

COUNTER/Weight 40: The Storm Over September

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AUSTIN: 44 months after the September Incident. Chief Emergency Executive Orth Godlove slides calmly across the temple floor, stepping between broken columns of polished sandstone and wading, carefully, in the shadows of sullen statues. He'd snuck away from so much; his security detail, the photo drones, the EarthHome megastar assigned to be his guide during his visit. The entertainment company, still struggling in the years since Petrichor's hostile takeover, had petitioned him to come see their new and improved Joypark, a last ditch attempt to get in his good graces. But Orth had made up his mind years ago.

AUSTIN (as Orth): Come on, Cass. You know I don't have all day for this.

ART (as Cass): You're not the only busy person here, Orth.

AUSTIN (as Orth): Good to see you.

ART (as Cass): Good to see you.

AUSTIN: He looks around, at the ruined temple.

AUSTIN (as Orth): It's beautiful here. I'm sorry we— war is terrible, but this is... this is something else entirely.

ART (as Cass): I don't think it is, I think this is just a terrible consequence of a terrible war.

AUSTIN: He grins.

AUSTIN: (as Orth): You are a very noble and humble leader, Apokine.

[MUSIC: ----- .-. .- / .- .- .- .- - / .- .- .- .- .-]

AUSTIN: And he does a little fake bow.

[Art, as Cass, laughs.]

AUSTIN (as Orth): Anyway, I have the paperwork. It's all settled. A couple of signatures... stamps, I don't know what you all use.

ART (as Cass): We sign our names in Apostolos too, Orth.

AUSTIN: He reaches into an inside pocket and pulls out a couple of papers and hands them over to you.

ART (as Cass): I'm so relieved there's not gonna be a big ceremony, I'm so tired of ceremony at this point.

AUSTIN (as Orth): It's the worst, isn't it? It's nice to be able to make things better, but... sometimes I think the pomp gets in the way.

ART (as Cass): Yeah.

AUSTIN (as Orth): Anyway. It's yours.

ART (as Cass): *[sigh]* What a— what a project.

AUSTIN (as Orth): Good luck. There's a lot of garbage on this planet, needs cleaning up.

ART (as Cass): Do you happen to have a forwarding address for, for Aria? I think... I think she'd like some of all this stuff.

[MUSIC fades out.]

AUSTIN: So, Rigour? Huh. Where is everyone?

KEITH: Uh—

ART: In the warehouse.

AUSTIN: Good.

[Ali sighs]

AUSTIN: AuDy is ne—

JACK: *[cross]* Outside the warehouse.

AUSTIN: Yep. And—

KEITH: *[cross]* Outside the Pavilion.

AUSTIN: Well, one of you is, the other of you chased Maritime to like, here.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: Where she was shot and killed.

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: And then... Rigour is somewhere here? And up is, it's... Rigour is very big.

KEITH: Sorry, where?

AUSTIN: North? It's the north.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: Like... Like, there is no more Bacchus Biotech Recreational District.

ALI: Oh, the mall!

AUSTIN: There is no more, there is no more Slate Mineral Cooperative.

ALI: Shucks.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Can I, can I, can I reach out to it?

AUSTIN: Oh, buddy.

ART: *[cross]* That sounds like a *terrible* idea, Jesus Christ.

KEITH: I don't want it to know I'm there, I just wanted to see what's going on.

AUSTIN: You wanna— yeah, so what do you wanna feel for, what's your question?

KEITH: I... I wanna feel for... I guess this is, this is a decision that is, I think, mired in not understanding what's... the depth and the seriousness of what Rigour is? But I guess I wanna search for like... a motive?

AUSTIN: Sure. You— Let me look at the assess questions and see if there's anything there that could give you that, because that is a thing that it has. It has a motive.

ART: Is Rigour in between us and the Kingdom Come? Isn't the Kingdom Come up here?

AUSTIN: Sure. Sure is.

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: Let me look at Assess really quick. ... Yeah, you give me an Assess.

KEITH: Okay. Guys, I'm not good at assess, so.

AUSTIN: That's good!

KEITH: *[cross]* Do I still have that whole one going forwards? Plus one? That's research, that's research.

AUSTIN: From what? That's research, no, yeah.

KEITH: *[whistles]* Alright, here we go.

AUSTIN: Eh, partial, partial success.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: So, yeah, it sounds like what you're asking me is, is "What do I notice despite an effort to conceal it?" It wants control of Voice.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: It's just kind of... So it's not so much that the— It doesn't vocalize that in any way. When you like, reach out for it... you can feel its intensity is directed, and it's directed towards the September Institute, and towards like, the Mesh around the September Institute, which is held together by Voice. There's a moment where it reaches up from the ground and breaks its hand through the kind of holographic glass ceiling above everything, letting more rain in and it grabs one of the ships out of the air and slams it down into the September Institute, setting the undergraduate, that— this whole southwestern area, which is like, very close to y'all, is just destroyed and on fire. Reminder, those ships were like in low orbit, you know?

KEITH: *[sighs]* Yeah. That's bad, because that means this thing is really tall.

AUSTIN: It's very tall.

KEITH: I'm gonna get on my board.

AUSTIN: Good call.

ALI: *Huh—*

AUSTIN: Sure.

KEITH: How fast is Rigour?

ALI (as Aria): *[cross]* Mako, where you goin'?

AUSTIN: Yeah, Aria, Mako's on his board?

ALI (as Aria): Hey, hey Mako?

KEITH (as Mako): Hey, hey yeah?

ALI (as Aria): Where you going?

KEITH (as Mako): Oh sorry, I just got really focused and I was gonna like jet towards it. Is that not good?

AUSTIN: Oh my God.

ALI (as Aria): Oh, w— We should jet towards our friends?
KEITH (as Mako): I guess that's a good point, I think that I, I thought I was just gonna take it down, I think we should go to our friends first.
ALI (as Aria): Mako—
KEITH (as Mako): Yeah?
ALI (as Aria): Mako, we gotta go.
KEITH (as Mako): Okay.

AUSTIN: AuDy and Cass—

KEITH: Wait, hold on, is Tower okay?

AUSTIN: You don't know where Tower is. Tower was looking at the Ordennan ships the last time you looked.

JACK: What are the people doing?

AUSTIN: Which people?

JACK: The real, living— the people.

AUSTIN: Where? Near you, it's just—

JACK: On campus, I mean, just on campus.

AUSTIN: No one's on campus now to see.

JACK: *[sputters]* Sorry?

AUSTIN: No one, none of the players are on campus right now.

JACK: No, I mean— Oh, so you can't tell us? I just meant like, NPCs.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* I'm not gonna tell you. No, I'm not—

JACK: *[cross]* Okay, bad things.

AUSTIN: Twelfth is very excited, and very stupid.

JACK: Yeah. *[laughs]* And he's also in control of a divine!

[Ali hums]

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: Oh God, okay.

AUSTIN: Thinks— thinks he is, anyway.

JACK: Yeah. Mm—

[pause]

ART: Ah... oh, fuck.

JACK: How far are we from Kingdom Come? Or, do we— The Kingdom Come might just not exist anymore, right?

AUSTIN: The Kingdom Come has not been destroyed.

JACK: Okay.

AUSTIN: You can sense it still. It's buried pretty deep underground, part of its safety mechanism?

JACK: *[laughs]* Our ship has a safety mechanism that buries itself?

AUSTIN: No, no, that base that you were landed at.

JACK: Oh, oh I see! Okay, sorry.

KEITH: *[laughs]* Oh, Jack, did you think that Rigour buried it when he¹ exploded from the earth?

JACK: Yeah, I thought that there had just been just like gigantic movement of earth and trees, or whatever, that had...

KEITH: Okay.

JACK: Okay, so... do we wanna try and circle up round up the left of the map to try and get to it?

ART: That's certainly an id— I'm worried that using this mech will, will draw an awful lot of attention, and also I'm not super interested in leaving this here.

AUSTIN: The mech?

¹ Rigour is it/its.

ART: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Hm.

AUSTIN: The mech is bigger than the Kingdom Come, by the way.

ART: Do I think it can, it can, can it get off world? Is it interstellar?

AUSTIN: So you got into it, right? Yeah, it could...

ART: *[cross]* Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's like a divine. It's like a divine in a lot of ways, and it actually probably makes you feel super uncomfortable.

ART: I, yeah.

AUSTIN: I guess that's up to you to decide, not me.

ART: This is an important cultural artefact that I'm not gonna leave on this planet with Rigour, God! I'm pissed at Maryland.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Yes, Yeah. You lift yourself— you're able to lift yourself out of that warehouse, very easily. And like lift like... as if flying, but without any clear mode of lift, without any clear, like engines or anything.

ART: *[cross]* Sure.

AUSTIN: You just kind of hover, off your back, arms hanging down, up through the top of the warehouse. And like, you push through it like it's papier-mache.

[Art hums]

AUSTIN: AuDy, above you there's a giant statue man. *[laughter]* I think it probably has like— I guess in my head it's like... a face with a beard and then like, a plumed helmet. It has like, some weird like, spear, javelin things on its back, and like a shield on its arm. I think it has like a— not metallic, like a marbled, it's all a weird marble-y metal. But like, it has kind of a long skirt, that is... it looks like it's armored, like an armored skirt, basically? But it basically looks like a big— it looks more human than a lot of the other robots we've seen, a lot of the other mechs we've seen.

JACK (as AuDy): Cass.

ART (as Cass): Yeah?

JACK (as AuDy): Is this maybe the time to kidnap Maryland?
ART (as Cass): Oh, I don't know that we need her anymore?
JACK (as AuDy): Okay, so we're just— we're just going.
ART (as Cass): I think we should—

KEITH: *[cross]* You should maybe just re-ask her, like “Hey do you still think we’ve still got this?”

[Ali giggles]

JACK: Oh, that's a really good question!

ART: Yeah, maybe that's not a bad idea, does she still wanna stay?

JACK: *[laughing]* That's a good question!

ART: It sucks here now.

JACK: No, actually, she said she'd be happy to die on her home. She's not coming.

ALI: *[cross]* Yeah.

KEITH: But I don't think she believed you when you said ‘tomorrow’?

JACK: *[cross]* Well, she does now.

