

COUNTER/Weight 42: A Splintered Branch, A Ringing Bell Pt. 2

Transcriber: the dread biter#0090

AUSTIN: Eighty thousand years before the September Incident. Doctor Irene Klipsch-Dove had read once that, in the old days, long before Rigour, priests would sometimes sit with their parishioners, listen to them confess their wrongdoings and then issue a sort of reparatory sentence. Go say this many prayers, donate this much time to charity. Spend some time in deep thought about your human frailty. There weren't many priests anymore, so Irene had taken the matter of repentance into her own hands.

[MUSIC - "[THE LONG WAY AROUND](#)" begins]

First, she'd moved to the far frontier. The planet where her awful creation made its current home. She'd have to be close enough to strike when it was time. Next, she'd forged activation orders for a couple of labor drones and moved them to a distant plateau, where they would dig out the basic shape of a research lab and engineering hangar.

Then she did the closest thing she could to pray.

She'd modified the old—*her* old—Liberty and Discovery navigation systems from one of the drones. She took what she'd learned from her failings, from Rigour, and put it to work here. The two would be inseparable, she planned. Each a check to the other. Liberty's desire for free blue skies and new horizons would keep Discovery from becoming myopic, and Discovery's agenda to learn and uncover would ground Liberty, keep it from fleeing when things turned. Eventually, she planned, Liberty and Discovery would lead someone back to her, and whoever came would need a weapon.

So she began her final act of penance. There was a dark humor for her when she realized it. The names Liberty, Discovery, Rigour, they were marketing terms. There was nothing truly free about Liberty, for instance. It was just another machine, but with certain biases and protocols. But when she looked at her new weapon, at this new being she'd built, she could feel it resonating with her own righteousness, and she could not be sure, not even once it was all over, if that was a trick of the machine or something real.

[MUSIC ends]

AUSTIN: The first thing I wanna do, now that we're back, is I wanna go back and give points for...the...interlude game. I think each interlude give—has three points. It's whoever spends the most of their interlude—whoever has most addressed the crisis, whoever has most addressed their own political thing, and then a wild card point for just like, "Yeah, they did good. They did—they did pretty rad." And I think we should come to agreement on those...together so during the dance scene, who do you think did the best crisis stuff? Who actually tried to address that? In any way? Or was it nobody? In which case it would be—

JACK: I like—breached—

ART: Keith did, right? Mako was working.

AUSTIN: No, Mako stole the thing, which advances his political points.

SYLVIA: I was gonna say—

ALI: Yeah...Kobus.

JACK: I like broached the subject with Ibex.

SYLVIA: Yeah, I was gonna say Orth talked to Ibex about it.

DRE: Yeah.

SYLVIA: And I think Aria did too. Didn't she?

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: Yeah.

SYLVIA: So that was kinda the two I was immediately thinking of.

AUSTIN: Yeah, Uh, I think it could go either direction there. Um. I'm gonna toss it. I think Orth probably...I think—

ALI: He probably gets it.

AUSTIN: I'm gonna give it to Orth, in that like I think thirty years of—or whatever—twenty-five years of knowing Ibex has finally paid off. And like.

[DRE and JACK laugh]

AUSTIN: This is the.

SYLVIA: You did your time.

JACK: Finally.

SYLVIA: Here's your reward.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Exactly. And I think Mako probably for political, because like the thing he did was do the thing that was—

KEITH: Take the thing?

AUSTIN: —the most for his purposes. Right? Um. Unless there's somebody else.

ART: Wait, but isn't the—isn't the reward for doing it getting...

AUSTIN: It totally is.

ART: ...the point?

ALI: Yeah. I feel like—

AUSTIN: No, the reward for d—no no no, you don't get those points unless you have it at the end of the game.

KEITH: Yeah.

ART: [doubtfully] Mm.

ALI: Mm...

ART: It seems like you're giving him points for pursuing points.

AUSTIN: Um. And you lose points and—and you lose points if someone takes it from you. And the way you get to take it from Mako is to have a scene with him in which you tell me you're going to take it from him.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: And that is it. There's no roll. That is of the o—part of the outcome will be that he loses the ball.

KEITH: I feel like that part of it was not sufficiently explained beforehand—

AUSTIN: It was absolutely explained ahead of time.

[ALI laughs]

ART: No no, that was definitely explained.

SYLVIA: Yeah, no. That was like the whole thing.

KEITH: Wait, hold on. Hold on—well—

JACK: It was explained—

KEITH: It was explained that you could take it.

AUSTIN: Yep.

KEITH: Not that taking it involved just saying "I take it!"

AUSTIN: That is—that is all it—that's all it takes.

JACK: ...I mean, to be fair, Keith, that is exactly what you did at the ball.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Yeah. [laughs]

AUSTIN: And let you do exactly that.

[DRE laughs]

KEITH: I did just say that I take it. That's true.

AUSTIN: So, I'm gonna give Mako a point for following his own political goals.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh, but then there's a wild card. Which was like, was there anybody who really stood out? And like, "Aw man, that was a really good—thing. That—a really good moment." And then they can—they can put it where they want.

KEITH: Um. Maybe like—

AUSTIN: I'm trying to remember exactly what—it's been a day since we recorded. Couple days.

JACK: I quite liked...I quite liked Cass talking to Kobus.

AUSTIN: Yeah! Me too.

DRE: Cass still hates Divines...like woah, huh?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Uh. I w—kind of—

ART: Yeah. There was a war.

AUSTIN: —specifically the moment that was like, "You should've..." What did you say specifically, Art? Do you remember? It was like, "You gave up Loyalty, but you should have..."

ALI: "You should be careful who you're loyal to," or something...?

AUSTIN: No, it was like more—

DRE: You—

JACK: No, it was something like "You gave up Loyalty but...y..."

DRE: "You're still hanging around with those people."

JACK: “—still need to give up more,” or...

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, y—it’s definitely like, “You should have done more,” basically. So Cass, do you think that was—that was Cass speaking in terms of what kind of—from the position of the Apokine? Or was that Cass speaking as the position of—from a member of the Golden Branch? You know what I mean?

ART: Oh, jeez. I think that that’s Apokine speaking.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: I don’t think...I don’t think the Golden Branch particularly wants to fight that...

AUSTIN: Well like you know what I mean? Like in other words does he¹ think that because he thinks that’s what’s best for the sector, or because he thinks that’s what’s best for their people? For the people of the Demarchy.

ART: I mean, I think the saddest and perhaps most true answer is that—is that it’s what Cass thinks works best for his own grudge.

AUSTIN: Okay. Well then that’s—definitely put that under political point.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Let’s do another d100 roll to see what our order is. For this next scene. Uh, A—Jack rolled 100, Dre rolled an 89, Sylvia² rolled a 48. Art rolled a 24, Keith rolled a 10, and Ali rolled a 3. It would have only been better if Ali had rolled a 1.

ALI: [sighing] Fuck you.

[DRE laughs]

KEITH: Would have—we would have rolled a gambit.

DRE: One *is* the loneliest number.

AUSTIN: Oh, god. All right. Orth. What sort of scenario are you looking for?

JACK: Um. I’m gonna go *Solitaire*. I’m gonna do my *Solitaire* now, I think?

AUSTIN: Okay.

¹ Cass uses they/them pronouns.

² The name in the audio recording is no longer in use, hence the audio/transcript discrepancy.

JACK: Um.

AUSTIN: What *Solitaire* scene are you gonna? What do we see Orth up to?

JACK: I think that I have been off duty drinking or relaxing with my soldiers. Um. And then next day, a corp purchases the establishment and shuts it down.

[AUSTIN laughs]

SYLVIA: Ooh.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: So I think what this is is I think that...I think that this is just—this is just a bar that Orth's been to essentially all his life? You know.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: Since back when he was a pilot. When he was allowed down onto the surfaces of the planet on leave. And then when he was like prepping to leave to board the *Kingdom Come* on the suicide mission. And then now he just turns up every so often. But I think he's made a mistake. Which is I think that on this day, in this bar, he's been talking a little too loudly, and he's been canvassing a little too strongly. Um. And while a lot of the people in the bar...I can kind of picture this almost like the...like Orth's version of a doomsday prophet? You know.

[AUSTIN laughs]

JACK: Orth's had like one too many, and he's slumped at the end of the bar, and he's saying

JACK (as Orth): [slurred] Now listen. Listen. It's all gonna end. This is all coming to an end.

JACK: And I think people laugh it off, but then they realize more and more that this guy's actually pretty serious about what he's talking about?

AUSTIN: Mm.

JACK: But I think there's somebody else in the bar. And I don't know whether or not it's even important which corp they work for. And I don't even think they have an interest in the sort of—the wider political situation. But they're just like “Ah, that's Orth Godlove. All right. Fuck this place. This place is done.”

AUSTIN: Right. “This is—this is an opportunity for me to swing at Orth.”

JACK: Yeah. except I don't think it's just been shut down,. I think it's been demolished? The next time Orth comes. With the speed and efficiency of Oricon demolition crews.

[AUSTIN laughs]

JACK: In that Orth just goes there the next night planning on apologizing for, you know, how it went down.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: And it's just not there? Like at all?

[ALI laughs]

JACK: Um. And it's a sort of a Grosse Pointe Blank style moment of like.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: "This was—this was supposed to be my bar."

AUSTIN: That's pr—so wait, wh—um. Where do you think that goes in terms of...point.

JACK: Uh, this is definitely crisis prep rather than political prep.

AUSTIN: Okay. In that—in that it was Orth spreading the word.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That is what led to...Is this also—is this part of an ongoing like...set of behavior from Orth? In that he is getting increasingly...what's the word I'm looking for? Not desperate, but—you know, we talked about him having...not sleeping anymore.

JACK: Mm.

AUSTIN: Is this him letting go a little bit? Or is this...like—does he even—is this the first time he's gone to a bar in a while? In the face—

JACK: I think—

AUSTIN—of the thing to come, is he letting himself button down a little bit, or is this still—is there still sort of a...an intensity to his...

JACK: I—no, I don't think it's a buttoning down. I think it's actually pushing in the opposite direction.

AUSTIN: Mm.

JACK: In that he is—he's...a sort of patina of unreality is beginning to set in on everything he does. He's making all these political maneuvers, all these corporate maneuvers.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: But at the same time, he's thinking to himself, "This tower block is gonna be rubble. You know, these streets are gonna be like carvings in the ground. [laughs] This bar is gonna be—" And then when he's in that mood and he's been drinking, what's he gonna say but, "We're all gonna die, a terrible thing is coming."

AUSTIN: Right. Right. All right. That works for me. Next up is...Dre.

DRE: Yeah!

AUSTIN: What do you wanna do?

DRE: Uh, I think I'm gonna go ahead and do my s—my *Solitaire*.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: It's *Solitaire* season.

DRE: Yeah, it is.

AUSTIN: Uh, yeah. Just to be clear. Yeah, you don't have to do—everybody doesn't have to do their *Solitaire* scene in this—in this run-through. You can totally do whatever. Uh.

DRE: Yeah, but I've been thinking about it, and I think this sets up my last scene.

AUSTIN: Okay. What do you wanna do?

DRE: I've been spending time with the Candidates, trying to get a hand on what's happening, and instead we fought bitterly and split ourselves.

AUSTIN: Ooh. Okay. So paint me that picture a little.

DRE: Well, I think it goes back to the first kind of opening...pregame *Solitaire*, where Kobus was meeting with like, you know, like union reps or whatever.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

DRE: And I think it also...What Cass said to them, you know, rattled them a bit. And I mean they're just very concerned that Grace is, you know, kind of going—is very—is very much deviating from what she normally does? And is becoming much more kind of like, you know, violent and acting, you know, out of hand. So I think—

AUSTIN: What—what specifically...What did she do this time. [amused] What did she do *this* time? What was the thing that specifically...has you...made it come to the fight? You know?

DRE: I bet she overheard what Cass said to Kobus, and like—

AUSTIN: Okay.

DRE: —launched a strike at like an outlying like Apostolosian station or like checkpoint or something like that.

JACK: Whoa.

AUSTIN: No, totally—oh, she's been doing this. I—we mentioned this before. Like she's been fighting. She's been like going off in surprise raids on Apokine, on Sage.

DRE: Yeah. Yeah, she used to own Sage, so I feel like she did something...

AUSTIN: She used to own Apokine too. It used to be Garden. It's where she lived.

DRE: Oh, that's true. Yeah.

ALI: Oh.

DRE: So maybe that's what it is, maybe she went—she'd lose Sage to Apokine.

AUSTIN: I mean, she took it from them to begin with.

ALI: Right. That's the...

AUSTIN: Right. Um. So yeah, what'd she hit? What sort of target does she hit? 'Cause I want the like—I want Vicuna coming back and like not giving a fuck that they just did something, that finally pushes Kobus. Like to like speak up.

DRE: [sighs] I could see one of two things. Like either—it's either something that took a lot of toll just in terms of like life toll?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

DRE: Or it was something very symbolic of the regrowing of like the Apostolosian culture.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: So like a very important like religious site, or like something like that.

AUSTIN: Here's another thing. Remember, Chet used to live on Sage too.

DRE: Mm.

AUSTIN: You remember, that's where we got that Grace and Vicuna like march.

DRE: Yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: All those episodes ago.

DRE: They killed Trumpet Greg.

ALI: Aw.

AUSTIN: Oh, no.

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Um. But maybe they destroyed something.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You know. Remember there was that bit on Sage that was like a garden statue of all of the Divines?

DRE: Mm. Yeah.

AUSTIN: What if Apostolos had like—I guess, Cass—what's—what's Apostolos—what's the Demarchy do with that? There's this amazing garden statue...that just goes for miles. Of all of the different Divines, from all of the Diaspora—not just here in the Golden Branch. what had...the Demarchy done with that?

ART: I...don't...know.

AUSTIN: What do you *do* when like you take over a place and someone else already has some shit there? Like some important...cultural stuff?

ART: I think after the...outrage isn't the right word. But like after Joypark—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: I don't think the Demarchy was super anxious to like tear down...

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: ..other people's stuff.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: Because it feels...it feels real grimy.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It does. Yeah.

DRE: Can I do a counterpoint? Could it possibly be that...that stuff was left up until Cass came in? And Cass dislikes Divines so much...

[AUSTIN laughs]

DRE: Maybe they didn't destroy it, but maybe they like either covered it or took it down or like removed it or something.

AUSTIN: I mean we're talking about miles, though. It's not—that was like the whole thing, was like it was...

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You would—it would take a—you couldn't just cover it up. L—

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: [jokingly] We've already talked about how big, how expensive tarps are. You know.

DRE: Yeah, Sylvia just said in chat, "get some tarps!"

AUSTIN: Good.

DRE: A very nice tarp.

ART: [jokingly] I don't see how bribing people is really gonna help. I don't...

[AUSTIN laughs]

ART: ...understand what you guys are even talking about.

[15:23]

AUSTIN: Um.

ART: But maybe it's like closed off? Maybe it's open for only a few hours a day?

AUSTIN: Yeah. I kind of like the notion—

ART: Like we're not shutting it down. It's not closed. But like, go away. No.

AUSTIN: I kind of like the notion of her attacking that city, and in the process, wrecking...the Diaspora's garden—own like statuary? And like. Kobus seeing—it's like...like "Fuck! Don't—you don't even care about our *own* shit." Like—you just—

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —"What are you doing, right now?" Um. I kind of like that image.

JACK: Yeah, this place...in so well to Grace acting erratically, right? Of just like...

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: Grace is very large, but also has the capability to be *extreeemely* precise. And.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: This is not happening at this point. And all these statues are getting...Is the Grace statue still on the planet?

AUSTIN: It had been.

JACK: Does destroy that?

AUSTIN: I think it's—I don't know that any of it was intentional.

JACK: Oh, okay.

AUSTIN: I think it may have just been...But I think we do get that great image of the Grace statue being...you know, torn in half.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Diagonally.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So is Kobus' response to this like...I guess—so here's the take away. When Kobus walks away from this, is that scene like, "Hey, you need to pull your shit together so that you can address these greater problems," or is it, "Hey, you gotta pull your shit together because...because it's dangerous for *you*." Like is Kobus at all interested in the crisis at this point?

DRE: Oh...

AUSTIN: Or is Kobus still struggling to keep Grace in line, primarily?

DRE: I think it's both but probably more the latter.

AUSTIN: Okay.

DRE: Like, Kobus knows something is coming, because they, you know, intercepted that—

AUSTIN: Mhm.

