

Twilight Mirage 20: Bits Left Behind

Transcribed by Tor @torelk#5673

[MUSIC - “The Twilight Mirage” starts]

AUSTIN (as Primary): Dispatch 172.

Satellite, it's not that I don't think that intervention is ever necessary. It's just...we are allowed one type of intervention. And that type is not a solution: it's proof that everyone in this fleet has failed, and an assurance that no one else will ever do the same.

We're here for one reason, Satellite: to make sure that Independence and whatever the hell the Iconoclasts are working on don't become Annihilation-class objects. We're here to assure that—no matter the cost to them, or to us.

It is romantic, in every sense possible, to think of us as just a couple of do-gooders on the edge of the Principality's border. A couple of gals on the frontier, keeping the world right-side up. But we are more than that, and less, too.

I love you, Satellite. I love us. But we are a loaded gun. And the second that you start thinking that a loaded gun is romantic, is the second you stop being like us, and start being like them.

[MUSIC continues]

AUSTIN: She says...what does she say to you. [JACK laughs] Ah...

[MUSIC ends]

AUSTIN (as Mother's Story): Can't wait to see you again, dear.

AUSTIN: And pulls the trigger. Take 4 damage.

JACK: Alright, I'm out. That's...

JANINE: Wow.

JACK: [laughing] That was a quick one.

AUSTIN [crosstalk]: Yeah, that was a shut-out. It doesn't do good to, uh—what's your armour?

JACK: [crosstalk] Oh, I've—

AUSTIN: It's -1 armour, it's -1 against armour, these rounds, but my guess is you don't wear armour.

JACK: So, did we—have we talked—do I have any armour in my things? I have...

AUSTIN: [amused] I don't think you've ever had any armour.

JACK: I think I do... [laughs]

AUSTIN: Let me check your sheet. Let's see The Dying's character sheet.

JACK: [chuckling in disbelief] Oh my god...

AUSTIN: I've written your character sheet down a lot, because of the thing where I write down people's character sheets and send them to Patreon backers—[as an aside] You can back us at [friendsatthetable.cash](https://www.patreon.com/friendsatthetable)—

JACK: You get to see this great map if you back at a certain level.

[ALI chuckles]

AUSTIN: Um...no. One small impractical weapon. That's—you don't get any armour with this character, unless you go out of your way.

ALI: [crosstalk] Boy howdy...

AUSTIN: Also, 4 is a lot, and you're already at—you only have—you would need 2 armour to live through this, so... [snorts] So! So. You increase symptoms whenever the gift manifests.

JACK: Are we doing this now? [laughing sigh]

AUSTIN: We can do this in a moment. Let's finish wrapping up this scene, because I do want to tell you what happens, because it's important.

JACK: Yeah! Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: So, everyone outside: you hear a gunshot, and then Mother's Story steps outside, cocking her shotgun, and the the two drones, the flying sphere drones, lower themselves to her left and right. And she says:

AUSTIN (as Mother's Story): I'll say it once: flee. I'll kill you like I killed your friend.

AUSTIN: And the fire, like, lifts behind her.

[ALI, JACK, JANINE sigh]

JANINE: Um...

JACK: [in a small voice] I'm sorry!

ALI: [laughing] It's okay!

JANINE: I was going to say, I think Signet's reaction is probably, like, action.

AUSTIN: So what do you do?

[pause]

JANINE: I still have a component on Morning's Observation.

AUSTIN: You do.

JANINE: And we've established this true name business is not, it's like—it's weird magic.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JANINE: Um...I want to use that component, to...do I—I don't—oh, I do roll for this. Okay. Well, this might go real bad, but let's give it a shot, I guess?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. What are you trying to do?

JANINE: I'm trying to reach out to Morning's Observation because I want...I want something on her. I just want a thing that hurts her. Like a—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Like a fact, like a—

JANINE: I just, I want a thing, I want a thing that I shouldn't know, or that is some kind of soreness for her...

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah, yeah. I got you.

JANINE: [crosstalk] I just want something there.

AUSTIN: I got one. We're good. Go ahead and give me the roll. How do you feel—oh, still sad.

JANINE: Yeah, this is still autopilot Signet. This is still just like, 'this is what I do.' I wonder if that's weird for Morning's Observation, because she's usually pretty warm to him, I think—like, warm at arm's length, but—

AUSTIN: Yeah, she's been warm. Go ahead and give me the sad. [JANINE rolls] Alright, so you got an 8.

JANINE: Hooray. Uh...

AUSTIN: That's not bad.

JANINE: [reading] "On a 10+ hold three, on a 7-9 hold one. If they're willing, you may spend your hold one without issue; if they're unwilling, you must have them in your sights in order to inflict harm."

AUSTIN: They're—yeah, you're good. You're good. So yeah, consume that, losing your power over him. [JANINE: Mhm.] This is like—is this like, instant psychic communication, basically?

JANINE: That's how I've imagined it, yeah.

AUSTIN: You just get—you get almost visual images of this, which is: you get them gearing up for sleep detachment and being sent here. And again and again and again, it's moments of her being told to report to Robin's Song, who is the person who's in charge of this. And it's her being frustrated that she's just another—she's not in charge of this. And every time it happens you see her face scrunch, because like,

AUSTIN (as Mother's Story, thinking): I'm the *best one*.

AUSTIN: And she thinks she deserves to be in charge of this, but is not. So that's the fact that you are given.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: It's that... 'you're not that good.' You know? She's *not* in charge. Robin's Song is in charge. Also, is this—hmm, have I—there's a fact about Robin's Song that I can't quite remember if I've told you.

JANINE: That he's Morning's brother?

JACK: [remembering] Mmm!

AUSTIN: Yeah. Okay, yeah, [JANINE: Yeah.] so he's like Morning's Observation, minus the face tattoos. He's like Morning's Observation got a job at Chase Bank.

JANINE: I think the thing that Signet immediately says is—there's like a moment of delay, where this is happening, and she is looking Mother's Story in the eye, and then she says:

JANINE (as Signet): Do you really think that taking over a dead facility full of monks is going to put you on his level?

AUSTIN: Um...I'm going to let this just be that she is—or, you know what, give me a—here's what I think this is. That is the distraction one, but you definitely have advantage on it. This is divert, because you are trying to make her confused or flustered [JANINE: Okay.] or create opportunity for you or someone else, so I think this is divert. But roll 3d6, plus 1, because you're still sad.

JANINE: Ha. Is this my last sad?

AUSTIN: This...no, because don't you still have...or, wait! You just marked one down, right?

JANINE: Yup.

AUSTIN: So, yeah, this is your last sad. So you say it with a little bit of an edge?

[JANINE rolls]

JANINE: Oh, fuck off.

AUSTIN: Oh my god!

[pause]

JACK: Oh my god. [laughs] This is it, this is the end—let's wrap up Friends at the Table—

[all crosstalk] 8:16

JANINE: Jesus Christ.

AUSTIN: Janine rolled—so, she had advantage, which means she could take the highest two. What'd you roll?!

JANINE: I rolled three ones!

AUSTIN: [laughs] Plus one, is two!

JANINE: This is trash!

[AUSTIN laughs]

ALI: I think this is the worst game that we've played, like—

AUSTIN: Mark XP...

JANINE: Well, I leveled, but I might die, so that's great.

AUSTIN: Two things happen in a row. Classic Austin Walker phrasing. [JANINE: Hmm.] Two things happen all at once. She shoots you, with a—the shot that she shoots you with is like, two flying—it's like a bolo shot, like two magnetic orbs, and they wrap around you and slam you against the ground, locking you in place. So that's the first thing that happens. She has locked you down. And she re-pumps the shotgun.

AUSTIN (cont'd): The second thing that happens is that the station shakes. And from the windows on this floor, they go outside of like this asteroid base station, is a sudden blinding prismatic bright and colorful light. Because the Iconoclasts have arrived.

JANINE: Oh, motherfuck.

AUSTIN: And it is that bright, shining thing that saw you at the tomb, except now it is not just this bright light, it is a rainbow. And it is massive, it is about half the size of this entire asteroid-based station, it's larger than the ship you were in, it's huge. And it doesn't have a face, but it's kind of like—it doesn't have a face, it's a humanoid shape in that it has four limbs. But its limbs are not distinguishable as hands and legs, or even front paws and back paws, and it has like a shape where a head might be, but it has it between both sets of—both pairs of limbs. So it has like a little head box, but then also a little head box between what might be its legs, and it doesn't stand, like—it's able to move between the two with ease. And it claws its way along the entirety of this ship. And the part where its head would be, where it's now just like a bright, like—also, when I say it looks like a rainbow, I don't mean the colours are split evenly, it looks like a rainbow in oil, you know that sort of rainbow? Where it's just prismatic. But it is bright and blinding. And it begins shaking the entirety of the station, and you can feel the station dip lower in orbit.

AUSTIN (continued): And then a second later you see the Melodica, which is Massalia's mech, fly past. And they fly past, and the thing just kind of—it turns to look at them, but with its stomach, not with one of its heads. And then turns back, and then like, pounds into the glass with its big bright weird stomach. And it's trying to break in. And you can hear the air begin to leak through the breaking glass of the life deck.

