

Gathering Information 04: Antagonists at the Table

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Introduction

Ali: Hello, and welcome to Gathering Information, a podcast about setting the table for Friends at the Table. My name is Alicia Acampora. This is the July 2023 episode. I think it is important to say at the top that we are recording this on July 14 2023, and as of this second, [laughs] this day, this week probably, a decision has not been made about the ultimatum presented in PALISADE number-I-forget: title-I-also-forget. [Keith laughs] "It always looks like that"? "It always looks like this"? [laughs quietly] It always something. Friendsatthetable.net.

Jack: What did we— you named this episode, Ali.

Keith: Yeah, I haven't heard that episode.

Ali: "PALISADE 18: How It Always Looks Pt. 1." [laughs quietly]

Jack: Yes. Although, the actual ultimatum itself is presumably going to appear in the next arc, which we haven't named and we don't know the number of.

Ali: Uh huh. We have—

Keith: Well, yeah. Well, it's gonna be 20, right?

Ali: The downtime will be 20 and 21.

Keith: Yeah. Yeah.

Ali: And then the episodes will be 22 through 26.

Keith: Right.

Ali: I am joined today by Keith J. Carberry and Jack de Quidt to talk—

Keith: Hi.

Ali: This is the first episode that I don't have, like, a funny— I don't have a funny theme.

Jack: What do you mean a funny theme? Because we did just go on a road trip to join the New England Perus [sic]. [Keith and Ali laugh]

Ali: We did, but okay, so, like, the episode before this, I was like, “Oh, I'm gonna talk to Dre and Janine about character playlists,” but I was actually talking to them about the, like, budding relationship between Thisbe and, uh, not Phrygian, Figure. [laughs quietly] And...

Keith: Austin has poisoned the whole show with that.

Ali: [laughs] It's true. The whole well is...

Keith: No one had an issue with this until Austin messed it up, like, 12 times in a couple months.

Ali: Nobody else realized there was a double F, and now we're all sick.

Keith: I realized it, but it wasn't something that I was gonna bring up.

Ali: Right.

Keith: But hey, isn't it funny that there's two F's?

Ali: Right. Right, and then the episode before that, I think, was...I forget what the funny

theme was, but I've always had, like, a...

Keith: Well, I was in 1, and it was switching...it was on, like, switching playbooks but staying with the same character when we changed games.

Ali: Right, yeah, uh huh.

Keith: That was the funny part?

Ali: That was, quote, unquote, "building characters" or something.

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: But today, we're just here to talk about... [laughs quietly] tension, I suppose.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: Mm-hmm.

Keith: Ooogh.

Ali: Hi.

Jack: And on some level, I feel a little bit like I have been...like on one of those reality TV shows where it's like, "You thought that you— now you're gonna have to talk to him face to face!" and then Keith comes out. [all laugh]

Keith: Well, it's the—

Jack: From behind the curtains.

Keith's Characters [0:03:20]

Keith: The sort of way that the sci-fi seasons move is that I'm seemingly not allowed to have Jack not be my personal enemy. [Jack laughs]

Ali: Oh my god. Is that true?

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: That can't be right.

Keith: Well, I'm thinking of just this season and last season.

Ali: Okay, yeah.

Keith: Not really the other ones.

Ali: Mako and Audy got along fine.

Keith: Yes, yeah.

Ali: Even though...I feel like if we were more developed actual players when we were doing COUNTER/Weight... [laughs] COUNTER/Weight ruled, but I think that, like, if we had had, like, a Mako/Audy arc, we would've had the, like, "Don't you think it's fucked up that I'm..."

Keith: God?

Ali: "I'm, like, mind controlling robots—"

Jack: [crosstalk] Oh, robots left and right.

Ali: "And it's something I choose not to do to you."

Keith: Oh, yeah, sure.

Ali: Like, that could've been... [laughs quietly]

Keith: I thought it was gonna be the other way around where it was that Audy was gonna be the fucked up one because they were a god.

Ali: Oh, sure.

Jack: Oh, yeah, that's true.

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: And then, in Twilight Mirage, we didn't hang out a ton.

Keith: No, almost not at all.

Jack: No, but I do think we would've been great friends, because in Twilight Mirage, I played a body-swapping assassin, and you played, like, a vlogger?

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: A space vlogger, and I think that—

Ali: Oh, yeah.

Jack: That there would've been lots of fun there, you know, in a sense of—

Keith: Gig is the only character that I've ever played that was effectively likable.

Jack: That's not true.

Keith: It is true. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Who—

Keith: Who else have I played that didn't annoy literally the entire rest of the show?

Ali: Wow.

Jack: Uh, Fero [**Keith:** Nope!] is angry.

Keith: Yep.

Ali: Yeah, Fero's not it. [laughs]

Keith: Fero's not it. Mako's not it.

Ali: Mako could be it.

Keith: No. Nope.

Ali: Mako was very lovable.

Jack: Leap is a delight. I, Jack, love—

Ali: Oh, yeah.

Jack: I mean, I love all these characters, but Leap is a true delight.

Keith: Can I say the thing about Leap, or should I not say the thing about Leap?

Ali: Don't...you could say you're having thoughts about Leap.

Keith: Okay, sure.

Ali: Say whatever you feel comfortable saying.

Keith: I have been actively trying to play Leap this whole season [Ali laughs] and trying to figure out how to stop playing Phrygian.

Jack: What do you mean actively trying to play— oh, are...you are saying goodbye?

Keith: Since before the season started, I knew that what I wanted to do was not play Phrygian at all. I never wanted to play Phrygian this season, but I knew that I didn't actually want that to be what the show was.

Jack: You were moving with your head and your heart in different directions.

Keith: Right. So, headwise, I knew that I had to start the season as Phrygian; heartwise, wanted to do it as Leap; and now, I'm like, how do we fit— how do we get Leap into the game and get Phrygian out of it?

Jack: That's really interesting.

Ali: Is there still, like...a cog in the machine that's, like, making it difficult to be Phrygian

because—

Keith: Oh, it's so hard to be Phrygian.

Ali: [laughs] Are you still struggling with that because, in your heart of hearts—

Keith: Oh, extremely, yeah. Yeah.

Jack: This is so interesting, because— so, I have been— it's been really interesting listening to this season, the ground team, kind of as a listener for the first time listening to Friends at the Table. It's very long. It's very good. Those are what I think about Friends at the Table. But I think you've been playing Phrygian fantastically, which isn't to say that—

Keith: Oh, I've been doing a great job. [all laugh]

Jack: I don't feel a tension from you in play.

Keith: Yeah, yeah. That's good.

Jack: So it is very interesting to me that you say that you're having trouble with Phrygian. What is sort of...where is the friction, the Phrygian friction?

Keith: Phrygian is, like, super...I have to, like, really think about everything that Phrygian does, and so there's a ton of effort just to, like, be in character as Phrygian and to, like, make sort of true and interesting Branched-slash-Phrygian choices. And that makes it hard to play the way that I like to play, which is quick and reactive to things.

Jack: Mm.

Ali: Mm.

Keith: And it also sort of is like— Phrygian's sort of like *The Addams Family* but without the humor.

Jack: I will need a little more about that.

Keith: Okay. [Ali laughs] *The Addams Family*...like, the bit of *The Addams Family* is, like, everything bad is good, everything good is bad. Like, they love each other, but they show that through, like, violence and being scary and being creepy and weird, and they hate, like, normal stuff. Anything that feels normal they hate and are, like, disgusted by. That is, like, the really quick and dirty way of explaining how to play the Branched, is like, they're not bound by our interpretations of reality and society, so anything can be anything.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Keith: And the way that that expresses itself usually is, like, interpreting things differently than I would as another character; being intentional about, like, the things that they find happy or sad or scary or stressful or relaxing; and, like, coming at things from a sort of oblique angle. And it takes a lot of thinking to, like, do that stuff and not come across as corny or stale or repetitive.

Jack: Right. Huh.

Keith: And I just want to spend more time playing a character that's, you know, that is, like, quick [Ali laughs] and not having to think about everything that I say, because when— other characters, you know, for however similar or different they are from me, besides Phrygian, like, you can kind of get into the mode. You buy into their beliefs. You make yourself feel right about how you believe about things, and then you can just, like, stay in character without having to— or I can. I can just stay in character without having to really think about it. All I have to do is, like, believe the things that they believe and react the way that they would react. But everything that Phrygian believes is, like, alien, you know, in kind of an intentional way, so it's hard. You can't just internalize it. Like, that's sort of the point of them, I think, is that they exist in an un-internalizable way.

Ali: So, for you, like, it's not about...it's not about, like, not having the Phrygian muscle developed, because if it was like, "Oh, I don't feel comfortable with this character yet," things like that.

Keith: Well, I think part of the problem is if I had the Phrygian muscle developed it

would make Phrygian a worse character.

Ali: Right. So, to you, the consideration that you have to take with all of Phrygian's decisions or characterizations is part of the character and not something that can be, like...

Keith: Right.

Ali: It's not like, "Oh, you know, I've played Phrygian for 20 hours, and that's why..." or like, "Now I've played Phrygian for 60 hrs," or...

Keith: Yeah, yeah.

