

"GAYMER"

Written by

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Based on a True Story

COLD OPEN

EXT. ELVEN FOREST - DAY

MARK, 17, shy kid who dreams of becoming a powerful wizard and JULIA, 16, his firebrand of a friend, run for their lives through an Elven forest from the dreaded DRAGON MORRATH. Julia's black battle garb is torn down its right flank; Mark's white wizard robe is plastered with mud. The two heroes run past the corpses of other slain adventurers littering the woods.

JULIA

Watch out, behind you!

Mark whips around to cast a spell. Close-up on his face.

MARK

Solarious Vindicteous!

We hear the approaching dragon roar in fury as Julia and Mark regroup behind a massive Oak tree. They're panting with exertion, a mix of thrill and terror in their eyes.

JULIA

Your spell has but wounded the fell
beast, fair wizard!

MARK

Its dragon-scale armor is too
thick!

JULIA

You must stun him so I may lay the
mortal blow with Gorehound!

We pan down to see her 'axe' is made of modern-day plastic pipework duck-taped to the end plate of an iron.

MARK

If this fails, you have been my
dearest companion in all my
adventures.

JULIA

I share the same love for you, oh
last of the Maiar! Now, for the
glory of Éa!

Mark darts out from behind the tree to cast the stun spell. At the same time, Julia rolls on the ground by his side and lunges forward with her axe.

Her axe arcs through the air and into a card-board cutout of a dragon hung by a cloth rope around a tree. Julia's slash knocks the dragon cutout clumsily off the rope; it falls to the ground.

We cut to the GAME MASTER, late-30's, overweight guy dressed in too-tight leather jerkins, who walks out from behind a nearby tree, holding a boom box. He presses the Play button, and the speakers makes the sound of a dragon roaring in defeat.

GAME MASTER

The Dragon Morrath has been defeated by our heroes: Talen the warrior and Aleolin the wizard!

The other LIVE-ACTION-ROLE-PLAYERS rise from playing dead on the field of battle and stream forward to hug our two heroes.

GAME MASTER (CONT'D)

This conquest concludes the campaign: "The Dread Within and Without!" Here-here for the greatest live-action-role-players in our clan!

Everyone cheers. Mark and Julia clasp hands and raise them in triumph. Julia pivots to whisper in Mark's ear.

JULIA

(under her breath)
Your robe looks like shit.

MARK

(whispering back)
Is that a hole in your crotch?

JULIA

You ever look in the mirror and just scream at what you see?

MARK

J.R.R. Tolkien called; he wants an apology.

JULIA

The force is with you, never.

MARK

Your face...sucks.

Everyone finishes cheering and starts to clean up their gear.

MARK (CONT'D)
That last one was bad.

JULIA
Yup, that was bad.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MARIN COUNTY, CA, CIRCA 2004 - DAY

Mark and Julia wave goodbye to the rest of the LARP-ers and sit down to eat packed lunches on a picnic table. While waiting to be picked up by their parents, they play a game of 20 questions as they eat. Mark is near to guessing the fictional character Julia is thinking.

MARK
Would it be of the Sci-Fi or
Fantasy oeuvre?

JULIA
Fantasy, fer sure.

MARK
Is it a main character or a side
character?

JULIA
Main.

MARK
Villain or a protagonist?

JULIA
Depends on interpretation.

MARK
(rolls his eyes)
Villain or a protagonist?

JULIA
Protag.

MARK
Character from a book or a film?

JULIA
Book that was almost made into a
film featuring The Beatles. Two
questions left.

MARK
It is a hobbit?

JULIA

Yes.

MARK

It is Gollum!

JULIA

(claps her hands in
triumph)

Wrong! It's Sméagol!

MARK

They're the same thing!

JULIA

Nuh-uh! Gollum and Sméagol are literally the antithesis of each other. Sméagol, corrupted by the Ring of Power, became a shadow of his former self - aka Gollum - willing to destroy anyone and everything to keep his "precious." Sméagol - happy hobbit! Gollum - murderous monster. Different.

Julia opens her palms to receive her prize for winning. Mark sighs and fishes in his pocket to hand over a rare POG Slammer. Julia bites the POG as if to check for its authenticity, then cackles and pockets her treasure.

A late 90s Ford Taurus pulls up to the parking lot and Mark leaves to go.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Not so fast. Prayer of Leaving.

They take a breath together and say a series of words in total unison.

MARK/JULIA

Hydrology - Mechanical - Sauron -
Botanical - Poo - Moo - Rivendell -
True - Frodo - Fro-yo - Dwarven -
Go-go - Picard - On-Guard -
Scotland Yard - Don't - Forget -
Elora Danan!

They both make a whooshing sound and clap their hands skyward.

INT. STEPHEN'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

STEPHEN, 40s, straight-edge, workaholic father who wonders why he couldn't have just had a normal kid, watches as Mark gets into the car, draped in mud-encrusted, head-to-toe wizard regalia. Stephen clears his throat and Mark stops midway, picks up some old newspapers on the floor of the car, and places them under his dirty robe as he sits in the seat.

STEPHEN

What's the deal with the way you
two say goodbye?

MARK

It's something left over from when
we were kids.

STEPHEN

Uh-huh.

MARK

(a little embarrassed)

We added one word after the other
until it became a string of words
only we could repeat which grants
us both fair travels until we next
meet.

Stephen seems unsure how to respond. After a beat.

STEPHEN

We could come up with a Prayer of
our own...if you want to.

MARK

No.

STEPHEN

Please?

The two wait a beat and then speak in unison.

MARK/STEPHEN

No - Please.

They awkwardly laugh, followed by silence as they drive off.

ACT ONE

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CHURCH - DAY

Mark is sitting in a pew next to Julia during a mass in the church of their Catholic high school in San Francisco, California. SAMANTHA, 17, well-intentioned, bleeding-heart student, is speaking from the lectern.

SAMANTHA

And so, we are called to live our lives for the greater glory of God - to be students of Christ in the New Millennium...

Mark tries his best to listen attentively while Julia doodles a pic of a Night-Elf with humongous tits mid-coitus with a Dwarf with a huge penis.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - LATER THAT DAY

Sitting together in the front of the school bus, Julia shows Mark a Bible passage she highlighted.

JULIA

Ok, for today's Biblical Hypocrisy Fun Time: Genesis IX, 18:27. Noah plants a vineyard and has nothing better to do then get drunk and pass out naked. His son Ham comes upon naked Daddy and tells his brothers, "Hey, bros! Dad's buck ass naked!" The brothers Shem & Japeth walk backwards, not looking, to cover up Drunk Daddy with a sheet. Drunk Daddy Noah finally wakes up - and in his hungover wisdom - *enslaves* Ham's son and all their progeny *forever* to the two brothers who walked backwards...all for the crime of Ham having seen Drunk Daddy's dick. Long story short, does this mean I should be enslaved for walking in on my parents having sex the other night?

Mark laughs, half-paying attention, half-leafing through a *Star Wars: Extended Universe* novel.

JULIA (CONT'D)

You ever seen your parents have sex?

MARK

I don't think they do that - ever. Mom says sex should only be for procreation.

JULIA

Then, how are you alive? Since you were an accident.

Mark slaps her with his paperback. Julia grabs the book from him and places her hand on it, as if swearing on a Bible.

JULIA (CONT'D)

(mimicking with a lisp)

'And let us go forth as students of Christ in the New Millennium...'

Mark wrests the book back from her and goes back to trying to read.

MARK

At least she was trying to say something meaningful. It's easy to make fun of someone trying to be sincere.

JULIA

When I hear someone give an honest-to-God sincere Homily, I'll listen. Until then...

Julia pulls out her drawing of the Elf and Dwarf fucking and starts roleplaying.

JULIA (CONT'D)

(in a sensual voice)

Oh, Aleolin, fair wizard, I'd offer thee my virginity in one beat of my heart.

MARK

(sighs and plays along)

Our progeny, dear Talen, will save the world...in the name of Christianity!

JULIA

So long as we only have sex while married!

They pretend to gratuitously make-out, just as a bunch of jocks board the bus. CHRIS, 17, leader of the gang, teen heartthrob as gorgeous as he is an asshole, bumps into Mark's shoulder. Mark makes direct eye contact with Chris with his tongue still extended, mouth wide open. Chris looks taken aback for a second, then leans in close.

CHRIS

Faggot.

Mark blushes and retreats into his seat. Chris follows his friends toward the back of the bus.

JULIA

(to Chris)

Hey Chris! What did you just say?

CHRIS

(over his shoulder)

He's a fag, and you can choke on it.

Julia balls up her drawing and aims to throw it at Chris. Mark stops her.

MARK

It's not worth it, Jules.

JULIA

Fucking pissant thinks he's a Númenorean King.

MARK

(changing subject)

Hey, I want to show you something. I bought it at Gamestop on the way home yesterday.

He pulls out a video game box of *Everquest: Scars of Velious*. The illustration on the front of the box features an assortment of fantasy figures mid-combat with a white dragon over a snowy plain.

MARK (CONT'D)

It's called Everquest. It's not like any other computer game - it's a massively-multiplayer-online-roleplaying game...an MMORPG!

JULIA

Ok, I thought LARP was the craziest abreve out there.

MARK

It's *like* live-action-roleplaying,
but with people all over the world.
Real-time combat. State-of-the-art
3D graphics. Scantily-clad
sorcerers.

He points to the picture of a female mage on the box wearing
little more than a medieval bikini.

JULIA

Hot. So, the last time you bought a
new video game, I didn't see you
for over a month. Remember the
Great Diddy Kong Racing fiasco?

MARK

I couldn't stop racing until I beat
the evil pig.

JULIA

That should be on your tombstone.

EXT. MARK HOUSE - AN HOUR LATER

Mark gets off the school bus in San Rafael and waves goodbye
to Julia in the bus window. She makes the Vulcan sign for
'Live Long and Prosper,' then moves her tongue in-between her
fingers and wags it at Mark. Mark repeats the sign back to
her and rushes into a middle-class, one-story house that
sorely needs a paint job.

INT. MARK'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Mark makes a beeline for his bedroom, throws down his
backpack, and tries to log online on a dial-up modem. JANICE,
40s, reformed liberal, now religious conservative, doting of
her perfect son, calls out from the kitchen.

JANICE (O.S)

Hello, Yaley!

Mark gets a busy signal on the modem and runs out to the
kitchen.

MARK

Mom - I told you to use Line 1 for
phone calls cause Line 2 is for the
Internet. And stop calling me
Yaley.

JANICE

Why, not? You're going to get in.
 (to Stephen on the phone)
 Mark's home. See you at *La Toscana*
 in an hour.
 (beat)
 It's our date night, remember?

She sighs and hangs up the phone.

JANICE (CONT'D)

Once again, please, what is "The
 Internet?" In a simple sentence.

MARK

A worldwide information
 superhighway designed by Al Gore.

JANICE

Didn't help him win the election.

Mark runs back to his room.

JANICE (CONT'D)

Dad says to heat up leftovers for
 dinner tonight. Ok, Yaley?

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mark dials-up on the modem; it grinds and crackles to life.
 Mark's face lights up in the glow of the monitor and we fade
 into...

INT. EVERQUEST VIRTUAL LOADING DOCK - INTERCUT

We see Mark brought to life as a run-of-the-mill CGI HUMAN
 MALE wearing nothing but white trousers and standing in an
 endless white void. Lines of black text spelling the word
 CHARACTER float above his head. Unimpressed with his
 appearance, Mark's avatar waves his hand, and with a chime
 each time, changes into a Gnome, then an Ogre, then finally
 landing on a High-Elf. The avatar nods approvingly, and the
 text above him changes to read CLASS. The avatar doesn't
 hesitate as he reaches into the air. With a pop, an unadorned
 Wizard staff of plain wood appears in his grasp. The text
 floating above his head changes to NAME.

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM - INTERCUT

Mark smiles at his keyboard and types 'Aleolin.' He presses
 Enter.

EXT. OUTSIDE CITY OF ALORAN - DAY

ALEOLIN, 20s, the confident, dashing, High-Elf wizard Mark always longed to be, manifests into the CGI Everquest world of Norrath, brought to life with gorgeous, vivid colors. Compared to the real world, it's like we've stepped through the rainbow into technicolor Oz. Aleolin is clad in a white initiate robe, holding his basic wizard staff. He stands alone outside the gates of the Elven capital city of Aloran. He turns to look around and yelps. A foot away from him is a middle-aged, generic-looking, High-Elf NON-PLAYER CHARACTER (NPC).

NPC

(in a bit of a monotone)

Welcome to Norrath, fair wizard.
Would you like to hear about the
state of the world?

ALEOLIN

I would indeed, oh fellow
adventurer.

NPC

The world has been shaken by the
discovery of the new continent of
Dragons - known as Velious. But
you'll have to gain experience
before you face the mighty dragons.

ALEOLIN

And how may I gain experience, my
friend?

NPC

I wonder if you would fetch a
certain rare plant for me from the
nearby gardens?

Aleolin jogs off around the side of the city to a nearby gated garden. He walks inside and pokes through an assortment of flowers until he finds a purple one with a slight sparkle surrounding it. Smiling, he picks it and brings it back to the NPC. The moment he hands it over, we hear a faint chime in-game as Aleolin earns a small bit of experience for the quest.

NPC (CONT'D)

Thank you, fair wizard.

ALEOLIN

T'was my honor.

A beat.

NPC

Welcome to Norrath, fair wizard.
Would you like to hear about the
state of the world?

ALEOLIN

Ookay, so you aren't a real
person.

NPC

I wonder if you would fetch a
certain rare plant for me from the
nearby gardens?

Aleolin shrugs and goes to complete the same fetch-and-return quest. We see a montage of him doing it again and again - gaining little bits of experience each time. Finally, Aleolin hears a much louder ding! Shimmering, golden halos surround him and black text appears above his head reading LEVEL 2, then disappears.

NPC (CONT'D)

Congratulations! You have gained a
level!

ALEOLIN

And how many more levels until I
can fight dragons?

NPC

You'll need to attain a minimum of
level 70 before attempting to face
the dragons of Velious. But each
level will require more experience
than the last.

A beat.

NPC (CONT'D)

Welcome to Norrath, fair wizard...

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM - INTERCUT

Mark looks clearly frustrated at the experience of playing so far. He's about to Command + Q on his keyboard but decides to give it one more shot.

EXT. FOREST OUTSIDE ALORAN - MOMENTS LATER

Aleolin ventures off into the nearby forest, following a dirt path out of the city.

As he walks deeper into the forest, it begins to resemble the woods where Julia and Mark went LARP-ing. Aleolin hums to himself as he strolls on the path.

ALEOLIN

(singing)

*Gremlins and Balrogs and Orcs, Oh
My! Gremlins and Balrogs and
Orcs...*

He stops in his tracks, hearing the faint cry of a creature from off the path. Aleolin grins and follows the sound, creeping into the thickest part of the woods. There, in a shaded glade, he spots the MONSTER, an ugly, pathetic-looking cross between a piglet and bear cub. Aleolin holds out his staff and closes his eyes. A small ball of fire glows at the tip of his staff, and with a small grunt, he hurls it toward the monster. The fireball explodes around the beast; it lets out a piteous cry.

Aleolin whoops with joy, right as the monster leaps through the fire, seemingly unscathed, and right at him. Its jowls are wide open, lined with razor sharp teeth. Aleolin barely blocks the attack by shoving his wooden wizard staff in its mouth. The monster crunches his staff in two in one bite, then leaps for Aleolin's face.

A FIGURE suddenly appears between Aleolin and the creature. It grabs the monster's neck in its right hand; it holds a jewel-encrusted, white great staff in its left. In one motion, it waves the staff and incinerates the monster in its hand into dust. The imperious figure turns - it's LIVEC, 20s, handsome, raunchy, daredevil of a human wizard.

ALEOLIN (CONT'D)

Why, thank you, fellow mage, for saving me from that heinous creature!

LIVEC

Why, you are most welcome, oh fuckwad newb!

Livec throws the ashes of the monster into Aleolin's face. Aleolin coughs and sputters in shock.

LIVEC (CONT'D)

Sorry, not sorry! Hazing fuckwad newbs is a favorite hobby of mine.

Livec laughs and offers his waterskin to Aleolin, who desperately washes the monster's remains out of his mouth.

ALEOLIN
 (still coughing)
 What, I pray, is a fuckwad newb?

Livec starts to stroll in a circle around Aleolin as he talks. As he walks, he levitates up and then down in the air, like he's on a personal Merry Go'Round.

LIVEC
 Why, fair dweeb, it's a new player to our game of Evercrack who A - doesn't realize that nobody role-plays for realz unless they're laaaame as fuuuck and 2 - you shouldn't wander into the fucking forest until your balls drop.

ALEOLIN
 Guess I deserved that then. Thanks?

LIVEC
 EQ 101: You're not going to last very long being an idiot. And if you die, you've got twenty-four hours to retrieve your corpse or you lose eeeeeeverything.

ALELIN
 Yikes.

Aleolin hands the waterskin back to Livec, who settles down cross-legged on the ground, takes a swig and licks his lips. Aleolin sits down next to Livec, staring a bit too closely at his chiseled face. Livec begins to roll a joint of fireweed from his purse as he talks.

LIVEC
 Yeah, EQ - she's a punisher. It's a total turn on. Like if I died and lost my corpse, I think I'd literally lose a year of my life.

Livec lights up the joint. He inhales with a sharp hiss, and sighs in relief.

LIVEC (CONT'D)
 Fireweed from Sibelious. Shit's good.

He offers Aleolin a puff.

ALEOLIN
 Oh, sorry, I don't do drugs.

LIVEC
(in a Morpheus impression)
'You think that's air you're
breathing?'

ALEOLIN
Ok - my favorite movie!

LIVEC
So, take the red pill.

Aleolin takes the joint and inhales. He coughs hard and looks around. The graphics in the world become a bit blurred and shimmery, as if he's seeing through a haze. Aleolin smiles a bit sheepishly and hands the joint back to Livec, who takes another drag and stubs it out.