AUSTIN (continued): And we're going to end that part here. We are going to cut somewhere else, before we wrap. [many sighs] We need to, Fourteen.

[JACK chuckles]

AUSTIN: So. [chuckles, reading] "You're holding it together for now, but it doesn't look good. Your timeline can be decided in multiple ways, but your symptoms begin at a +1. As your timeline proceeds, the bonus increases when it would increase, and when it increases to +5, you succumb to your disease and perish." So, for you, it increases at a set timeline, which is whenever your gift manifests, which is whenever you die, and your symptoms increase by one. Whenever you die your symptoms increase by one as you move to a different body.

AUSTIN (continued): So. The way this works is, the rule is written that your organic tissue regrows at a rapid rate. This is how we codify your being able to be made of data and transported elsewhere. [reading from playbook again] "You cannot succumb to death until the disease takes you. When you would die, roll symptoms. On a 10+, it would be hours or days until you awake, alone and confused in a foreign place. On a 7-9, you'll be out of it for a few hours and none the worse for wear. On a 6 or under, you awake from the comfort of a friend." So we want a low roll here. We do not want a high roll.

AUSTIN (continued): There is a problem here, which is, data is really hard to transmit, right now.

[ALI gasps]

JACK: Oh, fuck.

AUSTIN: So, take advantage on this roll, you're going to roll 3d6 and take the highest two, because you want a low roll here.

JACK: I'm rolling 3d6—uh, I'm rolling 2d6 because my symptoms are currently 2?

AUSTIN: You're rolling 3d6 plus...

JACK: Two.

AUSTIN: Are you rolling symptoms? Yes, 3d6+2, correct.

JACK: 3d6+2.

AUSTIN: [agreeing] Uh-huh.

JACK: It would be 2d6 but it's an extra one because...

AUSTIN: Because of the scanner, or the signal stuff. You don't have a clear path. You normally have a clear path.

JACK: [laughing] $3d6+2$.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: Alright. Well...

[JACK rolls]

JACK: Fuck.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Oh buddy. That's...

JANINE: [crosstalk] Wow.

AUSTIN: That's a 12. Um. [reading] "It could be hours or days and you awaken, alone and confused."

JACK: [crosstalk] I've got my head in my hands.

AUSTIN: So. Also, [reading] "After a gift from your disease manifests itself, roll symptoms," so give me another symptoms roll.

JACK: Okay.

AUSTIN: This is triggered, for when this happens.

JACK: So that'll be $3d6+2$ again?

AUSTIN: No, this is now just $2d6$, cause this is [crosstalk] just the symptoms happening—

JACK: [crosstalk] Oh right, because the symptoms are not, yeah—

AUSTIN: Oh, actually, sorry, this is now $2d6$ plus thr—what are your symptoms up to? Your symptoms are up to three now.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So now it's $2d6+3$. [chuckles]

[JACK sighs]

AUSTIN: [cheerfully] One of the only ways to get a high score is to have symptoms slowly killing you!

[JACK rolls]

AUSTIN: Alright, that's an 8, so, on a 10+ the MC chooses one and your symptoms manifest themselves as well. In this case, you only got an 8 so, uh...oh, so the MC chooses two from the 7-9 list below, that would be on a 10, but on a 7-9 I only get to choose one. So...sorry, this is written very weirdly. [reads] "On a 10+ the MC chooses one, and your symptoms manifest themselves as well." Okay, so you would take pain, but in this case you don't, because you only rolled a 7-9. So, [reads] "everything fades to black as you pass out, you lose control over blank, one of your symptoms manifests itself in a big way, or you lose track of blank." So your symptoms right now are that it is replacing and eradicating your memories, right?

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And then, because your symptoms went up, you also took another one, right? Which was...what was that last one? There's...

JACK: Oh, the other one is, you are being replaced by or incorporated into the Veil. [AUSTIN: Right.] Which is that Worthy of Grace was an actual thing.

[[00:15:00]]

AUSTIN: So tell me about the new person you are. Because I know what this thing is, and tell me a little bit more about them.

JACK: [sighs] Okay. Should I worry about the context for how they fit into this? Because I can't see them fitting in super cleanly right now.

AUSTIN: You mean, into what? Into, back into the game?

JACK: Into—yeah, into the situation.

AUSTIN: You tell me what they look like, you tell me what their background is, and I'll tell you some details that make 'em a little spicier.

JACK: [laughs] Okay, sounds good. It's collaboration. So, the new body is, uh, called...The Body Politic?

AUSTIN: Good name.

JACK: And they are a lawyer. [chuckles] They are not a singer or a gunslinger, they wear a suit to work, they have a mop of messy blond hair, which they sweep up into a high ponytail when they're working. If anybody's seen the film *The Big Sick*, I picture them as Holly Hunter's character in that, just very...sharp features, lots of thin blond hair, short, compact, full of energy. They are a, like a...[pauses] What's it called when...they're like Legal Aid in the UK, they're like lawyers that work for people who might not otherwise be able to afford—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Oh, like a—

JANINE: [crosstalk] Public defender?

AUSTIN: Public defender, yeah.

JACK: Like a public defender, yeah.

AUSTIN: Gotcha. Okay, there are two other things. [JACK chuckles] The good news is, you didn't have to travel too far when you died. You couldn't, in fact. I think maybe—have we talked before about whether you're conscious during this process?

JACK: I am not. I—

AUSTIN: You are, this time.

JACK: N—oh. [ALI laughs] Okay.

AUSTIN: This time you are. It's slow. You see it. And you can feel yourself withering away as data. You can feel it. I don't—what's it look like, to be data in the Twilight Mirage?

JACK: [pauses] Do you—how often do you experience waking dreams?

AUSTIN: Every now and then.

JACK: So, sometimes—I have them fairly regularly, and sometimes they're worse than others. But the ones that are usually most memorable are ones where I begin to perform a task while sleeping. Sometimes I'll try and get dressed, or sometimes I'll walk into another room, and even as I'm doing these things I have this very hazy recognition that I'm not conscious, that this isn't correct, that this isn't how I am. And I think the experience of the transfer feels like that sensation; it feels like that sensation that something is happening that is normal and happens a lot, but is through this weird hazy lens. And that sensation of distance is the effect of the memories disappearing.

AUSTIN: Gotcha. And that distance is now stretched further, and you can feel the memories moving away, disappearing. It's like getting a haircut. It's light, like each snip is hard to notice,

but the overall effect doesn't—you feel lighter, you feel lighter than you did once. Maybe the first time this happened you recognized your weight and now you do not. And you know that if you do not move quickly into a new body you will be gone; that what is happening is that each time you leave, each time you move, in the travel, bits of you get left behind. [JACK breathes in]

AUSTIN (continued): And so you go to the closest place you can. You go to...the Sky Reflected in Mirrors. [JACK laughs] Because there is a body there for you.

[MUSIC - "Data Will Arrive" begins]

AUSTIN: ...[sighs] There's sort of a body there for you.

[pause]

AUSTIN: You fall out of a bag onto the floor. Covered in goo. There is a drawer there, next to you. There are other bags there, also. And there are lights, big lights, and in the drawer there are like personal effects, there's like, a pair of glasses there for you. You haven't—you haven't been processed yet. I don't know that you know that right away. Ah—you do. There's a sign that says "Processing."

AUSTIN (continued): And I think we get a scene of you walking through this facility where new bodies are made. And they aren't made from nothing. They're hanging there—and to be clear, these aren't bodies in the depths of the Sky Reflected in Mirrors that were always there. You see them being assembled. You see bodies in the dark, and you see them being dressed, and being prepared to be delivered to places where data will arrive.

AUSTIN (continued): And you notice something strange about them, and then about you, which is: they have these vestigial limbs. Not even limbs, little marks on their backs, where maybe there were once four arms and now there are only two. And as part of the process those are carved away, as are the horns on their heads. People who are listening to this podcast will recognise these as people from Quire. The bodies of the people who once lived on Quire. Not *the* bodies, bodies in the same shape, not—these aren't people stolen from Quire, this is data, this is ... this is people being pulled out of storage. Being rebuilt. For Castlerose's needs.

AUSTIN (continued): And we just see you in this huge warehouse of people, being ready-made to be deposited into a position, somewhere.

[pause]

[MUSIC ends]

JACK: Oh my God. So...the symptom is...I'm unfinished?

AUSTIN: I mean, that's part of it. I think the symptom I'm looking at is, [reading] "You grow additional and/or new limbs or organs, perhaps losing old ones." Because you are unfinished, because you are in your raw Quire body. And I wanna be clear, in some way, like, the person you are, The Body Politic, the lawyer—you *were* a lawyer. This person was a lawyer, once, at the Golden Age of Quire, when, through collaboration with whatever force arrived there in the Glassed Age, it was perfect, it was as much a utopia as the Divine Fleet in its height. And this person practiced law there, and their job was to protect people who slipped through the cracks. You were the Quire equivalent of someone who would work in a place like Contrition's Figure, or a mercy officer. You helped people, you really did.

