of you out of bondage, and, uh, [laughs] *fucking move!*

Phi: I'll be damned. He did do it, huh?

Leo: Yeah. He really did.

Phi: My brother and I have good reason to believe that our father killed his - and your - brother, Valoran. For the purpose of extending the Voldhuran War.

Nora: Oh my God.

Zed: It occurs to me I may have, uh... forgotten to add something to our conversation on the train?

Leo: Don't worry about it, I'm capable of basic inferencing. Something something, you were better off before you met me, something something, I ruined your life.

Zed: I was gonna say I love you too, actually.

Eron: I am so sorry to interrupt, dear. Um, the Archduchess is here to see you?

Phi: The *who*?

B: In the hallway outside, you hear the *click* of high heels on the tile, closely followed by the offbeat percussion of a cane. The Archduchess of Astraria, Elasha Dacaryn, looks from your uncle, to your aunt, to you, nods grimly, and says

Elasha: Alright. Well, it seems we all need to talk.

[RECAP ENDS]

B: We open up right where we left off with Phi. You are standing in your aunt Nora's study, with your aunt, your uncle Eron, and the woman who raised you. Elasha Dacaryn is standing in the doorway, long magnificent gown trailing behind her, a gleaming circlet on her head, and has just been reintroduced to you as the Archduchess of Astraria. You see your aunt Nora's grip around her wineglass go white-knuckled, and she stands up and moves to go sit behind her desk. She looks over at your uncle, and goes

Nora: Eron, sweetie, we are being terrible hosts right now. How about you go downstairs, and get the kids, and our new guests, and take them out for some evening entertainment. Maybe to the night market?

B: Your uncle frowns at her.

Eron: I-Is that what we need to really be worrying about right now?

B: And she cuts him off.

Nora: Of course it is! I would hate to appear rude, so maybe you should just go get all of them and take them somewhere *outside the house*, Eron.

B: He then gets the picture, and nods shakily before turning to Elasha, dipping a little bow.

Eron: Your majesty.

B: And fucking books it. He's down the hall, gone. Nora is still sitting behind her desk, she has not moved, and Elasha hasn't either.

A: Phi grits her teeth, and reaches up to touch her fingers to the base of her neck, gives a very wide, very strained smile, and says

Phi: *Archduchess.* How... *wonderful* to see you, after all these months.

B: Elasha sweeps into the room, sets her cane down next to one of the armchairs, and reaches up to get your face in both of her hands. She hooks one finger under the streak of your hair that has gone white, after your incident with the lightning strike, and looks deeply saddened.

[TIMESTAMP - 5:08]

Elasha: Oh, thank Kimryl you're alright. What's *happened* to you?

B: And then she seems to remember herself, and takes a step back, picks her cane back up, and turns over to Nora.

Elasha: Nora, I know this is going to sound a little odd, but, as a favor to an old battle-buddy, would you perhaps mind... not discussing Phirora's arrival with anybody for now?

B: Your aunt Nora laughs, with absolutely no humor in it, and stands up from behind her desk very sharply.

Nora: [laughs] Oh, that horse has left the barn, Elasha, believe me. The first thing I did was reach out to Boreas and Jorana with a *lot* of the new information that I have learned today.

B: Elasha smiles at her very tightly, and you have known her long enough to see the threat that is lying just beneath the surface of it.

Elasha: Well, in that case. If you wouldn't mind giving us the room, I have some things to discuss with my stepdaughter.

B: Nora's lips press into a very thin line, and without displaying any courtly decorum or civility, she just shoves back from her desk, and stalks around it, and goes to the door. She stops in the doorway and turns back to you, Phi.

Nora: Fine. Phirora, if you *need* anything, I will be *right* outside. All you have to do is call for me.

B: And she walks out and *slams* the door behind her. There is a long beat of silence, following her exit, during which you feel the little *ping!* of a Sending spell go off in your head, and you hear your brother's voice.

Leo: [telepathically] Uncle Eron's rushing us out of the house. I get the feeling this is an evacuation. Where are you? What's going on?

A: Phi sends back

Phi: [telepathically] Elasha is here. I'm handling it. Start thinking of a plan.

B: In front of you, you see Elasha's very composed, regal posture, that she had adopted when talking to your aunt, cave in a little bit. And she winces, reaches down to rub at her hip, and sits down in one of the wingback chairs in front of the fireplace.

Elasha: Alright, so, we'll need to eventually unpack the mystery of how you managed to survive. But, for now, we have a lot of other catching up to do.

Phi: Yes, it seems we do!

A: Phi steps a little closer, and just hisses.

Phi: What the fuck are you doing?

B: She narrows her eyes at you.

Elasha: What I have to do. And mind your tone.

Phi: [laughs] You - You knew what he was, and you *married* him, and you want me to watch my *tone*? My *tone* is the issue, here, Elasha? *Really?*

Elasha: One could make the argument that he also knew what *I* was and married *me*, but that is *irrelevant*. Yes, I did! It was the best method to secure enough power to help me find out the truth of everything that's going on, and to secure your position once you eventually made it home! I have been in your corner for your entire life, Phirora, but now that support *actually* has some *power* behind it!

Phi: [scoffs] This is you being in my corner? Marrying the man that *fucked* with my mind, being complicit in a baseless war, sending Defiance after me as an attack dog - that's being in my corner?!

B: She gets to her feet. She gets up in your face a little bit.

Elasha: This war is *not* baseless. Crack open a history book, Phi. For *hundreds* of years, Vog Voldhur has been getting bigger and hungrier, and if somebody doesn't nip that ambition in the bud, they will swallow the *entire world*. As for the situation with

your father, if I had *known* more about what was going on, then I maybe could've done something to mitigate it, but - I - [deep breath, sighs] Morlin has a long and storied history of acting rashly when backed into a corner. And, as for Defiance... We had no way of knowing about all of that nasty business in Pearlport. She was just supposed to collect you and bring you home, safely! Although, in retrospect, that could be my fault, I should have known. Even as far back as the beginning of the Beacon schism, Defiance proved herself to be a loose cannon, who took the orders that she was given extremely liberally.

[TIMESTAMP - 10:06]

Phi: Orders that she was - ...[disgusted noise] Of course. *You* had the Jovarises killed. That... makes sense.

B: She reels back a little bit, looking shocked.

Elasha: [stammers] I - How do you know about - That's *irrelevant*. Listen, Phi, I see where you're coming from with this. I know you want to protect Leo, but you *can't*. He has proven time and time again that he will not content himself to play a long game, and he *will not* fall in line, there is no saving him. Please just *come home*. We can fix this. We can be a family.

A: Phi takes a step back from her.

Phi: [scoffs] A *family*? I *have* a family. I have people that *know* me well enough to know that I wouldn't take that offer, and that love me enough that they wouldn't *make* it. I - [huffs] A *family*. That's what you've been thinking that you've been pursuing? *That's* the reason you've had *so many* people killed? Or *let* them die?

A: And Phi just, like, starts ticking off on her fingers.

