

THE SILT VERSES: SEASON 3, EPISODE 5

CONTENT WARNING

JON:

Hi, everyone,

This is Jon, I'm one half of The Silt Verses team with my wife Muna, and it is the 17th October 2023.

After some discussion, we decided it would be responsible to begin with an audio content warning, which we don't normally do.

That may seem a little strange, because this episode is by no means the most intense or explicit we've produced.

However, although the episode was written and recorded a very long time ago now, over the spring and summer of 2023, the storyline does very unavoidably centre around military airstrikes as experienced by civilians on the ground, which I expect is a topic that for many of us hits all too close to home right now.

In our show, the nature of those airstrikes is heightened, fantastical and absurd, the events follow on organically from what you've already heard in the season, and in short, we don't believe there's any way of misinterpreting what you're about to hear as a deliberate attempt to sensationalise, trivialise or exploit the atrocities of the past two weeks conducted upon innocent people in both Palestine and Israel, nor specifically upon the devastating and horrific air bombardments now being inflicted upon Palestinian civilians.

However, we know that some of our audience members may very understandably want to avoid this kind of storyline altogether right now, and our duty of care to you is the most important thing, so we wanted to give you that additional warning in advance.

Of course, you are our community, so if you listen to the episode and you have any further questions or concerns for us, if there's anything you want to raise with us, please, please do, and we'll do our very best to answer.

Anyway, that's enough out of me. Wishing love, safety and happiness to every single one of you. As ever, thank you so much for listening.

EPISODE STARTS HERE:

ROCKET FACILITY, INT, DAY

A SKY-SAINT (TO BE) is in a cart or a cage - something with wheels, being pushed by a silent ATTENDANT. She's being rolled through a facility.

As she's rolled, the SKY-SAINT (TO BE) pleads - but is ignored.

SKY-SAINT (TO BE):

Wait! Wait! I've changed my mind, I've changed my mind!

Don't put me in there, please don't put me in there.

I can help, there are other ways I can help. I want to serve my country, OK? I want to make a difference. That's why I volunteered.

But this...this is just a waste, isn't it?

It's a waste of potential, and you don't know me, you don't know what I can do!

Because I've got talent, my old teachers said I've got talent, my boss said I was a hard worker. You can ask any of them.

(Trying to think of something)

I'm good at...I'm good at sums, I'm good at trigonometry. I can keep inventory for you. I can crack codes, maybe.

Fetch a general. Fetch **any** general. I can talk to them. I can send them my resume.

I have a science degree! I'm not like the others, I'm useful! I'm useful!

The trolley stops. The silent ATTENDANT pushes a button.

The trolley side drops away, and with a cry, the SKY-SAINT (TO BE) plummets a short distance downwards, landing on metal.

She's on the inside of a rocket.

The ATTENDANT moves to a control panel and begins to close the rocket doors.

SKY-SAINT (TO BE):

Please wait! Please wait!

Don't close the hatch, don't close the hatch, look at me, look at me, you're not a bad person, you're not a bad person, you don't need to do this-

(Muffled, as the hatch closes)

Hey! Hey, no, no, no!

Let me out of here! Please, let me out! Let me out! Please, let me out!

The ATTENDANT walks silently away.

ROCKET INTERIOR, INT, DAY

The SKY-SAINT (TO BE) hammers on the hatch from the inside.

She breathes hard and panicked.

And after a moment, we hear a speaker above her hiss. Patriotic music plays along with a pre-recorded message.

CLS GENERAL:

(Warmly, fatherly, over the speaker)

Good day, patriot. This is General Peter Lopez of the Consolidated Linger Straits national guard.

And I'm here to personally welcome you to the interior of a Class 9 TI-4b ground-to-air sainted missile.

You're about to become something special, in service to the CLS, and I just wanted to let you know that everyone across this country is so, so proud of you.

Whether you were conscripted or volunteered, that doesn't matter - hell, even if you opposed this war, remember, your airstrike could be the one that ends it.

Please sit tight, and try to relax.

(Almost like an airline steward - reassuringly)

Now, your technician's about to close and secure the exit hatch, so you'll experience about 10 to 15 seconds of darkness and noise before the hallowing process begins.

But take heart, and dream of clear blue skies above. I'll be with you all the way.

The music continues to play.

We begin to hear the whirrs and clunks of machinery starting up.

SKY-SAINT (TO BE):
Wait, what does that mean?

Nobody answers her. The clunks get louder.

Then we hear the hiss of steam and the whine of something sharp and horrible.

SKY-SAINT (TO BE):
Hey, no, no, no, no, let me out of here, please, please-

We hear the terrified cries of the SKY-SAINT (TO BE) turn to pain-

ROCKET FACILITY, INT. DAY

-and a moment later, muffled, they die out.

The machinery continues to move for a while, but the interior of the rocket is silent.

And then, quite, suddenly, a BANG from the hatch, and something screams.

THE SKY-SAINT sounds bird-like - sometimes a little as if it has two conjoined mouths. It gobbles and shrieks in protest.

We hear a SOLDIER running across the facility and taking up their rifle as if ready to fire-

-but then the screams end and we hear the SKY-SAINT, grumbling, settle down into place.

The SOLDIER crosses to the rocket and keys in a code. A beep and a clunk.

ROCKET TECHNICIAN:
(Business-like and calm, over a speaker)
Saint is secured and branded. T-Minus 20. These are the Silt Verses.

All personnel please evacuate the launch deck. Repeat.

CONTROL ROOM, INT, DAY

For a moment we cut away to the control room, quite silent, as the ROCKET TECHNICIAN taps away at a control panel:

ROCKET TECHNICIAN:

Michelle Kelly, Meabh de Brun, Alison Campbell, Jimmie Yamaguchi,
please evacuate the launch deck.

(Pause)

T-Minus 10. Laurence Owen, Lucille Valentine, Ishani Kanetkar, please
evacuate the launch deck and make yourselves known to control.

