

COUNTER/Weight 41: A Splintered Branch, A Ringing Bell Pt. 1

Transcriber: the dread biter#0090

AUSTIN: Counterweight hangs in the center of the Golden Branch star sector, a forked path where the Perseus and Sagittarius arms of the Milky Way come together. Because of its location—

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

AUSTIN: —life on this planet of billions brims with energy, and an exchange of cultures has led to an exchange of technologies. Automated robots valet vehicles; starships launch in the distance at regular intervals; holographic pop idols perform for holographic crowds. Giant humanoid mechs aid in tasks civil, commercial, and military, and sometimes you look up to them and think, “We could have made them look like anything, but we made them look like us.”

It has been four and a half busy years since the September Incident, that fateful day when the first Divine, Rigour, stood in full view of the Golden Branch, its mere appearance a new sort of violence. But before it could wound the sector, it was cast away, halted by heroism, locked behind sacrifice. The Chime, a group of cast-offs as diverse as the Golden Branch itself, stood ground while others quaked, and the threat of Rigour was stopped.

In the long shadow of the September Incident, though, things have changed. Maps have been redrawn. Old enemies have become friends, and new powers have emerged. Chief among these has been the Principality of Kesh, whose Rapid Evening intelligence and special operations unit has been surreptitiously influencing the sector for decades, policing dangerous technologies and operating history-changing experiments.

[MUSIC plays out to end]

Now the secretive monarchy has gone public. A mistake like Rigour could not be allowed to happen again. The future of every culture depended on it.

And so, under the leadership of Addax Dawn, the Principality of Kesh has opened communications with every major faction operating in the sector. And the Evening’s demands were stated plainly. The expansive and skirmish-prone borders of the sector’s superpowers would be reduced, with no faction allowed to claim control of space they couldn’t demonstrably protect. No one would be permitted to use assets retrieved from the verboten body of Rigour, and to prevent this, Kesh would oversee scientific and industrial operations on September and Ionias, and would become a third-party in sector-wide disputes. The nation claimed no land that wasn’t already theirs, but it also made clear that it had assets everywhere, assets like the mysterious agent Mako Trig, who hunts down any party foolish or arrogant enough to research Rigour tech.

And so the Kesh Accord was signed, and the sector changed forever. The new laws led to the decline of old powers, and so the Autonomous Diaspora and the Orion Conglomerate receded into themselves, but in some ways, this was a blessing, since each desperately needed to attend to their own internal strife.

With the Diaspora's historical foe vanquished, their political rivals diminished, and their leaders reaffirmed, Grace and her servants *should* have secured their place in the sector, but a real sense of danger remained. The Kesh Accord returned the planets of Garden and Sage to their pseudo-historical owner, the Golden Demarchy, led by Apostolos, and without her pastoral capital, Grace permanently made a *new* home on the strange, alien world of Sigilia. Sensing that they had failed in their duty, protecting Grace, and in warning of the threats of September and Rigour both, the Candidate Kobus of Loyalty resigned, an act unheard of in recent Diasporan history. And perhaps it is because they no longer have Kobus' calming voice in their ears, or perhaps it is due to their presence on Sigilia, or perhaps it is due to something else altogether, but Grace and Vicuna have become increasingly erratic in recent months, launching unannounced and devastating raids on the holdings of the Diaspora's enemies: the Demarchy to the north, and the most rebellious elements of the Righteous Vanguard, to the south.

In a strange twist of fate, Oricon has become Grace's greatest friend in the sector. Though the two powers have a long and violent history of conflict, for these ancient civilizations, painful but familiar history is preferable to an unknown future. Especially when Oricon itself is in upheaval.

After the September Incident, the distant leadership of the Orion Conglomerate, deep in the far reaches of the Sagittarius arm, woke to the crisis of continuity in their holdings in the Golden Branch sector. In order to counter the rise of the Minerva Strategic Alliance, Oricon re-equipped the old Expeditionary Group with the resources and authority necessary to bring the sector to heel, and to attempt to address the many systemic abuses and failings therein. The voice and mind of this new regulatory body is Chief Emergency Executive Orth Godlove, veteran of two wars and survivor of the September Incident. It is up to Executive Godlove to get the sector's holdings into order, because, from distant Earth, the question has been raised: Why not cut and run? Why not leave Minerva's rogue Steiger sisters to their own devices? Let the sector devour them. After all, the blockade taxes any support that Oricon sends, anyway.

The blockade in question is operated by the growing navy of the Free States of Kalliope. While the Chime battled Rigour on September, Admiral Hudson Thorne was leading the *Yersinia* and the Odomas fleet into the southern reaches of the Golden Branch sector, and in time, the planets of Kalliope, Ionias, Gemm, Slighter and Kaffe were loosened from their ersatz affiliation through effective, if unusual, diplomatic efforts, including the application of military pressure and simple good timing. Now, the Free States of Kalliope have risen in power. While other factions are organized around formal hierarchies or informally centered around ultra-powerful hegemonies, the Free States offer an alternative: a loose association of planets that offer their member citizens trade rights, migration access, and military protection, but ask little from them. Freedom is the watchword. But Jillian Red finds herself worrying that without further unification, the Free States may fracture and fall. In this moment of instability, the Free States look towards the Golden Demarchy for guidance.

This new democratic power, situated in Apostolos and now led by Apokine Cassander Timaeus Berenice of the dethroned imperial house of Pelagios, has also risen in power in the time since September. Its aspirant message of utopian representation and multicultural civilization has spread far and wide. Having reclaimed a number of worlds that were historically owned by Apostolos, Cassander has become a hero to the people—and a reminder of the empire's old glory. If left unchecked, Cassander's reign may be an end to the Demarchy and a return to the

imperial ways of the past. And yet another jewel in Cass' unworn crown is the city in the north, the so-called Megalopolis on Torru, built hand-in-hand with the Principality of Kesh, in hopes that the sector's populace may finally leave behind the blooded wasteland metropolis of Counterweight.

But for some, Counterweight and its satellite paradise Weight cannot be left so easily. As originally designed by Executive Ibex, the Righteous Vanguard was meant to take over the Autonomous Diaspora and to unify the Golden Branch sector in order to better the quality of life for its most marginalized and oppressed inhabitants. But when Rigour was defeated, the Vanguard lost much of its momentum, and Ibex vanished into the shadows, leaving the Vanguard to its new leader, the revolutionary Aria Joie. With reduced resources but redoubled passion, the Vanguard has re-focused its efforts on securing Counterweight and Weight for the masses. But for many, including political rivals the Diaspora and Oricon, the Righteous Vanguard is nothing but a trendy political party. It is not a sovereign power on its own, and certainly not a voice for anyone except its regal regent. If Representative Joie cannot secure Weight soon, and if she cannot resist the whispers of Righteousness, then the people of Counterweight may finally give up hope altogether. It just wouldn't be a wise investment.

And so it is in *this* context, with *these* crises already boiling, that another danger emerges: a knock on the door, and the sudden realization that perhaps, the lock isn't as sturdy as you might have hoped. It has been four and a half busy years since the September Incident. And it is finally time for the Golden Branch to determine its future.

[Pause]

AUSTIN: Welcome to Friends at the Table, an actual play podcast focused on critical worldbuilding, smart characterization and fun interaction between good friends. I am Austin Walker. Joining me today is the *entire* cast of Counterweight and Friends at the Table. Jack de Quidt.

JACK: Hey!

AUSTIN: Ali Acampora.

ALI: Hi!

AUSTIN: Sylvia¹ Clare.

SYLVIA: Hello!

AUSTIN: Andrew Lee Swan.

DRE: Hey!

AUSTIN: [running the names together] Leeswan. Leeswan.

¹ The name in the audio recording is no longer in use, hence the audio/transcript discrepancy.

DRE: Leeswan!

AUSTIN: Apparently.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Art Tebbel.

ART: Hey.

AUSTIN: Keith Carberry.

KEITH: Hey there.

AUSTIN: We are going to be playing a game called “Firebrands” by D. Vincent Baker. D. Vincent Baker is probably most famous for making some pretty major games in the independent scene. “Apocalypse World” is probably his most well-known game. He also did “Dogs in the Vineyard,” which was a kind of a—a s—a game that led to a sea-change in tabletop games. This is not like those games, in that it is—it is kind of casual and conversational. It is—here is the—the kind of slogan for the game is “*Fight with your friends, ally with your rivals, fall in love with your enemies,*” and when I—when I read that is when I knew we had to run this game for our finale.

[SYLVIA laughs]

AUSTIN: Shoutouts to fan Matt Mitchell, who sent me a physical copy of it. You can also get a copy by becoming a patron of D. Vincent Baker’s Patreon. I don’t know what the... link is to that off the top of my head. Just search for it. Um.

This is a game that is comprised of a bunch of smaller games? There are... one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, *nine* different... smaller games inside of this game. And again, they’re each conversational. Some of them will only take a minute or two to play, some will take five to ten minutes. And the way this game is gonna work is that there’s going to be kind of a series of rounds of play. Um. I’ll say what the games are, by title. *Solitaire, An Animated Disagreement, A Chase, A Conversation over Food, A Dance, A Free-for-all, Meeting Sword to Sword, A Skirmish, and Stealing Time Together.*

The way the game is gonna work is that we’re going to open up with one *Solitaire* scene from everybody. That’s as the rules set them up. It’s kind of an image of the... of your character at an important moment. And then we’re going to do three rounds around the table of people picking a scene and then—and then doing it. And in between each round, after that—so in between rounds one and two, and then in between rounds two and three, I’m gonna do an interlude, and then we’ll have a big scene. Um. And we’ll see how it goes, but that’s the structure I have for it in my head. “*Your duties as players are to play easy, play fair, and always let the other players make their own decisions for themselves. Try to get your character into messy entanglements with the others. Whenever anyone asks you a question about your character or the current situation, answer it. If you don’t know the answer, make it up. If you find that you’ve missed a rule or played a game incorrectly, just try to go along with what the other players do and what’s most fair. You can work out what should have happened later, when you aren’t playing.*” Um. “It

won't surprise you when it happens, but your character might be killed during play. You can create and introduce a new character to play, you can continue playing a supporting character that's already part of the game, or else you can keep playing without a character, asking and answering questions and participating in the games that call for an audience." There's a second step here that I've hacked into this game. One, we're playing with way too many players, but... that's how we do.

[ALI and DRE laugh]

AUSTIN: That's how we've *always* done. At the end of every scene, there will be... a moment where—after we're—you're done, the person who has run the scene will determine—in some cases, anyway—whether they want to give someone, including themselves, either a crisis point or a political point. A crisis point will represent your faction's ability to be prepared for a potential crisis. Political points will represent your ability to address the key political crisis of your faction? Whereas, again, crisis points—I've just named these—will—are about something much broader. Um. They're about something that is of the *scale*, at least, of a proper engagement with Rigour. And in a lot of cases, the end of a scene will be open-ended enough for the person who initiated a scene to say "All right, I'll give myself a political point for this," or "All right, I've give myself a crisis point for this, I think w—this scene represents me being more prepared for something like Rigour." On the other hand, they could say, "Hey, I actually—I'm gonna be honest and play fairly and say, actually, I—this didn't go so well for me. I'm gonna give a point to another character."

[15:20]

AUSTIN: Um. And there are some games in which it will be clear through the outcome of the game, either through tokens that are in play, or through uh t—uh the—just like the narrative outcome of the situation—in which like "Okay, this is super clear, it designates its own victor here." So. That's the—that's the long and short of this set-up. Let's start with *Solitaire*. I will read from *Solitaire*, and then—and then we can think about what your characters are doing. So for *Solitaire*—with this game, traditionally, you play by yourself, quietly? You don't talk out loud about what the scene is that you do. But for the fact that we run a podcast—

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: —it doesn't exactly work.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: So. What you—but what it—so what there are is, there's kind of a list of a bunch of different scenes. So, for instance, it's stuff like "You've been entertaining interloping off wordl—wordl—worlders—" I always say worlders wrong. "Interloping off worlders in your family estate." And then there is a set of like potential outcomes of what happens from that. For our s—for our purposes, you read which one of those things you've picked, and then—he—you know, we'll paint the scene a little bit for people. And then *after* you describe that, because of those events, "There is something about you, some detail of your mood, in your actions, or your

appearance, that everyone else might notice. Decide what the detail is and let people know what it is. Likewise there might be something—some news, some gossip or intelligence, that everyone has heard. Decide what's there. If—decide if there is, and if so, say what that is." All right. So. Cass.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Four and a half years after the September Incident, where are you when you receive the message? We'll talk about the messages after you set this up for y—for me a little bit.

ART: Oh, great. Uh.

AUSTIN: And also, just tell me like what you look like. Now. 'Cause you're the Apokine, right?

ART: Yeah, and—and it's been a significant four years. You see how being president affects people, right? It—it—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: It ages them *fast*. And Cass went from being like 38 to 42, which is—which is like a big change in general. I think Cass—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: —is noticeably greyer.

AUSTIN: Mm.

ART: Noticeably more like weary looking.

AUSTIN: Are they—did they like grow into it well? Or is there—is it weighty? Is it—

ART: I think it would be weighty, but you know how powerful people never look it?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: You know, there's a lot of—someone's always there to make sure that Cass looks presentable.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: So Cass always looks ready, and distinguished, but beneath it all, I think Cass is not... Cass wasn't ready for this.

AUSTIN: Okay. So what—

ART: He² wasn't ready to go back to being Cassander.

AUSTIN: Mm. [laughs] That's actually a really good distinction. No one calls you Cass anymore. Everyone—

ART: Right.

AUSTIN: —calls you Cassander or—you like—Apokine s—k—Cassander. Sometimes people call you, you know, Apokine Berenice, or occasionally maybe by the name of your—the—family line, right?

ART: Right, Pelagios.

AUSTIN: Yeah. That's interesting. Which should be dead. Right? The name—that name, Pelagios should be dead. But every now and then—

ART: I mean—we lost.

AUSTIN: Right. Okay. So which of these scenes have you—have you—are you gonna *Solitaire*?

ART: Uh, I think I want to do—where—I lost it. Oh. “I’ve been meeting in secret with the dethroned heads of old noble houses.” I’m trying to—

AUSTIN: Mm. Okay.

ART: —to—‘cause I think I need their support... for... political—

AUSTIN: Everything. Yeah.

ART: Yeah. Both inter—internal and external politics. I need their power, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: But we’re not goin’—I don’t wanna go back. I don’t wanna promise them we’re going back.

AUSTIN: Okay. So what is the—the outcome? Of these three? That are options.

ART: Uh. “And they prove bickering, short-sighted, stupid and jealous.”

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: [laughs] So.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: The picture there—

² Cass uses they/them pronouns.

JACK: A good start!

AUSTIN: I think that's a—that's a pretty good—I just like the image there of Cass at a table like head in hands. Or like one hand to their forehead, you know, kind of gripping their face. With all of these old nobles bickering over a table. And just like that's where the camera comes in. Um. On Cass' face. And Cass, if AuDy were to reach out to you, and let you know that something was coming, how would that happen? Across space and time, as if—as if—what's the one way AuDy could say “Hey hey hey hey hey. It's me. It's AuDy.”

ART: I mean this is a—this is an official room, right. It's a secret meeting, but this is still... this is still in the—the palace has probably been... *upgraded* to not be so palatial, and to be more of a government—

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: —building. But it's still a big old castle, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: Uh. But a future big old castle. And...

AUSTIN: Oh, actually, is it? Is it—it could be on—because—so one of the things that happened was that Apostolos—or the Demarchy—recaptured Garden, turned it back to Apokine, and that was like the place where the old royalty used to meet. It use—it was like—

ART: Oh, sure.

AUSTIN: —the like—the green hills—rolling green hills, huge palaces, and I think that you're right. It was still converted to be a—a kind of—for the people, to some degree? But it's still only, you know—ten thousand c—you know, fifty thousand people live on that entire planet. It's still kind of a retreat. Um.

ART: Right.

AUSTIN: A governmental retreat.

ART: And that would still be the place where—where Cassander would bring these nobles, to like...

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: ...to kind of flex a little, right? Like. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: We're all—we've all been rich for a long time.

[AUSTIN laughs]

ART: But—

AUSTIN: Good.

ART: —but my family won whatever war it was...

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ART: ...ten generations, fifty generations ago.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: This is the result of that.

AUSTIN: Okay, so. So you're in the castle.

ART: And I think another thing is, Cass stopped wearing his regalia.

AUSTIN: Oh. Sure!

ART: Because—because it—

AUSTIN: You're a leader now.

ART: —it's not what they want to—it's not what they want to present, it's not how they want to—he's not—he's trying not to show imperial power.

AUSTIN: Right. Sure.

ART: In a way that he thought it was kind of cute when he was in exile.

AUSTIN: Right. What an ass. Uh. So, how does AuDy—

[KEITH and DRE laugh]

AUSTIN: How does AuDy send you this message?

ART: I think they are wearing the regalia to this meeting, 'cause again, he has to—he's trying to—

AUSTIN: Right. Yes.

ART: —he's trying to flex.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: And I think AuDy can sort of speak into Cass's mind.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: Directly. I think Cass is like "Oh, my god, why won't—

AUSTIN: What's the word?

ART: —these idiots shut up?"

AUSTIN: What—let's defer to Jack.

ART: And then suddenly they hear AuDy in his—not in his ear, but you know what I...

AUSTIN: Yeah. AuDy, from across space and time, what would it be that you send to Cass?

JACK: Um.

AUSTIN: One word. Because sending any more would be too dangerous.

JACK: Right. I think it—I think it's just the word "failure."

[AUSTIN laughs]

ART: Yikes.

AUSTIN: Oh. That's actually really good.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Because then the scene is, again: it's Cass frustrated with these nobles. Who like—

JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: —who themselves are trying to flex over and over again, and who are talking about this planet like it's *theirs* again? Um. And then, yeah. AuDy just says, "Failure." Good. Good.

JACK: Is it immediately recognizable that it's AuDy's voice? To Cass?

AUSTIN: The audience certainly notices it.

JACK: Coming from such a—such a distance.

AUSTIN: But yeah, I don't know. Cass?

ART: I might recognize it as AuDy's voice, but I might not recognize it as... as an external thing. That might just be...

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: ...Cass thinks that—that his—that if his old friend could see him now, he³ would think he was a failure.

JACK: That's what AuDy would say.

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah.

ART: Yeah. So that's what AuDy would say.

AUSTIN: That's good. Oh.

ART: It's not like super consistent with AuDy, but, you know, it's been a long time—

AUSTIN: AuDy could be—

KEITH: AuDy is—

ART: —and this sucks.

KEITH: AuDy is pretty consistently rude.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Yes. AuDy is—is—

JACK: Yeah, I think that's fair.

AUSTIN: —blunt, at the very least. Okay. Let's move on. Mako. Uh, and these—

KEITH: Hi.

AUSTIN: —these first scenes don't—you don't get crisis or political points. It's only with next like—the first true rounds. This opening *Solitaire*, just opening shots, doesn't do this. Um.

ART: Should I do the next thing, or do I do that at the next...

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah! Let's do the next thing. Let's do the next thing. 'Cause we're just gonna roll from one of these to another, so you may as well do it. Um. So what is it that everyone notices, and has anyone everything? Or heard something about you?

ART: Uh. I think—I think there is—I think this kind of sours Cass on internal diplomacy, and I think that it shows, because Cass is now much more willing to... Cass is willing to find his alliances elsewhere.

³ AuDy uses they/them pronouns.

AUSTIN: Okay. That's cool. I like that a lot.

ART: That he's like—he's looking out, not in.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: I think people have—I think this—this meeting was probably big enough to be a topic of espionage. I think there are people watching or listening this—to this in some degree.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ART: And I think that it is—it is kind of out that it's—that Cass is struggling to... to control his... barons, or whatever.

AUSTIN: Right, right.

ART: Former barons.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I like that they have—they still—no, I think they probably still have the title. It just *means* nothing.

ART: Right.

AUSTIN: *Technically?* But it means something.

ART: And I like to imagine that they're like—it's like "I'm the baron of container ships."

[Laughter]

ART: "I'm the—"

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

ART: "I'm the archduke of rocket fuel."

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Right. One—and—

SYLVIA: Just a bunch of *trucker barons*? Like?

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes, the Apostolosian trucker barons.

ART: Yeah.

[Laughter trailing off]

AUSTIN: Uh, all right. Mako.

KEITH: [yawns] Sorry.

AUSTIN: So, you've joined the Rapid Evening.

KEITH: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And for you—you know—so—the structure—the struggle that Cass is going through is about—is about their position as, uh, as kind of leader in this place that has an urge to go back to the old ways? While—the old, much less democratic ways? Much more imperial ways. For you, with the Rapid Evening, your primary goal is to eradicate—to locate and eradicate unaccounted-for pieces of technology—

KEITH: Mhm.

AUSTIN: —that came off of or were developed around what was left of Rigour. You know, there was that—

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: —huge arm. Rigour's arm was knocked off.

KEITH: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Actually, both of Rigour's arms were knocked off on September, and one of them was not swallowed by the portal. One of them landed and became almost like a new range of mountains. Um. And. People spent a lot of time trying to sneak there and steal stuff away? And so now the world is—just, out in the world, you spent some of the last few years tracking down and kidnap—not kidnapping. Arresting. Sorry, I was thinking about the Chime. What the Chime does is kidnapping.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Now.

SYLVIA: Old habits.

AUSTIN: What you do is arrest people. And charging them with, you know, black marketeering, and dealing with illegal tech—you know, contraband technology and stuff like that. Um.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So, uh... that's your big. That's your kind of—your political goal is to continue getting rid of that.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: A—so what's—where do we pick up on Mako? Like what's the opening scene here? For th—for him.

KEITH: Um. I was—I was having a really hard time deciding between scenes.

AUSTIN: Oh?

KEITH: And I think that I—I think for this first one. Um.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: I think I'm gonna go with, me and the Makos training in the Mesh.

AUSTIN: We should set that up. So.

KEITH: What's up?

AUSTIN: We should set that up for the audience.

KEITH: Oh, okay. Yeah yeah yeah. Sorry.

AUSTIN: It's cool.

KEITH: So, yeah. I think—so we've got—so we've got me, and I'm Mako. Right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: And then, uh, yeah I got all—all these other—all these other buddies, and they all look a whole lot like me.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

KEITH: So what am I gonna do with them.

AUSTIN: And one of—of them, one of them—

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —is the—is still Larry, right? One of them is like—

KEITH: One of them's Larry.

AUSTIN: So it's six Makos.

KEITH: There's...

AUSTIN: And then one who is like palette-swapped and mirrored.

KEITH: Y—right. Yeah yeah yeah yeah.

JACK: Are these also kind of... are they kind of unfinished Makos?

AUSTIN: No, but they're—

JACK: Are these—are these top-notch, finished Makos?

AUSTIN: That's an interesting question. They're finished at this point. It's been—it's been years since—so Mako saved all—a lot of the other Makos from September.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Larry did, technically. Larry saved the rest of the Makos—

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: —which is very sweet, now that I think about it.

KEITH: This was—I *told* Larry to do it, though.

AUSTIN: Yeah, well. Larry could have said no, right? Larry could have said like, "I'm the only other Mako."

KEITH: Larry could have said no, but Larry promised not to cause trouble.

AUSTIN: That's true. So, I think that they—the thing that's interesting here is they've all been doing different things, right? Like, they're *you* up into a point. They have the fake memories that you had. But then, they don't—

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: —they never worked with the Chime!

KEITH: No.

AUSTIN: Right? They never met Ibex.

KEITH: No, they never did. They never *punched* Ibex in the face?

AUSTIN: Right, they never did. And so I think they're—to me, the thing that's kind of funny about this is definitely Mako trying to get them in line and give them the life experience—the knowledge from the experience he had.

KEITH: Yeah, like whatever I—whatever I learned between my time waking up in a vat—

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: —and, uh, like until... you know, the right on September, everything I learned until then—however much I grew, I’m trying to force, I guess, on the other Makos?

ALI: Aw.

AUSTIN: Right. So the—so the scene—

KEITH: And to a lesser extent Larry.

AUSTIN: So the scene that you picked was that you’re training with them in the Mesh.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: So, how’d that go?

KEITH: Uh, well, um. I would consider them more concerned with fashion and style than with hacking effectiveness?

AUSTIN: Okay. So is it just like they’re doing a bunch of—they’re just showing off to each other?

KEITH: They’re just—yeah, they’re just like—it’s like—oh, you know when you get like... I m—li—I imagine it’s sort of like if you got a bunch of magicians together.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Mhm.

KEITH: And you told like “Okay, guys, it’s time to do yard work!” And they just like keep on disappearing the leaves?

[A DOG barks]

[Laughter]

KEITH: But like—but—they’re still there.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Right, they’re done—they’re not—[laughing] right, the leaves are still there! Right, so I think that’s like probably very literally a thing here, which is like—you’re—what you’re going in to do is scrub mention of Rigour tech s—that’s out there, right?