Phi: Sorran, his parents, the family of someone that I love *very much* - at this point, I wouldn't be surprised if my uncle and Leo's mother are on the list - and every person that is going to die in this war that you are *helping* my father manufacture. If this is what you *being in my corner* looks like, I would rather stand alone.

B: This woman, for all intents and purposes, is your mother - I would like you to roll an insight check with advantage.

A: [dice noise] I'm going to use a reroll, off the Gift Of The Stormbringer. [dice sound] I'm going to use a second one. [dice noise] That one's a natural nineteen. So it's an eighteen, because I have negative one to insight, but still!

B: When you mention your uncle, and Leo's mother, you watch Elasha react in a very strange way. You level these accusations at her, and you see her eyes go up to the family portrait, hanging over Nora's fireplace in the study. Leveling on the face of a young Valoran Valcyne. Then she looks down, at where there is a magnificent wedding ring around her finger. She looks back up at you, and for a moment, she looks *deeply* afraid. And in that moment, you realize that you have called her out on a couple of secrets that she thought *nobody* knew about. As you are having this realization, the door to the study bursts open behind you. Leo comes running in, with Zed and Eleanora hot on his heels, and your aunt Nora reaching out for them from the doorway, as if she was trying to stop them. Leo skids to a halt, right next to where you and Elasha are standing in front of the fireplace, raises his eyebrows, and goes

Leo: [chuckles] You know, my uncle mentioned that the *Archduchess* was here, and I was wondering who had *dug up my mother's corpse* and dragged it all the way to Vog Voldhur, but I see what the situation is, now.

B: Elasha looks over at him, with a very distasteful expression, and goes

Elasha: Shortly after you disappeared, your mother unfortunately... took ill and died, under the custody of the priesthood on Loex Tolgalen.

B: And Leo just throws his head back and laughs.

Leo: [laughs] That is *such* a load of *horse shit*, Elasha.

B: A more subtle version of that fearful look that you just saw her have crosses her face, briefly. And then she stomps it down, puts the Archduchess mask right back on.

Elasha: You know this is all *your* fault, right? You could have just signed the papers, lived a comfortable life out in the countryside with your fiancé. Or, if not that, you could have at least had the decency to *die* when you were supposed to. But now we're all here, so *great* job, Leoril.

A: Without missing a beat, Phi snaps

Phi: I think you should leave. We have *nothing* else to say to each other.

B: Elasha turns over to you, with this look of utter desperation.

Elasha: I came here with a peaceful solution, Phi. The path that I am offering is the one of mercy. *Please* think it over.

[TIMESTAMP - 15:07]

B: And then she picks up her cane, turns on her heel, and walks out of the study. There is a long, silent moment where all of you are just standing around looking at each other, and then Leo lunges forward and hugs you super hard.

Leo: You scared the *shit* out of me, I'm so glad you're okay.

A: Phi hugs him back, and says

Phi: You *dumbass*, I said I had it handled! She wasn't going to hurt *me*.

Leo: And I wasn't going to just leave you alone!

B: And he kind of turns to look at your aunt and survey the situation going on in this room after Elasha has left.

Leo: Oh, fuck, things are *bad*, aren't they?

Phi: Well, they're certainly not *good*. I - [frustrated noise]

A: And Phi reaches up and, like, pinches the bridge of her nose.

Phi: I - I don't know what we do, from here, I - I don't know - [sighs] They know we're in the city, they know where we're staying.

B: Your aunt Nora steps into the room, into the middle of this conversation, and puts both hands up.

Nora: I understand that everybody is very stressed right now, but this is a conversation for tomorrow. You all look like you haven't rested in days, and I can promise you safety under my roof, if *nothing* else. The information that you are both alive is already out there, there is nothing that anybody can do to stop it, and if Morlin wants to try to come here and get you himself -

B: She turns her head, over to where her armor and her sword are still in the open cabinet on the wall, and her jaw sets very hard.

Nora: I wish he would. I *wish* he would try. Everybody try to decompress the best you can, go lay down, we will figure this out in the morning. Okay?

Phi: O-Okay. Um, yeah.

A: And Phi just kind of rakes a hand back through her hair, and goes

Phi: Right. There's nothing we can do.

Nora: There's never *nothing* we can do, Phirora. Go to bed. Try to rest. Uh, send Aydra in, before you do, I need to talk to her about the security system on the house.

Phi: Will do. Uh, thank you.

A: And Phi's going to walk out. And get Aydra, apparently.

B: You and Leo both leave, walk downstairs. You find Aydra in the foyer, kind of gathered with everybody else, looking just as confused as the rest of them. You direct her up to her mother's study, you see her roll off down the hallway, towards the elevator. And everybody else heads back upstairs for the night. You see Leo and Zed peel off into their room together, Ruvaen and... a Verity who is more subdued than you have ever seen her, go off into their room. Everybody starts bunking down for the night. And then, coming up from behind you, you feel two sets of fingers lace between yours and close around both of your hands. On your left, The Captain tilts his head and frowns at you a little bit.

The Captain: You alright, there, lass?

Phi: [laughs] Uh. As alright as I'm going to be.

B: On your other side, Sabine squeezes at your hand, and reaches up to pet your hair back from your face.

Sabine: And that's the best that any of us can ask for. I think we should all go to bed.

Phi: Yeah, uh... I'll discuss the things that I learned tonight with the two of you in the morning, I suppose. Honestly, I - I am *exhausted*. I'm - I'm - I'm just going to lay down.

A: And Phi just kinda pulls her hands out of both their grips, and goes to the room, and goes to take her trance. Leo. I would think it takes you a bit to settle down, after *that* adrenaline rush. But nonetheless, you have managed to get a full night's trance by the time that you are roused from your semi-conscious state by the rapid weight redistribution of Zed getting off the bed next to you, and the mattress bouncing back.

B: He opens his eyes and sits up.

A: Zed winces when he sees that he's woken you up, and just, grimacing, goes

[TIMESTAMP - 20:03]

Zed: [hisses] If we're doing this, you should know that I haven't slept past seven AM unless I was, like, *actively* dying, since I was about eight? And I can *try* to stay in bed, but I... get bored.

B: Leo sits up, with absolutely atrocious bedhead, and squints over at him, but then relaxes back against the headboard and smiles.

Leo: And *you* should know that *I* haven't gotten out of bed before ten AM without an entire pot of coffee since I was about forty, but I'm willing to compromise if it means that we get to keep doing this.

A: Zed grins, and, like, reaches up to rub the back of his neck, and goes

Zed: Coffee, I can do.

A: And he holds out a hand to you.

B: Leo takes his hand, and gets up and gets ready for the day.

A: Your party had a difficult day yesterday, so everybody else is still in their rooms by the time you get downstairs. So the only person that is in your aunt's dining room is your cousin Lark, who is just doing tarot spreads next to a plate that appears to be just muffins? With, like, an attempt at, like, an apple wedge? So they can say that they're not *just* eating muffins for breakfast?

B: Leo just pauses and leans in the doorway.

