

Twilight Mirage 46: Every Time We Leave, It Changes

Transcribed by Meko

AUSTIN (as Narrator): When Cascara found her [[The Notion](#) begins playing], and told her about Quire's offer, the world-being Acre Seven was drifting along the edge of the Twilight Mirage with lackadaisical curiosity, awaiting the bright arrival of something great. A link in a chain, she thought, or a sort of bridge, perhaps. But whatever was en route was less interesting than her old commander's words. Cascara had always had a knack for finding Acre Seven. Whenever she disappeared on assignment, Cascara had found her. Whenever she was caught in a loop of causal siphoning, Cascara had freed her. And in fact, it was Cascara who had located her among the researchers of the *Ever Forward* soon after the death of her adored Potent. She had been like a ghost in plain day then, an apparition haunting the scientists, not keen to the periphery but insisting on being seen, a silent demand that they too grieve for what they'd lost. It was Cascara who had convinced Acre Seven that even now, even as the sliver of the being she once was, she had purpose and value, and that to serve those that the Potent did would be to honor her old lover.

What Acre Seven never told Cascara, of course, was that her recruitment effort was no effort at all, but inevitability. Time, after all, was Acre Seven's purview, and no mortal being like Cascara could ever convince her to pursue something that was not already aligned to occur. Still, though determined by time or not, Cascara was always the one to find her. Which is why Acre Seven should not have been surprised that she'd found her again. But this time was different. She had not seen her commander's arrival, and there was something strange, yet newly familiar, in the visage of her old friend. Most surprising of all though was that, for once, Acre Seven had not expected Cascara's words. Quire was not only wounded, she said, it was dying. And it had a proposal for its kin.

[Music ends]

AUSTIN: Welcome to Friends at the Table, an actual-play podcast focused on critical world-building, smart characterization, and fun interaction between good friends. Today, we are continuing our Scum and Villainy game, a game by Stras Acimovic and John LeBoeuf-Little, which is a hack of *Blades in the Dark* by John Harper. My goals today as GM are to convey the fictional world honestly, to bring the Twilight Mirage to life, to play to find out what happens, and to make everything cool, weird, and touchable. Joining me today, Andrew Lee Swan.

DRE: Hey, you can find me on Twitter @swandre3000.

AUSTIN: Janine Hawkins.

JANINE: You can find me on Twitter @bleatingheart.

AUSTIN: Keith Carberry.

KEITH: My name's Keith J. Carberry, you can find me on Twitter @KeithJCarberry and youtube.com/runbutton. And, oh, do we have an idea of when this is airing?

AUSTIN: A while.

KEITH: A while.

AUSTIN: Probably next month.

KEITH: Probably next month?

AUSTIN: Probably somewhere in April.

KEITH: If it's—if we're—yeah. So if this is before April—shit [Dre laughs]. If it's before—if it's April twenty-eighth or before—

AUSTIN: It will be that, yes.

KEITH: Twenty-four hour Run Button marathon.

AUSTIN: Sorry, when is that, April twenty-fourth?

KEITH: Twenty-eighth.

AUSTIN: Twenty-eighth.

KEITH: Saturday, April twenty-eighth, seven p.m., to Sunday, April twenty-ninth, seven p.m., Run Button marathon, be there.

AUSTIN: Alright, twenty-four hours, April twenty-eighth.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Four twenty-eight—Wait. Four—

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Four twenty-eight—that's nice.

KEITH: Twenty-four hours.

AUSTIN: Twenty-four hours. Got it. Got it. And it goes to the twenty-ninth. Twenty-eighth to the twenty-ninth, not twenty-seventh to twenty-eighth.

KEITH: Right. Twenty-eighth to twenty-ninth. Seven to seven, yes.

AUSTIN: I'm just trying to make this clear as possible for everyone listening to this. Gotcha.

KEITH: Here's how you know. If you say, "Is it on the twenty-fourth?" just say no, 'cause that's not a Saturday.

AUSTIN: They—oh, so it's a Saturday. It's the last Saturday of April.

KEITH: Saturday through Sunday. Last Saturday of April. That's a great way to spend it.

AUSTIN: That's the way to do it. Spend—that's how you should spend the beginning of spring, you know?

KEITH: Yeah. That's that Vice training. That's like, you know, oh, last Saturday of April.

AUSTIN: Exactly [chuckles]. Finally, it's all paying off. Also joining us, Sylvia¹ Clare.

SYLVIA: Hi, I'm Sylvia. I guess you can find me on Twitter @captaintrash, but I don't know if I'm gonna be using that much more. But—

AUSTIN: Are you—

SYLVIA: I'm taking a break. I'm kinda—

AUSTIN: Oh, oh, Twitter. Taking a break from Twitter.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I thought you were taking a break from the—I thought you were like, "I'mma get a new Twitter handle. I'm gonna go to—"

SYLVIA: No, no.

AUSTIN: "I've been promoted, I'm Commander Trash now."

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

SYLVIA: Admiral Trash.

[Dre laughs]

SYLVIA: I'm just—the Internet has burned me out a little

AUSTIN: It's bad.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I've thought about deleting Twitter literally every night of my life.

JANINE: Yeah...

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Since forever. Since forever.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's bad out there.

SYLVIA: I pretty much just retweet the different shows I'm on, which you can find at videogamechoochoo.com, or my other show Emojidrome on Twitter, which is me and my friend Ryan reviewing different variations of emoji. It's very stupid.

AUSTIN: Oh, that's very good.

DRE: Gotta listen to that shit.

AUSTIN: That sounds great as hell. I gotta listen to that for real. Um, alright, we should dig in to what's—It's a new arc, obviously, this is the first time that this configuration has happened. Obviously, Gig, Echo, and Even have hung together before.

KEITH: Uh-huh.

AUSTIN: But this is the first time that Signet is part of this unique crew.

KEITH: Yeah. Well, we've been on the ship.

AUSTIN: Totally. But you've never gone off together on a mission, I'm very excited about this. In front of you right now you see a map of the Twilight Mirage that we—that I cooked up for our game of Lady Blackbird, which for people and are like, what are they talking about—

KEITH: That was great.

AUSTIN: We do a show called Live at the Table, where once a month we do a live show and it's a different game every time, and—or, it has been a different game every—that's not true. We've done one recurring game so far. Fall of Magic has been recurring and we're gonna start doing Primetime Adventures as another recurring game, starting this month actually, and—this month being well after you've heard this [laughs] already [Sylvia laughs]. You can find out more about that—they're for our patrons—you can find out more about that at patreon.com/friends_table or friendsatthetable.cash, which will give you the rundown on how to watch all that. You kind of get access to all these things at five bucks, you can—for fifteen you can watch us play live—or I guess live is for anybody at five dollars. So five dollars a month lets you watch that, and Lady Blackbird is a really cool game, also by John Harper like Blades in the Dark was, and we hacked it to take place—by default it's kind of in a steampunk-y setting, we hacked it to be in the Twilight Mirage during the “This Year of Ours” time jump and played out the very beginning of the story of how the prince—the king—of Crown, the secret heir to the old king of the Crown of Glass, was making his way via space pirate from captivity on Brighton into—back home, and it was like a h—it was just like—it was wild [laughs]. Keith?

KEITH: It was a blast. I was so tired, like I was col—like falling asleep [Dre laughs] sitting up going into it—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: —And I was really, really worried that I wasn't gonna be able to do anything, but instead I had a fucking blast, that was so much fun.

DRE: You were in the zone.

AUSTIN: Keith was in the zone, Dre was in the zone, Dre was covered in buckles and belts [Keith laughs], which was good.

DRE: And pockets. Don't forget the pockets.

AUSTIN: And pockets. And Ali—

SYLVIA: I thought you guys said it wasn't steampunk.

DRE: Oh no, it was steampunk.

AUSTIN: We brought it. Don't worry—'cause also, it had to do with Advent, and Advent is already super steampunk, right—

SYLVIA: Mm.

AUSTIN: So it was really bad and good at the same time. Ali was playing a space pirate captain who...just fantastic. She was just fantastic.

KEITH: Yeah, that was great.

AUSTIN: There was space magic, there was space flirting. There was—It was a lot.

SYLVIA: So, Friends at the Table.

AUSTIN: Yeah, very—

KEITH: Wait, was there flirting in that?

AUSTIN: Oh, buddy [Keith and Austin laugh]. So, that's the map you're seeing now, which I'm gonna use as a—I've kind of updated it to be a little bit different from where it was in that game, but it's just kind of a very loose map so you understand where you've been and kind of what the order of the planets is as they orbit around Volition, it's very rough obviously. And there are also some big ships or places on this map; you can see all the planets, right, Moonlock is the one closest to Volition, then Altar, then Crown, then Skein, where we're headed today, then Gift-3, which is where you were before. Also on the map is Herringbone Flotilla, which is where one of the major Rogue Wave sects is, the Brink, which is where Satellite and Primary have their kind of like, you know, I guess truck-stop-slash-smuggler's-den [laughs] out in the Shore, which is this big ring of asteroids and stuff. And then some other things are out there too: Rapid Evening, Advent has a base out there, so, you know, just a good way to position yourself vaguely in terms of where shit is. And today, like I said, we're gonna go to Skein, which is the third planet from Volition, so kind of in the middle of the system, all said. It's a beautiful, green world, and I'm gonna take you right now to the—this cool sheet, that is like the first sheet, like the Gift-3 sheet, but for Skein, which gives you all the info you need. Don't worry about reading it all right now, but I wanted to make sure y'all had access to this thing. And I'll read a little bit of it right now, just to set things up in terms of what Skein is:

[reading] "The citizens of the New Earth Hegemony learned about Skein the same way they learned about everything—through advertisements. It was a paradise just one long sleep detachment away: clean air, green jungles, blue skies, clear water beaches, and lots of jobs. Now, it is filled with the NEH's colonists seeking a better life than whatever is at the center of the universe." This is where there are millions and millions of New Earth Hegemony civilians who've moved here. This is where the New Earth Hegemony's military is based, this is where the Earthsphere Economic Concern has floating, like, city-state arcologies that float around. They're called the Allocologies after allochory, which is a way in which—Allochory is a way in which plants disperse seeds, whether that's through wind, or through rivers, or through other sorts of means, allochory is whenever seed dispersal happens along with something else.

And that's the kind of vibe here: there's lots of mountains and jungles, and pastel colors and bright colors; everything is kind of—it's sort of positioned as an ecological utopia, everything is—there is both a lot of expansion and lots of like, quote-unquote “guilt-free expansion.” And so here's one example, and we'll sort of zoom in right now: you're currently on the back of like, a giant—from the distance, it would look almost like a giant insect with super-long legs that are big mechanical legs that lift up and then punch back down into the jungle. And you're traveling hundreds of miles this way, but they're punching into small, little, like, metallic holders, or tubes, that come out of the ground, and they're just lifting one leg up, putting it down into one of these tubes that has very minimal interaction with the ecology around it, and then lifting up another one and going into it. It's almost like a big, six-legged silt-strider from Morrowind or something, but bigger.

KEITH: It's—oh, those are so cool.

AUSTIN: Yeah, but like, way bigger. Like, the size of like—

KEITH: Way bigger?! Those are already—

AUSTIN: They're already pretty big, but—

KEITH: —the size of a house

AUSTIN: Right, no, these are like the size of an apartment building, do you know what I mean?

KEITH: Wow, that's nuts.

AUSTIN: Yeah. And at the top—

KEITH: So it's kind of like it's a track but instead of—

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: —wheels on rails, it is legs in holes.

AUSTIN: Legs in holes, exactly like that. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because that way you don't have to like—no one knocked down any trees. And like it's definitely a—okay, please though, this thing is still walking through the fucking woods [laughs], and making tons of noise, and is still this big, metal thing that wasn't there before, so let's not pretend that there's no change here, but, you know, the numbers don't lie and they say it's better than having deforested a lot of this region and knocked down more trees and blah, blah, blah. So it's a lot of quote-unquote “ethical capitalism,” which is a lot of the NEH's whole vibe.

You're here because Cascara and the Seneschal's Brace—Declan's Corrective and the Cadent, the Cadent-Under-Mirage—have received word that an old ally of yours popped up. Deep inside of one of the jungles—actually not even deep inside one of the jungles—it's like from space, you can see that there is a huge crack in the side of Skein, the planet Skein. It is a wound, it is called the Wound, and it has formed a mountainous region along the edges of it. It's almost like, imagine a scar that has been cut into the earth, and then like, where around the scar is is now mountains and hills and everything else. And deep inside of that there is a place called the Vale, V-A-L-E, like a valley, and it is a valley, and deep there, there is a strange glowing green fog. And that place is under control of—or is not even under control of, but there is research center there, there are a number of research centers there, run by a group called Ternion Research, which is a combination of the Ever Forward, formerly of the Divine Fr—er, the Divine Fleet, the Skein themselves, who are those cool animal-people, who are also scientists and researchers and genetic experimenters, and the Garden, which was one of the many schools of the Crown, and that was the school that was focused on—you know, what we saw was focused on gardening [chuckles], right, we saw in the very first mission people's dissertation projects being destroyed and it was all like fruits and vegetables and stuff. But they also do some other stuff, the Garden was also a group that did, like, genetic engineering and mining and irrigation, and also acting was actually their purview in terms of the arts, they thought of it all in terms of the arts. And Ternion is an Earth Economic Sphere [sic] organized and operated combination of those three non-Earth groups.

