

Twilight Mirage 01: The Beloved Dust

Transcribed by Jen @wronghandle#1989

[MUSIC - "The Twilight Mirage" starts]

AUSTIN: [narrating] Dispatch 57a -- Satellite, the moment that a ship breaks through from the long black into the Twilight Mirage is breathtaking. Every new arrival splits the difference between violence and creation. With the Divine Fleet licking its wounds, any unexpected change carries threat. But as we learned a long time ago, threat carries possibility.

So when the sable curvature of the HSS Mercury's Kiss disturbed the pomegranate blots of Empyrean's false nebula, I knew things were about to get interesting. Which, Satellite, makes my job a whole lot more tolerable. But as I watched that ship hang in the clouds above the floating city of Seance, looking down on that impossible open-aired metropolis in the stars, I wondered for a moment if it might be okay that my tenure here be boring. That perhaps my desire for more active afternoons should come second to maintaining the long lasting serenity of the Divine Fleet. But I have seen the projections. And the projections don't lie, they don't know how. A graveyard's architecture can be sublime, yes. And grieving can be joyous. That doesn't change that fact that Seance is first and foremost a home for the dead.

[MUSIC - "The Twilight Mirage" ends]

AUSTIN: Welcome to Friends at the Table, an actual-play podcast focused on critical world-building, smart characterization, and fun interaction between good friends. I am your host, Austin Walker, and today we will be playing The Veil by Fraser Simons. And if that sounds new, it is because it is new. Because we are playing a new season of the show starting today that we are calling Twilight Mirage, which is named after the synthetic nebula I described in that intro.

If you've been looking for a place to jump on to the show, this is probably hopefully maybe going to be it. Long-time fans will recognize some loose connections to a previous season here. But they will remain loose connections. There is no starter information that you will need to know before jumping on here. It will be a completely stand alone show without any recurring characters or anything like that. My agenda as written in The Veil is to: make the world feel real, to make it high tech and personal, to make the protagonists' lives interesting and interconnected, and to play to find out what happens.

Joining me today, Alicia Acompora.

ALI: Hi, you can find me @ali_west on Twitter, and you could follow the show over @friends_table.

AUSTIN: Jack De Quidt.

JACK: Hi, you can find me on Twitter @notquitereal and buy any of the music featured on the show at notquitereal.bandcamp.com.

AUSTIN: Janine Hawkins.

JANINE: I'm Janine Hawkins @bleatingheart on Twitter, and since I haven't said it in a little while, I do freelance writing for various sites. Polygon, Game Spot, Waypoint. All over the place.

AUSTIN: And you can find me @austin_walker, and you can read the things I write and edit at waypoint.vice.com.

You can also, for the first time ever, support us doing this. A lot of you wrote in over the course of the last few years, saying you wish you could support us financially and help us do more and more. Now you can. You can go to friendsatthetable.cash. Ali set that up. It links to our Patreon, where you can, if you'd like to, support us with a couple of bucks. There are a whole bunch of different tiers that you can support us at, ranging from a dollar up to 5, 25, 15, all the way up to 100, depending on how you want to support us. And we have different goals and different rewards. There are post cards, there's access to maps and GM notes. And there's some really rad stretch goals, including a bonus campaign, just for backers, that takes place in a fictional Atlantic City. It's a little weird and a little bit paranormal, but also just a lot of Bruce Springsteen, a lot of down-on-your-luck people who want to get out of town. So go check that out, friendsatthetable.cash.

So we also recorded a world-building episode. We haven't decided yet, it'll either be in the feed as Episode 00 or it will be a link out in the description here. Regardless, you can go listen to that if you're really interested in us putting together some of the ideas for this world. I will say it's a little slow, but it is still pretty interesting if you're that sort of fan. If you're not, you should feel completely comfortable just listening to this episode going forward without having to go back. But it's there for you if that's a thing that you want to listen to.

Today we're starting the first of two games that will take place in this world. We'll switch between this group and the other group, which is Art, Sylvia¹, Dre, and Keith. And that will be probably next week. The thing that we should start out with is your characters today. I feel like we should make sure we go over the notes and look at beliefs and introduce your characters. And then we'll roll into a little mini adventure. Does anyone want to go first? No? I'll just go down the list

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

with Signet, because Signet's name starts with dot-dot-dot, so it's always going to be at the top of the list.

JANINE: Shit, my extraness came back to bite me on the ass.

AUSTIN: It always does, doesn't it? [ALI and JACK laugh]

JANINE: Yup, it does. That's very true.

AUSTIN: So can you give us your character's name, your look and jam, and playbook, and all that other stuff? And I'll explain what those mean to the audience as you do.

JANINE: Okay, so technically Signet's full name is ... They marked scars of light in pitch; born in fiercest purpose, and beheld as the signet sealed upon our pact. She was an Excerpt, and her name has become Signet.

AUSTIN: Right. Excerpt is the name that we're using for the pilots of these big robots or the operators of these super powerful AI things called Divines, which are a reference to a previous season. But really all you need to know right now is, "Hey, there are big robots." They're super robots basically, and you piloted one.

JANINE: So Signet's look is very feminine, very decorative. She's very lean because she had a very acrobatic piloting style. Handsome face, did I mention that?

AUSTIN: You did not.

JANINE: [laughing] I have a little list of touchstones. And one of my touchstones for her face specifically is Yuga Yamato, who was Tuxedo Mask in the recent Sailor Moon musicals, as Oscar from Rose of Versailles. Her, but a lot of blonde hair, basically.

AUSTIN: Gotcha.

JANINE: Lots of fancy robes, lots of sort of vertically oriented crowns. There's a type of Russian tiara, that—

AUSTIN: Tall crowns? What's the tiara called?

JANINE: Kokoshnik. It's sort of one of those. It's very far back on the head and kind of goes up vertical.

AUSTIN: Oh, okay. Yeah, I see. Yeah.

JANINE: In the world-building episode I referenced Miss Universe Vietnam 2015's swan crown. Very back and up and out kind of stuff.

AUSTIN: And then your jam, which is— so your group will be playing a group of secret agents/secret police/investigators for a group that is entrusted with protecting the remaining cities and ships of the Divine Fleet. But besides that, you also have some free time where you do other stuff. I think of your group as, not on reserve necessarily, but there's definitely a Power Rangers-y like, "Oh shit, we gotta go do a thing," but not every day. So your jam is what you do when you're not doing that. So what is Signet's jam?

JANINE: Signet's jam is basically attending to her duties as part of the religion. Because she used to pilot a Divine and that Divine is one of the ones that's no longer around, people like her are kind of in short supply. So she's put out as sort of a figure, not a figure head, but just a thing that people can connect to the faith through, because there aren't that many points of connection left.

AUSTIN: Right. We didn't mention what playbook it was by mistake.

JANINE: Oops. She is the Onomastic.

AUSTIN: Which is kind of like the thing you are, which is you are the last of a religious order, basically.

JANINE: Yes.

AUSTIN: And the religious order in question that we figured out was that you are the last Excerpt from the sort of Divine that you had, is that what we ended up on?

JANINE: Yeah. I think that's where we ended.

AUSTIN: So there were kind of 3 stages of Divines. The first Divines were made by people forever ago, 100,000 years ago. I don't know that that's the actual timeline math, but an unquestioningly long period of time ago. And those are just big robots that were made by people that kind of had democratic virtues assigned to them, things like Liberty. And then sometimes the more recent past, in the last 30,000 years or so, there were Divines made by synthetic lifeforms, by robotic people. By people who were not super powerful but were just robots who designed their own Divines. And then the third tier were Divines that a Divine would design itself. Which of the 3 was yours? Yours was the third kind, right?

JANINE: Yeah.

0:10:41

AUSTIN: And what was the Divine's name? Actually, we should note that.

JANINE: The Divine's name is Belgard.

AUSTIN: Which is a word that means a loving look?

JANINE: Yeah, it's a loving look.

AUSTIN: Good. Great. And we'll dig more into that as we go. And again, if you really want to get deep back story on that stuff, you can listen to the world-building episode. But for now, it was one that was a very protective robot, that was part of this fleet that kept people kind of patched up. Right?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay. What are your beliefs?

JANINE: My beliefs are, there's no excuse to leave someone in a situation that will inevitably lead to their death.

AUSTIN: Good. That's what you did with your Divine. Right?

JANINE: I mean, sure.

AUSTIN: Okay, good.

JANINE: Improvisation leads to oblivion. Routines, rituals, processes, and practices exist and endure for good reason.

AUSTIN: Okay. Status quo 101.

JANINE: Yeah. It's very much her ship's culture, the ship she came from. And my third belief specifically relates to Ali's character. Tender's redemption can't be delivered at the stroke of a bureaucrat's pen. It must become her life-long pursuit.

AUSTIN: That's good. I think that's good for this episode. Before next episode, this is the thing I'm only just noticing because I've gotten really into looking at people's beliefs and trying to work it out is: how can you make that actionable? What's the I statement in that? And is something to think about before the next episode.

We don't need to go through all of your other stuff, but you have a little bit of money. You have some armor that I'll ask you to describe when it's time to describe your armor, what you're wearing and stuff. Weapons, you have a mech. We'll get to that mech if it comes up.

The one thing we do need to do that we have not done is there's a thing that this game called giri, but I think we're calling it faith. Which is a sort of notion of obligation, a notion of you have a relationship at these other people that has a history, and that has a push-and-pull on whether or not you owe them something or they owe you something. And I just like the notion - you pointed this out earlier before we started - that the word faith is good for this for us. The word giri, which is what the game uses, is this Japanese concept of obligation. But we're leaving that behind, partially because we're just not in a Japan setting. And it feels really weird and appropriative to use it without that setting. And also even in that setting, there's a— it's kind of a minefield. But for us, faith is really interesting - you pointed out, Janine - because you have faith in someone, but also faith on someone. This notion of like, "Yeah, I believe that you're going to pay me back. I believe that you're going to pay back this favor I did you." But also I don't just believe in you. My belief in you is a sort of leverage also, which is interesting.

JANINE: Yeah. It puts it more like utopian slant on the idea of future debt.

AUSTIN: Yes. Totally.

JANINE: Which is something notoriously sinister and bad.

AUSTIN: I should say right now we are not a dystopian game. We've done 3 seasons of dystopian games. And a lot of my other ideas for other games we should do have a dystopic bent or at least a cynical or skeptical air to them. I don't think this is a utopian game in that I don't think that we're talking about adventures at the height of a utopia. But we are a game that takes place in the utopia in a moment of decline, a utopia under threat. And the world as-is should be a place people want to live and want to be in and not a place that is shitty. The basic structures of everyday life are positive for people.

