

Compelled Dual

Season Three Episode Eight: The Greater Good

Cast:

Barry: DM, NPCs and voice of Leo

Al: DM, NPCs and voice of Phi

A: Hey, Barry.

B: Hey Al.

A: Why was the assassin in bed all day?

B: I don't know, why?

A: They were working undercover. It's time for Compelled Dual.

[INTRO MUSIC]

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

B: And I'm Barry.

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

B: Previously, on Compelled Dual.

[RECAP STARTS]

Leo: Tomás - what's the exact kind of *follow-through* that you're looking for, here?

Tomás: The vote to allow the emergency Senate session went through. I... decided to back down.

Leo: You *what*?!

Tomás: You've got enough political weight behind you now that you'll be able to make a solid case before the Senate. Solid enough to stop a formal war declaration, anyway. A desperate plea from an exiled prince is one thing. But the will of the *rightful Archduke of Astraria* is quite another.

Zed: Trust me, guys, from my experience? Letting Leo go into a room full of big fancy politicians and make a speech is always enough to either start a war or stop one.

Leo: I present to the Senate a future where people from both of our countries no longer have to suffer and *die* for the petty squabbles of frightened old men. Please think on it.

Emperor Lucius Servillius: Myself, Emperor Lucius Servillius, first of my name - and thus this Senate - recognize Leoril Valcyne as the effective head of the Astrarian state.

Leo: Yes!

Senator Greyriver: I've been waiting to nail that Valcyne punk to the wall since Omagroth, and I can't think of anything fucking better than using his kid as the hammer.

Phi: Why do we care about it being on the news?

Leo: Because if the public at large knows, then so does Father.

Elasha: *You* remember what a disaster it was when Adhana found us out. What it took to make that little problem go away?

B: Leo manages to knock a couple papers off the desk, then, I guess, and then just collapses against Zed's chest, sobbing.

A: Zed holds you really close, really tight, and you feel Phi's hand close around yours, as you just cry yourself out, here.

[RECAP ENDS]

A: It has been... several days, I would say - if not a week then nearly - since Leo made his big speech to the Senate, and was recognized - effectively enough for negotiations - as the lawful Archduke of Astraria. We find the lawful Archduke of Astraria on his hands and his knees, in the dirt of his aunt's garden. Next to him, also sitting in the dirt, is his good good friend, Ruvaen Sarrel, whose girlfriend Verity is a couple feet away. Nora Valcyne is pruning at one of her topiaries, meticulously. And one Talindra Morren is lounging on a lawn chair, with her feet kicked up, in a big floppy sun hat, drinking a lemonade. From the lawn chair, she calls over

Talindra: You know, you're not going to get basil to grow in a soil with this pH.

B: Leo, who *also* has on a big floppy hat, and a pair of oversized gardening gloves, looks up at her, a little manic.

Leo: I'm doing my best.

B: He's got dirt, like, smeared up one cheek. He's a mess.

A: Ruvaen, uh, looks over his shoulder at her, and says

Ruvaen: We got the lemons so we could fix the pH, I know what I'm doing.

A: And Talindra says

Talindra: *Okay...*

A: And just sips at her lemonade, slowly.

B: Leo is making a desperate attempt to get this little pre-bought basil plant buried in the dirt effectively. He's, like, clawing at it with his hands - he has a spade, but he doesn't know how to use it. He's making a very good effort.

A: Can you please roll me a nature check? I'll let you have advantage, because Ruvaen is helping.

B: [dice noise] Eleven?

A: You have perhaps not been as delicate as you should have been with this basil plant. It's - [stammers] there are some snapped stalks. It's looking a little ruffled, a little squished.

[TIMESTAMP - 5:05]

B: Leo looks down at his sad squished little plant, and just kind of flops over to sit down in the dirt.

Leo: [sighs] Ain't that just the way. You know? I break everything I touch, I don't know why I thought it would be any different!

A: A small pile of dirt rains down on your head, as Ruvaen casts Mold Earth.

Leo: [sputters, coughs] *Why?*

A: Ruvaen, very calmly digging a hole where he's going to plant a bunch of flowers, says

Ruvaen: Negative reinforcement.

B: Leo spits out another couple of clods of dirt, and goes back to digging a hole in the ground with his hands, and grabs one of the packets of seeds that they just got at the farmer's market.

Leo: Okay, so, do I put the *whole* thing in, or...?

A: Verity, from behind you, casting Druidcraft on a bunch of marigolds, says

Verity: Do three, just in case one fails to germinate.

Leo: Wait, nobody *told* me the plants had germs. Am I going to get sick?!

A: From up on the back porch, you hear

Zed: Wow. Uh, what am I looking at, here?

B: Leo whips around to the source of the voice, his floppy hat going askew on his head.

Leo: I'm gardening.

A: You see Zed and Phi, both standing on the back porch. They both had gone over to the garage, by the time you actually got out of bed this morning, and Phi kind of tilts her head to the side, as Zed keeps squinting at you. And Phi says

Phi: ...*Why?*

Leo: I'm so glad you asked. See, I've been coming to the swift conclusion over the past few days that if I just have to sit around and wait for the Senate meeting to, you know, *feel like I'm doing anything*, I'm going to go off my fucking rocker! So, the other day, I went downtown, and I saw auntie Nora's therapist. Isn't that right, auntie Nora?

A: Nora, snipping at one of her topiaries, says

Nora: Yes, you did, and that was totally your idea, and you weren't coerced into it at all.

Leo: Yeah, exactly. So I went in thinking it would make me feel better - it actively made me feel worse, but, according to the therapist, I am -

B: And he brings up both hands, in these big gardening gloves, and starts doing air quotes

Leo: - "*suffering from a personality disorder*" and "*coming down off a manic episode*" and "*need to find a hobby where I create or nurture something, to help me channel these negative feelings.*" So, anyway, knitting reminds me of my mother, which makes me upset, I tried woodworking for a little bit, cut off the tip of my pinky - don't worry, it's fine now, I healed it - so... Plants.

A: [cackles] There is a beat of silence. And then Verity says

Verity: And we're helping!

Leo: Yeah, and they're helping! So, all-in-all, I feel like it's a good thing for me, you know? I get to channel things constructively. I get someone to talk to, you know, you're supposed to talk to them, it helps them grow.

B: Leo hunches down on his hands and knees again, puts his face right up against the crushed basil plant, and goes

Leo: Thrive, you little bastard, my entire sense of self-worth is hinging upon your success.

A: [laughs] Ruvaen, next to you, cringes a little bit and goes

Ruvaen: You're supposed to talk *nicely* to the plants. They need *encouragement*.

Leo: Got it! Thank you for the note. *Please* thrive, you little bastard.

A: [laughs] Ruvaen says

Ruvaen: That's not - know what? Actually, that's fine.

A: From the porch, Phi says

Phi: Well, I hate to cut a constructive coping mechanism short, but, Kalessa's here?

B: Leo looks up from where he is scooping dirt back into this hole he dug with his hands.

Leo: Say what now?

Phi: Yeah. A streetcar showed up from the embassy, just a minute ago, she has something that she needs to discuss with both of us, apparently?

Leo: [sighs] Well, this should be good.

B: Leo shells off both of his gardening gloves, and takes his hat off.

Leo: Ruvaen, watch my baby, please.

A: Ruvaen sighs, and says

Ruvaen: Can-do.

B: Leo's going to jog up onto the porch and throw an arm around Zed's waist.

Leo: Be proud of me, I'm doing the work. I'm getting better.

A: Zed leans over and just kisses the top of your head, and says

Zed: I'm real proud of you, boss.

A: From behind you, you hear Verity yell, haltingly

[TIMESTAMP - 10:00]

Verity: Leo, look! Your plant's already doing better!

Leo: [gasps]

B: He turns around to look.

A: Make an arcana check, for me.

B: [laughs, dice sound] Ten.

A: You know what, buddy? Somehow your basil plan has gotten, like, a few inches taller, it's thriving, it looks great. It must be the lemons.

Leo: I am the greatest gardener who ever lived. Look at her, she's beautiful!

A: Ruvaen and Verity exchange a look, and then Ruvaen says

Ruvaen: Yeah, she's gorgeous! Good job.

Leo: After we're done talking to Kalessa, I'm bringing her back here to show her.

B: And then Leo is going to follow Phi and Zed back inside the house. Phi, you, Zed, and your brother, all make your way back into the house, up this long hallway from the backyard, and into your aunt Nora's sitting room. Most of your party is out sort of pursuing their own devices, you know a few of them have probably gone to the garage to do some work, but in this room right now, your uncle Eron is in a wingback chair, leafing through a newspaper, your cousin Lark is sitting on the floor next to the coffee table, painting their nails, and one lady Kalessa Petris is sitting on one of the sofas, twiddling her thumbs in her lap. This big cabinet-like broadcasting machine, up against one wall of the room, is turned on, the crystal in the top pulsing and glowing, and through the speakers, you hear the tinny familiar voice of Senator Maximus Greyriver.

Senator Greyriver: Look, Claudia, all I'm saying is that why should we - as a nation more than capable of defending ourselves - put our fate in the hands of an Archduke with no crown, no control over his military, and no *real* seat of power, to keep us safe from a clear and present danger? There's a quick, efficient solution to all of this, and the fact that many of my colleagues in the Senate are too busy clutching their pearls over the moral implications of it doesn't negate the facts!

