

A Court of Song and Shadow

A Theory on the Plot Direction for ACOTAR 6, 7, 8

Author Credit: u/khalen_pearce on reddit; @solaraidan on instagram

In case I end up being right: dated April Xth, 2026

"Music is a moral law. It gives a soul to the Universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, a charm to sadness, gaiety and life to everything. It is the essence of order, and leads to all that is good and just and beautiful." – Widely misattributed to Plato, author unknown

"Among all the different arts, the art of music has been specially considered divine, because it is the exact miniature of the law working through the whole universe." – Hazrat Inayat Khan

OVERVIEW

Can the divine energy of the Maasverse be influenced through music? This is a theory that I have been working on for some time, but it originally felt too far-fetched (seriously, reread that first sentence) to be worth seriously pursuing. That changed with [Sarah J. Maas' March 4th instagram post](#). As you may/not know, [SJM assigns each of her books specific representative emojis](#) when announced: a crown for KOA, a flame for ACOSF, an otter for HOSAB, etc. These emojis are also in her instagram bio. For the ACOTAR 6 & 7, the emoji she has given is a collection of music notes (🎵). Thus, I finally sat down to put my thoughts to paper.

A few opening notes:

1. This theory draws on aspects from across all three of the Maasverse series. Where possible it leans on direct quotes, but in some cases it also leans on (or further develops) other fan theories. With that being said, it is FAR from being spoiler free. I highly recommend not reading this if you have not COMPLETED reading the three series. Many things are revealed in the last/most recent book of each series, and many of those things will be discussed in detail.
 - a. Unfortunately, I have ebooks of these books so I do not have page #'s but will provide chapter numbers for direct quotes.
2. This theory HEAVILY, directly, and inseparably develops the popular fan theory that the mechanics/"laws of the multiverse" SJM is drawing from are directly inspired by our real-world theory of String Theory. In the spirit of clarity, whenever I refer to string theory

from here on out, I will refer to it as string physics to make it clear when I am referring to our theoretical earth science vs. SJM theories. If you haven't heard of string physics or the fan theories around it, that's fine, we will get to that in a moment.

3. If you're coming from the reddit TL;DR version, I used superscript numbers (for example ¹²) instead of quotes to keep it as concise as possible. If you are coming here looking for the quotes to support a particular part of the post you had questions about, just match the superscript citation number from the post to the quote number in the body below. Quotes are indented with a pink bar, like the quotes below the title above.
4. One of the incredible things I find in SJM's books is the fact that there *is* an overarching plot/workings of the universe that our heroes are slowly discovering through their own individual actions and plotlines (sorry, if you haven't read Crescent City that's not my fault). This theory discusses a core aspect of the "nature of reality" that I believe our characters are about to discover about the universe. Specifically, I am theorizing what is out there for them to discover - there are a ton of ways SJM could actually go about achieving that in the narrative, but the how doesn't matter so much as the what. I do have SOME ideas for this though - Nesta and Koeschi are central to that. This also presumes that the ACOTAR characters would be pretty invested in figuring out how the events of CC3 were even possible, as I highly doubt they will just brush off the possible threats that opens the door to. If you do NOT find an overarching plot that allows for the series to merge around a unifying origin/magic source and protecting it, leave now. We are all allowed to enjoy different aspects of art, and this is the aspect I am enjoying here!

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<i>Click the section header to jump to a section, or review the TL;DR summary to see if you think the content is skippable based on what you already know</i>	
In this essay I will	I'm fully aware of how long this document is. This is basically my thesis statement summed up in a few up front. It may sound far fetched due to brevity, but everything that follows will support it.
Why would SJM connect music to the divine?	SJM has a degree in Creative Writing and Religious Studies; it is well known that music is one of the earliest ways through which humans practiced religion and developed relationships to both the divine and each other.
Quick primer on string physics	Bare bones explanation of string physics for the non-physicist: what strings are, why dimensions matter, and why SJM specifically name-dropping this

Click the section header to jump to a section, or review the TL;DR summary to see if you think the content is skippable based on what you already know

	theory is worth paying attention to.
String physics, vibrational energy, and bubble universes	New stuff! Not in the previous/cited post about string physics! Important! Read!
Plucking the strings	The Harp, The Horn, and the Wyrdmarks: how the primary objects of power in the Maasverse function as precision instruments for manipulating the vibrational fabric of reality, and why the language of creation may be musical notation in disguise.
Music throughout the Maasverse	No physics, just literary analysis. Every FMC has either a deep personal connection to music, a transcendental musical experience, or both. These quotes paint the picture for each character. Includes a quick summary highlight table for the sane, and/or an 11-page quote section for the committed.
Let there be light!	Sound is only half of what we're looking at here. All of our different light powers related to creation and destruction (+ the golden glow of Mother Wyrd) also make sense in string physics land, and sound can interact with light in weird ways in the real world.
Obsidian, quartz, and gates, oh my!	Obsidian and quartz are the core materials of wyrdstone, black salt, the Asteri palace, the Asteri gates, the list goes on and on. It's a crystal girlie world. And they have some very interesting qualities with light and sound (if you wanted to interrupt a sound wave and hold it open, obsidian is your boy)!
Where is the story heading?	Everything up to this point has demonstrated the framework, this is where it gets applied. Nesta is going to be very important and very busy.
Koeschi and the Multiverse of Madness	Who ELSE but an immortal sorcerer lord from Slavic mythology who captures young women, casts sleeping spells that are broken by music, fears nothing more than Death, hides his immortality in objects of power on a misty island, and travels through wind would make sense at this point?
Bonus Theories 1, 2, & 3	These are super short and not nearly as well researched, I'm kind of going off vibes and intuition. They work within/in addition to the main argument I'm making here. Bullet point speed run: <i>Koschei is an Asteri! Hybern was Orcus! Elain discovers the</i>

Click the section header to jump to a section, or review the TL;DR summary to see if you think the content is skippable based on what you already know

secrets of the Asteri in the crumbling Spring Court!

IN THIS ESSAY, I ARGUE: MOTHER IS MOTHERING

RE: Quote 7 (Ithan & Under-King, House of Flame and Shadow, Ch. 81)

[Ithan] and Hypaxia stood before the Under-King in a gray-stoned temple to Urd. The Under-King lounged on a throne beneath a behemoth statue of a figure holding a black metal bowl between her upraised hands. Symbols were carved all over the bowl, continuing down her fingers, her arms, her body. Ithan could only assume it was meant to represent Urd. No other temples ever depicted the goddess, no one even dared—most people claimed that fate was impossible to portray in any one form. But it seemed that the dead, unlike the living, had a vision of her. And those symbols running from the bowl onto her skin ... they were like tattoos. They looked oddly familiar. [...] “And she,” the Under-King went on, gesturing to that unusual depiction of Urd towering above him, “was not a goddess, but a force that governed worlds. A cauldron of life, brimming with the language of creation. Urd, they call her here—a bastardized version of her true name. Wyrd, we called her in that old world.”

Wyrd is the real main character of the Maasverse. She goes by The Mother, The Cauldron, Urd, maybe names we haven't learned or recognized yet. She's got a lot of names because she's older than the languages people use to name her, and a lot of faces because fate takes too many forms to pin down. She is the source of all life, all magic, and all reality across every world in this multiverse. As the Under-King says, she's "a force that governed worlds." She's not a goddess, not a person, not a cauldron, not a language, but the fabric of reality itself. The source and the foundation from which all else comes to be. And the Maasverse, generally speaking, is the story of what happens when she gets exploited. All 3 of our series start with a seed of a mystery - those who wield magic are unable or weaker than they should be, because someone is pulling the strings in the background. These narratives ask: who seizes the instruments of power, what does that cost the worlds they bleed dry, and how do our heroes eventually figure out what's wrong and do something about it. Mother Wyrd kinda reminds me quite a little of the world spirit in James Cameron's *Avatar* movies in that way.

There are THOUSANDS of fan theories about where it's all going. Most of them read the tea leaves of character arcs and foreshadowing, and I am asking a different question. I want to

dissect this hoe (as in, Elain loves gardening hoes) from the inside out. If you can actually characterize what magic is, what reality is, and how the mechanics all work, you get a foundation you can use for basically everything else. The bet I'm making is that if you understand the battlefield, you have a better shot at predicting the battles.

My argument is that the fabric of the Maasverse (Mother Wyrd) is (possibly sentient) vibrational energy. Specifically "strings" in the string physics sense, which SJM has namedropped in interviews and which have been hiding in plain sight as easter eggs across all three series. Those strings vibrate and form different bubble universes (this is a concept from string physics, not mine), each with its own rules and theoretically manipulable by anyone smart enough to alter the resonance of said strings. Sound and music are the primary way that manipulation happens via the Harp, the Horn, and the language of creation itself. And every single FMC in this multiverse has a relationship to music that goes way past "she just really loves music!" once you look closer.

Light is the second way. Same wavelength physics as sound, different frequencies. It's everywhere! We have firstlight, secondlight, healing light, starlight, Mala's fire, moonfire, spellcleaving light, Theia pulling a star out of her own chest and splitting it three ways using the Harp. String physics allows sound and light to both be part of the same magic system working with the same vibrating strings. The times where sound and light show up at the same time (which frequently happens during the big moments) are not a coincidence.

Then we have the materials. Quartz and Wyrdstone/obsidian (black salt contains obsidian) are everywhere reality gets thin and magic gets thiqq in this universe. The gates, ritual sites, objects of power, Asteri palaces, and thin places are all related to them. Their actual real world physics/the way they interact with sound and light are very well suited to what SJM has built around them.

And then there's Koschei. Ancient, imprisoned, deathless, very much a problem. The Irish and Slavic mythology SJM is pulling from for his character (Koschei the Deathless is an actual mythic antagonist) has a very specific relationship to music, female captivity, objects of power, mountains, and islands. I believe the Koschei conflict we are building towards is where our heroes will finally understand the vibrating fabric of reality. The Asteri were motivated to figure that out because they got munchies and had to skedaddle from their home world, the Inner Circle is motivated to figure that out so that they can explain where the **** Bryce came from, how she got there, and how to beat Koschei.

Strap in and strap on.

FIRST - WHY WOULD SJM CONNECT MUSIC TO THE DIVINE, ANYWAY?

For those that do not know, SJM graduated from Hamilton College with a bachelors majoring in Creative Writing and minoring in Religious Studies. The product of her Creative Writing degree is obvious; the influence of her Religious Studies minor requires a bit more examination. Clearly, she has a great interest in a variety of global mythologies that she adapts. A few examples of this: Baba Yaga (Yellowlegs) is a witch from Slavic folklore who preferably eats young children and lives in a deceptively sized traveling hut; Wyrd/Urd is the concept of fate in Old English and Norse mythology (the 3 Weird Sisters from Macbeth were originally spelled the Wyrd sisters, as they foretell fate); ACOTAR #1 is an adaptation of the Roman Cupid and Psyche myth (which in turn inspired many other similar folklores, including East of the Sun and West of the Moon as well as Beauty and the Beast); ACOTAR as a series broadly speaking borrows HEAVILY from Irish and Celtic mythology; The Morrigan is a Celtic goddess; the Valkyries in ACOSF draw from Norse myth; her long-rumored *Twilight of the Gods* series title is another name for the Norse event of Ragnarok, etc. Crescent City alone holds a trove of Norse references (Midgard, vanir, Thurr, Hel). The list goes on and on.

Beyond face value adaptations of mythology, it is also apparent that she is applying the core concepts of religious study to her work. Religious study programs are typically agnostic, focusing on the way that religions organize over time throughout human history and their impact on society, individual members, and culture at large. Broadly speaking, they examine what values or phenomena a given religion centralizes around; how people, objects, or rituals become venerated within the religion, what the relationship between a worshipper and what is being worshipped manifests, and how the religion is communicated more broadly. From Hamilton College's [Religious Studies description](#):

QUOTE 1: Hamilton College

"The goal of the Religious Studies Department is to nurture students' curiosity about societies around the globe from ancient to contemporary times and how they have made meaning, transcended boundaries, and found ways to live well; think critically about diversity within and among religious traditions; examine the intersections of religion and society, politics, and culture; and do all this while employing a range of approaches, methods, and theories."

You may recall from your world history class that one of the earliest and most fundamental ways that early humans organized and practiced religion was through music, among other types of art. Early human religions were primarily focused on the veneration and recognition of the natural world around them. Fire, rain, and the spirits of animals hunted were all things that early humans honored through ritual. We have archaeological records of instruments such as rainmaker reeds and bone flutes that imitate the sounds of birds of prey (made from the bones of those birds) to

support this. The values (of the natural world, although these values evolve over time as culture and religion does) that early religions congregated around served as a unifying factor for early societies. In [his Frontiers paper on the origin of music](#), Jeremy Montague argues:

QUOTE 2: Frontiers

“[M]usic is not only cohesive on society but almost adhesive. Music leads to bonding [...] Dancing or singing together before a hunt or warfare binds the participants into a cohesive group, and we all know how walking or marching in step helps to keep one going. It is even suggested that it was music, in causing such bonding, that created not only the family but society itself, bringing individuals together who might otherwise have led solitary lives, scattered at random over the landscape.”