That's maybe a weird thing for us, but I wanted to give it a shot. So you have 3 kind of faith questions. So these are about other players. I guess it could be about NPCs. There's nothing that says that they can't be, because you can have faith on other players or other NPCs. But the first question is, if you saved someone from the Iconoclasts, which are a group of antagonists that are related to your class— sorry, if someone saved you from the Iconoclasts, asking for nothing in return, they have 1 faith on you. So I guess the question is really to Jack and Ali, did either you ever save Janine's character? Did Tender, or Jack, your character, ever save Signet from the Iconoclasts?

JANINE: The big question there is also, do they know about the Iconoclasts?

AUSTIN: Totally. So I think the start of this game, you've run missions together. So there is totally possibility that they have. There's maybe possibility they haven't. Your boss certainly— or maybe— I don't know. You tell me. Are the Iconoclasts— have they acted on you since you've been awake? Have they come for you?

JANINE: I think almost certainly.

AUSTIN: Okay. The Iconoclasts, the description in the playbook is [reading] they're coming for you, they never stop, and they've already taken the rest of your order. Under their disguises, they look like... And then we've described it. Let's not describe it yet. They'll just come up at some point in play.

JACK: Oh my god. [JANINE laughs] So the question is, have we saved Janine from a thing that we don't know what they are or what they look like?

AUSTIN: I mean, I can tell you that.

ALI: Well, we know.

AUSTIN: We described it in the world-building episode. But—

ALI: I imagine that if we were on a job before they started messing around with us, we probably did? But that seems—

AUSTIN: Yeah. But that doesn't feel true to the spirit of the question. Right? That's just "Oh yeah, they fucked with our mission, etcetera." This is if they saved you without asking anything in return. That seems like a deeply personal and good thing. The answer can be no.

JANINE: And there's also the option of maybe they didn't know fully what was going on there. It was just like, "Oh, Signet." Just see her in the street or whatever, and there's something coming up behind her. And scuffles ensue. Or—

ALI: Yeah, I'm still willing to say yes, but— okay.

AUSTIN: Okay. Well, you can just—

ALI: I don't see why not. [ALI and JANINE laugh]

AUSTIN: Yeah. As long as Janine is cool with it, you can both have 1 faith on her.

JACK: Cool.

JANINE: I think that's good because I don't really have any other stuff like that.

AUSTIN: We can figure out how that happened later. We can talk about it after. It's first session.

JANINE: My build right now is just very, is very faith light, so I'm not at all opposed to having that happen.

AUSTIN: So that will be a thing that, Ali and Jack, you add to your sheets under giri. You have 1 on Signet. The second question is, if you've allowed someone entry to your sanctuary in order to shelter them from danger, you have 1 giri on them.

JANINE: I don't think that would have happened yet.

AUSTIN: Okay. That's fair. And then if someone has disclosed major life events to you, thereby increasing your components on them, they have 1 giri on you for each component.

JANINE: Right. This class has those components that, when I have those components, I can specifically use them to— manipulate's not a great word, but is the word for what I do when I know stuff about people.

AUSTIN: I'm going to give you 2 on 2 NPCs, if that's okay.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: So you have 1 giri on the remaining Excerpt, whose name is— where are my notes? Emphyrean's Excerpt, whose name is Blooming. Her name is To the prince, we offered 12,000 flowers blooming in an untouched field. And so you have some details about her personal life, which is that she is stretched thin at the moment. She has been the Excerpt for the last 30 years, and it has been a harsh 30 years. Lots of individual, lots of other Excerpts have been killed. And she has been thrust into a position of leadership. And that's not what she wanted. And so that's a component on her.

The second thing that you have is a component on the Cadent, who is— so I mentioned in the intro that the prophet of this faith was a woman named—

JANINE: Kamala Cadence.

0:19:41

AUSTIN: Kamala Cadence, there we go. Whoo. Lots of notes right now that I'm looking at. [JANINE laughs] And the descendants of her, the human or organic leader of this faith always has the name The Cadent. That's the title anyway. And they all have individual names also, like titles. They all have their birth name, which no one uses anymore. And they have The Cadent,

which is what a 99— er, a huge percentage of people use. And then there is a specific name, which is Our holy representative, light in darkness, guidance under Mirage, may she live in peace. And she's The Cadent Under Mirage, is what the title is or her individual name. The Cadent Under Mirage.

And the thing that you know about her is that she is very young, but also the remaining Divines elected her with great confidence 10 years ago. There were still 4 Divines left or 5 Divines left or something. And they kind of plucked her out of school when she was 16 and raised her to the status to replace the previous Cadent who died of old age. And it in the first couple of years was controversial because she was so young, but then she took to it incredibly well. And she is well loved among the people of the Divine Fleet.

I should note that the Divine Fleet at this point is 9 ships. It is the ships of the remaining— sorry, 8 ships of the 8 most recent Divines. There are probably other smaller ships there too, but those ships are these big capital ships that thousands and thousands of people live on the ships. Seance, the big ship that is Empyrean's home ship is hundreds of thousands, millions of people, live on that ship. So that is an important note.

Okay. Also briefly, are you an alien? Did we decide if you were an alien?

JANINE: I think I ended up deciding not to be an alien because of Jack and Ali. I figured it would— there's a balancing act of how much weird body stuff you can do in one squad. And I was like, "Eh, what if I just am normal?" It's fine. I don't have to make up a new—

AUSTIN: Just a regular person. Okay.

JANINE: And also, again, there's so much stuff going on with her that it feels like being like, "And she's an alien!" is a little— [AUSTIN laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah. Fair, fair. [ALI giggles]

JANINE: I definitely considered it, I did. Did you say where the giri situation was with The Cadent? Who has what on what? Or is it just a component?

AUSTIN: Wait, say that again? They have that on you. The way that that question is asked, they have 1 on you, which is interesting, which is the opposite of what you might think. But I like it a lot. Okay.

JANINE: Anyway, doesn't having— does it mean that I owe them a favor?

AUSTIN: Yes, correct. They have 1 faith on you. Correct.

JANINE: Okay. Okay, right.

AUSTIN: And we can get into how all that— so in a sense, faith is a currency that you can spend to do a certain set of moves in this game, in which you say, "Hey, I'm going to call that favor in, basically. I'm going to lean on you to get you to do something because I have faith on you."

Who wants to go next? Unless I'm forgetting something, but I don't think I'm forgetting anything.

JACK: I'll go.

AUSTIN: Okay. Hi, Jack.

JACK: Hi.

AUSTIN: Tell me about your character a little bit. What's their playbook and look and concept and jam?

JACK: I am playing from the playbook called the Dying. And the pitch for the Dying, I'll just read it because it's great. [reading] The Dying is suffering from a noncommunicable debilitating disease that is slowly destroying you. You may or may not be aware of your ultimate demise, but what you're aware of is the symptoms. There is no cure, but there may be hope, grace, or whatever you may wish to find at the end of your tale.

So I'm playing a body-swapping bounty hunter called Fourteen Fifteen who is transmitted to their targets essentially as data, taking on a body when they arrive at the destination to hide in plain sight. So my jam is that. My jam is being a bounty hunter.

AUSTIN: Right. So this is exactly— this thing that you do with this crew is a side gig, basically. Yeah, you're a bounty hunter for hire but also maybe do good things now and then.

JACK: I'm reminded of the moment in No Country for Old Men where the assassin in that decides to go suddenly off piste. And while I think Fourteen Fifteen hasn't gone off piste necessarily, they're doing something else, as well as being a bounty hunter.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Uhh. Yeah, good.

JACK: And I think that the boundary between bounty hunter and assassin is probably fairly slim? I'm not sure. I think it depends on what the bounty is.

AUSTIN: We've described— so a thing that's happened is, ever since the Divine Fleet started being whittled down, people have fled and have started colonies on a few planets, small frontier places. And between that and then other cultures, right, you're this— I'll just give you all a peek, really quick of the unfinished map of this kind of space sector I'm working on here. You're

between a couple of different cultures. And then there are going to be planets that are just outside of the Twilight Mirage altogether. Right? And between all of that, there are lots of clients. And that is a thing that— there's work for someone in your job. But I don't know that necessarily it is a culture of— this culture is not the culture of assassination necessarily. Right? There are people who hire assassins, because people are people. And they're shitty. But—

JACK: But this isn't a sort of Morrowind style thing of there's constant assassins.

AUSTIN: Right. Yes, exactly. What's Fourteen Fifteen look like at this moment?

JACK: So at the moment, Fourteen Fifteen looks like a gunslinger. They look masculine. They have stubble, thinning hair. Sort of in their late 40s, mid 50s, looking on the older side. A white shirt, a bandolier. My weapon is a— it's a kinetic handgun—

AUSTIN: Ooo.

JACK: — which is close and loud. And so the image of Fourteen Fifteen currently, in this particular body, is definitely that of a Wild West gunslinger.

AUSTIN: Good. This is going to go great. What are your beliefs?

JACK: Okay. So I have a belief with Ali's character, which is I don't know why, but Tender is important. Always keep her in my sights. And Fourteen doesn't know what this is, but I do.

AUSTIN: [excitedly] Uh-huh.

JACK: And maybe this is the point to say how I'm dying.

AUSTIN: Yeah. It definitely is, because otherwise this doesn't make any sense.

JACK: So it's not supposed to go like this. This isn't how the assassins work. [ALI giggles] But I have a bug. And every time I make a jump, my data degrades. And it's getting less and less coherent. And the more I jump, the less of me there is. So I'm losing data. And it turns out that one of the first pieces of data I lost is who my target is, because it's Tender.

[overlapping]

JANINE: Oh man.

ALI: Huh.

JACK: And I don't know that anymore.

AUSTIN: You just know she's important.

JACK: I don't know if Tender knows? But I know she's important. And I think if I'm being honest, I probably think that— I know I'm forgetting things. But I probably think that I knew her once, and we were close. Or we were friends.

AUSTIN: And something happened. There was a rift or something?

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah. Or that it's very sad that I've forgotten that. I have to do work to make sure that I can maintain that relationship.

AUSTIN: Good. [ALI giggles]

JACK: But it's not that. It's that I was hired to kill her.

AUSTIN: Good. Good and cool. Here's a question, does your commander know that about you? Your commander being the person in charge of your squad, not the person— does she know you're a bounty hunter/assassin? She must.

JACK: I think she super does. But I don't think she knows that I was— because she probably wouldn't have put me in a group with Tender.

AUSTIN: Maybe not. Yeah. Okay. [ALI giggles] What are your other beliefs?