KEITH: Right. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like, you found like message board posts saying like “Oh, I heard it’s here, here and here.” And they’re not like actually deleting the posts and clearing it out, they’re just like fucking with the form signatures?

KEITH: Moving into a different tab. Yeah, yeah yeah yeah.

[30:23]

[Laughter]

KEITH: They ch—like, they changed the username of the person who posted it.

AUSTIN: Right, right. Exactly.

KEITH: Um. And like, not to say that they're not capable of it.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

KEITH: They're definitely capable of doing this stuff, but it's just—it's just a game. Like, "Eh, we're just having fun, come on."

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: "What's up? What's wrong?"

AUSTIN: "What's the big deal?"

KEITH: "What's the big deal?"

AUSTIN: Mako has to deal with Mako, and it's *Mako*. It's *Mako dealing with Mako*.

KEITH: Yeah. It's exactly like the night—it's like exactly the nightmare it sounds like, that if there was, like all of a sudden, there's seven Makos, Larry, and Lazer Ted, all in a room.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Right. Also, Lazer Ted, I forgot to mention Lazer—Lazer Ted has become like your right hand man, right?

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: I think he's probably fed up too. Like, that's the most amazing bit?

[DRE laughs]

KEITH: Yeah, like—La—like—I'm sure that there's one *really* long afternoon, trying to get a specific thing done. It was maybe a little bit more important than it usually is. And Lazer Ted is just like, "Can't you guys just grow up?!"

AUSTIN: [laughing] Yeah.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Lazer Ted walks in—walks in—like, unhooks from the Mesh, goes over to your actual office, takes out his lazer grill and puts it down, and is like

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): [Riff Raff voice] I have to talk to you for real right now. I have to be serious.

KEITH (as Mako): W—Ted, what's up?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): You gotta go get your boys. You have to come get your boys.

KEITH (as Mako): What's wrong? What are they doing?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): *Everything* wrong. They're doin' everything wrong. They're out there—they—

KEITH (as Mako): Are they like—

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): They got me heated.

KEITH (as Mako): Do they need to study more?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): [sighs] They got me heated, Mako! They got me heated.

KEITH (as Mako): You're heated.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): They all look like me right now.

KEITH (as Mako): They all look like *you*?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): They all look, "oh, ah, look at me, I'm Lazer Ted." *I'm* Lazer Ted.

KEITH (as Mako): There's a—Ted. Okay, Ted, so first of all, I understand how frustrating that could be, but two, they always usually look like me, so I understand where you're coming from.

[Laughter]

KEITH (as Mako): Do you wanna try look like someone else for a little while?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): It's hard enough for me to understand—this one is... [sighs] What if you could convince them to look like anybody else?

KEITH (as Mako): Okay. I'll try that. Hey guys?

AUSTIN (as Triglets): Hey! Hey!

KEITH (as Mako): Do you wanna try lookin'—do you wanna try lookin' like someone that's not Ted?

AUSTIN (as Triglets): [Keith impersonating Austin impersonating Riff Raff voice] Naw, this is real fun.

[Laughter]

KEITH (as Mako): I kn—I mean, listen—

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): That doesn't even sound like me! That's a bad impression of Lazer Ted! You slanderin' me. Ugh. Imma go for a walk. You have to get your boys. You gotta bring 'em together. You gotta teach them either one, do impersonations of other people. Two, do a better Lazer Ted.

[Laughter]

KEITH (as Mako): I—Can I—

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Gonna make me change my name.

KEITH (as Mako): Ted, can I be honest, and I don't want to step on your toes here, I thought it was okay. I thought it was a pretty good Lazer T.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Woah.

AUSTIN: [sighs] In the chat, Andrew says, "We could have made them look like anything, but we made them look like Ted..."

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Good. Uh.

KEITH: I think—I think—

AUSTIN: So while this is h—

KEITH: Ted—

AUSTIN: While this is happening.

KEITH: I think Ted kinda storms out a little bit.

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: And then, in a brilliant move of camaraderie, I think that I also turn into Ted.

AUSTIN: Good. Good.

[Laughter]

SYLVIA: God.

AUSTIN: It's a team building ex—you're—yeah. Good.

KEITH: Yeah, it's team building.

AUSTIN: So how does AuDy contact you while this is happening?

KEITH: Um. I think it—I think...

[Cough]

KEITH: I think through Larry. I think Larry insists, for a second, that Larry is AuDy?

AUSTIN: Right. Does he even notice that he's doing it?

KEITH: And... Uh, no. I think it—I think it's like a very similar scene to the first time that I talked to...

AUSTIN: Right...

KEITH: Or, no, that's right, to the second time that I talked to—talked to Larry, where Larry was like, "I'm you! We're the same thing, right?"

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Except this time, it's like "Hey, Larry." He's like, "I'm AuDy! What's—what? Huh?"

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah.

KEITH: I think it's one of those. Um.

AUSTIN: I think he just—he probably just—and he—I kind of like that he's holding himself like Lazer Ted, still? But internally—

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: He like—he just looks up at you, and it's AuDy for a second.

KEITH: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Um.

AUSTIN: All right, so what—

KEITH: I don't even know if he says—I don't know if he says anything besides that he—

AUSTIN: No...

KEITH: —insists that he's AuDy. I think that's it.

AUSTIN: Yeah. All right, so what do people—how does this reflect on you? This kind of like—your crew is not necessarily holding it together right now? Um. And—do—

KEITH: Um.

AUSTIN: Do—does anybody else hear anything? Your situation is weird, because like you're a spy, basically?

KEITH: Right. Yeah.

AUSTIN: So like, people shouldn't be hearing about you, any more than they're hearing about James Bond, but you're still Mako, so.

KEITH: R—I mean, I've got bosses, I guess.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Um. I think that the—whoever is in—the people that are in charge of Rapid Evening, I think have faith in Mako and they understand the way that I operate?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: And when they see the other Makos messing around, I think that it strains that, but... but only because that's not how they do business?

AUSTIN: Right. Right. there's a lot of like—

KEITH: I think they're also understanding like, "This is just the guy that we hired, and we knew that. It's probably okay."

AUSTIN: Right. There's a lot of like, Jamil and Addax being like, convincing themselves that this is okay.

KEITH: Right. Yeah.

AUSTIN: But there is still a bit of doubt.

KEITH: "Just 'cause it's not our way doesn't mean it's not a way."

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: “Really wouldn’t like them...”

AUSTIN: All right.

KEITH: “...to keep impersonating people, though.” [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah. Next up is Kobus. Kobus is in a weird situation, huh, Dre.

DRE: [musing] Uh. I guess, yeah. A lil—they’re a li—they’re in a lil weird spot. I guess the weirdest spot is since we’ve—in these past five years, they have resigned from being a Candidate.

AUSTIN: Right. And then were allowed to do that.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um. And they’ve seen someone else become Loyalty’s Candidate, because they’ve stayed on in Loyalty’s retinue—in fact, in Grace’s retinue.

DRE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: I think the—the Divines on those planets have become increasingly tight, and like aren’t necessarily, um... you know, it’s not the same sort of like distant relationship. That was kind of one the lessons that they learned, was like “hey, Grace wants a little more control over everybody.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: “Grace wants to see people more often.” Um. And that’s, uh... that’s kind of the situation there. Grace has been acting increasingly erratic. Um. And looks a little different, which we’ll see the first time we see her, I guess. Um.

DRE: Sure.

AUSTIN: Where do we start with Kobus?

DRE: Um. Well, I’ve been thinking about like just what Kobus looks like? Cause I’ve been—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: They’ve—I mean, they’ve grown up, like they are now a—instead of like a teenager they are now a young adult.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Of course, they’re no longer a Candidate. Um. There’s—

AUSTIN: And aren't inside of Loyalty anymore.

DRE: Yeah. Um.

AUSTIN: They are, uh—they are free from that.

DRE: So last time that we talked about Kobus, we kind of talked about what their jumpsuit looked like, and we basically thought it was like kind of like form-fitting, like onesie pajamas?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Basically, more or less? Um. And so I've been thinking about how they look different, and I think between that and um their rig suit now—so they've got a keyfield suit, which is the thing that... uh... When did the Chime fight that? Was that during the...

AUSTIN: Territory Jazz. That was during the... sis—

DRE: The sisters of Rust?

AUSTIN: Yeah, the—yeah, yeah.

DRE: Sister Rust thing.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

DRE: Um. So I think that with that keyfield suit that can like morph into different forms?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: They now just have a like—a like very loose fitting like tunic?

AUSTIN: Mm.

DRE: That basically operates like Bayonetta hair. And—

AUSTIN: Oh, that's cool.

DRE: —just like—can like stretch to fill whatever forms that the keyfield suit is taking?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Um. Mostly to kind of like hide their body. Because they're like physically vulnerable while that suit is stretched out to different places.

AUSTIN: Right. So which of these *Solitaire*, um... games are you s—or—or scenes are you starting with?

DRE: Um. I'm kinda stuck between two, but I think...

AUSTIN: So the other thing to note here is, you will have another *Solitaire* scene in this game.

DRE: Yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: One of your remaining three games will also be a *Solitaire* scene. You get to pick which. It could be the next one, it could be the last one you do, but—yeah.

DRE: Yeah. So I think if that's the case, I think the first one will be... "You've been meeting in secret with the local civilian leaders, and they demanded that you lay off your violent, dangerous actions."

AUSTIN: Oh, that's cool. So which planet are you on here?

DRE: Uh...

AUSTIN: So it's Sigilia, which is kind of where Grace has—

DRE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: —made her HQ, and is kind of... has been repairing and upgrading herself using the qualities of that planet? Vox is the—is kind of the hub of the Hands of Grace now, because it's—it was taken back over from the Vanguard, and it's the most populous planet in their collection of planets? And Slate is still the industrial head and is still kind of a shitty place. It's still kind of—the people there aren't necessarily... you know. Some freedoms are more free than others.

DRE: Yeah. I would say it's probably Vox or Slate.

AUSTIN: Okay.

DRE: I feel like Sigilia [with hard g] or Sigilia, Grace has that pretty much on lock down.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: And I think like what people are upset about is Grace being kind of like—I mean, like we've talked about, reckless and violent and things like that.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Um. So yeah, let's do Slate!

AUSTIN: Okay.

DRE: I think Slate makes the most sense.

AUSTIN: So like—so, Kobus—at this point, not with any of the Divines. None of the Divines are there. And it's probably just a foreman of a... of a group of workers, who, herself, is like very—like, even though she's ostensibly the manager of these people, she's like

AUSTIN (as foreman): Listen.

AUSTIN: Like,

AUSTIN (as foreman): These people see Grace come to Slate and any time there's even a bubbling of resentment or—or radical, you know, uh—organization, like—people go missing. The Hands show up and then people's family and friends disappear. You—you're the only one who can get close to them who understands. You have to—you have to have a talk. You have to—we want to hope in something. We can't be afraid of our leader.

DRE (as Kobus): I understand and... I'm doing what I can, but something is—something is different, and I need more time.

AUSTIN (as foreman): You better work quick. I can keep—I can keep my people organized. I can keep them working. But I can't—I can't keep them from being afraid. Not for long.

DRE (as Kobus): Just tell everyone to lay low for as long as you can get them to. Just buy me enough time, and things will change.

AUSTIN (as foreman): I have your word?

DRE (as Kobus): Yes.

AUSTIN (as foreman): [sighs] I just wish you were still—never mind.

DRE (as Kobus): I couldn't do this if I still was.

AUSTIN (as foreman): But you kept the name, huh.

DRE (as Kobus): I don't even remember what it was before Kobus, so.

AUSTIN (as foreman): [slight sigh] All right. I'll try my best.

DRE (as Kobus): Thank you. I will too.

AUSTIN: And I think it's as you're leaving this world, that you intercept the message—maybe it's actually a message sent to Grace. Maybe Kobus has like—is doing that like really shitty thing? Of like—having—had set up—a—an—uh—communication intercept?

DRE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Um. So what would... What would AuDy send to Grace, Jack?

JACK: I think it would just be something like, "You got it wrong."

[AUSTIN laughs]

JACK: "You have it wrong."

AUSTIN: Yeah. Um.

JACK: No mincing words here.

AUSTIN: Yeah. And I think, Kobus, you can recognize that it comes from—like, it—you trace it back. You trace the message back, because you know who AuDy is, right? Like—I—what—okay.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But you trace it back to a point in space where there is nothing, but it's where September used to be. Like, years ago. Um. Because, again, September is slowly spinning off into... into the sun. So it's a place in space that September used to be. What do people notice about Kobus after that scene? What's noticeable?

DRE: Just that I think that their trust and belief in Grace is at an all-time low. So like, if they're ever at like a, you know—an event with Grace, or at like a—like a diplomacy table, people can read the tension.

AUSTIN: Okay. Cool. So next up is Orth.

JACK: Mm. Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's you, Jack.

JACK: Yeah, that is.

AUSTIN: Orth Godlove...

JACK: Uh-huh.

AUSTIN: Or sorry. Sorry. *Executive* Godlove.

[ALI laughs]

JACK: Yep. *Executive* Godlove.

KEITH: I like how—I like how he just keeps getting promoted.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. He's doin' all right this time.

KEITH: Good for Orth.

AUSTIN: Yeah. He's in a weird situation, right? In that—he—

JACK: I am in a super weird situation.

AUSTIN: [slight sigh] Talk to us about Orth!

JACK: So.

AUSTIN: What's Orth up to, Jack?

JACK: Well, so, Orth... has gotten to the point where, as a result of his service, and potentially almost... even he's not entirely sure why. He has been promoted to the position of a sort of Michael Clayton-esque fixer?

AUSTIN: Mm.

JACK: Who has been sent into Golden Branch Oricon megacorps to try and basically bring them in line, or reform them, or—he's essentially been given executive control over megacorps. And the megacorps have about as many good feelings towards this as you would expect!

[AUSTIN laughs]

JACK: In the notes that Austin sent me, it just says, uh, my enemies are "the Rapid Evening, Minerva," and then "every megacorp inside of Oricon space."

[AUSTIN and ALI laugh]

AUSTIN: Right, but your friends are smaller corporations.

JACK: Totally.

AUSTIN: They—you know.

JACK: Unfortunately—

AUSTIN: Smaller businesses—yeah.

JACK: —my job is to basically handle those megacorps and—

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: —introduce a regulatory body? Um.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: So. [quietly] ...Great. Um.

AUSTIN: Mhm!

JACK: Orth, uh... isn't sleeping. And that's because it's the future, and in the future, if you're wealthy enough, or if you're busy enough, you don't need to sleep. Um. Orth takes pills every four hours, and he just doesn't—there is no sleep time for Orth. Um. He maybe takes forty-five—like a forty-five minute break in the middle of the night, when he can't—

AUSTIN: Does he still watch anime?

JACK: [stutter] I think that's what it is. I think he's—

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: That's a serious question.

JACK: No, I think—I think that's what the break is. I think he'll just like watch an episode.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: Uh, but he'll watch that episode in the back of a car, or like in a hotel room.

AUSTIN: Right. Right. Yeah.

JACK: He books hotel—

AUSTIN: There's a lot of like—if you're seen Cosmopolis?

JACK: Yes. That's exactly what it is.

[45:08]

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah, it's Robert Pattinson's character in Cosmopolis, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah, but older, and...

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Still as disaffected, though, maybe.

JACK: So, in comparison to where we first met him, where Orth was kind of just like filling out this slightly too small suit in a dusty office?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: Orth doesn't have to wear a uniform anymore. You know. He's not wearing a military uniform—

AUSTIN: [softly] Yeah.

JACK: —he's just wearing a—he is wearing a very expensive suit with the look of a man who doesn't know how to wear one. Um.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And he is just in the back of cars, and in hotel rooms with really nice baths and really small beds, 'cause he doesn't use them...

AUSTIN: [laughs] Right. It's a special request he has to make, which is pretty great.

JACK: Well, but the other thing is, people do that request.

AUSTIN: Sure.

JACK: Because everybody knows who he is.

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

JACK: He's Oricon's man. For better or for worse.

AUSTIN: Um.

JACK: So!

AUSTIN: All right, so which of these *Solitaire* scenes are you picking?

JACK: Ah, I have been scouting and touring the holdings of a megacorp.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: And I think that—who makes medicine?

AUSTIN: Um... God, we had a medicine company.

KEITH: It's still Pfizer.

JACK: It's not [laughs]—

AUSTIN: No, we had a—I think there was a company on Mode City that did it—

JACK: I think it's just like a—

AUSTIN: —and it's probably them. Oh, it's Bacchus Biotech.

JACK: Oh, right. Well—yeah—so it's Bacchus. It's not even like a—one of the big megacorps. It's—

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: —like it's not even like—it's not like Minerva or something.

AUSTIN: No, no. They don't have a planet.

JACK: Um. And Orth has landed there because he has heard reports that basically the... the board has been embezzling. Um.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: And he's landed, and he's been given a really gracious tour, *except*... they contrived to "abandon me in poor and unfamiliar ground." Uh. In the s—

AUSTIN: Where is it?

JACK: —in the center of a—

AUSTIN: Where have they left you?

JACK: It's a *parking lot*.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Interesting.

JACK: And Orth was told to meet the next peo—'cause he was shown around the manufacturing floor—

AUSTIN Yeah.

JACK: And then he was told to meet the next people in this parking lot, and... they just—they haven't—

AUSTIN: And it's been an hour.

JACK: —they haven't turned up. And it's been *two* hou—it's gotten *dark*.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Are you with your bodyguards?

JACK: I am with my—

AUSTIN: Your three—your three bodyguards now.

JACK: I should introduce my bodyguards!

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: I have three bodyguards. They are called Quavious Marshall, who is called Quavo, Kirshnik Ball, who is called Takeoff, and Kiari Cephus, who is called Offset. Um. And they're pretty good!

AUSTIN: Ah. This is a victory for all fans of Migos.

[JACK and DRE laugh]

AUSTIN: This is a victory for all fans of anime.

JACK: Yeah!

AUSTIN: Uh, I—so the only one of those that I've done any work trying to characterize—and I've done with Ali—is Kiari Cephus is—

ALI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: —definitely a really like mousy like... you know. She still pilots a mech when time be, but I think she's kind of your personal assistant?

JACK: Yes. Yes. She's the one with the essentially like the cyber—she has a load of cyberware for organa—she has like really high-end organization software cyberware?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Yeah.

JACK: It's just kind of probably...

AUSTIN: I feel like Quavo is definitely your... your like tough.

JACK: Like the muscle?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Um.

AUSTIN: And I don't know what Takeoff's deal is. Driver. Probably.

JACK: Yeah, I think so. Yeah, I—yeah, ‘cause I think—and so I think what’s happened is all of our vehicles have been valeted away.

AUSTIN: Oh. Sure.

JACK: Because we’re supposed to meeting the next person.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And so we’re all standing in this… parking lot.

AUSTIN: Is this—is this parking lot filled, or is it empty?

JACK: It’s empty. Uh. Well, there’s like—there’s like two cars.

AUSTIN: And then—okay.

JACK: I think we’re at the point where we’ve all just begun to admit to each other that we’re cold. Because before that, we’ve—we were too professional to.

AUSTIN: Right. [laughs]

JACK: But I think—I think Quavo has just turned to me and gone like “Yes. It’s really cold, isn’t it?”

[Laughter]

JACK: [laughs] Um. And then—

KEITH: How relieved was Orth to be able to complain?

[ALI laughs]

JACK: [laughs] Just so—

AUSTIN: So relieved. Right?

JACK: —oh, they—like Orth immediately relaxes.

AUSTIN: Yeah. And then a car drives up.

JACK: Yeah. And it doesn’t have any lights on. Which is really weird.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Because the only cars that don’t have lights on are cars driven by robots.

AUSTIN: And then the passenger seat—the passenger side door opens up.

JACK: Mhm. Rather than the back.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And sitting in the driver's seat is—and it's so shocking for Orth, first of all. Because it's AuDy. And it takes a moment for Orth realize that it's—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —it's not. It's another one. It's—you know, back in the days of Automated Dynamics, a company that is now *long* dead. Just so obsolete and so dead. There were hundreds of thousands of AuDy units.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And this is just another one of them. It has both arms. It has both antenna. And it doesn't say or do anything. It just—it just—everybody gets into the car.

AUSTIN: Right. And Orth gets in the copilot chair.

JACK: Uh-huh.

AUSTIN: Huh.

JACK: And it just drives us to the offices of the managing director. Where I fire him.

[AUSTIN laughs]

AUSTIN: Good. Perfect. What do people know about Orth?

JACK: [laughs] Um. Uh. As a result of this?

AUSTIN: Yeah. What is the—what is the um... Again, there's a—there's a—something about you that everyone else might notice. And then there might something that—uh, some piece of news or gossip that people have heard. So. Both or either of those.

JACK: I think the thing that everybody notices is that—is that Orth is taking the pills. Is that Orth isn't sleeping.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: And what they choose to do with that information I think is up to them. But I think that's what they notice.

AUSTIN: Totally. Yeah.

JACK: And I think the gossip that's—well 'cause Orth has a fighter pil—he was like an ace beforehand, right? So people knew him from just like the—an odd news entry, or something. Up until this point.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: I think that they—that the rumor is going around—is that this is somebody who finally has courage of their convictions.

AUSTIN: Cool. Uh, all right. Next up is Sylvia, who... is playing [sighs] Miss Jillian Redd.

JACK: Oh, dear.

SYLVIA: Yes, I am!

AUSTIN: What's up with Jill?

SYLVIA: Uh, so... Jillian's sort of... if anybody doesn't remember, w—back when AuDy threw her out of a ship, she sorta woke up on the Yersinia...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: In a new bo—like revived basically.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Since then, she's sort of rose the ranks within the Odamas fleet until they took Kalliope. And she's um, like the rank of captain now. And...

AUSTIN: Yeah. B—can she have her own ship? Does she have the Yersinia? Does she have a smaller ship?

SYLVIA: It's a smaller ship. I don't—

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: —have a name off the top of my head.

AUSTIN: That's okay.

SYLVIA: But it's like a smaller like carrier ship that can hold a few rigs s—for her unit.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVIA: And uh, she's basically become the like... go-to person for Hudson to send out to do m - jobs for him—

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: —like, personally?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: ‘Cause he doesn’t leave Kalliope. ‘Cause he’s old. And a rat.

AUSTIN: Right. And busy.

SYLVIA: And busy.

AUSTIN: Right, and a rat. And a rat. Right.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: There are places that still maybe don’t let you in if you’re a rat person.

SYLVIA: People don’t real—like a lot of people don’t wanna deal with a rat dude.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Still. Um. So what she’s ba—her job right now is basically a mix of monitoring the blockade and also negotiating with the other Free States to try and unify them?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVIA: Um. So actually that’s like—I think what my *Solitaire* scene going to be—

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: —if we want to just jump right to that. It’s “you’ve been meeting with representatives from the rest of the Free States.”

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVIA: And, um, I think it was specifically the representative from Kaffe demanded to lift the blockade.

AUSTIN: Ooh.

SYLVIA: On Oricon. Yeah.

AUSTIN: That’s a big demand. Okay.

SYLVIA: Yeah, it is. ‘Cause they want to, um... They’ve basically been crunching numbers and seen that Kaffe can grow and be more profitable if they could su—could do better de—trade with the Oricon... planets.

AUSTIN: It's one of those things where like, "Listen, we make a lot of money from the toll that you charge when they come through. But we'd be making more if that was—if we were just trading more often.

SYLVIA: Exactly.

AUSTIN: "And—we'd be trading more often without this tax." Yeah.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um. So, does Jill—when Jill hears that, is like—does Jill have a response, or is her job effectively just like, "Listen, I'm here to collect a message and move on."

SYLVIA: I th—

AUSTIN: Or does she use this as an opportunity to address this question?

SYLVIA: I think she has like an unofficial response.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVIA: Where it's like...

SYLVIA (as Jill): I'll see what I can do, but you know that's not very likely.

AUSTIN: Heh. Right.

SYLVIA (as Jill): Just with the way the relationship we have with Oricon right now, doing that is not a good idea. But I'll let Capt—I'll let Admiral Thorne know your stance on this—the matter.

SYLVIA: And the people—

AUSTIN: They are—

SYLVIA: from Kaffe are not happy about it. Like, that response.

AUSTIN: Yeah, they are not happy. Yeah.

SYLVIA: They're really pissed about that.

AUSTIN: Right. They were hoping—I suspect that it was almost like a winned and dined situation?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Where—which I'm sure Jill was not—Jillian was not necessarily into that? But like, um, very much expected her to at least put on the air? Right, like the way you do this is you leave

pretending to be convinced at the very least, and then you go back and of course they're gonna be wrong, but like this is the first step. And so when she just straight up shuts it down—

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Ah, it kind of—

SYLVIA: She—she's not really like a diplomat, she's a soldier who's gotta play diplomat.

