

Twilight Mirage 09: The Sound of Strings

Transcriber: Elliot - @cordialement#1268

[MUSIC - "The Twilight Mirage" starts, then pauses]

AUSTIN (as Satellite): Transmission MP2.

Mirage Primary, we have received your dispatch. Crystal Palace has been made aware of this... inconsistency from guaranteed events. Official recommendation is to hold and continue surveillance. Under no circumstance should you engage on behalf of any Bountifsubject involved in the matter. Divert 5% of observational budget to the cloud phenomenon, both inside and outside the mesh. Beyond that, Crystal Palace defers to agent in field to identify most efficient allocation of operational resources.

Message lock. Prepare for dispatch. Send on mark. 3, 2...

[sighs]

Pause. Authorize allotment of personal communication time. Voice signature keen, forester, gloaming. Diamond encryption. Record.

[MUSIC resumes]

Off the record. Demani, this is a clusterfuck. No one knows what that thing is. Your instruments didn't pick it up until this last report, but when we analyze the data, it says that thing has been there since the day Gumption died. Some folks here think it's a ghost. Others think it's the killer, or both. My money's on neither, world don't work that way, too clean. But it ain't supposed to be there. And this wasn't supposed to be some adventurous assignment. You and my daughter both were supposed to have simple recon deployments. Watching the last years of a crumbling civilization. Important, but safe. Predictable. Guaranteed.

Clouds. When people think of clouds, they think of rain. But a little water isn't the problem. The problem is that clouds block the light of day. On a cloudy afternoon in the field, you can't be sure where the sun is, and without the sun, you can't know for sure where you are, or how much longer you have until it's night time. So I get it. I get being scared, I hear it in your voice and I understand. But listen close, Demani. Clouds are burnt away by the same light they hide. And we are not some lost wanderers in the woods. We are agents of the Rapid Evening. We *are* the sun.

[MUSIC ends]

[3:31]

AUSTIN: Welcome to Friends at the Table, an actual play podcast focused on critical world-building, smart characterization, and fun interaction between good friends. I am your host, Austin Walker. Joining me today, Ali Acampora.

ALI: Um, hi! My name is Alicia Acampora. You can find me @ali_west and you can follow the show over @friends_table.

AUSTIN: Jack de Quidt.

JACK: Hi. I'm Jack, you can follow me on twitter @notquitereal, or buy any of the music featured on the show at notquitereal.bandcamp.com

AUSTIN: Janine Hawkins.

JANINE: Hi, you can find me @bleatingheart on Twitter.

AUSTIN: I realized I just did the cadence of, like, "Oh, and then one more person," but there's not another person.

JACK: And the Cadent.

AUSTIN: And the Cadent herself. Uh, you can follow us also on Patreon. Support the show at friendsatthetable.cash. Thank you again, as always, to all of our great supporters who let us do this, and let us do so many of the other shows we're now doing. Since the last time we recorded this group, we've recorded a Live episode, we've recorded a Tips episode... We've recorded our first set of Bluff City, so it's been very exciting. And thank you again for supporting us and letting us do all that. If you want to support us, again, you can go to friendsatthetable.cash and seriously, even a dollar or two means a lot. So, so please. Please. I didn't mean for that to sound so desperate, but...

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Here we are.

JACK: We get to make a live show.

AUSTIN: We do. That's a thing, that's exciting. We get to do Bluff City, we get to do a bunch of stuff. We're nearing in on the goal that would let me do a prep show, showing off a little bit of the GM prep that goes into our various shows. So. Today we are continuing our game, in any case, of the Veil by Fraser Simons. My agenda is, as always, to make the world feel real, to make it high tech and make it personal, to make the protagonists' lives interesting and interconnected, and to play to find out what happens. Can we start by going over beliefs?

ALI: Sure.

AUSTIN: Uh, Tender, how about yours?

ALI: Okay. My first belief is, "Never take a shortcut." My second belief is, "Fourteen feels like they owe me something; I'll take whatever they're offering." And my third belief is, "My gift is divine and cannot be taken from me; I must hide it from anyone who would try."

AUSTIN: Awesome. Signet?

JANINE: My beliefs are, "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: And Fourteen Fifteen.

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

AUSTIN: Okay. So, as a reminder, I guess maybe just the game today opens up on this large vision of this city, um, that is kind of flickering between two modes. One vibrant and alive, with tall towers and statues representing 17 -- 17, is that the right number? 27? I need to look at my notes.

JACK: I think it might be 27.

AUSTIN: I think it's 27, of the Divines. And another version of it in which it is just a kind of war zone version of the same city. In which, instead of being statues of the Divines, there are 27 corpses of these giant robotic gods. And I think we just get a wide-angled shot of this city that also has, like... So there's a river running north to south, or south to north I imagine it's actually running. We're like seeing from the southern side of the city upwards, and at the very southern end of the city there is this temple that has, you know, a huge curved ceiling and all of these columns. Red, dark red columns. Dark grey tiling on the top with some gold accents. And that's at the very southern tip of the city, up on a hill.

And there are all these people, a mass clearly walking through the city streets towards the south. And then at the very northern end, the tall buildings get taller and taller still until finally, there is a single skyscraper going into the sky, and at the very top it sort of spirals in on itself. Um, making a very organic, almost plant-like, tip to the building. And there it just about touches this white cloud, this singular white cloud, that's very... towards the top of the... right, because

it's in the sky, just about touching the tip of the skyscraper. I believe it was also raining and thundering, correct? But the cloud is still white, is I think a point I made when we last recorded, three weeks ago.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Maybe longer. I think we just open on, from that wide shot. We see all the people moving, and then we zoom in a little closer, and closer. And we just get a shot... If I remember right, Fourteen, you and Sho, who is the kind of trainee who's been assigned to you, were moving south towards the temple, where there was the sound of strings being played. And also the sound of all of the kind of, the NPCs of this simulated world, the inhabitants of this city, were saying the name "Aura Antigua" over and over again. "Aura Antigua".

And I think we get an image of you two, like, rushing to the south past them. Like they're moving in this huge mass, but they're just kind of shambling in that direction. And we just get you two passing by them as they continue to walk. And they're like filing out of buildings, they're filing down alleyways, like stumbling over trash cans. And we get the two of you just kind of rushing towards the south. We get the image of the temple on the hill in the distance in front of you. What are you thinking and doing at this point?

JACK: I am disturbed by [laughs] many things.

AUSTIN: Fair.

JACK: Um, especially by the... so, at the end of the last kind of session, we had an engagement with some iconoclasts.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: That didn't go, I mean it went okay? It also was not the greatest. And I think that from a conversation with Diego's Correction going straight into--

AUSTIN: Declan. Declan's Corrective.

JACK: Declan's Correction. Declan's Corrective.

AUSTIN: Yes, you got it.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: Close.

JACK: That's an important name to get right, and I got it wrong. In every way.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Fourteen would've, too, don't even worry about it.

JACK: Yeah, that's true. Conversation with Declan's Corrective going straight into a pitched battle with paint people, and then to have these weird, monosyllabic creatures marching. I think also at the same time, I am torn, because I am not supposed to let Tender out of my sight. And I mean that quite literally a lot of the time.

[ALI laughs]

JACK: So I think I'm glancing behind me through the mass of people to see. And I can, because of the boulevard, and because of the mass of people, and because of the layout of the city, I can see Tender occasionally as I begin to move away from her. And I'm just sort of keeping checking over my shoulder, as if I'm expecting to see something.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: But all I'm seeing are more and more faces of these... citizens who are having a bad day.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yeah. Um, I think that's fair. I think at some point you just have to lose sight. Like, you have to either commit to this or not, because the distance is too great.

JACK: Yeah. I think it's that thing of trying to keep track of someone in a crowd.

AUSTIN: Right. Is there any way, when times like this happen, is there a way for you to keep track of Tender, like, indirectly? Do you have tools that would do that? Do you have anything that would do that, or is it just you have to suck it up and--

JACK: Look. Austin. I do have tools for that, but they're only for use against targets of the Castlerose Agency.

AUSTIN: Ah, I see.

JACK: So I'm not using them on Tender.

AUSTIN: I gotcha. Of course, not a target, so...

[snickering]

AUSTIN: Great. Good. And then maybe the camera like moves past Fourteen and Sho, and moves with Fourteen's look, past all of these other people who are gathering towards the south. Until finally there is just like, empty street. And it's still flickering between these modes, and then

we just get Signet and Tender heading northward. It probably passes Blueberri Jin and uh, Korin. Korin Kim, who is taking care of Blueberri.

JANINE: Other way around.

