Writing Alchemy Episode 30 – Willa and the Rubble Robots

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: Meet Willa the gecko lizardperson rogue in this character introduction episode. Willa is a student at the celebrated Adventurers Academy, and right now she is studying creative problem-solving. Join her for a surreal training exercise involving four hostile robots guarding an orb surrounded by a massive pile of rubble.

[*Music swells and then fades out entirely.]

Hello and welcome to the 30th episode of Writing Alchemy. I am Fay Onyx and today is the eleventh game episode of Unfamiliar Heroes, my new podcast series where I work with players and storytellers to create new representations of disabled, sick, and neurodiverse people using tabletop role-playing games. Today's game is the character introduction episode that I'm calling 'Willa and the Rubble Robots.'

Today's episode is preparation for The Owlbear Reintroduction Program. In it, the players' characters are students at the Adventurers Academy. For their first internship mission, they will be participating in The Owlbear Reintroduction Program, a project that is reestablishing owlbears in wilderness areas where the owlbear populations have been previously wiped out. Of course, this is not as simple as it sounds, because owlbears are large, ferocious, magical predators. Throw in a group of skilled poachers determined to steal owlbear eggs and things are bound to get interesting.

This game was played using Magic Goes Awry, which is a game system that I have created. Borrowing the core mechanic from Lasers & Feelings, Magic Goes Awry is designed to capture the fun of Dungeons and Dragons in a game that is free and accessible to a much wider range of people. I created this game to have little math, fewer things

to keep track of, and more room for creativity, while still having enough options and detail for people to create a diverse range of fantastical characters.

Because character creation is a bit more involved in Magic Goes Awry, I'm doing something a bit different. Rather than have one podcast episode with all of the character creation and no gameplay, I am doing individual introduction episodes for each of the three characters. Each character introduction includes a unique mini-adventure.

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 follow Writing Alchemy on Twitter at @Writing_Alchemy, on Facebook at facebook.com/WritingAlchemy, and on Google+ at plus.google.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: "Willa and the Rubble Robots."

[*Game theme, a bright, mysterious piece of world music featuring flute and percussion, plays.]

ORIANA: Hi, my name is Oriana. My pronoun is "they." I don't think I have specific access needs online. Most of my access needs tend to be physical, but I will definitely let you know if I have any needs during the recording.

FAY: Awesome, and are you comfortable sharing a bit about yourself?

ORIANA: Yeah, so I have a lot of different identity labels. I've been involved in different types of advocacy for a while, too. So I do identify as disabled. I have multiple chronic illnesses, including fibromyalgia

[and] chronic migraines, and I'm allergic to fragrances. And of course, there's a bunch of things that go along with that, but I'm also very conscious of being a very liminal person in the sense of I'm in in-between categories in a lot of things.

FAY: Mmm.

ORIANA: And the way I'm perceived is often very different in different contexts, or what I'm actually experiencing both as a person with disabilities who manages to get along in society and be supported by society in a lot of ways. I have the tremendous privilege of being able to work a job that's fairly accessible to me. I come from an ethnically mixed background, and that's also something that's very contextual. (**FAY**: Mhm.) And a lot of other things like that.

FAY: Absolutely. Yeah, I have to say that I do really identify with that experience of kind of being… or at least, not being perceived in the way that I am experiencing things.

ORIANA: Yeah, yeah.

FAY: Definitely. The majority of my oppressed identities are not apparent visually to the strangers around me, and so that's definitely something that I experience a lot.

ORIANA: I feel like that's also true with queerness, definitely, and also the interaction of, like, queerness and disability.

FAY: Mhm, mhm. Absolutely. So, was there something interesting about yourself that you felt like you would want to share?

ORIANA: Sure. I actually have two things, one of which is identity-related. Which is that I am working on a coloring book that I want to be, in a way, a collaborative art project [for] people of various identitiesbecause the theme is body positivity and disability pride. (**FAY**: Awesome.) So that's the content of the coloring book.

FAY: That is really awesome.

ORIANA: (laugh) I also have two reptiles. I have a snake and a gecko.

FAY: Ooh. That's really cool.

ORIANA: Yeah, and that's going to be really relevant because I might be basing my character off of my gecko.

FAY: That is absolutely awesome. It's also really amusing to me because in the previous- one of the previous games we've recorded, I based my character off my cat. So in the Inspectres game, my character was a space alien cat with the personality of my actual cat.

ORIANA: So great. (giggle)

FAY: She had a humanoid robot, which was actually her translator, so. But my character was a cat.

ORIANA: That is great.

FAY: That is awesome. Well, I think I'll jump in and share a little bit about myself. So my name is Fay Onyx. I use ze and hir pronouns. And (laugh) to reiterate my identities for any new people, I am queer, asexual, genderqueer… I have anxiety, I have a physical disability, I have a back condition. And I'm realizing how many new interesting things I'm going to have to share about myself over the course of this series, but for today I'm going to talk about my love of comics. As someone with anxiety, I think that it's sometimes hard for me to find access to media that is not too intense and overwhelming and too anxiety-provoking, and so I actually really enjoy comics. So I've selected a series of webcomics that are the right intensity for myself that I read regularly, and I also frequently get anthologies, which I also enjoy.

ORIANA: I think we're going to have to compare notes at some point (**FAY**: Ooh.) on good, not too intense comics.

FAY: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. I'd love to do that.

(narration) For those of you who are interested, the combined list of webcomic recommendations has been added to the show notes. We'd love for you to check them out and add your own recommendations.

(dialogue) For now, I think we're going to jump into the actual character creation, so I'm going to start by setting the scene by giving you a little bit of background on the setting.

[*Setting mystery theme, an ambient electronic track, begins playing.]

This game is set in the land of Crossroads, which is a kingdom that exists in a mysterious ring of mist. Trade comes through the ring, but the nature of the mist and what lies beyond it is still uncertain. This is an eclectic high-fantasy setting with significant fairy-tale influences. It is a quirky place of great ecological and cultural diversity, which

contains a pocket of every kind of person, culture, or creature. This means that the characters available are deliberately open-ended, and people are welcome to bring in elements from other genres such as steam-powered airships, clockwork golems, and even magic-powered gunslingers if they want to.

The social structure in Crossroads is fairly organized. So Crossroads has many laws, rules, and regulations, which is actually something that was fairly common in many medieval cultures. These laws cover many aspects of daily life. It's a densely populated kingdom, and that means that all of the resources are very precious, and they're regulated. So hunting, harvesting, [and] gathering all require permits, and that's everything from gathering down branches in the forest to fishing in the sea. Obviously, people will still break laws, especially when there's so many of them, but there are consequences, so this is not the sort of scenario where you can just murder someone and walk away, and everything's fine. Which is something that I've always felt uncomfortable with in many role-playing games, personally.

ORIANA: Seems a bit of the weakness of the story, if you completely strip all the humanity from it.

[*Music fades out.]

FAY: Yeah, yeah. And so the point is that, like, anything that's destructive that happens will potentially have social consequences of some kind. Crossroads is at a transitional early industrialization technology level, where much of the technology and day-to-day lie is still medieval, but there is also a presence of magic-powered technological advances that are also having an impact. So they're most notable in major cities. Things like magical light and heat, magic-powered vehicles, golems, [and] clockwork constructions. But because Crossroads is not an empire, it doesn't have the raw material resources to leap full-force into industrial revolution. So it's kind of in this- it's in a technological revolution, but it's going much more slowly because of that scenario.