Ali: You know, I'm level 40 in Phrygian. [all laugh]

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: I can— yeah.

Keith: And the flip side of it is that the combat of the playbook is, like, a riot. Like, it's hilarious to one-shot a five tier ship.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Keith: Like, that's really funny. That is like a level of, you know, of sort of...of strength and, like, battle competency that we don't see a lot in Friends at the Table, and that's kind of fun. I mean, it's very fun. It's very fun to just be like, "I'm going to blow up this ship," and I just— all I have to do is, like, make sure I've got the roll right, and as long as this roll goes through, the ship is gone. [Ali laughs] That's it. Ship's gone.

Authority and Stargrave [0:11:58]

Ali: Fair. Jack, as the ship, how are you feeling? [laughs quietly]

Keith: Yeah, as the ship.

Jack: I mean, the...it's interesting, right? Being able to take down the ship...a lot of stuff

started snapping together for me when that ship went down, because that mission went very badly for the Authority. You managed to get a bunch of spies. You took, like, large-scale violent action in a way that was interesting, and it also revealed that there is a degree of miscommunication and— I don't want to say infighting, but the left hand doesn't necessarily know what the right hand is doing in the Authority.

Ali: Mm.

Jack: You know, Tenn Alpenglow showing up in the ship to get Kenneth Marian Colver back after he had been imprisoned beneath the Isle of the Broken Key, potentially by the BIS, potentially by another arm of the Authority, [**Keith:** Mm.] was really fascinating to me, and this idea that, like, we have these kind of two mirrored things going on. We have the crew of the *Blue Channel* in constant argument and conversation about their own role within a larger organization, and then, at the same time, we are seeing that the Authority is also bickering, acting out of line, not necessarily acting in other elements of the Authority's best interests. And while, you know, I definitely didn't have the idea—and we can talk more about this. While I didn't have the idea that the Stargrave was going to make such a violent ultimatum, I was going into that recording thinking, "In what ways can we reflect the fractures within the Authority and, at the same time, use those to exploit the fractures within the Cause?"

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Keith: This is a question I have, because that episode only just came out this morning, right?

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Keith: So I haven't listened to it, and it's only the first half of it anyway, so I don't even know if it's in there. Is this something that, like, would upset the rest of the Authority?

Jack: Yes, absolutely.

Keith: To learn that this person has got, like, finger on the trigger of a 23 system wide destruction button?

Jack: Yeah, 100%.

Keith: Okay.

Jack: Uh, more than 23. If she pulls the trigger— or, I don't know how she detonates it. We'll have to figure that out.

Keith: I thought Austin said 23, or maybe you in your thing said 23.

Jack: No, it's worse than that.

Keith: Okay. [Ali laughs quietly]

Jack: She will destroy the Palisade system.

Keith: Right.

Jack: She will destroy the system called the Twilight Mirage. I imagine that the Principality has a different name for that kind of area of space. And then the combustors will destroy the 23 nearest systems in the available firebreak. So, because of how the combustors work, it's destroying 25 systems if it fires.

Keith: Okay, 25. Okay. I forgot— I heard— I just remembered the 23.

Jack: The 23, yeah. I, uh...and we can talk a bit later about how that ultimatum was kind of structured, but yes, the Stargrave is, on some level...I think, like a lot of people, I am anti-nuclear, [laughs] anti the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and in putting the Stargrave into the show, I knew from the off that having a woman who can unilaterally fire essentially a nuclear bomb is going to have political ramifications for her own team as well as for the other team, and— “the other team.” [laughs quietly] I mean the Cause. Hexagon. The thing that became really interesting to me was, well, what if something starts happening to the Stargrave? What if the pressures of the war start getting to her? What if there is a character flaw or a...what if the Stargrave—

So, the Stargrave works out of Tintagel, which is in the Brecheliant Forest in the south, and I knew going into it that Tintagel is in the middle of a swamp. It is very, very

hot there. It is— there's mosquitoes everywhere. There are, you know, Kesh, like— what are those boats with big fans on the bottom? Like, buzzing around and spraying insect repellent on themselves. Inside the castle in Tintagel, the wallpaper is peeling off the walls. And the first thing I knew about the Stargrave that I decided was that they were going to collect vintage cameras and had brought with them a collection of vintage cameras packed in, like, straw. And so being like, okay, we've got a bunch of pieces in place here.

This is someone who is, like, a Principality diehard, collects cameras, is like, "I'm going to this appointment on a distant planet where the stakes are extremely high," and they get themselves stuck in this swamp where it's hot all the time and the smell of mold and mildew, and suddenly they start thinking to themselves, "Oh god. Maybe I need to push the button." [Ali laughs] And so, separating just the anxiety and the fear and the ideation of her own death and the deaths of the people around her just building up in her head. She has gotten so in her own head about being the only person who can fire a nuclear weapon. So, the short answer to your question is yes. Kesh and the rest of the Authority is panicking about this, and in fact, in the ultimatum, you know, we hear from one of the spies that the BIS boss—who is a man called Connadine, but he wouldn't give that name out in interrogation—actually went to try and stay with the Stargrave to talk her down, to be like, "All right, okay, I have to arrive in a helicopter. We gotta try and figure this out," but it didn't work.

Keith: Yeah. On the one hand, it's funny, because, like, in the first faction game where you all are talking about the Stargrave, it's like, you know, it sort of registers as like a Chekov's gun thing, like okay, this is very plausibly some big thing that'll end up happening. And the way— I can't remember if it was in that game or in a different one that, uh...

Jack: You hear that she has a practice detonator made, [**Keith:** Right.] and she is— she has, like, a dummy detonator.

Keith: Practices pressing the— right, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jack: And she practices pushing the button.

Keith: Yeah, so the dummy detonator thing. I heard that and immediately was like, “This person is big trouble. This person is insane.” [Ali laughs] Like, that is such, like...you know, I can picture this kind of person, someone who has an enormous responsibility and thinks what they’re doing is taking that responsibility very seriously, but actually what they’re doing is totally losing it.

Jack: Yeah. Definitely. [Keith laughs] And on some level, I think we can all identify with being given a big responsibility that you are absolutely not prepared to do.

Keith: Right.

Jack: And it’s important to me that the—

Keith: And it’s reasonable to prepare— for someone to be prepared to do this.

Jack: Yes, yes. You shouldn’t have a Stargrave, is the thing.

Keith: Right.

Ali: Mm-hmm. [laughs]

Jack: We have fucked up from the start, you know? We have fucked up from the concept of there being a weapon that can destroy billions of people. That is already— [chuckles] I don’t think any of us— I don’t think anybody listens to Friends at the Table and go, “I think Friends at the Table thinks the stellar combustor is cool.”

Keith: Right. [Ali and Jack laugh] I mean, maybe, you know, maybe a couple trillion.

Jack: Yeah, it’s not good when you fire a stellar combustor. The second thing, the second mistake that they made was they gave it to one person. They put this authority on somebody’s shoulders, and the first thing that Austin said when we sort of decided on the idea of a Stargrave before we started making the season was I said something like, “Has a Stargrave ever detonated the weapon?” and Austin said, “Of course they have. The Principality is huge, is immense, and they are capable and willing to commit

atrocities across it. The stellar combustors run by a Stargrave have gone off before, and they will go off again.” And much like when you heard the dummy detonator and thought, “Uh oh! Shit!”

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: I heard Austin say that and thought, “Uh oh! [Keith: Yeah.] Hang on, I've got an idea for what's gonna happen here.” [Jack and Ali laugh]

Keith: So, the— so, I sort of have this read on this character and go, like, there's no way that this isn't showing back up in a big way. The twist is that it happens, you know, what I'm going to, with no evidence, call a third of the way through the season.

Jack: Yes! I know!

Keith: This has really felt like an episode 40 twist, not an episode 18 twist.

Jack: Yeah, to me too!

Keith: And that's what was, like— and it's like, oh my god, she lost one ship, and she's gonna blow up the world and 100 other worlds?

Ali: [laughs quietly] But that's—

Keith: Wow! That is a monumental— I mean, you know...

Blue Channel's Discussion [0:21:12]

Ali: Well, like, it's...I'm curious about this, because the, like, big play around this was yours, Keith.

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: So like, when you were looking at what we could do with the, quote, unquote, “spy points,” which again, for listeners, in that last arc, we captured all those spies.

Jack: [chuckles] Spy points.

Ali: And then were able to sort of cash them in for different bonuses.

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: Some of those bonuses were, you know, a thing for the *Blue Channel*. Some of those bonuses were get rid of grip for Violet Cove. And our plan was to dedicate everything we had to furthering the grip on the Kesh pillars that were the most sweaty at that moment, I guess.

Keith: Right. Yeah.

Ali: Bring everything up to three, and when you were—

Keith: Because that top pillar is, like, it's the biggest. It's the most powerful.

Ali: Right.

Keith: And it's the only one that had taken any damage, and so...

Ali: But—

Keith: Oh, go ahead.

Ali: When you were looking at that, were you thinking, like, "Oh, one of these is the Elcessor, and the other thing is the trains." Was that part of your calculus at all when—?

Keith: Yes, it totally was, and I can, if you bear with me, I can get you a thing from the book.