JACK: So my other belief comes from the culture that I grew up in. Fourteen Fifteen and the agency that I work for as a bounty hunter, I guess - or worked for, I'm not sure that works - are from the Divine Curiosity. And so my belief here is that I should always shine a light into shadowed corners.

AUSTIN: Were you—

JACK: There's not necessarily—

AUSTIN: Go on. Go ahead.

JACK: There's not necessarily a judgement there about finding something good or it being beneficial, so much that that's just a thing you should always do.

0:29:39

AUSTIN: Totally. So that ship that you were from— Curiosity was on a strange ship that it found in the dark of space. And Curiosity you described in the world-building episode as being a

swarm of kind of exploratory drones that dropped points of interest onto a map, basically. Like, "Ah, there's something here. There's something here, go check this out." And then they disappeared into this ship that was called the Sky in Mirrors. Was—

JACK: The Sky Reflected in Mirrors.

AUSTIN: The Sky Reflected in Mirrors, correct. You're right. Was Fourteen Fifteen born on that ship? Or did that just happen?

JACK: I think I was born on that ship.

AUSTIN: Okay. Cool. That's interesting.

JACK: Yeah. I think it's worth saying for people who didn't hear the world-building episode is that Fourteen Fifteen is not a robot or an AI or anything. They're a human. They were born, they had parents, they went to school, they joined an agency of assassins and bounty hunters [AUSTIN laughs], were reduced to data, and body-swapped across the galaxy. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yep! Yeah. It's an important note. And then do you have a third belief yet, or you still work on that?

JACK: I have a third one, but I haven't found the wording for it yet.

AUSTIN: Sure.

JACK: But it's perhaps worth saying at the beginning, codifying it almost. Which is that my character is dying, but I don't want my character arc necessarily to be about the tragedy of death. I'm not very interested in that, particularly in this season. It's not, "They're dying, and that's very sad," because lord knows we've done enough of that on the show.

AUSTIN: Us? Us? Weird.

JACK: So I want a belief that reflects, in some respect, the fact that Fourteen is, if not ready to go, is getting there.

AUSTIN: But for a final time. Not like you throw yourself into death because you know that you can transmit your data back to base moments before you die anyway. But yeah, really, truly a belief about being at ease with that. I'm just going to make that note for now on this sheet that I'm looking at, so that I can keep your beliefs in mind while we play.

JACK: I'll get you actual wording for that soon.

AUSTIN: Totally. Sounds good. Okay. I think that that's— oh, no. We have to do giri. We have to do faith with you, also. [reading] If you have exposed yourself to future danger by using your gift to save someone else, you have 1 faith on them. Have you done that with these two?

JACK: So I get a gift because I'm Dying. The thing gives me a gift. And the thing I've picked basically means I can't die. And that's how we're going to reflect that I can switch bodies. It's called— it would be in moves.

AUSTIN: It's called The Gift. It says [reading] your organic tissue grows at a rapid rate. You cannot succumb to death until the disease takes you. When you would die, roll plus Symptoms. On a 10 plus, it could be hours or days until you wake alone and confused and in a foreign place. On a 7 to 9, you'll be out for a few hours, but none worse for wear. On under 6, you'll awake to the comfort of a friend.

And it's not that your tissue is regrowing. For us, it's that your data is being transmitted across the Twilight Mirage, which is this network, this false nebula that hides the Fleet and also works as a network that connects all of the ships. So that's how that gift works. So have you used that gift to save anybody?

JACK: Yeah. I think so. I mean, if the party's okay with it.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: I think we said that they've seen me do it once.

AUSTIN: Yeah. So what was that time like?

JACK: I think it was fairly routine. I think it was a fairly routine job. And something went bad. There was a shootout, or there was a fire. Or we opened a bulkhead door without sealing it properly, and it began to flood or something. And Fourteen Fifteen died, and then introduced themselves to the crew the next day as a gunslinger. And I think that's the first time. I don't know whether or not that's Signet or Tender, though.

AUSTIN: It could be both.

JACK: It could be both. I mean, do you want faith on me?

AUSTIN: Other way around. You have faith on them.

JACK: Oh, I have faith on them because I saved them?

AUSTIN: Because you've done this, yes.

JACK: Oh, I thought they had faith on me because they were weirded out by my thing.

AUSTIN: No. No. Uh uh. [ALI and JANINE giggle]

JACK: Just like, "Ah, you're a gunslinger now. Okay. We thought you were a college student."
[AUSTIN laughs] No. Yeah, okay. I'll take faith on both of them.

AUSTIN: Great. If you—

JACK: If they're okay with that.

ALI: Yeah.

JANINE: So I have— you have 2 on me now?

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

JACK: Yeah. And 1 on Tender.

JANINE: Oh man.

AUSTIN: Uh huh. [ALI giggles] Listen, it'll all work out in the end. [reading] If you've confided your outlook on life and what you intend to do since becoming sick to one person only, you have 1 faith on them. Have you confided yet?

JACK: Yeah, I think I have. Can I confide with an NPC?

AUSTIN: Sure.

JACK: I like the idea that I have confided with— I think there's a person in an office who gives the bounty hunters names. And I think on late nights on the phone giving names—

AUSTIN: Names to go kill, is what you mean when you say names?

JACK: Yeah. Yeah, I think the person has picked up the phone and said, "Brightness Underwater, so-and-so planet." And I've gone like, "You know, I've been thinking." And they've sat back and put their feet up the desk. I think it's that person.

AUSTIN: Tell me what they're like a little bit, so I can write this down.

JACK: They are woman in her mid 60s. She has gray hair that she was in a ponytail. She wears a boiler suit, a work suit, because the agency is disguised as a cleaning unit.

AUSTIN: Oh, well, that adds up. The cleaning unit, yep. Sure.

JACK: She has to wear that into work in the morning. And she sits at a fairly featureless desk surrounded by screens and smart phones.

AUSTIN: You only know her as Mrs. Castlerose.

JACK: Okay. Is that one word?

AUSTIN: Yeah, one word. Castlerose, like a last name.

JACK: And I have 1 on her.

AUSTIN: Yes. You do.

JACK: And she's my handler, I guess.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's the word I've written down in my notes. I love her a lot already. All right. Games are good, actually. If someone knows something important about your sickness that you do not and is withholding that information from you, they have 1 faith on you.

JACK: Hey, do you want some faith on me, Signet?

AUSTIN: Huh.

JANINE: Uh, yeahhh.

JACK: You're really old, right?

JANINE: Oh yeah.

JACK: And know a lot of things and are connected to Divines— er, was, so are probably pretty informed?

AUSTIN: That's interesting.

JANINE: I also do have an ear that is special.

[overlapping]

JACK: You have a special ear?

AUSTIN: You have a special ear.

JANINE: I have a special ear. [laughs]

JACK: Can your ear hear death?

AUSTIN: I actually liked the notion of, "Oh yeah, Fourteen Fifteen's one of those." You just know because you were around hundreds of years ago or whatever. Also. Wait, wait. Were you around hundreds of years ago, Signet? It's something we talked about it and never really came down on.

JANINE: Yeah. I think so.

AUSTIN: So like 250 years ago or something—

JANINE: I think we thought that, of the last batch of Divines, Belgard was the first or among the very first to go.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. Because that's what put the rest of them under threat. One of the 2 remaining ones, Gumption, which was one that Keith designed, if you couldn't tell by the name [JANINE laughs], was similarly in a kind of defensive/protective rebuilding role that Belgard was in. And so that other Divine being around it is let them live it all after Belgard went. But Belgard was kind of like the final bell. Mm, bad. [sighs] Unintentional. So yeah, 250 years ago or something you were like, "Yeah, I know a thing." We'll figure out what that is later. I don't need to tell you that right this second. That how these games work.

Okay. Is there anything else, Fourteen Fifteen?

JACK: I don't think so. I don't have any cybernetics.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's interesting. I like that this body just didn't have any. No gunslinging eyes, no nothing. Just—

JACK: I don't think they're a real gunslinger.

AUSTIN: [surprised] Oh, okay.

JACK: I think I can just shoot, and I put on a white shirt.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Okay. Good. [ALI laughs] They do have at least the base-level thing of being able to see the mesh around you, the thing that this game calls the Veil, which is this mixed reality world that's a living internet. Because 95% of bodies in this world can see that.

The only people who can't are from one specific ship that Sylvia designed. Maybe this person's that from that ship at this point. There is a subfaith in the Resonant Orbit, which is the name of this big-tent faith, that doesn't believe in any intrusive surgery, basically. So there's no

cybernetics at all. Maybe this body is from there, actually, in retrospect. But the way that that worked is they had nanomachines instead. And then when their Divine died, their nanomachines stopped working. And in fact, a new generation is being born without nanomachines for the first time ever. They didn't propagate the way they were supposed to. And so a lot of those people went on to just get a chip put in their brain so that they could see the Veil because you're part of that world, you're part of— everything has existed like this for 30,000 years. It's hard to imagine a world without it. So many things are just part of that world. And so most people are just like, "Oh, this is terrible, but I'm going to get a chip in my head so I can keep doing my job." But there is sect of people still in that ship that are holding their faith to their chest and really, really holding firm in their belief that their Divine will return one day. And they have not replaced that yet. So they are seeing the world without any of the mesh overlay, the internet mixed reality, augmented reality overlay. And it's up to you whether or not you have that base-level thing or not. In this current body, that is.

0:40:57

JACK: Yeah. I think I probably do, if only because we're fairly early on in the game. And I think having access to the mesh technically at this point would be used here.

AUSTIN: Yes. There are moves built around it. This was the conversation Ali and I were having before about would people want to leave, want to stop having the access to the mesh. And I realized, "Oh no. Everybody in this game has to move Lift the Veil," which is when you can just know a thing. If you want to know a thing, you just know it. You could just make this roll and know it. [ALI giggles] And like, "Oh yeah, no one wants to not have that. It's really good." So it makes sense to me that this character does have that even though they don't have a cyber arm or whatever.

All right. Hey, Tender.

ALI: Hi.

AUSTIN: Tender— what Tender's last name?

ALI: Tender Sky.

AUSTIN: Good name. Tell me about your playbook, your look, and your jam.

ALI: Yeah, so I'm playing the Architect, which is kind of the class in the system that works in digital environments a lot, in terms of designing them and manipulating them. We've also sort of defined that in fiction, that she was a literal architect, where she was raised and had training in actually building digital spaces for people to live in, whether that's completely digital or this mixed reality space too. She doesn't do that anymore. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Things were bad. Right?

ALI: Yeah. Things were bad.

AUSTIN: That's a key part of your situation. Right?

ALI: I could just go over that now, I guess.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally.

