

Twilight Mirage 61: The Restitution of All Things Pt. 2

Transcribed by Meko

JACK: Previously, on Twilight Mirage...

[Recap clips begin]

AUSTIN: What had happened was Fourteen Fifteen had died and lost another one of their bodies, and had turned up in a new body, in the body of Carcanet's Ironclad, who was a synthetic person, a robot person, in a kind of a big suit of knight armor, I believe? Is that right, Jack?

JACK: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Who was inside of the *Restitution of All Things*, the massive supercarrier [[The Notion](#) beings playing] that is at the heart of Our Profit's fleet.

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AUSTIN: As you know, you got this call to come rescue Fourteen Fifteen, right?

ART: Yes.

AUSTIN: At some point, you were like, 'I should ask Waltz Tango Cache for backup'. Or, 'That's the person who should help me do this, right?'

ART: Mm-hm.

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AUSTIN: Y'all went to the planet Moonlock, because that is where the *Restitution of All Things* was orbiting.

AUSTIN: A member of the Concrete Town Particulars came to you. It's a man we've seen on-screen before, named Kentucky's Corona.

JACK: Ah, fuck this guy!

AUSTIN: [Laughs] And he asked you to come with him, because Advent had an offer for you.

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AUSTIN (as Kitcha Kanna): From what I understand, you want to live forever in luxury and security, a long way from here.

ART (as Grand Magnificent): The last part's the most important one, but yeah.

AUSTIN (as Kitcha Kanna): We can make that happen for you, Grand Magnificent. But, safety, security, and *especially* distance, have a cost. That said, as far as costs go, this one is low...We have a simple favor. We know you going to save your friend. It is a simple delivery. All I need from you is to carry this on-board and hand it off.

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AUSTIN (as Your Friend): Citizen Ironclad, you're late for your assignment! What's going on?

JACK (as Fourteen): I just got here!

AUSTIN (as Your Friend): You gotta get going! You have a very important duty! Come on!

JACK (as Fourteen): You just—you just showed me this house!

AUSTIN (as Your Friend): Well, by my records, you were due at the Center Centre Diplomatic Retreat seven hours ago!

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AUSTIN (as Waltz): God damn, I don't even know why the two of you need me.

ART (as Grand): I'm terrible at everything. This is, [laughing] this is an amazing stroke of luck though.

JACK (as Fourteen): This has all just been lucky. This has been...lucky.

AUSTIN (as Waltz): Well it's good to see you, in any case. Now let's get outta here.

ART (as Grand): [Laughing] I have a stop I need to make first.

JACK (as Fourteen): Yeah, me too.

AUSTIN (as Waltz): What're you two talkin' about? [Emphatically] *What're you talkin' about?* We have our ship, it's ready to go!

ART (as Grand): Yeah, I gotta drop something off for someone. [To Fourteen] What to you have to do?

JACK (as Fourteen): I...I gotta see Our Profit.

AUSTIN (as Waltz): Nnnnnoooo! No. Uh-uh. You know why this worked? Do you know why the two of you just worked? This all came together great 'cause you worked together. Now, you're gonna go your separate ways and everything's gonna fall apart.

[Recap ends]

[Music ends]

ART (as Grand) I promise this is not gonna hurt you or anyone that we care about.

AUSTIN: You can't make—

JACK (as Fourteen): I care about a lot of people.

AUSTIN: Wai-wait-wait. We need to decide if that's a lie or not.

JACK: Ooh. It is a lie!

AUSTIN: We don't—He doesn't know that.

[Jack snorts and laughs]

AUSTIN: Like, he doesn't know—I don't know how your ability works. Fourteen Fifteen has an ability called "Player" that says "You always know when someone is lying to you." I think that's—

ART: I don't know. / think I'm telling the truth!

AUSTIN: R-Do you?

ART: I deliberately [laughs] concealed information from myself.

JACK: Do you? You know who Fourteen cares about, right? Like—

ART: But this is just a projector! This isn't gonna hurt anyone!

AUSTIN: Okay! I think Grand is smarter than that!

[Jack laughs]

ART: No one's ever been hurt by a projector!

JACK: Grand knows who gave him the projector! [Scoffs]

AUSTIN: Even—

ART: I'm not gonna hit anyone with it!

[Austin and Jack laugh]

AUSTIN: I think this is as open—I think then, Fourteen, you know that this is, you know that Grand believes that no one is gonna hit anyone with this projector [laughs].

JACK: Mm-hm. Alright. Okay.

AUSTIN: But I think skepticism is perfectly fine here.

ART: I guarantee no one's gonna get hit with this projector! Guarantee!

JACK (as Fourteen): Who are you giving it to?

ART (as Grand): I'm not giving it to anyone. I'm just leaving it somewhere.

JACK (as Fourteen): Where are you leaving it?

ART: I uh, I don't—

AUSTIN: Aftville Resource Stockpile Eight.

ART: Yeah.

JACK (as Fourteen): You're just leaving it in a *place*?

ART (as Grand): Don't act like you've never left things in places!

JACK (as Fourteen): Yeah, whenever I have, I've told you why we were doing it.

ART (as Grand): I'm doing it for money!

AUSTIN: [Snorts] So that's true!

JACK: [Laughs] Ah, I think Fourteen just laughs.

AUSTIN: That's mostly true! That's mostly true. You're doing it for a bigger reason than money, right?

[Jack laughs]

ART: Well, I mean right now, what I'm trying to do is get enough money to not do this anymore, without hurting any of the people I've been working with. I'm hoping that this is just gonna—this is paying really well, it's a relatively easy job, no one's gonna get hurt...

JACK: Okay. Aftville Stockpile. Let's go.

ART: Alright.

JACK: I don't know where the hell it is. And I've been here for like—

AUSTIN: Ah, you, you have ways.

ART: It's aft.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it is aft. It is. It is. I mean, it's near your home. It's actually pretty close to your home. So y'all go back down this road, and into Aftville, and, you know, it's, again, beautiful, green lawns... And you eventually find a warehouse that says Resource Stockpile Six, or whatever, on it. Eight, eight is what I said. Um. What do you do? Do you ring the bell? Do you just leave it on the doorstep?

ART: I'll ring the bell!

AUSTIN: Okay!

ART: This is just delivery.

AUSTIN: It is just a delivery. Fourteen, where are you?

JACK: Standing directly behind Grand.

AUSTIN: The door opens, and you see Kentucky's Corona. And he goes:

AUSTIN (as Kentucky's Corona): Where have you been, it's late.

AUSTIN: And takes the projector from you.

ART (as Grand): Sorry, it's a fucking maze in here.

AUSTIN (as Corona): You're telling me. Anyway. Good working with you, Grand. Now remember. Andora, port twenty-two.

ART (as Grand): You got it.

AUSTIN: And the liquid door closes. And— but not before you hear the sound of talons on the ground.

ART (as Grand): Alright, let's go do your thing!

JACK: I think you just turn around, and Fourteen just doesn't move. Just standing behind you.

ART (as Grand): What's the matter?

JACK (as Fourteen): Who was that.

ART (as Grand): I dunno. They didn't even sign for it.

AUSTIN: Lie.

ART: Wait— do—

AUSTIN: Mm... You met that person before.

ART: But do I remember their name?

AUSTIN: You did not say "I don't remember their name." You said you didn't know them.

ART: Mm, alright. Fair enough.

JACK (as Fourteen): That's a lie.

ART (as Grand): Look. I deal with a lotta clients, I don't remember everyone by name.

JACK (as Fourteen): I remember them.

ART (as Grand): Okay, who was that?

JACK (as Fourteen): That's Kentucky's Corona. He's a real piece of shit.

ART (as Grand): Well, pieces of shit need packages delivered!

JACK (as Fourteen): Yeah, pieces of shit who work for the Concrete Town Particulars, and the Concrete Town Particulars work with fucking Advent.

ART (as Grand): I don't think this projector is part of some giant conspiracy!

JACK (as Fourteen): Was the package given to you by—

AUSTIN: Do you really— Do you really not?

[Jack chuckling]

ART: Yeah, I think Grand has chosen to believe that.

AUSTIN: [Laughing] Okay.

JACK (as Fourteen): Was the package given to you by Advent?

ART (as Grand): No!

AUSTIN: *Lie!*

ART: No, that's true! It was given to me by the...it was...

JACK (as Fourteen): Fuckin' fine. Was the package given to you by Kitcha—

AUSTIN: Yes— Wai-wai-wai-wait, time out. It was given to you by Kitcha Kanna, who runs Advent in the system.

JACK: [Laughing] He's the Advent boss!

ART: But! In a Concrete Town Particular...meeting establishment!

AUSTIN: [Laughing] Well the Concrete Town Particulars are part of Advent.

ART: So?

AUSTIN: O-kay. I'm just saying, I just need to trigger when Fourteen knows you're lying, because of a move that they have.

ART: But like—

AUSTIN: You're allowed to lie! But they have a move, that is you *always* know when someone is lying to you.

ART: But like, it's like saying, did the government give that to you, if like...

JACK: No! It's like, if the President of the United States gives you something, and I ask you, "Did the Americans give you this?" and you say, "No."

[Austin laughing]

ART: Well, no! But isn't it more like if the Governor gave it to you?

[Pause]

AUSTIN: No!

JACK: He's an American!

AUSTIN: No.

ART: Like if the Governor of California gave me something, I wouldn't say "the Americans" gave it—

JACK: He's an American!

JACK: [Laughing, incredulous] If you were talking to someone from another organization you would!

[Pause]

ART: I dunno. I feel like—

AUSTIN: This is a lie.

JACK: I think you have a—

AUSTIN: This is a lie. Let's be honest, this is a lie.

JACK: You have a vested interest in... in getting away with this, Art.

ART: I just feel like it's a regional, it's a regional thing.

AUSTIN: It's not! He's the leader of Advent in this sector.

JACK (as Fourteen): Alright, fine. Go and wait in the golf cart.

ART (as Grand): Alright, but we're runnin' out of time...I assume. I don't know.

JACK: I'm gonna ring the doorbell again.

AUSTIN: Bzz-onk. Bzz-bzz-bzzt.

AUSTIN (as Corona): Wha—One second.

AUSTIN: And Kentucky's Corona opens the door again.

AUSTIN (as Corona): Who—[sighs] Grand, you left your...guard.

JACK: I'm gonna try and swing at him!

AUSTIN: Okay! Give me a, uh, Scrap.

JACK: This is kind of coming out of nowhere. And this is like a position thing, right—

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think it's Great effect because of that.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But Kentucky's Corona isn't like, a, you know, a trained soldier, but I will say it's—it is Risky but I'm going to give you Great position—or uh, Great effect...Mm, I could go the other way, I could go Controlled...Standard, actually. It is out of nowhere.

JACK: Yeah, I feel like that's what it is.

AUSTIN: Okay, let's do that, let's go Controlled Standard.

JACK: Okay, right. I need to redo that.

AUSTIN: And this is just a punch, right?

JACK: Yeah, but it's a punch from—

AUSTIN: From a big robot, yeah, I gotcha [chuckles].

JACK: Um, Controlled...Standard.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Uh, I'm willing to just—Yeah, I'll burn a gambit on this.

AUSTIN: Yeah, you're earning them.

ART: *I'm* earning them.

AUSTIN: True.

JACK: Yeah, [laughs] you are earning them...[Dismayed] Oh my God.

AUSTIN: That's two ones.

JACK: That's two ones! That's the worst roll!

AUSTIN: Um...So I think you fly forward with this punch. You're in a controlled position, so I'm limited as to how badly I can hurt you, which is good, for you.

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: You go in like—You throw that punch forward and I think there is a moment where there is, there is a second of recognition in your uh—maybe, maybe they noticed you...In fact, what we get is, we see you about to throw the punch and then we get a shot of Kitcha Kanna watching from a monitor that has, like, a microphone, and so they heard that entire little conversation, right?

JACK: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: And Kentucky's Corona just steps out of the way, and you slide in, and the door closes behind you. You are now in a risky position. And Kentucky's Corona says—spits on the ground as you get back up into a stance and says:

AUSTIN (as Kentucky's Corona): I guess it's been that month.

AUSTIN: Referring to the time when you—During uh, as a reminder, during This Year of Ours, you made the case that because time is weird on Moonlock, it hadn't actually been a month yet so they couldn't come to collect from a farmer who they were trying to take the land of. Um, so. And, you know, just quickly grabs the, the, like, I don't know if you remember, but Kentucky's Corona just has like six of those guns, like a bandolier of guns, right?

JACK: Yeah, like those awful—Ugh, I fucking hate Kentucky's Corona.

AUSTIN: No, yeah, he sucks. And just like pulls a gun and points it at you. And pulls the trigger, I think, immediately. What do you do?

JACK: Oh God, uh, I think it's an evasive maneuver. Or at least evasive in the sense that I'm trying to make a less important bit of me get hit if something's going to get hit.

AUSTIN: Sure.

JACK: But I don't think it looks like an evasive maneuver. I think it looks like a huge slab of metal moving very quickly.

AUSTIN: [Laughs] Okay. Are you then— is this like an engagement? Zoom out a little in terms of time, are you then following up with an attack?

