

Twilight Mirage 30: This Year of Ours: The Muscle

Transcribed by: Emily (@tempestemily) [0:00-16:38]
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AUSTIN: An excerpt from an address to the high council of the Qui Err Assembly by Annex Iota Pretense, reconstituted leader of her people.

AUSTIN (as Iota Pretense): I have heard the murmurs, and I have seen the images. They're calling their bandits heroes. The bored rich like Joan-bee. Invaders like Templeton's Faire. Soldiers like Echo Reverie.

Do not misunderstand. We are the heroes of this story.

[["The Muscle"](#) by Jack de Quidt starts playing]

Their talking heads will tell you that history is more complicated than that. That everyone is complicit in some misdeed. That by our own logic, what we call ours was the planet's first. That we are colonizers, too.

But do not misunderstand. We are Qui Err Vi Qi-Em, The Soil With Memory.

Their petty historians hold matchsticks and think they wield the sun. Their propagandists will take our pain and twist it into lessons for their children, our struggle into entertainment for paying customers. They will turn sites of violence into souvenir shops, and in their little voices demand from us personalized baubles.

Do not misunderstand.

They will ask you to give them a name like ours. They will ask to touch your bone and branch. They will, with no understanding of their sacrilege, call all of this curiosity. They will call themselves "friends of the people."

Do not misunderstand.

That touch is a colony ship. Their interest in our ways is not curiosity, it is a hanging rope not yet taut: a whip, a lasso, a noose.

Do not misunderstand.

We do not have friends among them. We have only those who deign to speak to us. The so-called Free States walk on our bodies, toes mingling in soil, without sending so much as a delegation to meet with us. Even the Hegemony, which recognizes our sovereignty, does so as an addendum at best.

But do not misunderstand,

We are not an appendix. We are the body itself.

[Music ends]

AUSTIN: Echo, talk to me, talk to me, tell me, tell me or talk to me, one or the other, let's do both. Tell me and talk to me about what Echo Reverie looks like in Scum and Villainy. In both scum, and also, separately, villainy.

[SYLVIA laughs]

SYLVIA: So, okay, so we got like half an hour for scum, half an hour for villainy, that's what we're doing?

AUSTIN: Yeah, we'll- yeah, exactly, and then we'll do a vignette, and then Ali will have to turn all of that into a nice 90 minute episode.

SYLVIA: Eh, perfect.

AUSTIN: Not just with you, but with everybody else's.

SYLVIA: So you want me to run through my stats and moves?

AUSTIN: Yeah. So, so I think of the player characters, the easiest one to transfer was Echo.

SYLVIA: It was easy to the point where I thought I told you about it, but I didn't, but we both knew what class I was going to be. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. One hundred percent. Um, which is Muscle, right?

SYLVIA: That being the Muscle.

AUSTIN: Yeah. There's a bit of the Honed that's missing here, is what I'll say, but also it just goes to show the difference between these two books and settings, right? That The Veil is a world in which everybody is cyber — is all cyber everything.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And the — Scum and Villainy is not that. And I think that's kind of appropriate to some degree, because there has been this weird influx in the setting of New Earth Hegemony people, [SYLVIA: Mm-hm.] who definitely have their fair share of cybernetics, but probably way less than

the Divine Fleet, who have this very intimate relationship with technology. Whereas the New Earth Hegemony, while they use technology, have a skeptical — or very almost — not antagonistic, but certainly... They define themselves through their human-ness, and so probably have a lower... a lower resistance, or higher resistance, rather, to integrating people — to integrating technology into their bodies, socially and culturally, so I kind of like the notion of the Muscle just being, oh yeah, you're like this new kind of person who's just the muscle, who's here to beat people up, because there's a lot of people like you now. And you're not defined by your lack of technological integration at this point, because there are a lot of people who aren't as technologically integrated.

SYLVIA: Yeah, I also think that not being defined by that has been working with the arc we've had for Echo too, [AUSTIN: Totally.] of Echo being like, not directly connected to the Mirage, but having ways to interface with it, [AUSTIN: Totally.] the main one being like, the eyepatch and stuff.

AUSTIN: Yeah, definitely. And we [SYLVIA: Which I like.] might get into that in a little bit in this sequence that we're going to do the vignette after.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So the Muscle starts with Scrap and Command, and they earn XP when they address challenges with force or threats. So 2 Scrap, which is the fighting skill, 1 Command, and then you get two more points, one from your background and one from your heritage. Let's start with your heritage, which is the Tides of Harmony.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So what did you get from that?

SYLVIA: So, what I — the specific thing from my heritage that I put is Runner. For people who don't remember, Echo's whole thing back when they were on the Tides of Harmony [AUSTIN: Right.] was that they were sort of a materials runner, and thief to some extent.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

SYLVIA: And that's — and so, from that, I gave plus 1 to Scramble, which is the more like agility, movement-based thing.

AUSTIN: Right, right.

SYLVIA: And then — do you want me to go into the background right after that?

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

SYLVIA: Okay. And then, so from the backgrounds that are available — I'm assuming you've gone over some of these already.

AUSTIN: Oh, definitely. Yeah yeah yeah.

SYLVIA: So I picked Labor out of them, and related that to-

AUSTIN: Oh, actually, *those* I didn't go over specifically, because a lot of people are just using as their background — some people have, I think like Tender's is just 'Architect,' because that was [SYLVIA: Okay.] the Veil class that she had? But I think what you've done here is totally fine.

SYLVIA: Yeah, okay. So I chose Labor out of the ones that they have in the character sheets, and then wrote "former prisoner" as the more specific one. [AUSTIN: Mm-hm.] And for that, Echo gets plus one to Skulk, which is the sort of stealth-based thing. [AUSTIN: Right.] I wanted to sorta... make sure [slight laugh] Echo basically like — I wanted to — I looked [AUSTIN: Uh-huh! Uh-huh.] at the Prowess section, and was like "that's me. Right there."

AUSTIN: Yep. Yep. I thought that you were going to say the other thing, which is, you wanted to play Blades in the Dark where y'all at least had one person who had a point in Prowl. [laughs]

SYLVIA: Oh, that too.

AUSTIN: Because last time, you extremely did not.

SYLVIA: Yeah, I'm really hoping to succeed on some rolls this time. [laughs]

AUSTIN: [laughs] Well, the thing that's cool about this game is that I think it's a little bit easier, there's gambits now, which is a currency you can use to add to your rolls, and that will help a lot, I think.

SYLVIA: Okay. Awesome.

AUSTIN: And also, just I think coming off of The Veil, where we had some real rough rolls, I bet we're gonna get some better ones this time through. Cool, so — I'm trying to think, what is there with Echo's —

SYLVIA: [cross] Vice? I think I've actually figured that out a little.

AUSTIN: [cross] Yeah, vice. That's my biggest question always.

SYLVIA: Yeah. So I was thinking... [deep breath] So the list we have is Faith, Gambling, Luxury, Obligation, Pleasure, Stupor, and Weird. The ones that — there's a few that I immediately didn't feel. I think I was kind of torn between Weird and Obligation, with a leaning towards Weird. My only problem there is that Aubrey was also into Weird, and I don't want to just go back to my wheelhouse.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Well, what sort of weird stuff would Echo be into?

SYLVIA: So, what I was thinking was, because Echo was there when... the axiom fight was a big change, [AUSTIN: Yeah.] and then seeing the new Quires was — they were there and saw this shift in reality, almost.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: And I think it's sort of almost a mix between the two, in a weird way, where it's like Echo wants to learn more about this new world and the new way things work [pause] so they can track down the people that they care about that have gone missing because of stuff. [AUSTIN: Mm-hm.] And I might be overthinking that a little? But I definitely think there is genuine interest in- [Echo voice] "Oh, so like the way everything worked has changed, and so now, I don't have to be confined by this system that kind of failed me."

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: "And I can learn this new one."

AUSTIN: The key for me with that is, I'm cool with that, I think it's actually totally good.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But the thing that I wanna make sure about in framing it is that this is what Echo does in their downtime.

SYLVIA: Oh, for sure.

