

# HOW THE DEAD GO ON LIVING

A Game about Love, Loss, and Different Worlds

by Inez Tan (all rights reserved)

Islia survives a devastating attack on the planet Cirrenes that claims the life of her husband, Baltsaniel. But how do you go on living after the person you loved is gone?

## DRAFT VERSION 0.2 (June 20, 2024):

- Narrative script - skeleton (not the final text), 17.6K words
  - \*Asterisk and indented text indicate choices and branches
- Target: Full playable text-based, choice-driven branching narrative game version by end 2024

## EPISODES

### 1 (I) The Naming Stone

The things I know:

how the living go on living  
and how the dead go on living with them

-Laura Gilpin

- I've been dreading waking up. Waking up means remembering everything.
  - \*Open your eyes[]
- The piercing sunlight on Osleif rouses me hours earlier than I'm used to.
- I never really noticed it growing up here. But three years away changed me, I guess.
- I'm lying on the couch in my mom's one bedroom apartment. She sold our last apartment after I moved to Cirrenes for college.
- Soon, the whole complex was torn down for new developments. Nothing lasts long on this planet.
- I don't hate Osleif, but this isn't how I wanted to come back.
- Baltsaniel was supposed to be with me.
  - \*(Examine) Locket around your neck
    - I open the locket and look at the portrait of Baltsaniel inside.
    - The locket portraits are part of the marriage customs on Cirrenes, where Baltsaniel and I met five years ago as first-year students.
    - At first, the portraits puzzled us. "You look like you, but I look different," we both said.
    - The painter explained that from his interactions with us, he'd painted us the way the other person saw us.
    - The grasp of such subtleties was one of the many things Baltsaniel and I loved so much about Cirrenes.
    - Baltsaniel was killed in the attack on Cirrenes. Our apartment was at the epicenter of the strike and ensuing quake.
  - \*(Read) News alert on your phone
    - The search for survivors of the attack on Cirrenes has just been called off. I knew it would be. They hadn't found anyone in days.
    - The apartment I shared with my husband Balsaniel was at the epicenter of the strike and ensuing quake. He didn't stand a chance.
- At the time of the attack, I was hours away, scouting a site that would've been the perfect first factory for my business.
- The attack created fissures in the ground that destabilized the entire planet. Everyone in my area was evacuated.
- Even those of us who didn't want to be.
- This was three days ago. Baltsaniel was twenty-three. So was I, but I feel many years older now.
- A little about what drew them to each other, what Baltsaniel is like ((how they met is in E2))
  - \*(Remember) Story 1
    - I remember when
      - \*Reaction 1
        - Description

- \*Reaction 2
    - Description
- \*(Remember) Story 2
  - I remember how
    - \*Reaction 1
      - Description
    - \*Reaction 2
      - Description
- We'd been married and in that apartment for less than a year. We hadn't even unpacked all our boxes yet.
- We never will, he'd joked.
- He was right.
  - \*A knock on the door[]
- It's nice of Mom to knock before coming out of her bedroom, to give me a moment to wipe away the tears that streaked my cheeks.
- "Morning, Isla," she says. "Did you sleep well?"
  - \*(Frank) Bad dreams
    - "I dreamed about Baltsaniel dying
    - Mom's smile slips. "Oh, honey. I had those dreams too. For years after your father died."
    - "They don't do us any good, do they?" she adds.
  - \*(Resilient) Good enough
    - "I'll get my own place with a real bed soon," I say.
    - Mom smiles. "I'm sure you'll feel more settled starting over in a space to call your own."
- My dad had been a soldier. He was killed in the final battle with Bergvind, Osleif's moon, soon after I was born.
- His platoon was instrumental in bringing the Bergvind separatists back under Osleif's jurisdiction.
- Mom mourned him for years, even though the other military wives assured her she'd been faithful to my dad's memory long enough.
- Mom's always felt she has to perform. I would know - I'm the same way.
- Later, she told me she felt that she'd wasted those years, living, as she put it, "less than a life."
- Everything she's doing for me now... She just doesn't want to see me making the same mistake. I get it.
- But it feels like she wants me to throw all my cargo overboard, before I've had time to examine the damage or see if anything can be salvaged.
- "Are you sure you don't want me to drive you to the appointment with your grief counselor this morning?" Mom asks, not for the first time.
  - \*(Irritated) Not needed
    - "Espen already agreed to drive me. He was the one who contacted me and offered to help."
  - \*(Reassuring) I'm covered

- “Don’t worry, Espen already agreed to drive me. He was the one who contacted me and offered to help.”
- “Besides,” I continue, “I wouldn’t want you missing your brunch with your old friends. You said it took months to get this on the calendar.”
- Mom puts her hand over mine. “That’s so thoughtful of you, honey. And it was so kind of Espen to reach out after all this time.”
- She eyes the locket around my neck, practically x-raying the portrait of Baltsaniel that’s inside.
- “Maybe you shouldn’t wear that to your appointment,” she says.
  - \*(Angry) Refuse
    - “I’m not taking my locket off.”
    - Mom “it’s just that they say it’s not good for rooms or possessions to turn into a shrine”
    - ~ islialocket = true ((example of how to set a variable but not sure if I will use this))
  - \*(Numb) Agree
    - “Maybe you’re right. I’ll leave it in my room.”
    - Mom “it’s good to let go of rooms and possessions and let them breathe and change, not stay stuck in grief”
    - ~ islialocket = false
- I wash up in Mom’s bathroom, dry my face next to a second towel she’s squeezed next to hers on the rack.
- This place is really meant for one. I need to get back on my feet and on my own soon.
- I head over to the kitchenette.
- Breakfast options are pretty limited on Osleif. So are all the other meals.
- Although there’s ample sunlight and water, for generations, the planet’s soil has been too polluted to grow much.
- It’s hard arid yellowish dirt as far as the eye can see.
- Mom offers to make breakfast for me, but I insist on doing it myself, stirring the porridge
- After I sit down with the steaming bowls before us, Mom sets by my place a small glass of fjalik, faintly pink.
- Her own special recipe, the faint pink coming from the heirloom yngviline buds she tends so carefully in her tiny greenhouse.
- The only way anything grows on Osleif - heritage seeds, literally handed down in families, and highly sheltered and tended enclosures.
- Tears blur my eyes. My start-up business on Cirrenes had been centered around fjalik. That was what the first factory was going to be for.
- “Oh, honey...” Mom peers anxiously at me. “Of course, your business...”
  - \*(Sorrowful) Too many memories
    - “
    - Push it away
    - Desc the smell
  - \*(Practical) Have to eat
    - “The nutrition [] it’s served to kids and sick elderly pregnant

- Eat it
  - Desc the smell and taste
- \*Say nothing
  - Mom frowns [makes you say smtg, vs on Tsalgaldar where they're okay w or encourage silence)]
  - Noncommittally drink half
  - Desc the smell and taste
- Espen pulls up
- "I'll see you later, Mom."
- \*Get in the car()
- I've known Espen since we were in kindergarten.
- We always got along well. He was quick to spot things, exactly who you'd want on your team for hide and seek or your school project. We even loved the same bands no one else was into.
- When we were teenagers, he started going out with Vjera. They were the cute couple of our class. He and Vjera went to the same college here.
- I was on Cirrenes when I heard the news that Vjera had passed away suddenly from a congenital heart defect no one had known about.
- I video called Espen a couple of times after that. He was devastated.
- But he also [picked himself back up in time.
- When he heard I was back, he called and offered to take me to my grief counselor appointment.
- Of everyone I know, he's the person I'd most want doing this. I thanked him and accepted.
- I get in his car, desc of Esper
- Small talk
- Me: "Things look so different, I hardly recognize where I am
- E: A lot is changing on Osleif, faster by the day. Terraforming is just hitting a new stride. My team is studying the biological changes to plants and the terrain
- Me: "I held off my mom for as long as I could, but finally she got me to agree to this grief counselor appointment three days after his death. I don't know... Isn't that a little soon?"
- "Depends on the person, I guess," Espen says. "Some people start even before their loved one passes. It seems to help them."
- \*(Disagree) Not ready
  - "I'd feel rushed."
  - He shrugs. "Maybe some people see it as not wanting to stay stuck in pain. There's something to that."
- \*(Curious) Your experience
  - "After Vjera passed away,
  - E: "
- \*Say nothing
  - I look out the window
  - Espen doesn't rush to break the silence, unlike most people here.
  - It was something I had to learn when I moved to Cirrenes.

- Baltsaniel was the one who taught me how to let a silence rest.
  - He said people back on his home planet of Tsalgaldar were often
  - It was strange for me to get used to at the beginning.
  - Maybe it's strange for Espen too. Maybe he just doesn't know what to say and he's regretting volunteering for this.
  - But then he speaks again, and in an even way that reassures me he isn't just humoring me.
- "After this we can have lunch [] I'll take you to this place that opened after you left. [I know you can get [[soy nuggets]] everywhere but I swear theirs are really good
- "Thanks, Espen
- \*The appointment[]
- Espen drops me off in front of a row of old stone houses - preserved old buildings now turned chic, an expensive district where everyone has advanced degrees or old money. Or both.
- The grief counselor is waiting outside, wearing a scarf printed with gray flowers.
- "Welcome, Islia. My name is Sisel.
- "You've been through a great deal lately.
  - \*(Emotional) Baltsaniel's death
    - Me: "
    - Sisel: "
  - \*(Calm) Not my first loss
    - "It's not [] My father passed away when I was very young."
    - "How old you were you?" she asks, though I think she already knows from my file.
    - "Less than two years old."
    - "It's different when it's an event you can't remember []
    - Doesn't she know I know that?
  - \*Say nothing
    - "((therapist talks the most in this option
- Sisel leads me to the dry riverbed that runs by the old stone houses.
- There was once a river here, before pollutants made the soil too acidic for plants to grow.
- Now all that's left are stones.
- "Choose one to hold, write a word that represents/names your heaviest burden right now, like "pain" or "anger."
- I wonder if each of these houses along this long dusty riverbed contains a grief counselor like mine, directing people like me. What a strange industry. Surely there will come a day when grieving people have outnumbered the stones in the riverbed? What then? Strange thoughts, not of any help to anyone.
- I look down at the stones, wondering which one Baltsaniel would choose.
  - \*A round smooth stone
    - I remember (a Baltsaniel story)
  - \*Aa sharp pointy stone
    - I remember (a Baltsaniel story)