Ali: [laughs] Take your time.

Jack: I heard the unedited version of this as well, which I don't say in the sense of, like, "Ah, we had to cut a bunch of stuff, because everybody was fighting each other!" But when we say there was a lot of discussion about—

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: I don't know how much of that edit goes through, Ali, but y'all really try and figure this thing out on the episode. [Ali laughs]

Keith: Yes, yeah.

Ali: There was—

Keith: And that was the second thing— so, this whole arc was kind of fraught in that way.

Jack: Wait.

Keith: It wasn't— not like interpersonally fraught, but there was a lot of, like, "Should we even go on this mission? Should we do this other mission?"

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Keith: "How should we handle the mission? How do we end it? Now that we decided to not end it, how do we...what do we do with these points now that we have them?" There was kind of more discussion about this than all other things that we've done combined.

Jack: Yeah. I do want to ask about that edit, Ali. What did that look like on your end?

Ali: Um, it actually wasn't too bad, because what it ended up being is, like, we had a pretty thorough discussion about it, and then we had, like, an in-character discussion about it, and then we had another discussion after that, where there was some miscommunication about the in-character stuff, and then it was just like 40 minutes [laughs quietly] of more talking about it, because there were other arguments to be had. A lot of that was, like, it just came down to the gritty of, like, "Well, if we don't do this mission, then what do we do?" and then, like, Austin—

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: Me and Austin spoke about this a little bit in the last Gathering Info too, but like, for him to just do the GM thing of being like, "Well, here's how I'm gonna synthesize most people's desires into something that will, like, both be interesting and will generate, like,

a game and also, you know, speak to some of these in-character and out-of-character desires.” It just became easier to be like, “Okay, let’s get to the first conversation and then the in-character stuff, and then I can just lose that whole back half.”

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: Which was like, arguably the messier, like, the less interesting part [laughs] of our decision and became void once we were like, “Oh, we have the solution now.” So it’s not like I was trying to hide, like, a heated argument or whatever. It just wasn’t interesting radio and was all irrelevant.

Jack: Yeah. The amount of stuff that— Friends at the Table is fun to make almost all the time, [Ali laughs] and when we cut stuff we are— yeah, I don’t want to suggest that we are cutting us coming to blows at any point, but yeah, it is regularly just not good radio, like you say, Ali.

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: It’s us going, “Well, hold on. What if we…” you know.

Keith: But it’s fine, because it almost never even happens. Like I said, this is, what, the fourth arc this season?

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Keith: It’s really the only discussion of, like, “What do we do? How do we do it?” that we’ve had.

Ali: Right. And I think it’s because this has sort of… it’s really snowballed into a thing of like, “Should we even do the mission?”

Keith: Right.

Jack: Yeah!

Ali: And I think we were all sort of like, the thought of disobeying orders became such a shiny object that we all sort of leaned that way. [laughs]

Keith: Right.

Ali: But then, but then, Ali, there was a little bit of “Maybe we should stop disobeying so many orders,” [Ali laughs] and—

Jack: It’s so funny. This dynamic is so funny.

Keith: Because this is really—

Jack: Brnine has been killing it this season. [Ali laughs]

Keith: The cards on the table thing is, like, me as an out of player character, right, wanted to do the other thing.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Keith: And then I was like, “Well, now that we’re here, let’s finish it. Let’s go all the way.” And I couldn’t quite figure out why people didn’t want to go all the way, but we ended up, I think, in a good spot.

Ali: Yeah, I...and this is repeating a thing that I said to Austin, but I think that, like, I’m glad that we have a table, and I’m glad that one of the opinions expressed in that big discussion that we had was just, like, “I want to roll more dice.”

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: [laughs] And I think that that was probably the right choice, because like, in the Janine perspective and I think some of my perspective of being, like, it’s not that I don’t want to do that, but the thought of this team just having a bunch of spies and going and getting a bunch of spies [Keith laughs] and then just having them hang out, there’s like, the points don’t click, right? And it was sort of hard to get from A to B mentally, and I think we, Jack [laughs] sort of smartly pressed on that wound in the latest faction game in being like, “You guys just have a bunch of spies out?” Like, of course this is a huge

vulnerability, and in fact used that as the way to tap the *Blue Channel* for the first time.

Jack: Yeah, yeah.

Keith: Oh, I didn't realize the *Blue Channel* was tapped.

Jack: Oh my god, Keith.

Ali: Uh huh.

Keith: I, like, didn't even notice. [Ali laughs] It never came up.

Jack: So, what happens is—

Keith: And I was looking at the page too. I was like, “Hey, we've got four things tapped. we need to make sure that we take care of that.”

Ali: Uh huh.

Keith: I didn't notice that one of them's the *Blue Channel*. I do remember the last faction game, the discussion about, like, “Oh, should we tap the *Blue Channel*? They're not here.” You know, blah blah blah.

Ali: Any goodwill that we had in the faction game is gone, Keith. I know that you haven't listened to it yet, but there's... [laughs]

Jack: Oh, I can't— yeah.

Ali: I think you're gonna be— [laughs]

Keith: Yeah.

Faction Game [0:28:10]

Jack: And there's a couple of reasons for this that I sort of, yeah, I would love to talk about, which is: in general, I am being pulled by two impulses. The first is that I don't want to play adversarially for the sake of it.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: I say this on the recording. I want the Cause to win, and I understand that this is a story about a revolution that started on a moon coming to blows on an occupied planet on the edge of the Twilight Mirage. You know, I feel like we are— and, you know, we don't know how this story is going to end, and we've always sort of felt that way, but I'm going into this being like, "Well, this is a story following on from PARTIZAN, which was a story about how a revolution starts and how it progresses," and in that sense, I don't want to play adversarially just for the sake of it.

On the other hand, I have been struggling— no, not really struggling, coming to learn the difference in the play that is required being on a faction turn, which I've never been on before, versus being a player character. Player characters have so much more time to talk and make moves and think things through and act in nuanced ways, and in the faction turn, we have one scene each at the end of every arc, which means that we have to play on a much different scale. Not just on a faction scale, but we have to play aggressively. We have to make big moves. We can't be coy or hold onto things thinking, "Well, once I get all the pieces in place..." You know, it's like that thing that they tell you when you play *Magic: The Gathering*. It's like, if it is going to take you 26 turns to get to do your big move, you should have planned something else, you know? [Ali laughs] You want to be...you want to be throwing strikes constantly, and you don't want to be pissing about in the outfield figuring out what's going on.

Keith: I have— okay, I have like nine things. Keep going. No, keep going. [Ali and Keith laugh] I have so much to say.

Jack: And so, after the first couple of faction turns, I found myself frustrated by trying to move like a player would, trying to be careful, trying to think, "Oh, I've got all these cool characters that I want the players to get to interact with in interesting ways," and y'all just outflanked us constantly with the kind of natural pace and power of player characters. You are able to deploy ships and futz around on the ground and do all kinds of interesting stuff, and, you know, your pace will always be different than the pace we are moving at. So, I knew going into this faction game that I wanted to— what did I write

down? I wrote a note, going— I wrote a big list of things that I could try and exploit.

Ali: Wow.

Jack: “Faction Turn Thoughts” is my list. It says, “Act aggressively and play big. Don't hold onto ideas, [Ali laughs] play coy, wait for a right time that won't come.” Then I write some other stuff, and then I say, “Threaten ideatory nightmarish escalation from the Stargrave. Highlight the BIS ability to appear anywhere at anytime with the trains.” Because— and this, of course, was all just exacerbated so much by the aggressive swings that y'all took at the end of that game. So it's like you said, Ali: it's not so much that you have no goodwill left, although you don't really have any goodwill left. You revealed that you were prepared to play hard, [Ali laughs] and so we— and that you were capable of playing hard, and so we sat down in that recording going, “Well, shit. All right, what are we gonna do?”

Ali: Sure.

Keith: Okay, here we go. Here it is. Here's the thing. [sighs] Okay. I have so many different bits to that. I think it's funny. A funny observation is I think— and Ali, as the only other member of the player characters here, correct me if I'm wrong. I think that we felt the exact same about the faction turn, in terms of their efficacy and aggressiveness?

Ali: Oh, in terms of, like, oh, they're...

Keith: Right. Jack feeling like, oh, we have so much room to do stuff and change things and play big and win on point-to-point things over the faction game, because they have so much less time to affect things.

Ali: I guess so, yeah. I...yeah, because up until now, it didn't feel like we had a lot of [Keith: Right.] pull over that, and that's nature of it being, like, three arcs in. Like, I feel like the Diadem and the Bontive Valley, like, holds that we got, gains that we got were significant, but I didn't feel the sort of, like, ownership over them, because those were sort of, like, GM decisions [Keith: Yeah.] that were born out of those missions.