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

SYLVIA: So she's just like—

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA (as Jill): Yeah, I'll try, but nah, probably not.

AUSTIN: Yeah. So how do you think she...

SYLVIA: And—okay.

AUSTIN: ...realizes that there might be a crisis soon? Do you think it's something... 'Cause it's another accident, right?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: In that—in that AuDy is not sending her a message.

SYLVIA: [laughing]—a message that says like, "Hey, sorry about the whole 'throwing you' thing."

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

SYLVIA: God. That's...

AUSTIN: Yeah. I don't—well she doesn't remember that, right? So...

SYLVIA: Yeah, I know, totally.

AUSTIN: I was gonna suggest something about like being keyed in to something, but then, right. She doesn't actually remember being killed by AuDy.

JACK: Good. Good.

SYLVIA: Yeah. Well. Pretty much all she r --

AUSTIN: She was killed.

SYLVIA: All she remembers is that she died, and that certain people didn't come looking for her.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: What?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, weird.

JACK: Hey.

SYLVIA: Yeah, weird! Um. Uh, I think it would have to be a sort of interception of something.

AUSTIN: Do you think it's just like something in her ship that is like—so a lot of the stuff that she has—a lot of the stuff that has made the Free States of Kalliope so powerful or successful is technology either inside of the Yersinia or backwards—what's the word I'm looking for...

SYLVIA: Engineered?

AUSTIN: Back—yeah. Reverse engineered. From—

SYLVIA: Reverse engineered, that's it.

AUSTIN: —from the Yersinia. Because the Yersinia is Rapid Evening tech. Um. And so, d'you think maybe just some sensors go off?

SYLVIA: Yeah. I think—I think that's basically it. I - um.

AUSTIN: Uh. Yeah.

SYLVIA: Like she's out like on a job intercepting like someone trying to smuggle through the blockade.

AUSTIN: Or I think it's just on the way back from this?

SYLVIA: Okay!

AUSTIN: Right, like I kinda—

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —here's the thing that's neat, is Kaffe is in the same vertical column as September is?

SYLVIA: Oh, true.

AUSTIN: And I kind of like this notion of just like... The way the message blasted out goes off in these cardinal directions... whether or not like they're aimed in that way. And just catches like this strange blast coming from where Rigour was defeated. Four and a half years ago.

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: And that's maybe worth thinking about or looking into, at least reporting to your scientists.

SYLVIA: Oh, definitely.

AUSTIN: Right. Uh, what do people know about Jill? Like what do other people in the world know?

SYLVIA: Um. I think people kinda know that she's kinda—she's becoming the... sort of ambassador? For...

AUSTIN: Okay. For Thorne... and Kalliope.

SYLVIA: Um, Kalliope at this point?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Okay.

SYLVIA: And I think they also know that she's trying to deal with a lot of unrest within the Free States.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally.

SYLVIA: Particularly around the blockade.

AUSTIN: Right. Um. Okay! Aria.

ALI: Hi!

AUSTIN: How's it going? I just realized we should go over everyone's...

JACK: Goals.

AUSTIN: Adjectives?

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh, goals are—uh, the goal—I think the goals have been pretty finely set.

JACK: All right.

AUSTIN: But adjectives... Cass? Uh.

CASS: Um. Yeah.

AUSTIN: You're authoritative, attentive, and intuitive. Aria. You are alluring, energetic and savvy. And the the thing that's great about these is, some of these are the same as what they were back in Mech Noir?

ALI: Mhm.

JACK: Ah! I hadn't noticed that.

AUSTIN: All of them except for Kobus. Everybody except Kobus, I think...

KEITH: I think all three of mine are the same.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. Um.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, Mako. Mako, you are clever, quick and charming. Um.

KEITH: Can I—can I also add that in the—in the appearance change category of what do people know about you.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: I think in order to separate himself from the c—the clones, Mako is trying really hard to grow a beard.

JACK: Oh!

AUSTIN: Oh, that's very sweet.

ALI: Oh, my god.

AUSTIN: And sad. [sighs] Jillian is—

KEITH: It's not. Great.

AUSTIN: —cool, fearless, and smart. Yeah, it's probably terrible. Uh, I don't think we—I wrote any for Kobus. 'Cause I was gonna ask you to do that, Dre—

DRE: Oh, yeah.

AUSTIN: —and then I didn't. And then I didn't. Um.

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Because I'm bad at this. Because of time. [pause] So what do you think?

DRE: Eh... Um... three of 'em?

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think we have a pretty good handle on Kobus, but think of three, so that by next scene you'll have them. How's that sound?

DRE: I feel like I've got cautious, hopeful, and I'm trying to think of a third.

AUSTIN: Okay. And then Orth is experienced, resolute and ace. I kept ace from Mech Noir.

ALI: Good. Good.

AUSTIN: Never for—never forget that Orth used to be an ace—an ace rigger pilot. Um. So Aria.

ALI: Hi.

AUSTIN: How's it going? With—with you and the Vanguard?

ALI: Uh. Well, I am the leader of the Righteous Vanguard.

JACK: Oh, Jesus.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah! And a hero. Right? Totally.

ALI: Yeah! Uh, yeah.

AUSTIN: So what've you been up to?

ALI: Um. I have been up to... you know. The same stuff, mostly. I have like a place on Counterweight and I'm still trying to get Weight?

AUSTIN: Yep.

ALI: Um. Oh... I... Aria's had a weird five years, I think. But—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: —is like sort of doing well, right? Like she was like a pop star who like wanted to be a revolutionary, and then she got like... She had to start running this weird business?

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Um, and I'm sure like for a while that didn't go super well, but now it's like sort of...

AUSTIN: Actually.

ALI: Balanced itself out.

[1:00:09]

AUSTIN: Right. Is actually a business slash revolution?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Yes, yes.

AUSTIN: Um. So the reason I read—I wanted th—to go back and read those adjectives is because I feel like a lot of the adjectives that people picked at Mech Noir were maybe not the characters that they were... then. But were their aspirations, and I kind of like thinking of these characters as the things that they wanted to be then. Right, like Cass *is* authoritative, attentive, and intuitive. By the end of that game, he'd be—he'd become—or they'd become that. Aria is alluring, energetic, and savvy. And like even though maybe she goofed up a couple of times... during the main game. In the years since then, has kind of grown into those traits that were just potential traits at the time. Um. So what is Aria doing for the *Solitaire*?

ALI: Um, for the *Solitaire*, scene "I've been quietly building support among people of a planet or city"?

AUSTIN: Okay. Which one?

ALI: Um. I'm not sure. We said we were gonna talk about that, um.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: And I don't know—like what is the—I think that she's smart enough not to go for one of the Minervas, but like what is—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: —the one Oricon planet or city that would be sort of the most vulnerable?

AUSTIN: [sighs] Probably Tetrakal, which is a small place. Tetrakal is where the Odomas fleet used to be. Um. It's like—so—there are people on Tetrakal who are still, um... run by like... you know, pirates.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Like, ocean pirates, even. Like, it's an ocean planet that does lots of aqua—aquaculture. You know, lots of seafood stuff, lots of like, um... seaweed, you know,

growing like for food. And so I think the people there are the ones that are the cl—the furthest away from the megaplexes and, you know, the massive con—you know, conglomerates on the other planets of Oricon. And are probably the most—it's also—it also just provides a really good... bookend? To—or mirror of that scene of Ibex on—down on Coral? Um. With the fisherman. I kind of like—

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: like Aria on the beach. With a nice bonfire going.

ALI: That works.

AUSTIN: So what's the result of that scene?

ALI: Um.

AUSTIN: Of trying to build support there?

ALI: "And you're pleased with the armaments you've collectively amassed."

AUSTIN: Uh, so that—you've—uh—you've—so that means the Vanguard is like literally... giving arms to these potential revolutionaries on Tetrakal? So it's kind of like all right, you're there to check in on what this cell [laughs] is up to?

ALI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Okay, good. Man. Aria's goin' for it, huh?

ALI: [laughs] So the idea here is that, um, like the thing that I wanna show in this scene, and that everyone notices, is that like the Vanguard is starting to get a little bit more aggressive?

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: Whereas before it was easy to ignore 'cause it's just like, Aria Joise is still has this like place on Counterweight—

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: —and is still going to Weight, and it's now it's like no. Maybe...

AUSTIN: Bigger things.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. 'Cause there'd been this moment, in—there had been this moment, I should address this, where like the Golden Branch sector was *a lot* of Vanguard. The Vanguard had blown. Ibex was very... convincing, and very powerful. And then Ibex called in a bunch of favors. And kind of ate crow a little bit with the Demarchy, with the Hands of Grace. And made

trades, made *political* trades, made, um... said basically, "Hey, you can have some space back on Counterweight. Hey, you know, I'll back the fuck off a little bit." And then—didn't have to do that, because Rigour was dealt with not in a giant confrontation but in a kind of clandestine strike. And so Ibex ended up trading away power that he didn't need to trade away. And then, once Rigour had been dealt with like also, it kind of reaffirmed the status quo, in a way. Right, like people were convinced that maybe the way things were going didn't need to be changed so radically. And I think that's why you see the Free States and the Demarchy growing in power, and not the Vanguard. Because the Vanguard represents something more radical than just, "Oh yeah, we'll just keep doing planets, but instead of being a bunch of planets, we'll be individual planets that kind of hang out together." Or like, instead of being like, "Oh, this will be, this'll be space Marxism," it's just like "Oh, no, it'll be—we d—space democracy, instead of—instead of weird robot fetishism or oligarchy." You know? So, I think the Vanguard's radical message was... not rejected, but lost a lot of its momentum, um, when Rigour was defeated. So I think that that's kind of the state of things. So yeah. Now they're getting more aggressive. I like that a lot. Um. How does AuDy get in touch?

ALI: Um. So I think [laughs] I think that AuDy sends her like—so in like Golden Branch equivalency, it would be like if today you got like a MySpace message from someone? [laughs]

AUSTIN: Mm.

ALI: But you've been using Twitter for years? [laughs] 'Cause I think that like when AuDy and Aria were like in the Chime together, she was like super into trying to figure out who AuDy is, if he⁴ was like a person?

AUSTIN: Right.

And like hey, you can sign up for this thing, and like take this BuzzFeed quiz, so we know what like Starbucks drink to order for you—

[Laughter]

ALI: —like. And then we'll go out and do it.

JACK: Oh, no.

AUSTIN: Ah. Does AuDy just send the results of a quiz they took all those years ago and never shared with you?

[Laughter]

ALI: Maybe? It doesn't...

AUSTIN: I kind of love that.

KEITH: AuDy is Chandler Bing! AuDy is Chandler Bing!

⁴ AuDy uses they/them pronouns.

AUSTIN: Yeah. You just get “AuDy is Chandler Bing”—no, it has to be Buffy. We’ve established Buffy is the... [laughs]

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Um.

ALI: [whispering] Fuck.

AUSTIN: And you get that result, and it’s—the thing that’s good is there’s this plausible deniability of like “Huh. That’s weird. Why would this—why would MySpace be sending me...? Huh. Huh.”

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But—

ALI: Part of her is like, “I set up that account, so maybe it’s a glitch, but then also like wait a minute.”

AUSTIN: Right. You know. Is the thing. Like—so if—so that’s *Solitaire*. That’s this first round of *Solitaire*. And I wanna be clear, like in the moments that follow or in the weeks that follow from that scene, you internally know—though most of the sector does not—that something is happening near September. Something is coming through... the door that was once closed is ever-so-slightly creeping open. And it’s not a thing you could just close.

But you also have other things to worry about. You have your revolutions and your struggling democracies. You have your erratic gods and your bickering politicians. So. Now we move into the game proper.

[Pause]

Uh. Let’s keep rolling with thi—no, I don’t—mm. Do we wanna just keep r—how about this? This’ll be easier. Everybody roll a d100.

DRE: Ooh.

AUSTIN: That will make it so that there’s a less chance that we’ll get repeat l—or, same numbers.

[Typing]

AUSTIN: Jesus christ! We got a same number.

ART: And we got a repeat number!

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: [evil laughter] Keith rolled a 69!

SYLVIA: [loudly] Nice!!!

[Laughter]

ALI: Um. I don't—I don't like this podcast.

SYLVIA: That's the perfect number for Mako to roll.

ALI: I quit. I'm hanging up.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Bye, Ali.

ALI: Austin *writes* "Nice."

[Laughter]

JACK: Austin didn't just say "Nice,"—

AUSTIN: I had to type it!

JACK: —he typed in the chat as well. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh.

[Laughter]

ALI: [whispering] Fuck.

AUSTIN: Uh. So it's Orth, with a 90. Then it is Jill, with a 76. Then it is—it is Mako with a 69... Nice. Uh.

KEITH: Wait, hold on, you skipped—you skipped Orth.

AUSTIN: No. I s—he s—f—I said Orth first. Uh, then Aria.

KEITH: Oh, Art—Art's 91 was a reroll. Okay. I see.

AUSTIN: Oh, Art's 9—I didn't see Art's 91. Oh, oh, I see, I see.

ART: That's a reroll. That's the tie break. It just means I go next to last.

AUSTIN: And then—okay. Cass. And then Kobus. Boom. Okay. Orth.

JACK: Hey. Hello.

AUSTIN: So this is—this is some amount of time later. This is not like—later that day. This is... this is... all of this game will be happening over the course of like weeks and months.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So. What's Orth up to? What game does Orth wanna play?

JACK: I wanna play a—the—I wanna have dinner.

AUSTIN: You wanna have dinner. Who do you wanna have dinner with? So I'll go to the—*A Conversation over Food.*

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: *"Set-up! Ask your chosen partner how you two came together to be eating. Other players can join freely if it makes sense for their characters to also be present at the meal. What do you notice about each other? What have you heard? During the meal, anyone can ask anyone for details about the setting, occasion or circumstances. Um. And then in the conversation, you take turns. The person with the lowest social standing takes the first turn. If this isn't clear, have another choose who takes the first turn at a whim."*

JACK: Wow!

AUSTIN: *"On your turn, choose one or more of your conversational partners and a—and choose an action. Either ask a topical question. Engage in an actual improvised conversation. Pass, saying instead—saying instead something about the food. Or leave the conversation."*

JACK: Oh, wow.

AUSTIN: And you can end the conversation when everyone has passed in a row, or everyone has left the conversation but one. So.

JACK: Wow.

AUSTIN: Who is, uh, who are you inviting to this conversation? Or to this dinner.

JACK: Um. I'd like to have dinner with the Steigers.

AUSTIN: Ooh, okay. So, one thing I'm saying is I think that you're allowed to have one scene with NPCs in this game?

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Like exclusively—

JACK: Yep.

AUSTIN: —like a proper scene, not just a *Solitaire* scene. Because I really want to encourage players playing with players, and not just with me as NPCs.

JACK: Totally. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um. But you can still do it once. So.

JACK: Yeah. And I feel this is a fairly good place to start.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: Okay, yeah. So I think Crystal and Colleen are met in the lobby of their building by Offset.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Okay.

JACK: Um. Who says “Executive Godlove would like to have a meeting with you.” And then I think Offset just leads them up to their own office?

AUSTIN: [laughs] As Orth’s already there.

JACK: Orth is just in their office. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Good. Okay.

JACK: Um. And I think maybe he’s brought food!

AUSTIN: Yeah, sure, of course. What is it? What sort of food is it?

JACK: I think it’s sushi.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: I think they’re having sushi, and they’re sat—

AUSTIN: That’s a good spin off of the scene on Tetrakal, too.

JACK: Yes.

AUSTIN: With the fishermen. That’s a good—that’s a good transition to make. Okay. So.

JACK: Okay. Um and I guess we should also like—everybody else can join in w—do you wanna talk about the rules for the audience? A little?

AUSTIN: So that’s not—this game doesn’t do the audience stuff...

JACK: Oh, okay, so it’s just—okay.

AUSTIN: Um. Yeah. Yeah. Ah—anybody can ask details about—can ask questions for details of the setting, occasion, and circumstances. So anybody who—if any of us had any questions about like what the offices are, or anything else. Totally can do that.

JACK: Yeah. Uh.

AUSTIN: Okay. So this is the—just to be clear, the *A Conversation over Food* game.

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Okay. [pause] Um, who has the lower social standing here? I think the Steigers do. For once. In their lives.

JACK: Yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Huh. Um. Okay. They're going to start with... a topical question. They hope to find common ground with you, about... the role of Minerva in the new Oricon. They want—they're kind of s—immediately in this mode of like, they're talking in ways about Minerva as if it's already in a position of collaboration with you?

JACK: Hm!

AUSTIN: There's lots of wes, there's lots of like—

AUSTIN (as Steigers): Well, we'll—you know, of course we would love to—we're going to assist as—in all possible ways as, you know, the more abusive and corrupt members of Oricon... need more regulation. We—you know, we're offering our services, and we've of course already begun internally—

AUSTIN: There's a lot of like—it's not... [sighs] It's this middle ground between... It's not like they're owning up to anyone. They're just acting as if they're already on your side.

JACK: Okay.

AUSTIN: What's, uh—what's your response to that?

JACK (as Orth): Do you fly?

AUSTIN (as Steigers): Do we—of course we fly. We fly everywhere. We have a moon where we mine. We—we have to fly there quite regularly.

JACK (as Orth): No no no, I mean—ah—what do you pilot?

AUSTIN (as Steigers): Oh, no. C—

JACK (as Orth): Oh, sorry. Sake?

AUSTIN (as Steigers): ...Please.

JACK (as Orth): Ah, look, I have to tell you something. Um. Your machines? Just amazing. Just—just great stuff. I've been, ah—I've been—I've been flying some of your—some of your new models, when I get the chance, and look, ah—you know, I know they're away from public release yet, and the targeting systems are not—but I mean, that wouldn't—that doesn't really present a problem. What I'm saying is, you make the best stuff, and you've always the best stuff. And I just wanted to thank you for your involvement—in that regard.

AUSTIN (as Steigers): W—Of course, we...

AUSTIN: Crystal gives like Colleen a very confused look.

AUSTIN (as Steigers): We're very proud of what our engineers have done over the years. Uh—the Rook is—has been the backbone of... of Oricon defense—

JACK (as Orth): Your engineers! Yeah, I'd be proud of them too.

AUSTIN (as Steigers): ...Yeah.

JACK (as Orth): I—I just want you know that um... no matter how this happens going forward, um... I can really see, ah... Minerva's legacy persisting. Especially with these new models.

AUSTIN (as Steigers): Huh.

AUSTIN: They're gonna bring up a likely topic as a—as a response to this.

JACK: Of course.

AUSTIN: Um. Which is, um... the revolutionary fervor of the local citizens. One of them, I think—I think Crystal's a little f—a little harsher than Colleen. Like, Colleen is... in this back-and-forth, begins to kind of like—go out of her way to continue the we, we, we, like “we're in agreement” stuff. But at some point Crystal cuts Colleen off and says—

AUSTIN (as Crystal): How often do you walk among the streets, Executive? The thing is—

AUSTIN: —she doesn't let you continue.

AUSTIN (as Crystal): The thing is that the people here, they don't know what they want. Some days, they want a revolution. Some days... they want to eat. And for centuries, the Minerva Corporation has assured that the most *important* needs are met. The thing is—ah, we understand your role. We understand what Oricon Expeditionary has been empowered to do here. But... if you think for a second that you can eliminate us without repercussion, I... You should think about who will starve. You should think about who feeds these people. Who assures them that the power will be on. And who *keeps* them

from raising up arms against whoever it is they've convinced themselves is oppressing them this week.

[1:15:57]

JACK (as Orth): Let me get something clear. These people? That you describe being looked after so well? They don't know who you are. Nobody on the street says, "Ah, thanks, Steigers. Nice work." You know what they do? They look up at this building, and they look up at the lights in your office—which, might I say, are *off* most of the time. Because you're not there. And they look up at them when they're and they imagine you in here *eating sushi*. If you think that I'm going to, ah, [laughs] alter the makeup of Minerva of some way, and because... the Steiger name isn't on the letterhead, the person in the tenement building below your offices is going to go, "Oh, no. Oh, what a shame. The Steigers," then you've got another thing coming.

AUSTIN: Colleen leaves.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: In a—in like a—bit of a rush. Crystal eats a piece of sushi.

AUSTIN (as Crystal): The fish used to taste better, from Tetrakal. I'm not sure what you changed there, but... Things used to taste better.

JACK (as Orth): You're real quick to play the idealist. You know, when I was given this job, I was given, uh... you know what I spent the first six months doing? Reading. I was given documentation from every megacorp. And [scoffs] look, I hate reading. I hate reading more than anything. I don't have time to, but I made six months, and I read everything. I've seen what you've been doing, and... I'm sorry, which one are you?

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: I love new Orth. I want new Orth.

SYLVIA: That's fuckin' savage.

AUSTIN: I love new Orth so much.

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: And I think like that's—I don't think it gets better than that dunk. I think that that's—

[JACK and DRE laugh]

AUSTIN: You just get a shot of Crystal eating another piece of sushi, and like... the close up of the vein in her head pulsing.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh, I'm guessing that that's a—that's a political point for you, yeah?

JACK: Yeah, totally. Oh, and then I think we just like a—a—like a closing shot of the outside of the tower block at night, and all the lights are off in the building?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Of course. Yeah. All of them.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: ...Okay. Good. Good good good. All right. Uh. Sylvia is gone right now.

SYLVIA: No, I'm back, I'm back.

AUSTIN: Sylvia's back! Uh, so what sort of scene does Jill wanna do?

SYLVIA: I'm not [sighs] entirely sure, if I'm being honest?

AUSTIN: That's fine.

SYLVIA: Um. Like I've been looking at them. I'm trying to think what makes sense...

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVIA: Um.

AUSTIN: Um, are there any suggestions? We could do another *Solitaire*, if you want to like continue to—if you wanna g—one, get that *Solitaire* out of the way, and two—'cause there's one more that you have to do, um. An—

JACK: It's like picking modules at university.

SYLVIA: [laughing] Yeah, pretty much.

AUSTIN: [laughs] It happens a lot like that. Uh, you gotta get it out of the way. Um. Your electives can come later.

[JACK and DRE laugh]

AUSTIN: Or we could either do something with something else. Could do an argument with somebody. Again, ideally I would love these to start being about player interaction, and not just me playing NPCs.

SYLVIA: Yeah, that's what I'm trying to—I'm trying to think of who makes sense to interactive with at this time.

AUSTIN: And so... An easy way to do this is to look at your—or—one way to help here is to think about who the enemies and rivals are, of your faction?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And so, the Free States, right now, are friends with the Demarchy, uh, and with just like the lowest of the low of society, um.

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: Like, Kalliope specifically has a really good relationship with, you know, people who've been experimented on. The former slaves of Ionias. Right, like—the Vanguard has a good relationship with poor folk and the working class, but like they haven't had to deal with people who were turned into rat people.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Whereas Kalliope has dealt with—you know.

SYLVIA: [amused] Kalliope is led by one.

AUSTIN: Right. Exactly. And that's an important distinction there.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But you can also look at who your rivals and enemies are. And, uh... you are—you are rivals with the Righteous Vanguard and the Rapid Evening.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And are enemies with Oricon and the Diaspora, so that's good. God, I wouldn't mind—I kind of wouldn't mind *An Animated Disagreement* with... the Vanguard.

SYLVIA: [intrigued] Oh, yeah?

AUSTIN: I kind of wouldn't mind that.

SYLVIA: I don't think I'd mind—I wouldn't mind that either.

ALI: [amused] That seems fine.

AUSTIN: So the set-up for *An Animated Disagreement* is, everyone plays. Decide with your chosen partner what is the matter of your disagreement.

SYLVIA: Hm. That's it?

AUSTIN: Where are you holding your discussion and who else is present? So what do the Free States want?

SYLVIA: Um. Okay. I'm trying to think of what would arise from the—what like—what conflict would ar—can we see the map again?

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah. Oh sorry, right—I am on the map and no one else is. My bad.

SYLVIA: Yeah. I just wanna see like what planets are bordering which.

AUSTIN: Totally. There is—yeah, so Slighter and Glimmer border each other directly.

SYLVIA: Okay. [sighs] Like I'm trying to think of something that could there that would lead to this.

AUSTIN: Uh, so—you know, one thing is, of course, the Free States—if the Free States had Glimmer, they could also block Diaspora from coming up.

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: Like, right now the thing is—so again, the kind of way that I've been thinking about this map is that you can kind of project force into one zone past a planet you own? Um... And you—right now the furthest west you can go is to 0109, which is like the second to the most fur—far bottom left one?

SYLVIA: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Whereas if you controlled Glimmer, you could still interrupt stuff coming through 0009?

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: Um. And so, I could—I could imagine the Free States being like “Listen. Glimmer is a struggling place. It would be better if it wasn't part of the Diaspora.” Like, even though it's technically part of the Vanguard, that's still a Diasporan group on paper, according to OriCon, who is still one of the big powers of the region. “Hey, Glimmer should be allowed to come join us?” And then—it seems like Aria's position would be like, “No. No, actually—”

[ALI laughs]

SYLVIA: No!