Leo: Morning, Lark. Uh, do you know where a guy could get some fucking caffeine around here?

A: Lark looks up, immediately flashes a big grin. It's been a bit of an adjustment, reintroducing yourself to *them* - like, Aydra's pretty much the same, but, there's a certain level where Astrarian nobility, even children, especially boys, are expected to be very reserved and very quiet? And you remember Lark being extremely in the background, extremely silent. And they are *not that*, now. They flash you this big grin, and then, very chipperly, say

Lark: Oh, yeah, Aydra brewed *ridiculously* strong coffee, this morning. Uh, she didn't trance. I would go get it for you, *but...*

A: And they flip another card.

Lark: I'm doing tarot spreads to see if your dad's going to bust in and kill all of us, sooo, I'm focusing.

B: [laughs] Leo blinks at them for a second, and then goes

Leo: You know what? That is so valid of you. I'm going to -

B: And then goes off to find coffee.

A: Yeah, Zed's going to go with you. You get the sense he is not *super* comfortable being left alone with your relatives. You walk into the kitchen. The coffee pot is not hard to find. There is an *odor* emanating from it.

B: I'm going to pour myself a cup and take a very cautious sip.

A: It is like gasoline. It is rocket fuel. [laughs] This is the strongest, most bitter, most burnt-tasting coffee you've ever tasted in your life.

Leo: [coughs] Okay, alright, yep. Milk, milk. Milk and sugar.

A: As you are desperately searching for milk and sugar to put in your coffee, the back door from the kitchen pops open, and there is a clatter as Aydra slides in - she's not in the chair, she's got her leg braces on and she's on crutches, and she's got a bag that is making metallic rattling noises, that are a bit ominous, on her back. She looks at you, nods, and says

Aydra: If you empty the coffee pot, I request that you refill it.

Leo: [coughs] If I refill it, I'll do it with something better than whatever the fuck *you* put in there. *God*.

A: She blinks owlshly. She has, like, *dark* dark circles under her eyes right now.

Aydra: I didn't put anything special in it, I just double-brewed it.

Leo: Ah. Yeah, well it served its intended purpose, it woke me up. Why have *you* been up all night?

A: Aydra sighs, swings herself over and hops up on the counter, and just starts, like, absently rubbing at one of her thighs, and goes

Aydra: Well, you see. Mother mentioned that we might have... *issues*, with *certain people* trying to breach our secure perimeter around the house, and that we might require a little more firepower than usual out of the security system. So, I was up all night - beefing up the wards, extending the perimeter a little bit, trying to make sure

that there are no weak spots, and making sure that what we *do* have is strong enough to take out a fully-grown Dire Wolf.

[TIMESTAMP - 24:56]

A: And then she pulls a thermos out of her bag, and grabs the coffee pot from you and refills it, as she says

Aydra: I know uncle Morlin's powerful, but. I mean. I'm good.

A: She takes a long swig of the coffee that she just poured into her thermos, no milk, no sugar, straight-faced.

Leo: That's... very kind of you, to put all that work in, Aydra, thank you. Do we know if we have any other measures put in place to figure out what's happening next? Or are we just playing a defensive game at this point?

A: Aydra takes another swig of her coffee.

Aydra: I mean, not to be rude, but - I have no idea, because I was up all night, and you walked into my house unannounced.

A: As she's saying that, there is the sound of footsteps on the stairs, and Verity rushes into the kitchen with Ruvaen on her heels. She pauses long enough to grin at you, Zed, and Aydra, and say

Verity: Hi! Sorry to rush out, um, we have to grab breakfast or we're going to be late.

A: And she just starts grabbing, like, random foodstuffs - like, fruit, half a loaf of bread - and just, like, stuffing them in a rucksack.

B: Leo watches her do this, turns over to Ruvaen, and goes

Leo: Nah, no problem. Where are you two headed?

A: Ruvaen reaches up to, like, blearily rub at one of his eyes, and coughs up a small cloud of spores into his hand, and then says

Ruvaen: [clears throat] Uh, important intel-gathering mission into the city.

A: Behind you, on the counter, Aydra says

Aydra: They're going on a bus tour. I got them tickets last night, my girlfriend has a hookup at the transit agency.

B: [laughs]

Leo: [stammers] Okay. Be careful out there. I hope you have fun, just remember how many people want all of us dead!

A: Verity ties her rucksack closed, and goes

Verity: Thanks! They mostly want *you* dead, so I think we're going to be okay. Have a great day, though!

Leo: Yeah, you know, Verity. Surprisingly, you're right.

Verity: Really? Awesome!

A: She stops to give you a big bear hug, and Zed a big bear hug. Zed makes a kind of uncomfortable noise, like

Zed: [uncomfortable noise]

A: And pats her on the back a couple of times. And then she grabs Ruvaen by the elbow, and he goes

Ruvaen: Whoa, okay, guess we're going!

A: As she tugs him away.

B: Leo drains his mug of coffee.

Leo: [sighs] Hey, Aydra, do you want to show me that double-brewing thing that you were talking about?

B: Phi, you are woken up by sunlight slanting in through the curtains over the window of this guest suite that you are trancing in. There is the slight shifting of weight on the mattress that can only be expected when it is accommodating three people, and you feel The Captain flop one arm around your waist, and sling a leg over the two of yours. He's totally out, snoring to beat the band. On the other side of you, Sabine is kind of curled up into a ball, with her arm hooked through yours, also still out. You're not sure exactly what time it is, but judging by the angle of the sunlight coming in through the gap in the curtains, you can kind of estimate that you have over-tranced by a little bit. What are you doing?

A: I am being as careful as possible, trying to get out of bed.

B: Roll a stealth check.

A: Natural eighteen. Twenty-one.

B: In some feat of unholy acrobatics, you manage to disentangle yourself from the *middle* of The Captain and Sabine, both of whom are snuggling with you, and get out of this bed without disturbing them.

A: Phi pauses for a moment to do a victory pose, and then she's going to head downstairs.

B: Before you go, you see The Captain, in his trance, kind of splay a hand across the empty space on the mattress and make an unsatisfied noise, and then scooch over a little bit and wrap an arm around Sabine. The hallway is pretty quiet when you walk outside, you don't really hear any movement or anything coming from any of the other guest suites, but down on the corner, Aravae is sitting on the floor with her knees pulled up to her chest, holding this *weird*-looking crystal apparatus in her hands. You're too far away to see what's really going on, but there seems to be some kind of image flickering in it, and you hear tinny, distorted yelling coming out of it. Aravae sighs, pushes her goggles up on her head, and goes

[TIMESTAMP - 29:57]

Aravae: Look, I'm very sorry about your porch furniture, okay? But he's on a high fiber diet and he's used to scavenging, so these things happen - put him on the line.

Phineas. Phineas, look at me.

A: [laughs]

B: You see Aravae yell at this little image of Phineas in this stone, for a minute, before making a couple more apologies and sticking it back into her bag. She looks up, sees you, and puts her goggles back down over her eyes.

Aravae: Oh, good morning.