ALI: I don't know if we went over it fully in the start of it, where I guess the planet game is going to be on planets trying to make a colony. And sort of the idea of this world is that there's a bunch of spaceships, and they're sort of looking for places to colonize, because it's what you do.

AUSTIN: Well, specifically because— so I actually think that the big ship, Seance, the ship that you're on now, that culture has a rule that is never perch where there is already a bird. And because of that, this ship has never colonized anything before— uh, has only tried to colonize barren worlds where there's no other culture. Right? It doesn't want to— this Divine does not like the notion of displacing anything else or saying, "Us first." But they are now in a position that's like, "Uh oh! [ALI giggles] You're getting down to it now." And so the ground game is going to be a group that gets sent out to try to start a colony while also dealing with that rule.

And then also, there is— but the other Divines did not necessarily have that rule. And you came from the Divine Anticipation, which did not have that rule. Right?

ALI: Yeah. It had something similar. I didn't write it down anywhere. But I had the notion of that they had the thing to not build on top of anything else. But yeah.

Basically, she's been to a planet— she was part of a ground team to go and do that. And the colony was almost ready. And they just had to go in and paint it, essentially, with the mesh stuff. And things went super bad.

AUSTIN: Right. Which is a big deal. To be clear, it's not just like a paint job. It's not like wallpaper in The Sims.

ALI: No, I know. I'm joking. [giggles]

AUSTIN: I know. But I want to be clear for the audience that what you do, it's not just a decoration. It's structural in this important way that's actually really hard to do without your unique talent.

ALI: Uh huh.

AUSTIN: And tools, right? Because you have a special thing? Or had a special thing?

ALI: I had a special thing. So things went super bad while I was on the ground team. Anticipation died while I was there. So in a reaction to that, me and the other architect who were there— she had come up with a plan to try to combine our cyber brains so we would become a Divine together. And I was not into that. So.

AUSTIN: Fair!

ALI: I was like, "Naw!" So I could have pulled the plug on all of that, both literally and figuratively, I guess.

AUSTIN: Right. Literally, the cyber— so this class has a section called cyber brain. And I think the thing that is— because we're Friends at the Table, the first thing I said, or the 30th thing I said, cause we went back and forth on this a billion times, was like, "Oh, what if you don't even have a cyber brain anymore, but you still have the move Cyber Brain." What if your whole thing was you pulled the plug because, "Fuck that, this is bad and you're bad people. And this is not just sacrilegious but dangerous." And then you could left and you could still be an Architect, [ALI laughs] even though you didn't have the tool anymore. And that's weird.

ALI: Right. Yeah. I think that the situation— because I've flipped between calling an Architect and a priestess a couple times, because specifically what she does is Divine within the Anticipation culture. But the thought of, especially with the themes of this game being where there's division between what is human and what is machine, trying to do that, trying to make yourself a god is a huge thing!

So I think that she stopped it. And when they went back to the ship, they were like, "We're not putting these in people anymore. This is not a role that people are going to fulfill anymore. We're taking your things, and we're going to figure out a plan C, at this point."

AUSTIN: Right. You'll do this the old-fashioned way or whatever. And there were also people who did just go start colonies on their own, without Divine authority. And the ground game will have to deal with those people, try to get them back in the fold.

ALI: Yeah, I still have my abilities. My partner is a woman named Open Metal—

AUSTIN: Good name!

ALI: — who I was close with at the time. And I think that she still lives on that ship. Or here, or I don't really know. I imagine we kind of fell out of touch.

AUSTIN: So she was the one who had the idea about the brains?

ALI: Yes. Yes, she was the one who had the idea and developed it and tried to get me on board. And that's my whole deal, I guess.

AUSTIN: She didn't go to jail for that, because it didn't have happen?

ALI: I guess it didn't happen. I feel like a removing your cyber brain and kicking you out of a church is enough. I'm sure she's having a rough time. To the point where I don't live on that ship anymore. I went to a different ship to a completely different culture, because I can't just go to the same butcher that I used to, I bet. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Fair.

JACK: Someone hired me to kill you.

AUSTIN: Right. Right. Yes.

ALI: I don't know that. But—

AUSTIN: Her name is Open Metal?

ALI: Yes.

AUSTIN: Good fucking name.

ALI: I like it.

JACK: Is that metal or medal?

ALI: Metal with a T.

AUSTIN: With a T. Is she still an active priestesses?

ALI: [sighs] I don't—

AUSTIN: So the thing about this world is I think there's basic income. Actually, I think we talked about in the world-building episode was like, "Oh, there's no currency in the traditional sense." Everyone basically has RAM or memory the way characters in Nier Automata had memory slots where you can equip stuff. But that's money, where like, "Okay, you have 100 credits worth of stuff." And if you want to change your stuff, you can just— that stuff is still worth the same amount of credits was before. You trade that back in, and you get that money back. And now you can take that somewhere else and spend 200 credits on something else. And everyone gets to eat in this world. You don't have spend money on food. Everyone just gets food. You can

spend extra money to have access to a thing that spices your food differently. But everyone gets decent food for free. So she could just not be doing anything to make faith or credits or whatever. But you tell me.

ALI: Yeah. I think Open is living a life like if you went from being a pope to just a nun. Where that's sort of her penance. Where she's very local and does the sweeping and the sort of jobs that she didn't use to do. But is still very dedicated to it in a way that I guess she feels like she has to be after doing such a heinous thing.

AUSTIN: So does she feel guilty for it? As far as— I guess really so I know what to do with her. [ALI laughs] Is it a mix? Is it—

ALI: It has to be a mix. Right? Yeah. It's one of those things where she probably still believes that she was justified at the time.

AUSTIN: Totally.

ALI: And if that had happened, I don't think people would feel the way about me that they do now. But since it didn't, she's like, "Okay, I get it. I maybe went too far," or whatever. But in a way that— she feels that she has to pay penance, but also.

Tender, on the other hand. [laughs]

0:50:29

AUSTIN: Yeah! Let's talk about beliefs. Also look. Wait, what's Tender look like? [ALI laughs] Jam also.

ALI: Let's go over all of that. So my look is— I'm not reading this verbatim.

AUSTIN: No? You're not going to read this out loud?

ALI: [laughing] It's a joke for me and you, unless you want to say it out loud.

AUSTIN: No, it's all you. You wrote it. [ALI giggles] Ali's written down, "big tiddy catgirl with incredible tailor." [JANINE laughs]

ALI: Yup. That's it, that's the long and short of it.

AUSTIN: Live your best life, kids.

ALI: I'm living my best life! We're in space. This is an anime again. Anyone can exist. Yeah, Tender is a catgirl. She has ears and a tail and is otherwise basically humanoid, aside from some cyber gear. [cracks up briefly] I spent a lot of time looking at Vogue runway shows. But I know in my heart of hearts that every outfit that I'm going to imagine her is the most recent body suit from the Gucci show and that also Rihanna wore.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

ALI: Which is basically [laughing] a bejeweled mesh, a full body bejeweled mesh, but also with shorts? And a button down, probably. I imagine her in coats, but not military coats like Aria had, but more like cropped jackets with short capes on the back.

AUSTIN: You have written down here, "Capes all the time." [ALI laughs] Also if you hear Ali laugh earlier, it's because Janine said, "Excuse me, big tiddy catgirl shrine maiden." Good.

ALI: That was her old life.

AUSTIN: Uh huh. Right. [ALI laughs]

ALI: Okay. This is also another thing. As far as her body, I think of her as being kind of thicc with two cs, [laughing] which I have written here. Yeah. I hate going through the book stuff, but sweet face, calculating eyes.

AUSTIN: Yeah. And then your jam.

ALI: My jam is that every—

AUSTIN: Also, to be clear: you're a cat girl. We live in a world in which you can recreate your image because of augmented reality. There are lots of people who have who just have a plain jacket, and then they upload a new GIF that runs on the back of the jacke whenever they walk around. [ALI giggles] And that's the thing people have. Some people also have the abilities that change what their body looks like or whatever. This is a very— I said this in the world-building episode, but we want this to be a space where people can reimagine themselves into a form that is more ideal for what they really truly want to look like, in a way that both recognizes the value of bodies but also recognizes the value of agency.

Which is to say that just because a person is only a digital catgirl doesn't mean that's bad or something. But you're literally a physical catgirl. You literally have big ears.

ALI: Yeah. So the way that I justified this during the world-building episode is that we'd established very sort of basic genetic hobby doing [laughs] in COUNTER/Weight. And on a long enough timeline, humanity is kind of blurred in that way. Where, yeah, she's mostly considered a human but is also just an anime catgirl. And that's fine.

And then also, a big part of my class is that I can change my appearance. So she won't always look like this. But this is sort of the body that she was born with and presents in most often.

Anyway. My jam is that on the weekends, I run a weekly lounge, which settings and design changes every week. It's a digital lounge, so you've got to jack in. And it's a nice jazz club, I guess, or a nice picnic tables by a beach and. I don't know. It changes every week, so it can be whatever.

AUSTIN: Does it have a name?

ALI: It's called The Steady

AUSTIN: Nice.

ALI: And I wrote a catch phrase, which is "Nothing stays at the Steady."

AUSTIN: Nice. Good. Uh huh. [ALI giggles]

ALI: Because it changes every week.

JACK: That's so good!

AUSTIN: I fucking love this game. I love it so much. [ALI is still giggling] I'm so glad we're doing this. I - this is real - for weeks have been afraid that I would die before we played the first session of this game. [JACK chuckles]

ALI: Austin! [stress giggles]

AUSTIN: It's a real fear that I've had.

JANINE: It's a really weird fear.

[overlapping]

AUSTIN: I've been looking forward to this—

JACK: Austin, I've got some good news for you, pal.

AUSTIN: This has gotten me through weeks of my life.

[overlapping]

JANINE: Oh, honey.

ALI: We're here.

AUSTIN: Very seriously. So. Uh huh.

JACK: No one's more Friends at the Table than we are. [group laughs]

AUSTIN: Always a good time at Friends at the Table. No one's having terrible ideation ever! [ALI giggles] So what's your other belief? What are your beliefs?

ALI: My beliefs! My first belief is the most straightforward one, which is never take a shortcut. That was kind of born out of, if you listen to the world-building episode, the sort of memories of the ship Anticipation that she grew up on. Which was kind of built around really long spaces and being able to move from one place to the other and appreciate the journey there. So that's there.

I went a lot of different ways with the bond that I wanted to have with Jack, because their character is a digital person and I kind of work in digital or environments. And I thought that would be some overlap there? But I didn't really settle on anything that I'm happy with yet.

JACK: There's something about the fact that— and again, we don't need to work this out now and we probably shouldn't for time or whatever. But during the period when I'm not a body, I'm just data, which means that for almost everybody, but perhaps not Tender, I'm just gone. There is a gap there that Tender has access to in some way.

