

Worlds Beyond Number

The Wizard, the Witch, and the Wild One

Children's Adventure, Episode 01: Prelude

Brennan Mulligan

Snow falling over endless white sand and a tower made of glass, [Thunder rolls] in the image of night and day, as spells fire across the sky. For a moment the sun, captured against the horizon while stars gleam as the heavens cannot seem to agree, in the face of endless magic what the truth of this world should be. These images are captured in the mind's eye as memory, perhaps of dream, or perhaps of waking life, or perhaps of something in between. By Suvi.

Brennan Mulligan

Suvin Kedberiket right now, if you open your eyes, all that you would be able to see is the inside of your mother's cloak. And you can feel her hand on your shoulder. This patch of your mother's cloak, I won't lie, has a little bit of snot on it.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah, it's mine.

Brennan Mulligan

It's Suvi's. And you can feel her hand on you. So you don't have to see anything occurring outside, because right now you are underneath her cloak. Both literally but also, of course, in the deeper meaning of that, she has you. You can feel the presence nearby of your father preparing a working of great magic.

Brennan Mulligan

Having grown up in the Citadel, how does Suvi feel witnessing her parents work magic? How do you think of magic if that's what you've grown in and through and around; the water that you have been swimming in your whole life? In this moment, you can tell that something has gone wrong. But your parents have done a lot to hide you from that. As the spell starts to weave, what is Suvi feeling.

Aabria Iyengar

It's to... to her, to me, magic has always been a thing that belongs to adulthood and to, like, it feels like a birthright, but not a part of me. So it's always been a subject of, like, endless fascination. And I know that I want to look and see what he's doing because it's hard not to feel it and want to react to it. But there is something in that slight offness and wrongness that instead of that, I think I'm just going to bury my head into my mom a little more and just nuzzle and trust.

Brennan Mulligan

You nuzzle, you trust your mother's voice, soft as can be, in contrast against the sharpness of the noises of what you can only hope are spells. Because if they are not, then something truly monstrous and alien is occurring outside the doors of this chamber. She whispers to you.

Suvi's Mother [Brennan]

It's going to be all right. Stay right here. Don't look up. Keep your eyes closed for a moment. Very shortly, we are going to be far away. Don't keep your eyes open while we go. You'll get sick. I'll let you know when you can open your eyes.

Brennan Mulligan

You hear voices in the room your father is speaking to. And then with a flash that you can perceive even with your eyes shut tight and buried in your mother's cloak, you are momentarily blinded and feel a tug and sudden pressure moving so quickly, that you don't even experience the feeling of moving forward in the way that when you are falling through the sky, the feeling you feel is the feeling of being pushed up from the rushing wind.

Brennan Mulligan

A fraction of a moment later, you hear screams and heat and fire. In this moment, you feel a twitch of reflex from your mother. Give me an insight check.

Aabria Iyengar

Eleven.

Brennan Mulligan

Something is wrong. You don't know more than that. And you cannot see your mother's face. But you know that your mother is surprised, which is all of the fear that you know how to process.

Aabria Iyengar

Definitely, she's got her fingers, like, knotted in her mother's clothing. But turn and look.

Brennan Mulligan

As you turn to look, you see three figures, one of which is your father, two of which are not family to you, but one of them, to the right, could almost be described as family. A woman who is as close as your mother has to a sister.

Brennan Mulligan

The other is a man who works with your father. And that is how it has always been described to you. Of these three figures as you turn to look because your mother's face is directly above you. Of these three figures, who do you turn to look at first? Your father? Your family friend or this colleague?

Aabria Iyengar

I think because it's, no, I'm looking back at my dad.

Brennan Mulligan

Aabria what do we see in this memory of SUVIs? What does your father's face look like?

Aabria Iyengar

He's got dark skin, and you can tell he's very handsome and angular, but he's got just maybe like a week and a half of stubble coming in that obscures a lot of his lower face. I hate his beard because it's like, painfully itchy like whenever he hugs me, so I kind of crinkled my nose of that.

Aabria Iyengar

He's got pale gray eyes that are always a little bit shut when he smiles. Like, his cheeks kind of take over his face. He's incredibly tall on the leaner side of things, but you can tell that he is, like, strong and wiry under his billowing cloaks.

Brennan Mulligan

Your father is, in this memory, confident, capable, ready to do what is needed. And the flickering mist leaving his hands, which are themselves covered with a number of powerful rings, one of which you know to be special somehow. It is the ring he has shown to you when he has, you know, cradled you on his lap and talked to you about magic and shown you the ring that is on the index finger of his right hand. And it has a brilliant

green gem and is set in beautiful gold and brass, triangular and geometric. And he has often shown it to you and said:

Suvi's Father [Brennan]

No matter how complicated the spell, it always starts here. No matter how complicated the problem, it's always just the first step to start solving it.

Brennan Mulligan

You see the spell of traveling, the potent teleportation that has taken you to this hellish place. And in the moment before your father can notice that you are looking at him, he surveys where you are. Everything is orange, everything is hot. There is fire all around. And it takes a moment you can't even fully collect because there's so much smoke here that you can't open your eyes all the way.

Brennan Mulligan

It's hot and it's hard to see things moving because sparks and embers are flying and there will be loud pops of wood that will suddenly burst and sparks will go. And catching any movement or rhyme or reason to any of this is therefore quite challenging. But in your memory there is something that stays with you. The bottom half of a mural on a plaster wall that shows perhaps the hands or arms of a family smiling. The smoke has already charred away their faces. But you see in flowery script words, not in imperial, not in the language you speak.

Brennan Mulligan

But you are a bright enough young child that you know that word in another language means tea. Perhaps it means a tea shop. Perhaps this was a sign on a building that let people know that they could come here and sit together. No one's sitting here now. You catch your father's eye in this burning place and see him pointing, saying:

Suvi's Father [Brennan]

There in the harbor.

Brennan Mulligan

And so, you know, you must be near the sea. And he catches your eye.

Suvi's Father [Brennan]

It's alright. This is going to be alright, Suvi. You're going to be alright.

Brennan Mulligan

And he kneels down and swoops you up in his arm. When you think of a word that describes your father, you need not answer quickly. When you think of a word that describes your father, what's a word that comes to mind for you?

Aabria Iyengar

I think, weirdly, it's soft. Because even though his beard is scratchy and he's muscular, his skin is always really soft, like around his neck where I hug him. And his clothing smells of this same blend of flower and some weird wood. But it's also he put a little satchel of whatever he uses for his clothing under my pillow. So I associate the smell with both him and being safe in bed.

Brennan Mulligan

As your father goes to pick you up, you hear a growl from behind him.

Colleague [Brennan]

We have to move.

Brennan Mulligan

You see the colleague of your father. There is something about this man that has always turned your stomach. There's a smell he has that is a wrong smell. What do you think Suvi would smell on this man that would even make a child who has been told to trust him regard him with some anxiety?

Aabria Iyengar

It's something that is the opposite of the way her dad smells. It's like acrid and metallic. And I don't think she knows what blood smells like, but it's that, but worse.

Brennan Mulligan

Your father turns to address the man. He's not looking like a man much anymore. His ears move to a point behind his head and you hear a snap in his jaw as his jaw grows larger and tusks begin to extend from his mouth and something painful shudders in his arms as they grow to reach the ground. And he is something monstrous, disturbing. And you smell that smell as blood drips from his open mouthed

Colleague [Brennan]

Soft, we have to move now.

Aabria Iyengar

He growls and I start crying immediately.

Brennan Mulligan

His eyes dark to you and narrow. You see your father turn and say

Soft [Brennan]

We have to find the carriage. There's a wagon somewhere here at the edge of town.

Colleague [Brennan]

Wagon? You're out of your mind. They found us. It's a trap. They clearly knew we were coming.

Brennan Mulligan

You feel a hand on your body as well. This is your mother's friend, sister in all but blood. What does this woman look like? What is the memory you have of this woman in this moment?

Aabria Iyengar

She's so pretty, even stressed and in this weird orange glow. She's got long, just incredibly shiny auburn hair and sort of ruddy freckled features and pale skin but she's sort of glowing in this room that's so dangerous and hot and wrong but she looks like she's in her element.

Brennan Mulligan

She wears a long azure cloak and shining silver scales in her armor with a long jewel hilted sword at her side in addition to a tome of spells. You see her put a hand and address the man who is maybe now a monster and says

Family Friend [Brennan]

Eoighorain, calm down. If you want to be of help, move and move quickly. Here, follow me.

Brennan Mulligan

She looks down at you and says:

Family Friend [Brennan]

Don't be afraid of him. I've got you.

[Door creaks open, sounds of booms and yelling]

Brennan Mulligan

She starts to run.

[Clash of swordfighting, tense music, and the sound of heavy breathing]

Brennan Mulligan

As you run you see lights moving through the sky slowly at first and then faster and you begin to realize how large the seaside town is that you are moving through. You only realize how large it is when the far reaches of it are illuminated in flame as they come roaring out of the black night, and are only made visible in the moment of their destruction.

