

Bluff City 03: The Cost of Greed Pt. 1

AUSTIN: Out in the holy halls and clandestine chapels of the Vatican, the church fathers say clearly; "There is no such thing as a ghost". But I have my doubts.

They have pored over the scripture and from it derived dogma, it's true. They are right to say that Hebrews 9:27 declares that man is destined to die once, and after that face judgement. And Luke does tell us that when the rich man looked up from Hell at the spirit of Abraham and begged him to visit the living and warn them of the Cost of Greed, Abraham said that a great chasm separated Heaven from everything else.

But. The church fathers say something else, too. When they are not assuring us that the dead are gone to live with the Father forever, when they are not gesturing towards veils and promising that graves dug deep cannot be undone, when they are not reducing every spiritual encounter to angels or demons with no room for anything in between, they say something else. Do not try to contact the dead.

Now, I find that peculiar, don't you? If there were no such thing as a ghost, if the wall between this wall and the next was so firm, so impermeable, that those that passed could never return, then there would be no harm in trying to make that connection. I know, I know, 2nd Corinthians 11, even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light; yes, there is a chance that those who wish to contact the dead would reach out to Hell instead. But, and I know I risk my collar for saying what I am about to say. Bluff City needs to be realistic. Instead of pretending that no one will attempt to reach across that dark chasm we need professionals ready for whatever happens when they inevitably do.

[MUSIC: Bluff City - The Cost of Greed ends]

AUSTIN: Welcome to Friends at the Table, an actual play podcast focused on critical worldbuilding, smart characterization and fun interaction between good friends, I am your host, **Austin** Walker. Joining me today, **Sylvia**¹ Clare -

SYLVIA: Hi, that's me! You can find me on Twitter @captaintrash and I also am an editor over at VideoGameChooChoo.com

AUSTIN: Ali Acampora.

ALI: Um, hi, my name is Alicia Acampora, you can find me @Ali_west and you can follow the show @friends_table.

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

AUSTIN: And **Art** Martinez-Tebbel.

ART: Hey, you can find me on Twitter @atebbel and honestly, most of what I'm doing these days is calling accountants and lawyers on behalf of Friends at the Table, so you can check me out in Los Angeles doing that, I guess.

AUSTIN [laughing]: And as always, thank you so much for supporting us. If you're listening to this, then that means that you are making this possible by supporting us at our Patreon, which you can find at patreon.com/friends_table, I think?

Or! Forget that one. Just go to friendsatthetable.cash, that's the one you should tell your friends to support us if, for instance, you're in a car ride, listening to this episode with them, and they're like, "Oh wow that's really funny, how do you listen to this?" Just tell them friendstathetable.cash and that'll be great. Uhh -

ART: And then like subtly suggest that they owe us five bucks.

[everyone laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh, by the way, uhh, you owe them money now! Is what you should say. That's how it works.

ART: [overlaps]

SYLVIA: You're stealing from us! With your ears!

ALI & ART: [laughs in the background]

AUSTIN: Which is, frankly, an accomplishment so good job! Umm, today, we are gonna play a game called *InSpectres* but not spelled the way you think. [laughs] There's no O in this inspection. Uhh, it's *InSpectres* like spectres like a ghost, like spectres? Or like a Mass Effect secret agent.

ALI: Oooh.

AUSTIN: *InSpectres* [laughs] is a game by Jared Sorensen. It's apparent, the tagline is, "Fighting the forces of darkness, so you don't have to." It's sort of a *Ghostbusters* meets *The Office*, like the very quick and dirty pitch? It is like, you are playing a start-up ghost-fighting or kind of, paranormal investigation company? And, you are trying to, you know, keep the books balanced and deal with shitty, you know, bureaucracy and also deal with the paranormal cases that come across your desk.

Um, I'm very excited to play it, it's a game I've wanted to play for a long time, so um, we should just dive into this. The first step is to create characters. So, first and foremost, you should

come up with a name and basic personality for your character. It helps to also come up with their former occupation, even if that occupation is just like 'couch potato.'

The key with this stuff is really to keep it mundane. Like the, even though this is a game in which there might be demons and ghosts and vampires and all sorts of supernatural things a la *Ghostbusters* or *The Real Ghostbusters* cartoon show, first and foremost, like those characters, they're people in the world, right? Like, Peter Venkman was a professor who happened to like weird paranormal psychology stuff, right? Like, Egon is like a dude who likes technology and is a scientist but is also is kind of just like a guy who probably pays his bills late. That is kind of what grounds those characters.

Uhh, I think, even in a broader sense, you could think a little about the *Angel* TV show, in this sense?

ALI: [laughs]

AUSTIN: They're definitely a similar paranormal investigation show? And that show was at it's best also when it was just like, oh these are people who are in over their fucking heads. Um, so do people have character ideas at this point?

ART: I do.

AUSTIN: Yeah?

ART: Um, yeah but you said like we want really mundane people and -

AUSTIN: Y-Yeah?

ART: Mine is kind of like, a nine?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ALI: [laughs]

ART: So maybe if someone else wants to go first and then we can all kind of forget that **Austin** said that and I can come back around-

AUSTIN: Okay. I will say that one of you is allowed to be quote-unquote 'weird' character, which means someone who is supernatural or has some sort of weird, you know, magicky or even just superheroic element to them? Umm, but that is not a- there are downsides to that, is what I'll say. It basically means that you are not able to contribute to the larger goal in as direct a way. So, something to think about before you dive into the world of supernatural.

ART: No, it's not supernatural, it's just like really high on the uh-

AUSTIN [overlaps]: Okay

ART: On the normal scale.

AUSTIN [overlaps]: It's just very extra? Okay.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I see a name from **Sylvia** Clare already.

SYLVIA: Yeah, I already got mine kind of figured out, I was just waiting.

AUSTIN: Wow, **Sylvia** already has stats! Jesus Christ.

ALI: [laughs]

SYLVIA: Yeah. I've been sitting here for an hour.

[everyone laughs]

AUSTIN: Alright, tell me about your character.

SYLVIA: Uhh, so my character's name is Sid Ruiz. My whole idea for them is that they're basically the, she's basically the videographer-

AUSTIN [overlaps]: Ooh

SYLVIA: -of the group?

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: She's in, like, college but she's home for the summer and her step-dad made her get a job and this was the only place that would hire her other than like, the McDonald's without her having to take out like her piercings and stuff?

AUSTIN: Right. Good.

SYLVIA: She's also technically the driver but that's just because she owns a van?

AUSTIN [laughs]: Alright, okay, oh wait, wait, if you own a van-

SYLVIA: That's her talent, yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay so we should, so-

SYLVIA: Oh yeah, that's part of the uhh, the umm-

AUSTIN: Ah-huh. You don't own a van yet, we'll get to whether-

SYLVIA [overlaps]: Yeah we'll get to that later.

AUSTIN: We'll get to whether or not Sid-

SYLVIA: I'm gonna have like, her dad owns a van, wait, can we get it? I don't know.

AUSTIN: Who knows! We'll roll to find out.

SYLVIA [overlaps]: I just wanted to put driving down as her talent cause that was the only thing that I could think of.

AUSTIN: Okay. You didn't want to go the videographer route for the talent? So, let me go over stats really quick while we're just talking, so we're just jumping into it right now. Uhh, there are four core stats: Academics, which is like, 'I remember a thing' or 'I know how to find this book' or 'I can read this ancient tome'; Athletics, which is like, 'I can jump over this fence,' or 'I can shoot this crossbow,' or 'I can get into a fistfight,' or 'I can climb this wall,' Technology, which is like, 'I can use computers,' 'I can use uhhh you know, other technologies.' Driving would probably technology, right like, if I'm driving a van, that's a technology roll. Also, like, weird super future weird tech is all technology, so like maybe tuning the uhhh, oh my god, have I forgotten the name of the power pack, what's the gun of the power pack in *Ghostbusters* called?

SYLVIA: The uhh-

[voices overlap]

ART: I-It's just the proton pack?

[voices overlap in affirmation]

AUSTIN: It's just the proton beam, is that what, they're called proton beams, right? Anyway

[voices overlap]

ART: You don't cross the streams.

AUSTIN [overlaps]: You don't cross the streams, hurm.

ALI: [giggles]

AUSTIN: Anyway! Those would be rolled using Technology. Proton pack, yeah.

ALI: Yes.

AUSTIN: Those are used using uhh Technology, not using Athletics. And then Contact is talking to people. Being social. Talking to normal, everyday people specifically, like, I think that is still what you would roll if you were talking to something supernatural but the book is like, "This is how you deal with the world." This is how you deal with -

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: - like the IRS agent or with the uhh local librarian, like you need to use Contact. You know, lawyers, all that stuff. Uhh, and there is a fifth thing by default every character should start with a zero in and that's called Cool, which is both kind of like, "Oh man, you're a cool person, you can do cool stuff like I'm a movie." It's also like, "You're keeping your cool." You are, you know, cool under pressure, you are calm under stress.

Then there's also Talents and Characteristics. Every character should have a Talent. And a Talent is something uhh tied to what your background is and kind of what you know, and kind of the generally reflects a set of skills. And that's basically an extra skill point that you can use whenever it comes up. So some examples from them: "computers, car mechanic, football player, Star Trek geek, ninja training, librarian. Um, and I think there's a really good example in the book of what you want here, which is something that can be applied pretty broadly. So I'll just read briefly.

"Finally, Mitch needs a Talent. Actor seems appropriate," - this is, uhh the character in this in question is a college student who's studying drama - "Actor seems appropriate but not very interesting. Theatrical combat has more style but is a little too limited. Then it hits me: Theater major! Mitch brings his knowledge of the dramatic arts to the company. He can quote Shakespeare, swing around a prop sword, emote on cue and handle a lighting rig." Cool.

And so like, theater major is great because you can roll that across all of those things. There are times when you can roll Academics using Theater Major, there are times when you can roll Contact using it. You want something that's a little broad. I think driver is totally fine but I would almost rather something than can give you a benefit.

SYLVIA: Yeah, let me think on it a bit more, I'm still kind of figuring it out.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: So we can come back to that.

AUSTIN: Yeah, sounds good. And characteristics are something that'll come up in play as we continue.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Uhhhh, Ali?

ALI: [laughs]

AUSTIN: Do you have anything yet?

ALI: yes, I do, I do I do I do. I don't know how to write anything down, still?

[voices overlap]

ART: You use the text tool.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's the text tool.

ALI: How? What?

AUSTIN [overlaps] :Under the paintbrush?

SYLVIA [overlaps]: It's under the eye.

ALI [overlaps]: Ohhhhhh

AUSTIN: See, I don't know what it looks like for you guys at all, I've no idea what the player side of roll20 looks like.

ALI: Kay. Um, I'm gonna say what I'm doing with my mouth 'cause this is a podcast. So um, my character is Alexa Baker. Um, she is -

AUSTIN: Alexa or Lexa?

ALI: Alexa.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: She is a former over-the-phone customer service agent and -

AUSTIN: Ooh, okay.

ALI: - she also um, what year is this?

AUSTIN: Question mark.

ALI: [laughs]

AUSTIN: So Bluff City in general, I've said this before but one of my big influence son Bluff City is Dark City? The movie, uhh, that is like as late 90's, early 00's, I wanna say? And, so that movie takes, that movie's from 1998 and it exists in the late 90's but also in the 1950's and also in the near-future? And it just kind of blends together in a way that's like, there are people with hoodies listening to CD players next people in like full Mad Men 1960's like outfits. And, so for us, it's that same notion but ranging from "the early 80's through the near-future?" Through, like, 2028 or something.

And that's all happening in the same time. That's said, there are a few key things that are, like, I wanna make sure that like blend makes sense in a weird way? So like, technology-wise, I think everything is really clicky and kind of bulky? It just also can do futuristic things. The movie Sneakers is really a good example of what I want to get to? People should go watch Sneakers. Ghostbusters is honestly pretty close -

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: - which is like, they have big laser beam guns, but also they're big, bulky, weird laser beam guns. And, um, there's just also a disparity. In the first set of Bluff City games, you know, Sonny Veranda had a big, shitty phone, or he had a flip phone, like an old flip phone that didn't do, I don't remember exactly but he didn't have a smartphone.

But I think another character straight up had a smart phone? And that disparity co-exists, so yes.

ALI: Okay. I ask because I was wondering if it was more setting-wise for this game for [Alexa] to have an Etsy account or an eBay account that she sells crystals on?

AUSTIN: Uhh, eBay. For sure.

ALI: [laughs]

AUSTIN: For sure.

ALI: Perfect.

AUSTIN: Um, maybe she has both. [**ALI** laughs even more] Do you know what I mean? Weirdly, she does way more of her business on eBay than on Etsy. We're at that moment when, where maybe like Etsy is about to blow up?

ALI: [laughs even harder]

AUSTIN - but eBay is still poppin' or like the equivalence, right?

ALI: Fair. Um -

AUSTIN: Or it's this weird combination, right? Like, it has the good storefront of Etsy where like, 'Oh yeah, this is a person's store, it's fun to navigate and it feels like its own storefront?' But it still has like big, blocky letters and, like, Comic Sans fonts? There's still a MIDI that plays when you visit Alexa's like home page, do you know what I mean? Like, that's the blend I want to go for.

SYLVIA: What's the MIDI?

AUSTIN: But then - oh it's something off of Carly Rae Jepsen's Emotion, you know what I mean?

ALI [while laughing]: R-R-Right.

AUSTIN: it's that blend of, 'What happened right this moment,' plus, 'What's happening twenty years ago,' plus, 'Whatever happens ten years from now.' Welcome to Bluff City, y'all.

ALI: [laughs] Um, yeah that's my character.

AUSTIN [overlaps]: Anyway, what does she do?

ALI: I, so she, hmmm, I think of her as kind of like the, there was a lot in the uhhm, the write-up of this game about like, you know, someone has to make the deals and be the business-person -

AUSTIN: Hmm. Okay.

ALI: - and it's gonna be good at talking to people. She's kind of that. She's still kind of like, answering the phone and, you know, ironing out issues -

AUSTIN [overlaps]: She's like the face?

ALI: Yeah, yeah, yeah, sort of.

AUSTIN: Gotcha.

ALI: I imagine her kind of like, early thirties? Kind of mousy, spends a lot of time on Wikipedia, you know that kind of person?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

ALI [laughs]: But, umm, yeah. I should put some numbers here.

AUSTIN: You should.

ALI : How many die do we have to work with?

AUSTIN [overlaps]: So you should have 9 points -

SYLVIA [overlaps]: Nine total.

AUSTIN: - to work with.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: So long as you're not a supernatural person.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Again, it's Academics, Athletics, Technology and Contact. Nothing goes in Cool.

ALI: Okay.

SYLVIA: Everything has to have 1 and the max you can have is 4.

ALI: Cool. Coocoocool.

AUSTIN: Yeah

AUSTIN: [sighs]

AUSTIN: Art.

ART: hey, hi.

AUSTIN: How's it going?

ART: Good! How are you?

AUSTIN: [sighs] Oh boy, tell me about your character, that's how I am. I am, I'm curious, is the way I am.

ART: Okay, so. My character is Jake the Jackal.

