

### COUNTER/Weight 43: A Splintered Branch, A Ringing Bell Pt. 3

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AUSTIN [NARRATION]:

An excerpt from the journal of Addax Dawn, agent of the Rapid Evening, Lilac Duke of the Principality of Kesh.

Finally, after dismissing our testimony and reports, our studies and our evidence, the Golden Branch has come to the realization all too late that Rigour remains a threat.

It was never defeated, only ever delayed. I fear that it may only ever be delayed. Our reconnaissance shows that every player, large and small, now rushes to prepare some solution for a problem that each hopes someone else will solve. But each proposed solution is just another sort of devastation.

In the quiet halls of the Demarchy, the secret cult of Apostolos guards carefully the Gnosis virus. That diskette, secluded away by Kevin Vacation, from an experimental lab, so many years ago. A virus that weaves between flesh and mesh, connecting neural pathways to pure information, and then rewriting language, thought itself. Such a weapon could maybe change what Rigour is. But what would it do to the soldiers nearby? What would it do if deployed on Counterweight? Who needs Rigour when the virus could make us blank slates in an instant?

The Steiger siblings, meanwhile, do more than tinker with taboo Rigour tech. They've built their own combustor, like the old ones. The ones we used before, all those ages ago, to fling Rigour away, at the costs of hundreds of billions of lives. This time, it would be trillions. Without any connection downbranched to Oricon or the Diaspora, without sending warning first so that they could prepare, there might not be a chance to stop the force and fire of Minerva's bomb.

And Grace.

[Music: [The Long Way Around](#) begins - 00:01:59]

Oh, Grace. I can feel her whispers, still. I - I tried to explain it to Jace, once. Fifteen years since I piloted Peace, now. And, fifteen years since I stopped being a candidate, and I still hear Grace. And the terrifying thing is that her solution isn't a superweapon at all. It's bodies. It's just bodies, one and then another, and then another, a planet worth, and then a sector, and then another. Bury Rigour in population count, she thinks. There's enough people to go around.

And when I run the numbers, when I put our machines, Rigour-kin themselves, to work, I fear she's right. This isn't the Golden War. The old model, the one where heroes like Jace, like beautiful Jace, do the unthinkable, the numbers don't support that view anymore. There is no miracle coming. There isn't a magical bullet for Rigour, there is just flesh and metal, and whatever is in between.

[Music: [\*The Long Way Around\*](#) ends]

AUSTIN: Uh, Christ. Who's next? Mako.

KEITH: Hi!

AUSTIN: You need a solitaire scene.

KEITH: I do need a solitaire scene, and I have that list riiiiiiight heeeere. Okay. So. I think that, I think that like, Mako's stuck in a situation where he's trying to prepare for whatever comes next, but doesn't really know exactly how to do that, besides to like, get back in the mesh and train and hang out with the clones and make sure everybody is functioning properly.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: And so, I guess I've been spending time with my clones, trying to get a handle on what's happening, and we have agreed to bear this crisis with patience and care, which is a long time coming, [chuckles] for the clones. I think that -

AUSTIN: Did you - you must have - do you think you lost a clone in that last fight?

KEITH: Based on how you described it, it seems that they only took out the drilling, like, clone -

AUSTIN: It's definitely the first time they've been in a real fight like that, right?

KEITH: Oh, for sure. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AUSTIN: Do you think they're just a little somber?

KEITH: Yeah. I think that they've been on their own, in small groups, doing covert shit, but I don't think it's ever come to, like, real actual violence before.

AUSTIN: Right, right.

KEITH: So I think that there's a somber - there's a degree of the rest of the clones growing up in a way that maybe Mako has, but likes to - gets to pretend that he hasn't.

AUSTIN: Right, but they haven't had the same... they haven't gotten through shit, the way Mako has?

KEITH: Yeah, they haven't had any, a flashpoint to where it's 'this is a real thing.' And I have.

AUSTIN: So in some ways - right. They're not hiding. They have no interest in hiding - or not interest, they're not practiced in hiding that they're actually really nervous about this.

KEITH: Right, yeah.

AUSTIN: Alright, cool. I think Lazer Ted debuts that track to them, with Aria on it. It's a real good track.

KEITH: They all dance. All the clone Makos dance.

AUSTIN: Alright. That's a really weird scene. We're gonna move on, because I can't deal with the thought of like, six Makos dancing.

[Laughter]

ALI: How many nipples are there?

AUSTIN: To a Riff Raff track.

KEITH: Nah, they've got, they've got like, battle, they've got kevlar - or whatever future kevlar is on.

AUSTIN: God, we have to move on.

SYLVIA: So, oddly enough, three nipples.

KEITH: One of them has three nipples. The one that doesn't have a phobia -

JACK [overlapping]: Let's go! Let's go!

KEITH [overlapping]: Like the one that isn't scared of one thing -

SYLVIA: Okay, let's go -

AUSTIN: Aria! Oh, okay, let's give you a point for prep. Okay. Aria?

ALI: Um, yeah, I think, um, this is the last scene before the big one.

AUSTIN: Well, it's your last scene before the big one.

ALI: Yeah. Aria has been overseeing the retrofit of labour riggers for combat. Um, she was pleased and impressed with the cutting work of her technicians and makeshift armourers.

AUSTIN: I think that this is a scene... I think this is a really ironic scene. It is a collection of people. I think the Vanguard has a bunch of people who do logistics work, and canvassing, and like, the sort of day-to-day work of political organization, and they've gathered, I think, with... You kind of put the call out, said "hey, it's time to get ready." And you can't just arm an army in broad daylight, like this. So I think you're out at the ruined dome, under the shadow of Order. Or - maybe, I think it returned to Peace, last thing. So under the shadow of Peace, with Sister Rust.

ALI: Yeah, I was thinking that part of this was Aria meeting with Tea, and Rust.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think Tea... I think Rust is hosting it. There are probably hundreds of people here, working on machines. The Iron Choir has like, not swallowed their pride, that's the wrong phrase, but like, put aside their notion of like, the Dead Metal as the, this is like, perfect is the enemy of the good situation. No, yeah, the reason we don't like Live Metal is Rigour, and Rigour is clearly this thing that is so much more terrifying than an old Rook. An old Rook that's falling apart. And Sister Rust has convinced them to help prepare what is necessary to fight Rigour. Which is this failing, in some ways. It's seen as a sort of betrayal, in some way. That she would do that. But it's also, the people are definitely like, 'eh, you've carried us this far.'

And Tea is definitely like, her professional soldiers, it's almost a Seventh Samurai situation here. Her professional soldiers have been training the people here, to fight. And they're not gonna have the same - God, maybe that's actually better. Maybe it's not that they - maybe the retrofit isn't just 'oh, we're fixing up old Rooks', maybe it's that you've been figuring out how to pilot Rooks without live metal. Without an internet connection in them. Without processing power. And they were already able to ride, like, the things that sprayed the chrome that they could fly on. So it's not like they're opposed to machines. Maybe they're just turning them into dead metal machines, so the people of Seabed City can pilot them without breaking their religious code. I actually really kind of love that, so we have Tea, and her professional soldiers, training them. Again, Seventh Samurai style. Does Aria say anything, to kind of stir their emotions, or is it a more solemn occasion that that?

ALI: I think that, instead, it's more...like, it's just Aria overseeing things. And then when the sun sets, eventually, it's similar to the last time we saw Aria there. There's a fire, and Sister Rust gives a sermon.

AUSTIN: Okay. There's a choir singing, afterwards. Does she join the singing? It's like, a song she doesn't know, but can pick up. Do you know what I mean? It's a refrain that repeats.

ALI: She does.

AUSTIN: Okay. Alright. Again, crisis point?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That sound right for Aria, too. Okay. Dre. What's up with Kobus?

[DRE groans]

AUSTIN: This is a proper scene, right?

DRE: Yea, yea, yea. I mean, I gotta upload this Liberty system into Grace. Is this a meet sword to sword? I could also see it being a tactical --

AUSTIN [overlapping]: Oh, that's kind of cool.

DRE: I could also it being a tactical skirmish, if I called people in for backup.

AUSTIN: Right...No, I kind of like it being, hm...

DRE: I think it's more dramatic if it's meeting sword to sword.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think it's meeting sword to sword with Vicuna.

DRE: Yea, yea, yea.

AUSTIN: Right? Yea. So what's that scene look like. Like, what's the set up? Like, where is it? It's on Sigilia, presumably. Or did you catch her somewhere else?

DRE: No, I think it's on Sigilia. I think it's like, I mean they like... Kobus has to get this - I mean, they have to load this Divine into the frame of Grace. So, aw, I bet they're fighting in the hanger, in the shadow of Grace...

AUSTIN: Can I recommend something?

DRE: Yeah, go for it!

AUSTIN: What if you have... I guess, you'd need another Divine to agree to this. But maybe you get, you manage...okay. Hm... Loyalty's probably not the one to do it.

DRE: Eh, maybe.

AUSTIN: The thing I'd kind of love here, is to see that door open. Um... so that...Kobus can walk through - Oh. Maybe Orth will open the door for you. Orth, would you - would Ambition open the door?

JACK: Oh...um.

AUSTIN: I really...the image I really want is one that mirrors when Ibex met - walked in to meet Vicuna and Kobus, um, on Sigilia.

JACK: Yea, totally. Well, I mean, like, does Orth have the capability to do that?

AUSTIN: Ambition can.

JACK: I don't really think of this Divine as having candidates in the same way. But like, we could persuade Ambition to?

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: Like, it'd just do it?

AUSTIN: Yea.

JACK: Yeah, okay, I'll super open the door.

AUSTIN: Oh, oh, oh, I forgot an very important thing. I forgot an important thing. Discovery knows what this thing is.

DRE: Oh yea, yeah, they probably -

JACK: Oh.

AUSTIN: So, when, all that time ago, when Chital was Liberty and Discovery's first candidate, they found something that was also loaded onto a chip, similarly to the way that Liberty is now loaded onto a chip. And that was Righteousness. And Righteousness was created, uh, by the same woman who designed Rigour. And it was designed such that all of her... all of her best emotional traits, all of her feeling for like, what people needed, was poured into it. Which is why it came out as Righteousness, because she felt so terrible for having created Rigour.

JACK: Right.

AUSTIN: And this is the same thing, it was just, it's just modified Rigour. But it's, it's...emptied of its logic, and replaced by its... this ascending, triumphant, emotional stir. So in a weird way, Ambition is Righteousness, just without sixty thousand years of history, and without the same

emotional baggage that Irene Klipsch-Dove, who was the inventor of Rigour and Righteousness, had. So yeah, you know that.

JACK: Right. Huh. So I think, that Orth using - or, no, Orth is not using this. I think they're a Divine and a person working together, rather than a Divine and a candidate.

AUSTIN: No, I understand what you - that is absolutely true.

JACK: And I think as far as Orth and Ambition are concerned, this is Orth putting his money where his mouth is, as far as offering Kobus support goes.

