

*Transcribed by Sena Bryer.*

*A note for our readers: “Jess” is Jesse’s in-game avatar’s voice. “Jesse” is his real voice and, once inside the game, the voice of his internal thoughts.*

[Footsteps trudge through thick snow as winds blow mercilessly. We hear shivered breathing as the footsteps stop.]

**Jess:** I’ve lost the horizon.

[He sits down in the snow.]

**Jess:** It’s hard to think that little monster’s responsible for all of this, isn’t it...? I suppose it’s a good thing this world isn’t real. I’d be dead and frozen right now if it was. [Quiet, dejected laughter.] Oh, right. The real world. I was... trying to forget that, wasn’t I?

[The sounds of violent winds increase, then gradually shift into the loud hum of an air conditioning unit and distant background noise of a city.]

[A knock on a door.]

**Jesse:** [internal thought] This is a mistake. This is a big, big mistake.

[The door creaks open.]

**Ethan:** Whatcha need, Jesse my buddy?

**Jesse:** I... uh... well, you see—

**Ethan:** Money?

**Jesse:** [defeated] Yeah. Money.

**Ethan:** Jesse, Jesse, Jesse... I know how much it stinks being broke all the time...

**Jesse:** [internal thought] No, you don’t.

**Ethan:** ...but you can’t expect me to fork over cash every time you want something.

**Jesse:** It’s not...!

**Ethan:** It’s not... what?

**Jesse:** It’s...

**Ethan:** Yes?

**Jesse:** A video game.

**Ethan:** HAH!

**Jesse:** Wait! I know that laugh! You wait and you listen! It’s not what you think, I swear!

**Ethan:** Oh, it’s not, is it?

**Jesse:** You know about my streaming channel, right? You must, considering all the snooping in my room you do.

**Ethan:** It’s called ‘investigative research’, buddy. I’ve heard you talk about the thing, but I don’t know what it actually is. Do you just play video games on the internet for people to watch. Maybe while performing humorous commentary? Is it anything like that?

**Jesse:** So you do know.

**Ethan:** Nope! Not a clue!

**Jesse:** Okay, wise guy, look. It's how I make most of my income. You know, the income that helps pay this rent? You do know how rent works, right? Never mind. Don't answer that. The problem is there's this new game coming out, a VR game, and the hype around it is ri-dic-u-lous! Everyone's saying it changes the entire industry.

**Ethan:** Sounds fun. What's the problem?

**Jesse:** The problem is that the price is way beyond what I can afford right now, what with the bills from the surgery finally coming in.

**Ethan:** I told you you should have let me operate. I totally would have done it for free.

**Jesse:** You're a med school freshman, Ethan.

**Ethan:** Details.

**Jesse:** And even if you were an experienced surgeon, I still wouldn't you poking your fingers around to remove my inflamed appendix. Anyway, all my viewers want me to do this game. They're practically demanding I do, on account of I play mostly open-world RPGs, and this fits in perfectly with that. I know if I let them down I'm going to lose a ton of subscribers, and that means losing a ton of revenue

[He sighs.]

And early release is tomorrow. You see my dilemma.

[Ethan hums in thought for a moment.]

**Ethan:** Okay. I'll do it.

**Jesse:** Really!?

**Ethan:** Of course! There's just one condition... that I haven't thought of yet!

**Jesse:** [angry] Ethan!

[The sounds of the apartment fade out as the scene transitions to a parking lot. A car door closes, and then honks softly as it is locked. Jesse and Ethan's footsteps as they walk towards a store.]

**Ethan:** You preordered the game without knowing if you'd be able to pay for it?

**Jesse:** I wouldn't have gotten it otherwise. This game sold out long ago.

[Ethan whistles in surprise.]

**Ethan:** Wow. What makes this game so special? Is it just really well made?

**Jesse:** Game design-wise? No idea. I don't look into that kind of stuff beforehand. I like games more when I go into them blind, not knowing what I'm in for. Genuine reactions are always the best too. No, what makes it so special is it's the first to utilize complete mindlink technology.

[Ethan's footsteps stop. Jesse's immediately follow suit.]

**Ethan:** [astonished] All five senses!?

**Jesse:** Twelve, technically... I think. But yeah, it's state-of-the-art tech. Nobody's really sure how they made it this affordable this soon.

[They continue walking towards the store. The automatic doors open, and the store interior, people chatting and distant pop muzak, can be heard.]

**Game Store Clerk:** Hi! How can I help you?

**Jesse:** Oh! Y-Yes, I um... I pre-ordered a copy of Dreambound.

**Game Store Clerk:** Name?

**Jesse:** Jesse Piñero.

[The clerk types on her keyboard and clicks her mouse.]

**Game Store Clerk:** Ah, here we are. I'll be right back with it.

[She walks away, leaving Jesse and Ethan waiting.]