AUSTIN [defeated]: Okay.

ART: And he is a retired professional wrestler.

SYLVIA: [snorts in the background]

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: And he's not like that boy Crockett got down south, with the lizards.

AUSTIN: Wait.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Okay. Which is to say, he does not have a real jackal?

ART:right. And he's not, he's definitely not Jake the Snake.

AUSTIN: I gotchu.

ART: Uhh, but he's kind of like an Undertaker-type character?

AUSTIN: So is he like an Anubis jackal? Or -

ART: Yeah, he was kind of like an Anubis jackal?

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: They kind of like didn't steer too hard into the, the Egyptian part?

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: Because, like, no-one really knows what that looks or sounds like, you're gonna go too far and you're a mummy.

AUSTIN [overlaps]: It's funny you say that, for reasons we cannot get to quite yet but we will get there shortly.

ART: Umm, I think I wanna adjust the stats, I wanna put his Athletics up to 4, his Contact down to 3 because that's the sort of thing like, he probably knows how to talk to people a little bit, you know, he was in this, like, public-facing career.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: But it just didn't work out for Jake. He never like, quite got where he wanted to be.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: So anyway, we had a dust-up with a promoter -

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ART: - he kind of just walked away. And this is what he does now. He thinks that, like, it fits his gimmick.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: If he ever needs to get back in.

AUSTIN: He could literally have said that he was a ghost-hunter for a while.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Right. Here's what I love about you, **Art**, is that you're forward-thinking.

ALI: [laughs]

AUSTIN: We know already we're going to do some more fucking Jake the Jackal in Bluff City. I just -

ART [overlaps]: Yeah, absolutely.

AUSTIN: In my heart of hearts, I know it. Um, cool. So, what's your talent?

ART: Carny.

AUSTIN: Okay. What's that mean, for people who don't know how that's used as a term in wrestling culture?

ART: Well, like, wrestling has its roots in carnivals, right? Like, it used to be, you would go and see these two men fight and they would fight for honestly an hour. Wrestling matches used to be interminable and have literally nothing happen in them. But that's where you get all the speak, you know, that's where like 'kayfabe' comes from, like, from carny talk.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: Actually, if you listen to, this is like the second time in a row I'm on here -

AUSTIN: It is.

ART: - plugging Stone Cold Steve **Austin's** podcast but he just did two episodes with Don C. Ellis. And they're both just such old-school guys, they talk about, like, learning to talk carny, and stuff like that.

AUSTIN [overlaps]: I like that, that's awesome.

ART: It's like, he has a way of talking to people so they feel like they're on the inside.

AUSTIN: Gotcha.

ART: And there's people he is on the inside with.

AUSTIN: Right, what I like about that though is that I can also imagine a world in which you use that talent to make a Technology roll. Where you're like, "I know how rigging works. I know how to rig up a lighting system. Or I know how to, like, I know how to fleece somebody?" Like, "I know how to do more than just talk, I can also do these other, like, hands-on things that come with being part of any production. So that's good.

So we still need talents for Sid, we still need stats and talents for Alexa.

SYLVIA: Tell me if this is too broad but I was thinking, this could also just fit into the backstory is that Sid's old job was being a bartender? Even though they're only 20?

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think that that's - I've been to Atlantic City before.

[laughter]

ART: What - I dunno if you remember this story, **Austin** or anyone else who lives regionally? They had to, like, change the laws in New Jersey around the turn of the century because - the turn of this current century -

AUSTIN: Ah-huh.

ART: - because there was this, like, law that let underage -

AUSTIN: Yes.

ART: - people work at strip clubs -

AUSTIN: Mh-hm!

SYLVIA [overlaps]: Holy shit.

ART: - if the strip club didn't serve alcohol?

AUSTIN: Yep!

ART: So you had, like, juice bars with like, 16-year olds taking their clothes off.

AUSTIN [overlaps]: 100 per cent.

SYLVIA: Ooooh.

AUSTIN: It was bad. It was bad.

ART: So a 20-year old with bartending experience is not out of the realm of New Jersey.

AUSTIN: Right. In our New Jersey world, it was that same thing except the law was bartending instead of stripping.

ALI: Mhmmm!

AUSTIN: So yeah, I like bartender. I like that, that's pretty good and it's broad but again, I can imagine it - the key is, there'll be scenes in which you get to say, "Oh I get an extra die because I'm a bartender because there was this one time I had to deal with this asshole." You know or whatever.

SYLVIA: Yeah, exactly.

AUSTIN: Ummm, alright. **Ali**, do you have any ideas yet?

ALI: Nahhhhhhhh, uhhhhmmm?

AUSTIN: S-So she was a call center person, you said?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay. Umm, I honestly think that might be useful enough, in some instances, because a call center person needs to, uhh, talk to people, needs to know how to use a computer to look for, like, their call center scripts? Right?

ALI: [laughs]

AUSTIN: Umm, and like needs to know how to research some stuff, I think there's like enough there, you're hitting 3 of these categories, by being a call center person. Like, I think that's totally feasible.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Unless you have some other cooler talent.

ALI: I, like, I don't want to just write that down but that, like, that's the gist of it.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Ummm, okay, let's go through these one last time, just so we say them all out loud, in a row. So **Sylvia**, give me name, stats and talent.

SYLVIA: Aight, so I'm gonna be playing Sid Ruiz. She has an Academics of 3, Athletics of 2, Technology of 3 and a Contact of 1 and her Talent is bartender.

AUSTIN: **Ali**.

ALI: Umm, I'm playing Alexa Baker? She has an Academics of 2, an Athletics of 1, a Technology of 2 and a Contact of 4 and her Talent is call center.

AUSTIN: Hokay.

ALI: [laughs]

AUSTIN: Jake the Jackal, I'm sorry, **Art**.

ART: I'm Jake the Jackal, it's Academics 2, Athletics 4, Technology 1, Contact 2 and uhh, his Talent is carny.

AUSTIN: Great. Good, alright so now, it's time to talk about the business, it's time to talk about the franchise. I'm gonna again, read from the book here:

"The franchise is kind of like an additional character except that everyone works together to create it. Time to put your heads together to answer the following questions:"

- How big is your franchise?
- How long have you been in operation?

We're calling it a franchise because in the book, they talk about Inspectres as being like a national chain of ghost-hunting things but we're gonna keep this local to Bluff City. Think about this as, 'How big is your business?' How long have you been in operation.

ART: Well, if we have a 20-year old as an employee, proolly not -

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: - *too* long.

ALI: Well...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: I don't know, I feel like I wanted to feel like, we're not a booming business but we've been, like, doing it for a little while.

AUSTIN: Yeah. A bit that I kind of love is the notion of like, I want you to have caught or have dealt with the Jersey Devil already? And then -

SYLVIA: [laughs]

AUSTIN: - we never have to deal with it. It's always just, like, "We don't fucking talk about the Jersey Devil. We did that a while ago. And it's done. And it was a bad time."

ART: We'll do it for the 5th year anniversary of Bluff City.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Exactly, we'll do the background, it's a flashback. Alright, so it's been a little while, let's say, but it's not, you're not big booming business either. You still have, just like, an apartment or whatever.

ART: I guess, we like all don't have to be founding members either.

AUSTIN [overlaps]: Totally.

SYLVIA [overlaps]: Yeah. I think -

ALI [overlaps]: Yeah.

SYLVIA: - I would like most if Sid was new.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. Is it just Sid's first case, so to speak?

SYLVIA: That'd be pretty good, I think!

AUSTIN: Alright, sounds good. Umm, a thing to note is that the business can have more people in it than what is here, so there could be another 5 people back at HQ, or 2 people at HQ, there could be other NPC's who could theoretically, if we ever came back to Inspectres, you could play as those characters? It's a really cool system because the characters don't level up, the franchise does? Umm, and so, it's very easy to, like, pivot off of one character and play a different one for fun. Or to kill characters off, if that's what you're interested in doing, for instance.

Anyway, I think we already answered this next one so then third one.

- Where is the franchise located and how many people work there?

SYLVIA: I mean, located I think, we have that answer.

AUSTIN: Well, Bluff City's a city though -

SYLVIA: I know, I know, yeah

AUSTIN [overlaps]: So what sort of HQ is it, right?

ART: Either wanna be like, on the boardwalk, or in a shopping center, you know, as far from the beach as you can get.

AUSTIN: That's still in the city. Right?

ALI: [laughs]

ART: Right, I want it to be like -

AUSTIN [overlaps]: Yeah, I like that.

ART: - twenty minutes from the beach, or literally with, sand on the floor is a problem.

AUSTIN: [laughs]

SYLVIA: We just did a thing on the boardwalk so I'm more inclined to lean towards the second.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I like, literally a strip mall. Literally like, you're next to a shop, right. You're next to -

ALI: Ohh yeahhh.

AUSTIN: - like a grocery store.

ALI: [laughs] A grocery store and like a pizza place, and like, a dry cleaner's.

AUSTIN [overlaps]: Yes. All that sounds -

ART: A kitty corner from a gas station and maybe like there's a Wawa 3 blocks down.

AUSTIN: This is my dream. Like, ahh yes, please.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Take me home. Uhhhhh, alright cool.

- Who runs the show: a board of directors or the agents themselves?

ALI: Umm, I think we have like a manager? We didn't say it before but I feel like 10 is a good number for who works here?

AUSTIN: Ahh, that feels like a lot. 10 feels like a lot.

ALI: But like -

AUSTIN: Friends at the Table is a business and we only have 7, 8 people? Right? Sooo....

ALI: [laughs] That's fair. But I feel like -

AUSTIN [overlaps]: The Ghostbusters is 5.

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: I'm not saying we can't do 10. I'm just saying, 10 feels, 10 feels healthy. 10 feels good. I'm not opposed to 10.

ALI: Okay. I just feel like there's, maybe the one lady who only works in the morning because her kids go to school and then she has to leave at 3 to pick them up. And then we have like the one guy that we report to, and he's like the manager but he also owns like a hotdog place on the other side of town so he's not around a lot. And like that -

ART: I want there to be some mystery with the owner, right?

AUSTIN: Oh yeah.

ART: None of us has met the owner.

ALI: [laughs]

AUSTIN: Right. Okay! Let's do that then, let's do, 'Nobody has met the owner,' cause that gives me a good intro scene.

ALI: [laughs] Okay.

AUSTIN: Umm, which is better, actually. I like, 'Nobody has met the owner yet,' but there probably is a manager, you probably do have like, almost like a dispatcher? You know what I mean, who's just like, "Alright, this crew, you gotta, you got a case, go check this out."

Alright. "Do investors-" we kinda just talked about this. There's an investor, there's someone who runs it.

- What does your franchise look like? What amenities does it feature?

So like, someone comes in through the front door. What do they see?

ART: I feel like this used to be like an H&R block.

ALI + SYLVIA: [big laughs]

AUSTIN: Hmmmm...

ART: And we didn't spend a lot of money fixing it, like, we didn't spend a lot of money changing it up, it's kind of like the loose bullpen kind of look?

AUSTIN: Mhh-hmm.

ART: And like, there's a front counter?

AUSTIN: Perfect.

ART: [indistinct] newspaper clippings, and like, photos of staff, like in big things and there's also the softball team we sponsor, like the kids softball team?

ALI: Ohh, yes.

AUSTIN: Oh, we need a name at this point! Right? What is the name of the company so we know -

SYLVIA: Oh Christ.

AUSTIN: - the name of the kids' softball team is.

ALI: [laughs] Ummm, god.

AUSTIN: Is it just 'Paranormal Investigations,' is that all y'all do or do you also do regular investigations too?

ALI: I think it's just paranormal.

AUSTIN: Okay. Rapidly typing in various sorts of paranormal societies and hunters and, um -

ALI: [laughs]

AUSTIN: - god. 'Paranormal Investigation of NYC' is a website. This website is *bad*, y'all. Ohhh...

ART: I came up of a really good name if we ever start a bar based on this but it doesn't really help now.

ALI: Um, we can use it as a jumping-off point.

ART: I came up with 'Gin and Miskatonic.'

ALI: [laughs] Okay, no.

AUSTIN [overlaps]: That's - no. That's funny. I'm sure that's already in the world.

ART: Yeahh...

ALI: [giggles]

AUSTIN: Yes, it is, sadly. Huhhh.

ALI: You know we have like a marketing event where it was like, at a local restaurant and it was like, "Come here and speak to the team."

AUSTIN [overlaps]: Yeah, sadly. Uh-huh.

ALI: And that was one of the drinks you can order.

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes. Totally.

ALI: [laughs]

AUSTIN: [sigh] They're all gin drinks and one of them is just the E-Gin Spengler, which is like, they just changed the O in Egon to an I and turned it into a soft G.

[laughter all around]

SYLVIA: Jesus.

ART: I think it's Egin [note: pronounced with a hard G], I think it's Egin Spengler.

[more laughter]

AUSTIN: It is! You wouldn't say that. Uhhh. It's Egin Spengler and Tonic is actually what it says, it's the laziest drink name ever.

[laughter then sighs]

ALI: I don't mind sticking with the Inspectre pun. I think 'phantom' is a good word.

AUSTIN: Phantom is a good word. Ghost synonyms. Alright, is it just ghost or is it paranormal stuff generally? I mean, we already talked about the Jersey Devil, so it has to be slightly broader.

ALI: Yeah.

ART: I don't want to close any doors.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: True. Um, [typing noises] let's look at words, here we go. I like -

ART: Beasts & Booze!

AUSTIN: Uh, that's another bar.

ALI: [laughs]

AUSTIN: That's another bar. Beast & Booze is another bar. I like using, like, I guess none of you are super Academic, right? It's just, I like having 'metaphysical' in the name, do you know what I mean? Like a little too -

ART: Well there's 7 other people so someone might be.

ALI [overlaps]: Yeah.

AUSTIN [overlaps]: Oh true.

ALI: Also we can have, like, we don't have the stat Academic but we can sure pretend that we are.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: What's amazing is the kid, Sid, is 3 in Academics which makes her the smartest character here?

ALI: Yeahh.

AUSTIN: Which is good.

ALI: I purposely went low to make sure that that wasn't actually a character trait?

AUSTIN: Mh-hmm.

ART: Oh, we should all definitely have diplomas, right? We're all, like, certified -

AUSTIN: Right. Absolutely.

ART: - ghost inspectors.

ALI [overlaps]: Oh my god we just take some fucking 4-hour seminar and some on-the-job training?

AUSTIN: Totally.

ALI: [laughs]

ART: And we have some like, it's got some Hamburger University-type name.

ALI: God.

[pause]

AUSTIN: Ummm, just continuing to search things.

ART: We got a P- ah, never mind.

ALI: [laughs]

ART: P. H. Dead, that's what I was gonna say.

SYLVIA: [laughs] Shut the fuck up.

ALI [overlaps]: Ohh, yep.

AUSTIN [overlaps]: Fuck off.

ALI: Yep. Mhm-hmm.

AUSTIN: Ohh, this is killing me. Names are hard, it turns out.

ALI: What do, like, businesses call— [breaks down laughing]

[more laughter]

AUSTIN: Well like, the thing I'm looking at now is, what do actual private eyes name their companies, right?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, what do actual private investigators called.

