

Twilight Mirage 25: The Miracle of the Mirage: The Dragon

Transcriber: Vesta

AUSTIN: For a moment,

[MUSIC - "The Twilight Mirage" starts]

AUSTIN: [continued] we see the entire fleet at peace. Fixed, as silhouettes against the ribboned iridescence of the Twilight Mirage. Gumption's Gambit, Thyrus, the Ever-Forward, the By-and-By, Memorious, the Sky Reflected in Mirrors, the Tides of Harmony, Seance. They hover above the planet Quire, blue, and green, and brown, and more, too, its own white clouds reflecting back the brilliant colors of Empyrean's false nebula, and for this heartbeat everything seems certain. The Divine Fleet will fly forever.

AUSTIN: [continued] And then, from the fifth moon of Quire. From the Iconoclasts' god Volition: a pulse, like brick into pond. And then the Mirage ripples and contracts, and Volition roars, hungry for all of its open-ended potential. And then we see the star sector from above, the stained ether retracting inwards with speed, chased by fleets from Earth and the Rapid Evening.

AUSTIN: [continued] And then it holds, the insatiable gravity of Volition countered by something else. Not the empty shell of the dead divine Empyrean, nor Belgard, now alive, nor by Demani Dusk and Gray Gloaming, erstwhile agents of the Rapid Evening. It is Quire itself that holds the end at bay. And again we see the Fleet, holding firm. The Mirage not gone, not swallowed, but denser than ever, held together by a planet that believes in miracles.

[music ends]

AUSTIN: Welcome to Friends at the Table, an actual play podcast focused on critical world-building, smart characterization, and fun interaction between good friends. I am Austin Walker, and today joining me are Janine Hawkins, Art Martinez-Tebbel and Andrew Lee Swan. Today, we are jumping right into the first of our three holiday games. Just as a reminder, each of these games is focusing on a mission that is being taken on by the various members of the Beloved, and by Myraid's crew during a moment of crisis in the Twilight Mirage, and you know, kind of near Quire.

AUSTIN: [continued] The first one, the one that you are listening to now, is going to send Signet, Grand Magnificent and Even Gardner on a hunt to capture or destroy Independence before it can find its divine mind. Which is somewhere on the surface of Volition, which is the fifth moon of Quire. A fake moon and where it aims to recover its mind and join with Volition itself. Volition, again, being the god built by the Iconoclasts.

AUSTIN: [continued] The second one of these episodes is going to focus on Fourteen Fifteen and Tender Sky as they attempt to save the life of the Cadent from Sui Juris, which is the separatist movement that is run by Tender Sky's former partner, Open Metal, and which is also being manipulated to some degree at least by Robin Song, and some other members of the New Earth Hegemony's Sleep Detachment Unit.

AUSTIN: [continued] And finally, we will follow Echo Reverie and Gig Kephart as they help to evacuate members of the fleet onto Quire below. So, in order to play out those three missions, what we're gonna play, is Ben Robbins' Follow. Follow is a game we've played once before, we played during the last Holiday Special during the story of the Red Square Marketplace? Not Red Square... Red House? Red- what did we end up calling that place-

ART [overlapping with Austin]: Uh I don't know-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Art]: -cause it was Red House-

ART [overlapping with Austin]: -but the Red Square marketplace is definitely something else.

AUSTIN: Yeah. China's wild y'all. It was the story with like Red Jack, and Walligan, and Tisk and all of those great characters from Marielda. This is the second time we'll be playing it. I guess I also played it for the Beastcast Holiday Special last year. Lots of roleplaying game holiday specials in my life these days. I've real good plan for that this year, by the way, I'll tell you about that later.

AUSTIN: [continued] We played this game once before. I really loved it, it's really flexible and we're gonna do it in three different groups so that it's a lot more manageable than last time? Because last time I think we played with six players, which is too many players. We're gonna be playing with four in this group, and three in all of the other groups. I'm just gonna read from the guide now. And hopefully I'll just have to read it one time.

AUSTIN: [continued] Follow requires no preparation and no game master to run it. You can play a whole game, a whole quest, in a single session there's enough variety that you can play again and again and have new experiences every time. You'll need: three to five players, two to three hours - longer with more players, stones in two different colours about a dozen of each. They're called red and white in the text but any two distinct colours will work. They can be dice, poker chips, playing cards, so long as they're the same size and shape so you can't tell them apart by touch. A cup or bag or envelope to draw stones from or just close your eyes. About a dozen index cards, pens or pencils.

AUSTIN: [continued] Follow is a game about working together to achieve a common goal. Slay the dragon, cure disease, overthrow a tyrant, get your candidate elected. We'll pick a quest together and decide what kind of game we want to play. Can we stay united and succeed or will

our differences tear us apart? We'll play and find out. Follow isn't about coming up with the best plan or clever solution. It's about seeing what these characters do for better or worse. We may even intentionally make bad choices because they seem like decisions our characters would make. But even if we do everything perfectly our quest may fail. As players we can push for the outcome we wanna see but we cannot guarantee it. Our story may surprise us and that's a part of the fun.

AUSTIN: [continued] Step 1 is picking our quest. For this group, which is myself, Art, Janine and Dre, we have chosen the Dragon. You all are going after Independence, which is loose on the planet-being also of Volition. And you're gonna go try to destroy Independence before it unites and kind of joins up with Volition, turning it, from being just kind of a being of intense chaos into a malicious being of intense chaos. This will have severe repercussions for what comes next, for sure.

AUSTIN: [continued] So, the first step here is, I mean the first step was to choose that, we've done that. The second step is to come up with two things that make our quest difficult. I have two suggestions here but would be totally happy to hear other people's suggestions too. For me, the things that seemingly are kind of almost obvious in making it difficult is one: Volition as a place is intensely volatile. It is kind of just, I've described it before as just being switching between types of matter, between gas and liquid, and like slick solid. When you get there, you'll be able to find land and find purchase because of what it is. It is a thing that takes shape according to whatever strong will is around it. And so like, by your desire for wanting there to be land, it will firm up. There are limits to that, obviously, as the sluice is not just "oh I want Independence to be here!" but it is a place susceptible to the power of will. And part of that means that sometimes it will spit up a creature of intense will. It will spit up an area of lava and fire or deep deep drowning pools. There is no way to predict what will happen when you're there or what sort of strange creatures you'll encounter or what sort of weird post-Divines it may make. And so like, I think that the hostility and volatility of the planet itself, of Volition itself, is a pretty obvious difficulty.

AUSTIN: [continued] And the second thing for me, is that there are other hunters. You're trying to hunt the Dragon but the Iconoclasts want it to join with Volition, and I think at this point the Independents are kind of also hunting it down because they didn't want it to go this way necessarily. So I think those are my two suggestions, but I'd be up for hearing other difficulty suggestions. I'll say that the book says 'difficulties get everyone on the same page about what stands in our way; they may inspire the challenge we confront later or just tell us more about the world and the situation we're in.' So any other suggestions-

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: I personally like those two but-

ANDREW: Yeah I think those are good.

AUSTIN: Okay. Cool. There we go. So difficulty 1. volatility and hostility of Volition, and 2. There are other hunters. Three, our fellowship: the group of characters working together to complete the quest which in this case is Slay the Dragon, and specifically the Dragon is Independence, its not Volition, I think killing this thing that the Iconoclasts have been working on for ten thousand years is maybe out of the scope of your current capabilities. But killing Independence and preventing them from ascending to this next level of terribleness, is within your capabilities.

AUSTIN: [continued] The group is called a fellowship, we'll have two have characters each of us. We'll have a main character and a minor character. Both are part of the fellowship but our story's about our main characters. As you make your characters complete each step together and discuss your choices so that everyone knows what the other members of the fellowship are like. When you pick details about your characters, you're telling the other players that those are the themes you want to explore in the game. Follow the steps on the next page or prepare cards for your characters. The results should look like this.

AUSTIN: [continued] Obviously we know who our characters are a little bit better than maybe, most players would at this point. Because we are not just picking from a list. Like if you scroll down and look at 'The Dragon', there are character concepts like 'Noble' or 'Chosen One' or 'Knight of the Realm' or 'Peasant'. And obviously we could find things that fit perfectly here but I think we just know who you three are anyway, right? My question ends up being who wants what from who because that's the second part here. You turn each card so there's a kind of a line from one person to another, and then you choose 'want from the quest' and 'want from you'. The 'want from the quest' is what your character wants besides the completion of the quest. Everyone is on board, everyone wants Independence to be killed before it unifies itself and joins up with the Iconoclasts.

AUSTIN: [continued] But the question ends up being what do you want from the quest? It could be something - this is quoting - it could be something you could get out of our success, or it could be how you want to fulfill the quest, or to put it another way, why are you on the quest? Pick from the examples from the quest sheet or make up your own. No two kwa, characters - no two kwa-racters - no two characters, should want the exact same thing. If you choose the same thing, discuss until you find a difference that sets you apart. Don't worry about picking the perfect answer, just grab something that makes sense to you and run with it. This is a starting point for your character but as you play you might get what you want, give up or move on to entirely new things before the quest is over. Write your choice in the 'want from quest' section from your main character card. Keep it short and write in big letters so it's easy to read. So what do we all want from the quest? As individual characters- I think I'm playing as Blooming in this game, by the way. And, I'm still working out how to phrase the thing Blooming wants. I know what Blooming wants, but, I'm still trying to figure out how to phrase- does anyone else have an easy one?

ANDREW: I'm picking between two for Even.

AUSTIN: Okay, what do you have? What are your two-

ANDREW [overlapping with Austin]: I mean, protection is a pretty obvious one.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ANDREW: But, also redemption? Because we maybe could've already killed this thing if Even hadn't made making bullets harder. But that's an internal thing for him. But, I don't know.

AUSTIN: Um, yeah. [pause] What about you, Grand? Because I think redemption is also the one that came into mind for me for Grand. But I guess, fame could also- it depends on which Grand Magnificent we're getting right now?

ART: Yeah, I mean. Could I do fame? Yes, yes I could.

[laughs around the table and a short pause]

ART: [continued] But, redemption feels a little more on?

AUSTIN: Right, you built this thing, right?

ART: I built this thing, it's literally a representation of my- I mean, it is neither cowardice nor crime.

AUSTIN: Okay. Yeah, it does say 'slaying it will absolve me of my past cowardice or crimes'. Crime is broad, let's say.

ART: I mean, no one's trying to arrest me.

AUSTIN: Fair. People are busy, but that's fair. Okay.

ART: The police are busy.

AUSTIN: The police are busy, they're trying to evacuate people right now. Redemption. I think you're getting redemption. Signet what about you-

ART: I mean if, if [Austin laughs] you really want redemp- honour is the-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Art]: Right. Sure. Honour.

ART: -it represents a stain on my reputation.

AUSTIN: 'I've sworn I'd slay it, I will not break my oath, who did you swear it to'. I think- I don't know, it's up to you too.

ANDREW: Honour is interesting to me for Grand Magnificent because who did Grand Magnificent swear that oath to, to slay it, if that's what you're thinking about.

ART: Um, future Reddit. r/mechdesigners?

[Andrew and Austin laughs]

ANDREW: Your fucking, your favourite 3D printing forum.

AUSTIN: God, fuck off.

[all giggles]

AUSTIN: [overlapping with Art]: Signet, what were you thinking about before we-

ART [overlapping with Austin]: Yeah, and this time it's called Lazer Teddit.

AUSTIN: Okay, bad.

JANINE: Eugh.

ART: Merry Christmas everyone. That was- that was my gift to you.

ANDREW: That's your Lazer Ted reference for Twilight Mirage.

JANINE: It's your gift to Ali, who's gonna get it.

[Andrew laughs, followed by Art]

AUSTIN: Signet, what are you thinking about?

JANINE: I'm also a little bit torn. I think my choice actually depends on whether or not we decide to have Belgard and Signet as one character or to split them. Because that itself comes down to like, on the one hand, I really like Signet and Belgard interaction. But on the other, the last thing we did with them was basically making a point of saying that an Excerpt and a Divine kind of become a thing. Like, the potent is a thing.

AUSTIN: Right, the question for me is whether or not that thing should be under threat to test that, right. That is the thing that, it depends if this should feel like a moment of ascension for the

two of them, or if this is a moment where that works in theory, is it true. Can you keep them together.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You know? Because if they're together then we will never see Belgard hurt in this. Unless Signet gets hurt, so to speak, unless Signet gets pushed out of the fellowship or has to leave the fellowship as a result, Belgard won't

JANINE: I mean, that's the other thing that I don't see separation as a possibility at this point.

AUSTIN: It absolutely is a possibility.

JANINE: I mean, for Signet.

AUSTIN: I get that, but like it's absolutely a possibility at this point. There's nothing magical that says 'maybe Signet breaks down and doesn't do anything' and maybe we have to roleplay that out, but there's nothing in Belgard that says if Signet dies, Belgard doesn't continue.

JANINE: Yeah that's true.

AUSTIN: You know what I mean? So even if Signet drops to a pile of nothing. That's totally interesting but like, for me I think it's more interesting to see if those two characters make it out together and what that looks like versus assuming that that is going to be the case. Like, being able to show it off is way more interesting than like just having it be background colour.

JANINE: Although the other thing there is that if you're playing Belgard, then there's no scene with Signet and Belgard and also Blooming and Emphyrean.

AUSTIN: I trust my ability to do that is the thing.

JANINE: Isn't that not allowed, though?

AUSTIN: It says you're not supposed to play characters who are in the same scene as other characters? I just wouldn't have Belgard talk to those NPCs. Do you know what I mean- I would have them talk to you. But they wouldn't talk to each other, ever. That's the actual thing- would they ever talk to each other. That's the thing you want to avoid by having people on the same side.

JANINE: Yeah, alright.

AUSTIN: You're gonna end up in situations where both of your characters are in the same scene. They just shouldn't be, like, interacting with- they shouldn't be like I'm gonna do a scene with just me, and my other character also.

JANINE: Yeah, okay.

AUSTIN: So assuming that, then what do you want from your quest?

JANINE: I think, sort of you know the mission as a whole to them is to prevent further harm. But the personal drive for Signet, is probably to kind of justify what she is versus the Iconoclasts?

AUSTIN: I think that that's a perfectly fine- it doesn't have to be one of the six things from this list, I think it can totally be fine to be like, justify-

JANINE: There's a degree of like, it's kind of personal even though they are impersonal in what they are, but like-

AUSTIN: Totally.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Alright, so, I like the sort of self-justification. Blooming's then, I mean let's shake out- I'm gonna say Blooming can be whatever. For Even and Grand, have you decided one direction or the other?

ART: Yeah, I think redemption is the one that makes sense for Grand.

AUSTIN: Okay. And Even?

ANDREW: So either protection, but then you saying that we don't have to pick from this list.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ANDREW: I mean, Even has basically spoke to this thing where it scared the shit out of him. So, it could just be: I wanna be able to sleep at night.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think that like, easing your mind or like, something like that is totally fine. So, I think Blooming's is 'to prove to herself that she can do this'. Like she has an immense self doubt, so it's overcoming self doubt. She is in a place where she fully does not believe that she can do this. As a reminder, Blooming is the Excerpt of Emphyrean, which had previously seemed to be the last Divine.

AUSTIN: [continued] Okay, so then the second thing, and this is why we haven't written anything down yet- your main character starts out with a difficult relationship to the character to your left. Pick you something want from them that's important to you but that they're unwilling to give you. Choose from the examples on the quest sheet or make up your own. The examples on the quest sheet are: Respect - my lineage, rank, prowess, skill, virtue. Power - give me the enchanted sword, your magic, a blessing, or knight me. Teach me - sorcery, swordfighting, riding, or lore, or let me teach you. Revenge - for defeating me, betraying me, scorning me, taking my beloved. Forgiveness - pardon my past crimes, or dishonours, or foul deeds, or fears. Protection - watch my back, or shield me from danger, or let me protect you. But also you can ask anything here.

AUSTIN: [continued] My guess is that it's gonna go like, Even to Grand or Grand to Even, and then leap over to Signet and Blooming and then those two will connect. And then it'll lead back but I don't know what does leaps look like. I have something from Blooming to Grand, if we need that link. I mean we're gonna need that link, because it has to be a circle, right? Blooming wants power, Blooming wants Grand to figure out what's wrong with Emphyrean. Why the Twilight Mirage is - what's the word I used before - condensing around Quire, and why Emphyrean can't prevent it from doing that.

ART: And why does Grand know the answer to that question?

AUSTIN: Because you're a great technician. Because you're-

ART: And I-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Art]: You built Independence.

ART: And is there a reason that Grand wouldn't give that to her?

AUSTIN: Good question. That's a good question.

ANDREW: That's the part of this mechanic that I always get... tough for me.

AUSTIN: I mean, maybe it's Grand who doesn't want to give it to her because the last thing that he built was fucking Independence. Last time he messed around with Divine gods.

ANDREW: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Divine gods. That's, video films.

ART: It's better than what I have, which is that Grand doesn't wanna learn. Grand doesn't wanna figure it out.

AUSTIN: Yeah. [Art laughs] Any other-

ANDREW: Okay

AUSTIN: Any other ideas?

ANDREW: I mean the only thing I can think of. I mean I could probably think of a couple things that Even would want for Grand and I don't know how it fits in here? But I think that the thing Even wants from Grand more than anything is for Grand to just finally give a shit.

AUSTIN: Mmm.

ART: Wait but that's going- we're not making a circle then.

ANDREW [overlapping with Art]: Oh. Yeah that's the problem.

ART [overlapping with Andrew]: You have to want something from Signet.

AUSTIN: I mean I don't have to have mine, I can go- I can figure out a different direction.

JANINE: I could go to Blooming or Grand I think, at this point.

AUSTIN: What are your ideas?

JANINE: For Grand it would be very much like 'take this shit seriously'. [Austin and Andrew laughs] Like, humility. I want your humility. With Blooming I think it's probably like, I want to protect you.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Or, ultimately your forgiveness? But I think that's a bit too harsh for their relationship.

AUSTIN: Protecting is kind of interesting. I kind of like protect Blooming.

JANINE: I think that- I sort of- I feel like Signet would've send Blooming a message once this whole [unintelligible] (Bug-Art?) thing happened. Just to be like 'I don't want you to be alone in this again' or something like that? Like, I feel like that's very much the sentiment is like, she knows that was hard for Blooming and she doesn't want Blooming in that position again? Like, Blooming is capable but she just feels intense regret that she was ever that situation of just like being the only one left.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I like that. I kind of like you wanting Blooming to let you protect her. Blooming wanting Grand to- maybe I'll have to figure out a thing for Blooming and Even because I do want someone to want Grand to give a shit [Andrew giggles]. Grand do you know what you want?

ART: To keep not giving a shit.

[Andrew giggles]

ART: There's a lot of things. This means that I'm going to Signet?

AUSTIN: That's what it looks like, yeah.

ART: It feels really petty if we be like that- I want is power.

AUSTIN: But maybe that can be interesting to some degree right?

JANINE: I mean dude's into Divines and Signet is with one of those-

AUSTIN: Who also can't do anything to stop this one, right?

ART: Right. So yeah, like, I guess that's 'teach me'.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Art]: Yeah. I kind of like that.

ART: Cause like there's no like, you can't offer me any- you can't give me a blessing.

AUSTIN: Alright, so-

ART: It doesn't work like that.

AUSTIN: Grand wants teaching. Signet wants to protect Blooming, is that what we decided? Even wants you to give a shit. [Andrew giggles] And now I need one for Blooming and Even. Okay. I think hmm. I have an idea but I don't know if it's like feasible to like tackle in this?

