

Writing Alchemy Episode 26 – Cat’s Paw Ghost Control Adventure 2: The Backyard Mystery

Transcribed by Larcie

[Intro music that is an energetic, electronic song begins playing.]

TOBI: You are listening to Writing Alchemy, stories that step outside the oppressive grind of the everyday world with your host, writer and artist Fay Onyx.

[Music swells and then fades to a background volume.]

FAY: Tabitha the space alien cat, Jake the fake TV psychic, and Lalla the plant talker botanist are the paranormal detectives of Cat’s Paw Ghost Control. Join them as they solve supernatural problems with cat-themed technology, a shady network of contacts, and plant power.

[Music swells and then fades out entirely.]

Hello and welcome to the twenty-sixth episode of Writing Alchemy. I am Fay Onyx and today is the seventh game episode of Unfamiliar Heroes, my new podcast series in which people with disabilities, chronic illnesses, or diverse minds use tabletop role-playing games to create stories together about characters with disabilities, chronic illnesses, or diverse minds. Today’s game is the second adventure of ‘Cat’s Paw Ghost Control.’

This game was played using InSpectres, which is a humorous, paranormal investigation themed role-playing game created by Jared Sorensen. The title, InSpectres, is actually spelled in an unusual manner, as a play on the word ‘specter.’ InSpectres creates stories that are along the lines of what you might expect for a particularly ridiculous *Ghostbusters* movie.

Note that, for this episode, I have decided not to repeat the rules explanations from the previous episode in order to keep the story moving. Okay, so right now, I’m going to take a quick moment to say thank you to all of the people who help make this show possible. To each and every one of my Patreon backers, a huge heartfelt thank you for setting aside some of your money to support Writing Alchemy. Your contributions keep this show going! To all of my guests and participants past, present, and future, thank you for putting in the

time, effort, and commitment to add your unique perspective and experience to this show. I can't do this without you! And to each person who took the time to comment and share this show with others, thank you for helping this project grow. Your participation is creating a community and I am so grateful for that!

Finally I'm going to quickly mention that you can now follow Writing Alchemy on Google+ at plus.google.com/+WritingAlchemy. You can follow Writing Alchemy on Twitter at [writing_alchemy](https://twitter.com/writing_alchemy) and on Facebook at facebook.com/WritingAlchemy. You can visit writingalchemy.net to find all of the Writing Alchemy podcasts, articles, stories, and other content. And if you want to help me keep this podcast going, you can pledge your support on Patreon at patreon.com/writingalchemy.

And now, let's get to the show! "Cat's Paw Ghost Control Adventure 2: The Backyard Mystery."

[Game theme, a "cool downtempo piece with faster driving percussions,"¹ plays.]

FAY: So, my name is Fay Onyx. My pronouns are ze and hir, and I am playing Tabitha the tabby, who is a space alien cat who has a robot that everyone thinks is her owner. She's a YouTube celebrity that announced her presence to all of the Earthlings on YouTube, but everyone thinks she's just a joke and thinks that the owner did it. Her owner is her robot Abigail, who translates for Tabitha. So that's who I'm playing for myself. I am genderqueer, queer, asexual, neurodiverse, physically disabled as well, and I'm also a pagan, which-not a specific denomination or group, but I practice kind of a little spiritual tradition of my own which falls under the pagan umbrella.

BILLIE: Okay, I'm billie. My pronouns are ze and hir. My character is Lalla, and Lalla's pronouns are they and them. We are both Mizrahi, genderqueer plant-talkers.

FAY: Awesome.

BILLIE: Is there anything else you want me to say about me or my character? (laughs)

FAY: Um, that could be fine.

BILLIE: Okay, awesome.

¹ Taken from website's description; see episode post for link.

JOSEPH: My name is Joseph. I'm playing Jacob. [someone begins picking up and playing with dice] I have anxiety-

[Dice rolling noise: dice clatter on a hard surface]

JOSEPH: -and I am ace. Jacob is a TV psychic.

FAY: (laughs) A fake psychic, and we have a real psychic.

BILLIE: A real psychic who pretends not to be. (laughs)

ANNA: MY name's Anna. I'm bi, I'm disabled... and I'm playing the world... (**FAY:** Whoo! Whoot!) these lovely beings are inhabiting.

FAY: Very strange characters. Our characters have just gone on a vacation after the stresses (**BILLIE** sighs) of the grocery store, um, incident. Our first job.

JOSEPH: Wonderful stresses.

FAY: Yeah, Tabitha did not actually suffer any lasting stress from that, but it seems that everyone else, particularly Lalla, was very frazzled by the encounter.

BILLIE: Yeah, I don't think Lalla's gonna be doing a lot of cultural exchange for a while. (laughs) Lalla's gonna stick with being Mizrahi.

ANNA: Okay. So there's one thing I wanna- like before we get into the real rolling dice part, I want to talk about confessionals. So everybody remembers *The Real World*, or like other-

JOSEPH: *Survivor*.

ANNA: *Survivor*. That kind of genre of reality shows (**BILLIE:** Yes) where every character - every *character*? Every person - can go into this booth and just talk about everyone else and say what they feel, and then it gets cut and taken out of context. So as a player, everyone gets one opportunity to have a confessional during the session, and Joe's handing out little coins that you will turn in when you want to stop what's going on and make a confessional. So if you're doing something and it's like going really badly, you can be like "well that- I'm going to call a confessional." And then you just start talking about how well, this thing was going really badly, this ghost was eating our brains, but then Joe... leapt from the rafters and, like, tackled the ghost. He's so good at grappling. That kind of thing. That's a really bad example, but, um...

BILLIE: Like, could I be like, "I call a confessional. I don't think that Tabitha's really from another planet." Would that be a thing, or would it be only like things related to the plot, or...?

FAY: So it could be anything. Sometimes it's like foreshadowing something that's about to happen: "What none of us realized was that blah blah blah." So it can be as if you were talking about it later, it can be-

BILLIE: But then if you do that, does that mean that has to happen? Who decides that?

FAY: So we all get to do it. The thing is that if you do that... um, whatever character you're talking about- There's like a one-word or a one-phrase trait. I guess trait's not the word, but characteristic or- there's some word they use for it. It doesn't really matter. (**BILLIE** laughs) That then gets applied to that character and so that other person, they can choose not to play that. Um, but if they do play it, they're certainly encouraged- the mechanics encourage them to play it. And if they do play it, they earn an extra franchise dice for the group.

ANNA: Yeah, so there's- I'll just read out of the book. The only hard and fast rules for confessionals are these: "Address the other players as if they were watching the confessional on television. Confessionals should always add, never negate or detract from the game. Each player may only give one confessional per game. There may only be one confessional per scene. Each player can only give and receive one characteristic per game." So... (wheezing laugh from **BILLIE**)

JOSEPH: So [in] the example you gave saying that we don't think that Tabitha's actually from another planet, if you decided at some point to play that way, and make a-

FAY: Make her a mutated cat from Earth, for example.

JOSEPH: Or, I was gonna say, use a Contact roll to pretend like you're a normal cat, you would get a bonus because it had been established already that people don't necessarily believe you're a...

FAY: Yeah.

BILLIE: Okay, so basically I would be saying that it would be my opinion, but then the *game* mechanics-

JOSEPH: Is now supported, yeah.

BILLIE: it would contribute to the game mechanics.

FAY: Exactly.

BILLIE: And that's what game mechanics are.

JOSEPH: It's the source of synergy, player synergy.

BILLIE: Okay. I don't totally get it, but I probably will by the end.

ANNA: Yeah, so it's a cool aspect of the game where you can just totally derail everything. They give some examples like, "Well, if I hadn't eaten hot sauce on my burrito at lunch..." and you just like go to the lunch scene. (**BILLIE** laughs) So, um, it's got some cool aspects.

[Game theme begins playing.]

ANNA: It's totally optional.

[Music continues for about half a minute.]

ANNA: Um, okay, so I was thinking since the table conquered a ten-die challenge pretty handily, I was thinking of setting a sort of longer task at about twenty to thirty. Does any...?

FAY: Well, I-

ANNA: Twenty? Twenty?

JOSEPH: Fifteen?

FAY: I was thinking kind of fifteen. (**ANNA:** Okay.) Because my guess is - maybe we're underdoing the bar a little bit - but my guess is that once we get more stress involved from the challenge, (**ANNA:** True.) we will be rolling a lot less.

ANNA: True, true. And your dice were very hot.

FAY: Yeah.

ANNA: Okay, so I will find a different-

BILLIE: Are- hot dice means that we didn't roll super fantastic rolls?

JOSEPH: We rolled early really well.