ALI: Yeah, one of the early, early drafts of this bond was wanting to build you a home to die it, which was a little much. [ALI and JACK laugh]

AUSTIN: Yeah, but that's something you could work on. Right? There's a thing of like, "In my downtime— for whatever, Fourteen is incredibly important to me. And whenever I have free time, I will blah, blah, blah," is totally a viable belief.

ALI: Yeah. I think maybe not in between. I could have a space for you. I don't know. I don't know. We'll figure it out.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: We can work on it.

ALI: And then my third belief is also sort of the thing where it's the arc of her where I want her to be, but have not— it has to be boiled down more.

AUSTIN: Sure.

ALI: It's still fruit in a pan. It has to become a jam or whatever. Yeah. [laughs]

AUSTIN: I gotcha.

ALI: [laughing] It has to reduce is the word that I'm looking for. So a huge part of Tender's thing is that she's not supposed to have the abilities that she does anymore. And yet she does. And that has to feel Divine to her in a way? Or like fate, in a way. So the way that I have this written down is: controlling the mesh must be my purpose, and so I will either strive to protect it or I can determine what can be seen and what shouldn't. And those are attitudes that I want her to have—

AUSTIN: Totally,

ALI: — but I don't know that they're actionable.

AUSTIN: They are the sorts of things that could drive a broad type of action. They're not a clear, specific action. But the thing that, for me that makes it really interesting is that comes into conflict with— the notion of you can change the mesh, but you also have this notion that it is valuable as it is, in some ways. You're protecting it but also reshaping it. And those two things are not clean and parallel. They intersect in really fun ways. I will say that I'm curious if Tender wants to know about why she can do the things she can do. Or she's just like, "Here it is. I'm like this now."

ALI: I will say that I think that she's keeping it a secret. So she has not seeked out that knowledge to anyone else.

AUSTIN: Right. I will say that is one way that I could easily see something being actionable and something still tied to this larger arc. You don't have— I'm not saying you should do this, but maybe on a future belief or something. Because beliefs should change, you should resolve these.

ALI: Right, right, right. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Six sessions from now, all three of these should be new. Because when you resolve it, it doesn't mean that you don't believe it anymore. It means that you're not interested in putting the camera on it right now. It means you've come to a place with it, and it makes sense. And we can move on to kind of something else, to focusing on something else. And so at some point, if you do want to know about it, that's a good thing that you can get lots of XP from and that there'd be really good character arc stuff around that.

So. Okay. Anything else? I guess faith for you also.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I thing I've learned this week is I spell architect incorrectly all the time.

ALI: Mm hmm. 2 Ts, 1 H.

AUSTIN: Well, I put an extra H. That's the thing that I do. I put an H in the -tect side of it, which is just wrong.

ALI: I also always do that. 2 Ts, 1 H.

JANINE: Oh, like check.

AUSTIN: No, no. I put an H after the E—

ALI: Like tech.

AUSTIN: I put T E H C T, which is just wrong.

1:00:16

ALI: I guess I am an architect. Huh huh.

JACK: No, no! [JANINE groans]

AUSTIN: If someone keeps a secret about your subconscious from you for your benefit, they have one faith on you. Does anybody have a secret from you?

JACK: I do. [ALI giggles again]

AUSTIN: Yeah, but that's not about this. That's also not a secret about her subconscious.

ALI: That's also a secret from you.

JACK: Oh, it's also a secret from me. Yes. Got it. Yes.

AUSTIN: Yes. That is true. So again, it's a secret about your subconscious, which is— this class is very much built on— yeah, it's very much built in the Inception model of an architect. It's very clearly inspired by that and little bit of the Matrix style of— this is a cyberpunk game, but it's also a very post-cyberpunk game, very transhumanist game or very just wild side. It is actually a very flexible setting because the Ononastic, Janine's playbook, is at some points just like, "This is space magic. It's okay. It's space magic, you can call it space magic."

JANINE: Yeah, it's very open about, "You can explain this if you want. And if you don't, I dunno, just go for it."

AUSTIN: And so one of the settings that it pulls from is Inception. And so this notion of the Architect having a subconscious that can bleed into fully digital environments. What are your three things that are in your subconscious that can bleed over?

ALI: So the three things that I have are the memories of the Bye and Bye, which is the ship that I mentioned before, which is basically really big changes in scale to the environment, whether it gets much larger or much smaller. The second one is Open Metal herself, which is my ex-partner. Partner is one of those words. [laughs] We went over her so she can either show up or some sort of form of her. When I was making these, I was trying to think of more visual things than , "This is Inception and a bad lady is here."

AUSTIN: Uh huh. Yeah.

ALI: Because as much as my life's purpose is to write stories about women and how they feel about each other, I don't want that to just be the thing. That could definitely be part of the thing. But I'm really trying to move away from that, which is why my third one is unworthiness, which is basically her guilt about her not supposed to be having these powers anymore. As much as she feels like it's a blessing, this is also heinous in some sort of thing because this was taken away from me. And the way that I've sort of written that down is that the powers that I have faded a little bit, so either the—

AUSTIN: Can we actually just use unworthiness?

ALI: Sure.

AUSTIN: I mean, keep going. But I can do a lot with a feeling of unworthiness.

ALI: Yeah. No, for sure. I have some examples here that I wrote down that I really like, which is really wide shifts in color palette. Or items in the environment either crumbling or losing focus. Or kind of ripples in vision in the way that she is going to do with mesh a lot. Also, I have a parole officer, which was an idea that we had that I do not want to put down because it's the best.

AUSTIN: I love parole officer. Let's write that down immediately. That could be a girl question. Does that person know something about your subconscious that you don't?

ALI: I feel like the thing about my parole officers is that she shouldn't know that I can do that.

AUSTIN: Oh, sure. So she does not know this.

ALI: Yeah. So that is not that.

AUSTIN: I mean, she could still know something about your subconscious that you don't know.

ALI: That's fair.

AUSTIN: But your literal— I'm not saying that that's the case, but I want to make sure that that's on the table still.

ALI: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, I'm willing to involve her as much as possible, but—

AUSTIN: Does she have a name yet? Do we have a name for her?

ALI: I was going to give her the name of that other character. But she's not from Anticipation. She was Helena Bex, which is H E L E N A.

AUSTIN: Oh, I see. Right.

ALI: She's [laughing] from the Divine Mercy. Literally a mercy officer. [more laughing]

AUSTIN: Yes. We decided that your parole officer was called a mercy officer. Basically, you were court martialed, basically, for destroying these cyber brains and for fucking up this colony moments before it was complete. And also some people probably believe you had something to do with the death of the Divine, even though the timing isn't exactly lined up right there.

ALI: Right. Yeah.

AUSTIN: But also, you did the right thing because you stopped this person and this group from doing something that was sacrilegious. And so they showed you mercy. And in your culture, you have a mercy officer who's like a parole officer, who's making sure that you're living up to your potential and making sure that you're not turning back into a criminal. Which is a weird thing for what you did [ALI laughs]. And they probably are who connected you with the group that you're with now.

ALI: Yeah. I was thinking of the mercy officers as not just my culture, but is a ship-wide thing, even though they're— I guess those ships aren't around anymore. Right? But still.

AUSTIN: Wait, who's— oh, right, right, right. Literally from the Divine Mercy. Yes. I think their ship is gone. I mean, there were 300 Divines in this culture, once. Most of the big ships from those are gone. We talked about this as having these last 8 big capital ships. But those other bits of the Divines and their cultures haven't just been erased necessarily. I mean, I think probably a great number have been, and that's really sad. We'll touch on that in a moment.

ALI: Yeah. But the ones that serve a purpose in that way, or— yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. A lot of them are probably still around, mixed in with the rest of these cultures. And yeah, the notion of Mercy— one of the things that the Mercy culture did was figure out how to— and it's one of the reasons why the culture ended up being kind of utopia. There's an entire order of people devoted to making sure that there isn't just justice, but there's also mercy. We are devoted to bringing you back into society after you've done something wrong. We are devoted to giving you the resources to improve yourself and to monitor you and make sure— not in a terrible, no-privacy way, in a way that reflects your humanity and recognizes it, while still making sure that you are outfitted to do the best you can. And if you can't do well, then we'll make sure that if you're in prison, that it's not a shitty, terrible prison. We'll throw our political weight around to ensure that.

Again, it's a good world. It's weird to describe that. It's weird to— we spent a lot of time honing knives and have decided to use those to— [ALI giggles] what's a good thing a knife can do?

JANINE: Surgery?

AUSTIN: Mmm, that still feels scary to me. I don't like surgery.

JACK: What about a nice ratatouille?

AUSTIN: Yeah. We're making a nice ratatouille instead of stabbing with it.

JACK: The ratatouille?

ALI: Yeah. Cutting some nice— making some nice sliced bread. Who knows.

AUSTIN: Some nice sliced bread. Yeah, exactly. We're making a nice meal with knives instead of using them as weapons.

JACK: Don't get us wrong. It's going to be sad as hell at points. [ALI laughs] Everything is.

AUSTIN: Yeah! A touchstone for us again and again has been, for me at least, has been Frank Ocean, whose music often has this incredible overwhelming melancholy, but also a great deal of joy and hope and exploration and confidence in himself and in his culture. And that is what I want this game to kind of feel like, this kind of swing between— or the moves between looking off in the horizon in anime shows, right, as the sun is setting. Which can have this distant feeling of a bittersweet. Right? Thinking about FLCL or something like that, where it's— the pillows are playing, and these guitar hits are coming in, and what does the future hold? And I want that feeling, mixed with Studio Ghibli. Running through the open horizons, or running through city streets. And hopefully we get that, but that's a different thing for us. It's weird to be there, which is nice. Okay. We did your beliefs. So we did your NPCs—

[overlapping]

JANINE: We did no giri for her.

ALI: We did not do any giri. [laughs]

AUSTIN: That is what we did not do yet. Let's talk about faith. Does somebody else keep a secret about your subconscious from you?

ALI: Yeah. Does anyone here feel like maybe they were in the zone with me?

AUSTIN: Or know something about what happened there?

JANINE: I feel like Signet might in a— just because a lot of the stuff around that is probably very similar to feelings that Signet herself had in the past. Like feelings of inadequacy and weird machine syncope. [ALI giggles] That's not the word I want. That's fainting. [more ALI giggles]

AUSTIN: No, but— yeah. I think that that's fine. I think that even in that general sense—

JANINE: I don't know what that looks like in a more specific way.