AUSTIN: Not just — sorry, not just in their downtime, in order to relax. In order to-

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: — break off stress. Like, it —

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: There's an important distinction to me between "this is my long term project," [SYLVIA: True.] which this system totally has a way of working with, and "this is how my character, like, comes back to the norm, like finds that even keel." Um, so I want to make sure that that lines up? [SYLVIA: Yeah...] It's totally up to you, obviously.

SYLVIA: So I was kinda — so yeah, I definitely agree, I was kinda looking at it in a way similar to when we did Marielda, Sige had the boat thing, which was both a project [AUSTIN: Right.] and how he relaxed.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah.

SYLVIA: Because I definitely do think, like after — like we had that one scene where I found the statue and the ground snake.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

SYLVIA: And like that definitely felt like... both fun for Echo as well as like kinda tense at times, but like, the wonder of finding that was definitely enjoyable, and like— yeah.

AUSTIN: Right, so I like that notion of — it's almost, um, have you played the S.T.A.L.K.E.R. games or seen the movie Stalker?

SYLVIA: I have played a little [cross] bit of— yeah. One of 'em.

AUSTIN: [cross] Okay, do you know — I don't, I haven't played them a ton either. [SYLVIA: Yeah.] But like, I know enough about them to be able to have this conversation, which [SYLVIA: Okay.] is, in S.T.A.L.K.E.R., you're in The Zone, where there are [SYLVIA: Mm-hm.] lots of other factions of like, paramilitary troops and explorers and scavengers and citizens. And on top of that, there are these places that are like, places where weird things happen? I forget what they call them in... [mockingly] Me: "I can totally talk about this thing." Also me: "Uh, what's the name of the very important, obvious thing that's all over The Zone?" I comple — oh, fuck, there's a — it's not like, The Phenomena, but it's something very similar to that.

SYLVIA: I know what you mean.

AUSTIN: Um, Anomalies, right? There are these anomalies [SYLVIA: Yeah.] that are in The Zone, where it's like "oh hey, here's a weird like, trees growing up out of the ground and they look like claws, or here's just like, loose fire, hanging in the sky or, here's a thing of just like a tiny little whirlwind on the ground and if you step on it it'll launch you into the air," or something, right? Or just like [SYLVIA: Yeah.] space and time are bending. Umm... And I like the notion of Echo going on sort of walks into the woods, or into the wilderness, to just find those things, and just like, that being what centers them.

SYLVIA: Yeah, I like the idea of almost like being a hobbyist archeologist in a way?

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes yes yes.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Do you keep track of them? Like, do you write them down and record them?

SYLVIA: I think so, yeah. I like the idea of Echo having some sorta journal, umm, keeping track of this stuff. Because it's just like, what's the point in just discovering these things if you're not able to keep track of em all?

AUSTIN: Totally. Yeah, I'm into this, I'm way into it. And I think it also fits in because I think one of the things we had spoken about Echo doing during the last year is like, helping people reconnect using these weird bends in space and time? Umm, and I can imagine the like... It's stressful to do the mission, where you try to move someone through one of these weird anomalies? It's not as stressful, in fact it's relaxing, for them to go do the exploration ahead of time, [SYLVIA: Mm-hm.] and like get, get their head around the wild spaces. It's also just in line with what Echo has always been. Like, Echo's the one who scouted the plateau, Echo's the one who found, like you said, the snake and the statue of Pretense.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Echo's the one who then found the Holiday Gambit, like — their whole history is "I'm gonna go wander off somewhere?" Umm, and it's almost always this very positive vibe around it, so. So I'm into it.

SYLVIA: Alright. Cool.

AUSTIN: Umm... So what are the remaining stats you have? So right now, what I have written down for you is... uh-hh, again, from, just from the moves... that I've — I closed the book. I closed this — I closed the fuckin book. [cross] Why did I do this...

SYLVIA: [cross] So the starting was 2 Scrap, 1 Command, [cross] and then I have-

AUSTIN: [cross] Right, right. Scrap is fighting, Command is like intimidation and ordering people to do things. [SYLVIA: Yeah.] Then you took 1 Skulk from your [SYLVIA: 1 s— yeah.] heritage— no, your background?

SYLVIA: Background...

AUSTIN: Then 1 Scramble from your heritage. [SYLVIA: Yeah.] So then you have 2 left. So wait, [cross] where did those 2 go?

SYLVIA: [cross] I have 2 points left. So what I put my other points into was I put 1 point in Helm, [AUSTIN: Mm-hm.] which is your piloting stat, I believe is how they describe it?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yep. Totally.

SYLVIA: And I put another point into Scramble, so I have 2 Scramble.

AUSTIN: Right. [SYLVIA: Yeah. Yeah.] So, the thing I want to say is, you have Prowess out the fuckin nines?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You have 4 Prowess, and Prowess is an attribute that lets you resist kind of physical things, is the way I would describe Prowess. [SYLVIA: For sure.] Obviously, you and I have played Blades before, so I don't have to go down the whole thing of like stress rolls, and blah blah blah, but for listeners, [SYLVIA: Mm-hm.] umm, the way that this game works is that if you miss, if you go for something and you miss, and depending on the kind of positioning in terms of how risky it was for a player to do it, umm, I can inflict harm, and then the player can be like "uh-uh-uh, I'm gonna take stress to avoid that harm, or to avoid that outcome, that consequence." And the way you avoid that is by rolling... rolling the number of dice that you have in your related attribute, I'm pretty sure that's true? [SYLVIA: Yeah. Umm...] And then taking the highest number and subtracting it from 6. Uh... and so, you will crush any sort of Prowess resistance, but I do wanna say, your Insight is 0 and your Resolve is 1.

SYLVIA: That's... I was gonna bring that up.

AUSTIN: I think that's fine. I think that's fine, but-

SYLVIA: So. I do too, but we did talk a little about what we're gonna be doing today, maybe, and it makes me — I've been rethinking the Helm point a little bit.

AUSTIN: Yeah, me too.

SYLVIA: Um, and I was thinking of putting that into Study, because it relates to the vice I...

AUSTIN: I like that a lot. I actually like that a whole bunch. [SYLVIA: Yeah.] And also it makes Echo feel a little bit more full in who they are.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And a little less like... Echo's never felt like "the brawn," even though Echo's been the bodyguard. Do you know what I mean?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: They've always felt... Because of, I think, because of their position as the scout, and not just the person who's gonna kick down the door and beat people up, there's always felt like there's a degree of wisdom, or not wisdom, even, but like, intelligence?

SYLVIA: Instinct, maybe?

AUSTIN: Yeah, intelligence and instinct, [SYLVIA: Yeah.] and like, knowing where to look for things, and knowing how to break down a situation, and knowing how to be calm enough not to jump into action too soon, and I think Study really reflects that, even though it's not like...

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it's just as valuable for reading books [slight laugh] as it is for reading situations, you know?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I guess the only other one that I wanna ask about, and maybe this is a thing you could think about going forward, is if you continue down the path of, like, esoteric explorer, maybe putting a point into Attune down the line makes sense?

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: Um... Attune is when you galactic brain.

SYLVIA: Yeah. [laughs]

AUSTIN: [reading] "When you Attune to The Way, you open your mind to the galactic energies underlying all of existence. You might communicate with a non sentient species or robot, you could sense unseen danger or killing intent (though Study may be more appropriate)," yep, see there you go, that's why it's Study. [SYLVIA: Okay.] "You could safely handle precursor artifacts or remnants that tap directly into this energy." I don't think you're doing that, at this point, but [SYLVIA: Yeah.] I do think that that is — there will be times when I'm like ooh, you could totally get limited effect with Study, but you could get great effect if you [cross] rolled Attune, or something.

SYLVIA: [cross] Yeah, for sure.

AUSTIN: But I like that, I think that's good. And we don't have to go over your abilities word for word here, because they'll come up in play.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I will say, that I'm happy you have a move that lets you engage [amused] a small gang on equal footing in close combat. [laughs]

SYLVIA: This is Friends at the Table, alright?

AUSTIN: Yeah, someone has to be a fuckin' small gang, alright?

SYLVIA: It's finally my turn.