So, with music being one of the earliest and most fundamental ways through which humans 1) interacted with the forces they deemed divine; 2) organized into cohesive societies, it is not surprising that an author with a degree in Religious Studies might lean on music when considering how her characters may interact with divine forces of the universe, and in turn how those divine forces shape reality. In other words, the things we consider “divine” have changed across time (and can be adjusted for any fictional universe), but our tendency to relate with that divinity through music has been a constant throughout human history.

SJM has a recurrent theme throughout her series that asks: what does it really mean to be ‘a god’, or worthy of ‘worship’? What entities possess power or recognition that warrants that? How do they keep it? How do they share it? What hierarchy exists amongst god-like beings? Most importantly, what does that power mean for those who do not possess it? The Valg claim to be gods unto themselves, yet the Erilean gods imply that they could have easily taken care of Erawan back in their homeland per their original bargain with Brannon. Maeve claims herself to be a goddess, and Aelin claims to be a god right back. The Asteri claim to be gods, yet Polaris was eaten by Apollion. Across all of her series, we see a struggle between those that seize power and demand worship, those that rise against that injustice, and a benevolent force in the background carefully shaping fate (Wyrd, Urd, Mother/Cauldron) whose corruption our heroes are trying to resolve. Music naturally lends itself as an analogy for how this dance plays out. Instruments can literally be played, manipulated, or seized by those with the skill and the will to do so. But what if the question of who gets to play the instrument is not just political but also cosmological? What if the right instrument, in the right hands, could alter the very strings reality is woven from? What if a god is just the being who wields that power? That is where string physics comes in.

A QUICK PRIMER ON STRING PHYSICS

The easiest way to catch up on this and how it relates to the Maasverse would be to read [this excellent reddit post by u/puzzled bat 13031](#). Like mine, they have a shorter reddit post and [a more fleshed out \(26 pages\) google doc](#). This is also not totally concocted out of our wack job brains; [SJM has spoken about string physics previously](#) and stated that she imagines the rules of her multiverse operating in a similar fashion. Out of all of the multiversal and/or parallel universal theories of physics in the real-world, string physics is a highly specific one to mention and one that has been referenced in easter eggs throughout her series. String physics in the real world is actually better known for reconciling quantum mechanics with general relativity than it is for proposing parallel universes. I highly recommend at least reading that reddit post, but if not here is a quick summary:

Basically, string theory proposes that the most fundamental layer of reality isn't made of point-like particles, but of extremely small, one-dimensional "strings," and what we perceive as different particles are just different vibrational patterns of these strings as they vibrate. Strings are not solid matter, they aren't something that you can point to. They are the underlying structure of the universe, and it is the WAY that they vibrate on their own and with each other that produces the observable particles (photons, electrons, etc.) that we are familiar with. The whole point is focusing more on how they are vibrating rather than what they are. Now for the math to work, these one dimensional strings have to exist within more than the usual 3 dimensions of space (plus time). Depending on which school of string physics you're talking about, reality may have 10, 11, or even 26 dimensions, most of which are hidden or folded in ways we don't directly perceive. This allows for dimensions to sort of overlap (called a manifold, think of an incredibly complicated multidimensional origami) and occupy the same underlying space but remain separated by different dimensional configurations, effectively layered on top of each other/within each other (it's complicated, we will talk about it when we get to bubble universes).

QUOTE 3: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 13

"Merrill's brilliant. Horrible, but brilliant. When she first came here, she was obsessed with theories regarding the existence of different realms—different worlds. Living on top of each other without even knowing it. Whether there is merely one existence, our existence, or if it might be possible for worlds to overlap, occupying the same space but separated by time and a whole bunch of other things I can't even begin to explain to you because I barely understand them myself....Some philosophers believe there are eleven worlds like that. And some believe there are as many as twenty-six, the last one being Time itself."

Twenty-six is the exact dimensional count required by bosonic string theory, one of the oldest and most specific schools of string physics. This is not a number SJM would have picked randomly. The fact that Merrill's research lands on twenty-six dimensions, with Time as the last

one, and The Harp has twenty-six strings, each capable of manipulating a different dimension individually is a little too strong for coincidence. Aelin describes 11 worlds during her fall, which aligns with the 11 dimensions proposed by the M-Theory school of string physics (and also Merrill's research). That works out well with the Maasverse: the different series (TOG, ACOTAR, CC) can be understood as co-existing in the same overall 'space' while also having their own unique worlds, with things like Aelin's fall or Bryce's jumps acting as moments where a character moves through these hidden dimensions rather than across normal space. In that sense, the power of Wyrd/Urd functions less like "magic" and more like an analogy for the fabric of reality itself. Realistically, it allows it to function like both at the same time. And what self-respecting Religious Studies-backed author wouldn't be intrigued by exploring whether the very fabric of reality is divine in nature?

QUOTE 4: Crown of Midnight, Ch. 40

"The Wyrd governs and forms the foundation of this world. Not just Erilea, but all life. There are worlds that exist beyond your knowledge, worlds that lie on top of each other and don't know it. Right now, you could be standing on the bottom of someone else's ocean. The Wyrd keeps these realms apart."

QUOTE 5: House of Sky and Breath, Ch. 64

No statues ever adorned Urd's Temple—no depiction of the goddess had ever been made. Fate took too many forms to capture in one figure. [...] "I thought the Fae bowed to Luna, but perhaps you remember the old beliefs? From a time when Urd was not a goddess but a force, winding between worlds? When she was a vat of life, a mother to all, a secret language of the universe? The Fae worshipped her then."

QUOTE 6: A Court of Thorns and Roses, Ch. 13

It told a story with the way colors and shapes and light flowed, the way the tone shifted across the mural. The story of ... of Prythian. It began with a cauldron. A mighty black cauldron held by glowing, slender female hands in a starry, endless night. Those hands tipped it over, golden sparkling liquid pouring out over the lip. No—not sparkling, but ... effervescent with small symbols, perhaps of some ancient faerie language. Whatever was written there, whatever it was, the contents of the cauldron were dumped into the void below, pooling on the earth to form our world.

QUOTE 7: House of Flame and Shadow, Ch. 81

[Ithan] and Hypaxia stood before the Under-King in a gray-stoned temple to Urd. The Under-King lounged on a throne beneath a behemoth statue of a figure holding a black metal bowl between her upraised hands. Symbols were carved all over the bowl, continuing down her fingers, her arms, her body. Ithan could only assume it was meant to represent Urd. No other temples ever depicted the goddess, no one even dared—most people claimed that fate was impossible to portray in any one form. But it seemed that the dead, unlike the living, had a vision of her. And those symbols running from the bowl onto her skin ... they were like tattoos. They looked oddly familiar. [...] "And she," the Under-King went on, gesturing to that unusual depiction of Urd towering above him, "was not a goddess, but a force that governed worlds. A cauldron of life, brimming with the language of creation. Urd, they call her here—a bastardized version of her true name. Wyrd, we called her in that old world."

Beyond Merrill, at least a few of our other characters also ponder and study the existence of life on other planets and dimensions:

QUOTE 8: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 3

They sat in the High Lord's study, illuminated by the light of green glass lamps and a heavy iron chandelier. The two-level atrium occupied the northern end of the business wing, as Feyre called it. There was the main floor of the study—bedecked in the hand-knotted blue carpets that Feyre had gone to Cesere to select from its artisans—with its two sitting areas, Rhys's desk, and twin long tables near the bookshelves. At the far end of the room, a little dais led into a broad raised alcove flanked by more books—and in its center, a massive, working model of their world, the stars and planets around it, and some other fancy things that had been explained to Cassian once before he deemed them boring and proceeded to ignore them completely. Az, of course, had been fascinated. Rhys had built the model himself centuries ago. It could not only track the sun, but also tell time, and it somehow allowed Rhys to ponder the existence of life beyond their own world and other things Cassian had, again, instantly forgotten.

QUOTE 9: House of Earth and Blood, Ch. 14

The orrery in the far back of the space drew Ruhn's eye: a working model of their seven planets, moons, and sun. Made from solid gold. Ruhn had been mesmerized by it as a boy, back when he'd been stupid enough to believe his father actually gave a shit about him, spending hours in here watching the male make whatever observations and calculations he jotted down in his black leather notebooks. He'd asked only once about what his father was looking for, exactly. Patterns was all his father said. The Autumn King sat at one of the four massive worktables, each littered with books and an array of glass and metal devices. Experiments for whatever the fuck his father did with those patterns. Ruhn passed one of the tables, where iridescent liquid bubbled within a glass orb set over a burner—the flame likely of his father's making—puffs of violet smoke curling from it.

QUOTE 10: House of Flame and Shadow, Ch. 29 & 31

(Ch. 29) The Autumn King's head angled, gaze sweeping over her filthy T-shirt, her torn leggings. "I was informed that you were no longer on this planet. Where did you go?" Bryce declined to answer. Her father smiled slightly. "I can connect the dots. You arrive from offworld, bearing a knife that matches the Starsword. The dagger from the prophecy, no?" His eyes gleamed with greed. "Not seen since the First Wars. If I were to guess, you managed to reach a place I have long desired to go." He glanced up at the orrery.

(Ch. 31) That's where the orrery comes in: contemplating where we come from ... what sort of light we have, how it can be weaponized.

Add to this the fact that interdimensional life is a well known fact in Midgard, and has an entire Mystic industry built around exploring it + teams keeping stray demons from Hel at bay. In some worlds, this is the study of priestesses and mysticism, while in others it is studied by scientific experimentation. The same phenomena is being studied, just from multiple angles.

STRING PHYSICS, VIBRATIONAL ENERGY, AND BUBBLE UNIVERSES

We've covered that string theory replaces the idea of standalone particles with vibrating 'strings'. The fact that they operate through vibration naturally allows for analogies (aka the main point of this paper) to the other major things in our world that vibrate on a wavelength: sound and light. A key aspect of string physics (which u/puzzled_bat_13031 did not discuss) that applies even better to the Maasverse is the concept of bubble universes/vacua. String physics says that these primordial vibrations of energy settle into stable resonant configurations throughout the cosmos with each distinct configuration producing a bubble/vacuum universe that has its own physical laws, like different chords struck from the same set of strings on a guitar. The characteristics of each bubble universe depend on which strings are active in that universe and how they are resonating within the configuration. The dimensional geometry of each bubble universe then folds back on itself in complex ways (the manifold configuration), and where those folds bring the boundaries of neighboring universes into close proximity, the veil between them thins (more on that in a moment).

In simple terms, each universe follows its own set of laws based on how its strings are configured and vibrating, even though every universe originates from the same starting set of strings. Unlike the Many-Worlds multiverse interpretation of quantum mechanics and most other multiversal/parallel universe theories (where everything possible happens in each universe because the same rules always apply), the string physics multiverse is restricted by the specific energy configurations allowed by the "string landscape" (the qualities of the strings vibrating in a given universe), though this still allows for vast, unimaginable diversity within each universe.

[This relatively straightforward physics article](#) on the string landscape has a really good blurb:

QUOTE 11: The Marvels of the String Theory Landscape: Unlocking the Secrets of the Multiverse

String theory, first envisioned by physicist Leonard Susskind in 1969, revolutionized our understanding of the fundamental building blocks of the universe. It proposed that instead of point-like particles, the universe is composed of tiny, vibrating loops of energy known as strings. These strings can oscillate in different modes, giving rise to the diverse particles and forces we observe in nature. This groundbreaking insight laid the foundation for the development of the String Theory Landscape. [...] The String Theory Landscape emerged from the ideas of string theory and cosmic inflation. It postulates the existence of a vast multiverse, where each pocket universe is associated with a distinct configuration of the extra dimensions that string theory predicts. These extra dimensions, unlike our familiar three spatial dimensions, are hypothesized to be curled up into incredibly tiny loops or intricate shapes, far beyond our current ability to directly observe or interact with them. What makes the String Theory Landscape so intriguing is the notion that these extra dimensions can have a profound impact on the fundamental forces and physical constants operating within each pocket universe. In other words, the way these extra dimensions are configured directly influences the physical laws governing each universe, resulting in a rich tapestry of universes with diverse properties. This idea offers a compelling explanation for the fine-tuning conundrum, which questions why our universe seems to be exquisitely calibrated for the existence of life and complexity.

If you have a guitar (or perhaps, a harp???), you can make many different kinds of chords that all sound different with the same core set of strings depending on which ones you use. It's just a matter of which strings are resonating and how. All the strings are vibrational energy and they compose in different 'harmonies' to create different end result universes. That also doesn't mean that EVERYTHING is different between different universes though. A C Major chord and an A Minor chord both share a C and an E note. Throughlines are expected. And most importantly, these universes may be vast within themselves but can easily border or overlap with each other through their manifold configurations (the origami shapes of dimensional geometry we mentioned above, where the boundaries of neighboring universes draw close enough that the veil between them weakens). Which is also kind of like when you fold paper for origami over and over and it gets more flexible.

If I was an author with an interest in developing a fictional cosmological multiverse, adapting string physics is a JACKPOT framework to go off of. There are tons of papers, experts, and youtube videos out there to give you a basic idea for how it can be applied, AND it gives you creative freedom to not need everything between your worlds to line up perfectly. You can have variances between magic systems with some overlap, and it gives you a lot of choice to go back and rework old ideas into new concepts without having to fully retcon a mechanic. As long as

there is a core unifying fabric of the universe that gives rise to these diverse worlds, you have your pick of the litter for which aspects align and which aspects differ. Are the fey susceptible to iron? Doesn't really make a difference! Although different myths about that may bleed between worlds along with travelers walking between them. Hell, you might even throw in an intergalactic parasite scouring the universe for worlds where the fabric of reality has 'harmonized' in such a way that common life forms arise with similar magical powers. And maybe some of those life forms aren't quite up to snuff either, due to cosmic variance.

