

Writing Alchemy Episode 40 – Inside the First Responders Training Program Part 1

Transcribed by Goblin and Fay Onyx with the help of Otter.ai

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

TOBI: [voiceover] 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: We return to the First Responder's Training Program to catch up with Vanessa the Witch and Janus the Ghoul. In this sequel adventure, meet Gail the Ghost and follow the drama that swirls around the popular Chaz Drakon, as everyone prepares for another pivotal full moon ritual.

[Music swells and then fades out.]

Hello and welcome to the 40th episode of Writing Alchemy. I am Fay Onyx and I am so excited to be back with the twenty first episode of Unfamiliar Heroes, my podcast series where I work with players and storytellers create new representations of disabled, sick, and neurodivergent people using tabletop role-playing games.

It has been a lot longer than I expected, but we are finally back!

This is the first episode of Inside the First Responders Training Program, a six episode story arc that is the sequel to the Welcome to the First Responder's Training Program. It uses the Monsterhearts 2 game system by Avery Alder. I highly recommend it. Links are in the show notes.

As I get back into things, I'm hoping to release one episode of this adventure per month. Each episode will first be released, with transcript, on my patreon page. One week later it will go up in this feed. You can also look forward to Friendship is Music, a special musical-themed collaboration episode made for International Podcast Month. In addition, I will also be sharing the audio recording of the talk I gave for the Tabletop Mentorship Program, Disability Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them.

If I get more capacity in the future, I'll give you some more updates, but for now I have limited capacity, so I'm focusing on the basics.

I'm going to wrap this up by quickly mentioning that you can follow Writing Alchemy on twitter @ Writing underscore Alchemy, hashtag AlchemyCast. Visit Writing Alchemy dot net for all of the Writing Alchemy episodes, the Magic Goes Awry game system, and an extensive set of resources on accessibility and disability representation. And if you want to help me keep this podcast going, and my other work, pledge your support on patreon at patreon dot com slash Writing Alchemy, or make a donation through Ko-fi.

And now, let's get to the show!

Inside the First Responders Training Program, Part 1.

[The game theme, an angsty and emotional piece of rock music, plays.]

[This is the start of the game recording.]

JORDAN: My name is Jordan Green. I live in Seattle, Washington. Other fun facts about me? I'm pretty queer. [Laughter] I'm pretty Black. I love pizza, burritos, and sushi, and cheeseburgers. I'm your storyteller. That's it.

FAY: Uh, yeah, sure.

TOBI: Okay, so my name is Tobi Hill-Meyer. I'm a multiracial, queer trans woman. And I am anxiously awaiting my copy of Consentacle, [group laughter] which I believe is supposed to be in the mail at some point really soon. And if that sounds at all interesting to you, Google it.

FAY: There'll be a link.

TOBI: Yeah. Be careful if you Google it, though.

JORDAN: Yeah, definitely Not Safe for Work.

FAY: Not- Yeah, not safe for work.

JORDAN: Maybe not even safe for home.

TOBI: I- I would say the game itself is safe for work. They go to great pains to really limit the explicitness. However, if you do a Google search, you may find things outside of just the game.

JORDAN: Right. So you know, safe for your bedroom, or private area, private time.

TOBI: Yes.

BILLIE: It's safe for your private area. [hearty background laughter]

JORDAN: (humorously dramatic sigh) Wow! (teasingly) So glad you are going us.

FAY: Well, this is going to get an explicit rating. It's just the introduction. That's the thing, is, like, you get this introduction that's explicit, and then the rest of the game, oh, PG 13! [group laughter]

JORDAN: Pretty... Pretty family friendly.

FAY: Rated-R introduction! [much laughter]

TOBI: Okay, and Tobi, you have a character!

TOBI: Yes, I do! I will be returning to play the role of Janus Greer. Um, you might want to go and look up the old episodes to see how things turned out. But just to give you a quick summary, Janus is kind of a slacker and- and kind of enjoying just getting by. She's got a total crush on Chaz, ummm and just saved his life! Which is pretty cool.

FAY: Mmhmm. Right. And Janus is, uh, did you say she was a ghoul?

TOBI: No, I didn't. But I guess you spoiled the surprise.

BILLIE: (makes a bemused sound) [group laughter]

FAY: It's a surprise?

TOBI: No, it's fine.

JORDAN: I was like, is it a surprise? We have two episodes in which we explicitly say that.

TOBI: Yes, yes, Janus is a ghoul. And for Monsterhearts, that means a couple of things. It means that umm... she died and- and then, uh, didn't go away. So she is undead. And she also has a powerful hunger. And in- in- in different cases, with different ghouls. There might be different hungers. It might be for flesh, or- or it might be for power or plunder or fear. In my case, Janus' hunger is for avenging injustice,

FAY: Which she does in surprisingly adorable, petty ways.

TOBI: Yes, that's- that's true. [laughter]

JORDAN: Yeah.

TOBI: It can, it can. You know, it's one of those kinds of things where it's not just I see an injustice, and I must avenge it. But I- if I don't get to avenden-- avenge an injustice, uh, for a while, I'll start to invent some injustices to avenge. And so suddenly, I'll start paying very close attention who- to, uh, who cut in front of me at the

cafeteria line, and then I might, um, snidely tell them that- that they smell. [more laughs] To avenge the injustice of having them cut in front of me in line.

FAY: Indeed.

TOBI: Yes, yes.

FAY: So I'm Fay Onyx, and I am playing Vanessa the Witch. And, uh, Vanessa, is- she's one of those kind of like, secretly judgmental people where she- well she's really driven to develop her skills as a witch so that she can go join her mom, who's kind of, uh, engaged in this intense epic battle ongoing thing. So she has, like, real stuff going on that she's really focused on. It's just that she gets like really judgmental about other people, like, who manufacture problems and, um, or who just don't take things seriously.

TOBI: Why are you looking in my direction? [laughter]

FAY: And, um, yeah, so she's kind of judgmental.

JORDAN: (raspy and soft) Be judgmental!

BILLIE: Oooo! [laughing]

JORDAN: I mean it's not bad.

FAY: She doesn't get along with Chaz. So that's some drama.

BILLIE: Who's Chaz?

JORDAN: Oh, you'll learn!

FAY: We're gonna find out how new your character is. Billie, do you want to introduce yourself? So you're also returning so everyone here has been on Unfamiliar Heroes before?

BILLIE: Yes, that's true.

FAY: Would you like to reintroduce yourself?

BILLIE: I've managed some lederhosen sprites last time I was here. And that was very fun. It was really fun. Yeah. So this is my second game. I'm really excited. My name is Billie Rain. I am mixed race, um, European and Mizrahi Jew. And I live in Seattle. And I'm crazy. And I also have chronic illnesses. And I'm kind of extra crazy in my life right now. Which is like kind of funny because my character, like I was thinking she was like, a little bit like more crazy than me like, but actually, I think I'm about as crazy as my character is right now. So that hopefully that'll be interesting [laughter].

So my character Gail Strahan is from Ireland, and, uh, died like a long time ago, like 500 or so years ago. And her mother is a morish North African descent and her father is of Irish Celtic descent, and she was an herbalist. And she was burned at the stake for being a quote unquote, "witch." So that's like part of her character. She's, she like, totally blames like the Christian patriarchy for her death. And she's like, still sort of like fighting, fighting the same like forces that she feels are responsible for her death, like hundreds of years ago, and she's very resentful about it. And she totally has PTSD, still, she has ghost PTSD. And I have human PTSD. [laughter]

FAY: Absolutely.