AUSTIN [continued]: And you have, not those memories, but those abilities, and a strange distant memory of that, because that's also part of you being unfinished, is you are Fourteen Fifteen, but also, this is not just The Body Politic's body; there is still some of them in here, too. And if people wanna know where your bodies came from, it's this, it's this facility, which, I think you can piece together, was a facility meant to, one day, let the people of Quire come back to life. Not the same people, right—this is a situation where, like, their consciousnesses weren't saved, but the same people, a copy of those people, have been saved—some desperate act to survive, some desperate way of, you know, keeping the culture alive forever. You don't know why they're here, in this city. Or maybe you do, I don't know.

AUSTIN (as Miss's Castlerose): Fourteen?

JACK (as Fourteen Fifteen): Yes?

AUSTIN (as Miss's Castlerose): You should report to my office. I'll light the way.

AUSTIN: And then like [series of soft banging noises] the lights come on, and a pathway from this warehouse factory of bodies leads you to a staircase.

JACK: I'm going to head in that direction.

AUSTIN: Um..[laughs softly] Fourteen Fifteen? What's something that you don't remember anymore?

JACK: Um, I've been thinking of this, and I don't know if this is something that would be good at this stage, but given recent conversations Fourteen has had: a lot of people have asked them why they joined, [AUSTIN: Yeah.] why they joined the agency. And what if they lose that?

AUSTIN: I like that. What's—do you know what that is?

JACK: I wonder whether or not it—not exactly. My assumption is that like, the obvious answer is, well, I wanted money.

AUSTIN: Right, right.

JACK: Which is an interesting answer for an assassin that is now working with a government agency to give.

AUSTIN: Especially one from a society that takes care of its people. [JACK: Mhm, yeah.] Which means, like, it isn't—you didn't want that money because, or maybe you did for some other reason, right, but the notion shouldn't just be—

JACK: Like, "oh, I wanted cash."

AUSTIN: Right, or even, "oh, I had someone who was sick who I needed to get medical care for."

JACK: [crosstalk] Mhm, because in theory—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Because medical care is, again, provided for them, right.

JACK:—the Mirage should sort that out.

AUSTIN: Unless it's something that isn't available in the Divine Fleet, right? Like maybe it's something that you needed outside. I'm kind of cool with the notion of us not knowing.

JACK: Oh, right, yeah—I think this is one of those things where like—and this is one of those sort of general storytelling principles that I try and stick to—it should be something that we know at some point, I don't think we necessarily need to know about it now. I do like the idea that essentially, you know, 15 minutes ago Fourteen Fifteen knew, [AUSTIN: Right!] and could have given Sho some sort of explanation, whether or not it would have ever been a satisfactory one—

AUSTIN: Chose not to do that, and instead—

JACK: Chose not to, and kept going, and, perhaps as a result of that, I don't know how the virus works, that's what went.

AUSTIN: And then the thing that's great about that is, here's a memory you have: deciding not to tell Sho why you do what you do.

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: But you don't—[JACK: Oh!] you know you had it.

JACK: And this is like the most frustrating thing about memory, right? The most frustrating feeling about forgetting something is being able to remember things close to it. It's being able to

remember, [snaps] “Oh, I knew I was trying to do something,” or, “I knew I was trying to be here, for some reason,” [AUSTIN: Right.] and that sensation of—and I think it’s one that we’ve all experienced to a greater or lesser extent—that sensation of walking backward through your own memories to try to find the point at which you can get the clue.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: But the clue is gone. And perhaps most troublingly of all, the clue has gone at a moment that is kind of deeply unusual for Fourteen Fifteen.

AUSTIN: Right. And I think we just get that moment of them, who, again, they’re in this new body, The Body Politic, [laughing] this Quire lawyer, which to me, just like in my mind, you definitely have glasses on, you definitely have on like, a suit of some kind, I’m guessing?

JACK: Yeah, it’s like, I think it’s like a—like a business suit.

AUSTIN: Yeah. And then you have—I think we come back to you there, just in a chair in Castlerose’s office. And it’s like, mid-sentence, she’s just like—

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): I respect you a great deal. You know that, Fourteen.

AUSTIN: And, is already in the middle of basically scolding you. [JACK chuckles] What’s her office look like?

JACK: Um, her office is, it’s two rooms. There’s the front room which, when it was designed, was like an office, like a receiving office. There’s a table with Castlerose’s desk chair on, which is sort of like the big executive desk chair you bought the other day.

AUSTIN: Yes. Uh-huh, it’s a good chair.

JACK: It’s just one that you could probably pick up, it’s not super cheap, it’s not super expensive, it’s like a desk chair. And she’s sitting in there, and then on the other side of the desk there are four chairs. [AUSTIN chuckles] In case she needs a trio of assassins, *and* another assassin.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: But she’s never expecting to meet more than four people, and if she is, they can stand. [AUSTIN still chuckling] There’s a desk, there’s, like, desk flowers, and some desk toys. There’s like, four different sorts of phones. There is a laptop computer instead of a regular computer ‘cause she has to move around a lot.

AUSTIN: [agreeing] Mmm.

JACK: And then directly behind her there is a set of French doors that open into a room that is just, screens. Just, like, 20 or 30 computer screens. They have whatever the opposite of Flux is on them; you know how Flux makes things less blue?

AUSTIN: [amused] Uh-huh.

JACK: These make things more blue and keep you awake for longer.

AUSTIN: Gotcha.

JACK: And there's like, crappy chairs back there. And I think that when the room was designed these doors were supposed to be closed, but over the years the back room has begun to migrate into the front room—

AUSTIN: So are there like, wires and stuff coming out along the bottom of the floor?

JACK: Yeah, and she's like, put a screen up in her receiving office where she shouldn't have put a screen up, and there's like—

AUSTIN: [laughing] It's a screen of a ca—it's a camera view of of the other room [JACK: Yeah! Yeah yeah yeah] So it's like microversions of the other screens. But it is just a camera, it's not like, she doesn't have software that does this. She just has a camera facing 27 screens.

JACK: Yeah. That she can look at.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And I think she's smoking.

AUSTIN: And you can see the treads—or, not the treads, but like, the marks on the ground from where she's rolled her chair back from behind her desk through the French doors and into the other room so many times.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And, yeah, she's smoking. And she says,

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): I respect you a great deal, Fourteen. You know that. But if you fail to close this contract, it will be the third time you've dropped the ball.

JACK (as Fourteen Fifteen): Well, look, I'm—I'm sorry, Castlerose. Things have just been a lot, lately, and—you know—what with—

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): It's fine—it's, it's,—[sighs]. Hammerstein cleaned up after you the first time. We were lucky; he dragged in one of your targets while he was on another case, just for interrogation, and our analysts picked it up.

[[00:30:10]]

JACK (as Fourteen Fifteen): He's great.

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): ...yes. He is. And he is only *one* contract in the air. The second time, that required...intervention, on my part. A favour. And favours are currency. Aren't they, Fourteen.

JACK (as Fourteen Fifteen): [hesitantly] Well...yeah.

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): [sighs tiredly] When are you going to kill her?

JACK (as Fourteen Fifteen): [flustered] Well, you know, I'm just taking my time, and I'm just—uh, you know, like, I'm just finding—it's one of these things, [chuckles nervously] where, you know—what's it you always used to say to me? "You can do it quickly, or you can do it well"? And I'm trying to do it well. I mean, I hope I'm trying to do it well.

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): There's another thing that I say. Which is, "trust the contract to be true." I'm—

JACK (as Fourteen Fifteen): You say that?

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): [huffs quietly] Of course. I'm not not much of a patriot, but where I'm from, they put a great deal of faith in the contract. Here in the Fleet, that's not much of a thing; you have obligation, detached from paperwork. I respect it. But contracts have an appeal, a unique appeal, Fourteen. They make clear what happens if you break your end of the bargain. They align expectations.

JACK (as Fourteen Fifteen): Okay. I—I respect that. I respect the contract. I do. I respect the contract. Um. [pauses] Could I have just one more copy, please?

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): [sighs] For your records?

JACK (as Fourteen Fifteen): For my rec—for my records, you know, [laughs nervously] triplicate, you know. Or maybe...quad...quaduplicate...

AUSTIN: She like, brings up, she touches a button on a keyboard, and presses a few more, and then stops, and looks at you. And says,

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): Tell me the truth: do you remember?

JACK (as Fourteen Fifteen): ...remember what?

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): This contract. I need to know.

JACK (as Fourteen Fifteen): [slight pause] No, I don't.

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): [sighs] You need to come to me, with things like this.

AUSTIN: And she presses enter, and a file begins to print from, like, a—I think it's one of those ducks, it's like one of those, uh—

JACK: [laughing] Sorry?!

AUSTIN: You know one of those dipping ducks, one of the birds, the water birds?

JACK: Oh! Oh, the drinking birds! [laughs] The “dipping ducks”...