AUSTIN: Or, no, other way around. Other way around. Right, right, right, yeah. So you got Blueberri to take care of Korin. Correct. Sorry, my bad. But then catches up with you two as you move towards the north, where a huge skyscraper exists. And also where you know that the iconoclasts have fled to, heading northward towards this skyscraper. And I think even in the distance you can see them, kind of, this like mass of paint that occasionally grows a limb to pull itself up higher on the outside of the skyscraper. Like I think the mass of paint at this point is a couple of stories big. Do you know what I mean? It's big and gooey and like sometimes a bit of it will fall off, and then it will just reform as like a vaguely humanoid shape. But maybe it has three arms instead of two, or maybe it has like... it doesn't have any limbs at all, but it still has like, the shape of a head.

JACK: God.

AUSTIN: And then it kind of throws itself back up into, like a fish out of water, but like up against the side of the building, in that it manages as if there was gravity on the side of the building, to flop back up upwards into the paint creature. Until finally it reconnects. There's like a lot of that kind of happening, just generally. A lot of that...

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: ...is happening throughout the city.

JACK: I don't know if I said it in the last recording, but I picture these creatures absolutely as like the sort of goopy monsters in *Howl's Moving Castle*.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

JANINE: Yeah.

JACK: Like the horrible flood of those creatures as they come round corners and pour down corridors and things.

AUSTIN: And I think there's-- you know, one of the things that's true about the iconoclasts based on the rules, based on what, um, Janine, you set up as the truth about them is that they are, one, the past and future of humanity. Who knows what that means?

JACK: [laughs] Oh, God.

AUSTIN: Two, they are made of strange materials. Clear. And three is, they have no faces. Now, the thing that we've done is actually, they have had faces. They've just never had their own faces. They've only ever had other people's faces.

[ALI and JACK laugh in a horrified manner]

AUSTIN: And right now I don't think that they do. Like, I think that they, again they will occasionally grow a face or a head or two. But at this point they are not, like, mocking anyone with a face, at this point anyway.

[15:00]

AUSTIN: So, I think actually where I wanna start is we see them going up the top of this, um, building. And then we just get a voice, and then a cut. And the voice is, [laughs]

AUSTIN (as Tetragon): Help! Help me.

AUSTIN: And we get the little robotic face of the, um, the vice-warden. It's kind of a silver sphere with like an LCD screen on it, and it has some of this iconoclastic goop on it, and it's like resting up against a little tin trash can. And it's just saying,

AUSTIN (as Tetragon): Help, help me! He-help me!

AUSTIN: Over and over again. And Fourteen Fifteen-- sorry, not Fourteen Fifteen. Signet and Tender, you are the ones who stumble upon him.

AUSTIN (as Tetragon): I waited! I-- I waited!

[JANINE sighs]

AUSTIN (as Tetragon): I waited! I-- I waited!

[ALI and JACK laugh]

AUSTIN (as Tetragon): H-help me! H-help me!

[ALI continues laughing]

JANINE: [laughs] Oh my God.

AUSTIN (as Tetragon): H-help me!

[JANINE groans]

AUSTIN (as Tetragon): I waited.

JANINE: Oh my God, okay. I...

AUSTIN (as Tetragon): What is goin' on?

[ALI laughs]

JANINE: Fuck.

JACK: So he has no body?

AUSTIN: No, he's just, yeah.

JACK: It's just a screen?

AUSTIN: It's just a screen inside of a...

JANINE: Wasn't he like a dude before?

AUSTIN: No no no. He's always been like a robotic voice, face, thing.

JANINE: Okay. Okay.

AUSTIN: I've always imagined him being vaguely like the, um...

ALI: The DNA thing from *Jurassic Park*, right?

AUSTIN: A little bit like that, yeah. It's like

ALI: [laughing] Because it's the exact voice.

AUSTIN: It's that plus the superintendent from *Halo: ODST*. Which is like, a little green face that just has eyes? It's those two things exactly combined.

JACK: So we were expecting a robot.

AUSTIN: I don't know what you were expecting.

JACK: [laughs] Okay.

AUSTIN: You tell me what you were expecting. But right now, it's a little spherical robot.

JANINE: Okay.

[ALI laughs]

ALI: Can we just, like, put him in our pocket?

JANINE: I can't--

AUSTIN: No, he's-- I should give you the size.

JANINE: How big is he?

AUSTIN: He's like a little bit bigger than a basket-- he's like twice the size of a basketball.

ALI: Okay.

JANINE: Oh! Okay. I know what I can do. Um. [laughs] I got this, I think.

AUSTIN: [amused] Yeah?

ALI: [laughing] By all means.

JANINE: So you know how I've got, I have that sash, right? Like that's my thing is my cool sash?

AUSTIN: Mhm?

JANINE: I think what Signet does-- 'cause they can't stop right now exactly, but also, she's not gonna leave this dude.

AUSTIN: Uh huh?

JANINE: Ball, whatever.

AUSTIN: It's a dude. I think I've used he/him, so I'm gonna stick to that.

JANINE: It's also a ball, though. He's also a ball.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JANINE: [laughs] Okay, so I think what she's gonna do is, uh, she calls her sash out and it like wraps around him?

AUSTIN: [amused] Okay.

JANINE: Kind of like, um, when you see pictures of women with babies swaddled and like strapped to their back.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Mhm.

JANINE: I wanna do that with the ball man.

AUSTIN: Um, okay.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Are you just going-- you're just doing this.

JANINE: Sure.

ALI: Wait, if you could fish him out--

AUSTIN: I just wanna-- Go ahead.

ALI: [laughs] I was gonna say, like, the environment is like completely digital right now, right?

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: Could I, like, construct a little river-- like a little boat or something for him to go on, or like...

JANINE: Oh. Oh!

AUSTIN: I mean you're just in the street right now.

ALI: [laughing] I just like...

JANINE: Well, yeah, could you like make a fake river that carries him back to Blueberri?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Sure. What's that-- what would-- I'm totally into that. I think you probably have a move for this, right? Like this is probably-- what is this, construct or something?

JANINE: I mean, that's way better than us doing the next season version of the papoose situation, so.

[ALI and AUSTIN laugh]

AUSTIN: Um, yeah, I think this is reconfigure. "When you remake parts of the digital environment as you see fit, describe what you take from the digital world and what it becomes. Then roll plus cyberbrain." So what are you taking from the digital environment and what is it becoming?

ALI: Is he just like in-- he's just like on the ground?

AUSTIN: He's on the ground next to-- like leaning against a trash can, covered with some of the goopy paint.

ALI: Okay. Well, okay. So I like [laughs] I kinda like brush him off a little bit. And then I change the trash can into, like, a-- So I saw this thing recently that was like a, um, it was like one of those hoverboards, but with like a seat attached to it. So you could like ride it around while you're sitting down.

AUSTIN: [amused] Okay.

ALI: I think it's just like one of those. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Okay!

ALI: It's just like a little thing with wheels, and--

JACK: You give him a little car?

ALI: Yeah! So you can just zoom on down.

JANINE: Like one of those pocket bikes that got outlawed?

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: They get outlawed? What's outlawed, though?

JANINE: Yeah! 'Cause kids were riding them on the road and you're only like one foot high or whatever when you're on it

AUSTIN: Yeah, okay. Fair.

JANINE: So they were just getting fucking creamed.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Okay. Alright, so how are you feeling, cause you still mark a state here, but then you're gonna roll cyberbrain.

ALI: Yeah, um, what would like anxious or like rushed go into? Probably scared? Scared?

AUSTIN: I could see scared, I could like-- I'd say anxious, anxious is probably scare... Hmm. Cause it's like an anxious that is like hasty, right, it's not anxious like, "aw, I'm losing sleep", it's anxious like-- Yeah, I would say scared.

ALI: I don't think it's a frustration. I think it's like when you're overwhelmed by a situation. You're like, "I have a lot of things I have to worry about right now."

AUSTIN: Yeah yeah yeah. Then yeah.

ALI: So I'm gonna check this and then I'm gonna roll scared.

AUSTIN: Nope, you're gonna roll other. You're not rolling scared.

ALI: I'm gonna roll other. What's a zero anyway?

AUSTIN: I mean, you could just add the plus one. Yeah, that's fine, it's just-- so you add plus one to that. That would mean eight.

ALI: Okay so it's an eight.

AUSTIN: Okay, so on a 7-9 you do it, but you may only choose one of the following: you do not suffer feedback; the change is not noticed; or your subconscious stays repressed. You only get to choose one of those.

ALI: [groans] Um, okay. [laughs and groans again] Hmm... [laughs] I don't like-- I hate these rules. I'm gonna go with, um, the change is not noticed, cause I don't wanna be in another fight right this second.

AUSTIN: Okay. I just need to look at your subconscious then real quick.

