

The Road to PALISADE 18: Upstairs & Downstairs Pt. 1

Transcriber: Anachilles#0191 (Live at the Table version); thehreadbiter (intro and edits)

[Sounds of background chatter]

Unknown Speaker 1: Dinner's ready!

Austin (as Unknown 2): Thanks, honey. Just give people a few more seconds... Okay.

[Loud mic interference]

[Metal clinking on glass]

Austin (as Unknown 2): Hey. Hey, hey everybody. Hi. First of all, I just wanted to say, thank you so much for being here. I know that travel right now, even with the new laws... I know it took a lot for people to get here, so thank you. I know for a while we weren't even sure if... We weren't even sure if we would, uh, do this, this year, given everything. But it is important. You know, Keftin, um, Keftin normally does this. But well, I think since we lost him this year, I would, um, I would try to do my best to keep the holiday spirit alive, keep his spirit alive.

[["Permanent Peace"](#) by Jack de Quidt starts playing]

You know, Keft used to, every year since the first time we celebrated, he used to tell me that this was one of our earliest holidays as a *people*. Like, *old* old. Older than the Stels. You know the story. Our enemies had killed, um – how did he say it? He would say, "Our enemies had driven us to the stars. They'd killed our gods. Almost all of them. But we held out hope. And we prayed. And the Divines that we had left, they prayed too, and human or synthetic or Apostolosian, we all came together and hoped that a new Divine would show up and save us. And we tried to build one and it didn't work, and the Divines tried to will one into existence and it didn't work, and the synthetics tried to develop themselves into Divines and it didn't work. And then one day we realized Patina was right there with us all along."

And that's why it was important to Keftin and it's why it's important to me, still. You know, like a lot of us these days, we're a mixed family, and it's a reminder, we might be neighbors or enemies, we might be Apostolosian or Kesh or Pact or Bilateral Commission or Orion, but whatever we are, we're not alone.

[Audio cuts]

Austin (as Layer Luxurious): My name is Layer Luxurious, but the name of the man speaking a moment ago? That was lost to history, the video's metadata pointing only to a small city on a small planet which unfortunately became caught up in the war just days after this was recorded. But I do know one thing. Listen past the bad audio quality and the inaccurate story of Patina and you'll find a regular person caught up in something too big to make sense of. This show has focused a lot on magnates and ministers, gentry and generals, but today we're focused on regular people. We're going downstairs.

["Permanent Peace" concludes]

Austin: Welcome to Friends at the Table, an actual play podcast focused on critical world-building, smart characterization, and fun interaction between good friends. I'm your host, Austin Walker, and joining me today, Jack de Quidt.

Jack: Hello. You can find me on Twitter at [@notquitereal](https://twitter.com/notquitereal), and buy any of the music featured on the show at notquitereal.bandcamp.com.

Austin: Sylvi Bullet.

Sylvi: Hey, I'm Sylvia, you can — so, I know I wasn't on Twitter for a little bit —

Austin: Ah, yes.

Sylvi: But it —

Austin: Ah, I don't think that that — that might not have happened, though, on an intro. You may never — you may have never skipped an intro.

Sylvi: I have definitely mentioned it on an intro.

Austin: Okay. Okay.

Sylvi: I know that I have.

Austin: Okay, okay.

Jack: Welcome back, Sylvi.

Sylvi: Yeah, uh...

Austin: You really joined, you really rejoined Twitter at a great time.

Sylvi: Things were trending upwards, you know?

Austin: Yeah, you —

Sylvi: Comedy is allowed again.

Austin: Oh my god. [laughing]

Sylvi: Sorry.

Austin: Eugh, hell.

Sylvi: Anyway, if you want to follow me on Twitter again, you can go to [@god'snextmartyr](#). Mom, if you're listening to this, don't text me about it. It'll be fine. I'll probably change it at some point.

Jack and Austin: [laughing]

Sylvi: Also, if you go to your podcast feed and type in Emojidrome 2.0, you can hear my other podcast, where I'm doing this on a wider scale.

Austin: People should do that, I agree. Uh, Janine Hawkins?

Janine: Hey, I'm [@bleatingheart](#) on Twitter. And, tomorrow's the last episode of The Witching Hour for this year.

Austin: That's true. We have to finish Dragon's Dogma.

Jack: Yo.

Janine: We're gonna fight a dragon, which I've been saying for a week and a half now, but it's going to actually happen.

Jack: Doesn't — does the — correct me if I'm wrong, doesn't the dragon in Dragon's Dogma have a really cool name, doesn't he have like a person name?

Austin: Yes, he does. Do you want me to — do you, do you know —

Jack: He's called like, Victor or something, what's his name?

Janine: Prichard.

Austin: It's Grigori.

Ali: What?

Jack: Oh, Grigori! Isn't that great?

Austin: Grigori, yeah, it's great. He's so good.

Jack: I just love that there's a dragon just called, like, Michael.

Austin: It's Greg, basically, right?

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: It's like, a name you could imagine a dragon saying, too, though.

Austin: Grigori... yeah, he has a great voice. Everything — listen, everything about the dragon —

Jack: Does he have like a sort of Russian accent, or...

Austin: He has like a — well, no, he speaks in a different language —

Jack: He speaks in Latin or something —

Austin: Yeah, he speaks in Latin — I think that's actually true, Jack. I believe, I believe he speaks in Latin.

Jack: That's sick as hell

Sylvi: Are you sure?

Austin: There was a —

Jack: Do you have a memory, Sylvi, of him just talking?

Sylvi: I feel like he spoke English to me.

Austin: It has been — okay. Okay. It, it has been claimed — I mean, it's translated. It has been claimed that Grigori's speech and other instances of wyrmspeak is spoken in Latin in the game. However, no full matching translation of these lines have yet been provided. And an alternative claim is that the lines are gibberish. One proposed Latin translation of the speech thing is... da-da-da-da-da. So it's...

Jack: That's great.

Austin: Yeah. Uh-huh.

Jack: I mean, while we're on games that are in Latin, I've been playing the Faith Unholy trilogy recently, which is a pixel art horror game.

Austin: Right, yes.

Jack: That just came out on Steam, it's really is interesting as a really, really cool rotoscoped art style.

Austin: It looks gorgeous, it's wild.

Jack: Uh, it's terrifying. All of the menu text, uh, and most of the text in the game, is in Latin, but is translated to English when you mouse over it. Uh, and it turns out that seeing a character say, “what I am about to do has not been approved by the Vatican,” in Latin, is a fucking incredible way to, to —

Austin: Oh, that's so good.

Jack: Experience a game.

Sylvi: That's what I say when I wake up in the morning.

Jack: Yeah, uh-huh. That's the only way to be, Sylvi.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: Uh, also, Ali Acampora is here.

Ali: Yeah, hi. I'm here as well, uh...

Austin: Hi, Ali.

Ali: [giggling] You can find the show over at [friends_table](#), and you can find another podcast that I'm on over at [more_civilized](#), if you're a fan of Star Wars.

Austin: That's true. You should be watching And — if you are excited for Palisade [chuckles] — if you enjoy Partizan, you should be watching Andor.

Sylvi: And listening to the More Civilized age episodes about it, more importantly.

Austin: More importantly.

Sylvi: [chuckling] We're promo-ing your stuff.

Austin: Yes, you're right, thank you.

Sylvi: [laughing]

Austin: Yeah, Disney doesn't need us to fucking promote anything, right?

Sylvi: Mm-hm.

Austin: Uh, especially know that we know that the person who said that Andor was not getting good views was just wrong. Was just wrong — I don't know if y'all saw that. He made this big, this like, analytics guy was like, “ugh, Andor's numbers are in the toilet. Truly terrible.”

Jack: [laughing]

Austin: And then the next week he was like, “ah, mmm, I put in the, I put the numbers in wrong.” Classic data analytics guy.

Jack: That's so funny.

Sylvi: Yeah, classic analytics guy, being wrong. [chuckles]

Austin: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Jack: All data analysts know how to do is input numbers wrong. That's their whole deal.

Austin: Ugh... [laughing]

Jack: And then misinterpret what they read.

Austin: So, today, we are playing Upstairs Downstairs, a hack of John Harper's Lasers and Feelings, uh, by... a person whose name I have in my notes, Richard, da-da-da, Richard — their account name is Richard Rex.

Jack: Richard Adcock.

Austin: Richard Adcock. There we go. It's on the document, isn't it? Yes. I see. I have a split, I have a, I split the line in my notes, and so it was, it literally says, "Upstairs Downstairs is a Lasers and Feelings hack by..." and then there's nothing next to it. Uh...

Jack: [laughing]

Austin: Today, we are doing, uh, Janine, your pitch from the Crunchyroll interview from last year. Do you remember what you said the pitch was?

Janine: Uh, I believe it was something to the effect of wanting, uh, Kaoru Mori's Anna... Emma? Emma.

Austin: Emma. Emma.

Janine: Why do I always want to call it Anna? Uh, Emma, uh, but with a, with a Kesh household.

Austin: That is, that is what you said. And so, Upstairs and Downstairs is how we're going to do that. We thought about doing it in a bigger game. We thought about going back to, uh, what is the — I always forget the name of this game, the Jane Austen —

Ali: Good Society.

Austin: Good Society. Which we had a great time with last year, for, two years ago? Whenever we did the Good Society game. Time. Time. Who can say? But it's such a, it's such a long thing, and the Road has already been quite a bit longer than I think we anticipated, because of how long things like Lancer and Orbital went. Uh, you'll also note that, if you're looking at this on Patreon, you'll see that this is the January 2023 Live at the Table. [chuckles] Uh, this is for next year. [chuckles]

Ali: Yep.

Austin: Uh, so we're a little ahead of the curve on those. Uh, and so, that is, that is, again, we — wanted to keep to something a little bit, a little bit tighter. We've played Lasers and Feelings and games derived by, hacked by Lasers and Feelings on the show before. They're very fun. This one has a unique premise, it says it is a game about kinship, class, and desperate circumstances.

Quote: you are an aristocratic family and their staff at a French chateau during World War I. It is the fall of 1915 and the Western Front grows ever closer. Your tasks — your tasks are to assess your position, ensure your own survival, and preserve the estate. The Count has been overcome by tuberculosis, leaving you to fend for yourselves while he slowly perishes. [chuckles] Uh, we are obviously shifting that a little bit, you know, on this, one of the things of like, GM, create the threat of impending doom. The examples here are things like, the threat: a platoon of German troops. Or, rioting commoners — I mean, we can have rioting commoners, that can be there. Really, we're just not in France, we are just not on the Earth. We are instead going to be playing in a, a Kesh household. I believe I'm calling this the Solstice, this is the Solstice family, the Solstice house. Uh, I mean, maybe the house has a different name. You know, obviously sometimes an estate has a different name than the actual family that runs it.

Uh, but, uh, that is, that is, I know — here's the things I know. I know that, uh, this Kesh household is hosting an envoy. Uh, is hosting someone named Exanceaster March. And March is a Columnar magnate, has been an important figure in Stel Columnar for his whole life. Uh, uh, his family has been important in Columnar society since before they joined the Principality. And they've been friends with this Kesh household for those thousands of years now. Very tight allies. Uh, this family has, has fallen into harder and harder circumstances, uh, uh, while the March household has, has risen to greater and greater heights. Uh, you may recall that there is a civil war on [chuckles] between the two sides of the Principality. These two sides are on, these two families, the Kesh and the March — or, this isn't the Kesh family, but this Kesh family, again, which I'm calling the Solstice family, and the March family from Columnar, are on opposite sides of that war, at least as of now.

Uh, and in my mind, the, the Solstice family has sort of been tapped to try to bring this, this March, this March fellow over onto the side of Stel Kesh in this war. Uh, uh, and so there has been a, there's a sort of, you know, hustle and bustle in the house. There's a sort of, everyone is prepping for a big, important dinner party, a big, important visit from this very, very, uh, important figure from Stel Columnar. That's about where my pitch is. You know, I have some,

I have some NPC names, I know who's coming to dinner, I know who's coming with the, uh, March household, et cetera. But, uh, beyond that, I don't know who y'all are playing, and we can just make characters, or you all can just all make characters in the very simple way that Upstairs and Downstairs, and Lasers and Feelings by extension, always allow us to. Any high-level questions about the situation, as it stands right now, before we make characters?

Jack: Is there any precedent for this, in terms of Columnar families being drawn into the Bilat?

Austin: I have — which, I have, an important thing you just said was Bilat, uh, uh, a thing that, if you haven't listened to the last episode, I believe that's where we first, or no, was it, was it two episodes ago now? Was it Serious Reading that we rolled out Bilat?

Jack: It was Serious Reading, yeah.

Austin: Okay. Uh —

Jack: Rolling out the Bilat, much as the Princept did. [chuckles]

Austin: Much as the Princept did. So, for, for people, maybe, who have not listened to those past ones, the terms have changed. In the same way that, if you're a classic, if you're a Gundam fan, the first war was fought by Zeon and the Earth Federation, and the second one was between the Titans and, uh, a bunch of various groups, depending on who you're looking at, I guess, on the rebel side. Here, we have, we now — the Pact of Necessary Venture has become the Pact of Free States, a little echo of the old Divine Free States organization. And the, what was once the Curtain has now become the Bilateral Intercession, the Bilats. Uh, the Intercession. Still Kesh and Nideo on that side, still Columnar and Apostolos on the Pact side. Also, we can still say the Pact for them, so that's nice and easy. Is there precedent? Yes, in the sense that we've always been careful about saying that the Stels map one to one. There's always some exception, you know what I mean?

Jack: Right.

Austin: There's always some, you know, super, quote/unquote, “progressive” Kesh family that maybe has decided to side with the Pact, right? You can imagine, in a different world, that, uh, Gucci Garantine could have become a Pact member, right? And Gucci is a Kesh person, right? Is from Kesh originally. So it's easy to imagine it happening that way. Uh, you know, the Pact of Necessary Venture had a representative from every, uh, uh, Stel originally, or had an elect from

every Stel originally. So it's easily imaginable that their households, or their, you know, entourages, stayed with the Pact. And likewise, you can imagine that there's some sort of like ultratraditional Apostolosean, you know, general who decided to stay with, uh, the Curtain, now the Bilateral Intercession. So there's always been exceptions, but what I don't think has happened is this sort of like, uh, we've not seen onscreen this attempt to kind of bring somebody over, to pull someone over from the other side. And I would say that this is probably one of the bigger examples of that. This is like, you know, pulling over someone who has a great deal of industrial wealth and power, and huge amounts of connections, and, uh, uh, Exanceaster March is the head of a, uh, uh, an important technological firm, and like, big data business called the Frontier Syndicate. They like, helped build the, I don't know if people remember this about the Columnar, but in the era before they were part of the Stels, before they were part of the Principality, they used to do this thing where they would like upload their consciousnesses into like a center server, and then everything would kind of be averaged out —

Jack: Oh yeah!

Austin: And that would be like, how they made, they like made —

Sylvi: Right! [laughing]

Austin: Decisions for, like, politics and local policy and stuff. The Marches built that system. They designed that system —

Jack: It had a name, right? What was that thing called?

Austin: Uh, I, I literally just had to reference it in an intro, because Exanceaster March, and that was — Jack, you may recall, I messaged you [chuckles] two weeks ago and was like, “hey, I need you to read these 6 things.”

Jack: [chuckles] Yeah.

Austin: That was in a conversation with Exanceaster March. It was the something-perspective system?

Jack: I've just looked it up on the great Friends at the Table wiki, at FATT.wiki.

Austin: Mmm, yes.

Jack: Uh, it's called Perspective Blending.

Austin: Yes, The Assimilative Perspective System, or, yeah, it's Perspective Blending. Love to, love to build the democracy algorithm. [chuckles] Uh, so yeah, that's who's coming, the person who is the, the current scion of that family. Uh, so yeah, no one's done that particular, you know, again, I don't want to say no one. We haven't seen onscreen that this has happened before, that someone has been coo, you know, I almost said couped. Wooed over, from one side to another. [chuckles] You can coo in a, in a wooing attempt? You can do a little pigeon coo, and just bring someone over.

Ali: Mmm.

Austin: Uh, anyway. So yeah. So I think that's the setup here. But I would ask that the bulk of you not be from the family, and instead be from the Downstairs. I'm happy to have one person be an Upstairs person and even two and two, but I don't want three Upstairs people and then one —

Jack: [chuckling]

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: I mean, I guess I — that would also be funny, but —

Sylvi: [laughing]

Austin: But it feels brutal for the Downstairs person. Any other questions before we do create characters, which, I've given everybody note cards. I'll switch us over on the screen to my very ugly, uh, you know, uh, what do you call it, screen. Let's see, Chrome, let me make sure I'm on the right one. Uh, it's YouTube, no, nope, that's my intros. Let's not go to that, let's not spoil future stuff. Uh, where did I put Roll20 at? I thought it was on here. No, that's wrong. Uh... sorry, I've just — I've lost, oh, there it is, there's Roll20. Okay. Pull that over, close that. Why is OBS like this sometimes? All right, there we go. So, everybody has a note card at the top. Feel free to claim one at write your name on the top. Uh, players create characters. Each player should grab a note card to record their character details. First, choose a role for your character. Downstairs roles are things like butler, chef du cuisine, scullery maid, manservant slash maidservant, stable boy, gardener, or nursemaid. Upstairs include countess, eldest son, daughter, young son, ward, visiting distant cousin, estranged half-sibling, et cetera. [chuckles]

Uh, I'm happy to have anybody be any role here, including whoever the head of this household is. But, again, I'd love to keep the balance towards the Downstairs if, if possible.

Jack: I would like to play a Downstairs character, and I would like to play — the gardener!

Austin: Love this. So we have a gardener. Uh, any other immediate, immediate — ooh, and a name, instantly. Look at that. Any other strong feelings here? Oop, go ahead, Ali.

Ali: I could be a maidservant, if no one is calling dibs here. Laying out outfits, helping people get dressed in the morning. [laughing]

Austin: Ain't that the stuff?

Ali: Bringing up trays.

Austin: Uh-huh.

Jack: Carrying trays around.

Ali: Having heart-to-hearts.

Austin: Maid stuff.

Ali: [laughing]

Austin: Janine, this is all maid stuff, right? You're my expert on this.

Ali: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Janine: That's, that's basically the premise of most of the shit that Kaoru Mori has written about maids, so sure.

Ali: [laughing]

Austin: Uh-huh. Whether it's true or not, that is how maids get —

Ali: [laughing]

Janine: That's very, that's very — uh, that's less Emma, more Shirley. Although I guess Emma has a lot of it, too. But Shirley has a lot of that.

Jack: Oh my god. We are at a point in time here where we could have a Fran Drescher nanny character.

Sylvi: Oh my god. Oh my god.

Ali: Excuse me?

Jack: I just, I just want to make, I just want to speak this into the world.

Janine: I was going to say, Ali, do you want to, do you want to change your direction?

Ali: [laughing]

Austin: [laughing]

Sylvi: Oh my god.

Jack: You don't have to, I just wanted to, [chuckles] just speak it into the world, you know?

Austin: Oh, you've spoken it into the world, my friend.

Ali: [cackling]

Austin: Sounds like we have 2 downstairs, so that means we still could get a third. And I'm not going to say no to four downstairs characters, it just means that I'll end up playing people from upstairs, you know what I mean? More people from upstairs.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Ali: Mm-hm.

Janine: What do you think, Sylvi? Do you, is someone like, speaking to you? Is there something you're more excited about? Or, because I'll just go with whatever.

Sylvi: Yeah, I'm...

Janine: I'm truly —

Sylvi: I'm going to be the second daughter of the family.

Austin: Ooh, I love that.

Janine: Uh, I think I would like to be, this is kind of on par with stable boy, but I would like to be a lady mechanic.

Jack: Oh, hell yeah.

Austin: A lady mechanic?

Ali: Oh...

Janine: Yeah, not a mechanic of ladies, but a mechanic —

Austin: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Sorry. Yeah. Uh-huh.

Ali: [laughing] You sure?

Janine: My original concept, my original thing that I was thinking about earlier today, was someone who is most of the time a mechanic, but if they have guests over who need an extra lady's maid, then she swaps over to that, because she knows how to like, curl hair.