QUOTE 12: House of Sky and Breath, Ch. 72

Urganis. Children were ideal nutrition. Adults incompatible. [...] Firstlight tasted off. Terminated world.

The concept of bubble universes specifically is best explained by Aidas throughout the Crescent City series, when he is discussing the difference (or lack thereof) between realms and planets:

QUOTE 13: House of Earth and Blood, Ch. 51

The Northern Rift opens to other places—other realms, yes, but other planets as well. What is Hel but a distant planet bound to yours by a ripple in space and time? [...] [T]he Fae, the shifters, and many others came from their own worlds. The universe is massive. Some believe it has no end. Or that our universe might be one in a multitude, as bountiful as the stars in the sky or the sand on a beach.

QUOTE 14: House of Flame and Shadow, Ch. 60

Helena knew that Midgard possessed its own magic. A raw, weaker sort of magic than that in her home world, but one that could be potent in high concentrations. She learned that it flowed across the world in great highways, natural conduits for magic. [...] There are ley lines across the whole of the universe. And the planets—like Midgard, like Hel, like the home world of the Fae—atop those lines are joined by time and space and the Void itself. It thins the veils separating us. The Asteri have long chosen worlds that are on the ley lines for that exact purpose. It made it easier to move between them, to colonize those planets. There are certain places on each of these worlds where the most ley lines overlap, and thus the barrier between worlds is at its weakest.

Very roughly - in a model multiverse where string physics is creating bubble universes, the vibrating strings that comprise a universe have singularities or nodes where the strings join together to create the 'border' of the universe. These are the edges of the manifold configuration geometry. You can imagine it like the beginning and end of a knot or tangle, or a point on an origami paper that has been folded over and over. It's a little difficult to give three dimensional examples, since the geometries of the manifold configurations have more than three dimensions. But you get the point - the planes make borders where they meet. Anyway, if in this model

universe, we are also saying that the strings are representative of the fundamental MAGICAL fabric of reality, then this might appear as if conduits of magic are running across the world and knotting at intersections. This does require a bit of artistic liberty to adapt the science (since in the real world we'd be talking about whole universes and not single planets), but these books are fiction.

This is also the right time to address a common question I get when I am discussing this with other fans: everyone wants to know "so what do you think the strings in the Maasverse are? The ley lines are strings? The mating bonds are described as threads, are those strings?" My answer to those questions is yes and no. More precisely, those would be manifestations of the strings rather than the strings themselves. Again, the focus with string physics is how the energy is vibrating + how those vibrations produce different perceivable matter and energy (which are interchangeable for our purpose due to $E=mc^2$) more than what they are exactly "made of" or "look like". They are not solid, perceivable matter themselves. The best analogy I can give is a piece of hot metal. At its core, it's all just energy. The iron atoms, the heat moving through them, the glow they give off when hot enough are all different expressions of the same underlying energy and matter at different levels of concentration. At room temp you perceive the metal as solid, cold, inert, boring. But as heat energy increases, that same underlying matter begins expressing itself in new ways you can perceive: first as the feeling of warmth, then as a visible red hot glow. The metal ITSELF hasn't changed. What's changed is **how much** energy is moving through it and whether that **crosses your perceptual threshold.**

So is the glowing heat LITERALLY the metal? No, but it's a direct expression of what the metal is doing at that energy level. The same could be said of the ley lines and the mating bonds. Strings are everywhere, moving between all things. I.e., the room temp metal is still iron whether it's glowing or not. Where it gets interesting is that different bubble universes aren't just running at different energy levels, they're composed of different KINDS of strings entirely. Each kind of string vibrates in its own characteristic way, and those vibrations are what produce the specific particles, forces, and (fictionally) the specific magic observable within that universe. And within those bubbles, the strings may resonate with more or less energy in given perceivable places and ways. If the strings here are the fundamental filaments of magic and reality, the leylines and mating bonds are the visible glow: not a different thing from the strings, but the same underlying matter/energy/reality concentrated and energetic enough to be perceivable. And just like the room-temperature metal, I would argue that there are examples where the strings are still at work but at a lower threshold than can be perceived. Throne of Glass makes many references to the windings of Wyrld slowly pushing all of these characters from across Aelin's history back together just at the moment that they are needed, even though they don't have perceivable bonds (i.e., as strong as a mating bond) between them. That doesn't mean that Wyrld/Urd/strings aren't at work, it's just not as concentrated as the visible manifestations we see elsewhere. Urd runs bountifully where the ley lines are perceivable, but that doesn't mean it's not also all around. If it was just in the ground, the Asteri would be fracking. This is also where first/secondlight + early human religion come into play. In this world, the overall string energy is sustained by the generative cycle between all living things and the planet they inhabit.

ANYWAY, what Aidas is describing aligns very well with the concept of the core strings that make up a given bubble universe overlapping, and those origami points of the manifold construction allow you to peer from one dimensional bubble into another. Within those intersecting knots, different worlds with their own rules and laws arise, despite the fact that they are bordering a world with its own rules and laws. String physics doesn't have a solid theory on how one might actually get from one bubble universe to another, but all schools agree that this would be some kind of unstable event like wormholes through a black hole or violent collisions. All scenarios require an incredible amount of energy to sustain, otherwise the instability would cause an implosion of both (or at least one) universes. Does anyone else find it suspicious that two of our universes were almost annihilated by a black hole after the energy source generating reality was destroyed? Just me?

QUOTE 15: House of Flame and Shadow, Ch. 25

Our brightest minds found ways to bend the fabric of worlds. To travel between them. Wayfarers, we called them. World-walkers. [...] Once we left our home world, our powers began to dim. Too late, we realized that we had been dependent on our land's inherent magic.

QUOTE 16: Kingdom of Ash, Ch 20

Using the very language of existence itself, doors might be opened, however briefly, between worlds. It was forbidden, outlawed long before her husband and his brothers were born. Once the last of the ancient wayfarers had died out, the paths between realms were sealed, their methods of world-walking lost with them.

QUOTE 17: A Court of Wings and Ruin, Ch. 76

The ... thing in the Cauldron. Or lack of it. It was lack and substance, absence and presence. And ... it was leaking into the world. [...] It was a void. But also not a void—a growth. The Cauldron could never be destroyed, we had been warned. Because our very world was bound to it. If the Cauldron were destroyed ... we would be, too. [...] It was a hole. Airless. No life could exist here. No light. It was ... it was what had existed at the beginning. Before all things had exploded from it.

QUOTE 18: House of Flame and Shadow, Ch. 96

"That core is tied to Midgard's very soul," Rigelus said. "You destroy it, and this entire planet will wink out of existence. [...] To prevent rodents like you from getting any ideas about destroying us. I can teach you things you've never even dreamed of," Rigelus promised. "The language inked on your back—it is our language. From our home world. I can teach you how to wield it. Any world might be open to you, Bryce Quinlan. Name the world, and it shall be yours."

In order to build a functionally unstable kill switch, you also need to know enough about reality's fabric to keep it from going off unexpectedly and have an appropriate power source to keep it closed in the meantime. In order to travel between bubble universes, you would need to know enough about reality's fabric to get there without imploding your destination (gates will be discussed later), and have an appropriate power source to open and close your 'portal' safely.

The biggest challenge as an author would be: I am not writing a book about physics, for physicists. I'm not even a physicist myself. How am I going to relate this manipulation of the fabric of reality and how these strings can be 'plucked' to your average romantasy reader? The answer to that is very simple. I'm going to use sound/music, and I'm going to use light. And thankfully, those two things are already core parts of how we've told stories since the first humans danced

around the fire. But just to be safe, I might make sure that one of my worlds already has access to science and technology to bridge the gap and do some heavy lifting when necessary. Better to cover all of the bases.

PLUCKING THE STRINGS

A story about manipulating raw magic/fabric of reality requires you to define two things in order to paint a clear picture: how is the magic manipulated, and what does it manifest as? Without both, you can't really see cause and effect or what change looks like when you play with it. Because string physics suggests that the fabric of reality consists of interwebbing vibrational energy, a fictional novel that loosely adapts it would be looking for types of energy that vibrate or resonate to use as an analogy. This leads us to sound (now) and light (later). Wyrdstone/obsidian and quartz are going to have their own section afterwards because they relate to both sound and light.

If the powers of Wyrd/Urd/Cauldron/Mother are vibrating, and you wanted to “bend the fabric of worlds”, you have to be able to devise some way to control and alter those vibrations. This leads us to our two most significant objects that allow world walking: The Harp, and The Horn. The Harp is the easiest to explain; most are aware of the fact that a harp is a musical instrument. The Harp is described here:

QUOTE 19: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 54

*It has been a long while, sister, since I played. I shall need time to remember the right combinations [...] We shall open doors and pathways; we shall move through space and eons together, it had sung during her unintentional scrying. Our music will free us of earthly rules and borders. [...] Nesta counted the strings. Twenty-six. She'd touched the first, the smallest, to free herself from the Harp's power, but what did the others do? Twenty-six, twenty-six, twenty-six ... Gwyn's voice floated from far away, recounting Merrill's earlier research on dimensions. The possibility of twenty-six dimensions. We shall move through space and eons together ... The small strings are for games—light movement and leaping ... *Could the Harp ... Nesta's breath caught in her throat. Could the Harp transplant her from one place to another? Not only open a door, but create one she might walk through?*”*

By choosing a harp to manipulate reality, SJM is picking one of the most mythologically symbolic string instruments. It descends from the ancient lyre and is the ancestor of many Western string instruments, including the pianoforte Aelin loves. In Greek myth, the lyre had 7 strings and was crafted by Hermes as an apology gift to Apollo (he had just stolen his sacred cows), making it a product of conflict resolution between two gods. These early string instruments have been associated with divinity, prophecy, and the sacred across cultures for ages. In Greek myth,

Orpheus tries to bring his lover back from the Underworld with his lyre. It is the instrument that King David played in the Torah and the New Testament to soothe King Saul and please the Lord. The Tuatha Dé Danann (Irish gods) had a magical harp that sung the seasons into being and could shift consciousness into the spirit realm. Actually, music is so integrally tied with magic in Irish mythology that I'm just going to drop some excerpts [from the Master's degree thesis of musicologist Heather Beltz on the subject](#):

QUOTE 20: Heather Beltz, "The Power of Sound: Music and Magic in Pre-Christian Irish Folklore"

An especially interesting theme linking two knowledge systems within these stories is magical music: the use of music/sound as a tool for supernatural or superhuman accomplishments. Through the analysis of folk literature from pre-Christian Ireland, I explore the use of music as a source of power or magic, and thereby demonstrate the high status of music and musicians during Ireland's pre-Christian era. [...] Within these folk tales there exists a recurrent theme of using music in a magical fashion. [...] While folklore is one type of teaching tool, another important tool is religion. Chapter Three discussed the Irish deities, specifically Dagda, Lugh, and Brigid, their roles in Irish religion and mythology, and their effect on the symbolic power of music. [...] When examining instrumentation, we discovered a musical hierarchy pertaining to the status of instruments and associations of power with that instrument. For example, due to this status, the harp or timpán would be a better choice for a musical weapon compared to a flute. Thus, there is an intentionality in the choice of instrument for magical purposes. While any instrument or voice can be used to create magical music, certain instruments have more power and can create a stronger response. [...] In pre-Christian Irish culture, music meant more than just a physical sound, or a form of entertainment. There was a perception and understanding that music held a power that could literally control people, seasons, and the earth. This concept of power reveals music's importance and status.

We'll revisit Irish mythology and the Tuatha Dé Danann when we talk about Koschei later. For now, we know that The Harp is capable of manipulating space and time, seemingly aligning with Merrill's (and string physic's) theory that there are 26 dimensions, the last of which is Time. We also know, through both the plot and The Harp's own sentient dialogue, that it does this through making music and that the strings can be used in combination. Through Nesta's experimentation, we learn that each of these dimensions can be manipulated individually as well by plucking only one string. And although we know that Time is on the table for manipulation (e.g., when Nesta freezes time at the end of ACOSF), the Harp also implies that it is capable of much more - it wants to move through entire EONS together. I understand this to mean that transport across eons is

canonically *possible* in the Maasverse, although we don't have a *confirmed* record of that happening yet. That's a theory for another day.

The Harp also specifically says that "Our music will free us of earthly rules and borders." I take this to mean that there ARE earthly rules and borders, and through its music The Harp can alter them. Imagine that the fabric of reality is woven together by strings, perhaps by The Mother, with each world uniquely designed to operate according to the "rules and borders" she divinely intended when they were Made. These strings are everywhere and in everything throughout the world. At some point, the Daglan/Asteri come along and decide that they need to reshape this world to bend to their will. What do they need to Make in order to achieve that? A precision instrument, forged from the very same source of creation that the fabric of reality came forth from, with strings each uniquely keyed to one of the strings that reality is composed of. Thus, they made The Harp. The goal is to make the strings of reality resonate with a targeted vibration to achieve a specific outcome.