JORDAN: Wait, the player?

BILLIE: I have PTSD, I Billie Rain have PTSD as a human.

JORDAN: Yeah. Okay.

BILLIE: And then she has PTSD. Oh, my pronouns are ze and hir. And my character's pronouns are she and her.

JORDAN: Okay.

FAY: Awesome.

BILLIE: Yeah.

FAY: Absolutely. And and the ghost is all about past trauma. And so Billie's character has PTSD. Would you be up for dramatically reading this paragraph?

BILLIE: "The ghost! Life is precious. You understand that now that you've lost yours. You just want to help you just want to be seen. But sometimes even the simplest desires feel so difficult to grasp. Ghosty ghost, you're dead."

FAY: The melodramatic introduction! So, yeah, so ghosts are all about past trauma. Do you mind if I just explain a few things?

BILLIE: Have at it, yeah, no do it, because I don't know what I'm doing.

FAY: Yeah, so I'm jumping in here to help explain a few of the key things about ghosts really fast. And so basically, the main thing that ghosts have is they have a move called unresolved trauma. And so if an event in the game brings up their unresolved trauma, then they gain a condition which is called Traumatized.

FAY: So conditions are a little complicated to kinda talk about. But basically, it just means that if anyone is interacting with the fact that they're traumatized, they get a bonus on what they're doing. And someone can help Billie's character Gail resolve some of that current traumatized condition, and actually gives both players experience. But the other thing that Gail can do is projected blame of the trauma onto someone else.

BILLIE: Or all men. [group laughter]

JORDAN: I'm totally looking forward to this.

FAY: And so then that gives the condition At Fault for My Death onto the person. And again, what conditions are is basically they're like a label that people can interact with, for how characters are perceiving things. And so when another character has this label, if Billie is acting on this anger towards them, this projected anger, then Billie will be extra good at doing things to this person that they're blaming. Or that she's blaming.

BILLIE: I know right. [Referring to the pronoun correction that Fay did] [laughter]

FAY: I just use generic pronouns regularly, so...

JORDAN: Yeah, same.

FAY: And then as a ghost, Billie's character is also limitless. So Gale can walk through walls and fly. Gail is really good at being volatile and dark, which is – dark is kind of the magic stat – and is not good at being cold or hot. So not keeping the cool and not socially manipulating people. So that's kind of the basic ghost stuff.

FAY: And so then the first thing that we need to do is start out by just filling in the last few connections of how Gail fits into the overall story that we're continuing, this Sylvan community college setting. And so there's two things that we need to decide. So these things called strings, which are a social currency. And basically, if you have a string on someone, it means that you can, like have a bonus to interactions with them if you want. And so someone knows that you're dead and how you died, they gain two strings on you. So I guess maybe it'd be good to figure out how Gail fits into the Sylvan Community College setting. And then, uh--

FAY: So I know a little bit about like, I read over your character. So your- your character died quite a while ago, in a place that is far away from Sylvan Community College. So how do you think that they ended up-- Do you have any ideas around how that character ended up here?

BILLIE: Yeah, that is a good question. Well, I mean, I'm assuming she flew here. And like, I don't know, like, maybe, maybe she was kind of interested in like the like, you know, cool, like feminist activism happening in the United States. And so she liked flew over.

JORDAN: Ok.

BILLIE: To check it out in like the 70s.

JORDAN: Oh, in the 70s, so a while ago.

BILLIE: Yeah, yeah. [laughter]

JORDAN: Okay.

BILLIE: Cuz she's oldy timey.

JORDAN: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

FAY: So your character has been in the United States for quite some time. And they- she is... Has she always been in the Phoenix City area? Or has she been drawn here?

FAY: There has been a lot of, like, powerful female leaders in this area for--

JORDAN: Quite some--

FAY: Since the 1700s.

JORDAN: Yeah.

FAY: Yeah. So this particular area.

BILLIE: Well, isn't this area kind of known for like having supernatural entities?

JORDAN: Yeah.

BILLIE: So I feel like that would have drawn her to like, you know, see if she can create a social life that involves other supernatural entities.

JORDAN: Ok and so--

BILLIE: Plus feminism.

JORDAN: Plus feminism. Yes, I'm hearing the feminism real big. [laughter]

BILLIE: She's like hardcore.

JORDAN: Yeah, yeah. [laughter] I saw that. I'm really interested to see how that plays out in this character. It's particularly the second wave-y feminism.

FAY: Yass.

JORDAN: I know that Phoenix City has a lot of people who-- a lot of powerful women. And I know that your character has been in the United States for a while. Did they go straight to Phoenix City? Did they- are they- I guess what I'm asking is, are they just showing up now?

BILLIE: She's just showing up now [JORDAN: Okay.] to Phoenix city, I would say- I mean, now that I'm thinking about it, I would imagine she should have bopped around, like she probably lived in Chicago [JORDAN: Okay.] for a while, and was part of some of the amazing feminist activism that happened in Chicago in like the 70s and 80s around abortion access [JORDAN: Ok, great.] maybe like, you know, kind of just went to different cities where she thought there was cool stuff going on, but maybe [JORDAN: Yeah] never really fitting in cuz she's old and she's a ghost.

JORDAN: Okay, okay. And how does she appear? Can you describe what she looks like?

BILLIE: She kind of-- I feel like you would look at her and think this person goes to Renaissance fairs.

JORDAN: Okay. [laughter]

BILLIE: Yeah.

JORDAN: Fantastic! [group laughter] And is like in Renaissance cosplay, like 24/7.

BILLIE: Yeah like, cuz she thinks that's like normal clothes. [JORDAN: Okay.] And even if she can see people dressed differently, I feel like like mentally, it's like maybe even because of her PTSD she doesn't fully adjust with the times...

JORDAN: Got it. Okay.

BILLIE: She's kind of like, still a little bit outside of modernity- modernity?

FAY: Yeah, I like it. [laughter] Alright, so, um, and is she- does she- When she died was she old? Was she young?

BILLIE: Young, she's a young adult.

JORDAN: Okay, so we're thinking like, twenty one at maximum?

BILLIE: Yeah, right around there I would say because I don't think she would fully like had learned her craft. She was still being mentored in herbalism.

FAY: Sure, okay. And is she still interested in herbalism? Has she spent her time traveling learning about herbalism or what like--

BILLIE: Yeah, I mean, my imagination of her is that she was kind of a plant talker and that was part of her ancestral lineage.

JORDAN: Okay.

BILLIE: So it's kind of like, I feel like with her, she doesn't know the names of all the plants, but like she can kind of like-- If you, like, are taking a walk, she'd be like, "Oh, that's good for headaches."

JORDAN: Okay.

BILLIE: That kind of thing.

JORDAN: Okay, and so--

BILLIE: It wouldn't necessarily be like that's the name of this plant is blah she just knows.

JORDAN: Okay, um, so let's have you be attracted to Phoenix city, and particularly this-- uh, is it the-- the paramedics rescue...?

TOBI: First Responders.

FAY: First Responders Training Program.

JORDAN: First Responders, there we go! First Responders Training Program, cuz you actually heard that they had a really good natural medicine training course--

BILLIE: Nice!

