

Twilight Mirage 17: Like Falling Leaves

Transcribed by Elliot @cordialement#1268

[MUSIC- "The Twilight Mirage begins]

AUSTIN (as Primary): Dispatch 167.

Gray-- I mean... Satellite. Confirming that I've returned to Primary Capsule DF-298. I registered our visit with K-upside. There will probably be repercussions when all this is over, but until then they're pretty much letting us be. They felt it too, you know, through us. Independence. They felt what we felt. Alone. Lost.

The whole Fleet felt it, too. Some of the details were blurry. There's debate on a lot of the ships now as to whether what we saw was history, prophecy, fiction, propaganda... Some folks to it as proof that they should stay away from Quire. Others see it as evidence that they should go immediately. The By-and-By is in the process of establishing orbit as we speak.

But mostly, it's just put everyone in a real funk, Satellite. This place already felt like it was on the edge, you know? It's been a week and everyone just feels... really vulnerable, really tender, no pun intended. I just can't tell what the effect of this is going to be in the long run. Agents like us have watched countless cultures fall into nothing, but those cultures don't usually have this perspective. They've never seen another civilization erased. But now the Fleet has. I... It isn't our job, but I can't help but wonder if this could pull them back from the brink.

[MUSIC ends]

AUSTIN: Welcome to Friends at the Table, an actual play podcast focused on critical worldbuilding, smart characterization, and fun interaction between good friends. I am your host, Austin Walker, and today we're continuing our game of The Veil by Fraser Simons. Joining me is... Alicia Acampora.

ALI: Uh, hi! My name is Alicia Acampora, you can find me @Ali_West on Twitter. And you can find the show over @Friends_Table.

AUSTIN: Janine Hawkins.

JANINE: I'm Janine Hawkins, I'm @bleatingheart on Twitter, where you can also find the freelance writing that I do and then retweet [chuckles].

AUSTIN: I bet when this goes up, there's a chance you'll still also still be doing Witching Hour. Can you tell people what that is, and how to watch it?

JANINE: Oh! Yeah, there's-- I mean I guess if not, people can go back and watch the archives.

AUSTIN: True.

JANINE: Um, every October, I play one of the games in the Tongari Boushi series, which the first one was localized as Magician's Quest, so we call it the Magician's Quest Witching Hour. This year we are playing the last game in the series, the 3DS game, and I got a little Capture 2DS, so we are like... crystal clear

AUSTIN: Nice!

JANINE: And beautiful, and there's a giant shopping mall in this one, and that's weird!

[ALI gasps]

AUSTIN: Oooh! I'm excited to watch this this season.

JACK: [overlapping] Oh wow.

JANINE: It's weird! I don't know how I feel about it. Also we gave Streusel a makeover.

AUSTIN: Oooh.

JANINE: So she's a little different now.

AUSTIN: Okay, I'm gonna watch this after we record, for sure.

ALI: Streusel: The College Years.

[AUSTIN and JANINE laugh]

AUSTIN: And finally, Jack de Quidt.

JACK: Hi! I'm Jack, you can find me on Twitter @notquitereal, and you can find any of the music featured on the show, except Bluff City

[AUSTIN snickers]

JACK: on Notquitereal.bandcamp.com. Bluff City will absolutely be on bandcamp soon. It's gonna be available to everybody, even if you aren't listening, but you should be, cause it's the best.

AUSTIN: [laughs] We should, uh, talk to our artists and see when we're gonna get art for Bluff City, cause then we can put that music up, and that'll be good.

JACK: Yeah. It'd be great.

AUSTIN: Um, okay. Also you can find me on Twitter @austin_walker, and that's, that's where I am. And also as always, you can support the show, if you like what you're listening to-- if you do wanna hear Bluff City, which is the game that takes place in a fictional version of Atlantic City, kind of a mid-atlantic seaboard city kinda resort town with casinos-- that is at friendsatthetable.cash. C-A-S-H. And we are currently over on that show doing an Inspectors game. That's spelled like specter, like a ghost, but with the word I-N before it.

[ALI giggles]

JACK: [affirming] Hmm.

AUSTIN: It's like a Ghostbusters game, and it was very funny and very good. The first episode is out now, and the next one will come out... I guess a little bit later in October probably. So maybe by the time you hear this, both of them will be out. I'm not sure yet. I don't know what our release schedule is, exactly.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: But I know the basic windows. Okay! So, I think it has probably been about a month and a half, all said, since you dealt with Contrition's Figure, which includes the month that Signet waited to re-enter the rehabilitation center, to meet up with Blueberri Jin and kind of do that whole tour. And then the time of getting out of there, too. So you're kind of picking up exactly where we left off-- or not exactly, like a couple weeks since then, too. You know. So I'd say, you know, 45 to 60 days after the events of the last ship game.

The... I'm trying to think if there's anything else important, that like happened off-screen that you would all know about, and I don't think so. I don't think any of the Quire news has made it up here yet. Or if it has, like not to the Beloved. Like that stuff is-- Emphyrean probably knows what's happening on Quire, but I don't think that the Beloved do, without like digging into that specifically?

So, um, tell me about how things are going with everybody. I, I... kind of wanna know where we wanna come in here. My gut says maybe Signet and Belgard, since that was like the highest stakes thing? In terms of what the overall metaplot of the season is? The fact that Belgard has some resonance inside of it still and also has this weird cloud thing called Cthonic inside of it? Um... How has Signet been dealing with that since coming back out of Contrition's Figure?

JANINE: Uh... honestly probably not super great?

[AUSTIN laughs]

JANINE: That's probably like a very... jarring thing for her. Like Signet, you know, mechanically Signet-- sorry, mechanically Belgard is Signet's sanctuary.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: So that itself implies like a lot of, that's supposed to be a very like... sacred and personal space, and now there's just this other thing there that Signet doesn't really understand as much as she wishes that she did.

AUSTIN: Right. Sure.

JANINE: But Belgard is not just like a place. Belgard is like a, a living... thing. Like this is also like a loved one, for Signet, that she's known for hundreds of years. So that's a relationship you don't necessarily want a weird cloud thing getting in the middle of.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Right. Fair.

JANINE: And that was part of why she went back to Contrition's Figure, was like, she needed that time, as much as...

AUSTIN: Mmm, interesting. Like so--

JANINE: As much as she wanted to follow up with Blueberri, it was like... she needed...

AUSTIN: Some processing time?

JANINE: You know, there's like a very straight line to be drawn with like the first time she went to Contrition's Figure, the second time, and then the third time.

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

JANINE: And like what that... what effect that might have.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: But she probably comes out of that a little more clear-headed. Um, still not thrilled, but like... you know, [sighs] rooted again, I guess? Anchored, like a little stabilized. Um...

AUSTIN: And willing to like--

JANINE: She comes out of that kind of...

AUSTIN: --to like dig into whatever this thing is now? Or... and like confront it?

JANINE: Yes. To like take steps. Like the... the initial feeling going to visit Blueberri was probably one of like being helpless? Like not thinking that there's anything she can do while the people looking at Belgard are doing what they're doing.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Like there's nothing that she can contribute to that necessarily? So she wanted to go do something. But she comes back being like, "Okay, there are things I can do, too."

AUSTIN: Mhm. Um, so while you've been gone, I think that like-- the thing that I-- I think you traded in Faith for this? Or you called on Faith, basically, for this? Or maybe you used... I can't remember if you used components or you used Faith for this. I think you used Faith. Was like, to keep someone to watch over Belgard while you were away.

JANINE: It was Faith, I think.

AUSTIN: I think it was Faith, yeah. And to make sure that like, hey! [amused] Nothing dramatic happens that would be terrible.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And if it does, to like whisk you out of Contrition's Figure as soon as possible and bring you back so that you could help deal with it. But nothing has happened. I think that the reports that you receive when you return are that they have identified, you know, that this is the same thing, Cthonic, that appeared for the first time after Gumption's Gambit was-- sorry, after Gumption was killed.

They... It hasn't-- it has its kind of tendrils into Belgard and has some access to systems, but it isn't doing anything aggressive as far as you can tell? Or as far as they can tell. It's just kind of doing its best to get its hands, you know, kind of on the controls. But it isn't like... It hasn't started repairing Belgard. It hasn't started corrupting Belgard. Like, the being known as Belgard is still in that space, it's just also there is this other thing there, that does not communicate verbally? It kind of communicates in this weird pre- or post-verbal sense, depending on how you want to think about it or talk about it.

And... By and large, it's been staying the course as to what it did before. Or at least that's what they've noticed. So what do you do, as you come out of this and return to Belgard?

JANINE: Um, so... This, yeah, okay. [laughing] So... I'm like struggling with how to introduce this.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: Um, or how to do it without just being like, "Here's this this move, and whatever whatever."

AUSTIN: [laughs] I mean, we can just say it that way. Like I have no problems being like, you took a move and you wanna frame the scene around taking it.

JANINE: I... [groans] That's kind of what I wanna do, but I think we can do it without just being so... boring, I don't know. Um, I think--

[AUSTIN makes an offended noise]

[JANINE laughs]

AUSTIN: I don't like-- It's not a-- There is... What's boring is being, "Oh, I took this move. Move on." You know what I mean?

JANINE: Yeah, that's-- that's what I mean is I don't wanna... I don't wanna lead with the move.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: Um, I think I wanna lead with, why Belgard would... would pursue this as an action.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: Or sorry, why Signet. What am I--? We haven't recorded in a while.

AUSTIN: Yeah, we haven't. It's a problem.

[ALI laughs]

JANINE: So I think maybe what we get is... We get the scene of Signet going to Belgard, but then... you know, in the anime version of this, there is a flashback to like, very very young Signet, and she has like...

AUSTIN: Mmm.

JANINE: She's in her jumpsuit, her like opalescent flight suit thing.

AUSTIN: Right, the one that she uses to jump all around that big middle space in Belgard and actually control it? Control them? Is Belgard they/them?

JANINE: I, I always go with she.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: That's just my gut, though. There's no like specific reason for it, I just... That's just what I default to.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Gender is wild. Like [huffs] that's fine.

JANINE: It sure is. This big human pupa is a lady I guess.

[AUSTIN laughs]

JANINE: Um, so we get this scene of, you know, Signet. She's in that jumpsuit, and she's got her hair back in this, you know, really severe like ponytail.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: And she is strapped into all the like straps in that sort of acrobatic cockpit that I've described before.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: And this is like in the middle of a fight, so there are all the displays are up, and all these visualizations in the space around her of the space around Belgard, basically. The space that Belgard is interacting with, Signet is sort of tumbling around that space and interacting with, and sort of pulling up displays, and things like that. And... It's the middle of this fight, but we get this sort of shot of like-- there is information here that we would not consider fight-critical.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Right.

JANINE: There's information about like, when they go over to repair this one Divine. There's information about like, oh, this is this-- This Excerpt's, like, dad makes shoes, and he won this award for making the shoes, and this Excerpt always wears their shoes even though they're not very comfortable, they're just like pretty.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: But you know it's like a family-- but like all these little bits of trivia and stuff like that, that are flown in, or--

AUSTIN: That you w--

JANINE: --presented alongside like, “Oh, and this system is broken.”

AUSTIN: [amused] Right. As if they were not trivia, as if they were system-critical.

JANINE: Yeah. And... Signet is really annoyed by this?

AUSTIN: Mmm.

JANINE: Because she's... a lot more brash, and a lot more like, she wants to be really efficient. She wants to get shit done. She wants to focus on what's important, which is fixing things, not like whose dad makes good shoes, and whose...

[ALI giggles]

AUSTIN: And this is hundreds of years ago, to be clear. This is like--

JANINE: Yes.

AUSTIN: And how old is Signet at this point, in terms of-- like obviously the Fleet's ages, especially when it comes to Excerpts, seems to be way larger and longer than what our life spans are?

JANINE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: But even in terms of maturity, like where in her life is she?

JANINE: She's like an adult to a young a-- actually at this point she's probably a young adult.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: This is probably like a really early thing.

AUSTIN: Does she have like different hair? Is-- what's her hair situation? Very important stuff for me.

JANINE: [laughing] I picture her hair when she's-- I picture her hair when she's young being like the commander from Nier Automata.

AUSTIN: Okay. Right, cool.

JANINE: Like that really high, severe-- like now her hair is really curly, and she usually wears it down unless she's being casually, then she's got it like really wrapped up. But at this point it's

very straight and very like, tight. And... she's very business-like. Like the Signet we know is 300 years old. This is Signet maybe at like 20 or 30, at most.

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

[15:00]

JANINE: And she's getting really frustrated with all this extra information that she's getting. And there's maybe like a fight? Like maybe there's some yelling or some, "Stop showing me this garbage." But Belgard keeps displaying that stuff?

AUSTIN: Hm.

JANINE: And I think that's maybe all that we get out of that flashback scene before we're back to Signet going to Belgard now.

AUSTIN: Does she never turn it-- does she not turn it off in that scene? She leaves it on?

JANINE: No. Belgard-- Belgard always just displays that information in a fight. That is, to Belgard, critical information.

AUSTIN: So Signet never-- Signet doesn't do like the thing of like swipe it away and get rid of it. She just is annoyed by it.

JANINE: She can't, cause it's... paired with the other data.

AUSTIN: I gotcha. I gotcha. Right right right.