The Horn is a bit less intuitive, but not a stretch. For one, horns are still musical instruments today as well (although many today have ways of altering pitch, like the trumpet or trombone). *Bone* (and conch) horns specifically were common ritual or war instruments in ancient human cultures as well - recall earlier, I mentioned the bone flutes made from birds of prey? A horn, just like a harp, is a resonant instrument. You blow into it, the soundwaves resonate inside of it, and a big new sound comes out. You may not necessarily think of The Horn as making 'music', but it fulfills a similar duty in that it could theoretically be used to make the strings of reality resonate at a different tempo than what their "earthly rules and borders" dictate. We have an initial description of what the horn looked like and how it was used:

QUOTE 21: House of Earth and Blood, Ch. 21

"Luna's Horn was a weapon wielded by Pelias, the first Starborn Prince, during the First Wars. The Fae forged it in their home world, named it for the goddess in their new one, and used it to battle the demon hordes once they made the Crossing. Pelias wielded the Horn until he died." [...] Ruhn held out his phone, the picture of the illuminated manuscript glaringly bright in the thick shadows. The illustration of the carved horn lifted to the lips of a helmeted Fae male was as pristine as it had been when inked millennia ago. [...] Ruhn gestured to where the tourists were snapping photos of the goddess's hand. Specifically, the fingers that now curled around air, where a cracked ivory hunting horn had once lain.

QUOTE 22: House of Earth and Blood, Ch. 77

The language is beyond that of this world. It is the language of universes. And it spells out a direct command to activate the Horn through a blast of raw power upon the tattoo itself. Just as it once did for the Starborn Prince. You may not possess his gifts like your brother, but I believe your bloodline and the synth shall compensate for it when I use my power upon you. To fill the tattoo—to fill you—with power is, in essence, to blow the Horn.

Now, as a brief contrast, Aelin's back tattoo ALSO is written in the "language of the universe" but is not Made. It carries the instructions to bring her home after creating the lock. It cannot open doors, but it can navigate them:

QUOTE 23: Kingdom of Ash, Ch. 98

The new tattoo, of spread wings, the story of her and Rowan written in the Old Language amongst the feathers. A flick of Mala's fingers and symbols rose from it. Hidden within the words, the feathers. Wyrdmarks. Rowan had hidden Wyrdmarks in her tattoo. Had inked Wyrdmarks all over it. "A map home," Mala said, the image fading. "To him." He'd suspected, somehow. That it might come to this. Had asked her to teach him so he might make this gamble. And when Aelin looked behind her, to the archway into her own world, she indeed could ... feel them. As if the Wyrdmarks he'd secretly inked onto her were a rope. A tether home. [...] A map home, a map inked in the words of universes, would lead the way.

Interestingly, the main difference between The Harp and The Horn seems to be a matter of precision. Where The Harp allows the bearer to manipulate each individual string to perform a wide variety of things, The Horn is a more 'blunt' instrument. This calls back to the hierarchy of instrumental power in Heather Beltz's thesis from earlier. It's primary purpose is to:

QUOTE 24: House of Earth and Blood, Ch. 33

The Horn's purpose wasn't merely to close doors—it opens them, too. It depends on what the bearer wishes.

This is a less elegant solution designed to get somewhere quickly as long as your intent is set. Some user error is possible.

QUOTE 25: House of Earth and Blood, Ch. 77

"The Horn will open a portal—and allow me to summon an army to decimate the human rebels and end their wanton destruction." "What world?" Bryce asked, blanching. "Hel?" "Hel would resist kneeling to me. But ancient lore whispers of other worlds that exist that would bow to a power like mine—and bow to the Horn." He smiled, cold as a deep-sea fish. "The one who possesses the Horn at full power can do anything. Perhaps establish oneself as an Asteri." [...] "With the Horn, you would not need to inherit a star's might to rule. And the Asteri would recognize that. Welcome me as one of them."

QUOTE 26: House of Earth and Blood, Ch. 83

Micah had indeed wielded the Horn successfully. And it had opened a portal right through the mouth of the Heart Gate, drawing upon the magic in its quartz walls. Bryce had taken one look at what sailed out of the void suspended in the Heart Gate and knew Micah had not opened a portal to unknown worlds, as he'd intended. This one went straight to Hel.

QUOTE 27: House of Sky and Breath, Ch. 78

"Is this Hel?" Bryce asked again in the old tongue of the Fae. [...] The male stepped forward, tucking in his wings. He smiled slightly and said in the Old Language, in a voice like glorious night, "Hello, Bryce Quinlan. My name is Rhysand."

So, we have our two primary objects for transport covered. They produce sound, which is capable of reverberating across the strings that reality is woven from and altering their frequency. Fairly simple. Gates will be covered later on, I promise I'm not forgetting about them. But where does this leave Wyrdmarks? This took me quite a while to pinpoint, but I am fairly certain that they are equivalent to music notes. I'm going to go ahead and assume that everyone recalls Wyrdmarks are the glyphs used in the Throne of Glass series to execute a variety of magical tasks, including opening portals, speaking to the dead, and unlocking iron masks that are otherwise immune to magic. Those three examples alone are good demonstrations of Wyrdmarks being used to subvert the natural order of "earthly rules" in Erilea.

It's important to clarify from here on out that I also subscribe to the theory that the Wyrddmarks are the same language as the Asteri/Daglan language, or more specifically that the "language of creation" that Maeve learns from the spells of the ancient "wayfarers" (see: quote 16) are the same spells and the same language as the Asteri "wayfarers" who had left the homeworld planet eons/long enough ago to be considered ancient and forgotten by young-Maeve's time (see: quote 15). I believe the Valg are evolutionary descendants of the Asteri, adapted to their dark polluted homeland. Vesperus says that the wayfarers left when they saw the changes in the land beginning, Maeve says that the ancient wayfarers had died out eons ago and cannot conceptualize the color green or the idea of the sea because her homeland is a withered wasteland. Some theories believe they are the same thing, some believe they are completely unrelated. For the purpose of this paper, we're going to go with them being at least RELATED entities who can read the same language. Even if they are unrelated but the Asteri had previously been to the Valg homeworld, we know that the Asteri tend to keep leaving behind their books/language in the worlds they visit (Bryce's tattoo, book of breathings, etc.). Regardless - I will be treating Wyrddmarks/language from The Walking Dead and the language from The Book of Breathings/Bryce's tattoo as being the same thing.

QUOTE 28: A Court of Mist and Fury, Ch. 37

"NO!" Amren screamed, at the door in an instant, her fist a radiant forge as she slammed it into the lead—once, twice. And above—the rush and gargle of water tumbling downstairs, filling the chamber. No, no, no. I reached the door, sliding the box into the wide inside pocket of my leather jacket while Amren's blazing palm flattened against the door, burning, heating the metal, swirls and whorls radiating out through it as if they were a language all her own.

[...]

It had been formed of dark metal plates bound on three rings of gold, silver, and bronze, each word carved with painstaking precision, in an alphabet I could not recognize. Yes, it indeed turned out my reading lessons were unnecessary. Rhys left it inside the box as we all peered in—then recoiled. Only Amren remained staring at it. The blood drained from her face entirely. Amren hissed, "That place, or that damned book, nearly nullified my powers. We almost drowned." [...] "What language is that?" Mor asked. I thought Amren's hands might have been shaking, but she shoved them into her pockets. "It is no language of this world." Only Rhys was unfazed by the shock on her face. As if he'd suspected what the language might be. Why he had picked her to be a part of this hunt. "What is it, then?" Azriel asked. She stared and stared at the Book—as if it were a ghost, as if it were a miracle—and said, "It is the Leshon Hakodesh. The Holy Tongue." Those quicksilver eyes shifted to Rhysand, and I realized she'd understood, too, why she'd gone. Rhysand said, "I heard a legend that it was written in a tongue of mighty beings who feared the Cauldron's power and made the Book to combat it. Mighty beings who were here ... and then vanished. You are the only one who can uncode it." It was Mor who warned, "Don't play those sorts of games, Rhysand." But he shook his head. "Not a game. It was a gamble that Amren would be able to read it—and a lucky one."

QUOTE 29: House of Earth and Blood, Ch. 78

Micah loomed over her. She stretched her arm out—toward the shelf. Her tingling fingers brushed over the titles. On the Divine Number; The Walking Dead; The Book of Breathings; The Queen with Many Faces ...

QUOTE 30: House of Flame and Shadow, Ch. 1

Amren turned to Rhysand and said in that new, strange language—their language: "The glowing letters inked on her back ... they're the same as those in the Book of Breathings."

RE: Quotes 15 (Vesperus), 16 (Maeve), 23 (Aelin), 22 (Micah), 6 (Feyre), 30 (Amren), 7 (Ithan & Under-King), 18 (Rigelus)

(15) Our brightest minds found ways to bend the fabric of worlds. To travel between them. Wayfarers, we called them. World-walkers.

(16) Using the very language of existence itself, doors might be opened, however briefly, between worlds.

(23) A map home, a map inked in the words of universes, would lead the way.

(22) The language is beyond that of this world. It is the language of universes.

(6) Effervescent with small symbols, perhaps of some ancient faerie language [...] pooling on the earth to form our world.

(30) "The glowing letters inked on her back ... they're the same as those in the Book of Breathings."

(7) And those symbols running from the bowl onto her skin ... they were like tattoos. They looked oddly familiar. [...] Wyrd, we called her in that old world.

(18) "The language inked on your back—it is our language. From our home world. I can teach you how to wield it. Any world might be open to you, Bryce Quinlan. Name the world, and it shall be yours."

How are they analogous to music notes? If you think of the way that a song is written, music notes each correspond to a specific frequency to be played at a specific time in a specific order. They are the recipe for a designed outcome. When Celaena is initially researching Wyrdmarks in Throne of Glass, we get these early quotes:

QUOTE 31: Throne of Glass, Ch. 27

So far, she hadn't learned much: according to one book, Wyrdmarks were an alphabet. Though, according to this book, no grammar existed with the Wyrdmarks: everything was just symbols that one had to string together. And they changed meaning depending on the marks around them. They were painfully difficult to draw; they required precise lengths and angles, or they became something else entirely.

QUOTE 32: Throne of Glass, Ch. 41

The Wyrdgates. She pressed the heels of her palms into her eyes. Someone was actually using the Wyrdmarks to open a portal to summon this creature. It was impossible, because magic was gone, but the texts said Wyrdmarks existed outside of magic. What if their power still worked?

This description almost exactly matches how music notes work. They do have a logical and dependent order which could be construed as an alphabet, and if you were singing them they can be vocalized in speech. They still hold meaning with or without an instrument present. Despite being logically ordered, they lack grammar. They are strung together into music, and they change their meaning depending on the marks around them - a sharp or flat note is denoted with

an adjacent sharp or flat symbol, clefs define the range of the staff the notes are arranged on, time signatures dictate the tempo, and adding an angled length to e.g., a quarter note will turn it into an eighth note. Learning to write and read music is much like learning a new language, and if the vibrational fabric of the universe HAD a language, it would be music notes and frequencies. If you wanted it to sing a different tune than what it was already singing, you'd need to know how to read the current song and write a new one. Kind of like when a song is shifted to a different key to match an artist's vocal range, or the dietary preferences of an interstellar parasite. We get this exchange between Aelin and Rowan later as well:

QUOTE 33: Heir of Fire, Ch. 41

She did want to dance. Not from joy, but because she felt her fire and the music meld and pulse against her bones. The music was a tapestry woven of light and dark and color, building delicate links in a chain that latched on to her heart and spread out into the world, binding her to it, connecting everything. She understood then. The Wyrdmarks were—were a way of harnessing those threads, of weaving and binding the essence of things. Magic could do the same, and from her power, from her imagination and will and core, she could create and shape. “Easy,” Rowan said, then added with a hint of surprise, “Music. That day on the ice, you were humming.” She registered another cool wind on her neck, but her skin was already pulsing in time with the drums. “Let the music steady you.”

The main disconnect between them is the fact that Wyrdmarks can actually be read in prose. In Chapter 50 of Queen of Shadows, Aelin & Co. are poking around the temple of the sin-eater where she finds Gavin Havillard's deathbed confession written in Wyrdmarks on the wall explaining that Erawan was actually sealed away rather than killed. This is a long narrative that isn't a spell or instruction. There may need to be a distinction between Wyrdmarks that seek to communicate vs. Wyrdmarks that seek to instruct/bespell (which we are most interested in), i.e., that the spelling and casting glyphs may be one subset of a much larger language. This is less of a stretch than it sounds. English speakers tend to think of our language as English = Alphabet, but most languages are way more complex than just their alphabet characters alone. "Let's eat, Grandma!", "Let's eat Grandma!", and "Let's eat ... Grandma??" all mean very different things. The English alphabet includes 26 letters, but the full ASCII Standard expands that to 256 glyphs once you add punctuation, modifiers, and mathematical digits. It's worth noting that one of the other things fans frequently theorize (as in the previous string theory post by u/puzzled_bat_13031) Wyrdmarks to be is mathematical notation since that the glyph notations used by the Asteri in The Book of Breathings and The Walking Dead are repeatedly referred to as "the very language of existence itself" and "the language of universes" and these theories hinge on physics. That's reasonable but a little limited.

