

Twilight Mirage 32: This Year of Ours: The Stitch

transcriber: thedreadbiter

AUSTIN: *An entry from the journal of the former excerpt "To the prince, we offered twelve thousand flowers, **Blooming** in an untouched field," leader of the Beloved Nights.*

How did I get here? How did I find this home? Pain. Pain was my guide.

[MUSIC - "THE STITCH" begins]

For the first half of the year each second was a dozen or more. I have buried my kin, my peers, and myself. I put my love to rest and lived inside a marionette corpse for months. Yet I never knew a pain like this until I looked up from Volition's surface and saw a beautiful new world with no place for me in it.

I knelt before the so-called Cadent Under Mirage and waited for an answer. Where could I best serve her? Lacking her own answer, and without her advisor, the priestess, in sight, she deferred to a bureaucrat.

I remember the ship they put me on. It smelled of bleach and rust. it was crowded with those who would I would manage. A cleanup operation. The remains of Privign Station, which Volition's monstrous retainers had crushed into crumbs, and which the pull of the Mirage and brought to us like galleon driftwood.

They all speak of miracles, but the only one that matters to me is that in this broken place, I found reason to live again.

We found her in a pod and when we brought her to, we were moved by the force of her sadness. She looked out on what the Mirage had become, how our leader had shrunk from duty, and vowed to find a place for all of us. She lifted me with a finger and stared through me from behind her veil, and she had my loyalty instantly. And I had a home and a purpose, here, beside the Waking Cadent.

Signet...I wish you had been there. Just so you knew I wasn't a fool.

[MUSIC - "THE STITCH" plays out]

All right. So, Signet...before you tell me about your year, tell me about your character in terms of mechanics. What do we have written down here for like stats, and heritage and background, and vice, and all that fun stuff?

JANINE: Okay. So, heritage is pretty obviously—it's Thyrsus.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: It's ship-turned-planet.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Um.

AUSTIN: What did you—and you ended up taking what for that? Stat-wise.

JANINE: Stat-wise?

AUSTIN: Was that [CONsort] Consort?

JANINE: Um. I think that's [CONsort] Consort. Or Con—

AUSTIN: [conSORT] Consort.

JANINE: Is it [CONsort] Consort or [conSORT] Consort?

AUSTIN: [conSORT] Consort. Consort.

JANINE: [laughs] Okay.

AUSTIN: [CONsort] Consort is a noun, right? [conSORT] Consort is a...Consort is...Consort is a verb.

JANINE: [conSORT] Consort is a verb and [CONsort] Consort is a like a...person?

AUSTIN: I think [CONsort] Consort is what happens if you're in a fancy ball, and [conSORT] Consort is like if you're in a conspiracy.

JANINE: [laughs] Sure. Um. I think that's my thing for there.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that adds up to me.

JANINE: Um.

AUSTIN: Consort is like the...kind of social verb that lets you...

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Know people?

JANINE: The one that's not manipulative or that's not bossy.

AUSTIN: Right, right. It's like it's very just like, "I'm good at socializing. I'm—"

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like it actually is the like "I'm at a party..." skill.

JANINE: It's Bedside Manner. Like given Thyrus, it's like partially like...

AUSTIN: Wh...yes and no.

JANINE: Being good at people on that level.

AUSTIN: Uh, Doctor is also Bedside Manner, like very specifically, right?

JANINE: That's...true, yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um, which is part of the thing that's neat about the fact that the class you're playing, which we should have started with, is Stitch!

JANINE: Whoops.

AUSTIN: Right? Like you're not...

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I think coming into this, we—like before we did any character creation, and way before we even did a holiday special, like when I first decided...when I was up late one night after a Tips at the Table in which it was clear that I really loved and missed Blades in the Dark, and that in general Blades in the Dark was like...a great game?

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: That we all wanted to get back to, to some degree, and like especially for...[sighs] what the rest of this season looks like? Um. In my mind, anyway? I remember looking at the books, and being like, "Oh, Mystic. Mystic, Signet's already basically a Mystic!" And now you're playing the Stitch.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Which is com—which is—

JANINE: There were a couple classes that there was some humming and hawing about for Signet.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Like Mystic is the big obvious one. I think Speaker was also sort of put out.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: But that's more of like a...an aristocratic kind of feeling that...

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Didn't quite feel right.

AUSTIN: Sure. Um.

JANINE: Whereas like when you break down fundamentally what Signet's purpose is...

AUSTIN: Right. Right. And so like that's the thing that I like about the moves that are here—we're not gonna go over your moves specifically. It'll come out during play.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: But! They all have to do—not all of them, I guess, but they often have to do with helping people in the way that we already saw Signet helping people, right? Like, she...

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: ...from the jump, had been someone who comforted, and who eased the stress and the pain of others? Just as much as she did weird flippy cool bullshit, you know?

[JANINE laughs]

And so yeah, Doctor actually says, "When you Doctor, you attend to the needs of another lending aid and comfort, or looking scientifically at the world. You might treat someone's injuries; you might analyze a substance's composition to learn how it functions; you might comfort someone, but Consorting might be better." So like, that's one of the things I love about this game is, you could use Doctor or Consort.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: And like, I might in some instance, say “Ooh, yeah, Doctor will work here but...it’ll be a stretch, and so it’ll be a little bit riskier.”

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Or, it’ll be a little bit more...it’ll be a little bit more...or less effective, or something—or more effective! Right?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Maybe there’s a situation in which like the fact that you can talk to them while applying pressure to the wound, y’know, is actually...better than just *just* talking to them. So.

JANINE: And I do like that there’s room there for it to not just be a literal thing of like...mending wounds or whatever. You know, there’s room there for...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Espe—there’s room in this class for a more mystical bent...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: ...there’s room in this class for a more like psychological bent. So that makes it pretty perfect.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I’m into it. And so yeah, so your heritage is Thyrsus, which maybe gives you Consort.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Then your background is—you’ve written Cult, which is one of the—

JANINE: [amused] That’s one of the things it says! [laughs]

AUSTIN: It is one of the things it says!

JANINE: [trying not to laugh] That’s one of the choices!

AUSTIN: I think everybody else...so like the thing we haven’t gotten into is that Scum and Villainy has kind of a dope setting in its own right. It’s—I think it would be unfair to pitch it as just like “Star Wars meets Outlaw Star,” but it is definitely in that realm of science fantasy of like, you know, treasure hunting guilds that have access to special technology and, you know, an evil empire and rimw—you know, the outside rimworlds, and stuff like that, the outer rim. And so it’s

definitely like...little Cowboy Bebop, a little Outlaw Star, a little Firefly, a little—and a lot of Star Wars. Like the Mystic, you can totally read the Mystic then go, “this is just a Jedi.” [huffs a laugh]

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But there’s enough here that I think makes it really unique, and so one of the things there is like, the Cults. And that is just not part of our setting, so we’re not really gonna dig into it? But it’s the—it’s close—

JANINE: [amused noise] I mean, it’s—it’s close! It is—like there is...I wouldn’t blame anyone who like heard a little bit of Twilight Mirage and was like, “okay, so it’s some sort of weird like robot cult. Robot-human cult.”

AUSTIN: Oh yeah. Totally.

JANINE: Like, it’s—I didn’t have to—I didn’t feel like I was stretching writing in like, well, of these things, she’s closest to being...

AUSTIN: [chuckles] Yeah yeah yeah.

JANINE: You know, her background is excerpt, but that’s...

AUSTIN: Yes.

JANINE: There’s a cultishness to it, sure.