**Ethan:** I can't remember the last time I actually went into a store like this. I certainly wasn't expecting it to be this busy.

**Jesse:** Physical copies are coming back in style, man.

**Ethan:** Sure.

**Jesse:** It's nice to own your games. You can't lose all your stuff just because a service decides they want to take it away. Plus, it's kind of nice having a good shelf full of your stuff, you know? I remember my uncle had a shelf full of game cases, a lot of old sixth, seventh, and eighth-gen games. After that it was really hard to find anything physical for a while, until—

**Game Store Clerk:** [mispronouncing] Mr. Pinero?

**Jesse:** Yes! Did you—

**Jesse:** [internal thought] Wow, that's... a really big box.

**Jesse:** [spoken aloud] Why's the box so big?

**Game Store Clerk:** There's a helmet inside, I believe. I don't know much about the game, but it uses a helmet, doesn't it?

**Jesse:** Of course it does! I definitely knew that already.

**Game Store Clerk:** You're lucky you pre-ordered it when you did. I've had to tell a lot of people there's none of these left. Careful on your way home.

**Jesse:** You think I might get mugged?

**Game Store Clerk:** I was just thinking of scalpers, but I guess that could happen too. Anyway, I just need your payment and you'll be good to go, Mr. Pinero.

**Ethan:** [exclaiming loudly] I've got it!

[The chatter of the store, at Ethan's outburst, quiets a bit.]

**Jesse:** [internal thought] Speak of the devil.

**Jesse:** [spoken aloud] Ethan! Perfect timing. Can you come over here?

**Ethan:** Never mind that, Jesse! I've got it!

**Jesse:** Got... what?

**Ethan:** Your condition, of course!

**Jesse:** [internal thought] Oh, right. That.

**Jesse:** [spoken aloud] Well, okay. Lay it on me.

**Ethan:** [cackling a little bit] If you want me to buy this game for me...

**Jesse:** [internal thought] Ethan! Don't let everyone know you're buying it for me! Jeez, that's embarrassing!

**Jesse:** [spoken aloud] Then what? What, Ethan?

**Ethan:** You must play it as the cutest, most adorable girl ever!

[Hushed voices throughout the store murmur and whisper to each other.]

**Jesse:** Is that it? Sure, whatever.

**Ethan:** [desperate] Wait! You also can't tell anyone of your true self! No matter what!

**Jesse:** Yeah, yeah...

**Ethan:** I mean it!

[The scene transitions from the game store to Jesse's apartment, late at night. He types on his keyboard.]

**Jesse:** Yay for clogged servers... Ugh. Four terabytes. I guess it makes sense a VR game like this has to be totally clientside. It's going to take all night to download though.

[He gets up from his chair.]

Ah well, I wasn't really expecting to get to play it tonight.

[Time passes, and it is now morning. Jesse sits back down in his chair and puts on headphones. Faint music can be heard from them, and he begins beatboxing along to it underneath his breath.]

**Ethan:** [sudden] Done downloading!?

**Jesse:** [startled] What the hell, man!? When did you get there?

**Ethan:** Don't worry about it. Is it done?

**Jesse:** Done downloading. It just needs to install. And it's a lot of files so it could take a bit. I'm going to make myself breakfast real quick.

[Jesse stands up and walks out of his room.]

**Ethan:** Does the game have an instruction manual?

**Jesse:** It's on their website. Go find it. [Pause.] On your phone, not my computer.

[A clicking mouse and tapping keys shows Ethan went onto his computer anyway. From the other room cereal is poured into a bowl.]

**Ethan:** [quietly] Aha, there it is. [To the other room] Jesse! Let's make your character!  
[Jesse walks back into the room.]

**Jesse:** It's already done?

**Ethan:** No, but I'm looking at the species you can pick from and they sound really interesting!

**Jesse:** Just make me human.

**Ethan:** Human!? I believe I said 'interesting', not 'so boring why are you even playing a video game just walk outside if you want to be human'. Hmph!

[He calms down.]

Okay, let's see here. High elf looks cute, or dark elf. Dark elves are blue though. You wanna be blue?

**Jesse:** No.

**Ethan:** Well, okay. Hmm...

Ew, no. That's gross.

Eh, no.

Ooh! What about a siren? They're like mermaids—you get to breathe underwater! You like swimming, don't you?

**Jesse:** I do, but no thanks. I like to be able to connect with my character when I'm playing a game. It'll be hard enough doing that if I'm playing a little girl, so I'd rather not be a fish on top of that.

**Ethan:** So I guess dryad is no good either? Plant girl?

**Jesse:** I'm not a salad guy.

**Ethan:** Picky, picky.

No...

Definitely no...