JANINE: Basically. It's being presented alongside like, "The leg is busted" or "The gun is stuck" or whatever. The gun is stuck, that's a thing. Jammed? [laughs]

AUSTIN: [laughs] The gun is jammed. Yeah yeah yeah.

JANINE: So that's probably a thing that like Signet at the time did not understand. What that meant.

AUSTIN: Is that stuff still... So if Signet today brings that display up, like does it show it all, or is Belgard so gone at this point or so limited that she can't display that information anymore?

JANINE: I don't think there are displays anymore in that cockpit. When I picture that cockpit, it's very much like a--

AUSTIN: The only problem there is we already did a scene where there were still displays in that cockpit. When Cthonic took over.

JANINE: Did we?

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah. We got like the-- the Windows 95, like visual of like blue skies with a single white cloud.

JANINE: Oh. Yeah, I pictured that more in like a screen versus the like... 3D...

AUSTIN: Ohhh, I gotcha.

JANINE: Kind of.

AUSTIN: I didn't realize that those were two different things. Okay.

JANINE: I think there would probably be like a screen sort of wraparound?

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah.

JANINE: But then there'd be sort of-- what was that Windows thing? Windows Lens or some shit that they like--

AUSTIN: Like HoloLens?

JANINE: It's like a 3D augmented reality, yeah, like that sort of.

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah. Gotcha.

JANINE: [overlapping] That stuff I imagine is broken, but that would have been where that, the text and stuff would be.

AUSTIN: [overlapping] So that's where the... that's where that information was. Okay, cool. Does Belgard have access to that information at this point internally, whether or not she can display it to Signet?

JANINE: So I think that's the thing, is like the way I think about components is that Belgard also had components, but she could store a lot more of them than Signet can?

AUSTIN: Wait, when you say components here, you mean the specific thing that the Omnastic--

JANINE: Yes.

AUSTIN: Onomastic, there it is.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Playbook has about true names, the one that we kind of talked about with regards-- it's been six weeks now since people heard this, probably, so I just wanna briefly remind people. The Onomastic has a thing called Components that the, that that playbook can use to do special abilities by calling on the true name of somebody, which in our setting the version that we came up with was like, it's not their one true name, their only true name? It's like a specific aspect of their lives that they identify very deeply with. So like the shoe thing is a really good example of that. Is that an example of a Component?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Right. Okay, cool.

JANINE: Exactly, so those things that are being displayed are Components.

AUSTIN: Cool.

JANINE: Um, and when Belgard was sort of, was functioning at her peak and all that, she could access and use those Components to a degree that Signet can't, now.

AUSTIN: Okay, well then I actually want to-- I have an idea for how to, how Belgard might tell you about this, if you're interested in going down this route. Because when we left off, what Belgard had told you was that Cthonic had offered to fix her. Had offered to bring her back online.

JANINE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And we didn't get any more details than that. Um, so are you back in Belgard at this point?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay. [huffs] And is the communication between you two telepathic, or is it verbal, or what's the--?

JANINE: I think-- I think so. I mean I think, Signet has some like implants for remote access and interface and stuff like that.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: So I assume it would just-- it was, those implants were part of being Belgard's Excerpt that also just are useful elsewhere.

AUSTIN: Right, sure. Um, so... Is this the first time you've come back? Or have you been back-- like are you coming straight from... I just wanna know where we are in the timeline. Is this the first time you've spoken to Belgard since leaving Contrition's Figure? Or does this happen--

JANINE: Probably, yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay, cool. Also briefly, since you're on screen, what are your Beliefs before we continue?

JANINE: Oh. Right, uh...

AUSTIN: We'll go over everybody else's once we get there.

JANINE: Uh, Signet's Beliefs. "There's no excuse to leave someone in a situation that will inevitably lead to their death." "Improvisation leads to oblivion; routines, rituals, processes and practices exist and endure for good reason." And "Tender should use her divine gift only in service of the Fleet and the orbit; I will not entertain its abuse."

AUSTIN: Hm. So I think you've kind of been briefed at this point. Like on the way in, you met with the scientists who've been studying Cthonic and Belgard, and gotten the rundown. And now you've entered, and you can immediately feel like a... the pressure in the room changes when you enter. It's like someone's rearranging furniture, but like... in terms of pressure in the room. Do you know what I mean?

JANINE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Or it can just feel like someone's rearranging furniture. There's a difference between going to someone's house that's been set up for you to stay, and going to someone's house as it is on a Tuesday afternoon after work. And as you enter, she kind of like... there's the feeling that you're welcome there in a way. Like you can feel the rearranging of space. And it literally is just air pressure, as you reconnect with her. And she says

AUSTIN (as Belgard): How was your time away?

JANINE (as Signet): It was very restorative.

AUSTIN (as Belgard): I'm glad to hear it. Regarding restoration, when last we talked, the... invader had offered me something. To fix me. The scientists do not know what I am about to tell you. It spent that time in Contrition's Figure collecting information about the residents. And it wished to offer me nourishment through them. I refused. But I don't

believe that it is incorrect... when it suggests that, given freely, components like those might have an effect.

JANINE (as Signet): I have access to that kind of information, too. At much smaller quantities, but... It's not impossible.

AUSTIN (as Belgard): I do worry, though. With this thing in me, who knows how it will benefit. Or what its motivations are. If we travel this route, there may be complication.

JANINE (as Signet): It's already complicated.

AUSTIN (as Belgard): This is true.

JANINE (as Signet): This isn't... this isn't a... This isn't something that's gonna be in stasis. We have to move one way or another.

AUSTIN (as Belgard): Yes. How do we begin?

JANINE: Uh, I think at this point Signet pulls down like a lot of the straps that used to be used to harness her in place [amused] so she wouldn't hit the walls all the time?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: They're kind of like tucked up. I think she pulls a couple down and like knots them in the middle, and sits in them kind of like a swing.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: And I think... I think at that point she just... I think she starts with Morning's Observation.

AUSTIN: Mm. What's this look like?

JANINE: I think it looks a lot like... [long pause] [sighs] It's tough. It's not quite like the idea of a parent reading to a child, and then that child reading to their parent at an older age.

AUSTIN: Mmm.

JANINE: It's not quite there. But it's... it's sort of something like that. It's like telling someone stories because you know they wanna hear you talk as much as they wanna hear the story?

AUSTIN: Right, right. What is the... what is the true name of Morning's Observation? The one you offer.

JANINE: Mm. So it has to be a thing that, I think we defined before that it was a thing that Signet would say that that person would know it was her.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Would know it was her that was calling on them.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Shit, I don't--

AUSTIN: We could invent something here. Like you could've had more time with Morning's Observation.

JANINE: Yeah, I'm trying to-- I'm trying to...

AUSTIN: I mean, I can give you something here if that's like, you have this component, right?

JANINE: I want-- yeah. I want like an-- I want an animal that you can't really keep in a cage, but it mostly stays where it's supposed to.

AUSTIN: Mm. That's interesting.

JANINE: Like a barn cat or something more concise.

[AUSTIN and ALI laugh]

AUSTIN: Morning's Observation, the barn cat of the Beloved. Good.

[JANINE chuckles]

ALI: [through laughter] That's... fuck off.

[AUSTIN, JANINE and JACK laugh]

AUSTIN: You're not a barn cat! You're like a cool alley cat.

ALI: [Incredulous laughter] Wha--?

AUSTIN: You're like a cool city cat.

JACK: You know, an Ali cat.

AUSTIN: Yeah, get it? An Ali cat. Hashtag--

ALI: [choking on laughter] I get it, I get it.

JACK: It's cause your name's Ali.

AUSTIN: Cause your name's Ali.

ALI: You know no one calls me that? [laughs]

AUSTIN: No one calls you Ali-Cat?

ALI: No!

AUSTIN: You've played cats twice in this game.

ALI: I know.

AUSTIN: [groans] We're all bad at this.

[ALI laughs]

JACK: Maybe like a dog. I can see Morning's Observation as more dog-like than cat-like.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I could see that. I could see him as a bunch of things. But I do like that notion of like, something that is... what is an ani-- What is a pet that you don't have to keep in a cage? Of any kind. You know what I mean? [pause] Wow, it's-- we got 12 minutes before I typed in 'animals' onto Google. Good.

JANINE: Maybe like a s--

[ALI laughs]

JACK: You just googled "animals"?

AUSTIN: I said, I typed in "pets you don't cage".

JANINE: Maybe like a squirrel?

AUSTIN: No, no one keeps squirrels.

JACK: No, no. I mean--

JANINE: No, but like you could have a squirrel in your yard that you could feed. I don't know.

AUSTIN: Oh, I see what you're saying.

JACK: Oh. Maybe like some little birds. Little birds at a birdfeeder.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Well, what's interesting is of course... Mm, did I say this already? Did I talk about...? Hmm.

ALI: Is there a way to, like... talk about him as a stray that isn't like mean? 'Cause that's kind of what he is, right? Like...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Well, okay. Like, okay. You know that cat that Avery Edison has?

JACK: Mm.

AUSTIN: On Twitter? Do people-- people should follow Avery, first and foremost, cause Avery is very good. @aedison on Twitter. And over the last like month, she has had a cat slowly become her pet? The cat's name is Freyja. F-R-E-Y-J-A. And it's like, she just had a big open window. At like the very top of the tall window was open, and this cat just like jumped in? And has slowly become acclimated to living inside. And it's really cute and good, it's like my favorite thread on Twitter all summer. And...

JANINE: I think the word we want is "moggy", but that sounds like a slur.

AUSTIN: What is that? What? What?

JANINE: A moggy, that's like-- it's like... Jack knows, right? You know, Jack?

JACK: I mean... I have heard the word. I'm not...

[ALI giggles]

JANINE: It's like a British-only term for a cat that...

JACK: Yeah, but like, we don't use it.

JANINE: That doesn't have a-- it's just like a random...

[ALI laughs]

JANINE: I had a children's book where there's a, where they use the word. Like I had...

JACK: When was it written?

AUSTIN: [laughs] Aw.

[ALI chuckling in the background]

JANINE: The word? Or the book?

JACK: The book.

JANINE: I don't know.

JACK: It sounds like something from the 50s.

AUSTIN: Jack, I just need you--

JANINE: I mean, I read a lot of Beatrix Potter, too, so.

AUSTIN: Yeah, well there you go. Jack, I just need you to know you sounded a lot like the dude from Belle and Sebastian who's like, "Yeah, I mean I'll sing in a church, but I'm not gonna..."

[JACK snickers]

AUSTIN: "I'm not gonna believe any of it."

JACK: I'm not gonna believe any of it.

[chuckling]

AUSTIN: That's what you just said. "Yeah, moggy's a word, but I'm not gonna-- I'm not gonna say it."

JACK: It's like, you know. I mean, I think of it more as like an affectionate nickname for a cat, rather than necessarily one of those ones that kinda roams around.

JANINE: It's, I think it's supposed to be the cat equivalent of like 'mutt', though.

JACK: Mmm, I could see that.

AUSTIN: Gotcha. But this is the way that you're describing Morning's Observation.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay. Okay. So do you say this out loud? Is this like, do you stop doing the telepathy thing and then you actually describe this with your voice, or... Like, what-- Is it still in that space?

JANINE: Um, I think it's still a telepathy thing, because... giving it voice feels like expending it.

AUSTIN: Okay. I see.

JANINE: Where as this is more of a transfer. Right?

AUSTIN: I see. Right right right right. Yeah, and then... effectively--

JANINE: So this is like information that I'm displaying to Belgard the way that Belgard used to display information.

AUSTIN: I see. I see. So Belgard gains it in that way, like adds it to her list of components.

JANINE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Which is also effectively like, if you use components to get things, she uses components just like as her body in a sense. Like they are the pathways on which she can do things. That's interesting. Okay.

JANINE: Signet's ability to store components is probably just a-- is probably even like a function of just being, of her interface or whatever being Belgard's. Like there is a little flash memory or something, kind of thing of, for storing this information.

AUSTIN: Mhm. So how does this feel? And then we can roll this new move. One of the two moves that you get.

JANINE: Um... I think it feels... Powerful but in a sort of sense of voluntarily giving up a power.

AUSTIN: Mmm. Right. Right.

JANINE: Like this is something-- components, to be clear, Signet could just say "moggy" or whatever out loud, and then like hurt him. From wherever.

AUSTIN: [huff of laughter] From wherever in the world. Right right right.

JANINE: [laughs] Or just like make him forget what he's doing. Like if he's writing a word, she could just say whatever and then he just like forgets what he was doing.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: So this is probably, yeah, Powerful in the sense of like, handing something over that is of value, but knowing that it's more valuable this way.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally. Alright, so give me Nourish, which is a move from the Wayward playbook that you've taken, which says, "When you attempt to nourish your homeland, roll. On a 10+, choose two. On a 7-9, choose one." And roll Powerful, which, your Powerful is a one. That is bad. That is a six. Hm.

[JANINE sighs]

AUSTIN: That's a good start.

JANINE: That sucks. God dammit.

AUSTIN: Uh, you know what, give me-- give me one more d6. I think that this is like, giving the information, I think this has advantage, so give me one more d6 and we'll take the highest two. Which is how advantage works in this game. I should've given you that from the jump, to be honest, because this is like a big, interesting thing.

