Twilight Mirage 55: The Vault of Anticipation Pt. 1

Transcriber: thedreadbiter

[MUSIC - "The Notion" starts]

AUSTIN: Through and across the dunes of the planet Altar run threads of powder blue. For those that live on the world, they are an unavoidable and unsolved mystery, an always-present flourish of color and texture that complicates the palette of the otherwise orange-brown planet. The threads are a conversation starter, a common excuse for tardiness, and a valediction, too. "See you by the threads," people say as they leave work, or depart from their friends for the evening. "Apologies," you might tell your parents. "I didn't mean to miss dinner. I just got caught up in the threads."

Like satin vines, they climb the adobe walls of the Sanctum of Versatility, and crawl across the sacred paths in the Garden of Fidelity. In the Cathedral of Dissent, they hang in long arcs from the rafters, a woven sky above the ground's overturned pews, broken candles, and everburning hymnals. In a temple of black marble and gold flourish, a fraying twist of yarn stumbles its way into a closed briefcase seated on a glass lectern, and from its opposite side emerges a singular strand of the same soft color, smooth and righteous.

Among the many faithful of Altar, the threads are not only a mystery in the common sense, but in the holy one as well. If a common desire for their perished Divines had beckoned the reliquaries to Altar, then perhaps these threads, in all their forms, were the response to devout prayer, too. And so, driven partly by intellectual interest and partly by spiritual need, people began to follow the threads. Now, after a year of intense study, concluding with a joint expedition between the Waking Cadent and Sho Salon's Temple of the Lost, this impulse was proven correct. There in a crater at the base of the Mountain in Repose, disparate threads became literally one. Each line was only a part of a longer one, silk tied to cotton, cotton to linen, knots hidden in sand and wall and catacomb, all leading, eventually, to the Vault of Anticipation, a locked tomb resting in a caldera on top of the dormant peak.

[MUSIC ends]

Welcome to Friends at the Table, an actual play podcast focused on critical worldbuilding, smart characterization, and fun interaction between good friends. I'm your host, Austin Walker. You can follow me on Twitter @austin_walker. Joining me today, Janine Hawkins.

JANINE: I'm Janine Hawkins! You can find me @bleatingheart on Twitter.

AUSTIN: And Ali Acampora!

ALI: Um, hi! You can find me @ali_west on Twitter.

AUSTIN: My agenda—or, today we are continuing our game of Scum and Villainy, by Stras Acimovic and John LeBoeuf-Little. And my agenda is not on my screen right now, because it's not in these notes for some reason! Uh, where the hell did my notes go? Oh, I know what I did. There we go. I put a hyphen in here, and it changed it—anyway, my goals! Are. To convey the fictional world honestly, to bring the Twilight Mirage to life, and to play to find out what happens, and to make everything cool, weird, and touchable.

Um, we are kicking off the first of this new set of arcs, and there's only three people here, as you can hear. And I just wanna like quickly I guess set up what the vibe of these next little—this next mini set of arcs is? You know, we're getting kind of close to the end of the season, and I thought it was a good idea to kind of split things up in a way that would get you a little more of a picture of the entire area—the entire Mirage, the entire Quire system—but also, it felt like there was a moment here where people's interests were a little diverged? Also, maybe one of you was stuck on a—or one of the team was stuck on—the capital ship—the flagship of an enemy fleet, so, you know, we'll have to deal with that separately. It's a whole thing. But for you two…I really wanted to focus in on the situation with the Waking Cadent, and with Anticipation! So the end of the last—the end of the what-do-you-call-it game. The faction—not the faction. The downtime [ALI: Downtime.] game. Yeah. Y'all both—or maybe not even at the end, but during the downtime game, you received information pointing you towards Altar, and a promise from the Waking Cadent that there was something there—there was a relic, a remnant of Anticipation that could be used to revive the supposedly dead Divine.

So! I'm trying to think if there's anything else we have to say before I kind of set up the situation. I guess what I'll say is there's gonna be a little bit of time jumpiness involved here? A little bit of montage at work? And this next like session is basically going to imagine it taking place over the course of like a month. The…we'll kind of zoom in at the end of that month, but like you know there's stuff that goes in ahead of time. So…you arrive on Altar, right, we get y'all kind of arriving and saying hi to Janey and Serge, who are the mechanics who helped fix up The World Without End.

I think we meet—we see y'all meeting up with Shoghig, Sho Salon, who runs the Temple of the Lost, which is the temple that is kind of dedicated to all of the lost…Divines? All of the Divines who died, you know, who are already dead, and—kind of with an emphasis on those who died long ago, or like you know not in living memory? And she kind of trains people there in theology, and archaeology, and combat. They're all like [huffs a laugh] little Shos, in a way? You know, they're kind of like her swordsmanship technique, and her school of theological thought, which has kind of changed I think probably, since the Miracle? Much less Cadent-focused, as you might guess.

But the goal of that school is to go out and explore and study the many many tombs that dot the sands of Altar, where relics of the Divines have landed and kind of a combination of the Divine power there and the will of the people on the planet have become this kind—this whole kind of tomb world, covered in—you know, apparently ancient, but we all know that it could only have

been a year ago—you know, mausoleums, and catacombs, and temples, and all sorts of things, all seeded around these relics.

So I think that we get y'all climbing the stairs of the Temple of the Lost, and meeting with Sho, and I think we see you know—it's like I imagine it's like kind of almost like a pyramid thing with like big red and brown stairs. And we get an image of Sho, and she's kind of much more casual lolita style now. She doesn't have the same like…she is not as precious as she once was. And the colors are a little bit darker? It's like all burgundy and sienna and orange, now? We get kind of just like a wordless scene or kind of like we can see mouths moving, but we don't necessarily have to zoom in on this conversation, where she explains and kind of confirms at least part of what the Waking Cadent told you, which is—the Waking Cadent—who again, she definitely has her own issues with. There is a relic of Anticipation here, and she does also believe that it could be used to bring Anticipation back. The two groups undertook this expedition together, and what they found out was all of these little blue threads that were all over Altar were actually…tied together as a single thread. Almost like very precise wirework. You know, I don't know if you've seen—there's a portrait artist who does portrait with like a single piece of thread around nails? Like just like—she hammers a bunch of nails into a board, and then like twists the wire around all of these nails—

JANINE: Well, that's like an Etsy thing. Lots of people do that now.

AUSTIN: Sure. [ALI laughs] Okay, so it's that, except it's the whole planet. Right? And eventually it leads to the…this volcano. And there are three temples, or three—they're not all temples, but three structures that are at the kind of base level, at the middle, and at the very top of the volcano, and we kind of [huffs a laugh] get I think a montage of y'all going from like all across the entire planet following this line, because what Sho explains to you is that during their kind of study, what they realized is, it's all one temple—or it's all one thread, and if you pluck each individual thread, like that's tied together—they're very long threads, to be clear, like some of these threads are miles long, but if you have someone pluck each of them at the same time, the outer gates of the temple to Anticipation, the Vault of Anticipation, will open.

And so they've opened that vault. They've not opened the Inner Vault yet, and Sho's theory, because she has studied very closely, and remembers what happened at Contrition, and has listened very carefully to people like you two, is—she remembers that Anticipation loathes a shortcut. And so believes, based on that, and based on some stuff in the outer kind of area of the Vault, that you have to pluck each thread in order. And so I think we get just like a montage of Signet and Tender and Sho going through catacombs, and like climbing little hills, and like, [huffs a laugh] you know, diving underwater [ALI chuckles] to find all of these threads, and pluck them, one at a time, for like a month. It's long work, but they've been catalogued, so it's not like you're discovering them. Right? It's just about walking the path again.

And it's important that you do this, Sho explains, because no one else wants to. Even though it means—it would mean getting Anticipation back…everyone finds other, more important work to

do. And partially that is because it's [amused] kind of a pain in the ass, but also it's because there is sort of a lingering distrust of Anticipation here. After all, The By-and-By became the center for Seneschal's Brace, the…Cadent Under Mirage and Declan's Corrective's kind of governmental unit…where the members of you know kind of Anticipation's culture have started living side by side with people from the NEH, and there's a sort of like, "Cool, we're gonna give *them* a super powerful Divine again? Rad." And so the people here are, you know! They wish you well on your journey. You know, they wish you well on your pilgrimage. They think that you, Tender, as a member of—as a priestess of Anticipation, obviously it is your duty to do this, and encourage you, and give you good deals on food and [ALI laughs] water, you know? But like. They ain't goin.

Is there any questions about any of this stuff, before we get to kind of where we're at at this moment?

ALI: Oh…I don't think so! I don't know that I can think of anything.

AUSTIN: All right.

JANINE: Yeah, me neither.

AUSTIN: Okay. So, we just get that montage and then—again, we're kinda like—I'm definitely speeding through this, because I don't think this is a—this isn't a four-episode arc, you know?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So, we get now the moment that we're at. It's the two of you at a kind of archaeological base camp, at the base of this giant mountain. Very like orange sky…kind of like bubbling sound in the distance, presumably from kind of open lava veins or whatever. The sound of wind. And the base camp is kind of sizeable, because it's Sho, it's a lot of Sho's best students, including a recent arrival, Winchester Went, who was the girl that Tender, Grand, Gig and Fourteen were sent to recover from the Sailors of the Ark? She has since left and joined up with Sho, after like Cascara and Seneschal's Brace kind of put her in contact? She was…she was kind of like, you know, "I've kind of served my time here at the Sailors, I kinda wanna go do—I kinda wanna go be like the people who saved me, or who like showed up?" And so got put in touch with Sho, and came to join the Temple of the Lost. So those two are here. Other students are here, obviously. There's a few more people that you recognize.

Signet, you recognize someone who we haven't seen on screen, but…Weyerbach Zwei, who is the leader of the group called the Method of Apotheosis, which is the group that y'all gave Polyphony to, and Barricade to, to kind of like figure out how to turn Barricade into a Divine? So they are there, Weyerbach Zwei, and they are like [sighs] [amused] I have a hard time imagining them as anything other than the Speaker from Destiny. You know, the guy with that like white mask—that white angular mask, and like the robes and all of that. Except I think that for them,

for Zwei, it's like…[sighs] similar angular—one, it's not a mask! It's just their robot face. They're an algorithm inside of a robot body. They can take this kind of humanoid shape, they could also take other shapes, or like put their mind into other machines. I don't know that this—I think this is probably like an agent, like an agent body, it's not like…if this body was destroyed, the core algorithm would continue. Like, it's been around for thousands and thousands of years. They're not going anywhere, right? And then the other thing that's different about this than the Speaker is I think that when they speak all of the kind of slots on this like very angular, geometric head all light up and like vent out steam very slowly as they speak.

And then there's someone else that you both recognize here, which is that the Waking Cadent sent Blooming here, who is now the excerpt of Compulsion, and is there along with Compulsion, who we described in the downtime episode. I also think Blooming's name changed. I figure this is the most extra season, and we're allowed to get extra in kind of corny ways sometimes? And I so, remember, Blooming used to be **To the prince we offered twelve thousand flowers, blooming in an untouched field**, and now I think they are **And a spark kindled carpet into flame, turning solemn sanctuary into crisis, blooming and bright**.