ART: Or like, bail bondsmen?

AUSTIN: Yeah, also bail bondsmen.

ART [overlaps]: Because that's like, a frequent strip mall business that needs to have, like, a catchy name?

AUSTIN: Yes. Totally.

[0:30:00 TIME STAMP]

AUSTIN: Alright, here's Yelp. 'Ten Best Bail Bondsmen For 2017 in Atlantic City.' Or Atlantic County.

ART: Ohhh.

AUSTIN: Oh, these actually have terrible names. FYI. 'Jump Out Bail Bonds.' 'Boardwalk Bail Bonds.'

SYLVIA: [laughs]

ART: I like when they just suggest you are going to not return to court?

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yeah-huh.

ALI: [laughs] Um, so I Googled 'Paranormal Services.'

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ART: Okay.

ALI: Annnd...

AUSTIN: That's already good. 'Paranormal Services' is already exactly on-point.

ALI: It seems like a lot of them call themselves, "Paranormal Research Society"?

AUSTIN: Ooooh.

ALI: Something like that?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Oh, you know what's a good word? It's 'esoteric.' That's one of my favorite words for, um, because it just like, "What's that mean?" "Ah, we don't - it's just a lot of weird stuff."

ALI: [laughs] I feel like that's booky.

ART: Eso-tectives.

AUSTIN: Bad.

ALI: [laughs] Thank you, **Art**.

AUSTIN: What if it's just, I mean I like 'Paranormal Services' as like the last two things.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: What if it's just two names? Up top? Or no, I know who the secret investor is, I don't wanna - maybe if it's a front, unless the names, the other names on it are - there's someone near me here called, like, 'Poppa's & Poppa's.'"

[burst of laughter]

AUSTIN: Sorry, it's definitely Poppi's? Like a Greek last name but I read it all the time when I walk past as like, 'Poppa's & Poppa's.' You know, legal attorneys or whatever. I like those sort of like, 'J & R: Paranormal Services.'

ALI: Oh yeaahhh.

AUSTIN: You know?

ALI: Cause when you put your name on it -

ART [overlaps]: Oh you know, one of them has to be, like, an X.

ALI: [laughs]

AUSTIN: True.

ALI: Umm. I like that cause I like the kind of lawyer or like Cellino and Barnes kind of thing, "I put my name on this company and that's why I'm behind it and you can trust me."

AUSTIN: Yes. "And you can trust me!"

ALI: Right. "My name is on the door", like [laughs]

SYLVIA: Could we just be Cellino and Barnes?

[laughter]

AUSTIN: No.

SYLVIA: Paranormal services?

[ZeroPotential#1065 - 32:06]

Transcriber: Kārlis (@townout on Twitter) [32:06—]

Ali: No, but we can take their jingle.

(**Sylvia** humming)

Ali: (singing) Paranormal Services...

Austin: (singing) Paranormal...

(**Ali** laughs)

Austin: You know, the problem with — we can't take that. They're lawyers. They can sue us!
(laughs)

(**Art**, **Sylvia** and **Ali** laugh)

Ali: They've broke up this year. I don't know who owns the song anymore. It is up for grabs, I assume that's how law...

Art: Wait, they run those commercials in Canada?

Austin: All right, can we— Yeah, how do you know those? How do you know that, **Sylvia**?

Sylvia: Because it's like a... They show them up here! Because we're close to Buffalo.

Austin: Ohhh, okay. All right. Let me propose something that's really just nothing. All right. Cellino and Barnes is headquartered in the Graybar building. And I think Graybar is a great word. Graybar Paranormal Services is just like, "what's that mean? I don't know". Or because it's near the the ocean, it could be Sandbar Paranormal Services.

Ali: That's really good. OK, I'm going to pitch this and I think that the name of the outlet is Graybar whatever. (laughs) Or it Graybar Paranormal.

Austin: I see. Yeah. It's like Graybar Shopping Center or whatever.

Ali: Yes.

Austin: And it's on Graybar Street. Yeah. OK, totally. And it's just Graybar Paranormal. Done. All right. We did it. Thank you. Now we still have this great connection to Cellino and Barnes. Please don't sue us.

Art: Wait. 1-800-8888, if you've been injured.

(**Austin** and **Ali** laugh)

Austin: Great.

Art: This is not an endorsement. (laughs)

Ali: Or do we want to go with Graysand or Sandbar?

Austin: Sandbar Paranormal. Graysand. Graysand's not bad. It's kind of depressing in a good way.

(**Ali** laughs)

Austin: Graysand Paranormal. Yeah. All right. Sold. We can also go with Grayson Paranormal and then it's like a Batman reference.

(**Austin** and **Ali** laugh)

Sylvia: Nope.

Art: No one there would ever try to sue us.

Austin: All right. So, follow up here, we already talked a little bit about what it looks like. What amenities does it feature. And an extension of that is like, what type of gear do you have access to? What do you use for transportation?

Ali: Well, I believe we spoke about a van.

Austin: Yeah. We did. So, Sylvia, I'm going to need you to roll some dice already.

Sylvia: Oh, boy.

Austin: I need you to roll your technology dice to see what the condition of that van is at this moment.

Sylvia: 3D6?

Austin: So you roll 3D6, yeah. The way this game works is pretty simple. You roll 3D6, you take your top die.

Sylvia: Five.

Austin: So top die is a five, which I think means, if you scroll down here, five means good. "You describe one fact that leads directly to solving the case and gain one franchise die." Don't do that. It just means, yeah, you have that van. You have your dad's van? What type of van is it?

Sylvia: It's not like a mini van. It's like a boxy van. Like it's a proper van van. He doesn't like do this as his job, but he does carpentry stuff in his free time. So he has like a big van because he likes to do things around the house.

Austin: Perfect. All right. What other gear do you have? What other amenities are there in this HQ?

Ali: We have to have like walkie talkies, like “click On to communicate to each other and back to base” like, up to our mouths walkie talkies.

Austin: Give me a technology role.

Ali: Sure. That is...

Austin: So you're going to roll 3D6. So just /roll3D6 and we take the high roll.

Ali: Okay, and that's...

Austin: That's a four! Which is fair. Which means “describe the mostly positive result, but you must include a negative aspect to it”. So you have those walkie talkies. What's a negative to those walkie talkies?

Ali: They take C batteries. (laughs)

Austin: Oh, that's a real problem. That's a real problem.

Ali: But there's like a Wallgreens at the shopping center, so it's mostly fine.

Austin: No, what if it's, you have to go across the street to the shitty gas station?

Ali: (laughs) OK, yes.

Art: I've never seen a C battery in my life.

(Ali laughs)

Austin: What?! Well, that's part of the problem.

Art: Let me get a picture of these.

Austin: They're like smaller D batteries.

Ali: You've seen them. It's just been a while.

Austin: I haven't seen a B battery. That's the one that I don't ever see, when I was growing up.

Ali: Do B batteries exist?

Austin: Maybe they don't. Why aren't there B batteries?

Ali: What happened to the B battery?

Austin: That's the mystery. This week, on Inspectors.

Sylvia: I think we've already hit critical mass with the Googling this week.

(Austin laughs)

Art: We missed our boat on a Patreon tier, where we would do a podcast where we spend 20 minutes Googling things we didn't know about and reacting to it. People love it. We should have.

Austin: That's just— we all just do this full time, is daily Google stream. Google, fuckin' pay us.

(laughter)

Austin: All right.

Art: I have a thing, but it feels too low stakes to roll for.

Austin: What is it?

Art: You know, like... You ever been to a car dealership?

Austin: Yeah!

Art: That was a stupid question. (laughs) I know that you've had cars. You know like the coffee machines they have in those where like you pay like a dollar that you have like five choices? And, personally, I've never got anything but just like coffee.

Austin: But there's also like hot chocolate and then like white mocha latte, one latte drink that's way too extravagant to ever be made well by one of those machines.

Art: Yeah, by like a machine you know no one's touched in five years and you're probably drinking more mold than coffee if you really think about it, but don't.

Austin: Yes. I do think you should roll for that.

Art: All right. Is that also technology?

Austin: It's always technology. Technology is also what you roll to get stuff, to get physical stuff, to get technology, to get devices, to get transportation. Hey, it's a four! OK. So it works. It works.

Art: All right. And my negative aspect, that coffee machine is haunted.

Austin: OK.

(loud laughter, something crashing)

Austin: OK, good. Haunted coffee machine.

(more loud laughing from **Ali** and **Art**)

Austin: Good. Off to a good start. I read on the internet about this game, I was reading like forum posts and stuff, and people were like, "I just don't think my players are going to be able to get their heads around the notion that they have to get stuff to do things bad sometimes! They

have to like fail and have failure be interesting!” And I was like, Friends at the Table, let’s go. We ready. Lean into that failure. (laughs) All right.

Art: It’s a mostly benign haunting, it’s not...

Austin: Right, it’s a four haunting not a three haunting. If it was a three haunting. we’d have some talkin’. I’d be having some words about that coffee machine.

Ali: Oh, is that the way the numbers go?

Austin: Yeah. So the way this game works is, six, five and four are all successes. Three, two, one or not. And that’s also how it splits down the middle in terms of who has narrative control. On a four, five or six, you, the people who roll dice, describe what happens. On a three or two or one, I decide what happens. And on a three, there’s maybe something good, but it’s primarily not good. We’ll go over those as we get deeper in. Any other pieces of tech— Do you have ghost hunting equipment? Do you have like guns? Do you have— what do you have? Do you have a library filled with interesting ghost books? Like... I mean, part of that we’ll answer in a second because we have to assign points in a moment, but just more technology-side first.

Art: Someone should roll for some ghost hunting stuff. (laughs)

Ali: I don’t want us to have like proton packs, but I like the little box that they keep ghosts in. You know?

Austin: The trap?

Ali: Yes. I would love for us to have like a ghost trap.

Austin: What’s it look like? Because I don’t want to just have it be...

(Ali laughs)

Austin: Art just typed “some kind of ghost spray?” Question mark?

(Ali laughs)

Austin: OK, what if it’s like Dog the Bounty Hunter-style bear mace? But it’s for ghosts. Or it’s just bear mace. And when someone asks like, “does that work on—” Yeah, it’s bear mace. It works on bears. Of course it works on ghosts and werewolves and whatnot!

Sylvia: Bears are basically just ghosts, but like physical.

Ali: This is true...

Austin: (laughs) This is true. Yeah. If that’s where you want to go. But, Ali, I don’t want to cut you down on traps. I just want to know what it looks like if it’s not... I don’t want to just be their thing.

Ali: Let me see what theirs looks like to see if it's literally the thing that I made up. (laughs)

Austin: Okay, so it's a rectangle that you throw on the ground, you slide it like a curling stone. And then you step on a thing and it opens up. It's really cool. Ghostbusters technology is dope.

Ali: (sighs) I just kind of want this thing— no, but we can make it our own. We're professionals and we're good at this. I think that it's more of like...

Austin: It also can't be the vacuum from Luigi's Haunted Mansion.

Ali: No, yeah, I don't want us to have like a suction thing. I think I want it more to be like a... Like almost an area of effect...?

Austin: Like a roach bomb?

Ali: Almost? Where we put it down and maybe then we search the rooms and then they have to like, hmm.

Art: Oh, does it look like one of those like Dyson fans?

(Ali laughs)

Sylvia: Is it like a thing where we have to set it up and then somehow lure the thing over to it?

Austin: Or the thing that I like the notion of— it's not just that you have to set it up and lure it, but I like the notion that it takes time and like, "all right, no one can fuck with this for the next five minutes while it's doing its thing" . It's almost like— okay, let me pitch something. All right. This is maybe off into the occult more? In the old days, this would be a person who does the whole incantation and puts down salt in big shapes and all of that. And now it's a little robot who just— this is the one thing this little robot does. It don't have a face. It's just a little machine that you plant down and it runs, it makes all the good old school computer clicking noises, where it's trying to hook onto the Internet or it's trying to like... you know what I mean? Like you can hear a hard drive spin up and then it just needs to run through basically a simulation of whatever an old wizard would have done to capture a ghost?

Ali: (laughs) That's what I was thinking when I was saying area of effect. It doesn't suck it in, but it's more like a sage robot. And that we had to actually find wherever the mystic energy or whatever the enemy is and then like deal with it ourselves.

Austin: What do you mean by "deal with it yourselves"?

Ali: Well, like either scoop it up or (laughs) interact with it...

Austin: Oh, so it like pins whatever is nearby down and then you have to go touch it?

Ali: Yeah? Or like makes it interact-able?

Austin: OK, it makes it physical.

Ali: Is this too wild?

Austin: No!

Art: Then you got to make it.

Austin: We don't even know if it's ghosts! Like I wanna be 100 percent clear. That's the thing about this, I'm not committed to it being a ghost. I know—the way this game works is that we're going to start a job soon. And I'm going to tell you, like “here are the things that people are reporting”. And then from there, it's gonna become like “you tell me what you find”. And between the two of us, or the four of us, we end up collaborating on what it is. So. Yeah.

Maybe it can do a bunch of these different things. Maybe we should actually broaden this thing out to where it is, basically... One of the things it can do is, is... It's not pocket sized, I think it's bigger than that, right?

Ali: Yeah. I would say like lunchbox, two lunchboxes?

Austin: Yeah. Two lunchboxes, I kind of like. In fact, maybe it's built inside of two old lunchboxes.

(**Ali** laughs)

Austin: You know, wires and shit in there. And then you open the other one and it's a little monitor. It's a little touchscreen monitor but like a little Palm Pilot-style touchscreen monitor, like LCD. But it's bigger, it's inside of an entire side of a lunchbox. You have to like set that up and it can run a number of possible anti-paranormal things, but it might take different amount of time based on how you roll, for instance. All right. Give me a technology roll, **Ali**.

Ali: Oh, sure. Yeah. I sure did say the whole thing. (laughs)

Austin: That's a five. That's good. That means you get what you want.

Ali: All right, cool.

Art: All right. I don't want to skip anyone, but I think I want to roll for Ghost Mace.

(**Ali** laughs)

Austin: Okay. Give me a roll for Ghost Mace.

Art: I have the right number of dice to roll for Ghost Mace.

Austin: Which is one. That's a five. (laughs)

Sylvia: What the fuck.

Art: All right. Well. I'm trying, guys.

Sylvia: I have a question about the Ghost Mace. Does Jake make the Ghost Mace?

Austin: Oh that's a good question.

(Ali laughs)

Art: Yeah. Absolutely.

Austin: Is it an old carny thing? Because if so, you should roll one more die.

Art: I mean, all right. I don't think I'm going to get better than a five.

Austin: You could get a six, you don't know. That's a two, so no. But like, is that what it is? Is it like a thing that you learned from around the way?

Art: Yeah. This is the kind of stuff, you know, sometimes if you have the bad guy go over the main event, sometimes people, they throw a ruckus. You got to be able to put that ruckus down. So we got our own concoction.

Austin: Wait, that's regular mace.

Art: But it also works on ghosts.

(Austin and Ali laugh)

Sylvia: It's an all-purpose mace. Bears, ghosts, people, promoters, stuff like that!