BILLIE: Oh, I see. Uh huh.

JOSEPH: It gave us [unintelligible]

BILLIE: Oh, like natural advantages in the system.

FAY: Yeah, yeah.

ANNA: Okay. Um, so let me grab some basics. Six-sided dice and I will roll up a client for a fifteen-die challenge. [dice rolling noise] *Brring! Brring! Brring!*

JOSEPH: "Hi, this is Jacob with the Cat's Paw Ghost Control. Resident psychic speaking; how can I help you?"

ANNA: (panting like she is out of breath) "Oh my goodness! I'm- I'm calling- My name's Fred! McCarthy! I am the, the county dog-catcher! I'm calling about this weird sound I heard while I was patrolling, looking for animals."

JOSEPH: "Can you mimic the sound, or uh, possibly describe it?"

ANNA: "Um, let's see, it was kind of howly and kind of growly, but not like a dog, like something else. I know, I know animals. It wasn't an animal."

JOSEPH: "Was it a person playing a practical joke, perhaps?"

(**BILLIE** laughs)

Fay: "Ha, ha, ha."

JOSEPH: "We'll look into it; thank you very much."

Fay: We'll take your money!

JOSEPH: We'll take your money.

ANNA: "Yes, um, okay. I've got a discretionary budget of quite a lot, so please deal with it. It's in a neighborhood not too far from here." And he gives you directions before hanging up.

JOSEPH: Okay, um, I dictate the information we heard to the [others].

BILLIE: Howly-growly.

FAY: (interested tone) Howly-growly. I think it's time for some research.

BILLIE: (high-pitched voice) Research!

ANNA: Yes, so.

FAY: So.

BILLIE: That's not really much to go on.

JOSEPH: No, it's not. (**BILLIE** laughs)

FAY: We could go there physically.

BILLIE: Maybe we should go there first.

FAY: And look around a little bit and then come back and do some research.

JOSEPH: Yeah, that seems like the best opportunity.

BILLIE: I don't know where I would start with "howly-growly."

JOSEPH: I'll actually get started by asking around the neighborhood to see if other people have heard this noise.

FAY: That makes sense.

ANNA: Well, how are you getting there?

JOSEPH: We're getting there with my driver; we'll have him drive us in the limo.

ANNA: Okay, make a Contacts roll.

JOSEPH: Mhm, okay. [dice rolling noise] That'd be a four.

ANNA: Okay. Your driver is still hanging around after your long vacation.

JOSEPH: And he's also probably a little high, so he gets us a little lost.

BILLIE: (laughs) It is Seattle.

JOSEPH: Yeah, it is Seattle, exactly.

FAY: "Oh, I thought the vacation went two more days."

BILLIE: "I just ate some *really* good edibles."

ANNA: Okay. So you get to the neighborhood. It's, let's say, Madrona.

JOSEPH: Madrona? Okay.

BILLIE: Ooh, Madrona.

JOSEPH: I will go around and, uh...

FAY: Knock on doors.

JOSEPH: Knock on doors and specifically, if it's people that look like I could've taken advantage of them back when I was a psychic, I will make sure I give them my card. (**FAY** and **BILLIE** giggle) [dice rolling noise] Try to get back in that game. Uh, I get a six to ask about this creature.

BILLIE: That probably means we'll get some good information.

FAY: Two franchise.

BILLIE: What if I- would it make sense for us to poke around the neighborhood while you're doing that?

ALL: Yeah.

FAY: I'm not sure backup of a cat and- I'm also not sure what Lalla looks like.

BILLIE: I was thinking that Lalla- okay, so Lalla's Mizrahi, and actually Lalla is like a famous Moroccan Jewish woman. I'm thinking she's- they're North African, like me, and then has like black curly hair and olive skin and [they're] a little bit short, shorter than me.

FAY: What sort of clothing does- do they wear?

BILLIE: Yeah, I know, right? I don't know why I can't do it. I'm like totally screwing up the pronouns of my character. (laughs)

FAY: Character pronouns—it takes a while.

BILLIE: I think... wait, what was your question?

FAY: What sort of clothing does Lalla wear?

BILLIE: Oh, so, Lalla's a little bit more butch than me. Like, Lalla wears- Lalla would have worn the male version of lederhosen for sure, not the female version. Probably just like, you know like, sort of down

tones, like shirts and pants, but like as much coverage as is possible given whatever the weather is. So since it's late; Lalla's wearing a scarf and definitely always has a hamsa. Always. Does everybody know what a hamsa is?

FAY: I don't.

ANNA: I have no idea.

BILLIE: Oh, so hamsas- actually, it's kind of shocking that I'm not wearing one right now, 'cause I almost always have them, but you know the things that look like a hand and then they usually have an eye in it? It's a warding symbol from the Middle East.

FAY: Oh, is it like a necklace?

BILLIE: You can wear them as necklaces. I have a bunch that are just around my house because they ward the evil eye and anybody that's trying to do you harm. It's just like a warding symbol, and a lot of Mizrahi Jews wear hamsas constantly, because we're really fucking suspicious people. (breaks into a laugh)

FAY: Right. So, so we have Lalla and we also have this little old woman and a cat, so I kind of think we're not like, the most normal backup?

BILLIE: Probably not.

FAY: Because you probably have the belt of herbs.

BILLIE: Yes, belt of herbs.

JOSEPH: Utility belt. I like it.

FAY: So I'm not thinking we're the most, like, ideal backup.

BILLIE: We're strange.

FAY: We are strange. So we'll just poke around and hopefully not get noticed.

BILLIE: Um, I was thinking Lalla would stick to the bushes and things, and kind of like-

FAY: Talk to the plants?

BILLIE: Yeah. See if there's any good herbs around there, if they get like a vibe off any of the plants, or anything.

ANNA: Okay. Well, let's resolve the-

JOSEPH: So yeah. Jacob will talk to a few of the people. "Yeah, you know, I've heard the noises. They've been kind of coming and going the last couple months, and scratching the back doors and things like that, so." There's been some concern in the neighborhood, it seems.

BILLIE and **FAY:** (interested noises) Mmm.

ANNA: Okay, so Lalla and Tabitha and Abigail are investigating. You two can split up if you want; I just want to figure out who's doing what so I can resolve rolls.

FAY: Well, I think Tabitha is releasing a bucket of cat toys in the middle of the street.

[Sound effect of many bouncing, rolling, and jingling toys hitting the ground and rolling away.]

FAY: And then running around after them. Everyone thinks she's playing with the cat toys, but she's actually checking them to see if they're finding any ghosts.

ANNA: Okay.

FAY: Or paranormal activity.

ANNA: (sing-song voice) Technology roll!

FAY: Okay. So the cat toys rolling around in the neighborhood- [sound of dice falling] (**BILLIE:** Whoa!) Two of my dice run away. [dice rolling noise] Oh my gosh, okay. That's a five though, so that's one franchise dice. And that's a solid success. So... let's see, what's gonna be interesting... I think that the cat toys collect, kind of gather towards- they self-propel roll [themselves] towards this one little alley, a gravel road that's like a shortcut across the block. And there's some overgrowth and backyards along this area, so there's blackberries and stuff. So that's where they're congregating, is this gravel road. And so what everyone now sees is a cat running down a gravel road chasing cat toys.

BILLIE: Which is also a little weird. (all laugh)

JOSEPH: That's typically dog behavior.

ANNA: So, what is Lalla doing?

BILLIE: Yeah, so Lalla's just tooling around, like sniffing things and looking under bushes.

ANNA: Okay, what's their goal?

BILLIE: Lalla pretends to be smart but is actually psychic, so [they're] asking the plants what's going on, which is Lalla's talent.

ANNA: Okay, so then, let's go with... Contacts, because these are unfamiliar plants. (**BILLIE:** Ah.) But you do get your Botany special ability.

BILLIE: [begins shaking dice] Do I just roll these?

ANNA: Yup.

JOSEPH: You should- Yeah.

BILLIE: (small voice) Three. (laughs)

ANNA: Okay.

FAY: Oh no!

BILLIE: Well, maybe we don't get that much information.

FAY: And something interesting happens.

ANNA: For those listening at home, "Not great. GM decides your fate, but you may be given a chance to suggest a single positive, albeit minor, effect." So... the plants don't have a whole lot of information for you. They can't really hear that well.

BILLIE: Totally. They don't have ears.