Austin: Right, sure sure sure. I love that. That's very fun. Uh, okay. As people think about names, the next thing, of course, is style. There are example styles — foppish, austere, cheeky, self-serious, daring, forward-thinking, sexy, and world-weary. Tag yourself.

Jack: [chuckling] Oh my god.

Austin: I'm taking world-weary, obviously. Also, self-serious. Obviously. [chuckles]

Sylvi: I am still stuck on a name, so...

Austin: Uh, can I give you a limitation? Can I give you —

Sylvi: The last name has to be Solstice.

Austin: And the first name should start with a C.

Sylvi: Okay. That is very helpful.

Ali: Oh.

Austin: I can tell you some family members, if that helps.

Sylvi: No, I think I can —

Austin: [chuckling] Okay.

Sylvi: I think I can figure it out. Actually, you know what? Send me those.

Austin: I'll send you those.

Sylvi: I should probably know my family's names. Actually, you can put those in the chat. Everyone should know them, they work here.

Austin: Everyone, everyone will know that. Yeah, yeah, yeah, of course. Yes.

Sylvi: [chuckling] It would be very funny if y'all had to [laughing] guess everyone's name.

Austin: Very funny. Uh, one second.

Jack: Is your name... Carlisle? No. Okay. Is your name... [laughing]

Sylvi: And they're all named after Cullens.

Austin: God, that's so funny.

Sylvi: Carlisle [unintelligible]

Jack: Carlisle... Carlisle is maybe my favorite of the Cullens, outside of Edward.

Sylvi: Respectable. I've always been an Alice girl, you know?

Jack: Alice is fun, Alice is the one with pre-cog — well, sort of limitedly pre-cognitive powers, right?

Sylvi: Yeah.

Jack: There's... And then there's the confederate, the one who was a confederate.

Sylvi: Yeah, that's her boyfriend.

Jack: Is he the one who also keeps wanting to eat people?

Austin: Oh my god, right? I forgot about that.

Jack: Like, incessantly?

Sylvi: Yes, because he's the youngest of them, I believe. Or the newest.

Jack: And then there's, then there's the, the beefy one, who I forgot was a Cullen.

Sylvi: I can't remember his name.

Jack: And he keeps showing up, and I'm like, what's your deal?

He's big.

Jack: He's a big fella. And he's strong. And he fights, is that him? Victoria? The evil vampire? Played by Jessica Chastain? She gets replaced by Jessica Chastain at some point?

Sylvi: I think so... Yes, yes. The cast of those movies gets wild. Rami Malek's in the last one.

Jack: Woah! That's the only one I haven't seen.

Sylvi: It's like a bit part.

Jack: I'm excited.

Sylvi: It's very funny.

Jack: I like the Twilight movies.

Sylvi: Great.

Jack: Good movies. I mean, you know. You know. They are what they are.

Austin: [laughing] Uh, so the family names, Sylvi, your mother's name is Crevera, Crevera Solstice. The note I have about her is — absent. Always away, always somewhere else. Comes back, you know, once a month, for a dinner, and then vanishes yet again. Coughton Solstice is your father. I've written down — a pushover.

Sylvi: [chuckles]

Jack: [chuckles]

Austin: You have a brother, named Carvisle, with a V, Carvisle, uh, and I've written here — mean nerd. So, lots of —

Sylvi: Okay, perfect.

Austin: Debate me, bro, type stuff. And then Catalina Solstice is your sister, and I've written — adventurous and gay. So that's the family.

Sylvi: Sick.

Austin: Mm-hm.

Jack: Uh...

Sylvi: I think I know what [unintelligible]

Austin: Add these to, to the screen, actually, so we can also just look at them on the note page, or on the main page. Yeah, you feel like you have a, you feel like you have a —

Sylvi: Yeah, I think, I think, I think I'm starting to figure it out, yeah.

Austin: Also, I can erase any of these. Like, if any of these overlap, or if you're like —

Sylvi: No, you're good.

Austin: I don't want, you know, a mean brother.

Sylvi: I almost picked a name that was way too close to my, uh, the name I'm actually using for the season, so that's —

Ali: [chuckles]

Austin: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah yeah.

Sylvi: Of course. Spoiler alert, it begins with a C.

Austin: Interesting.

Jack: [chuckles] Is it Carlisle?

Sylvi: Fuck.

Austin: I think I know it. [chuckling] It's Carlisle —

Sylvi: Yeah, you do know it, I sent it to you.

Austin: I was going to say, yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay.

Sylvi: Uh...

Jack: Everybody has cool fonts.

Sylvi: Did you see Catrina? Catrina wasn't one.

Austin: Catrina was not one of them.

Jack: Catalina.

Austin: Catalina, there's a Catalina.

Sylvi: Yeah, sure. Uh...

Austin: After style, for people who want to look ahead, we have to start talking about relationships. Read the list below and choose or roll an option to decide on a relationship for your right-hand neighbor. Your left-hand neighbor will choose one for the two of you. Note that some may already be obvious. Alternatively, your group may choose to work out relationships improvisationally as you introduce your characters. Decide beforehand. I'd love to have a clearer understanding of what the relationship dynamics are here. The examples, the relationships on the table are family, lovers (secret), lovers (everyone knows), ex-lovers or jilted lovers, as close as family, and mutual resentment. We can also come up with our own.

Jack: This is really interestingly limited, this list.

Austin: Mm-hm. It is.

Ali: [chuckling]

Austin: I mean, we could force ourselves to stick to this, also. But, if you'd like to, if you have a good idea for one that's not here, I'd love to hear it, you know? I'm going to draw a little space to add what the relationship is between everybody. Whoops, that didn't work. Uh...

Ali: Should we just go down the line? So, I'll do Janine, and then —

Austin: Exactly, yeah. Yeah, that makes sense to me.

Ali: Oh, boy howdy.

Austin: Oh, that's backwards, fuck.

Janine: I'm still really hung up on style, to be honest.

Austin: Uh-huh.

Sylvi: Yeah, same. I like, wrote it down, then I was like, no, that's not right.

Ali: Janine, do you want to be as close as family, or mutual resentment?

Janine: Uh...

Jack: What a pick.

Ali: [laughing]

Janine: Man... you're right though, those are the two.

Ali: [chuckling] Those are the two.

Janine: Because you're also very like, lady's-maid-adjacent.

Ali: Uh-huh.

Janine: I don't know. I feel like... I could imagine a little bit of resentment for when Martine gets called in to help out. But also, I could imagine, maybe Martine was originally, originally like, full-time lady's-made and transferred, not transferred, but like, you know, developed an expertise with mechanical stuff and switched to sort of that side. So there would be maybe like a, we used to be in the trenches together kind of. It could go either way.

Austin: Mmm.

Ali: Right, yeah the way that I see it is either, like, we have a similar position so we've had each other's back, or it would be on, Eileen's case, which is my character of being like, oh, she thinks she's too good to be a maidservant, she's a mechanic now? That sort of thing. [laughing]

Austin: Mm-hm.

Janine: Yeah. I could go either way. I think they're both, I think they're both good angles.

Ali: Sure.

Austin: Are you, are you, uh, when you're a part-time lady's-maid, who are you a part-time lady's-maid for, Janine? Of the three ladies in this family? Who are, the mother, who's absent — I mean, probably not her, since she's absent all the time. She probably has her own maid who goes with her. But I guess then of Catalina, and then of Sylvi's character..

Janine: I was thinking it was more like, when company comes —

Austin: Oh, that makes sense.

Janine: They don't have their own lady's maid, you know, when you get your poor relation from the country who comes by, and you need to like —

Austin: Right, sure.

Janine: You know, have them up to a certain standard, you assign them a lady's maid, and you want to assign them someone who's like, kind of knows what's going on, at least? That kind of, that kind of thing. Cause I think two, I think two people is probably within the realm of Ali's character.

Ali: I think I'm going to go, close as family. Just because I would like to maintain some downstairs camaraderie. [laughing]

Austin: Love that.

Ali: And I would hope to be someone who would like, support your, your goals of not being a servant anymore, and learning how to fix things.

Janine: Well, it's still servant stuff...

Ali: Even though you're still, you know, you're still — yeah, yeah, yeah. [laughing]

Austin: Different type of servant.

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: Uh, Janine, you're going to define the one with Jack, the gardener.

Janine: Uh, hm... I feel very strongly, I think, about mutual resentment. Because I think I would have certain things I would want to use yard space for —

Austin: Ah...

Janine: That the gardener might disapprove of.

Jack: [chuckling]

Austin: Mm-hm. That's very fun.

Jack: Oh.

Ali: Oh.

Janine: Especially given the kinds of things that might be mechanically worked on in this setting.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Uh, that's not necessarily going to fit in your garage.

Austin: True.

Jack: I think, yeah, there's also a degree of mutual resentment, in that we could both think the other one was making an annoying noise at various times.

Austin: [chuckling]

Jack: You know, I'm trying to do quiet weeding, and you're making an annoying noise in the tool shed. Meanwhile, you're trying to neatly do some rewiring of something or another, and I'm running the lawn scrounger up and down the lawn.

Austin: Right, right.

Janine: [chuckles] I hate the lawn scrounger.

Jack: Ah, well — shut up about it, because —

Janine: [laughing]

Jack: When you deal with the car, it is a problem to me.

Austin: Right.

Janine: Make the wire wrap around this.

Sylvi: Lawn scroungist?!

Austin: Yeah, I've added lawn scroungist [laughing] to the — to Jack's character description.

Jack: Look, I've got a lot of other stuff to do. The lawn scrounger is just the noisiest tool in my arsenal. Uh, do you recall that, uh, in the early days, Clem had some relationship with that like, brewery person who visited —

Austin: Yeah.

Jack: That we never, that we never, you know, we never took anywhere in the way that you make a character sheet with a bunch of stuff on it, and maybe some of those bells ring.

Austin: The Blossom — yeah.

Jack: Uh, I wonder if there's a potential for some kind of relationship like that between my character and Sylvi's character, in terms of like —

Sylvi: Oh...

Jack: Like a, like a, almost like a... the gardener can be some sort of a mentor —

Sylvi: Okay.

Jack: And for Sylvi's character, there can be a sort of like, thrill in like, ooh, I'm getting advice from the gardener when, you know, it would be much rather the case that my, my boring tutor would try and give it to me, or whatever. And there's a kind of potentially symbiotic relationship

there, right? As the person giving the advice can gain some clout upstairs, and the person upstairs can gain some connection to downstairs.

Sylvi: I think this is great, because I am planning on playing her as a deeply unserious girl, so her having this like, tutor that's trying to sort of rise up the ladders by helping out the [chuckling] the sort of head in the clouds youngest daughter of the family? I'm into it.

Jack: Yeah, cool. So should we say, like, pseudo mentor or something?

Sylvi: Yeah. I, I also could see, like, uh, just as a byproduct of her spending a lot of time in the gardens, it being like a confidant or something like that, it doesn't necessarily —

Jack: Oh, confidant is really good.

Austin: Oh, that's very good.

Jack: Yeah, yeah. I prefer, yeah, I think I prefer that. Because it's not like I'm teaching you how to garden, so much as, you know, I mean, maybe I am, so much as it's like, oh, I'm a, I'm an ear to speak into, and vice versa.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: And Sylvi, it's up for you and Ali's character.

Sylvi: Okay. Hm... we already have one mutual resentment.

Austin: We do.

Ali: [cackling]

Sylvi: I don't know why that was where I jumped to, I was just like, well —

Ali: [snorts]

Sylvi: My — I'm, I'm the, the fucking youngest daughter of a rich family. I'm, you know.

Austin: Oh, so you're the youngest, okay. Oh, I see, it says it right there.

Sylvi: Well, so you said, I said second daughter, and then I have two siblings —

Austin: You're right, you're right.

Sylvi: So I was like, I'll just be the youngest daughter.

Austin: Makes sense. Yeah.

Sylvi: Uh... I also don't know how old your character's going to be, Ali. Because I was going to suggest like, former friends, or like, a some sort of a friendly thing, but it's like, divided by class stuff. Uh, friends [unintelligible]

Austin: Oh, like, yeah, when you were younger it was okay for the two of you to like, be friends —

Jack: Oh yeah.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: But now that you're properly adult, you're like, not allowed to socialize anymore.

Sylvi: Yeah, it's like looked down upon a bit more.

Ali: Yeah, that makes sense.

Sylvi: I'm also open to other ideas. Okay, cool.

Janine: That's like a classic of the genre too, is like —

Sylvi: Yeah, yeah.

Janine: You know, if, if Eileen was like, an existing servant's, like, kid —

Austin: Yes.

Janine: Who was on the estate, and like, you were also a kid of around the same age, maybe people would have looked the other way while you were playing, but then, you know, she ends up getting a post, and you're still family there, so it's like, you've got to — yeah.

Ali: Uh, the only thing that gives me pause here is that if you're like, the woman most present in the house, I guess it could be taken — well, your sister's adventurous, so she's probably out and about, too. You would be the person I'm tending to the most.

Sylvi: Probably, yeah.

Austin: That makes it better, to me.

Ali: [laughing] Okay.

Austin: The idea that like, and nevertheless, it's gotten cold, is kind of fun, right?

Ali: Sure. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Austin: But that's not, it's not my decision to make, so —

Ali: No, no, no, well, I was just like, well, if they're alone most of the time —

Austin: Right, true, that's true.

Ali: [laughing] But maybe there is this intense professionalism. I don't know that —

Sylvi: Yeah, I was thinking, I've been thinking a lot about like, family pressures and stuff.

Austin: True.

Sylvi: Right, is actually what's coming up. The mom not being around much, and the dad being a pushover, did sort of like —

Ali: [chuckling]

Sylvi: Immediately warp my idea of what this family was, so...

Ali: We can do former friends, to write it down and then like, see how it feels —

Sylvi: If it doesn't work then —

Austin: Next, choose your number from 2 to 5. A low number means your better at upstairs. A high number means you're better at downstairs. Upstairs is etiquette, authority, politics, high culture. Downstairs is subtlety, solidarity, fly-on-the-wall, and soothing platitudes.

Jack: I'm going to take 5.

Austin: Wow.

Sylvi: Okay, see you in a bit.

Austin: Love it. Very funny, very good joke.

Jack: That's a good joke.

Austin: It's a good, that's a good one. That's a fun one.

Sylvi: Thank you. Yeah.

Jack: That's a good joke. People kept saying that to Dave Brubeck, and every time, he punched them in the face.

Austin: [laughing] Ah... where can I best put this so that everyone sees it? I'll keep can where I was putting it. And then downstairs, of course, is...

Ali: [chuckling] I keep accidentally pinging things, and I made this fork huge, and then I pinged it, and I was like, Ali, you're being a little tense right now.

Jack: [chuckling] Look at me!

Austin: [chuckling]

Sylvi: [laughing]

Austin: Uh, the last thing is, give your character a cool French-sounding name and title. We are not French, so it's fine. We already have our own name systems and whatnot. And the final thing is to introduce your character to the group. Your character has clothing appropriate to your station, possibly sweaty and dusty. A weapon, probably improvised. Perhaps a keepsake you clutch when the artillery starts to fire. You detail. The player goal is to get your character into and sometimes out of trouble as they attempt to save the chateau. And your character goal is to choose one or create your own. Claim your inheritance, kill a German, keep the mansion intact, prove yourself to a character, get character the hell out of here before you're all blown to bits.

You know, I, I'll add a little heat to this to say that like, when Exanceaster March arrived in orbit, there is also a Columnar fleet. Uh, it hasn't landed. It's, it's probably fine. March just kind of moves with the fleet, you know. March is a very important person. So it's probably fine that there is a fleet in orbit that you can see from the ground, blocking out the stars. Uh, but, you

know. It's fine. Uh, uh, but yeah, so, so we're also just finally going to need, our player goal is to get in and out of trouble, obviously, but if you, if you, if you have a character goal in your mind, as this dinner party, this day that will end in a big dinner party approaches, I wouldn't mind having some of those to help, you know —

Sylvi: My, my quick question is, is the mother here for this?

Austin: She is not.

Sylvi: Okay.

Austin: Yeah.

Ali: Damn.

Jack: Imagine if the goal was, kill a German, and nobody did it or understand what it meant.

Austin: And it was just, kill a German?

Sylvi: Because, well, what about the ads, with the Panda?

Jack: We're in space — oh, god...

Sylvi: People know Earth Germany.

Austin: People do know about space Germany, I forgot, yeah, that's true.

Jack: [German voice] Do you have it?

Austin: [chuckling] [German voice] Do you have it?

Sylvi: Yeah. You're forgetting the lore, guys.

Austin: Oh my god. [laughing] I forgot. Ugh.

Jack: Yeah, I hear that ad brought someone back to life.

Austin: But only once! [chuckling] Oh my god. Uh, we also have to detail the chateau, detail Somerset House. There's two strengths for it. And then one problem. The two strength — two of the following things. Well-provisioned, defensible, well-armed, hidden away, labyrinthine. And

one problem — uncooperative peasantry, outdated furnishings, thin walls, a dark past, or perpetually bankrupt. Fucked up that I want to switch it so it's one strength and two problems, but I'll, I'll be a good GM and let it stand.

Sylvi: [laughing]

Jack: Also, is this place called Somerset House?

Austin: I called it Somerset House, because the family name is Somerset, but it doesn't have to be —

Jack: The family name is Solstice.

Austin: Oh, you're right, it's Solstice. So, yeah, it's Somerset House, because I just said so.

Ali: [laughing]

Austin: But I fucked up, and I like it. Somerset House is fun.

Jack: Yeah, Somerset House is a real place in London.

Austin: Oh, is it?

Jack: It's a, it's an art gallery and it's a, it's part of a campus of, I think the University of London, I'm not sure. It's a pretty cool building. Uh...

Sylvi: This family imported it.

Jack: Piece by piece.

Austin: Yeah, one step at a time, yeah.

Jack: Like that time Arsene Lupin stole a church.

Austin: [laughing] Yes.

Sylvi: God.

Austin: Ugh...

Ali: We have to set a goal now?

Austin: Yeah, just a little goal. It could be as simple as, the dinner should go well, you know?

Ali: Oh, sure sure sure.

Austin: Or for you, it could be, get back in the good graces of Catarina. You know, become friends with Catarina again, or —

Ali: Sure.

Austin: Make sure that, you know — sorry, I just spoiled a character's name. I was waiting, but, fucked that right up.

Jack: Is it not Catalina, or is this another character?

Austin: I was spoiling another character's name.

Jack: Oh — [chuckling]

Sylvi: Wait, do we have Catrina, Catalina —

Austin: Yeah — no, sorry, sorry, sorry — it's Catrina, it's not Catarina, it's Catrina. Right, right, right. I did not spoil a character's name, until just now, then.

Sylvi: [chuckling] Oh my god.

Austin: There isn't — no, no, no, I'm saying, it's Catrina and Catalina.

Sylvi: [laughing] Okay.

Austin: There is no Catarina.

Sylvi: Okay, I got scared.

Austin: No, you're good. So, what, what is Somerset House good at, and what are, what is it bad at? Again, the options on strengths are well-provision, defensible, well-armed, hidden away, labyrinthine, and the suggested problems are uncooperative peasantry, outdated furnishings, thin walls, a dark past, perpetually bankrupt. And you could imagine that those things could also swap, right? So like, you know, cooperative peasantry, new furnishings, thick walls. You know, a brilliant past, and well, you know, funded, or something could all be positives. And likewise,

poorly armed, out in the open, you know, easily maneuvered through, uh, poorly, yeah, poorly positioned, and undefensible could all be negatives, you know?

Jack: I would make a proposal for hidden away, because I love the image of this convoy of March's people having to go down increasingly twisty roads, through forests, the light from their vehicles going through the forest as the party approaches the house, which is just, like, out in the middle of nowhere in some pine forest. Um, oh, where are we? What planet is this on?

Austin: So, I know where it is on the map. If you look on the map, if you scroll down a little bit, I've circled this area that's fairly close to the front of, of the Branch, the war against the Branched. But there's this a little bit of territory, where the Columnar arm of the Principality and the Kesh arm of the Principality are up against each other. Uh, it's, it's honestly, it's very close to where COUNTER/Weight is. It's like, basically, the furthest edge of the Golden Branch on the southern side, you know, which, we kind of know what's there, ish. If I pull up a map of COUNTER/Weight, uh, this is like, this would be like, you know, Kalliope, or... you know, here, here we go. Let's see, let's see that real shit really quick. I don't really have the space over here. Well, that just says notes. Let's, let's, let's save this. That's a webp. No one wants that. Does that even work here? Okay, that worked. I haven't seen you in a while, buddy.