LIVEC (CONT'D)
Anyway, it takes a month really to
level up til' the game gets fun.
When you start, it's mostly just
farming quests for ex-p.

ALEOLIN
Yeah, I went and got a special
flower for some guy earlier.

LIVEC
Hot.

ALEOLIN
(laughs nervously)
Lol. But yeah, I'm in school and
slammed with homework...so I should
probably quit before I get in too
deep.

LIVEC
Mmm, 'getting in too deep' is my
favorite position.

Livec winks suggestively at Aleolin. Aleolin blushes.

ALEOLIN
Well, my main thing in real life...

LIVEC
We call that IRL.

ALEOLIN
...is LARP-ing.

LIVEC

(scoffs)

Live-action-role-playing is to
Everquest as Masturbation is to
Sex.

ALEOLIN

(now acting a bit high)

Hmm...I heard they're gonna ban
analogies this year.

LIVEC

Ban analogies?

ALEOLIN

Oh sorry, I mean - from the SAT.

LIVEC

Hah, so you're like what - 17?

ALEOLIN

(grinning)

A lady never tells.

LIVEC

When I was 17, I had better things
to do then waste my life on
Evercrack. You're probably right
about quitting now...that is
unless...

(beat)

You wanna take a leap of faith?

Aleolin hesitantly nods, and Livec reaches out to take his hand. Aleolin gingerly offers it up, and Livec bonds the two of them together with a flash of crackling white magic. The two stand up, and Livec arcs his great staff in a circle. A portal opens, and the two step through it.

EXT. SNOWY PLAINS OF VELIOUS - MOMENTS LATER

Aleolin and Livec step through the portal into the middle of Velious, the snow-filled land of Dragons. Mere feet away from them, a couple of white BABY DRAGONS prowl toward the pair. Aleolin yelps and tries to back up into the portal, but Livec closes it before he can return.

ALEOLIN

What the fuck! You brought me here
to die?!

LIVEC
Calm down, Gandalf The Gay, I'm
gonna help you.

The baby dragons lunge for the weaker of the two wizards. Right before they kill Aleolin, Livec shoots two darts of fire that shrivel them into embers. Golden halos surround Aleolin in the wake of the firestorm, along with a ding and text above his head declaring he's made Level 3.

LIVEC (CONT'D)
See, I can power-level your lil'
ass. These monsters are nothing to
moi, but will make a Real Wizard
out of you likity split.

ALEOLIN
You'd do that?
(beat)
Why are you helping me?

LIVEC
Charity. Alms for the poor.

ALEOLIN
(laughs)
Fuck you.

LIVEC
This game is all about finding new
ways to play it. And I'm gonna
play...with you.

Livec grins wickedly at Aleolin. He turns and makes "pew pew" sounds with pretend gunshot fingers as he blows up nearby baby dragons left and right. Aleolin is more than a little turned on by the affection this powerful wizard is showing him.

EXT. OUTSIDE CITY OF ALORAN - NIGHT

Livec and Aleolin step through a portal back outside the gates of the city of ALORAN - where Aleolin first entered the world of Norrath.

LIVEC
Level 10. Not bad for a day's work.

ALEOLIN
That last dragon - I totally laid
the killing blow!

LIVEC

I'm happy you believe that.

ALEOLIN

Seriously - thank you, Livec. Um, so, same time - tomorrow?

LIVEC

Can't do, got a raid scheduled with The Keepers.

ALEOLIN

Speak English?

LIVEC

Well, it just so happens you've become buds with a member of the most powerful guild server-wide: The Keepers of the Faith. And a raid, as in we're all gonna blow up some big ass monster together.

ALEOLIN

Ain't that just the tits.

LIVEC

(laughs)

You are weird. And I like it. I'll see you the day after.

ALEOLIN

I'm stoked.

The NPC outside the gates of the city notices Aleolin standing nearby.

NPC

Welcome to Norrath, wizard.
Would you like to hear about
the state of the world...?

LIVEC

I think you can do the honors
now.

Aleolin pulls out a new short wand made of white dragon bone. He concentrates and a flash of green light radiates from the wand. The NPC suddenly turns into a butterfly in a poof of green smoke and flies away.

LIVEC (CONT'D)

You are the one, Neo.

Livec waves goodbye and disappears in a white flash.

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mark logs off the game, elated. His eyes are bloodshot. He looks at the clock - it's midnight. His eyes slide over to his American History textbook and the homework assignment waiting on it that he didn't complete. His stomach grumbles as he realizes he forgot to eat dinner. Mark gives up and rolls onto his bed and goes to sleep.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - NEXT DAY

Crouched on the floor of his high school hallway, a bleary-eyed Mark hurriedly finishes the homework assignment that he ignored the night before.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - AN HOUR LATER

Mark plays soccer with the other SENIOR GUYS in his gym class. He sucks at sports. After Mark kicks the ball out of bounds, Chris imitates Mark flailing around in an effeminate way to his chagrin and to the laughter of his classmates.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - AN HOUR LATER

Post-gym class, Mark hides from showering with other guys in the locker room. He uses the Towel Trick to remove his gym clothes, then uses baby wipes from his gym bag to wipe the sweat off his armpits and crotch while no one is looking. He throws on his school uniform of a polo shirt and khakis. As he dresses, he can't help but steal glances toward the showers where guys are joshing around naked and splashing water on each other.

INT. CLASSROOM - MINUTES LATER

FATHER JAFFEY, mid 30s, easy-on-the-eyes priest, who walks the line between teaching Catholic values and coming across as hip, is leading Religious Studies.

FATHER JAFFEY

And so the Bible calls us to
chasteness in all relations between
men and women before the holy act
of matrimony.

Two fellow jocks, LUCAS and GREG, both 16, sitting next to Chris make snide comments under their breath.

LUCAS

Alicia's looking delisha.

GREG

I'd bang her in the sacristy.

CHRIS

Hail Mary, full of ass, the Lord is
with thee.

Mark eavesdrops on their conversation from his desk nearby. Julia raises her hand and Father Jaffey motions for her to speak.

JULIA

Can you please explain how the Roman Catholic Church advocates against birth control, excepting the rhythm method, which is absolutely unreliable, given that studies show abstinence-only education taught to minors doesn't work? And given the spread of STDS and the AIDS crisis and the fact that minors in this classroom are going to have sex whether the Church likes it or not? Shouldn't condoms be available and distributed amongst the student body to practice safe sex?

Father Jaffey smiles.

FATHER JAFFEY

Well said. And, personally, I agree with you.

JULIA

Then *why* are you teaching the opposite of what you believe?

FATHER JAFFEY

As Jesuits, we respect the teachings of the Church...even when we question them. The goal is to sharpen our minds so, over time, we can debate ideas for reform within the church.

JULIA

That doesn't change the fact that people in our school are having unprotected sex - right now.

The students in the class snort.

FATHER JAFFEY

Why don't you write an essay with your thoughts and submit it to the Archdiocese to express your feelings? That's the proper channel we would suggest.

Julia rolls her eyes.

GREG

Wiseass.

LUCAS

Biotch.

CHRIS

Dyke.

MARK

(whispering to them)
Hey, shut...

CHRIS

(cutting Mark off)
Don't like us talking 'bout your fag hag?

The other two jocks snicker. Mark sinks back into his chair as the bell rings, and everyone files out into the hallway. Mark gets up and follows Julia, who didn't notice what happened.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Julia and Mark stand at their side-by-side lockers. They spin their dials to the right, to the left, to the right - in the exact same combination sequence.

MARK

Why do you pick fights like that?
You're not gonna win over a Priest
to hand out condoms to horny teens.

JULIA

If no one makes a fuss, then
nothing ever changes.

Julia puts on a wicked grin and pulls out a folder from her locker to show Mark.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 My latest project. It's an
 application for a Gay/Straight
 Alliance.

Mark laughs, thinking she can't be serious. Then, he realizes she's serious.

MARK
 You can't be serious. Ok - it's
 2003 in San Fran, but in
 Catholicopolis it's like 1903...

JULIA
 1803.

MARK
 You aren't even gay, right? There's
 no gay students at Saint Isabella.

JULIA
 (carefully)
 I don't know what I am yet, but if
 there *were* gay students, and I'm
 sure there *are* gay students, they
 would have nowhere to turn, right?

Mark doesn't respond.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 So, let's change that!

Julia hands him the application. Mark holds it like it's hot to the touch.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 Co-sponsor it with me.

Mark is speechless. After a beat, he tries to hand her back the application.

MARK
 I'm not sure *this* kind of thing is
my kind of thing.

Julia pushes the application back into his hands.

JULIA
 Why wouldn't it be your kind of
 thing? C'mon, this is exciting!

MARK

Jules, I love ya, but I don't really have an interest in...

JULIA

C'mon, Mark! We made a pact to quest together until we die.

MARK

Yeah...in sixth grade.

JULIA

(teasing but with an edge)
When, as far I can recall, you didn't *have* much of a life 'til I *graced* you with mine...

MARK

It's not that, it's...

JULIA

...I remember shy little Mark - writing his stories during recess - I didn't even know you could talk 'til I returned that crazy ass fan fic you threw away.

MARK

'The Blue Star.'

JULIA

Right - about an evil blue necklace that turns a hobbit invisible.

MARK

One necklace to rule all necklaces.

JULIA

And, if I remember correctly, there was a female hobbit best friend named Talen, a white wizard named Aleolin, and a Gollum-esque creature called...

MARK

Gollum.

They both snort a little.

MARK (CONT'D)

Yeah, Mrs. Getz told me it was plagiarism when I showed her. So, I threw it out.

JULIA

And I found it.

MARK

Thanks for telling me it wasn't trash.

JULIA

I loved you ripping off *The Lord of the Rings!* I knew I'd found my bestie for life.

MARK

So, what if we got like a Fantasy club up and running instead?

JULIA

No one is being persecuted by the Catholic Church for LARP-ing or writing fan fiction...or gives a fuck about it 'cept us.

(beat)

This is important. I need an ally, Mark. This would be good for...for us!

MARK

(reluctantly)

Ok.

JULIA

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

She hugs Mark, thrilled to have won him over. Mark hides his feelings like he just made a big mistake.

INT. DINING ROOM AT MARK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mark and his family settle in for dinner around the kitchen table in their kitchen. Mark eyes a muted TV in the background showing recent polling in favor of Proposition 8 to ban Gay Marriage statewide in California. Janice plates a delicious-looking meal that Stephen has prepared. Stephen, famished, starts to take a bite off his plate before Janice lightly slaps his hand. Stephen sighs and settles into his chair for Janice to say grace.

JANICE

Thank you Jesus and all the angels for this food and for our family. Amen.

MARK

Amen.

STEPHEN

(reaching again for the
food)

Amen.

The family digs in.

JANICE

(to Mark)

Honey, I talked with your school
counselor today. She thinks you
have a real shot at an Ivy. You
just have to write a 'compelling'
personal essay, and she says you'll
be all set.

Janice gets up and goes over to a calendar she's hung on the
fridge and skips ahead to Jan. 1st - which she's circled with
a red Marker and covered in cheesy, gold sticker stars.

MARK

(cringing)

I'm on top of it.

JANICE

OK, Yaley...

Mark shoots her a look. Janice returns to the table.

JANICE (CONT'D)

...or wherever you end up.

STEPHEN

(with food in his mouth)

How was school?

MARK

Julia went on a crusade for condoms
during religion class.

STEPHEN

Good for her for having some common
sense.

JANICE

Stephen. It isn't right to
challenge a man of the cloth like
that in front of his students.

(MORE)

JANICE (CONT'D)

Not to mention, the church teaches us that sex is only supposed to be for procreation between a married couple. Condoms encourage rampant, casual behavior.

Stephen shoots an eye roll in Mark's direction but doesn't argue with his wife.

MARK

She also wants to form a Gay/Straight alliance...

STEPHEN

(snorts)

That's a whole different thing.

(pointing to the TV)

Like how we need Prop 8 because these gays in San Francisco don't know when to stop asking for special rights. How could two men 'in love' ever take the word marriage?

Mark silently plays with his food. He looks in the corner of the kitchen and sees YOUNG Mark, 9-year old version of himself, pretending to be a Jedi, swinging an imaginary lightsaber.

YOUNG MARK

Fear is the path to the dark side.

STEPHEN

Civil Unions are one thing when it comes to taxes...

YOUNG MARK

Fear leads to anger.

STEPHEN (CONT.)

...but marriage is reserved for religious ceremonies.

(beat)

Right, hun?

YOUNG MARK

Anger leads to hate.

JANICE

'You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.'

YOUNG MARK
Hate leads to suffering.

JANICE (CONT.)
Leviticus 18:22.

YOUNG MARK
(looks at Mark)
Only a Sith deals in absolutes.

Mark snaps back to the present at the dinner table.

MARK
May I be excused?

EXT. DRAGON LAIR - VELIOUS - DAY

Aleolin is running alongside Livec on the snowy plains of Velious. We see the two of them approaching a massive gathering of high-level avatars of The Keepers of the Faith preparing to raid a dragon in Velious.

LIVEC
Keep your mouth shut, for once.

ALEOLIN
Totes.

LIVEC
Stay out of the way.

ALEOLIN
Dope.

LIVEC
I really shouldn't be doing this.

ALEOLIN
I really appreciate it.

LIVEC
You'll be the death of me.

The two wizards reach the rest of the avatars. There are characters of all races and classes preparing for the battle: IKSAR MONKS meditating, BEASTLORDS speaking in animal tongues to their familiars, TROLL SHAMANS brewing battle-enhancing potions, WOOD-ELF BARDS cleaning musical instruments of death, HUMAN ENCHANTERS casting spells of protection over OGRE WARRIORS, sharpening wicked-looking weapons.

Livec takes Aleolin near the center of the chaos, where BOROFIN, mid-50s, gruff Dwarven paladin and the current head of the guild, draws a plan of attack with his sword in the snow as he describes it to the other raid leaders huddled nearby, including TULISIA, mid-60s, stalwart Troll Shaman and the oldest member of the guild.

BOROFIN

See - if we can get the dragon outside its lair, we can fight it without worrying about the lava flows.

TULISIA

You think other guilds haven't tried that? It won't leave its home advantage.

Aleolin meekly interrupts.

ALEOLIN

Perhaps I could lure it out?

The raid leaders turn to stare at the newcomer and Livec.

LIVEC

For fuck's sake, Al.

ALEOLIN

I mean, my puny level will make me irresistible bait...right?

Borofin snorts.

BOROFIN

(to Livec)

Why the hell is this newb raiding with us?

LIVEC

Sorry, Boro - this is Aleolin. I've been taking this idiot under my wing. Grooming the next gen and all.

BOROFIN

(to Aleolin)

Beat it. This is no place for wannabes.

TULISIA

Wait, it might work. No one else has tried using a Level 50 to pull it.

(MORE)

TULISIA (CONT'D)

If we made the rest of the guild invisible, and the dragon thought it had nothing to lose...Livec, could you handle that?

LIVEC

No sweat. Enormous invisibility spell. I charge by the person though.

TULISIA

I'm laughing my ass off.

The other raid leaders look to Borofin for a decision.

BOROFIN

Fine, let the kid commit suicide. But I'm not recovering his corpse if he doesn't make it out.

LIVEC

(to Aleolin)

Well, it was nice knowing you, Al.

INT. DRAGON LAIR - AN HOUR LATER

Aleolin creeps up just out of view of the gargantuan CRIMSON DRAGON, sleeping in its lava-filled lair. Aleolin, breathing hard, summons up his courage.

ALEOLIN

Do or do not...

Aleolin summons a small frost bolt and shoots it into the dragon's hide - it bounces off harmlessly. The dragon awakens and roars in outrage, spotting the little wizard, and after a moment's hesitation, comes charging for the kill.

EXT. DRAGON LAIR - MOMENTS LATER

Aleolin runs for his life for the mouth of the lair, the dragon gaining on him. He leaps for the exit and stumbles outside, falling onto the snow-packed ground. He turns to see the massive dragon bearing down on him, when all of a sudden he vanishes. The dragon whips its head around, searching the empty plain for its prey, roaring in confusion. Aleolin looks down at his body to see he's become a camouflaged version of himself, blending in perfectly with the snow. The dragon begins to turn around, only to be hit at once by hundreds of bolts of magic, arrows, and spears as the entire guild appears and attacks it. A row of warriors charge and get between the dragon and its lair, cutting off its escape.

In the chaos, a hand grabs the now visible Aleolin by his robe and pulls him backwards into safety - it's Livec.

LIVEC

Got yer ass!

Livec drags Aleolin backwards, as Aleolin fires spell after spell toward the dragon, hardly doing any damage but thrilled to be a part of the action. Borofin lays the killing blow with his two-handed great axe, severing the dragon's head. The guild cheers.

After the raid, Livec runs over to Borofin, who is cleaning the dragon blood from his axe. Aleolin tows along behind Livec, trying to hide his ear-ear grin.

LIVEC (CONT'D)

SO, that went well!

BOROFIN

(grunts)

He's lucky you saved him.

LIVEC

Oh, I won't let him forget it.

(beat)

Boro...what say we give Al a lil' trial position in The Keepers? Kid's clearly got guts. And is insane.

Borofin grunts in reply and motions for Aleolin to approach him. In the background, the rest of the guild rushes in and out of the lair, piling up the fantastic lewt the dragon was hoarding.

The paladin sizes up the wizard up for an uncomfortably long time.

BOROFIN

Don't get cocky. Don't be a daredevil. You need to execute orders - there's a reason we're #1 server-wide.

ALEOLIN

I promise to follow your leadership and be a loyal guild mate.

BOROFIN

Trial guild mate. We'll see.

Borofin waves his hand and in a flourish, golden text appears above the wizard's head saying <The Keepers of The Faith>.

Aleolin looks in awe at his new honorific. Livec winks at him and gives him two thumbs up.

BOROFIN (CONT'D)

(to Livec)

He needs to be at least Level 70 by our next raid.

