

## Live at the Table - May 2019

Transcribed by Ril (@kaorukeihi)

[T/N: Please check dialogue tags, especially for lines attributed to Dre and lines attributed to Sylvia.]

The prompts from the cards are transcribed as they were read, and written in bold.]

AUSTIN: Welcome to Live at the Table for May 2019. We had a false start for like 30 minutes as Internet fought us. But we're here, I'm Austin Walker, and joining me today: Sylvia<sup>1</sup> Clare.

SYLVIA: Hey!.. Eh... Fuck, last time was good, and I was just gonna do it, and Dre's got me tripped up! [All laugh.]

AUSTIN: Andrew Lee Swan.

DRE: [laughing] Oh word! I'm the one that's tripping things up, it's not YouTube and Internet and everything else?..

SYLVIA: Look, there's plenty of blame to go around...

DRE: I get it! Game 7's tomorrow, you're stressed out, it's fine.

AUSTIN: Fair, fair. I'm rooting for you, Sylvia. ...And Janine Hawkins.

JANINE: Hey.

AUSTIN: Hi. Hi. The Internet's bad, but we're good, and not only are we good, we are playing a game called *For the Queen*. It's by Alex Roberts. Alex previously wrote for *Waypoint*, you can go search for "Alex Roberts Waypoint" and find some great stories about roleplaying games over on VICE Games. ...I'm trying to hit all the bits that we didn't on the discarded previous version of this... Um... I'm gonna go through the first few rules again, I'm... we're just gonna to roll right into it because we didn't really get into anything too important, though what I will say is.... I guess the previous version of the stream did have us looking at a bunch of cool Queen cards. So... maybe I'll include those as like a bonus, or I'll send those to Ali as Clapcast material or something. Um... But if this is stable we can actually play this game, and to do that we should start looking at the rules and go over kinda what the game is. Does that make sense?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

JANINE: Yeah.

DRE: Word.

---

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

AUSTIN: Okay. So. I'm gonna start pulling cards out for us to read. I'll read the first one, then we're gonna go around the table the way we did before, except this time the Internet isn't gonna drop on us. So. [JANINE laughs a bit.] One. "Go around the table clockwise taking turns reading these cards aloud." Um. Two. Sylvia, can you read this one?

SYLVIA: Are we on the right?..

AUSTIN: Oh, you are not on the right one, sorry. [SYLVIA laughs a bit.] I brought this back over here, my bad. [JANINE laughs a bit.]

SYLVIA: "The land you live in has been at war for as long as any of you have been alive."

AUSTIN: Uh... This tiny fucking card, can I get it... [SYLVIA laughs.] Please... Thank you.

SYLVIA: I think we've got them in the sidebar under where the character sheets would usually be.

AUSTIN: Oh, do we?

SYLVIA: Yeah, I just clicked on them and...

AUSTIN: Oh, let's do those, that's gonna save us so much time!..

JANINE: But then the audience can't see them...

AUSTIN: I'll just bring them up as we read.

JANINE: Oh, okay. I was worried...

AUSTIN: So, we're on 3?

DRE: Yes.

AUSTIN: Dre?

DRE: "The Queen has decided to undertake a long and perilous journey to broker an alliance with a distant power."

AUSTIN: Four.

JANINE: "The Queen has chosen all of you, and no one else, to be her retinue, and accompany her on this journey."

AUSTIN: I just realized, Dre, you're gonna have to pull all of these up 'cause you're the host.

DRE: I am.

AUSTIN: Okay, cool-cool-cool-cool-cool. [JANINE laughs a bit.] ...Five. [Pause.] That's me.

DRE: That's you.

AUSTIN: [SYLVIA laughs.] "She chose you because she knows that you love her."

SYLVIA: "You are welcome to look through the Queen cards for inspiration. If there is one that seems right for the group, place it on the table to inspire your story."

AUSTIN: Oh, there's modified instructions for roll20 here! "The Queen cards are in the Queen deck, you can have anyone click "choose" to look at the deck, draw a single card at random, or draw a few to pick between." We drew them all, we looked at them all, we chose this one. Does anyone want to describe our... the Queen we've chosen here?

SYLVIA: Oh wow.

AUSTIN: Let me zoom in...

JANINE: Our Queen might be sith? [AUSTIN: I was gonna say the same thing, yeah! No, uh-huh!] I don't know anything about siths to really say that definitively [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] but it's possible.

AUSTIN: Our Queen is a Darth for sure. Absolutely.

SYLVIA: I... I...

DRE: Oh, go ahead, Sylvia.

SYLVIA: I was gonna say, add some zippers and we've got an organization member [AUSTIN: Right. True.] but...

DRE: Here's what I see. I haven't seen this far into Riverdale, but I understand at some point they start playing D&D... [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] This is like... To me, this is the villain that Jughead makes as like an analogue for the time he gets pissed off at Cheryl Blossom. [SYLVIA laughs.]

AUSTIN: That sounds right. That's good. She has like a cool golden crown that is on top of a dark like, black-purple cowl, and full-black face mask that I can't tell if it's made of cloth or metal, but the whole thing is very Metal, capital M. Got some ruffly or spiky shoulder pads going on here, full length like arms and gloves, like everything... There's no skin showing, all black everything, um... She's a good Queen. I'm here for sure. Who's up next? Where're we at, number seven?

DRE: I guess it's me. [AUSTIN: Sure.] "Set the card that reads "The Queen is under attack. Do you defend her?" aside."

AUSTIN: Modified instructions for roll20: "Ignore this card, it will be addressed later."

DRE: Alright. Cool.

JANINE: [laughing] "Shuffle the red prompt cards, and place them facedown in the center of the table."

AUSTIN: They're shuffled... And we don't actually have to place them facedown, they're just over to the side, you know. ....Uh, nine. Put "The Queen is under attack" card in the middle of the deck for a game that takes approximately 30 minutes, or shuffle it into the bottom third of the deck to play for an hour or more." Modified instructions for roll20: "As the GM click choose next to the prompt deck so you can see the location of "The Queen is under attack" card. Shuffle the deck until the card is in the desired depth for your game length (about in the middle for a 30 minute game, in the bottom third for a game that last an hour or more)." I'm gonna put it in the middle, because I know who we are [SYLVIA and JANINE laugh.] and the idea that like... I know what the fuck it is, you know? [DRE: Uh-huh.] So I'm gonna shuffle until that card is in the middle. That's too early... I think you can kinda see the card pretty clearly, that's... that's the middle... That's about the middle, I think. Let me see... I guess y'all can't see...

JANINE: None of us can see what you're doing.

DRE: We can't see this.

AUSTIN: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven... There's eleven and a half rows, so it should be in like the sixth row, right?

DRE: Yes.

SYLVIA: Yeah, about there.

AUSTIN: I'm gonna pull it up just a little be is what I'm gonna do. Can I not do that? Fuck, I can't do that. Whoops! [DRE: Whoa.] Okay, well, now I have to take the card back, and then recall it, and then reshuffle. Great. [DRE laughs a bit.] Shuffle. It was just about right, but it wasn't quite right. Uh... [Pause.] I'm trying to get it right in the middle of the deck or near-ish. It's harder than it looks. I guess no one can see what I'm doing.

JANINE: No.

SYLVIA: It sounds like you're trying to randomize it, right?

AUSTIN: 'cause what I'm doing is attempting to shuffle it right.

JANINE: You could just be buying time to like take a hit of a secret vape or something, I don't know. [DRE laughs.]

AUSTIN: Oh, if only... if only a secret vape were involved...

DRE: You know, it sounds like if you got to put in in the middle you have to put it right in the heart of the cards.

AUSTIN: [disgusted noise] You're saying I should let my heart be my guiding key?

DRE: Yes. [AUSTIN: Okay.] But cut off before you say key.

JANINE: The middle would be more like the tummy of the cards.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Alright, it's perfect.

DRE: It started as a Yu-Gi-Oh joke, so...

JANINE: Should be.

DRE: [laughing] Should be!..

[All laughing.]

AUSTIN: I got it. I got it. I figured it out, it's perfect. Agreed. Where the fuck were we? What number was that?

SYLVIA: We just did number 9, so we're on number...

DRE: She has blue eyes, white tummy! [JANINE and AUSTIN laugh]

SYLVIA: [sighs] "When you've read the instruction cards, continue clockwise with the red prompt cards. Take turns reading the questions out loud. Interpret these questions, and answer them, however you wish."

AUSTIN: So, to talk about a bit about how this game is gonna work... I mean, we'll keep going and I guess it's time for me to give more details, I don't remember what the rest of these... I'm gonna not spoil all this instructions cards. Let's go through all the instruction cards and then we can talk some more. [He laughs a bit.]

DRE: Okay. "Other players may ask you questions or make suggestions on your turn, but whether you answer those questions or include those suggestions is entirely up to you."

AUSTIN: Twelve.

JANINE: "Place the X-card somewhere everyone can easily reach it."

AUSTIN: "Modified instructions for roll20: The X-card has already been placed on the play mat." Is sure has. It's a big purple and gold X over here on the left.

DRE: Oh, it's just that big on the left, okay.

AUSTIN: Boop.

JANINE: The Organization card.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Right. Uh-huh. [laughs a bit.]

JANINE: Close enough.

AUSTIN: "If you encounter a card, or an answer, that you don't want to be included in the game, tap the X-card. That content is removed from the game." For our purposes you can ping it by holding... or by clicking on it, or like clicking and holding on it. You could type "X" in the chat here, or DM it to me, or just say out loud "Hey, can we not include this one" or "I wanna play the X-card here." That can be... There is a... The X-card here is understood very broadly, it can be about content, and about triggering content, it can be about content that we just don't wanna deal with, or it can be about something we think is just tonally inconsistent, or is not interesting to us narratively. The X-card is really woven into the way the game is set up here, so that for instance if a character asks me a questions about a decision I've made, or a player asks me a questions and says "Hey, you betrayed the Queen, can you tell me why you did that?", I can say "No, I'm not interested in answering that question right now. I can talk... Let's talk about this later." Or maybe I don't want to answer it at all. So. So. You know. It is a really broad use. Um, what number was that? Was that thirteen?

DRE: Fourteen?

AUSTIN: No, that's thirteen. "If you drew a card that is removed this way, simply draw another card. You can "X" a card that you drew yourself." So if you draw a card and you're like "Eh, actually I don't wanna answer this question", you can X-card it.

SYLVIA: Number fifteen, right? [AUSTIN: Yep.] "You can also pass on your turn. To do so, give the prompt card you drew to the next player, and say "I'd like to hear your answer to this question."

AUSTIN: It's true, you can do that.

DRE: "A prompt card can be passed around the table until someone applies the X-card to it."

[Pause.]

AUSTIN: Janine, seventeen.

JANINE: "Continue answering, passing, and X-ing questions until the "The Queen is under attack" card is drawn."

AUSTIN: Yep. Eighteen. "Each player should answer that question in turn." That question being the one that is on the "The Queen is under attack" card. "Then, the game is over."

SYLVIA: Number nineteen is "Whoever wants to can draw the first prompt card."

AUSTIN: So. The way this game works is pretty open-ended. We're going to draw cards from this prompt card deck and then we are going to answer question on it for ourselves, and then other people at the table can ask questions to clarify. I think the best way to do this is to play it, but you can imagine if I drew a card that said, you know, "The Queen shows you great favor. Why?" And I go "Oh, well, I am the child of the Queen." You could say "Are you the only child of the Queen?" You could say "Does she show you that favor out of love or out of obligation?" You could say "Can you describe a moment for me where she showed that extra affection." Right? We can do that... You could even say "Can we play out a scene in which I am the Queen showing this?" or whatever. In general we are all playing as characters, you are you. You are not you, Sylvia Clare, you are you, a character. But we don't know who those people are yet. And even those characters can be arrived at fairly collaboratively. You know, you could draw a card that says "You are jealous of someone else in the retinue. Who are they and why?" And you could in that moment invent a new aspect that's related to somebody else at the table. They are within their rights to say "No, actually... you know, not feeling it." Or they could say "Interesting." and ask you another question about that. Because they are always able to ask you clarifying questions. So. It is, yeah, it's a GM-less game, there's people asking in the chat. The other thing here is the... Right, I'm just remembering what was on the previous stream that got lost vs this one. So. We need to decide where we wanna do this. This is a Road to Season 6 Game. The map as it stands right now is that we know that there are a few major Houses, major what we're calling Stels, S-T-E-L, in the ever growing Divine Principality. We know that Stel Kesh is the oldest one, the one that goes back to the old culture of the Principality of Kesh. We know that Stel Nideo is the one that comes from Aram Nideo's kind of lineage. We know that Stel Orion emerged out of the events of previous Road to Season 6 games. We know that there's a fourth one because I want there to a fourth one when we get to Season 6, at least four. Maybe more in the end, but... So that'll be one. So maybe the game could be here, about something happening in this other area, this kind of yellow... the part that you just clicked on there...

JANINE: I was reading that as the actual name, Stel Four...

AUSTIN: It's a cool name. [He laughs.]

JANINE: ...which is French for "Other"...

AUSTIN: Great. Yeah, uh-huh. Are they... are they...

DRE: Yeah, don't say it...No, oh.

AUSTIN: What were you gonna say?

DRE: That we're Burning Stel Four!

SYLVIA: Oh my God!

DRE: Come on, it's an oven. Don't be mad 'cause I thought about it first.

