

COUNTER/Weight 28: A Special Kind of Warmth

Transcribed by kira @queencustom (0:00:00 to 0:03:25) and Jen @wronghandle#1989

[MUSIC - "The Long Way Around" starts]

AUSTIN: [narrating] 30 days ago, on Counterweight.

The room already smelled musty. The automated cleaner units Orth Godlove left behind did an admirable job of keeping the room free of biological contagions, but they did nothing to make it comfortable, let alone pleasing, to be in. But Ibex brings his own aroma wherever he goes, and within the first few steps of his arrival, the memory den took on a refreshing fragrance. The cleaner bots moved aside, lifting up their air scrubbers like trumpets announcing his arrival. He puts a hand on the old hero's head. It's warm, that special kind of warm that means things could move in any direction if pushed just so. Ibex was familiar with that heat. He practiced controlling it, bringing it from balmy to boiling to bring down a state, cooling it from scorching to sapid to ruin an economy. If you wanted to move history, you had to first learn to be comfortable in that mercurial warmth. He glided from one station to another. The press of a button, the flip of a switch, and then a cord pulled from its socket. And there on the bed, Jace Rethal struggles, desperate to feel cool air.

[MUSIC - "The Long Way Around" ends]

AUSTIN: Hey everyone, welcome to Friends at the Table, an actual play podcast focused on critical worldbuilding, smart characterization, and fun interaction between good friends. We are, as always, presented by streamfriends.tv and runbutton.net. Today we are back to the Faction Game. We are back to Stars Without Number/a little bit of Microscope, which means we are back to Sylvia¹ Clare and Andrew Lee Swan.

SYLVIA: Hey, I'm Sylvia!

AUSTIN: Welcome back! Where can people find you on the internet? Let's do it up front, so that way we don't forget it at the end.

SYLVIA: Yeah, you can just find me on twitter.com/captaintrash. That's it. [DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: It's a good name.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

¹ The name in the audio is no longer in use.

DRE: [laughing] Sorry, Sylvia just going “Ayy, it’s Sylvia!”

SYLVIA: It’s Sylvia!! I’m happy to be back! Hey, I got a new microphone! I sound good!

AUSTIN: You do.

DRE: Hey I’m Andrew. You can find me on Twitter at @Swandre3000.

AUSTIN: That’s a good Twitter handle.

DRE: Thanks.

SYLVIA: We’ve all got good handles here.

AUSTIN: [laughs] We do. I’m at @austin_walker, if you don’t already know. We’re back to the faction game because a lot has happened. [SYLVIA and DRE laugh] And it’s time to take stock, let’s say.

SYLVIA: That’s putting it mildly.

AUSTIN: I think it is putting it mildly. Is this the first full faction game that we’ve had since we did the—?

SYLVIA: Since the holiday, yeah.

AUSTIN: Since the holiday and since the re-jiggering of the factions?

SYLVIA: We did a mini-session to—

AUSTIN: We did, okay.

SYLVIA: —to sort out all— to sort of act out everybody coming to— the faction merging—

AUSTIN: Totally.

SYLVIA: —but we haven’t had an actual game.

DRE: Yeah, that was definitely more Microscope-y than—

AUSTIN: Yeah, it was. It was Microscope-y, and also we always agreed on what the outcomes were. So we barely even touched the rules of Microscope.

DRE: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But let's just go over quickly what the factions are, where they're at. Let's start at the bottom here. The Odamas Fleet is the faction that Sylvia has direct control over. It is the group of pirates and genetic experiments turned pirates that are slowly heading down towards Kalliope, the kind of space L.A., with their fleet of ships.

SYLVIA: I believe we just passed by — not Ionias. Where was—

AUSTIN: No, you've not—

SYLVIA: Was it Archonic that we just passed by?

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AUSTIN: You just passed— I think you're passing through Archonic right now.

SYLVIA: Well, I think that's where we were.

AUSTIN: Let's seen.

SYLVIA: Because that's how we came to join with the—

AUSTIN: Horizon Tactical.

SYLVIA: Horizon, that's it. Yeah.

AUSTIN: That might be right. Let's see. Yeah. You have—

SYLVIA: I'm pretty sure that's right. I'm pretty sure that's where we're starting.

AUSTIN: Oh yeah. I'm looking at the wrong place here. Well, we have it written down, so let's just double-check again. You might have only passed through Vyshe, because you started at Tetrakal and you moved— yeah, I think you're in Archonic now. I think that's correct. And heading south toward Kalliope, past JoyPark, past Ionias.

SYLVIA: Which will be interesting.

AUSTIN: It should be, because you're about to pass through Petrichor Automedia's space. Petrichor Automedia, of course, is the faction now currently run by Andrew Lee Swan. Formerly

Snowtrak, formerly EarthHome Entertainment, now this big megacorp, Petrichor Automedia. They do it all. They do robots, they do movies. They do that sound that keeps you up at night. [DRE laughs] They do existential dread, they do efficiency operations. They're good. They're good. And their goal right now is— they need a goal. We need to talk to you, Dre, about what your goal is.

DRE: So I was looking at all of this before we started. The two that stand out to me would probably either be Inside Enemy Territory, which is where you plant stealth assets on worlds. And it's equal to your Cunning score, which I think is 5?

AUSTIN: You should be able to see it over there. Yeah, it's 5.

DRE: Yeah. And then the only other thing I could think of would be— because it's expansion either way. It's either stealthy expansion or outright expansion. So I was thinking Planetary Seizure might be another possibility.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Planetary Seizure almost— I guess the question we have to have here is, is it time for Rigour to strike? So what was the other one you were thinking of? Expand Influence? Or Inside Enemy Territory, is that the one you just said?

DRE: Inside Enemy Territory.

AUSTIN: Inside Enemy Territory is pretty good, in that it would be the bit of Rigour and Petrichor that is prepping to set things off. But I am also really interested in, what if it's just time to go?

DRE: Yeah. I think that is more interesting. And I also think Inside Enemy Territory would be the half-goal to a Planetary Seizure.

AUSTIN: Right. Totally.

DRE: So it might as well just be Planetary Seizure.

AUSTIN: Planetary Seizure says [reading] take control of a planet, becoming a legitimate planetary government. Difficulty is equal to half the average of the current faction's Force, Cunning and Wealth ratings. If the planet somehow lacks any opposing faction to resist the seizure, it counts as difficulty 1. But I think all of the things that Petrichor has assets on, or all their possible targets, would have a ruling government currently.

DRE: Yeah. Would they do.

AUSTIN: All right. So let's just slot that in though then, as the —

SYLVIA: Sure you don't want Peaceable Kingdom? [AUSTIN and DRE laugh]

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah. That's what they want. In fact, I'm also going to jump up to Hands of Grace, who currently need a goal also, and give them the goal Peaceable Kingdom. Which is the way we've come to understand, at least some perspectives on the Hands of Grace is, "Hey, they're fence-sitting." They're so afraid that everything's going to fall apart that they're not doing much of anything. So I like them as having Peaceable Kingdom right now.

SYLVIA: They're licking their wounds right now.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Exactly.

SYLVIA: After everything that's happened.

AUSTIN: Yeah. They've crawled up into this little corner here, the northwest part of Diasporan space. That's all they have left. Yeah. It's good times. Good times for them.

Who else do we have here? We have the Golden Demarchy, Sokrates's reformist Apostolosian group. And their goal right now is— they have Inside Enemy Territory. Er, that might be wrong. That might be off.

SYLVIA: That might be old from—

AUSTIN: I think that's old.

SYLVIA: —the Apostolosian empire.

AUSTIN: That seems likely. Let me see something. Oh. No, you know what?

SYLVIA: I'm pretty sure.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think what they want actually is also Planetary Seizure of Gemm. That's what that other note is there. Because Gemm is currently a Hands of Grace planet, is technically Diasporan. So if you look at the map as we have it right now, I need to just—

SYLVIA: I thought they have their own little southern pocket as well.

AUSTIN: Yes. I need to upload this new map to the website, and maybe I'll try to do that tomorrow. So the map is now broken off into each of these different factions, but sometimes inside of a faction there will be— instead of faction space, there is still a planet that belongs to another faction.

So in this case, the Golden Branch Demarchy, again, Sokrates's reformed Apostolosian empire, they have this little corner, this little pocket in the deep south of the Golden Branch. But in the

pocket is Slighter. What's on Slighter, again? It's been awhile since I've thought about some of these factions. There they are. They're all the way at the top. Hundreds of thousands of people ... right, right. There's an archive. That's where Sokrates found Integrity. And then also Gemm, which is more or less— where the Kingdom game started was on Gemm where all the millions of refugees are. Gemm is technically Diasporan, a Diasporan planet, a Hands of Grace planet. So I think Sokrates wants to claim that, so that the Golden Branch Demarchy can actually help those people. That's what their goals are.

Who's left? Rapid Evening definitely just wants to keep Expanding Influence. I think probably to— let's see here. I kind of like the notion of them wanting to get to Minerva and— I don't know. I like the notion of they have maybe also sat on their hands for too long. They thought like, "Oh, our tech is so powerful that we can just get by that way." So maybe they're seeing the fracturing Minerva Strategic Alliance, formerly the OriCon Expeditionary Group and Minerva Mining and Mechanics. And they're like, "Oh, maybe we can scoop some of this up and start putting some agents on Minerva maybe."

SYLVIA: I do want to ask, do they know that Rigour knows about them?

AUSTIN: Yes, because we got that—

SYLVIA: That could also be a factor in them trying to move.

AUSTIN: Yes, totally. Totally. We got that kind of talk between Jamil Quartz-Noble and Aria a couple of episodes ago. And that was basically like, "Hey, we have to go get to the safehouse and hide for a little bit."

SYLVIA: I forgot Jamil was part of them.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah, in a way this almost feels like that. Or it's like, "We need to set up new safehouses in new places like Minerva instead of in Petrichor, instead of on Counterweight where they knew where we are." So yeah, I'll make that their goal. I'll make it Expand Influence to Minerva XII.

The Righteous Vanguard I think is now Planetary Seizure, seize Counterweight. Right? That's where we're at in this game right now.

Minerva Strategic Alliance has Destroy the Foe, destroy Petrichor. We'll see how all that goes. But that's kind of where we were at. In the last faction game, we had that scene in which the newly formed Minerva Strategic Alliance, which is led by these twin business ladies, is like, "Yeah, no. We're gonna put the leash back on Petrichor." We'll see how that goes.

And I think that that's everybody, in terms of what they want.

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SYLVIA: Yeah, you got them all.

AUSTIN: Where does anyone want to start? Or do you have any questions before we move forward?