ALEOLIN

I won't let you down.

Borofin grunts and walks toward the pile of lewt to begin awarding it to guild mates.

LIVEC

Well, guess we won't be sleeping for a week.

INT. LOCAL CHURCH - DAYS LATER

Mark is exhausted and bored at Sunday mass at his local church with his mom and dad. FATHER KEENE, 50s, drones on about Jesus in his teenage years cleansing the market in the temple.

FATHER KEENE

...It is written, my house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

Janice listens fervently. Stephen is nodding off. Mark doodles in a notebook on the subject of 'Ideas for Personal Essay.' He writes 'Leveling Up - then scratches it off. He writes 'Slaying The Dragon,' grimaces, and crosses it off. Janice startles Mark, poking him to get out of his seat for Communion. They shuffle past Stephen, who's now comatose.

MARK

Aren't we gonna wake him up?

JANICE

Stephen's a grown man and can make his own decisions in terms of his eternal soul.

The two of them shuffle to the priest. Janice takes her wafer and wine and makes the sign of the cross and heads back to her pew. Mark does the same, but on his way back to his pew he subtly makes the skyward motion from Julia and his Prayer of Leaving.

EXT. LOCAL CHURCH - LATER

Outside the Church, Mark is grabbing donuts and coffee from a table. Stephen and Janice are on the steps of the parish, saying casual hellos to other parishioners. They have a moment alone.

JANICE

Did you have to fall asleep?

STEPHEN

I was up all night. October extensions are due this week.

JANICE

It sets a bad example. For Mark.

STEPHEN

Sorry. Do you remember where we parked the car?

JANICE

Why is it my job to remember where you parked the car?

A beat as they both scan the lot for the car.

JANICE (CONT'D)

You shouldn't work on Sundays. It's the day of rest.

STEPHEN

The IRS doesn't give a shit about the Sabbath.

JANICE

We are outside a church.

STEPHEN

Saturday night doesn't count as Sunday, anyway.

JANICE

(seeing it)

The car's over there.

Stephen sighs and goes to get their car. Mark brings over donuts and coffee to share with his mom.

MARK

I liked the last priest better.

(speaking in monotone)

He spoke in something other than a monotone.

JANICE

Father Keene is not the most riveting addition to our parish, no. But anything can become interesting if you concentrate hard enough.

Janice takes a sip of her coffee and turns to Mark.

JANICE (CONT'D)

It bothers me, if you want to you know.

MARK

What?

JANICE

Your father not taking Communion. If I'm being honest.

MARK

Why don't you talk to him about it?

JANICE

(shrugs)

I've given up trying to change his mind. He shows up for mass; that's enough for now.

MARK

But if we really believe in the Church, shouldn't we ask for more than just showing up?

(beat)

Wouldn't teenage Jesus have kicked Dad's butt?

JANICE

Yes, teenage Jesus would have kicked Dad's butt.

Mark nods, mouth full of donut.

JANICE (CONT'D)

The best thing we can do is pray that he finds his faith...and until then, thank him for coming.

(beat)

Can I have a bite?

He gives her the last piece.

JANICE (CONT'D)

Old-fashioned is the best donut.

Mark nods in agreement. Stephen pulls up, and Mark opens the door for his mom as she gets in the car.

INT. SCHOOL LUNCHROOM - NEXT DAY

Mark sits by himself, shoving food into his mouth while furiously highlighting his textbook. Julia sneaks up on him and startles him.

JULIA

Where have you been, cremling!

Mark chokes on his food. Julia offers to do the Heimlich but Mark clears his throat and waves her off. He continues completing his homework as he talks.

MARK

Jules, I told you - I am committed right now to Everquest. I am taking the early bus home so I can level up, and I have to finish this homework in the next five minutes.

Julia props herself up on the table, eating an apple.

JULIA

Jesus, it's Diddy Kong Racing all over again.

(beat)

What's the appeal? Isn't it like more fun to role-play with people you can actually see, hear, share a Pepsi Twist with?

MARK

EQ is real. You're actually fighting monsters and not just wielding some jankity ass staff and screaming into thin air.

JULIA

Mark - you *know* how you get with video games. Promise me you aren't becoming another sad, loser gamer?

MARK

(still not looking up)
It's not like that.

A beat.

JULIA
So, I scheduled a meeting to ask
Father Jaffey to chair our club.

Mark freezes and stops reading.

MARK
(over his shoulder)
Oh, already?

JULIA
Well, with you being so busy, I
thought I'd take care of the
paperwork and get the ball rolling.

MARK
Ok.

JULIA
He's like...the only sort-of-
reasonable teacher here.

MARK
Yeah.

JULIA
So, the meeting is today after-
school in his office. I'll see you
there!

Julia gets up to leave. Mark gets up and stops her.

MARK
Wait. I really can't today. There's
a raid with The Keepers of the
Faith.

JULIA
I'm sorry - is that your Bible
study group?

MARK
It's the guild I'm trying to get
into in Everquest. They're the
best.

JULIA
(rolls her eyes)
Do you know how Catholic this guild
sounds?

MARK
It definitely sounds biblical.

JULIA

Mark, this meeting is important. As a Co-Sponsor, you should be there.

MARK

Well, you didn't *tell* me about this meeting today until...right now.

JULIA

I tried calling you three times this week!

An awkward pause.

MARK

Look. I promise I'll be over for *The Next Gen* marathon this weekend...

JULIA

(sighs)

Ok. But red alert if you aren't.

MARK

And you can tell me how the meeting went then.

The bell rings. Julia points to his stack of books.

JULIA

Ok. Well, good luck getting all that shit done in the next two minutes!

Julia makes the Vulcan sign for 'Live Long & Prosper' as she leaves, but Mark misses it as he returns to furiously finishing his reading.

INT. FATHER JAFFEY'S OFFICE - AFTER-SCHOOL

Father Jaffey sits at his desk, tapping a pen on the Gay/Straight Alliance application Julia has just pitched to him. Julia sits erect in a chair opposite him.

JULIA

So...what do you think?

FATHER JAFFEY

May I be candid?

JULIA

Course.

FATHER JAFFEY

I could see this being contentious amongst the Archdiocese. It could be they reject such a club. I don't want you to stick your neck out here just to be told it can't happen.

JULIA

Our school needs this.

FATHER JAFFEY

You will have to convince others there's a need. I'm not aware, for instance, of any gay students at SI.

JULIA

Like you're not aware of any students having sex?

FATHER JAFFEY

Hey - I agreed with you that was happening, but condoms are not allowed by...

JULIA

(interrupting)
How do you do that?

FATHER JAFFEY

What?

JULIA

Two things at once. Hip priest. Oxymoron.

FATHER JAFFEY

Patience.

(beat)

I want to change the church as much as you do. But I believe in the process. That these things take time.

JULIA

And, I believe there are closeted students who can't be themselves because of the environment here - an environment that insists a bunch of heterosexual teens are just waiting 'til marriage to have sex, that no one's being called hate slurs when teachers aren't looking, that we're students of Christ in the New Millenium obeying every edict of a 2000-year-old book? C'mon, Father. The world is crazy right now. Things are changing. Tell me you get this.

Father Jaffey gets up from his desk and clasps his hands behind his back, considering how to respond.

JULIA (CONT'D)

I believe the church does so much good in the world. And I don't want to have to leave it because it doesn't have room for people like me who question how they fit into all this.

Father Jaffey crosses back to sit on the edge of his desk, facing Julia, who holds his gaze intensely.

FATHER JAFFEY

I don't want you to feel you have to choose. I want you to be yourself *and* find fulfillment in the church. There is room for both.

JULIA

Then help me. Help your students to feel safe here - so they can be themselves.

FATHER JAFFEY

I will. I am happy to chair this and give it a go. But, I just want to prepare you - and Mark - that at the end of the day, it isn't all up to me.

JULIA

Ok. Thank you! So, what are next steps?

FATHER JAFFEY
I'll run this application up the
chain of...

JULIA
(interrupting)
What, like the military?

FATHER JAFFEY
(smiling)
Unfortunately...yes.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - MINUTES LATER

Mark, not looking where he's going as he multi-tasks walking and solving math problems, runs smack into Samantha outside her locker in the hallway, scattering his and her books and papers everywhere.

MARK
Sorry! Sorry, sorry!

SAMANTHA
It's fine, don't worry about it.

They both start sorting out the mess.

MARK
My bad. Sorry, you're...

SAMANTHA
Samantha.

MARK
Mark. Nice to 'meet' you.

SAMANTHA
Same! Blessed to meet you.

Mark raises a bit of an eyebrow at the weird greeting. They both continue stacking papers and books into a semblance of order, figuring out what belongs to whom.

MARK
I wanted to say I, uh, liked the
Homily you gave the other day
during school mass.

SAMANTHA
Aw, that is so kind of you! Thank
you for truly listening.

MARK

That's gotta be really scary. To talk like that in front of everyone?

SAMANTHA

(smiling)

Oh, not really. I wasn't talking.

Mark gives her a puzzled but strained smile.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)

Jesus was talking. Through me.

MARK

Oh, right, right. But, like - you wrote the speech and everything.

SAMANTHA

(laughs)

Well, I don't want to take credit for his words.

MARK

But, like, you said...the words.

SAMANTHA

Jesus spoke *through* me.

MARK

(nodding too quickly)

Ah, got it, got it.

They've cleaned up the mess of papers and books and are just standing awkwardly around now.

SAMANTHA

When you really get in touch with Jesus, it's like you always just know what he wants you to say. I'm not afraid to speak out - ever, anymore! I'd love to tell you more about it - I run an after-school group called "Jesus Speaks" - if you want to come check us out?

MARK

Sounds cool - I'm just a bit tied up right now working on an after-school club of my own.

SAMANTHA

Oh, so cool! What's it about?

Mark suddenly realizes he's put his foot in his mouth - only to be saved by the second bell ringing - one minute till class starts.

MARK

Oops, there's Jesus! Gotta get to class.

SAMANTHA

Ok! Talk soon? Be blessed!

Mark turns and hightails it out of there.

EXT. EVERQUEST CITY OF ALORAN - EVENING

Aleolin runs up to find Livec sitting cross-legged and eating an apple on a wicker bench in the city of Aloran.

LIVEC

Well, there's my lil' Level 70 piece of ass.

ALEOLIN

Sorry, I'm late! But I dinged 70 just in time for the raid!

LIVEC

Sorry, toots - raid's cancelled. Another guild beat us to killing Sontalak.

ALEOLIN

Oh, Bummer.

LIVEC

Sucks. We'll have to wait a couple weeks for it to re-spawn.

ALEOLIN

Ok...well, I guess I can stop procrastinating on some IRL stuff then.

LIVEC

Slow your roll, bitch. We got to celebrate your 70th. I've got a whole game plan. You know EQ is more than just quests and killing shit - you can do anything here you can do in the real world. C'mon.

Livec shows Aleolin the sights of the city. They walk up and down cobblestone streets.

NPC VENDERS hawk wares and potions and exotic animals. Livec steers the two of them through the bustle until they pass by a sign announcing a seminar in a tent led by the 'Self-Help Elf.'

ALEOLIN
(pointing)
Want to check it out?

LIVEC
You an alcoholic or something?

Livec peers inside.

LIVEC (CONT'D)
(whispers)
That's Tulusia!

ALEOLIN
Who?

LIVEC
Your memory is shit. She was at your first raid, backed your suicidal ass up? Founding member of The Keepers. Prehistoric. Been playing the game forever. I gotta see this.

The two wizards step into the tent.

INT. SELF-HELP TENT - MOMENTS LATER

The SELF-HELP ELF, 30s, mystic and self-serious, draped in layers of fabric and wearing one pendant too many around his neck, is leading a meeting right out of the AA movement with a circle of AVATARS of all types sitting cross-legged around him. Aleolin and Livec go fill ornate mugs with smoking cacao from a pot brewing in the corner of the tent, then sit in two empty spots.

SELF-HELP ELF
In Everquest, we are anonymous. We are free to share the things we hold back IRL. No one need judge us here. So, who wishes to come forward and take accountability for their life?

Tulusia sits up and steps into the center of the group. The Self-Help Elf reaches to hold her hand as she talks, but she gently and firmly pulls it away.

TULISIA

Hi everybody. I'm Tulsisia, and I'm an alcoholic IRL.

EVERYONE

Hi, Tulsisia.

TULISIA

I play Evercrack to distract myself from drinking. I want a beer more than ever right now. Thankfully, in EQ, I can drink electronic ale, without ruining my life.

The rest of the seminar participants applaud her and the Self-Help Elf holds her in a tight embrace, which she reluctantly accepts, for a bit longer than is comfortable. Tulsisia sits back in her place in the circle.

SELF-HELP ELF

Would anyone else would like to volunteer to share?

Livec raises Aleolin's hand for him; Aleolin recoils in horror.

LIVEC

My friend Al here has something to confess.

SELF-HELP ELF

(smiling)

If you volunteer someone else, you're really volunteering yourself.

Livec grins wickedly, gets up, and walks casually into the middle of the circle.

LIVEC

My name is Livec, and I've got a problem.

EVERYONE

Hi, Livec.

LIVEC

My problem is you all fucking suck.

Livec casts a Rain of Fire spell that kills everyone in the group except for Tulsisia and Aleolin. The avatars all scream as they die in agony, their skin melting off their bones. Aleolin's jaw is on the floor. Tulsisia raises an eyebrow.

TULISIA
That wasn't very nice.

LIVEC
I can't stand this self-help
bullshit.

TULISIA
Hmm.

Tulisia suddenly grabs and throws her spear right at Livec. Livec gasps and casts a Blink spell barely in time, teleporting himself out of the way. Tulisia scans the room and spots Livec in the corner by the cacao pot.

TULISIA (CONT'D)
One day at a time, you SOB!

She motions with one hand and the pot of cacao bursts open, the liquid forming a living mass of sludge that hardens around Livec's feet, locking him in place. With her other hand, she summons her spear - it flies into her grip.

LIVEC
9 out of 10 alcoholics relapse!

Livec shoots a Frost spell, icing Tulisia and her spear in place, then melts the cacao holding his feet.

Aleolin's head whips back and forth, amazed at the skill of each player.

With a roar of effort, Tulisia shatters the ice freezing her in place.

TULISIA
First things first!

She looks around to see Livec's duplicated himself ten-fold around the room.

LIVEC
Live your best life!

Tulisia sucks all the light out of the room until only Livec and Aleolin glow brightly as real avatars.

TULISIA
This too shall pass!

She throws her spear and stabs Livec in the shoulder, pinning him to a wooden post of the tent. The mirrored image magic dissolves as Livec swears, slumps, and groans in pain.

TULISIA (CONT'D)

That's for killing my sponsor,
asshat.

She summons her spear, ripping it out of Livec's shoulder. He yelps and falls to the floor. Tulisia walks over to him and puts the tip of the spear against his throat.

TULISIA (CONT'D)

Listen, you little shit. I know it's always just fun and games for you, but this is real for me. Maybe you could stop being a douche for one minute and think about someone else.

LIVEC

It's just a game, Tul.

She flips the spear over and thwacks him on the side of the head. He collapses on the floor.

TULISIA

Not to me.

She walks back out of the room over the charred remains of the corpses, not sparing either of the wizards a glance. Aleolin rushes to his friend's side.

ALEOLIN

Are you alright?!

Livec groans and painfully sits up. The right side of his face is swollen shut.

LIVEC

(slurring his words)
I'm sorry, Tul, I--
(seeing she left)
Well, fuck.

Livec pops a red potion out of his bag and drinks it through the left corner of his mouth. It slowly heals his shoulder and face, stitching his skin back together and closing his wounds. Livec cracks his neck and sighs.

LIVEC (CONT'D)

Guess I deserved that.

ALEOLIN

Yeah. You can be an asshole.

LIVEC

Thanks.

After a beat.

ALEOLIN

What's a good expression for right now...

LIVEC

Show your elders some respect?

ALEOLIN

Let's get the fuck out of here.

Aleolin helps Livec to his feet. Livec gathers some gold from his purse and throws it next to the corpses.

LIVEC

(to corpses)

Let go and let God.

(to Aleolin)

Let's go.

INT. ALORAN TAVERN - MOMENTS LATER

Livec and Aleolin enter a boisterous local tavern, filled with a variety of AVATARS drinking ale and loudly debating topics of the new millennium. The two wizards overhear snippets of conversation from a FROGLOK, HALFLING, and a NIGHT ELF as they approach the bar.

FROGLOK

They found no evidence of WMDs.

HALFLING

Gore tried to steal a Presidential election!

NIGHT ELF

No, no - the Zune has better sound quality than an iPod.

The wizards approach an NPC HUMAN BARTENDER.

LIVEC

(to Aleolin)

What you drinking?

ALEOLIN

Alcohol.

Livec smiles to himself.

LIVEC
 (to Bartender)
 Two Konark Delights.
 (to Aleolin)
 It's the 'Smirnoff Ice' of
 Everquest - we can start you out
 slow.

Borofin snorts from a barstool behind the two wizards. They turn to face him.

BOROFIN
 Only a pussy drinks Konark.

Borofin shoves a half-filled glass of Dragon's Breath in front of Aleolin.

BOROFIN (CONT'D)
 Drink.

Aleolin looks at the boiling hot ale and looks to Livec for help. Livec shrugs.

ALEOLIN
 Thanks, but I think I should pass.

BOROFIN
 How are you going to stand your
 ground in front of a dragon if you
 can't stomach a Dragon's Breath?

Aleolin grimaces and takes a swig and sputters, coughing as nearby patrons laugh at him and cheer him on. Borofin claps Aleolin on the back - too hard - causing Aleolin to expunge even harder. Borofin walks up to Livec.

BOROFIN (CONT'D)
 Take care of your girlfriend.

Borofin leaves. The rest of the bar goes back to their conversations. The NPC Bartender delivers their order of Konark Delights, resembling a fizzy Rosé wine.

LIVEC
 Congrats on just getting pwned.