[Dramatic music, the sounds of explosions, crackling fire]

Brennan Mulligan

As you exit from this place as fast as you can you see the buildings grow smaller in stature but also hear shouting coming from the waterfront behind you. Up ahead you see a wagon covered, it is wood on all sides with again bright paint of a woman drinking from a glass of wine with beautiful floral script.

Brennan Mulligan

Some merchant's cart advertising a life of carefree, wonder and of times kinder than the one you now remember. As you arrive at the back of the wagon your father opens the door and your father addresses the woman with auburn hair who whispers quickly to your mother and he says

Soft [Brennan]

[Muffled] Steel, we need help now. This was not supposed to happen in this way.

Brennan Mulligan

She turns and says:

Steel [Brennan]

[Muffled, slowly becoming clearer] I understand. I didn't think they would get here in time. But what we need to do is keep the plan. We need to-

Brennan Mulligan

You see, she says:

Steel [Brennan]

Perhaps, perhaps it's just better if Suvi comes with us.

Brennan Mulligan

And you hear, you hear a snarl.

Eoighorain [Brennan]
She'll be dead. Slow us down.

Brennan Mulligan
You see Steel whips around and says,

Steel [Brennan]
Eoighorain, I'll cut your head from your neck if you speak about Suvi.

Eoighorain [Brennan]
I don't want the girl to die. But die she will if she comes where we're going.

Brennan Mulligan
And you see your mother raise a hand and Eoighorain drops and does not look up. And you look up to see a face that you knew your mother was capable of pulling on you being applied to what looks for all the world like a monster.

Brennan Mulligan
And the monster has the same reaction you have to it. We see your mother. What does your mother look like?

Aabria Iyengar
She's got round, almost like a heart shaped face. She just looks very pleasant and kind and that if she was sort of left to her own devices would probably run to, like, curviness and voluptuousness. But none of that is there. She's got long, curly, coiled hair and dark skin. Her eyes are brown and just so large that I think I just kind of always try to play with her face because her eyes are so expressive that I get lost in them all the time. And, yeah, she's a little on the shorter side too.

Brennan Mulligan
Her stature is in inverse proportion to the amount of presence she wields in this moment. She looks at Eoighorain and says,

Suvi's Mother [Brennan]
Do not frighten my daughter.

Brennan Mulligan
And then she looks at Steel:

Suvi's Mother [Brennan]
My friend, he is right. Suvi cannot come with us. We have to stick to the plan.

Brennan Mulligan
Steel raises her eyes and goes:

Steel [Brennan]
Stick to the plan?

Brennan Mulligan
And gestures to the fiery city and says:

Steel [Brennan]

We can try to stick to the plan, but I don't think the plan is trying very hard at all to stick to us.

Brennan Mulligan

And you see that your father speaks again, and I'm going to ask for the word you most associate with your mother.

Aabria Iyengar

I think it's Stone. Not in a bad way, but in a sturdy way. That she is solid and strong and cool. She's always so cool.

Brennan Mulligan

Your father, still holding you, turns to your mother,

Soft [Brennan]

Stone, how can we do this?

Brennan Mulligan

Your mom looks at you and says,

Stone [Brennan]

I know this is frightening, but I need you to be brave, okay?

Brennan Mulligan

She turns and says,

Stone [Brennan]

Steel, talk to the driver. Eoighorain, keep us safe.

Brennan Mulligan

You see that the monstrous figure of Eoighorain looks at you one last time and prowls off, further extending his arms and dropping to all fours. Simian almost, or like a hyena, where the legs are not of equal lengths. The arms in the front extend far longer, prowls off towards the front of the carriage. And you see Steel goes around the other side and says,

Steel [Brennan]

Hail, driver.

Brennan Mulligan

And begins to speak to the driver of the carriage in front of you. Your father, through the open door puts you on a small little bench with a folded piece of hard canvas cloth on it. And he kisses you once on each cheek, and he says,

Soft [Brennan]

I'm going to go back into the town. There are survivors and other people here who need help. Alright, you are going to be safe. You are going to be safe.

Brennan Mulligan

He turns to Stone, kisses her on the cheek, and says,

Soft [Brennan]

I'll hold them off. We have time.

Brennan Mulligan

She steps up into the carriage with you, sits across from you, sort of crouched on the balls of her feet to get just as tall as you are sitting. And she wipes the tears from your face. In your memory, what do you look like?

Aabria Iyengar

Oh, God. Yeah. I feel even smaller than I must have actually been. A black girl with poofy coily, dark brown hair that I've just have a weird habit of jamming stuff into it. There's, like, a pencil and some flowers that I found and a very cool leaf. I have giant oversized glasses that I wear most of the time, but I'm not wearing them now because I already dropped them and they're already a little broken.

Aabria Iyengar

So I'm just holding them, and I can feel the metal kind of bending under my hands. I don't even remember what I was wearing. It was probably red because that's my favorite color. But I don't know, I just feel small, with eyes as big as my mom. And I want to yell, but I know I need to be good, so I'm just quiet.

Brennan Mulligan

She looks at you smiling. You see tears streaming down her face. But your mom, you've never seen your mom weep, although you've seen her cry often. And in this moment, she is not weeping. She is simply crying, as she often does when she is moved by powerful feeling. She wraps her hands around yours and whispers words in a language you cannot speak. But your mother has promised that you one day will, and you can feel the glasses mend within your hands.

Stone [Brennan]

You need to be careful with these glasses, because I won't be around to fix them for a little while. Okay? You're going somewhere safe. You're going to meet a very wonderful woman. Her name is Grandmother Wren. And I am asking you to be respectful when you meet her. She is a kind and dear woman, but she is not to be crossed. You will be polite when you arrive, and you will do as you are told. Is that understood?

Suvi [Aabria]

[Sniffing] Yeah.

Stone [Brennan]

I know that your father has explained these rules to you before, but I will say again, in the laws of magic, there are few errors more grievous than being unkind to a host or ungrateful for a service done. So, make sure you are respectful, and if any chores are asked of you, see that you do them.

Suvi [Aabria]

Okay.

Brennan Mulligan

She reaches around her neck, unclasps a necklace and a perfect sapphire blue raindrop made of glass at the end of a silver chain is placed around your neck and she clasps it. You see her look and she, holding your hands, goes,

Stone [Brennan]

It's all right to be frightened, but we're not ever going to let that stop us from doing what we need to do.

Brennan Mulligan

Appearing at the door once more, Steel moves her head around the corner and says,

Steel [Brennan]
Stone, it's getting to be time.

Brennan Mulligan
You see. Your mother nods and says,

Stone [Brennan]
Alright.

Brennan Mulligan
She kisses you again, holds you close and looks down at the little patch of snot on the inside of her cloak and goes.

Suvi [Aabria]
[Quietly] Sorry.

Stone [Brennan]
We must respect when a fellow wizard has marked something as their own.

Brennan Mulligan
And she takes the cloak off and wraps you up in it, because aside from the fire,

[Off-mic yell]

Brennan Mulligan
Our listeners cannot see Lou waving.

Lou Wilson
Get this out of here. Get this, this is how we're starting? Are we supposed to go up from here?

Brennan Mulligan
I mean, we sort of have to go up from here.

Lou Wilson
How? Whew.

Brennan Mulligan
She wraps the cloak around you. It is filled with the familiar smell of your mom, of all of the smells of home, of the flowers she keeps, of the things that are cooked with by her and your father in your home, of all the familiar library dust and scraps of books and parchment.

Brennan Mulligan
And it wraps you up. And you can tell that beyond the heat of the fire here, at the edge of town. It is a cold night, so the warmth is something you are grateful for. Your father appears at the door, his irises flickering with light. You have seen this before only once or twice, but you know that it means that your father has cast some magic that is not the type of magic he ever wants you to see. As the magic fades, Steel looks at you and says,

Steel [Brennan]

Kiddo, you're going to be all right. I don't know anybody tougher than your mom and dad. If I was these people out here, I'd be scared. I don't think you should be scared. I think all of them should be scared.

Brennan Mulligan

Your father puts his hand behind Steel's head and they touch foreheads in a solemn moment, even though she has been in your mother's life since childhood, your father has become very close with her as well. She draws her sword and walks out towards the fire again. Your dad looks at you and says:

Soft [Brennan]

You're going somewhere safe. Your mother's told you about Grandmother Wren?

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah.

Soft [Brennan]

You know how you need to behave.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah.

Soft [Brennan]

It might be a little while, it might be until the end of the summer before you see us again. I know that it would be happier if we were all together, but Grandmother Wren can keep you safe in a way that she can't keep us safe. It's one of those rules of magic.

Suvi [Aabria]

Okay

Soft [Brennan]

I love you, darling. [Echoing out]

Aabria Iyengar

When I remember this part, this is the regret. That I wish I had said I love you back. I wish I had hugged him or climbed out of the cart and followed him and refused to not go with them wherever they were going. But I was so worried that I would start crying again, that I wouldn't be good, that I just sort of sat there and let all of this happen. And I didn't say anything or do anything.