Phi: Good morning. Sorry to hear that Phineas is terrorizing the babysitter. Where is everyone?

Aravae: Oh, um. Well, your brother and his boyfriend are playing handyman for your cousin Aydra in the backyard, Lorelei's doing... something? Cellica's sniffing around Aydra's lab. Ruvaen and Verity went on some kind of sightseeing tour, not really sure what's going on with that, they were holding hands and kissing a lot. And... who am I forgetting? Oh. And Eleanora went to the Astrarian embassy.

Phi: Oh! Great! Why did she do that, before any of us had had time to consult with *anyone else* on a plan about what to do about this whole situation?

Aravae: I mean, Kalessa showed up with doughnuts this morning, and mentioned that, because Eleanora is *technically* the queen of Estermouth, that displaying the fact that we had a foreign power on Leo's side might help us with political leverage. I don't really think Eleanora was listening, Kalessa did that thing where she tosses her hair and bats her eyelashes real hard, and... You know. It's not that I blame her, I've short-circuited like that around Kalessa before.

Phi: Everyone has, but I have so many questions. First of all - Kalessa was here? Second of all - Kalessa's coming up with *schemes* in this situation and not informing anyone else... Actually, that's not a question, that's par for the course with Kalessa. And *third* of all - ...I didn't actually know that you two knew each other that well.

Aravae: ...We dated for, like, a *year* back when we were both at the order of Illuna - I've been to the palace multiple times, you really don't...? Anyway. Yes, Kalessa's scheming, we all know this. Yes, she was here, she showed up briefly and then she and Eleanora walked off together. And frankly, I'm not sure of what role *I'm* playing in all of this, yet, so I'm taking the prudent option - sitting down, shutting up, and staying out of the way.

Phi: I envy you. Have you seen my aunt?

B: She's already digging a little notebook out of her bag and starting to scribble in it.

Aravae: Uh, I think she's in her study.

Phi: Cool. She's the most experienced with... all of this situation, out of any of us, I'm going to see if she has any thoughts.

B: You make your way down this long hallway through the upstairs of the house, and, as you near the door to your aunt's study, you overhear the sounds of a conversation coming from inside. You hear the impact of something heavy being slammed down on a desk, and then your aunt's voice, supremely frustrated, saying

Nora: What do you *mean* you *knew*?!

B: And then a second - unfamiliar - voice replies

Boreas: Well, I mean, I didn't have *concrete* evidence, but let's look at the state of affairs. The heir apparent to the throne of a nation dies under mysterious circumstances, precipitating his ambitious younger brother's meteoric rise to power? Some of us have cracked open *literally any political intrigue novel ever*, Nora, so I was able to infer.

B: You hear the sound of furniture scraping, like someone is standing up from their chair, and then your aunt says

Nora: And, what, you didn't think to talk to either of your *sisters* about these suspicions, Boreas? What the fuck?!

B: This other voice snorts quietly and goes

Boreas: [snorts] Since when has anyone in this family *talked* to each other? I'm going to be real with you, Nora, I still don't know Jorana's kids' names. I've been starting off their birthday cards with *Hey buddy* for the last several decades.

A: [laughs]

B: There is a clatter, and multiple squawks of protests from inside this room.

A: I'm going to hesitantly open the door.

B: You open this door, to the scene of your aunt with a much smaller Astrarian Elven man in a headlock. He's on the shorter side, very lanky, jet-black hair, the same bright, piercing blue eyes as Nora and your father and Leo all have, and these thick coke-bottle glasses askew on the end of his nose.

[TIMESTAMP - 35:01]

B: As you look behind them, up to the family portrait that's on the wall, you are able to deduce that this is the older version of the little boy standing next to Nora in the painting, that appears to be her twin. Nora pauses, still with him in the headlock, and fixes you with a big fake smile.

Nora: Phirora. Good morning. You've never met your uncle Boreas.

B: And then she lets him go and shoves him away, a little bit harder than she probably means to.

Phi: I can come back later, if it's a bad time.

B: Your uncle Boreas, apparently, pushes his glasses back up on his nose and hurriedly goes

Boreas: Oh, please don't go!

B: Your aunt Nora is just glaring daggers at him, as he dusts off the front of his clothes. He's dressed very primly, he has, like, a fussy little cravat on.

Boreas: I would say pleased to meet you, but circumstances are... bleak. Nora asked me to come over, to see if I could help parse all of this out - I've lived in Vog Voldhur longer than she has, and pissed off far fewer people. We were just bouncing around ideas about how we're going to approach... *all* of this.

Phi: Uh, good. Good.

A: Phi sits down in one of the chairs.

Phi: We just need a way to pressure my father to *stop* all of this. I don't particularly care what happens to him, and... I won't argue that Vog Voldhur doesn't need to be kept in check, but this is going to lead to needless bloodshed. It already has.

B: Your uncle walks over and sits in the other chair in front of the fireplace, and Nora goes back and sits at her desk. Boreas pinches his lips into a very thin line, in an expression you have seen echoed in Nora *and* your father, before, and nods slowly to himself.

Boreas: Well, unfortunately, I don't know anyone who is still *breathing* who has ever been able to sway Morlin from doing something that he puts his mind to. But... Undercutting the legitimacy of the war is something that could perhaps be done. We would just have to present the relevant evidence to the Emperor of Vog Voldhur.

B: Nora snorts, from over at her desk.

Nora: [snorts] *Just*. Okay. Alright.

Phi: I'm gathering that he doesn't take house calls?

B: Your uncle winces a little bit.

Boreas: No, it's more along the lines of a several-months-long waiting list to have a *prayer* at getting an audience? I mean, you could attempt to make your case before the Senate, but that's more bureaucracy, more red tape. More *time*. Which I think we can all agree we don't have.

Phi: No, we don't. Uh, I think we should also try and publicize the fact that Leo and I are alive and opposed to the war, as much as possible. I don't know how much sway either of us really has over the people of Astraria, but... it has to count for something, given the scale of the military response.

B: Your uncle perches his elbows on the armrests of the chair and steeples his fingers in front of his nose, nodding slowly.

Boreas: Two birds with one stone, then. On a fundamental level, Phirora - I will be honest with you - Vog Voldhur is *not* that much different from Astraria. There's a lot of political pageantry and palm-greasing that, frankly, I've always found very boring. But I have dipped my toes in it, during my time here. You and Leoril make your grand Voldhuran political debut, start moving around social functions, gaining allies, and you *might* be able to get a backdoor to the Emperor himself.

B: From over at her desk, Nora shakes her head sharply.

Nora: That's too risky. They can't just be showboating around in public - if Voldhuran operatives don't kill them, Astrarian ones will!

Phi: Well, point the first, I don't see what other choice we have. And point the second, at least Leo will have fun politically showboating. It's his favorite hobby.

B: Your uncle Boreas stands up from his chair, and brushes off the front of his waistcoat again.

Boreas: Alright. It's settled, then. I will start seeing what kind of social engagements we can get you two involved in, and we will pray to Kimryl that you and your brother's political acumen is faster than Morlin's itchy trigger finger. I have nothing further to offer towards our plans, and I have a book club meeting this afternoon, so, Nora, if you don't mind?