ALEOLIN
 (struggling to breathe)
 That's a good thing?!

LIVEC
 From Boro? Take it as a sign he
 doesn't totally hate you.

Livec hands over their drinks and the two of them toast.

EXT. STREETS OF ALORAN - AN HOUR LATER - NIGHT

The wizards stumble out of the tavern, completely wasted. The world to them appears blurred and topsy-turvy, and they slur their words.

LIVEC

I haft to show you something.

They wander over to a Pegasus stable. The OWNER, 50s, gruff and not in the mood for drunk customers, is closing up.

LIVEC (CONT'D)

(hiccups)

Joy Ride for two, please.

OWNER

Closed until primetime in Asia.

Livec throws down a precious ruby amulet on the counter to trade. The owner's eyes go wide.

OWNER (CONT'D)

Joy Ride for two coming right up.
You can ride my best: Diamondaire.

He takes the two wizards to ride his prize Pegasus Diamondaire. The two wizards climb aboard her back and she whooshes into the air over the city. Aleolin holds onto Livec's muscular back for dear life.

LIVEC

(singing)

I can show you the world!

Aleolin sings along to the *Aladdin* song. They race their winged steed through the clouds. Aleolin lets out a yell of joy. Livec turns to Aleolin in the saddle.

LIVEC (CONT'D)

(in a low voice)

Do you trust me?

Aleolin blushes and nods enthusiastically. Livec pushes him off Diamondaire. Aleolin screams and plummets to the ground, only to be caught by Livec in his arms at the last second as he swoops to the rescue on the Pegasus. Aleolin giggles, weightless and protected in Livec's arms.

The two of them land, dismount, and return Diamondaire to the owner, who barely notices, still consumed in awe of the powerful amulet Livec gave him. The two wizards walk out onto the empty streets.

LIVEC (CONT'D)

You should have seen your face.

ALEOLIN

When you tossed me off or when you caught me?

Livec smiles, burps, does a little Drunken twirl, and disappears, logging off.

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mark logs off, thrilled and flushed. His elation breaks when he spots the mountain of textbooks on his desk waiting to be read - he's gotten way behind. He tiredly opens up a textbook and starts reading. Above him looms a duplicate calendar of the one his mother pinned to the fridge, opened up to the red circle around Jan. 1st. We pan over to his oversized Nokia cell phone nearby on his bed stand shows two missed calls from Julia.

ACT TWO

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD AT SCHOOL - DAY

Mark is playing soccer as goalie during gym class. Chris comes barreling down the field, ball in toe, toward Mark. In Mark's head, we hear the sonorous voice of Aleolin casting an imaginary spell to give Mark strength in this battle.

ALEOLIN (V/O)

The power of Norrath infuses you.
The mana guides you! *Incanticus*
Magnificom!

Chris kicks the ball to score as Mark unleashes a fury of imaginary mana in his mind and throws his body in its way, blocking the goal. Mark's classmates cheer in shock that he actually was helpful. Mark picks himself up, covered in mud, grinning with pride. Chris spits on the ground nearby, pissed that he got blocked by a nerd.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Mark tentatively makes his way to the showers. He takes a deep breath, undresses, and goes in. He keeps his eyes focused dead ahead on the shower spigot as he hurriedly cleans the mud off himself. He finishes, towels off, and rushes back to his locker - only to see Chris standing there, naked and blocking his path. Mark freezes, unsure of what to do.

CHRIS

You like what you see?

Mark gulps but steadies himself.

MARK

That's what I asked your Mom last night.

Chris moves to beat up Mark - only to be interrupted by other guys coming back from the shower. Instead, Chris bumps Mark hard in the shoulder as he walks past. Mark is shaken but hears the school bell and hurriedly dresses for his next class.

INT. CLASSROOM - MINUTES LATER

Mark furiously completes his homework under his desk during Religious Studies.

FATHER JAFFEY

...And a reminder that all Seniors must save-the-date for your trip to Kairos next month. As you know, it's a two-day silent retreat to prepare you for what it means to graduate as students of Christ. Also, you get a break from school. So, there's that.

Mark is cutting it very close. He completes his homework just as the priest comes by to collect it. The bell rings and Julia grabs Mark and makes a bee-line for Father Jaffey, now sitting at his desk.

JULIA

So, what's the word? Are we approved for our Gay/Straight Alliance?

Mark inhales quickly and looks around to see if any other students have noticed Julia's question. They are shuffling out nearby, but no one has overheard yet.

FATHER JAFFEY

So, I brought it up with the Principal, who brought it up with the Archdiocese, and the decision unfortunately is that the church can't allow a club that openly promotes homosexuality in its title. So, I went ahead and suggested we call it the 'Open Hearts' club. A bit less specific but still serving as a haven for anyone feeling outcast. Thoughts?

Mark cuts in before Julia can respond.

MARK

That sounds great - we understood it was a long shot, and this can work as a good compromise for all.

Julia is flabbergasted.

JULIA

Um, Mark is not speaking for me.
(to Mark)
How could you support hiding behind some pithy name like 'Open Hearts?'
Give me a break.

MARK

I don't think it's that bad...

JULIA

(to Mark)

It's a sell out.

(to Father Jaffey)

Best of luck appeasing a Church
that has its head up its own ass.

Before Father Jaffey can rebut, she storms off. Mark tries to catch up to Julia, but the priest stops him and takes him aside.

FATHER JAFFEY

Mark, the definition of homework is
it's done at home.

MARK

(distracted)

I'm sorry. I've, uh, just been
really bogged down with my college
applications.

FATHER JAFFEY

Which aren't due for another month.
Is there another reason? Anything
you'd want to discuss in private?

MARK

(cautious)

No. Not really.

FATHER JAFFEY

And you're...ok with the decision
about your club?

MARK

(very on-guard)

Yeah, why wouldn't I be?

FATHER JAFFEY

Ok - ok, just wanted to check.
But look, I've noticed this race to
finish your homework during class
for some time.

MARK

(quickly)

I've just been stressed
out...because I don't have anything
to write about for my college
essays.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

I mean - nothing really bad, or really good, or interesting has happened to me.

FATHER JAFFEY

Well, why don't you write what you're passionate about? What's your favorite thing to do in the world and why?

INT. KEEPERS OF THE FAITH GUILD HALL - NIGHT

We are midway through an in-game party that Livec has thrown for Aleolin to celebrate his one-month anniversary joining Everquest. The whole guild has shown up, and everyone is roaring drunk. The room resembles a medieval great room, a cavernous hall of stone with wooden tables lined up the center, on which people are dancing and cavorting. Aleolin stands on the raised dais at the end of the room, near the throne. He controls the music with his wand, creating mashups of popular songs from the early 2000s. The sounds appear as cloudy wisps of musical notes, floating from the tip of his wand and up into the rafters of the room.

All of a sudden, Aleolin leaps onto the nearest table, turns his wand into a makeshift mic amplifying his voice, and leads everyone in a fantasy-version of the Cha Cha Slide. Everyone follows his lead, dancing around the tables.

ALEOLIN

(rapping)

Enchant to the right! Heal to the left! Now, parry - parry! Now, dodge - dodge! Every-body-cast-a-spell!

Everybody claps their hands in time with the lyric.

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM - INTERCUT

Mark sits at his computer. He's wearing huge headphones connected to a Zune MP3 player on his desk which is playing "Cha Cha Slide." Mark quietly whispers his made-up lyrics to the song as he types them furiously into his keyboard. He bounces in his chair in time to the imaginary beat in the headphones.

Over Mark's shoulder, we see Stephen open the bedroom door.

STEPHEN

Hey kiddo, want to help with dinner?

Mark doesn't hear the question, totally absorded in the game. Stephen rolls his eyes and shuts the door.

INT. GUILD HALL - INTERCUT

The dance ends and people scream with laughter. Borofin looks on skeptically from the throne, where he sits grimly drinking his beer. Livec grabs the wand mic from Aleolin.

LIVEC

Ok, ladies and gentlemen, just when things couldn't get any gayer, we've got a surprise for Al.

Livec elaborately motions with the wand to Borofin, who grunts, stands up, and raises his beer.

BOROFIN

Against my better judgement, I've decided to offer Aleolin full membership in The Keepers. All hail, Aleolin Darkmoon.

The guild cheers; Aleolin is overjoyed and fist bumps Livec.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Stephen prepares a sumptuous meal between three separate pans on the stove. He cooks like a wizard, constantly throwing in new spices and adjusting the heat. Janice sits nearby at the kitchen table, snacking on some carrots and reading a trashy romance novel.

STEPHEN

(over his shoulder)
What's this one called?

JANICE

"Love in the New Millenium."

STEPHEN

What's it about?

JANICE

(still reading)
Remember that Y2K thingy everyone was freaking out about?

STEPHEN

Yes. The firm spent thousands on IT guys so our computers didn't crash back to the stone age.

JANICE

Well, this is a version of that.
Star-crossed lovers who meet on The
Internet before it shuts down
forever, and now they're trying to
find each other in the real world.

STEPHEN

I can't believe you read that
trash.

JANICE

(looking up from her book)
Everyone else in this family gets
to have their guilty pleasures.

STEPHEN

What's my guilty pleasure?

JANICE

Working?

Stephen looks away, not amused.

JANICE (CONT'D)

Sorry, that was a joke.

Stephen, hands full cooking, clears his throat and gestures
with his hip to a nearby cabinet. Janice puts down her book,
gets up, and pulls out a packet of pasta from the cabinet.
She walks over and dumps it into a pot of boiling water. She
moves behind Stephen and starts to give him a shoulder
massage.

JANICE (CONT'D)

Anyway, Mark's so into computers
and The Online, I thought I'd read
something in that...genre.

STEPHEN

(gesturing to a spot)
Ooh, right there. Little higher.

JANICE

You're so tense. These knots.

STEPHEN

Those knots pay the bills.

Janice digs into his shoulder. Stephen groans as she hits the
spot. After a beat.

JANICE

Hun, do you need help?

STEPHEN
With *your* cooking?

She raises an eyebrow.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
Sorry, that was a joke.

Janice slaps his back playfully, finishing the massage. Stephen gestures to the book on the kitchen table.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
Is it any good?

JANICE
No, not really.

STEPHEN
I honestly don't get how books like that square with...

JANICE
The Bible says nothing about reading trashy romance novels.

STEPHEN
Ok, ok!

He pulls out a spoonful of the sauce he's been simmering and offers it to Janice to taste. She blows it cool, then tastes it.

JANICE
That is...heaven.

Stephen smiles. A beat.

JANICE (CONT'D)
I love you.

STEPHEN
I love you too, hun.

Stephen kisses her hand on his shoulder. She goes back to the kitchen table and resumes reading; Stephen keeps cooking. This is as close as they get these days.

INT. KEEPERS OF THE FAITH GUILD HALL - NIGHT - MINUTES LATER

The party is over, and everyone is now sitting in neat rows of chairs surrounding the tables. The festive atmosphere lingers faintly with a laugh here or there, but mostly, the mood has turned somber.

Borofin stands up from his throne and Tullisia rises in her chair at the head of the tables. Everyone falls silent.

TULLISIA

Well, thanks all for letting me ruin the mood. I've realized that the time has come for me to say goodbye. I've replaced one addiction for another and need to get help.

BOROFIN

For those of us who aren't as old here as Tul...

TULLISIA

I'm pretty sure I'm hotter and younger than you IRL, grandpa.

BOROFIN

Let me rephrase - for those who haven't been in the guild since the dawn of time, we shall perform the Funeral Ritual to send off our family member.

(turns to Tullisia)

Tullisia, do you swear to never sell your login or let anyone else play your avatar forever - lest you betray The Keepers?

TULLISIA

I do.

BOROFIN

Then, farewell, and may your IRL be as thrilling as the one we shared online.

The guild mates raise their glasses. Livec stands up and clears his throat.

LIVEC

To Tullisia, the best pain in my ass I've ever felt.

Tullisia raises her eyebrows.

TULLISIA

Want me to kick your ass one last time?

LIVEC

(laughs)

I've never been able to beat you,
and I won't try now.

(sincere)

I hope you get your life
together...or whatever it is you
need. We will miss you to death.

The guild cheers.

BOROFIN

Final stats?

Tulisia raises her hand and a line of scrolling black text
appears above her head. She reads it.

TULISIA

2 years, 2 months, 5 days, and 41
minutes of game time.

(beat)

I've spent over two years of my
life in-game with you suckers.

BOROFIN

To Tulisia! To the fights, to the
fun, to the family, to the Keepers
of the Faith!

Everyone salutes Tulisia and she waves goodbye, tears in her
eyes, and logs off for the final time, vanishing in-game.

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

STEPHEN (O.S.)

(yelling)

Mark! I've called you twice
already!

Mark snaps back to reality as if waking from a dream. He
shakes his head to clear it, takes off his headphones, and
quickly types AFK into the keyboard.

MARK

Sorry, coming dad!

He runs out of the room.

INT. DINING ROOM - AN HOUR LATER

Janice finishes washing the dishes post-dinner as Mark and Stephen put out all the family board game options on the table. Mark places the board game *Settlers of Catan* on the top of the stack. The family gathers round the table.

MARK

So, this is called 'Die Siedler von Catan' - or in this English version: 'Settlers of Catan.' It's an indie game from Germany that Julia lent me.

JANICE

Why can't we just play Monopoly? I don't have the...

(to Mark)

Bandwidth, is that what's called?

Mark nods, surprised.

JANICE (CONT'D)

See - mom can learn new things. But I don't have the bandwidth to learn a new game.

STEPHEN

How are you so fried when you've been home all day reading?

Janice shoots him a don't-go-there glare.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Sorry. Well, Monopoly is no fun with just three people, so I suggest we play...Risk!

Stephen pulls out *RISK* and sets it on top of *Settlers*.

JANICE

We are NOT going to play Risk because you two always form an alliance against me, which is showing up over time as a subtle form of misogyny.

STEPHEN

Fine - we aren't going to play any of these games, specially not one made up by Nazis, sorry Mark.

Stephen pulls out the *GAME OF LIFE* and sets it on top of *RISK*. Mark groans. Janice smiles.

JANICE

I like this one.

Cut to Mid-game. Mark has a career as an Accountant with a mid-range salary. He pulls a new card and finds out it's his Marriage Day.

STEPHEN

Congrats on your big day!

Mark reaches in to pull out another avatar to add to his "life car." He eyes the blue avatars as he adds a pink one to his "life car."

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

So, are you dating anyone right now?

MARK

Uh, no.

STEPHEN

What about Julia?

MARK

We're just friends. I don't know how she feels.

JANICE

You don't need to pressure him, Stephen. Mark, you don't need to rush into a relationship. Save that for the Game of Life.

STEPHEN

You don't need to correct me, honey. Mark is almost a man, and it's fine and good if he wants to start going on dates. We met when we were both what - 19?

JANICE

We were both 22, thanks for remembering, and Mark *is* becoming so handsome. Some girl is going to be very lucky to know him...some day far in the future.

Janice spins the wheel and her avatar gets offered the chance to go to college. She moves her avatar to the college track of the board, while smiling at Mark and pointing over to the calendar on the fridge as a not-so-subtle reminder for him to work on his college essays.

Then, Janice and Stephen make eye contact without meaning to - but they look away from one another.

INT. JULIA'S BEDROOM - DAYS LATER

Mark stands next to Julia who sits at her Dell desktop computer in her bedroom. The Everquest game box lies next to the monitor. Julia is giving the game a go. She and Mark are at the character creation screen.

MARK

Ok! First things first, you gotta pick your race.

JULIA

You know, as a white man, I think you should rephrase that. And I know how to roleplay, Mark!

Julia slides her mouse over different configurations. She selects a Troll. The game prompts her to choose a Class.

MARK

If you want to be a wizard, you can hang with me and Livec...

JULIA

Who's Livec?

MARK

My best friend in-game. He's a real asshole, and he's really funny...

Julia chooses Warrior and names the character "Talen."

MARK (CONT'D)

Ooookk. Warrior's great too!

Julia finalizes her character, and her Level 1 Troll avatar TALEN appears on the monitor in the mountainous, arid zone of Sibelious. Julia starts steering the character with her mouse and keyboard controls. For the first time, we see the perspective of playing EQ from the real world - what it's like to try and play it on a computer. It isn't nearly as sexy as it seemed in-game.

MARK (CONT'D)

So, we'll want to find an NPC and a quest to gain experience.

JULIA

(distracted)

A what?

MARK

Non-player character...wait, watch out!

JULIA

What?

Julia gasps and bangs the keyboard.

JULIA (CONT'D)

How did that happen?!

MARK

I guess there's a lot of deadly cliffs in your starting zone. Trolls got it rough. You gotta watch where you're going.

JULIA

These controls suck.

MARK

And if you lose your corpse in EQ, you only have 24 hours to get it back.

Julia starts to play again, but the game stutters and freezes.

JULIA

There's a lot of lag.

MARKC

Well, your home set-up is barely meeting the min. system requirements.

Julia sighs and turns to Mark.

JULIA

Mark, I don't know if this is for me.

MARK

It's just a learning curve. Once you get over it, I'll power-level you, like Livec did for me, and we can all play together!

Julia shuts off her computer. She walks over and slumps on her bed.

MARK (CONT'D)

Jules, you ok?

JULIA

Why haven't you checked in about our club?

MARK

I didn't know you were still upset about that.

JULIA

You didn't ask.

Mark joins her on the bed.

MARK

C'mon Jules, you had to know it was never going to fly...wasn't this just another one of your cuckoo ideas that never goes anywhere? Like the time you tried to run for Class President on a platform of making school mass optional?

JULIA

Fucking lost to the bro promising pizza Fridays.

MARK

(gently)

You just like to push buttons. It's better we just go along with things until we get to college.

Julia turns away from Mark and faces the window.

JULIA

Everyone at St. Isabella is a hypocrite - the worst kind of Catholic because they pretend to be 'liberal Jesuits,' but they're just as bad as the rest.