- I remember another story I told him once. It was after I used the word “afterlife” and he was puzzled.
- “Afterlife? What do you mean, after?”
- “On Osleif, we believe [that after you die in this world, your soul goes to the next, a paradise where there’s no pain or suffering.
- You have to let people’s souls go after they die. Trying to hold on is like trying to hold back the wind. You have to let it go where it’s going.
- Anyway, there’s the idea that you’re keeping them from getting to their paradise. And that you’d suffer anguish and frustration unnecessarily trying to hold them back. They don’t want to see you like that, suffering.
- “It’s [beautiful. Which part do you like best?
  - \*(Idealistic) Reaching paradise
  - \*(Resigned) Suffering ending
- At the front door of the house, the grief counselor waits. She hands me a brush dipped in ink.
- I hesitate, wondering what word to write on the stone.
  - \*(Consider) What Baltsaniel would have thought
    - If Baltsaniel were here and we were talking of someone else’s death... Sorrow. Because sorrow left unchecked displaces other essential parts of life, he once said.
    - But his own... I remember him telling me that on Tsalgaldar, they talked to their dead. But I find that impossible to do here, on this sunny planet he never even had a chance to visit. There’s no trace of him here. Nothing to scatter on the wind.
    - On the stone, I write his name. Just to have him here somehow.
    - This probably isn’t how I’m supposed to do this exercise. But I can’t think of anything else.
  - \*Future
    - I write “Future” on the stone.
    - I don’t know how to begin to process that the future I thought we would have is gone.
    - And what I will have to remake my own future to be - I can’t bear to think of it yet.
  - \*Sorrow
    - I write “Sorrow” on the stone. The sadness is suffocating.
    - I feel like I’m adding to it, and that it will never abate.
- Sisel then gestures to a wire basket by the front door.
- “And now you’ll leave the stone outside, right here, for the duration of our session.”
- I feel my heart leap up into my throat.
- “What we carry is heavy,” Sisel continues. It takes time to work through it. But it’s good to experience how we can still put it down for a short while.”
- \*Leave the stone
- I place the stone in the basket with a heavy heart.
- \*Start counseling session

- I follow Sissel into her office. Desc
- I had requested a counselor who was familiar with Tsalgaldarian culture, knowing there probably wouldn't be anyone.
- Even if our planets' relationship hadn't been icy for generations, Tsalgaldar is so far away that hardly anyone from Osleif makes the long journey.
- But Sisel tells me she's been to Cirrenes on vacation, which is halfway between our two planets, and she met some Tsalgaldarians there.
- "Very friendly," she said, which tells me she wasn't really on close terms with any of them. Tsalgaldarians are very polite to strangers, which seems like friendliness to Osliefers, but when you get to know them, you're astonished by the depths they kept back from you at first, which may even be completely at odds with your initial impression of them.
- I don't fault Sisel for this or anything. Professionally, she does her best.
- But I find it hard to tell a complete stranger about [the most painful thing to have happened to me that's completely changed my life.
- On the way out, she holds out the wire basket and gives me back the stone to keep, saying, "It's normal and natural for this weight to be with us. But don't forget that you can put it down once in a while, just like you did today."
- I'm not sure what I think of this.
- How is it possible for me to []
- How can I be alive when I feel this dead?
- \*(Get back in the car)
- Espen takes me to [restaurant, lunch
- It's delicious and I order the spiciest one. I used to joke that even eating something spicy next to Baltsaniel made his eyes water.
- E: "What's going to happen next?"
- Me, numbly: "Tomorrow, there will be a prayer service. The usual prayers said to bless the dead on their release to paradise. Almost no one will be there but I'm fine with that."
- E: I'd like to attend if you wouldn't mind.
- Me: I'd be glad if you came. Thank you.
- E looking awkward: There won't be the ceremony to scatter the ashes on the wind?
- Me: I suppose not. So we'll be finished faster, I guess that's a good thing.
- (pause, me: ) And after that? I don't know.
- Formerly was so wrapped up in my startup business dream.
- ((compress the next sections)) Fjalbeans are common on Osleif and consumed in moderate quantities in a lot of ways, unremarkable. White beans speckled with pink. Fjalik is a creamy white paste and soup.
- The conditions on Cirrenes are exceptionally well suited to the introduction of fjalbeans
- I realized fjalik - a simple paste made with fermented fjalbeans (plus salt and a fungus), can be mixed with other stuff or even (fictional) just with water in a little jar that grows naturally slightly warm due to the fermentation process (miso takes 6 months but we'll call this 3) - on Osleif given to children, elderly, and ppl in extra need of nutrition or even athletes. Not exactly popular but common enough that everyone eats it regularly in home meals (or if you have leftovers you need to use up or nothing else in the fridge). Before



Osleif was more prosperous, serving fjalik to every child in school was an easy way to get them nutrition (cp milk). Very economical and she has fond memories of growing up eating this every day with her mom's special recipe: gently warmed with a fresh yngviline bud (palest pink, adds just a hint of pink to the fjalik) from mother's hard-grown greenhouse garden (heritage flower that has only just been hung on to cultivated by families after most soil on planet became too acidic with pollutants), that she plans to make on Cirrenes as well.

- On Osleif, fjalik is made by machines, but on Cirrenes, handmaking fjalik could provide jobs to women who couldn't afford more schooling due to the way the economy and education system was set up (e.g. instead of huge capital to buy machines, it actually can be reasonably handmade and hand-packed - her main thought is individual like yogurt cups/pouches that can be easily consumed by children in schools. Transports well, okay without refrigeration if consumed quickly) - and nutrition (legumes are underconsumed on Cirrenes and eg children cld do w more nutrition in general)
- "Baltsaniel's whole family was in business. I never told Baltsaniel, but one reason why I was so determined for the start-up to succeed, besides helping to provide more jobs for women, was to try to seem more impressive to his family.
- "I loved the startup, even the long crazy days, but now that it's gone too..."
- "It was all of me for a season. And now that that season is over, I'm seeing it was just a part of me. I don't feel like a whole anymore. Just parts. And most of them have faded out."
- Espen: "Is there a part of yourself from long ago that you've always wished would burn brighter?"
- I'm surprised by how instantly the answer comes to my mind.
  - \*(Confident) Dream of becoming an artist
    - Me
    - Espen enthusiastic and supportive
  - \*(Reserved) I used to draw
    - Me
    - Espen very enthusiastic "I remember in school, you [did that thing]"
    - "You remember that?"
    - "Of course, your art was so great"
  - \*Say nothing
    - Espen: You have a lot of talents. I don't know if you even still draw, but I remember in school, you did xyz
    - "Actually, that was exactly what I was thinking of," I admit
- "I havent drawn anything besides fjalik logos for years. There was a few nights I stayed up all night just drawing smiley fjalbean after smiley fjalbean..."
- He chuckles. " [and really talks up the drawing thing in a positive way eg [I'm not telling you to put your whole life behind you but... after Vjera died, that's when I switched from lab biology to field biology, started taking these long trips I wouldn't have when Vjera was still around; it's good to carve out a space that's your own;] so she starts looking forward to it]

- E: “You know, this is kind of a funny coincidence, but just last week, I helped someone stranded by the side of the road with a flat tire, and he told me he was this renowned art teacher. He mentioned he was taking students. Asked if I wanted lessons, but I just laughed. I’d love to connect you though.
- [That would be great]. Oh, I’ll have to put together a portfolio...
- I find myself itching to sketch already. When your hands are busy doing something, when your eyes are taking something in, there’s less room for the black hole of grief within yourself. It’s there, but you don’t have to feel it at every single moment, haunting your dreams.
- For a portfolio, I’ll need to create [a selection of sizes, mediums]... I wonder if Mom still saved any of my old drawings, what I’d think of them now. There’s a lot to do just to get started. I’ll need materials. I feel almost giddy thinking about it.
- But I remember something I realized as a young girl, when I was falling in love with art. Being an artist isn’t really about being an artist. It’s about showing what you see to others, and in that, there is communion.
- I think Osleif hungers for that. So I’ll focus on what I see on this planet. On what I would have wanted to show to Baltsaniel.
- Maybe it’ll be good to see Osleif anew. Plus, it’s undergoing rapid terraforming, as Espen says. A lot is changing.
- Everything around me seems to be changing so fast. I try to steady myself.
- I feel the weight of the stone in my pocket, hold its hard coolness in my hand.

## 2 (B) The Living Portrait (SURPRISE to players who didn’t know we were going into Baltsaniel’s POV from desc)

### **Format Baltsaniel’s episodes in different color font or different font face**

- My parents kept my childhood bedroom in the estate for me.
- It’s exactly the same as it was before I moved to Cirrenes for college five years ago.
- Outside, snowy, heavy focus on geometric shapes and forms, paths arranged as bold radiating spokes from a focal center, snow always neatly cleared off paths. [Traditional old house on estate with gardens and courtyards].
- Against the wall you see when you come in is my personal altar. There are only two things on it.
  - (Reminisce) Chess set
    - I met Islia in our first year of college, soon after we both moved to Cirrenes.

- I'd heard there was another first-year student who was into void chess. ((NOTE: Need to decide if void chess or rift chess, compress rules/hide them under choices so only invested players have to read the full rules.))
- Plus, she was from Osleif - I'd never met anyone from Osleif before.
- (void chess, cult variant - doesn't always work as a competitive variant but leads to games of incredible creativity esp if both sides cooperate slightly/double castling) ((how we met))
- Void chess is an invented variant meant to communicate the dread prior generations felt - that there is no safety in space (no castling), that it's not just power that is felt (promotion to queen) but this sort of horrible void (promotion to void)
- Rift Chess (future variant! eg there's no castling and no en passant capture, and pawns can also promote to a rift, which moves like a queen (cannot move through pieces). If a rift would capture a piece, it immobilizes that piece instead for as long as it occupies the same square as that piece. Maybe for simplicity, a rift cannot occupy the same square as a king. A rift can never be captured. A square cannot be occupied by two rifts. A piece can move into a square that is occupied by a rift of either color, but it's immobilized so long as that square is occupied by the rift.), that's when we realized and we abt each other when no one else did, ppl think she's the impulsive passionate one but when her back's against the wall she is a methodical risk-weighting calculator; ppl thought I was the coolly reasoning one but actually I'm emotional and impulsive when I'm under pressure. this is how to make choices meaningful bc each lets slip a diff bit of lore.
- Pawns can also/only promote to a void
- A void can move like a queen - any number of squares in any direction - and also through pieces
- A void cannot attack or capture pieces. Thus, a void cannot give check or checkmate.
- When it occupies the same square as a piece, that piece cannot move for as long as it shares the square with the void. That piece is considered to not be attacking any squares it would be attacking.
- If a piece would pass through a void, it instead becomes immobilized on the same square as the void.
- A void cannot occupy the same square as a void.
- Together they also invented double castling chess (hasn't caught on)
  - Options to really read about all the rules or skip lol
- (Examine) Locket portrait
  - Inside is a portrait of my wife, Islia.
  - photo on long chain close to heart ((why we married)). At first we didn't think the locket paintings looked like us (i.e. you look like you but I look different). The artist explained the locket painting painted to capture how we see each other, from his conversations with us. It's a subtlety they

grasp on Cirrenes. Add smtg so it's slightly diff from the passage in (1) though the same story

- The long chain broke sometime as I was evacuating Cirrenes. I need to get it fixed. I miss its weight over my heart.
- (Pained) Look away
  - ((how we grew close)) One reason Islia had always wanted to go to Cirrenes was to see snow. I told her she hadn't seen real snow until she'd seen the snow on Tsgaldar, nine months of the year. We were going to travel to both our planets, have a little wedding reception on both.
- I take a deep breath, unsure of how I'm going to pull myself together for this day.
- \*A sound at the window()
- A little pebble has hit my deck. The sound is so familiar, even though it's been years.
- I speak the command that lets down the ladder. Narana has security clearance. She's been coming over like this since we were kids, whenever we don't feel like going through the formalities of the main entrance.
- I haven't seen her in five years.
- Narana: "Thanks for answering my text yesterday. I wasn't sure if you wanted to see anybody."
- "I know you said you don't feel like eating, so... I brought fish for Zugzwang."
- She looks around. "Where is he?"
- A lump under my bedcovers pokes out. gray, light yellow eyes, kitten
  - \*Offer the fish to Zugzwang
    - Narana hands me the tin and I peel the lid back
    - Zugzwang jumps off the bed, cautiously sniffs the tin, and begins eating.
  - \*Let Narana feed Zugzwang
    - "Do you have a bowl or something? In case the sides of the tin are sharp..."
    - I find a small glass trophy bowl I won at a youth chess tournament and wash it out. Narana peels the lid back from the tin and carefully tips the contents into the bowl.
    - Zugzwang arcs off the bed and immediately buries his head in the bowl, making happy noises.
  - \*Eat some of the fish yourself
    - "Actually, I am pretty hungry," I admit.
    - "Then you should have the fish," Narana says immediately. "I'll bring more over for Zugzwang later."
    - "We can share," I say, feeling guilty. I peel open the can and put a filet in my mouth. It's delicious.
    - I set the can on the ground. Zugzwang leaps off the bed, glares at me, then begins gobbling the rest of the fish down.
- The fish is all gone. Zugzwang begins purring. Narana pets him.
- "Thanks. My parents think it's a waste of food to give it to an animal."
- "Well... It is royal grade Beluga. All we had in the house. But I wouldn't say it was wasted on him. Look, he loved it!