ROCKET FACILITY, INT, DAY

We cut back to the main chamber just as someone jogs away, closing a heavy metal door behind them.

We can now hear the roar of the rocket's engines, ready to launch, and an alarm sounding overhead.

ROCKET TECHNICIAN:

(Over the speakers)

All personnel are clear.

Three, two, one-

The rocket launches.

We follow it up into the sky, higher and higher, until it vanishes - and we're left only with the wind.

BELLWETHERS (FIELDS), EXT, DAY

Elsewhere, the wind blows.

We hear a grunt, and some hard breaths, slightly muffled as if under a gas mask. CARPENTER is digging out in the ruined fields of Bellwethers.

The sound likely reminds us of her digging graves alongside ACANTHA.

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:

(Distant)

Morning, Carpenter!

CARPENTER:
Good morning!

She pauses, takes a breath, and then returns to it.

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:
(Sort-of cheerfully, sort-of complaining as she passes by)
Keep at it.

Dig deep enough, maybe you'll find soil that can bear a seed instead of a saint.

ALICE passes on.

CARPENTER:
(Calling after her)
Here's hoping!

I'll see you in the canteen later, yeah?

BELLWETHERS (CANTEEN), INT, DAY

CARPENTER steps into the canteen tent and drops her bag with a grunt.

She takes off her gas mask and tosses it down.

HAYWARD calls out from his cooking station.

HAYWARD:
Carpenter! You ready for something to eat?

CARPENTER:
(Calling back)
Nah, I'm good for now! Got to get this down to the greenhouse!

She hefts the sack again - and takes a moment.

CARPENTER:
(Calling)
You seen Paige today?

HAYWARD:
(Calling)
I think she's sleeping in!

CARPENTER:
Fair enough.

She turns and goes.

BELLWETHERS (STREETS), EXT, DAY

CARPENTER takes a moment, then hefts the wheelbarrow again and begins to roll it onwards.

She's humming, cheerfully. It feels good, being here.

BELLWETHERS (CANTEEN), INT, NIGHT

Hubbub and busyness. A GUITARIST is playing a solo onstage in the background.

ELGIN and CARPENTER are chatting over a beer.

CARPENTER is mostly quiet. ELGIN, maybe a couple of drinks down, is venting her frustration.

ELGIN:
-it's been happening ever since...ever since the war started, to be honest.

Some shipping company gets a government contract to send military supplies up north, but between the Hungering Winds, the missile-strikes from across the channel, and our own saints that have broken loose...their drivers don't want to come up here.

So they dump it by the roadside and then they say they delivered it, and take their money.

Nearly everything we've built here, we've had to scavenge.

We found these beers on the back of a lorry three weeks back.

Applause for the GUITARIST. CARPENTER takes a swig of the beer.

CARPENTER:
(Not caring)

Stale as hell.

Go on. What were you saying?

ELGIN:

Well, I guess the issue there is - what do we do when the war ends?
What's the plan?

CARPENTER:

Is there a plan?

ELGIN:

I hope so. Anyway, uh, we got the beers off the truck, and Dan says, "alcohol is an abomination unto our god." The Rootkeeper, he says, "Dan, what are you talking about? I co-created our god. There's nothing about that in the scriptures." Dan says, 'alcoholism is a form of self-abuse. It stands to reason that the Woundtree wouldn't allow it-'

The GUITARIST stops playing again (hey, that was a quick song!). Everyone applauds again. ELGIN claps and gives a 'wooo!'

CARPENTER remains silent.

BELLWETHERS (STREETS), EXT, NIGHT

-and we cut to muffled applause and cheering as CARPENTER steps out onto the street.

She chuckles gently to herself - and then has a thought.

PAIGE has been nowhere to be seen all day.

CARPENTER, purposefully, dons her gas mask.

BELLWETHERS (PAIGE'S HOUSE) EXT, NIGHT

CARPENTER (masked) steps up to PAIGE's door. Gentle wind-chimes can be heard above.

She knocks.

CARPENTER:

Paige! Paige!

BELLWETHERS (PAIGE'S HOUSE) INT, NIGHT

Inside, PAIGE is slumped on her table, semi-conscious. Bottles clink as she shifts. She does not seem to hear CARPENTER.

PAIGE:
Tree...tree...tree...

BELLWETHERS (PAIGE'S HOUSE) EXT, NIGHT

CARPENTER waits for a moment - and then, unhappily, steps away and begins to descend the hill.

BELLWETHERS (BUNKROOM), INT, NIGHT

Maybe an hour or two later. CARPENTER is lying awake in the bunkroom, staring up at the ceiling.

We can hear the gentle snoring all around her.

And she whispers aloud, to the CAIRN MAIDEN.

CARPENTER:
(Softly, drily)
So what do you think about all this, anyway?

A world without sacrifice, a world where gods are left to starve.

Thoughts? Approve, disapprove?

Of course, you don't take 'em when they're breathing. So maybe you think this won't affect you.

(Chuckling to herself)

That why you led me here, Maiden? Is this your plan to kill off the competition?

Good plan, if it is.

She shifts on her mattress.

CARPENTER:

(Softly)

I would have gone south. You know that, don't you?

Given the choice, and nowhere else to turn, I'd have headed south, to a garden on the cliffs and an old friend who's waiting for me.

But you just kept on leading me north, and there had to be a reason for that, didn't there?

A quick death, a long sleep. That's what I expected.

I told you I was ready for it.

And now you've led me to these people, these fucking people. These desperate, foolish people, and one old friend.

Lifting their voices in song against the world, setting out in their coracles against a dark and unforgiving tide.

And I like 'em. I like that they're making the attempt.

I think I'd like to help them, if I can.

There's work to be done here. There's good work, and before it's done, there'll be corpses to bury, and that's work for the both of us.

There's a reason here to keep on living for as long as I can, and again, you led me to this place.

So...why are you still watching me, Maiden?

Slowly, gradually, we hear the whispers of the CAIRN MAIDEN - growing louder and louder.

