Writing Alchemy Episode 32 – D'Zân and the Sky Sharks

Transcribed by Larcie

Note: '*' is used to indicate music and sound effects that were added to the recording.

[*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 D'Zân [Note: pronounced duh-zahn] the weredragon druid in this character introduction episode. D'Zân is a student at the celebrated Adventurers Academy, and right now xe is studying creative problem-solving. Join xem for a surreal training exercise where xe swims through a sky full of sharks.

[*Music swells and then fades out entirely.]

FAY: Hello and welcome to the 32nd episode of Writing Alchemy. I am Fay Onyx and today is the thirteenth 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 "D'Zân and the Sky Sharks."

Today's episode is the final preparation episode for The Owlbear Reintroduction Program game. 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. Magic Goes Awry is designed to capture the fun of Dungeons and Dragons in a free game that is accessible to a wider range of people. I created it to have little math, fewer things to keep track of, and more room for creativity, while still

having enough options for people to create a diverse range of fantastical characters.

Before we get started I have a few announcements. Over the past few weeks I have been working on a series of website updates. Because the website, podcast production, and all of the other behind the scenes work is a one-human operation where I'm doing everything by myself, doing these updates did take some time away from podcast creation. This is the main reason for the delayed release of this podcast episode, the other reason being that my cell phone broke and I had to do a bunch of tech stuff to take care of that, which also ate up some of my time that I would have otherwise be spending on making this podcast.

I am really excited about the website changes. The most important change is mobile optimization. So, WritingAlchemy.net is now much easier to use on mobile devices, which is important for website accessibility. Other improvements include a contact form so that all of you now have the option to directly communicate with me; faster website loading; Ko-fi donation buttons, which are an alternative way for you to support this work that does not require monthly donations; social media sharing buttons; and improvements to overall website organization so that all website content can actually be found through the

menu system, which, I hope you agree, is kind of useful for a website.

In addition, Writing Alchemy is now on Google Play, so if that's your preferred listening platform, you can now find us there!

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 <u>patreon.com/writingalchemy</u>.

And now, let's get to the show!

"D'Zân and the Sky Sharks."

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

FAY: So I'm Fay Onyx. My pronouns are ze and hir, and as far as who I am, I'm [a] genderqueer, queer, asexual artist and writer. I have a chronic back condition. I have anxiety, and areas of privilege that I have are that I am white and middle-class and that I have rather extensive education. And the something interesting that I'm sharing about myself for today is that one of the ways I experience disability in my life is actually that I have a three-hour-long bedtime routine, which is—

SAGE: I believe you. (Both laugh)

FAY: It's, you know, a lot of it is, like I'm really fortunate that doing stretches every day makes a big difference to my back's wellness, but forty-five minutes of stretches every day is a serious time commitment. (SAGE: Mhm.) And so that's part of where [my disability] comes out, these different self-care, self-maintenance things. And

that's when I listen to most of the podcasts I listen to, [during] my three-hour long bedtime routine.

SAGE: Well, that's fantastic.

FAY: Yeah.

SAGE: So my name is Sage, and my pronouns are xe/xem/xeirs/xeirs— sorry, xe/xem/xeir/xeirs/xemself, and even I have a hard time using them. (Laughs) So I'm, like, not picky about other people using— they can use "they" with me; singular "they" is fine for me. (FAY: Sure.) But I prefer the xe/xem/xeir/xeirs/xemself set. What's, what's next?

FAY: Yeah, accessibility needs for recording or gameplay, if you have any?

SAGE: Oh, just that I have something visual to anchor myself when doing something where I have to keep track of things.

FAY: Okay, sure. So like a char—

SAGE: Yeah, like a character sheet, or I might be taking notes of some kind. Although if the typing is loud, it might mess up the recording, so I might not want to do that, but, um—

FAY: That's okay. We can record typing.

SAGE: I'm ace. I'm agender. I'm... I'm aromantic; I'm in an aromantic companionate, rather than a romantic relationship, with a partner who's sort of gray-asexual. And other stuff to know— oh, legally blind [and] autistic. I have albinism, like one of your other players. I was just listening to the beginning of the Lasers & Feelings story, (FAY: Yeah.) and I'm enjoying that.

And I'm also chronically ill with dysautonomia, which means that I have a lot of cognitive issues and I have a hard time keeping track of things. I have a hard time retrieving information from my head, which is theoretically there, but I don't know it again until it comes back, and it takes a long time. (FAY: Sure.) So prompting is really helpful. I have verbal skills issues where I will say things I don't mean or screw up people's pronouns or use ableist language, because getting words to come out at all is really hard for me. And I'm getting better at it, but it's still really hard. (FAY: Absolutely.) And I'm much better at writing accurately; it's just that it takes a lot longer.

And um... privileges, I'm white and I'm not middle-class but I have family that has a little bit of money, so I can buy luxuries. (FAY inhales sharply) I could say I'm quasi-middle class. Um, and what else—

FAY: So finally, if you wanted to share one quick thing about yourself...

SAGE: Oh, um...

FAY: I believe you were wanting to share your love of silk?

SAGE: Oh yeah. So I'm a member of a plural system, and one of our members has figured out how to hack our brain to get a temporary high by going and rubbing silk— and not just rubbing silk, but going— um, Silka, why don't you demonstrate?

[High-pitched cooing] Really lovable silk. Oh, I love the way that silk feels. [Kissing noise.] Oh, so soft and kissable.

SAGE: Anyway, so yeah, we have a whole bolt of silk that we bought. We were planning on getting one for months before we bought it the day after the election last year. It's sitting in the closet, waiting for us to get the sewing area set up in the dining room. Which is currently the computer area, (FAY: Mmm.) but it will stop being the computer area soon and will become the sewing area, and then we can start making our own silk scarves and clothes.

FAY: Ooh, nice.

SAGE: And that's another example of the middle class privilege that we have, you know. We wouldn't have been able to do that without our parents' help.

FAY: Yeah, yeah. Alright, so I'm gonna start up the character creation part of this session. So do you have a concept for who you want your character to be?

SAGE: Oh yeah, I wanted it to be a benevolent *zmeu*: z-m-e-u.

FAY: So is that a character race?

SAGE: Uh, that, I guess, is a race, yeah. It's a Romanian weredragon. (FAY: Yes.) Now, in Romanian culture, unlike the other Slavic cultures with similarly named dragons, these dragons are exclusively evil, but I mean, that's kind of— like, dragons were exclusively evil for a long time [in] the English culture. Until the Welsh said, you know, "What for?" Right? And then dragons started becoming good in various stories, so. (FAY: Sure.) Saint George is a pretty important figure in some of Romanian culture. It's the same with England.

FAY: Cool, so you know what their character race is gonna be, and that's great. (SAGE: Mhm.) Do you have

some sort of concepts about who they are or what they're capable of?

SAGE: So they can fly. (FAY: Mmkay.) And, uh, they are nocturnal and they shapeshift. (FAY: Okay.) Um, so the shapeshifting in this case is dragon to human and human to dragon, and it has limitations. And unlike, you know, werewolves, it's not dependent on the moon.

FAY: Mhm. Uh, were you wanting your character to be nocturnal?