ANNA: Correct. So they can't hear. There hasn't been a whole lot of visible things. And then one of the people comes out and you're standing in this lovely- like one of those really fancy gardens. It looks gorgeous, but it is very carefully cultivated. (**BILLIE:** Yup, yup.) And so then the gardener comes around the corner while you're standing in- it's not beauty bark, because this is several steps *above* people who would put beauty bark in their [garden] (**BILLIE:** For sure.). This is like pebbled gravel. And [the gardener] starts yelling at you while

you're talking to these lovely gorgeous plants. Make me a... let's see, where's the stress die.

BILLIE: (noises of distress)

FAY: (amused noise) Stressed already.

ANNA: Yes.

BILLIE: Poor Lalla.

FAY: How many franchise dice do we have? Just like three at this point?

ANNA: Three.

FAY: (quietly) Just three.

ANNA: I feel like [that's] decent.

FAY: Not bad for a start.

ANNA: Yeah, so let me flip back to stress. Um, let's go with one die. This has happened before.

BILLIE: Always. (laughter from several people) [dice rolling noise] Six.

ANNA and **FAY:** Oh!

ANNA: Wow.

FAY: Nice.

ANNA: This is great! There's a new aspect that comes into the game when you get a six.

BILLIE: Oh.

ANNA: Which is a cool die.

FAY: Wait, what? (**BILLIE** giggles)

ANNA: So, if you get-

FAY: Oh, right.

BILLIE: The cool, the cool factor.

ANNA: Yes, so you have just played off this situation to an amazing extent.

BILLIE: Probably me and the gardener are totally bonding at this point, 'cause I'm like, "Oh, I noticed you have dadada, but did you know that dadada actually solves this problem? (**FAY:** Yeah.) All you need to do is trim it right here and here." And the gardener's like, "Oh my god, I've been trying to figure that out for years." And we're like hugging each other.

FAY: Awesome. So I recently looked up what cool die do. That is awesome. I love this scene. Um, so you're hugging the gardener.

BILLIE: Yeah, we love each other now.

FAY: So cool dice are actually a little bit of a buffer when you do stress rolls. (**BILLIE:** Ahhh.) So having a single cool dice means that next time you do a stress roll, you can ignore the lowest dice. (**BILLIE:** Cool.) Just the one lowest dice. If you had two cool dice, you could ignore the two lowest dice. (**BILLIE:** Nice.) You can also spend cool die to add one dice to a single roll, but like if they help you with stress rolls, you really have to want to make a roll. Anyway-

BILLIE: Do I need to like, track this?

FAY: I think that would be good, yes.

ANNA: Yes. There is, I do believe, a spot on the-

BILLIE: So what do I write there?

JOSEPH: Just put a one.

BILLIE: Okay, thank you. (laughing)

FAY: Yeah, so that's your-

BILLIE: And then if I get another one I can just do like a-

FAY: Absolutely.

JOSEPH: Two more tallies.

BILLIE: What are these called? Is that what they're called?

JOSEPH: Tally marks, yeah.

BILLIE: One, two, three, four, five-

ANNA: Or tick marks, there's a couple different names.

FAY: Mmm.

BILLIE: Okay, got it. So do I roll?

ANNA: You rolled.

BILLIE: Oh okay, but I don't roll again?

FAY: You succeeded [in] the stress roll. You bonded with the gardener.

BILLIE: Yeah, so if something comes up later, the gardener totally will be willing to help us, for sure.

ANNA: Yeah. Okay, so we've got our gardener on the table, so do you want to keep researching out here, do you want to head back to your headquarters, do you want to go to the library...

BILLIE: Do we know anything about this creature yet?

FAY: Well-

JOSEPH: We do know that it's some kind of creature and not just a fluke that this one guy heard.

BILLIE: Right.

JOSEPH: There's definitely something going on here.

FAY: Well, Tabitha can go to the... center of where all of her cat toys are congregating and they're going like "squeak! Squeak squeak! Squeak squeak! Squeak squeak!" And she'll take her cellphone out of the bag, the rolling bag that Abigail carries for her. And use her rather bizarre opposable thumbs to get a GPS reading on this exact location that we can then use for researching the specific location. (laughs)

ANNA: Okay, so I'm gonna need a technology roll.

FAY: Oh, to get a GPS location, okay. [dice rolling noise] (high-pitched voice) I'm having- I was doing so well earlier, and now I just keep having dice hit the floor. Come back, dice.

FAY: (sadly) Aw.

FAY: Okay, I'll just roll a different dice for now. [dice rolling noise]
That is very five. Okay.

BILLIE: So like five across the board?

FAY: Just almost. So now we have another franchise dice, and that's a success. We have the GPS location of this particular alley. And so we can go back and do research, possibly in the public library, to figure out what's going-

BILLIE: The general library's super cute. The library in Madrona.

FAY: Mmm.

BILLIE: It's very cute, very small.

FAY: Okay. So who's gonna do that particular research?

ANNA: Before you get there, I was noticing that Lalla might have missed that there are plants in this particular GPS thing, this exact locale. Do you want to-

BILLIE: Yeah, I should talk to them.

ANNA: Yeah. Talk to the plants.

BILLIE: Okay, so let's do-

ANNA: Let's do Contacts, since these are brand new-

BILLIE: Oh, Contacts? Okay, uh huh.

ANNA: And then you get your botany die. Or more accurately, plant psychic die.

BILLIE: [begins shaking dice] Totally.

FAY: Plant psychic die.

BILLIE: Secret plant psychic. [dice rolling noise] [brief silence]

JOSEPH: It'll be a five.

BILLIE: Yeah okay, five.

ANNA: So five?

BILLIE: So five.

ANNA: Okay, so you get a franchise die.

JOSEPH: And what do you discover from talking to these plants?

BILLIE: Well I mean, I can tell just by looking at them that they're having a hard time because you know, there's a lot of yellow leaves. (**FAY:** Mhm.) It looks like some things are actually possibly getting into the root structure, and it even looks like they've been dug into. So that's just looking at them, and then talking to them, the plants are traumatized. They don't know what it is, but something has been interfering with them, and they're quite agitated. And the local fay are also very agitated.

FAY: Oh goodness.

BILLIE: Yeah, so this, whatever it is, is powerful, and it's bothering not only the plants and the plant spirits but also the local fae.

ANNA: Okay, well, this seems a lot of- this gives you a pretty good idea, I think, of a direction to go in.

FAY and **JOSEPH:** Mhm.

JOSEPH: Do we want to go and do some research, maybe, at the library?

FAY: Yeah. Research-

BILLIE: So look into local legends?

FAY: Local legends, absolutely. So are different people going to look into different things? We could actually get multiple Academics rolls going.

BILLIE: Yeah.

JOSEPH: I was gonna actually see if I could use my Contacts to talk to some local scholars, maybe.

ANNA: Mmm.

JOSEPH: Find someone in the area who is a bit more of an expert on local history and.

FAY: Awesome, that's great.

ANNA: Hit up a Professor at Udub? [Udub is a nickname for the University of Washington]

JOSEPH: Yeah.

ANNA: Okay, so make me a contacts roll?

JOSEPH: Yeah. [dice rolling noise] That's a six.

FAY: Sweet.

BILLIE: Ohh.

JOSEPH: So I find a guy that is actually doing a rather large study on local paranormal activity, and he's like "Yeah, I've got a whole bunch of information in this area. I've seen that the fae have been irritated, and I've been trying to figure out why. It seems like something's been, some kind of supernatural creature has been using it as a hunting ground."

FAY: (gasp) Uh-oh.

JOSEPH: I mean, the fae are really sensitive to that kind of thing, so.

FAY: Mmkay, supernatural things, so-

BILLIE: I was thinking about making an offering to the thing.

FAY and **ANNA:** Mmm.

BILLIE: So that maybe they might give us more information.

ANNA: Okay, yeah, totally.

FAY and **JOSEPH:** Yeah.

BILLIE: Are you still reporting?

JOSEPH: (stammers) He thinks that [it was] some kind of lycanthrope, not necessarily a wolf. (**BILLIE:** Ah, I was thinking.) Because the wolves are pretty distinctive, and from what I've told him, he thinks the dog catcher would have mistaken it for a wolf. (**FAY:** Mhm). But maybe a lycanthropic cow, or.

(All laugh.)

FAY: A violent lycanthropic cow?

BILLIE: A were-cow?

JOSEPH: A were-cow or possibly even a were-raccoon.

BILLIE: Oh? Ohh?

FAY: Damn, okay. Were-raccoon.

JOSEPH: Because, you know. Those are particularly territorial. It's pretty common knowledge that those are territorial.

ANNA: Mmkay, so Lalla wants to make an offering to the fae.

BILLIE: Yeah, I think that Lalla's gonna go to Cupcake Royale. (All laugh.) Well, because they like sweets.

JOSEPH: Of course, yeah.

