

COUNTER/WEIGHT 2x34 - Reaching Out

(transcribed by Sharlene)

Opening Narration: *Far above September skies, the network that undergrids the common mesh comes alight as the powerful and petty find excuse to put skill to test. Interns collate data sets that mean nothing in the abstract. New corporate protocols are established and old projections revisited. And all across the Golden Branch star sector, confidential people open confidential files.*

Kobus waits on the shores of Vox, Loyalty chittering -- afraid. On Archonic, Alunde Sinclair, OriCon Expeditionary CEO Emeritus, writes two speeches, one for each grave. Rapid Evening agents tend to wounds and limp towards a new dawn. And on far Apostolos, an envoy paces, waiting to deliver a message that they know Apokine Sokrates will not want to hear. The word has gone out. And now there is only the question of whether it is to be believed.

But there is one who already knows that it's all true. And with each word spoken, each curse uttered, each promise exchanged, with every time its name is mentioned, sound itself comes into its tune. Now all it needs is a bridge.

AUSTIN: Hey everybody, welcome to Friends at the Table, an actual play podcast focused on critical world building, smart characterization, and fun interaction between good friends. We are presented by streamfriends.tv and runbutton.net, and we are continuing our game of the Sprawl by Hamish Cameron--again, the Sprawl is available over at Drive Thru RPG, uh, you should go check that out. I also want to say that we now have an official Friends at the Table Twitter account, that's friends_table, @friends_table -- @friendsatthetable would not fit on Twitter because they hate our brand. Um, joining me today: Ali Acampora.

ALI: Hi! Hey. [crosstalk] Ah, you can--

AUSTIN [crosstalk]: Art Tebbel--oh, go ahead.

ART: Hey!...Oh.

ALI: What are we...hey, you can find me at ali_....uh, west.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Good. That's how we're doing it today. Art Tebbel.

ART: Hi! We're doing plugs at the beginning?

AUSTIN: Yeah, 'cause time.

KEITH [crosstalk]: We always do that!

ART [crosstalk]: I'm @a_tebbel.

[ALI giggles]

AUSTIN: Jack de Quidt.

JACK: I'm Jack. notquitereal on Twitter. Next!

AUSTIN: Wait, are you? @ notquitereal on Twitter.

JACK: Ye-yeah.

ALI: He doesn't do the "@''s anymore, we discussed this last time.

[crosstalk]

KEITH: Yeah, yeah, we discussed this last time. Jack dropped the "@''s.

AUSTIN: Keith?

KEITH: Hi, you can find me @KeithJCarberry on Twitter, and you can find the Let's Plays that I do at runbutton.net, or youtube.com/runbutton.

AUSTIN: Great. We're continuing the Sprawl. Our agenda is, as always, to make the Sprawl dirty, hightech, and excessive; to make the big things bigger, the small things smaller; to fill the characters' lives with action, intrigue, and complication; to tangle the characters in the Sprawl, and to play to find out what happens. Uh, I'm not going to go over personal directive stuff, because I'm pretty sure it's all staying the same? Uh, and, well, it's been a minute for us, it has not been as long for our listeners, we have not even had a faction game to split out the last episode from this one. But, do yourselves a favor and look over your personal directives. If I moved any, it's because we don't have a ton of time. Um...where did we leave off? We left off with...AuDy being...led deeper into the woods...by a woman. Did I iden--I must have identified that woman.

KEITH: Mhm.

ALI: Yes.

AUSTIN: By Maryland September. Um, and--

ART: But now I think she's a fake! That's, uh, you just ruined my, my trust [Austin: (sarcastically) Yeah, totally.] in her.

AUSTIN: And the rest of you are in the cafe with Paisley Moon. On campus. Uh, and...he was saying, basically, this place is safe, we gotta buckle down and just wait for this storm to pass. Um, things are kind've...bad out there. Don't go back out there.

KEITH: So what's going on?

AUSTIN: What are you doing? Let's start with...[sighs] let's start with the Paisley Moon group because there's three of you. Sorry, Jack.

KEITH: Also, that one's more suspense-y.

AUSTIN: Yeah, let's come back in on that. I think probably the shot is probably AuDy walking through the woods, quietly, and, like, as the rain, like, hits the canopy, ah--and then, over the sound of the rain hitting the canopy, and the trees above, it's, um...Paisley Moon pouring more coffee. And then we kinda crossfade into the cafe, of him pouring himself another cup. Alright, is everyone--what is the rest of the crew doing while this is happening? Or, like, in general, what are you doing in this Cafe?

ALI: Eugh, we can--we can't stay here, right?

ART: No, we probably can't stay here.

ALI: Like not, not for a few days. Um, is there anything here that we can use to, um, try to strength the signal with Jacqui and Orth?

AUSTIN: Are you asking him that, or you just looking around?

ALI: Um...

AUSTIN: Because no.

ALI: I guess I'll "look around" because then I can roll for it?

AUSTIN: Sure. Then, yes, totally. I love rolling. It's good to roll. Um, that sounds like--

[ALI giggles]

KEITH: We always do it so well!

AUSTIN: --Assess. It sounds like you're trying to scope the place out while he's doing his, like, cafe routine. Give me an Assess which is rolling Edge. [pause to read] Look at that!

KEITH: Nice. You nailed it!

AUSTIN: Ten.

ALI: I did it!

AUSTIN: Um, alright, so...give me a, ask me a couple questions, or hold these--you got three Hold here, you can ask me three questions from the list, or hold onto those Hold as you will.

ALI: Okay, um..."where can I hold the most advantage?"

AUSTIN: Sure....um, I think you're, um, able to put together--he's doing the thing that pros do, which is like...being busy in one part of the room to keep your attention there so that you don't notice--um, you pick up Aria as someone who has performed in little cafes like this when you were just getting your start, is that, there are ways that, that, cafes are set up that are lined tables and chairs, there's just a symmetry to it. Um, because, because, servers require that there be areas set up in such a way so that tips are shared equally. Um, and there's kind of an empty spot, where there should be a table and a chair, uh, and you suspect that something is up in that space. You look a little bit closer, and you can see, uh,

etching in the floor. Revealing that the floor there is fake.

ALI: Oh. Okay. Um, "what potential complication should I be wary of?"

AUSTIN: The storm is going to get worse. Not better. I....eugh, you can hear it in the way the rain is coming down. That this is picking up, it's not...dipping. And, you know him well enough to know that when he said that, that was not a lie. He wasn't gaming you there.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: And remember, you can save that last Hold if you want, I'm not saying "need to", I'm saying you can. [ALI: Right.] Um, that said, it will only be applicable to this room, to this cafe, and whatever's under it. But you can spend it instantly so it's not like, it's not like, say, "no, because you did this other thing, you can't use, you can't spend that Hold right now". You know?

ALI: Okay. Um...I guess I'll save it.

AUSTIN: Okay, and make sure you--

ALI: Unless anyone else...