Austin: I'm going to write down "all-purpose homemade ghost mace".

Ali: Can it just be like actual mace, but mixed with the rose water, please? (laughs)

Austin: Yes.

Ali: Thank you.

Austin: Yes.

Art: Yeah. Because, you know, the guy who invented it, they call him Jimmy the Catholic.

(Ali laughs)

Art: He always put a little bit of some blessed stuff in there.

Austin: Yeah. Rose water and holy water. Gotcha.

Ali: I like the idea of Alexa being like, “oh, do you want some [???][00:46:40.02] since you’re gonna put the mace together today?” And Jake is like, “sure, hon”.

(**Ali** and **Austin** laugh)

Art: But then he’s sitting up there with his mortar and pestle, just like—

(all laugh)

Austin: All right. I think that might be good for what we have here. Couple more questions. Is there any competition? Does anybody else in this city do paranormal investigation?

Art: No, but I think there’s an outfit out of Trenton.

Austin: Yes. OK, good.

(**Ali** laughs)

Austin: 100 percent. 100 percent. 100 percent. One of the things that came up during the Bluff City Fiasco game prep was just out-of-towners? like out of town— All right. So we were doing Fiasco and in the playbook that we had, there was all this mention of like, I don’t know if it was Columbia? What was it? It was some other country. It was some South American country that the book just fucking had it out for. The playbook we chose for Fiasco just constantly— It was Guatemala. It was like, “to those Guatemalans coming in town” and I was like, “is that a thing that I don’t know about, about Atlantic City? Like lots of weird Guatemalan beef?” And the answer was no. It was just, the playbook was made by people who were also not from Atlantic City. And so I edited it to say out-of-towners. And I do just like the notion of like, they’re from a big city, they’re basically either from Philly or from New York or from some out of town like group that that comes in to fuck things up a little bit. So, yeah, I like the idea of, you know, out-of-towners who have a different ghost hunting op. Trenton is fine, Trenton’s a good city. It’s not. Trenton’s a bad city. (laughs)

Art: I took the train there once. That’s really all I know about Trenton.

Austin: Mm. OK. And then, do you have a specialty? Their examples are: ghosts, vampires, demons, crypto-zoology.

Art: I think our specialty is ghosts, but we’re known for the Jersey Devil.

Austin: Gotcha. Is that a point of frustration? Is it a thing where literally people would be like, “(sigh) it’s a ghost. We got to get those boys in from Trenton”. And you’re like, “we’re ghost hunters!” And people are like, “oh, but you did the Jersey Devil thing. If we had a devil situation, we would call you in. But we need ghost hunters”?

Ali: Because I feel like if we were the guys who got the Jersey Devil, it's like getting the Marshmallow Man in Ghostbusters. Since everyone knows what it is, they would be like, "you got to go for that guy," right?

Austin: I— mm-hmm. I'm sorry. You called him the Marshmallow Man?

(Ali laughs)

Austin: Which is... IS his name. But I so rarely just hear Marshmallow— I always hear Stay Puft Marshmallow Man as like a single long phrase. And so just "the Marshmallow Man" really deflates that whole encounter. Oh, my God. All right, cool. So now—

Art: He's very big.

Austin: (laughs) "It is time to put points into your Franchise Cards. What are Franchise Cards? Franchise Cards enable you to add dice to your skill rolls, thus increasing your chance of success. There are three types of cards with each card able to augment a certain kind of skill roll. They are:

- **Library Cards**, which allow you to use the vast library in order to aid your research. Libraries can take many forms from huge databases of information to snippets of folklore bound into a three-ring binder."

So that's that's the first one. The second is a—

- **"Gym Card**, which gives you access not only to the latest exercise equipment, but also free access to firing ranges, martial arts dojos and a really nice swimming pool. Not surprisingly, use of the Gym Card helps you with athletic rolls."

Then there is the Credit Card, which is the—

- **Corporate Credit Card**. Access to the Corporate Credit Card allows you and your fellow agents to buy cutting-edge technology and also to cover fees for technical training. Should I bother to mention that Credit Cards add dice to technology skill rolls."

So you get to decide how many franchise dice you begin with. You could have five, which is like a completely brand new franchise. You could have 20. You could have 30. The thing to know is, I'm going to make the difficulty of this first mission twice whatever your franchise is and the suggested thing is between five and eight for a starting group. My gut says seven, but six would also be fine.

Art: I mean, you're the one who knows how loaded our secret investor is.

Austin: He's very loaded. The thing is, he has lots of investments also. Like, this could be a little— we'll see. You know?

There's also, just so you know, a Bank Score and Bank also takes from the same set of franchise dice and your Bank Points can be spent on any role, not tied just to a single stat. The thing is that there is the chance for serious complication. When you use a Library Card die, you just add +1, you subtract it from the Library Card franchise dice and then you move on. When you roll something from the Bank, when you add a Bank die, you have to look at what that die rolled. And then, if it was a one, two or three or four, it kind of goes bad. I guess not bad. Four and three are both just like. no penalty, you lose the die the way you normally would. But with a two or a one, it can really fuck you over. So, we're flexible but also has higher risk like Banks. So what you think?

Ali: (sighs) I don't know, like... I want us to feel a little established. If this is a company that's been running for like 15 years or whatever, then we should have—

Austin: 15 sounds *super* established to me.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Ali: Really??

Austin: Yeah, small businesses close quick.

Ali: Okay.

Art: But yeah, seven or eight is probably right?

Austin: I think seven or eight works for me. The other thing to know, this is how long the game will be. Because the way this game works is, as you roll fives and sixes, you will be getting new franchise points. And, once you hit the goal, is when you can successfully end the game. So if you were a five, then you would need, and I would double that, you would need 10, five or sixes— No, you would need ten fives or five sixes to have enough franchise points to successfully close the case. If you pick eight, then you'll need 16. And (laughs) that depends on how dice go! You know, sometimes you can wrap up a case pretty quick. Other times you can't. So I would say— between the six and eight range is what I would say. Any of those would be fine by me.

Art: All right. I mean, seven sounds like it'll give us some stuff to work with and also that we won't just be here until 3:00 in the morning.

(**Ali** and **Sylvia** laugh)

Austin: Just as stats, a third of small businesses last for more than 10 years.

Ali: Okay.

Austin: So. All right. So let's do that. What number did you say, **Art**? Did you say eight?

Art: Seven.

Austin: You said seven. All right. So now where do those seven points go? Library, Gym, Credit and Bank.

Art: And we could theoretically put all in one or it's a—

Austin: Yeah, you totally could. Yeah. There's no maximum or minimum. "A young franchise could put all five dice into their Credit Card, but it's usually a good idea to split up the dice according to the strengths and weaknesses of your agents. Remember that card dice are not transferable. Once you place them, you can't switch them around on a whim."

Art: We should get a pretty good Library Card because we're not great at that.

Ali: Yeah. I'd like us having like a database.

Austin: Right. You're basically signed up for some international BBS?

Ali: Right. We're like part of a broader society of paranormal activities. We're not a franchise from a different business, but we go to conventions once a year and there's like a newsletter.

Art: Oh, my God. I want to do the convention episode.

Austin: Me too. This is the one problem with Bluff City is, I just want to play all these games forever because they're great.

Ali: (laughs) I'm going to— OK. I don't think— with apologies to Jake, I don't think that we have a great gym.

(**Austin** laughs)

Art: I mean, Jake's probably got a heavy bag in his house.

Ali: Yeahhhh, we probably—

Austin: Oh, do you want to roll a technology for th— no, I'm fucking with you.

Ali: (laughs) Like, if we need a pool or weights, there's probably a local YMCA or rec center? But I don't think that's something we pay for or is official for this business.

Austin: I mean, the thing to remember here is that this is also a thing that— at the end of the day, this is "you get to add a die to your roll". And I go, "why?" And then you get to say, "well, this represents the time that I went to that firing range. This represents the time that I went to Tawny's dojo that she set up after the last game". Or whatever. Right?

Art: Yeah. I think like a one in gym is probably appropriate, right?

Austin: Yeah.

Art: One in gym... Two or three in library?

Austin: And then you still have four left.

Ali: Do you want to split it even?

Art: No, we have three left.

Austin: You three left. I don't know how math works.

Art: Two bank and a credit? Wouldn't you rather have it in the Bank than on a Credit Card?

Ali: (laughs) Well, the Bank is everything and the Credit Card is like technology?

Austin: It's technology. Yeah.

Art: Technology. Which we're also not... I mean I guess the two of you are both three.

Austin: Yeah. Having two threes is nice.

Art: Yeah. All right. So yeah. We don't need the technology that bad. I'm never going to get it.

(laughter)

Austin: We'll see about that.

Art: We could get the best credit— We could get the platinum card, and I'm still over here like, can I hit it?

(Ali and Austin laugh)

Austin: I just need these numbers. So it sounds...

Ali: So it's 2, 1, 1, 3? No.

Austin: No, it's 3, 1 and then you have 3 left.

Art: 3, 1, 1. 2.

Austin: 3, 1, 1. 2?

Ali: Yeah.

Sylvia: OK. That sounds good.

Ali: I had a little bit more wiggle-room with that last one, so we're good.

Austin: 3, 1, 1, 2? Is that right? All right. So, last step here. I'm gonna line up these numbers is actually what I'm gonna do next. All right. Last step is that we need to decide what your job titles are! You don't have to do this. But "although not integral to the success of the game, a fun bit of color is to assign each player a job title and some related duties. Three suggestions as well as their duties are described as follows:"

- Chief Executive Officer, who would be the de facto leader.
- Chief Technical Officer, who is the person who would track any purchases and add it to the gear list.
- Chief Financial Officer who would be the person who'd like updates the franchise sheet.

But there's more. You could be Chief of Security, Chief of Operations. It sounded like Sid was maybe like some sort of videographer role. Alexa and Jake, do you have titles or are you just Investigator?

Art: Director of Operations is such a funny title for Jake to have.

(**Ali** laughs)

Art: It might just reflect his seniority. Like he was here the day they opened the place.

Austin: Right. The book notes, Chief of Operations might just be a fancy word for handyman. (chuckles)

Art: Yeah. I mean handyman's not right because he can't fix anything.

(**Austin** laughs)

Art: But like, he's been on a lot— he was on that Jersey Devils job.

Austin: Right.

Ali: Chief of Operations to me, though, is like, do you have like a clipboard that says like "we need to order a new box of pens", like stuff like that? (laughs)

Austin: I mean, what if— what if he did? (laughs)

Art: Yeah, I agree.

Ali: (laughs) That's a yes or no question. You should... (laughs)

Art: I got a clipboard at Staples. It can have whatever you want on it.

(**Austin** and **Ali** laugh)

Austin: And also, you can hit people with a clipboard. That was your— (laughs) Before you were Jake the Jackal, you were Clipboard Clint. And you'd beat the shit out of some motherfuckers in Georgia with a clipboard.

Art: Crockett is— Oh, Crockett's where I said Jake the Snake was, never mind.

Austin: Yeah. Uh huh. OK. Alexa?

Ali: I want a title but I don't know what it should be. Like something Specialist? Should I just be like the receptionist? But I go on jobs so it's not that.

Austin: No, you're not the receptionist.

Ali: That's why there's 10 people because there is a receptionist and it's two different ladies. (laughs)

Austin: What if it's like... things like Chief Strategy Officer is pretty good. I like Chief Risk Officer, which is just a good ass title. And is a real thing.

Sylvia: What if it's like CSO and people think it's Chief Strategy Officer, but it's like Chief Spiritual Officer or something?

Austin: Uh huh, that's really good, too.

Ali: That is really good. I like that a lot.

Austin: All right. Good. All right. Write it down.

Ali: OK. Where?

Austin: Just anywhere.

Ali: (laughs)

Austin: Maybe at the top. Maybe like at the very top of the index cards, you know? God, Chief Visionary Officer. Fuck off, capitalism.

Ali: (laughs) I'm writing that, actually.

Austin: Also, Sid, you should write Chief Visionary Officer on your sheet job.

Sylvia: Ugh, God.

Ali: I'll take it.

Austin: Actually, wait. Are you— What's this videography stuff for? Like, are you making it into a TV show, are you putting this on YouTube, is it for marketing?

Sylvia: Yeah, I guess this comes down to like what the business was, but the whole conceit of the game, with the confessional and stuff, always played to me like it was making a TV show.

Austin: Yeah. There's definitely like— it's supposed to have a certain Real World-like or Cops or you know... I guess the thing that's funny is like Inspectors was made in a time before there were lots of ghost hunting TV shows. (laughs) I think it was 2002 when this game came out, maybe? Yeah. 2002. So that was *15 years ago*, what is time? And there are just these shows now. So, yeah, that works.

Is it the first season? Maybe that's like the whole thing, this is the first time that we're gonna film this stuff to see if we can turn it— it's a pilot. You're filming the pilot episode.

Ali: It's a YouTube account. Like... (laughs)

Austin: Well, okay. It could be both!

Sylvia: It's a DailyMotion account.

Austin: You can find a [YouTube.com/GreysandParanormal](https://www.youtube.com/GreysandParanormal) and "gray" is spelled differently, because someone already had GraysandParanormal and you can't—

Ali: No, it's GraysandParanormalOfficial because we couldn't get (laughs) GraysandParanormal, they are located in Tennessee.

Austin: I'm gonna get GraysandParanormalVEVO, just in case we ever turn into a musician. All right. I think that's going to do it. Let's take a quick break and we'll come back with the opening sequence.

Art: Does YouTube do checkmarks?

Ali: No. (laughs)

Austin: No. All right. BRB.

———[01:01:52.00]

Austin: All right. So. "All games of Inspectors start with the starting interview." Well, the first game you play, "skip the starting interview for some subsequent games if you want. This method enables players to quickly get to know one another and their respective playing styles, f the group is new. It's also a great way to get to know one another's characters and for the GM to establish the tone and mood of the game. So there are three types of starting interviews. There's an employee screening, which could be good with Sid here, but we've already established it is being hired. There's a media interview which is great for like, "hey, we've done this thing and now we're doing a media interview".

But what we're gonna do is the investor meeting. "This is a good way to start the game. If players have just started and their franchise needs seed money or they've been a lot around long enough to get noticed by a venture capitalist. Typically, the GM portrays a possible investor in the Inspectors franchise and the players need to come with the reasons why the VC should part with their money. Again, this can be played straight and serious or whacked out, as you can imagine. In one of my games, the prospectively see was a very tall, very pale man named Vladimir Russatoff who wore lots of black and would only meet with the group at night. You figure it out, winky face ;)." This book was written in 2002. This book was written in 2002. There is a winky face in it. So, you know, different times.

Art: I thought you were gonna be like, "this book was written in 2002. Dracula was real hip".

Austin: (laughs) All right. So I have to give you a little bit of background before we get into what this meeting is. After the last Bluff City game, we know one casino in the city, and that casino was called The Menagerie. There are probably eight or nine casinos in town, maybe ten. And three of them are all owned by the same person. Those three casinos are the Black Star, the Black Colossus and the Black Millennium.

Art: Oh, my God.