And they—one of those groups there, one of the bases out near the Vale—sent word that Acre Seven showed up, or that someone showed up and it turned out to be, in video at least, someone who looked and moved the way Acre Seven does, moving back and forward in time rapidly. And so you are on your way at this point to meet up with some researchers there. I'll also say, I think you're allowed to land here because you are actually being—you send in for—you're being brought in as guests of two people that Echo knows actually, which are Ternion scientists Plane Page and Facet Forester, who are those plant-people that you met.

SYLVIA: Oh yeah!

AUSTIN: They are the ones that sent this word on, and they got it in front of you. And so you're on—you have guest passes, you all have guest visas, temporary guest visas that they helped set up for you. And from the top of these insect transports you can see behind you Terncage, which is this big, like gigantic, metropolis, and ahead of you you can see the forest just continue and continue, like for miles—hundred and hundreds of miles. The night is like—or the sky is like—this kind of dark blue, but still like—not dark black—not all the way to black, but you know how the night sky can get sometimes where it's *just*, you can see enough blue in the sky that you can still identify that color? It's like that. So yeah, obviously we can always flashback to anything else we've done before, anything before, but I just wanted to know if there were any questions about Skein or what the vibe was here or anything like that.

KEITH: Yeah, so, I mean at this point, the Notion has done a few things?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: And not all the things have been, like, strictly the legal-est sort of things—[Dre laughs]

AUSTIN: Correct.

KEITH: And I was just wondering, like, sort of, I mean, whether or not you want to our rep with different factions in this, but what is sort of the idea of us on the ground? Do people know who we are?

AUSTIN: So your—That's a good question. The reputation—your reputation as a group is still weird, right?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And you—you know, [chuckles] the funny thing is, when you look at—if you hop over and actually look at your faction stuff, which, again, if you open up the notepad thing there's a link that says "faction list link"—

KEITH: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: You can see that you don't have *any* rep with the people here. You're—the people on Skein have not really encountered you directly. You have a minus one with the Rapid Evening, a plus one with Seneschal's Brace, and a zero with Advent—a zero with everybody, but Advent it's worth saying a zero because it changed. The Herringbone Flotilla—which is part of the Rogue Wave—is a negative one, the Mandati is a plus one, the Concrete Town Particulars is a plus one, the Brink is a plus one, Organized CommTech Workers of Quire is a plus one, Erannia Motor & Hull is a plus one, and that is it. So, like, the groups that are on Skein, the major factions on Skein—Ternion Research, Red King Strategic, the Wound, and Earthsphere Economic Concern—you're all, you're kind of even-stevens with them.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: So far as they know who you are at all, right? Ternion definitely knows who you are, because they're the ones who called for you—or a group of them called for you—and also, we know that, Even, you have a friend who works for Ternion—or a rival who works for Ternion, technically—in Arin Till, who was part of the Ever Forward and was also instrumental in bringing Ternion together and kind of betraying the Divine Fleet and joining up with the NEH. Also someone who took care of you when you came back with your hybrid originally, so there is a closeness there, but. We'll meet them soon, I'm curious about them. Red King Strategic is here, they are the faction that Grand used to work for as a trucker, they're like a logistics company who ships stuff. The Wound is the Wound, it's this mysterious place that's like—you know, it's

funny, Annihilation the movie just came out, but Annihilation—the book—has been an influence on me for a while, stuff in Winter in Hieron with the lamina and the strata and the Buoy and all that, are all very much inspired by Annihilation, but when I thought up the Wound, back before the holiday specials, very much was thinking about Annihilation here. So, think about that stuff as we move into this adventure. And the Earthsphere Economic Concern is like, you know, corporations are people too [laughs], and is the economic backbone of the NEH that is in control of all the corporations here—or not in control of, but they are the sort of ruling council made up of those things. Think about—remember in COUNTER/Weight Orth ended up working for—or even at the very beginning there was like, OriCon had a specific group, the Oricon Expeditionary Group, that was like, “Oh, we’re in charge of—yes, there are independent corporations here, but we’re the ones those people report to, we’re the regulators,” and also are like, “It’s not like outside regulators, it’s kind of like self-regulation.” that’s Earthsphere here. So, those are the big players on Skein. And your reputation with them is like, y’all seem to be Divine Free States citizens, so you’re only allowed here because Ternion has set up guest visas for you. Any other questions about Skein or what y’all are doing here?

DRE: So you said we had clearance to land here, are we landing with our mechs or are we landing with the ship?

AUSTIN: I think the ship lands in Terncage.

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: And then you board these transport—this insect transport—to take you out here. I think we should talk about—did you want to figure out a way to get your mechs with you?

KEITH: Eh, we don’t need those!

AUSTIN: Classic Gig [Dre laughs].

JANINE: Eh.

SYLVIA: I don’t think I want to bring mine.

KEITH: I mean, they’re, you know, let’s walk in the—it’s nice. The forest is nice.

SYLVIA: Yeah, that’s exactly my actual same thing.

DRE: Alright.

AUSTIN: Never forget that we have flashbacks, that’s all I’ll say.

SYLVIA: Exactly.

DRE: Yeah, true.

AUSTIN: Alright, cool. So when you get there, you arrive in a—so I just want to make sure that I'm very clear about this again. The Wound is *massive*, the Wound is, like, hundreds of miles long, right, maybe longer than that. I actually think it's a thousand miles north to south. Like, it's visible from space, it is this mountain range. But then, there's a part of it where the thing I'm calling the Vale is, again V-A-L-E, where—apologies for my rough, rough map—where beyond all the mountains, or like, between the mountains, there is a spot where there is this very sharp glow at the very center of this pit or of this set of—this valley, basically. And from above, what you would see is three bases, three Ternion research bases, each of which has people from all of Ternion's three subfactions—you know, the Garden, the Ever Forward, and the Skein—but each one is also kind of run by one of the three groups, you know, everyone—they're working together, but there is definitely a sense of competition also. And also a sense of, like [exhales], it's the first year of this group working together so it's slow to fully integrate and I don't know that they integrate cleanly right away. And this has been one of the main points of contention, and, you know, maybe I'll explain this in-character a little bit. So, the insect-bug-thing arrives at Skein HQ, which is this kind of half-orb that is—think of it as, like a—what are tho—like a biosphere, basically, right, that's made completely out of clear material and—it's like a mix of glass and then organic membranes and stuff on the outside. But then inside it's very pristine, it's very like 1950s corporate or governmental, like white—not marble floors even—white, like, um—

KEITH: Linoleum?

AUSTIN: Yeah, linoleum tile, and lots of chrome equipment and stuff. But this outside thing, is just—it feels like they built the megastructure around it out of stuff that they found in the environment, and Skein is, and has always been, full of people who have blended their genes with animals and plants so it's not long until you are led by guards to Plane Page, P-L-A-N-E Page, P-A-G-E, and Facet Forester. Plane Page is a tree-man, he has branches coming out of his head. He has like a long tree—he's not like an ent, he's not giant, he's like a human-sized person, but it's almost as if—and his whole body is covered in bark—but it's almost as if his head is tall, it's like a little tree by itself, do you know what I mean, kind of [laughs]? It's like a cylinder.

KEITH: Yeah, I know what you mean. You're saying that this is Prince Sidon and instead of the "he's a shark-man whose head is a whole shark"—

AUSTIN: Yes!

KEITH: —This is a tree-man whose head is a whole tree.

[Dre laughs]

AUSTIN: Yes. That's exactly right. Except it goes the other direction. So Prince Sidon's head goes backwards, like the rest of his shark-body is behind his head, as if it's like a long scoop of hair.

KEITH: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: This is like his chin comes forward like it's a long trunk, do you know what I mean?

KEITH: Got it.

AUSTIN: And then Facet Forester is like a lily—or not a lily, sorry, a tulip—whose whole head is like a closed-up tulip, and she has straight-up stem hands, and stuff. You don't know where her eyes are, you don't see eyes on her. You don't know if she *has* eyes or if she sees some other way. Or if maybe the stems are her—you don't know. You don't know and it's okay, because you see all sorts of people and they're really nice. So that's who meets you, and they are each wearing lab coats and, you know, khaki pants, and they're like—I think Plane probably begins and he's like:

AUSTIN (as Plane Page): Welcome, welcome! Echo, it's so good to see you again.

SYLVIA (as Echo): It's good to see you guys too! How've you been?

AUSTIN (as Plane): Good, good. We need to speak quickly. Things are going to get out of hand. Come with me.

AUSTIN: And, you know, you're walking past big ape-people and fox-people, they are—on the spectrum of furry from “boy that has cat ears” to “is a cat that wears pants”, they are all the way towards—like, they're very close to “cat that wears pants”, do you know what I mean?

KEITH: Mm-hm. Oh, I thought you were saying that they encompass the spectrum.

AUSTIN: You actually do see people who encompass the spectrum because there are people from the Divine Fleet here, who tend to lean closer to people who have cat ears, like Tender Sky, you know?

KEITH: Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: They lean way more cats who stand up on their back legs, but their legs still have that bend, that cat bend, you know, and are covered in fur completely.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So there's a mix of these people here, and yeah, you're right, there is probably a mix in the Skein all said, but if it leaned one way it would be towards Winston from Overwatch.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You know, that's an ape who happens to wear a labcoat. In fact, their leader, Genevieve Wei, is an ape who wears a lab coat and has glasses. She's the leader of the Skein, and she's the one who negotiated the treaty with the NEH that both got this planet named Skein and kept them in—made sure that there was a representational factor of Skein people in terms of who ran the major settlements. There's a big statue of her shaking hands with Templeton's Faire above—like, on one of the mountains surrounding Terncage, this big metropolis. So, it's—they've integrated very cleanly, believe it or not. They were part of the reason why so much of the technology is meant to not be—not leave an ecological footprint, right? They kind of pushed for that, and so, there you go.

In any case, they lead you into a little conference room. There's coffee and tea available on the desks, there's a whiteboard—or it's probably not just a whiteboard, right? It's probably some sort of, like, I almost want it to be, it's a whiteboard but instead of board, it's fabric or grass or something, and then the markers are different types of activators; they activate something inside of the grass to make it light up different colors or make it recede or grow depending on thickness and stuff, and in fact, on it right now is a physical elevation map of the Vale, of the area you're about to go into, and you can see there's these tall mountains on the outside and then there are kind of—there's a two or three-layer deep valley that has tiers almost, and the first tier is pretty high up, then there's another tier below it that's down to the ground, and there's a third tier that's actually, it's like pushed in past the rest of the wall and that's the thing that's glowing bright and green. And you're all served coffee or tea, what do you all want to drink? What are your drink orders here?

DRE (as Even): Just a water.

KEITH (as Gig): Do you guys have, um, do you guys have jelly juice?

DRE: Oh, here it goes [Austin laughs].

AUSTIN (as Plane): Of course, of course, it's a little early in the day though, don't you think?

KEITH (as Gig): Is it? Wait, hold on. Is there something about this drink I don't know?

AUSTIN (as Plane): Oh, don't worry about it. One jelly juice for the boy.

SYLVIA (as Echo): You know, one time I had jelly and jam juice mixed together, it was pretty good, Gig.

KEITH: Oh, if you can give me a mix, I'll take a mix. If that's—if they're in two different areas then that's fine, but I will take a mix if I can.

AUSTIN (as Plane): They're in the kitchen. It's one area.

KEITH (as Gig): I mean, like, if it's two different fridges, if you have a separate fridge.

AUSTIN (as Facet Forester): Why would we—

AUSTIN: And this is Forester.

AUSTIN (as Facet): Why would we keep drinks in two different fridges?

KEITH (as Gig): If you have—if this is a like workplace and you have a lot of people here, so if you have one fridge that was full and you needed a second fridge, and if you were in the first fridge to get the jelly juice and you were like, "Oh, there's no jam juice in here," don't worry about it, don't bother checking the other fridge.

JANINE (as Signet): You're already asking them to make an effort and go on a short trip for you, at some point it's all just—

KEITH (as Gig): Not me! I was the third person to ask for a drink.

SYLVIA (as Echo): Wait, should we have a second fridge on the ship?

JANINE (as Signet): I'll have tea.

KEITH (as Gig): Oh, you want them to heat up water?

JANINE (as Signet): They have tea prepared.

AUSTIN: They have tea prepared, it's fine.

JANINE (as Signet): I will just take the tea that is prepared.

AUSTIN: The drinks are served, it takes a few moments, there's some small talk. There's a point at which I think, you know, Facet—

KEITH: Is it a mix? Did I get a mix?

AUSTIN: You got a mix. You got a mix.

AUSTIN (as Facet): Echo, how have you been? Can you introduce us to your friends?

SYLVIA (as Echo): Yeah, you know, I've been okay, mostly. So, this is Gig, you probably know him from...being Gig.

KEITH (as Gig): Hi, I'm Gig from TV!

SYLVIA (as Echo): Yeah.

AUSTIN (as Facet): Of course, of course, I—

KEITH: I put out my hand.