What's interesting about music notation specifically is that it already contains mathematical notation within it rather than as something separate. The Standard Music Font Layout has about

2,600 glyphs (more than enough to build an entire language from alone if you wanted) and like mathematical notation, it is considered a universally recognized glyph system, readable by musicians anywhere in the world regardless of the spoken language of the original composer. The two systems share that universality for the same reason: they are describing the same underlying thing. Time signatures are fractions. Note values are ratios. Scales, chords, and octaves are mathematically derived relationships between frequencies. The glyphs in music describe numerical relationships and do the same legwork as mathematical operators. So when fans theorize Wyrdblocks as mathematical notation, that isn't a different theory from the music notation one. It's the same theory, just approached from a different angle. And if math and music are the same language, then the question of which one the universe is written in stops being a debate so much as a matter of which direction you're listening from. There is no more relevant quote than this one from Galileo Galilei to illustrate why:

QUOTE 34: Galileo Galilei

Mathematics is the language with which God has written the universe. [...] [The Universe] is written in this grand book which stands continually open to our gaze. But that book cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend the language and read the letters in which it is composed. It is written in the language of mathematics, and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometric figures without which it is humanly impossible to understand a single word of it; without these, one wanders about hopelessly in a dark labyrinth.

cough cough gee Maeve sure was happy to find those books and learn how to read them to escape her dark prison world

What makes Galileo really interesting goes beyond the quote itself. He was the son of Vincenzo Galilei, who was one of the most influential music theorists of his time and an expert lutenist (which is a proto guitar. The thing you picture when you imagine a traveling bard). Galileo went on to become a famous lute player too. The experiments he and his dad conducted on vibrating strings establishing mathematical relationships between string tension, length, and pitch, directly shaped how Galileo later approached physics. The man who wrote that 'the universe is written in the language of mathematics' got there by spending his childhood analyzing vibrating musical strings. He also, if you recall, famously fought the Vatican against the idea that science and divinity were separate domains, which is exactly what I think SJM is doing here. The Asteri are deadset on manipulating it to their will through experiments and tools, which corrupts the spiritual relationship the fey inhabitants of these worlds have with the divine Wyrd/Urđ/Mother. So, *Sarah J. Galileo* seems to argue that the language of divine existence 1) sounds like it should be math. It might also 2) be music, if the universe vibrates. It might also be 3) letters that can be read in prose. Do these three things contradict each other? I don't believe that they do, and neither did the ancient philosophers.

There is an entire field of musical study dedicated to understanding and applying mathematical principles to the way music is arranged into song, broadly termed Music Theory. The most famous OG is probably Pythagoras (pythagorean theorem man!) who discovered that “pleasing musical intervals” could be described using simple ratios by subdividing a vibrating string by whole numbers, which produced scales. Galileo and his dad were actually doing experiments based on that same “Pythagorean musical tradition”. The book they ended up writing redefined music in the Renaissance and helped usher in Baroque music, which Bach later innovated on when he was born a few decades later. Until Galileo's fight with the Church, music and physics were considered the study of the same thing; then Galileo made astrophysics a whole big deal and they grew into separate disciplines. Galileo would have still argued that math, music, and the divine were all part of the same story. Galileo would EAT WYRDMARKS UP. There are literally TONS of musical mathematicians throughout history. The Galileis, Bach, even Einstein: these are just SOME examples of these double threats. Your favorite artist's favorite producer who figures out the chord progressions in their song is a mathematician. From that single Pythagorean experiment about a vibrating string came the foundational framework for SAT questions, music theory, mathematical physics, and eventually the *Musica Universalis*, aka the “Music of the Spheres”. These two quotes explain THAT way better than I can:

QUOTE 35: Princeton

The connection between music and mathematics has fascinated scholars for centuries. More than 2000 years ago Pythagoras reportedly discovered that pleasing musical intervals could be described using simple ratios. And the so-called musica universalis or “music of the spheres” emerged in the Middle Ages as the philosophical idea that the proportions in the movements of the celestial bodies -- the sun, moon and planets -- could be viewed as a form of music, inaudible but perfectly harmonious. [...] The music of the spheres isn’t really a metaphor -- some musical spaces really are spheres,” said Tymoczko, an assistant professor of music at Princeton. “The whole point of making these geometric spaces is that, at the end of the day, it helps you understand music better. Having a powerful set of tools for conceptualizing music allows you to do all sorts of things you hadn’t done before. You could create new kinds of musical instruments or new kinds of toys [...] The most satisfying aspect of this research is that we can now see that there is a logical structure linking many, many different musical concepts. To some extent, we can represent the history of music as a long process of exploring different symmetries and different geometries.

QUOTE 36: EMERC Presentation:

The Music of the Spheres was a model of the universe proposed by Pythagoras and Aristotle, which explained cosmology in terms of spheres to which the sun, the moon and the planets were pinned, while their motion was driven by something akin to music. [...] Pythagoras (ca. 580–495 BCE) and Aristotle (384–322 BCE) [1] thus proposed a model of the world, actually of the universe, which has been remembered as Musica Universalis, the Music of the Spheres or the Harmony of the Spheres – the latter expression stressing the relationship between the spheres rather than the physical sounds themselves. The concept started from the understanding that the cords of a musical instrument such as the lyre vibrate and thus produce sounds, the pitch of which is directly related to their length: this was the first physical law that connected the physical world with the abstract world of numbers by establishing a quantitative relationship between sound frequency and cord length. Then, stunned by the novelty of this discovery, people started to wonder if this relationship did not have a broader meaning and if it did not explain more overwhelming phenomena, like the motion of planets in their circular orbs in the sky.

Many people with competing beliefs do share the idea that there is one true, fundamental nature of reality that is out there for us to discover. Some have tried to approach it from a solely spiritual direction, through religiosity and ritualism. We see this play out in these series via the Priestesses honoring the mother. Some have tried to approach it from a solely mathematical direction, like the Asteri who love their science experiments. Others get caught in between and believe there is a middle ground to be reached, like Galileo and Merrill. Ancient human philosophers would have

agreed with the position that the fundamental language of the universe is BOTH math and music, because music is math, and the universe seems to sing. Music provides that middle ground being sought. Through the *Music of the Spheres*, we can finally illustrate a full circle framework:

1. The fabric of the Maasverse is composed of vibrational energy, which weaves between all things and connects them together.
2. It behaves very much like the vibrational energy described in our real-world theory of string physics; certain strings harmonize together to compose various bubble universes, each with their own unique 'song' ("earthly rules and borders").
3. Like the Music of the Spheres, there is a natural inaudible harmony to the way these strings are intended to vibrate within each universe. A species that is sufficiently intelligent, observant, and motivated can learn to observe the song of the universe. They may even be able to manipulate the Natural Order of the 'song' in their bubble universe to achieve their own goals and bend reality.
4. The brightest minds of the Asteri, those they called Wayfarers, were 1) desperate to find a new home and 2) able to study and observe the fabric of reality to do so. They found a way to bend the space between worlds. These observations and directions were transcribed in texts such as The Book of Breathings, The Walking Dead, the books from Orcus's library, and the spell that Bryce's tattoo is written in.
5. The language that this universe is written in is Wyrddmarks/Asteri language, which is able to function as both mathematical and musical notation simultaneously. In this way, specific Wyrddmark combinations can be thought of as executing both an equation and a song. This is expectable for a reality composed of vibrational energy.
6. Having to remember and write an entire equation from scratch every time you want to do a specific action is tedious. To save time, they developed various objects of power that provide them with shortcuts to altering the vibrations of reality. Two of these resonant objects of power are The Harp and The Horn, which both directly bend the fabric of reality by changing the frequency of a specific set of 'strings'. These objects of power, the 'Dread Trove', were forged directly in the Cauldron of Creation through the Asteri's corruption.
7. These items can be used on their own or in combination with the Wyrddmarks - for example, the Made powder of Luna's horn in Bryce's tattoo ink is coupled with Wyrddmark instructions for activating the tattoo. Through this combination Danika was able to preserve the functionality of The Horn while also concealing it within the ink - it can't physically resonate anymore, but the Wyrddmarks can directly rewrite the song of the universe when needed. Like music notes, they still communicate meaning with or without an instrument present.

Music throughout the Maasverse

Finally! We are done with the heavy math. With the physics and premise properly explained, we can look at some key moments throughout the Maasverse with that new lens. It's time to focus on how this framework is applied in the books. It's worth opening with an SJM quote from [this 2016 video](#):

QUOTE 37: Sarah J Maas

Music is such a huge part of my day-to-day life. I always have music on in my house. In my kitchen when I'm cooking, when I'm cleaning, when I'm just hanging out. I love music, all different types. When I'm writing, I always have movie scores, classical music. Music inspires most of everything I write, like 90% of it.

It's not surprising to see how much music shows up throughout the books once you have this framework in mind. It is central to her process, her storytelling, and her character development. Every single one of our FMCs has either a deep personal connection to music, a transcendental musical experience, or both, and in a few cases there's something more mechanistic going on. Most of what follows is character exploration covering how each FMC experiences the deeper meaning of the universe through hearing or playing music, and the breakthroughs they have through those experiences. For example, Aelin's pianoforte sounding like the "heartsong of a god," the fact that music reminds her of creation and the power of healing, Bryce becoming "song given form" are mostly the "they feel magic when they feel music or vice versa" kinds of evidence rather than music being directly used to manipulate reality the way the harp/horn/Wyrdmarks section already covers. BUT, a few quotes do do heavy lifting. And there's a pattern across three of the FMCs (Nesta, Yrene, Feyre) where their unintentional visions all happen in underground stone chambers with music resonating in their bones.

Unfortunately for both of us, these citations are 12 pages long. SO! I'm going to give you two options.

- Option 1: I've made a [key take away table](#) below that covers the main points for each character. Each character name is a clickable in text link like the table of contents that will take you to their quote section if you want to read more.
- Option 2: You read the full quote section by jumping to it [here](#). Do not bill me for the time lost.
- Option 2b: You keep scrolling and read both sections. Take a bathroom break. You have been warned.

There is also a paragraph below the table that serves as our transition from this character analysis into the discussion about light (whether or not you read the whole 11 pages beyond that) tying back to the string physics we covered **cough cough** **a long time ago**. I'd recommend

reading it. If you won't be reading the 11 pages of quotes, that paragraph ends with a link to jump to the next section on light.

Music Highlight Table

<u>AELIN</u>
Aelin loves music more than basically any other character in the series. She taught herself pianoforte just to try to recreate orchestral performances she'd heard, she mourns the murdered Royal Theater musicians as a personal loss, and her playing is described as sounding like <u>"the heartsong of a god."</u> Music is what kept her sane through Endovier, through Sam's death, through all of it. She says <u>it makes her feel like she's creating instead of destroying, and that it reminds her of healing.</u> That last part matters later when we find out what healers actually are. But beyond the personal stuff, Aelin also has one of the earliest moments where music crosses from emotional into something more: during her training with Rowan, she feels her fire and the music fuse together and suddenly <u>perceives the music as a living tapestry "binding her to the world, connecting everything."</u> <u>That's the moment she understands what Wyrdmarks actually do</u> (harness those tapestry threads). Rowan notices it too, pointing out that music was the thing that unlocked her magic on the ice. So music is also the way that she first perceives the fabric of fate.
<u>YRENE</u>
Yrene isn't a music person the way Aelin or Nesta are, but there are two things to focus on. First, <u>Silba's Womb</u> (sacred springs beneath the Torre where healers are initiated) <u>is literally filled with bells</u> that generations of acolytes have hung in Silba's honor. <u>The harmony is described as a living sound</u> that fills Yrene's bones and lulls her mind "to open." <u>So the womb of healing power in the Maasverse is permanently resonating.</u> In her visits to the womb, the ringing leads her to realize what the darkness in Chaol is and how to treat it. Second: Erawan reveals that Yrene's/Silba's power isn't just healing. It's the power to unbind the fabric of life and worlds. She's a "World-Maker." If the fabric of reality is vibrational, then <u>Aelin's line about music reminding her of healers suddenly sounds a lot more like foreshadowing.</u>
<u>FEYRE</u>
Feyre's thing is painting, not music, but her actual encounters with music are some of the most interesting in the series. When Tamlin lifts the glamour in the grassy glen, the first thing Feyre perceives is birdsong exploding into a full orchestra and the willow tree itself singing. <u>Magic doesn't just LOOK different without the glamour. It sounds like music.</u> Then Under the Mountain, Rhysand sends music to her cell which triggers a full-on vision. Surprise! Rhysand didn't send those images. <u>The music produced them on its own,</u> which implies music can function as a bridge without anyone deliberately casting a spell. And Feyre's mating bond with Rhys is described as "a song that had been sung from the very first ember of light in the world." Feyre and Cassian also go to see a show where the ancient music, written <u>"when humans had not even walked the earth"</u>, entrances her.
<u>NESTA</u>
Nesta is the big one. She took the Cauldron's power, so her POV on wielding that power is the closest

we can get to characterizing/humanizing it. On a personal level she's a trained dancer, but it goes way beyond that. Her power is consistently *described as music*: Cassian calls it "a song"; she suppresses it by "quelling its music"; the Mask flows through her as "an icy song"; she forges Ataraxia by hammering "to a music no one but she could hear." During the dance with Eris, she is consumed by the music and "all she could do to honor it, worship it, was dance." And then there's the scrying. Gwyn sings during the Dusk service, and that singing is what directly triggers Nesta's vision of the Harp's location. Her mating bond with Cassian is described as golden threads that "shone as if they formed a harp strummed by a heavenly hand. For it was music between their souls. Always had been." Nesta attributes her scrying success to the fact that her own bones + the stones of the cavern serve as the scrying tools; I find it interesting that both her, Feyre, and Yrene's unintentional 'visions' occur in underground stone caverns with music that resonates into their bones 'singing' to them.