ANDREW [overlapping with Austin]: I mean, you know, we can workshop it-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Andrew] The thing I'm thinking of is like: break me off a piece of that weird hybrid alien thing you have. [Andrew laughs] Blooming's like crisis right now is her connection to Empyrean. And so like, in a sense it's, it might be power, right? Which is like, I need to stay connected to Empyrean right now, that thing you have can make that happen. I've written down 'want from you power, break me off some of that alien'.

ANDREW: Okay yeah, fair.

JANINE [overlapping with Andrew]: [scoffs] Gross.

ANDREW: I don't know if I can do that but, hey, you know.

[Janine sighs]

[Austin snorts]

AUSTIN: Alright. So then I need those wants again one more time for your actual 'what you want from the quest'. Grand what was yours again?

ART: Redemption.

AUSTIN: Redemption. Signet was..?

JANINE: To justify her being, versus the Iconoclasts or some more- [unintelligible]

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: I think justification, I think that's fair. As long as we keep that in mind you know. Even?

ANDREW: Ease of mind.

AUSTIN: Ease of mind. And Blooming's was... oh it was overcoming self doubt. Okay. Actually you know what, I'm gonna fix 'power'. I think it's not 'break me off some of that alien' but I think it's like, help me reconnect with Empyrean. And the fact that that- the fact that she's asking you and not Signet or Grand is like a personal failing from her, right? This is like, Signet is like 'yo let me help you' and Blooming is like 'yeah of course of course of course anyway Even what's up?' and that is a problem.

AUSTIN: [continued] Alright! So one more time going over those. Even Garden wants ease of mind and wants Grand Magnificent to give a shit. Grand Magnificent wants redemption, proving he does already kind of give a shit but doesn't showing it, and wants Signet to teach him how to be strong, right? How to fight- problems, how to be strong. How 2 B Strong. Signet wants a justification for her relationship with Belgard and proof that she can stand the Iconoclasts, and wants from Blooming the, not the authority- but the okay to protect her. And Blooming wants to overcome self doubt, and wants Even to help her reconnect with Empyrean. Alright.

AUSTIN: [continued] So now, each player makes their minor character who is also part of the fellowship. Just a concept or name and give a brief description. Don't create wants. Our minor characters are supporting cast and some of them will be almost certain- some of them will almost certainly be lost if our quest takes difficult turns. A good choice is to make a character who is connected to one of the main characters across the table from you, or who would mostly

interact with them. Avoid making a minor character who would primarily interact with your own main character, so you don't wind up making- needing to talk to yourself. Write your name and concept on both sides of the minor character card. We're now ready to play. I'm taking Belgard, so we can have some good Belgard scenes, Signet. Any ideas for the other ones?

ANDREW: Well I know from Ground Game, I think we were- the two we kind of settled on was Cascabel and Saint Caliper, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ANDREW: Or I guess if even- if Janine has a desire to play either one of those characters-

JANINE [overlapping with Andrew]: Um,

ANDREW: Because I think I would probably play one of them, but yeah.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Andrew]: It could go either way.

JANINE: I feel like I'd rather play Chthonic than either of them, but also I would understand if Austin wants to like slip those secrets to someone else so I don't really-

AUSTIN: I've thought about it I think I'm just gonna say the secret out loud, because it's gonna make this game more of what we do. More of dramatic irony and less 'it's a secret'. It's like, not how I imagined unfolding this necessarily, but, Chthonic- So Blooming's problem is that Emphyrean isn't there anymore. Chthonic is what's left Emphyrean, and it's not even. The reason the Mirage is collapsing is because Emphyrean left, Emphyrean failed to save Gumption and was like 'bye'. And what was left was, Gumption, and like a little echo of Emphyrean left inside of the shell that Blooming has been able to extend over the last few months and convince people that everything is ok.

JANINE: Oh, that sucks-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Chthonic is the opposite of Emphyrean. Chthonic is like, if Emphyrean is our highest highs, Chthonic is our lowest lows, and is not malicious, but is also not complete. Emphyrean decided not to have room for a pilot anymore. Chthonian is the thing that the Iconoclasts dreamt of as arrived at by a Divine itself.

ART: Yes, that is what I'm most interested in playing.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Art]: But it- Yeah? [laughs all around] I don't doubt it. But also is on this quest and thinks they are wrong, right? Wants to stop them despite that. And is also partially inside of Belgard still, and could leave at any point, right? My gut says Art should play it, because I think that that's a character who should talk to Signet. Like,

JANINE: My worry is that I would play it too kind, [incomprehensible]

AUSTIN: Yes, a hundred percent. [chuckles all around]

JANINE: Because that revelation like, makes me so sad. Despite not seeing Blooming on camera much, like I'm totally very attached to her. So I, probably shouldn't play.

AUSTIN: I've decided it's Chthonic, it's not Chthonian, I'm just gonna say Chthonic moving forward. I've almost misspelled it here, there's another 'h'. What a fucking word. C-H-T-H-O-N-I-C. That leaves two more slots. Really the only ones that are hard claimed for me are, Cascara, Sho, Morning's Observation, for the other games. There's another slot that is not a character who would be here. So I'm not even worried about that [someone chuckles].

ANDREW: I mean Janine are you still thinking there might be someone else you would want to bring from the Ship Game side of things?

JANINE [overlapping with Andrew]: I have- Yeah, I have ideas of like Ship Game people that I would be comfortable playing, but it becomes more of like, do they bring something, or like, do the Ground Game NPCs that we've sort of singled out bring something more than they would bring.

AUSTIN: They don't need to.

JANINE: Is the question that I find myself-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Right... who do you have in mind. You wanna talk it out?

JANINE: So I'm hesitant to like, pick, as much as I love Acre and Massalia I'm hesitant to pick either one of them because I think Jack or Ali might want them?

AUSTIN: Right, right. Fair.

JANINE: And like specifically in this case, taking them would mean, taking them out of that other game where I want them to succeed. [Austin laughs] Quite a lot? So for the other person-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Right. Like for their own sakes?

JANINE: Ye- well, sure, also that. [Austin and Andrew laugh] The other person I've been thinking of was- do you remember Korrin Kim? Korrim Kim?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Korrin.

JANINE: I've been thinking of her. She was getting out of Contrition's Figure-

AUSTIN: She was getting out soon. My question is like, what does she do I forget like, does she have-

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: I don't know if we ever really got this set-up on who she was or what she did, or-

AUSTIN: No, like, I don't know if you- like part of the thing with Contrition's Figure was like, you don't know anything about these people because their privacy is important, right?

JANINE: Exactly. And Signet never asked, because of those rules.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Right. Which means it's a blank canvas. You could say that's she's some dope shit right now.

JANINE: And she also like, faced Iconoclasts bravely, and then was very scared, and got hurt and maybe wants to- maybe would, if she was involved in this situation where she could hear about this, might say okay, Round 2.

AUSTIN: Right. Do you have something in mind for her? Like in what she is and who she- not what she is, like, what her abilities are, what her capabilities are, who she is, why like- how she's outfitted to do this.

JANINE: I was wondering if you had any like, other ideas for her, but I guess you didn't, so it's like she really is a blank canvas-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine] I- no she was- she's really a blank canvas, like, respect the privacy of her, meant that I didn't invent some bullshit-

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: -for what she did. It's not always true, like I know what Aura Antigua did that came up, right-

JANINE: Yeah. But the-

AUSTIN: -like. But for those three, I'm gonna gesture towards a style of behaviour more than I'm going to explicitly illustrate what they've done. Like I think Softstone was very clearly some sort of terrible war criminal?

JANINE: He was a jerk.

AUSTIN: Yeah, and I think very clearly Blueberri, they definitely had like a crime of passion situation going on?

JANINE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: But, that they were not sorry for. They were not- they had not in fact felt any guilt for.

JANINE: I'm not bringing in Blueberri into it because I want them to be okay forever.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

JANINE: [chuckles] Basically.

AUSTIN: So Korrin I think maybe, Korrin felt like vaguely professional to me? Like maybe Korrin was ex-Castlerose, like maybe Korrin was-

JANINE: Oh?

AUSTIN: Do you know what i mean?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Maybe there's a connection there, that could be really fun. Especially since the Independents are in play and Armstrong had previously infiltrated the Independents- or Castlerose? So there's some overlap there? I can do Korrin, I think that's fun. Like maybe she's a hitwoman-

JANINE [overlapping with Austin] I like that. That's pretty- she did seem like completely unafraid of this horrifying thing when she first encountered those Iconoclasts, so I feel like-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Maybe, then the idea of a thing shapeshifting or being-

AUSTIN: Yeah I feel-

JANINE: -weird in that way wasn't initially off-putting to her for no reason.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: She hit it with a chair or something, right?

JANINE: Yeah!

AUSTIN: She was like: fuck this, yeah, let's go. Yeah. Alright, let's do Korrin. I like that. And then, Even.

ANDREW: I think Cascabel.

AUSTIN: Alright.

ANDREW: Both for like, the usefulness of like, he's the dude-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ANDREW: that made these bullets that could hurt it, but also, I don't- like having Caliper with Even is a reminder of like, the thing he did that he feels real gross about.

AUSTIN: Sure. Fair. Cool. Alright. Minor characters chosen. Now we've done this layout, alright. To complete the quest, our fellowship will face three challenges. We won't know what the challenges- what challenges confront us from the start, we'll only know as they arise. Each challenge is something we need to do to move closer to our goal. If we succeed at a challenge we are more likely to succeed at the quest. If we fail or ignore or refuse the challenge, it doesn't mean the quest immediately fails. But it makes it harder for us to win in the end. You must pick challenges from the quest sheet but your choices and the order you put them in define the flavour of your game. Two sessions using the same quests might follow completely different arcs. Do we start our heist assembling a team and figuring out how to get into a vault? Or do we start with the loot already in our hands and spend the rest of the game trying to get away? Do we spend our scenes scheming and planning, or running around guns blazing? We won't know until we play.

AUSTIN: [continued] For each of the three rounds, we follow the same steps: Pick our challenge and describe why it's difficult. Play scenes to explore how our characters deal with the challenge and each other. Draw stones to see if the fellowship succeeds or fails at the challenge, and whether any of our characters were lost or betrayed. Or betrayed the fellowship. The third challenge is different. It's outcome determines the success or failure of the entire quest. But our wins and losses in the first two challenges will influences our chances of victory. After the third challenge is resolved and we've seen whether the fellowship succeeded at the quest, we'll play a short epilogue to look at the characters' lives after the quest. After all is said and done, was the quest worth it to them? Oh we'll play an epilogue alright. I hope you're ready for the second like whole, arc of this game.

[chuckles all around]

AUSTIN: [continued] Alright. Choose a player to pick the next challenge. It must be someone who has not picked one already. That person selects a challenge from the quest sheet. Picking a challenge establishes that is the next important step we need to take in our quest. You must

pick a challenge from the quest sheet but you can pick any challenge that you think is appropriate, even one that has already been used. When in doubt, just ask yourself: what would we need to do next? If this is the third challenge you are establishing the final task that after everything else that has happened, we must complete to finish the quest. And then I'm just gonna write down what the top quest is on this part in this sheet that says 'Challenges'. Our list is: learn the beast's weak spot, and then in parentheses: where can we find the answer? Get the weapon that can slay it (what and where is the weapon?). Raise an army to fight it. Convince a group to aid us (describe the group: kingdom, city, tribe, priesthood etc.). Travel through dangerous lands. Protect the village from the beast. Track the beast. Corner the beast. Lure it into a trap. Find its lair. Explore the beast's lair. Escape the beast. Face the beast.

AUSTIN: [continued] Does anyone have like a strong urge here? Whoever chooses this also chooses the main character that- I'll actually go over it in a second. So, whoever picks the challenge first describes why it's a problem, tell us what makes the challenge difficult and why we need to do it. But do not say anything about how the fellowship will solve the problem for our scenes. And then whoever chooses also picks the first player or which main character they think will be the first to decide how to deal with this problem. You cannot pick your own character. Just consider who in the fellowship will take the lead for this problem. And then set pace: we decide as a group how long this takes. Is it minutes, hours, days, weeks, months or years? This gets everyone on the same page about how much time your scenes will encompass. I can go first, because I have a pretty clear one in my mind, unless anyone else does?

ART [overlapping with Andrew]: No. Go for it.

ANDREW [overlapping with Art]: If you've got something go for it.

AUSTIN: I think its 'travel through dangerous lands'. I think this is: make land on Volition, and like, you have its basic track, you have a general direction where it's at, and so you have to travel across the dangerous lands of Volition to where you're going. And I think that Even Gardner as like, qualified pathfinder, the person who is like, on Ground Game has always been like: this is the direction we're going, I'm a military person - would, is the person who I want to frame that opening scene. I think this takes hours or days? Actually, I think this probably takes days. Maybe not, maybe this is just travelling, not really tracking [noise in the background]. You know what, maybe it's tracking more than it's trav- mm. No. I want the planet to be the thing that's dangerous. So, so yeah. It's travelling over the dangerous lands. I think it takes days. I think this is like, a march across this planet basically.

ANDREW: And this is the planet that Volition is kind of like, living on-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Andrew]: It is. It is Volition.

ANDREW [overlapping with Austin] : Okay, okay.

AUSTIN: Volition is- So there used to be four moo- there used to be two moons on Quire. When Gnosis hit, it gained four moons, because the planet got denser. Quire made itself, gave itself this weird, dense core that slowly built- brought in more moons. Because science fiction lets me do that. Then, the Iconoclasts have slowly been building a fifth moon, and that fifth moon is Volition.

AUSTIN: [continued] Each player makes one scene for the challenge - the person chosen by the player who picked the challenge makes the first scene. Followed by the player to their left, and then around the table clockwise. So in this case let's just go Even, let's go clockwise from Even, on our list here. Make, play, and finish each scene before starting the next. Scenes are the meat of the game, and your scene is your spotlight time. It's your chance to explore your relationship to other characters in the fellowship, what you think about the quest, and what you're doing to deal with the challenge. Use your scenes to lay the groundwork and put our plans in motion. But no matter what happens, we won't know if we succeed or fail at the challenge until everyone has made a scene. We may think things are going well or poorly but we won't know, we won't learn the outcome until we get to the climax. I have a question.

ANDREW: Yeah.

AUSTIN: What are we traveling on? Or in?

ANDREW: I was literally just thinking that. [Austin laughs] Because I was walking back to my computer I was like- are we in a ship?

AUSTIN: Yeah!

ANDREW: Are we in our mechs? Like what's-

AUSTIN: I think it's everyone's in a mech except Grand Magnificent who must be in another different mech.

ANDREW: Well, we have also canonically established that Grand Magnificent built himself a chair in the Amprunner.

AUSTIN: That's true.

[Andrew laughs]

JANINE: Korrin's probably not in a mech.

AUSTIN: Where is she?

JANINE: I was sort of vaguely sketching out Kim when we were talking about stuff- or Korrin Kim. Korrin.

AUSTIN: Korrin.

JANINE: I keep on calling her Kim.

AUSTIN: Kim's her last name. That's fine.

JANINE: I sort of sketched out here's so- hitwoman. She- have a description of her- er, I thought, for some reason, the ships in the Macross movie came to mind? I don't think it turns into a robot or anything I think-

AUSTIN: Uhhuh.

JANINE: -it's just like a cool jet thing?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: I just feel like she should have a jet.

AUSTIN: Okay, I can see her with a jet. Like a fighter.

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: And also a, a cool gun thing.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: But yeah like a, a fighter jet.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: Prolly could, could probably carry like one passenger.

AUSTIN: And Grand Magnificent is..? Question mark. Question mark. Question mark.

ART [overlapping with Austin]: Errr. I don't wanna like- I like this like, I like the mystery around where Grand Magnificent hangs out.

[all chuckle and laugh]

ART: I like that he doesn't have a place.

AUSTIN: Yeah. This isn't a situation where you've like quickly put together a mech for yourself or something- you're just in a seat somewhere?

ART: Yeah I think so. I think I'm just, hitching a ride with someone.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ANDREW: Are you in your Amprunner seat?

ART: I think that's external, I don't think that works in space.

AUSTIN: Maybe you just have like a bubble around it.

ART: Like in the Jetsons?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

[Andrew chuckles]

ART: Alright, sure yeah.

JANINE: Like in the Jetsons but the thing that Elroy has, or whatever the kid's name is, when they spit him out for school.

ART: Right, yeah.

AUSTIN: Alright.

ART: Done.

AUSTIN: [unintelligible] It's gonna be a doozy. Alright so, Dre, who, what, and where are we?

ANDREW: Okay. So I think the who, I guess like, give me a quick sketch of Blooming. Like how old is she, like how experienced she-?

AUSTIN [overlapping with Austin]: I mean- I think that she is, she wasn't around when you were around previously right, Signet?

JANINE: No. She's I think, she's- Signet was out of commission before Blooming was-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Yeah that's what I thought. I need to go to my actual Google Docs.

JANINE: I have, I think I have whatever we said about her in- [unintelligible]

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Yeah what do you have? Because that's probably in the Google Docs, but how do I find it? I bet you have it still.

JANINE: Maybe I don't- oh! Empyrean's Excerpt, Blooming. She stretched thin thirty years of harsh service.

AUSTIN: Here we go.

JANINE: Not a comfortable leader. Her full name is: To The Prince We Offered Twelve Thousand Flowers Blooming In An Untouched Field.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Yeah. Okay, so. She's been in service for thirty years, so she's probably in her mid to late forties at this point? Late forties, I'd say? Excerpts are yeah. Maybe in fifty, fifty five, something like that? Started in her twenties. She- I actually haven't- I never physically described her, probably?

JANINE: I don't know if we've ever physically saw her-

AUSTIN: Yeah. So I imagine that, I like to imagine something like a very similar to pets and their owners, right? Like, I think that she has a very avian frame and a very, like a very beak nose, very like hawkish nose. Large eyes. Think that she is- I mean it's like too on point, maybe it's too matchy-matchy. It's like she gets out of her big bird mech, and then is like a bird person, you know? Or alternatively, fuck it, I'm leaning in, and she has like- her hair is like up and back anime style? Do you know what I mean? Like not up, like it's straight hair and she's pulled it up. Like it's up and back, like it's blown out behind her up and back. She has this beak nose, I think she has big, big brown eyes and is in a very similar like suit to the one that Signet wears while in Belgard. Very similar like zero-G suit. So yeah, that's who Blooming is.

ANDREW: Okay. Then I would say that the scene is probably Even, Signet, and Blooming.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ANDREW: And this is- where they are is they're making their final approach.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ANDREW: As far as like, like maybe ten minutes out from landing on Volition.

AUSTIN: Okay. Cool. And at this point, Grand Magnificent is just in his bubble in the back.

ART: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Okay. Cool. Alright. So once the scene is set-up, start roleplaying. If you're in the scene, say what your character does, says and thinks. Play and see what happens. Each player controls the fate of their characters. If you want to do something to another player's character, describe your action and intended effect, and the player controlling that character decides the outcome. Don't be afraid to let bad things happen to your characters if it sounds interesting to you. Even if your main character dies or abandons the fellowship you always got a new character to play. Describe the losing characters and betrayal. Never describe succeeding or failing at the challenge in the scene. We won't know if we win or lose until after all the scenes have been played. If someone makes it sound like we've already succeeded or failed at the challenge we must also show how that is not the final outcome. The player making the scene has final say over who is present. No one can enter the scene without their permission.