CARPENTER:

Why are you there, lingering in the doorway with your veiled head bowed and your bony fingers dancing upon the frame?

Acantha said in time I wouldn't be frightened at the sight of you, and that just isn't true at all.

You're still frightening me, Maiden, because there's work to be done and yet you keep on getting closer.

So. Are you going to let me work?

The whispers grow louder.

And if we're listening very carefully, we might even hear the sounds of floorboards creaking, getting closer and closer - but no footsteps.

CARPENTER:
(More frantically)
Stop. Please stop.

This isn't the place. It isn't the place that was promised and it isn't the moment, so **draw back your hand**.

I can be useful here.

I'm an empty fucking vessel, and I can feel the cracks spreading up my sides and every part of me hurts and is begging for release, but I can still be useful.

You didn't lead me here just to take away the opportunity.

But the MAIDEN just keeps getting closer and closer.

CARPENTER:
Not tonight.

Let me die useful.
(Desperately hissing)

Please, Maiden. Not tonight. Let me die useful.

Let me die **useful**-

And the whispers of the CAIRN MAIDEN, suddenly, dissipate as we hear a distant BOOM.

CARPENTER, slowly, sits up in bed and gets to her feet.

She begins to walk towards the window.

We hear the slow booms of bombs hitting the landscape far away.

And then a sudden screeching that gets louder and louder -

CARPENTER:

(Aloud)

What th-

What's happening?

BOOM. An explosion as something hits the ground close by.

The building shakes.

Gasps and cries from across the bunkroom.

And then we hear DAN THE FANATIC, from far below, on street level. An alarm bell is going off.

DAN THE FANATIC:

(Distantly)

Fire! There's a fire in the hatchery!

We need help!

BELLWETHERS (PAIGE'S HOUSE) INT, NIGHT

In PAIGE's kitchen, the bell can faintly be heard.

She stirs - and then sits upright.

PAIGE:

(Groggily, still drunk)

What's...what's...Hayward?

What's happening?

She tries to get to her feet - and tumbles off her chair.

BELLWETHERS (STREETS) EXT, NIGHT

Everyone's streaming through the streets towards the HATCHERY.

HAYWARD is supervising them.

HAYWARD:

(Yelling)

Remember your masks! Masks and suits! Come on, now, let's go!

All hands!

We hear DAN, calling out distantly.

DAN THE FANATIC:

(Calling to get HAYWARD'S attention)

Rootkeeper! Rootkeeper!

HAYWARD runs forward to meet DAN.

HAYWARD:

Dan. What the hell happened?

DAN THE FANATIC:

(Babbling)

We were keeping vigil before the House of the Widow, Rootkeeper, when we beheld an extraordinary revelation; the sky ablaze with god-rockets in flight, missiles bearing a bloody message to the oppressors of the Peninsula from the oppressors of the Linger Straits.

HAYWARD:

(Overlapping, trying in vain to get his attention)

Dan. Dan-

Dan!

DAN THE FANATIC:

(Exultant, still rambling on)

"Let our foes destroy one another," I prayed. "Let nation cleanse nation, that a better world may be born in their mutual ruin."

Most of them were falling far to the east, we saw, but one seemed to turn and twist in our direction, a burning white star that grew larger and larger, as if the carrion-gods themselves had heard my challenge to them-

HAYWARD gives up on DAN and runs onwards.

HAYWARD:

(Yelling)

Alice!

The HATCHERY DISCIPLE pushes her way forwards. She's much more matter-of-fact.

HAYWARD:

Alice, what the hell's going on?

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:

Direct hit on the southern side of the hatchery, Rootkeeper. The upper floors have halfway caved in; everything's ablaze.

It's a god-rocket, for certain, but it's intact. Hasn't opened, and I don't think the Saint's woken up.

HAYWARD:

You're sure?

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:

(Just stating facts)

We're all still ourselves, aren't we?

HAYWARD:

Fair point. Anyone still in the hatchery?

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:

(With breathless concern)

Elgin, Seb and Rymon, we think. All unaccounted for.

HAYWARD is horrified in particular at the thought of ELGIN.

HAYWARD:

What the hell's Elgin doing in there? She's off-rot.

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:

She couldn't sleep in the bunkroom, so I made up a bed for her there.

Safest place, I thought.

HAYWARD:

(Worried)

Gods.

DAN THE FANATIC:

(Enthusiastically)

Let me go into the flames, Rootkeeper. Let me pit the Woundtree's strength against this foreign interloper-

HAYWARD:

(With great restraint)

Dan, I need you to head for the comms station.

Get some interference playing on the speakers - loud as you can manage.

We need to be ready in case the saint wakes up.

DAN THE FANATIC:

(Childishly thrilled)

...I can play anything I like?

HAYWARD:

(Snapping)

Dan.

DAN THE FANATIC:

On it, Rootkeeper!

As he dashes away, CARPENTER catches up with HAYWARD.

CARPENTER:

Hayward. What can I do?

HAYWARD:

(With barely a breath)

There's a couple of pressure hoses in the storage hall. We're gonna reel them out, draw from the water tower to put out the fire.

Once we know the saint's not waking up, then we can go in and look for survivors. Not before.

Carpenter, you go with Alice. Organise a perimeter around the fire, assign bucket chains from the canal while I get the hoses.

HATCHERY DISCIPLE:

(Protesting)

The canal's nearly **dried out**, Rootkeeper-

HAYWARD:

So you'll do everything you possibly can with what we have.

Make sure everyone else keeps their distance until I get back with the hoses.

Limit any exposure to the flames, rotate people in and out.

We need guns, we need ear protectors. Be quick.
(Yelling to unseen others)
You three, come with me!

He turns and runs.

Overhead, the wind chimes twist and turn.

BELLWETHERS (BURNING HATCHERY), EXT, NIGHT

We can hear the roar of the rising fire now.

A GOD-ROCKET, unexploded, is sitting in the centre of the flames.

