

Twilight Mirage 65: Futura Free Pt. 2

Transcriber: theeditor [0:00:00-0:46:38]; meko

[MUSIC - "[Twilight](#)" starts]

AUSTIN: A letter from Grey Gloaming, exile of the Rapid Evening and Operations Chief of the Brink, delivered to Keen Forester Gloaming, by secure courier.

AUSTIN (as GREY): Dad... I don't know if you remember this, but when I was just a little girl, just after you first took me off cycle, we had a big fight, about Crystal Palace. I didn't understand how a thing like that could exist, it didn't make sense to me... mostly because / didn't make sense to me. But I knew that I made sense to it. It knew what I would do even if I didn't know what I would do. And you worked for it.

I yelled at you and I cried, and because you wanted to appease me you told me something very important much earlier than you wanted to. You told me that sometimes Crystal Palace gets things wrong. You said that its predictions were like an endless field of perfect poppies: From a distance, they were a billow of pure red in the breeze. Yet if you looked closely, you might find other colors too: the green of stems not yet ready to bud; the yellow and blue of wildflowers dropped by passing birds; the damaged burgundy of petals crumpled under an animal's foot. The glinting copper and silver of a gardener's tools.

The field was the field, you said, a glide of sweet scarlet over hill and meadow. There would never be so many other colors as to change that; but they were there too, i was there too. This is me telling you that the Mirage is me. The Mirage is the broken stem and the stomped flower and the foreign strain of blossoms. I am... we are the exception to the rule.

So, I don't care what string of words they found inside of Crystal Palace this time; the Twilight Mirage isn't annihilation waiting to happen. This place has problems. Lots of them. But look around, dad. People are working to fix them every day.

Every day, Iota Pretense, the Qui Err Coalition, and her allies in Echo Reverie and Gig Kephart find new ways to bring people together whether through stitches, broadcasts, or literally lifting a city and transporting it across the Mirage itself. Every day, the Waking Cadent and her beloved Nights and the Excerpt Signet help people who want to leave this place, just like you want them to. Except they do it because they want to, not because you're forcing them.

Every day, members of Seneschal's Brace push back on the dominance of the Hegemony and the Free States. The Cadent. Declan's Corrective. Even. Fourteen. Tenderness. They're not perfect, but they aren't Volition either.

Every day Demani and I use our training to help people who pass through the Brink, and the many who can't even afford to do that.

And we aren't alone, because every day, even under the nose of groups like Advent, regular people are finally trying to do more than save their own hides. And more and more, under the shadow of Volition and in the face of your ridiculous announcement, people are realizing that they need to work together. So, throw out whatever Crystal Palace told you because that fact changes everything.

It might be the case that you don't notice all the other colors in the field of red, but that's only because they're spread apart, one-in-a-thousand. Bring them all together though? Put the violet next to the white next to the green and yellow and orange? Then look close, Dad, because the field disappears. Suddenly, just in that one little place, just right here in the Mirage, what you'll see?

It isn't a field at all. It's a garden.

(00:04:28)

AUSTIN: Welcome to Friends at the Table, an actual play podcast, focused on critical worldbuilding, smart characterization and fun interaction between good friends. I'm your host Austin Walker and we are gonna hop right back into our game of Futura Free which is a hack I made of two different games, Mobile Suit Zero Firebrands by Devenson Baker, uh and, uh, the Quiet Year by Avery Alder. Alright, like I said we're gonna hop right back into it, so, let's see, Echo—

SYLVIA: Alright.

AUSTIN: You ready to go?

SYLVIA: I am.

AUSTIN: The Ace of Summer. A contingent within the community demand to be heard. Who are they? What are they asking for? A contingent within the community have acted on their frustrations. What have they damaged and why did they damage it? Is it permanent?

SYLVIA: Um, I think I'm gonna go with the first one, a contingent within the community demand to be heard.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: And I think... what they're trying to like, I don't know if its one our specific defined factions but the group of people who want to leave already.

AUSTIN: Gotcha, that's good.

SYLVIA: Um, and that is also what they are asking for is—

AUSTIN: Permission to just leave.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Do they get it? I'm guessing yes? Like yeah, fine, leave.

SYLVIA: I mean, yeah I'm not gonna stop them. I imagine it doesn't help the scarce morale.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think that works, yeah I think that completely works. Like is it that low morale is already there and you can't quite keep people. Um, I don't think it's enough that you start to like lose population or something like that, but it's meaningful. Alright, clocks tick. Get ready for some bullshit.

KEITH: Wait, hold on.

AUSTIN: What's up?

KEITH: Oh wait. Alright. Echo, you didn't frame a scene yet right?

SYLVIA: No, I didn't.

AUSTIN: No, Echo has not framed a scene yet.

KEITH: Okay, cool. 'Cause we had that raid coming, if I—if you don't do that.

SYLVIA: Mmmhmmm.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. Uhhhh, oh no that raid is the top one. The raid is this one up here. The raid is the top one, not the second one. Here, I'm gonna move this.

ALI: Yeah, the raid doesn't move until—

KEITH: Ohhhhhhhhhhh.

AUSTIN: The raid won't move at all until Tender's turn.

ALI: Yeah.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: Plenty of time.

KEITH: So we can't, we can't do that one then. That one's locked in.

AUSTIN: You *could*, you could hit it while it's frozen.

JANINE: It's just frozen right now

ALI: You could destroy it, you just can't, yeah.

KEITH: We couldn't, I don't think we could, no we can't do the, sorry, the bottom one?

AUSTIN: The bottom one is not the raid.

KEITH: No but it's something, and we can't stop it.

JANINE: It has to be investigated first.

AUSTIN: Yes, and you don't have the time to stop that one.

KEITH: We don't have the time to stop it.

AUSTIN: No, the only one left that you have the time to stop is the second volition one -

KEITH: Yep.

AUSTIN: And that's it.

KEITH: Yep.

AUSTIN: It looks like, because... this one advances now, NEH advances and finishes, DFS-

JANINE: Wait, wouldn't there be time to stop the second Advent one because it has two, you missed one of those things, right. It still has two openings. yeah

AUSTIN: Oh, you're right you did. You're right, I totally missed one. Hell yeah, you're right. So yes, there's totally still time to stop this Advent one. Good catch.

KEITH: I think—I speak for myself but I'd rather stop the Volition one.

SYLVIA: I mean, I'm going to use my turn to investigate regardless, I was gonna do the Volition one.

AUSTIN: Alright one sec, let me just advance stuff and figure out how to, what things finish. SO NEH finishes, DFS finishes, Rapid Evening one finishes, which I almost missed. Uh, and then steal Gumption finishes. Alright, let's go through these real quick.

KEITH: God, this sucks.

AUSTIN: This is a big one. Maybe these won't be so bad, you know, NEH two.

KEITH: You're right, maybe they won't....

AUSTIN: Alright, so here's a fun one. So I don't know if you remember those from the last session or the last uhh, it's actually from the Outro of the Restitution of All Things arc, um, the Qui Err Coalition had negotiated with the, ummm, with the, uh, Our Profit, to figure out a way to get access to the Mirage without spending it, without consuming it, making it basically, turning the Mirage into a sustainable resource instead of one where you just like burn through. And they did it, they figured out how to do that, they're draining minor amounts of Mirage without destabilizing the system, whouthout consuming the mirage itself, and that gives everybody the splice abundance as an individual resource,

JACK: Ohhohoh.

AUSTIN: All throughout the resource the Splice comes online and the Splice is basically a version of the Mesh, It's the Our Profit's version of the Mesh, um and it is like, I mean the other comparison is it's comparable to something a character from the last season, from Winter in Hieron wanted to do, except it's collaborative and anybody can access it or not access it if they want to. it's a completely opt-in virtual world that they can, you can throw yourself into, and time annihilated in there, so if you want a day to last a week or if you want a week to be over in a day you can do that. If you want to live the rest of your life, if you want to live a hundred years in the next 24 hours you can do that. If you want to create something that you can only see with your mind and you're, you're as an artist, your hands can't bring it to life, you can do it in the Splice. Um, if you want to live a different life, if you want to be a different person, you can do it in the Splice. And it comes on board everywhere. Everybody gains access to this as an individual thing, not just as a system-wide thing. Alright, so I've added that to everyone's resources, over on the right there.

Alright, so that was the NEH one, that one's interesting, certainly. TWO - the DFS, right? It's the four step. Waking Cadent - the Apogee, which is the military fleet of the Divine Free States, slides in between and I'm gonna draw this one the map with just like a little arrows or something, slides in, let's see here, how are we gonna do this. Actually, just kinda surrounds y'all. Surrounds Privign, in a blockade. No more Divines being stolen over here. Fake Cadent. Um, and it is a barricade, it is a blockade that creates a new resources scarcity. Um, I think,

what does it probably? Let me think, what are the things that you' couldn't get into PRivign, now, is it food? Do you have any ideas Signet?

Janine: Wasn't Privign like kind of a self-sufficient monastery?

AUSTIN: So, what are things that couldn't be self-sufficient?

JANINE: So it seems more like it would be like, umm.

AUSTIN: So like a social thing of some sort?

JANINE: It feels like the big, the big incoming resource for the Waking Cadent would be people, right, people who would be like the thing you want is the thing I want.

AUSTIN: Yes,

JANINE: And if there's a blockade people are gonna be like, actually maybe this seems like a bad idea to go into the middle of a fucking siege.

AUSTIN: Yeah, so I'm gonna do negative population then, does that work?

JANINE: Yeah

AUSTIN: Um, cool, alright, uh, who else finished one—Rapid Evening finished one, right? The first Rapid Evening one, right? That's fun.

JACK: Mmmm. Could we mark what these are as well, when—

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally, I'll do that

JACK: When they close.

AUSTIN: When they close, yeah.

ALI: Uh, this second one, that's the food one, and then they finished their first one now?

AUSTIN: They finished, they stole, the second one was stealing something.

ALI: Okay.

JACK: Cool.

AUSTIN: Uhh, boop-bop, there we go. Um, so, whose turn is it? It's the Qui Err's turn right? It's uhh—

SYLVIA: Yeah, it's my turn. Yeah.

AUSTIN. Umm, the, your comms, you, so over the last little bit, we've been able to communicate with people further and further away, yall have those big antennas obviously, and you know in general things have been such that you could, you know, you could send missives, you could send, uh messages across, across, through couriers and stuff. The Rapid Evening effectively begins to capture anyone who sends physical messages and opens up for the next full turn, so until Echo's next turn, a, um, a kind of signal jammer that prevents anything except for near range communication. So you can no longer help each other on protects or attacks. That's a communications jammer.

JACK: Why are they doing this? This is not how you—this sounds like someone who wants to blow up the Twilight Mirage.

AUSTIN: Alright so the first NEH one was the anti-Volition fleet, and the second one was, the, I'm sorry I'm adding all these names. The second one was what, the Splice, spread the Splice.

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Splice time, Welcome to Splice [indistinct].

DRE: Shards?

JACK: We sure did.

AUSTIN: Uh, and the DFS's was the blockade, the Waking Cadent, right? yeah.

KEITH: Who drew the robot between Moonlock and Volition?

JANINE: I did the robot.

DRE: That's a very good robot.

KEITH: That's a good robot.

AUSTIN: That's a *dope* robot!

KEITH: That's a fucking really good robot. I can't draw anything.

AUSTIN: You drew, nope, I'm deleting the rar.

AUSTIN: I have to draw a line somewhere. Hey, can y'all tell me how you stole Gumption real quick? How'd that go? Did that go well?

ALI: Ummm, it finished so it went great. Um, uh....

JACK: I think that it's just like....

ALI: Kent is a professional pirate—

AUSTIN: That's true.

ALI: Like, he knows how to do this.

KEITH: Yeah, he gives off an air of being sort of a weirdo nerd politician, but he is a pirate.

AUSTIN: Yeah... I'm adding plus Divine to Seneschal's Brace because y'all have three now, and that's enough, right?

JACK: I think yeah, I think it's just like there's a commotion at the shuttle bay, uh, and it's just this enormous ship arriving, um. And then as the ship docks, like, you can't spirit a Divine away no matter how good a pirate, like the DFS know about this, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: It's not just like they're going into their room one day and being like, Oh my god.

AUSTIN: Remember, everyone on that planet used to look up and see Gumption being slowly rebuilt.

JACK: Yeah so I think what happens is the Gumption ship docks, and simultaneously an embassy ship, like, they have just sent someone, there's gunships around it.

AUSTIN: They've changed their mind.

JACK: Yeah, but it's not even, no one, presumably, no one was hurt, presumably Kent Brighton was like okay, so I don't think there like, okay, I think there's a difference between when an act of war happens and everyone immediately starts firing weapons, and when an act of war happens and someone shows up and says this is an act of war.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And I think, that's what, I think Gumption docks, and immediately following that, it's probably Nideo right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: It's probably Nideo and—what pronouns does Nideo use?

AUSTIN: Nideo is he/him.

JACK: So Nideo and his, just like his armed guard, just shows up, marches into the offices.

AUSTIN: I love the person who once sent Signet to go pick up groceries or laundry or something, is now the leader of the Divine—

JANINE: It was a cake.

Austin: It was a cake, thank you. it was a special cake for the Cadent. Now the leader of the Divine Free States, the de facto leader.

JACK: It's great as well, because he must have just been like, oh my god, they're stealing Gumption, we can't do anything about this.

AUSTIN: How are we supposed to, hmmm.

JACK: What is our reaction? ALright, fine just quick, get in a ship, we're just gonna follow it.

AUSTIN (as Nideo): I have a letter.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Alright, um, Echo, what do you do this turn?

SYLVIA: Alright, um.

AUSTIN: You're investigating.

SYLVIA: Yes, Keith, refresh me, what was the one you were leaning towards, was it the Volition one?

KEITH: I was leaning towards Volition, yeah.

SYLVIA: Ok, good we're on the same page then.

AUSTIN: Alright so you want to know what Volition is?

SYLVIA: Yeah, I wanna know

AUSTIN: What's this investigation look like? How do you find out what's about to happen?

SYLVIA: Well, yeah that's kinda what I have to figure out here.

AUSTIN: I'll tell you what it is, and then you tell me how you found it.

SYLVIA: Okay, that would be great, yeah.

AUSTIN: It's a fun one. So, you learn that Volition has developed a new Axiom named Aperture. You know, like a door, like a thing that opens and closes. And when it arrives, it is going to reveal all of the stitches across the system.

SYLVIA: Oh.

AUSTIN: And the first person, the first faction who makes any attack movement, after the one, that's going to give a system wide thing called Stitch, plus Stitches. Not one, individually one, but like a system wide one, and two, the first person who makes an attack after that is going to get, uh, an, a free resource, it's gonna like, the next attack is one less, costs one less resource to do. Because you'll be, like, the first person to activate, or like to take advantage of those stitches. So, that is what's happening, that is what will happen in two turns. How do you find that out, is this like investigating that same Stitch?

SYLVIA: I think, yeah, maybe. Maybe, I think it has to be something through that right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: I mean Moonlock is close to Volition and stuff.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: I do like the idea of Echo sort of stitch hopping and then coming across something that leads them to this.

AUSTIN: Right, there's like a faint glow, or like, there's something, like maybe it's been constructed from bits, from each of the stitches, right, so like a little bit of the water from the stitch on Gift-3, that goes from Gift-3 to Brighton. There's like, just straight up one of the tables, it's like a Katamari basically—one of the tables from the gift, from one that's on Altar, rather, the one that's like a convenience store that connects Altar and Moonlock from your, from the Quire one. It's just like a Katamari, uh, of stuff. And you see it rolling through a Stitch. Uh, and now they're all just like revealed, and so like, where it used to be you just sit there and wait, it's

instantaneous to move, or it will be, once it finalizes, the time component is just gone and you can just move through it like, pretty plainly. Alright so that's what your investigation was.

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: Gig, your turn.

KEITH: Hello.

AUSTIN: Ready for your card? Hey! Ten of Summer. Uh, you discover a cache of supplies or resources. Add a new abundance. Or a scarcity has gone unaddressed for too long, start a project that will alleviate that scarcity.

KEITH: Hmm, that's interesting, I like both of those.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Ummmmm, let's see. Ok, so, ah you know what?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Morale.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Start a project to alleviate our morale problem.

AUSTIN: Hell yeah.

KEITH: Ummm, that's a great thing to have is, is neutral morale.

AUSTIN: Agreed.

KEITH: Ummmm, boy. It's a pretty fun bunch so it's hard to think of a thing that would alleviate morale. Or a thing that would alleviate low morale. Cause we're already having a lot of -

AUSTIN: 'Cause we're already doing those parties.

KEITH: Doing those parties doesn't seem to be helping. Um, SO this sounds like a short project?

AUSTIN: It's a four.

KEITH: It's a four?

AUSTIN: Yeah, anything that's adding or changing a resource that you could then use to help other people is a four.

KEITH: Okay, Echo, what do you think would maybe help our morale problem?

SYLVIA: Umm, I'm not sure because like, low morale doesn't just mean sad, it means like scared and, I think something that makes people feel secure would work.

KEITH: Okay, I have a sort of idea. My framing for why we would have low morale was a sort of snap unilateral decision to unally or for the Qui Err Coalition to un-ally themselves from Seneschal's Brace.

AUSTIN: Mhm

KEITH: Um, would trying to form, To reform—

AUSTIN: Totally.

KEITH: An alliance under different terms be—

AUSTIN: Yes, especially after Tender and crew just helped stop the Advent raid, right?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That feels like fictionally it opens up the door, so, to something that would like, reconnect.