AUSTIN: [continued] Consequences: if someone thinks that you described your character succeeding at something too easily, they can add a consequence. Describe how your action put another player's character in danger or difficulty. A consequence can be something you didn't want and could not have foreseen but is a side effect of your action nonetheless. Anyone can add a consequence, not just the players in the scene. If you're making the consequence you can put your own character in danger however you want, but if you want to have the consequence fall on someone else's character, describe your idea then adjust or negotiate till that player approves since they have final control over their character. Consequences are a tool to make sure that everyone stays on the same page about what's possible in your story and to avoid downplaying the difficulty the fellowship places- or faces. In some games you won't need consequences at all. You can even ask for someone to describe a consequence for something you do to invite their input and add drama.

AUSTIN: [continued] And finally end your scene. When in doubt, end your scene earlier than later. Shorter scenes are better than longer scenes. The player making the scene has final say over when to end the scene, but anyone can suggest that it's time to cut. How do you know when your scene is done enough? Every scene should advance the story. That doesn't mean you have to wrap up all the question you raised to end your scene. If you've shown some decision being made or revealed something about a character or the situation, that's a good scene. In fact, it's often more dramatic to leave new problems hanging and resolve them later. If you need to take some action to put what you talked about into effect, don't try to expand the scene to encompass that new situation. Either save it for later or just summarize doing it. As in, "after you finished the meeting, I go to the bridge, sneak past the guards, and planted demolition charges, end scene". This is a great end scene. After every player's finished making a scene, go on to finish the challenge to determine the outcome.

AUSTIN: [continued] Alright, so. We are in- we are like heading towards Volition at this point? And it is like, below us all bubbling and like, I almost said bubbling and bruising, which is like, not a phrase but, for Volition kind of is? I'm guessing so the three of us are in different, are obviously in our various mechs and in my mind this is like good anime cutscene. Like, it's the

formation of the mechs flying through space and then like intercut with close-ups of characters talking. So what's Even say?

ANDREW: Grand, when you built the Amprunner did it have any sort of like, planet-scanning on it? Like would it have the capability to be able to tell if it's like breathable atmosphere, gravity, blah blah blah?

ART: Like, from orbit? No.

ANDREW: Ok.

ART: That's beyond the scope of what we're doing.

ANDREW: Yes. Absolutely. So, I think Even radios over to, I guess Signet and Blooming, to basically get filled in on this information that he can't get himself.

AUSTIN: Blooming is like-

AUSTIN (as Blooming): My scanner's taking a little while, what does yours say, Signet?

JANINE: I think it makes sense that a healing based-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Oh yeah.

JANINE: -mech would be able to scan and see-

AUSTIN [overlapping entirely with Janine]: Yes a hundred percent.

JANINE: if people can be in a thing- (unintelligible???)

AUSTIN: Totally.

JANINE: -without being hurt. I think Signet's scanning but not giving a committal answer? Kind of just making a sound. And then she kind of nudges Belgard lower, and then notices as she goes lower, things seem to condense underneath. So like the atmosphere becomes a little more dense, the ground becomes a little more dense. So she nudges it a little more, and then notices that there is basically a sustainable space forming as they approach. Doesn't probably seem terribly stable if it's based on that.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: But, it probably- I have such a hard time with her voice.

JANINE (as Signet): We can probably make this work.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): That sounds more like a prayer than a fact.

JANINE (as Signet): Do we even land on this thing?

AUSTIN (as Blooming): I'll go down first. Emphyrean's jets will be able to pull back up if I need to.

AUSTIN: And she like swoops down. Emphyrean again, in my mind is like, a dope bird? In my mind, it has like a lot of, has like cool engravings on the wings that are like lines and circles. Lots of like concentric, geometric shapes and patterns. And like it has wings- its arms are wings, like it has hands and stuff, but they're at the end of wings. Basically it has talons at the ends of wings, and it has feet talons. It's like a big bird person. And, so she swoops it down towards Volition. And there's a point at which she dips out of visual contact, like she passes through clouds that you thought were the ground. And then you hear her say like, you hear like the comms shake for a second and she says

AUSTIN (as Blooming): I've landfall.

JANINE (as Signet): That sounded a little shakier than I would've liked,

JANINE: But, I think Signet follows. But like, a little bit slower. She's still a little nervous about this situation.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ANDREW: Erm, if you're going slower, then Even goes ahead of you. And his old, shitty, beat-up looking zoid.

[Art chuckles]

AUSTIN: Okay. That feels like scene to me.

ANDREW: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Right. Because then we cut to the second scene, which I'll set up. It is Blooming- so it always has to have your character in it. It's Blooming, I think it's all four of the main characters. No, I think this scene is Blooming, Grand and Korrin, actually. Korrin has gone on ahead as, Korrin needs a runway to land, and there isn't one, and so Korrin is basically [Janine chuckles] playing scout up in the sky right now. And I think this scene is Korrin guiding Blooming and co- maybe it's Korrin, it's Even, it's Grand, who I just want to be talking in this scene, and it's Blooming, kind of going through a- trying to find a path through an area that seems to be- it

looks like it's... trying to think what this is. Looks like it's liquid or does it look like it's, how would Korrin know from the sky that it's safe? Maybe just super dense? And they're looking for a pathway through it.

JANINE: I wonder if there's a floodlight sort of thing on the-

AUSTIN: Sure

JANINE: -underside of her thing and she sort of uses the refraction of that to determine what the ground condition is.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I like that a lot.

JANINE: If it's like malleable or solidified.

AUSTIN: Yeah. So I think that is the sequence here to start, and then if some other shit happens, some other shit happens, we'll see. I think we basically have Emphyrean at like, very low altitude flight at this point, with the Amprunner and everything else kind of near it. Okay. Blooming says:

AUSTIN (as Blooming): Strangest thing about this place is it never stays the same. Gardner.

ANDREW (as Even): Excerpt?

AUSTIN (as Blooming): You've been to another strange worlds, yes?

ANDREW (as Even): I... I've been the worlds. I don't think I've been to moons that were created in- respond, the way that this thing does.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): Fair. Korrin, do you see anything?

JANINE (as Korrin): I see a lot of things. You're gonna have to be way more specific.

AUSTIN (as Blooming) [overlapping with Janine]: Do you see a pathway forward for the Amprunner?

JANINE (as Korrin): [sighs] I... you know, if I'm staking the Amprunner on it I'm gonna say no, but-

AUSTIN (as Blooming): Grand Magnificent.

JANINE (as Korrin): What's it gonna hurt to try?

AUSTIN (as Blooming): Grand, why didn't you build jump jets on this thing?

ART (as Grand): It would be an eyesore.

[Austin sighs]

JANINE (as Korrin): Oh my god.

ART (as Grand): It's a-

ANDREW (as Even): I-

ART (as Grand): It's a fantastic mech build for the environment we were going to. I certainly think it can survive a little brush.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): What if the brush turns to flame?

ART (as Grand): It's made of metal.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): You're sitting on the outside of it.

ART (as Grand): I'm gonna be fine.

ANDREW (as Even): I have an idea. It's probably a bad one.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): I'm all ears.

ANDREW (as Even): Grand, can you keep Amprunner up in the air? While I get out.

ART (as Grand): Oh. There's no controls from my-

AUSTIN: [Austin chuckles] You didn't build in that part controls?

ART (as Grand): No, what-

JANINE (as Korrin): I mean if he's willing to stick that haircut on a landing maybe it'll be fine. [more chuckles around]

ART (as Grand): What kind of backseat driver- student-

AUSTIN: Err

[more chuckling around]

ANDREW (as Even): Can you just remotely interface with it and keep it hovering?

ART (as Grand): I mean. No, but I- we could switch.

ANDREW (as Even): Okay, well then get in here.

ART (as Grand): Alright.

ANDREW (as Even): I've got a planet to try and to talk to.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): Excuse me?

JANINE (as Korrin): Yeah what?

ANDREW (as Even): So when we ran into Independence before, I spoke to it. And I don't know if that will work here, but I mean it's better than guessing.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): So what do you do?

ANDREW (as Even): I... honestly talking to it is the best way that I can thi- explain that but it's I mean,... you know, I'm not using my mouth with words, it's... I don't know.

AUSTIN: [makes some noise]

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: You like, think at it?

AUSTIN: What do you learn, what do you say?

ANDREW: Is that Blooming asking or is that Austin asking?

AUSTIN: This is Austin asking.

ANDREW: I mean, this is basically think-speak but I think this is-

AUSTIN: Right right right-

ANDREW: this is Even interacting with it being like- how far are you willing to let us go? How much are you willing to show of yourself to let us get passage through here?

AUSTIN: Um, it speaks in- I think it speaks sort of the way Chthonic does, which is like, post- which is like in making you have feeling, in kind of post or pre-language? In pure emotional

response. It is disgusted that you're here and it asks you to come closer. And as you do that, the ground shifts such there is a land bridge that lifts up above the rest of the floor and becomes a bridge you can walk across.

ANDREW (as Even): Why is it disgusted?

AUSTIN: Do you ask that?

ANDREW: Yeah.

AUSTIN: To it or to everybody?

ANDREW: I'm willing to bet that that feeling is so overwhelming that he means to ask it.

AUSTIN: Right.

ANDREW: To just it, but then says it aloud.

AUSTIN: I think it makes you feel small, is the thing that it does in response. Signet or Grand, do you have an answer?

JANINE: Signet's not in the scene, right?

AUSTIN: She can be, if you want to be.

JANINE: I think-

AUSTIN: I mean if, if-

JANINE: Signet does have an answer.

AUSTIN: Sure.

JANINE: Or has an answer to a degree.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE (as Signet): I can't speak for what this is. But I can say that its relations find what we are and what we do and what we believe the highest form of [pauses in thinking] not even sacrilege, it's just a heinous thing to them that we do what we do. And exist as we exist.

AUSTIN: That sounds about right. And we take that land bridge, it sounds like. I think all- as we close the scene, you like look down around from the land bridge, and can see the ground shaking and shimmering in various ways. Sometimes you see hands and claws reach up out of the nothing and then fade away. Like nothing is stable is here yet. Or at least none of the things we've run into yet have been. I think that's my scene. Signet. Who, what and where?

JANINE: So we're crossing this land bridge?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: To what?

AUSTIN: To- we have a point on our scanners to where Independence crash landed.

JANINE: Okay. Sorry it's- it's weird to know what we can do here.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: Because it's a weird alien thing we've never looked at before.

AUSTIN: That's true.

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: It's so gross and doesn't like- and it thinks we're gross. Okay, who do we have here? I think, oh- I know what I want. I want a scene with Signet, Chthonic and Belgard.

AUSTIN: Sure.

JANINE: This seems like the one we should do right away.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

JANINE: I think this is the scene of them trying to extend- well I can't speak for Chthonic but it's like a scene of Signet and Belgard trying to extend their reach and gather as much information as they can before they walk into stuff?

AUSTIN: Sure. Like full scanner mode, like the- all power to scanner-

JANINE: Very much like, like full scanner, communications channel down, because we're having an internal conversation about what's going on before we decide what's worth presenting and what should be put forward. Also very much keeping an eye on for incoming threats.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Because this whole planet is like made of the stuff that's tacky sometimes, seemingly.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Yeah. So that's probably super concerning.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Fair. So how do you- how does Signet open- what's the opening image?

JANINE: I think you get- well there's gravity in the house, so it's probably a little weird in the cockpit, because normally if she's in space she's sort of floating and tethered and I think when there's gravity involved, the tethers become more of a suspension thing?

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: She has to sort of wind an arm around to kind of pull herself in the right direction and stuff- it's a little more awkward-

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: -basically.

AUSTIN: How tall is Belgard at this point? Because like, for Art and Dre, I just realised, last time you heard of Belgard it was like a 'pupal form on the side of spaceship'. And now its a butterfly person.

JANINE: Yeah, it is like a butterfly person. I don't think Belgard is the biggest of Divine? I don't think Belgard is the smallest Divine.

AUSTIN: Well it's big enough for you to be standing inside of the cockpit running and jumping-

JANINE: Yeah, there's significant space in there. There's probably like- I think it's like a bit bigger than the average room, but it's kind of like a room.

AUSTIN: Okay. Mhm.

JANINE: So I think Signet basically- there's the shot of Signet like jerking herself over to make sure that external communications are shut off.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: And then, she specifically addressing Belgard when she says like:

JANINE (as Signet): What can we see now?

JANINE: She's saying like what can we see right now? What do we have?

AUSTIN (as Belgard): I'm registering dozens of entities rising and falling all around us.

JANINE (as Signet): In unison? Or not in unison-

AUSTIN (as Belgard): Nothing like-

JANINE (as Signet): Acting together?

AUSTIN (as Belgard): No.

JANINE (as Signet): No.

AUSTIN (as Belgard): Only insofar as there is some similarity between them. They are-
[pauses slightly] they are of kin there ways pears and apples might be.

JANINE (as Signet): Is the fact that they're moving together more coincidence anything else? How deliberate does this-

AUSTIN (as Belgard): If enough-

JANINE (as Signet): Does this feel-

AUSTIN (as Belgard): If enough things move at once, some of them will be moving together.

JANINE (as Signet): Are they receding at the same rate that they are advancing?

AUSTIN (as Belgard): I can find no pattern.

AUSTIN: You can just describe what Chthonic does and makes us feel and- I mean we haven't seen Chthonic talk yet? But that doesn't mean Chthonic never talks, right?

ART: Sure.

AUSTIN: Chthonic has always been like, again, pre-verbal or post-ver, post-linguistic

JANINE: Theoretically communicating in desktop wallpapers also.

AUSTIN: Yes. Also desktop wallpapers.

ART: Okay. So like.

ART (as Chthonic): Really artsy picture of a thunderstorm.

AUSTIN: Right. Good.

ART: That's what I'm saying.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Art]: Well that's sort of- [Janine sighs, kind of] yes, okay. Okay.

ART: Well that was [unintelligible] like, the lightning is hitting a point, and the farm is in the foreground.

AUSTIN: Right.

AUSTIN (as Belgard): Worrying.

JANINE (as Signet): Very worrying.

AUSTIN (as Belgard): It hasn't had this much autonomy in months.

JANINE (as Signet): It's still walled, isn't it? It's still quarantined as much as it could be?

AUSTIN (as Belgard): Yes. Question mark?

JANINE (as Signet): It's a very certain- certain tone.

AUSTIN (as Belgard): It shouldn't be able to do that. Something's changed.

ART (as Chthonic): A photo of the Grand Canyon, but from the bottom, so you see the tall walls, but the sky above.

JANINE (as Signet): I suppose it's because we're here.

AUSTIN (as Belgard): Perhaps. I wish it would leave.

JANINE (as Signet): Me too. But, [sighs] if it's communicating with us, that seemed like an honest message. That didn't seem like-

AUSTIN: [stifled laughter] (reading off the chat) "A picture of a child laughing. No." [continues to hold back laughter]

[Janine chuckles too]

AUSTIN: [continued] Art in the chat says: "How can I get Grand Magnificent the screensaver talking thing?" You know, build another body, I don't know.

ART: I'll work on it.

AUSTIN: Okay.

AUSTIN (as Belgard): I sense a path down. There is something- the bridge is ending but there is something on the other end. It's vibrating quickly.

JANINE (as Signet): The path?

AUSTIN (as Belgard): I haven't sensed energy like this. The being [Janine as Signet makes an uncomfortable sound] at the end.

AUSTIN: And I think that's when it comes into view, which is- if it was a Divine it would be called Ebullience, but it's not joyful, it's just energetic in the most raw version of that. It moves in fast motion like horror movie villains. It shifts forms constantly. Humanoid for a moment then something like an animal and then geometric shapes. It holds them, now and then, as if to taunt you, as if to say "oh I could be a column, if I wanted to be- I could be a column of fire. But it's just as easy for me to be a very large ant." And it just moves with such rapidity and such energy that it is- insofar it is joyful, it is joyful in and on itself for its own ends. It is joyful because it enjoys what it is doing. It is Ebullience.

AUSTIN: [continued] I don't have a name for what these are yet? I was thinking- because they're not Divines. Because they don't have a place for people in them. I thought of like 'Exemplar'? But they're not in the metaphysics of the Iconoclasts. They are not examples of something. This is not an example of what the eternal form of Ebullience is, or of kind of joyful-energetic-ness is. It is, it- the Iconoclasts believed that those things don't exist in life until something brings them into life. And for them, that thing has to be untouched by people. And so it's not really an exemplar. It's like- it is the definition itself. I don't have a word for that quite yet.

JANINE: Hmm.

AUSTIN: Like, what is in an dictionary, but not just words. [chuckles] You know what I mean? Like what's another word for 'this thing is- *the thing*'. Outside of like form or something like that. I'll get there at some point, I'm sure, it's okay that we don't have this quite yet.

JANINE [overlapping heavily with Austin]: It's killing me because I feel like I have a word for this but I don't, you know what I mean?

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah. Maybe they're 'Axioms'. Like, it's self evident. [sounds of agreement from others] It's taken as self evident. I kind of like that.

JANINE: I don't know, that's good. I think that's good.

AUSTIN: Well sometimes you just name things on a podcast, you go 'oh, this is it now'.

JANINE: Yeah, that's the thing.

AUSTIN: What's the other- there's another one, there's another way of saying that like something that is- something that is like- Tautology? But that's not- that's too long. I kind of like Axiom better.

JANINE: Yeah.

ART: Yeah. Although like, yeah. No no never- no, nevermind.

AUSTIN: You gonna undercut it?

ART: Nope, I was gonna offer, just thinking it could just be: 'Taut'
(transcriber's note: when I heard this I almost fell off my chair because in 2k18 you know exactly what word this sounds like)

AUSTIN: No. Bad, bad. Not good.

ART [overlapping with Austin]: It works on a lot of levels.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ART: Short for Tautology?

AUSTIN [overlapping with Art]: Uhhuh I know.

ART: It's like the past tense of teach.

AUSTIN: Uhhuh. [amused] That's true, that's true.

ART: And then, like firm.

JANINE: Also, tater (tot).

AUSTIN: Some of them-

ANDREW: [whispered] Oh, God.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Andrew]: Mmm. Let's move on. They're Axioms. This is the Axiom Ebullience. Maybe dealing with it is actually the next scene. I'm think I'm gonna call scene. Or wait, that's Signet. That's Signet's scene, not my scene, I can't call scene.

JANINE: [chuckles] Yeah I think that, that seems like scene. I don't think- I think if we dealt with it in this it would be cheap.

AUSTIN: Mhm. But Grand Magnificent, you have a scene now. Dealing with the Axiom Ebullience. I need to write to down Axiom before I forget it.

ART: And I, I guess it's because it's kind of continuous, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: So I should probably take Even and Blooming.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Sure. I think Signet- I think we could all be there for sure.

ART: Sure.

AUSTIN: Totally up to you, though.

ART: I mean then yes. Signet should be there. Alright, so it's- I mean this isn't combat, so what we're doing is trying to- are we escaping?

AUSTIN: I don't know it's up to you. What are we doing- like what is, it could be combat, it's totally up to you. It could be trying to avoid it. It could be trying to get past it.

ART: Could we. Mm... I don't know what that would look like. I wanna like, I wanna subdue it, I wanna get more information.

AUSTIN: Well that's interesting. How would we do that?

ART: Umm.

AUSTIN: How do you solidify this thing that is by nature like, jumping all around, so to speak. I like that. I like this notion. I like that- that is way more interesting than 'let's kill it and keep moving'? Is that also something Grand brings up?