Austin: The Black Star is out in the marina. So (sighs) the way Bluff City works, there is the boardwalk and that's where like most people think about Bluff City. And then there's the marina, which is to the north-ish of the island. It doesn't connect to the boardwalk, you have to drive out to it or take a shuttle. And those casinos tend to be a little more fancy. You can't just walk in from the boardwalk or from the street. And so they're a little fancier, they're a little artsier, they're a little more luxe. And the Black Star is there and it has a vague space theme. Then there is the Black Colossus, which the theme of that is basically... I mean, it is Alexander the Great's Empire, basically, and it has this gigantic Colossus statue out on a pier, basically. And underneath that there is a mall. It's basically Caesars, but Alexander the Great-themed instead. And then there is the Black Millennium, which you would think would just kind of be generic. But it's actually, and this is where you're going for your investor meeting, you're going to a penthouse suite in the Black Millennium, it's based on the year 2000. Everything inside is set to late 1999 music/early 2000s music. Everything looks like Windows 98. Everything is like a little too poppy in general and like saccharin. That is the theme of this whole casino and it is pushed to the nines.

And where we open is in a place that I'm literally just stealing from another podcast. It's not a storytelling podcast. I don't feel too bad and I'm shouting them out. They're just also friends of mine. Shoutouts to Important If True, which is a podcast in the Idle Thumbs network, in which they...Chris Remo went on this whole long thing about how a thing you could do now because technology was getting cheap enough is just buy a bunch of LCD screens and just plaster them all over everything. You could build a bookshelf out of LCD screens and like the side of the bookshelf is just super high-res bookshelf (laughs) on a display screen. And that is what this penthouse suite is. And on top of that, there are just like big displays that are showing, you

know, a beautiful sunset or birds. It's like walking into the TV section of a Best Buy and it's all nature documentaries on, do you know what I mean? Except it's set up in such a way that it is just, you know, a rolling spread of a single vista. It isn't just the same bird seven times. I've changed our mind. It's the same bird seven times. It's the same sunset seven times.

Art: Doesn't this cost a fortune in electricity?

Austin: Uhh, yeah, sure. This person is very rich. You're here to meet with the owner of the company, who has called you in because he needs to make a decision about whether or not to keep investing in you or to split you off and make you run under your own... you know, under your own budget, basically. Right now, he's been feeding Graysand Paranormal funds every single quarter to keep it operational. And he needs to make a decision about whether or not you're useful and profitable enough to keep as part of his company, as a subsidiary, or to spin you off as your own thing where you'll have to just deal with that.

This is the first time you're meeting him. It's time you're learning who he is, and I think it's the first time anybody has seen him in a while. His name is Millennium Alexander Black. He was a... he was a... kind of a folk hero to Bluff City? In what would have been the 70s of this world. He has kind of a reputation of being like almost like a blaxploitation character. Like, would roll into town and make things good and like throw the crooks in jail and, you know, save your brother from the drug dealers. And would beat up those fucking out-of-towners who came in and tried to push out the local gang and replace them with some some other gang. And he would walk right into city hall and tell the Mayor to stop trying to, you know, take over the the land from the local church to try to sell it for a new casino or whatever. He was like that hero. And then he kind of became super reclusive one day. And no one has seen him in years and years and years and slowly began to build up a fortune. Until, in the last 20 years, he has opened three casinos— or bought out three casinos and transformed them to be in his image. Also, he is played by like a cross of Wesley Snipes and Keith David is what you can imagine. He's like, what if Wesley Snipes put on a little more weight? You know? Just thickened up a little bit.

And he is sitting— he is like black turtleneck, you know, with white pants and like glasses with very round frames, just at the very edge of his nose. And is like looking out at the fake digital sunsets in front of him, as you walk past this entire— again, his whole penthouse is these bright digital LCD displays that all have like, again, Windows 98 style desktop images on them, while some Brian Eno-ass shit plays in the background. Just like, it is atmospheric as fuck. And he is just like doing the Gendo Ikari, fingertips touching, looking out at his fake sunsets. Maybe they're real sunsets, you don't know. They could be images of real sunsets somewhere else. And that's when you all come in. And he does not turn to look at you, he's in like a big burgundy leather love seat, basically.

Sylvia (as Sid): Hey, so, remind me again why you guys brought me here?

Austin: And you have like a big video camera on your shoulder right now, Sid?

Sylvia (as Sid): Oh, definitely.

Austin: OK. Good.

Ali (as Alexa): Well, hello, sir. Thanks for having us. You have such a lovely establishment here.

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): (gruff voice) Appreciate it. Could you turn off that camera, Miss Ruiz?

Sylvia (as Sid): Yes, uh— Yeah, sure. All right.

Sylvia: As It's like, kind of like...

Sylvia (as Sid): How does he know my name? (laughs)

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): I know a lot of things. Been around a minute or two. How's your dad doing? Good carpenter.

Sylvia (as Sid): I mean, like he put up our neighbor's kids' Jungle Gym the other day, they were pretty happy with that. But it's basically just for him to do, since he retired. Anyway, why do you know my dad?

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): I've been here for a long time, just like the Ruiz's have.

Sylvia (as Sid): Should I tell him you say hi?

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): Please. Jake the Jackal.

Art (as Jake): (growls like old men do when they say hi to each other)

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): God damn, you still got it, boy!

(huffing)

Art (as Jake): I hope so, I hope so.

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): Come around, come around, take a seat.

And he hits a button. And then just like... (technical swiveling noise) and seven panels open up on the side of one of the walls. And then just like a row of chairs slots out alongside a very visible track that puts them out around him, basically. It's just like a big metal— It's like the sort of like track-lighting-style track, big and metal and really obvious. And there are now just four extra seats for people to come sit on the other side of him. You can actually sit down— He hasn't looked at any of you during this. He's looking away from you for this whole scene at this point.

Ali: I think she's sits down to his right. Like the seat closest to him.

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): Ms. Baker.

Ali (as Alexa): Hi!

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): Tell me how you think things have been going with Graysand Paranormal.

Ali (as Alexa): I think that it's been going great, honestly. We have had a pretty, ummm, stable amount of jobs. I think that Jake has some of the paperwork here, but uh...

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): Jake, I'd love to see that paperwork.

Art: Jake passes him the clipboard—

(**Ali** and **Austin** laugh)

Austin: Can I get an image of what everyone's wearing for this meeting, by the way?

Ali: I think that Alexa frequently dresses very business casual, but like "clearance at Old Navy" sort of— (laughs) business casual. She has one office jacket that she wears, or like two or three that she rotates that are all like really solid. She got them like Lord & Taylor clearance, but the rest is like very practical khakis and a tank top or a shirt that's kind of breezy.

Austin: Jake and Sid?

Art: I think Jake's got track pants on and a tank top that he's probably owned for a few years. And then a *big* coat.

(**Austin** laughs)

Art: Like a coat that goes down to his knees.

Austin: (laughs) That's— Okay.

Sylvia: Holy shit.

Austin: Do you sit down in it?

Art: Like a dark trench coat. Yeah. He just... Cause he's too big to sit in like a normal chair. I'm really imagining him as like Undertaker-sized, like 6'10" kinda. So he kind of folds into the chair awkwardly and like... You know, for all the work WWE has done, you never see the Undertaker just sitting in an office chair.

(**Austin** and **Ali** laugh)

Austin: True. True enough. Sid?

Sylvia: I think, like I said, Sid didn't really know what was going on here. So they're just kind of dressed like how they normally dress when they go to work, which is very casually. She's wearing like her friend's band's T-shirt and a shitty vest with some studs that are falling off of it. And just like some jeans. So she's just like, "what the fuck. Why are we at the casino?"

Ali (as Alexa): If you guys checked the company newsletter I mail out to you once a week, you would know that this meeting is happening.

Sylvia (as Sid): Use the email!

(**Ali** laughs)

Austin: So, Mr. Black looks over the clipboard that Jake handed him and he's like,

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): Yeah, these are numbers. Money, man. But there are things more valuable to a man like me than money. If it was just by the numbers, I got to tell you, I would have shut down Graysand Paranormal a minute or two ago.

Ali (as Alexa): Well, it's not just numbers, sir. We're really impacting the community. Yeah, just last month we had a woman come in because there was a disturbance in her home that was really affecting the rescue animals that she was keeping and we were able to go clean it up. And, you know, they're doing fine now. We actually just got a letter from her—

Ali: And she like pulls it out of her purse. It's like a handwritten letter. It's like in very... You know, when you get a letter from your grandmother and you can't even read it cause it's like so cursive and like three Polaroids of an old woman in her 70s and three small dogs (laughs) just sitting on the couch like on a blanket. And they all look really nice! And it's like,

Ali (as Alexa): We helped that family!

Austin: And he's like... Oh, God. Sorry, I'm trying to figure out what he— at this point in his life, where is he? Where is he now with these? He's like.

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): Oh, yeah. Mrs. Peterson and the, uh, what was that again? Some sort of... hobgoblin?

Ali (as Alexa): Yeah... It was classified as a goblin, I don't know about a hobgoblin, but, you know, you're kind of on the money, it was basically that!

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): Goblins, you can't trust them. Anyway. I understand that there is service to the community, but there is also... Frankly, Bluff City has some things in it that (sighs) threaten the general stability. And while you've caught some goblins and you've helped out the neighborhoods, no taking away from that, there is this larger picture, and I need to know if you can contribute to that. And I'm not taking

away the Jersey Devil thing! Listen, I know about the Jersey Devil thing. Whole Eastern Seaboard is in your debt. Do not get me wrong. (deliberately) But I might have something for you that could help me... consider my investment. You know about The Menagerie? A Veranda casino.

Art (as Jake): Yeah. Who doesn't.

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): You ever do any work for those Verandas.

Art (as Jake): Ha. Nah, nothing like that.

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): Yeah. So just about a week, it's gonna be Labor Day. Last big holiday all season. Supposed to be the case that, you run a casino in this town, you're deep in preparation mode. You've got acts booked already. You got out-of-towners coming in. You got all the food preparations in order. You've already checked through all your machines. Make sure they work right. They shut down a whole floor. And for me, the problem is that floor has a sky bridge connecting to one of *my* casinos. Which on paper that's a problem. You get crosswalk, you get people who go off to The Menagerie and then they cross over to The Black Colossus and keep spending money. But there is a second issue, which is, no one knows why they closed it. And my people keep hearing footsteps on the damn bridge. And when we check the cameras, there's nothing to be seen. The doors are also cold or hot to the touch. It fluctuates. And it's one of those things I could take a look at, but I am a very busy person.

Ali: I think, at this point, Alexa is looking around the table and seeing no one else spring to action has like pulled out a notepad and is like (laughs) "footsteps. Hot and cold doors," like taking notes.

Art (as Jake): I don't know what you want, the man has my clipboard.

(**Ali** laughs)

Austin: He nods and hands you back the clipboard.

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): So here's what I want. You all go check into this. You figure out what's going on and, things go the right way, I keep my investments rolling. Maybe I double down. Maybe you go from being 10 people to being 20. Sound good?

Ali (as Alexa): Yeah, absolutely! Anything for you, sir.

Sylvia (as Sid): I mean, like, I need to pay for school with this, so sure. I don't really want to go work at McDonald's.

Art (as Jake): You know, sometimes you double down and that dealer's got a three.

Sylvia (as Sid): What?

(**Austin** laughs loudly)

Art: OK, so a double down is a bet you can make in Blackjack.

Sylvia: I know what a double d— but...

Art: And if you got three— usually you're looking for a big card on that, you double on like a 10 or an 11. You got three, you got a 13 or a 14, doesn't beat a lot of hands.

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): Mr. Black only rolls with big numbers. Now, I got business to attend to and so do you. Stay in touch.

Austin: And then the chairs begin to shake and wait for you to get up so they can roll back into the side of the wall. And the sun sets and it turns to like, as he says "I've got business to attend to," the all— Not all at once. Like in staggered, like almost a cascade, it goes from being a sunset to a moonrise. And everyone's lit in this like purple white now, instead of in the orange reds of the sunset.

Sylvia (as Sid): (whispering) What the fuck...

Art (as Jake): All right. Thank you for your time, Mr. Black. We'll take a look at this for you.

Ali (as Alexa): (nervously) Um, yeah, Mr. Black, thanks for having us. I actually have...

Ali: And she reaches into her purse again and she pulls out a little rock of turquoise. And it's like,

Ali (as Alexa): Here, it'll help balance you for your business!

Austin: He looks at it very closely. And then he says,

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): Montgomery, can you take this?

Austin: And a bald dude comes out wearing a valet uniform, wearing like a red vest with a black bow-tie and a white dress shirt and black pants, with like a silver platter. And he opens it with the top— like he opens the top of the platter. And it just a silver, mirrored platter for you to put the turquoise on.

Ali: And she sits down and she's like,

Ali (as Alexa): Um, there's going to be a full moon on Saturday. So leave it by a window.

Austin (as Millennium Alexander Black): You heard her.

Austin: And Montgomery— Montgomery is played by the dude who played Cedric Daniels on the wire. What is his name?

(Ali laughs)

Austin: Lance Reddick. And he just nods and puts the top of the platter on and and then just literally walks it over to an LCD screen, which he lifts up like a window? And it's a window??

(Ali laughs)

Austin: And then places the whole platter down and then takes a card out from a vest pocket and writes "Saturday" on it and places it next to the platter. And then as you walk out, you notice the front door is also a big LCD screen. So that's it. That's that's him.

Art: Love it. All the way love it.

Austin: Good. All right. So. There's our intro scene. Let me just give you the general gist of a job structure at this point. We've got the call already. You get the call, the client makes contact with the job. The usual difficulty, so the difficulty I'm going to set, is twice of the franchise score. So the difficulty is 14. I'm going to write this down somewhere. Let's make a new thing here and just boop. (typing) "Franchise score. zero, 14." You've got to get that 14. So the way this game works is you get... as you roll successful dice or successful rolls and fives and sixes, you get franchise points. That's way too big. Make that smaller. There we go. And the way you do that is by rolling as you step through the various structures of the job. There is research and investigation, which is you're doing research, investigation. And then at a certain point you suit up, you get the equipment that you need to take care of the problem. And then you do fieldwork. You travel to the scene and deal with the problem. And that's the basic— And then after that, we do cleanup and then you can go on vacation to kind of chill out and recover. That is the basic structure of this game. So at this point, like, what do you all do?

Ali: Before we—

Austin: Oh, I should also note. Go ahead.

Ali: I was just going to say, if you could repeat the things that he said again, because I said she wrote it down and I super didn't.

Austin: Oh, yes, totally. Sure. The Menagerie— Do you want to actually write it down, are you writing it down?

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: OK. The Menagerie shut down one of its floors, one of its casino floors the week before a big holiday, which is not what you do. The skybridge that connects The Black Colossus to The Menagerie is shut down as part of this. But people are still— people from his side are still hearing people walking across that skybridge. And then they're feeling the door as being hot

and cold. Like extremely hot and extremely cold. And like cameras don't reveal anything, the doors are locked. They could go in, but he told them not to. He's sending you in to do that.