ALI: Yeah. [laughs] By all means.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Wait, you keep turning it away. I need to look at your subconscious.

ALI: Oh.

[ALI and JANINE laugh]

AUSTIN: Ali is like literally turning the page away so that I can't do it.

ALI: [laughs] You need to see-- my move should not control yours.

AUSTIN: It does. It always has, in all of roll20 forever.

ALI: I hate it.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Um, okay so I think it is supposed to turn into like a little, what did you say? A little, like, hoverboard-style, but with a seat.

ALI: Eh, just like a little cart. Yeah, just like a little cart he can zoom in.

AUSTIN: Okay, so it starts out as a little cart, and then instead of being a cart it's like a 19-- it's like a mid-century hot rod. It like keeps growing until it's a hot rod, and begins like racing down the street. And then all of the other trash cans do, too. And you're now moving through these streets where there are just cars flying all over the place, crashing into you-- or not into you, into each other. Into walls. And the path in front of you is now just like, every intersection is just filled with cars speeding by. Um, so that's good. And they're all just like rad old hot rods, with like engines exposed, et cetera.

[ALI laughs, then sighs]

AUSTIN: Which is maybe not what you were intending to do. [laughs]

ALI: [sighing] Sure.

AUSTIN: Um, is it clear that that's-- I guess like Signet, is it clear that that was a mistake of Tender's? The question is also for Tender--

[JACK chuckles]

JANINE: How the fuck would that not be?

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: You know. Is it just-- is it just the digital environment fucking up, or is it her fucking up? Like I'm curious what Signet's view is when something like that happens.

JANINE: [sighs] I mean, I think when it's directly connected to like something they are both concerned with and trying to do something about, like the little-- the ball dude, it probably is clear that Tender had like an uh oh.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Uh huh.

[Jack laughs]

JANINE: I think in more obscure situations it's probably very confusing, but I think in this particular case it's probably relatively clear. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Right. Um, so you can safely get there. It's just gonna take a little bit more time. Unless you wanna be risky.

JANINE: I had a thing I wanted to do that might also help this.

AUSTIN: Sure.

JANINE: Um, so I think a thing that Signet wants to do, knowing that there's a very real danger of this place getting irrevocably fucked up.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: So I think she, uh, reaches out to Blooming.

AUSTIN: Oh, okay. This is using the true name move, right?

JANINE: Yes. True name, and my component that I have on Blooming.

AUSTIN: Right. What's that look like? Like what's it look like when you reach out in this way?

JANINE: I don't think it looks like anything, but I think it feels like something.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: Especially-- I think especially-- I think Tender especially would be very aware of it. People who are not as like keyed in to the mesh maybe wouldn't notice it as much, or they would just think of it like, "Oh that was a weird breeze, but it's not windy 'cause we're in space." You know, stuff like that. But I think to Tender it's like a very obvious, like a shudder or a ripple or something, and then it just kind of like shoots outward. But it would be like the air around her is moving a lot or something, and then stops.

AUSTIN: Right, right. Is this a situation where, like, do you have to actually speak their true name? Or do you just feel it?

[JANINE sighs]

AUSTIN: Like is it a thing you quote unquote speak in your head, or is it still like-- because with Blooming's name especially since it's another excerpt.

JANINE: Yeah. I... That's a good question. Um, because my answer is actually kind of [laughs]. I have a bunch of different things that involve speaking true names and I think I maybe thought of this one differently than the other one where I speak a true name. So maybe I should say that she says it out loud.

AUSTIN: Okay. But like not the rest of the conversation or whatever, just--

JANINE: No. Yeah and I think like the way that she says it is the particular-- like she's not just standing there saying "Blooming," like it comes out like an exhale?

[AUSTIN hums]

JANINE: It's like sounds are happening where there should only be breath maybe, so it's kind of weird to overhear it.

AUSTIN: Um, what is-- so here's a question for you is like, what do you think we mean when we say "true name"? Especially with an excerpt.

JANINE: [sighs] Yeah. That's...

AUSTIN: Like is it, is it just the verse that it's from? Is it like more of the name than what most-- like most people know Blooming, more people know "To the prince we offer 12,000 flowers blooming in an untouched field." Is there like some-- is there like an additional part of that that is supposed to only be known between, like between excerpts? Is there a...

JANINE: The trick of that is, because everyone has to have a true name it can't just be a thing for excerpts.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Let's start with this one. Let's start with this one, and also it's something I'm being careful about because I don't want it to be like, "Oh, it's their birth name." Like no, that's not.

JANINE: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, no.

AUSTIN: Like, their name is Blooming. And it's not like you have some power over them because you have a name that they don't use anymore.

JANINE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: It might, maybe it's about some connotation that you hold in the pronunciation or something?

JANINE: Uh, like what?

AUSTIN: I don't know.

JANINE: I don't know what you mean.

AUSTIN: Like is there another word in the excerpt that you emphasize instead of Blooming?

JANINE: Oh, I see what you mean. Hmm.

AUSTIN: [simultaneously with Janine] I don't know how that works with a normal person. Yeah.

JANINE: [simultaneously with Austin] God, what's their full name again? Yeah, it's...

AUSTIN: It's, her name is--

JANINE: It's tough, because true name is a thing I use on other people, like, it's hard to say. It's hard to define a true name for an excerpt and a true name for a random person, and there isn't any overlap there, like.

AUSTIN: Right. Well, like it's also a thing that's interesting--

JACK: I wonder--

JANINE: I mean also the true name of my sanctuary, is another one.

AUSTIN: Right, right, true. Um, yeah. Um, maybe it's about-- maybe we should think about "true" in a non-exclusive sense. Which is to say, my true name is-- is Austin Walker. My true name is also when my dad picked me up and threw me in the air and said, "My boy!" That's a true name for me. And if the onomastic knew that about me--

JANINE: Ohhhh.

AUSTIN: The onomastic, rather, knew that about me.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: They would have that true name power over me.

JANINE: Oh, that's good!

AUSTIN: You know what I mean? Like we all actually have a catalogue of true names.

JANINE: Yeah, just, yeah. So not even a name, just like the thing that in your heart of hearts you sort of associate with.

AUSTIN: One of the many, you know? Yeah.

JANINE: Yeah. A thing that that person would answer to, if they heard it in your voice.

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes, totally. Totally. Then, what is it for Blooming?

JANINE: Uh, I think it's Prince.

AUSTIN: Okay. Interesting.

JANINE: I think it's Prince in the sense of like, maybe that was like a little teasy jokey thing that Signet called them once, like just because they were-- because she was like in charge of one of the last Divines and like, in Signet's time when there were many more Divines, it wasn't as big a deal. Like there were other... You were still important, but you weren't important to the degree that like, basically everyone was focusing on you and maybe two other people.

AUSTIN: Right. Right, like the time that we're in now, it's Blooming and the Cadent, and that's such a different vibe than when there were six excerpts, let alone when there were four-- you know, forty, or something, so.

JANINE: Yeah. Yeah. So having Prince in their, in their sort of chunk of the script-- I wanna be clear about that, too, that the joke isn't "You're a girl and I'm calling you Prince."

AUSTIN: [snorts] Right. Right. It's about the power relationship.

JANINE: The joke is that there's an honorific title in that name and there's a power relationship that's, yeah.

AUSTIN: There's also something interesting there which is that it flips the verse. Because the verse is about offering the prince 12,000 flowers, and so--

JANINE: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: But in that way it's like, "Oh no no no, you're the one who's getting something," which is interesting.

JANINE: Yeah. She's not the offering anymore. She's receiving.

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah, okay, so now you have to still roll dice. [laughs]

JANINE: [laughs] Yup.

AUSTIN: So you roll plus components. Um, and I think that's plus the amount of components you have on that one person.

JANINE: That's just one.

AUSTIN: So roll plus one, yeah. And you should still mark, how do you feel about this?

[30:00]

JANINE: [sighs] God. I would say... I would say this is like a powerful thing, because Signet's using this very rare ability that, um...

AUSTIN: Mhm. Cool.

JANINE: ...can affect things. How do I do plus one again? Do I just add it in this little box, or?

AUSTIN: You could just /roll 2d6+1. Hey, that's a nine! Alright, so on a 10+ you would have held three, but on a 7-9 you hold one. If they are willing, you may spend your hold one for one without issue. If they are unwilling-- she's perfectly willing. Um, you'd have to have her in your sights in order to do some of these things. The components used are then consumed, losing their power over them. Uh, either, so these are what you can spend your hold for. Inflict harm. Uh, armor-piercing. Have them lose track of what they were doing. Have them take -1 or +1 forward right now. Assist or interfere with them without regard for distance or barriers. Or communicate with them without regard for distance or barriers.

JANINE: I'm gonna communicate.