AUSTIN: Yeah, and each time it dips, it just like, a little bit more of the paper is basically produced from it, [JACK: Oh, wow] and line by line it produces itself out.

JACK: This is both a desk toy, and, really secure.

AUSTIN: Yes! No one would know where it would come from. And then she slides it over to you, and it is, of course, your good friend, Tender Sky.

[JACK chuckles]

AUSTIN: It's probably buried in there, right? Like, the contract is probably this, like—

JACK: Yeah, it's a contract—I've been picturing it as a contract in the business sense, [AUSTIN: Oh yeah] more than it is a contract in the assassination sense.

AUSTIN: Yes, 100%, that's what I mean. Yeah, absolutely. It's still a one-page document, but it's filled with legalese, and subheaders, and you know, “Section C, part B” that sort of stuff. But there it is! Like, you *know*—and I think it's probably highlighted, right? I think she probably takes a highlighter and highlights Tender's name, and then places the highlighter down there next to a pen, as if to expect you to sign it. In fact, it probably says, like, “Copy 3”, you know?

JACK: Mhm. Oh, no, it says “Copy 5.”

AUSTIN: [laughs] Okay. Yeah. Fair.

JACK (as Fourteen Fifteen): [in disbelief] Ah, I can't do this. I can't do this one. I didn't sign this one.

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): You know that if I hit a different button, it'll produce the other four copies that you signed.

JACK (as Fourteen Fifteen): [chuckling] Well, I mean, those things aren't very secure. Um, I can't do this one, Castlerose. I didn't sign this one. I can't—this one isn't for me.

AUSTIN: She leans forward.

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): You have a difficult situation.

[JACK (as Fourteen Fifteen) laughs derisively]

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): I understand that, Fourteen. Do this one for me, and next time we'll go easy.

AUSTIN: And she is doing a move, which is called Refute.

JACK: Oh, wow. Okay. [laughing]

AUSTIN: [reading from playbook] "When someone has Faith on you, and they use it in order to ask you to do something they want but you can't or won't do, roll and add the number of Faith that they have on you." In this case, it's one.

JACK: She has one, yeah.

AUSTIN: So, 2d6+1. [continues reading] "You'll have to make a promise in order to avoid your obligations. Make it clear to them what your promise is." [JACK snickers] "If they have three Faith, you cannot refuse them, but you can appeal." So, 2d6+1.

JACK: And I'm rolling, yeah?

AUSTIN: Yeah. And you should still mark a feeling for this. How does this make you feel?

JACK: Oh. Sure.

AUSTIN:—this request. And this, like, very clear, [imitating Castlerose's thoughts] 'You know I take good care of you, because the reason I have faith on you is because you call me worried about dying.' [chuckles]

JACK: Yeah. This is definitely...[laughing]...I realized I marked Sad instead of Scared.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Oh, okay!

JACK: Which is good because I'm about to roll Scared. So, what should I do? Just press this button and add one to the result?

AUSTIN: No no no, it's just that you mark that you were scared in this moment. [JACK: Oh, yeah, sure.] You still just roll 2d6+1.

JACK: Gettin' pretty scared! Seems narratively appropriate!

AUSTIN: [chuckles] Uh-huh!

JACK: [along with typing noises] Roll - two - d - six - plus - one.

[JACK rolls]

AUSTIN: Hey!

JACK: Oh, my god.

AUSTIN: That's a 6, no, I think that that's good—

JACK: Oh, that's a good one in this context?

AUSTIN: Yeah, because if it's high—so what it would be is like, on a 7-9 they get an additional one Faith from you and it's up to you whether or not you keep your promise later, and on a 10+ it's, they get an additional two Faith from you and need a concrete assurance from you right now to back up your promise. But—

JACK: [contemplating] Hmm.

AUSTIN:—she failed. And I don't know what that means. I think that means that, like, you can make a move as hard—

JACK: [crosstalk] Did she expend her Faith?

AUSTIN:—as hard as you want. Yeah yeah yeah! It's gone. Or, wait, maybe it isn't. Maybe it just stays. Let's see. [pauses] No. That is still there.

JACK: Okay. This should be Miss's Castlerose on me, it actually says one on Miss's Castlerose, but it should be Miss's Castlerose on me.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think it's the other way around.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And the thing is, you doing this would pay that back, maybe. You know? [JACK: Mmm!] But it doesn't just—it isn't, in fact, a currency. She's wrong, in this sense.

[JACK chuckles in agreement]

AUSTIN: Favours in the Fleet are not simple currency. They are a track of how well you are kind of, mingled, or intermingled with somebody, how much you're entangled with someone.

JACK: Yeah. Hmm! Interesting!

AUSTIN: So, I think this means you get to make a move as hard as you want? [JACK and AUSTIN laugh] I think that's the rules?

JACK: It doesn't usually happen this way around, does it?

AUSTIN: No, it doesn't!

JACK: Good news: I'm going to squander it!

AUSTIN: [laughing] Okay!

JACK: Um...hmm. Hmm. Oh! [pause] What does "as hard as I want" mean?

AUSTIN: I—I don't know, like—what did you have in mind? Like, I don't know—is this you...she fails to do this and you convince her to take it away? Is this, you can lie to her successfully?

[JACK: Ohh...] Is this—

JACK: Let's play the conversation and see what the move does.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK (as Fourteen Fifteen): Ah—who wrote this?

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): The contract?

JACK (as Fourteen Fifteen): Yeah.

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): You know that that's classified information, Fourteen.

JACK (as Fourteen Fifteen): Well, um, you know, I'm just saying that it might be easier to, uh, it might be easier to close it if I knew who was paying my bills.

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): [sighs] Fine.

AUSTIN: And she takes it back, and lines it up under the bird, and hits a different button, and the bird goes down for one more little thing, and—like, one more dip—and then a new little part of the paper gets extended on, to turn it from an 8x11 to an A2 [JACK laughs] and there's an additional part that had been papercut off. And again, it takes you forever to find it, but of course, it is Open Metal.

[JACK breathes in and out again deeply]

AUSTIN: And I think maybe this is also, you see the due date on this contract is today. Like, this is why she's been needling you. And for every day after there's an increased fee [laughs] that Castlerose—

JACK: [crosstalk, laughing] Has to start paying?

AUSTIN: Or not a fee, but the other way around, right, like she gets less money every day that it goes over. [JACK: Hmm!] Or every hour that it goes over, probably not every day, please.

JACK: Oh, god. But—and like, I really like this, cause it's like—it never gets to a point where she has to pay [AUSTIN: No.] the person, but it does get to a point where the contract is worth nothing—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Completely free, it has to be done.

JACK: [crosstalk] It just has to be done.

AUSTIN: Or, you know what, it goes the other way: you get an extra one.

JACK: Oh, you get a free one.

AUSTIN: You get free killings. [ALI laughs] Or whatever, captures. [JACK: Oh, my god.] It goes down to zero, and then it starts going the other way, which is, Oh, and now you get another one, you get a half of one. We'll bring in somebody.

JANINE: This is the worst pizza place.

AUSTIN: It's terrible.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Um...

JACK: Oh, man.

AUSTIN: So maybe we just—so then yeah, you see that, you look down, and then, what does your face look like when you see that name? Do you know Open Metal? Tender, did you share that with people? Or is that just a nonsense name?

ALI: [laughing] Probably...not? I don't know...

JACK: Yeah, I like the idea that Fourteen looks down at the paper after having made a big gambit, and goes,

JACK (as Fourteen Fifteen): ...Yes.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Yeah! Sounds like the name of someone from the By-and-By, um, but other than that, you don't really know. And then I think we cut from that to some metal that is not very open, which is the metal that is currently uh, stapling, magnetically, Signet to the ground [JACK: Oh, god] in the lifedeck of the Privign. Um...how's it goin' there? What are y'all up to, how are you feeling?

ALI: Um...I mean, I just like, uh...

AUSTIN: [laughing] Transcended?! Like—

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN:—like, you just cosmic brained?!

ALI: [crosstalk] Yeah, I, uh...

JANINE: [crosstalk] You didn't even—ugh, it's so much worse, also...

JACK: [crosstalk] Wait, so you just—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Say again?

JACK: [crosstalk] Yeah!

JANINE: It's so much worse, than just that...

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's true.

JANINE: 'Cause, there's a room on fire...

AUSTIN: There's a room on fire.

JANINE: And the glass looking out into space is breaking because there's [JACK laughs] an Iconoclast on it, and the Iconoclast, I don't really remember perfectly, but in my memory, it has four legs but then two heads and the heads are like underneath and one of them is between the legs? Or something?

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's like—I'll just draw it really quick.

JACK: Oh, my god.

JANINE: And the Massalia flew by, just like, wavin' like, 'hey losers, bye...'

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Oh, I forgot *all* of that.

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's this, it's the thing I just drew. Do you see the thing that I just drew? It's like—yeah. So.

ALI: It's like two *Ks* back to back?

AUSTIN: Yeah, sort of! [JANINE: Oh.] But think of the *Ks*—that's actually a good way of thinking about it. It is like two *Ks* back to back, with like a tall long head. [JACK: Jesus.] Like it's kind of like a wavy-armed tube man. Except on both sides. Do you know what I mean?