JORDAN: ...Herbalism, um, the "Natural Medicine Training Course." I'm doing air quotes for folks that can't see my fingers. So the First Responders Program, for folks that are just joining us now, is a covert program to train all of the magical people in Phoenix City. And it's run-- it has been established and run by the Grand Coven of Phoenix City who has basically set up- set up a way to train, witches and, sorry, not just witches, but magical people, to respond to the threats of our time. And--

BILLIE: Like men!

JORDAN: Like men! [laughter] Mostly men, actually. So it's new moon. And it is the meeting of the Pagan Student Association. And Vanessa gets a email from pro-- I think it's gets an email from Professor de la Cruz. And Professor de la Cruz is- says, "Hey, Vanessa, wanted to check in with you about something really exciting. Please come by my office when you have a chance."

FAY: Well, Vanessa is all about that. Um, so a Professor de la Cruz is mentoring Vanessa. So she will come by Maria's office as soon as she gets a chance.

[Somber guitar music begins to play.]

JORDAN: Professor de la Cruz: Vanessa, darling, It's great to see you. Um, please come in, come in, come in, have a, have a-- Make yourself comfortable... So you know that I am teaching one of the herbalism classes this this term, correct?

FAY: (as Vanessa) Um, uh yeah.

FAY:

(whispered) She totally did not know. [group laughter]

JORDAN: (Prof de la Cruz) Excellent! Great! I know you're, you're one of those students that's just really on top of it. It's one of the reasons why I know that you're going to be such a great, great a graduate of our First Responders Program. But unfortunately, I've had some circumstances, where the person that I had tapped to be my assistant is no longer able to fulfill those duties. Would you be interested in joining me? I know it's super late in the term. and I would give you a little bit of slack around that, but I think you really have the greatest potential to be a real ally-- a true a true boon to this class, would you consider joining my herbal ism classes as my TA?

FAY: (as Vanessa) I'd love to.

JORDAN: Yeah--

FAY: Because that's that's how Vanessa is. So background on Vanessa is that she has been training kind of her whole life in witch stuff, so she does know a fair bit about herbalism that she's learned from various people who've mentored her.

JORDAN: Yeah.

JORDAN: (Prof de la Cruz) Excellent, excellent! The next class is in about 45 minutes. Do you? Do you have the time to come by and just do a brief introduction, so everybody knows?

FAY: (as Vanessa) Yeah, So I guess the one thing is, um, you know, with the class, what sort of duties would I have? Cuz like, if we're walking and doing- if, if- when the class is outside, and we're like doing walking stuff, that's cool. If there's a lot of standing, like, I'd rather have, like if we could just bring one of the office chairs in. So instead of standing, I could use that. But yeah, I'd be happy to come and do an introduction Do you want me to like stick around or like...?

JORDAN: (Proff de la Cruz) Uh, the class will be happening in the- in this building, so you don't need to, you don't need to go very far, but we-- there won't be as-- as for your other things, there won't be any standing, much standing. I actually would just like you to walk around and help some of the students. Mostly I'm going to need your assistance, grading some of the papers--

FAY: (as Vanessa) Oh sure!

JORDAN: ...understanding some of the classroom dynamics a little bit more. And every once in a while, I'll ask you to lead some of the herbalism journeys out into the- out into the nearby forests of Sylvan Community College, but nothing too major. I will always prepare you for for your trips out. Of course, if you're great at this, I could see this being a really good ongoing partnership. I teach this class every quarter. It's something that every young first responder should know about wildlife, and--

FAY: (as Vanessa) I totally agree!

JORDAN: (Prof de la Cruz) Yeah. And yeah, it's just, it's, it's a foundational class that we--

FAY: (as Vanessa) Absolutely! I would be absolutely happy to help!

JORDAN: (Prof de la Cruz) Great! It's a lot of responsibility, but I think there's anyone that could handle it, it would be you.

FAY: (as Vanessa) I- I'll- I'll do my best.

JORDAN: (as Prof de la Cruz) Wonderful meet back here in 30 minutes. Go get something to eat. Make sure you're refreshed. And I am really-- I will have everything else prepared for you.

FAY: (as Vanessa) I'll- I'll look forward to it.

JORDAN: (as Prof de la Cruz) Thank you!

JORDAN: So well end that scene there. We'll have Janus-- Janus, are you on campus right now?

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah, yeah, I don't have much elsewhere to be so I kind of just hang out, but I hang out on campus.

JORDAN: Okay, great. Um, and are you...? We are going to have you in the cafeteria for that.

TOBI: Sure.

JORDAN: And you happen to be hanging out with Tamara, who is-- we find, uh, munching on some onion rings.

TOBI: Mmhmm.

JORDAN: You and Tamara have been practicing some of your ghoulish abilities, um, earlier in the day and you're pretty exhausted. Tamara has been helping you learn how to sorta har-- harness some of your-- some of your abilities like flight and, uh--

TOBI: Oh, I didn't know I could fly.

JORDAN: Well, Tamara can. [laughter]

TOBI: Damn!

JORDAN: If you reca--

TOBI: She's really cool!

JORDAN: Yeah, she's super cool. She--

TOBI: She's got to be really cool if Chaz is dating her. [laughter]

JORDAN: Yeah. Yeah, you you and Tamara is just kinda just talking about her new- the new, the upcoming ritual and helping prepare, helping Chaz prepare for that because, as you know, Chaz leads the full moon rituals as the vice president of the-- (whispered to FAY) Do you lead the full moon...? [laughter]

FAY: Vanessa-- I'm pretty sure Vanessa is the one who led the- the most recent one.

TOBI: Vanessa leads the rituals, but but Chaz talks them up and gets everyone to show up.

JORDAN: Sure. Okay.

TOBI: Yeah.

FAY: Yeah, it's a-- it's actually would be a very functional partnership if they didn't-- if Vanessa didn't dislike him so much.

JORDAN: Yeah. Right. [Group laughter] So Chaz--

BILLIE: (in a low voice) Who is this Chaz?

JORDAN: Well, we're about to learn. So, uh Tamara is like, "Hey, Janus, you've got to help me get the word out about our new full moon ritual that's coming up this month."

TOBI: (as Janus) Oh, um, you mean like, like, talking with with people? [laughter]

JORDAN: (as Tamara) Yeah! You've been getting really good at that. And it'll be fine. You can just come with me and Chaz. We usually go out in pairs. But I know that he would love to have you along.

TOBI: (as Janus) Oh, well, sure! I guess- I guess if it's not just myself. Sure.

JORDAN: (as Tamara) Yeah. Um, where- we're gonna go shopping for some crystals this week. Are you up for getting some with us?

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah! Yeah, I just- I just learned a whole bunch about, like, ethically sustainable crystals, because a lot of them are really unethical. But, but I think I-I-I know, a place where I can, where they actually document where they came from.

JORDAN: (as Tamara) Really?

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah.

JORDAN: (as Tamara) Where do they get them from?

TOBI: (as Janus) I'd have to ask them. I think they get them from different places.

JORDAN: (as Tamara) Yeah.

TOBI: (as Janus) But they just, you know, they make sure it's not, you know, slave labor and...

JORDAN: (as Tamara) Oh man, I just read that article too. It's so horrible. You, you would think something as innocent as a crystal wouldn't have all of this negative things attached to it. It really-- We really tried to get crystals that don't have that negative energy.