AUSTIN: Yeah. What did you take for that?

JANINE: I think what—I’m kind of...I think that’s Attune, right?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. That makes sense to me.

JANINE: Because I think like...I have other skills, you know, I took Helm and Scramble, too.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: And I think those both make sense from the context of someone who was trained as an excerpt.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: But that’s not a specifically excerpt-related ability.

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah yeah.

JANINE: Whereas Attune is.

AUSTIN: You know, one of the things I also just like about this game is like, one, it's easy to imagine a world [amused] in which you have all of these skills. Right?

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Like you don't have any Scrap or Skulk. We've seen Signet doing both Scrapping—fighting—and Skulking—and kind of sneaking around, right? And we haven't—she doesn't have those skills, but that's okay because of the way this system works.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: There's a really great line early in the character like creation chapter that is like... "Every player character in Scum and Villainy is a daring outlaw, following destiny on the galactic fringe. All of them are familiar with the feats represented by the actions of the game. They're all able to Scrap enemies, Skulk in the dark, Attune to the way, Consort with contacts, and so on.

Because of the way the dice system works, every character can roll at least three dice for any action in the game: +1 dice from pushing or for a devil's bargain, +1 from an assist from a teammate and +1 from a Gambit—" which is a special currency in the game.

"A roll of 3d is fantastic; it's an 87% chance of success. The "0-rating actions" on your character sheet aren't things your character can't do, but actions for which you're likely to burn stress and rely on teamwork. When your crew has your back and you set your mind to it, you can attempt almost anything." And I really love that as like...

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: ...a key difference between this and the Veil, and some of the other systems we play—and also, between this and actual Blades in the Dark...because...this has this Gambit system, where your crew has a kind of collection of Gambit points that you spend and gain as this kind of bonus currency. And the fact that like you can always pull on that last little bit to help is not something that's in Blades [huffs a laugh]

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: And that alone makes this feel, on paper, anyway, we'll see how it actually shakes out—but like a little bit more positive, and a little bit more...derring-do and a little less like dire?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um. Again, we'll see in play.

JANINE: And I like the idea of—this is something that the Veil did too, where it's like...the traits that you take say as much about your character as the ones that you don't? Like...

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Signet was not a character prone to joyfulness.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: And the fact that that was written into her sheet just as much as like, "If she has to skulk around it's going to really stress her out and bug her 'cause that's not—"

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yes. Yes. Yes.

JANINE: "—her style," like.

AUSTIN: Exactly—

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's not that she won't do it, it's that it will stress her out. That's a really good way of putting it.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Speaking of stress, we should talk about what your vice is!

JANINE: Yeah!...This was like a tough one because... 'cause Scum and Villainy presents like, Faith...

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

JANINE: As a vice, and things like that. So I had to like sit down and really think that like that's not Signet's outlet, like that's just what does?

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

JANINE: A lot of that stuff that seems really straightforward a choice is just—that's like—that's where she wants to be at all the time.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: So I think her vice...sort of...I picked her vice as Pleasure, and I think that comes from...because she's always on...when does she ever just like...

[AUSTIN chuckles]

JANINE: Sit and hang out with a person?

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: When does she get to be close to a person not because she's helping them, but because she just wants to be with them?

AUSTIN: Right. So is that what that looks like for her, then? Is like...

JANINE: Yes.

AUSTIN: ...copresence—[amused] how many host and hostess clubs does she visit?

JANINE: A lot!

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

JANINE: That's totally what it is! Is, I think, she is a hundred percent like...that's totally what it is. It's hostess clubs, host clubs, like, brothels.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Like I think it is very much that thing of like, sometimes she just wants to like have a nice cup of tea with someone...

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: And sometimes she wants more, and like there needs to be room for that in her life, and not...[sighs] I think because of the way the religion is, there's a...a desire to be like "Oh, I bet that's not okay, I bet the religion would frown on that."

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

JANINE: But the emphasis that the Resonant Orbit places on humanity as having value...

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Makes me think that like that would totally be an acceptable...thing. For someone to pursue.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: On their own time.

AUSTIN: Well, especially because we also know that this is a world in which it's not just that it's acceptable to pursue it, but I...for the Divine Fleet, for now the Divine Free States, like, we've talked about the dignity of human life and the dignity of...

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: ...of choice and like all of the stuff that is like actually protected, and not just protected! Like not just, "the law will step in" but ingrained in a sort of culture attitude?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That to me like—I want this to be a utopia in which sex work is something that can be pursued safely...with state support—

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: —in the sense of like, having medical, you know, resources available.

JANINE: Exactly, yeah.

AUSTIN: And also not like framed as...not just a crime, but as something immoral?

JANINE: The lurid...

AUSTIN: And so I think that—yeah, I think that this is like...yeah, it's totally part of the culture for that sort of work to be—not just something that you can go have, but something you could pursue, if that's your interest in life, right? So...

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I'm totally with that. And also, again, like sex work is—and sort of *pleasure* work, is a very broad category?

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: So. I know we've joked—[huffs] there was a bit where we were prepping, and like talking about what the ship was gonna be for this crew, and it was like, "when you land, do you set up basically Majima's hostess club?"

[JANINE laughs]

As like your cover? When you're not—I don't know! I have to talk to Ali about what the Steady looks like at this point.

[JANINE chuckles]

But, my guess is, not exactly that. But, eh, we'll see.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um...God, now that I think about it, Tender's thing might actually—her vice might have been—it's been like a week since we've recorded, or a week and a half, or something—but I think—yeah, her vice was also Pleasure, and I think it's running the Steady.

[JANINE laughs]

So who knows! Maybe a little overlap. [chuckles]

[JANINE sighs ruefully]

In what's happening during the off time. Um. All right, so that is your—

[15:00]

—name, obviously, your class, your heritage, your background...What about the rest of your key stats?

JANINE: Um.

AUSTIN: So just go over your stat line, basically.

JANINE: Yeah. So we've got Doctor 2, Study 1—because those are built into the Stitch class.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Helm 1, because she has some experience, you know, with the Mariposa and Belgard.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: In terms of using vehicles, it seemed like a thing to put in there. Scramble 1, because, you know, some combat experience...

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: ...and crisis experience. Attune 1, to account for the sort of mystical element of still being attached to Belgard. And Consort 1.

AUSTIN: Cool. So the last thing I wanna say in this part of this—so the way we're doing this, just so you know, Janine, is we're doing this kind of stat-heavy thing, and we're gonna drop that as a bonus episode inside that we're gonna link out to? And then the kind of more narrative focus, "what has your year been like" stuff is gonna go in a different...gonna go in like the main episode? So that's why I'm saying there's like two parts of this. But the last thing I do wanna talk about in this kind of stat-heavy part of it is items, because I know one of the things that was like, "mm, is Stitch right?" was that it has things like Candies and Treats, and Syringes and Applicators here.

JANINE: [laughs] We had such a talk about Candies and Treats, didn't we?

AUSTIN: We did! And I think it's an important one, 'cause it's like, it was an important distinction. What was the—how did you make that distinction, again?

JANINE: So, for me...[sighs] you know, I do a lot of comparison between Signet and Adaire, and Candies and Treats is totally some Adaire shit. Candies and Treats is Adaire coming back with crackers for Hella.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: It's like, "okay, I need your cooperation, you're unhappy with me, here's a treat."

[AUSTIN laughs quietly]

"Instead of spending the time to actually mend this situation, to actually make you feel better about dealing with me—"

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: "—here's a treat."