Brennan Mulligan

Your father looks at your face, smiles. He is soft. And your mother touches his hand and touches yours, and for a moment you are all connected. And she is Stone. She kisses you one last time.

Stone [Brennan]

We'll see you soon.

Brennan Mulligan

And she steps from the carriage. She turns, her brow furrowed for a moment, as if she has one last thing to say. She points to the amulet around your neck.

Stone [Brennan]

I wouldn't share that with anyone, darling, because

Brennan Mulligan
and you hear

Eoighorain [Brennan]
Now, they're coming now!

Brennan Mulligan
You hear a leap and a crush of clay tiles and storms, as Eoighorain, who is now something truly monstrous, perhaps 12ft long, from his haunches to his head, lands on a clay tiled roof in this seaside town. Skidding across the shattering thing, you can see flesh hanging from his teeth.

Eoighorain [Brennan]
[Roars loudly]

Brennan Mulligan
Your mother turns around, closes the door, and the last thing you hear is her speaking in the language of magic itself. And a wind more powerful than you have ever felt rattles the sides of the carriage, and you hear a cry from the driver and these horses move like no beast has ever moved on this earth before or since.

Aabria Iyengar
I pull the cloak over my head and just wrap myself up in all of those smells. And instead of sitting on the little bench, I just lay down and try to remember the words. Because if I can focus on something I can think my way through, I can back myself down from how terrified I am. So I try to remember the words, and push to understand the language of magic because that will make me closer to them. Even as we're speeding far away.

Brennan Mulligan
The words move through your mind again and again, until eventually, after what seems like forever, you drift off to sleep.

[Slow, somber piano music plays]

Brennan Mulligan
That's where we're going to stop.

[Off-mic, Erika starts screaming while Lou yells "Woo" over and over. Aabria's laughs turn into raspy and emotional exclamations]

Brennan Mulligan
Noises. Neither rude nor loud nor overwhelming, but multitudinous, are what defines the cottage by the hillside.

[A rooster crows, and a symphony of birds and bugs rises up]

Brennan Mulligan
The noise of the babbling brook, the noise of wind, long branches of trees just starting with tiny green sprouts to bud again, foretelling the imminence of spring in full bloom. The noise of the creaky weather vane,

mounted atop its own structure with canvas fans and a little tail, and what looks to be a rooster to some, but a rooster with a strange serpent's tail coiling out behind it in brass, atop the weather vane.

Brennan Mulligan

Rows of carrots and radishes and onions and crawling beans on the sides of lattices and a cozy but stalwart and, in some ways perhaps as imposing as it is merry, cottage. With white plaster walls, some dirt and wear on the outside of them, light brown thatching of twigs on a massive roof only marked by the occasional [puff] of a white plaster chimney coming through with little spouts of smoke curls. Even here, at the very beginning of the day. Sunlight falls on fen and forest alike as the brook babbles and we see the morning begin.

Brennan Mulligan

The cottage. Well, perhaps it's not quite accurate to just say the cottage, but the cottage, in all of its domesticity and all of its hurried business has created quite a few friends for itself. It began with a simple garden shed, and then, of course, the goats needed a barn, and the barn was a good enough spot to make the hutch for the rabbits, which of course led to the building of, let's not forget, the shrine to the river Spirit out by a flagstone path that leads past the garden.

Brennan Mulligan

And of course, we shouldn't forget that up on the hillside, up some moss covered steps, is the well, which why the well is so very far from the cottage, I'm sure is constantly on the mind of our next PC.

[The players squeal]

Brennan Mulligan

Erica, here in this green and verdant and chore-filled domain between the road and the stream and the entrance to the forest, there is a cottage. And in that cottage there are rooms. And of those rooms, there is one which holds the now waking form of Ame. What is the state of Ame's room? What is the one word you would use to describe your room?

Erika Ishii

[Proudly] Wrecked. It is a mishmash of neat things from the forests that I have found and think are really cool. Rocks that are, if you squint at them, look like they're shaped a certain way. Flowers that are hanging and dried. I don't know if any of them are actually useful or not, but I see that's what happens in the cottage and perhaps that could be me. Little bouquets that have feathers or bone or weeds in them. Just an absolute—anything that's shiny at all. There's no rhyme or reason to how it's arranged. It's just there and it's comforting.

Brennan Mulligan

We see in Ame's bedroom the small rumped bed which is flush to the floor. There is no bed frame underneath it. It is flush to the floor, thick covers. We see that though this child lives in disarray, they are not a child unkempt or uncared for, the comforters are as thick and pillowy and downy as you could ever ask for, with many, many pillows, some of which take the guise of stuffed animals, others of which are stitched with little geometrical patterns. Some have plants and trees and floral designs, and others appear to just be old sacks and bags stuffed with odds and ends and fluffy down. Your sort of—to call it a bed is maybe generous as well. It's more of just a sleep pile.

Erika Ishii

A nest.

Brennan Mulligan

[Audibly grinning] A nest! It is Ame's nest. And we see throughout the rest of the room something that could theoretically have been a bunk bed, but the mattress was long ago taken off of it and brought to the ground. And now that is simply Ame's study treasure trove.

Brennan Mulligan

And we see a deeply enabled sensibility here. Because whoever the keeper of this cottage is, who we have not yet met, has seen fit to gift Ame with all manner of ceramic jugs and glass jars, of hanging baskets, lines of yarn from which to clip various findings; such that not only are the walls and floors and ceilings of this room bedecked with all manner of woodland treasures, but even the space in between those things has found a way to mostly become clotheslined with images and drawings and leaves of various sizes and shapes. It is a true Sylvan kaleidoscope in this dwelling. Could you please describe your character?

Erika Ishii

Ame is so small. A tiny little girl with a little bowl haircut and bangs. She is East Asian in appearance, and usually her face is full of exuberance and life. But it is the morning, and that means it's the crack of dawn, and that means that her eyes are crusted over with sleep and her little bowl haircut is completely awry in a little rat's nest. And she wakes up, she opens her eyes, and there, of course, right in front of her face, next to the bed, patched over a hole in the drywall, is a little sign that says, "Be kind," period.

Brennan Mulligan

The message written in your own hand greets you. And that is correct, right? Is it written in your own hand?

Erika Ishii

Yes.

Brennan Mulligan

The message written in your own hand greets you. Declarative, short, to the point. Though why it was written here, perhaps we cannot tell from the events of just this morning, but the words hold the weight with which they were written. As you regard those words, you hear immediately behind you.

[Blaring, urgent, and especially annoying crowing of a rooster]

Ame [Erika]

[Yelling] Five more minutes.

Brennan Mulligan

The oldest, most insane looking rooster in the world leaps from the ground onto your bed. For the many months that you have now been here. And what age is Ame?

Erika Ishii

Seven.

Brennan Mulligan

You turned seven while you were here at the cottage. That's how long you've been here. You have not yet been here a full year, but those months to a seven year old are an eternity. And this rooster, you have never been more certain, is a spirit. There is no way to explain the frequency and tenacity with which this rooster escapes the chicken coop. It is constant. The rooster appears to enter rooms with not only closed doors, but fully locked doors. The rooster is an ever present nightmare and perhaps your greatest enemy here at the cottage. May I ask for this rooster's name?

Erika Ishii

Taro. His name is Taro, and he is my arch nemesis. One day, I will best him, and I can sleep in.

Brennan Mulligan

Taro regards you in this moment of stillness. Now, standing fully sort of on your stomach, although you were separated by the covers that you are in, and regards you with his head cocked to one side.

Erika Ishii

I clutch the bed sheets and the comforter with both hands staring up at him, and he stares back at me.

Ame [Erika]

[Quietly, furiously] Ughhhhh... Fine, I'll feed you.

Brennan Mulligan

And you see that he hops off and walks towards the door and looks at you with a look like he has no idea how to get through this door, and that he needs your help to get outside of this door.

Ame [Erika]

How did you get in?!

Taro [Brennan]

BUKAAWK!

Erika Ishii

I throw off the covers and I pad over, clad in my nightgown to the door. I toss it open and I scooch him out with my foot. Just sort of shuffle him out. I don't kick him, I just kind of scooch him out.

Brennan Mulligan

Give me a little athletics check here.

Erika Ishii

Oh, no.

Brennan Mulligan

Twelve will get the job done, no problem. You're able to—you are a small girl. You are a little child. But this rooster has seen better days. This rooster is an old bird and so does not fight too terribly. The rooster's abilities seem more due to its wiliness and cunning than any sort of physical gift, and it is shuffled out into the door. The immediate outside of your room is a sort of little corner of a hallway, but the hallway is quite short, so from here you can see the kitchen, which has white ceilings and long wooden rafters.

Brennan Mulligan

But if you can see any of that ceiling, it's a miracle, because of the herbs and vegetables, the jars of different beans and lentils, the hanging peppers bundled altogether. And some things, perhaps, of the plant kingdom, but stranger still, are dried and bundled, such that the ceiling is a veritable cornucopia. Hard to even see what color the ceiling might be underneath all of these dried plants. And the smell of spices and herbs and plants fills the room as you open the door. There were many times where Ame's desire for these projects and these treasures was addressed as a failing.