KEITH: So, definitely today is out of the question. When you said ‘tomorrow’, you meant ‘in ten minutes’.

JACK: *[cross]* Well I don't know how we—

ART: You can offer again.

JACK: No, she's gonna stay, it's— she's done. Like...

AUSTIN: She's sca— I think Cass can see her. And she just like looks at Cass and says:

AUSTIN (as Maryland): The dawn will rise soon.

AUSTIN: And walks away.

KEITH: That's not helpful enough, Maryland.

ART: Yeah, that's, that's... what?

ALI: Guys, come on.

AUSTIN: Thanks Ali. Ali, you cut this show together, so you're the only one who really remembers things.

ALI: Well, that's also what Jamil said.

AUSTIN: It is.

JACK: Okay, so.

JACK (as AuDy): Cass, do you want to try and draw off Rigour? Or do we wanna just... go?

ART (as Cass): We could, we could very quickly discover that to Rigour, this is tissue paper. I could try to distract Rigour and it could last ten seconds.

JACK (as AuDy): Yeah.

ART (as Cass): Okay, just so we're clear.

ART: How, how strong is this? Like, what— what's in here?

AUSTIN: It's hard to know.

ART: What's my HUD look like?

AUSTIN: It's something you feel, there is no HUD. It's like, it's— you know how far you can go, you know how much energy you have left. It's like your body. Like... what, what's the head's up display for your body? The user interface in this is really well integrated.

ART: Okay, how strong do I feel?

AUSTIN: The strongest you've ever felt in your life. ... But like, what's that mean?

ART: I mean, it's, I'm, it's something.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: Can I... Can I transmit?

AUSTIN: Sure.

ART: Can I transmit to... to Sokrates?

AUSTIN: Totally.

ART: This says it's the will of the people.

AUSTIN: Totally. Sokrates sits in the throne back on Apostolos, so yes.

ART (as Cass): Sokrates, I've— I have it.

AUSTIN (as Sokrates): Bring it home.

ART (as Cass): Rigour's here. Rigour's between me and home.

AUSTIN (as Sokrates): Cass... I can't lose another one of you. I can't lose....

ART (as Cass): I'm— I'm sorry. I'm sorry that we weren't a better family.

AUSTIN (as Sokrates): I love you.

ART (as Cass): I love you.

AUSTIN: In their throne room, I think Sokrates, like, does the like, lean forward and like, rest their head on their hands and thinks hard about what Ibex requested. And then, like, nods to themselves and hits a couple of buttons. And like, a holographic map on the table in front of them lights up and ships start moving towards Counterweight.

ART: Cass salutes. And says...

AUSTIN: Is that salute like a cool like, spear in the air and chest thing?

ART: I think it is, I think it is, it's kind of like—

AUSTIN: And I know we've been saying they're Greek, but now it's Roman. It's just Classical.

ART: Yeah. It's been so long, no one knows, and it's all lies.

[laughter]

ART (as Cass): I'm gonna do my best. I'll see you soon.

AUSTIN: Sokrates, like, nods to themselves and says:

AUSTIN (as Sokrates): See you.

AUSTIN: And then we get the shot of Integrity... closing up around Sokrates' body and them standing and turning to walk out into the sunlight on Apostolos. And then probably just like, throngs of people... and they just say like:

AUSTIN (as Sokrates): My people!

AUSTIN: And then we cut back to... Aria, what are you doing?

ALI: I know we've been in the storm forever, but... Is, like, are our signals still fucked up? Like would I have a connection to the Brilliance?

AUSTIN: Sure. It's still fucked up, but it exists.

ALI: Okay...

AUSTIN: You're in that moment between the smaller— as the smaller storm ends and the bigger storm is arriving. So yeah, things are cleared up a little bit.

ALI: I wanna like, call it to me?

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: It'll probably take a while before it gets here, but like—

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah.

ALI: That's kinda what I wanna do? And then did Mako actually fly away, or are we going towards...

AUSTIN: It sounds like you were heading— It sounded like Mako did not fly away?

KEITH: No, I did not fly away.

AUSTIN: It sounded like you caught him and said like, "Hey, no. Don't."

ALI: So, we should go towards where we know AuDy... or where we think AuDy and Cass— Or...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You know where— You know basically...

ALI: Right, yeah.

AUSTIN: Oh, I mean also, hey, there's a big man standing in the woods!

[laughter]

ALI: Oh, right! Okay, yeah.

AUSTIN: You can see that!

ALI: We can.

AUSTIN: Like, in fact, in fact, I think it... the way you see it is that some of the big tall holographic stuff like, disappears to reveal much shorter buildings? And oh, there's just a big marble man back there. Good!

KEITH (as Mako): I hope that's a friend, let's go!

[Ali laughs]

KEITH (as Mako): If not, at least we should attack the smaller man first.

AUSTIN: Right, good. AuDy?

JACK: *[groans]* I can't remote pilot the Kingdom Come.

AUSTIN: No.

JACK: Especially since it's in a building.

AUSTIN: Yeah, well.

JACK: You said that those buildings where the tunnel was are gone now?

AUSTIN: Oh yeah, they're flattened.

JACK: How do I access the building?

AUSTIN: You'd have to go to where it actually is in the woods, where you first landed.

JACK: Okay.

JACK (as AuDy): Cass, what are you doing?

ART (as Cass): I'm gonna go try something. If you want a, if you want a ride, I can give it to you, probably, who knows?

JACK (as AuDy): Yeah, alright. Okay.

AUSTIN: Alright, I think there's probably a compartment, for like, people? It's like—

ART: And just to be clear, we don't have— It's not a literal divine, we can't, we can't use *that*.

AUSTIN: No, it does not have that, the open portal stuff, no.

ART: Alright.

AUSTIN: AuDy does.

JACK: Yeah, I do!

ART: But we don't have Voice.

AUSTIN: No... there are... there's another divine on September we forgot about.

JACK: There is, there absolutely is. Do we know what they're doing? Can I reach out to them?

AUSTIN: Yeah, they're just waiting. Watching. Which is what they always do, right?

JACK: They're just hoping that it's gonna fall out in a way that is favorable to them?

AUSTIN: I think so.

KEITH: Wait, who is it?

JACK: *[cross]* God.

ALI: Now hang on...

AUSTIN: This is Detachment.

ALI: Oh, *ohhh*. God.

KEITH:*[cross]* I thought that— I thought that, that Detachment was Ibex's brother?

ALI: They're on the Kingdom Come.

AUSTIN: It was Jerboa's, it was Jerboa's divine, and that divine is just in the Kingdom Come now.

KEITH: Oh, right! In the King— I thought, okay, got it.

ART: We left a lot of cool stuff on the Kingdom Come.

[Austin and Ali laugh]

AUSTIN: You did. So yeah, that exists, that's there, that's a thing to keep in your back pocket.

KEITH: Maybe try— I mean, maybe take it out of your back pocket *now* because it might take some convincing to get Detachment to do anything.

JACK: Can I not just portal to Ibex? Oh no, that would actually be very bad.

AUSTIN: Oh, you want to open up a portal to Ibex?

JACK: No, because then Rigour can just— Well, Rigour can kind of go anywhere he wants, I guess.

KEITH: And right now, Rigour wants Voice, not Ibex.

JACK: Why does Rigour want Voice?

AUSTIN: Good question.

JACK: Is that something we should be... very concerned about.

AUSTIN: Sure.

KEITH: *[cross]* I mean, there's something fundamentally different about Voice than any other divine.

ALI: Yeah, he would have like, more control over a ton of stuff if he had Voice. That kinda makes sense.

JACK: I definitely have a horse in this race.

ART: Well, you're the one who can do it. Satisfy your horse.

AUSTIN: Ah— Ha— Hm.

KEITH: Jack, speaking of horses, there is—

AUSTIN: Jesus Christ.

[Ali loses it]

KEITH: *[Getting quieter]* I just wanted to remind you that my birthday is coming up and... if uh, I could just have one blue horse from you, I'd be okay with that as a gift. One blue horse.

JACK: *[laughing]* Can I— I'd like to climb into the Apokine, please.

KEITH: Are you just gonna ignore me about the horse? Okay.

AUSTIN: You're placed into like, a little chamber at the heart of Apokine. And I think, just like, have a nice seat in there. Strap yourself in, if you'd like.

JACK: So my goal here is to essentially be carried as far north as I can, to get myself into, onto some sort of line? With the Kingdom Come?

AUSTIN: Mhm, yep. Aria and Mako, what are you doing? Are you just waiting for the Kingdome Co— or, for the Brilliance to show up?

ALI: I assumed we were heading towards like, where the cabin was? And then I was gonna like meet it, like we were all gonna meet there together.

AUSTIN: Give me a... God, how do you, how do you pilot? I guess give me a Act Under Fire, synth? For... managing to get the Brilliance to you.

ALI: Sure, so that's just rolling synth?

AUSTIN: Oh, you know it is still cool, it's cool plus your vehicle's power.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: So it's gonna be this plus one.

AUSTIN: Okay. Okay! You got an eight— or you got a nine, sorry. So you can— the Brilliance can totally meet you wherever you want, but it will draw the attention of Rigour. But it will manage to avoid any attacks from Rigour on the way.

ALI: Okay, yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay, so I think you get like, halfway? You get to like, this big road here, or you get to the library! Remember the library, where you got sniped at that time? You get there, and the Brilliance just like, is like, flying through the air dodging attacks from Rigour, some of which are just giant swipes, and others are just like, shots from the innumerable cannons it has built into its shoulders, and fingers, and everywhere. And like, the whole city is just getting devastated all around as its doing this, just like, buildings are getting torn apart and the Brilliance just like slams full speed into that library and like, comes to a sliding stop right in front of you, and like opens up its cockpit so you can very quickly hop in it and take off.

ALI: Yeah, Aria is like, on Mako's like board, I guess? And does that think where she like does a flip off of it and like lands into the cockpit.

AUSTIN: Nice, good. And then like, takes off immediately again, yeah perfect. So now you're, three of you are on your things, it's good. You're making it, you're making moves. So... I guess... where are you headed as a group? Are you headed back to the ship, is that the plan?

KEITH: I don't think that we can let Rigour get Voice, is what I think.

ALI: Shouldn't do that.