SAGE: Yeah, yeah. So I guess that's a disability in some contexts.

FAY: Yeah, because the other characters are not nocturnal, and in fact, one of them is very strongly day—like, they don't really function at night.

SAGE: Uh huh. Okay, so this will serve as a disability.

FAY: Uh, yeah, I mean—

SAGE: I mean, they can do stuff during the day.

FAY: The social aspect of disability, absolutely.

SAGE: Yes, thank you. It serves as a socially disabling condition.

FAY: Absolutely, yeah. So do you have an idea. There's six character classes, (SAGE: Okay.) and we're going for a magical character class, (SAGE: Mhm.) and there's four of those. So there's mages, which are people focused on casting arcane magic. [We've] got bards, where they have kind of entertainment performances imbued with magic. Druids, which can be nature magic focused. And clerics, which are kind of divine magic.

SAGE: Okay, so I guess druid would be the obvious class for a dragon.

FAY: Potentially. Uh, so do you have an idea of whether your character is gonna be more of a mind character, (SAGE: Oh.) balanced, or more of a body character?

SAGE: More of a mind character.

FAY: Sure. Now would be a good time to choose your character's druid abilities.

SAGE: Okay. Class abilities.

FAY: Yeah, there's a long, long list (laughs) because I like people to have options. Your character can go from dragon to human and back and forth. If you wanted to choose a broader shapeshifting ability, that is an option from this list.

SAGE: Oh, I see. Like turning into other animals, okay.

FAY: Absolutely, or... magical creatures or even elementals. So shapeshifting is one of the druid options. (SAGE: Okay.) It's one of the types of magic they can do. There's magic that's basically about healing and restoring people; there's magic about causing harm—

SAGE: I think I like the healing one.

FAY: We don't actually have a healer yet, so this will be good.

SAGE: Oh, oh, I'll totally be a healer. I'm happy to do that.

FAY: Yeah, you can have the healing ability. Absolutely. They also have a range of other things, like they could do weather magic (SAGE: Oh.) or plant magic.

SAGE: Weather magic! That actually fits in with the Romanian mythology, so that works.

FAY: Okay, um, and the bard also has weather magic.

SAGE: Oh, well maybe we should take that out of mine. I mean, even though it's part of Romanian mythology, it's— it's all mixed up. (FAY: Well—) It's actually part of

a different Romanian mythology than this *zmeu* thing, so it doesn't have to be here.

FAY: Well, what if I suggested water and air magic? (SAGE: Aah.) So for example, air magic does some of the same stuff that weather magic does.

SAGE: Okay. I can do air magic, um.

FAY: So that would—

SAGE: (stammers) We want water, wouldn't we?

FAY: Well, it's up to you. It's whatever you think is the most fitting for your character.

SAGE: Water magic is very healing, so I can see that being consistent with being a healer. (FAY: Okay.) So how about water magic?

FAY: Absolutely, yeah.

SAGE: I just thought of something that's totally not topical anymore, but I wanted to say it.

FAY: Sure.

SAGE: We were talking about my character being nocturnal. Well, you know how like diurnal people sometimes stay up

late because they're night people? But they still go to bed at like midnight or whatever, and they just hate mornings. (FAY: Okay.) So my character is, is somebody who stays up until like ten or eleven in the morning and, you know, hates early evenings. So they're like the nocturnal person equivalent of a night person, but they're a morning person. (laughs)

FAY: Yeah, okay. And the group is going to have to decide as a group whether the characters are going to be operating during the day or the night.

SAGE: Oh, okay. Well, that's good.

FAY: It's kind of, in a way, useful to have characters who are... you know, (SAGE: Oh, yeah.) really functional during the day, really functional during the night. But it also means someone's always gonna be out of their element (laughs) as well. So there's benefits and downsides.

SAGE: Mhm. And that's okay.

FAY: Yeah.

SAGE: I mean that makes variety, so I'm good with that.

FAY: Absolutely. Yeah, so there's some other nature-focused abilities... so for example, there's two related ones. Communing with nature is a magical connection (SAGE: Mhm.) to the environment around them. Um, and then there's in tune with nature, which is a non-magical ability, kind of like a perception-focused one, where the character is really good at noticing things in natural environments.

SAGE: Ohh. Huh. Hmm.

FAY: And they can move through natural areas without leaving traces behind. And—

SAGE: It seems more congruent with this character, actually. (FAY: Yeah, so—) To have the non-magical version.

FAY: Yeah, absolutely. So that means that your character will be able to move through especially familiar natural terrains, and you'll have bonuses to physical skills in those environments. So there's— your character could have plant magic, which would mean that your character could affect the plants around them or speak with plants, for example. Or your character could have animal magic, which means that you could speak with animals, summon animals to your aid, but also potentially use animal-based magical effects. (SAGE: Mhm.) Such as giving someone eagle eyes or giving someone wings or creating webs.

SAGE: Hmm. I'm trying to think what sort of a character— I think my character could probably prefer to do the animal than the plants because this character is a vegetarian. And um, not for real-life idealistic reasons, but because I thought, "You know, this is more congruent with being a healer." I don't know. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe it's okay to be a meat-eater, but I don't want this to be a ferocious dragon. (FAY: Yeah.) Except in battle, maybe.

FAY: Sure, sure.

SAGE: I want to sort of get past the whole evil thing, you know.

FAY: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay, so those are the character's main abilities. So as a druid, your "in tune with nature" ability is a[n] ability that's not magically based. But the other three are magic, so the limitation that druids have around their magic is that they must have some sort of symbol or item or plant, some something that is the focus of their connection to nature. And they'll use this to cast their magic, so they have to either touch it or present it depending on what the thing is.

SAGE: Ah, so it would be— the *zmeu* dragons in Romanian mythology have a crystal in their forehead, and so they could have an associated crystal that grew up separate from them. For a druid, they use the crystal

that's in their cave, and they can take it with them where they go to live, so if they moved to a different cave. (laughs)

FAY: Okay, so it's— are they wearing it on their head? Or are they—

SAGE: Oh. I mean, they have one growing naturally in their head, but they need the other one to be able to do the focusing because the two are connected. (FAY: Okay.) So um, they could carry it with them, like, on their neck as a pendant.

FAY: Absolutely, so your character will need to be able to, um, have that, I guess touch it, (SAGE: Mhm.) to use the magic. Oh, [what are] your character's pronouns? I forgot to ask.

SAGE: Oh, I might as well have them be xe/xem/xeir, like me. You know, it just occurred to me, I'd really rather their focus be a silk, but silk is unlike stone. It could get damaged, and you know.

FAY: It's true. That is a risk.

SAGE: Though I'd just as soon not...

FAY: Well, you can, like, weave a silk cord into the chain on it as well, if you wanna.

SAGE: That's a— Okay, yeah. Alright.

FAY: So there's defensive training options: characters each get a form of defense against magic and a form of defense against physical harm. There's three different options, and each has a limitation. We'll start with magical defense.

SAGE: Okay.

FAY: So one way a character could defend against magic is by having a magical outfit. And this magical outfit is kinda like armor, but for magic. But obviously they have to be wearing it, and that's something they can't wear while sleeping. Whereas another option would be a staff, which can be used kind of like a shield against magic. Or they can deflect, which is the equivalent of dodging, sort of. (SAGE: Mhm.) And the limitation there is that they need to be able to use their body to make these magical gestures, which will deflect the magic.