B: Your uncle Eron emphatically turns another page in his newspaper, and goes

Eron: [sighs] Lark, turn that crap off.

B: Lark puts their nail polish down, and hops up to go turn this machine off, and right behind you, through the door of the sitting room, Eleanora Ashthorne kind of hip-bumps you to the side, as she comes in with a serving tray, full of a teapot and several cups of tea. She starts putting them down in front of people, one for Lark, one for your uncle, a couple for you and Leo, and then hands one to Kalessa, who kind of smiles softly and squeezes her arm, and goes

Kalessa: Thanks, babe.

B: She looks up at you, Leo, and Zed, who just walked in, and kind of raises an eyebrow.

Kalessa: Wow, Leo, I know I say this a lot, but you look like shit. You've got... dirt... in your ears?

B: Next to you, you watch Leo's ears, of their own accord, sort of shake and ruffle to get the dirt off them.

Phi: He's gardening. It's a whole thing.

A: Phi's gonna move over and sit down next to Kalessa.

B: Kalessa waits for Leo and Zed to sit down on the sofa opposite you two.

A: Phi waits until Eleanora's back is turned, and then looks at Kalessa, and mouths "*Babe?*" incredulously.

B: Also checking to make sure that Eleanora's back is still turned, she reaches out and pinches at your arm super hard. But then she reaches into the folds of this very nice traveling cloak she has on over her dress, and pulls out two envelopes, one of which she hands to you, and one of which she hands to Leo.

Kalessa: Anyway, apparently I've been demoted to *courier*, at this point. Um, these are for you.

Phi: Oh, good. Mail.

A: Phi opens the envelope

Phi: By the way, *how* are you here? I thought... You know, steep consequences, everybody being fucked? All that?

Kalessa: Yeah, well, that's the thing - my dad sent me. Go ahead and take a look at what's inside that envelope, before you ask any more questions.

A: Phi does so.

B: Inside this envelope, on the letterhead of the Astrarian embassy, is an invitation to a party, tomorrow night, addressed to *you* specifically. Leo also opens his envelope, pulls out an identical invitation, and frowns down at it.

Leo: What the hell?

Phi: So this *definitely* smells like a trap, right? Everyone? Yes?

[TIMESTAMP - 14:57]

Leo: Well, given what I saw in that scrying spell... The knowledge that Elasha and Father are planning *something*, and the fact that we're the only two that got these, and there's no provision on them for a plus one? Yeah, trap. Definitely a trap.

Phi: Alright, glad we agree, so...

A: And then Phi stands up, kind of rolling the invitation up, and she's about to, like, chuck it into the fireplace.

B: Kalessa grabs your wrist before you can do this.

Kalessa: I wouldn't do that.

Phi: Well, obviously we're not *going* to this.

B: Kalessa bites at her lip, and squeezes your wrist a little harder.

Kalessa: I don't think you can afford *not* to.

Phi: Well, that's delightfully cryptic - would you like to *elaborate*, Kalessa?

Kalessa: I mean, on the surface, it's a big fancy embassy party, we have them all the time, but... I got a look at the guest list, before I came over here. Pretty much the entire National Defense Committee from the Voldhuran Senate is going to be there. I don't think you two *want* the part of the Astrarian political delegation that your father controls to be able to talk to these people without the two of you being able to get a word in edgewise. And, say it is a trap? Point the first, you'll have me, Fen, and Mia there to back you up, and point the second... How bad of a trap can it be? My whole family's there, the entire staff of the embassy is there. Your dad and Elasha are going to

have to pull some pretty fancy footwork to be able to do *anything* to *either* of you, while we're all there watching.

Phi: We wouldn't be invited if they didn't have *something*, Kalessa. Like you said, we don't want them to be able to talk to the senators without us being able to get a word in. That is *exactly* what *they* want.

Kalessa: I know. I agree. Something about it stinks. I've been trying to press Elasha as much as I can without raising suspicion, but she's not giving me anything. The best I can tell you is that the party is going to be big enough that you can maybe get a couple people in? I know that you don't have plus ones on your invitation, or anything, but there's gotta be a way you can sneak a couple folks past the door, right?

Phi: [sighs] We do know a forger. As far as I understand, he mostly works in art and antiquities, but... I've seen his calligraphy, it's not bad.

B: Leo frowns at you.

Leo: Who do we know that's a -

Phi: Florian.

Leo: Fl- ...Yeah. Actually, yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

A: [laughs]

Phi: Sabine won't be happy to have him involved, but if he's just forging the invitations... I mean, how much trouble could he really get in? Or... cause?

Leo: Well, I feel like you're tempting fate by saying something like *that*, but - okay, fine. Let's figure out who we're bringing with us.

B: Zed, who has not touched the cup of tea that Eleanora brought him, kind of leans back on the couch and slings an arm around Leo's shoulder.

Zed: Well, I mean - me, obviously.

Phi: I... don't think that's a good idea.

B: He kind of raises an eyebrow at you.

Zed: Well, that's good to hear - you don't think this is a good idea. Put me down for an invitation.

Phi: Anyone we bring with us is going to have to be obtrusive enough that no one bothers to check the guest list, Zed. You are a lot of things, unobtrusive is not one of them.

B: He looks... affronted, hand up to his chest in a very offended gesture. But then nods, as if acknowledging your point.

Phi: I don't think we should bring The Captain, either. For similar reasons.

B: Leo has gone headfirst back into political chessmaster mode, which is *very* funny with all the dirt smeared across his face, but he perches his elbows on his knees, and kind of steeples his hands in front of his face.

Leo: But, in that vein, bringing Sabine seems to be a good idea. This is *her* preferred terrain, after all.

Phi: Yeah, and she knows the Beacon better than any of us, so if Elasha sent anyone in, she'd be the first to spot them. So, who else? I think we could justify one more invitation, in our party.

B: From the corner, there is a *click* of a cup and saucer hitting the table, and Eleanora turns around, kind of halfway raising one hand.

Eleanora: Uh, I mean, well. I'm at least *somewhat* of a familiar face at the embassy. And, if anybody asks, I could say I'm there as a politically-neutral party. I've got a good bit of muscle, if we need it.

Phi: That... is fair. And, once we're inside... [sighs] If we need extra backup, we can sneak someone else in - maybe a few people - through the back.

[TIMESTAMP - 20:03]

B: Kalessa purses her lips, and nods.

Kalessa: Yeah. And we'd have Mia to help with that, from the inside, so. Sounds like a plan. I think as long as we're all aware that we're walking into something that is designed to fuck us over, we've got a fighting chance at beating it. We've done it before.

Phi: Yeah. Yeah, we have. [hisses] I'm going to go on record now, saying I hate this.

B: Leo, who is still staring down at his invitation, goes

Leo: Seconded.

B: Zed kind of leans forward and puts his head in his hands.

Zed: Thirded.

B: Eleanora opens her mouth like she's gonna say something, but then picks up a couple of empty teacups, squeezes Kalessa's shoulder on the way by, and just walks out of the room. Leo, from the couch, pinches the bridge of his nose and sighs.

Leo: [sighs] Okay. Phi, uh, go ahead and get ahold of Sabine, tell her to get home as soon as possible, and bring Florian, if he's there.

Phi: Already on it.

A: Uh, Phi's pulling out her Beacon coin.

B: Okay, you get ten words. What do you send us to Sabine?

Phi: [text] We are alright. Come home. Bring Florian, if possible, please.

B: A few seconds pass, and then your Beacon coin glows, as a message from Sabine comes back in return.

Sabine: [text] He's right here. You're in luck. Aravae isn't. Back soon.

A: [laughs] Phi nods, and - to the room at large - says

Phi: Alright. Uh, that'll be a few minutes, but they're on their way.

A: And then she turns to Kalessa.

Phi: If you were just here to drop these off, you should probably get going before anyone gets suspicious.

B: Kalessa stands up and dusts her hands off on the front of her skirts.

Kalessa: Yeah, no, you're right. I'll head back to the embassy, I'll catch Fen and Mia up, and we'll be there to back you up as much as we can tomorrow.

B: From the other couch, Leo raises a finger and goes

Leo: Do you want to take any fresh basil back, for the kitchens? I grew it myself.

B: Kalessa squints down at him, and goes

Kalessa: Fucking what? No.

B: And then leaves.

A: [laughs] Alright. So, Kalessa walks out. Phi is pacing the sitting room for a couple laps. Leo, what are you doing?

B: I do have a question, about my Whispers Of The Grave Phantom Rogue ability.

A: Yes?

B: So, with the ghosts - do they *only* show up when I am making the relevant checks with the proficiency they're giving me, or are they just kind of... hanging out?

A: Uh, they only *appear* when you are making the relevant check, and they stay for an amount of time that is variable, but has seemed, to you, to be getting longer.

B: So if I were to, like, make an *effort* to see one of these ghouls, what would happen?

A: Why don't you roll me a religion check.

B: Okay, I can do that. [dice noise] Twenty-six.

A: Okay. You're still in the sitting room, are you focusing on trying to see a ghost?

B: Yeah, just for shits and giggles.