DRE: —that transmission from AuDy. But I mean for them, Rigour was something that Ibex like talked about five years ago?

AUSTIN: Right.

DRE: And they never saw it up close, and. So they know it's a bad thing. If Rigour comes back. But they don't...That's farther from their mind than Grace is.

AUSTIN: Right. All right! Next up...is...

SYLVIA: I believe me?

AUSTIN: Sylvia.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Um.

AUSTIN: What's up with Jill?

SYLVIA: I actually am gonna continue the chain of *Solitaires*, I think? Sorry?

AUSTIN: Okay!

SYLVIA: I just like...

AUSTIN: We're on that *Solitaire* train.

SYLVIA: Yeah. Um. And I think after...so everyone knows that the—it's Zeal, is the name of the Divine that—the little orb thing, right?

AUSTIN: That is what—that is the thing that...

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: ...Mako saw it as.

SYLVIA: So after that got stolen, I—that's—it's public knowledge that that got stolen, right?

AUSTIN: It's not *public* knowledge. But you know it.

SYLVIA: But it's knowledge of the people who were in the room, right?

AUSTIN: Yes.

SYLVIA: Yes.

AUSTIN: That word gets out.

SYLVIA: So after that got stolen, I think she...

AUSTIN: God, who got the winning bit in the end? Who—was it Aria?

SYLVIA: I think it was Ali.

ALI: It was me, yeah.

DRE: Yeah, it was Aria.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Good. Great. Good.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

ALI: Having a real l—rough time.

SYLVIA: Um. After that, and after sort of the...tension between...tension between Jill and Aria that Ar—that Jill is also reading as tension between the Free States and the...Vanguard?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: She's like, okay, things aren't...great. We need to train more.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: So, the *Solitaire* I'm doing is..."You've been training with your soldiers, and you were very near—very nearly caught out by an enemy?"

AUSTIN: Ooh. Who's the enemy?

SYLVIA: Ah, I'm thinking that it was...just some people from Oricon.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: They were by the b—training by the blockade?

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: Just doing like drills and stuff?

AUSTIN: So like proper Oricon, or Oricon to the north?

SYLVIA: Um...

AUSTIN: Probably proper like to the south Oricon. Like true Oricon.

SYLVIA: Yeah, I think it's to the south. I think they were just by Kalliope.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: And then...like a—just this like group of Oricon soldiers tried to break through the blockade, where they were?

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: And this like big fire thing comes out.

AUSTIN: One thing that's cool about that—the thing—one of the things that's cool about that is that because Oricon is just a conglomerate of a bunch of different companies, it means that...it can just be—it doesn't even have to be an act of like s—a state-wide decision—

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —to roll on y'all? It can just be, "We're the company that's gonna break this fuckin' blockade. Um, and we've got the private security to do it." So like is this a situation where it's like everyone has their—you've just finished your training? So like everyone's a little—a little tapped out? And then the kind of like blockade breakers show up?

SYLVIA: Yeah. So like e—like it's been like hours of running drills and stuff, and then, all of a sudden, just like this squadron, basically, comes through—like—not a huge group, but sizeable enough to be a threat?

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: To—'cause they're just trying to punch a hole in it, right?

AUSTIN: So this is good too, 'cause it gets—it gets a good scene of Jill's squad, and what their like mech situation is? So like tell me a little bit about what Jill pilots, and...stuff like that.

SYLVIA: Um. Yeah, so, I love Jill's mech. Um. It's called the Impetus Symphonia.

[AUSTIN laughs]

SYLVIA: And it is a sniper? It's like heavily armored, but...I think in this, we see her—she can also drop the armor?

AUSTIN: Ooh.

SYLVIA: And I think what happened is while she wa—they were training, she didn't h—bring a ton of ammo for the railgun...thing she uses?

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: So that's out of ammo—

AUSTIN: Wait, she just finished training with it, right? So like, yeah.

SYLVIA: Yep! Exactly. So she has to drop the armor, and when the armor is off her rig, it's much more agile, and uses a beam spear?

AUSTIN: Okay. Nice.

SYLVIA: And then we've got...I think while she's sort of going on the front lines, like...attacking the Oricon rigs from the back, you've got...Defiance! Territory Jazz Jr's—

AUSTIN: Right, Territory Jazz...Jr.

SYLVIA: —Divine, which you described to me as also being a long-range.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think—so I think the thing with Territory Jazz Jr is she knows how her dad died? Which was getting sniped out of the air. 'Cause she—her dad got goosed?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: If you recall?

ALI: Mhm.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh, he got knocked out of the sky by...Cass' Megalophile.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So I think the Defiance is like very similar in nature to the Megalophile, she's like "Clearly the bouncing around stuff that my dad did did not do him any favors in the end." And so it's a very rounded mech. I think it's like a—like almost a pearlescent purple. With like a giant plasma bazooka? Um.

SYLVIA: Oh, that's sick.

AUSTIN: With sort of like huge green plasma shots that she can shoot from super far ranges? Um. Very bulbous like shoulders and hips. And then, who else? You got...

SYLVIA: Adler. Is the other major one.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Adler. Right, Adler, who is from way back in the Chime game.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Who is just a Horizon Tactical person who ended up siding with—who ends up siding with the Free States because she's *from* Kalliope. Um. Instead of siding with—a lot of the Horizon Tactical people have kind of...there's this weird split in the Free States, between groups

that want to be in—even more independent, like almost like...they wanna—they don't wanna leave the Free States, but they want the Free States to be even less affiliated than they are? And I think a lot of Horizon Tactical has gone that way? They're mostly situated on Gemm and on Ionias. And they are in opposition to people on like Kalliope who think, "Oh hey, no. Like we set up all this up. We want to keep everyone really unified, and we wanna continue being kind of a political power." And most of Horizon went—most of Horizon opposes that, except Adler was like "No, like I'm from Kalliope, I've seen—" at this point Horizon Tactical has worked with everybody.

SYLVIA: yeah.

AUSTIN: They've worked with Rigour, they're worked with—like they've worked with everybody. And she knows like "No, what we need is a strong group." And I think she's just like piloting an old Rook. Like she hasn't—it's like well maintained. But it's still just a Rook. Um. But she's a very much like, "Listen, the basics don't lie." Sort of person.

SYLVIA: Yeah. The way I see the—how she's working is that Jill is sort of relaying like positions and like orders through—

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: —whatever radio, and then Adler is in char—Adler is the one leading those formations for like just their—

AUSTIN: Sure.

SYLVIA: —like unnamed soldiers, who are also just in standard Rooks.

AUSTIN: I actually just remembered that's not true, because what Adler used to pilot was that dope Venus.

SYLVIA: Oh!

AUSTIN: Which had—which is like art deco with huge like open wings? Um, not like full wings but again like art deco statue wings. Um. That's what she used to pilot. That's what she piloted—

SYLVIA: I love all these mechs! [sighs wistfully]

AUSTIN: I—all of the mechs are good, and true, and they're in our hearts.

[ALI and DRE laugh]

AUSTIN: And then Diego Rose has a fighter, right? Of some sort, that was what we had Diego in?

SYLVIA: Diego pilots—yeah, his is just a fighter ship called the *Red Petal*.

AUSTIN: Good.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

ALI: Wow.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So we just get like a really good scene of them—

SYLVIA: He's the most—

AUSTIN: —carrying this sh—

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Despite being exhausted, like, tearing the shit out of this blockade breaking force.

SYLVIA: I just wanna say really quick, Diego's ship also has an *incredibly* gaudy rose painted on the side of it? 'Cause he's *that* motherfucker?

AUSTIN: [laughs] Of *course* it does.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That adds up.

SYLVIA: Yeah, so I think the way it starts is like. There is like a carrier that they have that they're going to dock on? And all of a sudden it just gets blasted out of the sky?

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: And there's just like a group of riggers coming through...like coming through the area. And...I think it sort of starts with like...I really like the idea of like the debris of the ship floating in the back—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

SYLVIA: —and that's where Defiance goes—like it like docks itself on part of the debris? As like a platform to use? For where it's firing from?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVIA: And it just starts taking like shots at them.

AUSTIN: Potshots. Yeah.

SYLVIA: And..

AUSTIN: Yeah, it just—

SYLVIA: Jill goes to do the same , but then like can only do like two or three before she has to drop the armor and like—

AUSTIN: Zooms in.

SYLVIA: —does the big dramatic like. Speeder comes out and like.

AUSTIN: Nice.

SYLVIA: Lights up, and it's—you know. I'm—

AUSTIN: So they are not to be fucked with is like the—

SYLVIA: —very self-indulgent. Bite me. But yeah.

AUSTIN: —the takeaway here is. Yeah. All right.

SYLVIA: And then it's essentially just like a really solid formation from the Venus and the generic Rooks.

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: While Jillian's—Jillian and Diego are basically piloting circles around these...smaller—

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVIA: —standard rooks. The enemy.

AUSTIN: I think like given the nature of this scene being like “No yeah, we got this?” I guess, again, this could go two different ways. Is the scene framed as like, “Oh, we're dope. We could take on anything.” Or is it framed as like, “Hey, uh, Oricon can't fuck with us. We're united.”

SYLVIA: I think it's “We can—” It's more specifically “We can take on anything,” yeah.

AUSTIN: The former. Okay. Cool.

SYLVIA: Because the fact that they could get through the—like cut through the blockade in the first place show that Oricon is a threat still?

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: In fact, maybe we get the like...the other side of this, which is that like we get a shot of someone in the Oricon fleet that's been fed data from Horizon?

SYLVIA: Mhm.

AUSTIN: That like, “Oh, they—” at the beginning of that scene, it’s a shot from one of the Oricon like flagships that shows that they have information that you’re—you will have just finished your training?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Uh, thing? So you should be at your weakest right now, before you get to fly back and rearm.

SYLVIA: It’s.

AUSTIN: Um. And like—that doesn’t --

SYLVIA: Yeah like that’s how they have the positioning of the freighter, and know where they are. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. No, I—I want it to be clear that like focusing on crisis stuff means that you’re not focusing on political stuff.

SYLVIA: Yeah, no, totally!

AUSTIN: It—there is—that’s the scene with you. All right, cool. All right. Next up is...Art! Cass.

ART: Uh. I’m gonna go a little—a little more light-hearted than the...than my last *Solitaire*.

AUSTIN: Awesome.

ART: I’ve been taking off worlders hunting, fishing, and touring my family’s estates. And they pr—and they proved bright company. Cheery, appreciative, and outgoing.

ALI: Oh!

AUSTIN: Who was it?

ART: Um. I think these were—this was a Kesh?

AUSTIN: Mm.

ART: Visit?

AUSTIN: Okay. Is Mako there? Oh! Oh!

ART: Is—

AUSTIN: You know who’s from Kesh?

ART: Who?

AUSTIN: Maxine Ming is from Kesh!

ALI: Aw!

DRE: Aw.

ART: Yeah, let's—is she—is she a person who warrants such a...

AUSTIN: Yeah, sure. Yeah.

ART: Such an inclusion.

AUSTIN: She's from a family. She's from Kesh. If you're from—if you're actually from Kesh, you warrant it. Basically. Um. If you're from Ziishe, the other planet, you're like. Oh yeah, you're just a person as part—who lives in the Principality of Kesh. But. Yeah, she totally warrants it. Um.

ART: All right.

AUSTIN: I think she's probably like taken over her family's operations of something or another, or—I think of the Principality as being very like...lots of minor lords who do very little? Um.

ART: Mm.

AUSTIN: Because they don't have to? It's not...No one wants for much in Kesh. And there are these like...there is an aristocracy that debates things, and—you know, we've talked a little bit about Kesh having different factions internally about whether or not they should interfere with the rest of the sector, and all that. But like...I think even the people who live on—Kesh is just a small planet, and the people who live there get titles? But like no one in Kesh or on Ziishe is like starving. Like it's actually a really well-run society in that way? It's just also nothing like—no one—I don't think anybody from Oricon or the Diaspora would be comfortable there. Because there are people who are barons. You know. Because—that's just—

ART: Sure.

AUSTIN: —not—that's just not what they believe in on either side of that thing. All right. So...So you just like go on a tour and catch up?

ART: Yeah! You know, "How you doin'?" It's weird that we...are friendly but never actually knew each other."

AUSTIN: Yeah. And I think *she* knows that, too. Right? Like having left that place now. That's a really interesting friendship to swing back too, of like—we know that a lot of the memories of that time we got pizza are *completely* fake. Completely. But also, you remember getting pizza with her that time.

ART: Yeah! It—it—wh—

AUSTIN: Like you remember helping her move into the dorm room, and like that's—weird.

[30:04]

ART: Yeah, and who cares what's real! What's real?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Is there—

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Are there—are there...

ART: I saved her from Rigour. That really happened.

AUSTIN: That did really happen. Are there weird political marriages? Is someone—is someone trying to matchmake y'all?

ART: Oh, maybe. Cass doesn't have a partner. And—

AUSTIN: Cass has no partner. And Kesh and Torru are currently being pushed together, as like, "Oh, we could—it could be us! We could be the group that does it. We're gonna—the ones who are gonna save everything!" Although, I'm not saying that Cass has to be into this.

ART: Yeah, although I imagine that must make—that must make Sokrates nervous. As long as—as long as Cass is single and childless.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: Who really cares what happens?

AUSTIN: Right, because—even if an empire starts, it doesn't—you know. Who cares? There's no line.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Mm.

ART: Really, both siblings should be mad.

AUSTIN: They are. I'm sure.

ART: Sokrates because of the—because of his³ political aspirations, and Euanthe because if something happened to Cass, they might be the logical...

³ Sokrates uses they/them pronouns.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: Next in line.

AUSTIN: There's also—there's also...I kind of could go the other way, too, which is like—what if Cass does just genuinely like Maxine? And they...kind of resent that it—political ambitions are being pushed on it at all? I think a lot about how Marco Rubio talked about when he's—like—in a few months, he'll be a private citizen?

ART: Mm.

AUSTIN: And like he says it with a resentment that there's a greater expectation, and I'm curious if Cass feels the same way, of like, "No. I'm going to finish my duty as Apokine, and then I'm gonna go live the rest of my life."

ART: Yeah, I do think that is what Cass wants and expects. I don't know if it's what Cass—is realistically going to get.

AUSTIN: We'll see.

ART: But Cass doesn't wanna be—Cass doesn't want to be emperor.

AUSTIN: Okay. Um. So.

ART: He wants to keep his robot though.

KEITH: You know what, Austin, I have always pictured Cass as sort of a little Marco.

AUSTIN: [disgusted and amused] Oh, my god.

ART: Oh, my god.

AUSTIN: A *little* Marco?

ART: We're not friends anymore, Keith. Hold on, I'm unfriending you on battle.net.

[AUSTIN and DRE laugh]

KEITH: [laughing] Oh no!

[JACK laughs]

ART: Stay out of my Overwatch games.

AUSTIN: Oh, boy. Wow.

DRE: The dream team has been destroyed.

AUSTIN: It's like—it's like *that!* It's like *that*.

ART: I don't care if you *are* the best Reaper who ever lived.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Okay. Um. So what is that—

KEITH: Art's as vicious as a Young Republican.

AUSTIN: Oh my god. So is this...is the takeaway here political or crisis?

ART: Um, I think it's crisis.

AUSTIN: Is that convers—okay.

ART: I think—I think they talk about Rigour. I think they talk about the threat of Rigour and what the two can do. About it.

AUSTIN: Okay. Have they talked about Rigour since September?

ART: I don't think either of them ever says the word Rigour. I think they have to like—

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: —skirt around it, because it's kind of a tense—it's a tense thing for both of them.

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah.

ART: But, you know, the incident on September. The...

AUSTIN: Mhm. No, I got you.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay. Uh. Keith. Mako.

KEITH: Okay. So I've been thinking a lot about this. I wanna—I wanna have *A Conversation over Dinner* with Orth?

AUSTIN: Okay. I'm into that. So how'd you two come to be eating together?

KEITH: Um. I want to give...Orth Zeal.

AUSTIN: Mm.

KEITH: And I invited him.

AUSTIN: *You rules-lawyering motherfucker.*

[ALI laughs]

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: But I *love* it. I fuckin' love it.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: This is the perfect—this is—all right. So let's do this scene. Uh, *“other players can join freely if it makes sense for their characters to also be present.”* I don't think it does. Um. What do you notice about each other? What have you heard?