AUSTIN: Alright, so, the door opens. It's probably just that same sort of sunlight, like, I think it's nighttime on Sigilia, and there's just one patch of land that's covered in sunlight, and then Kobus can walk through. So what sort of gun - sorry, guns. What type of sword does Kobus have? It doesn't have to be a real sword. It can be whatever. It could be a gun. It could also be the suit.

DRE: Uh...

KEITH: Is it a Leonardo diCaprio Romeo and Juliet style saber-gun?

DRE: No! Fuck no!

SYLVIA: Are you...are you sure? Ok.

KEITH: That shit was bad.

DRE: It was so bad! Um... I imagine Kobus has... a rapier comes to mind for me. I don't know why, but for some reason, a rapier comes to mind for me.

AUSTIN: Okay. Um. I think this'll be a neat thing of like, I think... Vicuna... we've seen Vicuna fight, haven't we? When they were... when they had... what's her face, Kira Voight, the Rapid Evening agent, captured. How did Vicuna fight?

DRE: She didn't fight much, 'cause she got her arm busted, remember? She kinda lost that pretty quick.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I don't think she has a weapon, I think she's just like, martial artsy. So I think you walk through, and show up at the, like, at the, there's like, scaffolding around Grace. And I think Vicuna knows immediately. And I think she just stands up, and like, Tony Jaw cracks her like, her whole body. So you should... who starts first. Um. I think Vicuna is better with a sword, so to speak.

DRE: Absolutely.

AUSTIN: So. Um. We circle, sword tips touching. In this case, it's just, you have your blade ready, and she's in stance, circling you. You're circling each other. What do you say to me?

DRE (AS KOBUS): If there's any of you, the real you, left in there, I know you understand why I have to do this.

AUSTIN (AS VICUNA): You're a fool.

AUSTIN: And she spits.

DRE: I overreach slightly, and you have an opportunity to slip in a dirty little cut. Do you take it?

AUSTIN: Absolutely. I think she just like, knees you right in that groin, man. Like, you overreach, she... I think you overreach, and she snaps your arm, and knees you in the groin. And you have to pick the blade up with your other hand.

AUSTIN (AS VICUNA): You're wasting your time.

AUSTIN: She launches a sustained attack with her weight behind it. Do you give ground readily or grudgingly?

DRE: Uh...readily.

AUSTIN: Where do you go?

DRE: I think I try...maybe I give, I jump up to a higher platform.

AUSTIN: Mmm. Is this a situation where you're giving ground by heading up towards Grace's systems?

DRE: Yes.

AUSTIN: Okay, and she's like, chasing you at this point. That's pretty good. Alright, your turn.

DRE: I thrust and you just barely turn it. A fraction slower, and you'd be cut through. Does it exhilarate you or chill you?

AUSTIN: Oh, exhilarate, for sure. Absolutely. We lock swords, and your mouth is near my ear. What do you say? I think that she like, flips up from one of the like, scaffolding levels to another, and like, tackles you to the ground. And you have the blade, but she's like, trying to choke you. What do you say?



DRE: God, this is brutal. Because I mean, like, if Ibex was Kobus' kind of adopted older brother, then Vicuna's probably their adopted older sister? So they're caught between knowing what they have to do, and... ugh. Yes. Maybe that's just what they say.

DRE (AS KOBUS): You made me do this.

DRE: I pretend to falter and dip my blade. Do I draw you out, or do you recognize the ploy, and hold steady?

AUSTIN: She's angry. You draw her out. And then, I think this is... this is a good point for this. I seize momentum and initiative and drive you backward. If you stand, throw. Which means roll 1d2. One is heads. On heads, you hold me back. On tails, I cut you through, killing you. Do you stand, or do you allow yourself to be driven?

DRE: I stand. So I guess I roll.

AUSTIN: Alright, one is heads, two is tails.

DRE: Oh boy. [overlapping]

KEITH: Oh boy. [overlapping]

ALI: [distressed sigh]

ART: This feels good.

DRE: Oh!

ALI: [squeak]

DRE: One.

AUSTIN: You hold her back. And I think that gives the opportunity to insert the chip.

KEITH: Oh...

[overlapping sighs]

KEITH: Jesus Christ.

AUSTIN: As you do it...

ALI: That's a good job.

AUSTIN: As you do it...okay, so here's the interesting thing. You like, slam this thing in, and there's this intense immediate connection to Grace, right, cuz like the thing that the planet stuff of Sigilia was doing was enhancing her ability to do her like, telepath - her telepathy, her connection to people. So all at once, you have a couple of things. One, you have a decision to make. Are you overriding Grace with Liberty, or are you building a construct a la Liberty and Discovery. Are you building Liberty and Grace?

DRE: I'm building Liberty and Grace.

AUSTIN: Second thing, and I'll let you change this decision if you want. I could be that jerk who doesn't do this, but...you realize, there's nothing - there's nothing wrong with Grace.

[Music: [Sigilia Breathes](#) plays - 0:21:00]

AUSTIN: This is a thing she does, sometimes, is...Grace's vision of the world is that it will continue, justly, that through the Grace of history, through the constant march of progress, through our faith in ourselves, we will improve. And then she looks at the map, and sees that maybe progress means something without her in it. And she is a machine, but she gets anxious. And lashes out. And for as much as she believes, or says she does, that history will prevail, that grace is all we need, she can't help but want to be home. On Garden, now Apokine. She can't help but feel anger at the losses, dealt to her by the Demarchy, by the Vanguard, by the Free States. Sigilia isn't making her do anything. This is a way she gets sometimes.

[Music: [Sigilia Breathes](#) ends]

AUSTIN: So, construct? And hope that that's enough to even things out? That adding Liberty, which, which fled, which is the one that fled, that opened the door, because it couldn't stand being locked up. Or overriding it, which, who knows what it could cause?

DRE: Is there anyway there's a third option to destroy them both?

AUSTIN: Sure. What's that look like?

JACK: Woah.

ALI: [Astonished sigh]

AUSTIN: What's killing two Divines look like?

JACK: Oh my god.

AUSTIN: And what does this mean for Kobus? Like, is this the moment where Kobus sees this, sees the history of Grace, which is a history of beauty and honour and plurality, a history of letting others be in charge, and being deeply important, and helpful, for people. And then these moments where her belief that things will just work themselves out becomes regressive and harmful, to the point of making her hawkish. And I think that floods into Kobus, and then the other thing is like, yeah, because of this telepathic connection, Kobus can also see the fear that is in Liberty. That it can see the beauty in Liberty, which is like, oh hey, freedom is the best, it's great to be able to do what you want. But it also sees the fear, that is like, but also the 'leave me the fuck alone.' But also, the 'I don't have any responsibilities because I'm free.' I think that Kobus maybe sees that Freedom [sic] might get in Grace, and just bounce. That's what it wanted to do to begin with. Or Kobus could step in, and could Kobus, as candidate, keep them leashed? Or Kobus could destroy them right now. And send them down into Sigilia.

DRE: I don't think...Kobus has seen what happened when a candidate thought they could leash a divine.

AUSTIN: Heh. Yeah.

DRE: So I think what happens is that Kobus gets into the cockpit of Liberty and Grace, and seals it up. And while Liberty and Grace are using their processing power or whatever to basically fight amongst themselves...

AUSTIN: Right.

DRE: Kobus sets autopilot for Sigilia's sun.

AUSTIN: And stays inside?

DRE: Yep. To see it through.

AUSTIN: Oh, Kobus. Vicuna coughs blood out.

JACK: Oh, boy.

AUSTIN: And watches, as Sigilia, like, reaches up for Grace. The body of the planet reaches up a tentacle to grab. But she pulls away. She's Freedom now, right? Alright. Alright, Kobus. So this puts Kobus in an interesting position.

DRE: Yeah, I don't- Uh... Am I playing Kobus anymore?

AUSTIN: Nah, I don't think so. Think Kobus is dead now.

ALI: [sigh] We did it.

AUSTIN: We did it, we did a kill. We killed a good person. [Pause] We killed a good person. Kobus was so good, they were kind...

DRE: They were the sweetest child.

AUSTIN: They were the sweetest child. But hey, listen, at least they died inside of a divine.

DRE: Yeah.

ALI: [laughs] No!

DRE: Right where they started. Right where they started.

ALI: That's not an at least!

AUSTIN: It's not an at least, it's not.

DRE: [laughs]

AUSTIN: What is... uh... let's, let's, Dre, we have to think about what you're up to. But first, let's do the next scene.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Which I've already lost. Is that not -

ALI: Sylvia.<sup>1</sup>

AUSTIN: It's not Mako. Ali?

DRE: It's Ali.

AUSTIN: It's Sylvia.

DRE: Oh, yeah, Sylvia.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it's Sylvia. Nah, it's uh, Jill?

KEITH: Is this the last one?

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

AUSTIN: Yeah. And then we get the final scene.

KEITH: Shit.

AUSTIN: We're in it. We're in it.

[overlapping sighs/mutters]

AUSTIN: PS, my recording is four hours and twenty minutes. What's up?

KEITH: What happened to Kobus' points? I guess Kobus didn't have any crisis points, so it doesn't...

AUSTIN: Mm-mm.

SYLVIA: Something happens.

AUSTIN: Nothing happened. Or, I'll figure something out. But let's call that, what kind of point that would have been, though. Would that have been a crisis point? Or would that have been -

KEITH: If, if, if...

AUSTIN: Christ.

JACK: I think that's super a crisis point.

[Some crosstalk]

KEITH: But, if, if they did it, well, destroying them would have been a political point.

AUSTIN: But would it have been? Because Kobus' political goal was like...making Grace great again.

[Laughter]

KEITH: Oh nooo.

AUSTIN: And what we learned was that maybe Grace wasn't great to begin with.

DRE: Jesus Christ.

JACK: In terms of crisis thing, all of Orth and Kobus' negotiating was like, we've gotta get Grace to help us.

[laughter]

JACK: And Kobus is like great, I've got it. I'm gonna fire her into the sun. And Orth's like, no, no, no!

DRE: It's fine.

AUSTIN: Yup.

DRE: Good job, man.

AUSTIN: On the plus side, this frees up Loyalty and Service and Fortitude and all of the other remaining divines to be like, yeah, Rigour. Because we don't have to babysit Grace anymore.

JACK: Right, that's true. That is true.

AUSTIN: Like, Loyalty's especially interesting, because Loyalty was supposed to be loyal to Grace. And now what? Also, like, this map is wrong now. [Typing noise] Like, right? Who owns...

JACK: Austin just replaced the title saying 'Hands of Grace' with five exclamation - er, five question marks.

AUSTIN: Oh, wait, wait, wait. There we go.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: I dropped the old 'alert' from our clock back in the sector.

KEITH: Dre, who are you gonna play now?

DRE: We'll figure it out.

AUSTIN: We'll figure it out. Let's go forward to Jill's scene.

SYLVIA: So I've been trying to figure out, what scene I want to do, and figure out which of these games fits into it.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVIA: Because I have an idea of what I want to do with character now.

AUSTIN: Okay.

SYLVIA: With that, after that fight, she's basically like, no, all hands on deck, need to be on this Rigour thing. Because it doesn't matter if we're still around if this thing gets through.