AUSTIN (as Facet): I knew I recognized that voice.

AUSTIN: —and shakes hands with you.

SYLVIA (as Echo): And this is Even. Even's our pilot. Even, say hi.

AUSTIN (as Facet): What a wonderful hairdo.

DRE (as Even): Oh, thank you!

AUSTIN: —and does a little curtsy, and takes your hand.

DRE: I guess I shake.

AUSTIN: Okay.

KEITH: Even—I'm sorry, what does Even look like again?

AUSTIN: Oh my God.

DRE: Oh boy.

KEITH: [laughing] I can't remember. Do you—are you like eighty percent bug?

DRE: Yeeaah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: I'd say like seventy percent maybe.

DRE: Seventy percent bug.

AUSTIN: You still stand up on two legs. You have—

DRE: Yeah, I mean, those legs probably have different joint directions than probably the rest of you all but—

AUSTIN: Right. Sure. And you have hair tendrils.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But you still have a face, right? You still have like a human-y face?

DRE: Yeah, one hundred percent.

AUSTIN: Okay.

DRE: Yes.

AUSTIN: And wings. And you have big wings.

DRE: Well, obviously.

AUSTIN: Alright.

DRE: That's been around forever.

AUSTIN: Yeah, right, true.

KEITH: Yeah, the wings I remember.

AUSTIN: And, um—

SYLVIA (as Echo): And this is Signet. She looks like she's more normal than Gig and Even, but none of us really are.

[Janine laughs]

KEITH (as Gig): I'm normal.

SYLVIA (as Echo): Gig, you have an eye that flies.

KEITH: It pops out of my head and does a little twirl.

AUSTIN: Good.

DRE: Doesn't even bother me anymore, it's weird.

KEITH: It's never bothered you.

AUSTIN (as Facet): Ah, the Excerpt Signet. Well, we should hurry. There is a limited amount of time here. Let me explain the stakes. Between ourselves here, the Skein division of Ternion, the Garden, which is to the north—their headquarters at the Vale is—and the Ever Forward to the east, things are, well, productive, certainly, but there is a degree of tension between the leaders of the three groups. One of our primary agreements has been that any move into the Vale would happen as part of a three-group front. There would be no unilateral movement. Unfortunately, someone—we believe after speaking to your contact Cascara, your old ally Acre Seven—broke that agreement involuntarily.

AUSTIN: And then one of them, Forester, moves over to the map and runs an applicator along it and it draws a little pathway, draws a bright orange pathway through the mountains and then down into the Vale. I think I've moved you to the right map on my screen, right? Yes.

AUSTIN (as Facet): We don't know this Acre Seven, we've never met her, but she was picked up by drones sent out by the Ever Forward.

AUSTIN: And they play back an image, they play back the video footage that you've seen of Acre Seven kind of moving back and forward in time and br—walking into the green fog that this whole area is covered in, and then disappearing from sight.

AUSTIN (as Facet): Unfortunately, that happened closer to us than the Garden or the Ever Forward's base, and so they believe this is us going back on our agreement. Now, we've kept things quiet as best we can, but there's a chance that they might go in at this point. The treaty's been broken, and so—

KEITH (as Gig): Have you tried telling them that it was a mistake?

AUSTIN (as Facet): They don't believe us.

DRE (as Even): Would you say Acre involuntarily entered—

AUSTIN (as Facet): I mean that she involuntarily broke—she had no idea about this agreement, I don't even know how she arrived on this planet undetected.

DRE (as Even): Okay. So she went in of her own volition, but just without the knowledge of this treaty.

AUSTIN (as Facet): Yes, as far as I know.

DRE (as Even): Okay.

AUSTIN (as Facet): The—

KEITH (as Gig): So what do you want us to do?

AUSTIN (as Facet): This is—consider this a favor repaid. Last year, your friend Echo Reverie did some mapping for us. They carried a set of sensors into a dank, seemingly unmappable, part of Quire, and this was before the Miracle, but we never had the chance to pay that back, but now we are. We would like you to retrieve your friend, and also there is the matter of, well—

KEITH (as Gig): Wait, doesn't this sound like we're doing another favor?

AUSTIN (as Plane): It's a bit of a favor for us too, it's true, it's true. If no one finds Acre Seven, then we can say that it was another apparition of the Wound, and if there's no evidence, then the agreement holds and they can pull back their own investigators.

KEITH (as Gig): Do they know that we're going in to investigate?

AUSTIN (as Facet): No one knows anything yet.

KEITH (as Gig): So, what if they think that you're breaking the treaty again with a bigger group of people?

AUSTIN (as Facet): This is a risk we need to take. Also, we may be able to disavow you. Maybe you acted on your own.

KEITH (as Gig): But it sounds like you're already having trouble disavowing—what's her name, Acre Seven?

AUSTIN (as Facet): Acre Seven.

KEITH (as Gig): Acre Seven.

AUSTIN (as Facet): Well, part of the problem is that Acre came in closer to our base than theirs. Perhaps there are ways to complicate that for them. As long as you don't enter right from here—

AUSTIN: And they make another point on the map.

AUSTIN (as Facet): —maybe there is a way for them to believe that you came in on your own volition, or under the volition of the Ever Forward. You are, after all, members of the Divine Free States.

DRE (as Even): I mean, for what that is worth anymore.

AUSTIN (as Facet): Yeah. The important thing is, your friend is moving in a very dangerous place.

KEITH (as Gig): Mm-hm.

AUSTIN (as Facet): We have not been able to properly map what's beyond the fog because every time we leave, it changes. But this is what we know: the top level is incredibly hostile. It is filled with creatures, and beings, and forces that do terrible things to people.

KEITH (as Gig): Like what?

AUSTIN (as Facet): Physical things. Mental things. Torture.

KEITH (as Gig): [consideringly] Huh.

AUSTIN (as Facet): It is cruel. It is not like a wolf hunting. It is like a [sighs]—it is like a person in its cruelty. Beyond that we don't know because no one has come back.

DRE (as Even): Is it like—do you like inhale or ingest something, and that's how it gets to you? What're we talking about here?

AUSTIN (as Facet): We thought that at first, but we haven't been able to pinpoint anything. There is nothing there that isn't here, or that isn't in the city, or that isn't on other planets inside of the Mirage. It is just the same blend here as anywhere else.

AUSTIN: Forester like, taps the—she taps the thing a couple of times, the weird grass screen a couple of times—and it turns into being a bunch of data analysis, you know, data visualizations, basically, of what the air composition is, and like—she walks you through it, and she's like, the air is made of blah blah blah blah, here is the—it's the same shit as everywhere else, basically.

AUSTIN (as Facet): As far as we know, it's exactly the same. The difference seems to be how the Mirage is being activated. It's similar in some ways to technology that uses the Mirage directly as a medium.

DRE (as Even): [sighs] Echo, I need to ask you a very blunt question.

SYLVIA (as Echo): Hit me with it.

DRE (as Even): How much do you trust Page and Forester?

SYLVIA (as Echo): I mean—

AUSTIN: Are you just saying this in front of them?

DRE: Yep.

AUSTIN: Okay, cool.

SYLVIA (as Echo): I don't have any reason not to trust them, they helped me back on Quire. Like, before it was—back when there was one Quire, you know?

DRE (as Even): [laughs] Yeah. Ah, the good old days.

SYLVIA (as Echo): Yeah, no, I don't—I don't have any reason not to trust them, so, yeah I guess I would say I do trust them.

DRE (as Even): 'Cause this sounds like Axiom shit to me.

KEITH: Uhhh.

AUSTIN: I'm trying to think if they have the—no, they don't know how to scan for Axioms.

JANINE: We still have our individual things though.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

JANINE: My project is only to expand those for the rest of the crew.

AUSTIN: Yep, totally.

JANINE: But the three of us still have shit for that.

DRE: How widespread is the knowledge of what an Axiom is and what it does?

AUSTIN: Axioms are like bogeymen at this point to some degree. Or like they—it's known. It's known that there are Axioms. These people would know what an Axiom is actually, like, they would know who Volition—they would know what Volition is, they're scientists, right?

DRE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Like, if you go to Terncage, the city, those people are probably like, “Anything could be an Axiom!”

[Dre laughs]

AUSTIN: Like, “An Axiom could be a big bear!” And like, yeah, an Axiom could be a big bear theoretically, but the people here know Volition makes Axioms, there’s some sort of weird shit happening that some people believe is about breaking into another realm of existence, but as scientists, they’re pretty skeptical of that; they think they’re probably just weird, you know, beings that are being created through some sort of chaotic arrangements of molecules or something, you know what I mean, they are all pretty skeptical of breaking into another realm of reality, but they understand that that is what Volition and what some people in the system believe it is. But they don’t—they aren’t experts in that. They are biologists, they are physicists, they are anthropologists, they are—sort of scientists of nature. In each case. I’d say the Ever Forward group is the one that is probably most interested in Axioms because of the connection—or the seeming connection—to Divines, and their history with Divines, obviously, but that’s kind of it.

KEITH (as Gig): So, you want us to go into this area, close to one of the other—what are they, buildings? What do we call these guys?

AUSTIN (as Plane): Facilities.

KEITH (as Gig): Facilities.

AUSTIN (as Plane): Yes.

KEITH (as Gig): To basically sort of semi-frame them for breaking the treaty.

AUSTIN (as Plane): [sighs] Frankly, at this point, the most important thing is retrieving Acre Seven.

KEITH (as Gig): Right, well so I was gonna say, what is the possibility that Acre Seven is doing that same thing, but on the direction of Ever Forward or the Garden?

AUSTIN (as Plane): We don’t know her. We don’t know what her—you would know better than we.

DRE (as Even): Yeah, Signet, what do you think?

KEITH (as Gig): I sort of meant on the reputation of the Garden or Ever Forward, not on the reputation of Acre Seven. Would they do that? Would they—would these groups do those things?

AUSTIN (as Plane): Certainly, but we don't know—or perhaps, perhaps we—they haven't done anything like that before. I don't know if this Acre Seven is someone who would agree to something like that. We don't know much about her. We don't understand her to be a mercenary or a fixer or anything like that.

KEITH (as Gig): Hm.

AUSTIN: Signet, you were gonna say something?

JANINE (as Signet): [sighs] I was gonna say the—ultimately it doesn't really matter if Acre—Acre is strange in a way where she does things for certain reasons. Even if she is doing something on behalf of someone else, I don't entirely know how much weight I would place on that connection. I think ultimately, even if she was sent to enter from the point that she did at the behest of the Garden or the Ever Forward, it doesn't matter. If we do the same thing it still puts the situation at a bit of a—I guess the word is a *détente*. It sort of—even if someone else might have to take responsibility for Acre, someone else would have to take responsibility—like, they'd still have to admit that they did something if we also—you know? Either way this is—this—[sighs]. It doesn't secure the situation but it provides some leverage that is currently lacking for those involved. As for Acre, I—to be honest, I would say she's better off in there than we'll be.

AUSTIN (as Plane): Why do you say that?

KEITH (as Gig): Uh, you did say no one's ever come back.

AUSTIN (as Plane): But why would she?

JANINE (as Signet): Acre is very special. And I don't say that in a way meant to be patronizing or diminish her. What she is, is very special. That said, I would very much like to retrieve her from a place that's cruel, certainly, but...I would say she probably stands a better chance of keeping herself together in the way she does than the average person.

AUSTIN (as Plane): Well, that is good to hear. Forester, anything else?

AUSTIN: And she returns the map to like—or the screen to the map with all the different elevation and such—she says:

AUSTIN (as Facet): Well, we have this. We know that the Ever Forward has made contact with the Garden and together they plan on sending a group in tomorrow. The group will probably be the Garden's so-called Saints. Are you familiar with the term?

KEITH (as Gig): Uh, yeah.

DRE (as Even): [scoffs] Yeah.

AUSTIN (as Facet): So, there are four of them. My suspicion is they will not send the full team in. one will be left behind as defense or perimeter security or perhaps even looking exactly for a group like yours. We also believe that the Ever Forward and the Garden will be doing this as a unit, which means there may be a mix of people there, maybe even someone from the Ever Forward. We do not wish this to come to violence—in fact, I must warn against it. One of the things we've noticed, one of the—

AUSTIN: And she taps the grass again and it turns into like, a weird video screen. Like, it's still just colors changing, it's like grass instead of pixels, basically, but every little—

JANINE: I keep thinking lichen would be better for this, because lichen especially is kind of—I could see it being pixely—

AUSTIN: No, I want it to be long. I want it to not be tight. Like, I want it to be—and that's the thing, the entire blade changes color, not as a unit, like different photocells inside of it can change, and so there's this weird depth to it that's weird on the eyes. I want to avoid just like, that sort of nice lichen or moss or anything like that. I want it to be—I want it to feel like each blade has height, you know? Anyway, it turns into a video screen, and you can see images of—you see a very strange image—or video—of someone with kind of the symbol of Ternion, which I haven't really figured out. The thing is, I keep coming to like, Treyarch's symbol, the game company, but that's not right, right? But it's some sort of trio, it's some sort of, like—I don't know, like maybe—Dre, what do you think it is? You're the science character here.