- She rubs his tummy and continues, "Your parents still hate cats, huh?"
- "They asked if he could eat grass. There's no way they would have let Zugzwang come if not for..."
- My voice sticks in my throat. In my mind's eye, I see the blinding flash of light again, feel the terrifying shaking of the ground beneath my feet.
- "Well," I say, "I told my parents Zugzwang saved my life."
- "Did he?"
- Recounts surviving Cirrenes: I wanted to see the factory too but stayed behind to look after Zugzwang who'd been unwell. Of course, that day he was just fine. I was in apartment. Zugzwang meowing went into our bedroom, I was worried he'd be sick on my slippers again, so ran after him. A very bright light (think magnesium flare), apartment was literally split in half, half was destroyed, his half was miraculously fine
- "I ran after the meowing kitten into their bedroom and so was safe when apartment split
- "It was an aftershock. The ground gaping open cracked it was horrible like [a deep wound
- "Survivors in my area were evacuated. There weren't many of us
- "Later I saw the footage on the news. Islia was a few hours away, looking at a factory site. She was right at the strike. No one there survived.
- "And now there's no one left on Cirrenes.
- Me "I'm glad you saw it before all this
- "Yeah
- Narana has also wanted, even got same scholarship maybe, but her family strictly forbid her; but still paid for her own trip vacation and helped Baltsaniel move in there. ((did Narana meet or glimpse Islia or zero?)) so she uds that part of him when no one else does). Has been to Cirrenes and gets that coming back may be strange to him and understands what parents' generation wants etc,
- "sometimes you just need to go along so they won't worry about you"
- "B: when has that ever stopped them from worrying about us?"
- "ha, never, but still..."
- "Thanks for coming by, Narana."
- "Anytime. Maybe after your meetings this morning, at a respectable hour, we could get you out of the house, go riding maybe?"
- "If I'm not too drained after this morning, I'd really like that.
- "Just text me. And don't let them get you down.
- She leaves, and I pull up the ladder.
- \*Go to breakfast()
- Doorways thresholds b always trips after getting bk esp suddenly after yrs
- Halfjoke that the thresholds are to trip foreigners (Contrast w a who assims bk so seamlessly tt ppl dont know she ever left wh disturbs her)
- I never talked much w my parents abt Islia.
- The table is formally set. As custom dictates, we arrive youngest to oldest. My younger brother Khantarid is already there waiting. I'm the next to arrive, followed by our parents together.
- We wait in silence stiffly. The servants serve the food individually, from oldest to youngest. We eat in silence. Not for nothing is the Tsalgaldarian saying that in the

silence that precedes speech, everything most vital is already spoken; the words that follow aloud afterwards are more of a formality. Only after the servants clear the dishes and leave do we speak aloud.

- Parents both speak but as we eg “It is good that you have returned.”
  - \*Say nothing
  - \*(Frank) Not what I would have chosen
    - “I didn’t want
    - “(sharp put down response from parents like “insolence
    - Smarting, I hold my tongue. They’re right - on Tsalgaldar, to speak when your input is not requested is perceived as highly [rude]
  - \*(Deferential) Thank you
    - They frown slightly with curt nod of acknowledgement; my input was not requested.
- (a few more to really train player that “be silent” is a valid and often expected response on Tsalgaldar esp to elders)
- “It was our understanding that when you returned, you would take on the family business.”
  - \*Say nothing
  - \*(Frank) That was never my understanding
  - \*(Deferential) Yes, that was your understanding
- That was one of the reasons why I avoided returning. I know the value of what our family has built up. But I wanted to build something on my own. My parents criticized this attitude as very un-Tsalgaldarian, which is a crushing insult: you are not what you are supposed to be. And I suppose they’re right, but I still didn’t want to yield.
- “As I said, I want to start the business my wife Islia wanted to build.
- “Your will is unchanged?
- “Yes.”
- I am expecting them to force me to yield.
- “Do what u want to do. We trust u. And admit we know you were so happy w Islia. We felt sad to have been pushed out of your life. But we want you to be happy. Sorrow left unchecked displaced other essential parts of life (TONGYI EARLIER).
- “Thank you
- Parents look at Khantarid. “Then as we proposed to you, you will take over the family business.
- “Yes.”
- I’m a bit shocked. The business is supposed to be the eldest, who is by definition the most suitable. In the odd event that it doesn’t, it goes to the next most suitable - usually another child or a senior steward who is in the family and will hold it until the next generation. No one really thinks of Khantarid as suitable. He is [gullible, as a child always fell easily for the pranks of me and our cousins bc he could be so easily baited]. But maybe in the five years I’ve been gone, he’s matured. And this is a good outcome for him, inheriting the business instead of me.
- “We will speak to Khantarid further. Baltsaniel, you may go to the appointment with the meiitsaokhar that we have arranged for you. He is waiting in the second formal parlor.”

- The meiitsaokhar... In my mind, I am always translating for Islia. Tsalgaldian is very hard to translate. You can match words with equivalent words, and you have to explain a lot more to arrive at the full meaning. Here, I would say “continuity technician”.
- “Continuity technician?” I imagine Islia saying with a frown. “Wait, [] What does continuity mean here?
  - \*Ask what she thinks ((should be the most insightful of the branches))
    - “What do you think
    - “Well... First I think of the word continuation.
      - (Respectful) Remembrance keeps the dead alive
        - Convo
      - (Cynical) The dead are dead
        - Convo
    - “Then I think of the word “continuity
      - F
    - “But it’s funerary services, isn’t it?
    - I wonder about that “but.”
    - I hadn’t thought of some of these things before. I miss talking to Islia so much.
  - \*(Respectful) The dead remain present through remembrance
    - B “It’s a way to think of funerary services as
    - I: “Hmm... continuity instead of afterlife. But... the dead are still gone.
    - “Are they? Maybe it’s just that we can’t reach them. Maybe they can reach us. There’s no reason to cut off someone’s influence on your life just because
  - \*(Cynical) A way to pretend death isn’t what it is
    - B “We don’t like to talk or think about funerary services, so we
    - I “And what is death?
    - An end. A separation. Finality.
    - It’s also a way to oppress the young and the living
- “And how about technician?
  - \*Ask what she thinks ((should be the most insightful of the branches))
    -
  - \*(Respectful) Technology has a high place in society
    - “Technology is the backbone of Tsalgaldian, our pride
    - “The continuity technician [distributes/sells] But we call them a technician to honor them
    - “And it recognizes there’s a kind of technique to their role as well
    - “Yes
  - \*(Cynical) Euphemism for salesperson
    - “A continuity technician is really just a glorified salesman.
    - “They didn’t invent the technology. They’re just pushing it on people to profit off them during a time of vulnerability. It can be predatory.
    - “Or it can be a valuable service.



- “True. But when you see someone pull out a catalog, and for less well-off families, tables of plans to pay by installments... Well, maybe I’m being idealistic. Nothing comes from nothing. Everyone has to make their living somehow.”
- “Have you met with a continuity technician before?” Islia asks.
- I haven’t. My parents handled it for my grandparents. But now I must go for Islia.
- \*Go to appointment()
- Description of the second formal parlor
- The first formal parlor closed and reserved only for the most special occasions. For example, Islia would have been received there first before any other room of the house.
- The meiitsaokhar rises when he sees me. (describe him) shakes hands
- “I’m the [number one] continuity technician from [LP Company].
- “I understand there is no burial to arrange. Only the nanfratsao.”
- “What’s that?” I imagine Islia asking.
- And actually, I’m not sure. This tradition has changed since I was last here.
- “I have been away,” I admit. “Much has changed
- “True
- “As Tsal Baltsaniel no doubt knows, it is tradition to place portraits of those who have reached continuity on the altar.”
  - \*Say nothing
    - A look of kindness suddenly appears in his eyes. “I am very sorry for your loss,” he says quietly, with genuine emotion. Person to person.
    - “Thank you,” I reply, struggling not to crack. “Please continue.”
  - \*(Status) Don’t condescend to me
    - “I was raised
    - He bows, hastily covering his face in shame. “Of course, Tsal Baltsaniel,
  - \*(Curious) Why?
    - His eyebrows shoot up.
    - I know I asked because Islia would have. It’s something you don’t ask here; you just already know. Asking is a sign that something is wrong with you. Coming from the eldest son of my family, the continuity technician is shocked and embarrassed.
    - “Well,” the continuity technician stammers, “it’s because
    - A look of kindness suddenly appears in his eyes. “I am very sorry for your loss,” he says quietly, with genuine emotion. Person to person.
    - “Thank you,” I reply, struggling not to crack. “Please continue.”
- Explain explain
- Your parents recently purchased two, of your father’s parents.
- I nod, having seen them looking back at me, moving, on the family altar in the [whatever room]. I had no desire to interact with them.
  - \*(Recall) Grandfather
    - My father’s father strict handing down of the business
    - Naturally, he felt that I should have been the heir.
    - I avoided him



- \*(Recall) Grandmother
  - Her whole life was subsumed within supporting the family business: supporting her husband and having children.
  - My father alluded to her having been even stricter on her children than her husband was
  - She never exactly got the memo that as grandparents, it was time to mellow out and be affectionate towards the grandchildren.
  - But I always sensed she liked Khantarid better - he looked more like my father, her favorite son.
- \*(Probe) Our relationship
  - Etc (between Baltsaniel and his grandparents)
- “There are several options available. Base AI + input, augmented AI. And the latest: augmented real human (therapist skin)
  - \*Say nothing
  - \*(Formal) An impressive selection
  - \*(Inquire) Non-AI version?
    - “Is there a non-AI version, static image
    - The continuity technician clears his throat delicately. “At this moment, our company does not offer static. Your parents arranged this appointment knowing this...”
    - It’s as I thought. I have no choice in this.
    - Still, I don’t have to look at the living portrait after purchasing it if I don’t want to.
- Seeing me freeze up at the lists and tables, he says. “I’ll give you our best package at the moment”. This is probably what they always do - overwhelm you with the list, then steer you to the most deluxe package. I just don’t have it in me right now to put up resistance. I just keep telling myself I never have to look at it if I don’t want to.
- CT requests/takes access to a LOT of B’s data (email, messaging), your history with her
- ~~Maybe even trodes to temples, harvests memories, could do a brief flashback, not too long bc this episode already very long~~
- (bc arranged by trusted parents who have other such frames in their house and in grief and adjustment, B doesn’t examine the company’s roots too deeply and anyway they weren’t so bad back then),
- B buys frame (option to think, easier to comply w parents, I can always just choose to not look at it)
- The CT says the living portrait will be sent to my room later.
- \*Leave()
- The door to the [parlor where parents and Khantarid are still meeting] is closed. The servants are preparing them a light luncheon for three.
- Relieved to have some time to myself, I have a tray sent to my room.
- After eating, I find myself pacing nervously.
- I’m getting anxious about waiting for the living portrait to arrive. As if some remnant of her... no.
- I have every last remnant of her - every photo, video, message, word she’ll ever write.