Mark takes a breath and scoots up to her.

MARK

I'm sorry if I was cavalier about your feelings.

(beat)

I'm sorry I didn't take your club seriously.

JULIA

Our club. Fuck Mark, I did this for...

She cuts herself off mid-sentence.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Nevermind.

Mark looks warily at her, then carefully puts his head on her shoulder.

MARK
(under his breath)
Hydrology - Mechanical - Sauron -
Botanical...

A beat. Julia nestles her head in his shoulder.

JULIA
(under her breath)
Poo - Moo...but I'm not playing EQ
with you.

Mark laughs.

MARK
Ok. Thanks for giving it a go.

They break off their weird neck embrace. Julia grabs a remote control from under her pillow and turns on the TV to the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* playing. Mark gets up.

MARK (CONT'D)
I'll brb.

Julia raises an eyebrow.

MARK (CONT'D)
Sorry, I'll be right back.

JULIA
One more rule - no gamer phrases in
our relationship.

MARK
Make it so.

INT. JULIA'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mark looks in the mirror, and sighs, confused and upset by what just happened. As he washes his hands, he overhears a faint sound coming through the overhead air vent in the corner of the bathroom. It's the sounds of two people - Julia's parents - having sex in the room above.

Curiosity gets the better of Mark, and he stands up on the bathroom counter to listen as closely as he can to the sound of the two adults having intense, passionate sex.

INT. JULIA'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mark returns and plops down next to Julia, who's munching on a bag of Corn Pops. She offers him some.

MARK

You figured out if you're going to the Winter Formal yet?

JULIA

(food in her mouth)

Yeah, if I can go dressed as a nun with a ruler enforcing everyone dancing six inches apart.

MARK

Could I make things up to you by taking you to the dance?

Julia snorts, then realizes he seems to be serious. She eyes him warily.

JULIA

You mean, like going as friends? Or...?

MARK

Oh, um...what do you think?

Julia is taken aback. She considers how to reply. She is about to say what she's thinking and open Pandora's Box, then changes her mind.

JULIA

Well, I think you're a dumbass.

MARK

(nods)

I am 100% a dumbass.

JULIA

I think this is a cheap ploy to get back in my good graces.

MARK

100% cheap ploy.

JULIA
 Ok, cheap dumbass. Then, let's
 just...play it by ear.

She points to the Vulcan ears on her nightstand. Mark laughs
 and they settle in to watch *Star Trek*.

INT. CITY OF ALORAN - NIGHT

Aleolin paces the street as he talks to Livec, who absently
 juggles a bunch of rocks with magic.

ALEOLIN
 And now, it's like, is she my 'girl
 friend' or my 'girlfriend?'

LIVEC
 You ever been with a woman before?

ALEOLIN
 I've never even been kissed.

LIVEC
 Ok, it's *my* thing to quote 90s
 movies. And, we need to practice.

Livec opens up a portal in front him.

LIVEC (CONT'D)
 Hey, Keira! I've got a mission for
 you. Come thru.

KEIRA, 30s, a stunning 6-foot bombshell of an Erudin Cleric
 from The Keepers, steps through Livec's portal.

LIVEC (CONT'D)
 How do you feel about a lil'
 practice, sexy date with Al here?
 He needs to get his sea legs.

Aleolin gulps. Keira shoots Livec a sly grin.

KEIRA
 What is this, "He's All That?"

LIVEC
 I just said only I get to make 90s
 movie references.

INT. RESTAURANT IN ALORAN - MOMENTS LATER

Livec seats Keira and Aleolin down at a table in a gorgeously lit restaurant in the canopy of a massive tree. An NPC ELVISH WAITER walks up to the table to take care of them.

LIVEC

(to the waiter)

I'll be their server tonight, bud -
No need for your services.

NPC

(to Keira and Aleolin)

Hello, how may I take your order?

LIVEC

Ugh, NPC.

Livec casts a hypnotism spell on the NPC.

LIVEC (CONT'D)

These aren't the droids you're
looking for. Now, go and jump off a
ledge.

The NPC turns and walks silently off the ledge, plummeting to his death. Livec turns back to face the two of them.

LIVEC (CONT'D)

Starters?

Mid-way through the date.

ALEOLIN

The Silmarillion is a total slog,
but there's some riveting parts.

KEIRA

Beren and Lúthien.

ALEOLIN

(shocked she's read it)
The Ruin of Doriath!

KEIRA

The Downfall of Númenor.

ALEOLIN

Absolutely! And all of it - the
backstory - it just gives so much
more weight to events of the Third
Age.

KEIRA

To think, most people can't even make it through *The Hobbit*.

ALEOLIN

They're missing out.

A moment of silence. The two of them look out over the edge of the canopy. Fireflies light up the leaves above their head. Aleolin takes a sip of his wine.

ALEOLIN (CONT'D)

Elves really get the best real estate in Norrath, right?

KEIRA

Very romantic, if you ask me.

She leans forward. A beat. Aleolin gulps.

ALEOLIN

So, what's your favorite dungeon in Everquest?

KEIRA

I like the one where I tie up men and do whatever I want with them.

ALEOLIN

Umm...

Livec comes around the corner, bursting with laughter, and slaps Aleolin on the back.

LIVEC

We got your ass!!!

KEIRA

(laughing)

Sorry, Al. I'm a dude IRL.

Aleolin is horrified. Livec and Keira salute each other.

KEIRA (CONT'D)

To be fair, I thought that date was going pretty well.

ALEOLIN

I think I should go.

KEIRA

(snickering)

Back to my place?

Aleolin gets up and heads for the exit. Livec intercepts him, Keira in tow.

LIVEC

Calm down, Al! It doesn't mean yer a homo. It's totally normal for guys to play women avatars.

KEIRA

TBH, I'm a 45-year old construction worker in Toledo.

LIVEC

More than we needed to know, but thanks.

ALEOLIN

(quietly)
Yeah, fun trick.

LIVEC

Next time, you might want to ask for an A/S/L upfront.

Aleolin tries his best to laugh at the joke.

ALEOLIN

I really gtg. I gotta get some homework done.

He vanishes in the game, leaving Livec and Keira looking at each other and wondering if they went too far.

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mark logs off and stares dumbly at his computer. He gets up and goes to his bedroom door and locks it. He sits back at his computer and opens a Netscape internet browser. He hesitantly types "gay sex" into the search. He clicks on the first link, and it slowly loads a huge Geocities-esque page with hundred of hardcore porn pictures and GIFS playing loud sex SFX. Shocked, Mark tries to close the window, only for more windows to pop up each time, each with accompanying sounds of men fucking each other. He frantically starts closing windows as fast as possible but can barely keep up. He sneaks a terrified look back at his locked bedroom door, terrified his parents are going to overhear what's happening.

Finally, he closes the last window and gets back to his basic Netscape browser. He catches his breath, then types "gay sex story" into it. He browses to the Nifty Erotic stories archive online. He discovers a folder of stories marked Fantasy.

He opens it to find a *Lord of The Rings*-themed porno fan-fiction between Aragorn and Frodo. He begins to read the story, cautiously liking what he sees. He unzips his pants and grabs a nearby jar of Lubriderm.

INT. GENERIC DEPARTMENT STORE DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Mark is shopping for new dress pants for the Winter Formal with his mom at a generic department store. Inside the dressing room, Mark tries to get his regular size dress pants on, but he's gained some weight since starting to play EQ 24/7. They won't fit.

JANICE (O.S.)
How do they look, honey?

MARK
Uh. I think they don't...

Before he finishes the sentence, another pair of black slacks appear on the door.

JANICE (O.S.)
How about these?

Mortified that his mom predicted his pants wouldn't fit him, Mark begrudgingly accepts the size 36 pants.

Moments later, Mark comes out of the stall to model them - they're baggy and Mark hates what he sees in the mirrors. His mom stands off to the side, trying to look supportive.

JANICE (CONT'D)
I think you look very handsome.

Mark furrows his brow and sighs.

MARK
Can we go?

INT. FROZEN YOGURT SHOP - MINUTES LATER

Janice sits across from Mark, who holds his new oversized dress pants in a bag in his lap. She offers up two cups of frozen yogurt - hers is plain chocolate, his is vanilla with rainbow sprinkles.

JANICE
Just how you like it, right?

MARK
(mumbles)
Thanks.

Janice begins to eat. Mark just pushes the sprinkles around his cup. Janice leans in.

JANICE
Honey, what's wrong?

MARK
(beat)
I don't like the way I look. Or
feel.

JANICE
(laughs)
It's ok.
I used to be very worried with how
I looked and felt every day too.
(beat)
You know, when I was a little older
than you, I had my "Fuck it" phase.

MARK
I've never heard you swear!

JANICE
Savor the moment.
(beat)
I hated my life. I dropped out,
first year of college. I left home,
I did whatever I felt like until I
hit a very dark place.

Mark slowly begins to eat his yogurt as he listens.

JANICE (CONT'D)

What saved me was realizing that
nothing external matters - the
feelings we have day-day, what the
world insists we do, how we think
life ought to go. What saved me was
believing in something bigger than
myself, something I could follow.
And that's when I got myself
together. It led me to your father,
and we started a family. It led me
to you.

Mark smiles a little.

MARK
 (pointing to her frozen
 yogurt)
 Can I have a taste?

She hands him the rest of hers.

JANICE
 You know I had a dream before you
 were born. My grandfather came and
 told me I'd have a son who was kind
 and smart and beautiful.

MARK
 I've heard about Grandpa's dream a
 million times.

JANICE
Great-Grandpa to you.

MARK
 Grammar Nazi.

JANICE
 (laughs)
 Hey! The point is you are exactly
 the son I always wanted, and as
 long you love yourself on the
 inside - the way God made you -
 you'll always be perfect to me.

Mark tries to smile as she reaches across the table and
 squeezes his hand.

INT. EVERQUEST MERCHANT SHOP - DAY

Aleolin picks out a new lewk in game from a cloth MERCHANT.
 He selects an outrageous, dazzling, flaming pink wizard robe.
 He strides out of the dressing room wearing the robe to the
 amusement of several fellow WIZARD GUILD MATES and Livec.

ALEOLIN
 From now on, you can call me 'The
 Pink Pansy!'

Everyone bursts out laughing at his gay joke. Aleolin buys
 the rest of the wizards bright fruit-colored robes, and they
 put them on.

ALEOLIN (CONT'D)
 Wizards of The Faith! I dub you the
 newly formed 'Juice Crew!'

LIVEC
I'm raspberry!

WIZARD 1
I'm strawberry.

WIZARD 2
I...don't get it.

WIZARD 3
Pick a fruit that matches your
robe.

WIZARD 2
Wait. Why are we doing this?

LIVEC
Because Al here is fruity, and
we're all gonna be fruity too!

Aleolin smiles. He's the ebullient and flamboyant version he always wanted to be IRL.

He leads the Juice Crew to come up with a salute - each member adding a gesture until only they know the sequence - just like he did once upon a time with Julia. They all perform it and clap their hands skyward to close.

EXT. PLANE OF POWER - HOURS LATER - NIGHT

It's just Livec and Aleolin left sitting alone under a cypress tree in the Plane of Power, which resembles the ruins of a Roman civilization - straggly trees and broken marble statues strewn about the scarred plains of a great battle from ages past. Livec procures and offers Aleolin a fireweed joint. Aleolin lights it up with the tip of his finger and the two share a smoke.

LIVEC
You know, this game was getting
pretty boring until I stumbled
across your lil' ass in that
forest.

ALEOLIN
Real men can say they love each
other.

LIVEC
Oh Al, I love you, bro.

ALEOLIN
 (half-sarcastic, half-
 sincere)
 I love you, too.

They laugh. There's a bit of an unsure moment. Aleolin looks like he's trying to get up the courage to make a move.

LIVEC
 OK, Ok - we gotta stop staying up
 so late - it's 2 AM my time. I have
 to at least pretend to look for a
 job tomorrow.

He playfully turns the butt of the cigarette into a rose, gives it to Aleolin, stands up, and blows him a kiss.

LIVEC (CONT'D)
 Night, handsome.

Livec logs off. Aleolin sits under the tree, staring up at the virtual stars above him, wanting to remember this moment.

INT. CLASSROOM - NEXT DAY

Mark arrives early to Religious Studies with huge bags under his eyes. Father Jaffey is waiting for him at his desk.

MARK
 Hi, Father. You wanted to see me?

Father Jaffey hands Mark his current grade mid-way through the semester. It shows a C+. Mark is aghast.

FATHER JAFFEY
 I can't believe it either...you
 literally just have to answer
 questions to prove you did the
 reading, which you obviously
 haven't been doing. I'm going to
 need your parents to sign off on
 this because it's so abnormal.

MARK
 (in shock)
 Of course, yeah.

FATHER JAFFEY
 And, I talked to Ms. Freidman who
 said you've asked for extensions on
 two essays recently.
 (MORE)

FATHER JAFFEY (CONT'D)

She said you claimed you're "stressed out by your college applications." I'm seeing a pattern here, Mark. What's wrong?

MARK

I've just been under a lot of pressure. My parents...I will get them to sign this and we can just pretend this conversation never happened, ok?

FATHER JAFFEY

Ok. Mark, I want you to know I'm here if you need to talk.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Mark leaves the classroom and nearly walks into Chris and his gang outside bullying BENNY, 17, a scrawny, terrified Senior student. They are repeatedly pushing Benny against his locker and knocking his books out of his hands as he frantically picks them up. Mark hears the voice of Aleolin in his mind as he summons the courage to intervene.

ALEOLIN (V.O.)

The power of Norrath infuses you!
The mana guides you! *Incanticus...*

Chris grabs his crotch suggestively and wags his tongue at Mark. The voice-over cuts out instantly; the magic fails Mark. He chickens out and walks past as the bullies continue to pick on Benny, who sees Mark walk right past without helping him.

INT. DINING ROOM AT MARK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The family sits around the kitchen table looking down at Mark's C- report.

STEPHEN

This is...disappointing.

JANICE

Is everything ok, hun?

STEPHEN

You know the rules, you're only allowed to keep playing this computer game of yours as long as you keep up your A average.

MARK

I know, I'm sorry. This is a fluke, I promise. I can fix it by the end of the semester.

JANICE

We trust you. But...honey, do you want to go over your college essay?

MARK

It isn't ready.

JANICE

You've been saying that for the last month. This is not something we can keep delaying. We just want to make sure it's up your usual standards.

MARK

(snaps)

A 'personal essay' is personal, and I don't need to show it to you so long as I get it done.

Mark storms out the dining room and heads for his bedroom. Janice and Stephen exchange a concerned look.

STEPHEN

Where the hell did that come from?

Janice sighs and goes to sign the C- report with her signature.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

We can't just let him talk to us like that.

JANICE

Glad to hear you have an opinion, Stephen.

STEPHEN

What's that supposed to mean?

Janice starts to set the table for dinner.

JANICE

(avoiding answering)

Mark has never let us down, ever. We just need to trust him and give him space and support. He'll pull through.

STEPHEN

I think we need to draw a line here.

JANICE

He'll figure this out in his own way. He's always been different. He's had a rough life - with the way other kids bullied him.

STEPHEN

I don't think you can call *this* a rough life.

As if to show his point, Stephen goes to the fridge and cracks open a beer.

JANICE

Mark is stressed. He's lonely. He has *one* friend, Stephen. The two of us - and his faith - need to fill what's missing in his life right now.

STEPHEN

Fine. You know best. As always.

A beat. Janice stops setting the table and turns to face Stephen.

JANICE

Maybe you should spend some more time with him.

STEPHEN

I want to. But, it's like we have nothing to talk about. He doesn't like any of the things I liked when I was his age.

JANICE

He is perfect just the way he is. And I need you to acknowledge that.

STEPHEN

Nobody's perfect, Janice.

Stephen starts cooking dinner. Janice finishes setting the table and walks out of the room.

EXT. PLANE OF FEAR IN EQ - NIGHT

Midway through a raid in EQ in the Plane of Fear, a gray, barren landscape of death and decay, and it's going terribly. The Keepers are fighting the God of Fear himself - CAZIC THULE, a sickly-fleshed giant monstrosity. He is spawning fear demons faster than the guild can control the situation. A demon ambushes Livec and leaps for the kill - but Aleolin blasts it away at the last second, saving Livec's life.

LIVEC
(breathless)
Thanks, Al!

The two of them turn and see the infantry line in front of them collapse. Cazic Thule and the fear demons charge through their ranks. Livec and Aleolin make eye contact. Knowing they're doomed, Livec walks over and grabs Aleolin's hand.

LIVEC (CONT'D)
(pretending to cry)
I'll never let go, Al.

A second later, Cazic Thule crushes them both into oblivion.

INT. GUILD HALL - MOMENTS LATER

The Keepers re-spawn in their guild hall, all their corpses left behind in the Plane of Fear.

BOROFIN
Get out yer back-up gear - we have
to retrieve our corpses. No one's
going to bed tonight.

The guild groans as they outfit themselves from various wooden lockers around the hall.

The guild wizards open up portals and they all teleport back to the Plane of Fear.

EXT. PLANE OF FEAR - MOMENTS LATER

The guild stands at the entrance, looking in the distance as Cazic Thule guards their corpses. There's no way they can retrieve their gear with him standing right over it. Aleolin marches over to Borofin, Livec following behind.

ALEOLIN
Boro - let me distract the God,
like I did before with the dragon.

BOROFIN

(snorts)

Wizards don't make raid strategy.
You stand in the back and point and
shoot.

LIVEC

C'mon, Boro. If anyone can run for
his life, it's the Pink Pansy.

BOROFIN

I am *trying* to strategize an actual
recovery plan here.

Borofin squints in the distance, gaging how they can mount a
fight in their paltry back-up gear. He sighs with exhaustion.

BOROFIN (CONT'D)

Fine. Let the wizard do his best.
But if this goes sideways, I'm
blaming you.

ALEOLIN

I won't fail you. Promise.