KEITH: yeah.

AUSTIN: Those two groups. Um, and maybe one that's very explicit, that's like, hey, if this succeeds, you will like, turn over some, land, like Moonlock fucking sucks. Um, you know, that there is active decolonization of some space on Brighton and Seneschal. Or something.

KEITH: Yeah. Well, I think, as far as what, and I haven't, we haven't had a scene with Iota in this game, but it does sound like what Iota wants and what the Qui Err coalition wants is more of their own land.

AUSTIN: Yep.

KEITH: Reasonable. And it also seems like a lot of people are willing to leave and, like, find someplace else anyway.

AUSTIN: totally,

KEITH: So if we can take care of Volition and Advent and the Rapid Evening, like, hey people can just fucking come and go now, like, specifically go, go and find a different home.

AUSTIN: Off and go, yeah. At least some folks who are yeah into that, yeah, totally

JACK: Do we want to frame a scene there, or just do that?

KEITH: I have to -

JACK: Oh, you have to make a strike now.

KEITH: I have to make a strike. Like, um, so that's a project.

AUSTIN: Oh so you're gonna strike the Aperture project, you're gonna get rid of that. You're not gonna let that happen.

KEITH: Well actually, that was, that was my question was that—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh

KEITH: What is the—

AUSTIN: So that's gonna add a benefit to everybody, that's gonna add a system-wide resource—

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Called open stitches. No I'm not gonna call it that, that's bad. Just called Stitches, just called Stitches

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: And then the first player to do an attack after that will get, it will be one resource cheaper.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: That's not a bad thing that's, this is not, I'm not.

JANINE: And that will complete on my turn, that will be my turn to do a thing, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: No, but it would bring in a new Axiom.

AUSTIN: That Axiom, yeah, that would be true. There would be a new Axiom, yes, fictionally speaking.

JACK: And, this is something Volition wants...

KEITH: Well—

AUSTIN: Totally, but Volition also made Polyphony

KEITH: Volition wants, yeah, Volition wants is like a weird, like it's not the same sort of want.

AUSTIN: Yes, Volition does not want something even the way Rigour wants something.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: Volition doesn't want something like Ibex wants something, Volition wants something because Volition is will itself. Like, it sort of wills-

JACK: Yeah, it sort of goes, ah, that thing.

AUSTIN: That thing, now. And then the things it makes, go, ah I'm the thing.

KEITH: Yeah, it's not, although we have had some sort of, and I cannot remember the context of this but there was -

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: There was some sort of clues where it was like, maybe Volition can directly want to—

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: —destroy like a specific thing, like—

AUSTIN: So there is a thing Volition wants and I'm just gonna give it to you because you've connected the dots: Volition does want to leave, and you could conceive of how a Divine, or an Axiom named Aperture could one day help that.

KEITH: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Right? Maybe it starts by opening stitches but down the line maybe Aperture could open a door out the Mirage for Volition.

KEITH: Yeah. I'm, I—

AUSTIN: Or, Aperture could do that for, for, the uh, the Waking Cadent, who also needs a way out, right?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: These are the dilemmas, these are the -

KEITH: But right now the Waking Cadent is with Qui Err Coalition, tentatively.

AUSTIN: I mean not forever, Waking Cadent—the Waking Cadent is going to leave.

KEITH: No, not forever. yeah.

AUSTIN: The Waking Cadent plans on leaving. As soon as possible, as soon as there's a way out.

ALI: Yeah the specific deal was like, I'll help you and then I gotta go.

AUSTIN: And then I gotta go, like I'm not staying to help you past when it's time to go.

KEITH: Umm, alright, I want to confer with Echo, just because they helped me set up the whole thing anyways, like is this something you think we should stop? Or do we want to risk the Waking Cadent leaving too soon to have the benefit of this—these stitches opening up, which is sort of neutral, maybe leaning positive neutral sort of thing.

SYLVIA: I mean, I don't think Aperture arriving is necessarily a bad thing here.

KEITH: Yeah.

SYLVIA: I just think that it could be like, that resource goes to everybody. And that is both the upside and the downside, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Yeah.

SYLVIA: So, you know.

KEITH: I, um, you know, we've got, you know what it is.

AUSTIN: What is it? You tell me.

KEITH: I, you know I thought that maybe that would just kickstart something, and it didn't.

[Laughter]

KEITH: I think, oh, okay, I know what I should do, is uh, I want to, um, I want to attack the Advent clock for raid the Qui Err. That's what I want to do.

AUSTIN: Okay so you want to get rid of it, you want to spend three things, or are you just gonna refreeze it?

KEITH: No, I'm gonna get rid of it, I'm gonna spend three things to get rid of it.

AUSTIN: Okay. Alright, so that is, you can't help each other, because of the Rapid Evening thing, so no one can help you with this.

KEITH: That's fine.

AUSTIN: So what are you spending?

KEITH: I'm spending -

AUSTIN: Contempt, probably-

KEITH: My Contempt first, yeah, my Contempt token is my first one.

AUSTIN: Good, good.

KEITH: Um, and then.

AUSTIN: You're resourceful, kind and handsome for yourself.

KEITH: Yeah, I'm gonna spend resourceful

AUSTIN: Mhm.

KEITH: Oh, I'm gonna use our Splice abundance.

AUSTIN: Okay cool, how do you do that? What's that look like?

KEITH: Ummm, I—

AUSTIN: Are y'all like hanging out in the Splice and... like?

KEITH: Yeah, it's a hyperbolic time chamber, so

AUSTIN: Yes!

KEITH: We get to go in there and take as long as we need to plan it out—

AUSTIN: It is.

JACK: Ohhhhhhhhhhh

KEITH: And we get buff and we can do Super Saiyan two.

JACK: Ohhhhhhhhhhh

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh. Yeah, what's wrong, what's wrong, Fourteen? It works, the thing is it works. It's wild.

JACK: Yeah, sure it works. But the thing is you're the fucking Qui Err Coalition. And Our Profit comes along and is like Hello, I'm Our Profit. It's one thing to take twenty dollars from your enemy but it's another thing to take two and a half million dollars from your enemy, who will be made very happy from your taking the money.

KEITH: That's fine—there's—Advent's gonna raid us, so it's not like, it's not, you know.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's a good point.

KEITH: It's a big deal.

AUSTIN: That's a good point, that's a good point.

KEITH: 'Cause it's not like someone ran, was like here, here's twenty bucks, it's like there's two people and one of them's like we're gonna kill you and one of them's like you could not, you could not die, like.

AUSTIN: Mhm, alright. So this is a heavy attack, right?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Alright, what is it? What's the game you're gonna play?

KEITH: Um, have you seen Groundhog's day? Groundhog Day?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: The Groundhog's Day. Have you seen the -

AUSTIN: The Groundhog's Day.

KEITH: The Groundhog's Day?

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh-huh. Classic.

KEITH: Umm, there's the part where he's like, uh counting out the second to perfectly steal the bag of money from the armored vehicle.

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: Ummm and it's like the hyperbolic time chamber of that where we just like figure it out, like -.

AUSTIN: Gotcha. Which minigame in Firebrands are you going to play?

KEITH: OK, it's probably skirmish, let me look at them real quick.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think it's either skirmish or free for all. Neither of them's great. I mean they're both good, but like this is, we're getting into it.

JACK: This is Firebrands.

KEITH: Now, could it be, um -

AUSTIN: It could also be meeting sword to sword I guess, but that's... a little hornier than I think this scene is.

KEITH: No it's not that. It could be a dance?

AUSTIN: Ok? Tell me how that looks.

KEITH: I don't know. Let's see, let's read A Dance.

AUSTIN: My face close to yours, do you turn to face me or suddenly away?

KEITH: Oh, towards.

AUSTIN: Ok, well.

KEITH: No, it's not that one. I thought maybe it was a like a dance contest, but it seems very romantic.

[laughter]

KEITH: Alright, alright, let me real quick look through free for all and tactical skirmish. Uhhh...

AUSTIN: Those are the ones that feel, in terms of like going to blow something up in this case, I get—

KEITH: Oh, I think it's free for all, I'm on your back and outmaneuver you at every turn.

AUSTIN: Ok, wait wait, free for all is, is the start of a thing.

KEITH: Oh, it's a challenge.

AUSTIN: Yeah, so we start a free for all.

KEITH: OK.

AUSTIN: Um, so, oh boy, alright, um, I think Echo should probably be here for this too. Echo, are you here for this or do you stay at home?

SYLVIA: Yep, I'm here.

AUSTIN: AS written, free for all is supposed to be like everybody at the table, um, but I think we could adapt it for this to where that's not the case and it's just you, Echo, and then two people from Advent.

KEITH: Ok.

AUSTIN: And those two people are...

KEITH: Art.

AUSTIN: No, I don't think Grand's coming to this, Grand's not here to fight. Grand, are you coming to fight these people?

ART: No. Like, I'm not fighting anybody.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: He's got milk lawyers to talk to.

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh it is—

ART: I am considering, I am contemplating legal action.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Um, it is Kentucky's Corona and Ballad Reverie. Both of which in—

KEITH: Oh boy.

AUSTIN: Both of which are in their Independence units. Setup, everyone plays—

ART: They started passing out personalized Independence units?

AUSTIN: They're like the prototypes for the next model. They're working on something, don't you worry about it.

ART (as Grand): Who's working on my designs?

AUSTIN: A lot of people. Everyone plays -

ART (as Grand): Fucking assholes.

AUSTIN: Everyone's characters meet in your mobile frames to do battle. Ask your chosen partner where the free for all takes place. So yeah, where's this fight, is this space, is it down on Skein? Did you chase them back to somewhere?

KEITH: Can we be in—where is the—where's the asteroid belt?

AUSTIN: The Shore, it's on the outside it's out on the outskirts here.

KEITH: OK.

AUSTIN: So maybe like Tender's attack pushed them back into the Shore basically, like so there like, I'll mark it, or I'll do a little beep on the map it's like, beep, out here somewhere. You know?

KEITH: Yeah. I think maybe that, 'cause that, that borders Skein. Maybe that's where they were coming from.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah.

KEITH: They were like. Let's hide in here.

AUSTIN: Totally, totally. Um, what do you notice about each other, what have you heard? Are you surprised to see Echo here? Um, I think Kentucky's Corona has heard that y'all joined the Qui Err Coalition but is surprised because you're not - you're not them.

KEITH: Um, I notice that they changed Grand Magnificent's designs.

AUSTIN: They did, yeah. They have like different paint jobs on.

KEITH: And they have to be worse, because they like -

AUSTIN: They, right they, here's one big one: They made it so that in the inside you don't, the reflections don't show you your worst self, they show you your best self.

ART (as Grand): That's the whole fucking point!

AUSTIN: Mhm. Yeah.

[laughter]

ART (as Grand): I'm calling another lawyer.

AUSTIN: Uh, conducting the free for all. Go around the table, each of you gets two turns. You go first. Let's go Gig, Kentucky's Corona, Echo, Ballad. On your turn choose an enemy player's character and give them a challenge they answer it freely. The challenges are on the next page. Um, when everyone's had two turns, it comes back around to you for your third turn, you choose to end the battle. Choose one that best fits the action up to that point. So you begin with a challenge.

KEITH: Alright, um.

AUSTIN: And be, my guess is that you're both in your Anglers, right?

KEITH: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Yeah, I guess so.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Okay, this is the first attack. I guess they, here it is—yeah. I fall out of the sky like a hunting bird. Do you survive my attack? How?

AUSTIN: Um, who? Kentucky's Corona or Ballad Reverie?

KEITH: Um, Kentucky's Corona.

AUSTIN: Ok, Kentucky's Corona, um, does survive but you rip off, like, you come at him, like a hunting bird?

KEITH: Yeah, like a peregrine falcon.

AUSTIN: So he's like, "ah, my arm."

KEITH: Fastest animal in the world.

AUSTIN: Lifts up the arm of the Independence unit and you can see that they, uh, I guess this is the custom one so maybe this doesn't happen, but it just like blocks you with um, his arm but the, force of your descent does manage to damage like the uh, it's like one of those cool close ups like in anime, he stops you with the hands but the crystalline hands like slowly pressure and then shatter. And so can't use like the big crystal blaster that these units normally can use in fights. Uh, Kentucky's Corona goes, and, um, heaves you bodily off the ground, then lifts you up to smash you down again.

KEITH: Me?

AUSTIN: Uh, yeah, you, Gig. Um, how, are you able to get out of my grip? How?

KEITH: Um, yeah. I have my, I have like that container of like spare parts to do like the mini gumption thing, and I think that I like jettison that to loosen your grip.

AUSTIN: Cool. Awesome. Echo.

SYLVIA: Um, can I tweak any of these at all?

AUSTIN: A little bit, a little bit yeah.

SYLVIA: I know that the last one's a little bit open so,

AUSTIN: Totally yeah, so like rifles, you don't have those.

SYLVIA: Yeah. Um, so like I wanna do a take on the one that, it's a little different than I hold back, lighting you up on my sensors and comms for my allies, it's more I hold back, trying to distract you so you don't, so you're distracted by me, not my allies, would that work?

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

SYLVIA: Uh, I think the question would be do you notice what I'm trying to do?

AUSTIN: Who is this to? Is this -

SYLVIA: Uh, Ballad.

AUSTIN: Okay. Um, upon seeing you, no. Ballad is, like, focused on you. And so does not, does break away. This trick does work, and does not understand that you're like, that you're playing at it. Do you know what I mean?

SYLVIA: Mhm

AUSTIN: Um, and he, oh. So, it's actually, remember, so this model is made to look a little like his custom, his last custom mech. Has like the same horns, and he basically like raises his arms in two different directions, like he does diagonal arms up. And it has basically a version of the Torch unit or the Profit's Star big bright light in it, and basically does a solar flare at you, we're just all the way DBZ out here.

SYLVIA: Oh my god.

AUSTIN: And Solar flares you and so you get, um, where is it? I just saw it a second ago. Um, I rush you, I'm faster than you'd believe. Can you react in time and get away? How? So it's like this blinding light hits and then you've lost sight, and then he zooms in at you. Can you react in time or get away—and get away? How?

SYLVIA: I think I can react in time, but just barely and I think in dodging the way I get away is that I have to take a light hit by it.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: Like, I'm hurt but I'm not like not destroyed by it now.

AUSTIN: Totally. Like the fist of this thing slams into the back, these are bigger than you, also - like the angler units are not the size of the independence units, like they tower over you. Um, and he's like, uh:

AUSTIN (as Ballad): Echo, I told you this would happen. Get out of here!

SYLVIA (as Echo): You know, you could always come with.

AUSTIN: And we kick back to Gig, Gig what do you do?

KEITH: Ballad, I come upon you and hit you with a roaring jet of flames, steel meltingly hot. Can your frame take it? How?

AUSTIN: I mean I think the answer is it can take it, but, I mean steel meltingly, um. So it's just like while Ballad's distracted basically? No, Ballad's frame can't take it. Uh and it starts, the heat begins to burn through, and you can see like, Echo, this is happening.

SYLVIA: Yeah, yeah.

SYLVIA: (as Echo) Gig, stop!

KEITH: Uh, I stop.

AUSTIN: Kentucky's Corona, uh, let's see. Um, It just, just is on your back, uh, and like the fact that you turned to fight ballad at this point, and Echo interrupted you, outmaneuvers you at every turn. Can you shake him? Because he's just like literally on your back at this point, and is pounding, is like kicking you in the back. OR like, kicking at you in the back.

KEITH: Uh, I don't think I can shake Corona but I can keep firing the jet.

AUSTIN: You can.

KEITH: The flaming jet, that I had just been firing.

AUSTIN: Still at Ballad.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Or have you turned it on Kentucky's?

KEITH: Well, I pictured it like, it's on my back like thrusters right?

AUSTIN: Oh, I get you, like thrusters, yeah yeah yeah. So you're like escaping and going into ultra hyper or whatever and burning into both of them at this point?

KEITH: I mean, it depends on what, where like Ballad is.

AUSTIN: In my mind you're doing the cool thing of like, we get the wide shot of just lines in the sky, and the two of them are now chasing you down, right?

KEITH: Yeah, okay sure.

AUSTIN: And they're just trying to push through the heat to get to you.

KEITH: Yeah

AUSTIN: Uh, Echo.

SYLVIA: Um, can I use ones that have already been used?

AUSTIN: Yeah, there aren't that many.

SYLVIA: Then I'm gonna go with I rush towards Kentucky's Corona, was the other name?

KEITH: Yeah.

SYLVIA: 'Cause Echo's very much like, if I get one of these guys off of Gig, maybe he'll stop killing my brother.

AUSTIN: Gotcha.

SYLVIA: And I'll do the one that I can hurt.

AUSTIN: Right, right.

SYLVIA: Can you react in time and get away? And how?

AUSTIN: No. So what do you do? What does this look like?

SYLVIA: So remember the hammer I had?

AUSTIN: Yeah, I do.

SYLVIA: I think I'm gonna use the cool hammer and like, just try and knock, 'cause they're in the sky, right? Knock Kentucky's Corona back down to—I don't know if we were fighting around the planet or what.

AUSTIN: It's like an asteroid.

SYLVIA: Yeah. I wanna knock Kentucky's Corona into an asteroid.

AUSTIN: Alright, cool. With a big hammer. It just goes through it.

SYLVIA: With a big hammer.