KEITH: Um. I think at this point it's gotten around that...Orth just doesn't sleep.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Right? And so—I think that...in—I think that the combination of like seeing a really haggard sort of almost like...like servant to his morals, like “can't stop 'cause he feels like he has to” and—coupled with the fact that I attacked him and blew him up and...killed his friend by accident? Um. I think I just feel—I think I notice that he's worse for wear and I feel really bad about it.

AUSTIN: Is this a thing where like you literally sent an invite? Or are—did you just kind of pop in on him?

KEITH: Oh, I popped in. I definitely popped in. Um.

AUSTIN: What are you eating?

KEITH: I th—

AUSTIN: I—that'll come up. That'll come up, maybe.

KEITH: I have bu—Okay.

AUSTIN: Uh, so, *“You take turns. The person with the lowest social standing takes the first turn.”* Mako. Um. *“On your fir—on you turn, choose one or more of your conversational partners and choose an action: ask a topical question; engage in actual improvised conversation; pass, saying something instead about the food; or leave the conversation. End the conversation when either everyone has passed in a row or everyone has left the conversation but one.”* So Mako.

KEITH: Okay. Um. I hope to convince you that...there are other ways to stop Rigour than using a factory that builds mechs using Rigour tech. Can I?

JACK: Um. What's your line of argument there?

KEITH: Uh, well. It's like—it's sort of like...I don't know. Like the, uh—just—I think that, you know, Mako's job is to destroy Rigour tech. I think that he genuinely believes, especially after

coming from the September Institute and being sort of bred to fight Divines his entire life, sort of sees like fighting a giant fire with a bunch of little fires as not working out super well? Like why...Like Rigour is a poisonous thing, why we create a bunch of little poisons to be the weapon against that? Um. There are other things that we can do.

JACK: Like?

KEITH: And we have done. Like. Other weapons, other—different Divines other than Rigour itself. Not just brute force and throwing four hundred mechs a day at it.

JACK: Uh, no. I don't think s—I don't think you can. Um. Because I think that...I think that what you're trying to do is explain...alternative military tactics to a man who has always been more of a sharpshooter than he was a tactici—than a military tactician? Um. I think in the past, we've seen Orth trying to...I think especially this Orth—I think while we're eating, as well—are we in a restaurant?

KEITH: No, I showed up to your office with two buckets of chicken.

JACK: [laughs] So I think while we're talking, Orth goes into like a tiny bathroom and gets a glass of water and just starts like...putting pills into the glass of water so that they fizz like an alka seltzer? Um.

[KEITH laughs]

JACK: And I think that—I don't think that I believe that there is—I don't think that this is the time for...complicated alternative military tactics? I think that this is the time—like Rigour is so big. That I think what we've gotta do is overwhelm it.

AUSTIN: Orth.

JACK: Yeah?

AUSTIN: It's your turn.

[ALI laughs]

JACK: Okay. Uh, "I'm feeling generous. What favor do you ask me?" But I think that this is the—I think that this is a sort of—um. Sweat-beaded forehead, tired generosity? Of just like—almost like f—s—almost manic? Of just. "Okay. Right. Look."

KEITH: Like the assumption that that's why I'm there, is for you to do something for me?

JACK: Yeah.

KEITH: Um. Uh. I think that—I think that I give you Zeal, and I tell you that you need to...figure out how to use this to help. And that I thought about everybody that I know, and that the only person that I trust to have a thing called Zeal is Orth.

AUSTIN: Orth?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Do you touch it?

JACK: Yeah. Wait, so you've come to my office carrying two buckets of chicken and a Divine?

KEITH: [laughs] Y—Yep.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: Orth. There's nothing zealous about this thing.

JACK: No.

AUSTIN: When you touch it, it's something else. It's, um. It's all of the good parts of *Ambition*. It's...the reason you stay up at night is because you have...a goal that is...greater than that can be conceived of on any normal day. You know, it's not—it's not...It's not just like, "Oh, I hope things go well." It's not, "I believe deeply and, you know, with religiosity in a cause." It's, "I think humans can do this. I believe humans can do this. And I'm going to be the one to do it, or we're going to be the ones to do it."

JACK: Oh, wow.

AUSTIN: And there's something interesting here. Which is. In Mako giving it to you, there's a moment where you can feel the Divine, or whatever it is—it's a Divine. Where you can feel the Divine almost asking you if it should resent zealousness. If it should resent...Mako and the Rapid Evening...but in giving it to you, it realizes that there is common ground between these two positions. That it is not—that these are not incompatible things.

JACK: Right, because in the sense of—of all the best bits about *Ambition*, one of the big ones is compromise, right?

AUSTIN: Sure. Sure.

JACK: Right.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Okay. You're up, Mako.

KEITH: [sighs] Um. Wait, am I up?

JACK: Yeah, I think so, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah. 'Cause he asked you for something—

KEITH: Oh, right, he let me do the—okay. That's—so—that.

AUSTIN: Yes. Yeah. Yes. Totally.

KEITH: Um. I...hm. This is tough, 'cause I was—I was going to give Orth the favor, and he gave me the favor. Um...

AUSTIN: Say something about the food. You know.

KEITH: Uh, no. I need you—

AUSTIN: Or just chat.

KEITH: Uh. I need you to reassure me that...we can all work together on this. Can you?

JACK: Yeah, I think so. Um. And I think the way I do it is...I ask Mako...if he—I ask Mako if he has like forty minutes.

KEITH: Yeah, I got forty minutes.

JACK: Um, and then, over the next five hours—

[KEITH laughs]

JACK: —I take all the papers out of my desk and draw complicated and at the same time confusingly simple maps on various big pieces of paper, like we saw Orth doing in the very early stages of the Kingdom game, when he was kind of desperately trying to make plans? But I think that...I think that something in this action, something in these very long hours—and it might be that Mako's just getting tired, as well, 'cause Orth—doesn't. And they've been doing this for ages, and it's probably like four in the morning now? Um. But either through the tiredness or through the plotting, I hope Mako comes to some sort of reassurance about how things might work.

AUSTIN: So, let's be clear. It's literally, Mako said, "Can give me some assurance?" And you were like "All right, let's plan this out? Let's put together a Powerpoint together?"

KEITH: Yeah. [laughing] Yeah.

AUSTIN: You—

JACK: Or not even necessarily a Powerpoint, or it's more just like...

KEITH: It reminds of those stories that I used to hear when I was a kid about how J. K. Rowling wrote Harry Potter on a napkin?

JACK: Right. Except, to an extent, I think it's a bit like...If I sat down...and asked Austin to explain briefly the history of capitalism?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

[DRE laughs]

JACK: And.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Austin goes like, "Sure, yeah. I can do it really qui—" and then like five hours later, there's like paper everywhere? And we've been to the library.

[AUSTIN laughs]

JACK: And back. And—

AUSTIN: Or it's even better than that in that like what he said was, "can we...can you give me your assurance that we can work together?" And what you did was immediately start working together.

JACK: Yes.

KEITH: Mhm.

JACK: Yeah, totally.

AUSTIN: Right?

JACK: Yeah. And I think that—I think that...

AUSTIN: It's like if you asked me, "Could we—can we work together to dismantle capitalism," and in four hours, we have leaflets ready.

[KEITH and JACK laugh]

JACK: And somehow we're in Vienna.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: Um. Yeah, no, but so I think, as well, that—yeah, actually. This is my question, I think, which is...I think it's that "Something gives you away to me. What?"

KEITH: I think...I think that you can tell by the fact that it's...it's been hours and hours, and I'm tired, but that I don't get sick of the planning, how worried I've become about the whole situation.

JACK: Okay.

AUSTIN: Just like cold KFC in a bucket.

JACK: Yeah.

KEITH: Yes. Still trying to find pieces that haven't gotten all soggy.

AUSTIN: Yuh. Good luck.

KEITH: Yeah. I talk about—I say that the food's all cold.

JACK: [laughs] Um. Yeah, and, I think that...without saying anything, Orth just—or even without looking, Orth just sort of like fumbles around inside a gigantic stack of papers and books on one side of his desk and just pulls out like a coupon for like fourteen percent off another chicken order—

[Laughter]

JACK: —and balls it up and throws it towards Mako.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Nice. I love it. That's so good. Uh, crisis points, yeah?

[45:09]

AUSTIN: Hm?

JACK: Yeah. Oh, well, yeah, that's Keith's.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah. Boom. But that makes sense, right, Keith?

KEITH: Yeah. Totally.

AUSTIN: You think—that's—yeah. Okay. Um. Yours is of course the most interesting in some ways in that it is...it is—there's an overlap. Right? Between personal and crisis. All right.

KEITH: Yes. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Aria.

ALI: I, um.

AUSTIN: Do you wanna do the scene that we've talked about? 'Cause I have a really good intro for it.

ALI: I think so? Yeah. I...yeah.

AUSTIN: Can I clear something by Orth, here?

[ALI laughs]

JACK: Yeah?

AUSTIN: I kind of—what if the—what if...what if because you were meeting with Mako, you missed a meeting with Aria?

JACK: [intrigued] Oh, yeah. Yeah. Like—

AUSTIN: Like you'd scheduled this meeting with Aria that night, and in your fervor—and you know it's one of those things—you touched Ambition. You have Ambition now. Like.

JACK: Mm.

AUSTIN: You're driven in this way, immediately.

JACK: Um, I—

AUSTIN: I—

JACK: ANd I think that like—did Aria arrive at my office and just have to like wait in the lobby? The cold lobby downstairs?

AUSTIN: That is—that is where our—yeah, that is where our next scene starts.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: So I think like, you know, seventy floors up, Mako and Orth are eating—are *not* eating chicken. They're just sitting next to chicken, where it's going cold. In the lobby. Aria.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN What scene?

ALI: Um. I...[laughs] I am going to be *Meeting Sword to Sword* with Paisley Moon.

AUSTIN: I think Paisley shows up and like—there's this moment where you are—so you are sitting down. At the...There's probably just like a nice row of chairs. It's a—it's ni—you know, it's a nice lobby. And it's like an automated lobby, so you're the only *person* here. There's probably a receptionist robot. Though maybe not. It's Orth, do you—ah! I kind of like this as being like a co-work space? 'Cause like Orth doesn't have a permanent office, right?

JACK: No, but I think that...I think that Orth has a...so...Storage units now are automated?

AUSTIN: Mm. Oh, that's so good.

JACK: They just move on endless highways, just constantly rolling or whatever. So I think that even if Orth doesn't necessarily have an office, he has a storage unit that he can call at any point.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Meaning that he could just fill an office immediately with...

AUSTIN: Yeah. I love it.

JACK: ...stuff.

AUSTIN: Okay. I actually like these offices as being that in general? Where it's just—it's a modular structure where offices move—like are flown in and out of it. Um.

JACK: Oh, yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: And we just get this great wide shot of the building as big office modules get pulled in and out of it and turn on and off all night. Um. And it's two am, and [amused] Aria's waiting in the lobby to be called up, and...[seriously] someone walks through the door, and there's a brief moment where it's clear that Paisley Moon did not expect to see you here.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: And then he draws a gun on you. What do you do?

ALI: I think Aria jumps up and like takes cover?

AUSTIN: Okay. And I think you get like—he does the thing where he shoots at you a couple of times, and then somehow you have get to being sword on sword.

ALI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: ...I think he probably has—does Aria still have her whip?

ALI: I—that's what I was gonna say! I think...she has her whip, and then like there's like a little like slider on it that she can click?

AUSTIN: Oh, *shit*.

ALI: And it turns into like sword mode and it makes that like Top Chef like “woink!” sound.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: —and then it cuts like—

AUSTIN: Yes. Sylvia in the chat say it's the threaded cane from Bloodborne, and that's exactly what it is.

ALI: Yes.

AUSTIN: This is the best—we're running the best game.

ALI: Yes.

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Awesome.

ALI: She has to like—she has to like swing it, and then it—it gets hard.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And then it's like a—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: —beam saber, I guess?

AUSTIN: Yes. Um. Paisley does not have that. He just has a sword.

ALI: God!

AUSTIN: And I think you like—he comes in, sees you, his eyes go wide...And they are also like lit blue. They're like a cold blue light. He's wearing a dark navy suit with...a black turtleneck under it. It's a cold night on whatever planet we're on, apparently. And he pulls up his gun and starts shooting at you. It's a silenced like blaster—like it's shooting like...some sort of plasma, energy. But it's like—it sounds as if the sound in the room is getting sucked out of it, whenever he pulls the trigger. Um. And he shoots at you like three or four times, burns through the receptionist counter, and then you manage to whip the gun away? And then he draws the blade.

ALI: Cool. Um. Who...

AUSTIN: *"Set up. Uh, decide together how the two of you came to be standing alone sword to sword."* We did that. *"What do you notice about each other? What have you heard?"* What's he heard about, and what's he noticed about Aria?

ALI: Um...I think there's—I mentioned it before, where there was like definitely...There was a turning point in Aria's life where she went from...trying to appear like authoritative and aggressive—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: —and then, by toning all of that down, actually started to.

AUSTIN: To be autho—actually authoritative.

ALI: Right. Um.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: And I think it's like...how much of like his memories does he still have?

AUSTIN: You don't...you don't know?

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: It doesn't—

ALI: I ask 'cause it's only one of those things where it's like...Half of it is like, "Wow, it's way different than—what I remember, if he remembers?"

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

ALI: But then a—the other half of it is like, "Oh, she's finally doing what I taught her."

AUSTIN: Right. N—it's not that. It's only...it's...it's "This doesn't match the profile I have." And the profile he has is partially built from his own memories, but it's not...It's not, "Oh, damn, she grew up." It's, "Huh. My data says—"

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: "—she's not like this."

ALI: Hm.

AUSTIN: Like in his head, you should have died in that first blast, because you wouldn't have been on your toes enough to get behind cover. Which is why he's open enough to get—to disarm him with the whip. Um. All right, you're not fighting in mobile frames. Uh. Oh, yeah—so the thing you notice about him is that—is the stuff I basically just said. Right? Which is he—there is a glint of recognition, but it is a cold sort of recognition. Um. Y—and his weird glowing blue eyes. Um. He also doesn't move with the coolness he used to. Like. The thing about Paisley Moon is you knew he was the busiest dude in the sector, but he didn't show it. Like he always seemed like he had a lot of free time, even though he had none. And that is completely gone here. Like the second you see him you can see he's a man on a mission. Um. And that mission is, right now, to kill you. Uh. So. *"Ask a leading question. The better with the sword begins."* Who do you think's better with the sword? If you don't know who that is, you can throw a coin.

ALI: Is Paisley probably better... 'cause he's a robot? Or is Aria—

AUSTIN: 'Cause he's a—he's—

ALI: —probably better because sh—he fights with a gun so often?

AUSTIN: I think...I think he's probably better because he's a robot?

ALI: [laughing] Okay.

AUSTIN: Because he's not a robot, but because he's a cyborg. Um.

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: And just like has the best...of that software built in, and is—and has like a really great body for an assassin. Right? Like he has a good assassin's body.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: All that muscle memory is there. Um. PS, if this was like mid-season episode, "A Good Body for an Assassin" would be a great episode title.

ALI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Oh well. Um. So, *"take turns asking leading questions back and forth. At any time after the third question, either can choose to ask one of the closing questions instead."* Okay. *"Note that some of the closing questions may end the duel and others may allow it to continue, depending on the answer."* "We lock swords—" also, I think his sword is—it's metallic, but it's not—it's just like—it's just like a tube on his belt? So it still—it also does the extension thing. It just—it can only extend into a metal sword.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: I think it's a very *thin* blade, is part of it. Like it's *coiled* inside of this tube. Um. And comes uncoiled into like a sharp...point. Once it's pulled out. "We lock swords, and your mouth is near my ear. What do you say?"

ALI: Was gonna start with this. [laughs] Um. Mm.

AUSTIN: We can always do it twice.

ALI: Yeah. Um. Do you think this is the first time they've seen each other since September?

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: Yes.

AUSTIN: A—you thought he was dead.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Or, no, you knew he wasn't dead, because you saved him, but yes. I think one night, he was gone from the hospital.

ALI: I think she...apologizes. And then like immediately moves to create distance between them.

[AUSTIN laughs]

ALI: "I launch a sustained attack with my weight behind it. Do you give ground readily or grudgingly?"

