

Hi folks! Welcome to Follow the Leader's fourth game! In this episode we play The Sundered Land, a game (or, more specifically, a series of minigames) by D. Vincent Baker. The players in this episode were Kales, Jade, Alix, and Dora. (Direct quotes from the players are highlighted in their colors.)

Please note that this episode contains descriptions of monsters and death in the first game we play, A Doomed Pilgrim. We discuss this at the start of this episode around 8:05.

## GAME PREP

Since this is a series of minigames, we start the episode with introducing the characters we're playing and a little bit about the landscape. We're playing in a post-apocalyptic landscape (probably about 150 years post-apocalypse) overrun by greenery and vines as opposed to desert wastelands. The characters we play are:

- Tala, played by Jade, a scout and hunter-gatherer who knows the land and how to survive off of it. "Think like Chin-Po, from Mulan."
- Yvaine, played by Alix, Tala's younger sister who's a very motherly type— "She likes to knit, and to cook."
- Marius, played by Dora, a refugee of the Mage Enclave at Anukar who's trying to escape with the last tome of knowledge from the Enclave— "They're too focused on study and the pursuit of knowledge to be a nice person, so they're an accidental jerk a lot of the time."
- and Sable, played by Kales, a veteran of a recent war who talks about the time pre-apocalypse like they were actually there, "but that's impossible, right?" (Kales: "They're constantly trying their best but their best isn't very good.")

## FIRST GAME (9:24)

We started with the game of A Doomed Pilgrim In The Ruins Of The Future. In this game, one of us plays the Pilgrim, and the others play the world around. The pilgrim asks questions about the world, and the rest of the players respond. The first answer the pilgrim receives is the one they take.

Our pilgrim is Marius, trying to escape the Mage Enclave and get to a place of safety. We decide they're heading for a distant city, or perhaps the other three characters, who travel as a group. So Dora, as Marius, asks Jade, Kales, and Alix questions about the world, and together the three of them dictate Marius's journey and the perils they face. Marius is tired and afraid, and they carry the tome in their clothing and they have the summoning-name of a ghost burned into their memory (Jade: "This can only end well.")

Marius hears the sound of a bird cawing overhead. They look around and try to find the direction the bird came from but they cannot. So they push on, trying to peer through the vine-choked rocks to see what lies beyond. They see, up ahead, many birds feasting on the carcass of

something that has died. As they approach they can see long clawmarks that are too big to belong to any of the birds in the body of the dead animal. Marius backtracks and tries to swing wide around the area, but the vines are covered in thorns that catch and pull on their clothing and scratch their skin. They make their way through, slowly, to an outcropping where they can see something huge stalking through the shadows on the other side of the rocks. Marius tries to swing wide around that, but they can't keep their eye on the moving shadows. (Dora: "Crap.") When Marius reaches a clear area they can see the creature waiting at the edge.

The creature looks much like a tiger, big with long teeth coming from its jaw, big reflective green-yellow cat-eyes, and patchy, mottled fur that shift as it moves. (Kales: "It does have the tiniest little meow though!") There are the sounds of Dora's cat in the background.) The creature blinks slowly at Marius, watching them. Marius raises one hand and says they're just a traveller, they're not nearly as good prey as what's been left to the birds, and all they want is to get to their destination. The creature asks Marius what they have to offer it, speaking in their mind. Marius offers it knowledge, offers to share the name of the ghost. The creature settles down to think and asks to hear something interesting.

"I can tell you the story of how this place came to be. Does that interest you?"

Marius considers what version to tell, and tells the version that speaks of the Mages and how they tried to fight the machines overtaking the land, and how the land responded to their call and that's why everything is overgrown.

"So it was the land that tore up the moss and made the jagged rocks and thorns harsh beneath my feet?"

"The machines ripped up the land, but the land covered itself in defense."

The creature asks if the mages made the land the way it was, could they not undo it? Marius says they are the last mage of Anukar, and they can only do so much. The creature laughs at that, somewhat mocking but not quite hitting that mark. Marius promises the creature that if they make it where they're going they will share their knowledge and try to repair the damages of the past. Marius starts shifting to the side a little bit, but the creature doesn't notice. One of their eyes is clouded and sightless. Marius asks the creature, again, to let them pass, and the creature tells them to go, "while I am still of the inclination to let you." Marius does not need to be told twice and takes off.