AUSTIN: That's it. Kentucky's Corona goes like flying through there, smashes through, and think, uh, at that point, we get... Ballard knows he's outnumbered. And so he is basically holding, now he's holding back, lighting you up on sensors and comms, zeroing you in for his allies, but that's more of an escape thing that's more of a get distance thing than a, than a hurt you thing. Are you able to evade or keep on the attack as he tries to grab Kentucky's Corona and escape.

SYLVIA: Who's this targeted at specifically?

AUSTIN: Uh, Gig I think.

KEITH: So Ballard is trying to escape with Corona

AUSTIN: Yeah

KEITH: By jamming my comms and stuff.

AUSTIN: Your comms and stuff, yeah. Or you know, it's like another solar flare, it's like fuck it, I gotta get out of here, hyper light attack, and then boom, and is just gonna retreat. Which would probably end in a win for you.

KEITH: Um, so this is, this is the last turn?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Uh, so I guess it's three, it's serious fighting but the rules of engagement hold.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: By the end, we hold the field but everyone's given and taken their fair share of hits, and no one's crossed any lines, I also don't know what that means.

AUSTIN: It's like you know, killing people should mean something right?

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: And so y'all fought over this, you're in mechs, you're not, this isn't, like you're not fighting with swords against people, so there's a way where you're like hey, I fucking hurt you, I won this fight, by the rules of engagement you should retreat now and they do.

KEITH: Yeah, um.

AUSTIN: And you successfully destroy this thing. And you didn't kill Ballard. Nice work.

KEITH: Yeah, I thought about it man.

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh-huh.

SYLVIA: I *know* you did.

AUSTIN: Hey, I can tell.

KEITH: But here's the thing I would've done it, but you said, like, if they get away, then you've won, and that's what the mission was.

AUSTIN: Yes, that's the thing. Ballad's still on the table. So. Alright, that's your turn.

KEITH: Man.

AUSTIN: Signet, are you ready?

KEITH (as Gig): Echo, you've gotta kill your brother.

JANINE: I'm ready.

KEITH (as Gig): This is too much, this guy.

AUSTIN: God. The Jack of summer. Predators and bad omens are afoot. You are careless and someone goes missing under ominous circumstances, or, predators and bad omens are afoot. What measures do you take to keep everyone safe and under surveillance? Do not reduce project dice this week.

JANINE: Gahhhhhh.

AUSTIN: [Laughter]

ART: Is that everyone's project dice?

AUSTIN: No, that's just her faction. That has to be just the Waking Cadent. Right?

JANINE: We don't have any projects.

KEITH: Wait, what do you mean reduce project dice?

AUSTIN: Unless, mmm, yeah, I mean, how would you be making no projects advance this turn is my question.

JANINE: How, how would keeping projects from advance make, be a measure to keep everyone safe?

AUSTIN: That's my question.

KEITH: Well a lot of these projects are trying to hurt us.

JANINE: No thats, that's what I mean Austin, is for it just to be -

AUSTIN: No no no, I'm asking, no no no, I'm asking materially, how do you do it? If you want to do that one, you can do that one.

JANINE: No, I don't want to do anything until I know what it actually does because I don't have any project clocks.

AUSTIN: Oh, I would, I would freeze, I'm saying, are you, you could not reduce, ah sorry, you could not move any projects this week, if you could convince me why this should be a system wide thing and not a faction wide thing.

JANINE: I don't want to do that.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: Um, I don't want anyone to go missing either. It sucks.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

KEITH: Wait, the second one sounds like an okay one.

JANINE: No, it doesn't, not to me. Um. I mean it kinda does but it doesn't make much of a difference, I don't know.

AUSTIN: Yeah it would be -

JANINE: I have a thing in mind that I would like to do.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JANINE: That that would interfere with greatly. Um, ok.

AUSTIN: I mean that would fire, oh I guess you know what, dice, yeah, do not reduce, um, anything that you set up this week, anything that we knew you set up this week, oh you were gonna help something this week weren't you.

JANINE: No.

AUSTIN: Oh, then what's it interfering with that you were going to do?

JANINE: I need a clock to complete.

AUSTIN: Oh, I see. Oh, / see. Oh, ok, fair.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Mhm. Okay, then who goes missing?

JANINE: Uh, who is there to go missing that wouldn't make me super sad if something horrible happens?

AUSTIN: So your list here the Waking Cadent, Silver, AKA Masalia D'argent, Blooming, Polyphony, Belgard, Bounty and Nebula or Aluna Voge, the priestess Privign.

JANINE: I'm gonna say it's Aluna, or.

AUSTIN: Or someone from the free agent list who—

JANINE: Oh.

AUSTIN: Is interesting, because it shouldn't be, you can't just be like, uh yeah, Red Equity Janus, that lawyer who showed up once, they're gone. The key here is that *you* are careless and someone goes missing.

JANINE: yeah, the thing is we're barricaded off and so I don't know how my carelessness would necessarily affect this unless it's sort of like a retroactive I fucked up. Oh, it is a sort of retroactive I fucked up.

AUSTIN: You did.

JANINE: Blueberri.

AUSTIN: Yeah, Blueberri goes missing.

JANINE: Yeah, and I don't think it's a thing that I fucked up right now, it's just like I probably did not tell them why I was coming here.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: And they like know.

AUSTIN: And to be clear, like, you didn't bring Blueberri Jin, who is a member of the first exponent and who is someone who is important to you.

JANINE: Yes, I specifically was like, no. Blueberri is not getting involved in what I'm doing here.

AUSTIN: Yeah. and maybe y'all have a like a special thing that would, that would let you talk even beyond the comms interruption. And you reach out to them, and they are not there to respond.

JANINE: Yeah. I do have that power that just lets me have visions.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. And so you look for them and they are not anywhere.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay, cool. Clocks advance.

JANINE: Damn right they do.

AUSTIN: I'm—we're gonna have to have a talk in a second.

JANINE: Hmm.

AUSTIN: So the first one that finishes is the Advent one, right?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Let me find my list here, here we go. Alright.

KEITH: I heard this is a bad one.

AUSTIN: First Advent one. I just need you to know that this is true the thing I'm about to say is true, I'm not—so. They launch a system wide, uh, they launch spores into the air, right? Which are like techno-organic spores. Um, because they are scanning for Divine data. Partially, they're looking through computer systems. Partially, they are looking through the ruins of Altar. Partially they are looking on Volition itself. Um, and they've kinda released these nanomachines to, like, get to the bottom of what a Divine is. Um, because they would really like their Independence units to be stronger, they really would. And so, what they've done is freeze every clock for two weeks.

[sighs, laughter]

AUSTIN: I swear, I can copy and show you where it's written.

JANINE: You're a son of a bitch. I swear to God.

AUSTIN: I swear I can show you where it's written! I swear to god I can.

JANINE: Fuck off! Ugghh.

AUSTIN: I swear [laughs].

JANINE: This is bullshit, okay.

AUSTIN: [laughing] It's right there, it's right here.

JANINE: I know, I know it's right there [Austin keeps laughing]. I believe you, I don't think you're a liar, I just think you suck and....

[laughter]

JACK: This fucking food project for the Rapid Evening is just.... It's just like, alright look there were some problems producing Calciyummm that we did not anticipate.

JANINE: I don't care. I'm gonna do my fucking thing anyway, it's just gonna cost me more, it's fine.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh, okay.

JANINE: Um, I want to do a medium attack.

[0:46:38]

AUSTIN: On?

JANINE: On Volition.

AUSTIN: Oh-kay.

JANINE: This is where it might be complicated. I want to frame this as a dance with Massalia.

AUSTIN: Ooh, okay. How? Is this about getting Massalia on board for this attack? Is this about—ohhhh.

JANINE: I mean, the thing I want to do in the attack is I basically—this—the thing that I want to do is I want to fucking give them an Axiom scarcity.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: But that seems like a lofty thing for Signet to do on her own.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: But there is such a tension between Signet and Massalia that I feel like the chemistry could fuck that up. Like, that's the potential for failure is if they are not on the same wavelength.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Then it all just goes to shit and I'm in the middle of Volition. Like—

AUSTIN: Okay, yeah. Totally. Um, so where's the dance? So let's—I like this a lot. So what are you spending?

JANINE: I'm spending—

AUSTIN: This is a medium attack so this is two things you have to spend.

JANINE: Yeah. I'm spending my Contempt token and—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. The best way to start a dance.

JANINE: Yes. And I think I'm also—so when we spend a thing, we still kind of are that thing, we just can't spend again?

AUSTIN: You are. You're activating it. You're like digging deep into that part of you, you know?

JANINE: Okay. I'm think I'm gonna use Strong then.

AUSTIN: Like, I'm absolutely activating some sort of creative trait in all of the fucking prep around all this shit. I can't do this again for six months at least.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um [laughs], so.

JANINE: Okay, I'm gonna—I'm spending Strong then.

AUSTIN: Okay, cool. Alright, so—so this is a thing where by default there's no risk to this. So the risk—or like there's no winner or loser but I think we can just decide whether or not you think it—whether or not you're successful. Right?

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Like, we're adults who are playing this game and can make that judgement.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Setup: ask your chosen partner how you two came to be dancing together. So I guess you're asking me that, right?

JANINE: I guess, yeah.

AUSTIN: Um, I think—this is a private—this is private? This isn't like—there's not a dance happening at the—on Privign, right? Or is there?

JANINE: What? No, it's—

AUSTIN: There's not like a ball happening.

JANINE: It's a metaphor. No, it's not a party.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: It's like they're fighters and fighting is the dancing.

AUSTIN: Okay, you know there's a move for—there's one for that too.

JANINE: No, I know, but it's not horny enough, so.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: What?! Have you looked at that move? Are you kidding me?!

JANINE: I mean, it is but it's like competitive. It's like I'm slicing at your lapel or whatever.

AUSTIN: "We lock swords and your mouth is near my ear. What do you say?"

JANINE: But we're not locking swords! That's the thing; that's like if I'm fighting Massalia. This is me and Massalia fighting and in my head here, the dance's figures would be the Axioms that we're fighting.

AUSTIN: I see. I thought you were literally suggesting that you had danced before you went out.

JANINE: No! [laughs]

AUSTIN: You didn't make that clear!

JANINE: No, this—

AUSTIN: Other people at the table—

KEITH: Hi, what?

ALI: I understood what she meant.

AUSTIN: I did not.

KEITH: Wait, so we're—the discussion is, is the dance to convince or is the dance the fight?

AUSTIN: No, the dance is not to convince. The dance is the fight.

JANINE: The dance is the act of fighting and having to be, like—yeah.

KEITH: Right, no, that's what I—'cause that's what I wanted to happen earlier, so I understood right away.

AUSTIN: I fully did not.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay. That's fine. So...then it's on Volition?

JANINE: Yes.

AUSTIN: Okay. And y'all are both in—you are in Belgard?

JANINE: I'm imagining like Signet told Belgard to loop around the barricade and then meet up on Volition, and maybe tagged along with Massalia.

AUSTIN: Sure. And Massalia is in Compulsion.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Which is—or, Silver is in Compulsion. Uh, wait, Silver is not in Compulsion.

JANINE: Silver is Massalia, isn't—

AUSTIN: Silver is Massalia but Compulsion is—

JANINE: Barricade.

AUSTIN: Yeah, Barricade. Barricade.

JANINE: Compulsion is Blooming's.

AUSTIN: Right, perfect. God, we haven't even described what Barricade looks like as a Divine. Which I think it's probably still some cool version of that coral constantly growing thing, right?

JANINE: Sure.

AUSTIN: I don't know.

JANINE: Is it like a mech except that it's half like that tessellation art that people do?

AUSTIN: What tess—

JANINE: Where it's all like you can zoom out infinitely because it's all just the same shapes all the way down.

AUSTIN: A hundred percent. Yeah. And I think in fact it is like—it's wrapped around the shape of Melodica, which was their faux Divine that they built years and years ago when they used—when they were part of the Beloved Ivy. So it's almost like Barricade is almost like netting or armor that's built around and into the kind of humanoid body of Melodica. You know, Melodica has big, boxy things on its shoulders. Kind of like big, boxy engine or beam-cannon things. So I imagine that Barricade is integrated with Melodica both physically and mentally. Like, they're almost a composite being at this point. Alright. Uhh. You take turns asking each other questions, each of you get to ask the other questions, taking turns, and then the dance ends. If other players have joined the dance—I don't think anyone else is joining this dance, so that's not gonna come up. The worst dancer asks the first question, or else have another player choose who asks the first question on a whim. Who's the worst dancer?

JANINE: I don't know enough about Massalia to say for sure but Signet did all that acrobatic-y shit.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: So I feel like Signet's probably—

AUSTIN: I actually think it's Massalia because they just got this Divine. And this is the thing they've wanted for a long time.

JANINE: Mmm.

AUSTIN: And they are extremely in their own head about it.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: They were raised to be an Excerpt, they became an Excerpt under the worst conditions. Or, not the most—not worst, but the most, you know, the most intense conditions. Not anything like the very, you know, spiritual and ritual way that was described to them. And so now they're dealing with this. So they are the worst dancer, which means they ask first. This happens immediately: I lose my place in the dance. Do you let me stumble or do you draw me back into place?

JANINE: Uh, I definitely draw you back into place. Belgard is a support Divine, primarily.

AUSTIN: Mmm.

JANINE: And attack functions have—Signet has become more comfortable attacking, out of necessity but—

AUSTIN: Right. This is funny. Neither of you were like, attack-y things.

JANINE: Well, you make do [laughs].

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JANINE: I mean, Signet has literally chopped things up with shields.

AUSTIN: Yes, yes.

JANINE: So this is a complementary pairing in some ways.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JANINE: In terms of guidance, in terms of thinking creatively when stuff goes bad with the skillset you have.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Yeah.

JANINE: I also remember, got the—before we left, the downtime, I got that Axiom-killing gun. I am imagining some sort of Belgard-y thing. Like, I'm imagining it's a sort of shoot-y thing on that end, like a small gun.

AUSTIN: I don't remember this, what was this? Can you explain what this was again?

JANINE: That was what I did my downtime actions—was I got one of the guns.

AUSTIN: Right. Yes, okay.

JANINE: One of the special guns.

AUSTIN: So this is like—Is this a big, fucking Belgard-sized gun, then?

JANINE: Belgard has that thing that like—from way back when that's like 'you can adapt stuff'.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JANINE: It feels overpowered to be like 'and it's also a fuckin' Divine-sized Axiom-killing gun', but—

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Versus like a temporarily learned, like 'I can do this for a bit but this gun is very small and I'm very big and we're making do. That kind of thing.

AUSTIN: Right, right, right. Okay. Yeah, gotcha. Alright, um, you have a question, right?

JANINE: Yes. At this moment in the dance, you laugh. At what?

AUSTIN: I think they're just like, 'this has never happened'. All the time that, like, the two of you have had weird tension but also rivalry, have been on the same basic team when you were both part of the Beloved under Cascara. You never fought side by side and it's happening, finally. And it's actually, now that they've found their footing, is fun. They've always been—they've always taken a lot of joy in combat and to do it with someone who is so practiced—you know, their old team was Waltz Tango Cache and Acre Seven—they're fantastic, one of them has won a lot of awards, but they're such a different team, do you know what I mean? Like, they were

such a chocolate-and-peanut-butter weird combination that's great thing, whereas the two of you are mint chocolate, you know?

JANINE: [laughing] Okay.

ALI: Hmmm.

AUSTIN: I don't know if this holds.

JANINE: That's very cute. I like it, honestly.

KEITH: Mint chocolate is an incredibly elegant talented ice cream.

[Austin, Janine, and Ali laugh]

JANINE: That's true.

AUSTIN: Exactly. Alright, I have a question now?

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: The dance figures brings you to dance with someone else. Whom? When the dance brings you back to me again, are you pleased or disappointed.

JANINE: Uhhhh. I—Is this—mm, there's a separate thing about separation by the figures alone.

AUSTIN: That is a separate thing.

JANINE: Whereas dancing with someone else implies there's another fighter there.

AUSTIN: I think there are other fighters there.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: I think there are lots of Axioms here. I think Volition is here. Belgard's spoken to Volition before.

JANINE: Right, yeah. I don't know who specifically to say.

AUSTIN: Eh, up to you. I don't—I wouldn't mind—

JANINE: Do you have a list of spooky people?

AUSTIN: Yeah, there's a list of fake Axioms that we've never seen before. Under Volition at the bottom.

JANINE: Ohhh. Right.

AUSTIN: But there's also just like, Volition, the Iconoclasts...there's a name in there that I just snuck in there that I didn't bring up but Alekhine Dendaro, who used to be an Independent who used to—who was the person who led the Quire expedition—is now the leader of the Iconoclastics.

JANINE: [sighs] Oh boy.

AUSTIN: Who live on Seneschal's Brace and worship the Iconoclasts and Volition and the Axioms. And, like, you can't—they're practicing their freedom, you know?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You can't—what are you supposed to do with them? But he's not here. But—

JANINE: I actually have a good idea for this. Because, again, in my head, the dance's figures are used as a separating thing in this sort of thing.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JANINE: So, to me, the dance's figures represent enemies whereas partners represents something other than the direct enemy.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: So I think—I think when I'm brought to dance with someone else it is Iconoclasts.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: Who—like, it is sort of the moment of, like, I'm focusing on these big things, I'm forgetting these little, awful things that can still cause a lot of trouble and can still be scary and dangerous in their own right.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Even if they aren't Axioms.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: And so there is a moment of having to deal with this much smaller problem and scrabble away.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: And once that's done, I think I'm probably pleased to be back with Massalia instead.