A: You put your mental energy to the task of seeing these ghosts that have appeared to you. The edges of your vision go weird, and kind of, like, blurry and dim. And after a moment, you realize that is because there are *figures* on the edges of your vision. More than two - you have no way of counting how many, but you can see *hands*, reaching just barely into your peripheral vision. So yes, if you concentrate, you can see ghosts.

B: Leo screws his eyes shut, and shakes his head super hard.

Leo: [clears throat] Well, um! Yeah, we can all agree that this is *fucked*, and definitely a trap. I have some things I need to handle, if this is all going down tomorrow, if you'll excuse me -

B: And he gets up and charges out of the sitting room.

A: Uh, Zed is going to follow you.

B: I think Leo's, like, halfway up the stairs. He was headed towards their room.

A: Zed's not going to stop you, but he is gonna come up to the bottom of the stairs, and just call up to you.

Zed: Hey. What's going on?

B: Leo brings up both hands to kind of press against either side of his forehead.

Leo: Weird creepy shit that you don't want to know about. And... that's really freaking me out.

[TIMESTAMP - 25:01]

Zed: Alright, well. If it's freaking you out, then clearly I need to know about it.

Leo: Um, let's not... Not here, just. Upstairs. Come on.

A: Okay. He's gonna to follow you up to your room.

B: I'm going to religion check again, and see if I can still see the same shit that I saw downstairs.

A: Roll it.

B: [dice sound] Seventeen.

A: Less so. There's still, like, a little bit of weird wavering at, like, the very edges of your peripheral vision, but not as much.

B: Leo sits down on the edge of the bed and, like, grinds the heels of his hands up against his closed eyes.

Leo: There's *more*. Ghosts, I mean - and they're following me around, and apparently if I concentrate hard enough I can see them, now.

Zed: Hey, hey.

A: And he's gonna kinda drop to his knees, in front of you, and just put one hand on either side of your head.

Zed: Alright. I mean... First thing's first, did you tell the therapist about the ghosts?

Leo: Yes, I did, and she said that I need to go on something called a *mood stabilizer*?

A: [cackles]

Leo: But apparently she's going to need a couple more days to cross-reference the medicinal textbooks and make sure it's not going to negatively interfere with the top-tier Astrarian gender juice that I'm already taking, so we're waiting a few days on that. Meanwhile... *this*.

Zed: [shaky breath] Yeah, this. Okay.

A: And Zed's just gonna put his forehead against yours for a second.

Zed: ...I'm not going to lie, it's easier to know that it's not just your ex. Freakier, but easier.

Leo: Yeah, well, if it makes you feel better, I haven't really seen Sorran in a while. It's mostly just been my dead uncle, and now... innumerable unnamed shadow people.

Zed: *Shadow p-* Okay! Uh, mhm.

A: He pulls back a little bit, and then shakes his head, and then puts his forehead against yours again, and then pulls back again. Zed is buffering. And then he says

Zed: Alright, boss, I'm going to ask you a really genuine question. How the *fuck* was what you just said supposed to make me feel better?

Leo: Uh - I don't *know*. It's not making *me* feel any better, that's for damn sure. I - [sighs] I need to go run an errand, I'm going to be gone for a bit.

Zed: Oh yeah, cool, you're seeing *shadow people* and now you're going to just go somewhere. Great - Great plan. *What?!*

Leo: I can't have this *fucking with me* while I walk into whatever my Father's planning at the embassy, alright?! I need *answers*, I'm going to go try to find them.

Zed: And how *exactly* are you planning on doing that?

B: Leo fists his hands up in his pants, and, through clenched teeth, goes

Leo: I think I need to go to church.

Zed: ...I can't believe *I'm* saying this to *you*, but... I really don't think religion is the answer, here?

Leo: Zed, you are talking to the most *areligious* priest on the face of this planet, I am not *stupid* enough to think that blind faith is going to ease my mind in all of this. But yelling at my God might *really* help me feel better.

Zed: Fair point.

Leo: Do you want to come with me, honey? Astrarian churches are beautiful - lots of elaborate candelabras, stained glass windows, incense, there's skulls hanging from the ceiling, sometimes they talk.

A: Zed makes a little *meep* noise, just

Zed: [uncomfortable noise]

A: And then he gently pulls his hands back from your head, rakes one back through his hair, and says

Zed: Uh... M-Maybe I'll just wait outside?

A: He stands up, dusts himself off, and you two head out.

B: Uh, first of all - *is* there a church of Kimryl in Voldhur? And, second of all, would I know where it is?

A: You would not, because you have not tried to look, but you assume there is one, because you have noticed your aunt Nora heading out to church a few times - like, she's *pretty* religious - and you assume that you could ask her where it is.

B: Okay. I feel bad about lying to my aunt by omission, but I'm going to go take Zed and try to find her.

A: You find her in her study, as she often is - you get the feeling that, like, it's very much *her space* when she needs a second. You find her painting what looks to be a landscape.

B: Leo makes a good faith effort to put on a very happy jovial expression, and leans in around the doorway.

[TIMESTAMP - 29:58]

Leo: Auntie Nora, hi, um, I was just gonna take Zed to church. Do you mind giving me directions?

A: Roll performance.

B: Okay. [dice noise] Nineteen!

A: Your aunt Nora is absorbed in her painting. She does not notice that anything's up. She just says

Nora: Uh, yeah, it's on the corner of Fifth and Amethyst. Um, if you don't know where that is off the top of your head, Eron can just give you a map. Have fun!

Leo: I am so sure we will. Come on, Zed, let's go.

B: And we head out.

A: Uh, roll me a survival check, with advantage.

B: [dice sound] Sixteen.

A: You manage to find the one, like, *big* Astrarian church in Voldhur. You can tell which building it is. It stands out. It's got a lot of big stained glass panels. You see that someone has, like, graffiti-tagged the sides and the front of it.

B: Yeah. Leo is going to walk up to the front door, and then turn over to Zed.

Leo: Are you sure you don't want to come in? I mean, if not, it's fine. And you're not going to catch me, of all people, proselytizing. But, now that I'm at least *somewhat* officially the Archduke, this all sort of -

B: And he waves down at himself.

Leo: - comes with the territory. You might learn something?

Zed: I'm not gonna lie to you and say I'm interested, but...

A: And then he kind of reaches out and grabs your hand.

Zed: I'll come in with you, for moral support. But if a skull talks to me, I'm fucking *out*.

Leo: [laughs] Well, you got to ask a priest real nice to make something like that happen. You can probably just post up in one of the back pews and wait for me to get done.

Zed: Will do.

A: And he walks in with you. The stained glass in here is, like, *gorgeous*. It's not what you are used to - having grown up attending the main chapel in Velunthal - but it - it's pretty nice. There's a lot of representations of, like, Kimrylite saints and such - you know, people that worked, like, great miracles, uh, things that you can't do with your cleric spells, like raising people from the dead with something more powerful than a Revivify, like making huge weather events happen, stuff like that. It's not regular service hours, so it is pretty empty in here.

B: Okay, I'm just going to look for a member of the clergy, around here, that looks like they're in charge of something.

A: Yeah, sure. You see, like, an old priest dusting off something on the pulpit. You can tell he's kind of a senior member of the church, 'cause he's got a veil going on, but it's, like, thrown back over his face, because only the Hierophant wears it in front. And he's got the signature knife - that is the holy symbol of all priests of Kimryl - stuck in his belt.

B: Leo is gonna walk up to this guy, and wait for him to be done with whatever he's doing, and then sort of wave

Leo: Hi there. Sorry to disturb you, brother...?

A: You said this, I assume, in Common. He responds in Elvish, like, rapid-fire

Brother Garrick: Brother Garrick. What can I do for you?

B: Leo is going to zap Kimryl's Blade out of his bracer, and kind of off-handedly wave it at this guy

Leo: From, uh, one priest to another, I'm just looking for a secluded and sacred space to... have a few words with the big guy. If you know what I mean.

A: This guy looks up at you, and his eyes go extremely wide. You *watch* him recognize you. And you watch him look at Kimryl's Blade, and his eyes get wider.

Brother Garrick: Uh... Certainly, your Highness.

Leo: Not sure if you all have a broadcasting device here at the church, brother Garrick, but it's actually *your Majesty*. If you could show me to that space that I mentioned?

A: Yeah, he spins on his heel and starts heading towards the back of the church. He leads you down a hall, and to kind of a little room that has a whole bunch of doors, just on the walls, and he gestures, and he says

Brother Garrick: Uh... Meditation chambers, for use by the clergy. If this will suffice?

Leo: I certainly hope it will.

B: Leo is going to head in there.

A: You head into this little tiny room, and... What are you doing?

[TIMESTAMP - 34:59]

B: Um, are there, like, general trappings of the Kimrylite religion, in here? Like, offering vessels and incense and things like that?

A: Yeah. It's a small room, it has just barely enough space for a little stool, and a very small altar against the back wall.

B: Leo is going to light up some incense, put that on the altar, and then sit down on the stool and start going through every fucking Kimrylite prayer that he knows how to do. Every piece of liturgy, every scripture, until he is just sitting there in the silence with nothing else. And then - still hands clasped together in front of him - he says

Leo: I know you can hear me. Not too long ago, you told me that both of our goals were aligned, and I - I *want* to believe that, but I have heard the stories of a lot of people - a lot of *good* people - that put their faith in you and got burned for it. And now *I'm* sitting here, and there are *thousands* of lives on the line, and they're all sitting on my shoulders. And I *want* faith, but I *need* answers.