ART: Yeah. I wonder if I could- I wonder if Grand could trick it. You know like-

AUSTIN: Let's open on you saying we should capture it.

ART: Yeah. We should be trying to capture this thing. This thing is so valuable as a teaching tool. Let's-

AUSTIN (as Blooming): Magnificent, it's a monster.

JANINE (as Signet): We're not in a position to retrieve anything, except for what we're here for.

ART (as Grand): I'm- but no one's ever seen anything- think of the conceptual-

AUSTIN (as Blooming): The concept I'm interested in right now is survival.

ART (as Grand): I mean, I'm also- that's- I'm super into that too but, but we could- what if we, we could trick it? We could try to get it to take a form it can't leave? Or- or find some way to trap it?

JANINE (as Signet): We could do that.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): How could we do that?

ART (as Grand): I mean do you think it would imitate- do you think it would imitate designs?

AUSTIN (as Blooming): Hmm.

JANINE (as Signet): There does seem to be a kind of cockiness to it. Not cockiness, but, it is kind of showing off.

ANDREW (as Even): Definitely didn't get the vibe from it that it thinks that we can- we of all people and all things could trick it into doing anything.

ART (as Grand): I mean-

AUSTIN (as Blooming) [overlapping with Art]: I'll let you try this, Magnificent. Do not let me down.

ART (as Grand): It's never seen designs like mine.

JANINE (as Signet): We're not bringing it back as a toy, either.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): But we could learn from it. We could learn-

ART (as Grand): Lots of toys are educational, that's like a whole section of toys.

[Austin laughs loudly]

JANINE (as Signet): Perhaps if it's still here when we're on our way out.

ART (as Grand): Alright.

AUSTIN: So what do you do?

ART: I think what I- I think I try to like get it to imitate drawings. Like those light drawings.

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah. What do you draw? So you get out of the backseat of this mech,

ART: Yeah

AUSTIN: And walk to it in front of it? You like stand- it's towering you right now, right?

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's- not only is it towering over you, but it makes itself into a tower for a moment. Like-

ART: I draw a cube.

AUSTIN: I think it turns itself into a cube, but a real big one. And then like inside of that cube are millions of other cubes. Like it almost looks like Memorius for a second, staring back at you. That cube could be anything.

JANINE (as Signet???) [overlapping with Austin]: That's an inaccurate facsimile, then. What a bad job.

ART (as Grand???): Er yeah, also cubes are easy. Anyone can draw a cube. Eight year olds draw cubes.

ART: Yeah, Grand draws a lattice pattern, like an intricate-

AUSTIN: Hmm.

ART: Lattice.

AUSTIN: It like- I think for a brief moment it turns into- I think for a brief moment it turns into the shape of Independence, and like reaches a hand up, and then like lets its hand into a lattice pattern and the rest of it turns into a lattice pattern. It is like completely taunting you for sure.

ART (as Grand): Okay, this next one is one I need you guys to do in.

JANINE (as Signet): What?

ART: I make- look, it's gonna be obvious in a minute [Janine scoffs], you just have to be ready for this. I make tiny dots. Disparate, and spread out.

AUSTIN: Okay. It does it. It turns into, like falls into marbles.

ART (as Grand): Get em! Get the mar- get em!

[everyone bursts out laughing]

JANINE: You know what, fuck it. I think I- I think Signet does. I think Signet-

[Austin groans]

ART (as Grand?): Grab a handful of marbles.

JANINE: This is not-

ANDREW [overlapping with Janine]: Are we picking them up? Are we shooting them?

[Janine makes an exasperated sound. Janine and Austin overlap heavily]

AUSTIN: No I think it's picking them up,

JANINE: Fuck

AUSTIN: -we're like we're scooping 'em,

JANINE: No, I-

AUSTIN: -we're gooping the scoop.

JANINE: Okay.

ART (as Grand?) [overlapping with the rest]: [unintelligible] Keep 'em apart.

JANINE: So the thing Belgard did in battle was, Belgard shields people and heals them.

ART [overlapping with Janine]: Yeah, let's use some shields.

JANINE [overlapping with Art]: That was her primary function- yes, that's the thing I'm saying.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: I think Signet has a moment of 'this is the dumbest fucking shit' and then is like 'oh right' and then like there's no shield button to like slam?

AUSTIN: Uhhuh.

JANINE: But I think there's some equivalent where like, I don't know if it would be- I think there's an energy component and a physical component to shielding.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: But I think it's basically one of the plates that makes up the butterfly wings? Shoots out, and sort of forms itself around some of the marbles, and then it sort of like charged.

AUSTIN: Right. You don't think like a bunch of the wings fly off and go do that? Or a bunch of the pieces from the wings fly off and go do that? To give like a bunch of little groups of marbles?

JANINE: Yeah sure that makes sense too.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Cause the thing that I'm thinking is the consequence here is you don't have your shield for the next round.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Or the next like scene, is because you're here holding it back and your wings will come back to us once we get to a far enough distance away?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Do you take any of them, Grand? Let's get this-

ART [overlapping with Austin]: Of course. Grand like fills a pocket with.

AUSTIN: Nice.

[Andrew groans]

JANINE: Nearly like loses his hand to a shield that's flying and sinking into the ground.

[Austin chuckles]

AUSTIN: I just really want the image of Grand holding up the marble, to the sun or whatever. Like yeah, cool. It also just like there is no, it doesn't look like there is a, an atmosphere here. Like there aren't clouds in the sky. It is just- you see space from down here.

AUSTIN: [continued] Okay. We did it. We did a full sequence. We did a full wraparound here. End the scene. Then finish the challenge. After every player has made one scene for the challenge, we see if the fellowship has succeeded or failed. If this is the third challenge, which it isn't, blah blah blah. We'll draw stones to determine the outcome and then narrate the results. Sometimes the outcome will surprise us, but even when it's not what we expected, it's our job to explain it. Interpreting those unexpected results can push our stories in exciting and new directions that you wouldn't have thought of on your own.

AUSTIN: [continued] First and second challenge draw. Start with no stones in the pool, add one white one red. I think I remember how we did this last time so don't even worry about it. Each player takes two red into their hands. If your main character is unhappy about the path the fellowship has taken, hold one red stone. If your main character actually wants to quest to fail, hold two red stones, otherwise hold no stones. So i'm gonna ask we all type without hitting enter, we're gonna type how many red stones we have into chat, and then i'm gonna do a countdown, and then i'm gonna say we hit enter.

ANDREW: Wait, hold on. Remind me what the colours are again-

AUSTIN: One red- so right now it's just red, we're just talking about red stones for this question. One red stone if you're unhappy about the path the fellowship has taken, and two if you want it to fail.

ANDREW: Okay. And zero is a legit number?

AUSTIN [overlapping with Andrew]: Yep. Zero is a legit number. So.

ANDREW: Okay.

AUSTIN: Tell me when you're ready, and we should all hit enter. Is everyone ready?

JANINE: Yep.

ART: Yep.

ANDREW: Yes.

AUSTIN: Three, two, one.

[short pause]

AUSTIN: [continued] Alright! Zero red stones. Then, each player takes one white and one red. Read aloud. As a player, do you think the fellowship did what was necessary to succeed at the challenge. Hold white if yes, red if no. Decide secretly then reveal simultaneously, add them to the pool. So one white or one red, type. And then, tell me when you're all ready.

ART: Mhm.

JANINE: Mhm.

ANDREW: Ready.

AUSTIN: Three, two, one.

[hits button]

AUSTIN: [continued] Boom! Four white. That's a good one.

JANINE: Yay!

AUSTIN: Put the stones in the cup without looking, draw one stone and reveal it, then draw and reveal a second. Don't put the first stone back before drawing the second. So here's what I'm gonna do. We have one red stone and we have five white stones. It always starts with one red one white. So that means that I'm gonna roll a d6, and one is the red. So there's the first roll.

AUSTIN: [continued] That is a six, so that's white. And now I'm gonna roll, because it's two different rolls.

ART: You're gonna roll a d5?

AUSTIN: Imma roll a d5.

ART: Because you don't replace the- yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, exactly. And again the one is the red. I typed it- ah, two! There we go. Two. Alright so two white! So on the challenge card, put a check next to the challenge if you succeeded. Or an X if you failed. So, succeeded, means, check mark. Boop! Nice. Also I should

be- look up your results on the 'describing the outcome' table. White-white is you win the challenge. All it takes is one red to lose a character so, it's like that.

[Janine sighs]

AUSTIN: Alright.

[Art or Andrew chuckles]

AUSTIN: As you- as a group describe the outcome of your challenge, match the results of your draw. If this was the third challenge, describe the outcome of the entire quest. If any characters were lost, agree as a group who it was and what happened. It can be a main or minor character but the player losing the character has final say over what happened to them. We're not gonna get into that right now, because who's gonna lose characters? Not us!

[Janine groans]

[Andrew chuckles]

ANDREW: Not this well-formed team.

AUSTIN: Nope! Definitely no already seeing cracks in the armour. So yeah, I think we get far enough away and, what else happens? Does anyone else have like an image in their head?

ANDREW: [Andrew makes a noise] I don't know, does that marble do anything weird?

AUSTIN: I think- no, I don't think so, not yet. But what I do think is true is like, we reach a point where the dangerous terrain is not an- is not the active threat? Like, we reach some space that looks like something, and that has stabilized. Like maybe Inde- like you know what it is? I think we reach- so, both Grand and Even will know- actually even Signet will know this now, like in character, Signet. Well Janine hasn't heard this episode yet. But we reached the corpse of Independence. We reached the old corpse of Independence. This giant battleship that's like 'what if a millipede instead of legs had guns and what if it was all around it'? And it was this like, gross weird like- it's all mechanical but it still feels bio-technical, bio-mechanical. And it's like, it is built in black glass. It's like a perfect replica, and we're on the beach. Like we get away from that thing and find a way to what is basically a replica of the island where Independence's old body was destroyed and somewhere in there, in the black glass replica of Independence is the new body of Independence. Presumably looking for its mind. Like guided to it. So that's what I think our success looks like.

AUSTIN: [continued] Alright. I think Janine is next, right? I think we go clockwise- so I did first, I set the first- I picked the first challenge, Janine now picks the second challenge. And those are below us again.

JANINE: Yeah. Is the big black glass thing, would that be considered a lair? Or is it like a big object.

AUSTIN: That could be a lair, it's up to you. Do you want to explore the beast's lair, is that what you're suggesting?

JANINE: We said there's a thing in there that's doing the searching for the mind so-

AUSTIN: Yep.

JANINE: That kind of seems like an 'explore the beast's lair' thing.

AUSTIN: I'm cool with that.

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: Unless we're still like, tracking like, the heart or whatever, you know?

AUSTIN: No, it's here. The mind is here, it is here.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: For sure.

JANINE: Then this is definitely explore the beast's lair.

AUSTIN: Like, yeah, I even think that at this point Belgard is able to say like, you know, "I'm tracking Independence and its mind separately."

JANINE: Great.

AUSTIN: Blooming is like "Yeah, they're definitely here." I'm not a liar at all.

JANINE: Honey. Okay. So I'm picking whose in the first scene for this then right?

AUSTIN: Yeah, you're picking who you think would be the-

JANINE: The frontlines getting into it..?

AUSTIN: Who- yeah who do you think would, so first you tell us what makes the challenge difficult and why we need to do it. And then you decide which main character you think would be the first to decide how to deal with the problem.

JANINE: Okay. The thing that makes it difficult is I think, finding a way in. Seems like a challenge. But also the idea of like, you don't know what the fuck's in there. Really.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Like you kinda know. You have like two points on a list of kind of knowing and the rest is a bit of a mystery.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: I think, so I think that is the big problem- I think the people best suited to getting in there, would be, I think Grand and Even.

ART: We have been here before.

JANINE: Yeah, exactly.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: That's true.

JANINE: Trying to think if there's anyone else who. I think maybe Korrin would like insert herself? A little?

AUSTIN: Right. She'd be flying from above, basically.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: This thing is like the size of like a major city. This thing is like, what if Manhattan was a battleship. And instead of buildings it had guns. Except now they're made of weird black glass.

JANINE: Mhm. Is there anything I'm forgetting, sorry.

AUSTIN: Nope, you're good. You got it.

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: Okay.

AUSTIN: So then, who is leading this scene? Is it Even or is it Grand?

JANINE: I wanna say Grand.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: That's a great choice.

JANINE: Yeah.

ART: I know a lot about mechs.

[Janine and Andrew chuckle]

AUSTIN: So then, Grand, you then choose what this scene looks- actually sorry, you know what? You actually, Janine, you just pick who that main character is.

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: Oh, okay, sorry.

AUSTIN: Then, that player sets the scene.

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: Sorry. I'm a little sleeping today.

AUSTIN: That's okay. It's also a weird roll that we always-

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: Yeah. Yup.

AUSTIN: We forgot last time too. And also, it's late, so.

JANINE: I'm gonna pick Grand then.

AUSTIN: Mmkay.

ART: Alright, I do agree with all of your choices.

[Janine and Andrew chuckle in agreement]

ART: Us out here. And I mean, how old is this body?

AUSTIN: The one that we're looking at? Like the glass one?

ART: No, the battleship, the-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Art]: That's what I mean. The big fake- that, sorry-

ART [overlapping with Austin]: The real milli- No, yeah.

AUSTIN: The real glass one. I mean the milli- the real one is from ten thousand years ago. This one, you're not sure this has been here. This might just be, a projection. In the same way that Ebulience was.

ART: Mm.

JANINE: So Tomorrow Children shit.

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah. This is totally some-

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Thank you Janine, yes. This whole place is some Tomorrow Children shit. If you haven't seen Tomorrow Children, look up the Tomorrow Children and just like, big weird structures that like- a weird glassy, neutral coloured you know, ground that is like hard to see when it's safe to walk on and when it will kill you instantly

JANINE: People interested in this will have to look it up too because it'll be closed by the time this goes out.

AUSTIN: [chuckles] That's true and sad.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: God. So yeah, Art. I think it's fair to even assume at this point that this is here because the mind of Independence is here, and this is a projection of the mind of Independence.

ART: Okay, but it's- it seems to be approximately the same the-

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's like it remembers what its body was and not having that body present, it is project- it is building its own body out of the weird black goo that is Volition. Out of the potential that is Volition, but it's not a body, and the mind is not strong enough itself. Like, Independence was a Divine, it is not yet melded with Volition.

ART: But I think what I'm looking for in terms of like access to this layer, is the space that would be there, that would have to be there, for the real body. I want- I'm looking for the vent, I'm looking for the access.

AUSTIN: I mean there are- think about this like, do you know how the Death Star has a bunch of trenches and shit on it?

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like that is what this body is- like there are plenty of places it could be, in terms of like, narrowing it down. Like it's just- it's covered in long trenches between guns. It has all sorts of vents all over the place. I'm cool with Grand like being- finding a way in. But I just want a fun, interesting way that he pulls that off.

ART: I mean I think it's like, it's like he just stares at it? He's I mean- that's like the least interesting thing- I think it's like- he stares at it and everyone gets more and more exasperated at him? Like- and then it's like: oh, there.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Art]: [chuckles] This- you just have Korrin do like, not laps, but like, flyovers over and over again, scanning it and like, sending down data that you're making with like your laser hands?

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: Korrin probably strafes it after he takes too long. Just like, [Austin scoffs] maybe I'll shoot a hole in it, I don't know. It's the [Austin laughs] 'pick up a chair and throw it at the paint monster' school of figuring things out.

AUSTIN: Totally. Totally. I think like the missile hits it or whatever? And then like instead of shattering or breaking it goes full Akira and like, gets really big and bulbous and the explosion is held inside of it. Like a big boil.

JANINE: Gross.

AUSTIN: It's gross.

JANINE: That was an in character exclamation: gross.

AUSTIN: Oh, okay. But then you just eventually find something?

ART: It's just like yeah, I need more time. It's there. It's definitely there.

JANINE (as Korrin) [overlapping with Art]: You're a designer, where would you design a-door? Vent? Whatever the fuck.

AUSTIN: Oh so yeah, maybe that's where it is, Grand. Maybe what you're doing is, you're X-ing off the potential pathways to like the center? Where you're like, it could on the surface go in any number of ways, but you know that like, almost like, what's that game with the pipes? And you need to get the liquid through it? Like hacking in Bioshock?

ART: Yeah, what is that game, Pipe Dream?

JANINE [overlapping with Art]: Hacking in Bioshock.

AUSTIN: Pipe Dream. [Janine chuckles] Is actually what it's called originally. Like you're X-ing off the places that would be dead ends. Or like there's another thing- it's like there's a maze, like a maze. You're X-ing off dead ends, or like okay, it's too tall. It's too wide. It wouldn't be able to get through this door. This vent would be you know, is closed off on this side, so that means it's

probably closed on this other side. And bit by bit, it's just like this perfect, perfect blueprint of the old body of Independence. With all of these little red X icons glowing on top of it.

ART: Yeah, I think that is it. It's like, reverse engineering it from the outside.

AUSTIN: Right. And then you find like a pathway through?

ART: Yeah, I think so.

AUSTIN: Cool. Alright. Set the scene. What's the scene- what's the way through? Like give- let's give Even something to start the next scene out of. Like what is the way in?

ART: I think it is it's like- there's a trench that looks like every other trench and you walk down for a few hundred yards and suddenly like, gets much wider?

AUSTIN: Mmm.

ART: And then it's like, I don't wanna- that's like too- but like there's it's honestly like a giant- [pauses and sighs]. This is too specific a pull but like, you know the LA River?

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's been on movies.

ART: It's, most- Yeah, most of the time it's like not very big it's this little like trickle of a river?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: And there are sections where it's just like, oh you could drive a car in here and drive for example. Or like, there's even-

AUSTIN: Yeah. Or Terminator 2.

ART: Yeah, there's even like bigger, yeah like- a semi truck, this goes from like trickle trickle trickle, semi-truck, and there's like this big, I'm assuming busted open grate.

AUSTIN: Okay. And that's you find this big- which is interesting because like, we've seen what a missile does to this thing. So why- what's this look like when you say it's busted open? What's it look like?

ART: I think it's like torn.

AUSTIN: Okay. I think you can see like, torn like jeans? Like torn like armour?

ART: Torn like wrapping paper.

AUSTIN: Oh. That's awesome. Cool. Yeah. That's like it's nothing.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Great. Okay. Is that scene?

ART: I think so, yeah.

AUSTIN: Alright. Even. Your scene.

ANDREW: Boy we're just spelunking into the-

AUSTIN: Yeah

ANDREW: -body of this old Divine.

AUSTIN: Yup.

ANDREW: Okay. Well I guess- so Even has to be in the scene, right? The scene that I make?

AUSTIN [overlapping with Andrew]: Yes, this is your scene. Yeah.

ANDREW: Okay. I think I want a scene with Belgard and Chthonic?

AUSTIN: Oooh, okay. And Even.

ANDREW: Yeah. Yeyeyeah.

AUSTIN: Okay. How are they communicating to you?

ANDREW [overlapping with Austin]: That's a really-

AUSTIN: What's it look like?

ANDREW: Good question. Cause is Bel- I mean, I guess- is this hole big enough for Belgard to get in? And the other Amps- the other mechs to get in?

ART: Yeah, it's definitely that big. Like you could put- you could probably get a Tyrannosaurus in here. [Art chuckles]

AUSTIN: Is that- okay. Are T-Rexes big?