Keith: Well, this is the sort of, like, you know, when you lay bare the mechanics of the

game, what you essentially have is the Cause starts with 0 points, and to win, they have to get 27 points. [Ali laughs quietly] Actually, I mean, there's a way you could count it where actually it's 36, because they also have to be fallen, not just fully gripped. So, 36 points, and at the time before that mission to Violet Cove, the second mission to Violet Cove, we had scored 2 out of 36 points, and we were on episode 15 or 16 or something, whatever it was. And so, the sort of thing that I had been talking about when we were discussing, like, "Well, what should we be doing?" the thing that I was, like, talking to Austin about, like, "Hey, this is what I think that we should be, like, making sure we do this season," is not letting things get to act three and we realize, like, we actually haven't accomplished anything.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Keith: Which sometimes happens in a season. We'll get to the end, and we'll be like, oh, we've had a lot of, like, conflict, but what ends up happening is we have, like, a lot of pyrrhic victories over and over again. And so, you know, going into this latest arc, like, we had dealt with every single— basically it felt like we had devoted all of our effort into sort of just barely eking out of a stalemate with the Authority on every front but not really making any progress, and then, the nuance of being a player character means that, like, you know, if you're not trying to make a good show and... [Ali snorts] If you're not trying to make a good show, and you're not—

Jack: Which we aren't.

Keith: Which we're not. No, we are. We're trying to make a good show. If you're not trying to make a good show and you're not trying to, like, have a fun and interesting narrative, then you can go 10 out of 10 hard at the Authority and call it a day, but all of that nuance is actually subtractive from our efforts towards the main goal.

Ali: Right.

Keith: And so, because otherwise it would just be, you know, every episode we try to blow up a big ship or whatever.

Ali: Right, yeah, exactly. But I also, like, I don't think of...I never thought of the season of PALISADE as a show where we would be getting all of those points of grip back throughout the season. Like, if we fell, like, a pillar or two or something like that in the span, I think that that makes—

Keith: Sorry, just because there's grip for our things but there's also grip for the Authority things...

Ali: Right, yeah.

Keith: Which one do you mean? Or do you mean just both?

Ali: Well, I mean in terms of— what you're saying, in terms of as the player character we have to get these 30 points.

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: We would never do that in an entire season. We would get a couple of them, or we would make a big story about going after one or two of them, but like, the idea of “Oh, we end PALISADE with the Authority completely shaken” was not, like...

Keith: Right, yeah.

Ali: Something I internalized, so it's not, like, a part of the rules that I really thought of.

Keith: Oh, yeah, I should say that I was not expecting to get 36 points of grip on the Authority in one season.

Ali: [laughs] Sure.

Keith: But that is the game is to do that.

Ali: Mm-hmm. Right.

Keith: You know, whether it's at a home game or whether we do multiple seasons or whether we fight to a point and then call it. Oh, and to answer the way back question about the Stargrave being part of, like, an intentional thing.

Ali: Right.

Keith: Yeah, I wasn't sure. The thing behind that, I was hoping that it would be Stargrave that keeps the grip or is fallen, because there's a part in the book on page 104 that— it sort of explains, like, hey, the Authority has all these really excellent and powerful moves that they can use pretty effectively, but the twist is, like, they can only fight a losing battle. They can't, like, gain any ground back like the Cause can. It's, uh, [reading] "Why can't the Authority retake pillars? This is to prevent a tug-of-war situation where your game lasts forever as pillars are traded back and forth. When players fell a pillar, they're making a conscious choice to push the campaign and the Authority closer to an ending." So, this is the thing that I posted in the group chat that I had in mind for this whole thing, which is like, you know, episode whatever we should start pushing towards an ending. "While the Cause and the players can attempt to take pillars one by one, reducing their grip until they are exposed, they might also focus on attacking..." Oh, is this not the—? [whispering] Oh, this isn't the thing. This is the wrong one. [normal volume] Anyway, there's a bit that says, like... [Ali laughs] that says, basically, like, when you fell a pillar, you essentially get...you essentially get what it is. Like, it becomes not a part of the Cause, but the Cause has sort of access to this thing.

Jack: Right.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Keith: So, like, say we get the train. The train becomes part of the Cause. We get the benefits of having the train, or like the Bontive Valley and the resources that the Bontive Valley offers. One of the sub antagonists of the campaign so far has been that the Cause sucks. I don't like this Cause. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Yes. That's very interesting, isn't it, Keith?

Keith's Cause Thoughts [0:39:18]

Keith: Yeah, and this is not something that I expected to have to deal with is that I don't believe in this Cause. I don't think that it's a good organization. I don't— like, Phrygian

doesn't care, because Phrygian is, like, essentially like a sledgehammer that's knocking down walls and is doing a lot of thinking about what is the best way to, you know, constantly inventing new ways to take down walls. And so it's fine if, you know, the Cause gets, you know, the Cause overturns the Authority and then the Cause mostly sucks, as long as they don't keep doing a war in the Branch, and so I'm allowed to, like, not *really* care about that as a character.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Keith: But as a player, I do— I don't really want to see this version of the Cause in power. I don't like it. [Ali laughs] Again, even without Mustard Red. Like, even before I learned about the Mustard Red thing, I was like, "This sucks. These people suck."

Ali: Wow.

Keith: "The way this is set up is terrible."

Jack: What is it about it—

Ali: We—

Keith: Oh, go ahead.

Jack: Go ahead, Ali.

Ali: Didn't we— like— [laughs]

Jack: Yes.

Ali: We had a choice in how it was set up. Like, what...I'll let you go ahead, Jack. I'm sure you could—

Keith: When?

Ali: During the— when we built it, when we chose, like, what our position within the Cause was.

Keith: Oh, I just mean, like, the government and the characters who are controlling things.

Ali: Sure.

Keith: Like, you know, I think that the Gucci thing has been a standout part of the season, but this is essen— I mean, it really, in a lot of ways, is like, it's a bunch of Guccis and it's—

Jack: Okay.

Keith: Okay, go ahead, Jack.

Jack: I mean, this is great. This is— [Ali laughs] every time this conversation happens, an angel gets its wings, and I am the angel. This tension is the thing that I want to press my finger into. [laughs] It is incredible. The thing that— you know, why wouldn't I try and exploit this? You talk about the Gucci thing, which Gucci is such an interesting character. We know that she is essentially, like, a, uh...

Keith: Radlib?

Jack: Like a wealthy— she's like a radlib. She's like a wealthy Principality person who has come over to the other side and is not doing it as a double agent thing. She believes in what she believes, and what she believes is kind of fucked. I am curious about— so, let's go through the other members of the Cause.

Ali: Yeah.

Keith: She's like an Oliver Cromwell.

Jack: Uh, she is sort of—

Keith: She's maybe a little better than Oliver Cromwell.

Jack: She is, uh...no, yeah, she's a noble. We have— I'm gonna open these up. Keith, I would like you to raise a little— I'm giving— Keith, can you see what I'm handing to

you? I'm handing to you a little red circle on a stick. This one is "no, bad." And I'm handing you a little green circle on a stick. This one is "yes, good, go for it."

Keith: Okay.

Jack: Have you received these?

Keith: Yeah, I've got them.

Jack: Okay. I'm gonna say the leaders of the Cause.

Ali: Wait, can I have a little sign that says "objection"?

Jack: Oh, Ali? [Ali laughs] You have a big button that you can push [**Ali:** Okay.] that makes the word "objection."

Ali: Okay.

Jack: And, of course, as a member of the Authority, I'm purely neutral here.

Keith: Okay.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: None of this— I have no thoughts. Gucci Garantine.

Keith: Bad.

Jack: Uh, okay. Calvin Brnine. Uh, no.

Ali: I love Gucci. [laughs]

Jack: Gucci is Brnine's boss. Okay. Jesset City.

Keith: Um...

Jack: Who, again, I will remind you, are the Company of the Spade, the Oxblood Clan, and the blue collar revolutionaries of the Shale Belt Concrete Front. They get the Cause

equipment and maintain it. They are engineers.

Keith: I'm gonna say mostly good.

Jack: Okay. That's Jesset City, mostly good. Great. Jade Kill, run by August Righteousness, who is a Delegate. That is somebody who has been essentially shaved off a Divine. They led a slave rebellion and captured a duke *Crusader Kings* style. They are working with Kalar Anakalar.

Keith: Uh, I'm gonna say mostly good.

Jack: Okay. Skelton Knaggs, a pirate captain and his eight pirate fleets. They launch pirate vessels from their island shaped like a gun, and they were the ones that brought you all that treasure from attacking the Facer Cancellor.

Keith: Uh, good.

Jack: Decario Dicario of Violet Cove. This is a bunch of mystics reading a broken thing of the Crystal Palace and the Cult of Devotion from the Twilight Mirage.

Keith: Bad.

Jack: Rose River. This is a defector from the...from the Bilats, Ali? Where is Rose—where is Veronique from?

Ali: Oh...

Jack: They're not from the Pact, are they?

Ali: Actually, I feel like Keith would know that better, because that was from the first *Armour Astir* live game, right?

Jack: [crosstalk] No, I was in that game with Art. No, this was *Hounds* with me and Art. I don't remember whether she's from the...

Ali: Ohh.

Jack: They are working with sleep detachment, and they were defending against the Fundament nodes.

Keith: Um, I don't know enough about Rose River to say.

Jack: Okay. So, really we're talking about Gucci Garantine—

Keith: Well, this is the thing, though.

Jack: And Saint Decario Dicario.