JANINE: [amused] I appreciate that.

AUSTIN: There you go. That's way better. That is a nine. Which is, oh no, it's a 10!

[30:00]

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: Cause it's a four and a five, plus one is a 10. So. That could've gone bad. That's still-- like you still needed a decent roll [wheezes] to get that up to a decent success? So on a 10+, choose two. Either you halt the erosion where it stands for a time, which I don't think is an option at this point. I think it's as eroded as it can be. You begin to restore what's already gone, or you gain two Essence.

JANINE: Um... [sighs] So there's no option to halt the...

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think it's as-- I think it's at zero right now. Right? Like I think that like the homeland, which is what we're about to define in another second, of Belgard at this point is as eroded as it can be. Do you know what I mean? Like...

JANINE: Mmhm.

AUSTIN: I think it makes more sense to start at zero here and begin to start rebuilding Belgard than to say like, "Oh, it's slipping away." You know?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So I guess that kind of chooses it for you, which is you begin to restore what's already gone and then you gain two Essence. So, this stuff from the Wayward playbook is really interesting. The Wayward is a playbook in the Veil that says, "When the future came, it brought a new age of technology. The virtual and the physical bleed together, blurring the line between both. Nature will not be stopped, though; it finds a way. Wherever you may be in this chromed age, it finds you, the Wayward."

And obviously you are not now the Wayward. You are still the Onomastic. But the Veil's really built towards players taking moves from a bunch of different books to add extra flavor and keep them really... [stammering] keep them designed a more complex, holistic concept.

And so, the Homeland says, "While others may not be aware of a connection between humanity and the natural surroundings found in the world, you are. What type of areas do you come from, identify with, and feel close to?" And like obviously all of these are mostly things like, mountains. [snickers] Coastal.

[JANINE laughs]

AUSTIN: Like glacial, ocean. Alien is one of them, which is something. Uh... also karst, which is a great... which is a really great word that I had to look up, because I don't know shit about topography. Um, but that's like lots of limestone. Lots of rocky, but still with like greenery all around? With those sinkholes and some caves?

JANINE: Oh, like an escarpment. Sort of.

AUSTIN: Sure, yes.

JANINE: Stuff.

AUSTIN: Yes. Uh... but I bet you there's a connection there in terms of language. That's my guess.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Maybe. Maybe not. Anyway, so, I think we can be more specific here towards Belgard, but I still kind of like the notion of choosing these that fit into Belgard's overall aesthetic. So what do you think?

JANINE: Um... It's tough. Like it's-- I definitely see Belgard as both an individual and an environment. Like I think Signet is, by virtue of her closeness with Belgard, very comfortable around like robots that you can be inside.

AUSTIN: [amused] Right. Yes.

JANINE: Or you know, life that also has a chair for you to sit in.

AUSTIN: Right, right. So do you wanna put synthetic as one of these, maybe?

JANINE: Yeah. That sounds right.

AUSTIN: Uh, and what would the other one be? And I'm thinking about this because I think there's like larger repercussions for these choices in some ways. Like I do think this reflects you being comfortable in Contrition's Figure, for instance. Which again, like, was a facility built by a Divine, so.

JANINE: Mhm. Um... God, sorry, what are the other choices again? Like I don't...

AUSTIN: Mountains, coastal, river rain, glacial, ocean, alien, karst, desert, forest.

JANINE: [giggles] What a weird fucking question.

JACK: Glacial is an interesting one.

AUSTIN: Oh, it is!

JANINE: [overlapping] I was kinda thinking-- Yeah.

JACK: [overlapping] And like connotations with big, big slow robots.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: That was also kind of the one that was speaking to me, also in terms of like, I bet it's cold in Belgard. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Oh yeah.

JANINE: Like I bet that's not like a super warm...

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I like that.

JACK: And the acoustics are really weird.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Mmhm.

AUSTIN: Alright, let's do those two. Let's take glacial--

JANINE: And there's probably like a degree of loneliness to it, too.

AUSTIN: Oh, definitely.

JANINE: Sort of empty space with just you and Belgard.

AUSTIN: Mmhm. So yeah, let's do glacial and synthetic. And what qualities does your homeland possess that you hope to find or foster in others? Choose two. And the list here is: steadfast, adaptable, resourceful, generous, savvy, indomitable, unknowable, mysterious, loving, respectful, broken, kind, harmonious, versatile, and bold.

JANINE: Some of these are almost... Some of these are very similar in a way that makes it a little, um...

AUSTIN: Mmhm.

JANINE: A little bit tricky. Um... I know for sure, generous.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Definitely.

JANINE: Seems... I think generous and loving actually are the two. Right?

AUSTIN: And like-- Yeah. That's totally like, that seems to be what Belgard is, straight up.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like if we're not-- you know, let's not split hairs. Like let's not, like, we don't need to go into the-- we don't need to be the people who go into like the deep discourse marginalia of

whatever the, you know, participants in this ancient technological faith would do, and argue over whether Belgard is more...

[JANINE laughs]

AUSTIN: Is she generous? Or is she really-- is she loving or is she kind? Like no, she's loving, she's generous.

JANINE: Also the "hope to find or foster in others" thing is... yeah.

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes, that-- yes. True. That puts that on you, as Signet, more than on what-- what Belgard--

JANINE: Mmhm. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay. So then finally, when you think of these qualities-- when you think of generous and loving-- assign two states that they elicit: mad, sad, scared, peaceful, joyful, powerful.

JANINE: Um... I think I already-- I picked these before picking the other things, but I think they still work. I think... sad and scared?

AUSTIN: Mmhm.

JANINE: Because I think-- I think sad specifically for generous, because generosity is kind of why Belgard is broken, the way she is.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: And scared because-- scared for loving because Signet is, in a lot of ways, at peace with the idea of things going poorly, but it still is frightening to think that things like... like the sort of, the love that she knows from her faith and from society, could be in jeopardy, or could suffer.

AUSTIN: Right. That's interesting. I like this question being framed as, "when you think of these qualities, assign two states that they elicit", not, what is loving? Is loving peaceful? No.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: What do they elicit from you specifically, from Signet specifically, and I like...

JANINE: I think it would have been a very different answer like, when everything was going well and great and wonderful.

AUSTIN: [chuckles] Yeah. Totally. Totally.

JANINE: But now these positive qualities are also like reminders of what can be lost, like what's at stake.

AUSTIN: Totally. So, just to continue down this path really quick: "Wherever it is, wherever you may be, you have something with you intrinsic from the homeland with you. It allows you to purposefully stay connected to it in order to use its power. This possession is referred to in the game mechanics terms as Essence. Detail what exactly it is below, and mark that you have two Essence to start with." In this case you have four, because you just used Nourish. You're up to four Essence now. But uh, yeah, tell me what your... what is that connection like? Is that the vision of the different true names that you've nourished it with?

JANINE: [hums, then sighs] I guess? I'm not really sure how to... conceptualize that, to be honest.

AUSTIN: Yep.

JANINE: Like it's one of those things that I don't-- maybe it's like a thing of just like, Belgard starts thinking of those people?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: Because Belgard-- Belgard doesn't really have a lot to do.

[AUSTIN laughs]

JANINE: Belgard has been in one place for like 300 years?

AUSTIN: Yeah. True.

JANINE: Like that's my-- my own rationale for why Belgard doesn't have any components on her own, is because she doesn't go anywhere or talk to anyone except Signet.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: So she doesn't-- and I don't think she could have components on Signet, cause Signet is like, in some ways just an extension of her.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: There's a connection there that, you know, you know everything about this person. It's not a-- you know. So I think it's maybe even like, every now and then Belgard's just like, "How's Morning's Observation?" Check in on him.

AUSTIN: Right. And I think in a physical way, it's probably worth maybe revisiting, too, how this connects to your, your cybertome?

[All laugh]

AUSTIN: Your wonderful cybertome. Which like, maybe when you do this, that thing starts to-- which you described before as being like a big... bug. A bug.

JANINE: Yeah, I kinda wanna start calling it something other than cybertome, cause there's a cool bug word we could just use instead of cybertome, if you want us to stop using cybertome.

AUSTIN: Yeah, what's the-- what's the cool bug word?

JANINE: Exuvia.

AUSTIN: Ooh. Ooh.

[JACK groans]

JANINE: That's like a bug shell? Like when a bug moults, I think, it leaves behind an exuvia.

JACK: Oh my god.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: [laughing] Sorry, Jack.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's just a bat--

JACK: Can you like, real quick, go over what this bug is and is it on your body?

AUSTIN: Do you carry it? How big is it?

JACK: Yeah. How is this bug... there?

JANINE: It's like hand-sized.

AUSTIN: [incredulous] It's a hand-sized bug?

JANINE: It's not like a bug bug. It's like...

[AUSTIN chokes back laughter]

JANINE: Like a robot bug, maybe. Or like--

[ALI giggles]

JACK: Yeah, I've seen that Guillermo del Toro movie. Those things suck.

[AUSTIN laughs]

JANINE: You know, okay. So every now and then an aesthetic sharer retweets these pictures of these bugs that have gold leaf on them.

JACK: Mmhm.

JANINE: And I have a bunch of those in my inspiration folder for like what this thing probably kind of is. It's like a gilt bug.

JACK: Googling gold leaf...

AUSTIN: Gold leaf bug.

JACK: Let's see what we got here. Holy Lord! Oh my god!

AUSTIN: Oh, wow!

JANINE: It moves, but probably not a lot?

AUSTIN: [even more incredulous] It moves? [overlapping] But probably not a lot?

JANINE: [overlapping] But probably not a lot! [laughs]

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Excuse you?

JANINE: Like if her-- like if she's keeping it in her sleeve one day, and her arm like slips a little bit--

[AUSTIN groans]

JACK: Janine...

JANINE: --and its leg pokes their like, just climbs back in a little bit.

JACK: [plaintive] Janine...

JANINE: [laughing] What?

AUSTIN: That's gross.

JANINE: It's holy!

JACK: She just moves her sleeve and she just feels it--

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: There's just, "Oh, there's a bug in there. There's a gold bug."

JACK: Oh, my god...

AUSTIN: Don't worry, this is just my exuvia.

[JANINE giggles]

AUSTIN: You've heard of a cybertome? Well, this is like that, but a bug.

[JANINE giggles]

JACK: Don't worry, don't worry. It's just the name of what it is when a bug sheds all its skin.

AUSTIN: [wheezing] That's all. Uh...

JACK: Oh, this bug looks cool as hell. I'm gonna link you a bug real quick.

AUSTIN: [resigned] Okay. Fucking... Oh! Kay. No, not into it.

JANINE: That's weird. That looks like a kid made it.

AUSTIN: [snorts] Okay, don't judge the bug. That's what my bumper sticker says: "Don't judge this bug!"

[JACK and ALI laugh]

JANINE: No, it looks like-- it looks like a plastic suction cup that someone put like chocolate wrapper foil on.

[AUSTIN huffs with laughter]

ALI: What?

JACK: Yeah, that's how it moves. It goes-- it gets very small and it goes, "pop!"

AUSTIN: I see it. She's not wrong. Yeah, it pops around.

[JANINE chuckles]

AUSTIN: It's like a quarter toy. Um, you-- so, going back to this list, you nourish it obviously with components. Um, we've obviously kind of gone over how you give it to that. And then the other thing to note here that's interesting is that it says, "This Essence allows you to have your abilities. However, the more you and the people from your homeland use its Essence--" use, in this case her Essence, "--the more it will erode your homeland. In order to restore this damage being done, what does your homeland need to replenish or nourish itself?"

Which now know is true names, is components. So, we now kind of have this interesting thing, which is like, you are now repairing Belgard by learning people's true names and... and sharing them with Belgard. And, and losing direct access to them, right?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like you do lose that component, right?

JANINE: I'm spending that component, basically.

AUSTIN: Yeah, okay. Cool. So the other move that you got from this is Uplift. Right?

JANINE: Yeah. That was-- yeah. This move is like the whole reason that we went down this path.

AUSTIN: Right. Which is--

JANINE: It was very important to give this to her.

AUSTIN: "When you act or say something that defines your character to be morally positive, directly resulting in an action or circumstance by another which would have been considered morally reprehensible not to occur, choose one of the following to apply to each of you for the amount of Essence consumed: clear or spike out any of the states associated with your homeland,--" So in this case Scared or Sad-- "mark XP, or take advantage forward." So know that you have this now.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Whenever you're good, be good. Be good and be good at it, as Danielle Riendeau would say.

[JANINE chuckles]

AUSTIN: Um, cool. So like, how does that-- what's the, what's this look like? What does Belgard coming back online a little bit look like? Besides your bug moving a little bit. Besides exuvia, the exuvia like, fluttering maybe for a moment.

JANINE: Um, I don't know that it's that dramatic at this point.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: Because it's just, we've just turned back the clock one point, right? Like the erosion doesn't scale back--

AUSTIN: Two. Like I'd say that each point of-- I mean more than that actually, right? Like because, taking this basically gives you two Essence, from zero to two.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: And then Nourish gave it another two, right? So that's four steps.

JANINE: Okay!

AUSTIN: Which is not nothing. And I don't know-- like I think it's, I need to start a clock. I think it's clock time, y'all! [snorts]

JANINE: Oh, God.