It's making a steady beeping sound.

CARPENTER and the HATCHERY DISCIPLE arrive on the scene.

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:
(Calling back to the others)
Woah, woah! Don't get too close.
(Awed)
Gods above. Just look at it.

We got lucky.

CARPENTER:
Fire might still set it off.

Come on.

She dashes onwards. We can hear screams and cries from the gathered crowd.

CARPENTER yells at the volunteers.

CARPENTER:
Everyone! We're going to form a bucket chain.

Five lines, five volunteers to the front.

One minute at the front only, then you rotate to the back.

Keep a close eye on the rocket. If it starts to open, yell out a warning and get as far back as you can.

Come on, now, form a line!

BELLWETHERS (CANAL) EXT, NIGHT

One DISCIPLE leaps down into the canal and fills a bucket, which he passes up to someone ('Take the bucket! 'I got it!')

Distantly, we can hear CARPENTER yelling instructions.

CARPENTER:
(Distantly)
You, you, and you-

All right, good. All the way to the canal, people. Where are those buckets?

BELLWETHERS (STREETS), EXT, NIGHT

We hear grunts and the splash of buckets as they're passed up the chain.

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:
(Roaring)
Five lines! Come on now!

Get those buckets moving!

Let's go, let's go!

BELLWETHERS (STREETS), EXT, NIGHT

We hear PAIGE stumbling down the hill after the crowds, still gasping, still half-drunk.

She topples down with a grunt.

CARPENTER sees her and rushes over to help pull her upright.

CARPENTER:
Hey! Hey, you OK?

PAIGE:
(Vaguely)
I was asleep.

Why...why are they outside? It isn't safe...

CARPENTER:
There's a fire in the hatchery. Rocket-strike from over the channel.

PAIGE:
(Quietly horrified)
This is it, isn't it?

CARPENTER:
What are you talking about?

PAIGE:
It's the reckoning.

CARPENTER:
(Gently)
Just a fire, Paige.

Come on, let's get you some help-

She helps PAIGE to her feet.

They begin to walk - but as they move, we hear footsteps running past them in the opposite direction, and the alarm bell begins to sound.

CARPENTER:
What's happening?

Nobody answers her, but we faintly hear:

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:
(Yelling from a distance)
Hey! Carpenter!

It's opening!

The rocket's opening! We need to get them back!

BELLWETHERS (BURNING HATCHERY), EXT, NIGHT

-and suddenly we cut to the middle of the flames, and the beeping noise is getting louder and faster-

-and then it stops.

With a whine, a speaker on the rocket activates and we hear a pre-recorded message from the SKY-SAINT (TO BE).

SKY-SAINT (TO BE):

Citizens of the Peninsula. Rejoice. The hour of your final victory is upon you.

A triumph over your own soilbound bodies. A triumph over your own limitations. Look to the sky.

For you have wings, and you shall soar.

(Repeating the mantra)

You have wings, and you shall soar.

You have wings and you shall soar.

The rocket door clunks open.

And the SKY-SAINT steps out.

Again, it's bird-like and huge, both menacing and absurd, clucking and sniffing to itself as it spreads its wings and shrieks.

BELLWETHERS (STREETS), EXT, NIGHT

The horrible sound makes PAIGE snap back to reality, sobering up quickly.

PAIGE:

(Hoarsely)

Sky-god.

Carpenter, I think it's a sky god-

CARPENTER staggers back up to her feet.

CARPENTER:

(Yelling)

Everyone get back, damn it! What are you staring at? Don't look at it, don't listen to it!

Everybody hold onto something! Tie yourself down if you have to!

We can hear the various civilians rushing back in all directions.

BELLWETHERS (BURNING HATCHERY), EXT, NIGHT

The SKY-SAINT screams - and then launches itself up into the sky, flying higher and higher.

BELLWETHERS (STREETS), EXT, NIGHT

ALICE is ringing the alarm bell. DISCIPLES rush past her.

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:

(Still roaring orders)

Everyone get back! Get away from...

Overhead, we hear the SKY-SAINT's scream - but it sounds longer and stranger, almost musical.

ALICE stops ringing the bell as she stares up at it.

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:

(Softly, awed and dazed)

...get away...

Get...

As everyone else flees, the HATCHERY DISCIPLE is staring up at the SKY-SAINT, hypnotised.

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:

(In an awed, hypnotised tone)

I have wings.

I shall soar.

I have wings.

I shall soar.

She begins to walk slowly forwards.

ALICE, THE HATCHERY DISCIPLE:

(Exultant)

I shall **soar**, I shall **soar**-

WHOOSH.

-and suddenly the HATCHERY DISCIPLE is propelled unstoppably upwards into the sky, screaming in triumph and horror combined as she goes, the sound vanishing into the stratosphere.

A long silence.

And then a few coins and a set of keys drop to the ground, expelled from her pockets.

BELLWETHERS (COMMS TOWER), INT, NIGHT

DAN THE FANATIC bursts into the comms tower.

He begins flipping switches frantically.

DAN THE FANATIC:

(To himself)

A worthy anthem for the Woundtree. Yes. Yes, let the vales and hills sing out in exaltation-

He finds a CD and drops it into the player.

Some very generic dad-rock begins to play.

DAN turns it up.

BELLWETHERS (SKY), EXT, NIGHT

We hear the faint screams of DISCIPLES flying upwards into the sky, and the roar of the SKY-SAINT as it flies past them-

-and then the dad-rock begins to play over the speakers of the town.

The SKY-SAINT screams and flies on.

BELLWETHERS (STREETS), EXT, NIGHT

-and overhead, the loudspeakers begin to blare out the same triumphant music.

CARPENTER and PAIGE just gasp.

Elsewhere, HAYWARD, who's unspooling a length of pressurised hose, takes a breath-

HAYWARD:
(Shaking his head)
Lousy taste in music, Dan.

-and goes back to it.