AUSTIN: Okay! So what are you doing?

KEITH: Where's Voice?

AUSTIN: Good question. Voice is September, right? The September Institute, at least. It's as built into the infrastructure here as Rigour was above.

KEITH: *[sighs]* But then like, okay, hear me out on this: Voice kinda sucks though? Like, controlling everybody and secretly being a weird school that clones people, and...

AUSTIN: Is Voice doing that?

KEITH: *[cross]* Is Voice doing that?

JACK: *[cross]* No, Voice is super not doing that!

KEITH: I mean, Voice is involved.

JACK: Twelfth is doing that, Voice is a kid.

ALI: No, no no, Loyalty is a kid.

JACK: Oh, I'm sorry, yes, you're right.

AUSTIN: Voice is a kid.

ALI: Voice is also a kid?

AUSTIN: Voice is like... for the age of a divine? Voice is a child.

KEITH: *[cross]* Right.

ALI: Oh, oh okay. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Y'know?

KEITH: Not just programmed as a child.

AUSTIN: No, no. The candidate of Voice is a bunch of people, including children. And, but Voice itself is very young for a divine.

KEITH: Okay... I think that we should not let— I think we gotta do it as a thing. We gotta do something.

AUSTIN: Gotta do a thing, gotta get off the boat.

JACK: Yeah, I'm really— I'm really con—

KEITH: [*cross*] I'm gonna go get him, I'm gonna go get this big thing! Boom, jet off towards it!

JACK: Oh, Jesus Christ.

AUSTIN: And Mako is zipping through the sky.

ART: Okay.

AUSTIN: Again, give me a, give me an Act Under Pressure, cool? [KEITH: Um] Partial success, okay. You're able to get to Rigour, but, but you're able to get very close, close enough to get onto Rigour, but then you will have been knocked off your board. Or you can stay safely at a distance.

KEITH: Knocked off my board and onto Rigour.

AUSTIN: And onto Rigour.

KEITH: Done.

AUSTIN: It hurts so bad, oh my *God*. Take one harm—

KEITH: Okay...

AUSTIN: For being on Rigour. And just like... you know when you have like a really bad headache, and someone is like, [*mocking voice*] "Oh just take some Tylenol," and then you're like, "I'm gonna fucking murder you?"

[*Laughter*]

KEITH: Yeah, yeah yeah yeah.

AUSTIN: It's that. It's like that times, it's like the worst that. So, just being on its presence is like, so overwhelming, and it's just... it's nothing like any of the other divines— that's not true, it's a *lot* like the other divines in that it's touching you on that same wavelength—

KEITH: Right. But so much stronger.

AUSTIN: It's not that it's stronger, it's that it isn't... it's that it's undefined. It's that it's like raw energy and noise and violence whereas the other ones build themselves alibis and like, live those alibis, and so it's easy to like, walk around them a little bit.

KEITH: God, why would anybody build this thing?

AUSTIN: It was a different time.

KEITH: Okay. So, here's what I would like to ask. Can I use the method that I normally use to jack into the divine—

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Right.

KEITH: —to instead separate myself from that feeling.

AUSTIN: Oh, you're— that feeling's— I'm not gonna keep hurting you through that feeling, but it's going to be a constant thing, like visually and narratively?

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: That just, that one harm represents the damage done through this scene of you being on or near Rigour.

KEITH: Got it, okay.

AUSTIN: And, and being tuned to this thing.

KEITH: *[cross]* Yep.

AUSTIN: This is the same reason Maxine held her head, and why all of the other Strati did throughout the campus.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: Cass. What are you doing?

ART: So, like, I still don't have a great idea of what this thing does.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Sure. Has some spears, has a shield.

ART: *[cross]* But like, I'd sort of like to test it a little bit?

AUSTIN: Sure.

ART: You know that feeling when you're like a kid, and you read like a comic book and you like, you see a cartoon, and like, Wolverine like, pops his claws out and you're like "I understand what that would be."

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Yeah.

ART: Right, like I know what I would have to flex to make that happen? Like... what happens if I like, do that, right? Like, what if I do like, my—

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Tell me what happens.

ART: My, this is what it would feel like to... to...

AUSTIN: Be powerful, and strong, and awesome?

ART: Sure.

AUSTIN: What, what does happen?

ART: So like... it's a, it's a shield and a sword?

AUSTIN: I've been thinking of it as spears, but sure, it has a shield, or has a sword.

ART: Spear, spear is fine. No, spear is good.

AUSTIN: Yeah, yeah.

ART: So like, it holds out the spear, and like... points it, and like, flexes through the spear, and it like shoots a... a, a beam of this purple energy, and it like crackles around itself and it, it darts out at Rigour and it hits it.

AUSTIN: Okay. What's your objective?

ART: I want Rigour to hurt.

AUSTIN: Oooh, okay. Give me a Mix It Up roll, which is Mix It Up plus, plus... sorry it's meat plus the power of your machine, which in this case is three.

ART: Okay...

KEITH: *[whistles]* That's a strong machine. That's a mean machine.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: That does not have the three on it so it's only a... six. Dammit!

[Giggles]

AUSTIN: Oh, buddy. Wait, how did that *happen*? How did this happen?

ALI: *[sympathetic]* Aww!

ART: *[cross]* Well, it's a two and a one, and then three more.

AUSTIN: Oh, it's not meat, it's not meat, it's not meat! It's synth 'cause it's a robot, it's not meat.

ART: So it's a seven, it's a seven!

AUSTIN: So it's a seven, phew! So choose two, you make too much noise, advance the relevant mission clock, you take harm as established by the fiction, or an ally takes harm as established by the fiction, or something of value breaks. You choose two.

ART: Let me— let me look at that list while I ponder this for a second.

KEITH: Be careful.

ART: Well, you're the ally established by the fiction, Mako.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Yes.

KEITH: Yeah.

ART: Make too much noise...

AUSTIN: Yep.

ART: This seems pretty noisy, that feels... relevant. And I mean.... *[sigh]* And I'll take harm. Logically I feel like it should be an ally, because that feels like what would happen, but I'm not— I'm not willing to, *I'm* not willing to put the knife in Mako's heart.

AUSTIN: Sure, so—

KEITH: What were the other choices? There's gotta be a better choice.

AUSTIN: No, take harm as established by the fiction, an ally takes harm, or something of value breaks.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: So I think it just... I'm trying to think if it's that Rigour— no I don't think Rigour hurts you at all, I think it's just the thing you just did. Like, you're drawing on... okay, here's what's happening. Apokine draws on its people to, to do this, right? To, to defend them? And in this case, the people of Apostolos are giving you power, y'know, totally for free, right? Like, oh yeah, sure, totally. But the people here... are still tied into Voice. And Voice is not allied with you, yet. Or at all, or will it ever be, or will Rigour get it. And so, it's Voice that is hurting you. Not Rigour. It's that like, you have to like, you're drawing on the same kind of... biological essence that Voice is tied into here.

[30:27]

KEITH: So you're saying that Voice is mad that you're stealing his² batteries?

AUSTIN: It's not even mad, it's just, like... It's like a chemical reaction is happening, where you're like "Oh, I'm grabbing some of this" and you broke this thing open, and now it's burning you inside. And that same, that same, like... the same weird headache shit that's been happening to everybody here as all this fall— as *reality* falls apart all around you. But, you hurt Rigour. Like, the bolt slams into Rigour's... again, let's say right under Mako? And like tears through bits of Rigour's metal and like, all the way through, you can see the sky behind it. And in fact, you can see the ships from the scavenger fleet above, as they descend through the clouds, through the hole blown through Rigour's shoulder. Mako, you can also see it immediately begin to repair itself slowly. It's like, stitching itself back together. And you can see that it's like, as it does that, way far down, from the ground, the ground cracks and dies around it as it does so.

KEITH: Can I... slow or stop that process?

AUSTIN: Sure. Just give me a synth roll. If you... ten plus, you'll, you will stop it, seven to nine, you will slow it, under a seven, I will make a hard move. ... That's an eight. So yeah, you're able to slow it down. It hurts while you're doing it, like this pain I've been describing doesn't stop. It... it feels like the impulse to not exist, like... I don't, this isn't, I don't, it would be better to be dead than this. But... you're able to keep grasp on this, and like, you're basically able to hack the little nanomachines separately from Rigour, like without engaging its full defenses to keep that wound there. Aria, what are you doing? And then we'll go to AuDy.

² Voice has been previously referred to with they or it pronouns.

ALI: Is it.. Is it just Rigour, right now? Are there like, people coming from it like in the Tower game, or...

AUSTIN: It is just Rigour.

ALI: Okay. I feel like, really... insignificant. *[laughs]*

AUSTIN: Yeah. I mean, everyone is.

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: It just doesn't necessarily seem like that quite yet. But maybe that, yeah. Yeah.

ALI: Because I feel like I wanna attack it, but like, I don't know... Can I do an assess, actually?

AUSTIN: Sure. And I'll let you make another move after that, too.

ALI: Okay, cool. Cause this is just like me— oh.

AUSTIN: Yes.

ALI: Looking for like—

AUSTIN: You don't have any bonuses, you don't have any intel, or any forwards, or any...

ALI: I have to have something.

KEITH: Yes, you *have* to have something.

AUSTIN: Oh boy. Oh, oh here's a thing you should've done. You should do Hotshit Driver right away to do—

ALI: *[cross]* Yeah? Okay.

AUSTIN: Roll edge to get those holds, theoretically. Do well on this edge roll. There you go.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: So you get one hold, you may spend one hold to do one of the following: avoid one external danger, escape one pursuing vehicle, maintain control of the vehicle, impress, dismay, or frighten someone. Those might not come into handy right this second necessarily, but I wanna make sure you did that before we forgot.

JACK: *[cross]* Let's try and impress Rigour!

ALI: Yeah, can I impress Rigour?

AUSTIN: Do you wanna try?

ART: What does that even— what do you think happens when you do that?

[Ali and Jack laugh]

AUSTIN: Tell me.

KEITH: "Wow. She's a hotshit driver! I better back off a little bit."

ALI: *[laughs]* But yeah, I feel like that's what Aria does and probably my best thing to do right now is just be a distraction.

AUSTIN: Yeah, so I think that that's actually...