AUSTIN: --take +1 forward for acting on these answers. So--

ALI: Okay. Unless anyone else has a question?

KEITH: Uh...

ART: No....?

KEITH: No.

ALI: Okay. Um, I wanna see what's under that floor! Um, can I, like, is it, like, tile? Can I try to like move it, or shift it?

AUSTIN: Uh, I think as you approach it, you can see that it, like--it shimmers softly? And that shimmer...it is....not going to be like a physical door you can open. There is something, like, there is something here that is either tied into the mesh,

or is coded to him, and is, like, eh, it's not going to be a thing that you can just reach down and open. Without hacking into it at least.

ART: Is the "him" in that sentence Paisley?

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI [as Aria]: Uh, hey Paisley, do you know what's up with this, uh--

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: I'm staying--ugh.

ALI [as Aria]: --thing underneath my foot?

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: What are you...ugh. Please, don't--that's my work space, I can't--won't you stay here while I work this thing out.

ALI [as Aria]: Ooh! Your workspace?

KEITH [as Mako]: That sounds really safe!

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: It's--it's kind of cramped, it's way more comfortable up here. It's not worth your time. I have some other supplies down there--some rations to wait this thing out. Um, I have, you know, some ammo just in case things go bad.

ALI [as Aria]: What we need to do is get in touch with our partners, so do you know if there's anything down there that could, like, help with that?

KEITH [as Mako] [crosstalk]: Yeah, like a radio thing? Like a good radio thing?

AUSTIN [as Paisley] [crosstalk]: I could try to make a--I could try to make a call out, but that's risky.

ALI [as Aria]: Yeah, we take risks.

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: But this is my space. You take a risk here, you throw my entire operation out the window. And I respect you, and I know that you know I care *deeply* about just about everyone in this room, but I'm not

sure--

Art: That's so mean to Mako.

[laughing]

AUSTIN: (laughing) That's who it's mean to?! Okay--

[more laughing]

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: I'm not sure if I'm ready to take that risk on nothing.

KEITH: Is, is our focus right now--are we trying to contact Jacqui and Orth? Or are we trying to find AuDy?

JACK: Well, it would be a little bit weird if you were trying to find me, because we all just agreed that, like--like, you let me walk off.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Yeah, but like--

JACK: And just immediately were, like, (gasping) "Oh my god, no, where did you go?"

[ALI giggles]

KEITH: I mean, we let you walk off because we wanted to hear Paisley out and we kind of finished.

ART: Ah, maybe this is, ah--I really want to know what the biggest threat is in this situation, but it's probably the storm. And we'll get no new information there.

JACK: Just like...Rigour?

ART: I don't know if he's¹--if this situation is just this room and this place under it,
[JACK: Yeah, yeah, yeah.] I don't think Rigour is the biggest threat in here.

¹ Rigour is it/its.

AUSTIN: Yeah. You would know.

ART: If he was, I think that would be useful information

KEITH [crosstalk]: Hey, I think, I think--

AUSTIN [crosstalk]: Alright. If you--go ahead.

KEITH: I think that knowing the storm is the biggest threat in that it's useful to know there's not anything else...threatening us. [AUSTIN: That's not what that would be.] That is, that is, not threatening us that is more important than...walk the fuck out, big storm.

ALI: I mean, like--I mean we know our other threat is, like, Twelfth is on the system.

AUSTIN: Here's the thing you should maybe do, take a second to go over what threats you know exist here.

KEITH: We've got the...secretary assassin?

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: We've got the angry robot. We've got the--

AUSTIN: Wait, which angry robot specifically?

[ALI giggles]

KEITH: The really big one.

AUSTIN: Okay. Yes.

KEITH: Um...we've got, Twelfth?

ART: The smaller angry robot's on our side!

AUSTIN: For now, yeah.

KEITH: For now.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: I'm not too convinced. (chuckling) He's² been a wild card recently.

[ALI giggles]

ART: He sure did start lying to us with reckless abandon!

KEITH: And he says stuff, like, "you guys are useless!"

[ALI giggles, continuously]

AUSTIN: I think that he speaks from a place that he believes is true at the very least. Okay! Is anyone going--are you going to try to convince Paisley to use it, or are you letting it die at that point?

JACK: Okay, well, hang on a second. I think that it's important to address that, in fiction, whenever you find a room, and a character says "that's mine", and follows it up with "but you can't go in there"....

KEITH: I agree with Jack, that's exactly what I was going to say.

JACK: Like, that means you have to go into the room.

ALI: (laughing) Right.

JACK: Because "you can't go in there" is never a good enough excuse for the protagonists.

AUSTIN: (chucking) No, you're just applying bad fictional logic. Which is how you get your characters in trouble. Which I'm all for! So, how are you trying to convince him to let you go down there? Are you just going for it?

ALI: I am going to attempt to Fast Talk, by convincing him that, um, [AUSTIN laughs] if things--(laughing) why are you laughing at me?! It's a good idea!

JACK: "How about that room, huh? Cool. Sure would love to go there."

² AuDy uses they/them pronouns.

ALI: But--just, like! We're not--

ART: Are you sure it's not the other one? The one I can't find right now?

AUSTIN: Yes. I'm pretty sure what Aria is--she's not threatening violence.

ART: She's not Playing Hardball, right?

AUSTIN: No, she's not Playing Hardball.

ALI: I'm trying to convince someone to do what I want.

AUSTIN: Yeah, she's not threatening violence on him.

ART: Are we sure we don't want to be threatening violence on him?

ALI: (giggling) No!

AUSTIN: No. Let's just keep--

ART: I'm Respect with him, I don't think it would be appropriate--

AUSTIN [crosstalk]: No. Tell me how you're Fast Talking him.

ALI [crosstalk]: He's...I would not threaten violence on Paisley Moon. I really--

AUSTIN: Sorry, I'm not trying--I'm trying to keep us moving, we don't have a lot of time tonight, so I'm just trying to keep us moving.

ALI: Okay. So, um, I think that like...what the argument that she's going to make is, like, what she's trying to do is not so risky as to blow up his whole thing?

AUSTIN: Totally.

ALI: And if there's any risk involved, they would be able to protect him, and, like...

AUSTIN: Alright, totally. Give me a roll.

[ALI laughs nervously] [Pause to read]

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah. An eleven. Ah, he sighs, and like...he goes over to the coffee maker again. Dumps out his current cup. Make a few more, like, hits a few more

switches on it, and holds it under again. makes a new cup. And then he goes--

AUSTIN [as Paisley] [crosstalk]: One second.

KEITH [as Mako] [crosstalk]: Don't you think that's wasteful?

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: Hold on a second, I just need a different cup of coffee before we leave to do this.

AUSTIN: And then he walks over. And it opens up.

ALI [as Aria]: I'm really just trying to call my girlfriend.