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: And Signet is completely the opposite, of like, the thing she wants is to spend that time.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Um, or to at least promise to spend that time when it's available. Like.

AUSTIN: So—do you have a similar...?

JANINE: She doesn't want the shortcut.

AUSTIN: Right. Do you have a similar thing that would slot in there instead of Candies and Treats? Like is it like a tea set?

[JANINE laughs]

Which at least suggests a sort of like “okay, no, what I'm doing with this is sitting down with you and spending time.” It's not just disposable—it's not just like currency.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Or is it something else? Is there [stammers]—Is it something else completely?

JANINE: I think [sighs]...So Candies and Treats is tricky 'cause it sort of like seems like it's intended for children, but I guess you could also stretch that to be like, “oh—she's got a flask of whiskey for, I don't know, like—”

AUSTIN: Well, no, the thing that's wild is like Candies and Treats—so this is a weird thing in this system. But in the way that—if you didn't listen to Marielda, if you don't remember how Blades in the Dark worked...if you did listen. When you go out in the world to a mission, you pick how much...

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: ...load you're carrying? You have like either light, normal or heavy, and that gives you different amounts of kind of carrying capacity and some things are free to carry. So like one of your other things is fine bedside manner? And that's free.

[JANINE chuckles]

That doesn't cost a load. Recognizable medic garb, which again we'll rework to be some sort of recognizable garb.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: For Signet's role as excerpt, presumably? Or maybe as—

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —something else. I don't know.

That's also free. That doesn't cost load. Uh. Candies and Treats [laughing] costs a load?

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: But then, over on the side—I don't know if you're looking at like the full—the sheets. Illicit drugs does not cost any space.

JANINE: [puzzled] Oh.

AUSTIN: And so it's funny to me that like Candies and Treats is like, "no, you gotta spend a pocket somewhere for these candies and treats. You don't just get those for free." Or who knows, maybe this is an early beta—version, and that'll change in the final [huffs] in the final...but um...

[JANINE huffs a laugh]

But I—it's just a funny little note, so. So yeah! What are you—

JANINE: Yeah, I don't—...I'm not sure what—like, I feel like the spirit of that...translating the spirit of that to Signet would probably be...like Candies and Treats are something very quick, like.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Something very much just like you eat it, it's gone, it's sugar or something—I think it would have to be something more like amusing?

AUSTIN: Oh, okay.

JANINE: That sort of implies like an activity together?

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Um...I guess it...could be a tea set, 'cause I don't know that we're gonna be dealing with like...kids...but...

AUSTIN: [rueful] Well, you might be. I'm—kids are good. Playing Bluff City has—

JANINE: Yeah...

AUSTIN: —reminded me that kids are good. Playing...[sighs] Misspent Youth. That was like a reminder to me, like, "oh, right, kids are really good!"

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Um, that and also...what was...Golden Sky Stories was the other one. Right?

JANINE: Yeah. That was good!

AUSTIN: Of just like, "oh, right, kids. Kids are good." And like I wanna get a little more Golden Sky Stories in the rest of this game. For sure. A little more like...low-energy—not low-energy, low-power? Like low-violence?

JANINE: Mm-hm. Yeah.

AUSTIN: It can still be a game that has violence in it, but like—

JANINE: With softened edges.

AUSTIN: —just solving everyday—yeah, yeah. Softened edges and solving everyday problems, is a little bit more—

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: —of what some of the initial...adventures I have in my mind look like? You know, still...

[JANINE laughs quietly]

We'll see how people play!

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Like that's what I'll say at the end of the day. But based on these vignettes, so far, I think people have been doing a good job with hitting that tone. So yeah, maybe not Candies—I'd say maybe sleep on it and we'll figure it out—

JANINE: I think I actually do kinda know what it is now.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: So. [sighs] One of the first things that came to my mind was a deck of cards.

AUSTIN: Mm.

JANINE: Because...cards, there are games you can play with adults with cards. There are games that kids like with cards.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: There are tricks you can do with cards.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: It probably wouldn't be a set of just like straight up playing cards, but it might be some sort of like...something like a tarot deck...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: ...but with a game-y component to it...

AUSTIN: Can they be made of metal?

JANINE: —something probably like—

AUSTIN: Can they be made of like—

JANINE: Yes.

AUSTIN: Can they have bits that spin? And like...

JANINE: Ha—what? [chuckles slightly]

AUSTIN: Like imagine a playing card made of metal that's—imagine the eight of diamonds, and each of the diamonds can like lock into place, or unlock and flip [clears throat] to be backwards, so that like you could face it either way and like—I don't know, like it's a weird fuckin magic deck of cards, okay? Uh.

[JANINE laughs]

I just like I have it in my mind as being kind of spindly and metal and heavy, like it's a hefty thing.

JANINE: I kinda like the idea of like going back to the tarot idea of like—you know there's the whole thing about if you deal a card upside down or right side up.

AUSTIN: Mm. Mm-hm.

JANINE: And I kind of like the idea of the image on the card having a mobility of its own...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: ...so that it like moves as you're laying it down?

AUSTIN: Yeah. That'd be really cool. Yeah. So—

JANINE: Some sort of like gyroscopic kinda...

AUSTIN: Yeah, I'm definitely—

JANINE: ...thing.

AUSTIN: —when I'm thinking about things moving, I'm thinking about gyroscopic motion here, not like—

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: —not like gears turning.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I'm thinking about like. It feels like it has—and like maybe it is itself attuned with Quire and with the Mirage, and whatever this weird force is that's around everybody now. Um. I like that a lot, because it—

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: One of my big notes for myself for the rest of this season is that things should have texture, and should be—someone noted, I think in the Discord, that we've been going to mosaics a lot this season? And the reason for like mosaics and mosaic touchscreens and things like that [clears throat] and the part of the reason that they read it was like, "Oh, because it's not as simple as just like, "it's a touch screen!" And mosaics have this sense of history, but also have a sort of tactility to them—

JANINE: Yeah...

AUSTIN: —like, “Oh, right, yes, that’s perfect. Yes, that’s one hundred percent...”

JANINE: I’m just making a note of this card thing so I don’t forget it.

AUSTIN: [laughs] That’s completely fair.

[JANINE huffs in amusement]

This is my—it’s Tewhit, who’s very good, in our Discord, says, “Beloved ships use mosaics in the walls and as a method of control input. Tender also has a mosaic shrine in her private sanctum. I think they tend to recur in Twilight Mirage because they have that overlap of being ancient while also being something physically tactile, but visually resembling pixels or keyboards. To be clear, I think that’s a neat idea, but drawing them is hard.” [amused noise]

[JANINE makes an amused noise]

And then Grr face. And uh, I don’t know! Tewhit, you did a good job on the mosaics in this sketch that you did for Inktober, so. I’m into it.

Um, okay! So I think that might be it for your stat run—we’ll figure out the rest of what your equipment is, but that was like the one that I really wanted to zoom in on, and figure out, right—

JANINE: Mm-hm. That’s a big one! That’s a big one.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. And the rest of it’s like fine clothing, fine medkit. Like you won’t have a medkit, but you’ll have something else—

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —that has to do with something, we’ll figure it out. You still have that sash, right? Like...Um.

JANINE: Yeah!

AUSTIN: Presumably a sash.

JANINE: I got a sash, I got a weird buuug! I got lots of stuff.

AUSTIN: You do got a weird bug—we gotta figure out what that bug does at this point—

JANINE: [laughing] We do.

AUSTIN: —because I have no fucking idea anymore. I know what it did that one time! But who knows what your Exuvia does at this point. Um.