BILLIE: So yeah, I was gonna get a cupcake, and you know.

JOSEPH: A brownie for the brownie.

BILLIE: Like a mini-cupcake and then one for themselves. (All laugh.) And go out to, like, away from the area, since the fae have kind of evacuated, to- there's a little park in Madrona. And just go sit in the park and put out the offering.

ANNA: Okay. Um, I'm gonna say that's gonna be Contacts.

BILLIE: Lalla doesn't have [any skill in] contacting even though they're in academics.

ANNA: And probably not your Botany die, 'cause-

BILLIE: Right. What does that have to do with plants.

ANNA: Right. (**BILLIE** laughs) So let's see what happens.

BILLIE: [begins shaking dice] (whispering) Two dice. Two dice. Come on. (blows air through mouth) [dice rolling noise] Three.

ANNA: Three.

FAY: Ooh.

BILLIE: So I've annoyed them, I think.

FAY: They were like, "Your cupcake is bigger than the one you gave us. We noticed that." (**BILLIE** laughs)

ANNA: Yeah.

FAY: (having fit of laughter) "I was getting a fae-sized one!"

ANNA: The cupcake disappears, but-

BILLIE: That's pretty much it.

ANNA: That's pretty much it. You notice that your cupcake wrapper is getting- you set it down on the bench next to you to throw away because there's no convenient garbage cans, and it's getting tugged, gradually. Like every time you turn around, it's further away from you.

BILLIE: And they might even be like, trying to steal the shit off my belt, too.

FAY: (cackles harder)

ANNA: I don't think they'd be doing that because they know that's special.

BILLIE: Yeah, that's a very good point.

ANNA: So, um, yeah. They're just- your cupcake was bigger.

BILLIE: And they're like, "Thanks for the cupcake. Bye!"

FAY: So I have an idea for a technology thing that Tabitha is doing to, um, try to track down what's going on. She's using the GPS location, and she's actually going to look at, like, a super zoomed-in version of the world map and try to use her tech skills to get access to a very current version of the satellite map of the area. Looking for other damaged plant areas. (**BILLIE:** Mmm.) See if there's a trail or something. [dice rolling noise]

BILLIE: A trail of destruction from the were-raccoon?

FAY: Uh, yes.

JOSEPH: Possibly a were-cow.

BILLIE: Or what if the were-raccoon's really attacking... cats?

FAY: (sucks in air) Yeah, this could be dangerous for Tabitha. So that is a six, so that means we get another two franchise dice. By my count, we're up to nine.

BILLIE: Yeah, Lalla always has the trouble, man. (laughs)

FAY: Lalla seems to have a little bit of complicated luck going on.

BILLIE: Yeah, yeah, it does seem that way, doesn't it. So what are we going to do?

FAY: So Tabitha does get a good version of a satellite image of this area, and it seems that one particular backyard is really overgrown. (**BILLIE:** Ooh.) [It] was adjacent to this area of plants. And [there are] more areas of damaged plants in this backyard. There's like a shed, and there seems to be a trail between where this patch of damaged plants is to the entrance of that large shed building in that backyard.

BILLIE and **JOSEPH:** Ooh.

BILLIE: (laughing) We might have to go in the scary shed.

FAY: We might have to go in the scary shed. We'll find out if it's just a shed.

JOSEPH: As it seems.

FAY: Perhaps.

[Podcast announcements music, a calm electronic track, comes in.]

FAY: If you are enjoying today's show, please help me keep it going by heading over to my Patreon page at [www dot P A T R E O N dot com slash Writing Alchemy](http://www.donatepatreon.com/Alchemy) and pledging a monthly donation. Even a dollar a month is a meaningful contribution that helps me keep doing this. These pledges pay for things like audio equipment, web hosting services, and acquiring all of the interesting gaming systems we will be playing in this series. It is also my hope to grow my Patreon funding to the point where I can afford to increase accessibility with things like episode transcriptions.

I believe that art is an important source of community sustenance in these challenging times. It also gives us a place to learn, grow, and create new ways of doing things. However, in the larger culture, intersectionally marginalized artists are under valued and under paid. It is hard for us to have the resources to keep doing this important

work. That is why your Patreon pledges are so important. They help me pay my costs and support myself as an artist.

I know that not everyone can afford a dollar a month and there are non-monetary ways that all of you can support this show. The biggest is sharing the show with your friends and telling them how much you enjoy it. You can also help out by rating and reviewing Writing Alchemy on iTunes and Stitcher. Each five star review helps new people find this show.

And to all of my Patreon backers, guests, participants, and community members: Thank you! Your support makes this show possible!

[Music swells and then fades.]

ANNA: Okay, so you have some sort of lycanthrope in a shed. So, it may be a cow. (FAY breaks into laughter) It may be a raccoon. Do you guys feel comfortable with figuring out how you're going to deal with that-

FAY: Yeah, I think we need to gear up and go in.

BILLIE: I think we might need to hit the hideout.

JOSEPH: Yeah, let's kind of go back and do some research. See if we can find some appropriate plants, maybe some wolfbane [sic].

BILLIE: Totally, yeah. Although would wolfbane work on a-

FAY: (fascinated whisper) That's the question.

JOSEPH: That's the only thing I know to deal with lycanthropes.

ANNA: Well, you could make a[n] Academics check to research.

BILLIE: I should do that.

ANNA: Yeah, talk to the wolfbane. See if it-

FAY: Yeah.

BILLIE: So four or-

ANNA: Five.

BILLIE: Oh, five, okay.

JOSEPH: Five because you're, yeah.

BILLIE: [dice rolling noise] Six!

ANNA: Nice.

BILLIE: I got two sixes. Phew! Now Lalla's in their element. (laughs)

ANNA: Nice! So...

BILLIE: So the answer is kind of, but it has to be combined with other herbs depending on the nature of the werebeast.

FAY: Okay.

BILLIE: So wolfsbane is *one* of the ingredients, but we have to determine what kind of beast it is to make sure that we're combining the correct combination of things.

FAY: So does that mean you just have to take the wolfsbane plus a bunch of other herbs and you have to mix it on the fly?

BILLIE: Probably.

FAY: Ooh.

BILLIE: So yes, so Lalla has like a fold-up mortar and pestle that pops open (**FAY:** Nice) so that they can make different kinds of potions on the fly and things. It all flattens up and goes into one of the pouches, but then when it opens up, it's all hard and usable. So we'll bring that and a bunch of herbs.

FAY: Okay.

ANNA: Yeah.

FAY: So in we- into the breach, I guess we'll take another bucket of those cat toys (**BILLIE:** For sure.) to collect them up and, of course, some of the cans of the ghost traps and ghost collector cans. Though how well they're going to work on a lycanthrope...

BILLIE: Did- did Jake get any more information? Can Jake make some calls for us?

JOSEPH: I was actually gonna have Jake give a call to some of his old television buddies that do other kinds of hustles, like the guy that- one

of the other paranormal investigators on a TV show. See if he's got some silver bullets or silver weapons laying around

FAY: Oh, nice. (**BILLIE** laughs) So our very unathletic party is going to have silver weapons. This will be entertaining.

ANNA: Um, you're trying- you're on parole.

FAY: (gasps)

JOSEPH: I am on parole.

ANNA: You're trying to obtain weapons.

JOSEPH: Yes, I am. (laughs)

ANNA: Okay. Um, let's call for a stress test because (**JOSEPH:** absolutely) you are not a violent criminal, which you said multiple times at your parole hearing.

JOSEPH: Yup.

(**FAY** and **BILLIE** laugh)

ANNA: Let's go with a two-die stress roll.

JOSEPH: [dice rolling noise] Oh, one.

OTHERS: (long "Oh"/"Ooh" noises)

BILLIE: That goes bad. Uh-oh.

FAY: That's very bad. That's very bad.

BILLIE: Are you gonna have to go to jail?

ANNA: No, he's just stressed out about this.

BILLIE: (laughs) Oh, I see.

ANNA: This is the checking to make sure he's calm and collected on his calling to get-

FAY: So, a one-die stress roll is-

ANNA: [Losing] your cool.

FAY: -a total meltdown. So he doesn't have any cool, but if he had some, he would lose it. (**JOSEPH:** Mhm.) And lose a number of skill die equal to the number of stress die rolled.

JOSEPH: I'm gonna say that's going to come out of contacts because that's what I'm trying to do (**BILLIE:** Totally.) that caused the stress.

FAY: Yeah, yeah, oh dear.

BILLIE: Sorry, buddy.

JOSEPH: I'm still gonna try the roll, and can I get the additional die from it being a TV compatriot?

ANNA: Yes.