BELLWETHERS (BURNING HATCHERY) EXT, NIGHT

The bellowing of the SKY-SAINT continues, but it's partially masked by the horrible music.

A few DISCIPLES run forwards with rifles and begin to fire up at the SKY-SAINT.

HAYWARD runs past them towards the fire, dragging the hose behind him.

He twists it on - and after a moment it begins to spray water.

The civilians are regrouping to continue to fight the fire. PAIGE hurries to their head.

PAIGE:
(Yelling)
Get a mantra going! Come on, now! Back into line, keep the buckets moving!

Ear protectors to the front!

PAIGE:
(Yelling)
Carpenter! Ear protectors!

PAIGE looks across to CARPENTER, who is standing still, gazing into the flames - breathing hard and ragged.

And for a moment, we hear the fires, loud and horrible, accompanied by awful whispers.

CARPENTER can see the CAIRN MAIDEN standing in an upstairs window.

She hands them to CARPENTER, who is still staring absent-mindedly upwards.

CARPENTER:

There's someone still alive inside. They're on the upper floor.

(Slipping on her gas mask)

Keep the bucket chain going. I'll get them out.

She turns and runs.

PAIGE:

What are you talking about?

(Yelling)

Wait!

Dammit, Carpenter!

BELLWETHERS (BURNING HATCHERY) INT, NIGHT

CARPENTER rams her way through a door, staggering up a staircase and into the burning building.

CARPENTER:

(Under her breath, to the MAIDEN as she scrambles through the burning building)

This is it, then, hm?

This is what you kept me around for.

That's OK, that works. We have an agreement.

Let me get them out alive and safe, and then we can go together.

Stay right there, Maiden; I won't be long.

CARPENTER presses on through the rubble and the flames. She's repeating her own mantra under her breath, with nervous anticipation and excitement.

CARPENTER:
This is the place.

CARPENTER:
This has always been the place.

She clammers through the wreckage, climbing up the stairs.

CARPENTER:
You were always walking towards this moment-

-and she pauses. The MAIDEN is nowhere to be seen.

It's almost disappointing.

CARPENTER:
(Under her breath)
Lost you again, Maiden.

And distantly, we hear the weak, coughing, voice of ELGIN, who's half-buried under a fallen wall.

ELGIN:
Over here!

I'm over here!

CARPENTER knocks her way past another door.

She approaches ELGIN - and with a grunt, yanks something heavy off her.

CARPENTER:
I've got you. Come on, I've got you.

Here - here, put this on.

She unbuckles her gas mask and puts it over ELGIN's head.

CARPENTER begins to cough and choke from this moment on.

CARPENTER:

Come on, let's get you up.

Ready? Up.

ELGIN and CARPENTER, gasping and grunting, scramble back up onto their feet-

-and we can hear DAN on the speakers, muffled through the window, faintly repeating the WOUNDTREE'S mantra.

CARPENTER:

Hear that? Those are your friends out there, and we're going to find them.

Just listen to them. Focus on the words. Tune out everything else, OK?

ELGIN:

(Feebly)

OK.

CARPENTER:

Come on, let's go. And I don't know the mantra, so you're going to have to help me with it.

They begin to walk, painfully, together, back through the rubble.

ELGIN:

I will die today.

CARPENTER:

(Drily)

Hope there's more.

ELGIN:

I will not die helpless.

CARPENTER:

(Encouraging)

Better. I will not die helpless.

ELGIN:

My death will not amount to nothing.

CARPENTER:

My death will not amount to nothing-

They reach the bottom of the stairs.

And suddenly, overhead, we hear the faint flapping of the SKY-SAINT's wings.

CARPENTER:
-wait-

BANG. The ceiling caves inwards.

And the SKY-SAINT lands before them in the wreckage, grunting, gobbling, and shrieking. It begins to advance upon them-

CARPENTER staggers up to her feet.

CARPENTER:
Back, dammit!

CARPENTER and ELGIN turn and flee back up the stairs as the SKY-SAINT lunges clumsily at them-

BURNING HATCHERY (UPPER FLOOR), INT, DAY

-and the SKY-SAINT's shrieks are muffled as CARPENTER and ELGIN reach the upper floor.

CARPENTER crosses quickly to the window and begins to break the glass.

CARPENTER:
(Calling)
Come on!

ELGIN crosses painfully to the window - and hesitates at the edge.

CARPENTER:
(Losing her patience)
Let's go!

ELGIN jumps.

BELLWETHERS (CANAL), EXT, NIGHT

ELGIN lands heavily and painfully in the canal. There's more mud and hard ground than water.

A moment later, CARPENTER lands beside her with a grunt.

Both of them cough, breathing hard.

Above, we hear HAYWARD's voice.

HAYWARD:
(Calling)
Hey! They're over here!

Someone get the doctor!

BELLWETHERS (BURNING HATCHERY), EXT, DAY

The SKY-SAINT shrieks furiously, its wings flapping, the hatchery collapsing in on it.

Its howls become more muffled as the hatchery ceiling, already damaged, begins to fully cave in-

-burying the SKY-SAINT underneath the rubble.

The rumble of the collapse turns slowly to the sound of flickering flames-

-and then, slowly and gradually, the noise of rain begins to spread, and the noise of the fire dies out.

We take a long, calm moment with this.

CANTEEN, INT, DAY

That same rain hammers down on the canvas of the canteen tent.

HAYWARD, PAIGE and CARPENTER are all assembled here, having lost their meeting-room in the hatchery fire.

HAYWARD is giving a briefing. He takes a long sip of his coffee.

Everyone is exhausted and traumatised. Nobody is doing OK.

HAYWARD:
(Tired, but doing his best)

There were seven other rockets. All of them landed in or around a military base ten miles to the east.

One of them must have veered off-course.

As far as anyone knows, this town's abandoned, it's off-border.

On paper, we should have been safer here than anywhere.

We got unlucky, that's all.

We lost-

The tent flap flicks open. ELGIN is there.

She is audibly in pain and exhausted, but quietly determined.