Brennan Mulligan

The first adult that Ame ever knew who regarded her wonder at the world and her desire for treasure, and her need to begin these many quests and projects and missions is now standing in the kitchen preparing Ame's favorite breakfast. I'd like to know what is being prepared, and as you walk into the kitchen, Taro, the

rooster marching solemnly in front of you, I would like to know what that meal is. And I would like to know your description of the keeper of the cottage, grandmother Wren.

Erika Ishii

Oh, wow. So I can already smell the bubbling rice porridge, juk, and it's made with a broth and a slow cooked porridge. I can smell the eggs being marinated to put into it. I can hear the bubbling. The air is thick with that rice gruel smell. I see the back of Grandma Wren bustling around the kitchen. She is short and wide. She almost feels wider than she is tall. She has her hair in a neat bun, up on the top of her head. Well, it starts neat usually, but by the end of the day, it's mostly all over the place. It's silvery, not gray. It is silver.

Erika Ishii

And she constantly has a stained apron with the sleeves rolled up. And again, it changes by seasons. Oranges and golds and russets in the autumn, and greens and multicolored pinks and heliotrope in the spring. And she feels very much of the seasons. She'll smell that way. The colors will be that way. She'll have different kinds of flowers or leaves or pine needles in her hair, depending on the seasons. This cottage is very much of the environment it is a part of. It is so very human, and yet it works in harmony with the time and the space around it.

Brennan Mulligan

As you walk into the kitchen, Grandma Wren turns around and takes this rice porridge in a massive bowl. It is the one bowl that sort of has a design to it. It has like a little floral thing around the edge, and it is much larger than an eating bowl should be. It's almost like a salad bowl. But the design is so beloved by young Ame that she lets you eat out of it and puts it in front of you. It also is a nice way to get extra food.

Ame [Erika]

Oh, boy. It's the kitty bowl.

Brennan Mulligan

Grandma Wren smiles and looks at you and says:

Grandma Wren [Brennan]

Good morning, Ame. How does this day find you?

Ame [Erika]

[Excited and childlike] Morning, Grandma Wren! It is a lilac day.

Grandma Wren [Brennan]

Auspicious!

Brennan Mulligan

And she turns around and takes a little quill and draws a quick picture of a flower in a calendar with no numbers, just boxes that she draws flowers in. She says:

Grandma Wren [Brennan]

[Thoughtfully] Oh, that's the fourth lilac day this month.

Brennan Mulligan

She turns around, puts a hand on your back and smiles as she puts a little napkin and a little glass of water in front of you and says,

Grandma Wren [Brennan]

Well, have your breakfast, and then see to it that the animals have theirs.

Ame [Erika]

Thank you, Grandma Wren. I humbly accept this breakfast, which I'm about to eat. [Aggressive eating noises]

Erika Ishii

Just starts inhaling the bowl.

Brennan Mulligan

Grandma Wren always smiles. There are many different cultures in this world, but the one from which Grandma Wren came as a child, believed that this type of eating was the only way to actually express gratitude. That the noise of furious and quick eating from a fear that the food would somehow vanish if one did not get rid of it as fast as one could. So she smiles, breathes in, and as she exhales, you can almost hear the house settle and moths alight in the fresh morning, and the wind kick up and the first songbirds of daylight begin to sing.

Grandma Wren [Brennan]

All right, well, I'm going to go up and continue to straighten out the study after that spell went wrong. Those books, I didn't realize that there were a lot of shelves that had books behind the books you can see. So that'll be a little bit of a lift for old Grandma Wren, but I will more than happily get to that myself. You'll be all right feeding the animals and taking care of fetching some firewood?

Ame [Erika]

Of course. You sure you don't need help with any heavy lifting up there or anything?

Grandma Wren [Brennan]

Oh ho, child. No, I won't be using my arms at all. I'll be using—

Ame [Erika]

[In a quiet, awed voice] Maagiiiic!

Grandma Wren [Brennan]

All right. I know I shouldn't have said it. I knew I shouldn't have said it. Look. Yes, I will be using a very small, practical cantrip. The smallest type of magic.

Ame [Erika]

Can... Trip.

Grandma Wren [Brennan]

Yes.

Ame [Erika]

Are there ones that you can use to... Trip... People?

Brennan Mulligan

Here, Grandma Wren raises an eyebrow.

Grandma Wren [Brennan]

And why would an inquiring mind wish to know of such hexes?

Ame [Erika]

Well, you know? Because it's funny.

Grandma Wren [Brennan]

Is there an inscription on the wall above your bed instructing you to be funny?

Ame [Erika]

No, I'm pretty good at that on my own.

Brennan Mulligan

Ah. Then perhaps this is not the magic to seek after, young Ame.

Ame [Erika]

Yes, Grandma Wren.

Grandma Wren [Brennan]

My God. You've already finished.

[The cast laughs]

Grandma Wren [Brennan]

Well, to the animals, then. Chop, chop. We have many chores!

Brennan Mulligan

And Grandma Wren puts on a little shawl and shuffles up an old, creaky wooden staircase up to the study, one of the many rooms in this cottage. And you see that right behind you, you hear tink, tink, tink inside the bowl. And you turn around and Taro goes.

Taro [Brennan]

BU-KAAAWK

Ame [Erika]

There were eggs in there, you know!

Taro [Brennan]

BU-KAW

Ame [Erika]

[A long and frustrated groan]

Erika Ishii

I take my dishes to the sink, and I wash them out and help clean up the remainders from breakfast. And then I stoke the fire, and put on a kettle. And you must imagine that all of these things I do, I am smaller than even a normal seven year old should be. So everything appears to be twice my size. As I sweep out the hearth, the broom, which is a normal sized broom with cinnamon twigs at the bottom. I have to hold it halfway down.

Lou Wilson

Of course you do. Of course you do.

Erika Ishii

It goes above my head, the top of it goes above my head. There's a cool, gnarled, figure head on the broom handle. But I couldn't tell you that that's there because I can't really reach up to the top there. Boil the water, I

sweep the hearth. And, oh, I have to water some of the living plants inside. Some of them take water [lower and closer to the mic] some of them take meat.

Brennan Mulligan

The ones that take meat all have a nice little, usually, if not, like, a little barricade, there's, like, at least some yarn or something. It's like a sort of demarcation. [chomp noise] And you see, how many times you have turned over here and seen Taro amongst the meat plants completely unharmed and unmolested by any of them is staggering.

Erika Ishii

And then I have to go feed all of the animals.

Brennan Mulligan

You rush off to go feed the animals. As you are finishing sweeping up, give me a wisdom check. We'll call it a DC 10.

Erika Ishii

Yeah, ten. Exactly ten.

[The cast all yelling "Ohhh" and "Oh my goodness!]

Lou Wilson

This child succeeds!

Aabria Iyengar

Baby genius!

Brennan Mulligan

Incredible! As you are sweeping, the top is so tall that you get to a part of the cottage where the roof, it's such a slanted roof that comes down so sort of low that there are parts where the roof is only, like, a couple of feet off the ground. And so you actually hit the top because you're not really looking up that high. The broom falls down. You knock it out of your own hands, essentially. And as you go to pick it up, there's a slight gust of wind, even indoors, and a few sheets of herbalogical parchment flutter off a table just as your hand brushes the handle. And you realize that you are standing over the broom as you go to pick it up.

Erika Ishii

I look around. [Mischievously] I look around, and I do it again. I put my hand exactly in the same way.

Brennan Mulligan

Give me one more wisdom.

Erika Ishii

Aiiee!

Lou Wilson

Come on, let's go, child.

Erika Ishii

Come on, come on, come on!

Lou Wilson

Let's go, child. Come on, child.

Erika Ishii
Twelve.

Lou Wilson
BOOM!

Brennan Mulligan
You grab it. Your bowl haircut, your bangs [whoosh] flutter as you touch the broom, and you hear:

Grandma Wren [Brennan]
[Distantly] Ame!

Ame [Erika]
[a loud, shocked squawk]

Grandma Wren [Brennan]
Why are you using the big broom?

Erika Ishii
Because it gets done faster.

Grandma Wren [Brennan]
Oh, it's done faster if you knock it against the roof in all those hard to reach places, eh? Ame, please use the brush and dust pan. Remember, I don't just have eyes in the back of my head.

Ame [Erika]
What what's the end of that sentence?

Grandma Wren [Brennan]
[Whispered yet eerily loud and reverberating] That's for me to know, and you to find out.

Brennan Mulligan
You hear that whispered in your ear because Grandma Wren was shouting from the study, and then you hear her voice right in your head.

Ame [Erika]
[Meekly] Oh. Okay.

Erika Ishii
I go get the dustpan and I stow the broom really quickly.

Brennan Mulligan
You take this gorgeous broom that smells like cinnamon, and when you touch the wood, it's so perfectly smooth and warm. The weight, even as massive and giant as it is, it just feels so cool in your hands, and you put it back in its spot.