[15:00]

They're still Blooming! You can still call them Blooming.

[ALI laughs]

But that is their—their full name has changed. Um. And so here's what we know. In front of you, you have this—you have all these students, you have kind of resources to pull on, you have the base camp, you have all these other characters here. In front of you is the first of the three remaining places you need to travel through and threads you need to pluck? There is the Arena of Eon and Naught, which is a kind of joint Divine. That's on the ground level of this mountain. Then there is the highest—so then the middle level is the Basilica of Pleroma, who is a third-generation Divine that we could roll to see what you know about. And then, at the very top, in this kind of crater on the very top of the mountain, is the Vault of Anticipation.

Sho is not coming with you. Sho has done this journey already, and has already plucked—has already spent her time plucking these…threads, and literally can't be the one to open the door, because she had her chance, and she does not have another chance to pluck in the right order. Just the two of you. But she, and everyone else here, can be in constant communication via not only the communicator but this device that she has, which is a relic from—it's called the Communicant Relic, it's from the Divine Communicant. And it's sort of like an old scrying bowl? You know, it's like a bowl with water in it? I guess maybe she puts sand in it. That's kind of way more on-brand for Altar. But it's basically just like the kneecap of a dead Divine, called Communicant. And she can use that to—anybody here can use that to communicate with you, and kind of enact a sort of copresence, which we'll see if it comes up!

Any questions at this point, now that you're at the base camp, and there are characters here, and it's time to move forward?

ALI: Do we know what the order of the last three is?

AUSTIN: Yeah, so it's just you're climbing up, right, it's like [ALI: Oh, okay.] there is a single blue thread I think running through the desert at this point, towards the Arena, which is in front of you, and then from there you know it goes up to the Basilica, which is on the second level, and then the Vault is the very top.

ALI: [yawning] Okay, I…

AUSTIN: So. Pretty straightforward.

[ALI laughs]

I think also if you have any questions about these Divines or anything, I'm not gonna make you roll…about anything that's like too—anything that you could like go look in a book in Seance about, do you know what I mean? Like you've had a [JANINE: Mm.] month. You could [ALI: Yeah.] have learned whatever. So feel free to ask me questions about any of this stuff, at any point like as we continue. Do you know what I mean? I think that that is—unless it's something that I think is like secret knowledge, in which case like that's when we can do an information roll, but I don't think researching should ever cost you flashback stress this session, because you've had lots of time to do that, and I think it's fair to be like, yeah, before you went on this journey, you looked some shit up. You know? Um. So. Keep that in mind. Does anyone wanna just share words with any of these other people?

ALI: I don't know! Not stuff that we would have to like keep the camera on, right? Like I would love to check in with Winchester, but it's like a…

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: …"Hey, glad you're here. How are your [AUSTIN: Mm-hm.] classes," or whatever sort of [cross] thing. It isn't like a whole…

AUSTIN: [cross] They're go—right.

JANINE: [cross] Yeah, that's—

AUSTIN: That's fine! [cross] That sounds g—people love that shit. Like.

JANINE: [cross] That's kind of the thing, is there's a lot of like…[ALI chuckles]

AUSTIN: It's good!

JANINE: There's a lot of stuff that like because we're skipping through a month here, it's like well they've probably said hi to so-and-so. [laughs] Like.

AUSTIN: Right. Well, I think these people—like this is the day you've all gotten here, to this place. Do you know what I mean? Blooming and—Winchester's probably been around. But like Blooming just arrived. Weyerbach Zwei just arrived. And, to be—I think that I should be clear about why they are there, which is like, in a sense they are both vying for whatever you find. Weyerbach Zwei, again, is the one who is working on turning Barricade into a Divine, and has not yet done that, but has been working on it. Behind the scenes, I've been rolling that between sessions. And they have been moving very slowly [laughs slightly].

[amused noises]

Which [cross] works out—

JANINE: [cross] Fitting, considering it's Barricade.

AUSTIN: Fitting, because fitting a—because it's Barricade, and also I think fitting because the notion is—not the Notion, sorry. That confuses things. Part of the—I think part of the stress here is they haven't shown that they can do it. They haven't shown that they can turn an Axiom into a Barri—or into Divine yet, and we haven't seen them turn a relic back into a living Divine yet, either. But we have seen the Waking Cadent take an Axiom and turn it into a Divine. And so…Blooming is there like very much as like "All right, when you're done here, give me whatever you find, and I'll bring it back to the Waking Cadent and we'll get this taken care of." And that is—she very much I think stands there as like proof of the Waking—even if she doesn't take it literally like she's like "Hey, look. The Waking Cadent isn't fucking around. [huffs a laugh] I can do this thing, or she can do this thing." You know?

And then I guess like the third—I don't know. We'll see what other options there are, right—but I guess to some degree like you could take that relic and just give it to Sho, and she'll put it in a temple in Seance, where it will be worshipped. Right, like a lot of what Sho is at at this point is like—she's in some ways the opposite of the Waking Cadent, in that [sighs] she's given up on the Cadency? [huffs a laugh] Like she doesn't really think that there needs to be a human component of the church, at this point—or of the fleet, of the kind of Resonant Orbit? She doesn't think there needs to be like a human executive figure, but she also…has come to see Divines as…you know, real living things, obviously, but also…more like saints, in that they are to be learned from—more like saints from someone who prays to saints, or who focuses on saints as a meditative or academic interest than people who pray to saints so that the saints will solve problems for them. Does that make sense? It's like, what is the lesson that can be learned from Anticipation, instead of how can Anticipation literally physically, materially help us. So those are kind of the factions at play, I think, at the base camp.

And then yeah! It's a blue thread, running through the desert towards this kind of coliseum-looking Arena. I think it actually—it opens up a little bit more. It's like it's not like—or not opens up more, but it's almost like…conical in shape? And like at the base is where it's thinnest, and then it kind of opens up—so it's almost like…an amphitheatre, more than a…like the Coliseum? In terms of what it looks like on the outside. I guess it even sort of looks like the coliseum from the very beginning of the season, except that one was like hard angles, and not like rounded? This is kind of rounded. But yeah! It runs right up to a wall that is a weird—it looks like a weird purple energy field. And it's like there's the physical outside that is keeping you from climb—or like from like walking in, there's like walls, and then there's this entryway that has a weird purple energy field, and that is kind of where we'll do engagement for this little mini-adventure.

ALI: Um, Have I spoken to…my Cadent at all?

AUSTIN: Sure! What would you [ALI chuckles] like to have—I mean. I mean. Yeah, that's a totally fair thing to have done.

ALI: Yeah, just to kind of see like—I mean, cuz there are other people here being like, hey, I would love to have that. Right? [AUSTIN: Mm-hm.] Like am I here to like bring it back to her, or like…

AUSTIN: You're here because—why are you here? You tell me. [cross] Like the Waking—

ALI: [cross] No, I mean, I know why I'm…[laughs]

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: But like in my—is she like, hey, go, you know, go do that. [cross] And then—

AUSTIN: [cross] This is not a mission for them at all.

ALI: Okay. Fair enough.

AUSTIN: Seneschal's Brace is not like telling you to go do this.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: If you want to have told them about this, that is fine. And I think their response is very much, that's fine to investigate that. You shouldn't be fucking around with—we told you not to fuck around with the Waking Cadent. Like. More admonishment? [huffs a laugh] About that? [ALI: Mm-hm.] And, if you go, bring it back to us, and we'll figure out as a group where it should go. Whatever you find.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: But like, doubling down on last time when they were like, don't stick your hand in the stove? You know?

[ALI laughs]

Like, don't touch hot things, don't fuck with the Waking Cadent, was absolutely what they said, and they stick by that, and I think are probably frustrated with you for not listening to them. [huffs a laugh]

ALI: Fair…

JANINE: Before we like *go* go, can Signet ask Blooming a question?

AUSTIN: Totally.

JANINE: I think…I think this actually probably happens like quickly after Signet sees Blooming?

AUSTIN: Sure.

JANINE: And there's not a lot of like pleasantry around it, so I'm not gonna—like there's probably some, I don't need to go into it [AUSTIN chuckles] but I imagine there's [ALI chuckles] like a little bit of like, hi, like. But I think the thing Signet like most wants to ask Blooming is what it's like to be an excerpt under the Waking Cadent.

AUSTIN: Blooming says…

> (as BLOOMING): There is a clarity here I did not know before. I have freedom to pursue my understanding of myself as an excerpt, of the living text…and of what the Resonant Orbit really is. As the excerpt of Empyrean, I felt only like…I was holding things together. Now I feel like I am flying free.

JANINE: [slight laugh] I don't know that Signet's—I think Signet like maybe says something that acknowledges that, but I think she probably looks like not pleased with the answer, but also just goes.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. [JANINE mutters] I'm trying to think if she says anything or asks anything of you—oh! I actually have a question is like, did you bring Belgard to this? Is Belgard still on Thyrsus? Is this a situation where like you would want Belgard nearby?

JANINE: [sighs] I don't know. Partially because we have really like sidestepped Belgard.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Post-Miracle. So it's often difficult to think about what Belgard's…not—Belgard doesn't have a role in things, necessarily, but Belgard's perspective is still a thing that exists in this world, [AUSTIN: Right.] but we haven't really [cross] talked about it. Or done stuff with it.

AUSTIN: No, we haven't. We haven't touched it. No.

JANINE: A lot of it being for like—it's really fuckin OP and stuff to just [AUSTIN chuckles] have Belgard hang around [ALI laughs] all the time, so like that's not fair.

AUSTIN: I think like the narrative reason we've talked about it is like Belgard is best served—or the [JANINE: Yeah.] Divine Free States are best served with Belgarde paying attention [cross] to stuff there?

JANINE: [cross] Yes. That's—yeah, that's the other thing is Belgard still being out and operating is a way to buy Signet the kind of time needed to do this other stuff.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Cuz like you know the Fleet or the…collection of stuff out there can [AUSTIN huffs amused] afford to maybe have Signet distracted for a little bit, but it [AUSTIN: Right.] still…at least in her eyes, can't afford to have Belgard distracted for that same amount of time.

AUSTIN: Right. Totally.

All right!

JANINE: This is kind of a particular case, though.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's the thing. That's my kind of—maybe not for the whole month, you know, but like I'm curious if we see Belgard there at the camp, you know? Or in orbit, or something. You know? Where…or maybe a situation where it's like, all right…we're gonna line this up so that it's when Belgard would be on Altar anyway, you know? Going through and repairing [JANINE: Yeah…] stuff, and…

JANINE: Yeah, that makes sense. I feel like a weird…something [laughs quietly]—I'm inclined to trust this, I feel like weird about Belgard being at the camp. Something about [AUSTIN: Yeah.] feels…

AUSTIN: That's fair!

JANINE: …bad to me.

AUSTIN: [amused] Yeah.

JANINE: And I think that's a feeling I would trust as like a Signet feeling of just like [cross] I don't know if that's what we want.

AUSTIN: [cross] Yeah. Trust your instincts. Yeah.