HAYWARD:

Elgin? What are...what are you doing?

You ought to be in bed.

ELGIN:

(A little coldly)

I couldn't stay idle, Rootkeeper.

Not when there's so much work to be done.

Do you mind if I join the meeting?

HAYWARD:

Sure, yeah. Uh - take a seat.

(Returning to the agenda)

So. Losses-

ELGIN interrupts him as she comes to take her seat.

ELGIN:

Alice, Rymon, Seb, Wesley, Hyrrall.

Gavin, Awaale, Mark, Edison.

Plus all of the chickens, three goats, two sheep.

We've also lost the hatchery itself, the unspoiled grain, the greenhouse and associated equipment, and everything we were growing inside.

Silence.

HAYWARD:

(Tiredly, sighing)

Yeah. We got **really** fucking unlucky.

ELGIN:

There's an equipment-and-egress request coming in today from a few folks who are hoping to form a search party to find the dead.

HAYWARD:

(Infuriated)

They shouldn't have come to you with that. You're meant to be resting-

ELGIN:

(Ignoring him)

We don't know what's happened to the bodies. Whether they just keep on going up, or if they've come down somewhere in the countryside.

So the aim is to locate our people, and bury them if possible.

They're aware of the risks - but this is important to them.

HAYWARD:

(Gently and sincerely)

Sure, Elgin. I think that should be fine.

(Pulling himself together)

All right, so we can-

ELGIN:

(Interrupting him)

There's also been a call for a vote.

Everyone stares.

HAYWARD:

(Reluctantly)

Go on.

ELGIN:

We're in a difficult position. We all know that.

Hiding out here at the Grace was the right thing to do - for a time. It's kept us safe from the law.

But it's not sustainable. This isn't a place for the living.

And the Lingers are going to keep shelling up and down the length of the coast.

They might not be aiming for us, but we're still exposed out here.

PAIGE speaks up.

PAIGE:

We've been excavating, Elgin. You know that. We've made good progress.

If we can get underground, we'll be protected.

ELGIN:

(Scornfully)

Yes, we've been excavating. Digging into poisoned soil, breathing in haunted air.

Do you **really** think we can go on like this, Widow?

That shuts up PAIGE - who of course does not believe that they can go on like this.

ELGIN:

(Taking a breath)

North is the sea-channel, west is the polluted lands.

So the proposal is that we send the scouts back south. Through the hills, sticking close to the border.

See if we can find a place of refuge.

PAIGE:

(Growing frustrated)

But there's nowhere, Elgin.

We already tried this.

Nowhere that's safe, and hidden, and undiscovered, and big enough for sixty people or more.

Every inch of this country is claimed by people or it's been broken by gods.

ELGIN:

(Protesting)

We know that, Widow.

We don't **want** to find an undiscovered place.

The proposal is that we find a hidden sanctuary close to the water's edge. Somewhere that's still active, still lived-in.

Some sects of the Trawler-man are out this way, we know, but there are gods of stone and earth lurking in the hills. Entire false-faith communities in the deep caves.

Once we find somewhere suitable - we empty it out, then we occupy it.

(Firmly)

A couple of our Wounded Saints could clear out an entire village; we could find an entire new home for our movement and lose fewer than we did tonight.

Our god is powerful, and our people aren't afraid.

Silence. She's basically proposing that they wipe out another illegal community.

HAYWARD:

(Softly)

Did the idea for this vote come from you, Elgin?

ELGIN:

Yes. I'm sorry.

HAYWARD:

(Gently)

You don't need to be sorry.

PAIGE:

(Less gently)

Elgin, you do understand that if we find some...some hidden community and we purge it, if we hallow our people and murder theirs to give ourselves a home, we'll be the very worst of hypocrites?

You do understand that we'll be no better than-

ELGIN:

(Interrupting her)

If I can be honest with you, Widow, I don't think our people care about any of that.

If the choice you're giving us is between absolute ethical purity and a chance at lasting out beyond the winter, then you're going to be left alone to die with all of your purity and nothing else.

If there's a hypocrisy that troubles our people, it isn't that.

(Pointedly, towards PAIGE)

It's that we've put our lives in the hands of someone who's ready to give up on us.

HAYWARD:

Now, wait-

ELGIN:

(With venom)

Our Widow of Wounds from across the border spends more time drinking our vodka supply into thin air than she does at our morning prayers or our meetings.

She tells us our god has no revelations to share with us. Our god isn't **speaking** to her.

Despite that, she doesn't have to sleep in the bunkroom. She gets the comfort of her own private house, where she's free to sleep late and hide away all day and all night from the rest of us, and she can act like she isn't a part of this community.

She isn't on the work rotas, and all she contributes is sullen glares and objections, and moral boundary-lines she draws up then tells us we aren't allowed to cross.

There's an empty hollow in the heart of our movement, and right now that's what's likely to ruin us.

PAIGE takes it on the chin-

PAIGE:

That's...well, that's fair, you know.

That's all...pretty fair.

-but HAYWARD is furious.

HAYWARD:

(Impassioned)

No. No, it isn't.

And Elgin, you are free to criticise the choices we make, but don't you **dare**.

Don't you **dare** pretend you know what Paige has to deal with.

Yeah, she sleeps alone. Yeah, we keep her off the rotas.

We agreed on that, right at the start. She gets her own bunkroom, and she stays apart from the rest of us, because we still don't know if we've got this god under control, and the fucking thing is living under her skin.

It's not for comfort. It's to keep the rest of us safe.

ELGIN stares at PAIGE for a moment. Then she shrugs.

ELGIN:

(With quiet, cold sincerity)

Well, your disciples believe in this cause, Widow.

We're not afraid of the god you've raised, and we're not ashamed of it either.

We bear its brand upon our backs out of choice, and when the time comes and the gods have all starved and fled...we'll kill it, too.

We don't need to be kept safe from it.

You're the only one we're likely to lose faith in.