SAGE: So um, with the staff, is that something where you could help protect others behind you? 'Cause like with clothing or gestures or dodging, it's personal, right?

FAY: Well, [with] all of it, you have the potential to protect others if you want to. (SAGE: Oh, okay.) It just depends on how you do things, right? So the magical outfit's like armor. An armored person could stand in front of someone else.

SAGE: Mhm. So I think dodging is a good one because that kind of is consistent with the whole being able to slip through nature undetected, you know.

FAY: Okay, and yeah, so the word for that is deflection 'cause I needed something separate from dodging. (laughs)

SAGE: Okay, so deflection.

FAY: But absolutely. Yeah, deflection. So there's also the (stammers) (laughs) the physical defense. There's heavy armor, there's a shield, or there's dodging.

SAGE: Armor, which brings in the whole— every time I shapeshift I have to wear the armor for the dragon shape or the armor for the human shape, which means I have to change clothes. Like you know, it's kind of realistic [in] that sense.

FAY: It depends on how your armor's set up. (SAGE: Mhm.) So.

SAGE: Yeah. Though all those— the dragon form is not gonna be that much bigger than the human form, so. I guess that would be possible. Yeah, um, okay. I'm gonna go for armor.

FAY: Oh armor, absolutely. Cool. Yeah, so there's skills, and there's magic items... You can choose six skills that are any skills you want to give your character, and then from being a druid you get an additional two skills. So here's what happens: as a druid, you have nature knowledge. And then you could have either survival or animal handling as an additional skill. (SAGE: Oh, um.) So...?

SAGE: Well, I've already got the animals thing down here.

FAY: Mhm. Yeah, so animal handling might be, in some ways, less useful to you, but it is—

SAGE: Yes, I could do survival, mhm.

FAY: Yeah, survival. So survival is things like tracking, first aid, basic things you need to survive in a wilderness setting.

SAGE: Well, that makes sense 'cause healer, you know, the first aid thing, right?

FAY: Absolutely.

SAGE: And tracking and all that, being able to move around. I mean, that's very congruent with the character, so.

FAY: Yeah, so those are the two you get from being a druid. And now you get to choose six skills in addition to that. And basically all these things are things that your character is particularly good at. It doesn't mean your character can't use a skill that they're not trained in; it's just that they're not gonna be as good at it.

SAGE: Okay, so let's see. Um, what about diplomacy? Oh no, we've already got a bard, right?

FAY: Well true, but—

SAGE: How about intimidation? Since we don't have anybody that's a fighter, we should have somebody who's at least good at intimidation.

FAY: Sure and also just to say, like, diplomacy's one of those skills that I've noticed that if your character wants to talk to people, you know, having the bard there won't necessarily [help] unless you want the bard to be the only person talking, right?

SAGE: That's a good point.

FAY: And especially since your character, for example, can speak to animals. The bard can't necessarily help you with that.

SAGE: That's a good point. Okay. So having diplomacy would be useful in situations where we need to be diplomatic with animals.

FAY: Mhm.

SAGE: Okay, so I'll choose diplomacy as one of my skills.

FAY: And... you were talking about intimidation.

SAGE: Yeah, intimidation.

FAY: Yeah?

SAGE: So being a dragon kind of helps. (laughs)

FAY: Yeah, yeah, sure.

SAGE: I think I think insight is a good one to add too.

FAY: Mhm.

SAGE: Yeah, because after all, to be a good healer, you kind of need that, so. (FAY: Sure.) This is sort of, you

know. Between survival, insight, and healing magic of being a druid, that makes a pretty well-rounded healer, don't you think?

FAY: Absolutely.

SAGE: Okay, we've already got flying, so we don't need that.

FAY: Well, so flying is your skill at flying. It doesn't give you the ability to fly. Your character—

SAGE: Oh, that's a good point. So I can either be good at it or sucky at it. (laughs)

FAY: Right, so if you wanna be good at it—

SAGE: Mmkay, so choosing flying makes a lot of sense because that would make them good at it.

FAY: Yes, I would recommend that. It would be very congruent with what your character is.

SAGE: Okay. Okay, let's give me athletics.

FAY: Yeah, sure.

SAGE: I've got the magic— the water thing, right? So why don't I be good at swimming?

FAY: Swimming could be very useful, so let's give you swimming.

SAGE: I came up with the name. Okay, so the character's name is... Doamnă Zân, but um, that's a way long name, so they've been going by D'Zân since they were a kid. And this is sort of a faux— ugh, it, it means essentially "lady elf" or "lady fairy" or something like that. It's "lady," and then normally it would be *zână*, z-a-n-a, where the first 'a' has a little hat on it and the last 'a' has a smile on top. And that's a feminine word, but *zân* would be the masculine. So if you put *doamnă*, which means "madam" or "lady" in front of a masculine form, then [it] sort of neutralizes or it— I mean, I wish that I knew Romanian well enough to invent, like, actually agender language, but at least it's non-binary. (FAY: Mhm.) And that's the point because this character is non-binary.

FAY: Sure. Cool, so that's the character's name. So their manner and their goal...

SAGE: It depends on, like— yeah, scholarly I can totally get for manner, but for goal, I'm not really sure because it depends on their relationship to [the] other characters and what we're doing and where my character is in their life.

FAY: Yeah, so I guess the main thing we're looking for is where is your character in their life? What, in general, is the thing that they want to accomplish or that they pursue?

SAGE: Oh. I can't actually answer the question "What is my character's goal?" without discussing their backstory with you.

FAY: Okay, well, we'll talk about the—

SAGE: That's a barrier I just can't get past.

FAY: Okay, well, we'll talk about the story then.

SAGE: Uh, yeah, yeah. Alright. So backstory, um, D'Zân grew up in a frugal middle-class family and showed early affinity with nature, as do many of xeir kin, or sorry, xeir kind. (FAY: Yeah.) And demonstrated early aptitude for healing arts. In *zmei* culture— *zmei*, by the way is the plural of *zmeu*. (FAY: Mhm.) In *zmei* culture, non-binary dragons share the brooding of the young and often are involved in the healing arts and care for the elderly.

FAY: Mhm.

SAGE: So after xeir basic education—reading; maths; physical education, including athletics, swimming, and flying;

interpersonal skills; basic insight and diplomacy; [and] cave economics, which is the dragon equivalent of home economics— (FAY: Awesome.) (Laugh) xe went off to secondary druid school to get a druid healer's college prep education.

Knowing that D'Zân would need some kind of amulet for using magical skills, D'Zân's parents gifted xem with xeir late, great-great-great-grandfather's forehead gem to use in the final binding ceremony where xe would realize xeir semi-professional basic druid powers and be legally allowed to use them without supervision. (FAY: Mhm. Cool.) Parenthesis, prior to this, while a student, xe had to make do with essentially borrowing xeir mentor's magic in small amounts 'til xe could learn to do all the magic necessary to make xeir own binding amulet.

FAY: Mhm.