Also, because magic is so prone to going wrong even for experienced casters, most permanent magic is done by enchanting small, removable gemstone orbs. These orbs are then incorporated into large objects if that enchantment process went properly. And the orbs are actually in somewhat standardized sizes to make them easier to swap in and out of creations.

The final bit of background that I want to give you is about the Adventuring Academy because the adventure that your character's going to be going on is part of the internship program for the Adventuring Academy. So the Adventuring Academy was founded by Natasha Shen and Kyra Piper, a couple who are famous adventurers from marginalized backgrounds. The used their wealth and fame to create this organization because they wanted to ensure that other marginalized adventurers had the same access to high-quality training equipment and social connections that was previously only possible for privileged adventurers.

Classes teach a diverse range of skills and knowledges that are tailored to each student's unique talents. However, the academy is most famous for its innovative internship program, where students are carefully matched with tasks that are difficult enough to challenge them without overwhelming them. So your character is about to embark on their first internship, which is going to be the main adventure.

ORIANA: Can we take a quick pause and backtrack to the mist thing? (**FAY**: Absolutely.) Can you explain the mist/fog thing again?

[*Setting mystery theme resumes playing.]

FAY: Oh yeah, absolutely. So basically this is a kingdom, and the entire kingdom is surrounded by mist, this kind of ring of mist.

ORIANA: Is it in the sky?

FAY: They don't know. (laugh) (**ORIANA**: Okay.) But trade comes through the mist, so there's a lot of theories. Some people theorize that it's just a magical protection that some ancestors placed on their kingdom to keep it separate from the politics and from risk of invasion from nearby locations. Other people theorize that they're in some sort of alternate plane and that the mist is actually a place where people are able to cross over into many different worlds. There's a lot of theories, but for some reason as of yet undisclosed, no one actually knows what's going on outside there. Yeah, so that's kind of just part of the setting.

[*Music fades out.]

ORIANA: Cool.

FAY: And at this point, I am happy to jump into the actual character creation. So, I think you already have a concept for your character that I'd love to hear about.

ORIANA: So I was imagining what my charcter would be if I were a lizardperson. (**FAY**: Awesome.) But a lizardperson that is maybe a little bit less like a very traditional Dungeons-&-Dragons dragon-like creature with fearsome magical powers and a thick, scaly hide, and more like my precious little gecko, who is extremely squishy.

FAY: Aww.

ORIANA: And kind of round and adorable. So my character is- I'm, at least for now, imagining the name Willa. I think Willa would be a good fit. (**FAY**: Awesome.) And Willa uses she pronouns. And Willa is a lizardperson who's very conscious of the fact that she is not magical or tough or scaly and really wants to prove that she can still be a great adventurer anyways.

FAY: Cool. So the very first thing to decide in character creation is your character's class. Did you have a class in mind for your character?

ORIANA: I was thinking rogue would be a good fit because she's clever and nimble and definitely very cute and charming, but not necessarily the big, tough, strong one.

FAY: Perfect. So the major thing to decide is whether your character's going to be mind-focused or body-focused or even.

ORIANA: It's going to be mind-focused, so like Mind 5, Body 3. (**FAY**: Awesome.) So the way I was thinking about this is that she'd be really focused on mind-type abilities, but she would still have a few physical abilities. Do you think it still makes sense that she's a Mind 5, Body 3?

FAY: (inhales, as if about to speak)

ORIANA: So I was thinking that she would have, like, maybe one or two skills that are [like] a gecko. For example, I'd like her to be good at climbing, which is a body skill.

FAY: Absolutely. I've actually tweaked the number system from the original Lasers & Feelings system to make it so people aren't so terrible at the things they're not great at- or at the stat type that they're not good at. So a mind-focused character can still have some hope of successfully accomplishing body skills that they have. Just so you know, by making it mind-focused, your character's going to have

much more success at mind stuff than she is at body stuff. But if she's going to use her mind, for example, to prepare for body skills or even just doing something you're skilled at, there's a reasonable chance of success. It'll be just much more often partial success.

ORIANA: Okay.

FAY: Okay, so for rogues, basically for every character, they get to choose four abilities off the list for their class. And those abilities are then the things that they're considered experts at. So I know you have had a chance to go through this, so did you have some abilities you were wanting to give her?

ORIANA: So I was imagining that maybe she would be really good at chemistry.

FAY: (excited) Mmm.

ORIANA: And choose to be an alchemist. (**FAY**: Awesome.) And also possibly using that in combination with something like bombardier, where she's making maybe smoke bombs or throwing things that have effects that are chemicals that she has put together.

FAY: Absolutely. That sounds awesome. I was hoping somebody would choose those.

ORIANA: I think they'll be really fun together.

FAY: They are designed to go together. I mean, they don't have to, (laughing) but they are designed to go together.

ORIANA: Yeah, I definitely think they will be fun together.

FAY: Yes, and perfect for also a game that's not necessarily violent is, you know, throwing smoke bombs. Very effective way to say "escape" or do whatever else you need to do. Awesome. (**ORIANA**: Yes.) Did you have two other talents that you were thinking about?

ORIANA: She's definitely charismatic, and if you ever meet a gecko, you will know that this is true. (**FAY**: Oh, interesting.) What she lacks in scaliness, she makes up in adorableness.

FAY: Ooh. That's cool.

ORIANA: I do think maybe there's a little space to figure out what exactly that means and what she might include. Is there leeway to

invent things and stuff like that, and what are sort of the parameters within which I can invent things that still make sense for the game?

FAY: Oh, um, so you mean like invent an alternate ability that you wanna use or… so a lot of things are deliberately left open-ended. So specifically, like, the magic [is what] it's most obvious with. Where it's like, you can do water magic, and here's six options for things you could do to get you started thinking about what that could be, but you could do anything. A lot of abilities are left open that way, so alchemy, for example. I'll actually read this, since we're talking about it.

So it says, "You are skilled at crafting poisons, drugs, explosives, and the antidotes to neutralize them. You have a bag full of basic alchemical items, which include smoke bombs, flasks of grease, bottles of acid, acid neutralizer, flammable liquids, fire suppressants, sleeping drafts, glue, tar bombs, solvent (which dissolves and breaks down things like glue and grease), stink bombs, mild poisons (for example, things that are just enough to sicken someone without actually causing permanent harm), as well as simple antidotes.

You can also craft more advanced alchemical items, including fireworks, animal scents (such as scents designed to lure or repel specific animals), alchemical fire, fire extinguishers, hallucinogens, truth serum, deadly poisons, tricky antitoxins, grenades, and bottled lightning. You own a portable kit for creating alchemical items. The limitation here is that you need both time and alchemical equipment to craft the more elaborate alchemical items."

So these lists of items, feel free to add to them. So if you decide that there's a type of thing your character has - maybe it's something that makes things waterproof.

ORIANA: Or maybe it's something that like is laughing gas that actually makes people laugh.