AUSTIN: Ah...the floor, like, slides away--

KEITH [as Mako]: Hold on. Are you guys, like, official?

[ALI giggles]

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: Yeah. Good question.

ALI [as Aria]: Sort of? We'll see.

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: Ah, it's one of those things. I see. Kinda playing it by ear?

ALI [as Aria]: Yeah...

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: One of those, like, uh, mission flings? Like, as long as this one is going on, why not? But then, in the long run, who knows? Maybe she'll be redeployed somewhere else.

ALI [as Aria]: Yeah, I don't know.

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: Anyway!

ART: And then the cycle will continue and someone will murder Aria for her.

AUSTIN: (laughing) Jesus Christ. Uh, there's like a little, uh, step, um, a little set of stairs that go down into a dark room, that is lit by, um, a kind of monitor display on the far wall. It's, uh, it's a thin--clearly, a trench that has been dug out underneath

this cafe, and there is, like, duffle bags filled with equipment, and like, um, ranging again from ammunition to rations. There are, um electronics devices. There is a map of the campus there, with all the buildings marked. There's uh...the map of the campus might have more than just the buildings marked, but I would say you'd have to spend hold to get that. Um, and there the computer that's hooked into, uh, it's like a boosted network signal. Um, it's actually set up to like, eavesdrop on other calls? It's like tied into the campus network system, but it also has a broadcast mode. Um, that will let you reach out, or scan any incoming stuff. Currently, the network is basically dead. A couple of students sending messages that are just, like, variations of like, flirting and sexting? Variations of, like, "I can't wait until this storm is over, baby". So what are you doing?

ALI: I'm gonna try to call them, but Mako, is there any--is there anyway to, like, mask where we're coming from? Because technically, we have student IDs, so like--

AUSTIN: I will let Mako do an Aid roll to do that.

ALI: Okay.

KEITH [crosstalk]: I can make an Aid roll.

AUSTIN [crosstalk]: Um, uh. He has the fictional positioning to be able to say, "Yeah, that's the sort of hack I could do. Uh, but that would be an Aid roll.

KEITH: Uh...do you know what my...thing is with you? I think it's one or two, it's two.

ALI: I have plus one with you.

KEITH [crosstalk]: I have plus two--

AUSTIN [crosstalk]: It's the other way, it's, no--

ART [crosstalk]: It not, it's not the same--

AUSTIN: Yeah. Um, Mako you have two with her.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So roll two.

KEITH: Roll 2d6 plus two.

[pause to read]

AUSTIN: Alright, seven, that means you're implicated in whatever--

KEITH: I am implicated.

AUSTIN: --the result is, here.

ALI: Cool.

AUSTIN: So you're trying to....let's think about what move this would be, or if we have to put together a new thing. Um, I think this might be Act Under Fire Synth. Which is when you [ALI: Okay!] race against the clock, act while in danger or act to avoid danger. And you're acting within danger. Um, it's not cool because that's not *the thing*. It's not like you're dodging bullets or keeping your head down, you're just kind of... trying to use this technology in a safe way.

ALI: Okay. [pause to read] And that went fine.

AUSTIN: That went mostly fine. With a plus one, it's a nine. (reading) So you stumble, hesitate, or flinch. The GM will offer you a worse outcome, a hard bargain, or an ugly choice (end reading). Um...you can totally...reach out to them. Um, there's only one condition: either someone else finds out where they are, or someone else finds out where you are. You pick.

ART: The second one! We're leaving!

ALI [crosstalk]: (sighing) But the idea would be to tell the enemy where they are.

JACK [crosstalk]: He's showing us the gun! He's showing us the gun!

ALI: It's...! Um...

AUSTIN: I'm showing you two guns. You have to pick which one you want to use.

ALI: (laughing) Yeah, there are two guns here. I totally just promised Paisley that it

would be fine. But, yeah. They'll know where--ah!

JACK: Ah!

ALI: Ah! Because I have no idea where they are, I just feel like...

AUSTIN: Mhm!

ALI: ...ideally they would be moving from that place? But what if they're already, like, on the Kingdom Come. Fuck.

ART: It would be real bad if that's where they are.

[laughing]

ALI: (laughing) If that's where they are. But then, like, being in a hole in a library is like, a great...I don't know. I look like I'm just, like, a student, so they'll know that I sent that from this cafe.

AUSTIN: Okay. One second, I need to advance a clock then.

ALI: Meh...!

ART [crosstalk]: What the fuck.

JACK [crosstalk]: He would've done that anyway.

AUSTIN: I'll show you!

ALI: Yeah!

AUSTIN: It's this one, uh, and what you need to know is that this isn't a thing that just happened, it's a thing that will happen momentarily. In sometime in the near future.

ALI [crosstalk]: Wait, I wasn't looking--

ART [crosstalk]: I didn't see a clock go up.

AUSTIN: There you go.

ALI: It moved?

ART: Down here?

ALI: Oh, that's fine.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Eh.

JACK [crosstalk]: The clock labeled "Paisley Moon"?

AUSTIN [crosstalk]: It's a one man clock. The Paisley Moon clock just advanced. No big deal.

ALI: Eugh. That's fine.

AUSTIN [crosstalk]: That's totally normal.

ART [crosstalk]: Why is it in a bracket? So it doesn't--

AUSTIN: That's just so that I know that you can't see it. That's all. All of them on my GM layer are currently in brackets. Ah, okay.

JACK: Ugh, man...

ALI: I'll interrupt. This'll blow over, it's fine.

AUSTIN: It'll be *totally* fine! Alright, so, you send out a signal, um. What do you do? What does the signal look like? Are you just tracking them, or are you trying to send a message? And if so, what's the message you send?

ALI: Um...I'm trying to send....well, would we be able to have a conversation?

AUSTIN: Um, s--.....I'm trying to think of how exactly you worded this to begin with. What was the, what was the conditions that you were sending?

ALI: I said that I wanted to call them, but call them in such a way that made it look like it was a student.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I'll allow it, that's fine, you can totally call them.

JACK: Okay.

AUSTIN: Um...so, you...it takes a few seconds. Like, it's clearing through a couple of things. And it adjusts for the weather, and it bounces a signal off of a cloud nearby so that it can reach, ah, deep, ah...kind of distant from the city actually. Um...and, it takes a second, but then, a kind of staticy image of Jacqui appears in front of you.

ALI [as Aria]: Hey!

AUSTIN [as Jacqui] [crosstalk]: Jesus Christ, Aria--

ALI [as Aria] [crosstalk]: How are you guys--

AUSTIN [as Jacqui]: How are you, are you okay?

ALI [as Aria]: Yeah, I'm fine. How are you guys?

AUSTIN [as Jacqui]: We're fine, we're fine. Everything's going... (sighing) pretty well.

AUSTIN: Behind her, the door opens. And AuDy and Maryland September walk into the room.

[JACK & ALI laugh]

KEITH: Aw, they're together--Jack, Jack, you did it! You found everybody!