Hmm, angel might be nice. I wonder what they— Oh wow, they look like bimbos. Never mind! High elf it is then! And would you look at that? It just finished installing!

[Ethan clicks the mouse, and a mystical sound effect plays.]

**Ethan:** 'Play Dreambound'!

[Title screen music plays for a moment, but fades away when he clicks the mouse again.]

**Ethan:** 'Create Character'! There we go!

[Jesse sets his cereal bowl down on the desk.]

**Jesse:** All right, my turn.

**Ethan:** [mischievous] No way, buddy.

**Jesse:** What? No! You chose the race and gender. I'm doing the rest. Now c'mon! Move!

[Ethan swivels the chair around.]

**Ethan:** Push me off then. You're a big guy. You can do it.

**Jesse:** [internal thought] Really, Ethan? Using my phobia against me? That's low, even for you.

**Ethan:** Just sit tight and eat your cereal. I'll be done in just a bit. What class do you want?

**Jesse:** [angry] Priest.

**Ethan:** Priest it is!

[Time passes, much more than 'just a bit'. Ethan finished as Jesse is in the other room, cleaning his cereal bowl.]

**Ethan:** Finished!

[Dishes are set down and the faucet is turned off.]

**Jesse:** Took you long enough. Let's see her.

[Jesse walks back into the room.]

**Jesse:** Do I really have to be that?

**Ethan:** How badly you want those views, buddy? You'd better not change your mind now—this is my masterpiece! Front page of my portfolio! You think they'd let me into your art college with it?

**Jesse:** Ethan, just the thought makes me shudder. [Pause] Make her taller.

**Ethan:** No way dude. Tall girls aren't cute. Tall girls are hot. Big difference.

**Jesse:** Whatever. Let's just do this already—it's going on two.

[Jesse lies down on his couch and slips the VR helmet over his head, which muffles all sound slightly.]

**Jesse:** Helmet's on. Oh! Is Capturite running?

**Ethan:** Yep! Systems are go, Captain!

**Jesse:** All right. Choose a random server for me. It doesn't matter which.

**Ethan:** Looks like there's only one.

**Jesse:** [growing nervous] No kidding? Huh. Okay. Interesting. Well then, I... I guess I'm good to go.

**Jesse:** [internal thought] I wonder how it does it. It's not a needle, is it? Or a shock? Or—

[A quick electric noise cuts him short, and all is silent.]

[The cold winds of the snowstorm fade in once again. Jesse's breath is quick and jagged.]

**Jess:** I guess that only makes sense, knowing what I do now.

**Mysterious Voice:** Are you going back?

**Jess:** I don't know. I feel like I should go back, but... I'm afraid. What will they say? I don't even want to think about it. [At himself] You really are a stupid, little girl, aren't you? All this time it was right in front of you and you never noticed. Ethan, you devil.

[The snowstorm slowly dies out.]

**Credits, read by Sena Bryer:** This was the prologue episode of Dreambound. Dreambound is written, directed, produced, and edited by Sena Bryer. The role of Jesse was played by Jack Hawkins and Daisy Guevara. The role of Ethan was played by Grant Young. The game store clerk was played by Francesca Mylod-Ford. The mysterious echo-y voice was played by Sena Bryer.

Dreambound's main theme is "Blue Light" by Pinofas. Other music in this episode was by Sascha Ende and Kevin MacLeod. Proper attribution can be found on our website at [www.senabryer.com/dreambound](http://www.senabryer.com/dreambound). But we're not stopping here! This is a 2-for-1 deal! So, with that being said, let's jump straight into Episode 1: Into Mardéon.

\* \* \*

[A scene outside of time. A historian reads from a book.]

**Julienna Fruy:** Our Mardéon is home to species beyond count. However, many of our scholars hypothesize that, among the endless number of worlds out there along the tides of creation, the norm is one race achieving sentience and then greedily hoarding it for themselves, keeping all the rest of their worldly companions as unenlightened slaves, and eradicating any who should try to rise up.

If this is so, do not think ill of us for saying so. We are certain you have your reasons. Our world must seem queer to you then, with so many peoples inhabiting it together in relative equality.

Mardéon is home to six intelligent species, and among them several subspecies. Later in this book I shall go into greater detail, but for now, let me give a simple overview of the Six.

There is Mankind, made up of Angels and their wingless brethren, Humans;

Naku, a rugged feline race;

Elves, split between the Dark Elves and the High Elves;

Scalefolk, comprised of the magical Draken and the shadowy Kobolds;

Wildkin, a number of races each associated with one of the elements;

and the Dryads, mysterious floral people that others understand little of.

There are others some believe should be included as well, orcs and moblins and fishmen and such, but the Six all mutually agree on the intelligence of the others, so we stop with them for simplicity's sake.

[Main theme plays.]