FAY: Oh! Absolutely, so if you can think of some cool thing your character wants to make, absolutely. And we can just decide, like, is that going to be a simple item or a more complicated item?

ORIANA: Okay.

FAY: And the simple items are designed [so] that, basically, you have however many of them you need. We don't need to count them. And the complicated items are more designed for- because they're so far-

reaching, you do need to make a specific number. And once they're used up, you need to make more.

ORIANA: That sounds sensible.

FAY: Yeah, I try to avoid counting as much as possible. But I didn't want to overly limit alchemy, so that's my compromise. So absolutely like, if you can think of something else that you want your- you know, any time in a thing I say "such as" or "which includes," that means that I am hoping that people will come up with great, awesome things of their own. And it's like intended for people to come up with their own ideas for how to use things. So [did] that answer your question?

ORIANA: Yes, definitely.

FAY: Okay, awesome. So I think you have one more ability to grab off this list.

ORIANA: Yes. I was thinking trap expert.

FAY: Ohh. Awesome.

ORIANA: And possibly there might even be some fun combinations with traps and alchemy, but I haven't quite figured that out yet.

FAY: Oh yes. I definitely, definitely was thinking that as soon as you said trap expert. (laughs) Hmm, such as a trip wire linked to a smoke bomb.

ORIANA: (laughs) Yup.

FAY: Awesome. Oh, these are great choices. This is so exciting. Okay. So that is your character's main class abilities. We also have two types of defensive training that your character can have. So at the academy, everyone gets defensive training for… whatever's appropriate for them. You get two types of defensive training. And there's magical defenses, and there's also physical defenses. And each type of defense has multiple options for how your character defends.

ORIANA: Okay so, the way I'm imagining my character, I'm thinking that she's very good at being slippery and wriggly, but she's still very squishy and can't go very fast. (**FAY**: Okay.) So she's definitely good at dodging. (**FAY**: Awesome.) So she can dodge physical attacks. Part of the limitation on that is probably that she's not going to go very far. She's just good at kind of getting out of the way of things.

FAY: Absolutely, and each type of defense has a [built-in] limitation because I think it's important. It's that kind of realism aspect, even though the game is very fantastical, of no one's perfectly defended all of the time. And so dodging, its main limit is you need to be able to move around in order to dodge things. So if your freedom of movement gets too inhibited, you will not be able to dodge effectively. But of course, also, your character will have their own way of doing each of these things. So in your case, your character will not be going very far when she dodges. Okay, do you have an idea for a magical defense that would be good for her?

ORIANA: I was thinking deflection because it seems like it works in very similar ways. I don't actually know what extensive physical gestures are, but I imagine a gecko would be good at them.

FAY: Absolutely. The main thing is that, again, if you are overly constrained- so for example, if you're climbing a rope, and you're trying to deflect a magical attack, and you are also, say, holding an object of importance. So one hand is on the rope. The other hand is holding that important object to you to not drop. You're not actually going to be able to deflect magic attacks at that point. (**ORIANA**: Mhm.) But if you're just standing around, you can do that. So it comes down to what sorts of things your character is going to be doing, and any time that they're in a situation that you can't do these magically protective gestures realistically. (both laugh) Then you would not have this particular type of defense.

ORIANA: Gotcha.

FAY: Okay, so we also have a skills list in addition to your specific training. These are a range of abilities, or rather skills, that your character has. So some of these are knowledges, some of them are social skills, some of them are physical or how perceptive you are. Do you have a sense for what skills you want to give your character? I believe you get six… yeah, six. There are two rogue-specific skills that you can choose in addition to the six.

ORIANA: So I was thinking, together with all this other wriggliness, since she's good at dodging and deflecting, she's also good at escaping. That's one of her rogue skills. (**FAY**: Awesome.) And her other rogue skill is deception. Because she is charismatic, she's good at, you know, convincing people of things. So her rogue skill is deception, and her mind skill is diplomacy. She's a talker, and she will talk and try and talk her way out of any situation. And if it doesn't work, that's when the smoke bombs come out.

FAY: (laughs) Perfect. Okay! So we got deception and diplomacy. She'll talk, she'll tell the truth, she will lie, she will convince you of things. Beautiful.

ORIANA: Have you ever tried arguing with a gecko? It's really hard.

FAY: I have not tried arguing with a gecko.

ORIANA: Okay, then it's just me.

FAY: I have tried conversations with my cats, and, you know, they're pretty good at holding firm, I have to say.

ORIANA: I feel like it's similar.

FAY: (both laugh) It probably is similar. Until you bring out significant bribery, they will hold very firm. Okay, so you get five additional skills.

ORIANA: I think one of them should be insight because being able to assess the feelings and motivations of others is really important to be good at communicating, to being convincing.

FAY: Absolutely. If you don't know what they want, how can you effectively deceive or use the truth on them? (both laugh) Depend-

ORIANA: [unintelligible] That's a pretty cynical way of looking at it, but yes, basically that. (more laughter)

FAY: Reading people is also helpful, important. (**ORIANA**: Yes.) Awesome, so I guess that's four left.

ORIANA: One of them should be survival, which includes things like, I think, tracking, first aid, finding things to survive.

FAY: Pretty much anything you'd learn in a wilderness survival class.

ORIANA: Exactly. But also, I think a character that does spend a lot of time trying to understand people's feelings [and] motivations and trying to convince them - you know, work things out by talking - also definitely has an interest in helping people and wanting to be able to know sort of those basic things in case somebody gets hurt.

FAY: Absolutely, first aid is a really useful skill to have. Cool. What else?

ORIANA: One of them is going to be culture. (**FAY**: Mmkay.) There's definitely a little bit of my own personality coming through there

because I'm a huge language nerd, but I think it also fits well with a character that I'm imagining is very social.

FAY: Yeah, and culture is about history and customs and awareness of different social groups and cultural groups and knowing their languages. So that makes a lot of sense.

ORIANA: So even though this is definitely a mind-focused character, I was also thinking of doing climbing, like I mentioned. But I was wondering if it would make sense for a gecko to use a rope, grappling hook, hammers, and pitons, like is listed for this skill. Would it make more sense for it to just be something that's used without tools? Does that fit in the storyline?

FAY: Yeah, so if you want- the idea is that your character would have basic climbing gear. And your character could have that if they want, but if you want to have, say, specialized- like your body is designed to grab and hold onto things in a climbing way, that's fine too. You don't have to have the tools if you don't need to.

ORIANA: I mean, don't get me wrong. I always want to have rope around, but I do think that the gecko will be using hands and feet before something like a hammer and hooks.

FAY: Oh absolutely, and the basic adventuring kit comes with rope, so everyone gets rope anyway. (**ORIANA**: Mhm.) So I think you have one more?

ORIANA: Yeah, I think that should be crafting. I think it goes well with the trap making, but just in general… we're talking about somebody who likes making things and can create things.

FAY: Absolutely. And crafting does come with crafting tools and materials. (**ORIANA**: Awesome.) Because if people have the skill, they might as well have the things they need for the skill.

ORIANA: Yup.

FAY: …Ah, so special item. So every character who enters their internship is given a magical item by the Adventuring Academy, so your character can choose one of several possible magical adventuring items.