Sylvi: Oh, wow. The dot.

Austin: Sorry, it's huge. Yeah, I'll —

Sylvi: The dots are back.

Austin: The dots are back. Uh, this could be a Gemm, this could be a Kaffe, this could be a Kalliope, this could be a Slighter, this could be a Glimmer, you know? I would, based on looking at the map, like the current map, it would be —

Jack: Wow.

Austin: It would be the parts, it would be the southeast. So it's probably Kaffe or Kalliope. Or it's something just off-map, further southeast of that, you know?

Jack: What do we know about Kaffe? Kalliope is space LA.

Austin: Yeah, of course. Uh...

Sylvi: Uh, Kaffe —

Jack: Because all planets have the same —

Sylvi: Kaffe had a civil war.

Austin: Kaffe, da-da-da-da-da, I mean, this is all so —

Ali: It's also been like a trabillion years, right?

Austin: Yes, a trabillion years, yeah, so it's completely different.

Jack: Kaffe was a heavy industry world for OriCon.

Austin: Yes, 100 percent.

Jack: Yeah, with the corporate civil war.

Austin: Yeah, exactly.

Jack: God, yeah, what if we do space LA, except it has changed, to just like fjordland, and mountains, and —

Austin: I love that, that's extremely fun.

Jack: Forests.

Austin: Yeah, just gone.

Sylvi: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Ali: That's just space Orange County.

Jack: [laughing]

Austin: And all it took was 100,000 years —

Ali: [laughing]

Austin: It's less, it's less than 100,000, it's like 57,000 or something, depending on how you do the math, but, yeah, uh-huh.

Sylvi: I believe we said it was a trabillion.

Austin: Oh yeah, sorry, it's a trabillion. It's a trabillion.

Jack: Kalliope is also the home of the Odomas fleet, right?

Austin: Was — well —

Jack: Quote/unquote home.

Austin: Yeah, origin point of where all the —

Jack: The experimentation.

Austin: Experiments were happening. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ali: What was the stupidest number that I heard recently? I was like, stupid — oh, how expensive —

Austin: How expensive the Death Star cost?

Ali: [laughing] The Death Star cost.

Jack: How much does the Death Star cost?

Austin: 852 quadrillion. I had also heard something about quintillion, maybe.

Jack: Wait, that's more than those fish that Ali and I discovered?

Ali: That's what I was thinking!

Austin: Wow.

Ali: When I heard this I was like — [laughing]

Jack: [chuckling]

Ali: How many, how many Star Wars credits could you plant at the bottom of the ocean, and how scary would it be when it happened?

Jack: [chuckling]

Austin: That's very funny.

Sylvi: I'm, I kind of like a dark past, generally speaking.

Austin: Ooh. Generally —

Sylvi: I like a creepy reputation, but I'm open to hear other flaws.

Jack: Oh, a dark — no, hidden away and it's — god, the idea of like, whether or not this is a haunted house, the vibe of it being —

Ali: [laughing]

Jack: A haunted, like a party at a haunted house is incredible.

Austin: Uh-huh.

Jack: You ever see a movie that is explicitly not set in a haunted house but has mega haunted house vibes? There was a movie called The Humans that came out a couple of years ago that is not a horror movie, but it is about a party in a house that feels like it could be.

Austin: I feel like if you name a movie The Humans, it should be a horror movie.

Ali: Mm-hm.

Jack: Uh, a lot of that movie's trick is, how can you make a movie that is explicitly not a horror movie, feel like a horror movie? And the question at that point becomes, have you made a horror movie? Good question. Uh, I don't know.

Austin: Mm-hm.

Jack: Also, it's Halloween, basically. When we're recording this.

Austin: Oh, it is.

Ali: Oh, true.

Austin: All right, so we need one more strength, I believe.

Jack: I mean, I'm always — I mean, I suggested hidden away, but I'm always out here — shoutout to the IO Interactive level designers, labyrinthine is an option —

Austin: I mean, I've written down hidden away, we just get two strengths, is all I'm saying, so —

Jack: Oh, hidden away and labyrinthine are different.

Austin: They are.

Jack: I, what I mean to say is, I didn't want to pick both strengths.

Austin: Right, I see, yes. Any other non-Jack feelings on a strength, then? Since Jack doesn't want to pick both.

Sylvi: I just brought up a dark past, so I'm also taking a break. But also trying to think of a goal.

Austin: Ali, Janine.

Ali: Maybe defensible?

Austin: It's hidden away, that seems like a good follow up in some ways, right?

Ali: Right, yeah.

Austin: Deep in the, in the mountains, or deep in the —

Ali: Right, plus we presumably have a mech, mechs on hand.

Austin: Apparently. Yeah, probably have something, right?

Ali: If we have a mechanic, you know what I mean?

Austin: If you have a mechanic who could be working on stuff like that. Uh... all right.

Janine: Maybe the way up is like, very narrow and easy to sort of cut off or, you know.

Austin: Are there feelings on what the dark past is besides, you know, being a Kesh household?

Sylvi: I don't have any particulars for it.

Austin: Is it — here's a question. Is it dark for us, or is it dark for people in the world? Is it dark for the morality of people in the Divine Principality? Because dark to us is like, a lot of stuff, you know? It's a lot of like, treating people bad, lots of things that we would consider skeletons in the closet. Dark in the world could include stuff like, you know, helped the Branched at one point, or were responsible — you know what I mean? Things that we would think are like, kind of sick. Uh, you know, housed terrorists, et cetera.

Jack: Right.

Austin: So I'm not sure what dark past means.

Jack: You could split the difference and go for the former —

Austin: Yes.

Jack: And be like, was rumored to have captured a Branched during the war —

Austin: Ooh.

Jack: And nobody knows where it went.

Austin: Eugh, yeah, uh-huh.

Jack: Figure of a house built to hold a Branched is really creepy.

Austin: Yeah.

Jack: Like a Kesh dynasty, who have long been friends with a Columnar dynasty, and years ago, it was rumored that they captured a Branched soldier.

Austin: That's, that's pretty good. Even before they were soldiers.

Jack: This is also like, playing off a lot of the World War I stuff of like, capturing a pilot who crashed in the woods nearby or something.

Austin: Yeah.

Jack: Uh, I saw I really terrible movie from 1943 or 1942 called Mrs. Miniver a few months ago, which was functionally a movie made to get the Americans into World War II, and a sort of

central plot point for that movie was about Mrs. Miniver, who's this British housewife, successfully capturing a German pilot who crash-landed nearby. Uh, it's not good.

Austin: Mm-hm. As a reminder for people, the Branched are a sort of post-human species and culture that now live in the bulk of the Golden Branch, and have recently, in the past few years, begun to push out of the Golden Branch to take over parts of Apostolosean space, Nidean space, probably even more Kesh and Columnar space, after the Principality had tried to recolonize bits of Counterweight, in the Golden Branch area. And they've also spread back through what was once, I guess, the ancient Diaspora arm. That, that long arm is where the Diaspora was, all those years. Uh, we don't really know too much about them. We know that they, their bodies, in natural form, are not comprehensible as things that we would look at and say, that is an individual person. They are, a Branched could be 7 paintings hanging on a wall. A Branched could be 1,000 blades of grass. A Branched could be — I always use this one —

Jack: Like an eye opening and closing.

Austin: An eye opening, closing. I really like, uh, you know, an ant — a group of ants walking around in a spiral, indefinitely. We, of course, had the character of Phrygian in the last season, in Partizan, and Phrygian's natural form, I guess, was like, the cables of a bridge, uh, fluctuating and stuff, right?

Jack: One of my favorite Friends at the Table villains, Corrasion —

Austin: Right.

Jack: Who is, who loves to, uh, who loves to destroy things.

Austin: And specifically like —

Jack: Melt them.

Austin: Sort of like, erode them through water, you know, over a period of time.

Jack: Or acid.

Austin: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. And that's just like, who they are, effectively. So, but they also take on these different forms. They've been kind of forced to do that, et cetera. So, yeah, I kind

of like the idea that, many, many, many years ago, they captured a Branched. Maybe this is even, maybe this is even like, start of the war type shit, you know?

Jack: Or they say they captured a Branched.

Austin: Mmm. Right. Right. Uh, are we ready to talk about the names and goals and pronouns and everything else? Ali, are you still trying to figure out a goal?

Ali: I am. I am trying to figure out a goal. Sorry, I was listening to everybody who was talking about stuff and stopped thinking about it. These are some good goals everybody else has. Uh, why don't we introduce everybody, and then when you wrap around to me —

Austin: Sounds good, yeah.

Ali: I will have a goal, yeah.

Austin: Do you want to start — you'll go last. We'll start with Janine.

Ali: Yeah, yes.

Austin: Okay. Janine, tell us about your character..

Janine: You caught me as I was chewing a gummy.

Austin: Sorry.

Ali: Oh.

Janine: I also was [chuckling] immediately thinking about changing my goal.

Ali: [cackling]

Jack: [chuckling]

Janine: So...

Jack: I could go.

Janine: Because I think my goal is boring.

Ali: But I think like, having a situational —

Austin: Yes, that's totally fine.

Ali: Because we're just playing this game, right? So like —

Austin: Just playing this game, 100 percent. Focus on the night, don't focus on a campaign-length goal, you know?

Ali: Right. In defense of your goal, sorry, Janine.

Janine: Yeah, that's fair. Also, the thing I was going to replace it with, I think I could probably slot into this, if there's actually space for it. We'll see how things go. Uh, right. So I'm playing Martine Sprue. It was originally Martine Hux, and I remembered Hux is a Star Wars thing.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: And that annoyed me to think about, so I changed it.

Austin: Fair. Fair.

Janine: She/her. She has an upstairs score of 2, I guess.

Austin: It's just a total score. There's only —

Janine: Yeah, but it leans upstairs.

Austin: Yeah, it's all — yeah, that's the highest upstairs you can get, yeah.

Janine: Because, this is a tough one. I was originally going to put her somewhere in the middle, because I figured, when she was doing more lady's-maid stuff she would be higher on that scale, or lower, I guess. Lower being more upstairs. But then, working mechanically, maybe she kind of loses that stuff. But I looked at what the actual —

Austin: Right.

Janine: Definition is, with culture and authority.

Austin: Mm-hm.

Janine: And how you use upstairs to go over or through an obstacle. Which, in the context of a mechanic in a society that has mechs, I don't think employing those skills would be subtle — it

might be resilience, but if you are, if you are like, plying your like, knowledge of mechs to be like, hey, that thing is broken, or, hey, I need to take this, and like, that feels like you're applying authority.

Austin: Mm-hm.

Janine: Because you have knowledge of this thing that is integral to this culture. So, that's, that's like, I don't know if that like, tracks with how we're doing things here, but I think it maybe makes sense as we're sort of adapting this to this setting, to not just think of it as like —

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: You know, what spoon to use.

Austin: Yeah, I think that makes sense.

Janine: What is high culture in a technologically advanced civilization?

Austin: Right, right.

Janine: Is it still like, oil paintings? That's probably part of it, but —

Austin: Mm-hm. But we know Kesh has this whole, like — we know that, for instance, Kesh thinks about old mechs as art, and thinks about them as old relics —

Janine: Yes, exactly.

Austin: The way that you might consider old weapons, you know.

Janine: Yeah, I was thinking of Clementine's whole situation, and you know —

Austin: Totally.

Janine: So I went with 2 for that. Mechanic slash part-time lady's maid. She is self-serious. Her goal is to impress an important guest. Aesthetically, I don't want to go into details, necessarily, but I'm thinking of her as like, if JC Leyendecker drew Rosie the Riveter.

Jack: Oh, wow.

Janine: So it's kind of like a, kind of like a Gibson girl, but like in a jumpsuit.

Austin: Mmm, that's very fun.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: That's very fun. Uh, and then, your relationship with Jack's character is mutual resentment.

Janine: Yes.

Austin: And you said your goal, right?

Janine: Yeah. Impress an important guest.

Austin: Right. All right. Jack.

Jack: Uh, I'm going to be playing Vivian Exler, who uses she/her pronouns. Everybody just calls her Exler. I have, uh, a downstairs score of 5, the highest that it can be. I'm a gardener, and some vandal has written lawn scroungist next here, even though lawn scrounging is just a small part of my job. I am forward-thinking, and my goal is to make off with a Columnar treasure.

Austin: Ooh.

Jack: Figuring that, uh, this March is a wealthy fellow, he's bound to have brought something to show off, or someone in his retinue has. And, uh, I'm in a position where I might be able to get away with it. My, uh, my vibe for this character is Michelle Yeoh in 1993, meets Ahti from Control.

Austin: Uh-huh! [chuckling]

Jack: So, you know, uh, shabby gardener's wear, a wheelbarrow, hair tied up, tools in a tool belt. Spends a lot of time in a tool shed smoking, or outside smoking, and listening to music on a tiny little tinny speaker, that kind of vibe.

Austin: Amazing. And then, your relationship with Sylvi's character.

Jack: Uh, Sylvi's character is a confidant to me — or, no sorry. I am a confidant to Sylvi's character.

Austin: Yes, amazing. And, Sylvi.

Sylvi: Yeah, so, my character is, uh, Catrina Solstice, pronouns are she/her. She is the youngest daughter of the family. My, what I put for style here is like foppish slash fash — slash flashy.

Austin: Not fashy!

Sylvi: Not fashy.

Ali: [laughing]

Sylvi: That might be her brother's thing.

Austin: Her brother's way more that, yeah.

Ali: [giggling]

Sylvi: Uh, yeah. I — when you described the siblings, my immediate thought was like, okay, if her sister's like adventurous and stuff, she's going to lean hard into being like, the princess of the family.

Austin: Right. Sure.

Sylvi: And so, like, very femme, very concerned about her appearance, I feel like it would be a missed opportunity if I didn't give one of my characters ringlets like that, so —

Austin: Sure.

Sylvi: Making a mental note of that, that she's got that going on. Uh, and my goal is to outshine my siblings. I thought, hey, why the fuck not? That sounds like a fun thing to fill in there.

Austin: It is. Uh, now, you are, you are what? With Ali's character, what is your relationship to Ali's character?

Sylvi: Uh, we are former friends.

Austin: Mm. Ali.

Ali: Hi, hello. Hi. Yeah, I'm playing Eileen Lilas. That's how I'm choosing to pronounce it now, I guess.

Austin: You decide, it's your character.

Ali: [laughing] Uh, her pronouns are she/her, she's a maidservant, her style is cheeky. Her goal is to improve Somerset House's reputation. I was going to write maintain, but then I was like...

Austin: Mmm.

Ali: Our reputation is kind of bad, actually, so —

Austin: Yeah.

Ali: Let's bring that up a little bit. Uh, I'm — vibes. [laughing]

Austin: Your vibes.

Ali: My vibes. I know that Fran Fine was thrown out here.

Austin: Right, yes.

Ali: And I, I'm going to see if I have that person in me tonight, but I don't know that I do. But, in terms of like, appearance, I, I feel like I want to go more... Elaine from Seinfeld when she's wearing glasses? [laughing] Which is very specific, but everybody knows —

Austin: No, I gotcha.

Ali: That it's different from when she's not wearing glasses.

Austin: Yeah, vibes, vibes are different when she has glasses on.

Jack: Also, the season, the season has turned once again, and Elaine from Seinfeld has showed up in Friends at the Table, which she does every three months or so.

Austin: Yeah, she's been here before, right? She, was she in, uh, she was in —

Ali: Oh yeah, when was the last time we had —

Jack: I think a couple of Bluff City —

Austin: Bluff City, I want to say she was in, what's it called? Sylvi and Jack, you were both in it, uh, —

Jack: Yeah, Tales from the Loop.

Austin: Tales from the Loop. She was some reference, somewhere.

Sylvi: Right.

Ali: Oh, sure. [chuckling]

Austin: I don't know how or —

Sylvi: Was she the librarian?

Austin: No, I don't think she was the best character that's ever been in the Friends at the Table —

Jack: She appears as a glitch.

Austin: Yeah, she was the glitching, she was the glitchy ghost. Spoilers.

Ali: Oh, right.

Austin: She was, I think, tied to the glitchy ghost. [chuckling] Oh, because there's that image of the VHS distortion or whatever, with her in it, right? That's, that was my reference point? I'm never going to find this image, but I think that that was right. Anyway.

Ali: Yeah. Uh...

Austin: God, that librarian. So funny. God.

Ali: [laughing] Uh, I think that I'm also going, if you search Emma Manga and you look at the inspiration here in terms of the character, like —

Austin: Yeah.

Ali: I think I'm going for that sort of like, glasses, hair pinned back, but it's like, really big. Needs to dress sort of professionally in public spaces.

Janine: Ali, do you know the artist on Twitter, [suzushiro333](#)? Who does —

Ali: Mmm...

Austin: Oh.

Janine: They specialize in images of anime maids skateboarding.

Austin: Right. Of course. Yes.

Ali: [cackling] Same.

Janine: And like, sometimes just like, eating at restaurants and stuff. Uh...

Ali: The anime maid person that I know — no, I'm thinking nun, sorry, never mind.

Sylvi: [laughing]

Ali: [laughing]

Janine: Very different.

Ali: Can you read, can you tell me that Twitter name again, though, so I can —

Jack: Holy shit, this is so good.

Janine: Oh, I can just link it on here. It's suzushiro333. It's one of my favorite secret Twitter follows that I'm sharing.

Jack: Yeah. Don't sleep on the animations of them on a half pipe, either.

Austin: It's very good.

Janine: Oh yeah, I think that's like a fan animation that someone did.

Sylvi: Oh, wow. This is what the second season of SK8 the Infinity needs.

Ali: [giggling]

Austin: And one of these maids shopping for decks is extremely funny.

Jack: It's so good.

Austin: It's great.

Jack: This one, I'm going to link one that's Ali at the end of this game.

Austin: Oh, okay.

Ali: This game.

Jack: Yeah, I've put it in the Patreon chat.

Austin: Little prediction, it's a little —

Ali: Oh, sure.

Sylvi: [laughing]

Janine: The one where she's eating out of the pan?

Austin: No, it's not. That's a good one too, though.

Ali: That's going to be after this, though. Yeah.

Austin: Uh, all right.

Ali: Wonderful.

Austin: Great resource here, thank you.

Ali: The, uh, the nuns one that I was thinking of was the nuns with all of the ducks?

Sylvi: Yeah.

Ali: There's all the —

Austin: Nuns with the ducks?

Ali: [laughing]

Jack: I don't know this one, but I would like to see it, if you have it to hand.

Ali: I don't, unfortunately. But if I find it before the end of the session.

Jack: I'm just searching nuns with ducks.

Austin: I think I found it. Maybe. Yeah.

Jack: Oh, I found it. Yeah.

Austin: Uh-huh.

Sylvi: Yeah, really good.

Ali: [chuckling].

Austin: You just search nuns with ducks, you'll find it. The nuns person I know, of course, is Xeecee. [Xeecee Vevo](#).

Ali: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Austin: Who's making Misericorde, the nun-based visual novel.

Jack: Game looks fucking incredible.

Austin: Yeah.

Ali: Uh, and just so they're properly credited, the Twitter user with the nun ducks is [hyxpk](#).

Austin: Nailed it. Great. Love these ducks, love these nuns.

Ali: You know?

Austin: All right. So that's everybody. That's the whole damn thing. Uh, and again, Somerset House, on Kalliope, strengths — hidden away, defensible. Problem — dark past, rumored to have captured a Branched many years ago. I ran out of space, but I imagine, in a way that like, both doing dark science to a Branched is fucked up, and also, there are maybe loose rumors about how that led to what has become the Branched, the war against the Branched.

Uh, so, as a one more going over how the rules work before we jump into it, uh, in this game, when you do something risky, you roll 1d6 to find out how it goes. You roll another plus-1 D if you're prepared for the thing, and another plus-1 if you're an expert. The DM tells you how many dice you roll based on your character and the situation. You roll your dice and you compare each die result to your number. If you're using upstairs, culture, authority, again — etiquette, politics, high culture — you want to roll over your number. You use upstairs to go over or through an obstacle.