AUSTIN: [sighs] It's fine. It's fine. It's fine. Yeah, listen. I will say that the... The Fifth House was like the working title of Season 6 in a while, so I get that just naming a thing a number is exactly... a thing... that you could be... Oh, sorry, not the Fifth House, the Fifth House was one of them, The Sixth Season. But I was like, well, we've already done Seasons of Hieron, we can't do another "Season" name [laughing a bit] in a game this soon. Um. So this could be: Who is this Stel? What is this clan, what is this House? How did they become a major clan? Who is their leader? The Queen does not need to be a queen, and could just be a leader of some sort. If we are in the Divine Principality I would like it to be someone who uses she/her pronouns still. The other alternative is: I'm super interested in what happens when Apostolos, whatever shape it is in the future, comes face to face with the might of the Divine Principality, and whether it decides to be consumed by an assault, you know, fight to the bitter end, and be kind of brought to heel that way, or if, like what happened with Stel Orion it is... it willingly joins. Um. I'm very curious about how that plays out. And I can imagine this being that game, where the Queen is actually someone who's using they/them pronouns, and is the Apokine, or some other equivalent of whatever the ruler of future Apostolos looks like. Um, and is, and they are like in the middle of figuring that out, and we aren't necessarily sure, I'm not sure, right? Like, that would have to come out of play, like what is this person doing? Are they like—throw the biggest last haymaker they can at this place? Or are they going to bend the knee, so to speak? Um. So like, *that's* a big question. And I'm happy to do either of these things. The thing that's interesting with Stel Four is that it would be a place for us to build an entirely new, um, culture. But it would be doing it in a really new way for us, where we don't sit down and go, Okay, what are they like? It would be really like in medias res, like, building it by way we answer questions about ourselves and the Queen, which could be fun. But those are kind of the big distinctions I would say here, you know? Um... It would mean, one way or the other.

DRE: [overlapping] I... would say it's more than we normally ...

AUSTIN: No, go ahead. Go ahead.

DRE: I lean more towards the Apostolos.

AUSTIN: Can you explain why a little bit?

DRE: Um... I guess I'm just... Like, I feel like most... at least what I've been involved in so far has been like very very... more on the new side of things as far as like leading up to Season 6, [AUSTIN: Sure.] and I'm interested to see like what the familiar name looks like, [AUSTIN: Yeah.] and how familiar it stays or doesn't.



AUSTIN: Fair enough. Yeah. Totally. Um, someone in the chat says, "What's up with the Divine"... or "what happened to the Autonomous Diaspora?". People should go back and listen to the last, um, the last Live games.

DRE: So, *Beam Saber*? Was that the last one?

AUSTIN: *Beam Saber* was last, the one before that was *Ech0* and *Dusk to Midnight*. *Dusk to Midnight* by Riley Rethal, and I guess *Beam Saber* by Austin Ramsay, both of which are fans of the show and are in the fan Discord. Shoutouts to both of them! Um, so. We... Yeah, I'm cool with Apostolos if Sylvia and Janine are. [Pause.] And if they're not... [JANINE: Yeah, I'm good.] I'd rather have the conversation than be like "Alright, let's do this thing you don't wanna do!" [DRE laughs.] [SYLVIA: Yeah.] Yeah. Okay. Um. Alright, I like that too. Here's a thing I wanna do really quick is I'm gonna link us, or I'm gonna pop it up on this page in front of us if you give me a second... Uh... Gotta go over here and then type in... [typing] Just like a quick, I guess, a quick... I'm actually curious, how much of old Apostolos do we want there to be in current Apostolos? Or whatever it is.

DRE: Um... You've already talked about this, and I agree with you, the kind of emphasis on keeping they/them pronouns...

AUSTIN: Yeah, for sure. And I will say again, actually, now that I have them, I'm gonna pop them on the screen in a second, the ones that we developed for the Apostolosians back during... um, back during... um... COUNTER/Weight, that's the name of the show we did, right? Uh...

DRE: [laughs] You know the one that's going to be on a T-shirt. In like a week.

AUSTIN: Yeah, in a week! Can you explain that while I get this image together really quick?

DRE: Oh yeah, we're launching merch! [AUSTIN: Hell yeah.] Uh, through Fangamer. We're gonna have a COUNTER/Weight T-shirt. We're gonna have Deputie pins, and we're gonna have a map of Marielda. [AUSTIN: All of which rule.] Yeah. They're all really good, and I believe... I know you get a Laser Ted sticker if you buy the T-shirt. Do any of the other ones have like little pack-ins or anything like that? That I'm forgetting?

AUSTIN: I think that that's it? I'm pretty sure that that's it.

DRE: I'm just gonna drop this link in the chat really quick.

AUSTIN: Yeah, please do. Um. So. These are the pronouns and Eidolons that we had for Apostolos eons ago. They are... very clearly in-jokes regarding Hieron when I first wrote them, like, they map very cleanly to the Samtheon, but because you pronounce them differently and because the culture around them is so distinct, I think that it's not necessarily a bad thing... I've kinda gone back and forth on this over the years, but the Eidolons, for people who don't remember this, are Apostolosian kind of paragons of virtue. They are who, when you were... this is, again, at this point, 50+ thousand years ago in Apostolosian

culture, so all of this is up for grabs, all of this could change. Though I still absolutely want there to be a default when we speak to they/them pronouns, I don't want that to shift because I think that it's such a key part of what we've put forward about the Apostolosian culture. And I kind of wanna keep this idea of pronoun choices being key to what it means to grow up inside of Apostolosian culture. So, the Eidolons were kind of the great heroes of Apostolosian history, and became... not Houses in a sort of Medieval Fantasy sense, but became sort of... icons that you would relate yourself to at key moments of your life. As you grew up you would at different points of your life choose one to be kind of your... your... What's the word I'm looking for here? [JANINE: Patron saint?] Sort of like a patron saint, there's a degree of... a degree more of, um... not ambition, what is the other word I'm looking for? [JANINE: Aspiration.] Yeah, they are very aspirational, exactly. To where you would say "Here are the qualities that I most want to represent as I move into this next stage of my life." Um. So. Apole was the Eidolon of personal sacrifice, family, and the collection of resources, and if you chose to be... If you chose to devote yourself to Apole you were ol/olm/olms/olmself. Apotine was the Eidolon of security, patience, and monuments, and that is tine/tinem/tiens/tienemself... but I think what would be better is just "tineself"... We wrote these four or five years ago, which is wild. Apoannta, the Eidolon of journeys, commerce, and challenging oneself, who... If you were following Apoannta you took ann/annem/anns/annemself. Apote, Eidolon of instruction, celebration, and wolves, which is understood broadly to just be "animals" was ote/otem/oter/otemself. Apothesa is the Eidolon of construction, military action, and history, tea/team/teas/teamself. And Apokine, which is the title that was at the beginning of COUNTER/Weight held be the current ruler of Apostalos, and you could basically say "Hey, I wanna be like the current, like, Apokine, I wanna embody their traits." and so you'd choose them, and be ki/kinem/kis/kinemself. And so you... that would change from generation to generation as the Apokine changed, basically. All of these can change at this point, because it's been so long and because we know that Apostolos left in a different place at the end of COUNTER/Weight, without getting into spoilers, it was not the same culture that it was when it started. Um. I also like the idea of some of these things changing a little bit in terms of pronunciation. I was looking at these earlier, and it kind of just drilled at the back of my brain that over time the Eidolon of construction, military action, and history would go from Apothesa to Apocassa, and you just slipped Cass right in there. And just like... suddenly this is a god of war, which is not necessarily what Cass was, but given the way we talked about Cass in the epilogue of... of COUNTER/Weight, and the way they were remembered, I think that's really fun. Um. But I just wanted to like put these out there, just so we had them on the field as like... Even if these cultures at this point are not worshiping these Eidolons, those were the ways they thought about themselves years ago, f that makes sense. Um. But I'm curious if people think that this is where we are at all or if we wanna just kind of dig in by turning over the first prompt and seeing where it goes from there. [Pause]

DRE: Um... I guess I'm wondering if all of these are still a part of like the Apostolos culture at this point.

AUSTIN: I kind of think... I kind of like the idea... It's been so long, I kind of like the idea of doing something similar of what we did with, um, OriCon in the last game, in the last Road to Season 6 game, which if you haven't seen, the basic premise was that like over time what

was OriCon, what was the Automated Diaspora fell apart, and became little squabbling microkingdoms, that were not unified around a single culture, because time is long, and how could anything that big last that long without finding reason to split. But with the threat of the Divine Principality they kind of rejoined, and built new allegiances, and there were still enough cultural similarity and shared history that they were able to kind of rebuild themselves as the Orion... instead of OriCon, instead of the Orion Conglomerate, it was the Orion Combine. [He laughs a bit.] Uh, and it didn't necessarily go well for them, but that's how we get back here. And I can imagine a world in which Apostolos as it ends in COUNTER/Weight—because one of the thing I really wanna do is not betray the end of COUNTER/Weight here, uh, I don't wanna say like, "And then 10 years later, all fell to shit." [He laughs a bit.] But over a long enough time things could have gone in different directions, do you know what I mean? That like, from what became the Demarchy, a culture that was very interested in representation, and in making sure that the will of people was protected by the structure of government, though also not in a way that was like a pure democracy, you could imagine things going in all sorts of directions, you know? Um. In fact maybe there's a world in which these Eidolons *do* become more traditional Houses, on top of being the ways in which people identify themselves... Or they are the leader of various... sorry, the people who took those roles in the Demarchy in any given generation could have at one moment or another began to build out a kind of longer lineage? I don't know. Like there's a lot that could've happened there. Um... Yes, I also, chat, agree that I like the idea of Cass being remembered even if it's remembered in this kind of weird perversion who they really were. Big part of why I suggested it. I think let's just go in with this stuff in mind, and we'll try to like color in the lines as we go. I think the thing to remember at the start is what we've already read, which is that we have been at war for as long as we've been alive. I think that's a thing we can answer right away, we've been at war with the Divine Principality, who wants to continue moving north, uh, galactic north, and who sees us as necessary in, for whatever the reason they say, to expanding divinity, and to, I think, specifically reclaiming things that they believe were theirs. We can get into that as that continues, but that is like who we have been at war with all of our lives. Um. So I wanna pull the first one out, let's see how that goes. Oh, great. [All laugh.]

JANINE: Oh, good start.

AUSTIN: Fantastic. So I'm gonna start with this. **The Queen is not my Queen. Why do I serve her anyway?** Why do we serve them... In this case, again, because we're doing Apostolos, I'm gonna say they/them, um. Should we decide right now if this is the Apokine? Is this someone who has taken the title Apokine? That way we have just a default title to sub in for Queen. Whether or not that, you know, whether or not that's a title that lasted over the last 50 thousand years, or one that was resurrected as titles often are in times of crises, who know. But are we good with just saying the Apokine here?

SYLVIA: Yeah, I don't see a problem with that.

AUSTIN: Okay. So. The Apokine is not my Apokine, is not my leader. Why do I serve them anyway? I... have been sent here by the members... I've been sent here by the Branched. Which is what the people who reside in the Golden Branch call themselves now. I am a...

[sigh] I serve them because—they meaning Apokine—because I believe that an allegiance between our peoples is only way we can stand against the Divine Principality, um. And because I believe that long ago Apostolos and the Golden Branch came together to fight an ancient foe, and that we have a shared history, and that we should rekindle that relationship. And so, that is why. Does anyone have questions about this? [Pause] About me, or about the Branched, or about why I would serve the Apokine, or how long, anything like that?

DRE: Uh, can you click back over to the... [AUSTIN: Yeah.] like, galaxy map real quick?

AUSTIN: Absolutely. Boom. So, we are still neighbours.

DRE: Yeah. That's what I wanted here

AUSTIN: The Golden Branch and Apostolos, like whatever this is at this point, still share... are like bordering each other, and have some stars that are like right up against each other here.

DRE: How difficult was it for you to travel from the Branch to Apostolos?

AUSTIN: Good question. I think it was like a big deal. I think we... We have relationships that at this point exist in this weird generational sense. I think I was... I've been training my whole life for this. I've been basically in transit since I was a child. And that's normally fine when it's like, we're shipping you, you know, huge amount of, you know, granit, or special metals, or whatever through the cold of space, over the next, you know, century, we've signed this long trade agreement or something, right? But when it comes to like, I'm a person, it is very weird to be like drifting in and out of cryosleep as I go through the black between these planets. We don't have like FTL, we certainly don't have FTL, but we may not even have like traditional local hyperspeed lanes or whatever between each other. So it was a big deal, I think that this was like someone in... among the Branched was like "we need someone to go join, and to join the Apokine's retinue", um, and so, I think for 30 years or something, 40 years, I was in transit and training and learning, along with like a ship of other Branched folks.

SYLVIA: I have a question.

AUSTIN: Sure.

SYLVIA: Was this something that you volunteered for, or was it more of a conscription type thing?

AUSTIN: [sigh] This is one of those like, respect the fiction things, right? I don't think the Golden Branch ever conscripts anybody.

SYLVIA: Okay, yeah, right.

AUSTIN: I don't think that's... I can't do this without betraying the ending of COUNTER/Weight.

SYLVIA: Right.