AUSTIN: Readily. Uh. It's...it's like he's hoping you'll tire yourself out. Um. I think he like—as you charge in at him, he's like "Yeah, I can defend this all day. This is—it's an empty room, no one is here but us." Uh. And like—you know, steps back over furniture, as you charge at him. Makes distance between the two of you. Um. And is like totally happy to give you that ground. "I pretend to falter and dip my blade. Do I draw you out, or do you recognize the ploy and hold steady?" I think specifically, he flashes you a moment of true recognition. He just says—

AUSTIN (as Paisley): Aria.

AUSTIN: —and like dips his blade.

ALI: I think he...I think he draws her out.

AUSTIN: Okay. And like...I'm trying to think if he...takes advantage of that with an attack, or what? I think he continues the ploy, effectively. Is like still guarded. And Ar—I don't know if Aria knows it's a ploy. Still guarded. Sword down. But not down all the way. Just like facing downwards. I almost wanna just cheat and do another move.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Like at that point. There's a—there's...There's, um...God, where is it. "I catch your wrist in my hand and draw your close to me. Do you let your sword drop or do you shove me away and fight on?"

ALI: That's a good move to cheat for. Um.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: [sighs] I think there's a moment where it seems like she's going to?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ALI: But when she looks into his eyes, she shoves him away.

AUSTIN: Mm.

ALI: Um.

AUSTIN: Yeah, his eyes are still the cold blue.

No

ALI: Right. Um. But I...Um, they're still close, though, so—"We lock swords and your mouth is near my ear. What do *you* say?"

AUSTIN: I'm trying to think how much of him is there.

ALI: [laughs] That's a great thing to hear. That's cool.

AUSTIN: [sighs] I think he starts...Oh, no. He says—

AUSTIN (as Paisley): You should have—

AUSTIN: And then something in him stops him. From saying that you should have let him die. “You get your sword's point well between us, inside my guard. If you drive it home, you'll kill. Do you drive it home, or do you allow me to step back and recover myself?”

ALI: [sighs] Aria says.

ALI: I know.

ALI: And apologizes again. And drives it home.

AUSTIN: And then a clatter. A metallic clatter of the sword hitting the ground. And...he falls, and slips slowly off your blade. And then I like Mako opening the elevator door.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: With the chicken coupon.

[JACK laughs]

ALI: [crying] Oh my god! I didn't know Mako was here!

AUSTIN: All right.

KEITH: I just want it on the record that Ali saved Paisley.

[AUSTIN laughs]

KEITH: And, through a chain of events, allowed Tower to die, and then *killed Paisley* the next time she met him.

AUSTIN: Um. Quick thing. We need to go back and do our—the second part of the *Solitaire* game? For everybody, which is...“What is everything someone else might notice, and what is everything someone else might have heard?” Based on those *Solitaire* scenes before we move on. Because we're go—we're about to move on to the second interlude. [pause] Also, what was that scene?

KEITH: The first one was Jack doing...doing what?

AUSTIN: Uh, the first one—

JACK: Uh, I was in the bar that gets blown up.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: Right. So what do people know, Cass? Or, uh, Orth?

JACK: Um. I think what starts happening is that Orth starts turning up at other bars. Um. And...

KEITH: They all keep blowin' up.

JACK: This is—this is before he's got Ambition. Right? So, yeah. This is before...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: So I think...I think it's like seeing the old vet in the bar.

AUSTIN: Mm.

JACK: And I think people are beginning to...are beginning to see the mask of Oricon's man slipping just a little?

AUSTIN: Right. And then after he gets Ambition.

JACK: Well, I think what happens is that um. Um. I think it actually comes to the bar with him, as like a little golden orb, um.

[AUSTIN laughs]

JACK: Orbiting his head, or orbiting his shoulders.

AUSTIN: Yep. Perfect.

JACK: And I think it casts a light—

AUSTIN: It's like a MAG from PSO. Okay.

JACK: Right.

[DRE laughs]

JACK: I think it casts a light. And I think depend—if it's a very dark bar, it casts a light on the bar, or if it's a very bright bar, it—you can still quite see. But I think the thing that people notice is the way it lights up Orth's face as it passes in front of him, and the expression they see on his face when it does.

[1:00:14]

AUSTIN: ...Mm. I like that. S—um. Who did the next one...

DRE: I think it was...

AUSTIN: Uh, Dre?

DRE: [negative] Ooh.

AUSTIN: No, it was—oh yeah, it was—yeah, it was Kobus.

DRE: Oh...let's see. So ever—something that everyone else might notice, and then something that everyone else has heard?

AUSTIN: The second one is optional, but yeah.

DRE: Okay. Uuuuah. How—like how well known is kind of Grace's behavior? 'Cause maybe that's the thing, in that it's now *more* well known. Is it just that the...

AUSTIN: That's been known.

DRE: That's been known?

AUSTIN: W—it's been—I guess it's not been known. It's been like...how well known are US drone strikes? They're pretty well known, but like it ain't like we talkin about them at dinner. You know what I mean?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um. It's...W—more—I guess, more importantly, what about *Kobus*?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: What's *Kobus*'...change?

DRE: Um. Kobu—I think Kobus' change is they just don't trust Grace at all. Anymore. Um.

AUSTIN: Mm.

DRE: And that they might—that they're even becoming hostile towards Grace?

AUSTIN: Okay. Is it—

DRE: They see G—they see Grace as more of a threat than an ally now.

AUSTIN: Okay. Is that in the...is that also something that gets around about Kobus, or is that just an internal thing?

DRE: Um. I think it gets around because he m—the way that they reached out to Mako, they are probably reaching out to more people now.

AUSTIN: Okay. Cool. Uh, now, Sylvia? Jill?

SYLVIA: Yeah. Um. So I think—so it's both. What everyone else's...

AUSTIN: It's the first one—it's definitely—it's—what might they see a—that's different in you—

SYLVIA: Okay. And then it's—

AUSTIN: —and then what might have they heard.

SYLVIA: Okay. So for what—

AUSTIN: The latter is optional.

SYLVIA: Yeah, I'm gonna do both. I just want to make sure...

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVIA: ...I can do both. Um. I think what they noticed about Jill is that after the attack she seemed a little on edge. Like she's normally—everyone's a normally a little on edge, but this is kinda out of character for her? She's known for being kinda...cool and collected?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: And I think people are starting to see that being at the front of all the diplomatic goings-on with the Free States...

AUSTIN: Mm.

SYLVIA: ...and all the tension is starting to get to her? Um.

AUSTIN: Gotcha.

SYLVIA: And I think what people have heard is they heard that an attack got through the blockade, which is kind of un...Like there are attacks along the blockade, but this one actually got through it?

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

SYLVIA: Which is kind of...new. So, people know that it's not this...sort of impenetrable—

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: —structure and like formation.

AUSTIN: Totally.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um. And then Cass.

ART: Uh, I think—I think there's a...like a...You know, a bounce in Cass' step. He's⁴ seen a—he's seen a friend he hasn't seen in a long time. I don't think Cass has enough time for his friends.

AUSTIN: Does that get around, or is there...is there...um.

ART: I can't imagine how it could. But I think the meeting is knowledge.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: I think people...

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: You know, I think what's gotten around is that—is that the Demarchy and Kesh are kind of cementing alliances.

AUSTIN: Okay. Cool. All right. I think that's all of the *Solitaires*, right? All right.

ALI: I didn't get points?

DRE: Yeah, we need to do points.

AUSTIN: Oh yeah. Points.

ALI: [yawns] Um. But I'm a little torn. I, um...

AUSTIN: Yeah. On one hand, you ended up eliminating a political enemy.

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: I think—here's another thing that you should be able to put together. Like in the moments—or in the time after you recover from this, it becomes clear that Paisley was sent by the Steigers to kill you and Orth at this meeting. Um. As like a...

ALI: Two birds.

AUSTIN: A...two—yeah, two bird situation.

[ALI laughs]

⁴ Cass uses they/them pronouns.

AUSTIN: Also, Paisley was expected to die, too. But was like totally disposable. Uh...so yeah, what do you think?

ALI: [breathes in] It's tou—mm.

AUSTIN: Again, a lot of this is like how it would be visually framed as a scene...Like is this Aria closing one more chapter so she can focus, or is this a success for the Vanguard in that it's a success against the parts of Oricon that resent her. And it.

ALI: It's tough, 'cause it's both, right, but I think it's more like Aria almost making the same mistakes? And then being able to...

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: ...act...accordingly. [laughing] Right.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Um.

AUSTIN: My gut says it's political.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: In that way. Like if this didn't...I don't see how this made things better...I don't see how this actually prepares you to fight Rigour.

ALI: Right, I could make that argument—

AUSTIN: At the end of the day.

ALI: —that like it could be crisis in that she's willing to make hard decisions? But I feel like—

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: —that's also a political thing? Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's not preparation. That's—right. Right. Yeah. Okay.

ALI: It works both ways.

AUSTIN: Mm. All right...So. Interlude two. It's been a couple of weeks since the dance? And so it's surprising, I think, when you get the notification. All of you. A message from Ibex, visibly distraught...telling you that you all need to be at a certain point in space, about equidistant between September and Counterweight. He tells you that the door was opened. And it's clear that this is a recording from inside of some sort of machine, which is not...not something you normally see Ibex in. And that he'll meet you there. Who goes?

ALI: I do.

DRE: I do.

JACK: Uh, I'll go?

SYLVIA: Yeah, I'm goin'.

AUSTIN: Does anyone not go?

KEITH: [sighs] I go.

AUSTIN: Okay. Mako, what do you—

ART: I'd really like to not go, but I can't. I can't do it.

AUSTIN: Do you bring Apokine?

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Mako, what are you in? Are you just in a spaceship?

KEITH: Yeah, I g—maybe a—like a b—like a—like a skybus.

AUSTIN: It's just a skybus? Is it you *and* the Makos, or is it just you?

KEITH: Mhm. ...Me and...me and all but one of the Makos, and Lazer Ted.

AUSTIN: And Lazer Ted with you, or and Lazer Ted is safe somewhere else?

KEITH: Um. Oh, and Lazer Ted is safe somewhere else.

AUSTIN: Okay. You're in like a space party bus, yeah.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Good. So you arrive, and it takes a moment...it's rare that you're in space without an objective, without like, "Oh, we're heading to this planet." Like, it doesn't happen often, especially now that you're not *at war*, that you're just like "Okay, we're in this -- is this where we're...We're meeting—like what are we—what's here?" Because space is *huge*, and...you're in the middle of nowhere.

You know, it's probably not that different from just being like "Oh, yeah, meet me in the woods." Like, what? Like "yeah, there's a thousand acres, meet me there." Um. Like, okay. Like, that's...It's vast and dark. You're not near enough to any star to, uh, orient yourself. So notions of up and down don't make any sense, and I think we actually probably see your different ships and mechs like from different perspectives? Um. Because you're coming from weird different directions.

And...It takes—there's two things. First, you notice a blip—first you notice each other. Right? So there's three things. First, "oh hey, all of those people are here. Huh. Was this a trap? Why are they there? It's—you know—or did Ibex send this to everybody?" Um. Art in the chat says "Oh my god, if this was a trap it would end the war right now." Yep. That would be it for the entire sector. All of the most important people are here. Um. Yeah, nobody sent somebody else, huh?

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Jacqui isn't here instead of Aria, like. Sokrates didn't...

ART: Now, are you deciding if it's a trap right now based on—this?

[ALI and DRE laugh]

AUSTIN: This? I know what it is. I'm just curious. To see who's here. Euanthe isn't here instead of Cass. Huh.

KEITH: I guess—

ART: No, I don't trust any of those people, really.

AUSTIN: Okay.

KEITH: I mean, I did something really close to sending someone else, which is I didn't send all of me. All of the Makos.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: But you did go yourself.

KEITH: I did go myself, right.

AUSTIN: You didn't only send other yous. Okay. So, the first thing you notice is each other. The second thing that you notice is a blip. It's an *old*...rigger, you think. It's not in any of your machines—not in any of your data banks, but from the design you can tell that it's...It's something OriCon in design, but ancient at this point. Um. You can see that it has like—you do a schematics scan, and see that it's been updated with like more recent life support systems, and better mobility stuff. It has a number of arms that are currently like, closed and close to the body? Um, and it's heading full speed in a direction away from you.

And the third thing you notice...You kind of pull it up on cameras. Is like, there is like a section of space where there's supposed to be stars, and there isn't. It's just *black*. And as you get closer, you see that there is a metallic mech heading straight for Ibex's mech.

KEITH: Huh.

AUSTIN: And those of you who are in the Chime recognize it as the body of Detachment.

ART: Oh, shit.

ALI: Uh-oh.

[SYLVIA laughs]

ART: That's supposed to be behind a door, right?

ALI: Yeah, that's not good.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Well, Ibex said a door was opening. And then what you see is, as you come into sensor range, as you come in from different angles and at different speeds, you actually hear this, this comes in at different points for each of you as you approach. It's Ibex, and he says—

AUSTIN (as Ibex): Wait. Detachm—...No. Liberty. How? They left you to—? Why are you *alone*?

AUSTIN: And those of you with Divines—I guess Orth with Ambition, and Aria with Righteousness, you recognize that Detachment is gone from that body. It's Liberty piloting it now. But that doesn't stop the mech from doing the same thing that Detachment did to the Chime back all those years ago now. And so it starts to orbit around Ibex at incredibly fast speeds, and it whips that blade out, and Ibex...Ibex goes to move the arms of that old Liberty and Discovery model. It has all these different arms, and it tries to raise defense against Liberty, but one of its arms gets cut off, and then another, and then another.

[sighs] At one moment I think Ibex launches that old chain blade? You might remember from that game? The one that Liberty and Discovery gave their Candidate, so long ago, when they had a Candidate still.

But that chain blade is not meant for space, and Ibex was never much for combat, and so...[sighs] Liberty piloting the husk of Detachment, it bats that blade away, and there's another cut or two, and then Ibex is left in his mech, floating in space with no real way to move it to safety. He's like flipping on switches, one and then another, and he can't quite get anything to work, and you can hear him over the comms, he's like—

AUSTIN (as Ibex): Damn it!

AUSTIN: And then he slams his fist down on the console and then looks up and sees what you, now, see too: a *second* shape.

And it's Rigour. You *couldn't* forget that shape. It's something like a factory and a fountain pen and...size itself all mixed together, and it's far away and still so massive...You think, until you realize, as the info comes in on your radar: it's not so far away after all. And it's not as *large* as it

was on September. And then you realize that this is a new shape. It isn't *not* Rigour, necessarily, but it's definitely something new. And it's moving towards Ibex.

Liberty flies away up past you and...working towards an exit course for the sector. And Aria and Orth—again, maybe even Kobus, here, who, even though you don't have a Divine now, you are attuned to the way Divines think aloud when they're anxious. And you can feel Liberty's doubt. It isn't *regretful* for what it did? But it is terrified that maybe...Maybe there was a greater cost for its freedom. Maybe it made a mistake. But no, no. It couldn't possibly stay locked in that world any longer.

And as Liberty flies away...You hear, over the comms, Ibex laughing. One last close call, that's all this was. He finds the right switches to flip, and he diverts power from his totally disarmed weapons systems and, you know, from some of his, you know, sensor units—I think, probably—to the one remaining booster he has.

[1:15:16]

[MUSIC - “-. - - - . . . / . - - - . . . - / - . . - - . . .” begins]

And he starts to turn back to you, and then, as that small rigger gets closer, he stops.

And it's within his comms range, but not yours, not quite. And so he stops Chital's old rigger, and he turns back to that shape, and he says her name, one more time.

AUSTIN (as Ibex): Maryland?

AUSTIN: And she reaches out to him in that dark machine, a hand outwards and palm down, and it is *hard* not to read in recognition. And then her rigger's hand turns vertically, and then unfolds, in jagged, silent, mechanical spasms, until it is not a hand but a blade.

And she reaches out with her second arm and pulls him in, *slowly*, until the blade passes through his cockpit. And it is a blessing, the only one for Ibex, that he gets close enough to see that she is not his Maryland but something else. Something someone left behind in Mode City. She holds him there for a moment or two, and then slides him away, off her blade, and into the dark, where he falls. Despite being in space, he falls, backwards. Past her and into something. And then you see: the door is open.