SAGE: After getting their A-level, because that's the way their education system works, their A-level in basic druidry and basic druidic healing, D'Zân now set out on xeir own to make xeir way in the world, and eventually, uh, and eventually has made xeir way to— I wasn't sure. Did you want the characters to make their way to a magical university, you know? I couldn't remember; I couldn't find—

FAY: It's the Adventurer's Academy.

SAGE: Ah, there we go. Okay, okay. So to pursue college-level studies in their field.

FAY: Yeah, so the Adventurer's Academy is focused on training people to become adventurers. It definitely includes druidic education for those who are druids. But it's... broader than just that. (SAGE: Mhm.) Yeah.

SAGE: Yeah, alright. So that's their backstory. (FAY: Awesome.) Okay, so I'm gonna assume that their goals, their goal might be to become proficient in healing with all animals, not just with *zmei* and humans.

FAY: Yeah okay, so... it sounds like xeir goal is a lot around learning?

SAGE: Yeah.

FAY: So for example, kind of like, "Why does your character want to be an adventurer?" and it kinda seems like your character might want to continuously learn. Is that sound— feeling right?

SAGE: Yeah. Yeah, that sounds right. I mean, at some later stage in their life, they may have different— xe

may have different goals, but right now (FAY: Of course.) that sounds like what xe wants.

FAY: Absolutely. People change; it's totally fine to change your character goal. Um... (laughs)

SAGE: Are we allowed to swear on this podcast?

FAY: Yes, you are.

SAGE: Okay, so continuously learn new shit. (both laugh)

FAY: Awesome, yeah. So...

SAGE: And then the last thing on this sheet, by the way, that we hadn't discussed is, uh... magic item? (FAY: Right.) And I wanted to know, should it be magic heavy armor as opposed to just heavy armor? Because shapeshifting, well, with the wings that aren't there in human form and are there— you know, heavy armor that isn't magical wouldn't necessarily be able to shapeshift, right? So should, should (FAY: Ah.) that be the thing that I choose for this character?

FAY: That is a very good point... so I guess you have a couple options of how you want the heavy armor to be. Um... it might be possible to have some armor that would,

um, be more flexible. It depends on how much you imagine your character changing size and shape.

SAGE: Well, it wouldn't change a *whole* lot— see, they're shorter when they're human and more, you know, stockier, right? They're more muscular and have bigger bones, and then they elongate a bit to become the dragon. They grow a tail, and they grow wings.

FAY: Mhm. So, so I guess the question is if they have armor [that's] really fitted, it's not gonna work. But if it's like individual pieces that are kind of strapped on, that might work, but there'd be maybe more gaps, and there wouldn't be any armor on, say, the tail. (SAGE: Yeah.) Soif you—

SAGE: Um, so that's what I'm thinking, it has to be magical. (FAY: Sure.) Because you know, having loose armor with gaps is— I mean,[if] you ask anybody who knows anything about (laughs) medieval armor, you know, that's just not, that's not gonna work.

FAY: Well, it's not great. The armor's kind of like a shield you're wearing so like shields don't have to cover anything as long as you work with it, but it would definitely that's not— you're right that it's totally not the idea behind how armor is supposed to be.

SAGE: Also you know, you're supposed to be wearing, like, a gambeson underneath to keep it from, you know, (FAY: Oh yeah.) chafing, right? And it has to be pounded just right you know after every battle you have to repair your armor so that you can wear it without getting chafed.

FAY: Well, that, and like the gambeson also adds the padding, which is what actually protects you from (SAGE: Yeah.) the force of the blow. (laughs)So do you want magical armor that's going to alter itself to be armor the dragon can wear while flying, or do you want to have to actually take it off to shapeshift?

SAGE:Okay, so I have to think about this. Um, 'cause it means giving up having something else, you know, like medical supplies or a set of books.

FAY: Mhm. That is true, but the magical armor would also have other magical benefits for defense.

SAGE: Oh, okay. Well, I think I'll go with magical armor, then. (FAY: Absolutely.) Alright, so D'Zân will, uh— my brain is like, "*duh-zahn* sounds better," and nicknames don't always have to— like "Meg" for "Margaret," you know what I mean? It doesn't have to sound (FAY: Uh huh.) like it's a [shortened] version. So *duh-zahn* is fine with me. And I have a feeling that I'm going to slip and do that all the time, and I'm sure that a Romanian looking

at this would be irritated with me. Although they would say that 'd' shouldn't be *dee*. It should be *duh* or *deh* because that's what it is in the alphabet for Romanians, so *deh*, *deh-zahn*. *Deh-zehn*. Now it'll be *deh-zehn*. But yeah, so I'll just— (sighs) I guess I'll say *dee-zan*, *deh-zan*, because that's something that I have a feeling that everybody in the group will probably have an easier time defaulting to.

FAY: The spelling of the short version of the name is now capital 'D,' apostrophe – capital 'Z' – 'a' with a karat – 'n', and it's pronounced "*deh-zahn*"?

SAGE: Yeah.

FAY: *Deh-zahn*.

[*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 undervalued 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 mini-adventure takes place in Kyra Piper's creative problem solving class. So to remind you, Kyra Piper is one of the founders of the Academy. (SAGE: Mhm.) She is a middle-aged orc woman with green skin and long blue hair, and she's in a hovering wood-and-brass wheelchair.

SAGE: Okay.

FAY: So this class is taking place, for this challenge, in the arena which is at the center of the Adventurers Academy. (SAGE: Okay.) Encircling the arena is the three-story main building of the academy. A spiral of open tree- and vine-supported ramps and balconies covers the inside of the main building, which surrounds the, uh, arena. So on these balconies and ramps are places where people can view the arena, and so that's where the class is. They're up there, watching along with Kyra. The arena itself is encircled by a ring of magical orbs, so again, these are the magic technology. And those create illusions within the arena that are multisensory. Even though the things inside the arena are illusions, students are expected to treat them as if they are real. So that's where this is taking place.

SAGE: Okay.

FAY: The goal of this challenge is to find and retrieve a fist-sized crystal orb. (SAGE: Okay.) It's a radiant orb which emits both a soft white light and a gentle warmth, both of which can be felt at the same distance from the crystal.

SAGE: Mhm.

FAY: While doing this challenge, um, adventurers are required to not kill anything while they're doing their adventures. As a student, you need to treat this as real, and so your character is not allowed to significantly harm any creature or animals that xe encounters. (SAGE: Okay.) Mmkay, so that's kind of the basis of this challenge. So your character is about to enter the arena from the south, and when your character looks into the arena, xe sees an open sky—

[Sight of the arena music starts. This is a synthetic drone with an ethereal melody over top that creates a mood of anticipation that has an edge of uneasiness or worry to it.]

FAY: —with a dozen small puffy clouds that are in constant motion. (SAGE: Mhm.) Oddly, each of the clouds is moving in a different direction. Between the clouds, animals with long graceful bodies can be seen gliding through the air. Their silhouettes are just like those of sharks swimming in water. Through the clouds, there are

glimpses of the bottom of the arena, where the orb is resting on the flat, sawdust-covered ground.

SAGE: Wait, uh, my character walks into the arena from the south and looks into the sky. Are we looking up or looking down?

FAY: Your character's looking down.

SAGE: Oh, from one of the balconies?