AUSTIN: Um. Carter Richmond says "Wait there's no FTL anymore?" in the chat. There was only FTL between key planets and stuff. The thing that separated Apostolosian ships at the time, if you may remember, was that they could, um, travel through darkspace. That's like what made them really like cool. And so, I don't think that the Branched have those Apostolosian ships. Um, so. So yeah. That's the situation here. And we do not have Divines that could create portals or anything like that. Um, don't ask me about how fast travel worked or faster than light travel worked in Twilight Mirage. It was the Twilight Mirage, everything was fucked. So. [SYLVIA chuckles.] So yeah. Any other questions?

DRE: Can you communicate back to the Branch? [AUSTIN sighs.] Or do you just have to fly back?

AUSTIN: I think there are runners. I think that there are... there's an Apostolosian, like... The Apostolosians can travel through darkspace, but they can't do it with manned craft at the speeds that would do it. So there's like literally... there are little darts that get shot from some sort of gravity canon deep in Apostolosian space, and you could not push a person at the speed that these go. [DRE: Hm.] But they kind of like are antennae that get thrown from... they're like javelins, they're called javelins, and they get thrown from Apostolos into the Golden Branch, and along the way, they can like pick up messages and send them the direction that they are travelling, and so that's a way to between ships on this shipping lines, basically. Or to send a message back home. The thing you have to do is either catch one going back towards the direction you came from, or catch one going the direction you're going, which will get there first and then be flung back still carrying your message. So. Yeah.

DRE: Gotcha.

AUSTIN: Um. Yeah, also the note here is: we're in the Perennial Wave, we're close even to where the Perennial Wave happened, and so that has completely changed the state of what technology looks like, it's given us a nice clean break here. Things can be as grimy as we want them to be. I've said before that the Season 6 like touchstone is lots of like dip switches and, you know, the sound that like turning on a big power unit, like, ca-clunk-BOM... That is extremely Season 6. Um, you know. Fuses that are like... the little fuses and not just like a fuse board with switches, etc. Um. Any other questions or should we move on? I should see if I have a name. I don't have one yet, but we'll see. [JANINE chuckles.] Um. [Pause] Alright. Ready to keep moving?

SYLVIA: I think so.

JANINE: Uh-huh.

AUSTIN: Sylvia, do you wanna draw a card?

SYLVIA: Alright. [Pause] Oh! [AUSTIN: Um. Oh! That's in your hand.] Okay. There we go. [JANINE laughs quietly.] [AUSTIN: Ooh!] Oh wow. **When was the last time the Queen hurt you?**

AUSTIN: Good question!

SYLVIA: Or the Apokine, sorry, I gotta... [AUSTIN: No, you're good.] just read it. Um... I think it was an indirect hurt. [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] I think it was something where it was either a... I think it was a... I think it was just like a royal order that had ramifications on my character's personal life, I think maybe because we've been at war so long, it might have been a question... yeah, I actually like this idea, a questionable decision to mobilize troops in some way. [AUSTIN: Interesting.] And I ended up taking something... or from my character.

AUSTIN: Were you in war directly or did you lose something because of the decision that the Queen... or that the Apokine made?

SYLVIA: I was in the war directly, yes. And I... it was... It's a bit of both, honestly. Because of the decision... Me being there didn't affect what happened, but it... it... um... it did have an effect on my character, on myself. Like, that is what... I was there, but I wasn't able to stop what happened from happening.

AUSTIN: Gotcha.

JANINE: Are they aware that this affected you the way it did?

SYLVIA: ...No. They aren't. I think... yeah, I think this is something that's been kept under wraps.

AUSTIN: Hm. [Pause. He sighs.] Do they.... Were you part of their retinue before this decision? Or only after?

SYLVIA: After. [AUSTIN: Huh. Okay.] Yeah. [Pause.] Actually, if I can add on to that. [AUSTIN: Please.] The battle caused by this decision was what led to me being on the retinue. As a part of a... Like, because I survived it while many others didn't... [AUSTIN: Gotcha.] It was sort of a valor thing. And I received a promotion afterwards.

AUSTIN: Um... Interesting. [Pause.] Okay. Dre, do you have anything, or do you wanna move on?

DRE: No, I think I'm good.

AUSTIN: Alright. Your draw.

DRE: Right. Red deck, right?

AUSTIN: Red deck.

DRE: [typing] Draw one card... Okay, alright... And there. [AUSTIN: Ooh...] Wow, okay. [AUSTIN: Big one!] **The Apokine trusts me, but no one else in the royal court does.** Why? Um... I am... the Apokine's adopted sibling. [AUSTIN: Interesting.] But I was adopted... so I was born in a family that at one point was trying to overthrow the current Apokine... [AUSTIN: Ooh!] But in order to basically quell that [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] there was like a deal made in the court where myself and then one of the Apokine's like... by-birth siblings were more or less swapped at birth.

AUSTIN: It was like a... royal hostage type situation? [DRE: Uh-huh.] I'm so... Dre, I'm so happy. I just need you to know that we're like... you got it, you're on it, you're *on* Season 6 shit. [DRE laughs quietly.] I'm just gonna dip back here in a conversation that I had with Art less than a week ago, in which Art is describing how his character may have been... there may be the Season 6 character that he's planning... Quote: (This is me saying) "I do think we're gonna have some sort of hostage prince situation somewhere in this world, so if you were tied to that faction, that would be good." And Art said: "But very polite hostaging." So... [DRE chuckles. JANINE laughs quietly.] You're on point here, I love it. Um. What happened to the family you were born into? Are they... Did that make peace, did that lead to peace?

DRE: Um... No. It didn't. They still tried, [AUSTIN: Oof...] and it went very poorly for them. [AUSTIN: Oh. Okay.] But I think they went about it in such a way, that like it was... it was very grotesque to me, so I... you know... The family I grew up with always felt like more of a family, and then seeing, like, the people who were my "blood", what they were doing was just... gross.

AUSTIN: Do you know we don't trust you?

DRE: Oh yeah. [AUSTIN: Interesting.] I think it's... Again, it's very polite hostage taking, [AUSTIN: Right.] but it's... I know which conversations I'm not a part of. [Pause] It's that kind of thing.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah. [Pause] Any other questions here?

SYLVIA: I'm drawing a blank.

AUSTIN: Um... Have you tried to earn our trust?

DRE: I think I used to, but I know the Apokine trusts me, and that's pretty much all I care about.

AUSTIN: Interesting. Okay. [Pause] Do you trust the Apokine?

DRE: Oh yeah. [AUSTIN: Okay.] Completely.

AUSTIN: [laughing a bit] No further questions.

[Quiet laughter.]

JANINE: Your witness.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. [DRE and AUSTIN laugh.] Um... If there are no further questions, Janine, you can draw.

JANINE: Okay. [Clicking.] Uh, **You are considered beautiful by almost everyone you meet. How does the Apokine make you question that perception?**

SYLVIA: Oof.

AUSTIN: Jesus.

JANINE: [laughs a bit] Um... So, I think I was... What's the Apostolosian equivalent of a wet nurse? Is there one? [AUSTIN: Sure. Do you want there to be one? I can see it.] I imagine like a wet nurse or a nurse maid kind of role... [AUSTIN: Yeah.] But that was like... a long time ago, when I was much, much younger. And eventually, as the... You know, eventually the Apokine didn't need that, obviously, didn't need [AUSTIN: Right.] that kind of caretaker anymore, and I think I returned to my... my role as like... Primarily a fighter, I guess. So a lot of people would still have this image of me as a very sort of like young and nurturing kind of guardian, but to the Apokine themselves it's a very dramatic change. [AUSTIN: Right.] You know, it's gone from this sort of very soft, nostalgic face to a very aged and scarred face... [AUSTIN: Right.] Um, and I imagine they're very... They're not like rude about it, but it's probably one of those things of like, you know, when you have a dinner with the family or whatever and you're like "Man, your hair is sure different." [AUSTIN: Ohhhh...] "There's sure less of it!" [She laughs a bit.] I think it's stuff like that.

AUSTIN: So this is a very... Is this... about physical beauty primarily? Or is it... is it also about emotional or just like the relationship you have with them?

JANINE: I think it's both. I think it's... because we had that close relationship... You know, that relationship with everyone else wasn't close, so the changes are not as apparent, both in terms of like physical changes, and in terms of like role being played. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] Like, I am not in a nurturing role anymore, so that sort of aspect of the beauty is gone too, even to people who are outside of it it's still "Oh yeah, you know, they helped raise the Apokine"... [AUSTIN: Yeah, and are now...] I keep switching between Apokine and Apokine.

AUSTIN: We can pick either. [JANINE laughs a bit.] We should pick one, though. I like Apokine, I think. -kine like "line". [JANINE: Uh-huh.] Do... Did you have the choice to leave the retinue? After your service when the Apokine was younger was over? Or was this a for life?..

JANINE: Yes. [AUSTIN: Okay.] I think it was probably even suggested. [AUSTIN: Ooh...] That it would be wise to kind of step out of that attachment.



AUSTIN: Why did you stay?

JANINE: 'cause I didn't want to step out of attachment!

AUSTIN: Oh, okay. [laughing a bit] I see. I gotcha now. Um... And now you're... If you're scarred... You said you were scarred from combat, you've now have done... [JANINE: Yes.] You've fought in this war. [JANINE: Yeah.] Okay. Um... Hm.

JANINE: Do we want names in this game or do we want to stay clear of names?

AUSTIN: We can totally have names once you have a name.

JANINE: I have a name.

AUSTIN: What's your name?

JANINE: Antigone Gennadiy.

AUSTIN: Great. Spell that?

JANINE: Gennadiy spelled G-E-N-N-A-D-I-Y.

AUSTIN: [typing] A-D-A-Y? [JANINE: I-Y.] I-Y. Gennadiy, not Gennaday. Gennadiy. [Typing] Great. Um. Any other questions for Antigone? [Pause] Alright, I'm gonna draw the next prompt. Boom. Wow! **You saved the Queen's life once... You saved the Apokine's life once—how?** ...Also, I have a name now. My name is Modus Maria. M-O-D-U-S Maria spelled M-A-R-I-A, like Maria, but pronounced Maria. [Pause] I think it was like... early in our journey, because here's... Alright, this is also the thing. 'cause we're on a journey now, right? The game never goes "And now you're on the journey." We can just kind of start to blend the answers we give with the fact that we know that we're on this journey to try to stop this war. Uh. I think fairly early on we were... God, I need to look at the list of things. Um. For the first month of the journey through the darkspace we were headed south. I'm gonna pull us over to the map again really quick. We are headed through... we are headed from like the kind of like the center, where like the P is in Apostolos, south through the rest of the green, and then... Do you see these like two stars right here? Like in between... I'm just gonna draw on this map instead of [laughing] instead of pinging... Oh, that's way too big. [JANINE laughs] Thin, please. Do you see these little stars right there? They're like right south of the green in Apostolos? [SYLVIA: Uh-huh.] [DRE: Oh yeah.] We have to like stop there to refuel, and that's like a long trip from like here down to here. And I think a month into the darkspace part of this trip, we... A gate opened, and a... There'd been a Divine already in this... at those stars, and it opened a gate to allow for the arrival of a major warship. And so it and the Divine that was there—and I have to figure out which Divine was there, let's see... Um... I have a list in here. Do I have a list in here? Or is it on my phone?... Regardless. A Divine attacked, and the thing that I ended up doing was... [He sighs.] And maybe that revealed something more about myself than I was ready to reveal at the time, but... I went out in a

mech of my own, and got into a fight with it, and held it up in such a way that... absolutely should have meant the death of myself. Except that after the dust had settled, after the main fleet had escaped, and the Divine who had killed me left, I began... I started to regrow on my own flagship, where my mech launched from, you know, earlier in the journey. And it is revealed that part of what I am is something similar to the characters Jack and Jill... Jacqui and Jillian from COUNTER/Weight, or Fourteen Fifteen from Twilight Mirage. I am a being that has... that regrows. But I'm not just regrowing from nothing, it's not like a pod that I come back in, I think that there's like a collection of... They're almost look like jacks—you know, like jacks that you bounce a bouncy ball in and then you grab them... you know, jacks—that slowly realign themselves in some, you know, special room on my main ship, and reconstruct me with a combination of biological and mechanical technologies. And this is part of what it means to be Branched, is to be this new type of being that blends the line between like organic and cybernetic, like, all the way through. And... I just like, I've given my life once for you. Well. Not for you, but for the Apokine. And I think the Apokine begins a tally of each time I die on this journey. And that is... that is how I've given my life. I like... held off... Let me look at my Divine names. Does anyone have a good Divine that I could have sacrificed myself to hold off on? [Pause] Let's see. Here's my Divine list. Um... [Pause] Oh, here's who it was. Because it's one that certainly, people thought I would've died. It was the Divine Rogalian, which is an archaic word that means "of or pertaining to a great fire". And so, this was like a Divine that set my mech ablaze, like literally set something made of titanium and metal ablaze like it was made of paper and, you know, just like chits, like little wooden chits, like just completely set it ablaze. And yet I reappeared. [laughing a bit] Any questions?

[SYLVIA laughs.]

[Pause]

SYLVIA: Did the Apokine reward you in any way for this or show you favor afterwards?

AUSTIN: [immediately] Not at all. Outside of the counting, right? I think there's a degree to which... when they start to count something, it counts for something, right? Like, you've earned favor by being... by being counted, by being given the grace of their attention. And I think before that, they would not let us, my fleet... or like my main ship even close to their core fleet. ...I don't actually think that it's a big fleet, this is probably a small... like, it's a retinue, the whole thing was like, it's just us. But I don't think it's just four people, I suspect it's like, you know... Four ships of people. And previous to that I had been way in the distance, and now I'm allowed to get closer. [SYLVIA: Hm.] Which is a sort of recognition, certainly.