**Jess:** From “Mardéon: A Visitor Primer”, written by Julienna Fruy.

Episode One: Into Mardéon.

[Silence. The setting is unclear.]

**Jesse:** [slowly waking] Oh. That was a dream. Where am I? It feels like I was dreaming, but... I know that's not right. What was I...? [Pause] I entered the game.

[He moves just a bit. A bed beneath him creaks.]

**Jesse:** I'm lying down in a bed? I guess that makes sense. Ugh, everything's still blurry. I can see a ceiling but...

**Jess:** But where—

**Jesse:** That's right! I forgot! I... Where's something I can— Aha! A mirror! Perfect!

[He scampers out of bed and scurries over to a mirror.]

**Jesse:** I have to see myself! I have to—

[He gasps.]

**Jess:** Holy sh—

**Jesse:** That was not my voice! That was definitely not my voice. And that... is definitely not my... I saw her on the screen, but wow... Now she's a person. Something I can see and touch, but also...

**Jess:** ...me?

**Jesse:** No, no, no, no! That is not me! There is nothing about that face that is me! That is a young teenage girl with pink hair and purple eyes and... [his attention instantly shifted] ...wow, those elf ears look even bigger in person. I can't touch them, right? Or, I can, but I won't feel it, right?

[A cartoon-ish pinching sound effect.]

**Jess:** I CAN feel it! [Pause.]Uh... how in the world do they do that?

[He stands up.]

**Jesse:** Oh my god, I'm short. I am SO short. I remember Ethan moving the height slider all the way down but this is really, really short. That explains why my balance is so off, though it does feel like I'm adjusting quickly to it. So weird. All of this is weird. I shouldn't be able to feel half of this. [Pause] Hmm... If I can feel things I couldn't before. [Slightly perverted] Should I? Or shouldn't I? This might be your only chance, Jesse, to explor—

[A catchy tune plays as a Tutorial / Notifications voice appears.]

**Notifications:** Welcome to the world of Mardéon, and thank you for purchasing Dreambound!

**Jess:** [Startled] Who's there!?

**Notifications:** No one! This is a semi-automated message provided for the purpose of helping to ease you into the game and better ready you for the trials ahead.

**Jesse:** [Scoffs] So much for getting a look at... yeah. Save it for another time, Jesse. When you're not recording your gameplay.

**Notifications:** The mind is an amazing organ, capable of adapting to remarkable situations, but an entirely new body takes some time to become fully accustomed to. Having accomplished quite literally the first step, standing up, the mindlink is now stable enough that you should have little problem with anything else. However, there are some things you might not know about your new body. First and foremost, look at the symbols on your palms.

These sigils are your means of logging out of Dreambound and returning to the real world. Don't do it now if you wish to remain in the game, but to log out, simply place your hands together and either say or think the words 'I want to go home,' and so shall you be!

**Jesse:** Simple enough. I hadn't noticed those symbols on my palms though. Those are kind of cool-looking. Like summoning circles, almost.

**Notifications:** Second, your HUD, or heads-up display. As you may have noted to be a bit strange, there is absolutely nothing obstructing your view of the world, unlike most games. Place your middle and ring finger, either hand, on the palm of the same hand, and watch what happens.

[A quick, digital sound effect as Jesse opens his HUD.]

**Notifications:** In the bottom-right corner is the date and time. As much as we hope you enjoy our game, we do not want you to forget about the real world, so be sure to pay attention to the time! In the bottom-left is your health and mana, both listed as numbers. Your health is what keeps you alive. If it reaches zero, you will have twenty seconds to be revived. After that, tough luck! Your mana is magical energy used to cast spells and perform techniques.

**Jesse:** Oh, for the love of...

**Jess:** Yes, yes. I know this. I've played a video game before. Skip. Where's the Skip Tutorial function?

**Notifications:** There is none! Should you be in a group with other players, their health and mana will be viewable here as well. In the upper-right corner is the main menu where you may manage your inventory, spells and abilities, and view your statistics, among other things. Also note that while in this view, you will see the names of other character, both player and nonplayer.

**Jesse:** That's right! I never even thought to choose a name for my character. Oh Ethan, I swear to God if you named me something--

[A pause.]

**Jess:** Did... you... REALLY!? Tutorial! How do I hide my name!?

**Notifications:** Why, just grab it and put it in your inventory, you silly thing!

[He reaches up, swipes the nameplate, and puts it away. A quick jingle plays.]

**Jess:** Wow, that actually worked.

**Jesse:** Ethan, when I log off, I am going to murder you for naming me that, I swear.

[Sighs] But that can come later.

**Jess:** For now, I have a game to play. No, correction. I have a game to enjoy. So...

**Jesse:** Ugh, this voice is so-- NO! No, I need to get used to it.

**Jess:** Yes. Get used to it. It's just like a voice changer app. A really, really good one!

[Slightly distraught] That I can't turn off.