[ALI laughs]

JANINE: But I think also having Belgard on hand even to like do some of this research-y stuff.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: To consult things in a way that is more complete than what can be done remotely.

AUSTIN: Totally.

JANINE: To have those conversations about like, what am I doing here?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Is this a good idea? Who do we trust here, like what do we…yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I'm with you.

Cool! All right! So then that stuff taken of, this blue thread leads to the front of this arena. Again, there is just kind of a big—I'm imagining it like a open archway, except the archway is filled in with again what looks like a kind of purple energy field. A glowing purple energy field. And your—we were gonna open with an engagement roll here? [huffs a laugh] I just need to know like how are you getting inside of the arena, is really what it comes down to.

Let me pull up our engagement rules…

ALI: Yeah…Where's our list…

AUSTIN: Mm-hm…

[ALI laughs]

I think it's actually just in the actual book, really quick. Here we go. So!

“Six different plans, each with a missing detail. Assault: do violence to a target. Deception: lure, trick or manipulate. Infiltration: trespass unseen. Mystic: engage mystic way or ur-power. Social: negotiate, bargain or persuade. And transport: carry cargo or people through danger.” Sho does let you know that the last—when she was here last, this purple wall was not there. This was not the situation. [huffs a laugh]

ALI: Okay. Oh, yeah, that—okay. [laughs] Something weird here.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Otherwise she’d just be like, hey, yeah, just here’s—pull this switch, or whatever, you know. [laughs]

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But no.

ALI: Okay. That’s a thing to keep in mind, cuz I’d [AUSTIN: Mm-hm.] already forgotten about that.

AUSTIN: Right. That she’s done some of this stuff before. And can give you tips.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

ALI: Exactly. Yeah. Um. I mean, this is…I mean, either mystic or transport, I would guess?

AUSTIN: Yeah, I could see like mystic being something to do with clearing this energy field, I could see…

JANINE: Have we done any mystic entanglement [cross]—engagement rolls in this…?

AUSTIN: [cross] No. Never once.

ALI: [cross] No. This is the time. [laughing] [cross] This is—this is the…

AUSTIN: [cross] This is the fuckin time.

JANINE: [cross] Yeah, I was gonna say, this feels like the time.

AUSTIN: [ALI laughs] Uh-huh. Okay. So which arcane—

JANINE: We don’t get a bonus dice or anything, but…

AUSTIN: [amused] No. You don’t—well! No. You don’t. Wait—

ALI: You should give us one.

AUSTIN: You do! You do. Well, we'll see, right? Because the…

[ALI laughs]

That's [JANINE: Mm.] how this works. Right? So the detail. I need to know what is the arcane power you're using here.

ALI: Um…I mean…does anything happen if I try to attune? I would be surprised if I wasn't.

[30:00]

Right? Like. Just going temple to temple, trying to attune with it, just to like…

AUSTIN: No! Yeah, I think that that's fine. [cross] So you—are you—

ALI: [cross] Feel less out of sorts. [laughs]

AUSTIN: So you're using kind of your Stratus power, you're using your attune to do this [ALI: Yeah.], it's not—Okay. Totally. That's fine. That's a perfectly fine—so what's that feel like or look like? Is that about just like accessing what the emotional state of this area is, and seeing if you can open the door with your mind, is it…literally—is it making [ALI laughs] making a doorway inside of the wall—do you know what I mean, like there's [ALI: Yeah.] a lot that you could—that whatever your attune looks like.

ALI: Right, yeah. Hm. [sighs]

JANINE: Can I propose some fuckin bullshit?

ALI: Sure.

JANINE: Um. The thing I'm thinking of right now is in a magical girl show, when multiple magical girls like…

[AUSTIN huffs a laugh and continues laughing silently]

You know, when one lends their power to another for whatever [ALI: Mm-hm!] reason, and you know there's the hand on the shoulder moment or something, and then a lot of like glowing, and then like music picks up [laughs]?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh!

ALI: Uh-huh! [wheezes]

AUSTIN: Is that what's happening?

JANINE: That'd be cool!

AUSTIN: Uh-huh! [ALI laughs]

JANINE: We don't have a cat, we have a robot beetle, but.

AUSTIN: You do have a robot beetle.

[ALI continues laughing]

Um. Yeah!

ALI: True. [cross] Yeah!

AUSTIN: [cross] And I think even Sho could be there as part of the magical girl—I think this is maybe all of the magical girls here are here. [ALI laughs] Helping y'all opening this door. Right?

JANINE It does work best when you have like an arrow formation, [AUSTIN: Totally.] with like the main magical girl at the head.

AUSTIN: [cross] Uh-huh.

ALI: [cross] Right.

AUSTIN: So it's like hand on shoulder with Sho and Signet and [JANINE: Mm-hm.] Blooming and Tender, and also—

JANINE: And Tender's hair is doing the thing where it floats.

ALI: [cross] Yeah. Uh-huh.

AUSTIN: [cross] Very good. Very good. Oh, and Winchester can be there—Winchester doesn't have any magic powers, so it can't be [ALI laughs quietly] Winchester.

She can be there! She—

JANINE: Believing! Believing [cross] and love are magic powers.

AUSTIN: [cross] She does believe.

ALI: [cross] Yeah. Yes.

AUSTIN: That's true. That's true. [chuckles]

ALI: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: All right. So yeah, we do that. Okay, so "is this operation particularly bold or daring? Take +1d. Is it overly complex or contingent on many factors?" It's not overly complex. I'm not sure it's bold or daring. [laughs]

[ALI and JANINE laugh]

It's rad, but I don't know that it's bold or daring. [cross] Does this—

ALI: [cross] I mean—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh?

ALI: I think like holding hands with Blooming right now is [laughing] particularly [AUSTIN laughs] bold or daring!

AUSTIN: Fair. Yeah. Um. Yeah…[ALI giggles] I'll give you 1. I'll give you 1. That's fair! All right, "does it expose vulnerability of the target or hit them where it's weakest, take +1. Is it strongest against this approach?" This is what it's weak to. It's weak to attune, right—or it's weak to space magic, right, like that's…this wall is supposed to protect it from people who wanna fuckin walk inside, not people who are space wizards, like y'all. [ALI: Mm-hm!] So take +1, so that's 2.

"Can any of your friends or contacts provide aid or insight for this operation?" That's literally what you're doing, and also yes, so take 3. And then, "are there other elements that you wanna consider. Maybe a lower-tier target will give you +1, maybe a higher tier target will give you -1." Um! I think for this part of this, this is like to tier with you, so not +1 and not -1. This is…you know, these are—this isn't a living Divine, right? This is something that's happening because of the relic of the Divines that are here, but are also still, hey, it's still Divine. So even though it's dead, [huffs a laugh] you know, it still has a lot of power. So, that's 4 dice. Start with 1, and then 1, 2, 3 bonus dice. So 4 dice!

Who wants to roll it?

ALI: I rolled so many 1s last [laughing] time…

AUSTIN: Uh-huh! You did.

ALI: [cross] I rolled all of them.

AUSTIN: [cross] I got the fuckin squad of 1-rollers here today.

JANINE: [doubtful] Oh—mm…

AUSTIN: It's gonna go great!

JANINE: I've been *okay* recently. I think.

ALI: I don't remember the last time I had a good roll…[silent laugh] Oh, let me just do it.

JANINE: I can—

AUSTIN: You just—4d6, let's do it. Here we go.

[ALI laughs]

JANINE: This'll break the streak, and then we'll be great. The whole thing will [cross] go great.

ALI: [cross] 4d6? I took 5. Okay.

AUSTIN: [cross] Mm-hm. And you get two gambits—you can't use a gambit on this, cuz it's not an action roll, it's just a fortune roll, but.

ALI: Right. But we have them. Okay.

AUSTIN: Yeah. There's a 5! [ALI: Okay!] There you go! There you go!

JANINE: Yeah! Woo-hoo.

AUSTIN: Mixed result, you're in a risky position when the action starts. But that's still better than [huffs a laugh] being in a desperate position! [ALI: Mm-hm…] So. Okay. There we go. All right. So is there just like—okay, so two questions. Or two things. One, I can tell you about what the emotional state of this place is, which is…a sort of…a sort of playful conflict? You know that Eon and Naught—so E-O-N and Naught, N-A-U-G-H-T, are both third generation Divines. They are…sort of siblings? They're sort of—they kind of emerged from the third generation pool of Divines at the same time, and took a liking to each other, and then became inseparable? And in history, their excerpts often were either had literal familial bonds, or figurative ones. They were always very protective of each other. They were often very like…devoted to…helping not only each other, but helping out other people as a…duo? There was a sort of Wonder Twins aspect, they were kind of annoying to some of the older Divines and excerpts!

[ALI laughs]

They were always kind of prodding and overcurious, but also could be kind of moody, right, like they are—Eon, they are like a long, long time. They are forever. They are the notion of being around indefinitely, and also they are Naught, they are nothing. But [sighs] depending on the generation, depending on like who their excerpt was, and how things were going in the Fleet…there was always—there was flexibility on which one of them was the optimist and which one was the pessimist.

Right? Because on one hand, you know…you would think that the one that's devoted to this idea of longevity would always be the optimist, and the one that's devoted to nothingness would be [huffs a laugh] the one who's the pessimist, but there is something really nice about the idea of possibility! And so Naught was often the one who was the optimist, and who could imagine, like, oh wow, you know, we basically—there's—nothing exists, basically. Like basically anything can happen, because nothing here matters. And so that's a great deal of possibility that the future could bring.

And Eon could be really depressed and like pessimistic, especially as the Fleet started to die off, because it was like, we've lived for so long and all of that's coming to a halt. Or, are we really going to be stuck like this forever? It's like, I'm going to obsess over this notion of a long period of time. Time is long [huffs a laugh] and if time is long and also it's stuck like this, we're on the fucking run, with dozens of us left? It's miserable.

And so that's kind of what you know about them. And that's kind of the emotional residue of them? Except right now, what you're getting from them is a sort of playful combativeness, and as the two of you walked down the—there's kind of like a gladiatorial entryway into this arena, you can hear like—it's almost like the sound of like…do y'all do metal pan—as kids, did you do metal—banging metal pans, clanging metal pans at midnight on New Year's Eve? Do you know that that's a thing?

JANINE: No.

ALI: I think so.

AUSTIN: It's like a celebratory thing where my mom's family is from, is like if you go outside in fuckin Wilkes-Barre, PA at midnight on New Year's Eve, you can hear people just like clattering metal pans together. And just like making loud noises. And that's basically what you hear as you walk down this kind of gladiatorial entryway that's silhouetted and you can kind of see the red clay field out in the middle of the arena. And you can see shapes moving back and forth, and I think when you first come out it would be fair to assume that what you were looking at were like Iconoclasts fighting each other?

It's two groups of humanoid shapes…or at first, at least, humanoid shapes. Sometimes they stop being humanoid and become other shapes, either specific things like a big like net or sometimes like just like big globs of material, and one side is made up of empty canvas, and the other side—that canvas has kind of like dirt and red clay dust on it and stuff like that, but otherwise is like they're people made of empty canvas. And the other side are people that literally look like they've been made up by the night sky. The night sky without any of the Mirage in it, which you don't see very often. You've never been in a place where you can just see the night sky before, right? So. That's—it looks like just stars, on black.