All of us are prepared to do whatever we have to keep the torch aflame.

And the fire is dying out here, in your hands, while you guard it from the rest of us.

So. We're calling for a vote.

Silence.

ELGIN:

I should let you discuss it between yourselves.

HAYWARD:

No, you...you can stay, Elgin. We really don't want to hide anything from you-

ELGIN:

I think it's better, Rootkeeper, if I leave you to it.

Please excuse me.

She gets up and leaves.

Everyone sits in unhappy silence.

Finally, PAIGE quietly speaks up.

PAIGE:

(Exhausted)

About the last thing Alice ever said to me was that we needed to learn to compromise if we wanted to survive.

She'd lost patience with me, too.

So...look, Hayward. I'm not going to be difficult about this.

If you think this is the decision we need to make, we'll make it. I'll play along.

HAYWARD nods. Then he says, firmly but gently,

HAYWARD:

No decisions today - from any of us.

We're all exhausted, we're all hurting. We're not in a position to be clear-headed.

I'll go speak to Elgin.

He gets up and goes after her.

Silence.

And CARPENTER speaks up. We might not have realised she was even in the room.

CARPENTER:

She's not as meek as she looks, your girl.

PAIGE is still tired and guarded.

PAIGE:

She's not meek at all.

Elgin grew up in an artists' colony out east. Nobody seemed to know whose child she was, but from the earliest moment she could remember, they'd made her their muse.

They fed her psychotropics, kept her doped up so she could be the ecstatic voice of their gods of invention and inspiration. And they'd take the stammering, babbling words she spoke and turn that into paintings they could sell by the roadside.

When they needed her to sober up, they'd lock her in the basement.

As she got older, she grew numb to the psychotropics, and she started learning how to fake it.

She'd pretend to pass out in the centre of the studio, and then she'd listen to them talk.

One night they propped her up in the corner and stayed up until the morning drinking.

When dawn came and they were all fast asleep, Elgin got up, took a knife from the kitchen, and went around the room slitting throats before she called the police.

She should have been a poster child for your government, really. An innocent victim of the monstrous false faiths.

But they arrested her and charged her with multiple homicide, because I guess they needed bodies more than anything, or maybe one of the artists was beloved by someone who matters.

Three weeks later we showed up, and we freed her.

She told Hayward all of that - she'd never have confided in me.

She really seems to hate me.

That reminds PAIGE of something.

PAIGE:
Carpenter. How...

...how did you know where to find her?

CARPENTER hesitates for a moment too long.

CARPENTER:
I could see her. She was standing in the flames.

PAIGE:
(Unconvinced)
You could see **Elgin** standing in the flames?

CARPENTER:
(Lying)
Precisely.

She takes a moment - and then quickly changes a subject.

CARPENTER:
Hayward wants me to talk to you about something.

He's got a plan, and he hopes you'll be receptive to it if it's coming from me.

Because he agrees that we need to find a way forward, and right now it seems like all we've got before us are hard choices.

PAIGE stares at her.

PAIGE:

Go on.

CARPENTER:

He wants to head into Glottage for a few weeks. Make a base camp there, some kind of hideout we can safely use in future.

Get a sense of how people are talking about us. Build up a few contacts.

Then he wants to try and make contact with an adjudicator, the one who's been speaking up for us on the radio. Shrue.

See if we can win them over to our cause. See if they'd be willing to help us out.

Maybe that'll give us opportunities we aren't seeing. Maybe it'll help us spread.

PAIGE:

We can't even feed ourselves out here from one day to the next and he wants to roll the dice on **that**?

CARPENTER:

I think that's why he wants to do it.

Before the hard choices get any harder.

So the flame doesn't die out here, alone.

(After a moment)

I'm willing to go with him, if that helps. Keep an eye on him for you, keep him safe.

Get the job done for us.

(Correcting herself)

I - I **want** to go with him. Make myself useful to you all. Pitch in where I can.

PAIGE:

So you think it's a good plan.

CARPENTER:

I think people need to see that we **have** a plan.

They need to know there's a way forward that doesn't involve butchering a bunch of hermits in their caves downriver.

PAIGE takes all of this in. She's stung and hurt by the implied criticism about the lack of a plan.

PAIGE:
(Unamused)
We, we, we.

You keep saying 'us' and 'we', Carpenter.

Have we really converted you so quickly?

CARPENTER doesn't reply.

PAIGE:
You don't need to go with him **or** stay with me.

I hope you know that. You don't have an obligation to me.

CARPENTER:
(Stubbornly)
Why wouldn't I want to help?

PAIGE:
But you've got other places to be.

CARPENTER:
Right now they matter less.

PAIGE:
No, but-

CARPENTER:
(Firmly)
I've got nowhere else to be. Nowhere that matters. This is where I need to be.

PAIGE pauses. She's upset and frustrated, but she doesn't mean to cause harm. She's just being honest.

PAIGE:
You're someone I've held in my heart for a long time now, Carpenter.

I think back to our road-trip upriver and...it's how this all began, really.

A lot has happened to me since then, and at times when I've felt lost I've tried to hold onto the memory of this strange, brave, unstoppable woman.

Relentless as the tide.

Exactly the sort of person I needed to me if I wanted to survive all this.

That image of you, it's been a good example to me, I guess.

(A little uncertainly)

And now you've come back to me, which I have to take as something meaningful, and suddenly I'm wondering if I was remembering you wrong.

You're...

She hesitates.

CARPENTER:

(Trying to laugh it off)

Starving and filthy. I know it.

A few more grey hairs. A few less teeth.

PAIGE:

That's not what I'm talking about.

You still haven't recovered. You've only just got here.

And already you're pitching in with the work rota, and you're dashing into burning buildings, and putting yourself in harm's way for the sake of the rest of us, and you're talking about 'we' and 'us' like you were born into this.

It's like you don't know how to stop.

CARPENTER:

Thank you.

PAIGE:

(Softly)

I'm not sure it was a compliment.