Ame [Erika]
[Sighs]

Brennan Mulligan

[In a bored voice] You get an old cobwebby bristled up horse hair brush and a metal dust pan, and you finish sweeping up, and then it's time to go feed the animals.

Erika Ishii

Okay.

Brennan Mulligan

What are you going through now, Lou?

Lou Wilson

Nothing. It's just delightful. It's the full range of emotions. I was ready to cry during the first one of these, and now I'm filled with pure joy. It's just brimming with joy.

Aabria Iyengar

The two genders.

Lou Wilson

Exactly.

Aabria Iyengar

Trauma, and joy.

Lou Wilson

I think we should stop. I think we've got our characters. I don't think we need any more characters in the story.

Brennan Mulligan

Oh, I disagree!

Erika Ishii

I disagree

Brennan Mulligan

I disagree. So, Ame, as you depart with some feed, what animals do you go to hit first? You got chickens, goats, rabbits, there's some beehives that are starting to get active again because it's about to be spring.

Erika Ishii

That's right. And that means lots of honey.

Brennan Mulligan

Right. And the bees you won't be feeding the bees you will be collecting from.

Erika Ishii

Yeah, I should go do the chickens first because they get cranky and they need the eggs collected. But if I go do the honey first, that means I get to lick my fingers and eat the honey faster. Is Taro there?

Ame [Erika]

Taro? What do I do?

Brennan Mulligan

Taro looks over at you, glances towards the beehives.

Ame [Erika]

Yeah, you're right. We should do that. Yes.

Brennan Mulligan

So you go to the beehives, you start collecting a bunch of honey. You see that Taro is sitting there. You see that sort of like swatting and missing a bunch of bees with his beak. And you... Give me a perception check.

Erika Ishii

Oh, a natural 20.

[The cast goes wild]

Brennan Mulligan

Incredible!

Lou Wilson

It begins.

Brennan Mulligan

Incredible. What a fortuitous natural 20. You begin to hear a distant noise. You're a pretty perceptive little kid. All of your mischievousness and tricksiness and all of that stuff is not because you are not paying attention. No. In fact, many of it, or like much of your tricksiness, abounds from your abundance of attention.

Erika Ishii

Yeah, nobody ever pays attention, you get to do the most fun things if you're paying attention.

Brennan Mulligan

And you hear:

[Quick clip-clopping getting louder]

Brennan Mulligan

And you hear multiple pairs of hooves on a nat 20, I'll say you hear four pairs of hooves. Wow. And something creaking. Lots of people come and visit Grandma Wren. There's lots and lots of villagers who come up here for mending things and fixing things, for helping them with a pair of shoes, with the soles worn out, or weaving. Grandma Wren is a master weaver and a cobbler.

Brennan Mulligan

But of course, they often—most often come for medicine, which is the number one thing that Grandma Wren knows how to make. What all the plants and herbs are for poultices, salves and balms. So most people, if you hear hooves, it's a big deal because it means that someone with a horse is showing up.

Erika Ishii

And, like, they're going fast.

Brennan Mulligan

They're going fast. You've never heard as many hooves. And the creaking is beyond you. Most people walk here on foot. It's only about a 40 minute walk from the village to get here. So on a horse you can get here in no time at all.

Erika Ishii

Yeah. Why would it be creaking?

Ame [Erika]

Grandma Wren!

Erika Ishii

and I lick the last of the honey off of my fingers as I go. I toss a tiny bit of honeycomb to Taro.

Taro [Brennan]

[Gulp, chomp chomp chomp]

Brennan Mulligan

He swallows the whole thing.

Lou Wilson

I thought we were about to hear the death of Taro, as he choked.

Erika Ishii

[Laughing] Choked on a piece of honeycomb. And I take the bag, or uh the box where I've been stashing combs with me. It bangs against my legs as I run back towards the cottage.

Ame [Erika]

Grandma Wren! There's people coming. They're on horses and a uhh creaky thing.

Grandma Wren [Brennan]

They're creaking horses? Wooden horses?

Ame [Erika]

[To herself] Are there wooden horses? [Loudly, to Grandma Wren] Are there wooden horses?

Grandma Wren [Brennan]

Never you mind about wooden horses. Here's what you are to do. Go and make them welcome. Put on a kettle, if you haven't already and make sure that our guests are welcome, whoever they are.

Ame [Erika]

Okay!

Grandma Wren [Brennan]

And stable the horses after the guests are seated.

Ame [Erika]

[Mumbling to self] Okay. hmm. kettle, and then... [yelling] I left the kettle on!

Erika Ishii

I remember that I had put the kettle on earlier and did not pull it off. So I take it off, adjust it higher onto the higher hook so that it will stop boiling actively. And then I go run back. Outside.

Ame [Erika]

[Mumbling again] Okay. Make them welcome. Stable the horses.

Brennan Mulligan

A carriage arrives with painting on the side. This is not from the village. This is from a town, like a big town. You can see it has the style of painting of these fancy people in gowns and coats drinking wine. You see flowery script. You see flowery script on the outside of them drinking wine together. This is the type of painting you saw in the seaside town when you first arrived here from your old home. You see four beautiful chestnut horses, each with a little diamond of white on their forehead. And nobody. There is no driver.

Erika Ishii

What?

Brennan Mulligan

The horses seem to have stopped here in front of the home, but you see no driver.

Ame [Erika]

Hello? Hi..um

Erika Ishii

I head over towards the horses and check them, make sure they're okay. They are probably in a bit of a lather after running.

Brennan Mulligan

You see that they are in a bit of a lather, but not as much as you would imagine. You see a little twist of wind come off of the carriage, kick up some leaves. And on that nat 20 perception which I'll keep applying here, you smell a little bit of magic.

Lou Wilson

Mm, mm.

Erika Ishii

I look around. There's a wagon in back. I don't know. I want to go look at that. Make sure that the horses are okay. And then I go around.

Brennan Mulligan

The horses seem okay. They seem to have stopped pretty much of their own volition. You open the back of the carriage, when Ame and Suvi first meet.

[The cast starts yells together in excitement]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Through the window and over the field and past the branches of the tall, tall trees, the shadows grow longer as the wood grows greener. And somewhere beyond where any can say, one deer path, and one switch of a stream leads to another until finally one is so turned around that the shadows have all switched ways and one no longer stands upon the foundation of the waking world. One stands in the world of spirits.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Their world is ours and yet, aside, behind and between, under and over and through all ways. For there is no part, no parcel of mortal affairs that is not touched by the presence of the spirit. And yet the spirit does extend beyond. How deep does the forest get, Lou?

[The cast starts yelling]

Lou Wilson

Oh. It goes deep.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Beyond the paths at the edge of Grandma Wren's cottage, this forest, which is a forest with a name, and which some enterprising humans have even had the audacity to place upon a map, there is an as yet unmapped forest that begins at the heart of this one. Beyond the edges of the map, or perhaps more truthful to say, within and through this map to a place that cannot be charted or ever fully beheld with a single mortal eye; the deepest wood of all shudders in the approach of not only a wild one, but one of the Great and Wild Ones. Before we meet your character, Lou perhaps it would behoove us to meet your family.

Lou Wilson

Oh, of course. Yeah. Eursulon travels along, kind of in the shadow of the Great Bear. Just this big, semi truck sized bear that's just, like, slow. He plods along and, like, dancing and playing. Amongst his feet are his children.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

A cavorting, pawing, screeching, shouting cavalcade of fairies and spirits. Entities of the great deep wood tumble and somersault, flitter and flap, each of different shapes and sizes cavorting and gallivanting amongst the steps of the Great Bear.

[There's a loud roar, as bright sounding wind instruments and drums rise up with a joyful chorus]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Now, the Great Bear, it is said, was born at the heart of the world before the spirits of Star and Sun first alighted and woke him with their terrible brilliance. And yet others say that it was the ending of the first winter that caused the bear to emerge fully formed from the world.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yet more have sometimes said that it is the Queen of the Sea and the King of the Forest who first fell in love and that their first child was the Great Bear himself. These stories are of little consequence to the Great Bear himself, who, if asked with impertinence to describe his origin, would much rather and more clearly state his purpose: to live deeply and live well in the Wild Forest.

Erika Ishii

[Emphatically] Shit goes DEEP.

Aabria Iyengar

[Yelling, away from the mic] He's so cool. He's so cool!

Lou Wilson

[Proudly] My dad is cool. Daddy is cool!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

The fur is as thick as night and within it grow flowers and moss near his ankles where the mud and water through which he travels allows for the sweet smell of honeysuckle that clings to his fur. Up above, thatched pieces of branches begin to sprout and even from his great back we have seen one or two sprouts of trees, as when he sleeps, he sleeps for a long, long time.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

His great eyes, deep hazel and brown gold that seemed to shimmer with all of the wonder of the deep forest of the spirits. Smell of moss and earth and sweet jasmine flow out from his enormous frame. The Great Bear is a source of wonder and noise and joy, his children heralding his approach with the wild caucus, the wild rumpus of approaching wonder.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And yet, when a long pink tongue licks his lips a fang greater and sharper than any sword or spear or mortal has beheld can be seen. The Great Bear knows many hours of peacefulness and rest and for this blessing is the world of spirits grateful.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

[With an upbeat turn] Of the many children cavorting within the wide boundaries of his mighty paws we see one such child cavorting. Lou, could you describe your character?