[A pause as he looks around.]

**Jess:** Just where am I anyway? A cottage? Is it supposed to be my house? My character seems kind of young to own a home. Hey, tutorial! Is this my house? Where am I?

[There is no response.]

**Jess:** Tutorial?

[Still nothing.]

**Jesse:** I guess the tutorial's over? Or maybe I need to activate other items to continue it. Maybe... Let's see what we got in here... Aha!

[He picks up a staff, and the same "Item Get" jingle plays.]

**Notifications:** Obtained Worn oak staff!

**Jess:** Cool! Is this my weapon? How do I use it? Do I just swing at stuff?

[No response.]

**Jesse:** All right, fine, you butt. I'll pick something else up.

[Item Get jingle!]

**Notifications:** Obtained Map of Han Tol!

**Jess:** Is that where I am? Han Tol?

[No response.]

**Jess:** Oh, who am I kidding. You're not going to say anything else. You're just waiting for me to go outside.

**Jesse:** [Nervous] Outside. Right. I have to leave here and go outside.

[A gentle harp plays as Ethan's voice appears.]

**Ethan:** [As a flashback] You also can't tell anyone of your true self!

[The flashback ends.]

**Jesse:** Yeah, yeah. I get it, Ethan. You want me to act like a girl. Fine, fine, but you can't blame me when it doesn't work.

**Jess:** I mean, just because I look and sound like one doesn't mean people are going to assume I am one. The world just doesn't work like that, man.

[He grabs the door handle.]

**Jesse:** ...So then why am I so afraid?

**Jess:** [Shaking out his worries] Oh, just open it, Jess!

[The door creaks loudly as he opens it. A gentle piano melody plays as the murmur and quiet bustle of townsfolk fills the air.]

**Jesse:** [Astonished] Wow... This is... wow. What town is this? Is that a mountain? Am I in a mountain village?

[He bumps into someone.]

**Jess:** Sorry! I wasn't looking where I was—

**Jesse:** Another elf like me. Now that I notice it, they're all elves here, aren't they? I guess that makes sense for a starting zone. [Pause] Why isn't he saying anything? Is he a player or an NPC?

**Jess:** [Nervous] H-Hello?

**Jesse:** Okay, he's gotta be an NPC. An actual person would say something back. This guy's not even looking at me. [Pause] What IS he looking at?

[A roaring fire gradually increases in volume.]

**Jess:** Wait... that one's not a sun. It's—

[An explosion! A ball of fire impacts with a building, sending debris flying about. People scream out.]

**Jess:** Aah!

[He runs back to the door, now closed, and bangs on it frantically.]

**Jess:** Let me back in! Let me back in!

[Fire continues to rain on the city. Distant explosions boom in the distance as townsfolk continue to panic and flee for their lives.]

**Jesse:** This is insane! Did I start the game when someone decided to siege the town? Like, a big guild or something? No, no, no—that's impossible! The game hasn't even been live for a day yet! Then... this was scripted to happen! But I haven't even learned how to fight yet! [Pause] Should I log out? I should log out, shouldn't I? Okay... what were the words again? 'I want to--

[Another fireball careens into the cottage Jesse exited from, sending him to the ground.]

**Jess:** Ow! Ow! Ow—

**Jesse:** Wait, right. It doesn't actually hurt. Pain is illegal in a mindlink.

[He opens his HUD.]

**Jesse:** Still took away seventeen health points though. And I've only got a hundred and eleven. So I'm running, right? Yeah, I'm running.

[He runs through the burning town as the explosions and fires continue. He bumps into one person, a kid, still alive.]

**Jess:** Agh! Hey! What are you doing running that way, kid? The fire's worse that way!

[The kid does not respond.]

**Jesse:** Tch! Just an NPC.

[He turns back around, taking two steps before a voice calls out.]

**Dark Elf Wizard:** [from a distance] There you are I've been looking for you!

[Jesse stops.]

**Jesse:** Okay, this one's got to be a player. Is he an ally?

**Dark Elf Wizard:** I'm gonna start now! Okay? Let's go!

[The wizard begins casting a spell.]

**Jesse:** A dark elf...?

[The spell completes, and a crack of lightning strikes Jesse atop his head.]

**Jess:** Gah!

**Jesse:** Why is he attacking me!? Did he target the wrong person!?

[Jesse sprints away.]

**Dark Elf Wizard:** Hey wait, wait, wait, wait! I need to kill you for a quest!

**Jesse:** That's even worse!

[He pants heavily as he runs through the remainder of the burning town. From ahead, a middle-aged elf villager calls out to him.]