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: Um.

SYLVIA: Uh, yeah, that sounds good! ...Like it—it—like they're phrasing it like, “this is for the people on Glimmer,” but it's a really good tactical position for them.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Right. Okay. So, here's the thing that I love about *An Animated Disagreement*. So "*you and your partner each state your position. Everyone else takes the part of your audience, real or imaginary.*" So that means the other people in the room who—god, who's in this room? Who do you bring... Jill?

SYLVIA: Um. I think I bring—

AUSTIN: And where is this—where is this conversation happening?

SYLVIA: Would it be s—I think it'd be on Glimmer. It'd have to be.

AUSTIN: Okay. You think they would let you go there, or do you think it's—it's... somewhere that's actually not as hot? Like, somewhere diplomatically neutral.

SYLVIA: Well, where would be diplomatically neutral here? Like it could be on a ship?

AUSTIN: On Cou—

SYLVIA: I mean, is it...

AUSTIN: It could be on a ship, it could be on Counterweight. You could be anywhere on this map. Right? Like again this is a matter of months, not a matter of days.

SYLVIA: Okay. You know what, yeah, let's—I like the idea that of the di—the political—

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVIA: —government stuff happens on Counterweight, like at embassies on Counterweight?

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah, Counterweight has gotten increasingly multicultural—

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —in that because the Kesh accord has reduced the amount of reach that Oricon and the Hands of Grace have had, Counterweight is now just this amazing mess of embassies and different corporate enclosures, and just like—*everybody* has somewhere on Counterweight that's theirs now.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Weight is still mostly Grace, Oricon, and a little bit of Kesh, um, but Counterweight is now just this amazing mishmash. Um. So yeah. Do you go to Vanguard HQ or do you get somewhere that's no one's?

SYLVIA: [thoughtful noise] I think we'd wanna go to the Vanguard HQ to show we're not afraid of them? Basically?

AUSTIN: Okay. I think that. So, Aria.

ALI: Hi!

AUSTIN: Who do you bring—or who is there, when Jill walks in? Who is there with you at Vanguard HQ—also, what's Vanguard HQ look like on Counterweight?

ALI: Um. I don't know—where would it—mm.

AUSTIN: It's just like a building, but like what's it like—

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: —what's the des—how's it decorated?

ALI: I think that it's kind of simple, because like the point of the Vanguard is that like they're not trying to...

AUSTIN: Mm.

ALI: They're not trying to pull any of the influences from Oricon or Diaspora?

AUSTIN: Right...

ALI: Or like Apostolosian or like anywhere else.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: So it's like... It's like nice, it's like pleasant. It's like soft colors and like comfortable chairs.

AUSTIN: Okay. That's interesting. I like that. Okay. So. The audience of this, again, real and imagined. So that includes the people in the room, who I'm guessing are the people written down as soldiers on both sides? So that's like, on Aria's side, that is Jacqui, that is... Who else do you have? Um. Do do do... I have to pull this up. Oh, right! Tea. Tea Kenridge is there. We haven't seen Tea in forever.

SYLVIA: [pleased] [gasps] Tea!

[ALI laughs]

SYLVIA: I love Tea.

AUSTIN: I think maybe Sister Rust—

ALI: I think Tea is—

AUSTIN: —isn't there, Aria. I think Sister Rust is like with you, but not with you at base. Like, she's—runs—

ALI: Oh.

AUSTIN: —her crew still. It's just that they're loyal to you?

ALI: Yeah. For sure.

AUSTIN: Um.

ALI: I think like actually in this meeting I probably brought Tea with me.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. Yeah, I think Tea and Jacqui make the most sense.

ALI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Um. And then Jill... who did you bring?

SYLVIA: Um. I wanna bring... Territory Jazz Jr? But it doesn't make any sense.

AUSTIN: Me too! No...

[Clapping]

SYLVIA: I really wanna bring her.

AUSTIN: I know...

SYLVIA: Do—but like maybe as muscle? I don't know.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah. I kind of like that. I kinda want her there, in her fuckin' mask, with just—

SYLVIA: Yeah. Like, she's just standing at the back of the room.

AUSTIN: Spoiler, Territory Jazz had—Territory Jazz had a—had a daughter, and her name is Territory Jazz Jr?

SYLVIA: I call her JJ.

AUSTIN: They call her—yeah. Yeah, JJ. Um. She just wears—she has like—she's Asuka. She's Asuka with like silver hair? But like that same super violent grin? Um, and... Territory Jazz's blue and red mask. Blue mask with like red eye slits. Um.

SYLVIA: Mask...

ALI: Does she have like the—

AUSTIN: So, yeah.

ALI: —the like kitty-cat hat with the two pins that Asuka has in the movies?

AUSTIN: [snorts] God. I—no. Um, all right, so...

SYLVIA: And I think, um.

AUSTIN: Do you think Diego is there, too?

SYLVIA: I think Diego m—came along.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: But he wants to be the one running the conversation?

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: He's a little... upset that he's not doing what Jill is doing?

AUSTIN: Okay. I like that. This is also the first time, of course—so I—this is what happens.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Aria, you're at this table, and the door opens, and in comes Territory Jazz...

[ALI laughs]

SYLVIA: Yeah!

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: ...and Jacqui's ex.

SYLVIA: Yep!

ALI: Cool.

SYLVIA: Who you haven't seen since...

AUSTIN: Ever!

SYLVIA: Ah—like—oh yeah, I guess ever...

AUSTIN: Aria's never seen Jac—Jillian.

ALI: Aria never met her.

AUSTIN: Right—has Jacqui ever talked to you about Jillian?

ALI: ...Probably?

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's been five years. Right?

ALI: Yeah, I think—

SYLVIA: God!

ALI: —well, so I think like the—and that like—

AUSTIN: Ah.

ALI: —specifically the—why I was like “I don’t know if Jacqui and Aria are dating yet!” ‘Cause I think like that month-long trip to September...

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Probably was like “I’m a really big fan of yours, and like, my girlfriend just died?”

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: So Aria was like, “I can’t like—I very much wanna be your girlfriend, but I should maybe back off—”

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: “‘Cause you have some stuff you’re going through.”

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Um. Yeah.

AUSTIN: But in the time since then?

ART: Also I call that this is almost Stockholm Syndrome, but...

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: This countdown.

[SYLVIA laughs]

AUSTIN: Also—also there’s probably like—

DRE: [laughing] God.

AUSTIN: —a moment two years after you’ve known Jacqui where Aria gets really sad about AuDy, and then Jacqui is just like, “Yeah. I have to tell you something about AuDy...”

[ALI and JACK laugh]

AUSTIN: “...and my ex-girlfriend.”

ALI: Yeah, I feel like she never knew. Fuck!

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: God. Cool.

AUSTIN: Good. So. They’re all there now. *“Conducting the discussion. During the discussion, anyone can ask for details, setting—uh, about the setting, occasion or circumstances. The audience conducts the discussion. Audience members—”* who are us. Not, uh Aria or Jill. We *“take turns posing challenges to the position holders. Both position holders must answer each challenge. You decide who goes first, or let one of them volunteer. Once both have answered, award one coin to the one who gave the best answer. You have to choose. If either position holder goes on too long, you can cut them off—hoots and boos are optional—”*

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: *“—and award one coin to their counterpart, or else just ask them to kindly wrap up. They’re absolutely not allowed to interrupt—”* they meaning the two people, Jill and Aria—*“are not allowed to interrupt or rebut one another. If either position holder interrupts the other or tries to get in—tries to get in a rebuttal when it’s not their turn to answer, cut them off at once and award one coin to the counterpart. After three challenges, they compare coins. Whatever proportion they each hold, they can be confident that, if they were forced to commit, the same proportion of the audience, real or imaginary, would side with them.”* Um. So I’m not gonna do any of the challenges. I’m gonna make you s—three other people—

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: —pick that the challenges from the *Animated Disagreement* list. So—

JACK: I think it would be... interesting if Aria goes first?

[1:30:09]

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: If the onus is on—is on... Jill to respond?

AUSTIN: Respond. Okay. I like that. So what's the challenge? What's the first challenge? At.

JACK: Um. Let me just find the page... Okay. Um. Hm.

AUSTIN: And again, so this disagreement is over the ownership of Glimmer. Right? Is that the—

JACK: Okay. I—

AUSTIN: —is that the basic thing, or is there something deeper than that happening here? Is there something about the future of people, more broadly, in the sector? Like, is the—is the—does—real disagreement here, is it “who controls Glimmer?” Or is that a smaller piece of “who represents the disenfranchised?”

SYLVIA: I think it's like... they're hinting at the “who repres—who actually represents the disenfranchised,” but they—under the pretense of...we want control of Glimmer.

AUSTIN: Right, so that—I guess I—so, it—but in the abstract sense, it is that second thing, it is not the first thing.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay, because the ways these challenges are—work, it's like, we are—these challenges are not just like “Hey, um. Tell me—give me evidence that you're right,” necessarily? It's also—it's things like, *“Please explain how your position carries the weight of tradition, law and social order.”*

[ALI laughs]

[JACK laughs]

ALI: No one pick that. [laughs] We don't have answers.

JACK: Um.

[Pause]

JACK: What about—

SYLVIA: Everyone pick the f—

JACK: What about *“urgent and expedient?”*

AUSTIN: Where's that at?

JACK: Uh, *“Please explain how your position is the most urgent and expedient.”*

AUSTIN: Ooh. Okay. So that goes first to Aria.

ALI: Okay. [scoffs] [laughs] So the actual argument here is that they wanna take over...

AUSTIN: No. The actual argument is that the Free States are better for the people of the Golden Branch.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: The Glimmer thing is a pretense to have that more important debate.

ALI: Okay. So that's what we should be basing our positions on? Okay.

AUSTIN: That is the—yeah, yeah. Yes. That is the actual fight. That's—the actual *Animated Disagreement*. Like, they come to the office to be like “Hey, there's this territory dispute,” but the thing that's really—the real fight here is, “Is the Vanguard or are the Free States the voice of the people of the Golden Branch star sector?”

ALI: ...Mm. Okay. [laughs]

AUSTIN: So. How is the Vanguard the most urgent and expedient way to help people? And you don't have to do this in character, necessarily. You can speak the—or you like—you don't have to be in the voice of Aria necessarily.

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: You can be. But you can also just like talk about what Aria would talk about.

ALI: Yeah. Um. I don't know, I kept up being—'cause I think like... Those are tough things. 'Cause she's been like... waiting for a little while to actually make any action.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Um. So “urgent and expedient” are pretty tough? But I think that... god. And she's not even like the most—'cause like—the Free—

AUSTIN: So does she spin it around, and kind of reject the question all said? Is that kind of what her strategy is?

ALI: I think so, 'cause it's—it's sort of a weird thing where like... the... She's not the most urgent, she doesn't need to be, because that's how you make mistakes.

AUSTIN: Mm. Right.

ALI: Um. Where like... Kalliope like has better technology and like... you know, works in a much more direct way than the Vanguard does, but like...

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: The Vanguard has the... the bil—ability to say that like they've... had fights with Oricon and the Diaspora before.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And like they know how to do this, and like if it takes a long time, it takes a long time, but like it's gonna take a long to do it right.

AUSTIN: Right. Okay.

ALI: And then also like she's only just starting to do a thing, so like having any sort of like instability in her sector right now is the *worst* idea.

AUSTIN: So, Jill. How do you state that the Free S—how do you explain that the Free States are the most urgent and expedient way to serve the needs of the... lowest of the low on—in the Golden Branch?

SYLVIA: I think Jillian's like, "All the experience in the world doesn't matter if you don't do anything with it. And... from what I can tell, all the urg—all the Vanguard *does* is sit around waiting for the right time. A right time that doesn't seem to come up very often. We—we're not like that. We're willing to do what needs to be done *now*, instead of waiting forever until people have suffered more than they need to."

AUSTIN: Jack?

JACK: Yeah?

AUSTIN: Well, who do you give a coin to?

JACK: [breathes] I think I'm gonna give it to Jill?

AUSTIN: Okay. Jill gets one.

ALI: That is rude and not true. [laughs]

SYLVIA: Wazzup!

[DRE laughs]

JACK: Hey, no. I feel that—I feel that "all the experience in the world—"

AUSTIN: No no no.

JACK: "—doesn't matter if you don't do anything with it" is a very good [laughs]

ALI: Nn.

AUSTIN: All right.

ALI: My first scene was just doing stuff!

AUSTIN: What's—wh—wh—

JACK: And then you didn't!

AUSTIN: What's—we're talking—

ALI: No, it's fine. It's fine.

AUSTIN: Okay. Uh, we're gonna go to Art. But also I just want an image. What's Jacqui doing right now? When Jill says that, as the first words that she's heard from her ex who she thought was dead forever. Does she even know? Do you think—do people think she even rec—like... believes? D'you think she walks in and it's like that "Woah!" like, "That's weird!" and then hears her voice... and puts it together? Just paintin' pictures. Just—I don't know. I don't know the answers to these questions.

[ALI laughs]

SYLVIA: It's good. It's good!

AUSTIN: Ah, it's painful. All right, Art says that he wants to propose a challenge.

ART: Please make a personal attack on your counterpart.

ALI: Fuck you! [laughs]

DRE: Perfect.

KEITH: Aw, that was mine!

AUSTIN: Who goes—who goes first?

DRE: That was the one I was gonna to do too. [laughs]

ART: Well, I'm glad to—to satisfy both of our curiosity.

AUSTIN: Who goes first?

KEITH: It's okay, I have a back-up.

AUSTIN: ...Art, who do you want to go first?

ART: Uh. I want *Jill* to go first.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: Oh...

AUSTIN: Jill.

[SYLVIA sighs]

AUSTIN: This is a good game.

SYLVIA: Yeah, it is.

[JACK laughs]

ART: [sing-song] Love it!

SYLVIA: [laughs] Oh, man. Um. I think she goes,

SYLVIA (as Jill): Listen, Aria. I know you've had a lot of fun playing at revolutionary, but it's time to let the people who actually get things done do something for once.

AUSTIN: [in his hands] Ah, oh my god.

ALI: Ow!

AUSTIN: [gasps] Oh, my god.

ALI: [laughs] Should've said me...

SYLVIA: I'm sorry!

KEITH: Oh my god.

AUSTIN: Aria?

KEITH: I can't even get away from the election season in the games I play.

[Laughter]

SYLVIA: I know!

ALI: Fuck!

AUSTIN: Oh... Christ.

ALI: I'm so mad, I can't respon—no, I can. Come on.

SYLVIA: [laughs] Aria's response is—her personal attack is shooting Jill.

ALI: I'm just—

[AUSTIN laughs]

ALI: God, could you ima—no. No, but also. God, I'm just mad 'cause like—you've been my only fucking friend in the sector, you bitch. Fuck.

[KEITH and AUSTIN laugh]

KEITH: Ah, Art's sayin' fun stuff in the chat.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

[DRE and ALI laugh]

[SYLVIA laughs]

ALI: [away from the mic] I'm so upset. All of this is making me so upset.

AUSTIN: God, what if she—

SYLVIA: Oh, shit!

AUSTIN: Art in the chat said, "Aria: I threw a revolution in your girl's pants!" And that is maybe a step too far, Aria. Maybe don't do that?

ALI: Yeah. No. Never do that.

AUSTIN: Or, maybe do!

ALI: No. Never in my life. That's gross. Jacqui is not a bargaining chip.

AUSTIN: It's gross.

ALI: Fuck. Fuck you.

AUSTIN: Okay, good.

ALI: [laughing] Fuck everyone. Um.

AUSTIN: That would be when we know Aria has finally lost it. Right?

[DRE laughs]

JACK: Finally?

AUSTIN: And also, let's remember we said this, a few hours from now.

ALI: I like the Free States. [laughing] That's why I'm having a hard time like insulting you guys.

AUSTIN: Yeah, well. Sometimes you—

JACK: You could say something like “The bells are ringing!” and then shoot your gun in the air.

AUSTIN: [laughs] That’s mean.

[JACK laughs]

ALI: [laughing] Everyone is being so rude to me right now.

SYLVIA: That’s the problem, is like we’re rivals, we’re not enemies. But that went like to—zero to one hundred immediately.

AUSTIN: Yep.

ALI: You’re listed as like one of my only friends. It’s you, and the working class. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yep.

ALI: So I have to tread really carefully.

SYLVIA: I don’t think it’ll ruin like diplomatic relations. I think this is more of a personal thing between these two.

AUSTIN: That’s accurate.

ALI: I don’t not like you. [laughs]

SYLVIA: [sheepish] Yeah.

AUSTIN: Fight with your friends, ally with your rivals—

SYLVIA: Yeah, exactly.

AUSTIN: —fall in love with your enemies. It’s right there in the book.

ALI: [laughing] It’s right there! I think that what Aria says is, um. If you think that all I’ve been doing is playing, you haven’t been paying enough attention.

AUSTIN: All right. Keith. Not Kei—wait, who made that—Art.

SEVERAL PEOPLE: Art.

AUSTIN: Art was the one who made that challenge. Art, award points.

ART: Um. I think—I think I have to g—I think I have to give it to Jill. I think that was, uh. That was a sicker burn.

ALI: [breathless] Sure.

AUSTIN: Ouch. Youch. All right, either Keith or Dre. And that'll be the last one, 'cause we can't have—can't even out.

KEITH: Please express your position in the form a slogan that people can rally behind.

AUSTIN: Me.

SYLVIA: Fuck.

AUSTIN: I love that one.

DRE: Oh, yeah, that's way better. That's way better.

ART: Oh, my god...

AUSTIN: Please express your position in the form of a slogan that people can rally behind.

KEITH: I also—I really wanna say real quick, I like how difficult of a time Ali has using her fake character to insult another fake character, but is *perfectly* willing to be so mean to us all the time.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Damn!

ART: Oh!

DRE: Jeez!

ART: Keith gets a coin for that one. Give Keith a coin.

[AUSTIN and DRE laugh]

ALI: Ugh. Anyway, who goes first?

AUSTIN: Slogan! Yes, who goes first.

KEITH: Um... I'm gonna say that, uh... I'm gonna say that Jill goes first.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: I hate you. Um.

[ALI laughs]

SYLVIA: Like this is the one question I was like, man, I hope nobody picks this one!

AUSTIN: It doesn't have to be catchy.

SYLVIA: Yeah...

AUSTIN: We're not winning a real political thing here.

[ALI laughs]

SYLVIA: I know. I'm just like, what do I say that doesn't make me sound like an asshole.

JACK: But it does have to rhyme.

AUSTIN: It does have to rhyme. You're right.

SYLVIA: Does it h—okay.

JACK: No.

AUSTIN: It doesn't have to do that. No. But.

ALI: Also, you can be a little bit of an asshole.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: No no no, I mean like—not a mean asshole, like a sh—doofus asshole. I'm not trying to look like.

[AUSTIN and ALI laugh]

AUSTIN: Boo.

SYLVIA: [laughs] Fuck off. Um.

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Keith in the chat says, "Free the state of Glimmer. Make the Vanguard slimmer."

ALI: [laughing] I'm furious right now.

JACK: Boo! Boo!

ALI: I'm as mad as I've ever been in my life.

DRE: Boo, indeed.

SYLVIA: Uh.

AUSTIN: There's a thing here that I kind of like—uh. So do you have something, Jill?

SYLVIA: Yeah yeah yeah. I'm—

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: —just trying to figure out like how to word the first part of it.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: Um... Under the Vanguard, Glimmer will never shine like it used to, but with the Free States, we can make it... part of something... better. I don't know. I'm bad at slogans. [laughs]

AUSTIN: That's fine. So is Jill, probably.

[ALI laughs]

SYLVIA: Yeah. Jill's like not—fuckin', the songwriter can do it. Jill's just like—

AUSTIN: Aria?

SYLVIA: —“I wanna shoot somebody.”

ALI: [laughs] Um... I'm trying to think of something that's like a little bit Ibex bullshit.

AUSTIN: Yeah! Channel it.

ALI: Um. And I think it's something—god, it's something like really shitty, like... “Perfection takes time and saves lives.”

AUSTIN: Mm. Perfection. Good.

ALI: [laughs] Yep.

SYLVIA: Yeah. Say that to fuckin' my people, of course.

AUSTIN: All right.

SYLVIA: Why did you go first? I could have made a really good rebuttal to that.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Keith.

KEITH: Ugh.

AUSTIN: Keith and Dre.

KEITH: I'm gonna give it to—

AUSTIN: I guess—

KEITH: —what—what's that?

AUSTIN: But I guess Keith asked the question. Who you givin it to?

KEITH: Uh, Dr—Dre, do you wanna—do you wanna decide together on who to give this to?

DRE: Uh... I don't know. I'm torn. I'm gonna let you do it, it's your question.

KEITH: Okay, I th—I think that we should give it to Ali.

ALI: Thank you.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: Like, yeah, it's—yeah. It's Ali. Like don't pretend it's not Ali.

[ALI laughs]

SYLVIA: Like, yo.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Okay. Um. *“Ending the d—ending the discussion. After three challenges, they compare coins. Whatever proportion of coins that they hold, they can be confident that, if they were forced to commit, the same proportion of the audience, real or imaginary, would side with them.”* That means like a third of the people in that room agree with you, Aria. And kind of, in a sense, a third of the people in the Golden Branch. Right? That the Vanguard is the way to go. Um. Which is interesting, because a lot of the argument made here was about taking more active steps? Um. That's what people want. Um. God. Does Jacqui say anything? Jill, do you—Jill doesn't know. Right, Jill has no idea. Aria, do you say anything? To Jacqui?

ALI: Um. I think I will in my next scene? [laughs]

AUSTIN: O—but not here, not now.

ALI: Right, 'cause—yeah. That would be...

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: I think she like... it... it's like maybe a little bit clear that sometimes Aria gets distracted.

AUSTIN: Mm.

AUSTIN: I could—

ALI: There's like—

AUSTIN: I think—

ALI: There's like glances between the two of them like a lot.

AUSTIN: I think Jill—after Jill leaves, I think Jacqui goes after her. Like, after a moment. Like, not like in a rush. But like. I think she goes. And we don't see that onscreen. We just see—we don't see what happens on screen. We just see her going after Jill. Who's next? Let's roll back up, past all these insults.

ALI: I am, I think?

AUSTIN: Oh, good.

ALI: Yeah.

ART: I think it's Mako's.

ALI: Oh. It is Mako, yes.

AUSTIN: Okay. Mako, what sort of scene do you want?

KEITH: Um.

AUSTIN: Also, wait—wait wait wait, wait. Before we forget. Uh. Who—sorry, I've totally lost w—my order thing. Okay.

SYLVIA: Uh, w—

AUSTIN: So Jill.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Who do you think—so Jill, do you get a—you get a political point there, you think?

SYLVIA: That's political, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: That's purely political, I think.

AUSTIN: Okay. Boom. Mako.

KEITH: I want to do... maybe a tactical skirmish?

AUSTIN: Ooh. Okay. That's fun. Um, against a PC or an NPC?

[1:45:00]

KEITH: Uh, PC.

AUSTIN: Okay. *“Set up. Only you and your chosen p—chosen partner play. Decide with the chosen partner which of you is the attacker and which is the attacked. Ask your chosen partner how the battle came about.”* Who you choosing?

KEITH: Um... I... This is hard. This is a hard one. Okay.

AUSTIN: Yeah. We can contrive for a reason for this with anybody, though, so.

KEITH: Yeah, yeah. That's—that's what *makes* it harder, I think.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Is like, I can do ba—I could do all of us.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Um. I think it's... I think it's Orth?

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: Hello!

KEITH: Hi! Hello.

AUSTIN: Interesting.

JACK: Uh, this is a sk—tactical skirmish?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Yes.

JACK: Okay, I'm bringing up the page. [with trepidation] Oh my god.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Ask your chosen—so, Orth. How did this battle come about?

JACK: I think that... I think that I'm defending. I feel that the Righteous Vang—sorry, that... that, um...

AUSTIN: The Rapid Evening.

JACK: The Rapid Evening are more likely to make a move... on the OriCon Executive than o—the OriCon Executive making a move on the Rapid Evening, at this point.

AUSTIN: Okay. Y—

JACK: I don't know. How do you feel about that, Keith?

KEITH: I totally a—I totally—uh, well. I *guess* that I totally agree. I think that—I think that the Rapid Evening has really weird motivations in that they kind of feel they belong everywhere?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Uh, and so, because of that, it doesn't really feel like they're attacking, more like they're pushing... pushing something that they're—they're—that's—that they already consider kind of theirs?

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: Yeah. Okay.

AUSTIN: So is the situation here then, I—here's my suggestion, maybe? Is that they're—there's a—they're on a place... Orth, you're there to do whatever Orth does, which is like go in and s—do an evaluation of something. And while there—

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Mako is leading an attack to reclaim... something—that this place shouldn't have.