ALI: Okay!

JACK: Accidentally!

KEITH: Jack went and solved the problems!

ART: Our team didn't do well at all!

AUSTIN: (laughing) I think Jacqui and Orth solved the problem. Originally.

ALI: (laughing) Of course they did!

JACK: And then I walk into it.

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's good.

[JACK laughs]

ALI: I'm so happy.

AUSTIN [as Jacqui]: Where are you both?

ALI [as Aria]: We're still on campus.

AUSTIN [as Jacqui]: What are you doing there?

ALI [as Aria]: Ah, we had to look into things and this is where we're looking into stuff.

AUSTIN [as Jacqui]: That place is *dangerous*.

ALI [as Aria]: (sighing) Yeah...yeah, yeah, whatever. Um--

KEITH [as Mako]: We started to leave but then we started to get a real "will they, won't they" vibe.

AUSTIN [as Jacqui]: Is, is Mako--is that Mako? Is Mako there with you?

ALI [as Aria]: Mako is here.

AUSTIN: She's like, ducking as if to look past--that's not how this works on this display, it's just she's used to weird VR displays, I guess?

ALI: It's precious and I love her.

ALI [as Aria]: A-huh, Mako and Cass are here. We're good...we're good for now.

AUSTIN [as Jacqui]: Okay. Well stick tight, and, uh, hope I see you soon.

ALI [as Aria]: Yeah. Same.

AUSTIN [as Jacqui]: Alright....uh, this, this is awkward--

ALI [as Aria] [crosstalk]: I don't know what's left--

ART [crosstalk]: Wait, do we find out where they are? We don't know where they are.

ALI: They're in that building in the woods! We knew where AuDy was going.

ART: So we knew about--

AUSTIN: Yes.

ART: Oh, okay.

ALI: Yeah.

ART: I'm forgetting what we know and what we know.

[soft laughing]

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: They're in an empty square of the woods that none of us saw.

AUSTIN: A-huh.

ALI: We knew that's where AuDy was headed. I guess--

AUSTIN: AuDy, do you do anything before this call hangs up?

JACK: Um...I think I...is this the first time I've seen Orth and Jacqui?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Okay, so I guess I walk up behind Jacqui and, to the camera, from which I can hear Aria's voice, say:

JACK [as AuDy]: I am relieved that I have rescued Orth and Jacqui.

[loud laughing]

AUSTIN: Good!

ALI: I gave him a really, uh, firm thumbs up, and say:

ALI [as Aria]: Good job, AuDy! See you soon.

AUSTIN: Orth, like, shakes his head, and puts a hand on AuDy's shoulder -- the bad shoulder, the one that's missing the arm still. Ah, and the call hangs up. Let's go to AuDy and Co. Orth and Jacqui are--so this room, is, like--so here's the thing. You approach this room--this building. It is much smaller than it appears on the map. It's effectively this little log cabin. Um, and inside there is a nice rug, and a fire burning. Uh, inside of a fireplace -- (laughing) it's not just a fire, it's not just a loose fire.

JACK: A Synecdoche New York fire.

AUSTIN: Exactly. And, uh, Orth and Jacqui are, like, sipping tea? She's probably not sipping tea. She's probably having a Hot Toddy. Like, they're just kind of relaxing. I think Orth probably is sketching something on a notepad. Like, making notes and making little diagrams. Um, he, like, goes back to that after touching you on the shoulder, AuDy.

JACK [as AuDy] [crosstalk]: So how did you end up here?

AUSTIN [as Maryland] [crosstalk]: So. This is home.

AUSTIN: --says Maryland--oh. Are you, like, asking me, or them, or--

JACK: Yeah. Yeah, I'm asking Orth and Jacqui.

AUSTIN [as Orth]: Well...(sighing) we went to the library to do some research, which is where we figured out where Maryland was -- um, Miss September, sorry -- and, uh, we...came under attack from a unit from the Tzadik. We fought them off -- we killed a couple -- and, uh, moved as quickly as possible to this location. Fairly sure that they are not aware of--

AUSTIN: Maryland shakes her head.

AUSTIN [as Maryland]: There's *no way* they're aware of it. Don't worry.

AUSTIN: --she says, and as Art points out--

AUSTIN [as Maryland]: And it's Dr. September

[soft laughing]

JACK [as AuDy]: Does Dr. September know the reason for our visit?

AUSTIN [as Orth]: We didn't really...brief her. Would you like to do the honors, AuDy?

JACK [as AuDy]: Not at all. But I will try. Dr. September...we have been hired.....

JACK: And then I think AuDy just sort of...walks away? Into the corner of the room, and thinks about this for a second.

JACK [as AuDy]: Hang on.

Austin: She--so, I should describe her, for a bit. She has, like, kind of sullen eyes. She's in her...uh, I would say, probably her mid forties. Um...high cheekbones, thin from age. You can see what used to be muscle, um, wearing down. Uh, a slight--a slight curve to her back. Um, dark hair--sorry, not dark hair anymore. Actually, her hair has greyed, kind of shoulder length, and, uh, dark, dark brown eyes. She's wearing, um...I guess, did I describe her last time, in terms of what she was wearing? [KEITH: No.] She's, she's dressed very practically. Which, which is weird for the future? It's not like...it's not, like, hunting clothes, but it's weird futuristic hunting clothes, right? It's, like, fairly form fitting, but also kind of like, clearly warm, uh....weird new fabric stuff. Um, that, that the water was just like, rolling off of outside out in the rain, um, and I think it's a lot of dark oranges, tans, khakis, uh, in color. As you turn to walk away from her, you catch her eye. Like, really looking at you. And she says:

AUSTIN [as Maryland]: Ibex.

JACK [as AuDy]: Correct.

AUSTIN [as Maryland] [crosstalk]: You're his friend.

JACK [as AuDy] [crosstalk]: I represent--

AUSTIN [as Maryland]: You're the two. You're the two he talked about.

JACK [as AuDy]: I prefer to think of it as business partner.

AUSTIN [as Maryland]: Hm. He'd be disappointed to hear you say that.

JACK [as AuDy]: Are you aware that the situation has worsened?

AUSTIN [as Maryland]: What situation?

JACK [as AuDy]: Every situation.

AUSTIN [as Maryland]: There's a lot of situations. One second.

AUSTIN: And she heads into her kitchen. Um, and reaches into a refrigerator, and pulls out a few vegetables, and puts them out on a cutting board and begins to prepare something.

JACK [as AuDy]: The Divine Rigour is on the planet.

AUSTIN [as Maryland]: The Divine Rigour is a myth.

JACK [as AuDy]: I can guarantee that that is not the case.

AUSTIN [as Maryland]: We've studied the texts, we've looked at reports. There may have been a few...incredibly deadly machines. But the thing that people call "Rigour" never existed.

JACK [as AuDy]: Are you ready to study a new text? It's me. I'm here. Rigour exists.