DRE: Is that enough for you?

AUSTIN: Um... Yeah. Yes. I think in fact, when I am reconstituted, it feels like it's going according to plan. I think we get a shot of Modus Maria like sending a message back on one of those javelins that is passing by sometime in the next week, that is like, you know... The first...

AUSTIN (as Modus Maria): Our first encounter with the Principality came and went as expected. The Apokine has seen use in me. [Pause]

AUSTIN: Anything else here? [Pause]

SYLVIA: I guess this is a little broader, but... were there any drawbacks to when you came back?

AUSTIN: I'm not sure. Um... I'm still working out on my own... in my head, what's up with the Branched and whether this is like... how all of them are, or if this is like a perfected technology. What I do think is that... there aren't... I think that there's probably a time in which it's like "Alright, I'm not at my full self yet", you know, I don't have... There's like a down period, a recovery period from doing this, and... But I think more than that, it's just like... [He sighs.] I actually think the drawback is that I need to keep this one physical shape, and each time this happens it makes me wish I could change my shape into something else, but that for this mission we've decided this is the shape that best serves our needs. Um, whereas I think that if I was home, if I'd been raised, you know, in... in what used to be the Golden Branch, or maybe still is, the physical form is like something that shifts with your desire, and with your expertise in being able to this. And the hope is to build a world or like... previous to this long stupid war with the Divine Principality, it was this like world of imagining yourself and exploring yourself and the world in different forms. And being at war has meant that we've had to continue to take warlike forms. We've had to continue to build ourselves into bodies that wield weapons better, and so each time I do that, each time I build myself a warrior instead of a poet, or instead of a, you know, a scientist, or instead of... whatever, you know, someone in leisure, right? Instead of somebody who likes to play basketball... It's a reminder, that we're still in this stupid fucking war with the Principality. [Pause.] Jetsnacko says: "Inquiring minds want to know what the mech looks like but if we don't know I am just going to cover it in fire..." I think it's actually similar in nature to the kind of jacks that I've described... I think it's a mech that can reconfigure itself by pulling component parts around. I think it like has a few modes that it's in, basically, and like it... I'm gonna like play off the javelin imagery before, which is like it launches and it looks like a spear, and then when it arrives it kind of like keeps the angles of the spear on its shoulders as these big sharp shoulders, and like knees... like knee armour that comes up and comes to a point, and probably wields like a half-lance in one arm, and then the other... So, it's like... so it has sort of a... It's almost a little bit more super robot-y than what I normally go for. Think about something like the mechs from The Big O, with those like flat mask-like faces, and those like extra big weird like... piston arms, or like these huge forearms... It's that way for sure. Any other questions? [Pause] BioD42 in the chat says: "Is this the first time they've died???" Um... I don't think so. I think before I arrived, the Principality tried and successfully destroyed my body once before. And I have since... come around the other way. I came back once before. I think it's only because I don't necessarily want to have to be like... why was I so cool with it this time. I think I happened to have had some experience with it before. [Pause.] Um, any other questions here? Okay. [TN: In the audio version of this, here there's some strange loud playback for a second or so. It's very startling.] Sylvia.

SYLVIA: Alright. Draw one card... **How does the Queen remind you of her status while on the journey? Or how does the Apokine remind you of their status while on the journey?** [AUSTIN: Good question.] Um... That *is* a good question. [Pause] Um. I think it's like... It's like a quiet authority, right? It's the way I'm seeing it, [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] where it's like... what you mentioned earlier with the Apokine basically... the most like attention you got for literally giving your life for them was just like a tally. Actually. [AUSTIN: Yeah. But also, I'm not from here.] For sure! [AUSTIN: [laughing] I don't even go there.] But I think it is also one of those things where they seem above it in a way, [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] where people just like... intuit what they need and what they want for the most part, [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] and then when they do speak up it is like... everybody is silent almost, you know? [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] And, I think directly... if we want something a bit more like direct to my character—who I also have a name for, I'll get to it in a sec—I think it's just like... assignments that I'm given [AUSTIN: Interesting.] are ones that would not be given to... like, one, wouldn't be given to most military officials, like, this isn't something they ask a typical soldier, and two, the Apokine is the only person I would say "yes" to for that. And like because it's these like unorthodox and sometimes dangerous tasks it's one of those things where it's like—oh yeah, the only reason why I'm doing this is because this is someone so above my head. [AUSTIN: [laughing quietly] Right.] Yeah. And my character's name is Orbit Shard.

AUSTIN: Great name. Um. Do you take joy in this? These assignments? Like are you proud to be getting these assignments?

SYLVIA: Yes, but I wouldn't admit that. [AUSTIN: Hmm.] I try to make it just seem like it's a duty, and like "oh, it's an honor" for this, but I try not to show that is genuinely like... It is a rush and a thrill that I'm getting the assignments. So, yes, I do enjoy it, and I... though I try to hide it from others in the retinue.

AUSTIN: Hm. [Pause] One day the Apokine gives you... Asks you, does not give you a task. I think you are called for, and... One, does the Apokine speak directly, or does someone relay their, like, commands to you?

ANSI: I'm thinking that it might be like relayed to me to keep... Again, because of the way I've sort of envision these... These are things that like... are delicate, [AUSTIN: Right.] and so... [AUSTIN: Okay.] Yeah. Basically, it's not something you'd like do in like a normal war council or something like that.

AUSTIN: Okay. So then I think there is a day at which you're called in to the Apokine's like throne room on the ship, and in all of their glory [He laughs a little bit] in their long black robes, they gesture as you come in, and as you, like, stand in attention, and their, you know, one of their other servants approaches you with... Actually, I think two of them approach you with what we might call an arc. You know, like a huge crate, with gilded bars on it, like handlebards on it, and some inscriptions written in... written in like what at this point is *absolutely* Ancient Apostolosian. [He laughs a bit.] But also there are some symbols on it that you know are tied to a legendary hero of Apostolosian lore, um, the First Demarch, Sokrates. And they... the Apokine asks you, and I think, actually does speak:

AUSTIN (as the Apokine): Will you take and protect this?

SYLVIA (as Orbit Shard): With my life.

SYLVIA: That's always the answer, implied or not. [AUSTIN: Right.] Orbit always is "I will do this and I will give my life doing this for you."

AUSTIN: Great. And so, you are given, [extremely casually] you know, something in a box. What could it be, Sylvia?

SYLVIA: Well, I don't know... Who knows? Could be anything, really.

AUSTIN: Certainly not something of Divine make.

SYLVIA: [very innocently] No! What? Us?

AUSTIN: No.

SYLVIA: I've never even heard the word Divine before. [AUSTIN laughs.]

AUSTIN: Any other questions here? About how the Queen reminds Orbit of their status while on the journey? [Long pause] Sounds like no. Dre?

DRE: [in a sing-song voice] Let's see what I got... [AUSTIN: Oooh!] **The Queen... The Apokine knows something about me that no one else does. What is it?** Also, I figured out my name. My name is Eudora. [AUSTIN: E-U-D-O-R-A?] Yep. [AUSTIN: Got it.] Which a couple of sources say roughly translates to "good gift". [AUSTIN: [laughing] Great. Love to be a gift.] [SYLVIA laughs.] Yep! And I probably have a last name, but... [AUSTIN: Maybe. Yeah.] I'm pretty sure... [AUSTIN: Could you have... Go ahead.] I have a last name. It was the Apokine's, no one uses it. [AUSTIN: Right. Right.] They use the other last name, so I just don't have a last name.

AUSTIN: Interesting. So you've lost your last name at this point. Is that what the Queen knows about you that no one else does? Or that's a side fact?

DRE: No, I think I know it. I know it. [AUSTIN: But it's... Yeah.] It's like... It's almost like if you have a name, but no one uses it... [AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Um...] [DRE sighs.] What does the Queen know about me that no one else does?.. Um... [Long pause] Oh, okay. And I think this is something maybe, mmm... yeah, this is something even I don't know. [AUSTIN: Interesting. Okay.] So I mentioned that I was kind of part of a like hostage swap. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] And then my family went ahead with their overthrow anyway. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] That's because the baby that was theirs died very shortly after. Of illness. [AUSTIN: Oh wow... Wait, wait, the one that... So like the Apokine's actual sibling?] No. [AUSTIN: Oh.] The other family's actual child. I don't have anything to do with that family, actually. But I was just

brought in to put up appearances. [AUSTIN: So you're in fact not connected to this at all...] Nope.

AUSTIN: But your whole life has been like lived under the pretence that you were from this other family, and that everything is in the right, and that there was never... Okay. Great. So wait, does this mean you've never known anyone from your supposed other family?

DRE: I mean, I've met them. And they were introduced to me as... [AUSTIN: Right, I see.] you know, [AUSTIN: "This is your child."] Yeah. I don't know this. I think probably the only people who... that are alive now... is the Apokine, and then the people who also knew were the people who attempted to [AUSTIN: Right.] do the overthrow and they are gone.

AUSTIN: Right. Love to see it. Um... Are you interested in the family that you were supposedly born into? Or at this point are you committed to the Apokine's household?

DRE: I'm committed to the Apokine's household.

AUSTIN: So this isn't something that they could like wield over you in that way? [DRE: Um...] Or is it something... Or actually, is that actually why it is something that they could wield over you in this way? By like... [DRE: Right. Yeah.] separating you from the situation?

DRE: Yes. I think it would probably shake my trust in the Apokine if I came to know this. [AUSTIN: Right.] Just because it's... I would, like... They had been so seemingly supportive, and honest, and transparent through like everything else. Why would they bother to not tell me this?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Um. Trah5591 in the chat has a question that I think is great because it helps us move from subtext to text here a little bit. Which is: Are you in place... placed "To create the perception that the other family broke their oath?" That like... [DRE: Yes.] Okay. Just to be clear.

DRE: Yeah. That other... And I don't think they did anything nefarious to the child [AUSTIN: Right.] that was supposed to be me. [AUSTIN: They just died.] Yeah. [AUSTIN: They got sick. Whatever, it happens.] Yeah, though it's very sad that it happened.

AUSTIN: Yeah. But instead of being like "Hey, this thing happened, fuck..." [DRE: Yeah.] What they said was "Give me another kid!" [DRE: Yep.] "Could we get another kid in here?"

DRE: [laughs] "Need that backup kid."

JANINE: Is this part of why the Apokine trusts you as much as they do? Like, because there is so little connection both real and imagined? Or does that not factor in at all?

DRE: Um... Maybe it's part of it. Maybe that was initially it. Um... And then I think that like actions that I did later on just cemented that. [AUSTIN: Interesting. Um...] Like there were probably arguments early on where certain people were like, you know, "It doesn't matter

what Eudora says,” [AUSTIN: Right.] “they are related by blood, and that’s a very powerful bond.” And like in their mind, Apokine’s like “Mm, but is it though?”

AUSTIN: How close are you in age to the Apokine? Like, were you children together? [DRE: ...No.] Okay. So that means that like you didn’t... You weren’t a kid, Antigone was not like also taking care of you as a child.

DRE: No, I think Apokine was probably Apokine for a while before I came around.

AUSTIN: Gotcha. Okay. Um... I had another question, but I’ve lost it. Probably fine. [He and SYLVIA laugh quietly.] Oh! Was this the Apokine’s decision? Or was this a decision made by the previous Apokine? Like... How long have... I’m trying to figure out when this attempted coup happened and whether this was an attempted coup on this current Apokine, or on one of their parents, or a previously appointed Apokine. We never got into like how the Apokine... how you become Apokine in this moment, but...

DRE: Yeah. Uh... Yes. It was current Apokine’s [AUSTIN: Okay.] plan.Yeah.

AUSTIN: Interesting. [Pause] No further questions from me. [SYLVIA laughs.] Love to know your leader. You know. [Pause.] Um. Janine.

**JANINE: You have a personal connection to the land you are currently traveling through. What makes you want to stay, and why don’t you?**

AUSTIN: Interesting. I’m gonna pull us back over to this map here really quick. I think if you zoom all the way in, we are probably still in the general vicinity of those two stars, but if you wanna move us further down, like, we can do that. If you wanna like, cut around a long way... I’ll just draw a mark here, and be like, here’s where we are going to. [DRE: Okay.] We’re aiming to get to... Let’s see, what’s a cool place to circle here... Um... Let me draw my shapes, here we go. Uh... A nebula here. You can barely see it, but there’s like a little tiny red mark if you zoom all the way in. Like in between that circle that I just added? Yeah. And so, if we wanna duck through all of this unexplored territory here, that’s fine, if we wanna punch through, that’s fine, if you wanna draw a line somewhere else and say “Here is where we are now and I feel closeness to this thing” that’d be cool too.

JANINE: Hmm. [typing] Um....

AUSTIN: You can also pass the card or X-card it. Totally up to you. Maybe you just don’t have a great answer.

JANINE: Yeah, I think I wanna pass this card.

AUSTIN: Um, so I think it passes to me. I am also gonna pass this card. So, Sylvia, do you have an answer or do you wanna pass the card also?

SYLVIA: Oh, I have an answer! [AUSTIN: Okay.] I remember I mentioned the... My first question was “the last time Apokine hurt you”, and I mentioned a battle. [AUSTIN: Yes!] This is where that took place.