Lou Wilson

Okay. Eursulon is young but tall. Is childlike in kind of the way that he stands. It feels like he's constantly, like he doesn't stand upright. He stands slightly slouched and there's just constant motion in his body in that way that a child at play is. There is no stillness to Eursulon. He has, like, big—like the back legs of an animal kind of bent around like the knee area. Big kind of ursine body.

Lou Wilson

But then his head, his face especially has kind of a feline shape to it. Cleft lip like a cat, but with two what are they called when they're on the bottom? Are they still called tusks? Two tusks that jut up kind of deep. He has his father's eyes, that same kind of deep hazel and gold extending up into a plumage like that of a horned owl kind of jetting up and layered along the sides of his head.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Eursulon, being a child of the Great Bear is, to all the spirit world, a babe, a cub traveling under the protection of his father. And like many of this great and fearsome host, Eursulon knows not of what other parent he might have out there. But though the spirit world might see him as a cub, the truth is this: he is a wild thing. As you cavort and make merry in this place, there are nearby spirits here as well, siblings of yours. And like most of your siblings, with some exception there are some twins and triplets and things of that nature here. But most of your siblings, these are half siblings as the Great Bear has fallen in love, and with many others, have fallen in love with him over the countless ages. And the Great Bear is a source of never ending love.

Aabria Iyengar

Mmm. Also thinking about just trying to be the great, just getting in that body count, trying to be about it.

Erika Ishii

Oh, no, I'm trying to BE that.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

This is the energy I'm trying to bring. You behold nearby two spirits. One of them nearby is a sibling of yours to whom you feel some closeness in the wild joy of this place there is not much cause for the type of camaraderie that mortals tend to worry about, because so much of camaraderie in the mortal world is based on concern of danger or the need to stick close and stick by. Danger is a foreign concept to you here, under the guise of—the only danger you've ever known is those who cross your father.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

But that being said, there is one sibling close by to whom it can be said that you feel close or that you can trust. And there is another here who often has sought to make you the butt of their terrible jokes. So what I would ask is what the appearance of these spirits are nearby? For indeed, there is very little to be said in the way of family resemblance, at least from the dull eyes of a mortal, though, of course, you can see the resemblance in the great and varied host that now parades throughout the wood.

Lou Wilson

Yes, I think the spirit that I feel closest to is also animalistic like me, but a little more squat. I think, like Eursulon is kind of long and kind of tends to stand upright. I think this sibling tends to be on all fours, more like a badger, and like uh.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
I literally wrote badger.

Lou Wilson

Yeah, of course. Of course. You know. You get it.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
I get it

Lou Wilson

More like badger like, with streaks of, like, gray and white. Kind eyes and just incredibly playful as well. I think that the person who teases me is more of an elemental figure, a child of fire. Yeah, they've got age and they tend to stand above the rest of us, and they do not join in the playing. They tend to point and laugh and kid.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

As the Great Bear comes to a halt, sniffing at the ground ahead, you see that your sister, Kalaya the badger, looks down and you see that she prefers to stay in this form. She is a shapeshifter, but like many shapeshifters of spirit, she tends to wear one of two forms, that of a great badger or that of a young woman with streaks of white and black in her hair. And you see that she kneels down [snuffling noises] and digs in and finds an enormous puffy mushroom buried in the moss underneath the tree and says,

Kalaya [Brennan]
Eursulon, look, I found a snack.

Eursulon [Lou]
[With a voice of high-bearing, gentle and well enunciated] Delicious.

[The cast screams at the voice reveal]

Lou Wilson

Eursulon does everything he can to not just rip it from her and waits patiently for her to offer some of it to him.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Give me an insight check.

Lou Wilson
That's an 18.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You get a quick sense that Kalaya, as much as she loves you, is not going to stop until this mushroom is gone.

Lou Wilson

Eursulon is going to, in a way that I think, for a human would seem rude, going to tackle her and attempt to wrestle the mushroom from her.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Nothing could be more de rigueur. Nothing could be more completely appropriate in the spirit realm. She knew what she was getting into when she disclosed the location of a mushroom. And this is absolutely rules-as-written as far as spirits are concerned. You tackle. Go ahead and we'll make opposed athletics checks.

Lou Wilson

Great. Eursulon is going for it. That's going to be a 19 from Eursulon.

[The whole cast "Woo's" in awe]

Eursulon [Lou]

Give me this mushroom. Give me this damn mushroom.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

On a 6, Kalaya is not going to get it done. She goes,

Kalaya [Brennan]

Eursulon, no, I found it!

Eursulon [Lou]

[Forcefully] Give me the Snack-uh!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You hoist it from her arms up above you, and you can see Anarion. Anarion is your elder brother. He is a mixed elemental of leaf and flame. The core of his chest is a column of fire that reaches up through his head. And there is a swirl of leaves ever catching alight that serve as the exterior of his body, such that flickering shapes of orange light exit from the dappled patterns of the leaves intermingling around him. An ever-burning body, arms and legs akimbo and the flame eventually reaching the crown of his skull and bursting into twigs and leaves and flame rippling out in hair behind him.

Lou Wilson

I mean, I don't like him, but, damn, is he hot.

Aabria Iyengar

He's the coolest dude.

Erika Ishii

Your family is hot.

Aabria Iyengar

Yeah, your family's hot as shit.

Lou Wilson

We all come from the Great Bear. And, I mean, that man lives WELL.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Anarion is getting to an age that many of your siblings get to. Not all. Some of your siblings do not age, and others do. Anarion is getting to the age where eventually he will either have to leave or your father will eat him, and—

Lou Wilson

As it goes!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

As it goes. But of course, the Great Bear always lets it be known when the time has come. And it is always the choice of the child whether to grow up, or [in a lower dramatic voice] whether to be devoured. You see, Anarion looks at you and says,

Anarion [Brennan]

[His voice layered and haughty] Ho there, Eursulon. Seems you've caught something for yourself from our dear sister.

Eursulon [Lou]

Well, I won it! Uh, rightfully!

Anarion [Brennan]

Did you? Let's see if I can do the same. Brothers, sisters, siblings, after him.

Eursulon [Lou]

[With a waver to his princely voice] Raah! It's my mushroom!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And as it often does, a wild chase begins.

Lou Wilson

I think Eursulon is going to put the mushroom in his mouth and go down on all fours and start just bounding away from Anarion and his older siblings.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Go ahead and give me, you can either give me, like, if you're trying to go brute strength, give me athletics.

Lou Wilson

I think we're gonna go brute strength.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Let's do it.

Lou Wilson

That's going to be a 16.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

OOH.

Lou Wilson

This is what I'm, I think this is where Eursulon feels comfort. In this kind of like, just being in his body and running, jumping, all of those sorts of things

Brennan Lee Mulligan
in the pocket.

Lou Wilson
Yes.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
As you rush through the forest, you begin to peel away from everybody. You hear a sound. You hear a sound on the wind.

[The upbeat ambience of the cavalcade recedes]

A whisper on the wind [Brennan]
[Quietly, echoing] A road is different from a path. And you may know a road if it has known bounded wheel, or the iron shoe of horses.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
What these words mean, you cannot say. But you know from where the whisper came. [An ominous tone underscores the words] Somewhere hidden, deeper in the woods past where you have traveled before. Before you lies a mossy hill, which, you can dart up that hill but you know that it is steep and the moss is slick with water. And you know that your siblings are nearer behind you seeking to take that which you have rightfully won.

Eursulon [Lou]
There's no way they'll get me at the top of the hill.

Erika Ishii
Love him.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
At the top of that hill is farther than you have ever been, into a deeper part of the woods than you have ever known. Do you journey there?

Lou Wilson
Eursulon is going to look back one more time to see just how close his siblings are.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Anarion rounds the corner and you see, he smiles. You are not within sight of your father anymore.

Lou Wilson
With that, Eursulon is for sure going to take the hill.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
I want you to roll two D20. But this will not be with advantage or disadvantage. You will take the number farthest from ten.

Lou Wilson
Great.

Erika Ishii

[Gasps]

Aabria Iyengar
Oh my God

Lou Wilson
18.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You surge to the top of the hill avoiding all the moss, avoiding every patch of damp that might give way under your feet and give you to your siblings and let them take what you have taken for yourself. You alight faster than wind, faster than lightning to the top of the hill and burst through the foliage. And see a thing you have never seen before. An absence of trees, stretching from one horizon to the other. You see before you a thing for which you have no name but for which, in a different world, two young girls do. You see a road.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see in a long line waving banners in the air from the ends of tall lances. You hear the sound of metal armor, and the ringing of bells and buckles on the saddles of tall horses. A line of armored knights moves down the road. Though these words would be unfamiliar to you, to say armored knights to a spirit of the wild, having never seen this before, would be nonsense, gibberish, undefined and therefore meaningless. And yet you see, and now behold this.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

As the line of knights continues the sun breaks through the opening of the treeless road. And though dappled by the tall leaves of the canopy, the armor does something that before you had only ever seen water do, which reflects the gleaming sunlight. This magic is one you have never beheld before. What is Eursulon thinking and what is Eursulon feeling as you behold this? And how does your mind even process what this could be?