SYLVIA: I think it was pretty clear. I'm not 100% sure where to start, if I'm being honest.
[AUSTIN chuckles] There's a lot to do—

AUSTIN: There is!

SYLVIA: — here. Is there anybody that you guys in particular want to touch on, to make sure we get to today?

AUSTIN: Well, your two factions, obviously.

SYLVIA: [laughing] I mean, other than that. Yeah.

AUSTIN: We have limited time today, but I think it might make sense to just kick it off with— do you want to— let's— god. So the last game was so heavily Ibex and Rigour that I can't decide if we need to stay away from them for a few seconds or if we should follow forward on them. I think let's save them for later in the game.

SYLVIA: We could try and do the—

AUSTIN: Or do you want to do one and then the other?

SYLVIA: No. I was gonna say we could do the ramifications of their movements. So.

AUSTIN: Yeah. So in other words, maybe a scene on Counterweight? Or a scene— you know what? How about we take a look at what's up with the Hands of Grace, which—

SYLVIA: Oh yeah. I'm into it.

AUSTIN: The opening of this episode is at a peaceful place coming off of the last one. Something about them continuing to lick their wounds. I just like the— whenever we have Grace scenes, there's lots of slow movement and sometimes interjected with fast movement. But it's lots of slow parade marches, a fleet in orbit. Movement but careful, slow movement, and I want to open up a shot on that. So what are they doing today?

DRE: I have a question about that, specifically about Sigilia. I mean, the only thing on that planet is marked as a true alien.

AUSTIN: Yup!

DRE: Have we ever discussed what that is?

AUSTIN: The closest we got was that is where one of the weapons from the Kingdom game was being developed. That's as far as we've got with it. That comes from when we did world generation months and months and months ago. Sigilia was just marked down as "a true alien." And we had spoken about, in the world generation, that even the Apostolosians, who are maybe aliens or maybe trace themselves back to ancient Atlantians or who knows what they really are? They're still basically people. They're basically humans at the end of the day.

SYLVIA: Genetically similar enough to humans to be considered just an offshoot of humans.

AUSTIN: Especially genetically similar enough to whatever humans are 10, 20, 100 thousand years in the future in this setting. Right? I don't even know— I'm willing to handwave this little bit of it. I'm sure that if we had— if we were an actual TV show, we would have much more interesting talks about how to make Apostolosians visually distinctive or if we even should do that. But we said, "If they're going to be aliens, it's going to be not just an easily— not Star Trek aliens."

DRE: Yeah. It's not going to be blue people.

AUSTIN: Right. Exactly. And so, Sigilia was that. And we know that it was tied to the creation of the device that made Weight. And that's about all we've known about it. And I'm still not sure if we should go there and define that more or not. I don't know. Maybe we should. Do you think— do you have any ideas about that place?

DRE: No, I don't. And I had totally forgot that in the Kingdom game, it was a place for weapon development.

AUSTIN: It wasn't necessarily a place for weapon development. it was just that is where one of the— half of the weapons was. And that was when it was still Apostolosian. And it was going to be brought to Counterweight along with something from what is now Minerva XII.

SYLVIA: Was it being secured there, or was it just moving through? Was it being protected there?

AUSTIN: I think it was being developed there, is kind of the way I phrased it then, and it was half of this thing that was going to be. But maybe it was being secured there, because we've also talked about it as being potentially Rapid Evening tech. So maybe it was recovered from the

Rapid Evening. Or it was stolen or put into the wrong hands. We haven't really dug into that stuff. And I'm pretty open when I say— I have plans for some stuff, I don't have plans for other stuff.

I haven't sat down and hammered out what a true alien is because I think it's really fascinating. I wanted it to eventually, at least, be part of this game. So maybe it is time to talk about what the thing is. So yeah. Maybe it's Grace and Vicuna moving from Garden to Sigilia.

SYLVIA: I'm assuming that Sigilia is still a pretty secure planet, because they were securing such a powerful item there. Right? So it's probably a stronghold for them.

AUSTIN: Well, we can literally just see because I can tell you what's on or is not on Sigilia, actually. Yeah, okay. So the item that's there is a thing called Book of Secrets. And that says, "re-roll one die for an action taken on that world, or force an enemy faction to re-roll one die." So for the sake of this game, it's like a time machine. It goes again. You either get a second shot at what you do, or else you make someone else go back and try it again. Which, again, is fascinating—

DRE: I think that fits with the goal of being Peaceable Kingdom. I mean, it's a defensive weapon. So that makes pretty sense with the kind of technical part of it.

SYLVIA: It could also tie into the alien life form there.

AUSTIN: Right. And what the device is that made Weight. Literally, it took from Counterweight and rewound it into this beautiful, perfect world. Right?

SYLVIA: We don't have to go deep, because we just don't have the time to deep-dive into it. But I'm liking the idea of something about this alien biology was used in the development of this thing.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally. Even if it wasn't really an even alien— it could be something that's beyond what we think of as alien biologies. Right? I like it a lot.

So actually, how about this turn— I think we just open on shots of Vicuna in Grace looking at images. And then we get a shot of Sigilia similar to the one that you got in the Kingdom game. I kind of see it as a very— a yellow planet with a fog over it and old ruins, old Apostolosian ruins that have not been cleared away the way you normally clear away— the way the Diaspora has cleared away the rest of the ruins. Right? Normally, it moves in— maybe the Diaspora doesn't clear away the ruins the way that OriCon does. OriCon just steamrolls everything like, "Oh, this is a theme park now." Maybe the Diaspora has always been like, "Oh, we just can convert what's here into our new usage." Right? Like, "We'll keep the old Apostolosian archways and just build a new building around it. We'll make—"

SYLVIA: They just gentrify?

AUSTIN: Yeah, exactly.

SYLVIA: Yeah. It's perfect for them.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Like, "Oh, we don't want to burn down their museums, we just want to fill it with Starbucks." [DRE chuckles] It's great.

SYLVIA: What was— Constellation Coffee.

AUSTIN: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. So maybe it is that there are all these old ruins there that have not been — but even these have not been disturbed anywhere near the way the other ones have. And I like just opening on Vicuna saying,

AUSTIN (as Vicuna): It's time to mobilize what's on Sigilia.

AUSTIN: Maybe even a light debate back and forth between Vicuna and maybe not the voice of Grace in that we hear words, but some sort of vibration, sort of color that communicates tone. And eventually we see bits of Grace starts to move. We get an outside shot of the body of Grace and little rings on her - almost like bracelets that are around parts of her body - start to rotate, as if to activate something far away.

SYLVIA: I really like the color idea. So I think she's in the cockpit, and when she's saying these things, there's a sequence of lights sort of playing. And it pulls out, and because Grace is missing the arm still—

AUSTIN: Right.

DRE: Oh yeah.

SYLVIA: — you just see inside where the arm was just this constant small motion—

AUSTIN: Oh, that's really good.

SYLVIA: — with the light underneath it changing. Just something within Grace.

0:20:06

AUSTIN: I like that. I like that a lot. All right. So I think what's actually happening that turn is either they're buying a new asset - they have 15 credits saved up - or they are using postech industry to get more money. But let's just peek at what they could get for 15 credits.

DRE: A lot.

AUSTIN: They could get a lot. They've been saving for a little bit here. Their Force is 8, their Cunning is 7. So let's look at some Force 8 assets. They could theoretically buy up another capital fleet— actually they need to pay down their capital fleet. One second, let me just do that. Okay, so they have 13 credits, not 15. That's still sizeable. Ah, asset tables. Yeah, that's still enough to get a middle thing. But maybe they keep saving up. Maybe this is like they're building up to get something really fantastic.

SYLVIA: I think they want to go for something huge. Right?

AUSTIN: Yeah, probably.

SYLVIA: Because can't really be building this big thing, and then it's like, "Oh. No, we just got a party machine."

AUSTIN: Right, exactly.

SYLVIA: Which is still my favorite item in the game, even though I know it's not an actual party machine. [DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: If only it were.

SYLVIA: It's just my favorite.

AUSTIN: They could afford psychic assassins right now. That's a thing they could afford.

SYLVIA: That's—oh, that's really sick! And that could also play into the alien stuff.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Yep.

SYLVIA: Oh, should we do that?

AUSTIN: I think maybe they buy some psychic assassins.

SYLVIA: Yeah. Hell yeah! Let me tell you, the next month or whatever until we do the next one, I'm just going to be scribbling down all these ideas for alien stuff, because it's my favorite.

AUSTIN: I like it— they are, oh man— actually, is this what the literal Hands of Grace are like? In that the thing they can do, they have the elements of Grace that offer the light empathy stuff,

a lighter version of her ability to see into people's minds and make them feel really guilty and bad, but also this element of Grace which is— this ties into the Book of Secrets stuff, too. Where— what is more graceful than knowing how you might fail and going in a different direction? Right? Or failing gracefully, such that when you fall, you don't fall with a 1, you fall with a 2 or a 3 because you got to reroll it. And these psychic assassins are effectively doing this little minor version of what Grace can do, which is see the negative outcome and spin it just so, so that they land instead of falling.

SYLVIA: I like it too because it sort of plays into why— because I believe, if I'm remembering right, the September Institute are sort of threatened by the Hands of Grace?

AUSTIN: Yes.

SYLVIA: And this is sort of an offshoot of what Strati can do, not with tech but with alien stuff.

AUSTIN: With pure biology. Yeah, I like too. I'll think a lot about that over the next week or two, about what was the Diaspora's response— what was everyone except for Ibex's response in the Diaspora when Strati were first theorized?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's on Sigilia, which is at 00/03. Okay. Starts stealthed. Great. That was an easy opener.

SYLVIA: Yeah. Do you want to just go down?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Let's keep going down the list. How's that sound? Who's next?

SYLVIA: So Minerva.

AUSTIN: Minerva Strategic Alliance. All right. They want to destroy Petrichor. Let's see where they have assets, decide what they're going to do, and then frame a scene around it. So they have Archonic, and the closest thing that they have, the closest place where they can hurt Petrichor is JoyPark. They could also probably swing at Petrichor on Counterweight if they wanted to just— if it was time to go.

DRE: Oh, I forgot that they have something there.

AUSTIN: I think both.

SYLVIA: Do you think they'd want to try to punch Petrichor off of Counterweight?

AUSTIN: We've seen that happening a little bit in a Chime a couple of weeks ago, which is what AuDy was doing. Remember? Delivering doctored Petrichor movies. They could. Let's see. What do they have? They have cyber ninjas on Counterweight! Minerva has cyber ninjas, pretech researchers, commodity brokers, and a hostile takeover.

DRE: I have marketers on Counterweight. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Is that all you have? [SYLVIA laughs]

DRE: I have marketers and a base of influence.