DRE: Umm, I mean, when you say Treyarch's symbol, the thing that also crosses my mind is almost like a Celtic knot of some kind.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

DRE: Ummm—

AUSTIN: Like a three-armed—

KEITH: I prefer a garlic knot.

AUSTIN: [wearily] Okay.

[Keith laughs]

DRE: I think we all do, buddy.

AUSTIN: Same. I would love a garlic knot right now, you kidding me? Look up some garlic knots, those look good as hell. God damn. Yeah, I could see that, that also fits in with the Skein, right? Which is a word that means “knot” or “knotted”, basically. It’s like a length of thread that’s been knotted together, that’s always been—it’s like a tangle, basically. So yeah, that would make some sense, especially since they’re kind of the ones that started in a position of negotiated strength here a year ago and have since kind of ceded some of it bit by bit. In any case, you see a video of someone wearing that symbol shooting up at a strange thing in the mists, and as he’s shooting, like before he’s even hit by this thing, you can see that he holds down the trigger and just starts shooting higher and higher into the air and then needs to be pulled away by two other people, like, including the person who’s filming, drops the camera and then runs over and grabs this guy by the shoulder and runs back away and they grab the camera from the ground and, you know, you see the gun fall to the ground and, you know, it’s like found footage style, basically.

AUSTIN (as Facet): People who do violent things must face the repercussions inside of the Vale.

DRE (as Even): Okay.

AUSTIN (as Facet): We’ll prepare dinner, we’ll have dinner prepared for you. Feel free to use the facilities as you need.

KEITH (as Gig): What about the other rooms? Or is it just the bathroom?

AUSTIN (as Facet): [laughs] Hahaha. Very funny. Any room you wish. But keep facilities business inside of the facilities, hmm?

[Keith laughs]

DRE: Lord.

DRE (as Even): You said these two teams are going in tomorrow?

AUSTIN (as Facet): One team. It’s—they’re two teams together, we believe.

DRE (as Even): Oh yeah, this joint team.

AUSTIN (as Facet): Yes. We believe tomorrow. We’re not sure.

DRE (as Even): Then maybe we shouldn't stick around for dinner.

AUSTIN (as Facet): I see. We could prepare for you immediately to go, but I will say there is a great deal of research we have available that could aid you if you spend time, but perhaps haste would be best.

KEITH (as Gig): Haste makes waste, I think is what—

DRE (as Even): [sighs] Yeah.

AUSTIN (as Facet): Well, that's the opposite of what we're saying, we don't want you to be wasted. Except for on jelly-jam juice.

SYLVIA: Echo high-fives Gig.

KEITH (as Gig): Hold on, I've—

KEITH: I'm sort of whispering away from them.

KEITH (as Gig): [loud whispering] I've had a lot of this juice, I've never felt anything. Do you guys get drunk?

DRE (as Even): Oh, so you have a problem, okay.

KEITH (as Gig): I don't have a problem—no, I'm just saying. People keep saying stuff like, "Oh, it's too early for that," or "Don't drink too much,"—it's just like—this is not a—is this drugs?

[Austin laughs]

SYLVIA (as Echo): Gig, do you need to go to a doctor?

DRE (as Even): I don't Gig, I'm not a cop so I can't tell you if it's a "drugs" or not.

KEITH (as Gig): [plaintively] I just want an answer!

AUSTIN: It's—

SYLVIA (as Echo): Wait, I drank it a bunch too.

KEITH (as Gig): Yeah!

SYLVIA (as Echo): Gig, do we need to go to a doctor?

KEITH (as Gig): Do we need doctor?

[Austin laughs]

DRE (as Even): Okay, I think we have three options here [Keith laughing in the background]. None of which I think involve jelly juice. Or jam juice. Or jelly-jam juice. J—Jam-ly?

KEITH (as Gig): Ground—Just ground juice is I think the umbrella.

AUSTIN: Ja-ly.

DRE : Jam-elly? Jamelly juice?

AUSTIN: Jamelly Juice, that's an NPC, sorry, I have to write that one down.

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: ...Jamelly...

DRE (as Even): [sighs] Okay. So, one, we stay here, we do research, we go out on our own tomorrow, or whenever we feel ready. Two, we try to go in ASAP, maybe without as much knowledge. And three is we try to force ourselves into this group that's already gonna go.

AUSTIN (as Plane): Go in with them? Hm.

DRE (as Even): Yeah.

KEITH (as Gig): Hm.

DRE (as Even): I don't know how much pull I have with people leftover from the Ever Forward, but—

KEITH (as Gig): Or the Garden.

DRE (as Even): Yeah. But—yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, y'all have never really met people from the Garden, you, you—no, you never met anyone from the Garden when you were on Quire before. You only saw their dissertation projects scattered across the ground [laughs].

KEITH: Oh, well, we know the Saints though.

AUSTIN: These are different Saints. Every school has different Saints.

KEITH: Ohhh, it's different Saints.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

DRE (as Even): I mean, look it worked out so great for me the last time I went on a joint mission with a Saint. Why don't—[Austin laughs] Round Two, right?

AUSTIN (as Plane): If you think they'd have you, that is an option.

KEITH (as Gig): I do kind of like the idea.

JANINE (as Signet): I think it would be wise to—whether we get our preparation here or go in with people who are prepared—doing something other than going in blind to a place that is actively hostile without any kind of—

KEITH (as Gig): And apparently hostile in—unlike any other place in the world

SYLVIA (as Echo): I don't know if I wanna work with the Saints, if I'm being honest.

DRE (as Even): Mm. Fair.

SYLVIA (as Echo): Like, [sighs] I just rather—one, going into this with more people brings up more complications, but two, we don't know—like, you guys are asking me if we can trust the guys here, at least I know them. I'm just—I don't know how well we can trust, if we—I don't want to go into a strange environment with people who, one, I haven't met, and two, might have ulterior motives.

DRE (as Even): Well, I can put that to bed right now. They absolutely are gonna have ulterior motives.

SYLVIA: Cool, I'm a 'no' then, for that idea.

JANINE (as Signet): [sighs] Yeah, I'll also say these people don't seem hostile towards Acre, they just wish she hadn't done what she'd done. I don't know if the others involved will feel a similar kind of benevolent indifference towards her.

KEITH (as Gig): They did try to pitch this incredibly dangerous mission as if it were a favor to us. That they were paying us back for helping them out earlier.

JANINE (as Signet): Yeah.

DRE (as Even): This is kind of what we do.

SYLVIA (as Echo): I mean, I don't think it would hurt to have friends with the resources that they have here, you know?

KEITH (as Gig): That's true. I'm willing to go it alone.

DRE (as Even): Okay. Would you all be upset if I—

KEITH (as Gig): Left and joined them?

DRE (as Even): No. But if I went to go have a talk with anyone I still knew at the Ever Forward.

SYLVIA (as Echo): I mean, you can go talk to your friends but if you do anything that could, you know, risk our mission, I am going to kick you. Really hard.

DRE (as Even): I mean, that's fair.

SYLVIA (as Echo): Okay.

DRE (as Even): I don't plan on being kick-worthy?

SYLVIA (as Echo): Okay.

KEITH: That is my favorite filer website, by the way, is Kickworthy.

AUSTIN: God.

JANINE (as Signet): That seems like a good part of the information-gathering process then.

KEITH (as Gig): Yeah, I agree.

SYLVIA (as Echo): Yeah, for sure.

DRE: Well, I guess I'm going to the Ever Forward.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it sounds like. Is anyone else joining for that, or is it just gonna be you?

KEITH: Um—

SYLVIA: I was planning on staying behind here and—

AUSTIN: Doing some work here tonight?

SYLVIA: —my scientists pals.

AUSTIN: Alright, cool. Let's start with something here, and then we'll go to the Ever Forward. So who has a thing to do here in Skein HQ?

JANINE: I want to use one of my abilities.

AUSTIN: Ooh, okay. What is it?

JANINE: I have visions where I can spend one stress to remotely view a distant place or person tied to me in some intimate way.

AUSTIN: True. And you can spend extra stress per feature.

JANINE: I can.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: I think—

AUSTIN: Right now you have how much stress?

JANINE: I have one stress.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: Because I had a nice time with the singing housekeeper.

AUSTIN: That's true, that did happen.

JANINE: It was great. Um, I want to actually I think spend three stress on this.

AUSTIN: Okay. So it's, "Spend one stress to remotely view a distant place or person tied to me in some intimate way." I'm guessing you're choosing Acre Seven?

JANINE: Yes.

AUSTIN: Fair. Then, you're also spending two more stress for which features?

JANINE: I want it to last for a minute, rather than a moment.

AUSTIN: Sure.

JANINE: And I want my target to also see and hear me.

AUSTIN: Okay, cool.

KEITH: Oh, those are both really good.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I'm also gonna say you have potency for this because you have the Cerberus ability, the ship ability, Light Touch. "You gain potency when trailing a target or when gathering info at a target's previous location. Previous locations can include crime scenes, favorite bars, and the like. Can also be used for tracking if you're hot on the trail." That's what you're doing here, so you'll have potency here which will give you a higher degree of—so, what I'm actually gonna do is basically say, there's not a roll here, right?

JANINE: No. It's just I spend stress to buy these things.

AUSTIN: Right. So I still want that to count for something, so I think maybe instead of one minute you're gonna get two minutes for this.

JANINE: Ooh.

AUSTIN: It's like an extra—in Scum and in Blades there's a thing called Magnitude which kind of changes based on a bunch of various things and so, go from a few moments to a few minutes, basically, you know, so. A couple minutes with her.

KEITH: Is Light Touch—is that the new one?

AUSTIN: That is the new one, yep.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: So, immediately pays off [laughs]. So yeah, what do you see? You see—what's this look like from the outside when you're using this? Where do you go to use this and, like, what's it physically look like from the outside and then from inside of Signet's mind?

JANINE: I think this is—I want to say this is the first time I've used this. Maybe it's not.

AUSTIN: I think so. I think it's the first time in—

JANINE: I've considered using it before.

AUSTIN: You've used a similar thing during the Veil, but not—

JANINE: Yeah, yeah. I had a power during the Veil that let me speak someone's true name and then sort of access them remotely.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: And like, in changing this, I didn't want it to feel like a downgrade or also like a straight dupe of that move.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: I wanted it to feel like an extension but like kind of an evolution of that.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: So that was just a thing where under her breath, Signet would say the name of someone that, basically the thing that she could call and they would answer to.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: That would not necessarily be their actual name. In this case, I want to say it's gotten a little more, like, ephemeral. Like, Belgard has woken up—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Belgard is in full service and at full strength. So it makes sense for this to have expanded a little. I think this is a thing though that Signet prefers to do, if it can be helped, sort of somewhere quiet.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: Especially if she's intending to contact someone for more than a second.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think—

JANINE: And I think it's a very meditative thing. I don't think she says the name out loud anymore.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: Especially in Acre Seven's case. I feel like Acre Seven's true name is more of an idea.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah.

JANINE: So I think for anyone seeing it from the outside it is just like, Signet is being weird and quiet and maybe looking like she's spacing out a bit.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: And then there's that sound, of like, beetle shells.

AUSTIN: Right. I like this happening inside of the quarters they've assigned you, which have like—they probably have some sort of balcony that looks out into the Vale, down onto the Vale below you.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: And you can see—what we see is the fog there. It's completely covered in fog. You stop even seeing trees poking up through because the Vale keeps going deeper and deeper, and so there's just like a sea of fog, basically. And most of it has this green glow, and we kind of get this—or not even green glow, but kind of green has been dispersed through it, almost, so there is a glow at the center, at the very center that's poking through, but most of the fog has a green mist quality to it. And we kind of move through that very quickly and you're seeing things pop up at the periphery; you're seeing, you know, buildings, you're seeing *beings* moving here and there as you're kind of zooming through it, like the camera lifts behind you from the balcony and kind of zooms down through. I almost picture it like that *Twin Peaks: The Return* shot, that like super-slow shot that at first it looks like everything's really small and then you realize, oh no, I'm just traveling a great of distance here, I'm like traveling miles and miles.

JANINE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And you kind of dip into the fog, and you get closer and closer, and you're starting to be over tops of buildings, and there's a river that cuts through here, and there's like, you know, a strange creature that moves, or shape, and finally we're really close, and we have that beetle-shaking sound, that chittering—not the chittering, but like the beetle shells shaking in a bag, basically.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: And we see, we pass by a bunch of tiny creatures that are like eight-legged monkeys, almost, which we first saw during Echo's vision, kind of Echo's weird walk through the fog, months ago. And then we see Acre Seven standing at the edge of a bridge that is about to—that is crossing over a small stream, so it's a tiny bridge. But it is going—right in front of her is a wall of just plain gray fog, that you can still see a pulsing green light deep inside of, but it's like she's passing from this greenish fog and into this grayish fog. It's almost like the—like a Dark Souls boss fog, do you know what I mean? Just like, wow, this is just like—You can see it from above, that it's like a sphere of gray dense fog, it looks like a wall, almost. And she is walking the edge of it, and running a finger along it, and there is like, as if it's water, there is a, um—what do you call it when like a boat moves through the water? Wake, there's a wake behind her finger.

JANINE: Wake.