ANDREW: Yeah. What? Yeah!

AUSTIN: Like big enough for Signet to jump around inside of? I'm trying- I still don't have Belgard's scale. Is really what it comes down to.

JANINE [overlapping heavily with Austin]: I mean the thing with Belgard also is she's in a very expanded form right now. But she can also just like, be pupa shaped again [Austin makes unintelligible words] and like slug along in there if she needs to.

AUSTIN: Right. I'm just trying to figure out if Belgard is a Godzilla or a Gundam. Do you see what I mean? Like those are two different scales.

JANINE: It depends on which Godzilla you're talking about really.

AUSTIN: I've got- [Art chuckles] Like, the- we described Independence as being like four floors tall. Or something, right?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like forty feet tall. Which is different than the knights, the Saints on Ground- are like two stories tall. So there's a b- I'm fine with there being a big difference, but I do want to get it firm in my head if Belgard is a Voltron or a Macross.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: One Macross. [Andrew chuckles] That's what they're called. Big fan. Sorry, a big Macross fan. That's definitely- A big BattleTech fan.

ANDREW: Macross

JANINE: I think erm-

AUSTIN: *Macross*.

JANINE: -on that scale like, probably like, three floors? Like, bigger than a Saint but smaller than Independence?

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: She's big, but again she can make herself like a tube.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I'm just trying to like again, like, it's rare that mechs have big spaces where you can run and jump around inside of them?

JANINE: Yeah, again it's like the size of a room-ish. And that's probably-

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: -in her widest point, so like either her.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: It's probably like in her hips, actually. It's probably like in that area-

AUSTIN: She have like dope big hips that are like actually- [unintelligible] cockpit? It's not-

JANINE: I imagine her as like extremely bottom heavy, yeah.

AUSTIN: Right, cool.

JANINE: She thicc.

AUSTIN: Alright. Okay. Good to know. Good to know that Belgard is thick. It's 2017, even robots. Alright. So then, yeah- Even, give me that scene.

ANDREW: Oh man. I guess it just goes back to how he's talking to them, huh.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Like does Chthonic reach out?

ANDREW: Oh I- could it be that like, Chthonic is forming like a weird bridge between the three of them?

AUSTIN: Totally, could be. Chthonic can do a lot of things.

ANDREW: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Just hasn't in a while.

JANINE: And that would kind of bring Belgard along for the ride in a way.

AUSTIN: Oh yeah, totally. Yeah, Belgard be like- where am I?

ANDREW: Cause I think that opens an interesting opportunity which I think is what Even wants to communicate? Is like, that awful experience he had interfacing in Independence?

AUSTIN: Mm, okay.

ANDREW: And, I don't think that's something he could verbalize, but if he is able to connect with them like, through his hybrid-ness and Chthonic is like able to even further bridge that?

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think that that's totally fair. Especially cause like, you're in a mech right now too. You know?

ANDREW: Yeah.

AUSTIN: What's that Chthonic- what's that look like? What does reaching out to Even look like?

ART: I think it's very dream like.

AUSTIN: Mm.

ART: I think it's like- I'm like, kind of like the dream like in the way- I don't wanna be like- the way they describe it in Inception but like, you don't remember how you got there. And you get ideas that are vague and kind of like self-referential, like it's a lot of what you brought into it?

AUSTIN: Right.

AUSTIN: Like if you're coming in here because you wanna get satisfaction after your interaction with Independence, you're gonna like kind of have a bad time?

[Austin chuckles]

ANDREW: I don't know if it's satisfaction or if it's more like, it's- I think- so that was Even's first, probably real interaction with anything remotely resembling a Divine? And previously the Divines were these things that he- I mean he idolized.

AUSTIN: Right.

ANDREW: He put everything he had into defending and holding up the values of these Divines that he had lionized in his head, and the first time he meets one it scares the shit out of him.

AUSTIN: Right.

ANDREW: And goes against everything that he thinks is important? And I think it's almost him reaching out to Belgard to be like, is it like, is what I thought true? Are you all different or better than this?

AUSTIN: What if the place this is happening is, that underground city you saw at the start of all this? Covered in that bioluminescent like, stuff? The old Quire city?

ANDREW: Oh, yeah,

AUSTIN: Like that's the weird dream space? And also the camera doesn't recognize it as a weird dream space? You're walking through the guts of Independence, and you turn a corner and here's like this old, dark, abandoned Quire city, the one that you didn't- that you decided not to go down to? Like, covered in this glow? What's Chthonic look like here? Is it just that? Chthonic, is that just like, it is the city, it is this kind of dilapidated, abandoned place?

ART: Yeah I think that's right, but I think there's like a - god I just have the worst ideas right now - you know when you're in a really cool person's car?

AUSTIN: Uhhuh.

ART: And like, the cupholders, have like a bright coloured light coming out of them?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ART: What if it was like that, for like, the whole city? Like all the-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Art]: All the houses?

ART: The nooks of the houses and the buildings and like the alleyways and the gutters. What if there was just like, a kind of like, neon-y purple coming out of that?

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: Just trying to make it look a little like, otherworldly,

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: Even though, it's literally otherworldly already?

AUSTIN: Mhm. And then I guess we get this other version of Belgard, right? Which is, like it's maybe corny? But I think it is still just a butterfly, like down here it's just like, a glowing, gold butterfly, that's like flapping around you. Maybe it's not just one. It's one butterfly and then you see all of these other- the ones trailing it? Which are like the people it's protecting, the people that it has- that Signet has fed its true names to? To it? And just like, over and over again like, flapping around you and guiding you deeper into this place. What do you see down here, Even?

ANDREW: Oh, God. I'm even trying to remember- I mean there was like- I mean there were buildings, right? I mean there were like-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ANDREW: -empty homes, and-

AUSTIN: I think that's kind of what it focuses on. I think maybe what Belgard tries to communicate to you is that it, it leads you through the homes of people. And it like, as these little butterflies like, sits on mugs, half-empty, and on you know, the empty shoes, on hats that hang on hat racks. It rests all over the places people were. As if to communicate like, I'm committed to 'us'. This is what a Divine can be like, even when the place is dark and strange as this. It is trying to comfort you. Chthonic do you intercede in any way?

ART: Absolutely not.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ANDREW: I think that's scene.

AUSTIN: Okay. So my scene is, I want Blooming, Signet, and Even here? And I think it is [pauses] I think it's just like, Blooming is like

AUSTIN (as Blooming): Gardner. Gardner? Snap out of it, Gardner.

AUSTIN: I wanna see like, maybe we were resting for like, thirty minutes to let us you know, let our machines rest, and do their oil changes or whatever [Janine chuckles] their like, maintenance mode. And we're like down some side vent? And I just really want Signet to overhear us, and to unintentionally or- maybe completely unintentionally at first, maybe our voices just carry through some weird vent? So that it isn't that she's just being a shitty eavesdropper?

JANINE: I mean, Signet does have a- an ear thing.

AUSTIN: That's true. That's true.

JANINE (overlapping with Austin): Using it- I mean she could conceivably be using it in this situation especially if Belgard's resting or, you know-

AUSTIN (overlapping with Janine): Right. Right.

JANINE: Occupied. She could be keeping a ear out. Probably.

AUSTIN (overlapping with Janine): Fair. I think maybe Belgard, Signet has been like, after the thing that just happened, "Imma just run some maintenance, and make sure that Chthonic isn't gonna do any shit."

JANINE (overlapping with Austin): Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: "I don't know why I was in that city." Alright, so. Blooming at this point has pulled Even aside. And is like, very clearly nervous but is- she's like framing her nervousness, her nervous energy as an interrogation? And she's just like,

AUSTIN (as Blooming): Alright Gardner, I need you to walk me through your last encounter with this thing. What happened? How can I beat it?

ANDREW (as Even): The only thing that we had to damage it was the bullets that Cascabel made. And I mean when I last saw it, mean I- I killed its pilot, I took out some of its weaponry but. I mean it's huge, I mean it's four storeys tall. It's made of this special Q-Glass, it's almost impregnable, it's.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): How do I kill it?

ANDREW (as Even): [sighs and pauses] You know Divines better than me, Excerpt.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): [sighs] Stop calling me that. My name is Blooming. It- my name- [sighs]

ANDREW (as Even): If you- How would you kill Emphyrean?

AUSTIN: She like lowers her head.

ANDREW (as Even): Or if it's easier to think about, how would you kill Belgard?

AUSTIN (as Blooming): No, it's. Not easier to think about that. Gardner, I don't know what happened. [whispers] Emphyrean isn't talking to me anymore. Not since Gumption. It's like, it's like Emphyrean isn't there. I'm holding it together as best I can. The Fleet can't know that there's no one at the wheel.

ANDREW (as Even): You're at the wheel.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): I'm a person. I'm a fifty three year old woman who has done a pretty good job. But it is touch and go. Help me get- [stammers for a bit] You're good with these things. You have those wings. I have wings. How did you get your wings to talk to you?

ANDREW (as Even): They don't- they don't talk to me, they just are. That's. That's like me asking how you get your lungs to talk to you.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): Exercises. [Andrew chuckles] Deep, deep breathing.

ANDREW (as Even): Blooming, you may think you're just a person but, I mean, when I spoke with Independence, it even wanted me. It still wanted a person. [pauses, Austin grunts in acknowledgment] We're still important in all this.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): What if we could save it and, and then I could- what if me in Independence could become-

ANDREW (as Even): [interrupting Blooming] No, no, no.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): The Fleet needs Divines.

ANDREW (as Even): It doesn't need that Divine.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): I wish I knew more about it.

ANDREW (as Even): I wish that I could give you what I knew and then I didn't have to think about it anymore.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): Fair.

ANDREW (as Even): D-Do you want me to try to connect with Empyrean?

AUSTIN (as Blooming): Could you do that?

ANDREW (as Even): I could try.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): Quickly. No one can see.

ANDREW (as Even): Okay.

AUSTIN: And then like we go back. Signet do you interfere at any point? Do you watch? Do you-

JANINE: I don't think- Signet certainly doesn't interrupt. I think she stays pretty much where she is? I think she's probably like, sitting sort of on the exterior of Belgard somewhere. Just kind of, my- you know doing the very cartoonish sort of like "I'm minding my own business" [Austin laughs] "Just minding my own business". I don't think she interrupts specifically because. When someone's telling someone else something in confidence,

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: You don't get anywhere by interrupting that confidence.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Is this a sequence where like Cascabel and Korrin are maybe talking to Signet, and she's just like "Yeah, Mhm, Ha ha. Ha ha cool."

[Andrew or Art chuckles]

JANINE: Well, I, I don't know, that makes it a little more complicated cause like, I oft- I sort of see Signet as someone who does listen genuinely when people talk to her.

AUSTIN: Okay, that's fair, that's fair.

ANDREW [overlapping with Janine]: Yeah, that is not [unintelligible]

JANINE: So I feel like if people were talking to her and she was occupied she would just be honest with them and be like, can we talk about this in a second? Or-

AUSTIN: [chuckles] Yeah, she's definitely eavesdropping. Alright. So what's this look like? How do you use your abilities to kind of look for Emphyrean in here?

ANDREW: I don't think- Even would get in, like that feels like, I mean that's almost blasphemous to Even. So I think he just puts his hand on the outside of Emphyrean and then it's- it's like that. I mean it's that- the experience of when he got the wings, cause like his fingers kind of like expand and flatten out and kind of, I guess become more like tendril-y or something.

AUSTIN: Right. And you connect and I- I can just tell you this because it's true about the world. It's just a machine. If there is any Emphyrean in there, it is [sighs]. Maybe you find something here. Which is, like, effectively, deep deep down inside you find like, the log, so to speak? You find the black box. And it is the moment that Chthonic comes into being and before it finishes leaving the body of Emphyrean and its very first thought is, the feeling- actually, Chthonic, what does an apology look like?

ART: One of those like, macro images of a flower?

AUSTIN: [laughs] Does it say- no it doesn't because there's no words. But yes, I get what you're saying. Yeah, like a deep- oh! You just mean like- macro like, super close up.

ART: Mm.

AUSTIN: Not macro as in an image macro that has text at the bottom.

ART: No.

[Andrew chuckles]

AUSTIN: Good. Fuckin'. Hey.

ART [overlapping with Austin]: I mean. Very close.

AUSTIN: Don't be online. God. Fucking. Me. Alright. So I think that's what you find. There are all sorts of lairs.

ANDREW: Oh boy, Austin is that scene or?

AUSTIN: I think that's my- for my side that's scene for sure.

ANDREW: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Signet?

JANINE: Okay. So we're in here. We're in this. We're looking for the thing. We're all rested up now.

AUSTIN: We are.

JANINE: We're all slightly nervous about things we've overheard other people say. [others chuckling in the background]

AUSTIN: Yes.

ANDREW: We're all engaging in existential dread.

JANINE: Nervous is the wrong word. But, feeling. We're all feeling certain things. Okay, I think [groans] I think the next thing is like, we have to move deeper? Obviously?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: We need to actually get to the brass tax of finding this moving thing once everyone's kind of rested up.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: So I think Signet, shit. You know, we need a scene with Cascabel.

AUSTIN: We do.

JANINE: Never mind that actually, okay, maybe it's not searching. Maybe it's the sort of like, we're looking for this thing, what do we do when we actually find it? And that's-

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Definitely a Cascabel scene. Man, okay. I think, Cascabel and- I think this is Cascabel, Belgard and Signet because I think Signet missed out on Cascabel doing their shit on the Ground Game?

AUSTIN: Right, right.

JANINE: And wants to know more about that in a way that she can maybe make useful, and sort of presumes that Grand and Even are already kind of in loop on that.

AUSTIN: Gotcha. Where is this? So just like deep in the depths of this thing?

JANINE: Yeah. I think this is maybe after like, the stuff with Even and Blooming kind of.

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah.

JANINE: [unintelligible] so awkwardly, and Signet's like, okay we need to get back into it, she probably I think calls Cascabel over, and like you know, hops off of Belgard's shoulder onto the ground.

AUSTIN: Mhm. And says?

JANINE: And says:

JANINE (as Signet): I need to know about those bullets.

ANDREW (as Cascabel): Okay, yeah, what do you wanna know? It's pretty proud of them.

JANINE (as Signet): As you should be. So they took a very long time to make, yes?

ANDREW (as Cascabel): Yeah. I mean, it's not the making, it's the gathering. The glass I need it's- they told you, right?

JANINE (as Signet): Yes.

ANDREW (as Cascabel): Electric energy(?), thousands of years. Yeah, it- I thought we had more than we ended up having? [Austin laughs]

AUSTIN: Oh. Janine, er, hmm. Even ate a bunch of the glass.

JANINE: Black holes(?) Wait, what?

AUSTIN: Even no- Yep. Mhm. Ya.

ANDREW: Mhm.

AUSTIN: One of Even's beliefs is, like just this desperate need to consume new technology, literally physically. And so he ate a bunch of the charged glass.

ANDREW: Like potato chips, I think was the thing we used to describe it.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uhhuh.

ANDREW: But nobody else knew.

JANINE: Well that- how long ago was that?

AUSTIN: A while. Like bef- the last adventure?

JANINE: Okay. Is that stuff like gum? Like it stays in your stomach for a month or whatever?

AUSTIN: Oh we don't know this. Even didn't-

JANINE: Oh. OH KAY. Okay okay. Okay.

AUSTIN: This is out of character, I'm letting you know.

[Janine continues to be uncomfortable]

AUSTIN: God.

ANDREW: Listen. I've definitely had that thought though.

JANINE: Woof.

AUSTIN: My god. Woof, no.

ANDREW: I just have bullet juice running around inside Even right now.

JANINE: Geez.

ANDREW: I mean that is something- you do have that in you in a weird way. No, this is bad, I'm not, no- I'm not doing, no-

ART: Do we have to call it bullet juice? [someone laughs] Is that name a part of this forever now?

[Austin groans]

JANINE: I like the idea that Even's just like a Yoshi but with bullets.

AUSTIN: Oh my god.

JANINE: Bullet time it eats like a lychee-

AUSTIN: I think. Throw eggs.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Or vomit.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like in Super Mario Sunshine, it's great. A game for children.

JANINE: Mm.

AUSTIN: The vomiting dinosaur.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: Alright is Belgard bigger or smaller than a Yoshi? No, okay.

[Andrew laughs]

JANINE (as Signet): Okay, so [sighs] the materials of the bullets are completely what made them effective?

ANDREW (as Cascabel): Well you know, the- your buddy, Grand Magnificent-

JANINE (as Signet): I just met him.

ANDREW (as Cascabel): And his- okay, well- lucky you. [Janine laughs] But. So. I mean he made the whole thing outta this glass. And so, you know, you use the glass to beat glass.

JANINE (as Signet): And this glass that's around, is-? Too substantially different?

ANDREW (as Cascabel): I don't- I don't think it's, it's not like a molecular difference, but I don't know if it has the charge. The charge was the thing.

AUSTIN (as Belgard): Could we- could we charge it?

ANDREW (as Cascabel): [Andrew groans] I mean... You need a really big battery. I mean this stuff gets charged like, over centuries.

AUSTIN (as Belgard): What if we deactivate it, one of the machines? Amprunner, or perhaps Korrin's jet? Or even- [pauses and stammers]

ANDREW (as Cascabel): How do you get out of here? I'd like to get out of here.

AUSTIN (as Belgard): There's enough room in me for a number of people.

JANINE (as Signet): Accomodations can be made. Not comfortable accommodations but, it wouldn't be the first time.

AUSTIN (as Belgard): We could discharge the current store of energy and perhaps produce a few rounds.

ANDREW (as Cascabel): Yeah, okay. I mean- yeah, we could try it.

AUSTIN (as Belgard): The alternative is, from my readings and my calculations, a simple slugfest.

JANINE (as Signet): Belgard. Who taught you that word?

AUSTIN (as Belgard): I've been talking to Morning's Observation.

JANINE (as Signet): Oh, of course you have. Did I he- is that why there was a spaghetti stain in the fucking-? Okay.

ANDREW (as Cascabel): I mean look-

AUSTIN (as Belgard): He has some good ideas about the gold standard.

JANINE (as Signet): He's a- [Art laughs] he's a sweet boy.

ANDREW (as Cascabel): Okay. Wha- I mean, what's this calculation though? I mean, you've got, I don't know about Grand Magnificent but you got me, you got Gardner, you got yourselves I mean.

AUSTIN (as Belgard): I'm a big robot.

ANDREW (as Cascabel): What I'm saying is, is we're good at killing things. Maybe you don't take as much professional pride in it as I do but we're good at it. And do we really wanna take one of our biggest chips off the board? At a shot at something?

AUSTIN (as Belgard): We can't fight this thing without weapons. If we must melt one down to forge a stronger blade.

ANDREW (as Cascabel): Okay.

AUSTIN: Which thing are we de-energizing?

JANINE: Which thing is-

ANDREW: Oh boy.

JANINE: -cooler?

AUSTIN: I think it's-

JANINE: Cause then it's the other one.

AUSTIN: I think it's like. [chuckles for a bit] I think they're both cool. I think it's like. I basically feel like- this isn't gonna come down to a die roll necessarily? I think this is a thing that we would make a judgment call on later in this mission. And this is whether or not we believe that we have done enough to succeed in terms of picking white or red stones.

ANDREW: Right.

AUSTIN: Korrin's fighter is the least. Either Belgard is the most.

JANINE: No.

AUSTIN: Then Em- then Em- I know-

JANINE: I know.