TOBI: (as Janus) Oh, oh yeah. And that negative energy just, like, negates all of the benefits of the crystal.

JORDAN: (as Tamara) Right, You have to do all of the extra cleansing and all that extra work, just to like--

TOBI: (as Janus) And especially if you don't know too! And then you don't do the cleansing. Ah, you're just- you just, you know, you're messing everything up.

JORDAN: (as Tamara) Right. It'll mess everything up. And really, we're trying to make sure that we're gathering as much good energy as possible to help those who are constantly waging war against, um...

TOBI: (as Janus) You gotta love that good energy.

JORDAN: (as Tamara) ...the force of that darkness. Yeah, those good, good energy. That pure- those pure moods.

JORDAN: Um, yeah! Okay, great. So, um, and it is at this point, as you all are talking Chaz walks in-- Chaz doesn't walk in, Chaz skates in.

TOBI: (Admiring gasp) Of course!

BILLIE: Like on roller skates?

JORDAN: No, on a skateboard.

[Slow dramatic funky music comes in with a dramatic flourish. This is Chaz's theme music. It has bass and a few snares starts in the background.]

[Skateboarding sounds.]

JORDAN: And he like-- And you-- you look across the cafeteria, and they are set up on these tables, right? And Chaz just kind of is like wheeling around. And as Chaz come in everybody's like, "Oh my god Chaz, high five bro! What up man!"

TOBI: I- I- I really want to do that, but I'm gonna hold back from it. [laughter]

JORDAN: And he skates up and he's like-- He, uh, he skates up to Tamara and Janus is like, "Hey." [Group laughter]

BILLIE: (Imitating Chaz's low, laid back voice) "What's up?"

JORDAN: And, uh, Tamara's like, "Hey, Chaaaaz!"

TOBI: (as Janus) "Hi Chaz. I'm glad to s-- " (Tongue tied sound) "Hi!"

JORDAN: (as Chaz) HeyJanus its good to see you! Your totally cool.

JORDAN: And he walks up and, like, plants a kiss on Tamara's cheek. And they get on-- gathering on.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) So, Janus, you uh, you want to join us for, like, the full moon ritual?

TOBI: (as Janus) Oh, um, yeah, I- I was kind of I yeah, yeah. That's what I was assuming. But it's it's like-- I'm glad you invited me, cuz--

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Yeah, yeah. Janus, I like, I really like you. Like you're- you're so cool. Tamara says you guys have been like, practicing and training and really getting better at like, protecting us from all those things that are out there in the night.

TOBI: (as Janus) Well- well, anytime, anytime you need some protection, you just let me know.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Oh, that's that's good to know. Thank you, Tamara's like, Tamara's like really cool and, uh, protects me a lot of the time, but I can always use a little extra muscle.

TOBI: (as Janus) Well, you know, if- if she needs a break or something for maybe, maybe I could, like, I could protect both of you sometimes.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Oh, yeah. Right on. That would be-- Yeah, we would love to have you around us more often.

JORDAN: And Chaz is like, "Hey babe, I gotta get going uh to uh uh herbology class." [group snickering and laughs]

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Professor de la Cruz is like, getting a new TA. And, uh-- cuz the old one disappeared. Because of that that weird were-cat thing. You remember that?

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah, yeah. I I remember how he felt.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Yeah. Anyway, I'm so glad. Hey, Janus, are you gonna take herbology next year?

TOBI: (as Janus) Um, you know, I- I- I signed up for all the easy classes this this term, but but next term, maybe I'll- I'll like, go for y-- Do you think I should?

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Oh, no. I mean, if you want an easy time, don't join any class taught by Professor de la Cruz. [snickering]

TOBI: (as Janus) Ah! Oh- okay. Tha- Thanks for the advice.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) But! But if you want to be a good first responder, join every class she teaches, cuz shes like... the best. [laughter]

TOBI: (as Janus) Okay, okay, yeah! I'll- I'll- I'll- I'll do that.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) You are, like-- You have such the potential to be, like, the best!

TOBI: (as Janus) Oh, thank you!

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Next to me and Tamara, of course.

TOBI: (as Janus) Well, yeah, yeah! And and, you know, I was I was thinking maybe that like the three of us could hang out some more some time.

JORDAN: Yeah. So as he's saying this, he's like playing in Tamara's hair, and like nuzzling on her neck and stuff. And is, like, being super lovey-dovey [laughter from the group] in the most obnoxious way possible, right.

BILLIE: I hate him! [Group laughter]

JORDAN: (in Chaz's voice) Hate is a really strong word.

BILLIE: It's not strong enough. [More laughter]

JORDAN: Okay. [group laughter]

FAY: Is Tamara enjoying this though?

JORDAN: Yeah, Tamara is like super into it. Which is why she's been like so quiet the entire time. She's just like, purring and cooing, um-- [more laughter]

FAY: We- we forgot to mention the appearance of these two characters. So Tamara's this, like, gorgeous black woman with really dark skin, right?

JORDAN: Yeah, she's got this beautiful dark skin with, like, cool undertones underneath. And she has this beautiful-- She has beautiful hair as tightly coiled. Usually it's in a protective style, so like, either like bantu knots or braids. But today it's just out in full. Tamara's wearing-- She's looking really good in a very-- The only color I could describe it as is, like, electric teal. [Billie: Oooh!] And so she's wearing this like electric teal crop top that happens to show off her, like, very well defined abs, cuz Tamara is, like, super athletic. And her nails match it.

JORDAN: And then there's Chaz, who is, like, Chaz is like, this beautiful-- Like, we decided he was like brown skinned...

FAY: Pacific Islander, or something? Yeah.

JORDAN: Yeah. I- the- If anybody's ever seen the show, or the movie Johnny Tsunami, like, that's the person I'm thinking of. Just like, I want you to think of like your quintessential skater boy, with, like, a bowl cut. And just like super cool, like 90 style, because the 90 style is kind of back in vogue now. And he's wearing-- this-- Here, he's wearing, like, a striped shirt with jean overalls. And he's wearing high top shoes. So that's Chaz. And so he like, has this kind of like, affected, like, he-- Everybody thinks he's like this skater surfer boy, and he just eats it up. Cuz that's, that's definitely his persona.

JORDAN: And so yeah! He's like, "Anyway, like, Janus it would be like, really cool to hang out with you and like, let's, let's make some fun time. I gotta get to herbology, it's starting in like 30 minutes. But afterwards, we should go get some crystals, you know?"

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah, yeah. Tamara was just just saying that to me, and I- I- I was mentioned I- I know a place that's gonna be a really good choice.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Oh, awesome! Awesome, yeah. Is it in town?

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah. Yeah, it's not it's not far.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Great! Babe, I'm gonna check you later.

JORDAN: (as Tamara) See you later, honey. [laughter]

JORDAN: And he's like, Janus, and he like, does the finger guns. [group laughter] And he's like "Stay cool!"

BILLIE: Nooo!

TOBI: (as Janus) A- ah- Always! [more laughter]

JORDAN: And, he like hops on his skateboard and like skates out to-- to the-- Like toward herbology.

[Skateboard sounds]

FAY: I'm sure that's against school rules.

JORDAN: Yeah, but it's Chaz. Everybody loves Chaz.

FAY: So does he skate into herbology? Like where Vanessa can see that he's violating school rules.

JORDAN: Well, we're not there yet. [laughter] So we're about 15 minutes away from the herbology class.