JACK: [groaning] Oh, wow.

[ALI giggles]

AUSTIN: Ah, but a positive clock! Like Tender's-- like Tender's clock.

JACK: Here we go. [ironically] A positive clock.

JANINE: [sighs] No clock is 100% positive.

AUSTIN: No, that's not true. That's not true. There we go.

ALI: We love time.is!

AUSTIN: I've added a clock. I've added a new clock, and I'm adding this thing here that says Belgard, question mark? And that is an... that is a one, two, three, four, an eight-step clock. Which ain't bad!

JACK: Well the question mark is what worries me.

[JANINE giggles]

JACK: That's the bit that's not positive. We found it. It took us one second.

AUSTIN: [overlapping JACK] Oh, I'll get rid of it. I'll get rid of it, I'll get rid of it!

[JANINE laughs]

AUSTIN: Belgard. Um, the thing to remember is like, as you spend those, you'd lose these points, too. Um, so.

JANINE: Mmhm. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: Wait, so just to recap really quick, you get Essence by giving Belgard, by feeding Belgard true names?

JANINE: Yes. Components, basically.

AUSTIN: Correct.

JACK: And then you can spend that Essence... um.

JANINE: But then I'm essentially taking it away.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: It's-- the thing that's being spent is like... I see this a lot as like, both of these characters use components. Like Belgard is saying that both can use components, but Belgard is a lot better at it. Belgard also does different things with them, compared to what Signet can do. So, Signet can do certain things with components, but when they're given to Belgard, Belgard enables other things. Because she's better at it.

AUSTIN: Right. I get it.

JACK: That makes sense.

AUSTIN: Yeah. That adds up. Um, cool. So then, like... do you feel different with Belgard coming back online?

[44:58]

JANINE: It's probably, um, Belgard's like voice maybe is a little stronger, and like her presence a little brighter.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: And that probably is... I don't know the exact word I want, but it's probably-- you know, it's probably a little reassuring for Signet.

AUSTIN: Mmhm.

JANINE: Probably makes her feel like, "Okay. We can... we can move forward with this. Like this is something that... can work, maybe." You know.

AUSTIN: Make sure you mark the Powerful that you rolled before, also.

JANINE: Oh, yes.

AUSTIN: I think like, there's like one last shot shot which is, the straps that you'd strapped yourself in with to kind of... connect with, they slowly recoil on-- by themselves. No, recoil is too harsh of a word, but they like unwrap around you and... recede back into the body of Belgard, and like, she does that on her own. You don't call for her to do it. And it's soft, and it's like, it's like finishing a hug, is what it feels like. You know that like brief moment of warmth.

JANINE: Should we clear emotional states from before?

AUSTIN: No. No, I think we decided not to do that, because the game's just way more interesting when you don't do it.

JANINE: Yeah. Okay.

AUSTIN: Especially 'cause like, we saw you go into that place, and then... like a couple of weeks have passed since then, not like six months.

JANINE: Mmhm.

AUSTIN: I think really it has to be like, a lot has happened in your life for me to wanna completely clear it. At this point.

JANINE: Yeah. Okay.

AUSTIN: Um, okay. Fourteen and Tender, what are you two up to as we come back in?

JACK: I think I've probably been getting gradually, increasingly... at first overwhelmed by the fact that I'm now actually a performer.

AUSTIN: [amused] Right, cause you actually have to do those performances, right?

[ALI giggles]

JACK: Um, yeah, I'm like--

AUSTIN: Like you've been scheduled to perform and you have this character you have to keep up now, so...

JACK: And like definitely, there are definitely a couple of days where it was just like, "We are terribly sorry. Worthy of Grace will not be performing tonight."

[AUSTIN laughs]

JACK: "They have-- they have..." [wheezes with laughter] "They have," uh, I don't know whether or not it would be described as a glitch or something. I don't know whether or not what Worthy of Grace is gets ill.

AUSTIN: Mmhm.

JACK: But it's the sort of thing of like, "Oh, they have to rest their voice tonight." And the theater's like, "Oh, man, we gotta refund tickets," or whatever.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: But on other days, I'm out there and I'm performing. Uh, and I think it would probably be good to describe Worthy of Grace really quickly? Since we didn't--

AUSTIN: Mmhm! Definitely.

JACK: Since we didn't beforehand. So, there's a picture of... Rosario Dawson wearing turquoise earrings that I was like, "Oh, this is extremely on-brand." Uh, which I'm gonna link. In the ship chat, just below this bug. [snickers]

[AUSTIN and JANINE chuckle]

JACK: This just here now.

AUSTIN: Ah, Friends at the Table.

[ALI giggles]

JACK: Ahh, Friends at the Table.

AUSTIN: Oh, it's a good picture!

JANINE: Oh yeah.

JACK: So it's like, it's like a... messy bob and... I think definitely those turquoise earrings--

AUSTIN: That's a Bluff City character, actually.

[ALI giggles]

JACK: Messy Bob?

AUSTIN: Messy Bob. Is uh, definitely a Bluff City character.

JACK: Oh, for sure. And I also saw a video the other day of like, we've been talking when we were planning this season about like, e-Ink clothes?

[AUSTIN makes approving noises]

JACK: And I saw a video the other day of Jennifer Lopez performing with projection mapping on her dress.

AUSTIN: Mhm. That's a great video.

JACK: Uh, and it looks like she's being like... sucked into the stage, or patterns are kind of rippling from the stage onto her. I think that Worthy of Grace has a similar dress, except e-Ink or whatever the Mirage's equivalent of e-Ink is lets it just do that whenever.

AUSTIN: Right. Like, anywhere you are, not just on a stage.

JACK: Yeah. So it's like one part-- it's one part the projection mapping of the Jennifer Lopez show, and one part projection mapping on buildings, you know, you see sometimes? Where buildings are transformed. And then one part that famous art exhibition where the man disguises himself as his surroundings by painting his body.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And disappearing into shopping... into supermarkets, or... like various backgrounds or whatever. So I think that dress is just kind of constantly reflecting the scene they're in somehow?

AUSTIN: Cool.

JACK: Or flickering, or... playing advertisements for the performance later that night.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Perfect. Good.

JACK: Which they might not even be able to attend. Or whatever.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: So I think I'm beginning to like [???

AUSTIN: If you're not attending, does a digital version of you still attend and perform?

JACK: A digital version of Worthy of Grace appears and apologizes.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: Does not perform.

[ALI giggles]

AUSTIN: Does not perform. Wow, that's interesting. Okay.

JACK: Um, well, it's important.

AUSTIN: Yeah! No, I get it.

JACK: You know, it's like, this is a different situation to Aria performing. Or fake Arias performing.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: Where like, and I think especially since audience reception of Worthy of Grace is probably pretty weird right now, since they were suddenly told like, "Worthy of Grace has been form."

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: So I think they would understand if... someone came and said, "Not tonight." The--

AUSTIN: Um, so two things. Go ahead, go ahead. What were you gonna say?

JACK: Oh, it was just, Worthy of Grace would say, "The theatre will refund your tickets."

[AUSTIN laughs; ALI giggles]

JACK: And they would go, [sarcastically] "Ah, great, yeah. Yeah... Love to refund tickets."

AUSTIN: [laughs] Uh, two things. One, one of the amazing moments of this J-Lo performance, which was at American Idol-- I'm gonna do a search for...

JACK: It's so good.

AUSTIN: ..."video mapping Jennifer Lopez American Idol" and find this video. In this video there's a moment where it just turns into a kids' cartoon on her dress?

[JANINE laughs]

JACK: Yeah, it is definitely that.

AUSTIN: And there's just a little CG kid running around. There's like little monsters and tubes and bubbles and stuff. Like when it's not being the cosmos, it is just a Dreamworks original picture. [laughs] It's very good.

JACK: It's great.

AUSTIN: The second thing is, you need to... um... don't you have a beginning of thing move? Or maybe you don't have that move.

JACK: Perhaps. We might have done that... last time. Let me double check.

AUSTIN: Well, no, cause it's a beginning of session move, is the one that I'm thinking of.

JACK: Oh.

AUSTIN: But maybe I'm wrong. Maybe you don't have that.

JACK: No, I think it's when I...

AUSTIN: Yeah, you know what? You don't have this move. This move is for when you-- this is a move you've not taken, which would have been Reach Out, which you don't have. So, okay, yeah. You're good.

JACK: Yeah. Um, and I think... I have a new move, and I think the reason that Fourteen Fifteen started using this move is because of something that happened while they were performing. Um, which is... the move is from another playbook. It's from the playbook of the... god, what's that called? It had a great name.

AUSTIN: It's Percipient. Percipient.

JACK: Percipient.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Which is from... which is from Cascade, an upcoming... expansion to the Veil.

JACK: Percipient, also the name of a bit of a bug that gets sloughed off.

[AUSTIN and JANINE laugh]

JACK: No, it's not. It's not. Uh, the move is called Axiomatic, and it says, "Whenever you Analyze, you can ask the MC, 'What is it only I can perceive about this situation or place?' for free." Um, and... During a show, or backstage for a show, Fourteen had sort of decided to combine both jobs that they have?

[AUSTIN exhales]

JACK: And kind of off-handedly asked an aide or a makeup person, or a makeup machine, that can also talk, which is also probably a person.

AUSTIN: Also a person. Yeah. In most cases, not all cases, but most.

JACK: Uh, asked for some information very sort of obliquely about-- that might help them with, you know, what they were doing also at the theater, which was planning to assassinate someone. And the person just gave them some information that nobody would have ever have given to an assassin, but would definitely have given to the... award-winning singer, Worthy of Grace.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: That was just so clear and so unique, and only they could possibly have known. And this is something that Fourten Fifteen has definitely experienced before. They've been through different bodies, so something they understand really well is like, different levels of information available to different people.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: But it was writ so spectacularly in the dressing room of this theater, that I think this is something that I have access to, or I'm gonna be thinking about, a lot more.

AUSTIN: Sure. Cool. Um, so that's what you've been doing. You've been performing and stuff. Tender, have you just been working on that temple, basically?

ALI: Um, yeah, I think so. I think that like the... the like visual image of it is if like, the last episode we saw her and it was like a cut of like an ashtray with three cigarettes in it. And then it widens to like the room and she like wakes up and gets breakfast, and then like takes off her shoes and washes her hands, and like goes into that office of hers? It's like her just doing that over and over again, it keeps cutting to that ashtray and it's like, eventually you can't see the ashtray anymore? Because butts are just like, fluttered with it? But then she always like opens that door, and that room is really white and pristine, and she like dusts it once a week. And then takes off her shoes and like sits down and does the thing.

AUSTIN: Right. Do you make substantial progress on the design of it? Like should we have you continue this move? Or has that not-- have you not had time to do that yet?

ALI: Um, I mean if it's been a month of her continually building it?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: I think probably that seems appropriate.

AUSTIN: Yeah, sure. Right, then let's do it. That's another roll, right? Which was... Construct is what we were thinking of doing, right? Because so far you've made it highly detailed and expansive, but it is not yet-- it will not persist without you maintaining it; it does not-- it does have a cap on population, and it is not secure from intruders. [huffs]

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: As of right now. As we learned, when Open Metal visited you.

ALI: Oh, right. I had forgotten about that. Yeah. [laughs] Oh, okay.

AUSTIN: Yeah. And where she still lives there as the sun, or whatever.

ALI: Right. Yup. Uh huh.

AUSTIN: Uh, so give me a Construct, how do you-- Oh, you're rolling +Cyberbrain, but still tell me how you feel.

ALI: Uh, I'm still... spiked at Peaceful.

AUSTIN: Oh, you are. Okay, right. You just wanna mark that down?

ALI: I feel like her-- Yeah, yeah, that's like not...

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: I mean, her like waking up, eating one meal a day, and building a church is still like...

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: ...spiked out in Peaceful for a month straight?

AUSTIN: Yep. Yeah, so go ahead and... roll Peaceful at +1. So roll 2d6 plus-- or, no, it would be, you're rolling +Cyberbrain, which is also +1 I'm guessing?

ALI: Okay, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. But mark down one Peaceful.

ALI: Okay cool.

AUSTIN: As you continue to work through it. Alright, that is a nine, so you get to choose one more of those remaining three.

ALI: Uh... It was Construct, right? Was that with--

AUSTIN: Construct, yeah yeah yeah. Totally.

ALI: I think that I'm gonna say that it persists without me actively maintaining it.

AUSTIN: Oh, interesting.

ALI: I was like thinking of jumping right to the like, intruders can't come in, but there's already been like the biggest breach of privacy there, that like whatever.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Right. Right.

ALI: But also like, I think that especially with some stuff that we might talk about in a second, I think she's more interested in seeing how long she can maintain it?

AUSTIN: Right. Interesting. Why-- why does she... Like, so yeah. Let's talk about that. What's-- why?

ALI: [sigh] Um, so I think... I picked up some moves and stuff that kind of implies the... the sort of boundaries of Tender's abilities are widening in a way that she... kind of does not know how to... deal with, and doesn't really understand, but wants to lean into a bunch? I also added a Belief that kind of reflects this. But um... [inhales] I think that her being like, "Okay, I'm making this thing and I know like... you know, I log off at the end of the day." [huffs]

[AUSTIN chuckles]

ALI: Like I save the Audacity file, I close Audacity, and then I close my monitor and it turns off. But like, being able to like... make it like a structure in the way that like, things in the world are?