B: And I would like to cast Divination as a ritual spell.

A: Okay. What does that do?

B: “Your magic, and an offering, put you in contact with a God or a God’s servants. You ask a single question, concerning a specific goal, event, or activity, to occur within seven days. The GM offers a truthful reply.” Leo sits there, hands going white-knuckled, where they are clutching each other

Leo: All the things I am seeing. *All* of it. *What* does it mean?

A: There's a long beat of silence. And then you hear that soft, familiar, raspy voice say

Kimryl, The Lord Of Bones: It means that your connection with it is getting stronger. It means I made the right choice. I'm sorry.

Leo: No - No, that doesn't answer anything. *What?*

A: There is no reply.

Leo: ...Fucking skeletal *pain in the ass*.

B: Leo's going to knock over a candelabra or something, on his way out of the room, and then storm off past Zed and out of the church, without waiting for anything else.

A: Zed hurries on out after you.

Zed: Hey, uh, did that... not go well? Or...?

B: Is there, like, a bottle, or a piece of breakable trash, that I can scoop up and throw against a wall?

A: Yeah. You find a liquor bottle, just empty on the ground.

B: Cool. I bean it into the nearest flat surface.

A: Okay. You do that, with the musical sound of breaking glass. Zed, behind you, goes

Zed: *Whoa*.

B: Leo watches this bottle shatter across the pavement, and then turns around, grabs Zed by the face, and pulls him in and kisses him super hard.

A: Zed kisses you back for a moment, and then pulls back with a *pop* and says

Zed: Hey, hey. As much as I enjoy kissing you, boss, are you... okay?

Leo: I'm fantastic. And I am *done* putting my faith in people that don't know what that faith is worth. Take me home.

A: Zed takes you home. And, Leo, you have received your tenth cleric level.

B: Oh, well, isn't that *great* for me?

A: [cackles]

B: Phi, the following evening finds you standing in your little makeshift war room at the Tonys' garage. You, Leo, Sabine, and Eleanora are all dressed for a party, and the rest of your party - save for Fen, Kalessa, and Mia - are all sort of milling about, looking like they're waiting for something to do. The Captain looks the most nervous out of anybody. He is just pacing the length of this room, hands behind his back. After he turns on his heel for the umpteenth time, he looks up at you, and goes

[TIMESTAMP - 40:13]

The Captain: Are you sure there's no way I can go with you?

B: And then, from the table, you hear a sharp

Florian: *Shh!* I'm working.

B: Florian Jovaris is hunched, gremlin-like, over the surface of this table, with yours and Leo's invitations splayed out in front of him, and then a big leather folio of calligraphy pens and various inks rolled out behind them. He is currently squinting down at a little square of paper that he has taped to the table. And - supremely frustrated - he shakes out the tip of his pen, and goes

Florian: Kimryl's *bones*, Sabine, where did you get this cardstock? Fucking *Kenku's*? This is *ass*!

B: And he rips the project he's been working on up from the table, tosses it aside, and pulls out a new piece of cardstock to start over.

A: Phi turns to The Captain, and says

Phi: Well, given how difficult forging invitations is, *apparently* - yes, I'm sure. If we need you, we'll find a way to sneak you through the kitchens.

B: Meanwhile, your cousin Aydra, down at the other end of the table, is sort of cracking her knuckles and looking down over the spread of maps across this table.

Aydra: So, what, we're all just supposed to sit here and wait for orders while the four of you go into the lion's den?

Phi: Aydra, if you have a better plan, I'd love to hear it.

Aydra: I - I *don't*, it's just that I *want* to.

Phi: [sighs] Look. We all know this is a trap. We all know something's going to go wrong. But, the way I see it, we've protected ourselves as best we can against it. The four of us are all formidable forces in our own right, and if we need more backup, then... Yes, I think the most helpful thing that any of you can do is stand by.

Aydra: [stammers] Dammit!

B: Aydra wheels around the edge of this table, up to you, and throws her arms around your waist.

Phi: *Oh*, we're hugging. We're hugging, now.

Aydra: We're hugging now. Just let it happen.

Phi: Yep.

A: Phi hesitantly hugs her back.

B: Your cousin Lark, from where they were sitting next to Aydra, kind of pushes their chair back from the table and loops you and Leo into a big group hug, and pats you both on the back.

Lark: Well, if anybody can upset devious political machinations, I think it's you two.

B: And you and Leo both have a D10 of bardic inspiration. From the table, Florian Jovaris goes

Florian: This is all very touching. Aravae, I need the light at a forty-five degree angle, please.

B: Aravae - who has been hovering around all of you with a lantern - kind of pivots to the side a little bit, and holds it up a little higher. And Florian, droplets of sweat running down behind his big round sunglasses, goes

Florian: Okay, and Eleanora's invitation... done! Take it away from me!
Somebody blow on it.

A: Phi's going to grab the invitation and do a Gust cantrip at it.

Florian: Supremely useful! Sabine, you're up next.

B: He pulls another piece of cardstock down, tapes it to the table, and gets to work. Phi, in the hand that *isn't* holding this forged invitation, you feel another hand reach down and twine its fingers in between yours. And when you look over to the side, you see Verity, newly-dyed bubblegum-pink hair braided back around her horns and pulled into a low ponytail at the nape of her neck. She squeezes your hand, and goes

Verity: I, um... I wish I could do my job. I wish I could do the whole trustworthy high priestess thing and tell you that this is what the Stormbringer has in store for you. But I can't, so... / believe in you, for whatever that's worth.

A: Phi's going to squeeze her hand, and attempt to put on a reassuring smile.

Phi: It's... It's worth a lot, Verity. Thank you.

B: She also gives you a big, super uncomfortable hug.

Verity: Great. This is awesome. Uh...

A: Phi pats Verity's back, and then says

Phi: Does anyone want to hug Leo?

[TIMESTAMP - 45:01]

B: As if on cue, Ruvaen sweeps out from the corner of the room and pulls Leo into a big bear hug.

A: Phi does finger-guns at him, and goes

Phi: Ruvaen, you're my favorite.

Ruvaen: Oh, yeah, I'm everyone's favorite at this point. I'm the only fucking person in this party that makes *sense*, anymore.

Phi: Fair point. That's a fair point. Yep.

B: From the table, Florian, with a big flourish of his hand, goes

Florian: And Sabine's is done! Gust cantrip, Phi, please.

A: Phi - presumably still wrapped in a hug by Verity - does a Gust cantrip, on cue.

B: He slumps back in his chair, and kind of pulls his big floppy hat down over his eyes.

Florian: Art styles are easy. You just have to learn the basic vibe of it all. Handwriting? Handwriting is a *bitch*. You all owe me *so big*.

Phi: Assuming I don't get *assassinated*, I'll buy you a cake.

B: He kind of pushes his sunglasses down on the bridge of his nose, and wiggles his eyebrows over at Aravae, who's standing on the other side of the table.

Florian: Or, more preferably, there's this wonderful little bistro downtown. I would love a gift certificate for a dinner for two.

A: [laughs] Phi also looks at Aravae, and then smirks, and says

Phi: Yeah, I think I could arrange that.

B: You see Aravae's jaw twitch, and she reaches over and yanks Florian's hat down over his face, but then looks between the two of you and goes

Aravae: Eh, fair enough.

B: Leo kind of glances over both of these forged invitations, before handing them out to Eleanora and Sabine respectively.

Leo: Okay. Well, I guess we're doing this.

Phi: I guess we are. Does anyone else want to say it's a bad idea?

B: Everybody in the room, up to and including T-O-N-Y Tony and T-O-N-I Toni all start talking over each other, to the similar tune of *this is a horrible idea*.

Phi: I was speaking rhetorically, but thank you all.

B: And without much further input, you, Leo, Eleanora, and Sabine all gather your invitations and head out through the garage, out the open door, into the alley. So, the four of you that are headed to this party come out of this alley onto the main street. You're about half a block up, when you hear a pretty familiar voice, behind you, going

Boreas: Hold on, hold on, hold on! Wait!

A: Phi turns.

B: Your uncle Boreas is standing in the middle of this street. He looks out of breath, first of all, like he has run a pretty far distance - and pretty rumpled, his little fancy cravat is kind of loose around his neck. He's reaching out, towards the group of you, and kind of braces his other arm against the wall of the nearest building, just panting.

Boreas: Oh, thank Kimryl I caught you. Nora said I would find you here, I - Hoo. Oh, my asthma.

Phi: Uh - O-Okay, one, are you alright? Two, why are you here?

Boreas: [deep breath] My medications are back at the house, it'll be okay. I think - [coughs] I think I found out what your father's planning. I need backup from one of you - Phirora, I could use some thunder on my side. Just a second, I'll have you at the party before anyone misses you.

A: Phi kind of looks around, at Sabine and Eleanora and Leo.

Phi: Uh... yeah, I think if you need backup I'm probably the best suited for it. Do the three of you feel like you can handle things without me, for a little bit?

B: Leo purses his lips, but then nods.

Leo: For a few minutes, yeah.

A: Phi looks back at Boreas, and says

Phi: And you're sure things are going to be alright if they go to the party? He's not planning anything to jump out at them on the way there, or anything?