AUSTIN: Yeah. And she's like, considering stepping in and she's still doing the classic Acre Seven thing of like, rewinding backwards and forwards in time. So, what do you—and then you appear. And you're on this bridge with her. Or you're on this bridge and she's just across it. What do you do or say?

JANINE: I think Signet says like:

JANINE (as Signet): You've caused a bit of a fuss. There's a bit of a problem. I know you didn't mean to. I do want to know why you came here.

AUSTIN (as Acre Seven): Signet. It has been too long.

JANINE (as Signet): Way too long.

AUSTIN (as Acre Seven): Hmm. Time. Hmm. Time.

JANINE (as Signet): Does it feel longer for you or for me?

AUSTIN (as Acre Seven): Different. It is wounded here. Hurt. And dying, but separate. But separate.

JANINE (as Signet): Are you here to fix it?

AUSTIN (as Acre Seven): Hmm. I'm not sure it can be fixed. Or. Hmm. I'm not—hmm. It used to be one world, and now it is eight. Or nine. It can never be one. But this is not what it was. This is not. The continuity is broken. The continuity is broken. It is much older than me. It is near death anyway. A few hundred years more, maybe. And then it will be a rock. A rock. But this wound is not death. This wound is—this wound is separation. It is not like me.

JANINE (as Signet): [sighs] We have to come in after you.

AUSTIN (as Acre Seven): Why?

JANINE (as Signet): Because there are three groups who are all very interested in this place and very concerned—each about the other. And you being in here causes some problems.

AUSTIN (as Acre Seven): I've caused trouble for people. Hmm. People find their own trouble. Their own trouble. This place, this place wants people. But not these people, old people. People who have not been. People who have not been allowed to be. If you come, I expect you to help me help Quire, not them. Otherwise, do not come.

JANINE (as Signet): Acre, I'm not coming to stop you, I'm just coming for you. Whatever needs to happen after that—you know me. I'm not closed-minded.

AUSTIN (as Acre Seven): I know, but you are not like us either.

AUSTIN: The ground around you starts to shake, and there's something approaching from behind. And you hear a sound that's almost like—it's almost like an elephant's, like—the sound of an elephant. What do we call those? What's the trumpet—The trumpet, I guess. The trumpeting of an elephant.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: But it's like, crackly, it's like pushed through a filter, like a physical filter. It's as if an elephant made a noise on the other side of a long metal tube, and the tube was filled with trash. And so it's kind of barely pushing through, do you know what I mean?

JANINE: [laughs] Yes?

AUSTIN: Or like the other end of a tunnel, but the tunnel was filled with—was caved in, you know? And as you turn to look, there is a huge creature in the fog, the silhouette of one. And when you see it, Acre Seven says:

AUSTIN (as Acre Seven): Up top, it is the old Quire. Quire without memory. It has no room for people here. And below there is only regret, for what happened. For what happened.

AUSTIN: And then she steps in. And I think you're—the silhouette gets bigger and bigger, and then—it gets bigger and bigger, but it's not like it's taking steps towards you. It's just like—it's as if someone has selected it inside of Photoshop [Janine laughs] and then has increased its size.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: It's just getting bigger. And then your vision snaps back to the balcony.

JANINE: Cool.

AUSTIN: Who else has a thing? Do we want to go to the Ever Forward, do we want to do something else back at Skein HQ? I'm guessing—do you share this info, Signet?

JANINE: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay, cool.

JANINE: Or like, as much as people would listen to [laughs]. I imagine Signet being like, "I remote-viewed my friend Acre and there was a big thing and also a ball. Like a gray ball [Austin laughs]. It was like fog, but also it seemed kind of solid, but not really solid."

AUSTIN: [amused] Uh-huh.

JANINE: "And there was a bridge, and this big thing, and the big thing just scaled up a lot, like someone was holding Shift and dragging the Transform tool."

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: [chuckles] And then it sounded like an elephant blowing through some garbage [Austin laughs].

SYLVIA (as Echo): You haven't been having any jelly juice, have you? [Austin laughs]

JANINE (as Signet): Never in my life.

KEITH (as Gig): What does that do? What does that do, I don't *get* it.

AUSTIN: Oh my God. And now I just—

JANINE: I was going to say, I was picturing Gig's scene as being him trying to drink as much jelly juice as possible to see if it has any effect.

[Keith cackles]

AUSTIN: Oh my God. It's getting—Oh my God, gross. Gross. We have to keep moving. Who has a thing?

SYLVIA: I have a small thing.

AUSTIN: Sure.

SYLVIA: So I was thinking, it's Plane Page and—fuck, I'm blanking on the other name—

AUSTIN: Forester.

DRE: F—Facet Forester.

SYLVIA: Yeah, Facet, that's right.

AUSTIN: Facet Forester and Page, yeah.

SYLVIA: This is my main goal here, I want to see if—What similarities are there between what I went into back on Quire when it was its own planet and this.

AUSTIN: Sure.

SYLVIA: Sort of like, what should I expect, basically, from their research and from what they personally know. 'Cause I have a rapport with them, I want to go straight to that.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. So I think—I'd like this to be a Gather Information roll, actually.

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: Which—you can use whatever you want, but it sounds like you're using a social thing here, but it could also be like, Doctor, it could also be—

SYLVIA: I was gonna suggest maybe Study, for looking stuff over with them.

AUSTIN: Yes, that's a good idea. Yeah, totally.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So, go ahead. And I think that this is—it's a fortune roll, so it's not a—there's no difficulty to this, it's just a matter of, like, how much do you get.

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: And it's a matter of like, can you keep up with their paperwork situation [laughs].

SYLVIA: I mean—

AUSTIN: Like, can you actually study what their stuff is, you know?

SYLVIA: Let's see. I got one.

AUSTIN: You got one in Study? I don't think—you don't get any potency—oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, wait, wait, you get potency for this, right?

SYLVIA: Do I?

AUSTIN: Right, because, again, this is—or no, you're not studying—you're not—I guess you are still—you're just asking about the place, right? You're not—this isn't about where Acre is or anything like that. This is just, tell me more about—

SYLVIA: No, I'm asking specifically—I'm asking specifically where we're going and, like, the sort of ecosystem we're going into.

AUSTIN: Totally. Alright, yeah.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Go ahead and give me a Study.

SYLVIA: Alright...it's a six!

AUSTIN: That's a six! That's a Great—you get exceptional detail. The information is complete and followup questions may expand into related areas or reveal more than you hoped for. So yeah, we're gonna get the scene of y'all poring over paperwork, basically, and findings on their weird grass-TV, and, like, the thing here that—with Great, you're gonna even get more than they know they have, do you know what I mean? It's gonna be one of those moments like, "Oh, we didn't even notice this thing before." So, ask me like—kind of give me a broad question besides just like—start somewhere, because it's not just, "Tell me what you know,"

SYLVIA: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Because what they know is kind of what they already told you. It's the top layer is filled with dangerous creatures and things that—it changes every time the buildings change. Every time that they go in, new—things are in different places, and sometimes things have disappeared altogether. So that's like what they—that's the base-level of what they know about that place. The, I guess—here's one new thing: you notice there are structures similar to buildings that you've seen on old Quire before. I'm trying to think of a specific one—oh, do you know what it looks like? It looks sort of like the underground place that Even found—or not—it wasn't Even, it was Grand—the one that Grand found. No, it was Even, was it you Even, who

went underground, and saw the photo—or the luminescent, the bioluminescent lichen and the underground city?

DRE: Yeah, that was me.

AUSTIN: Like its structures—

DRE: Yeah, and we had that fun talk about lycanthropy.

AUSTIN: Yes. Lycanthropy, yeah, uh-huh. You see buildings that are like those buildings, and so you immediately know that this top level is about pre-Golden Age Quire. Pre Glassed-Age, it's the Blooded Age, I believe is what the first age is called. This is Quire before it combined with Gnosis. This top layer is what that is. A hundred percent. So like, the—you also see buildings that have like a strange diamond; in fact, there's this church that looks sort of like the church from Oldchurch, right, the one where Erannia Motors are in, where Janey and Surge are, except that instead of having the globe symbol, there's a diamond symbol, which you also saw in the Crown of Glass connected to the Church of the Self. And you're like, digging through paperwork and stuff and you see that the Church of the Self was the predominant church of old Quire, pre-Gnosis Quire, and then again became a church, a prominent belief, in the Crown of Glass, in—kind of from the beginning of the Kingdom of Glass, before even the Doyenne was around, the previous rulers adopted this old pre-Gnosis Quire church that was all about self-discovery and self—you know, pulling yourself up by your bootstraps and pushing yourself to the greatest version of yourself and it was very in line with their ideas about what a great artist was. And so that popped back up, but these are clearly pre—this is not the Crown of Glass Church of the Self, these are like old cathedrals and old temples of the pre-Gnosis Church of the Self, which got pushed away after Quire gained memory via Gnosis and became a kind of sympathetic or a symbiotic—began a symbiotic relationship with the people of Quire instead of a hostile. So the top level is hostile Quire without memory, you know? So, followup questions?

SYLVIA: Okay. So since things change around a lot, I'm assuming it's difficult to map in any way.

AUSTIN: Right. In fact—

SYLVIA: Are you able to track us through it, though? Like, are you able to know where we are or how—

AUSTIN: Yes—

SYLVIA: How do we know how to get out, basically?

AUSTIN: So I think there is like, they are able to produce some sort of super-bright light that pierces the fog, that gives you a guiding star to get back from, but they can't—and they can track where you are inside, but they can't map what's there, 'cause what's there changes, do

you know what I mean? So, like, they can have a map of what it was today, but tomorrow it's gonna be different, or, you know, in an hour, it's gonna be different. They are also—they are experts in the unmappable, it's why they were stationed by the fog on Quire before the Miracle, so they kind of have all sorts of loopholes and workarounds depending on like—"Oh, you say it's unmappable, but what's that really mean?" Well, it's like, "We know what the distance is. We know where the fog comes out to, it doesn't come out any more than that, we know how deep down it goes, we know how—" They're very much like experts at—they do what astronomers do, right?

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: Which is like, it's about finding—learning something based on what's adjacent to the thing you're trying to learn. You can't actually see something, but you can see what's around it and so you can deduce what's in the spot you can't see. And so it's lots of those techniques, basically. But yes, they can guide you home at the very least.

SYLVIA: Okay, well that's good.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: That's very important.

AUSTIN: Any other questions? For me, not even for them. Like, because we can—

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Again, you've learned more—You've seen something that they maybe haven't even seen yet, inside of the data.

SYLVIA: [long exhale] Trying to think—there's a couple ways I could go with this. I think the one that I'd want to know most from a character perspective is like, so when I went into this fog on old Quire, you know.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

SYLVIA: I saw stuff, basically.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: And I don't—you said that the top layer doesn't have the memories of Quire, I think is what you said.

AUSTIN: Right. Yes.

SYLVIA: So does that mean there's less of a chance of that happening because I was seeing the memories of there, or is there still a possibility that we will have to deal with these—I don't want to say hallucinations because they were tangible, but.

AUSTIN: Right. So I think—what you put together is that the stuff appearing on the top layer is—it's not memory in the sense of a person's memory. Things like that Church, the Church of the Self, show up, but it's not like it's taken from—it's Quire's own internal version of that thing or memory of it. Or not even memory, but like the impression, right? And maybe you see it somehow in the data, like, the—you're looking at the things that they've tried to send into that second layer of fog and you—maybe there's one photo that comes back and you recognize it. It is the palace from—the palace that you went into, remember the one that said, "No Apokine, No Demarchy, Only Us," or whatever, do you know what I'm talking about?

SYLVIA: Uh, yeah.

AUSTIN: The one where you saw Iota Pretense when she was like a little girl.

SYLVIA: Yeah, with all the—when she was a girl or when she was a soldier? 'Cause I saw—

AUSTIN: When she was a girl, that palace.

SYLVIA: When she was a girl, that palace, okay.

AUSTIN: Yeah, the one that said "No Apokine, No Demarchy, Only Us."

SYLVIA: And it had the sculptures and stuff.

AUSTIN: Right, so you see that. Like, there's one photo from inside, or one image that you're able to clean up with them using something in your—you know what, maybe it's using some of the technology that you got from Advent. You see—you're able to clean it up and it's that palace, but it's that palace without those sculptures, without the stuff from Apostalos there. It's only—it's like old Quire people before Gnosis arrived, but like, it's there—it's them. It's them. It's like—it's like that part of Quire with memory is remembering the stuff that came from before Gnosis. It's like it's kind of synthesized what could have Quire's—what could Quire have been if there had never been any interlopers and it was just Quire helping people from the beginning instead of only after Gnosis—the Gnosis virus arrived and instead of only when Independence showed up. It's this alternate vision of Quire in there, of like, there it is, there's the palace without anything except for people from Quire, and there's the picture—or the one thing engraved there still is Quire itself, you know, the image of the globe above the doorway. And so, you're able to immediately go like, "I've been there. That's this place that was in the fog to begin with." And so you're able to extrapolate a bit from that. And it just makes you really sad to look at. Like, there's something in the image as you clean it up and identify it, that's just like

something deep in your chest that feels just regret because that place never really existed, right, like the palace existed and there was this kingdom or whatever, but, like, before Gnosis made Quire into a helpful planet there was never a place where people worshipped the planet, do you know what I mean? Like, they never—that symbiosis didn't exist until Gnosis connected them and made it aware of people, and this is almost imagining a world in which it was always like that and so there was never this—it was its own place. It was its own place uncolonized, untouched, and working with the planet from the beginning, kind of alternate reality of Quire.