JACK: This is, like, yeah, this is like some Wicker Man bullshit.

AUSTIN: Yeah. [ALI: Yes!] And also, it's made out of like colour that's missing in this system.

JACK: [surprised] Oh! It is!

JANINE: Oh...

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's like the only bit of colour, is this big rainbow creature that is trying to break in.

JANINE: Hmmm...

AUSTIN: So.

ALI: Well, I'm spiked out on Powerful, so we're all going to be fine.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Hell yeah, flex on 'em.

[ALI laughs, JANINE groans]

JACK: Wait, hang on, just so I can check—is what happened, Tender did the universe brain, and then immediately got stapled to the floor—?

JANINE: [crosstalk] No, I got stapled—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] No no no, Signet got stapled to the floor.

JACK: [laughs] Oh, I see.

JANINE: Signet's been reverse-universe-braining...

[loud laughter]

JANINE: ...so, yeah. [crosstalk] That's the dynamic—

JACK: [crosstalk] I thought they just made a very hard move on Tender.

JANINE: The dynamic is, as my character gets weaker, Ali's characters get stronger. And when Ali's characters are weak, mine become super powerful.

AUSTIN: [laughing] You've just gotta get the middle ground, that's all.

JANINE: It's true.

ALI: Yeah!

JACK: It's like two sides of a *K*, back to back.

AUSTIN: Yeah! Gotta get both sides. Uh...so yeah, what's everybody doing? The last thing that happened, I think, was that Mother's Story cocked the shotgun one more time.

JANINE: Well, I already tried negging her, and that didn't work, so...

[laughter]

AUSTIN: It didn't. That was a good hustle though, good try!

ALI: She's like out there—no, she's—oh, she came out, and was like...

AUSTIN: Yeah, the fire was behind her, and she's like, 'I killed your friend,'—

ALI: [crosstalk] 'I killed your friend,' yada yada yada.

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] Right, yeah yeah yeah.

ALI: And now, like—

JANINE: And then I said, 'You're never going to be as good as Daddy,' [AUSTIN: Yeah.] and then she shot me [ALI: Ohh!] with her bolo gun.

JACK: Oh, yeah!

AUSTIN: Yes. You did not say 'Daddy.'

JANINE: [laughing] No.

AUSTIN: She's definitely older than Robin's Song, also, to be clear.

JANINE: [laughing] That doesn't—I don't think it matters, at this point—

AUSTIN: No, okay, fair. Uh-huh. [ALI: Umm...] Tender, who is spiked out on Powerful, what are you up to, now that your bud just got stapled to the ground?

ALI: Yeah, I would like to help. What's like—where's—

AUSTIN: Everyone is kind of where the stuff is. Like, she is where the circle is. Or, like, in front of it. [ALI: Oh, right.] You're all where the X is, going westward, basically.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: But just like, a few feet, or whatever. Um...I want to know what you do. There's a—I just wanna know what you do in this moment, basically.

ALI: I would like to attempt to disarm her.

AUSTIN: Ooh, that's good. I like that a lot.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Just with your hands, basically?

JACK: Yeah, get rid of that awful shotgun.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: That's a good idea. I still think that that's probably Neutralize, it's just not about, it's not about—it's still neutralizing a threat, you just won't choose the damage ones, right? You'll take away stuff from her, basically, if you succeed.

ALI: Right, right right, yeah.

AUSTIN: So, yeah. Are you going to use Powerful, or are you going to use something else? Cause you're spiked out right now.

ALI: I think that that's going to be Powerful.

AUSTIN: Roll with advantage, so roll 3d6+1 instead of 2d6+1.

ALI: Okay. So, I'm like—she's standing there with her gun in her hand.

AUSTIN: Right, yeah yeah yeah. You're—

ALI: And I'm just like—I'm in this waist-high...

AUSTIN: Like, collection of metal things [giggling in background] that you somehow pulled out of this station, yes.

ALI: Okay. I think that I put my hands on that thing... [AUSTIN: Mhm] and then like vault myself up, and in doing that try to kick it out of her hand.

AUSTIN: Okay, cool. So you're almost like jumping over a fence or something.

ALI: Yeah. [AUSTIN: Cool.] And then that was 3d6 plus t—

AUSTIN: Plus one.

ALI: Plus one?

AUSTIN: Yeah, because you're spiked out, so it's only +1.

ALI: Oh, okay. That's weird, that I like, have a—that's worse than what I usually do. Okay—

AUSTIN: It's because you're spiked out, you don't have control over it, you know?

ALI: Yeah.

[[00:45:00]]

[ALI rolls]

AUSTIN: Okay, yeah. Okay, you actually get a s—wait, you get a 7, because it's 4 plus, it's your highest ones, so it's 4+2+1.

ALI: Oh, okay.

AUSTIN: It doesn't make a difference, it's still a success, right? So, you have 2 hold, and you can spend one for one to inflict harm; to take away an advantage—in this case I'll let that be, take away this gun, basically; suffer little harm; force a change of location; or impress, dismay, or frighten your opponent. So you can pick, with 2 hold.

ALI: Hmm...yeah, then I'll do, impress, dismay, or frighten, and then force a change of location.

AUSTIN: Okay. So I think you, like, you jump over and kick her fucking gun out of her hands, and it goes sliding toward the steps that you came down. And she's like, about to draw her gun on you, and then the monks that you freed all stand up. And that—with you in front of them all—is what impresses, dismays, and frightens her. And then she pulls her gun out, and then slowly walks away and like, looks up at the cracked glass, and she spits on the ground, and says:

AUSTIN (as Mother's Story): Amateurs.

AUSTIN: And then walks back to her gun and grabs it and runs up the stairs to escape. And at that point, the monks run into the other room—the one that was next to the one that's on fire—and you can hear them coughing and stuff as they, thankfully, drag out—or, not drag out, she's not knocked out—like, guide out the woman whose hologram you saw when you first

landed. The kind of leader of this temple, who is kind of dazed and is just kind of being guided by them. One of them runs over to you and says,

AUSTIN (as a monk): This way!

AUSTIN: And begins running across the room toward, like, the west, basically—towards, away from the life deck and up a different flight of stairs, towards the temple. I think also, at a certain point she gets far enough away that you can hear the—like, Signet, the metal staple, the magnetic staple thing, just goes limp, and it's like, light and soft, and it's like it was charged with energy and once her gun gets far enough away from it, it de-charges and loses its energy and is just like, almost like—imagine if, what if metal could be made out of like, a stocking or something. Like you can pick it up, and it's really light, but if you put a charge through it, it completely firms up. It's probably a similar thing to your sash, actually, in retrospect—in terms of being able to be very firm despite being something that's also super flexible. [JANINE: Mm.] Like, it's probably a different technological path to get to the same type of thing. But, yeah, you're able to get up at this point. What do y'all do? Do you follow this monk?

[pause]

AUSTIN: Do you chase after her?

JANINE: I know what I want to—there's another thing I wanted to do.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: I want to, uh, probably untie the blindfold I'm wearing...

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Fair.

JANINE: [laughing] That I put on myself and don't need anymore. But, I want to reach out to Acre Seven using True Name.

AUSTIN: Okay. Uh...you can do that—

JANINE: I did the thing where I just said the thing I wanna do instead of saying how I was doing it or anything. [laughs]

AUSTIN: You did. That's alright, that's the first step in stopping doing that, is...

JANINE: When I spoke with Acre before, I took a component.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: Because, she disclosed—is it she or they?

AUSTIN: She.

JANINE: Okay. I thought we'd been using she, but wanted to double check.

AUSTIN: Yep, she's she. She/her.

JANINE: She'd disclosed...sort of her origin. So I took a component on that. And I think Signet is probably—it's probably a thing where, as she's running after the monks, and getting up [AUSTIN: Right, okay] it's sort of an exhaling of the name kind of thing, and sort of tuning into that frequency, as it were.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah, totally. So, you're able to reach out, and the way that the move works, is it—do you roll for it? Or do you just...

JANINE: I think I do roll, yes.

AUSTIN: Yeah, okay.

JANINE: Because it gives me Hold to spend on different things.

AUSTIN: Based on—okay, yeah, so that's 2d6+1. And still again, how are you feeling, when you—as you run away, how are you feeling? You're still coming down on a Peaceful spike? Is that right?

JANINE: I was on a Sad spike.

AUSTIN: You were on a *Sad* spike. Okay. So you're un-Saddened.

JANINE: Also, wait, is this 2d6+1 or is it—

AUSTIN [crosstalk]: Yeah, it's 2d6 plus components.

JANINE: [crosstalk] Oh right, it's components.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Yeah. But I'm still marking...stuff...

AUSTIN: I think—I think it's one—and I think it's the amount of components on that person, not total components? But maybe it is, maybe it's total components.

JANINE: I th—no, that wouldn't make sense. Why would me knowing something about someone else help me contact her?