KEITH: Do I get to choose the place?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally.

KEITH: Um, w—wait—

AUSTIN: No, you collaborate and do it, but yeah.

KEITH: Okay. So, Jack, I think that—I think the—so the reason that I chose Orth for this is that I think that maybe the—I think the Rapid Evening have overlapping goals and ideas, in a way?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

KEITH: And I think th—but I think that because we're separate entities, they sort of butt heads? And I think that we both have an interest in Minerva.

AUSTIN: Right. So like—

KEITH: And in...

AUSTIN: Go ahead.

KEITH: Specifically in the... specifically in the—uh, with the—what's the... company called? I can't remember the megacorp name.

AUSTIN: Minerva's right. You got it.

KEITH: Oh, is it—that's just the name, is also Minerva?

AUSTIN: Minerva Mining—Minerva Mining and Mechanics, yeah.

KEITH: Yeah, right. Yeah.

AUSTIN: So like maybe they, uh—Orth, you were there to shut down a fac—or to investigate a factory that is a... like an experimental facility where they have some—they've stolen a piece of Rigour's arm. And are using it—

KEITH: Mhm.

AUSTIN: —to investi—to develop new technology.

KEITH: You said you made the best stuff, Jack! There's a reason.

[AUSTIN laughs]

KEITH: There's a reason they make the best stuff.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: Um. So I'm guessing—what are your objectives in this skirmish?

KEITH: Um. Is there a list of objectives? Or am I just telling you...

AUSTIN: Uh, no! You just tell me a thing.

KEITH: Okay. Um. I think that I want to... I wanna get in, destroy the Rigour tech, and also sabotage the... line of—

JACK: Oh my god.

KEITH: —riggers that they're making and that—

JACK: Oh my god, Mako.

KEITH: —are using that technology. Uh-huh?

JACK: Mako. Mako.

KEITH: Yeah, hi. Yeah.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: What's up?

JACK: [laughs] Mako...

KEITH: Yeah?

JACK: There's about to be a war.

AUSTIN: And he wants to blow up a f—a war factory. Yeah. Uh-huh!

JACK: Yeah... Mhm.

AUSTIN: Okay. Um, so what's your objective? Orth.

JACK: Protect the things, and also try and—actually, no. No. My objective is to [laughing] try and convince Mako th—

AUSTIN: Oh, this is not a convince scenario. This is donezo.

JACK: Oh, okay. Right. Fine. Yeah. Right. Just defend the—defend the thing. Stop it from being blown up.

AUSTIN: Okay. So, both of you *“say how many soldiers you lead. It should be a number from three to eight. Be prepared to identify each one by name, rank, code name, relationship to you or position in your force.”*

KEITH: Boom. Eight. Got it.

JACK: Are these people on our list? Or can we just make 'em up?

AUSTIN: You make 'em up. But it's also the people on your list. But you can also make 'em up.

JACK: Okay! So—

KEITH: Here's my—so—is it—is the eight including—or is the number myself, or is it other than myself?

AUSTIN: It's you and eight other people.

KEITH: Okay. It's—so it's—it's—okay. So, no, it's me and seven other people.

AUSTIN: Or you and three to eight other people.

KEITH: It's me and seven other people—

[JACK laughs]

KEITH: It's me, Larry, Mako, Mako, Mako, Mako, and Ted.

AUSTIN: Okay. See—so—so there're Makos out there. In the world.

KEITH: Uh, yeah, like one or two?

AUSTIN: Yeah, okay. Um. Okay. So the way this game works—"During the skirmish, anyone—including people not there—"

JACK: Do I not get to say who I have?

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah, please, tell me who you have.

JACK: Uh, it's me—

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: —it's Quavo and it's Offset.

AUSTIN: Okay, so... So... God, what is the third one's name? Offset—

JACK: Uh, Takeoff.

AUSTIN: —Quavo and—Takeoff, right. Not there. Takeoff not there.

JACK: No.

KEITH: Wait, does—Jack—do you not need a third troop, or is it—

DRE: Oh. It's—

AUSTIN: Yeah, you do. You do need a third person. It can be somebody else. It could be just like another unnamed bodyguard or one of the—one of the—

JCK: Oh, it's the—it's the—

AUSTIN: —Minerva people?

JACK: —it's the human valet of the car that we were in, at this point.

AUSTIN: Okay. Okay. Um.

JACK: Oh, we have a human valet, 'cause it's kind of not a good look for Orth to be getting out of a car driven by a robot, if what he's promoting is sort of like—

AUSTIN: People?

JACK: Uh—yeah. A better, more—more human workforce.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Good call. Okay. Um. *“During the skirmish, anyone, including people not at the table, or not at the battle, can ask for more details about the landscape and the circumstances. Conducting the Skirmish. Take turns making demands of each other. The attacker makes the first demand.”* Which means in this case I think it’s Keith. Mako makes the first demand. *“When you make a demand, you choose whether to demand submission or withdrawal. In your demand, you must name yourself, one of your own soldiers, and one of your enemies declared objectives.”* The list of demands is on 25. Uh, *“the Skirmish ends when either one one of you accedes to a demand, submitting or withdrawing, one of you—one of you loses the last soldier from your force, in which case you must immediately submit or withdraw, or one of you is killed or captured.”*

KEITH: Now, do I—when I—when I make the demand, do I give them the option of submitting or withdrawing—

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: —Or do I say “Submit now?”

AUSTIN: No, you say, “Submit now or withdraw now.”

KEITH: Okay. Um.

AUSTIN: I love this game, because it’s the reverse of what you think it might be.

ART: Yeah, it’s great.

KEITH: Some of these are *brutal*.

AUSTIN: Yeah! They’re all brutal.

DRE: Yeah!

AUSTIN: Fighting is tough, it turns out. And difficult. And painful.

JACK: But let’s be clear, it is absolutely nothing compared to what’s about to happen, in...
[laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah. A couple hours. Yeah.

[JACK laughs]

KEITH: Jesus christ. These are like brutal.

AUSTIN: Yeah!

KEITH: Okay. Uh. [clears throat] Now submitting, is that a full surrender, and a withdraw is like a partial...?

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think it's—withdraw is you back off—they would back off this factory, and you would be able to—regardl—if you win, you get to blow up this factory. But if they withdraw, then the fiction isn't that they've been captured by the Rapid Evening. Right? Whereas—

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: —whereas, if Orth submits here, then I—the next scene better be Orth in... custody somewhere.

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: The next Orth scene.

KEITH: Uh... okay. Uh, withdraw now, or my least experienced soldier surrenders to your mercy.

JACK: No.

KEITH: So you—I—you just get one of my Makos?

AUSTIN: Yeah, one of the Makos just get—so like, I think maybe—

JACK: Uh, wait. So Keith, are you sure it's one of the Makos?

AUSTIN: Also wait—what—also, wait a second—um. Yeah, that's a good question.

KEITH: I would say that the Makos are my least experienced soldiers.

JACK: Sounds to me like you're trying to... they're clones of *you*, Keith.

KEITH: Right. Well, I—they di—they're clones of me with less experience and different... lives.

[Traffic noise]

JACK: It's been a lot of years.

KEITH: Yeah, well, I got—I got—

JACK: You literally said you've been training them.

KEITH: Yeah. But they're still like... the student's not become the master.

JACK: They're clones of you!

AUSTIN: I think Jack wants Ted.

KEITH: You're—

AUSTIN: Jack wants Ted real bad.

KEITH: Jack can't have Ted. Ted is... my right-hand man. He's not my least-experienced soldier.

ALI: Yeah, Ted has tons of experience.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): [scoffs] Ted has so much experience.

[DRE and JACK laugh]

KEITH: Ted is an entrepreneur. Ted is—

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Ted got twelve more jobs, since—

[JACK and Ali laugh]

KEITH: Ted got twelve more jobs.

ALI: What twelve?

ART: [whispering] Jack! Kill Ted!

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): They're all part of this one business, so...

ART: [whispering] Jack! Jack! Kill Ted. Kill Ted in this battle.

DRE: Oh my g... No!

AUSTIN: That would go—that would be a long battle. Uh—yeah. Okay.

JACK: So, okay. I've got a Mako.

AUSTIN: You've got a Ma—oh—so is this—this is a ground battle. This is like—running through the factories with guns?

JACK: I think what happened is that I—do I know it's Mako? 'Cause we're—I assume we're all inside riggers.

AUSTIN: Okay, so yeah. I think—from my sug—here's my suggestion. Is like, yeah, you're inside, like looking through the factory, there are not very many people working in this factory. It's just like "K-chunk! K-chunk! K-chunk!" Just like machines punching out parts of riggers and being put together. There's some scientists, who, deep inside the facility, are the ones who have the Rigour tech, who are like experimenting on it and, you know, doing the job as safely as they can, but also it's still part of Rigour. And, uh, I think you probably hear the Ring of Saturn. You hear like the—

JACK: Ugh!!

AUSTIN: "Vrooom!" cut through the air. And then other Makos roll up too, with just guns and stuff?

JACK: Oh, god.

AUSTIN: Ah, and they—and—of course, they start hacking the factory, probably, right?

JACK: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Does that make sense, Mako? To you?

KEITH: Uh, yeah. Yeah, definitely.

AUSTIN: To where it's just like the rigs are waking up and like—attacking the factory itself, and each other, and you. But one of them over commits. And Quavo like tackles him to the ground, and puts the—puts like futuristic zip ties on him. They're made of metal instead of plastic, but like a real bendable.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: Metal.

JACK: And they also paralyze on contact.

AUSTIN: Yes. Totally. Just like an electrical charge runs through them.

JACK: Just cut out the middleman, here.

[AUSTIN sighs]

JACK: Um. Okay! So I have a Mako.

AUSTIN: Yeah. And now it's your turn.

KEITH: Mhm.

JACK: [sternly] Keith. And Mako.

KEITH: Hi.

JACK: Withdraw now, or an opportune shot cripples Quavo, my lieutenant.

KEITH: Uh, no.

AUSTIN: Ah, everyone's gonna die. Good.

JACK: Okay, so...

AUSTIN: So Quavo gets—Quavo's like in the process of zip tying this Mako, and paralyzing him, and then he like pushes off of him, and stands up, and like runs with like—real—pulls out a little cube that extends into an ex—into an assault rifle, and then just like starts shooting at the different Makos, and I—I really like this image of just like one of the riggers picks up Quavo by a leg.

JACK: Ah, yeah!

AUSTIN: And just squeezes, and drops—him?

JACK: Okay!

AUSTIN: And he just like doesn't have that leg anymore.

JACK: And so I think then what happens is Offset runs over and puts Quavo in the zip ties. Just like, "Don't move!" Like, what...

AUSTIN: Okay, right. Sure. Sure sure sure.

JACK: You're gonna hurt your back, you're gonna hurt your leg.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Great. Mako.

KEITH: Wuh! Um. Okay. Uh. Withdraw now, or we abandon another Mako to you and retreat to a fallback position.

JACK: [laughs] What Keith is doing here is the boss fight where they're all weak clones of...

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Yep! That is what's happening.

JACK: No! I want another Mako—Keith, am I just gonna end up with a Mako army?

KEITH: You're gonna end up with

AUSTIN: I mean, they don't join you, but.

JACK: Nope.

AUSTIN: Yeah, so.

JACK: Okay. Right, so where are you withdrawing to?

AUSTIN: He's not withdrawing.

KEITH: Uh.

AUSTIN: Right?

KEITH: No no no, I'm retreating to a fallback position.

JACK: Oh no, sorry, where are you pulling back to?

KEITH: Yeah. I would—I would just say like—I'm imagining a factory filled with, you know, conveyor belts and weird boxes, and we just moved back a couple rows of boxes.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: I think it has to be more than that.

KEITH: What's that?

AUSTIN: You're not like leaving the facility or anything, but you do have to fall back from like—it can't just be twenty feet, you know?

KEITH: Okay, we can go—we can go back towards near the exit. Like—

AUSTIN: Okay.

KEITH: Like a—"If we gotta retreat, we gotta retreat."

AUSTIN: What if it's the other way, actually? What if it's that you start going deeper into where the—where the science stuff is?

JACK: Oh, that makes sense, yeah.

AUSTIN: And so you leave behind one of Makos, who can't keep up.

KEITH: Okay.

JACK: God. There's a way to win this game.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: Yeah. But, ah—it's a tricky one, huh?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: [laughs] I don't know if I can do it.

AUSTIN: You have to.

JACK: Yeah, like I—

AUSTIN: That's the thing.

JACK: I feel that—yeah. Like.

AUSTIN: No no no. Like literally you can't accede to a demand this turn.

KEITH: It's okay. I have a really good idea, and everything's gonna work out fine. Trust me.

AUSTIN: I'm excited.

JACK: Yeah, I think—I think we might all be talking about the same thing here. But I'm not—I can't do it. Um. Withdraw now, or you zero—oh, no, I can't do this, right, I can't play Quavo again.

AUSTIN: No.

JACK: Oh, no, I can! I can, right? I can, because they'll—there'll still be consequences.

AUSTIN: Sure, he'll be dead.

JACK: Yeah. Uh. Ss. Withdraw now, or you zero Quavo on my—you zero Quavo on my flank, and blow the hell out of them.

KEITH: [quietly] God damn it. [louder] Um. I can't do the—I can't do the thing that I wanted to do. Um.

[AUSTIN laughs]

KEITH: So what are the—what are the consequences of submitting or withdrawing at the end of this?

[2:00:03]

AUSTIN: Well, you withdraw. In your case I would say that it means you don't—this is your scene. If you withdraw here, you do not get to put a—a point into your political thing.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: Right? Like if anything, I think he—

KEITH: Um. Right.

AUSTIN: But Orth—

KEITH: What's the—what's the consequence of—if Jack or I get captured? Like what is the—

AUSTIN: It's a fictional thing. Which is, your next scene better be about you being captured.

KEITH: Right. Yeah. Okay.

AUSTIN: And that will probably not be a place where you can earn crisis points or political points for yourself.

KEITH: Right. Okay. Orth? Submit now, or an opportune shot cripples Ted, my lieutenant.

[AUSTIN laughs]

[JACK laughs]

SYLVIA: [laughing] God.

AUSTIN: Oh.

KEITH: This is submit. This isn't withdraw.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: Wait, hang on. So—so... also, just to be clear, you *did* just kill that guy whose leg you'd previously blown off.

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: Yes.

JACK: You just gunned him down.

AUSTIN: Quavo is dead. He was zip-tied on the *ground*.

JACK: Yeah, Keith.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay.

KEITH: I mean, I didn't w—I didn't want to!

JACK: [irritated] Okay! We have a lot to talk about. I submit.

[AUSTIN laughs]

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: Phew! Uh, political point for Mako. Presumably. Right?

JACK: Hey, Mako? Hey, Mako.

KEITH: Yeah. Hey.

JACK: Have fun with that tech.

[AUSTIN laughs]

KEITH: I'm not gonna have fun with it, I'm gonna destroy it.

AUSTIN: Well, he's destroying the whole facility. Let's remember.

JACK: ...Jesus christ.

AUSTIN: And he's—

KEITH: Oh, do I have to destroy the whole facility?

AUSTIN: That was your objective. Yeah.

JACK: Yep! Sorry, dude!

KEITH: Well, I might—my objective was to destroy the Rigour tech and to sabotage the—

AUSTIN: Yeah, but the—all of this is—all of this is—that's what this facility is.

JACK: Look. Yeah.

KEITH: Okay, that's fine.

AUSTIN: Building mechs, uh, based off that stuff.

JACK: No, let's also—

KEITH: Okay.

JACK: —be clear. Building *riggers*.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yes.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Out of Rigour. Out of Rigour tech.

JACK: Uh-huh.

AUSTIN: It's really good stuff. And they're being—

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —being—very safe. They're being—

JACK: Really.

AUSTIN: —as safe as possible, you know.

JACK: Mhm. Mhm.

AUSTIN: So.

KEITH: My plan—my plan was to submit to Jack, but Jack did withdraw, and I was—that would have been a nothing for anybody.

AUSTIN: Right. I see what you're saying.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I would have given a—I would have given points to—I would have said Orth gets points from that. Gets political points. But yeah.

KEITH: It's fine.

AUSTIN: Um. Let's, uh, who's next?

ART: Aria.

ALI: Me.

AUSTIN: Aria.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: In the chat, Dre says, "Lazer Ted turns this factory into a giant printer production facility and runs Kinkos out of business." God damn it.

ALI: I hate this show.

AUSTIN: Aria. What's your scene?

ALI: Um. Hi, I... I'm debating whether I want to *Steal Time* with Jacqui or do another *Solitaire*.

AUSTIN: I think that *Steal Time* is probably right now, right?

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Post-Jill?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It has to be. All right.

ALI: Yeah... I just mean that—Yeah. [laughs] That's gonna continue getting weird.

AUSTIN: Only you—mhm.

ALI: Um. But.

AUSTIN: *"Only you and your chosen partner play."*

ALI: Mmh.

AUSTIN: *"Ask them how you two came to be stealing time together."* I think we know. I think this is just, you and Jacqui have been together for a while. And—where is this, do you think?

ALI: Um... It depends on how we wanna do the interruption mechanic.

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah.

ALI: They probably make their home like in the Vanguard base?

AUSTIN: Sure.

ALI: Like that's where they actually live? Um. My favorite... *Stealing Time Together* move is, "I open your mobile frame's canopy. May I?" Um. So.

AUSTIN: Oh, so—y—it has to be in a garage somewhere.

ALI: Yes. [laughs]

AUSTIN: It has to be in like the Vanguard garage.

ALI: Um. Yeah. I—[sighs] I don't know if... it should be Aria going to visit Jacqui in the Brilliance, or if it should be... Jacqui coming to... or her—I guess her calling her to... It's probably the Brilliance.

AUSTIN: I kind of just like, it's just going through... like normal—like scheduled maintenance. Together.

ALI: Okay. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like this is a thing that they do in... like—this is a scheduled thing they do every week. It's like a favorite activity for them to like—"It's hard to spend time together. We can at least get

to... hang out. While we fix your mech up every week.” And run—go through schematic—you know, go through—go through, uh—what’s the word I’m looking for. Um. You know what I mean.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It had to go through tests and stuff.

ALI: Right. Yeah. That’s perfect. Good.

AUSTIN: All right. So, *“what do you notice about each other, what have you heard?”*

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: I think Jacqui is distant. Like she’s going down the checklist, and isn’t... being especially flirty.

ALI: Mh. [whispers] God. [louder] I think that up until that Kalliope meeting, Aria was also sort of like distracted with stuff, and this is her like—

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: This would be her trying to make up for that?

AUSTIN: Yeah. I like that.

ALI: But then Jacqui is also really distant. Um.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Um. *“Converse as you like, naturally. During the conversation, either of you may, whenever you like, begin an exchange by making an advance. The other then makes an answer to conclude the exchange. Return to conversation or advance into the next exchange as you like. Ending the liaison: at any time after the third exchange, any player may interrupt by having someone else enter the scene. Otherwise, continue your conversation and exchanges until you—until you part, or draw a curtain upon what follows. Under another’s nose: if there’s a risk that you’ll be caught together, then any player may, after any answer, have you throw.”* Uh, toss a coin. *“On tails, you’re discovered or exposed.”* I don’t think this is a—I don’t *think* this is under anybody else’s nose. No one’s gonna *discover* them. Here.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But. But. All right. Yeah. So I think Jacqui is down on the ground, looking up at—what’s the name of your new mech?

ALI: Um.

AUSTIN: And what’s it look like? This is a good moment to describe that.

ALI: Yeah. So I pilot the Righteous Regent now. Um. Which is a... it's a Queen custom? That we decided, and in like—so, it has the Queen frame, and it's like all black. Um. All black everything. I guess.

AUSTIN [laughs] Uh-huh.

ALI: Except for—I guess it's off right now, but it has the same sort of things with the Brilliance did, where it has like a... It has an updated like skeleton? Um. Which isn't exposed right now, but it has like around its joints and like through its legs and torso and stuff has like lights that um like kind of go from gold to white, depending. And, yeah. That's...

AUSTIN: Cool.

ALI: That's my mech. Bye.

AUSTIN: So are we there or are we at the Brilliance, which Jacqui pilots now? 'Cause maybe that's better. Maybe Jacqui in the mech.

ALI: Yeah. I think it's Jacqui in the Brilliance.

AUSTIN: Okay. Okay. So Jacqui's piloting that now.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: All right. So I think Jacqui is just like,

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): [dully] Yeah, the lights work.

[ALI laughs]

DRE: Woof.

ALI: I'm so upset. I just need a minute to be upset, and then okay.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: Um. [laughs]

ALI (as Aria): Hey, are you okay?

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): [thoughtful] Yeah. It's—yeah. I'm good. I'm good.

ALI (as Aria): Okay. ...You don't seem okay.

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): I think the fireworks are next.

ALI (as Aria): [sighs]

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): Do you wanna test those?

ALI (as Aria): Yeah. Okay.

AUSTIN: And she like

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): Yeah okay those work.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: She's also talking to you from outside—like through the speakers, right?

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: 'Cause the canopy is closed.

ALI: Yeah. And there's this like incredible flash of like and sound now? [laughing]

AUSTIN: Right. She launches fireworks inside.

ALI: [laughs] I think that Aria still has the—would she have taken it out, would it be too... 'Cause she has that like cybernetic connection to the Brilliance, where she can control it?

AUSTIN: Oh. Yeah, she still has that. She wouldn't give that up, right? That's really fun.

ALI: Yeah. So I feel like she... makes the Brilliance put its hand out so she can stand onto and then like come up?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Is this "I open your mobile frame's canopy. May I?"

ALI: Um. Yes.

AUSTIN: I think Jacqui like sees you doing this and like does the thing where couples are fighting and then knows—where it's like "All right. we're gonna have this talk, huh?" Like. She's—yeah. uh, so. You may.

ALI: Okay. Um.

AUSTIN: She like puts down a wrench or whatever and like [sighs] looks out at you and like. Big metal arms. Crosses them.

ALI: [laughs] Cool. Great. Um. I think... [sighs] Aria sorta knows that she's... won a little bit by just getting her to open it, so she doesn't step inside yet?

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: Um. So she's just like standing on the Brilliance's hand. Um. And is like—

ALI (as Aria): We should talk about this.

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): Yeah. I. [sighs] I r—I don't know if we should talk about this.

ALI (as Aria): Why shouldn't we talk about this?

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): It's before your time. It doesn't matter. You know, it's—it was a different life.

ALI (as Aria): Yeah, but it's becoming part of our time, if you're gonna act like this.

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): I d—I just need some time to get my head straight. Okay?

ALI: Um. "I touch your hand. May I?"

AUSTIN: "You may... but only for a moment. And then she withdraws to a less charged distance." She like lets you hold them, and looks you in the eye, and then pulls them away and leans back in the cockpit and puts them behind her head. Like to like lean back.

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): Aria, it... I'm sure you had people in your life like this. They're—no one was as important to me as Jillian. And then... [laughs] and then your friend *killed* her. And... I think you don't understand that. I think you think that's easy for me somehow because apparently losing people is easy for you, and—

ALI: Wow. Woah.

ALI (as Aria): I—[sighs] I don't know why you would think that. I—I know what AuDy did, and I can't make up for that.

AUSTIN: She sighs.

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): It's a I—I... Aria. The first woman who I ever loved was killed. Was *murdered*. And then I moved on with my life and I fell in love with you, and we built this together, and we said goodbye to a lot of other friends. And... then. She walked into our office, and *didn't recognize me*. And insulted you. And all I wanted to do was *break her jaw* for you. And then...

AUSTIN: And she scratches the back of her head.

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): I—I just need time. I'll be okay.

ALI (as Aria): Okay. I... I understand that, I just wanted to make sure... I—I mean it'd be... it'd be okay if you needed more than that?

AUSTIN: "I touch your cheek. May I?"

ALI: You may.

AUSTIN: She like reaches out and like rubs your cheek. And like pulls you a little closer. And like rests your head on her head.

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): I might need more time, but. Thank you for waiting.

AUSTIN: "I kiss you on the top of your forehead. Uh—May I?" Right.

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: Consent is a thing in this game. Which is pretty dope.

ALI: [laughs] Um. "You may not, but instead I kiss your lips. May I?"

AUSTIN: No.

ALI: Oh.

AUSTIN: No. Um. "You may not. And I break off and depart." She pushes you away, s—softly. Shakes her head. And says,

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): Not yet.

ALI (as Aria): Okay.

AUSTIN: And climbs out of—the Regent's Brilliance. And walks away.

ALI: I hate Sylvia. [laughs]

[AUSTIN and DRE laugh]

ART: I don't. That's sensible.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh-huh. Someone says they need time, they need time.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Learn that lesson.

JACK: I need time. Now I'm going to kiss you. No no no—

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: All right. Cass.

ART: Time is my mouth. They call my lips AM and PM.

[Laughter]

DRE: Woah. Oh—okay!