AUSTIN: But I'm just saying what the options are. So on one end is. I think it goes successively. Korrin's ship, Amprunner, Empyrean, Belgard.

ANDREW: Oh boy. I mean. Yeah, my first reaction was the practical answer is the Amprunner. The maybe gut wrenching answer is the Empyrean.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Andrew]: More middle of the road- Yeah. That's just because that you know it's just a machine at this point.

ANDREW: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Or you don't, but Even does.

ANDREW: Even does. And I guess, we never- we've finished that scene before the answer does Even-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ANDREW: Tell Blooming it's just a machine.

AUSTIN: Did he?

ANDREW: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Then I think Blooming says like, like Blooming walks into this conversation and says:

AUSTIN (as Blooming): Use mine.

JANINE (as Signet): Are you sure?

AUSTIN (as Blooming): I don't want to talk about it. Not all of us are lucky, Signet.

[Janine sighs]

AUSTIN (as Blooming): Not all of us have a little sliver.

ANDREW (as Cascabel): I'm gonna go figure out how we're gonna do this while y'all have this conversation.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): I'll be fine. Don't- don't. Do not. You're it now. Let's do this thing and move on. I'll do my best to do what you do when we get back and help people, and shake hands and listen to people who have problems and you can protect the Mirage. Belgard was always better for it anyway.

JANINE (as Signet): You did a very good job.

AUSTIN (as Blooming): We're standing on a planet made of willpower that hates us. The Fleet is falling apart. The New Earth Hegemony is coming to kill us all. If that's what a good job looks like-

JANINE (as Signet): All of that began before you were even born!

AUSTIN (as Blooming): We all stand on the shoulders of giants. We all have to do our best despite that. If all of my failures are simply the result of what came before, then, the same to success. I'm gonna finish this out. I trust that you will do well as well. You are noble. And [breathes] faithful.

AUSTIN: And I think she walks away.

JANINE (as Signet): If there's-

AUSTIN: She like walks away, you start to talk, she like, Arthur fists, and she just, like, closes her fists and then walks away.

[Janine sighs]

AUSTIN: That was Signet's scene, yeah?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Grand, last scene in the challenge.

ART: No I started.

AUSTIN: Did you? I thought Even started-

ART: No we're-

AUSTIN: Oh, shit.

JANINE: No.

AUSTIN: That was the last one of this- yeah you're right.

ANDREW: Oh yeah.

AUSTIN: Holy shit. That was. Cause that was- you did-

ART: I did the outside.

AUSTIN: You find the way in.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Even did weird underground place. I did Blooming's doubts and then we ended. Awesome. And then we did the Signet one. Wow, this game moves so fast when there's only four people.

ANDREW: Yeah! [laughs]

ART: Also when none of us want us to do well.

AUSTIN: Uhhuh. I don't know, I think we did well in that-

ANDREW Yeah, I mean it's not emotionally do well.

AUSTIN: No. Correct. That was- what about the lair that was- Explore the beast's lair?

ART: Yeah

ANDREW: Yeah

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Alright. Put that there. It is time for- to do another one of these things. So, again, if your main cal- if your main character is unhappy about the path the fellowship has taken, hold one red stone. If your main character actually wants the quest to fail, hold two red stones, otherwise hold no red stones. The maximum is two, just to be clear. Even if you all of those. Ah, man. Okay I'm ready is everyone else ready?

JANINE: Uhhuh.

AUSTIN: Three, two, one. Go. Alright, we're split one red from me, one red from Art. And then zero zero from Signet and Even. Gr- why does Grand think that? That we- are unhappy about the path?

ART: People are talking about destroying these machines?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: And I mean, I'm pretty sure someone was talking about destroying the Amprunner? That's like being like well we're pretty cold, it's like chilly in here. Let's set our Renoir (art piece I presume) on fire.

AUSTIN: Good I'm glad it's very personal. I think that that for Blooming, this is not about like- she's unhappy with the path the fellowship has taken, not like- she hasn't turned her back on this. But she's unhappy- is she unhappy about it? Yes. It's the thing that needs to be done, but she's also unhappy about it.

ANDREW: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Alright? Each player takes one white one red read aloud. As a player do you think the fellowship did what was necessary to succeed at the challenge of exploring this lair? Hold white if yes, hold red if no. Tell me when you're ready.

ANDREW: Ready.

ART: Ready.

AUSTIN: Three, two,

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: One. All white, hell yeah. So, this time it is one two three four white, and three red. So that is seven, is that right? Four five six seven.

ART: Plus the one, it's five white.

AUSTIN: Oh you're right it's five white plus one red. So it's a d8, right? It's eight total?

ART: Seven total. Oh wait yeah-

AUSTIN: One two three four five six seven eight. So one two three so imma roll a d8, one two three are red. The rest are- man, that's a lot. Three out of eight is bad. Alright.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Oh that's a two.

ANDREW: Uh, fuck.

[Janine groans]

AUSTIN: And... wow. So it's one in two are red.

ANDREW [overlapping entirely with Austin]: One in two and seven

AUSTIN: One two sev-, yeah you're right, yes.

[Andrew makes constipated noise]

AUSTIN: It's taking a while- six. Okay, we're out of the- okay so it's a one red one white.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: So what happens when you get one red, you lose one character but you win the challenge. I think we've lost Blooming.

ANDREW: Yeah, that makes sense.

AUSTIN: Right? Like, I think-

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Blooming is just. I think Blooming is just not in it at this point. She isn't dead, she isn't gone. Like, I think she just sits in Korrin's jet, in the back of Korrin's jet, and looks at the stars. You know? Also I guess Korrin is outside? In this moment? Right? Korrin didn't bring her jet in here?

JANINE: No... I guess not.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: That'd be kind of weird.

AUSTIN: So I think yeah, that's what happens, is like, she decharges all of Empyr- she decharges all of Emphyrean's like juice to charge up these bullets that Cascabel is like, ad-hoc making from the weird black glass here? And is like, leaves just enough juice to get back outside. To like fly through the guts of this thing, get back outside, get picked up by Korrin. But we won the- we won! We won! We won the challenge.

JANINE: Mmm.

AUSTIN: Check.

ART: Check.

AUSTIN: This... check please. Now, my main character is Belgard. That's how that works. Okay. I think- so that was, one was? Who did the first one- me. I set the first one which was travel across dangerous terrain. Explore the beast's lair was Signet. Grand you pick the final challenge, and the character who you think would first take action. At this point it feels like it has to be one of the ones about the beast, right?

ART: Yeah. But there's- I mean, I think it could be corner, escape, or face.

AUSTIN: Or lure it into a trap, no? You don't think that that's- I guess that would be a-

ART: Oh that didn't have the word beast in it, so I didn't look at it when I was scanning-

AUSTIN: That's fair, that's fair. It could be protect a village from the beast.

JANINE: No. [Art makes a sound]

AUSTIN: I thought about it- I thought it could- I actually thought about that earlier, we're not doing it because I don't think it's a good last one. But instead of doing travel across dangerous terrain, I almost did- or if I had gone second instead of going first, I thought of doing protect a village, and the village would be like, an Axiom that was like, very clearly not a monster? It was just like, it was good, it was fine, it was not trying to hurt anybody, and this thing was gonna like hurt it.

JANINE: Aww.

AUSTIN: We're not doing that, but maybe it'll come later. Who knows?

ART: Oh, what are- what do we think? Is it corner?

AUSTIN: I feel like it's face, but but-

ART: Face? Okay.

AUSTIN: I mean corner might be right because you're inside the guts of this old machine right?

JANINE: Face might also be how that concludes. Like when the shit actually-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Yeah, totally. I mean- here's the actual question: do you a corner a thing like this? Or do you face it.

JANINE: We're making bullets, so.

AUSTIN: Yeah-

ART: Yeah I guess we have to face it.

AUSTIN: How many bullets do we have?

ANDREW: I- I don't know.

JANINE: We said a [unintelligible] good one.

AUSTIN [overlapping entirely with Janine]: I think we said said- a number we said- Well you picked the secondest biggest goodest one

JANINE: Well- Secondest biggest goodest one.

AUSTIN: Yeah, uhuh, I'm a writer. That's right. You heard me I use all the biggest words.

ANDREW: So I would say- he had- Cascabel had made these to fit Even's revolver. Which I guess is what-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ANDREW: Six bullets is a revolver?

AUSTIN: Sure.

ANDREW: So... four?

AUSTIN: Okay. Yeah, I like four.

ANDREW: That seems like the secondest goodest number.

AUSTIN: Thank you, thank you for using the lingo [Janine and Art chuckle] I appreciate it. Alright. Let's, so yeah- it's good to know. Just for the sake of painting a picture later, four. I kind of want Face the Beast because I kind of want to be like, we find it and then we get four scenes of dealing with it? But maybe that's too meaty.

JANINE: That's kinda cool though.

ART: No, I think that's yeah-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: And I feel like if was the only one scene of actually fighting it, that feels really cheap, given what this thing is.

AUSTIN: Exactly, exactly. And also, there's a whole other thing that hasn't come up yet, which is. There are other hunters.

JANINE: Yeah. That's true.

ANDREW: Ah, shit. Yup.

AUSTIN: The Iconoclasts, the Independents, there's other things [Janine groans] that could intercede into this big fight at the end of this movie, basically.

ART: Alright. Who should start? I guess the real question is who wants to go last?

AUSTIN: Oh, that's a good question.

ANDREW: Oh boy.

AUSTIN: Even has to go last, right?

ART: Alright, so then that means you have to start.

AUSTIN: Or Signet, because it's- this is the question, right? Is like, is it-

JANINE: I kind of had an idea based on the idea of the bullets like weakening it. But I don't know- I don't know enough of the bullets to know like what actually goes down with those.

AUSTIN: They hit it.

ART [overlapping entirely with Austin]: I mean- [mostly unintelligible] No.

AUSTIN: And then it does damage. Like-

JANINE: Cause I have a thing I can do that's like the last power I took with Signet as a level that I like,

AUSTIN: Oh, interesting

JANINE: That would be interesting to use, but probably would be way too overpowered to apply to the thing if it was in perfect shape, basically. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Oh yeah that's pretty cool, I like that a lot.

JANINE: Yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's pretty dope. Yeah, we could do Grand, Even, Blooming, Signet. Or not Blooming, Belgard, Signet?

JANINE: This is gonna be weird.

AUSTIN: Well what we should probably do is jump between- I mean Grand- oh it can't be, because Grand picks the scene. He can't pick himself.

JANINE: Ohh.

AUSTIN: So we cannot end on Signet.

ANDREW: Aw, bummer.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: You can go next to last and I can do mop up.

AUSTIN: Right, that's true.

JANINE: That's true.

ART: I mean-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Art]: But then like you can do escape effectively, right? Or whatever that ends up looking like. We don't know what that scene looks like yet.

ART: Sure, it's a long time from now.

ANDREW: There is a- a nice, weird thing, to it ending on Grand. Who built it.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Oh yeah.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Oh yes, absolutely, you're totally right.

JANINE: Shit.

AUSTIN: We've been fucking up from the jump. Hell yeah.

[Andrew laughs]

AUSTIN: Alright Even kick us off then, right? What's-

ANDREW: Oh, God. Okay.

AUSTIN: What's it look like when we find Independence?

ANDREW: Cause it's looking for the mind, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ANDREW: Part of me likes building on this imagery that Art gave earlier of the bit being torn upon like wrapping paper?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ANDREW: Which to me implies desperation? Like power in desperation.

AUSTIN: Right. I love it actually because it could also be opening a gift? And it's like-

ANDREW: [Janine sighs] Oh God.

AUSTIN: Which is it?

ANDREW: [chuckles] Shit.

AUSTIN: Uhhuh.

ANDREW: No it's prob- no it's probably opening a gift.

AUSTIN: It think it could be both. It could be the little kid opening a gift who is just like, oh please oh please oh please be the Nintendo 64.

[Janine groans]

[Art laughs]

ANDREW: And the- what happens to the kid when they've opened six gifts? And the Nintendo 64 is still not there.

AUSTIN: Yeah yea yea, that's exactly- yeah. Yes.

JANINE: Uhhuh.

ANDREW: Okay.

AUSTIN: Like, what's that next wrapping paper look like? I can't- this cannot be another fucking sweater gramma.

[Andrew laughs]

AUSTIN: Give me the mind of Independence.

ANDREW: At one point the gift four was like, the really big box? But then it had other smaller boxes in it.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Mhm.

ANDREW: Okay. Yeah. Okay.

AUSTIN: Yeah, exactly.

ANDREW: And maybe that's how we're able to find it. Because it's getting faster and sloppier.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ANDREW: Okay. So I think this scene is- I mean I guess, I feel like it's every main character.

AUSTIN: Yeah I think so at this point, right?

ANDREW: Yeah. And I think we see it like in the distance. We see it like- maybe there's like- cause I feel like the mind is- it's not gonna be like just accidentally tossed somewhere, right? It's in something that looks significant or something.

AUSTIN: Right. What would it be? Where would the mind- where would the mind of a Divine- so it- the mind of Independence built this place from its own inception, like from its own understanding of what it wanted to be at.

ANDREW: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Where would it be? What would this like- this tomb for itself look like?

ANDREW: You know what? No. I think it is somewhere that is obvious because I think Independence thinks - I'm going to want to be found again.

AUSTIN: Oh, sure.

ANDREW: And I also want to be found again.

AUSTIN: Right. So it's like- where the bridge is. It's- or like it's at the like- or it's at the very center or is it at-

ANDREW: Yes. Yeah. I think it's- we could probably have seen this if Korrin Kim could fly her jet inside?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ANDREW: But since we couldn't, as we get closer we realise every path ends at this point.

AUSTIN: Oh, that's really good. Like it doesn't matter which way we go.

ANDREW: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, this is the way it was going the whole time. There's almost a teleological design here. That's really good. And like it makes the desperation of the body, of Independence, so much more like, not just interesting but like, depressing? It's like- just walk forward. You'll get there. Stop shaking the presents. There are twelve presents, you're gonna open all twelve of them. If one of them is an N64 you're gonna get it. So we find it there? Missing an arm still?

ANDREW: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And its cockpit blown out from the back?

ANDREW: I just realised, what did we do with the Doyenne's body?

AUSTIN: It's in there still, are you kidding me?

ANDREW: Okay, good, yeah.

AUSTIN: Oh yeah.

JANINE: Ew.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah it's bad. It's no good.

ANDREW: And yeah. I think this scene is- I mean Belgard probably gets it first on their sensors. And I think that's where we start the scene.

AUSTIN: Right. I think like- yeah. Belgard sends out like a cool pulse? That scans the entire way forward, and just says to everyone through communicators that's like

AUSTIN (as Belgard): Pick a direction and go. We're here. It's here. It's here. Independence is here.

AUSTIN: And like stands up as tall as she can. And maybe just like- there's like a massive doorway forward that you could open but it's already been torn through. And like takes the lead and opens it, and like, Independence is right there, and just like, turns and scowls. But like its- I think it turns and scowls but its jaw comes lower than it should. Like its- the body doesn't know where its mouth is? So it detaches down through the neck and like- Art, or I'm sorry, Grand like, you did not design this thing for its whole front jaw like and neck to open up like that? But it's yelling, it's like screaming the way a monst- the way an animal would. Not the way a monster would. The way an animal might. Like it's like- it's almost crocodilian at this point. In terms of like, it has this huge open mouth. And then it just starts like running like, almost ape like towards its mind.

AUSTIN (as Belgard): We need to go now. Signet!

JANINE: I think within- within Belgard's cockpit Signet is like already in full battle mode. Like there's the shot of her you know, flicking open a bunch of extra displays in the space around her with all of- all of the people who are there, it's their vital stats but also their unvital stats. It's like, the information that Belgard's scanners have passively picked up that is part of the- the sort of tapestry that make up what Belgard does. And it's Signet basically, you know, unminimizing like, twenty different windows all at the same time.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: And like, getting her UI set up, basically, and. Probably you- shouting at Even to get his fucking gun out.

[Andrew chuckles]

AUSTIN: Yeah. Do you like- you're still in the Amprunner at this moment, right?

ANDREW: Yeah. I mean, Even is like- I mean, he punches it. Like, the Amprunner takes off running. And I don't- I don't know if Grand is in that backseat or not but I hope he has a seatbelt on.

AUSTIN: Grand, what are you doing?

ART: I'm- Grand is so sad.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: This isn't-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Art]: It wasn't supposed to be like this.

ART: Yeah. None of this was supposed to be like this. It was such- it's such a good- there's such good bones there. This is. This is so undignified.

JANINE: Does Sig- or does Belgard have her shields back yet?

AUSTIN: Yes. Totally.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: In fact we get this sequence of like, Belgard's nervous, and we get like, the overhead shot of the shields like- find- like winding their way through the maze to her? Actually?

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: Remember- remember when I said that the second most relaxing thing Signet could think of was like, flower? But not necessarily organic? I think it's like that but with all of Belgard's shield plates just sort of weaving their way like a- like a flock or a cluster of petals through those hallways

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: And then eventually reforming the wings behind her.

AUSTIN: Right. And then like turn to the camera- stand- like almost like stomp? And like the wings open up and like a dope big- it's like- aw!

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Awesome. Huge wingspan? And then like-

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: Good like energy wing, and then like, sort of shimmers out from the center?

AUSTIN: Right. But like we go- we cut from that to the kind of sad face on Grand. These are the things we built. So Amprunner gets there, what happens? Do you take a shot? Like, what's the-

ANDREW: No.

AUSTIN: What's the end of this scene look like?

ANDREW: I think the end of this scene is, as Independence is like, doing its like, jowls opened howl.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ANDREW: I mean, the Amprunner opens its mouth and lets out that

AUSTIN: Oh yeah!

ANDREW: Garbage shitty Pokemon yell [Janine laughs] thing. And they just- slams into it.

AUSTIN: Nice. I think like it- literally rams itself into it?

ANDREW: Oh yeah.

AUSTIN: Oh I think like- it has to take damage, right? The head has to snap off or the shoulder has to completely break or like

ANDREW: Yeah.

AUSTIN: The rail cannon like- it's like a watermelon on concrete.

ANDREW: Even just wants to try and pin this thing to the ground.

AUSTIN: Totally, totally. Yeah maybe that's actually a good exchange, that's like. Amprunner slams into it and it's just like, this mess of metal and its just heavy, and it does pin it down. And then like, Grand I guess? I picture Grand at the top of it all, somehow? Because the seat is on the back of Amprunner? And like the back is just up in the air now. Or like the rear. You know?

ART: Sure.

AUSTIN: Is that scene? With it pinned down?

ANDREW: Oh yeah. I guess it is my scene. Yes.

AUSTIN: That's your last- yeah. Alright. So. Belgard at this point is like char- I think it's again, it's the same set of all these main characters. Actually you know what- I kind of want Chthonic here instead of Grand, for this sequence. So it's Even, Belgard, you know what- no. I think it's- I need to see Cascabel in this scenario. Cascabel, Chthonic, and Belgard, and Signet. And Belgard is

like moving in to do this and then like, little wisps of hair start to pull up from the ground of Independence. Little like- it's like waving back and forth it's almost like there's a huge- like horse hair brush or something coming up from the ground. And as it moves and slides back to- back and forth over and over, you eventually make out voices. And what they say are:

AUSTIN (as Iconoclasts): Vision is velocity is volume is vector is vastness is victory is volition. [gets louder] Vision is velocity is volume is vector is vastness is victory is volition. [even more intense] Vision is velocity is volume is vector is vastness is victory is *Volition!*

AUSTIN: And the Iconoclasts are here. And there's a lot of them. And they like pile around like, they are waves of horse hair, here. People made of hair, like throwing themselves like, carcasses between Belgard and Independence. Cascabel, what the fuck is going on? Is what my question is. What's Cascabel-

ANDREW [overlapping with Austin]: Cascabel- Cascabel is up on a roof and he's got that big ass fucking rifle

AUSTIN: Hell yeah!