If you're using downstairs — subtlety, resilience, solidarity, fly-on-the-wall, the soothing platitudes — you want to roll under your number. Use downstairs to go under or around an obstacle. If you get zero successes, then it goes wrong. The DM says how things get worse somehow. If one die succeeds, you barely manage it. The DM details a complication, harm, or cost. If two dice succeed, you do it well.

If three dice succeed, you get critical success. The GM tells you some extra effect you get. If you roll your number exactly, you have a stairs stare. You get a special insight into what's going on. When situationally appropriate, this should come as a moment of intense eye contact as your character ascends or descends a staircase. Ask the GM a question, and they'll answer you honestly. Some good questions are things like, what are they really feeling? Who's behind this? How could I get them to do what I want? What should I be on the lookout for? What's the best way to do this thing? What's really going on here? Roll again if you get a stair stare. You can first change your action, if you want to. Your insight might give you a preparedness bonus die, at the GM's option. Finally, you can help someone else by saying how you try and making a roll. If you succeed, you give them an additional die. Those are the rules.

Uh, so — I'm going to say, generally speaking here, the threat is that this dinner party goes bad, right? Uh, the dinner party goes bad, the, there's potential that like, you know, the Solstice family is going to move into a slow death, right? You failed to, uh, uh, bring over the March household into the Bilateral Intercession, and that means that like, the more powerful Kesh families, the more powerful Bilateral institutions, let you effectively slip further into, irrelevancy, and the lack of wealth and of, of social power means that sooner than later, this will be the last, the last generation of the Solstice family in the Divine Principality.

If you manage to succeed, well, maybe you get more resources, you gain some sort of, you know, more social cache, and more prolific existence on the social scene, writ large. And if things go really bad, I don't know, there's an armada in, there's a fleet in orbit. So, you know, things could go really bad, who can say? Uh, there will be surprises as we play, there will be other things that happen. But those are the big picture stakes. Play to find out how they overcome the threat, in our case of a bad dinner party. Use the chateau details, the players pick to decide how the threat comes to start. Start the game by describing evidence of impending badness, then ask the characters what they do.

I think the place to begin is that for those of you who work at the house proper, I guess, here's a question for you. Janine, is Martine, Martine is just the mechanic, not like the driver, also. I know sometimes you get that combo. You're not driving like the —

Janine: Uh —

Austin: Or are you driving like the town, or the house car, you know?

Janine: So, I've been thinking about Martine a lot in the like, you know, one of the suggested roles is stable boy.

Austin: Right, right.

Janine: And I'm thinking about that in sort of the context of like, when there was a transition to cars.

Austin: Right.

Janine: Where, I'm sure she could drive someone, but that's probably not, they probably wouldn't pick her unless there was no one else.

Austin: Okay. Yep.

Janine: Or like, you know, it might be a situation where they're driving themselves, you know —

Austin: Mm-hm.

Janine: Because it's still an expensive novelty — or, I mean, it's not still an expensive novelty, that's a different thing. But, you know, it's, it's where you're putting that stuff socially.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Do you want to be driven around, or do you want to drive the thing yourself?

Austin: Totally. So then you, Eileen, and Vivian, you're all at Somerset House, deep in the mountains. I think it's a, it's a snowy season. Uh, at this point. Uh, uh, and so there's, there is the, you know, a chill in the air. I think it's, it's, maybe, we'll say it's mid-morning, at this point. You're going about your daily tasks, uh, which we can get an image of in a moment. When you hear first a, a, the kind of Doppler effect sound of something like jet engines flying overhead. Uh,

zooming overhead, shaking the entire house. These are low-flying machines. Uh, and then, and then behind them, you hear a sort of like, rumbling, that almost has like a, it's the sound of some sort of like, magnetic pulse engine, so, you know, like a [engine noises] bru-buh-buh-buh-buh, more than like a brrrr, you know —

Sylvi: Mm-hm. Yeah, yeah.

Austin: Or maybe it's reverse, you know, the magnet sound in your head, that comes there. It's a rounded sound. It sounds the way the rainbow, the iridescence of an oil spill looks. And a huge ship kind of shadows over the, uh, the entire estate for a moment, before passing east across the kind of hills towards where it will eventually land and let Exanceaster March and his retinue off.

You'll note, I did not mention you, Catrina, because you are in the, the family, you know, car, the family jeep, whatever this, this thing is, that goes through these twisty, curvy roads in the mountain, to where the pickup point is. Uh, and, you know, so the two jet engine sounds, those are, uh, whatever the newest version of this, god, I think they were, I think it was the Wake, the W-A-K-E, the AdArm Wake, which were these fucked-up looking jet, uh, mechs, that, uh, uh, y'all fought, the Rapid Evening side of the game fought in the Fort Icebreaker mission. I used this very gross [chuckling] uh, Emerson Tung piece called [Mecha Jet Fighter - CONDOR](#). Emerson Tung does the Tankhead series of mechs —

Jack: Oh yeah.

Austin: And I guess is now lead concept artist, uh, at, uh, uh, id, you know, the Doom people, apparently, which —

Sylvi: Mmm.

Austin: Shoutouts to Emerson. Uh, uh, but, but yeah, there's this really fucked-up, cool-looking, uh, jet, that like walks around on its knuckles, kind of, uh, that we referenced, uh, for the AdArm Wakes. So a couple of those have landed, or, or, I, they, they probably didn't land. They're probably like, hovering above the sort of landing zone, the, the kind of designated landing zone for this big frigate that's come to land. Uh, and then the frigate itself does land. Catrina, who, who would make a ride like this, out to welcome a guest, besides you?

Sylvi: Uh...

Austin: Does your father make it himself? Would it be you and one of your siblings? Would it just be you?

Sylvi: So, I think it would be... it wouldn't just be me. I think there would definitely be other representatives — like, I get the feeling that Carvisle would want to make a good first impression as well.

Austin: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Yeah, definitely. Does a big salute, you know.

Sylvi: Yeah, absolutely. And I feel like... if you've, if two of your kids pressure you enough, and you're Coughton, you're going to probably go as well.

Austin: Yeah. Yeah.

Sylvi: Both from the angle of like, it's going to look bad for us if you're not there.

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvi: Mom's already not here.

Austin: Yeah. Uh, then — what is the version of, I — second question here. Is there one big vehicle? Like, like — you know, whatever the equivalent of like, a luxury Volkswagen bus is? Or, are there multiple vehicles coming to pick up March and March's retinue?

Sylvi: Uh, yeah. I feel — so, I feel like we're coming in like, there's like one vehicle that's only got enough space to hold us and like March and maybe a couple extra people.

Austin: Uh-huh.

Sylvi: Uh, and then also, like, supplemental stuff to bring the rest of the retinue and like, their —

Austin: Supply, whatever else they're bringing.

Sylvi: If they have servants, yeah, that sort of thing.

Austin: Uh, so yeah. The, the group that leaves this, you know, space shuttle or ship or whatever that's landed is, uh, one person bigger than you thought it would be. Uh, you know, I'm sure that you had been kind of briefed, I guess maybe you tell me, how much, how much did, did Coughton tell you about this impending, uh, dinner party situation?

Sylvi: Uh —

Austin: My instinct is that he was like, anxiously talking about it for the last three weeks, you know what I mean?

Sylvi: Yeah, I think that that works. I think like, maybe not directly talking about to Catrina about it so much.

Austin: Sure.

Sylvi: A bit like, doing that like, I don't want to worry her about it, but I will worry everyone in her vicinity about it.

Austin: Mm-hm.

Sylvi: And I think like, on top of that I imagine Carvisle also talking about it constantly.

Austin: Mm-hm.

Sylvi: You said like, I'm not misremembering you comparing him to like a redditor, right?

Austin: I did not make that comparison.

Sylvi: Okay, for some reason my brain went there.

Austin: But you are not wrong! Yeah, I think that that's probably —

Jack: I think your exact words were, he's a real debate me, bro, type.

Austin: That is what I said, yes.

Sylvi: Yes, okay, yeah.

Austin: Which is a synonym, I think, for a certain type of redditor, for sure. Uh, uh, so yeah. I think he is like, out the car, you know, leaning on the car like a little shit, until the — I'll actually tell you exactly what happens. Even as March is approaching, as March gets off, has not like, straightened up his posture. But then this, uh, you know, the rest of March's crew comes, there's a, March has a valet and bodyguard, who's also Columnar, named Guilford Gain. And then, and then there are the kind of key three servants who are with March — Laris, Leah, and Laurice.

And then, uh, the person who makes your, your, your nerd brother snap literally into attention is Bel'agos Bloom. And Bel'agos is in the brother-in-law of Exanceaster March, and an Apostolosean admiral. And the second —

Sylvi: Oh...

Austin: This admiral in full dress uniform shows up, uh, uh, you know, snaps into attention, you know. I said brother-in-law, I guess, I guess I don't know, what is — do we have a, I guess sibling-in-law. I don't know. Uh, Bel'agos uses Bel as, as their pronouns. So, sibling-in-law. And, yeah, instantly, Carvisle is like, this is military, this is —

Jack: A soldier.

Austin: This is a soldier, this is an admiral, this is an officer. The high, the high, one of the highest officers.

Sylvi: Was this is an expected guest, or is it an unexpected guest?

Austin: No, this is an unexpected guest.

Sylvi: Okay. Okay.

Austin: Uh-huh. Yeah. Mm-hm. Uh, uh, and, and they begin to work their way towards you. Your father Coughton immediately, very clearly not happy about the addition. Uh, I think, I think he just under his breath goes like, “Well, this is going to make everything a lot harder.”

Sylvi: [chuckles]

Austin: Uh, no, let's — go ahead, what were you going to say?

Sylvi: I was going to like, nudge him with my elbow and smile at everyone.

Austin: Uh-huh. Yeah, big smiles, please, everybody.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: Uh, how, how are things going back at the house? What are, what are we seeing as the snow begins to fall at Somerset House, as the Solstice household begins to prep for a day of hosting and dinner? What are, what are each of you doing in your, in your morning

preparations? I guess another way to think about this is, what are your daily tasks, generally speaking?

Jack: Yeah, I've got some, like, burlap sacks, and I am loosely wrapping the white roses, on the, uh, outside of the big, uh, windows of the receiving area in burlap, so that the snowfall doesn't, uh, uh, blight them terribly.

Austin: Is this a thing where the roses are, have been blooming later in the season than normal? Or this is like a freak snowstorm that has caught them in the middle of their bloom?

Jack: This is a freak snowstorm that has caught them in the middle of their bloom. I've been trying to cultivate roses later and later into the snow season, and I'm getting better and better at it, but this snow is far too early, and I am confident that, however good my efforts are so far, they are not good enough for a snowfall coming this early. So, you know, I've gotten three-quarters of them done, and I'm just moving methodically down the line of these rose bushes. All of them have names like, you know, Emilia Rose, or like, Elegant Rose, or The Opera Magnifique Rose.

Austin: [chuckles]

Jack: They have little stamps on them that the, that the family has won for the various rose strains.

Austin: Incredible. That you have one, but that the family has won.

Jack: Yeah.

Austin: They're your roses, but you don't get the trophy.

Jack: No, no.

Austin: The trophy exists in the sitting room, the den —

Jack: The trophy room.

Austin: The trophy room, the dedicated trophy room of the house. Yeah, of course. Uh, Martine, Eileen? Where are you at? What are you up to?

Ali: Uh, I think because the house is sort of free of, uh, upstairs people right now, I'm probably doing a lot of like, making beds, I don't know if it would have come back to us already, that like,

if someone was able to like, send a call-in real quick that's like, there's one extra person, prepare another room. But there's probably, uh —

Austin: Yeah, I think whoever the driver is would have done that, you know?

Ali: Okay, yeah.

Austin: And maybe it's an automated driver. Maybe y'all have a — not an Automated Dynamics unit, but something similar, right? Whatever the, 55,000 years after COUNTER/Weight version of that is, here. You have something that's a regular robot, and not a Columnar-style synthetic person. Uh, uh, who, you just get a note. Plus-1 — you know. Plus-1. And then, plus-1, there isn't a particular name on it, but it has the tags — military, Apostolos, Pact Leader, you know? So you have some — and then like, uh, the, the height and weight, you know, so you know like, that, to inform, whatever sort of bedding you're choosing, or whatever sort of robe you want to leave out for the person, you know?

Ali: Right, yeah. So I'm sure the scene is like a hallway of different rooms or whatever, and sort of like, maids going from each to each, and sort of being like, “well, who do you think it is? Why is there an extra person? We're busy already.”

Austin: [chuckling] Uh-huh.

Ali: That sort of vibe.

Austin: Martine?

Janine: Uh, I think, this is going to be some supposition that will cross into Jack's territory so I appreciate some feedback. But, I think there is, there should be like a utility sink on the exterior of the groundskeeping shed or building, or whatever it is that would be like where you're keeping most of your stuff, and like maybe —

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: Doing any like delicate interior stuff that has to happen. And there's probably like a big, a big like basin sink with plumbing and stuff on the outside of that building. And because the stable or hangar, I guess, maybe more accurately, maybe like a, you know, small, a small domestic hangar of some sort. [chuckling] Is pretty close to that. There's probably not a utility sink in there. So I have to sometimes use the sink outside the, the groundskeeper shed. So I

have like, sort of, not snuck over, necessarily, but I definitely approached it furtively with, with two objects, or like, I think one is tucked under my arm and one is in my hand, and I'm like, washing it. I'm like, washing it in the sink. I have it under the tap, and I'm filling it with water, and then I'm dumping it out a couple times. And the objects are like the — a finger, sort of up to the first knuckle. So it's kind of like a long, round-bottom, like bucket with like some angles to it. And I'm, I'm rinsing these off, because they are covered in, uh, like an oil.

Austin: Great, great image.

Jack: God. This is like, the infinite focus shot, or like a split diopter shot of me in the background working on the outside of the house, and you rinsing this thing at the sink.

Janine: Mm-hm.

Austin: Which of you is closest to Coughton? If Coughton was going to call one of you to give a request, who would it be?

Ali: Uh, I think just in terms of like, like... I don't know the word that I'm looking for. [laughing]

Janine: Proximity?

Ali: In terms of me being the closest to the family —

Austin: Right, right.

Janine: Yeah.

Ali: It would probably be me.

Austin: Yeah, so then, so then I think Coughton, who, uh, you know, I think is, uh, probably in, uh, his, his mid-50s, graying, uh, uh, but, but well-kept, uh, is anxious as a person, but doesn't, you know — is a pushover, but wants to present as cleanly as possible, so there's no excuses to push him over, you know what I mean? So hair is, is, is, you know, carefully brushed, well-shaven, uh, is wearing a kind of long coat. Steps away from this landing area, or steps, steps away from the, the cars, as the, uh, you know, everything starts to get unloaded from the ship, and starts to get loaded onto the various vehicles here, that are going to take the whole group back, and dials you up on, you know, a comm, and is instantly just like, "Eileen? Eileen? Eileen."

Ali (as Eileen): Uh, yes sir?

Austin (as Coughton): Uh, we need an activity. Do we have an activity? We're going to need an activity. Uh, uh, — croquet, or hunting —

Ali (as Eileen): Like a —

Austin (as Coughton): Perhaps a hunt. A hunt? Perhaps a — I — I need to be — I, I must speak with Exanceaster alone, and Exanceaster has an additional guest, and I will need a way, I will need an activity. An activity that would pair us and separate us from the group. I know we did not prepare an activity, but I'm asking you to prepare an activity.

Ali: [laughing]

Austin (as Coughton): Oh, yes, I'll be right there. Oh, it's go good to meet you. So good!

Ali (as Eileen): That'll be done, sir. Hunting sounds perfect.

Austin (as Coughton): Ah, make sure that the, that the hunting hollows are in good repair.

Ali (as Eileen): Yes.

Austin (as Coughton): We'll go after the, the big bird, the dino, the, the — you — the big one — the wings. We'll go after the winged ones. The big ones. The big wings? The big wings.

Ali (as Eileen): Yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes. I'll, I'll inform Martine, and the staff will be prepared. Uh, would you like to have lunch before or after the event, sir?

Austin (as Coughton): Little sandwiches. I don't want to ruin supper.

Ali (as Eileen): Before or after the event, sir?

Austin (as Coughton): Oh, the activity. Before. Before the activity — or, perhaps during. Yes, during. During would give me a perfect opportunity to speak one on one, while we eat our little sandwiches.

Sylvi: [cackling]

Ali (as Eileen): Sir, sir, I don't mean to over — overspeak here, but I, I figured your best opportunity would be during the hunt, if you made two teams. Perhaps, uh, Carsville would like to be paired with the new guest, and you could focus on something besides —

Austin: Give me a roll. This is very risky —

Ali: Okay. [laughing]

Austin: I can't believe you're speaking to the head of the household. Would you say this is authority — upstairs or downstairs?

Ali: God, this is probably... upstairs, right? Because I'm like, big-timing, in terms of like, you don't want to be talking about sandwiches with this guy, right? [laughing] Let's be a team here. Yeah, I bet.

Austin: Yeah, I guess — that's true, yeah.

Ali: It is not subtlety, solidarity [wheezes]

Austin: Fly-on-the-walling, or soothing platitudes.

Ali: [laughing]

Austin: So you're going to want over a 4. Uh, and I'm going to say, you are cheeky, that is what you are.

Ali: Okay.

Austin: Uh, so I'm going to give you a plus-1 die to this. This is like, in line with who you are, and presumably you've done this sort of thing before. Uh, you're also, you have proximity. So I'll, I'll give you, you get 2d6 here. You want those 2d6s to be over a 4, I think, is the thing you want, right? Uh...

Ali: Right, so this is a, a roll 1d5 plus one? Or 1d —

Austin: No, it's, it's, it is — sorry. I've lost the dice part of Roll20. Where did it go? It's gone. I have to refresh the page. One second.

Ali: Oh, 1d6.

Austin: No, it'll be 2d6, because I'm giving you that bonus d6, basically.

Ali: Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh. Oh, plus-1 is if you — okay, right. I'm playing games. I got it. [laughing]

Austin: Uh-huh. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ali: [laughing] Okay.

Austin: That's a success, and also you got stair stares, because your number is 4. So... again, if you roll your number exactly, you have a stair stare. You get special insight into what's going on. When situationally appropriate, this comes in a moment of intense eye contact as your character ascends or descends the staircase. Who do you make intense eye contact with, descending a staircase, in this moment?

Ali: Uh... I guess Martine?

Austin: Yeah, that makes sense. Martine, maybe you've come in to get some tools or something, and you see that, uh, Eileen is on the call. Uh, so some sort of — you've, you've remembered something here. Ask me one of these questions, Eileen. Or any question, and I'll answer honestly, to give you extra insight.

Ali: Uh... and this is just insight in general — so, what are they feeling, doesn't have to be the head of the house, or whatever, right? It would be —

Austin: Uh, it could be, it could be whoever, it could be whoever you want, I think. Yeah, these are just some good questions.

Ali: Okay, okay.

Austin: You can ask any question.

Ali: [pause] Uh, yeah. Uh...

Austin: It can be as broad as you want, it can be as — you know.

Ali: Special insight into what's going on. Uh... I, I feel like I want to know more about the new guest. But I —

Austin: A thing that, a thing that hits you is, this is a Columnar — little sandwiches are not going to be the food you need to separate a little Columnar from — Columnar, most Columnar don't have stomachs. We know that some of them might also partake of things, other types of input. But most of them are not — like the Equiaxed do have, do have stomachs, so you'll, you'll want to have some sort of special other type of refreshment, Columnar-related refreshment. Maybe it's looking at Martine, a mechanic, that reminds you, oh, wait, the thing that came in said that this would be a Columnar. Oh, sorry, this is an Apostolosean guest, right? Uh, but, but March, sorry, March is Columnar, so, yes, March is not going to want to eat little sandwiches. March is going to want some other sort of refreshment. Uh, and so, and so, uh, that is going to, to be, uh, a better choice than, than that would be good. Again, I don't know what Columnar refreshments look like. But you remind yourself of that —

Janine: Thermal paste?