Oh, and then—I mean, the big one—here's the actual big one that we should talk about briefly, is like—how do we wanna talk about Belgard? Like we're gonna talk about what happened to Belgard in a second, or what Belgard's doing, or like where...she is? I always forget—she/her, with Belgard?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, okay. Where she is. But like I—my gut says I wanna make her like a...personal ship for you, basically. But not one that you're in all the time? Like—[sighs] what like—

JANINE: Yeah, that's pretty much where I'm at.

AUSTIN: Yeah. One of the key things with this game is that you all share a ship together.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: And I don't think I've said this yet, but you all share that ship, like all seven players share this ship together. And...part of the joy of this is like i get to mix and match groups from—adventure to adventure? Or like you do—'cause I'll say like “here are the two thing that are up for grabs mission-wise. Who's doin what?”

[JANINE makes an amused noise]

And that's exciting. But also part of that means like not...like forcing y'all to cohabit a space?

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Which the ship design is really good at, like the actual like ship mechanics are pretty good at like making you wanna be at home in that ship. And so I've been trying to figure out like how do we do Belgard? And so one of the things that you could do is that the way the ship mechanics work is there is a personal ship size? And I think that's probably what we do with Belgarde, is just make her a personal ship. And I might just end up making everybody a very like simple personal ship, because one of the upgrades you can get on your ship is like...not ground vehicles, where is it...There's one—personal vehicles, that you could have personal vehicles that basically would solve the problem of like “What happens if in one game y'all crash the big ship?” [laughs]

JANINE: [amused] Yeah!

AUSTIN: And the other game has to get off the planet now, and we're recording in opposite order—like who—you know. Stuff is weird with stuff like that.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So...So, yeah. That's probably what we'll do? I don't know if you have any—and probably have some abilities that used to be Signet abilities, but be on Belgard now.

JANINE: Mm. Yeah, that makes sense. Um. I don't think it's like much of a stretch to be like—Belgard has been restored. Belgard is—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: —is alive and well, like that's established.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yep.

JANINE: But I don't think it's a stretch to say that if Signet is doing this other stuff, that Belgard tagging along all the time isn't really feasible.

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

JANINE: Like, because—a Divine is a very obvious thing.

AUSTIN: Yep. A hundred percent.

JANINE: And, moreover, like there are things...[sighs] You know, even if stuff is going that like Signet feels like her time is best spent doing these smaller actions, there are still probably things Belgard can be doing.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Totally. One hundred percent.

JANINE: Like—you know, on a large—like Belgard has abilities, and also doesn't really need Signet to tell her to use them? Like.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: If they are near a place where there is a big broken thing, or whatever, like—

AUSTIN: Right. That's just day-to-day...

JANINE: —Belgard can go take care of it. Like I don't—

AUSTIN: The day-to-day maintenance stuff...

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: ...is not why there is the Divine plus excerpt situation.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like that's not a crisis, that's about making sure that things—like when it's time, you need that human to pull the reins a little bit.

JANINE: Yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Or vice versa, you need the Divine to—

JANINE: Totally.

AUSTIN: —push the human in the right direction.

JANINE: Um. I think it's—that's a thing that like I don't—I like the idea of employing Belgard as a vehicle, in sort of a structural sense. But I do think her autonomy is still kind of an important...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: ...element of that.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I'm...

JANINE: She's not just KITT from Knight Rider, like she's...

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Right, like I don't know what the closest equivalent is, in terms of who she is at this point, like in fiction, in like sci-fi or something like that. Like she's a living being who has her own—whose interests are in line with yours?

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: But is also...I mean, we'll get into this. We should actually just pivot, and we should talk about what your year has been like, all right?

[JANINE huffs in amusement]

So!...Signet. What's your year been like?4 Broad strokes. Last thing that happened—

JANINE: [amused] Very busy.

AUSTIN: Yeah! Right? That works, yeah.

JANINE: Very busy.

AUSTIN: Um. I'm guessing you've mostly been on Thyrsus, or have you been going place to place?

JANINE: I feel like...[sighs] I feel like Signet, especially early on, would make it a priority to be as mobile as reasonable...

AUSTIN: Mm.

JANINE: ...in the current situation. Like I don't think she'd be moving around constantly, but like I think—

AUSTIN: Sure.

JANINE: She would be making a kind—she would be making a sort of rounds?

AUSTIN: Yeah, that adds up.

JANINE: Of the places, um. Making appearances, making sure people's needs are being seen to as best she reasonably can. Because she's a proper—

AUSTIN: She certainly has cause, yeah.

JANINE: Yeah, she's a proper excerpt again. Like she is...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: She is doing what she trained to do, and has not been able to do for a long time, at a time when people really do need it.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Yes, she is now one of two excerpts...

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: ...at this point. The other one is the synthetic being formerly known as Czar, is now the excerpt of Bounty. And I don't know that I have Czar's new excerpt name yet? We'll get that probably at some other point. And you've probably spoken to him at some point. But...between the two of you, like there's definitely...a sort of like—you make the rounds, not just because it's good for morale, but because there's like actual work to be done? [laughs slightly]

JANINE: Yeah!

AUSTIN: The thing that I've said about this setting is now that each of these planets like is shaped by great will on it, some great willpower, or whether that's a collective will or the will of a stratus, or the will of a divine, or an axiom, or something else, right? Like, the will of Quire itself. The thing that that doesn't mean is that everything just works. [huffs]

[JANINE makes an amused noise]

[30:00]

AUSTIN: I suspect there's lots of like trying to build houses, and trying to build bridges, and trying to make sure that like the heater works in the big y'know feast hall or whatever. There's probably a lot of vehicles that break down, and a lot of like...transport ships that are not used to the new high density of the Twilight Mirage, and that have engine problems. And so I think there's *literally* work to be done. But there is also that second type of work, which is like, "Hey, the excerpt is here." The Divine Free States are still about Divines. And maybe we can keep rebuilding them.

JANINE: I mean, and also...yeah. [laughs] Given the context of like all of this resettlement, all of this...like massive transition, the fact that the two divines are like divines of abundance and of like recovery?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Just them existing doesn't mean those things would happen on their own, like...

AUSTIN: Right! Right, exactly.

JANINE: There's a lot of...footwork.

AUSTIN: So what sort of things have you been focusing on? And like what are some of the—like I guess maybe that's not true. Maybe what I actually want is like, what's that look like in terms of power structure and in terms of like authority and—like where is Signet at, as a person, right now?

JANINE: Well, there's like [sighs]...

AUSTIN: [amused] Small questions, you know...

JANINE: Yeah...There's two sides of it. There is like—especially with, you know, Emptyrean is not...around anymore, and Blooming is...I suppose, doing the smaller tasks, but like isn't a big presence. And the Cadent—right? Is not, like...

AUSTIN: Well, so the—

JANINE: The Cadent is still leader, but the Cadent isn't leading everyone.

AUSTIN: No, in fact the Cadent is now leading like [sighs]—like, the Cadent has been minimized to some degree!

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: We'll get into this—or either we will get into it in Tender Sky's or we already have!

[JANINE makes an amused noise]

But the Cadent now corules a planet named Seneschal...along with Declan's Corrective.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: And it works! Like she...partially because of Tender's prodding, and teaching, and like weird mentorship, and partially because she was always capable, but she just wasn't trained in the specific things she needed to be trained in.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: The Cadent has begun to step up a little bit more? But not for all of the Divine Free States.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And in fact I think the thing that I'm doing here, and the thing that I wanna do, is that the Cadent is the dove among a bunch of hawks, to some degree.