Lou Wilson

I think Eursulon immediately forgets the mushroom and Anarion and the chase. He's desperately just, trying to connect it to anything he's ever experienced. And like you said, the closest thing is that kind of, that dance of water. But the fact that it moves with these men as they move, that it's not still. That they are of it, that they are of this play of light. Eursulon wants to see it more, and get closer to it. I think in the kind of cavalcade of his siblings, discovering something or bringing something to the group is held as, like, special or celebrated. And I think there's a part of Eursulon that wants this to be his, then. This gleam and this light with you as you move.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Go ahead and give me a perception check and do this with disadvantage.

Lou Wilson

Oh, must I? Okay, here we go. It's a 19 and a 17 minus, minus two to 15.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Okay, you, in that case, notice the mushroom fall from your hands and tumble back down the hill, through a little door of ivy that clings to the boughs of these trees. You have stumbled through a door. There's a natural arch of where the ivy meets the tree branches and grows here, that it is covered by leaves, and the mushroom rolls back through it.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

As wild as you are, you have never been inside of a door, but you have seen many. Your father has traveled to many places. And, of course, in the world of spirits, there are many spirits which dwell in palaces and in great places. Not all of our honored friends are, in fact, wild ones, and there are some spirits that dwell in these places. So you know a door when you see one and realize that this is the first door you have ever walked through.

Lou Wilson

Yeah, I think Eursulon is going to pick up the mushroom. I'm not going to leave a loose mushroom. My snack. So I'm going to grab my mushroom.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I think on that perception check, there is a smell in the air here. The enchanting deep earth and jasmine and flower and musk of the world of spirits that invigorates wild things and lulls mortals to sleep is not present here. There is a crisp smell in the air. There is something dangerous here, and alive.

Lou Wilson

I think with those scents and those smells, Eursulon is going to start to move toward the knights, but with a sense of not wanting to, not greeting them like his family or his friends, to treat them as strangers.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Do you think Eursulon ever seen a mortal?

Lou Wilson

Definitely not.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Definitely not. So it's about 50 yards of thick underbrush that gets to the last line of trees by the side of the road. And then there's about 5ft before the ditch. And the ditch is about a foot and a half wide, and then the road is maybe 20 to 25 feet wide.

Lou Wilson

I think Eursulon is going to move with stealth. I think Eursulon wants to watch and if possible, take one of these. I think Eursulon is already thinking of, like, "If I can get a piece of this gleaming light, I'll be special. I'll be the one everyone will celebrate. The father will notice me," like kind of that excitement.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You are going to give me a stealth roll.

Lou Wilson

Okay.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I'm not going to roll for all of these nights, but I am rolling for one of them in particular, and the one for which I am rolling adds a plus eight to perception checks.

Aabria Iyengar

Okay.

Erika Ishii

[Incredulously] What?

Aabria Iyengar
Sure. Sure, sure sure!

Lou Wilson
How about that knight.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You are trying to beat an 18—

Lou Wilson
18?

Brennan Lee Mulligan
—on your stealth roll.

Aabria Iyengar
You could do it. You could do it.

Erika Ishii
Yes.

Aabria Iyengar
You got this!

Lou Wilson
Okay. [With a deep sigh, and a pause...]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Now what'd you roll there?

Lou Wilson
We don't, you know—

Erika Ishii
Go on...

Lou Wilson
We'll say, I have as many hit points as quality of stealth. A clean four.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You give yourself more distance to travel trying to get to the middle and see what the deal with all these knights could possibly be. And you arrive at the vanguard of trees. As you arrive there, you hear the cry of a falcon. Overhead, a proud and deep voice speaks from the center of the column.

Perceptive Knight [Brennan]
Brothers, ride on. I must tarry a moment.

Aabria Iyengar
[Nearly silently] Oh my god.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And Lou, I'm going to need you to describe the symbol of the crest, and the bearing and appearance of a mounted knight that pulls from the column and rides on his horse, not looking at you, towards the side of the road.

Lou Wilson

I think it's golden plate. I think, like shining golden plate, wearing one of those helms with the visor that goes up with, like, a full plume coming out of the top of, like I think of red and orange feathers carrying a shield that bears his symbol. Which I think is a deeply rooted tree, with roots that crawl down to the corners of the shield. And a gorgeous rich green, like a very deep earthen brown of the tree that then blooms into a gorgeous voluptuous greenery, with three blue flowers.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

The knight moves from the—breaks from the column, moves to face the oncoming train of knights that are moving in column. He looks to the approaching knights and smiles a deep, warm smile of camaraderie. And you look at this knight filled with this sense of purpose, and you get the sudden sensation that he would never, ever take one of their snacks.

[The cast attempts to contain shocked laughter]

Lou Wilson

Whew. Wheew. Eurulon's heart is racing. He feels his paws getting, like, sweaty in a way that's, like, every person he's ever met has been familiar to him or, like, comfortable. Or, every person that he's ever met has kind of fit into two categories; like big, scary, but never close, and like family. I think there is, like, there's a wanting in this person. Eurulon wants to know them, to be them. I don't know.

Lou Wilson

The thing I'm closest is like, a child reading a picture book about astronauts and then seeing one in an actual suit but not knowing what—there's just something about him and his presence that Eurulon wants. I want to take it from him. I want what he has. I want. And I think that's the word that Eurulon starts to grab onto is just wanting it's like, I want this. I want the way people look at him. I want his armor. I want his saddlebags. I want his horse. I want, I want.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

As you want that, you do turn to look, and this knight has your fascination. He is so different to anything you have ever beheld in the World of Spirits. And the final mesmerizing moment comes when you see, as strange as you are feeling in this moment, to aspire, to desire something beyond what is in front of you, to grab and wrestle for and consume, to want something that you cannot put your hands on, in the eyes of the knights that ride past him.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

As the rest of the column advances, you see visors raised, and the knights put hands to brow and salute and smile, and you see that what you want, they all want as well. And you cannot tell what has caused the appearance of this most desired and yet wholly invisible and intangible thing. There is something that you cannot name that is in the air around this man, and it is sweeter than any honey you have tasted and brighter than any gold you have seen. It is swifter and more sought after than the whitest hind that flees through the forest from any hunter, and this man has it.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

They look at him and smile, and there is something there. And he meets their gaze and smiles in return, as though to acknowledge that this is shared between them. Before the moment where you realize that your

window of opportunity to somehow seize whatever this thing could be is rapidly closing, a falcon descends from a tree overhead, lands on the shoulder of the knight, and the knight, not looking, speaks in a soft voice.

Perceptive Knight [Brennan]

Ygraine, I must say, has clearer and sharper eyes than I. But even so, your approach was noted. Honored friend, I am Sir Curran of the Hawthorn. Mean you harm, or help, or neither of the two, I honor your presence in this wood.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

When he says honor, it's a word you've never heard before.

Sir Curran [Brennan]

I suppose what I am saying, honored friend, is that I can see you, and I hope that that does not give you embarrassment.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Embarrassment also a word, that—

[Erika and Aabria start cackling]

Lou Wilson

I think Eursulon is, like, trapped. I think, in that way that when you ask a child a question, even about something that they love or deeply interested in, they just say nothing. I do think Eursulon just kind of gazes, is just... holding.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

I'm gonna roll a little insight check for our knight here. That is a nat 20.

Erika Ishii

[Gleeful laughing]

Aabria Iyengar

My god. Here's the thing. The knight is Brennan.

Erika Ishii

[Whispers] What have you done?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

The knight doesn't look at you, but you see—

Lou Wilson

He still is not looking at me.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He's still not looking at you. But you see, as he senses something, he looks up at the falcon, and the falcon is looking right at you. And you see, he says,

Sir Curran [Brennan]

Ygraine, is our honored friend still where he was before?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You hear this falcon go

Ygraine [Brennan]

AHK

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And this knight dismounts. He takes off his greaves and boots, takes off his helmet, takes off his pack, draws his sword, lays it on the ground, puts his halberd on the ground, takes a dagger from his belt and puts it on the ground. Leaves his armor on, looks at his shield for a moment, slings that on his back, does a little hop, which in full plate armor, a little hop is pretty impressive. This is a brawny, broad framed knight. Does a little hop to walk barefoot in the forest.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And now as he walks, he just goes enough to cover the ditch. So he has crossed that liminal space. He's crossed that threshold. And he kneels down and looks at you and says,

Sir Curran [Brennan]

Hello, friend. I am called Curran. Many spirits ask for deference and respect in their terms of address. But I did not mean to frighten you by being perhaps overly courtly. It is a pleasure to meet you. Do you protect these woods?