ANDREW: He shot the Saint with. And he just unloads on these weird, bizarre, gross looking things.

JANINE [overlapping with Andrew] Oh boy. I think this is- I think this is probably the point Signet is gonna cast. I think she communicates however we had them communicating over the group.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE (as Signet): It's not that you can't- it's possible that you can kill these things, but I don't know that's the best use of energy. [sighs] Really, the best thing to do is to get them out of the way and stay out of their way. We really-

ANDREW (as Cascabel): Signet, I'm simple. You show me where to shoot and I shoot it.

JANINE: God. Are these-

ART (as Chthonic): An image of a Wild West Town at dusk. [people chuckle]

JANINE: Are they- are they being cut as if hair would be cut? By bullets?

AUSTIN: Yeah. But then it just grows, right?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And like it interweaves- it's getting all matted and gross. But there's still human faces in there?

JANINE: Man.

AUSTIN: Or like the shape of noses and mouths. You know?

JANINE: Okay. I think the thing that Signet does als- hmm. HMM. Okay. Before it gets too big, she is I guess as she sends out that warning of like 'it is very fucking hard to kill an Iconoclast, I've personally never seen it happen but you're welcome to try'. She is also typing command into Belgard to fire a few shield plates as a sort of physical barrier-

AUSTIN: Uhhuh.

JANINE: Between the mind and the body?

AUSTIN: Okay. So I think we get those plates land? And-

JANINE: Like I imagine they would be like thunk. Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's, yeah, they go like 'thunk' and they go into the ground to separate the mind and the body. And then like the camera pans back to see Belgard. And Belgard's gone, and Signet is gone and Chthonic is gone, and they're somewhere else. The Iconoclasts had a true name- had a component on you. Right, Signet?

JANINE: Fuck, they did.

AUSTIN: What's the core of Volition look like? Like, how do we- how do we even- Like I- I've done this explanation before privately about what Volition is in terms of philosophy, and I'm gonna go really really really really like, basic to try to make this analogy? A lot of people learn about the Platonic forms in school, and you hear that like, Plato, you should tell the allegory of the cave right? Which is like, okay, people are chained to a wall and all they see are shadows on the wall. Right? And so they see shadow a thing and say okay, that's a horse, I know what what a horse is, because I'm seeing the shadow of a horse, I understand what a horse is because I can see this reflection of a horse, I can see this like secondary you know, version of a horse. I've never seen a real horse, according to Plato. They've never seen the Platonic form of a horse. That's out there somewhere and all the horses reflect that Platonic form. It's also a big like, thing on- on good education looks like, it's a whole fucking thing. Anyway.

AUSTIN: [continued] That's not what Volition is. Volition is not that notion of Platonic forms. It is- it is Aristotelian forms. It's the Hegelian spirit. It is the notion that the only way that there is- there is such a thing- there is a thing called 'horseness'. But it is only because there are horses in the

world, and Volition is tilted so far that it believes that for there to even be a thing like 'horseness', you need the perfect horse. Thankfully we know that it exists, that's Duck, Duck is the perfect horse, all other horses are pale imitations. But that is what Volition is like. Mixed with just, the raw possibility of something happening over and over and over, or in any number of combinations of ways. And I wanna know what the like, if this thing has a throne room, or a core. Or a seed. What's that like? Is it at peace or is it chaotic? Is it- does it have a colour to it? You know, what does something like that look like in its own core?

JANINE: I suspect that because it's chaotic externally, my instinct is to say it's peaceful internally

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: If the chaos externally was stopped, it would become an internal chaos instead.

AUSTIN: Right, right.

JANINE: But because the exterior is still a roiling mess, you know, my very simple gut here is that the interior should be calm.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: To- like, not comfortable though.

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah.

JANINE: You know.

AUSTIN: Is it like-

JANINE: Very eye of the storm.

AUSTIN: Right, maybe is it even a storm? Like how- maybe, like, you arrive in the middle of it's as if there is a storm, in the middle of this- or you're an eye of the storm that's inside of this planet. Again, there's a weird scale thing happening here where like, you're in the center of this planet and then, instead of finding a molten mass or this moon- instead of finding a molten mass, instead of finding something else like, you're on a island in the sea, and the storm is all around you raging in every direction. And then there's Belgard on this plain simple island that everything is moving around, all around. And you can see creatures in the sea and you can see creatures in the clouds. Two things like, breaking out of the cloud, as if it's diving downward before being picked back up by gravity above it. Chthonic? This thing is closer to you than to a Divine. How does that make Chthonic feel?

ART: Scared.

AUSTIN: Okay. So this is like, I don't wanna be like this?

ART: Yeah, this is a- this is a negative comparison.

AUSTIN: Mmkay.

ART: What's my capacity to do anything about this?

AUSTIN: Like, to affect Volition? Or to do something about what-

ART: Yeah to affect Volition, or to disrupt these hairs?

AUSTIN: Oh you're gone from the hairs. You are now- you are all now on this- you, so Chthonic, Signet and Belgard are now on this weird island. They have- to be clear, Signet connected with them before and did what- gave them her true name, which they use the same way she can use a true name, which is to- like grab somebody and do weird teleportation shit with them sometimes.

ART: Mm.

JANINE: I mean, I don't think I can actually teleport people

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: I guess you do- well-

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: But it's feasible that they I could guess.

AUSTIN: You do that with your special, right? You do that with-

JANINE: Yeah that's not a true name thing, that's a like- yeah.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Yeah, that's true. This is still- I'm still gonna do this.

JANINE: Whatever, they're weird fucking

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Yeah, horse people- horse hair

JANINE: Non-thing monsters, I don't know.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Especially-

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: They can do whatever the fuck they want.

AUSTIN: Volition itself on its own body.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I don't know that it speaks to you. Because to know your language would be to betray what it is. But it rumbles at your presence. There's a curiosity here. I think it reaches for Chthonic, like-

JANINE: I think, when it does that, Signet's reflex is a protective one. Like, even if, even if she knows the pull isn't for Belgard.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: I think there is an instinct of like, no.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: You don't get to do that. Like, this is- no.

AUSTIN: Oh I guess it can talk to Chthonic, now that I think about it. Because like, that's not-Chthonic is like it, more than like, you.

ART: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Or the like, Belgard. And so it does ask- it does say to Chthonic.

AUSTIN (as Volition): You belong here.

ART: And I'm responding in kind, huh.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART (as Chthonic): I don't think- [Austin overlaps unintelligibly] I don't think I do.

AUSTIN (as Volition): Why?

ART (as Chthonic): I think- I think I'm trying to achieve a more harmonious purpose.

AUSTIN (as Volition): Harmonious for who?

ART (as Chthonic): Harmony is for all things.

AUSTIN (as Volition): No. Something will always be out of harmony. There can be no harmony without something somewhere being disjointed. This is why I do not strive for harmony.

ART (as Chthonic): You- you are listening to bad music.

AUSTIN (as Volition): Music ends. Music exists from a point. The tip of a horn. If you were on the outside, it is harmonious. If you were inside the horn, is cacophony. I don't listen to music. I make it.

ART (as Chthonic): I disagree. It always echoes back. The first song is still echoing somewhere.

AUSTIN (as Volition): I've heard the first song. It is not good enough.

ART (as Chthonic): The merit of the work is the joy in playing it.

AUSTIN (as Volition): Play and work are separate. It is good to play well. This is separate than the work being good. Both deserve to exist. They need not be harmonious.

ART (as Chthonic): I think it's how it should be, though.

AUSTIN (as Volition): I do not trifle with oughts and shoulds. I am concerned only with what will be.

ART (as Chthonic): Then we're not alike at all.

AUSTIN (as Volition): I suppose not. If you reconsider, I will be here.

ART (as Chthonic): We have so much time.

AUSTIN (as Volition): Nothing but.

AUSTIN: And then the water recedes, and like- I think that during that sequence like, the water was going closer and closer to the shore, it's like swallowing up the island bit by bit. Maybe there was like a little bit of steam coming out of Belgard as it was trying to pull the cloud out. And then like, all at once, like there's a tidal wave going out to sea that sucks the- all of the water away from this island. And I really just want it to be like a nonsense image? I really just want it to be like, the island is on top of like, a building, or a head, or like, something- I- not nonsense, really, I want it to be some sort of meaning, it's why I'm not just saying the first thing that comes to mind? But like, the island should be on top of girders. On top of like, the- the water washes away, and below it is a cityscape of big, red girders, and the island is just sitting

on the top of a bunch of unfinished buildings. I think that's the image. And then Belgard is back, like that. In the room. And that is my scene.

JANINE: Huh.

AUSTIN: Signet.

ART: What do you wanna talk in riddles about? [Austin and Andrew laugh]

JANINE: Shit. To be honest, I don't think Signet much wants to talk at this point.

AUSTIN: Fair.

JANINE: Cause that was weird but it was also a little bit par-for-the-course with Iconoclast shit.

AUSTIN: Uhhuh. Yup.

JANINE: This weird shit happens sometimes. I think I want my scene to be a very committed assault.

AUSTIN: Okay. So is that like- you and Belgard and Even?

JANINE: Yeah. I think that- actually, well, I think yeah. I think Signet, Belgard, Even, and maybe Chthonic?

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: Because I want part of this to be you know, they get back, and Signet needs a moment to regain her bearings because she is unlike many people here, not a robot. And so she kind of has to you know, displace- have to pop back out and refresh things and like that.

AUSTIN: Alright.

JANINE: And there's a moment of just like - okay, right, where were we? And within that moment, there is sort of, a question for Chthonic that I've just like- I don't know how the- I think she would just ask it in the cockpit because she knows that Chthonic like, listens and observes anyway.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: I think she just asks like - is everything- are we okay to proceed? Like, it's a formal kind of concern but it's still like a-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: We're going forward? You know?

ART: Struggling with an image.

AUSTIN: Just go to wallpapers.com, I'm sure that's safe.

ART: Yeah.

JANINE: It's a picture of Dwayne the Rock Johnson and some sunflowers.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Classic.

ART: Can that be the wallpaper on my compu- what?

AUSTIN: I mean, it could be.

ART: Does that picture exist?

AUSTIN: Sure.

JANINE: Wait, was that a Vin Diesel site? Which was the one that Ali talked about like, years ago.

ANDREW: [whispers] Oh God.

JANINE: It's like Vin- I want to say it was dwaynetherockjohnsonwallpapers.blogspot.com or something.

AUSTIN [overlapping heavily with Janine]: It- yeah. It was- It totally was. I'm at dwaynejohnsonwallpaperstherock.blogspot.com. This is a good fucking website holy shit.

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: That's a good website. Have they stayed up- have they stayed current for the 4K era?

AUSTIN: Imma link this shit real quick hold up. Put this right here in Twilight Mirage, where it belongs. No- they are not at 4K unfortunately.

JANINE: Mm, that's a shame.

AUSTIN: These are good. It's the Rock just smiling in front of the moon.

ANDREW: Yup, uploading that to the chat [Austin and Janine laugh]

AUSTIN: Here's what I love is, there's that one, Dre? Which is the Rock smiling in front of the moon, and then there's another one, which is the same smile, [people continue laughing] just in front of vague blue shapes.

ANDREW: There's also the Rock carrying a gun in front of a bunch of fish.

AUSTIN: Uhhuh.

ANDREW: Yeah these are good.

AUSTIN: These are all extremely good. Oh this one's good- look at this fall one. Ali in our Discord says - excuse me? There it is! Oh, that's not sunflowers but it's close. Good memory, Janine.

JANINE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Look at this one. [Andrew chuckles]

JANINE: Ah those were tulips. I knew- it was some yellow in front of a blue sky.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Uhhuh. You got it. And then it loops unfortunately, it looks like.

ANDREW: Yeah.

JANINE: That's a shame.

AUSTIN: So is that what it is? Chthonic?

ART: I want it to be a real picture.

AUSTIN: This is real, what are you talking about?!

ART: This is- this is Photoshopped.

ANDREW [overlapping with Art and Austin]: This is the realest shit.

AUSTIN: No it's not! What? [people laughing] They're really big tulips!

ANDREW: Perspective is a hell of a thing.

AUSTIN: It is!

JANINE: I mean, what do you want the picture to convey?

AUSTIN: Oh ho. Thanks, thanks Grand. [laughs]

ART: I mean it's- the problem is like, the desktop wallpaper genre is a- is sort of like an inherently like, tranquil one.

JANINE: You could express a lot of things in Betty Boops.

ART: I don't think anyone knows who Betty Boop is anymore. [Janine laughs]

AUSTIN: Boop boop-a-doop!

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: Even now, here. In the present.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: What if it's- I mean, I think it should be this autumnal image with just- without Dwayne the Rock Johnson.

AUSTIN: Like a path forward?

ART: Yeah. I actually- if you cut the Rock out of this, I think-

AUSTIN: Never, never in my fucking life.

JANINE: Mm. [Andrew starts laughing]

AUSTIN: Don't you fucking dare, you piece of shit.

JANINE: I mean, maybe he is also there, because it definitely applies like, getting ready for a fight. And he's all like geared up. He's gonna get in there.

AUSTIN: He's also both too big and too small for that image, it's unbelievable. [people still laughing]

ART: Yeah. He's both like, most of the size of a tree, and not taking up any space.

AUSTIN: It's so bizarre! I love art.

ART: Yeah. That's- that's what we're talking about.

AUSTIN: Alright, what are we- so is that what it is?

ART: Yeah, it's that.

AUSTIN: Alright. Cool.

JANINE: Okay. I think that's- that's probably good enough for Signet as abstract as it is, it's not like, a picture of a robot burning, so- good. [Austin chuckles]

AUSTIN: Good.

JANINE: So I think at that point, she is probably doing the 'hey Even get your gun out' thing again.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Or, you know, making moves but also being like, we need to do this. This is- it's now or it's when we're all buried in hair.

AUSTIN: Is that a saying?

JANINE: No!

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: It's cause they're hair people!

AUSTIN: No, I get it.

JANINE: It's not a thing people say.

AUSTIN: Now- [unintelligible]

ART (as Chthonic) [overlapping with Austin]: Very close-up shot of someone's mohawk.

[Janine groans and Austin laughs]

AUSTIN: Alright. So Even, is this like you scramble out of the Amprunner to take a shot?

ANDREW [overlapping with Austin]: Oh I don't scramble out, I fly out.

AUSTIN: Oh right! You've got fucking rad wings! [Andrew and Janine laugh] I always forget.

JANINE: We made good characters this season.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Yeah, we really did.

ANDREW: Yeah, what- what's left for me to shoot in this damn thing?

AUSTIN: It has an arm, it has a head, it has a body.

ANDREW: Oh no, here's what I do. I shoot it right at- the big open mouth.

AUSTIN: Oh, nice. I like- it snaps off the jaw. For sure, right?

JANINE: Woof.

AUSTIN: But I think like. It has to get its mind here. Grand has to confront it with its mind, right?

ART: Yes, I believe that to be true.

AUSTIN: Like I can't- I don't know how this doesn't end with like, Grand with a gun- with one bullet left, and this thing that he's built, right?

ANDREW: I mean, if you want the end of this scene to be that- it takes a swing at Even,

AUSTIN: Right.

ANDREW: Clips its wing, and Even like tumbles and like, the gun goes flying out of his hands and dramatically lands perfect-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ANDREW: Two feet in front of Grand.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ANDREW: I'm great with that.

AUSTIN: Same. And then like, it gets its mind. It like grabs whatever its- we described the heart as being this big black like, like almost just like collection of chromed-out pipes? What's its mind look like?

ART: The mind of Independence?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: Sheesh.

AUSTIN: I think it's like, a pipe organ, or a typewriter. Like, lots of little independent parts, that like move up and down by themselves. Not that that's what typewriters or pipe organs do, but do you know what I mean? Like-

ART: Typewriters kind of do that. I mean not by themselves.

AUSTIN: No, but I actually like the notion of a typewriter brain. And it does that- as it picks it up like, all of the keys start to depress. And there are you know, thousands of keys around this huge thing. That it just like, like I guess it probably just puts it into a cavity in its back, and you can see it now. Like it shoves it in there, it wasn't built for this thing, but it has the parts it needs. Like, it puts it right- maybe it puts it into the hole that Even blasted out at the back, back when you were still on Quire, and it just smooshes in there. And the wiring that they collected to put into it, like tentacle-like, smooth-like, moves up through its body and wraps around all of the keys of this brain, of this mind? And begins like, pressing them and pulling them tighter and tighter and tighter, and it moves to face you. And it's like missing its bottom jaw. It is open in the middle. It is torn apart, and I think that's the- I'm guessing, Signet, that that's the end of that scene? Unless you have something else to do at that point like- what's Signet and Belgard doing, I guess actually is the question. When it has its mind, what's the- what is the move?

JANINE: The move is the- it's the Wayward class, right, I think?

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's imbue, right?

JANINE: Imbue. Whenever you consume essence to interact with any fundamen- with and fundamentally alter a piece of technology. Describe how you do it and roll. On a 10 plus, choose [unintelligible mumbling]. So, I get to choo- I would get to choose. I get to change how it's powered, change its size or dimensions, or change its purpose or how it works. By consuming the energy that Belgard stores. True names.

AUSTIN: Yeah. The thing that that makes me think is like. You can briefly, cause it's a Divine, right? Like, this is not-

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: A regular piece of technology. You can briefly like, shrink it down to human size, and make it, not- like not try to kill you instantly. I mostly want Grand to stand in front of a person, that he built.

JANINE: Yeah. Make it not try to kill you instantly.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Austin]: Right, right.

JANINE: Is kind of a weird change of purpose. Like I don't know how to phrase that as a change of purpose. Like, sit there quietly isn't a purpose.

AUSTIN: I think that don't kill me is a totally fine change of purpose.

JANINE: Yeah. I mean I guess-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Oh! What if you have it kill the fucking- kill the Iconoclasts that are all around you?

JANINE: Oh! Fucking yeah!

AUSTIN: Right? Like-

JANINE: That's exceptio- yes, yes, totally. Okay so where- where we at? With this scene and the camera.

AUSTIN: This is your scene ending, so like, you have the camera still.

JANINE: No I mean like, what's the camera on right now?

AUSTIN: Even has shot it a bunch of times, the gun goes flying in the air, lands at Grand Magnificent's face- or feet, not at his face- hits Grand Magnificent in the face, no. Lands at his feet. And then Grand says like, then the camera like, Grand looks down at the gun I guess? And then it cuts to you doing something.

JANINE: Okay. So, oh good it doesn't say I have to actually touch it. That's nice. I just wanna check the specifics there.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: So I think the thing that happens, and this is probably the first time we're seeing Belgard use, or like it's not, because I'm not controlling Belgard, but, acting through Belgard-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: As the pilot. I think it's the first time we've seen Belgard like employ actual abilities and not just shields?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: And I think it is that brief shimmer we saw through the wings when the plates came back, except a few of the plates are off and buried in the ground.

AUSTIN: Right right right right.