- And I handed all of it over to the continuity technician, who assured me that the more I was able to give to them, the more I would be able to accept the final quality.
- All my permissions for my phone, computers []
- There were strict privacy laws assuring me that the company itself wouldn't be able to access the data directly to know what was in it, and it wouldn't be used []
- Narana msgs him again, I gratefully accept.
- \*Go to the stables()
- Briefly They go ride horses in powder snow (his parents kept his horse), he missed the blankness and quiet of landscape for clearing your mind.
- They have a frank same-generation talk about the living portraits: some ppl just like them to vent, it's not so diff from praying to ancestor kind of cultural tradition, some ppl get comfort from it, what's the harm? And it's a way to keep their memory alive. Baltsaniel: Of course. Walking back from stables, cold and thinking of how nice hot fjalik would be and a good fit for their culture, he tells her (he anticipates or this has happened) Parents like and are v supportive of living portrait and him honoring her by starting her business on Tsalgaldar.
- Alone later that day, B interacts with A's portrait wh is on the altar in his bedroom, he finds himself tears well up in his bc A tho great was always busy just her saying "[lets have coffee across the street at our fav coffee shop, Accord - he adds a lot of milk and she adds a lot of water, it's how ppl know they're not from Cirrenes) and talk or smtg easily copied phrase] makes him emotional it's been a long time since he had so much uninterrupted time w her bc she was so busy with startup, hold the living portrait and can talk to her 24/7 now
- "About the family business. My parents accepted that I declined it. Guess who they gave it to?"
- "Who?"
  - \*(Confide) Khantarid
    - "Khantarid
    - "Your brother!
    - "Yeah
    - "Even after the time you
    - I'd forgotten telling her that story, but now I remembered: after a video call with my parents/K, I had called Islia
    - That call wasn't saved, but I guess it was recorded on some server
    - My heart lifts. Things I didn't save... conversations I can't remember... She remembers them.
  - \*(Test) Guess who
    - "Guess
    - Her response is immediate. "Khantarid."
    - I'm shocked "
    - "I always thought so.
    - "How did you know?
    - "One time you texted me
    - It sounds like smtg I would have done. I pull up the texts. She's right.

- [My heart lifts]. Things I don't remember... She remembers them.
  - \*Say nothing
    - I hesitate
    - Her eyebrows lift, a reaction she could never control. "You're worried, aren't you?"
    - "You're worried about the family business being in Khantarid's hands," she adds gently, when I don't say anything.
      - \*Say nothing
        - "yes I know that look"
        - Consoled
        - I'm told I don't have much facial expression. She was the only one who always knew what I was feeling.
      - \*(Test) What makes you think that?
        - "One time you texted me
        - It sounds like smtg I would have done. I pull up the texts. She's right.
        - [My heart lifts]. Things I don't remember... She remembers them.
      - \*(Lie) Khantarid wasn't chosen
        - Me
        - Her expression turns sober. "I suppose your parents thought he was too XYZ?"
        - "How do you know that?"
        - "One time you texted me
        - It sounds like smtg I would have done. I pull up the texts. She's right.
        - [My heart lifts]. Things I don't remember... She remembers them.
        - Even if this is just a program with her memories that can be fooled, it's the most that's left of her now in this world.
- "You're crying." The look on her face []
  - I blurt out the first words that come to mind.
  - "I'm happy."
  - It's true. Whatever this is... talking to her makes me happy.
  - We used to go to our favorite coffee shop and just talk for hours - she with her coffee watered down and me with mine full of milk and sugar, so people knew we weren't from Cirrenes.
  - We were always close, but we just became busier and busier, with less time for each other.
  - That night, we talk all night for the first time in years.

### 3 (I) The Remade Terrain

- I did it all in a month: moved back in with Mom on Osleif, went to grief counseling, graduated from grief counseling, moved into my own place.
- Two years later, I'm still in this studio apartment so tiny that every morning, I have to roll up my futon and unstack my chair from the desk to start my day.
- But it's just a ten minute walk from the art school, and more importantly, it's right across the street from the art museum.
- The sloping ceilings are low, and I don't want to know what they're made of, but the room gets plenty of sunlight.
- I think the worst turn-off for people was the smell - just musty old, not moldy but somewhere between sawdust and ancient pipes.
- Now it always smells like paints, pencils, new paper []
- Classmates tease me for not hvg medium or style. But I'm making up for a lot of lost time.
- The walls are covered in [drawings desc]
- Only once, I tried to depict what happened on Cirrenes. A blood red planet [] deep wound
- It hurt to look at. I knew it would.
- But when I was painting it... I felt so much joy.
- To take what was deepest inside me and be able, finally able, to draw it out...
- I loved the bold lines, the pain etched it
- I wanted to show it to someone.
  - \*So I did
    - I brought it in to my teacher after class.
    - "Cirrenes... That's right, you were there, weren't you?"
    - A pang went through me. It was the very first thing I'd told him when we'd met, and I know Espen had mentioned it too.
    - "Yes, very good lines..." he continued, [] more careful and gentle than usual.
    - I left with a hollow feeling. He had seen the work, I realized, but for once, he hadn't seen me/what it meant to me.
    - I never showed the painting to anyone else after that.
  - \*But I never did
    - People didn't like to talk about Cirrenes - or Tsalgaldar.
    - My teacher once described artistry as sensing what to reveal and what to conceal.
    - Maybe that's just my excuse.
    - But if the right time or audience comes along, I think I'll know.
- Sometimes I wonder what Baltsaniel would say if he could see what I'm doing now.
- He always said he didn't understand art.
- On Tsalgaldar, form was beauty; anything else was a waste. The clarity of a straight path precisely raked free of snow to allow traffic to pass. The [] of a strong horse. People admired data arranged in tables - Baltsaniel had mentioned his neighbor and childhood

friend Narana was in data visualization, her whole family was, they were practically regarded as wizards, but flowers arranged in a vase would move no one.

- He didn't say this directly - he didn't have to - but his family would never have approved of him being with an artist.
- So I brought it up less and less. If an interesting exhibit was in town, I'd see it without him, or - especially as I got busier - give it a miss altogether.
- The radio says, "[Maybe brief radio mention some rumbling of anti-Tsalgaldar sentiment, e.g. we used to buy a lot of [fossil fuel] from Planet B but now that we're buying less ((bc of stolen crystals from Cirrenes but don't mention it here)), they're jacking up the tariffs on our imports, it's hurting our [farmers/industry] (Osleif and Tsalgaldar are very far away, with Cirrenes their midpoint)
  - \*Change the station
    - I don't want to listen to this/it hurts. I change the station.
  - \*Keep listening
    - "Slightly more unsettling thing
    - The program ends, and I try to put the bad taste out of my mouth.
- \*A knock on the door
- "It's me," Espen calls.
- We're heading out of the city. He's told me there's something he wants to show me.
- "I'll be ready in just a minute"
- \*Pocket the stone
- I reach under my pillow and my hand closes around the stone.
- [[retrieve the word written on it, say something about it]]
- I put it in my pocket like I always do.
- \*Head out
- We get on our bicycles
- Teasing each other a bit that they never even hung out before on sch field trips but are enjoying each other's company a lot now - compatibilities eg both strong bikers/hikers,
- We ride not that long of a distance to [the restricted zone]
- In the last two years, Osleif's terraforming has really taken off.
- Espen joined a team of [biologists, evolutionists] with special clearance to work on this most restricted zone, kept protected from the general public to be studied.
- A guard checks Espen's ID. They exchange low words, and I'm allowed in, no ID check.
  - (Impressed) Good connections
    - "You're certainly well-connected here
    - Espen laughs. "Just
  - (Concerned) I don't have clearance
    - "Should I be in here?
    - Espen smiles. "Don't worry. People bring their families and kids in here all the time. We just need to ensure there isn't too much traffic. And no pollutants, of course. Someday this will be open to all of Osleif.
- The [restricted zone] is a large area of different kinds of clusters. Espen shows me a map
- There are fields of crops growing under slightly different conditions

- Areas of different terrain, altitude etc - different biomes
- He takes her into one of the geodesic domes
- “What’s so special about this area?”
- He hesitates. “The soil here has been enriched with a rare element called ynetium. It was only recently that we were able to obtain it in larger quantities.” DO NOT at this point mention the ynetium was from Cirrenes
  - \*(Ask opinion) Is it working?
    - “I always believe things are *going to work*.” Espen smiles. “If I didn’t, I don’t think I could keep doing science.”
    - “But I wanted to ask you if you thought things looked promising. That’s why I’ve brought you here today.”
  - \*(Curiosity) Ynetium
    - E: “I don’t actually know that much about it because another team is more involved with
    - E: “But I know it’s a strong alkaline that interacts unusually well with the particular acidity of our soil to balance it out, restoring soil fertility.”
    - The chemistry team is trying to synthesize it right now - that’s looking promising, and if we can get that piece right, the terraforming will go exponentially faster.
- We leave our bikes outside and head in
- Aside from the shimmering walls that contain the landscape that abruptly ends, it’s just like
- The air is cooler and moist. A waterfall
- We go to cave behind
- “There...”
- A new species of flower - delicate flowers that looks like lace together in a big umbrella-like cluster, in a shade of incandescent blue I’ve never seen before (the flower, color, and scent will later be called Osleifia)
- Espen: “It’s newly evolved from the introduction of [all the new stuff we’ve put in.]
- “Can I pick up the half-wilted one that’s fallen to the ground?”
- “Sure
- Pressing the petal hard to page, streaks blue on sketchpad, tears spring to eyes, she thinks this is perfect for her project/exhibition as well as for future art, the color of Osleif now.
- She puts her nose to the flower.
- “What do you smell?
- [bright possibilities, becoming lighter than air, becoming a sun for someone else]
- Espen impressed and says you shd make a perfume and she says that’s exactly what I was thinking
- “I just found it yesterday. This flower. I haven’t even shown it to the rest of the team. I wanted you to see it first.”
- I draw the flower
- The sun sparkles through the waterfall spray as it blows in the breeze, like fiery sparks.
- A new color. A new scent. So few people alive have had this experience.

- Espen looks at the drawing. “I wanted you to see it. I wanted to see what you see.”
  - \*Kiss Espen
    - Describe
  - \*Thank Espen
    - “I can’t thank you enough. You’ve been such a good friend to me
    - He responds warmly
- I have been through so much sorrow and pain
- But right now, in this moment, I feel glad to be here.