[TIMESTAMP - 39:58]

B: Your aunt is still sitting at her desk, and just fully puts her head in her hands.

Nora: [sighs] Go.

B: And he turns around and leaves the study. After a long moment, Nora finally looks back up at you.

Nora: [sighs] Alright, well. The Voldhuran social scene is not exactly my favorite thing, but I know enough about it to know that you can't be going around to parties in clothes that you have clearly been sleeping and *bleeding* in for several months. Why don't you go downstairs and find Lark and Aydra and tell them that you all need to go shopping.

Phi: Will do.

A: Phi gets up, gives a clipped little curtsy, and then leaves the study. Leo, you are outside, with your twin cousins, Zed, Lorelei, and Aravae. Supposedly you are all working on the security system. Practically speaking, what this means is everyone but Aydra and Zed is sitting in the grass, like the queer kids during gym class in middle school. Aydra is calling instructions up, where Zed is on a ladder, against the roof of the rowhouse. Aydra has settled into her chair again, which is why Zed is up on the roof, trying to affix runes to it, Lark is redoing a couple of Aravae's braids that have gotten a bit loose.

B: Leo lays down on his side in the grass, and kind of perches his chin in his hand, and calls up to Zed

Leo: A little to the left!

A: Zed yells back

Zed: You can't even see where I'm at!

A: And then there's a pause, and he goes

Zed: *Heh.*

Leo: Don't make jokes that you're not planning to give me context to understand.

Zed: You got *no idea* what my plans are!

A: Roll me an insight check really quick.

B: [dice sound] Twenty-two.

A: Lorelei is sitting out with all of you, she's a little bit apart from where you, Aravae, and Lark are all sitting, picking at the grass. You watch her hand movements get a little, like, faster and more jerky? And you watch her jaw tense a little bit. And then you hear an ominous wood-on-stone scraping sound.

B: Uh oh! I turn towards the source of the noise.

A: You turn, in time to catch the bottom of the ladder that Zed is standing on scrape across the pavement, as it just completely falls out from under him. Zed, from up on the roof, goes

Zed: Whoa!

A: I'm going to roll a DEX check for him. [dice noise] Yeah, he's fine. He lurches forward and grabs the gutter, as the ladder just clatters to the ground, and he looks down over his shoulder and goes

Zed: What the *fuck*?!

B: Leo jumps to his feet and sprints over there and picks the ladder back up so he can get down.

Leo: What the hell happened?!

A: Everybody has kind of gotten up. Aravae and Lark have also run over with you, Aydra has started wheeling herself across the grass. Lorelei did not get up. You ask what the hell happened, and Zed goes

Zed: Fuck if I know, I was just... standing on it, and it just started moving. *Holy shit.*

Leo: You okay?

Zed: I'm... fine, boss, I just, uh. I mean, I've gotten pretty good at landing gracefully, but the prospect of having to *practice* that skill is always a... bit of an adrenaline spike. [exhales]

A: He looks, like, a little bit freaked out, he, like, runs a hand back through his hair.

Leo: Yeah, okay, enough with the runes, for now, I think. Aydra, I did want to bring up - um, I have something that could help out with the security of the house? I'm just wondering how... pet-friendly your family is? W-We do have access to a guard dog, is what I'm saying.

A: There's a pause, and then Lark's head snaps to the side, and they look at you, and Aydra goes

Aydra: Oh, Kimryl's teeth, here we go.

A: And Lark says

Lark: You have a dog?

Leo: Okay! I'm taking that as a positive reaction, so in that case.

B: Leo up-dumps his bag on the floor and a bunch of loose bones come clattering out. And he casts Animate Dead and animates Dexter, who has been disembodied in his backpack for the entire time.

A: You animate Dexter, he bounds to his little wolfy feet. Does one of those spectral echoing barks, and Lark goes

Lark: [gasps] Oh, I love him.

[TIMESTAMP - 45:00]

Leo: This is Dexter, he's a very good boy, but he will rip the throat out of anybody that tries to hurt any of us, so. It's potentially a security benefit.

A: Lark is not listening, Lark has grabbed Dexter by his little head and is sitting on the grass, petting him. Aydra, from the other side of them says

Aydra: Noted. It's not going to be a problem if he gets table scraps for the next... infinity meals, is it?

Leo: Aydra, he is made of bones, and has no stomach.

Aydra: He's also a *dog*, and Lark has a problem.

A: Zed, from your other side, puts his head in his hands and says

Zed: I feel like I'm going to burst a fucking blood vessel.

Leo: Don't we all, honey. Uh, Lorelei, can I talk to you for a second?

A: You say this, and everybody kind of turns to look at Lorelei, where she's still sitting in the grass and has not reacted to any of this. You watch her rip up a big fistful of grass, and then just scatter it at her side, and then say

Lorelei: Sure thing.

A: And she gets to her feet and just walks past you, inside.

B: Leo follows her inside, and pulls her into the kitchen or the dining room or whatever room is open.

Leo: Okay, so I'm going to lead into this with the fact that I saw that.

A: Lorelei crosses her arms over her chest, and looks like she's trying to stare a hole into the floor. You watch her jaw tense again.

Lorelei: Saw what?

Leo: Lorelei, you have known how to cast Telekinesis since you were fifty, and you weren't subtle about it when you tried to *kill my boyfriend*, just now.

Lorelei: My intention was not to kill, only to maim.

Leo: Maiming people isn't cool, either! *What* has gotten into you?!

Lorelei: You know Sorran *never* stopped trying to bring you home, right? He *died* trying to make things right for you, and all that time you were... what?

A: And she gestures towards the backyard.

Lorelei: Running around with *him*? Did you ever *actually* love him?

Leo: Of *course* I did!

B: Leo reaches down and starts fiddling with the engagement ring that's on his finger, looking *devastated*.

Leo: I loved him more than *anything*. And leaving him *destroyed* me. *Losing* him destroyed me - I will never be okay again, Lorelei. When you lose someone that you love as much as you and I loved Sorran, it takes a piece out of you that you *never* get back. And you've got two choices. You can fill that hole inside you up with things that make you *bitter* and *hateful*, but that only makes the hole bigger, and you have to keep dumping all of that *bitterness* and *hatefulness* into it just to stay upright, and eventually it will eat you from the inside out. Or... you can fill it up with things that would make that person proud. And you can get up, and you can keep going. When I broke off my engagement with Sorran and left Astraria, I was *not* a good person. Maybe I'm still not. But I am trying to be better, and Zed is *helping* me be better. I am done with trying to fill up the space Sorran left in my heart with things that will only hurt me. I am trying to make him proud. Would he be proud of what you did out there, just now?

Lorelei: I don't *know* because he's not *here*! And I -

A: And Lorelei throws her hands up, and they are shaking a little bit

Lorelei: And I'm *angry*! I'm angry *all the time*!