AUSTIN: Sure.

JANINE: And specifically, I think that evokes when they saved my ass from that Iconoclast.

AUSTIN: Yup.

JANINE: That sort of 'here is this weird existential terror and oh right, you are this complicated ally and you're here also.'

AUSTIN: I think even visually speaking they're probably still in their weird video mode and the Iconoclasts have—there's like—they feel like an echo of the big spectrum—rainbow-colored Iconoclast that Massalia saved you from that time, right?

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: It's almost like it. But then it flickers out as you return to their side. You have the last question.

JANINE: When the dance ends, will you stand with me or rush away?

AUSTIN: [exhales] Will they—they stay with you. I think the rest of it went well, they had a good time. And the old Massalia would have run. Silver stays. Silver is really an Excerpt and does not hold any—like, I think was outperformed by you, was outdanced, right? But is happy to stand by your side and not eager to leave and hide their head in shame or be bitter about being the second-best dancer. I think that's successful?

JANINE: Feels successful to me, unless anyone has any objections.

AUSTIN: I don't think so. So what did you stop here? This was—actually this was destroying Axioms, right? This was luring Axioms?

JANINE: Yes, this was to give them a scarcity of Axioms.

AUSTIN: Yeah. So wait, this was the level three? Or was this level two?

JANINE: The level three is you give yourself an abundance, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: The level two is you give someone else a scarcity.

AUSTIN: It's both. I think it's b—if I've worded it poorly there, it is both of those things. You're basically stealing something.

KEITH: Wait, so now do they have an abundance of Axioms? [laughs]

AUSTIN: No, no, no. No.

JANINE: No, I only picked two.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: I don't want Axioms [laughs, Keith laughs], is the thing.

AUSTIN: You don't want Axioms. Yeah, that's fair.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yep, good.

JANINE: If I'd had the other thing I might've found a way to make it three but I didn't have that three points, so, yeah.

AUSTIN: You don't want to spend a second thing.

JANINE: No. So yeah, reducing Axioms to scarce.

AUSTIN: Gotcha. Okay, there we go. I just changed the rules so it was clear. Alright, awesome. Alright, so that's Signet. Even, we're back around to you.

DRE: Heyyy.

AUSTIN: Ready to draw?

DRE: Yup.

AUSTIN: That is the Four of Summer. The eldest among you dies, what caused the death?

DRE: Jeez.

AUSTIN: Or, the eldest among you is very sick. Caring for them and searching for a cure requires the help of the entire community; do not reduce project dice for this week. Well, you're already not doing that.

[Jack and Janine chuckle]

DRE: Yeah. I'm gonna take the second one then. And I'm trying to think who is the eldest amongst Seneschal's Brace.

JACK: Is it Declan?

ALI: I think so. I was gonna suggest that.

AUSTIN: I think so.

DRE: Yeah.

KEITH: Yeah, Declan's *old*.

AUSTIN: It's Declan's Corrective...There's someone else in Sui Juris who's really old, the fisherman.

ALI: Ohh.

AUSTIN: But, I think Corrective is probably the one here, right?

KEITH: Um—

JACK: Is it just that like, man, Declan's Corrective came here so long ago on technology that is now so outdated it might as well be the stone axe.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

JACK: And to just sort of—just to see this, to see Our Profit show up and to see this, like, develop—

AUSTIN: It's a lot at once.

JACK: That's gotta take a toll on someone, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah, I think he is in the middle of Seneschal's Brace. He's in the middle of the City Drifting. He's in his penthouse, right? He's drinking whiskey and looking at the sun and he

puts on a jacket and stands in the elevator and rides it all the way down. And just walks around a bunch of people, and I don't—there's no dramatic speech, right? His affairs are in order. He's been sick. He knows he's been sick. He has not told very many people that he has been sick. He knows he isn't going to die a hero and that's okay.

KEITH: Wait, didn't Dre pick the non-die one?

DRE: Yes.

AUSTIN: Oh, you did? Okay.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: My bad. Well then, he tells you, actually. I think that's the opposite. He stays upstairs. He looks down at everything. He considers doing the thing I just said.

[Keith laughs]

AUSTIN: And instead, he's like—he picks up the phone. And he says, like, that he didn't think he had anybody he could call. That a year ago he would've died in a cell somewhere, right? A year and a half ago. That it's too much for him and that he needs to slow the fuck down and get some help. So yeah, I guess don't reduce project dice this week.

JACK: What does—What's Seneschal's Brace's response to that, Dre? What does looking after him—how do we look after Declan's Corrective in this context?

DRE: [exhales] Well, I wonder if this maybe ties into what I was gonna do as my action, 'cause I wanted to shore up one of our resources. I don't know, I could—like, I think it is—doing this, setting aside resources to care for someone within Seneschal's Brace I think is a statement of “No, these are our morals.”

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: And maybe these resources could be more efficiently used, like funneling towards another project, but that's not what we want to be right now.

JACK: Mmm.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: This is a looking inward rather than looking outward moment, in that sense.

DRE: Yeah. Yeah.

JACK: Especially because all of our project dice have been frozen *and* there's been a couple of really actually quite successful strikes over the last few weeks.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You know what else is interesting here? Is I think this backwards-explains why the lack of experience. Corrective is the most experienced person in the leadership team here.

JACK: Mmmm.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And has not been at a hundred percent. I think that is a pretty good conversation there. Clocks don't advance. This is the second turn, so they'll start advancing again next turn. What do you do this turn?

DRE: Um, I want to shore up or improve our—I guess our trust resource.

AUSTIN: Okay. How do you do that? This is a new project, I'm guessing? I feel like on one hand, stealing Gumption was really bad.

DRE: Yeah, that's true.

AUSTIN: On the other hand, stopping the Qui-Err raid, or freezing the Qui-Err raid to give them time to win it, was very good.

KEITH: Uh, I have a question. You stole Gumption but you didn't put Gumption back together yet, right?

AUSTIN: Yes they did; that's why they have the Divines trait. Or abundance.

DRE: Yeah.

KEITH: Oh, I thought that it was like, well you've got this one waiting in the wings.

AUSTIN: No, they have it. I don't know who's piloting it.

KEITH: Yeah, who—or is anyone?

[Ali chuckles]

AUSTIN: I don't know. Maybe not yet.

DRE: Oh boy. Okay, what if—

JACK: It's just this inactive Divine just hanging out.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh?

DRE: Okay, hey, what if I do this?

KEITH: Just fixing washing machines.

AUSTIN: It's Duck. [clapping] Duck! Duck! Duck! Duck!

[Dre sighs, Jack and Ali laugh]

AUSTIN: I think it might be someone else with hair tendrils]

KEITH: [mock-sadly, as Duck] Responsibility.

DRE: Yeah, no, 'cause I don't want Kent Brighton to be flying a Divine.

[Austin laughs]

DRE: So I don't know, yeah Austin, what do I gotta do to make Even Gardener the fucking Excerpt of Gumption?

[Ali hums]

AUSTIN: I think that's a couple of—

KEITH: Contempt! [Austin laughs] Just saying that—Contempt.

DRE: Fair, fair.

AUSTIN: I think that's a couple of—like, you already have—this is the interesting thing, right? This is a two or a—this is a one, two, or three, right? Because you have the Divines resource already. This is not for people. This is for you, right? Or I guess it's for keeping [laughs] Kent from being the Excerpt.

DRE: Yeah.

JACK: I mean, [sighs] it also—

DRE: It doesn't even have to be Even. But I don't want it to be—Even doesn't want it to be Kent.

KEITH: Do a—

ALI: [gasps] Surge!

[gasps from the table]

DRE: Oh shit!

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Surge does not want to be an Excerpt.

DRE: Awww.

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: Surge has a family. Never in his fucking life.

[Ali laughs]

KEITH: I don't think that having this Divine here means there's gotta be some race to figure out who's gonna tell Gumption "I'm your fucking pilot now."

ALI: [softly] Well—

JACK: That is true but I suppose if we want to fly Gumption, which we probably—like, I—

AUSTIN: Yes, by the time that scene happens you should know who the fuck that is.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: And I feel like if we don't do that at some point, there's gonna be this moment where we're gonna need to make a really big play against someone and then just go like [laughs], "Oh shit! Quick, scramble!"

[Dre laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: "Oh quick, someone fix it! [Austin laughs] I mean, so would that—Dre, would that—that wouldn't be you shoring up trust, I take it.

DRE: Yeah, no.

AUSTIN: No.

JACK: That would be you trying to—God, I think I might have to take a Contempt. I can super understand why you're doing that—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: But I might have to take a Contempt there, because I think Fourteen is—not appalled, but Fourteen is low-level contemptuous of someone saying "Well, I will be the Excerpt."

AUSTIN: Right.

DRE: Sure. Well, in that—

JACK: Like, you don't get to pick that you're the Excerpt.

DRE: Yeah, yeah, yeah. What should be the process, then, for us to find an Excerpt?

ALI: Me and the Cadent could—God—put together—

KEITH: I think I should be the Excerpt!

DRE: I think other—

JACK: What were you going to say, Ali?

AUSTIN: One second, one second, let Ali—yeah, go ahead, finish up.

KEITH: I'm sorry, Ali.

ALI: Yeah, I was gonna say, put together a research team, right?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: Or, like, you know—

KEITH: [whispering] Talent show.

JACK: Yeah! And I like this as well, 'cause this is such a fucking Seneschal's Brace way of doing this.

[Austin laughs]

AUSTIN: Oh my God.

JACK: It's like, "Well, we'll assemble a—[laughs]" [Dre laughs]. It's not quite as bad as the DFS, right? The DFS would be like, "We have outsourced it to a think tank—"

AUSTIN: Yeah [laughs].

[Ali laughs]

JACK: "and the think tank is going to—[laughs]

AUSTIN: "—has determined that it's this white guy!"

JACK: Yeah, right, exactly. Yeah! It's Baron so-and-so and the fucking Tory government.

[Austin laughs]

DRE: Oh boy.

JACK: But Seneschal's Brace is like "Alright, look, let's—[laughs]. There's a war happening, Declan's Corrective has just keeled over. Now, we all need to talk about this."

ALI: Well, I mean, that's the thing, 'cause it's like, you know, we're—we still want to be a Divine state.

JACK: Yeah! Yeah, for real.

ALI: So it would be us—

DRE: Yeah.

ALI: Actually, probably Gumption and Anticipation would have—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: —their hands on this too, right?

AUSTIN: Harmony also. Out of all the Divines here, and all the Excerpts, both the Excerpts, and the Cadent, and the leadership team, which is the three of you, right?

ALI: Yeah.

DRE: Yeah.

JACK: Also, this is way better than saying to Nideo—when Nideo shows up and is like, “What have you done with our Divine?”

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: If Option A is “Kent Brighton is the Excerpt!” [Ali, Austin, and Jack laugh] And Option B is “Look, we’re putting together a committee. We—look a Divine with an Excerpt that was chosen very carefully, it was just sitting in a warehouse for you—”

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: “We have all the components, it will help the whole system,” is at least a better argument.

DRE: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah, I’m into this.

DRE: Let’s do that then.

AUSTIN: I think this is also—

DRE: Start the Divine committee.

AUSTIN: I actually think the Divine committee is a trust thing.

JACK: Mmm.

AUSTIN: Like, what you’ve just—me as an outside observer, you’ve decided to not just elect someone overnight, which you could have done. So I think this is a—this is now raising your trust to Neutral. Or will be, when it finishes. Which is a four clock.

JACK: Damn. Okay.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: If that works for y’all.

DRE: Gig, do you still want to keep your Contempt?

[Keith sighs, Austin laughs]

KEITH: N—I am tentatively—

DRE: I mean you could be contemptuous that we stole Gumption before you.

KEITH: Here's the thing. If I could put—I'm—I would rather give it—I'll put it back for now, but you're on fucking thin ice.

[Ali, Jack, and Austin laugh]

ALI: There isn't a part of you that was like, "You guys didn't just give it to Brighton? What's wrong with Brighton?" [laughs]

KEITH: I don't think that Kent should just be flying Gumption.

ALI: This is fair.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: Look, Kent's a great pilot.

AUSTIN [jokingly, as Kent Brighton]: It would be very fun, Gig.

[Jack chuckles]

ALI: No, I just—I'm—

KEITH: Gumption can handle his own flying!

AUSTIN: No, this is an emerging trend of thought, right? Is that—I mean, this is—there is an emerging of trend though, probably, that is like, "Why do Divines need pilots again?" It's been a long time.

KEITH: Yeah!

AUSTIN: Axioms don't need pilots [Jack exhales]. I'm not saying that this is the case, but I'm saying I do think that—you know, we are not playing as the community but Gig's voice is—should represent, you know, one-seventh of the invested people [Ali laughs]. There are

people who are just like, “Yeah, why don’t we just put him out, this is Gumption! The big ol’ guy! He’s good!”

KEITH: Yeah, he’s the big ol’ guy!

AUSTIN: He’ll take care of us! He’s the big guy!

ALI: [laughs] Yeah, I mean I think even Tender’s, um, Excerpt-cy [laughs], is sort of a similar thing where it’s just like, “Okay, I’m just going to—I am going to be a resource for this [laughs] Divine.”

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: We can pick someone else who is going to be a resource for Gumption.

AUSTIN: Right. Alright, let’s—that’s that turn, right?

[Assents from the table]

AUSTIN: So that’s Even. Fourteen! Ready for a card?

JACK: Okay! Uh, just to check, the QC clock marked ‘Morale’, is that the one to try kind of re-extend the olive branch?

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes.

JACK: Has that—oh, everything’s frozen. Okay. [laughs] I see.

AUSTIN: Everything was frozen. This coming turn is the first turns that it will [laughs], that it will advance. Sorry, Art, can you say what you just wrote, please?

DRE: Oh good.

ART: Uh, excuse me, I would like to hear from Flanger Johannes on the Gumption issue.

[Ali and Jack laugh]

AUSTIN: God.

KEITH (as Flanger): [muffled] I think I should be the pilot of the big ship.

[Ali laugh-wheezes, laughter from Dre and Jack]

AUSTIN: Excuse?

[laughter continues]

KEITH (as Flanger): I should be the one to have the Divine. I should be the pilot of the Divine.

JACK: You're from Advent!

AUSTIN: Great.

KEITH (as Flanger): I'll pay three hundred million coin to be the pilot of the Divine.

[laughter continues]

AUSTIN: Well, this is a fun card we drew, isn't it, Fourteen?

JACK: Yeah, this one's great, I like it a lot.

AUSTIN: A project finishes early. Which one and why?

JACK: Yeah, but—

AUSTIN: Thankfully, you don't get the second bit here, which is if there are no projects underway, boredom leads to quarrel. A fight breaks out between two people, what is it about?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So—you only have the one project [laughs].

[Dre laughs]

JACK: Wait—

KEITH: I can't believe this is happening right now. Somebody better get ready for some Contempt.

JACK: Wait—

ALI: Wait.

JACK: So, when we played this yesterday—

[Dre laughs, Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah?

JACK: We had a rule where you could affect projects that you had contributed to.

AUSTIN: That is true. Which—

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: But we haven't contributed to any of these [laughs].

AUSTIN: [laughing] No, you haven't.

JACK: We're involved in, but like—

AUSTIN: You're targeted by it.

JACK: But like—Yeah.

AUSTIN: But that—and you're actually not targeted by it at all. That is about raising the morale internally of the Qui-Err Coalition. Y'all are like an accessory, you know what I mean? That's—

JACK: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Boy.

ART: Would that mean I would still be able to affect food project? Did I contribute to it by starting it?

AUSTIN: Yes, I think you could. You can't yet because of the ongoing one turn thing from Advent. But when we wrap back around to that—

ART: Sure.

JACK: [snorts] From your own team.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: Okay! [popping soda can in background] Yeah. So the Gumption study finishes early, as I see you've already done.

[laughter from table]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh!

JACK: The pizza, uh—Oh God.

AUSTIN: What happened? We were gonna do that whole study!

JACK: Right.

AUSTIN: This doesn't say this finishes bad. This is like a good thing.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: No, no, no. I'm just—I wanna check the scratch doc real quick.

AUSTIN: Yeah, go for it.

JACK: Um, alright, so I'm kind of looking through this. Someone just—

ALI: I'm throwing out names. [laughs] I can stop.

JACK: [laughs] Yeah, no, thanks. Ali is—Now everyone is throwing names. We can speak into the microphone.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: What is that?

ALI: Ohhh.

AUSTIN: Uhhhh.

ALI: The name suggested so far are Open Metal, Sho Salon, and Declan's Corrective.

AUSTIN: Declan's Corrective is kind of good.

JACK: So, alright, okay, here's what—

DRE: Ooh, Gigas.

AUSTIN: Gigas is not bad either. Gigas is also not bad.

DRE: Gigas is very good.

ALI: Mm.

JACK: There is something about—thank you for this.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Thank you for the no pilot coalition.

JACK: [laughing] Yeah, okay.

[laughter from the table]

AUSTIN: [laughing harder] And one vote for Flanger!

KEITH: Flanger did offer a lot of coin.

JACK: He is a write-in that has the same amount of votes as everyone else right now. Okay—

AUSTIN: It's a tie.

JACK: I know what the answer is. The reason that it finishes really fast is that we get an answer really fast. We put—

KEITH: No one even asked Gumption.