JOSEPH: Alright. [begins shaking dice] So here we go with my three dice, opposed to five. [dice rolling noise] And we have a six!

FAY: (whispered scream) Yes!

BILLIE: So even though you're having a personal meltdown...

JOSEPH: Yeah, I'm a little freaked out by the prospect of needing to be rolling around with a weapon. (**BILLIE:** Yeah.) But he's able to get us a couple machetes that have had silver poured over 'em and [been] resharpened.

FAY: Okay.

BILLIE: That'll be good for cutting back some of those overgrown herbs and herb plants in the garden.

JOSEPH: And then one or two .22 revolvers, a little practice (**BILLIE:** Oh, shit.) guns with silver rounds.

BILLIE: Maaan.

ANNA: Can anyone use a gun, or are you just going to be brandishing them at the were-cow? Or were-raccoon.

JOSEPH: Brandishing them at the were-creature.

FAY: Okay.

BILLIE: (high-pitched voice) Go into the cat food can or else. (all laughing)

JOSEPH: A cat with lederhosen and a gun.

BILLIE: A were-creature, though, by nature is physical and not just spiritual, right?

FAY: That is poten-

BILLIE: Can they go in the can?

FAY: Good question. (**BILLIE** laughs) Good question.

BILLIE: 'Cause I would think that only, you know, ephemeral things could actually shrink into the can.

FAY: So I guess the question is we don't know-

BILLIE: How do we neutralize it?

FAY: Whatit'sgonna take, yeah. This is a tough one.

JOSEPH: Yeah.

FAY: So I mean if it's cursed or something, we can maybe remove its curse. We'll find out.

ANNA: Okay, so are- you're taking the...

JOSEPH: Yeah, the silver weapons.

FAY: (giggles) Silver weaponry. That's awesome, that's awesome.

ANNA: The silver weapons, the stoned...

JOSEPH: Driver.

ANNA: Stoned driver, okay.

JOSEPH: (laughing) So we have a driver under the influence while we're all armed to the teeth.

BILLIE: Can Lalla take this to talk about being super stressed out about all these different elements? Would that be-

FAY: You can have a confessional, absolutely.

OTHERS: Yeah.

BILLIE: Because Lalla's felling kind of overwhelmed.

FAY: Yeah, this is a great moment.

BILLIE: Can I talk about it as Lalla?

OTHERS: Yeah.

BILLIE: So... (sighs) Oyoyoi! It's like, we've got a parolee getting weapons. We have a stoned driver. We have the fey that are completely terrified and making themselves scarce. They won't talk to me, and the plants are just like *trrrrembling*. I feel like this is a trap. I feel like we're going into a trap. I feel like this is a trap. I think that you're gonna end up back in prison, (quiet chuckles from FAY and JOSEPH) I'm gonna die, and the android is gonna fritz out. That's what I think. That's what I think is gonna happen. [bangs fist on table] I think it's a trap.

FAY: Okay.

BILLIE: So I'm just going to pray. *Inshallah*.

FAY: (quietly) Oh, Lalla. (**BILLIE** starts laughing)

ANNA: Okay, so. (laughter dies down)

ANNA: So there's a trap element, with the confessional, that's...

FAY: So we'll figure out how that works out.

ANNA: Mmkay.

BILLIE: Are you guys mad at me, or-

JOSEPH: No.

FAY: No, that's fine.

BILLIE: I'm like, (scratchy voice) "It's a trap!"

FAY: Yeah, no, apparently it's- we're going to find this out. So I'm guessing we go around in the neighborhood, and this house is for sale. (**ANNA:** Mmm.) And so it's an empty house.

[Supernatural action track, mystical and somber in a way this is a bit eerie and suspenseful, with percussion and synths, begins playing softly.]

FAY: So we kind of just take advantage of that. And we go in...
(**BILLIE** giggles) So what exactly are we doing?

BILLIE: It's dark.

FAY: Are we doing this during the day or night?

JOSEPH: We're doing it at night, because you always do this at night.

BILLIE: Because it's scarier.

FAY: Okay, it's a scare.

JOSEPH: It's like, atmosphere, yeah.

FAY: So it's night, which, you know- Tabitha can see pretty good in the dark, so she's cool. We're going in. We probably have the limo parked in front of the house as if we're viewing the house. And so maybe there's a little side gate that lets us in, and we're going in, and we're officially viewing the house. (all laughing)

BILLIE: In the middle of the night.

FAY: (high-pitched voice) In the middle of the night.

BILLIE: With a weird cat.

FAY: With a weird cat. And so there's the, uh, overgrown backyard and the shack.

ANNA: Okay, I want everybody to make a two-die stress roll. Because you are going through- there's a lot of things-

JOSEPH: [dice rolling noise] Ooh.

ANNA: -going on here that are stressful.

BILLIE: Oh no, is that a one?

FAY: That is a one.

ANNA: So let's go around here. We'll start with Jacob.

JOSEPH: Jacob got a three.

ANNA: Okay.

JOSEPH: Which is stressed. I lose a die from an appropriate skill, and I'm gonna say he's getting really jittery, like he's having a hard time holding himself steady, so that's going to be athletics going down by one.

ANNA: Mmkay, Lalla.

BILLIE: Lalla got a five. Now that Lalla has like, unburdened themselves, they are-

JOSEPH: Did you remember to roll one less die?

ANNA: No, you-

JOSEPH: Normally you ignore the lowest. That's right, that's right.

ANNA: So was six your highest?

BILLIE: Nah, I got five and five.

ANNA and **JOSEPH:** Oh. Okay.

FAY: Well, that works.

BILLIE: So five.

ANNA: Nice.

BILLIE: So I'm thinking Lalla, like, did the breathing exercises and got everything off their chest and was like, "Okay, I'm ready now. I'm good."

ANNA: Okay, Tabitha.

FAY: Yeah, so Tabitha's having a meltdown. So I think that this whole area smells of some sort of animal that she's never smelled before, and it is freaking her out. And I think I'm gonna- since it's a two dice stress roll, I'm going to take her academics from two to zero. (soft whistle) Because I think she's having a really hard time thinking right now. She is really, like, she's cowering behind everyone, she wants to run away, this smells really weird here. It does not smell okay.

BILLIE: (quietly) Sorry, Tabitha.

ANNA: So we've got [you] proceeding through this overgrown yard to this scary shed.

BILLIE: Lalla's in the front. (all laugh)

ANNA: Okay! So what are you gonna do when you get to the shed?

BILLIE: I mean, open it and go straight in.

FAY: (laughs)

ANNA: Make me an Athletics roll.

BILLIE: Oh, shit. (bout of laughter)

FAY: You can always use the membership if you need it.

ANNA: Yeah, don't forget you all have access to, I think, four dice.

[Music fades out.]

ANNA: You can add-

FAY: Any number of those you want.

BILLIE: Oh, see, I don't get this. I want to see somebody else do it so that I know what it is, but I rolled six.

ANNA: Oh.

FAY: Well, that works.

BILLIE: (laughs) So I'm good.

FAY: You would be-

JOSEPH: So you throw open the door to the shed; what happens?

BILLIE: Oh my god. I have to say what happens?

FAY: Yeah.

BILLIE: Um, well first of all, it does smell.

[Supernatural action track resumes.]

BILLIE: And now that I have the door open, the smell is really, really strong. Luckily, Lalla is used to dealing with really weird-smelling plants and stuff, so Lalla's like "Whatever" and goes in. And you hear all these scuttling noises, and it smells really, really strong, like an

animal but also a weird, sharp herbal smell. And you hear these weird noises, like:

BILLIE: (makes zombie-like guttural groans alternating with scuttling noises: *mgrualuala tsktsktsktsk uguralrrgla tsktsktsktsk*) Just like that.

ANNA: (drawn-out) Ohhh.

BILLIE: And it's like totally dark; I can't see anything.

FAY: Oh, oh great. (**BILLIE** giggles) Tabitha could see if she weren't busy cowering behind you. (**BILLIE:** Yeah, Tabitha.) Her tail is puffed.

JOSEPH: Um, I'm going to attempt to flip on my flashlight to get it to work. (**ANNA:** Okay.) This weird flashlight that our cat rigged for us.

FAY and **BILLIE:** (laugh)

ANNA: Okay, technology roll.

JOSEPH: Alright. [dice rolling noise] I'm taking a six.

BILLIE: Yeah!

FAY: Nice.

JOSEPH: I flick it on just as I hear one of the skittering [noises]. And it pops on, and there's this roughly four-and-a-half-foot-tall, hunched-over man with huge dark circles around his eyes. Looks kind of raccoon-like, almost.

ANNA: Okay.