And you notice pretty quickly that they're playing like a combination of dodgeball and soccer. And none of them have note—like they're kinda like bouncing around, and like there's—here's the basic sport. There are nets on either side.

[ALI laughs] There is like one big blue ball, which is very clearly—it's a like glowing bright blue ball, that is like the scoring ball? And then there are five orange [breathes in loudly] glowing balls, and those are just dodgeballs. And you can like knock people out with them? [cross] And like shatter them.

JANINE: [cross] This is Quidditch!

AUSTIN: No, cuz you're throwing them at each other. It's—and no one's on broomsticks! They're running around!

JANINE: No, this is like college Quidditch! [laughs]

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Well, yeah! Duh.

JANINE: [Over Ali laughing] Okay.

ALI: Kay!

JANINE: I feel like I need—

AUSTIN: Well they're more like—they're just soccer nets. There's big—there are no hoops in the sky. And also they're [JANINE: Okay.] people who become three—like three of them combine and turn into a giant baseball glove. You know? [ALI: Ohhhh!] Made of canvas.

JANINE: Yeah, you don't see that in college.

AUSTIN: It doesn't happen [ALI laughs evilly] in—the college students aren't good enough at magic yet.

ALI: Mm.

AUSTIN: Leviosa doesn't get you that. Is that one of the ones? Is Leviosa—that's levitating?

ALI: Yeah.

JANINE: Wingardium Leviosa is the full [AUSTIN: Wingardium. There you go.]—leviosa—that one's probably nothing, I don't know.

AUSTIN: Great. Thanks.

[ALI laughs]

Guess I'm never gonna be a wizard. Um.

[JANINE laughs]

So yeah! That's what you kind of see at first blush. And then you notice—I could actually draw their symbol. They have a really cool symbol. Let's see if I can do it in a way that's not terrible. One second. Uh…

Okay. So do you see the shape here? It's almost like…two peas? Like one facing the right direction and then one upside down, facing the other direction, so…at first blush, it just looks like a circle with a line vertically down through it. But when you look closely, you can see that that line is a single thread. It's actually very si—it's a single thread, right? It's one thread that's making the shape of a circle with a line vertically through it. And you can see that that shape is above the arena, like high above the arena, and is made of this blue thread.

And…you already plucked the version of it that is visible, right? That is above you. Like, so again, the goal is to pluck every thread that's tied into this one big thread, right? And so you've plucked the version that is above you right now. I'm gonna draw another thing really quick like on this, which is…make sure I figure out how to do this the right way…so. The version that you've already plucked is the part that I'm gonna redraw with blue. Boom. There we go. So, imagine a rope, and then there's a knot, and then another rope. Imagine like two blue pieces of rope, and there's a knot, and one of the pieces is cotton and the other part is linen. Right? Or two textiles of your choosing. [huffs a laugh]

You've already plucked the cotton and the linen is hidden currently in like almost like a glass tube that runs along the entire outside of this arena. And you can see it! You can like look and see like that's the part we need to…we need to pluck, but it's inside that fucking tube right now. And you can see that that rope is moving—that thread is moving back and forth as the teams score. And so when Naught scores, the knot gets further away from you, angoes deeper into

that glass tube, and when Eon scores, it gets pulled out. It's like a tug-of-war based on scoring. Does that make sense?

ALI: So we have to [JANINE: Yes?] help them win?

AUSTIN: You either have to help them win or help them—or make them lose so badly that that part of the thread gets pulled all the way through the arena and then outside to be behind it. Either way. Or actually you don't need to help them win! You need to get the—here's what's actually gonna happen. I'm gonna make a clock. Here we go.

[ALI laughs gleefully]

[JANINE sighs] Classic Austin. All right. This is a unique clock in that this clock is like a tug-of-war clock, basically. Um. You need the score to be close enough that the part of the thread where it switches over is above the arena.

ALI: Ohhh!

AUSTIN: So that you can pluck it. Do you know what I'm saying? Does that make—whoop. [cross] Hey, that's a nice blue.

JANINE: [cross] No, what? I thought I understood, but I don't understand that at all.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: All right. So right now the part of the thread you need to pluck is hidden away in the kind of—in this glass tube. I mean, I guess you could also go break the tube and pluck it, which I wouldn't stop you from doing. But I don't know if the things here would, though. So we'd have to have that conversation. Right now the part of the thread that you need to pluck I'm just gonna draw it as a different color is what I'm gonna do so that you can kind of just see what the fuck I'm talking about. You need to pluck the purple part of this. Right? But it's hidden away—the only part of it that's visible is the vertical line in the middle of the circle. Like the middle middle of the circle, like inside the circle. Does that make sense?

JANINE: Mm.

AUSTIN: So as…Eon scores it will pull that part in. It'll like pull down this way and pull it back up into the visible part, it'll pull it out of its kind of tubing so that you can actually reach it. But you also need to make sure that they don't win so well that it gets pulled like—I mean, I guess as long as they're winning you're fine. As long as they're like tied [ALI laughs] or winning, you're fine, basically.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: That's how it works. Basically if this clock is at between—everything over 3, you're good. Is basically—and right now it's at 1, which is not above 3.

ALI: Okay.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: And right now it's risky because like…hey, these ghosts, they're—basically these are ghosts of Divines that are like possessing weird materials to play a game with each other in the night. You don't know how long this is gonna go on for. And you also don't know how they'll react to seeing you here. But that is what you see. You see these weird teams of Divine echoes, basically, playing—Quidditch with each other.

ALI: [laughs] Um. Well. I last night just played a *Yakuza 7* story that was very similar to this.

AUSTIN: Oh, wow.

[JANINE laughs]

ALI: And I know the thing that I have to do is like go and play that game so hot-blooded with them that they're like [laughs] we're gonna rest in peace now! That was amazing.

AUSTIN: Oh, wow! Right, cuz then you can just like go do the thing. Okay! Let's talk about that. What's that look like?

ALI: [laughs]

[45:00]

Um! I—uh. I don't know! That's the thing, like how do they like—you said that you didn't know how they were gonna react if we approached them or whatever, like.

AUSTIN: I do—*I know* how they'll react!

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: You don't—[ALI: I don't—] [amused] *you* don't know how they'll react!

ALI: [laughs] Signet, are you up for just being like, hey, guys. [JANINE: What?] You know, deal me in. I don't know! I don't [laughing] know!

JANINE: Deal me in on your ball game!

AUSTIN: Deal me in! Yeah.

JANINE: [over ALI laughing] That's what people say. Break me off a piece of that five-ball game.

AUSTIN: That's it. You—five-ball. That is what it's called. Thank you.

ALI: I would love [cross] to turn into a glove with you.

AUSTIN: [cross] This actually might be called six-ball? [laughs]

ALI: Oh. Six-ball…

JANINE: Mm.

[ALI sighs]

AUSTIN: Um, we should note, Tender, you do have the distracted harm still.

ALI: God. Okay, I don't even remember that.

AUSTIN: Did you not clear that? Did that not get cleared at some point?

ALI: No, I got distracted because I found out about the…

AUSTIN: Oh, right. Fair.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Honestly? [ALI: Yeah!] Fair.

ALI: Mm-hm!

AUSTIN: Mm-hm! So Signet, by the way, you've noticed, Tender has been super distracted for the last month!

JANINE: [chuckles] Yeah, it's been weird.

AUSTIN: If you were doing anything else except this specific thing, I would clear that distracted. Like if you were like, [ALI: Oh yeah, I know.] oh, we're gonna go kill Advent, or something, like yeah. Get rid of that. You're focused on killin Advent. But this is literally the thing. [huffs a laugh] So.

ALI: Yeah, this is my season status, is…

AUSTIN: Yeah. [laughs]

ALI: [laughing] Basically what's going…!

AUSTIN: Eh, we'll see. Your stress is also at 5, so.

ALI: [sighs] Uh-huh.

AUSTIN: Anyway, yeah. Are you gonna be like deal me into the six-ball game?

ALI: I mean, I don't know if we're the team of sneaky-sneaks, right? Like. [wheezes with laughter] I feel like Tender and Signet would just be like, oh, there's some cool ghosts here. Let's see what's up. [laughing] But maybe I'm sneaking! I don't wanna speak for Signet or Janine.

JANINE: Um! Okay. Does Tender like in the moment—okay, so they're like looking at this ball game.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JANINE: Does Tender like turn to Signet and ask like, should we do…this? Or like is there any…or does she just like watch it for a bit and try and figure out a way to get in?

ALI: Um, I mean I imagine we've been watching it long enough to like understand the knot puzzle, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Everything [JANINE: Mm-hm. Yeah yeah yeah yeah.] I just said is, assume you succeeded at like a study roll. You know what I mean?

ALI: Yeah. [laughs]

AUSTIN: It's also really complicated to explain, but physically I think it would be very obvious. Do you know what I mean? Like [ALI: Right. Yeah.] if I could show you a literal diorama, you'd be like, oh yeah, just pull on this string and you're good to go. You know?

ALI: Yeah. I feel like the *Uncharted* cutscene game of us like…

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: …coming over the hill and looking down and seeing all these weird ghosts, and being like, oh, okay. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Classic *Uncharted* cutscene.

[ALI and JANINE laugh]

JANINE: That's just a gunfight.

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah.

ALI: But yeah, I mean like in character, I think I would suggest like,

> (as TENDER): I mean, you know, what's the worst that's gonna happen if we just walk over there, right?
>
> JANINE (as SIGNET): I mean, something horrible could happen, but. What else are we gonna do?
>
> TENDER: Yeah. Horrible things can happen every day, but we're never gonna have this chance again.
>
> SIGNET: Th…
>
> [TENDER laughs]
>
> That's true, I guess.
>
> TENDER: Mm-hm!

JANINE: All right, I think that's good enou—I know how Signet like enters into this game.

AUSTIN: Okay?

ALI: [laughing] Okay!

JANINE: Because it's a thing that I have been neglecting.

AUSTIN: Oh, shit. [cross] *Oh, shit!* Hell yeah! All right, I'm excited.

JANINE: [cross] For some time. And it's like the perfect time to be like right, remember this cool thing? The kinetic sash.

AUSTIN: Yeah!

JANINE: Seems like a really good way to fuckin hit a ball around and look cool.

ALI: Ooh.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Yes, it does!

JANINE: So. I think Signet—I don't even think Signet asks, I think like maybe there's a ball that is about to go out of bounds, or something, and she's like on the sidelines, and she like walks up and then like smacks it, like—was there like a Skullgirl that has hair-hands?

AUSTIN: Yeah, that sounds…

JANINE: You know the fighting game?

[ALI makes an amused noise]

AUSTIN: That sounds right?

[ALI laughs quietly]

JANINE: I can't tell if I'm thinking of *Skullgirls*…

AUSTIN: Or…

JANINE: *Queen's Blade*!