AUSTIN: I think that that's fine with faith— that is not a belief. You're not acting on it. All that that needs to be is a reflection of the fact that you have a relationship in which you have faith on her. Right?

ALI: Yeah, I feel like the word secret here is kind of a hang up. But I feel like if it is something that Signet wasn't able to sort— they're kind of two sides of a similar coin. That's the save point. That's how that works. Anyway, that—

AUSTIN: Coin is a different character. [ALI and JANINE laugh] maybe the word insight would be better than secret, right?

ALI: Right. Yeah. I feel like Tender's probably confided in her, because they could sit down and talk about this. But not something she's actively hiding.

AUSTIN: If you used your cyber brain to change something in the digital environment in order to protect someone else, you have 1 faith on them.

ALI: Yeah, I can do that. Huh.

AUSTIN: Who would have you done that with?

ALI: People can volunteer, but could we say Carsica? Or are we just trying to keep her off the table?

AUSTIN: No, wait, that's a different season. Cascara. Corsica, bad-ass lady from a previous season cast. Cascara, bad-ass lady from this season.

ALI: I said that with an A. I melded them, but—

AUSTIN: No, it was where the R was. The R was early, that's all.

ALI: Okay, yeah. Fair.

AUSTIN: It's fine.

1:10:55

JANINE: It's possible that's tied into— because I had that faith question about "Who protected you in the past?" And—

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Oh yeah. That's just a trade.

JANINE: — a lot of these things— yeah. I mean, that's already marked, basically, if that's what that is.

AUSTIN: Yeah, if it's the same thing, then let's just say that that's already marked, basically.

ALI: Okay. Yeah, that's fine.

JACK: Who is Casacar again? [ALI giggles]

AUSTIN: Cascara is— [JACK laughs] Cas-ker-a. It's actually Cas-ker-a.

JACK: Cas-ker-a.

AUSTIN: Is the commander of the Beloved, which is a group that you belong to, which is the group of—

JACK: She's our boss.

A: She is your boss. Her name is Pure Cascara, and she is your commander. I'll describe her— we will have a notion or a reason to describe her shortly. But I'm just to link her now, because I think she looks dope. She looks like — if you do a search for "Zoe Kravitz Met Gala 2017," you'll

find what she looks like. I just linked it in the chat instead, for us. She has kind of light brown skin with short cropped, blonde hair. And she wears these incredible flowing satin dresses.

She's also in a wheelchair. She's from the culture that Sylvia's character is from, which has the belief of no cybernetics. And she was wounded during— she was a soldier during some of the combat exercises that were happening, that during which Sylvia's Divine was killed. I guess Sylvia's Divine actually slowly died over the course of time. But in one of the battles that was happening around that time, Cascara died— er, didn't die, got wounded badly. Sorry. And because Sylvia's culture - Harmony is the name of the Divine - because that religion believes that you can't use cybernetics, she's just in a wheelchair. She can't get robot legs like you have without discarding this core belief of her faith. And so she does have a cool cyber wheelchair, but it's still a wheelchair. She just sits in it— I'm trying really hard not to imagine as the Professor X wheelchair from the X-Men cartoon that floats around. So I'm just going to do my best to think of it as just it's a regular wheelchair. Maybe it has a little hover jets on it so she can go up and down stairs and stuff. It's the future. Right? But yeah, that's her deal.

She's tough and has gone from being sort of on-the-ground soldier to a tactical thinker, who can— the ship that she was from, the Divine that represented that ship, Harmony, was this incredible, again, tactical thinker. The thing that made Harmony special was that they could see all the different possibilities around a battle or around a war and could organize things that way. Harmony was this really incredible mediator was able to see things from both sides, from every possible side. And so when Cascara had to stop being a soldier, she devoted her life to aspiring to the sort of wisdom and speed of thought that Harmony once possessed and became this incredible tactical leader. Which is why she operates the Beloved, this group of secret agents for the faith.

So yeah, that is your boss, Cascara. No one calls her Pure. Everyone just calls her Cascara, even though her first name is Pure. So is that it for your faith questions? No.

ALI: There's one more more.

AUSTIN: You have one more. If you've taken solace— no, that's the wrong one. That's a wrong class. I changed pages and was like, "Wait, that doesn't like you. Solace? That's a different character." [ALI laughs] If someone jacked into the digital environment to pull you out of it when you couldn't or wouldn't leave yourself, they have 1 giri on you, 1 faith on you.

ALI: I think I'll end up giving that one to Helena, actually.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: I think that works.

AUSTIN: That's good. I like that a lot.

ALI: Do I just put that as a negative one on my—?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. And I'm going to make a note here that Tender— and then Open Metal doesn't have one on you. Right?

ALI: Yeah, no. No. No. No.

AUSTIN: Okay. So making sure. Making sure— just, I'm adding up all my stuff. That way I have the NPC stuff. Right? Okay.

Tender, you are in a waiting room. There's some light jazz playing. You're on a black leather couch. There are some magazines on a coffee table. In the middle there's a white coffee table. There's a water cooler over in the corner, and there's one plant by the door in. There is no other doorway. There's just the door in. There is a painting on the kind of opposite wall from the door of— I don't know. What's the painting of? It can be of anything.

ALI: Fruit.

AUSTIN: Okay. It's a painting of a bunch of different fruit. It's a big long mural painting. It takes up the whole wall. It's just a painting of fruit. And then the only other color in the room besides the painting and the plant is this huge window from which you can look out and see the skyline of Seance.

So Seance is the city ship of the Divine Empyrean, which is spelled, for people at home, E M P Y R E A N. Empyrean. And the city is— I guess I should give you a brief overview, I guess. It's like an octagonal cylinder in space. On each side of the octagon, a city, just on the flat of this cylinder, going out into space. There's no dome, there's no— I mean, I guess there probably is an interior to the cylinder. Inside of the cylinder, you can go deep underground, which is where there're probably engineering stuff and the ships controls and all of that stuff. One side of the cylinder has a huge booster rocket on it. And there are huge fins that are coming up out of the ground on the sides of it. But beside those fins, there are just buildings, and they're sticking out into the sky. And there are people walking around. And for them, the city doesn't turn suddenly, while they're walking. They're just on the other side of the cylinder now.

And from here, you can look out and see, maybe, another one of those fins and another building that's really tall. But you can tell that you're high up above the city in a large structure. And there's the bright red star of the system that you're in in the sky. The star changes every now and then, not daily, as you travel through the Twilight Mirage. The ships don't stand in place. They're not anchored to a specific planet or anything. They need to constantly be moving because that's the only way that they can remain safe. And the system you're in now has this really bright red star that is kind of hanging in the sky. The sky's painted from this almost silky gradient of orange to a deep purple. It's flat. Sometimes it's a really cloudy thing because the

nebula can appear really cloudy from the inside, but sometimes it's just like flat color. And right now it's this stark flat orange that goes down from orange through red it into a deep purple. And there's none of the puffy clouds.

There is also a reception desk in this room, and behind that reception desk, there is an ancient black rotary phone that begins to ring. And the receptionist, who is a tall black woman in a pantsuit— a gray pant suit. No top, actually, just dress pants with a white blouse with a black bolo tie. She answers it. She says a few words, and then places it on a silver tray and brings it to you. And she says, "A call for you, competitor."

ALI: I lift up the phone, hold it to my ear.

AUSTIN: You recognize the voice. And it is your commander, Pure Cascara, the leader of the Beloved. And Cascara kind of reminds you of your mission. She ask you first how preparations are going, if you're ready to compete. And you know that you are.

ALI (as Tender): [laughs] Absolutely.

1:20:15

AUSTIN: You are being sent to infiltrate this week's mystery. The Mysteries are a weekly event that are broadcast throughout a ship. Every ship has its own version of this. And in the old days, before the age of the Twilight Mirage, back when the Divine Fleet was massive, when there were 300 main capital ships, it was one big thing where it was shown to everybody all at once. The Mysteries are a kind of combination of mythical reenactment and interactive video game. Moments through the history of the Divines are replayed. And citizens are elected to go into a purely digital environment and to replay those moments. And they can come out differently than how history was. And part of the joy of them is that they can reflect a living history. They reflect the notion of different interpretations of history. And at this point, now that there are only 8 ships left and 2 Divines left, they are an aspect of life that people find a great deal of joy in but also a great deal of faith from. Seeing the histories is a really important reminder of what has come before and the struggles that we've faced. And they always, always underscore the agency of everyday people and history itself. That things can change. Things can get better, things can get worse! And so we should love what we have now and work towards making sure things are better.

And you were about to infiltrate that, Cascara reminds you, because - she doesn't remind you, I'm just giving you this info - because a source has tipped the Beloved off to the fact that the group that you all just call the Earth Cult, is going to interrupt the Mysteries today. There are three ways in which you believe that could happen. They could to try to hurt or kill one of the competitors who are playing as a combination of Divine and pilot, because today's Mystery is the story of how the Divines and their earliest adherents fled from Earth across space to a new

colony and found themselves a new world and a new society. It's about fleeing from this disaster. The second way that they could interrupt the Mysteries or take advantage of them, is that they could try to assassinate the Cadent or the Excerpt of Emphyrean, both of whom are scheduled to be in attendance. And the third way is that they might just try to harm the 100,000 attendees who are there in this massive amphitheater, maybe by doing something directly to them or maybe by doing something structural. Or who knows? So those are the ways that they could go bad and Cascara has left Fourteen Fifteen and Signet to determine how they want to counter the other things. But she insisted that you participate as one of the competitors and go into the digital environment to make sure that that plays out according to the way it's supposed to play out, which could mean a bunch of different things.

JACK: So fucking new season Friends at the Table! [ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Fucking welcome. Here we go.

JANINE: Can that be our new Twitter bio? Fucking welcome.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Fucking welcome.

AUSTIN (as Cascara): How are you feeling, Tender?

ALI (as Tender): Excited.

AUSTIN: Her voice is a little crackly over the phone line. I guess she'd be in this ship with you. She'd be on this ship probably. Oh wait, here's a question. Do y'll have your own ship? Is there a home ship for— a separate little mini base ship for the Beloved?

ALI: No, the whole is that we're on this place. Right?

AUSTIN: Well, you go between— you're not only on Seance. You do this across the entire fleet.

ALI: Oh, okay.

JANINE: But we come together as needed, so it'd be weird if—

AUSTIN: Right. I'm just curious where

JANINE: — if we also had a dedicated thing.

AUSTIN: I'm just curious do you have a ship, a smaller ship? A thing that we talked about in world building was there were lots of smaller ships in this setting, in a way that there were not in COUNTER/Weight, in a previous season. So in COUNTER/Weight, the season that we played before - it was a sci fi season - there were a handful of ships. The most ships we ever saw on

screen at once were 3 for the majority of the show. Whereas here we talked about adventurers having their own little two-seaters going off on adventures. And so—

JACK: I have a pitch for a cool-ass ship, maybe.