Leo: So am I! *All* the time! And it is okay to be angry, because sometimes anger brings *justice*, when it's focused on the people that deserve it, but... There are people you need to be angry with, Lorelei. Zed is *not* one of them. The people who made all of this happen? The people that killed Sorran? I'm angry with them, too. And when the time comes, I am going to make that anger *mean* something, but until then, I'm *not* going to misdirect it, and I'm *not* going to let it make me worse. And neither should you.

A: Lorelei opens her mouth to say something, and, as she's doing that, Phi whips around the corner into the kitchen with The Captain and Sabine on her heels, takes in the situation, and says

[TIMESTAMP - 50:01]

Phi: Uh, are we interrupting something...?

A: Lorelei, sounding very bitter, says

Lorelei: *No*.

A: And she just turns on her heel and leaves.

B: Leo finds the nearest chair, and just sits down and puts his head in his hands.

A: Sabine kind of cranes her head back around the corner and looks after Lorelei, and says

Sabine: Should someone go talk to her? What's going on?

Leo: I was engaged to Lorelei's big brother, for quite a few years, and he died in a pretty violent way. Because of me.

A: Sabine winces, and interrupts

Sabine: I - I know. I knew Sorran pretty well, by the end.

B: Leo visibly flinches.

Leo: Mm. Yeah. She's having some issues with me and Zed. It's a complicated situation. I did fully break things off with Sorran before I left Astraria, but... it just feels pedantic to try to explain it to her at this point. Anyway, please give me *any* information about *anything* else that's going on, because I feel helpless and *irredeemably* shitty, in my current situation.

A: Phi, grimacing, says

Phi: Well. Uh, apparently our *surviving* uncle is going to try and get us in a position where we can make some political maneuvers, vis-a-vis getting the Voldhuran Emperor on our side, I suppose? Which, distasteful though it may be, seems like the only solution we have.

Leo: Political maneuvers?

B: Leo drops his hands from in front of his face and perches his chin on his fist.

Phi: You'll like this, too. Lark and Aydra are supposed to take all of us shopping for some suitable attire, to go to high class Voldhuran parties and rub elbows with the relevant people.

Leo: [gasps]

B: Leo jumps to his feet, looking much more animated than he did before, and goes

Leo: Let's go, let's go, let's go.

A: Alright, you all head to the backyard and get Lark, Aydra, Aravae, and Zed, and head out.

B: Phi, you get dragged, somewhat against your will, into a very elaborate shopping montage. Lark very excitedly leads your party out into the city of Voldhur, through the winding cobblestone streets, to a pretty elegant-looking Astrarian tailor's shop. They seem to be on first-name basis with the girl behind the counter. Zed and The Captain both seem highly unenthused about the entire situation, Aravae is mostly indifferent as

she browses the shelves, but Leo and Sabine both shriek in joy as soon as they walk in, and immediately dive into the shelves. Aravae calmly browses the shelf, picks out some nice utilitarian outfits for herself - tight-fitting breeches, nicely-trimmed waistcoats. Sabine is more concerned with dressing up The Captain and Zed than she is with finding anything for herself. Leo, meanwhile, is already emerging from a fitting room in a very closely-fitted slinky set of Astrarian formal robes, with a slit all the way up to his thigh and a set of matching stilettos, all glimmering under the low light of the shop. He poses very dramatically, and goes

Leo: Who could say no to *this*?

B: And then Leo turns over to you, Phi, with a mildly feral expression on his face, grabs you by the shoulder, and goes

Leo: Okay, we're finding something for *you*, now.

A: Oh, this isn't going to end well. I go with him.

B: He drags you off through these racks of *beautiful* garments, richly-beaded and -embroidered, and stops at a mannequin in the back corner of the shop. He points at it emphatically, which is interesting, because this dress is not your style at all. It does have the high collar and long, tight sleeves that typically factor into your fashion choices, but it's much tighter and less fluffy than the dresses you usually go for.

[TIMESTAMP - 55:00]

B: It's got this long, slinky black skirt. The collar and the sleeves are all made of this very sheer black fabric, overlaid with intricate shimmering black beading all the way down, and the back of this dress dips *all* the way down, just, big open back, intricately-beaded bodice. Leo grins over at you, still wearing this very high fashion outfit that somehow manages to leave very little to the imagination, and goes

Leo: You should go try that on.

Phi: [chuckles] ...Sure.

A: Uh, Phi gives him kind of an indulgent look, and then grabs the dress, and she goes to try it on.

B: You go back, you try it on - the low-cut back of this dress does do quite a lot to expose the silvery-white Lichtenberg scars all the way down your back, from your incident with the lightning strike. It fits you pretty well. You walk outside. Leo starts a slow clap, and Sabine and The Captain both stop what they are doing and gape at you.

Phi: It's, uh. Not something I would usually go for, but...

A: And Phi kind of rolls her shoulders, and pulls her hair back to start braiding it, and she picks the white streak out with her thumb.

Phi: I think it's a good change. I think it's good for everyone to know *exactly* where I stand, now.

B: The Captain, who has a *horrendously*-tied necktie loose around his neck, stares over at you, and goes

The Captain: Do a twirl for us, lass.

A: Phi laughs, but she does - both hands up in her hair - do a quick twirl.

B: You see him lean over and whisper something in Sabine's ear, and she smacks him in the shoulder so hard.

Phi: I'd say *share with the class*, but I don't want to -

A: And Phi gestures at Leo.

Phi: - traumatize certain company.

A: She finishes getting her hair in kind of a rough braid, picks up her shield, which she left outside of the little changing booth, and says

Phi: In any case, I certainly feel ready for... whatever comes next.

B: From the doorway of this boutique, Aydra goes

Aydra: I mean, you're all going to want to change back into your other clothes, because we're not exactly going to any parties tonight. We'll just pack all of this up into garment bags and head back toward the house. I do have one quick stop we need to make before we get home, though.

B: Leo looks deeply sad to have to take his outfit off, but he does go do so, and change back into his clothes, and carry it out in a garment bag.

A: Yeah, Phi's going to change back as well. As she's getting the dress packed away, she says

Phi: And *where* are we stopping, before we go back to your house?

B: Aydra's cheeks darken a little bit.

Aydra: A little local mechanic shop, very charming. They have really good prices and rare supply, though, and I need a couple of things for the security system, so.

B: Lark breaks out into a *shit-eating* grin.

Lark: What she means to say is that she's going to go see her *girlfriend*.

B: Aydra's eyes narrow, and her head snaps up toward them.

Aydra: I swear to Kimryl, Lark. One more word, you're going in the bubble.

B: And Lark shuts up.

Phi: The b-? Doesn't matter. Okay. Mechanic shop, cool, lead the way.

B: And you all make your purchases, Lark digs a very large sack of coin out of their bag and pays for all of your new outfits and everything. And then Aydra leads your party down through a winding set of streets and alleyways outside, and you end up in kind of a semi-residential - not super populated - area of the city, at a rundown-looking storefront. There is a parking lot, riddled with cracked pavement, that opens up into three rickety garage doors and a small office with grimy windows, over which there is a sign that says *Mancini & Son Mechanics*. Aydra and Lark move confidently towards this office, and Lark pulls open the door, Aydra rolls in, are you following her?