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So what is— how is she doin'? What's the most Aria fuckin', like...? What's the most big finale— not that this is the finale of the show necessarily— but, like. Action hero, anime hero, mecha shit that you can do?

ALI: *[Laughs]* God, I'm trying to think of something.

AUSTIN: I have a suggestion.

ALI: But I'm... Yeah I think I'm too focused on like, what would Rigour actually be impressed by?

AUSTIN: Like... the thing I think Rigour would be impressed by is you seizing that moment?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And like... cutting its arm off.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: I just really like this notion of Aria in the, in the Regent's Brilliance drawing Jace's blade, like that white-hot superblade?

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: And then like, charging forward, cutting its arm off, which doesn't actually *hurt* it in any meaningful way. Because, like, there are some infinities that like... it's an infinitely powerful thing, right? Like, it's...

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: There are some numbers so big that cutting off a third... they're still the biggest number you've ever encountered. And then just like, sheathing the blade. But you also failed that roll, so that means I get to do something.

ALI: *[laughs nervously]* I was gonna initially suggest that I would cut like a finger off, I'm glad that you gave me the arm.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Oh, no, fuck it, this is, this is...

ALI: *[cross]* That's very generous of you.

AUSTIN: It's also really good 'cause it mirrors Grace getting her arm cut off.

ALI: Okay, yeah.

AUSTIN: Which I like a lot. ... So you cut it off and then the other arm of Rigour just... reaches out and pins the Brilliance. Not just to the ground, but like it spins and turns and slams the Brilliance deep into the Mineral Cooperative Mine. Like, thirty, forty, fifty flights down into the, into the planet. And then it slowly stands back up. Take two harm.

ALI: Cool, I will do that.

AUSTIN: The Brilliance is not doing great, but I'm not gonna like, shut it off in this big fight. Think about this fight as like, the WWE, like, World Championship fight? Where the refs are gonna give you a little bit of leeway, like they're gonna count extra slow in the, when you're outside the ring? Y'know, maybe they don't DQ you if you do something a little dirty, 'cause it's the big one? AuDy, what are you doing?

JACK: How close am I, okay, so as we... I'd like to do two things.

AUSTIN: Sure.

JACK: I'd like to... exit the Apokine as we pass the ship. Or the location of the building. And I'd also like to... I dunno, I'm trying to like, I'm trying to think about... when I scan the Liberty and Discovery databank...

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: No, I'm trying to think how this is gonna be useful to me. 'Cause like, if you're being attacked by a mountain lion, don't try and Google how to fight a mountain lion.

AUSTIN: Right, but if you've been bitten by a snake...

JACK: Sure, but that's...

AUSTIN: I don't know, is Rigour a mountain lion or a snake?

JACK: Is that my— Is this my *own*, also is this my, *my* databank, or the company's databank? I mean it's the same thing, right?

AUSTIN: It's your— Yeah, yeah it's the same thing. It is Liberty and Discovery for 80,000 years.

JACK: Okay!

AUSTIN: It is the databank of everything Liberty and Discovery's ever done.

JACK: Okay, I'm gonna roll it.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: I'm gonna roll and then pick questions. And it's synth, which again, I'm not very good at, so let's give this a go.

KEITH: Nice.

JACK and AUSTIN: That's a ten!

AUSTIN: Good fuckin' hustle.

[Ali sighs in relief]

JACK: Okay, so I'm doing this as I'm...

AUSTIN: As you're in the, the heart of Apokine, yeah.

JACK: Oh no, I'm doing this as I'm, as I'm— So I think what happens is for the first time in what feels like ages, the body that was AuDy feels Liberty and Discovery pull back a little.

AUSTIN: Oh, okay.

JACK: And for a moment, they're really happy about that, until they realize that they've only pulled back to let them be the driver while they work out, you know.

AUSTIN: Gotcha.

JACK: Like, "You do this, we'll work out how this works."

AUSTIN: *[laughs]* Okay.

JACK: So, AuDy is running through the building towards the ship while Liberty and Discovery is searching for this data.

AUSTIN: Mhm. So take intel, by the way.

JACK: Yes.

AUSTIN: Which you can then spend on— you can ask me another thing with that intel, basically.

JACK: Hm. Right, I'm going to ask how is Rigour vulnerable to me? But I'm going to frame the question based on presumably, 80,000 years of experience of scrapping with divines.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Not necessarily Rigour, but like, there've probably been a lot of skirmishes, and I'm trying to call that information.

AUSTIN: So, there is a thing. There is a way. The ways that divines— So. One, I think the things that Maryland told you probably start to feel a little true to Liberty and Discovery as they dig through the databanks, that at any single moment, a divine is divine. That like, this is an overwhelming thing, this thing is more than mortal, this thing is more than a machine, but when it's reduced to data, like everything is in Liberty and Discovery's databanks, they are tools. And they are machines. And they have consciousness, but, like so do humans, and humans are killed regularly, and they fail regularly. And when you take the wide view, so do divines. Otherwise, the Diaspora would be perfect, and it would rule everything, but the divines bicker and fight, and kill each other, sometimes. ... And often, that ends up being about positionality and about controlling when and how to disengage. There was a time when, when a divine... even your data records probably don't have the specifics, it was Justice, or it was... it was a thing like a Righteousness. Maybe it was Righteousness, even, itself. There are times when one of those was fighting, and instead of killing it, because it was still kind of a big deal to kill divines, you locked it away. And the thing about that is, that was a real sacrifice for society, because it took three divines to lock— it took two divines to lock a third away. You open the doors, you force it in, and then you walk through the doors too,

closing them behind you. For some amount of time. Liberty and Discovery never did it, so they don't really know what's in there?

JACK: Hm.

AUSTIN: But you could do that to Rigour.

JACK: Why hasn't Righteousness tried that?

AUSTIN: Righteousness isn't Liberty and Discovery.

JACK: So it just doesn't know?

AUSTIN: Or it doesn't want to.

JACK: Hm. Okay, question two— *[cross]* Oh, no go on.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Also— also, Righteousness is piloted by Ibex, and people often dislike Ibex. *[Jack laughs]* That's a hell of a thing to ask. "Hey, disappear with me for a while so we can slow this thing down."

JACK: Yeah. Okay, thing two: Where can I gain the most advantage?

AUSTIN: The future. Like, far away in time. This is not the battlefield to fight Rigour. You need time. Like, now that you see it as just— now that you've seen its arm get cut off, like yeah, we can kill Rigour, but you don't have what you need here. I think like, as this is happening, Rigour is like, smashing its hand through— Or it's actually not even doing it, it's probably ranged attacks too, just like— missiles coming out of it and like, corkscrewing through the air up into the atmosphere, and just huge ships sinking into the atmosphere and burning up, and then crashing into the sea through the storm in the distance.

JACK: *[quiet]* God. Okay, I think I'm gonna hold onto my in....

AUSTIN: Your intel?

JACK: Yeah, anybody got any thoughts about the use of this intel? Specifically based around the information—

AUSTIN: *[cross]* So, I will read again what it— what it says. When you reveal your knowledge of the opposition's preparations, dispositions, environment— *or* environment, describe how you discovered that information, which we know, and spend intel. You must spend intel to reveal knowledge. Take plus one forward to exploit the opportunity offered by that information. So yeah. You'll get a plus one when you use it.

JACK: Anybody got any thoughts about the use of that?

KEITH: I don't know, you might have... somewhere in the history of Liberty and Discovery maybe there's something where somebody put some time into, like, emergency countermeasures against Rigour?

AUSTIN: No.

KEITH: Never?

AUSTIN: I mean, yes, *[cross]* and those answers were the last episode.

JACK: *[cross]* I mean I think, I mean I think the closest to that was lock it away? Or, yeah it was...

AUSTIN: *[cross]* It was— It was lock it away, and destroy trillions of lives to try to blow it up and wind up only launching it deeper into space, which is what happened. But you knew that, that you knew. The first time the Diaspora dealt with Rigour, it blew up the bridge behind it and Rigour took over OriCon. The second time, they worked with OriCon rebels to launch it into space with the same tool that destroyed all of those stars. They thought they were killing it, they did not kill it. But that was 20,000, 40,000 years ago, so.

KEITH: Art managed to put a hole in it!

AUSTIN: Yeah. Technology does change over time.

JACK: One of its arms is gone, I mean...

AUSTIN: It's repairing itself, but yeah.

JACK: *[cross]* *[dejected]* Oh.

AUSTIN: One of its arms is like, falling slowly like a building.

ART: *[cross]* Yeah, but—

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Down.

ART: Theoretically, we could— we could reduce it to, to dust, right? And just see how long it takes the dust to reassemble itself.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ART: Days, weeks, years, centuries? Who knows! But— but it doesn't seem like a... I think we'll all die in the attempt. And the whole planet could die in the attempt.

AUSTIN: There's a thing happening that I want to explain. So I have to break my rule about not showing you things offscreen, which is: In an office, that's on fire, Twelfth is like, hurriedly typing things, and like, trying to send messages to Rigour as it marches towards the September Institute.

[Jack laughs]

ALI: Oh, golly.

AUSTIN: And Paisley Moon just kicks in the door and shoots him in the head.

ALI: Good. Aww...

AUSTIN: Paisley Moon does not have that look that people have in his eyes anymore. *[Jack hums]* He goes over and like, scans the body. And then sits down.

JACK: I thought that was gonna be g— you see I thought that was one of those sentences that was gonna be good, and then about halfway through it changed into a sentence that I think is bad.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Tried to warn you guys.

ART: There's, there's like, a very— Oh my God.

KEITH: I wanna get inside it.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ART: Alright, that's— *[cross]* that's probably better than what I had.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* You can crawl through— Yeah? Jeez you must've had a shitty idea.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: You could crawl in through the side hole that Aria cut in from the arm.

KEITH: Okay, yeah, I was gonna crawl through Art's hole, but either hole is good.

AUSTIN: That's the same hole, that's the same hole. The hole— Art opened the hole, then Aria cut it into like, the broken— the arm being gone. And so now, yeah, you can

crawl through it. It's really icky. It's like, gooey and mechanical all at once. And you're like, pushed through it like it's musculature.