[MUSIC plays out to end]

AUSTIN: This is, uh, *A Free-for-all*. Everyone plays. Everyone's characters meet in your mobile frames to do battle. Ask your chosen partner, who in this case is the clone of Maryland September...Which I keep coming back to. You could have done anything with those. Uh. You, uh—you...sorry. During the Free-for-all, anyone may ask questions for details about the location, landscape or circumstances. Um. Go around the table, each of you gets two turns, you go first. So I think every player here will get two turns? Though there's a lot of us and this is more than the game can normally handle—so maybe like everybody gets one turn here. Against this Rigour model. Um. And I think it's gonna *start* with Maryland. Uh. Once everyone's had their turns, it comes back around for the final turn, and then you can choose one of the ends. I think

we'll probably just feel out where that is. She opens fire first on...I think Aria. Who...almost immediately, Aria, you notice Righteousness flees into you. As Ibex's body drifts through space. Um. I think you can even see in the Righteous Regent? Like it's like—the—all of its—all of its edges open up and there's a second layer in there, that's like glowing red?

ALI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Um. And like all of your percentages go up? It's like, "Oh, I used to run at this speed. Now I run at 150% that speed."

ALI: [sighs] Does it force the—is it like—so startled that it forces the...?

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: Yes. Okay, cool.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Um, you know. We'll have to talk later about how Aria's dealing with this.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: But for now, it is startled and frightened.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Um. And it doesn't really understand what it's facing. Um. Because those of you with Divines also see that this is Rigour, but also it's clearly not Rigour. Like Rigour was a mountain of a thing, was bigger than a mountain. So like how is this Rigour? That's weird. Um. But it still kind of has that resonance and signature. "So, Aria. I open fire on you, pounding you with everything I've got. Can your frame take it? How?" Um. Rigour's like body is that same sort of like...new flesh. It's like the f—the body of Rigour is...basically a bunch of gooey nanomachines? Um, and it's forming like missiles in its shoulders and firing them out, one after the other. And when they explode, it does the thing of...erasing light and blocking the light from behind it. It's like—it's almost as if the—'cause you're—it's in the middle of space, so it's just stars everywhere, but you can see new negative space being created by the kind of flurry of missiles that flies out of it.

ALI: [laughs] Uh, well, so I think if Righteousness has come into the Righteous Regent, and...is sort of startled, then...I don't know who's around Aria who could see it happen, but the audience certainly does. Where like...In the places that its armor...where there were like cuts?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: For like light to come through? Those...close up, so there's no more light, and then the...

AUSTIN: Ooh.

ALI: The limbs extend? Um. So the body of the Righteous Regent is a little bit thinner, and its like arms and legs are twice its size. Um. And it's—

AUSTIN: That's like terrifying?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's like pretty scary.

ALI: It's the scariest thing. Um. And there's like—it's just all black now, and it—I guess it really is only...it's just showing the like...a really dim reflection of like the light that's the in the area now?

AUSTIN: I love that. So it's like—

ALI: But it doesn't have any...It doesn't have any—

AUSTIN: It's almost doing the same thing, right? Like it's also blending into the sta—like it's also blocking the stars out?

ALI: Right. Exactly.

AUSTIN: That's really good.

ALI: Um. And like...in cockpit, like if the camera pans to Aria just like panicking now... 'Cause she like...she knew about this, but she thought that she would have control over it? [laughs]

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And also she's just panicking 'cause of what's happening. Um. But like...I think it's, again, the thing where she's like, "Okay, this is—it's time to pop off now, and I'm able to do this—"

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: "—in a way that I have never been able to do."

AUSTIN: In the past. Sure.

ALI: And like with Righteousness being there completely, like she is piloting better than she ever has.

AUSTIN: Gotcha.

ALI: So I think it's...it's part that like because of the shape of her frame has changed so much, like some of the missiles just miss.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: And the others just get dodged. 'Cause like...she can move in a way that she never has before in that unit.

AUSTIN: All right. Uh...Keith. Mako.

KEITH: Yes.

AUSTIN: It is your turn.

KEITH: Okay. Well. So, there's something special about this bus in that it's just literally a bus.

[AUSTIN and ALI laugh]

AUSTIN: O...kay.

KEITH: Things that buses have, is a lot of seats. And in those seats are all those goddamn robots I bought.

[ALI and DRE laugh]

AUSTIN: God damn it.

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: This motherfucker.

SYLVIA: [delighted] I'm so happy right now!

ALI: We're doing it!

AUSTIN: I'm so—

SYLVIA: Finally!

AUSTIN: [defeated] Okay, so what's your challenge?

KEITH: So, my challenge is: "I rush you. I'm faster than you believe. Can you react in time and get away? How?" And this is just like a—just a swarm of tiny little—

AUSTIN: Of Makos.

KEITH: Yeah. Well, there's—some—most of them are Makos, some of them are, you know, just running scripts that are—

AUSTIN: Oh, just, right. Right. You're actually just—

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: —launching them like they're missiles. They're the old Snowtrak—

KEITH: Yeah. You remember the Starcraft carriers in, uh—the protoss carriers in Starcraft?

AUSTIN: Yes. Yeah.

KEITH: It's that. It's that, and then s—a handful of them are piloted by real, actual—people, and then some of them are just like running scripts that are...

AUSTIN: But like those were mixed in so it's even hard to pick those out?

KEITH: Yes. Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's like you've launched all of these fuck—also, a lot of those mechs were like—have clearly been retrofitted for space combat, 'cause they were all just like digging drones? And so—

KEITH: They were—yeah, they were drill—yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um. So I think—I—

JACK: Also, aren't they all—at least partially obsolete by now?

AUSTIN: Oh yeah, totally, but whatever, like—

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —this is still—

KEITH: But, you know, I work for the Rapid Evening—

JACK: Oh, yeah yeah yeah.

KEITH: —they'll just like, "Yeah, I can make these relevant again!"

AUSTIN: Yeah. So I think she's able to—she's able to do the thing where like they all fly towards her. Um. And she turns one of her arms into...or one of them was already the sword, 'cause the sword that killed Ibex. And she's like—starts cutting through some of the drilling ones that come near, but has to give ground to back up—she has to back up closer towards where the door is. Um. But manages to cut through a bunch of them with that blade. But there's just too many to actually target and like take them out? So I think they're just like—

KEITH: Mm.

AUSTIN: —swarming around her now. But she hasn't taken any hits.

KEITH: Kay.

AUSTIN: All right. I'm gonna—so I'm just rolling a 1d5 to figure out who gets to narrate next? So Dre. I have a list—I have the list...of just at the bottom of the screen. That's Andrew, Alicia,

Jack, Keith, Art, Sylvia? And so I'm—[amused] don't worry. Andrew goes next. That's the important thing.

[DRE laughs]

KEITH: We—yeah.

DRE: Uh.

AUSTIN: So, Kobus. What the fuck is Kobus doing? And also, is Kobus just here in the key field suit?

DRE: Yes. Um.

AUSTIN: Okay.

DRE: What is...what is Liberty doing?

AUSTIN: Liberty's leaving. Liberty's just *going*.

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: Um. But. If you went and go Liberty, I'd give you political points.

DRE: [sighs] I'm torn between that and rushing Maryland, but I think...I think I go and get Liberty. And I think the move I make is "I'm on your back, and I outmaneuver you at every turn. Can you shake me? How?"

AUSTIN: Right. So like...the thing that's cool about you is like you have this updated key field suit that has a ton of extra drones, that can form like almost Green Lantern style shapes?

DRE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And I almost like this notion of like, you're faster than it. You put up walls in front of it. It's punching through the walls. Eventually you get a hand on its—one of its thruster packs, and you do the thing where you just like pop it off and it flies up into—like through space—and explodes. And then you cage it. You cage Liberty, and you're able to keep it...locked behind the cage, because you're able to rebuild the cage over and over again. Grace'll be happy about this.

DRE: Aw. Shit. Maybe I shouldn't have done that. Oh well!

AUSTIN: Well, you know, you recovered a Divine. And you recovered a Divine that had been previously...you know, aligned against her.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: For a long time. So. But it's like slamming itself against these drones that you're quickly, you know, putting back into place. And I think like zapping it inside. It moves inside in a

way that you haven't seen a Divine except Rigour move. In that it's very organic in its—it's very intentional. It moves with intent. And with...I don't mean with like...intellectual intent? I mean with bodily intent. Like it slams its hand against the wall, or like it kind of slaps at it as if it was *angry*. And we haven't seen that in Divines that—without a human pilot, at least. That often.

DRE: Yeah. Well, it's Liberty, and I've caged it.

AUSTIN: Exactly. So. Good job.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Good job, friend.

DRE: Um. I think the...I don't think Kobus like...I think Kobus reaches out to Liberty, and is like—

DRE (as Kobus): Hey, like, chill. I just—I need you.

AUSTIN: Uh...You say that, and it immediately begins trying to upload itself to your suit.

DRE: Oh boy. That's bad.

AUSTIN: We'll jump back to that, maybe.

[JACK laughs]

DRE: Okay.

AUSTIN: Uh, Cass.

ART: Sure. Uh, these questions are designed around other mechs, and it's—and it's...

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's hilarious. We'll figure it out.

ART: "I button up and march on you, shrugging off everything you throw at me. Can you stand me off? How?"

AUSTIN: That's a good one. For the Apokine.

ART: Yeah, thanks.

AUSTIN: Um. The answer isn't good. The answer is, at first it can't. It's clear that it's kind of like—dark missile are hitting the Apokine, and not doing much. And there is something in the way it moves that is...It communicates that the missiles aren't meant to hurt you? They're just meant to buy time. Until it reaches the door. Puts its hand back through, and pulls through one and then another and then another very similar mechs. Each one is clearly designed like Rigour, but each one almost has a different...a different vision of Rigour to it? You know, earlier I described Maryland's as being like a fountain pen meets a factory. And they all have that factory

bit going on, but like some of them are like a race car meets a factory. Another one is...is like a wall meets a factory. Where it's just like solid, and vents are pointed out of it, in different directions. And the way that it's able to...not be overtaken by you is that it's not alone. And suddenly the increase in incoming fire is enough to—not hurt you but at least let you know that your current—you know, your decision to walk forward, so to speak, is untenable.

ART: Hm.

AUSTIN: Especially because you don't know how many more are in there.

ART: Sure.

AUSTIN: Uh. Who's next? Let's roll again.

ART: [dejected] I tried.

AUSTIN: That was 1d4...

ALI: [laughs] Good job, Art.

AUSTIN: You did your best.

[1:30:03]

AUSTIN: Uh...Jack! Orth.

JACK: Hey.

AUSTIN: What do you do?

JACK: Um. So. I think that...as soon as Orth didn't see the stars?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: Saw the thing blocking out the stars.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: He immediately began to move in for an attack. Um.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: And what I think that involved—

AUSTIN: In the Kingdom Come.

JACK: In the Kingdom Come.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: And what I think that involved was...was essentially overclocking the Kingdom Come. Um.

AUSTIN: Mm.

JACK: And jetting off towards the Rigour mech at high speed. However, the engines failed. Um.

[AUSTIN laughs]

JACK: And Orth realizes—

AUSTIN: It's an old ship.

JACK: —that not only does he h—not have any control over the Kingdom Come's weapons anymore, but he also doesn't really have any control over the thrusters? And so the Kingdom Come, a ship that can hold, what, three riggers? Four?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Riggers? Um.

AUSTIN: Four. I think we decided four by the end there.

KEITH: Yeah, four.

JACK: With the terrible implacability of like non-Newtonian physics, or Newtonian physics—falls out of the sky like a hunting bird. Essentially towards one of the Rigour mechs.

AUSTIN: I mean it's probably not even towards one of them, 'cause the—only source of gravity here is the door to September.

JACK: Oh, wow! Yeah, totally! I'm super up for that. Do you survive my attack?

AUSTIN: Do you think it falls through?

JACK: [delighted] Oh, man! Yes, it super falls through!

AUSTIN: I think it pushes...I think it sli—it hits two of the smaller ones, and falls through into the other side. So it knocks two of them out.

JACK: Mm.

AUSTIN: But now the Kingdom Come is in that place...

JACK: And it's—I think it's able to maybe take altitude.

AUSTIN: It also opens the wider. Because the Kingdom Come—

JACK: Oh, yeah!

AUSTIN: —can hold four mechs. It's as if it smashes and like shatters the door to be a little bit larger.

JACK: Right. Totally. So I think, inside the Kingdom Come, Orth is now panicking? Um.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. We'll come back. I—because I wanna—

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —I want—I need to tell you what you see in there. But we'll come back. Um. Now it is down to Aria and Jill. [typing sounds] Aria. What do you do?

ALI: So roughly like how many are around at this point?

AUSTIN: There is the one that is piloted by Maryland, and there are two more, still. The one that looks like a wall is still here?

ALI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Um. And then there's one that is...just like Rigour, except...or just like—just like—yeah. Basically just like Rigour except it's has a sort of...There's a showman quality to it. It's like—I think it has a lot more curves. It's symmetrical. It is...it is pretty to look at, and that's a strange thing. Um. It takes a few seconds, and you also see that it has some of the classic design architecture of the Minerva Rook. Like I think its head is the same as the Rook model? Um...Yeah.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: So one of those is there.

ALI: Um. I s—um. "I rain—I rain a barrage of rockets down on you out of nowhere." But I don't think that they're rockets? I think...from like the...[sighs] because the arms are so much thinner now, the like shoulder pieces on the Queen that she had are like protruding?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: A little bit?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: Um...Out from the like protruded shoulders, there's like six...gold?—No. Silver. They're just like silver, yeah, they're really basic.

AUSTIN: You know, silver. Basic.

ALI: [laughs] But like metallic. It's, uh, you know.

AUSTIN: I got ya.

ALI: It's not supposed to be fancy.

KEITH: It's baaaarely a precious metal.

ALI: Right. Um. [laughing] Not anymore. Um...Yeah, like it—they're just...They're like almost raindrop shaped? In that they're just like—like they're just supposed to be guns. There's nothing fancy or showy about them. They're just like—

AUSTIN: Hm.

ALI: —six extra funnels that kind of...come out and like...are like a half-circle over the Righteous Regent's head. From like. And then just start shooting. And I think that she's just kind of opering—opening fire on all of them? To kind of see what she can get, yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay. Yeah. The...The one that is like a wall...it's just barrel-chested. Grows, it's as if it unfolds itself into a wall. And you're able to shoot through it, like it takes damage clearly, and like—it go—again, the way that reads is just this huge wall of black in space like expands. And then you start blasting holes through it and stars start appearing. But then it like quickly folds back in on itself and repairs itself and open back up. It's—

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: —it's not capable of like moving in on you or anything like that, but it is able to withstand this. Um. And it gets close to you? And reaches out. Like it slowly moves forward on you a little bit at a time, until it reaches out and lifts you up until your toes aren't touching...aren't where they're supposed to be.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: And starts to like try to swallow you. But I think you're able to push back and get away. Uh. Sylvia. Is next,

SYLVIA: So, Ali pointed out to me that there's literally just a move in this that is made for me, and I'm gonna do it.

AUSTIN: Oh yeah?

[ALI laughs]

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh?

SYLVIA: “Far across the landscape, I raise my rifle. I can put a shot into your reactor core, slice off your comms antenna, unhinge your knee, put out your eye. Do you avoid my shot? How?” You know, makes sense for a sniper.

AUSTIN: Yeah. That’s totally makes sense for a sniper.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Which—who you shooting for?

SYLVIA: Um. I actually...

AUSTIN: Is it the one who picked up Aria?

SYLVIA: I kinda really like if while Aria’s being picked up, I take that shot at the one picking up Aria?

AUSTIN: Okay. What’s the—what’s the ammo like? And what’s it look like on screen?

SYLVIA: Um...So, it’s...I think the like ammo are like these giant...Well first off, what it looks like is...On the back of the Symphonia, there’s a big—the rail gun’s sorta mounted on the shoulder, and it comes down—

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVIA: —sort of in front, and like the mech holds it by like a couple handles.

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: And I think—it’s like—it’s huge. It’s like the size—like it’s comparable in height to the mech itself?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVIA: And I think it fires these like...almost like metal screws, is kind what they look like? Um.

AUSTIN: Ooh. Okay, how big are they?

SYLVIA: They’re—pretty big.

AUSTIN: They are big—this isn’t like the—

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —the sort of thing where it’s like “It’s a rail gun so it’s not the mass of thing—”

SYLVIA: No.

AUSTIN: “—it’s the velocity it travels at—” Okay.

SYLVIA: It’s the—it’s both. Like...

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: This is like a drill being shot at intense speeds into Rigour.

AUSTIN: So then we get the shot...of Tower Chalet opening comms with Aria Joie...

ALI: Oh, fuck you.

AUSTIN: ...and saying...

SYLVIA: God!