GWYN & AZRIEL

Gwyn doesn't get a ton of page time relative to the others but what's there is extremely suspicious. She's a trained priestess who loves the Dusk services specifically for the music. She physically *glows* when she sings and her voice is described as having "so much sound fighting to break free of her that she couldn't quite contain it all." She's also Merrill's research assistant. Merrill, who is studying the theory that reality has twenty-six overlapping dimensions. The same number as the Harp's strings. The same number as string physics. So Nesta's best friend is both musically gifted enough to glow when she sings and professionally working on the exact multiverse research that relates to the Harp. That's a LOT of coincidence. I also feel like there's SOMETHING going on in Azriel land that I'm not sure of yet but Gwyn asks him point-blank if "shadowsinger" involves actual singing, and he says yes. And after Bryce plays music from her phone in the caves, Azriel is the one humming "Stone Mother" as they walk while his "shadows danced at the sound."

BRYCE

Bryce is the FMC who exists in a modern world with phones and clubs, so music is everywhere for her in a way it isn't for the others. She describes dancing as the moment when "she became the notes and rhythm and the bass, when she became song given form," and Ruhn clocks that as a natural Fae draw towards music. This reminds me a bit of how badly Tamlin wished Feyre could experience magic the way he did and hear the singing of the willow. Two moments are most important. When Bryce makes the Drop, she falls into "the golden light and song at the heart of the universe." Song. At the heart. Of the universe. Music is at the literal core of where the Drop goes to the source of all power. And when she frees Avallen's magic with the Starsword and Truth-Teller, she hears "the song of the land beneath her. Quiet and old and forgotten, but there." The land has a song. It was dormant, suppressed, but still present. Even when Urd is running below the threshold of perception, it's still vibrational and musical. The strings don't stop just because you can't hear them.

It was through studying music that Galileo first thought to measure the stars. Through music that humans first touched the divine. And like Galileo, it is through music that Aelin first understands how magic works. Music/musical math gives SJM EVERYTHING she needs to actually implement real world string physics, and a magic system, and make everything work seamlessly, without ever actually having to go full sci-fi. The metaphor is intuitive and relatable, and offers both enough support for inspiring worldbuilding rules AND enough space for creativity. The Asteri can run their science experiments on the same planet as priestesses and high lords. Spacetime can

be divine. Our heroes can come to explore and FEEL Wyrð rather than just learn it. Midgard can combine technology and magic. You can allude to the 26 dimensions + bubble universes of string physics and have world building that lines up with that without ever having to have your characters feel that energy beyond analogies. Things can JUST WORK, and you can spend more time making the narrative immersive.

This character table is more than a list of gals who really love music! Remember the hot metal? Vibrating strings, at sufficient energy, become perceptible. That's the actual mechanism I explained earlier. The Harp and the Horn show that explicitly through plot since they are literally instruments for making reality resonate at a different frequency. But what the FMC moments show is that this isn't ONLY something you do deliberately with an object of power. The music (our string physics threads) must already be there naturally (the power of Wyrð/Urð/Cauldron) in order for the Asteri to ever study and manipulate it. It's something you can bump into as it weaves through every part of life. When the vibrational energy concentrates enough (through a mating bond, accidental visions, the song of power in the blood, the actual heart of the universe on the way down into the Drop), they feel it through music.

Except Bryce didn't only feel music during the Drop. She fell into golden light and song simultaneously. SJM wrote that as a single experience/destination. Not two things at once, one place that is doing two things. She could have stopped at just music really, but she tackled vibrational energy from another angle too. Which makes sense, because vibrating energy doesn't just produce sound. It produces light as well. Same basic wavelength physics. And thus, it's time for us [to take a look at light](#) (golden, star, and otherwise).

Music Die Hard Mode

AELIN

Aelin famously loves music and interprets many of the things that happen to her with musical analogies. Besides from [the quote above](#) where she comes to understand Wyrðmarks as a sort of music, one of our earliest introductions to her in Throne of Glass is her complicated relationship with the pianoforte:

QUOTE 38: Throne of Glass, Ch. 20

Celaena eyed the pianoforte. She used to play—oh, she'd loved to play, loved music, the way music could break and heal and make everything seem possible and heroic. [...] The notes burst from her fingers, staggering at first, but then more confidently as the emotion in the music took over. It was a mournful piece, but it made her into something clean and new. She was surprised that her hands had not forgotten, that somewhere in her mind, after a year of darkness and slavery, music was still alive and breathing. That somewhere, between the notes, was Sam. She forgot about time as she drifted between pieces, voicing the unspeakable, opening old wounds, playing and playing as the sound forgave and saved her.

Later, we get some additional backstory for this:

QUOTE 39: Throne of Glass, Ch. 30

"I like music," she said slowly, "because when I hear it, I . . . I lose myself within myself, if that makes sense. I become empty and full all at once, and I can feel the whole earth roiling around me. When I play, I'm not . . . for once, I'm not destroying. I'm creating." She chewed on her lip. "I used to want to be a healer. Back when I was . . . Back before this became my profession, when I was almost too young to remember, I wanted to be a healer." She shrugged. "Music reminds me of that feeling."

In Crown of Midnight, Rena Goldsmith's singing is described as spellbinding. For her songs, she is executed at the end of the chapter:

QUOTE 40: Crown of Midnight, Ch. 15

Rena Goldsmith's unearthly music wove through the cavernous space, wrapping them in a spell that he would have called magic had he not known better. But Celaena and Chaol just sat there, staring at each other.

Soon after, Aelin (who is still cut off from magic) leaves her post during the Royal Ball to dance to the music and leaves us with these quotes:

QUOTE 41: Crown of Midnight, Ch. 17

"You made me come out here, and someone left the balcony door open so I could hear all that lovely music." The waltz was still playing, filling the frozen air around them with sound. "So you should really reconsider who's to blame. It was like putting a starving man in front of a feast and telling him not to eat. Which, by the way, you actually did when you made me go to that state dinner." [...] [S]eeing her cry during Rena Goldsmith's song had stirred him so bone deep it was like he'd found a part of him he hadn't even realized was missing. [...] And then the music exploded around them, and Chaol took her with it, spinning her so that her cloak fanned out around her. Each step was flawless, lethal, like that first time they'd sparred together so many months ago. She knew his every move and he knew hers, as though they'd been dancing this waltz together all their lives. Faster, never faltering, never breaking her stare.

Aelin is also moved deeply by the killing of the Royal Theater musicians that occurs while she is away during Heir of Fire. In Queen of Shadows, we get these quotes:

QUOTE 42: Queen of Shadows, Ch. 16

"And since the Royal Theater was shut down by His Imperial Majesty, I trust we both agree that what was done to those musicians was a crime as unforgivable as the massacres of the slaves in Endovier and Calaculla." [...] There was nothing calculated, nothing cold, when Aelin put a hand over her own heart. "I will miss going to hear him conduct the Stygian Suite every autumn. I will spend the rest of my life knowing that I may never again hear finer music, never again experience a shred of what I felt sitting in that theater while he conducted."

QUOTE 43: Queen of Shadows, Ch. 17

"When you shatter the chains of this world and forge the next, remember that art is as vital as food to a kingdom. Without it, a kingdom is nothing, and will be forgotten by time. I have amassed enough money in my miserable life to not need any more—so you will understand me clearly when I say that wherever you set your throne, no matter how long it takes, I will come to you, and I will bring music and dancing."

QUOTE 44: Queen of Shadows, Ch. 34

[S]itting on one of the wooden rafters in the gilded dome of the darkened Royal Theater, Aelin munched on a lemon cookie and swung her legs in the open air below. The space was the same as she remembered it, but the silence, the darkness ... "This used to be my favorite place in the entire world," she said, her words too loud in the emptiness. [...] "I wish you could have heard it—I wish you had been there to hear Pytor conduct the Stygian Suite. Sometimes, I feel like I'm still sitting down in that box, thirteen years old and weeping from the sheer glory of it." "You cried?" She could almost see the memories of their training this spring flash in his eyes: all those times music had calmed or unleashed her magic. It was a part of her soul—as much as he was. "The final movement—every damn time. I would go back to the Keep and have the music in my mind for days, even as I trained or killed or slept. It was a kind of madness, loving that music. It was why I started playing the pianoforte—so I could come home at night and make my poor attempt at replicating it."

[...]

Once she had started seeing the notes in her mind again, when muscle memory had her fingers reaching for those familiar chords, she began. [...] This piece was a celebration—a reaffirmation of life, of glory, of the pain and beauty in breathing. Perhaps that was why she'd gone to hear it performed every year, after so much killing and torture and punishment: as a reminder of what she was, of what she struggled to keep. Up and up it built, the sound breaking from the pianoforte like the heartsong of a god, [...] and the crescendo shattered into the world, note after note after note. The music crashed around them, roaring through the emptiness of the theater. The hollow silence that had been inside her for so many months now overflowed with sound. She brought the piece home to its final explosive, triumphant chord. [...] They spent the better part of an hour seated together on the bench, Aelin teaching him the basics of the pianoforte—explaining the sharps and flats, the pedals, the notes and chords.

YRENE

Yrene does not describe as deep a personal connection to music, but there are connections to music within her narrative. It is worth drawing the connection from Aelin's earlier quote about how music reminds her of creation and of the power of the healers to the fact that Yrene is literally a healer with the power to Make and Unmake reality.

The first relevant quotes are from the springs beneath the Torre. Bells (another resonant instrument) are strung up in honor of Silba, the goddess of healing who gifts Yrene with her powers:

QUOTE 45: Tower of Dawn, Ch. 9

No one in the Torre knew who had first brought the various bells of silver and glass and bronze down to the open chamber of Silba's Womb. Some bells had been there so long they were crusted with mineral deposits, their ringing as water dropped from the stalactites now no more than a faint plunk. But it was tradition—one Yrene herself had participated in—for each new acolyte to bring a bell of her choosing. To have her name and date of entry into the Torre engraved on it, and to then find a place for it, before she first immersed herself in the bubbling waters of the Womb floor. The bell to hang for eternity, offering music and guidance to all healers who came afterward; the voices of their beloved sisters forever singing to them. And considering how many healers had passed through the Torre halls, considering the number of bells, large and small, that now hung throughout the space ... The entire chamber, nearly the size of the khagan's great hall, was full of the echoing, layered ringing. A steady hum that filled Yrene's head, her bones, as she soaked in the delicious heat. [...] All around, bells rang and hummed and sang, blending with the trickling water until she was adrift in a stream of living sound. [...] The ringing of the bells flowed and ebbed, lulling her mind to rest, to open. [...] But to battle that thing within him ... How? Yrene mouthed the word into the steam and dark, into the ringing, bubbling quiet. [...] You must enter, it murmured again, the darkness above seeming to spread, to inch closer. Yrene let it. And let herself stare deeper, move deeper, into that dark. [...] Distantly, as if she were now far away, a bell rang, clear and pure. Yrene blinked at the sound, the world tumbling into focus. Her limbs and breath returning, as if she'd drifted above them. [...] Yrene's head spun slightly as she sat up, stretching limbs that had gone a bit stiff, even in the mineral-rich water. How long had she soaked?

QUOTE 46: Tower of Dawn, Ch. 53

Yrene remained in the center of the chamber, amid all those faintly ringing bells, and stared up into the darkness high above. [...] The bells sang and murmured, the voices of their long-dead sisters. She wondered if that healer who had died ... If her voice was now singing here. Yrene peered up at the nearest string of bells hung across the chamber [...] Yrene padded to the little stalagmite jutting from the floor near the wall, to the chain sagging between it and another pillar a few feet away. Seven other bells hung from it [...] Around and around the sound of her bell danced, and Yrene turned in place, as if she could follow it. [...] The ringing flitted through the room, and she watched it, tracked it. It faded once more. But not before her power flickered in answer. With hands that did not entirely belong to her, Yrene rang her bell a third time. And as its singing filled the room, Yrene began to walk. [...] On and on, she tracked that sound. Past the bells of generations of healers, all singing in its wake. Yrene streamed her fingers along them, too. A wave of sound answered. You must enter where you fear to tread. Yrene walked on, the bells ringing, ringing, ringing. Still she followed the sound of her own bell, that sweet, clear song beckoning onward. Pulling her. [...] Yrene peered up into the darkness of the Womb overhead. Feeding. The Valg's power had been feeding off him ... Yes, the darkness above seemed to say. Not a drip sounded; not a bell chimed. [...] Yrene spooled her magic back inside herself, the glow fading. She smiled up at the sweet darkness above. I understand now. Another drop of water kissed her brow in answer.