JACK: Yeah, I'm absolutely following up with an attack.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: Yeah, I'm gonna, uh...hmm....If I check two boxes for a heavy blaster—

AUSTIN: That's, uh, much more damage, basically, right?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I think per the book [typing], a heavy blaster is—Let me see, "Can do considerable damage to vehicles and things like unshielded doors."

JACK: Oh Jesus.

AUSTIN: [Reading] "Will do serious and messy harm to people, illegal."

JACK: [Laughs] Illegal.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Okay, cool. Agent Forty-seven can't carry it in public.

AUSTIN: What I will say, right, what I will say is—Oh wait, you have six, so yeah, you can still—you can totally carry it. I mean that could just be you. Right? You're a big robot.

JACK: Mm, I don't know whether or not—

AUSTIN: Or should the sword have been your heavy blaster, in retrospect?

JACK: No, 'cause I—[Exhales] I think the sword is a sword.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: I think, you know, if I had wanted to knock the door down, I'd have been hacking at it for a while.

AUSTIN: Yeah, okay.

JACK: I think the only reason that we hit the two guys behind the thing was the sort of anime thing of the golf cart was moving in the same direction.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's great, it gave you extra speed, exactly. Is the thing, is it like piston arms, is it like—you're looking to really swing here, basically, right?

JACK: Yeah, maybe this is where this body has some kind of projectile, I just don't really know—In my gut, the visor opens, and something like cool and *NieR: Automata*-y happens.

AUSTIN: Oh sure. Like from like your weird gem eyes?

JACK: From my mouth, I think—

AUSTIN: Ooh.

JACK: Like something very weird—some, some, leaning into synths being able to do cool and weird stuff.

AUSTIN: Yeah. What if it's not a projectile? What if it's like, heat mouth? What if it's like a heat ray—

JACK: [Laughs] I'm sorry?

AUSTIN: What if it's like a heat ray, from your mouth?

JACK: Oh yeah, no, that's pretty close to what I was thinking.

AUSTIN: Like, it's just a super, super, super hot heat lamp.

JACK: Yeah, and we just see the metal around Fourteen's lips ripple.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah.

JACK: This is a blast pistol. It's not a heavy blaster, I don't think. I think if it was coming out of my chest it would be.

AUSTIN: Here's what, no, what it really comes down to is: could you get through a doorway with this?

JACK: Very slowly.

AUSTIN: Okay. So, you couldn't damage vehicles or unshielded doors?

JACK: Oh my God, no, the vehicles would run me over or something while I was doing that.

AUSTIN: Okay, then yeah, it is just another blast pistol.

JACK: Um, wow.

AUSTIN: But it's not a projectile weapon in terms of a gun, so I don't know that Quire is going to interfere with it, right? It seems like—

JACK: I have to be close, close-ish.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's basically a close-ish—Basically if this was DungeonWorld, it would be “close”, right? It's the same room, it's not a pistol that could shoot thirty or forty yards?

JACK: Yeah, if you were standing thirty or forty yards away and I did this, nothing would happen [chuckles].

AUSTIN: Right. You would feel a warm breeze [chuckles].

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Alright. Gimme a, gimme a Scrap then.

JACK: So, yeah, let's see how it rolls, and I'll narrate based on, I guess, I'll know if it goes well.

AUSTIN: Are you spending another gambit?

JACK: I should. Art, I'm sorry, I got myself in this situation—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: —can I spend another one of your gambits?

ART: Uh, yeah, just save one for me.

JACK: Okay, alright, I won't spend the last one.

AUSTIN: So, 2d6—

JACK: Is this a Desperate position, or?

AUSTIN: This is Risky.

JACK: Okay.

AUSTIN: You went from Controlled to Risky.

JACK: Yep. Standard effect. One bonus dice...[rolls] Okay.

AUSTIN: That is a five. Alright, so, on a five, you do it but there is a consequence. You suffer harm, a complication occurs, you have reduced effect, you end up in a Desperate position. Tell me what you want to happen here, on your success.

JACK: So, I want to—Fourteen has been knocked down—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: —And, has sort of begun to move away. But I think that they—and I really am going for a *NieR: Automata* sort of horrifying thing a robot can do—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm

JACK: I think they spring up, and they just put their face very close to Kentucky's.

AUSTIN: Mmm-hm

JACK: And says, "Yeah, I guess the month has come around," and their mouth just opens.

AUSTIN: Oh my God!

JACK: Were they wearing a helmet?

AUSTIN: Yeah, always. Remember they're Concrete Town Particulars; they need to.

JACK: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I thought that if I—

AUSTIN: If you destroy their helmet, they will die.

JACK: Oh, yes, yes! I don't know if I wanna liquefy this dude, but I will take a shot at his helmet.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I mean, that's—even with this—I guess you start to, right? You get the heat in—so this is what, here's the complication, or the, here's the—

JACK: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: —You get the heat in and it starts to melt the, it melts the tubes. So as a reminder, the way that this stuff works is the Concrete Town Particulars have these gas mask-looking things on, that what they're doing is pumping a bit of the Mirage into—like concentrated Mirage—into their oxygen, or into their, into their, you know, into their gas mixture, their breath mixture, so that they can actually breathe—without it, they can't breathe anymore—and I think your heat basically shuts those valves, or it melts the tubing in such a way that it's making it harder to pump that gas in. And it's working, and then, and then, he pulls the trigger. And then he grabs another gun, and pulls the trigger, and drops it. And he grabs another gun and pulls the trigger and drops it. And you take the Level Two harm "Riddled".

JACK: Ohh, perforated.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's back.

JACK: Level Two harm "Riddled".

AUSTIN: Yeah, and you just have three gunshots in your stomach. And it's like—again, he has on, a, uh, I just said it like a few minutes ago, what is it called again? Like a—

JACK: Bandolier?

AUSTIN: —A bandolier of guns. So: grabs gun, shoots, drops, grabs gun, shoots, drops. Three times, and it's like right hand, left hand, right hand, so it's like "boom-boom, boom-boom, boom-boom", and drops all three. You still have hold on him or you could be dropping him but you would be—I think this is, this is not a great position to be in. He still has three more of these guns on him, and you are "riddled". You could resist that, you could try to resist that, uhhh it's just that you also have seven stress already.

JACK: Could I downgrade it with armor?

AUSTIN: You could totally downgrade it with armor, yep! You could avoid it with armor, actually. So you want to spend armor? You would have four, yeah that would be four of your six—

JACK: And I would have one remaining armor?

AUSTIN: Uhhhh, no, I think you would only have one armor.

JACK: Wait—

AUSTIN: Armor takes two slots in your load.

JACK: Oh shit, it's not like two boxes?

AUSTIN: Correct. That's two slots for one piece of armor, in the same way that heavy blaster is two slots.

JACK: Oh God. I'm gonna play pragmatically here and actually resist it because losing a dice, especially on a lot of these rolls—

AUSTIN: Okay. Resisting it could knock you out again, remember?

JACK: Oh I mean, sorry, I mean—

AUSTIN: Take the armor?

JACK: Yeah, avoid it with armor, yeah.

AUSTIN: Gotcha, alright.

JACK: And I think, so, so, gems come *flying* off the armor. Right?

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: It's just like an awful sound. And in the same way that like, you know, protective vests will protect you but they don't negate damage—

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK:—There's like bad bruising and stuff—

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JACK: —I think that Fourteen feels rocked by this. The armor is damaged.

AUSTIN: Do you think it actually, this is a thing we can talk about, but, armor lets you resist an effect, and it can either say like, "Okay, you don't take that damage," or it can say, "You take less damage." Is this resisting the damage entirely or is this—

JACK: I don't think that, given what I've said—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —We would be being true to the fiction if we negated it entirely.

AUSTIN: Yeah, so then I would say—I'm just gonna double-check this to make sure that armor does in fact, I'm ninety percent sure that that's right, I just wanna...confirm. Give me a second. [Reading] "To reduce or avoid a consequence." So, yeah, it can be either, and I think what you just said makes it sound like it reduces it to a Level One harm instead. Which, "Rocked" is kind of nice.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I kind of like that, that are just, that you've been "Rocked". Outside, real quick, hey, Grand?

ART: Uh-huh?

AUSTIN: There are gunshots coming from inside.

ART: Yeah, that's a real shame.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: Alexa, play "Despacito".

[Austin bursts into laughter]

ART: Um—

[Jack also starts laughing]

ART: I fucked that up, it's "it's so sad."

AUSTIN: It's so sad. It's fine. It's fine. Do you want a new take? Do you, you want a take?

ART: Uh, yeah maybe, yeah. That is so sad. Alexa, play "Despacito".

[Austin and Jack keep laughing]

AUSTIN: [Laughing] Still good.

JACK: Such a bastard.

[Austin still laughing]

ART: I told you not to do it!

JACK: Why did we bring, why did we bring Grand on this mission? Couldn't Waltz just have come?

AUSTIN: You know, who could say?

ART: [Indignant] It was my mission! You can't not bring me, I'm the mission!

AUSTIN: So you're driving away?

ART: No, I, I mean, I'll tell you what I really want out of this situation. Is, I want Fourteen to lose, and then I want to take them back with me.

AUSTIN: Okay. Like, all fucked up.

JACK: Sort of like it becomes a kidnap?

ART: It's a rescue! I'm rescuing you!

JACK: By letting me lose a fight and then just sort of transporting me back [laughs].

ART: I told you not to do it! We could be on our way back right now!

AUSTIN: Inside, you've been rocked, and Kitcha Kanna, who is, you know, eight feet tall, stands up from behind a desk that has a bunch of, like, CCTV monitors set up. I imagine that the place smells like sawdust—I don't know if you can smell as a robot, but it smells like sawdust. It is a resource warehouse that they've just taken over, basically, and are using as a staging place. And Kitcha Kanna, like, click-clack, click-clack, click-clack, rushes over to you and is gonna try to talon you with their diamond-sharp claws. In fact, I think they do a cool jump and it's the first time we've seen that they can fly, because they do the thing of, like, they jump up to try and come down at you and then they flap once to try and throw you off—

JACK: Mm.

AUSTIN: —And then are gonna come down and get you. What do you do?

JACK: [Exhales] Um, oh God. I wanna engineer the position that Grand finds the room in, if they decide to show up.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: And I don't know what the best one of that is.

AUSTIN: Good question.

JACK: Is there sort of a, what—[sighs]. I have to evade at this point, and I have to try and regain control of the room as best I can, right?

AUSTIN: Sure.

JACK: That feels like the move to make—

AUSTIN: Sure.

JACK: —The move is like, if I don't do that, if I just go swinging into another attack, I'll just be on the back foot, they've got me against the ropes.

AUSTIN: Right. So are you basically then looking for a move to where you can move back to Controlled position?

JACK: Yes, that's exactly what I'm trying to do.

AUSTIN: That's cool, that's a cool roll. How are you doing it?

JACK: I wanna—I'm trying to think about ways to embody this big physical shape in this room.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: What's the lighting situation like?

AUSTIN: I think it's kind of dim in here. You know—

JACK: Is there a light I could destroy or pull down from the ceiling?

AUSTIN: I think it's too tall. It is a warehouse, right? So it's like, there's rafters up there, do you know what I mean?

JACK: [Laughing] It's similar to one of these small warehouses.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah.

JACK: Tiny Atlantis, but a warehouse.

AUSTIN: Yeah, exactly.

JACK: Ummm [exhales]. Oh God. Okay! Alright, I think what I do is I run through a rack of storage.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: Just without stopping, just absolutely—

AUSTIN: Push through it. Yeah.

JACK: The Michael Bay Transformers, a Transformer decides to go through a wall, you know?

AUSTIN: [Laughs] Gotcha. I think that's either Scramble or Scrap, probably?

JACK: Well, I have no points in Scramble.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: But—

AUSTIN: I actually don't know that it's Scrap.

JACK: No, yes, no, I think you're absolutely right. I think I gotta—

AUSTIN: I'm reading the thing—

JACK: I think I fucked this one [laughs]

AUSTIN: It's a good move! Are you Intimidating or Threatening? Maybe it's a Command? No you're not really—

JACK: But I'm not commanding *them* to do anything. If I said, if I was gonna say "Stand down," but I'm past negotiating with this.

AUSTIN: Then you're not trying to threaten them either. It is just "I'm trying to get my feet under me," basically.

JACK: I mean, there's an alternative, right? Which is, that I use the—we need a better word than "heat breath" because it just sounds awful.

AUSTIN: Uh, heat breath? Your heat breath?

JACK: No, no, it sounds awful. It sounds like the symptoms of a cold, in the summer. [Laughter] Like the flu. It makes me think of the flu every time you say it.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: The other option is I roar, right? Like I use heat breath—

AUSTIN: Ooh, yeah.

JACK: —As something frightening. Just this synth squares up on the floor and just like, shrieks up at the bird as it dives down. To just sort of like, you know when you're being charged by an animal—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —And you're like, "I'm gonna try and make myself very big,"

AUSTIN: Totally.

JACK: I'm doing that, except my mouth is causing enough heat to begin to melt my lips.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: God, that was a horrifying sentence!

AUSTIN: You just said that, out loud. It's great, we love our show. Umm, that to me does sound like an Intimidate, like a Command. 'Cause then you're making space, basically, by making them back off from you, right?

JACK: Yeah, by being weird and frightening. And Kentucky's Corona already knows that this move means business.