Austin: Thermal paste, some sort of oil, cleansing oil. Yeah, all sorts of stuff like that.

Jack: A nice combination of flashing lights that, that, that just relax —

Austin: Yeah. That like, when you run it, it like, degausses your brain, you know?

Jack: Yeah.

Sylvi: Ooh.

Ali: Oh yeah, one of those.

Austin: Thinking about that makes my brain feel better, in a way.

Ali: [snorts]

Austin: I want that to exist, and I want it so bad, that it worked, on my brain. So —

Ali: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Austin: So, yeah. That totally. So now you can reroll. You can change what you say if you want to, you can first change your action if you want to. Your insight gives you a preparedness bonus die at the GM's option. I think mostly I'm just going to give you that bonus die. I'm not going to push you to change what you said, necessarily. So, you can reroll if you want to.

Ali: Yeah, that's a little weird, right? I guess, mechanically, why would I get a success on an action I wanted to take, and then... change it?

Austin: Well, you only got one success, right? So remember, one success is a mixed success.

Ali: Oh, okay. Okay.

Austin: Right? So, so I guess that's the thing is, I could let this stand. Or do you have to reroll? I always forget this about Lasers and Feelings. Uh, you have to reroll. Reroll. Roll again, is what it says. So, uh, so now, but now you roll three dice. Wow, according to Morgan Jay, there were specifically, a specific frequency of green light that theoretically improves migraine headaches.

Ali: Ooh. Uh, now I'm rolling three dice?

Austin: You're rolling three dice, yeah.

Ali: Also, just to clarify — I'm, I, I always feel this lost when I play Lasers and Feelings, to be honest.

Austin: Uh-huh.

Ali: But if I'm taking, if I'm taking an upstairs action, do I want it to be above a four?

Austin: You want it to be, you're taking an upstairs action, and it says, if you're using upstairs, you want to roll over your number. Yes.

Ali: So, just the 6 is a success? And then the 4 isn't a success?

Austin: The 4 is not a success. The 4 was not a success, correct.

Ali: Oh, but it activates the special thing.

Austin: It activates the special thing, yeah. Mm-hm.

Ali: Okay. [chuckles] I was like, I get a special thing, isn't that a success?

Janine: Oh...

Austin: Yikes. You hate to see it. You hate to see three failures, 1-2-1. Uh, Coughton is just completely double-downing on the little sandwiches. Coughton is like —

Austin (as Coughton): No, no, no. Little sandwiches in the middle of the hunt. I'm — that's the plan. I've told you, Eileen, when I have a plan, I have to stick to it. And that's — I've been told I need to get better at sticking to my, my guts, and my guts say, little sandwiches, middle of the hunt. Thank you for the input also —

Ali (as Eileen): It'll be done, sir.

Austin (as Coughton): I appreciate it.

Ali: [chuckles]

Jack: Do we have a facecast for this guy, and if not, can I propose Robot Bill Nighy?

Austin: Yeah, I can see it. Yeah. Uh-huh. Uh, uh — I guess, I guess — what's the, what's the uh, what's the Bill Nighy thing that Americans know best?

Jack: Uh... Autumn de Wilde's Emma, uh, might be the —

Austin: Yeah, the dad in Emma.

Janine: Oh, okay. I —

Austin: Yeah, yeah.

Janine: I thought you meant Bill Nye.

Austin: No. Not Bill Nye, the Science Guy.

Janine: Bill Nighy.

Austin: Nighy. Nighy.

Ali: Oh! I was thinking Bill Nye this whole time.

Austin: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Nope!

Janine: I was like, I don't get it.

Ali: [chuckling] Yeah, I was like, what are y'all talking about?

Austin: [chuckles]

Jack: Uh, Bill Nighy is also –

Sylvi: Dad hangs up the phone, but not before saying, “science rules.”

Austin: [laughing]

Jack: There he goes. He's great in, he plays, uh, Davy Jones, in the adequate Pirates of the Caribbean movies. And he does a really good job at playing a weirdo fish man, a role that presumably is difficult.

Austin: Oh, sure.

Janine: I didn't know that was him.

Jack: Mmm. He's really good.

Austin: I of course, first saw him in the Underworld series, what has about the vampires and the —

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: Werewolves fighting.

Sylvi: Right, yeah, he's like the, the, the old vampire.

Austin: He's like an old vampire.

Sylvi: That sleeps, that they wake up too early, in the first one.

Austin: Yeah, uh-huh.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Uh, already. So, [chuckling] how do you begin to prep this activity? Do you, do you just go down to — Martine, I mean, Martine is here now, right? We've introduced Martine into the scene.

Ali: Right, yeah.

Ali (as Eileen): Martine, the, the hunting mechs need to be — why did I say mech? I don't know. The hunting —

Janine: I actually had an idea for this.

Ali: [chuckling]

Ali (as Eileen): The hunting units need to be activated and prepared for, for an event this afternoon.

Janine (as Martine): Yeah, no problem. Anything else?

Ali (as Eileen): Uh, I'm, I'm to understand that there's going to be a lunch service during the hunting, but that's not your worry.

Janine (as Martine): Nope, it's not.

Ali and Sylvi: [laughing]

Janine: I'm not being self-serious, I should be more self-serious, I should be more — no, it's not.

Austin: I mean, if you're, if you're feeling not self-serious, it's not too late to change that to something else.

Janine: No, I think I want —

Austin: Okay.

Janine: Self-serious. Well, what I want is a little bit like, frigid, to be honest, and self-serious is close to that. A little haughty.

Austin: Sure. All right. Uh, you go up to do that. Let's swing back over to Catrina and the Solstice family. You're all loaded into this, as people in the chat have pointed out, you know, this, this family Range Rover, this family Hummer, giant vehicle, jungle vehicle. Yeah, it just has to be the most absurd and most outlandish —

Sylvi: A stretch Hummer, yeah.

Austin: It's a stretch Hummer. Uh, and, and — I think, instantly, Carvisle has begun to ask questions of, of the admiral. Very stupid questions, like, “how many spaceships do you have” and “how many Hallows are in orbit?” And, “what do you think of the Bilateral Intercession's new name?” And, to their credit, Bel'agos seems — charmed is too strong. But, you know, sometimes someone can patronize somebody, and have fun doing it, you know what I mean?

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: Someone, sometimes someone can be like, oh, yes, these are good — I think at some point, Bel'agos says to Coughton, you know —

Austin (as Bel'agos): You've raised your son to be very observant.

Jack: [chuckles]

Austin: How are you getting along on this car ride back? What's your attitude?

Sylvi: I think that there's a certain point where I'm, like, kind of sick of Carvisle's bullshit, to just put it bluntly, and I'm trying not to let it show on my face, but eventually I'm like, I'm sure — what is the title, actually? The —

Austin: For Bel'agos?

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: Admiral. Admiral's right.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Sylvi (as Catrina): I'm certain the admiral didn't come all this way just to talk about work, right?

Austin (as Bel'agos): Oh, well, I don't —

Sylvi (as Catrina): They're here for a much-needed break.

Austin (as Bel'agos): Uh, my work is my life, and so, of course, I'm happy to answer the young lad's questions. I'm really here as just an advisor to Exanceaster.

Austin: And March just sort of nods. It has the, there's a sort of air about Exanceaster that is just constantly judging. Uh, uh, and I think that, you can tell that Catalina, your sister who's also in the car, is not comfortable with being read. Catalina has been trying to keep her mouth shut, clearly because someone has told her recently, keep your mouth shut during this trip. And I think you can tell that she is about — you — how well do you know your sister? What is your relationship like with her?

Sylvi: I think my relationship with her is like, we get along well, but there is a bit of a strain due to how like, different we are.

Austin: Mmm.

Sylvi: One of those things where it's like... we can balance each other out really well, or we can make it so we're clashing way more.

Austin: Mm-hm.

Sylvi: It kind of goes either way. But, like, I think that there's like, there have been many periods of both of their lives where they've been like, oh yeah, my sister's my best friend.

Austin: Right. Okay. Well, then you can tell that she is about to say something, maybe not rude, but something that might cause more trouble than it, than it's worth. Uh, uh, I think you know that, just like with you, Carvisle gets under her skin, and maybe a bit less like you, she enjoys causing issues.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: She, she likes to go toe-to-toe a little bit, you know? Uh, so you — do you just let her lay, lay into him? Do you, what do you do?

Sylvi: I'm trying to think of a thing to change the topic to.

Austin: Ah, that's fun.

Sylvi: Is the move here, is like, to bring up something that Catalina could talk about that might be of interest to like, people in the car, but also like, just distant enough from things that it's not going to lead to her and Carvisle fucking bickering the entire ride home.

Austin: Sure.

Sylvi: Uh...

Austin: What's a good topic, what's a good way to —

Sylvi: So, like, you describe her as adventurous, and I kind of wanted to just ask a bit more about like, in what way is she, like, is she like gallivanting?

Austin: Yes, she, she is gallivanting. She's a little like your absent, your often-absent mother, in that she leverages the family's wealth to see things and go places, and have little causes that she cares about for a month and then forgets about.

Sylvi: Okay.

Austin: The difference is, she is much more happy to then come home for 6 months, you know what I mean?

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: She's like, she's like backpacking across Kesh space —

Sylvi: Oh, that's perfect.

Austin: And then comes home and then spends the next year doing nothing, you know what I mean? Uh, so —

Sylvi: I, I wonder if there's like a thing where it's like, “oh, you spent some time near such and such front, where the Apostoloseans were,” or something like that.

Austin: Yes, yes.

Sylvi: Like, “I wonder if you two have ever, like, have you, have you also been there, admiral?”

Austin: Give me a, give me a little roll. Give me a — this feels like downstairs to me, subtlety.

Sylvi: Ah, fuck. Okay.

Austin: Uh-huh.

Sylvi: I'm doing it —

Austin: I mean, I —

Sylvi: No, listen, I'll roll it.

Austin: I think it's subtlety. Because your goal might be etiquette, but you are, to use the framing that Janine mentioned before, going under or around an obstacle, right?

Sylvi: Yeah. Yeah, I am definitely deferring to try and save my sister some face here.

Austin: Uh-huh.

Sylvi: Or save my whole family some face here.

Austin: Whoops, I fucking — oh, boy, I hate, I hate, uh, Roll20.

Sylvi: Text?

Austin: Yeah, I made your text smaller, by mistake.

Sylvi: Ah, no worries.

Austin: There, it's fixed now. Uh, I think this is —

Sylvi: Uh, am I rolling just one, or two?

Austin: Oh, boy.

Sylvi: I guess [unintelligible]

Austin: I'll, I'll give you two, because it's about your siblings, right?

Sylvi: Okay.

Austin: And your, your role is youngest daughter, in the same way that Eileen's role is maidservant. So there's relevant, there's relevant expertise here.

Sylvi: Okay.

Austin: 2, 2d6. And you want under a three. Well —

Sylvi: I got a 1.

Austin: You got a 1 —

Sylvi: And a 3.

Austin: And a 3. So you get some special insight. What do you, who do you make eye contact with, what's your question?

Sylvi: Uh... I, I think it might, I, I — my gut is with, to have it be either with — I think it's Catalina, actually, is kind of my gut here. Because you talking about her having like, pet causes and stuff, uh, makes me wonder about, if she is like, opposed to an Apostolosean military figure being here, I don't really know like what her —

Austin: Mmm, mm-hm. Is that what you're asking?

Sylvi: Like, is like —

Austin: Are you asking — is that the question, is, what is Catalina's —

Sylvi: Yeah, it's like, what are, what is Catalina's current political allegiances. Because you also said that she changes that a lot.

Austin: Yes. I think currently, you recall that Catalina is... Catalina thinks there should be peace. Uh, and she's said lots of words about it. She thinks that there shouldn't be war or fighting. And there should be, instead, you should get people together in a room to talk about their differences.

Jack: Brave.

Austin: Uh, yeah, and have a, a meal. I think she's very big on food, bringing people together. And so she actually last year started a new charity, that is about bringing people together through fancy dinners, right? Through like —

Jack: [laughing]

Austin: She pays money, they pay money to high-class chefs, their normal rate, to come in to do, like, a dinner with, uh, you know, if there are gangs that are having sort of a rivalry — what if they had a fancy dinner? Or, what if, if there are two business magnates who are risking, uh,

having, you know, economic, uh, fallout from their competition, you just bring them in to a nice dinner. And then they have a nice dinner, and they talk about what their, their thing is. And also you film it, and then you put it on the internet, the future internet —

Sylvi: Yeah, of course.

Austin: To kind of like, lead by example. Uh, it's, it's, what's it called? Does anybody have a good name for a terrible organization? Uh, [chuckles] — ugh.

Jack: Uh, it's called, uh... is it called like, like — is it called something like, appetizer, entree, dessert, except one of those words is like a pun for like, bringing people together or something?

Austin: Yeah, uh-huh.

Jack: Or like, or like peacefulness or something.

Austin: Uh-huh.

Sylvi: Appetizer, entries, dessert.

Austin: [chuckling] Yeah.

Jack: Oh my god.

Sylvi: Because we're building entranceways to peace.

Austin: [laughing] Uh-huh. Great.

Jack: Yeah, it's like a, it's like a door with a plate in it. Appetizers, entries, desserts. And then underneath it, it says, "entranceways to peace."

Austin: Yeah. Uh-huh.

Jack: And then underneath that, it says, "A Catalina Solstice project."

Austin: [laughing]

Sylvi: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Austin: All right, give me three dice. You've got to work this into your — [chuckling]

Sylvi: Okay.

Austin: 3d6. Looking for —

Sylvi: I just rolled 1d3.

Austin: Nope. I mean, that would give you a win.

Sylvi: That would have — I mean, I would have won, but I would have been cheating.

Austin: Yes.

Sylvi: Oof.

Austin: You got another, you got another 3. So you can once again, make eye — you make eye contact in this moment —

Sylvi: [laughing]

Austin: With — not with March, with — what the fuck is this character's name?

Sylvi: Bel'agos?

Austin: Bel'agos — not Bel — Bel, yeah, Bel'agos. And then you recall that the Apostolosean military denied someone from going on the show. You don't know who it was, but you do recall now, oh, wait, no, the military said —

Sylvi: [laughing] Fuck.

Austin: I'm not allowed to — uh, again, give me another 3d6.

Sylvi: Okay!

Austin: That's — you got a 1. That's a 1, success.

Sylvi: Okay.

Austin: What do you, what's this, what's this mixed success look like here? With a, with a 1 success, you barely manage it. The GM details a complication, harm, or cost. Uh... what do you say —

Sylvi: I think...

Austin: To Catalina?

Sylvi: I think I take the wrong angle on it, is what ends up happening.

Austin: Mmm, okay.

Sylvi: I think as opposed — my original idea was like, bringing up like, “oh yeah, we had, you did this dinner, and it was like Apostolos-themed.” [laughing] Or some shit. But like, none of — you're saying that none of them were able to make it, or that Apostolos, like I think it was like — I think what instead, what Catrina ends up being like is like —

Sylvi (as Catrina): Oh, well now that you have the opportunity to speak to an actual member, an actual ranking member of the Apostolos military, maybe you could sort of break down that wall and figure out a way that, you know, have them for dinner.

Austin: [chuckles] And I think, this is one of those great moments where Catalina is like — you're right! And the rest of this, the rest of this entire trip back, which is like an hour long, is Catalina needling this, this admiral —

Sylvi: [laughing] Oh, no.

Austin: Like all of the questions that she had prepared for the show, but a lot more pointed, and a lot of like, a lot of like, “well, if you really believe in your position on the war, you should have come on the show and defended it, and talked about it, and talked through your differences, you know? Uh, that's what a real general would do.” And, and, you know, uh, uh, Carvisle's like, “admiral, they're an admiral. They're not a general. A general is for the ground.” [chuckling] And it is not — the vibes in this car are wretched. So you succeeded at changing the topic.

Sylvi: I sure did.

Austin: And things didn't blow up, but, you know, you kind of just dodged the big annoying fight for the little annoying conversation, instead.

Sylvi: I'll take it. I'll take it, you know?

Austin: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Ah, all right. Uh, Vivian. We haven't really heard from you. As you can tell that people are rushing even more than they were before, you finish your burlap sacks, you've come back inside. What, what are you getting up to, as people prepare for the hunt?

Jack: I am... trying to figure out where the best place is for this hunt to take place. They have a grounds — there is a groundskeeper on staff.

Austin: Separate from you.

Jack: Uh... yes.

Austin: Okay.

Jack: Groundskeeper — oh, sorry, a gamekeeper.

Austin: A gamekeeper, okay.

Jack: I'm the groundskeeper, the gamekeeper is, is doing something, you know, is in charge of the, the, the —

Austin: Oh! Jack, what if the gameskeeper is off, isn't here, because there was no hunt scheduled? What if the gameskeeper like, took vacation?

Jack: Yeah, that's —

Austin: This week, and, and —

Jack: Yeah.

Austin: Uh, uh, Coughton was like, “of course, of course, of course, that's fine. You — of course. We were just — it's just a dinner, so —“ you have been left with —

Jack: That's great.

Austin: The gameskeeper is off at the nearest big city, you know? Visiting family who's in town, or whatever. You can reach them by phone, but —

Jack: Yeah. I am... I am standing on the back porch of the house, looking out into the kind of rear gardens. The house has a lot of gardens. And one side of it is kind of a wild garden, that

has been allowed to grow up into a forest, and is, you know, dense and thick pine woods. And it'd be very easy to stage the hunt in there. And on the other side of the back garden is an immense hedge maze, that is the prize of the family, and has been for generations. In fact, I was originally hired to specifically work on the maze. And I'm wondering if there might be a better venue for the hunt than the woodland.

Austin: And you're thinking it could be the labyrinth —

Jack: It could be —

Austin: It could be the maze, the mech-sized hedge maze.

Jack: Yeah, a, a mech in the maze might be visible, you know, its antenna might be visible above the top of one of the hedges —

Austin: Right.

Jack: And obviously, a big mech would be very visible. But, you know, the, the hunting —

Austin: The hunting ones are not as —

Jack: They're hollows, right? They're not Hallows.

Austin: Yeah, they're hollows and they're, they're not, they're probably in, in —

Janine: I had an idea for this.

Austin: Oh, we should — okay, what is your idea? Tell us, tell us your idea.

Janine: My idea was more like a, like an exoskeleton, kind of like —

Austin: Sure.

Janine: Like frame, an archery frame, that's like a, it's like a bodysuit to make you — not bodysuit but like, you know —

Sylvi: [chuckling]

Janine: An external frame that has like a built-in sort of bow thing, and it's supposed to make you really good at drawing this really powerful bow —

Austin: Oh, that's very fun.

Jack: Oh, that's great.

Janine: That you couldn't draw on your own.

Austin: That's very fun.

Janine: But it's like, mostly like, metal beams and tubes and things like that, where it's very like, external and kind of — yeah.

Austin: I wonder if it's that, and then that stuff gets almost covered up with cloth, or with some sort of —

Janine: Oh yeah.

Austin: You know what I mean? Like —

Janine: There's probably some sort of like, sheath thing.

Austin: Right.

Janine: To keep it looking, like, nice. Or like, you know, if you were having like a really fancy event, you would have custom sheets made for that event —

Jack: Yeah.

Austin: Right.

Janine: To like, commemorate like, oh, it's the 16th hunt of the whatever and — yeah.

Austin: [chuckling] Right. Yes, I like this one, I like this quite a bit. This is very fun.

Jack: And this means that we can bring the scale of the hedges down —

Austin: Yes, back to, back to regular — but still big.

Janine: Yes, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ali: [giggling]

Austin: But just not that big. Uh, which also makes sense, because the smaller it is, the more it actually makes sense to keep the strengths of the house — hidden away and defensible. If there's a giant maze next to it, that's like, a lot of space that a spaceship could have just decided, fuck it, I'm landing on that, you know what I mean?

Jack: Oh, a maze, I'll land on that!

Austin: Exactly. If it's, if it's tucked — if it's truly defensible and tucked away, there shouldn't be a mech-sized supermaze, you know what I mean?

Jack: Oh god, and the — but the maze weaves in and among trees, you know, it might look like it's covered by a canopy, but underneath it are these like, perfectly manicured, uh —

Austin: [chuckles]

Jack: It's got like, beautiful white gravel paths.