AUSTIN: Okay, so what do you say?

JANINE: Um, the thing I say specifically is that, um, I need her clone and quarantine the prison? Like the information of the prison?

AUSTIN: Right right right. Yeah.

JANINE: So, A, there's a backup-- I mean there's probably already backups, but like this is a special backup.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Um, cool.

JANINE: It won't be a great one. But the thing that I'm kind of banking on there is that that's probably like a memory-intensive process that might freeze things up for a little bit.

AUSTIN: Right. I see, that's interesting. Huh. Yeah, I like that a lot actually. So I think first of all we get a picture of Blooming inside of the mech of Empyrean, which I've described before as being very bird-like. And I think it is currently perched on Gumption's Gambit, or Gumption's arm that is still just implanted inside of the coliseum, and it's kind of sticking up out of the coliseum in like a closed fist. And, uh, Blooming, we just get that shot of Blooming just like slowly turning her head as you speak, in that sense of just like you've pulled her out of something. Out of like deep, deep thoughts. And then you just get this like brief pulse of positive response. Like no words exchanged. And then we get like the wide shot of seeing Empyrean take off from Gumption's arm and begin flying to like the other side of Seance, like around the cylindrical shape of it.

And then as you're moving through the city still, the cars do begin to-- they keep moving, but they slow down until it's like slow motion, and up in the sky you start seeing... Actually, you don't see this at all first. You don't see anything at first. The sky gets taller, is a weird thing to say but that's what happens. That's the beginning of what you see. And then actually, I guess you see this pretty quickly. Suddenly there is a second sky scraper, an inverted skyscraper, pointing downward, mirrored, that is slowly brick by brick being built, as a mirror to the world that you're in now. Um, and that is the quarantined backup that Blooming is building, that you requested. So you can like literally see above everybody, a second city as it starts to get built as a backup to this part of the prison. And then bit by bit the other parts, too.

Alright, Fourteen Fifteen. As Tender and Signet begin making their way through this weird slow car crash simulation, you are heading towards this temple. And you are moving through this crowd that is getting thicker and thicker, and Sho says,

AUSTIN (as Sho): I don't think we're gonna make it. There's just [sighs], there's too many.

JACK (as Fourteen): Well I mean, I think we can, you know, we gotta barge through a little. A little more than we're probably doing.

AUSTIN (as Sho): Should we split up?

JACK (as Fourteen): No. [laughs] No. Never split up. That's, that's one of, you know. Don't split up. And...

AUSTIN (as Sho): Wait. Didn't we just split up? With Tender and Signet?

JACK (as Fourteen): [chuckles] You're allowed one. You're allowed to split up once.

[amused noises]

AUSTIN (as Sho): A single... rule number four, one split up.

JACK (as Fourteen): And then beyond that, you gotta stick together. Especially since you're a trainee as well, 'cause if you go and you... and it's bad, then, um, Pure Cascara is not gonna be happy about that.

AUSTIN (as Sho): Is... Can we cut our way through?

JACK (as Fourteen): No. Uh, look. [breathy laugh]

AUSTIN: Her hand like drifts to her sword.

JACK (as Fourteen): I was gonna say, you've got that sword, haven't you? Um, have you had a chance to use that yet? On operations?

AUSTIN: She just like makes eye contact with you. And then like starts to pull it out.

JACK (as Fourteen): Okay. No, that wasn't me saying, "Use it on the shambling... uh, constructs." Please. Please don't. Cause that's, look. We don't know who these people are. We don't know if they are people. And even if they aren't people, it's not a good idea... to cut them with a sword.

AUSTIN (as Sho): When do we know when violence is appropriate?

JACK (as Fourteen): [breathes in] Well, violence is appropriate when... [chuckles] I'm not the person to ask here, necessarily, Sho.

AUSTIN: She pulls her sword out.

JACK (as Fourteen): Ohh. No-- okay. I wouldn't, but uh... if this is what we're gonna be doing?

AUSTIN: The people who are, there's this moment when she pulls the sword out and there's just like the single strum of whatever the stringed instrument is. And when it strums, it like... blocks

out the people chanting that name. And everything goes out into silence. It's like noise-canceling headphones or something. Like it's, it's, the sound wave is built such that it would silence them. And you can still see everyone's mouths moving as they chant and like bump into each other. It's completely packed. It's like New York-- It's like New York City-- it's like Times Square on New Year's Eve, right? Like it's like shoulder to shoulder, breathing room barely, um, and their mouths are still moving, and you can just barely, like in the distance, hear the sixteenth notes of some sort of stringed instrument playing. Um, very like... very full sound. A very, um, voluminous audio profile. Uh, but distant. And then where would be each kind of syllable of the name Aura Antigua, there is instead this like sharp singular note, until eventually even that fades away and all you hear is this like...

[AUSTIN starts vocalizing sixteenth notes]

AUSTIN: Like, and that is it. And even that is pretty distant. Um, and Sho like clasps the blade tighter around the hilt. Um, and she's mouthing words to you, and like shrugs, and you can't hear her.

JACK: Huh. Can I fire my pistol into the air?

AUSTIN: Sure. To what effect are you looking?

JACK: Uh, it's a combination of things. One, I want to see if I can enact a loud sound and what that will do. And also, I'm kind of clinging onto some sort of hope that by-- that the universal gesture of "Get out of the way" will work here.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Right. Huh. Give me a risk, unless there's another move here. Um.

JACK: Sure. I don't think so. Most of my moves are about dying.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Mhm. Weird.

[JACK laughs]

JACK: Um, oh God, I think I'm still scared.

AUSTIN: Okay, fair. Mark scared.

JACK: Uh, cause this is motivated by fear. Either fear that I'm not gonna be able to speak, or fear that-- God, it's the most Friends at the Table shit, right? A character asks "How do we know when violence is appropriate?" and then nobody can talk.

AUSTIN: Right. And then you take out a gun and shoot it.

[ALI laughs]

JACK: [laughs] And shoot it directly into the air.

AUSTIN: Uh huh. Hey, that's a nine, okay! So, with risk, when you roll a 7-9, I think I give you a hard-- a cost, complication or choice introduced by the MC. Um, so there is this moment as you pull the trigger that you do hear a sound, and then you hear a new second note play that like cancels it out, and it's almost like it's vacuumed away. And in that moment, you make eye contact with-- I'm trying to think how might this work. Sho looks at you, and then also one of the many people in front of you begins to turn to look at you, and you basically have this moment to communicate one thing, which is either "Get out of the way" or "Put that sword away." Um, and you have to pick one of those two things.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: You've gotten both of their attention and you get to do one of those two.

JACK: Okay. Uh, I'm gonna communicate, uh, "Get out of the way."

AUSTIN: Okay. And I think that person-- that construct-- did we describe them as having faces before? In my mind they don't have faces either. But maybe we should just let that be an iconoclastic thing. Maybe in fact they just have the same face?

JACK: Maybe they're like... Oh, what if they're like, um, you know sometimes in *Battlegrounds* when geometry doesn't load in?

AUSTIN: Oh! Good.

JACK: And you just get these amazing low LoD buildings.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

JACK: What if it's that for people?

AUSTIN: What if it's like that for people except the ones that are like the closest to you?

JACK: Mhm. Yeah.

AUSTIN: So like the 10 closest to you totally have faces, but as you get further and further away you just get that LoD drop and it's just mush face?

JACK: Oh God, yeah. Also, not to like just keep making comparisons, but um, in *Hitman*, if you look at an NPC from a distance, uh, the frame rate of their walk cycle is halved, and I bet that's happening to these people as well.

AUSTIN: Oh, totally.

JACK: It's as if they're moving at 30 frames a second if they're far away from me.

AUSTIN: Right. But like at least 60 up close, maybe 144?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And so yeah, I think they begin to spread and like push each other up against the wall to give you space, and they're like crawling over each other to get away from the person with the gun at this point. Um, and they open up like the Red Sea in the Ten Commandments, a pathway to the temple. Not that there was a temple at end of the other side of the sea, but in this world there is, and there is like this huge staircase going up to this temple, where you can hear the, uh, the stringed instrument being played. Do you just walk through?

JACK: I'm gonna run at this point, I'm picking up a pace. And Sho presumably still has her sword out?

AUSTIN: Oh, her blade is still super out, and definitely like puts her chest out when any of these kind of constructs even like gets near her at all, and almost is ready to go. Before finally you make it to the bottom of those stairs. And I think you climb up those stairs I'm guessing? You continue to look for the source of this?

JACK: Mhm, like three at a time.