AUSTIN: Sure!

JACK: What if we have a ship that has a sail, a solar sail? [ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: [immediately] Sure. Yes, good. Tell me more. [JANINE laughs]

JACK: So I like the idea of it's not like a sailing ship, and I think it's important to say that. It looks like a spaceship. But I guess maybe the closest thing is it looks like a spaceship that has a wing, like a single wing of this incredibly fine filament that we've worked— not we, but the Twilight Mirage have worked out how to make very cheaply. And it's very energy efficient. And it can catch the light, the multicolor light of the Mirage. And it just skims this ship like a skipping stone across the water— er, across the Mirage.

AUSTIN: I like this alot.

JACK: I just like the idea of rather than the sound of engines starting, the sail just opens. And this thing lifts off like a dandelion seed.

AUSTIN: I like this a lot. Is everyone okay with that?

ALI: Yeah!

JANINE: Mm hmm.

ALI: [pretend voice] Jack, I hate that idea, no! [ALI, JANINE, and JACK laugh]

AUSTIN: Is that called the Beloved, or does it have a different name? We could sleep on a name. We don't need to name this second. Yeah. I have a good list of people names. I don't have a good list of ship names right now.

ALI: I feel like the answer that question is no, but I don't have an alternative in mind.

AUSTIN: Okay. I'm not going to— okay. [ALI giggles] I'm going to walk away from this list of names. I was like, "Hmm, that could work," but no. I'm going to save it.

AUSTIN (as Cascara): Excited's a good thing to be. Just be safe out there.

ALI (as Tender): Of course.

AUSTIN (as Cascara): Don't give me that lip. Things could go wrong. These Earth people...

ALI (as Tender): Mm hmm.

AUSTIN: Where are you, Signet? I guess Signet and Fourteen Fifteen, which of the 2— what are you guys doing with regard to those other 2 possible threats?

JACK: I could take the crowd.

AUSTIN: Like in a fight? [ALI and JANINE laugh]

JACK: Yeah, one-on-one, one at a the time or all at once.

AUSTIN: 100,000 people.

ALI: Single file.

AUSTIN: Let's go! Crack your neck.

JACK: I mean, I don't know— Signet has more of a connection to the Divine than I do.

JANINE: Yeah, I feel like I would definitely be going for—

JACK: And you're also kind of famous, right?

JANINE: — be going for Blooming and the Cadent. Would they like be together?

AUSTIN: Yeah. So they would be—

JANINE: In a box seat or something?

AUSTIN: It's literally exactly it. You've been there for these before as a guest. You don't have a permanent seat. They have a guest seat where you've been invited once or twice. But on this ship, it's a— the actual arena is weird because it's a massive inverted pyramid that has— it's almost like an Aztec pyramid floated on its back. Right? That has four giant columns that are keeping it stable, but then it goes down to a smaller point and then it goes out way further than the giant columns. Does that make sense? At its height, its width is much bigger than its base. It's an upside down pyramid, but it has the stair-like pyramid quality of a South American pyramid— er, Central American pyramid. And on the inside, on the pyramid sides, there are— what's the word I'm looking for, where people sit at a stadium like benches, and there's a better word for this.

JACK: Bleachers? No.

AUSTIN: Yeah, bleachers is totally fine. And there is a box seat. There are a number of those at the lower levels where honored guests can go. This building was actually taken from a previous Divine. The ship was destroyed, but this one was, not restored, but was saved. And was integrated into Seance. In fact, that's a thing with Seance. It's named that because Emphyrean has a hope that it will reconnect with the dead. That is written into the streets of Seance. And so in this whole district, everything has the similar sort of aesthetic as this giant upside down pyramid. There's lots of really beautiful arrow iconography that is in resin on the side of buildings here. There's lots of inverted things in this space, lots of things that, "Oh, that's what the base of that thing should look like, but it's at the top." That seems to be an architectural vibe in this entire sector of the giant city ship.

So yeah, that is— I forget what your initial question was, Jack. [ALI giggles] But that is my answer to it. The end.

1:31:01

JACK: I think it was, can I fight everybody? [ALI is laughing so hard]

AUSTIN: Yes. And the answer is, yes, of course you can.

JACK: No, I'm happy to install myself in the crowd. I've probably bought a ticket.

AUSTIN: Okay. You've just gone through with the crowd. Do we get a shot of Fourteen Fifteen, handing a ticket over or getting something scanned?

JACK: Mm hmm. Buying popcorn. Or what's the snack? I don't know.

AUSTIN: I don't know. What is the snack? Popcorn's good, but.

JACK: Churros.

AUSTIN: Churros are also good. I had a churro last week that was good. Yeah.

JACK: Lots of people carrying big trays of fruit.

AUSTIN: Yes, definitely.

JACK: Edible flowers.

JANINE: I kind of like toasted bean.

JACK: Toasted bean. You know, the 3 things: fruit, edible flowers, and toasted bean. [JANINE and ALI laugh] The 3 snack of the Mysteries.

AUSTIN: Right. Those are the 3 flavors of churro, actually. [JACK laughs] Right, the question had been from Signet, which was, is there box seating? And the answer is, yes, there is. And that's the basic setup for it. And, yeah, if you wanted to, Cascara would pull the strings to get you into the box seat or at least near the box seat. Maybe she couldn't get you in. Without a roll, she couldn't get you in, but she could get you into a different box seat. So if Signet wanted be in the box seats with the Excerpt of Emphyrean and the Cadent, then you would need to figure out a roll to do that. Or figure out a way to get in there. But what Cascara can do is, basically, get you into the area where box seating is, at a different box seat.

And so, yeah. The whole thing is, I was still setting this up, which is people sit in the bleachers all around it. But then the middle space is literally filled with the Twilight Mirage. And then once it becomes fully filled in this kind of huge glass center, then it transforms into a 3D space that is a digital environment where the competitors appear. And people watch it that way. So yeah, I kind of want to— what's the picture of Signet here? Because Fourteen Fifteen is now in my mind, moving through the crowd. And Tender is waiting in the lobby, where she's waiting to become a competitor, I guess.

JANINE: I feel like the smartest thing for Signet to do would be to lean on her own church affiliation to get as close as possible to those 2, to the Cadent and Excerpt.

AUSTIN: Are you doing that in the moment, or did you try to set something up ahead of time?

JANINE: How much lead-up did we have for this assignment?

AUSTIN: A day.

JANINE: I think that she'd probably reach out.

AUSTIN: Sure. So how are you doing it? What type of person or you reaching out to?

JANINE: Probably whoever, I would say, whoever directly oversees the Signet's work with the church.

AUSTIN: Sure. There's a proxy—

JANINE: Yeah, just a direct like, "I need you to go up the ladder." And this is the first step of—you know.

AUSTIN: So yeah. Let's say that that person's name is Nideo, N I D E O. And let me write that down. So you do this in person? Do you do this over a phone? Do you do this— what's your connection? How do you make this happen?

JANINE: This would've been an in-person thing.

AUSTIN: Okay, what's their office like visually?

JANINE: I imagine a lot of textiles on the walls, very— not tapestries, but printed fabric to sort soften the hard surfaces.

AUSTIN: Cool.

JANINE: Probably not super colorful, though. A little muted.

AUSTIN: Okay. So Nideo has on a robe that is a muted green green with a whole head wrap, that that opens up to a cylinder on top of their head that goes like left to right horizontally. And then he has on some face paint also. And he is looking through some documents that are hovering, in front of him at his desk, digitally. It's the mixed-reality environment. So he's scrolling through what looks like just a scroll in the air, right, but is a digital thing. But it has the physicality. Light bounces off of it the way light would bounce off of a real scroll hanging in the sky. And when you come in, he opens them up as if they are a door and does a little bow to you And says,

AUSTIN (as Nideo): Ah, Signet. How can I help you?

JANINE (as Signet): I'm pursuing some information of a possible threat to the Cadent and to Empyrean's Excerpt. I need access to their seating area at the Mystery tomorrow.

AUSTIN (as Nideo): Oh. Well, we have a very special guest due, so I'm not sure I can book you in the room.

AUSTIN: Is there anything you can do to convince him otherwise?

JANINE: It's not exactly a pleasure trip. It's because there's a fucking—

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah. Make that case.

JANINE: — assassination threat.

AUSTIN: Make that case in character, I think that that's a thing that you can try to do.

Okay, so I think in this scene and how I imagine this scene, he's at the desk with this scroll and stuff. And Signet's been standing politely halfway between the desk and the door. And at this point, she probably takes a few steps forward and her very light, sort of drapey robe situation swishes a little bit around her feet. And she sort of leans forward just a little bit, just enough to display some of her hair over her eyes. She says,

JANINE (as Signet): This isn't an entertainment trip. This isn't my own curiosity. This has a purpose, and there's a risk.

AUSTIN: That sounds like you were trying to get an NPC to do something you want. [JANINE giggles] And so what you could do is roll. And here is the trick with The Veil, this game, which is we have to figure out what you roll based on what you feel like right now. How are you feeling? Before even looking at the stats, what is Signet's feeling about this situation?

JANINE: I think she's very calm. I think she's very much— this is the thing that she needs to do. And there's no dissonance there. It serves her beliefs and her purpose very clearly.

AUSTIN: So then that sounds like maybe you should roll peaceful. So there are 6 states in this game versus in traditional games, there are things like strength and charisma— er, not traditional, a lot of other games— dexterity or whatever. In this, there's mad and peaceful, sad and joyful, scared and powerful. And I say those in those pairs, because of a system that happens in this game that we'll talk about in a moment. So yeah, go ahead and roll peaceful.

JANINE: I should just do the normal peaceful roll?

AUSTIN: I think you just click on that normal little peaceful button.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: That's a 9. So on a 7 to 9, you choose 2. Either you're going to owe them some serious cred; your own giri is in question now, your own faith; you're going to need to give them something now instead of later; you need to do them a favor first; or you need to give a piece of yourself to the, body or heart. So you get to choose 2.

JANINE: God. Which—

AUSTIN: So it's cred. Faith. You're gonna have to give them something now instead of later. So that could be, "I'll just give you money right now," or "I'm going to give you a thing," or whatever it is. A favor, wou would tell me what he tells you is, "Okay, fine. But then you need to do XYZ, and then I'll give you something." Or you need to give a piece of yourself to them, body or heart, which also feels like faith to me in some regards. But could also be something else, it's up to you.

JANINE: Yeah, I'm not sure what some of those would look like. Also I did just want to know what specific move this was.