ORIANA: So I was looking at the list. I noticed there's an alchemy kit and four uses of basic alchemical items. Are either of those things that I already have as an alchemist?

FAY: Yeah, so the alchemist ability says that you own a portable kit for creating alchemical items, and so this includes basic equipment and materials. The four uses of advanced alchemical item that some people can choose, that's for people who aren't alchemists who want some of those alchemical items available to their character.

ORIANA: So another thing that I was possibly considering is what if I had a stack of chemistry books that I could consult to learn things about chemistry that I might not already know?

FAY: Interesting. Um… so the basic idea is that those books- three times a day, if you take some time to look in them, they will give you some extra knowledge so that you hold greater success when using your alchemy?

ORIANA: Yes.

FAY: Perfect, that's a great item. Let's put that in, and I think I'll probably put that into the larger list. I think that's a great item.

ORIANA: So one of the things about my character's personality is that because she's terrible at magic, she likes to pretend that you don't need magic and that magic is actually kind of useless. She knows better. (**FAY** laughs) But as much as she can get away with not using magic, she's not going to.

FAY: Okay, okay. And one of the things I just want to mention: once you get a group of characters that have disabilities, I think one thing I've already noticed is that you end up with the game kind of changing in a way, where… it's like the characters do things that are a little more realistic to the real world, such as retreating and researching and coming back when they're prepared. (**ORIANA** laughs) Or things like that.

ORIANA: Or being too proud to use magic.

FAY: Yeah, well… it's like in a super action-focused adventure where characters don't do things like retreat, it'd be hard to use alchemy books necessarily, unless you're doing lots of preparation. One of the things I actually really enjoy about having disabled characters is that they are maybe more inclined to retreat and come back better prepared. There's something that really pleases me about that. And it also makes items like this more useful as well, so.

ORIANA: I think also, as a disabled player of various types of games, I'm super conscious of my body and also of the avatar that I am

playing. Like, how it interacts with the world because of that. (**FAY**: Mmm, yeah.) Like I'm just very conscious of my body and space a lot of the time.

FAY: Mmm, mmm. And so you feel like you're more conscious of that aspect of your character as well. Yeah, yeah. That makes sense.

ORIANA: For sure.

FAY: Yeah, I've definitely noticed on some podcasts that are gaming podcasts where someone's playing a disabled character, it's like if the person playing that disabled character is able-bodied, they completely forget about it. (**ORIANA**: Mhm.) Like, completely out the window. Oh, your character has a bad knee. Oh, I guess that only happens in between sessions, when your character has downtime and his knee hurts, but it doesn't actually affect your-

ORIANA: See also: every TV show and movie that has ever done a terrible job of portraying disabled people. (both laugh)

FAY: Yeah. Okay, so there's some optional finishing touches that we can give to your character, such as a manner or goal for your character.

ORIANA: Yeah, I think I'll definitely be keeping in mind that this is a friendly and adventurous personality. This is somebody who might be considered studious, but really wants to be perceived as adventurous. So, "Yes, I spend all of my time in the library, but I'm just prepping for my big adventure, and one day I'm totally going to be famous, really." So- [unintelligible]

FAY: I kind of feel like-

ORIANA: Definitely projecting a little bit of myself in there, but also definitely a goal of proving one's self and like, "This is my chance to really show what I've got!"

FAY: Um, I kind of feel like your goal is almost like being adventurous and proving yourself, and your manner is studious. (**ORIANA**: Yes.) OH, I love that. That is beautiful. Okay, so… physical appearance? So we have a gecko.

[Sound of typing on a keyboard.]

ORIANA: Yeah, so for a lizardperson, I'm smaller than your average lizardperson, which probably makes me the size of, like, a short-to-

average human. But I'm very conscious of the fact that for a lizardperson, I am short. (**FAY**: Oh my.) Um, so I also have really big eyes and a really round belly, and I'm sort of a yellow-green, but my colors get darker and brighter when I'm excited.

FAY: Oh, that's adorable. That's super awesome. Does your character not have scales or are they just, like, more realistic scales that most reptiles have?

ORIANA: No, they do have scales, but they're very small and rounded and they're fairly soft, yeah. So they definitely don't form like on a snake, for example, where you have overlapping scales. (**FAY**: Mmm.) They're not overlapping like that.

FAY: I see. Well, even with snakes, their skin is so soft. And it's skin, you know, with scales on it, but you touch it, and it's not like a huge mass of armor.

ORIANA: Yes.

FAY: Yeah. Okay, so I guess the final questions are just a little bit about your character's disability. And anything you want to share about your character's background, ideas you have there.

ORIANA: Okay, so… I also wanted to ask you a little bit about this, I guess. Because I'm imagining that some of the things that are part of my character's disability are things that aren't necessarily… physical impairments so much as they are [**FAY**: Sure.] social impairments.

FAY: Oh, that's fine.

ORIANA: So that they're things that are very natural for this type of creature. So it would be considered healthy within, for example, another gecko lizardperson community. (**FAY**: Mmm.) But might be considered an impairment in a community [with] very mixed species and cultures.

FAY: Yeah, well, you know, that's a really interesting point because I personally think it's really exciting to explore the social aspects of disability and how what's considered a disability is really contextual. And I think even with certain types of neurodiversity we see that some cultures are much more harsh on, like, sensitivity and shyness versus others. And I would expect that the experiences of different types of neurodiversity such as anxiety might be, at the very least, very different in those cultures. I don't actually know. But I would imagine that a culture more open to sensitivity would be more open to anxiety

being more normalized, depending on the details of the culture. So yeah, if you want to basically have this be natural for a lizardperson, but in a mixed-species context, it becomes, socially, a disability, that's fine.

ORIANA: Okay, so one of the things that's inspiring this is also my personal experience. (**FAY**: Sure.) So I have a running joke that I am a lizardperson both because some people are cat people in the sense that they have cats, and I'm a lizard person in the sense that I have a lizard. But also, it's sort of a fun metaphor for how I interact with the world in many ways.

FAY: Mhm.

ORIANA: For example, I'm very sensitive to cold, and I think that a lizardperson would also be very sensitive to cold. (**FAY**: Absolutely.) Yeah, so that would be one factor. Like the colder it gets, the less active Willa is going to be. She's going to really struggle to be functional if she's not in a comfortable temperature range, and because she's a gecko, that also includes if it gets too hot. So if it gets too hot, and this, again, (laughs) is also very much an analogy for my experience with fibromyalgia, she just becomes a lot less functional. She's going to get also really unhappy and stressed out if she's notat a fairly comfortable temperature. (**FAY**: Awesome.) Which is like regular room temperature.

FAY: Absolutely. And so warm clothing can only do so much.

ORIANA: Yeah, so she also needs to be, like, around warm things.

FAY: But she doesn't like magic. That's unfortunate. (breaks into laughter)

ORIANA: Yeah, I feel like the magic thing is also a little bit of a pride thing. (**FAY**: Yeah, yeah.) So like, I think she has this really great gecko family, so Willa was raised by some very loving gecko parents in a very mixed community. And so she got a lot of support from her family, but also sometimes struggled to fit in because her needs were different from a lot of her friends' needs. Which is one of the things that, you know, helped her become very studious and also learn to fit in with different communities. But it's definitely something that she feels she has to work at a lot, and so the things she's not good at, she tends to sort of shun a little bit out of pride.