JOSEPH: And he's- "What- what are you doing in my shed?" I tell him, "We're here looking for the source of the disturbance in the area. Is there anything you know about that?"

ANNA: Make me a stress roll.

JOSEPH: How many dice?

ANNA: Uh, I'm going to say one. [die rolling noise] This is a raccoon man.

JOSEPH and **ANNA:** Three.

JOSEPH: I lose another one. Let's go ahead and put that in Technology because flipping on that light is what startled me.

FAY: Are we all freaked out by this raccoon man?

ANNA: Um...

BILLIE: (laugh) No. I'm good now.

ANNA: Actually, yeah. You can ignore the one-die stress rolls, essentially. Like, you can roll the dice, but-

FAY: It's an automatic success for you.

ANNA: Yeah.

BILLIE: Oh, because of my cool points?

FAY: Because you have a cool point, yeah.

ANNA: So Tabitha, or Fay, should roll-

FAY: Too.

ANNA: Or not too [sounds like two], as well.

BILLIE: Also.

FAY: I will roll a single dice. Oh, it's another one.

BILLIE: Oh my god, poor Tabitha.

FAY: This raccoon man is not okay.

BILLIE: Can I give Tabitha any herbs to help anxiety? Yeah, of course I can, I've always got catnip with me when I'm working with Tabitha.

ANNA: Sure, why not?

FAY: You can attempt to do that.

BILLIE: Do I do a roll for that?

ANNA: Yeah, I'd say roll your botany roll. So like, the Academics plus-

[Music fades out.]

BILLIE: Oh, okay. [dice rolling noise] Five.

ANNA: Okay. I'm not going to give you- like, since you succeeded, I'm not going to give you any franchise dice, but-

FAY: Yeah, because it was to help me.

BILLIE: But you're feeling maybe a little better?

ANNA: Yeah.

FAY: You've doused Tabitha in catnip and she's feeling a little bit better.

BILLIE: Yeah, and the catnip is also mixed with a little-

JOSEPH: Seventeen. [probably referring to the total number of franchise dice that have been accumulated so far]

BILLIE: -of the pheromone stuff that makes cats feel-

FAY: Okay, so she could actually function a little bit. Okay. Thank you, thank you.

ANNA: Yeah.

BILLIE: Afwan. Means you're welcome. (giggles)

ANNA: Um okay, so we've got the raccoon man. (**BILLIE** giggles) You've figured out- what are you gonna do now?

BILLIE: Good question.

ANNA: You have a raccoon man.

BILLIE: I feel torn now. Because I was kind of thinking of it as an enemy, but now that it's a stressed out guy, I'm like, "Aw, I kind of feel bad for him." Like Lalla feels bad for him.

JOSEPH: I just want to kind of convince him. Like, he's stressed out the fey in the area and he should maybe find a less nature-y area to live in if he's gonna...

FAY: Well I mean, there must be something wrong with him, though. Because would fey inherently be stressed out by a lycanthrope?

JOSEPH: They're pretty unnatural, so I would think so.

FAY: Maybe he just needs help with something.

BILLIE: Yeah, I wonder if we could help him heal. (**FAY:** Yeah.) Or could we help him get- is this reversible?

ANNA: I don't know.

FAY: Well, I don't know, maybe. Let's find out.

BILLIE: Maybe we should find out, because if we can help him reverse it- you talk to him.

JOSEPH: Alright, yeah, we'll talk to him about- try and calmly-

BILLIE: Like, how upset is he about his condition?

JOSEPH: Yeah, I'll use some of the skills I had to read people-

BILLIE: (playfully) Does he want to change?

JOSEPH: -as a TV psychic to kind of get a sense from [him], to get lead-ins to talk to him.

BILLIE: Mmm. Use your mentalism?

ANNA: So you're mentalisting-

JOSEPH: I'm mentalisting him, yeah.

ANNA: Mentalisting the raccoon man in the shed, okay.

JOSEPH: [dice rolling noise] The five looks like it's going to be the big one there, and so yeah, I will. He doesn't know much about it. He knows that he was doing one of those urban outreach programs (giggle from someone else) when he was scratched by an absurdly large raccoon. (**FAY:** Okay.) (**ANNA:** Mmm.) And ever since then, he's been kind of teetering back and forth in this transformation that hasn't fully changed yet.

BILLIE: How does he feel about it?

JOSEPH: He's horrified by it. [It's] a lot of stress.

BILLIE: Okay, so if we could cure it, he'd probably be happy.

JOSEPH: Yeah.

BILLIE: I feel curing is better than banishment.

FAY: Mhm, mhm... (repeatedly)

BILLIE: Or like, destroying him.

FAY: Yeah, yeah... (repeatedly)

BILLIE: I feel bad. Lalla's generally nonviolent.

FAY: Yeah, of course.

JOSEPH: I'm a nonviolent criminal.

BILLIE: (cackles) That just happens to have some guns, and- wait, what are they, machetes? He's like, "Hello! We were going to kill you with guns and machetes!"

ANNA: Actually, make me a two-die stress roll. (**JOSEPH:** Oh, yeah.) You've got weapons on you [dice rolling noise] and you're trying to convince a guy that you're harmless.

JOSEPH: Two.

ANNA: Two.

JOSEPH: So that's going to be frazzled. Lose two dice from an appropriate skill or one die from two skills.

BILLIE: Maybe he sees your weapons and gets really upset.

JOSEPH: Uh, Academics and Technology are going down to zero.

ANNA: Oh. (**FAY** laughs) Explain your choice there.

JOSEPH: Well, the Academics: he's having trouble thinking, like he can't recall the limited stuff he's had training in. As far as the Technology is concerned, he's now trying to shy away from reaching for the pistol. (**BILLIE:** Right, yeah. **FAY:** Mhm.) So he's not trying to think about how to, like, maneuver and operate devices.

BILLIE: Alright. We have the wrong machinery now for the job.

JOSEPH: Yeah, we definitely do. And so he's kind of being shy about that and a little stressed about-

BILLIE: Well yeah, because he doesn't want the person to call the cops and then be caught with weapons.

JOSEPH: Yeah, exactly. And plus, I mean, Jacob feels a little bad immediately going to the "Let's just kill the werewolf!"

BILLIE: Yeah.

FAY: Mmm. I kind of feel like the moonlight enters the shed at this moment or something dramatic is about to happen because of the trap. (**JOSEPH:** Oh, yeah.) I think there's a shoe that's about to drop.

BILLIE: Yeah, right, like everything's going really good. We're like, (high-pitched voice) "Let's just cure him; everything will be great."

FAY: Who wants to narrate what's about to happen? 'Cause I feel like this trap thing is just about to happen. There we are. It's all going really well, sort of. We're talking [to] this guy, and then...

ANNA: Well... (**BILLIE** laughs)

[Supernatural action track resumes.]

ANNA: You hear, in the distance, a lowing.

JOSEPH and **BILLIE:** A lowing?

ANNA: Lowing, the lowing of cattle.

[Sound of a cow mooing twice.] (laughter from all)

ANNA: I think that's how you pronounce it. I've never heard anyone actually use it in a sentence, but I've read it plenty of times. [Another moo.] And you hear the feet- the hooves- [The sound of footsteps in dry grass.]

FAY: Hooves.

JOSEPH: Oh no!

BILLIE: A slow, deliberate hoofbeat.

ANNA: Yes.

FAY: Slow, deliberate hooves.

BILLIE: (starts making mooing noises)

JOSEPH: They've got us surrounded!

FAY: We're surrounded! Okay, so like, we look behind ourselves.
[mooring ends] What do we see?

ANNA: Um, well, there is a cow, and would anybody like to make a roll to figure out what kind of cow it is?

FAY: Well, that sounds like Academics.

JOSEPH: Yeah.

FAY: I don't have any Academics.

BILLIE: Do I roll four dice for Academics? (**ANNA:** Yeah.) Every time? Okay. [begins shaking dice]

FAY: Unless you-

BILLIE: I'm just so new at this.

JOSEPH: That's fine.

BILLIE: One, six, two, six.

ANNA: Oh. Wow.

BILLIE: I know exactly what kind of cow it is. It's a were-cow.

FAY: It's a were-cow.

ANNA: It's a were-cow.

BILLIE: It's totally a were-cow. And in fact, we're surrounded by were-cows. [The sound of a herd of cows making insistent mooring sounds begins.] Because actually, the were-raccoon is not the problem in the neighborhood. [Footsteps in the grass begin again.] It's the COWS.

FAY: (agreeing) The were-cows.

BILLIE: They're malevolent. They used the were-raccoon to draw us in because they knew that we could neutralize them.