AUSTIN [as Maryland]: I'll study you. I'd like to see it. But let me finish this salad first. It's been a long day.

JACK [as AuDy]: Secondly. Ibex has--

JACK: --and I think AuDy is choosing their words very carefully here--

JACK [as AuDy]: --been compromised by the Divine Righteousness. And has recognized the extent to which he has been compromised.

AUSTIN [as Maryland]: Believe it or not, that's an *improvement*. If he's recognized it.

JACK [as AuDy]: He has asked that we evacuate you from September. Immediately.

AUSTIN [as Maryland]: (laughing) I'm not going anywhere. This is my home.

JACK [as AuDy]: Well, what are we supposed to do about that?

AUSTIN [as Maryland]: Are you talking to yourself now? Or--

JACK: No, I'm talking to her.

AUSTIN: No, no, that's what she says.

JACK: (laughing) Oh!

AUSTIN: She's preparing, uh, a little salad.

AUSTIN [as Maryland]: (sighing) Jacqui, Orth, what do you like?

AUSTIN: And the two of them, like, stumble over, maybe a little too giddily, and begin chirping about what their favorite vegetables are?

[soft laughter]

ALI: This is the best.

JACK: Uh, so I guess I'm going to go to the door of the cabin and look out into the woods.

AUSTIN: You look out into the woods and, for a moment, the rain is as hard as it's ever been, and then it begins to let up. And then, the sun is out. Back in the cafe,

you see that too. Let's go back to the cafe briefly. What are you doing?

ART: We got to go, right? Everything we need is in the woods.

JACK: I could -- and I'm saying this as Jack -- I could really use a little help now.

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: Don't go.

AUSTIN: --says Paisley.

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: This storm ain't over. [crosstalk] This is not--

KEITH [as Mako] [crosstalk]: Yeah, but we gotta go.

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: --even a respite. This planet is funny. Trust me, don't go.

[ALI sighs] [ART "half giggles"]

ART: Cass gives like, that kind of "half giggle", or half-chuckle.

AUSTIN: (laughing) No, "giggle" is the right word.

ALI: Hee-hee-hee!

AUSTIN: Yeah!

[laughter, loud from ALI]

AUSTIN: Oh, Cass.

ART [as Cass]: The God of Storms has been the patron of my house since before we left Earth. I'm not going to die in a rainstorm on some inconsequential rock.

AUSTIN: (laughing) Good.

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: (sighing)...Cass. You know, I've seen you work. And you're damn good at showing off when you need to. But sometimes, I wish you'd learn a little patience. But fine. The door's right there, I'm not gonna

stop you. But don't count on me to come save you either.

AUSTIN: And he sips his coffee.

ART: Ah...so I've had--I have one Hold.

AUSTIN: Yep.

ART: I have one--well, my only Hold, from I Love It When A Plan.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: Ah...and I, I was going to use this for a very dramatic moment. Do you think I should, do you think I should, do you think I should keep it? How dangerous is this storm?

AUSTIN: I'm going to read--it's very dangerous. I--I've made that super clear.

[ALI giggles]

ART: Right, right, I believe you.

AUSTIN: Like, I--I want to be clear that that's not a trick. But I want to read the move real quick, because I want to see what happens to Mako and Aria if you use it.

KEITH: Do I have, don't I have a piece of-- I know I have a lot of intel. Do I have a piece of gear?

ART: I also have a Gear Hold, but I don't know if there's gear that we're going to get that's going to be like, okay--

KEITH: We're on September! Gotta be a weather car somewhere.

AUSTIN: Ah, here's the thing that I would say, is--it's not even up to you, it's up to AuDy. And it sounds like maybe AuDy has said yes. You appear in a scene where you're needed right now. If you wanted that to happen, it could happen.

ART: No, that's not what I--that's not what I want. Uh, should I just say what I

want? I meant to, like, talk to you about it in between games.

AUSTIN: Yeah, what do you want?

ART: Uh, so this used to be an Apostolosian holy world.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: Uh, and I've got a pretty powerful piece of broadcasting technology. What are the chances there's a ancient Apostolosan mech buried under the crust of this planet?

JACK: Oh my God.

AUSTIN: Not high.

ART: Awh!

[ALI giggles]

JACK: (laughing) No! Austin. Austin, never.

AUSTIN: Only because I already know it's buried under the planet. So, actually...eugh.

ALI: Oh, boy.

AUSTIN: Pretty high. It's just--you saying that makes me retcon a thing into a much cooler thing. Um, so yeah, that could totally exist. Um--

JACK: That was such a quick pivot that now I'm immediately suspicious of it.

AUSTIN: Oh, no, it's pretty cool. It's cooler than the thing I thought of before. In, like, my prep.

KEITH: This is another, this is another, ah, zombie-pirates moment.

AUSTIN: Yes. Well, except that, like--imagine I already had that city planned out, and it wasn't a ghost city, it was just a cool city? And now, "oh shit, this is way cooler actually".

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: So, yeah, this could totally exist possibly. I don't know that this is the moment to spend that? But maybe it is.

ART: Alright. Then can we cash in our Gears for a rain car?

[soft laughing]

AUSTIN: Yes. If you want to.

ART: Or a future umbrella?

[giggling]

ALI: (giggling) Can we go with the car? Can we get the Jeep or whatever.

KEITH: Oh, you don't want to stroll?

ALI: The campus Jeep.

AUSTIN: Driving in a rainstorm is not super safe either, you guys.

ART: Wait, we still have to drive--

[crosstalk]

AUSTIN: But I'll give you a bonus on a roll. Do you know what I mean? There'd be, like, a plus one.

JACK: Is there, like--does September get storms like this, or similar to this, fairly frequently?

AUSTIN: Yes. We've talked about that before, that normally, it this sort of storm that hits and then it passes. But the thing that's different about this is that there's supposed to be this intro storm, and then another storm off on the coast.

JACK: What is--

AUSTIN: But it is --I wanna be clear about this -- it's too early for that storm to be

over at this point. According to what the weatherman said, anyway.

ALI: Do we need to leave?

AUSTIN: I don't know.

ALI: Is....I would like to have that conversation right now.

KEITH: Jack did ask for our help.

ALI: Okay. Okay, alright, yeah.

JACK: Well, I mean, you know--

ALI: If the help is "convince her to leave with us", that can also happen after the storm.

JACK: Also, I don't see how I can fail the situation. It's me, it's AuDy, and it's Jacqui.

[laughing]

AUSTIN: Wait--

JACK: We only have--

ALI: Wait.

AUSTIN: You said, wait, which one are--are you Orth again? Did we switch characters?

JACK: I was thinking about Orth's ineptitude. It's me, it's Orth, it's Jacqui. We'll be fine, we'll be fine.