AUSTIN: Okay. You're like hopping up bit by bit. And also another thing is, I think as you move through you still get the vibration of them all chanting "Aura Antigua", I think is still in the ground. It's still in, like, the physical force of them chanting is still there. You still feel it, once you're in the middle of them all. But you can't hear it. Um, and you climb the stairs and then there at the very top of the stairs, there is just this big open aired temple. It's like grey stonework for the floor and like very polished stones as a walkway. Um, with like a few kind of braziers that are lit with fire. A little stone garden. And then in the middle is just like underneath the big huge roof there is just polished wooden kind of floor, and then a few chairs, and then at the far end in front of... There's a banner that features a symbol that you would have to, given Fourteen Fifteen's recollection of Divines before...

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: And how many there might be, I would wager that maybe Fourteen Fifteen doesn't know, they don't know off the top of their head what that symbol is.

JACK: No.

AUSTIN: But you know it has something to do with the faith and the Divine Fleet, and maybe the office of the Cadent or something? Um, it's sort of like seeing the white house insignia and being like, "Ah, America, right? Something America?" And...

JACK: [laughs] [in a clueless tone of voice] Is this to do with a president?

AUSTIN: [amused] Right, exactly. Like, "Yeah, you got it, buddy."

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: And then there is a woman at the far end who is playing, like, a very... It's like an L-shaped... It's like a very long stringed instrument that is flat horizontal and then curves slowly upwards. And there are both strings all along it, like along the whole of this kind of like flat L. It's like an L where the long side is horizontal and the tall side is, or the short side is vertical. Do you know what I mean?

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And there are strings. There's a bunch of strings going along the entire side of it, and then also strings forming like a triangle from the top going down. And she's very skillfully playing all of these different strings. Uh, she's wearing a long, like, white plain robe, or dress actually I would say. It's not a robe. Like it's not as thick as that. It's just like a white dress. And her head is, around her head is a sort of crown. Um, that is, I mean like maybe it looks like a crown at first, and then it's hard to know if this is something that's on her head or something that is pushing in on her head.

AUSTIN: There are these little golden beams, like little golden lines, coming out or all around her head like a halo, that then come close to like a cage. Like a gilded, curvy cage that only-- it doesn't cover her face, it only covers the side and back of her head. And the beams, the golden beams that form this halo all around her, are like alternately pushing inwards and moving outwards.

[45:00]

AUSTIN: And you can see that the cage is like moving around her head a little bit, like trying to push in, and then as she plays, she's basically holding it out away from her as you step up. And that is what you see.

JACK: Woah.

AUSTIN: Uh huh. Sho at that point, like, just lowers her blade, but she doesn't put it away still. Um, Signet and Tender.

[ALI chuckles]

AUSTIN: You've made it to the base of the tower, of the skyscraper. How you doin'?

ALI: Well, we were not hit by a car, so that's great.

AUSTIN: There's zero car hits. Uh, you probably watch one crash very slowly, into the wall.

[ALI and JANINE groan]

AUSTIN: Uh, but it is, it doesn't hurt you. It doesn't hurt anybody as far as you can tell. A bit of the paint goop falls on it after it crashes and then scurries back up the side of the wall, uh, to get away from you. And you're just at the front of this building. There are like big front door-- what's the futuristic equivalent of, like... What, instead of having those rotating doors, you know what I'm talking about? What are those actually called? Not carousel doors. Are they called carousel doors?

JANINE: I have no idea.

ALI: [simultaneous with Austin] Yeah, I know what you mean. And they're just, like...

AUSTIN: [simultaneous with Austin] But you know what I'm talking about. Like revolving-- Revolving doors.

JANINE: Revolving doors, yeah.

ALI: Yes. Revolving doors. Yes.

AUSTIN: What is the Twilight Mirage version of revolving doors? [snorts]

JANINE: Carousel doors.

[ALI and JACK laugh]

ALI: It's revolving doors but it's just like a holograph.

AUSTIN: [amused] Just like... It's fun--

JACK: So you could just walk straight through them?

AUSTIN: You could just walk through them, I guess, okay.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Um, maybe it's just revolving doors. This has been like a weird mish-mash of multiple different places. Uh, and that's just like what's in front of you. You're at the base of this place, you can see the weird paint monster slowly climbing up the side of this building. And, um, you can hear it continue to echo the thing that it had been saying before. Uh, which was... Man. I'm trying to remember it by heart.

JACK: This is the...

AUSTIN: It is, it is... we are, we are the river and it is the sea? Um...

JANINE: Run to it or run dry but all will run.

AUSTIN: Yeah, or run fr-- I don't think it was run dry. Or maybe it was run dry.

JANINE: I think it's-- it is run dry.

AUSTIN: Yeah. You're right, 'cause we are the river. Yes. Totally.

JANINE: Yes.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Good call.

JACK: It's the, it's the "all will run" bit that's most pressing, I think.

[ALI laughs]

ALI: Um, where's the cloud? Is it still like--

AUSTIN: Straight up.

ALI: --near the tip of the tower?

AUSTIN: It's very at the very tip of the tower. Yep.

[ALI sighs]

JANINE: I just wanted to like, specifically roll for more information. Basically.

AUSTIN: Sure, what's that look like?

JANINE: [laughs] I was trying to think of a way to dress it up, but it's really just like, it's probably just like Signet looking at stuff. [laughs] Like, maybe the heads up display on her interface is like doing the stuff it does in anime where various numbers are flashing in little boxes, or...

AUSTIN: [laughs] Okay.

[ALI laughs]

JANINE: Face tracking software and things [laughs] are happening.

AUSTIN: Of course. Uh huh. Um, so is this, it sounds like you're doing "analyze" maybe?

JANINE: Yeah, analyze.

AUSTIN: Um, again it's either "analyze" or "lift the veil", it's up to you. Or--

JANINE: I think in this specific case it's "analyze", because it's like...

AUSTIN: Sure.

JANINE: It's not really piercing the illusion.

AUSTIN: Right, yes.

JANINE: Like there's a degree of this that's like playing along with the illusion.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JANINE: You know?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Alright then, go ahead and give me an analyze. How ya feelin'?

JANINE: Man, fuck. I... [groans]

[ALI laughs]

JANINE: In this specific moment, probably like slightly harried, but not really.... Things probably don't feel... well, all the cars. I was gonna say, "Things don't feel out of control," but I guess she slowed the cars down, so that's like...

AUSTIN: Uh huh. Yeah.

JANINE: Kind of in cont-- I don't, I don't wanna say-- I'm gonna go with peaceful.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: Probably not powerful, that's a stretch.

AUSTIN: Probably.

JANINE: But like, things still feel like they're in hand.

AUSTIN: Okay, then yeah, mark peaceful. And then go ahead and roll it. Oh, buddy. That's a six.

JANINE: Fuck.

AUSTIN: Uh, Tender could help.

ALI: I would love to help.

[JANINE laughs]

AUSTIN: How are you helping?

ALI: I think that it would actually, is like Tender steps forward, and then Signet puts her hand on her shoulder, and then the interface pops up?

AUSTIN: Ooh.

ALI: Um, so then [laughs] like, Tender does the same thing and uses her, like, forensic eyes to also be like, "Okay. If we're assessing, this is the thing we're both doing."

AUSTIN: [simultaneous with Janine] Is this a thing that you've done before?

JANINE: [simultaneous with Austin] Also there's like a little blinking cat emoji in the bottom of my heads up display.

[ALI and AUSTIN laugh]

AUSTIN: This is really good. What's, what does Tender--

JANINE: Like, paired indicator.

AUSTIN: What is the icon for this for Tender's UI? When Signet shows up.

ALI: Um, I don't know, cause it's just my... Hmm.

AUSTIN: I mean you still get a cool UI, it's the future.

ALI: Yeah. I do still get a cool UI.

AUSTIN: Maybe it's like a, is it a... like an instagram filter? Is it like, uh...

[ALI and JANINE laugh]

AUSTIN: 'Cause it can be a presence, it doesn't have to be... Is it a sound? You know what I mean? Like it could just be like... something, it's anything that signifies that you're doing this together.

ALI: Yeah, I think it's like a... like an overlay of, kind of like the color changes a bit?

AUSTIN: Mhm. Cool.

ALI: Where it's like, usually either what it is or like black and white, but now it's kind of like a peach color almost?

AUSTIN: Ooh, that's nice.

JANINE: Ooh.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Alright. Give me a... give me a, how are you feeling?

ALI: Yeah, what do I roll to...

AUSTIN: How are you feeling?

ALI: [sighs] Um, I think this is gonna be also peaceful.

AUSTIN: Okay. So then mark peaceful. Make sure you unmark one mad when you mark peaceful. And roll.

ALI: Okay. But I'm just rolling...

AUSTIN: Peaceful.

ALI: Plus one?

AUSTIN: No, you're rolling peaceful.

ALI: Okay okay.