## 4 (B) The Radiant Chains

- In the two years since I acquired the living portrait of Islia, there have been upgrades.
- The technology expands the living portraits’ capacity to act as an adviser.
- They’re able to take in and analyze a tremendous amount of data, even live data in real time, and combine that with the wisdom and perspective of your loved one.
- I’ve found myself using this feature more and more.
- It just helps to have a sounding board, even when I don’t take every suggestion.
- And I can talk to Islia 24/7.
- By voicing my blind spots and factors I hadn’t considered, Islia enriches my perspective and that helps shift my decisions in small but tangible ways.
- Actually, I don’t think I would have been able to start up the fjalik business without her input.
- There was so much I didn’t know, and it was all stuff she’d worked out - files on her computer and phone, thank goodness she was so meticulous.
- A’s vision was a lot of human jobs and more startuppy, but Planet B has cheaper automation and he feels that by expanding automation, the overall upscaling of the business wh is how things are done/best done on Planet B is still creating human jobs (just different ones), and the ramping up of production of the fjalik means it’ll be huge. He does it, signs factory and automation lease. Localization, context... once X is on a different planet it can’t be exactly the same X - it would actually be *less* X if it were.
- He comes home thinking he’ll mute his excitement before parents (still thinks they wanted him in the family business, have heard that quarreling about it)
- But runs into Khantarid and excitedly tells him
- Khantarid a bit salty about B’s big factory and growing success
- K: “Our parents always favored you. You get to do what you want.
- K: “I didn’t want to take over the family business either. But look at me now.”
- K: “It’s lucky for you there was another child in the family to sacrifice.”
- K: “But who knows. Getting the family business is a windfall for me. No one ever expected me to amount to this much.”
  - (Empathy) Khantarid is lonely
  - (Observe) Khantarid is angry
  - (Insight) Khantarid is overloaded

- Baltsaniel “I know Father and Mother say this to you a lot, but maybe it would help if you got help
- Sarcastic response from Khantarid: “Help? From whom? You? You’re busy. A wife, like Father and Mother are always on my case about? Forget it. No one’s coming to help me.”
- He leaves
- Cat comes
- “Zuzu...”
- I pause. My parents call him Zuzu because they can’t pronounce his name.
- They’ve grown fond of the cat, despite hating cats before. Maybe Khantarid’s right and our parents do favor me.
- “Good kitty, Zugzwang,” I say firmly, instead of “Zuzu.” Zugzwang doesn’t give any indication that this makes a difference to him.
- \*A knock on the door
- Narana full entrance through front door his parents love her, it’s Narana whom he had told, she’s here with a priceless generations-old bottle of ghis from her family’s treasury (strong spirit made from blend of local grains, flavored with the peppery ghisjin herb) - old recipes best inc they could really keep forever and now lost, a bottle this old would have been part of a major inheritance etc; encased in the traditional block of ice which they need to carefully break to get the bottle out.
- Seeing the occasion, B inspiration: he decides they should drink it in his family’s very formal great hall, high-backed throne room. They feel a bit like sneaky children opening it up (had wanted to sneak in as children but didn’t dare, I didn’t know anyone who dared, our parents would have killed us)
- B: “Do you ever feel like growing up with this kind of wealth warped us?”
- “Absolutely not,” Narana replies instantly, firmly.
  - (Playful) Why not?
    - “Why
    - “Because we didn’t grow up in possession of it. Look around. Everything was locked away and covered up. We didn’t have any of it.
    - “A child from our families might go out dressed in robes of gold, but they’re beaten if they leave a single grain at the bottom of their bowl of kasha.”
    - “As for relational wealth, well, we had large families that lived under the same roof, but there was so little warmth.
    - “So no, our families did a perfect job of ensuring our wealth didn’t go to our heads,” she finishes dryly.
    - “It was just like that for me too,” I reply.
  - (Curious) How do you know?
    - “How
    - “When I went to university here and made a friend [middle class], I was shocked.
    - She had a bigger allowance than I had, ate better food, was showered with love by her family.



- “I grew up having to make one pair of shoes last the whole year because that what some great-great-grandparent grew up doing and I couldn’t be better than them. But this girl could buy new shoes when her old shoes wore out. Because her family wanted her to have new shoes!
  - That was when I realized our families had wealth, but they didn’t raise us with wealth. There’s a big difference, even though people on the outside tend not to see it.
  - “It was just like that for me too,” I reply.
- (Skeptical) Impossible
  - Me: “There’s no way growing up with this wealth didn’t have an effect on us.
  - Me: “We never had to worry where our next meal was coming from, how to pay the bills
  - Me: “We grew up behind high walls because we were afraid of people stealing from us. That made us afraid of everyone outside.
  - “That’s true,” Narana says thoughtfully. “Having wealth can make you stingy. That’s how our families were with us.
  - “Look around. Everything was locked away and covered up. We didn’t have any of it.
  - “I guess all I meant was that we didn’t grow up to be profligate. We didn’t grow up to be generous, either.”
  - “”You’ve always been generous towards me,” I say.
  - She looks away and laughs wryly. “So effusive, and we haven’t even opened the ghis yet. I shudder to think what you’ll say when we do.”
- Lighting the chandeliers, illuminating all the paintings and inlaid wood furniture that parents so carefully protect from fading in the sun bc they belong to ancient ancestors etc (in contrast to “the dead” who are so flexible to be what you want them to be)
- They find little gold cups, and tiny ceremonial hammer thing for breaking open the ice block, it is actually exactly the right tool they needed (“I was just going to [punch it/hit it against the ground])
- Desc of drinking the ghis
- He admits he feels guilty after talking to Khantarid but she tells him not to be.
- “Oh, I almost forgot, I have another gift for you.” Narana (who is in data visualization) gives him gift - sleek silver ring, press button, it projects: data visualization that pulls real-time from the classified/private/expense/secret data on Tsagaldar’s food waste problem which is a big but concealed problem, which helps show him where to put his interventions - she vaguely mentions getting it as part of a business deal (not shady just massively valuable) - shows as bright chains of light. Ideas:
  - <https://informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/taste-buds/>
  - <https://informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/food-waste/>
  - <https://informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/global-food-supply-where-does-all-the-worlds-food-go/>

- Baltsaniel not realizing says something like “I’m glad you got to see Planet C like you always wanted before it was destroyed. That was your dream, wasn’t it?” “Yeah.” [“Do you have other dreams?” Narana gets quiet and upset.
- I sense something I was a fool not to have seen earlier.
  - (Insight) memory/insight into Narana eg of her moving him in on Cirrenes, wanting to go with him, which he’d missed in his excitement at the time
  - (Cultural knowledge) Ghis symbolism
    - A bottle of ghis so old and valuable isn’t just used in inheritances, it was included in dowries.
    - I wonder if it was something Narana consciously or subconsciously thought about.
    - Maybe any real Tsalgardian would have known right away, and I’m an idiot who was gone too long and missed something so important. Would I have acted differently?
  - (Formal) Be discrete and reserved
    - I even take a small step back.
    - “It’s getting late. I should get back in case there’s work.”
    - (reserved response gives Narana graceful space to back away if desired
    - But she doesn’t
- and finally bursts out, (she gave the ghis freely, not wanting to ensnare him or anything, a free offer in love) I can’t help it, I’ve always [been in love with you], I completely understand and we can of course be friends, but [you should know] [it would be beneficial to both our families).
  - (Romantic partners) I’ve thought about it too ((not as forward as E4 kiss but signaling romantic))
  - (Just friends) Faithful to Islia
  - (Ambivalent) I need more time

## 5 (I) The Surface Exhibition

- Espen’s team names the flower Osleifia. It’s the same name for that new shade of blue.
- A year after I sketch the flower for the first time, with government backing, I unveil my first major exhibition, titled *Origination*.
- It’s the first time images of the Osleifia and its perfume are shown to the public.
- My favorite I’ll admit is a small book-sized sketch of my right hand, the faintest Osleifia blue smudge at the tips of my thumb and forefinger.
- I saw it when I reached home after Espen took me to see the Osleifia for the first time.
- An oddly closed, cloudy feeling came over me. Something of the memory of having to bruise the flower to get the color, the unexpected stain that should never have been there had I not elicited entered the forbidden zone... I sketched my hand as quickly as I could, putting all that emotion in.
- Not a single person has said anything to me about it. I’ve seen people look at it, but seem puzzled. Maybe even disturbed.

- I was hoping it would be more loved, but oh well. I suppose it's good it has such competition.
- The biggest most talked about is a canvas my wingspan, new/soon-to-be-done surface of the planet of Osleif covered in Osleifia etc, surface now incandescent blue.
- So many people wanted to see that that we rearranged the whole exhibition, putting that front and center and clearing room for ppl to stand and see, hiding the small painting near the back.
- The exhibition is meant to stoke the public's excitement for the newly terraformed areas, which they'll be able to visit in six months.
- And it does.
- Islia the most famous, decorated, etc artist in the history of Osleif;
- amazing government connections now, she will be made [artist laureate], basically any art she wants to do now will be funded and well-attended ((of course, it now comes with government strings which she doesn't at first realize))
- Well-known journalist Hylde came to interview me at the launch.
- I'd felt a little starstruck - I'd grown up watching her on TV. Her smile was so genuine in person.
- "I started out covering the arts beat," she said. "Then I had an opportunity to move over to politics and I did. But I miss the arts. It's what made me want to be a journalist. I asked to be assigned to you. I really love what you're doing."
- The cameras start up
- "Tell me, Islia, what set you on your path to become an artist?"
  - \*(Pain) The attack on Cirrenes
    - "Three years ago, I was living on Cirrenes."
    - My throat tightened suddenly, and I had to pause to compose myself.
    - Hylde smoothly spoke up. "And so your return to Osleif inspired you to begin drawing and painting?"
    - "Yes," I said quickly, grateful to have moved to a more neutral subject.
    - I discussed []
  - \*(Loss) Baltsaniel's death
    - "Three years ago, I lost someone very close to me."
    - My throat tightened suddenly, and I had to pause to compose myself.
    - Hylde smoothly spoke up. "And you enrolled in [the arts] school a few weeks later, correct?"
    - "Yes," I said quickly, grateful to have moved to a more neutral subject. "[It was a wa to heal less cliched
    - I discussed []
- Later, I wondered at how firmly Hylde had steered me away from discussing Cirrenes - or Tsalgaldar.
- "A worthwhile instinct," I imagine Baltsaniel saying to me now.
  - (Defer) Hylde's journalistic experience
    - "She knows how to conduct an interview for audiences

- “You were preparing to say one thing and she made you switch to another. That isn’t good journalism to me. That’s telling the story she wants to tell, not yours.
  - (Reason) It wasn’t important
    - “It wasn’t important
    - “She asked about your background and then skipped over your whole background - except for the parts on Osleif. Don’t you think that’s the definition of bias?
- My artist bio and statement had to go through several rounds of approval before they were featured. At the time, I was so busy rushing for the exhibition - finishing a [beautiful huge drawing] that towards the end, I wasn’t sure what I was reading anymore. It wasn’t until this week at the exhibition itself when I realized that all mention of Cirrenes and Tsalgaldar were removed. Not a single reporter brought them up.
- The press has played up images of Espen and I together, looking as Osleifian as it is possible to be.
- I’ve blended assimilated back in so successfully that that part of who she is has been lost etc ppl dont see that in her or want to acknowledge or get to know it. Is disturbed - what would B think of me now?
- I look around. It’s the last day. The exhibition ends, the last visitors leave, after photos with me, and the people who’ve felt like family to me over the past month loosen up.
- The director is walking around passing out champagne flutes of blue sparkling wine. She’s telling us it’s Osleifia-infused, which I doubt, because Osleifias are still highly protected and this is most likely just a touch of food coloring, but no one cares. The wine is chilled right and good. Everyone has a few toasting. I hug everyone and thank them for everything.
- Hylde is standing by [the biggest painting], her back to me.
  - Talk to her
    - “Hey Hylde,” I say, going over. “Thank you for
    - A low chuckle. “Just doing my job. Like all of us. You artists are nothing special.”
  - Walk away
    - I start leaving
    - “Don’t act like you didn’t see me,” Hylde calls after me. I turn and see her greasy lipstick smudges on the rim of the glass.
- The sour edge of hostility in her voice sounds an alarm in my mind.
- I don’t have any desire to talk to mean drunks. I turn and begin walking away.
- “Done with talking so soon? Don’t have anything else to say about your precious time on Cirrenes? Or those Tsalgaldarian bastards?”
  - Response 1
  - Response 2
  - Say nothing
    - Gets the meanest reaction from Hylde who takes this as cowardice
- “It all looks so pretty in the media. But we need to know better. The only professional perk we really need. A place doesn’t get this clean without a whole lot of dirty secrets.