AUSTIN: Yup! A hundred percent with you! [ALI sighs dramatically and repeatedly] One hundred percent like, are you thinking of the goo girl from *Queen's Blade*? Cuz you might be.

JANINE: I am kind of imagining each end of the sash acting like an extended like big, big magic hand kind of thing.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JANINE: Cuz it's not shaped like a hand, cuz that would be weird.

AUSTIN: Right.

JANINE: But um. You know.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm!

JANINE: That's the gist of it.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. I gotcha. Um!

JANINE: It's probably very much like the sports movie, though, where it's just like, whoa, the new girl.

AUSTIN: Right.

[ALI laughs]

JANINE: She can hit that five ball. Six ball.

AUSTIN: Tender, are you also—is this—I'm guessing that this roll is going to be a…group roll? [ALI: Yeah.] Or at least an assist?

ALI: Yeah, I think—so what's the play here? Do I—wait—does one of us join the other team and like not?

AUSTIN: Oh, shit! Are you gonna fuckin throw it?

JANINE: Ohh! That's so good!

ALI: Not like throw it. You said [AUSTIN: What?] that they specifically had to be like within a couple points, right? They can't like super win.

AUSTIN: No, I—the physics of it—I was wrong about that, that's the thing I thought, but then I was like, oh wait, no. Cuz you just need to hit the—on our diagram I've made—

JANINE: I mean also, we don't have to finish the fuck—do we have to finish the game?

AUSTIN: No. No, all you have to do is pluck this thing.

ALI: Okay.

JANINE: And also, if I join one team, well, you have to even out the numbers.

AUSTIN: That's the—[JANINE: See?] well, no, [JANINE: You know?"], so when you join, one of the 11—or one of the -- yeah, eleven players on that side just melds into another one and the just drop to ten.

JANINE: Oh, okay.

ALI: Ohh.

AUSTIN: So.

JANINE: Well, maybe y' know, maybe y'know, these divines like—you know they like the playful—they like the playful [AUSTIN: They do.] opposition thing, so they maybe appreciate two people who came in.

ALI: Yeah.

JANINE: That might be the actual thing that makes them not like kick us out of the game, is [AUSTIN: Right.] "Oh, cool. They're playfully…"

AUSTIN: They wanna play. Right.

ALI and JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: All right! [cross] That's interesting.

ALI: [cross] I wanna—oh. I wanna like make a big like a big paddle, [laughing] essentially?

AUSTIN: Okay. Sure, I'm not gonna fuckin make you roll to do this. This is fun and goofy and not [JANINE laughs]—not the *point* of…

[ALI laughs]

Uh, so you just make like a big cricket bat style thing [ALI: Yeah! Basically] to like knock this thing around? Okay.

ALI: Yeah, hell yeah.

JANINE: This is good, we started as a magical girl anime, now we're a sports anime.

AUSTIN: Now we're a sports anime, we're gonna go through all of the genres. It's gonna go great. Not *Queen's Blade*. We're not gonna do *Queen's Blade*.

[ALI and JANINE laugh]

Um. So. Uh…yeah, are you assi—who's rolling, is my question. And also, is this a roll about—here's a question. Is this a roll about playing the game—is this a roll about getting them to play with you in such a—I guess it's up to you what you roll. That's what it's gonna come down to. And I guess we'll just characterize it based on what you roll. I've stopped myself from trying to figure it out. We're just gonna go with it.

ALI: This maybe feels like a group action, then, maybe?

AUSTIN: Yeah. I can see that.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: I could see it either way. But so what is the action is my question.

ALI: Um. Sportsmanship. [wheezes in laughter]

JANINE: Hm.

ALI: [laughing] I gotta roll my sportsmanship stat…

AUSTIN: Um, so I—this is why I say it could be a bunch of things, right, like.

[ALI laughs]

You could attune to the Way to communicate with non sentient species or robots, sense unseen danger or killing intent, safely handle precursor artifacts or remnants. You could be scrambling. You could be scrapping if you're being really aggressive.

ALI: Um. I mean, I know that I have a vested interest in saying this, but I feel like it's like maybe an attune or something like that, because I feel like the thing isn't like oh, I have to take the fall really well. It's like how well can we kind of like mesh and have a good time with this team, right? [cross] Is that weird, yeah?

AUSTIN: [cross] With this team of Divine ghosts.

[ALI laughs]

Signet, how do you feel about that? You good with..

JANINE: Yeah, I'm inclined to think too, to think it's—I mean. Yeah there's so many arguments that could be made depending on what we see that the central issue as. I think [AUSTIN: Right.] for me it's also a little bit different than for Tender cuz my specific goal is like contribute meaningfully to…push, you know, the push of victory, like I do actually need to do a thing to win the game, [AUSTIN: Mm-hm.] or whatever.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um…

JANINE: Versus just like being accepted in the team.

AUSTIN: Totally. Totally.

JANINE: Or not being kicked out or whatever.

AUSTIN: Uh, so the thing with group action is that you both roll and whoever's leading the group action will take stress for failure. So keep that in mind, depending on all of that.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: And also whoever's leading has to describe how you are leading the team. Not just the sports team, but each other, as a team. Do you know what I mean? Like are you—do you have hand signals, do you—are you shouting orders at each other, are you like—is it about like a personal rivalry seen on the scree—[ALI laughs] you know what I mean? Like what is it.

ALI: Oh, boy. Um. [chuckles] Um, I feel like that's maybe—I don't know. I don't feel great about Signet right now, I guess.

JANINE: [fake disgusted voice] Ew!

ALI: I'm like keeping a [JANINE: Okay.] secret from her! Right?

AUSTIN: You are keeping a secret from her, [ALI: That's true.] that's why she should feel bad about you! Fuck!

ALI: Yeah…

AUSTIN: Is it one of those things where like, oh, I'm gonna feel bad about this person cuz I don't wanna confront the fact that I'm kinda being shitty?

ALI: Yeah…

AUSTIN: Okay.

JANINE: Uh…So should I lead them?

[AUSTIN laughs]

[ALI laughs a lot]

JANINE: Okay. Is that [cross] what we're getting at? Okay.

ALI: [cross] Yes, I believe so.

JANINE: Yes, me too.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Okay. Signet also has less stress. So. Y'know.

ALI: Uh-huh!

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You wanna game it that way.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: All right, so both of you make—did we decide on attune, or did we decide on something else?

JANINE: I think we both have at least 1 in attune, right?

ALI: Yeah. We both have 2, I think? [cross] You might have 3?

JANINE: [cross] I have 1.

AUSTIN: Signet has 1, Signet has 1.

ALI: Oh. Oh.

AUSTIN: [chuckles] I like that you assumed [cross] Signet had 3.

JANINE: [cross] I have 2 in consort, but, uh. [ALI chuckles] You're the priestess, I'm…

ALI: Oh, yeah, that's fair.

JANINE: The politician.

AUSTIN: I'm just the excerpt! Yeah.

[general giggles]

JANINE: Belgard does all the work on that side of things, [ALI: Yeah. Fair, no.] that's…

AUSTIN: Yeah, fair, fair.

ALI: I’m not outsourcing it.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: All right, go ahead and give me your attune rolls. Uh, risky standard.

ALI: Okay…

AUSTIN: That’s a 3 from Signet.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: That’s a crit!

JANINE: Whoa!

AUSTIN: That’s a crit! From [JANINE: Shit.] Tender Sky! So take [ALI: Woo-hoo.] 1 stress, Signet, from your own failure.

JANINE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Um, y’all gain a fuckin gambit—cuz that was without [JANINE: Nice.] gambit, so you’re up to 3 gambits—I should make a—I should make a thing really quick that says 3 gambits.

ALI: Do I lose a stress when I crit?

AUSTIN: And you lose a stress cuz you crit!

ALI: [cross] [whisper] Thank you god…

JANINE: [cross] Mm!

AUSTIN: That like never happens!

[ALI giggles]

Good hustle.

JANINE: All those 1s, you were just banking.

ALI: Mm-hm.

JANINE: [cross] Banking for a crit.

AUSTIN: [cross] Seriously.

JANINE: It also looks like a little face, and that's funny.

[AUSTIN and ALI laugh]

AUSTIN: I'm also pretty sure—I'm just double checking on that crit thing. Uh…No. You do not reduce—you do not clear stress. You only do that when you—that's only from resistance. [ALI: [whisper] Damn.] If you rolled that on resisting stress, you would get a—clear 1. You just gain that gambit. That's really good though. So.

ALI: Mm-hm.

JANINE: Yeah!

ALI: I'll take it.

AUSTIN: All right. I mean, with that, like you—this whole—what's that look like? What does—that success…

[ALI chuckles]

…fuckin…

ALI: I mean, it's weird cuz it's Signet doing kind of poorly and Tender doing really well, right? [AUSTIN: Uh-huh!] So how does it affect like the weird puzzle? [wheezes]

AUSTIN: [cross] Right, well like—

JANINE: [cross] But doing well at a different thing, like.

ALI: [emotional] Uh-huh! [laughs]

AUSTIN: Um, I mean like for me it suggests that like—this would be 1—so it's a 6, right? So it would have been 1…2…yeah, okay. So like your team, the Eon team, Tender, is now just crushing it, right? The Naught—the part of the thread that you need is completely visible. It's more than just split down the middle at this point, you're clearly winning. So that's—you're ready to go there, you just need to get up and pluck it somehow. But I am again curious like what's Tender's play look like. Does the paddle just do a lot of work?

ALI: Um, I think that it like kind of glows, and it like kind of extends? So I can [AUSTIN: Great.] get those like real good like almost out of bounds hits?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ALI: Um. And yeah. I think I'm just like—you know! I've been distracted. Kind of a bad month for me. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Oh, sorry. You know what? That's not a crit. It [ALI: Oh.] reduces effect. You have reduced effect because of your thing.

ALI: Come on.

AUSTIN: It's a crit—it's a crit, but it's not a great success. Do you know what I mean? It would—you get to keep your third gambit, cuz you still rolled a crit, but instead of getting increased effect, which is the other thing a crit gives you, it's *only* great effect. So.

ALI: Only great effect. [laughing] Okay.

AUSTIN: Not the end of the world. Not the end of the world. Or only standard effect, I guess, actually. But still.

ALI: Okay. But we're still like doing fine.

AUSTIN: You're still doing fine. You're still the…the thread is visible.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: But your tired—your distractedness should come into play with what you're about to describe. So.

ALI: Yeah, I mean that's the thing is that I think that I'm just like, you know what, I think the thing that I need to do right now is just play a really good game. [amused] Of this game right now, [AUSTIN: [laughs] Yeah.] just to kinda like work it out.

AUSTIN: Totally. Great.

ALI: Yeah, just fully like, super into it. I'd love to talk to these people, too, right? Like we didn't talk about…

AUSTIN: None of them are…they are playing this game.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Again, I've given you their kind of emotional residue?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But they are not alive. And they are not ghosts in the sapient like, I was killed and now I have reve—like no. [ALI laughs] They are like.