[End of this section of the game recording.]

[The mid-roll music, a calm electronic track, comes in.]

FAY: [voiceover] Welcome to the mid-roll! I'm hoping to start mixing these up more so that they are different every time and I'm going to end each mid-roll with a recommendation for my favorite podcasts. Links to everything mentioned here are in the show notes.

I believe that art is an important source of emotional sustenance in these challenging times. It also gives us a place to see ourselves and our communities reflected. However, in the larger culture, intersectionally marginalized artists are undervalued and underpaid. It is hard for us to have the resources to keep doing this important work. That is why your support is so important.

If you can, please make a donation through patreon. Even a dollar a month is a meaningful contribution that helps me keep doing this. Funds raised on Patreon go to pay reoccurring expenses, like web-hosting fees, and hiring a range of talented folks to keep this project moving and increase its accessibility, like audio editors, transcribers, and sensitivity consultants.

As a thank you for your support, Patreon backers are now getting early releases of each episode with its transcript.

You can also support Writing Alchemy through the Writing Alchemy Tee Public store. Just following the Writing Alchemy link to the Tee Public website sends a few dollars my way when you make a purchase, even if you don't buy anything in the Writing Alchemy shop. And the Writing Alchemy shop is full of awesome disability and intersectionally focused merchandise, including art of strong disabled people, black fairies, fat mermaids, and all sorts of quirky things, like a spoon hoarding dragon. There also are empowering statements, like "Gender is a Universe," "The Future Is Accessible," and "Wheelchairs Are Freedom." Tee Public is more than clothing too, so there are shirts, masks, notebooks, tote bags, cell phone cases, stickers, pillows, and wall art. And Tee Public has big sales every month, including sales for every major holiday.

I know that not everyone can afford a dollar a month or to purchase merchandise, and there are non-monetary ways that you can support this show. The biggest is sharing this show with a friend and letting them know you think they will enjoy it. Word of mouth is the number one way that shows grow. Positive ratings and five star reviews are also a big help. Send me a link or screen cap of your review and I will share it in a future mid-roll.

And to all of my patreon backers, volunteers, collaborators, guests, participants, and community members. Thank you! Your support makes this show possible!

Today's recommendation is Kalila Stormfire's Economical Magick Services. In 2020 I did a crossover with Lisette Alvarez, the creator of Kalila Stormfire's Economical Magick Services, in which Kalila gives Janus her first tarot reading. This crossover takes place between the first Welcome to the First Responders Training Program adventure and this second one. Honestly this crossover was a bit of a bucket list item for me. Working with Lisett Alvaraz was awesome!

One of the reasons the crossover worked so well is because Kalila Stormfire's Economical Magick Services is set in a magical version of our everyday world, much like the First Responders Training Program games, except in Kalila's world the presence of magic publicly knowledge. One of the most extraordinary things about this series is the way it centers real-world witchcraft and spiritual practice and uses them as the heart and foundation for the magic in its world. And this is a version of witchcraft that centers communities of color and diverse spiritual traditions. Truly, I can't say enough good things about Kalila Stormfire's Economical Magick Services, and now the series is complete, so you can listen to all of it. I highly recommend checking it out!

And now back to the show!

[The music returns, swells, and then fades.]

[The game recording starts again.]

JORDAN: So that exchange happens. And, uh-- (Jordan struggles for the character name) Vanessa shows back up at the office, gathers all the papers and is walking in the class. When she-- She right? Yeah, she bumps into--

BILLIE: (Said in an exaggerated, drawn out way) Gail.

JORDAN: Huh?

BILLIE: Gail.

JORDAN: Gail our new character. And Gail, why don't you just describe a little bit of what you're wearing today. How you generally look like for folks at home.

BILLIE: Okay, well, so Gail is Irish, the North African Moroccan and so she has, like, kind of like kinky hair. And it's like, sort of like, like kind

of like a dark brown color. And she has freckles and she has kind of, like, I feel like kind of like, medium olive tone skin and she's wearing like, a like flowy blouse with like, kind of like lace in the front.

JORDAN: Okay.

BILLIE: Like sort of like lace up tie thing in the front and then just like a long flowy skirt.

JORDAN: Okay.

BILLIE: And like a little shawl over it.

JORDAN: Okay, [laughter] I love this! Okay, um, so you're busy. Janus-- Not Janus, sorry. Vanessa is busy rushing to class trying to-- like, Janus has this, uh--

FAY: Vanessa? [group laughter]

JORDAN: Vanessa. (dramatic sigh) I'm sorry, my brain--

FAY: We're going to have some fun outtakes on this one. [more laughter]

JORDAN: Yeah right! Vanessa has this rule that's kind of like if you're 15 minutes early you're on time, and if you're on time, you're late sort of ethic about them?

FAY: Yeah.

BILLIE: (quietly) Zoinks.

JORDAN: Huh?

BILLIE: Zoinks! [snickering]

JORDAN: Zoinks, yeah, very! And so, you know, with it being about 17 minutes to class, Vanessa is trying to get there as quickly as possible.

TOBI: Hey--

FAY: Absolutely.

TOBI: Hey, Jordan--

JORDAN: Yeah?

TOBI: I- Is that a rule that you live by? Cuz-- [everyone laughs]

JORDAN: (in a playful deadpan) Stop it. Stop being so mean.

TOBI: It's okay. It was-- it was it was great that you were two hours early.

BILLIE: Ooooooh!

JORDAN: (playfully) So mean to me your friend who you've known forever. My heart hurts! [Jordan laughs]

JORDAN: (whispered) It doesn't actually hurt.

JORDAN: I was two hours early today. Don't worry about it. [everyone laughs] Anywho, um...

FAY: You w-- You were here to help set up, so that was awesome.

JORDAN: That was true. I was here to help set up. Anywho, So the game- the-- Vanessa is rushing the class. And Gail, right? Uh, kinda of runs smack dab into Gail.

[A soft thud, paper rustling as it falls, and scuffling noises.]

FAY: Okay.

JORDAN: Not paying attention.

FAY: Right.

JORDAN: I'll let y'all take that interaction from here.

[Low volume background rock guitar that starts with a high pitched electric whine intended to communicate anxiety.]

FAY: (as Vanessa) Oh- oh! I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry!

FAY: And Vanessa immediately starts picking up the papers.

[Paper swishing and rustling as it is being picked up.]

BILLIE: I would say that Gail would immediately try to help. Gail's like really socially awkward, probably was, like, looking down. And like, wasn't totally not paying attention to where she's going, because she's very, like weird and socially awkward. And now she probably feels totally embarrassed and horrible.

JORDAN: It was like--

BILLIE: (as Gail) (in a waivering voice) Oh, my God, I'm so sorry!

JORDAN: Gail, I will tell you that the only reason why you, um-- You were not paying attention-- Or in this in this situation was you were trying to get to your only and favorite class Herbology 1.

BILLIE: Yeah, that's a pretty good class.

JORDAN: Yeah.

BILLIE: You're gonna take one class, it should be your herbology.

JORDAN: Correct.

FAY: I think what might happen is they have that really awkward, like, social interaction as they both pick up the papers. And then they suddenly, like, awkwardly find out they're heading in the same direction.

JORDAN: Yes.

FAY: And especially, like, if you kind of already said, "Okay, thank you bye," and then you both end up going in the same direction. [laughter] It's like, so awkward.