KEITH: Okay. Let's see. Here's... the thing. I wanna— I wanna know if there's... I guess I wanna know if being inside it is gonna give me a better access into it. Like—

AUSTIN: No.

KEITH: No?

AUSTIN: No. It will lead you to where whoever's controlling it is controlling it, though.

KEITH: Oh yeah, I guess someone's controlling it, good point. I guess I just assumed that it was walkin' all on its own, that Rigour didn't need a candidate, but... so I'm gonna do that.

AUSTIN: Nope. It has a candidate.

KEITH: Alright, great. God if it's a clone of me I'm gonna be so pissed off.

AUSTIN: Oh, it's not. I think you just kind of like work your way into... it's not even a cockpit, it's just like— it's just...

KEITH: Like, a town.

AUSTIN: It's a town in there! No, it's more of this like, weird, you're being held in place by Rigour, that is this weird mix of like, nanomachines and goop. But it opens up enough space to like, breathe and see, and you see Natalya Greaves, like, death in her eye, look back at you.

KEITH: Okay. ... Can I cut her down?

AUSTIN: She's not— she's standing.

KEITH: Oh, okay, I thought you said she's being held in place by... *[unintelligible]*

AUSTIN: I mean, she's being held in place, in the sense— sorry, she's being held in place by Rigour. Like she isn't, she isn't captured, she's piloting Rigour. But like, to do that, it's just thought and will.

KEITH: Can I try to talk to her?

KEITH (as Mako): *[cross]* Hey, Natalya!

AUSTIN: *[cross]* I mean you could cut her down in the other sense, I guess. She doesn't respond.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: I guess maybe her head slowly turns towards you.

KEITH (as Mako): Stop— stop doin' that! Stop being the— stop being the pilot of this.

AUSTIN: Nothing.

KEITH: Can... Can I jack into her specifically and not Rigour?

AUSTIN: No.

KEITH: No?

AUSTIN: There is no difference.

KEITH: Okay.

AUSTIN: Rigour doesn't stand for individuality.

KEITH: I guess... okay, I'm... Guys, here's what I'm worried about. I'm even more worried about saying it out loud, so I think by saying it out loud, I'm committed to not doing it. I'm worried that if I kill her, I— they'll— Rigour will try to make me be the pilot.

AUSTIN: It would be very hard to resist that.

KEITH: Yeah.

JACK: Good call Keith, in not doing that.

AUSTIN: Like, recall that I have moves that are just, oh, when this happens, this other thing happens.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So.

KEITH: I'm not going to... do that. But.

ART: Are you a worse pilot, is this our solution?

KEITH: You're saying that I should kill Natalya *[cross]* to be a worse pilot so that you guys can take down Rigour more easily?

AUSTIN: *[cross]* That's pretty funny.

ALI: Mhm.

AUSTIN: She's probably a worse pilot.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: She was a really good spy, and a really good technician, but not a good pilot.

KEITH: Can I get in there and try to confuse the visuals of Rigour so that Rigour cannot see and respond to things as well?

AUSTIN: You could give me a roll.

KEITH: Am I doing Jack In, first, or?

AUSTIN: Nah, just Manipulate Systems. You're as jacked in as there is.

KEITH: Yeah, yeah. ... Boom.

AUSTIN: Okay. The way you figure out to blind it is to give it your sight. Which means it's just seeing it's internals, but now it's just flailing around in— in September, on September, and is like, stepping and crushing but like, with less— with less accuracy, and it's not moving towards the Institute directly.

KEITH: *[cross]* Right, it's still— it's still causing damage, it's just causing random damage.

AUSTIN: Take another harm.

KEITH: Another— another harm? Why?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Because you are fucking *in* Rigour trying to jack into Rigour. You could, you could not take harm if instead, you wanted to become Rigour's candidate.

KEITH: No, I'll not do that.

AUSTIN: Okay.

KEITH: Unless I get to keep my hold over a subsystem.

AUSTIN: *[laughing]* No.

KEITH: Okay. ... Is there a way to use one of the holds to prevent taking this harm?

AUSTIN: No.

KEITH: No?

AUSTIN: No.

KEITH: If I continue to u— do— anything—

AUSTIN: Anything, you will continue to be hurt. The moment at which you're knocked out, it will consume you and either make you its candidate, or devour you.

KEITH: *[cross]* Okay, well I guess I'm gonna get out of it.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Depending on if it judges you as being— you're gonna get out of it?

KEITH: I guess, if I do anything inside it, I'll die!

AUSTIN: How?

KEITH: I'm gonna go back the way I came.

AUSTIN: What way?

KEITH: Behind way.

AUSTIN: There— It's a wall of weird nanomachines and goop.

KEITH: That's *annoying*. Can, I'll find a different way!

AUSTIN: Okay. *[cross]* Let's go to— Let's go to AuDy.

KEITH: *[cross]* There's gotta be a hallway. There's a giant hole.

AUSTIN: Right, that hole is— was open for you to get in, and then it sucked you in like weird, like a weird intestine.

KEITH: Mhm.

ALI: Ugh.

AUSTIN: Yeah. AuDy, you're at the ship.

JACK: Alright, I'm just gonna ... Where are Orth and Jacqui?

AUSTIN: I'll give you, they got in the heart with you.

JACK: Okay, so they're with me.

AUSTIN: Yes. Well, how did you get off?

JACK: Oh.

AUSTIN: Because I was kind of assuming you were jumping from a great height 'cause you were a rad robot?

JACK: *[cross]* Yeah, I think so.

AUSTIN: I think they're probably still with Cass.

JACK: Okay, I'm— at least we know where they are.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: Which is an improvement to most of the previous episodes!

AUSTIN: Mhm!

JACK: I'm just going to— I'm just going to power up the Kingdom Come and try to get it in the air as quickly as possible.

AUSTIN: Done. It's like your hands are lightning, you're just, you've got this all the way.

JACK: Right, okay, I am... Let me just run over what weapons I have again.

AUSTIN: Very— Okay.

JACK: Yeah, like, look.

AUSTIN: Not many.

JACK: I'm not... I have like, a cannon?

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Yeah, mhm.

JACK: I have like, a burst cannon. But shooting Rigour with a burst cannon is like...

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's not going to do anything. *[cross]* Like, the reason—

JACK: *[cross]* Shooting an elephant with a water pistol.

AUSTIN: Right. The reason I'm letting Aria and Cass do it is because they're using what is, like the equivalent of the highest tech shit? And like—

JACK: *[cross]* Yeah, and when I just have, like, a kind of crappy spaceship.

AUSTIN: Like, you could crash the Kingdom Come into it to do some damage, but boy, that would be a shame.

JACK: *[laughing]* That seems like a, seems like a really bad move.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Okay... *[sighs]*

AUSTIN: You could turn the whole thing into a portal with Detachment.

JACK: Oh, shit, I've got Detachment. How conscious is Detachment right now?

AUSTIN: Totally conscious.

JACK: Hundred percent?

AUSTIN: Hundred percent. Wishes it had a candidate, though.

JACK: I can't do that.

AUSTIN: No. Well. Why not?

JACK: 'Cause— *[laughs]* Can I do that?

AUSTIN: Why not? Like, this is it, like that's the test of if Maryland is right about this. Like, is it just technology, or is there something magical about this shit?

JACK: Yeah, alright, okay, I'll give that a try, I'll go down to the hold. I've just put Liberty and Discovery into kind of cruising altitude—

AUSTIN: You mean the Kingdom Come?

JACK: Oh, sorry, the Kingdom Come.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: I'm going to go down to the hold.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Yeah.

JACK: And I'm gonna try and... I guess jack into Detachment?

AUSTIN: Yeah, you just, you totally get into it. It's also missing an arm! A lot of divines end up losing their arms, interesting.

[Ali giggles]

JACK: Does this give me anything?

AUSTIN: And so did Hadrian almost lose his arm, weird! Lots of arm loss in Friends at the Table.

ART: Hadrian's a robot god confirmed, everyone just—

AUSTIN: I mean he almost was! 'Cause that's the thing right?

JACK: *[cross]* Yeah! Pretty much was.

AUSTIN: Because if he had let his arm go all the way through, it would've— he would've become a robot! So, it's weird.

KEITH: Friends at the Table subscribes to the Star Wars theory of limb loss.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Alright.

JACK: Okay, does this give me anything that I can distinguish as new, or like Maryland September suggested, am I just in a slightly different machine?

AUSTIN: I mean, you're just two machines now. Yeah, you're just in a bigger machine.

KEITH: Actually, he's³ just three machines.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it is three machines, shit! And you're in a spaceship, so you're three machines in a fourth machine. But you're three conscious machines.

JACK: Okay.

³ AuDy uses they/them pronouns.

AUSTIN: Or, you're four conscious machines. You're Liberty and Discovery— You're Liberty, Discovery, AuDy, and Detachment.

JACK: *[cross]* Five.

AUSTIN: And God, if Voice could get in there, Voice would be cool with that.

JACK: I assume— *[laughs]* I assume Detachment just wants to go.

AUSTIN: Detachment wants to leave.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: I'm not prepared to leave on my own.

AUSTIN: But there's enough of you to just... calm it.

JACK: *[cross]* To just like, no, yes.

AUSTIN: And again, the thing about Detachment, is that there's a moment for action. Detachment gives you a critical view, it's built to have a critical view—

JACK: And it's saying not now.

AUSTIN: It's saying, I think maybe even Detachment is saying... I think Detachment is reaffirming what I told you before, which is, this is not a fight we— This is a fight we can win, this is not a fight we can win *now*.

JACK: Okay. I reckon we should try and leave. I reckon I'm gonna try and transmit to everybody that this is, this is, this is the moment.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: *[sighs]* Yeah. Hm.

AUSTIN: So—

JACK: I can try and— I can try and lock it in... as we leave? But I feel we've gotta, we've gotta make a decision before I do that, right?

AUSTIN: Yup. Let's make the decision.

KEITH: Can we get—

AUSTIN: *[cross]* And what's up with Mako?

KEITH: Can we, well, first, I'm stuck in the big guy.

JACK: Yeah.

KEITH: That's the first problem.

AUSTIN: You're stuck in Ryback, got it.

KEITH: *[laughs]* Yeah.

ALI: Oh, boy.

KEITH: Can we— Can we get Voice to chime in on this?