Boreas: [coughs] Not as far as I can tell, no. You and I need to head to the library.

Phi: [stammers] Okay, sure.

A: And then Phi's going to turn back to Leo, and say

Phi: Shoot me a Sending if anything looks sketchy, alright?

Leo: Yeah, and reach out to Sabine if you two need anything.

Phi: Yeah, absolutely.

[TIMESTAMP - 50:00]

Leo: Okay, we'll see you there. Do what you need to do.

Phi: And you, as well.

A: And then Phi's gonna hitch her skirts up, and head off with Boreas. So, Leo, you, Eleanora, and Sabine head off to the Astrarian embassy, with your sister absent but following you eventually, after whatever this is. You walk up to the Astrarian embassy building - it is this big gorgeous converted mansion, it seems, with two stories of balconies out the front, with huge marble columns, these big glass doors in the front. There are people milling about on the porch, there are people milling about in the front yard, which is gorgeously manicured. The three of you present your invitations at the door, and I want you to go ahead and roll me performance with advantage.

B: [dice noise] Dirty twenty.

A: The three of you are let in without incident. You don't recognize *everybody* at this party by any means, like, it is very clearly... The party aspect of it is big, to cover up the political negotiations that are going to be happening. But you *definitely* notice Maximus Greyriver, hamming it up by a fireplace, to a semicircle of people listening intently and holding punch glasses. You notice a few other senators with the red sashes and the military medals. You notice Kalessa's dad milling about, being a good host, and you notice her mom, reclining on a chaise lounge, picking at a plate of food. Kalessa is sitting on an armchair next to her, and talking animatedly about *something*, and Nasalia smiles indulgently as she picks at some hors d'oeuvres. You notice Fen, standing amidst a crowd, being chatted at. Uh, roll me perception, really quick.

B: [dice sound] Twenty-nine?

A: As far as you can tell, as you walk through this party, your father is not here. Elasha is not here. And you feel like you can be *sure* neither of them are here, because you would *know* that Fen's dad was here, if you saw him. He is a big motherfucker of a dude, he is hard to miss. You do not see him anywhere.

B: Hey, AI?

A: ...W-What?

B: Just a little thing, for this scene, that you need to know as a DM.

A: *What?*

B: Boreas is here.

A: [murderous pause] ...Huh. Okay. Well, since you rolled a twenty-nine to perception - Leo, the character, knows that Boreas is here.

B: And given that, he is going to frown, pat Eleanora on the back, and then make a beeline for Boreas.

Leo: Hey, what the hell?!

A: Boreas is in a circle of his book club friends, somehow still managing to look stuffy as he shoves a canape in his mouth whole. And, around a mouth of puff pastry and what appears to be mushroom, he says

Boreas?: [garbled] What?

Leo: [mockingly] What? What - Where's *Phi*?

A: He pauses, swallows, and then says

Boreas?: What do you mean "*Where's Phi?*" Wouldn't you know where your sister is better than I do?

Leo: Given that I saw her walk off with *you* a couple minutes ago, *no!*

A: Boreas blinks. Shakes his head. Looks at a wineglass in his free hand, and goes

Boreas?: Now, Leoril. I am admittedly a bit tipsy, but, to my knowledge, I have been here for the last half hour.

Leo: ...So you didn't come by the garage, you didn't -

Boreas?: What *garage*?

Leo: *Motherfucker.*

B: Leo storms back out the front door, onto one of the balconies, zaps Kimryl's Blade out of its bracer, and tries to kind of hide it under his outfit, and sends a Sending spell to Phi.

Leo: [telepathically] You need to get the *fuck* out of there. Whoever you're with, it's not Boreas.

A: You get a response back from your sister, almost instantly.

Phi: [telepathically] What are you *talking* about?

B: And Phi, we cut back to you. You are following your uncle down this twisting maze of Voldhuran streets - towards the city center, towards where you know the library is. He's

not saying much as he leads you, but he does have a very tight grip on your upper arm, pulling you along behind him.

[TIMESTAMP - 55:07]

A: Phi tries to, like, kind of shake her arm out of the grip, and when it doesn't work, she says

Phi: Uncle Boreas, you're s-squeezing my arm a little tight.

Boreas?: Oh, um. [coughs] My apologies. Sorry.

B: The grip does loosen a little bit, but does not leave entirely. He is still ushering you up the street, towards the library. You two get to the front of this big gorgeous academic building, and he starts kind of tugging you up the steps behind him, when you feel the *ping* of a Sending spell go off inside your head. And - echoing with an urgency you have *never* heard before, against the inside of your skull - you hear your brother's voice.

Leo: [telepathically] You need to get the *fuck* out of there. Whoever you're with, it's not Boreas.

A: Phi pauses, and looks at her uncle, and then sends back

Phi: [telepathically] What are you *talking* about?

B: Your uncle pauses, a few steps above you, and turns back around, kind of frowning at you.

Boreas?: Come on. There's a file in the genealogical records in the library that we *really* need to look at.

Phi: And how *exactly* are genealogical records relevant to whatever my father is planning, with this party?

Boreas?: That's not something I feel comfortable discussing out where people can *hear us*, *Phirora*, let's just *go*. You want to get to that party, right?

A: [clicks tongue] Phi's going to cast a Witch Bolt at him.

B: [wheezes] Um, okay, go ahead and do that, roll to hit.

A: Natural nineteen.

B: Yeah, that'll hit. What level are you casting that at?

A: [dubious noise] I'll just cast it at first level. I want to see what I'm dealing with.

B: Okay! Roll 1D12 lightning damage.

A: [dice noise] Twelve.

B: Your uncle falls back on these stairs with a scream, as a bolt of lightning hits him, and yells

Boreas?: What the *hell*?!

A: Phi takes a step back, so she has some distance between herself and whoever the fuck this is, sets her stance very firmly, and says

Phi: Got an interesting Sending from Leo - you'll never guess who he saw at the party. Who are you?

B: As you ask this, I have a couple things to clarify. You feel the end of this Witch Bolt spell crackle and die on your fingertips, and, as you do, you remember a night, *long* ago in Oscaea, where you and Leo had talked about what the two of you had endured at the hands of your father. You remember Leo asking you the question “*Did he do the thing where he makes you think that everything you saw was just a bad dream, or did he do the thing where he makes himself look like someone else?*” And *then* you remember, from your arcane studies over the years, that a Seeming spell is indissolvable for the full eight hours from its casting. Your uncle, as far as you know, collapses down onto these grand marble steps, coughs into his elbow, weakly tries to prop himself up.

Boreas?: [coughs] Well, see, now you're asking the wrong questions.

B: And then he makes eye contact with you, and he smiles. And, Phi, you feel something visceral and primal and fearful at the nape of your neck, because your uncle Boreas is smiling in a way that is *wrong*, but familiar. And when he speaks again, his voice shifts - in a way that does not match up with your uncle, but you know *very* well.

Morlin: What you should be asking, darling, is how fast you can run. I don't think you're going to make it there in time. Tick tock, tick tock.

[TIMESTAMP - 59:57]

A: Phi takes another step back, I think, just shocked, and then takes a deep breath, steadies herself, and says

Phi: As usual, Father, you underestimate me.

A: And she casts Haste on herself.

B: Okay. So your AC increases by two, your speed doubles, you get an extra action on each turn. What are you doing?

A: Um, well, since I get an extra action, what I'm going to do is I'm going to burn both actions on each turn to Dash, which means that I'm moving a hundred and eighty feet every six seconds.

B: For the folks at home, that means Phi is moving faster than Zed, right now. As you absolutely sprint away, buoyed by your magic, this person on the steps that has your uncle's face, but speaks with your father's voice, says

Morlin: Time's a-wasting, darling!

A: Leo, after you get this Sending back from your sister, what are you doing?

B: Pacing nervously on the front porch for a little while, but then going back inside and hoping that she's on her way.

A: As soon as you go back inside, you run into Sabine. She grabs you by the arm in, like, a vice grip, and says

Sabine: Leo, step outside with me for a moment.

Leo: Yeah. Uh, was just about to find you and ask you to do the same thing with me. Let's go.

A: You step out onto the porch, and Sabine drags you into a corner, and hisses

Sabine: Phi just sent me a message, she says *get out*.

Leo: How *interesting*, since I just fired off a Sending to her that said pretty much the exact same thing. Have you seen real Boreas in the party, yet?

Sabine: *What?!*

Leo: Yeah! My uncle's *here*. Whoever grabbed Phi at the garage, it wasn't him.

A: Sabine looks very afraid.

Sabine: O-Okay, um. No one else could have sent a message on her Beacon coin, not on this short notice, so she's okay. Uh... If she's telling us to get out, then she's not the one in danger, *we're* in danger.

B: Leo looks over the railing into the yard, and then back into the party through the window, and purses his lips

Leo: You and Eleanora keep your distance. I'm figuring out what's going on here.

A: Sabine's hand tightens around your arm, and she says

Sabine: We all need to get *out of here*, Leo.

Leo: Okay, and given Phi's absence, who is going to pull Kalessa and Fen out of this house kicking and screaming, Sabine? You or me?

Sabine: I... I - I don't know, but we'll figure it out! We just need to - [unsteady breath] We just need to come up with a plan, hang on, hang on.