FAY: So the papers that you managed to drop happened to be, you didn't know this, but managed to be the midterm. That was like the big midterm. And so the-- Professor de la Cruz had put them in a specific order that had been messed up. And you're not really sure what that order is anymore.

FAY: (deep dramatic sigh)

JORDAN: Gail, you happen to see that your name was toward the bottom of the stack, which didn't have the best grade on it. Which is quite surprising to you, because you have been rocking herbology.

BILLIE: (as Gail's melodramatically distraught thoughts) This the only class I'm taking!

JORDAN: It is the only class you're taking.

BILLIE: (as Gail's melodramatically distraught thoughts) How am i getting a bad grade in the only class I'm taking?!

JORDAN: The bad grade is a C plus by the way.

BILLIE: (as Gail's melodramatically distraught thoughts) That's horrible!

FAY: Right, okay. And so these are the graded midterms?

JORDAN: Mhm, these are the graded midterms.

FAY: Okay. Right, okay.

JORDAN: Uh, it's about 10 minutes before class starts. Professor de la Cruz is beginning to set up as you both walk in the door. And she says, "Oh, uh..." (long pause)

JORDAN: (whispered) Your name?

TOBI: (softly) I'm Janus.

JORDAN: Okay. [laughter]

JORDAN: (as Prof de la Cruz) Oh, Vanessa! Please come over, come over. Good- Hello- hello Gail.

BILLIE: (as Gail) (in a small, tense voice) Hi.

JORDAN: Huh. Anyway... [laughter]

FAY: (as Vanessa) Um, well, um, I'm- I'm so sorry. There was a minor hallway collision. And I did drop the papers. I pic-- I made sure I got them all. But the order is a little bit, um...

JORDAN: (Prof de la Cruz) Oh no.

FAY: (as Vanessa) I- I- uh I-

JORDAN: The order is done by the students sitting in the seat. I do them in that way so it's super efficient to get them passed out.

FAY: (as Vanessa) Sure. Well, if you if, if you got the seating chart, I'll get that fixed right now.

JORDAN: So she hands you a seating chart and was just like, "Please, uh, please make yourself a little bit more useful and sit away from the podium."

So the room is set up in a- it's an auditorium style seating, right, and so it's a raised flat theater where all the seats raise up toward the back. There are two big whiteboards in the front of this room. And one door leads in from the hallway, which is where Gail and Vanessa came in. The other door comes in from the- leads directly onto the pathway that leads into the quad. And through those doors comes in Chaz on his skateboard.

[The sound of a skateboard rolling over seams in concrete comes in, followed by Chaz's funky, but dramatic, theme music.]

JORDAN: And is like, "Hey, Professor de la Cruz!"

JORDAN: And Professor de la Cruz is like, "Chaz, my boy, it's great to see you! That's a very nice skateboard. I always love when you come into class this way." [Group laughter]

FAY: Vanessa is, secretly, like, you know, like, stewing about the like, "No, it's against rules." (dramatic sigh)

JORDAN: Uh, and so she's like, "Chaz, Chaz, please, please come. I would like for you to stay in the front row this time. I know you tend to go to the back, but I would like to talk with you a little bit. I would like you to be part of this first activity."

JORDAN: And so other people start filing and, and the class gets settled. Professor de la Cruz goes, "Class I'd like to, um- I- I've graded the midterms and our new TA is going to be handing out to you. But before she hands them out, I'd like for her to introduce herself to the classroom."

[The tense rock music with the high pitched electric whine starts up again.]

FAY: (as Vanessa) Well, um, my- my name is Vanessa. And, uh, I'm really excited to, uh, be your TA, I've been studying, um, herbology I guess kind of my whole life. And I'm just so excited to be working with all of you. And, um, you know, uh h-h-hopefully I'll-I'll do a good job of-of helping Professor de la Cruz and, um, helping assist any of you, um, and, uh, pass on some of the things that, uh, I-I-I've learned. And, yeah.

JORDAN: Professor de la Cruz is beaming wide and she says, "You may know Vanessa from the Pagan Student Association. She is one of our brightest stars here in the- in the program, even though she's still fairly new. And if you have any questions, I would, I-I-I would implore you to use her expertise. She is going to be fendt- a fantastic addition to this class. And I hope that we have a partnership that's a long, long and fruitful one."

"And speaking of resources in this class--" And she's like, "Vanessa, please begin to pass out the midterms. I'd like to just highlight the one student who has in the history of my five years teaching here, gotten 100% on my midterms and all of my quizzes, and that is Chaz Drakon."

[Chaz's theme starts playing in the background.]

JORDAN: And like the class is just like kind of slightly quiet at first, and then erupts into a thunderous applause and is just like, "Yeah, Chaz, get it bro! Like, yeah that's great! You're so good! Thank you so

much for helping me!" Professor de la Cruz is like, "Chaz managed to get 100% and has- has been an excellent student this year. Unfortunately, I can't have Chaz as my TA, although I would love to have him as well. But I would hope for him to work with- um- If you have any--"

FAY: [Loud melodramtic groan that turns into a laugh]

JORDAN: (As Prof de la Cruz) --any questions about the material, he seems to have a great grasp on it. Um, so maybe he could also help with Vanessa if she gets overwhelmed a little bit with the duties assigned to her.

FAY: Vanessa plasters on, like, the fakest to smile.

JORDAN: Chaz is like, "Thank you, professor." And is like kind of embarrassed and he's like being a little shy and he goes to sit down. So Vanessa is passing off the grades. And the course just kind of continues. Moving along, Gail, you get your- your paper back-- herbology midterm back and what is your response?

BILLIE: I mean, this is kind of the worst day ever so far, cuz like, Vanessa actually seems like somebody cool that I would want to be friends with. [FAY: laughs] And like now I've completely screwed things up, like right away by like messing up her first day as a TA. And then I found out that the guy that I totally can't stand--this obnoxious guy--is like perfect in the class--

FAY: [Groans sympathetically]

BILLIE: And I only got a C+ and I am just like, seething and I'm super triggered and I feel terrible. And I'm really mad at this guy.

JORDAN: Okay.

BILLIE: [laughing]

FAY: Kinda sounds like we're, uh, starting up the traumatized condition.

JORDAN: Yeah.

BILLIE: Yeah, I think she's triggered, cuz I think-- You know, when you have PTSD, like even just like making like a simple mistake, like running into someone like that, just like set her off. [JORDAN: Mhm.] And like, now she's just like, everything just like keeps piling on top of it. And she just like, can't deal.

FAY: So people are beginning to shuffle out of the class. Professor de la Cruz is answering a few questions about the midterm. Where are you in the room?

BILLIE: Probably shuffling out with my head down.

JORDAN: Okay. As you're about to shuffle out with your head down. Professor de la Cruz is like, "Gail. Gail, before you go, please, please come see me."

BILLIE: (as Gail) Okay...

JORDAN: She's like, "Gail, uh, I- I, you know, I was really shocked by your midterm. You've been doing so well in the class. Consistently hitting 100%. What happened here?"

BILLIE: (as Gail) I don't know. I'm really embarrassed. I-I guess I just, I don't know, I was kind of upset that day. And sometimes when I get upset, I just like, can't really think straight. And so I guess that's what happened. And I don't really know. I thought I was doing good, but I guess I'm not I guess I'm not very good.