Austin: Yeah. What if an English garden had a French garden inside of it? [chuckling]

Jack: [laughing]

Sylvi: Oh my god.

Jack: Ah, Kesh.

Austin: Yeah. Uh-huh! Yes.

Jack: Yeah, so, I... I think I'd like to go and see, uh, I think I would like to go and see Martine. And, and —

Austin: Oh, who you're mutually resentful of?

Jack: Yes.

Austin: Yeah. Yes.

Jack: And Martine is preparing these hunting units, right?

Janine: Mm-hm.

Jack: Uh...

Jack (as Exler): You busy?

Janine (as Martine): Well, I'm preparing these hunting units, but other than that —

Jack (as Exler): Yeah, okay. I need 5 minutes.

Janine (as Martine): All right.

Janine: I think Martine, not passive-aggressively, but just as a matter of course, sets a timer on her watch.

Sylvi: [laughing] Oh my god.

Jack (as Exler): Okay, I'll try and keep it brief.

Janine: This is normal for her. I want to maintain — I'm doing it like this is a thing she does, it's not a thing she's doing just now.

Jack: Oh, but I'm resentful of you, so I think —

Janine: Yes, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ali: [laughing]

Janine: Yeah, I just want to make, I just want to make clear this isn't new.

Jack (as Exler): All right, well, I was talking to the boss, and we need to move them. The hunting units. I know we had them prepped, and it's much easier to get them down the tracks to the forest, but the hunt is going to be taking place in the Latimer Maze today, so —

Janine (as Martine): You're doing the hunt in the maze?

Jack (as Exler): I don't know, it's what the boss said.

Janine (as Martine): Is there any actual — is there anything to hunt in the maze right now?

Jack (as Exler): Well, I — uh, Marceline is away in town or away on business or something, so I've been put in charge of the gamekeeping for the time being, and as far as I can see, we can move the winged ones into the maze pretty easily. And just bring the cages in, let's them out.

Janine (as Martine): I guess, yeah.

Austin: Real quick, did you actually call, or is this your idea that you're passing off as Marceline's?

Jack: Oh, I am absolutely passing this off. No, I'm passing this off as, as — what's his name, Coughton?

Austin: Oh, as Coughton's idea, I see.

Jack: Yes.

Austin: Yes. Unbelievable.

Jack (as Exler): So, uh, you know.

Janine (as Martine): I could always, I could always call Marceline if — she couldn't get back here in time, but she might have some advice for us.

Jack (as Exler): No, I don't think that's necessary.

Janine (as Martine): She's my sister, after all, it wouldn't be a problem.

Jack (as Exler): No, no. When I last saw her, she was, she'd been dealing with those migraines, so.

Janine (as Martine): Yeah.

Jack (as Exler): I don't think we need to bother Marceline. But if you could just, when you're done with that, get them lined up outside the entrance to the, to the maze —

Janine (as Martine): The frames? Yeah, no problem.

Jack (as Exler): And make that the west entrance. I'm blocking off the east, because I don't want them getting onto the, the, the — the land kind of falls away quite easily down there, and I don't want people who are unfamiliar with it to have a problem. So —

Janine (as Martine): Yeah, the thrusters on the archery frames are not strong enough to do much good in that situation, that's probably a good call.

Jack (as Exler): Were you using my sink earlier?

Janine (as Martine): Yeah.

Jack (as Exler): Why?

Janine (as Martine): Because I don't have one.

Jack (as Exler): Can't you — every time you use the sink, and I keep saying, every time I say to you —

Austin: Beep-beep-beep! Beep-beep-beep! Beep-beep-beep!

Jack (as Exler): Well, I guess my 5 minutes is up. Uh...

Janine (as Martine): Yep.

Jack (as Exler): It's 5: 30 now, uh, I think we'll probably need the mechs ready by 7 or something. Does that sound good?

Janine (as Martine): Yeah. No problem.

Jack (as Exler): All right. Well... stay shiny. Good-bye.

Austin: Stay shiny. Okay. Uh, Elaine, the cars arrive. Catrina is obviously there as well. And all of these people begin to get out of these cars —

Janine: You called her Elaine?

Ali: It's Eileen. [cackling]

Austin: Fuck. Eileen's — okay, but —

Ali: No, I know. I know, I know, I know.

Austin: But —

Ali: Because when you said it, I was like, wait, is that my name? And then I had to realize that it wasn't. [wheezes laughing]

Austin: Eileen, Eileen Lilas, you see, as the whole crew gets out of the cars, out of the Range Rovers, Catrina's there, so is Coughton, Carvisle, and Catalina, and then Exanceaster March, and Guilford Gain, who is another — in my mind, March is like, what if a Motorola Razr was a Columnar, right? Uh, a slick flip phone of a guy, you know?

Ali: That sort of sheen.

Austin: Yeah, uh-huh.

Ali: That like, wasn't chrome, but like, was shiny.

Austin: But was shiny —

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: But also had like, almost like a carbon fiber vibe, you know what I mean?

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: Uh, and I haven't fully placed Guilford, but I think she's like, what if — she's like, what if one of those old telephones from the 1920s was a Columnar. You know, right, the handset —

Jack: The one that you pick up and say [old timey voice] hello?

Austin: [old timey voice] Hello? Yeah, that — yeah, uh-huh.

Jack: [old timey] London 5-2-4 —

Austin: Yeah, she is that. That's how, that's what Guilford is. Guilford is a, she has like a —

Janine: Important question — one of the ones you can hold in your hand and put on the table, or one of the ones that's mounted to a wall?

Austin: One of the ones that's mounted to a wall.

Janine: Or one of the ones that's built into a table? Okay, mounted to the wall.

Austin: Mounted to the wall, and I mean, I mean, the kind that have the —

Janine: Like that one in the house in Niagara.

Austin: No, no — did that have that type of —

Janine: It had like a thing, it had like a hand — it didn't have like a speaker —

Austin: I don't remember.

Janine: It had like a whole handset.

Austin: The whole handset, like the, the — when I say the handset, I don't mean like a regular phone handset, I mean like the old retro —

Jack: The little trumpet you speak into.

Austin: The little trumpet you speak into.

Janine: Yeah, just the microphone part.

Austin: Just the microphone part.

Janine: And the speaker would be on the, would be built-in.

Austin: Or, sorry, the other way.

Janine: Or no, it was the opposite. It was —

Austin: The speaker was what you hold up to your — right.

Janine: Yeah, the speaker is the — yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jack: [chuckling] Yeah. Rather than you having to crouch down next to the wall.

Janine: It would be very weird the other way around.

Austin: Yes. I guess this is — is this called a — is this called a candlestick phone? Is that what this is called? Yes, this is called a candlestick phone. So yeah, actually, it could be the table-mounted ones. You know. Ah, but I guess in my mind it's bigger, it's the bigger, payphone style of that type of phone. Anyway, you know what the fuck I'm saying. Uh, Frank Webb says, this is the first for a phonecast before a facecast. Given our history, probably not. We've probably done this before. Have you met us? Like — uh...

Sylvi: [laughing]

Austin: So yeah, that's —

Ali: Also, this is a facecast of — the robot's face is the phone.

Austin: Right. Yeah. So I think it counts. I think that's a face.

Ali: Yeah.

Austin: Phones have faces. Uh... don't quote me on that.

Ali: [laughing]

Austin: But yeah, everybody's getting out of these cars, this whole crew — oh, and then again, Laris, Leah, and Laurice, March's servants, who are not Columnar, and in fact, the three of them were — and I know this is going to sound bad, but they were gifts from the Solstice family to —

Jack: That does sound bad!

Austin: The March family — oh, they just have a long-term contract. They just have a long-term contract. They just have a long-term servantry contract. So they just —

Janine: Long-term indentured servantry contract.

Austin: Right, you know, it's just, it's a long-term contract that they're working off. And they've been signed over to the, uh, March family. Uh, last generation. So, uh, they were born —

Janine: So we don't know them.

Austin: You don't — well, I bet you've met them before. But you didn't used to work with them. Uh, they've visited before. This is not the first time March has come to visit. You've all worked

with them before. But, yeah. They, they were effectively born into servitude. They will theoretically die outside of servitude. But, you know, it's great. Maybe they're cousins to one of you. I could see that being the case. Uh, but, there they are, here they are, carrying all of March's bags and stuff. And the, that whole crew begins to make its way towards the household. Uh, I'm curious, for you, Eileen, what is your first, like, order of business, as, as this big group starts to come in?

Ali: Uh, I think I'm doing like the, you know, standing outside with the other maids. Like, the head of the household is probably there. There's probably a house butler who's like, grabbing everybody's things and doing all of that.

Austin: Yeah.

Ali: To start, to start bringing bags upstairs. I'm, mmm —

Austin: The head — the butler's name is Talbert... uh, and uh, we can invent other names as we need them. But, Talbert, yeah, is, I think, uh, probably need to organize some of this stuff, and, uh — will be — I'm going to say that Talbert is like, there's enough people here now that Talbert is going to be busy, generally managing the rest of the household. Though also, this is not a particularly wealthy household. So I don't know that, like, I'm sure there's a cook, right? We know there's a gameskeeper. But I bet there are limits. The fact that the mechanic has to sometimes be a lady's maid says it all, right?

Ali: [chuckling] Sure, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Austin: Uh, so, uh, so yeah.

Ali: Uh, yeah, but I think it's that sort of thing, where it's like, I'm, I'm probably directing people to a room where tea is set up, I'm probably collecting, uh, Catrina and Catalina's coats, probably to introducing myself to Guilford, showing her to her room —

Austin: Totally, yes. Yes. So, yeah, and maybe that's a good place to come in. Guilford is like, uh, Guilford makes a request that is, I don't know if it's unheard of, but it's, it's fairly, it's rare and maybe you receive it as insulting, which is, she asks to, to have a, a room across from Exanceaster March's. She says, "I'll need a room across from Exanceaster's." And she is a servant. Like, fundamentally, yeah, she's a bodyguard, but she's also a servant. And that is not, you know —

Janine: Yeah, it's not called Upstairs, Downstairs because everyone has rooms next to each other.

Austin: Exactly. Exactly.

Ali: Oh, sure sure sure sure sure.

Austin: She's supposed to stay downstairs. You know, she's — maybe she happens to get a guest quarters downstairs, but it's certainly not, that's not what happens, you know? Uh, but she insists on this.

Austin (as Guilford): That won't be a problem, will it, miss?

Ali (as Eileen): Not at all, ma'am.

Austin: And hands you her bags, which are very heavy.

Ali: Damn, you got guns in here? I didn't say that — [laughing]

Austin: You know?

Ali: [chuckling]

Austin: Might could be, you know?

Ali: [laughing]

Austin: I wrote bodyguard down, didn't I?

Ali: [chuckles] I think I do the thing of like, taking the bag and then like, getting, like, pulled down by being surprised by its weight, and like, awkward smile.

Austin: Mm-hm. Yeah, as you begin to move in with it, Coughton comes over and is like —

Austin (as Coughton): The activity is ready, yes?

Ali (as Eileen): Uh, yes.

Austin (as Coughton): I want to roll right into it. So begin gathering people, and I will let everyone know, and we should be ready to go in... 10 minutes? 10 minutes.

Ali (as Eileen): Yes, I'll inform the others. Uh, did you have some tea, sir?

Austin (as Coughton): No. Tea during little sandwiches.

Ali (as Eileen): There's arrival tea set up in the room. Your guests are in there.

Austin (as Coughton): Arrival tea. Hm.

Ali (as Eileen): It's a long car ride.

Austin (as Coughton): You're right. I'll go have a cup of tea.

Ali (as Eileen): I'll, I'll, I'll inform the gardens of your intent to be there in, 10 minutes, was it?

Austin (as Coughton): 10 minutes. 15, for tea. 15.

Ali (as Eileen): 15. Yes, sir.

Austin: Catrina, you've been set out, you are at the arrival tea.

Sylvi: Mm-hm.

Austin: Everyone else has sat down. It's, despite the fact that your primary guest is Columnar, it's all just tea. There's nothing laid out for the Columnar part of the guests at this point, reflecting the previous miss. But, hey, the admiral is, is enjoying multiple cups of tea. Just like, has just downed the first cup, steaming hot, like it's nothing, and then poured themselves a second cup and is going at that. Uh, is not treating this with any sort of etiquette. And, to be fair, has been being yapped at by one or the other of your siblings for the entire trip back. Uh, how are you doing?

Sylvi: I... think, hm.

Austin: Actually — you go ahead.

Sylvi: Oh, no, go ahead, go ahead.

Austin: I was going to say, because of that, you actually are in a situation where Exanceaster and you are the two quiet ones, which leads to a bit of a conversation, right?

Sylvi: I was actually going to mention, I think after multiple attempts to change the topic, uh, with Carvisle, Catalina, and Bel'agos, I am just like, no, you know what? I should impress the actual, the main guest that we have here.

Austin: Mm-hm.

Sylvi: Uh, I think it's like, very polite-like —

Sylvi (as Catrina): So, how was your trip over here? I hope everything was — easy.

Austin (as Exanceaster): Oh, it was excellent. Of course, yes. It's a simple trip from my household, and one I've made many times. I'm quite fond of it. Now, tell me, Catrina, I've now heard quite a bit about your sister's projects, interests, and I know that your brother has... military, or at least militaristic aspirations. But you have shared so little about what your ambitions and interests are.

Sylvi: Oh my god. Uh... I am trying to figure out, I might ask for a roll here, to see whether she gives the like —

Austin: Oh, like — ugh — [laughing]

Sylvi: This is the respectable answer, or —

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvi: No, she's a little weird.

Austin: I, I'm happy to — I mean, you decide which of those things, but the question is, does it come across, how does it across, right? And so —

Sylvi: Okay, uh —

Austin: I think etiquette is upstairs, and so you should be rolling upstairs. You want to roll over your 3 here. What is your actual answer?

Sylvi: Uh, so, I think the way it's going to be worded — I have a way of wording it either way —

Austin: Okay, okay.

Sylvi: Uh, is why I ask. I can — the thing she's really into is taxidermy.

Austin: Uh-huh. I see. Great.

Ali: Nice.

Sylvi: So, there is a way of being like —

Sylvi (as Catrina): Oh, you know, I've taken to sort of, uh, zoology, and preservation and things like that.

Sylvi: And then there's also —

Sylvi (as Catrina): I like to do taxidermy because it's —

Austin: On dead things, yeah.

Sylvi: How things are put together.

Austin: Give me, give me — this is, this is direct. You're answering directly, you're going through the obstacle, right? You're 100 percent, you're not trying to duck it. So —

Sylvi: No, yeah.

Austin: 2 dice, I'm going to give you one for foppish and flashy, uh, to try to get this person's approval. Hey, that's one success. That's a 6.

Sylvi: Okay, cool. Yeah.

Austin: So, uh, so again, you, you, uh, succeed, but there is, uh, a consequence, there is a complication, harm or cost.

Sylvi: I do just really quickly want to say, so people don't think that I am playing just another goth self-insert, that the way I am picturing Catrina is extremely, like, pastels and pinks and stuff.

Austin: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Sylvi: Very important note there.

Jack: [chuckling]

Austin: Uh, so I think, uh, March, with a success, March is fairly, let's say surprised that you would, you would enjoy such a task, but is nevertheless impressed. Uh, also, Exanceaster is kind of a fucking... weird asshole. Uh, and so I think the way that he responds is like —

Austin (as Exanceaster): Oh, yes, there is something fascinating about taking something apart and putting it back together. Would you, what would you say to taking on the task of... preserving whatever I manage to hunt today?

Sylvi (as Catrina): Oh my gosh, I mean —

Sylvi: There's like a second where she pauses, where she's like, part of her realizes like, well, I've kind of fucking done everything that lives on the grounds here. But then she's like, well, no, I need to be polite. And she's like —

Sylvi (as Catrina): I would be honored. It would be lovely to be able to give you a memento of your time here before you go away.

Austin (as Exanceaster): Good, good. Then you'll be with us on the hunting party.

Sylvi (as Catrina): Oh, fantastic.

Austin: Uh, and, you know, also I think says —

Austin (as Exanceaster): And I'll be grading you on your hunting expertise as well. I don't trust a taxidermist who can't kill what they stitch up.

Sylvi (as Catrina): Uh, of course!

Sylvi: Big, like, comedy, nervous laugh, after that.

Austin: Uh-huh. Mm-hm. Hey, Martine, how are repairs going? What's the process of preparing these things look like, especially given the time crunch?

Janine: So, yeah. I think there's a degree of like, we have to dust them off —

Austin: Mm-hm.

Janine: They're probably stored in — this is weird, but I kind of imagine they like, flat-pack a little bit.

Austin: Oh, that's —

Janine: They flatten out kind of like when you get exercise equipment that you can like, put in a closet really easily. That kind of thing, where it's like —

Austin: Mm-hm, yeah.

Janine: There's some clip, there's some like, pins, those like — the, the little pins with the like bump that you have to like, pull out, and reslot back in to get everything like, straightened out, and then you have to pull the dust covers out of the, or, they're not dust covers, but the, the covers, the sheets out of the bag where they're all stored in, you dust those off, you like pick, like, okay, which set's most appropriate. Uh, you know, let's go with the like, autumn set, the like, late autumn set, where it's kind of like —

Austin: Mm-hm.

Janine: Some nice warm browns, something like that. Uh, and like, slip all those in. And then, I think you have to like, get in and walk each one to the dropoff point and like, line them up. Because I don't think you can just like, they're too much to carry, but also, is it worth it to like, dig a trolley out to move the truck? Because the trolley then has to go on the lawn, and then you see the tracks from the trolley on the lawn —

Austin: Yeah, yeah.

Janine: And like, that's a whole thing. Uh, so I think it's easier to just hop in and like, walk from there. Uh...

Austin: Love it. I think this is a roll, right, getting all these prepared.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: I think this is upstairs, for two reasons. One is, again, you're doing the work, you're not sneakily making somebody else do the work for you or something like that. And two is, you made that case, right? This is high culture, right?

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: This is, prepping for this sort of thing is a cultural work. So, yeah, give me, and again, you're a mechanic, so that's another one, obviously, so that's 2d6. Okay, only one success.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Uh, so, so I think the, the — you manage to get all of them there, and you notice in the, uh, as the tea service comes to a conclusion and people start coming over, you realize that one of the units is not up to snuff. I don't know if the batteries haven't been charged enough, or — you tell me if there's, if something comes to mind for you, but something is busted about it. And, someone is either going to go without a unit, or they're going to have the unit that isn't, that isn't fully functional or is going to break in some way in the middle of all of this. Who gets that? And again, I guess the teams here, as we've seen them, are Coughton, Catrina and Exanceaster on one team, Bel'agos and Carvisle and Catalina on the other team? And then I guess the valet and bodyguard, uh, Guilford, is not hunting, but is going to be with that first team as a bodyguard.

Janine: Right. Uh... so, I think I know the way in which the thing is broken —

Austin: Mm-hm.

Janine: Which is that those pins that I mentioned, where it's like a thick metal pin, and there's like a hole on, you know, there'll be like two bars with a bar in the middle, and there'll be holes in all three of them that line up, and when you fold it up, it lines up with a different set of holes. Uh, I think — I think there's a mech where a couple of those pins, maybe because there was like, some moisture or something, are rusted through.

Austin: Ooh.

Janine: Uh, and when I pull them out, they just kind of snap.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Uh, so I have to quickly improvise — well, I don't have — this is a certain grade of metal that it has to be, and like, I don't have any of this that's like, pre-cut, ready to go. If I had more time, I could make that happen. So I think the thing that has to happen is, I use just sort of like some stock metal barring, and like snip it, and like, bend it at the edges. Kind of the equivalent of like, using a paper clip, like unfolding a paper clip —

Austin: Paper clipping it, yeah, uh-huh.

Janine: And then kind of folding the edges in, just like, well, I hope this doesn't fall out, but also, depending on who's using this, it might bend over time.

Austin: Right.

Janine: And use, and then it might like, start to stick in certain positions, or, or snap or things like that. Uh, and given that, I think I would pick, like, whoever I think is the lightest, like whoever I think is —

Austin: Right.

Janine: Least likely to tax it. Uh, I don't know if that's Catalina or Catrina.