AUSTIN: So where is it? Do we wanna?.. What map... Yeah, let's get back over to the map, [SYLVIA: Yeah, pull us back over to the map.] there we go.

SYLVIA: Um, let me see here... I think it's just like... [typing] a little further down here. There's like a little... It might just be me on my monitor [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] 'cause I was leaning in... [AUSTIN: It's fine.] and it was very quiet... There's like a fainter light there... Right in the middle... [AUSTIN: Yes. Can you draw on this map? Is that a thing you're allowed to do?] Let me see... [AUSTIN: I don't know if you can or can't.] Um... Oh, that's too big! I can. Just made it too big. [AUSTIN: [laughs quietly] Pretty sure you can undo...] Yeah. There we go again. Like around here... Oh, wrong color. Ugh! [AUSTIN: That's fine.] Yeah. Just around there, a little further... [AUSTIN: A little bit further down, yeah, that's cool.] And yeah...

AUSTIN: So this is a battlefield. Is this like?.. Are we like passing through the wreckage of a previous fight? Like... Or is it a planet, or..?

SYLVIA: Uh, it used to... I think it's more wreckage than anything, I think there are like... There are a couple of like small moons and planets around this area [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] that were deemed strategically valuable, but otherwise aren't actually like used for much. And those were sort of the site... around those were the sites of where this battle took place, and... I think since then it's actually been abandoned.

AUSTIN: Oh wow. Interesting. How does being back here make you feel?

SYLVIA: Uh...It is... [Sigh.] There's a type of like nostalgic ache to it, you know? [AUSTIN: Yeah.] Where it's like... something awful happened here, but part of me wants to be able to face it, and my duties are pulling me away from that. So there's this like... It is mostly pain, but it's also like the feeling of leaving something unfinished.

AUSTIN: Does the Apokine make any special note of this place as we pass through?

SYLVIA: No. I don't think they even notice. [AUSTIN: Does the thing...] Or at least it's... Oh, sorry. [AUSTIN: No, go ahead.] I was gonna say, or at least it's not perceptible to Orbit that they notice.

AUSTIN: Uh... Does the thing in the box call to you at all and ask you to do anything in memory? Actually, let me just say this. The thing in the box calls to you and asks you to memorialize what happened here. Do you do something or do you ignore this?

SYLVIA: [sighing] I'm going to ignore it. [AUSTIN: Okay.] I don't take orders from that. I get my orders elsewhere and I've been told to follow them.



AUSTIN: There you go. Um... Any other questions here? [Pause] Janine, I think let's stay on you so you get a card here. [He laughs a bit.]

JANINE: Yeah, okay. [clicking] [AUSTIN: Ooh.] **You think of someone in this retinue as the Queen's favorite. Who? What makes you think this?** Um... [Pause] Um... Dre, what was your character name again? [DRE: Eudora.] Right. I think that Antigone would probably think of Eudora as the favorite. Um, knowing that... I suppose, something that makes sense to me anyway is that if they don't have any siblings of their own, that would give them even more reason to sort of keep Eudora close. Because, you know, if they trust Eudora, and can sort of have that relationship, it makes sense. [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] So I think... But maybe it doesn't get like put forward that way for obvious reasons, this is royal family, and those are... tricky. [AUSTIN laughs a bit.] But I think to Antigone it probably looks like... This is the way that sort of a want of a sibling relationship is manifesting in this much closer relationship with Eudora than maybe you would see otherwise.

DRE: So how does this lead you to treat me?

JANINE: Um, I think that I try to treat you... fairly, but I also don't really trust you... because I was almost certainly there when all of that went down... [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] If I had, you know, if I helped raise the Apokine and all that. So I think there's just like too much awareness of the difference in the distance there to be a 100% cool, but at the same time I respect their choices, and I respect the way they choose to forge their relationships, so I'm not going to be outwardly hostile, or like try and whisper in their ear that they shouldn't trust you, or anything. [JANINE and AUSTIN laugh a bit.] It is just a matter that I try to keep out of.

AUSTIN: Who is your favorite person in the retinue? And it doesn't have to be a player character, if you want to invent someone else here, you can do that. Or it can be a player character.

JANINE: Um... Probably Orbit. Because Orbit is coming from... I believe Orbit is coming from outside of this sort of a royal sphere... And has, you know... lived their life... [AUSTIN: Yeah.] Like, has not lived their entire life, has lived a life, like a genuine life, that is also... you know, within a society that Antigone recognizes, is another big part of it.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Right. Totally. [JANINE: Um...] It's good you said that, 'cause I'm gonna describe what I look like in a minute, and [JANINE: [laughing] Yeah.] it's not gonna be what you think. [JANINE: Yeah.] So.

JANINE: Yeah. So I think for Antigone that makes Orbit a lot easier to... or a lot more approachable, a lot easier to work alongside. Just because there is that kind of bias of familiarity.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Um... Hm... Is there anything else I have? I think that's it for me. [Pause] Who do you think *should* be the Queen's favorite? Or do you just not care?

JANINE: Mm... I don't think I care. [AUSTIN laughs a bit.] I think... I think I was there when they were at the stage of their life where like one day their favorite thing was the fish on wheels with the pull cord. [AUSTIN: Right.] And the next day their favorite thing was a xylophone... that also involves fish somehow. [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] Um... [AUSTIN laughs.] Like, you know, the toy that fish use in Little Mermaid to like...do the sounds of music under the sea and stuff. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] I think that I've... Because I was there through the sort of childhood fickleness phase of things, and probably a lot of the like, tantrums, and disagreements, and things... I understand that like the way that someone's interest falls, or like the way that someone's favoritism falls doesn't necessarily bear out in the long term, it doesn't necessarily need to affect me at all [AUSTIN: Right.] as long as I'm doing my job, and things are going okay.

AUSTIN: Yeah. It doesn't all have to be about you, and people are allowed to have preferences, etc. [JANINE: Yeah.] Yeah. Cool. Anyone else? [Pause] Okay. I'm gonna draw a card. Ooh! **When was the last time the Queen showed you real kindness?** This is useful, actually, 'cause I can answer with the thing that I was gonna talk about which is what I look like. So, someone in the chat—I need to find out who really quick... Um, here we go.—Dylan in the chat said: "Maybe I've been playing too much Xenoblade, but my head casting for Modus is now Wulfic from Xenoblade Chronicles 2." And what I like about that is that Wulfic looks like—Let's see if I can... how do I do this? Let me save this image... Looks like the thing that's uploading right now. Boom.

SYLVIA: Whoa!

JANINE: Oh my God!

AUSTIN: Look like this. Um, and... Okay, so. What I'll say is Xenoblade Chronicles 2 has some real bad character design in it. The Blades which are like the Pokémon people that you can recruit are all super horny, they're all just like deeply objectified ladies... But there are also some characters in that set, that look fucking rad as hell. And the overall sense of... yeah, there's a humanoid shape here but something else is also going on... Some of them have multiple arms, there's definitely a very like Warframe vibe to a lot of them... I'm just dropping a lot of them on the screen right now so you can like see what I'm playing with here. I do think that when we talk about the Branched building themselves bodies for different purposes, and building themselves bodies that meet the... like, that they want to inhabit, and that they are frustrated that they need to take on warrior's bodies while at war... This is what I mean. Like, I don't mean that they get... that they have big muscles, I mean that like some of them have extra arms to wield weapons with, and some of them give up speech so that they can... so that they never need to divulge secrets, so it's impossible for them to divulge secrets. Or they build themselves in forms that are like... that can't feel anything, and are...It is not that they wish they could look more like humans, it's that they wish they could look like this, but also not like this so they could wield energy swords better or what-the-fuck-ever, right? And so I think like, as a placeholder, as far as placeholder goes, as far as proportions and shit go, I actually am with Dylan here that like Wulfic is like a good starting point. I don't think as many weird antennae here... But I think the other thing that this has made me realise: I don't think that Modus Maria gets into a mech, I think that Modus

Maria reconfigures themselves into a mech. I also actually think Modus Maria uses she/her pronouns. And I think that she like... consumes more of this stuff to build into that shape. And the thing that the Queen does to show me real kindness is that for two weeks—Sorry, not the Queen, the Apokine—the Apokine orders me to stand down. And gives me two weeks where I am, like, relegated to civilian status, where they reject my offer to serve as bodyguard on this journey, and offer that I could... Effectively saying like “Take whatever form you want. We will be fine.” And I refuse. Because my job is not to listen to the Apokine, my job is to be part of this mission. Um, and I don’t trust them. I don’t trust that the Apokine wants me to stand down because it is a real kindness, but because the card is written the way it is, *it is* a real kindness. And I have rejected it. Any questions? [Pause]

SYLVIA: How did they react to that?

AUSTIN: [sigh] I don’t... [short laugh] Looking at the image on our screen, I think they know well how to cover up their own disappointment, but they... I think they let me know that the offer is on the table, so to speak. That I’ve earned that, you know, over the course of multiple battles or whatever, that I have earned their... the right to... That, you know, all soldiers in the Apostolosian employ are allowed this down time, and that I’ve earned that status, you know. Maybe they even call me Private, or some equivalent thereof, you know. They’ve given me that title, and with it that... not required, or maybe it is required leave, and I’ve rejected it. But I think they are upset by that. Or disappointed by it, but they don’t let that show. [Long pause] [Quiet laughter] Someone linked... someone linked another weird... One of these... This one’s really cute, actually, I like this one a lot. This is a good one, let me save this image and bring it over. [DRE laughs a bit.] This is Boreas... Wow, that’s way too big! [SYLVIA: Whoa!] But it’s very cool looking. Zoom out all the way. I’m gonna shrink this down. [DRE: That’s Xenoblade?] This is Xenoblade Chronicles 2, that’s like some sort of big cold rabbit, I don’t know. [JANINE: I don’t understand it.] It’s a rabbit, it has like a...

JANINE: Yeah, but it has more legs than I understand is all.

AUSTIN: Just like the Branched. [JANINE: Okay.] Sometimes you just got more legs than you need.

JANINE: This also looks like if there was... you know the whale Pokémon? [AUSTIN: Yeah.] Wailmer? [DRE: Wailmer or Wailord is the...] No, the one that’s rounder. [DRE: Yeah.] It reminds me a bit of that but as a killer whale, but like with puckered lips and a rabbit head inside the puckered lips.

SYLVIA: Oh yeah...

AUSTIN: Oh yeah. I’m looking at an image here, I think this whole thing is a mouth. I think... [DRE: What, Wailmer?] No, Boreas. [DRE: Oh.] I think the whole thing opens up. [JANINE: How.. oh. What?] Watch. I’m uploading. [DRE: What... Don’t believe me, just watch.] Boom. [DRE: Oh Jesus!] Yeah! Uh-huh! It opened up in the middle! [SYLVIA: Why is there a Pokéball in there?] [AUSTIN laughs.] I don’t know. Sometimes you just make a design, and

you go “Is this it?”, and you go “Yeah. Uh-huh.” [SYLVIA laughs.] [DRE: “Nailed it.”] Nailed it. Nailed it on the first try.

DRE: I can’t believe you spoiled Detective Pikachu this way. [AUSTIN laughs.]

AUSTIN: Any other questions about the Queen showing me kindness? [Pause]

SYLVIA: Did your response earn any like, ire from people, like, beneath you?

AUSTIN: Oh, absolutely. [SYLVIA: Yeah.] I think, everyone fucking hates. Unless you don’t want to, but yes, I think... You know, no one spits as I walk out, but that’s only because the Apokine is in the room. Um... But yeah. I think that like the idea that the Apokine offered you something, and you not only rejected it but like... Yeah. First of all, like, they were mad that I was offered it, probably, right? They would never say that, because you can’t say that the Apokine did something wrong, but... [Pause] Should we go Sylvia again, or should we skip over Sylvia ‘cause Sylvia did that last one? What do you wanna do?

SYLVIA: I’m fine with it if you wanna skip ahead just to keep it even.

AUSTIN: Okay. Dre.

DRE: [singing] Too-do-do-doo, drawing one card... Oh! [AUSTIN: Whoa!] [SYLVIA: Ooh.] [AUSTIN: Huh.] Ummm... [AUSTIN: The fuck did you do?] So, **The Apokine had me punished once. What about the memory of that will stay with you forever?** Oh, this is easy. [AUSTIN laughs.] Now, can I upload a picture, or would I have to send it to you, Austin, and then you would have to... [AUSTIN: Uh, you should be able to, I honestly don’t know. You can try.] What if I just [AUSTIN: If you have one on hand...] drag and drop something?

AUSTIN: You can drag and drop a photo from your, like, hard drive over to it, I don’t think that you can drag and drop a photo from the Internet...

DRE: Uh-oh...

AUSTIN: Did you just?.. [DRE: Dropped it over roll20.] Yeah, that’s what happens if you try that.

DRE: We’re back in there. [AUSTIN: Okay.] Um... [AUSTIN: Do you just wanna put it in chat? And I’ll grab it.] Yeah, I’m just gonna put this in chat. [Dre is singing softly.]

AUSTIN: Again, the question here is: The Apokine had you punished once. What about the memory of that will stay with you forever? [DRE: ...and I reset this, so you can’t still see anything... ] Oh hell yes. Oh, Dre, that’s the way you can do this. [DRE: What?] You can just put it on stream.