AUSTIN: Well, like, in a weird way, in the same way that having a bunch of those—well, no, she'd have to be one of the components, but, would having more components in general enhance that ability, the way that Belgarde seemingly is better with multiple—with more components, or whatever? You know?

JANINE: ...I guess...

AUSTIN: I don't know, like I'm—

JANINE: Also, it does just say Components, and normally when it does that it's like, treating it like a stat.

AUSTIN: That's what I'm saying, yeah.

JANINE: It's possible we've been doing this all wrong!

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally! It might—it totally could.

JANINE: Well, shit. Okay. $2d6+2$, then?

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. And then mark whatever you're feeling while you're doing it.

[JANINE rolls]

[AUSTIN makes a sound of surprise and exasperation]

JANINE: Okay!

AUSTIN: That's a 14.

JANINE: Alright! Heck yeah.

AUSTIN: Meaning, two 6s.

[ALI and JANINE laugh]

AUSTIN: Alright, so you have 3 hold. That's a lot.

JACK: Maybe this is the lucky game! [AUSTIN laughs] After the last one!

AUSTIN: Yeah, maybe! Um, so, what do you do, with these 3, this 3 hold?

JANINE: Um...I marked this as Sad, also, because—I considered spiking Peaceful, but it didn't feel like—

AUSTIN: Yes.

JANINE: Actually, maybe I should spike Peaceful.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Love this game where we just throw ourselves under buses! So good.

[JACK laughs]

JANINE: No, I think I—I, it's like a toss-up between, does Signet feel like, calm now that part of this crisis is over, or does she still kind of feel like a fuck-up? And I think she still kind of feels like a fuck-up, even though she did really well with this.

AUSTIN: Okay. Yes. [laughs]

JANINE: Okay, so, I get to pick...three?

AUSTIN: Yeah. And those—there's a lot of 'em here.

JANINE: Yeah...

AUSTIN: It's, inflict or ignore one harm; have them lose track of what they were doing; have them take minus or plus one forward right now; assist or interfere with them without regard for distance or barriers; or communicate with them without regard for distance or barriers. So, definitely that last one, right?

JANINE: Um...

AUSTIN: 'Cause you wanna—you're communicating with her.

JANINE: Yes. I think I actually want the last three.

AUSTIN: Okay. So you want to assist, you want to give her a plus forward—a +1 forward, so you're helping? Um, I guess maybe like—

JANINE: Yes. I want to help her with what she's doing now, specifically.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: 'Cause she left, to recap—she left to try and help Waltz Tango Cache, who was trying to find his way into the core, but also being pursued?

AUSTIN: Correct. Yes, totally. So how do you—what's this look like? 'Cause especially, if you can assist, what's it—like, are you seeing where she is and what's going on there? Are you like, seeing through her eyes? Are you, like, are you there also?

JANINE: I suspect it's more—I don't know that it's especially—well, Acre Seven is kind of a special case.

AUSTIN: [emphatically] Yes.

JANINE: Acre is a really special case, and I don't know that necessarily what happens here would be what happens if, you know, when Signet applied components to Morning's Observation.

AUSTIN: True. Right. Uh, can I propose a cool thing?

JANINE: Yes. Always.

AUSTIN: What if you, like, lend her your form for the fight that she's in? And like, she's able—

JANINE: [crosstalk] I don't know that that's doing her a favour; she has a really good form.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Well, no, 'cause like—y'all haven't seen her fight.

JANINE: I've been doin' bad.

AUSTIN: So maybe we, just, what we see is an image of how she fights, which is, she's constantly drawing on all of these selves that she's been over the history of the planet, Acre. All of these different beings that have been on the planet Acre that she's been part of, that she can become. And her most stable form is the version that you know, but, but—she can also become, like, a giant wolf, or a soldier, or, or—like all sorts of stuff, like—a brick wall. Like, she slips into different versions of like, of time, and is almost like slipping into different versions of the world in which something besides her was saved from Acre, for this split moment. And I just like the notion of, like, you're able to—she's seen you work at this point. She knows you. Or, maybe she doesn't know you, but in making this connection, she's able to move the way you did when you saved the Cadent. And it's like, we get the same sort of choreography of her sort of backflipping

over something the way you backflipped there. You know what I mean? [JANINE: Mhm.] Something like that could be fun.

JANINE: Yeah, I like that.

AUSTIN: The image of what she is doing is, like, moving between a giant Red Torch—giant being, like, 10-12 feet, somewhere in there, like, not a mech, maybe a little bit smaller than the Mariposa, but not as big as like a Saint, from the Quire-based game—she's in between that and a wounded Waltz Tango Cache, and they are near a lift that's going to take them from this abandoned quarters, they're kind of in, like, a dormitory that is on fire. There's this very faint red glow here, from certain rooms and from the floor, but again, it's still very desaturated. But that is what's allowing the Red Torch to look red, too. And she's fighting that thing when you contact her, and in the process is able to sneak around on it. It starts to light up its much heavier torch face, its much heavier flashlight face, and instead of doing a blinding blast, it shoots a beam of energy, and she turns into you and raises that sash, and it reverses the beam and catches it in the leg, and she falls off, and then from the ground Waltz Tango Cache pulls a pistol and shoots it in the back of the head, and then like, pushes himself back up, bit by bit, onto a staircase, and then like, spits—a lot of spitting in this episode—[JANINE: Yeah!] and then takes out a cigarette from—he has like, a bandolier, and the last thing in the bandolier, instead of being a shotgun shell, is a cigar, and he takes it out and bites it, and lights it. So...

[all chuckling]

JANINE: This fucking show.

[JACK chuckles]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. And then she says,

AUSTIN (as Acre Seven): Um...um. We're headed to the gem scanner. We think that is the cause of the signal disruption...disruption. Thank you.

JANINE: [quietly] I don't know what I want to say...

AUSTIN: I want to be very clear: they were going to be in the danger and maybe lost if one of y'all didn't go check in on them. So.

JANINE: That's what I was worried about. That's specifically—

AUSTIN: [crosstalk] So, nice work. Good, good—good work on that.

JANINE: [crosstalk]—that's specifically what I was doing here. I was like, oh, we haven't heard from them, huh, and we might not be going towards them—

AUSTIN: Mm-hmm.

JANINE:—yuh-oh. [JANINE sighs, JACK laughs] I think I just—I probably—Signet's not even going to acknowledge like, having helped. It's just like, this is just the thing, was like, I felt this strong connection here and was able to do more than usual [aside] go for it. The thing she's going to ask here, I think, is probably, something to the effect of like, where do you think we can be of the most help? Sort of like, we were caught up in something, we're free of it now, should we keep going this way? You know, like...

AUSTIN: Right. Um...

JANINE: Probably, actually, there should be a mention of, like, "Mother's Story went this way."

AUSTIN: Right, right right.

JANINE: Like, a basic unfolding of where we're at.

AUSTIN: Right. I think at this point you've probably moved into the temple space, also, like while this conversation is happening, and so, it's like, everyone else is kind of taking a chill, taking a breath. The temple room is, by the way, like, it is the gem processing centre—

JANINE: Oh.

AUSTIN: It's like, huge illustrated pistons that are breaking these large pieces of rock—

JANINE: What I'm telling her should probably change, then, huh.

AUSTIN: Well, like, that's just where you are, you know? I'm just kind of giving you background on—

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN:—on like, the shot, basically. Um, she tells you that she thinks that Mother's Story—they found Mother's Story's ship. It was in storage, it was like in with—mixed in with a bunch of minerals that had been brought in...that abandoned storage and storage both have docks also, and that her pod was there, that that is—you know, she probably, she might not say she's going there. What she might say is, you should get the monks to her ship, take her ship and leave. Um, someone should get the monks onto that ship and get the fuck out. Um.. [laughs] ...because that's where her ship is, and there's enough room to actually fill it with a bunch of people, if this Iconoclast is really here to fuck shit up. So that's—I think what she says. She tells you she's gonna use the gem scanner to get the info that Morning's Observation wanted. Once she, like, fixes it. And deactivate the comms blocker, also.

JANINE: Okay. Well, we're there right now...

AUSTIN: Well, no, you're in the temple right now.

JANINE: Oh, I thought that was the gem thing.

AUSTIN: That's the gem manufacturing—that's like, the processing centre. The scanner is the thing that scans—that's where they're going now.

JANINE: Oh, okay.

AUSTIN: They're going to the scanner, which is like, it seems like it's putting out like—instead of scanning the area, it's broadcasting, and filling everything with stuff.

JANINE: Okay. Cool. [pause] Oh boy.

AUSTIN: Tender. The monks have been attending to their leader, who again, has this rad, like, lick of flame—like licks of flame behind her as a halo, basically, and has these giant spring arms, like—I didn't base it on the video game Arms [JANINE sighs] but she basically has regular arms, and then around them has big metal coil arms that she can, like, do stuff with. If she had gotten busted out during that fight sequence she would've fucked up Mother's Story, let me tell you. [ALI laughs] I mean, maybe not, she didn't do it before, right? So who knows. But she has her wits about her again, and like, bows her head to you.