AUSTIN: Damn! Uh, Aria, did you—what are you doin' for points for this?

ALI: [strangled] I don't know.

AUSTIN: Do you think anybody gets points for this?

KEITH: I mean, I'll take a point if we're just giving 'em out.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: No, we're not just giving 'em out. Mako.

JACK: Don't give Keith points!

KEITH: Listen, I didn't mean to kill the bloody stump you left tied up on the ground, Jack!

AUSTIN: Uh, I think—I think either... I think either this is... Jill points?

ALI: God, fuck you. Fuck—

AUSTIN: Or it's—I think you could make the case that it's still you working on internal relations? Do you know what I mean? Like I think the outcome of that scene is still fairly positive. Like I don't think you lost Jacqui over that.

ALI: Right. I could use the points. To be fair. But, um. Yeah, 'cause I feel like—is there a way just to not give anyone points? 'Cause I don't think that like Jill or me won there, right?

AUSTIN: Sure. Totally. Totally. No points. Cass.

ART: I think I would like to meet someone sword-to-sword.

AUSTIN: Okay! Who?

ART: I'm not sure, I kinda wanted to open it up. I could—and I mean—I mean mecha swords.

AUSTIN: Okay, so you—you want—you want *big* swords.

ART: I want big swords.

AUSTIN: Um. Okay.

ART: Uh, and I can—

AUSTIN: I kinda like—

ART: I can make some—oh, go ahead. I can make some cases.

AUSTIN: Go ahead, no, you—I want your suggestions. I want your cases.

ART: Uh. I could just take the... the Apokine and like fly it into enemy space and just see who comes, right?

AUSTIN: [slight laugh] That's a move.

JACK: Woah!

ALI: Mm.

KEITH: Man, Art's like in it.

AUSTIN: Um.

[DRE laughs]

ART: I mean, I think Cass really wants to blow off some steam. I don't want like a—I don't want like a fight to the death. i want like a sparring, right? But I want a giant robot sparring.

AUSTIN: I see.

ART: Which like—

AUSTIN: Oh wait, so—

ART: —almost necessarily has political ramifications, right?

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: I guess! But what if you just fuckin' snuck off with someone who you're friendly with to do a fun spar?

ART: I mean, that's certainly possible. It's—the problem a little bit is that—is that Mako and Orth are kind of both—

AUSTIN: Wrapped up right now, yeah.

ART: —wrapped up right now, so it's just Aria. And Aria's taken a lot of shit—but maybe she wants to blow off some steam too! We could just go—

AUSTIN: Yeah! I love that

ART: —and meet...

ALI: Oh, that could work!

ART: —in the skies of... uh, the skies of Counterweight is probably too public...

[2:15:13]

AUSTIN: No, but like 302.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Right?

ART: Fly to 302.

AUSTIN: Where it's...

ART: And just... you know? We're—this is fun. We're just gonna—we're just gonna have a little fun.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: But our fun is combat.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Right. You don't get to fight often anymore, is the thing. That's weird?

ART: Right.

AUSTIN: It doesn't—like—you're too important. To do this that often.

ART: Yeah, I miss it.

AUSTIN: Um. So are you both in your mobile frames? Are you st—both in your riggers, or your—are you in Apokine and in the Righteous Regent? Or are you in something else?

ART: I'm—I think I do take Apokine, yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: Um. Okay, yeah. Apokine is like so much bigger than the Righteous Regent is, but—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: —it probably still works. Yeah, if you look at the questions for *Meeting Sword to Sword*, they work.

ALI and AUSTIN: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: So the—it says the better with the sword begins. And we looked, and stat wise in the old game that was Cass. Do you wanna—do you wanna say that you're better with the—with the sword than I am, we can figure it out, or do you...

ALI: Cass was like a soldier while Aria was like a child.

ART: Sure.

[AUSTIN laughs]

ALI: And she can't really like—she's gotten better. But she's not like—

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: He's⁵ still always gonna be better than she is.

ART: All right. So we take turns asking leading questions. Any time after the third question, we can do a closing question.

AUSTIN: Uh, and that's a list of questions over on the right, on page 23.

ART: Uh, okay, I'll start with... "I thrust and you barely turn it. A fraction slower and you'd have been cut through. Does it exhilarate you or chill you?"

ALI: Um. It exhilarates me.

ART: All right.

AUSTIN: So what's that look like? 'Cause Apokine is so much bigger.

ART: I think—yeah, I think the way this fight works is it's like a classic like small vs. big fight, like the—

AUSTIN: Mhm. Like Ryback vs. Sin Cara.

ART: It's Ryback vs. Sin Cara, right?

[DRE laughs]

⁵ Cass uses they/them pronouns.

ART: It's—the little... the bunch of little hits, and I think, you know, the shield is what opens it up. Is that...

AUSTIN: Mm.

ART: I'm finally aware enough to like get my shield out in front it, and then—and then—

ALI: Wait—if I'm gonna be small, can I be Enzo Amore?

AUSTIN: Yeah, you can be Enzo.

ALI: [laughing] Okay.

AUSTIN: It's Enzo vs. Cass. Which I hope we never live to see, but we know we will. Um.

DRE: No. No!

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Also we already y—Cass is already named Big Cass, so—

ART: Yeah. It was an homage.

AUSTIN: Big Cassander.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: And then—and then just—

AUSTIN: How you doin'?

ART: —you know—

[DRE laughs]

ART: —blocks a shot with the shield, and then thrusts the spear, and, yeah, and turns it—

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: —but Aria's real good at this, right? She gets out—she gets—

ALI: Yeah.

ART: —she gets like under her armpit or whatever.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: That's still my thing.

AUSTIN: Right. Aria.

ALI: Um. Um, "I overreach slightly, and you have the opportunity to slip a dirty little cut. Do you take it?"

ART: No.

ALI: Oh.

[ALI and AUSTIN laugh]

AUSTIN: That's an interesting mov—'cause like Aria knows that she left herself open, right?

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: How's that happ—is that just, you've gone—are—also, what are you fighting with, Aria? What's the actual—what's the—what's the Regent use as weapons.

ALI: Um. Has a ton of weapons, but I think right now she's still using Jace's white blade?

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: 'Cause that makes sense for like—'cause she's not gonna actually use like her guns and stuff? Which is like mostly what the—

AUSTIN: Right, this is—this—Yeah.

ALI: —this has.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Um. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay. Cass.

ART: "We circle, sword tips touching. What do you say to me?"

ALI: ...[sighs] God, what is our relationship even like right now?

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's my question.

ALI: Like how often do we do this?

AUSTIN: I—can we go back and actually talk about—yeah, like how often does this happen? Is this like a secret monthly...

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: ...thing?

ART: I mean, it really changes the relationship between... Aria and Cass if it's true. It's like Aria and Cass are heads of state for states that don't really like each other. But once a month—

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: —they meet in dead space and like do friendly fighting?

JACK: Ha.

[ALI laughs]

JACK: That's so good.

AUSTIN: I love it so much. I love soooo much.

ALI: I am fine with that. Um.

AUSTIN: So this is just like a spar, and that's part of why there hasn't been much talking yet. Right, is like—th—is this the first moment where Aria—where like you can both tell that you're both in a fucking place right now?

ALI: Mhm. I think so.

AUSTIN: Also, neither of you—neither of you has talked about AuDy sending you a message yet.

[ALI and JACK laugh]

ART: I'm not sure I believe it happened.

AUSTIN: So.

ART: In-universe, I'm not sure that that wasn't my doubt.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Right, right. No, again, I wanna be clear, you know that something is happening at September, at this point. Like whatever your doubt was that day, at some point in the days that followed, you did enough—you went like “Let me just fuck—let me just check.” And you checked, and something is happening at September.

ART: All right.

KEITH: What was... what was Aria's message from... AuDy? I can't remember.

ALI: It was a MySpace message. In the days of Twitter. [laughing]

KEITH: Oh, right, right right, the BuzzFeed quiz. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Right. Which Game of Thrones character are you?

KEITH: He's Xander.

AUSTIN: Right. Yes. From Game of Thrones. Yes.

ALI: [laughing] God!

KEITH: He's Xander from Game of Thrones, yeah.

ART: No, it was what Buffy character are—you're the one who just—

SYLVIA: There's gotta be a guy in that named Xander.

AUSTIN: Yeah, there's definitely is a X...

KEITH: He's Littlefinger from Buffy.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

[AUSTIN laughs]

ALI: Um.

AUSTIN: So what are you saying. Where were we? We were at—sword tips?

ALI: Oh, I'm supposed to say Aria—yeah. [laughs] Actually, so—because they can both just tell that they're so like tense right now, um—

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: —Aria says.

ALI (as Aria): So what's been going on with you?

AUSTIN: [laughs] Swords out.

[JACK laughs]

ART: Oh, what does it look like when Apokine laughs?

AUSTIN: Oh, boy.

ART: Does the—does the robot—does the stone mouth chuckle, or is it like...

ALI: God...

AUSTIN: No, I think it's a—I hope not.

ART: Or it's like a broadcast?

AUSTIN: I think it's a broadcast.

ALI: Yeah, I think our comms are just open.

KEITH: I always—

ALI: Like I can see your face.

KEITH: So, am I—am I wrong in picturing Apokine as like the, uh—you remember the first Harry Potter when they played the big chess? It just looks like one of those big chess piece—like just like weird stone...?

AUSTIN: I have to look this up. I'm bad. I'm bad at Harry Potter.

SYLVIA: I know what you're talking about. I kinda had a similar...

AUSTIN: Um. I'm on Youtube. Here's the chess—s—yeah. Yeah, totally like that. And Greeker.

SYLVIA: It's a giant marble statue, basically right?

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah yeah yeah. It's just like this, except, again, Greek. And not like medieval Europe.

KEITH: Right. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um. So, yeah. No mouth moving.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: So—I—so he⁶ laughs in response. Got it.

ALI: Okay. Is that it?

AUSTIN: Uh, I think this thing can also just talk, obviously.

ART: Ah.

⁶ Cass uses they/them pronouns.

ALI (as Aria): I—it—is it that bad?

ART: It was, “So what’s new with you?”

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. And then you laughed.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And then she said, “Is it that bad.”

ART (as Cass): I’m not—I might not be cut out for statecraft.

ALI (as Aria): Ugh. Yeah. It’s tough! It’s really hard!

[AUSTIN laughs]

KEITH: This is Obama and Putin playing chess and going, [laughs] “This is so—it’s so hard to be like presidents and stuff!”

ALI: [laughing] Um.

AUSTIN: Oh, boy. It is.

KEITH: Playing tennis.

ART: I think it’s I—it’s like they’re boxing, though.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: It’s like.

AUSTIN: Hoo. Yeah.

ART: You look at some of these boxers and you could definitely die.

AUSTIN: They’re boxing in tanks.

KEITH: Yeah [laughs]

AUSTIN: And like O—in this scenario, Obama’s is a tank painted like George Washington riding an eagle.

[KEITH laughs]

[DRE laughs]

KEITH: [robotically] This is an absurd scenario.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it is.

ALI: Um.

AUSTIN: Or, Cass is Putin and it's just a big Putin. He's just driving a big Putin.

ART: It is, it's Putin driving a big Putin.

KEITH: In a big Putin.

[AUSTIN laughs]

ALI: Um. "I pretend to falter and dip my blade. Do I draw you out or do you recognize the ploy and hold steady?"

ART: You draw me out.

AUSTIN: Hoo. Oh, Cass.

ART: "You get your sword's point well between us, inside my guard. If you drive it home, you kill me. Do you drive it home, or do you allow me to step back and recover myself?"

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Could you imagine? Fuck.

ALI: Could. You. Imagine?

AUSTIN: You could do it. I'm not gonna say you can't do it.

ALI: *Absolutely not!*

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: God, could you imagine. Hold on. [laughs] But also.

AUSTIN: But also, could you imagine?

[DRE laughs]

ALI: She doesn't. But also. Let's just take this time.

ART: Let's all appreciate the pregnant—

AUSTIN: Sh—

ART: —moment there, right? That this is—this is the moment in the anime—

AUSTIN: 'Cause like—

ART: —where it's like, "This thirty seconds has been going on for ten minutes now."

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah. And she could kill you, and then the Demarchy would fall the fuck apart. Right?

ART: Oh, ye—

AUSTIN: Or—and the Va—there'd be a war in—

ART: How would it even—

AUSTIN: There'd be a war!

ART: Would there? Who would know? What? It's just—

AUSTIN: Yeah. Well, they'd find the Apokine eventually. They must, right?

ART: Sure. I mean, think of the psychic—

AUSTIN: It wouldn't—

ART: —damage it would do to the people of the Demarchy if the Apokine was destroyed.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Was *destroyed*. Yeah. I also love that that's literally—that like... the Regent gets in very close to the Apokine. Like literally is—because of the scale difference, is like at its chest, or its head, right? Like right there. On top of it. Uh. So doesn't—so you don't kill 'em?

ALI: No.

AUSTIN: Aria?

ALI: No.

AUSTIN: Okay. Do you have other words? After this. Like what's the—what's the... parting shot of this scene? And think about this in relation to like, Cass, where you want to paint this in terms of points.

ART: Sure. I think—yeah, like C—like Cass steps back and recovers, and... and they—they share like that look, right? The... Cass knows he lost that fight.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ART: And that this is—this is over for a while. And he won't see Aria again for a little bit. And he like... I think there must be like a thing that they do at the end of these. You know. It's—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: What's—what—how do—how do mechs shake hands? Right? The...

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Oh, like a secret mech handshake.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: There must be something.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: There must be like something with... like all of lights turning on at full bright, or like something with your boosters. "Or a giant robot fistbump," says Sylvia in the chat.

[ALI laughs]

KEITH: Well, they're rocket fists, so they...

[AUSTIN snorts]

KEITH: You don't even have to be close.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: The ratio is so small.

AUSTIN: It's so small.

DRE: [whispering] Do it!

ALI: It would just be the Apokine punching my entire mech.

ART: And what's Aria's title?

ALI: Um. Oh my god.

AUSTIN: Good question.

ALI: What is her title? [laughs]

AUSTIN: Good question. Because the Vanguard is such a strange thing.

ALI: Right. 'Cause it's not like a military.

AUSTIN: She's—she's party chair? She's, um... I don't know!

ALI: [quietly] Fuck! She should have a title!

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Is it just Regent?

AUSTIN: It m—I guess, but like what's she the regent of?

ALI: Right?

AUSTIN: The People's Regent? Like.

ALI: Yeah—well. [laughs] I don't *hate* that. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Um.

AUSTIN: 'Cause like she's not the leader. The people are the leader, right?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But she's their short-term regent.

ART: Representative?

ALI: It—

AUSTIN: Representative... Joie isn't bad.

ALI: Yeah, I like representative.

ART: So it's just like...

ART (as Cass): This was a lot of fun. I'll see you next time, Representative Joie.

AUSTIN: All right. Are there points to earn there? Cass.

ART: Um. What are th—show me the—show me the chart again? I think—I think we could both take a political point. I think we both...

AUSTIN: No. There's one point.

ART: Just one point?

[ALI laughs]

ART: Uh. Oh, then I think it should be a crisis point, and I think Aria should get it.

AUSTIN: ...Okay.

ALI: Woo! Get 'em.

ART: She defeated Apokine.

AUSTIN: And like in that sense, it's just like the sparring has made you strong. Like the strong—the sparring had been... a way to—for Aria to stay at the top of her game, militarily—

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: —even though... Yeah, okay. I like that.

ALI: Like, I could take down the Apokine if I wanted to.

AUSTIN: Right. Hey! That means something!

ALI: [laughing] Yeah!

AUSTIN: That does mean something. Totally. Um. All right, Kobus.

DRE: Right. Um. So I want to do *A Chase* with Mako.

AUSTIN: Ooh. Okay. So Orth is locked up somewhere.

KEITH: Heey.

AUSTIN: Kobus, what are you—what's the—what is the situation of this *Chase*? Let's talk about this *Chase*.

DRE: Kobus wants to figure out what is going on with Grace.

AUSTIN: Oh. That's neat.

DRE: And who knows how to figure out what's going on inside a Divine than Mako Trig?

AUSTIN: That's really good.

KEITH: Yeah, it is good.

AUSTIN: All right, let's look at *Chase*. ...We're getting close to the first interlude. I'm really excited. Uh. *"Set-up. Only you and your chosen partner play. Uh, choose which of you is the hunter and which is the quarry. Ask your partner how the chase came about. What do you notice*

about each other? What have you heard?" So what have you noticed about each other?

KEITH: I think that I... I think if I've noticed any—if I'm chased, I assume that I'm being chased in a ship.

AUSTIN: Maybe! It could be in a ship, it could on foot, it could be in a car!

DRE: Like, I—

KEITH: Or it could be on foot, 'cause I have *rocket skates*.

AUSTIN: Sure.

DRE: I feel like this could—this could easily turn into Kobus is trying to find Mako, but is not very good at this, and not very subtle or trained in espionage? And this quickly turns into like a group of Makos cha—K—[laughing] chasing Kobus.

AUSTIN: Oh, so you wanna be the—you want to this flip around at some point?

DRE: I think it—I think that would be true to the character.

AUSTIN: Hmm. So this begins with Kobus like trying to find Mako in bars, and—

KEITH: Like trailing me?

AUSTIN: Trai—yeah.

KEITH: And then I realize I'm being trailed, and then I just like book it?

AUSTIN: But then, behind Kobus are other Makos. In fact, what if real Mako isn't here at all, 'cause real Mako is with... Orth.

DRE: Yeah, it's Orth.

KEITH: Right, sure.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: I could play as—I could play as a surrogate Mako.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally. Um, Surrogate Mako is also a good band name. Um.

[DRE laughs]

[KEITH laughs]

AUSTIN: All right. I like that. So, *"the quarry conducts the chase."* Um. So where are you going, Kobus? You're presumably trying to go to Mako...

DRE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Which means that if you escape from this, that means you found the real Mako. How's that sound? Like—you—

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —you've tra—you're—okay. So then, so that's where you're going. *“Lead the hunter—”* who in this case is a surrogate Mako—*“through a series of four challenges and admissions. Choose freely, except that the third one must be an admission. During the chase, you and the hunter gain coins, representing the distance you're able to gain on each other.”* Um, so the challenges are there on page 15. Uh, and—a—yeah, is this—this is like—I like this on foot, in a major city.

DRE: Mhm.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: Or in a—in a... Like so how about this? Mako, where did you take Orth?

[2:30:26]

KEITH: I think I took... I think I just took Orth to Kesh. Which is the—really close...

AUSTIN: Oh, that's really good then. Okay, so... that means that Kobus is like deep undercover. Wearing like... you can't just be wearing your tunic on Kesh. 'Cause everyone here is in like 19th century clothing.

DRE: Oh, yeah.

AUSTIN: Um. So you—maybe you see the—tunic peeking out, underneath it? Um. Underneath like—a suit?

KEITH: I didn't realize they were still doing that on Kesh.

AUSTIN: Oh, that's—yeah. That's the ruling class.

KEITH: The fact that like... 'cause they—'cause the Rapid Evening came out, and they basically—they basically became public about being a shadow organization?

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: They were just like, “We're gonna—hey, so we're the Rapid Evening, we're a shadow organization—”

AUSTIN: Yep.

KEITH: “—we’re gonna keep doing that.”

AUSTIN: Well, so—so, to be clear—so the way this works is that like Ziishe is where the Rapid Evening is HQed, which is this planet to the northwest—galactic northwest of Kesh. Ziishe has millions of people on it. It’s like where the majority of the Principality of Kesh—like where their citizens live.

KEITH: Yep.

AUSTIN: Kesh itself is where the Principality is. And it’s where like the H—it’s where like all of the political offices are. It’s where the rich folks live. And they like are—they’ve decided that what they get to do is live in weird Victorian times. Um. Like that’s a choice that they make. And are protected by the Rapid Evening for that.

KEITH: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Um.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So. And they still know, like they’re not—they understand science? And like...

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: They just also—that’s just like their weird—

KEITH: They’re Luddites.

AUSTIN: —affect—right. Exactly. But not—but it—ah. They’re weird. The Rapid Evening and Kesh are weird. They both like—they don’t like—it’s not that they think technology is evil. It’s that they think that everybody else fucks technology up all the time

KEITH: Sure, no. They’re the Steel Brother—the Brotherhood of Steel.

AUSTIN: Right. They’re like the Brotherhood of Steel in that way.

KEITH: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah. Um. S—but I like that a lot. I like that because that means like we get a foggy night, in Kesh. We get like a foggy—a foggy London night, for this *Chase*. So.

DRE: Okay. So we’re just playing Assassin’s Creed now.

AUSTIN: You’re playing Assassin’s Creed.

[DRE laughs]

KEITH: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Mako is my favorite Assassin's Creed protagonist. He's the one who like doesn't really give a fuck about the Assassins and Templars shit. Um. So, what are your challenges? Let's go through them.

DRE: Um. Do you want me to read them all, or do you want me just to pick my first one?

AUSTIN: No, pick your first one.

DRE: Um, I think it's "I press through a thorny briar," but I think in this instead of a thorny briar, it's like a crowd of people.

AUSTIN: Yeah, sure.

DRE: Uh, follow me if you want, but throw: on tails, you're tangled and torn and must extract yourself, and I gain a coin.

AUSTIN: So, what—

KEITH: Oh, but if I don't follow, I just lose.

AUSTIN: Right, correct. Um—

KEITH: Right. So.

AUSTIN: So go ahead and roll a 1d2. 1 is heads, 2 is tails. 2 is tails! So on tails, uh... you're tangled. So I—you—one of the Makos just get caught in a crowd of people.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Who are like out in the city streets—maybe it's like a festival night or something, on Kesh. Like maybe it's like a holiday night, and lots of people are gathering singing a song, and one of the Makos gets caught up in the crowd.

KEITH: It's—here's what it is. It's Arbor Day?

AUSTIN: Oh, right. Big—

KEITH: And there's a misconception of Arbor Day being a—having been a big deal?

[DRE laughs]

KEITH: On.

AUSTIN: On Earth?

KEITH: On Earth Home.

AUSTIN: Okay. Ah, right, sure.

KEITH: So they were like, this is—this is like a historical celebration of our roots—

AUSTIN: 'Cause trees.

KEITH: —Arbor Day.

AUSTIN: Right. Good.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: Good. Uh, all right. Next—uh, next challenge.

DRE: Um... Ch ch ch... Uh, "I race along a high and perilous ledge. Follow me if you dare, but throw: on tails, you have to slow to pick your way carefully along and I gain a coin."

KEITH: Boom. God! Damn it!

AUSTIN: 2! Kobus is just dodging y'all.

DRE: Yeah.

KEITH: This is hard.

AUSTIN: Other Mako, listen. Here's the—you know, can I tell you something about one of the Makos, Keith?

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: One of the Makos is afraid of heights. Just one, but.

[DRE and KEITH laugh]

AUSTIN: Uh, here's what happened.

KEITH: They each have their own unique but mild phobia.

AUSTIN: Right. Listen, Larry just got them out of the city, and one of them ended up on like the top of a cliff, just wheeled out there.

KEITH: Mhm. One—yeah. This one's a little bit afraid of heights. One of them is a little bit afraid of snakes. One is a little bit afraid of uh those pictures online of uh weird holes in people's hands?

AUSTIN: One of them's afraid of mirrors, which is really tough. 'Cause sometimes they think there's a mirror, and it's just another Mako.

[ALI, KEITH and DRE laugh]

AUSTIN: Um. All right. Next scene has to be an admission.

DRE: Yes. Um. And I think this is perfect. "There are other enemies ahead of me and I must suddenly change my course. Throw, and on heads, you gain on me, and so gain two coins."

KEITH: ...Okay.

AUSTIN: So, you throw. Dre.

KEITH: This is how I tie it up here. This is how I—this is how I tie it up. Boom. 2!

AUSTIN: No, it's—

KEITH: God *damn* it!

AUSTIN: Yeah.

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Sorry. Not tied up. All right, last one.

KEITH: I literally just—I just—I just—three tails in a row.

AUSTIN: It's amazing! That's how you it's legit.

KEITH: It is statistically improbable.

AUSTIN: [laughing] No, it's not!

SYLVIA: No, we just call that a Miles Prower.

[ALI laughs]

KEITH: It is! That's statistically improbable.

AUSTIN: Three Tails in a row...

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Bad. You're bad, Sylvia.

DRE: Ugh.

AUSTIN: All right. Last one.

DRE: Um. "I reach clear ground and leap away. Follow me if you can rally yourself, but throw: on tails, you stand grasping and I gain a coin."

AUSTIN: Oh, my god. Four tails in a row.

KEITH: Four. Four tails in a row.

DRE: Wow.

AUSTIN: You're rolling right, right? We're rolling right? We're rolling right.

AUSTIN: Kobus just—

KEITH: I believe that I'm rolling right.

AUSTIN: I mean—no, we—here, also—

KEITH: I'll—you know what, I'm gonna just keep do—I'm gonna see how many it takes rolling 1d2.