Keith: This is the thing, because it's not about, you know, how committed I think any of the individual verticals are to the Cause, [Jack laughs] how much I think they're willing to kill or fight for or against the Authority or even about the individual sort of apparent politics of each leader of the group, but it's what happens when what you do with your rebellion is, like, make a senate. They sort of have an interim government that is, like, I think is not effective. It's deeply bureaucratic. It's headed up by who I know out of character to be the worst. Sorry, Ali. [laughs]

Jack: It's not headed up by them. They are the tiebreaker. Also, I want to push back a little on "deeply—"

Keith: They're the tiebreaker, but they're really the president of the senate. They have the same role that, in the US government, the Vice President has.

Jack: Uh, they made major gains in the Bontive Valley, Keith.

Ali: Mm-hmm. Also, I don't think that, like...I don't think that, like, the fact that they have to make decisions together makes them super bureaucratic. Like, the fact that there's an organization does not mean that, like, [laughs] they're ineffective.

Jack: What is it about their ineffectiveness? What is the ineffective bit?

Keith: Um, they're— I mean, it's very— it's, like, very hierarchical.

Ali: How?

Jack: But how is that outputting ineffectiveness?

Keith: I think it's— this is an evidence-based ineffectiveness. [Ali laughs] And I know—

Jack: And what's the evidence?

Keith: [sighs] So, we spent a— we had a lot of missions where not much was accomplished. We had a lot of—

Jack: You won the Bontive Valley!

Ali: [crosstalk] Yeah, we had two missions and both of them—

Keith: [crosstalk] We didn't win the Bontive Valley. We have one grip in the Bontive Valley.

Ali: Yeah, but—

Keith: We have one quarter of the Bontive Valley.

Jack: You have liberated a city in the north of the Bontive Valley!

Ali: [crosstalk] Yeah, did you see the map? Like, how much of it we got back?

Keith: [crosstalk] But then the next thing that happened was that every single other faction got flipped.

Ali: They didn't get flipped.

Keith: Yeah, yeah, they did.

Ali: They got tapped.

Keith: Tapped, sure, okay. Tapped. They got...

Ali: Which just means, like...like, we were—

Jack: That's the cost of combat.

Ali: [laughs] Yeah. Tapped is like, oh, people are out there doing the damn thing, and doing that requires— is, like, stressful.

Keith: I—

Jack: You took down a ship on the Isle of the Broken Key. [Ali laughs]

Keith: I—

Jack: They nearly have control— Millennium Break— sorry, yeah, the Cause nearly has control of the train network that runs the entire planet.

Keith: Look.

Ali: And that was from one mission.

Keith: Okay, I don't— we don't have to keep talking about this. [Ali laughs] They're not— I mean, it's— to me, this is they suck so bad on its face that I'm, like, confused by this conversation.

Ali: I'm...okay, sure. Because it feels like... [laughs]

Keith: I mean, the whole b-plot of the season so far has been us being in conflict with the—

Jack: The whole b-plot of the season so far has been that someone is making decisions for you, against you.

Keith: Right, well, this leads into—

Jack: Not you, Keith, against—

Keith: Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jack: Millennium Break, after having spent PALISADE in— oh, I'm sorry— after having spent PARTIZAN in which they were the movers and shakers with SBBR and [Keith: Mm-hmm.] the Rapid Evening, the pseudo Rapid Evening. And then, you know, being

able to sort of kick Clem out. The revolution has now gotten to a point where you are, like, a B unit.

Keith: Right.

Jack: And I think the fact that you are a B unit is not necessarily the same as the revolution is being run badly.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Keith: Well, okay, but this is also— this is, like, there's a difference between, like, a military organization that's effectively winning battles and a good sort of...what's the word? Like, a...like, a good organization that I'm happy about how it's being run.

Jack: Yes. Although, I think that what is— Millennium Break doesn't have much say in how it's being run.

Keith: No, and this is something that came up in an episode where, like, there was an effort to sort of get Millennium Break— not Millennium Break, get *Blue Channel* more authority within the thing, and I was basically like, "But that's not what—" I wanted the way the Cause was being run to change, but I didn't want to just get more power for the *Blue Channel*. That wasn't really what I was looking for.

Ali: Right, yeah.

Jack: Right.

Keith: And so, like, this is in the episode, or I think it is anyway, where I was like, "Oh, if this is just about, like, getting us the Gucci position, then that's not what I'm..."

Jack: Right, because essentially, at that point, you would be moving up the chain.

Keith: Right.

Jack: You would be moving up the same chain, like Fleetwood Mac sing about.

Keith: Right. It's a different chain. I want a different chain.

Jack: But I don't know that that's something you can get.

Keith: No, I don't— that's— I mean, this is sort of part of the undertone of the season for me.

Jack: Right, it's that we are now the...we are now a tool in somebody's revolutionary toolbox.

Keith: Right. Yes. Like, I'm...because I'm not playing a character that cares for ideological reasons, so I've only been able to have Phrygian care for personal reasons, which has shown up through being like, you know, "People can't tell me what to do," basically is how it's shown up.

Jack: [laughs quietly] Yes. Yes.

Keith: Like, you don't have— you literally— the only authority that you have to tell us what to do and where to go is that you say that you have that. We are terrorists fighting a war. Like, you either need us or you don't.

Jack: And so something I really wanted to do was put pressure on that specifically. So, the way that I was told this would work in the episode is if the Stargrave goes ahead with this ultimatum, which she has now, the first people to receive the tape will be the Cause, and the Cause leadership will make a decision about what to do. And so, what I was trying to do was not only—

Keith: Which we have not done.

Jack: No, the Cause *leadership*.

Ali: The Cause leadership has made the decision.

Keith: Oh, okay.

Ali: It's up for us to see if we're gonna make a double...a double disagreement.

Jack: A double disagreement. I wanted to really put the screws on the *Blue Channel*,

[Ali laughs] in the sense of: you now need to decide whether you are going to— so, my understanding— we'll see how this plays out. As we talked about it in the episode, it seemed like the Cause's leadership was going to try and deescalate, and so what that will result in is the *Blue Channel* having to decide whether they are going to disobey orders *again*, and then they will be the ones shouldering the burden of "What happens if we fuck this up and the bomb goes off?" And to me, that seemed like a really interesting way to exploit these anxieties that the *Blue Channel* is having.

Ali: Yeah. I just, it's such a— it's interesting that there's such a difference of opinion here, because like, for me, the progress that we've made in the season so far both seems like sort of natural and also thematic. Like, we started this season with seeing these Twill refugees who had just been taken from their homes from this, like, lush verdant place. And then, in the next faction game, what we do is we get some of that back, and like, oh, you can imagine some of those people being able to go back to their homes and, like, if we keep pushing on that, you know, some of the story of this season is, like, look at how these revolutionaries were able to give these homes back to these people. Same thing with the train, where it was like, oh, we looked into the train, and then, instead of just, like, getting the train back, we also ran into these other people who had these whole other ideas, which let us into a mystery of the planet, like, literally.

Keith: This is one of the other sort of weaknesses of Phrygian, not as a character but as a character that I have to play.

Ali: Mm.

Keith: Which is like, you're listing these things, and I'm just like, Phrygian doesn't care about *any* of that. [Ali laughs] This is not...this is not on their radar at all. Like the— it's like...

Jack: What does Phrygian care about?

Keith: Uh, Phrygian cares about ending the war with the Branched.

Jack: Okay. Okay. Does Phrygian care about freeing the planet of Palisade?

Keith: No.

Jack: Whoa! [Ali laughs] Whoa! Let's put this in the episode! [laughs]

Keith: That's gotta be in an episode. Oh, we just talked about this, sort of. Yeah.

Ali: It might be coming up in the downtime episode.

Jack: We learned that Phrygian is war-weary, right?

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: And I think—

Keith: Which is exacerbating this.

Stargrave [0:54:16]

Jack: Yeah, 100%. And I think that I wanted to kind of create a mirror of that as well, where I don't know if it's weariness as much as, like, sweaty feverish anxiety.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: But that's also what is hitting the Stargrave too, right? This kind of, like, oh, you lose one spaceship and you're done with the idea of life.

Keith: Someone has to be the person who is the most frivolous with the button. Why not have it be during our show? [Ali laughs]

Jack: Yeah, and I mean, this is— this speaks to, like, we knew as soon as we— it's like you said earlier, Keith. We knew as soon as we put the Stargrave in that we have hung Chekov's gun above the mantle.

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Keith: And it's so funny, like, it's such a funny twist on Chekov's— not like there haven't

been twists on Chekov's gun, but like, having the gun show up, and then one scene later, someone stubs their toe, so they pick up the gun and shoot themselves and everyone in the room. Like, no, we used it scene two.

Jack: This is why it's scary to me. So, I went into that faction game, and this was my plan. I was going to send Connadine to Tintagel [**Keith:** Mm.] and have a conversation with the Stargrave, lowering the Stargrave's grip to two.

Keith: Right.

Jack: At the same time, I was going to— what did I plan on doing?

Keith: Oh, I almost finished this thought. Sorry to interrupt you, Jack, but before we lose it—

Jack: Oh, no, no, please go ahead.

Keith: The reason that I was hoping that the way that we would succeed is to get the Stargrave is because that gives the Cause a Stargrave.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Keith: That's...I mean, I think, on its face, is insane, [Ali laughs] is just...it's not good.