KEITH: Oh, okay, but for real though--we've got this storm, it's a dangerous storm, like, is...do we feel like there's something dangerous about waiting it out? [AUSTIN: Mako--] I guess, like, it felt more urgent when we didn't know where Maryland, Orth, or Jacqui were, and now we know where all of them are.

ALI: Yeah, and they--

AUSTIN: Ah, you know it's more dangerous now because of what Aria did. Which was give away your location.

ALI: Right. But--

KEITH: But what I, what I think we should do then is go to a different location. Don't go to a close by location. Wait out the storm. And then go to Jack--we can hang out in the dining hall, I'm sure that there's a fryolator?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Outside you hear birds chirping.

KEITH: Birds?! Birds, oh, it's definitely cool now, we can go outside!

ALI: Oh no, that seems like a lie.

AUSTIN: Also, like, the sound of people.

KEITH: Oh, that sounds wrong. I'm going to take a peek outside.

JACK: Oh no. No, no, people are going to come out and then they're going to get killed. Listen, this is the second time we've had a bad storm on Friends at the Table, and we're going to screw it up again!

[ALI & AUSTIN giggle]

KEITH [crosstalk]: And this time, we're not even on a boat.

ART [crosstalk]: Well, I wasn't there for that one, so this is my turn to screw up a storm!

ALI [second crosstalk]: No, you were there!

JACK [crosstalk]: (laughing) No, dude, you were super were.

AUSTIN [crosstalk]: Wait, no--there were multiple storms. [end crosstalk] You were there for two different bad storms. Wait, no, sorry, you were there from when the bad storm turned--you were there at the beginning, when it was just a bad storm in the woods, and then you were there at the end when the bad storm hit the city and

killed all those people.

ART: Oh, right.

KEITH: I think I should look out the window.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: There are people, like, milling about outside.

JACK: Oh, this is really bad.

KEITH: Are they real people?

AUSTIN: Sure.

ALI: Hmm...

KEITH: Are they flesh people?

AUSTIN: Mako...you, like, recognize a few of these people.

KEITH: Oh, okay.

[a pause]

ALI: Hm.

KEITH: Does, so--

JACK: So, this is not--

ALI: No, that's....not.

KEITH: Oh, this is a wrong thing. [ALI: Oh, is it?] I'm going to Assess.

AUSTIN: Okay, give me a roll.

JACK: No, no, no, the people are real people. My concern is that Austin's just going to murder them all. Again.

KEITH: Assess is...Edge?

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: Ooh, Edge is actually--I might not want to roll Edge.

AUSTIN: You said...I mean, yeah, fine, you don't have to, but--

ART: You can let me Assess, I get a, I get, um--oh, okay.

[pause to read]

KEITH: Partial.

AUSTIN: Okay, so you get--what is your, what is your question?

KEITH: Um. Let me just pull up the list--

JACK: Ask something about how to warn these people.

ART: (sighing) That's not a question on the list.

KEITH: "What do I notice despite an effort to conceal it?"

AUSTIN: Hm. I think that you notice...this isn't an effort to conceal, so I'm kind of....hm. The thing I want to give you, there's no effort being made to conceal it. Um....you recognize that it's....I wanna figure out how to answer this the right way.

KEITH: Or maybe this can be "what do I notice despite an effort not being obvious?".

AUSTIN: "Not being obvious", yeah, I understand. There's a lot there, to unpack.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: You notice that what's outside is totally real. In so far as things on September are totally real, which is to say that, in a place where the Strati--I mean, where the Mesh is so powerful, that it's often indistinguishable. What's outside counts as much as anything else. You know that it's not dangerous in the way that storms are dangerous anymore. It's not dangerous in, like, the "I'm going

to get caught up in a flood and drown" way. But it is dangerous in other ways. It's...you look outside and really want to go to your favorite place on campus. And that's--and you realize that's a feeling you just had, and that's not a feeling you've had in years, and that's scary to you.

KEITH: So, well, now I'm mad at Paisley.

KEITH [as Mako]: What the fuck, wait--Paisley?!

[laughing]

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: What?

KEITH [as Mako]: "Don't go out, the storm's so bad!" It's like, this is a whole different thing, you weirdo!

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: *What* are you *talking* about?

KEITH [as Mako]: Look at the--well, look at it!

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: I don't trust that shit! Stay in here!

KEITH [as Mako]: Yeah, that's what I'm saying, but that's not what a *storm* is! You said the *storm's* bad, this is clearly a thing that's bad that's *different* from "the storm's bad"!

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: Yeah, well, my intel...my intel said the storms here were very bad, find a location, secure it, build out a bunker, stay here until the storm passes, carry out with my mission. That's what I told you

KEITH [as Mako]: What in your intel is telling you that this is also not to be trusted?

AUSTIN [as Paisley]: This is--eugh. Mako, I'm a professional. I told you what my intel said. That was a professional *courtesy*. The reason I'm so good at my job is that when I get intel from people I *trust*, I trust it.

JACK: He didn't know what Rigour was!

AUSTIN: That's not what his job is!

[laughing]

JACK: So his intel is good about everything so far.

KEITH: Did he tell us what he was doing here, or did we not--

AUSTIN: No.

JACK: No.

ALI: No, he's here for the Minerva twins.

AUSTIN: You know that as the player because you've listened to the podcast, but--

ALI: No, he told us that.

AUSTIN: Oh, did he say the Minerva twins to you?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Oh, that's fine. That still isn't his mission, specifically.

JACK [crossroad]: We don't know what his mission is.

AUSTIN [crosstalk]: For those of you who listened to our last episode, his, his, his mission is to bring this place back under the heel of the majority of OriCon, right? Like, "oh, this place slipped out of control". It used to be that we thought we owned this place, OriCon Expeditionary, and now that it's Minerva Strategic, Minerva Strategic is just, like, "hey, go fucking, go bring those fucking fools to leash".

ALI: Mako, do you have any more Holds?

AUSTIN: You do, Aria.

KEITH: Um...I have two...I have two or three Intel.

AUSTIN: Or did you spend yours, Aria? Um...

KEITH [crosstalk]: So, if you have a question, you can use your roll.

ART [crosstalk]: I know the only person who hasn't Assessed yet -- [end crosstalk] but I do get Assess bonuses in precisely this situation. Sure. Can I make the roll?

AUSTIN: Sure, totally. [pause to read] Uh, that's a nine. Successful.

ART: Alright, I get--I get a bonus Hold [AUSTIN: You get a bonus Hold.] +1.

AUSTIN: Nice. Oh, an additional +1 on acting? Or an additional +1 Hold?

ART: Oh, no, it's not even that, it's +1 Hold if I miss. It's not what I thought it was. The +1 hold...it's not.

AUSTIN: Hmm. I see.

ART: Well, whoops.

KEITH: Oh, I see. You can fail and still ask a question?

AUSTIN: That's useful.

ART: Yeah.

KEITH: Yeah! That is useful.