A: Sabine starts pacing.

B: Leo is going to stare back into the house through this window, and see if he can find Kalessa, Fen, or Mia.

A: Uh, roll perception.

B: [dice sound] Fourteen.

A: You can just barely see Fen moving through a crowd. Like, you can see one of his shoulders.

Leo: Ah, *fuck*. Okay, I see Fen in there, just let me go in and tell them what's going on.

A: Sabine sets her jaw very firmly, and then says

Sabine: I'll get Eleanora. Uh, the two of us can figure out what to do about Kalessa.

Leo: Okay, fine. Do what you need to do, keep an eye out for Phi, I'll be back as soon as I can.

B: And Leo is going to dive headfirst back through the doors, into this party, and make a beeline for Fen.

A: You notice, as you walk back in, that there is live music playing. It appears that they took a pause around the time that you came in. You don't know what was up there, but, uh, they're playing, they're very loud. And you cut through this crowd to get to Fen.

B: Leo is going to grab him by the elbow, and yank him off towards the nearest doorway, and then kind of lean up into his ear and go

Leo: My father and Elasha are trying something. Phi's involved in it - she's okay, she's on her way here, but we need to get ready for shit to pop off. Sabine seems to think we should all get out.

Fen: [stammers] Okay, uh. [stammers] Get out *where*? You mean *all* of us?

Leo: I mean everybody that we don't want to *die* here tonight. Where is Mia?

Fen: Mia's in the vents! Mia can't be seen!

Leo: Oh, fantastic, Mia can't be seen - can Mia be told to bug out?!

[TIMESTAMP - 1:04:58]

A: The door to a powder room behind Fen opens, and you hear a voice say

Mia: Sure thing, sugar, but what's our contingency plan?

B: Leo shuts his eyes and shakes his head for a couple seconds.

Leo: For now, I think it's *fall back to the garage*, but I think things here are about to get... *bad*. So we should make ourselves scarce before that happens.

A: Mia steps into your view, drawing up next to Fen, looks sideways at him, and then says

Mia: Do you want to, uh, go get the lady Petris? And I'll go ahead and grab Kalessa?

Leo: Yeah. Good. Whatever you two need to do. We just need to be ready to vacate in ten minutes.

A: Fen nods, and then says

Fen: Right, right. Uh... We'll meet up at the garage, if we get separated.

A: And he heads off into the crowd. You watch Mia ooze their way between people, very nonchalantly. Are you moving back out into the greater crowd?

B: I'm headed back towards the front door. I'm watching for Phi

A: Your uncle Boreas stops you. Still with a wineglass in his hand, he just puts a hand on your shoulder, and goes

Boreas: Leoril, you *will* have to explain what's going on, right now.

Leo: I'll explain later, after you get yourself and everybody else we care about out of this house and onto the front lawn. My father's up to something. And he's been using your face to do it. Shit's about to go *very bad*.

A: Your uncle Boreas stops, squints at you, and goes a couple shades paler than usual. He looks *sick*.

Leo: He came to the garage, and he took Phi from the rest of us. At least as far as I can tell. You need to get out of here.

A: He keeps looking at you, for just a second - just, this look of naked fear on his face. And then he nods, and he sets his jaw in a way that is *very* familiar, and he starts moving towards the door. Roll me perception.

B: [dice noise] Twenty-five.

A: Okay. With a twenty-five, you see out of the corner of your eye - as the front door opens, your sister practically falls into the house.

B: What do I need to roll to catch her, as she comes in? 'Cause I know that coming off a Haste is *bad*, from personal experience.

A: You're pretty far away, but you can get over to her. You do recognize that she is coming off a Haste spell - like, she is jittering, as she collapses against the doorframe. As soon as she sees you, she relaxes a little bit, and as you walk over, she grabs your arm and just, slurring a little, says

Phi: We all need to go. We need to go, we need to go!

Leo: I've got Fen and Mia on it, Sabine's facilitating getting everybody out. Just breathe, okay? Deep breath.

A: Phi takes a deep, steadying breath. And then you hear a *blood-curdling* scream.

Leo: [sighs] *Shit*.

B: I run towards it.

A: You head up the stairs, towards where you heard this scream. A few people are heading up, they're kind of crushing past you on the stairs. And as you, in this crowd, head up there - when you're about halfway down the hall, you feel a hand close around your elbow, and Mia Sondiss has appeared out of the crowd.

B: Leo leans over next to their ear.

Leo: This better not have been you.

A: They give you a disgusted look, and say

Mia: Obviously not. But if you want to do what you came here to do, you better not go in there.

Leo: What the *hell* are you talking about?!

A: Mia grimaces, and then you hear another scream, and this time you recognize it as Kalessa's voice.

B: Oh, no, there is nothing that is capable of keeping Leo from going in there. He's going to shove people out of the way and run.

A: Roll perception, as you get in the door, just to see how much of this scene you process.

B: [dice sound] Fifteen?

A: You open this door, and the first thing you see is Ambassador Eamon Petris - who was a fixture in your childhood, as pretty much your father's closest friend, and your best friend's father - lying dead on the floor.

B: *What?*

[TIMESTAMP - 1:10:01]

A: Yeah. You saw him right before you went outside to fire off a Sending to Phi, just making the rounds, being a good host. He is wearing the same formal robes he was, he is immediately recognizable, and so is the pool of blue softly-luminescent blood spread out around him. His wife, Nasalia Petris, is hunched over him, both hands on the body, and you see the soft glow of paladin magic around her hands, as she is trying to do something, but it is not working. She is *sobbing*. And you see Kalessa leaned up against the wall next to the door, both hands clapped over her mouth. She is, like, visibly shaking.

B: Uh, Leo is going to run in and, like, baseball slide down to the floor next to the body and kind of try to - as gently as he can - kind of push Nasalia's hands off.

Leo: Move, move! I've got him!

B: And he's going to pull the diamond that he always has on him out of his bag, zap the knife out of his bracer, and cast Revivify.

A: You try to cast Revivify, and it does not work. He has been dead for more than a minute, which is outside the bounds of Revivify.

Leo: *Fuck!*

A: Kalessa's mom is still just letting out these *gut-wrenching* sobs, just

Nasalia: [sobs] No no no no!

B: Leo grits his teeth, and then pushes himself back, shaking his head.

Leo: Phi, Mia, keep people out of here.

B: And then he's going to stand up and just pull Kalessa into his arms.

A: She takes her hands away from her mouth to shove at your chest, and goes

Kalessa: No, no, no, no, you have to - you have to do something. Somebody has to do something!

B: Leo squeezes at both of her shoulders, and just shakes his head.

Leo: Kallie, it's been more than a minute. The Revivify spell didn't take, there's not anything anybody can do. He's gone.

B: It's the first time he's called her that since they were kids.

A: You're very aware that - especially recently - Kalessa has had a complicated relationship with her dad. But, as you say that, she stops shoving at you, and just collapses into your chest. Just sobbing.

B: Leo holds her. Super tight. If he can, he's going to nod at Phi and then over at Nasalia, like *get her over here if you can*.

A: Phi nods back at you, heads over and starts, like, trying to pull Nasalia to her feet. You watch Nasalia just cling to her husband's dead body, and Phi crouches down and says something to her, like, very softly, you can't quite make out what she's saying. You watch her go to put a hand over her mouth, and then realize that there is blood on her hand, and she just, like, shrinks in on herself. And Phi very gently gets her to her feet and brings her over.

B: Leo is still just holding Kalessa, rocking her back and forth a little.

Leo: Okay. I can help you two calm down, magically, if that's what you want.

A: Kalessa is, like, inconsolable, curled up against you, but Nasalia wipes her bloody hand off on her robes, and nods, and says

Nasalia: I think that would be best, yes.

B: Okay, cool. I cast Calm Emotions, they can fail the save voluntarily.

A: Nasalia is definitely going to do that, I'm going to roll for Kalessa. [dice noise] Yeah, Kalessa rolled a thirteen, she fails.

Leo: Okay. This is an unpleasant conversation, I'm very sorry. Lady Petris, was he like this when you found him?

A: Nasalia, under effects of this Calm Emotions spell, straightens her shoulders, and for just a second, you see all the decades of her experience as a paladin. She nods, and she says

Nasalia: Ah... Yes. As far as I can tell, some sort of magic was used. I - [deep breath] I checked.

Leo: Any signs of forced entry? Open windows, broken locks?

Nasalia: No, nothing.

A: She looks around at this room, that - you can tell, as you're looking around it - is some kind of study, there's a desk, there's some bookcases.

Nasalia: Eamon never locked the door in here. In case someone needed to talk to him while he was working.

[TIMESTAMP - 1:14:54]

Leo: Right. So, whatever happened came from inside the house. You and Kalessa should go somewhere else. I've got magical tracing abilities of my own, Phi and I'll figure this out, okay?

A: She reaches out and grabs Kalessa from you, and just hugs her super close for a second, and then nods and leads her out of the room.

B: Leo looks over at Phi and nods grimly.

Leo: I'm going to look around up here. Go get Fen, he's the only person here that's a security professional, I want his eyes on this.

A: With Nasalia taken care of, Phi has just been staring at this dead body on the floor. And she shakes herself, looks over at you, nods, and says

Phi: R-Right. Right, I'll - I'll get Fen. Yeah.