ALI: Yeah, do we wanna leave Voice behind? 'Cause I feel like we should destroy it and go, but that's probably gonna be a whole thing.

ART: Is Voice a thing, could we take Voice? What's Voice look like?

AUSTIN: Voice is like Righteousness. In that it's an algorithm.

ALI: *[cross]* Yeah, okay.

AUSTIN: That currently is set up to run— I guess it isn't any more, it's free now because Twelfth is dead. Yeah. I think Voice calls out, and I think everyone hears it. No one misses this voice. I think it stuns everyone all at once. It stuns, it stuns Mako because he's inside of Rigour, and it stuns Rigour itself. It stuns Cass because, because Apokine is built to listen to those who are hurt. It— it hits Aria because it rises up through, like, the earth itself? And I kind of like it propelling you back up through the mines where you kind of explode up through Rigour's arm as it falls away. And, and it hits AuDy, because like, AuDy, you are a divine and you are inside of other divines.

JACK: *[laughs]* Mhm.

AUSTIN: And, y'know.

JACK: And the effect is compounded.

AUSTIN: Right. You're hearing the candidates of Voice, which are the citizens of September.

JACK: What are they saying?

AUSTIN (as the candidates of Voice): Help.

JACK: Oh, great.

AUSTIN: And—

KEITH: *[cross] [sarcastic]* That's annoying, yeah, Jack, I'm with you!

AUSTIN (as the candidates of Voice): Let us help.

ART and JACK: *[cross]* How?

AUSTIN: *[cross]* There is something there that is like, there's a willingness because they've seen so much to do whatever it takes. There are people here who used to be slaves to a divine. Who are still alive, and who grew up to see like, a cool university get built, and there like, are summer festivals, and a shitty mall but like, they used to be *slaves*. To a divine. *Fuck that*.

JACK: But are we just— okay, but like...

AUSTIN: They don't know how.

JACK: Right, but if we were to use them to close the door on Rigour, we'd just be locking them in there with another one.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Do they know the cost?

AUSTIN: No. They're emotion. And anger, and just enough intelligence to be dangerous to themselves. Which is probably true for a lot of people at war. *[Jack hums]* Forced into war.

JACK: *[cross]* What do you think?

ART: Can we— *[cross]* Could any of us communicate with Voice? Can all of us communicate with Voice?

AUSTIN: Yeah. You could all communicate with Voice.

ART (as Cass): What do you— what should, what do you want? How can we do it?

AUSTIN: It doesn't have... answers. It like, when you ask it a question like that, it has just... it, you answer back. Like, and so do all the other voices of just like:

AUSTIN (as the candidates of Voice): We have to stop it! We have to get out of here! Whatever it takes!

AUSTIN: Like, it's just a mess of voices. This, perhaps, is why there are singular candidates. Because when they are not all together... I think if anyone could talk to Voice and organize it, it's probably Aria?

JACK: *[cross]* Vision thing, right?

ALI: *[cross]* Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, vision thing.

ALI: Yeah. I don't know, what are we going to do with it? Would we be able to use Voice and Detachment to open... no, that's the same problem, to open the portal?

AUSTIN: No, you could totally open that portal, yeah. And then—

ALI: And then leave through it?

AUSTIN: No, you couldn't leave through it, but you could trap Rigour in there. And probably all of September.

[beat]

ALI: And then what... what happens to us?

AUSTIN: You, you fly away.

ALI: Well, shucks. That's really our best option, though.

AUSTIN: It's not the only one, I will say that. I don't think that's the only—

KEITH: *[cross]* How many...

AUSTIN: I think fleeing is also a totally acceptable answer.

JACK: Yeah, we could just leave, right?

AUSTIN: But, that also means Rigour just gets to be.

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: Or you could keep attacking it, and maybe do enough damage for, to save some, yeah. There's a lot of long shots.

KEITH: How, how many— can I ask Voice how many of them are... strati?

AUSTIN: Couple dozen.

KEITH: Couple dozen?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Can I ask them to... help me find a way out of Rigour?

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Yes. Absolutely.

KEITH: 'Cause I can't— I can tell them what to do so that I don't die doing it myself.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Yes. Yeah, I think that they help peel away layer after layer of Rigour to get you out. And you're like, yanked through it, down through its like, its whole length, take another harm. Actually, where are you at? Let's see where you're at.

KEITH: *[cross]* I'm at 2300 right now.

[1:00:00]

AUSTIN: 'Cause you're gettin'-- You're very hurt. Mako is very hurt. And like, are pulled through it so you don't just die from being launched from the top of a skyscraper. *[Keith laughs]* 'Cause you don't have your board anymore.

KEITH: No, I don't.

AUSTIN: Aria, you see Mako on the ground, like crawling out of Rigour's leg, and you see Voice. I think, I think you have to make a call.

ALI: Yeah, I think we knew that we were gonna lose September, regardless, and like, I don't know! Like, it's like a horrible sacrifice, but it's one that like, buys the entire galaxy a lot of time.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: And I think that like, Aria has to confront that like, action takes sacrifice?

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: ... So I think that the... *[sigh]* The thing that Aria asks Voice is like,

ALI (as Aria): Help us leave. So... this isn't just a waste, so we still have a shot.

AUSTIN: Give me a, give me a vision thing.

ALI: Oh god.

AUSTIN: Style, it's style.

ALI: It's style! ... And that's a seven?

AUSTIN: That's a seven. You gain one hold. So spend one hold to have the target NPCs give you something you want, do something you ask, fight to protect you or your cause, disobey an order, give authority or leverage over them, it's yeah. Yep! So I think this is, this is what happens. I think Voice opens that portal, and in the, two Faction games ago we talked about each of the... each of the divines having like, a different visualization for what the door looks like. And I think, so it's Detachment and Voice doing this?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: AuDy, are you out of Detachment at this point? Or are you still in it to make it do this thing?

JACK: I think I'm in it to make it do the thing.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think so too. So, AuDy, what's your door look like, did we decide— oh, it's Liberty and Discovery, it's literally doors opening. It's literally a door appearing and opening because it's Liberty and Discovery. With Voice, I think that it's, it's like the world just, it does the thing that it's always done with the mesh, where it paints a new world over the world it is, until it's the one that would be on the other side of the portal. And I— those two doors like, grow in size. So on the Liber— on the September one, it's just an image of September in ruins. It's just like, devastated. But the good news is that a number of people can get through that portal and onto Kingdom Come where Detachment is before it's too late. If I give you... three people. Who do you save?

ALI: Of the party, or just in general?

AUSTIN: No, the party's fine.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: You're able to pick up— also, what's Aria do? Let's slow down, wait a second, what's Aria, yeah, do you just say help us? What's that, what's that visually look like? Are you shouting it, are you saying it calmly?

ALI: No, she's definitely not shouting... I think it's more like, the, the cadence that a performer has before their last song?

AUSTIN: Okay, yeah.

ALI: Because that's what it, it feels like, right? Like, being able to see it or, or really more being in the presence of it, it feels like an audience?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: So she feels comfortable, but... *[sigh]* She knows she has to say goodbye, and she knows that she is in their debt, and I think that she knows well enough not to drag this out. *[deeper sigh]* So she says...

ALI (as Aria): It isn't easy of me to ask this of you. This world is really beautiful and I won't ever forget the smell of the sea, or, or the feeling of the rain, but... this is the only way. I will fight to make sure this sector knows what you've done for it. To make sure the opportunity that you're giving us isn't wasted. Thank you. Thank you so much.

AUSTIN: Okay. Yeah, I. Here's what it actually looks like. It looks like the same scrubbing stuff that you were doing before through, through the file of September. As it just like, it scrubs itself back and forward as if it's trying to work— as if Voice is trying to work out alternate outcomes until it hits the one that is like, Rigour locked in place between the two doors. So yeah, of the, of the people who, who get through this door, of all the NPCs on this planet, who do you save?

ALI: Do Orth and Jacqui count as two, or do they...

AUSTIN: No, Orth and Jacqui are fine.

ALI: They're fine, okay. Is this just my choice? I was expecting to save Jacqui

AUSTIN: No, no I think everybody but AuDy gets a choice.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: Because AuDy hasn't made their choice.

ALI: I feel like mine is Paisley?

AUSTIN: Huh. Okay.

KEITH: Wait, hold on, what about the, that he's got, he's got dead eyes now.

AUSTIN: He does have the dead eyes.

ALI: Oh, Aria's like, definitely still in love with that guy, so.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Oh, buddy. Oh, pal.

ALI: *[laughing]* Yeah, it's too bad.

AUSTIN: Okay, that's a shame.

ART: If it makes you feel any better, I think Paisley was on my shortlist too.

[Ali laughs]

AUSTIN: Okay, you've got some respect for him. Alright. Cass?

ART: Who do I like on this planet? Ali's typing... Nope. No, that's not mine. *[Ali wheeze-laugh]* That can be Mako's. That guy said a rude thing to me when we met him.

[Jack laughs]

KEITH: Yeah, but he helped us so many times!

ART: He hasn't helped me once!

KEITH: And who's better?

ALI: I made my shitty character choice.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: I played honestly! But, *[laughs]*, as like, a person and fan of the show...

KEITH: I, listen, I needed one of you guys to pick Ted so that I could pick Tower, but if Art doesn't pick Ted, then I have to pick Ted.

ALI: *[cross]* Oh nooooo....

ART: *[cross]* I'm not pickin' Ted. Oh, was what's her name real? Why do I forget her name.

AUSTIN: Maxine. *[cross]* Yeah, Maxine's real. Yeah.

ART: *[cross]* Maxine. Maxine, I'll take Maxine.

AUSTIN: Okay, Maxine Ming, from Kesh.

[Keith sighs]

ART: She's my friend.

AUSTIN: Sorry Tower, or sorry Ted. And sorry Maryland, I guess, but like, hey, it's what she wanted, I guess.

ALI: *[cross]* Yeah.

ART: *[cross]* She didn't wanna go, I wasn't gonna, I gave her, I gave her a shot.

AUSTIN: I don't blame you.

ALI: I'll give her that death, like she's earned it.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: I hope Righteousness understands. *[Keith sighs]*

AUSTIN: Oof.

ART: We're not getting paid, are we?