ALI: [whispering] Fuck. [louder] You fuck. Anyway. What does he say?

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN (as Tower): It was only ever a delay.

AUSTIN: And then the screw hits. And it’s just like, single shot, frozen, red. His face twisting. And you never thought a person who was so sweet could look so cruel. As he dies.

SYLVIA: [upset] Fucking—god damn it!

ALI: I’m sorry for the listeners.

AUSTIN: Orth.

KEITH: Hey guys, my audio cut out for a second?

[SYLVIA laughs]

AUSTIN: No, it didn’t.

KEITH: Whose face was twisted?

AUSTIN: Oh, honey.

ALI: No it didn’t. You’re a liar...

ART: You’re really...

AUSTIN: This is a bit. This is a bit.

KEITH: No no no.

ALI: Don't tell him. No one tell him.

AUSTIN: We're just gonna move on.

KEITH: No no no no.

SYLVIA: Keith, I'm sorry.

KEITH: Sp—it's okay. Who died?

AUSTIN: Tower—Tower isn't with us anymore.

KEITH: Oh, no, I m—I can't miss—I missed Tower being back for like half a second!?

SYLVIA: And then I kind of murdered him with a giant drill.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Aw. That sucks. Why'd you do that?

[DRE laughs]

SYLVIA: I didn't know it was him! I just knew he was attacking Aria.

AUSTIN: I think at the same time, some of the Mako drills like push through the rest of like the Tower rigger, breaking its arms off of the Righteous Regent, and freeing Aria up. Orth.

JACK: Yes.

AUSTIN: Orth, it's no good in there.

JACK: [with trepidation] No?

AUSTIN: No. And like...it's only been a few years, so there's a limit to the transformation, to some degree, but you know—Orth, you were on the Kingdom Come when it came to September, a few years ago. This little—to Mode City. And.

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: The trees are just gone. The quarry has expanded into the city itself. And there's Rigour, *the* Rigour, still massive. But surrounded by...just hundreds? Thousands? Of those smaller Rigours? The ones with the Rook-style heads? Um. And then like—you're only there for a second. Before you get a call.

JACK: Oh, wow. Who's it from?

AUSTIN: An old friend.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: You, uh—you loaned them some money once, and a ship. And they really wanna not be here anymore.

JACK: Oh dear. Okay. Where are they?

AUSTIN: You pick them up at...the...where Apokine used to be, inside of Maryland September's old...like warehouse slash secret, you know, woodland cabin-facility. Uh. It's AuDy. It's AuDy and Discovery. Um.

JACK: Oh, wow.

AUSTIN: You only have a few minutes before Rigour like notices you? And it doesn't make noise, but...its newest members do.

JACK: Oh, boy. Okay.

AUSTIN: And start flying toward you. And there's something that AuDy slash Discovery knows about them.

JACK: [afraid] Yeah?

AUSTIN: Which is...that they're Voice.

JACK: Oh, boy.

AUSTIN: That a Voice left alone with Rigour...both of them—let's say they both learned a few things from each other.

JACK: Oh, no—that's very—that's extremely bad. Um. What kind of shape is the ship in?

AUSTIN: The ship is...not in great shape...I think we probably get a shot of like AuDy setting up Maryland's auto defenses to start shooting down—

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: —the mass-produced Rigour models. As like the—the warehouse facility goes to work on like repairing...just like—just like retching the—wrenching the engines off of the Kingdom Come, and trying to like quickly replace them with newer models.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It probably tears off the old...like the extra bays from the bob—bottom—

JACK: Oh, yeah.

AUSTIN: —so that it's a lighter machine, too?

JACK: Oh, wow. Hang on a second. Uh.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: What if one of the things it tears off actually just like breaches pressure? So like...like there's just a hole in the ship? So Orth is now wearing a—

AUSTIN: Sure.

JACK: —like one of those—it's not like a proper space suit, because—

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: —he doesn't really need one. But he's wearing like a—

AUSTIN: I mean, yeah, there's oxygen here, but yeah.

JACK: He's wearing like a—oh, well, he's—he knows he's gotta go out through the door again, I guess.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: So he's wearing one of those almost like Prometheus-style single-helmet units?

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And it's gotten very cold inside the ship—is there still snowing on September?

AUSTIN: Yeah. The storm's about to pass, though. Finally.

JACK: Okay. [laughs]

AUSTIN: And you don't see it in the distance—like normally, it's on its last...like on its last days. You can see it out on the sea. In the distance. Um. But it's not there this time. The sun's rising. Uh. And it's not just the sun, of course. It's the sun of September, where the ship is—or not the ship—the actual planet September is getting closer and closer to being swallowed whole by the sun.

JACK: Yeah. Wow, so we gotta go, right? We just gotta...

AUSTIN: You gotta go. You gotta go.

JACK: Fire up the engines. Try and get out of the door again.

AUSTIN: Where's Detachment, I wonder? Do you think it just stays behind? Loaded into some...shitty frame?

JACK: Oh, on the planet?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: I don't think it would want to stick around with AuDy and Discovery.

AUSTIN: No...But this isn't safe either, right?

JACK: Oh. What if we just...I kind of like just that we don't know?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah, what if we don't know? What if we don't know what happened?

JACK: Just Detachment just does something? And we're not sure where it is?

AUSTIN: Yeah. But the important thing to know here is that Rigour and Voice have collaborated. And...the scary thing, now, is they're not leaving—the fact that they're not leaving isn't because they can't.

JACK: No.

AUSTIN: It's because they're not ready to, or—it's not clear. But.

JACK: Hm!

AUSTIN: I think you...I think the Kingdom Come, with AuDy on it, escapes.

[1:45:02]

JACK: Thank you.

AUSTIN: Orth—where do you sit?

JACK: I think Orth is in the pilot seat, at this point. Right? I think Orth, without...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: ...the Divine of Ambition might go into the copilot's chair, but I think Orth is—has got the controls.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think AuDy is really amused by Ambition? Um.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: It has like a really positive effect. To be around.

JACK: For everybody?

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's—yeah.

JACK: It's gotta be pretty—

AUSTIN: It seems to want to be liked.

JACK: Yeah. It's gotta be pretty weird for...I wonder whether or not AuDy thinks, "Yeah, okay, that would be your divine. Okay. Yep, that's the one."

AUSTIN: Yeah. That's the one. I'm trying to think if I should s—if it appears different to AuDy, but I think without actually having it, it wouldn't. All right.

JACK: Right.

AUSTIN: So. At the point at which the Kingdom Come like—blasts back out through the door, it like knocks all of the other Rigour models around, and—I think that they head back into the door. Um. Which closes up ever so slightly. Um. A few extra Rigour models like chase the Kingdom Come out, and actually get locked out. Which Mako's units like quickly do—make quick work of, 'cause they're surprised. And in general, the whole crew just like crushes them. And they kind of...scatter off. Like the—when you blow them up—like they don't explode. It's like they...melt away into the dark. I think that's the end of the interlude. [pause] Uh. Kobus, take a political point. God, I don't—I—again, the crisis point stuff doesn't matter as much as to who—where it goes, but I do wanna keep a record of it. Who do y'all think was like the big crisis point winner of that scene?

JACK: Not Ibex.

AUSTIN: ...No. No.

[ALI laughs]

DRE: [slightly horrified] Womp womp.

AUSTIN: Not Ibex. Not the...clone of Maryland, either.

DRE: Can you give a quick reminder of what the crisis points are supposed to represent?

AUSTIN: Your preparation—they're like galactic readiness.

DRE: Okay. Um. I would say probably either—

AUSTIN: Um. From Mass Effect, the—

DRE: —Mako or Aria? I mean, Aria basically—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: —unlocked the hidden power

AUSTIN: [ruefully] Yeah.

DRE: —within her—within her rigger. And then Mako showed that he has a robot army.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think a bit of his robot army got used up in this, but you—everybody in his crew has a robot. I'm gonna go Aria, because Righteousness is a big deal. Um.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And because, right, having Righteousness is again kind of specifically maybe anti-her political position? Um.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Which is tough.

ALI: It's fine. We'll do fine.

AUSTIN: Uh, and then a wild card point. I think Mako gets a crisis point just for being—for that fucking payoff.

[DRE laughs]

KEITH: Thank you.

AUSTIN: Boom.

KEITH: Heh heh heh heh heh.

AUSTIN: Oh, you're not on the—sorry I gave everybody points. There we go. All right. Final set of scenes. Let's roll d100s again. I could do the thing I did before, but this is way more fun. I like—I like making you all roll.

ART: Lot of 80s.

AUSTIN: Man, lots of 80s.

ART: Jack!

JACK: Oh my gosh!

AUSTIN: Woah, Jack!

KEITH: Holy shit!

ALI: [laughs] Jack.

AUSTIN: Jack, you're cheating! [laughs] Jack rolled a 99. [pause] So Jack.

JACK: Um, what is the...uh, what's the one where it's like...um. Ideological battle.

AUSTIN: A Heated Conversation, I think, or something like that?

SYLVIA: A heat—

JACK: Yeah, that's—

AUSTIN: *An Animated Disagreement. An Animated Disagreement.*

JACK: *An Animated—Disagreement.* Yeah, that's—I would like to have *An Animated Disagreement* with Kobus.

DRE: Oh, dear. Okay.

AUSTIN: No, I believe you're not—

JACK: No.

AUSTIN: *"Everyone plays. Decide with your chosen partner what the matter of the—what is the matter of your disagreement...where—uh, where you're holding the discussion and who else is present."*

JACK: Does the—so...What's the Diasporan embassy on Counterweight? Austin?

AUSTIN: Are you asking me?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Oh. Um. Yeah, there is one. Uh. It's—everybody has a slightly less present f—has [strained] slightly less presence... 'Scuse me. On Counterweight than they used to. But the...the Diaspora still holds its one sector?

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Which? I forget what it was called. But it was that sector that was all sil—flowing silk like cloth. Um. It is in...we name it—we didn't ever name it. Just says the Diaspora dome still.

JACK: No, I don't think so.

AUSTIN: Uh, it's towards like the north of Counterweight. And yeah, it's the one that's like flowing silk cl—banners and...kind of like nice—like very very utopian futurism? You know?

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: It has—it has an...it has that embassy still.

JACK: Okay. So, Orth has arranged a meeting with Kobus at the embassy.

DRE: What are we disagreeing on?

JACK: Um. Oh, well...It's hard, right? Like I—part of me wonders whether or not this is better suited to dinner? But...I think Orth is frustrated that...in his eyes, Grace and the Hands of Grace and the Diaspora aren't pulling their weight in the upcoming preparations.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I—'cause that—well, I don't think it's—Kobus agrees with you. But he⁵ isn't doing anything.

JACK: Right. Totally. And I think that especially—so—so what's interesting is that almost everybody was at the fight except Grace? And I think Orth is pragmatic enough to understand that—

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: —to understand that there is like...Kobus can't just go, "Hey, Grace?"

AUSTIN: So yeah. I think the thing is, it's a—it's *An Animated Disagreement* because it's not like "oh, you're gonna like talk to him over dinner about like how he feels about this." Like you're not here to like—

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Have a conversation, you're here to get him to do a thing. And I don't think the—

JACK: Yeah, totally.

AUSTIN: —disagreement is—sorry. Not him. Them. I forgot this was with Kobus. The thing is that like Kobus agrees with you that Grace should be doing shit?

JACK: Yeah, totally.

AUSTIN: But they—aren't—they aren't doing anything to make that happen.

DRE: Yeah, I think the crux maybe is that Kobus says "I need to deal with Grace's shit and *then* we can help with this." And maybe Orth is saying, "No, no," like, "We have to throw everything at this now, and you can settle your—whatever issues you're having after we beat Rigour?"

AUSTIN: Right. So that's the—that's the disagreement then, is which to prioritize?

JACK: Yeah.

⁵ Kobus uses they/them pronouns.

AUSTIN: Okay. Um. All right, so. *"You and your partner each state your position."* We've done that. Each—*"Everyone else takes part in the audience, real or imaginary."* Is there a real audience here? Uh, I think—I think your bodyguards are probably there, Orth.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Are they—

JACK: Are we—I think we're also—yeah, totally. And I assume that there are some Diaspora peo—I assume that there are sort of like...like diplomatic interns, almost, to an extent?

AUSTIN: ...Yeah.

DRE: Yeah.

JACK: You know, like people who have—people who have—who are at the very early steps of rising up the ranks of Diasporan—

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: —diplomacy.

AUSTIN: That's—

JACK: Who have just found themselves in the...In the—

AUSTIN: That's why this is important. Right? We've talked about the Hands of Grace before as both being like the name of the military group that works for Grace, but also just being like—those are the people who do the daily job of governance?

JACK: Right.

AUSTIN: And this to me is sort of—this feels like—a thing that happened fairly recently is that Paul Ryan gathered together a bunch of interns, and was like, "Hey, maybe I made some mistakes with regards to how extreme I've been about some shit." In the face of Donald Trump's—political rise. And I kind of think that this has a similar vibe, of like, it's Kobus and a bunch of low-level...politicos inside of the Hands of Grace, who—this is why this conversation matters. Is if Orth wins it, then it's not just that you've convince Kobus to do something. It's that the Hands of Grace—you've seeded this sort of idea through the Hands of Grace, too.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Versus...their very real concern that no, they need to handle Grace's shit first. Um. *"The audience conducts the discussion. Audience members, you take turns posing challenges to the positions holders. Both position holders must answer each challenge. You decide who goes or let one of them volunteer. Once both have answered, award one coin to the one you think gave the best answer. You have to choose. If either position holder goes too long, you can cut them off. Hoots and boos optional. Award one coin to their counterpart, or else just ask them*

to kindly wrap it up. They are absolutely not allowed to interrupt or rebut one another. If either position holder interrupts the other or tries to get in a rebuttal when it's not their turn to answer, cut them off at once and award one coin to the counterpart." All right. So let's start with Dre, because you didn't technically get a thing last ti—last turn. Or last *Animated Disagreement*, so. What's your challenge? Or—I guess—wait, no—you're in it.

DRE: Yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: What am I talking about? Sorry.

[ALI laughs]

DRE: I was confused. I was like, "What?"

AUSTIN: Who was in the previous—who was in the previous...thing. Was that—

ALI: It was me and Sylvia.

SYLVIA: It was Ali and me.

AUSTIN: —Aria and Jill? All right, so let's start. Let's start—let's start with Jill.

SYLVIA: I guess start something kinda broad with, "Please explain how your position is best for the most people?"

AUSTIN: Uh, who you asking first?

SYLVIA: Um, I wanna ask...Kobus first.

DRE (as Kobus): Sure. Um. So Rigour is definitely an enormous threat, but at some point before Rigour became this giant, overwhelming force, it, too, was just—

DRE: —*just* in air quotes—

DRE (as Kobus): —a Divine. The way that Grace is now. But Grace is being corrupted by something...different, and alien, and strange that we don't understand. So if we let this go unchecked...I worry that we'll just have another Rigour situation on our hands, that we—that we'll then have another crisis to deal with. And I'd rather stave off and take care of this issue while it's still a solvable problem, instead of pushing it to the side until it becomes too big.

AUSTIN: Orth?

JACK (as Orth): You make a really good point. And, if we do what you're saying, the problem will be solved. I can guarantee that. Grace will no longer be a problem, because she will be dust. Here are some other things that will be dust: every person you have seen, every planet you have ever set foot on. I can understand that you are concerned about...a common cold that might be becoming more serious, and I understand how that

would be more serious. But...you need to be much less worried about the common cold when there is a man outside your door with a gun.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Who do you give the point to?

SYLVIA: Uh, I'm gonna give the point to Orth there.

DRE: [jokingly] Boo!

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: Sorry. I just—

[DRE and AUSTIN laugh]

SYLVIA: —I'm susceptible to fear tactics. I'm very scared!

[Laughter]

SYLVIA: It's spooky.

AUSTIN: That's fair.

DRE: Yeah, no, that was a good—that was a good counterpoint.

AUSTIN: All right. Uh, Aria. Not Aria, but Ali, as one of these audience—

ALI: Right. Right, right.

AUSTIN: —kind of—members. Saying challenges.

ALI: Um. "Please express your—" Mm. Um. Fair. Actually, [laughs] "Please explain how your position best serves the neglected interests of the underprivileged." Um.

JACK: Uh.

ALI: Do I decide who goes first?

AUSTIN: You pick—yeah, you who goes first.

ALI: Uh, I'm gonna go with...Orth to start it.