DRE: Oh sure, [SYLVIA laughs.] but I want you all to see it too.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I got you now.

DRE: And also I'm afraid to mess with fucking OBS sorcery. [DRE laughs.]

AUSTIN: Yeah... Just open it in file and drag it over... Oh, are you just capturing the Chrome's screen? [DRE: Yeah.] Okay, I gotcha, gotcha. Right-right-right. So I'm gonna upload it for you. One second. Tchoo. ...Downloads? Where the fuck did I?... There it is, there it is. Boom. Uploading. So. Cool image. [DRE: Um, so...] What have we got here? Can you describe this for the class?

DRE: Um, so the thing I was punished for? As I grew up, it became, uh... There were certain physical features of mine, that just started to diverge from that family I was supposed to be from. [AUSTIN: Oh, yeah, sure.] So I have worn this mask for most of my life.

AUSTIN: Bud. Dre. You're fucking... I just gotta tell you, bud. You're just knocking them all out the park for me right now. [DRE: [laughing] Thanks.] Child hostage, wears mask, this is the entire... this is the shit right here. ...Is this the mask? [DRE: Yeah.] Is it a mask like this? Can you describe this mask?

DRE: So this mask is like a kind of like, white, maybe like a porcelain. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] With some like brass etchings kind of around the eyes and things like that. And then just a lot of ornate... what I think is kind of either like ruffles or fans, like going around the top... [AUSTIN: I think it's both. I think it's some ruffles at the bottom, and some fans at the top, some fan blades at the top. I think some feathers in there too.] Yeah. And some feathers in there too. What looks like some like, stylized flowers and things like that. I mean, it's very ornate, and it's very beautiful. And I think this was like passed off as like a gift, you know? [AUSTIN: Yeah.] Like, this is... This was, like, very intricately crafted, made of probably some very rare and expensive stuff... And I think it's maybe also like, you know, this is to keep you safe, right? If someone ever tried to, uh, you know, shoot you or harm you in some way... [AUSTIN: Yeah.] Like, this would deflect those blows.

AUSTIN: I'm trying to find how people can find this... at home if they're listening. Um, if you do a search on the Internet for... God, this is a... [DRE: Yeah, I just stumbled across this via Pinterest, so...] Right, so. If you do a search for venedik, V-E-N-E-D-I-K, maske M-A-S-K-E, then a third word here, modelleri, M-O-D-E-L like "model", and then L-E-R-I, all one word, modelleri, you will see the thing that we are describing... But actually you may not see it in the first row... You'll see it in the second row, because apparently this is just a term that gets used. I'll maybe put it in quotations. Nope, didn't help at all. I do not know how to find this just by searching. I'll have to fuck around with this search a little bit more to try to find something... [DRE: Yeah...] perfect. But great mask, let me tell you. I love it. I love this mask. Um... Does this... Hm... What do I wanna ask here?

DRE: Welcome to my Q&A on my skincare routine, just ask me anything. [AUSTIN laughs.]

AUSTIN: Are people... does anyone in the fleet or in this group... Have they seen your real face? Not your real face, because I guess at this, like... Have we seen you without the mask on?

DRE: No.

AUSTIN: Interesting. Um.

JANINE: Are you thankful for this or is it a burden?

DRE: Oh, yeah, no, I fucking love this thing. There is a part of me that wonders if I can take this off...

AUSTIN: Oh, you've had it *on*? [DRE: Yeah.] You've *had* it on. [DRE: Yeah.] Not..

DRE: Like, there's a part of me that wonders if I can take this off, but I don't even think like that's a question that is in Eudora's mind because they just don't. Why would they?

AUSTIN: Do people have a cool nickname for you 'cause of the mask?

DRE: Uh... No. [AUSTIN: Okay. Still just "Eudora".] That's probably part of the no last name part, right? [AUSTIN: Right. Yeah. Sure. Sure.] You know how that song says "Mask on. Fuck it, mask off"? What if only the first line?

AUSTIN: Great, uh-huh. Uh... Never take it off... Okay. Huh. We're really Friends at the Table tonight, I gotta tell you. [DRE laughs.] Is this a mask of someone important? Or is this just a cool mask that people had around?

DRE: No, I think it's... I think it is intentionally, like, featureless. [AUSTIN: Okay.] One of the big things about this mask is like, it has like a nose and lips and I don't even know how I feel about that, because we haven't really talked about what physically Apostolosians look like at this point [AUSTIN: Right. Yeah. ...I think probably still human with scales... Or you know, with not scales, with gill-like features, as before.] Yeah, I think the face is like intentionally just like flat, and very nondescript. Not like "this nose is modeled after somebody" or something like that.

AUSTIN: Totally. But are there like... Does the iconography, does the use of feathers, the use of... Like does that stuff refer to a particular like, family, or, a... You know what I mean? Like, if we... If someone in real life was wearing a mask like this, there would be articles all over the Internet like "This is what the rubies mean". [DRE: Uh-huh. Um...] The answer can be no, to be clear. I just wanna... I'm just like trying to dig in a little bit.

DRE: I mean there's like... Where my mind is going right now is finding ways to make some of these details all match up to the different Eidolons.

AUSTIN: Right. That makes sense. I like that though, we don't need to like do the specifics. [DRE: Yeah.] But that's a good thing to say is like each of the Eidolons is represented here. [DRE: Yeah.] Right. Cool. Love to be punished because your... not even because you did something, not because you were figuring this thing out about yourself, or honestly, even if someone could, like... "Hey, that kid looks different than the rest of their family" *is* a thing that just happens [He laughs.] sometimes.

JANINE: I mean, you know what you also can't do when you wear a mask all the time? Look in the mirror.

AUSTIN: Look in the mirror, true. [DRE: Yeah.] True.

DRE: I mean, I look in the mirror all the time, because I gotta shine my mask.

AUSTIN: Right. [SYLVIA: Oh.] Hygiene is fine, right? This is some sort of special mask that keeps your face okay.

DRE: Oh yeah, sure, yeah. It's a... it's space tech shit.

AUSTIN: Yeah, okay, good. Whew.

JANINE: Inside it's like one of those little CD-cleaner machines, that used to be...

SYLVIA: [laughing] God!

AUSTIN: Oh nice! That actually feels great.

DRE: I mean...

JANINE: Just spray a little bit of like whatever solution into the eyehole, and there's a crank hidden, and then you turn the crank, [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] and it spins some disks...

DRE: And there's this weird pattern all over my skin now. [All laugh.]

AUSTIN: Well, what's great is the mask, if you turn just so, the light catches you, and you do get that CD rainbow effect, it's beautiful. Great. I'm gonna delete this mask. Uh, Janine. [Pause] [JANINE: Oop.] ...Ooh, okay.

JANINE: [laughing] This is... [AUSTIN: So something's changed.] I've gotten a succession of these.

AUSTIN: But what I'll say is, one way to play this is... this is... what you said before is maybe no longer true, you know?

JANINE: Uh-huh. How long ago was this mask thing again? Like quite a while?

AUSTIN: I think it was when they were a kid, right, Eudora?

DRE: Yeah... [AUSTIN: Or maybe not a kid, I don't know.] So like... at least two decades, if not longer.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: I think this still probably has something to do with that, because if the mask has been on that long, then it means there would have been some resizing that would have to happen... Some like readjustment, because your face gets bigger, and changes, and stuff... Like, between adolescence and like middle-adulthood, and things like that. So I think the fact that... I think the fact that Eudora has had this mask for so long, and still wears it, and... I think I, like, understand that there is an expectation that they continue to wear it, that if they showed up without the mask, it would be a thing. And so sometimes because I'm just so used to seeing Eudora in this mask I don't really think about it. And then sometimes maybe when I see them like trying to reach an itch underneath it or something like that... [JANINE laughs] I have this moment of like "This has maybe gone on too long. This is maybe not... This is not a benevolent thing to do to a person that you actually care about if you do." And that worries me because if you are just sort of... immune to the inconvenience you're causing a person 'cause they themselves don't seem to care about it all that much... Like, why are you keeping them close? Like, what... [AUSTIN: Hm.] at that point, what is there for you in that relationship if you are that kind of callous?

AUSTIN: Is the fact that you're not wearing this mask... that mask, the fact that you have not directly been inconvenienced in that way part of what makes you think you may be the Queen's favorite? Or the Apokine's favorite? That like, so far you have not been put upon in this way?

JANINE: I think it's... I think it's more that when you remove Eudora from the equation, I'm probably the closest thing that the Apokine has to family in the retinue. [AUSTIN: Okay.] So it's like, if it's not Eudora then... [AUSTIN: Right.]

DRE: Do you read [AUSTIN laughs a little bit.] Eudora wearing the mask as a sign of the Apokine being callous? Or is it more the... like, this is just what has to be done? They don't feel great about it but they do it because like, that's just, this is just what it is.

JANINE: I think that's probably one of the things that makes this a "sometimes I think this" and not an "all the time I think this" where sometimes the mask seems celebrational. And other times it feels... you know, a lot of it looks like it's very solid and not built to be comfortable in the way that you'd want, like... I think it's one of these things where sometimes it's easy to think like... why couldn't this mask be a little smaller? [DRE: Yeah.] Or why couldn't it be a sometimes mask? Things like that. I don't think I'm in on the real reason for the mask. [AUSTIN: Huh.]

AUSTIN: Anything else? [Pause] Alright, I'm gonna draw a card. **You suspect this journey isn't just about diplomatic negotiations. What else do you believe is going on, and**



**why?** ...I don't think I'm very often in the ship that you are in, Orbit. But I'm there for some reason. A training exercise, to make a delivery, like, whatever the reason is that I'm on that ship instead of my own. And I think I'm on a pretty small ship of my own normally, but... maybe yours is a little bit bigger. [SYLVIA: Hm.] I... Something I have picks up the box in your room. Like, some scanner or a piece of technology, something... Or actually, you know what is actually better, duh? The box calls out to me. Um... And I slip into your room, and I open it up. And I see this thing there that is like... it is like a metallic spinal cord. Or a staff that's twisted like a snake... not twisted but like, longwise it has this, like, a curve, that snakish curve, and you could pick it up and hold it like a staff. I think it actually does coil and like form a sort of animal shape, a sort of snake shape, as I open the box. And I think I start to believe that the Apokine is... It is diplomatic negotiations, but not of the sort that we thought. It is not suing for peace. It is, um... It is trying to join the Divine Principality, that this is a gift of a Divine—this is the Divine Integrity—meant to ingratiate themselves with the Divine Principality and begin the first steps that would turn Apostolos on the Golden Branch. Um. And I am there looking at it. And that is what I believe is going on here. I think actually maybe... I don't know if the Divine tells me that or if the Divine... I think what the Divine tells me, specifically, is... One is like, "Take me". And two is...

AUSTIN (as Integrity): There are death worth dying so that you do not bring... Wear me. Take me and wear me. And find a death worth dying. Do not... do not allow me to become a weapon for them.

AUSTIN: Orbit, do you catch me in here?

SYLVIA: Um... I... I was actually about to ask if you took it or not. I think maybe I catch you leaving.

AUSTIN: Your room? [He laughs a bit.]

SYLVIA: Like, like in the hallway, [AUSTIN: Yeah.] and I'm immediately like suspicious of it, like it's not a direct like "I caught you", but it's like "why are you here?", you know? Because I just, I don't wanna [AUSTIN: Yeah-yeah-yeah-yeah.] walk in on the Integrity thing.

AUSTIN: Yeah, fair. Um... We can have this scene.

SYLVIA: Sure.

AUSTIN: I think with my big bulky frame taking up the hallway, these hallways were not built for me... My voice is kind of low and rumbly. It does not, like, my vocal cords are not... It sounds like... When I speak it sounds like my body is vibrating, not like I'm projecting sound through a mouth. Um...

AUSTIN (as Modus Maria): Are you certain your Apokine can carry the weight?

[Pause]

SYLVIA (as Orbit Shard): If I wasn't certain of that then I'm not sure what else I'd have to believe in.

AUSTIN (as Modus Maria): Of course.

SYLVIA (as Orbit Shard): And I'm not quite sure who gave you clearance to be on my ship right now. [AUSTIN (as Modus Maria): Uh...] But I think you should leave if you're asking these questions.

SYLVIA: Like, Orbit is immediately like furious about this, [AUSTIN: Yeah.] and I picture them as being very like... like, they're smaller than you, they're... [AUSTIN: Yeah, it's so good, it's such a good image, yeah. Uh-huh.], Yeah. It's like this very like scarred up Apostolosian trying to prod their like robot arm into this giant [AUSTIN: Like the chest...] chest, yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: [laughing] So good! I think I just kind of look down, Modus, she just kind of looks down at you, and is like

AUSTIN (as Modus Maria): I was invited it.

SYLVIA (as Orbit Shard): . I... I highly doubt that the Apokine would give you permission to get...

AUSTIN (as Modus Maria): Not the Apokine.

SYLVIA (as Orbit Shard): What?!

AUSTIN (as Modus Maria): Someone... something else.

SYLVIA (as Orbit Shard): Did you... Did you hear it?

AUSTIN (as Modus Maria): It called to me. I saw it. It is dangerous. And not simply because it can kill. Why would she give you a weapon? [AUSTIN: Sorry, not the Queen, the Apokine.] Why would they give you a weapon?

SYLVIA (as Orbit Shard): I'm a soldier. If my Apokine decides to give me a weapon... If I... If my Apokine decides to give me something, and tells me keep it close, I will keep it close to me, whether it's a weapon or not.