AUSTIN: Right, I mean that could just be another, that could just be another solitaire scene.

SYLVIA: So what, but here's the thing -

AUSTIN: Or, it could be -

SYLVIA: What I want to do...

AUSTIN: Go ahead.

SYLVIA: What I want her to do, is have her figure out if there's a weapon that could kill Rigour. And like, research what happened in the past with it.

AUSTIN: The Yersinia is a bit helpful here.

SYLVIA: Yeah, that's what I was thinking.

AUSTIN: And it could give me a chance to say a thing that I didn't - hm. Do I want to reveal this thing about the world?

SYLVIA: Do you wanna do it off...

AUSTIN: It's just one of those things I thought I would never reveal about the world, you know what I mean? So, the Rapid Evening's tech is all Rigour tech, in that they came here with Rigour when Rigour was blasted here forty thousand years ago. Um, and, escaped from Rigour, took what they could,

[0:30:00]

and found Kesh. Found Ziishe. And it took then tens of thousands of years of infighting, and, um, y'know, careful science, to figure out how to reconfigure this technology such that it wasn't - it wasn't just reconfiguring the technology, it was reconfiguring both the technology and themselves, to stop thinking about this stuff as 'it's Divine', and it took enough wars that they forget that this was... like, the cultural memory was gone. Forty thousand years is enough time to forget, that hey, we're just these.. we're the Principality of Kesh. The Prince showed up, and the Prince is good. And so, in that way, the lesson that I think Jill comes to, is maybe the same thing that Maryland was trying to say. Which is, even at its worst, Rigour is another machine. The way you lose against it is that you fight as a fractured force. You reason with it and take

small losses. You refuse to face it head on, and instead, think that you can be exceptionally tactical about it. Or you look for a superweapon. The way you lose against Rigour is by looking for a superweapon when what you need to do is fight Rigour.

SYLVIA: Okay, I know what I need to do for my scene. You said I could do a scene with an NPC?

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

SYLVIA: So... who would be the leader of, it is... what's the group that's sort of leading the separatists?

AUSTIN: Gemm is definitely leading the separatists. And at this point, Horizon Tactical has risen to be its like, military... It's almost like a military tribunal there at this point. Where it's just like, oh yeah, this is the crew that is making the decisions because this is a time of great crisis. Um, and it's been one for so long, it's been one since the time of the last war. They're finally getting back on their feet.

SYLVIA: Okay, so, I want to do an Animated Disagreement with whoever is leading that.

AUSTIN: I think it's Augustus, right?

SYLVIA: I think it is, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Okay. Alright. So that I think that's...where is it done? It's probably done on... I think it's the two ships dock. So it's the Yersinia...Oh, no, it's probably happening on the Yersinia. Which is like, neutral ground, in a weird way.

SYLVIA: Yeah, because Augustus still has some fondness for, um, Hudson.

AUSTIN: Cool. So someone else should set up challenges. The two positions are that the Free... Augustus and the Free States, that Augustus and Gemm, rather, believe that the Free States should separate, that they should be independent nations. City states again, with good trade deals, maybe with a shared military they can buy into for protection - Horizon has very reasonable rates. But fundamentally, the thing that got us here were these big superpowers with too many political... too much political power and too much military power. Um... so that's his position.

JACK: Okay, I think I have a challenge.

AUSTIN: And Jill, just to be clear, Jill's, Sylvia, Jill's 'we need to be together' ?



SYLVIA: Yeah, we need to be in a united front or else we're going to die, basically. She's basically coming saying that this thing is coming, and we need to work together it doesn't matter if you're independent or not.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: Please express your commitment to your position, even if it's not actually true or right.

AUSTIN: Who are you asking first?

JACK: Um, I'm asking Jill.

SYLVIA: I think, what she does first, she's got like, a little projector thing, and like, she's got footage from her, like, rig, recorded some footage during the fight. And she pulls up just a freeze frame of one of the smaller riggers, when it was firing the missiles at Aria, and when it made, um, basically the stars almost vanish around it. And she just kind of points out,

SYLVIA (AS JILL): I was there for this. I saw this. And I have never seen anything like it. And I've never felt so scared of something. You and I, Augustus, we fought together, and we fought both together and against each other. We've seen unfathomable amounts of violence, really. You were there when we landed on Kalliope, you remember that. And the losses we had, when we took our independence, won't even be, won't register compared to the amount that's going to happen if more of these things come through. I've never seen technology like this. I've never seen weaponry do the things that this has done. And I'm scared, and you should be too. And I think, the only thing I can think of, now, is trying to find a way to stop this from destroying us all. And I think that if you ignore this, you're just, you're asking for disaster.

AUSTIN: Augustus like, takes in the Yersinia.

AUSTIN (AS AUGUSTUS): You know, Jill, in a way, you and I were both reborn on this ship. I was born on Archonic. I worked for pennies for Horizon, and I worked for pennies less when Rigour took over Horizon. And then you captured me, here. Or not you, you weren't here yet, but Thorn and Diego captured me. And I served them, in exchange for my life. And through all that, what I learned is that I'm afraid, too. I'm afraid to die, a slave to someone else, or to a system that makes us slaves through associations we do not want. It is convenient for you to combine the notion of survival with leadership under Kalliope, but that is not the case. You're right. Maybe if we are independent, we'll die. But if we unite, under you ten thousand or so on Kalliope, we'll live as slaves. Ideological slaves. And I'd rather die than that.

JACK: On what criteria am I awarding the point?

AUSTIN: Just what it says in the book.

JACK: Which is?

AUSTIN: Both position holders must answer the challenge. You decide who goes first. Um..

JACK: Who gave the best answer.

AUSTIN: You can maybe consider being someone in the audience, someone on the Yersinia. You could imagine being someone in the Free States, generally.

JACK: I mean, I think I'm going to have to give it to Augustus. Because I could see the argument of 'if we're going to die, I'd rather die a free man' being persuasive when framed in that way.

AUSTIN: To the Free States especially.

JACK: Yeah. And also, like, at this point, when the galaxy knows, when the Branch knows something is coming...

AUSTIN: Yeah. Word is out at this point. I think that footage of that... I think the old Counterweight's Angels footage - channel came back on after that fight and showed that off.

JACK: Right. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Challenge?

ART: I have a challenge. Please express your position in the form of a slogan that people can rally behind.

SYLVIA: God fucking damnit!

KEITH: Yeah!

ART: Never enough slogans. That's my rule for this podcast. Please excuse me while I go to iTunes to write that review.

SYLVIA: You always do this! Why?

JACK: Was Art the one proposed it last time?

KEITH: No, I think I proposed it last time.

SYLVIA: But it was me that had to do it last time! And I sucked at it!

KEITH: Sylvia did have to do it last time.

SYLVIA: Who's going first, Art?

ART: Um... I'll give you a second. Austin can go first.

SYLVIA: Thank you so much! [laughing]

AUSTIN (AS AUGUSTUS): Nothing is more golden than liberty.

[DRE groans]

ALI: Damn...

ART: Oh, dip, you're in trouble.

SYLVIA: I'm up against fucking Austin here, of course I'm in trouble!

JACK: Austin actually has a google doc of slogans for every faction that he's pulled up.

AUSTIN: Yeah, mhm.

SYLVIA: [laughs] Fuck off, Dre.

DRE: [laughing]

SYLVIA: He said freedom isn't free, in the chat.

AUSTIN: It's bad, that's not the one.

SYLVIA (AS JILL): Liberty means nothing if it's used for cowardice.

DRE: Damn.

ART: Oh.

[laugh]

SYLVIA: I don't think that invoking the name Rigour, Jack, is a good idea.

ART: I like the other reading, though. Let's be rigorous, is clearly is the intended reading. But let's be rigour-U.S., us. As like, an American election year slogan, is also very good.

AUSTIN: You think you're better than us? Us? US? USA? No way.

SYLVIA: Pwease no steppy.

ALI: Stop.

ART: I have to give that to Austin, I liked it a lot. Sorry, Sylvia, you did real well.

AUSTIN: You did real well.

KEITH: Wait, was Sylvia's pwease no steppy?

AUSTIN: Yeah, it was pwease no steppy.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You did a good job, Sylvia.

KEITH: Can I challenge, or are we done with challenges?

SYLVIA: No, we have one more.

ALI: Nope, this is the last one.

KEITH: Please explain why your position is best for the most people. And Sylvia, you can go first there.

SYLVIA (AS JILL): Augustus, you need to listen to me. You're not the only planet going to be - Gemm is not the only planet affected by this. I know that you and Horizon deal with almost everybody in the Free States, and outside of it too, and um -

AUSTIN (AS AUGUSTUS): You know what? You're right. We do. So we're leaving. And you won't have us there.

JACK: Wait, wait, wait, did you just interrupt?

ALI: You're not allowed to that.

AUSTIN: Yup. Augustus does, though.

ALI: [gasps] Well.

AUSTIN: And he storms off the ship.

ALI: What a jerk.

KEITH: Yeah, I give the point to Sylvia.

DRE: Boo!

KEITH: Boo!

AUSTIN: Sadly, it's still two-to-one for Augustus.

SYLVIA: Yeah, it's still, so. I think when that happens, Jillian turns, and like, radios Hudson, and is like, "I think unification is gonna take a lot longer."

AUSTIN: I think that's still a unification point, in that it's still, that's what you were pursuing there. In fact, that's the takeaway. You don't have them here for this.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: This is not a crisis point, because at the end of the day, you're not prepped in that way. It's going to be Yersinia and Kalliope vs Rigour, not the Free States. So, Dre. Any thoughts? About who you are, in this final scene?

DRE: Capra.

AUSTIN: You could be Capra. AKA Chet, and Loyalty, without Grace. Okay.

KEITH: What's Chet's last name?

DRE: Chet Wise.

AUSTIN: Wise, Chet Wise.

DRE: Just an old soldier.

AUSTIN: Chet Wise, has a - old soldier. Old soldier, old candidate. Very old candidate. A very, uh, untraditional candidate. I think Chet's appointment was almost an apology to Sage. To the people on Sage that felt left behind.

DRE: And then they just went and joined the Demarchy anyway.

AUSTIN: I mean that was political. They didn't do that on purpose. They would have preferred not to have. But wars, you know?

DRE: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Let's go over this list. Cass has two crisis points and one political point. Mako has three crisis points and two political points.

KEITH: Whoop whoop!

AUSTIN: Kobus...

KEITH: Is dead.

AUSTIN: God, did we decide to give Kobus a crisis point at the end of that? I think we did and we didn't mark it, because it frees up everybody else to be at that fight. Ah, has one crisis point, and I think just a big red line through political points?

DRE: Aw, boo.

KEITH: Who does? Oh, okay.

AUSTIN: Kobus, because like,

KEITH: Is dead.

AUSTIN: Kobus is dead and so is Grace?

KEITH: Although, to be fair, there was that one guy who ran for uh, like, Congress, who lost to a dude that had died a few months earlier, because he was, the new guy was so unpopular.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh?