FAY: Yeah, so basically [at] the entrance to the arena—

[Music fades out.]

FAY: —there's space below you and above you. But most of what you see is below you.

SAGE: Okay, My character is wearing armor, as this is an adventure.

FAY: Mhm. Absolutely. So your character is prepared for this challenge, so they will— xe will be wearing armor and have the, uh, backpack full of items with xeir.

SAGE: With xem.

FAY: Or xem, yeah. (SAGE: Yeah.) And xe has not yet entered the space of the arena. Xe is standing at the entrance.

SAGE: Okay. So... (FAY: Mhm.) (mumbles) Yeah, so I guess we won't be needing the bedroll, the blanket, (laughs) soap, fire-starter kit, waterskin right at the moment. Well, maybe to get some water, but.

FAY: Yeah, yeah. So it's standard for adventurers to take their gear with them. (SAGE: Yes.) Unless they're specifically putting their backpack down, um. So that's kind of standard.

SAGE: Again, this is an adventuring test. Therefore, xe would keep xeir backpack. (FAY: Right, right.) So I guess the first thing that they— xe would consider doing would be to take dragon form and fly.

FAY: So xe is gonna fly into this space.

SAGE: Mhm.

FAY: Okay, absolutely. So because it is a species trait, this specific shapeshifting is automatic. Your character can just shapeshift into that form. (SAGE: Mhm.) So your character is now flying into the arena.

SAGE: Also, what time of day is this?

FAY: Middle of the day.

SAGE: Okay, so xe is pretty sleepy. This is like late-night for most people because xe is nocturnal.

FAY: Oh, right.

SAGE: I mean, that's the limitation, right?

FAY: Sure, sure. Yeah. So this is a challenge because it's in the middle of the day, so xe is sleepy.

SAGE: Because xe normally goes to bed late morning, so. Um, xe takes off from [the] balcony. (FAY: Okay.) And starts exploring around the clouds.

FAY: So I'm going to need you to roll two dice. Your character is flying, which is a body skill. (SAGE: Mhm.) And as soon as your character gets into the arena, xe is going to experience that the reason why the clouds are moving in different directions is because each one's being blown around by a different air current.

SAGE: Okay, so lots of buffeting.

FAY: Yeah. So this is a (laughs) non-trivial flying situation. (SAGE: Yeah.) I'm gonna need you to roll two dice, since your character is an expert at flying.

SAGE: So I have rolled a— I got a five and a four.

FAY: Okay. This is a body skill, so you're looking for numbers under three.

SAGE: Under three.

FAY: Yeah. In this case, what is happening is that at this moment when xe flies into the arena, xe is expecting to just fly through the air. Maybe experience some air currents. But when xe gets into the arena—

[*Sound of steady wind current.]

FAY: The air feels very much more like water than air. (SAGE: Okay.) And this surprises, um, xem.

SAGE: Xem, yeah.

FAY: And so xe was kind of intending to like just fly near a cloud, check it out. And these currents and the thickness of the air really surprised xem, and xe is now just being carried along. So instead of going where xe intended, xe is now kind of caught up in this swirling current.

SAGE: Okay, so this is not as much like being on an airplane with turbulence as it is like swimming, but swimming in a really— an undertow, like in the ocean.

FAY: Well, it's— yeah, it's very much like swimming, and that took hir by surprise.

SAGE: Took xem by surprise.

FAY: Absolutely. Mhm.

SAGE: Okay, so um. Alright, xe rolled a four and a five, so xe is therefore, uh, pretty out of it, I guess.

FAY: Yeah, so...

SAGE: Pretty disoriented, at this point.

FAY: Xe is disoriented and being carried along by this water-like air current.

SAGE: Have you ever swum in the ocean?

FAY: Not full-on. I mean, a little bit.

SAGE: When I was a kid I got, I got sucked into this place. I can hold my own, but I couldn't get back to land because there was this undertow that was dragging me, and a lifeguard had to come and fetch me. So um, you

know, if I wanted to get back to the balcony where I left off from—

FAY: Mhm.

[Wind sound fades out.]

SAGE: Or if I wanted to get to one of those clouds, I might not necessarily be able to, if it's what I'm imagining it to be like. (FAY: Right.) Okay. So, um... (stammers) This is where my inexperience as a gamer comes in. (FAY: Sure, so—) What happens next?

FAY: Xe has a lot of options. So water magic does not actually— they don't have to use water that's around. They can create water with this, (SAGE: Oh) and manipulate it.

SAGE: Alright, so the presence or lack thereof is not a limitation on this ability.

FAY: No, it is not. You can just do magical effects with water, so if your character wanted to make a geyser to, say, blast themselves over to a cloud, that would be one option.

SAGE: Oh, like having a rocket on your back. (Laughs)

FAY: Absolutely, or... they could try to bring a cloud over to them— xem.

SAGE: Oh right, because water magic.

FAY: And yeah, absolutely. I'm running into the problem of, I often just talk in "they" as a generic non-binary pronoun (SAGE: Okay, yeah.) when talking about characters, and so I'm trying to—

SAGE: Yeah, understandable. Because if you're not talking about a specific character, "they" is fine.

FAY: Yes, yeah, I'm talking in general. So characters with the animal ability could try to use animal traits to enhance themselves. (SAGE: Hmm.) Or they can summon animals to their aid. For example, creating webs is an animal trait. So there's a lot of options.

SAGE: Alright. I think what xe can do is, uh, take on the trait[s] of a dolphin so [xe will] be able to swim better in this. (FAY: Okay.) And by the way, this character already has swimming as one of their body skills. (FAY: Yup, Absolutely!) So we can treat this pretty much like water but have the extra help from dolphin-like swimming abilities 'cause they definitely need it. (FAY: Absolutely, absolutely!) So you want a roll?

FAY: Absolutely, absolutely, so that's gonna be a mind skill. Since this is your magic (SAGE: Mhm.) and you are an expert at it, that's two dice. And you're aiming to get below five.

SAGE: Okay. Oh, rats! (laughs) I got a five and a six.

FAY: (amused) Oh no! Okay, so this is where things get interesting. So I'm gonna say that, um, xe was trying to give xemself a... dolphin—like swimming ability... and has partially turned into a dolphin.

[*Transformation sound effect: a metallic, vibrating *whoosh* at a medium pitch and with multiple layers.]

SAGE: Oh.

FAY: But um, that is not actually making it easier to swim, so... xe is stuck as kind of a part-dragon, part-dolphin in a way where the way that xe would normally swim is... harder to do.

SAGE: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Okay.

FAY: But xe is not all the way to dolphin yet, either. So xe's sort of partway there.

SAGE: I would imagine the buffeting but also probably partly falling, right? At this point? So maybe below the clouds—

FAY: No, not falling, no.

SAGE: Okay, just being kept aloft.

FAY: Yup. Uh, and so at this point, xe looks partially like a dolphin, and those silhouettes are starting to come much closer.

SAGE: Oh, gosh!

FAY: And they do in fact look like sharks.

SAGE: So xe switches animals at this point and goes for shark because sharks can swim.

FAY: Okay, so you're gonna try that again, and you're gonna try to straight-up turn into a shark?

SAGE: Yeah.