Jack: It gives you a stellar combustor. I don't think that—

Keith: Oh, sure, sure, sure.

Jack: You might have a pet Stargrave, but...

Keith: Not the Stargrave. It gives us access to [**Ali:** Mm-hmm.] what the Stargrave had, which was the combustor, yeah.

Jack: When I say stellar combustor, there are multiple units, in order to blow up this many things. We're not talking about one beeping device.

Ali: Uh huh.

Keith: In my head, I always think of it sort of like the Stargrave is the person but also the thing. I just can't get it out of my head that the thing that kills the star is called a Stargrave.

Jack: Yeah, it's true. [laughs quietly]

Keith: But also the person that uses the Stargrave is called the Stargrave.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Keith: Like they're the same thing as the machine.

Ali: Yeah, Stargrave Elcessor. Is Elcessor her surname or is it part of the...?

Jack: Elcessor is her surname.

Ali: Okay.

Jack: Her first name is Ellia [sic].

Ali: Okay. And then the device itself has a different...

Jack: The device, uh— I don't know.

Ali: Oh, a stellar combustor is the term that I was thinking of.

Jack: We are calling the device a stellar combustor in the ultimatum.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: I wondered if they would call it something different, but I do sort of like the idea of a device so horrifying and violent that its name has remained basically the same for, you know, tens of thousands of years.

Keith: This is kind of funny. There is only two— and even two is high. There are two sort of singular consciousnesses on the list of Authority pillars. One of them is the person, the Stargrave Elcessor, and the other one is the Divine Arbitrage. [Ali and Jack

laugh] Those are the only two individuals on the list. Everything else is, like, a faction.

Ali: Oh, does Gentian not count? Or is Gentian not a Pillar?

Jack: Uh, yes.

Keith: Oh, the Divine Resonance is on there, and then— okay, I see.

Jack: But yeah. Yeah, so, I had— but I didn't want to talk myself out of taking a big move, and the way that the Stargrave becomes scary is if the Chekov's— it's like you say, Keith. The Chekov's gun is revealed at the end of the first act. Listeners know that the Stargrave is coming and that this is going to be consequential. They don't know that it's happening now, you know?

Keith: Right.

Jack: It's like...

Keith: I don't think anybody could have guessed that after the last— especially because, you know, the loss of the Kestrel White sort of flew under the radar in that episode, because the thing that happened right before it is—

Jack: Not to Elcessor.

Keith: Is Griesel getting smashed.

Ali: Uh huh. [laughs]

Keith: And so, like, nobody is talking about the Kestrel White, as far as I can tell, anyway. I saw a lot of people talking about Cori and Cori's dad, but I think it ends up sort of flying under the radar of that episode, so I don't think anybody heard that and went, "They're totally gonna use the Stargrave and blow everything up over this."

Jack: Yeah. Yeah. I think that's why it's scary.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: I think I pitched—

Ali: Well, and I guess this hasn't been in the podcast yet, so sorry to listeners, but I think part of that is, like, we have the grip. Like, I think part of the shakiness that we see from the Stargrave is sort of her seeing the light on her head, right? Like, the sniper is pointing at her.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: The grip is on her and not on the Paint Shop or not on any of these Nideo things. Like, structurally and, you know, tangibly, her and her unit should be able to feel the lurch of the Cause over her.

Jack: Yeah, and unfortunately, the world's worst person is feeling that lurch. [Ali laughs]

Keith: Yeah. I mean, there is, like, a much more horrible, I think, kind of person. You know, we're talking about terrors, you know, almost beyond comprehension. Like, the idea that someone is worse than Stargrave Elcessor is almost a fantasy, but there is someone who's worse who, like, never has to practice pressing the button, and the bright side of that is probably wouldn't overreact, but is probably way better at pressing it in the end.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Yes. It's what kind of a Stargrave do you get? [Ali laughs] Is...you know, I mean, I wonder if on a long enough timeline the technicians back home on Kesh are like, "We can reliably predict how an outcome is going to go when we assign a Stargrave to a planet." I don't know if that's true. But yeah, definitely Gentian and Connadine and March are like, "Fuuuck. Shit." [chuckles] There was a version of this where—

[all sarcastic for next few lines]

Keith: This is why they should have given it to a robot. Get a Divine to be in charge of the button.

Ali: Oh, yeah.

Jack: Oh my god. Keith, if a Divine...

Ali: Set it up to an algorithm.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: Oh, wow!

Keith: Just get a—

Jack: Oh, wouldn't that be great.

Keith: Yeah, past a threshold, the button goes. No one even has to worry about it.

Ali: Right. Everybody's assured that it was the right decision that was made in that time, [Jack laughs] because there's so many failsafes.

Keith: When we all agreed, when we put the thing on: if it gets that high, it gets that high.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: And then everybody blows up. I wondered for a while if Connadine was going to come to you and say, "Guys. [Ali laughs] Uh, something bad is going on."

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: But I don't want to weaken Connadine, and I don't want to weaken the Authority. As fun as it would be for your nemesis to reach out to you and say— your structural nemesis. Millennium Break doesn't give a shit about this guy. To reach out to you and say, "Uh, look. I don't want to be contacting you, but you need to know that you have fucked this, and the Stargrave might blow this up," is fun, but it ultimately weakens the Authority's position.

Keith: I think it's evidence that the way to play the game is to do the hardest swings

possible, because I think it has turned out to be, like, probably the best [laughs quietly] five or six episodes of the season.

Jack: It's immediately interesting.

Keith: Especially after, like, I've really liked this season so far, even considering that I've been wanting to play as a different character.

Ali: Mm.

Keith: But I was conscious— self-conscious of how good of a start, like, and how exciting the first arc that I was in in PARTIZAN was and being like, not only can I not top it, we're not in a position to top it. Like, the pieces aren't there to make a better first arc, like a more exciting first arc than that.

Jack: Mm.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: PARTIZAN was great.

Keith: But it took 12 or 13 episodes, the pieces are there. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: Yeah. And I wanted to... [sighs] I think I pitch it in the episode, Ali, as like...do I say something like, "This is a terrible idea, and we shouldn't do this," before I pitch the Stargrave?

Ali: [laughs] I think you say, "Here's a ploy, and I hate it."

Jack: Okay. Okay. [Jack and Ali laugh] Because, you know...the stakes are so high.

Ali: Uh huh.

Jack: The stakes are so high.

Ali: It's a big deal.

Jack: But sometimes, when you have...the three of us in the call, it was like someone had lit a lightbulb above each of our heads, and we were like, "Oh, we want to talk about this. This is exciting," and the more we started talking about it, the more we were like, "We are being pulled towards this direction, and this seems like the way to go." Because otherwise, I'd have just been like, "Well, you know, I'm gonna deescalate things with the Stargrave, and I guess you're gonna take the, you know, the trains or whatever."

Ali: To spoil it for you, Keith, Art's main objection [laughs quietly] in that recording was to make us regret what we had done.

Jack: Yes, I begin that episode saying, "I don't want to play adversarially against Ali, Keith, Janine, Sylvi, and Dre," and Art basically says, "Fuck those guys." [Ali laughs]

Keith: That's fair.

Ali: He gets so upset, and it's not even his— like, imagine a world where Art is also secretly working against Kesh, [Ali and Jack laugh] in terms of Nideo, and is like, "Yeah, let's go," but that's not the game that we're in.

Keith: Well, this is the sort of interest—

Ali: We're in Art taking this personally.

Keith: This is the sort of interesting thing about the season, because if this were like a normal game of *Armour Astir*...

Ali: We'd be playing the factions? Yeah.

Keith: We'd be playing the faction. We'd be playing the Authority and the Cause.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Keith: So like, there wouldn't be this sort of, like...this is not a moral judgment. This is

like a descriptive, like, reality. There wouldn't be, like, a self-centered, like, "I am just the Authority. I am just the Cause." Like, it would be—

Ali: Right.

Keith: Yeah, so like, and it's...the sort of difference in play styles— or not play styles, [Ali laughs] because it doesn't actually seem, Jack, like you've had that much trouble doing the thing.

Jack: Well, I definitely did at first.

Keith: Okay.

Jack: I was really frustrated with not being able to move aggressively. You know, like, I go on a sea chase. I, um...you know, I think I—

Keith: Do you think part of the problem is not having a lot— because I think this might sort of bring together the two things that you were saying and then I responded with. That there just hadn't been a lot to move against at the beginning?

Jack: To a certain extent, but I think I was getting in my own head [Keith: Okay.] about wanting to do something...no plan that I make would survive first contact with the players, you know?

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: I can't— I wanted to be clever and fiddly and neat, and instead, I need to be clever and aggressive and make big swings.

Keith: Yeah. I think there's a world, though, where it can feel that way for episode after episode after episode, and then the reality is really just, like, you setting up pins and us knocking them down, and then at the end of it, no progress has been made, [laughs quietly] which is what it had—

Jack: Right.

Keith: Which is what it started to feel like, where it was like, we thwarted all your plans, but actually, we're supposed to be being proactive. It's supposed to be you thwarting our plans.