Aleolin marches over to Cazic Thule. As he walks toward the
God, he starts improvising a ridiculous, rhyming song to get
its attention.

ALEOLIN (CONT'D)

(singing)

*Cazic Thule, oh Cazic Thule! Don't
you know the golden rule. Do onto
others as they pwn you!*

The God is torn between wanting to hoard the corpses of the
Keepers and swat this annoying wizard out of existence.
Aleolin's stupid song finally drives the God nuts, and he
bellows in rage and rushes toward Aleolin. The Keepers swoop
in to grab their corpses.

Aleolin teleports himself out of the God of Fear's claws just
in the nick of time. The God looks confused, then spots
Aleolin singing on a hill nearby.

ALEOLIN (CONT'D)

*Cazic Thule, oh Cazic Thule! Don't
be such a stupid tool. Come and eat
my ass, you fool, I promise not to
lay a stool!*

The God charges toward him - Aleolin again apparates out of
the way, this time landing on top of the God of Fear's head.

The God roars in anger, reaching up and seizing Aleolin in his claws. This time, Aleolin can't escape. He moves to swallow Aleolin whole, but Aleolin starts slow-clapping. The God pauses, confused, then looks behind to see that all The Keepers have retrieved their gear and are running for the exit portals. The God bellows in rage and crushes Aleolin in his claws.

INT. GUILD HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Aleolin re-spawns in the Guild Hall to the raucous applause of his guild mates.

EVERYONE
(cheering together)
Pink Pan-sy! Pink Pan-sy!

BOROFIN
I don't know how to thank you for
that god-awful display.

ALEOLIN
I promise to make up lamer rhymes
next time, sir.

Everyone but Livec logs off. Livec walks over to Aleolin and hands him back his dazzling pink robe.

LIVEC
Thought you'd want this back, babe.
Didn't have time to grab the rest
of your gear, but we couldn't have
the Pink Pansy walking around
without his fabulous robe, now
could we?

ALEOLIN
You shouldn't have. Help me get it
on?

Livec pulls the robe snugly down over Aleolin's body. His hands rest on Aleolin's hips for a minute, and he playfully slaps Aleolin's ass.

LIVEC
Thanks for taking one for the team,
Al.

Livec logs off. Aleolin looks at himself in a mirror and sees himself as the epic, free-spirited, bold person he always wanted to be.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - EVENING

Mark arrives at the Winter Formal: the theme is "Agape." The gymnasium is decked out with very PG-versions of couples holding hands and banners which proclaim 'Love for the whole world."

Mark meets up with Julia, who wears a beautiful, navy blue, form-fitting gown. Julia looks stunning; Mark looks like he's drowning in formal wear.

MARK

Wow, I didn't know trolls could look hot.

JULIA

You look uglier than a Ferengi.

They laugh, but there is some awkward tension between the two of them. Is this a date or just friends hanging out? They go get some punch together - Father Jaffey serves them.

FATHER JAFFEY

Ironic I can serve you wine at mass
but only fruit punch tonight,
right?

The two of them offer a forced chuckle. Chris and some other jocks in the corner nearby are spiking their punch with flasks of Everclear when the priest isn't looking.

The dance floor is mostly empty with everyone hugging the walls. The DJ starts spinning pop hits of the day like "Back at One." Julia looks with disgust at everyone hugging the walls, wasting a perfectly good song.

JULIA

This is just pathetic.

She grabs Mark.

MARK

What are you...? No - no - NO,
Jules!

Over his protests, she forces him out on the floor with her. Mark is mortified as Julia dances unabashedly - miming actions for all the numbers and lyrics in the song ("One - you're like a dream come true..."). They look ridiculous but their courage gets the other nervous SENIOR STUDENTS to join on the floor.

The song ends and the DJ puts on K-Ci & Jojo's "All my Life." Everyone on the dance floor down-shifts to classic slow-dancing positions. Out of all the couples, we see Benny paired off with Samantha, who is talking his face off about something Jesus related, while Benny looks like he'd rather be anywhere else. Chris and the jocks lurk in the corner of the room, thoroughly wasted by now, and mock dancing with each other, pretending to be gay then pushing one another off, then gay-bro-ing it up again in an endless, stupid joke. Father Jaffey dances a little to himself behind his station at the punch bowl, looking like he actually has some smooth moves in his repertoire - if only he had someone to share them with. A random nun actually starts patrolling the dance floor with a six-inch ruler, making sure no one is slow-dancing too close to anyone else.

JULIA

(sighs)

Well, when on Romulus...

She moves in close to Mark and they awkwardly embrace and begin to sway side-side.

After a beat.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Do you think this is what Hell is like? 'The Agape Winter Formal?'

Another beat.

JULIA (CONT'D)

I could see myself going full 'Carrie' tonight.

MARK

(suddenly)

Can I kiss you...

Julia is, for once, speechless.

MARK (CONT'D)

...at the end of the song?

A very awkward beat as they continue to slow-dance. Julia struggles, torn between saying what she's thinking and not shutting Mark down in this moment.

JULIA

You really...want to kiss me?

Mark nods his head. Julia slowly nods her head in reply, confused but open to it...and, they endure a very awkward three minutes until the final phrase of the song, when Mark leans in to kiss. They touch lips a couple of times; it is not passionate; it feels weird to both of them. They break it off. Mark's face is pained, as if he failed some test. Julia tries to smile.

MARK

Excuse me, sorry.

Mark rushes outside, leaving Julia bewildered on the dance floor, surrounded by couples slow-dancing around her.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Mark calls his dad on his oversized Nokia mobile phone.

MARK

(into phone)

Dad? DAD! Stop talking...please! I need you to come pick me up. Yeah. Right now.

Julia arrives and finds Mark hyper-ventilating, sitting on the curb.

JULIA

Hey! There you are.

(beat)

Uh, can we just talk about what just happened.

(beat)

Mark, it's no big deal - we can just be friends!

(beat)

I mean, did you like it at all? Do you like...kissing girls even? Cuz I don't care whatever the church says about it, it's cool.

MARK

Of course I like girls. I just didn't like kissing you.

Julia is taken aback.

MARK (CONT'D)

I mean, maybe you're gay and that's why it felt so weird...you're the one who wants a Gay/Straight Alliance.

Julia is flabbergasted. She takes a breath and tears into him.

JULIA

1) What's wrong with being gay if I am?

2) You don't blame the other person when there's no chemistry, idiot.

And 3) YOU are being the ignorant one here!

MARK

Maybe I'm not as liberal as you are. You should just keep your gay crusade to yourself.

Julia stops in her tracks.

JULIA

What did you say?

Mark stands up, flushed, and faces her.

MARK

I think we need to show more respect for what the church says and not just cave in because of what everyone else in this liberal city says.

(stammering)

It is a sin to be gay - the Church says homosexuality is wrong and I'm not going to question that.

The silence is deafening.

JULIA

How can you say that? Mark?!

Mark doesn't reply. Julia gives up.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Ok. So, we have nothing in common anymore. Why don't you fuck off and go back to your 'perfect world' of Everquest - which isn't real - and your 'online besties' - aka strangers who have no idea who you really are: a fucking bigot!

MARK
(shouting back)
My EQ friends get me exactly as I
am! I am a better version of myself
with them!

Julia just shakes her head and walks away.

INT. STEPHEN'S CAR - MINUTES LATER

Mark gets in the passenger side of the car. He looks shell-shocked.

STEPHEN
Bud, is everything ok?

MARK
(robotically)
Me and Jules had our first kiss,
but we wanted to take things slow
and not go too fast, so I decided
to call it a night.

Stephen is surprised and relieved in more ways than one.

STEPHEN
Well, I'm proud of you for taking
things slow and not rushing to sex.
But on that note...

Stephen reaches over to pull out a condom out from the glovebox and hands it to Mark.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
We don't need to mention this to
mom - this can be just between the
men in the family.

Mark palms the condom, and looks out the window, feeling awful.

INT. EVERQUEST SELF-HELP TENT - DAY

Aleolin walks into the same self-help seminar as before as it's about to begin. The Self-Help Elf raises an eyebrow.

SELF-HELP ELF
Wasn't your friend the wizard who
murdered everyone before?

ALEOLIN

I'm sorry about that. I want to talk for real this time.

SELF-HELP ELF

(smiles)

Well - it's never too late to begin.

Cut to Aleolin, centerstage, in front of the assembled group.

ALEOLIN

I'm a loser. I can't do anything right. I only feel like myself in-game, like the person I know I can be.

(beat)

I alienated my one and only friend IRL after we made things sexual, and it didn't go well, and I don't know if there's something wrong with me, or...

Before he can continue, Livec suddenly teleports into the tent. The Self-Help Elf and several participants who recognize him from before yelp in terror.

LIVEC

(to Self-Help Elf)

Relax, sweetheart, I don't have time right now to ruin your party.

(to Aleolin)

Al! Found you! What's goin on?

Aleolin just hangs his head, silent.

LIVEC (CONT'D)

OK - well, *now* is not the time to have your first nervous breakdown cause we have to go! Sontalak respawned - this is our shot to take him down!

SELF-HELP ELF

(to Aleolin)

You can stay and finish. We've got your back.

ALEOLIN

Nevermind, I'm fine. Let's go.

The two wizards teleport to Velious. The Self-Help Elf sighs.

INT. SONTALAK'S LAIR - AN HOUR LATER

The Keepers of The Faith are mid-battle with the black dragon SONTALAK, the uberest dragon in the game. Things are not going well. He's insanely powerful, able to slay fully-armored warriors in one swipe and regenerating health as quickly as The Keepers chip away at it.

Sontalak bellows a plume of jet black fire toward the line of wizards in the back of the raid. Aleolin grabs his fellow wizards in the nick of time to shelter behind an outcropping.

ALEOLIN

Juice Crew! I've got an idea! What if we link our mana with the guild and Manaburn at the same time? It'd create a blast powerful enough to kill that SOB in one shot - before he can heal!

LIVEC

Uh, cause if that doesn't work, we're all shit out of luck?!

Aleolin shoots him a 'what-have-you-got-to-lose' look.

LIVEC (CONT'D)

Fine, fine! I'm not gonna stop you when you get all 'crazy eyes.'

Aleolin and Livec jump into the fray of the battle and run up to Borofin in the center of it.

ALEOLIN

(shouting over the chaos)
Call off the attack! Link the guild's mana to the wizards! We can destroy it!

BOROFIN

Get back in line with the other glass cannons!

LIVEC

Al's right! That thing regenerates too quickly! Manaburn could beat it!

The dragon slays their last line of warriors and begins to charge toward the rest of the guild.

BOROFIN

Fuck it.

Borofin turns raid leadership over to Aleolin's control with a flurry of hand gestures. Aleolin quickly summons strands of ethereal blue mana from every living guild member except the wizards, draining them of their magic. They all fall to the ground, nearly lifeless.

Aleolin channels the huge amount of power through the Juice Crew, each wizard acting as a node, creating an enormous lattice of sizzling blue magic above their heads. With a scream of effort, Aleolin hurtles the blue bolt of pure mana toward Sontalak bearing down upon them. For a second, it appears to have merely shocked the dragon, but suddenly its eyes roll back in its head and it comes crashing lifeless to the ground!

The day is saved, the dragon is slain, and amazing lewt drops from the dragon: a rare, epic wizard staff of jet black obsidian. Borofin grabs the staff and holds it up high.

BOROFIN (CONT'D)

I never thought I'd say this
but...for his improvisation, his
ingenuity and his all-around,
insufferable demeanor, I grant the
'Staff Of All-Knowing' to Aleolin!

LIVEC

Holy shit, Al!!!

Aleolin gingerly takes the staff, bonding it to his avatar, making him instantly one of the most powerful wizards in the game server-wide.

LIVEC (CONT'D)

I gotta say it while I can stomach
the sincerity - we love you bud!

The guild cheers. Aleolin cries tears of joy.

LIVEC (CONT'D)

(whispers)
I'm grateful you're my best
friend...

Aleolin abruptly disappears in-game.

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM - INTERCUT

Stephen and Janice interrupt the most joyous moment of Mark's life by storming into his room. Stephen pulls the plug on the computer without warning.

MARK
What the hell, Dad?!

STEPHEN
What the fuck is this?!

Stephen slams Mark's Winter report card on his desk, showing a B- average.

JANICE
Language, Stephen!

STEPHEN
Your game access is cut off from now on. I want it uninstalled for good. A drop in grades like this - in the last semester before your applications? This looks terrible!

MARK
(on the verge of crying)
You can't! You don't get it!

STEPHEN
This is a disaster! How could you betray our trust like this?

MARK
It's not just not a game - this is my family!

JANICE
We are your family, Mark.

MARK
I can't just leave them!

STEPHEN
This has gone too far. You need to come back to the real world.

Janice gets between the two shouting men.

JANICE
Please! Both of you. Let's...we can pray on this.

Mark pushes his mom away and screams at his parents.

MARK
I hate you! I hate you both!

Mark walks into the nearest bathroom, slams the door behind him, and locks it. Stephen bangs on the door.

STEPHEN
Mark, open this door right now!

JANICE

Just tell us what's going on! You
can tell us anything!

Mark cries on the other side, slumped against the door,
doubting it's true.

STEPHEN

You can NOT just throw your future
away because you are having a
couple rough months in high school!

Janice pulls Stephen away from the door. They start yelling
at each other, over one another.

JANICE

(to Stephen)

Stephen! Stop. He's sensitive
and needs to be loved right
now.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

(to Janice)

No! He needs to man-up to his
responsibilities.

The two of them leave, continuing to fight. Mark opens the
bathroom and crosses back into his room and shuts and locks
the door behind him. He picks up his mobile phone and dials
Julia's number, only to stop and hang-up, realizing he
doesn't know what to say to her post-fight. He's all alone.

INT. SCHOOL COMPUTER LAB - AFTERNOON

Several days later, Mark sits in the computer lab after-
school, trying to catch up on all the work he's put off doing
for a month. We see he's buried in busywork; he's reading
Cliff Notes versions of books online; he's typing furiously
and printing off essay after essay.

Cut to two hours later: he has barely made a dent in the
backlog. The computer lab has emptied out during his marathon
work session. He looks around and sees he's alone.

Mark opens his bag to reveal the CD-ROM for Everquest. He is
torn between wanting to get his life together and play the
game. He loads the CD into the desktop at school. The
computer asks for an admin password for him to launch the
game, and Mark sneaks into the empty teacher's room to find
the admin password written on a post-it note pasted obviously
next to the monitor.

He types in the admin password and the game boots up. Mark
calls his parents on his mobile.

MARK

(to phone)

No, I'm fine, I'm just calling to say that I'm going to stay late here catch up on my homework. I'll catch the last bus home. Yeah. Ok...yeah, love you.

The game finishes loading and Mark logs on.

EXT. PLANE OF POWER IN EQ - DUSK

Aleolin walks over to Livec, who is smoking a joint and watching the sunset in their favorite spot under the cypress tree in the Plane of Power. Livec sees his friend, puts out the joint, and rushes over to give him a hug.

LIVEC

My man. My man! We have missed you. What the hell happened?

ALEOLIN

My parents banned me from playing.

They sit down cross-legged and share the last drags of the fireweed.

LIVEC

Aaaaalllll I'm gonna say is your parents can bite it.

(beat)

The game hasn't been the same without you.

Aleolin gets emotional, starting to tear up.

ALEOLIN

I miss you. I miss my family here.

The sun sets over the horizon in the distance. After a long moment.

ALEOLIN (CONT'D)

I want to tell you something. It's a secret, and I'm afraid to do it.

LIVEC

You can trust me, remember?

INT. SCHOOL COMPUTER LAB - INTERCUT

In the real world at his desktop, Mark types on his keyboard the words "I am gay." He takes a deep breath and presses Enter on the keyboard.

INT. PRESTON'S HOUSE - INTERCUT

The real man behind Livec's avatar - PRESTON, 40s, overweight, overgrown man-child, is at his computer, staring in disbelief at what Aleolin just wrote. Preston wears a wedding ring. Behind him, there's a Bible sitting on a shelf in his well-appointed suburban house.

EXT. PLANE OF POWER

Aleolin watches Livec in silence and decides to risk it all. He leans in and kisses Livec on the mouth. Livec backs away, aghast, wiping his mouth.

LIVEC

(stammering)

Al, I am really, really sorry for whatever I did to make you think I'd accept this. Because I don't feel that way at all.

There is a horrible silence between the two. Aleolin looks crestfallen.

LIVEC (CONT'D)

Um, I know I don't sound like it from the way we josh, but I'm religious. I love you like a brother, but I can't just support someone who's a...homosexual. I can't give you what you want. I'm so, so sorry.

INT. COMPUTER SCHOOL LAB - INTERCUT

Mark is stunned sitting in the computer lab. He starts to cry but stops himself when another student comes into the computer lab and sits near him.

EXT. PLANE OF POWER - INTERCUT

Aleolin tries to compose himself.

ALEOLIN

I'm Catholic myself, and I know
that I can love you even if it
takes time for you to...accept me.
I hope you can do that.

LIVEC

I have to go.

Livec logs off and disappears.

INT. COMPUTER SCHOOL LAB - MOMENTS LATER

Mark closes the game, takes the CD-ROM out and throws it in his backpack. He's completely distraught but choking his emotions back, lest the other student in the lab notice. He furiously opens up a Netscape browser and logs onto the Everquest's online message boards. Mark tries to steady his breath and begins to write a post. We hear a voice-over of what he types:

MARK (V.O.)

"Aleolin is Gay."

Hi, everybody. I'm gay. Yes, the fabulous Pink Pansy of The Keepers of the Faith is a homo. Who would have guessed?!

Seriously, though, I know I make gay jokes and sing stupid songs and act more flaming than a plasma demon, but I'm also really this way IRL.

I know not everyone may be ready to accept an openly gay player. I'm also Catholic, and I believe we can respect one another, despite our differences. I just can't live a lie anymore.

I hope coming out today can set an example server-wide for everyone to be themselves. Thank you.