[[01:00:15]]

AUSTIN (as the leader): They told me what you did. Who are you?

ALI (as Tender Sky): My name is Tender Sky, and I am a member of the Beloved.

AUSTIN: She bows to you.

AUSTIN (as the leader): I am Iluna Vouje, the Gleaming Sage. I've never seen anyone do what you just did.

ALI: [sighing] I think there's like—I think it's tough for Tender to be modest right now, but I think it's also like—

AUSTIN: [incredulously] Uh-huh!

ALI: [smiling] —like, I've *a*lso not seen anyone do that!

[JANINE and JACK laugh]

AUSTIN: Right, fair, fair, fair.

ALI: [laughing] So she doesn't think that—like, she's kind of waving it off, like [AUSTIN: Yeah.] enh, it was nothing...! You know, like...I think that she, she tries to explain by being like,

ALI (as Tender Sky): I don't understand the full scope of what's going on here, but your people have to be protected. And so they were.

AUSTIN (as Iluna Vouje): Thank you. It is...it is in our heritage to not be protected. It is why we learned to protect ourselves...but apparently, not well enough.

AUSTIN: Her hair is up, by the way. It's like, the flames kind of wrap up around it from behind, but she has this really fancy updo that kind of coils in on itself a couple of times. And even in this black-and-white version of this world, you can see that she has brownish skin—I imagined her as being played by a Colombian actress, basically. Like, that skin—sort of light brownish skin tone, dark lipstick, very dark lipstick, and carefully made. And what's interesting is, despite having just been in a fight and all that shit, she isn't, like, pristine, by any means, but she's presenting physically like, she's holding herself such that she has the confidence of someone who just finished making herself look perfect. She's a larger woman, both in height and in weight, you know, she's got some roundness to her, and also some height. She's probably six foot even, or something. And the—I've talked about her coiled arms, and her flames on her, around her—but there's also this, her dress is like, a sleeveless dress, that is very billowy, and again, like kind of moves—not billowy, billowy is the wrong word. Um...

JANINE: Voluminous?

AUSTIN: I guess that's the right word? Yeah. But also, you can see that it's made of component parts. Like, you can see it doesn't present as, like, 'here is one piece of fabric.' It's layered, in a way, that's like sleeveless, but then as it goes down her body, you can see all these different layers of fabric, which are meant to reveal the craftsmanship on it, right, like, oh, someone worked on this thing, this is a real physical thing, this is the opposite of Worthy of Grace's dress in some ways—still beautiful, but in this other completely different way. Anyway. She says:

AUSTIN (as Iluna Vouje): Are you here simply to stop that woman? Can we help you with anything?

ALI: Um. I think Tender kind of glances to Signet and kind of thinks for a second, like, wait—

AUSTIN: Signet on the phone, basically—

[ALI laughs]

JANINE: This might be when Signet, like, snaps back. She probably—it's hard to imagine the whole 'having a conversation elsewhere and also walking' but it's probably a very distant look in the eyes, that's probably the easiest way to tell.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh.

JANINE: This would probably be the point where Signet catches her up on, like—and at full voice, so everyone in this room can hear, like, you know, our [sighs] not coworkers—not cohorts, either—

ALI: Coworkers.

AUSTIN: Compatriots? Coworkers. Coworkers. You got it right the first time.

JANINE: ...Allies?

[general laughter]

AUSTIN: Comrades.

JANINE: Comrades is, yeah...

ALI: Other...other members of the Beloved...

JACK: Colleagues.

JANINE: Colleagues! They're going to try to deal with the signal that's being sent out so that communications can resume and deal with that. Mother's Story is trying to get to her ship; it would be very beneficial if we got there first, because we definitely, definitely need to evacuate this place as soon as possible, and I don't think either of the Beloved ships are capable of that in the slightest. Uh—so, the sooner we get that done, the better. [short laugh]

AUSTIN: I have a question. What happened to Worthy of Grace's body? Like, what ha—what's the protocol for that?

JACK: Um—oh, god. Um—is there one? I don't know. I wonder—

AUSTIN: I don't know, either. Did it dissolve into the Mirage?

JACK: Before we learned what we'd learned last episode—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: —I'd say that there was some sort of, either it just goes, or it's just kind of left there. But knowing the kind of weird industrial scale of the operation [AUSTIN: Yeah.] I wonder if it dis—yeah, if it—

AUSTIN: If it dissolves.

JACK: Um.

AUSTIN: Or like...

JACK: Although that's kind of like—yeah. I'm cautious about like—the process by which they're made, it's so deliberately and specifically grotesque [AUSTIN: Yeah.] that I wonder if the process in which they disappear should be a contrast to that?

AUSTIN: [agreeing] Mmm.

JACK: Should be that they enter this world messily and confusingly, and they leave it, like, gently and as close to beautifully as we can get in this weird context? So I wonder if—

AUSTIN: Yeah, I kind of like that direction.

JACK: I wonder if it's that they dissolve, but it's not so much that they dissolve like they're being unmade, so much as like—

JANINE: Evaporate?

JACK: Or, no, it's like, it's like, like particles of light. Or you know when you see someone who has, like, glitter on their face? And it catches the light in a particular way? What if the whole body sort of shimmers in that way, and sort of shifts like it's suddenly—as though it suddenly has the texture and the weight of a curtain or a cloth, and then it's gone, and that's the end of it. Also, the room was on fire, so—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Yeah, fair.

JACK:—all of that stuff happened quite quickly and ignominiously.

AUSTIN: Fair. Yes. Um. Ali?

ALI: Hi.

AUSTIN: Okay, I didn't know if you were still feeding your cat.

ALI: No no, I'm still here, sorry [laughing]

AUSTIN: So, what were you saying—sorry, you were in the middle of saying something, though, to Iluna. Also, for people who want to know spelling, 'cause I know how this goes, it's I-L-U-N-A, Iluna, Vouje, V-O-U-J-E.

ALI: [laughs] I know we want to get to Mother's ship, but do they have any—I think Tender just asks her, like, after Signet says, like,

ALI (as Tender Sky): Does the facility have any evacuation procedures?

AUSTIN (as Iluna Vouje): A few pods. And a, um, that will send you into orbit, and then require pickup. And then we do have two of the mining vessels, but those only seat two each. Perhaps that will be just enough—two in the pods, and then four more in the mining vessels, and then one more maybe in your ship. [pause] Or, or the Bel—the other, your compatriots. That would work.

ALI (as Tender Sky): Do you know how many of your—

ALI: Is there a—do the people here have, like, a title? Or, we've been just saying "monks."

AUSTIN: It's just the Jeweled Heirs, is the name of the thing. Yeah, I don't know what the ranks are, of this specific thing.

ALI: Right, yeah.

AUSTIN: I thought I—I'm trying to remember exactly how many of them are still alive. I thought we had a number, I thought it was not that many.

JANINE: We do have a number. It is, um, wait, I can't actually read what I wrote. [ALI and AUSTIN chuckle] I wrote—okay, so we had seven white torch units—

AUSTIN: Yes.

JANINE:—but then I wrote MS, I don't know what that—oh, Mother's Story.

AUSTIN: Mother's Story.

JANINE: Um...oh, a *dozen* monks.

AUSTIN: Oh, okay, so, there are a dozen. So, that is not enough space.

JANINE: And then, plus one—plus the lady.

AUSTIN: Plus Iluna, right. So that would be 12, 13, you have one extra space in your ship, there's one extra space in the Beloved Ivy's ship, so that's two—

JANINE: Wouldn't there be two, because Massalia uses a mech to travel?

AUSTIN: That's what I'm saying—that's why there would be one. Because each of those ships holds three people.

JANINE: Oh right, and one of our people died. Right.

AUSTIN: [chuckles] Yes, exactly.

JANINE: [laughing] Okay. Sorry!

AUSTIN: It's fine! So then, four more on those ships, so yeah, you'd be leaving behind six people, or something like that. Four, five, six—oh, and then two pods. Seven, eight. Four people would not fit onto the current amount of stuff that you have.

JANINE: [sighs] Ugh. I don't think that's going to work. More to the point, also, Acre was extremely clear about that part of what would work—

AUSTIN: Right, right.

JANINE: And Acre is also taking the loss of the ones that were already killed quite harshly.

[AUSTIN: Mhm.] I don't think—I do not think it is a reasonable idea to lead with the plan where several people need to stay behind. I think we need to move very quickly on this.

ALI (as Tender Sky): Then let's move.

AUSTIN: Then Iluna says,

AUSTIN (as Iluna Vouje): Not without the core. It's—hmm. The ritual to open the core will take 30 minutes, at least.

JANINE: Is that what Acre and Waltz are after?

AUSTIN: No, no, they're after—they're scanning the field for the data that is missing from the broadcast.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: That, like, weird signal that was being sent out—or, that was picked up, basically.

JANINE: Okay. [sighs]

JANINE (as Signet): What if Tender goes with the monks, to try to beat Mother's Story to her ship where it's stored, and Iluna and I try to get the core.