KEITH: So, Kobus is still...like, if he<sup>2</sup> ran against a really unpopular candidate...

AUSTIN: Right, I getcha --

KEITH: For US Congress....

AUSTIN: Orth has two crisis points and one political point.

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<sup>2</sup> Kobus uses they/them pronouns.

KEITH: And, uh...

AUSTIN: But also has Ambition...

JACK: And.

ART: Keith is sort of leaving out the headline there, and then that person was Attorney General of the United States.

KEITH: Oh, right! Yes, yes, I forgot about the end, the guy that lost.

AUSTIN: Jill is the, uh, has one crisis point and two political points. Aria has three crisis points and one political point. Very interesting stuff.

[Music: [Rigour](#) begins - 0:44:40]

AUSTIN: It happens all at once. And it happens everywhere. The thing about being Voice is that you can be at multiple places at the same time. So doors open across Apostolos and Torru, across Sage and Apokine, across Vox and Slate and Counterweight, and Minerva 12 and Archanic. Even on Kesh, even on Apotine, among the old ruins of Apostolos. Even on Kalliope, bastion of freedom. Even on Glimmer, where you met Ibex first, all those years ago. Rigour is everywhere. And it is on September, too. Silhouetted by the sun into which that planet is falling. And it moves with speed and purpose. And it is time to see if the Golden Branch is ready for it.

AUSTIN: Here's how this is going to work.

[Music: [Rigour](#) ends]

AUSTIN: For every point of crisis preparation you have, you can tell me how you hurt Rigour. And I will mark it down that Rigour was hurt. That a victory somewhere in the sector was won. That despite all the space between you, you act as one. And then Rigour gets to go, and will ask you to submit or withdraw, or else, it will take something from you. One at a time, until nothing is left. Or, until you win.

ART: I'll go first.

AUSTIN: Oh Cass, oh Cass. Tell me how you fight it on Apokine. Or on Apostolos itself?

ART: On Apostolos itself. Using the artifact Apokine. Conduit of the Apostolosian people. A brave and free people. I use the ability to tap into the collective consciousness of those people, and I ask them to drown out the voice.

AUSTIN: That works for some time. And, your people, and the Apokine, push them. Hard. The small units, they mingle with larger ones. I think that you probably have some back up from Maxine Ming's group, the Principality of Kesh. And you win a key victory over Apostolos' city. Or Apostolos' capital. But on Apokine, the old home of Apostolosian royalty, Sokrates falters. Flying high in Integrity, they encounter a group that is too large for them. Submit or withdraw now, or Rigour pins Sokrates down and takes them out, while you do battle on Apostolos. So, do you submit or withdraw?

ART: No. I don't.

AUSTIN: A call comes through, Cass. The green planet of Apokine is in the background. And then, your sibling, Sokrates, turns the camera back onto them.

AUSTIN (as Sokrates): Don't ruin this, Cass.

ART (as Cass): [cry-laugh]

AUSTIN (as Sokrates): You goddamn hero. I love you.

ART (as Cass): I love you too. I'm sorry. I'm sorry about everything.

AUSTIN (as Sokrates): No. Shut - shut up.

ART (as Cass): We're both...you're...

AUSTIN (as Sokrates): Shut up.

ART (as Cass): You're a great hero, of our people.

AUSTIN (as Sokrates): [scoffs] Go win.

ART (as Cass): I'll make sure they remember you.

AUSTIN: They hang up. Who's next?

JACK: I'll go.

AUSTIN: As Orth, yes.

JACK: Mhm. On Counterweight, and across the OriCon planets, as a result of the napkin sketches on Orth's notes, and half lines of speeches, Orth begins a reluctant and heartbroken campaign of conscription, trying to pull people from the cities, and from their little communities,



and from the planets, and maybe, failingly, from planets outside of the Golden Branch sector, from OriCon's headquarters elsewhere, to mount into mechs and riggers, and come to fight.

AUSTIN: They do. They show up in force. You've never known the people of OriCon to be patriotic, and maybe they aren't tonight, but goddamn, do they want to live. Where are you at for this? You're on the Kingdom Come?

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: At one point, one of the uh, one of the rigger, smaller units of the riggers, that looks like the Minerva Rook, that has that rook head, slams against the Kingdom Come.

[Music: [\*Everything At Last Must Come To An End\*](#) begins - 0:50:22]

AUSTIN: And thrusts its saber into the cargo hold, cutting open enough space for a person to get out. On their way in, they're able to concentrate fire on Offset, unless you submit or withdraw.

JACK: Nope.

AUSTIN: Offset is gunned down, and Take-off tackles the pilot to the ground, grabs the gun, and makes a fatal shot. When the mask is pulled off, AuDy recognizes the face first. It's Maritime Lapel. One of the ones left behind. And then, people notice that elsewhere. One Maritime Lapel, and another, and another. Clones put to work.

[Music: [\*Everything At Last Must Come To An End\*](#) fades out]

AUSTIN: Who's next?

KEITH: I'll go.

AUSTIN: Okay.

KEITH: I think that the first line of defense for all the Makos, and Larry, and Ted, has to be a sort of real intense group fogging.

AUSTIN: Mhm. Yeah.

KEITH: Sort of, like, uh, one of my favourite, least favourite things that ever happened in Star Wars, uh, was a thing in the expanded universe was when a bunch of Jedi got together and forced through an entire Sith fleet into deep space, which I pointed out as some dumb bullshit that Star Wars might do, but I think this is a lot like that, where it's just like, 'let's do the one thing that we can all do a little bit, and do it together on a big scale!'

AUSTIN: It totally works. Where are you doing this?

KEITH: Um, I think that this is, in the Rapid Evening territory. This is probably, not Kesh, what's the other one?

[pause]

AUSTIN: Zeesh. Zeesh is the one where the people are.

KEITH: Yeah, the people. That's where.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I really like this notion of like, it's an armada coming for you. And then, the power is really great. Like, it's a unified weapon of, of clouding. Clouding? Is that what -

KEITH: Fogging.

AUSTIN: Fogging, fogging. It's been a while since we've done this. I remembered stratus, I couldn't get to fogging. And the majority of the fleet just drops from the sky and begins to scatter in the same way it did back when you first met this force in dark space. Um, like, it kind of just - it's almost like, when you light up flash paper, and there's nothing left. Weird. It's that weird. It's like, that quick. There is something, though.

[Music fades in]

AUSTIN: You can feel it, digging into you. It seemed to have a way in, through you. And, it's not stopping. There's a moment where Larry shows up, in front of you. He hasn't done this - he doesn't do this that often. He doesn't actually show up in front of you that often. And he's like,

AUSTIN (as Larry): Oh boy. This isn't - hey Mako! Good job. Good job with the armada. That was really good.

[Music fades out]

KEITH (as Mako): Thank you.

AUSTIN (as Larry): There's a thing. There's a thing in you. There's another thing.

KEITH (as Mako): Yeah, it's not good.

AUSTIN (as Larry): You remember when - nope. You remember that time when it was me and you and there was also Ibex in there, and that was weird?

KEITH (as Mako): Yeah, it was all of us, and we were all together, and it was a big party, except it sucked, and you almost got us all killed?

AUSTIN (as Larry): Well, yeah. Well, listen, first of all - first of all, you almost got...There's something else in there. And, it's, I don't know how it zeroed in on you like this. Are you not telling me something?

KEITH (as Mako): I don't think I'm not telling you something.

AUSTIN (as Larry): Alright, well, here's the thing. I think if I, I think if I, I think I can take care of it for you. Is that cool? I'll go take care of it. You don't even worry about it.

KEITH (as Mako): That's good. If you think you got it, you go get it.

AUSTIN (as Larry): Oh, I got it, man. This has been cool.

KEITH (as Mako): It's been super cool.

AUSTIN (as Larry): It's been cool.

KEITH (as Mako): Thanks for reigning it in, this whole time.

AUSTIN (as Larry): [laughs] Oh, definitely. I thought it was like, a good, you know, better to team up. Two heads are better than one, that's what they always say.

KEITH (as Mako): Right. Two heads, team up, better than one fading away. That's what they say.

AUSTIN (as Larry): That's what they always say. I - oh, we got that tattooed.

KEITH (as Mako): Mhm. You got half and I got half.

AUSTIN (as Larry): On me. I got that tattooed. Yeah, we put it together.

AUSTIN: And then he doesn't respond anymore.

KEITH (as Mako): And that's why we got the same tattoo. Two tattoos, matching up, are better than one fading away.

AUSTIN: And then he disappears. He's gone.

KEITH: Aw... Larry...

AUSTIN: Unless you submit, sorry, I should have given you that chance.

KEITH: I don't wanna submit.

AUSTIN: This is definitely a submit, not a withdraw.

KEITH: No. I don't want to submit.

AUSTIN: You're doing well. Who's next?

ALI: [sighs] I think Aria mobilizes the, the like, army we saw in the last scene, with Sister Rust and Tea. I think especially because, if it's Voice, right, and it's Dead Metal, then they're sort of not...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Affected?

AUSTIN: They definitely won't be affected in the same way, for sure.

ALI: Yeah, so she's putting her best foot forward.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think that's like, a huge surprise, for...like, I think the Rigour fleet, above Counterweight, doesn't even notice the dead metal army. Like, they don't register, because that's not what machines look like to them. That's just metal, that's just scrap. And then they open fire, and it's like, ballistics fire, like scrap fire. And it just crushes them. And then there's this moment.

[Music begins]

AUSTIN: Where they catch you out in the open. Because you're like a beacon, Aria, compared to all the dead metal. And you can submit, or withdraw, or else Tea will pay back that promise she owes you, still. And save your life, with hers.

[Music fades out]

ALI: That really sucks for Tea, because she didn't want to be like, involved in a war again. But. um, I don't know, I guess she's not being used by OriCon. So maybe that's better? But I do not submit or withdraw.

AUSTIN: Maritime's blade cuts right through. But Tea holds her close, in the Rook custom. I think Tea has her old Queen custom back. We get the interior shot of her flipping all her switches to activate her self-destruct.

ALI: Oh, God. Oh, good for her. She would

AUSTIN (as Tea): Aria, you... Aria.

ALI (as Aria): Yeah, um, Tea?

AUSTIN (as Tea): You know, I thought you tricked me all of those years ago, when you told me you knew what the fuck you were doing.

ALI (as Aria): [Laugh-sobs]

AUSTIN (as Tea): But you didn't.

ALI (as Aria): Tea, back then, I promise you, I did. But, thank you.

AUSTIN: She gives you a little wink, and then she hits the button. Jill? Capra? Who's up?

DRE: I can go.

AUSTIN: So, you're on Vox, probably?

DRE: Yeah, and I think the remaining Divines probably ... form up?

AUSTIN: Yeah. It's weird, because they're definitely forming up around Loyalty, because Loyalty was second in command, but is also Loyalty. And that's like - wh - how do I...What's Capra do? To push them on Vox?

DRE: I think this might probably be more Chet than Capra, but I think he basically orders the Divines to basically hold a line, and allows the populace of Vox to get into shelters of some kind.