FAY: We are surrounded by were-cows.

JOSEPH: Malevolent were- (breaks into laughter)

BILLIE: Lowing. (makes mooring noises)

[Footsteps fade out.]

FAY: What do these cows look like? Are they like the classic, TV-style, mostly white with the black spots?

BILLIE: Yeah, like dairy cows but with bangs and red eyes.

FAY: Glowing red eyes.

BILLIE: Yeah.

FAY: Okay. Do they have, like, claws on their hooves?

JOSEPH: No. They're bipedal, though. They do walk around like-

ANNA: Oh, like a *Far Side* cows?

JOSEPH: Like a *Far Side* cows.

FAY: Oh my, okay.

JOSEPH: Which, uh, a little confession here: I'm not afraid of much, but the *Far Side* cows really freak me out. (high-pitched laugh from someone else) Those things are terrifying.

BILLIE: So those are were-dairy-cows.

[The mooing fades out.]

ANNA: Were-Holsteins, okay. So let's- everybody give me...

FAY: Some stress rolls.

ANNA: Some stress rolls. Let's go with two dice.

[Others begin shaking dice.]

FAY: Two? Okay.

BILLIE: So do I just do two dice with my cool point?

ANNA: Yeah, and then you ignore the lower one.

BILLIE: Oh, okay. Thank you.

[dice rolling noises]

FAY: Oh, wow.

JOSEPH: I'm stressed; I lose another die. I'm going to say my Contacts. I'm stuttering now from fright. My childhood social anxiety is kicking back in, (**BILLIE:** aw) and I am not able to articulate, so.

FAY: Okay, yeah. I actually got kind of lucky with that one. It was only a four, so Tabitha is annoyed-

BILLIE: Tabitha's still high from the catnip.

FAY: Yeah, she's still really high from the catnip, and so she's actually, instead of terrified by these were-cows, she's annoyed that it actually was a trap.

BILLIE: Lalla got a three.

ANNA: As the lower one?

BILLIE: Uh huh, as the lower one.

ANNA: Nice.

BILLIE: Yeah.

FAY: So what was the other one?

BILLIE: Oh, the other one was a two, but I ignored that.

FAY: Oh, okay. I see, yeah.

BILLIE: Yeah, right?

FAY: Mhm, yeah, yeah.

JOSEPH: Yup, that's it.

BILLIE: Yeah, so Lalla's like, "This fucking sucks, basically." (laughs)

FAY: Called it!

BILLIE: Oh, and we have to lose a die. Um, let's say Lalla... I think Lalla's going to lose a Contact die, because that's the first thing to go when Lalla gets stressed out.

ANNA: Fair enough. So...

JOSEPH: I think I'm going to use my confessional. (others gasp)

FAY: Okay!

JOSEPH: So there we were. We were completely surrounded by these malevolent, bipedal cows. (others laughing) And Lalla and I were just losing our shit. But...

FAY: Tabitha.

JOSEPH: Tabitha, just cool as a cucumber, unholstered her gun and my gun and was like *Matrix*-ing that crap, and was able to pull us out of the fire.

FAY: (inhales) Okay, so. Tabitha and her-

BILLIE: Tabitha and her bipedal-

FAY: Her opposable thumbs and her athletics of one. I'm going to actually pull in her YouTube celebrity status because this seems like something a YouTube celebrity would know.

BILLIE: Is this Technology too, or no?

ANNA: It is Athletics. If it's a regular, just a...

BILLIE: Oh, right. It's a regular- ah, crap.

ANNA: There is the gym dice.

OTHERS: Yeah.

FAY: You know what, she's gonna hurt tomorrow, but it's worth it. So I'm using two of the Athletics card- gym membership dice, and I'm going to roll. [begins shaking dice] And use her YouTube celebrity status.

JOSEPH: To do something really cool.

FAY: To do something really cool. Um, and we'll see. Her arthritis is going to hurt so much tomorrow. (**BILLIE:** Aw). But this is a life-or-death cat situation [shaking stops] and she is-

BILLIE: You really do have a thing with the dice today, don't you. (laughs)

FAY: Yeah. Well, the first game I was fine. I was not dropping dice underneath the table every other time. [shaking resumes] But this

time, apparently, I am, so I don't know what's up with that. [dice rolling noise] Oh, one six and everything else is terrible. Hooray!

So basically what Tabitha's gonna do is she's going to awkwardly balance on her hind legs because she is a cat, but cats can do that, as my cat proves every day. And she has opposable thumbs, so she is going to pull out the gun. And I think she does have to two-paw the gun, though, because they're not designed for paws. And she runs around with this gun and she shoots at the cows. She's trying to- um, they're malevolent, so I guess she's ready to kill them. So she's shooting at the cows, the were-cows.

BILLIE: With silver bullets.

FAY: Yeah, with these silver bullets and this gun, and like every time, the recoil knocks her flying. (**BILLIE:** Aw.) So the cows are trying to attack her, but because the recoil sends her flying, they're actually having a really hard time hitting her. (laughs)

ANNA: I can see our cat doing that, honestly. (all laugh) And he's about sixteen pounds, so even a tiny gun would send him flying. (**BILLIE:** Definitely.) So you've reached twenty franchise dice with that awesome success (**FAY:** Okay) which does, I think, put you at the mark (**JOSEPH** and **FAY:** Mhm) at least, or half again.

FAY: Yeah. So turns out it was a twenty-dice. We do a lot of research; we have to take that into account.

ANNA: Yeah.

FAY: Okay so, but we have this-

BILLIE: We still have the were-raccoon person now.

FAY: Yeah, so I think there's a little more climax that needs to happen here, story-wise.

BILLIE: I don't think Lalla would be okay just being like, "We solved it. Deuces!" and leaving poor were-

ANNA: Yeah, no, I'm not saying that. I'm just saying that...

JOSEPH: Yeah, we're good enough to get paid.

BILLIE: Alright. At this point it's just our conscience. (laughs)

ANNA: Right, you've handled the... (**FAY:** Mhm.) The were-cows are mooing sadly.

BILLIE: Aw.

FAY: Oh no.

BILLIE: (moos sadly)

ANNA: They're sort of slowly shifting back into human form because they don't seem to be particularly injured by this. The silver bullets seem to be removing their lycanthropy traits, so.

FAY: Okay, okay. So does anyone else have actions that they want to take here?

JOSEPH: Um, I was gonna try to convince him that while the cows are shifting and distracted, we get this were-raccoon guy out of here and have him come back to the base with us.

BILLIE: That's a good idea.

JOSEPH: Especially since he's been exposed to all this supernatural stuff, I mean, he might as well join our franchise and work with us.

FAY: New recruit.

BILLIE: That's what I was kind of thinking, that, you know, by the time we finish curing him, he might as well join us.

JOSEPH: Yeah, and obviously he like- being a were-raccoon probably makes it difficult to get a job, so.

BILLIE: Totally.

FAY: Quite so, quite so. So what's going on with these cows? They're transforming back into humans. Are there, like, people we recognize? Is there something we need to do with these people?

BILLIE: I feel like they did this on purpose, because it was a trap.

FAY: Yeah, this was on purpose. It was a trap. We have to do something more.

BILLIE: So I almost feel like they had to be humans when they planned it.

JOSEPH: Definitely one of them was one of the people that put me on the trail of the raccoon. (**BILLIE** and **FAY:** Mmm.) Because I feel like they're really territorial.

BILLIE: Right, because then they would know where we're gonna be, too. So you recognize one of them.

JOSEPH: Yeah, I recognize one of them for sure.

FAY: So how are we going to try to prevent these were-people, these malevolent were-people, from returning to their evil ways of trapping people and perhaps killing them?

BILLIE: Mooing them, lowing them to death. Do we know that they're not going to turn into were-cows again?

FAY: Mmm...

JOSEPH: Um. We don't know that.

ANNA: Would somebody like to make an Academics roll to... (others laugh)

FAY: The only person with functioning academics?

BILLIE: Am I?

ANNA: Yes.

JOSEPH: I mean, you can use some stuff from the library card if you'd like. [**BILLIE** begins shaking dice]

BILLIE: Oh, sure. I mean, I've got four die.

FAY: That's plenty, yeah. Probably.

BILLIE: I mean, I'd say that and then like kick myself-

FAY: And then you roll like four ones.

BILLIE: -in three seconds. [dice rolling noise] Six.

FAY and **ANNA:** Okay.

BILLIE: So we do know.

ANNA: What do we know?