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mark rushes to his bedroom to check on his post. But instead of messages of support, he sees reply after reply from other gamers, including his fellow guild members, ripping him apart. He reads through them frantically.

KEIRA (V.O.)

I know he was a pansy IRL. He tried to hit on me in-game!

TULISIA (V.O.)

I don't play anymore, obviously,
but my two cents: I wouldn't feel
comfortable raiding with a homo.

BOROFIN (V.O.)

Personally, I only see gays having
a purpose as flight attendants or
hairdressers.

Mark turns red, fuming with anger. He scans for a reply from Livec - there's nothing.

Mark runs distraught over to his parent's room, wanting to talk with someone - anyone - but he overhears them having another fight.

INT. STEPHEN/JANICE'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Janice and Stephen are nearly shouting at one another, years of repressed feelings pouring out.

STEPHEN

We leave him to his own devices,
literally, and look what happens.
His future is in total jeopardy!

JANICE

Well, if you were more attentive, I
wouldn't have had to raise him
practically on my own!

STEPHEN

I work, Janice! Constantly. I
provide for this family. You sit at
home and what - alternate between
reading the Bible and romance porn?

JANICE

I raised our son! We are talking
about our son.

STEPHEN

I don't *get* the kid. I have *tried*
to get close to him but it doesn't
work because you turned him into a
mama's boy since Day 1, gabbing on
always about how Mark is perfect -
Mark is your special boy.

JANICE

He *is* perfect and the fact that you don't see that is why he is acting out!

STEPHEN

No you *thought* he was perfect, but, apparently, we missed our son becoming a video game junkie who isn't going to get into a good college!

JANICE

I didn't graduate college, and I ended up just fine!

STEPHEN

Our marriage is the only thing that pulled you out of a very, very bad spot.

JANICE

It wasn't marrying you! I grew up and believed in something! Can you say the same?

JANICE (CONT'D)

You don't commit with your heart to this marriage; you don't commit to our faith, our family, or anything!

STEPHEN

You have become a fanatic! You see everything in black and white.

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mark rushes back to his bedroom, hyperventilating. He locks the door and logs into Everquest, which he never uninstalled from his computer.

INT. KEEPERS GUILD HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Aleolin walks in on the guild mates continuing to make fun of his sappy "Coming Out" post. Borofin leads the harangue.

BOROFIN

I always knew something was 'off' about Aleolin...

Aleolin kicks Borofin in the back, sending the paladin crashing into a table and smashing it to the ground. Their guild mates gasp as their leader sprawls on the floor, his armor weighing him down.

ALEOLIN

(shouting)

Bigots like Borofin aren't worthy
of being our leader!

(to Borofin)

I demand a duel.

The Juice Crew rushes inside the guild hall, and Livec tries to get between Borofin and Aleolin.

LIVEC

Woah, woah, everyone calm down...

BOROFIN

(getting to his feet)

Out of the way, Livec.

(to everyone)

I don't need to duel Aleolin. I can
just ban him from The Keepers,
effective immediately.

Borofin waves his hand and the golden <The Keepers Of The Faith> text appears and then dissolves into mist above Aleolin's head.

LIVEC

That's excessive, Boro! We can all
just cool off and talk later.

BOROFIN

No pansy who kicks a guild member
in the back is welcome in The
Keepers.

ALEOLIN

(screaming)

You've all stabbed me in the back!
I thought I was your friend!

He turns to Livec, pleading with his eyes for help, but Livec just backs off, unwilling to defend him.

BOROFIN

(laughs)

At least we know Livec's straight.

Aleolin roars in anger, reaches into his purse, and flings an acid potion at Borofin's face, who barely blocks the potion with his gauntlet. It smashes to the floor and burns a hole in the stone floor.

It's total pandemonium as the fight breaks out inside the guild hall.

Borofin summons a protective glowing dome over him and Aleolin, locking them in close combat and silencing all outside noise. Livec bangs on the outside of the shield, mouthing for both of them to stand down!

Aleolin doesn't hesitate; he pulls out his obsidian Wizard staff and casts a Gravity Inversion spell at Borofin, launching the paladin upwards into the top of his own energy shield. Borofin gasps in pain as it electrocutes him. Aleolin reverses the Gravity spell and smashes Borofin back down to the stone floor. Aleolin summons a Fireball to immolate Borofin once and for all, but the Paladin rolls onto his back just in time, where his Mirror Shield reflects the fireball back at Aleolin. Aleolin spins his staff wildly to counter the flame with a Frost spell, but his timing is too slow, and his beautiful pink robe is singed.

Aleolin puts out the fire only to see Borofin charging forward, wielding his great axe and swinging to decapitate Aleolin in a mortal blow. With nowhere to escape, Aleolin tries to block the blade with his staff. The great axe severs Aleolin's epic staff in two, destroying his greatest possession in the game.

Aleolin falls to the ground, holding the remains of his legendary staff. Borofin walks up to the wizard and spits in his face.

BOROFIN (CONT'D)

That's what you get, faggot,
thinking you could be a man.

Borofin lowers the shield around them and walks away. The whole guild stares at Aleolin in silent horror. Aleolin, crying, looks around at his chosen family for one last time and logs off.

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mark is sobbing in great heaves. It's his worst nightmare. In his anger, he logs onto the Netscape browser and logs onto eBay.com. He types furiously.

Cut to minutes later, we see a listing up for auction of Aleolin Darkmoon's avatar, priced with a 'Buy Now' at \$1000. Mark is shocked to see it has sold almost immediately - he could have asked for much more.

He exchanges messages with the unknown buyer - the funds are wired to his eBay account, and he replies with his EQ username and password.

He takes a screenshot of the eBay confirmation, opens another browser window and uploads the screenshot into his coming out thread on the EQ message boards.

He shuts the desktop down. He's just completely cut himself off from EQ forever.

ACT THREE

INT. SCHOOL COMPUTER LAB - ONE WEEK LATER

Mark gets to school early with a suitcase in-hand, prepared to go on Kairos. He sits in the empty computer lab, looking unsure what to do with himself. Finally, he takes out his Everquest CD-ROM and loads it on the desktop. He attempts to log on as Aleolin, but whomever owns his account now has changed the password. Mark creates a new character - it's a female, human Warrior resembling what Julia looked like when she went LARP-ing with him. He names the character "Talen."

EXT. CITY OF ALORAN - DAY

TALEN, 20s, a lowly, Level 1 Human warrior, walks through the streets of Aloran until she reaches The Keepers of the Faith guild hall and peeks inside. There's a newly framed poster of Aleolin's face hanging on one of the walls with a sign that says "Traitor" underneath it. Scribbled in graffiti around the poster are hate slurs. A burly human GUILD MEMBER suddenly walks over to Talen.

GUILD MEMBER

Beat it. No newbs allowed.

Talen walks around the outside of the guild hall and eavesdrops through an open window.

KEIRA

Selling his character like that?
Final nail in the coffin.

GUILD MEMBER

What a dick.

BOROFIN

At least the new Aleolin, whomever
it is, probably isn't a faggot.

Talen runs away from the guild into the city streets...and literally runs into Aleolin's avatar - played by a stranger.

TALEN

Oh...hi. Can I ask, who are you
IRL...?

ALEOLIN

No English.

Aleolin runs off, leaving Talen alone.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - MINUTES LATER

Mark boards one of the school busses leaving for Kairos. He sits in the middle of the bus, friendless. Julia sits apart from him in the front; Chris and his gang frat it up loudly in the back. Mark talks to no one on the bus ride.

INT. CHURCH AT KAIROSS

In the silence and reflection of the day-long Kairos service, all of Mark's fears come forward via flashbacks he imagines happening overlaid in the church pews around him, seeing himself as Young Mark.

CUT TO: Young Mark is harassed in middle school at recess by a gang of BULLIES, who call him a fag. Young Mark raises his hand during class and asks his FOURTH GRADE TEACHER what a "Fag" is. She furiously sends him to the principal's office for using a bad word.

CUT TO: Young Mark types out "The Blue Star," his first fan fiction on an Apple II computer in his home, channeling his anger into creativity, typing with one hand and drinking from a juice box in the other. There's a stack of YA fantasy novels to the right of the computer: *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Big Friendly Giant*.

CUT TO: Young Mark transfers schools to a Catholic academy. He shows his fan fiction to MRS. GETZ, 60s, harried from teaching kids for too many years, who tells him it's plagiarism. He throws his story into an outside trash bin, where YOUNG JULIA, 9, plucky despite being friendless, finds it. She brings it back to Young Mark, and they become best friends instantly. At recess, they play space aliens and cowboys and ninjas and pretend to be hobbits. He's finally met someone who enjoys fantasy as much as him.

CUT TO: Young Mark attends his first Communion as his parents watch on, Janice crying with happiness, Stephen trying to look proud. Young Mark looks up at the priest, truly happy and at peace, believing with his whole heart in God.

INT./ EXT. HOUSING AT KAIROS - DAWN

The next day, Mark wakes up in his bunk bed at Kairos from a nightmare. He goes outside in the dawn light and sits on the grass.

MARK

God. I'm talking to you.

A long beat.

MARK (CONT'D)

I don't give a fuck. About anything. I'm gonna burn it all down...like Jules would do.

He chokes up at the mention of his friend.

MARK (CONT'D)

I'm going to be bold as Aleolin. And if everyone rejects me, then who cares. The world isn't fair and won't ever be.

(beat)

Do you hear me, God?

Silence.

EXT. CHURCH AT KAIROS - LATER THAT DAY

Before the final mass service of the retreat, Mark approaches Father Jaffey.

MARK

I'd like to offer a Homily today.

The Priest looks surprised.

MARK (CONT'D)

It's my favorite Gospel passage, and I really want to share my thoughts on it.

FATHER JAFFEY

Well, look who's coming out of his shell for once! Of course, yes - let's do it.

INT. CHURCH AT KAIROS - MINUTES LATER

Julia is finishing up an announcement at the lectern. She looks pained as she speaks.

JULIA

...and so, 'Open Hearts' welcomes everyone - regardless of our differences - to be themselves in a judgement-free space.

Mark sits nearby to Chris and his gang.

CHRIS

Told you she was a Dyke.

Mark grimaces, then starts as Father Jaffey calls out his name.

FATHER JAFFEY

And now, a word on today's Gospel
by Mark Campagna.

Mark shuffles out of his pew as nearby students groan and roll their eyes, dreading another speech. Mark walks up the aisle as Julia walks back to her pew. She doesn't make eye contact with him as she passes.

Mark arrives at the lectern and clears his throat.

MARK

Jesus spoke of love. Universal
love. Unconditional love.

There's some coughs in the church. Mark makes eye contact with Samantha in the front row, who shoots him an overly encouraging nod.

MARK (CONT'D)

Jesus defied what everyone else
told him was the way of the world.

Mark makes eye contact with Julia near the back pews. She returns an intense gaze.

He did things because they were
right, even if they were hard. He
wasn't afraid to buck tradition, to
say God had changed from this Old
Testament vengeful guy to one
filled with love for all of us.

Mark looks at Chris and his fellow jocks. Chris subtly licks his lips suggestively at Mark. Mark bears down and continues on.

MARK (CONT'D)

No matter what we did or who we
were.

Mark takes a breath and looks at Father Jaffey, who stands to his right, offering a solemn glance. Mark turns back to address his peers.

MARK (CONT'D)

I know most of you don't know me. I
don't know most of you.

Mark tries to make eye contact with Benny sitting far off to the side in his pew, but Benny just looks at the floor.

MARK (CONT'D)

I've always been scared to show
others who I was.

Mark sees a vision of Livec appear standing slightly apart and turned away from him on the pulpit. Mark starts to choke up.

MARK (CONT'D)

Because I haven't liked who I was.
So, I hid.

Mark imagines Aleolin's avatar standing next to Livec. Aleolin faces Mark.

ALEOLIN

(to Mark)

You have to take a leap of faith to
be a wizard in real life.

Mark suddenly sees Young Mark looking at him while holding Aleolin's hand. Mark takes a breath.

MARK

(to his peers)

I think Jesus would want me to tell
you all right now that I'm gay.

This is followed by the deepest silence imaginable - the whole Senior class of hundreds of students freezing in shock.

Then, very slowly, a smattering of applause amongst his peers grows into a crescendo. Mark sighs from relief. He takes a breath and leaves the pulpit. He walks past the front pew, where Samantha looks straight ahead, refusing to applaud, her disdain plain on her face. Mark makes eye contact with Benny who sits in a state of awe, clapping robotically, mouth agape. Mark passes Chris and the other jocks, who slow clap because they don't know what else to do, looking very uncomfortable, overwhelmed by the support of the rest of the students. Others shake Mark's hand and pat him on the back and whoop for him as continues his way to his pew. As he sits, he makes eye contact with Julia who is streaming tears from the back as she gives him a standing ovation. She makes the skyward gesture from their "Prayer of Leaving" before everyone sits back down in their pews.

Father Jaffey returns to the pulpit, flabbergasted. He tries to carry on with Mass without commenting on what Mark just did.

FATHER JAFFEY

Let us Pray.

EXT. CHURCH AT KAIROS - AN HOUR LATER

Julia comes running up to Mark on the steps of the church, grabs him in a hug, and slaps him on the face.

JULIA

How could you! I'm so happy for you! Why didn't you share this with me! Bitch, I would have had your back! And, hurray! You finally came out! And, what the fuck?!

MARK

Finally? It was that obvious?

JULIA

Color me not toooooo surprised the Everquest-famous 'Pink Pansy' is a raging homo.

Mark laughs a bit for the first time in a long time. Then, he takes a deep breath.

MARK

Look, I have to tell you something while I'm feeling like a gay superhero, ok?

JULIA

Of course, anything.

MARK

I feel like you pushed me.

JULIA

(taken aback)
What?

MARK

With the club and everything. Like you were...trying to 'out' me, or whatever. You knew I was gay, and you wanted me to come out with it.

JULIA

Yeah, I knew. Best friends know.

MARK

I wasn't ready.

JULIA

I was just trying to help you feel safe...

MARK
It wasn't your call.

JULIA
Mark, I mean...

A beat.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Ok. Ok, you're right. I guess with this being our last year here, together, I just didn't want you to leave for college still in the closet.

(beat)
And now, like right now-now, I'm realizing how sometimes maybe just every now and then I can be a controlling monster.

MARK
(nods)
You can.

JULIA
And, I'm not good at apologizing because I usually don't have to apologize for things.

MARK
Mmm-hmm.

JULIA
But, I'm really sorry.

MARK
Thank you.

They hold hands.

MARK (CONT'D)
Jules, I don't know how to explain it other than I had to come out first as Aleolin. In the game. He was brave enough to come out.

(beat)
For the record, it went horribly.

JULIA
Gamers. Notoriously the most open-minded of people.

MARK

But I knew after I survived that, I could do something as epic IRL - I could be a real-life wizard. For a moment.

A long beat.

MARK (CONT'D)

So that spell I just cast in church? I call it "*Flaming Silence*."

Julia and Mark both snort with laughter, breaking the tension.

JULIA

With our gay powers combined, I silence The Father, The Son, and The Holy Ghost.

They mime casting the spell, making "pew-pew" sounds with finger guns as nearby seniors walk by looking confused.

Another beat.

MARK

Thank you. And, I'm sorry I was such an asshole to you.

JULIA

Given the circumstances, I can forgive you for being an asshole. But *never* for making me wait three minutes to kiss you...at the end of the song.

MARK

That was a very stupid way to ask to kiss someone.

A beat.

MARK (CONT'D)

Can I, um, join your club?

JULIA

You want to be the gay poster child or something?

MARK

I solemnly pledge, of my own free will, to be your gay poster child.

JULIA
Yes! Yes, I would love.

They hug.

MARK
I can't believe you really went
along with 'Open Hearts?!'

JULIA
Better than nothing. It's a start.
Look.

She fishes in her bag and hands him a condom featuring an
"Open Hearts" logo on the wrapper. Mark does a double take.
Then, they both scream with laughter.

JULIA (CONT'D)
I'm gonna give them out at every
meeting.

MARK
They'll crucify you for this.

JULIA
Wouldn't be the first time.

They start walking back toward the bus.

MARK
I'm scared to tell my parents.

JULIA
You're not Closeted Gollum anymore.
You're Gay Sméagol now. Different.
(beat)
Just do what Aleolin would do.

Mark smiles. A beat.

JULIA (CONT'D)
What did it feel like to come out
like that?

MARK
It's the closest I've ever felt to
God.

EXT. CHURCH PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Father Jaffey intercepts Mark and Julia on their way to the
bus.

FATHER JAFFEY

Mark! May I...can we speak for a second, alone?

Julia eyes the priest warily.

MARK

(to Julia)

It's fine - save me a seat in the front.

Father Jaffey seems torn and flustered.

FATHER JAFFEY

I want to start by saying that I am so happy for your life discovery... and public sharing of it. And truly, you know, gay people exist in all walks of life.

(beat)

I would be remiss if I did not inform you about the responsibilities as a gay Catholic - to embrace a path of lifelong celibacy.

Mark smiles to himself and considers his response.

MARK

You know, since I first came out, I've been rejected, I've been accepted, but this is something new: "I love you so long as you don't act out the deepest part of you."

(beat)

I don't blame you for your confusion - it must be difficult to be a gay priest.

The priest doesn't refute him.

MARK (CONT'D)

I'm going to 'pass' on the advice. Thanks, anyway.

Mark walks away and boards the bus as Father Jaffey looks dismayed.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - END OF SCHOOL DAY

Returning to school, Julia announces Mark's entrance into the hallway like he's the king of the Renaissance Faire.

JULIA

All hail the most fabulous wizard
of all: Mark Campagna!

Mark walks through the entrance to a chorus of applause - word of what he did spreading fast and making him an instant school celebrity - person after person coming up and congratulating him.

In the midst of the adulation, he spots Chris standing off to the side, alone. He holds Chris' gaze this time. Mark points to himself and mouths the word "Faggot" with a gleeful smile. This time it's Chris who backs off and walks away.