**Middle-aged Man:** Miss! Hurry!

[A nearby explosion destroys a nearby building, but Jesse manages to bypass it and meet up with the man.]

**Middle-aged Man:** Are you all right? Can you walk?

**Jess:** [exhausted] I'm fine, thank you. Please tell me that's your carriage over there and that we're getting the hell out of here right now.

[The man makes no response.]

**Jesse:** NPC. Got it. Man, there's really no way to tell without talking to them, is there?

[He climbs inside the carriage, which muffles the sounds of the fire only slightly. The middle-aged elf follows in. A driver outside whips the reins.]

**Driver:** Yah!

[The horses whinny, and immediately break into a gallop.]

**Jesse:** Five others. And a driver. Are we all that survived?

[The scene fades out to silence. When it fades back in, wildlife can be heard. The carriage moves at a much gentler pace. Time has passed.]

**Middle-aged Man:** Yai Wen... obliterated. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes I'd refuse to believe it.

**Crone:** I would. I've known all my life those dark elves couldn't be trusted! Treaty be damned!

**Older Brother:** I suppose it was too good to believe they'd stay in their desert forever.

**Crone:** That's what I've said! I've been telling everyone that all my life! The treaty with Binésa was signed over fifty years ago, and even then, I knew it was nothing more than a filthy façade of theirs! And now look! [Remorseful] Our town of Yai Wen... in cinders. Its people, ash!

[A baby begins to cry. Its mother tries to soothe it.]

**Mother:** [Gentle] Shoosh, shoosh, it's okay... [To the others] Let us be thankful then that we are not among them.

**Middle-aged Man:** Agreed. But what I don't understand is why.

**Older Brother:** Why? Because they're dark elves! Why wouldn't they burn and pillage? It's what they do!

**Middle-aged Man:** Inherently evil they may be, yes, but they are not stupid. Han Tol eclipses Binésa in every aspect of military strength, and they know this. Why would they start a war with us like this? It makes no sense.

**Jesse:** And, like the first ten minutes of a murder mystery, I haven't a clue. I'll try to remember the names at least--they'll probably quiz me on them later. The burned town was Yai Wen and Binésa is a nation of dark elves.

**Crone:** Maybe they know something we don't. Maybe they HAVE something we don't. These are not good folk like you and I. Dark elves dabble in magics and alchemies Bao has deigned foul and unholy in His eyes.

**Jesse:** And Bao is some deity. Cool.

**Middle-aged Man:** Let us pray you are incorrect, elder. War is horrid enough, but dark magics?

[A shuttered door in the carriage opens.]

**Driver:** Shin Hil on the horizon, folks. We're almost to town.

**Young Brother:** Where? I don't see anything!

**Older Brother:** Sit down, Ren! And it's right over there. Can't you see it?

**Jesse:** It's okay, Ren, I don't see it either. [Pause] Oh wait, there it is. Huh. Tiny, little place.

**Middle-aged Man:** We aren't stopping here, are we?

**Driver:** We are.

**Middle-aged Man:** But so close to Yai Wen! Are you sure we'll be safe?

**Driver:** I am sure, though of our danger, not our safety. Now that war shall surely be upon us, safety, I fear, shall be a luxury. But Shin Hil is my home, and I plan to stay here. If you seek to travel further, you will need to find someone else. For this I am sorry.

**Middle-aged Man:** [Sighs] I suppose you're right. Those dark elves will hunt us down. All of us. We are the witnesses to their evil.

**Jesse:** Uh huh. I get what you're saying, old man. 'There will be still players trying to kill you, so be

careful'. And now that I know PKing in this game is merciless, I'll be a little more alert when I'm

outside towns and other sanctuary zones.

**Middle-aged Man:** I mean to make for Shan Tir, personally. The Admiral there is my cousin. If I were you, however, I would put as much distance between you and Yai Wen as possible. Head to the capital or maybe even jump the border into Terland or Thaar if you feel so inclined. Just... not here.

**Older Brother:** What about Lagan? They're our allies, aren't they?

**Crone:** Pah! The mountain cats love our power, not us. You watch! The moment we lose that they'll abandon us quicker than you'd blink! And good luck passing through the Broken Neck when that happens!

[The baby begins to cry again, which puts an end to the conversation. The scene transitions to the town center.]

**Jesse:** You're definitely out in the world now, Jess. So uh... jeez, how do I approach this? Should I just act natural? Or try to be more... feminine? Ugh, I don't know which is better. Which won't make it obvious I'm a nineteen-year-old dude playing a little elf girl?

**Jess:** [Nervous] Here I go...

[He cautiously steps out of the carriage and onto the street. The carriage immediately sets off, leaving him alone.]