AUSTIN: Yeah, if they get close to you while doing it they might just die, right?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So go ahead and give me a Command. That is one d6. It is Risky Standard.

JACK: Art, I love you very much, I'm not going to use this gambit.

AUSTIN: Are you gonna push—you can't push yourself, right, 'cause you'll status out. Uhhhh, are you gonna—there's nothing else you can do. Okay. Well, I can Devil's Bargain you. I can give you a Devil's Bargain here. Let's see, what's a good Devil's Bargain...I can offer you one,

which is [pauses]. Oh, you know what a fun one is? Mmm mmm, uhmmm. There is—[Sighs]. I can give you a die, here, if you let me tick a clock earlier. Not one of the ones that are already on screen.

JACK: No, I'm not gonna do that.

ART: Secret clock. That's the worst!

AUSTIN: There's a secret clock.

JACK: I'm not gonna do that. You overplayed your hand there, that is—[laughs]

AUSTIN: No, that's fine. That clock is gonna advance at some point. Honestly? Maybe now is better, but—

JACK: Now you're just trying to psych us out!

AUSTIN: I don't know!

ART: Yeah. This is—

JACK: You're with me on this, Art, right? Like, we shouldn't [laughs]. We shouldn't tick this clock.

ART: No, probably not.

AUSTIN: Alright.

ART: I mean, maybe!

AUSTIN: Then one d6.

ART: This is going pretty badly right now.

AUSTIN: It ain't great.

JACK: It's going great.

AUSTIN: Risky Standard, one d6.

JACK: Risky Standard.

AUSTIN: One d6, to Command/Intimidate these people.

JACK: Watch this! This is—I'm putting positive energy out into the universe.

AUSTIN: Same!

JACK: I'm gonna get a gambit! [Clicks]

[Laughter]

ART: [Dismayed noise]

AUSTIN: That's a two. So [Prolonged laughter]! The Talonites, who are these bird people that Kitcha Kanna is, they're from a desert planet, so. Just lands on you.

JACK: [Groans] Oh God.

AUSTIN: And you're just breathing—and just like, claw claw claw, claw claw claw, claw claw, tearing the jewels off of you.

JACK: It's a bird versus a necklace, and the necklace is losing.

AUSTIN: The necklace is losing this one, unfortunately. *Very* badly.

JACK: [Groans]

AUSTIN: You are gonna take the Level Two harm—mm, Level One harm—"Clawed", because the actual thing that's happened is that you're in a Desperate position. So take another Level One harm, "Clawed"—

JACK: Clawed.

AUSTIN: —And you've also been pinned to the ground, Desperate.

[Pause]

JACK: Is this the moment? [laughs]

AUSTIN: I dunno what's—You tell me! You're pinned to the ground. And Kitcha Kanna, like, Kitcha Kanna basically does the bird equivalent, or like the bird-person equivalent, of that moment when Neo shakes all the dust off of them by just posing, do you know what I'm talking about?

JACK: [Chuckles] Yes.

AUSTIN: But also, it's almost as if they're just like, and maybe they are actually like pulling their collar on their, or on his, jacket, to be like "I'm in command of this situation," and it's just like one claw going deeper and deeper into your shoulder, another claw going deeper and deeper into your stomach, just standing on top of you. And is like:

AUSTIN (as Kitcha Kanna): Your group of so-called heroes has gotten in my way over and over again. All I do, I do for my people. We're all just helping ourselves. But you're too egotistical to understand that.

AUSTIN: Grand, are you still just outside?

ART: I mean, I was gonna enter, but that line really makes it hard. [Laughs] That's a hard line to enter on.

[Jack laughs]

ART: But I mean, I guess, I'm here to offer Fourteen an out.

AUSTIN: Okay, so what's that look like?

ART: Can I just open this door open? Can I open the door?

AUSTIN: I think you have to open the door. Per the fiction? Because they—

ART: Is it openable? Am I knocking?

JACK: Space-crowbar. Or something.

AUSTIN: You're gonna have to space-crowbar it, yeah.

ART: Alright.

AUSTIN: To get in. Yeah, because the condition, the fail-state from when Fourteen threw that punch, was that they got locked in here.

ART: But sometimes, it's only locked from one side.

AUSTIN: Yeah, and this time it's the inside [chuckles].

ART: Right, so I can open it from the outside.

AUSTIN: Oh, no, no, no. It's locked. It's locked. They didn't leave it so that anybody could walk in on them beating up this person.

JACK: [Laughs] In the warehouse.

ART: Alright, so I'm gonna try and open the door, if I can.

AUSTIN: Alright. We established you have the tool already so—

ART: Yeah. Is it Risky? Or Controlled?

AUSTIN: This is Risky. You might not be the one at risk, you know?

ART: Sure, I mean, yeah.

AUSTIN: So 2d6, Risky Standard. There's a four! So the thing that I'm gonna ask you if you wanna do, the thing that happens here, is that it just takes a long time. You're just like clawing at it again and again and again, and Fourteen, you're going to take a Level Two harm that is—what is it going to be? What happens when a robot has their wires on the outside?

ART: I mean, that sounds a lot like what “disemboweled” is for a person, but I don't know if—

AUSTIN: Yeah, that is what it is. I'm typing “disemboweled synonym” here. “Gutted”?

JACK: [Dismayed] Ohh.

AUSTIN: “Eviscerated”? Eviscerated.

JACK: Ohh, this is awful. It's “Eviscerated”. This is awful.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Eviscerated.

ART: Do we have a technology pun for any of these, though? Do we want to, like, take a moment?

AUSTIN: That's what I'm trying to figure out. Right, like—

JACK: This is not the time for punning!

AUSTIN: “Wires crossed”? No. I'm looking up idioms for the word “wires”. [Laughs] “Tangled”? No, I don't know.

JACK: Just “Eviscerated” is fine!

AUSTIN: It's “Eviscerated”. It's “Eviscerated”.

JACK: Oh boy, I can have two of these.

AUSTIN: Yeah! So you're at negative one die now, Fourteen.

JACK: And lessened effect.

AUSTIN: And lessened effect, correct. You wouldn't lose—

JACK: Jesus.

AUSTIN: To be clear, you don't lose a second die from having a second Level Two harm.

JACK: Okay, alright, fair, it's just where—

ART: I promise, I'm trying to save you.

AUSTIN: So yeah, you're just getting torn up, Fourteen. And are getting monologued at by Kitcha Kanna.

JACK: Yeah, this asshole is monologuing at me at the same time!

AUSTIN: Totally. So, I mean, here's what I'll say, one thing. Grand, you could resist this for Fourteen—

JACK: Oh wait, real quick. Is he lying?

AUSTIN. No. About what?

JACK: Okay.

AUSTIN: Good question.

JACK: Him believing that what he's—

AUSTIN: No, no. Kitcha—

JACK: Does he really believe that what he's doing is for the good of people?

AUSTIN: No, I mean—you may not have heard, there was a, I'll read it to you, one second. I just need to go to my Drive real quick...Kitcha Kanna, you know, came from a place, like everybody, right? And fuckin' clawed his way into where he's—that wasn't supposed to be a pun. But like, clawed his way into the position he's in, you know, grew up as an orphan who was put to work, and absolutely believes that this is a dog-eat-dog world type thing. Here's the paragraph in

question, uhh: [reading] “He leans forward in his chair, his back locked at a straight diagonal angle, as if ready to launch. It was a position of strength, one that the Talonite had earned, not least of all through his ability to do what he is doing at this very moment: untangling threads of information and capitalizing where no one else sees the possibility. It served him when he escaped the labor world he was born on, it served him as he maneuvered his way up through the underworld of crime bosses and malefactor algorithms, it served him as he did what all good entrepreneurs do and learned how to make his cruel business legal and acceptable, and it serves him now as he plans his next ascent to the very peak of Advent itself.” He is very much the sort of person who came from the lowest of the low and is a “rising tides lift all boats” sort of person. He is just cruel, also—

JACK: Mm

AUSTIN: —like I’m not, there is no—he takes joy in what he is doing to you now, so if there’s a lie, it is that he is maybe downplaying that—

JACK: Yes.

AUSTIN: But he absolutely thinks the world according to Advent is the world as it should be.

JACK: Okay. Yes. There’s a difference between being able to tell when someone is lying and being able to tell when someone is wrong.

AUSTIN: Right. Exactly. And I’m sure you believe he is wrong.

JACK: Well, fuck this guy.

AUSTIN: Right, yeah.

JACK: I’m not doing any, there is deliberately no comebacks here, I’m just—

AUSTIN: Okay. Grand, you could resist what just happened to Fourteen, if you’d like. And I think that’s a Prowess resist, because—oh no, it’s not, it’s an Insight resist, because it’s like “No, I have to go faster, I have to get in.”

ART: Alright.

AUSTIN: To do that, you roll your Insight, so you’d be rolling 1d6, and taking six minus whatever your die roll is in stress.

ART: Ughh

AUSTIN: Which is enough to maybe give you a status immediately, if you rolled a one.

ART: [Scoffing] I'm not gonna roll a one.

JACK: Ohh dear.

AUSTIN: Okay, so, click the Insight button for me. And I don't think you have any sort of—

ART: We still have a gambit, right?

AUSTIN: Can't spend that on resists.

ART: Ahh well.

AUSTIN: It's only on action rolls, yeah.

ART: Oh God. Just don't be a one. I have to look away while I click this button so it's gonna take a second.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I getcha, yeah. Hey, that's a five!

ART: Hey!

AUSTIN: Look at you, you only get one stress! Alright, so get rid of that "Eviscerated", Fourteen.

JACK: [Relieved exhale] Thank you!

AUSTIN: Because instead what happens is, you know, Kitcha Kanna is monologuing at you and then like *buuup* the door opens, like, you find the crevice you need with the crowbar and you open it. What do you say or do when the door opens and Fourteen Fifteen is pinned to the ground by this giant bird-person?

ART (as Grand): Enough! It's enough.

AUSTIN: Kitcha Kanna like tilts their head at you, or his head, at you and says:

AUSTIN (as Kitcha Kanna): Grand Magnificent, I decide what is enough.

ART (as Grand): They're finished. We'll go.

AUSTIN (as Kitcha Kanna): They are.

AUSTIN: And then begins to put the talon deeper in.

ART (as Grand): C'mon. You got what you want.

AUSTIN (as Kitcha Kanna): What do you think I want, Grand Magnificent?

ART (as Grand): The package?

AUSTIN (as Kitcha Kanna): That is part of it. But I want a clear route. If I let this one go, they will interfere, right?

AUSTIN: And they look down at you, Fourteen.

JACK (as Fourteen): Yes.

ART (as Grand): [Incredulous] But that's gonna happen—if I leave, if I go back and say, "Oh, Fourteen couldn't make it," that's gonna—same, same thing.

AUSTIN (as Kitcha Kanna): Yes, and then one less will be in our way.

ART (as Grand): [Annoyed] Oh my God.

AUSTIN (as Kitcha Kanna): This is the world we live in, Grand Magnificent.

ART (as Grand): It's not the world I wanna live in anymore, that's the point! I'm not here to hurt people.

AUSTIN (as Kitcha Kanna): Then sit in the golf cart. Or go to Port Andora, number twenty-two, and see none of this ever again. The offer is true.

AUSTIN: Fourteen Fifteen, he is not lying.

JACK (as Fourteen): [Exhales] He is telling the truth.

[Delighted claps]

ART (as Grand): Why don't you just let it go?!

AUSTIN: Who are you talking to?

ART: Fourteen.

JACK (as Fourteen): Do you really not know why?

AUSTIN: Just jewels everywhere, wires out, sparks.

ART (as Grand): It's fuckin' fixable.

JACK (as Fourteen): What is?

ART (as Grand): Whatever it is.

JACK (as Fourteen): Yeah, and you'd rather fly away than fix it.

ART (as Grand): I opened the fucking door. Flying away is out that way. I just want people to be okay.

JACK (as Fourteen): Then do something about it.

ART (as Grand): I'm doing it right now! This is it! I'm telling you to let it go and walk away. I'm saying you don't have to die here. And I don't know if it's true!

JACK (as Fourteen): We're not done yet, Grand Magnificent.

ART (as Grand): I'm. Done. I don't want *you* to be done. There's so much more that you can do than die on this floor.

AUSTIN (as Kitcha Kanna). What will you give us for their life?

ART (as Grand): Fuckin' nothing until they say they want to live!

JACK: How many shots does Grand have left in his gun?

AUSTIN: Two.

ART: Two.

JACK: Do I know this?

AUSTIN: Mm. I dunno.

ART: No, but how good's your line? [Laughs]

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: You couldn't have known if he used them on the way, right?

JACK: Right.

AUSTIN: Even if he always shows up with—even if you know he always comes with three—which is maybe a, that's, who knows if you knew that—you know if he used one on his way, like earlier in the fight with the Riggers, or after landing, you know, so.

ART: I will say that the holster is unbuckled.

JACK: Oh that's true. Which could mean either, it could go either way, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: Yeah. It either means I'm ready or I don't give a shit. But it means I, it at least means I considered—If I have shots, I came in here considering violence.

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes.

[Pause]

JACK: [Sighing] Oh, God.

ART: If I'd gotten that door open sooner, it would—I had a whole different pose, it would have been great. But it's not the road that carried us.