ART: It just isn't what I thought it was right now.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: Uh, "what's my best way in, way out, way past?"

JACK: Oh, good question.

AUSTIN: That's a good question. Um, you're specifically looking for a way out, here? A way past?

ART: Yeah, "a way past" I think is my specific--

AUSTIN: The safest way is to wait out this storm. [ALI laughs] I--I'm not done. I'll give you more here.

ART: What's our best...?

AUSTIN: Uh...yeah, that is the best way past. Is to wait. The best way past a high tide is to wait for it to be low tide. Um, that's the best way past if you don't have a boat. The second thing would be to move with incredible focus through whatever that thing is out there. The third thing is to move alone. You know that you could probably get out in a way the other two couldn't. That's your best way past, is to spend that, that Plan.

KEITH: Is this, like, the pool of souls in Hercules where he swims through and he gets real old?

AUSTIN: No. It is not that.

KEITH: Okay. Okay.

KEITH [as Mako]: I'm gonna go. We've got to go.

ART [as Cass]: Oh--okay?

AUSTIN: Mako--

ART [as Cass]: I was going to say that we should, we should really assess how...how much AuDy needs our help.

ALI [as Aria]: We should just stay!

AUSTIN: Mako steps out the door.

[JACK laughs]

KEITH: Yeah, I fucking put on my jet, my jetboard--

AUSTIN: You do. Wait, what are you wearing right now, Mako?

JACK: Oh, dear.

KEITH: We're going to go with...I have a, a... jean shorts.

ART: Oh my God.

[laughing]

KEITH: A yellow teeshirt.

AUSTIN: A-huh.

KEITH: A yellow teeshirt, and then a pink and grey flannel with one sleeve rolled up, and the other just ripped off.

AUSTIN: You didn't just say pink and grey.

KEITH: I did.

AUSTIN: That's really good! When you step outside, the sounds of cicadas chirping in the distance, the sun is bright and the sky. Lots of people you remember from your years here, kind of lazing about this lawn in front of this, um--what is called when a street ends in a circle, again? A cul-de-sac?

KEITH: Cul-de-sac?

ART: Cul-de-sac.

AUSTIN: A cul-de-sac. Yeah. And this, this is kinda a vast cul-de-sac that is kind of this whole area. And you're not wearing jean shorts anymore, Mako. You're wearing a kind of, like, pastel-pink, salmon and grey school uniform. It says it right there on your blazer, it says "House Rosemoon", which is the dormitory that you're apart of when you were here years ago. Um--

JACK: Great, Mako.

AUSTIN: And there, across the--the lawn, is one of your, one of your friends, that you haven't thought about in a long time. Uh, Tower. Tower Chalet. He's a large, bronze dude, with, like, really floofy hair, that, like, if he kept it together, would be really nice hair. But he's like, too much of a mess to deal with it? [KEITH: Mhm.] And he waves you over, and he's like:

AUSTIN [as Tower]: Dude, I have two slurpees! (whispering) Come get a slurpee!

KEITH [as Mako]: What, two slurpees? That's never happened before!

AUSTIN [as Tower]: I snuck it out of the residence, uh, of the student center.

KEITH [as Mako]: You stole it, you stole a slurpee?!

AUSTIN [as Tower]: I didn't steal it, I had a second ticket--I got a second ticket, I called in a couple of favors. I got a second slurpee ticket.

KEITH [as Mako]: We're only supposed to use one ticket at a time.

JACK: Is this just Cool AD?

AUSTIN: (laughing) This is Cool AD, yes. This is just..ugh, God, if only.

AUSTIN [as Tower]: I figure, like--listen. I know we have that big test tomorrow. But I think we just chill out today--we both already know what we need to know--

KEITH [as Mako]: Wait.

AUSTIN [as Tower]: --we'll go and relax.

KEITH [as Mako]: Whoa, whoa. I don't have a test tomorrow.

[ALI giggles]

AUSTIN [as Tower]: Oh, man, you're already trippin'!

KEITH [as Mako] [crosstalk]: No! I haven't even had a slurpee!

AUSTIN [as Tower] [crosstalk]: What have you been up to, Mako? [end crosstalk] Ah, I think you've had a couple slurpees!

KEITH [as Mako]: I haven't had a single slurpee, I'm fine. I am sober as a bird.

[ALI giggles]

AUSTIN [as Tower]: You sober as a bird. Come with me.

JACK: That's not an expression!

KEITH [as Mako]: No, no, no, no, no, I have to go do a thing.

AUSTIN [as Tower]: (sighing) Where you going?

KEITH [as Mako]: I, uh--over to the woods.

AUSTIN [as Tower]: (laughing) Oh, you want to go do slurpees in the woods?

KEITH [as Mako]: Yeah, I'm going to go to a slurpee in the woods. Just, I--I just, gotta go, uh, relax a little bit. I'll see you later?

AUSTIN [as Tower]: Oh, alright, man. I understand. I'll see you later.

KEITH [as Mako]: Right, yeah. See ya.

AUSTIN: As you go through the rest of the campus, like, there is, ah....there's something niggling at the back of your head.

KEITH: A-huh.

AUSTIN: Which is, like, ugh, you know that you don't have a test tomorrow!

KEITH: I don't have a test tomorrow, for sure.

AUSTIN: But you also suddenly super remember studying for that test tomorrow.

KEITH: What's it on?

AUSTIN: Um, it's on the...let's see. What time of year is it? It's on...um, uh, OriCon history. [KEITH: Okay.] It's on, like, the Great Peoples' Rebellion. The, like, third Great Peoples' Rebellion. Um, it's, like, history, so, like, you kind of hate it because that's, like, bit memorization, and that's not why you like it, you like, you kinda like all the characters you read about in history? Like, "oh, that was a cool thing that happened" but like, the specifics are kinda shitty and boring. But you've definitely done a good job at, like, remembering some key names and places.

KEITH: The only class that I hated, that I was ever really good at, was Applied Holograms.

AUSTIN: Uh, Applied Holograms is pretty good. Um, and, and I'm sure you wish the

midterm was in that tomorrow instead of, instead of Cultural History, but there we are. Um, I think you need to make an Act Out of Fire to move through this place.

KEITH: Oh, boy.

AUSTIN: Because, because you're just trying to keep your cool!

KEITH: Just trying to keep my cool.

[pause to read]

AUSTIN: That's a five.

KEITH: Oh, boy!

AUSTIN: Mako, you really have this test tomorrow, and you realize that it'd be cool to hang out and have slurpees in the woods, but really, you should go back to your dorm room and get some last minute studying in.

MAKO: Dorm room?

AUSTIN: It's in, uh, House Rosemoon.

MAKO: House Rosemoon...

AUSTIN: Here it is on the west side of campus.

MAKO: Of course it's in House Rosemoon, and I go there all the time because that's where I live.