FAY: 'Cause she's so used to that struggle to fit in.

ORIANA: Yeah.

FAY: Mmm. Awesome. That's some great stuff.

ORIANA: Um, also, another thing is going to be physical sensitivity. Like, we were just talking about the scales. She's not physically armored; her skin is very sensitive. And again, this is sort of a similar experience to having fibromyalgia for me, like being physically very sensitive to just about everything.

FAY: Absolutely, absolutely. Cool. That is great.

ORIANA: I'm really excited to be able to play fibromyalgia as a social construct. Because as somebody who spends a lot of time thinking about disability in terms of, like, a social model versus a medical model - where medical model has to do with how we clinically define things, and social model has to do [with] how we socially perceive things - it's really fun for me to have a space to be like, "Yes. This is an illness that very literally affects my body and that I want to treat with medication, but also it's very much a social thing because it has so much to do with how I interact with the world and how I interact with other people."

FAY: Yeah, yeah. Well, that's certainly- as someone with anxiety, it's really obvious how socially constructed that is. Because it's like, if society was more forgiving and kind, I would be doing better, you know. But it is so many things, like what are the social structures in place? How forgiving are they? What expectations do they make?

And the fact that our society has such rigid expectations for people, and not everything is started with a dialogue about… you know, what are people's strengths, and what are things we need to do to help people be included? That's a social thing that makes things, for example, less accessible for a lot of neurodiverse people. And I'm excited to bring this for physical experiences of disability as well.

ORIANA: Yeah, so I think one other thing for Willa and also for me is that… geckos are diurnal. We have a daytime and a nighttime. And people with fibromyalgia, we also have a very distinct daytime and nighttime. So Willa is going to have a really hard time if it gets really late and she doesn't get to sleep at night. (**FAY**: Okay.) She, she needs her rest.

FAY: Yeah, absolutely. Think of multiple different kinds of chronic illness, sleep is super important.

[*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 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.]

FAY: So, the training sequence I'm gonna run you through is basically a little vignette from your character's training at the Adventuring Academy. This was specifically training that happened in Kyra Piper's Creative Problem-Solving class. So Kyra Piper is actually one of the founders of the academy, and she is a[n] orc woman who is a bard. She's got green skin [and] bright blue hair, and she has a hover wheelchair that she uses. So she actually regularly instructs classes. And so this is one of her classes, and this is basically a class that takes place in a large, magical arena that's in the center of the academy.

Basically, the standard rules for doing things [are] that if someone's attacking you or something, like an animal or a person that's part of a challenge, you're allowed to incapacitate them if needed, but you're

not allowed to, like, significantly harm them. And that's part of the training. The specific goal of this challenge is to find and retrieve a fist-sized orb. This is a radiant orb, and it emits both a soft white light and a gentle warmth. The warmth can be felt at the same distance that light from the radiant crystal can be seen. The scenario that you're in is [that] your character enters the arena from the south, and the arena is filled with a mountain of rubble.

[*Ominous robot music, a dark, unnerving track with a repeated theme featuring contrabass bassoon, oboe, and violins, begins playing softly.]

[A] clear roadway runs through the middle of this mountain with walls of rubble looming on either side of the road. Halfway down its length, two humanoid robots with spears and shields stand guard. At the far end of the arena, the road ends in a small clearing, and in that clearing is a three foot tall pedestal with the orb on top of it. And that pedestal is guarded by two more humanoid robots with spears and shields. So that is what your character perceives when she enters the arena.

ORIANA: So Willa walks into the arena and looks around. She really doesn't like the look of those robots. They look exceptionally pointy with their spears.

FAY: They do look very pointy. Yeah, so what you're noticing is that there's a lot of rubble around you. And a lot of it's, like, bricks and… stone pieces, but there's also bits of wood and metal in that rubble… Um, and it does look like it would be a bit tricky and treacherous to cross over. But you do notice that it is humped in a large way so it is a kind of mountain shape, with this road carved through the middle of it. Through the middle of this kind of channel through it, you see those robots guarding the road halfway down.

ORIANA: So I guess Willa looks at them and looks at the big pile of rubble. (**FAY**: Mhm.) It doesn't look super safe.But she definitely is wondering whether or not it wouldn't be safer to try and climb the rubble and get around the robots that are halfway down the road.

FAY: That is definitely an option. You can either try it, or you can use one of your knowledges to try to gain some more information. And again, you can use any skill you want. You just are only an expert at the ones that your character is trained in. So if you want to use perception to see what else is going on, or if you want to use your dexterity to climb over these things…

ORIANA: Okay, I'll try- first I'll use my dext- my perception, because Willa's definitely a "look first, then leap" type. (**FAY**: Absolutely.) So she's going to look around and see what else she can see with perception.

FAY: Okay. Yeah, so if you have anything that is preparing you to perceive well, let me know. Otherwise, you have a single dice for perception.

ORIANA: Then I have one die.

[Die rolling noise: die clatters on a hard surface]

ORIANA: And I rolled a six.

FAY: So that means that under these particular circumstances, you're not perceiving anything additional to what you've already seen.

ORIANA: Okay. In that case, I'm gonna go for it. I'm a pretty good climber.

FAY: Okay, climb-

ORIANA: So Willa's, you know, looking at some of these bits of wood and stuff. Not super enthused, but sharp wood - probably safer than sharp shears.

FAY: Absolutely. So you've got the climbing skill, and this is definitely something you can use to get over this particular mountain of rubble.

[*Music fades out.]

FAY: So you are an expert at that. Are you gonna take any preparatory actions, or you just- you're just going for it?

ORIANA: Um...

FAY: Would you like some more information about what sort of things would be preparation?

ORIANA: Yeah, what's preparation?

FAY: You're a crafter, so you can make yourself a bit of gear to make climbing easier or safer or to test what areas are safe to climb on. So if you do a simple task, you won't even need to roll for it, but that will assist you in climbing somehow. Or you could make something really intricate, and then you'd have to do a roll to see how effective that

thing is. Either of those would be, for example, preparation actions that you could do to help yourself climb.

ORIANA: Okay. When I get to the other side, there's still space between me and the next set of robots, right? If I made it over?

FAY: Yeah, yeah. Yes. You could either stay on the mountain, or there's a clearing around it. It's a small clearing, but there's still- you're not up against them.

ORIANA: Okay. So I am… going to try and prepare a little. So Willa looks around and notices that some of this rubble looks really, pretty unstable, so she decides to make a testing rod. (**FAY**: Awesome.) Which means she finds a large stick in the rubble and decides to use it to test the ground in front of her as she attempts to climb the giant pile.

FAY: Excellent, so that is a very simple, straightforward thing to do. There's a lot of various things in this rubble. You can definitely go around until you find yourself a large stick, and the robots that are halfway down the road don't seem to care at all about you walking around in this zone and pulling out a big stick. So yeah, you got a big stick.

[*Ominous robot music resumes playing.]

ORIANA: Alright. I'm gonna try and climb with the aid of the stick.

FAY: Awesome. So with the aid of your testing stick, you now have three dice you can roll for climbing.