[both laugh]

AUSTIN: There isn't... that doesn't exist in Dungeon World, does it? Because there isn't — [SYLVIA: I don't think so, no.] oh, because in Dungeon World, you don't actually... you stat out everything, and there's HP, vs the rest of the games that we play, where it's not ever so clean as just HP. Um, yeah. But it's Counter/WEIGHT, Marielda, and now... Twilight Mirage, we got our small gang. We got it. [laughs]

But yeah, the rest of these moves are all really good, it's just like you're tough, you're a toughie. You're not gonna get jumped, and you're not gonna — and if you do get jumped, you're gonna be okay. I am actually — wait, maybe there is a move here that I'm surprised I didn't see you take. Wait wait wait wait wait wait wait. Wait. Maybe I'm just a liar. Oh oh oh! Yeah. I'm — it's the first one. It's Unstoppable, which lets you perform a feat of physical force that verges on the superhuman [SYLVIA: Yeah, that's—] which is basically already like a move from the Veil.

SYLVIA: Yeah, for — that's... why I was like, oh, Echo's gonna be easy to transfer over to this. [AUSTIN: Totally.] I think that's also the default for the Muscle?

AUSTIN: It is. It is the starting move, [SYLVIA: Yeah.] yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. All right, so. I think that's it for stats. You have an easy one, like, I've had some long conversations with other people about their stuff. And there's obviously some other stuff that we'll get in play too around like [SYLVIA: Yeah.] who your bud is — everybody starts with a deadly friend and like someone who — a rival of some sort. [SYLVIA: Okay.] And we'll work that out in play. Oh, and then I guess here's the one thing, is I want to address the fact that — so the Muscle items are all like weapons?

SYLVIA: Yeah...

AUSTIN: So... two of these are just your thing already. Fine Martial Arts Style is already your thing. [slight laugh] [SYLVIA: Yeah.] And then there's a blade, which you already have a name for and everything, so [SYLVIA: Yeah.] both of those are totally good. I think I'm cool with you having a Fine Flamethrower. I think.

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: Um. But... and I'm definitely fine with you having Mystic Ammunition and a Fine blaster pistol, because like [SYLVIA: The way guns work now?] we've set those up as being that's how guns work, that's the [SYLVIA: Yeah.] Cascabel system? But I'd like to come up with something different for this detonator launcher and the fine sniper rifle.

SYLVIA: *Yeah.*

AUSTIN: Partially 'cause I just don't see Echo using those?

SYLVIA: I'm not super into the whole grenade launcher thing, no.

AUSTIN: No! And like I... the setting just doesn't work with it anymore. right? like.

SYLVIA: No, for sure.

AUSTIN: We've changed those rules — and I don't want it to like, oh, cut those off, you don't get them. So let's figure out some other cool stuff that might work [SYLVIA: Mm.] there, maybe something nonlethal, maybe something that just fits [cross] Echo's vibe a little more?

SYLVIA: [cross] I definitely want some more non-lethal options here.

AUSTIN: Yeah, so let's — you know. I don't know, let's go play some Heat Signature and figure out cool non-lethal options.

SYLVIA: [quiet laugh] Oh! So I got a wrench.

AUSTIN: You got a wrench. [laughs] Yeah yeah, exac — you got a wrench and —

SYLVIA: And I've got a wrench to throw as well, so.

AUSTIN: You have two wrenches! [SYLVIA: God, I'm—] That's the whole sta... [cross] that game is really good.

SYLVIA: [cross] Yeah. That's how you play Heat Signature!

AUSTIN: Dude, that game is so good, I love it so much!

SYLVIA: That game fuckin rules!

AUSTIN: Ah, god. Ah, god. Okay.

SYLVIA: That game rules.

AUSTIN: So yeah, I guess the thing briefly is just like you have a gun that can fire Cascabel rounds, and you have — you can always [SYLVIA: Okay.] bring mystic ammunition — it might be one or two bullet — it might be a handful of bullets that you can take on any mission, that actually gives you a gun that you could use in an ongoing fight, whereas basically every other gun in the universe, at this point, is single-shot. And you'll run into actual military people who have weapons systems where they can quickly reload those guns, but it's rare. Do you know what I mean, this is not going to be— this isn't Star Wars where everybody in the cantina has a blaster pistol. You know what I mean?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Or if they do, they're all one-shot blaster pistols [laughs], so that's not gonna be a big gunfight, you know? So I think that's a place where we kinda are diverging from Wild West. and maybe veering a little bit more towards like... what's the period of Japanese history that I'm thinking of? Like post-war — not post-war. But [SYLVIA: Post Feudal?] post Sengoku era — say that again?

SYLVIA: Yeah yeah yeah. When rifles started getting introduced.

AUSTIN: Like but actually bef— when rifles were introduced, like *after* rifles were introduced, like the period of kind of wandering samurai versus — like the [SYLVIA: Yeah.] period of the Tokagawa shogunate, basically.

SYLVIA: Okay, yeah, so like straight up —

AUSTIN: [cross] But the Edo period is really my...

ADI: [cross] i immediately went to like, oh, Mitsurugi's backstory in Soul Caliber.

AUSTIN: Yeah, Mitsurugi's — yeah, Mitsurugi's story — yeah, exactly. [laughs] [SYLVIA: You know!] Have you played Soul Blade? Soul Blade is super good.

SYLVIA: I haven't! Ugh...

AUSTIN: But yeah, it's sort of that time period. Or like it isn't that time period, but in terms of like — there are not big Wild West gunfights. That's not [SYLVIA: Yeah.] the fantasy we're going for. There are...

SYLVIA: No one has like a sixshooter, really.

AUSTIN: [cross] Right. Exactly. or like the two people—

SYLVIA: [cross] Or they're not common. At least.

AUSTIN: on the — [laughs] the entire crew that do are you and *Grand Magnificent*. So [laughs]

SYLVIA: Oh jesus!

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh-huh! And they're not even sixshootrs, they're just guns you could reload in combat, you know?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Which is a big deal, so. Um. All right. I think that that's it for our stat talk. I think now we can pivot into doing a quick scene. Um... let's give it a second so that we can breathe. All right. Echo Reverie, tell me how your year has been.

SYLVIA: [deep breath] It's been complicated. [sighs]

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yeah?

SYLVIA: Um. So after the events of... what was it, Follow, was the name of the game we played?

AUSTIN: Yeah, Follow. [stammers] [cross] I guess we're calling—

SYLVIA: [cross] After the event—

AUSTIN: We're calling that whole series of events the Miracle of the Mirage.

SYLVIA: Okay, so... okay. So after the events of the Miracle of the Mirage, we kinda saw Echo left in a position of power that they didn't really want.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: And I think a lot of this year has been balancing those responsibilities with what they actually wanna be doing.

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: It's a lot of making sure that like... people are being taken care of, people are adjusting, people are not being forgotten about by others, and like everyone is keep - like... they're building a community. like [AUSTIN: Right.] they're actually builidng like a life for these

people, but at the same time, fuck, they really just wanna go like find their brother, [AUSTIN: Right.] who's been missing, 'cause the Tides of Harmony [AUSTIN: Right.] went to a different Quire than —

AUSTIN: They split, in fact. [SYLVIA: Yeah.] Right, like the Tides of Harmony [SYLVIA: Yeah.] split and landed two sides of — on two different planets, and space travel's really hard. Like even with a spaceship, it's a pain. And especially like an ancient spaceship. [laughs] So where did you land?

SYLVIA: I don't remember where we said, I feel like...

AUSTIN: I mean, we can — where did you wind up, let's say. 'Cause like I can imagine you bouncing from place to place for a little while before kind of coming to rest.

SYLVIA: Well, like, I guess the question is like — 'cause I — where did the... what Quire did we originally land on?

AUSTIN: Oh, in terms of — at the end of the... Miracle?

SYLVIA: In terms of like the end of the Miracle...

AUSTIN: I don't even remember. It has been [SYLVIA: Yeah.] a while since we played it. And that's why I'm [SYLVIA: Yeah.] kind of like happy to be vague, 'cause everybody wound up in different places. Do you know what I mean? [SYLVIA: Yeah, sure.] Like Gig wound up on Brighton, which is the kind of Rogue Wave ocean-y planet. And... Declan's Corrective wound up on Seneschal, which is the By-and-By planet. Along with the Cadent. And so like the whole crew that you were with kind of all split up. Cascara disappeared. Myriad disappeared— or didn't disappear, but was made very like committed to [slight laugh] to the logistical work, right, and— who else was with your crew? There was another person, right?