AUSTIN (as Modus Maria): Why would they not wield it? Or give it to you and tell you to do such?

SYLVIA (as Orbit Shard): [flustered, exasperated] Why... Why do you think that you can..? Who gives you the authority to come onto my ship and start questioning all of this? Start questioning our entire structure here?

AUSTIN (as Modus Maria): History. Future history. If we make the wrong moves now, everything will tumble apart. I spent decades in the dark thinking about the right moves. I could not be sure of your Apokine's intentions or aptitudes. I can only be sure that if the Divine Principality adds your strength to its, it will be unstoppable.

SYLVIA (as Orbit Shard): [gasping] That... that wouldn't happen. With all they've done to us, with this war we've been... We... Did something happen to you when you came back? Is everything..? Did everything come back alright? That... You're not making any sense.

AUSTIN (as Modus Maria): I am fine. I will leave you. And know that I did not take anything from you. Carry it well.

AUSTIN: And I step back one step from your finger, and your, like, presence in my... inside of my personal space, [He and SYLVIA laugh a bit.] and slowly try to turn around in this big hallway walk away... or this tight hallway, and walk away. Any other questions here?

SYLVIA: I have one. [AUSTIN: Sure.] Why did you decide to leave it? Or is that something you would rather...

AUSTIN: Because if I took it I would... I would scuttle the mission. [SYLVIA: Got it.] I could sense that if I wore it, and I believe if the Apokine... Modus believes that if she put it on, she would immediately scuttle this mission because it would... The risk is too high. And wonders if the reason the Apokine gave it to you is because Integrity would also drive them to make the right decision—what Modus believes is the right decision—and to go out fighting instead of to... you know, beg for pity, effectively, and join the... like, actively plead for House status, for Stel status, you know? But yeah, I didn't take it because it's like, I think we can do this, I just, we just need more time, we just need to, like... we need to figure out a different solution here that isn't me burning everything down.

SYLVIA: Hm. I'm out of questions.

AUSTIN: Okay. You wanna draw a card?

SYLVIA: Yeah, I might as well. Oh, I hit "Escape" instead of "1". [AUSTIN: No worries.] ...Oh. Oh wow. [AUSTIN: Jeez.] Uh... **You are considered ugly by almost everyone you meet. How does the Apokine make you question that perception?**

AUSTIN; Aw. Shoutouts to you, Apokine.

SYLVIA: Eh... So, I mentioned it in the last scene that Orbit has a lot of war scars from that battle mentioned like... way back when, at the beginning [AUSTIN: Yeah.] of the stream. Uh, and so that does elicit like "Ugh!", like a reaction from people when they first see them. The Apokine never had that, and has almost never actually commented on it aside from saying "thank you"... Like, not even "thank you", but like, acknowledging that Orbit has sacrificed for Apostolos. [AUSTIN: Right.] Um... And like just knowing that the most powerful person

within, like, my culture doesn't see me the way that a lot of the other people have been, is a big reason why Orbit is so loyal as well. [AUSTIN: Hm.] Yeah. So it's kinda like... It's almost like giving confidence by omission it a lot of ways. [AUSTIN: Right.] Yeah.

AUSTIN: Let me think... Um. Hmm. No, I think you kind of answered what I'm... [SYLVIA: Uh-huh.] what I had in mind here. Dre or Janine, anything here?

DRE: Hm...

AUSTIN: Oh, here's one. Does Integrity think that you're ugly?

SYLVIA: ...No. Uh... And that's... [AUSTIN: Yeah.] That is new and kind of scary. [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] [Pause.] Alright.

AUSTIN: Um... Dre.

DRE: Let's see... [AUSTIN: Lot of beauty questions here.] Yeah. **What makes the Apokine beautiful in my eyes?** Um... [Pause] The Apokine has always been the person... the only person who's ever been consistently and always kind to me. Um, they make time to spend time with me one-on-one, they ask me about my thoughts and my opinions, [AUSTIN: Hm.] they listen to me in a way that it doesn't feel like anybody else ever has.

AUSTIN: Is... Is this what compels your loyalty to them?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So if... if you saw a side of them that is not this sort of personal interest, or this, like, that... If you could see the machinations at play, would this change your perspective?

DRE: Um... It would probably take a lot, but it could maybe start to sow some seeds depending on what it is. [AUSTIN: Right.] Like, if I saw them, you know, treat someone else cruelly, I don't know if that would make me bat an eye. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] Especially if it was someone that like... 'Cause I've seen them treat people cruelly, especially people who have attempted to, you know, be cruel to me. But... I don't know. I think it would probably take a lot but it would not be impossible.

AUSTIN: Is it a unique sort of beauty that you've seen or is it specifically the Apokine's status that makes this sort of behavior beautiful? Sorry, is this a generic..? When you see the same qualities in other people, are you just like "yeah, of course other people are like this, they're regular people, but this is the Apokine and that's what makes it beautiful"?

DRE: No, I think I would notice and appreciate it in other people as well. Uh... But I think, again, it is that status that makes it exceptional for the Apokine. [AUSTIN: Hmm.] Like, you know, the fact that they have so much that they have to attend to, and so much they have to juggle and keep track of... Um. So five minutes from the Apokine is like five hours from someone else.

AUSTIN: Right. Right. Any other thoughts here? [Pause] Or questions, rather? I guess here's one. Do other people see this beauty in them?

DRE: Um... I don't know, probably Antigone? I don't know, Janine, what do you think?

JANINE: Um... [Pause] [AUSTIN laughs quietly.] I don't know! I don't feel like this should be a hard question but it kind of is.

DRE: And maybe this goes back to like the question I asked you... I can't remember if it was last round or two rounds ago, the one about, the one that was about what makes you think that I'm not the Apokine's favorite. You know whether it's, you know, do you see the Apokine and this mask as a burden and as a punishment all the time? Or are there times when you see the Apokine speaking to me or extending a kindness to me and that makes you wonder like "is there some sort of genuine relationship or connection there?"

JANINE: I think to some extent that Antigone would rather... If they can avoid thinking about these things then that's the ideal situation [DRE chuckles quietly.] for them... is not interrogating it too much, and just kind of taking situations... not at face value, but in sort of a presumed light based on previous experience and previous... previous understanding of just how everything is supposed to be.

AUSTIN: Cool. ...I keep wanting to say "No further questions." [All laugh.] Um...

DRE: Sylvia, it's your witness.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

SYLVIA: I have no further questions, [DRE giggling gleefully.] you guys kind of covered it all.

AUSTIN: Alright. Janine, your card. We're getting there too. I peak ahead... Not at cards but at like about how many are left, and we're getting there. Only a few more.

JANINE: **The Apokine sometimes shows interest in your personal life. How do you respond to that? And why?** [AUSTIN: Hmm.] Uh... I don't think I respond well. I think there's a degree of like... You know how some people hit that point in their life where they can call their parents by their first names, and some people don't ever hit that point? ...Saying "hit that point" is not the correct way to phrase this. [AUSTIN: [laughing a bit] Yeah, I was gonna say like damn, really?] Some people have that relationship and some people don't. And there are two ends of that where like it can be weird on the kid's end and it could be weird on the parent's end... to have that relationship, which is why some people just don't. [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] I do not have that relationship, I don't think I'd want it. But some people do and that's just the way it is. I think this is kind of that, where like Antigone has difficulty with the fact that the Apokine is more than entitled to have that kind of... relationship on, like, not even equal footing, right? Like, [JANINE laughs a bit.] they're the fucking... they're the ruler. And Antigone is not a parent, but... You know, you spend a

certain amount of your life being kind of... at least in a very very small way in charge of someone, and then when they start kind of... when they become autonomous, and more than autonomous, when they have a say over you, it's weird. And because Antigone is not really a parent, I don't think that they've been able to adjust to that in a way that a parent might by kind of reconciling that "well, I'm still a parent, and I'm still this, and I'm still that"... She doesn't really get... Sorry, they don't really get that. So, you know, whenever the Apokine tries to get involved with like, you know, "How's your family?" and "Hey, I saw you talking to so-and-so, and you seem mad, what's going on?" Um... I think there's a real conflict between, like, duty and fealty, [AUSTIN: Hm.] and also what that relationship once was. Especially because, you know, being in that sort of a nursing role, there's no like gradual fade out there really. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] One day you're needed and one day you're kind of not. In terms of it being a professional thing, so... No transition there means that's been an adjustment that never really settled into normalcy for them.

AUSTIN: All my questions end up being like "Is that something you've wanted to change?", you know, but I feel like you've answered, you've asked and answered that.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Does anyone else have something here?

DRE: No further questions.

AUSTIN: Thank you. Thank you, thank you. Um... Alright, I'm gonna draw. Ooh, good, great. **Who is this distant power you're traveling to, and why do they make you uneasy?** Um. Well, let's look at the map again. Let's see. Someone earlier was like "Oh, are they going to Kesh?" They are not going to Kesh, it's way closer, like, it's the border. Remember, Kesh is *in* the Golden Branch technically. Um, so I imagine Kesh is like... I'm gonna draw another circle on here. I think Kesh is probably like—boop!—right where that circle is, or... I didn't mean to put it in the Golden Branch... But maybe it is, like, maybe right now it is literally in the Golden Branch, maybe as part of this war it has fallen into the Golden Branch. But it's at that little like... I can't zoom in close enough to grab it... oh, there it is, I grabbed it. Oh! I can't move it now, fuck. Uh... it's there, where I put that circle. Do you see that circle? Right where those three things hit? Um, yeah. Um. So I think that's Kesh. But we're not going to Kesh. I think we're going to this special nebula... called the Twilight Mirage... No, we're not going to the Twilight Mirage. [AUSTIN laughs a bit.] We're going towards... I think we kind of like skirt through the dark 'cause that's what Apostolosian ships can do, and head towards the special nebula here where there is some sort of like... Actually, you know what? It is explicitly in this nebula because the nebula reminds the Divine Principality of the Twilight Mirage. Like, it is explicitly, um, supposed to evoke the Twilight Mirage, but it has none of the brightness. Remember, the Twilight Mirage was its own light source, and this is not the case for this nebula. Real nebulas, it turns out, you can't see when you're in one, you can only see it from the outside. And so... Two things here... they don't happen, but two things are true. One, you should not be able to see a nebula from inside of it, and that is true for this place too. Two, you *can* see a nebula there because the Divine Principality has projected one, has like released some sort of visible gas around this palace that is, like, built into... I

think it's like a series of palaces that have been built into an asteroid belt. I think we meet a lot of like asteroids belts that have been turned into like mining centers and into, you know, kind of like down-dirty, grimy outsider zones in sci-fi. This one is straight up like, they have used these asteroids to turn them into floating palatial estates for some of the highest ranked people in the Divine Principality. And I think we are explicitly going to see the current Prince... or I don't know what the title is yet of the leader of the Divine Principality. I know that there was a Regent, because I know that Aram Nideo was the Regent for a while, had the title the Resolute Regent. But I think in this moment there is a Prince, or a Princess, or a... I would love to figure out a really cool gender-neutral or even a genderqueer title that we can use depending on who is reigning at any given time here. But the current leader of the Divine Principality, who I think is explicitly the person who has like made gains in this war. This war has been going for a long time, and in fact I wanna lean into this thing from before, that like, this is a war about Kesh itself and about... or at least that's kind of what the claim is, that like "Hey, we're fighting so we can get Kesh back." And yet that has not stopped them from also fighting to the south into where the Orion Conglomerate once was, or trying to attack Apostolos which is not in control of Kesh at all, but the Golden Branch is. And so it's clearly like what they've used as justification for this war, um, but everyone knows that if they got Kesh back they would just keep pushing and kill even more people. And also the people on Kesh don't want to be part of the Divine Principality which I think is an important distinction. I think the people on Kesh are like "No, we're good. Like, we went through COUNTER/Weight also eons ago, and have developed a revolutionary identity." And so there is like a divide there, and to some degree everyone who is fighting against the Divine Principality is doing it along with the people on Kesh. That was not like a military acquisition on behalf of the Golden Branch or Apostolos. But I think the people we're meeting are... it's the Prince, and maybe also the head of... so I think it's like the head of Stel Kesh and Stel Nideo, the person who is the equivalent of the... your character, Janine, whose name I'm forgetting... Antigone, who was like instead of just being the kind of like wet nurse was the, uh, primary educator, and who stayed in that role as advisor, who like... who maybe is manipulating the Prince also, hard to say. It is making me uneasy because the fact that they would put both of them together means they are highly confident with their control over that space, you know. That is why I'm afraid. And also 'cause of the thing I said before, that I think that the Apokine is just gonna sell us all out.

JANINE: Um... This isn't a question so much... I believe "prince" used to originally be a gender-neutral term. [AUSTIN: Oh, really?] Before "princess" became a thing. I don't remember where I heard this, I *do* remember that I heard it somewhere. [She laughs a bit.] Uh, in my head I hear it in Lucy Worsley's voice.

AUSTIN: [overlapping] Dre? Dre? Dre?

DRE: Yes?

AUSTIN: Do you have Pokémon playing in the background?

DRE: Oh. [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] I don't think so... I was scrolling Twitter, did something autoplay?

AUSTIN: Something autoplays. [JANINE laughs very quietly.] Pikachu showed up.

DRE: Ugh.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Chat blew up, it's very funny. [JANINE: Prince Pikachu.] Prince Pikachu. ...I didn't know that about "prince".