ORIANA: [begins shaking dice] Alright. I'm going for it. [dice rolling noise] I got a two, a two, and a three.

FAY: Ooh, cool. Two successes. That is a solid success, so that means that you have no problem. You may be going a little slow, but with the aid of your testing stick, you do not step in any areas that are drastically unstable. So you get yourself- you go around the outside of the mountain hump. The robots in the middle cannot see you. And you make it all the way up to the edge of this little clearing around the two robots with spears that are guarding the orb.

ORIANA: Phew. That's a relief. (both laugh) So Willa eyes the robots a little bit hesitantly, but, I mean - alright, they're pointy, but they don't look *that* bad. Maybe I should just say hi.

FAY: Sure. So what's she doing specifically?

ORIANA: She waves at the robots and says, "Hello, there."

FAY: They completely ignore you.

ORIANA: Alright.

FAY: So if you want, you can use an insight roll. Figure out why they might be ignoring you.

ORIANA: I think I'm going to do that, so Willa takes a moment to try and figure out if she can tell what these robots are feeling.

FAY: Absolutely, so you are an expert at that-

ORIANA: Is that two dice?

FAY: Yes, that would be two dice.

ORIANA: [dice rolling noise] Alright, got a six and a two.

FAY: Okay, so that's a partial success. Um…

ORIANA: To be fair, they are robots.

FAY: They are robots. (**ORIANA** laughs) So you are not aware of what they might be feeling. You are aware that robots often have specific instructions and are sometimes- sometimes they're forbidden from taking actions outside of their instructions. Sometimes they are just very simplistic and only follow their basic instructions.

[*Music fades out.]

FAY: So [it] could be a number of things. Maybe they just don't like people. Maybe they're focused on their task. Maybe they're not allowed to talk to you. But you think it might have something to do with how they've been programmed.

ORIANA: Hmm. If they are programmed to guard things, maybe that's something that Willa can use. She's a pretty crafty gecko. She's thinking that if this is the only thing she really knows about them, she should probably take advantage of it. (**FAY**: Sure.) So she's going to try and be diplomatic because she's usually pretty good at that. Maybe these robots- their instructions are probably to guard. Maybe I can convince them to guard something else?

FAY: So what's she gonna do?

ORIANA: She's gonna roll for diplomacy and try and be like, "Robots! Guard this pile over there!"

FAY: Okay, so that means that she's then choosing to walk up to the robots? Or is she staying at a distance and shouting at them?

ORIANA: She's gonna edge a little bit closer, but still outside of the range of the spears, just in case they don't take too kindly to getting new orders.

FAY: Sure, so-

ORIANA: And, and she's going to make an effort to be really diplomatic in a robot sense. So she's going to try and phrase it the way she thinks the robots might be programmed if they're voice-activated robots.

FAY: Absolutely, okay.

ORIANA: So, "Robot, new input? Uh, guard rubble heap." (both laugh)

FAY: Okay! So roll that diplomacy. So that's-

ORIANA: So it's two dice again?

FAY: Two dice for being an expert.

ORIANA: [dice rolling noise] Okay, another six and another two. (laughs)

FAY: So one of the robots says…

[*Robot voice: Fay's voice, distorted with an echo effect. Used for all robot speech.]

FAY: "New input. Guard rubble heap." And it walks over to guard the rubble heap. The other robot says, "New input. Guarding rubble heap. Now guarding both orb and rubble heap."

ORIANA: Oh no! Now I'm trapped. (both laugh)

FAY: So one of them is guarding the rubble heap, and it's walking towards you. And it says, "No one is permitted to touch the rubble heap. You are in violation of the rules. Step away from the rubble heap."

ORIANA: Willa quickly moves towards the clearing, trying to skirt the robot awkwardly with a sort of sideways shuffle to avoid being on the rubble heap. (**FAY** breaks into laughter) But also trying to avoid getting too close to the robot.

FAY: Well, so one of them, the one that's now just guarding the rubble heap, [is] totally fine; it's guarding the rubble heap. And the one that is guarding both is- let's say it has moved in between the orb and the rubble heap. So it's in the middle of the clearing, and it is turning its head back and forth between the orb and the rubble heap. But it's not otherwise reacting to you. So one down. (laughs)

ORIANA: Okay, so these robots look like they were programmed by different people, but I'm not sure that's gonna help me right now. I do think I can probably do anything that doesn't seem directly threatening to them (**FAY**: Quite possible.) right here. "So now that I'm off the rubble heap, at least I have some space to work," Willa thinks to herself as she's trying to figure out how much closer she can get to the orb. Sort of eyeing it and eyeing the robot, and eyeing it and eyeing the robot, back and forth.

FAY: Absolutely. So is she slowly edging closer to it?

ORIANA: Yeah, but still staying, like, a decent distance away. She can't really reach it yet.

FAY: The robot's-

ORIANA: But she's closer to the orb now than she was to the rubble heap before.

FAY: Okay, yeah, so the robot is fine so far.

ORIANA:I think Willa's going to check out what she's got in her crafting kit. Maybe she can come up with some sort of way to distract the robot. (**FAY**: Yeah.) I think she still has to get out of here, right?

FAY: Um, yes. She does need to leave with the orb.

ORIANA: (exhales) Okay, and now the, the rubble heap is being guarded (**FAY** laughs) by the robots. (**FAY**: That's true.) So that makes it even harder to get out.

FAY: It does make it harder to get out. You don't know what the programming of the robots in the middle is, but I will say that the path is not part of the rubble heap, so.

ORIANA: That's true.

FAY: You may also, if you wanted to- just to kind of give you some sense for the scope of what your character can do- as a crafter, not having access to the rubble heap means some less materials. But you could potentially try to craft yourself a way out of this that does not involve the rubble heap.

ORIANA: This is… this might end up being what Willa goes for. (both laugh) But for the moment, she's trying to figure out how to get this orb in the first place.

FAY: Yes, yes. How to get that orb.

ORIANA: Are there, like, specific things in my crafting kit?

FAY: It's totally left open-ended for you to discover whatever you need. So basically-

ORIANA: Okay, so reasonably speaking, I could have some modeling clay?

FAY: Yeah, absolutely.

ORIANA: That I could wrap around a rock to make it look like that orb?

FAY: Um, the orb is glowing. (**ORIANA**: Oh.) But you could absolutely use modeling clay and make something the same shape and size.

ORIANA: Okay, I'm gonna try and craft a model of the orb. (**FAY**: Mhm.) Maybe I could use something alchemical to make it a little shinier. Definitely have some glitter somewhere- uh, that might not work. Maybe some of the shine potion. I know I promised to give it to my friend for their hair, for the party, but I'm sure she'll understand. (**FAY** laughs) They have really nice hair, but also, I know that she wants me to pass this class, so we'll- we'll figure something out. I'll come up with something different for them.

FAY: Absolutely.

ORIANA: Alright.

FAY: So, because of that clever use of being, let's say, prepared with a plausible explanation for why you would have a potion that makes something glow, I'll give you an extra dice for this. (laughs)

ORIANA: Okay, so that's three dice?

FAY: Yeah, absolutely. Because I feel like making things glow is probably something I should have added to the general simple things that alchemists have. But I imagine that's probably- we'll say that for now it's a specialty item that your character absolutely has in their bag right now.