FAY: All the way? Okay.

SAGE: Might as well.

FAY: Go for it. You got two dice.

SAGE: Okay, I got a six and a two.

FAY: Awesome, okay. That is a basic success, um... so your character has successfully transformed into a shark.

[Transformation effect sound]

FAY: But xe is a rather small shark. (SAGE laughs) And some of these other sharks are quite large. They look kinda like great whites and tiger sharks (SAGE: Mhm.) So... you're a very small shark, an inconveniently small shark amongst larger sharks. They're coming closer but not immediately, um, attacking. So that's what's happening there. I am also gonna point out that at any point your character can take a moment to assess the situation with a knowledge skill. (SAGE: Oh, okay.) If xe would like.

SAGE: Okay, why don't I do a— roll a nature, um...

FAY: Absolutely.

SAGE: Alright. How many dice?

FAY: You're an expert at this, so you're gonna use two dice, and you're trying to get below five.

SAGE: Uh, wow. Six and two again.

FAY: Okay, you know a little bit about what's going on. So xe knows that there are certain magical places in the world where properties of various things are altered. And that these do appear to be ordinary sharks as far as xe can tell. They seem to be just taking advantage of this water-like air and able to breathe just fine. And xe can't really tell entirely what's going on with the sharks, but they seem to be normal sharks and curious about you.

SAGE: Hm. Okay. We do have our water ability if we wanted to go down to get to that orb, right?

FAY: Absolutely. Mhm.

SAGE: The orb's down there. Um, we could try to create a wave that would, like, wave us along and deposit us down lower. (FAY: Sure.) So why don't we do that?

FAY: Okay, so you're gonna use your water magic. Can you give me a clear sense of what xe is trying to do with this water magic? It sounds great.

SAGE: In this case, try to get out of this sort of stasis where they're stuck in this one level. So get down lower, where they're trying to go.

FAY: Right, so are they creating a geyser to kind of blast them like a rocket, or are they more trying to create something that's gonna push them?

SAGE: Yeah. Something in water that push[es] them.

FAY: Absolutely.

SAGE: Alright, do you want me to roll?

FAY: Two dice.

SAGE: Okay, two dice, and here we go. Double sixes. (laughs) Aw, it is not my day.

FAY: Yeah well, the one thing about this game is that, uh, when characters struggle, it creates interesting situations. (SAGE: True.) Okay, so xe creates a sudden wave of water that kind of blasts through this area.

[*Sound of splashing wave.]

FAY: And, you know, it's going down towards the bottom. What happens is that this is going in an entirely different direction than all of the other currents. (SAGE: Oh.) And so it throws the currents into chaos. (SAGE: Oh dear.) So for a moment there's this wave of water, but then it breaks up into all of these other, um, bits of water, and the currents are being thrown into chaos. Because your

character wasn't really controlling the water magic effectively in this moment—magic is very unpredictable—water started going everywhere. So this whole space is now this kind of part-water, part-air vortex of chaotic currents that are going in all sorts of different directions.

SAGE: Um, okay, so now I'm going to wanna use insight to figure out if I've pissed off the other sharks. (FAY: Mhm, mhm.) Because that would be my first worry. You know, when you spill your entire science project all over the jocks next to you in school, you wanna know whether you're going to get beaten up. (laughs)

FAY: Sure, sure. Go ahead and roll that insight roll.

SAGE: How many dice?

FAY: So that is two dice.

SAGE: Okay. Alright, a four and a three, and both of those are lower than a five.

FAY: Absolutely, that's a solid success. So what you can tell is the sharks do seem rather upset. They don't know that you caused this, but they are much more agitated and, um, they do not find this mixture of air and water to be pleasant. So they're gonna be potentially more unpredictable and aggressive.

SAGE: So um, the next thing I would do is try to clean it up. (laughs) (FAY: Okay.) 'Cause you know, that would be the respectful thing to do.

FAY: Sure, okay. You can try to dry out water as part of water magic, so you're gonna try to dry this water back out?

SAGE: Yeah.

FAY: Absolutely. Um... so that is gonna be a two-dice roll.

SAGE: Mhm, we got two two's.

FAY: Awesome, that's a solid success. So the water is gone, and after a little bit of time, it seems like the currents are starting to return to normal.

SAGE: Okay. So at this point (stammers) I'm thinking that maybe D'Zân should try using some pretty mundane stuff. (FAY: Sure.) Like say, the rope from their pack.

FAY: Absolutely, absolutely.

SAGE: Let's see. How would they figure out if there's a place that they can, like, lasso the rope onto down there?

FAY: So there's perception, which is not something your character's particularly good at.

SAGE: No, but—

FAY: Which is just perceiving things. (SAGE: Mhm.) Basically from what your character can see, there is just sawdust on the ground, and the orb is there. Though that's what your character can see right now.

SAGE: Oh, I wonder... in a way rope is— no, you couldn't lasso the orb because [the rope] would just go right through it, right? It's like a ball.

FAY: Well, it is a ball, so your character could attempt to build something. (SAGE: Hmm.) With magic or physically. That is absolutely something you could try. You'd probably want something more like a basket on the end of the rope.

SAGE: Yeah. Well, I've got twine. Twine is something—

FAY: You do have twine, absolutely.

SAGE: And this has gotta be a one-dice roll, right? Because we're not an expert in building stuff.

FAY: Absolutely.

SAGE: Alright, we got twine, so xe's good. D'Zân's going to try to make a basket that can go on the end of the rope that can be used to scoop up the orb. So we got a

one dice roll— one-die roll. Here we go. We get a four. (FAY: Excellent.) That 's our physical— (laughs) our physical's three.

FAY: This is actually mostly mental, right? You have to figure out how to do this. (SAGE: Oh, okay.) So it's one of those skills that is both physical and mental. But it's more mental than it is physical, coming up with a strategy for how to make a basket, right?

SAGE: Okay, so we succeed in making a basket.

FAY: You do. Xe's not an expert at this sort of stuff. Xe doesn't make things regularly, so it's a pretty decent little basket, but it's not super sturdy.

SAGE: So xe attaches it to the end of the rope and xe winds up to throw it as like, a lasso.

FAY: Absolutely. And xe does have athletics.

SAGE: Okay. That's a two-dice rather than a one-dice roll?

FAY: It is. Well, let me think about this for a second. So you have built a tool specifically for this. You are prepared, so I'm going to say that this is gonna be a three-dice roll.

SAGE: Alright, we got a four, a two, and a three. It's a partial, right? It's two out of three.

FAY: It is a partial success. So what I'm gonna say is that after many tries, xe has managed to hook the orb. And what has happened in all of this trying is that the sharks have gotten very interested (SAGE: Uh oh.) in what is going on here, so they're swimming very close to the rope and the orb.

SAGE: Okay, so they're able to go up and down more easily than—

FAY: Yup. They are doing fine. As far as you can tell, the sharks are strong swimmers. They're able to go up and down just fine. And they're very interested in this rope and this orb. So they're swimming very close to it, and as you know, this basket is not super sturdy.

SAGE: Ah, so pulling it up might result in the thing breaking free and falling down again.