There's one more thing I need to explain to you, and maybe it's time to even do one of these, I don't know. There are confessionals in this game! As in reality TV, at any point you can basically look into the camera and have a confessional scene. Just by yourself, you and the camera. And that can be a comment that you're making later. You know, like documentary-style or Real World-style where you're like, "I don't know why this went wild," or "I don't know why they did this, but they did this". And the rules around that are, if you're doing this for real, you would be sitting in a special chair. We would literally designate one chair (chuckles) as the confessional chair. I wish we could do that. I so, so, so, so wish that that was a thing we could do. But instead, I have this token in the middle of the thing, the Confessional Token, which I'm about to make it so that everybody can control it. There we go. And when it's time for you to do a confessional, just grab it and drag it over to your character sheet, basically. You have to address the other players as if they were watching the confessional on television. So it's just like "I look into the camera" or like "you see me do ____". Confessionals should always add, they should never detract from the game. They should never negate something that was already said. So it's not like someone rolls a success and then you go "I wanna do a confessional" and say, "What they didn't know was the gun wasn't loaded." Always "yes, and" here. Only one player can give a confessional per scene. So it's one confessional per scene.

And then here's the last big thing is, the confessionals can be used to do a couple of things. And one of them is they can be used to give characteristics. So, for instance, you could use your confessional and say, like... the example that they have here is, one player could say that another player is flirtatious in their confessional where they're like, you know, "I had no idea that that, you know, Jake was such a flirt." (chuckles) And then that could give Jake the "flirtatious" characteristic, which, if he then played into, you would get an extra bonus franchise die at the end of the game. You don't have to play into that if you don't want to. You don't have to— Someone could say like, "Oh, yeah, you're really brave." And like, no, I want to play a coward. You're gonna get to keep playing a coward. But if you did lean into it, you basically get a bigger reward at the end of the game. And everybody can just get one characteristic per session. So that's the basic gist of confessionals. Just a thing on the table before we continue. I think all of those rules are also... I don't know, maybe they're not on the... I'll make this one thing that's currently just for me viewable by everybody, which has the confessional rules. There we go.

OK. So what do you do? You're in this phase of the game at this point, which is your kind of research and investigation. So how do you begin the process of researching this stuff?

Art: Do we want to go talk to someone? Do we want to go talk to like whoever the Head of Security is over at The Menagerie? Ask him why they close that down?

Sylvia: Or we could even talk to the— which casino was it of...

Austin: It's The Black Colossus. It's The Black Colossus and The Menagerie. Those are the two that are in play.

Sylvia: Cause, if they're connected, we could also talk to Black Colossus, they might be a little more—

Ali: We should talk to both, for sure.

Sylvia: Well, yeah. But they also might be more receptive.

Ali: Yeah. Exactly.

Austin: So where do you go first? Who goes where?

Art: I think Jake is definitely— if we're gonna split up, Jake is gonna go to The Menagerie. I think Jake kind of enjoys talking to people who aren't super receptive.

Austin: Gotcha. Uh huh. Great.

Art (as Jake): I could show him some stuff on my clipboard, if you know what I'm saying.

(Ali laughs)

Austin: Uh huh...

Art (as Jake): I'm gonna hit him with a clipboard.

(Austin and Ali laugh)

Ali (as Alexa): I feel like I also like talking to people who aren't super receptive because the point is to make them open up?

Art (as Jake): She's going to hit them with a crystal.

Ali (as Alexa): Also a little afraid that you're going to hit someone.

Ali: Should we... Do we need to split up?

Austin: You don't need to. So where do you go first?

Ali (as Alexa): I think we should go to The Menagerie first because whatever bullshit we get from them, we can speak to the people who are gonna be open with me about it.

Austin: Do you call and make an appointment? Or do you just walk in.

Ali (as Alexa): I would love to make an appointment—

Sylvia (as Sid): (sneakily) Oh, we walk in...

Art (as Jake): If it was up to mean, we just walk in. There you go.

Austin: All right.

Sylvia: See, I feel like what happens is like Alexa is like, “Oh, we should make an appointment.” And then Sid and Jake are like, “No, we just fucking surprise them.”

(**Austin** and **Ali** laugh)

Austin: All right. So—

Art: I feel like like Alexa’s like, “We should make an appointment,” and Sid’s like, “Well, we’re here.”

Austin: (laughs) Because you’re driving, right. All right. So. First of all, the parking here is expensive. It’s such a pain in the ass. It’s like 12 bucks to stay here, just to park, which is too much— Actually, no, it’s the holiday week, so it’s like 15 bucks just to park—

Art: The charge you to park at a casino?!

Austin: Yeah, dog. You haven’t been to a casino in a minute, huh? They charge like 20 bucks on holiday weekends to park at a casino. It’s unbelievable.

Art: (astonished) You’re going there to spend money!

Austin: Yeah. And you’re starting by spending at the fuckin parking lot. That’s the first place that you spend money.

Art: Shit...

Austin: Uh huh. It’s like that, man. Atlantic City is bad. So you head inside— you park, you head inside. The inside of The Menagerie, again, is like— it’s themed like an open air zoo and they’re constantly just kind of speaking in, blasting in the sounds of an open-aired zoo. So just like (bird sounds) (roars). Like it’s just animal noises with like a kind of... I think like the musical background in The Menagerie is vaguely colonial? Do you know what I mean? It’s a mix of shitty “tribal drums” with like the sorts of music that... what safari people would listen to. And the decor is like lots of jungle-painted like— painted-on— lots of jungle murals with very cartoonish tigers looking out. Lots of gates, like golden gates that like are supposed to be cages. But they’ve never closed. They’re just like plastered onto the side of a wall or stapled into the side of a wall. All of the parts of the of the casino, all the different like wings are named after different places in the world where animals are from. So it’s like the Serengeti Casino Floor, the name of the theater is like the Amazon Theater or whatever. That’s how it’s set up.

Ali: A touchstone here is definitely like the Rainforest Cafe, right? Like it’s that sort of—

Austin: A HUNDRED percent. One BILLION percent, yes.

Ali: Okay. (laughs)

Austin: That is exactly it. Totally. Uhh... What's another good pla— What's the name of the floor that got shut down?

Ali: Oooh, umm. It's like parts of the world? Or like...

Austin: Yeah, yeah. Parts of the world. It's all named after specific parts of the world where there are like, you know—

Art: Like the Sahara Terrace.

Austin: Right. Exactly. That is not the name of this specific one. (laughs) But that's a place in here for sure. I'm looking at all of the— Go ahead.

Ali: Is there a place in the world where there's like a bridge or a pathway? Should it be, like...?

Austin: Mm, it doesn't have to. That place existed before the skybridge existed.

Ali: Fair.

Austin: Oh, you know, maybe it's like... Maybe it's like... Is there like a term for the Pacific Islands or that region? Maybe it's like the Polynesian level? And it's all tropical themed, but that's all blocked off. The escalator up isn't working and there are stops there. The elevator skips that floor. And there are, you know, there is a security guard stationed at the stairwells that would take you up.

Ali: Ohhh, do you know why I really like that, because maybe the skybridge is designed to be like one of those, uh. You know, when you're in an aquarium, you have a hallway where the sharks are above you?

Austin: Yeah.

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: Wait.

(Ali laughs)

Austin: But it's outside— It's a skybridge. It's not an underwater— There can't also be a shark.

Ali: (laughs) No, but it's like screens that are like, "Oh, yeah, you're at the islands!"

Austin: Or! Or it could (laughs) be a skybridge that has an aquarium around it.

Ali: See? That seems dangerous and really hot, but.

Austin: No sharks. But fish.

Art: The Golden Nugget has that.

Austin: What?!

Art: In Vegas.

Ali: (high-pitched) WHAT?

Art: Or maybe it's like a slide, you can go through a slide through a shark aquarium?

Austin: Uh huh. I see it. *Why* do they have this?

Sylvia: Because it owns?

(Ali laughs)

Austin: Oh, yeah, okay.

Art: Cause they're not on the Strip and they've got to get you over there?

Austin: Oh, yeah. That adds up too. Okay. Fair. This is weird. I'm watching it. I'm watching it happen right now. I'm watching a GoPro of Zoe's Golden Nugget Shark Tank Pool Experience. There's a slide. It's a slide. I hate this. OK. Anyway. Um, sure. There's one of those. Where do you go? So now you're in The Menagerie, I've set up what The Menagerie looks and sounds like.

Ali: Do we want to go to like (laughs) the—

Art: I mean, I sort of feel like we should go to a security desk that's on the floor and be like, "We want to talk to the head of security." And then leverage the fact that we could create a scene to kind of get there.

Ali: Um. Yeah.

Art: I want you to know—this is a bad plan.

(Ali laughs)

Art: I want you know that I know that this is a bad plan.

Austin: Yeah, you can totally do that. So there is kind of a heavy-set dude, dude with my build, in a suit. In like a security guard suit, do you know what I mean when I say that? I just realized I've spent a lot of time in casinos and that gives me a distinct shortcut to thinking about this stuff? Where like, this guy has a suit on, but he's a security guard, which means it also just has like a shitty badge sewn into the lapel of the suit. His shirt is like a little too tight. Uh... What the fuck is the name of this actor who I have in my head? Heavy Hispanic actor, comedic actor...

Ali: George Lopez? No. (laughs)

Austin: Nope.

Art: But not... What's that guy's name? I keep wanting to say Enrique Iglesias.

(Ali laughs)

Austin: Nope, no, it's not him. Not Gabriel Iglesias either.

Art: Okay.

Austin: Not that heavy. He's like an actor. He's like an actor first, and he's done some serious roles.

Art: But not Carlos Peña, he's too skinny, right?

Austin: I don't know. Let me see. It's not him. No, not Carlos Peña. It was like in the 80s and the 90s... He was in a bunch of stuff.

Sylvia: I'm out of my depth.

Austin: Fuck.

Sylvia: Like if you knew something he was— I vaguely knew about something he was in.

Austin: I can't. Oh, my God. It's right on the tip of my tongue. I hate this. Eughhhhh.

Art: And it's not Danny Trejo.

Austin: (chuckles) It's not. Luis Guzman is who I'm thinking of.

Ali: Ohhhh.

Art: Ohhhh, sure.

Austin: It's him. Irony because the name I had in my head for this character was already Luis. So his name is Luis Puma, like the cat. And that's what he says when he meets you. He says, "Puma. Like the cat. What can I help you with?"

Ali (as Alexa): So... we are... here on behalf of the, uh, the Graysand Paranormal... what are we called?

Art (as Jake): Investigations...

Ali: And she pulls out like a little business card and puts it on his security dustpan, slides it over.

Ali (as Alexa): And just had some questions? I was wondering if we could speak to the head of security, unless that's you! In which case, um, nice to meet you.

Austin (as Luis Puma): If it was me, I wouldn't have such bad loans to pay off.

Ali (as Alexa): Yeah, well... (awkward pause) Loans, am I right?

(**Ali** and **Art** laugh)

Sylvia: Sid gives a thumbs up from behind the camera.

Austin (as Luis Puma): (whispering) Oh, my God. (sighs) Do you have a permit? Did somebody give you a permit to film here?

Sylvia (as Sid): Yep.

Ali (as Alexa): Well, that's part of why we would like to speak to the head of security.

Austin (as Luis Puma): I'm going to need you to turn off the camera, ma'am.

Sylvia (as Sid): All right. All right, all right. All right, all right. All right.

Sylvia: And Sid turns it off. And by "turns it off", I mean, hits the button and then covers the lamp until he notices and then actually turns it off.

Austin (as Luis Puma): I can help you with whatever it is you need. I don't need you to talk to anybody else. I'm a professional. I've been here for 30 years. You just let me know what you need. And the Puma's gotcha.

Art (as Jake): We want to know about the closed floor.

Austin: He, like, looks back and forth and leans forward.

Austin (as Luis Puma): (annoyed) It's closed.

Art (as Jake): That ain't it.

Ali (as Alexa): But thank you! We understand that it is closed. We were mostly wanting to know why...

Austin (as Luis Puma): Renovations.

Ali (as Alexa): Mmmm...

Art: Jake starts talking louder, loud enough the people nearby can hear.

Art (as Jake): That ain't what I hear happened. I hear someone got hurt up there. I heard there's a cover-up for some robberies going on in here.

Austin: (laughs) Give me a contact roll!

(Ali laughs)

Austin: Jesus Christ. Oh, my fucking God. He rolled two sixes.

Sylvia: Holy shit.

Ali: Wow-ee!

Austin (as Luis Puma): (quieting Jake) Okay, okay, okay. Okay, okay. Calm down! There was a robbery upstairs, in a sense. They were, uh, the people were robbing us blind. All those machines kept winning. Then we got new machines, and they kept winning. And we had new new machines. And let me tell you...

Austin: And he leans forward and like grabs you by the leather trench coat collar and pulls you down to his level.

Austin (as Luis Puma): They kept winning. We don't know what's going on. We're looking into it. But we can't go into the biggest holiday of the rest of the year with everybody winning! That's not how casinos work.

Austin: Also, you rolled a six, so I should actually note something. So, you actually describe two facts that directly lead to solving the case. I should not have given you that, I'm like so used to playing the other way. So that's one of the facts. I'll let you give the other fact and then you get two franchise dice, so that number goes up to two. So what's the other thing he gives you?

Art: That's a great question. Thank you for asking.

(Ali laughs)

Austin: It is the rules of the game to ask. I should not have given you *anything*. You're supposed to come up with this shit.

Art: I'm stalling. I don't have anything.

Austin: O-kay. People can suggest stuff!

Ali: All I know is that Alexa pulled out her notepad and wrote "Winning!!!" with three exclamation points next to it.

(Austin laughs)

Art: Oh, okay. Um. The graveyard custodians. The people who clean up at night. Not like people that clean up a literal graveyard. I just want to make sure that we all know there's not a graveyard in this hotel.

Austin: Not this one.

Art: Not this one. Definitely one of the others. They couldn't shake this smell. And it was like... Have you ever driven past like a bakery that was making cakes? Like that overwhelmingly sweet smell.

Austin: Mm. Mm-hmm.

Art: But like... They're ain't a bakery in that part of the hotel. There's a bakery behind the buffet. And they don't make cakes at 3:00 in the morning.

Austin: Yeah. Good. And he's just like (sighs). He takes off his jacket and puts it down. Puts it like over his— he has like a barstool-style seat. Like it's a seat. It's a bar seat. You know what I mean? It's raised, but just a little seat. And he puts it over there and he steps down off of it.

Austin (as Luis Puma): You know. I work security. I'm not cut out for— The bakery smells or, or... Luck. I'm not a lucky guy— I don't deal with luck. I deal with, someone comes in and they are cheating, I toss them out. That I can do. I don't deal with this.

Ali (as Alexa): I mean, is it just affecting the machine? Do people up there also have good luck? If you're up there and you're playing your cell phone games, does that also win?

Austin (as Luis Puma): A cell phone— I— We didn't do any rea— we didn't... (sighs)

Austin: He's like holding down one of his nostrils and is sighing out of the other side of his nose. Very— (aggressive nose exhale sigh).

Austin (as Luis Puma): My name's the Puma. But sometimes I get to be like a bull. (pause) Maybe they're testing that now. I don't know. You shouldn't bother them.