[JANINE sighs]

There is something here of both of them that is…they are like the steam from a locomotive engine. Right? Like you can't talk to the steam. The steam doesn't direct the train. The steam comes off of the train, the engine directs the train, and in this case the engine is kind of like barely humming at all, but it's still putting out steam. Y'know? And so like it's not…sadly, you cannot like chill with them. They're not gonna share Gatorade with you.

[ALI laughs sadly]

Or they might share Gatorade with you, but like, they're not also gonna talk to you. [chuckles]

ALI: Yeah.

JANINE: We could…

AUSTIN: So yeah. So now the thread is visible, but it's—you know, at the very top of this arena.

ALI: Mm.

AUSTIN: So what do you do?

[ALI laughs]

Which is hundreds of feet in the air. Do you know what I mean?

ALI: Yeah. Is there a pathway up? Is there like a…

AUSTIN: There's like, you know, stairs on—around the ar—or there's like seating around the arena that goes high up to the top, but does not get to the roof, you know, does not get up the roof, but does not get to the very top edge of the arena, where you would climb up onto—the roof of the edge, you know, it's an open air arena, but you know what I mean when I say the roof, right? Like the edge of the outside wall [JANINE: Mm-hm.], the top of the walls.

JANINE: What's our definition of plucking?

AUSTIN: You get up there with a finger and you pluck it.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: One of you has to touch it. And whoever touches it has to touch the next one, too. And then the next one. Right? Like so far you have both plucked all of the previous threads, so either of you can go forward and do it, but like you can't skip one and count.

ALI: Oh, so this is like [clears throat] super magical girl where like we have to do these in unison.

[1:00:00]

This is like…

AUSTIN: I mean, either of you can do it, to open the inside vault, right?

ALI: Okay, yeah, fair.

AUSTIN: But right now, both of you could do it, either—like right now, either of you could do it, but if one of you doesn't—

JANINE: We'd be breaking a chain if only one of us [cross] does it. Basically.

AUSTIN: [cross] Exactly.

ALI: [cross] Right. This is like the test of friendship. [laughs]

AUSTIN: I'm saying one of you doesn't have to go up now and do it, but if—like Tender, if you didn't do this one and Signet did, then Signet would have to do all of the remaining ones, to open the vault.

ALI: Oh.

AUSTIN: Because her chain [cross] would not be broken.

JANINE: [cross] Because the chain is intact. [AUSTIN: Yes. Yeah.] My multiplier is still intact.

AUSTIN: Your multiplier is—your combo chain has continued, exactly. You did not drop the combo. Your next challenge is *Dragon Ball FighterZ* at Evo, so be careful. SonicFox is there. He's not taking any [ALI: [amused] Oh no, okay.] prisoners. He is in the fox costume. He is ready to go!

[JANINE laughs]

ALI: Please draw Tender hanging out with SonicFox. [laughs] in the fox costume, thank you. [AUSTIN laughs quietly] Um. Anyway. Um. Does the Exuvia have a jetpack? Like what—[laughs]

JANINE: The—I mean, by bug standards it's large. By us standards it's a bug.

ALI and AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: Like I pulled a lot of like weird—I've, in this season, done a lot of things that arguably maybe shouldn't have been allowed to do. [ALI laughs quietly] I'm gonna say that it's not fair to be like, and the Exuvia can fly us both up there!

AUSTIN: [amused] Uh-huh.

ALI: Yeah, fair, but can we like make a rope? Can you like kinetic sash…the ceiling? I don't know! [laughing] I'm just saying words!

JANINE: It's also not that long a sash!

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's not like [cross] the roof of like a…

JANINE: [cross] I'm thinking about it, but it is still like…even the inspiration for the kinetic sash, which is…Koshosho from *Samurai Warriors*, her sash is not that long.

ALI: Yeah. It's like a four-foot…

JANINE: I would say her sash is longer than Signet's, even, but.

AUSTIN: Y'all could try to scramble up there. The only thing is that like as you do other things, the Naught team is going to start winning again, and this clock is gonna start ticking down, and you only have—you're at 4 now, what did I say, it has to be about 3 or better? [ALI: Mm-hm.] Or did I say it had to be above [JANINE: Yeah.] 4—yeah. So like each action you take—and maybe you'll get the roll and it'll be successful on the first roll! And you'll get up there quick enough. But. You know! That's what I'm sayin.

JANINE: Should we take turns?

AUSTIN: Oh, that's interesting.

JANINE: Like if one person…

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: …stays on the ground to keep—

AUSTIN: To keep the clock up.

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's a good idea!

JANINE: And then we swap out.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Yeah, that works.

AUSTIN: Um!

ALI: [cross] Do you wanna go first?

AUSTIN: [cross] All right, if you're gonna do that, I won't lower—I'll lower the clock once every other turn. I'll lower the score clock, once every other turn? I'm not gonna make you reroll—you've already succeeded on that roll, do you know what I mean?

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: So—but it does mean each of you has to individually roll to get up to the top, then. So, how are you doing—who's going first, and how are you doing it?

JANINE: Um. [cross] At least we didn't—

ALI: [cross] Oh, do we have our mechs?

AUSTIN: I don't—

JANINE: Yeah, that was what I was gonna say. [cross] We didn't come in here with them, but.

AUSTIN: [cross] You totally could have your mechs outside. You know?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Up to y'all.

JANINE: That is like the easiest way to do it.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm!

ALI: Yeah…Mm-hm!

JANINE: I mean, I guess actually the trade-off there is like we still have to pluck it with our hands.

AUSTIN: Yes. [cross] That is the trade-off.

JANINE: So we have to like…balance on our…[AUSTIN: On your mech. Uh-huh.] mech or…yeah.

ALI: Um. I mean, I can try to make like a rope or something. But like, I feel like buildings have like rafters. Right?

AUSTIN: Yeah, I'm saying you could climb up there. You [ALI: Yeah.] could totally go climb, like that's [ALI: Yeah.] totally a thing.

JANINE: I'm mostly looking to use a helm roll instead of a scramble roll, [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] cuz I got an extra [AUSTIN: There you go.] point there. [laughs slightly]

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh!

JANINE: That's *my* perspective here!

ALI: Uh-huh!

AUSTIN: That would be a helm. I think either of those is fine, it's just about making sure we paint the picture the right way. So yeah, helm roll to do the thing you're describing makes perfect sense. I think we're so early at the beginning of this that your fuckin [JANINE: Yeah.] mech could be right there, there's no flashback stress again for that. You know.

JANINE: Okay.

AUSTIN: It also just looks cool. Right?

JANINE: Yes.

AUSTIN: All right, so are you going up first?

JANINE: Yeah. [cross] With my mech and…

AUSTIN: [cross] Gimme that helm roll. Yep.

JANINE: …go up there and [cross] helm to…

AUSTIN: [cross] Risky standard. Or controlled—I think controlled is fine. This is a simple roll, this isn't a…

JANINE: Whoops, I…yeah.

AUSTIN: Just don't fail it, y'know? [huffs a laugh]

JANINE: Yeah…

AUSTIN: [cross] Ah, but interesting things could happen.

JANINE: [cross] I'll be sad if I fail, cuz this feels like a thing Signet has probably done before [cross] in different contexts.

AUSTIN: [cross] There you go. That's a success. Yeah, so it's a risky—sorry, you got a 4 on the controlled, which means you succeed, but with some complication. Um. Uh…Or, again, you could withdraw and try a different approach if you don't want this complication, obviously. I think—so yeah, you—what's this look like? You fly up, and then reach out with your real hand from inside of your mech?

JANINE: Yeah, I think it's like the front of the mech does that sort of open—like clam shell open up [AUSTIN: Yeah.] thing, and Signet has to like, you know, grip onto a strap, but then like lean out to pluck the thing.

AUSTIN: Totally. Uh, so you pluck it, and there's like this really beautiful like [sing-song tone] plung~ sound. [ALI chuckles] Sound~. Sound~. That's what it sounds like. And then, but the thing is, I think that this actually takes you a little bit longer, like—for whatever—you go up and try to hover, but there is some sort of draft coming from the heat nearby. In fact, I think the thing that you face is like you go up and you're fine for the first like 90 feet, and then when you get up to the very top of the arena you're able to look at the Basilica that's in front of you, the next step on this journey, and there's like this incredible flash wave of heat. You get like cold sweats. And it shakes you for a second, and you hesitate. I think for that reason, I'm dropping the clock 1. So that is the hesitation. So—but then you're able to pluck it, and move back. And land.

JANINE: Cool.

AUSTIN: So now Tender, you now have to do this.

ALI: [breathes in] Okay, yeah, I'm gonna choose to scramble. I think that I'm just gonna try to like—I'm still trying to sweat out my distracted.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I got you. [ALI laughs] I got you. I feel you. Go ahead and give me a scramble.

ALI: Um, I only have a 1 in scramble, so I don't know if I should take a gambit? [cross] I'm a little nervous…

AUSTIN: [cross] Uh, if you fail…if you out-and-out fail here, I'll lower this, but otherwise it won't get reduced. So. [ALI: Okay. Um.] You'll have two chances here, basically.

ALI: But it's still just risky standard or?

AUSTIN: It's controlled. [ALI: Okay.] Controlled standard.

ALI: Okay. Let me—let's just try it then.

JANINE: Also, even if you pluck it and then it gets reduced, you're still good.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: [cross] Yeah. And you're down there, you can…

AUSTIN: [cross] Right. That's true. You're the second person. Totally.

ALI: Yeah. Okay. [cross] 5! Okay!

AUSTIN: [cross] Hey, that's a 5! You did [JANINE: Hey!] it. Boom. Uh, so again, are you just like climbin the stairs and jumping across rafters and like, all that stuff?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay. Um! So yeah, I think you—here's what happens is you pluck it, it makes the sound again, and the…you also catch sight of the Basilica, and are like entranced by it. It's this large domed structure with all of these other wings, and the…not like literal wings, like it's a building. It's like a church that has all of these other wings surrounding this dome, and you don't just feel that heat. Your distracted thing moves to the—you actually get 2—your entire bottom bar is now distracted. You get a second wound of distracted? Except maybe it's not distracted this time. It's like entranced.

[ALI laughs silently]

You could roll to resist this. But [ALI gasps] I know that your rolls—your stress is gettin up there.

ALI: [groans] I'm gonna take it, cuz it's really good. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Okay!

ALI: [laughing] Sorry…

AUSTIN: So take entranced.

ALI: Mm-hm. What do—like what does harm actually do? It's just—

AUSTIN: So in this case it lowers your effect.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: So the lowest level of harm is it reduces your effect, which means [ALI: Okay] that when you roll for standard effect, you're only doing limited effect. When you roll for great effect, you're only doing standard effect.

[ALI sighs]

Uh, the real thing about filling this is that the next wound you take, even if it would be a nothing light wound, will actually be a level two wound. Because I'm [ALI: Yeah.] basically just filling the second slot.

ALI: Um. I should try to resist then, I should try to focus. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah. Probably. You should probably try to focus. So, how are you resisting? Is this probably resolve?

ALI: Yeah?