JORDAN: (as Prof de la Cruz) No, no, Gail you're- you're phenomenal. You're fantastic. You know, we all have off days. I'm just sad that it happened on the midterm day. Have you? Have you met Vanessa, my new TA?

BILLIE: [sounding stressed] Uhhhhhh- Uh--

[The tense rock music starts again.]

FAY: (as Vanessa) Uh, b- briefly. But, I mean, not- not really. (cheerfully) Hi! Hi, Gail!

BILLIE: (as Gail) Hi, sorry. Hi. Sorry. I'm sorry.

FAY: (as Vanessa) It's-It's- It's nice to meet you.

BILLIE: (as Gail) I'm really sorry. Hi. Sorry.

JORDAN: (as Prof de la Cruz) (confused) O-kay. [laughter] Well, uh, Vanessa has one of the most natural aptitudes I've ever seen. With--

BILLIE: (as Gail) Better than Chaz!?!

JORDAN: Yes, better than Chaz. [laughter]

FAY: Vanessa totally picks up on that.

JORDAN: (as Prof de la Cruz) I would suggest that you all figure out the time to get together and review this midterm.

BILLIE: (as Gail) Okay. I'll try- I'll try not to miss anything else up.

JORDAN: (as Prof de la Cruz) Well, you didn't mess up. It's just a learning opportunity.

BILLIE: (as Gail) Okay. Sure. Thanks. No, that's nice. Thanks.

JORDAN: (as Prof de la Cruz) Over the next week, if you guys can get together and review this. If you have any questions, I will be happy to answer them for you.

BILLIE: (as Gail) Thanks!

JORDAN: "Yeah." And Professor, de la Cruz gathers the last bits of paper heads off. And so we're going to end that scene there, and we're going to transition over to you all after class going out for crystals.

TOBI: Okay. The crystals.

JORDAN: Yeah. So-- [group laughter]

TOBI: (narrating Janus' thoughts) Okay, I'm a little nervous. We're-we're all going out together. But, um, but it's going to be good.

JORDAN: So it's actually you and- you and Tamara- Or, no, sorry. Tamara's not with you. When you arrive at the crystal shop in town, and you're looking for em, and you hear the familiar clickety clack, clickety clack of Chaz's skateboard.

[The sound of a skateboard going over seams in sidewalk. Chaz's music theme starts up.]

JORDAN: And he comes up and is like, "Oh, my God, Janus! It's good to see you!"

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah, yeah, totally. So I- I've been asking around some questions about the crystals and I think I can tell you anything you need to know about- about these crystals.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Oh, excellent! Tamara is not going to join us. Cuz she's not feeling well? (Chaz's voice shows uncertainty)

TOBI: (as Janus) Really? Is- is she okay?

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Yeah, she'll be fine. She just needed to- What did she say? She said, she just needed to lay down for a little bit.

TOBI: (as Janus) (surprised) Yeah, really?

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Yeah, it was really weird. But she said go hang out with you. And she was really sad she couldn't see you.

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) But she wanted us now for a really good date. Friend date.

TOBI: (as Janus) Oh! Uh, yeah? O-okay.

FAY: [laughing] Ooo-hoh-hoo, my!

TOBI: (as Janus) Well, I'm really glad that's what she wanted.

JORDAN: And so he hops off the skateboard and like flips his like-hops off and flips it up. And then it lands on his arm. [everyone laughs] He's like, he takes you by the other arm. He's like, "Tell me about these crystals!"

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah, so- so this crystal i-it's got a triangular point--

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Oh cool!

TOBI: (as Janus) Which is a really excellent focus.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Oh, yeah.

TOBI: (as Janus) And- and- and it is actually, like, right from this area.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Oh, word!

TOBI: (as Janus) So you, you know its history.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Oh, local crystals are really good for rituals.

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah, yeah, that's why I was thinking this one would probably be the best. It's- it is a bit spendy but, um, but- but i think- i think you're worth it.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Oh- Oh! Oh, thank you! Uh, yeah, my parents totally pay for all of my crystals--

BILLIE: (whispered) I knew it!

JORDAN: (as Chaz) And my PSA stuff because they're-- Do you know my parents?

TOBI: (as Janus) Uh, no, I-I don't.

FAY: You met brief-

TOBI: I do? I do? I--

FAY: So if after you saved Chaz's life--

TOBI: (gasp of recognition)

FAY: They briefly said hi to you and said like, "Hey, we're watching you. We got what great expectations for you."

TOBI: Oh, that's right! Yeah.

FAY: So you've briefly met. You don't- Yeah.

BILLIE: (quietly) Ohh.

TOBI: I remember that all happened in like the last five minutes of the last session.

TOBI: Yeah.

FAY: Yes.

JORDAN: So, um, Chaz takes a moment and looks at you and he's like, "You know why I like you Janus?"

TOBI: (as Janus) Uh, why?

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Cuz you treat me like a person.

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah, do- do- other people don't?

JORDAN: (as Chaz) No, I'm kinda like, really, uh- Like, it's a lot of pressure being a Drakon, you know?

TOBI: (as Janus) Oh, yeah. Yeah, I've seen the way that a lot of people- Well, well, a lot of people look up to you and some people don't you're- you're- it's kind of, you're a polarizing figure in some ways. [quiet laughter]

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Yeah, it's cause my family is so powerful and high up and well connected. And I just want to like, live, you know.

FAY: [ongoing laughter]

TOBI: (as Janus) Oh, of course! I mean, that's- that's how I see things too. And, you know, like, I- I don't care about any of that stuff. That's- that's, th- that's- that's- that's not important to me!

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Yeah, that's why I, like, like you because you like, you like see me for me.

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah. [FAY and BILLIE burst quietly into laughter.] I- I definitely- I, I do see something really special in you and--

JORDAN: (as Chaz) I see something really special in you. I think we'll be, like, really good friends.

TOBI: (as Janus) I- I kind of want to ask you something.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Yeah?

TOBI: (as Janus) So-sss-

JORDAN: And he's like picking up crystals and putting them in the basket and is like, "What do you want to ask me, Janus?"

TOBI: (as Janus) Well, uh, you know how I died, right?

JORDAN: (as Chaz) I want to ask you something.

[Dramatic emotional music with synths and a pulsing beat begins to play.]

JORDAN: (as Chaz) You died? Yeah, a little. [giggles]

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah. Like, you know, Tamara has told you about how I'm ghoul.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Yeah, a little.

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) I like ghouls. Like my girlfriend's a ghoul.

TOBI: (as Janus) I-I noticed that. [laughter] And- and I was wondering, um, since you do seem to like ghouls, um, are the two of you exclusive?

FAY: (dramatically expressive quiet scream)

TOBI: And with that, I'm going to roll to try and turn someone on.

FAY: What?!

TOBI: Okay, so, um, I am using morbidity to-to turn someone on using my cold.

JORDAN: Sure.

TOBI: This is gonna give Chaz the condition morbid...

FAY: Uh!

[The sound of two dice being shaken then rolled, and one skittering off the table.]

TOBI: And, ohhp-

FAY: Ooh!

TOBI: One die went off the edge.

BILLIE: This is so messy! Oh, my God! [laughter]

TOBI: Okay, so I rolled a seven and then I add one. And so that means that Chaz can either give me a string on him, or can choose one of the following reactions, and it'll be your choice, the string, or one of those three.

FAY: And what are the three?