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: [overlapping] Like a Starbucks is, you know? I mean like--

AUSTIN: [overlapping] Right. Like a real place. It is, or not even--

ALI: Yeah, like a real place. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Right. That continues on when you close your eyes. Object permanence is, is not a thing that individuals have access to when it comes to the Mesh here. Normally it's like, "Oh, I have to go through the government, basically. I have to go through the Divines and say, 'Hey, I really wanna set up X amount of... you know, digital storage this month, so that I can have this place open even when I'm not there.'" You know, or whatever it is. And like all that stuff is carefully administered. But you're just doing this with your... brain? And not your Cyberbrain, cause remember, you don't have a Cyberbrain.

ALI: I do not. [laughs]

AUSTIN: You do not have a piece of metal in your brain at this point. But so you're like finishing the creation of this thing, and you step outside of it, and then you know it's still there, basically.

ALI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: That's interesting.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So what are the moves? And how do they... how can you like show them a little bit?

ALI: Um, it's tough in like a solo scene to do this.

AUSTIN: Right. Maybe we don't need to. Maybe we can hold onto them until it makes sense to. In fact like maybe that's-- maybe just illustrate the broader point. Or maybe you've just done that in a sense, right? Like being able to keep this thing active, even when you're not there, on nothing. Right? Like on the Mirage itself theoretically, maybe? Like what does she think she's doing?

ALI: I-- It's tough to know like what her... understanding of it is? Cause I think that she has like a technical understanding of what digital spaces are, moreso than a lot of the other... NPCs or PCs? But like, yeah, I don't know. I know that she... I know that she thinks that like, being able to do this is divine in some way. But I don't know that she has an understanding of like, where it's being uploaded to, or like that.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Or like what server it is or that kind of thing. I don't know that she's like super... interested in that either. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: Like she's not searching for like the IP address of the church that she's building. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: She's just building it, and it's hers, and it like... she...

AUSTIN: And it works. And that's what matters.

ALI: Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Interesting. Okay, cool.

ALI: Yeah yeah yeah. Um, I can go--

AUSTIN: So what's the Belief that goes with this?

ALI: Yes. Yeah. So--

AUSTIN: Cause that's what I'm actually interested in.

ALI: [giggles] The Belief that goes with this is "The boundaries of my mind are fading; I will crack the barriers that remain."

AUSTIN: Ooh.

ALI: Yeah. Um... [laughs]

AUSTIN: That's-- that's a very demonstrative and like, declarative belief. Good.

ALI: [weakly laughing] Yeah. Yeah, I got there.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: And the other Belief is still... My Belief in Fourteen has remained, which is, "Fourteen feels like they owe me something; I'll take whatever they're offering." And then my third Belief has kind of a like significant change, which is, "My gift is divine and cannot be taken from me; I must stop anyone who would try."

AUSTIN: Oh, that's a significant-- it used to be "I must hide it from."

ALI: Yaaaah. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Okay. Tender Sky drawing fucking lines in the ground.

[1:00:00]

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: And then breaking through other ones. Into it. Cool.

ALI: I realize that, like, knowing when a character will enact violence is an important thing.

AUSTIN: It is very important. Yup.

ALI: And like, yup. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Totally. For that note, really quickly, Fourteen, can you talk about your beliefs, because we did not--

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: --mention those, and I should have.

JACK: Um, mine haven't changed. "I don't know why, but Tender is important; always keep her in my sights" is one. "Always shine a light into shadowed corners" is another one. "I am not afraid of death, but others are; I will never manipulate someone with a deadly but empty threat" is my third.

AUSTIN: Cool. Okay, so, we've kind of gotten these snapshots of everyone apart. Is it like-- is there like a regular day when you check back in with the ship? Is it just like, "Eh, we get there when we get there," or is there-- do you know what I mean? You've had this time apart at this point. Is there-- is it always a call from Cascara that says, "Hey, come back in"? Or is there an opportunity for you to just be there? Is kind of what my question is.

JACK: I wonder if it's something like, um... when sailors were called back to ships in ports, in like Tudor times or whatever, by like ringing of bells and lighting of fires around the town.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And like, everybody began like, "Oh, man, the ship's moving out. Alright, let's go."

AUSTIN: Okay. Yeah. That's good.

JACK: I wonder whether it's some equivalent of that.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And in COUNTER/Weight it would definitely be like, we receive a call on our pager, but this is the fuckin' Mirage, so I reckon something appears in the sky. Like lines appear in the sky.

AUSTIN: Are they-- it's not just words. It's not just cloud writing. Like it's literally... some sort of like... Is it like an aurora? Is it like the sail of the ship? Cause the ship has this cool sun sail, flashes a symbol, like not a bat signal, but literally like bends the light in the sky so that there are these waves of color?

JACK: I have a weird suspicion we might have talked about this before.

AUSTIN: I don't th-- maybe.

JACK: I think it's the sail of the ship. And I think it's like... It's not quite an aurora, but it is almost like bands of color in the sky.

AUSTIN: Hmm.

JACK: Because we use the same ship as the Ivy, right?

AUSTIN: Yes, yeah, you're all on the same ship.

JACK: So they'd have to--

AUSTIN: You have little ships that get you onto Seance, like the moon ship--

JACK: Oh, we're all on the same ship at the same time. We don't like timeshare it?

AUSTIN: No. You're all on the--

[ALI giggles]

AUSTIN: Well, except that you do. Historically, though, remember this was kind of a big point was, the last time you were there was the first time you realized you'd been timesharing it in a sense. That like--

JACK: Oh, right, yeah.

AUSTIN: Cascara had kept you all quarantined from each other. You've never met the Beloved Ivy. You've only ever met each other, and so suddenly it was like, "Oh, Cascara has moved this into a new, like, degree of-- a new alert status, DEFCON 5 or whatever." It's like, "No, you all actually need to know each other, and hey, by the way, there are other groups here active it's you two."

JACK: And they suck.

AUSTIN: And they suck. [laughs] "And you're all here together now, and you're gonna have to deal with sharing this space, because we're getting more active." Whereas previously it had been sort of like, whoever is on a mission is gone, and you know, everybody else would be at the ship. And she would time missions like-- you know, kind of like deployment times. Where it's like, "Okay, if they're deployed, they're not here. And if they're coming back, I'll deploy the other group and keep them away, and that way there's no overlap and everyone can kind of have run of the ship while they're away." So, but yeah, now I don't think that's the case at this point.

JACK: I reckon it's like a combination of colors, um, that specifically call to Signet and Tender and Fourteen.

AUSTIN: Mmhm.

JACK: And we could definitely go back before that.

AUSTIN: Sure.

JACK: Like I don't think we would be locked out of the ship or whatever.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: But this is like, "Oh, we're getting to work." And I reckon you see bands of colors like this appearing above the dock--

AUSTIN: Right, right.

JACK: --all day, as different ships are arriving and people are calling to their crews.

AUSTIN: Mmhm. Cool. So, um... Who gets there first? Who kind of like drops what they're doing-- And I guess the other thing is, we're actually-- Someone has to go pick up Signet, cause Signet is at Thyrsis, and not at Seance, right?

JANINE: I mean if I got to Thyrsis by using Sanctuary, then technically I think I can just like go, right?

AUSTIN: I don't know! What do you mean you can just go?

JANINE: Um, I mean that like the whole--

AUSTIN: Is that a two rate--

JANINE: That's like a whole thing with the, with the Asylum is, you can re-emerge in a different place altogether.

AUSTIN: Okay. I didn't know that part. That's the part.

JANINE: Yeah. There's like a weird [laughs], there's a weird thing that I don't know that I can ever explain, in the way that I've tried to explain some of the things that have to do with this, of like, you can just go there or just leave, wherever.

AUSTIN: We have your Exuvia, and we've already established in COUNTER/Weight that any two Divines can create a portal, so maybe this is like a weird variation on that stuff.

[ALI giggles]

AUSTIN: I don't know!

JANINE: Sure.

AUSTIN: But like, I bet this wouldn't work if you didn't have the Exuvia. I think that's probably a fine, like, thing. That you have this thing on you that connects you, and can do instant transportation. In a way that normally you can't. So yeah, I see. You can re-emerge in a different place altogether. Okay, yeah. Totally. So yeah, you could just show back up on the Beloved ship. Which we still don't have a name for, by the way. Unless someone's figured it out.

JANINE: Names are hard.

AUSTIN: Yeah...

JACK: Names are so hard. I'll work it out between now and then next recording. [Austin hums] I'll like sit down and make a big ol' list.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

[ALI giggles]

AUSTIN: Okay. So, uh, yeah, so who gets there first? I just wanna kind of paint the picture of as you arrive, what you see. And then to do that means I need to know who's there first.

ALI: Um, do you think like Tender and Fourteen go together?

AUSTIN: Sure, like maybe they get-- if they're both on Seance, maybe they both get a, like a shuttle. Like a whatever, one of those smaller ships that kind of fly you out.

ALI: Right, yeah, like we'd meet at the port and then travel over.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Is this the first time you've seen each other since that bar? [Jack hums] Have you spent more time together?

JACK: What do you think, Tender?

ALI: I like... Probably not? If not, like really briefly. I think it depends on how much Fourteen would be like, "Hey let's hang out. Hey, like, let's go out tonight. Let's go get dinner. Come to my show." [Jack chuckles] Cause I don't think Tender's--

AUSTIN: But Fourteen has to be the active participant. Because--

ALI: Yeah. Yeah, yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: Is that because Tender is so spiked out on Peaceful, or is that just kind of how Tender is?

ALI: Uh, well I think specifically right now, she's home building a weird church, so [laughs]

AUSTIN: Right, okay.

JACK: I think Fourteen probably sent tickets.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: Um... That's cute. I think that, um... [laughs] Sorry.

AUSTIN: That's cute. No.

ALI: [laughs] No, I think Tender probably went.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: Like, how often do you think that Fourteen does shows?

JACK: Oh, God, like too frequently, right? [ALI laughs] Like part of the thing is that it's like, badly frequently. It's like, maybe every like three days?

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: Oh, wow, okay. That's a lot, but like not...

JACK: Like every other day or every three days, yeah.

ALI: Um, I think that she goes... once? Like as Tender. And like brings flowers and they go out for dinner or whatever afterwards. But then I think she goes to like another two shows, like, disguised as someone? I have the-- [JACK giggles] I haven't used it yet, but I have the Lady in Red, which means that like--

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: --she can just change her appearance whenever. [laughs] And I think that she's like, a little curious about what the performance would be like if Fourteen doesn't know that like, their coworker is in the audience? [laughs]

AUSTIN: Does it change at all, Fourteen?

JACK: Um... No? I don't-- [AUSTIN laughs] I don't think so. I don't think so. I think at this point, Fourteen is definitely like, [singsong voice] "I am not trained as a singer."

[ALI laughs]

JACK: I'm good, because that's how this works, but I'm definitely still playing it by ear, at this point.

AUSTIN: Um, alright, so yeah. I think we get you to, then, in that context, this little shuttle. There's also, um, a little drone arrives [clears throat], and drops off a canvas satchel filled with fan mail for you? [JACK chuckles] Uh, Fourteen? It's all just like, [false starts], I don't know, you didn't open them yet, but there's probably 300 letters from people who love Worthy of Grace. All in little envelopes, or they're postcards, or whatever. And they're just like, they're canvas, or a burlap sack basically. Like a mail sack just gets dropped there.

And [laughs] just between the two of you as this ship heads out into the Mirage, towards your home ship... This is probably the most time you've spent in a completely private space, then.

JACK: Well.

[ALI giggles]

AUSTIN: Like since before, the last time.

JACK (as Fourteen): Would it be, uh, would it be a real faux pas to open some of these?

[ALI and JANINE hold back laughter]

ALI (as Tender): I-- Is this the first shipment you've gotten?

JACK (as Fourteen): No.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Wow.

ALI: Well in that case, I think Tender like reaches into the thing and opens one up herself? [laughs]

AUSTIN: Roll a d6 for me-- roll 2d6 for me.

ALI: Yeah, absolutely.

AUSTIN: This isn't even-- [stumbling] I just need a, probably like a fate die.

[ALI hums]

AUSTIN: Alright, yeah, cool. Um, the first one that you reach in for, it has a little rose on the back. Like, that's sealing the envelope. I don't know if you notice this, but Fourteen does, as you start to open it.

JACK (as Fourteen): Not that one.

ALI (as Tender): [smug laughter]

ALI: And then she opens it faster.

JACK: Mmmm-hmmm.

AUSTIN (as Castlerose): Fourteen, one of your clients is concerned about the length of time it's taking you to pursue one of your objectives. Get in touch.

JACK: Well--

AUSTIN: That is just something you read. Or, you know, I think it's like you see it, and then hear those words. Uh, Tender? Those are--

ALI: I think Tender reads it out loud. [laugh]

AUSTIN: Oh, wow. Okay.

ALI: [laugh] And then like immediately is like-- cause she knows, like she knows.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: And then closes it, like,

ALI (as Tender): Oh, this is business, I'm sorry."

ALI: [laugh] Like hands it to Fourteen.