[TIMESTAMP - 59:55]

A: Phi gives the place a very dubious look, but decides to trust her cousins that she's just met, against her own better judgment, and, yes, walks inside.

B: Everybody else follows you. Your whole group - Lark, Aydra, Leo, Zed, Sabine, The Captain, Aravae - are all *very* cramped, inside this tiny little lobby in this office space. There's no one here? There's a long front desk stretched all the way across the length of this lobby, a lot of handwritten receipts and paperwork scattered across it. Aydra frowns, boosts herself up out of her chair a little bit, and leans over the desk and yells back through an open door into what appears to be the garage area.

Aydra: Hey! Toni!

B: There is a metallic clatter, and an amalgam of Gnomish cursing, from this room off to the side of the office. And, after a couple more seconds, this little Gnomish dude comes hustling in - he's somewhere in the neighborhood of three feet tall, dark hair, about jaw-length, that is slicked back with pomade flat against his skull. He's got on a blue heavy-duty cotton shirt, with a little embroidered patch on it that says Tony, T-O-N-Y, and a gold chain hanging around his neck. He skids to a halt behind the counter, looks at all of your party gathered there, and then back to Aydra, and goes

Tony: Hey, Aydra, what is this, Little Astraria up in here? What do you want?

B: Aydra looks exasperated.

Aydra: I'm looking for a very specific mechanical part. And your cousin.

B: Tony goes

Tony: [snorts]

B: And then whips around his shoulder, and yells back into the garage

Tony: Hey, Toni!

A: Phi squints, and says

Phi: But isn't he...?

B: Aydra puts one finger up, with extremely rigid posture.

Aydra: Don't ask about it. Just trust me.

B: Another few seconds pass, and another Gnomish person comes sidling out of the garage. They have straight black hair, in a stacked bob that is held back off their forehead with a banana clip, *a/so* have a gold chain around their neck and a blue sturdy shirt with a nametag on it that says Tonii, but it is spelled T-O-N-I-I. They have a pair of thick leather work gloves on, and kind of brace their hands against the front counter, look over at the first Tony, and go

Tonii: Yeah, boss, what do you need?

B: Tony the first looks over at them, and goes

Tony: Not you, you putz.

Phi: ...Alright, I'm deeply unsettled by many of the things that are happening right now.

B: Tonii the second - Tonii with two Is - looks over at you and goes

Tonii: Ah, you and me both, toots. Hey Aydra, you here to see Toni?

B: Aydra puts a hand up to her forehead and goes

Aydra: Yes.

B: And then the new Tonii leans back over their shoulder into the garage again, and goes

Tonii: Hey, Toni!

B: A couple more seconds pass, and then this little Gnomish lady comes barging her way out of the garage, into the lobby. Buzzcut, completely shaved head, just small remnants of dark hair, big doe-like dark eyes, lightly pointed Gnomish ears. She is *also* in a heavy-duty blue cotton shirt with a nametag on it that says Toni, but it is spelled T-O-N-I. She walks in, already starting to yell at the other two Tonies, and then pauses, swivels her head to the side, sees all of *you* standing there - but, more notably, *Aydra* standing there - and kind of scrapes one hand back across her buzzcut.

Toni: Aydra! Uh, you know, you usually, uh, drop me a line, when you're thinking of coming by! Uh...

[TIMESTAMP - 1:04:50]

B: Aydra, face going darker and darker blue by the second, goes

Aydra: Uh, yeah, I [stammers] these are my cousins, and their... various romantic attachments. And Aravae, who's very cool. Um, I was just in the market for a runic adapter, and I thought I would drop by, 'cause I know you guys always have the best prices.

B: Toni - Toni with one I, Toni with the buzzcut - kind of tilts her head to the side, and grins, and goes

Toni: Ah, come on. You know you're just flattering us so you get a better price. Alright, let's see what we got. Come on.

B: And she nods you back into the garage, behind the counter

A: Phi reaches up to pinch the bridge of her nose, nods, and then walks back.

B: Leo and Zed are looking at each other and barely biting back laughter, Sabine and The Captain are both absorbed in some other conversation amongst themselves, Aravae also looks mildly interested, but you all move back around this counter and into this garage. It is *fucking wild*. Phi, you have no idea what an automobile looks like. So there are just these massive metal contraptions, lifted up on stilts, in this garage - big wheels, rumbling engines, the smell of coal and steam and magic. Tonies one two and three followed you out of the lobby, but underneath one of these Voldhuran contraptions, you can see another pair of little Gnomish legs dangling out.

A: Phi gestures towards this person, and says

Phi: So, let me guess, that's also Tony?

B: The first Tony that you met, T-O-N-Y, waves vaguely towards this pair of legs dangling out from under this machinery, and goes

Tony: Eh, well, his real name's Paolo, but we call him Toney 'cause he's just so buff. Show 'em, Toney!

A: [cackles]

B: There is an almighty clatter, as this glider slides out from underneath the machinery that Toney - T-O-N-E-Y, as you see on his shirt - was working on. Long dark hair, pulled back in a low ponytail, gold chain around his neck. Stands up, flexes his arms, and goes

Toney: [Link noise]

B: And he's ripped as hell. Just the buffest gnome you've ever seen.

A: I hate it here. Phi nods to herself, eyes closed, and says

Phi: I... don't know what I expected. We need a runic adapter, apparently.

B: Uh, Toney - T-O-N-E-Y, the very buff one - goes

Toney: Hm.

B: And goes and starts climbing up the shelves, in the back of the garage? Kind of like a cryptid? It's very unsettling to watch. He disappears up towards the ceiling, and there is a very awkward pause, and then he returns with this little metallic part that he very gently places in Aydra's lap, and then reaches out and presses a hand against the side of her face and kind of pats it. Aydra grins, and then turns back to what appears to be *her* Toni, nods very cordially.

Aydra: We appreciate it. I'll... catch you up later, we're still on for trivia at night down at the pub, right?

B: T-O-N-I Toni, this little lady with the buzzcut, grins at her and goes

Toni: Yeah, toots, even the blockade didn't stop trivia night, you bringing a bunch of fucking weirdos into my shop sure as hell ain't gonna.

Phi: Offended.

B: Toni looks over and tilts her head at you.

Toni: Eh. I call 'em like I see 'em.

Phi: I didn't say you were *wrong*, I just said I was offended. *Anyway*. Lovely to meet you, should we be getting back?

B: Aydra is fiddling with this little mechanical part in her lap, and then looks up at a clock hanging on the wall of the garage, and goes

Aydra: Oh God, it's almost our established dinner time. We need to go now. Mom's going to *fucking* kill us. Lark! Now!

B: Lark looks panicked, and then grabs at the back of her chair, looks up at the clock, and goes

Lark: Okay! Uh, may I?

B: Aydra goes

Aydra: In the interest of us not both being *grounded* for the rest of our lives, yes!