Ali (as Alexa): Oh, are there the researchers up there?

Austin (as Luis Puma): Of course! We're trying to figure out (getting angrier, more high-pitched) why everybody's winning!!!

Ali (as Alexa): We're also here to figure it out! Please calm down, we're trying to help!

Art (as Jake): Did you hire those Trenton boys?!

Austin (as Luis Puma): I don't— (huffs) I didn't hire anybody.

Art (as Jake): Oh, my goodness.

Austin (as Luis Puma): That's not me, that's not on me. You talk to, uh. You talk to Angelica. Maybe she hired some people, I don't know! I do my job! I do my job, I come in every day. I clock in. I push the buttons. I sit here. I look at the monitors. I say, "Hey!

Hey! You shouldn't! No. No." That's what I do. That's my job. And someone else comes in, they want to investigate it, that's fine. That's on them.

Ali (as Alexa): Luis, can I say something?

Austin (as Luis Puma): Anything.

Ali (as Alexa): Thank you for coming in here and doing your job every day. Security is very important!

Austin (as Luis Puma): That's what I'm saying. How you doin'?

Ali (as Alexa): Thank— (laughs).

Austin: I slipped right in. I just didn't mean to even be there, but all of the sudden, he transforms in the chubby Latino Enzo Amore.

Ali: Enzo Amore is always just going to be on the side of the screen here.

Austin: Yes, absolutely.

Ali: He's going to be there to grab it to you.

Ali (as Alexa): And you know, sir, we also are passionate about our jobs. We fulfill an important role. And if you— Listen, I know that you're not the head of security, but you are obviously established here. And, you know, if you have the authority to let us up there, we want to help you with this as well!

Austin: Give me a contact roll.

Ali: (whispering) I would love to.

Austin: 3D6.

(**Ali** sighs)

Austin: Hey, that's 6! So I'll increase this franchise score to 3. No, actually, to four. All right. So you tell me two facts that lead to solving the case. I think this could be a transition to— I think you can transition into that scene, right?

Ali: Yeah, for sure. (laughs) So, the establishment of the question I think is true, but that might just be another fact onto the first one, which is like, Alexa pulls out her cell phone and pulls up like a Gacha game. (laughs)

Austin: Right.

Ali: Does a roll and gets like a Super Platinum...

Austin: Right. Can we actually see that happen as like... He's like, "Follow me." And then he leads you to the escalator and, in broad daylight, he just like turns a key that turns the escalator on and like shuffles one of the blockers off and you're playing the Gacha game. And it's like, you've opened the box, right? You've opened whatever the Gacha is. And the first three things that come out are just like common, common, common. And then it's like ultra platinum, extra roll, you know, ultra platinum, extra roll. And you just keep getting the thing.

(Ali laughs)

Austin: That's perfect. So that's one. So, yes, it applies to everything up here, not just to the machine games.

Ali: Okay. And for the second one. I'm up to suggestions. (laughs)

Austin: One thing I'll give you straight away is that that Trenton team is here, which is not about— that's not a fact that leads to solving the case. But like if you want to see them doing something, you can see them doing something and then like learn something from that.

Ali: Yeah, I would love to one up them. (laughs) Maybe... that's not like a result, but I would love to overhear one of them be like, "Oh, you know, I just checked out that hallway and there might be something over there." And we go down there before them and do a thing? I don't know.

Austin: I mean it could just be the thing you find. That's the whole thing here, right? Is you can totally... You can totally go all the way to that, which is a weird thing about this game. Like, I don't know what's in that hallway.

Ali: Yeah. Man, what kind of ghosts are luck monsters? (laughs)

Art: They could be leprechauns!

Sylvia: I was gonna say leprechauns, but I didn't want to, but they could be leprechauns.

Austin: All right. Yeah, maybe you just hear— All right. Have y'all run into the Trenton people before?

Art: Probably, yeah. And I want them to just be like... I don't know, I just want them to have all the technology, I want them to be like... I want them to be...

Austin: Like if you're Ghostbusters, they're Men in Black.

Art: But they're like Men in Black meets the Best Buy Geek Squad.

Austin: OK, that's good. Yeah. There are... Have you met them before? Cause I'll give you names if you've met them before.

Ali: Sure, I would love to have some names.

Sylvia: Sid hasn't. These two have.

Austin: So there's three of them. One of them is a lady you have not met before. She's like a black lady with straight brown hair, she— This is Bluff City. It's straight red hair, like dyed red a la 2002 hip-hop/R&B performer. You know what I mean? She definitely has like a Mary J. Blige cut right now. And she is in a white shirt with a black tie and a black skirt. And y'all don't know her. You do know Jacob van der. He doesn't have— it's just Jacob van and der. There's no third. It's not van der whatever, it is Jacob van der. And he is like... He's basically like current Dawson. What the fuck is Dawson's name? What's the actor for Dawson from Dawson's Creek?

(Ali laughs)

Art: James Van Der Beek.

Austin: James Van Der Beek! Oh, right. Yeah. He's van der Beek! Yes, of course! Uh huh. Funny. But like the way he looks on CSI Technology, CSI Hacking. CSI...

Sylvia: *CSI Cyber*.

Austin: *CSI Cyber*. Thank you.

Art: Cyber??

Sylvia: Yes. Come on.

Austin: *CSI Cyber*. I'm writing that down.

Sylvia: Classic.

Austin: Oh, it's a classic, all right.

Sylvia: One season.

Austin: The name of this crew, by the way, is the Trenton Terror-normal Investigators.

Sylvia: Holy shit.

Austin: And then the third one is— And he's also in khaki slacks with a white shirt, like a white button up shirt. And he has on... What type of tie does he have?.

Ali: They have like a uniform, right? Like...

Austin: Yeah. Yeah.

Ali: They're all wearing—

Austin: I think it's just like—

Ali: Oh.

Austin: —like the same colors and the same— But I really want that Geek Squad vibe here too.

Ali: Right. They should be wearing like... They should all be wearing white shirts with like a blue tie that like is... It's like navy on the top and then fades into a lighter blue at the bottom. And they each have badges that mean nothing. (laughs)

Austin: Right. Absolutely. Like one of them is the Metaphysics Expert and one of them is like... you know, I guess it's a casino-based thing. So it is probably like they have a person who's just dedicated to luck. You know, a... not just like Luck Inspector.

Art: Oh, Luck Inspector's good, though.

Austin: Yeah, but I think it's broader than that. I think it's just Actuary? I think one of them is just an actuary. Someone who understands risk and chance. That is the equivalent, actually, of the Chief Risk Officer here. And then the third one is older, same exact outfit, looks like someone who is in the Best Buy Geek Squad and who has been there for maybe a decade too long. And that is John Paul St. James. He goes by Luke. And he's like 42, 43. He has a beard. His hair is long. But it's like back in a ponytail. He keeps it clean. So. So, yeah.

Art says, "I'm Chance Inspector, and I'm the Chance Inspector."

(Ali laughs)

Austin: Good. Also, Sylvia says, "They understand chants, in addition to chance. They're multifaceted." Good. Perfect.

Ali: Can I be Facebook friends with some of them?

Austin: Yeah, totally. Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. In fact, I think John Paul sees you and calls you over. And I think, yeah, the thing you overhear is the black lady, whose name is Mint Mocha, she says, "Leprechauns? Haven't been leprechauns in Jersey in 17 years." And that's when y'all come up the escalator. And that's when Luke, John Paul St. James, sees you. And he's like,

Austin (as Luke): As I live and breathe. If it isn't Alexa Baker, come here! Give me a hug, Baker!

Ali (as Alexa): H-hiiii!

Ali: And then she comes over and gives him a hug.

Ali (as Alexa): I didn't know that you guys would be here. Heyyy!

Austin: Jacob is like,

Austin (as Jacob): You're not on this case. They didn't put you on this case, you're not on this case.

Ali (as Alexa): Well, we are— We were contacted by a different establishment to investigate it. And of course...

Austin (as Mint): Y'all don't have clearance.

Austin: Says Mint.

Ali (as Alexa): Luis Puma gave us clearance. On behalf of The Menagerie.

Austin (as Jacob): Well, just don't get in our way.

Austin: Says Jacob.

Ali (as Alexa): Jacob...

Austin (as Luke): Calm down, everybody, calm down. We're all here to investigate the paranormal, to root out any unkind spirits and to make sure everybody has a damn good day!

Ali (as Alexa): Exactly.

Art: That's a good thing. That's a good thing that that was said because, Jake's eyes widened, his nostrils flared. When he was told he shouldn't be up here, he got like the full on like, "Ooooh, this is going down!"

Austin: I think Jacob has like... makes eyes with you. Like angry eyes. He's ready to go. But he's sort of angered. Not like— not the— well, you know, maybe down the road, who knows? But right now, it's the other eyes, it's the eyes that are like, "You don't belong here, Jake. There's only room for one Jake, uh, name here who hunts ghosts, thank you." In fact, I think he says, like, he looks you right in the eyes and he goes, "Don't you have some people to be body slamming, Jackal?"

Art (as Jake): You might have heard there's a lot of luck up here, but there ain't enough for you to try me, boy.

Austin (as Jacob): You want to—

Austin: And he like starts to undo his tie a little bit.

Art: Jake just like makes himself big. Like stands all the way up.

Austin: When you do that, he unclips his tie and throws it down.

Sylvia: I grab the Confession Token?

(Ali laughs)

Austin: Uh huh!

Sylvia: It's just a cut of Sid. I think they filmed this in a lounge in the casino. And it's just Sid clearly has set up the camera on a table themselves, and is just like...

Sylvia (as Sid): So I didn't expect Jake to be wearing his tights underneath his clothes?

Austin: Oh, my GOD!

(Ali laughs)

Sylvia (as Sid): Um. But then again, I didn't expect to have this job at all this summer. So this is where we are at this point.

Art: So we cut back and Jake's jacket is on the ground? He's taken his sleeveless shirt off. And you can see that under it he is wearing like— he didn't take his pants off, he's not like a weirdo. But you can see that it's the top of a singlet under it, like one of those like deep cut, you know, what the Undertaker wears. Don't make me just keep—

Austin: I gotcha, yes.

(Ali laughs)

Austin: Jake van der is just like— He goes to like shoulder charge you in the abdomen region.

Sylvia: Oh, what the fuck.

Austin: It's on! He threw down his clip-on tie. He busted open his like twelve dollar Boscov's shirt. He's ready to go. And he has a shirt on underneath too! And it's a big dog shirt. And it says—

Sylvia: (spit takes) Fuck off!

Austin: —I'm the big dog here!

Ali: Stooooooooop. (laughs)

(Art laughing uncontrollably)

Austin: And there is a big dog underneath it. And then there's another line of text and it just says, "Any Questions?" And it's underlined six times.

Art: I think I'm just going to just, I'm just gonna give him a lariat?

Austin: (laughs) OK. Give me an Athletics roll.

Art: I think I might just want to take four on it? Cause I'm not leading to us solving the case by putting this guy on the ground. The negative aspect of it is, I break his nose. He's just like bleeding everywhere now. Like now this has escalated.

Austin: Right. Hey, I'm gonna say, Sid and Alexa, give me stress rolls.

Ali: (laughs) Sure. How do I do that?

Austin: Just one stress— just roll 1D6.

Art: Wait, why?

Austin: You didn't expect to just like run into some bloody nonsense here! All right. So, uhhh. Alexa, you're going to lose one die for the next roll that you make. You're at one die stress penalty for the next roll. It doesn't apply to one of your skills permanently. Just, whatever your next role is, is minus one die. So make a note of that somewhere.

Ali: Okay.

Austin: (laughs) Sid! It is your first day on the job, basically. You have to lose one die from the appropriate skill for the rest of the case.

Sylvia: All right. What would the appropriate skill here be?

Austin: I don't know. I could see a case for contact? I could see a case for athletic— I could see a case for academics, athletics or contact. But you just tell me how and why it is.

Sylvia: I think... OK. I have an idea for what happens. Is, when this is going down, Sid has like left the camera a little bit behind them and is like scrambling to get it. And they trip and twist their ankle. And so she's got like a minus one off athletics from now.

Austin: All right. So make that a one athletics instead of a two. This is effectively the way damage works in this game, so to speak? You know, you won't die from this at any point. In fact, we didn't go out of our way— There's a rule in this game that says, "Hey, can characters die? If so, you get bonus points at the end to invest in your company." But we didn't say yes, so no one's dying this game. But this is kind of like how you take damage, so to speak, through the course of a game. Things get harder for you. So. Yeah. So that's good.

You win that fight, though, Jake. Also, I don't know that we said it on the recording or not, but Take Four is that, if you have a four in a stat, you could just say "I take a four." Even though, if I'd rolled it, I might be able to get higher, there's always the chance that you could roll three ones and a two, and that would suck. So there you go. That's— You win that fight. What else happens here? This guy's knocked out on the ground at this point. Or maybe like scrambles back up and away and grabs his shirt and puts it back on.

(Ali laughs)

Art: Or maybe he uses a shirt to sop up the blood.

Austin: Yeah, I think so. I think that might be it.

Austin (as Jacob): Jesus Christ!

Austin: Uhh. And John Paul St. James says,

Austin (as Luke): Don't take the Lord's name in vain! Everybody calm down. Now it's just— everything is— We're gonna all calm down, we're gonna work this case, we're going to stay out of each other's way. Sound good?

Ali (as Alexa): Yeah. I'm sorry about this. Don't challenge us, though, please. Cause I just— we get and I just— Things happen and... Okay. I'll see you around. Friday's next week?

Austin (as Luke): Friday's next week.

Ali (as Alexa): Okay. See you then. It was— it was great seeing you!

Ali: And she's just like retracting. (laughs)

Austin (as Luke): Hey! One more thing, though. You're the one who's gonna get the Jack Daniels chicken strips, though, this time.

Ali (as Alexa): Yes.

Austin (as Luke): Then we're even.

Ali (as Alexa): Yes. Mm-hmm.

Austin: All right!

Sylvia (as Sid): See you, mall cops!

(**Austin** and **Ali** laugh)

Austin: Oh! They leave. So you kind of push them out of this place, actually. So now you have the run of this floor for now.

Ali: Okay. Leprechauns. Man, I think that...

Austin: We can play fast and loose, remember, you don't have to actually stay here and do— you can do... Again, think about this in terms of these phases of like research and investigation, which includes being— researching at a place, it means going to a library, it means checking the Internet, it means talking to people. Suiting up, which means going to get equipment to take care of that problem. I don't know that you know what that equipment is quite yet necessarily? If

there's extra equipment? And then there's the like, go deal with the problem. But you're up here, you could just go look at stuff. It's up to you.

Art: I feel like it's early to go look in the walkway, right? But like, I want to look in the walkway.

Ali: I kind of want to use our computer thing to get... out readings or whatever? The way I had this in my head is that it either is a thing that turns a game's random generated fights thing into like not maybe we'll see them to being able to see them. Or, it's a sage thing and we sit down and we wait 10 minutes and then areas where there's like dense psychic power or whatever have a smoke or whatever. And whichever people at the table like more we can say is the thing that will happen here.