The Divine Free States aren't looking for war, so maybe hawk is too strong, right? But they're deeply distrustful of any sort of cooperation with the New Earth Hegemony? They're happy that they're at a state of uneasy truce. They would prefer it to be...a state of peace in which the New Earth Hegemony just was not in this system at all. But the Cadent is like the only one—and the Cadent's you know entourage and...some allied smaller factions and stuff—who think “oh yeah,

we should unify this as its own place.” They’re the only ones who do, and so to some degree the cadent has been minimized...as a political actor.

And part of that is also the kind of broader realization that her job was always to manage Divines and excerpts, not to manage people.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Not to manage like the citizens. And also like...you haven’t heard this yet, Janine, but part of the evacuation game was very clear that like half of the By-and-By sided with Sui Juris.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: So that’s hundreds of thousands of people, if not more, because we have not [laughs] we have not been clear on our numbers throughout this season. You know. Either something like two hundred thousand, or something like two million people—sided with—

JANINE: The By-and-By is the largest ship in that fleet, right?

AUSTIN: It is the largest ship in the—

JANINE: Or was. Yeah.

AUSTIN: —yeah, it’s the largest ship in the fleet. I’ve given different answers—I’ve looked this up as to what I’ve given—

[JANINE huffs in amusement]

—in terms of answers? [amused] And at one point I said that it was like a large American city, in terms of size, and another time I said it was like a large or like a mid-sized Canadian city? I basically said it was like, “oh, it’s like five hundred thousand.”

[JANINE laughs]

And another time I said it’s like, “oh, it’s like New York. It’s like ten million.” And those are just two wildly different numbers. So.

JANINE: Yeah!

AUSTIN: But the good news is, we have a new opportunity to standardize those populations...

[JANINE huffs in amusement]

...and I'm gonna do that as part of the world-generation stuff? Also because there's lots of colonists coming from the earth, now?

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: And arriving rapidly, at a rate that they should not be arriving. So. So yeah, anyways, Cadent has minimized as far as like political power goes, to some degree. But maybe—minimized is wrong. She's been concentrated.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: She's concentrated on this one place now, and is actively taking part.

JANINE: Um. I think in light of that, though, that sort of means that there's two sides to what Signet's been doing with this time. There is the like very large public side of like trying to make sure there isn't a void?

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Because like some very important actors have sort of shifted or sort of, essentially, left those roles, and...bad stuff can happen when there are voids like that.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Like culturally, even. Not just in terms of [sighs] holding power or whatever, that's not really Signet's main concern here, but.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: She wants to make sure that people have faces to look up to, still.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: And that they still have a presence that they can turn to, or that they feel they can draw comfort or strength from, like that's very important to her. Um. So she is doing those big things. She's, you know, making very public, you know, tours of places, and doing what she can like, not just appearances, but *work*. You know, trying to make things better for people in a way where they know they can depend on her.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: The other half of that, though, is that...and this is a thing that I've been pretty sure of with Signet for a while, is that I don't think she has thought, like for a long time, that the faith that she's a part of was going to last forever.

AUSTIN: Mm.

JANINE: Like I think when she was very young, she probably thought like, "okay, well some Divines will die, but then it will stabilize, and maybe we'll make more, or something, and it'll be fine."

AUSTIN: [soft laugh] Right.

JANINE: Um. But I think probably for the past like...at least one hundred years of her life, she's been like—she's seen the writing on the wall. Like she thinks...

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: ...that...we had a very good—like a very, very good run.

[AUSTIN huffs in amusement]

But things are changing, and like...I mentioned this to you, a phrase that I've had written sort of—I wrote it at the top of my...famous notes, more than once, is that...is "die out with dignity."

AUSTIN: Mm.

JANINE: Of like...if the faith is ending, it should end on a high note. It should end with good things, and not with like tearing itself apart, or...

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: ...like complete decay, or whatever.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: So I think as part of...not part but like [sighs] a side thing during this year is that she's been finding people from outside of the faith—or you know, relatively. Not like people who have left the faith, but like—

AUSTIN: [amused huffing] Right right right. But people who are not excerpts or who hold church status or—

JANINE: People who aren't like priestess-type, you know...

AUSTIN: Right, right.

JANINE: Who aren't...within the church's explicit structure—

AUSTIN: Who are lay people, inside—

JANINE: Yes.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: And also probably some people who don't get a shit about the church, too, 'cause—

AUSTIN: Sure! Yes.

JANINE: —I don't think that—if they'll hear her out, then she's happy.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: But she's been finding these people and essentially training them in...in the skills and the things that people in the church do that have...that have real benefit, to people in the community. Um—

AUSTIN: Like mediation, and like—?

JANINE: —the things that should be—yes. Mediation, counselling.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Making sure people feel heard, making sure that people have someone to go to that they trust, making sure that people are taken care of in, you know, many different ways.

AUSTIN: [huffs gently] Right...

JANINE: Um...And...I think—

AUSTIN: And are these people all in contact with each other, or just in contact with you?

JANINE: I don't know that she's like specifically setting up a network between them. I think it's sort of like...

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: ...You know, I don't imagine like she's holding seminars or whatever, but she is sort of going to places and teaching people one on one these techniques.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: And...specifically so that the good that the church does, like if those priests and priestesses and whatever, if all those people in that religious hierarchy just went away tomorrow.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: The things that they did would still survive...

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: ...for the communities, for the people who need them.

AUSTIN: It's—the phrase that you used with me, if I'm remembering it right, was like, "it's not a secret society, but it is kind of how one starts."

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: It's totally how they start. Like it's...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: You know...It's a thing that—you know, we have a name for it. Like...the...Exponential Contingent.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: I think is what we've settled on, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah, I think so. Yeah. I'm into it.

JANINE: Because it...

AUSTIN: The Exponential Contingent, yeah.

JANINE: Because it...you know, there's a lot of multiple meanings in those words. There's a lot of stuff about like contact and sort of a unit of people, or like a backup plan, or, you know...the sort of multiplication of one thing into many. So it is totally like I could totally see like 3,000 years or, you know, whatever ahead of this, that's like some sort of...shady like Freemason whatever.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: But in this moment that's just like a way for those people to identify each other, or to be like, "okay, I know how to take care of this. I know how to do these things."

[Pause]

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: I think we also have talked about that like part of that is she exchanges something with them, so like...because...

AUSTIN: Like a physical thing? Like a...

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Because the last power I took in the Veil was the ability to sort of transform objects?

AUSTIN: Right, right.

JANINE: Using Belgard's sort of...not recycling abilities, but like, y'know, reconstruction abilities.

AUSTIN: Yeah, like—yeah. Yeah.

JANINE: I think that that would be a thing that Signet would do, like she would sort of as like a bond between her and the person that she's trusting this information to, because like this is information that you could use to manipulate someone.

AUSTIN: Right, right.

JANINE: This is information you could use to do damage.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: So she wants to sort of make a pact between herself and these people, that like, I'm giving you something material here and you need to pay for it in your actions.

[AUSTIN huffs in amusement]

Need to repay it in doing good—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm!

JANINE: —and doing, you know, what this represents.

AUSTIN: Right. So how many people are in the Exponential Contingent at this point, or who have gone through this training?

JANINE: It's probably not a massive number.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Considering how difficult it is to travel around—

AUSTIN: [amused] Yep!

JANINE: —and how much time she could be spending in one place—and—

AUSTIN: And also—also like trusting people that much.