ALI (as Tender Sky): I'm fine with that.

AUSTIN (as Iluna Vouje): Okay.

JANINE (as Signet): Because, two people, we can get it—we can use the escape pods. Presuming that the ship situation works out.

AUSTIN: As you say that, the whole station shakes [ALI and JANINE shudder] as the Iconoclast returns, basically.

JANINE: Cool.

AUSTIN: And again, there's just light streaming in through—I think this room is mostly, like, does not have a huge window, but it does have little eyelet windows at the top of the, towards the ceiling, that run horizontally along the room, and just like, bright—it's almost like, what if colour could be shadow? Do you know what I mean? Like, what if instead of it being that a shadow crosses your face, it is this prismatic glow that moves across the group of you as this thing crawls around this space station.

JANINE: Okay, this is maybe a bad idea, then.

[AUSTIN laughs]

ALI (as Tender Sky): I mean, if the pods don't work, you have other options...

JANINE (as Signet): I don't know that we have the half hour.

ALI (as Tender Sky): Mmm...

AUSTIN (as Iluna Vouje): We need the core. [pause] We could—we could overwrite the access and just get in and grab it, but that would be—

JANINE (as Signet): Sacrilegious?

AUSTIN: She nods.

[JANINE sighs]

ALI (as Tender Sky): Well, we are not the two that are going to convince you otherwise. So...

[AUSTIN and ALI laugh]

AUSTIN: She smiles. Uh...

JANINE: I mean, actually...[sighs] Ahh...

AUSTIN: Oh shit. Is it—is it—are you breaking this rule?

JANINE: I mean, here's—Signet has committed sacrilege for the sake of survival. That is two beliefs directly in opposition, in this case.

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah. It is—

JANINE: Which is, you can't leave someone to die...

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JANINE: But, you need to follow protocol.

AUSTIN: Yeah. [reading] "Improvisation leads to oblivion. Routines, rituals, processes, practices exist and endure for good reason." I think, like, this is the moment where the—what was I calling it? The chaplain? The surrogate chaplain—rolls in and says—like, across its chest, the lasers beam into the crystalline chest it has, and says,

AUSTIN (as the chaplain): Station Eight. Temple.

AUSTIN: And then begins breaking down or explaining what happens in the temple, and how the, you know, the work that the monks do here is the deepest religious experience that they have, and that their work is seen all throughout the fleet, ever since it was first—ever since the Privign station first joined the fleet years ago, and blah blah blah, and then it says,

AUSTIN (as the chaplain): Onward to Section Nine.

AUSTIN: And then goes down to core access. And she explains, like,

AUSTIN (as Iluna Vouje): The ritual would require us to walk the stations and learn, even briefly, about what happens here. There are ten. They span the entirety of the ship, from docking to observation to storage—it's the whole ship. But is that—

JANINE (as Signet): I suspect we'll be dead before five.

AUSTIN: [laughs] My favourite 1980s zombie rom-com. [JACK laughs] Alright. Those are the stations; I've made them visible. You have to walk them, one after the other. If you'd just followed the chaplain this is what would've happened, by the way. This is the place it would've guided you to.

JANINE: That wasn't gonna happen.

AUSTIN: Nah, no. But listen, maybe it was! Like, I don't—you know. [JACK laughs]

JACK: Oh, my god. This is, like, the—this is the awful sequel to the fuckin' mysteries.

[ALI inaudible in the background]

AUSTIN: Yes! One hundred percent. Hmm?

ALI: Is there not a five? Oh, by the—

AUSTIN (crosstalk): Yeah, it's in the bottom

JACK (crosstalk): Yeah, it's down there.

AUSTIN: It's down in what was—yeah.

ALI (as Tender Sky): Can you walk, like...briskly?

AUSTIN: It would be a risk! [ALI laughs] You could, like, I—I—this is not—[JACK laughs, JANINE sighs] This is not me saying you couldn't do it. But it would be...boy.

[ALI and JACK laugh]

AUSTIN: Right—or, or, she could turn her key and open the door.

[[01:15:02]]

JANINE: Also, two of these stations are on fire!

AUSTIN: Uh-huh!

JANINE: This is—this is stupid! We can't do this! This is—okay, to be clear, Signet is not standing in the middle of this temple saying this ritual is stupid and—

AUSTIN (crosstalk): That this ritual is stupid?

JANINE:—we're all going to die.

AUSTIN: Like, what's walking in fire, do you know what I mean? Like, whatever.

JANINE: [pained groan] Mmmmmm....

[AUSTIN laughs]

ALI: This might be a...a sway, or an ultimatum, or like a...

AUSTIN: I—I think it's just a decision.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Like, I don't—I think, if one of you says, like, "No, we're gonna grab this core and go," like, I'm fine with her being like, "It's on your shoulders," do you know what I mean? Like, I don't think she's ready to—she's not ready to fight you on this

ALI: Right, right, right, well—

AUSTIN: What she said is, the only way in—for her, she kind of has two beliefs, which is like, one, we can't give up the core of this thing, and two, ritual. But like, it's that order, for sure. But I think she needs—you know what, maybe she does need some swaying, because otherwise she would just do it, you know? Um—she would let one of you do it, she just can't bring herself to do it herself, um, that's kind of where it is.

JANINE: Yeah, that's what I was thinking, um...[sighs] I was actually thinking of using my new move, but it might be a different thing anyways.

AUSTIN: What is that new move, again?

JANINE: The new move is, [reading] "when you speak earnestly and candidly with a character, you may ask them a question from below. Afterward, they may ask you a question as well. Both of you must answer honestly."

AUSTIN: Mmmhm. Um.

[pause]

JANINE: I think—

AUSTIN: That's an interesting move. You don't need to roll for it or anything, so.

JANINE: Yeah. I think the thing that Signet would say to Iluna at this point is that, is, you know, I have already—hmmm.

JANINE [as Signet]: My hands are already tainted by sacrilege. They're tainted by sacrilege and by the process of redemption from that sacrilege. I don't mind committing this sin if it means we all survive, and it means you all survive, and if it means that the heart of this station survives; if the heart of your order's beliefs survives, then it's worth it, one hundred percent, to me.

AUSTIN: Hmm. You know what—give me a Sway. Because there's a stake here that is not about you getting access. There's a separate stake here. Which is interesting. So how do you feel about this? And then roll sway.

[JANINE sighs]

JACK: Lucky day.

[ALI giggles]

JANINE: Uhhh...okay. I think this might be the Peaceful swing.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: Spiking Peaceful. Uh..

AUSTIN: Boom. 2d6+2. That's a 9. That ain't bad.

[JACK makes an impressed sound]

AUSTIN: Alright. So on a 7-9, you choose two. You'll owe them some serious cred—[snorts] that, 'kay.

JANINE: That's silly.

AUSTIN:—your own faith is in question, she'll get faith on you; you're going to need to give them something now instead of later; you need to do them a favour first; you need to give a piece of yourself to them, body or heart. The thing that, the one thing that I can say for sure that—the one thing that you would have to spend one of these on, basically, the thing that this is about, is whether she'll come with you to do it. And, like, stay with you, or if she will just leave. That's what this roll is about.

JANINE: [agreeing] Mhm.

AUSTIN: So you could—like, yes, she'll come with you, but, if you want her to come with you, you have to choose two of these things.

JANINE: Um...I have two favourites in this list that I think I always go to, but they are just the things that always feel right. Giving someone—like, making someone have faith on Signet, and giving them a piece of her, body or heart.

AUSTIN: Okay. So, what is the body or heart piece?

JANINE: Um...it might be, it might just be saying what her sacrilege was...because that's not a thin that Signet ever puts voice to...

AUSTIN: Yeah. I like that a lot.

JANINE: I gotta mark this Faith, though.

AUSTIN: You do. You've got a lot of Faith situations happening here.

JANINE: I actually—I know Faith is a liability, but I really, every time it's a case of Signet owing someone or someone having Faith on Signet, I want it. [AUSTIN: Yeah.] I want that to happen, I want her to—

AUSTIN: You want them to come calling, at some point.

JANINE: I want her to have all these spiritual debts. [laughs] So I think the thing that she says is, yeah, she puts voice to this thing that, like, everyone on Thyrsus knows, and probably a lot of people on other ships know, but that often doesn't really matter, because it was very—it was bad, but like, what's it going to change by trying to undo the good that she does, and stuff like that. But she says, you know,

[MUSIC - "The Twilight Mirage" starts]

JANINE (as Signet): I was an Excerpt. I was the Excerpt of Belgarde. And in the fight where Belgarde was lost,

JANINE: —she probably very specifically says, "was lost," and not, like, "perished"—

JANINE (as Signet): ...I left Belgarde. I left Belgarde intact, and Belgarde did not remain intact. And that's my sacrilege.

AUSTIN (as Iluna Vouje): [lets out a breath, pauses] I'm sorry. [pause] All the more reason to come with me.

AUSTIN: And she begins to walk toward the core access, which is another hallway that has these two giant doors, that lead into the core.

[MUSIC continues]

[MUSIC ends]