ORIANA: Sometimes it's also just fun to, like, think up reasons I would have different things. (**FAY**: Absolutely.) And I feel like having a genderflux friend that I'm making cosmetics for is totally the best possible reason. (laughs)

FAY: That is a great reason.

ORIANA: Alright, I'm going to roll. [dice rolling noise] And I got a five, a three, and a six.

FAY: Oh no.

ORIANA: (inhales) Oh no.

FAY: Yeah, okay. So-

ORIANA: Did I melt it?

FAY: Yeah, so I think… so crafting is a body skill, and so none of those count as successes, unfortunately. I'm gonna say that, in fact, you do successfully craft a simulation orb, but you were so focused on crafting this that you didn't notice that the robot that's guarding both has come up behind you. And as soon as you finish making it, it grabs this new fake orb you just made and says, "You are not permitted to touch the orb." And it takes the new fake orb and it puts it on the pedestal next to the real orb.

ORIANA: Wow.

FAY: You are now going to have a little bit of a hard time telling which is which. (laughs) You did a really good job with that.

ORIANA: I keep making this task harder and harder for myself.

FAY: I will mention that the real orb does also radiate warmth, so if you get really close, you can tell which is which. But it won't be completely instantaneous as grabbing the one glowing object. But that

is the downside with failing. (**ORIANA** laughs) Um, but it has advanced the plot quite entertainingly.

ORIANA: Um, yeah, because I have now literally doubled the difficulty of this task. Possibly by two factors.

FAY: Well, potentially. It depends on what you're doing, so.

ORIANA: Well, I hope my professor's impressed.

FAY: You made a very good, very good simulation there.

ORIANA: Great, now I have to find out how to get the real orb *and* get out of here *and* fix up a new hair potion before tonight. (**FAY** sighs) Alright, I've gotta get a move on. (**FAY**: Yup.) Willa decides to try coming up with (laughs) a new alchemical solution.

FAY: Sure, so what are you crafting?

ORIANA: Willa's going for her old tried-and-true smoke bombs. Everything else that she's doing creatively seems to be going wrong, so. She's gonna try and do something-

FAY: In fact, you already have smoke bombs in your bag if you would like to use those.

ORIANA: Okay, okay. In that case, she's going to build a trap.

FAY: Okay, cool. If you want to use your trap expert ability, that means, in addition to being a crafter, you'll get an additional dice for being a trap expert when creating this trap.

ORIANA: Okay, so that's three dice?

FAY: So you'll get to roll three dice to create your trap.

ORIANA: Awesome. So Willa the gecko has noticed that the robot moves in pretty straight lines, and so she's going to try and build a trap in between the robot and the orbs.

FAY: Absolutely.

ORIANA: Okay, so I'm going to roll. [dice rolling noise] And I got a one, a four, and a six.

FAY: Beautiful, so that's a partial success, um… or the most basic form of success. But that is a success. So what exactly is your trap supposed to do?

ORIANA: So the trap is actually going to use [a] magnet that will activate when the robot rolls over it. (**FAY**: Sure.) And prevent the robot from moving past that point at all.

FAY: Okay, sure. Absolutely. So you get your magnets trap set up. And, um, it's all set up to the best of your knowledge. I know what's gonna happen when it goes off. What do you do now?

ORIANA: So… Willa looks at the trap, looks at the robot, hopes that it really will work, and edges around behind the orbs.

FAY: Great. And she's getting-

ORIANA: From there, she's trying to, like, look over the orbs at the robot to see if it's reacted to her presence behind the orbs.

FAY: Okay. Is she within reaching distance of the orbs?

ORIANA: Yes, she just hasn't touched them yet. Just looking at them and at the robot.

FAY: Okay, so the robot does start moving over to you, and it says, "You will step away from the orbs." And it does go over the trap, and the trap goes off.

[*Magnet trap sound: clang followed by overlapping rattling, clunking, and loud metallic banging]

FAY: Um, and you slightly underestimated the power of this robot when crafting this trap. So the trap goes off, the magnets are clinging onto the robot, and what has happened is that they have not completely stopped the robot from moving. Instead, they are simply drastically slowing it down. So it is coming towards you, repeating, "You will step away from the orbs." And it is brandishing its spear and shield, but it is coming towards you slowly. It is significantly hampered by the trap that is attached to it and dragging along the ground behind it.

ORIANA: Okay, I- Willa grabs a smoke bomb and throws it in between the robot and the orbs.

FAY: Beautiful, okay.

ORIANA: Do I roll for that?

FAY: Yes, so you're going to roll to see how effective this particular smoke bomb is. Um…

ORIANA: Am I using bombardier or alchemy or both?

FAY: That is a really good question. I'm gonna actually have you roll both. Bombardier for where the smoke bomb goes, and alchemist for how effectively it goes off.

ORIANA: Okay.

FAY: So bombardier first. You're an expert at that, so you get to roll two dice, and since it's throwing, I'm going to say that's a physical skill.

ORIANA: [dice rolling noise] I have a three and a four.

FAY: Okay. So… I'm going to have you now roll your alchemist skill, so this is your mind, this is the smoke bomb going off. [dice rolling noise] So we'll see how effectively this goes off.

ORIANA: I get a one and a three.

FAY: Beautiful, okay. So this smoke bomb is going to go off very well. I'm gonna say that you did not throw it where you intended to throw it, so… what's going to happen is that the bomb is actually going to bounce off the robot into the rubble heap. So you didn't throw it anywhere near where you wanted it, but it is going off beautifully. There is a huge cloud of smoke covering the area of the rubble heap.

[*Smoke bomb sound.]

ORIANA: Does it cover the robot?

FAY: It covers the one robot that's guarding the rubble heap. It does not cover the robot you intended it to cover, but there's a beautiful cloud of smoke covering the rubble heap now and the robot that's guarding that.

ORIANA: Great.

FAY: So that's a mixed blessing there, I think, but.

ORIANA: I guess I back up really hastily so that I am no longer within an arm's reach of the orbs because there's still a robot approaching me.

FAY: Okay, the robot slowly approaches. So it's actually going pretty slow, so it's taking it a little while to get around to you. But once you back up, it stops moving. So it's still farther away from the orbs than you are, but it has gone back to guard mode, where it is looking at the rubble heap, which it can no longer see. And it is looking at the orbs and back, so.

ORIANA: I'm going to attempt to distract the robot with my skills. I'm gonnabe like- "Oh no! Somebody must have stolen the rubble heap!" I shout at the robot. (laughs)

FAY: Ohh. Yes, so that's going to be a deception roll, I think.

ORIANA: Yup, yup. So that's two dice?

FAY: I'm gonna give you a third because that rubble heap is covered in smoke. It cannot see the rubble heap.

ORIANA: (laughs) [dice rolling noise] I get a one, a three, and a four.

FAY: Okay, so that is actually three successes. That is a great success. Um, so this robot is very convinced someone has stolen this rubble heap. And it is going to turn around, and it's going to lumber towards the rubble heap. And it's a bit slow, but if you're watching it, (**ORIANA** coughs) it actually bumps into the other robot that is also guarding the rubble heap, which you can kind of vaguely see in the smoke. But also you hear the clanging of the two robots, which are now both enmeshed in this magnet trap. (**ORIANA** laughs)

[*Another magnet trap sound]

FAY: So-

ORIANA: Such a good trap.