JACK: I'm trying to think about—'cause what I don't want to be here is obstinate. I don't feel like Fourteen is making this decision out of obstinacy—

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: —So much as—[Sighs]. You don't, you don't surrender to Advent.

AUSTIN: Right. We've seen what that looks like already—

JACK: Right.

AUSTIN: —And what happened was Advent got born, the way it is.

JACK: Right, yeah, exactly. Like, this is not a situation where you go, "Oh alright, goodbye."

AUSTIN: Not trying to Chamberlain your way into World War II.

JACK: Right, yes. Yes.

AUSTIN: I think Kitcha Kanna's gonna make the offer, like, twisting the talon a little bit and then saying—ah, who even knows if that feels like anything to you, you know?

JACK: I was gonna say—

AUSTIN: I don't know.

JACK: I think I'm very aware that there is a limit at which the robot will stop working.

AUSTIN: Right, right. This is—

JACK: But I think I'm just sort of—this is more for Kitcha Kanna than it is—

AUSTIN: No, it's more for Grand.

JACK: Right, yes.

AUSTIN: Kitcha Kanna's doing this performance, right? And is like:

AUSTIN (as Kitcha Kanna): If your friend wants to live, all *you* need do is, in a safe place far from here, give us your talents one time. And there is a better way. Fourteen Fifteen will walk here free. You will come with us, and I will take you to a beautiful world, where you will design for us a single object of our choosing.

ART: [In the background]: What the *fuck* did I just do?

AUSTIN: [Laughs] Art?

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Art?

ART: Hi.

AUSTIN: You here? Okay. You there?

ART: Yeah, I was typing something and I got into some weird Roll20 window.

AUSTIN: Oh, weird. Okay.

JACK: [Laughs] You entered deeper. Oh quick, Art, check the box that makes them all be good numbers!

ART: I'm already gone.

AUSTIN: [Kitcha Kanna voice] Now we're the good guys! We are friends now, to you! Your friends! Let's go to a party!

ART: I want to say no, but I also want Fourteen to have a chance to have me say yes.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ART: Grand doesn't want one more job, Grand wants to be gone.

JACK: Yeah.

ART: But if you're telling me—You can tell me that you want me to take it, and I'll do it.

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: I don't think—okay! That seems like, I don't know, that just seems like it goes against everything Fourteen just said about not giving in to them, right?

ART: Yeah! But—

JACK: Right, that's Fourteen saying—

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ART: But like, facing oblivion, do you mean it?

AUSTIN: Which is oblivion. This is not a good place to be.

JACK: Yeah. Um—

AUSTIN: Well, cards on the table. This is—we've been here before, right, but. Cards on the table: you're on your last life. We know that that's the truth.

JACK: Yes, yes.

AUSTIN: The second thing, the thing that I want to put on the table is like—if we go down this road and Grand leaves this room, I don't know how Fourteen lives. Fourteen makes a roll, is what happens, right? Fourteen makes a roll.

JACK: Yeah, there's like a—

AUSTIN: And tries to fight their way out.

JACK: Then we get into this weird space where like, this is like a sort of technical problem as well, where we're at this great narrative moment, and as much as I love a good Deus Ex Machina, I want what happens to feel...good narratively. 'Cause part of me is just like, "Well, there's a flashback. I spend stress and I get a flashback."

AUSTIN: Right, totally.

JACK: But it has to be a really fucking good flashback—

AUSTIN: It does.

JACK: —In order to make this thing work—

AUSTIN: And maybe it is!

JACK: [Laughs] Maybe it is.

AUSTIN: It is the game we're in. You have two stress to play with here, right? Or one—

JACK: Yeah, and a flashback costs me what?

AUSTIN: It costs you between zero and two, depending how outlandish it is.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Given this, I think it would be two and you would status out, but that would probably be better than hitting a status.

JACK: But that would take me out for the rest of the game, right? It just would be like, "Off you go, Art!"

AUSTIN: Yeah, uh-huh.

JACK: [Laughs] Oh fuck.

AUSTIN: Or take you out for an extended period, right? We would probably come back to you in thirty minutes or something.

JACK: There is another thing here, right? Which is I agree, if only to get a window.

AUSTIN: What do you mean? Oh, I see what you're saying.

JACK: If I go like, "Let's do it!"

AUSTIN: I don't like that. I mean, I do, it's fine. I would run, if y'all want to do that—

JACK: It's like me leaving the room and turning around and shooting.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: It's like okay, cool. That's—there are way more interesting things to do here.

AUSTIN: Right [Siren sounds in background]. I'm gonna let this siren pass us, one second.

JACK: It's the ambulance for Fourteen [Laughs].

AUSTIN: Yeah. The thing I keep coming back to is this constant, you know, watchword or phrase or whatever that I've been using for most of the season, which is "No more alibis." The drama of this sequence for me is "What does Fourteen decide to do?", "What does Grand decide to do?" Now I think there's lots of ways for that to break out and I think the version of it that's like, "Give me the window so that I can, we can turn around and shoot these fuckers" is something—

JACK: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: —Is something about who Fourteen is, but I do think it also kind of discloses or kind of closes off, I guess, rather, the possibility of answering this core question about who Grand is, and we're in the third act. Right?

JACK: Yes. Yes.

AUSTIN: We are either one or zero games away from starting to play the finale.

JACK: The thing is, it's the Gunslinger, the Gunslinger would do that.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And Fourteen is not the Gunslinger.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: I feel that following that line, the answer is as clear as it is uncomfortable, right? Which is like, the Ironclad is not gonna back down in the face of this. The question is, you know, if I make the roll, it's gotta just be an attack, it's just gotta like—

AUSTIN: Right, you're gonna Scrap your way up to your feet, right?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: In which case, the thing that—so maybe there is drama there that's worth pursuing, which is, I can say very clearly that the result of that is going to be a fatal thing if you fail that roll, right? Like a Level Four damage that you could—

JACK: Resist and take a status.

AUSTIN: Resist, take a status, and it would still drop to Level Three harm, do you know what I mean? Like, you still would not be in a good place.

JACK: No, yeah, the difference would be, "I'm out permanently" or "I'm out for a while—"

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And even when I return I'm in a bad way.

AUSTIN: You're in a pretty rough way.

JACK: There is not—I'm not—like, I think a lot about when Hitchcock tried to negotiate with Thackery—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And he just cuts his throat.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And there are situations when I've played these games where that is a fun mistake to make—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: That is not a mistake that I want to or can make here.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: I—this—I'm not, I'm not consorting with these people.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: Um. So I think I'm gonna take that shot. And if it goes badly, we'll see how badly it goes.

AUSTIN: I mean, before we commit to that, Grand, are you happy with where you're at, which is, Grand is sort of, not fence-sitting here but like, will neither step in to help his friend nor will close the door and walk away?

ART: Well I think that the push here is we find out that, like, Grand wanted it both ways, right?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ART: Grand wanted to make this mistake and get out and not have anyone get hurt or be mad at him.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: And—

AUSTIN: Which he could have done, if he'd come here alone.

[Austin and Art chuckle, Jack laughs]

ART: Yeah, but then something bad might have happened to Fourteen.

AUSTIN: Right, true.

ART: Like that's why the last time we—

JACK: It's such a limited position, right? [Amused] 'Cause you're not shooting. You're just hanging out in the doorway, *in the doorway*.

ART: I mean, I thought I could get you out. And I was wrong, but I don't think it was a bad try.

[Austin laughs, Jack laughs]

ART: Y'know, sometimes you're wrong. And I mean, you were kind of a jerk about it. We might have been able to get you out.

[Jack laughs]

ART: We'll never know now.

JACK: Hey, we might, we might! This—We're just assuming that this roll will go badly, because it's Friends at the Table, a podcast that we make.

ART: I mean whatever happens, I'm not gonna talk you out of it. The work we've—We're closing that window; that window is closed.

AUSTIN: Right.

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: So you're gonna make this Desperate Scrap attempt, is what it sounds like then.

JACK: Yes.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: Do you want to do it before or after Grand leaves?

AUSTIN: Oh, that's a good—wait, so Grand's leaving. See that's—This is the drama I want to get to.

JACK: Ohh. This is a good—I mean, I feel like—

ART: Grand is going to say 'no'; Grand is going to say that he doesn't want to work for—

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: He doesn't want to do any more work, he wants to be gone. He wants to find somewhere and be there and never talk to anyone he's met before.

AUSTIN: And then I think if you say that then Kitcha Kanna says:

AUSTIN (as Kitcha Kanna): Then leave. Go to Harbor Andora, dock twenty-two. We will see you there.

ART: And that's the question. Do you want to act right now, or do you want to act in forty-five seconds, after Grand has, you know, started up the golf cart? What's your—

JACK: Um. I mean my—

ART: I'll walk as fast or slowly to the golf cart as you want me to right now, for whatever dramatic moment you want.

AUSTIN: I guess the question there is like, does—

JACK: I—

AUSTIN: One of the questions I'm curious about is, does Fourteen believe that if they make a move now, with Grand still in the room, that's beneficial?

JACK: Yes. I think that's what they believe.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: I think that's what they believe. And I think also if we—if the camera shows Grand leaving the warehouse—

AUSTIN: That's it.

JACK: And then—Right. Yes. It's either that's it, which is more compelling, or it then refocuses on Fourteen doing a fight, which shifts the focus in the scene in a way I don't like.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Agreed. Agreed.

JACK: I think that keeping both people on screen—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —Is the way to go here.

AUSTIN: Yep.

JACK: I feel really bad about rolling here, not in that I'm making the wrong decision—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: —But in that I'm frightened of the dice [laughs].

AUSTIN: The dice are scary here; I'm scared of these dice...I'm scared of the dice, is what I will say.

JACK: Okay!

AUSTIN: So. It is Desperate. Standard?

JACK: And I'm using this gambit, right, Art?

AUSTIN: Right, oh yeah, c'mon.

JACK: [Sighs]. I'm not even gonna ask Grand for help here, because I don't think that is either narratively appropriate or likely.

AUSTIN: I mean—

ART: No, you would only get the help if you were guaranteed to win, is the real thing—

AUSTIN: That's the problem.

ART: Or I guess—

AUSTIN: Right. That's exactly it.

JACK: Oh, yes, yes. Yeah.

AUSTIN: So then no, you're not helping. Because helping is about opening yourself up to reprisal, in this game and many other games.

JACK: Which Grand is *explicitly* not.

AUSTIN: Yes, that is the explicit thing that's happening with Grand's soul right now is, "Yeah, I'd help if no one would notice."

ART: Yeah.

JACK: [Laughs] Exactly.

ART: I mean, I would give the same answer to them but they don't have to ask for help.

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: Right. Right. And that again is the thing.

JACK: Okay. Alright.

AUSTIN: So what is this, 2d6?

JACK: Yeah, this is 2d6.

AUSTIN: I'm gonna give you—

JACK: And I'm actually gonna go back and click all this stuff again.

AUSTIN: Alright. So, you're already—you're spending a gambit, right?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um.

JACK: Scrap. Desperate position.

AUSTIN: One second. Let me see if there's a Devil's Bargain I can offer you, 'cause you're not gonna push yourself, right?

[Jack exhales]

AUSTIN: Devil's Bargain—

ART: Well, it's interesting if you push yourself.

AUSTIN: It is, right, yeah that's super interesting then.

[Jack laughs]

ART: 'Cause if you succeed and push yourself then we kind of get Grand's best-case scenario.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Devil's Bargain: Waltz leaves. You get a die. There's too much heat.

JACK: What does that mean?

AUSTIN: It means that there's heat—

JACK: Oh he leaves. He leaves.

AUSTIN: —and he has to leave. He leaves with the ship. You can't go to his ship to leave.

JACK: Oh my God. I like that a lot. It—I feel—cause if, you know, if what we were talking about earlier about refocusing the drama in a way that we don't like—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: I feel like this refocuses the drama in a way that is really cool—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: It just further lumps weight on Grand and Fourteen, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And Waltz is already pissed off with us.

AUSTIN: Yeah. So I think it's like—and also I think it frames the moment a little bit, which is, you know, Fourteen is pinned down by Kitcha Kanna, Kentucky's Corona has a gun pointed at Fourteen on the ground, is, like, holding the tube into his mask with the other hand, Grand is in the doorway, you know, there's the sound of birds being played—I don't know if there's actually birds here—there's blue skies outside this door, and then the communicator starts chirping and that is the moment of action, right?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Maybe Waltz comes through the communicator and is like:

AUSTIN (as Waltz): Ah, I'm sorry to do this but they found us, I gotta go. I'll try to make another pass but I gotta go now!

AUSTIN: And then—

JACK: I like Waltz [laughs].

AUSTIN: And then takes off.

[Jack sighs]

AUSTIN: So you took that die, right? So that is a gambit, that is a Devil's Bargain—

JACK: Scrap.

AUSTIN: And that is Scrap.

JACK: Desperate.

AUSTIN: So Desperate, Standard, 3d6? That's a pretty good roll!

JACK: Desperate, Standard, two bonus dice.

AUSTIN: Two bonus dice.