JANINE: Yes! Finding the right person.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Is going to be difficult. And then also having the time to train them in addition to doing work and stuff like that.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: So I think—in the span of a year—

AUSTIN: It's only been a year—right? Yeah.

JANINE: Maybe a dozen people.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: I think a dozen is like around the right number. There—might be even a little high, but—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Probably a little high, is what I'll say. Like—or it's either a little high, *or*—

JANINE: Well.

AUSTIN: —that relationship is not as...firm as you might think? Do you know what I mean? Like.

JANINE: Or some of those people are people she already knew.

AUSTIN: Right. Right right right. Yes. Right. And who you already had a positive relationship with.

JANINE: Yes. And knew that she could like trust with...

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally.

JANINE: ...this kind of thing.

AUSTIN: I'm trying to think of other stuff. Like there's a lot here for Signet, right? Like we could do a scene with Belgard, we could do a scene with the—I kind of would love to do a scene with Primary, Satellite, and you.

JANINE: Oh, yeah!

AUSTIN: I'd love to see—I'd love to check in with Blueberri, like there's all sorts of stuff on that page that we could—you know, there's Korrin—like there's all these characters who you've interacted with, that would be cool to check in on? And there's also just like—there's like whatever else Signet is up to.

You know, there's even, is Signet losing...or not losing but like [sighs] we talked about one of the things that happened with the kind of restructure of where the Cadent is, politically, and also with the restructure of where Signet is politically, that like there has been a shift to power to sort of district governors? Like not literally district governors, but—there is a certain sort of like [clears throat] parcelling out of control—of Thyrsus, of all of the Divine Free States, because there needs to be. Not because there is corruption. We're not talking about like the, you know, the governors are overthrowing the emperor type situation.

JANINE: Yeah, it's not a coup.

AUSTIN: It's not a coup, it's just literally is like, "okay, well we have another new settlement popping up over on this continent over here that needs to be managed! And we have to give

someone the authority to do that. We by ourselves can't do that at the central hub or whatever." So I—could do a scene about that. I would do a scene about whatever. Or like I—you know! I don't know...I'm happy to not—I'd be fine not letting you—not forcing you to roll dice [laughs]

[JANINE laughs]

But like, so far, everybody else has had this thing that's like, "here's an image of them in action." And what we do need is like you to be somewhere when recruitment happens, for what comes next? So. Maybe that's one thing—maybe that's one way to think about, is just like, where are you? It's 11 months in. It's 11 months and like two weeks since the Miracle of the Mirage. Where is Signet?

JANINE: Um...That's tough. I just realized like I don't know that she has a home...place.

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

JANINE: Like, I don't know that she has a place that she goes where it's like, "okay, I did my stuff, for now."

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: I think she's just constantly like...

AUSTIN: Bouncing place to place.

JANINE: Month by month.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: Or every couple weeks, just like...being wherever she has to be next.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: So I don't know where the most interesting place for her—

[45:00]

—to be would—be...

AUSTIN: I think Thyrsus, if only so we can see it.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: [pauses] [sighs] I'm trying to think. So here's what we know about Thyrsus right now, is it's cold...[huffs]

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: First and foremost.

JANINE: And they wear coats, so it's cool with them.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's good. They already wore coats.

[JANINE laughs quietly]

Now their coats might have better lining now. Or something. Right?

JANINE: Now people don't make fun of them for wearing coats inside all the time.

AUSTIN: [chuckles] Right. Exactly. Um...Note that there are three major factions on Thyrsus. There are the...let me pull these up really quick, here we go...there are the [sigh-nod] Synod or the [sin-odd] Synod, which are a group of kind of travelling like...medics.

There is the Merciful, are now headquartered there, and the Merciful have also taken on a sort of—you know, the Merciful had kind of been...sort of parole officers, in the past? Parole officers, social workers. Now they are also a sort of...community police force? They're small. They can barely get off of Thyrsus, like they don't have the reach across the entire sector, but you'll find a couple of them on every New Earth—or, sorry, not New Earth—every Divine Free State planet, doing their best to try to like...doing not the same sort of mediation—not the same sort of *intimate* mediation that you do, but the sort of like community leadership stuff, and kind of community policing, that they were already kind of doing before.

And then there's the Loving Gaze, which is a group of...like intelligence operatives? Thyrsus has sort of taken on an infrastructural role, in the Divine Free States, in that like, they get information—[stammers] and transmit information, and you know...bring it from place to place—they don't just transmit it, they literally physically like have, you know, agents across the sector reporting data, doing drop—not blind box—dead drop boxes and stuff like that with the information. And then like serving a medical function. And I kind of like that that's what Thyrsus has gone on to be, is like “we are the people who make this thing work.” [huffs]

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: So those are the three factions that we know are there. I could imagine you working with somebody from the Living Gaze, or something like a sequence of just like...you in a—in my mind I just have such a clear image of Signet [amused] in a weird ice bunker somewhere?

[JANINE chuckles]

Looking at screens, or like helping somebody. But I don't know. You tell me, like is there any scene that jumps to mind?

JANINE: Um...

AUSTIN: Given that stuff.

JANINE: I mean, I think...[sighs] The thing I'm least interested in exploring with her I think is the transfer of power stuff.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: Because I think that's like totally mundane, like she is a hundred percent just like, "Yep, okay. Yeah, okay."

AUSTIN: [laughs] Right, right.

JANINE: Like she totally sees the need for that. She is not precious about retaining authority or anything like that.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: You know—

AUSTIN: Is—

JANINE: —is probably like relieved, 'cause like, okay, now I can have a little more time to find some other people, and like—or like I'll know who's trustworthy in a sense, or...

AUSTIN: Right...

JANINE: I don't know. Like I could see her finding like a lot of value in that, outside of the obvious.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

JANINE: Um.

AUSTIN: Then maybe we make the focus of this scene just this exchange with Cascara, then, because I think that that is...enough to maybe talk through some of where Signet's at? So we

can just jump to that, which is like—[stammers] yeah, I know what this scene is. I've gotten it now.

[JANINE huffs in amusement]

Where are you on a Wednesday night?

JANINE: Um...

AUSTIN: You've done your work! You're turning out for the night—you're turning in for the night, rather. Or you're going out, like, whatever! What is Signet doing on this Wednesday evening?

JANINE: I think she is probably...uh...God, it's really hard to picture her at leisure. It's always very hard [laughing] to do.

AUSTIN: I know.

JANINE: Y'know. She's very buttoned up. I think she's probably like—if she has free time and doesn't have an appointment booked with someone to teach them a thing...

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: She is probably just like...not patrolling, necessarily, but she is like putting herself out in the community to like...see how things are going, or like be there if someone wants to talk, or like...

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: She's putting herself out there in case...[breathes] in case like [laughing] work leaps at her, I guess is a way to think of it!

AUSTIN: Right. So let's then say there is...are there streets? What's this place look like? What's this city look like? Whatever city you're at in Thyrsus. Is this like...again, I just keep coming back to like tundra, and ice, and snow, and stuff? But like—

JANINE: I think the best way to think about Thyrsus is to think of it as an inside-out ice hotel. Um.

AUSTIN: Excuse me?!

JANINE: Beca—[laughing] An inside-out ice hotel. Because, remember, their whole thing was like...their ship design didn't allow for a lot of big open spaces.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JANINE: So they faked a lot of big open spaces, and they faked a lot of outdoor areas that were actually indoors.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: So like, you wouldn't go into a shop, you would just go to the storefront and like talk to the shopkeeper there—

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: —in the rest of storage, and it would—everything felt very outdoors.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JANINE: Bedrooms looked like parks and whatever, courtyards.