Jack: Yes, but now— but we went into that recording and said, "Can we give them a headache?" [Ali laughs]

Keith: Yeah. Well, that's the thing. I think that the roles finally reversed, and we're on the right— I think we're on the right track.

Ali: Yeah, and I think, like, part of this is dice rolls too.

Keith: Yes. Yeah.

Ali: Jack, you mentioning, like, "Oh, I went on a sea chase, and I didn't get anything." It's because you lost that conflict. Like, there's... [laughs]

Jack: Oh, yes.

Ali: There's a version of that where you...

Keith: That's true.

Ali: Where you get the win over Clem, I believe it was at the time? Or it was the pirates who were...

Keith: Is this the end of it where— this is the sort of thing where it's like, but only get that one roll. Like, I get a dozen rolls.

Ali: Uh huh, yeah.

Keith: Ali gets a dozen rolls. Janine gets a dozen rolls. Dre gets a dozen rolls. Sylvi gets a dozen rolls. You get one roll. Art gets one roll.

Ali: Uh huh.

Jack: I can do one roll every...month, maybe?

Ali: [laughs] Yeah.

Jack: More than one roll, but you know, I can take one swing.

Keith: Yeah, you did, what, three rolls? Something like that?

Jack: So I decided to threaten to blow up the Divine Cycle.

Keith: Everything, yeah.

Ali: Mm-hmm. Well.

Keith: This is the part—

Ali: We've also been—

Keith: This is the annoying part. That is really the annoying bit is the— I can't just get— I don't get access to a kill-anything-I-shoot-at weapon.

Jack: Because you're not the Divine Principality. We are an empire that has existed for thousands of years. You are necessarily on the back foot. You're right. You are in the right, [Ali laughs quietly] but the moral victory doesn't count for much if you don't have the bomb.

Ali: Yeah.

Keith: That's why I'm trying to get the bomb.

Jack: Oh my god.

Ali: Keith, I think that you should see the most recent *Mission: Impossible*.

Keith: Yeah?

Jack: If you get the bomb, I will try so hard to blow that bomb up. Millennium—

Ali: You can't.

Jack: [laughs] I'll fucking try.

Ali: [laughs quietly] You can't get a pillar back.

Jack: I'll say this.

Keith: Yeah, actually, it's true; you can't, in the book.

Jack: Ideologically, Millennium saying, "We have the nuke now," [Ali laughs] is interesting.

Keith: This is the thing.

Jack: Millennium Break becomes an organization that can destroy 25 star systems?

Keith: Sorry, say the last sentence again?

Jack: Who do you give the button to? Millennium Break becomes an organization that can destroy 25 systems?

Keith: It's outrageous, right?

Jack: Who do you give the button to?

Keith: I don't know.

Ali: We'll talk about it.

Keith: We'll figure it out.

Ali: We'll figure it out.

Keith: This is the thing. Ali, you're totally right. That is the real thing, is, you know, there's nothing in the book that prevents us from having a story where there's a game-over button, [Keith and Ali laugh] but there is something in the book that prevents you from getting the game-over button back if we take it from you.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: Yes, but then you will have the game-over button.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: And something we know about the game-over button is that it drives people mad.

Keith: We could get rid of it.

Jack: Yes. Although, I would like to say that you are putting a little bit of the cart in front of the horse here, and you are dealing with a horse where if you put the bridle on wrong, England explodes.

Keith: Right.

Ali: Sure.

Jack: No, Europe explodes.

Keith: Yeah. But my character's fine with that.

Ali: [laughs] We'll figure it out.

Jack: Well, viva Millennium Break. What does it say on the postcard? Go forth.

Keith: Millennium Break.

Ali: "Go forth and strike, *Blue Channel*," or something?

Jack: I wrote it down. "Cry out, *Blue Channel*. Onward, Captain Brnine. For liberty, for justice, and the Cause!"

Ali: Yes.

Keith: That's so funny. That sounds like it was written in the 17th century.

Jack: [laughs] Thank you.

Ali: Exactly what we were going for. Any final thoughts about table tension [Keith sighs]

or ultimatums or...?

Table Tension [1:10:53]

Keith: I think, as always, when we have some table tension because of, you know, for whatever reason, whenever it comes up, you know, it's always something that you've gotta keep an eye on mentally of, like, it always plays better— and maybe this isn't the best way of doing it, but for me, it always plays better if I let it feel as real as I can without it actually, you know, getting in the way of how I feel about people.

Ali: Mm.

Jack: Yeah. I think the way...I'm always reluctant to let— you know, it's that old thing that I think is often repeated, and it's true, which is don't try and resolve table tension in play. If there is the table tension, you can try and resolve that outside of play through conversations and then try and play out. But essentially, if it's like, Mick and Susan can't stand each other, don't render that into a duel between the wizard Glabulor and Susan's guy.

Keith: Sure.

Ali: Right, yeah.

Keith: It's just, like—

Jack: That's a short road to an unpleasant time.

Keith: If, like, it's part of the— we talked earlier about it being kind of hard to get...to, like, get into a reactive mode with Phrygian, [**Jack:** Right.] in a way that I think makes the character better but also makes them really difficult to play.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: Yep.

Keith: But I can feel myself going to old tricks, which is, like, trying to feel mad about

things that my character would feel mad about, trying to feel sad about things that my character would feel sad about.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Keith: And then, like, letting that help me play the character.

Jack: Sort of guide the play.

Keith: Right. And—

Jack: That's—

Keith: Go ahead?

Jack: Oh, I think, you know, if that's something that you have had experience with and helps you get to a place and ultimately doesn't end up, uh, what's the word? like, straining your relationships with the people that you're around the table with—which I don't feel that it is—you know, that's a way of it working for you, I think.

Keith: Yeah, it totally works for me, especially like...the only thing is that I worry about, like, getting too into it and, like, hurting somebody else's feelings. [Ali chuckles]

Jack: When I—

Ali: Sure.

Keith: But we've all been doing this for a long time. I would hope that if that happened, just, someone would tell me and not be upset secretly. [chuckles]

Jack: And say, "Hey, buddy." It's the— when, after the Feast of Patina or something, and I said to Art, "Wow, you seemed really mad," and he essentially said, "That's acting, baby." [Keith and Ali laugh]

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: Which I thought was very sweet.

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: Uh huh. Yeah.

Keith: It is. I think it's easy to forget that it's acting, maybe, from the outside.

Ali: Right. But I feel like there's been something interesting about this specific dilemma. I think what it is is that, like, because the decisions have become so rolling, there's like, "Well, we made this one decision, and I didn't agree about it then, and then we made this other decision, and I guess I sort of agreed with it then, but I still didn't...not so much so that I changed my opinion on that first one, and now we have this third decision," and it feels like this whole big escalation [**Jack:** Yeah.] of whatever that I feel like there's a lot of, like...it's all sort of squishing, and I think— [laughs] I mean, the hope and, like, what the reality will be of it that it'll— these differences in, I think, where the season is pulling people will end up interesting play and, like, good characterization when we get to the stuff that [**Keith:** Yeah.] we eventually want to do when we do decide what we want to do with the ultimatum. But it is just like, since it feels so squished in this one arc—

Keith: Yeah, it really has been.

Ali: That even started with "Should we even do this arc at all?"

Keith: Right. Yeah.

Ali: [laughs] Has been, like...

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: It feels like this has been the most tenuous that the show has been in a little bit, and it's just because, like, everything about Violet Cove felt like it was...

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: You know, you were gonna step on something. Landmines is the word that I'm thinking of.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: And then we didn't go into the faction game going, "Let's give them a break. Let's..." [Ali laughs]

Keith: Yeah, yeah.

Ali: Uh huh.

Keith: It was definitely the roughest. Like, in terms of just the nuts and bolts of getting it recorded, it was the hardest bit of the season, but then it turned into the best arc, I think, so far.

Jack: God, the way that arc ends is so good.

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: [chuckles] Yeah.

Keith: Two crazy things, like, on top of each other, really.

Ali: Yeah.

Jack: That's war.

Keith: Yeah.

Ali: That's war.

Jack: Yeah.

Ali: Well.

Keith: Is there anything else?

Ali: This has been— I think that's it, unless anybody has any final thoughts.

Final Thoughts [1:16:14]

Keith: If you listened to this and then I eventually start playing as Leap, you know. You know why.

Ali: Uh huh. You know why. Yeah.

Keith: Oh, that was so— that felt so sad at the end of one of the recent episodes and everyone was like, “That went so great! I love playing all of our characters! This is so fun!” and I don’t remember why I— I don’t know if somebody asked me [Ali laughs quietly] or said something about Phrygian or if I was just like, [mopily] “I hate Phrygian.” [laughs]

Ali: I know! [laughs sadly]

Jack: Aw! [laughs sadly] I remember this! I was doing dishes, and I was like, “Aw, buddy.” [Ali laughs]

Keith: Oh, was that in, like, an unedited bit? Yeah.

Jack: Yeah.

Keith: It’s not that bad.

Jack: I mean, I’ll say this: I think that all my characters this season are horrible.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: Deeply unpleasant people.

Ali: Sure, yeah.

Keith: [laughs] Oh, I don’t hate Phrygian as a person. I hate them— I hate having to be them for three hours every month.