AUSTIN: Yes they did! Yes, Gumption is—

KEITH: Gumption is part of it?

ALI: Gumption's part of the committee, yeah, yeah, yeah!

JACK: Gumption is part of this.

KEITH: Okay.

JACK: Yeah, this is absolutely what it is. And we call the hospital. We phone the hospital where Declan's Corrective is. I don't want a scene here, so I'm just going to narrate this.

AUSTIN: Yep.

JACK: But if you want to do a loose conversation, that's fine. I think that's against the rules. I don't think we can—

AUSTIN: It's against the rules.

JACK: Yeah, we can't have a conversation. There's a game for that. And it has to be, it has to be Declan's. For like—in part, he's very experienced. And in part because the link, symbolic and direct, between a Divine and their Excerpt, will do as much, if not more, good for him than the hospital. Especially a Divine like Gumption.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: But also because Gumption is a Divine about repairing and building things. And at a time like this, who better to pilot that Divine than the man who once killed—how many was it?

AUSTIN: Twenty-seven. Twenty-seven Divines.

JACK: And I think Declan hears the pitch—Declan's? Does he take the full—He still takes the full name, right?

AUSTIN: He—he lives his life as a public figure. Which means that different parts of Seneschal—on the planet Seneschal—people'll call him Declan, people'll call him Decland, people'll call him Corrective, people'll call him DC...It's his job as a politician to be like, "Yeah, what do you need?"

JACK: What do people—what does the leadership call him?

AUSTIN: Declan's Corrective.

JACK: Okay, just the full name, yeah.

AUSTIN: It's important they see him—it's important to keep the possessive because it shows that there is a connection to the NEH.

JACK: Yeah. And I think the pitch is made and I think the people around the table—I picture this, you know, it's the war room, right? It's the White House—the Situation Room. And we expect a pushback but on the screen we see Declan's Corrective smile broadly and laugh. And it's not the smile of a man who has nefarious plans for the Divine. It's the smile of a man who realizes that the time that he had probably thought about for a long time has come and he needs to pick up the pen and pick up the sword.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And, uh, and so Gumption has a new Excerpt.

AUSTIN: Does he have a name? Do you know if—do you have a name yet?

JACK: I think it would be a real mistake in the finale to say "We'll work out the name later."

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: *But* I will will work out the name [Ali laughs] for the next season [laughs]. I'll come back with a name.

AUSTIN: Okay. Of Friends at the Table! That'll be—[Ali keeps laughing]

JACK: No, I'll come back with a name for the next—after we take a break. Oh my God, there's lightning outside.

AUSTIN: Here too!

JACK: We make Declan's Corrective an Excerpt and there was just a huge flash of lightning.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh!

ALI: Can I—

KEITH: Contempt!

ALI: Yeah, I'm gonna take a Contempt. I think Tender's really proud of him and like, glad that this happened—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: That, like, the full loop happened. But I think seeing him there still makes her a little bit sick.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah, totally!

AUSTIN: Totally.

ALI: A little bit.

JACK: I think for a lot of people it is just like, "Hang on! [Austin and Ali laugh] He's the Divine-killer!"

AUSTIN: Can Anticipation—can Anticipation light—force Gumption to light a cigarette? Is that a possible power move?

[Jack and Ali laugh]

ALI: Sure!

AUSTIN: I don't know. Signet?

JANINE: I'm also taking Contempt, just because it—I think that's news Signet meets with exhaustion. [Austin laughs] Of just like, why the fuck would you—you're so old, just don't! Don't let them make you do that!

KEITH: You're just as old!

AUSTIN: You are just as old.

JANINE: Yeah, but I'm already in this. Like, I'm already in it.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: I wrote it in the chat while Jack was talking, but I'm saying it out loud for posterity: I'm not saying I wanted it, but absolutely offended that my name was never even in the ring.

JACK: Look, Keith.

KEITH: What?

JACK: We have an Order/Peace situation going on here and we have to choose very carefully [laughs]

KEITH: Listen! "We're going to create a research project to find the best candidate for Gumption" is different than "We're going find—we're going to start a research project to find the best candidate for Gumption within our community."

[Jack and Austin laugh]

KEITH: Are two different things!

AUSTIN: I've advanced clocks. Aperture has arrived. And the—

JACK: Oh wait, do clocks advance now? Because—

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: Because the thing has timed out.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. That thing's over.

JACK: The projects frozen—Okay, cool.

AUSTIN: Yep, projects are no longer frozen.

JACK: So I'm the first person to make an attack.

DRE: Oh.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: Oh!

JACK: Morale's gone up, food project's gone up.

AUSTIN: Yep.

ALI: What happened to the—

AUSTIN: Do you think—oh, here's a question: do you think that this is—I was actually gonna—do you think that this is plus experience back or plus trust back? That last event.

DRE: Hmmm.

AUSTIN: Do you think it's still trust?

JACK: Uh, no, I think it's experience.

KEITH: I think it's experience.

ALI: [laughs] I think it's experience.

DRE: Yeah, agreed.

AUSTIN: Alright.

JACK: Yeah, like none sees Declan's Corrective climb into a Divine and go, "Ahhh, I trust him. I feel very safe."

[laughter]

DRE: "I feel very at ease now."

AUSTIN: Yeah. Alright, I'm adding the plus Stitch to everybody.

JACK Out of interest—

AUSTIN: Oh, wait, I'm sorry, you know what, was plus Stitch for everybody or was it for *everybody*? I don't remember; one second, let me find that out.

JACK: I think you said it was for everybody.

AUSTIN: [laughs] I should have been more clear.

DRE: Oh, damn [chuckles].

ALI: 'Cause it shows all of them, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yes. That makes sense. It's not just for one thing.

ALI: What happens when someone does an attack?

AUSTIN: What do you mean?

JACK: Oh, we gain a thing.

ALI: In the—

AUSTIN: Oh, the first person to do an attack gets a bonus. Like, doesn't have to spend one resource.

ALI: Oh, hell yeah.

AUSTIN: Because they're using the Stitch without using the Stitch, basically.

ALI: Okay, okay.

JACK: Umm, okay. Quick question.

AUSTIN: Yeah?

JACK: What is Nideo—what happens here? Very briefly. What is the immediate response from the embassy ship.

AUSTIN: There's no—I don't—oh. I think fury.

JACK: Just absolute—

AUSTIN: Outrage. Lots of words that mean fury and outrage.

JACK: Yeah, like the ship rapidly—um, what's the word—deploys its machine guns and then de-deploys them.

AUSTIN: And then de-deploys them, right, exactly.

JACK: It bristles.

AUSTIN: And then sends an apology for deploying its machine guns, but you know that apology—

JACK: But it's very angry.

AUSTIN: Seventh-dimensional chess.

JACK: Fucking DFS.

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh-huh.

JACK: Yesterday, when we did this dry run, an alliance between the DFS and Seneschal's Brace showed up and we called it the Most Boring Alliance [laughs].

[Janine and Ali laugh]

KEITH: Wait, it was between who?

AUSTIN: The DFS—Divine Free States—and Seneschal's Brace. It was just like—

KEITH: Oh.

AUSTIN: The dice, so to speak, made it look like it was a big deal but at the table I couldn't have been less interested [chuckles].

[Keith laughs]

JACK: It was just like, 'oh, the politicians—two politicians have started talking.'

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Alright. So what're you doing this turn? As the Stitch—again, Stitches have opened up, everyone's gotten the plus Stitch bonus. Which is everyone has access to those. But then what are you doing for your turn?

JACK: Oof. I don't know, maybe this isn't the time for it. Maybe this is the time for it. Around this—maybe this is the scoring the goal just before halftime. Is there a Stitch onto the Catapult?

AUSTIN: No.

JACK: There's a Stitch onto Thyrsus, and I could probably take a—

AUSTIN: Stitches are on planets, yeah.

JACK: I could probably take a ship to the Catapult from Thyrsus.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Maybe, yeah. Hmm.

JACK: Hey Grand?

ART: Yeah?

JACK: Wanna dance?

ART: Sure, I'd love to.

AUSTIN: What is this—what is the thing—what is the action you're taking?

JACK: I am going to—I think I probably want to [chuckles]. I'm gonna try and start a project. Projects fail forward, but they can still fail, right? We can still describe projects failing but they ten to fail forward.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: So I can't—I can't make a project clock called "Win" [chuckles, Ali laughs]. 'Cause that doesn't—that's not how it works

AUSTIN: No.

JACK: But I can make a project clock with some expectation that what I set the clock out to do will happen, or won't happen in an interesting way.

AUSTIN: What is the clock? It depends on what the clock is! You're being very coy.

JACK: I want to try and extend some branch, not to Advent, but to a man in Advent.

AUSTIN: I—

JACK: There's been a lot of stuff happening at Advent—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —and I want to make that official.

AUSTIN: I think that that's—you want to make it official that Grand is your man on the inside?

JACK: Is an agent, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Um, I don't know that's a project.

JACK: I don't know whether or not that's true.

AUSTIN: That could be Hold a Discussion, that could be Discover Something New. I don't think you need to start a clock to do this.

JACK: Yeah, oh yeah. It's absolutely Hold a Discussion. I really wanna hear what people think about taking this moment.

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes.

JACK: Alright, fine. So I can ask a question or make a statement.

AUSTIN: Let me, let me—yeah. Do you want me to read the rules again for Hold a Discussion, that way they can—

JACK: Yeah, yeah, yeah, go ahead. 'Cause listeners might wanna—

AUSTIN: Also me. Also me forget.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Hold a Discussion...[reading]. "You can choose to open with a question or a declaration. Starting with you and going clockwise everyone gets to weigh in once, sharing a single argument comprised of one to two sentences. If you opened with a question, you get to weigh in last. If you opened with a declaration, that's it for you. Each discussion should be tied to a situation on the map." In this case, the situation is the Catapult where Grand Magnificent is, I guess. [continues reading] "When a discussion ends, mark the situation it is attached to with a small dot. A discussion never results in a decision or summation process. Everyone weighs in and then so long as you haven't already framed a scene this turn, we frame a scene using a relevant Firebrands game to illustrate one way in which this conversation happened inside of the broader community."

JACK: Right, yeah.

AUSTIN: "This conversation is not representative of the full community's feelings on the matter, but provides an opportunity to explore your own character's relationship to an ongoing matter." So this is everybody. So are you starting with a question or a statement, Fourteen?

JACK: I'm going to start with a question.

AUSTIN: What is your question?

JACK: Uh, [laughs] I had one and then I realized that it started with a statement. But I need both bits. So I'm gonna reframe the question so I don't say the statement bit.

[Ali laughs]

JACK: Okay. Because it's weird. Because everyone outside of Advent has seen maneuvers take place that look like they come from Advent and also seem to be smashing up Advent.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: So I think my question is:

JACK (as Fourteen): Should we take the strange events at Advent as evidence that Grand is working from the inside against their interests?

AUSTIN: Tender? One or two sentences to respond.

ALI (as Tender): [sighs] You know, I know the last time we saw him it was really heated, but the action he took that upset you was to save you, Fourteen. So, I think we should take that into consideration.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Grand Magnificent?

[Ali and Jack laugh]

JACK: Hey, what's the word, Grand?

ART: Hold on, I—can I have three sentences?

AUSTIN: Oh my God.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: What a Grand Magnificent thing.

JACK: This fucking Advent! You spend time with Advent and then just—[laughs]

AUSTIN: Unbelievable. Go ahead.

ART: Well just 'cause sentence one—

AUSTIN: Sorry, whose sentence are you taking? You get to take [laughing] one sentence from somebody else.

JACK: Oh yeah, it's Advent. Yeah, sure!

DRE: God.

ART: Oh wait, no, hold on. I can transition this. I'm just gonna splice this sentence.

ART (as Grand): Absolutely you should, because they reneged on their deal with me.

[Keith and Jack laugh]

ART (as Grand): I can't abide them any longer, and check your email.

[Austin laughs]

ART: Not right now, in the future.

AUSTIN: Okay. Echo?

SYLVIA (as Echo): I think we need to be careful but I would rather have Grand on our side than against us. So that's my take.

KEITH (as Gig): I don't think Grand would switch sides to switch sides. And if he did, then what's to stop him from switching sides?

JANINE (as Signet): He's done one of the worst things he could do. So, realistically, anything he does going forward has a greater potential to be helpful than harmful in a numbers sense.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Oh, word?

JACK: [laughing] Oh, he's hit the bottom of the swimming pool!

[Ali and Austin laugh]

AUSTIN: Alright, Even?

DRE (as Even): Yeah, I saw Grand pull the trigger and do the right thing when it mattered the most, so I trust him to do it again.

AUSTIN: Fourteen?

JACK (as Fourteen): [emphatically] I will not work with fascists.

AUSTIN: Alright. What's the scene you're framing? Or what's the—yeah, what's the minigame here?

JACK: So, I think the camera cuts very suddenly.

AUSTIN: Mm.

JACK: One of those cuts that's just instantaneous. To the tiny shape of a ship leaving Thyrsus with the massive bulk of the Catapult in the distance. And we see the ship, you know, be carefully docked and presumably Fourteen is under some sort of armed guard. I guess Advent—at least Kitcha Kanna—knows who they are. So they're like, "Alright, fine, you're here. Come in. Carefully, we don't want you to breathe fire or anything." And I think that we see Fourteen in an elevator and the elevator dings and the doors open. And it's just like the pleasure barge in Solo. There is a dance happening.

AUSTIN: Mm.

JACK: This is an actual, legit dance. And yeah, I want to do the dance. I guess beforehand—Grand, what do I see you doing when the door opens? Like, what is the first thing I see of you again?

ART: Uhhh. Oh, I—hmm, I really have to hit this. Um, because it's the—it's honestly your worst nightmare made flesh. It's like, you know, there's a small semicircle of, you know, horrible hangers-on [Jack chuckles] surrounding Grand and he says something and they all just explode in laughter and you can tell from looking at Grand's face that what he just said was not that funny.

[Jack chuckles]

AUSTIN: Mm. He knows it?

ART: And he's holding, you know, a nice drink and he's wearing, you know, just a fantastic outfit. It's like—okay, you know like hologram trading cards when you were a kid?

KEITH: Yup!

JACK: Mm.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Very well—intimately.

ART: What if they made a tuxedo out of that?

[Austin laughs]

JACK: Oh my God!

KEITH: Wow!

JACK: Can I actually wear that? I like that.

KEITH: It's so much more rare than a regular tuxedo!

[Austin laughs]

ART: Yeah, it only comes one in every fifteen packs of tuxedos.

JACK: Mm-hm. [growling] Which they fucking have at the Catapult. Buy a fucking pack of tuxedos. Gonna use them once and throw them away.

ART: Yeah, most of them are garbage.

JACK: Yeah, exactly! [laughs]

AUSTIN: God.

ART: You get eight crushed velvets looking for the—

[Keith laughs]

AUSTIN: *God*. Alright, so you're gonna dance.

JACK: Yeah!

AUSTIN: I'll return to the start of the conducting the dance thing. We know how you came together. Anyone can ask details about setting, occasion, circumstances. What do you notice about each other? I mean, I guess Grand just gave you that. What does Grand notice about you, Fourteen?

JACK: I think Grand notices two things. They notice that—they're surprised that Fourteen is here. They notice that Fourteen is here. This isn't a mech body. I mean, it is, but it's not a, you know, remote mech body.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And neither is it a complete absence of a person. Fourteen has arrived on the Catapult. I think the other thing that Grand notices is that Grand as seen Fourteen as—not as the Gunslinger, uh—no, did we meet at any point before that? No.

AUSTIN: No. Only ever as the Body Politic.

JACK: As the lawyer and as Carcanet's Ironclad. No, maybe a bit of Worthy of Grace.

AUSTIN: Would have known Worthy of Grace from the beginning of the—yeah, the Miracle. Pre-Miracle, immediately pre-Miracle, would have met Worthy of Grace.

JACK: I think the thing Grand notices is that in the gait of Carcanet's Ironclad, or in the way that the face moves, there are the reflections of the lawyer and the opera singer, and also just countless reflections of things that he can't quite—he's like 'That looks familiar in some way but I don't quite understand it.' Fourteen has showed up not as Carcanet's Ironclad but as the collected Fourteen Fifteens.

AUSTIN: Mm. Alright, so to play this game—which one of you is the worst dancer?

JACK: It's probably me, right? I feel like Grand has—I don't know, Grand, do you have a history of dance?

ART: Certainly more than zero. Grand's gone to a lot of parties.

JACK: I guess I probably was a dancer but I doubt I remember it.

AUSTIN: Right, right. We've lost part of that, right?

JACK: Yeah. So I think it's Grand. I think I was probably an incredible dancer.

AUSTIN: And you've never yet danced as Carcanet's Ironclad, so.

JACK: No. Yes, I am an enormous metal robot.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Alright, so then Fourteen, you ask the first question.

JACK: Okay.

AUSTIN: You're on the dance floor. What type of music is playing?

JACK: It's like, it's like—what's the music that rich [laughs] people listen to when they want to dance but what they really want to do is either flirt or d—it's like fuckin' bad smooth jazz or something. There's someone playing a space piano.

ART: I mean, I think you really mean EDM.

JACK: Do you think it's actually—do you think it's this?

ART: I don't know. That's—I guess that's a very moment in time answer.

AUSTIN: Is there a jazz/EDM crossover? There must be. There—yes, of course there is.

KEITH: There super is.

AUSTIN: Of course there is, of course there is, of course there is. I've heard Square Pusher. Alright.