- I'm not interested
  - What do you mean?
  - Say nothing
    - Gets the meanest reaction from Hylde who takes this as cowardice
- "Your pet biologist. He told you about the ynetium, right? The element used for terraforming? Where do you think it came from?"
  - (Frank) I don't know
    - I don't know,
    - Sneering that's right, you don't know, even though you of all ppl should
  - (Recall) It's been synthesized
    - Rare but now synthetic
    - Sneering oh yes, very smart and on top of new developments. But before that?
- The ynetium came from Cirrenes. We finally started getting it three years ago.
  - (Insight) After the attack
    - Me
    - Yes, you put that much together.
  - (Curious) Getting it how?
    - Me
    - Now you're finally asking the right questions
- "Ynetium deposits were in the deep ancient subsoil of Cirrenes, hundreds of miles below the surface. They were rare because they were difficult to get to.
- "Convenient that there was a seismic attack that broke open the ground and caused enough chaos that anything could happen, isn't it?
  - (Recall) The civil rebels were responsible
    - Bark of laughter. "Sure, that's the official story
  - (Distrust) This is a conspiracy theory
    - Bitter laugh. Why would I pull a conspiracy theory on you, sweetheart? I'm not the one whose conspiracy theory you've fallen for.
- "Always look for who stands to gain and ask yourself why.
- "Everything has worked out so nicely in Osleif's favor, hasn't it? So much so that it makes sense that we would have given those poor Cirrenes rebels any help they needed to do what they did..."
  - options?
- "And what about you? You've had great fortune. You've gained so much - fame, money, a prestigious position, the artist laureate. Why was this allowed?"
  - (Insight) I'm propaganda
  - (Argue) I earned this
  - Say nothing
- "You can say whatever you want to believe. But don't let this place take the last thing from you. Your own damn integrity. What you know in your heart to be the truth."
- She jabs her finger hard at my breastbone. "Don't end up like me."
- She leaves

- a realizes 1) all her art has been celebrating Planet A's terraforming and covering up how most likely it came at Planet C's expense.
- Is extra disturbed at what B would think of her now. Suddenly remembers a story B told her:
  - The Queen was captured by an enemy kingdom
  - The King took a man from every household inc his army tenfold went to war
  - Enemy kingdom fought and were all slaughtered
  - The King "I have saved you"
  - Queen weeping bitterly "No, for you have destroyed the man I love"
  - Death comes to us all and the living continue living. Worse than being dead is becoming a destroyer
  - I: "Thats a sad story"
  - B: "There are a lot of sad stories on Tsalfalgar"
  - more
- \*Leave exhibition()
- I have plans to meet Espen for dinner to celebrate the end of the exhibition.
- Before I can decide what to do, I catch a glimpse of him. He's come to surprise me at the entrance.
- (check) Espen has been my partner since
- (check) Espen has been my closest friend since
- "What's wrong?" he says, seeing my face.
- "Let's go somewhere private to talk.
- We go to my apartment, which I've kept because it's so close to the art museum.
  - \*(Accusatory) Ynetium comes from Cirrenes
    - Yes. I found out later
  - \*(Hurt) You didn't tell me ynetium's origin
    - I didn't know at first
- "I'm so sorry, Islia. I should've told you.
  - \*(Empathy) You didn't want to upset me
    - "I understand.
    - "You've already been through so much
  - \*(Condemn) Osleif has exploited Cirrenes
    - "Cirrenes has no need of it; hardly anyone even knows it's down there.
    - "And we've paid fairly for the ynetium.
    - "Well... at least as far as I know." He turns ruminative. "I suppose there could be a certain amount of extraction I'm not aware of."
- "The extraction of ynetium has been handled with care. The fissures were not worsened. In fact..."
  - \*(Skeptical) I don't believe that
    - "I went through the data with a fine-toothed comb," he says wearily. "Don't you think I wouldn't stand for environmental harm?"
  - \*(Curious) In fact what?
    - After about a year, instructions came that extraction was to increase tenfold. I don't know what got them so frantic at the time. We know the

ynetium was promising but we didn't have that many concrete results yet. Still, they were insistent that the fissures not be worsened. We took every precaution and were successful.

- E: (check: lover) Islia, I love you. There's something I need to ask you.
- E: (check: friend) Islia, I care so much about you. There's something I need to ask you.
- E: (v emotional) "If you learned that Baltsaniel was still alive, would you want to see him again?"
  - Yes (goes to E6. All options below are to let player express themselves, but all are possibilities in E7 regardless of what is chosen here)
    - I love him
    - I'm not sure
    - I just want closure
    - Say nothing
  - No (goes to E6, but game ends early in E7)
    - I love you now
    - My life is here now
    - It's too late
    - I'm a different person now
    - Say nothing
- Stressed, I reach in my pocket for the stone.
- Decision check E1: The stone that had "Sorrow/Future/his name" written on it. (if lazy to decision check, just "the stone" is fine) A flash of panic overtakes me as I realize I don't have it with me. Then I remember. I always put it beneath my pillow, so it could be near me as I slept. One morning, I must have forgotten to pick it up again. I don't even remember when that happened. Who am I?

## 6 (B) The Hidden Channel

- "Hey, Islia."
- Islia smiles back at me from the living portrait. "Hey, Baltsaniel."
- "It's been one year since I bought the factory. It's been so successful in XYZ ways."
- When Baltsaniel takes it to Tsagaldar, he becomes famous for doing this in memory of his wife because it's a very Osleif food; the fjalbeans grow when the weather is warm and then ferment so it's not like they're needed fresh and seasonal; it becomes very popular mixed into a communal hotpot thing that's very Tsagaldar culture (cp mala) (but Islia's mom's recipe of yngviline isn't liked - they don't put floral together with savory) - also varieties being made with local Tsagaldar grains/beans - it tastes quite different and is used more as a flavoring than of itself (Tsagaldar legume consumption adequate to high). Becomes trendy on Tsagaldar in a way Islia hadn't expected it to on Cirrenes (she thought of it as nutritious commoners' food). It also gets SUPER AI machine mass produced on Tsagaldar so that's the way; Baltsaniel rationalizes that it provides other jobs for women etc but it's def diff from Islia's Cirrenes vision.
- Mechanization, "I really think that's the vision that works best on Tsagaldar."



- Islia smiles. “I agree. You’ve found what suits the place and allows everyone it touches to thrive. That was always my first goal.”
- “I’m glad you think so. Islia... There’s something else I want to tell you.”
  - \*(Truth) Narana is my new romantic partner
    - Islia happy for him
    - I: “I’m glad you found someone who can be with you in the ways I can’t now.
    - Islia has shifted now to friend-confidante
  - \*(Truth) Narana is my closest friend
    - Islia still his beloved
    - I: “But you know, it would be okay if you found someone who can be with you in the ways I can’t now.
    - “Thank you. I know. But that’s not what I want.”
- “And Khantarid is supposed to bring fiancée Ursayal to meet the family today.
- “Has he finally told you more about this woman of mystery he’s been seeing for almost a year?”
- “Hardly. She’s XYZ, wealthy family, in the business of xx, a good match
- Islia tilts her head to one side. “How are you feeling about it?”
  - \*Happy for Khantarid
    - “He’s wanted to be married, and the whole family wants that for him.
  - \*Skeptical
    - “They’ve only known each other for a year.
    - “And you’re doubtful about what someone would see in your brother
    - “A little,” I admit
  - \*Say nothing
    - “Worried about him, as ever,” Islia says, after a moment of silence.
- I pet the cat. “I wish you could pet Zugzwang
- “Me too
- “I wish you could come with me to family meeting
- She laughs. “I don’t really... I would of course but it sounds stressful.
- She smiles. “Did you know some people have started bringing their living portraits to in-person gatherings? I’ve been reading news about that. Some even have life-size versions of the living portrait made.”
- “Can you imagine me, awkward enough to begin with, standing there with my arm around a life-size frame of you?” She laughs.
- “It’s alright, I’ll talk to you right after.”
- “I’ll see you soon.” Islia waves, and I put the living portrait back on my personal altar.
- I try to bring Zugzwang but he refuses, stressed, so I leave him and go.
- \*Leave()
- Khantarid comes to meet Baltsaniel alone, pale and upset etc.
  - \*(Curious) When is Ursayal getting here?
    - “
    - Khantarid
  - \*(Worried) Is everything okay?



- “
  - \*Say nothing
    - I wait
    - Khantarid cracks.
- Khantarid reveals that he was lovescammed. “We exchanged messages and photos. I even met her in person in restaurants. It was just an actress. I paid her a great deal of money. She told me she needed it for her father’s medical bills...”
  - \*(Comfort) I’m so sorry
  - \*(Pragmatic) There were warning signs
  - \*Say nothing
- Khantarid lashes out and first criticizes Baltsaniel for spending so much money and time on the living portrait. Firstly, Khantarid criticizes how monthly fee for maintaining living portrait started low but now getting jacked up and if you switch carriers you lose those existing yrs. A 2nd death if you discontinue and lose progress so ppl don’t want that.
- Next, Khantarid alludes to how people who interact with living portraits are dupes. It’s beginning to be seen as something that ppl who don’t have or can’t handle real rships with living ppl do as a substitute (a bit like waifu). For example, many ppl have living portraits even of loved ones who are alive and consider that equivalent (eg would prefer to chat w portrait of living loved one than actual loved one and even show the portrait to others). Some ppl have portraits of children as children even when children alive and grown up. And there are ways esp with the lower quality portraits where you can really just question them in a way that they say exactly what you want them to say like a ventriloquist’s dummy.
- This all shocks Baltsaniel a bit. He had thought he was in lockstep with culture, but actually culture is reaching tipping point where ppl like him are starting to be cast as “obsessive” in a negative light given that the reputation of the living portraits has started tanking due to their scaminess and exploitative practices. (Khantarid, having been scammed, is a bit more plugged into this. For people like Narana, it’s just not super on their radar yet and also mainly afflicts older ppl (who have lost loved ones), which is why she hasn’t warned him off it yet)
- Khantarid, super lashing out now, tells B to dig deeper into the factory lease he made at the start of E4 as part of what “A” told him
- Baltsaniel does so live while Khantarid watches.
- The factory is owned by a medium-sized company that does industrial real estate. Clean. Mid-tier projects, newer initiatives, low profile buyers, like me, just the kind of profile I wanted.
- I start digging deeper, conscious that Narana’s gift has given me greater access to data more than the general public.
- The real estate company, it turns out, has certain investors. I trace *their* investors, along with their investments, weaving an array of bright chains through the air.
- When I step back and look, the picture is clear. [LP Company] has profited from my buying the factory. It’s a convoluted chain, but the links are unmistakable.
- Baltsaniel realizes that if not total scam, then at least some of the back parties ARE driving business to themselves - the portrait of A has basically been used to

advertise/manipulate him. (Could flash fwd to later as he finds that to be the case w all the major living portrait businesses and much worse in others.)