AUSTIN: Right, right. I'm still waiting for the inside-out ice hotel.

JANINE: [laughing] So. I imagine this place as like...there are lot of like pillars, and areas with ceilings, and places with two walls but not four.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: So like...it never entirely feels like you're outside or inside, I think?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: And a lot of structures if not built out of ice, then built out of things that very much resemble it, or like crystalline structures...

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: ...white stuff too, just like...lots of very cool tones, lots of very like making the environment into the structures.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Okay.

JANINE: Um.

AUSTIN: Um...So then I guess like at an intersection, or in a threshold or something—I kind of like the notion of like you're standing in a threshold, you're gonna cross between, you know, one

section of this place and another. There's just a gust of wind that blows up a bunch of snow, and then Cascara is sitting next to you, in her chair. And you have not seen or heard from her in a year. She disappeared during the evacuation. No one has seen her—or not no one. No one you've spoken to has seen her, including the Loving Gaze. Like, she has been off the radar entirely. And now she is standing next to you. Or sitting next you, not standing next to you. And I think, you know, she just probably says your name in full, right? Which is...[sighs]

[JANINE laughs silently]

(as CASCARA): They marked scars of light in pitch, born in fiercest purpose, and beheld as the signet sealed upon our pact. You're doing well for yourself.

And for others.

JANINE (as SIGNET): That's the important part.

CASCARA: They're both important. [sighs] Can we get a drink?

SIGNET: [amused] I would say so.

CASCARA: Lead the way.

JANINE: I think Signet leads her to [clicks teeth]...Mm. My instinct was open-air cafe, but everything's open-air, so that's not quite as special, is it?

AUSTIN: [amused] Uh-huh! Yeah...

JANINE: I think...this might be a little too weird, but y'know in like Iceland and Finland and a lot of like sort of...subarctic places, you can rent, as hotel rooms, like these bubbles?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: And it's just like a bubble in the middle of the woods.

AUSTIN: [amused] Uh-huh.

JANINE: This is probably not in the middle of the woods, but I imagine there are—you know, it's like a cafe that has some of these bubbles, and instead of being clear, they're maybe kind of like...when ice doesn't freeze properly—

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

JANINE: —like when ice gets disturbed midway through freezing so you see all the like weird kind of...scratch marks?

AUSTIN: Yeah. I totally know what you mean.

JANINE: And like the crystalline—yeah.

AUSTIN: So is it like little—is it a cafe where it's like a big one of those, or is it a cafe where there's the center bubble, and then there's little bubbles off to the side where you can go? Also.

JANINE: I think I like the second one—

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: —'cause that reminds me a little bit of Thyrsus itself, as a ship.

AUSTIN: Me too. Yeah, totally. Totally. Like it's—

JANINE: Yeah. I like the idea of that being a thing, of that being like a trendy thing now.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally. Um. Very...avant-garde.

[JANINE makes an amused noise]

Or actually very nostalgic, so it's actually not—

JANINE: Yeah!

AUSTIN: It's like a—it's a little of both!

All right, so she joins you, and...with everyone else, she's just been like—in fact, and maybe she's just gonna say this. She's just gonna say this. She's just gonna say it outright to you, because this is you. And she says,

(as CASCARA): Signet, with...everyone else, I've come to them, and I've impressed them, and I've told them how important they are for the mission. For...what it is I'm working on. For what it is that we're working on. And I convince them. "This is why we need you," is what I tell them. And they hem and they haw a little bit. And then...I paint them a vision of the future for the Quire system. One of unity, and of...[sighs] respect, and something new, but also something that has its roots in the Fleet. Something still true to the Resonant Orbit, but also something that adjusts, and...no one's said no yet. It's not that I don't expect you to say yes, it's just that it feels wrong somehow to try to convince you to do this. I...I might be the one who needs convincing.

And then she lays out for you what this is, which is a group of problem solvers that carry the official seal of Seneschal. They carry the sort of weight of the Cadent under Mirage, and also the—Declan's Corrective? The co-governors of Seneschal? Which is like a thing you can use to land on planets, and get into settlements, and get near people. But also there's no official jurisdiction, and so to any degree that you have authority it's because people give it to you. And...she lays that out on the table. And there's just this doubt in her voice, of like, you can sense the weight on *her* shoulders, now. Which is like, she bought into this thing, and has now been jetting around [laughs slightly] the system for months, or for weeks or something, and meeting up with people, and trying to convince them to do this, and like she's nearing the end of these trips, and is having a moment of doubt. And isn't gonna try to bullshit you, 'cause she knows you better than that.

What do you think? Am I...is this naive? Is this just one more gasp of a dying civilization?

JANINE: I think Signet like listens really attentively, of course. She probably has her finger looped through the handle of her teacup, but doesn't really actually lift it that often.

AUSTIN: [amused noise] Uh-huh.

JANINE: And I think she says...

(as SIGNET): What do you think dying looks like?

CASCARA: I came very close, Signet. I have a pretty good idea.

SIGNET: I don't mean a person dying, or a machine dying, or...any individual thing dying. A collective, or a concept. What does that look when it's dying?

AUSTIN: [sighs] She puts her cup down on the table, and like...runs her hand over her hair. Which is like...I wanna say it's braided, now? Previously it had been like cut very short, and now she has her hair in braids. She kind of like tosses them back a little bit. And then like pulls them into place. And she says,

(as CASCARA): Before the Beloved, before I joined on as a commander of that unit, I was just a...another officer in the Divine Fleet. This is...it was a little while ago, it was before you joined the Beloved to. And we had a skirmish...and I thought, going into it, that death was gonna be really quick. And I was going through a dark phase.

And she smiles.

(as CASCARA): But the thing that surprised me...we lost. And...the signals kept coming. My unit was 40 people. It took a week before we knew what happened to all 40. A week after *losing*. I spent a week thinking that some of them were alive, and they weren't, and I spent a week thinking that some of them were certainly dead. And one of those ended up being Waltz Tango Cache, so...sort of [huffs] sort of a yes there, sort of a no. Um. It's messy, is what I guess I'd say death is. It's messy. It's longer than I thought it would be. That's what I think about death.

SIGNET: Do you think that this is...making more of a mess? This thing that you are...asking us to do? Or do you think it's...[sighs] cleaning the mess? Do you think it's...[sighs] I think the word is debriding? The wound?

[60:00]

CASCARA: When we do...

SIGNET: When you sort of clear away the sort of bad tissue.

CASCARA: Mm.

SIGNET: So that the good can...

CASCARA: Mm-hm.

SIGNET: Can form in its place.

CASCARA: I'm...

SIGNET: Do you think what you're doing is...cleansing or complicating it?

CASCARA: I'm not sure. I—[amused] this is why I'm talking to you...

SIGNET: Mm.

CASCARA: ...Signet, is...on its face, it's the latter. It's cleaning things, it's putting a foundation in place for something bigger. It's forward-thinking. It might be death, but it's also...transition, it's also a birth. It's also a...the first steps for a world that none of us will live to see. Well, you might, but [huffs]...I don't have your long...your long age. I almost said long legs.

[SIGNET/JANINE laughs in surprise]

Not intentional. Um.

[SIGNET chuckles]

But. I think about those signals that kept coming back. Just little blips on the radar where we—we saw *action*. We saw activity, from ships that had no one in them left alive...Like [sighs] like steam coming out of an engine that's already crashed. And I don't know which of the two this is.