AUSTIN: Which is zero in this case.

ALI: That's an eight.

AUSTIN: Hey! Okay, so that means...

[JANINE sighs]

AUSTIN: You get pushed up to a seven. Um...

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: That's good, Janine.

JANINE: Thank God.

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh huh.

JANINE: Shit.

AUSTIN: Uh, okay, so when you roll a 7-9, ask two of these questions and make sure you take +1 forward when you act on them.

JANINE: Okay, so the first thing I wanna ask is, how is the goop monster vulnerable to me?

AUSTIN: Um, you notice that it is... I think like it gets to... As it's being copied over into this quarantine zone-- it is not being copied over. As this city is being copied over, you can see that it is like trying to basically jump into the little building blocks that are being brought over into the copy. Do you know what I mean? Like you can kind of see in the digital overlay as little bits of the building, bit by bit, brick by brick are like

[AUSTIN makes "pew pew" noises]

AUSTIN: Like going upwards in these arcs to rebuild the giant skyscraper. And you can literally see the goop try to jump onto one of those bricks, and it just falls down. And suddenly you get that that is part of why it's falling down like that, is that it keeps trying to get onto the transfer

that's going into the backup server that's been set up, that you set up with Blooming. With, yeah, with Blooming. And so one thing is just it is stuck here, that is one way in which it is vulnerable. It can't leave here as far as you can tell, at least. So that's a big vulnerability. I'd say that second is that whenever it gets split apart, you can see that the big goopy monster part is slower, and it has to wait for the bits that fell off to like reconvene for it to pick up pace. It has to like regroup with them, before it can move fast up the wall again. So those aren't the sort of vulnerabilities where it's like, "This is how you kill it," but that is how it is vulnerable to kind of being... for you stopping it from getting what it wants.

JANINE: Okay. I get a second question, right?

AUSTIN: You do.

JANINE: Um, I don't-- where's my best way past, I think, might be... like way in, way out, way bast. Like the door is the obvious thing, but...

AUSTIN: No, I'll give you more than that. I think you're like in this vision mode and you see that there is an elevator. That there's like five elevators in the elevator lobby, and one of them will take you right to the top of this place. And you know which one, because you've done this scan, and have kinda found... Like it is an elevator in the physical sense, and it's also kind of like a quick route. It's like a shortcut, Tender, that will take you right to the top. Directly, without having to deal with any of the other, like, levels.

JANINE: Cool.

ALI: Okay, I love elevators, though, so I don't know why you're... [laughs] using that tone.

AUSTIN: Um, because you literally have a belief that says, "Never take a shortcut."

ALI: [laughing] No, I know, but...

AUSTIN: Okay. Making sure that's clear. This is one.

JANINE: [laughing] Okay, Tender, let's go take that shortcut.

ALI: I guess. Sure.

AUSTIN: Do you just take it?

ALI: [as a breath] Yeahh...

JANINE: Um, I think in Signet's case she's gonna walk straight forward.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: What about Tender?

ALI: Yeah, I don't, like... Yeah! [laughs]

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: I-- I-- I have a belief that's against that, but I don't, like, I don't feel the like... tension here with it, I guess? Cause like... the focus on just wanting to be able to fix the thing.

AUSTIN: I would say then maybe it might make sense to rethink that belief. This is like--

ALI: Okay.

[talking over each other]

AUSTIN: When captains[?] don't-- when-- when--

JANINE: This seems like-- this seems like a weird case, though.

ALI: Yeah, that doesn't... yeah, the...

[crosstalk ends]

JANINE: Because like, what's the alternative, is take two elevators...

AUSTIN: Okay, well then think about the-- think about the alternative here, though, which is: one, it means you're not gonna get the XP that you would get. You should have something that should be testable in a scenario like this.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: So that you have to, so that you get that XP. Like that's number one, right?

ALI: But I mean, so like what's the longer alternative here? Is it like take the stairs? Is it that--

AUSTIN: No, it's take any of the other elevators. It's take any of the other elevators that do not go direct. And then you'll have to deal with whatever else that elevator goes to.

[ALI laughs]

JANINE: I-- I don't know-- I don't... Hm.

AUSTIN: I mean, I think that's-- like, it's fine? What I'm saying is there are other things on the floors between you and it.

ALI: Right.

JANINE: Is a highway a shortcut?

AUSTIN: Yes. When I say it is, it is.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Like when there are other ways, it is. Like... this is the, that's the belief.

JACK: I think a highway is absolutely a shortcut, if...

AUSTIN: Yeah. Like if it means you don't have to go through a small town? Yes.

JANINE: I mean... [sighs] I don't, I disagree but it doesn't matter.

[JACK laughs]

ALI: Yeah, I sort of also do. So.

AUSTIN: [simultaneously with Janine] Well, then, what-- I mean, tell me--

JANINE: [simultaneously with Austin] I mean to me the shortcut in this situation is like, Tender flies up the side of the building.

ALI: Right, exactly.

JANINE: With her mesh power.

ALI: Or like I change the environment so I don't even have to go up this tower, like I've had all of those options.

AUSTIN: Well then that should be-- okay, but then that should be an ability, and then that belief should be about how you use your gift to never take a shortcut.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Not, "Never take a shortcut," because "Never take a shortcut" is broader. That is, especially when you talk about it in the physical world, right? Like, you describe this as being a

reflection of stopping at every level in the elevator. Like you literally-- that is literally where it comes from.

ALI: Okay. Yeah, I mean, sure. [laughs] I guess I'm gonna go against them now, and we can...

AUSTIN: Sure. Just rethink-- just--

ALI: Figure it out later, 'cause like...

AUSTIN: Think about it, 'cause I want it to be something that you can get XP from.

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: Which isn't gonna happen if you don't think it applies in a situation like this. Do you know what I mean? Okay. Um, so you get on that elevator, and it is not-- it is in fact not-- It just, you're in it and then instantly it goes like, "ding!" And you're at the top of the building. Looking out, down, onto like-- it opens up to like a very small restaurant, with a 360 degree view of the city. Uh, to the north further outside of the city, like the river opens up into a lake to your north.

And then a desert. And in the desert you can see a weird spider robot? Or like something with big spindly legs that I guess at the very least Signet recognizes as being... the robot that was in the chess room or like in that first room that Signet went to. Just trying to flee. That's Soft Stone, who was the robot with like the big orb head, the big sphere-- not spherical, it's like oblong chrome head, and is just trying to like run away into the desert.

And then below you, if you like look down from the top of this kind of penthouse restaurant, you can see the goop monster continuing to climb up. And at this point you are, like, you'd have to leave to reach it? You'd have to leave like the confines of this restaurant. But you're basically eye-level with this white cloud, which up here you can see is like... made up of infinitely smaller white clouds. Like as you look at it, you can just see another like-- it's not just-- it's like fractal in that way, but very curvy, very... like, kind of, not bulbous, but like you can see these little clouds and if your attention strays just so, it's hard to tell-- or if you focus too closely on it, it's hard to tell where the outside is and where the inside is of it. Like it's hard to see, okay is that the outer edge of it? Or is that a smaller cloud deeper inside of this thing?

And then you're just up here on this level, otherwise. I think there's like a bartender construct who is just like constantly cleaning a single glass.

[ALI sighs after a long pause]

ALI: Okay. Um, well, we also have to go outside to get to that cloud. It's like outside of the window?

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's outside of the window. There's like a balcony that you can step out-- you know, like a nice-- on the outside of the-- I'm imagining it as a circular room with glass all around it, and then a balcony outside of that glass that you can get to from the door. From like a door.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: And above that is where it spirals up into this weird curvy, like, again plantlike shape. Almost like a root or something, do you know what I mean?

ALI: Right right right.

AUSTIN: It's kind of gnarled.

ALI: Um... [sighs] Can I analyze the cloud? I was looking at "Lift the Veil" and I don't think that that...

AUSTIN: Totally.

ALI: Applies. But I think like that's the enemy right now, so to speak.

AUSTIN: Yeah. This is the cloud that you determined in the last time we recorded, just as like a refresher, is doing the thing where it's copying over individual people from the prison and putting them in these different simulations. Right?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So yeah, totally. Is this the same thing as before with the eye?

ALI: Um, yeah, I think so.

AUSTIN: Okay. How you feeling?

ALI: [sighs] I think probably still peaceful? I think that moment with Signet before was kind of like, "Okay, we can do this. Let's just take a step back

AUSTIN: Yeah. Okay. Yeah, go ahead and...

ALI: "and look at some stuff." So.

AUSTIN: That works. That's a bad roll. That's a five.

ALI: [groaning] That's a baaaaad roll, that's a bad one.

AUSTIN: So. Um... what were you looking for here?