A: She shakes her head again, and then walks out.

B: I'm gonna go back over to where the body is, kneel down, and cast Detect Magic. So if there's been any magic used recently, I can see it in a faint aura, and I learn the school of magic.

A: You notice a faint aura of enchantment magic, over from where you cast Calm Emotions. And around Eamon Petris's body, you sense a *lot* of necromancy magic. You know some of it is from your own unsuccessful casting of Revivify, and you assume that Nasalia was also trying to cast something healing, which would fall under that, but that doesn't account for how *much* of it there is, you don't think.

B: Leo frowns, and his grip tightens around the hilt of Kimryl's Blade.

Leo: What *happened* here?

B: Wild pull, I'm going to cast Detect Poison And Disease. So if there are any poisons, poisonous creatures, or diseases within thirty feet of me, I know, and I also know what kind they are.

A: You sense some kind of disease magic around Eamon. Roll me an arcana check.

B: [dice sound] Twelve.

A: You can infer that some sort of necromancy spell that causes disease was cast here. You cannot narrow it down beyond that.

B: Uh, this is fucked up. Leo's just in this room with this dead body, talking to himself. He stands up and starts pacing.

Leo: Okay, necromancy magic, but he was poisoned. What does that? Contagion, but that would take days to kill you. Uh... Ray Of Sickness, maybe? And then there's the stab wound, but that just feels like *overkill*, at this point.

A: As you're saying that to yourself, Phi and Fen both walk in. Fen looks around, scrubs a hand down his face, and goes

Fen: Well, shit!

Leo: Yeah, Fen, try to process this as quickly as possible. I just need confirmation that whatever happened here came from inside the house, so, check the doors, check the windows.

Fen: Uh... Yeah, sure.

A: And he goes over to the windows. Phi kind of sidles up next to you.

Phi: Alright. [sighs] While he's doing that, what are you thinking?

Leo: I'm thinking of this reeks like Father.

Phi: I see where you're coming from, and I'm inclined to agree, but... [sighs] I just don't know how he could *do* this. Father doesn't exactly have a lot of friends, ambassador Petris was... *it*.

Leo: And uncle Val was his brother. Just take it from someone who's talked to the old man pretty recently, Phi - there's not a lot a person won't do, after they've convinced themselves that they're bearing the burden of the greater good.

A: As you're saying this, people are continuing to push in from the doorway, and Fen, over by the windows, says

Fen: Hey, can I get everybody to clear out so I can see what's going on here?

A: There's a beat, as people are all chattering over each other, and then Mia steps out from around the doorway, smiles very sweetly, and says

Mia: Y'all heard the man. Go on, *get!*

A: Roll me a WIS save.

B: [dice noise] Sixteen.

[TIMESTAMP - 1:19:54]

A: Uh, that doesn't do it. Let me roll for Phi. [dice sound] Nah. Okay, so you - along with this crowd - as Mia so eloquently said, *go on get*. You are frightened of Mia for the next minute, you cannot move closer to them.

B: Well, getting out of the room would require me to move closer to them, so I guess I'm just going up against the back wall.

A: As this crowd starts rushing out the door, they sidestep and also gesture you out.

B: Leo gives them a weird look, but then grabs Phi and pulls her out the door and down the stairs. Phi, you are following your brother down this grand marble hallway towards the stairs. I would like you to roll perception.

A: I *love* when you ask me to roll perception. [dice noise] Four, but it's a fourteen because of Reliable Talent.

B: As you make your way past one of the many closed doors lining this hallway, you hear *gut-wrenching* sobs, from inside. You recognize the voice as Kalessa's pretty easily. And then another voice, that you are able to recognize as Eleonora's, says

Eleanora: Kalessa, sweetheart, look at me. It is *okay* for you to mourn your dad, despite the shitty things that he did, because he *loved* you. Trust me, I get it.

B: Kalessa sniffles, and goes

Kalessa: [sniffles] No, I need to go out there, I need to help. This is all my fault, I - I need to -

B: Eleanora cuts her off.

Eleanora: *You* need to stay here with *me*. Leo and Phi are handling it. We need to trust them.

B: Leo pauses outside this door alongside you - you can tell that he has picked up on what's going on on the other side as well, but he just clenches his jaw, shakes his head, and yanks you along.

A: Eleanora's got it, Phi will give Kalessa a hug later. Uh, she's going to follow Leo.

B: The two of you head down the stairs and back into the party, which is still in full swing. The people that did not hear the screaming and the tumult from upstairs are still just going through their evening like nothing is going on. People are laughing, dancing, drinking. On one side of this big ballroom, you see Sabine sort of leaned up against the wall with a glass of punch in her hand. She catches your eye, Phi, as you walk in.

A: Phi makes eye contact with her, raises an eyebrow.

B: I would like you to roll insight with advantage.

A: [dice sound] That is a ten exactly.

B: Sabine has a very complex look on her face, that you can't quite figure out. This party is still hopping, people are still moving back and forth across the dance floor. The entertainment for the evening is still up on a little stage, playing her lute, singing with a modified - maybe like Thaumaturgy or Prestidigitation spell or something, to make her voice louder. Sabine nods over towards the stage, and the bard that is playing, reaches into the front of her dress, and pulls out her Beacon coin clutched between two fingers. Flashes it at you, nods at the stage again, and then tucks it away. And you are able to gather that she is trying to tell you *hey, this person up there is a Beacon operative*.

A: Phi nods slowly, and then she's going to elbow Leo, and try to, like, subtly gesture down at Kimryl's Blade, and then point at herself.

B: Leo frowns, but then tucks the knife into the folds of his robes, and, a second later, you get a Message spell inside your head.

Leo: [telepathically] What? What's going on?

Phi: [telepathically] The bard is a Beacon operative. I would be willing to stake a lot on the idea that she's one of Elasha's.

B: Leo grits his teeth, and then you see a subtle purple flash, as he zaps Kimryl's Blade back into his bracer.

Leo: *Shit.* Alright, we need to go catch Sabine up.

Phi: Yep.

A: Phi's going to tow him over to Sabine.

B: Sabine - who has been able to figure out that you two caught her meaning - nods at you as you walk over, and then cuts her eyes sideways back over towards the stage.

[TIMESTAMP - 1:25:01]

Sabine: I'm not personally familiar with her, I've only seen her at a couple of functions before, but... She's been acting sketchy all evening, and she took a break in her set about twenty minutes ago.

A: Phi nods, grits her teeth, and says

Phi: That would be right about when... an *unfortunate* situation with the ambassador was unfolding.

B: Sabine's eyes go wide.

Sabine: *What?!*

A: Phi lowers her voice even further.

Phi: We don't want to alarm everyone, but I think we need to try and get our *friend* alone, and sort this out.

Sabine: [exhales] *Fuck.*

B: Sabine kind of clenches and unclenches her fists a couple of times.

Sabine: Yeah, and it would appear that the two of you were right, about walking into your father's trap. We need to get all of our people out of here, we don't know what comes next.

Phi: Yeah, I agree. I don't think we can trust that there's anyone in here that doesn't have a knife poised over our backs.

B: She closes her eyes for a second, purses her lips, and nods.

Sabine: Yeah, that sounds about right. You get ahold of Aravae, get the rest of the folks that are waiting at the garage here to help facilitate evacuation. I'll keep an eye on our friend over there.

A: Phi's going to try and duck into a secluded corner, and pull out her coin, and send a message to Aravae that says

Phi: [text] We need everyone here. We are evacuating the party. Hurry.

B: Almost immediately, your coin glows, and you get a message back from Aravae

Aravae: [text] We're on our way. Is everybody alive? What happened?

A: [groans] Oh, it's Phi's last Beacon message of the day. Okay. Um. Yeah, she sends back

Phi: [text] Ambassador Petris is dead. Something's really wrong.

B: Leo is off in this little side chamber with you. He kind of narrows his eyes, as you send this last message.

Leo: Okay? So, are they coming?

Phi: They're on their way, yeah. We need to get everyone out with as little fuss as possible.

B: As you say that, you hear quite a bit of an uproar coming from the ballroom, just outside the door.

A: *FUCK*. Goddamn. Okay, fine. Phi's going to walk out there. Shit Goddamn.

B: Apparently the news has hit the party at large. As you and your brother come back out into this party, people are letting out worried shouts, murmuring amongst themselves, bustling back and forth across the ballroom, and in the center of it all, one Senator Maximus Greyriver is standing with both hands upraised.

Senator Greyriver: Alright, well, clearly we need to lock the house down 'cause someone in here's a murderer! Astrarian security professionals have confirmed as such.

B: And hovering in the doorway, you see Fen, who makes eye contact with you and shrugs like *I tried*.

A: [deep breath] Phi grimaces, and then says - loud enough to be heard over the crowd -

Phi: It's being handled, Senator Greyriver. My brother and I are working with said security professional, and it is *all* of our opinion that we need to evacuate this building.

B: This old, old dwarvish man locks eyes with you, and tilts his head to the side in a very patronizing fashion.

Senator Greyriver: Oh, so you can do what, hide the evidence? I just got back from the crime scene, and I gotta wonder - who in this house doesn't want the Voldhuran Senate entering into political talks with the reigning Archduke of Astraria? Who in this house can cast something like a Ray Of Sickness, and famously fights with a knife?