Benny finds Mark after most of the crowd disperses. He walks up gingerly and offers his hand.

BENNY

I'm Benny.

MARK

Hi. I'm Mark.

Benny motions to the corner of the hallway, where there's less people. Mark motions goodbye to Julia with their Skyward salute, and the two young men walk over to chat in private.

BENNY

That was really brave of you today.

MARK

Thanks. But I was a coward to you.

BENNY

That wasn't your fault.

MARK

I didn't help you when I could have.

BENNY

It's ok. You helped me today.

A beat.

BENNY (CONT'D)

I think I'm gay too.

MARK

That's great!

BENNY

Ya. I...think it is. You really inspired me.

(MORE)

BENNY (CONT'D)

I asked Father Jaffey if I could give a Homily at the next mass, and he said, "I had to show him a transcript of my speech first." Your fault, right?

MARK

Yeah, I don't think anyone's gonna top my speech.

BENNY

(beat)
That's a gay joke, right?

MARK

Yes. I think.
(beat)
You should come join the new "Open Hearts" club.

BENNY

"Open Hearts?"

MARK

It's code name for "The Gay Agenda."

INT. DINING ROOM AT MARK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mark has gathered his parents around the kitchen table. They sit across from him, unsure what they are going to be talking about. Mark looks over in the corner of the kitchen and sees Young Mark playing Jedi. Young Mark stops and looks at Mark.

YOUNG MARK

May the force be with you.

MARK

(to Young Mark)
And also with you.

Mark turns to face his parents, who look a bit confused at whom he was just talking to.

MARK (CONT'D)

I'm gay.

His father and mother catch their breath. Neither speaks. After a very long silence.

STEPHEN

We're...going to need some time to process this.

Janice stands up and grabs the edge of the chair, white-knuckling it and saying nothing.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
(doing his best)
We...love you, son no matter what.
It's just...

JANICE
...not right. This is because you
are stressed.

Mark stands up and faces his mother.

MARK
I'm telling you the truth.

JANICE
You were bullied as a child. You
were always bullied, and called
names, and this got in your head.

MARK
(trying to stay calm)
No, Mom. I've been this way my
whole life.

JANICE
We can pray. We can go ask Father
Keene...

MARK
(losing it)
I knew you'd do this. I knew.

Stephen goes and holds his wife, who is shaking, on the verge of losing it.

STEPHEN
We need time, son. This is really
hard for us.

MARK
And it's not hard for me?!

JANICE
It's a phase. When I was young, I
had thoughts like this too, but it
was just...

MARK
So - I can never bring a boyfriend
home!

JANICE
...just a phase.

MARK
(interrupts)
Would you come to my wedding?

STEPHEN
Slow down.

MARK
Would you?

JANICE
Of course not.

Mark is shocked. After a beat.

MARK
This is who I am. This is me. This
is the deepest part of me.

His parents do not know how to respond. Mark storms out of the room.

INT. MARK'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mark paces around his room, unsure how to get his anger out, wanting to log online and play his feelings away but no longer having the means to do so. Mark takes a deep breath to steady himself and sits down at his computer. He loads up a blank Word Doc on his computer and titles it "Coming Out."

MARK (V.O.)
I've been role-playing my whole
life.

We see a montage of scenes over the voice-over.

Cut to: Stephen and Janice watching TV in the living room, with Mark watching from the other side of the room. An announcer on the TV declares Proposition 8 to Ban Gay Marriage has passed in California. Stephen looks back at Mark; Janice stares ahead at the TV. Mark walks out of the room.

MARK (V.O.)
Pretending to be a wizard, or a
Jedi, or someone epic. The truth is
I've always tried to escape.
Because being just Mark felt like
being no one.

Cut to: Mark walks into the kitchen, without looking at either parent. He plates himself his dinner and walks out of the kitchen to eat by himself, without looking back. Neither parent says a word; they let him go.

MARK (V.O.)

My happiest memories are all make-believe. I could be a different person in the fantasy worlds I created - the mage who knows the right spell to slay the beast, the charmer who could dazzle a crowd, so long as I didn't have to take off my mask, the dreamer who could fall in love with what I dreaded admitting most - another man.

We cut to: Mark eating dinner at his computer, scrolling through the Everquest online forums, looking for a post or comment from Livec, and finding nothing. He closes the web browser and sits aimlessly at his desk, barely picking at his food.

MARK (V.O.)

I came out first as a wizard in a massively-multiplayer-roleplaying-game. Yes, that's as insane as that sounds. And I was rejected by the people I thought were my truest friends in the game.

Cut to: Mark is back to using the Towel Trick and baby wipes to clean himself in the locker room at school. Other guys noticeably cover themselves up as they walk by him on their way to the showers, murmuring to each other and pointing at the gay guy who might be checking them out. Mark looks deeply uncomfortable and tries to not make eye contact as he changes under the towel. Chris walks by on his way to the showers but doesn't say anything, the only one ignoring Mark entirely.

MARK (V.O.)

But I learned from that pain that the only way out was through. The second I shoved down that hurt, that fear, the less-than-desirable parts I wished I could just pray away...I shut the door to being myself.

Cut to: Mark, Julia, Benny, and a couple other students sit around some desks in a classroom, decorating posters that say 'Open Hearts' on them. Under the table, we see Julia and Mark passing out piles of condoms to the other members, who hide them in their backpacks.

Father Jaffey sits at a table at the other side of the room, grading papers - chaperoning as their club sponsor but not at all involved. For one second, he looks up at the group of students longingly, as if he wishes he could be a participant, and then looks down and returns to his work.

MARK (V.O.)

I am a proud, gay wizard. And no matter what anyone tells me, even what my own family believes, I'm not going to lose that. I am thankful I have a chosen family of friends who love me precisely because I'm such a weirdo freak.

Cut to: Mark and Julia LARP-ing in the woods again, this time wearing newly upgraded costumes. They are having the time of their lives with the other live-action-role-players.

MARK (V.O.)

I'm not writing this for your pity, or your approval. I'm finally writing this just for me - and for my faith in myself.

Cut back to: Mark as he finishes typing at his computer, looking flushed but satisfied with the essay he just poured his heart into. He presses Command + S and looks out the window.

INT. MARK'S HOUSE - TWO MONTHS LATER - DAY

Mark stands above his kitchen table, holding a heavy manilla envelope addressed to him from Northwestern University. His parents look on. Trembling a bit with anticipation, Mark opens it and reads his acceptance letter, admitting him with a generous ride of financial aid. He can't believe it; he passes the documents to his parents, and they gasp with joy.

STEPHEN

Congratulations, Mark!

MARK

(half-heartedly)

Thanks, Dad.

They hug, Mark a bit uncomfortable in the embrace, but allowing it.

JANICE

It's just like my Grandpa told me:
"My son would be smart, talented,
and handsome."

She goes to embrace him, but Mark backs off.

STEPHEN

Hey, now, let's just try and talk about how we all feel.

MARK

(to Stephen)

It's not about feelings. There isn't more than one right choice here.

(to Janice)

Mom, I'll pray that you learn to love what's inside me because it's not something I can change...nor would I want to now. You're the one who needs to change if you want your son back.

STEPHEN

(sighing)

You shouldn't talk to your mother like that.

Janice tries to approach Mark again. They talk nearly face-face.

JANICE

Mark, please, I've prayed on it too, and I believe - I believe that you will grow out of this in time.

MARK

(trying to get through)

Mom, when I came out, *in a church*, it was the closest I've ever felt to feeling Jesus in my life. Doesn't that mean anything to you?

JANICE

(trying to get through)

I believe you felt that. But I have talked with Father Keene, and he and I agree this was a confusing moment for you. Jesus does not condone what you think he does.

Mark breaks their eye contact and starts to leave the room.

MARK

(losing it)

Jesus, literally, never said anything about being gay!

He whips around.

MARK (CONT'D)

You are going to have to choose
between your faith - or me.

STEPHEN

(raising his voice)

Can you two - and Jesus - just stop
so we can take a moment, as a
family, to celebrate this?

He holds up Mark's acceptance letter like a trophy. Janice
and Mark both look at Stephen.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Can we - just once - do as *I* want?
Can we go to a nice restaurant,
where we have a nice dinner, and be
so proud of our son, and let him
drink a glass of underappreciated
wine, and afterwards we will come
home and play whatever overly
complicated boardgame Mark wants to
play, and we will all say good
night and be at peace as a family?
Can I have that, please? Can we
have that?

Janice and Mark look down at the floor, then briefly at each
other, then back at Stephen.

MARK

Sure, dad.

JANICE

Yes, of course.

STEPHEN

Well, ok. Good.

INT. NICE RESTAURANT - AN HOUR LATER

We see the family dining together and doing just as Stephen
suggested. The family toasts their glasses of wine together.
Mark tentatively takes his first sip of alcohol in front of
his parents. His dad leans forward and raises an eyebrow, as
if to ask what Mark thinks of the vintage. Mark pretends to
judge it with a "just ok" gesture. Janice laughs.

Toward the end of the meal, Janice reaches across the table
and holds Mark's hand for a moment; he begrudgingly allows
her to do so.

INT. MARK'S HOUSE LIVING ROOM - AN HOUR LATER

We cut to Mark setting down the board game *Settlers of Catan* down at the dining room table. Stephen and Janice both seem a bit drunk but are trying to focus as they learn the new game. Mark unpacks the pieces and sets up the game and begins to animatedly teach them the rules. His parents nod along as the family plays their first game night since Mark came out.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - ONE WEEK LATER - NIGHT

It's Senior Prom. Mark slow-dances with his date - Julia. He's dressed in a much-better fitting tuxedo; she wears a stunning, green-leaf patterned dress. They dance once more to K-Ci & Jojo's "All My Life."

JULIA

Aleolin?

MARK

Yes, Talen?

JULIA

Can I give you a blowjob...

(beat)

At the end of the song?

They both laugh. Mark twirls Julia in a dance move.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Mark and Julia sit together on the curb outside where they'd had their epic blow-up, sharing a Natty Light that Julia snuck into Prom.

JULIA

Twenty questions to guess who you think is the hottest guy in school?

MARK

Ok.

JULIA

Is he an athlete?

MARK

Yes.

JULIA

Is he repulsive - on the inside?

MARK

Yes.

JULIA

Would you hate-fuck him?

MARK

No, he doesn't even deserve that.

JULIA

Ooh, burn...it's Chris!!!

They share the Natty Light. After a beat.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Any better at home?

MARK

A bit, I guess.

JULIA

I'm sorry. I didn't think your mom would get stuck like this.

MARK

I don't know what else to do.

Another beat.

MARK (CONT'D)

I promise I'll find a way to come visit you out East. Yale - Jesus Christ do you always have to be such a one-upper?!

JULIA

Yes. Look - I gotta show you something.

She pulls out a sleek, thin new Nokia cell phone and starts pressing the numerical buttons.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Look - we can "text!"

MARK

What's text...ing?

JULIA

See, if you press a number a certain amount of times, it forms letters and eventually forms a word and then a whole sentence that you can send to the other person...like magic.

Julia spells out the word with a lot of effort on the phone and presses send. Mark's bulky cell phone buzzes, and he fishes it out of his pocket to see the word "hydrology" displayed on the screen. He opens a rudimentary messaging program on his cell and struggles to reply back "mechanical" until he gives up. They lean in and rest their heads on each other.

MARK/JULIA

(quietly)

Hydrology - Mechanical - Sauron -
Botanical - Poo - Moo - Rivendell -
True - Frodo - Fro-yo - Dwarven -
Go-go - Picard - On-Guard -
Scotland Yard - Don't - Forget -
Elora Danan.

They pass their beer back and forth.

INT. MARK'S BEDROOM - DAY - SEVERAL WEEKS LATER

It's the end of Summer, and Mark prepares to leave for college on a road trip across the country with his dad. As he's packing up, Mark takes a break and out of curiosity logs onto the Everquest message boards. There, he sees a private message in his account Inbox from Livec. He reads it feverishly.

LIVEC (V.O.)

Al, I want to first off say I'm sorry. I failed you when you needed me most.

I don't know if you'd ever want to talk to me again, but I'm sending you my cell number below. If you're ever passing through Utah - lol, ya, my life sucks that bad - let me know. Maybe we could meet up.

You'll be off to college soon, right? Hope you got in where you wanted to go. Hope you're well. I miss you, bud.

Mark begins to type a response.

EXT. MARK'S HOUSE - EVENING - SEVERAL HOURS LATER

Mark is packing up the car. Janice helps him load up the last of his gear in the trunk as Stephen opens the driver seat of the car and starts the engine. Janice closes the trunk. She and her son stand face-face. Neither know what to say.

JANICE
Be safe driving.

MARK
We will. I'll make sure Dad takes
breaks and lets me drive.

STEPHEN
(from inside the car)
Got a lot of sights to see between
here and Chicago!

JANICE
Call from the car phone - at least
once a day, ok?

MARK
Sure, we will.

A beat.

JANICE
Thanksgiving Break will be in no
time.

MARK
Right.

JANICE
I'll see you then.

MARK
Yup.

A long beat.

JANICE
Ok, well. I love you very much.

Mark hugs his mother. She hugs him back tightly, tearing up.

MARK
Love you.

They break off the hug. There's a moment where either of them could say more, but they both choose not to.

Janice walks over to the driver side window of the car. Stephen rolls down the window and the two of them exchange a brief kiss. Janice backs away to stand alone as Mark gets in and shuts the passenger door. Stephen pulls the car out of the driveway, and Janice waves goodbye. The two men wave back and drive away.

INT. STEPHEN'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

STEPHEN
Give her time.

MARK
What about you?

STEPHEN
(sighs)
I don't pretend to know why my son is gay, or obsessed with wizards, or addicted to video games - but I love you...even though I don't always understand you.

Mark nods, satisfied with the answer - for now.

MARK
Are you two going to be ok?

Stephen takes a deep breath.

STEPHEN
I don't know.

A beat.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
You know, when we first met, she was the wild one.

MARK
Her "fuck it" phase?

STEPHEN
So she told you. I was the boring MBA student in love with a wild woman. She was always getting me to try crazy things.

Mark leans in, curious.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
No details. Maybe when you're
older.

(beat)
This is not me giving you
permission to do drugs.

Mark laughs. A beat.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
When we had you, she changed. You
were her everything. And she didn't
want to risk anything anymore. She
became die-hard about religion,
about faith, and I just...never
felt it the same way she did. A God
or...a higher power.

MARK
That's not exactly how she told the
story.

STEPHEN
Well, we all tend to remember
things the way we'd like, right?

Mark just sits and listens.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
Point is, I've found that people
either open up as they age or
narrow in how they see the
world....and the world is changing
faster and faster.
(beat)
I'm still trying to open up. And I
hope your mom can learn to again. I
think she's trying.

A beat.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
She loves you, you know.

MARK
I know.

The two of them drive off.

EXT. DINER IN UTAH - DAY - TWO DAYS LATER

Mark and his dad stop by a small town diner in a suburban city in Utah.

MARK

Thanks for letting me do
this...I'll brb.

STEPHEN

B-R-B...?

Mark gets out of the car without answering.

INT. DINER - MOMENTS LATER

Mark scans the room and finds Preston in a booth, sipping coffee, looking nervous. Mark slowly walks over, and Preston stands up and awkwardly shakes Mark's hand, then midway through, transforms it into half a hug. They sit down. An attractive WAITER, 20s, comes up to give them menus and leaves.

PRESTON

So...the man behind the avatar! Or,
I guess I should say, the young
man.

MARK

Yeah, I didn't know you were old as
fuck.

PRESTON

Hey now, I'm only a good 20 years
past my prime.

The two of them laugh. A beat.

PRESTON (CONT'D)

We had some good times, ya know.
Killing Sontalak with Manaburn -
that was genius. You literally
changed the way people worldwide
did that raid. You got a little
internet famous, you know?

MARK

For being a gay wizard or killing
the dragon?

PRESTON

Eh, one story kinda bled into the
other.

(MORE)

PRESTON (CONT'D)

(beat)

It was more than fun.

MARK

It was a family.

A long silence as they drink their coffee.

MARK (CONT'D)

You know, I don't care if you accept me for being gay, that's your call, but I want to be honest. I don't think I can be friends with someone who can't accept the deepest part of me.

PRESTON

I struggled with it. I hated how everyone treated you when you came out. I should have defended you.

(beat)

I was too afraid to say something.

The attractive waiter comes over and refills their coffee. Mark can't help but check him out. Preston notices.

PRESTON (CONT'D)

Your type?

MARK

Nah, I prefer middle-aged straight Mormons with a thing for 90s movie references.

Preston laughs. After a beat.

PRESTON

Look, it's still a new thing out here to talk about 'accepting homosexuals.' Regardless, I failed you as a friend.

MARK

I accept your apology.

Mark gets up and leaves a five dollar bill on the table. He's ready to leave.

PRESTON

Oh - no, no. I'm paying. I owe you that.

Mark picks up his bill and walks over to the waiter. He tips him with the bill by boldly putting it in the waiter's shirt pocket and winking at him. Mark walks back to the table. The waiter just looks confused.

PRESTON (CONT'D)

You, uh, ever gonna MMORPG again? I quit The Keepers. You were right - buncha bigots. There's a new game out, called World of Warcraft. It's even more fun than EQ.

MARK

Maybe. I promise I'll let you know.
(beat)
Thanks for being the first person I ever came out to.

Preston stands up at the table as Mark does. Preston awkwardly does the first part of the Juice Crew salute, and Mark finishes the salute. They both make the skyward gesture, and wave goodbye.

INT. STEPHEN'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Mark gets back in the car with this dad, who looks pretty confused at whatever just happened between the two men. Mark looks at his dad.

MARK

Do you want to know what just happened?

Stephen thinks about it for a second.

STEPHEN

No.

MARK

Thanks.

They both look at each other, remembering.

STEPHEN/MARK

(in unison)
No - Thanks.

They laugh for real this time and drive off.

END