Austin: It could be any of the kids. It truly could be any of the kids.

Janine: Uh...

Austin: Because it's not like — I'm thinking of Carvisle as a little nerd —

Janine: Right.

Austin: Who is not like, Carvisle is not in the gym, you know what I mean?

Janine: Yeah, that's the thing, is, I think then I maybe would pick Carvisle, because Carvisle seems the least, like, doer.

Austin: Yeah, uh-huh.

Janine: He seems like a talker more than a doer.

Austin: He's a talker, yeah, 100 percent.

Janine: So he's probably not going to tax it as much as, you know. So that's my, my line of thinking, right? Is that Catalina is adventurous, she's going to be really out there pushing it. Catrina, my impression is probably that she could go either way. Uh, but Carvisle feels — safer.

Austin: Mm-hm. Yeah, let's go with Carvisle. Great, perfect.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Uh, and Carvisle, you know, I think, you know, he begins to get dressed into it, and I bet someone else is — like, this is, you're, these people are being dressed, the way that you would dress a person for a dinner, you know what I mean?

Janine: Mm-hm.

Austin: Uh, there's like an entire, everybody has an attendant, everybody's getting, getting put into their, their mechs in this way, their exosuits in this way. Uh, and you can — he is just, he looks over and he's like, ah, I got the good one. And it's like, oh my god, you don't even know. You don't even know. You're such a little idiot.

Janine: Well, that's the other thing, right? Is like, he's probably also the one who's the least likely to notice that, that these — like, there are probably some people here who, if they were looking over — I mean, I guess it would be covered by the sheath, but —

Austin: Mm-hm.

Janine: Of the people who are most likely to notice, he's probably not up there.

Austin: Yeah, yeah. Agreed. Vivian —

Janine: Probably just thinks like, oh, the sheath is the cleanest.

Austin: Uh-huh.

Janine: So, that means it's the best.

Austin: [chuckling] Vivian, you said you were the one who you were going to set up the winged ones, and also you've been taking care of this place. Tell me, what's your side of the preparations for this hunt look like?

Jack: I have — first I went into the maze and lit braziers around the maze. The snow is starting to come down pretty heavily now.

Austin: Mm-hm.

Jack: Not enough to be a blizzard, but I imagine that there's a degree from the Solstice family of like, oh, it's a winter getaway, uh, you know?

Austin: Right, right.

Jack: You know, there's a degree of romance here, but it's like, my, my roses might, you know, die, and I have to light all these braziers in the, you know, stomping the gravel of the maze in snow boots and lighting the braziers. And then, I think it is probably time to let the winged ones into the maze. Shall we talk about the winged ones?

Austin: Yeah, talk to me about the winged ones.

Jack: There are four of them.

Austin: I know I said the winged ones first, but I don't know what the fuck they are. You tell me. There are four of them. Okay.

Jack: Yes. And they are named after, uh, like, legendary generals or something. Like, in our world, I think they'd be named after like Roman generals, right? Like this is Caesar Augustus, this is —

Austin: Right, right.

Jack: Maybe that's what they're called. Maybe one is like, one is Caesar Augustus, one is Marcus Aurelius, one is, you know — uh, and they are, I am — have we got thoughts on winged one vibe? I am picturing like a cross between an emu and a bat, a sort of like —

Sylvi: Woah...

Austin: Oh my god. [chuckling]

Jack: Like a tall, walking on two legs, leathery, slightly feathery, bird-winged type creature.

Austin: Right, right [bird squawk]

Jack: Yeah —

Janine: I had actually been looking at prehistoric birds, and I didn't bring it up, but that's more or less where I got to with that.

Jack: And like, you know, uh, they each, they each have their own temperaments. You know, Marcus Aurelius is stalking backwards and forwards in the snow, with like, sharp claws dragging lines in the snow —

Austin: I just realized something. We — okay. There are four winged ones that you go and hunt. And they have names. Have they been raised to be hunted? How many hunts have these ones survived?

Jack: Yes.

Austin: I guess if they're like — do the maze hunt with them, that's, like — do they, do they win?

Jack: Yeah, the answer is yes. Also, the maze hunt is new. I don't know if anybody's tried the maze hunt before. They usually hunt it in the forest.

Austin: I see.

Jack: But yes, I don't think, I think it's a bit like, you know, you sometimes see those, uh, whales, that have like, marks from fishing lines in their backs, or —

Austin: Right, sure.

Jack: You know, like when you encounter in fantasy the big boar that has spears in it.

Austin: Yeah.

Jack: I think there's a degree almost of like matador stuff with this. It's very interesting that, uh, March, at least, does not believe this is the case. March is like, I'm going to kill one of these fucking birds —

Austin: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Jack: And you're going to taxidermize it.

Austin: Yeah.

Jack: But I do think that they are like, this is a Kesh cultural experience, I think it is very Kesh to be like, we have things that we breed for hunting, and we keep hunting them.

Austin: [chuckles] That's deeply fucked-up.

Jack: And it's not necessarily considered like a victory for the birds, but it's like, you know — when the bell rings at the end, or whatever, uh, we, we get the birds back in.

Austin: Unbelievable. Fantastic. I need a roll to see how this process goes. Uh, I don't know with this — how are you handling these animals?

Jack: Very, uh, I am afraid of them. I'm like a gardener.

Austin: Right, this is not your job.

Jack: I have really been hoist by my own petard in terms of being like, I know the maze well, I can maybe like, uh, put the cat among the pigeons in there, and see if I can get away with stealing something from them, trap them in there, the maze seems like a good place to do some sneaky stuff. And now I'm like, you have to let the winged ones into the maze.

Austin: Yeah.

Jack: So, the winged ones are in four crates on four, like trolleys, that get loaded onto these, like, slightly sunken metal tracks in the paths. Uh, and I can drag them towards the gate, but eventually the tracks don't go up to the maze, so I have to like, lead them into the maze one by one.

Austin: Oh, god.

Jack: Uh... I think —

Austin: Would you say that you're doing this through a sense of authority or soothing platitudes? Are you, would you say that you're doing this through or over the obstacle of them not wanting to be led into a maze where they will be hunted? Or are you going under or around that obstacle.

Jack: I feel like I might be — ugh... how could I be going under or around the obstacle? I'd be trying to placate the birds, right?

Austin: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Jack: The first one is like, listen, you fucks —

Austin: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jack: You're going in the maze.

Austin: [chuckling] Yes.

Jack: And the — [chuckling] — and the second one is like, it's like my little tinny speaker is playing a ballad, and I'm just like soothingly singing under my breath to these birds as I like slip a little temporary collar around their neck.

Austin: Exactly —

Jack: They flap, and —

Austin: Mm-hm. You're giving them little sugar cubes or whatever the bat-emu equivalent is —

Jack: Oh, no, it's sugar cubes, it's sugar cubes.

Austin: Okay.

Jack: Yeah, it's a, it's a flashback to me seeing Eileen earlier and saying, "I need 50 sugar cubes."

Austin: [laughing] They have little tongues that dart out, you know —

Jack: Yeah, their tongues are blue.

Austin: Like lizard tongues. Ugh.

Jack: Gray-blue tongues.

Austin: Uh, all right, give me —

Jack: Also, I want to be clear that these birds don't want to go in the maze.

Austin: I, yeah, no.

Jack: As far as the hunting is concerned, they are, they're pretty excited about this. This is their whole deal.

Austin: Mm-hm.

Jack: We, as, as people who are against hunting would be like — oh, that might be worse. But the birds are not like, oh, no, don't hunt me! They're like, ah, this is the game!

Austin: I see, I see, I see, I see. I actually had that backwards, I see. Okay. I think you want —

Janine: This is a Star Trek thing.

Austin: Is it literally?

Janine: This happens in Star —

Austin: Oh god.

Janine: Remember, there's that, that race of — there's like a race who are bred to be hunted?

Austin: Oh, I do remember that.

Janine: From the gamma quadrant, or the delta — whichever, the delta quadrant, I think?

Austin: I think gamma's right. The, or maybe you're right, maybe it's — no, I think it's gamma. Anyway, yes, I do remember that episode now. Jack, you —

Jack: I think the closest parallel is like, uh, uh, yeah, because this is not my area of expertise, I'm imagining like racehorses or racing dogs, who might not necessarily feel positive about it, but are like, oh, it's time to race.

Austin: Right, right.

Jack: We are going.

Austin: Right.

Jack: Uh, I'm going to roll 1d6.

Austin: And you want to roll under the 5 here. Hey, look at that!

Jack: Oh, beautiful work.

Austin: So, one success, there is still a consequence. Uh, which is the one is that you lose?

Jack: Uh, great question. List of Roman Generals.

Austin: I'm going to say, I think that it is Trajan.

Jack: Oh, ho-ho-ho. Oh, no!

Austin: You've lost Trajan.

Jack: How do I — do I just turn around and he's gone, there are now four birds.

Austin: There are — I thought you said there are four to begin with. There's five to begin with?

Jack: Uh, however — we can decide. We're making this up. None of this is real.

Austin: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Jack: Uh, let's say there are five — no, four is easier. There are now —

Austin: No, five's good, five's good, because uh, that means that like, whoever scores a hit — it's like a competition between the two teams, right? So you need 5 so that there's a tiebreaker.

Jack: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Austin: You know? Trajan, gone. Could be in the maze. You don't know!

Jack: [chuckling]

Austin: Trajan gone. Trajan is, uh, Trajan is like, uh, uh, the, the one that has like, some sort of, there's some sort of special coloring or some sort of special feature. What's the special feature for Trajan? Is it like a shock of white hair, fur, is it like — or feathers. They're, they're winged ones, I don't know. [chuckling] Is it —

Jack: It's, uh, eyes, heterochromia, eyes are different colors.

Austin: Oh, eyes have different colors, yes. Love it, great.

Jack: Uh, and it's just, you know, the smoke from the braziers is going up into the bonfire, and you can hear the sounds of some number of birds distantly —

Austin: Uh-huh.

Jack: You know, in the maze, and the sounds of their sharp claws in the snow. And I like, look back at the house and see maids moving behind the windows.

Austin: Mm-hm. Uh, uh, there is, there are, I'm going to say that there are like, some military officers, you know, also with, uh, uh, Bel'agos, who don't rate. They're going to stay back at the house, you know, and expect to be, you know, pampered, and given little sandwiches of their own. Uh, uh, and they're watching from some sort of big back porch, with, with binoculars, you know. I think they're, someone prepares, you know hunting binoculars, for them to use, and they like, wave them off and use their mil-spec, super tactical, you know, binocs instead or whatever. And so they're watching. Uh, uh, so the teams are set. Does anyone want to do anything else before this hunt begins? Eileen, any final — go ahead.

Jack: Oh, no, no, no.

Austin: I was going to ask Eileen if there were any final words or exchange with Coughton, or if there was anything else you wanted to prepare separately at this point. But...

Ali (as Eileen): Best of luck with the hunt, sir.

Austin (as Coughton): Of course, of course. Just, uh, thank you, again, for the little sandwiches. Uh, they'll be delicious, and a boost in trying times.

Ali (as Eileen): I'll pass those words to the kitchen.

Austin: Uh, Vivian, you had one more thing?

Jack: Uh, no, I can wait for the hunt.

Austin: Okay. Well, the hunt is on. Uh —

Jack: [chuckling]

Austin: Catrina, again, it's you, it's Coughton, your father, and it's Bel'ag — sorry, and it's, and it's Exanceaster. You're all in your hunting gear. You take off through the maze. How well do you know this maze?

Sylvi: Uh, I feel like I have, I'm assuming I know it pretty well. Like, I grew up here, you know? Like — I, also like, unlike, uh, Catalina, I've been here like my entire life, is kind of how I'm picturing Catrina?

Austin: Right, sure, yeah.

Sylvi: Uh, so like, you enter, you have to entertain yourself a lot over the years, and I imagine part of that is doing dumb shit in the maze.

Austin: Mmm.

Sylvi: Uh, so, I think she's — knows them well enough, yeah.

Austin: Okay. Then, I think Coughton, knowing this about you, Coughton is like —

Austin (as Coughton): Uh, my daughter Catrina will be our guide as we move through the maze. She knows the maze best of any of my children, giving us a firm leg up.

Austin: And, Exanceaster is like —

Austin (as Exanceaster): Very nice. Happy to have every advantage we can.

Sylvi (as Catrina): Thank you for the vote of confidence, papá.

Austin (as Coughton): Of course.

Austin: And, again, also there with you is Guilford, Guilford Gain, uh, who is, I would say, keeping a 10-step distance from the three of you, and is not in any sort of, you know, mechanized anything, is just sort of — I mean, is, because of being Columnar, but is not wearing any sort of exosuit, is not in any sort of hollow or anything. Uh, is keeping, keeping her distance just a little bit. It isn't long until Coughton begins to try to break into conversation about stuff. Uh, about the, the Pact and the Bilateral Intercession. And, you know, it's a lot of like —

Austin (as Coughton): Well, we've been friends for so long, our families —

Austin: Da-da-da-da-da, you know, it would be such a shame if politics got in the way of our eternal friendship. And you are getting the vibe that March... wants to hunt, in this moment, you know?

Sylvi: Okay.

Austin: And, uh, it is, it is not necessarily clear if this is an annoyance, or if this is — you don't really know what March was, what March was coming here for, is part of what you realize, right? Uh, you know that like, you do a dinner pretty regularly, you're old family friends. But, while you know what your father's objective is here, the only thing you can get from March at this point is, March is here to hunt and then have dinner, right?

Sylvi: Okay.

Austin: So that's kind of the vibe. What are you focusing on here? Are you focusing on the hunt? Are you focusing on trying to help your father make his points? Are you just trying to keep your head down?

Sylvi: Oh, I mean, I was told I'm being graded on my hunting, you know?

Austin: True. True.

Sylvi: So, I feel like I have to sort of focus on that.

Austin: [chuckling]

Sylvi: Also, like, listen. My two chucklehead siblings are off doing their bullshit.

Austin: Mm-hm.

Sylvi: If I kill a big bird and then stuff it, I'm going to look great.

Austin: That's true, that's true.

Sylvi: So...

Austin: All right. That sounds to me like an upstairs roll. You know the maze, so I'll give you a bonus one for that, I feel like that makes sense.

Sylvi: Thank you.

Austin: So that's two dice. I don't know that foppish/flashy or youngest daughter gives you a third one —

Sylvi: No...

Austin: But it sounds like you're prepared, at least, so that's two dice, 2d6.

Sylvi: I got a 4 and a 2.

Austin: So that is one success.

Sylvi: So, one success.

Austin: What's the — so, so, Janine, can you redescribe for me the mechanism — it's, it's basically an archer, you're basically using a bow, right? Like a superbow? An arrow?

Janine: Yeah, I kind of pictured like, you know, a more, well — you know those compound bows, the like new bows that people use?

Austin: Yeah.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Where it's like hinge-y and metal and springy, and there's like pulleys and like weird shit? I imagine it kind of being like a full-body version of that, where the bow is kind of like built-in.

Austin: Right.

Janine: But a lot of it is like, reinforcement, so you are also able to even draw it, because it's like, big and powerful, at a different scale.

Austin: Mm-hm. Yeah. I love that. It makes all sorts of cool bendy noises as you pull back on the string, and the whole thing —

Janine: Yeah. I mean, the other way to think of it is like, uh, I mean, like I said before, like exercise equipment, right? Like a Bowflex or something.

Austin: Right, yes. Like a Bowflex, yeah, yeah, yeah. Absolutely. Uh, so you take the lead here. You guide them through the maze. You know, not only which ways to go, but also like, which

ways give you more options, one which way is to go and which ways link back up. And every once in a while, there's like a break in the maze to have like a kind of big open space, which you know would be a great place to be able to get a shot in, you know. You know, there's like little alcoves and little, little, almost like groves, inside of the maze.

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: Not groves, but uh, what's the word, for when there's like — not a cove, but there's another word for when you're in the forest, and then there is like a glade, you know? That might be the right word.

[transcriber's note: Austin is reaching for “copse: a small group of trees”]

Sylvi: I think glade is what you're thinking of.

Austin: It's one of many words that means that sort of thing. Uh, and, and, I think it is, with one success, you realize quickly you can hear the sound of somebody else running, chasing something. Uh, and it's like, they're in a parallel, imagine that you're in the hedge maze. They're one, like, row over in the maze. And you can hear the sound of the winged one running past, and then the body of whoever else is with the, wearing the mech suit, the exosuit, running past it. And you're like, okay, they're on the hunt.

You're running on the hunt, Exanceaster and your father and the bodyguard are all behind you. You're taking the lead here. You bust out into this big open area. You can see it across the way. You fire, you miss. Then, you realize, it is, it is Carvisle. Carvisle fires and misses. Now the two of you are like, chasing the thing, full speed — another thing that these, that these hollows let you do is keep up with them, right? You have this enhanced running capability, so it's not like, uh, it's not like hunting a deer and then the deer runs away. You're also able to fucking pursue, right?

Sylvi: Yeah. It's like hunting a deer, and then running and tackling the deer.

Austin: Yes. You get in front of the, of the, uh, of your brother. You, you're pulling back on the bow to shoot, and then you, you release — as your arrow is in the air between you and the deer, you can hear your brother jump to try to do like a jump shot over you, and you hit the deer — or the, not the deer, sorry, you hit the —

Sylvi: The winged one.

Austin: The winged one. It's Trajan, the most, uh, powerful of them, the one that got loose in there.

Jack: He was in the maze!

Austin: He was if the maze, he went into the maze.

Jack: That's great!

Austin: It's totally fine, it's —

Jack: It's a W, as far as I'm concerned.

Austin: Exactly. 100 percent.

Sylvi: As planned. [chuckling]

Austin: But, having needed to chase Trajan, who was running at full speed, who was free, in his own mind, you know? He had gotten away, right? And so he was really going for it. He was not playing the game. He was running for his life, which put extra stress on Carvisle's suit, and Carvisle should not have been trying to do a jump shot, which isn't a thing you do —

Sylvi: No...

Austin: You little dummy. And the suit breaks, and he fires the bow, and the bow, the arrow slams into your father's shoulder, as he completely spins around —

Sylvi: Oh my god.

Austin: And your father is, is dropped, he's, there's blood. You know, uh, there are, the bodyguard, you know, sends back message immediately that there has been, a, you know, a casualty, a wound on the field. The braziers all take some sort of special, there's like a, a purple flame kicks in, some sort of special gas gets added to the braziers to let everyone know the hunt is on, you know, has been halted. Your father is yelling — he goes, “Ah!” and falls over.

What do you do, Catrina?

Sylvi: [laughing] I think I scream. The... my initial reaction is, "oh my god, Carvisle has just killed father," you know?

Austin: [laughing] Yeah. Uh-huh.

Sylvi: Like —

Austin: Uh, it's a big arrow, right? These are special mech arrows, right?

Sylvi: Yeah.

Austin: It's bad, this is bad. Uh, uh, and you're in the middle of a maze. You're in the middle of a maze. This is not a good place to have been wounded. Uh... [chuckling] what do you, what do you do?

Sylvi: Uh, I guess it's like, we, we've got to keep him from bleeding too much until help can get here.

Austin: Yeah, uh-huh. I think — you know what, here's what I'll, I'm just going to straight-up give you this.

Sylvi: Yeah?

Austin: Guilford has medical supplies that can stabilize Coughton for now.

Sylvi: Okay.

Austin: Hey, everybody, back at the, the estate — the purple smoke is going up, you know what that means, someone's been hurt. Who, who jumps into action in a moment like this? Is this a, is this an Eileen? Is this a... who's like, I guess, you don't have a doctor on board, but —

Ali: Uh, do we think that this is the sort of estate that would have, like, like a town nearby? I guess we're not, we're like —

Austin: No —

Jack: We're tucked away.

Austin: We're tucked away, yeah.

Ali: It's hidden away and defensible, yeah, yeah, yeah. It's not the sort of like — yeah.

Austin: Unfortunately. So that, but in some ways that means, you must have decent medical supplies here for that reason, right? Or —

Ali: Mm-hm.

Austin: But of the three of you — Vivian, Martine, and Eileen, who responds to this, to this emergency? I guess, where are you all during the hunt? Let's maybe rewind a second. Where is everybody while the hunt is going on?