[TIMESTAMP - 1:09:47]

B: And then Lark reaches down to their big clunky goth boots, that they have on under their sundress, and clicks out a pair of rollerskates, and just fucking *goes*. So Lark is using their magical item, the Heelies Of Speed, to just shove Aydra in front of them and go. They are like sixty feet in front of all of the rest of you.

A: Phi kind of puts her hands up and goes

Phi: I mean, she can't ground *us*, but I do worry about the two of them and whatever shenanigans they're about to get up to on the way back, so.

A: And then she gestures out the door.

Phi: Let's go.

B: Leo whips around and puts a hand up.

Leo: Thank you, Tonies!

B: And then he sprints, he's going, he's using his Cunning Action to double-dash.

A: You all make your way through the streets of Voldhur. Lark's Heelies Of Speed give out after about a minute - they keep the wheels out, though, they're just going. But you all draw even with them and Aydra by the time you get back to the rowhouse. Phi and The Captain and Sabine are being gross, as you walk along, and Aravae, who is a chronic speed-walker, has gotten out ahead of all of you by a bit. As you've been walking, Zed has reached down to... not quite hold your hand, but, like, lace a couple of fingers together. You walk up your aunt Nora's street, and... Roll perception for me, really quick?

B: [dice sound] Twenty-five.

A: Dexter's in the front yard. You left him in the back, but he is out front, pacing back-and-forth on the inside of the gate. And, as you walk up, he puts his front paws up on the fence and *whines*.

B: Leo opens the front gate and walks in, and kind of leans down to pet his head.

Leo: Hey buddy, what's - what's going on? It's okay.

A: Dexter whines again, and just, like - he does that thing that dogs do, where he tries to bury his head in your body as much as he can, like, he nuzzles up against your stomach and, like, turns his face sideways.

Leo: Oh - Okay, Dexter, cool it. It's okay, bud.

B: Leo looks around at the rest of their party.

Leo: He's being weird, we should go inside.

A: Aravae had, like, paused on the front steps as you fussed over the dog, and she says

Aravae: Well, that bodes terribly.

A: And she's gonna open the door, step inside. Uh, two questions. Are you going? And are you taking Dexter?

B: Yes, to both of those questions,

A: You all move inside, kind of, as a cluster? Dexter is *glued* to your leg. You walk inside, and you hear the sound of something shatter against a wall, and your aunt Nora yells

Nora: Get out of my *house*, Morlin!

B: Leo immediately whips back around to look at Phi, and whispers

Leo: Oh, *fuck*!

A: Phi took a step back, when she heard that, and she has her fingers pressed to the base of her throat, looking wide-eyed in the direction of your aunt's voice. From the sitting room, you hear your father's voice.

Morlin: Nora, I know you've always had issues with authority, but you would do well to remember to whom you *speak*.

A: And Nora fires back

Nora: I *speak* to my *least favorite sibling*!

A: And there's another smashing sound. You hear your father gasp, and go

Morlin: Hurtful.

A: Nora yells back.

Nora: Oh, I'm sorry! Did I hurt your *feelings*?! I know, why don't you go tell *Val* about it? Oh. *Wait!*

A: *Smash.*

B: Are they still in the sitting room?

A: As far as you can tell, they are in the sitting room, yeah.

B: Leo looks over at Phi, and says

Leo: Do you have your wand?

Phi: What? Yes, but -

Leo: I have a plan, and I don't have time to explain it. Give me your wand.

Phi: What the hell do you mean you have a plan?

Leo: Look me in the eyes, and tell me that we are going to run from this. *Give me your wand, Phi!*

A: Phi pulls her wand out of the holster on her hip, and hands it to you.

B: Leo reaches down to his belt, and pulls Kimryl's Blade out of its holster. He tries to act like he's fussing around with it, but, as he does so, he's going to cast a Message cantrip. To Sabine. Telepathically, he says

[TIMESTAMP - 1:15:11]

Leo: [telepathically] I am about to do something really, *really* stupid. I need you to not let Phi or Zed stop me. And if it goes bad, I need you to promise me that you're going to get them out of here. This is our crisis deadline.

A: You meet Sabine's eyes, and, for just a second, this look of *horror* and *shock* flashes across her face. And then it is gone. And she replies

Sabine: [telepathically] Understood. Do what you have to do.

B: Leo reaches down to his bracer and zaps Kimryl's Blade into it, and then takes Phi's wand in his dominant hand, stands outside the door of the sitting room, and waits.

A: You hear another *smash*. And then, your father says

Morlin: Nora, I don't have *time* to deal with you acting like a petulant *child*. I'm here to see *my* children.

A: And the door opens.

B: Leo does his best to move fully in front of Phi.

A: Your father stands in the doorway. Nora is behind him, clearly winding up to throw another teacup at a wall. She stops, looking at all of you in absolute terror, and your father starts to smile.

Morlin: Hello, children. You're late. Let's talk.

A: And *that* is where we're going to *wrap*, on season two.

B: I feel like I'm going to be fucking sick.

A: [laughs] I'm - I'm feeling whatever comes *after* hysteria.

B: What in the *fuck* is *going on*?

A: We'll find out next time!

B: On Compelled Dual!

[OUTRO MUSIC]

B: Hey everybody, Barry here with the postscript. That sure was a season, huh? Anyway, you can find us on social media, on Twitter Tumblr and TikTok, @CompelledDual. We also have a lot of other cool stuff available, like an official website, an official Spotify profile. You can find all of that stuff linked on our various social media pages. If you're interested in supporting the podcast, we ask that you consider heading on over to patreon.com/CompelledDual, where, starting at just \$2 a month, you can get all kinds of cool perks, like early access to episodes, access to exclusive Spotify playlists and bonus content, and even handwritten letters from your favorite character every month. Speaking of Patreon, thank you to our newest patron, Catherine Mittasch. Thanks so much for your support. If you're interested in supporting us in ways other than pledging to the Patreon, if you're listening to us on Apple Podcasts, we ask that you consider leaving us a rating and a review, because that helps us get promoted to a wider listener base and helps us grow our audience. And, as

always, we rely very heavily upon word of mouth advertising, so if you're enjoying the show, we just ask that you tell a couple of friends about it. And if they like it, ask them to tell a couple friends as well. And now comes the kind of sad part - we are going on hiatus for a little bit, while we plan and record the first part of the *final* season of our first campaign. But, not to worry, there will be plenty of fun bonus content for you to interact with while we are gone. We will have lots of character playlists going up on the official Spotify, if you're a member of our Patreon, we will have several bonus episodes going up, we're going to be posting our first public bonus episode around the holidays. Lots of stuff is coming. And, as far as season three, you can look for that to go live on Friday, December 17th, 2021. However, if you are a member of our Patreon, you'll be getting access to that on Thursday, December 16th, at 9AM PST, or, if you'd like to join us on our YouTube channel for the live premiere of the season, that will be going up on Thursday, December 16th at 5PM, PST. Here we go, y'all. We'll see you soon.