JACK: Okay, I'm gonna press this. I'm gonna look away this time; I didn't when Art was rolling, and now I am.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

[Clicks]

AUSTIN: Alright, that is a mixed [laughs], a mixed success, which is the worst possible one here. On a Desperate success, five, you do it but there's consequences: you suffer severe harm, a serious complication occurs. So what are you doing here?

JACK: The—

AUSTIN: Oh fuck! Oh, it doesn't matter, you only lost one die so you still would have gotten that five.

JACK: Oh yes, because of the less effect.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh wait, it's also less effect, right? Fuck. So it's less effect—

JACK: No, I wouldn't have lost a dice at all because I didn't—

AUSTIN: Oh you didn't, oh, right, right right, you're right, you're right. It's just less effect, it's just less effect. So, we'll have to keep that in mind too. So it's not Standard effect in fact, it's little effect, it's, what's the word I'm looking for?

JACK: Limited.

AUSTIN: Limited effect.

JACK: [Laughs] Little.

ART: Oh my goodness.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Little effect, Standard effect, and Big effect.

AUSTIN: Big effect [Laughs]. Small effect.

[Jack laughs]

JACK: Okay, alright. I'm going to describe what the armor does and then you can just—[Laughs]. I don't—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: Alright, so the armor...unfolds.

AUSTIN: Mm.

JACK: In the sense that—you know those toy balls that are, like, almost like polyhedrons or like buckyballs—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —Where you throw them in the air and they suddenly reveal that they can expand on a lot of axes, and then when you catch them again they're this little compacted star?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: It is revealed that the armor is not a solid body, it's a lot of plates and pieces put together—

AUSTIN: Ooh.

JACK: And it sort of explodes, or like, yeah, explodes in the sense that an exploded diagram explodes rather than a grenade explodes. Maybe just on the back, or maybe just on the shoulders—

AUSTIN: Yeahh.

JACK: —And heat just *pours* out of it. A bright, bright light, heat, I want to be able to hurt or stun Kitcha Kanna in some kind of a way, so I don't think that—

AUSTIN: Yeah, with limited effect, I think this is a stun. This is a stun, you can stun here for sure.

JACK: Yeah, and I mean maybe also Kitcha Kanna can withstand one hot mouth—

AUSTIN: Yeah, but there's a difference.

JACK: But not a whole suit of armor blazing heat out.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: But yeah, that's what we see. We see essentially, we see Fourteen's body become incoherent.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: Or not incoherent, weird and cool and beautiful.

[Austin laughs]

JACK: With an aspect of incoherence.

AUSTIN: So, I think that that happens, and also this mode, or whatever, like, it doesn't unhook, you can't close it. I think you'd normally be able to, but as you do this to push them back, Kentucky's Corona pulls the trigger. And the single round flies through the air, through the opened plates, and catches you in some sort of—like in the heat valve.

JACK: Mm.

AUSTIN: And we just get a super close-up of, like, a blazing hot white vein of heat running through your system and around a single line of circuitry that outlines your entire body in hot white, and you take the Level Three "Cauterized" harm.

JACK: Ooof. Cauterized is generally pretty good though, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah, but in your case, you're cauterized—

JACK: But this is really bad.

AUSTIN: —you're cauterized *open*.

JACK: [Laughs in dismay] Ohh no.

AUSTIN: So—

JACK: And I need help.

AUSTIN: Yeah, and you need help. And so—I don't think we've ever seen the Level Three "Need help" on the table here in this particular game.

JACK: Jesus.

AUSTIN: Soo, Level Three harm, let's see here [Reading]. This is where you showcase powerful opponents without killing the crew. A tough bounty hunter might punch you in the gut, leaving you with Level Three "Can't breathe" harm.

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: Let's see here...So you can choose to resist this. I need to actually read the thing about what "Need help" actually does, one second. I think it just means you literally can't do anything without help.

JACK: [Laughs] Hey, Art.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it leaves you unable to do much of anything for the rest of the scene.

JACK: Ohh, ahh.

AUSTIN: So Kitcha Kanna does back away for a second, and, you know, and is burnt, is singed, right?

JACK: Feathers on fire. Smoldering.

AUSTIN: Feathers on fire, steps away. You're still in a Desperate position. Feathers on fire, is like putting them out, stunned. I don't, I don't know what happens next, y'all [Pauses]. So, again, really quick, you can resist that wound. It would be a roll, of some sort. It would be an Insight or a Prowess or Resolve roll. It'd probably be a Prowess roll, a Prowess resist, unless you convince me as to how it could be a Resolve resist. A robot resolves to, like, de-, like to get rid of—I don't know, I don't know what that looks like.

JACK: No. I think that's not—

AUSTIN: It's like not getting shot. It's like retracting your armor in time to reduce the damage of the bullets coming in or something, right? But then that would be 2d6 and then you would take six minus your highest die roll. So again, between five and zero stress. You're at seven out of nine stress now.

JACK: Mm [laughs].

AUSTIN: But important for me to put it out there, you know?

JACK: Yeeah.

AUSTIN: Because the alternative is, you take this damage and you need help to do anything.

JACK: Um. My mic arm just clicked. I like the idea of needing help to do anything right now—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: —Because it feel like it plays most unpleasantly and interestingly into Grand's dilemma.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And If Grand decides in my favor, that's really cool and interesting, and if Grand decides [laughs] not in my favor, that's equally good; whereas if I take a status—

AUSTIN: And then just kind of keep this fight going, it's getting away from the heart of the actual issue.

JACK: And also, we're in the third act, and I think Fourteen is in a really interesting place, and I don't know if what we need about them is a new—

AUSTIN: Status.

JACK: I feel like the place they're in is an interesting one to explore—

AUSTIN: Sure.

JACK: —Without adding something on top of it. So, no, I'm gonna be extremely cauterized.

AUSTIN: Okay. As a note, if you ever take another Level Three harm, that again would be a fatal harm, so.

JACK: Yeah, that's fine, it's—the stakes are high.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Signet! Signet! [Laughs]

ART: So [Sighs]. I mean, do I really have a move here?

AUSTIN: Yes! Up to you! I think it's the same set of moves.

ART: But like, I'm not gonna fight these people. And they're still not gonna let me take Fourteen.

AUSTIN: Alright. Then they're going to kill Fourteen. Or attempt to kill Fourteen.

ART: I mean—

AUSTIN: I mean, they're going to kill them; they're going to kill Fourteen, because Fourteen can't to anything.

ART: I mean, I can ask again. Maybe I'll even roll Sway.

AUSTIN: What's the case? I'd love to hear the case.

ART: Yeah, I'm—

JACK: Who are you asking?

AUSTIN: Yeah, Kitcha Kanna and Kentucky's Corona? Right?

ART: Yeah. Um—

AUSTIN: You could also—I guess that's the—You could also push yourself to—or right, you're saying, Fourteen, you're saying, could Grand try to sway Fourteen into letting him take you out of here, basically?

JACK: Yeah, I was just curious about where Grand was aiming at that point.

ART: Oh, I didn't think Fourteen could stop me from—

AUSTIN: No, at this point Fourteen can't stop you from doing anything, correct.

JACK: No, I'm basically unconscious, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah, you could—

JACK: At least mechanically.

AUSTIN: You could spend—you could push yourself to ignore a wound level, so you could push yourself, you could spend two stress to make an act—to take an action.

JACK: [Laughs] Alright, I'll keep that in mind.

ART: That would—

AUSTIN: That would immediately give you a status.

JACK: Yes, and then knock me out of the game [laughs].

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: Yeah, that would be rude as shit after I—

[Austin laughs]

ART: I talk you out of this, we start to go, and you spend two stress to act and not take it.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's great.

ART: That would be fuckin' rude

AUSTIN: Yeah, maybe there's something you want to do though, that's worth it, you know? We'll see.

[Pauses]

ART: C'mon.

AUSTIN: So what's the case? What's the case you're making?

ART: Oh wait, they already said I could take Fourteen if I agree to do the work I don't want to do. I still don't want to do that.

AUSTIN: Yeah, one hundred percent. Yeah

ART: But maybe I can—

AUSTIN: But maybe you can argue for better—maybe you can negotiate here for a better deal.

ART: Yeah. It's gonna be just full of lies. 'Cause no one knows that this mission happened.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: 'Cause I was the only person on the ship when the call came in.

JACK: Wait, wait. Ohhh.

ART: So it's just me and Waltz.

AUSTIN: Waltz knows.

ART: Waltz, yeah.

AUSTIN: Waltz, who likes Tender Sky enough to, when pushed to come up with a name on the spot, just said her name.

[Jack laughs]

ART: But Waltz doesn't know anything that happened here!

AUSTIN: Right, true.

ART: I'm just establishing that I'm—that failing this isn't worth that much to me. I might even still be able to go back [laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ART: Until...until it was time to go. I don't know what I—mm—

AUSTIN: Is it...is it about doing a smaller favor for them? Is it like, what do you have—you don't have anything on them, you've already given them this device...you could—

ART: Do I have the Independence plans?

AUSTIN: [Shocked] You're gonna give them the plans for Independence??

JACK: [Stammering] W-w-wait, what'd you—what's your—

AUSTIN: Sure, yeah. Take extra effect!

JACK: Wha—No no no no. No wait wait wait, no wait wait.

AUSTIN: One hundred percent!

[Art laughs]

JACK: Wait wait wait. Wait. No. Austin, no!

AUSTIN: It works. That's a fair trade.

JACK: This is like in Civilization where you make an absurd trade, and they're just like, "Yeah, sure, absolutely. [Austin laughs] I'll give you forty gold for Paris"

[Austin laughs. Jack laughs]

JACK: So uh—

AUSTIN: Are you forty gold or Paris in this equation, Fourteen? Are you—

JACK: I think I'm—I'm forty gold, I'm absolutely forty gold. I don't know how much Paris is worth in Civilization. What are you—what is your exact bargain here, Grand?

ART: I don't want to do any more work for them. That sounds dangerous. I have—

JACK: But you also—

ART: Oh, go, go on.

JACK: You, but you also want to, like, save me.

ART: Uh-huh.

JACK: But you don't want to attack these two men. These two, like, demonstrably bad men.

ART: No!

AUSTIN: You could say evil. I could hear it, I could hear you wanted to say evil! They might be!

JACK: [Laughs] I did, I did, yes. Yeah.

AUSTIN: I know we avoid the word, but—

[Jack laughs]

ART: I haven't been paid for the job I've done for them yet!

AUSTIN: That's true.

JACK: Alright, so you're one of them, okay.

ART: And I can't win.

AUSTIN: You *could*!

JACK: You don't know that. Just draw them out into the thing, and then—

AUSTIN: You got two bullets. From this magic space gun.

ART: This magic space gun that I have a very poor track record with!

JACK: Alright, so I just wanted to get this actual trade. So you want to get me out of here, but without any sort of consequences [laughs] for these two evil men. Other than maybe giving them the plans to a Divine.

AUSTIN: To the worst Divine!

ART: But my plan!

AUSTIN: To one of the worst Divines.

ART: A body that didn't make it very long.

JACK: I'm not worth—

AUSTIN: 'Cause they shot it with the gun you're holding a bunch [Laughs].

JACK: If you gave—If you traded—

ART: I think I only shot it once.

JACK: Fourteen is not worth giving Advent the body of the worst.

AUSTIN: I'll bring it back!

JACK: No, don't listen to him!

AUSTIN: There's no roll involved; if you offer them Independence, they'll say yes.

JACK: What—but why is Grand making this decision? Does—

AUSTIN: Because Grand—

ART: Because—

AUSTIN: Just let me—no. Yes. My read is—maybe Art's gonna disagree with this—but my read is that Grand is the contemporary person who only understands immediate consequences. Who *only*—who like—

JACK: It's Lem King.

AUSTIN: It's Lem King. Yeah, one hundred percent. Or is like the person who is pro-drones because they can't conceive of—who in the Obama administration was pro-drones because they couldn't conceive that a different president would do different things with drones, and also because the knowledge of drones were—of what Obama was already doing with drones didn't bother them that much, because it was happening there and there were enough alibis to not have to think about what extrajudicial killings look like. Is the person who is like—who completely separates—and also maybe, *maybe*, and maybe actually, Grand, you said this already, we can fix it. Whatever the bad is in the future, that's for future Grand to fix.

ART: But not future Grand [laughs].

AUSTIN: Well, no. But future other—future Fourteen.

ART: Future Fourteen.

AUSTIN: Which is like the actual most selfish part about all of this—is that Grand is willing to make a mess and wants Fourteen around to clean it up.

JACK: But does Grand—

ART: W—

JACK: Does Grand appreciate how dangerous the plans for Independence are?

ART: No. Grand doesn't see his work as—or doesn't see any of his work as uniquely dangerous. Grand sees Independence as like a failed art project.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: God, I fucking hate this! I think you're convincing me. I think that this is a good idea [laughs].

ART: Like, you know, it didn't—It impressed the person who commissioned it, so in that way it was a success.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: And it impressed the Divine, so in that way it was a success. But like, wasn't it online for like a week or two?

AUSTIN: Sure, sure.

ART: Nobody even saw it.

AUSTIN: Because other people cleaned it up. Right.

ART: I was on the mission that cleaned it up!

AUSTIN: Sure.

JACK: But you didn't care enough about the consequences of that clean-up to do it again?