AUSTIN: What's your base of influence score? 20? That's pretty good.

SYLVIA: Well, keep in mind, the defender chooses what's to defend.

AUSTIN: Oh, that's true. That's true.

DRE: Oh yeah.

AUSTIN: Good job knowing the rules, Sylvia!

SYLVIA: No problem.

AUSTIN: Thanks, buddy.

DRE: Rude.

AUSTIN: It would have been bad if we had goofed on that. You did it!

SYLVIA: Well, I mean, it just gives Dre more choice over what happens with his stuff. Right?

AUSTIN: Except that I think he only has the marketers. Right?

DRE: Yeah! Listen, I love the idea of marketers fighting against secret military assassins.
[laughs]

SYLVIA: Well, what I really like— what we could do is, not have be an actual fight, but almost a SWAT raid of Petrichor's ranch on Counterweight.

AUSTIN: I kind of like— oh man, what's the HP on the marketers?

DRE: 8.

SYLVIA: It's such a good sentence!

AUSTIN: It is. [DRE cracks up] All right. I think they're going to try a hostile takeover.

[overlapping]

DRE: Okay.

SYLVIA: Okay.

DRE: How does that work?

SYLVIA: That makes sense.

AUSTIN: It is Wealth versus Wealth. So that is— the way attacks work in this game, it's 1d10 plus the relevant stat.

DRE: I don't have a lot of Wealth.

AUSTIN: You don't? No? Oh boy, this is gonna be good, because hostile takeover is great. Let's do the roll, and then we'll see what's happening. Then we'll frame a scene around what's happening.

DRE: So 1d10 plus my Wealth?

AUSTIN: Yeah. What is Minerva's Wealth? Minerva's Wealth is 8.

DRE: 8. It's 8.

AUSTIN: Oh, good. Oh. Well, you lose.

DRE: Yeah. There's literally no way for you to not beat me.

AUSTIN: Andrew rolled a 5. [DRE laughs]

SYLVIA: Aww, buddy. Oh god!

AUSTIN: All right. So that does— I got a 15. [SYLVIA laughs] So then [reading] once matched, the attacker rolls 1d10 and adds the relevant attribute for the asset. For example, a military unit attack blah blah blah. If the attacker's roll exceeds the defender's roll, the attack is a success. The defender asset suffers damage as given on the attack line of the attacking asset. In this case, I think it is 2d10.

DRE: Which are you— what are you attacking with?

AUSTIN: I'm attacking with hostile takeover tactic. So I'm going to roll 2d10. That's a 17. What's the total life on a marketer again?

DRE: 8.

AUSTIN: Okay, I'm going to read what happens.

DRE: Those are some dead-ass marketers.

AUSTIN: No, they're not, because here's how hostile takeover works. [reading] If a hostile takeover does enough damage to destroy a faction— oh, maybe this is only factions. Let me see. Is it factions, or is it items? One second, I might have written this down wrong. I believe you just get it. [reading] If a hostile takeover does enough damage to destroy a— it says a faction, but earlier it says assets. So I think it's assets. Hostile takeover assets allow a faction to seize control of damaged and poorly controlled assets. Quote, "If a hostile takeover does enough damage to destroy a faction, the target is reduced to one hit point and acquired by the hostile takeover's owning faction." Maybe they do just mean faction, but I kind of— I don't know.

DRE: I think they mean asset.

AUSTIN: Otherwise this is kind of useless. Right?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So. So do you think we just get the marketers? What's—

DRE: I think so.

SYLVIA: We can just house rule it, even if we're not right.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally.

SYLVIA: We do that enough.

AUSTIN: I think it's really fun. It's really fun for them to have just done a hostile takeover on the marketing team for Petrichor/EarthHome. What's that look like on Counterweight?

DRE: I think it is— we kind of got rumblings of this in the last game, where we had talked about Jorne being like, "Naw, I'm outta here. I'm going to go into the line railing business."

AUSTIN: Right.

DRE: Or whatever. Oh, it was with his casinos. It was his casinos. Right? His casinos along the— er, the gambling machines in the trains.

AUSTIN: Right. That was Jorne. Yeah.

DRE: So I think it's just people being like, "This is— we gotta get the fuck outta here."

AUSTIN: You think there was almost like— do you think the hostile takeover was people at Minerva noticing this pushback from a handful of EarthHome employees who had bounced?

DRE: Yeah. They're at whatever bar corporate bigwigs on Counterweight go to. And a couple of Minerva guys are overhearing some Petrichor people be like, "I don't know what is going on." And they're like, "Well hey, we've got some openings over here, if you want to check out. Send me your Counterweight LinkedIn profile. [AUSTIN snorts and laughs] Maybe we could network and get you hooked up over here at Minerva."

AUSTIN: [groans] I like that a lot. I do want to— let's talk about— what were the twins named again? I'll have to find them really quick. We had to have written them down. Right?

DRE: Somewhere. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Maybe they're not in this—

SYLVIA: By the way, I just got the notes page up, and the animal that Google assigned to me for my anonymous thing is Anonymous Ibex. So that's pretty great.

AUSTIN: Oh my god! It's the best! [DRE giggles] I'm going to take a picture of it right now. Oh my god. It's so good.

DRE: I want to see Anonymous Alligator.

SYLVIA: [softly] Oh man.

AUSTIN: All right. I forget their names. We'll have to go back and listen to what their names are.

SYLVIA: We can go back.

AUSTIN: It's not the end of the world. But I like them as— I want them in almost like a cockpit-mode, but instead of being like they're in giant robots, it's just them in their office. In their corner offices in their penthouse suites, buying and trading Petrichor stock on Counterweight, interfering with supply lines, buying out space UPS that delivers all Petrichor's robots and films to Counterweight. They're just like, "No, we don't run there anymore. No, sorry. No." Or just buying it out and dumping shit into space. Just dumping dozens and dozens of— obviously not

film reels, but the high-quality HD super VR film stuff just into an empty space system where no one will ever find that shit. And maybe even more importantly, because if we think about what marketing looks like, let's be a little bit more serious about this. How about this: one of the things that they do is Minerva releases - I'll just tear it from the headlines - Minerva does this amazing corporate blast about how important the privacy and security of its consumer citizens are. "The consumer citizens of the Orion Conglomerate need to be able to participate in a market that treats them as individuals not just demographic data." And they push this solution. Obviously this solution has to be through the market too. But they make it really fashionable to wear a different face that fucks up the algorithmic read of what all of Petrichor's face-scan technology is. The stuff that's— you walk into a store, and it's like, "Oh, Mr. Swan, we know exactly what drink you want." You walk in, and they're just like, "Oh, Mr." and then bzzzzt. Just noise. Nothing. It doesn't know how to read you anymore. Maybe it's not even— your face doesn't look actually different, but on all of Rigour's readings, the people on Counterweight stop— they can't be boiled down to algorithm anymore, because it breaks up. That's what marketing looks like. That's the thing that has been taken over. Except now—

SYLVIA: Now they have it.

AUSTIN: Now they have it. Right? It got to a point where Rigour had to cut that division because it was doing so poorly. And so Minerva buys it up on the cheap, keeps selling the "Oh, you need to protect your face from marketers" shit, but then has the backdoor built in to immediately get by that stuff. That is my dystopic vision of corporate warfare. [DRE chuckles]

SYLVIA: It's really good.

AUSTIN: Ugggh. We live in the worst of worlds. Okay. So the only question I have about this rules-wise is does the marketer soak all that damage? Or does any of it slip through? I think they soak it all.

DRE: I think so. I think— because you were targeting them.

SYLVIA: I think so.

AUSTIN: Right. Nothing gets through. You have to actually hit the base—

DRE: Yeah. And so they're reduced to one, and now they're owned by Minerva.

AUSTIN: Right. So we should update that. Where is that document? Here it is. Minerva, let's add a line. And now where's Counterweight? Here we go. Coulda sent the cyber ninjas. Didn't. Sent the hostile takeover tactic. Welcome to Counterweight.

SYLVIA: Shoulda sent the cyber ninja. [AUSTIN chuckles]

AUSTIN: Hostile. There we go. Who is next?

SYLVIA: Righteous Vanguard.

AUSTIN: Oh boy. Let's—

SYLVIA: Do you want to do them, or do you want to—

AUSTIN: No, let's wrap back around to the Righteous Vanguard. Though—

SYLVIA: All right. You got something in store of them?

AUSTIN: No, I don't.

SYLVIA: Just not sure yet?

AUSTIN: I don't want to stick on Counterweight twice in a row is what I don't want to do quite yet.

SYLVIA: Oh, that's a good point.

AUSTIN: So let's talk about the Rapid Evening for now.

SYLVIA: Rapid Evening? Okay.

AUSTIN: They want to Expand Influence into the Minerva Strategic Alliance. Oh, a thing we should be thinking about too is the bonus tags that these different divisions have. Is there anything you could have done with Petrichor, by the way?

DRE: Not on— not as defense, no.

AUSTIN: Okay, I wanted to make sure. Very important stuff. Okay. Expand Influence, hmm.

SYLVIA: They're trying to get to Minerva XII, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Let's see where they have stuff right now. Rapid Evening. Base of influence. Man, they have bases of influence everywhere.

SYLVIA: Yeah, they're everywhere.

AUSTIN: But not on Minerva XII quite yet. God, do they have anything that—

SYLVIA: Let me look at— is there a Stars Without Number thing about how to get stuff on another planet?

AUSTIN: Yes. And it's a lot of— there are certain assets that need permission to get there. But that's not the case everywhere. So they really need to get from Kesh to Minerva XII, unless they have something closer. But it looks like Kesh is probably their closest bet. They don't really have much on Kesh. Oh, right. Kesh is the 19— the 20th-century planet? Or is— it's the 19th-century planet, where the Rapid Evening— are they— no, there they are. There's only tens of thousands of people on that planet, and they're stuck with 19th-century technology. They must have been some other faction from before this game ever started that dealt with some high-tech shit that was too dangerous. And the Rapid Evening kind of put them on lockdown, which is part of why it's hard to get anything from there, because their technological level is low.

SYLVIA: The cruelest fate! They turned them into steampunks. [AUSTIN and DRE crack up]

35:08

AUSTIN: They just— everyone opened their doors one morning, and at the base of their door was a package. And they opened it up, and it was just brass goggles.

SYLVIA: Yup!

DRE: And a top hat.

AUSTIN: [whispers hoarsely] “Anything but this! No! Oh, there's a belt in here. Oh no, it has gears as the belt buckle! That doesn't make any sense. That's not how gears work!”