Sylvia: I think the second one's a little funnier.

Ali: (laughs) Okay. Yeah, so is that just a technology roll?

Austin: Yeah. That's a technology roll.

Ali: OK. Does anyone wanna assist?

Austin: So I should talk about how assisting works. Assisting is kind of unique here. It is not as simple as just like, "Oh, you get an extra die because you describe a thing." Let me find the actual write up of how it works so that I can give you more than just "it's weird".

So first of all, it has to be before you make the roll, so teamwork— All right. Here we go. "You can also improve your chances by acting as a team. The other players may announce assisting actions and roll their skill dice as normal. After this is done, they give you any of the dice that they rolled, even if their action was a failure, and you get to use the value rolled on that dice. Players do not have to use the same skill in order to help out. Their actions can simply give their teammate an advantage.

If a teammate has announced their intent to help out, he or she must hand over a die to the other player, even if the die is less than desired result. For obvious reasons, characters with the skill of one can only hand over their single die if they choose to take an automatic failure on their own action."

So I'm going to read this example because it helps things. It helps put in perspective what this might look like on screen. "The professor is examining in a cult tome, trying to remember his ancient Sumerian before some demons can knock down his hastily constructed barricade. Joe announces that she is going to help him by blasting a few of the hell-spawned creeps. Joe rolls her athletic skill and gets a one, a four and a five. She takes the five as a success and blasts apart one of the demons. Although not a great roll, she gives the four to the professor, hoping that his academics roll works out. If the professor's roll is less than a four, he could then use Joe's loan four to score at least a partial success. Just then, Barry grabs his shotgun and hurries over to assist Joe and the professor. Barry is not that great a shot to begin with. He's got an athletic score of two, and he's a bit hurt from a previous encounter, giving him a one die penalty

to this action. Still, he gives it the old college try, rolls his one die and scores a three. Because he has to give up his only die to Joe. He automatically fails. Duh. Nice going, Barr. Joe rolls her eyes as Barry trips over his shoelaces and falls headfirst into the barricade.”

So you kind of have to say like, “Okay, what am I specifically doing to help the other person go do their thing? Like what other thing am I taking care of while they do it?” You know?

Ali: Okay, fair.

Austin: Which means you can help. It just means like, let me know what that looks like.

Ali: Okay.

Art: You can have my one die, I don’t know what it... What this...

Austin: I mean, again, you could roll other things. You could— It doesn’t have to be the technology roll.

Art: Oh, sure.

Austin: It just means like, how are you helping her do that? Like, what’s the other thing that you’re doing while helping?

Ali: I guess nothing, then? (laughs) I’ll just roll it

Austin: All right.

Art: Well, because, you’re only rolling one die? We got to help you.

Austin: No, she’s rolling two, isn’t she—

Ali: I’m rolling two.

Austin: —Oh no, you’re not! You have that stress!

Ali: OK. Should I just roll one again. Are we gonna?

Austin: No, we should— We should take that first roll. (laughs) So that’s a two.

Ali: OK.

Austin: All right! That means I get to say a thing. “The GM decides your fate.” Tell me of the thing that you’re doing.

Ali: So I’m turning on the computer thing. I think she sets it down and in the middle of the floor on like a table. And she has like a piece of tiger’s eye that she’s sanded to look like a USB thing and plugs it into a port that’s just a USB charging port. (laughs) She’s like, “No, but it helps!”

Austin: Well, OK. So. So it starts to glow! The crystal does. So roll stress because that has never happened before.

(Ali laughs)

Austin: And that means that something supernatural is definitely happening here. It starts to glow this bright color. So, three on stress means “lose one die for the appropriate skill for the rest of the case”. You tell me which. And then the second thing that happens is— So how does it detect stuff again? When it knows that there’s something here, what’s the thing that happens?

Ali: It’s not like a mist that comes out of it, but once it detects something, it turns into maybe a purple smoke? It’s like, “oh, we need to look over there for like whatever this thing is!”

Austin: Well, so it starts... it’s like, “Oh, there’s a hit! There’s something supernatural here!” And then like, “Oh, there’s a hit! There’s something supernatural here!” And then it hits again and again and again. It super platinum hits. It’s super lucky. And the purple smoke starts *poooooourring* out of this machine. Like there’s no way that machine has that much purple smoke juice in it. (laughs) There’s no way. And the whole floor just gets comp— It’s like someone burnt a steak up here. Just smoke everywhere and it smells. Also, by the way, you smell that cake smell up here that you described before, that Luis described to you before. And so it’s just like the fog machine cake smell mixed with fog machine gross burnt steak smell coming from this machine. And the whole place is just— And then, the sprinklers turn on from all of the smoke. And everyone just gets soaked. And the fire alarm goes off.

Art (as Jake): We got to get out of here right now.

Art: Jake snaps up the computer and picks Alexa up by the middle of her jacket and he’s is like,

Art (as Jake): We’re getting out of here.

Art: And heads toward the backstairs.

Austin: Sounds good. Yeah, totally. Unless you want to see more stuff, you can just cut ahead to some other point. But if you want to find something maybe on the way out, then we can stay kind of moment to moment.

Sylvia: I can’t think of anything to do in here.

Art: No, I think we should— I think we should like go do like a research on leprechauns?

Austin: So do we just cut to a scene of y’all back in the actual headquarters, back in the office? Like with a pizza and you’re all still wet from the sprinklers, so you’re drying off?

Ali: Yeah. Or maybe it’s like a couple hours later and Alexa’s blazer and Jake’s jacket are hanging up in the corner, drying off. And we have like a meeting in— it was the old H&R Block,

where they take you in there to, like, talk about your finances or whatever, but it's like a meeting room with a book of Irish folklore, (laughs) a book on luck.

Sylvia: I have an idea for something.

Austin: Sure.

Sylvia: So, Sid, like I said, tried to turn the camera on for the fight that happened. So I think she's gonna want to check if they got any footage at all.

Austin: That's a good call. Give me that technology check.

Sylvia: All right.

Austin: 3D6!

Art: I just want to scene paint real quick—

Sylvia: I got a five.

Austin: Yeah, sure.

Art: I just want to make clear that because they got wet, Jake has just taken his track pants off and now just is just in wrestling trunks.

(**Sylvia** and **Ali** laugh)

Austin: Oh, God, good.

Art: It's like mid-thigh.

Austin: God. Perfect. Maybe that's a way— I have a question. Is there a laundromat in this strip mall, too?

Ali: Yes.

Austin: Because then we can get the opening shot of Jake walking back with a laundry ticket in his wrestling singlet, down the out— we just see the long shot of him leave the laundromat, walk— like single take, one take. Walk down, one thing, they go into the pizza place, comes out with a pizza still in his wrestling singlet. His hair is still wet. He walks down one more and then turns and goes into the Graysand Paranormal where you can still see, on the sign, you can still see the H&R Block on the other side of the sign. You didn't get a new sign, y'all just like painted the empty side of that sign to say Graysand Paranormal.

Art: And because he feels too exposed in his wrestling gear, Jake's wearing like a baseball cap cause it makes him look incognito.

(Ali laughs)

Art: And it's just for like whatever the minor league baseball team for this town is.

Austin: We have a name for them now! We figured this out a while ago! Fuck. What are they? There's some sort of octopus thing, right? Oh, we figured this out and I've since forgotten. This is the worst. I hate this. Anyway.

Art: It's an octopus thing? Well, whatever. If it's in the other episode, people will know when they hear this.

Austin: Well, no, we figured it out after. Because I have a message from Janine that says, "I am mad at myself at 3:00 a.m. for not using that Fiasco game to define a shitty local sports team." So I think we have the opportunity to do that now. I think we want it to be an octopus of some kind. It's just I also just— it's a hat with a big octopus on it, smiling.

(Ali laughs)

Art: All right. The Atlantic City Surf, for the record, have a pretty cool logo.

Austin: Yeah. Yeah. That's true. I've been to a Surf game!

Art: Oh yeah?

Austin: Yeah, a couple of them! They also did like haunted houses inside of the Atlantic City Surf Stadium every year.

Ali: Oooh!

Austin: It's neat. It's a neat thing. Anyway. What's their mascot? Their mascot is named Splash. That's bad. **Ali** linked an octopus. I'm clicking this octopus. Oh, my God.

(Ali laughs)

Art: It's the World Cup octopus!

Austin: Is that Gus? What was that World Cup octopus's name? It was a G name. Gascoigne? No.

Sylvia: Nope, that's— nope! (laughs)

Austin: Is that Bloodborne? Paul. It was Paul.

Sylvia: So, not a G name. (laughs)

Austin: Well, different language, so it could have been.

(Sylvia laughs)

Ali: Alexa is currently reading a stack of printed-out articles about that octopus to see if the luck juice affected his whatever. (laughs)

Austin: Oh, my God, that's amazing. OK. Anyway, what did you roll on technology, five? You got a five.

Sylvia: I was five. So it's one fact that directly leads to solving the case and one franchise die.

Austin: Yep. I upped that franchise score to five. So.

Sylvia: So I think what happens is we get like... Sid's just in the corner, basically making sure the camera's not broken from the water and just kind of like rewinding it idly and... I think it's—
So the fight happened right by where the walkway is, right?

Austin: Yes, totally. Totally.

Sylvia: So I think it's actually during the fight, she sees... It's not quite leprechaun-sized. It's like—

Austin: What's that mean? Wait, what's that mean?

Sylvia: Like, small. Like it's not small. It's not little. It's not like a gnome. You know, like leprechauns are? Because they're little. Come on.

(Ali laughs)

Sylvia: Everybody knows this. Watch a Lucky Charms commercial.

Ali: God.

Sylvia: Anyway, it's... Like an appendage. Kinda like a foot? But it looks weird. Like it's not the... It doesn't look human. And it's just like slipping behind something?

Austin: OK?

Sylvia: It's slipping behind the door. I think it's green. Is what it is.

Austin: OK?

Sylvia: And Sid doesn't know what the fuck, but she knows that there's something weird there.

Austin: So "green foot" is what we can write down as a clue.

(Ali laughs)

Sylvia: "Green non-human foot."

Art: Greenfoot?

Austin: Green not-a-foot.

Sylvia: Yeah. It's got something that could be fingers or toes, but they're not right. Is how I would describe it.

Austin: Are they they too long?

Sylvia: I think they're like long and kind of curly.

Art: Is it like a plush four-leaf clover?

Austin: What?

Sylvia: There are four of them, actually. Yeah.

Ali: Ooooh, yeah.

Austin: Oohh. Creepy. OK.

Sylvia: Yeah.

Austin: OK. I can get with this. OK, so that's a little added fact. Is it plant-like? Or is it—

Sylvia: It actually, to go with the four-leaf clover thing. It's not quite plant-like but there's like... the shape of the weird toes, when they balloon out, when they come out towards the end, they're kind of shaped like a cloverleaf too.

Austin: OK. Good. Do you would you show everybody? Do you like—

Sylvia: Oh, hell, yeah.

Austin: Do you— Is there a print-out for this? Do you just show them on an old CRT?

Sylvia: I think it's literally on the viewfinder. It's like, "Just look at this."

Austin: You flip it around the other way, she flips it around to show the, yeah.

Sylvia: She's basically like... if— whatever. I like to think it's like a laptop or something that Alexa's on, looking at the weird octopus. She just like closes it and puts the camera on top of the laptop, and is like, "No. Look at this."

(Ali laughs)

Austin: "This is important."

Ali: Yeah. Maybe this closing shot is a wide shot of all of us doing our own thing. And then we'd look to the screen and then it shows like whatever the fuck this is to viewer camera. And the closing shot is whatever the fuck this weird thing is.

Austin: Do you want to— I thought you were looking at books. I want to make sure we don't forget that you're looking at books before we wrap.

Ali: (laughs) OK, do you want me to roll that?

Austin: I kind of do. That feels like academics to me.

Ali: 3D6.

Austin: 3D6, yeah. What was your last— you took one away from technology, right? From that last thing?

Ali: Yes, yes, yes.

Austin: Oh, yeah, there's another five, so that franchise score is now at six. So what do you find? You look up like that and then like the camera pans down to whatever's on your book.

Ali: (laughs) Oh, God, OK. It's a, hmm. It's one of those folklore books. And it's like a sea creature that was... There's a whole story about how it was hurting this town or whatever. And the townspeople, like, found it and it went to the sea and whatever. And then, the book is open and then, over the page right next to it is a print out of a weird sea creature that washed up on shore that nobody knows what it is. And the print-out is from like a month ago.

Austin: Is it like from the Bluff City Current?

Ali: Yes! Yes.

Austin: From the newspaper, basically? Yeah. Perfect. Good. It's like, "No one knows what this mysterious thing—" It's the front page. No, it's not. Sorry, I have to go real deep. All right. So there is— Here's what you need to know. You know the dude at the end— it used to be Alive, and he was on the end of 60 Minutes? Uh, Andy, Andy.

Art: Andy Rooney.

Austin: Andy Rooney. There was like a local Andy Rooney in Atlantic City named Pinky Kravitz—

Sylvia: Holy fuck.

Austin: Which is a real name. That's his real name. And he's like a shitty neoconservative, respectability politics, like "in the good old days", like very much that. And I want it to be, it's like a blurry picture and then it's literally basically a column from whatever this columnist, whose name I don't have right now. Actually, wait, let me look at my list of names. I don't have a good name for him. Sadly, sadly, I don't. Does anybody else have a good name for this shitty columnist?

Sylvia: Stinky Kravitz.

(**Austin** sighs)

Ali: Nathan? Kravitz? Kravitz works.

Austin: You can't just take the real one's last name. That's how we get sued.

Ali: Nathaniel.

Austin: Definitely Nathaniel.

Ali: Nathaniel Bridges.

Austin: OK.

Art: Wait, isn't that—

Austin: Wait.

Art: Oh, never mind. That would be Nat Bridges, which made me think of Nash Bridges, but that's not.

(**Ali** laughs)

Austin: It's actually, he prefers Nath. He prefers (laughs) Nath. His name is Nathaniel and the way he abbreviates it is Nath. Thank you very much. And it's...

Austin (as Nath Bridges): "In the old days, it used to be the case that when something mysterious washed ashore, everybody dropped what they were doing to make sure that the community was OK. But this year, a strange creature washed ashore and no one bat an eyelash! That's because they were looking at their phones."

(all laugh)

Austin (as Nath Bridges): "These days, Millennials just don't care about strange creatures and esoteric phenomena. They're too busy on the Facebook. And that's why this city is going to hell."

Austin: And that's the name of the column. It's called, "This City is going to Hell". And it's a weekly column from Nathaniel Bridges.

Sylvia: Holy fuck.

Austin: And it is just a strange sketch of the sea creature that clearly has four toes. Just like in the image that Sid captured. Any parting words, any parting confessional?

Art: It's just, he's still wearing the hat. You can see the pizza behind him. And it's...

Art (as Jake): If I'd known then...

Art: Oh, no. This has to be way later. So this is way later. This is from a long time from now. It's like...

(Bluff City – The Cost of Greed plays)

Art (as Jake): If I'd known then what I know now, I would have gone in the ocean. See if I get washed up somewhere better than here.