AUSTIN: But right. But at the time—no remember, I wanna be full context, at the time, Grand decided to *fail* that mission. To become the Candidate of Independence.

[Jack laughs]

ART: That's not entirely true [laughs].

AUSTIN: The way the dice came out, the, your personal failure did not fail the mission.

ART: But that was just how the dice came out, I didn't—

AUSTIN: No, no, no. You put in black dice because you wanted to fail the mission.

ART: No one knows if that's true.

AUSTIN: Okay. There's not recordings or anything.

ART: Yeahh. I guess it's like, Grand spent a lot of time being really fascinated by the fl—by the look of the flame—

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ART: And now he's been burnt and he doesn't want, he just doesn't want it anymore.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ART: He wants to go to gallery openings and, you know—what song was it that I said he was sick of hearing at the party?

AUSTIN: I forget. That was a long—That was a year ago, right?

ART: Yeah, it was a year ago. But it was, um, what's the, um, uhhh—

AUSTIN: Was it a Vampire Weekend song?

ART: No. It's, uh, LMFAO.

AUSTIN: Ohh, yeah.

ART: The Party Rock.

AUSTIN: The Party Rock song. Anthem or whatever.

ART: Yeah, is it Anthem? That sounds right, but I'm not sure. It was like he heard that song—

AUSTIN: Party Rock Anthem, featuring Lauren Bennett and GoonRock, yeah.

ART: Like he heard that song for the third time on the playlist and was like, "Fuck, I don't want to do this anymore,"—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ART: And now Grand is like, "You know, Party Rock Anthem is kind of a good song."

AUSTIN: Right.

[Jack laughs]

ART: And it's not. But like, is Independence that—was that Independence body that good; do they even have access to enough glass to make it?

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: Oh, that's the other thing, right? Yeah. Which is just—

AUSTIN: You don't give them this—

JACK: —A completely misguided—

AUSTIN: Right. I—

ART: Well, it's like Grand doesn't appreciate that it's a horrific war machine—

AUSTIN: Yes.

ART: Grand is like, "Well that didn't work, it wasn't a successful project—"

[Austin laughs]

ART: "I didn't have fun with what happened with it." They're not gonna have fun either. But then Fourteen would get to keep on trying.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: And it's great that you're so hurt—

AUSTIN: With the knowledge that you—

ART: —Because then we don't have to talk about it.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: But would be *incandescent*.

ART: I don't think we ever see each other again. Unless you decide that hunting down Grand Magnificent is worth your time. And maybe it is.

JACK: I got a lot of time [laughs].

ART: Well—

JACK: I actually don't. And that's the thing. I actually do not have a lot of time.

AUSTIN: No.

JACK: And I'm gonna try and make the best of it [laughs].

ART: And I think, like, Grand is hoping that in this calculus, you would decide that he's not worth it. Grand was a stupid child playing Cops and Robbers and decided to get out of that game. Grand was only gonna hurt people by sticking around anyway. Grand isn't good enough at this. I just want to be out

JACK: Well, alright. What do the plans for Independence look like?

ART: I mean that's the thing. I don't—Do I have them on me? Is that just like—

AUSTIN: Sure. Maybe you keep them in the gun.

ART: There's a moment in an episode of New Girl I saw recently—spoilers for like the antepenultimate episode of New Girl if anyone cares—but um, they're at the memorial service for one of the main character's cats, and at the end they find a cat and he's gonna adopt it to replace the cat he lost and the bartender comes up, it's her cat, the bartender's Tig Notaro, it's not important for this story but Tig Notaro's very funny—

AUSTIN: Shoutouts to Tig Notato.

ART: Yeah, and uh, Jess, the main character of that show, you know—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: —Offers her five thousand dollars for the cat. [Laughing] Five thousand dollars cash, and she says “yes” immediately—

[Austin, Art, and Jack all laughing]

ART: And then someone asks, “How much money would you have taken for that cat?” and Tig Notaro goes, “I don’t know, fifty bucks?”

[Austin, Art, and Jack all laughing]

ART: And I feel that’s where Grand is at, is that Grand just offered five thousand dollars when they would have really taken fifty.

JACK: [Laughs and sighs] Oh God.

AUSTIN: One hundred percent. ‘Cause you weren’t gonna build them Independence!

ART: I don’t—But for all Grand knows, he would have built something worse!

AUSTIN: Right. What they had in mind was like a pretty good mech. Like, a mass-produced design model, you know what I mean? That’s where I was going with it, this is better. I—

ART: They can’t mass-produce Independence.

AUSTIN: [Laughs skeptically] Thank you Art. You have a thing on your character sheet called “Personal Memento”, so maybe it’s that.

ART: Alright, I’ll pay five thousand dollars for this cat.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: I don’t mean to—

AUSTIN: Put a name—put a price tag on Fourteen Fifteen.

ART: On anyone’s pet. I also don’t mean to diminish Fourteen Fifteen by calling them a housecat from a bar.

AUSTIN: A cat—

JACK: I—are you—this is such a bad [laughing] —you’re trading forty dollars for France. It’s—let’s do it.

AUSTIN: No, I think it's the other way around.

ART: Trading France for forty dollars [laughs].

AUSTIN: I think that he might be—

JACK: You're right. Yes, you're trading France for forty dollars.

AUSTIN: But it's a good forty dollars.

JACK: How much can you give me for this France? Ah, forty bucks? [laughs]

AUSTIN: Forty bucks [laughs].

JACK: Okay, yeah.

AUSTIN: I really want that forty bucks.

JACK: Sounds good.

ART: Sometimes you need forty bucks.

AUSTIN: So what's this look like?

ART: And the best part is, I'm not gonna have to deal with this. I don't know where we're going from here—

[Jack sighs in exasperation]

ART: —But I'm pretty sure whoever has to deal with this isn't named Grand Magnificent.

AUSTIN: Yeah, we'll see. Um, so what do you—

ART: Alright, so it's some personal memento. I don't know what it is; let me think about it for one second. I really want it to be something meaningful, I want it to be in the shape that shows the optimism that Grand used to have.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: I want it to be like, you know, it's in a locket with a picture of the ground crew on their first mission, he has like a picture of them all at camp—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: —And Grand has a big smile and everyone else is like, “Oh my God.”

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: But like—

AUSTIN: Telling them about werewolves.

ART: But like, the—it contains the plans in like some digital—I don’t know, it’s the fucking future, you know.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: That’s where he keeps it.

AUSTIN: It projects out.

ART: Yeah. And, like, there’s a moment where it first projects the picture and then it, like, rearranges the lines into Independence, that’s like a cool way for that to work.

AUSTIN: Yeah. And you just toss it over to them?

ART: Well, I make the offer.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART (as Grand): I have this.

AUSTIN: And they—

ART (as Grand): I have the plans for the failed body of Independence. I’ll trade it to you for Fourteen Fifteen.

AUSTIN (as Kitcha Kanna): Done.

AUSTIN: —says Kitcha Kanna.

ART (as Grand): Great. Can you help me get them onto the golf cart?

AUSTIN (as Kitcha Kanna): Corona.

AUSTIN: —says Kitcha Kanna, as they—Kitcha Kanna walks over to you and puts out their taloned claw-hand to let you drop the thing into it, the locket.

ART: Uh, yeah.

AUSTIN: Alright. And then yeah, Kentucky's Corona comes over and grabs one side of the opened up, and very hot, Fourteen Fifteen. And drags you onto the golf cart. Or, you know, one person can do it, I think Fourteen can move—Grand can move Fourteen, because "Need help" would let that work, you know.

JACK: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: It's just, like, very slow. So Kentucky does start to come over, and then I'm guessing, or I'm wondering, Fourteen, do you, are you just, "No, don't, I got this." [Laughs]

JACK: Um—

AUSTIN: Or do you let them, let him, grab you and put you in the cart with Fourteen.

JACK: Ah, with Grand?

AUSTIN: Sorry, with Grand, with Grand, yeah.

JACK: I don't think I can move.

AUSTIN: Okay. If, the thing is that with "Need help" it's just one person needs to help. So I didn't wanna—

JACK: Oh, oh!

AUSTIN: I wanted to give you the opportunity to be like, "Fuck off, Kentucky's Corona."

JACK: Oh no, in that case, in that case, if, yeah, it's just one person—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah, this is just—well no, I think what it is, is that Kentucky's Corona, I think that Kentucky's Corona touches a bit of me that is very hot.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah.

JACK: And just, you know, gets burned—

AUSTIN: Recoils, yeah.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Cool. Alright so you get back in the golf cart. Where are you going?

ART: To that—

AUSTIN: The dock they said—

ART: The dock they said, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yep, okay. So you're just in the golf cart together, you're not saying anything. Did you call back Waltz?

ART: Um, no, right? I'll just leave in their thing.

AUSTIN: No, I know, but are you telling Waltz that? So that he knows?

ART: I think I'm vague, you know, "I found another way out, you stay safe"

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah. Okay cool.

ART: See you next time.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. So you're driving through Aftville and down these long corridors, and you're headed toward the Port Andora [laughs]. You're blowing past the Center Centre Diplomatic Retreat, where there are like seven or eight other very important NPCs, and I think you get there, and you get loaded onto this exit craft that's there. It's just like a personal transport, you know? It has a pilot, it has an automated pilot and it has, you know, and it's very similar in some ways—it's like the actual model of the thing that Waltz's ship turned into, that the *Bolero Smooth* turned into, it just is one of those ships—

ART: Sure

AUSTIN: And you sit there, and it's like, "Takeoff in thirty minutes," and so it's just the two of you alone in this ship for thirty minutes. Are you talking? Are you saying anything or are you just sitting together quietly?

ART: [Sighs] I don't—

JACK: I don't think Fourteen—

ART: Oh, go ahead.

JACK: [Laughs] Oh.

ART: I think I was gonna say the same—

JACK: I don't think Fourteen, yeah I don't think Fourteen is giving Grand anything here.

AUSTIN: Okay. So, minute twenty-eight. Minute twenty-nine. Minute thirty. That clock that I mentioned before, that clock goes off. And the entire ship starts to rock. Probably not from what you think. It takes a moment, and then you hear, like: [Imitates comms noise] "All hands to battle stations. All civilians, please find secure shelter. If you are concerned, move to one of the escape pod decks. This is a yellow alert."

ART (as Grand): Alright, great, let's get out of here.

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: And I'm just gonna paint the picture for you: you're sitting in this deck, you're sitting in this ship. And from the interior camera or from the—you know, it has a viewscreen, basically, that's pointed forward—you can kind of cycle through various views of the world, right? Or of the, from the—You can see outside the, you can see the front of ship, or you can see the deck that you're in, you can hook to various cameras connected to the *Restitution of All Things*.

And one of them is pointed down at the world of Moonlock. And I don't know if you remember this, but the world of Moonlock in my mind has kind of a yellow-ish, like a brown-yellow-ish color, and there's one whole big area called the Kajj Umbra, that's named after Tannoy Kajj who is a smuggler, an adventurer, who is the only person ever who managed to pass through the entire thing. It is this big black dark spot that is in line with Volition; it's like Volition is casting a permanent shadow onto the planet and is constantly making this one part of Moonlock dark. It's huge. It's the size of a continent, right? It's "What if South America was a big circle?" It's "What if Europe and Eurasia was a big circle?", constantly cast on this planet. And, you know, from space it kind of looks—not flat necessarily, right, because it's a curved planet, it's a sphere, or spherical, but, you know, it's flat.

And then something starts to come out of it. Just this gargantuan gangly limb that has two elbow joints. And they bend in different directions. You know, it's like, planet-big. It's big, it's—it doesn't make sense to look at it, you know what I mean? It's big like, part of its arm is the length of Florida, you know? It's made of perfectly polished ceramic, like rose-beige ceramic, and in another context, you'd be like "This is really beautiful," but instead it's this weird gangly arm. And at the very end of this limb it kind of turns into like a, you know you're looking for fingers, or maybe looking for like a spike, but instead it's just innumerable little spikes, just like a thousand fingers, each made into sharp ceramic knives, and it just slams that into the side of Moonlock, and begins to push itself out, the actual body of itself, and then like the ceramic starts to shatter and it kind of falls inward, and just "kew kew kew", and it shatters all the way down. And then another limb starts pushing its way out and again it shatters and, you know, it's pulling itself out bit by bit, and what you see is like, I guess I would describe it as: Imagine a ceramic

hammerhead shark. Cut in the middle, like cut straight down from the head down the torso, and those two parts of it are separated—not totally, like they still rejoin down low in the torso—but like are separated enough that they're moving at two different times; they're kind of wagging through the atmosphere and more and more growing these ceramic limbs and pushing itself up over and over and over again as it crawls out of the umbra.

Volition failed to join with Independence. And so it spent a year, it and the Iconoclasts—which no one ever checked in on—spent a year building a new Axiom. They couldn't do it on Volition, it was too big to build inside of Volition, Volition is Volition, so they used Moonlock instead, they used the Kajj Umbra, and they built Schism, the Axiom Schism. And the thing is that everything it touches turns into something like it. So we just get this close-up of these fields of corn, fields of wheat, orchards of jelly juice, where the trees are just turning to this ceramic and splitting down the middle.