SYLVIA: “Oh no, we're living in a Panic at the Disco video!” [DRE and AUSTIN laugh]

AUSTIN: Oh, boy. Oh, brother. Ahhh.

SYLVIA: Okay. I'm trying to look up the specific assets that can move between.

AUSTIN: So we— yeah. We can see what all of their assets are. I don't think that they have many. I think space marines might be able to move a thing? Yeah, they can move 1 hex without permission. Sadly, they are more than 1 hex away, so that's not going to help.

SYLVIA: We could just start them moving there. Right? Or do they have to move to a planet?

AUSTIN: I think you have to move to a planet unless you are— I guess not. I guess you don't have to.

SYLVIA: Because that's how the Fleet's been doing it.

AUSTIN: Is 1 at a time.

SYLVIA: We moved a little bit through dark space. But it's been 1 at a time.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's true. Let's just do that. Again, we can just house rule it. I think that there's a little bit—

SYLVIA: Do you want to just drop them?

AUSTIN: No, I want to— it should take a turn for them to get there. You know? Maybe not. Maybe it's hotter if they just fucking show up, given where we're at with the main game. Given that this is— this episode should be maybe, "Okay, shit is popping off in the episode."

DRE: Yeah, I think so.

AUSTIN: So let's just house rule it in this case like they were on the way. It has been a long time since a faction game. They didn't have a move last faction game. We didn't deal with what that past game was, so maybe these characters were already on their way. Is this Tetsuo again?

SYLVIA: Tetsuya.

AUSTIN: Oh, sorry. Yes.

SYLVIA: I didn't name my character [DRE laughs]— I'm not that big of an Akira nerd. I am listening to the soundtrack, though.

AUSTIN: You're an— oh, good. Good.

DRE: I'm sorry, Akira?

SYLVIA: It's literally what I thinking of when I played this guy.

AUSTIN: Okay. So yeah. Is it Tetsuya and the Eclipse?

SYLVIA: I don't know. I kind of—

AUSTIN: Or do you think it's a different division?

SYLVIA: I think it's different division, because I've been thinking about what his job is. And I like the idea of calling what his unit does a Heresy Unit, because they go after Divines.

AUSTIN: Oh, I love that so much. Write that down right now! Before we forget!

SYLVIA: Yeah, I will. So I think it would be a different unit, a different sort of colonization unit.

AUSTIN: Okay. Hmm. So it's going to be a new character here, huh? Oh god, Natalya is still here in Rapid Evening. [sighs] I'd better move her somewhere else.

SYLVIA: I mean, she's kinda technically. But not really.

AUSTIN: Not really.

SYLVIA: Not really.

DRE: At least, she thinks she is.

SYLVIA: Yeah. She doesn't know—

AUSTIN: In her best moments. Right.

SYLVIA: —anything is going on. Oh yeah, we still have—

AUSTIN: I added her down there.

SYLVIA: We still have Oren listed. We should probably scratch him out.

AUSTIN: Wait, Oren or Omen?

SYLVIA: Omen.

AUSTIN: Because there is also Oren. Oren I think is—

SYLVIA: Oren is the JoyPark guy.

AUSTIN: Did Oren die yet?

SYLVIA: I thought we killed off Omen. I thought—

AUSTIN: We definitely killed Omen. I'm going to strike through Omen.

SYLVIA: Oren's still around. Oren's running the JoyPark's day-to-day.

AUSTIN: Right, correct. Correct.

SYLVIA: Yeah. They just have extremely similar names.

AUSTIN: So let's— actually, so that's the Eclipse Heresy Unit. So what is this— this is a colonization group? Or is this a—

SYLVIA: I think maybe it's a— are they going to attack? Do you want them to attack and try and take over? Or—

AUSTIN: No. So I think— so they land. They land this turn, because they're moving without permission. But you have to imagine there is an attack there. Right? But it's not an attack where there's a roll. It's just they're landing on this planet. So to remind us of what Minerva— oh, how about this. Okay, so Minerva XII is actually two things.

SYLVIA: It's a police state.

AUSTIN: It's a police state, one. So there's Minerva XII, which has a toxic atmosphere, really unpredictable weather, superstorms and stuff like that. It's a police state. And there's millions on that planet. Millions of people who are, like on Counterweight— er, like on Slate, living in poverty conditions, working their asses off very little of anything. Maybe they're not even— they might not even be working their asses off. They might be the sort of Cloud Atlas/Orison of Somni-451 style, again, consumer citizens. They're given— it's like a capitalism welfare state where everything is still about consumption, but you're also given a basic living wage just for keeping these giant businesses afloat. So that everyone is getting enough money to eat and then give more of that money back away to the executive class. So that there isn't a riot. Right? So there isn't a revolution. It's just keeping people kind of content enough, subsisting just enough that there isn't a revolution. But there is also Minerva XIIa, which is the moon where there's the automated mining facility. And that's where all the money is for Minerva. That moon, maybe it's even a series of moons.

SYLVIA: What if we have them land on the moon?

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's what I'm thinking.

DRE: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Yeah. They're going straight to where the money comes from.

AUSTIN: Yeah. This is the opposite between— the Rapid Evening is not Ibex. The Rapid Evening is not Sokrates. They are not coming to save people. They're coming to destroy Minerva. Right? Or really, they're coming to build a new power base for themselves so that they can continue to police the sector.

SYLVIA: They're very pragmatic about their shit.

AUSTIN: Exactly. I like that a lot.

SYLVIA: They're looking at the bigger picture of maintaining the equilibrium of the tech. So yeah.

AUSTIN: Totally. All right. So let me know if you come up with a name for this. Let's put them on Minerva XII.

SYLVIA: I don't have another Heresy Unit in me right now. I'll have to think of something.

AUSTIN: That's fine. Sleep on it. We'll see how it goes.

SYLVIA: But yeah. I'm thinking— we said they have drop pods, right?

AUSTIN: Totally.

SYLVIA: So just them crashing— I think in the way this would be formatted as a show, we have an earlier scene of just these pods flying through space. And then we do Minerva scene.

AUSTIN: Oh, do you they don't have ships? It's just the drop pods?

DRE: Yeah.

SYLVIA: I think for this type of unit, yeah, it's just the drop pods. It's either you—

AUSTIN: Oh man. Were they launched from Kesh? Did we get the scene early on in this episode of just 19th-century Victorian Kesh with people walking through the streets, and then almost Foolsy Coolsy-style, the steam dissipates from up on the hill, and these giant towers turn just so. And then a grenade launcher thwpp sound happens. And it's just the pods launching from Kesh towards Minerva.

SYLVIA: Yeah! That's exactly what I was thinking. I was thinking either the towers there or a mountain or something coming up a little bit. And then just these things flying out. And nobody who lives on Kesh knows what the hell is going on.

AUSTIN: But this happens every now and then.

SYLVIA: It happens every now and then, and they think it's an omen of some kind.

AUSTIN: Right. Exactly.

SYLVIA: But really, it's the Rapid Evening. Who I think have a base in the planet itself. And then later we have— like I say, that happens before the Minerva thing. And then after that, we have them landing.

AUSTIN: Right. We have the launch. And then it cuts to them, yeah, slamming into— you know what it is? It's the shot of the twins in their high rise. Pulling back out from that, the high rise literally cuts through one of the domes on Minerva XII. It literally goes up past the dome, through the middle of the dome, almost like a space elevator. In fact, maybe it is a space elevator.

SYLVIA: I think they would have a space elevator for Minerva XII.

AUSTIN: Totally. And so they're halfway up that, before it becomes just the wire elevator part. And then it pulls back from that to the moon. And the drop pods hit, and then the "It's about damn time" Jim Raynor moment. Right?

SYLVIA: Yeah. I also really like drop pods being like— this unit's been like, "Okay, we're sending you out to do this. And we're giving you just enough supplies to do this, and if you don't do it, you're deniable."

AUSTIN: Right. The drop pods themselves are what will turn into the base. Right? The drop pods land, and then the team is going to reconfigure them into a modular base or drill system that drills into the ground and builds a different base. You know?

SYLVIA: Oh, I love the drill system! Because the drill system then— I like the drill system too because then it gives the pods this really cool spiral design.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally. I like that a lot. And it's not— again, I think that their space marine unit is not a giant space marine— it's just a handful of super soldiers. Right?

SYLVIA: I was thinking six people at the most.

AUSTIN: Totally. We need to figure out who those— here's the thing I like about this game right, is we run a one-shot of just that team doing what they're doing.

SYLVIA: I know!

AUSTIN: I love it so much.

SYLVIA: Really quick, I generated a name earlier, and I just want to write this person down as being part of that unit. I got the name Kiva Helsing.

AUSTIN: Ahhh, that's a good name!

DRE: That is a great name.

AUSTIN: Kiva Helsing runs this unit, and she is the best.

SYLVIA: I'm going to write that down.

AUSTIN: All right. Let's call that pretty successful. So they were trying to expand into— where is it? Da da da. What was the actual— Expand Influence? Okay. So they haven't yet planted a base of influence. They've just landed. Next turn they can plant that base. They can buy that base. Da da da. Oh, let me go back really quick and do the money stuff again. Minerva is just rich as hell, by the way.

SYLVIA: That makes sense.

AUSTIN: Minerva makes monnney. They make money.

DRE: I'm jealous. [giggles]

SYLVIA: They have Wealth 8. And the closest to that from anyone else is 4. They have double the Wealth of most people. It's perfect.

45:25

AUSTIN: It really is.

SYLVIA: Also, next up we have the Demarchy.

AUSTIN: One second, I want to get— okay. I want to get to them. I just want to make sure that the upkeeps are all paid.

SYLVIA: I just wanted to mention so we can start thinking about it.

AUSTIN: Okay. Yeah, so Minerva has to pay 3 for upkeep. And then does Rapid Evening have any upkeep? No. Okay.

SYLVIA: I don't think so.

AUSTIN: So Minerva right now is sitting on 24 creds. Like you do.

SYLVIA: Jesus. They literally are just space Wall Street.

AUSTIN: Oh yeah. Totally. 100%.

SYLVIA: It's great. I hate them, it's great.

AUSTIN: Yup! [SYLVIA laughs] I mean, that is true for everybody. Right? Who is there to love anymore? Is there anyone?

SYLVIA: I mean, the Rapid Evening I'm kind of into. But in a very much like, "You are terrifying!" way.

AUSTIN: Right. You're into them the way you can kinda-sorta be into any counterintelligence—er, intelligence agency, which is like, "Oh man, spies are dope. Oh wait, this is terrifying. This is the worst."

SYLVIA: Yeah. "Oh wait, you literally have a branch of your thing dedicated around the idea of killing gods."

AUSTIN: Right. Yup, yup. Cool. Great. All right. So wait, who's next?