SYLVIA: Um...

AUSTIN: There was one more character who I cannot remember — that's all right.

SYLVIA: Who did you name — you named Cascara...

AUSTIN: I named Cascara — oh wait, no, is that it? Myriad, Cascara, and Declan's Corrective. Yeah, that's it. I think?

SYLVIA: Yeah, those were the three non-player-characters that were with us, yeah.

AUSTIN: No, there has to be a fourth one. There's one more. This is gonna kill me.

SYLVIA: Was... fuck...

AUSTIN: [sighs] Man!

SYLVIA: 'Cause it was you, me and Keith who did that, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah, so there should be six characters total.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And I'm only gettin five.

SYLVIA: Was it Waltz Tango Cache?

AUSTIN: Yes! Yes yes yes yes yes yes. It was Waltz. [SYLVIA: Yeah.] It was Waltz. [close whisper] I don't even know where Waltz is. Waltz is up to some shit, I'm so sure of it!

SYLVIA: I mean, yeah.

AUSTIN: [slight laugh] But, but yeah.

SYLVIA: So I think the one I'm drawn to is Altar.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally.

SYLVIA: Primarily because, one, it's where a lot of these people would land. Like, a lot of the people Echo was overseeing would land, they've got the connection there. They have kinda obligations there? But also I'm super into the idea of Echo becoming like a divine tomb raider there?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Me too.

SYLVIA: So, I think Altar is where Echo probably has ended up.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I also like that because Altar, I believe — let me look at my notes real quick. Uh... dododooh...I have a bunch of notes now. I have so many notes... you wouldn't believe the amount of notes I have. [SYLVIA laughs] Um. Ultra — or no — okay. [SYLVIA: Eh.] No no no. You're good. You're good, everything's... I thought for a second that half of the Tides of Harmony went there. Had the other half — where the hell did I put the other half of the Tides of Harmony? Does anyone know? Does *anyone* know where I put the other half [slight laugh] of the Tides?

SYLVIA: [laughs] It's probably in the couch cushion somewhere.

AUSTIN: Yeah [laughs]... That's where — oh wait, of course, of course. I know where they are. I know where they are, *you* don't know where they are. I know where they are.

SYLVIA: Yeah. I mean —

AUSTIN: It's Perigean? Is that the name of the other one?

SYLVIA: Uh, Perigean and Seiche are the two names, yeah.

AUSTIN: And Seiche, yeah yeah yeah. [SYLVIA: Yeah.] I know where Seiche is, because let me tell you about the Volunteers of Seiche, they do not like Earth. [SYLVIA: Great.] The V-O-S, the VOS, they are not out here for fuckin Earth. [typing] Other half of Tides of Harmony. There we go. I've written it down. I've written it down!

SYLVIA: All right.

AUSTIN: All right! Cool. So... being a tomb raider, slowly handing off power to other people who you think are worth taking it on. What else has Echo been up to? Where are you at, eleven months after the Miracle of the Mirage?

SYLVIA: I think at that point, Echo's probably like almost done their like tenure as this sort of figurehead [AUSTIN: Yeah.] in a way? Like things have calmed down enough that they don't really need their like... I don't wanna say wartime, but I guess it's the only word I have for it, like wartime leader? You know?

AUSTIN: No, I think that's fair. We call — I've been calling it the Week-long War, in my notes. [SYLVIA: Okay.] And like I think that that's — there is an honesty in saying like, I was given this power — I took this power because no one else was taking action. [SYLVIA: Mm.] It's time for me to step back from it.

SYLVIA: Yeah. And like honestly Echo would step back sooner if they were able to, but it's one of those things where it's like, I wanna make sure these people are ready, you know?

AUSTIN: Totally. Totally. So what have you do — like what are you doing — it's your — are you... What's the last thing that is your job to do — or maybe not even job, but your last like responsibility? And it could be anything you want here [SYLVIA: Hm.] for Echo as they kind of — their one last ride as the representative of the peoples of Altar. A-L-T-A-R, by the way. I know I sometimes sound like I'm saying A-L-T-E-R, Alter, [SYLVIA: Okay.] but. You know us and our fuckin homophones! We love em!

SYLVIA: Yeah. Some people sp — listen, like, I'm the person who has a character named Ephrim that can be spelled like fifteen different ways.

AUSTIN: True.

SYLVIA: I got you. Um. I'm thinking maybe it's something along the lines of like slowly Echo is like — how big is the city, are you thinking?

AUSTIN: Um. The main one, Seance? [SYLVIA: Yeah.] I'd say that's... Seance... here's one of the questions that I still haven't figured out — I can tell you how many temples it has? [SYLVIA: Okay! Lo—] It has 302 temples. I don't know how big — uh. [cross] It is one of the —

SYLVIA: [cross] I just wanna make sure I'm not like — it's like sizeable though, right?

AUSTIN: Oh, it's absolute — it's one of the three biggest cities at this point.

SYLVIA: That's all I really needed to know.

AUSTIN: [stammers] In the system, for sure.

SYLVIA: Yeah. I was thinkin maybe it's one of those things that just like settling like a newer district. [AUSTIN: Okay.] Like the last little like area there? Making sure —

AUSTIN: Yeah. What do you mean by settling, like...

SYLVIA: So it's a little — maybe it's on the outskirts of the city, and it's a little like riskier being out there. It's almost like a outpost type thing?

AUSTIN: Sure.

SYLVIA: So like they have to make sure that they're prepared for like wildlife, environmental stuff, shit like that.

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: Because maybe it's not like directly connected, it's like a couple miles away.

AUSTIN: Right. Okay. Cool, so I know exactly what happens then. [SYLVIA: Cool.] It is late night, and you have taken — you're doing a late-night watch guard a favor. By kind of taking over their duty and keeping watch on the perimeter — on the eastern perimeter that leads into the kind of jungle. And Seance sort of — the area around Seance is sort of like the area that used to be around the... the Sculpture, Sculpture City, the kind of rolling hills of sand, except it just keeps going. And there are some jungles here and there, but like by and large I'm picturing this as very orange hued, very sandy, very — this is the desert world of our Star Wars-y setting now. I'd say it's much more orange in hue than Tatooine or something. You know, it's a little bit

more saturated with color. And you can see these other planets, right? Like that's one of the things I just wanna keep noting is, you can see these other planets, huge, on the horizon. Even though — the system is small, physically, even though it still takes a long time to get from place to place, like. The reason that it takes a ship a long time to go from Moonlock to Altar is not that it's super far away. I mean, it's super far away, 'cause you're talkin about space still, right? But like, the thing that makes it hard is that the Twilight Mirage is actually super dense, and the engines just don't go as fast [slight laugh] through a dense at — like weird, pseudo-atmosphere as they would through vacuum. And they're also just not built for it, like maybe as new ships get built for this specific —

[30:00]

for the Mirage, this new form of the Mirage, they'll go faster, but for right now, everything still kind of takes a long time. And so you just get these views of the giant planets hanging in the distance, just dominating your view as you travel. So, while you're holding watch, you hear a cry for help, or there's some sort of like— is the— I'll ask. Is there a sort of alarm system, is there a — do people have any sort of like... is there any sort of like personal ID card or phone or something that like sends a signal if someone's vitals get dropped, or anything like that?

SYLVIA: Um. I think they probably have like radios or something. [AUSTIN: Okay.] I think right now, like I think one of the last things they've been setting up is a system like that, and that's why Echo's still there, because it's riskier. [AUSTIN: Okay.] I think right now when they hear — like I have this idea for like watchtowers set up around it, and like a flag system, in a way, that they like are like, I need to step away from this, so this string of flags goes to like the next [AUSTIN: Totally.] thing, so the person there knows, oh, this person needs to step away, so I need to... be careful.