Beyond the creature is a pile of rocks that Marius has to climb— not as much greenery, just a steep incline Marius needs to climb. They get to the top and see the nesting ground of the birds in the small valley in front of them. Marius carefully picks their way through the nests, taking the direct route. They accidentally step on a nest that was small enough to miss, and a bird caws at them. Marius just makes a run for it, but no birds attack them. They make it to the other side and when they look into the distance they see the glimmer of a distant fire flickering in the approaching dusk. Between them and the fire is a river, deep enough that they have to swim, fast enough that it'll be hard work, and exceptionally cold. Marius pauses to bind the tome in leaves and vines to protect it from the water, but by the time they've finished night has fallen

completely. Marius wades out into the water, and it's so cold that they have to stop for a moment to collect themselves before they start to swim. When they emerge on the other side they're exhausted and soaked through. They make their way to the fire, pushing on, hearing people talking and laughing and sounding cheerful, and they stumble into the light of campfire and they promptly fall over and pass out.

"The world did this to them."

"It's called nighttime. It just happens like this!"

## SECOND GAME (29:04)

We move directly from this game to Night Watch In The Ruins Of The Future, a game where the character goes around telling stories of themselves around a campfire. We establish that the group of characters are the only ones around our fire, we can speak aloud, and we decide that we're keeping watch against uncertain dangers. One person is the Night Player, who asks the questions of the group. We fudge this rule a tiny bit, but it's alright.

Marius stumbles into the camp and passes out. Tala leaps up and rushes to bring Marius to the fire and starts pulling off their wet clothes, wrapping them in a dry blanket. Yvaine is there in a moment with warm clothes and has them ready when Tala asks for them. Sable just sighs at the picture.

Marius wakes up and begs Tala and Yvaine to not take their clothes, but Yvaine reassures them that they're just taking their clothes to dry near the fire. (There's a moment where everyone is confused about the size of the book. Dora: "We had to play to find out what book it was!") Tala pulls the book from the pocket of Marius's robes and places it separately. Yvaine gives Marius clothes she made herself.

Yvaine asks Marius if they're a Mage of Anukar. Marius says yes, but Anukar is no more, so they may just be a mage. Sable points out that Marius is still of Anukar, even if Anukar no longer exists. Marius proclaims themselves the last of the Mages and says that their book is the last of the knowledge of Anukar. Yvaine asks what happened. Marius says they were overrun, with no warning, by who they think were followers of the god of the dead, Ningal.

"I thought magic worked against most things."

"If we don't know, then how can we use our magic?"

Marius tells the group that all their compatriots are dead. Marius only escaped because their mentor sacrificed herself for them. "She was able to give me this book and she was able to cast an illusion on me so I could slip out just before... before she was struck down." Yvaine takes Marius's hand and apologizes for their loss. Marius tells them they're just trying to get to a city so the knowledge doesn't die with them, and asks to join their party. Yvaine and Tala look to Sable, like children asking their parent for a pet. Sable sighs and reluctantly agrees. Yvaine

asks if Marius can teach them magic, and Marius says if they have the fortitude for it they can teach them anything they know.

“Magic is a dangerous tool to have.”

“So’s a knife if you hold it wrong.”

“I’m not saying you shouldn’t learn it, I’m just saying you should know what you’re getting into.”

“I always know what I’m doing.”

Sable laughs a little disbelievingly at that. Yvaine and Tala wonder if magic has “a pointy bit.”

Yvaine asks if they can use magic for things to help feed people or make warmth without fire ruined buildings whole again. Marius says there are some things magic has been used for and some it hasn’t yet, but their fellow mages were striving towards using magic to right the wrongs and ask the land to heal itself. “You can talk to the land?” Marius says they can’t.