[simultaneously]

SYLVIA: The Demarchy.

AUSTIN: Oh, the Demarchy.

AUSTIN: The Golden Demarchy. [sighs] So they also want Planetary Seizure here. They want to take over Gemm. Do they have anything on Gemm yet?

SYLVIA: They have a base of influence on Gemm.

AUSTIN: And that is it, probably.

SYLVIA: And they have a demagogue.

AUSTIN: A demagogue on Gemm. Ooo fancy.

SYLVIA: That is fancy.

AUSTIN: I think that that demagogue is probably a local, someone who's been converted to— someone who knew— okay, what about this? What it was one of the people who was— what if it was someone who used to be a soldier in the Seventh Sun back when Sokrates was part of the Kingdom fleet, who was—?

SYLVIA: Yeah, I was going to say either— yeah, that's better than what I had was just someone who had met Sokrates when he² was just there getting Integrity.

AUSTIN: What if it's the same person who met them twice?

DRE: What if it's—

SYLVIA: The same person. They met again.

AUSTIN: What were you going to suggest, Dre?

DRE: What if it's the person that Sokrates refused to give up, that sent the email?

AUSTIN: Oh, that's really good.

SYLVIA: That's super good!

AUSTIN: Yeah. I like that a lot.

DRE: We never named that person.

AUSTIN: No.

DRE: I mean, if anyone's going to be blindly loyal to Sokrates, it'd be—

SYLVIA: It's the person whose life they saved.

AUSTIN: I like that a lot. Okay. So yeah, maybe they're that demagogue unit. Let me just generate a quick Greek name. [sing-song] Greek name generator, that's how this works.

SYLVIA: I'm literally doing that right now. [DRE giggles]

AUSTIN: Thank you, internet.

SYLVIA: How about Erasmus?

AUSTIN: Erasmus is pretty good. Oh, we can't use Erasmus. Erasmus is already a major NPC in another tabletop game I'm playing in. I'm playing a Burning Wheel game on Fridays most weeks, and I'm playing a character who is maybe a little too close to home. He's a revolutionary philosopher who's realizing that maybe his revolutionary philosophies aren't saving people as much as he wishes they were. And there is another newer, hotter revolutionary radical

² Sokrates uses they/them pronouns.

philosopher who is named Erasmus. And my character right now is going around constantly reading the pamphlets of Erasmus. It's pretty good. I almost just said Basili. My character in that game is named Basil, so we can't— it can't be that, either. Let's see.

DRE: Ariadne?

AUSTIN: I thought— isn't that a lady name? Or am I wrong about that?

DRE: It is.

SYLVIA: [cross] I mean, it is, but.

AUSTIN: [cross] Oh, you know what? Yeah. Whatever.

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah. No.

SYLVIA: We've used a lot of masculine names for the Apostolosians.

AUSTIN: Who are supposed to be much more— I don't even know—

DRE: Yeah.

SYLVIA: More gender neutral.

AUSTIN: Much more gender neutral, at least. That's not what their pronoun system is like, and I suspect they have different name conventions. So yeah, Ariadne. Totally.

DRE: Ariadne also, in Greek lore, is who helped Theseus kill the Minotaur and escape from the—

AUSTIN: Right. Which is really good for what we're doing.

SYLVIA: Really good.

AUSTIN: So let's— asset tracker and ba ba ba. Golden— there is it. It's under here for The. The Golden Demarchy. Let's name that.

SYLVIA: I just want to look up what demagogues do.

AUSTIN: I don't think it does much. Otherwise I would have made the note of it here. I think it's just a strong Cunning unit. I'm pretty sure.

SYLVIA: Yeah. It just says [reading] popular leaders of a faith or ideology that can be relied upon to point their followers in the direction of maximum utility for the faction.

AUSTIN: Right. All right. So I think they're going to attack the Hands of Grace here on this planet. What do the Hands of Grace have to defend with?

SYLVIA: It's Cunning versus Cunning, I believe.

AUSTIN: It is Cunning versus Cunning. What do they have in terms of what can—

SYLVIA: Let me see.

AUSTIN: This is Gemm? Okay, so they actually have some stuff here. [chuckles] They have space marines there. So if that hits, that's rough. And they also have postech industry. So if they want to fight back, this could be a bit of a slog. But let's see. So it's Cunning versus Cunning?

SYLVIA: Yeah. So that is—

AUSTIN: It's a close one. Oh, except wait one second. Let's see if this [chuckles]— what's the tag that the Golden Demarchy has?

SYLVIA: Machiavellian.

AUSTIN: Which says, "Once per turn, this faction can roll an additional d10 when making a Cunning attack."

SYLVIA: Oh shit! [DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: So it's roll 2d10 plus 6. And then someone else want to roll for the Hands of Grace here?

SYLVIA: Yeah, I'll do it. That's 1d10 plus 7, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: 14.

AUSTIN: Okay. Sorry, I was just checking to make sure that the Hands of Grace didn't have a cool thing.

SYLVIA: They have fanatic.

AUSTIN: Yeah, which is, "The faction always rerolls any dice than come up as 1." They always lose ties during attacks, though. Holy shit!

SYLVIA: Doesn't matter. Holy shit. [DRE laughs] Austin rolled perfect!

AUSTIN: I rolled 26. I rolled two 10s. 2d10 plus 6. I rolled a 26.

SYLVIA: You have this planet.

AUSTIN: Ariadne just— whew. So what's the damage on a demagogue here?

SYLVIA: It is—

AUSTIN: That I should have written down. Oh wait, no.

SYLVIA: I have the page. I'm—

AUSTIN: I don't even— it should have—

DRE: 2d8.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's just here in the spreadsheet. I just needed to dig it up. Okay. So 2d8. Let's roll that. All right, that's 8 damage to the space marine force here. Where is that? Okay. So that's down to half of its HP, half of its original HP. That's pretty substantial.

SYLVIA: How do you think this would play out?

AUSTIN: Good question. So I think it's—

SYLVIA: I'm thinking there's sort of this underground support movement for the Demarchy. And maybe the law enforcement on Gemm caught wind of it. And they tried to stop this meeting that Ariadne was leading, but people were just so for the Demarchy and what was being talked about, and want to join it and upset with the powers that be on Gemm already, that when they tried to break it up, it ended up sort of turning into this riot that resulted in the police just getting—

AUSTIN: So there's an extra wrinkle here, which is that space marine unit is not just a space marine unit. It's Fortitude. It's the Divine Fortitude.

SYLVIA: Oh shit! Okay. That is—

AUSTIN: And they wounded it. They almost killed it.

SYLVIA: That changes everything.

AUSTIN: So what happened there? And what is Fortitude?

SYLVIA: Yeah, we don't even know what Fortitude is. I like the idea of Fortitude being not just one thing but a few— when I think of Fortitude, I think of a group of riggers, of things that look like riggers but with shields and stuff. Literally robot riot cops is what I'm thinking of. But they can reform into different formations and stuff. They're very protective.

AUSTIN: Right. So is— maybe we should spin this— er, not spin but continue this line of— we hit this earlier already, where people from Petrichor bounced and joined Minerva. Maybe this is another scenario of—

SYLVIA: Do you think Fortitude's going to leave?

AUSTIN: Not all of Fortitude. But it had pilots, right? Because it has a Candidate maybe and also has—

SYLVIA: It has people who have to be within.

AUSTIN: Right. How does that work?

SYLVIA: Because I'm thinking of Fortitude as this big phalanx, basically, if that works.

AUSTIN: And it's— they kick in the door to the speech that's happening and march in with energy batons at their sides. And there are people there who won't do it. And it becomes, not just a riot— it doesn't just become the people who are protesting are being hurt. But there are parts of the Fortitude phalanx that are pushing back.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I'm now going to— there was a really good Candidate name that I wanted to use. One second.

SYLVIA: Was it Camel?

55:05

AUSTIN: No. It was not Camel. [DRE cracks up]. Good hustle, though. [SYLVIA laughs] I'm going to link it. I'm going to link it. This comes from Ice_Cream_Jones on Twitter. Lindsay? Is that her name?

SYLVIA: Lizzie.

AUSTIN: Lizzie, Lizzie.

SYLVIA: Who's holding it down on the wiki!

AUSTIN: Shoutouts to Lizzie. Totally! By the way, there's a wiki now. I forgot to mention that.

SYLVIA: Yeah. She is crushing it.

AUSTIN: She is crushing it. So is—

SYLVIA: counterweight.wikia.com?

AUSTIN: Yeah. counterweight.wikia.com, and then also killing it is Shaun, Shaun P. Welch on Twitter. Shoutouts to them also.

SYLVIA: Yeah. Check it out.

AUSTIN: I really like— look at this gerenuk.

DRE: Whoa!

SYLVIA: Oh, perfection.

DRE: Look at the neck on this fellow.

AUSTIN: It's like a giraffe-necked deer. I love it so much.

SYLVIA: What a good buddy.

AUSTIN: Okay. So what if the Candidate of Fortitude is in similar armor? At this point, I'm just kind of thinking of Iron Man armor. Right?

SYLVIA: Kind of, yeah.

AUSTIN: Not as— it doesn't do the kind of body-horror stuff that we saw with the Rapid Evening stuff. It's a little bit more mechanical than that. It still has a face. And everyone in that unit— or maybe it's not. Maybe it's more form-fitting, like Ordinators from Morrowind. Do you know Ordinators from Morrowind? Everyone google Ordinator really quick.

SYLVIA: I'm doing that right now.

AUSTIN: O-R-D-I-N-A-T-O-R.

SYLVIA: Ohh.

DRE: Ooo.

SYLVIA: Yeah. That's really good.

AUSTIN: It's the face. In Morrowind, they have the face of Vivec, who is a god, who is a living god. And I like that the Candidate's face just starts to look like that, and everyone else has the Candidate's face on— has a mask of the Candidate's face.

SYLVIA: I want to— I would really like it too if that face has been the face of Candidates for Fortitude for a while. Their face just sort of ends up changing to be that.

AUSTIN: Yeah. To that. Totally. It's not like—

SYLVIA: I also think that the Candidate is in— their Fortitude unit or whatever is a foot or maybe 2 taller. It's much bigger than the other ones.

AUSTIN: Oh, totally. I didn't finish saying the thing I was saying, which is I think like Iron Man, it literally hovers above the rest of the units. Like it's popped up. You're right. It's probably also bigger than them, but I like that it's hovering over them. It's at eye level with Ariadne on the stage. And they're staring back at him, at Gerenuk, and saying— continuing their speech about democracy and freedom.