This next quote is unrelated to music, but important for recontextualizing what Yrene's powers actually are:

QUOTE 47: Kingdom of Ash, Ch. 113

"In my world, your kind exists, too. Not healers to us, but executioners. Death-maidens. Capable of healing—but also unhealing. Unbinding the very fabric of life. Of worlds." Erawan smirked. "So we took your kind. Used them to unbind the Wyrdgate. To rip the three pieces of it from its very essence. Maeve never learned it—and never shall." His jagged breathing deepened as he savored each word, each step closer. "It took all of them to hew the keys from the gate—every one of the healers amongst my kind. But you, with your gifts—it would only take you to do it again.

[...]

Her power [...] Tore and shredded and ripped into him, into the writhing worm that lay inside. The parasite. The infection that fed on life, on strength, on joy. Distantly, far away, Yrene knew she was incandescent with light, brighter than a noontime sun. Knew that the dark king beneath her was nothing more than a writhing pit of snakes, biting at her, trying to poison her light. [...] The power of creation and destruction. That's what lay within her. Life-Giver. World-Maker. [...] Erawan could do nothing. Nothing against that raw magic, joining with Yrene's, weaving into that world-making power.

Although Yrene does not seem to have a personal connection to music, she is Silba's Heir and Silba's Womb below the Torre is filled with a "living sound" in her honor.

FEYRE

Feyre has a connection to art generally speaking (specifically painting), but does have a few key encounters with music. Or more specifically, where her understanding of the fey world expands through interactions with music. The first is when Tamlin removes the glamour hiding Prythian's magic in the grassy glen:

QUOTE 48: A Court of Thorns and Roses, Ch. 23

He smiled and half sat up, twisting to look at me. "You're human," he said, and I rolled my eyes. "Your senses are still sealed off from everything." [...] "I could make you able to see it," he said. His fingers lingered at the end of my braid, twirling the curl of hair around. "See my world—hear it, smell it." [...] I braced myself at the brush of his mouth on one of my eyelids, then on the other. He pulled away, and I was left breathless, the kisses still lingering on my skin. The singing of birds became an orchestra—a symphony of gossip and mirth. I'd never heard so many layers of music, never heard the variations and themes that wove between their arpeggios. And beyond the birdsong, there was an ethereal melody—a woman, melancholy and weary ... the willow. Gasping, I opened my eyes. The world had become richer, clearer. [...] There was no tangy metallic stench —no, the smell of magic had become like jasmine, like lilac, like roses. I would never be able to paint it, the richness, the feel ... Maybe fractions of it, but not the whole thing. Magic—everything was magic, and it broke my heart.

The next, famously, is when Feyre drinks the faerie wine at the summer solstice:

QUOTE 49: A Court of Thorns and Roses, Ch. 25

It was the most glorious thing I'd ever tasted. It liberated me from bonds I hadn't known existed. The music became a siren song. The melody was my lodestone, and I was powerless against its lure. With each step, I savored the dampness of the grass beneath my bare feet. I didn't remember when I'd lost my shoes. [...] The tempo increased. I wanted to be in the music, wanted to ride its speed and weave between its notes. I could feel the music around me, like a living, breathing thing of wonder and joy and beauty. [...] No chains, no boundaries—just me and the music, dancing and dancing. I wasn't faerie, but I was a part of this earth, and the earth was a part of me, and I would be content to dance upon it for the rest of my life.

Feyre has another (possibly more famous) run in with the faerie wine Under The Mountain, when Rhysand paints her body and has her dance at night. Feyre's recollection of this is hazy, and we don't get many good quotes about the impact of the music specifically. However, after her Second Trial + more wine nights, Rhysand sends music to her cell to lift her spirits. This literally results in an out body transcendent experience for her:

QUOTE 50: A Court of Thorns and Roses , Ch. 41

I looked toward the small vent in the corner of the ceiling through which the music entered my cell. The source must have been far away, for it was just a faint stirring of notes, but when I closed my eyes, I could hear it more clearly. I could ... see it. As if it were a grand painting, a living mural. There was beauty in this music—beauty and goodness. The music folded over itself like batter being poured from a bowl, one note atop another, melting together to form a whole, rising, filling me. [...] The music built a path, an ascent founded upon archways of color. I followed it, walking out of that cell, through layers of earth, up and up into fields of cornflowers, past a canopy of trees, and into the open expanse of sky. The pulse of the music was like hands that gently pushed me onward, pulling me higher, guiding me through the clouds. I'd never seen clouds like these—in their puffy sides, I could discern faces fair and sorrowful. They faded before I could view them too clearly, and I looked into the distance to where the music summoned me. It was either a sunset or sunrise. The sun filled the clouds with magenta and purple, and its orange-gold rays blended with my path to form a band of shimmering metal. I wanted to fade into it, wanted the light of that sun to burn me away, to fill me with such joy that I would become a ray of sunshine myself. This wasn't music to dance to—it was music to worship, music to fill in the gaps of my soul, to bring me to a place where there was no pain. [...] The music rose—louder, grander, faster, from wherever it was played—a wave that peaked, shattering the gloom of my cell. A shuddering sob broke from me as the sound faded into silence. I sat there, trembling and weeping, too raw and exposed, left naked by the music and the color in my mind. When the tears had stopped but the music still echoed in my every breath, I lay on my pallet of hay, listening to my breathing. The music flittered through my memories, binding them together, making them into a quilt that wrapped around me, that warmed my bones.

In ACOMAF, Feyre credits this music with saving her spirit and Rhysand is surprised to hear that she had a vision due to it:

QUOTE 51: A Court of Mist and Fury, Ch. 29

They had never played a piece like it Under the Mountain—never this sort of music. And I'd never heard music in my cell save for that one time. "You," I breathed, not taking my eyes from the musicians playing so skillfully that even the diners had set down their forks in the cafés nearby. "You sent that music into my cell. Why?" Rhysand's voice was hoarse. "Because you were breaking. And I couldn't find another way to save you." The music swelled and built. I'd seen a palace in the sky when I'd hallucinated—a place between sunset and dawn ... a house of moonstone pillars. "I saw the Night Court." He glanced sidelong at me. "I didn't send those images to you." [...] He'd done it to keep me distracted—keep me angry. Because anger was better than feeling nothing; because anger and hatred were the long-lasting fuel in the endless dark of my despair. The same way that music had kept me from breaking.

There are three other noteworthy mentions to music in ACOMAF: the song the weaver sings in her cottage about turning a sister into an instrument; the moment Rhys and Feyre's mating bond snaps into place; and the ancient afternoon performance that Feyre and Cassian watch at the amphitheater with music that predates humanity.

QUOTE 52: A Court of Mist and Fury, Ch. 20

A honeyed voice, for an ancient, horrible song. I'd heard it before – slightly different, but sung by humans who had no idea that it had come from faerie throats. [...]

*There were two sisters, they went playing,
To see their father's ships come sailing ...
And when they came unto the sea-brim
The elder did push the younger in.
Sometimes she sank, and sometimes she swam,
'Til her corpse came to the miller's dam.
But what did he do with her breastbone?
He made him a viol to play on.
What'd he do with her fingers so small?
He made pegs to his viol withall.
And what did he do with her nose-ridge?
Unto his viol he made a bridge.
What did he do with her veins so blue?
He made strings to his viol thereto.
What did he do with her eyes so bright?
On his viol he set at first light.
What did he do with her tongue so rough?
'Twas the new till and it spoke enough.
Then bespake the treble string,
'O yonder is my father the king.'
Then bespake the second string,
'O yonder sits my mother the queen.'
Then bespake the strings all three,
'Yonder is my sister that drowned me.'*

Side note: this is adapted from an actual Scottish folk ballad called "The Two Sisters". A rendition of this song, retitled "The Bonny Swans", appeared on Loreena McKennitt's album "The Mask and Mirror". Odd fun fact, will come back to it later.

QUOTE 53: A Court of Mist and Fury, Ch 55.

I felt and saw and smelled that bond between us, until our scents merged, and I was his and he was mine, and we were the beginning and middle and end. We were a song that had been sung from the very first ember of light in the world.

QUOTE 54: A Court of Mist and Fury, Ch. 58

The next afternoon, Rhys was still gone, Amren was still buried in the book, Azriel off on a patrol of the city and nearby shoreline, and Cassian and I were—of all things—just finishing up an early afternoon performance of some ancient, revered Fae symphony. The amphitheater was on the other side of the Sidra, and though he'd offered to fly me, I'd wanted to walk. Even if my muscles were barking in protest after his brutal lesson that morning. The music had been lovely—strange, but lovely, written at a time. Cassian had told me, when humans had not even walked the earth. He found the music puzzling, off-kilter, but ... I'd been entranced.

NESTA

My queen, death personified. Nesta literally stole the Cauldron's power by force. Nesta and Bryce have some of the strongest connections to music (which they bond over while they're on their hiking trip). This is really fleshed out for Nesta throughout ACOSF as it relates to her love of dancing. Unlike Aelin and Feyre, Nesta (like Yrene) possesses the power to Make and Unmake things.

Early in ACOSF, we meet not-doing-so-well Nesta while she is drinking herself numb in music halls to drown out her sorrow and the pressure of her untapped power.

QUOTE 55: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 51

"It's a long story, and not one worth telling, but through it all, I picked taverns and pleasure halls to frequent because of the music. I've always loved music." [...] "I think I might be glad Feyre did this for me. The drinking, the males—I don't miss any of it. But the music ... that I miss."

Music comforts her, and she (and others) also describes her power as being a sort of music in a few places:

QUOTE 56: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 15

"The first time I saw that look on your face, you were still human. Still human, and I nearly went to my knees before you." His breath caressed the shell of her ear and she couldn't stop her eyes from fluttering shut. His smile brushed against her temple. "Your power is a song, and one I've waited a very, very long time to hear, Nesta."

QUOTE 57: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 29

"I am descended from Rabath, Lord of the Western Wind," Merrill seethed. "Unlike Gwyneth Berdara, I am no lackey to be dismissed." To hell with this witch. To hell with restraint and hiding. Nesta let enough of her power simmer to the surface that she knew her own eyes glowed. Let it crackle, even as she ignored its wild, unholy bellowing. Gwyn had backed away a step. Even Merrill blinked as Nesta said, "With a fancy title like that, surely such a petty grudge should be beneath you." Nesta smiled, savage and cruel. Merrill only glanced between her and Gwyn before saying, "Get back to your work, nymph." Wind snapping at her heels, Merrill stalked into the gloom. Nesta dropped the thread of her power, quelling its music and roaring with an iron hand.

QUOTE 58: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 36

Her blood was a cold song, the Mask a slithering echo to it, whispering of all she might do. Home, it seemed to sigh. Home. Nesta did not refuse it. Only embraced it, letting its magic—colder than her own and as old—flow into her veins. [...] Drifting in the water, the power of the Mask an icy song through her, Nesta summoned the dead. To do what her own body could not.

QUOTE 59: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 38

Cassian's voice stopped, and then the world paused, and all that existed was him, his fierce smile, as if he knew what song roared in her blood, as if he alone understood that the blade was an instrument to channel this raging fire in her.

Again, when she is forging Ataraxia:

QUOTE 60: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 40

Nesta's arm arched above her, the hammer gripped in her clenched fingers. It was a dance, each of her movements timed to the ringing echo of the hammer on the blade. She pounded the sword to a music no one but she could hear.

The most striking depictions are when 1) Elain is describing her love of dance ahead of the Winter Solstice celebration in the Hewn City, and 2) the solstice itself. Elain has this to say about her:

QUOTE 61: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 44

Elain leaned forward. “You only think you know—you haven’t seen her on the dance floor. That’s when Nesta truly lets the wolf roam free. When there’s music.” “Really?” Nesta had told him once, when he’d dragged her out of a particular seedy tavern, that she’d been there for the music. He’d ignored her, thinking it an excuse. “Yes,” Elain said. “She was trained in dance from a very young age. She loves it, and music. Not in the way I enjoy a waltz or gavotte, but in the way that performers make an art of it. Nesta could bring an entire ballroom to a halt when she danced with someone.” [...] [W]hat Feyre does with paint, that’s what Nesta did with music and dance. Our mother saw it when we were children, and honed it into a weapon.

[...]

They moved on to far merrier subjects, but Cassian mulled it over throughout the evening. The fighting was only one part of it. The training would sustain her, funnel that rage, but there had to be more. There had to be joy. There had to be music.

Once they get to the Hewn City, Nesta is immediately struck by the music. She knows that the plan is for her to woo Eris with a dance, but that doesn’t stop her from basking in the music and dance anyway.

QUOTE 62: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 47

Perhaps it was because Nesta’s eyes had drifted toward the dancing, shimmering throng. As if she couldn’t help herself when the music swelled. She seemed to be half-listening. Maybe music meant more to her than the dagger—more than magic and power. [...] Even Eris’s eyes widened at it—the sheer skill and grace, each movement of her body precisely tuned to each note and flutter of music, from her fingertips to the extension of her neck as she turned, the arch of her back into a held note. Cassian dared a glance at Feyre and Rhys and found even their normally composed faces had gone a bit slack.