JACK (as Orth): Kobus? I can understand that like...You're not from here. And...spending any time here, you'll have seen that there is...just an—just an enormous disparity in this city. And on this planet. Between people who have things and are going places, and people who don't and aren't. And, for these last three years, I've been doing everything I can. I've been doing everything if I can. If I see that a company is...is damaging in some way, I shut it down. No second chances. And it might seem like things

haven't helped, but what you're seeing in the streets, these—the protests, the riots. What you're seeing are people...recognizing for the first time that something might be moving in their direction. And trying to do something about that. All of this doesn't mean anything if Rigour comes and destroys everything we've been working for.

JACK: And I think that's it.

DRE: Okay.

DRE (as Kobus): Orth, you've definitely brought a lot of changes to Oricon, but...I find it a little dishonest that you would imply that I don't know what the people want. Because as you've risen in stature, I've voluntarily given up my position and my privilege, so that I can better serve the people. So I can better know what they are. Going through, and what they're dealing with. While you're sitting in your—seventieth floor office, watching riots in the street. I'm in the streets. I'm in Vox. I know what they need better than you do, because I actually talk to them. I don't talk to their bosses, or the people that own them. I talk to *them*.

ALI: I think that goes to Kobus.

AUSTIN: Who's next? Let's see. Um.

ART: What's one more, right?

AUSTIN: Does everybody have a challenge? Yeah, it's one more—does anybody have a challenge they really wanna ask?

KEITH: I've...

AUSTIN: Go for it.

KEITH: I've got one that I really wanna ask.

AUSTIN: Sure.

[2:00:05]

KEITH: Um. Please explain how the other position has merit and is worth real consideration, Kobus.

DRE: Yeah! I mean—Orth is a general. He's served in times of war. He has a lot more military experience than I do. Um. So if we're looking at it bigger picture, I mean, maybe Orth...has the right of it as to what should be, you know, kind of ordered in this kind of triage of issues to deal with.

AUSTIN: Orth?

JACK: The only thing more frightening than enlisting a powerful soldier is enlisting a powerful soldier who also seems to be possessed.

DRE: Wait.

KEITH: I'll go with Orth.

AUSTIN: Okay.

DRE: Is that—are you saying that Orth's argument is good, and that my side is right?

AUSTIN: [laughs] This is—

DRE: Or are you saying that my argument for Orth's side is right?

KEITH: I'm saying that I think Orth did a good job of saying why you are right.

AUSTIN: This is a beautiful—okay. I like it.

DRE: [laughing] So does that go to me or to Orth?

AUSTIN: I think it goes to Orth.

DRE: Okay.

KEITH: To Orth.

AUSTIN: Who gets the coin. Uh, but this is going to wrap back around, probably, for you anyway?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I mean, this is gonna wrap around to a crisis point. Right? No matter what?

JACK: Yeah, I think so.

DRE: Probably, yeah.

AUSTIN: Um. Well, I guess it wouldn't have—if Kobus had llllost—anyway. Um. Yeah, I think the move—so that's two-to-one. The mood in that room—and Kobus, I think, feels this.

JACK: No, I got two.

AUSTIN: That's what I'm saying.

DRE: Yeah.

JACK: Oh.

AUSTIN: The mood in that room turns around from this was a Diasporan room where they all thought, "We have to be handling the Grace situation," to "Hey, we need to be...part of this larger picture thing. We need to be addressing Rigour. Grace will—Grace—we'll have to address Grace later, but—you know, we'll have to address Grace, but later, not now." Um. SO yeah, I think that that's—it's definitely a crisis point, and not a political point?

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: But I don't know...Again, it doesn't really matter. So let's just, I think, toss it into the Orth column here, since Orth initiated the action? Uh. All right. What's the final shot of that scene, like Kobus, how does it—what's Kobus's reaction—what's their reaction to...realizing that the people actually do want to...let Grace be and turn to address the internal—or the external crisis?

DRE: Let's see. Kobus's adjectives are headstrong, principled, and endearing?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Maybe not so much this third one right now. Um.

[AUSTIN laughs]

DRE: What do you think happened to Liberty? 'Cause I have an idea.

JACK: Um. Are you asking Orth, or are you asking us?

DRE: I'm kind of asking the—I'm asking you all, as players.

AUSTIN: Oh, then yeah. I don't know, what's your idea?

DRE: Um. I think I have Liberty contained in—I mean, some kind of device. I mean, I don't know if it's like an orb or a chip or something.

AUSTIN: But like stripped from Detachment's body.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Old body.

DRE: Um. And I think...Kobus grips it tight, and knows what they wanna do with it.

AUSTIN: Huh.

DRE: And that's plug it in to Grace.

AUSTIN: Oh, shit.

JACK: Oh...[laughs]

ALI: [laughing] No!

AUSTIN: That's really good. That's really interesting. Okay. Um. All right, who is next? Our chat is a mess right now.

ALI: Art? Art is next.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Uh, Cass.

ART: I think I wanna—I wanna have that meal. I wanna have that meal with the Chime.

AUSTIN: Okay. Who all's there? *Conversation over Food. "Ask your chosen partner how you two came to be g—eating together. Other players can join in freely if it makes sense for their characters to also be present."* So. Cass?

ART: I imagine that Apostolos, in an attempt to like...This is—this is Cass trying to get everyone together—

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ART: —to talk about what's going to happen. Uh. But, ostensibly, this is about awarding the members of the Chime with honorary...you know, medals and titles and all this like honorary stuff—

AUSTIN: Oh, wow.

ART: —as heroes of the sector.

AUSTIN: So this is like—it's dressed up like a state dinner.

ART: It's dressed up like a state dinner, and Sokrates, and Euanthe, and a bunch of other ministers are probably there? But—

AUSTIN: Right, the other—the other council members of the actual Demarchy leadership...

ART: But they're at one end of the table, and we're at the other.

AUSTIN: Aw. This is really sweet. I like this a lot.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: All right, so it's...Aria, Mako—just one Mako?

KEITH: Uh.

ART: I mean, I sent out an invitation. They—he can send whoever he wants.

KEITH: Yeah, just one Mako.

AUSTIN: Okay. No Larry?

KEITH: Uh. Lazer Ted's there.

SYLVIA: [whispering] Oh, man.

AUSTIN: Poor Larry. Um.

ART: Lazer Ted doesn't get a medal, I just want to disclaim that.

KEITH: Larry was at...Larry was at the door.

ALI: Hm?

AUSTIN: Larry—wait—No no, I'm just saying—

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —yeah, but Larry didn't get to come to dinner?

KEITH: Uh. No.

AUSTIN: I guess Larry's in your head, so.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Sylvia says, "Lazer Ted made his own medal. He printed it." Good.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Um.

SYLVIA: It says "Kinko's" on it.

KEITH: [Lazer Ted voice] Medal works, it's one of my businesses.

AUSTIN: It's one of my—one of my—yeah, he makes medals. He wears medals. Two different businesses, he's a medal model. You've heard of a male model? I'm a medal model.

SYLVIA: Fuck.

KEITH: I'm a male medal model.

ART: Medal model.

AUSTIN: Uh. AuDy is there. AuDy—and Discovery? Is AuDy just Discov—we'll find out! Um. Aria, who are you bringing?

ALI: [sighs] If I ask Jacqui, would she come?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Okay. I mean, she was a member of the Chime, so she should—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: —get a medal too, yeah.

ART: Oh, Orth should probably be there too, huh?

AUSTIN: Yeah, Orth's probably there too. I think probably AuDy and Orth show up together.

KEITH: I wouldn't call Jacqui a *member* of the Chime.

AUSTIN: She is, in the—in... We know that she is, because she counted for "If she died, you wouldn't have gotten that bonus."

ART: But we didn't get that bonus anyway.

AUSTIN: Um. Right, but that's 'cause somebody else died.

ALI: But she's my plus one regardless. Like.

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes.

ALI: Aria has a conversation with Jacqui, and it's like "Hey, they're honoring the Chime. Do you wanna come with?" and she says yes.

AUSTIN: Okay.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Yes, she absolutely says yes. What are you all wearing to this state dinner?

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Let's get the important things right first.

KEITH: I'm wearing teal green pants.

[SYLVIA laughs]

KEITH: Uh, black shoes with white socks, a see-through plastic t shirt, uh, and then an orange blazer.

AUSTIN: This m—

ART: Oh my god. Get out of my empire.

DRE: What is *any of that*?

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Lazer Ted is wearing—a very nice tuxedo? And platinum—a platinum grille. And has his hair done just real respectful-like. Um. And also he's wearing—

KEITH: Lazer Ted's gonna make me look bad!

AUSTIN: —he's also wearing like a pin that is like the five different Apostolosian—deities. Like it's like their five symbol, he's wearing that on his lapel.

KEITH: Oh my god.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Listen. I gotta like—one day this'll all be over. I gotta angle for like another job, another position.

[ALI laughs]

[KEITH laughs]

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Tryin' to become the next Apokine. You know.

[DRE laughs]

KEITH (as Mako): At least—Ted—at least you—

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): 'Cause eventually the Demarchy's gonna see, you need more than just these Apostolosians. You gotta branch out. Diversity. Multiculturalism.

KEITH (as Mako): Diversify. You gotta get a broad portfolio.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): The broadest.

KEITH (as Mako): Ted, can I tell you something?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Yeah.

KEITH (as Mako): Can I te—if you promise, you gotta—you won't be mad at me?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Not at all.

KEITH (as Mako): Okay. I usually count on you to be like a little bit trashier than I am, so when you come up all dressed up like this, it makes me look bad, but I'm glad that you're at least doin' it for an angle.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Oh yeah, I'm doing it for make that money.

KEITH (as Mako): Yeah.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): They get paid a lot, right? Like leadership roles?

KEITH (as Mako): Oh, yeah. They get paid tons. Social services are like really—

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Like that's why they call it a leadership role, 'cause you get that roll. In like stacks and stacks, that are rolled up together into little rolls, you put them in—

KEITH (as Mako): Got a leadership stack!

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Yeah, leadership stacks.

ART: Enough stacks to buy a ship.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): I gotta get a ship.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: All right, what else—

ART: The leader ship.

ALI: Oh—

AUSTIN: Oh—mm. Bad. Bad! Aria, what are you wearing?

ALI: God. Um. I think Aria's wearing a slightly more formal version of the...the like uniform that people are used to seeing in—her in now?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: So it's like a white coat with like gold...details on it, and like a red cape, and like black tights. But I think the thing that's noticeable is that she's wearing her hair down? Um.

AUSTIN: Ooh.

ALI: The thing with Aria is that she—she didn't cut her hair or like redye it or anything, 'cause she didn't wanna like lose that much of herself?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: But she always wears it up. So she's.

AUSTIN: And so tonight she's wearing it down.

ALI: Yes.

AUSTIN: For the first time in—that's interesting. Okay. Um. I think Jacqui is wearing like—a very similar outfit to yours, minus the cape. She's in like her formal Vanguard wear, which isn't a thing she wears. Very often, at all. Like she...she either is like dressed down, in like—in the sense that she's like wearing the right colors, or like bits of that uniform, or she's dressed up super formal? In which case she's like very much like, "I'm asserting my personal identity, separate from the Vanguard?"

ALI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: When she shows up with you, she's like—she's like dressed—she's like ready to go as a rep of the Vanguard. Um. What is Orth wearing?

JACK: Just a suit, I think.

AUSTIN: Just a nice suit.

JACK: Yeah, I think—I think he considered wearing like military regalia, but c—but thought that would be incredibly in poor taste?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Going to the—Apostolos.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Um.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: IS this on Apostolos or is this on Apokine?

ART: Uh, I think this is on Apostolos proper.

AUSTIN: Okay. Um. What's AuDy—what's AuDy's sitch? I know—

JACK: Just—

AUSTIN: —AuDy doesn't wear clothes, but.

JACK: Just the—just the robot body, I guess.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Um. Here's a real question. Is—AuDy is gonna be—receive a medal?

ART: Yes.

AUSTIN: Okay. So like this is a non-person. Is being awarded a medal from—the Demarchy.

ART: I welcome anyone to tell Cass that AuDy is a non-person.

[Everyone says “aw”]

AUSTIN: [moved] That’s really good. That’s really good. What’s Cass wearing?

JACK: [as though in-character] Cass, I’d give you a medal.

[AUSTIN and KEITH laugh]

ART: I think Cass had his⁶ like military stuff laid out, and then—he—someone told him that Orth came in a suit, and he scrapped it?

[Laughter]

ART: And instead he’s just kinda wearing like nice Apostolosian formal wear, but he’s wearing his Chime jacket?

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: Aw.

ART: As like—not—like he’s not like wearing—it’s like almost like—almost like a cape. He’s like...It’s like fastened.

AUSTIN: Right. Um. All right. Is—and then Sokrates—Sokrates is probably similarly—no. I think Sokrates is probably wearing...their...I mean, obviously they have Integrity on. But not like out? But they’re wearing their...like...version of like their formal wear from when they were an Apokine. Um. And it does not have all of the like—the trademark flourishes of Apostolosian culture? Like it’s a much more metropolitan look. Um. Like it looks closer to Orth’s suit than what Apostolosian military formal wear looks like. Euanthe is wearing...traditional, pre-Demarchian Apostolosian wear. Um. Probably the...formal, you know, military uniform that they wore back during the Golden War. Uh, is that everybody who’s here? I think so. Right?

ART: Yeah, there’s probably, you know, random ministers who we don’t care how they’re dressed.

AUSTIN: No. Right.

ART: Or what they look like.

⁶ Cass uses they/them pronouns.

AUSTIN: But they're—I mean, they are probably in this middle zone of like a little bit of metropolitan, you know, cosmopolitan, you know, sector-wide stuff, with a little extra flair of the Apostolosian, because that's what's in vogue right now. So. *“Take turns. The person with the lowest social standing takes the first turn. If this isn't clear, have another player choose who takes the first turn at a whim. On your turn, you can: ask a topical question; engage in actual improvised; pass, saying instead something about the food; or leave the conversation.”* ...Mako probably still has the lowest social standing here, right?

ALI: Mhm.

KEITH: I don't know if that's true! Kobus, maybe?

DRE: Wait.

AUSTIN: Kobus isn't here.

ALI: Kobus isn't here.

DRE: Yeah.

KEITH: Oh, Kobus isn't there? Oh, right. That makes sense.

ALI: This is the Chime.

AUSTIN: Kobus and Jill are not here. This is just the Chime.

KEITH: Yeah.

DRE: Yeah.

KEITH: Uh.

AUSTIN: Yeah...It could be AuDy. Though AuDy is—like a Divine, kind of?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You know?

KEITH: AuDy's a Divine, but I work for like a shadow organization.

AUSTIN: Yeah, but that's—you don't get like—James Bond doesn't have high social standing.

DRE: You're also wearing a plastic t shirt.

AUSTIN: You are a—[laughs] That's true...

KEITH: Listen, that doesn't—just because it's trashy now doesn't mean it's trashy in the far-flung future, galaxies away!

AUSTIN: Cass, this is your home. Is it trashy?

ART: I mean, I think Sylvia makes a pretty good point in the chat.

SYLVIA: Put the nip away!

ART: That you can't see AuDy's nips.

[ALI laughs]

DRE: Hey. Hey.

KEITH: I didn't say you could see the nips.

DRE: A lot of things may have changed from September.

KEITH: There might be like a strip of black.

SYLVIA: There's a time and place. Why ya titty out?

AUSTIN: Mako.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Make a—

KEITH: All right.

AUSTIN: —make a—take a—make a topic question or a likely topic. Remember that the updated version of that is in the Counterweight chat.

KEITH: Yes. Uh.

AUSTIN: You just have to scroll past all of the *horse stuff that you posted!*

[DRE and ALI laugh]

KEITH: Not just me!

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Uh, the—

KEITH: Not just me!

ALI: I hate this show...

AUSTIN: The topical questions are the ones in the book. The likely questions are the ones that are in the chat.

KEITH: Yeah yeah yeah. Okay.

ALI: This show.

[2:15:05]

KEITH: Uh. [laughs] Listen, bloodhorse.com, it's an incredible resource.

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Oh my god.

KEITH: [laughs] Um. Do I have to direct the question, or is anyone free to pick it up?

AUSTIN: I think anyone's free to pick it up!

KEITH: Okay. "I'm feeling expansive. What do you want to know about me?"

AUSTIN: Oh my god. [amused] Anybody can pick that up.