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: I think that's what you get from that. Okay, Gig, Even?

KEITH: Um, I think that what I want—I need to—I'm worried that we're going to get seen going in here and then that will both be dangerous for us and reflect poorly on Echo's friends.

AUSTIN: Mm. Mm-hm.

KEITH: And so I want to spend my time trying to find the safest way in here, whether that's by surveying where other people's sort of research things are posted up—

AUSTIN: Sure.

KEITH: Or maybe surveillance footage—

AUSTIN: So—but you're doing this through research stuff that's already at the Skein HQ, you're not like going out into the woods at night.

KEITH: Umm—

AUSTIN: I'm trying to figure out what your roll is here, basically.

KEITH: You know, if they have that information—I will go out if I don't think there's enough information in the building.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Like, I'm going to do that.

AUSTIN: Um, I think in the building—

KEITH: I think there's more—I bet they have more information than I will get from a few hours of watching.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. Here's the thing, I've been explaining this as there are these three headquarters but they're still all report up to Ternion, right? Ternion is still the group, it's just there's factions inside of Ternion that haven't melded together yet.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Especially out here where things are such high stakes. So yeah, I think—the thing is you need to—I think maybe it's Study. I think it's—I mean, you can roll. You get to roll what you want to roll, this is a situation where Hack would get you a better result than Study would, 'cause Study's only gonna get you what you already know.

KEITH: Oh, well—

AUSTIN: Or, what's already available.

KEITH: I can hack it for sure.

AUSTIN: [slightly incredulous] Okay.

KEITH: I'm—oh wait, no, sorry, I *cannot* Hack.

AUSTIN: You have zero Hack, in fact. Yeah, totally. So that's the thing, you can spend two points of stress to get one point of Hack but that seems like a big ask when you're at four stress already.

KEITH: Can I [chuckles]—can I Rig up a robot that will hack?

AUSTIN: No.

KEITH: [laughing] No?

AUSTIN: Not without rolling Hack.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: No.

JANINE: I'm sorry, don't you have a flying eyeball?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, but that's only gonna say what's out there right now, right? I think what Gig is saying he wants is, like, patrol routes and, like, where are there already surveillance cameras set up.

KEITH: Yeah, that's what I want.

AUSTIN: You're kind of finding the Metal Gear Solid map so you can cut through it correctly.

KEITH: Yeah. That's exactly—yeah. For sure. So here's—the unfortunate thing is we already got a six from someone with a one in Study.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. So two in a row is gonna be a roughie. You could again push yourself and make that Study a two, you know?

KEITH: That—I have enough stress.

AUSTIN: You do.

KEITH: We should save the stress for when I'm in the mission.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

KEITH: But yeah, I'll do a Study roll.

AUSTIN: Alright.

KEITH: What's my position?

AUSTIN: It's nothing, 'cause it's a fortune roll, not an action roll.

KEITH: So Controlled.

AUSTIN: Yeah, whatever, doesn't matter. Yeah.

KEITH: And then Effect—

JANINE: Any ship bonus things?

AUSTIN: Not for—you're not trailing anybody, you're not—

KEITH: Am I—I'm not trailing the trail?

AUSTIN: —in Downtime activity. And you're not engaging yet so you can't—this isn't the engagement roll so you don't get a bonus from that. And then, let's just make sure you don't have anything special, let's see...nope.

KEITH: No, I don't have anything. I know *my* moves well enough.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Um, this—you don't think this counts as tailing someone?

AUSTIN: Oh, let's make sure—No.

KEITH: I'm sort of digitally tailing.

AUSTIN: No. That's not what tailing somebody is, really.

KEITH: I think that today's private eye force would say that then browsing Twitter for—

AUSTIN: Right, if you were tracking one person by doing it, I'd say yes.

KEITH: Oh, not a whole bunch of people?

AUSTIN: But that's not what you're doing.

KEITH: Alright, that's fair.

AUSTIN: 'Cause you're not even tracking people, you're looking for weaknesses in surveillance, you know?

KEITH: Yeah, that's fair. Okay so...roll the thing! Bonus dice, none. Boom.

AUSTIN: Three, so limited [laughs].

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You've gained limited information. What you know, what you see immediately with limited information—

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Is that there is a network of cameras that are spread—one sec, I have switch back over to this map—that are spread every few hundred feet on top of there being, you believe, some floating drones that are tied to the Ever Forward. You know that the Saints go out on

patrols and that they are able to cover a pretty big distance pretty quickly, but you don't know where they are. But you know those are the things that are out there. It's almost all technological stuff—I guess the Skein also have on their side a number of biological detection mechanisms, right? Where they are literally getting reports through vines and through pads of grass, and they can kind of track that stuff. And that's like—that stuff is generally shared with Ternion in general, right? So like, those are ways in which your heat would go up, even if you didn't immediately piss off the Ever Forward, eventually someone would see that there are footsteps on those places, you know?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So—so. So [laughs]. But that's kind of it. Those are the—that's kind of the—On a Limited, that's what you get. Good hustle though. I think it's a good—you know there will be drones. You know that there are cameras.

KEITH: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: You suspect that there are cameras with various filters for like, oh, they're tracking heat, they're tracking movement, they're tracking whatever. But like, you don't really—on a three you don't get any major weakness unfortunately. I guess the one thing is, if you go in on Skein-side the plus side is, you know, [drops voice] maybe you could get the Skein to temporarily hide your presence going in through their territory. Which they didn't do with Acre Seven.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: Because they didn't know it was gonna happen, you know?

KEITH: Yeah. Hmm. Good point.

AUSTIN: Alright. Ever Forward, or Even. I think you take a smaller version of that big bug-machine [laughs], over this way [Dre laughs]. Or maybe you just ride a big bug, like maybe they have like a big flying bug that you can hop on the back of that flies you over there, that seems more—

DRE: Good times.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Oh wait! What if we skydive in?

DRE: That's—

KEITH: Off a big flying bug!

AUSTIN: You could skydive in, that's totally a thing you could do.

KEITH: You could skydive—that is a really good way to avoid all of the— 'cause there's no one in there, that's the whole point!

JANINE: I mean—

DRE: Last time we did cool skydiving stunts we let space-ghosts into our spaceship, apparently.

[Austin laughs, Sylvia snorts]

JANINE: Space Pope, well—

DRE: Not like the cool space—

JANINE: Space Pope Two, thank you.

AUSTIN: Not, right, uh-huh.

DRE: Not the talk show hosts.

JANINE: Someone with a telescope could see us, like that's—

KEITH: I guess, but they'd have to be watching. All their equipment is set up to monitor the perimeter not the...alt...imiter.

AUSTIN: That might be right, that might be the right word.

SYLVIA: That might be right, actually.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's—nice work. Alright, so what is your play here, Even?

DRE: I just want to figure out what they're trying to achieve by going in here. And I'd rather do that by relying on old networking connections and stuff.

AUSTIN: Right, right.

DRE: But, I mean, you know, I'll do what I gotta do. And I also want to try and be—I don't want this to link back to Forester and Page.

AUSTIN: Okay, so you just want to—But how are you arriving? What is your—How are you announcing yourself? Like in my mind, you're arriving on this big bug from Skein HQ, and they'll know that's where you're coming from, you know?

DRE: Hmm. Okay. I think the cover story that I'm coming up with is that Signet knew of Acre Seven through her time in—

AUSTIN: With the Beloved Dust, yeah.

DRE: With the Beloved. And since we're working directly with her now, we are here because of her vision of Acre Seven being here and being in trouble.

AUSTIN: Okay. Sure. Alright, cool. So I think you land and you're pretty quickly—you land and there are guards who surround you with, you know, batons and stuff at the landing bay for this bug. Based on—they send things between these two groups but they don't know who you are at first sight.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's a bunch of people who are wearing the sort of gear that you're used to seeing from the Ever Forward, lots of pockets, lots of peacoats. Or not peacoats, 'cause it's too hot.

DRE: What sort of ranks having on? Like do they have insignia ranks?

AUSTIN: Their military—Their old military insignia have been kind of corporatized into—it's less military and more like subdivisions. Like they've been given a once-over by a logo—by a design department, and stitched into shirts and jackets instead of pinned in, you know, or sewn in. And so like—What was Even's rank when he was in the group?

DRE: I think by the time he was done he was like a Colonel.

AUSTIN: Okay. So what was that—what did that insignia look like, vaguely?

DRE: [exhales] Ohhh. Now you're gonna make me go down a deep hole of looking up Airforce stuff.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh [laughs]

[Sylvia laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah. But whatever it was, just imagine that it got pushed through San Francisco design, you know, aesthetics—

DRE: Right [laughs].

AUSTIN: And changed into something a little more friendly, a little more twee, you know?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, if it was an eagle before, or like a leaf, it's now a little more rounded, and maybe the eagle has been—you know how Twitter says its icon is not a bird?

SYLVIA: Mm-hm.

DRE: Oh Christ, do they?

AUSTIN: Yeah, they say that's—

JANINE: Sorry, what? No.

AUSTIN: Yeah, Twitter says "Our icon is not a bird."

KEITH: What do they say that it is?

AUSTIN: It's the Twitter logo.

DRE: Oh, fuck off.

KEITH: They say it's not a bird, it's the Twitter logo. Fuck off.

JANINE: So it's one of those things like Hello Kitty isn't a cat.

AUSTIN: Right, it's just like that.

DRE: It's just Hello Kitty.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: Yes, but you're not allowed to talk about the Twitter bird, or anything like that.

DRE: [disgusted noise]

JANINE: I'll fucking talk about the Twitter bird all day [Austin laughs]. They can stop me.

AUSTIN: So yeah, that's the—it's like that, you know? The—so it's probably like, ten people surround you. I don't think you recognize any of them directly. The actual base is made up of those same types of big glass orbs that were part of the Ever Forward to begin with, but they're in kind of a weird, almost like arrow formation, you know what I mean?

DRE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Pointed down towards the Vale. So there's almost like an aggressive or—the Ever Forward, right, so it's always kind of forward-facing—but I imagine the Ever Forward in space being kind of neutral in its posture, if that makes sense.

DRE: Yes.

AUSTIN: In its kind of architectural posture. And now it's very aggressive. It comes to a point. There's a single orb at the front of this collection of orbs, basically. And eventually, as you're—you know, they're like, "Stay where you are, we have someone coming for you."

DRE: Oh, I'm not taking that shit.

AUSTIN: Oh word? What do you do?

DRE: I'd say,

DRE (as Even): I would highly recommend that you lower your weapons, unless it's new policy that you raise your weapons to a superior officer.

AUSTIN (as soldier): Superior officer? Who are you?

DRE: I flash my old Colonel's rank badge [Austin chuckles] that I still have on my flight suit jacket.

AUSTIN: Give me a Command roll. That's what that sounds like.

DRE: Yep.

AUSTIN: If you're taking the lead here, that's interesting. I mean, again, it could be Sway, it could be Consort, but this sounds like Command to me.

DRE: No, this is Command, I think.

AUSTIN: This is Controlled. No one's like physically about to hit you, but Controlled Standard.

DRE: Hmm, how much stress is it to push, two?

AUSTIN: Two, 2d6. Or two to add plus one die, rather.

DRE: Yep, I'm gonna do that.

AUSTIN: I just intuitively said 2d6, because I say that a lot on this show.

DRE: Oh boy, oh boy. Gotta remember how to roll things without accidentally resetting my whole stat sheet [laughs].

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Yep. I think you just click the button. The word, maybe.

DRE: Yeah, it's the word.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: You said Controlled Standard....

AUSTIN: Controlled Standard. Yeah.

DRE: Bonus dice one...wow.

AUSTIN: Oh, you have two—oof, that's two failures.

DRE: Yep.

AUSTIN: Two twos. They close in around you. I should note you all have two gambits again, just want to put that out there.

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: I'm actually gonna move you back over to the Skein sheet so that we can write that down. Um, the—they move in closer around you and one of them is like, "That rank's been retired!" and one of them whips energy cuffs basically and they say,

AUSTIN (as soldier): Turn around and drop any weapons that you have. You're gonna come in peacefully.

DRE: Oh boy. Hmm hm hm.

DRE (as Even): I'll go in just fine. The cuffs can stay out here.

AUSTIN (as soldier): No. You lost that opportunity when you tried to pull rank.

DRE (as Even): It's not pulling rank if I have the rank!

AUSTIN (as soldier): You don't have the rank. If you're not with us—if you weren't with us already then you're clearly some sort of spy or saboteur.

DRE (as Even): [laughs] Okay. Yeah, alright, sure. Yes. The person who was sent by the Ever Forward to go shoot Volition in its goddamn heart is a spy and a saboteur.

AUSTIN (as soldiers whispering in background): Volition?

DRE (as Even): Colonel Even Gardner of the Ever Forward is a spy and a saboteur.

AUSTIN (as soldiers whispering in background): Even Gardner?

AUSTIN (as main soldier): Oh, um, please come up with us, sir.