AUSTIN: I'm gonna say it's resolve. I determine resistance, I just remembered.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: I think it's resolve. It's about like not letting yourself be pulled in by whatever this thing is.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Uh, so, roll—just click resolve, and it should roll for you.

ALI: Okay!

AUSTIN: Try not to get a…like a 1. There you go. All right, so you roll 6 minus the highest—or you suffer 6 minus result, so we get 2. Take 2 stress. What does this look like? [ALI: [sighs] Um.] How do you shake yourself free of this?

ALI: I mean, I think that it's like the camera showing Tender with like an expression that they—that we haven't seen at all this [AUSTIN: Mm. Mm-hm.] episode, right? Where it's like. You know, she did the thing. She did really good at that game, and then she was able to climb up this building, and [AUSTIN: Mm-hm.] then she gets on the top of it, is like—the wave comes, but she like closes her fists. Grits her [AUSTIN: Mm-hm.] teeth and y'know. She's good.

AUSTIN: Gotcha.

ALI: She tucks in. She continues on.

AUSTIN: And she continues on. All right. Cool. All right! So you both plucked it, and—I wanna be clear, there's no—you hear that sound? That sound feels physical. That sound feels because it's taut—it's a taut string. There is no like, you've done it! Move on to the next stage! [ALI chuckles] Do you know, like…you could get to the end of this and Sho could be wrong. About how to open this door. [huffs a laugh] Cuz no one's done it before. But it's as good of a chance as any. So. The game continues on, but you're able to continue if you'd like to.

ALI: Um. I mean, I feel like I would stay and hang out for a little bit, but.

AUSTIN: Okay. [laughs slightly]

ALI: We don't have to.

AUSTIN: This game—like you all can play for another 30 minutes, 40 minutes. The game just keeps going.

ALI: Yeah.

JANINE: I don't think Signet continues to play. I think she like [AUSTIN laughs] waits patiently like a child—or like a parent [ALI wheezes with laughter] waiting for a child to finish their soccer match? Like.

AUSTIN: [over ALI cackling] Uh-huh. Good. Perfect. Ideal.

JANINE: I'm not gonna say anything, but [ALI: God…] also…[cross] checkin my watch. Like…

AUSTIN: [cross] You're like—yeah, I was about to say like you're reading the newspaper on the Exuvia.

[ALI chuckles]

JANINE: Talkin to another parent there about the fuckin…

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: …the factory or something, [AUSTIN: Uh-huh.] like…

ALI: [cross] Yeah.

AUSTIN: [cross] Perfect. It's great. It's ideal, honestly. Um.

So! You advance up the mountain. There's kind of a long pathway, and again the powder blue thread continues leading you there. I think it's actually—at this point, is sort of strung the way cable is alongside a highway, do you know like through kind of like needles—not needles on the ground, but like big metal—what are those called? The things that like you just punch into the ground, there's eyelets in them and you can run things through them? Do you know what I'm talkin about? They look like big needles. [huffs a laugh] Like big iron or steel…anyway. Uh. This is gonna fuckin kill me. Um. [typing] Eyelet…

JANINE: Posts? Like they're just—

AUSTIN: I guess they're like posts. Um! But that's not really…

JANINE: It's just a post with a loop on the top, right, like…

AUSTIN: Yeah, I guess that's right. I think there's a specific name for that, but that's fine. Um. [typing] I'm gonna stop, I'm just gonna stop searching and just close my window. There we go. [ALI: Mm-hm. [laughs softly]] Okay. And so I think the thread is running through those, up this mountain path, and as you continue, like, it gets hotter and hotter. And I think this is probably when Sho appears? Um. She just kind of like…the sand alongside the like little—like pebbles and dust and little bits of rock and sand kind of…come together, they roll towards each other, and form a kind of a sand version of Sho, and she says,

> (as SHO): Please stop and rest. The Basilica can take a lot out of you.
>
> How did you find the arena?

TENDER: It was great! Great time!

[AUSTIN laughs quietly]

[ALI also laughs]

SHO: Signet?

SIGNET: It was an arena.

[AUSTIN huffs a laugh]

SHO: That's true.

[ALI giggles]

I know you're both tired. This…you've almost made it.

There is a lot in the Basilica. Many threads to pluck, and also…lots to learn. There were things there that would have surprised me if…if I had not been so devout a student, so…prepare yourselves, and each other, if you can. Okay?

TENDER: Yeah! I mean, what else would we…[laughs nervously]

SHO: Hm…I'll see you by the threads.

AUSTIN: And then like all of the sand disperses. Do you kind of gather your strength here? Do you march on? What's the play?

ALI: [sighs and buzzes lips] What like time of day is it?

AUSTIN: It's late afternoon by now.

ALI: Oh, okay…Um…

AUSTIN: It can be early afternoon. By the time you go in here, early afternoon, let's say. Like 2, like the equivalent of 2 PM. It's like mid afternoon, I guess, actually.

ALI: Um. Yeah, I don't know. I feel like it's maybe just time to do the damn thing, but…

AUSTIN: Okay. [cross] And you—

ALI: [cross] It's up to you, Signet.

[laughs quietly]

JANINE: I mean, I think Signet already—her POV is like, I rested at the arena.

ALI: [cross] Yeah. Mm-hm! [laughs]

AUSTIN: [cross] Right. True, fair.

JANINE: [cross] Like.

AUSTIN: I really just wanted to give Tender one more chance to talk about the Waking Cadent. That's really what I was doing. [ALI: Oh…] That's what the show is basically saying. [ALI chuckles] Without saying.

JANINE: [cross] That's sweet.

ALI: [cross] Can I—okay. I'm gonna just say this out loud so we all know. But I think Tender is very much like kind of wanting to see what Signet does and doesn't say? Because I think that that is more important to her [laughs slightly] cuz she knows that Signet is good at talking to people.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: And like doesn't want the like, oh, you know, don't be stressed out anymore! We'll take care of this! We can talk about this! But like wants to know what Signet's legitimate reaction to this is. Cuz she hates this knowledge. [laughs] Um.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: [amused] Right, so, yeah.

AUSTIN: But not enough to just say, hey, here's some knowledge I want your genuine reaction to.

ALI: *No* no no no.

AUSTIN: Okay. Just wanted to be clear. Okay.

ALI: Right, cuz she doesn't want Signet to be like, [gasps], and then take a deep breath and then be like, well, Tender, blah blah blah. Like, [AUSTIN chuckles] you know? [laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Yeah.

ALI: Right? I don't know.

AUSTIN: No, that's—that is good characterization of—

[1:15:00]

—Tender, I think. That is fair.

[ALI laughs]

All right. So. You walk on, and you come to the front of this basilica. It is a domed structure, like I said, and immediately, the second you reach it, you both feel this heat wave again. And you realize like on first blush, it just straight up looks like lava is running from its windows into the ground. And there's like a fountain where lava is pooling, and there are like structures outside, even, and more when you walk inside, that look like they're just made of like hot magma—or I guess cold magma, like relatively, like it's not flowing and burning, it's just like steaming and resting on the ground. Which, you know. That ground has to be made of something very sharp—or very hard—to not be burned through. And that is like this entire place is like a palace, is like a cathedral where it just has lava running through it. [coughs] Excuse me.

And not just running through it, but like there are things made from it. There are paintings that have a sort of…that sort of orange and black glow, as if you can like see the brushstrokes of the stuff. And it is…impossibly hot? And, also, I need both of you to make a resolve check. But what's happening here is not gaining stress. Well, I'll tell you how it works. You're gonna resolve check, both of you, and whatever stress you would normally reduce, your stress is set to that. Like your overall total stress. This could be good for you, this could be bad for you. [laughs slightly]

[ALI and JANINE groan]

ALI: Ahh! Okay.

AUSTIN: All right, so that is—you would have gotten—you would have gotten 0, so Signet, your stress is emptied. You rolled a 1 and a 6, you would have normally suffered 6 stress minus the highest die roll, so you—6 minus 6 is 0! Set your stress to 0.

JANINE: Cool.

AUSTIN: Tender?

JANINE: Great.

AUSTIN: Set your stress to 3. [huffs a laugh]

ALI: Okay, that's an improvement.

AUSTIN: Um, so here's what happens. Like it takes you a second, but like there was something under the heat, which is…Pleroma is, as like a concept—it's a Greek word. It's a word that comes up in kind of theology and kind of gnostic theology especially. It is this kind of like the fullness of divinity. And this place is its own kind of minor temple to the 300 Divines. I'm trying to think if—what Sho would have told you is basically that Pleroma was a Divine devoted to understanding the Divine Fleet. Third generation again.

And was sort of built by Divines to have…not an outside perspective, necessarily, but to have a perspective devoted to understanding the place of Divines, and kind of looking through everything, and figuring out, hey, like, what's up with us? You know? Because we have to do other stuff, like make sure these ships don't explode, and make sure everyone has food and make sure that there is you know equality of opportunity and equality of outcome and like all of the stuff that has made the Divine Fleet great. There wasn't a lot of time to philosophize about the state of being a divine being in a way that could both encounter the religiosity of it, but also step to a different perspective, and think about them as objects. And so that is what Pleroma is.

And so as you walk through this place you go from room to room and each room is dedicated to a Divine, and each room has its own thread, and suddenly there are 300 more threads to pluck. And we're not gonna roll for each of those or anything. [huffs a laugh] Uh. Because that would be ridiculous. Instead…two things here. One. The reason you lost stress here, or could have gained it, is like…being in the face of the divine, so concentrated, can be either fulfilling and cleansing, or it could have been overwhelming. Right? And it's up to your resolve to see how that shook out. Thankfully, for both of you, it was an improvement! Nice work!

[ALI laughs]

It was like getting a good roll during the Yawhg.

[ALI and JANINE laugh]

Two. You can begin to make study checks here, you can gather information here about anything you would want to. Ever. That has to do with the Divine Fleet. This is the place where if either of you have questions about what happened to a past Divine that was ever part of the Fleet, you could ask that. If you want to know about the first time that the NEH attacked, you can ask that. And that is a study roll. That is not a study roll, that is a gather information roll, which means there's no stress involved. There's no—it's just about what type of information you find. The thing that I will say is, after your second roll on gather information, you will start gaining stress from being in the face of the divine. Um.

So does anyone have any questions? This is about as much of a lore dump place as I could ever come up with!

ALI: [laughs sheepishly] Oh…

AUSTIN: And also because you both did well on the resolve check, I think the thing you realize is like this isn't lava, this is like a recording medium? This is like the…to some degree, the body of…all of this weird lava-like substance used to be inside of a shell that was Perl—was Pleroma. That shell was broken, and its way of communicating with people cleanly and as a being is gone, because it was killed. But the kind of gooey lava substance is Pleroma's mind, and both of you have the ability to interface with that, because you're the two characters you are. [huffs a laugh] [ALI laughs] Uh, Fourteen Fifteen would not be able to do this. Or Grand, or anybody else. Not just Fourteen Fifteen. You know? I'm not sure Sho could do this, necessarily. Sho probably has equipment that could help her do it, but she does not have the natural ability to. So. [stammers] Anyone have any questions?

ALI: [sighs thoughtfully] I didn't come with notes prepared!