Ali: Sure.

Keith: Or whatever it is.

Ali: Well.

Keith: Just because it's hard. That's why I— I feel bad about complaining about it, because really it's just not as easy.

Ali: Right.

Keith: But I do think that the easier it is to roleplay a character, the better the show is.

Ali: Sure.

Keith: I think there's, like, always a line that you toe between having a character that, like, is natural to play and can react quickly and smartly to things in a way that feels real [Ali: Mm-hmm.] and then also someone that can make interesting decisions and have interesting ideas that, as a person, you never do or have.

Ali: Yeah.

Keith: And there's like, oh, there's a way to balance that, and the balance is off for Phrygian, so it's like, kind of always feels like I'm flexing. Not in the— like, straining.

Ali: Right. And it's not a thing that's, like, fixable.

Keith: No, I don't think it is.

Ali: Especially when you've established a character. Like, I...if there was a character that I hated the way that you probably hate Phrygian, it was definitely Tender.

Keith: Yeah, I remember you didn't like Tender.

Ali: Yeah. I just did not enjoy the experience of trying to do that for as long as I did, I guess. [laughs]

Keith: Do you remember why?

Ali: Well, it just came to a point where, like, especially the sooner that we got to the end of the season, where it was just like, I don't know that I know what I'm doing, and if—

Jack: Oh man, I know that feeling.

Ali: [laughs] If I don't know where to go with this character or how to react to situations, then I'm not doing good play or having a good time. But, you know, that was a fine season.

Jack: That was a fine season. Long, but there's some good stuff in there.

Ali: Uh huh. [laughs quietly]

Keith: Can I read— this is from me and Austin talking about Phrygian.

Ali: Please.

Keith: This is five weeks ago now, but I think [Ali: Okay.] it gets at the difficulty of the Phrygian thing, and basically I was like, “They're kind of stuffy and even-tempered, and they don't really relate to people,” and we talked a bit about, like, you know, there's already characters this season that kind of fit in that niche, and we started talking about, like, using war-weary as an excuse to let Phrygian loose a little bit.

Jack: Mm.

Ali: Mm.

Keith: And it starts being this thing where, like, you know, you're letting loose— they're sort of burnt out from their job, right? And so, letting loose and trying to relate more to people and trying to be more personable and present and friendly in that way, for Phrygian, would not be letting loose. It would actually be leaning into war-weary. I said, “I don't know how to get there. I don't know how to play Phrygian in a way where Phrygian cutting loose reads that way. In a way—” oh, sorry, I can't read this part, [laughs briefly] because it's a big idea that I'm still working with. But there's, like, this other big kind of weird way that I was thinking of taking war-weary, and I was like, this

seems big and weird and kind of wild, but like, that would be their version of cutting loose, not going and having fun with friends. That's the opposite of cutting loose for Phrygian.

Ali: Right, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Keith: So it's sort of like anything that I would naturally do to, like, make a character have more fun and have a better time, would, because of the way we've set Phrygian up, in fact do the opposite thing as a character. So it's, like, kind of stuck.

Jack: It's the Addams family.

Keith: Yes, the Addams family. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Who are you in *The Addams Family*, Keith?

Keith: [crosstalk] Oh, sorry, can we take that again? Can you say "the Addams family" again?

Jack: Yeah. It's the Addams Family.

Keith: [snaps twice, like *The Addams Family* theme]

Ali: Wow!

Jack: Whoa!

Keith: That's what I should've done.

Ali: Wow.

Keith: I should've had that. [snaps again]

Ali: That's funny.

Keith: Yeah. I love *The Addams Family*. I haven't seen the new thing, [Ali laughs quietly] but I love those two movies and some of the cartoons from when I was a kid.

Ali: I do actually wonder, before— we should go, but since we've gotten back on this, Jack, is there any overlap with Clem for you here?

Jack: [laughs] Thinking about a character that is difficult and tiring?

Ali: Uh huh. [laughs quietly]

Jack: Yes, yeah, absolutely. I love Clem dearly, but— and Clem did the thing that she was supposed to do, and I'm always excited to see where that horrible child goes, but yeah, she is very very tiring to play, because I was constantly— and I wonder if— maybe it's a little easier for Art because of the faction turn, where things move a little more softly, but I wonder if he's gonna have the same problem. I am constantly trying— playing Clem, I was constantly trying to balance sort of three separate goals of, like, how do I be true to the fact that this person is not just irritating, she is cruel and destructive and wrongheaded; and how do I make a good show with Friends at the Table; and how do I try not to, like, lock off modes of action and expression for other cast members? Especially when Clem was, like, a prison warden, you know. I didn't want to be like...Clem would've just killed people in that opening episode, [laughs quietly] given the amount of disobeying that was going on.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: But we couldn't do that, because it was a— because we were making the show we were making. And—

Keith: Maybe you don't feel this way, but I feel like that part is, like, that she was also kind of craven and kind of, like...

Jack: Uh, yes.

Keith: She's cruel but weak.

Jack: Clem's cravenness—which ends up making her a really interesting character, that kind of aspect of her, is like, she's not good at this, and she makes bad decisions because she is craven—was at least in part a response to: how do you make a

character who is cruel but is unable to act [**Keith:** Yeah.] with the authority that— you know, a Clem unchained looks a lot like Crysanth. But realizing that we can't play that character that way, for, like, real reasons—you know, not just...you know, there are reasons that Clem can't be the worst version of herself—meant that I had to start thinking about, well, what does it look like if I make this deeply cruel, deeply weak, self-obsessed idiot, who is nevertheless, like, a real piece of gravel in the boot of the party. But yes, that was fucking tiring. [Ali laughs]

Keith: It's funny. It's actually very funny, because the— and I don't know if we've ever talked about this. The dynamic between the party, especially Leap and Clem, was— had been going on for so long and had taken such a big chunk of the...

Jack: Like a toll?

Keith: It had taken— not just a toll, but it had, like, kind of sort of through osmosis, sort of sucked a lot of the focus of the season towards that [**Jack:** Yeah.] and was part of the motivating decision to change from Leap to Phrygian, my Clem.

Jack: [laughs] Oh no! Clem!

Keith: And then Clem disappeared right after that, [laughs] which is like—

Jack: The curse! God.

Keith: It really felt like an O. Henry moment. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Yeah, sometimes— [laughs] I bought you the...

Keith: Yeah. [Ali laughs]

Jack: The flailing girlboss.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: Oh no! You bought me the aloof alien weirdo.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: Yeah, no, this is the curse. This is the curse of Clem. but yeah, I think that I'm proud of what we did with Clem. I think that we get to really interesting places. That dynamic played out really—

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: Having the fucking Icebreaker Prime *Kingdom* game, and it's just being, like, eight people try really hard to make a revolution in the same room as one woman who would like very much to be sitting on the throne is great. But yeah, I do feel tired playing Clem. I would play Clem again conceptually, but I don't think it would be— I don't think it's good storytelling to be like, "Let's make Clem a player character again."

Ali: Mm-hmm. Do you feel like there's overlap in that mode of play where you are in the faction game, some of this like, "Oh, in my heart of hearts, I'm endeared towards the Cause and I want to see it grow healthy, but my role as a player is this other..."

Jack: Yeah, and at this point, I want to...try and do what is most interesting for a story, right? Like, you know.

Ali: Mm-hmm.

Jack: At that point, I sort of have to, like, go— I have to furrow, pinch the bridge of my nose and go like, "Oh god, all of my guys are interesting but despicable, and the person that I am cheering for is the *Blue Channel* and Kalar." But I have to be honest to the fact that what is happening now is [laughs] someone is threatening to blow up existence.

Ali: Mm-hmm. Well, we'll see how that goes.

Jack: Aaagh! [Ali laughs]

Keith: It'll be fine. It has to be.

Ali: It'll be literally fine.

Jack: It doesn't have to be! It doesn't have to be!

Keith: Oh, sorry, I don't mean it has to resolve happily. I mean that the show has to be good. [Ali laughs]

Jack: Oh, yeah, we will make a good show. [laughs]

Keith: So it doesn't matter worrying about how it's gonna go, because it has to be good, so.

Ali: Yeah, we really— we wrote ourselves into a corner here. Whatever happens, we have to like it and perform it well.

Keith: Yeah.

Jack: We have to make a good LP, yeah. [Ali laughs]

Keith: Well, as evidenced, I think, we don't have to like it. [laughs quietly] We just have to do it well.

Ali: Mm-hmm. [Jack laughs]

Keith: We have to have fun, even if we don't like it.

Jack: The number one rule of Friends at the Table, as, uh...we all got those group tattoos seven years ago—

Keith: Right.

Ali: You're right.

Jack: That say, "But most of all, have fun."

Keith: But most of all, have fun. Yeah, it is not— this is why I'm not upset about it. It's not difficult to not enjoy Phrygian and to still have fun.

Jack: Yeah, I want to be clear to the listener. Now I'm talking to you, the listener: we spent 45 minutes before this, like, politely touring around New England on Google Maps together. Keith and I watched *Halloween*. We have a good time. We're not beefing.

We're just threatening to— I'm just threatening to blow them all up.