AUSTIN: And they move behind you like, you should have mentioned that beforehand [laughs]. And begin to lead you—they're still flanking you as if you were a prisoner but yeah, they have not tied your hands up, and they begin to lead you deeper into the facility and in through one little mini orb into one of the bigger orbs. And then they lead you into a room that you know is a fancy interrogation room, like, there's carpet in here, it's made up to not look like an interrogation room, but it's where you—in fact, what it is, it's like, it's the room where psychologists and other mental health professionals who were part of the Ever Forward would kind of debrief and kind of evaluate anyone who'd come back from a strange place in the galaxy to make sure that they were still mentally fit and mentally themselves and had not been taken over by an alien parasite or something, and so they set you up in there. What's that room look like, like what type of stuff is in there other than the carpet that I mentioned?

DRE: Umm—gosh. There's probably like a bunch of furniture in there that looks comfortable but there's only a couple of chairs in there that are actually comfortable.

AUSTIN: Mm.

DRE: So Even definitely takes one of the comfortable chairs.

AUSTIN: [laughs] 'kay.

DRE: But yeah, it's probably very—like it's, it is that kind of weird mix of like a place that has been—if you've ever been inside a house or office that is like for sale or for rent, and it's been like—I forget what the term is called, but when people cart in rental furniture to basically set it up to make it look lived in.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Staging?

DRE: But you can tell—yeah, there we go. So it's definitely—it's staged. So it's staged to look like an office that—like you said, it's not supposed to look like an interrogation room, so it looks like an office that people do business in—

AUSTIN: Gotcha, yeah.

DRE: —but you can tell nobody's in here every day

AUSTIN: [laughs] Gotcha. Alright, so you're sitting there and they make you wait for a little while, there's water for you, and then the door opens and Arin Till comes in. Tell me about Arin—A-R-I-N, right?

DRE: Yes.

AUSTIN: Okay.

DRE: So they were a researcher on the Ever Forward.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

DRE: And they and Gardner I guess probably knew each other for a while but definitely became closer because they were the doctor that basically was like—I guess Even's primary care person—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

DRE: —after he came back and had become hybridized. So, um, I think we kind of talked about it in Even's initial character pitch—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Like, you know, is this a person who is going through it mentally because he has become something different? And I was like, no, that probably did happen but I'm not interested in playing that part of the character.

AUSTIN: Right.

DRE: I think Till probably was the person who Even spent a lot of time with when he was going through the rougher patch of coming to grips with like being a different person.

AUSTIN: What his identity was.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Gotcha. The one fact I know about Arin Till is that they are here—I've written down here on my sheet that they are an armadillo-person.

DRE: Hell yeah.

AUSTIN: So they have, like, long ears and back-plating, and a tuft of hair up top. Are they they/them? You used they with them a second ago, do they use they/them?

DRE: Yeah, I think so, yes, yes.

AUSTIN: Okay. So they are in—I think almost like you, they do have a fondness for this military part of what the Ever Forward was, and they do have the new logo on their rank, I think that they are probably also a Colonel, but they—they have the new logo but it's clearly the old uniform, do you know what I mean? They had it made custom so that they could retain that part of their personal identity. This is your rival, we should say very clearly, right? And they sit down on the other comfortable chair, and it's interesting 'cause you're now both sitting in both comfortable chairs but those chairs don't face each other, right? So, like, they sit down at kind of a weird angle to you and just kind of turn and face you and say:

AUSTIN (as Arin Till): It's been a long time since we've been in this situation. How're you feeling?

DRE (as Even): Uh, good, good.

AUSTIN (as Arin): What're you doing on Skein, Even?

DRE (as Even): Okay, um, well, I guess how much do you know about me since I stopped flying explicitly for the Fleet?

AUSTIN: Snaps their fingers and the wall which right now looks like the sort of white—or like, kind of off-white, eggshell-painting paint of an office, like reveals that it's actually made of glass, of Q-glass, and the texture changes from that just like flat wall that's been painted to a screen. And the—I mean, this is the one time I'm going to let myself have a traditional screen, I feel like the Ever Forward has this—and they just have that screen up and it's a picture of you and the Notion, probably—I think it's probably you on Seneschal from when you first joined—first landed there. They say:

AUSTIN (as Arin): I know you're part of this group called the Notion. I know you've been doing ops around the system. I know that you spent some time with the Free States, as they are, running tests on new hardware. And now you're here, and that's what I don't know. Why are you here?

DRE (as Even): Well, we have an Excerpt with us, Signet, and she had a vision of one of her old buddies from the Beloved, Acre Seven, she was here and it didn't look good for her.

AUSTIN (as Arin): No, she—the woman you're calling Acre Seven—under, we believe, instructions by the Skein entered into the Vale and that is prohibited. Any sort of maneuver like that suggests a sort of selfishness that we at Ternion cannot abide by. You know how that goes. Science is not done by individuals, it is done by teams, and this was a betrayal of that.

DRE (as Even): So you think she's like—I mean, do you think she's compromised? What's the deal?

AUSTIN (as Arin): They won't tell us anything, we've sent questions. We're going in tomorrow to find out for ourselves.

DRE (as Even): What's—I mean, what's in there? Do you guys even know?

AUSTIN (as Arin): [sighs]

AUSTIN: They rub their snout and they say:

AUSTIN (as Arin): It's...complicated. You—you were part of the initial recon op on Quire, right?

DRE (as Even): Was I ever.

AUSTIN (as Arin): Quire itself is sort of a living being and we believe that—being might be the wrong word, it might be a collection of beings, it might be—we know that the thing we call Quire is alive. And here it is very volatile, it is creating structures and places and creatures that are deeply hostile. Now, Ternion believes that if we can pierce this—if we can pierce the Vale, we can obtain something, we can figure out how it's doing this and really help quite a lot of people throughout the system, and I don't just mean through Hegemony space. I know you hold this against me, but I have everybody's good interests in mind here. This is a force that can create a hospital overnight, this is a force that can bring the air to life. What could we do on Moonlock with something like that? What could we do in the Shore? How many more people could have homes and could be provided with food? The Hegemony doesn't have something like Bounty, remember.

We have lots of mouths to feed, and we're trying to do it in a way that doesn't step on any toes. I've wanted to go in now for a while, frankly, but the cost is high and it is risky. I respect my colleagues at the Garden and in the Skein a great deal but they aren't like us. We're explorers, aren't we, Even?

DRE (as Even): Yeah, guess so. What do you know about the Garden?

AUSTIN (as Arin): [sighs] Strange. You know that they were part of the Crown, once.

DRE (as Even): Yeah, I've had—I've never met them but I had a working relationship with another Saint. Didn't go great.

AUSTIN (as Arin): They have their own Saints. Hereditary houses. My understanding is that that's not how it worked with the rest of the Crown, but here it did. They are artists and nobles, are interested in what's happening on Skein in the Wound and the Vale out of pure curiosity, and that I respect. But I am not if they are ready to face whatever's in there. They've always been a bit more comfortable in a laboratory setting, you know?

DRE (as Even): I think you might be surprised.

AUSTIN (as Arin): Hm.

DRE (as Even): And I don't think you should trust them.

AUSTIN (as Arin): Well—

DRE (as Even): I mean, you probably don't trust me either at this point but I think you should trust them less.

AUSTIN (as Arin): Why?

DRE (as Even): Maybe it's not fair, I never met any of their cadre of Saints, but the ones I met—I don't know.

AUSTIN (as Arin): Would you like to? Maybe a conversation over an evening drink would settle your nerves, and you could come in with us tomorrow.

DRE (as Even): No. No, I don't think so. I don't even know if we're going in, or when, or how. I don't know, this stuff about Acre maybe being compromised, maybe working for somebody else, I don't know, maybe that changes stuff for us, it's not our problem anymore.

AUSTIN (as Arin): Wait. If you're going in, you are going in on behalf of the Skein.

DRE (as Even): Hold on. I said maybe. If we go in, we're going in for Acre, but if she's compromised and she's messed up this treaty, I don't know, like I said, maybe it's not our problem anymore.

AUSTIN (as Arin): We'll retrieve Acre and I have no interest in harming her. She seems like quite a resource.

DRE (as Even): I mean, that's gross. She's a person.

AUSTIN (as Arin): And a knowledgeable one. I think of myself as a resource. In times like these, we all must be resourceful. Stay out of this, Even. Or come with us. There is no reason for this to be...a situation. You understand. It's too dangerous.

DRE (as Even): I agree. But I already had weapons pointed at me, and then you put me in this room.

AUSTIN (as Arin): They didn't know who you were. I'm not sure I do. I still don't understand why you didn't join up. Things were good in the Fleet. I have a home in my heart for those days. But now, there are new times.

DRE (as Even): The Fleet—

AUSTIN (as Arin): And Ever Forward has always been about progress, not staying in the past.

DRE (as Even): [sighs deeply] The Fleet sent me down to a planet with a turncoat commander and a mad scientist that made a body for a homicidal machine-god. And then when I cleaned up their mess, they sent me to fly like fucking bubble-gum-and-string spaceships in the ass-end of the Mirage.

AUSTIN (as Arin): All of this—all of these are points in my favor. Ever Forward left all of that behind, for stability, for resources, for the ability to work with others. We've always been multidisciplinary, and we've always liked working with those who have other sets of talents and experiences. Now we have that with the New Earth Hegemony, with the Skein, with the Garden. And say what you will but they were here before us, the Skein, the Garden. They know more. They have an intuitive sense, a cultural history, here. We'd be fools not to work with them.

DRE (as Even): Skein was here first, why are you so frustrated that they might have sent someone in there?

AUSTIN (as Arin): [aggrieved] Because it's against the agreement! The agreement is to protect all of us, and to insure that we actually meld together over the next few years. This seems like they're going back on that.

DRE (as Even): Did you invite them to your nice foray tomorrow?

AUSTIN (as Arin): They've already sent someone in.

DRE (as Even): Acre?

AUSTIN (as Arin): Yes. And when we retrieve her, she can report back.

DRE (as Even): Look, Till, I'm not here to try and stop you or something, I just want to know what's going on.

AUSTIN (as Arin): Well now you know. Why does it feel like I'm the one who's been interrogated?

DRE (as Even): Uh, 'cause I was always way better at this than you.

SYLVIA: Oohhhhhh!

[Janine laughs]

AUSTIN: They grin down their long snout and stand up, then like—

DRE: I mean, that was like a friendly burn.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. They do a head-tilt-shake thing, you know?

AUSTIN (as Arin): You were better at a lot of things. You were better at running headfirst into danger. You were better at insults, certainly. But you never had the remove of a scientist. Never once. Look at you now. I hope not to see you tomorrow.

DRE (as Even): Yeah, like I said, I don't know. But if you do, know it's not personal.

AUSTIN (as Arin): A word of advice, do not raise arms. On me or anything else in there. That is not a place of violence. I know it has gotten you out of trouble before, but here it will only get you deeper in.

DRE (as Even): Well that's appropriately cryptic and creepy.

AUSTIN (as Arin): Say what you will of it but the planet that made it so guns don't work—[sighs] It is not a soldier and it doesn't care for us.

DRE (as Even): Fair enough.

AUSTIN (as Arin): It will get in your head. And I will not be there to get you out.

DRE: I think Even just puts his hand out for a shake.

AUSTIN: They shake your hand. And, you know, it's very professional. And then they just walk out after that. Alright. I think we just cut scene there and come back. So, let's lay it all out. What did we all do? We did—Signet did Remote Vision to meet up with Acre, Acre explained briefly that Quire is dying and also is wounded. The death seems natural, is what Acre said, like this is just old age and Quire is going to die in a few hundred years, but also is hurt and is separated, we got a little bit more of that from Echo's research and it seems like, at the very least, this top layer is Quire without memory, it's the old old old Quire, and then a little bit further in is Quire with memory but kind of stuck in an alternate timeline, kind of a vision of Quire in which it was never colonized. And then Gig learned there's lots of cameras everywhere and there is, you know, it's gonna be hard to sneak in, basically, not impossible, but you didn't learn any specific sneaky paths in. And then just now Even, I guess you didn't really ask anything else there, you didn't do a Gather Information or anything.

DRE: No.

AUSTIN: But just from the conversation you got what the stakes are and where the rest of Ternion is at.

DRE: I think more importantly, I also got like, tone.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. Totally. So, what is the plan [laughs]? We need to know—

[Janine laughs]

DRE: Good question.

AUSTIN: I need to know two things. I need to know what the plan is, what the plan of attack is. Three things. Plan of attack, load, and then the detail for the plan. I guess I can set it even more cleanly, which is like, the next morning, Plane Page and Facet Forester tell you that the other group went in very early. Like, before anybody else even had their coffee they departed, and they left behind one Saint to kind of guard, and that Saint is actually positioned very close by and is running a drone net to keep watch over the area. So that is like your initial thing you need to get past, is one of the four Saints from the Garden. That is Saint Wynter, W-Y-N-T-E-R. And then—so that's the kind of immediate wall to entry is her. Your possible plans of attack are

Assault, point of attack is the thing I need; Deception, I need the method of deception; Infiltration, I need the entry point; Mystic, which is what arcane power are you using, I need to know that; Social, which is what social connection or, you know, social relationship are you leveraging; and Transport, which is what are the locations or the route that you're taking to transport in past the initial wall. So, any thoughts on this? And then also Load, let me know individually what your load—or just mark what your load is in your books. Thoughts?