AUSTIN: Sure. That makes sense. It is in a tense moment where Fortitude, who you might remember is the Divine who had previously been down on, I believe it was on Gemm, who had been the military police style enforcer, who was trying to keep the people of Gemm in line, within Divine rule -

[Music fades in]

AUSTIN: - Fortitude, gets flanked. It's like, holding up it's shield, to protect some Vox - some major population centre, basically, blocking a bunch of incoming fire. And then one of the, there's an incredibly quick Rigour unit, that is like, moving in and out of vision, it's like it seems to be teleporting around. And it finds a shot that's lined up with it, lined up with it, lined up with

Fortitude's cockpit, it kind of forms a rifle from its arm. Submit or withdraw, or Fortitude, and Gerenuk, its candidate, die.

DRE: I don't submit.

AUSTIN: And there goes Fortitude. From inside, it is Amira Kiani-

[Music fades out]

AUSTIN: -the secretary, at that place you tried to sneak through, Chime, the Tzadik logistics expert and sniper, who almost killed Mako that time. That's who's piloting that Rigour mech, to be clear. Um, alright. That leaves Jill.

SYLVIA: Yup.

AUSTIN: How you doing?

SYLVIA: Probably not great. I don't think anybody is.

AUSTIN: No, no.

SYLVIA: Um, I think we concentrate our defenses on Kalliope, because we can't rally everyone else. Every planet's population is sort of taking care of their own.

AUSTIN: It's kind of interesting, because if you had gotten that other crisis point, you could spend another one in this section of scenes so you could have actually protected another planet.

SYLVIA: Totally.

AUSTIN: But you can't. Which is really great. Are you a bad person, is that why?

SYLVIA: No, no. It reflects that Jill's mission didn't work out.

AUSTIN: Mhm, right. So.

SYLVIA: Um, I think, it's basically, what's happened, is that they've called back everyone back from the blockade.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVIA: To the best of their abilities. Obviously, some get caught on the way, to sort of come in to the respective planets that sent those soldiers. To sort of minimize the damages on the

planets. And while that's happening, Jill is...I think that this is happening down on Kalliope's planet itself, and Jill's sort of on this... Jill's got her mech stationed on this building, like, hunkered down, armoured up as much as it can, just sniping at the different, um, at the different Rigour mechs, while Adler and Diego go in more close range, and Territory Jazz Jr. is also sniping at them, is kind of how this goes for a while.

AUSTIN: I think that you're totally able to break through almost all of their forces. And then there's that one Rigour again, with the fountain pen head, that slips past your shots. And gets to Territory Jazz Jr.'s Defiance, dodging her blasts as well. And the thing is, this rigger isn't here to kill. It's here to capture. Submit or withdraw, or Rigour will add Territory Jazz Jr. to its army.

[SYLVIA laughs.]

SYLVIA: Uh...

KEITH: Austin?

AUSTIN: Hey. What's up?

KEITH: What are the consequences of withdrawing? Cause submitting is just you get captured, right?

AUSTIN: Yea.

KEITH: Withdrawing, do you still do damage, what's the bad stuff?

AUSTIN: So, when you withdraw, you won't be able to participate in the scene anymore, which means you won't be able to damage Rigour anymore.

KEITH: So if you had one point left, you'd be wasting it to withdraw.

AUSTIN: Right. So, consequences of everybody withdraws, the point at which where you will no longer do damage, you'll have some choices to make. There's a point where you can just withdraw and see how things go, based on how you and everyone else around the sector have damaged Rigour. Whether you've pulled together enough to hurt it. There is a sliding scale here, in terms of how successful you will be. Right now, at this moment, you will not be very successful.

KEITH: Right, after, what, three --

AUSTIN: Five.

KEITH: Five.

AUSTIN: Five hits, basically. It has more than that.

SYLVIA: Regardless, I don't think the people of Kalliope would surrender anyway. There's no way it would happen. So, I gotta stay true to the character and say, no. I don't submit or withdraw.

[Music fades in]

AUSTIN: Territory Jazz, at one point, tosses her like - as she's being consumed by Rigour's black ooze, sets her like, cannon, on overcharge, and launches it into a big swarm of the Rook style Rigours, taking a bunch with her before she is swallowed up.

[Music fades out]

AUSTIN: Is that a full round?

ART: I believe so, yes.

AUSTIN: Who's next? You're doing well. I think like, there's a point here, where there's enough communication happening across the sector, where like, there have been some big wins. But, Rigour seems to be innumerable. There's something about the fight in these people, that's very human. And that's really scary. Like, people had prepped themselves to fight a monster, but instead even when they're killing clones, they're people. They're fighting like people are. They're not fighting like the Flood, or something, they're fighting like - Halo's really big in the future.

[laughter]

KEITH: Glad I get to do it again.

AUSTIN: People are totally high on the Flood in the future. They're like, yeah, I really like the library.

SYLVIA: I like the library.

AUSTIN: So yeah, that's the setup. I know you do, buddy. I know you do. So, round two, so to speak. Who's up?

KEITH: I'll go.

AUSTIN: Alright. What are you up to?



KEITH: So, the first time, I think, uh, was a really good stretch of the muscles for the Makos. Uh, we took down a bunch of the stuff with our flash paper mind powers, but I think that the scope, just how many they are, means that we can't just... destroy them. We've gotta use them on each other. So I'm gonna do the same thing I did last time, but try to take control of a giant swarm, and turn them to another giant swarm.

AUSTIN: Mako?

[Music begins]

AUSTIN: It's easier than you ever thought it could be. It's like you speak their language. And I don't just meant that because you're a stratus. The other Makos have a really hard time doing this. It's very easy for you.

[KEITH makes an uncomfortable noise]

AUSTIN: Unfortunately, it is not easy for them. One by one, they're overwhelmed. And the thing is, they all do the same thing. Which is, they all come up with some stupid plan. One of them takes your old Ring Of Saturn, another just hops in a space suit and jumps out the airlock. One of the ones down on the ground like, uses one of the Rapid Evening's cannons to shoot itself up and away -

[Music fades out]

AUSTIN: -remember, that's one of the ways that they stealthily send people places, is they just kind of like shoot them from a canon on Kesh, like super long range ODST, lost of Halo going on here, don't know going on with that.

KEITH: Well, I like Halo.

AUSTIN: You do like Halo. And there's also the factor that they're just purely outnumbered. There's only at most eight Mako clones.

KEITH: Yeah, there's eight clones, plus me.

AUSTIN: They've been making a lot of Maritime Lapels back on September. Shame you didn't save her. Shame you didn't say, like, "Oh, I want to save Mako and all the Maritime Lappels. I wanna move them." So, withdraw or submit, or the Mako clones get it.

KEITH: All of them at once?

AUSTIN: One at a time.

KEITH: Oh, motherfucker. Goddamnit. See, here's the thing - the better, the more crisis points you get, the more shit you've got to lose at the end.

ALI: Uh-huh

AUSTIN: Mhm. Preparation is a motherfucker.

KEITH: No. I don't submit or withdraw.

AUSTIN: The last one, before he leaves, says,

AUSTIN (as Mako Clone): You've been a real good dad!

AUSTIN: And punches you in the arm.

[groaning]

ALI: God! Oh my god?

AUSTIN: And he sticks his tongue out at you, because he knows it's gonna make you the most mad motherfucker.

[more groans]

ALI: You've met Keith, right?

DRE: [laughter] Oh goddamnit.

ALI: I just wanna...I just wanna...

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: You can cut that out -

AUSTIN: Keith owns fuckdads.com.

KEITH: Yeah, you can go buy some of my music. Fuckdads.com.

AUSTIN: You should do that, make him feel better. Make Keith feel better, he makes good music, it's good.

KEITH: Thank you.

AUSTIN: Good stuff. Who's up?

JACK: I'll go.

AUSTIN: Okay. Oh, Orth.

JACK: Okay. I think I... I think I want Orth in a rigger.

AUSTIN: It's been a while.

SYLVIA: Do you???

JACK: Cause I think, I think that... I think that, yeah.

ALI: You sure?

JACK: I think that, yeah. Orth has a brand new rigger, right? I'm gonna put him in his new...this new custom rigger. And I think he's probably going to give the controls of the Kingdom Come to AuDy at this point.

AUSTIN: The new rigger is the new model... the new model of the um, of the Rook, that's just like, it's the same basic stuff that Orth piloted back in the war, and even before that, because Orth piloted back in early skirmishes against the Diaspora, because Orth has seen so much war.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: So it's a very familiar machine, but faster, but it might even take a second to be comfortable in it.

JACK: And I think, to an extent, there are probably like, legacy controls options.

AUSTIN: That's really good, it's like, you go into the settings, and turn off auto-aim, so to speak?

JACK: Almost like, inverted, yeah.

AUSTIN: Perfect.

JACK: But Orth is not proud enough to try, and fail, to fly it with the new ones. I think Orth goes in there and is like "okay, great, I'm gonna have to set the date back thirty five years, um, before I'm gonna be able to fly this..."

AUSTIN: Yeah, and Orth makes short work of the forces. Which planet are you at...it's probably over...

JACK: I- No, go ahead.

AUSTIN: I'd say Archonic, which is OriCon's home base, but it could be anywhere. It could be Minerva, it could be September, it could be Counterweight or Weight.

JACK: To an extent, I like the image of Orth on Counterweight.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: Who, so Orth has been on Counterweight, even as Executive Orth, I think he has spent most of his time on ground level, or on like, Skytrains, stuff like that. But I think it's very rare that he has seen the cities or the domes at this altitude, with this degree of freedom. I think Orth is having a running battle over a planet that he knows inside-out, but has very rarely seen from this perspective.

AUSTIN: Right. And again, other pilots do fine. Orth does great. There is the matter of the Kingdom Come. It's just a small ship, you know? It doesn't have any weapons on it. AuDy's a very good pilot. Not that good.

JACK: So, I guess that Orth and AuDy are working in concert at this point.

AUSTIN: Absolutely.

JACK: Like, as close, as close as they've ever been to working in synchronicity. As opposed to what they were first in their working relationship, which was actively antagonistic. But I think that they're communicating clearly and directly, and if they had the chance to acknowledge what their relationship was at this point, they'd probably be pretty happy with the outcome. But it doesn't work like that, so Orth asks AuDy for a position on a unit that he's seen,

[Music fades in]

JACK: And AuDy gets three words through a direction, and Orth turns to see the Kingdom Come just... on fire. And it goes down, into a parking lot.

AUSTIN: It's a massive explosion.

[Music fades out]

[groaning]

AUSTIN: Who's up? Just to go over, Cass has a crisis point, Mako has a crisis point, Jill has a crisis point, Aria has two.

ART: I'll go.

AUSTIN: Hey, Cass.

ART: Hey. It's gotten real sad in here.

AUSTIN: Yeah. But you're doing work.

ART: Yeah. Cass hurts Rigour with his<sup>3</sup> brain. Cass mobilizes the Apostolisian defense forces, the Demarchy's military, and his maneuvers are crisp, and clever, and he's there to lead them from the front, with the skill he's gotten with all those lonely sparring sessions with Aria in the middle of space. Cass pushes them with force.