AUSTIN: All right, so here's what happens is, I think what you get is, do you remember that sequence in... it's a very brief moment in Fury Road where the smoke — the flares go up? They're not even flares, [SYLVIA: Yeah.] like the big puffs of like colored smoke? [SYLVIA: Mm-hm.] I think you get one of those in bright — or not even bright but in — ah! It is bright. It's like a bright green, way off in the distance to the east, over the dunes, you know, from this kind of jungled area, and then you see like the series of flags going up as other people see that, and you know that... a flare like that is like serious injury. [SYLVIA: Okay.] So something is happening. What do you do?

SYLVIA: Okay, yeah. So I think what Echo does is they pull like — I'm picturing like these like... almost — they kind of look like, y'know... Ah, what's the like hanging bars that kids play on?

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah. Uh...

SYLVIA: But like the ones that are just handles? [cross] They — this kinda looks like that?

AUSTIN: [cross] [stammering] Handlebars. Right?

SYLVIA: Handlebars. Perfect. [AUSTIN: You got it!] That's exactly it!

AUSTIN: [laughing] I've been there [cross] all week, I've been there —

SYLVIA: [cross] It's been a long day.

AUSTIN: Yo, I have been there all week, Sylvia¹, don't even [SYLVIA: Yeah.] worry.

SYLVIA: So I think they pull one of tho — like it looks like kinda like that, like it's a big like yellow Fisher Price-lookin handle, almost, [AUSTIN: Mm-hm.] connected to like this like Gumption's Gambit-looking stuff.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: Like it's connected to like metal and shit, and like they pull it, and then this string of like yellow flags [AUSTIN: Mm-hm.] just like unfurls along to the other like watchtower, to let the person know like, we're not under attack, but there's something going on?

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: Red is we're under attack... it's urgent. [AUSTIN: Right, and—] Yellow is I need to go check something.

AUSTIN: Gotcha. Okay, cool. So the yellow flag goes up.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You get back whatever the like signal flag is that says mesage received, and then other signals go up across the rest of the kind of patrol to make sure that nobody else also goes after it, like [SYLVIA: Mm-hm.] you've got this under control, basically.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And then you just take off to the east over the dunes, right? As the — you know — as the sun sort of sets, but again, we're in the Twilight Mirage, so things are either just like always near night time, or near dawn. yknow, so it can get pretty dark, but it never gets pitch black. for the most part. there are some times and places where that shifts.

SYLVIA: Every now and then.

¹ The name in the audio recording is no longer in use, hence the audio/transcript discrepancy.

AUSTIN: Every now and then. The shadow of Volition will land on, — is the thing that happens, where there is a place — there is one planet where that is always the case, but I think everywhere else just every now and then, for whatever reason, Volition will put its dark shadow on you. So. You head over the hills and stuff, and it's not long until you — all right, what do you do? How do you try to find this signa — do you just head in the general direction?

SYLVIA: Yeah, I think so. I think it's sort like... yeah, I think it is literally just like, okay, I saw this there, I — maybe Echo like marked it on a map or something [AUSTIN: Sure.] the direction they saw it in [AUSTIN: Mm-hm.] — and then head that way? 'Cause I feel at this point they've probably gotten pretty good at orienteering. The—

AUSTIN: Yeah, definitely. I'm not even going to make you roll for the [SYLVIA: Yeah.] basic orienteering here.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um, uh. But you're just going out on foot, right?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay, cool.

SYLVIA: It's not like — super duper far, right? [cross] 'Cause if it was—

AUSTIN: [cross] No, it's not like six hours — it's not like — [SYLVIA: Yeah.] but it is like, you know, further than shouting distance. Do you know what I mean, like...

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: From HQ, basically. All right, so. You eventually get to this like jungled area, and you kind of pass through, and maybe you cut away some brush as you go into where — you can smell the powder in the air, from the kind of flare shot, so you know you're getting closer, and then you break through at just this — into this clearing, and inside is... It looks like a large like a giant marble? Like a cat's eye. And then you see that [slight laugh] there is just like a pair of wooden doors on the — out front. And then you see the — what sort of vehicles or animals — beasts of burden — do people who are part of Altar drive or ride?

SYLVIA: Oh man.

AUSTIN: [cross] I will note —

SYLVIA: [cross] I feel like it —

AUSTIN: — the Aranea Motors is on the planet, so you could make up something that Surge and Janey would have made.

SYLVIA: Okay, then yeah, I think it probably is something along the lines of like — what was Surge's like doom buggy? Was it doom buggy?

AUSTIN: Yeah, the doom buggy. Yeah.

SYLVIA: Yeah. I think it's like... they have like bulkier, less combat versions of that?

AUSTIN: Sure, okay. So yeah, so it's one of those that's here. And there is a... you can see that it is... I guess you— there's nothing to notice right away. Is — that's what I'll say! There's nothing here to notice without a roll, certainly! It's just it's parked here.

SYLVIA: Hm! [pauses] Well, I do have that 1 point in Study.

You do have that point in Study, and I won't — this isn't a risky roll either, this is what I would call a — so there's two types of rolls in this game. There's an action roll and there's a fortune roll. There's no risk here, so a fortune roll would just let you know how much information you gathered, basically. So "when you want to know something specific about the world, your character can gather information. The GM will ask you how your character gathers the information or how they learned it in the past," because, remember, this game has flashbacks. If it's common knowledge, I can just answer it, but otherwise, either an action roll or a fortune roll, because there's no obstacle. "A fortune roll determines the quality of information you gather." Uh, so, you can go ahead and give me a fortune roll... of... whatever you wanna use here.

SYLVIA: Like anything I wanna use here?

AUSTIN: Yeah, as long as you can explain how it works, but — but —

SYLVIA: Yeah, okay. I think I'll just go with Study, then.

AUSTIN: Okay. But there is definitely a way for me to still be like, well, you're gonna need to get more — a higher result to get better information, you know what I mean?

SYLVIA: Yeah. For sure, it's just like the only things better than a 1 I have are both like — are running and fighting.

AUSTIN: Yeah, which neither of those [cross] would have been able to... play out here.

SYLVIA: [cross] And like... if I needed to get like to a higher point to look at something, I could see using Scramble [AUSTIN: Totally.] but that's not gonna work here.

AUSTIN: Totally.

SYLVIA: So i'm just gonna go with study — that's 1d6, right? I roll 1 for each point I have?

AUSTIN: 1d6. Yep.

SYLVIA: Okay. Hey, I remembered how to play this system!

AUSTIN: It's pretty simple. It's pretty simple.

SYLVIA: Oh, god.

AUSTIN: Well, that's a 1.

SYLVIA: That's a 1.

AUSTIN: So I guess here's the actual thing that I — on a 1, when you're gathering information is "you get incomplete or partial information. [SYLVIA: Kay.] More information gathering will be needed to get all of the answers." The thing that happens is you get turned around in this space — and this is information! This isn't — I'm not saying you won't be able to find your way out — but you realize that you're not sure which way west is anymore. It feels [SYLVIA: Mm-hm.] as if the marble has turned, and the doom buggy has moved with it. And that's probably not true, but like you just sense that the planets aren't in the same place anymore.

SYLVIA: Okay. So I'm in like a wooded area, right?

AUSTIN: You're in a — it's like a — it's a jungle. It's like — [SYLVIA: Yeah.] I wanna like differentiate that from forest, you know what I mean, it's a little [SYLVIA: Yeah.]— it's definitely a little more humid, and it is — you know, there's different insects and animals and stuff. And so again, there's this giant cat's eye marble that has doors in the front, and then this doom buggy with no one in it.

SYLVIA: Okay. The main reason I just wanna ask that is 'cause there's trees and stuff around, right?

AUSTIN: Totally. A hundred percent.

SYLVIA: So I think immediately upon feeling that, Echo would like mark the tree nearest to them [cool. awesome] where they think they came from? I don't know if — they don't know how useful that's gonna be, but it's [Yeah.] the most like grounding thing they have.

AUSTIN: That totally works.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Uh, awesome!

SYLVIA: Um. And then — so it's like it's a cat's eye? Like... you said?

AUSTIN: Like a giant cat's eye, yeah.

SYLVIA: Okay. [cross] And there's no —

AUSTIN: [cross] A cat's eye marble, to be... clear.