**Jess:** Oh... Okay. Bye, I guess.

**Ethan:** I was wondering when you'd show up.

**Jess:** Ethan!?

**Ethan:** What's the matter? Stunned by my beauty?

**Jess:** [Sidetracked] What? No, in fact you look exactly the sa-- [back to furious] Wait, that's not the point! It's you!

**Ethan:** Yep! It's me!

**Jess:** But... but how...?

**Ethan:** How did I get here before you? Yeah, I dunno that one either. You must've taken your time getting here. Boy, that burning city was something though, wasn't it? Scared the bejeebus outta--

**Jess:** That's not what I mean! How did you get a copy of Dreambound? It was all sold out!

**Ethan:** Don't worry about it, Jesse my buddy! Isn't this just great? You and me on an adventure together!

**Jesse:** [Sarcastic] Yeah... what could be better?

[The scene fades, transitioning to the thick of the forest. Footsteps as Jesse and Ethan trudge through. Ethan's rambling fades in.]

**Ethan:** The girl they had me fight in the beginning didn't have a clue what she was doing the poor thing. She was barely able to fight back before she went down. Same for you, right? Since, you know, you came in on the carriage as well instead of... I dunno, whatever happens to the dead ones.

**Jesse:** [Fibbing] Yeah. Well, he put up a bit of a fight at least. [Pause] These trees are really big, aren't they?

**Ethan:** And deadly, no doubt! Ooh, I can't imagine what horrible nasties are just waiting in those branches to pounce on a pair of unsuspecting elves wandering through their forest!

[Something rustles in a nearby bush. They stop.]

**Ethan:** Oh?

[More rustling as a boar steps out.]

**Jess:** It's just a boar, Ethan.

[The boar snorts.]

**Ethan:** Hmm. A cute little thing like you oughta start with a mouse or a rabbit, dontcha think?

**Jess:** [Sassy] Ethan, I will fight you.

**Ethan:** [Sassy right back] You better fight that boar first.

**Jess:** Ignoring you now.

[Jesse breaths deep, stabilizing breaths as he thinks to himself.]

**Jesse:** Okay. You read the help page on the way here. You saw how to cast a spell. Just point at your target, then either say the spell's name, or think of it in your head. Hmm. Do I want to use the staff or should I cast my spells barehanded? [Pause] I want the staff. Okay... Here we go!

[The spell forms around Jesse's staff.]

**Jess:** *White Comet!*

[He casts it at the boar, which squeals in pain upon impact.]

**Jess:** [To Ethan] Ha ha! Did you see that!? That was amazing!

[The boar, not dead, roars in anger and charges towards Jesse.]

**Jesse:** [Panicking] What!? I thought I got it! Uh... um... what do I do!?

[Another spell is cast at the boar. This time, it falls to the ground and is silent.]

**Jesse:** Is... Is it dead? [Pause] I'm gonna poke it.

[It makes a squish-squish noise as he pokes the dead boar.]

**Ethan:** Hey, I got a boar tusk. Neat! I wonder what I can use that for.

**Jess:** [Sighs in relief] I thought you would've chosen a thief rather than a wizard.

**Ethan:** Are you saying I steal things?

**Jess:** I'm saying you like money, you rich bastard.

**Ethan:** Hm. Well. Okay. But I'm not a wizard-- I'm a summoner.

**Jess:** [Jeering] Oh really? So why didn't you summon something to attack the boar? That would've made things much easier.

**Ethan:** [Slightly dejected] Unfortunately, I can't just yet.

**Jess:** A summoner who can't summon, huh? [Laughs] That's pretty sad, man...

**Ethan:** [Haughty] Hmph! Miss, I seem to have scraped my knee in that last fight. Might I beg a healing spell of you? Oh! What's that? A healer who can't heal? You don't say! [Back to normal] Don't worry, Jesse, when I'm able to summon some monster I'll be sure to let the two of you do all the work while I sit back and reap the benefits. Ha ha ha ha!

**Jesse:** Okay, that does sound like him.

**Ethan:** So, shall we continue exploring out here?

**Jess:** Of course. I have to get my heals and you your summons, right?

**Ethan:** Sounds like a plan!

[The scene transitions as time passes.]

**Ethan:** [Distant] Got a wolf coming!

[The wolf pants heavily as the two run closer]

**Jess:** Ethan! I told you I'm low on mana!

**Ethan:** Oh, don't worry about it. He's just a little fella. Aren't ya, buddy?

[The wolf barks. It sounds more like a dog than a wolf.]

**Jess:** Oh, fine. But we rest after this one, okay?

**Ethan:** I should get level three with this, so that's fine by me! Oooh, I'm definitely going to get my summon this time!

**Jess:** You said that last time. Here, I can see the wolf now. Get out of the way so I don't shoot you instead.

[Jesse casts his White Comet spell the same as before.]