KEITH: Anybody can pick that up.

JACK: Um.

AUSTIN: Who's this coming from. Uh.

JACK: Uh.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I—sorry for Jack, but you're gonna need to do double duty in this scene.

JACK: [laughing] Okay. [seriously] Uh, this is from. Um. This is from AuDy. Um. AuDy asks,

JACK (as AuDy): What do you think happened on September after you left?

KEITH (as Mako): Um. Well I think the big...warp gate closed, and all the people that were inside mostly died, which is bad. And then the rest of the planet started being really not cool 'cause of the storm, so we had to jet. And it sort of just, um. Think it just sorta, you know. Flung itself ever closer into the sun. That's my understanding. Why, is that not—is not that is the case?

JACK (as AuDy): Everything you described happened. Forever. In a snowstorm.

KEITH (as Mako): You're saying it wasn't gr—it wasn't great?

[SYLVIA snorts]

KEITH (Mako): How have you been?

JACK (as AuDy): I saw myself torn apart three times.

KEITH (as Mako): Sorry, buddy.

JACK (as AuDy): Today we will all get a medal.

KEITH (as Mako): ...That's true. Today we'll get a medal.

AUSTIN: Oh! Hoho! Oh. [sighs] Someone else. Please.

ART (as Cass): AuDy, I'm sorry. That that happened. But we had no way of...we had no way of knowing. We had no way of getting to you.

JACK (as AuDy): You did the best you could. Now we have a chance to do it again.

ART (as Cass): I agree wholeheartedly. We have an obligation to ourselves, to the sector...To life as we know it. To stop Rigour again.

JACK(as AuDy): It has become much worse.

ART (as Cass): I...I can't imagine what that means.

[Pause]

ALI (as Aria): ...What did you learn that could help us? What do we do this time?

JACK (as AuDy): We lose.

ALI (as Aria): [laughs] We're not doing that.

JACK (as AuDy): What did I learn that could help you? I—I did not trap myself inside September on a research programme. And as such. I gained no useful information. Other than that which reinforces my belief. That unless we do *something*—that's the end.

ART (as Cass): Did anyone else survive in there?

JACK (as AuDy): Maryland survived for...a while. And then...no longer. Everybody else was either killed or assimilated.

ART (as Cass): Oh no...

KEITH (as Mako): How did you survive?

JACK (as AuDy): Bad luck.

ALI (as Aria): How did you come out?

AUSTIN: I think Orth just says like,

AUSTIN (as Orth): I found them. As soon as I came though, AuDy saw me.

AUSTIN: Jacqui like reaches down a big spoon—or not spoon—I—yeah, probably like a big serving spoon, and like takes a lot more of the squid ink pasta onto her plate.

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): This is real—this is really good. Is this like a... This like a delicacy or something?

AUSTIN: And she starts eating it.

ART (as Cass): It's a family recipe.

KEITH (as Mako): Can you guys see my nipples?

ALI: Oh, my god...

ART: Oh, my god...

AUSTIN: She's like—

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): Yeah.

KEITH (as Mako): I tried to make it so that you couldn't see them.

AUSTIN: She nods.

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): No, they're right there. Ah.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): Yep. That's it. I think so.

KEITH (as Mako): Should I do something or is cool?

ALI (as Aria): It works for you, Mako. You're pulling it off.

KEITH (as Mako): Cool.

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): They're bigger than I thought.

AUSTIN: She says.

ALI: Oh my god!

KEITH (as Mako): They're not—they're not huge!

ALI: [laughing] Oh my god!!

KEITH (as Mako): Did you expect them to be weirdly small, or are you saying that they're weirdly big?

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): You're very small, so I thought...Never mind. It's fine—it's—

KEITH (as Mako): They're just regular! They're just regular.

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): [abruptly] Is there any wine?

ALI (as Aria): Yeah. Yeah, we probably need wine.

ART (as Cass): Of course. I'll see to it.

ART: And Cass stands and walks to the serving room.

JACK: What are the o—what the Apostolos—the other Apostolosian diplomats at the other end of the table doing?

KEITH: Also comparing nipples.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: [laughs] That's not true. They are...There's a s—there is a...not a heated—there's almost like a...[sighs] They're like—what's the word I'm looking for? They're like—being fucking big-shot assholes, who are talking about—in a sort of inflammatory jest—about how much longer until all of Grace's holdings are the Demarchy's—or, no. They don't say the Demarchy's. Are Apos—are Apostolos'. How much longer until the Apokine takes Sigilia, Slate and Vox? After all, there is no Diasporan here.

JACK: Um. Can we address them?

AUSTIN: No. That was just—I'm—yeah, totally. You totally could. But that like—it would be a s—it would be a scene, and you can have that scene. Do you know what I mean? But like—they are having their own conversation? Uh, so it would be interrupting them. You could totally do it.

ART: Cass comes back with like a—an almost comically large carafe of wine. It doesn't look like this was entirely meant for this. It—I don't think Cass entirely knows his way around—that part of the kitchen, and he's just like filled the biggest container he could with this just...

AUSTIN: [laughs] Good. Good.

ART: This autumnal white wine.

AUSTIN: Jack, were you gonna interrupt them?

JACK: Yeah. Um. Have you seen... *There Will Be Blood*?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah, do you know that scene I'm thinking about?

AUSTIN: Not off the top of my head. It's been a little while.

JACK: There's a bit where Daniel Plainview overhears some people at another table talking about him?

AUSTIN: Mm.

JACK: Um. And—and—sort of moseys their way—moseys his way into the conversation. But I think AuDy just stands up and glances over at the Chime and then walks over to the...the the diplomats.

AUSTIN: And says. They're like gonna continue—they're not giving you—they haven't noticed you.

JACK: And says—you are going to die. No, says—points at one, and says—

JACK (as AuDy): You are going to die. You are going to die.

JACK: Your king demands service—or—

JACK (as AuDy): Your emperor demands service. Listen to them.

ART: Oh, ixnay on the emperor...

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Good.

[ALI laughs]

ART: We're doin' something. Here.

AUSTIN: Sokrates stands up, at that. And like—AuDy, you can—you can feel Integrity like ready to spring. From their flesh.

AUSTIN (as Sokrates): There are no emperors in Apostolos anymore. There's no Apostolos anymore besides the planet. There's just the Demarchy. And our people are free to do and say what they will. No machine...no matter how Divine...will order us in any other way. Now go back to your table.

JACK: Um.

ART: Oh, god.

ALI: [laughing] Poor Cass!

JACK: I think. I think—I think what happens is AuDy turns around and starts walking back towards the Chime, and then says loud enough for them to hear—

JACK (as AuDy): Like I said, within September, they either died or became assimilated, and that is all that I have learned.

ART: Okay. Does anyone have a—anyone have a question, or a...something. Something...

KEITH (as Mako): Is there any juice?

AUSTIN: Oh my god.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Lazer Ted is feeling generous. What favor do you ask of him?

KEITH: Uh. [laughs]

ART: Can he print me a printer?

DRE: [laughing] Damn it, Art!

AUSTIN: Ah.

[KEITH laughs]

ALI: God...

DRE: I just made that joke in the chat!

ART: Oh, yeah, Dre said the same thing.

AUSTIN: Good.

ART: Um.

KEITH (as Mako): No, I can't think of a favor that...—Ted kinda works for me, so I can get him to do basically whatever. He's like—

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): That's not true. That's not true. I'm keeping a tally.

KEITH (as Mako): He's kind of addicted to being dared.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Imma invoice you. You're gonna see.

[JACK laughs]

KEITH (as Mako): I pay you! You don't have to invoice me. I already pay you!

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): You pay me a salary. I also get commission.

KEITH (as Mako): That's fine. But that doesn't change the fact that you're addicted to doing dares.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): I love dares.

KEITH (as Mako): He loves dares.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Dare me to do something.

KEITH (as Mako): I dare you to eat the entire plate of food in one bite.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): All right. Wh—I—you can't look at it, though.

KEITH (as Mako): I can't look at it?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): I got this nice tuxedo. You can't make—you got...

KEITH (as Mako): That's part of the dare—

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): I hate—

KEITH (as Mako): —is you can't get your tuxedo dirty!

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Yeah, I *know* I can't get my tuxedo dirty! I look fly. I—

KEITH (as Mako): Yeah, you look fly!

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): I'm gonna have to say no to this—

KEITH (as Mako): You're gonna eat this entire plate of food, one bite, without spilling.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): [quietly] It's not gonna ha—Imma have to say no to this dare.
[trailing off] I—I never s...

AUSTIN: He's very upset.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): I can't get this tuxedo dirty.

ALI (as Aria): Hey—Hey Ted?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Yeah, what's—

ALI (as Aria): Do you s—

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): What's up?

ALI (as Aria): Do you still make music?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Yeah, you know...

AUSTIN: He's like looking at the—he can't even look at the spaghetti.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Yeah, I make music still.

ALI (as Aria): Can you—

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): I made a song the other day. It's pretty good.

ALI (as Aria): Can you s—

KEITH (as Mako): Can you sing it?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): No. I'm not in the mood to sing, Mako!

ALI (as Aria): Ted, c—

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Someone put me in a bad mood, Mako!

KEITH (as Mako): [laughing] I'm sorry.

ALI (as Aria): Ted, calm down. You're among friends. It's fine.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Am I?

KEITH (as Mako): Yeah, it's cool. Yeah!

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): I think some people don't appreciate my friendship.

ALI (as Aria): Mm.

KEITH (as Mako): It's—no, I totally do. You—listen, you don't have to do the dare. You can do the dare later.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Yeah...

KEITH (as Mako): You can put that food in a doggy bag, take it home, eat it all in one bite at home.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Does that still count for this dare though?

KEITH (as Mako): Yeah, it'll still count for the dare.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): All right. Yeah.

[ALI laughs]

KEITH (as Mako): What's the song—what's the song you wrote?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): I'm not—I... You know, it's just like—it's about hope, and like—justice, and also—real good chicken wings.

[ALI laughs]

KEITH (as Mako): That's great.

ALI (as Aria): That sounds—

KEITH (as Mako): You—what's—how's it start?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): It's like...

[ALI keeps laughing]

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): "I got that *good* sauce! That *hot* sauce! That *just* sauce! I'm *just* sauce! I'm *the* sauce! Of *justice*! I'm coming hard! I'm coming hot!" And it just goes like that. You know.

KEITH (as Mako): I do know. I heard him sing it twice. It was really good.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Uh. It's pretty good, though. But I need like a hook on it. 'Cause that's just the verses. I—all I do is verses now. No more—no more hooks. 'Cause I'm tryna get like—I'm tryna make it clear that I'm a real performer, and not just like a hook machine. 'Cause people come to me like "Lazer Ted, I'm here to make money." And like I get it, I'm here to make money too. But like I need to be the star and not the background vocalist. You know, people bring me on their tracks like, "Oh, I have good verses. I need a hook to make sure that I get, you know, put on the radio." And I'm like one, what radio?

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): No one goes on the radio anymore.

[KEITH laughs]

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): So I'm not gonna work with you. Clearly. And then two...Write your own damn hook. You know, that's how I got here.

ALI (as Aria): Hey—hey Ted?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Yeah.

ALI (as Aria): If we survive this, I'll give you a hook. That's a great song.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Oh, word?

ALI (as Aria): Yeah.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): But what if you gave me that hook now, instead?

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): 'Cause then we could put that track out, and then like the things...Like you know if...The thing is, like when we on September, all right? I thought...Like I didn't...The thing is, I—no one like saved me before. Like I got into trouble a lot growin' up. Obviously. You know how I do. And I didn't think you would...But y'all came back for [choked up] me. For Ted. And. Like if we don't make it through this, the th—y'all find some old stuff sometimes. Like this boy here is like eighty thousand years old or whatever. And the thing is.

[KEITH laughs]

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): It would be cool if we could leave behind something. So that...like one day maybe someone could find what we make. And then like listen to it even if we didn't make it. You know. If we didn't make it through it, even if Rigour...it—even if Rigour gets us. We could have a thing. That's bigger than us? So like what if you came by the studio later, Aria. 'Cause I got it in the ship. Like I c—put the—I got the studio.

ALI (as Aria): Yeah, that sounds good. Before I head home, we'll...

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): All right. You brainstorm some stuff. I got some ideas.

KEITH (as Mako): That's beautiful, Ted. What's—what's the oldest song you like? ...Just in terms of like things not being forgotten. What's like the oldest—

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Yeah, I'm thinkin' about songs. Right now. Give me a second. there are a lot of songs, it's the future. And every song exists.

[KEITH laughs]

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): You ever hear...that track..."I can feel it. Comin' in the air tonight."

[ALI laughs]

KEITH (as Mako): No. Is that *dirty*?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Uh. It could be. It *might* could be. If you doin' it right. ...Ba da! Da da! Da da! Da da! Da da!

KEITH (as Mako): That's hot!

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Anyway, this food's real good.

[ALI sighs]

JACK: I think the diplomats are now—the diplomats have been watching for the last—

AUSTIN: Yes. Yup!

[ART laughs]

AUSTIN: I think that was Lazer Ted making an ignorant social or diplomatic blunder.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Do people let him recover gracefully, or do you hold it against him?

[2:30:03]

JACK: Oh.

KEITH: R—gracefully.

JACK: Gracefully. Gracefully.

ALI: Yeah, I think we're all like...

AUSTIN: The most gracefully.

JACK: The most gracefully.

ART: Yeah.

KEITH: I think that g—the gentler nobility is even rooting for Ted at this point.

AUSTIN: Yes. At a certain point. Yes.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: I think we need a little something more, and then we can end this scene.

ALI: Yeah, I...

ART: Yeah, we can't end on Ted.

ALI: I kinda wanna...

ART: But I also don't know how to follow that. Sorry, Ali. Go.

ALI: Yeah, I don't wanna f—like—'cause I kinda wanna pull AuDy aside and...I need you to reassure me about Righteousness. Can you? [laughs] Um.

AUSTIN: mm.

ALI: But.

AUSTIN: Ne—

[JACK laughs with trepidation]

AUSTIN: AuDy could. Discovery could.

ALI: That's so...[laughs] Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um. Yeah.

ALI: Is Discovery still in the frame?

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: AuDy is still Discovery.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Which is—which is—which makes what they said about not being there to do a research program even better. Right?

[ALI laughs]

JACK: [laughing] Yes. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um.

ALI: But I think—I—

AUSTIN: Discov—what—I mean, what Discovery knows is like that shit goes through cycles. There are moments when Righteousness is overaggressive, but Righteousness has been around for sixty thousand years, and has often not been a threat to the unity of the galaxy. You know? Um. And there are other times when it needs to be put in its fucking place.

JACK: Yeah, I think so. I think—I think that that's—I think that's what AuDy conveys to Aria. Um. I think...I think also, with the more recent knowledge of having seen what it did to Ibex. Before the Chime met him? And I think Discovery tries to convey the fear and the power of some of that.

ALI (as Aria): Is that—why you don't have a Candidate?

JACK (as AuDy): Is what why?

ALI (as Aria): What happened to Ibex. Is that what they all do?

JACK (as AuDy): Sometimes...sometimes it ends differently.

[MUSIC - "[EVERYTHING AT LAST MUST COME TO AN END](#)" becomes audible]

JACK (as AuDy): Sometimes it ends...in the opposite way to the way you've seen it happen. Aria, if you are hoping that I can tell you that you're not going to be consumed by this thing? That is a promise I cannot make.

ALI (as Aria): Okay. I'm sorry, it's—it's—good to see you again. We shouldn't talk about this.

JACK (as AuDy): We have medals waiting for us.

ALI (as Aria): [laughs] We do! I'm glad you're here.

JACK (as AuDy): Thank you.

ART: And, coincidentally, this is when...the guard—the former Apostolosian royal guard, now the Demarchy...special service?

AUSTIN: Sure.

ART: Comes out with medals for everyone. Or rather—not for Cass. That would be gauche.

[ALI laughs]

ART: Dictators give themselves medals. And Cass stands, and raises his glass.

[MUSIC - "[EVERYTHING AT LAST MUST COME TO AN END](#)" fades into "[THE LONG WAY AROUND](#)"]

ART (as Cass): To the heroes of the Chime. The saviors of the Golden Branch.

ART: And says that—

ART (as Cass): I hope to see you all soon. I hope to join you side by side in the fight against Rigour. But now I must take my leave.

ART: And they gesture for Sokrates to come with him. And the two leave.

[MUSIC plays to end]