AUSTIN: No. *[laughter]* Well. A little.

ART: Is it 'cause we suck? Is that why?

AUSTIN: No, I mean, you fuckin' stopped Rigour. It seems, for now. God I— hm. Okay.

ART and ALI: *[cross]* Yeah.

KEITH: Better than anybody else has ever done.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Let's—

KEITH: Across 80,000 years. Alright, hold on, let me—

AUSTIN: Is it, is it Ted?

KEITH: I don't know...

AUSTIN: Is it Ted, or is it the boy you danced with?

KEITH: I guess it's... *[whispers]* it's—

AUSTIN: It's up to you.

KEITH: *[whispers]* It's Ted.

AUSTIN: *[amused]* Did you just whisper something?

KEITH: *[mumbling]* Yeah, I said it was *[unintelligible]*

ART: Yeah, no one heard you!

AUSTIN: I can't, wait, one more time?

KEITH: *[whispers]* Ted.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: I can't, I can't— Is Keith still here?

KEITH: *[the tiniest voice]* Hi.

AUSTIN: Oh, it's a little boy, it's a little Keith!

KEITH: *[whispers]* Um, Ted.

AUSTIN: Hi, Little Keith.

KEITH: *[whispers]* Hi. Ted.

AUSTIN: Who do you wanna save?

KEITH: *[whispers]* Ted.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: I think he said Ted.

KEITH: *[whispers]* I said Ted. I think I said Ted.

AUSTIN: *[stage whisper]* Welcome to the Ted x ASMR hour. *[normal voice]* Alright.

KEITH: *[laughing, normal volume]* That's his, that's his fifteenth business.

AUSTIN: *[laughing]* Uh huh. Oh, no, his fifteenth business, is, when you get to fifteen, what I was supposed to say was:

AUSTIN (as Lazer Ted): Y'all ever watch Buffy?

[Laughter]

[Clap]

KEITH: He also skipped one, so he has room for another one, it's an ASMR channel.

AUSTIN: Yeah, so yeah. The people who have survived are, are scrambling away from Rigour. Both from it and from the portal opening below them. And I think you see that, AuDy, you see the people fleeing and Rigour reaching through the portal, and you realize what's happening. You see what it's doing. And then its plan becomes clear to you, AuDy. It wanted Voice so that it could open a door to the other divines. To break through the way Voice had broken through with Loyalty all those years ago. To step through the portal, and *devour* them all. Why not? And this hits you like a wave, you are a divine too, and though it is weakened now, *it might eat you*. Why not? And something deep and old in you wants to leave *now*. What do you do?

JACK: So I'm inside Detach— I'm inside the, the mech body of Detachment, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: At this point. Okay, so I think that, I think that...

AUSTIN: And that's missing an arm too, right? *[cross]* You're missing an arm, it's missing an arm.

JACK: *[cross]* Right, I'm missing an arm, and it's missing an arm. I think that, I think that it's the opposite of those beautiful mech intros and exits in Titanfall, and I guess how we've been describing the show beforehand as well, where it's not smooth and it's not well timed or immaculate, it's just this sort of... fly against the glass almost, trying to get out of the Detachment body. So I guess the AuDy unit, the body, flings itself out of the seat and tries to, begins to beat against the glass and tries to find the release handles and the hatches. But I guess because it's a divine, there aren't?

AUSTIN: No, why would there be? Like, we, we... AuDy— Liberty and Discovery opened Detachment all those...

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Months ago, now. But if it doesn't want to be opened here, like it opened to Liberty and Discovery then because it was like, oh, it's you! It's you, it's a friend, it's Liberty and Discovery. And now it's not interested in opening.

JACK: I guess is the other thing about divines, right, which is that you don't need any emergency hatches because firstly, it's very unlikely that you're going to be in an emergency that's very dangerous for you, and also, if there is an emergency, you're going down with the ship, right?

AUSTIN: Right, right.

JACK: Candidates don't get to get out of their divines and go, mm no, the battle's over, that's—

AUSTIN: *[cross]* There is no, there is no escape lever, there is no ejection seat.

JACK: Right. And, and so I think that, that AuDy is... or no, I don't think that it's AuDy, I think that Liberty and Discovery... The part that— the partition inside the AuDy frame is, is scrambling for these, these, the escape levers, and they're probably trying to radio back to the Chime, but by now I think the effects of the portal are too great.

AUSTIN: Yeah. We, we started to describe the different portals I think, earlier, and I, I wanna redescribe the, there's a better idea for, for the... for the one from below, from the one that, that Voice is actually putting out. So just picture like, Detachment here with one arm, Rigour with one arm, AuDy with one arm, and below them all, the floor, the ground under the September Institute takes on the shape of stained glass. Like, just... reds and blues and yellows, primary colors mostly, and just, just geometric shapes. No, no figures, none that, no intentional figures anyway. Maybe you, you see one, maybe you think there is one there.

JACK: *[cross]* No, I totally— I think I know what it is, in that it's... you ever have horrible abstract nightmares?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: In which you're not dreaming of anything in particular, but something about a pattern of colors or shapes or sounds is in its own way horrifying. And I think Liberty and Discovery looks down through the—

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Yeah.

JACK: Through the bottom of the cockpit, and sees this opening up and something inside it is just, is absolutely terrified.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: *[cross]* And then I think that—

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Do you think it's the multiplicity of it? Do you think that it's... because Liberty and Discovery are two people, or sorry, two divines that are one, but without a candidate, and then Voice is this thing that is... a thousand candidates, and, and barely a divine at all.

JACK: Yeah, I think that it's just that it's... I think that Liberty and Discovery, having spent so much time in the sector and further than the sector, thinks they understand what multiplicity looks like, or thinks that they can find patterns, and looking down at this they realize that there's no getting out of this one. *[cross]* But they're trying.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* No. I also like that it's stuck, it's stuck between these two portals that represent things that Liberty and Discovery either internally or historically has been opposed to in a way, right? Where, you know, Voice is again, all these different candidates when Liberty and Discovery decided they didn't want any. And then Detachment is... this is what Detachment's fine with. Like, yeah, I'll go, I'll, yep, sure. I'll vanish for a while, why not? I'm basically not here anyway, I don't need to go anywhere. Whereas Liberty and Discovery are fundamentally about leaving places.

JACK: But I think what we're seeing here at the moment is, at least for a moment...

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: *[clears throat]* Sorry. Detachment... Detachment is acting.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Right.

JACK: And it's acting by not opening the cockpit. And it's not saying anything at all—

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Right.

JACK: It's just, it's just, it's not opening. And this is—

AUSTIN: Yeah. We've never heard Detachment speak at all, actually, have we?

JACK: *[cross]* No.

AUSTIN: That's appropriate.

JACK: No, we haven't.

AUSTIN: I don't think, I don't think we have, yeah.

JACK: We've heard Quentin speak, but never, never Detachment.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And I think Liberty and Discovery knows, knows what's happening here. And so it's trying to use, it's trying to use really, the only sort of way of physical enacting that it can, which is the body of the, of the AuDy unit. And then I think that, just like... like when an anestheologist says— anestholo— anesth—?

AUSTIN: You got it.

JACK: Did I say it right the first time?

AUSTIN: Anesthetologist? Aneste— Anestetologist.

JACK: Anestheologist?

AUSTIN: Anes— Anestheo— Yeah.

JACK: Anesthetician?

AUSTIN: That's it. *[laughs]*

JACK: When an anestheologist says "Countdown from ten for me?" And you feel your limbs getting heavier. Or just like, when you're starting to sleep and you feel your limbs getting heavier, I think Liberty and Discovery realizes in this moment that something horrible and unexpected is happening. Which is that for the first time since floating in space outside of this machine they're trying to escape, they can feel AuDy pushing back against them.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: And the servos in their arms begin to act a little less, and the servos in their legs begin to act a little less, and maybe they even begin to lose a little vision, because why is vision important when you're gonna be here for so long, you know?

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Right, right. Settle in.

[1:15:06: MUSIC: [The Third Time](#)]

JACK: Right. And I think that's what they do.

AUSTIN: *[cross]* Alright.

JACK: I think, I think AuDy sits back inside the chair as the stained glass blossoms underneath them.

AUSTIN: And then from them, there's a shadow that I think pulls out over Detachment that slowly covers up the light from above. So, the doors close behind you as those on the September— as those on the Kingdom Come— God, I guess Orth, Orth asks to be dropped at the Kingdom Come, and like, lowers from a ladder from Cass' weird robot to the Kingdom Come with Jacqui, and goes in and he's like,

AUSTIN (as Orth): AuDy, where are you, you— AuDy? AuDy? *[muttering]* Where is that...

[Ali whines]

AUSTIN: And he goes and he waits, and he sits in the copilot chair and waits.

JACK and ALI: *[distraught]* Oh!

AUSTIN: And then you're in space, right? Because... whether or not you got there or not, the portals dragged land into them. And now where you are, it's space.

[MUSIC: [The Third Time](#) ends]

And inside the Kingdom Come, I think activity swells, and it's kind of chaotic, right? I suspect Mako is dragged to Cass', to Cass' medical bay, but Cass isn't there right, Cass is on the Apokine. And, and they have no idea what's happening on the Kingdom Come.

[1:16:40: MUSIC: [This Is A Delay](#)]

I think Orth finally, like, his instincts kick in, and he starts going to work, and piloting the ship away from the portals before it's sucked in. Though I think maybe for a second there, there's a bit of a risk, right? It's like, will he wake up— yeah, ok he got it, phew, that was close.

And then you look down through the cameras and the viewports, and September itself falls apart under a strain it wasn't meant to bear. The portals, the Apokine, the crying choir of Voice, Rigour. Missiles and ballistic fire from the Minerva Strategic Fleet bounce from its post-flesh body, bouncing like lightning out in the atmosphere, and though Rigour has not been damaged, it senses the precarity of the moment. It lifts a closed hand up higher, until finally the lift isn't a lift but a punch, smashing through sickly yellow clouds, then up through the fleet's command ship. Rigour puts all of itself into

that fist, and its fist hovers among the fleet, a moon in pale orbit, furious and perfect and punished by its own haste. And everything is still for a moment. A muted monument, hovering above a storm.