AUSTIN (as Ariadne): Fortitude is supposed to be a symbol of solidarity. It's supposed to be an example of what democracy can give us, and instead, they're here with batons.

And then just the riot breaks out. And I almost like the Candidate not wanting to even be— maybe it would've been within the Candidate's power to win this fight, and he just turns a cold shoulder to it. He doesn't organize his troops the way he's supposed to, to play out the Machiavellian angle. Right?

SYLVIA: I like the idea of Gerenuk also being sort of petty.

AUSTIN: Yeah! Totally. Totally.

AUSTIN (as Gerenuk): This isn't what I'm supposed to be doing. I'm supposed to be a hero, god damn it.

SYLVIA (as Gerenuk): Yeah, I'm better than this.

AUSTIN (as Gerenuk): What the fuck is Grace doing?

AUSTIN: Which maybe is not the best thing for the quickly crumbling lines of Grace. All right. Let's get to your thing because I know we're short on time here.

SYLVIA: Yeah. And then if Dre has to bounce before mine, you and I can just do it.

AUSTIN: Totally.

SYLVIA: Because it's going to be super minor.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Dre, what are you up to?

DRE: So what are the rules in terms of moving things from planet to planet that don't have—

AUSTIN: You need something to move them. There are units that do that, but not—

DRE: They're expensive.

AUSTIN: They tend to be. They tend to be. You have extended theater, for instance, which can move any non-starship asset 2 hexes for 1 faction credit.

DRE: Yeah, but that's only from Ionias. Right? I can't hop it from Ionias to JoyPark and then use extended theater to move stuff from JoyPark.

AUSTIN: Well, let me double check. I think extended theater is really dope. Let's see. [reading] As an action, any 1 non-starship asset, including itself, can be moved between any 2 worlds within 2 hexes of the extended theater. So for— so wait, where is it?

DRE: It's on Ionias, I'm pretty sure, right now.

AUSTIN: Okay. So it could move anything from JoyPark to Kalliope. Let me see here. One second. Theater. Yeah. So anywhere from JoyPark to Ionias, down to Kalliope. Kaffe is probably just outside of range. September is just outside of range. But including itself. It could move itself to JoyPark.

DRE: Yeah. I just feel like the move is going after Archonic, prepping to go after Archonic. So I think there probably is— so extended theater can move itself, you said?

AUSTIN: Right. Or anything else. And we just said—

DRE: And it costs a fac cred, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah. The other thing I'll say is if you want that thing to be on JoyPark because that would make more sense, totally do that. Because we didn't have time to go over this stuff during the downtime to make sure that it was right when we redid all of the things, all of the faction stuff, for this game, when we brought all the factions down. So that could make sense, to just be on JoyPark, because that is a more strategic position for it. From JoyPark, you can hit September, Archonic, Ionias, and Vyshe easily. So I think we just move that there, and that's not your turn. That is just where that should have been to begin with.

DRE: And then it's 1 credit every time you move a non-starship asset.

AUSTIN: Right. So you can't move a starship.

DRE: I have—

AUSTIN: And also a starship can move itself. But if you wanted to move Rigour there, you could do that.

DRE: Yes. So I think the move is— what all do I have on Ionias that's military?

AUSTIN: Well, you can only move one thing at a— unless maybe you—

DRE: Ohh.

AUSTIN: That's its special ability. It doesn't explicitly say only one at a time. Right?

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Hmm.

DRE: And I don't know that— there's rules as to how many actions you can—

AUSTIN: It's one. As an action, any one non-starship asset, including itself, can be moved. So you only get one action per turn. So in this case, one action would be moving one thing, which could be Rigour.

DRE: Yeah. I think it is—

AUSTIN: Rigour and Ionias, which again in-system is represented by a grav tank formation, but that's not what Rigour is. We've seen what Rigour is in the last episode. But what we do know about Rigour is that Rigour is embodied in the physical infrastructure of a place. So it's the command center, and it is a big robot, but it's now also— so are you moving it to JoyPark or are you moving it to—?

DRE: Well, it's currently on Ionias, so I think I can only— I can move it to JoyPark but then I can't move it to Archonic.

AUSTIN: No. You can move it to anywhere within 2 spots of JoyPark.

DRE: Oh fuck! [laughs]

AUSTIN: It could be on September if you wanted.

SYLVIA: This just got scary.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: Okay. So I'm kind of torn between do I put it on September, because that's where the ground game is going?

AUSTIN: Shit! Maybe we can put it on— OHHH NOOO!

SYLVIA: OH SHIT! [DRE laughs]

[simultaneously]

AUSTIN: Oh shit!

SYLVIA: Oh shit!

SYLVIA: Oh shit! [DRE is still laughing]

AUSTIN: I think we have to.

DRE: I mean, that's the most interesting thing to do, is to put fucking Rigour on—

SYLVIA: Oh my god!

AUSTIN: Okay. So is this Natalya— okay, so we know that— so it doesn't know that September is where Ibex has anything. It doesn't know the September-Ibex connection, which is also not my favorite 1970s heist film.

DRE: [laughs] Yeah, I guess. Because the only way it would know that was if Natalya knows that.

AUSTIN: She doesn't know that, but she does know that it's a threat. She does know that that's where Strati are built.

DRE: Yeah, to fight Divines.

AUSTIN: So maybe Rigour is like, "Oh, it's time to shut that shit down."

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Huh. Okay. I like this. How about this? How about— here's the shot [DRE laughs]--

SYLVIA: Dude, this is great.

AUSTIN: —is Minerva keeps interfering with these shipments to Counterweight of EarthHome material, of SnowTrak vehicles, of all the Petrichor stuff. So we've seen them drop off stuff that this garbage dump all throughout the episode. Right? They dropped off— the first time we see it, it's just film reels. The second time we see it, it's all big robots. The third time, it's t-shirts. They've interfered with all of these, all the shipping of all the Petrichor stuff. And then there's a shadow over all that stuff in this garbage dump that they've created, and it's Rigour. And it's Natalya pulling up the September Institute's HQ on Rigour's scanners. And of course Rigour is Rigour, but all the Divines have a few other ships with them. And it's just that shadow moving slowly toward September in the distance. This is going to be the worst. I'm very excited.

SYLVIA: It's going to be the best. I'm so pumped.

DRE: There's also not a lot on September.

AUSTIN: No. There super isn't.

DRE: [laughs] I guess they never thought anybody would—

AUSTIN: Right!

DRE: —would try to go there.

AUSTIN: Totally. Totally. Oh boy. I mean, it has— oh! Wait. Okay. Well, there is this.

DRE: Oh, it's got transport lockdown.

AUSTIN: It does have transport lockdown. So let me read transport lockdown. This is cool. This is a good game. This game works in interesting ways. Transport lockdown says [reading] transport lockdown techniques involve selective pressure on a local routing and shipping company or companies. On a successful Cunning versus Cunning attack against a rival faction, the rival faction cannot transport assets without 1d4 fac creds and waiting one turn. So maybe— it that just the move that September is making? Does that— it doesn't seem like it hits automatically.

DRE: It says Cunning versus Cunning attack, so that's—

AUSTIN: I guess my question is, is that an action? Or does that just fire by itself when this happens?

1:05:35

DRE: Ooo, that's a good question. I'm checking. [laughs]

AUSTIN: I know, I know. I'm looking at it right now. On a successful Cunning versus Cunning attack against a rival— I feel like it has to be— it doesn't say action, though. Or as an attack.

DRE: Then I think it is probably just—

AUSTIN: A reaction?

DRE: —a reaction, yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay. So let's make that Cunning versus Cunning attack. What is—

DRE: You got your attack of opportunity. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Exactly. Even in this game. Petrichor's Cunning is 5. And the Righteous Vanguard's a 7.

DRE: So is that just a 1d10?

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think so. And I'm going to double check based on what things are. Let's make sure psychic academy doesn't change things. [laughs] Psychic academy is really good. Make your roll.

DRE: Oh god. Does it change things?

AUSTIN: It changes things. Or it can.

DRE: So that roll.

AUSTIN: 1d10 plus—

SYLVIA: So 13?

AUSTIN: What is— Righteous Vanguard, 7 on Cunning. Okay. Okay, so here's the thing psychic academy does. Psychic academy says [reading] this faction can provide psionic mentor training to qualified psychics. Once per turn, this faction can also force a rival faction to reroll any 1d10, whether or not the faction is involved in the roll. So reroll that 1d10.

DRE: Okay. Nope!

AUSTIN: Oh shit! [SYLVIA laughs]

DRE: 15!

AUSTIN: Rigour comin'! You rolled a 15. All right. So there's no counter here.

SYLVIA: Made it worse.

AUSTIN: I think they're just not prepared for what Rigour is. Right? The September Institute Strati were designed to fight Grace and to fight Fortitude, to fight Service, to fight the modern Divine. Not to fight this ancient thing that is— it's one of those things where the code base is just so different that it just doesn't hit in the way it's supposed to. And I think it's just— so it's there. Let's move it there, onto September. Christ. Ohhh, I didn't think about this even a little bit.

DRE: It's fine, it's fine.

SYLVIA: No, it's good. I'm very pumped about that.

AUSTIN: [morosely] Me too.

DRE: It's going to be great when Natalya and Orth get to meet again.

SYLVIA: Oh fuck!

AUSTIN: [unhappily] It's going to happen. [small moan] Oh, Orth.

SYLVIA: I'm not looking forward to that.

DRE: Poor Orth!

AUSTIN: Oh, precious baby Orth. [under breath] Fuck. Man.

DRE: God, no matter what we do, we just shit on Orth. [cracks up]

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Yep. Yep. [SYLVIA sighs] All right. So given this, do you think Planetary Seizure is actually— do you think Planetary Seizure, September, is the goal?

DRE: Yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay. Again, we hadn't had time to really review this stuff. All right, let's do— you have to go, Dre. Thank you so much for being here.

DRE: Yeah, I do.

AUSTIN: We're going to wrap this up. I still don't know what Ibex is going to do, so you'll have to listen to find out, Dre.

DRE: I will. I will.

AUSTIN: Thank you again for joining us.

DRE: Bye.

AUSTIN: Bye-bye.

SYLVIA: See you, Dre.

AUSTIN: What's going on with your fleet, Sylvia?

SYLVIA: So I was— one, I'm very happy that Rigour is not on September now— I mean, JoyPark now. I'm very happy about that.

AUSTIN: Really just opened up a line, huh?

SYLVIA: Yeah, kinda helped me dodge a bullet there. I think we're just going to move— that's why I was saying it's not going to be a huge thing to miss, because we're still just moving. We're still moving to JoyPark.

AUSTIN: Right. So the question there is, can you get into JoyPark or will they fight you on that?