B: Beside you, you feel Leo tense up, clenching his fists at his sides, and - more to you and himself than anyone else - he mutters

Leo: Who in this house isn't willing to play ball with *you* and your *fucking* political games?

Phi: [sighs] Senator Greyriver, if it will assure you, the two of us will leave the house before you do - but we *all* need to *leave*.

[TIMESTAMP - 1:30:02]

B: He raises an eyebrow at the two of you.

Senator Greyriver: Sounds like the sentiment of someone who's pretty desperate to make an escape, kid.

B: And then, Phi, you feel the psychic static of a Message cantrip coming into your mind. And Sabine's voice says

Sabine: [telepathically] She just dipped out the side door, I think she's heading for the basement. We need to *move*.

A: Phi shakes her head, and says

Phi: You know what? Believe what you want.

A: And then she grabs Leo's hand, and she heads towards the side door.

B: As you leave, you hear Maximus Greyriver shouting to the security detail of all of the Voldhuran Senators that came here tonight

Senator Greyriver: Alright, lock down the house! Nobody comes in, nobody goes out!

B: And you and Leo book it out this side door, into the hallway. There's an access door to the kitchens that Sabine is hanging out of, frantically waving at you.

A: Phi goes over. To Sabine, she says

Phi: Alright, uh, Eleanora, Kalessa, and Kalessa's mother are upstairs. Fen is in the main room. I - I don't know where Mia is, I don't know where my uncle Boreas is, but that's all of our people, and get anyone else out that you can.

B: Sabine reaches up and presses one hand against the side of your face.

Sabine: I've got things handled here. You two go!

A: Phi's gonna stop, give her a kiss, and then head out.

B: You and Leo charge through this door, into the kitchens. There is a cellar door in the floor that is lying open, leading down into some kind of dark basement. Other than that, it's a dead end. There's no other doors out of here.

A: Okay, uh... I'm going to grab Leo and Thunderstep outside.

B: Okay. There is a large echoing *boom* of thunder, as you cast this spell, but nobody's within range to be hurt by it, and you find yourselves outside the house. Leo immediately takes off running. He's got you by your sleeve, and is pulling you along behind him. He's going to use a fourth-level spell slot to cast Locate Creature. He is at least somewhat familiar with this bard that was playing at the party, he saw her for a little bit, so I'm going to roll something to see if she is A) within a thousand feet and B) if he can see which direction she's going. [dice noise] So that's a seventeen. It was a DC ten survival check. He's got a bead on her, he knows which way she's going. He charges down this alley outside the embassy, and, over his shoulder, calls to you

Leo: If you've got another Haste, now would be the time to drop it on yourself!

A: Yep. Doing it.

B: And now I am going to need Leo, Phi, and this mysterious murder bard to roll initiative.

A: [dice sound] Twenty-seven.

B: Okay. Leo gets [dice noise] a twenty-two. And this bard that has escaped the party gets [dice sound] an *eight*. You and your brother - you using your Haste spell, and Leo using his Cunning Action double-Dash - catch up with this bard very quickly. You see

her almost down the end of one narrow alley, and she kind of freezes at the end. Phi, you are up first in initiative. What would you like to do?

A: If I can see her, I'm going to cast Command.

Phi: *Stop.*

B: Okay. She's going to roll a wisdom saving throw, against your spell DC. [dice noise] Ten.

A: My save DC is an eighteen. That does *not* do it.

B: She freezes, at the end of this alley. Now that you're getting a better look at her, she is this young Astrarian Elven woman with long chestnut hair, kind of wavy, pulled back in several braids from her face, dressed in very rich bard's garb. And she looks *afraid*. And Leo is up next. I would like to specify, all of this damage that he is about to do is non-lethal. He's just trying to knock her out.

[TIMESTAMP - 1:35:00]

B: So, first off, he's going to roll to hit her with a fifth-level Inflict Wounds. [dice sound] Which is *definitely* going to hit. He's going to use his once-daily ability from Kimryl's Blade to do max damage on a necromancy spell, so. That's going to be seventy damage outright, just from the Inflict Wounds. Plus, when you add Channel Divinity: Touch Of Death, brings it up to ninety-five. And then when you add the knife damage, the sneak attack damage - because she was stunned from your spell just now - and I'm also going to burn a sneak attack spell slot from Kimryl's Blade, as well. So I'm going to get ninety-five damage, plus 5D6 additional, plus five. [dice noise] So the total for all of that is a hundred and eighteen, which *will* knock her unconscious. So, since it's non-lethal damage, I'm just going to say that Leo pistol-whips her *real good* with Kimryl's Blade. Just right to the back of the head. She crumples to the cobblestones, and looks up at both of you, flickering in and out of consciousness.

Murder Bard: [laughs] You're both too late.

B: And then she passes out.

A: Phi looks over at Leo, and says

Phi: Shoot off a Sending to somebody that's back at the house, *now*.

Leo: Yeah. Yeah, I don't like this.

B: He spins his knife around his finger, and you see it glow as he fires off a Sending spell.

Leo: Something bad's going to happen.

Phi: Run.

Leo: What about -

Phi: We'll come back! *Run!*

B: Okay. He takes off after you. This bard - Beacon operative, murderer, whatever you want to call her - did not get super far from the house, you could make it back to her unconscious body pretty easily, but you and Leo crash back through the main gate of the Astrarian embassy to utter pandemonium. A lot of the party-goers have since been evacuated onto the front lawn, and you see many of your party who you left on standby at the garage kind of hovering around, trying to facilitate further evacuation. Kalessa is hovering in the corner of these big privacy hedges around the embassy, just with a thousand yard stare out ahead of her, with a blanket wrapped around her shoulders. On one side of her, Eleanora is petting her hair down, trying to talk her through all of this trauma. Across the courtyard, you hear the sound of a door bursting open, and Aravae rushes out with half a dozen or so people, that she just ushers off into the yard. Right behind her, you see Zed herd some more people out, and then spot you over by the gate, and just make a beeline over for Leo, who he pulls into a hug.

A: Phi's going to give them a little space, and make a beeline over to Sabine or The Captain, whoever's closest.

B: You don't see The Captain, he's not out here.

A: [upset noise]

B: Sabine is holding the front gate open, and trying to usher party-goers out into the street. She looks over at you, wide-eyed, panicked, and goes

Sabine: Did you do what you needed to do?

Phi: More or less - Uh, we knocked her out. How many people are still inside?

Sabine: Several, but I've got the most persuasive person any of us know on the job.

B: And then The Captain, with five or six more people in tow, comes charging out the front door.

A: Phi's going to run over and get him in a hug.

B: He gets an arm braced across your back, and pulls you in super tight.

The Captain: It's pandemonium in there, lass. You know, you'd think that if you walk into a group of people and you say "*Hey, get out, your life depends on it!*" but *no, political implications and plausible deniability.*

Phi: Yeah, you'd think. Are you okay?

B: You're standing there, locked in this embrace with The Captain. You look around and see every other person in your party kind of hanging out around this front lawn. And then, off to the side, almost unnoticeable, you hear Kalessa mutter

Kalessa: Wait. Where's my mom?

[EXPLOSION NOISE]

B: And the Astrarian embassy erupts into a massive *unsurvivable* ball of fire.

A: *WHAT?!*

B: And that's where we're going to end for this week.

A: [stammers] *Huh?!*

B: Yeah, this sucks.

A: *What the fuck are you talking about?!*

B: It done exploded.

A: [laughs incredulously]

B: And we'll find out more about *this* next time.

A: On Compelled Dual!

[OUTRO MUSIC]

B: Hey everybody, Barry here with the postscript, just clearing up a couple of housekeeping things here at the end of the episode. As always, I'm going to go ahead and plug our social medias, you can find us on Twitter, Tumblr, and TikTok at @CompelledDual. We have a lot of other cool stuff, like an official Spotify profile, an official website. You can find all of that linked on our various social media profiles. We also host a Q&A livestream every week on our YouTube channel, so if you want to head on over to YouTube and search Compelled Dual, and subscribe to us over there, we'd love to see you come hang out for that. It's a lot of fun. If you like what you're hearing so far on the podcast, and are interested in supporting us, we ask that you consider

heading over to patreon.com/CompelledDual, where, starting at just \$2 a month, you get access to all kinds of cool patron perks, including but not limited to early access to episodes, access to bonus content and exclusive Spotify playlists, and even handwritten letters from your favorite character every month. If you'd like to support us in ways other than pledging to the Patreon, we ask that, if you're listening to us on Apple Podcasts or Spotify, that you leave us a rating and a review, since that helps us get promoted to a wider audience. And, as always, word-of-mouth advertising is the most powerful tool we have at our disposal, so, if you like the podcast, we just ask that you tell a friend about it. And if they like it, ask them to tell a friend as well. And, in other news, we did just open our official merch store, so if you're interested in getting any kind of cool Compelled Dual merchandise, you can head on over to compelleddual.myshopify.com. We have lots of cool stuff - t-shirts, stickers, notebooks, buttons... Pretty much anything you can imagine. Our next episode will be coming out on Friday, February 11th, 2022. Or, if you are a member of our Patreon, you'll get your early access to that on Thursday, February 10th. Thank you guys so much, and we'll see you next time.