You know, there are—immediately it comes under fire from the Concrete Town Particulars and from members of the Qui Err Coalition, and the NEH, no one likes this thing and so they immediately start attacking it with everything they have, but entire fleets of incoming ships just get hit by this thing and are cut in two and then rejoin its side. And then they break and fall apart, you know, it's not building a fleet, it just is the thing it is. And that's what you see from the viewscreen, what do you do?

ART: So we're not, we're not leaving?

AUSTIN: You could. I w—

ART: I thought it was automatically piloted.

AUSTIN: I was waiting to, so I guess, yes, it's beginning to pilot its way, and it's heading towards Moonlock which is where it's programmed to go to [laughs].

[Jack laughs]

JACK: This is not intentional, right? They—

AUSTIN: No, Advent had nothing to do with this. No one involved had anything to do with this.

JACK: No idea this was going to happen.

AUSTIN: No.

JACK: But I guess Kitcha Kanna sees this and is just sort of like, "Oh, okay."

AUSTIN: I don't know! Kitcha Kanna has other things going on at this moment, Kitcha Kanna is currently in that warehouse and a different—there's stuff going on, let's say—

JACK: He's putting out his feathers [laughs].

AUSTIN: Right. But it's been thirty minutes; there's stuff happening at that diplomatic retreat right now, let's say, that could be happening on screen—

JACK: Oh God.

AUSTIN:—If not for the way this all went. The way it did.

ART: Can I override this, and make it go somewhere else?

AUSTIN: Sure.

ART: I don't have Hack, if it's important.

AUSTIN: Sure, you could probably Rig this. I think that's Controlled Standard.

ART: I mean that's my first choice, just get somewhere else. I don't want to go back that way.

AUSTIN: Well, give me a Rig to basically put it into manual control.

ART: Sure...Controlled...

AUSTIN: Controlled Standard, which is like, you're popping the cover and trying to rewire stuff...Alright, that's a five. So I think you do definitely get it into controlled—uh, into manual control, but immediately, this thing is in the air now, or is in the—this thing is standing on top of the Kajj Umbra, it's poking out of it, its legs—it's a big, split down the middle hammerhead shark that has fins that turn into basically—legs is probably the wrong word, they're just long fins that let it balance itself on the side of this thing as it trying to get up the strength to jump off the planet or something, or push itself off of the planet and into the Mirage. And it's flinging its arms around into upper orbit so you are going to be in the Risky position here; you have lost Controlled status but you have it under manual control. Are you two talking at all?

JACK (as Fourteen): We have to go back.

ART (as Grand): And do *what*? That wasn't a—I wasn't kidding—that's a real q—I'll do it if you have an idea but we're not just gonna go back to go back.

JACK (as Fourteen): No. We have to go back to kill Kitcha Kanna.

ART (as Grand): Oh my God.

[Austin laughs in delight]

ART (as Grand): You're missing the forest for the trees right now.

JACK (as Fourteen): Wasn't it you who said "We can fix it?" Start with what we can fix.

ART (as Grand): That's not a thing you can fix! Do you—do you see you right now?!

JACK (as Fourteen): Eh, that's why you're gonna help me.

ART (as Grand): Oh my God, I'm not. Do you have a solution for *this* problem?

JACK (as Fourteen): Which one?

ART (as Grand): You're not seeing this?

JACK (as Fourteen): The fucking—the thing coming out of my planet?

ART (as Grand): Yeah!

JACK (as Fourteen): No.

ART (as Grand): Well, I think you do. I think you said what it was and then said, "No."

JACK (as Fourteen): I don't have a solution to this.

AUSTIN: I need to roll some dice, real quick. I need to know how those negotiations went, that were gonna happen on-screen—

JACK: [Laughs] That were supposed to happen.

AUSTIN: And so I need to see if the Qui Err stopped something in this series of things, so I'm just gonna roll 3d6...There's a six in there. So, that's good, depending on your definition of good. I'm trying to figure out how I should show this to you. Uhhh, maybe the easiest way is to just get over your line—so the first thing that happens is, Waltz Tango Cache is just like:

AUSTIN (as Waltz): Are you guys seeing this?

ART (as Grand): Yeah, fucked up, right?

AUSTIN (as Waltz): What is that thing?

ART (as Grand): I'm not sure. I've, I've some ideas, but they're vague and not—

AUSTIN: And then, you're on the Notion's channel, basically, right, and then you hear Declan's Corrective, is like:

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): The hell are you three doing here?

ART (as Grand): Rescue mission.

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): I hope you're rescuin' me, 'cause I could use some help, honestly. This whole place is going to shit.

ART (as Grand): Where are you?

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): Uhhh, ship's big. Ummm, I can meet you by Cargo—one of the cargo bays, I'll send you—

AUSTIN: And it's the cargo bay you snuck in on.

[Jack laughs]

ART: Yeah, I have no reason to believe we couldn't do that.

AUSTIN: You wanna pilot over there?

ART: I mean...not really.

[Austin laughs]

JACK (as Fourteen): We're on our way.

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): Fourteen, is that you?

JACK (as Fourteen): Yup.

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): Nm. You don't sound good.

ART (as Grand): Don't look good either.

JACK (as Fourteen): No.

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): Nmm.

JACK (as Fourteen): It's been a day.

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): Yeah.

AUSTIN: Alright, who's at the helm?

ART: I think the person who can act without taking stress should probably be piloting the ship.

AUSTIN: Probably.

[Jack laughs]

ART: [Laughs] I mean, we can talk about it if you want.

AUSTIN: No, that makes sense to me.

JACK: No, yeah, no, I'm into that. I'm, I'm, I'm—[Laughs] It's not good.

AUSTIN: Alright, give me a Helm check. This is gonna be a piloting check, Risky Standard. The risk is, as you can see, I'm changing the color of all the various ships inside of this fleet, as they are hit by the Axiom, the Axiom Schism, and are turned into strange ceramic—basically ceramic missiles that spread the virus of Schism.

ART: Mm. I sure wish I was better at piloting, or that we still had gambits available!

AUSTIN: Yeaah.

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: So what d'you got? What's your—

ART: One.

AUSTIN: Oof.

JACK: Oh dear.

AUSTIN: I'm trying to think if there's a Devil's Bargain here for you. Ummm, [hums]. I mean, you can push yourself for an extra die.

ART: I'm not super interested in that right now!

[Jack laughs]

AUSTIN: No? Okay. So how about—okay, if you fail this roll, this ship will be able to make it into the cargo bay but will not be the ship that you can take out of here. Because it will be hit by the Schism virus or whatever we're going to call this thing.

ART: That's if I fail the roll?

AUSTIN: Yeah. If you succeed, you succeed. But like, failure means that even if you make your way into that thing eventually, back into the ship, this ship will not get you out.

ART: [Sighs] Umm.

AUSTIN: And that will give you a bonus die.

ART: Deal.

AUSTIN: Alright. So that's 2d6...That's a five, alright, so that doesn't come to pass. Awesome. What does happen is, you—I guess we don't have this ship's sheet—so instead, I'm just gonna put this in—you're gonna end up in a Desperate position here. The rest of this fleet—you're dodging all of these attacks basically, you're flying this ship, pretty well all said, and this virus is moving through this massive fleet of Our Profit's, and is like—when I say it's moving through, what I mean is these ships are touching each other, and as they touch, the other ship gets infected with the Schism virus—and are blowing up and are shattering in space, and you're seeing escape pods being launched from them as best as can be done, but some of them are big slow ships, and some of them don't have enough escape pods, and it's going bad. Thankfully, the main ship is safe so far but it begins shooting down the ceramic ships that are coming towards it, but it's a Desperate situation outside of this vessel. But you manage to make it into Cargo Bay One, and Corrective is there waving you down. And you come to a stop and he rushes on board.

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): Where did you get this ship?

ART (as Grand): Over in the—

AUSTIN: [Corrective voice] He's actually more back here, I have to find him again, he's back here.

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): Where did you find this ship?

ART (as Grand): Andora, don't worry about it, let's go.

AUSTIN: And he hops on and he says, like:

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): I don't know whether to be terrified of this thing or thankful. All this happened, and then a second later we left the rooms, and then there was an explosion. A lot of people could be dead right now.

ART (as Grand): Terrified is the right reaction.

[Austin laughs]

JACK (as Fourteen): Wait, an explosion?

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): Oh my go— Fourteen. You look different.

JACK (as Fourteen): It's been a while. When did we last meet? I was like a cowboy?

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): Something like that. We talked after the Arc stuff, the kids? You were like a lawyer, a lawyer's like a cowboy.

ART (as Grand): You talk too slow for us to have this conversation here!

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): Well—

JACK (as Fourteen): There's been an explosion on the—

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): At the retreat, but you're probably right, we should get out of here.

JACK (as Fourteen): It was prob—[sighs] Grand.

ART (as Grand): What?

JACK (as Fourteen): Was that you?

ART (as Grand): No! I've been with you the whole time!

JACK (as Fourteen): Was that—did you do something to make that happen?

ART (as Grand): No!

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): I feel like I missed somethin'. Grand, are you gonna try to get us out of here?

AUSTIN: Alright.

ART (as Grand): Yeah! I've been trying!

AUSTIN: Alright, give me another roll, Desperate, Helm. What is your goal? Your goal is to get the fuck out of here, right?

ART: Yeah, just *out*.

AUSTIN: Okay.

[Jack laughs]

ART: Away—

JACK: What's the next nearest planet?

AUSTIN: Uh, good question, let's look at a map. Let me hide all—actually, I think I've already taken—let me take a screenshot real quick, and then I can clear all of this stuff off of our map [laughs]. Alright, let me begin to clear this nonsense away. Bye, Connecticut. I loved, I really loved you.

JACK: Bye, Connecticut.

AUSTIN: Can I just actually do this...?

JACK: I've never been to Connecticut.

AUSTIN: There we go. Delete that...

JACK: It's Altar?

AUSTIN: It depends on the place—It depend where the planets are at any given moment, right?

JACK: Oh, that is true, yeah. It could be Crown.

AUSTIN: Altar, it's Altar, it's Altar. Uhh, yeah, it's Altar or Crown. For the sake of it, let's say it's Altar.

JACK: Alright.

AUSTIN: Because that's where Tender and Signet are. I mean, I guess it could be Crown, I, you know, let's roll a die. One, it's Altar, two, it's Crown. It's Crown.

ART: Alright.

AUSTIN: Crown's a cool desert planet. So yeah, you could be heading from Moonlock to Crown.

ART: Okay.

AUSTIN: So you start to head in that direction. And I guess, you know, I'll just give you some quick exposition here. There were negotiations about a lot of things, in the way that—so, so. So.

ART: You're not forgetting about this Helm roll, right?

AUSTIN: Oh, you didn't make that roll yet. I did forget about it, thanks. Yeah, give me that Desperate roll. I totally did, I totally did. I rolled die, so I was like, "We rolled a two, yeah, good, moving on." Uh, yeah, Desperate Standard. [Laughs] Fuck.

JACK: Art's out here like, "Did we have homework?"

[Austin laughs]

AUSTIN: Alright so what do you do, you have 1d6 on Helm, what do you got?

ART: I have 1d6 on Helm.

AUSTIN: You don't want to push here?

ART: I really don't, 'cause wouldn't I rather save it to Resist?

AUSTIN: Maybe! Well Resist, Resist can't—there's things Resist can do and there's things Resist can't do, is the important thing to remember.

ART: Yeah, I don't—

AUSTIN: A Resist can't get you a win, is the key. A Resist can prevent a consequence, but it can't get you home safe.

ART: I mean, who cares?

AUSTIN: Alright...That's a five, on a Desperate roll. Wooh boy. So, you're not gonna make it, you're not gonna make it to Crown. You manage to dodge past a number of these incoming vessels, and one of them doesn't hit you, but what does happen is one of these Schism vessels hits another ship, and that ship, before it's totally infected, spins out and catches your engine. And there's a fuel leak. You can turn back and go back to the *Restitution of All Things*; you could land on Moonlock; you could probably make it to Volition. You could float and just hope that nothing else hits you.

[Jack sighs]

AUSTIN: But you don't have—Or hope that somebody else can come by and fix your ship or something, but you're not gonna make it out of this in your situation. It's huge. It's—like, I cannot explain the size thing. We can get a shot from the planet Moonlock, where from, you know, the building in the Sky Reflected in Mirrors, that Fourteen Fifteen used to have an apartment in, you can look out that window and see it out in the wilderness where Fourteen's—where it's standing over Fourteen's farm. I want to see it's standing over Fourteen's farm, like—it's standing over Fourteen's farm the way mountains are standing over a farm, but bigger than that. I don't know that there's a clear equivalent for us.

JACK: God.

AUSTIN: It's so big—

JACK: Just impossibly big—

AUSTIN: Right. That it goes past the horizon, and you can still see it, you know what I mean? You can't see all of it, obviously, from the curvature, but you can see the top part of it waaay past where it normally would be. Impossibly big. *Impossibly* big. What's the world's biggest city? It's like if that stood up. Or like, you know how—[Laughs] It's bigger than Connecticut, again.

[Jack laughs]

JACK: Back to the scale of Connecticut.

AUSTIN: It's like what if Texas stood up.

JACK: Hmm.

AUSTIN: Maybe bigger than that, but Texas is pretty big.

JACK: Okay. So our options are: float, but I don't like the sound of that, because if we get hit by one of those things just for a second, that's it.