FAY: (laughs) Yeah! Yeah, it is. They're now both enmeshed in it, and I think they're actually talking to each other, telling each other to let go. "You will step away. You will step away." And they're like going back and forth at each other. (**ORIANA**: Awesome.) So you have successfully incapacitated two robots.

ORIANA: I hope I still get points for that, even if it was by accident.

FAY: Hey, maybe you intended to do that.

ORIANA: Yeah, I'm hoping my professor doesn't realize that.

FAY: Well, the professor for this class is Kyra Piper, and she's actually a pretty practical, down-to-earth person who's known for saying things like, "Always have a way out." "If you can't do something directly, do it indirectly." And "when in doubt, retreat." And "play to your strengths." So she's, you know, she's an experienced adventurer herself.

ORIANA: See, that's why Willa wants to impress her so badly. (laughs) So yeah, yeah, Willa really wants to do well here. (**FAY**: Right?) But now, she finally has the orbs almost within [her] grasp, so she moves up to take the orbs and figure out which one's warmer.

FAY: Yup, no problem. You have all the time you need. You can easily take [those] few moments you need to figure out, "this is the warm one." You pick it up; you're good to go.

ORIANA: Can she put it in her backpack?

FAY: Absolutely. Yeah.

ORIANA: Okay, she's gonna do that so she has her hands free.

FAY: Yup, absolutely. So all she has to do is hopefully just her last moment of retreating. So there's a road, there's a rubble heap, there's a lot of smoke.

ORIANA: But there's now also four robots on the road, right?

FAY: Um, the robots guarding the rubble heap are not directly in the road.

ORIANA: Okay.

FAY: Or you could try to get out of the arena (laughs) some other way.

ORIANA: So first, Willa's gonna look around. She's not necessarily great at perception, but she's gonna try and see if there's any other way to escape because she is pretty good at escaping.

FAY: Sure. That's one dice roll.

ORIANA: [dice rolling noise] Two.

FAY: Okay, that's a success there. So there's nothing immediately super helpful. The arena has some walls on the sides - to contain the things inside it - that are pretty steep and smooth, but it's open air

above you, so you could get out there. There's certainly like, you know, there's a lot of options here. There's a little bit of rubble against the walls that is not part of the heap but it's just the stuff surrounding the pedestal, and there's the kind of smooth sides of the wall going up. Oh, I was imagining that the arena is, like, kind of dug into the ground, so it's maybe eight feet up to ground level.

ORIANA: Okay. I mean, a smooth wall presents some challenges, but she is a pretty good climber, and that doesn't seem super high, so. (**FAY**: Nope.) Willa's gonna try and do her little gecko thing and climb up that back wall.

FAY: Absolutely, and I will also mention that surrounding the arena, there's like- the arena's actually inside the middle of the main building of the academy. The entire inside of this building is this big hole where the arena is, and there's ramps that go up all three floors that spiral up around the building. And there's also a bunch of seating up there, so the rest of the class is up there, observing, and your teacher's up there. And there's also a ring in the wall of the arena. There's periodically- there's little orbs, which are the magic of the arena that help it produce safe training scenarios. (laughs) Should you want to use any of that.

ORIANA: Okay, yeah. Looking at that wall, Willa feels somewhat confident that she can make it up.

FAY: Absolutely. So you are an expert at climbing, so that is a two dice if you're just using your expertise.

ORIANA: Okay, she's gonna go for it. [dice rolling noise]

FAY: Awesome.

ORIANA: There's a one and a two.

FAY: Oh my gosh! Super successful. Yeah, so up that wall she goes. She's got her little grippy feet and grippy hands, and they do everything she needs. And she's out, successful. (**ORIANA**: Yay.) And everyone congratulates you.

ORIANA: (high-pitched voice) Willa's so pleased! (laughs)

FAY: Yay!

ORIANA: And that means she saved a bunch of time, which means she can still make the hair potion (**FAY** laughs) she promised to Xyla.

FAY: Yup. Gonna have to sit down and craft that a little bit. Fortunately, alchemy rolls with mind.

ORIANA: Yes. (both laugh) So- and that was really fun. (**FAY**: Yay!) I liked the robots.

FAY: Yay, I was just- for all my scenarios, I'm just like, can I think of a way for every character class to use their unique cool stuff to solve this? And this was perfect because it was social stuff – you can talk to the robots - and also you can do rogue-y things, and you can build things. And I'm like, "You have all of the things for this one!" (laughs)

ORIANA: Yup, yup.

FAY: Awesome, super cool. Well, at that point, I'm super glad you enjoyed it. I'm really looking forward to the whole owlbear aspect of the game where everyone's together, and the final thing is, where can people find you on the internet?

ORIANA: Okay, well, I can tell you about my coloring book page. And thank you so much for including this, by the way. It didn't even occur to me, but it's awesome.

FAY: Yeah, if you don't mind my grandstanding for just a moment, I think it's really important for artists to support each other and help each other get their stuff out into the world because that is so hard. And it is like, privileged people have a much easier time with that than intersectionally marginalized artists. And I just really think it's super important for us to support each other in that way.

ORIANA: Yes, absolutely, and I've been telling my coworkers about your podcast.

FAY: (gasp) Thank you so much!

ORIANA: (laughs) And how excited I am to be a part of this project and sending them the links so that they can listen.

FAY: Aww. Thank you so much.

ORIANA: Yeah. I would also say that the coloring book is a hobby, so it is not something that I'm going to be doing a ton of marketing for. And I'm very much trying to treat it as a collaborative art project with other people, where people can give me ideas, and I will draw them, and they can color them. It's called "Our Space: A Coloring Book." And

if you look on Facebook and type in "our space, colon, a coloring book," you should be able to find the public page for that.

FAY: Awesome. Well, thank you so much for doing this. I'm sort of sorry that it went way over, outside of the fact that it was awesome. And so thank you for being my first person and being really flexible and open about all of that. And yeah, thank you. It's been exciting.

ORIANA: Thank you so much for hosting this. I had an awesome time. I totally don't mind that we went over, and I really appreciate you adjusting to my schedule. Because I know that I had a bunch of stuff going on, so I really appreciate how accessible you make this whole process.

[*Game theme plays.]

FAY: (narration) And that is the end of this episode. Please join us in three weeks on Thursday, March 22nd for the introduction episode for Tarragon Songsteel the orc bard and their underwater maze mini-adventure.

If you like what you hear and want to hear more, be sure to follow Writing Alchemy on Twitter at @Writing_Alchemy, on Facebook at facebook.com/WritingAlchemy, and on Google+ at plus.google.com/+WritingAlchemy, where the first plus is the word and the second is the symbol. You can subscribe to this podcast on Stitcher, iTunes, or by using its RSS feed. If you want to help me keep this podcast going, pledge your support on Patreon at patreon.com/writingalchemy. And be sure to visit writingalchemy.net to find all of the Writing Alchemy podcasts, articles, stories, and other content.

[*Outro, a 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, March 22nd for "Tarragon Songsteel and the Underwater Maze"!

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