**Jess:** *White Comet!*

[The wolf gives a pathetic yelp and dies. As soon as it does, they both level up with a loud ding!]

**Notifications:** Level up!

**Ethan:** [Dismayed] Oh come on! Still nothing!? That's it! I'm logging off!

**Jess:** Hah! Giving up? You're just mad because I got my heals.

**Ethan:** [Sneering] Wow, you must be really into it, Jesse, because you haven't noticed it's already going on six o'clock.

**Jess:** Whoa, seriously?

**Ethan:** Seriously. And last time I checked, virtual food doesn't cure hunger, and I'm hungry.

[Jesse's stomach growls. How do we hear it inside the game? That's a mystery.]

**Jess:** I hadn't noticed it until you said something... [Pause] Sheesh. My mouth is parched too.

**Ethan:** Bazo's? My treat.

**Jess:** Pff. Please. Nothing is your treat.

**Jesse:** Without 'conditions' at least.

**Jess:** So, I just go like this, right, with my hands? And say the words?

[He takes a deep breath.

**Jess:** I want to go home.

[He waits, but nothing happens.]

**Jess:** ...Did I screw it up?

**Ethan:** Probably. Here, I'll try.

[He claps his hands together.]

**Ethan:** I want to go home!

[His body dissipates into code with a sound like static electricity amid soft, discordant beeps, and then all is quiet again.

**Jesse:** Well, it worked for him. I must've done something wrong. Let me try it again. Elbows high, legs shoulder-width apart, clap my hands together and shout...

**Jess:** I want to go home!

[Nothing.]

**Jesse:** Okay, I'll think the words then. I want to go home!

[Still, nothing.]

**Jess:** What the hell!?

[Ethan reappears, logging back in with a similar electric and computerized sound]

**Jess:** [Panicking] Ethan, good, you're back! It didn't work!

**Ethan:** I saw. On the bright side, your recording program is still running.

**Jess:** Who cares about that!? What am I going to do if I can't log off? I don't get it. I said the words and did everything just like you did, but nothing happened! Nothing! [Pause] I should tell someone. I should file a report and--

**Ethan:** [Suddenly grave] Wait! Let me see your hands.

**Jess:** My hands? No!

**Ethan:** Just let me see them.

[Silence. Jesse does not comply.]

**Ethan:** Yeesh, you really don't like being touched, do you? Fine, just show me your palms.

**Jess:** Okay...

**Ethan:** They're gone.

**Jess:** The symbols... Is that why?

**Ethan:** It has to be, right? The friendly robot voice said that's how you log off.

**Jess:** [Panicking] But that's stupid!

**Ethan:** I agree. But as it stands, it seems like that's the situation.

**Jesse:** That's... That's ridiculous! Why would they even do such a thing!? Why would they ever make it so you can't log out!?

**Jess:** I'm going to report this. I have to. This is a horrible bug.

**Ethan:** I wouldn't do that...

**Jess:** What!? Why on earth wouldn't I?

**Ethan:** Because this could be very, very dangerous if word got out that someone was trapped in the game, especially for that someone themselves. [Reassuring] Don't worry. I'll send the report confidentially from the real world. And I won't give out your name unless they absolutely need it. Until then, just... sit tight, all right?

**Jess:** 'Just sit tight'? Ethan, I--

**Ethan:** Trust me on this, okay? It's better that I do it. I do have... friends in high places, you know.

**Jesse:** Well, that's true at least...

**Jess:** But—

[Ethan logs off once again, leaving Jesse alone with the forest.]

**Jess:** But I don't want to be alone...

[The forest sounds slowly fade to silence.]

**Credits, read by Sena Bryer:** This was episode 1 of Dreambound. Dreambound is written, directed, produced, and edited by Sena Bryer. The role of Jesse was played by Jack Hawkins and Daisy Guevara. The role of Ethan was played by Grant Young. The role of Julienna Fruy was played by Stacey Cotham. The friendly tutorial robot voice was played by Sena Bryer. The dark elf assailant was played by Joe Cliff Thompson. The elven villagers were played by Daniel Santoy, Daniel Kisala, Pavle Vasiljevic, Jumpie Studios, and Sena Bryer.

Dreambound's main theme is "Blue Light" by Pinofas. Other music used in this episode was by Alexander Nakarada and Kevin MacLeod. Proper attribution can be found on our website at [www.senabryer.com/dreambound](http://www.senabryer.com/dreambound).

If you like what you've heard, and want to hear more, then consider donating to the Seed & Spark season 1 fundraising campaign! It will be launching soon so keep an eye on our website or follow @dreamboundpod on Twitter for more information, such as backer incentives and stretch goals! And of course, it never hurts to leave a rating and/or a review of Dreambound wherever you listen to it. Stay safe everyone, and we'll see you in the game!