JACK (as Fourteen): Well, I'm glad I've received the information. [AUSTIN laughs] I have been slacking my duties lately, because I've been singing so well. But I'm sure this is something that I will have to keep in mind. Thank you, Tender. Thank you.

[ALI chuckles]

JACK: And then I'm gonna fold it up and put it in my bag.

AUSTIN: Mhm. [ALI laughs] The rest of these are all pretty regular. Like as far as fanmail to living vocaloids go.

[ALI laughs, JACK chuckles]

ALI: Which is like, they're all just like chiptune remixes of songs that people--

JANINE: I drew a picture of you holding a bloody knife and being a yandere!

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Right, right. Exactly. [ALI laughing loudly] Yes. Lots of that actually.

JACK: Oh my god. So do we arrive and the floor of the shop is just covered in--

AUSTIN: [crosstalking over JACK] Yeah, it's just covered. Absolutely. I think some of these are also like, interesting digital cards, where it's like, it's just a little sliver of metal where you hit a button and a holographic card appears, and you can just like hit the button again and then deposit it in the recycling and it just deals with it, you know what I mean? Like ships it back, basically. So you get a mix of the stuff, and yes, there are definitely some physical letters with like-- you have like a second bag filled with like empty envelopes and stuff like that. Do you talk about anything else on the trip?

JACK: Mmmm... Yeah. I wanna talk about, I wanna talk about having spent time in Contrition's Figure.

AUSTIN: Okay. What do you say?

JACK (as Fourteen): Tender. I did not enjoy my time in the prison.

ALI (as Tender): Um, I don't know that any of us did.

JACK (as Fourteen): It was an environment that I did not thrive in.

ALI (as Tender): Uh huh.

JACK (as Fourteen): And part of the reason that I feel that I did not thrive was, I allowed myself to be parted from you.

ALI (as Tender): [laughs] O-Oh?

JACK (as Fourteen): Tender, I was killed by chanting zombies.

[AUSTIN laughs]

ALI (as Tender): That did happen, you did die.

JACK (as Fourteen): And yet you escaped flawlessly from, as I understand it, the roof of some--

ALI (as Tender): I wouldn't call it flawless.

JACK (as Fourteen): You escaped beautifully from the roof of some great tower. [struggles to find words] And I think this is simply due to a, a disconnect between our skillset in environments like these.

ALI (as Tender): I mean, that was mostly Signet. To be fair, that was mostly Signet.

JACK (as Fourteen): Oh, you're so modest.

ALI (as Tender): [laughing] Um, I... I do have an incredible skillset. That's true. But, um... so do you, that's why the three of us work together, and it works, and uh... Splitting up happens? I don't know that I understand...

JACK (as Fourteen): Understand which bit?

ALI (as Tender): The-- mm... I appreciate that you think that I add value to the missions? But, it's professional.

JACK (as Fourteen): Oh, Tender. Oh, Tender. [ALI struggles not to laugh] No, I-- No, please understand. Uh, I think I could learn from you. From what you're capable of doing in spaces like these.

ALI (as Tender): Ohh, ohhh, ohhhh, oh.

[AUSTIN laughs]

JACK (as Fourteen): Oh, don't worry. Don't worry, Tender. I-- you read the letters. Many people make the same mistake.

ALI (as Tender): [laughing] Yeah, there's-- great. Mm. I guess I have been reading love letters to you for forty minutes. Um...

JACK (as Fourteen): That's true.

[AUSTIN and ALI laughing]

ALI (as Tender): I... [frustrated noise] What do you wanna learn?

JACK (as Fourteen): Simply to feel more comfortable.

ALI (as Tender): As...

JACK (as Fourteen): As, as, as... One that exists in the digital.

ALI (as Tender): Oh. Well. I mean, yeah, I mean we all do, but not, not...

BOTH, at once: Not like you. [laughing]

JACK (as Fourteen): We just click.

[all laugh]

AUSTIN: Is this-- I should just note, like, this is different characterization for Fourteen Fifteen on screen. Does it feel different, Tender? Like, how many previous Fourteen Fifteens has Tender known?

ALI: Um...

AUSTIN: They're all Fourteen Fifteen, they're not previous-- Previous bodily forms and kind of, um characteristics of Fourteen Fifteen.

[1:15:02]

ALI: Right, yeah, I don't... How often do you think this change happens? Like, often, right? She's not fazed...

AUSTIN: Every time they die. Right?

JACK: I think we've previously said that the-- Signet and Tender have seen one other incarnation.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Oh.

JACK: So the gunslinger?

ALI: Oh, oh, oh. Okay. Then... yeah, I guess it's like-- It's weird but it's not... it's a little more normalized to someone who is able to change themselves really easily. And also, like, we ended up getting rid of the bond that was like "I could recognize Fourteen wherever they are," but I still think that's true.

[AUSTIN and JACK hum contemplatively]

ALI: So I think that there's like... [sigh] a familiarity? I think that there's, it's not like when you don't see someone for like five years, and then you see them again and the shape of their face is different. You know? Like, or it's closer to that than like interacting with someone completely different.

AUSTIN: Right. From Fourteen's side, like, this is different characterization, right? Like Worthy of Grace is different than the gunslinger. [JACK hums] In mannerism? Or am I misreading that?

JACK: I think in mannerism. I think that-- I think it's, Fourteen has done this so many times that I think part of part and parcel with switching comes this change. And I don't know whether or not Fourteen's even clear on the exact circumstances of that.

AUSTIN: Sure. Right.

JACK: But as far as they're concerned, they're no more Worthy of Grace than they are the gunslinger than they are whatever came before. I mean, it's easy to think of the gunslinger as the default Fourteen Fifteen, just because that's the first one we saw, but... That's like the-- I don't know, that's like many, many different incarnations, and different characters.

AUSTIN: Right. Right, cool. So I think somewhere in here is when the ship lands and everyone arrives back to the Beloved ship, and... I think you like, walk into that main area that we've talked about as having these two tiers, like the kitchen at the top and then the, kind of like lounge-y living room area where you kind of interrogated Morning's Observation.

JACK: You know, the lounge/interrogation room. [ALI chuckles]

AUSTIN: The lounge/interrogation room. And like the kitchen and dining area at the tiered second level of this big open area. And then there's like the interior rooms and stuff past that, down these hallways and stuff. And the cockpit, or the command center, is in my mind behind the kitchen. Like behind the walls, there's a wall and a doorway and you can cut past that to go back to the kitchen-- err, back to the command deck. Or whatever. But here on the... we just see at the dining room table, you walk in to Morning's Observation playing a board game with two people. With Sho Salon, who today is in a... what's the word, is there a good word for like a faded pink? Like a very light pink?

JANINE: Muted.

AUSTIN: Like a muted pink, yeah.

ALI: Millennial pink.

JANINE: I--

AUSTIN: Wait, is it--

JANINE: I feel like normally when you're talking about that kind of pink, you would also use the word rose. Like a muted rose.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

JANINE: A dusty rose.

AUSTIN: A dusty rose...

ALI: Dusty--

JANINE: I think is a crayon name. I think dusty rose is the crayola name.

AUSTIN: Dusty rose, let's see. Yeah, like dusty rose might be right. And a similarly very muted blue, like Gothic Lolita dress today, with her headscarf is the pink, and then-- so it's, she's playing with Morning's Observation, and then also there in a like, a basketball jersey, like a tanktop, like a basketball jersey and shorts, is Chiron, the synthetic robot that Signet saved in the very first session, is here.

Just like a brief reminder, in my mind, and I only literally seconds ago just figured this out, I have been thinking of Chiron as a robotic version of Burter from Dragon Ball Z? Um, just B-U-R-T-E-R. Yes, it sounds like butter, because Dragon Ball Z has lots of food names. In that like it's a spherical head, like a regular spherical head, with these kind of, two big rounded ear outcroppings-- they're all metal, he's a synthetic person-- and then it has this like yellow kind of top where his hair would be theoretically. That is like what I've been imagining. And most of his skin is this chromed green skin with this yellow top. But that's like the general shape that I'd been imagining for this whole time. Also kind of like a Destiny robot I guess, like an exo.

And he is just kind of lounging with one leg, like out? Like not up on the table or anything, but you know what I mean? Like one leg back and one leg out, and kind of leaning back too far on a dining room table, as Sho and Morning try to explain some complex board game rules to him? [laugh] And Sho is very chidey. Like she's very, like,

AUSTIN (as Sho): No, no, no, you only have three moves per turn.

AUSTIN: And Chiron is like

AUSTIN (as Chiron): I'm not sure I understand. You said that I have seven moves per round.

AUSTIN: And she's like

AUSTIN (as Sho): That's right. Seven moves per round, three moves per turn. A round and a turn are two different things.

AUSTIN: And Morning's Observation is like

AUSTIN (as Morning): Sho, cut him some slack. Let me just-- So basically, in this game...

AUSTIN: And he's like trying to make a really weird analogy about life with it, and it's not connecting in any way. Like it's just not--

AUSTIN (as Morning): You're moving around dragon pieces, but you can't think of the dragon pieces as like, pieces on a board. You have to think of them as like, people you care about in your life, I guess. That's the closest you can get, is like a dragon as like an uncle, but not like a good uncle, just like an uncle-- Someone you care about because you're supposed to care about them.

AUSTIN: And Chiron is like

AUSTIN (as Chiron): Not sure this game's for me, y'all.

AUSTIN: [laughs] And is just like, gets up and goes into the refrigerator to get some sort of-- I guess Chiron is fully synthetic. We haven't talked about what synthetic beings eat or drink in this world. Or if they do. But I want them to, so I think-- I think he basically gets a Capri-Sun. [ALI laughing loudly] Like something in a silver pouch, with a straw, [JACK chuckles] and like puts the straw in, and raises it to a mouth portal, a mouth thing, and like... Sits back down backwards on his chair, like deep in his mid-90s fashion right now. Deep in his like, mid 90s hip hop fashion, way too long basketball shorts. It's good, it's a good look on this green robot man.

So that's what you all come back to at this point. And the Beloved Ivy, the group that y'all kind of had weird beef with because they're kind of shitty, they are nowhere to be found. But the rest of you all arrive, I think, in this window of time. And I think the first thing that happens is Sho

catches vision of Worthy of Grace and like-- Maybe this is one of those things that you notice because this new move you took.

[JACK hums]

AUSTIN: You can tell that she repositions herself. She's explaining the rules of the game, but she repositions herself to keep the table between you and her at all times. She has not seen you since this. Since you died.

JACK: [hums] I think I'm gonna go over? And...

AUSTIN (as Sho): Dragons move on a cross L shape

AUSTIN: She's like very focused on the rules of the game.

JACK (as Fourteen): Sho.

AUSTIN (as Sho): Oh, hi! Um, three players only on this round. We can bring you back in two turns from now, the rules say.

JACK (as Fourteen): You have something of mine.

AUSTIN (as Sho): I do?

JACK (as Fourteen): A pistol?

AUSTIN (as Sho): [stammering] It's in my room, you can go get it.

AUSTIN: And she picks up a couple of the pieces, like these little currency cubes for this game, and just kind of plays with them a little bit in her hand, like very nervously.

AUSTIN (as Sho): [stammering] It's in the third drawer, in the bureau on the right.

JACK (as Fourteen): I gave it to you to take care of.

AUSTIN (as Sho): It's-- I took good care of it.

JACK (as Fourteen): Well, it's not mine to take back from you. It must be given.

AUSTIN: She sighs, and says

AUSTIN (as Sho): Alright, just... Morning, don't let him go past the... the third turn, on the second board.

AUSTIN: And then she like walks away very slowly down the hall with her head down.

JACK (as Fourteen): Morning, is something the matter with Sho?

AUSTIN (as Morning): [whispering] She has been weird ever since, uh... [normal voice] I heard about what happened. It sounds like you did some like real badass shit, which is cool.

JACK (as Fourteen): I was killed by some chanting zombies.

AUSTIN (as Morning): Yeah, that seems dope. Uh... But you're here, and that's cool. I think it just-- I don't know. I don't know that she's seen like a friend get killed like that.

JACK (as Fourteen): I wasn't killed.

AUSTIN (as Morning): Mm. But you sorta were.

JACK (as Fourteen): But I sort of was. I can understand why that would be frightening, especially as someone... new. Um, I should take some time to reassure her.

AUSTIN (as Morning): Yeah. Anyway, you gotta think about the castle pieces like--

JACK (as Fourteen): This is terrible advice, you're explaining this terribly.

[ALI stifles laughter]

AUSTIN (as Morning): Do you know how to play?

JACK (as Fourteen): Yes.

AUSTIN (as Morning): Castles and Dragons?

JACK: [snorts laughter] Sorry?

AUSTIN (as Morning): That's the name of the game, it's Castles and Dragons.

JACK: It's an actual play podcast? [ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: It's an actual play podcast focused on--

[AUSTIN groaning, ALI laughing]

AUSTIN (as Morning): I don't listen to those, they're too long.

JACK (as Fourteen): Far too long. Uh, I play poorly, but I know the rules, and I know them well enough to know that you're describing them terribly. Chiron?

AUSTIN (as Chiron): Yeah?