JACK: It's like that and it's also whatever the equivalent of fuckin' electroswing is in the Mirage.

AUSTIN: [groans] Ughh.

JACK: This kind of weird, nostalgic—

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's actually it.

JACK: Like, whatever robot-style takes, it's like this fake nostalgia for a thing that doesn't quite exist and even if it did, carried a bunch of stuff with it.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And it's also really—it's badly played. It's like a live band.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Alright, so you ask the first question.

JACK: I fucking hate Advent. Okay.

ART: A live band playing EDM would be, like, *the* funniest thing in the world.

[Austin and Jack laugh]

JACK: Oh, God. Okay. Your mouth is close to my ear. What do you say?

ART (as Grand): [whispering urgently] Fourteen, you're not safe here.

JACK (as Fourteen): It's fine. They can't do anything. It would be like a fuckin'—it would be like a diplomatic incident. You guys care about proprie—pro—

JACK: [laughs] Wow, big move for me to start a sentence with a word I can't say in it. Propriety. Proprietary?

AUSTIN: Propriety. Propriety.

ART: Those are different words. You mean propriety. Proprie—yeah.

AUSTIN: Proprietary is an adjective.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So not that one.

JACK (as Fourteen): You guys care so much about propriety when it's, like, figures that people would recognize.

ART (as Grand): I don't know that that's true for everyone.

AUSTIN: Fourteen? You—or, I guess, Grand, you have a move now.

ART: You may, at this moment in the dance, place your hand upon my elbow, my shoulder, my waist, or my hip. Which do you choose.

JACK: I put my hand on your shoulder. Do I get to say something, or is this just a physical move?

AUSTIN: Sure. It is just a physical thing, but given the scene I want you to have, you know, an exchange.

JACK: Yeah, I feel like—

AUSTIN: One-two-three, one-two-three.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's electrowaltz, that's what's happening. Tango Cache, and he's there too and everyone's having a good time.

[Ali gasps]

AUSTIN: He's not there, he's—I'm sorry to get your hopes up, Tender. I'm sorry.

JACK: [laughs] If Waltz Tango Cache is on the Catapult, the Catapult's gonna have a really bad day.

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh-huh.

JACK: He's award-winning, did you know that?

AUSTIN: He's won awards for dancing, multiple times.

JACK: He sure has!

AUSTIN: Anyway, continu

JACK: Yeah, I put my hand on your shoulder. And I say:

JACK (as Fourteen): Grand Magnificent, I have not come here to take you away or to kill you. I've come here because I want to know: are you with these people or against them?

ART: Grand does, like, a furtive look. Like, this isn't the kind of thing that someone can hear the answer to, you know? And then is:

ART (as Grand): I was wrong, I see that now. I'm sorry. I'm doing my best from where I am.

JACK (as Fourteen): You know that can't come without consequences, right? You don't just get to say 'I'm playing in their tools and I'm going to make it right.'

AUSTIN: I think that's—now you have to ask another question.

ART: Yeah, one-two-three was our—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah.

ART: Was our—yeah.

JACK: Oh, this is great! Because I think I explicitly say this.

JACK (as Fourteen): Grand Mag, when the dance ends will you stand with me or rush away? And you can take that as broadly or as—you know, you have people that seem to be enjoying your company.

ART: Oh, I was gonna choose that one. You're so rude.

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: You can always fire it back!

JACK: Yeah, that's true, yeah.

ART (as Grand): The answer's rush away. I have work to do here and it really helps if they don't think that it's happening.

JACK (as Fourteen): So I can—I'll get back in the elevator if they don't kill me, which they might. But I'll get back in the elevator and I can go back to Seneschal's Brace and yeah, okay.

ART: And do I get to—I finish this one?

AUSTIN: Yeah, three. You can finish this one. Give me the third.

ART (as Grand): Yeah, be careful getting out. Don't come here again, this was a really dangerous idea.

AUSTIN: I—really quick: it's intentional that Grand is responding in the immediate and Fourteen is asking in the broad sense there, right? Or—unless I'm misreading it.

JACK: Yeah. No, I gave Grand the option to dodge the question.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: And he seemed to take it.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: Yeah.

JACK: But with the implication that we were gonna be—that it was gonna be positive.

AUSTIN: Yes, yeah.

ART: Yeah, get out and look closely.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Last question. Or last—yeah, last question.

ART: [laughs] Okay. The dance's figures bring you to dance with someone else. Whom? When the dance brings you back to me again, are you pleased or disappointed?

AUSTIN: [laughs] Ooh.

ART: Take my question will you?

[Austin and Jack laugh]

JACK: I was hoping you were gonna ask this one. There are talons on my shoulder. And I turn, and there is Kitcha Kanna. I don't know, do we want an exchange with Kitcha Kanna?

AUSTIN: What does Kitcha Kanna say? Um—

JACK: 'Cause I think what Fourteen says is:

JACK (as Fourteen): Ah.

AUSTIN: And Kitcha Kanna says:

AUSTIN (as Kitcha Kanna): You are lucky we respect a transaction.

AUSTIN: —and squeezes just a little bit.

JACK (as Fourteen): Well, I hope you're keeping well.

AUSTIN: And sends you on your way.

JACK (as Fourteen): Grand, I'm okay! I'm so glad.

[Austin and Jack laugh]

JACK (as Fourteen): Oh my God, I thought he was gonna kill me.

ART (as Grand): Yeah, me too.

JACK (as Fourteen): Do you know what he said?

ART (as Grand): No, I was over there dancing with—

ART: —Uh, hold on, I'm—

ALI: Flanger.

SYLVIA: God damn it!

JACK: No!

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, Flanger!

ART (as Grand): —Flanger.

AUSTIN: Flanger [Flan-ger] Flanger.

KEITH (as Flanger): Please take my approximation of a hand again and have this dance one second time!

[Jack laughs]

ART (as Grand): [exasperated] We'll get back to you, Flanger!

[laughter from the table]

JACK (as Fourteen): He said I'm glad that we—you should be glad we respect a transaction, which is the fuckin' propriety thing again. What—I cannot believe the reason that Kitcha Kanna didn't kill me was the reason I gave you *literally* five minutes ago. But, uh, [Austin laughs] yeah.

ART (as Grand): Stay safe. Please.

ART: —Grand whispers.

JACK (as Fourteen): We're not good, Grand.

ART (as Grand): Yeah, I know. Maybe later.

JACK (as Fourteen): Yeah, okay. Maybe later.

ART: And Grand walks away like:

ART (as Grand): Who's running the security in this place? How did you let—how'd you let this joker in here?

[Austin and Jack laugh]

AUSTIN: Ah, perfect. Good. Alright. Tender?

ALI: Hi. Card time, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Ooh, I thought it'd be the king.

KEITH: This is a long season.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: This is—we get—it's at the bottom. It went from the top to the bottom. One hundred percent did.

JACK: Oh, damn. We deliberately tried to avoid this!

AUSTIN: Uh-huh! A project finishes early—this is the Five of s—the five of, I guess, morning. A project finishes early, what led to its early completion? Or, the weather is nice and people can feel the potential all around them. Start a new project.

ALI: Um, I mean, so we don't have a project so it's the second one, right? I don't know that this is a good idea or that it's gonna work, and if the implications are bad, let me know. But I was wondering if, like, creating an Anticipation nest inside of the Splice—

AUSTIN: Boy.

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: Boy, is that a sentence you just said.

JACK: Oh my God.

ALI: —might reduce their resources? Or like kind of—

AUSTIN: An Anticipation *nest*?

ALI: Mm-hm [laughs].

AUSTIN: This thing that is running in your head and that is—okay.

ALI: Well, so, the thing that Anticipation wants is an infinite amount of time—

AUSTIN: That's true.

ALI: —to think about the problem that it has.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: And I could offer that very easily, and in doing so kind of do the thing that the, um, Our Profit wanted to do with the Mirage, but with the Splice. Which is like, just slowly drain it, right?

AUSTIN: Slowly drain the Splice?

ALI: Drain it from them, yeah.

AUSTIN: Y-yeah.

JACK: Oh my God. This is like Our Profit is like "I have a beautiful scheme and a grand plan."

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: And we're just like "Welcome to the Twilight Mirage! Everything here [laughs] is kind of incredible and horrifying."

AUSTIN: "I'm putting a virus inside of the Matrix that's gonna slowly eat away at it."

ALI: We can take Gumption, we can take the Splice [laughs]. We can do whatever we want.

AUSTIN: Fuck. I think this—I think yeah, I think this is a long clock; I think this is a six-step clock.

ALI: Okay. Okay.

AUSTIN: Because this is like—not because you're—I don't think this is gaining a resource. I think this is just adding something to the map, right?

ALI: Okay. Yeah, I was wondering how it—

AUSTIN: Or actually, is this an attack? What is this?

ALI: That's the thing, I don't know! Like, I'm try—I think I'm trying to take it from them, right? Like, this is—

AUSTIN: So I mean, the thing is it's too late to some degree.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: And that's the beauty of the Splice. *Everyone* has the Splice.

ALI: Okay, yeah. Okay.

AUSTIN: It's like taking the internet. Like, yeah you can destroy the local servers in New York but it's distributed, right?

ALI: Okay. Fair, fair, fair.

AUSTIN: But I do like the notion of planting Anticipation in there like that.

ALI: Can I—instead of taking a r—I can reduce their resource of the Splice. To be like "Yeah, thanks for giving us this. I'm gonna cut you off from this so you can't benefit from what people upload," right?

[Jack exhales heavily]

AUSTIN: Yeah, you could like implant it inside of the NEH.

ALI: [chuckling] J—Yeah.

JACK: This is so good.

AUSTIN: That's an attack. The thing you're describing is an attack.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: The thing you're describing is an attack to remove their Splice abundance. Which is like—

ALI: Yeah, I want to cut their Ethernet cable, essentially, or whatever.

[Ali and Dre laugh]

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: But in a way that is also kind of—I love this—in a way that's kind of insidious as well.

AUSTIN: Yeah. 'Cause it's not—

JACK: Like, it'll probably take Our Profit a while to even go “Hang on, something's wrong.”

AUSTIN: Yeah. A long time, right?

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: *And* it's good because it's getting to see Anticipation in action, which we don't get to do much of.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: And it's good because it's like a uniquely Mirage counterattack.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I'm advancing clocks before we do this, just so that we are up to date.

JACK: Gonna take the opposite of a Contempt token.

[Ali giggles]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Alright.

JACK: It's got a skeleton on it.

AUSTIN: So what—What is this scene?

ALI: Uhh—

AUSTIN: Is this a medium attack? Are you destroying it? You're not stealing it. You're not getting double the Splice for yourselves, right?

ALI: Y—

AUSTIN: I mean, it could be.

ALI: Is that an option? Yeah, I feel like—

AUSTIN: If you heavy attack, [reading] “choose an abundant or neutral resource, reduce your target's abundance, and increase your faction's hold of that resource by one step, from scarce to neutral—”

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: “—or from neutral to abundance.” There is already abundant Splice.

ALI: But wouldn't we like—there's no level above abundance?

AUSTIN: Not in the book as written.

ALI: Okay [giggles].

AUSTIN: Like, I could imagine it being like—[sighs]. On one hand, it's our game and we do whatever the fuck we want.

ALI: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: One the other hand, I'm cautious of being like “Oh, here's a new thing you could do that you could've done at any turn before but I didn't say it,” you know what I mean?

ALI: Right. Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Um—

ALI: I think just—I think wounding them is enough, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Where, like, I super have it—I don't think that—especially Seneschal's Brace I don't think is in the position to be like “Oh, we want to take the Splice and then we're gonna have super control of it but everybody else can connect to it.”

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: 'Cause that's just doing what Our Profit is again.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Where it's like the intention—

AUSTIN: Okay, here's what I'll say—sorry, go ahead.

ALI: I was just gonna say the intention is to show we're willing to wound the bad actors here because we actually want to create.

AUSTIN: Right. So the thing that you could do—what I'll say is, on top of that, once you do it that opens up the fiction for a future project that could be like “Anticipation's backdoor into NEH,” do you know what I mean?

ALI: Okay, yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, you could then do a project to create another abundance or another resource for you that's about having access to them. You know?

ALI: Okay, yeah.

AUSTIN: So. I mean, you could also just do that. Now that I think about it, if what you wanted was just the backdoor to use in a future attack you could just do that as a project. Which then you'd be able to cash in when attacking them, to destroy something. Or you could just go in now and start attacking them, up to you.

ALI: Um...Fourteen, Even, do you have, like [laughs awkwardly], as the strategists here, do you have a preference?

DRE: Um, alright, what are the options that you're picking between?

ALI: It's either—I guess it's either we just take it from them because what we're doing is taking it from them or what we're doing is creating an opportunity to attack them later on. Right? Is that what you—

AUSTIN: Yeah, with a—it's almost, like, you know there's the anti-Volition strike force? It's like you're doing that but it's like the anti-Splice, you know, Anticipation-backdoor-bug-virus-thing. Right? You're implanting Anticipation into—it's giving you a thing that you'll be able to use as resource down the line in that specific con—uhh, uhh.

DRE: So it's just—

AUSTIN: I almost like that better because then if it is Anticipation is spread throughout the Splice then you can use that in a bunch of different ways, right?

JACK: Yeah.

ALI: Yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's way stronger.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: And way more interesting. So maybe that's a—I think that's a six—I think that's a—I mean, it is just you. So it's a four-step clock still, right?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's basically just like Anticipation's going to give you mastery over the Splice. Which you'll then be able to use in a bunch of different ways.

JACK: But we're not necessarily taking it for ourselves, right?

AUSTIN: No, it's not about that. It's literally just 'I'll spend this later to get a bonus on this roll,' right? Or not roll, but—

JACK: Yeah. It's like we're seeing a nice statue of a horse and saying [Ali laughs] "Let's put a bunch of soldiers in it."

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Right, that's exactly it.

ALI: Okay, cool.

AUSTIN: Alright. So let's start that clock.

ALI: So that was my starting a new project.

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: My second action is...[blows out air]. I could still start that thing with Grand, if you're, like, interested in it?

JACK: What, like open a spy line?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You could.

JACK: 1-800-SPY.

ART: That's not enough numbers.

[Ali laughs, Jack laughs]

KEITH: You don't know how phones work here.

ALI: 1-800-SPY-LINE is [laughs] seven numbers.

ART: There you go.

ALI: Otherwise—

JACK: I mean, do we want that or do we want—I'm just a bit cautious, I'm a bit worried about—God, there was thunder going outside and it's amazing. I'm a bit worried about Volition.

ALI: Yeah, okay.

JACK: I wonder if there's a—maybe if we make the spy line but we focus it a little more on, like, 'Can we begin to collaborate with Grand on some sort of anti-Volition strat?' Or—

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: 'Cause that's the big—

ALI: The only—yeah.

JACK: Yeah.

ALI: I just don't—Volition doesn't have anything that we can directly attack right now.

JACK: No, but—

AUSTIN: It has resources, always. Always has resources.

ALI: Oh, okay.

JACK: Yeah, we can try and take resources away from it. We could also try and develop some sort of—like our own anti-Volition strike force or prep Gumption for combat-readiness or—

ALI: Oh, oh, woah, woah, woah. No, no, no. I know what I'm doing. Can I try to attack it to get its abundancy of DIY knowledge away?

AUSTIN: Sure. What's that look like?

ALI: Um—

AUSTIN: How do you get away? How do you get it so that it doesn't—'cause I have a lot of fun ways for *it* to use DIY knowledge against *you*, right? But, I'm curious. I'm not saying you can't do it in any way. I just—I think this is interesting.

JANINE: You know those things on Pinterest where it's like—or I guess it's Instagram now—where they all go where it's just like “20 hacks to do with your whatever!” and then you sit through this ten-minute long video [Jack wheeze-laughs] and the hack that's on the thumbnail isn't even in there, and it's all stuff like “Take the cotton off the end of a Q-tip and you get a stick!”

ALI: Yeah.

[Jack laughs]

ALI: Yeah, I think it's—

JANINE: Do you just bombard it with useless crap?

[Ali giggles]

ALI: Something like scrubbing its—'cause those were all Gig-made, right? Where it's fucking with its recognition of Gig or what's in the video. How do we Firebrands this?

KEITH: Sorry, what did I make?

ALI: The, the—the reason everybody has DIY knowledge is 'cause you made those.

KEITH: Right, I finished the project that has—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

KEITH: —it's like an encyclopedia on how to build stuff.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So are you—you're—are you lowering it to a non-abundance or are you trying to make it go all the way to a scarcity?

ALI: What do I need to spend for that? I'm sorry, I'm looking at the rules.

AUSTIN: So if it's a—you can reduce it from abundant to neutral for just a single thing.

ALI: Oh, okay.

AUSTIN: And also you don't have to frame a scene; there's no risk involved in that.

ALI: Okay. But I should make it a scarcity if I have the—

AUSTIN: Yeah, you can spend two to make it a scarcity.

JACK: And I can help, right?

AUSTIN: You cannot help. We're still within—

JACK: Oh nooo!

AUSTIN: Until Signet's next turn.

ALI: [laughing] Oh God.

JACK: Fucking shit.

AUSTIN: Was that Signet's turn? Or was that not Signet's turn? That was not Signet's turn, Signet's turn was the freeze. The Divine Search fired at the turn before Signet, right? Or, no, that was Signet's—the Divine Search froze, that was the thing that froze it for two. When did comms interruption hit—at the beginning of the season, right? So that's actually gone now. It must be.