SYLVIA: Exactly. Do you think they would?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally. Because they're going to add—

SYLVIA: It's Dre's faction, but—

AUSTIN: I don't think they just let you—

SYLVIA: —I think you can play them all off.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Let me see something.

SYLVIA: What are we— whoops, that's the file name.

AUSTIN: So yeah. What are you moving? You're moving the Yersinia, obviously.

SYLVIA: We're moving just the Yersinia. What does—what's the?

AUSTIN: Oh right. So wait, what is Yersinia actually? What type—?

SYLVIA: Yersinia is a—

AUSTIN: Is it a scavenger fleet or a—?

SYLVIA: No, it's a capital—

AUSTIN: Is it a capital fleet?

SYLVIA: —fleet, I think. Or strike fleet. Oh yeah. No. It's pretech infantry and a base of influence.

AUSTIN: Oh, right. It's a very weird thing. I forgot that that's what we did with it.

SYLVIA: Yeah. We made it a mobile base of influence.

AUSTIN: That is what we did.

SYLVIA: Because the whole idea was that this was the operating—

AUSTIN: And it could generate stuff, basically.

SYLVIA: Yeah. Oh, and Jillian's there.

AUSTIN: Hmm?

SYLVIA: Jillian's there.

AUSTIN: Oh, right. Yes. We knew Jillian Red is actually on ship. So the planetary government does need to give support for this asset to be either created or transported into its zone.

SYLVIA: Okay.

AUSTIN: So you would need to get Petrichor's support to do it. And if you don't have it, you'd have to bust your way in, which is probably doable. Let's see.

SYLVIA: I think that's probably what they would do—

AUSTIN: You don't mention. You don't say.

SYLVIA: Truth be told. Yeah, weird that the pirates are like, "Wait, no. We're not going to listen to you. What?"

AUSTIN: [reading] Some assets require the permission of the planetary government in order to purchase them or move them onto the planet. This is not a formality. The standing government's forces can physically disrupt any attempt to recruit an asset onto their world or shoot it down in its vulnerable entry phase. Whether or not this permission will be extended usually depends on the faction's relationship with the planet's government, though bribes of 1d4 fac creds can occasionally suffice. Under no conditions will a government willingly permit the recruitment or entry of assets powerful enough to overthrow them. So here's the question. Do you think Rigour just lets it through with a bribe? Or do you think you need to build something to stealth the ship or to, like a space marine, get in without permission or something like that? That's the question.

SYLVIA: Well, one, I don't know if Rigour would go for a bribe.

AUSTIN: Rigour would not like a bribe? Rigour is not a J-m unit?

SYLVIA: I don't think Rigour is looking for a tarp.

AUSTIN: No tarps.

SYLVIA: No tarps.

AUSTIN: Okay. Then it might—

SYLVIA: So I think we're going to find a way to get through.

AUSTIN: You might be able to just buy stealth. That's the other thing, because you can straight up buy stealth. It just costs money.

SYLVIA: Let me see. That would be under—?

AUSTIN: I think it's Cunning, but you might not have the thing high enough. Let's see. Or you might have to go around. Right?

SYLVIA: Make sure— yeah. Which would make us have to go close to September.

AUSTIN: Oh my god.

SYLVIA: —which might be the more interesting scenario.

AUSTIN: We'll see. That might be good.

SYLVIA: Stealth is Cunning 3.

AUSTIN: Okay. So you probably have that.

SYLVIA: I believe we do.

AUSTIN: You have Cunning 5. Yeah. You have Cunning 5, so you could totally do that. What's the cost on stealth? Or is it special? It might be one of the special ones that—

SYLVIA: It is— I can't find cost on there.

AUSTIN: Cost is 3. Cost is 3.

SYLVIA: Oh, 3.

AUSTIN: It costs 3 to stealth something. So you could spend this turn buying stealth for Yersinia.

SYLVIA: I think that's what we'll do for that.

AUSTIN: Oh, do you think this is the— do you think— August is the name of the Horizon Tactical Solution?

[simultaneously]

AUSTIN: Augustus.

SYLVIA: Augustus, I believe, is the name.

AUSTIN: Do you think—

SYLVIA: He's the new guy.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Do you it's him or someone else on the ship maybe that figures out how to do that sort of stealth stuff? Do you think— okay, so one, what does stealth look like on this ship? Is it literally that the ship disappears? Or is it something else?

SYLVIA: No. I think what this would be would be making things to disrupt sensors.

AUSTIN: Yeah. What if it's not even that? What if it's just diversionary tactics? Like, "Yeah, we assume you can get out, as long as we go fuck some shit up for a few minutes."

SYLVIA: Ohh, that's really good actually.

AUSTIN: What this is— it's a tactic. Stealth isn't— when you look at it in Stars Without Number, stealth is a tactic. It isn't a special ops unit. It isn't a piece of technology. It's a tactic. So yeah. I kind of like it as you launch all of your riggers and all of your fighters, and those draw away the force long enough for the Yersinia to pass through.

SYLVIA: Yeah. Because the Yersinia isn't just military people. There's families and stuff on there. So they want to draw attention away from that because they're like, "We need to be able to bring our people to Kalliope." So I like that a lot. And I think that would be— what I really like— the idea of that is Diego wants to sort of be in charge of that operation, but as it goes on, Augustus sort of steps up.

AUSTIN: Okay. I like that a lot.

SYLVIA: And just in the middle, he starts calling for different formations and stuff that ended up sort of saving them, as opposed to Diego's idea. So setting up sort of a power struggle there.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally. That's the best.

SYLVIA: I have some ideas that I want to talk to you about off-air for what's coming up.

AUSTIN: Definitely. I'm excited. I also like the notion of like, "Well, how are we going to get back on the ship?" "Don't worry about it, we never leave anybody behind. You should know that, Augustus." Or maybe that's the thing, is that Augustus actually already knows that, based on what he's seen with the crew.

SYLVIA: How he's been treated.

AUSTIN: Yeah. They didn't even leave him behind, so.

SYLVIA: Because I think— we haven't really had a chance to do this, but I want to sort of, as things progress, show this sort of almost mentor role that Hudson starts taking towards Augustus. And Diego is very unhappy about that.

AUSTIN: Yeah. In that, "This is not supposed to be— this was supposed to be my relationship with this guy that I was torturing."

SYLVIA: Yeah. Exactly.

AUSTIN: Good.

SYLVIA: It goes both ways. "No. One, he's supposed my—"

AUSTIN: Plaything. Right? "My toy."

SYLVIA: "—victim, and two, I'm supposed to be your confidante."

AUSTIN: Right. Not this guy.

SYLVIA: But instead, because Augustus has basically— because they haven't had riggers before, he's sort of stepping in as their rigger—

AUSTIN: Expert. Yeah.

SYLVIA: —head. Yeah.

1:15:15

AUSTIN: The other thing here is that, because the Yersinia is a production facility, it means they can lose the riggers if they want. And just put together new parts for them. Right?

SYLVIA: Exactly.

AUSTIN: I like that a lot. I wish we had more time to do just Yersinia stuff all the time, because it's so good.

SYLVIA: It's so good. I love it.

AUSTIN: Again, it's like a big outlaw star that can make stuff.

SYLVIA: I have way too many ideas to fit in for stuff, both on the Yersinia and what an Odamas, because they have stuff on Kalliope, what that looks like. We can talk about it off-air.

AUSTIN: Sounds good.

SYLVIA: So we still have to do Ibex's stuff. Right?

AUSTIN: So they get some stealth?

SYLVIA: Oh yeah. They get stealth.

AUSTIN: I just wanted to make sure you add it to the— we add it to the faction.

SYLVIA: I did not. I will do that now. And now we just have Ibex's crew to do.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Okay. So the last game ended with that speech from Ibex, from the Righteous Vanguard—

SYLVIA: Oh yeah. On Counterweight.

AUSTIN: —Counterweight and then the hum of Rigour, which now we've seen has been in motion. But the goal, still, right now is to take over Counterweight. Right? That's what it wants is to be in charge of Counterweight. And so the question here is, let's remind ourselves how seizing a planet— what that actually looks like in terms of rolls. Seize planet [reading] faction seeks to become the ruling body of the world. Faction must destroy all unstealthed assets on the planet belonging to factions who oppose their attempt before they can successfully take control. If all assets cannot be destroyed in one turn, the faction must continue the attempt next turn. So they're probably not going to make this seize the planet thing here. They're going to fight something specifically.

SYLVIA: So all they have on Counterweight right now is their capital fleet.

AUSTIN: Yeah. To be fair, though, that's a fucking great thing.

SYLVIA: No, that's what I'm saying. Their only option is Force right now.

AUSTIN: Right, right. And they have a base of influence.

SYLVIA: So do we want to go with that? Or do we want to— oh, they have a base of influence?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Which means they can buy new stuff there.

SYLVIA: Oh okay. Oh. No, they have more than that. They have Ibex the seductress there, which we need— they need a gender-neutral term for that.

AUSTIN: They really do. Good job, Stars—

SYLVIA: They also have popular movement, so.

AUSTIN: Yeah. They sure do. Okay. So they have a bunch of things here.

SYLVIA: I had scrolled down too far.

AUSTIN: That's fine. Oh yeah. That doesn't do anything, the popular movement. So they can make Cunning attacks, they can make— actually, what does this unit do? What does Ibex actually do in terms of rolls? [reading] As an attack, it does no damage, but an asset that has been attacked immediately reveals any other stealth assets on the planet. Okay, that's not that— oh, and it can move. That's the other thing. Ibex can move freely, kind of, 1 hex at a time, as much as he wants.

God, I'm just thinking of the time we were like, "Oh, I guess this faction has a seductress. What's that look like? Uh, what if it's a cool dude named Ibex? Let's talk about that guy. What's that guy? Oh, that guy sounds cool. What's he like?"

SYLVIA: Yeah. And now—

AUSTIN: And now we have lots of ideas about what he's like. God.

SYLVIA: It was just— the second you described him getting— the second you described him, I was like, "This guy's gonna be huge."

AUSTIN: He's gonna be huge. This guy.

SYLVIA: "This is an important guy. Not only is he a Candidate, but this guy is important."

AUSTIN: This guy is an important guy. All right. I think it's going to attack.

SYLVIA: Yeah? With the seductress or something else?

AUSTIN: I think with Righteousness. Right?

SYLVIA: Righteousness?