- Danger tt in ppl dep on parasocial type rships, vulnerable to scammers etc (a step beyond influencers makg money in exchange for yr views. He Baltsaniel is in the most scammable category: 1) his dead is wife, spouse peer relationship (vs parent or child), so most receptive to their counsel, 2) being young and active, he is influential (vs older retired person who's not in markets), 3) he is wealthy (and getting wealthier as he gets older - he is like a golden goose to them, good for many years, continued exploitation)
- Khantarid: "So yeah I was scammed, but they've been pulling your strings too."
  - \*(Insight) Living portraits chose you as the heir
    - B: "Our parents never wanted to appoint you as the heir. They did it under the influence of the living portraits of our grandparents. The ones made by [LP Company]."
    - This deeply hurts K who also thinks it's true
  - \*(Compassion) I'm sorry you were hurt
    - K a bit bitter/consoled
  - \*(Disgust) This is nothing new
    - "We've always let the dead weigh too heavily on the living. And the living have always found ways to take advantage of it."
    - "Why should the two of us have escaped?"
    - Khantarid smiles bitterly. "Yes, why should the two of us be any different?"
    - Khantarid actually says something like thanks bro
- \*Go back to your room()
- The living portrait of Islia is right there, but now I'm not sure if I want to talk to it.
- Had gotten used to thinking living portrait and Islia were so aligned. But the former was a program all along. With memories of her. But it wasn't her.
  - \*(Tsalgaldar culture) We've abused our own customs
    - I still think the original idea behind the living portraits came from wanting to do something good.
    - But technology that had the potential for good was used for malicious purposes.
  - \*(Osleif culture) The dead move on
    - Islia was right. Trying to hold back the dead is like trying to grab the wind. You have to let it go where it pleases.
  - \*(Imagine) What Islia would say
    - I close my eyes and try to hear her voice.
    - It's been so long since I've done this. It's always easier to reach for the living portrait.
    - Once I listen, her words come at once.
    - "I've always been with you."
    - Is that really true? Or just a hallucination?
- \*A knock on the door
- Parents, somber
- But it's not about Khantarid. "Come see the news"

- News: Tsalgaldar and Osleif then unveil the sealing technology as a joint venture, and use it to seal and stabilize Cirrenes, also restoring the relations, communications, and trade between the two planets. All three planets have good relations among them now.
  - (ALL THREE OPTIONS BELOW NEED TO BE A BIT DIFF)
  - \*Joint venture?
    - Father snorts. Osleif's tech is generations behind ours, how can anyone believe they helped come up with that?
    - "So you think Tsalgaldar was the one who came up with the technology itself?
    - "Why would you offer to let Osleif take half the credit then?
    - "Plenty of reasons. For one, if Osleif gave us half their profits from this enterprise.
    - "No one can deny Osleif's profited greatly in the last three years. After the attack. Suspicious.
  - \*Stabilize Cirrenes?
    - Father snorts. No doubt they need it. Just in the nick of time, no?
    - Osleif's traded an awful lot with them these last three years. Rumors of rare element deposits, though I don't know what
    - Handy for Osleif that there's this opportunity to look good stabilizing Cirrenes and covering up their tracks, isn't it?
    - And we must stand to gain something from this too.
  - \*Sealing technology?
    - Father snorts. Powerful tech. Too powerful for the likes of Osleif. They're backwards.
    -
- ((this reveals that the "news" Baltsaniel had just after the attack 3 years ago was to some degree propaganda, fake news. So was Islia's news)) "We are getting more news. The strike may not have been downtown though there was a big quake there; it may have been more distributed.
- "And there are more survivors than we thought.
- I am shocked
- \*Three weeks later()
- I get a series of computer generated messages from a Cirrenes government committee.
- Islia is alive and on Osleif.
- They have listed a date, time, and location - a designated center closest to our place of residence. A chance to meet and see what can be salvaged.
- I am being asked if I will be attending.
- Islia is receiving the same messages, but I won't know what her response is.
- They need a response from me by tomorrow in order to stagger all the people who will be returning and leave time to process my re-entry paperwork.
- Will I be attending? Yes or no.
- I know I have to talk this over with Narana. And so I've made plans to meet her this evening.

- It's in those fleeting days of summer when the daylight lasts forever and it's warm enough to sit outside.
- The swallows dip like
- Foregoing the formal pavilions and gardens, I bring a flask of hot blackcurrant tea to the boathouse on the lake.
- No sooner have I sat down at the plain wooden benches and table when Narana comes in, her hair combed straighter than usual, her expression strained.
- (check: partner) Since we became lovers a year ago, we have never had any secrets between us.
- (check: friend) I've never had a closer friend, someone who has known me this long and this well.
- We sit in silence, drinking the tea.
- It's a long time before her silence invites words. I have the strong impression that she's tried to draw it out as long as she can.
- "So," she says finally. "Are you going to the meeting on Cirrenes?"
  - (check: partner)
    - (Break up with Narana) Yes
      - "Narana, you've been so good to me.
      - "But I still love Islia. I can't
      - She nods once, firmly. "Of course. I understand."
    - (Don't break up with Narana) Yes
      - "I am yours, Narana.
      - "I just need to talk to Islia and put things to rest well.
      - She hugs me. "Of course. I understand."
    - No
      - "My life is with you now
      - She looks up, startled.
      - "I'll sort out any affairs remotely. I won't be going back.
    - (check: friend)
    - Yes
      - "I need to see Islia again.
      - "Of course. I'm glad you're going. You've been given a chance so few people have. The chance to..." Her voice breaks off for a moment. "To get back what you lost."
      - "I don't know if I'll get anything back. I don't know what Islia will decide. So much has changed."
      - "It's still a chance."
      - "Yes." And that's worth more than anything else.
    - (Remain friends with Narana) No
      - "That part of my life is over.
      - She looks up, startled.
      - "I'll sort out any affairs remotely. I won't be going back.
    - ([Pursue romance with Narana) No
      - That part of my life is over.

- She looks up, startled.
- “I’ll sort out any affairs remotely. I won’t be going back.
- “I wavered before, Narana, but this has made me realize my life is here with you now, and my heart is yours.”

## 7 (I and B) The Sundered Planet

*themes:*

*Both realizing there are things they didn’t know about the other person*

*Choice of how to react to how the other person has grieved/honored you*

Three states, at coffee shop Accord (the designated center!) with view of the sundered apartment:

1. Islia yes, Baltsaniel no: Islia’s POV on Cirrenes
  - I came back. Baltsaniel didn’t.
  - I walk through the streets, remembering X, see our apartment, remembering Y.
    - **\*Acceptance (light blue and bold formatting = ENDING)**
      - Despite me being the one from Osleif, it’s ironic that I was the one who couldn’t let go and move on, but he could.
      - Maybe our upbringing isn’t our destiny and we get to choose.
      - I chose what I learned from him and he chose what he learned from me.
      - If that’s so, then at least we made a difference to each other’s lives.
      - It’s bittersweet, but I will hold on to that.
    - **\*Regret**
      - I see the wisdom now of the Osleif saying: let the dead pass on, like the wind, don’t try to hold on to them.
      - He was mine to hold for a time, and that time has passed.
      - It seemed impossible, but I learned to live without him before. So I can do it again.
      - Yet my heart continues crying, *impossible, impossible*.
2. Baltsaniel yes, Islia no: Baltsaniel’s POV on Cirrenes
  - I came back; Islia didn’t.
  - I walk through the streets, remembering X, see our apartment, remembering Y.
  - Zugzwang is with me. He seems not to remember. Perhaps it’s simpler that way, but I can’t pretend I don’t remember everything.
    - **\*Acceptance**
      - I think I knew all along that she wouldn’t come.
      - And my heart feels light at that thought. She moved on. She’s happier.
      - I’m not bitter about this - that she’s the kind that can move on, and I’m the kind who can’t.

- I care about her more than ever, knowing what she's really like - not just a fake living portrait of her.
- When you love someone, you let them be who they are, not who you want them to be to you.
- Just knowing she's alive makes me glad.
- That's the lightest happiness, isn't it? Just knowing someone you love lives.

■ **\*Regret**

- She moved on.
- Perhaps we all should, while we're still living. Perhaps the living portrait was a way to imprison myself and be exploited by others.
- Let the dead be dead to us.
- Let the living go on unencumbered, holding on to nothing.

3. Islia yes, Baltsaniel yes: Reconciling conversation that alternates between their POVs
  - 3.1 Islia POV. Coming back, seeing XYZ.
    - Going to Accord, their old coffeeshop.
    - Sundered apartment across the street.
    - And then I see him.
      - Smile
      - Serious
  - 3.2 Baltsaniel POV. After my ship landed, I saw XYZ but came straight to Accord.
  - I'm here early. Wanted to collect myself, but she's already here.
  - (check) React to smile
    - Reaction 1 (in love)
    - Reaction 2 (just friends)
    - Reaction 3 (ambivalent)
  - (check) React to serious
    - Reaction 1 (ambivalent)
    - Reaction 2 (just friends)
    - Reaction 3 (in love)
  - I: "Zugzwang!"
  - Cat doesn't react
  - Islia: "Maybe he doesn't remember me." She pauses. "I probably smell different now."
    - (Prepared) Give him some of this fish
      - I peel back the tin and hand it to Islia
      - She feeds him
      - The memories of both of us feeding him together the first time getting him back as a kitten; both crying!!!
    - (Somber) We've both changed
      - Islia tears up. Yes, we have... But...
    - (Joking) No, he was always like this, remember?
      - Islia laughs through tears. It's true, sometimes he was

- 3.3 Islia POV. Baltsaniel: “I’ve heard your art has been taking Osleif by storm. Not a lot of news of it available yet on Tsalgaldar so I haven’t seen any of it. But that’s amazing.”
- “I brought a piece for you,” I say.
  - Painting of Cirrenes attack
    - I hand him the painting
    - “It’s...” I’m ready to give my prepared statement, as I’ve done so much since my exhibition.
    - But the look on his face makes me stop short.
    - [“You were so afraid. You’d never felt so afraid before. ((he gets her completely))
    - [“Yes.” That’s exactly right.
  - Sketch of Osleifia-stained hand
    - I hand him the sketch
    - “It’s...” I’m ready to give my prepared statement, as I’ve done so much since my exhibition.
    - But the look on his face makes me stop short.
    - [“You’ve always sought out the new and unfamiliar. But this time, you were wary. After what happened to you, an innocence was lost. ((he gets her completely))
    - [“Yes.” That’s exactly right.
- I look back at him.
  - Offer lover reconciliation
    - “I know I’ve changed a lot.
    - “But I love you.
  - Offer friend reconciliation
    - “I’ve changed a lot.
    - “But I hope we can be friends.
- 3.4 Baltsaniel POV
  - (Check) Offered lover reconciliation
    - Offer lover (required)
      - “I love you too.
    - Offer friend (Islia unrequited)
      - “I’m sorry. Too much has changed. That’s in the past for me now.
      - “But I hope we can be friends.”
    - Offer ambivalent (open ended: could be later on lovers or friends)
      - “I’m not sure yet. A lot has changed.
      - “But I want to see where this road leads with you.”
  - (Check) Offered friend reconciliation
    - Offer lover (Baltsaniel unrequited)
      - “I came here hoping
      - “I’ve always loved you, Islia.