JORDAN: So the three reactions we have are, "I give myself to you. I promise you something I think you want. Or I get really embarrassed and act awkward."

FAY: Whaaaaat!

JORDAN: So at this point, Chaz, like, drops the crystal in the basket, and is just like, "Janus, uh..."

JORDAN: You have never seen Chaz speechless before. And his eyes get real big. And he's like, "Janus, uh..."

TOBI: (as Janus) Y-yeah?

[FAY and BILLIE quietly laugh in the background—laughter that increases in intensity as the scene continues.]

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Uh... Janus!

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah?!

FAY: (melodramatic groan)

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Uh, you know, I like you a lot. As a friend. And I-I- Janus!

TOBI: (as Janus) I-I- I-I definitely don't want to, like, overstep in any way, but I-I wanted to actually get a chance to- to chat with you to see, like, this is a little embarrassing, but I kind of want to ask Tamara out.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Janus! That is so awesome!!!! [group laughter that includes clapping]

[Happy, upbeat, jazzy music begins to play with a guitar flourish.]

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah?!

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Oh, my God, yeah!

TOBI: (as Janus) So- so that would be okay? Like you're not exclusive or anything like that?

JORDAN: (as Chaz) I mean, we were. Until right now. You're so cool!
[more group laughter]

TOBI: (as Janus) Wow. I- I'm really glad!

JORDAN: (as Chaz) I, uh, I think you should ask Tamara. But- but you should wait. Like--

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah?

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Like, wait, like a week. So we can, like, talk about it.

TOBI: (as Janus) Oh, yeah! Yeah, yeah.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Cuz I'm like super open, but Tamara and I are, like, have been, like, the power couple for, like, a long time. I would love to have you with us.

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah!

JORDAN: (as Chaz) That's so cool.

TOBI: (as Janus) You know, hanging out with the two of you is one of my favorite things.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Hanging out with the two of you is one my favorit things.

TOBI: (as Janus) Awwww!

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Along with skateboarding. [quiet laughter]

TOBI: (as Janus) Wow!

JORDAN: (as Chaz) (shouted) Janus I'm so happy!

TOBI: (as Janus) Cool. Wow!

JORDAN: (shouted) Janus this is amazing!

TOBI: (as Janus) I think I guess I'll take your advice then. And I'll just kind of like play it cool for a little bit.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Oh my God, oh my God! Can I help you with a- with a date? !?!?!

TOBI: (as Janus) Oh, yeah, yeah, if you want to give me any advice.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Oh wait, wait, I'm getting ahead of myself. Oh, my God, Janus! (whispered) Janus! [group laughter]

TOBI: (as Janus) Yeah.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) [whispered] Janus we are gonna be such good friends.

TOBI: Yeah!

JORDAN: Janus!

TOBI: Yeah! You know, I think this is gonna be a really good way that the two of us are gonna get a lot closer.

FAY and BILLIE: (almost simultaneously, while laughing) Uh, this is so messy!

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Janus.

BILLIE: (imitating Chaz) Janus.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Can you hand me that crystal over there?

TOBI: (as Janus) Oh, yeah, of course.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Let's do- let's check out, uh, and like then I will talk with Tamara.

TOBI: (as Janus) Okay.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Hey, are you hungry?

TOBI: (as Janus) Um, a little bit, yeah.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Dude, I know the best pizza shop.

TOBI: (as Janus) Cool. Is it nearby?

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Yeah.

TOBI: (as Janus) Awesome.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Do you skate?

TOBI: (as Janus) Um, you know, I- I haven't but I've been thinking about it.

JORDAN: (as Chaz) Okay, well, we can just walk there.

JORDAN: And they go and check it out and stuff. [group laughter]

BILLIE: (imitating Chaz) Janus!

FAY: Does- does Janus actually have a crush on Tamara too? Out of curiosity or do we want to hold that in--

TOBI: That- that- that definitely has been brewing.

JORDAN: Yeah, yeah.

FAY: I mean, Tamara's totally crush worthy.

JORDAN: Yeah!

BILLIE: I mean she sounds really hot.

JORDAN: She, yeah!

FAY: [laughter] She sounds way cooler than her boyfriend, but maybe that's just that's Vanessa talking.

TOBI: Like- like she was- She was gonna try and date both of them, but...

FAY: [laughter] Okay, cuz as long as it's not like Janus dating Tamara because she wants to date Chaz. Because Tamara is totally worthy, of, like-

TOBI: Yeah.

FAY: She is amazing!

JORDAN: Uh, yeah!

BILLIE: [imitating Chaz's voice] Janus...

JORDAN: Janus! [laughter]

FAY: [laughing] Oh my god.

JORDAN: That was a really fun scene. Thank you for that!

TOBI: Yeah! [group laughter]

[End of game recording.]

[The angsty game theme plays briefly, then fades out.]

FAY: [voiceover] And that is the end of this episode. In a month you can look forward to the second episode of this adventure. Before that, you will be able to enjoy Friendship Is Music, a special collaboration made for International Podcast Month that is a mash-up of the fantasy, superhero, magical girl, and musical genres.

Audio editing for this episode was done by Kimberly Loftus.

Sound design was by me, Fay Onyx.

The music is from Kevin MacLeod of InCompeTec dot com, and additional artists from the Free Music Archive.

Sound effects are from Free Sound dot org.

Detailed credits are in the show notes.

Transcription was done by Goblin, with help from me, using Otter dot ai.

If you want to find out more about today's guests, here's how to follow them.

[Start of recorded group section.]

BILLIE: BillieRain.com B I L L I E R A I N dot com. And my Twitter handle is at Billie Rain.

JORDAN: Uh, I am on Twitter as Mr-- uh, so M R underscore Smaragdine S M A-- [quiet background laughter] What? R A G D I N E. And that's pretty much, like, that's my handle everywhere. So if you see that you can find me there.

TOBI: And, um, I think probably the best place to find more info about me is at Tobi Hill-Meyer dot com it's T O B I H I L L M E Y E R.

FAY: Awesome! Well, thank you all so much, uh, for the first session of, uh-- I-I don't know exactly what we're going to name it yet, but, uh, Sylvan Community College, uh, game- or game two, I guess?

JORDAN: Yeah. [laughter]

FAY: Thank you so much!

JORDAN: Thank you!

BILLIE: Thanks for having me.

TOBI: Thanks!

[End of recorded group section.]

FAY: [voiceover] If you like what you hear want to hear more, be sure to subscribe to Writing Alchemy on your podcast catcher of choice so that you don't miss any of the upcoming episodes. Follow Writing Alchemy on twitter @ Writing underscore Alchemy, hashtag AlchemyCast. And if you want to help me keep this podcast and my other work going, pledge your support on patreon at patreon dot com slash writing alchemy, or make a donation through Ko-fi.

[The outro music, a calm, uplifting electronic track, slowly fades in.]

FAY: You can find the show notes, complete with guest links and detailed music and sound effect credits, on Writing Alchemy dot net, where you can find all of the Writing Alchemy episodes, the Magic Goes Awry game system, and an extensive set of resources on accessibility and disability representation. There you can join the discussion and sign up for the mailing list to receive announcements about new podcasts and projects.

Thank you for listening, and please come back again for the special collaboration, Friendship Is Music, and then Episode 2 of Inside the First Responders Training Program!

[The calm, uplifting outro music continues for about half a minute, then stops.]