DRE: I guess the thing that comes to mind is Infiltration? Like getting past this drone that—

JANINE: Yeah...

DRE: I don't know, like hacking or rigging this drone so that we can get by it undetected.

KEITH: Okay. I'm not the hackiest guy, I don't know if anyone here is super hack-y.

JANINE: Does that count as Infiltration or Deception? Again, the idea I have is also hacking-related if it's needed, but. Does that—Would that be Deception method or Infiltration entry point?

AUSTIN: I think hacking would be Deception. "Lure, trick, or manipulate." Whereas Infiltration is "trespass unseen," which suggests that's just find the spot to pass.

JANINE: I think actually it would be Infiltration then, because this is about being unseen. This isn't about luring.

AUSTIN: Not if you're touching them though. If you're manipulating, if you're touching them in any way, that's deception. That's not—

JANINE: I guess.

AUSTIN: Yeah, 'cause trespass unseen is like you're going through natural—you're finding a place that is not seen. You're not—you're creating one, that's what deception is.

JANINE: Yeah.

DRE: Right.

AUSTIN: Or Mystic. Or, you know, there are ways to do these other things that are about—they're all about getting in unseen.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: It's a game about not being seen, but it's about, you know, finding a new way.

KEITH: I think that we should burrow.

[long pause]

JANINE: [sighs] No.

AUSTIN: Turn into a big vole?

JANINE: Just no.

SYLVIA: The last time you tried this—

DRE: Yeah, I died.

KEITH: There's a—listen, there's a whole other—

SYLVIA: Wait, I died!

DRE: Oh, I'm thinking in Hieron.

SYLVIA: I was too!

KEITH: Yeah, that was a whole other world, a whole other universe.

DRE: Oh God.

KEITH: Or at least whole other galaxy.

SYLVIA: [laughing] Keith, have you killed two of us by digging places?

DRE: Uh-huh.

KEITH: I didn't—

AUSTIN: Wait, how did you die, Dre, when was this?

DRE: This was when we were fighting fucking asshole magic man and he—

AUSTIN: Oh, that's true! That's true! [breaks into laughter]

DRE: Keith was too busy digging around to help me fight this dude!

KEITH: Listen, it's not my responsibility! I can't be fighting everybody's battles for them!

SYLVIA: You don't need to leave though!

AUSTIN: Goddamn. Alright, let's—

KEITH: That was a whole other world, it doesn't count. I think that we should burrow.

[Dre cackles]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

SYLVIA: I, I'm anti-burrow—I'm anti-burrowing.

JANINE: I'm also anti-burrowing.

KEITH: Listen—

JANINE: Signet dresses very nicely, I don't think that she's into caves and holes.

KEITH: Wear—wear something—wear your painting shirt! Wear something that you don't mind—

DRE: I'm claustrophobic

JANINE: We've never met but no.

[Austin laughs]

JANINE: [laughs] We don't hang out, but I don't think Signet—Signet's casualwear is like black-tie gala still. So I—mm. I don't know. She's probably dressed in something a little more jungle-appropriate, but.

AUSTIN: Yeah, what—we'll get there.

JANINE: I have ideas. It's fine, we don't need to talk about it today.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: So, do we have—okay I—does anybody here have any Hack skill?

KEITH: No.

SYLVIA: I'm assuming Even does.

DRE: No...

JANINE: I have a skill that lets me do anything as a doctor roll if I wanted.

AUSTIN: That's true. Yes.

JANINE: So [laughs]. And my doctor is two so I'm like okay.

DRE: We do have Rig.

KEITH: Can I build an EMP?

DRE: Oh shit.

AUSTIN: Probably.

SYLVIA: [laughs]

DRE: [excitedly] Let's do this! Let's do this idea.

KEITH: That's—

JANINE: I feel like they're going to notice that and not like it.

KEITH: Hey, the Wound is weird, who knows, you know?

JANINE: I guess.

DRE: Oh, does this count as doing violence in and around the Wound?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

DRE: Okay, let's—

JANINE: Yeah, that seems bad.

KEITH: Oh, does it?

JANINE: That's bad, that's bad, that's bad.

DRE: Yeah [laughs]

KEITH: Is—

AUSTIN: People are referring here to something that they're seeing on the screen which is that each of the locations on Skein has a rule—that's one of the ways that Scum and Villainy works like, "oh the city gives you a bonus one when you're indulging on a vice"—the Wound has a rule that says, "The first time that you perform a violent act near the Wound, you must resolve resist—you must do a Resolve-resist or take three stress."

KEITH: Hold on. Does it—I mean, turning off a bunch of robots—I underst—

AUSTIN: Robots are people, often.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So, yes.

DRE: Yeah.

KEITH: These drones though?

AUSTIN: Unless you're building some sort of special—there are robot-people—

JANINE: This is us, robots feel things [laughs].

AUSTIN: Yeah, this is—there are people in Ternion who are just robots. One of the Saints is just straight-up a robot-person.

SYLVIA: Like even if these are just the drones we're targeting, we can't factor in collateral damage, you know.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I'm not saying you can't do it, but yes, that is a violent act.

SYLVIA: I would rather not if there's a chance it could kill a person.

KEITH: I still think—I think that means that—I'm pretty sure that everyone said yes to digging?

[Austin laughs]

DRE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: What was—Janine, you had a hacking solution? What was your hacking solution?

JANINE: The thing I was thinking I could do—remember in the holiday special when Signet reconfigured Independence to, like—I forget what it was specifically but it was something about the way it was perceiving things to like—I really hate that I forget exactly what I did there, but I want to say it was like basically reconfiguring it in terms of what it saw as a threat or what it was doing, I think, is what I did. What that boils down to is I want to, I think, maybe, do a thing in a similar vein that makes the drones focus on the wrong stuff.

AUSTIN: Or like, see you as not being threats?

JANINE: Like, I want them to get really interested in the leaves or something.

AUSTIN: Ohh, interesting. Okay.

JANINE: Like any time a leaf moves in the wind, they're like "Oh shit!" That kind of thing.

AUSTIN: Right. Okay.

KEITH: Is hacking not a violent act then?

AUSTIN: Not—again, not if you're only hacking these drones. An EMP is a bomb that's gonna hit an AOE; you're not gonna be sure everything that's connected to it. This is why bombs are dangerous and produce collateral damage.

JANINE: Yeah, we're not turning them off, we're just confusing them for a little bit.

AUSTIN: I'll say that the way engagement rolls work, we're not even looking at your stats. We're looking at major advantages and disadvantages; we're starting with 1d and then changing based on questions, if you remember that. Like, "Does this plan's detail expose a vulnerability?" blah, blah, blah.

DRE: True.

AUSTIN: The fact that you only have—you know, you have to use your Doctor roll basically—

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: You have to tell me you can do this 'cause of the doctoring, that's maybe a little more—that'll be something that might come up in the questions, you know?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: None of you are expert hackers, but you do have that two in Doctor, so. Any other ideas here or is that what you're you doing, you're doing Deception?

SYLVIA: I'm completely out of ideas here.

AUSTIN: Okay.

DRE: Yeah. I mean, I think maybe if we sat around and talk about it more, we could figure out a way that we could maybe throw together a Mystic plan. But we're also approaching—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Then we don't get a snatch-and-grab.

DRE: Yeah. We're also approaching "we have to get off the boat."

AUSTIN: Yes, we're getting there. We're getting there. But yeah, do you have "deception, infiltration, or social plans give you a plus one on the engagement roll"?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

DRE: Yeah.

JANINE: So Mystic's probably—

AUSTIN: I'm for it, as long as y'all are.

KEITH: I would like to say—

DRE: I'm good with the deception.

KEITH: Here's the thing. I mean, I'm also good with the deception. I would like to say that I think the beginning of the mission for the Gift-3 thing—sometimes it's okay to be on the boat for a little while [laughs].

AUSTIN: That's true. That's true. Coming off of—yes, the other side definitely should have stayed on the boat a little bit more, there was information that was left behind. This time, I think y'all have done a decent job of gathering info. Could have learned more about the Saints, you could have learned—there's stuff you could have done extra, but that's okay.

KEITH: So we're not—we're not digging, we're not skydiving?

AUSTIN: We're not skydiving. We are—

JANINE: We can kind of just walk in the front door.

AUSTIN: Okay, so let's ask these questions! You start with 1d, for sheer luck. You get another plus one from the snatch-and-grab, which is a move from the *World Without End* that gives you plus one when you're using a deception infiltration to go in and kind of recover somebody, or kidnap them, you're recovering. So you're at two. "Is this operation particularly bold or daring? Take plus one. Is it overly complex or contingent? Take minus one." I don't think it's either, really. Like, skydiving with mechs: bold and daring. I think like, quietly hacking drones: not bold and daring, but not overly complex or contingent, so still at two.

"Does the plan's detail expose a vulnerability of the target or hit them where they're weakest? Take plus one. Is the target strong against this approach, or do they have particular defenses or special preparations? Take minus one." Again, I think this is just average, I don't think it's either their weakest point nor is it like they're particularly—they're not hardened to this sort of hacking.

"Are there any other elements that you want to consider? Maybe a lower-tier target will give you plus one. Maybe a higher-tier target will give you minus one. Maybe there's a situation in the district that makes the operation more or less tricky." There *is* a situation, but I don't think that it—it's one of those things I'm going to keep in my back pocket for if you fail a roll but I don't think it gives you a minus one or a plus one here. Actually, you know what? I think it gives you a plus one, I actually think it does give you a plus now that I've thought through it a little bit. So three dice.

"The engagement roll assumes the PCs are approaching the target as intelligently as they can, given the plan and detail they provided. We don't need to play out the probing maneuvers, special precautions, or other preponderous non-actions, the engagement roll covers it all. The PCs are already in action facing the first obstacle; on top of them is the spaceship, cutting the hole, busting into the bounty's hotel room, et cetera." So, okay. We—who wants to make this roll? It's 3d.

DRE: I mean, Janine's the only one who hasn't rolled yet today.

JANINE: Hnggghhhh.

[Austin laughs, Dre laughs]

AUSTIN: Also a note: you cannot take stress on this roll or anything like that, or spend a gambit, because it's not an action roll or a fortune roll, like, it is just this one type of roll, it's an engagement roll that just stands on its own.

JANINE: 3d6?

AUSTIN: But you're not even rolling it. It's just 3d6, yeah.

JANINE: Okayy.

AUSTIN: That's a five! That's totally good, that's a mixed result. You're in a risky position when the action starts. So, I think the sound that you hear—so you've hacked through the first couple of drones, and you notice—you recognize them immediately, they're actually NEH drones. They're like the ones that are like the little balls that fly around, the ones that Mother's Story had, actually. But they're being controlled by one of the—by a knight from the Garden. So this is clearly technology spreading from culture to culture here, and they're using those same sorts of little rice or grain-named drones, and you're hacking them to, what, think that things that aren't actually targets are targets?

JANINE: Yeah. So the thing I'm thinking of is—I know I'm not technically using "I'm a Doctor not a whatever"—

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah.

JANINE: But I'm definitely thinking of when we were on Privign and we had those little—were they fireflies or little sort of bird things—that we released to sort of amplify the signal. So I think the intention is to amplify signals, but the wrong signals.

AUSTIN: Totally. So I think you're doing this, you're like, oh, you're making the leaves look like they're perpetrators, or maybe you're making foxes, like little animals or something. But then, the thing that—The alarms actually start going off, not near y—from the drones near-ish to you, but not at you, and you realize there is actually another person coming through. There are three figures, you've already—you've made it past this wall of drones and you're on the other side, you're looking down into the Vale, into the fog, you have a means secured, and then the alarms all start going off because behind you, three members of the Advent Group have arrived, taking the same path that you're taking, and you hear the stomping feet of the Saint moving to be between you and them, behind you, and you hear a woman—I'm going to say a girl's voice, she's like nineteen, twenty, she's like, young—who calls out and says, like:

AUSTIN (as Saint Wynter): Alright, who goes there?!

AUSTIN: And you're like, okay, she does not know how to do this necessarily, but she's trying her best [laughs]. And you hear her draw a sword from the side of her mech. She has a stock Saint, for those of you who saw these before, they are like knights that have glass-covered cockpits kind of in their chests, near their heart, and you can see her in there and she has—Or, you know, maybe *you* can't, but Gig, your eye-drone could, the camera can. She's like twenty

years old, she has freckles and red hair, she has [*The Notion* begins playing] an aquiline nose and a pageboy haircut. She is clearly new at this, but is trying very hard.

And then you immediately see, like sprinting through the woods, three people who are bearing—they're wearing a mix of the gear from Advent Discovery—they have the Advent Discovery logo, but on the M65 jackets of the Volunteers of Seiche, and they're all wearing that sort of shiny armor of the Concrete Town Particulars, and one of them has on a gas mask, the other two don't. And they are splitting off into three different directions to try to split the difference, and are—have immediately [chuckles] stirred up some shit. And I think we'll figure out what's up with that shit next week, or next time we play.

[Music continues to end]