JANINE: So the wings are kinda fucked up.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: You get the effect. I think it's that, but pulsing? Like it probably pulses two or three times, and each time it gets a little bit faster and a little bit stronger. And the cast-off of the wings goes a little bit farther?

AUSTIN: Mm.

JANINE: And then it's kind of like an EMP I guess, but like, a vaguely fantasy magicky kind of EMP, so a little more shimmery.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: And, it's sort of this like, you know when the beat drops in a movie trailer? When they do like 'boom!'

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah.

JANINE: In a game trailer I guess.

AUSTIN: Uhhuh, yeah.

JANINE: Like that. And what Signet does is, she uses this sort of, the essence of names that Belgard accrues and one, reduces the size of this thing. This is, this is a man-sized thing, this is a thing that man-size specifically, or person-size specifically, so that it is both defeatable but like, feels defeatable emotionally. To people who confront it. Like, this is isn't a god, this is a mortal. That kind of mental, you know?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: I think that's the justification for it. I don't want to be just like 'she makes it small'.

AUSTIN: [chuckles] That's fair. Grand-

JANINE [overlapping with Austin]: The second thing is she makes it see the Iconoclasts as foes.

AUSTIN: Mm.

JANINE: That is, it's- it's- that's how it works, is it?

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Right. I mean that's almost true to itself. Right? like-

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It might even be that she can like just, emphasize that part of it. It's Independence. It doesn't belong to the Iconoclasts, are you kidding me?

JANINE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And like it think it like steps forward and cuts through them. Like its legs are knives, and each- and as it cuts through them though, and like, they like, can sense that it wants no part of them and it's too strong for them to sing- by themselves bring it down, and like consume it? It like, does shrink in size bit by bit, until it is just like, standing between- like. The gun is between it and Art on the ground. It and Grand on the ground. And that's probably the scene switch. Grand. What's this scene look like?

ART: I mean. We're just gonna- It's continuous?

AUSTIN: Yes, okay.

ART: It's continuous thing-

AUSTIN: It's not like a hard cut to when we're outside now.

ART: Yeah. Everyone has a milkshake.

[Austin and Janine laugh]

ANDREW: I can't believe Independence was made of cheeseburgers!

[Austin and Janine laugh]

AUSTIN: No but for real. What's it like to face your greatest failure? Dropped down to your size, looking at you straight in the eyes.

[MUSIC - "Form Leads Function" starts]

ART: Grand picks up the gun and points it at it, and says:

ART (as Grand): You know what's really hilarious about this? You're gonna- you're gonna enjoy this. It's good.

ART (as Grand): [continued] I came here looking for independence. It's so perfect.

AUSTIN (as Independence): Did you find it?

ART (as Grand): [chuckles] Of course I did! Look at you!

ART (as Grand): [continued] But. But I don't think that that's- I don't think that's for me. I'm not- [pauses]

ART (as Grand): [continued] I'm not-

AUSTIN (as Independence) [overlapping with Art]: You're not wrong. You're an artist, Grand. Artists need subjects and they need patrons. And they need supplies, and a medium to work with. I am not what these things want me to be. I am a Divine. I need a Candidate.

[Art as Grand sighs]

AUSTIN: It steps towards you, arms like out.

ART (as Grand): It's not. This isn't right.

AUSTIN (as Independence): We could make it better. Did you see my old body?

ART (as Grand): Yeah.

AUSTIN (as Independence): What a mess.

ART (as Grand): Hideous.

AUSTIN (as Independence): Disgusting.

AUSTIN (as Independence): [continued] Form. Leads. Function.

AUSTIN (as Independence): [continued] Think of... think of what this form could do.

ART (as Grand): Yeah, I have. I've thought about it a lot. [sighs]

[music ends]

AUSTIN: Do you have a strong feeling about this, Art?

ART: I mean I know I'm not supposed to narrate the conclusion.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: So we should- we should probably pull some rocks.

AUSTIN: Ugh! This fucking game! [people chuckling] Games are good y'all. Let's pull some rocks, it's the third time. Alright, third challenge draw. The outcome of the third challenge decides the entire quest if we fail now the quest is lost. Start with no stones-

ANDREW [overlapping with Austin]: [silently off screen] Yeah that's fine. [chuckles]

AUSTIN: Start with no stones in the pool add one white one red. Add one white for each successful challenge, one red for each failed challenge. We are up to four white. Each player takes two red. Read aloud. If your main character's unhappy about the path the fellowship has taken, hold one red stone. If your main character actually wants the quest to fail, hold two red stones. Otherwise, hold zero stones. Max 2. My main character is Belgard in this scenario. Let me know when you're ready.

JANINE: Ready.

ART: I need a minute.

ANDREW [overlapping with Art]: Ready-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ANDREW: Yeah. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Fair.

JANINE: Mm.

ANDREW: Mm, do I need a minute?

AUSTIN: Even! I mean 'is happy with' is a broad- you know.

ANDREW: Right.

JANINE: Golly I hope my friend turns into a monster!

ANDREW: Well- I think it's more like- why is this- why is Grand still talking to this fucking monster.

AUSTIN: Right.

ANDREW: Instead of just dumping on him.

JANINE [overlapping with Andrew]: Yeah, that's true. Right.

ART: Grand did not like his life on the Fleet.

AUSTIN: That's true.

ART: That's why he went on the worst camping trip anyone has ever been on. [chuckles all around]

ANDREW: But you discovered werewolves.

ART: We didn't even sing any songs. We didn't- we never made smores.

AUSTIN: I was gonna say I counted- I saw no smores.

ART: And like- okay. So we win here. And then what? I go back to the Fleet and make fucking mechs for the guy who sent people to kill me?

AUSTIN: [sighs] This sounds like two red stones.

ART: It sure does.

AUSTIN: Is that- alright. Go.

ANDREW: Yup. Go.

AUSTIN: Zero zero two. Agh! Each player takes one white one red. Read aloud. As a player, do you think the fellowship succeeded at the challenge? Hold yes if white- hold white if yes, red if no, this will decide the entire quest, not just this challenge. Decide secretly then reveal simultaneously. I mean the challenge is-

ANDREW [overlapping with Austin]: God.

AUSTIN: The challenge is to slay the dragon. Right?

ART: Face the beast.

AUSTIN: Face- oh that's the challenge! You're right. It's the challenge. It's face the beast.

JANINE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Oh that's a good- that's a- thank you Art.

AUSTIN: That's a very good difference.

ANDREW: Yes.

AUSTIN: Alright. Alright is everyone ready?

JANINE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Go. Alright. Everyone goes white. Ohhh-kay. Decide secret dadada- Put the stones in the cup without looking draw one stone, reveal, then draw and reveal the second stone. Don't put the first stone back before- blah blah blah same as before. Alright. What do we have? We have two white from previous successes.

ART: One white cause- it always starts-

AUSTIN: It always starts with one, so that's three white to start, right?

ART: And seven... four more so it's seven.

AUSTIN: Seven.

ART: That's gonna be a d10.

AUSTIN: Okay. One two and three are failures, everything else is a success?

ART: Well we still- we got a red in the first one still.

AUSTIN: That's what I mean. Right right right right. I'm sorry but. One two and three I'm saying on the numbers are, right now- in this d10, one two and three are all red.

ART: Yeah that's true.

ANDREW: Wait...

AUSTIN: Yes.

ANDREW: Yeah you're right. Yeah yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: I think so. Cause there's always one red one white, always.

ANDREW: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And then one two three four, five six seven. Yes. Okay. Adds up. Roll one d10.

ART: I can't look.

ANDREW: Tough- fuck. That's a red.

JANINE: Mmm.

AUSTIN: Alright. Roll one d9. So now this is one and two are red. Everything else is white. That's a seven. One red one white. Which means we lose one character but win the challenge.

ANDREW: And it has to be a major character?

AUSTIN: No, it doesn't.

ANDREW: Mm. Okay.

AUSTIN: It doesn't at all.

ART: I mean-

AUSTIN [overlapping with Art]: We have to debate who we lose and like what happens here.

ART: I mean do we wanna talk about-

AUSTIN: We should have this talk, Art. We've never lost a character- we've never lost a main character at Friends at the Table, until the very end game of a season.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And not just a season. Like, the end of an end.

ART: I mean, we've talked about- it's hard- Grand is the hardest character to go into the second half of this season.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: You know, it's- it's a rough transition for him in terms of mechanics, in terms of-

AUSTIN: A lot of things.

ART: Yeah. But- he's- he's fun.

AUSTIN: Okay, here's my actual question for you is. Is it more fun- is it more interesting for you to play Grand as- there's a lot of things here. One, I believe your ability to come up with a new character on the spot tomorrow. Like Art, you- you and I have played dozens of games together [Art chuckles]. You will have a new character you love by the end of next week.

ART: Yeah, and I- but I want to play this character for way longer than that.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Art]: Weeks. Yeah For you to switch over.

ART [overlapping with Austin]: I'll have- so much time to live with that.

AUSTIN: Yeah. So that's one. Two, do you think it's interesting to play Grand as someone who fails here, and then someone else loses, steps in, like, does Chthonic sacrifice itself here to save Grand? And then you- and then we play Grand as like, having lived with that, knowing that he made the wrong choice. And got something killed? Is that interesting?

ART: Yes. That is interesting. I don't know if it's more interesting [Austin chuckles]. Like.

AUSTIN: This is one of those decisions that I love to make. Because I don't have to make it.

[Andrew laughs]

AUSTIN: But also cause I think literally every direction we go in is an interesting one. Dre and Janine do you have feelings about this?

ANDREW: Oh, man.

AUSTIN: As a reminder, like, the thing that's wild here is we lose a character and win the challenge.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like there's a world where Grand gets in and then someone fucking shoots him.

ANDREW: I mean yeah.

JANINE: That's I mean- that's what I was thinking exactly.

ANDREW: That's what it would be.

ART: That's it.

JANINE: Yeah. I can see that and I can also see the Chthonic thing. Because we've- we've gone through a good arc with that character as well.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Yeah. Yeah. We have.

JANINE: So I think it come- yeah. Whatever Art's comfortable with.

AUSTIN: Cause this is a big one.

JANINE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: This is why I like Follow. Because like it leads to this instead of being-

JANINE: It's a good game.

AUSTIN: Instead of like what we would do in this sequence. If we just played this through in the Veil, we would have figured out a way. Do you know? Like-

JANINE: Or we would stop here, and then y'all would do a pickup or something.

AUSTIN: Yes, totally. Which is still hard not to resist- like it's hard to resist-

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: -that possibility right now but I don't want to. Sorry Art, I know that puts a lot of pressure on you.

ART: Yeah. I mean, I know- I know what's gonna happen, is that I'm gonna spe- we're gonna make a choice here. I'm gonna spend the next sixteen to twenty four hours being like 'I should've made that other choice'

ANDREW: Yeah. Yeah.

JANINE: That's how it goes.

AUSTIN: It is how it goes.

ART: [sighs] This is a real. This is a real kill your darlings moment. And it's figuring out is- is- is Grand Magnificent my darling? Or is my like, obsession with tragedy my darling. [Austin and Janine laugh]

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah.

ANDREW: That's a good like, encapsulation of this fucking podcast.

AUSTIN: Yup, it sure is. It's like literally you- you're choosing between a really fun, goofy character who lets you do lots of really funny bits, and the fact that our show can get really fucking sad sometimes.

JANINE: Especially on Holiday Specials.

AUSTIN [overlapping with Janine]: Alright we should talk this- yes a hundred percent, especially on Holiday Specials.

ANDREW: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Especially Art on Holiday Specials. Are you fucking kidding me.

JANINE: This is- this the Holiday Special, so.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I guess like. Let's talk about Grand Magnificent. Maybe that's what we should be doing.

ART: Yeah maybe that is it.

AUSTIN: Because let's- stay true to the character here.

ART: Well I mean like, in like, a simple storytelling way,

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: He- he's at the end of his arc.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: If this was a TV show, and we're like at this point, I would be like, Grand Magnificent is going to die because-

AUSTIN: Blank.

ART: He's had his- he's had a beginning middle and end?

AUSTIN: Except that TV shows are bad because what actually happens is, the character's actor has a two year contract, and so you don't actually get to kill him off here. Or, or, the opposite happens, right? Which is like the reason this happens is because we have to write you off. Which is not what's happening. There's no alibi here and that's the dilemma.

ART: Yeah. Well I mean I was thinking of like a-

AUSTIN: Like a good TV show.

ART: Like a good TV show. Like a Sopranos. Like.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: You know that's how you knew someone was gonna die on the Sopranos because their character hit an arc.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: You know I could've- [unintelligible]

JANINE [overlapping with Art]: So you're saying when we go into the next system, it's not gonna be Grand Magnificent in Italy for some reason with Gillian Anderson? [Austin chuckles]

ART: Wait is that on the table?

AUSTIN: I mean listen. [Janine chuckles] This new system is dope. I think there's a Gillian Anderson role. I think there's a stat in there for that.

ART: But like the real question is like, what- what is, like. [groans] How do you- how do you come back from- how do you come back from this?

AUSTIN [overlapping with Art]: I know! I don't know but I've been thinking about the second part of this show or this season as being like. I talked about this a lot but like the- when we did COUNTER/Weight I always conceptualised COUNTER/Weight as a sequel to a show no one ever saw. And then we saw like the special ending to it with the Kingdom game? The whole first sea- the whole first half of this season, the last few months of this season, the first few, have been that first season of the show, or that first- that first show. The second part of this sh- season, second part of Twilight Mirage is the follow up to? And like, I totally in the realm of possibility to come in on a character who is like, disgruntled or is like, you know, a mess. Like I don't know is this how- is this how you go from being the Artist to the Scoundrel class, you

know? Is this how you go from being like 'oh I don't pick up paintbrushes anymore', you know? I don't design mech- I don't do that anymore. Like that's also a fun character type to play.

ART: Yeah, what's the- how long is our- what's the time between now-

AUSTIN: It's a year. We're going a year between this and when we come back.

ART: It's almost not long enough. I wanna just say like- it's gonna be five years.

AUSTIN: It was originally and then we talked about it and more people were like- yeah what about a year?

ART: What if we do five years. [Austin and Andrew chuckle]

AUSTIN: Listen, time is weird in the Mirage now. That's only half a joke, actually. Like that is literally only half a joke. Like part of what's going on is that things get timey-wimey going forward. Things on the outside and the inside do not match up. And very strong emotions can rewrite the space around you. Most-

ART [overlapping with Austin]: Are you reading from a Doctor Who pitch document right now?

AUSTIN: Yeah, basically. Yes. Uhhuh. Like I actually kind of like the notion of like, everyone else spent a year, Grand Magnificent spent five. I'm not kidding. Like, every mo- like the- that Quicksilver comic, right?

ART: Sure. Now I think that's more interesting.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: I think that's more interesting than me coming up with a new character.

AUSTIN: It's also more interesting like, I think the other thing here, there's probably people yelling at this- at the podcast right now who are like: fucking kill him! That's the end! That's to me, is still more of an honest answer than the other thing we could be doing here which is like, oh then Cascabel gets it- gets killed. Or then, Korrin Kim like, smashes her plane into Independence. Like Independence Day! You got it! Like this is still- this still feels like I do wanna see what happens next with Grand Magnificent. There's almost something cowardly in letting him die here.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Alright. So what happens?

ART: Is- is Chthonic the person-

AUSTIN: I think so, right?

ART: Yeah I think so too.

AUSTIN: It's not Even, it's not Signet, I mean it could be, I mean- we could put every character on the table here to be clear. And could talk it all out. But I don't know that- I don't know that I'm done with Signet or Even either.

JANINE: I'm definitely not done with Signet.

EVEN: Ah, yeah. [Austin chuckles] I'm not done with Even.

JANINE: I- I love the class we picked out for her too much.

AUSTIN: Okay. Yeah it's really good. Aw, it's really good.

ART: So it's like. Is that the image? Is it like- Grand Magnificent like reaches to take his hand, and-

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: Take its hand, and Chthonic like, I don't know. What does it look like when a cloud destroys a robot?

AUSTIN: I don't know. Let's think about it. Actually, what was Chthonic's last like message to Signet and Belgard?

JANINE: I mean that's an Art question, right?

ART [overlapping with Janine]: Oh.

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah, that's an Art question.

ART: I had a really good one then realised that in- in narrative it wouldn't make any sense. Cause my idea was like - oh, an empty concert hall. They weren't in that conversation. Doesn't mean anything to them.

AUSTIN: Nope.

JANINE: Actually. Mm. Okay. So here's the thing. Here's the thing. When Chthonic was transferred from-

AUSTIN: Oh true.

JANINE: Tender to Belgard, it was in a movie theatre, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah, it was. Like in a old timey movie theatre specifically.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So it actually would totally work. And like the lights shut off?

ART: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Like a '*khng*'.

ART: The- the- yeah, Like '*chnk*'.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: That's like a- that's like a board stadium, but whatever. We're-

AUSTIN: Yeah. You know. Post- post linguistic. Cool. But yeah so, so what does it look like when Chthonic destroys Independence?

ART: I mean the obvious answer is like, or like, I sort of want the Indiana Jones shot? The like,

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: The, the cause it's that, it's that glass? Is that it. Is that it, is it just corrodes very quickly you know? All glass turns back into sand?

AUSTIN: Into sand, it gets-

ART: Also, what I really want is for Grand Magnificent to have part of the inside, the part that reflects you back worse than you are?

AUSTIN: Oh right.

ART: So we can't destroy all of it. But I mean, you could- you could turn a lot of glass into sand and not have all of it go.

AUSTIN: Yeah I think it just-

ANDREW: You still have the weird marble in your pocket.

AUSTIN: You do still have that weird marble in your pocket. I think you would save that. I think that's like a thing you have going into the second half of the season for sure.

ART: Sure.

AUSTIN: It's like those marbles, like. You're always just playing with those marbles. You know? It's a good tick to have. I think it just gets cloudy. Like it literally looks like clouded glass, or clouded crystal. And then yeah, like. Begins to turn to sand in front of you as it- like it steps towards you, and you're like ready to let it- like it touches your face, and then like bit by bit it turns to sand from the feet down. And then yeah like, shatters after- like after one of the legs is gone, it falls down. And then it just like. It sticks to one face and looks back at you. Did you build Undela Apogica into it? I don't remember.

ART: I don't remember either.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: I don't think so.

AUSTIN: Okay. Then it's-

ART [overlapping with Austin]: I think- I think that was rejected.

AUSTIN: Okay. Then it just looks up back to you and like. Shatters. And the rest of it does fall on the ground and then yeah, like. There's part of it, part of it where it, in its head, basically, reflects up back and you see whatever the worst version is of yourself.

ART: I mean, I want to image to be Grand like, grabs that piece and just fucking runs and no one sees him for-

[MUSIC - "The Twilight Mirage" starts]

AUSTIN: Like is he-

ART [overlapping with Austin]: Like I don't know how to get out of here, but I don't know how it works.

JANINE: He came here in a bubble that was attached to another thing, so that might be tricky.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: But like-

AUSTIN: No no no. But like, you spend like the- that's the epilogue here, so to speak? Is- Grand grabs that, runs into the depths and then. We just cut to Grand like, knees to chest, leaning up against Korrin's ship or whatever. That's parked on the ground. Or like, the- the body of Empyrean? Like, back up against the empty body of Empyrean.

ART: Yeah that's- that's the one.

AUSTIN: That's it. Hooo-ah.

ANDREW: Hooo-er.

ART: This was going so well for so long.

JANINE: Mm.

[music ends]

[Episode ends]