JACK (as Fourteen): Morning's Observation's describing them terribly. You don't need to think of the dragons as though they're people in your life, you know, important figures. You need to think of them as [breath] though they are falling leaves.

[AUSTIN cackling, ALI giggling]

AUSTIN (as Chiron): Ohhhh

AUSTIN: Says-- that's Morning's Observation. He says

AUSTIN (as Chiron): Oh, falling leaves... But what type, though? Like--

JACK (as Fourteen): Autumn. Autumn.

AUSTIN (as Chiron): Mm, I don't know that they're autumn leaves. I think they're like spring leaves that fall. Like the kind that--

JACK (as Fourteen): Spring leaves?

AUSTIN (as Chiron): Yeah, the ones that like blossom real quick, and then--

JACK (as Fourteen): Like cherry blossoms, yes.

AUSTIN (as Chiron): Like cherry blossoms.

JACK (as Fourteen): Yes. Yes, that's true.

AUSTIN: Chiron is then like

AUSTIN (as Chiron): Do they have fire breath? Like what's their move? What do they do? [ALI chuckles]

JACK (as Fourteen): They, uh, well. They do have fire breath.

AUSTIN (as Chiron): Okay.

JACK (as Fourteen): That's true, they're dragons, Chiron. That should be pretty obvious.

AUSTIN (as Chiron): Yeah, I don't like fantasy stuff that much actually. I'm more like, um... I like space ships. I like psychic stuff like ghost mysteries. That's a thing I like.

JACK (as Fourteen): Realism. You're into realism.

AUSTIN (as Chiron): Yeah, mostly.

JACK (as Fourteen): Interesting.

AUSTIN: Sho comes back down the hallway with like... I mean she has like a little wooden box that she's carved. That she then like slowly opens up and will not make eye contact with you, and inside is the gun, like glass handle, that's been very well maintained, and it is on like red velvet. She has like built this box to hold this gun for, for you.

JACK (as Fourteen): Sho, did you make this box?

AUSTIN (as Sho): I did.

JACK (as Fourteen): I really appreciate that, thank you.

AUSTIN (as Sho): Thank you. I heard you talk about the leaves, and the leaves are wrong. They're not like-- it's not like leaves.

JACK (as Fourteen): Well, I think that it's, uh, it's a matter of how you look at it, in some circumstances.

AUSTIN (as Sho): Most of us don't come back. And I don't know how to deal with you coming back. Most of us when we die... that's it. And that-- that's why I do the things I do, is because we need to protect people so that they don't die. And that is why I'm willing to do the things that I do. I mean, that is the code that I live by. Most of us don't come back. And if we could come back-- most of us don't come back.

JACK (as Fourteen): There aren't many like me. Uh... I have met others.

AUSTIN (as Sho): Could there be more? Why aren't there more? If no one has to die, I don't understand.

JACK (as Fourteen): I know that it does not seem like it, Sho, but what you witnessed in Contrition's Figure was not a death. It may have looked like that and it may have felt like that, and I can understand how it feels like that, but-- Sho, have you taken a life? You have. You must have, in Contrition's figure.

AUSTIN: She nods.

AUSTIN (as Sho): I took one there. Sort of, I-- Yeah.

JACK (as Fourteen): What we do when we do that is different to what happened to me at the top of the tower. That was like sleeping and waking. I will die one day, Sho, and then that will be that. The answer as to, you know, why there can't be more that do not die is... that I will die, and... I am dying every time I change, but what you're seeing now, Sho, is... is just me on another morning. I've simply woken up again.

AUSTIN (as Sho): [quietly] You've woken up. Okay.

JACK (as Fourteen): The version of you that you met, Sho, with the beard, who gave you this pistol... they weren't the first.

AUSTIN (as Sho): They were my first. I don't understand how you just act like this is nothing. I wake up every morning, and I Brush my hair, and I say my prayers, and I wash my face, the way my father taught me, and this is my body. And I give it in service of the Fleet, and of the Orbit. And I understand intellectually with my mind what you mean. But I don't know-- Is what you do even sacrifice? Or is it something else?

[1:29:52]

JACK (as Fourteen): It was once sacrifice. Long ago there was the child that was born, who was loved by their parents. And the child grew older, they went to school, they studied. [breath] And they took a job. They took a job because... I forget now. But in taking the job, there was a sacrifice. It was a sacrifice in service of, uh... It was a sacrifice in service. And a sacrifice was made. And everything that follows have been a series of smaller sacrifices.

AUSTIN: She, like, covers her mouth.

AUSTIN (as Sho): You don't remember.

JACK (as Fourteen): I don't remember what?

AUSTIN (as Sho): Your first-- You don't remember what the sacrifices were for. You don't remember what you were acting in service of. How far back don't you remember?

JACK (as Fourteen): It's not like that, it doesn't work like that. The thing that takes things from me... It takes them from me piecemeal. I held onto that memory for a long time. I thought that it was one that wasn't going to go, and then I woke up and it had. But I keep

the memory of my parents, and I keep the memory of their names, and, you know, I keep the memory of the name they gave me. These memories are things that I hold onto, but uh...

AUSTIN (as Sho): I need to go. I can't.

JACK (as Fourteen): There's something I for--

AUSTIN (as Sho): You kill people twice. You kill them with your gun and then you kill them again when you forget who you've killed.

AUSTIN: And she closes the lid on the gun and walks away, back to her room.

JACK (as Fourteen): You may continue playing.

AUSTIN (as Morning): So the castles are like cousins, I guess.

ALI: [giggles] Can I really quick just do a thing?

AUSTIN: Sure.

ALI: I think that during that scene, it was like, Tender wanting to interrupt. [AUSTIN voices agreement] Cause I feel like, when you see someone kind of berating like a sick person?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: You, like, Fourteen clearly had a handle on that situation, but Tender was waiting for the moment when they didn't.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: But I would like to... roll Search Feelings.

AUSTIN: Sure, what does that-- Ooh, this is a new move.

ALI: In terms of her just being like, observant. And I think that it makes sense that she would kind of test the boundaries of this in a place that's familiar?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Mhm. It says, "When you read the emotional residue of an area to reconstruct past events," right?

ALI: Yes.

AUSTIN: Cool. So give me a-- how do you feel while doing this?

ALI: Um, I... [hums]

AUSTIN: I guess you're still spiked on Peaceful, so anything else would be at -2.

ALI: Yeah, I like, this is a different thing though, right? It would be -2 but I think that this is more of like, a curiosity?

AUSTIN: So this is not a Peaceful thing that you're doing.

ALI: Yeah, I think like her... like being out in the world and like-- this is Powerful.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: This is her testing the boundaries of--

JACK: Cause you're in a safe place, right?

ALI: Yeah yeah yeah. This is her doing an experiment.

AUSTIN: Alright. So you're gonna mark Powerful, which, what is your Powerful score again?

ALI: Uhh...

AUSTIN: Or I guess right now it's -2 so it doesn't matter, but you'll mark a spike in Powerful and then you'll erase everything out of Peaceful, cause this will break you out of that.

ALI: Oh, okay. So it'll just--

AUSTIN: Yep.

ALI: Oh, okay.

AUSTIN: Once you take one -2, it all clears out.

ALI: Okay, cool, I-- I guess I like that thematically, cause it's her like testing the abilities, like not alone any more? I guess.

AUSTIN: Yeah, sure. I mean this is the first time we've seen you do this thing, which is from the Empath playbook, so.

ALI: Yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: Go ahead and give me that roll. 2d6-2.

ALI: [crosstalk] But that's still -2?

AUSTIN: Yep. That is a 5.

ALI: It's a 5. [giggles]

AUSTIN: Interesting.

JACK: Hmm.

AUSTIN: Um, so I think this is like-- this is the first time you've done this, right? Have you done this before in a place that isn't your own place?

ALI: I think that like there's been instances where she's picked up on it?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: Um, like... There's definitely-- I think when she's in a digital environment, there's information that she has access to, and then she doesn't have access to that information when she's like, just out in the world. [Austin hums] And that started to fade a little bit? So like she hasn't tried to directly access that part of her ability, but it's like she's walked into her local coffee place and known the barista was in a bad mood before she spoke to her, right?

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And was like, "Oh that's weird" and you know, it keeps on being that like, the feeling that she gets before she gets the like confirmation of it, keeps being the thing.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And then now she's like, "Oh okay I'm in a room where people are upset already."

AUSTIN: I think that there is a... the emotional feelings of this place, especially in-- I think you only wanted to dig a little bit. You only wanted to be like, "Okay, what are people really feeling right now in this moment?" And instead you got this like wave of everything someone has felt here in the past year or so. Maybe even further back than that. And it's like, this is a long time of people not being able to stop the Divines from being killed. This has been team after team after team, failing to protect the Divine Fleet.

And then it spikes with this last encounter, which is like, the thing that you get at from Sho is that the only thing-- She does her job based on a set of principles that need to be held together just so, otherwise she thinks that what she does is bad. Because killing people fundamentally goes against what the goals of the Fleet are. And for her, everyone needs to be in, not lockstep necessarily, but you've seen how firm she is about certain beliefs around the faith.

And nowhere is she firmer than like, you need to be able to feel remorse for people you hurt in the pursuit of doing good. And so, in confronting Fourteen here, you know that like, she is shaken, in an important and major way, because what has been revealed is that the other people she works with may not share that belief. Which to her was fundamental to the Fleet in general and not just fundamental to this team of people. Like that is it, like the number one thing is like, if you do harm, you better fucking feel bad about it.

And so to confront somebody who might not because they can't remember is... um, really shattering. And you feel this the way she felt it, not-- this is not detached in the way that you intended it to be. Right, like there's something almost clinical about the way you just described Tender doing this, right?

Like, "hmm, I wonder what this feels like. I wonder if I can see the aura," you know what I mean, almost?

ALI: Right right right.

AUSTIN: And instead you tapped into the raw. Raw actual, physical emotion. Like you can feel the sweat on her brow as she walks away. You can literally physically feel her presence as she cries into a pillow in another room, and like doesn't know how-- she doesn't have the words yet to frame what she does in a way that's positive. So you're gonna take Humanity harm from this.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: So you take Disadvantage forward, so the next time that you roll, you're gonna roll 3d6 and take the lowest two results?

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: And then, um, you're going to answer a question posed to you by me, the GM, which is... [ALI laughs] Why does Tender do this instead of anything else?

ALI: Do...

AUSTIN: The Beloved Dust stuff. Do the like, weird secret agent stuff. Like what causes her to engage here, like at a choice level? Like you would be able to leave at this point. And slip away, and watch the rest of this fleet slowly fall apart, in peace. Or maybe even leave the Fleet

altogether. Like, get on a ship and head south, galactic south, to a different place where there's maybe somewhere you could fit in, and not risk being killed by...[ALI giggles] you know, earth people, or weird painting people, or any of the number of other threats that you've encountered. So why do you do this?

ALI: [sucks teeth] Um... I think that there is a... like a desire in Tender to... still serve? [AUSTIN hums] The way that I spoke about Tender from like developing her, is that I wanted her to feel like someone who is separated from the places that she is, but like still has a strong attachment to what her faith is? And that like, regardless if the faith of people around her is different, or shows itself in different ways, she... I think that like, your personal relationship to your faith is more important than like, going to church every Sunday or whatever. [AUSTIN hums] So I think that there's, like, there's an ease in being able to do the thing that you already do. But there's also like, the inability to be able to close a door.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And like walk away from something, and like clean her hands and just shut off that part of her life.

AUSTIN: And she isn't there yet.

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: Or, or maybe she'll never be there, but right now, she's not there.

ALI: Right right right. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Make sure to take an XP for that failed roll.

ALI: Uh, sure.

AUSTIN: Cool. And remember that you're gonna be at-- you're gonna roll 3d6 and take the lowest two for whatever your next roll is, because of this Humanity harm.

ALI: I'm gonna make a note. I obviously don't have these three holds any more.

AUSTIN: No.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: I don't know what that's from.

ALI: Yeah, who could know? 3d6 minus...

AUSTIN: No, just 3d6, take the lowest two.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Cool. I think [laughing] right when all of that wraps up... We get Morning's Observation saying, like

AUSTIN (as Morning): [sigh] Can't even play this game with only two people.

AUSTIN: [laughing] And puts it back in a box. And I think that's when Chiron notices that you're here, too, Signet, and he like hops up out of his chair and like does one of those real quick walks down the stairs. Do you know what I'm talking about? Where you just like, really quick, buh-buh-buh-buh-buh, down the stairs to the lounge, living room area. And is like

AUSTIN (as Chiron): Signet. [stammering] Thank you. I haven't seen you since you saved me. Thank you.

JANINE (as Signet): You don't need to thank me.

AUSTIN (as Chiron): No, I kinda do. It would be kinda... it would be kinda rude, if I didn't thank you.

JANINE (as Signet): I guess. But, you know, don't worry about it.

AUSTIN (as Chiron): How you-- how're you doing?

AUSTIN: He's tall. That's a thing I just noticed about Chiron, is he is like 6'6". 6'7". [JANINE laughs] And also is a robot, in basketball shorts and a jersey.