[1:00:00]

ALI: I...

AUSTIN: What were the questions that you were going to ask be?

ALI: I was mostly looking to see how it was vulnerable to me.

AUSTIN: Okay. So, there is this brief moment where, um, and you don't know what causes this. But one, you like go into that mode, and for a brief moment Signet's coloration is still there, and then two, you can feel the like... I think maybe the goop begins to make its way up to the top layer? And when you look at it from this close with this eye, it begins to like infect the user interface, actually. Like it's in your eye. Right?

And then the white cloud, like, pushes it away. Um, and makes direct connection with you. And like prevents-- gives you clear vision, and you can see not only your vision, but you can see its vision of the entire city space? And it... [sighs] is able to like communicate with you. I don't wanna say speak to you. There is no... embodiment here, but you've dealt with constructs like this before. You've dealt with artificial things that have, artificial beings that have selfhood even if they don't have what you would traditionally think of as personhood. And it wants to know your name.

ALI: [groaning] Hmm... Umm... I think I offer that? [laughs uncertainly]

AUSTIN: Um. You sense that it senses in you the desire to-- it like begins to prod at you, looking for the port in your cyberbrain. And then realizes there isn't one. And then like, I think we visually almost see this. Or it's just you, looking into this cloud. And there is this almost like tendril-like thing happening inside of the cloud that is-- it's as if you can see yourself in the cloud. Or like, you know what I mean?

ALI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Like you can see your body, and like it's trying to reach into your brain, realizes it's not there, and then like very instinctively, or instinctually, forms a little helmet around you. Like as if to protect your brain when it realizes what your brain is.

[ALI muffles a laugh]

AUSTIN: And then like offers to stay there.

ALI: Uhhhhhh...

AUSTIN: Like it senses that you don't want-- it senses that there's no cyberbrain and then senses that you don't want other people to know that you can just do this without one of those.

ALI: [breathy laugh] I'm trying to think what I know about this cloud at this point. Besides the fact that it's associated with like the Earth Cult?

AUSTIN: Uh, the thing that you know is, let me just-- so one, it's doing the copying of the prison; two, the first time it showed up on screen was the very end of the first ship session. It showed up after Gumption died.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Off in the distance.

JACK: When you say copying-- when you say copying of the prison, you don't mean Blooming's clone, right? The...

AUSTIN: I don't mean Blooming's copy. Sorry, I-- yeah.

JACK: The main copy.

AUSTIN: I mean making these little simulations for the individuals who are there and then bringing them over to it. Yeah, my bad.

ALI: Yeah I like, it seems like a villainous cloud, one. And second of all I like

[JACK laughs]

ALI: I don't, like, brain intimacy is not a thing that I'm super fond of.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: Um, so [laughs] If there's a way that I can like reject this, I would love to.

AUSTIN: Totally. What's that-- is it just like-- what's the thought that you communicate, or is it even, is it pre-verbal?

ALI: I don't even know that it's like a thought so much as it is like a recoil?

AUSTIN: Mhm. It pulls away from you. But like, in a sense it's like, "Alright, I'll be here."

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: And you're back in your head at the top of this building, and the goop monster is now pulling itself up. And I think we're gonna jump back to Fourteen Fifteen. And then we'll deal with the iconoclasts again when we come back. Fourteen Fifteen and Sho, you're walking into this temple, and there is this woman who is playing this instrument. What do you do?

JACK: Um [sighs] I'm gonna call out and see if I can-- see if my mouth makes sounds.

AUSTIN: It does at first and then she begins to cancel it out, but does make eye contact with you.

JACK: Okay, I'm going to... [sighs] Sho is presumably still holding her sword.

AUSTIN: Oh yeah.

JACK: Albeit lower. I'm going to hold my hands up but with my pistol in my hands, so it's clear that I have it, but also that I'm still definitely holding onto it? And I'm going to approach her, uh, across the room. Across the shiny floor of the temple.

AUSTIN: Okay. Sho, like, turns her back to you and begins to like walk-- like follow you back-stepping, while watching the kind of entrance to make sure that no one's following you up quite yet.

JACK (as Fourteen): Good work, Sho.

AUSTIN: She nods, and like-- she like has her blade out and then also kind of like pulls her headscarf a little bit tighter on, as if to make sure like-- she's ready to go.

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And you approach this woman, um, who continues to play but does not make any aggressive or, um-- she doesn't like motion for you to stop getting closer. And eventually you're close enough to like look at her in the face. She has pale skin and hair that is losing its blonde coloring. And kind of light grey eyes, and a small nose, and I think that's pretty much like-- a very pointed chin. Like a very-- not just pointed actually, sorry, it extends out past her lips a little bit, you know? And is like... looking at you and like tilting her head just a little bit inquisitively.

JACK: I'm gonna try and say,

JACK (as Fourteen): My name is Fourteen Fifteen. Who are you?

AUSTIN: Um, and she stops playing for just a moment and you can hear them say

AUSTIN (as the constructs): Aura Antigua.

AUSTIN: And then the rays on the side of her head, like, crunch inwards a little bit, and she begins to play again.

JACK (as Fourteen): Can you stop playing? Is that thing making you play?

AUSTIN: She like slows it down and you can hear-- she like slows her playing down and you can hear them chanting her name outside. But it's, the playing is quiet enough that it-- they're just background texture, both her playing and the people chanting outside. And she says,

AUSTIN (as Aura): It is painful when it is loud...

AUSTIN: And like, slowly moves her head just a little, a few inches downwards to like punctuate what she said.

JACK (as Fourteen): Why does it have to be loud?

AUSTIN (as Aura): It has never been this loud.

JACK (as Fourteen): Are they coming? Here? The figures?

AUSTIN (as Sho): Yeah, they're coming!

AUSTIN: says Sho, who like steps back forward toward the entrance.

AUSTIN (as Sho): They're getting closer.

JACK (as Fourteen): What will they do when they reach you?

AUSTIN: She shakes her head.

AUSTIN (as Aura): I am not sure.

JACK (as Fourteen): Do you want them to reach you? Sho? Uh... We-- we can do something about this. Uh...

AUSTIN (as Sho): Fourteen, there's a lot of 'em.

JACK (as Fourteen): We can do something about some of this.

AUSTIN (as Aura): I'm not supposed to go.

JACK: Can I-- God. [sighs] I'd like to examine her-- I guess her cage-crown?

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

JACK: Um, I think this is "Probe"? No, that's for talking to people. "Analyze."

AUSTIN: What are you-- what are you looking for? Maybe, I mean this might just be a thing you can see. I mean, what is the...

JACK: [sighs] I wanna see...

AUSTIN: She keeps playing as you do this, too, so we just see her like playing these strings as you get closer.

JACK: I wanna see... I wanna see how it's connected or if it's connected. And I wanna try and get some sense of, uh, what might happen were I to remove it. And intuiting that is tricky, and...

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

JACK: I guess--

AUSTIN: I think this is-- this is "Lift the Veil".

JACK: Oh, this is a Veil-hat that she's got on?

AUSTIN: You're in the Veil. Right? You're piercing-- this would be piercing the constant illusion of the Veil.

JACK: Oh yeah.

AUSTIN: And trying to figure out, like, what is this? Is this thing-- is this a thing that just works physically, or is there another thing happening inside of the Mesh that this is like doing?

JACK: Yeah. Um, what is the--

AUSTIN: How're you feeling?

JACK: Yeah. What is the emotion associated with curiosity, which I guess is appropriate?

AUSTIN: [laughs] I think that depends-- for me that depends on what type of person you are.

JACK: Mhm. Yeah.

AUSTIN: But it's probably either peaceful, powerful, or joyful?

JACK: So I think that to an extent this is powerful, because while we're being advanced upon by these low-poly people down the corridor, Sho is between them and me and she has a large sword. And it's quite a large temple? And it's almost as though-- it feels almost like a stand-off against the tide, and so, Fourteen is going to take the time to sort of pace around this figure.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

JACK: You know when, like, when you look behind your desk and there's all those cables down there?

AUSTIN: [laughing] Uh huh!

JACK: And you know that you could reach in and start pulling cables out but you'd be like, "Oh, God, is that the monitor?" So instead you play a sort of lateral thinking puzzle of what is connected to what.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: I'm trying to do this with this hat that I don't know what it is

[AUSTIN laughs]

JACK: And seems to be causing [laughs] pain? So I'm gonna roll Powerful. I'm gonna take one off Scared, right?

AUSTIN: Yep. You got it.

JACK: Okay. Nice. Here we go.

[gasps]

AUSTIN: Hey! That's an 11! Look at that roll! Look at that good, good roll! On an 11... I think this is our first 11, or a 10 or above on "Lift the Veil."