AUSTIN: It's the first time that the Apostolisian military has been mobilized like this, with this force, since the Golden War. And a nationalistic pride rises in the hearts of those who fight. And Euanthe, your oldest sibling, once heir to the throne, takes the opportunity to lead a final charge. That is, unless, you submit or withdraw to Rigour.

ART: No. I was an only child for a decade.

ALI: Damn.

AUSTIN: Apokine reminds you, in that moment, that there are no only children. Not in Apostolos. Who's up?

SYLVIA: Do I have one more?

AUSTIN: Mmm...yes! You do.

SYLVIA: I guess I'll go.

AUSTIN: Hi, Jill.

SYLVIA: I think at this point... things have moved a little... here's how it is.

[Music fades in]

SYLVIA: Kalliope is burning, basically.

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<sup>3</sup> Cass uses they/them pronouns.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Yes.

SYLVIA: Even with Admiral Thorne back at the helm of the Yersinia, things aren't going well. Jill has had to switch to the secondary mode for the Impetus Symphonia so she's now using her spear. It's just complete chaos. They're trying to hold the line, and they're trying to stay in formation, but things aren't looking great.

[Music fades out]

SYLVIA: Despite the fact that she's able to cut through these mechs, like, the more inexperienced pilots are falling by the second.

AUSTIN: She's fantastic. And there's a moment when, it's the first moment in five years that the people of Kalliope deeply feel thankful for what Thorn, the Yersinia, the Odamas fleet did. Because, and this is just such a Kalliopian thing...Jill fights with such style. There's a beat to it. A rhythm, and a beauty. It's inspiring. Unfortunately, style doesn't save you. Ask Diego Rose, who is drawn out of position by a simple feint. Most days, Diego would be smart enough not fall for it. But exhaustion is a hell of a thing. Withdraw, submit, or Diego's gone.

SYLVIA: If Jill submitted, she'd never hear the end of it from Diego.

[AUSTIN laughing]

SYLVIA: There's no way. He wouldn't want her - he wouldn't want to be saved by her, and he wouldn't want to see what would happen after if she withdrew. So, nah.

AUSTIN: Okay. Aria?

ALI: Yeah. Um.

AUSTIN: Hey, bud.

ALI: Hey. I think that Aria's come to the point where like, the people who are fighting for her are doing well, but it's the point in the battle where she has to put as much of herself into as she can.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And there's not even the consideration that she can hold Righteousness back anymore. She doesn't even want to. It allows her to move in a way that she never has, because she's never been a brutal person? Um.

AUSTIN: She's always holding herself back, a little bit.

ALI: Yeah. She's always drawing attention so people can take the big hits, or like, moving in such a way that she can draw people in and then create distance. Now, she's fighting in a way where she is just trying to destroy things. Getting really close with Jace's blade, and just ripping through what she can.

AUSTIN: It's, again, scary. Like you said, people haven't seen her like that before. Like you said, and like...It's awesome, in that other meaning of awesome. In that old meaning. There is something - the thought crosses someone's mind, what would Ibex do if he knew how to fight? If this is what Righteousness can do to Aria? In Seabed City, it stirs from its slumber. Because Rigour takes hold of it.

[ALI SIGHS]

AUSTIN: It turns black, and then it turns into something else. A vehicle for Rigour. Not Peace, not Order. Just Rigour. And Sister Rust knows what to do immediately.

[Music: [The Antenna](#) begins - 1:17:33]

AUSTIN: Rigour is...monstrous, but it is alive. And that self-same orb, that gives Seabed City life, we've seen what it does to living things. So she takes it, and climbs up the side of the thing, the goo nipping at her toes as she does, climbing the same ladder that Mako did all those years ago now. Climbing into the side of Order's body, stepping into the cockpit. And before it can consume Peace, and Order, activating the device. Unless you submit or withdraw.

ALI: I do not do either.

AUSTIN: Sister Rust is...she doesn't get a chance to send you a message, but she looks down at her people one more time. It's a strange relationship she's had, because she's lied to them, about the way the world works, in so many ways, and what she believes. But she hasn't lied to them about the value of life, and community. And so, her sacrifice does not feel sacreligious.

[Music: [The Antenna](#) ends]

AUSTIN: Mako?

KEITH sighs.

KEITH: So, um I've got some robots left.

AUSTIN: Yeah, you do.

KEITH: I've got probably about twenty -

AUSTIN: [overlapping] You've got that big one...

KEITH: of the small ones, and I still have that Jupiter? Saturn?

AUSTIN: Got that Jupiter. You got - Um, Saturn? I think it was Saturn because it was the Ring of Saturn and it flew around it, but it might have been a Jupiter, who knows.

KEITH: Right. It was a big one.

AUSTIN: It was a big one.

KEITH: I think I'm gonna send the small ones out there, running the same scripts were in the ones I was using before, and I think I'm going to directly take control, via fog, of the Jupiter. And kind of send it off there and pick off what I can, while the little guys kind of make a ruckus.

AUSTIN: The Jupiter does wonders. It is... it is a strange thing, because it's this big spider-like machine that's been fitted for spatial combat. It's just like, it has all of these boosters all over it, but it's jumping from giant rigger to giant rigger, just tearing into them, through space.

KEITH: I'm thinking like, each leg has a booster, except for two of them which have giant blades that can just slice through --

AUSTIN: Totally! It's rad as hell.

KEITH: More like a jab, not a slice, like a stick it through and pull it out of whatever power center.

AUSTIN: Right. There's this moment where you feel like, a strange bump, though you're fogging the Saturn, where it bumps into something that wasn't registering as an enemy, and you realize it's the Party Bus.

KEITH: PB!

AUSTIN: And, Lazer Ted has parked you, with your real body, next to the Saturn.

AUSTIN (as Ted): Alright man, you've gotta get in there. It doesn't make sense to have us in the same place. This is how you get killed, together.

KEITH: Wait. Hold on. Hold on. Wait, no.

AUSTIN: Yea, what's up?



KEITH (as Mako): We can't - we can't split up!

AUSTIN (as Ted): I'll go in there, you come in here.

KEITH (as Mako): No, no. Ted. Go home.

AUSTIN (as Ted): I mean, I don't really have a home. You know that. I'm like a drifter, lots of sleeping on couches. Couches are good. I like hotels a lot.

KEITH (as Mako): I know. Ted, I gave you a bedroom, and you put two couches and a hotel mattress in it.

AUSTIN (as Ted): Yeah. It's cause you can't host people without a couch. And you know Lazer Ted has got to be hosting people.

KEITH (as Mako): Gotta get guests.

AUSTIN (as Ted): Gotta get guests! I have so many guests. I've got guest rooms, I've got guest vocals, I got...what other sorts of guests do I got? What other sorts of guests are there?

KEITH (as Mako): Guest writers.

AUSTIN (as Ted): I don't have no ghost writers, but I've got guest writers. Y'know. Cause I can bring people on and be like, what's a good lyric you want me to say? If my delivery brings something extra to it.

KEITH (as Mako): Mhm. Be a guest in my voice.

AUSTIN (as Ted): Right, exactly. And I charge people for that, and that's my sixteenth job.

KEITH (as Mako): [laughs] Okay. I'll get in the thing. You get to safety.

AUSTIN (as Ted): Yeah. Yeah, definitely.

KEITH (as Mako): To *safety*.

AUSTIN (as Ted): Definitely.

KEITH (as Mako): Got it.

AUSTIN (as Ted): I'm glad you remembered me back then. Like, you could have gone to anyone on September, but you came to Lazer Ted.

KEITH (as Mako): Mhm.

AUSTIN (as Ted): That's because you know quality.

KEITH (as Mako): I know who gets it done.

AUSTIN (as Ted): Say it with me. No, no. Mako. Say it with me.

KEITH (as Mako): Lazer Ted knows quality.

AUSTIN (as Ted): No, no. Not Lazer Ted knows - just,

AUSTIN and KEITH (as Ted and Mako): Quality.

AUSTIN (as Ted): There it is. Aight.

AUSTIN: And he closes the back of the bus door. Now, I'm gonna say this once, and I mean it. Do you withdraw, or does Lazer Ted get in that bus and try to go home?

KEITH: Well, I've done all the damage I can do.

AUSTIN: You did, you have.

KEITH: Withdraw. I withdraw.

AUSTIN: Alright. That means a thing here. That does mean something else. I'll tell you the thing it means, before you commit. It means, if it comes down to it, Mako, you won't be able to sacrifice yourself against Rigour. Because you fled, too.

KEITH sigh-groans. It sounds like a fucking death rattle, dude.

AUSTIN: Is this a thinking sound?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Mmkay.

KEITH: Can I get input?

ALI laughs.

SYLVIA: I guess not.

KEITH: I guess not.

AUSTIN: I guess not.

ALI: We've all said goodbye.

DRE: Keith, follow your heart.

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah, follow your heart.

KEITH: I mean, my heart is in that I lost all the Makos, and now Austin is going to try to steal Ted, too.

ART: We're all gonna lose a lot before we win.

ALI: What's winning if there's no Ted?

ART: I don't even understand that as a question.

[laughter]

ART: It's like, what's winning if also there's a hot fudge sundae when it's over?

SYLVIA: Listen. When he asked what kind of fish are you, did you want to say a wimpy fish who can't figure stuff out?

AUSTIN: Wow.

ART: It's a wimpy fish that stays in the war? That's the wimpy fish?

SYLVIA: Yeah. Who doesn't save Ted!

ART: The wimpy fish is the fish that keeps fighting?

SYLVIA: Okay, maybe I should have said traitorous fish! Listen, I'm emotional!

AUSTIN (as Ted): I didn't know it was like that. Jeeze.

AUSTIN: Mako, decision?

KEITH: I stay.

AUSTIN: There's something in you, Mako.

[RIGOUR FOOTSTEP]

AUSTIN: We'll be back to that in a bit. Aria, you have a point left.

ALI: I do.

AUSTIN: Oh, I should also note - Rigour is, throughout the sector, losing. Lazer Ted did not get away. I should at least give him this. Let's rewind, one second. I told you a long time ago, that Lazer Ted was also training as a stratus.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But he had different talents than you. You see that, I almost went into a Lazer Ted impression, because I was thinking about Lazer Ted. Also a Lazer Ted impression implies that he's a real person.

KEITH laughs.

ART: And all similarities between Lazer Ted and Riff Raff are purely coincidental -

AUSTIN: Complete coincidence!

ART: And not subject to legal action

AUSTIN: Absolutely. Um, and the thing that Lazer Ted can do is that he has the - he has a real creative style of fogging, where it's not just like he can hack into things and shut them down, he can hack into things and make them do stuff, hack into things and have them display stuff or make sounds. And there's a point at which where I think Lazer Ted is surrounded by a big group of the Rigour units, and he makes a trade with them, of a sort. Like, yeah, they'll be able to get in on him. While they're doing it, they're gonna blast his music, and when they're done, they're gonna explode into a bunch of light that just says "keep it wavy."