AUSTIN: Oh, I think it's— the thing with Righteousness is at a certain point, it's— these different units are indistinguishable. The popular movement of the people are enabled by the Righteousness software that runs in their weaponry and that plays from their speakers. Right? Righteousness is— that's the thing, it takes hold. And it makes whatever you're doing seem so much more important and so much more focused. So when we roll for the "capital fleet," it's not just the fleet nuking things from space. It's Righteousness enhancing the popular movement that tries to overthrow the nearby— whoever's in control nearby. And that's the question. Where's it swinging? Who is it swinging on? I think most likely, it's the Hands of Grace who— oh, lord!

SYLVIA: [reading] the controlling faction on—

AUSTIN: There is no controlling faction currently on Counterweight.

SYLVIA: Okay. Then I think Ibex would go right after the Hands of Grace.

AUSTIN: Oh, fuck.

SYLVIA: What?

AUSTIN: Hands of Grace don't have any units on it anymore, except the base of influence.

SYLVIA: Oh. Yeah, no, that's perfect.

AUSTIN: Oh man. I didn't even set that up. That's just—

SYLVIA: Yeah. Well, it makes so much sense, because they've been repositioning.

AUSTIN: They've been juggling and trying to— they've been trying to keep hold of Sage. They've been trying to get stuff happening on Sigilia. They've been trying to push down revolution on Slate. They've been everywhere, and now they're not on Counterweight. So Force versus Force roll.

SYLVIA: So Ibex sees a moment of weakness in his biggest rival.

AUSTIN: Exactly.

SYLVIA: Pitch perfect.

AUSTIN: All right. Let's see how it works out though.

SYLVIA: Is this Cunning versus Cunning?

AUSTIN: No, it's Strength versus Strength. It's Force versus Force.

SYLVIA: Oh, you're doing a capital—

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's the capital fleet. It's Righteousness. I think it's 8 versus 8. 1d10 plus— yeah. Actually, it looks like— the Hands of Grace don't have any assets here. All they have is the base of influence, so they can't even defend.

SYLVIA: So it's just a direct hit?

AUSTIN: I think it's just a direct hit. You can't just leave your bases of influence unprotected completely. You need— it's like in Magic: The Gathering where you don't have any— or Hearthstone. You need something with taunt. You need a creature to block the attack. [SYLVIA laughs] Obviously. Capital ships do a lot of damage, so.

SYLVIA: Oh, man. How much? Let me see.

AUSTIN: [anxiously] A whole bunch. It's a whole bunch.

SYLVIA: Would it— I don't know if it— it doesn't have enough to take it out completely though, huh?

AUSTIN: [anxiously] It'd 3d10 plus 4.

SYLVIA: Oh, it could be, because it's 27 HP.

AUSTIN: Yeah. And that damage will hit the Hands of Grace. All right. Well, let me roll this 3d10, plus what was it?

SYLVIA: 4.

AUSTIN: Is that what it was? Plus 4?

SYLVIA: I can check.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Let me just pull it up again here. Yeah. Capital fleet, yeah, plus 4. 3d10 plus 4. Christ. All right. 25 damage.

SYLVIA: That is 2 way from wiping them out!

AUSTIN: Yeah. So let's—

SYLVIA: 25. Holy shit. You're rolling a ton of 10s today, by the way.

AUSTIN: I know. This is very scary. I don't think I've ever rolled this many 10s before in my life. All right. So let's go to the Hands of Grace and their Counterweight— oh, wait. The Counterweight— no, no, no.

SYLVIA: Wait. Am I looking at the— I was looking at the wrong one.

AUSTIN: You were. You were looking at the wrong one. The Hands of Grace Counterweight base is only 20.

SYLVIA: I was looking at the one above it.

AUSTIN: So that's gone.

SYLVIA: Holy shit.

AUSTIN: The Hands of Grace have lost their hold on Counterweight altogether. Let's delete this whole row. That's fun.

SYLVIA: That's the first—

AUSTIN: That's the first real hit. So they lose. Here's another question. Rules. Rules are cool! If it goes— does the attack bust through and do— does all whatever I just rolled— what did I just roll? 25?

SYLVIA: 25.

AUSTIN: Does the extra 5 hit or just the flat 20?

SYLVIA: I say let's just go with the 20, because it wouldn't make sense to do, "We made a bigger crater."

AUSTIN: [laughs] "No, we really hit you!" Yeah. Totally.

SYLVIA: We peed on the rubble afterwards. It was a moral hit.

AUSTIN: It was a moral hit, yes. All right. So that means the Hands of Grace are down to 26 HP.

SYLVIA: Oh, damn,

AUSTIN: Which means that it's weaker now than the Minerva Strategic Alliance. It's weaker than the Righteous Vanguard. It's weaker than the Rapid Evening. It's weaker than the Golden Demarchy.

SYLVIA: They're the weakest right now.

AUSTIN: They're weaker than Petrichor and weaker than the Odama Fleet. They are— let me put it this way. Ibex has lethal to continue the—

SYLVIA: [laughing] Jesus christ.

AUSTIN: Fuck, I'm going to have to change some maps. [sighs] So what's this look like? I think this is— I think this is happening— I think maybe this whole episode is playing out along with the previous episode. Right? So the previous episode was the Chime moving through the dark of space for a month. And all of this is— it opens with "30 Days Ago." Right? And then "27 Days Ago" instead of being "7 Days From Now." Right? And it's slowly leading up to Rigour lands on September and the speech. We just get the speech that Ibex gives. Right? Or we don't get the

speech, but we get him preparing. We get— throughout this episode, it's Ibex scribbles notes for the speech down that he wants to give and practicing it in the mirror and getting a new haircut and—

SYLVIA: It's a weirdly human moment of him making sure he's getting it right.

AUSTIN: He's getting it right. And then meetings with his advisors. And every now and then, via video footage, shots of violence. Of Ibex talking to an advisor, and the advisor just says, "The raid on the Hands of Grace base in the eastern dome went well." Or footage of a door being kicked in. Oh, this is the wrong map. I wanted to take us to Counterweight itself so we could see it. Right. Sorry, it's not the eastern dome, it is the northern dome. This Diasporan dome up top is taken over by Ibex first, for sure. And then it goes out from there. And one dome falls, and then another dome falls. And we end up getting to where that speech is, and the thing is - what we didn't know, what the viewer doesn't know - is by then, it's already happened. The reason that felt so celebratory, the reason why that didn't look like a coup is because the coup already happened. The reason no one shot at Ibex while he was giving that speech it because it wasn't a rallying cry, it was a job well done.

1:25:44

SYLVIA: Oh yeah. I think— that speech, was that broadcast by him at a secure location?

AUSTIN: No, that was in the middle of—

SYLVIA: Because I was going to say the podium should be right at the final base of influence of the Hands of Grace.

AUSTIN: Right. Well, it was. It was in Centralia. It was in the middle— it was in Monument Square that was supposed to be— that was kind of the heart of commerce and power for— yeah.

SYLVIA: Are there— because we've talked about how, on Garden, there was monuments for Divines and stuff. Are those on— would those be there, as well.?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally. Right. But the monuments there— okay, how about this? [laughs] So there're—

SYLVIA: Well, because I— yeah, go ahead.

AUSTIN: So there are monuments to all of the heroes of the war. Does Ibex only pull down Grace's and leaves up Peace for Addax? As this move of like, "Listen, that's what a real hero looks like. Addax did something when it was necessary to do something."

SYLVIA: I think that also plays into a lot of— I've always seen Ibex and Addax having a very tense but respectful relationship, especially after our Kingdom game. So—

AUSTIN: Does he leave up the statue of Jace?

SYLVIA: —Grace's— yeah. I think he thinks it would be a bad move to— I don't think it's the same relationship he has with Addax, but he thinks, "Oh, it's a bad move if I take down a thing with Jace." I think what would be— I like the idea of the rubble of the statue of Grace falling at the base of Peace.

AUSTIN: Me too. Yeah.

SYLVIA: Because they were next to each other. But Grace is destroyed now and is just lying in pieces behind Ibex while he's speaking and then at the feet of Peace.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think we get shots of people elsewhere in that big park where he's delivering the speech who are lounging on it and around it, sitting on it and clapping. And yeah. I like that a lot.

SYLVIA: Having a picnic.

AUSTIN: Literally having a picnic on the ruined statue of Grace. It's so good.

SYLVIA: Yeah, it's really good.

AUSTIN: And I think, yeah, it is a combination of military strikes at a handful of holdouts, but mostly it's the thing Ibex does, which is be the guy who seems reasonable in an unreasonable world. It's lots of - again, we've seen this twice already in this episode - it's people who are being convinced to change sides. It's them being told,

[MUSIC - "Love's First Explosion" starts]

AUSTIN (as Ibex): Listen, I do know what's best for us. And I can see where you are useful here. Come work for me.

AUSTIN: And they say yes.

AUSTIN (as Addax): Centralia's Memorial Square has never been a quiet place, at least not since I've been here, since the end of the war. The inconsistent architecture seeks to combine the improbable whirling of Diasporic construction with the focus-tested blocks and spheres of OriCon, every curve so algorithmically studied that it was transformed into a hard line. And all of that built on top of the ruins of Apostolosian marble. The result

is a space that echoes sounds in strange, discordant ways. But that day, something strange happened. In the park at the core of Centralia, a new cadence had taken hold. People laughed. And when the laugh bounced from building to building, it didn't twist. It amplified in joy. As vehicles moved by blasting music through the park and the streets, the songs took the architecture into themselves so that each note was performed at a new venue, an intimate stage.

And the rumor that day was that he'd speak soon, there where *he'd* pulled the statue of Grace down, shattered her hold on the Diaspora here in a single symbolic gesture.

[MUSIC - "Love's First Explosion" ends]

He'd add his voice to the concert. And then he did. And though I know that this is how it works, I feel that even now, years later, like he looked at me, looked through me and demanded I see in myself the best version of who I could be. And he demanded I be that person. Watching Ibex take the stage was a strange moment for all of us on Counterweight. All the hope and so little vision towards the cost of change. There was one man in the crowd though - his curly hair already growing back - who knew all too well how expensive transformation could be.

[MUSIC - "The Long Way Around" starts]

But Jace knew something else, too, maybe better than anyone else on the planet, maybe better than anyone else in the sector. He knew that living the same day over and over was cowardice dressed up in pragmatism. And finally, he was done being scared.

I remember that it was warm that day, a special sort of warm. I remember, because when Ibex pulled away that fake sky, when I looked up and saw the burned atmosphere and the way it distorts the stars, when I saw Weight and all its beauty, I shivered. And then he saw me, Jace did. And the warmth came back. And people cheered, but I barely remember that. I barely remember the speeches or the music or the food or the dancing or that night. But I remember the warmth, and even now I hold onto it. One vice, one gift I let myself have. The warmth.

Addax Dawn, member of the Rapid Evening, signing off.

[MUSIC - "The Long Way Around" ends]