AUSTIN: And she is like legitimately at this crossroad—like there is not—you are not going to move her with words alone. Or you're gonna—you can move her with words, but you'll have to roll, to move her with words.

JANINE: Hm...

AUSTIN: I'm gonna say this is Contr—uh, it depends on what you do. But I...yeah. It depends on what you do. That's how this game works. [huffs] I just remembered.

JANINE: Yeah...

AUSTIN: I always need to like—I'm so used to being like, "what do you do, here's the difficulty or whatever." But...the way rolls in this work is that you tell me what you do. What skill you're using, and then I determine the...position and the risk.

JANINE: Um...

AUSTIN: Or the position and the effect.

JANINE: God, does the roll affect what I say, or does what I say affect the roll?

AUSTIN: Both.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: Like, to do it you do it. Um.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You know. Those two things should be in concert.

JANINE: Um. [sighs] I think...Signet, at this moment specifically, does take a sip of her drink.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Fair.

JANINE: Um. And sort of has that moment of like...that very anime moment of like looking into the cup.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: And...she's not reading the tea leaves, because her tea is still in there, and that's not how that works, but—

AUSTIN: [chuckles] Nope!

JANINE: —y'know, she's...she's definitely spends like a long moment sort of considering the very slight movement of them in the bottom, and trying to figure out...

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Even how *she* feels about this. And then I think she...looks at Cascara. And says, like...

[sighs] Man, what is even the best way to express it?

(as SIGNET): This...[sighs] this isn't a case where...everything is spiraling towards nothing. There are too many people, there are too many...places, there are too many factors. It's not a ship where something exploded and people died. It's not a single battlefield where one side wins over another. It's all of those things, and dozens and dozens of other things. I...things like that don't just stop. It's not just...It's not just an engine that breaks. There's always something left over. There's always something that...that remains, and is—you know—that remains in play, that remains in motion. There's always something.

AUSTIN: That sounds like [CONsort] Consort, but...[conSORT] Consort. Is that what you're using?

JANINE: I think so, yeah.

AUSTIN: All right, so I don't think this is an action roll, I think this is a fortune roll, because action rolls are Risky by default, or even when it's controlled...it is...a Risky maneuver. "When the player character does something challenging, we make an action roll to see how it turns out. An action is challenging if there's an obstacle to the PC's goal that's dangerous or troublesome in some way." I could conceive of this being troublesome. In regular play I might call it troublesome. [laughs] I might say like—

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: “Okay, there’s an intermediate follow-up effect.” But what I’m really curious about is just how well does this pep talk work, not does it like—not...like what the risk is, or anything like that. So I think we’re just gonna do this as a fortune roll, which means we’re just gonna roll your Consort, plus any bonuses...as just d6s, and like there’s no Risky Standard or anything like that. Um. So...What is your—

JANINE: I don’t know how to roll in this game. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah. So I’ll talk you through it—so it’s Consort, right?

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: My question is whether or not—you have an ability called...Welcome Anywhere. “While wearing your medic garb, you’re welcome to even dangerous places. Gain +1d to Consort and Sway when offering—

JANINE: Oh, that’s true.

AUSTIN: —*tending* to anyone in need.” Are you wearing your medic garb right now? Or whatever that looks like.

JANINE: I think Signet’s medic garb is—‘cause the purpose of medic garb is to be recognizable.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: And I think when Signet walks around town, she wants to be recognizable...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: So that people can find her if she’s needed in that moment.

AUSTIN: Totally. I’m good with that. All right, so then that sounds like 2d6. So you’re gonna roll 2d6, and the way this system works is like, fairly simple. You want—pick whatever the highest dice. The highest die is what counts, and 4 or 5 is success, 6 is the highest succe—it’s, 1 through 3 is bad, 4 and 5 is mixed, 6 is good. If you happen to get two 6s, then it’s a critical success.

JANINE: Okay. How do—

AUSTIN: It’s pretty—it’s just flash...

JANINE: How do the +1s and stuff involve—or get?

AUSTIN: You're just rolling an extra die. So instead of rolling—

JANINE: Okay, so you have—

AUSTIN: —one die, you roll two.

JANINE: —0 in that, you just roll the one.

AUSTIN: Uh, but you do have 1. In this, sorry.

JANINE: Yes. No, I'm just like trying to wrap my head around that in general.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JANINE: 'Cause I didn't—I wasn't in Blades. So this is all new to me. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Correct. Yeah yeah yeah. So yeah, if you had a 0, but you had a +1 from another bonus, you would roll a +1. And that bonus could be that you push yourself to add a bonus die. By—you could take stress on to add a bonus die to the roll. You could accept a devil's bargain to add one, or you could spend a Gambit point to add one. Or you could roll—you can always roll in this game—if you have 0, and you don't have any help from a friend...

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: ...you don't have any gambit points, you can always try to roll? Even if you have 0. And that's a 2d6 [amused] and you take the lowest one, which is not as good!

JANINE: No.

AUSTIN: So in this case it's 2d6, and you gonna take the highest result.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: You could also push yourself to gain stress, and roll 3d6 instead, but that is up to you. And that Stress would carry over into the real game.

JANINE: [sighs] And I don't know that this is the moment.

AUSTIN: No, I don't think so either.

JANINE: Where like Stress comes in. Like this is...this is a thing where something's gonna happen anyway.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: This is a conversation between two people who know each other...

AUSTIN: Yes. Yeah.

JANINE: In a cafe, and, y'know.

AUSTIN: Yeah...Hey, there's a d5.

JANINE: Nice.

AUSTIN: 5 is a success. I guess on fortune, it is a mixed success, but like good, and not bad.
[huffs a laugh]

[JANINE makes an amused noise]

I'll read the exact thing. It's a limited/partial effect. Which is to say, yeah! You know, I think that you can see in her eyes, like, you haven't moved her to be like, "The mission is the mission and I'm in lo—" you know, like—

[JANINE laughs]

—she isn't like going out to set the world on fire, now, right?

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: But she's like—she nods with you. And says like,

(as CASCARA): Yeah. Yeah. It's not the same. And...that's a good thing and a bad thing. A battlefield I know. A...conflict I know how to win, and I know what it means when we lose. This is scary, Signet...I don't...I don't know that I need you on board 'cause you're an excerpt, because you are good with people, because you're building this little network—don't think I haven't noticed.

I need you as part of this team because...I need someone for all of us to turn to when it gets scary. You up for it?

JANINE: I thought of a thing that Signet would say, and it's—not comforting! Um. [laughs quietly] The thing that leapt into my mind—yeah, no, fuck it! I think she—yeah, she just says this. Um. Like, Signet's been scared for hundreds of years.

[AUSTIN chuckles]

In one form or another, like...she was scared as an excerpt, because...you know, she was relatively young, in the grand scheme of things, and suddenly thrust into a *whole* lot of complicated stuff.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: And then she fucked that stuff up! Kind of.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Not—really, but, y’know, that stuff got fucked up. And ever since then, it has been...a case of...

[MUSIC - “THE STITCH” begins]

...watching society slowly slide...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: From a position where she couldn’t really do anything.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: She could do her small part. So she knows that fear. And I think has like embraced it to some degree at this point.

AUSTIN: So she says that to Cascara, basically?

JANINE: Yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Cascara like shrugs, a little bit, is like—just her shoulders, not like her whole arms. And she goes,

(as CASCARA): You’re scared, I’m scared. You cut diamonds with diamonds.

And then takes a sip! And then I think that that’s scene.

[MUSIC - “THE STITCH” plays out]