Janine: Uh, I think Martine is, is sort of doing some exterior mechanical work, just in case she's needed — knowing that there's specifically a thing that could go wrong —

Austin: Uh-huh.

Janine: Makes her want to be accessible. I was going to suggest that she should, because she has access to vehicles, uh, she should get one of those ready, and then try and grab Vivian to try and guide her through the maze.

Austin: That's a good idea.

Jack: Yeah, I am chatting with the soldiers on the porch —

Austin: [chuckles]

Jack: And trying to like, uh, uh, persuade them to let me look through their fancy, you know, military binoculars or whatever.

Austin: Ooh, right, I'm sorry. You know what? I should have — we should have paused in general during that hunt. Weren't you spending that time to go try to rob these people?

Jack: I was planning on going and, uh, inter, interceding to be like —

Austin: Gotcha.

Jack: I was going to go and visit, uh, uh, Catrina, and be like, oh, have you seen anything on these people? But as far as I'm concerned, before I could have like, leapt to action there, someone has been hurt inside the maze.

Austin: I should have slow-rolled the hunt a little bit to make sure that people back at, at the estate weren't looking to snoop around or do anything else. I, you know, that hunt can take a little bit, right? So I have no problem being like, meanwhile, this is what was happening before things blew up. Uh, as long as it does wrap back around to what, what Martine just said, which is, finding Vivian to, to head out into the maze, right? Uh...

Jack: Yeah, I want to go snoop around their quarters.

Austin: Okay.

Jack: I want to go and see Eileen, I think.

Austin: Okay. Where do you find Eileen. Eileen, where does Vivian find you, inside the house?

Ali: Uh, inside the house during the hunt, I am probably cleaning up the arrival tea service?

Austin: Sure.

Jack (as Exler): Oh, it's cold out. Do you mind if I just hang out in here for a bit?

Ali (as Eileen): Uh, sure. Do you want a cup?

Jack (as Exler): Oh, I mean, I can help tidying up —

Ali: Sort of gesturing to the — [giggling]

Jack (as Exler): But yeah, I'll, I'll take one. Did they have anything for the Columnar people?

Ali (as Eileen): Uh, we... kind of couldn't put something together. But we'll adjust during, during dinner.

Jack (as Exler): Yeah. Yeah, you got anything big planned?

Ali (as Eileen): Ugh. No.

Austin: [laughing]

Jack: [chuckling]

Jack (as Exler): Oh, bud. Eileen... they're going to be busy with the hunt for a while. Uh, I — who's that, who's that person who came with the, uh, with March? Like his second or something?

Ali (as Eileen): I'm to understand that she's a, a bodyguard, and demands, uh, to stay close to March. She wants to sleep upstairs.

Jack: Uh, Exler makes a big, like, “huh?” expression.

Jack (as Exler): You want to go poke around her stuff? They're going to be busy in there for like an hour, two hours. Come on, it'll be fun.

Ali (as Eileen): She had this bag that was very heavy.

Jack (as Exler): She had a bag that was very —! Look, come on — put the tray down.

Ali: [laughing] I think sort of like, awkward glance to like, all of the cups on the table, back up to Vivian, back to the table, then just like, fine.

Austin: [chuckling] Uh, all right. I mean, they're away at the hunt. So you're able to go back upstairs. It's your house, you know, you know the way in. You have the key to open that door, you know? Uh...

Jack: Is it like, taking the key from a little keyring on Eileen's belt, and —

Austin: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, Eileen, do you, do you carry the key to that place, or do you have — I mean, right now it might just be open. I'm trying to think if, if the bodyguard would have been careful enough to like, request it be locked. But it doesn't matter, right? Because it's —

Ali: Right, yeah. I would have access to it regardless, yeah.

Austin: Yeah, exactly. And I didn't do that, I did not have, I did not have her say, lock it and give me the key. So I am not going to retroactively do that.

Ali: [wheezes]

Austin: She should have done that, and she did not. So you find your way into her room, where the bag is. I think, you know, there was such a short time between arriving and heading out for

doing the tea that I don't think she's unpacked anything yet. Uh, and so she has that one big bag, and then a smaller bag that is, uh, you know, also lighter, but also just like, not as densely packed, not as heavy per pound, per inch, so to speak. What do you do?

Jack: You know, I reach into, into a pocket in my overalls, and pull out a little pair of gloves, uh —

Austin: Mmm, you're ready to go. [chuckling]

Jack: So as not to — [laughing]

Ali: [chuckles]

Jack: Just looks at Eileen and shrugs. Points at the bag —

Jack (as Exler): Was this the one?

Ali (as Eileen): Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Austin: It's like a, it's like a hardcase bag, you know what I mean, like luggage, it's like a, it's not soft luggage. It has like the hard, plastic, almost metal, and maybe it's a special material that's like, light as plastic but strong as metal! It's science fiction here. Uh, uh, with some sort of very basic print on it, you know, repeating stars or something. Uh, and it has a digital lock on it.

Jack (as Exler): Oh. Shit. It's, it's locked.

Sylvi: [laughing]

Ali: Uh, I think I've been like, making like a pathetic show of like, dusting or whatever around the room —

Austin: Oh my god.

Ali: While you're doing that— [laughing]

Jack (as Exler): Good dusting, Eileen, it's looked.

Ali: And then when you say that, like, stop. [laughing].

Ali (as Eileen): It's locked...

Jack (as Exler): Come and dust — the bag — just dust the bag over here, come and look.

Austin: [laughing]

Jack (as Exler): Have you seen this kind of lock before?

Ali: [laughing]

Ali (as Eileen): Do you know how to break into things like — you can't break into their — get out of here!

Jack (as Exler): I'm not going to break — I, I'm a gardener. I grow roses... do I know how to break a lock.

Jack: I do know how to break a lock, absolutely. My trait is forward-thinking. Uh, and if you come back to me in my, uh, little gardener's shed, I've been, you know, with my feet up, smoking, in the evening reading a book called "Practical Weapon-building for the..." [chuckling] you know.

Sylvi: [laughing] Oh my god.

Austin: [chuckles] Oh, you're forward-thinking. You're... are you a radical?

Jack: Oh yeah, 100 percent.

Austin: Okay.

Jack: Like, I've been picturing Exler as like, Exler is a Millennium Break person, through and through.

Austin: [laughing] Unbelievable.

Sylvi: Okay. Okay.

Austin: You're that sort of forward-thinking. What a reveal.

Ali: Oh... [laughing]

Jack: I mean, I don't know how much clearer I could have been. My act one for Exler was, trap all the nobles in a maze with four birds. [chuckling]

Austin: [cracking up] Oh, no.

Jack: I feel like this is very consistent.

Austin: Yeah, uh-huh!

Jack: Uh, yeah, the vibe that I get from Exler is big, uh, I've been replaying Blendo Games' Quadrilateral Cowboy.

Austin: Yes, uh-huh.

Jack: Uh, and the excellent Gravity Bone and 30 Flights of Loving. And there's a crew in Quadrilateral Cowboy called Impala, who are three —

Austin: So good.

Jack: Uh, I guess like programming contractors, who have been unable to get any contract work, so are just robbing buildings. Uh, and that's the vibe I get of Exler, sitting, sitting at home in the evening reading a book on like, breaking locks or whatever.

Jack (as Exler): But, okay, Eileen, if I did break the lock, if we did open the lock, would you be curious about what's inside, or do you want to go outside and dust in the corridor, and maybe make a little sound if you see anybody coming back from the hunt?

Austin: [chuckling]

Ali (as Eileen): You're not breaking anything, unless you can assure me that it'll remain locked. We can't leave evidence.

Jack (as Exler): Well... no. I'm going to open — well, I'm going to try and open the lock. If I were going to, I would try and open the lock, and then I would look at what was inside, and then I would lock it up again.

Ali (as Eileen): What would become of us, if rumors came out that a guest came to this place and had their things stolen?

Jack (as Exler): Oh, rumors have been — rumors abound about the Solstice —

Ali: [giggling]

Jack (as Exler): You know, there are worse rumors about the Solstice family, Eileen, and you know it.

Ali (as Eileen): Exactly!

Austin: [chuckles]

Jack (as Exler): Nobody's going to get anything stolen, we're just taking a look. Did it rattle when you picked it up?

Ali: Y — [giggling]

Jack (as Exler): Sorry, what were you going to say?

Ali (as Eileen): I was going to say, I was going to — stand guard for you!

Sylvi: [laughing]

Jack (as Exler): Top work, Eileen. Top work.

Ali: [laughing]

Austin: All right. Eileen, it sounds like you're helping here.

Ali: [laughing]

Austin: Give me — you know, I think you... you've got to roll, I think this is 2, and you start with 1, and you get another 1 for being the maidservant. And this is downstairs, this is subtlety, this is solidarity, if ever there has been any.

Ali: True.

Austin: And if you succeed, Jack will get a plus-1 on the roll. So this is 2d6. Uh... that's one success. Okay. Uh... so something, so something, you roll a 5 and a 3. That's, 3 is under your 4, that's downstairs, success. I think this is probably the moment that, Martine, you've — sorry, Martine, you were looking for Vivian, is that what you were doing? To, to bring out to the maze? Or was Vivian going to find Martine, I don't remember.

Jack: I think Martine was looking for me, right? Is that right, Janine?

Janine: Yeah. Yeah.

Austin: Yes. Yes. So, Martine, you come up the stairs looking for Vivian. You cannot find Vivian anywhere. And instead, you see Eileen, very obviously standing around a hallway, and that's weird.

Jack: Dusting a model of the moon of Partizan or something.

Ali: [giggling]

Austin: Yeah, exactly. Uh, we'll come back to you in a second. Let's finish resolving the rest of this roll. So, Jack, go ahead. Vivian, you take plus-1 from forward-thinking, and plus-1 now from the aid of Eileen. So, 3d6. You're looking to go, again, under. This is subtlety, for sure. You're trying to break into a thing. So, uh... trying to be sneaky. Oh!

Jack: Will you look at that.

Austin: Will you look at that. 1, 2, 3. That is a critical success.

Ali: Woo!

Austin: The GM tells you some extra effect that you get. How do you get through this lock? What is the, yeah, what is the thing that you've done here?

Ali: [chuckling]

Jack: I had a book, that was — okay, so, the vulnerability of this case is that the default code, it gets, keeps getting switched back to the default code, as like a vulnerability of the case. And the default code is dependent on the pattern on the outside of the case. You know, you described it as like a repeating pattern of stars, or whatever. And I got through, like — god, you know Millennium Break are like fucking incredible zine makers, and zine distributors.

Austin: [chuckling]

Jack: And I got an incredibly cool zine beamed to me through like some... the, the, it was like at such high-frequency radio, or such low-frequency radio that the quality of the zine is like, you know, flaky or whatever, or like, misty. And it's a pattern book of the patterns of these cases,

telling me what the combination is by default. And there's a chance that it hasn't been reset to its default combination, but I plug in the default for this pattern, and the lock clicks.

Austin: Amazing. Inside, you find stuff that immediately is upsetting. Uh... from top to bottom, one — uh, there are, there are guns in there, right? There are a pair of pistols, ready to go. There are zip ties, ready to go. There's a set of exactly as many gas masks as there are people who are not Columbar in the crew. So it's one for Bel'agos and then two for the other two soldiers who came with Bel'agos, so three of them in there. And then at the bottom, there is an already counting-down device, that has green liquid in a cylinder —

Sylvi: Oh my fucking god.

Austin: Attached to so much sort of dispersal mechanism. It is set to go off in the middle of dinner.

Jack: [chuckling] Just, like, the color draining from Exler's face.

Austin: Uh-huh!

Jack: Uh...

Jack (as Exler): [whispering] Eileen!

Austin: Eileen, Martine is here, before —

Ali: Hm? [snorts] [chuckles]

Austin: Before, as you, the second you hear Vivian say your name, Martine, you have arrived in the scene.

Janine (as Martine): What's, uh, going on — have you seen Vivian?

Ali (as Eileen): Viv — uh...

Ali: Leaning on the door. [chuckles]

Austin: [cracking up]

Sylvi: [laughing]

Ali (as Eileen): Uh, Vivian was putting some flowers in, uh, the, the guest room behind here. Uh, hi.

Janine (as Martine): Okay.

Janine: [chuckles] And then Martine walks around her.

Austin and Sylvi: [more laughing]

Janine: She just said, Vivian's in the room behind me, so Martine is like, okay, Vivian.

Jack: Uh, Vivian is sitting on the bed —

Janine (as Martine): Where are your flowers? Oh.

Jack: Shaking.

Ali: [cackling]

Janine: [chuckles]

Austin: Uh, there's also, let's just say, uh, also in there, make off with the Columnar treasure, there is, what you know is, from your Millennium Break zines, some sort of, some sort of like, you know, a device that's basically going to, going to call some sort of evac mechanism to you. Like, what's the most weird-ass sci — it's like, it's going to drop-pod from space, some sort of escape pod down, that you could then take out, you know what I mean? Like an XCOM escape device.

Jack: Yes. Tell me what it looks like —

Austin: You tell me.

Jack: It looks like — I mean, I have a microphone right now mounted on like a single microphone tripod, you know.

Austin: Uh-huh.

Jack: Like, it's got that little dial at the bottom and three little feet. It just looks like one of those that you unfold really rapidly onto the ground and hit a button —

Austin: Uh-huh.

Jack: And that is the capture and targeting device for the satellite drop pod that is in orbit right now.

Austin: 100 percent. And you just have this in your hand. You're holding this in your hand when Eileen comes in, or when, sorry, when, ah, Martine comes in. Also shaking, also no blood in your face.

Jack (as Exler): Okay. Eileen. Eileen! Come in here.

Austin: [chuckling] Just ignoring Martine at this point.

Jack: Yeah. Or like, we can deal with that in a second.

Ali (as Eileen): One of us has to stand watch. What is it?

Jack (as Exler): Come in, come in and close and lock the door. Look at this.

Ali: [laughing]

Jack: Just like, stands up, holding the case open.

Austin: [laughing] Oh my god.

Jack (as Exler): Hi, uh, hi, Martine, it's good to see you. There is something very bad about to happen. I think that March and co have brought a bomb.

Janine (as Martine): Okay, well something very bad has already happened, because they've thrown up the purple smoke —

Jack (as Exler): Oh, f —

Janine (as Martine): During the hunt, which means someone's hurt, and we have to go get them out of the maze.

Jack (as Exler): Not right now, we don't. We have to figure this out first.

Austin: [laughing]

Jack (as Exler): Look at this!

Jack: Like, holding up the zip ties in one hand, holding up the [chuckling] gas mask.

Austin: [laughing] Also again, just for the record, as a reminder, Vivian's wearing, like, gloves. Are they like latex gloves, are they like work gloves? What are they?

Jack: No, they are like a clean pair of gardening gloves.

Austin: Okay.

Jack: I'm picturing, you know, like, that brown leather, gardening leather, or whatever.

Janine (as Martine): So you weren't putting flowers in here.

Jack (as Exler): No, I wasn't putting flowers in here, Martine. Do you want to set your timer, or — we don't have long.

Ali (as Eileen): It's, it's a euphemism. Are there non-erotic euphemisms? [laughing]

Janine (as Martine): It was a euphemism?

Ali: [wheezes laughing]

Jack (as Exler): It, it was — Eileen was, Eileen was... look.

Janine (as Martine): Keeping watch, while you went through their stuff.

Jack (as Exler): Yeah, Eileen was keeping watch. Why do you have to be like this?

Sylvi: [laughing]

Jack (as Exler): I'm telling you that something very bad is happening, and you're just taking this as an opportunity to put me down.

Janine (as Martine): No, I'm just confirming that there was no actual intention to do work, and that it was, you were doing other stuff, that's all.

Jack: Big, like “yeah, obviously” nod.

Austin, Janine, Ali: [laughing]

Austin: Ah...

Janine (as Martine): Well, whatever that is, can't we, can't we throw it off a cliff, or put it in something and drive it far away, and then just pretend it wasn't there?

Jack (as Exler): No, because — Uh, this is Guilford's room, right?

Austin: Uh-huh.

Jack: Looking at Eileen.

Ali (as Eileen): Mm-hm.

Jack (as Exler): They'll know! When the, this is, I think this is going to go off over dinner.

Ali (as Eileen): Does that mean it's a timer, or —

Jack (as Exler): I mean, in the in the first place, she's going to come — yeah, look. She's going to come back up to the room to put the gas masks on, right? To distribute the gas masks.

Janine (as Martine): What if we could... defuse this...

Jack (as Exler): Sorry, did you say that they sent up the purple smoke?

Janine (as Martine): They sent up the purple smoke, yes.

Austin: Uh, jump cut briefly here — Catrina, blood everywhere. Your father bringing you close —

Austin (as Coughton): If, if I die, you have to save the household. [choking out the words]
You have to — you have to, you have to convince Exanceaster —

Sylvi (as Catrina): Stay with me, father! You're going to be okay!

Ali: [giggling]

Austin: [laughing]

Austin (as Coughton): You must convince Exanceaster to join... the Bilateral Intercession!

Sylvi (as Catrina): Carvisle, you've killed father!

Austin (as Carvisle): I've done no such thing! You got in my way!

Jack (as Exler): I'm sure they can wait, it can't be that — I'm sure they can wait.

Everyone: [cracking up laughing]

Jack (as Exler): You were saying we, we defuse it?

Janine (as Martine): If we could defuse it, if we could replace whatever it is with something harmless, and then replace the bomb, and then —

Ali (as Eileen): Replace a bomb...?

Janine (as Martine): Maybe they would think it just didn't work. Maybe they would think it would just — well, I suppose then they might just pull out guns and kill everyone if that was their goal. Uh...

Jack (as Exler): Fuck. Fuck!

Ali (as Eileen): I make beds for a living.

Jack (as Exler): Fuck.

Austin: Oh, no.

Jack (as Exler): All right, let's work this out, backwards. We go in there, and we get them out of the maze.

Janine (as Martine): Yes.

Jack (as Exler): Whatever the fuck has gone wrong in there, I can get you through the maze. Eileen, while we are doing that, you need to — what's Guilford going to do when she comes back? She's going to come back, and she's going to go and get the gas masks, right?

Ali (as Eileen): I assume so.

Jack (as Exler): And when she does, she is going to find — help, help me here.

Ali (as Eileen): We can distract her, we can, we can keep her from returning to her room —

Janine (as Martine): We, hang on. What if we take the filtration cartridges out of the gas masks.

Ali (as Eileen): What?

Janine (as Martine): Put the gas masks back together. She might think she forgot the filtration cartridges for the gas masks. But then, if she knows of a way to defuse, to stop the bomb, she'll have an incentive to at least delay it, because the gas masks won't be suitable for them to use?

Jack (as Exler): What if she doesn't notice that the, the, the gas masks are sabotaged?

Janine (as Martine): Well, then they die, too.

Sylvi: [sputtering laughing]

Janine (as Martine): And it's a sort of bitter, uh, bitter but equal death.

Jack (as Exler): I think this is some kind of a kidnapping. I don't think you pack zip ties if you want to kill a bunch of people.

Janine (as Martine): Well, that's true.

Jack (as Exler): I think we distract her. I think you're right. I think — look. I go into the maze, and I get them out. You try and defuse this bomb —

Ali (as Eileen): Who's you?

Jack (as Exler): No, don't worry, Eileen, I'm talking to Martine, the mechanic.

Austin: [laughing]

Ali: [laughing]

Janine (as Martine): Are you going to be able to drive the trolley safely?

Jack (as Exler): Are you going to be able to defuse the bomb, Martine?

Janine (as Martine): [chuckling] I don't know.

Jack (as Exler): Eileen, your job, once we get back, is to prevent Guilford —

Jack: Guilford?

Austin: Guilford.

Jack: Like the region of London?

Austin: Yeah, uh-huh. Guilford. Yeah.

Jack (as Exler): Guilford, from getting up to her room. Can we do that?

Ali (as Eileen): I will do my best.

Jack (as Exler): Okay, 3, 2, 1, break. Also, if.

Sylvi: [wheezes]

Jack (as Exler): Uh, no, I can't remember what I was going to say. I'm sure we'll be fine.

Austin: [cackling] Oh, no.

[“[Permanent Peace](#)” by Jack de Quidt plays]