AUSTIN: So it goes.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: There's no rush. You know?

ALI: Yeah. Do you have anything, Janine?

JANINE: Uh…I mean, a big thing here is that like if Signet was like at home with a book I can think of things she would look up. I don't know what she would…like, in this particular moment, doing this particular task, I don't know what she would either think to ask or care to ask. You know what I mean?

AUSTIN: The thing that I'll say in counter to that is, all of your stress just got erased. Literally all of it. Like we should be thinking about this a little bit like Polyphony, Signet? You are in the realm of God. Like, there should be…

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: There should be some degree of curiosity here, if only because—[cross] or if there isn't—

JANINE: [cross] Can I counter that?

AUSTIN: Yeah! Yeah, you should, with the thing that you were about to say.

JANINE: Before Polyphony, I wasn't cold.

AUSTIN: Right. That is the answer. I think that that's fair. And then like, we should show that on screen, then.

JANINE: Yeah. But that—I'm saying maybe Tender should lead here, [ALI laughs] cuz I don't know.

AUSTIN: I mean, you'd both be—yeah. There are—these are individual rolls. [ALI: Okay. Yeah.] Like you both can do this separately, without talking to each other. You know?

ALI: Yeah! I don't know, there's like—I mean, there's like practical questions that I think she would wanna know, which is like—Jesus. Um. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Mm-hm!

ALI: Like I don't know the like first hundred years of the Divine Fleet or whatever, right to like [AUSTIN: Right.] kind of get a pulse on [JANINE: Yeah.] Karmela? But I think also she just like…you know. The thing that I think with Tender, especially for this mission, is that she wasn't home when Anticipation died?

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: So I think that there's even just the like, what was that last month like at home?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Uh, do you wanna give me a study?

ALI: Sure. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Or an attune. Either one works here. For both of you.

ALI: [sighs and buzzes lips] Yeah, I don't know. I think I'm gonna go attune, cuz I feel like it's more like, I think that she wants to do the practical thing of like, oh, let's get some information here, but it's like Tender just like wandering down these halls [AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally.] or whatever, right?

AUSTIN: Totally. And it—

ALI: But Signet also looking really impatiently—[laughing]

AUSTIN: Totally. It is again a controlled st—or a controlled great, but again, you are at reduced effect, so that will be controlled standard, unless you get a crit, in which case it would go back up to great.

ALI: And…

AUSTIN: Or it's gather information, so it's not controlled—yeah. You know what I mean. All right, so, with a 4, you actually don't get that much. Because of the reduced effect. The month when Anticipation died was a pretty big [laughing] downer, unsurprisingly.

[ALI laughs]

There were—and I think it echoes what we talked about before in some ways. So. There are a lot of people in the By-and-By. There are more people in the By-and-By than other single ship in the Fleet when it died, or when she died. Anticipation was she/her? [cross] Or was Anticipation they/them?

ALI: [cross] I don't know that we ever said, but I mean. We can do she/her.

AUSTIN: Okay. So when she died—or when she stopped functioning, right, cuz you described to me that the thing that happened to Anticipation was like it got caught on a problem, right?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And it just kind of like got stuck buffering forever. And…there was the month…there's kind of two months, right? There's the month that she stopped responding, and then there's the month when people realized she isn't going to respond again. Or maybe it was longer than a month. [ALI: Yeah.] Right? Which is like, oh, she just needs to work through this. It'll be fine. And then like bit by bit, she stopped responding to…like taps. She stopped responding to like—normally you could be like, all right, I'm just checking in! And she'd be like, I'm working on this problem, or whatever. Right? And then like—but eventually she stopped responding to that. And that's happened before. And then she would start responding again. And this time she never stopped. She never started responding again.

And so I think there was just a great deal of…denial is what you get. That's like the emotional sense that you get, and also the kind of—and you—here's the other thing, like—you don't get this from the knowledge that's inside of Pleroma, because Pleroma was already dead. What you get is like really this emotional wave of residue that Pleroma has picked up. That the like the resid—the gooey lava stuff of Pleroma has absorbed from people since it was like a relic on Seance, on the ship of Seance. Like it picked that up from people from Anticipa—from the By-and-By who had been nearby—like it just kind of gathered that from their…from their minds directly, which means it's unfiltered. Like, you don't have Pleroma's perspective on those events. All you have is like, you've opened a faucet to that feeling of denial, to that feeling of like

unconfronted sadness. And it would take years for those people to later kind of come to terms with the fact that Anticipation had died.

ALI: Cool. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yep. Love it. So that's one from you. You can get one more without having any stress cost. And after that it would start going.

ALI: Cool…Um. Yeah, no no, that was sad and it sucked. [AUSTIN: Mm-hm!] [laughing] I mean like she's—showing her doing the more practical thing now, which is like…is the story of creation the way that I…[weakly] learned it? Right? [AUSTIN: Right.] Like I don't know. Um. That's a tough question to ask, but. [AUSTIN: Mm.] A valid one.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Is that just another…

AUSTIN: Yeah, another…

ALI: I think this is a study roll.

AUSTIN: This is more of study, yeah. [cross] This is like your—

ALI: [cross] This is shooting myself in the foot, but!

AUSTIN: Go for it! Love it.

ALI: Good. Um, is this still controlled great?

AUSTIN: Yeah, because it's gather information, it's not even an action roll, there's no…

ALI: Okay. We just wanna [cross] see a good number.

AUSTIN: [cross]…consequence other than—yeah.

[ALI clicks her tongue]

That's a 3.

ALI: Weh.

AUSTIN: Um! I'm trying to decide what a 3 is here. Um. I think it's just—so, in a gather information roll like this, this is limited, you get incomplete or partial information, except that you

are, again, you're wounded. So you get a -1 to this. You're distracted. Which means you don't even get limited or partial information. So instead what I'm just gonna say is like, nothing you read contradicts the—but. I don't wanna s—[stammers] I wanna be clear. I'm not coding that you could have got information that would have contradicted your vision of events. Do you know what I mean?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You're just too distracted to put together anything that enlightens you here. [cross] I'm trying to decide like—

ALI: [cross] Right. So kind of like, oh, I know about that. Yeah, okay. Yep. Like.

AUSTIN: Yeah! And some of it does line up with the stuff that you just learned. Via…[ALI: Yeah.] the…the kind of Kamala's version of the Exuvia. Or the Waking Cadent's version. I'm just gonna call her Kamala Cadence, because she's, for all intents and purposes, in our world now, she is Kamala Cadence. Right? That is…the stuff that you see here is pretty much in line with that. And there's no added color to that, I don't think—again, because you're distracted. If you hadn't been distracted, you at least would have gotten some new partial information.

[ALI laughs]

But again, I think it's appropriate that you didn't.

ALI: Yeah, fair.

AUSTIN: Hey maybe it's even that other type of thing which is like this confirmation bias, which is like [ALI: Yes.] you're like, oh yeah, I know this, and oh this says I can read this for—okay this is—you're just like—you're recreating the argument for the version of history that you do know.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Y'know?

[ALI laughs silently]

Um. And you know, plucking a string here or there. [ALI: Mm-hm.] As you continue from room to room. All right.

Signet, you're still not—you're good. Nothing.

JANINE: No, I got some stuff.

AUSTIN: [amused] Okay!

[ALI laughs]

JANINE: Um. Can—I mean, we're there for a while, so [AUSTIN: Yeah.] like…there would be things that would come to mind, I guess.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JANINE: I think Signet would ask about how old the oldest excerpt was.

AUSTIN: Ooh, that's good. Um…Give me a—well, how are you asking that? Is that like a—

JANINE: I'm gonna say attune,

[1:30:00]

like [AUSTIN: Okay.] again, this—

AUSTIN: [cross] Is this like—

JANINE: [cross] I'm okay with this being an attune-heavy…

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah, [JANINE: Game.] session, yeah.

JANINE: Given the cast, you know.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Sounds good.

JANINE: [amused] And the location, and the…

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Go ahead and give me an attune. Again, it doesn't matter, controlled, whatever, doesn't—controlled great is fine. Whatever. [cross] That's a 1.

JANINE: [cross] Great. Well, that's….

AUSTIN: Oh, you still get incomplete or partial information. So I think you don't necessarily find the oldest. Right? Like that would take—you would need to be cross-referencing that, across [JANINE: Mm-hm.] a bunch of stuff, right?

JANINE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But you do get—you get two things. I'll give you two things here. One. The oldest ever was 2000 years old. And they eventually only—they were synthetic. They were a synthetic being, so they didn't have any medical concerns at all, and it wasn't that other people necessarily…it's not that other—human excerpts, or biological excerpts couldn't theoretically live until they are 2000, it's that, you know. When you are taking care of a medical condition for the 30th time, there is a notion that enters your mind, which is like, I think I've done my job here. I think I'm okay. You get sort of like what we talked about with Nacre, in season one, where there is a different idea of what death is, and it's a much more positive relationship with death, because you had lots of time to…think about what your role has been as a living being.

The same is true for synthetic beings, but they—you know, some of them process time differently! And so the oldest known was 2000 years old. And that's really long, and that person—they lived to—I have a list of potential Divines that could come up today, so let me take a look. One second. That was the…that was the [snorts] the excerpt of Emphasis, and they lived to see great improvements come to the Fleet.

They were one of the first synthetic pilots for a Divine—or synthetic excerpts, and they were also one of the first synthetic—or I guess were they one of the first synthetic excerpts of a synthetic Divine, of a generation two Divine, and…they lived to see just like any sort of lingering…divide between synthetic and biological and organic like life broken down, in the sense of equality and stuff like that. Obviously part—and I guess they also then lived to see that synthetic life was then also eventually recognized as being a distinct thing, like it wasn't just—they lived through the part where like "we're just as good as people," and then also the like, "also sometimes we're like cars." [huffs a laugh] Um, and cars aren't like people, and that's good, and that's fine.

So they lived through this like this period of change in the kind of grand—the broadest attitudes of the Divine Fleet. We talk a lot about the Divine Fleet having been around for 30,000 years, right? That's a long fucking time, but there are things that take a long time to work through, and, you know. They probably lived through some incredible technological developments, too, right? Like I don't think we've talked on this podcast before, but as individuals we've definitely spoken about how like, you know! The time between contemporary painting and the first sketches on the walls of caves…is incredibly long. The time between like bowls existing and what we think of as like…farming existing? Incredibly long.

[MUSIC - "The Notion" starts]

And part of the thing with the Divine Fleet is they made technological advances just as broad that it's hard for us to conceive of? You know, the jump from the pen to the computer is a really fucking big one, and so the jump from the sorts of computers they had at the beginning of the Divine Fleet to the kind that they had the end of the Divine Fleet was also a very big one, and I imagine that they lived—that this excerpt lived to see that sort of development too. Um. The youngest, you find, was very young. In fact, I think you catch a trend. The excerpts of Anticipation started dying sooner and sooner. Closer and closer to Anticipation's own death. And

the youngest—not their final one, but their youngest who died—died only after 35 years. Very young. Not sure why.

[MUSIC plays to end]