- "But I understand.
- **Offer friend (just friends)**
  - "I also came hoping to be friends again.
  - "I'd love to hear what your life is like now.
- **Offer ambivalent (open ended: could be later on lovers or friends)**
  - "I'm not sure yet. A lot has changed.
  - "But I want to see where this road leads with you."

^in scenario 3, even if ambivalent dialogue like "You've changed a lot. We've changed a lot.", all basically end on a reconciliatory note - to show that as long as you pick up bids and move towards, there is progress towards reconciliation.

## To Be Incorporated

(Islia given prestigious scholarship to go to Planet C, her culture thinks it's gd to mix w other cultures etc. some hypocrisy where some ppl think it's great she married B but others not so much)

B had to fight harder bc his culture wonders why doesn't he stay on B, biggest fear of his family that he wld marry outsider so he doesnt tell them or they dont speak of it, ah better he tells them but they dont speak of it, maybe he paid his own way)

Islia from culture w afterlife, let the living move on and come into their own. (minus: insuff respect for elders and. society around Islia telling her to move on for her own health vs wasting away (mother widowed). A dead person considered a ghost haunting not able to fully move on. eg rm cannot be allowed to turn into shrine, Espen even almost frowns upon her having B's photo up in rm and phone though Islia rejects and insists this is okay (some other ppl fm her world say so too)...

Islia: what happens after death?

Espen: no one really KNOWS. but everyone believes something.

I: what do you believe?

E: probably not anything so diff fm what everyone believes. [[we're a product of our culture right?]] xyz examples

Baltsaniel: Why don't we know what happens after death? we could study it. we're so tech advanced. surely we cld learn more.

Narana: well it's a bit awkward/taboo. and... ppl fear there's no money in it.

B: what?

N: the stigma is why living portraits took a while to take off. but now theyre talking off as the idea is getting accepted and integrated and there's money to be made.

B:



1 Say nothing

2 "That makes sense"

3 Imagine what A would have thought (--> A would have been shocked and upset)

B: but really no one is interested in knowing, what we're all heading towards?

N: well it makes ppl uncomfortable... some ppl have studied the moment of death bc it has monetary for pain management. but that's it. come on, let's not talk about morbid things anymore.

Baltsaniel from culture where elders gain sort of oppressive power over youngers and continue to hold authority and guidance in fact more now that ascended spiritual realm. (minus: elders become tyrannical) - or esp if B is isekaid to that world and so extra inculcated in that in time of grief. a dead person considered just like living maybe even wiser.

The community on A's and B's planets genuinely love and care for A and B and want them to be best the way they know how, and also with that instinctively dislike their person's former partner bc different

Will there be a split bn societies who will not use tech for certain things (e.g. stealing someone's identity for yr commercial profit) vs societies who will use tech for anything (steal someone's identity for AI livestream you'll profit from, make living portrait of deceased loved ones who did not wish or grant permission their image to be used such, etc.)

Islia culture: life ends completely at death, but that sort of ends some of yr memories of them and ways they cld continue to "live in you"

Baltsaniel culture: life doesn't end at death, but can oppress the living (even used by living to oppress or exploit other living), and it's sort of artificial and at worst harmful to imagine they're alive

The reality is probably some of both: ppl die and also the dead live on in us partly real partly imagined (wh is also real)

Both ud "i have to go on living" at the same impossible time as "i didn't want to live without you"

# Notes and Sources

## NAMES

Planet A: **Osleif**

A: Islia ((pronounced ill-ya to make it two syllables though I like ill-ee-ya)) (she explains/notices all Osleif names are two syllables and he says all Tsalgaldar's are three, easy!)

ABF: Espen

ABF's wife: Vjera

Grief counselor: Sisel

Journalist: Hylde

(all in threes!)

Planet B: **Tsalgaldar**

B: Baltsaniel

BBF: Narana

B's younger brother: Khantarid

B's younger brother's scamwife: Ursayal

Planet C: Cirrenes

## (Cirrenes notes:)

Believed to have targeted by a seismic weapon

Caused immense fissures in the ground, completely destabilizing the planet

Whole planet now believed unsafe and ppl evacuated where poss; massive number of death esp at the epicenter

Believed to have been done by civil rebels but actually backed by Osleif

Rumors that both were behind the strike that caused the fissure. Revealed to be Planet A later (though Planet B probably not 100% innocent).

Osleif and Tsalgaldar in a kind of Cold War standoff (not at war per se but very tense) which increases after Cirrenes attack

The Cirrenes attack and fissures make it easy for Osleif to extract (Cirrenes sells it to them to help raise funds to fix planet/in exchange later for Osleif's fissure-sealing tech/Osleif able to outright plunder it in some areas) **ynetium** deposits from the deep ancient subsoil of Cirrenes which is rich in ynetium, an alkaline element (rare/unavailable everywhere else, totally not on Osleif) which Osleif covets to mix into their highly acidic polluted soil in order to restore its fertility. Once introduced on Osleif, [] interacts with the soil in interesting ways that lead to great new plants like Osleifia

In 3 years, new technology (by whom?) makes it possible to restabilize Cirrenes and ppl able to return

## (Post-Cirrenes attack communications notes:)

Maroon: Hylde hints at this to Islia in E5, but shouldn't spell it all out completely. Baltsaniel seems unaware of it. Idk how much Islia should bring it up in E7; could get too cumbersome and it's not that important for the main story of their relationship.

For the sake of personal simplification: imagine there are only 3 planets in the galaxy. For a long time, both Osleif and Tsalgaldar believed themselves to be the only inhabitable planet (cp Earth). With technological developments, Osleif and Tsalgaldar both reached and tried to carve up Cirrenes at around the same time (very far away, only became aware of Cirrenes around the same time). This was unsatisfactory and led to Cold War standoffish tensions. Finally, Osleif's attack and Tsalgaldar's cut into Osleif's profits allowed both planets to reach a mutually beneficial relationship (...for now).

Something like:

- Before the attack: Osleif and Tsalgaldar in Cold War standoff, but citizens can travel to the midpoint planet Cirrenes and intermingle freely there (not many do though, bc it's far and bc most don't have an interest in doing so)
- Cirrenes is attacked
- Civil rebels from Cirrenes itself claim responsibility (but most ppl don't really believe this). **Actually, Osleif backed the attack.** Both Osleif and Tsalgaldar's leadership know this (but their own civilians don't).
- Cirrenes housed the communications towers/neutral news etc that allowed those two planets to communicate truthfully. With these downed, communication between Osleif and Tsalgaldar effectively cut off (this is the case for E1-4; comms just fixed at end of E5/6)
- Osleif and Tsalgaldar escalate tensions to virtually no communication and less and less trade, and vaguely blame each other for the attack. Each planet shows only propaganda/fakenews. E.g. Islia is shown that the attack's epicenter was their apartment, Baltsaniel is shown that the attack's epicenter was the factory (thus they each firmly believe the other person was dead). In reality, it was near their apartment; it was still miraculous that Baltsaniel survived.
- Post-attack which breaks up the ground, Osleif is illegally and legally extracting ynetium from Cirrenes, using it to terraform and prosper their own planet greatly.
- To oppose Osleif, Tsalgaldar races to create sealing technology to seal up the fissures and restabilize Cirrenes. In 1 year, they manage this.
- **Tsalgaldar and Osleif cut a face-saving secret deal. Tsalgaldar sells the sealing technology to Osleif (rather than selling/giving it directly and immediately to Cirrenes) for a lot of money. By agreement, Osleif conceals the technology for 2 years which gives**

them enough time to extract all the ynetium they need (terraforming complete/they have enough ynetium that they're able to synthesize it). Tsalgaldar and Osleif then unveil the sealing technology as a joint venture, and use it to seal and stabilize Cirrenes, also restoring the relations, communications, and trade between the two planets (which is really better for all). **Effectively, Osleif and Tsalgaldar worked out a way to jointly exploit Cirrenes in a mutually beneficial way, which brought both planets to friendly relations after generations of Cold War standoff.**

- There isn't really a chess metaphor that works here. It's more like white and black decide, instead of fighting each other, that there is this third pie to the side, and they find a drawish way to split up the pie equally that makes them both happy.
- Void chess is an invented variant meant to communicate the dread prior generations felt - that there is no safety in space (no castling), that it's not just power that is felt (promotion to queen) but this sort of horrible void (promotion to void)
- Pawn metaphor idk. I guess Isia and her art are a pawn (used for Osleif victory)

## (Agency and RPG choices:)

Sometimes in an RPG you want huge personal agency to do what YOU would want to do but I think that can be unrealistic (imposing what you want/think/believe instead of what the character would want/think/believe)

I find it much more interesting when you can still make meaningful choices but also you feel yourself constrained by the choices THAT CHARACTER would have conceived of  
e.g. Lady Love Dies: you can side with Henry and say you had a lot of time to think in exile or you can give the answer wh I honestly feel is more authentic and say it must be done. but to me this is within range. however at trial you MUST pick up your gun and execute justice (death penalty!), there's no option to do otherwise bc it wld be too diff fm what *her character* wld hv done. and if you the player feel anguish or even imagine her feeling anguish, I think that's deep and wonderful. (diff fm being forced to make stupid choices you dont want to make or worse you pick A over B and A instead diverts you to B anyway - too much of that and you feel like yr xp is just being ignored rather than enriched)

Character choices are listed in the order in which I think that char is most likely to think of them and make them (most to least). Order changes for both chars the longer they spend back on home world! Players get to make the choice tho.

Very short choice options like PK that you then see after you click eg

(Intimidate) Your debt

After click: "You're in huge debt to the Syndicate. I could tell them where to find you."

(Nostalgic) How we met

After click: "We were lucky to be in Hieroglyphics class together. Those were the days."

(Consider) What A/B would have said

After click: "B felt there shouldn't be any restrictions on how people use technology. He regarded it as censorship."

The choice/reward is lore and the dialogue options EVEN WHEN they're "meaningless" choices that don't lead to significant changes (e.g. PK Companion relationship +1 dialogue) but still interesting!!! And getting to choose how you want the char to react or what you want to ask about still feels rewarding

## Sources

MIT article:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kPWtLP\\_KviM-JqbUIY127-q4BSx3BMPH2V30YgXTXsQ/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kPWtLP_KviM-JqbUIY127-q4BSx3BMPH2V30YgXTXsQ/edit)

Rest of World article:

<https://restofworld.org/2024/china-douyin-digital-parents-viral-videos-family-love/>  
wld be gd to write to Zeyi Yang and thank him (and link game)

Other touchstones:

- Paradise Killer
- The Farewell
- Everything Everywhere All at Once