FAY: It might. Or it might simply, um, be very exciting for the sharks, and they might decide to bite the rope, which could damage—

SAGE: Oh, and then they could eat the orb, (FAY: Yeah.) which— yuck.

FAY: Well, they might or might not. You don't know. You just know that the sharks are very curious and interested in this.

SAGE: Okay, and the other problem is if they're curious and interested and we pull— D'Zân pulls the rope up and successfully gets the orb near to them, the sharks will also come near to xem.

FAY: Mhm. Oh, one thing that I seem to have missed is you were a shark, so I'm gonna just assume that D'Zân has shapeshifted back into a human.

SAGE: To a dragon, yes. (FAY: Okay.) Or a human? (stammers)

FAY: Which one does D'Zân want to be?

SAGE: Human, I think human works better for this particular situation.

FAY: Okay.

SAGE: So D'Zân decides to pull the thing up and cross the bridge of interested sharks when xe gets there.

FAY: So how is your character trying to do this? Are they trying to do it athletically and quickly, or are they trying to do it super slowly and stealthily?

SAGE: Oh, um. I think super athletically and quickly on the grounds that, you know, [the] sharks will have less time to react.

FAY: Okey-dokey. So that'll be a two-dice roll there.

SAGE: Okay. Aw, darn. Four and five. I was wishing for snake eyes. (laughs)

FAY: Four and five, and this is a physical skill.

SAGE: Mhm, yeah. So total failure.

FAY: Yeah, so what's gonna happen here is... D'Zân starts to pull this up just a little bit. And then one of the sharks gets really excited and bites onto the rope and starts swimming around with it.

[*Shark humor music, a bouncy yet unnerving circus tune featuring organ, xylophone, and percussion, begins playing.]

FAY: In their mouth.

SAGE: Oh, which of course yanks D'Zân around.

FAY: Which is yanking D'Zân around.

SAGE: Okay. And is the orb in the shark's mouth, or is it just near to the edge?

FAY: Um, I think it's just kinda dangling there on the edge of the rope. The rope is not broken at this point; it's in the shark's mouth. The shark is swimming around holding on to this, and it's pulling D'Zân around too.

SAGE: So D'Zân gets an idea, which is what if xe goes hand over hand toward the shark because that will solve the problem of them being up too high (FAY: Okay.) Xe is thinking okay, xe has xeir blanket, so once xe gets up to—or down to—the shark, xe could perhaps use the blanket to cover the shark. You know, essentially get the shark like [it's] in a net.

FAY: Right. There's a lot of things that could happen, so what is D'Zân doing right now? Just kind of... pulling themself—

SAGE: Yeah, pulling themself down on the rope.

FAY: Sure, so that is going to be athletics.

SAGE: Okay.

FAY: Um, yeah. Athletics or climbing, but your character has athletics, so. (SAGE: Mhm.) It'll be an athletics skill.

SAGE: Oh, so we're just talking about the climbing, okay.

FAY: Because that's all on its own gonna be challenging.

SAGE: Alright, so this is two dice?

FAY: Yeah, so this'll be two dice.

SAGE: I rolled with just two dice and it's a one and a two.

[*Music fades out.]

FAY: Oh, beautiful. So xe is feeling very determined. Maybe all of this chaos with the sharks is waking xem up a bit. (SAGE: Yeah.) And xe makes it to the shark.

SAGE: Okay.

FAY: No problem.

SAGE: So now the scary part is reaching over the shark's mouth to get the [orb]—and oh, by the way, what are the other sharks doing?

FAY: Yeah, the other sharks are pretty excited by this too, so they're all kind of nearby. And they're not immediately threatening, but they could become threatening.

SAGE: I'm thinking, "Okay, never mind the blanket." If this shark is still holding onto the rope, and xe is like a foot or two away, (FAY: Mhm.) xe might want to somehow negotiate getting onto the other side of the rope

from the mouth of the shark. And I'm thinking, um... oh, I know. Xe has intimidation as one of xeir skills, (FAY: Uh huh.) so xe could be intimidating enough to keep the shark from doing anything while xe gently, and with some finesse, tries to get over to the other side of the rope.

FAY: So xe just wants the shark to not bite, or does xe want the shark to like, go over the rope, or....

SAGE: If the shark lets go and doesn't do anything to D'Zân, it's okay. But if the shark lets go and then decides to bite D'Zân, that would be a problem. (FAY: Right.) I'm thinking of a podcast I heard about, an episode about somebody [who] punched a shark in the nose.

[*Shark humor music begins playing again.]

FAY: Okay, okay. Yeah.

SAGE: I'm thinking that that would be something that would have to happen if the shark let go.

FAY: They're very protective of their eyes. And they also have some very sensitive sensory organs in their face, so that's definitely something you could do. So xe's going to punch the shark in the nose?

SAGE: I mean, how big is this particular shark? 'Cause you mentioned different sizes.

FAY: Ah yeah, there's a bunch of different sharks. This is gonna be a larger shark. (SAGE: Okay.) We'll go with a great white. It's a great white. So if xe is just straight-up trying to be intimidating, xe can intimidate this shark. Is that what xe's doing?

SAGE: Yeah, the idea is it's a means to an end, the end being to get to the other side of the rope.

FAY: Cool. So that will be a mind skill, say, to figure out how to intimidate the shark.

SAGE: Okay, and how many dice?

FAY: So that's gonna be two dice, since this is a skill xe's an expert at.

SAGE: Four and six.

FAY: Okay, so here's what's gonna happen. So... this shark does become a bit aggressive. Xe punches it in the nose. It bites the rope, (SAGE: Oh.) which cuts the rope. And then backs off.

SAGE: So the orb has, I can presume, fallen to the bottom of the pit.

FAY: The orb is starting to sink, but it's sinking at the speed it would through water rather than through air. So it's sinking. It's not all the way at the bottom yet. Xe is maybe halfway to the bottom at this point.

SAGE: Okay, alright. So uh, xe could try swimming down.

FAY: Sure. Just straight-up swimming.

SAGE: Yeah.

FAY: Absolutely, okay. Um, so go ahead and roll that. Xe's an expert at swimming, so that's just a two-dice swimming roll.

SAGE: Okay. Four and six, and it's a physical thing, so. That means it does not work.

[*Music fades out.]

FAY: Yeah, so these currents seem really strong, and xe is finding that they're just not making any progress through these currents. I will point out to you that xe is a mentally focused character. (Mhm.) And magic is mentally focused. Now, magic does have bigger consequences when it goes wrong because it is bigger to begin with. But xe does have both water and animal magic, which would be appropriate to this situation. To remind

you, animal magic can include giving xemself animal traits as well as animal abilities, and it can also include interacting with animals. (SAGE: Oh!) So you can summon animals to your aid; you can speak with animals.

SAGE: Oh, for heaven's sake, sharks are animals.

FAY: Absolutely are.

SAGE: Okay.

FAY: So...

SAGE: So uh, I think that D'Zân might try to communicate with the sharks.

FAY: Okay, absolutely.

SAGE: And this is a two...?

FAY: Two-dice roll.

SAGE: Two and two.

FAY: Oh, that's beautiful. So yeah, sharks are actually quite intelligent, and these sharks are... um, they're definitely willing to talk to you. So these sharks are very hungry, and they're curious. They wanna know what's going on. And they're kind of curious to know if the orb is

food, if you're food, if the rope's food. They're just curious. They wanna know about food.