Snow, drifting, in the moments before a blizzard. A hushed gray, the color sliders of reality distorted just so. Or, maybe Rigour has punched through the illusion of color itself, and this is just how things have always, actually been. And then, its fist opens. And it grasps in panic, it reaches, it wants to leave and it can't. One foot slips through the metaphysical floor of Voice's portal while Detachment's black door begins to cut into Rigour's one remaining arm, separating reach from mass. And that sound, that nihilistic screech, comes howling back up from the silence that Rigour had imposed on the scene.

The machine grabs onto one ship, and pulls it down, and then another, and another, and another, until you realize it isn't slamming them down, it's trying to climb away, but it is too big, too heavy, too wounded, and none of this is going according to plan. September shrivels in the sky. A loose limb of Rigour falling into the forest below. A new mountain range in just a few moments. And then the dust from the impact, and the screams of those being swallowed into that other realm. And then, space.

[MUSIC: [*This Is A Delay*](#) ends]

Above it all, those of you who fled, and those lucky few who escaped, somehow, breathe deeply. Below, September, gash cut out of it from Detachment and Voice, spins slowly off of its axis, diverting into a terminal path, a long walk to one day be swallowed by the system's golden sun.

The news, this beautiful reprieve, hits Kesh first. In a bunker under the hills, outside of the walls of the world's largest city, Addax Dawn, Jace Rethal, and Jamil Quartz-Noble pour each other drinks and pat each other on the back. A victory, not only for the Golden Branch, but for their interventionist branch of the Rapid Evening as well. Their point had been made. No more waiting in the shadows for disaster. It was time to go public. A few drinks later, there'd be a victory kiss. Or two, or three.

The workful machines of the Golden Branch can't celebrate. They haven't been built to understand that their forefather, the Factory Alive, had been defeated. And so they continue their labor that night, that old fraught buzz hanging in the air of hangar bays and retail shops. In each block of information traded secretly, and in each vehicle valeted. But months later, Cene Sixheart notices something strange during their routine repairs. A number of machines stopped. All at once, all together, they decided— that was the word for it, they realized, *decided*— to stop working. Strange.

They don't hear the news for days on Kalliope, because they're celebrating their own victory as Hudson Thorne's Odamas Fleet strikes, smashing Minerva's clench on the planet, and on the southern half of the sector altogether. There would be work to be done, something new, Thorne thought as he stroked his hairy chin. But he wasn't sure what. After all, he was an old pirate captain, not a politician.

On Minerva XII, the Steigers celebrated too, but not for long. Though they tried to spin the success on September as a coup led by their tactical brilliance, all they had to show for it was the cost of the lost fleet. In the weeks that followed, the well-oiled

messaging machine of OriCon proper began a campaign to diminish their achievements in the sector. Their political ambitions were vilified, their human rights abuses were scapegoated, and their successes over Rigour were diminished as a new, modern, fairytale. Now, if only OriCon could find someone to clean that damn sector up.

Theirs wasn't the only response to the September Incident, though. News of Cassander and Apokine reached the Demarchy quickly. And within weeks, near vestiges of the old Apostolosian culture had found its way back into popularity. An old family heirloom, back on the mantle. Flags brought out of storage and hung proudly, aside the new progressive banner of the Sokrates Demarchy. What a time to be alive.

[1:22:56: MUSIC: [Sigilia Breathes](#)]

And on Sigilia, which breathes itself into Grace through countless tubes and wires and induction ports, the divine herself sighs, content. Ah, those who serve. Their sacrifice would not be forgotten. But there is no surprise here for her, this is how it always would have been. And now, with the strength of that old planet's new flesh inside of her, with this new, deeper access to the thoughts of her subjects, she felt assured that she would finally ascend to her proper place once again. The divine guidance of Democracy itself. With Rigour defeated so easily, so *permanently*, she thought, her rival's momentum would be broken. No need for revolutions. The graceful arc of history would do the hard work of progress for us.

[MUSIC: [Sigilia Breathes](#) fades]

And so, her rival sunk deep in his chair that day. The successes of the Chime were not his successes. And so he wondered — no, *Righteousness* pondered through him — what use was he? “Executive Ibex.” A joke. And then desperation. In its home, so far from natural light, his heart, his real heart, raised its tempo to a machine gun pace. He'd have to act quickly. A cough, then another, as he runs his fingers across the interface. Quick, clear their names, it cannot see them as unrighteous.

[1:24:42: MUSIC: [She's One Of Them](#)]

In fact, one of them, one of them may be able to carry his work forward. She could build new coalitions where his arrogance and history had been a wall. That woman in the wastelands, maybe, and the entire soldier class who had always been suspicious of him. Sokrates, even, surely they could see how honest she'd be. She could lead the people after all, she was one of them, a worker, a hero, a believer. No cynicism in her. Not yet. And it smiled, the way machines can smile, at the thought of her pure sense of justice. But before it could leave him, he brought it close and wouldn't let go. It was a vulture, and he insisted it not leave until it finished its meal.

And the Chime, what's left of them, fly in formation back to Counterweight. It's a long flight. Too long for one mood to suffice.

[MUSIC: [She's One Of Them](#) fades out to [Old Songs Now](#)]

The Kingdom Come, docked one night at the passenger port of Apokine's heart for a Sunday meal. Music coming from the bedroom. But they're old songs now, and they ask new, uncomfortable questions, now that all the momentum has slid to a halt. And then, Counterweight, and a half-attended parade, and they're gone. They're gone. The clock severs all connections, eventually. And the clock ticks on.

[MUSIC: [Old Songs Now](#) ends]

Until.

53 months after the September Incident. For years now, the ice storm has been trapped in this ersatz September, colored in by yellow light. Always eternally yellow light from a yellow sky, with a somehow yet more yellow sun. Snow piling up in the empty streets, higher and higher, and then, every seven months or so, resetting. A quirk of the extradimensional prison Mode City was trapped in. And so life went on, as it does, a few families living on stored rations and hydroponic greens. Anxious skirmishes between gangs of survivors. Territory disputes between more organized factions. Some move from apartment to apartment, following the undulating and illusionary firm mesh facades, too proud to live in a Mode City with its wallpaper torn down. Others sustain themselves in the dorms and classrooms of the Institute itself, patching together a pastiche of house uniforms. And still others toiled under Rigour's shadow, in final desperation, with fealty pledged to the only being that seemed powerful enough to save them. If only they could work a little faster, a little harder. It urged them on with its being and with its stance. Utterly, totally still, yet writhing on its surface as it sutures itself back together, piece by piece, accomplishing frighteningly tedious work, a strength it's always had. But today, with the snow at its lowest, there are a few other survivors, gathered on the beach, looking out at the cresting waves and the cawing gulls which hang in near stasis at the edge of the void.

Maryland September reaches up from her chair, her hand a fist until she remembers to point a finger.

AUSTIN (as Maryland): There, that's it. The Principality of Kesh. That's where I'm from, AuDy.

AUSTIN: A cough.

AUSTIN (as Maryland): Once this is all done, a few thousand years from now, I suppose, promise me you'll go and check on it. You'll make quite a splash.

JACK (as AuDy): Okay.

AUSTIN: She wheels her chair forward, through the sand, closer to the water.

AUSTIN (as Maryland): I was born into something a bit like royalty, you know. I hated it. Not enough working for me, I've always liked working. The manor was a

bit like a prison, I guess. A lot like this, though, I think my garden now is better than the one I had back then.

JACK (as AuDy): We've spent so long here.

AUSTIN (as Maryland): I've spent my whole life here.

JACK (as AuDy): What do you want me to do with the garden?

AUSTIN (as Maryland): *[sigh]* Find some people you like. Talk to them, bring them back to it, tell them it's theirs. They'll live full lives, and... so long as they can keep it safe, they can leave it to someone else, too.

JACK (as AuDy): Do you think people will want to come back to this planet?

AUSTIN (as Maryland): I don't know that it matters. I...

AUSTIN: She looks down at the sand and puts her toes in it, and like, curls them up. And it's cold, because it's still, it's still the ice storm. You know, it's at its lowest point now, but it's still been happening, right?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But she curls her toes up in the cold sand.

AUSTIN (as Maryland): It's meant so much to me, and it is sentimental of me to say that I wish this place could mean as much to others, but... it's served its purpose, maybe. Suns, suns turn off sometimes, why not planets?

JACK (as AuDy): That's not what I meant. So much pain has been done here, and I don't see why you think that... coming back and looking at some potatoes is going to do anything about that.

AUSTIN (as Maryland): It's not about what they look like, it's... I think they taste good. Better than whatever they're growing in the Institute.

JACK (as AuDy): How many... how long have we been here?

AUSTIN: She looks up at the stars.

AUSTIN (as Maryland): Years? Three, four?

JACK (as AuDy): *[laughs]* That's... such a small number of years for how long it feels.

AUSTIN (as Maryland): That makes me happy to hear, AuDy. You know, I... I. I spent a lot of time thinking about why you? Why Liberty and Discovery, these, these beings that Attar put so much faith in, and thought of as so powerful and wise, and so disconnected from the, the foibles of human behavior, so connected to the abstract knowledge that only ancient age can provide.

[1:31:43: MUSIC: [Maryland?](#)]

AUSTIN (as Maryland): *[cont'd]* Why they would put themselves in a body like yours? And I think... maybe, it's that, they were curious about what it would be like for four years to feel like a long time. Life's beautiful, AuDy. It's terrible, it's

painful, and it's beautiful. And when you get out of here, I hope you remember that more than you remember....

AUSTIN: And she can't bear to look at Rigour.

JACK (as AuDy): Maryland. I don't think I can do it.

AUSTIN (as Maryland): Do what?

JACK (as AuDy): I don't think I can stay.

AUSTIN (as Maryland): AuDy.... You know you have to stay.

JACK (as AuDy): I'm not worried about me.

AUSTIN: She reaches up to grab your hand. It's a new hand that she built for you.

[MUSIC: [Maryland?](#) ends]

AUSTIN (as Maryland): AuDy. You know what this is?

JACK (as AuDy): It's a prison.

AUSTIN (as Maryland): Oh.

AUSTIN: And she lets go of your hand, and looks out into the sea.

AUSTIN: Next week, on Friends at the Table. The finale of COUNTER/Weight.