Do you remember what we said to each other before we parted?

Silence.

CARPENTER:

Yes. 'May you find your peace on a lonely road.'

'May your peace walk on with you for a while.'

PAIGE:

Yes.

(Coldly)

Has it?

CARPENTER shrugs.

CARPENTER:

(Equally coldly)

Can it?

This is becoming an argument where there can be no winners. Both PAIGE and CARPENTER are exhausted, both of them are wounded. Both of them are carrying too much.

PAIGE:

I can tell there's something wrong.

You keep looking off to one side, Carpenter. Your gaze keeps on wandering to the doors and windows. Like you're watching for something.

And you keep muttering under your breath, but I don't think you're talking to yourself.

Are you?

Silence between them.

PAIGE:

I'm so truly glad and grateful that you're here.

But the more I see of you, the more I worry about you.

They stare at each other.

CARPENTER:

(Coldly and annoyed)

Well, I'm sorry to be the cause of that.

But I'm really not looking for your worry, Paige.

I'm looking to help you, however I can, for as long as I can.

(Punching back)

And I think maybe...maybe you should concern yourself with the dark bags under your own eyes before worrying about mine.

PAIGE:

(Trying to calm it down)

I didn't mean-

CARPENTER:

(Growing more angry)

Because I can see you, you know? As you claim to see me.

You're just as tired as I am, just as frightened.

You're carrying just as much weight on your shoulders, and maybe more. And it's a weight that's starting to break apart the thing you're building here.

But you can't stop either. Can you? Hmm?

So. Let's just admit that to each other.

Nobody's pulling anyone else to safety out here.

No-one's in the lifeboat. All of us are drowning, and there's no peace any of us have found.

So why pretend you can help me by worrying about me? Why waste our time?

Let's at least be polite about it. We can still find a little comfort in each other's company.

We can keep on smiling and waving to each other as we both go down.

Isn't that better than sitting me down and telling me that there's something **wrong** with me?

PAIGE:

I worded that badly-

CARPENTER:
No, you said it well.

I'm not unstoppable, Paige. Nobody is.

There's one very hard full stop, and it's coming for me fast, and I can feel the wind of its passage in my face.

So I just want to help you. However I can. While I still can.

Can't you at least give me the dignity of that?

CARPENTER gets up, and goes, leaving PAIGE alone.

PAIGE sits back and sighs.

BELLWETHERS, EXT, DAY

HAYWARD slams the jeep door.

He turns and walks up the hill to where PAIGE is waiting.

HAYWARD:
(*Breathless*)
All right! Jeep's just about loaded.

You sure you'll be OK while we're gone?

PAIGE:
(*Tightly, lying*)
Of course I will be. These are our people.

There's no place in the world I'd rather be.

Scouts head south tomorrow morning. Maybe we'll get lucky and find somewhere we've missed, another safe refuge.

I'll do my best to keep us all from killing each other in the meantime.

HAYWARD:
(*Reassuring*)
You'll take good care of them.

PAIGE:
I'll try and live up to your example.

Silence between them for a moment.

HAYWARD:
(Conspiratorially)
And, uh, I wanted to ask-
(A little under his breath)
What kind of music does she like?

PAIGE:
(Taken aback)
Carpenter?

I have absolutely no idea what kind of music she likes. You could ask her.

HAYWARD:
No, I know, but I thought it'd be kind of cool if she gets in the car and I
turn on the radio, and straight away, it's something she-
(Hearing himself)
Doesn't matter. You know what? It doesn't matter.

He turns to go - but PAIGE calls him back.

PAIGE:
Hayward. Something's going on with her, and she won't tell me what.

HAYWARD:
What do you mean?

PAIGE:
(Giving up on explaining herself)
Just. Be careful, please.

I think that's all I'm trying to say.

HAYWARD:
(Shrugging calmly)
Our god must feed.

Anything bad happens to me out there, I'll make them pay for it.

PAIGE stares at him. She's horrified by the thought of HAYWARD martyring himself for their cause.

PAIGE:

That doesn't make it any better.

You do understand that doesn't make it better, don't you?

HAYWARD:

(Reassuring)

Nothing's going to happen to me.

Don't worry.

We'll make contact with the adjudicator - carefully, without putting ourselves in harm's way - then we'll come straight back.

I know the city. Carpenter knows the roads. We're as safe as can be.

Silence.

PAIGE:

(Reluctantly)

Find Shrue. See if they're willing to help us. Come straight back.

Please.

HAYWARD:

I'll be back here again, infuriating you endlessly before you know it.

(Cheerfully calling back, like he's posing a brain-teaser)

Hey!

Something to think about when I'm gone - "What's the opposite of a sacrifice?"

PAIGE:

(Baffled)

What?

HAYWARD:

"What's the opposite of a sacrifice?" Can't wait to hear your answer!

He turns and walks down to the jeep, opening one of the car doors.

HAYWARD:
(Trying to be enthusiastic)
All right. Next stop, Glottage.

CARPENTER:
(More quietly)
Yeah.

The car doors slam as they get inside.

PAIGE stands alone, watching them as the car starts up.

She sighs, to herself. She's alone.

And then she speaks to her god upon the winds.

PAIGE:
(Softly, coldly)
I don't know if you're capable of watching over them on the road ahead. I
don't know if you have any kind of protection to offer.

I don't know if you can do anything other than feed.

But if they die out there, my god-child?

If you allow harm to fall upon them...

I'll take this crib we've built for you, and I'll burn it.

I'll murder every worshipper here with straining sinew, and as their bodies
burst open to take their vengeance against me, we'll all conjoin; a great,
shapeless black tree. Your final offering.

And the reckoning will be not only ours but yours as well, because when
we are dead and gone you will starve and you will fade.

That's the only prayer I'm willing to give you now, so keep them safe, you
fucking **thing**.

(More faintly, to herself)
You keep them safe.

The wind blows. The wind-chimes dance.

Her god does not answer.

END OF EPISODE