JACK: I think this is the first 11 I've ever rolled.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: The MC will give you good detail. On a 7-9 the MC will give you an impression. Uh, it is... so you're just kinda looking around at it, right? So as you get closer you also kind of see that it is not just a cage with like... There are shapes in the metalworking of the cage around her

head, that are two different humanoid figures. With, um, kind of one of them is reaching out and has their hands around the throat of another one. You also notice as you do this, too, that there is-- as you get closer you can see kind of behind this, kind of-- What I'm imagining is like a coda or a zither kind of instrument. But with this weird L shape.

And you can see now that like her dress at the bottom of it is permanently a little bit wet. It's just a little bit like there's water at her feet, her feet are as if they were in the water recently, too. You're not sure what that's about. And what you notice, besides the physical workings of the crown/cage is that you can see-- and you'll have to tell me how Fourteen notices this or understands it, I'm curious-- that it is... with every sound she hears, it is making her relive some specific memory. So that's one.

Two, you know that it's not supposed to do that. It's not supposed to do that in terms of-- it's not supposed to respond to sound in that way. It's supposed to respond to her desire to work through specific memories. It's supposed to be a thing that like-- almost like VR goggles, except a weird head cage? Um, that helps her revisit her past.

JACK: And it's gone wrong.

AUSTIN: It has gone completely wrong. It has been made to go completely wrong. And that the only way to remove it is for it to go onto the head of someone else. That is what you know about it.

JACK: It just takes on a new...

AUSTIN: Yeah, like it is not-- whatever removes it, whoever removes it, wears it.

JACK: Oh, God.

AUSTIN: And it might not be a crown that time. It might be a different shape, or a different-- You can see, maybe you see it in the metalworking. You see almost this, like... what's the-- a hieroglyphic story happening in the physical metalworking of the side, where like you see it being removed from one head and being placed-- or taken by somebody else, and then it becomes a gauntlet on their arm. And then someone pulls it off of their arm, and then it becomes a pair of leg irons on the next person.

JACK: Ohh, God. This is horrible.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: Okay. Well, so first I'm going to call out to Sho, and I'm going to say to be quiet. From here not to say anything.

AUSTIN: Sho, like, starts to-- and then she just like nods her head, as if, like, "Okay. Yep. Mhm."

JACK: But presumably we can still hear the voices of these people calling this woman's name.

AUSTIN: Yes. At this point, now that you're not talking, she does begin to play more rapidly and loudly, so that she is cancelling out their voices again. But they are getting closer, and so she's needing to play more rapidly still.

JACK: Ohhkay, right. I'm going to... I'm going to try something now. I'm going to, uh, walk back-- turn and walk back down the corridor so that I'm level with Sho. And I'm going to try and shoot one of the constructs.

AUSTIN: Okay. What's the-- there are so many of them, I'm not gonna make you roll for this. You totally do. And again there's like this sound, like the beginning of the gunfire sounds, and you can hear her adjusting to cancel out the rest of it, so that it isn't echoing around inside of this temple. And you shoot one of the constructs, and it falls, and then someone just steps right-- literally steps on them to get closer. There are thousands of these people.

[1:15:00]

JACK: Does this... is this woman relative to our mission as far as we know in any way?

AUSTIN: It depends on what you define as the mission. Um, she is clearly a prisoner here. She's clearly, this is not what her rehabilitation is supposed to be. Um, insofar as the Beloved Dust is supposed to be a force for good in the Divine Fleet, yeah, she's relevant. She's relevant in the sense that like, your jobs-- you're a hitman. This is not a hit, right? This is supposed to be, save the people who were here, which includes the... The Vice-warden as much as, or Antigua as much as Blueberri Jin. They are not less because they are inmates here.

JACK: Right. I was-- yes. They are contained-- she is contained within one of the objectives.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: Um, the name doesn't do anything for me, does it?

AUSTIN: That-- Mm. Yeah, maybe it does. Here's the-- hm.

JACK: I can roll for this

AUSTIN: No.

JACK: But I also wanted to take an action, so I kind of don't want to--

AUSTIN: I feel like it's-- well, the thing is, I feel like maybe this should be given to you as part of "Lift the Veil", because "Lift the Veil" also includes recalling something you may already be privy to. Does Fourteen Fifteen keep up on killers?

JACK: Yeah, absolutely. It's, you know, Austin. You-- you read game sites.

[JANINE laughs]

AUSTIN: I do. Exactly. That's kind of what I'm thinking.

JANINE: They're full of killers.

[ALI laughs]

JACK: Yeah. They're full of--

AUSTIN: The current Cadent is the Cadent Under Mirage. The last one was the Cadent Over Mirage. She who leads us ahead, our living will and strength, the Beacon, may her life be a signal to the universe. Aura Antigua killed the last Cadent.

JACK: Oh, okay. Wow.

[ALI sighs]

AUSTIN: She drowned her.

JACK: She dr-- Okay. Whoo wee.

AUSTIN: I don't know how many details you know beyond that. Um, you certainly don't know the why. [laughs]

JACK: Hmmm. This is-- this is-- this raises something interesting here, which is in the last episode for us, or I don't know when it was. We saw Fourteen's unhappiness and lack of warmth towards Correction.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: Precisely because they'd killed Divines.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: But, at the same time, [sighs] this seems to be someone for whom the system is not working.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And central to, I think, a lot of citizens of a utopia is an attempt to prevent people from facing systems that aren't working.

AUSTIN: Mhm. And, from what you could tell, Corrective was fine. Right? Like, Corrective's simulation was not being touched.

JACK: Yeah, absolute-- I think that like, I'm trying to work out an internal headspace of a character that can be furious and, I bet Fourteen-- would I have been around when the last...?

AUSTIN: How old are you? Oh, do you remember? That's-- that's an interesting thing actually, is, is this a memory you didn't know you had?

JACK: [laughs] This is absolutely a memory I didn't know I had. And I can't tell you where it's from.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: But I know I have it. I suppose as well this is one of these things that, this presumably happens to Fourteen occasionally? To the point where they've kind of gotten to a stage of the like, "Okay, this is a memory I have now. I'm not sure where this is from."

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yeah. This--

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: This job is something--

JACK: This is information.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh huh.

JACK: This is information that I have.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Then, yeah. They were definitely alive when this happened. This-- we talked before about the Cadent Under Mirage being taken out of school at a young age and blah blah blah. This is... why that happened so quickly. Or I guess she was taken out of school for training, right, so that was probably already happening. But the reason that she is so young is that this happened probably in the last 15 years, right? 20-- 10 years, maybe, even.

JACK: Yeah. Which is fairly recent history for me.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh, if Signet was here, Signet would immediately be like, "Oh yeah, that's Aura Antigua, the one who killed the last Cadent." Like yeah, of course.

JACK: [laughs] Do the Cadents go Over Mirag" and Under Mirage respectively, like in a--

AUSTIN: No. This was the name "Under Mirage"-- this is just me giving you this. Signet would know this, again. As a response to the death of "Over Mirage". It was a way to inscribe mourning forever in her name.

JACK: Oh, wow. Okay.

AUSTIN: Like most of them are just like-- oh, you know, the Cadent, you know... Carrying Hope. The Cadent, you know, of... The Fleet's Eastward Expansion. It's ranging from very material specific things to kind of vague positive, um, what's the word I'm looking for that I'm not finding?

JACK: Sort of gestural things?

AUSTIN: Yeah, exactly.

JACK: Okay, here's what I'm gonna try and do. I'm going to... uh, go and walk in front of Sho so my back is to the-- to the flood of these people approaching. I'm going to take my pistol out of its holster and pop the clip out to show her how the clip works.

AUSTIN: Uh huh.

JACK: And then I'm gonna give her my pistol.

[MUSIC- "The Twilight Mirage" starts]

JACK: And point at Aura. And then I'm gonna try and take the helmet off Aura.

AUSTIN: [sighs] Okay.

JACK: To be clear, just because Austin, just to be clear-- It is implicit within my gesture that I am not asking Sho to shoot Aura.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yes, I understood.

JACK: I just, I don't wanna take the thing off and then have Sho shoot her.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I [laughs] I gotcha. Yes. I'm terrible, I'm not-- Sho is not that person, do you know what I mean?

JACK: [laughs] Okay, good.

AUSTIN: Like I think that's a key thing. Um, I think you just make eye contact with Aura, and... she takes a second, like you move in with your hands, and then she like pulls back. And then like, eye contact, and then she's like, yeah alright if you say so, and then kinda leans forward a little bit.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: And like looks at you, keeps eye contact as you do this, and begins playing the instrument without looking at it. And then we see Sho looking carefully between you two, and then down at the people who are coming up the temple stairs.

[MUSIC ends]