Eursulon [Lou]

Mhm.

[Erika and Aabria laugh at this and yell "no!"]

Sir Curran [Brennan]

A fierce champion, I am sure.

Lou Wilson

Eursulon is going to close the distance between them. Eursulon is going to move on all fours and just move closer to Curran and put a hand or paw onto his plate.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You touch this plate, and the gold; it is a feeling like nothing you have ever felt. This is as cool as moonlight and harder than stone. And it captures all of the light of the sun with none of its heat. You have never seen a magic like this. And you see your face reflected in its shining surface.

Lou Wilson

Fuck off, dude.

[The score ceases. Everyone laughs]

Erika Ishii

We hurt!

Lou Wilson

You know what you're doing.

Erika Ishii

Dying in here. You don't understand!

Aabria Iyengar
Please!

Lou Wilson
You know what you're doing.

Aabria Iyengar
Please.

Lou Wilson
I see my face reflected in it?

Aabria Iyengar
Oh, my God. I'm screaming and shitting.

Lou Wilson
Oh, that's fucked up, bro. Bro, that's fucked up. That's crazy.

[The soft, sweet music peppered with sounds of the woods comes back in]

Lou Wilson
I think Eursulon, noticing his reflection, steps back, moves closer, steps back, and is then going to try and not like force it off of him, but just grab it and pull at it as to see if he could have it.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You pull on it and a full throated laugh as you attempt to take his armor apart, bellows from Curran

Lou Wilson
I think, skitters back like, two or three feet.

Sir Curran [Brennan]
No, it's all right. Would you like to see?

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And he takes off one of his pauldrons. You see that one of his pauldrons can come off separately, the shoulder plate of his armor. And he takes that off and takes his shield off as well. You see that the shield is also bright but is painted. It has a very subtle gloss, so it doesn't luminously reflect light like his armor, except for in a couple of places here and there where there are cuts into the shield.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And you see that this thing is proudly kept. It has not fallen apart. But this is not a palace guard. This is a knight that has known war. And so the shield, though it is strong and sturdy has met its foes on the battlefield. And he holds them both to you and says,

Sir Curran [Brennan]
Would you like to try it? You are of a frame that you might be able to wear this pauldron.

Lou Wilson
I think Eursulon then pushes up off of his four legs and stands on two.

Sir Curran [Brennan]
Honored friend, what might I call you?

Eursulon [Lou]
[Slowly, quietly] Eursulon.

Sir Curran [Brennan]
Eursulon. Well met.

Eursulon [Lou]
Who is your father?

Sir Curran [Brennan]
Who is my father? My father is Lord Aelthred. The Lord Aelthred of the Holly. The Bear of Brockvale.

Eursulon [Lou]
Your father is a bear? Oh, my father is a bear.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
He looks at you and says,

Sir Curran [Brennan]
Well met. Then perhaps in some way we are brothers, you and I.

Lou Wilson
Eursulon, I think in hearing that word looks at Curran, and in that moment, they are brothers. And I think Eursulon is going to hug him. It's like a head first, like nuzzle. It's like head into chest and then arms slowly around.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Curran responds immediately. Responds in the moment, to cover you with his armored arms and hold you in this way. And I think this is the moment where Curran realizes you are a child.

Sir Curran [Brennan]
Well met, brother. Little one, I feel that I should say that our fathers are indeed great. And I feel that your father may not only be a bear but may in fact be The Bear. In some ways, my father is the bear as well, though he is called the Bear of Brockvale, and—

Eursulon [Lou]
He's not THE Bear.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Not The Bear, no. But, brothers, still we remain. My father earned his name from his ferocity, but more his stalwartness that he held Brockvale for six nights and seven days.

Lou Wilson
That means nothing to Eursulon at all. Just kind of glazes over. But it's just the intention and the like, the, I think Eursulon sees the way in which current communicates this information and the pride that he has in his father from where he gets his name. And I think Eursulon connects to that.

Sir Curran [Brennan]

As you have said, you are the protector of these woods, and I honor you and thank you for allowing my brethren and I, my fellow knights—

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And this is the first time you've heard the word knight.

Sir Curran [Brennan]

—fellow knights, passage through your woods. I hope that we remain in your blessing and with the honor of your safe-keeping.

Eursolon [Lou]

Mhm. You are a—

Sir Curran [Brennan]

A knight.

Lou Wilson

Eursolon cocks his head.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He smiles and says,

Sir Curran [Brennan]

At their best, a knight is a warrior. Which is to say, one who prizes danger for themselves over the thought of danger for another. A knight is one who puts himself in the path of chaos and dismay, of trouble and trial and tribulation, who seeks the doing of great deeds that the sun might shine more brightly on those in need.

Sir Curran [Brennan]

There are some, I should say, brave spirit, who give themselves this name falsely. There are some knights who move through the world believing that their birthright is that.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see, he points to the sword which he left on the side of the road. And he turns his shield around, swiveling it on its point, this kite shield. Swivels it, shows his crest, and he says, but this is the mark of a knight

Lou Wilson

Eursolon nods, and is going to reach down for the shoulder piece and hold it and just clutch it to his chest.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Curran smiles, looks at that and says,

Sir Curran [Brennan]

For the protection of such a noble spirit, a pauldron is a respectable price to pay.

Lou Wilson

In that moment, Eursolon is going to mirror the kneeling of Curran back to him.

[Erika and Aabria hold back quiet sighs and squeals]

Sir Curran [Brennan]

Thank you for safe passage. May you wear the pauldron in peace, and with pride.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You can tell that Curran is venerating you in this moment. He knows that you are—he can feel that you are young, but you can feel him readying to leave. You can feel him, that he has come, that you have—to him, he this is an honoring of the spirits. He has come to the woods and a magical creature has arrived. And there is no shrine here, but he has given an offering, the pauldron of his armor is the offering he gives. And he waits calmly in a way, even though he can tell that you are young and a child, he waits almost for your leave. Unless there is anything left that Eursulon wishes of him, but you can see that he waits for your leave.

Lou Wilson

They kneel there like an awkward amount of time. I think Eursulon doesn't want to leave, but also the idea of going with him, I think, is conflicted. And so I think Eursulon just wants to stay in this moment.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Give me a wisdom check.

Lou Wilson

18. Big daddy rolls over here.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Big daddy rolls over here.

Lou Wilson

For this child!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

This is a moment of actual awareness, in a moment. I think you do, on an 18 realize that there's something—if you were to follow him on the road, he would not want you to follow without telling your father.

Lou Wilson

And I think also it doesn't feel right for, Eursulon doesn't, as much as he doesn't want the moment to end, now that he has the Pauldron and it's his, and the man's not going to be mad that he takes it and he's going got all these words that he, wants understanding, but maybe isn't even sure how he'd go about getting it, is going to just put the mushroom—do we still have this mushroom? Canon, I still got this mushroom?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Yeah.

Lou Wilson

We'll give this man this mushroom.

Eursulon [Lou]

A snack. My snack.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He cradles it in his hands.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Brother Eursulon, you honor me. The blessing of safe passage was gift enough, and I can say only that a debt is owed.

Eursulon [Lou]

I'm going to go home. I gotta go home.

Sir Curran [Brennan]

Blessings, then. And safe speed on your travels.

Lou Wilson

Eursulon is going to go back down. He's going to walk upright carrying the pauldron and just slowly take steps back, not wanting to turn away from Curran.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Curran stands and smiles. He looks at you as you walk away. Before he turns, he calls out to you and says,

Sir Curran [Brennan]

I have your back, brother. I know you guard these woods. My quest takes me elsewhere.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And when he says quest. [The word echoes out] Oh, man, something, look, because that's the thing that was invisible. He HAS a quest. He he can have it. It's a thing you can get your hands on somehow. But he doesn't gesture to something on him that a quest could be.

Sir Curran [Brennan]

But my quest takes me elsewhere. I know that we fight under the same banner after all. To a brighter world, Sir Eursulon.

Lou Wilson

I think that is overwhelming to Eursulon and he's just going to turn around, and put the pauldron in his mouth, and hit all fours and start running back home as fast as he possibly can.

[Violin music begins]

Taylor Moore:

That was Lou Wilson as Eursulon

Erika Ishii as Ame

Aabria Iyengar as Suvi

And Brennan Lee Mulligan as Everything, and Everyone Else.

Worlds Beyond Number is edited, designed, and scored by Taylor Moore at Fortunate Horse.

What you just heard is a prelude to our first adventure, The Wizard, The Witch, and the Wild One.

To follow along with the adventures of our heroes, just keep listening. But, if you'd like to hear the whole story of that one crazy summer when they all first met, and how they met, you can follow young Eursulon, Ame, and Suvi on their Children's Adventure. Six episodes of it, on our Patreon, at Patreon.com/WorldsBeyondNumber. And hey, guess what? It's only 5 Bucks. See ya there.

[Violin fades out]