AUSTIN: He got one. He got a—yep.

KEITH: Boom. 2.

DRE: Are you cursed?

KEITH: All right. I did five in a row. Slash roll... up. That's not—that's rool. 1d2.

AUSTIN: Rool 1—there you go.

KEITH: There we go. There we go.

AUSTIN: You would—you would have gotten—yeah.

KEITH: It took six. It took six... to get a heads.

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Uh, "after a total of four challenges and admissions, compare coins. If you have more coins than the hunter, you break away and escape. If the hunter has as many coins as you or more—" that does not—that's not the case.

DRE: No!

AUSTIN: Uh, so yeah. You get through, Kobus. And that like—obviously the reason you had—you did this better is ‘cause the other Makos just aren’t as good as real Mako. And I think you bust—

KEITH: I can’t d—I can’t not be consistent. Look at this.

AUSTIN: I know.

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Just you’re hittin’ those 1s. 1, 1s.

KEITH: I just r—then now I rolled four 1s in a row.

AUSTIN: Keith is a very consistent—roller...

KEITH: Can I—f—next time I have to do this, can I just get a real coin?

AUSTIN: [laughs] You don’t trust the system.

KEITH: Not anymore.

DRE: That’s very Mako of you.

AUSTIN: So I think this is—this is a—definitely a political thing, right? For you?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Dre?

[DRE sighs]

AUSTIN: Because like what you’re getting is... you—show up to real Mako?

DRE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And it sounds like... do you... Let’s do a short little mini-scene here.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: Where I guess—or there’s like—I can explain what I think... So this is like—Kobus, you want Mako’s... knowledge on like what the fuck is happening to Grace. And Mako is both Rapid Evening...

DRE: Like they, Kobus, might even want... Mako to like hack in to Grace.

AUSTIN: Ooh. That’s not bad. I can tell you where Grace is gonna be.

KEITH: And, by the way, that's like the sort of thing that Mako does not need to be convinced to do.

[AUSTIN laughs]

KEITH: Like that just like—like—I—“Mako, I'm glad I found you. I need you to hack into G—”
“Oh , I'll hack into whatever! Yeah! What's up!”

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: “You want me to hack a Divine? Totally.”

KEITH: “Oh, a Divine? Yeah, I love that shit.”

AUSTIN: Also, Orth is just—there? Tied up? To a chair.

JACK: I think I'm—

KEITH: Hey, have you met Orth?

JACK: I'm—am I in Mako—I'm in the headquarters, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah. No, I think I'm in a separate room. Right?

KEITH: I don't that—

AUSTIN: No—

KEITH: I don't think I have Jack tied up.

AUSTIN: No, you don't think he's...?

KEITH: I don't think I—I think I trust Orth to not have to be tied up.

AUSTIN: But you—but you don't trust him enough not to *kidnap him*.

KEITH: I didn't mean to ca—

DRE: Or blow away his...

KEITH: Listen.

DRE: S—his second in command...[laughing]

KEITH: When I started the kidnap process, I had no way of knowing who it was I was kidnapping.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: It was only until I s—you know.

JACK: No! That's not true! You didn't go into that mission going "I'm going to kidnap something."

AUSTIN: Yeah, he went in going "I'm gonna blow this place up."

JACK: Uh-huh.

KEITH: Right. Right.

AUSTIN: And in the process, happened to kidnap people.

KEITH: In the process, I decided "Okay, the only way to do this is to take these people prisoner." And then, once I took you prisoner, I was like, "Oh my god, this is Orth. Hi, Orth."

AUSTIN: Did you—did you let Orth go after that?

KEITH: No, I've still got Orth. We have some shit to talk about.

[DRE and JACK laugh]

AUSTIN: Like what? I think that's the convers—like, so. What's that conversation? That's the conversation that Kobus will interrupt.

KEITH: Okay. I think—

JACK: Oh, okay.

KEITH: I think if I've gotta put it in the context of this game?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: If I had to put it in the context of the game, I would have say that what he's interrupting is *A Conversation over Food*.

AUSTIN: I don't think we're gonna—we just have this conversation. That's a really good—I've—

KEITH: Yeah yeah yeah. No, I'm—but I'm just—I'm just contextualizing it.

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: That's the tone.

AUSTIN: I appreciate it.

KEITH: Of how I want this to be.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Um. Yeah. Um. I think that the thing that we were talking about was... I think Orth was going, uh, "Why the hell are you blowing up these factories?"

[AUSTIN laughs]

KEITH: And then I say,

KEITH (as Mako): Well, they're bad factories.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Orth?

JACK (as Orth): Why are they bad factories?

KEITH (as Mako): Their tech—they got some of—they got pieces of Rigour, and they're using Rigour to make these robots.

JACK (as Orth): Every weapon ever made has got something horrifying in it. That's what *weapon* are.

KEITH (as Mako): Right, but Rigour's like a really bad one.

JACK (as Orth): [sighs] You ever had a hangover, Mako?

KEITH (as Mako): Never once!

JACK (as Orth): [laughs] Yeah. That tracks.

[AUSTIN laughs]

JACK (as Orth): When I've had a rough night, and I wake up in the morning. The first thing I do.

KEITH (as Mako): Uh-huh.

JACK (as Orth): Is uh...

KEITH (as Mako): Advil?

JACK (as Orth): No, no. It's called "hair of the dog," Mako, and it's, ah... you know. You get some—

KEITH (as Mako): That's gross.

JACK (as Orth): —like a little spirit, and you crack an egg in there, and it's really good, and it gets rid of your hangover.

KEITH (as Mako): Wait, so, when you—when you drink too much, when you wake up the next day and you feel sick 'cause of the alcohol, you drink more alcohol plus a *raw egg*?

JACK (as Orth): Yes. Uh. Let me put in terms you might understand, Mako.

KEITH (as Mako): That sounds like homeopathy. They disproved that hundreds of thousands of years ago!

[ALI laughs]

JACK (as Orth): You know as well as I do what's about to happen.

KEITH (as Mako): What do you mean?

JACK (as Orth): ...Did you get the message?

KEITH (as Mako): ...Um.

JACK (as Orth): I saw them, Mako. AuDy was in a car.

KEITH (as Mako): Who? Oh! Larry said that he was AuDy. Is that the message? Is—is AuDy sending us a message?

JACK (as Orth): Mako.

[AUSTIN laughs]

KEITH (as Mako): Yeah.

JACK (as Orth): I've spent the last four years watching for when things are going wrong and trying to fix them. That's my job.

KEITH (as Mako): Well, I was doing the same, I just didn't realize you had already started to fix this one.

JACK (as Orth): No. No. Stop talking. Stop talking now. [pause] Rigour is coming.

KEITH (as Mako): Okay.

JACK (as Orth): And you just destroyed a weapons factory.

KEITH (as Mako): Well, [whispering] they had a piece of his *arm* in there.

JACK (as Orth): We—...I am so furious. What are we supposed to do? What are we supposed to do?

KEITH (as Mako): There's a lot of factories.

JACK (as Orth): We make four hundred riggers a day from that factory. And you—it's just gone.

KEITH (as Mako): Well. Okay.

JACK (as Orth): We're gonna lose this war, Mako.

KEITH (as Mako): Let me try to—

JACK (as Orth): Mako. We're going to lose this war.

KEITH (as Mako): We wo—listen, we took off his arms before. He only had like three... three mechs? Four hundred riggers a day is a lot *more* than we need, I *think*.

JACK (as Orth): Here's what's going to happen. You know how to destroy Divines.

KEITH (as Mako): Yeah.

JACK (as Orth): I am going to... offer your organization a contract. To supply my organization with the weapons... that you destroyed. Alternative weapons. You know? I know you've got that tech. And in return, Mako...

KEITH (as Mako): Oh, yeah. Sure, I can do that.

JACK (as Orth): I won't punch you in the face right now.

AUSTIN: [laughs] And then Kobus walks in.

DRE: Mhm.

[JACK laughs]

KEITH: He—I haven't met Kobus. Right?

AUSTIN: Uh—b—everyone knows—

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —about this, though. This was like news. This was like... you know. In the tabloids. Right? Like. A Candidate stepped down.

KEITH: Right. Mhm.

AUSTIN: That doesn't happen. And this one is saying that something is wrong with Grace. And that they know where sh—where she will be. And when he explains where she'll be, you know exactly what... what he means. Or what they mean. Sorry. What Kobus means.

Which is... that... you received word, Mako, from the Rapid Evening, that your next assignment—you received this like a week ago, and you've been prepping for this. You've been trying to deal with this Orth thing before then. Uh. There's an auction coming. In fact, everybody here knows about this auction. Everybody who's on the call. Every player of the game knows about this auction. For something new, something strange.

Um. Your people... all have different ideas of what it is. Some sort of... a piece of technology... it... connected to what happened on September. But not necessarily connected to Rigour. It's hard to tell what it is. Everybody wants it. It's a small golden orb. Sort of like the one that the Chime recovered, that time. And... also ssssort of... it's strange. It has all of these different—depending on who you talk to, it seems to have Apostolosian writing on it. It seems to have, um... some references to the Free States of Kalliope on it. It seems to have some of the qualities of a Divine. Um. In that it's—in—it seems to have—huh—kind of neuro—neurological connections. Like neuro-linked. A neuronet—neural net intelligence in there. But it isn't doing anything.

Um. And it's being auctioned off, secretly, on Counterweight, at the biggest event of the year. Which is this massive costume ball. And it's a secret auction that happens during the dance. Um. And Grace herself and Vicuna are attending. And everyone is invited. And is hoping to find this MacGuffin. Because, if you have it, you'll gain two points... for your political position. Also, once you have it, someone else can do a scene with you to take it from you. At which point you lose those points, and an additional point. Whoever has it at the end of the game gets that bonus.

So everything's at—everyone's at this gala. Talk to me about what you're wearing to a gala. This is my interlude. This is the first interlude... Uh, and this will be the game *A Dance*.

[2:45:43]

KEITH: Um. I'm wearing...

AUSTIN: Is this really you? Are you actually there?

KEITH: Mako?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: M—real Mako?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Also, you have to tell me who your plus one is.

KEITH: Um. I think it's the illustrious and always styled Lazer Ted.

SYLVIA: Yes!

AUSTIN: Good. Yeah. Good.

DRE: Hm??

AUSTIN: What are you wearing?

KEITH: Um. We're matching.

AUSTIN: O—of course.

KEITH: Wearing blue jeans...

AUSTIN: Oh, motherfucker.

KEITH: Blue jeans, a black t-shirt...

[AUSTIN sighs]

KEITH: And then a blinding white, uh, suit jacket covered in pink bow ties.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): [Riff Raff voice] Yeah, we look good. We look real good.

JACK: [wistfully] I'm so angry.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Mine light up. But I'll keep 'em off for now.

[KEITH laughs]

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): I don't wanna outshine you.

KEITH (as Mako): Keep 'em off for now.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): You know.

KEITH (as Mako): Yeah, thanks.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Yeah.

ART: You could have stopped this, Jack. I just want you to remember that.

KEITH: Um. [laughs]

AUSTIN: [weakly] [amused] O—Orth? What are you wearing?

KEITH: I'm not—I'm not wearing a tie.

AUSTIN: No, I understand, it's a black t-shirt.

KEITH: But the jacket is covered i—yeah.

AUSTIN: In pink bow ties.

KEITH: In pink bow—yes.

ART: Fucking hell...

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): [Riff Raff voice] All pink everything. Except for the jeans, those are blue.

KEITH (as Mako): Right.

JACK: Um, I'm—

KEITH (as Mako): And it's—the jacket is technically white.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Yeah.

KEITH (as Mako): Underneath the bow ties.

JACK: I'm wearing a—

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): They call me the salmon salamander.

[Laughter]

ART: Oh my god.

KEITH (as Mako): Ted, why do they call you the salmon salamander?

JACK: Yeah, actually, I also want to know this.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Uh, I like to go fishin' a lot, and I eat them up. I eat 'em up.

[KEITH laughs]

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): The way a salamander do.

KEITH (Mako): Ted, do you know that salamanders don't eat salmon?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Yeah, prove it.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Have you ever seen a salmon and a salamander in the same place? You ain't because—

KEITH (as Mako): Yes!

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): When? Right here, 'cause it's a salamander salmon right here.

KEITH (as Mako): At the—I mean, to be fair—okay.

[ALI laughs]

KEITH (as Mako): Okay, Ted. You got me, right?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Or the other—the other way around, I guess.

KEITH (as Mako): Uh.

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Look, I'm the salamander salmon when I'm in my like—my nice light o—my light green suit. That's when I'm the salamander salmon.

KEITH (as Mako): Right. But other times you're the salmon salamander?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Right.

KEITH (as Mako): Okay. Just don't turn the lights on.

AUSTIN: Orth, who are you here with?

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): No. I won't.

AUSTIN: Orth?

JACK: Oh. Um.

AUSTIN: Who are you here with, and what are you wearing?

JACK: I am wiiith Offset... and I am wearing a... blue... three-piece suit.

AUSTIN: Okay. Just classic Orth. Just classic suit.

JACK: Well, Orth typically wears black, I guess.

AUSTIN: Okay. Is this like a dark—

KEITH: Is it powder blue?

AUSTIN: Yeah, what—

KEITH: Or is this casual navy blue?

JACK: It's like c—it's like casual navy blue.

AUSTIN: Okay. Okay.

JACK: Just a really—it's a really nice cut. Like a thicker material...

AUSTIN: Cass?

ART: Uh, I think Cass is wearing Apostolosian formal wear? Which is a little Greek looking, it's kinda like...

AUSTIN: But you're wearing Apostolosian wear. You're not wearing—like... you are—you are showing the Apostolosian heritage.

ART: Yeah this is—like I don't wanna be like—

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: —“Oh, it's a toga!” ‘Cause that's silly.

AUSTIN: No no no no. But I know what—

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —but you know what I mean, right? Like you're... coming in traditional Apostolosian wear, not just... Counterweight clothes.

ART: Right. No, I'm representing as a head of state.

AUSTIN: Okay. Okay.

ART: And I think my plus—my plus-one is Euanthe.

AUSTIN: Your sibling.

ART: My older sibling.

AUSTIN: Okay. Uh, Kobus!

DRE: Uh. I brought a—

AUSTIN: You're the plus-one.

DRE: —oh, I don't know who Kobus' plus-one is.

AUSTIN: You don't have one. You're here—you're part of a retinue. You don't get—

DRE: Oh, that's true.

AUSTIN: You're not here to—be a dignitary.

DRE: I'm Grace's plus-one.

AUSTIN: You're Grace's plus-seven.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: 'Cause she's Grace, and she brings whoever the fuck she wants, right? Um. Vicuna and... the new—the new Candidate! This's the first time we get to see the new Candidate of Loyalty.

DRE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Who is Capra.

DRE: Formerly Chet.

AUSTIN: Formerly known as Chet. Who is—

DRE: Wise, was that his last name?

SYLVIA: Chet Wise, yeah.

ALI: Chet Wise, yes.

AUSTIN: Chet Wise. Yeah.

DRE: Uh, anyway—I'm gonna drop an image link in the Roll20 chat. Of this sick Victorian jacket that I found.

AUSTIN: Ah, that's pretty good.

DRE: And I'm pretty sure that's what Kobus is wearing.

AUSTIN: That's pretty good. Um. I'm not reading that out loud, Keith.

[Laughter]

SYLVIA: Fuck...

DRE: Why are we making—

AUSTIN: Someone else can, but I'm not.

DRE: Lazer Ted into Borat? Why are we doing this...

[AUSTIN laughs]

SYLVIA: "Ted is also wearing a black hat with white text that says "NOT!"."

AUSTIN: [laughs] God. Uh.

ART: Thanks, Keith.

AUSTIN: Jill!

KEITH: It's one of his businesses. He sells hats.

AUSTIN: Jill, what are you wearing and who did you come with?

SYLVIA: I think Jill is just wearing like a really well-tailored suit?

AUSTIN: [gleeful] Awww, do I wanna be the worst?

SYLVIA: Go ahead.

AUSTIN: Could I be the worst person?

SYLVIA: Go ahead!

AUSTIN: Can I tell you who your plus-one might be?

SYLVIA: Go ahead.

AUSTIN: ...It might be Jacqui.

DRE: Ooh!

ALI: [sadly] Why? [seriously] But why, though? But actually.

SYLVIA: Yeah, but. It would be—g—[sighs]

DRE: Why not?

SYLVIA: I guess it depends on like what they talked about, after. 'Cause Jacqui went after her, huh.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think they may have been spending some time.

SYLVIA: ...I kinda like it.

AUSTIN: Jacqui may have like told her what the old situation was. Maybe Jill figured out why her memories didn't come back this time.

SYLVIA: Yeah. Um...

AUSTIN: But it's not... they don't arrive hand-in-hand or anything.

SYLVIA: No... It's more like, uh...

KEITH: How about hand-in-foot? Hand-over-foot?

SYLVIA: Yeah, hand in over—hand-over-foot. Um.

AUSTIN: From the outside, what this looks like... is that the top two lieutenants of two friendly groups showed up together.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: As like a—a symbol of respect—

SYLVIA: Goodwill.

AUSTIN: —and alliance between these two progressive groups. From the inside... aw, yeah.

SYLVIA: I also think that part of Jillian's like... Jillian—part of—Jillian's thinking is one, "All right, let's give this a shot—"

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: —and two, "We used to work together, let's see if we can still work well together."

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Sorry, Ali!

AUSTIN: What is Jillian wearing?

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: No, this is good.

ALI: Did Jillian even know Aria was gonna be there? That's important to me.

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah.

ALI: Okay. Okay! Okay.

AUSTIN: Jill's—what's Jill wearing?

SYLVIA: I—she just has a really well-tailored suit, I think.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think they're both just wearing dope suits.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: ...No. I think Jacqui's wearing a really nice dress, actually.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like but still, big fuck-off arms, like just—like—

SYLVIA: Oh yeah, it's sleeveless.

AUSTIN: —rad ch—yeah. Yes.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Aria, what are you wearing?

ALI: Um. I'm going to describe what Aria usually wears?

AUSTIN: Yeah, read us—yeah.

ALI: Which is like, um... Like—she spent her entire life trying to look like a soldier? [laughs] And like—

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: —trying to actually look like authoritative, and I think becoming the Vanguard person like she finally like pulled that off?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: By toning it down a little. So she usually wears just like a nice like... I guess like jacket with... like that's white with like gold detailing. Um. And like—but it has like really long coattails, almost like—*almost* like a ball gown? And then like really high boots and like she's not wearing pants, um. [laughs] And then like for a ball she just like wants to look cool and fashionable again?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: Um. So she's probably just wearing like a really nice dress. It's probably not a ball gown? Um. But like a mermaid-style like form-fitting, and she looks really nice, it's probably like—

AUSTIN: Yeah. What color is it?

ALI: It's—mm. It's probably like... red, prob—it's probably red. As we go for a... [laughs]

AUSTIN: Okay. No, that's right. The person you're with is also wearing red.

ALI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: It's like a—it's like a dark red suit with a o—kind of like, uh—black lapels, white dress shirt with no buttons, um, underneath. Like it's just—it's just—it looks futuristic and weird. Um. And I think he does have like golden cufflinks on, on the red suit. And he's grown a beard, and he walks with a cane. But... when he gets to the dance floor, he hands it off to somebody, because he still wants to dance. And Ibex is at the ball.

ALI: My good pal!

AUSTIN: Yeah. No one's seen this guy in five years. Like *no one* has seen Ibex. In years. And here he is.

JACK: What do we—do we—what did we previously think Ibex was doing? Like what was the—what was the word on the street about Ibex?

AUSTIN: Oh, "Ibex died," or "Ibex went—" you know... "was in a hospital somewhere..."

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Or "Ibex was hooked up to a computer," or, uh, "there never was a Ibex" is a popular one.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: "There was only ever Righteousness, there never was an Ibex, Ibex is just a robot." Um. Lots of rumors. Lots of rumors.

KEITH: That—part of that was a little bit true. Ibex was *kind of* just a robot!

AUSTIN: There was—there were *robot* Ibexes, yeah.

KEITH: ...Right.

AUSTIN: Um.

ALI: It—um—has there ever been a question of like where is Righteousness? Or...

AUSTIN: No...

ALI: ...people know it's with... yeah.

AUSTIN: People assume it's with you.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: ...I think. But you don't call yourself a Candidate name, so it's strange.

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: But also there are other people now who... don't always go by Candidate names. Cass—

ALI: Like Territory...

AUSTIN: Right, like Territory Jazz Junior.

SYLVIA: Yeah...

AUSTIN: Who is a Can—who has a Divine, which we haven't talked about yet. Um, also... I think... We gave Sokrates a Divine name, but I don't know that they use it that often anymore. Like especially... now. Especially like—they still have Integrity, but... Or maybe they—maybe they've shifted to using it, I don't know. Um. Also, Cass, you did *not* bring Sokrates. Sokrates is not here.

ART: Right.

AUSTIN: Right? Okay.

ART: Well, unless Sokrates is—was separately invited.

AUSTIN: Right. So. *"You ask your chosen partner how you came to be dancing together."* That's clear. That—everybody here is here now. *"Other players can join freely if it also makes sense for their characters to be present."* Everybody here is present. Um. *"During the dance, anyone can ask for details about the setting, occasion, circ—or circumstances. Take turns asking each other questions. Each of you gets to ask the other two questions. Take turns. And then the dance ends."* So everybody here gets to pick someone to dance with. Um.

JACK: [distressed] Oh!

AUSTIN: Of this whole pool of people. *"If other players have joined the dance, you each get to ask two questions in total, choosing which dancing partner for each question. Take turns around the circle as the figures of the dance bring you from partner to partner. The worst dancer asks the first question, or else have another player choose who asks the first question at a whim."*

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: So, Orth? Probably the worst dancer?

JACK: Yeah.

ALI: Aw.

DRE: Aw. Buddy.

AUSTIN: Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe it's not. Maybe it's Kobus.

ART: Are we drafting—

AUSTIN: Kobus is like—

ART: —partners? I don't—I don't think I came here to dance with my sibling.

AUSTIN: No, we can draft partners.

ART: All right.

JACK: Can I put in a vote for Ibex?

AUSTIN: As the worst dancer?

JACK: No, as a partner!

AUSTIN: Oh, sure.

KEITH: Oh, man, it would be so funny if Ibex was the worst dancer.

AUSTIN: I don't think he is. Ibex is—

ALI: No, he's absolutely not—

KEITH: His *one weakness*.

AUSTIN: *Please*.

[DRE laughs]

ALI: There's no way.

AUSTIN: Ibex's one weakness is his incredible arrogance! [laughing] That's—

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: —been clear from day one!

KEITH: Right, maybe he *thinks* that h—maybe he thinks that he's the best dancer.

AUSTIN: No, he knows ex—

KEITH: And no one's had the heart to—it's like Jon Hamm in 30 Rock.

AUSTIN: Right. No.

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Not in this one case. Uh, I—the worst dancer is probably Kobus?

DRE: Yeah. No, that's fair.

AUSTIN: In that like, they haven't had experience dancing, and also aren't very good at opening up to people.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um. So that means you get to choose the first—the first partner. And ask a question.

DRE: Oh, boy. Um... Who...

AUSTIN: You can also—you can also choose not to ask a question, in order to place the leading bid on the object.

DRE: Ooh.

AUSTIN: Again, this is—there is a criminal organization here. There's a black market operating the Met Gala this year, and little dance moves are g—are the bids. That you make.

DRE: The—the only person I could really see Kobus like desperate to dance with would probably be Ibex, but I feel like that's—like—a lot of people are gonna want dibs on him. Um.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Uh, Vicuna is here also, obviously, Capra is here. And there could be other NPCs here who we haven't mentioned.

DRE: Yeah. Yeah, maybe Kobus does make the opening bid. And they just let Vicuna do the...

AUSTIN: Right. The politicking.

DRE: 'Cause Vicuna's the face.

AUSTIN: Right. Right.

DRE: Let her do the dancing, and the politics, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Uh, who's—let's just go down the thing here, so Kobus—Orth! Who are you dancing with first? Or are you making a bid?

JACK: Ibex!

AUSTIN: Ibex. Okay. Orth, uh... Who's leading?

JACK: [confidently] Ah, I am.

AUSTIN: [thoughtfully] Okay. So what's the question? And there's this list of questions here, but lots of them are like, "What do you say?"

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And you can also just talk. Uh, here's a note. He takes your hand, and it's *warm*. Yours. Uh, his, rather. It's a warm hand.

KEITH: Huh!

JACK: ...Hm. I think it's gonna be, "Something about me catches your eye and your look lingers. What is it?"

AUSTIN: I think like the way—I think you lead. You take *his* hand, and like go and like take the lead position. And he immediately sees that you've become like confident and capable. And the leader that he once lied and said you could be. And so he is surprised to see that? And then the second he recognizes someone capable in you, he says—

AUSTIN (as Ibex): Are you getting prepared?