JACK: Okay. I can help.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Yeah, so you can help.

JACK: I can discard—I want to discard one of my—oh, not discard, I shouldn't say that. I can spend one of my—

AUSTIN: Activate? Yeah.

JACK: I can activate one of my things. And the thing I want to activate is Determined.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: Should I explain how that determination works, or—?

AUSTIN: Yeah, how are you—how is this helping?

JACK: Oh, I have an idea!

ALI: Yeah?

JACK: What's the name of that really tired station that watches Volition?

AUSTIN: The Quarantine Group or whatever.

JACK: With that great lady on it who's just exhausted.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Split Spool was her name, yeah. Quarantine Task Force.

JACK: What if we try and rig one of their satellites to broadcast that Pinterest bullshit at Volition?

ALI: [laughs] Uh, yeah.

JACK: Because then it could be a conversation over dinner with Split Spool to be like "Hey, I know your job is watching, let's do something more."

ALI: Okay, yeah. Yeah, that works.

AUSTIN: Let's do that. And so the idea there is you're going to literally broadcast so much that there's just noise?

ALI: Basically, yeah.

JACK: Yeah, and it's like what Janine said where it's just like so much of it is just complete—if we can teach Volition that DIY knowledge is just like the equivalent of that trick you do to make it look like you're pulling your nose off or pulling your thumb off or something.

[Ali giggles]

AUSTIN: Right, right.

JACK: Volition's like "Yesss [Austin laughs]. Amazing!"

AUSTIN: Gotcha. Alright, so. Ask your chosen partner how you two came to be eating together...we got that. Other characters may join freely if it makes sense for their characters to also be present. Take turns; the person with the lowest social standing takes the first turn. If this isn't clear, have another player choose who takes the first turn at a whim. I think Split Spool does. On your turn, choose one or more of your conversational partners and choose an action. Either ask a topical question; engage in an improvised conversation; pass, saying something about the food; or leave the conversation. End the conversation either when everyone's passed in a row or when everyone has left the conversation but one. And Spli—what Split Spool says, looking up at you from over her, you know, government-made rations is:

AUSTIN (as Split Spool): Boy, I really love the meal tonight.

AUSTIN: Pass [Jack snorts]. Tender, you should go first here.

ALI: Okay.

ALI (as Tender): I hope to find common ground with you, Split—

ALI: Or, does it have to go to Fourteen?

AUSTIN: No.

ALI: Okay, sorry.

ALI (as Tender): —Split Spool, about Divine worship in general [laughs]. Is there any?

AUSTIN: Sure. Yeah. Split is from the *By-and-By*. And, you know, she is—she says her prayers just like anybody else at night. And, you know, there is common ground there. I think the common ground is that of shared daily ritual more than of active faith, but also a shared feeling of duty. So, yes, that exists. Fourteen?

JACK: Um, there are some great—[sighs]. It's rough because there are some great questions here relative to Tender and Fourteen's history [Ali laughs], but I don't know if hanging on this station is necessarily the time or the place for them in order for them to feel genuine. Like, there's the whole 'I was sent to kill you' thing, but I think if we had the conversation now it would feel like we had saw an opportunity for it mechanically rather than saw an opportunity for it narratively. I don't know.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: I would think that Tender and Fourteen are characters who have never taken an opportunity before so if it slips out now then they messed up and that's fantastic.

JACK: Yeah, right, it really does.

[Ali laughs]

JACK: It really—yeah, I mean, if this was a scene where we were at a party of something, that would be—and it did slip up and was a complete mistake that would be great. But we're trying to do a weird diplomatic mission. And for like—if we're seated on one side of the table and Split Spool is on the other and Fourteen turns around and says [laughs] "There's something I have to tell you [Ali laughs]," that's bad. So, okay—and I think this is when my determination come through. Which is like, Fourteen's determination isn't just Split Spool-focused, it's sort of everybody-focused.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm?

JACK (as Fourteen): Tender. I hope I can get you to commit to redoubling our efforts to shut down Volition before the Rapid Evening do. And make that a priority. Can I?

ALI: [laughs] I think that when the Anticipation clock ends, Tender will be less distracted. But that is four turns from now.

[Jack exhales]

AUSTIN: So no?

JACK (as Fourteen): Yeah...I don't know if we can work to rebuild a house that is on fire, Tender. I'm as committed to making this place good for the people who live here as you are. But if they're going to blow us up before we can even start to do that—

ALI (as Tender): I mean—I don't know if I'm breaking the game here—I think that we—the nature of the thing that we're doing and the people we work for means that we have a lot of concerns. And the Volition one is one that concerns everyone on the map.

AUSTIN (as Split Spool): Can one of you pass me the mustard?

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Pass.

JACK: [laughing] She's so tired!

AUSTIN: Right, and no one's trying to convince her of anything!

JACK: No, right!

[Ali keeps laughing]

JACK (as Fourteen): Tender!

ALI: That wasn't gonna be the next thing that I asked [Jack laughs]. It still works though. I'm feeling generous, what favor do you want to ask me? To Split Spool.

AUSTIN (as Split): More people. [laughing tiredly] There are five of us on this station. There are five people. There's eight stations. There's five people per station. That's forty people to watch Volition. That's not any people. Give us ten times the amount of people.

ALI (as Tender): Yeah, I mean, that's something we're capable of.

AUSTIN (as Split): I don't know, you're not very trustworthy.

ALI (as Tender): Part of what this project is is to change the scope of what you're doing here. And of course, you know, that would add people and organization and whatever else.

AUSTIN: Fourteen.

JACK as Fourteen): I hope to convince you that the time for observation is over. And you need to allow us to use your antenna to attack Volition. Can I?

AUSTIN (as Split): Not until you get me those people.

JACK (as Fourteen): Okay.

AUSTIN: So I think what she's proposing here is literally—

JACK: Like a project clock of stuff for the station—

AUSTIN: A project clock that fires this attack x number of from now.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: This attack is, like, deferred.

ALI: I think that works.

JACK: Yeah, I think that works.

AUSTIN: Okay. Alright.

ALI: We're like—yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, this actually—yeah, uh-huh. I know something you don't know. So that's really funny [nervous laughter from Ali]. This is gonna go good.

JACK: That's on Austin's business card.

AUSTIN: It is [laughs]. What's the—what's the—what size of clock is this? This is a—

KEITH: It's one of those cool ones that's really small.

AUSTIN: Yeah. How long do you think this clock is?

JACK: Does this help everybody?

AUSTIN: I think it kind of helps everybody.

JACK: I think it does. I kind of—

AUSTIN: Except for Volition.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: Shit.

KEITH: Is there—what's the—is there like a new system resource or—?

AUSTIN: No, this is just a project clock that's about to start.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Which is, I think, a six-step, probably?

JACK: Yeah.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But the result is to hurt Volition so that's not bad.

KEITH: So I guess it helps everybody but Volition.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Alright, so it's gonna staff the QTF, which is the Quarantine Task Force. Alright, and that shows that nameplate...I'm just gonna start that clock, basically.

KEITH: Look at all these fucking clocks this got.

AUSTIN: And that'll fire when it's over. Okay, that's your turn.

KEITH: Um, I believe that we missed finishing the morale clock this turn.

AUSTIN: Mmm. I advanced it. I'm pretty sure I advanced it.

KEITH: Um—okay.

AUSTIN: Because remember it was frozen for two full turns. Until—I thought it was until Fourteen...

KEITH: It was frozen, but it was frozen at three and so it should have finished during Tender's.

AUSTIN: So Signet—Signet's turn it was frozen and Even's turn it was frozen. Okay, yeah, yeah. You're right. Alright, so y'all gain your morale, your morale comes up. Out of the doldrums.

JACK: What does this look like?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Um—[sighs]. I think it is a handful of people from Seneschal's Brace are invited to—are invited to Skein. And it's probably...you know, it probably Declan's Corrective and the for—the members of the former Notion and Gumption.

AUSTIN: It has to be more than a visit. I mean, we already kind of set this up, right? Like—

JACK: This is like a land where this is like—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: No, no, invited to have a talk. Like a renegotiation of an alliance.

AUSTIN: Like reopening of negotiations. Okay. They show—

JACK: And as part of that there's an offer made, right? With the—this isn't just like us sitting around the table going like "Well, we'll talk about maybe giving you some land."

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah, this has to be something.

KEITH: Yeah.

JACK: Like, conditional on the negotiations is us giving up land somewhere. Returning land somewhere.

KEITH: Yeah.

ALI: Yeah.

KEITH: I think it's a dedication to returning land and an acknowledgement that there are factions that are looking to leave, just wholecloth, the system.

AUSTIN: Right. I mean, yeah, the Brace's people are not that. The Brace's people generally want to stay. And so that's part of the trickiness here, right?

KEITH: Well isn't there—there's like a ton of people that just happen to be in that territory, right? It's not—

AUSTIN: The people who want to leave with the Waking Cadent are tied to the Waking Cadent and are, like, already going that way, you know?

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: People who are part of Seneschal's Brace and believe in Seneschal's Brace want to stay here.

KEITH: Okay.

ALI: I mean, there is some opening that once places like, I guess, Crown people probably want to stay...but once other planets open up their space when people leave, we'll give you that. But you could also just take—

KEITH: Yeah, that's a big—a big part of it is that if people leave then that goes back to the Qui-Err Coalition.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: It's not—

AUSTIN: So I think it's—yeah, you could like—that's a thing that you could sign on paper. Which is like: we will support that, your claim on future—here's what we're giving you now and we will support your claim on future territory on—like, is that like Altar, Gift-3, Thyrsus...is that—what is that?

ALI: Oh.

AUSTIN: Because that's a big—that's a *big* thing to support. Because if the DFS stays, which it will, it's effectively saying "Hey, we got your back in a fight."

JACK: Yeah. I think that's—

AUSTIN: But if they're not saying that, then that's not gonna raise morale, right? So.

JACK: I think that's something that Fourteen would be prepared to offer and would be prepared to argue for.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: Yeah.

DRE: Yeah, same for Even. Like—

JACK: And in fact, you know, if we really want to—if we want to follow through on this, which I think we should, it has to be more than 'we'll have your back in a fight.'

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: It has to be like, 'If space needs to be made, we will help make that space.'

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: It's not—we're not just gonna say, like "Hey, it's yours. Yeah, go for it!" and then watch as they're just flattened by DFS.

AUSTIN: On top of immediate now—right. And on top of something immediate now with Seneschal or Brighton or both. So ideally maybe add something for Qui-Err there.

ALI: Is that what that is?

AUSTIN: I don't know what that is.

ALI: This little dot.

AUSTIN: Is that a volcano, what is that?

ALI: Is that a duck wearing a big necklace? Like a—

JACK: On Brighton? Is this—

JANINE: It was supposed to be a little hat, I don't—I'm tired.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

KEITH: Wait, where's the hat?

JACK: On Brighton.

ALI: On the bottom.

AUSTIN: It's where Brighton is saying "Ooooooh."

DRE: Oooh.

JANINE: Perspective is hard.

KEITH: Oh, okay [laughs].

AUSTIN: I see it. I get it.

JANINE: It's supposed to be a big boy. With a little tiny face.

ALI: Oh, okay.

JANINE: It just seemed so empty.

AUSTIN: It's very empty.

JANINE: And big.

AUSTIN: Maybe draw like an island or something. That'd be good.

KEITH: Draw a little fish.

JANINE: I don't want to make presumptions.

AUSTIN: Okay [chuckles].

JACK: Is is Skein—I mean, where's the DFS, like—is it that—or do we push for land on the NEH sides of Skein and Moonlock?

ALI: That's kind of the play that I was making 'cause we don't—I mean, like, we want to make more enemies with the NEH than we do with the DFS. Then again, we've already stolen Gumption and have, like—

JACK: Also, I'm prepared to—I'm prepared to—

AUSTIN: You stole Gumption and gave it to someone from the NEH!

JACK: No, he's SB now.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ALI: But he—yeah. No, he's not NEH. That's the point.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Mm-hm.

JACK: I'm prepared to make—I'm prepared to antagonize the DHS. The DHS [laughs]...

AUSTIN: NEH. Uh-huh.

JACK: That is a British furniture store.

[Austin laughs]

AUSTIN: Going to war!

KEITH: It's also the Department of Homeland Security.

JACK: I'm prepared to antagonize DFS for this. I would go to bat for Quire much faster than I would go to bat for the—and Gift-3 has historical significance for Quire.

ALI: Yeah, fair. I was just gonna say Crown is a little bit more tactical for them, but whatever.

JACK: Oh, yeah, that is also something we should consider.

AUSTIN: I mean, you could also just start with "We're going to push them off of Skein and Moonlock and they're yours."

KEITH: Yeah.

ALI: Oh.

AUSTIN: 'Cause right now they're split, right?

ALI: Oh, okay. I didn't—okay, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Oh, so we just say—essentially we redraw that borderline north—Galactic North—of Skein.

AUSTIN: Right. Which we can't do because I drew this in Paint, but like—

JACK: No, but I mean—[laughs]

ALI: Yeah, you can.

KEITH: I want to—I want to make sure—we're also talking about Seneschal too, right? We're not just talking about pushing the—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: —pushing the NEH out but we're also talking about Seneschal's Brace giving up their own land—parts of their own land.

JACK: Yeah, totally.

ALI: Yeah.

KEITH: Okay.

JACK: We're not here saying like "Yeah, they can give up land and we—"

KEITH: "We want our land back!" "Oh, yeah, yeah, we'll take it from the NEH!"

[Austin and Ali laugh]

JACK: Right, right, right. Yeah, exactly.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that would suck actually, so. Alright.

JACK: And I think contingent on this—this is one of these diplomatic documents that's just like four hundred pages long and everyone is assumed to have read and hopefully has.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

KEITH: Yeah. Well luckily, Seneschal's Brace probably wrote most of it.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yeah. Alright, cool. Let's keep moving. We have one more card in this deck. So that is the agreement agreed upon. Alright.

JACK: Wait, is that a—oh, that's morale ticking off, right, I see.

AUSTIN: That's morale ticking off—oh yeah, wait. So did you have an action this turn? Did we do an action this turn already?

KEITH: Yeah, we finished Tender's action.

ALI: Mm-hm.

KEITH: And then went back to redo—

JACK: Yeah, cause we sorted out—we went to the observation station.

AUSTIN: I see, gotcha. Alright, so Grand Magnificent. You got a good one here with the king of morning. King of summer.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Summer is fleeting. Disregard what you see on this card, 'cause it doesn't make any sense. Because we actually have a different one. So.

ART: Oh.

AUSTIN: And I've written over here in my notes. Uh, so, this is fun. The summer—the king of summer for us is advance all clocks twice and *you* take two actions this turn.

JACK: Oh shit! This is an incredible 'Grand Mag is a spy' card!

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: It really is. I'm gonna preemptively tick two clocks, or every clock twice. There we go. There were only two clocks. Oh! Yeah, that's it.

ART: Is that in addition to the normal tick or two ticks total?

AUSTIN: No. No, it's a total of two.

ART: Okay.

AUSTIN: Oh, and the food project also finishes. Finally. Boom! Rapid Evening. Rolls out.

JACK: It's the Rapid Evening's.

KEITH: Rapid Evening has food if you want to join!

AUSTIN: System-wide food! Everybody gets food.

JACK: Oh, so everyone has it.

AUSTIN: Everyone has food. Except for Volition, right?

KEITH: Right.

ALI: Yeah.

ART: That was the original goal, do they get to re-choose who doesn't get?

AUSTIN: No, they get to give it to everybody.

[Jack chuckles]

ALI: Yeah. I thought you could only take it if you wanted to leave though? Or just people are like—it's like free tissues.

KEITH: Or they're just like 'we're bragging, we have all this food.'

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's, it's—you know. I think it's one of those things where, like, you have people who are going now and who are like "Yeah, yeah, yeah we're gonna go. Just send over the food first." And the Rapid Evening's like "Yeah, alright, sure."

JACK: I mean, it is milk.

AUSTIN: It is.

ALI: Tender must get a box of those and be like "What the fuck?!" [laughs]

JACK: [laughs] Yeah, this is very weird for Fourteen and Tender and Grand to just be like "Oh my God, it's real!"

AUSTIN: Um, I think here's the thing to actually think about here. I mean, it is real, which is very funny. People love it, which is great.

KEITH: People love Calciyummm?

AUSTIN: People loooove Calciyummm! The thing that's extra weird here is—I have to—I gave it to Volition, which I didn't mean to do. I also don't think they give it to Advent, right? Advent was gonna get it—nah, you can't undo it. Uh, this is a bit of a coup, a bit of a PR coup. Which is like 'Look, the Rapid Evening's feeding people! If they were gonna come here and kill people, they wouldn't feed them first. So, maybe we can trust these people from the Rapid Evening. And they want to kill Volition; no one else has killed Volition yet.

JACK: Didn't they freeze all our clocks?

AUSTIN: No, that was the—that was Advent. They—

JACK: Didn't the Rapid Evening arrive and do something really petty and violent?

AUSTIN: They made it so that no one could—so that none of them—so no one could, uh give advantage—

JACK: Help each other.

DRE: Help each other, yeah.

AUSTIN: It's different, please.

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: That's what they did. And they—yeah, they stole the food project, that's the other thing that they did.

KEITH: But then they did it.

AUSTIN: Then they did it! So Grand, what are you doing this turn? You get two of 'em. You get two things.

ART: Yeah, I had one really clear—

AUSTIN: Oh—yeah, that's it. Sorry.