KEITH laughs.

AUSTIN: There was a new constellation in that sky that night.

ALI: [sniffs] I'm actually crying.

AUSTIN: Just, "keep it wavy!", and in a real small font underneath, it says, "yeah."

[Laughter]

SYLVIA: I love you Austin, so much. That's so good.

AUSTIN: Lazer Ted loves you too. Lazer Ted loves everybody.

DRE: Lazer Ted's twenty-ninth, and final job. Constellation creator.

AUSTIN: Constellation creator, right. Yup.

KEITH: Lazer Ted, you were too good for this world in very specific ways.

[laughter]

AUSTIN: Okay, alright. Aria.

ALI: Hey. Hi. Hey, hi. Hi.

AUSTIN: Hi.

ALI: I thought I wanted crisis points, but I don't.

AUSTIN: No, they're bad, actually.

ALI: They're really bad. You shoulda, you should have told me how bad they are.

AUSTIN: So, how's Aria doing?

ALI: She's winning a war.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: So really well. I don't know what's left for scene setup.

AUSTIN: There's Weight.

ALI: There is.

AUSTIN: We haven't seen Rigour on weight yet.

ALI: How's that going?

AUSTIN: I think it's going bad, right? Like, the thing about moving so many - so much of the Diaspora and Counterweight - oh, sorry, Oricon, off of Weight and Counterweight, them losing their political and military power, is like, oh, actually, they don't have a ton of troops in this area anymore. And Weight, especially, is like, a curiosity at this point, because nobody's figured out what to do with it. So there's a side of Weight, that is like, from space, you can just see the Rigour units like, descending on it and covering it up. It's like an eclipse.

ALI: It's like when the Blue Sky domes turned on.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: And Aria was like, I have to stop being a bounty hunter, and start being a revolutionary.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: Yeah, I guess she takes the fight there. It's where all of her political power is. It's important.

AUSTIN: Yes. All of her, everything about her is that Weight is what this place could be.

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: And specifically, we probably should have -- own Weight, also.

ALI LAUGHS.

ALI: Sidebar.

AUSTIN: Also that. Sidebar, give us Weight.

ALI: Hey, hey. Let me get that real quick. I mean, she's been fighting above Counterweight and seeing it been destroyed.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: I mean, she's been with the Vanguard, but she's been living on Counterweight. So she hasn't lost that ordeal.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: So she lives among people living in this destroyed world every single day.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: And like, it's not even like people, like, there's riots and people who are upset but I think for a long time...She moved off Joypark to go to Counterweight because she thought it was the best of what the sector could be, it was like, a complete, it was a perfect melting pot.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And it's wasn't even that people were upset with their lives, but they were just too busy trying to eat to realize that there was something better.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: So she's still compelled to try to protect what will be left for them, if they win against Rigour.

AUSTIN: So I think you lead the fight there, and the forces of yours that can make it, can actually make it off Counterweight and to Weight, because the Dead Metal, sorry, the Iron Choir stuff, it can fight and fly,

[1:30:00]

AUSTIN: but it's tough to get off one planet and onto another one, successfully. So you lead kind of a small but effective strike force there. And you have Righteousness, so you're incredibly powerful. Um, and you cut through a ton of them. And then, you remember that time in Seabed City where you fought Territory Jazz, and he just like.. He kind of fucked you right up?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: His daughter's here now. She just has - she comes over the comms with you, and she just has the biggest shitty grin on her face, she's still wearing her dad's blue mask, but the eyes are completely black instead of red. And her like, previously pearlescent purple Defiance now also like, swirling black, and she's just taking potshots at you from a distance. And she's the only thing that like, can, is able to put you on your back foot here, because she's also in a divine, and also pretty fucking committed to taking you out. The big thing is she has incredible range on you, so it's hard to get close enough to take her out. There's a moment when, in the Regent's Brilliance, Jacqui -

[ALI SUCKS AIR IN THROUGH HER TEETH. AUSTIN PLEASE BE NICE]

AUSTIN: - motions that she's going to take the Defiance out. Her plan is simple. You just keep dancing, the way you do, and she'll get close. She's fitted the Regent's Brilliance with those like, charges she uses, and all she has to do is take her down once. Just one tackle, one clean tackle. Or you could withdraw. And here's the thing I'll say. Here's the trade I'll offer you, Aria Joie. If you withdraw, then awesome. Jacqui gets to live, you get to live, that's a good life. If you don't, then you'll win Weight. And you'll get another political point. Right now, you have one.

[ALI SIGHS AGAIN]

AUSTIN: But withdraw is absolutely an acceptable option.

ALI: It is.

AUSTIN chuckles

ALI laughs

AUSTIN: Jack in the chat says 'remember Austin talking about different sorts of triumphant?' I'm - [chuckles] - Andrew says 'I'm glad I shot myself in the sun and only got one conflict point.' Yup.

JACK laughs.

ALI: I just make really shitty character choices but I feel like -

AUSTIN: There might - mhm.

ALI: Let me finish.

AUSTIN: I'll let you finish.

ALI: I feel like with everything I just said about Aria, being on Counterweight and living there for like, maybe eight years now, is like, it's horrible? And she hates it, and she feels really bad, but like, she still sees people who are happy there.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: She still walks down the street and sees like, two people on a first date, or like, she still sees children...

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: ...there's still a beach people can go to...

AUSTIN: There's that dude who asked her to sign the autograph for his daughter that one time.

ALI: Right. Um, it would be really cool if she could have everything, but it's not worth it to have a life on Weight without Jacqui?

AUSTIN: Mmm.



ALI: So I'm going to withdraw.

AUSTIN: If you want a scene with Jacqui, y'all could be pinned down somewhere, because that's a thing that happens in anime. So, I think the Brilliance, and the um, um, God, what is your mech called again? The Regent...

ALI: The Regent's... the Righteous Regent.

AUSTIN: The Righteous Regent! So the Regent and The Brilliance are now like...

ALI chuckles.

AUSTIN: [sighs] I think it's interesting because this isn't a thing we see super often. I think that they're like, down below a hill. They're in a valley. They're in a beautiful green valley, leaned up against a hill, a really lush, green hill. And like, Territory Jazz Jr. is, y'know, a couple kilometers away, blasting away at the Vanguard's forces on Weight, and, um, you can kind of see the smoke over the horizon, and from this... and maybe there's fighting down in the valley too, and you see bits of the smaller Rigour units being blasted away, and tossed into a river that's running through the valley, and um, I think maybe the Regent's Brilliance is like, not operating super well, so Jacqui has like, put it into kneel-down park mode, and is like, hopped out to put out a fire on its arm, and quickly try to get it back up into operating order.

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): Aria, I've got a plan! We can work through this, this isn't a problem. Just let me - ugh.

AUSTIN: She like, jumps out and starts trying to climb up on the thing's arm.

ALI: I think Aria goes to stop her? Like, she tries to climb up, and Aria's just like,

ALI (as Aria): Jacqui...

AUSTIN: So you get out - you get out of the...

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Okay.

ALI: I think that Jacqui's doing that thing where someone's panicking but they think they can make everything fine, and Aria has to put her hand on her shoulder and be like, it isn't? And she has to pull her down.

AUSTIN: She lets you pull her down, but then kind of like, in a tantrumy way, not a personal way, she like, slinks away from under your arm, and says,

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): Aria, I know. [scoffs] I'm not an idiot. I know...I know that if I go out there, and I just...The hope was that you could distract her fire. You're so...it's always been hard not to look at you, and while she was distracted I could get in close, and just grab her. And then...It's a fucking *divine*, but it - it'll blow up just the same. I still have a lot of my charges left.

ALI (as Aria): That's not...Jacqui, that's not an option. Stop.

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): What do you mean it's not an option? This is the whole thing, this is the the whole thing! This is what we've been - the whole time, it's been about preparing for this, and about Weight. What have we been fighting for if not for this?

ALI (as Aria): What have we been fighting for if I'm gonna watch you walk away because of it? No, Jacqui, no.

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): Aria... what if we lose? And, not quick. You know, like...so this one time, a long time ago, Jill and I had this mission. It was one of those dirty things, one of those heavy things. We had to break into this compound, slip past this guy's guards, and it was supposed to be in and out. Get in, kill him, leave. And we got in, but we did not get past his guards, and there was a big fight. And things got really bad. And I got separated from Jill. And I found him, but by the time I did, I was out of ammo, and I was out of blast packs, and it was just me, and my arms. And this man. And what happened was real slow. And I won, but like, I didn't even wanna be there. Like, what if when Rigour wins, it isn't fast? Like, it isn't like...you know, those stellar combustors, they wipe everything out real quick. What if it's not like that? What if it's like, we survive, and go back to Counterweight, and try to make a life of it, or whatever, and Rigour is there. And we just watch, for thirty years together, as it does whatever it does.

AUSTIN: And she starts crying.

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): I just wanna be strong enough to beat it, and if I don't beat it, then at least I won't be around for that.

ALI: Aria does that thing where like, she still needs to calm Jacqui down, so she like, puts her hands on her shoulders and tries to interrupt her as she's talking.

ALI (as Aria): Listen - I - if it sticks around, if it continues, there's gonna need to be someone left, right? So it doesn't have to be right here. We don't have to end this right here, like this. We can lose Weight if we need to.

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): But we worked so hard. This has been... I thought this is what people looked to for hope. What are they supposed to look to now?

ALI: Jacqui...the last couple of years,

[Music: [\*Love's First Explosion\*](#) begins - 1:39:10]

ALI (as Aria): I've looked to you for hope. I'm not letting you do this.

AUSTIN: I think she lifts you up, and kisses you, and she holds you, and is just bawling. And then she gets it together, and puts you down, and says.

AUSTIN (as Jacqui): Well, at least let me slow that bitch down.

AUSTIN: And she gets back into the Regent's Brilliance, and the cockpit's open - she's not like, suiting back up, she's going in and tapping on keys and overcharging the reactor core, and getting it ready to be a missile. Um, and she sets in like, a targeting lock, and without even asking, hops into the already very tight compartment of the Royal Regent - Royal Regent, no, no, the Righteous Regent?

ALI: The Righteous Regent.

AUSTIN: And offers you a hand, to get back in. And basically sit on her lap, like, there's no room in there.

ALI: [laughing] Perfect. Good. Yeah, of course.

AUSTIN: And I think, you get away. You kind of fly away, and you can see below as Territory Jazz Jr.'s army, a web of black Rigours, continues. And I think we also see that Territory Jazz Jr., of course, survived.

[Music: [\*Love's First Explosion\*](#) ends]

Distraction, maybe, but divines, especially divines that have been passed through both Rigour and Voice at this point, don't die that easy. But you get away. I have a question.

ALI: Do you.

AUSTIN: What's Righteousness think of this?

ALI: Probably disappointed. Cause this is like, she's not doing the thing that he...he<sup>4</sup> convinced Ibex to do. Which is like, just let everything go, and we can fix all of this.

AUSTIN: I'm gonna mark something for...I'm gonna change Aria's name here, so I remember that you can't do anything else.

ALI: Okay.