SYLVIA: Marble, yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah. And like where the, you know, where the...line of the eye would be, basically, is where at the very bottom of it there is a door.

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: Where it's like a big double door, is what it is.

SYLVIA: [sighs] I think... [pauses] I think what Echo does is they like go up to the door, but they like do that where you're like standing to the side of it [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] and they like — like, with their back to the building, and like push it open from the side, basically [cross] so they can peek in.

AUSTIN: [cross] Uh-huh. As soon as— yeah, as it starts to — as soon as you start to peek — as soon as it opens a little bit, you hear like [singing cheerily] *ba dap ba da, ba dap ba! Ba dap bap! Ba dap ba da, ba dap ba! Ba da bap!* And it is like the... [slight laugh] It is like a...not a ringtone, a — not a motto, not a slogan. A—

SYLVIA: Jingle?

AUSTIN: A jingle for like a convenience store? And you peek inside, and there is a convenience store with a robot behind... a counter, and it's one of those convenience stores that has a like a little tiny seating area, so it's like — it's basically like a 7-11 [laughs], [SYLVIA: Okay!] except also there is like a little cafe — like cafe pastry thing where you could go buy the coffee roll at the front desk and then — or at the front counter, and then take it and sit down and eat it while you look at your newspaper. And also from in here, like, looking out, like it is just — it is a giant cat's eye still, like you could look out through the inside of this marble, so it's like — it's almost like a two-way mirror, or something?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um, and as you look around, you see there is a guard, who is tied to one of the chairs, who has a... who's blindfolded, and has like a — their mouth taped shut. And then there is a woman in military dress with her — one leg over the other, sipping a hot drink at the table like next to it. Next to him.

SYLVIA: Well! That's great. Um, is she armed, I'm assuming?

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah. Um.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, she has like a long pistol? She has like a long dr — she's in — so let me like describe her a little bit.

SYLVIA: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Because it's not like you — it's not like you don't get to see her. So she is like 5'7, 5'8, so taller than Echo.

SYLVIA: Much taller.

AUSTIN: Yeah. She has like [SYLVIA wheezes] — it takes you a second to put it together. Good, yeah. Good callbacks in terms —

SYLVIA: Good callback to me not knowing how height works.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh! She has — I mean, the first thing that you notice is that her skin is like a tealish grey? And she has a — you know how all of the Qui Err had those arm nubbins. She — instead of having them like right underneath where her other arms are, she has them [SYLVIA: Hm.] on her back, and they're like just bone. They're — insted of being like little vestigial limbs, she just has like two bone spines pointing on the back of her shoulderblades? [SYLVIA: Ooh.] Up a little bit, like they're not — they're rounding off, right? But they are — they're like a different type of... you know, vestigial body part. She has... on her kind of greenish or her tealish grey skin, she has fish scales coming up from like her neck, like from the top of her shirt — from the top of her — she has like a military dress uniform on — coming up to like under her chin. And she has like similar fish scaling on the insides of her arms, kind of like the wrist side of her arms, going down the length of her arms. And her skin in general looks like it's pretty tough. And then her hair is like — you imagine it's very long, because it is now up in like a double-braided crown that is weaving in and out of these curved spines that encircle her skull. This is...the — I mean, you recognize her face, because [laughs slightly] you've seen a statue of her. This is Pretense,

this is Commander Pretense, at least that's what you know her as. And you also saw an image of her as a little girl, and then you saw her as a commander, years later.

SYLVIA: All right.

AUSTIN: I guess you recognize her. Yeah, I think you do.

SYLVIA: Yeah, I think like — I think Echo's smart enough to put two and two together there.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think she's wearing glasses, also, which you did not see her wearing previously.

SYLVIA: Yeah. [sighs]

AUSTIN: Also in terms of her uniform, I imagine it's like — I'm imagining a version of — did you play Valkyria Chronicles ever?

SYLVIA: Oh, dude, yeah. [laughs]

AUSTIN: All right, do you know Eleanor... [stammers] Varrot? Eleanor... the commanding lady, the lady with the glasses and like the little short cape?

SYLVIA: Yes! Yes, I do. Yeah.

AUSTIN: And has like... her... I'm imagining something like that, except — so her thing is just like it's like a dress [amused] that's also a military uniform? [SYLVIA: Hm.] I imagine hers is almost like a super-long dress jacket that buckles across like one half of the — like down like her left side, basically — [SYLVIA: All right!] or maybe down her — yeah, down her right side — and then does still then become a larger dress, but underneath, she probably also has on like a...like a pantsuit, basically, or like pants, [SYLVIA: Okay.] and then like a white blouse, basically. And then she does have on like a little cape.

I haven't figured out their colors yet, and it's so hard not to just be like, oh she's a badass commander in a Friends at the Table game, so it's black and gold, but I don't think it is. [SYLVIA: Yeah.] I don't think it is. I imagine it is... I'm trying to think like what would their thing be, right? It's the Glassed Age, is what she was —

[45:00]

where she was, at the end of the Glassed Age, so I actually imagine there's actually a lot of that Glass in her outfit, so like, instead of having like a buckle — or not a buckle— instead of having like a brooch or something that connects her cape or whatever, it's like there's just like a big Glass — maybe it is like a brooch, like it's a glass brooch, like a Glass — a carved Q-Glass...

brooch that like attaches her shawl or whatever to her — the front of her jacket. There's lots of like little — so I think maybe it's like silver? It's like a grey with white?

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: Like... accents, grey with white — and probably some other really — probably like grey, white, and like red, like a deep like burgundy?

SYLVIA: Ooh, okay.

AUSTIN: I think that's basically what it is. Like the bulk of it this grey, not like a bad grey [slight laugh] like it's a pretty sharp grey, with white and burgundy lines, and little flourishes of the Q-Glass. Which kind of shines in here. [amused] Despite it just being like fluorescent lighting.

SYLVIA: Okay. I think what I wanna do is push the door open wide enough so that she knows I'm there.

AUSTIN: Sure.

SYLVIA: But stay outside still?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. She sips whatever she's sipping.

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN (as PRETENSE): Time is a factor, Reverie.

SYLVIA: [pauses and laughs]

(as ECHO): Oh good, I thought I was the only one here who knew the other's name. Pretense, right?

PRETENSE: Pretense. It's a family name. You can call me Iota, or Annex, my title.

ECHO: All right, well... I'm gonna need a little something for ya before I come in there.

AUSTIN: She like begins to — she like takes off the holster, and puts it down on the table in front of the guard who is tied up.

SYLVIA: Uh, I think what Echo does is they — I think Echo's only armed with their sword right now.

AUSTIN: Sure.

SYLVIA: So I think Echo like takes off their sword and like holds it out so they can see that they're — so Iota can see that they're disarming as well.

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: And like hangs it on like the handle of the door, [AUSTIN: Mm-hm.] from its strap, and then enters.

AUSTIN: As you walk in, the [slight laugh] the robot behind the counter — and again, that song is like — the jingle is still playing, and now it's like — it's just like a verse about how, you know... "Cat's Eye Convenience always has what you need, Cat's Eyes Convenience... it'll be your friend in need," it rhymes need with need, it's really bad, and the Cat's Eye... uh... retail drone is like... like does a scan of you, and then says...

(as RETAIL DRONE): Echo! You've lost something! Echo, come here for your s — for your: sword!

And then like an arm descends from one of the lighting racks, like there are these — there are the florescent lights above, and there's this like — a mechanical arm goes [mechanical unfolding foley] "Brrm, chrnt! Brrr," and then like picks your sword up and then like offers to hand it back to you.

ECHO: Uh, you can hold onto that for a minute, yeah?

RETAIL DRONE: There will be a 3.99 per hour holding fee!

[ECHO sighs]

AUSTIN (as PRETENSE): I'll cover it.

ECHO: Thank you.

AUSTIN: Says Pretense.

(as PRETENSE): Take a seat.

SYLVIA: All right, yeah, I sit across from her.

ECHO: Y'know, if you wanted to get my attention, uh, we are actually open to visitors where I'm staying right now. You didn't need to... y'know... hold a hostage.

PRETENSE: Mm. [sound of cup being put down] Things are a little more complicated than that. Unfortunately.