ART: —when I thought I was only gonna get one.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ART: Which is I would like to start a project.

AUSTIN: Sure.

ART: One that benefits me, my friends, and family. And luckily, Fourteen let all my friends identify themselves.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh?

[Ali and Jack laugh]

ART: So I think that group is Tender, Echo, Even...

AUSTIN: Okay?

ART: I was just—that was a pause in case anyone wanted to dispute my findings.

AUSTIN: I don't think anyone does.

ART: And I want to send them a perfected Independence plan.

AUSTIN: Ooooh.

ALI: Ohh [laughs].

ART: I want to send them Independence Mark II.

AUSTIN: Fuck.

JACK: Wow.

AUSTIN: This is good?

ART: For which I'm going to spend my Contempt token [Austin laughs] I got from them changing my designs.

AUSTIN: I don't think you need to spend anything to start this project, do you?

ART: I think you need to spend something—

JACK: You can spend to—

ART: Oh, that's to contribute to a project?

AUSTIN: You contribute to a project, you can't—

JACK: Can you start a project and tick it up by spending?

AUSTIN: No. You have to wait to tick it up.

JACK: No, okay.

AUSTIN: You have to wait to tick it up. Wait, so this is only a—but it's still only a three-step thin 'cause you're only sending it to them, right?

ART: It's a two-step thing.

AUSTIN: Oh, 'cause only—yeah, you're right. You're right. Okay.

ART: I do not want to help my faction with this.

AUSTIN: Right. Great.

JACK: It's like the butterfly meme where Grand is looking at the butterfly and the butterfly is 'Meaningful aid' and the subtitle says—[Austin laughs]. No, the butterfly is 'Giving people Independence' and Grand is saying "Is this helpful and meaningful aid?" [Austin laughs]

ART: Well luckily, I have a second action now.

[Ali laughs]

JACK: I'm gonna take it away!

AUSTIN: You do! You do have a second action.

ART: But I don't know that I can meaningfully contribute to these other things...

AUSTIN: I mean, you can now advance Independence Mark II and it will arrive mid-turn next turn, right?

JACK: I mean, is there anything you can do—so a bunch of new clocks are gonna show up, is there anything you can do to maybe bolster or begin to, like, preemptively handle clocks in some way? I don't know.

ART: No, right? I can't, like, investigate a clock that doesn't exist.

JACK: Yeah, that doesn't exist, no.

ART: Because they don't show up until the end of this turn, right? Austin?

AUSTIN: Sorry, say one more time?

ART: The new clocks don't show up til this turn is over-over?

AUSTIN: Correct. Those new clocks don't exist yet.

ART: Is there anything worth stealing? Who has something they shouldn't have?

AUSTIN: Everybody.

ART: Because if I expend a resource to take something from someone, we're really getting two takeaways.

JACK: Mmm.

AUSTIN: Wait, why? Oh, yes.

JACK: Because Grand has a—

ART: 'Cause I can take it away from Advent.

AUSTIN: So long as you're not giving it to Advent.

ART: Well a light attack just reduces a resource.

AUSTIN: Yeah, a light attack will reduce a resource; a medium attack will reduce it all the way to scarcity.

ART: Okay...I can do that. What's a thing that would be nice to go down two levels?

AUSTIN: You could...

JACK: A thing that might be interesting would be—no, that's not honest.

ART: We could—I could bump Iconoclast down two levels.

JACK: I was looking at fear. I was thinking, what does it look if the Mirage sees people attempting to strike that thing in the middle and goes "Yeah, we might be able to do this." But at the same time, Volition is *fucking* terrifying. And to say "Oh, no one's scared of that anymore," is not true.

ART: Well, what if—

KEITH: You could take away its DIY knowledge.

AUSTIN: It's on the way. It's already happening.

KEITH: Oh right, we're already doing that. Yep, you're right.

AUSTIN: You could just—you could just do it internally. Though that's kind of a waste, right?

ART: And I'll get caught.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah.

KEITH: Well, says who?

AUSTIN: You could hit another one, but yeah.

JACK: But also we might want Grand to have—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Like, shouldn't Grand take away stuff by using it?

AUSTIN: Yes.

ART: Yeah, like, that's just using my ability to attack later.

JACK: Yeah.

ART: Maybe—maybe I should Prophecy?

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's not bad?

JACK: Where's that to?

AUSTIN: It's Rapid Evening.

JACK: Oh, in the Rapid Evening. Oh shit. Would that fuck with Crystal Palace in some way?

AUSTIN: We'll see.

ART: Prophecy is bigger than Weapons, right?

JACK: Or Stealth. Stealth for the Rapid Evening is maybe a real problem.

ART: Alright, I could hit Stealth, probably.

KEITH: Also Weapons, that's the—

[Jack and Ali laugh]

KEITH: You know what, I'm gonna say anything that you hit the Rapid Evening or Volition for...totally worth it.

ART: I'm gonna take Prophecy. I feel like Prophecy's gonna make it easier to take everything else.

JACK: It's kind of their whole thing, isn't it?

AUSTIN: So what's that look like? So what is it, a medium attack?

ART: This is a medium attack.

AUSTIN: Alright. What's the—what is it that you're doing and what is the game? And what are you spending?

KEITH: Wait, can we acknowledge the pun of taking away Prophecy with a medium attack?
[chuckles]

AUSTIN: Ahh, that's pretty good.

JACK: Oh my God.

AUSTIN: It's pretty good! It's pretty good.

ART: I will not [Austin and Keith laugh]. I will not acknowledge that.

KEITH: That's fine.

ART: A risky scene...

AUSTIN: And how do you do it?

ART: That's a great question.

AUSTIN: Last time it was by blinding Crystal Palace with a giant super-gun. Super light-gun.

ART: Um...I could—I can make a blinding gun but I don't want to go do it.

KEITH: Super helpful.

ART: Yeah, I'm workin' on it.

AUSTIN: You could...again, we could do it as a chase, where you're deploying this thing. We could do it as a...

ART: Could I be delivering it and intercepted? Because they have Prophecy to know that that's what I'm doing?

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes. A hundred percent.

ART: Alright.

JACK: Wait, delivering what?

AUSTIN: Whatever this—you're, like, you're putting something into position, right? To actually—

JACK: It's another bomb?

AUSTIN: It's another—it's like a light-bomb. It's like a, it's like a—I guess maybe this is like—are you doing it the other direction? So that what you're blinding is not Crystal Palace but blinding the—how would you do that? They're hidden. Hmmm. They have Stealth, you don't know where they are. I think you—I think that that's hard. I'm think that I'm trying to respect the fiction here; I don't know that you can hit their Prophecy without hitting their Stealth first.

ART: Alright, I'll hit Stealth. How do I—how do you hit Stealth?

AUSTIN: You gotta find them. You gotta ferret out their secret agents, right?

ART: Alright.

JACK: I mean, it could also be the same thing, right, of like you try to send the bomb and then the stealth fighters come for you, because they have Prophecy.

AUSTIN: Right, but the stealth fighters aren't the thing that gives them Stealth.

JACK: Oh, yeah, that's true, they have a kind of—yeah.

AUSTIN: They're just—they have hidden places all throughout the place, right? They're ferreted away on every planet, throughout the Shore, they have lots of sleeper agents...

ART: I mean, could I spend—could I spend Information Control to ferret out sleeper agents?

AUSTIN: Oh yeah. Yes. So that's one. What's the second thing? Oh, just—is that your Contempt?

ART: Yeah, and I'll spend Contempt. And then, I think I still want to do a chase and I'll just chase a sleeper agent instead.

AUSTIN: And you're just doing—you're just doing medium or heavy?

ART: Medium.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: I don't want to gain Stealth.

AUSTIN: Oh, right. Right, right, right [laughs]. I forgot who you were. Right, good. Alright, so yeah, are you being chased away with the knowledge? Or are you—I kind of like that more, that's like the—a little bit more film noir vibe. You've successfully—you've gotten the microfiche that has the names of Rapid Evening agents.

ART: Sure.

AUSTIN: And you're on, like, a planet we haven't—You're on Thyrsus, you're on—it's a snowy, icy, like, spy planet. It already is that, and now also you learn that the Rapid Evening have—not, like, taken it over but have a number of—that's where they were storing this information. Or we could have it be on a space station, it's up to you.

ART: No, I like the ice planet. 'Cause, like, I think we can have a little bit of—we can interject a little physical comedy because Grand is not good at this.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Remember that you have to win for this to work.

ART: Yeah, I can slip and fall—like, Jackie Chan wins hases all the time!

AUSTIN: Okay [laughs]. True.

[Jack chuckles]

AUSTIN: Okay. So who is chasing you, let's see. Can I tell you who it is? 'Cause there's two more, we got two more. So Castlerose threw in with Advent. Because whenever she gets a chance to move on and support someone new who's in power, she's gonna do it. And this time it is...McCartney and MacManus, who are the two music agents again. And so it is just Paul McCartney and Elvis Costello chasing you through this snow city.

JACK: Wait, real quick.

AUSTIN: Yeah?

JACK: Can we get spaceships and outfits for these people?

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. The name of the spaceship is the *Veronica*.

JACK: Okay [laughs].

AUSTIN: And it looks like a harmonica.

JACK: [laughs] Cool.

AUSTIN: The outfits...let's see...[typing] Paul MccCartney...outfits.

ART: I mean, it's really the cover of Sgt. Pepper or nothing, as far as I'm concerned.

JACK: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's pretty good. That's pretty good. Let's do that. It's them, Yeah, uh-huh. Good. Done. Alright. How's this game work? Let's see...You are the quarry so you're conducting the chase. Where are you going?

ART: Um—

AUSTIN: Do you have an escape ship to get to?

ART: I was thinking more like a safehouse?

AUSTIN: Okay!

ART: But I guess I sort of have to like...lose them, but only for a little bit. You only need to be like two turns ahead of someone for a safehouse to work, you know?

AUSTIN: Right. It's like an anti—is it like an anti-Rapid Evening group? You just know someone who set up a safehouse? Did you set up a safehouse? Did Advent set up a safehouse for you?

ART: I think it's an Advent safehouse.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: I think it's part of Advent being on every planet now.

AUSTIN: Gotcha. Alright, cool I have a thing. Alright, so say where you—so that's where you've said you've gone. Lead the hunter through a series of four challenges and admissions. Choose

freely, except the third one must be an admission. So you see that on the other page?
Challenges and admissions?

ART: Yeah. So it's four challenges. The third one has—four total things.

AUSTIN: Yes.

ART: And the third one *has* to be an admission.

AUSTIN: Yes. And you can make an admission earlier than that if you think you should [laughs].

ART: But like, always the third one must—

AUSTIN: Must be.

ART: So first or second could be.

AUSTIN: Third must be.

ART: Third has to be. Yeah. Alright. I'm just gonna start with my Jackie Chan moment. I slip on treacherous ground and scramble to keep my footing. Throw: on heads, you slide to overtake me and so gain two coins. That's ice planet-y.

AUSTIN: That is. Alright, I'll throw. One is heads, two is tails...two is tails. So, I don't gain any coins, fuck. Alright. Next one.

ART: Um—

AUSTIN: So you've slid down this ice hill.

ART: Yeah, I did great.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. We've described this city once in—or, Thrysus's cities back in this Quiet Year. And it was, like, big ice bubbles that people lived and worked in. Is that right, Janine?

JANINE: It was like—[clears throat] I think I originally pitched it as 'If an ice hotel was all half outdoors.' I think the cafe that Cascara and Signet met in had bubbles, had that kind of like Icelandic hotel bubble in the middle of whatever.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Where you're all cozy but it's all snowy outside. But I think the general structures are kind of like if an ice hotel had interior walls but no exterior walls.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Or like only partial exterior walls, or—my inspiration for it also had pictures of Russian subways in it. Like subway stops.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: That kind of thing.

AUSTIN: Right. That works. Challenge or admission?

ART: I race along a high and perilous ledge. Follow me if you dare but throw: on tails you have to slow to pick your way carefully along, and I gain a coin.

AUSTIN: Alright, one is heads, two is tails...tails! I have to slow to pick my way carefully along. So we just get these two guys in Sgt. Pepper's uniforms walking along the ledge of a second or third floor hotel and Grand is just *moving* and they are not. They are being very cautious. Three: this one has to be an admission, I think, right?

ART: Yeah. What kind of idiot was I to do an extra admission?

AUSTIN: I don't know! I don't know what kind! I was confused!

ART: I was really just trying to make it fun [laughs].

AUSTIN: It was! It was very funny!

ART: But I'm at a position now where I can automatically lose, is that right? [laughs]

AUSTIN: Mm, no. 'Cause you might win this one.

ART: Oh, okay.

AUSTIN: You have to win this one though.

ART: I risk leaving the trail and standing quiet while you race past [laughs]. Throw [Austin laughs]: on heads you spot me and don't overshoot and so gain two coins.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Ohhhh, boy. That's a good move. That's a good move...[Art yells] Oh, buddy. That's a one. That's—

ART: Do I get to win or can I tie?

AUSTIN: You—I don't think you can even tie at this point.

ART: No, I can. We're two to one.

AUSTIN: Oh, you're right.

ART: But if I tie, what happens?

AUSTIN: If you tie—if the hunter has as many coins or you as more you—if you have more coins than the hunter, you break away and escape. If the hunter has as many coins as you or more, choose one.

ART: And they're all bad.

AUSTIN: None of them are great.

ART: Okay, so I'm gonna do the Hail Mary.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh!

ART: I'll leap out over nothing and make a hard, precarious landing. Follow me if you dare, but throw. On heads, you gain one coin. One tails though, you barely catch yourself. You're clinging on with all your strength and the chase ends now, with you at my mercy.

[Jack sighs]

AUSTIN: Do they go for it?

ART: Yeah, or fuck off.

JACK: [laughs] That's what it says at the end of the thing: "Yeah, or fuck off".

AUSTIN: Oh I've already—this is all fucked up. I just realized this is all fucked up. they're not chasing you. Because they're Castlerose and Castlerose is Advent, not RE. I forgot how bad you were. I forgot which part of the bad—I was like "Okay, I gotta give him some bad guys, uh, I'll give him Advent." *You're Advent*. So this is not who's been chasing you.

JACK: [laughs] Oh noooo!

AUSTIN: We're gonna fix it in post...we're not gonna fix it in post, I'm just—leave all this in. So it's not, in fact, our very good—I think maybe this moment happens and the entire thing kind of [laughs] rewrites itself, as like from a goofy Jackie Chan chase scene against two Sgt. Peppers

to like, “Oh no, that’s right. It’s two Rapid Evening people who are ready to die for the fucking cause,” right? I’m gonna roll for them. And that’s a heads. So they gain a coin.

[Jack inhales]

ART: Oh, I really needed that tails.

AUSTIN: You did. If it had been the two people I said it was, they would not have gone for it. But I fully forgot who they were with! Because it’s late and I haven’t eaten too much yet today. So they—you make that leap. You leap from the side of this hotel down onto a rooftop below. A lower rooftop. And I think just, like, they do it too and make it look good, you know? And they’re just two Rapid Evening agents. So it is your thing now. If the hunter has as many coins as you or more, choose one.

ART: Okay. I’ve come to some temporary security. A wall or a tree to climb, a door I can lock behind me, here is where I go to ground. So I get to the safehouse.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: I just didn’t get there—they just know where I am.

AUSTIN: They know where you are, you’re just locked in there?

ART: Yeah, it’s just a standoff.

AUSTIN: [delighted] Oh boy.

ART: It’s a siege.

AUSTIN: How do we resolve this?

ART: I mean, so many ways [laughs, Austin laughs]. From very dark, you know, they could just burn the building down.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Scorched earth.

ART: To, you know, this could be some peril we can deal with in the next season. Or some third thing, those are just my two things.

AUSTIN: I think they capture you. I think if someone wants you, they’re gonna have to come rescue you.

ART: See, I think that goes against the spirit of the end I chose.

AUSTIN: I mean—

ART: I think if I'm stuck, I'm here.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. You can be stuck here. In your safehouse. That's, like, a jail all your own.

ART: It's a jail with TV, probably.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, totally. And, like, some food. They don't put food in jails, but you know what I'm saying.

ART: [laughs] Right.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Can you send a message out.

ART: Probably one. I probably got the first one out.

AUSTIN: Great. So what is it?

ART: I mean, I think the real question is: who is it to?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: 'Cause the message is like "Trapped by Rapid Evening. Send help."

AUSTIN: [laughs] I think it can hit the table. I think we can see who saves you.

ART: Um—

AUSTIN: Or it can be to a specific person. I, you know, I'm up for whichever one you think is more interesting for your character.

JANINE: Who's he, like, geographically closest—space geographically—closest to? Like if he sends a message out to friendly signals, who does it hit first?

AUSTIN: You, probably. Yeah, it's you.

JANINE: I would be okay with that.

ART: I think the real answer is, it just blind copies to his whole address book.

[Austin, Jack, and rest of table laugh]

ART: Like everyone in the Notion, everyone who's ever talked to him in Advent.

AUSTIN: The truckers he used to work with.

[Janine chuckles]

ART: The truckers, Cascabel—

AUSTIN: Morning's Observation.

ART: Morning's Observation.

AUSTIN: All the—yeah. Demani Dusk and—

ART: Waltz Tango Cache—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ART: Just everyone. "Stole from the Rapid Evening. They've caught me. I'm stuck here. Peace."

[Music: [Twilight](#) plays to end]