Nesta then proceeds to hoedown throwdown for everyone, completely consumed by the music:

QUOTE 63: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 47

The music burned through Nesta. Had there ever been such a perfect, half-wild sound in the world? [...] It flowed and swam around her, filling her blood, and if she could have done so, she would have melted into the melody, become the rolling drums, the soaring violins, the clashing cymbals with the counter-beat, the horns and reeds with their high-arcing song. There wasn't enough space inside her for the sound, for all it made her feel—not enough space in her mind, her heart, her body; and all she could do to honor it, worship it, was dance. [...] The music stomped into its crashing finale, drums striking, violins whirring, and the entire room straightened, eyes upon Nesta. Upon Nesta, this once-human female who had conquered death, who now glowed as if she had devoured the moon, too. [...] Each one of the sapphires atop her tiara glimmered as if lit with an inner fire. Someone gasped nearby. It might have been Feyre. And as Nesta spun solo—on the toes of one perfect foot—she smiled. Not a courtier's slick smile, not a coy one, but one of pure, wild joy, brought by the music and the dance and her wholehearted yield to it. It was like seeing someone being born. Like seeing someone come alive. [...]

Nesta's mother had wanted a prince for her. Cassian now thought she'd undervalued her daughter. Only a king or an emperor would do for someone with that level of skill. [...] The next dance began, and Nesta did not hesitate when Eris led her into it. It was a lighter, easier dance than the first, whose music had been a song in her blood. [...] If she hadn't been wearing the heavy dress, she might have begged the orchestra to play the song again so she could just execute spin after spin after spin by herself, knowing when to throw in doubles and triples by instinct and ear alone. She was drunk on the music.

Obviously, this makes Cassian's solstice gift to her perfect:

QUOTE 64: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 58

Music was playing from the silver orb. And not just any music, but the waltzes from the ball the other night, pure and free of any crowd chattering, as if she were sitting in a theater to hear them. “This isn’t the Veritas orb,” she managed to say as the waltz poured out of the ball, so clear and perfect her blood sang again. “No, it’s a Symphonia, a rare device from Helion’s court. It can trap music within itself, and play it back for you. It was originally invented to help compose music, but it never caught on, for some reason.” [...] The tears she couldn’t stop. She didn’t try to fight them as the music poured into the room. He had done all of this for her. Had found a way for her to have music —always. [...] “Say it,” Cassian whispered against her skin. [...] “You’re mine.” He groaned, thrusting hard. She whispered, “And I am yours.” Those golden threads between their very souls shone with the words, as if they formed a harp strummed by a heavenly hand. For it was music between their souls. Always had been. And his voice was her favorite melody.

QUOTE 65: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 61

Cassian extended a hand, and Nesta wordlessly took it, letting him lead her down the hall. When she looked at the steps upward and her legs buckled, he scooped her into his arms and carried her. She leaned her head against his chest, closing her eyes, savoring the sound of his heart thumping. All the world was a song, and this heartbeat its core melody.

I would be also absolutely remiss to not include the scrying vision she has when she is listening to the Dusk service music performed by the library priestesses. This will also be our segue into talking about Gwyn:

QUOTE 66: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 51

Nesta knew she had to scry—soon—for the Harp. She'd lost a good week in the mountains, and if Queen Briallyn already had the Crown ... Time was not on their side. But she said, "You mentioned a while ago that you have evening services—with music, right?" [...] "I'll be there." Nesta shifted on her feet. "I think I need something like that." At Gwyn's quizzical look, Nesta said, "I ..." She fumbled for the smoothest way to say it. "I ..."

QUOTE 67: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 52

A bell rang seven times somewhere nearby, echoing through the stones, through Nesta's feet. Each peal was a summons, a call to focus. Everyone rose at the seventh peal. Nesta gazed at the sea of pale robes and blue stones as the entire room seemed to suck in a breath. As that seventh bell finished pealing, music erupted. Not from any instruments, but from all around. As if they were one voice, the priestesses began to sing, a wave of sparkling sound. Nesta could only gape at the lovely melody, the voices from the front of the cavern leading it, lifting higher than the others. Gwyn sang, chin high, a faint glow seeming to radiate from her. The music was pure, ancient, by turns whispering and bold, one moment like a tendril of mist, the next like a gilded ray of light. [...] It was like a braid, the song—a plait of seven voices, weaving in and out, individual strands that together formed a pattern. Halfway through it, a drum appeared in the hand of the singer on the far left. A harp began strumming in the hands of one on the far right. A lute sounded from the center. She'd never heard such music. Like a spell, a dream given form. The entire room sang, each voice resonating through the stone. But Gwyn's voice rose above them all, clear and powerful and yet husky on some notes. [...] The words and the countermelodies danced around and around, until the walls hummed with the music, until the stone seemed to be singing it back. [...] Gwyn's voice soared like a bird through the cavern as she started the third song with a solo, and Nesta closed her eyes, leaning into the music, shutting out one sense in order to luxuriate in the sound of her friend. Something beckoned in Gwyn's song, in a way the others' hadn't. Like Gwyn was calling only to her, her voice full of sunshine and joy and unshakable determination. Nesta had never heard a voice like Gwyn's—by turns trained and wild, as if there was so much sound fighting to break free of Gwyn that she couldn't quite contain it all. As if the sound needed to be loose in the world. [...] With her eyes closed, only the music mattered—the song, the voices, the harp. It wrapped around her, as if she'd been dropped into a bottomless pool of sound. Gwyn's voice rose again, holding such a high note it was like a ray of pure light, piercing and summoning. Two other voices rolled in to join, pulsing around that repeated high note, the harp still strumming, voices whispering and flowing, lulling Nesta down, down, down into a pure, ancient place where no outside world existed, no time, nothing but the music in her bones, the stones at her feet, her side, overhead. The music took form behind Nesta's eyes as the priestesses sang lyrics **in languages so old, no one voiced them anymore.** She saw what the song spoke of: mossy earth and golden sun, clear rivers and the deep shadows of an ancient forest. The harp strummed, and mountains rolled ahead, as if a veil had been cleared with the stroke of those strings, and she was flying toward it—toward a massive, mist-veiled mountain, the land barren save for moss and stones and a gray, stormy sea around it. The mountain itself held two peaks at its very top, and the stones jutting from its sides were carved in strange, ancient symbols, as old as the song itself.

GWYN & AZRIEL

The quote above does most of the heavy lifting that I need it to. I for one find it HIGHLY suspicious that Nesta's best friend has such a musical talent that she glows when she sings, and is ALSO the intern for the researcher studying multiple dimensions. There are three other quotes worth highlighting: Gwyn's favorite services are the Dusk services; Gwyn glows when she sings (again); and Gwyn asking if there is any musical connection to Azriel's 'shadowsinger' title (which is in the ACOSF bonus chapter and doesn't really mean much on its own, but is a fair enough question to highlight).

QUOTE 68: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 13

Nesta knew she could let the conversation end there, but she asked, “And what do you do with the time you’re not in the library? Practice your ... religious things?” Gwyn huffed a soft laugh. “In part. We honor the Mother, and the Cauldron, and the Forces That Be. We have a service at dawn and at dusk, and on every holy day.” Nesta must have made a face of distaste because Gwyn snorted. “It’s not so dull as all that. The services are beautiful, the songs as fair as any you’d hear in a music hall.” That did sound rather interesting. “I enjoy the dusk services.” Gwyn continued. “The music was always my favorite part of it, you know. I mean, not here. I was a priestess—an acolyte still—before I came here.”

QUOTE 69: A Court of Silver Flames, Ch. 13

The words of Gwyn’s merry song were in a language Nesta didn’t know, but for a heartbeat, Nesta allowed herself to listen—to savor the pure, sweet voice that rose and fell with sinuous ease. Gwyn’s hair seemed to glow brighter with her song, skin radiating a beckoning light. Drawing any listener in. But Merrill’s warning clanged through the beauty of Gwyn’s voice, and Nesta cleared her throat. Gwyn whirled toward her, glow fading even as her freckled face lit with surprise.

QUOTE 70: A Court of Silver Flames, Bonus Chapter

She angled her head, hair shining like molten metal. “Do you sing?” He blinked. It wasn’t every day that people took him by surprise, but ... “Why do you ask?” “They call you shadowsinger. Is it because you sing?” “I am a shadowsinger--it’s not a title that someone just made.” She shrugged again, irreverently. Az narrowed his eyes, studying her. “Do you, though?” she pressed. “Sing?” Azriel couldn’t help his soft chuckle. “Yes.” She opened her mouth to ask more, but he didn’t feel like explaining. Or demonstrating, since that was surely what she’d ask next.

BRYCE

Bryce loves music. She bonds with Nesta over it. She’s also the “party girl” in a modern setting with all the benefits that come with that, including music on her phone whenever she wants.

QUOTE 71: House of Earth and Blood, Ch. 5

Bryce's blood pulsed in time to the music, as if she had been crafted just for this: the moment when she became the notes and rhythm and the bass, when she became song given form. Juniper's glittering eyes told Bryce that she understood, had always understood the particular freedom and joy and unleashing that came from dancing. Like their bodies were so full of sound they could barely contain it, could barely stand it, and only dance could express it, ease it, honor it.

From Ruhn's perspective (something about this makes me think of the quote about Feyre's human senses being opened in the grassy glen, can't put my finger on it):

QUOTE 72: House of Earth and Blood, Ch. 16

Fae impulse—to be drawn to music, and to love it. Perhaps the one side of her heritage she didn't mind. He remembered her showing him her dance routines as a young teenager. She'd always looked so unbelievably happy. He'd never had the chance to ask why she stopped.

Bryce, making the drop:

QUOTE 73: House of Earth and Blood, Ch. 92

It was joy and life and death and pain and song and silence. Bryce tumbled into power, and power tumbled into her, and she didn't care, didn't care, didn't care, because it was Danika falling with her, Danika laughing with her as their souls twined. She was here, she was here, she was here – Bryce plunged into the golden light and song at the heart of the universe. Danika let out a howl of joy, and Bryce echoed it. Danika was here. It was enough.

When Pippa finds Bryce and Hunt with the Under-King:

QUOTE 74: House of Sky and Breath, Ch. 64

Her star began glowing beneath his fingers, as if in greedy anticipation. Another barrage of bullets clanged against the door. His lightning flowed into her like a river, and he could have sworn he heard a beautiful sort of music between their souls as Bryce said, "We need reinforcements."

Bryce freeing the magic of Avallen:

QUOTE 75: House of Flame and Shadow, Ch. 63

Light blasted up through the blades into her hands, her arms, her heart. Bryce could hear it through her feet, through the stone. The song of the land beneath her. Quiet and old and forgotten, but there.

QUOTE 76: House of Flame and Shadow, Bonus Chapter

"So that... phone of yours," Nesta said suddenly, as if eager to change the subject for all their sakes. "You said earlier it has music inside it?" [...] "Can I... hear some of your music?" Nesta's question was tentative, as if she was uncomfortable making such a personal request. Bryce flashed her a half smile. "Sure. What kind of music do you like?" [...] "Put on the music that represents your world best," Nesta said. "I think Midgard could descend into another war over that," Bryce said. "But I'll play you my favorite, at least." [...] "**Stone Mother**" began playing, its rolling, thumping drums offsetting the wild, yet mellow, guitars. And then Josie's voice filled the tunnel, sharp and yet soaring, accented by Laurel's sweet, clear backups. The sound was foreign, earthy – haunting. In the span of a few notes, Bryce was back in her childhood bedroom in Nidaros, sprawled on the carpet, letting the sound of the music run over her for the first time. [...] This song had carried her through it all – through the years of pain and emptiness and rebuilding. It had carried her from light into darkness and then back to light. [...] My friend Juniper dances to [Classical music] in the Crescent City Ballet. I used to dance, too, but... long story. This was one of my favorite dances. It's from a ballet called **The Glass Coffin**." Bryce hit play again, and the violins began. [...] "This sounds like some of our music," Azriel murmured. Nesta shushed him. Bryce tapped her foot along to the melody, reading the expressions stealing across Nesta's face as the music played. Wonder and curiosity, joy and longing. Nesta seemed to be thrumming with the music, though she didn't move at all. Like she was coming alive merely listening to the sound. [...] Nesta pointed to the phone again. "Play more, please." So Bryce did. Two hours later, they were walking again. Maybe Azriel had been interested enough in the music that he'd let them linger. Bryce had played them a sample of every genre she could think of. Nesta had clapped her hands over her ears at the screaming, wailing death metal, but Azriel had chuckled. [...] "It's crazy to me that in fifteen thousand years, we've developed all sorts of tech and your world is still, you know, like this." She motioned to their clothes, the cave. At Nesta's narrowed eyes, Bryce quickly added, "I'm simply wondering why similar changes didn't happen here. I mean, we had the Asteri, but a lot of our inventions didn't come from them." "Maybe it was the result of so many different worlds blending together in Midgard" [...] Nesta nodded to Bryce's pocket. "Could we hear some more of your music?" [...] The battery was inching toward the red zone. It would be dead soon. But for this... she could spare it. "What do you want to hear?" Bryce asked, opening her music library. Nesta and Azriel swapped glances, and the male answered a bit sheepishly, "The music you play at your pleasure halls." Bryce laughed. "Are you a club rat, Azriel?" [...] [T]he music seemed to linger, like a ghostly echo through the caves. And with each mile onward, she could hear Azriel humming to himself. The rolling, wild melody of "Stone Mother" softly flowed off his lips, and she could have sworn **even the shadows danced at the sound**.

LET THERE BE LIGHT!

Between you and me, I need a break from the music. You have no idea how long that took me to put together. In my head and also on paper.