Kales pulls out one of the rules of the Night Watch game, saying that Sable doesn’t think that Marius is telling the whole truth. When someone says that, the player speaking rolls two dice. On a 2-5, they might be overstating their role or their accomplishments. On a 6-8 they might be forgetting interesting details. On a 9-12, they might be holding back something delicate, embarrassing, incriminating, improper, or inexplicable. Dora rolls a 7, so Marius says that it’s a difficult thing, and with the knowledge in the book they could work out how to speak to the land but not now. Yvaine asks what cost magic comes with. Marius says that if one doesn’t know how to shape magic, magic will shape them instead. Yvaine nods.

Marius looks at Sable and asks if they’re one of the Acolytes of Aphiel. Sable says they aren’t anymore, but Dora thinks they’re not telling the whole truth. Kales also rolls a 7 and tells the other players that Sable doesn’t realize that they still are an acolyte of Aphiel. Tala asks who Aphiel is. Yvaine nudges them for being rude, but Sable says that it’s alright. Aphiel was once a minor god. Sable says they don’t follow gods anymore. Marius asks what they do follow, and Sable says the path to safety.

“I can rely my own instincts far more reliably than I can rely on any god.”

“Spoken like a true former Acolyte.”

Yvaine asks if the god hurt Sable. Sable claims that they never met their god, none of the Acolytes did, but they never hurt them. Dora thinks Sable isn’t telling the whole truth again, and Kales rolls a 12. “This is the result I was hoping for.” “Mmmhm. Mmmhm. Sable fucked their god.” Sable starts blushing, which Tala notices. Sable asks them to say nothing. Marius thinks that Sable smells strongly of Aphiel, but they don’t say anything.

Yvaine is vaguely embarrassed by everything, and asks if it was a long time ago. Sable says it was. “Cause I mean, you’re pretty old now. I mean, not that you’re old, but.” Sable laughs, not unkindly, and says they understand. Marius asks how long the three have been traveling together. Tala and Yvaine were traveling alone for a long time, and when they met up with Sable they attached themselves to them, and Sable kept them around cause it was smarter to

travel in groups than alone. Tala says they don't remember a time when they weren't traveling. "I remember Yvaine being a baby, but I don't remember not moving." Yvaine asks Sable if they had a home with Aphiel. They did. "I don't think I'm ever going to get that back." Marius says they're alike in that regard.

Marius asks Tala if they're a nomad of Arkhala. Tala doesn't hold with gods, but Yvaine might. Yvaine thinks they might have been, once, as children. She remembers them wearing the colors, but it might have been a coincidence. Marius says if they're from the area the most likely reason for wandering is to maintain the protection of Arkhala, but Yvaine says they move for the protection of themselves. Marius says not everyone was as lucky as they were before the night the Mages fell. Tala says they think they're very lucky: "I have my sister by my side when so many people are alone, I know the paths, I know how to find paths, I know how to keep my blade sharp, and not to hold the sharp end. I don't hold track with much in the way of gods, and I don't know about magic, but I know what I feel and I know how to track using the stars, so I don't find myself wanting in anything, and I certainly don't think I'm lacking in anything."

Yvaine asks if they've ever wanted to find anyplace to call home. "I mean, you're my home, but—," "Exactly." Yvaine thinks they aren't fully themselves when they have to stay up all night and sleep in snatches and she wants something more. She asks if—"I'm sorry, what was your name?"—is going to pick their pockets. Marius introduces himself and says they're not; they only need the fire. "We should feed you too. You're skinny." Marius says they've been running for a long time, and thankfully the army that destroyed the other mages didn't follow them.

Yvaine says they have to take Marius with them. Sable says they already said yes.

"You don't have to look so unhappy about it though."

"This is just my face!"

"I know, you should work on that."

Tala says their face won't crack and fall off if they smile once in a while. Yvaine asks Tala to give them time to warm up to them, like that sad baby bird they saw one time, "but an old baby bird." Tala says they're already so old, and then asks Sable how old they are.

"Why would you ever ask a lady their age?"

"Should I not?"

"No."

"But you always say the best way to get information is to ask questions."

"There are some questions that are impolite. Some people will answer you anyway, but not me."

Yvaine laughs.

(55:45) At the conclusion of the stories, the Night player rolls two dice to determine how the end of the night goes—if they're attacked, or if they're safe. Dora finished the game as the Night player so they roll. They roll a 10, so the dawn comes and the night has passed in peace.

END EPISODE