AUSTIN: Oh, this is Sway. You did Sway: when you want to get an NPC to do something you want and their motivations don't land up with yours. In this case, his motivation isn't, "I want this to go bad." It's, "I trust that you can do this without getting access. I have other obligations, which is to let my other guest in, basically."

JANINE: I'm going to say, give them something now instead of later. And do them a favor first.

AUSTIN: Okay. So what is the thing you're going to give now?

JANINE: Oh god. No, maybe it's the other one. Maybe it's a body one, which isn't in this move description for some reason.

AUSTIN: Oh, is it not?

JANINE: In Roll20, no.

AUSTIN: Oh, weird.

JANINE: Okay. So I'll go with favor and then the body-or-heart thing.

AUSTIN: Okay. So how are you doing body or heart?

JANINE: I mean, wouldn't you have to ask for something, or—?

AUSTIN: This is abstract in some way. In my mind, you have to— I'm giving you the agency here because you succeeded, basically. I can ask you that favor, but whatever you think is adequate for body or heart is adequate or body or heart.

JANINE: I guess, my thing is that I don't entirely understand the—

AUSTIN: That's everything from kind words to a kiss on the cheek to anything else. If you were playing a femme fatale, you could be seducing this guy right now.

JANINE: Okay. So maybe some sort of faithful gesture?

AUSTIN: Sure. Like what?

JANINE: To reinforce the idea that Signet is very devoted and is taking this to a very personal degree. I think maybe she swears a kind of oath but uses her full name in the process—

AUSTIN: That's good. That's a really good.

JANINE: — which would be a really fucked up thing to actually say out loud. So I kind of don't want to do it.

1:41:35

AUSTIN: I mean, you I should say it. I want to hear it now, now that you've said that part.

JANINE: I don't know how to work that into a whole oath without it just being a word salad. [All giggles] I don't know that I want to do that to people, is what I'm saying. [laughs]

AUSTIN: I just want to hear it because it's a good name.

JANINE: It'd be something like,

JANINE (as Signet): I, They marched scars of light in pitch; born in fiercest purpose and beheld as the signet sealed upon our pact, am pledging to you my utmost devotion."

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think that's super good.

JANINE: Etc. That's a lot!

AUSTIN: I think that I-comma-that is really powerful and not something you should shrink from. That's like, "Oh right, you're that. And you're blessing me with that in some way." He sighs, and says

AUSTIN (as Niedo): All right, look. If you can just do me a small favor, I can make this happen. [sighs] There is a matter of some political urgency.

AUSTIN: He turns one of the scrolls around in the digital space, so that you can see it in the mesh and scrolls through it until there's a picture of a young woman who you recognize is the Excerpt of Gumption, the second remaining Divine. And he says,

AUSTIN (as Nideo): She was to be the guest tonight, but we don't have her favorite dish. I need someone to go and collect a few ingredients to bring to the chef, but it's on the opposite side of Seance. It would take an entire day. I you were willing to give that day up and perhaps I can have the Excerpt at a meal instead of in the box with the Cadent. And that way you could both be kept happy.

JANINE (as Signet): Yeah, that sounds perfectly reasonable.

AUSTIN (as Nideo): You will, of course, also need to pay for the ingredients. I will forward you a refund on that, once—

JANINE (as Signet): The paperwork clears.

AUSTIN (as Nideo): Of course, exactly.

JANINE (as Signet): I've been at this for a while. I understand.

AUSTIN: Ali says, "We don't have Amazon Prime for—"? [ALI giggles] They're very rare ingredients! It's a thing that only one cube makes on this space station. Okay?

JANINE: To be honest, the way I thought this was going to go was him saying, "Can you take your mech and go get some groceries?"

AUSTIN: Uh huh. I think really—

JANINE: This is still fine.

AUSTIN: — the thing that I'm just doing here is closing off— I'm taking a credit from you for the rest of this session and that you'll get back. So just make note of that. And then you just can't do any other prep things today. We're not going to give you any more flashback time because literally you are the ex-pope who is now going to get someone else's groceries. Exactly.
[JANINE laughs]

Okay. Fourteen Fifteen— actually, let's go back to— and it's now the next day. And you are in— Signet, you do get into the box and are allowed to sit in the extra guest seat that's set up for you. And you notice that neither the neither Excerpt Blooming nor the Excerpt of Gumption, whose name I gave earlier and I've already forgotten, Covenant. I did not give Gumption's Excerpt's name before. Gumption's Excerpt is named Under starlight, covenant was etched into flesh and steel. So Covenant nor Blooming are there. The Cadent is, and she is guarded by her personal armed guards.

Tender. I think we get a shot of you hanging up the phone. And the second that the phone hits the receiver - it's that really nice, bouncy receiver, do you know what I mean? - you look back up and you're in the digital environment. I already painted this picture as like, "Oh, this is the story of how the Divines fled Earth to go to a different arm of the galaxy where they would set up their own society." And this was 100,000 years ago or 80,000 years ago or something. But you have a move that says you get to decide what everything in the digital space looks like. Right? What's that called?

ALI: It's called Reconfigure.

AUSTIN: Er, no. Isn't it even before that? Isn't that just— it's just Subconscious. Yeah. When you enter any digital environment, you may frame the scene. So you tell me what the scene looks like.

ALI: Mmm. I don't know. I feel like because part of this is competing in this thing, it should stay as it is. It's not espionage in that way. Right?

AUSTIN: What do you mean?

ALI: She's going to this thing to actually be involved in this thing and not going into this thing to get information or—

AUSTIN: To fuck it up.

ALI: — talk to a guy or hack it or—

AUSTIN: Right, right, right.

ALI: So despite this being the first scene she ever does this, I think that it's— let's not mess around with it too much.

AUSTIN: All right. So let me give you— I'll give you, at least then what it looks like by default. And if you want to touch it, you can touch it. And actually I think it's going to get touched a little bit by your subconscious, no matter what.

The way it was designed was like, it's basically a strange race in which the computer plays as the armies of the original society on Earth, which at the time was the surrounding star systems, was a group called the Orion Conglomerate. Which is this mega corporation, evil cyberpunk society. And they were chasing after the Divines and the people who built the Divines, who are fleeing from this mega corporation through the stars. And partially the players have to avoid the armies of OriCon, the Orion Conglomerate, and partially they have to avoid— halfway through the game, they have to avoid the explosion of a big bomb, basically. And it looks like a big 3D space that is really abstract, in that there are asteroids and planets, but you're also ships that are as big as an asteroid is and one-third the size of a planet, which is not as big as the ships were. It's like a racing video game. Right? You're doing Mario Kart in space [ALI laughs]. But it's held up at once as this deep ritual but also as this fun entertainment. It blends those two things very well somehow.

So yeah, that's what it— by default, it's kind of a big 3D space that has a track. There's a lead Divine that takes off that you follow that draws a path through space that you will— your goal is to follow that one and survive basically. So that's what looks like by default. The thing that is different is that though, is your subconscious bit happens. And one of the things in your subconscious is that the sense of scale, because of your memories of your home ship, changes.

And the planets get way bigger than they're supposed to be. [ALI giggles] They're only supposed to be— again, they're supposed to be basically the size of these ships. It's kind of an abstraction, but instead they're this massive thing that breaks out of the space that it's supposed to. So there are some people in the crowd up who literally can't even see the field because Jupiter is in their way, or they have to see through Jupiter. It's a semi-transparent Jupiter or something. And it also just makes it harder for you to see because the planets are big and a blocking the path. And it means that there could be a fleet, an enemy fleet around every corner. You won't see where the explosions start to go off.

Fourteen Fifteen, you've settle into your seat?

JACK: Uh huh?

AUSTIN: I just wanted to make sure that was true.

JACK: Oh. Yeah. Yeah, I've managed to get a seat. I don't know what my view is like.

AUSTIN: No. You tell me. What is your view?

JACK: Is this a lot of Jupiter? [ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Okay, good. You're the person who get stuck on Jupiter. [JACK chuckles] I guess briefly, Tender, what do you look like in this world? The other competitors are just mechs. One of them is a mech that has a Divine aura their head, and one of them is a mech that has a big flag cape. One of them just looks like the Statue of Liberty.

ALI: Right. This is her idea of what a Divine looks like: just a metal box. There's probably a door that's engraved or whatever.

AUSTIN: Oh, interesting.

ALI: I think that the camera still sees her what she is, which gives me another opportunity to describe her.

AUSTIN: Cool.

ALI: Which is a cat girl, but also she's still humanoid. The way that I've been imagine her in my head is if you've seen Master of None Season 2, Eric Wareheim's his ex-fiance. I guess we would traditionally call her kind of light skinned? I should just give the actress's name. It's Ciara Renée. And that's kind of where the sweet face from the description from before it comes from. Really high cheekbones, really light skinned but still a person of color. She has a long curly light purple/lilac hair that kind of falls chest length. Curvy big thighs and hips and whatever else. And yeah. So.

AUSTIN: Right. Awesome. Yeah, [ALI giggles] I think the camera sees her from— whenever it's on her, it's her. And then when we go to Fourteen Fifteen's you or Signet's you, it's this silver box that's floating in space. [JACK chuckles] But there are definitely people— in fact, next to you, Fourteen, there's a dude with a beer gut and a big handlebar mustache. He goes,

AUSTIN (as Spectator): [drawls] Never seen a Divine like that in my life. You ever see one that looks like that?

JACK (as Fourteen): I have not. No. It's a weird one, huh? Hey, is it supposed to look like this?

AUSTIN (as Spectator): Ahh, I haven't been to this one specifically.

[MUSIC - "The Twilight Mirage" starts]

AUSTIN: And then he looks at you right in the eyes. And he says,

AUSTIN (as Spectator): About how many of these have you been to?

JACK (as Fourteen): Uhhh, 4?

AUSTIN: He like, "Ugh." And then he says it again. He looks around.

AUSTIN (as Spectator): About how many of these have you been to?

AUSTIN: He gives a little wink.

JACK: It's been a long day, I'm sorry. I've been about— it's— Fourteen Fifteen.

AUSTIN (as Spectator): All right. Good.

AUSTIN: And drops the accent and takes a pair of glasses out of his coat and puts them on.

AUSTIN (as Spectator): We think they're going into engineering.

JACK (as Fourteen): Okay.

AUSTIN (as Spectator): I already have some scouts down there looking around. And we checked the manifest. And there there's one more operator than they're supposed to be.

JACK (as Fourteen): Okay.

AUSTIN (as Spectator): But we can't find them. These Earth bastards, someone's gotta make them pay.

[MUSIC - "Twilight Mirage" ends]