ECHO: All right.

PRETENSE: I live *very* far away, this is the closest I could get.

ECHO: All right! You know what, that — that totally makes perfect sense! Sure. Um.

PRETENSE: You've seen them. I know you've seen them.

ECHO: Yeah.

PRETENSE: The...passageways. Between worlds?

ECHO: Oh! You're from off-world.

PRETENSE: Right now, so are you.

ECHO: I mean... You know what I mean.

AUSTIN: She takes another sip.

ECHO: You've come here from another planet.

PRETENSE: And like I said, so do you. We're not on Altar anymore.

ECHO: Well... Well, that makes things a little more complicated!

PRETENSE: Yeah. It was hard to lure this one this close, but we figured it out.

ECHO: Where exactly are we, then?

PRETENSE: Somewhere in-between. [ECHO: Okay.] For as long as... as long as one of us has a hot drink.

And we get like a shot of a — the arm comes back like [laughs] holding — like comes back down from the lighting rig, and it's holding three drinks, it's holding like a coffee, a tea, and a chai latte?

SYLVIA: [makes an amused sound]

(as ECHO): I'll take the tea.

AUSTIN (as RETAIL DRONE): Tea!

And then like puts the tea down and then two sugar packets and then a lemon just drop from the ceiling.

SYLVIA: [laughs]

(as ECHO): Um... all right, so, it's just — well, the three of us here.

And Echo kind of looks over at the guard and kinda does a quick scan to make sure he's not [cross] hurt in any serious manner.

AUSTIN: [cross] Guard's fine, guard got — guard has a bump of the back of his head, but [SYLVIA: Yeah.] he's fine. There's also a quick — a rapidly cooling drink in front of that guard. [laughs]

SYLVIA: [laughs] Um.

AUSTIN (as PRETENSE): I'm here about the Gambit.

ECHO: Oh! The ship. Okay.

PRETENSE: That's my ship. W... that's my great-great-great... great-great-great... great-grandfather's ship.

ECHO: Okay.

PRETENSE: It's my ship. It's *our* ship, it's my people's ship now.

ECHO: Yeah! No, I un... And I'm assuming you want it back.

PRETENSE: Yes.

ECHO: Okay.

PRETENSE: I'd like you to... relinquish it. It's fair.

ECHO: I mean.. I... Listen, I understand. I have... family heirlooms that are very important to me too, and I — totally fine with you getting this back. The only problem is, we are still using it for our efforts to, y'know, settle here. And I'm — I don't know how quickly I can just give it away.

PRETENSE: Echo. When I was alive, the thing that happened was that a machine from a planet none of us had ever heard of landed here, and it was all teeth and guns. And for [slight laugh] some reason, it convinced some of the people of this world that it would make a better ruler — or that they would make better rulers — than me and mine.

ECHO: Mm-hm.

PRETENSE: And... towards the end of my life, we took a chance, and we recorded ourselves, so that we might have a second chance. It's strange to think about me, because I remember doing it, but I also know that the me that lived went on and... had some other sort of life afterwards. Won some fights, lost some others, probably died on the battlefield. So I know that I'm not her. But I am still from *Quire*. And when I lived, there was one. Now, different people, from different worlds, have come to my planet. And now they're telling me that they will be inconvenienced if I *take my ship back*. I'm afraid I won't be inconvenienced anymore.

ECHO: All right. [sighs] I'm assuming this comes with the whole, if I don't do this, there will be retaliatory action of some kind —

PRETENSE: No.

ECHO: — that type of thing? Okay!

PRETENSE: This is a... let me be clear. I'm not asking for permission. Why do you think I led you out here?

ECHO: Oh! No, I understand.

PRETENSE: It's already on the way home. This is a courtesy.

ECHO: Well! Is that all, then?

AUSTIN: She like sighs.

ECHO: Listen, you can have your ship back, I'm not gonna dispute that anymore. You've already taken it, from what I can tell — I just — I have people to take care of, and I have business to deal with. And I respect that you don't like that we're here, and I respect that you don't like... that I have to do — I have to try and negotiate these sort of things, but I had to. And if I can, yknow, get my guard patched up. Doesn't seem too bad, but y'know.

PRETENSE: He'll be fine.

ECHO: Myeah. But if I could do that and be on my way, I think that would be for the best for both of us, don't you?

PRETENSE: I read your records.

ECHO: Oh!

PRETENSE: You were a crook. A commoner, a thief.

[ECHO laughs]

And now you're...not a mayor, not an Annex, not a governor, but... These people spit on you. They called their world a utopia, and they made you do forced labor. And not in response to open warfare, not in...a hospital, not... In the ways in which you helped people, you did so in the most indirect and replaceable way — they could have sent other pathfinders. They sent you, and...they did so...as a sentence. And now you lead them.

ECHO: Something you need to know about a lot of the people that, as you put, spat on me, is that a lot of them aren't here anymore. And a lot of the people who...didn't even know me, or the people that were treated similarly to me, are still here. And those are the people that I'm doing this for. I've been given a chance to live in a way that a lot of those people that you've mentioned didn't want me to live. And I'm taking it. So, no, I'm not an Annex, I'm not a mayor. I'm not a crook anymore either. I've never really been one for titles, y'know? So I get why you're confused, but really, when it comes down to it, I'm doing this for myself. And I'm not doing it for power, I'm just doing it because — well, you say they coulda sent another pathfinder, and, let's be honest: they really couldn't.

AUSTIN: By the end of this speech, she is grinning ear to ear.

SYLVIA: Echo is too!

AUSTIN: And she says like,

(as PRETENSE): There's the Echo Reverie I heard about.

And she finishes her drink and stands up.

(as PRETENSE): The eyepatch looks good on you. Keep it.

ECHO: Thanks! I... be honest, I was planning to anyway.

PRETENSE: [slight laugh] Courtesies.

ECHO: Enjoy the ship.

PRETENSE: If you're ever on Moonlock, look me up.

ECHO: Was nice meeting you! Finally.

[PRETENSE laughs slightly]

AUSTIN: And then she doesn't say goodbye. She just — she picks her — her hand like hovers over her gun for a second. Her holster, like the holster that she's like gonna pick up. [SYLVIA sighs in amazement] As like just a, *just* a... Your sword's so far away. You put your sword behind the counter! There's like a little bit of like — you fucked up.

SYLVIA: There's a little bit of that, but this is also Echo, who's like, [AUSTIN: [amused] I know.] oh, I'm close enough now that I don't need the sword.

AUSTIN: Yeah, true, true true true!

SYLVIA: Yeah. I guess also — that's Echo's whole thing is like, oh nah.

AUSTIN: I just like — a very intense eye contact, with a little bit of a grin. And then picks up the holster and puts it on, slowly. And it's like — again, it's like a pistol — it's like what if a pistol was also like a curved sword, like almost like a scimitar or something?

SYLVIA: Aw, that rules.

AUSTIN: It's super dope. And it has like all sorts of engraving on it — and you know if she pulls the trigger, it will explode. It will shoot once, and then explode, probably?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But. Or — the thing that happens with them is like they break in weird ways. They don't ju — sometimes they'll just explode. or sometimes like the entire inside of it will turn into Glass, or sometimes you'll a trigger the barrel will become like paper, and like break apart and like filter down. You've pulled a — you've seen someone pull a trigger once and the front of their gun just became a rose. Like. Well, I can't use this anymore! Fuck! [laughs] So like, that is the — and you know that that would be — that's probably what would happen, but she'd still get one shot off, so, who knows. Um. And so yeah, she puts it on, and then... goes up front, pays for the drinks, and then leaves. And you hear the sound of a ship overhead. And you know those engines are your engines. [slight laugh]

SYLVIA: Yeah. Well. They were hers to begin with.

AUSTIN: Then you hear the sound of the door opening again. Uh, you hear the sound of an engine outside, and then you hear the sound of the door opening again. And —

SYLVIA: I think while I'm hearing that I'm untying the guard.

AUSTIN: Yeah, sure, fair. You turn to look in, and — look over, and you see another woman who you recognize, because this one arrested you once. And it is Commander Cascara, formerly of the Beloved, and she rolls in.