BILLIE: What we know is that once you hit a were-cow with a silver bullet, then they become regular humans again. But of course, did we hit them all? A, I'm assuming we did. (**FAY:** Yeah.) And B, I mean, I'm just saying, these are bad people. Like, maybe they belong to a weird were-cow cult, or something. (others laugh) Clearly, they tried to trap us, so even though they're not were-beasts anymore, they're a problem.

FAY: Yeah, they're gonna become were-cows again.

JOSEPH: I can always use my Contacts to get ahold of my parole officer and inform him that there's this malevolent group of people in this neighborhood. Drop a dime on them.

FAY: Yeah, so we're gonna have to do a social thing.

BILLIE: Snitches get stitches, man.

FAY: But how do we convince the people that these people are evil?

BILLIE: Evil were-cows? That's going to be tough.

JOSEPH: That is going to be tough.

FAY: That's a tough sell, there, even though it's true.

BILLIE: Especially since none of us right now have great social skills, do we? What's your social at?

JOSEPH: Mine's from four to one.

BILLIE: Yeah, I'm at one.

FAY: I'm at one.

ANNA: There is the guy who hired you, remember, who is a city employee and may have some-

BILLIE: Ah.

JOSEPH: Oh, that's true.

ANNA: If somebody would like to make me a technology roll...

FAY: I can do Technology.

ANNA: To snap a video or photos of the transforming-

FAY and **BILLIE**: (at the exact same time) YouTube!

FAY: YouTube celebrity over here! So you know what we might have to do is kind of record this on the internet and just put it all over YouTube so that they can't do this again.

BILLIE: Were-cow cult exposed!

FAY: (laughing) Were-cow cult exposed.

JOSEPH: Yeah, you take a lot of their power away if you out them like that.

BILLIE: It's true, it's true.

FAY: Yeah, yeah. And it's not super prestigious to be a member of a were-cow cult.

JOSEPH: (laughing) It's frowned upon.

BILLIE: It's generally frowned upon in Madrona. (all laugh)

FAY: And that is a six, so Tabitha manages to grab her cellphone and film these people transforming back from were-cows.

BILLIE: And revealing their whole plot in Scooby-Doo style like, (scratchy voice) "If it wasn't for you crazy kids, then we would have taken this shack for ourselves, for our group!" 'Cause I think that was their original plan. They were, like, gonna get that were-raccoon killed and then take over the shack for their headquarters. "If it wasn't for you meddling kids..." (all laugh)

FAY: "Our were-cow cult would still be growing."

JOSEPH: "We were moving out."

ANNA: Oh god.

(laughter dies down)

FAY: Were-cow cults foiled.

JOSEPH: I need such a vacation.

BILLIE: I want to see the YouTube comments on that.

JOSEPH: "Fake!"

BILLIE: "Fake news."

ANNA: Okay, so you have the dog catcher willing to pay you his entire discretionary budget.

FAY: Nice.

ANNA: Which is twenty franchise dice, so it was a pretty stressful...

FAY: Pretty stressful. So what do people need? I think I need three over here.

JOSEPH: I need seven. (laughter)

FAY: So that's ten.

BILLIE: Wait, I don't understand. How do you know what you need?

JOSEPH: Because of how many points you lost.

BILLIE: Oh, I lost one point.

JOSEPH: So you have one, yeah.

BILLIE: Yeah, the lederhosen was way harder on Lalla than this was.

[Laughter begins and continues throughout dialogue.]

JOSEPH: Yeah, this was ridiculously hard on Jacob.

BILLIE and **FAY:** Poor Jacob.

FAY: Being the [spokesperson] is so stressful.

JOSEPH: Especially when you're on parole.

FAY: And you have social anxiety.

ANNA: You still have a decent amount of cash after taking everybody to a nice mountain retreat.

JOSEPH: I just curl up and cry in the hot tub in the limousine for a week.

BILLIE: That's like the recuperation when you're- whoever's the most traumatized just sits in the hot tub and cries.

FAY: Unless it's Tabitha.

BILLIE: Unless it's Tabitha.

FAY: She does not sit in the hot tub.

BILLIE: Tabitha makes the android get in the hot tub.

JOSEPH: "Get in there, Sparky."

[Pause; laughter dies down.]

FAY: That was wacky.

BILLIE: That was cool. I had a really good time.

FAY: So if everyone has, like, a final thought or favorite moment to share?

JOSEPH: This was always a great game, but this was a really good group to play it with. [Sound of fingers snapping.]

FAY: Awww.

[Silence broken by a high-pitched laugh from **BILLIE**.]

ANNA: This was just really exciting. I haven't been able to play this game in a while, and it's always fun. But this was really low-key, but good energy, and I really like that in a gaming group.

FAY: Yeah, I really liked that everyone just had great ideas of weird, wacky, fun things to take it in. And actually, one of the things I really liked was chatting with everyone over food, which none of you listeners got to hear. We actually got to hear some of the cool background behind the whole lederhosen stuff. (all laugh) Uh, I don't know if you're willing to share that, billie.

BILLIE: It wasn't my lederhosen story. It was your lederhosen story.

FAY: Oh sorry, it was yours? Oh, right. Sorry, Anna.

BILLIE: I have no lederhosen experience.

FAY: Sorry. Totally mixing up people, then.

ANNA: So, um, my grandmother is half-Swiss and really into her Swiss identity. That often gets swallowed up by the rest of the family, but she once picked my aunt up from high school wearing lederhosen. In the seventies. And that's just kind of my grandma.

FAY: That is awesome. Yeah. So I really liked doing that. I also liked playing a cat as a character because it allows for it to be kind of extreme. (quietly) Um, don't you have a favorite thing, billie?

BILLIE: Gosh, I don't know because, you know, everything was totally new, so it was all just like... different. But I had a really good time. It was cool because I based my character partly on me, just so I wouldn't get confused since this is my first game. (**FAY:** Absolutely.) So it's kind of cool, going on and thinking more and more about inhabiting my character. Like that part was really fun, being like, "What would Lalla do?"

FAY: Nice.

BILLIE: It was neat, it was neat. And I named Lalla after a really amazing revolutionary Mizrahi woman who had her head chopped off because she would not convert. (**FAY:** Oh, wow.) And they- she's super famous among Mizrahis because she refused to convert to marry someone, a royal family member. And so they killed her and chopped off her head, and her head is in France now. (laughs)

FAY: Wow, that's... that's quite a...

BILLIE: She was badass. She was like, "No, I don't care. Take my head. I'm not converting."

FAY: What were they trying to convert her to? Christianity?

BILLIE: Islam.

FAY: Islam, okay.

BILLIE: She's from Morocco, I'm like ninety percent sure.

FAY: I wasn't sure because you said her head was in France, so.

BILLIE: Yeah, they took her head, and they put it in France. It's kind of a weird story.

FAY: Okay, yeah.

BILLIE: And I don't have the kind of brain that remembers information very well. I think there's a shrine to her where her head is, but I could be wrong about that.

FAY: Well, that's really cool, sort of. I mean, it's unfortunate that that historical violence-

BILLIE: I mean, Jewish history is sort of full of these stories, like, "Well, her head was cut off, but she was amazing!" (dissolves into laughter)

FAY: Yeah. Okay, so the final thing is, where can people find you all on the internet? So Anna, do you want people to find you on the internet?

ANNA: Um, you can find me at arctowardsthesun.tumblr.com. (spells URL)

BILLIE: My website is billierain.com. (spells URL)

JOSEPH: And you can follow me on Twitter at "ancient blasphemies" @JustEvilEnough. (**BILLIE** giggles)

FAY: (incredulous) Wait, what?

JOSEPH: My Twitter is @JustEvilEnough.

FAY: Wow, okay. Awesome. Well, thank you all so much for doing this. This has been something I've been waiting to do for a long time, and I'm so excited to have gotten a chance to record this.

BILLIE: Thank you.

ANNA: Yeah, thank you.

BILLIE: Thanks for inviting me. I'm really happy you did.

[Game theme plays, then stops.]

FAY: (narration) And that is the end of this episode. Please join us in three weeks on Thursday, December 21st, for the first episode of "The Renegade Starship". This game was played using Lasers and Feelings, a free, one-page game system, which creates science fiction stories that are a lot like campy star trek episodes.

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[Outro, calm electronic track, begins playing.]

FAY: There you can join the discussion and sign up for the mailing list to receive announcements about new podcasts and projects. If you are a person with a disability, chronic illness, or a diverse mind and you would like to participate in an Unfamiliar Heroes game, head over to WritingAlchemy.net and click on the participation link in the sidebar. Future games include recorded audio games and text games which will be published in chapters. Thank you for listening and please join us in three weeks on Thursday, December 21st for the first game episode of "The Renegade Starship"!

[Music continues for about half a minute, then stops.]