AUSTIN: That's kind of it. I think you all have spacesuits on your sheet, but you know.

JACK: Volition, which, I don't even—that's like landing on a sun, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: I don't even know if that's possible.

AUSTIN: There is, I guess, just thinking about the faction sheet, there is a group of people whose job it is to watch Volition, that I've mentioned before, I don't know if y'all remember that, and they have stations situated around Volition, so I bet you can maybe make it to one of those stations.

ART: That sounds like a fine idea.

JACK: Yeah, that sounds like a—

AUSTIN: I'm gonna read from them, they are called the Quarantine Task Force, the only openly cooperative large-scale operation between the Divine Free States and the New Earth Hegemony, the QTF operates out of eight stations which orbit Volition, monitoring the surface for Iconoclast movement and the creation of new Axioms; they are tired, under-resourced, and the first line of defense standing between Volition and you. So.

JACK: Yeah, that sounds perfect!

AUSTIN: Alright, that a good direction to push in then. It's much closer to Volition than it is to Moonlock, but it's not as far away as Crown or Altar are, so. So, yeah, you start going in that direction, you are still not free though, like you're still—I'm gonna need another Helm roll here. You are not free of this nonsense yet.

ART: I thought that was the point of the last Helm roll, was to free me from that nonsense.

AUSTIN: You got free of the fleet part of it, right? Ah, you know what, fuck it, I'll let you get there. It's more interesting at this point to let you be on the way and watching this in the rear view, and I guess I could just paint some pictures as to what you see here, which is: I guess, like, Corrective can just not stop talking and it probably takes you both a second to realize it but he is *shook*. Like, it's clear that everything has gotten to him: seeing Fourteen in this condition, barely escaping from Schism and the assassination attempt on his life, which you helped along, Grand Magnificent.

He explains to you in a hurry, his normal cadence sped into a gonzo-fantastic blur for the entire length of your trip, and it's draining to unwind his poetic verbiage from the facts of the matter. He's all, "Cadent condensation ensures Qui Err collaboration," but what he means to say is that at the Center Centre Diplomatic Retreat, an alliance was struck between the Waking Cadent and the Qui Err Coalition, and when he mumbles for five straight minutes about "Thrice, slice, splice," you understand that he's talking about Our Profit's vision for a connected dreamworld utopia, and so, bit by bit, the picture comes together for you.

Corrective was there as a representative of Seneschal's Brace, as was nearly every other factional leader in the system. Our Profit, having revealed the Rapid Evening to the sector, had earned at least enough respect from everyone to set up this meeting of minds. The Divine Free

States, the NEH, Seneschal's Brace, the Waking Cadent, and the Advent Group. A dozen, maybe more, diplomats, executives, bureaucrats, generals, and even Excerpts. Both Cadents. And, of course, a limited self projector, which soon after the emergence of Schism, erupted into a wave of neon energy. Thankfully, that happened moments *after* the bulk of the group was moved into a panic room.

The talks, you learn, through Corrective's scattered report, began well enough. The siege of the Lineage Brighton was called to a halt, as not only a ceasefire but a new promise of fealty was negotiated between the Herringbone Flotilla and the Brightons. The Rogue Wave was whole again, and what's more, they leaned in favor of Seneschal's Brace, the pirate republic supporting a vision of self-determination, affinity, and, of course, independence.

And, on a smaller note, Corrective says, early on in the week's negotiations, the Qui Err Coalition convinced the Final Hegemon to immediately place a six-month hold on the NEH's ongoing attempt to extract and refine the Mirage, leaving the Qui Err time to research whether the resource was renewable. And if the NEH had been led that day by anyone else—by Templeton's Faire, or by Corrective's father, or by Corrective himself, such a demand would have been scoffed at, but luck or fate or something else must have been on the galaxy's side that day, because Our Profit had already lived for a millenium, pondering away at her future utopia. What was six more months? It only took three requests from Annex Iota Pretense, de facto leader of the Qui Err, to convince Our Profit to back down and give them the time they needed.

And it's while telling you this part of the story that Corrective's eyes open wider than you've ever seen them. He has made the realization. Schism isn't trying to destroy the Fleet; it's trying to destroy the Mirage. Corrective goes to stand up, but is slammed back down into his seat by the vessel's automated safety belts, which he struggles with for a moment or two, before finally breaking free and making his way to the rear observation window. He magnifies the view from the ship's aft camera, and when you see it, it's striking. Entire subsections of Our Profit's massive fleet, turned into a floating field of discarded and fractured ceramic coffins.

And Corrective is right, and you can see it now too, swiping away at the Mirage itself. It was hard to see it at first, maybe; the Axiom Schism looked ineffective, like a toddler trying to climb a ladder or trying to punch a hole through a wet clay wall. But suddenly, one of its infinite fish-hook claws catches the ether itself, and the wisps of the purple-pink turn rose-ceramic too, and then they shatter. And from behind it, for the first time in any of your lives, you see the true black of space. And you know, and Corrective knows, that Schism aims to leave. But before it can, the gap begins to close. Now today it is speculation, but decades from now, it will be known as fact: if the Qui Err had not convinced Our Profit to turn off her machines, Schism would have broken through, and following it would have been Volition's deep store of Axioms, aimed to remake the world in a more ideal image.

And yet, by the end of the day, the Qui Err will be hailed as heroes anyway, on Moonlock and throughout the system. It begins as many things do, with light. The burning beam of Profit's Star, the NEH's blinding-bright weapon against the Rapid Evening, flickers off for a moment, and then, as the *Restitution of All Things* turns with confidence towards its foe, dodging and countering any incoming threats, the beam returns with an energetic hum. Schism is stunned, but it is the Kajj Umbra itself which is wounded.

At first, it's as if the light is burning the dark shadow away, you think you can see it evaporating—or, no. It's not evaporating at all. It's retreating. And it takes you another moment to recognize what you're looking at, until suddenly the repulsive truth is all too clear. The light does another sweep over the dark shadow that is Moonlock, and it comes apart, revealing itself to be a collection of millions of Iconoclasts, hiding in plain sight, and as the light strikes them, their nest breaks apart, like a horde of bugs, and they crawl one over the next, long, twisted living silhouettes, as they seek shelter in the crevices of Moonlock. Big, long people, turned this way first by their devotion to Independence and then to Volition, now vermin in the shadow of their ideals.

But it is not the beam that kills Schism, no. It is the Qui Err. Somewhere, perhaps on the bridge of the *Restitution of All Things*, perhaps back in the panic room, Iota Pretense reveals her own secret weapon. Her attendant hands her the device, which looks like an intricate bronze astrolabe, and her hands go to work at once, dialing in coordinates. They always liked coordinates, her expert on the Divine Fleet had told her. And then somewhere deep, deep, inside the hidden tunnels of the Sky Reflected in Mirrors, they all lit up at once. The recovered drone bodies of Curiosity, the Divine long since really and truly dead. The Divine which first pointed the Fleet at the Quire System to begin with. The Divine comprised of boundless self-replicating flying shells, dozens, hundreds, thousands, millions, more. And at the command of Iota Pretense, they *scream* out of the sewer pipes of the abandoned factories and the empty fountains of the Sky Reflected in Mirrors. Once, they housed one of the most brilliant beings in creation. Now, they are little more than dead metal, an endless swarm of makeshift missiles flying through a loophole in Quire's new natural laws, bashing aside Schism's own flock of monsters and slamming directly into the Axiom's body.

And here is what happens: you watch this for the length of your trip. Scores of these drones, these beings once holy, smashing against Schism. They do not offer a knockout blow, a dynamic finale. They only offer slow, tedious, victory. They are a chisel and Schism is a mountain. And they work away on its surface until it is a valley instead. And somewhere in there, as he and you and the whole system watches this monotonous victory, Corrective finds a clarity that many other leaders in the system will find today too.

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): This is an Axiom.

AUSTIN: —he says.

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): Function does not lead their form. Form does not guide their function. Those things are secondary. Shape, content, character. Axioms exist only to exist. And only to exist over all of their primitive echoes. We squabble over borders, it is Schism. We amend footnotes and declare ourselves a new school. It is Schism. We leave our parents behind, take new names. It is Schism. An Axiom may dance with you under moonlight, but it won't care for the flutter in your heart, only for the precision of your step. An Axiom may be a bridge for a day, but it knows that bridges break too. And it'll take a sort of gravitational joy in falling out from under you. They are unyielding truth, with no whisper of empathy, no issue of regret. Despite all their violence, they have no interest in causing harm. They simply do it, because it is what they do. And without interest, there can be no debate. This is an Axiom. This is what we let Volition build.

AUSTIN: And he goes quiet then, and returns to his seat. He lifts his arms and the automated buckles fasten into place. And from the rear window, you watch in silence as Schism continues to be bombarded. And though it will be defeated by end of day, its carcass will leave a wake. The attempted assassinations, the arrival of this monster, the disruption of the negotiations. With time, borders had begun to break down, but now it's as though someone had taken a marker to the map and traced over those old faded lines. There won't be unity, at least not today.

And I think a lot of this is going through your heads as you pull up finally to this station, and call in for docking clearance, and you're able to dock and land. The person who opens the room is just this beleaguered fifty-two year-old woman, her name is Split Spool, S-P-L-I-T S-P-O-O-L, and she is like the chief researcher at this station, and it's like her and five other people. And she says:

AUSTIN (as Split Spool): Oh thank God, you came! We need—what sort of resources do you have?

ART (as Grand): Almost literally nothing.

AUSTIN (as Split): Wait, I thought you were coming for backup, we don't know what Volition is gonna do.

JACK (as Fourteen): I'm sorry.

AUSTIN: She's like:

AUSTIN (as Split): [Sighs]. I thought with the thing that happened on Moonlock, you were coming to buoy us, what—[Sighs]

AUSTIN: And Corrective is like:

AUSTIN (as Declan's Corrective): Uhh, yeah, we came from there, and kind of just needed a safe place.

AUSTIN: And she just kind of sits down in a big chair and just like completely sinks into it.

JACK (as Fourteen): I'm sorry, I hate to ask, but do you have any medical assistance?

AUSTIN (as Split): Uhh, for you, ummm. There's an infirmary you can take a seat in, we'll see what we can do.

AUSTIN: Is it just silence between the two of you?

ART: Yeah, probably.

JACK: Yeah, I think at this point.

AUSTIN: Grand, when the Advent ship comes for you, do you get on and go?

ART: Oh, I didn't know—

AUSTIN: They're keeping their deal.

ART: Yes.

AUSTIN: So I think it shows up, and it's another one of those like—the equivalent of a spaceship that looks like the 2003 Lincoln Towncar, shows up and—Fourteen, do you say anything as he steps on?

JACK: No.

AUSTIN: Alright, then it takes off, and you're flying through the debris of this fight that happened, to this giant space catapult that they have out in the shore. And I think that they land you there and you can like, you know, you have your bags—or, do you get bags, or are you just like, "Fuck it, I'm going with what I have on me"?

ART: Yeah, I think the idea is that anything I have is replaceable.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: I think that's why Grand had the locket, honestly.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: That was something Grand cared about.

AUSTIN: Right. So I think Grand lands at the catapult, and begins preparations to be launched out of the Twilight Mirage and back out into the galaxy at large. Do you want to make that decision today, or do you want to wait?

ART: I think that's a, that's a good thing for the downtime episode.

AUSTIN: Sure. Then I'll leave with this little teaser, which is—or, or, eh, this little teaser, which is, you know, the shore is this big ring of asteroids and debris out at the edges of the system, and I suspect parts of Schism have—and the Schism fleet—have broken up and flown out there basically—or not flown there, but through the natural rotation they're spreading out there, so we do just get like images of ceramic arms and stuff floating out—ceramic ships—floating out in the debris. You see behind some of it that the Brink has lined up with the catapult, it's like kind of close by. You recognize it from here, and I think you're, you know, an hour away by flight, maybe thirty minutes, twenty minutes, away by ship, and you can see that while you're at the catapult getting your stuff ready, having a meal—the catapult's great by the way—

ART: Mm.

AUSTIN: Space catapult is like the finest food you've ever had in your life, and there's a big gelatinous guy with a top hat on, and he's explaining to you what his home planet is like, and it sounds gross but in kind of a fun way; it's like a bouncy castle but a planet, it's made of gelatin and all the people are made of gelatin, it's wild.

[Art laughs]

AUSTIN: And you're just, like, meeting interesting people who are all super rich, and are all [*The Notion* begins playing] the worst of the worst, but you're among them now. And you can see—you know it's been maybe a couple more days—and you can see that the *World Without End* is docked at the Brink. It's like pulling into the Brink, so all of the people who you know are there—Also, the *World Without End* is not in great shape [laughs]

JACK: Mm, hang on.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. You should—

JACK: What's, what's—

AUSTIN: Don't worry about it. Don't even—Certainly don't worry about it. Don't worry about the fact that its hull is completely shattered. It's fine.

ART: Who had the ship?

JACK: Who did that? Yeah!

AUSTIN: You know, Echo and Even and Gig were fighting a war with it, is the thing.

ART: I don't think it's that kind of ship.

AUSTIN: Nah, you know [laughs]. It turned out it wasn't!

[*The Notion* continues playing to end]