[SYLVIA stammers in surprise]

(as CASCARA): Hard to track, Reverie!

SYLVIA: Sorry, just — really quick. Cascara went missing after the Miracle, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah. And you haven't seen — no one has seen her in a year. I mean, except the people who have sent you now to do this.

SYLVIA: Yeah. So I haven't seen her in a year.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA (as ECHO): [quiet laugh] Y'know, I think it's a little ironic coming from you.

And I've got my sword back at this point [AUSTIN: Yeah.] but I'm — it's not like threatened by her, [AUSTIN: No.] I just like have it back 'cause it's a safety blanket thing.

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh-huh. And you've untied this guard.

(as CASCARA): Friend of yours?

ECHO: Eh. Co-worker, I guess?

AUSTIN: She like peeks at the untouched coffee.

(as CASCARA): Eh, mm. I'll get the tea, I guess.

And... not your untouched coffee, the guard's untouched coffee [SYLVIA: Yeah, yeah.] that has now gone cold. And again, the arm like spits out some tea at her, basically. It drops a styrofoam looking cup with tea in it. And she like rolls over to the side of your table.

ECHO: I'll be honest, I thought you were dead.

CASCARA: Yeah.

ECHO: Where have you been?

CASCARA: Something like that. [amused] It was a miracle. It was a miracle. We need you, Reverie, and...

[1:00:00]

I'm not in a position to compel you, this time. Any crime you did — you've outdone yourself, and... you... You're a model citizen, Reverie.

SYLVIA: [laughs] Echo like laughs at that, [AUSTIN: Yeah.] for sure. Um.

(as ECHO): Well, let's not get ahead of ourselves here.

CASCARA: No, I mean it, I mean it! Uh — I've heard parents say, if you work hard, you could grow up to be like Echo Reverie. I've heard them say it.

ECHO: Ugh... ugh... I don't like that.

SYLVIA: That's Echo saying that.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Like,

(as ECHO): Ugh. That's weird.

CASCARA: Yeah. You don't like being in public? You don't like being... a model, an icon?

ECHO: I don't like the pressure of it. Especially considering the fact that like... I'm not someone who should be looked up to.

CASCARA: [cross] Hm. Has it—

ECHO: [cross] Who's this 'we' you were talking about?

CASCARA: Well, it's growing every day. Right now, it's me, it's the Cadent, and it's an old friend of yours, Declan's Corrective. And some other old friends, too. As long as they agree.

ECHO: Hm. And you need me for what, exactly?

CASCARA: [cross] I would have never —

ECHO: [cross] 'Cause I have to tell you, I'm not really feelin the whole like colonial tour guide thing anymore.

CASCARA: [laughs] Ah. Understandably. We...hm. There are lots of divisions, Echo. And there've always been divisions. I don't want to seem naive. I don't want to paint the picture that the Divine Fleet was...unified.

ECHO: Yeah, you'd be talking to the wrong person there, if you tried to do that.

CASCARA: I mean, listen. I may have been in the Beloved, but you are and I are both different than our former fleetmates. We live in a world *now* where there is an opportunity to ensure that everyone's interests are taken into account, instead of only the powerful and the entrenched. People like us, we were provided for. We had opportunities in the fleet, even when we were being...separated. We...had the resources necessary to allow for a fundamentally good quality of life. Right now, it's hard to know if that'll be true, in whatever the Quire system [slight laugh] develops into. Or if the influence of the Hegemony or, frankly, the dramatic shifts in the Divine Free States, will push some of us to the side.

ECHO: And your goal is to keep that from happening.

CASCARA: Our goal is to build something new. Or to find something new, or to... Our goal is to give people a reason to think of themselves not as members of Altar, or Moonlock, of...Thyrsus or Seneschal, but as members of this system, citizens of Quire. We don't have a voting block. [slight laugh] There is no — I don't wanna get you hyped up here. We're not prepared to declare sovereignty. One day, maybe. But not yet. Because right now, everyone is divided and looking for more division.

On Seneschal, where the Cadent and Collective — where they work, there is a bit more unity. The people of the Hegemony and the people of the Free States...both of them, they are living together and dancing and sharing food and [amused] sharing fashion tips. And they're doing that because they realize that they are fundamentally both groups of people infinitely divided all the way down, beyond the individual, and yet there is something similar, something that holds them together, because Independence was wrong, because Independence was *wrong*, and there is something that ties us together: synthetic, organic, Earth, Fleet, Quire. But everywhere else... We are fraying. I need someone to build us a path forward.

ECHO: [deep in-breath and sigh] Shit, I thought had enough trouble just building a city here.

CASCARA: We'll build much more than cities.

ECHO: All right, so, what, do I come with you now and we go fly away to some secret base you got, or what?

CASCARA: I mean, you have that ship, right?

ECHO: Do I have — not anymore! You have caught me a little [CASCARA sighs]— I'm kinda...

CASCARA: [bewildered] What do you mean, you don't have the *ship* anymore? It's a — that's a cool ship!

ECHO: The original owner kinda showed up and they still had [cross] the papers, and I didn't.

CASCARA: [cross] Are you kidding me! We don't have the *ship*? Oh... I guess we'll have to use the fishing one, then.

ECHO: Uh — sorry — were you lookin for me or the ship, 'cause I'm not sure here.

CASCARA: You. It was you, it was you, it was you, but it was gonna be nice to have this cool — that ship, it was like a smuggling ship and it had all these *compartments*! I've read the spec sheet. [ECHO: Yeah, I've—] I've been on it. There was a pool, Echo.

ECHO: Yeah, I lived there for like ten months. It — trust me, I know. [slight laugh]

CASCARA: All right, back-up plan. I still need you. To be clear. I swear I wasn't just here for the ship.

ECHO: Okay! I got a question, really quick.

CASCARA: Yeah.

ECHO: If this starts to smell to me, if this starts to — if I catch any whiff of this stinkin of ulterior motives, I'm out. [cross] All right?

CASCARA: [cross] You're not a prisoner.

ECHO: Okay. [CASCARA: In fact—] I just want that to be clear.

CASCARA: None of this works like that anymore, because [ECHO: Okay.] I'm gonna be asking you to go to places where not only do I have no authority over you, but where you will have no authority over the people there, except whatever authority you can win from them. You are free. You will remain free. That is why we need you.

ECHO: Okay. Do I have to go now, or... [CASCARA: The new year.] is there some way I can come with you?

CASCARA: The new year is when we need to be active by.

ECHO: Okay. That should give me enough time to wrap up what I've got going on.

CASCARA: We'll send transport.

ECHO: Thank you.

CASCARA: And Echo. I... I'm proud of you.

ECHO: [laughs] Thanks?

CASCARA: Have you been in touch with the Tides?

ECHO: Uh.

SYLVIA: [clears throat] This is when Echo actually breaks eye contact.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ECHO: I've been trying. I haven't been able to figure out where a lot of the people are. Um. So no, I can't say I have.

CASCARA: Do you have it too? The feeling of... We were both ostracized there, but...late at all night, it's all I can think about. Going home.

ECHO: I can't say it doesn't sneak up on me sometimes, but it's less the desire to go back and more the desire to make it better that really keeps me up. 'Cause I don't know what they're doing there anymore, I don't know if they're still the same. And if they are, then things need to change there.

CASCARA: It's you, it's not the ship. [sighs] Get that one back safe. I'll see you in a few weeks.

SYLVIA: Echo just kinda like nods and [amused] finishes their tea.

AUSTIN: And she rolls out, and then gets back into the kind of like vehicle that she came in, and then you can hear her engine revving up and it revs up, and then it like turns off. And you can just ima—I think we just get a shot of her like looking at her map like, how the fuck do I get outta here? [SYLVIA laughs] And then like it revs back up.

[[“The Muscle”](#) by Jack de Quidt begins playing]

And then what happens is like, we see another shot of you, and the tea has gone cold. And then she’s like, oh. And then like takes off.

SYLVIA: Mm.

AUSTIN: And is like very clearly just back on Altar, and is able to get away, and you’re able to head back just as easily. And I think that that’s the scene.

[[“The Muscle”](#) continues to end]

[1:10:15]