JANINE: I'm 99% sure that's not apocryphal, I think it's true that "prince" used to just mean like, [AUSTIN: Heir, right, yeah.] royal kid of either or any...

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah. I believe that, I'll look into that. Uh, you didn't have a question though, that was not... that was not leading into a question?

JANINE: No-no, I just wanted to put that on the table. [AUSTIN: I appreciate it.] 'cause we were talking about [AUSTIN: Princes. Yeah.] princes and princesses and all that.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Dre, just so you know, I've done that before... [DRE laughs.] I have to think, very... One of the things I realized today was like I'm not streaming, that means that if I click on a video by mistake it won't get me in trouble. [DRE: Yep.] Um.

DRE: Ah, it's 00:30 and I didn't sleep studying last night, so... [DRE laughs.]

AUSTIN: I feel you. We are almost here for real, just about there, so. Uh, so. Any other questions here about traveling to this knock-off Twilight Mirage?

DRE: Uh... God, how long have we been traveling at this point?

AUSTIN: I think... That's a good question. I think it's probably been years. This is a long journey. We're going pretty fucking far and even at like... even with Apostolosian ships that go super fast in the dark, you know... It's not great. [Pause] Um, okay, I'll bring us back over to the actual sheet. Um... Sylvia.

SYLVIA: Alright. [AUSTIN: Mm. Mhm.] Ooh. **What do you do for the Queen... or for the Apokine that no one else can do?** Um... If I can like... be a little like, loose with the actual verbiage here, I think it's less that... it's not things that no one else *can* do, it's things that other people are afraid to do. Um... It's pretty much like... I mentioned it earlier that like, Orbit tends to go on sort of these like... under the radar missions for her, uh, for them, things that, uh, things that like aren't well-known even to other military officials. And I think this is part of that, I think it's like... even... Even Modus, who's like... can come back from the dead, does not charge into as many almost-certain-death situations on orders from the Apokine like Orbit does.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Um, is that something that predates this journey?

SYLVIA: It... Yes, but it doesn't predate the promotion that led to Orbit being here.



AUSTIN: Gotcha. Um... Any other questions? [Pause] [DRE: Nuh-uh.] People in the chat joking about the fact that we absolutely have the cards set for the half-hour game [DRE: Uh-huh.] and still managed to go for hours and hours. [SYLVIA: Incredible.] And we've only done one scene! We've only done one real like, drill in, do dialogue scene, and as we play I think we probably all feel like we're not asking enough questions [AUSTIN laughs.] [ANSI: Yeah...] or at least I do. [DRE: Oh yeah.] So, that's... We're us, we just gotta let it not feel bad. [AUSTIN laughs a bit.] Um... Here is a question. Is... I can just ask you this, because it's a GMless game. /s it true that the reason that they gave you Integrity was because you could carry it and they could not? Without falling to its, like, push to "do the right thing"?

SYLVIA: ...Yes, I think. I think that... Yes, that is their theory. [AUSTIN: Right.] That is a working belief that the Apokine has, [AUSTIN: Okay.] that Orbit is so loyal to them that this is not a risk.

AUSTIN: Right. Right. [Pause] Cool. I have no other questions.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

DRE: Yeah, me neither.

AUSTIN: Dre.

DRE: Guess what, y'all? [AUSTIN: I'm ready. There it is.] **The Queen is under attack.** Or the Apokine is under attack. [AUSTIN: I love that the flowers, the flowers on this card match your mask.] Oh shit! [JANINE: Yeah...] [SYLVIA: Oh fuck...] Yeah, you're not lying.

AUSTIN: So yeah, **the Apokine is under attack. Do you defend them?** Um. So here's what I think. We can answer this question, each of us. The way this game is supposed to work is, okay, we answer it and then, once we answer the question the game is over. I'm happy to do that. I'm also happy to put a pin in this and wrap back around when we zoom in on this question. Um, the same way that we did with *Dusk to Midnight*, Riley Rethal's game—shoutouts to Riley in the chat—and play out what happens here, in this like false Mirage. "False mirage" is, of course, redundant... [AUSTIN laughs.] But in our special world it is not. 'Cause I would love to play these characters more directly and see how this unfolds, and also to get us playing another game, either a different mech game or *Beam Saber* again, 'cause none of y'all played in that last *Beam Saber* game, right? [DRE: Uh...] No. [SYLVIA: No, no.] So. The stated original goal here was to get us all used to playing various games and like figure out what we wanted to play for Season 6, and that just... We've mostly been playing cool GMless games or one shots or whatever. But... One shots not in mech systems. But I would love to do that. But maybe the thing to do here is still do a little narration. So Dre, do you want to like set us up? On what this might mean, [DRE: Hmm...] and begin to... begin the answer here? Or do we not want to... do we actually... Is the thing here that we understand the attack really broadly and like... Is it maybe more interesting if we are received peacefully? And we see what the fuck happens from here?

DRE: Yeah, I would definitely rather have the idea of what it means to be under attack [AUSTIN: Yeah.] to be more of a group kind of conversation than just me [AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.] deciding it.

AUSTIN: Um. Here's what I'll say. I really wanna see what the downtime stuff feels like in *Beam Saber*, so I kind of like the idea that they put us up in some... Also I'm reading a lot of the *Imperial Radch* trilogy by Ann Leckie, um, which does a really good job of having tense pre-fight shit. And so I really like the idea of... Our fleet arrives in this false Mirage, in this false nebula, and is led by ships of the Divine Principality to an empty palace on the underside of an asteroid. It's the only one... Like, there's a whole ring of these asteroids, and each of them has palaces on it, and ours is the only one that is upside down... But it's not actually that, 'cause it's space, and space doesn't actually have an upside down, but when you have thirteen palaces, and twelve of them are all basically on the same side of an asteroid, and ours is on the other, and they send us to that one... I don't know, it sends a message. [SYLVIA laughs quietly.] And we land, and it's like... It's totally empty. I think one of the things I definitely want to bring back is something Janine came up back in our *Dialect* game, which was the appropriation of all of this like fashion that was built around like, people wearing statues. Janine, you made a really good point earlier this season, of pointing towards kind of like Neoclassicism, this like move towards bringing in the aesthetics of a past idealized, like, era, but misunderstood. And so I think... or maybe I'll let you speak to this, but your pitch for me earlier was like, the Divine Principality is like... the people who don't understand the Twilight Mirage's high fashion, but want to evoke it.

JANINE: Um, yeah. I mean, the specific comparison is the idea that like Ancient Greek and Roman statues were painted, [AUSTIN: Right.] but when Neoclassicism came around and everyone was literally putting them on pedestals, [AUSTIN laughs.] and venerating them and trying to reproduce them, everything was this like pristine untouched white because all the paint had been worn off over the years. So when people were bringing back the marbles, it was all just like clean pristine white, so that was what they reproduced.

AUSTIN: So good. Um... So yeah, I think it's a lot of that stuff. I think it's a lot of like, the color of the Twilight Mirage without the motion, if that makes sense, right? Maybe another example here is like, I go into this a lot but... we've talked about the differentiation between English and French gardens a lot... I did a podcast this year [JANINE laughs quietly.] on *Pride and Prejudice*, and that came up a number of times... And I think the thing about Twilight Mirage is it was neither of those things. It was interested in the kind of like open-endedness of identity, and self-determination, and queerness, and the ways in which those things guided your art and made a space that was like at once expressive and in resonance with the rest of what was around it, yet also never felt like it had too strongly the hand of the author on it. And I think the Divine Principality is the kind of English garden style which is like "We are going to try as hard as we can to create the feeling of the natural. We're gonna try as hard as we can to produce a sense that this has always been beautiful in this way." And I think that that's like... the asteroids have been arranged this way. This is not a natural asteroid belt. It is in perfect imperfect harmony in a way that evokes the Resonant Orbit, but is not the Resonant Orbit. Um, and so like, yeah-yeah-yeah, that's the other thing, Trah559, as you were saying there, Janine, copying the ruins instead of replicating the

culture, so it's like a lot of the... a lot of the material might be the same, but not necessarily for the same uses, right? Like, without the actual Twilight Mirage around it, this stuff doesn't work that way, so you do have like holographic projections, but no one here understands that in the Twilight Mirage eons ago, or however many hundreds of thousands of years ago, I guess thousands at this point, like... Seeing something that was projected did not make it less real. But here, it's like "Ah, yes, we've installed two new holoprojectors to watch the entertainments on. It's beautiful, isn't it?" It's like, no, you don't... *People* used those before, [AUSTIN laughs.] you idiots. Um, so. So I think that's...

JANINE: It's also kind of the idea of a folly, right? [AUSTIN: Right, yes-yes-yes.] Like, having gone back to the art in this, it's really good... *Gentleman Jack* is very good, [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] and there's a moment in *Gentleman Jack* where... where Anne Lister commissions a folly to be built on her land. And a folly is just a thatched roof cottage. [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] But it's still a folly, which is very grand, and like... She doesn't want to be perceived as living in this old sort of farm estate, so it has to be a folly, can't be "Build me a little cottage." [AUSTIN: Right.] But it is just a little cottage.

AUSTIN: I mean, okay, well, to that point, the thing, the folly... A folly, for people who like... When I first heard the word "folly" I was like, do you mean like something a fool does? Is that what that is? Like foolishness, you know? But it's like an ornamental building that doesn't actually... It's just an ornament, it's like "I'm so rich that I'm gonna build a pyramid in my yard." [JANINE: Yeah, or like fake Roman ruins, stuff like that.] Right! [JANINE: Or things like that.] [DRE laughs.] I think that they rebuilt, for people who remember this, there was a sequence in the middle of Twilight Mirage, where the leadership meets. It is like a building that gets described in one of the... kind of midseason finale games... That's the one that Fourteen Fifteen and Tender Sky are in... Um, it is that building. They've recreated that building but the proportions are wrong. It's like way bigger than it was. Like, it's the same shapes, but instead of kind of being just a little two-storey building that people went into to debate some things, it's been turned into this massive structure that has all these extra rooms in it. It's just like they had a miniature of it and they didn't understand what the scale was, you know, they thought it was a 1:... you know, a 1:44, but it was a 1:100 or whatever. I maybe got that backwards but you get what I'm saying. ...So yeah, I think that's the vibe, and we all just kind of get... accepted in, and we go in, and unload our stuff, and are assigned quarters. And negotiations will pick up next month, I guess. Any other final shots here, any other final things? [Pause] Who.... Do you move Integrity into your... into your, like, quarters, Orbit?

SYLVIA: ...Yeah, I think I do. I think that conversation with Modus really rattled my, sort of... like, worldview, honestly. Just that doubt kinda... [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] You said it's been years, right? [AUSTIN: Yeah.] So that doubt just kinda kept eating away [AUSTIN: Yeah.] and I like... And because of that, yeah, I start to, like, actually talk to Integrity.

AUSTIN: Interesting. Other questions. ...Um, Eudora, what is it like to see people who are like wearing faces that look like yours, both on their own face, but also just like, on their shoulders? Because that's the fashion is that people have masks and statues built into their clothing and their ships, like... Suddenly you are surrounded by other faces like yours.

DRE: I think I get a lot of... Uh... It's like the equivalent of... Have you ever been in like a store, like a department store or something, and somebody asks you where something is because they assume you work there? [AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh.] I think I get that a lot.

AUSTIN: [laughing] That's really good. Uh. Antigone. Do you stay in the main household with the Apokine still? Or are you like... How does the Apokine assign you here... in this court?

JANINE: Um... I would say that Antigone... that I probably stick close. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] Um... If only because... I mean, I fought and I've been involved in the war, but also I probably haven't been that far out from [AUSTIN: Yeah.] what I would consider home generally, like... I don't think Antigone has... Antigone has experiences and has, you know, done a lot of shit, but to some degree I very much doubt that they would ever be dispatched to like the fringes of the conflict. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] So, you know, being this far away for as long as it's been... It would probably feel fairly important to stick close and just... For the sake of it, almost.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah. I think that that makes sense. Does anyone have a good final shot of the Apokine themselves? Settling into, you know, this, this... foreign court... [JANINE: [overlapping] Glowing red room with that beautiful chair?] With a beautiful chair, uh-huh. Uh-huh. [JANINE laughs.] Yeah, is it this? Is this where they, like, sit? And call court to order?

JANINE: I mean, you know, Twilight Mirage has a lot of... [AUSTIN laughs.] A lot of color, a lot of bright color. [AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.] [SYLVIA laughs.] Maybe we've, over the years, lost track of what colors are the best [AUSTIN laughs.] for that effect... [AUSTIN: Great.] Maybe we've lost touch with the profound menace offered by a brilliant crimson red... [AUSTIN laughs.]

AUSTIN: I love a chair that lights up a room, you know? [JANINE: Yeah.] [AUSTIN laughs.] I love a chair that is a lightsaber, that's what I love. [SYLVIA laughs.] Alright. We should time.is. Thank you, everyone, for joining us! Again, we will pick up this story in a future episode, um, and hopefully not that far off, probably June, because this is the Live for this month. [DRE laughs.] Or maybe if it lines up late May, then we do it then, it will be the June Live, but... it'll be the way it works, so. Um. Let's do a time.is.

SYLVIA: Alright.

DRE: Wanna do 15?

AUSTIN: Yeah, let's do 15.

JANINE: Uh-huh.

[THEY CLAP.]