JANINE: Um, I think Signet's like not in the habit of lying to people, but also not in the habit of talking too much about herself, like... She sees her role very much as like, being here for other peop-- like being there so someone else can talk about stuff? Can talk about themselves, and she's... probably both not used to and not entirely comfortable in conversations that are more about her, people asking things about her. [AUSTIN hums] At least things that don't have very simple answers. So she's, she probably doesn't say like... She doesn't wanna lie, she doesn't wanna say like, "I'm totally great."

AUSTIN: Right.

[ALI giggles]

JANINE: But is just like

JANINE (as Signet): You know, it's just-- it is

JANINE: Something to the extent of like, everything's working. [chuckles] Like everything's

AUSTIN: Right, right right.

JANINE: Nothing's exploding right now, so..

AUSTIN: He nods, and he's like

AUSTIN (as Chiron): I feel that, I feel that. I, uh... To be honest, I'm a little-- I'm a little nervous. Like, I've done all this work in the Cadent's office, working as security and bodyguard duty and stuff like that, but like... This is my first time that I'm gonna be mixing it up out there, you know? You have any tips?

JANINE (as Signet): I don't think they would have assigned you to protect the Cadent if you weren't capable of handling yourself in a variety of situations.

AUSTIN: He nods, like, part of his cheeks glow. Like he's not-- I guess that's blushing. I just said that without thinking about it as being blushing, but I think he's blushing a little. He's a tall robot man who blushes. And he's like

AUSTIN (as Chiron): Yeah, I guess that makes sense. Um, anyway, good luck with everything. Just, yeah, thanks.

AUSTIN: And then he like, plops down on a couch. And starts basically flicking through channels. [snorts]

Up at the-- up on the table up on the top part, Morning's Observation is like working on something. There's like a sound file hanging in the air, up there, on the mesh, and he's just like tinkering with it. And it's-- he has it going into just like a personal communication field for himself, so that nobody else can hear it. But he's like, he has Audacity open, and is like fucking with stuff to try to make it-- He's clearly like-- I don't know, I don't think any of you are sound engineers, so you don't know what he's doing. I changed my mind. You don't know what he's doing with that stuff. But he's tinkering with the wave form, is what you do know. [laughs] Um, I think that that is, like unless anyone has another thing...

JANINE: I was gonna ask if I could intercept that, but that seems rude.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Like I feel like the thing Signet would do is, she would like go up and ask what he's working on. Instead of like using her robot ear to like [laughing] spy on him.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Yeah, yes. Asking is definitely... yes, the right call. He's like, um... Yeah, he totally would let you. He says, like

AUSTIN (as Morning): Alright, but let me turn it down real quick, cause it's loud. This is from, uh... [sighs] You know what, let me ask Cascara before I...

AUSTIN: And he hits a button that ring the... command deck. And a second later, Cascara comes in in her wheelchair, and is like

AUSTIN (as Cascara): [sigh] Yes, Morning.

AUSTIN: And he nods and is like

AUSTIN (as Morning): Yeah, yeah, I just wanted to know if I could share what I'm working on with Signet. Like, is that like a breach? I know one time at a team type stuff, but [quietly] you told me it was okay for me to work on it, so...

[1:45:03]

AUSTIN: And she nods, and says like

AUSTIN (as Cascara): Honestly [sighs] we were going to talk about this soon anyway. Beloved Dust, can we have a meeting in the command deck? Morning, you can come, too.

AUSTIN: And he nods, and is like yeah, okay, and then like collapses the wave form and puts it in his back pocket. And stands up and goes into the command deck for this ship that I don't know that we've talked about what the command deck looks like, but I bet it looks cool. What's it look like? I want like another 360 all-around view screen situation, for sure.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And then... I'm just imagining like all of the command decks in all the Mass Effect games, but I don't just wanna retreat to that.

ALI: Yeah. I feel like it should be like cozier almost?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah. We'd talked in the past about this ship having like elements of tile work.

AUSTIN: Yes. Totally.

JACK: Patterned tiles and patterned mosaics. And like worn fabrics. And I wonder if this extends to the command deck.

AUSTIN: Totally.

JACK: And I-- I'm reluctant to go down that thing of like, that shitty Doctor Who thing of like, "Well, we'll just make the command module like weird ceramics!"

AUSTIN: [laughing] Right. Right.

JACK: Of like, a sink plunger! That's bullshit.

ALI: Oh, no. But like-- as soon as you started mentioning the tiles again, I was thinking the feeling of like, when your friends go into the kitchen at a party.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: I get what you mean.

ALI: Like there's a circle here that other people shouldn't break. [AUSTIN and JACK hum] Like there's-- you know? But it's not like--

AUSTIN: What's on a refrigerator and like, a kitchen island. It's like a map in the middle and a bunch of weird buttons on the walls, but it still has that vibe of, you're stepping into a communal space that's actually similar, like you said, to a kitchen. I like that analogy quite a bit.

JACK: I think it's like a physical map on a map table, with like map pieces of the ships of the Fleet. Big map pieces of the ships of the Fleet.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: That you can move around, and that have like AR stuff associated with them, so they have like information floating around them and the map is being edited.

AUSTIN: That actually-- that's actually a really great way to move into this, which is like she, like, touches the base of the piece that is-- I'm imagining the pieces that have like bases that then have stems that come up?

JACK: Mm, yeah.

AUSTIN: And then like there's a model of each ship basically. So she touches the one for the Sky Reflected in Mirrors. That's what it's called, right?

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: I'm not misremembering that?

JACK: Yeah, that's what it's called.

AUSTIN: And it zooms in to a system where there is a ringed planet. It's the largest planet in the system. And the Sky Reflected in Mirrors is resting on the dark side of it. And she says

AUSTIN (as Cascara): This is the system of Benthos. And the Sky Reflected in Mirrors is currently refueling there, but that's not an issue. As far as we know, the Sky's completely fine.

Elsewhere in the system, though, there has been trouble. In the weeks after their attack on the Fleet, [sighs] we ran analysis on all of the ships coming and going from Seance in the days before and after the attack. What we found was that one ship, which we believe to be a pod operated by one of the New Earth Hegemony assassins, left in this direction. And the only possible destination was this sector.

Now at the time, the Sky Reflected in Mirrors was not there yet. That choice only came later. It would have-- If they knew that that's where that ship would be, then there is a much more severe problem than what we already believe there to be. So we do not believe that that is a target, it just happens to be in the neighborhood. What we think may be a target is this.

AUSTIN: And she taps on another, like, piece of this map. I think the map like zoomed in around the Sky Reflected in Mirrors and reconfigured itself, basically.

JACK: It's still like definitely looked like a physical map. This isn't a screen.

AUSTIN: Yes, totally, 100%. It it totally, looks like a physical map. And I think she like places down another-- she places down another base of like a ship piece, and then it physically configures itself to look like an asteroid with a docking bay at the top of it. Like kind of a port, a portcullis that could open up from the top of it.

And it's like, I think it's using the same stuff that Memorious uses to reconfigure? Like tiny versions of that, whatever that technology is that can kind of reconfigure itself, it's the same thing. And she, um, she says

AUSTIN (as Cascara): We believe it's going here. This is Privign. P-R-I-V-I-G-N. Privign Station. The Temple of Privign.

AUSTIN: I think Signet, you would know this, which is that Privign is-- alright, when people think about third generation Divines, the Divines that were designed by design-- by Divines [AUSTIN and ALI chuckle], most people think about Synthesis as being the first one. That is like the one that there was like lots of debate about, that was the one that ended up having some really interesting great history in the Fleet, where Synthesis sacrificed themselves in many ways, and blah blah-- It was a lot of history around it.

But Synthesis was the second of the third generation Divines. The first one was Privign, which rhymes with Divine as a complete coincidence. Privign is an obscure word that means step-son. And it was the first divinely-created Divine. You didn't know it. It was dead before your time. It was one of the first Divines killed. In fact, the records indicate that it was killed before the Twilight Mirage even came to exist.

Because Empyrean only made the Mirage after it became clear to Empyrean that this was a-- it was not just a few flukes, but something important had changed, and that they were under threat. And so Privign never lived in the age of the Mirage. Cascara explains that this was a station that was built into an asteroid. It's kind of the northeastern edge of the Mirage? [chuckles] Galactic Northeast. Kind of near the border to the northeast, in fact?

And about one thousand years ago, Privign went offline. So it died. No one knows why. And now it is stuck, this asteroid base / the body of another Divine, in a kind of eternal decaying orbit. Like it is slowly, this whole station, drifting into the body of the gas giant Benthos. I have a picture for everyone. Ooh, here we are.

JACK: Oh wow.

AUSTIN: It is slowly falling into the orbit of this gas giant, which has like all of these rings. And they believe that this is where one of the agents of the New Earth Hegemony is, are going. And they don't know why. This is an old mining base effectively. It's a temple, where the members of the temple, the kind of monks of this order, are called the Jeweled Heirs. They go out into this, these rings, and collect minerals and scan for jewels, for gems.

And then they bring them in, and then they cut them, and they break them down. Like the entire facility is this like refinery and processing facility. And also what, at its height, like home to hundreds and hundreds of members of this order. Now there are maybe two dozen. Maybe 20? And no one has heard from them. And so they send the Beloved Ivy to go check out what was going on. And no one's heard back, and it has been weeks.

And that's when, I think, Morning's Observation says, [sighs]

AUSTIN (as Morning): There was this, though. We found this just before they went offline.

AUSTIN: And he says

AUSTIN (as Morning): Cover your ears, this is rough.

AUSTIN: And brings that wave form back out. And keeps it kind of low and then hits play. And it is this just howling, crushing data sound, that is... It is like hard to listen to, it is-- I'm trying to think of like, there's a sense of like wind in the distance? But as if the wind had been... like, crushed down to only the clipping parts of its sound, like it's clipping against a microphone, and you don't hear any of the middle of the sound.

You only hear the very highs that are clipping and the very lows that are clipping. So like that midrange is just completely absent. And then there's a clicking noise every once in a while, and it sounds like something is howling, and you're not sure what. And Morning's Observation says

AUSTIN (as Morning): You know, at first, Cascara and I tried to decrypt it like the usual way, like regular com cyphers. And you know, we got rid of the junk data, and we tried to find patterns. Basic shit. And then nothing. And then I-- what I realised was like, this is old, this is an old file. This is like, not from recent.

This isn't them sending us a message, this isn't something in the system now making a message, this is something that's been bouncing around the Benthos system for like, ten, eleven thousand years. And so part of the problem is that this is a dying signal, and... I need to have more of what the signal is there to fill in that middle of that bit and try to work out what it is. I tried a bunch of different possible, you know, synthetic replacements, but it's just not working. I need the real stuff.

And what I realised is, those rocks are really dense. So if you can get there and scan them with a scanner inside of the Privign system, the Privign station, you could get me that data, and I could work out what this message is.

AUSTIN: And Cascara says

AUSTIN (as Cascara): And you could locate the Beloved Ivy and figure out whatever that Earth killer is doing.

AUSTIN: Morning like looks down for a second. I think maybe that's that moment when he like looks back up and says like

AUSTIN (as Morning): Yeah, also just I'm gonna take this opportunity to thank everyone for letting me, [JACK laughing] like [huffs] be here, and like eat your spaghetti. And like... hang out. Uh, you know, just-- I wanna be clear, you can call me Observation, you can call me Morning, like Morn, whatever you wanna call me, that's good. Like I'm just happy to be here. Um. I've had a real busy couple of weeks here, and.. just thanks. That's all.

AUSTIN: Cascara kind of gives you each eyes that's like, we'll talk about it. And that is the mission here. You are going to go to the Benthos system, you're going to locate and secure the Beloved Ivy. You're going to reconfigure the gem finding apparatus of the Privign to scan for broadcast signals and get the data that Morning's Observation needs for to decrypt whatever this is. And you're going to capture or kill any New Earth Hegemony agents. That is the mission that Cascara provides for you. Are there any questions?

JACK: Uh, so this isn't actually the body of the Divine.

AUSTIN: Well...

JACK: It's, we're not sure?

AUSTIN: It is. It is, but it's...

JACK: It's also the temple.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: It's like, Privign is the temple and is the gem collecting material, and--

AUSTIN: That is, yes. That is what Cascara can tell you. There are, like, if you like do some legwork here you can get more, is what I'd say.

JACK: Cool. Just off the bat I wanted to like work out... whether or not this was a separate entity, or...

AUSTIN: No. This is the same entity, there is more here for sure, but like, Privign is either in there, or is there, some combination thereof.

JACK: Right. And as far as we know is long dead.

AUSTIN: Yes. Again, pre-Mirage.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: In that little window between when the Divines started dying and when the Mirage was, was born.

[MUSIC - "The Twilight Mirage" begins]

Cascara says

AUSTIN (as Cascara): There's something else strange.

AUSTIN: And she activates a-- how does she do this? What's the cool way to do this? I think there is a picture frame here, like a-- like an actual physical wooden picture frame here, that she-- on the map, she takes like a pen basically, and circles the Privign. Or actually circles the whole system. And we get the view that you see here, that I've given you, this kind of black and white grayscale vision of Privign slowly falling into the orbit of Benthos, above the rings. And it's grayscale. And she says

AUSTIN (as Cascara): This isn't-- [sighs] this monitor is not grayscale. This camera is not grayscale. The color of the Benthos system is vanishing, and we have no idea why.

[2:00:00]

[MUSIC - "The Twilight Mirage" finishes]