SAGE: Mmm. Wish I could help 'em out with the food situation.

FAY: Well, you do have some rations in your bag. (SAGE: Okay.) For those creatures who are not vegetarian, rations include some jerky.

SAGE: Oh uh, D'Zân is vegetarian, which I forgot to put into their bio.

FAY: Okay, so these rations would then be vegetarian rations.

SAGE: So that's not gonna appeal to sharks.

FAY: That's not gonna appeal to sharks, unfortunately. Unless you wanna say that D'Zân regularly keeps meat around just for sharing with animals.

SAGE: That actually might be a trait that they would have.

FAY: Yeah, it's literally something a lot of animal trainers will do. Like, you know, vegetarians who own cats will still keep cat treats around. (laughs)

SAGE: Like pets. Oh yeah, if they love their cats, they will. Um, [unintelligible].

FAY: Hopefully, they will be feeding the cats appropriate diets. Absolutely, so what sort of meat treats does D'Zân have for these carnivores?

SAGE: Uh, meat jerky.

FAY: Yeah, some beef— some sort of smoked meat jerky that has no other chemicals added so that it's safe for the animals.

SAGE: Yeah, and it doesn't have too much salt. Just a little, but not like the mill.

FAY: Absolutely. So you got some jerky.

SAGE: Mhm.

FAY: You gonna throw that out into the water for the sharks?

SAGE: Yes.

FAY: Absolutely.

SAGE: Alright, so how many dice do I roll? Because I mean, this could go well, or it could involve a frenzy on their part, right? So.

FAY: Um, yeah, so I'm gonna say that... I'm gonna have you make a nature roll to figure out the best way to distribute these treats.

SAGE: Okay. So that's one or two dice?

FAY: That's a two-dice because you are— D'Zân is an expert at nature.

SAGE: So four and two. Both of those are below five.

FAY: Absolutely. So yeah, D'Zân knows exactly what to do. So D'Zân breaks the jerky up into some different pieces and kind of tosses the jerky into a couple whirlpool zones that are nowhere near where xe is. And the sharks are going in, each going after little bits of jerky for themselves. And they are now going to be easy to avoid.

SAGE: Okay. So now...

FAY: (laughs) The final challenge of the air currents.

SAGE: Yeah, okay. So having to speak with the sharks meant taking shark form again, or at least temporarily, right?

FAY: It does not.

SAGE: It doesn't? Oh, oh okay. Well, alright. Interesting. Well, xe could try to use the in tune with nature ability to figure out how to go with the flow, you know. (FAY: Aah.) And suss out the currents so that xe can swim right. 'Cause I mean, after all, back when I was a kid, that lifeguard knew how to swim in that undertow water. (FAY: Uh huh, right.) And was able to rescue me, but also did not get trapped there himself, so. (FAY: Mhm.) You know, I mean, this could be a sussing out the right way to handle this situation.

FAY: Okay. So... this isn't exactly a natural environment, but yeah, that makes sense, to kind of try to [use] that ability specifically to figure these currents out better. And certainly the clouds moving around in them [give] a lot of hints to how these currents are moving.

SAGE: Uh huh, okay.

FAY: Absolutely. So I'll have you do a nature roll. (SAGE: Okay.) And I'm gonna give you three dice, since nature's a skill and you're also using in tune with nature.

SAGE: Okay, so I rolled a one, two, and four.

FAY: Awesome, so this goes extremely well. So it seems that D'Zân had been kind of misinterpreting the currents, and that's what had been causing so much difficulty trying to swim. And so when D'Zân just takes that moment to relax—

[*In tune with nature music, a minimal electronic track, begins playing.]

FAY: Not be stressed about being spun around in this little whirlpool that xe got stuck in. Xe kind of just really tunes in, notices how all these currents are moving, and realizes that with actually some very small swimming motions, xe can get through this space quite easily, without any drastic effort needed. Because xe is using the currents to go there and back rather than fighting them.

SAGE: Mhm.

FAY: So I'm gonna say that that was so successful that it's actually going to be trivially easy to get to the bottom and back, using the currents to xeir advantage. So that's pretty much what xe needed, so xe can go get the orb and retrieve it.

SAGE: Okay. Is that all included in this roll, or is there more need for— I don't know how these things work.

FAY: Yeah, I'm gonna say that that was so successful— so when you get three successes, you get additional bonus. So because it's easy to get there and back, xe doesn't actually need to roll. (SAGE: Okay.) To do that. Xe can just do it.

SAGE: So xe has now acquired the orb.

FAY: Absolutely. So xe has acquired the orb, xe is going by the sharks, and the sharks are still busy with the jerky. (SAGE: Mhm.) And xe can make it out of the arena successfully.

SAGE: Awesome.

FAY: Congratulations.

SAGE: Thanks.

FAY: Well, thank you.

[*Music fades out.]

FAY: So the final thing is, do you want any of the listeners of the podcast to be able to find you or any projects of yours on the internet?

SAGE: Um, there really isn't much there. (FAY: Okay.) I have a Dreamwidth. The thing is, spelling out loud for me is really hard. That's why I was saying, just put the link in, you know, into the notes, because that is one of my pretty big cognitive limitations.

FAY: Absolutely. Well, if you want to, um... put the link into the notes, and then I can read it out loud, I'm happy to do that.

SAGE: Oh, that would be lovely.

FAY: So the Dreamwidth, is it a journal or a blog?

SAGE: It's a journal, but it's a blog in that there's public posts, so that amounts to a blog. And then there's people [who] add me, and if I feel safe, I'll give them access to my private posts.

FAY: Okay, so it is v-l-a-d-d-r-a-c-u-l-e-a dot d-r-e-a-m-w-i-d-t-h dot org. So that's <u>vladdraculea.dreamwidth.org</u>, and I will have that link in the show notes as well.

SAGE: Yeah, and just uh, you're pronouncing it *drak-yuh-luh*. It's actually *drak-oo-lee-uh* because [it's] using "e" between the "l" and the "a." Though it's not a standard spelling. (FAY: Okay.) It's actually, it is the standard Romanian spelling, but it isn't the English spelling.

FAY: Good to know! Well, thank you so much. I hope you enjoyed going on this mini-adventure.

SAGE: I did.

FAY: Awesome, that's wonderful. And I'm very much looking forward to getting everyone together. 'Cause one of the fun things that's gonna happen when all of the characters are together is that if someone causes some sort of dramatic consequence with magic, everyone else can also react to it as well, or people can build on each other's abilities, so. (SAGE: Mhm.) Very much looking forward to that.

[*Game theme plays, then stops.]

FAY: (narration) And that is the end of this episode. Please join us in three weeks on Thursday, May 10th for the first episode of "The Owlbear Reintroduction Program," a game where Willa, Tarragon, and D'Zân start off on their first internship mission, to move a family of owlbears.

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[*Outro, a calm electronic track, begins playing.]

FAY: 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. Note that wait times vary a lot depending on what games participants are interested in. Thank you for listening, and please join us in three weeks on Thursday, May 10th for the first episode of "The Owlbear Reintroduction Program"!

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