[3:00:30]

JACK (as Orth): It's really hard.

AUSTIN (as Ibex): [sighs] We weren't ready last time, Orth. We got lucky.

JACK (as Orth): What can you do to help?

AUSTIN (as Ibex): Well, I don't think I have much clout left. Ms. Joie, she...

JACK (as Orth): I -- I'll take *anything*.

AUSTIN (as Ibex): Anything?

AUSTIN: And he raises an eyebrow.

JACK (as Orth): I have two jobs, Ibex. I have to make things better for people, and I have to make sure that people aren't dead.

AUSTIN: He laughs.

AUSTIN (as Ibex): Oh, Orth. God damn, you sound like me.

KEITH: Ugh. I hate this guy still.

JACK (as Orth): You know they call me Executive now?

ART: Ha!

AUSTIN (as Ibex): Yeah.

JACK (as Orth): Yeah

AUSTIN (as Ibex): Yeah...

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN (as Ibex): [laughs] I won't do this to you, Orth. You turned out too damn good.

JACK (as Orth): Do what?

AUSTIN (as Ibex): Give you the only thing I can offer.

JACK (as Orth): [laughs] Ibex? I'm gonna—I'm gonna find another dance partner now.

AUSTIN (as Ibex): When—

AUSTIN: He lets you—he starts to let you go, and he says:

AUSTIN (as Ibex): When they bury me, you make sure they call me Attar Rose.

JACK (as Orth): I will. Thank you.

AUSTIN: He squeezes your shoulder. Jill, who do you dance with?

SYLVIA: I mean. You dance with the partner you bring, right?

AUSTIN: [laughs] Yep. Okay.

SYLVIA: Yeah. Yeah, it's Jacqui.

AUSTIN: [breathes in] What's your question?

SYLVIA: Um. My question is actually, I believe the same as.... Jack's. Which was—

AUSTIN: Which was “something catches—”

SYLVIA: “Something about me catches—

AUSTIN: Yep.

SYLVIA: “—your eye and your look lingers. What is it?”

AUSTIN: She makes a joke. She makes a joke that you two used to have, and you laugh at it, but it’s the laugh that is—it’s the laugh at hearing it for the first time? Not... the laugh she hoped for. Which was like “Oh, it’s our—it’s our funny old joke.”

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That’s what she notices. Aria, who you dancing with?

ALI: [laughs] I... I went into this wanting to dance with Cass, but now I’m not sure.

AUSTIN: Mm.

ALI: Um. ‘Cause we already had a like a good scene.

AUSTIN Yeah, but that’s still a good...

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: The trailer would be able to cut those two scenes together in a good way.

ALI: [laughs] Um.

AUSTIN: And you still get a second dance, remember—everybody’s gonna get one more dance.

ALI: Right, okay we’re gonna go around again? Um.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: Uh, hold on. While you’re thinking, I need to type something in the chat. Just don’t—just give me time.

ALI: O...

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: [nervously] Okay? [laughs]

[AUSTIN laughs]

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Ah, we're not laughing at what Art typed. We're laughing at what Sylvia typed, which is—

[DRE laughs]

ALI: Nope!

AUSTIN: Which is. "I want—"

SYLVIA: "I want everyone to know Ali has sent me "You fuckin bitch" like a hundred times this game."

[Laughter]

SYLVIA: To be fair, I did send her "Get cucked" at one point.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Wow!

[Laughter]

SYLVIA: She called me a bitch first, though.

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: That's—jesus christ.

DRE: Ah, this is brutal.

AUSTIN: It's brutal out here. Y'all catching *feelings*!

KEITH: This is a—

SYLVIA: I've—

KEITH: This is a harder fight than Rigour.

SYLVIA: [sad voice] I'm just—I'm just roleplaying and she's making it personal.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ALI: I'm gonna choose... Cass.

AUSTIN: Okay. What's your question?

ALI: Um.

AUSTIN: Also, what music is playing? What sort of music is this dance?

DRE: Lazer Ted's new album.

ALI: Stop. [laughs]

KEITH: It's classical. Smash Mouth.

AUSTIN: Classical Smash Mouth, right. Yeah. Uh-huh. Performed by Lazer Ted.

DRE: Mhm.

ART: Lazer Ted's Smash Mouth cover album.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ART: All Star Two.

AUSTIN: It's—y—[laughs] It's just called All Star Two. It's just called All Star, but the—the two Ls in All Star are a Roman numeral two.

[KEITH laughs]

AUSTIN: [laughing] Even though they're Ls. It's good.

JACK: So—wait, so it would be mispronounced as "Aii Star."

AUSTIN: [Lazer Ted voice] Yeah. Aii Star. It's my latest.

ALI: Um. "At this moment in the dance, you laugh. At what?" And it's not All Star lyrics. [laughs]

[AUSTIN laughs]

ART: That's good, 'cause those lyrics are *crazy nonsense*. I laugh thinking about... about old times. About where we started...

ALI: [with emotion] Mm.

ART: And where we are now.

AUSTIN: ...Cass.

ART: The enormity of change.

AUSTIN: Who do you dance with, Cass? And what do you ask?

ART: Hm.

AUSTIN: Right now Kobus has... the bid, by the way.

ART: Uh, yeah, Cass'll bid.

KEITH: And how did you say that we can get the bid?

AUSTIN: You just spend your—you don't get to ask a question. Okay.

ART: Cass bids.

[ALI sighs]

AUSTIN: Okay. I like the—the bid is like a dip. Cass dips Aria. And like that is the action to bid the next high—the next step up?

ART: 'Cause everyone knows there's no spet for a dip in All Star.

AUSTIN: Mako. [laughs]

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Not your—no the bad Smash Mouth version, but the real good Lazer Ted version.

KEITH: That's the really good Lazer Ted...

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

KEITH: Lazy Tazy cover.

AUSTIN: Lazy Tazy—that wavy cover.

[ALI sighs]

DRE: [tiredly] Aw.

AUSTIN: Uh. Mako. Who do you dance with?

KEITH: Aw, man. Mako doesn't like dancing.

AUSTIN: Mako doesn't have to dance.

KEITH: Mako—I could just bid?

AUSTIN: Yeah, your bid could be, “I’m gonna sneak away and go fuckin’ try to steal this thing.”

KEITH: Yeah. Oh yeah. For sure.

AUSTIN: So it’s—

KEITH: Mako doesn’t like to—Mako doesn’t like when he has—when there’s too much attention on him. So he doesn’t like to dance.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: In case somebody sees him dancing.

AUSTIN: [pained] ...Ah.

DRE: Oh, boy.

KEITH: What’s up? What’s happening?

AUSTIN: Oh, Mako.

KEITH: Oh. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Mako doesn’t like dancing anymore, huh?

ART: Oh...

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Mako used to like dancing. Mako—has Mako had a dance since Tower?

KEITH: Oh, no.

AUSTIN: No.

KEITH: No.

AUSTIN: Lazer Ted—

KEITH: No time. Just too busy.

AUSTIN: —just like goes to ask. Like goes to ask. And then... is like. Like he’s about to ask you to dance. And then says like “

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Oh, nah. I’m—I’m just gonna get some punch, actually...

AUSTIN: And then gives you like a very complicated handshake. 'Cause he doesn't know what to do with his hands.

KEITH: Complic—oh, okay. And you—do you meaning complicated like there's a lot of moves, or complicated like—

AUSTIN: There's a—lot of moves.

KEITH: —emotionally complicated?

AUSTIN: Both. It's both. It's both.

KEITH: Okay. ...Um. Yeah, I'm gonna s—I'm gonna—Mako would like to sit out the dancing.

AUSTIN: All right, so take a bid. Kobus, we're back around to you. You've been... Mako vanishes. Mako is just like not there anymore?

DRE: Mm.

AUSTIN: Um. Oh, I could—I'll offer you something else, though. I'll offer you access to Grace. You could ask me a question about Grace. Instead of this—instead of getting close to this thing. ...I also haven't yet figured out how you don't just automatically win this by being the last person who goes? By the way? [laughs] So.

[DRE laughs]

DRE: Um. What sort of—

AUSTIN: Uh, Mako. I'm saying. Mako, who will be the last person who goes.

DRE: Oh, yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: Um... So do you want to make a bid now, Mako, or do you wanna ask something about Grace? I just also think Grace is just here. Like in the giant hall.

KEITH: Um. Now did—Dre, did we have our conversation about Grace. In the—

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah. We just—we just—

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: —sped through it because we don't have that much time.

DRE: Yeah.

KEITH: Right. I guess—I guess because I agreed to do that, I will ask a question...

AUSTIN: Okay. What do you—

KEITH: About Grace.

AUSTIN: —it's not one of these questions. You're not asking if Grace has the opportunity to draw you close and hold you.

KEITH: No, no. Right. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Um.

KEITH: My question is, Grace, would you like to hold me? Um. I...

AUSTIN: Grace has a sleeve? Grace wears a sleeve now.

KEITH: Yeah?

AUSTIN: Is a thing. And that's—strange. Like there's... It looks like a mix between metal and silk. That runs down her... formerly missing arm.

KEITH: Mmkay. Um.

AUSTIN: Also, the second you start to open up—to her, to like hack into her. You're able to do it, I'm not—you're not rolling or anything.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: But you can tell that she is... in a sense, constantly connected to *everybody* here. Like her head is in—she's seeing what everyone is thinking here. Um. But you're able to shield up.

KEITH: That's crazy.

AUSTIN: Because you're Mako. Yeah.

KEITH: How—okay. And... I guess—I guess the—what I wanna look for is how she's able to do that.

AUSTIN: [breathes] So she has something in her, something from Sigilia? That... is increasing her ability to... be telepathic, basically. That is letting her see into the people's minds here. But the thing that's strange is that like... Kobus told you—there's two things. One, Kobus told you that... she'd been acting erratically. And as far as you can tell, nothing about the weird foreign substance in her is messing with her decision making? It's just providing more data.

KEITH: Okay. So this is not a side effect.

AUSTIN: No. Like.

KEITH: Something else happened.

AUSTIN: She's been raiding places. She's been disappearing in the night to go blow up, you know, settlements where there's territory disputes. This is not feeding her information. And as far as you can tell, there's no filter on the information coming in. It's just raw data.

KEITH: A blast of noise?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Um. But it—but she's a Divine. You think she'll be—she can—she can unpack that noise fine. Um. You c—

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: You—and you realize this for a second. You shouldn't be able to, Mako. It should be a noise—it should be noise to you. But... you're able to unpack it... too. And that's a little unsettling.

KEITH: Huh.

AUSTIN: Kobus. What do you do?

DRE: Um. I think Kobus wants to dance with Cass.

AUSTIN: Okay! That's interesting.

ART: [surprised] That is.

DRE: Well, they're... they're our neighbors to the north, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah! They are your neighbors to the north.

DRE: Might as well.

AUSTIN: They did take a couple of planets from you!

DRE: Just to be a little—be a little friendly.

AUSTIN: Yeah!

DRE: Um. So I guess my question is... Cass, your mouth is close to my ear. What do you say?

[AUSTIN sniffs]

ART: I'm really—I'm really s—I'm p—ugh. I wanna—I need this to be like a... I need this to be a good moment. And I wasn't prepared. [pause]

AUSTIN: [laughs] Cass doesn't say that—

ART: Right.

AUSTIN: —I know. But.

[ALI and DRE laugh]

ART: Because I'm not fond of—I'm not fond of... any of you lot, really.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

DRE: Not even the one that quit being a Divine candidate?

ART: I mean... Not politically, no. You're in—you're—I—get out my—get out of my *space*.

[DRE laughs]

ART (as Cass): I'm glad you shed Loyalty.

AUSTIN: Hm.

ART (as Cass): But. [sighs] But maybe you still have too much.

AUSTIN: [laughs] That's pretty good.

ALI: Wow.

ART: And Cass sort of like changes partners.

AUSTIN: That's... Nice.

ALI: [whispering] Damn, that's good!

AUSTIN: Nice.

DRE: [laughs] That was good.

AUSTIN: Fuckin' brutal. Orth.

ART: I did a really big like turn on that. I want... Ca—

AUSTIN: Yeah. Good.

ART: Cass dances from the hips. He's⁷ a hip dancer.

JACK: Um.

AUSTIN: Nice.

⁷ Cass uses they/them pronouns.

JACK: I wanna make a—

AUSTIN: I could see that.

JACK: I wanna make a bid.

AUSTIN: What's your bid look like?

JACK: Um.

AUSTIN: And who you dancing with? Just some random person?

JACK: I think I'm dancing with Offset, at the moment.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: Uh, but I think—actually, I think, because... they're sort of like my lieu—not my lieu—they're my administrative lieutenant. If—and I guess now they're actually my lieutenant?

AUSTIN: Yeah. They're moved up, in rank.

JACK: But I think that...

AUSTIN: She's a...

JACK: ...I am reminded, by her, to make the bid. She's the one who—

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: —puts her hand on my arm, and says

[AUSTIN laughs]

JACK: "Orth."

AUSTIN: [whispering] Orth, you have to go! We're here for the thing!

[JACK and ALI laugh]

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay. Jill? Oh, is that—you're gonna do—

SYLVIA: Yeah, I'm with Jacqui and I'm gonna do the—dance's—"The dance's figures bring you to dance with someone else. Whom?" Gee, I wonder who. Uh, when the dance brings you back to me again—

[ALI snorts]

SYLVIA: —are you pleased or disappointed?

AUSTIN: ...Oh, this is big.

SYLVIA: Yeah, this is big.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Let's have that little side conversation. Aria.

ALI: Oh, yeah?

AUSTIN: Jill trades partners with you.

ALI: Uh-huh.

AUSTIN: To Jacqui. Or with Jacqui.

ALI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: How's that go?

ALI: Um.

AUSTIN: What's Aria's response, when that happens? What does Jacqui see in you?

ALI: [sighs]

AUSTIN: When... your hands touch.

ALI: I... [sighs] I think that Aria's doing that thing where like you're too afraid to do anything, 'cause you're afraid that it's gonna be the wrong thing?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Yeah. Uh-huh. I know the thing.

ALI: [laughing] Um. So she's like... [serious] So they're just like dancing, and she's not like—you know. She's—[sighs] It's like—I don't wanna say it's sterile, but it's almost like that. Like.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: Um. No! But I—yeah. It's not that it's affectionate. Right? But it's that she's not... she has already tried to cross that boundary once. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: [laughing] And that didn't work out. Um. [serious] So—I—yeah. I think that she like... she smiles at her, and... I think that she says that she looks really nice. But otherwise... is sort of keeping her distance.

[3:15:35]

AUSTIN: Mhm. I think she just says like...

AUSTIN (as Jacqui) You too.

AUSTIN: And then, when it's time to trade back, holds your hand for an extra second, during the switch. And doesn't... she's disappointed. Of pleased and disappointed—

[ALI sighs]

AUSTIN: —if she has to answer the question, she's disappointed that—be back with Jill. Dancing.

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: Aria. What do you do?

ALI: [laughs] ...Oh, this is my... Oh.

AUSTIN: Now it's your dance. Yeah.

ALI: I am gonna dance with Ibex.

AUSTIN: Like who—you've now traded Jacqui back off, now—Ibex? Okay.

ALI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: He's like—

ALI: Um.

AUSTIN: He's still dancin' good. He's still a good dancer. But... is definitely gettin' a little tired.

ALI: Um.

AUSTIN: Still has the moves. He's a good enough dancer to know what moves not to use? When he's gettin' a little tired.

ALI: Um... I think Aria asks him, um. How he's enjoying his night out.

AUSTIN: He like uses the opportunity to dance with you to like—he does like lots of big, sweeping, circular motions? So that he can like basically make a tour of the room, and look everyone... in the eye. Who was like... in his life, basically. Right, like everyone who has been a

Candidate in his lifetime, who's here. All of the political leaders. He like does a lap. And then he smiles at you, and he says—

AUSTIN (as Ibex): It's good. I just... I wish she could have been here. [sighs]

[ALI sighs]

AUSTIN (as Ibex) Anyway, it—[indulgently] don't worry about it. I... [sighs] The important...

AUSTIN: There's a little swing, and *da-da*, the song goes.

AUSTIN (as Ibex): The important thing is... that you're all here, and you can get ready. Aria. You have to be ready for this. Nothing else matters.

ALI (as Aria): I know. I—we will be. It... We got *close* last time.

AUSTIN (as Ibex): [sighs] [laughs] Did you?

ALI (as Aria): [sighs] We figured something out, at least.

AUSTIN (as Ibex): You know Orth's not sleeping?

ALI (as Ari): Yeah.

AUSTIN (as Ibex): —You can see it in him. He doesn't *sleep*. He doesn't have *Righteousness*, and he doesn't sleep. And I see Cass. And... you. And you're obsessed with doing the job right. And, god, Mako *split*—himself, or something, into a dozen men, just to—

[KEITH laughs]

AUSTIN (as Ibex): —work all day. And I have to wonder. Are you sure Rigour lost? ...Anyway. You need anything, you tell me this week. I don't think there'll be too many after that.

ALI: I wanna make a bid?

AUSTIN: I mean, no, that was your—

ALI: Oh, okay.

AUSTIN: Oh, so you wanna bid instead of...

ALI: Instead of asking a question.

AUSTIN: Oh no, you did—I thought you did. I thought you did... um. I guess—mm—did you not choose a thing?

ALI: Yeah, no, I thought that—I—yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: That was just like a talk.

AUSTIN: Right. That was just a talk.

ALI: Um. I mean—

AUSTIN: I—

ALI: 'Cause that's like the important thing, right? Like.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I guess.

ALI: Instead of like studying him—

AUSTIN: Well.

ALI: —or asking a question, she's showing him that like yeah, she's putting in an effort for this.

AUSTIN: I'll remind you—so this bid is about political points, not about crisis points.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: So... in some ways, making that bid would be saying, "No, I'm still—caring—I care about what my—I care about my shit." Um... But. I'm not gonna say "you shouldn't. You can't do that." You know?

ALI: Okay. But yeah, so that—

AUSTIN: So that's what you do.

ALI: So that's what I'm gonna do. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Cass.

ART: I'll dance with Jill, during that interlude?

AUSTIN: Right. You do that switch?

ART: Finishing the interlude?

AUSTIN: Sure.

SYLVIA: Hello!

AUSTIN: Hey, Jill.

ART: "I lose my place in the dance. Do you let me stumble, or do you draw me back into place?"

SYLVIA: I draw you back into place.

ART: All right.

SYLVIA: I don't—uh. The... I—um. The Demarchy is a friend, I believe?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: And—

AUSTIN: Then you are—

SYLVIA: I don't wanna have their leader looking like a little... buffoon.

ART: Yeah, I'm cementing our alliance through dance. Yeah.

[AUSTIN laughs]

SYLVIA: Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

AUSTIN: The real question is whether or not Cass stumbled on purpose. To see what Jill would do.

ART: How will we ever know.

AUSTIN: And Mako.

KEITH: Well. I s—I still don't think I'm dancing.

AUSTIN: Okay. Well—uh—no, at this point, I imagine that you are like sneaking around the rafters, or some bullshit.

KEITH: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

AUSTIN: Like you're like—

KEITH: I um...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Okay, so here's what I do. Here's what's—here's what I do. Okay. I take off my jacket.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

KEITH: In my back pocket, I have a ski mask.

ALI: [whispering] God.

KEITH: And so now I'm—now I'm in a black shirt. Black long-sleeved t-shirt. And a ski mask. And I'm just kinda acrobating around... on the rafters.

AUSTIN: And like—I think maybe you noticed that the actual—

KEITH: And then Lazer Ted's cover of the Mission Impossible theme song.

AUSTIN: Comes on. Right.

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Which is just a cover of the Kanye West cover of the Mission Impossible theme song.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: And, uh...

KEITH: Um...

AUSTIN: ...Yeah. This is the best. I think you notice that the actual, physical *thing* is here. Um.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: And it's at the—

KEITH: And which I still don't know what it is!

AUSTIN: Well, you get a better look at it now. Like you've crossed the rafters. It's being held... It's being—it's like—it's like a centerpiece, 'cause criminals are the worst. It's like the... almost like the New Year's globe. It's at the top—or the ball. It's at the top of a statue. It's like being held by a statue that's holding, in one hand—in one hand it's holding Weight. In the other hand it's holding Counterweight? Um.

KEITH: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And. There is... Or, no, it's Counterweight in the lower hand, Weight on the higher hand? And as you get close—I think you actually just see. It's one of the eyes of the statue. It's this golden eye. Of the statue. Um. And it is... God, who are you? Mako? Okay. Um.

KEITH: Yeah, I'm Mako.

AUSTIN: As you get to it... As you get close to it. You can feel the like... all of the times that you have been outraged by Ibex, or... some other asshole. God, in fact—you like see it there, and

then you look down, and you realize that one of the people who's like running this whole thing is Jorne? Uh. Jorne is one of the black marketeers here? And like. Just all of the anger you've had for every asshole who's ever pissed you off. Is like.

KEITH: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Coming through this thing. But like not your like... It's not the anger at them. So much as it is like your confidence that you were in the right. And you realize that this little orb is... the Divine of Zeal. ...And I guess you—you like just jimmy it out of there? You like take out like a little pry bar?

KEITH: Yeah! Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's like the size of like... not a basketball, but like... bigger than a baseball, smaller than a... maybe it's like the size of like a small bowling ball? But not as heavy? Uh, maybe—about as heavy.

KEITH: Talking about a candlepin ball.

AUSTIN: Let's say about as heavy.

KEITH: Talking about the classic New England tradition of candlepin bowling.

AUSTIN: I don't know what that is. What's—

KEITH: You don't know what candlepin bowl—okay. A—so candlepin bowling is a smaller ball, the pins are like conical shape, they don't have like the curves in them?

AUSTIN: Oh, I see. I see it.

KEITH: And it's just—it's just what bowling is in Massachusetts. And we—it's—

AUSTIN: Wait, do you not have *regular bowling*?

KEITH: No. Okay—candlepin bowling, in Massachusetts, and some other New England states, is so much more prevalent than regular bowling, that we actually call that “big ball bowling.”

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: [incredulous] No, you don't.

KEITH: And we do—we call candlepin bowling regular bowl—we call that bowling.

AUSTIN: You don't—that's *stupid*.

KEITH: I swear to god. Big ball—google candlepin bowling and you'll see a picture of it. And the balls are like—

AUSTIN: I see.

KEITH: —you know the s—you know the size of like—like a c—like a coconut that you buy at a grocery store? That's about how big a candlepin ball is.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's—okay, that's the right about—that's the size for this. Sounds good. Um.... All right. So you pop this thing out, and—do you have like a bag? Do you have a candlepin bowling ball bag?

KEITH: Uh, I put it in the jacket, and I sling it over my shoulder.

AUSTIN: You're like hanging from a rafter. I still like you putting it in the pocket of your jacket, somehow?

[MUSIC - "[Everything At Last Must Come To An End](#)" becomes audible]

AUSTIN: But your jacket is just like hanging, 'cause it's weighted down by this... [laughs]

KEITH: I—yeah, I just—I think I just make it sort of like a bindle.

AUSTIN: Okay, I see.

KEITH: Like a jacket bindle.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Good. Um. And we look down and see everyone dancing, from your vision. And Ibex gives Aria a little hug, and goes and grabs his cane from one of like the people who are holding his cane. Like the coatroom, I guess.

KEITH: Mhm.

AUSTIN: And he leaves. And then. God, who made the last high bid? Let's—I think Vicuna probably—

JACK: It was me.

AUSTIN: Huh?

JACK: I made the last high bid.

AUSTIN: Okay. I think after you—

ALI: No, I...

AUSTIN: Did Aria bid too? Aria bid.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You're right.

JACK: Oh yeah. You had a conversation *and* you bid.

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Uh, Aria, Jorne. You remember Jorne?

ALI: [laughing] Yes.

AUSTIN: Jorne—at some—like the dances are continuing, but Jorne comes over to you and goes like—

AUSTIN (as Jorne): [whispering] [obsequiously] Ms. Joie. Congratulations. You've made the bid. Uh. Gonna work out everything out with you later. It's a pleasure to see you. It's been—it's been a long time. Uh. But everything's gonna work out. We'll have it delivered to you first thing in the morning.

AUSTIN: Uh—and then he like—

ALI (as Aria): Nice. Thank you.

AUSTIN: He like—

AUSTIN (as Jorne): You wanna see a little—

KEITH: [pleased] Can't believe we get to *fuck* over Jorne!

AUSTIN (as Jorne): You wanna see a little thing I did? A little trick? I guess I'm pretty proud of it. Just up there, just behind me, look at the eye. That's where it is.

AUSTIN: And like you follow his thumb up. He's like pointing behind him with his thumb. He's not looking up there. And there's Mako...

[JACK laughs]

[Non-music audio becomes incomprehensible, fades out]

[MUSIC plays out to end]