AUSTIN: Totally. Four houses at September. September Institute. House Rosemoon is, like, for the best of the best in terms of, like, pure Strati....talent. You're kind of tested for that as soon as you arrive, and, uh, it's kind of this gift and a curse in a sense? Like, oh, the campus is yours. You're the one for who the security guards leave a light on, you're the one who's able to show up to class late and not get in trouble. But also when you test poorly, the entire infrastructure comes down on you, because, everything is such high expectations.

KEITH: Yeah. It's like Harry Potter.

AUSTIN: There are three other houses. Yes, exactly. Well, sort of--Harry Potter is obviously an influence here, there are four houses. The other houses are a little bit different, though. Um, there is, uh, House--

KEITH: There's the nerd house, the evil house, and then the total dork house.

AUSTIN: The dork house, no. There's also, ah, House Whitestar, which is this tiny house here. It doesn't even say the word "House" there because I couldn't fit it on the tiny little rock there. That is a place for non-OriCon people to go. So it's people from the Diaspora, people from Apostolos, um, and, and, people from beyond the Golden sector, including OriCon people that are not from this part of OriCon. Uh, and a few other people. They--it can also be a place where you can kind of be sorted into if, if your specific talents lean diplomatic. It's where diplomats and other political figures go, ah, either, either in their early years or eventually are moved there so they can begin to build relationships and network with people from other cultures. Um, that said, there is this kind of shitty stereotypes of them being solitary geniuses, because that's how it happens, like, "oh, you're that one dude in our class from the Diaspora, you must be a weird genius, like, fuck off, we don't want to deal with you".

On the other end of things, there's House Goldslate, which is people that are not Strati that attend the September Institute who are from September. Um, surprise, there's not a lot of positive connotation with that. It's sort of, like, your very own townies here on campus. And, there's, like, resentment in both ways for that. And then there's House Blueworld--or, or actually, it's EarthHome Presents: House Blueworld. Which is where Strati who have specific, um, kind of media focused proclivities go, um, to kind of hone their Strati powers to either be artists, or creators, or performers, or other sorts of -- it's one of those things that's funny, because everyone thinks that House Rosemoon -- or maybe this is the joke--that House Rosemoon is supposed to be where all of the most important, like covert ops and spies come out of, but really the people that do the real work of OriCon are the people that come out of House Blueworld--

JACK: Also, hang on, I just want to double check--

AUSTIN: Yep.

JACK: Essentially Rigour owns EarthHome? At this point, right?

AUSTIN: Mh. At this point. But not when Mako was here, years ago. Not the last time he saw Tower.

JACK: Alright. But still, the house where all the spies are coming out of--

AUSTIN: Sure.

JACK: --at the moment--

AUSTIN: Sure.

JACK: Okay.

AUSTIN: So you end up going to check back into your, uh, dorm room. You just slide your card in, and it works, and that's the poster that you have on your wall?

KEITH: Uh....shit, uh. It's, uh, it's a big, black poster with a picture of really shiny purple sunglasses on it.

AUSTIN: Oh my God, Jesus fucking Christ. Perfect. A subway sized poster, just, like, massive--

KEITH: And it's still--it's still, like a pretty big, uh--the sunglasses are pretty big, but it looks small compared to the size of a poster.

AUSTIN: Awh, good. AuDy, are you--are you doing anything before we go on to what the rest of these folks in the cafe are doing?

JACK: Um, I want, um--I'd like to try and roll Liberty and Discovery. Which is--

AUSTIN: Okay, um. Can you remind us what that roll was?

JACK: Okay, when I scan the Liberty and Discovery databank to research a person, place, object, or service, ask one of the questions from the Research move, and roll Synth. If I get 10+, I get two Intel and I chose from two from the 7 to 9 list. If I roll a 7 to 9, I either get my answer immediately, and get information I can really

use, and get Intel, or I get a little something extra. Take an additional question from the Research list.

AUSTIN: Sounds good.

JACK: So. We've talked in the past about this databank being the opposite of Lem King's archive knowledge?

AUSTIN [crosstalk]: Yes, yes. In that Lem King--right.

JACK [crosstalk]: In, like, what it holds.

AUSTIN: Right. Lem King has, like, the details of, like, the beauty of everyday life in, like, Pre-Erasure society. Um, down to like, "oh, this is the sentence structure", or "I know a poem about that". Um, whereas, you know, Liberty and Discovery knows the demographic data about what things used to be like.

JACK: I'm looking up the data banks that have been installed in the cameras and the microphones on the Liberty and Discovery unit when it was working at Liberty and Discovery.

AUSTIN: Sure. In the Golden Branch sector?

JACK: In Ibex's office.

AUSTIN: Sure. But it was in the near past--

JACK: No, no, we're not talking about, like--then again, instead of accessing the databank, I'm specifically accessing the [AUSTIN: Okay.], essentially, a weird sort of memory. Okay, here we go.

AUSTIN: So roll Synth.

[pause to read]

JACK: Oh my God!

AUSTIN: AuDy rolled a three.

[ALI hisses]

KEITH: Alright, that's not--

AUSTIN: Let's decide what to do here. Let's go over to clocks, let me peek at clocks real quick here.

[ALI laughs nervously]

KEITH: Ughhhhh!

AUSTIN: Ask me the question you wanted to ask.

JACK: Okay then, let me double check...

AUSTIN: Cause that will help me decide what the response here is. I haven't moved anything on clocks yet, I just moved you over there.

JACK: Okay, I'm going to be honest here, rather than mitigate the damage.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: The question I was going to ask was "what is the relationship between Ibex and Maryland?"

AUSTIN: I think you know that at this point, don't you? Was that not clear?

JACK: Right, but I was going to use that as the....as the vector for accessing...oh wait, yeah, no, this actually works really well, I was going to use that as the vector for Ibex talking to Liberty and Discovery about Maryland.

AUSTIN: I see, to get information from him that you could then kind of leverage on her.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um--

JACK: Or kind of, or kind of, like, Disney movie style -- this is what this person thinks of you. This is the importance this person holds in you. But since I've rolled

it, I realize I've actually delivered you something very dangerous there. So.

AUSTIN: No, I think that that's--I think that the answer you get is something that would've always been. I think that, so--here's the thing that happens. I think that you dial into--you're like, reaching for it, um, and, and, you're digging through your data banks, and it's like, oh this is actually not on my deep data banks, because this is not from that long ago. Or if it's in there, that's--that's not the way to get access to this information. The access to that information is, like, a thing, you know, it's like the difference between say, oh, I have my old back ups in a different room, I'm going to go back in there, grab it, plug it into my USB drive, wait for it to be recognized. You know, that's going to take two minutes. Instead of doing that, it's, it's right here on my hard drive. I'll just access that.

Except your hard drive is not here, it's on another planet in this system. In the Golden Branch star sector. so you just reach out, like, absentmindedly, through the clouds. Back to Liberty and Discovery HQ. And someone follows you. Someone sees where you're reaching.

[end theme music]