AUSTIN: So, here's where we stand. Things across the sector have taken a turn for the better. Rigour has been defeated across population centres, but still exists in two major ways. One, there's a lot of Rigour left in some of the the smaller, most vulnerable planets. It's where people are already the weakest, and where they could not gather armies like you could. And two, the body of Rigour still stands, in Mode City, which has been reunited with September. While Voice powers this new army of Rigours, the original being lives too. And basks in that closing sun. At this point, I'll say it straight up. You are three points away from the highest tier victory. Any character who's willing to like, make that sacrifice will advance it by one. You have to tell me privately, if you're going to make that sacrifice. There is no collaboration. No open collaboration.

KEITH: I haaaate you!

AUSTIN: Mhm! I will say one person just says, "wow. fuck you."

ALI laughs.

KEITH: Hold on, we're not alright yet. Hold on.

AUSTIN: Mako, you...Okay.

KEITH [under his breath]: Fucking bullshit.

AUSTIN: It's like a prisoner's dilemma thing happening here.

KEITH: Yeah, it sucks. Listen, it's real easy to be the hero when you don't have to also die. Heroes are supposed to be too important to be the ones that die.

ART: No, we're all gonna lay down our lives so Aria can bone.

AUSTIN: Get married. Yeah.

DRE: That sounds like a pretty good ending.

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<sup>4</sup> Righteousness was previously referred to using it pronouns.

SYLVIA: I'm just glad that our show doesn't have the dead lesbians trope, okay? I'm just happy about that.

AUSTIN: That's a hundred percent true, isn't it?

ALI: Yeah, it's been a rough year for that.

JACK: I'm just gonna take my headphones off and close my eyes.

AUSTIN: No no no no no. You don't get to do that, this is a, this is a, this is gonna be a moment.

Jack laughs.

AUSTIN: Let's start with Jillian Red, who's died in this game once already.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I think she goes to those other planets, like, that's the thing, right? They don't have armies for themselves. She ignores Gemm, Gemm has Horizon.

SYLVIA: She flies past Gemm, giving it the finger.

AUSTIN: I think it's Ionias. I think like, there's something about Ionias where the refugees are.

SYLVIA: God.

AUSTIN: They suffered for so long, first under Snowtrack. That wasn't a good life. And then they found Rigour? And Jill is like, nah. Not again. Not them, the most vulnerable who've already been traumatized, who've already been hurt so badly. And I just really like the shot of her shedding her armour and diving in. And the thing that happens there that's surprising is that the people there, they take up arms. Or, it's not surprising that they take up arms, too, of course people are going to defend themselves. But there is a catalyzing effect, seeing her there, leading them. They didn't think they counted, but she reminds them, that in the free states of Kalliope, everyone counts. And they know where their home is.

AUSTIN (con't): Chet Wise, A.K.A Capra, but this is definitely Chet Wise, piloting Loyalty. I think puts it all together, in a way, which is why he's still Chet Wise, is just like...this is just like a *gun*. I'm just in a gun. Like, it's cool it has thoughts, but like, it doesn't own me. I'm just a dude who's in a gun. And he fires it a whole bunch. Until he runs out of ammunition. Who does Loyalty serve when there's no leader? And I think, in its final moments, at least its final moments with Capra, it realizes that it serves the people of the Diaspora, it's always served them. And thinking it served anyone else was a mistake.

AUSTIN: And on September, Apokine lands. It's caught in the sun. A startling silhouette. Beautiful. Aspirational. *This is what we could be*. And I think it conquers Voice instantly, because something in Voice sees itself, in a reflection clearly. Volunteering shouldn't be like this. It shouldn't be...You shouldn't have to convince yourself that the best thing to do with your life is to work. How does Cass feel, back here?

ART: Bad. I think... we talked about this a little bit, and I didn't super want to go with it but. I think there's been a part of Cass that's been afraid this whole time, that Rigour got him.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: And it's silly, and it's easy to push it out of your head, especially during the day. but at two in the morning?

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: Less. I think that Cass thought this is always where he'd come back. That this was his fate. Not his destiny. His fate.

AUSTIN: There's something about September. We talked about September before, as having been built on the ruins of old Apostolian architecture. And it's very old Apostolian architecture. Recall that Apostolos did not hold this planet at the start of the war, but also recall that Apokine was buried there. That's because Apokine began there, it started there. In the same century Kesh was founded, so too was Apostolos. Refugees carried from deep down the Perseus and Sagittarius arms. And they built Apokine, because after so many years under Rigour, they did not know how to live without a leader. Even an imperial one. Even one with demands that were too high. Even one that took more than it gave. But over the years it became clear that leadership was a flexible thing.

[Music: [Cassander Timaeus Berenice](#) begins - 1:48:20]

AUSTIN: And that when empowered, some people were capable of giving back. And then it just surges, the history and the life of the Golden Branch Sector surges through Apokine. I don't know how fast the fight is. I don't think it's very... I don't think that Rigour expected this. I think you pin it to the ground with your spear. And you sit. And you wait. Until the sun takes you both. It is monotonous work. We know Rigour is built for that sort of work. But the heroic thing is that Cass is not, but holds it all the same. It looks into the eyes of you, for hours, as the heat rises, until finally September is swallowed.

[Music: [Cassander Timaeus Berenice](#) ends]

AUSTIN: That's a lot of time though, Cass. Do you wanna send any messages?

ART: Sure. I'll call Aria.

AUSTIN: I think you know immediately, that it's Apokine calling. There is no...the way it communicates with you, and you know this because of all the times you've done your monthly sparring sessions, sometimes Cass has to call and reschedule.

ALI laughs.

AUSTIN: It's reaching through the consciousness of everyone to you, but it's still also just a mundane call. It's not like it's magic, and that's kind of a weird feeling, probably. So what do you say Cass? And what - do you see Aria?

ART: Yeah, I think so, I think we both see each other, I think it's kind of like a holo? Because there's an image I want to hit in like, forty seconds.

AUSTIN: Can we do the anime ass bullshit? Is it time to be in new type vision mode? In Gundam, there's the moments of, oh, the Newtypes are talking across time and space. and it's just psychedelic nonsense, but like, talking with the Apokine to your friend across space, is maybe the time for us do that? So it can look like whatever we want it to look like. It's our version of Assassin's Creed, you've just killed someone, and that space could look like anything. So what's it look like?

ART: I think that it's like, we each see each other not as we are or as we think of ourselves, but as what's been thrust upon us? I think it's like, Cass in this ridiculous outfit. He's wearing the clothes that have been chiseled onto the Apokine, which is some ancient toga bullshit that he'd never actually wear - it looks good on a statue, and it never looks good on a person. And I don't want to tell Aria what she looks like, but it's like-

AUSTIN: But you're going to do it!

ART: Second Encore, right?

ALI: Yeah. Oh God, yeah.

AUSTIN: What's that look like?

ALI: Um. Man. Would it have any Vanguard influence? or like...

AUSTIN: It's up to you!

ALI: Everything that's on her isn't that, right?

AUSTIN: I think it starts with the Vanguard influence there. I think that has to be a thing in this conversation. In the sense that Cass is calling upon you to live up to that. In a sense, as long as Cass is calling you, it's put upon you. Cass is putting it on you as we speak.

ALI: I guess it's the most bullshit version of her Vanguard outfit? Like, if her Vanguard uniform was also like, a Rose Bride dress. Which is a hot Utena reference while we're being as anime as we can. Um, so it's like the collar and the jacket that just turn into a ballgown. This is good. We're good at this.

AUSTIN: So what do you say, Cass?

ART (as Cass): Aria... I've done it. I've trapped Rigour. He's<sup>5</sup>...we're...we're going into the sun. How... how is your battle going?

ALI (as Aria): Cass... I... I left.

ART (as Cass): [sighs]

ALI (as Aria): Cass. I'm sorry.

ART (as Cass): You... you're Aria Joie.

ALI (as Aria): I know, that's why -- Cass, I'm really proud of you, for being able to do what I couldn't. But I... There's only so much I was willing to give up.

ART (as Cass): [scoffs] Okay. I get it. It's not for everyone.

ALI (as Aria): I couldn't make all the same mistakes that he did, you know? The last time I spoke to Ibex, what he said was "I wish Maryland was here," and I couldn't stop thinking about that.

ART (as Cass): Sure. Ibex told you.

AUSTIN: [woops] Oh...

ART (as Cass): Tell everyone goodbye for me.

ALI (as Aria): I will. I promise.

ART (as Cass): Don't...Don't tell Maxine I did this on purpose.

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<sup>5</sup> Rigour is it/its.



ALI sighs.

ART (as Cass): And certainly don't tell her I spent my last few hours looking at this.

ART: And Cass, like, gestures, and then Aria can see what he's seeing out of his viewport, which is just Rigour's face. I'm sure, in some snarling...

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: ... expression of endless, methodical hate.

AUSTIN: And I think we get like, the shot pulled back, it's the Apokine with Rigour pinned at like, huge scale, and Aria, it's in the weird psychedelic Apokine zone, and the sun of September is rising on the horizon, getting closer and closer, and you see like, a sweep of light, swing across the floor and up Aria, and as it hits her, her outfit is changed. And like, all of it is ripped away from her, and she's back to just Aria Joie. Aria Joie who sleeps in sometimes. Aria Joie who hates Constellation Cafe, but where else are you gonna go? And like...the gown is gone. It's just you.

ART (as Cass): I should, I should go. My ears are ringing.

ALI: That's so sad...

AUSTIN: And yeah, I think the signal closes. And Cass, you have a long day. You have a really long day.

ART: Yeah. It was just dawn.

AUSTIN: That's everybody who sacrificed themselves. If you're dead, which is a number of people, you can use this opportunity to narrate how your death realigned your political points, if at all. That means they're up in the air.

SYLVIA: I don't think mine really changed as much or at all.

AUSTIN: No, I think you pretty clearly did your best to...your death is what solidified those.

SYLVIA: Exactly.

AUSTIN: But Kobus slash Capra's, and Cass', I think are a little more up for grabs. It's funny because I really like that Kobus had theirs locked down, because like, oh no, Grace is totally fine, Grace was never corrupted by Sigilia, except, [stage whisper] it never was really, no, it wasn't. [normal voice] But now Kobus has all those points. Or I guess, another way to think about that, is that the former Hands Of Grace have all those points.

DRE: Is uh, is Service left?

AUSTIN: Yeah, Service is left on Slate.

DRE: Well, I've got...

AUSTIN: But also, fuck Service. Service is just Rigour part two, as far as I'm concerned. I know I'm supposed to be a little bit impartial here, but fuck Service. We never even gave Service a candidate.

DRE: Oh, we didn't, did we?

AUSTIN: No. It's just some middle manager.

DRE laughs.

DRE: It's the district manager.

AUSTIN: We're lucky Jorne already showed up once.

KEITH: Service is like...he's a real...he's a dick. He's like, work harder.

AUSTIN: Yes. That's him.

KEITH: Work harder, you bunch of ingrates!

AUSTIN: Yup. And another thing about this is like, what do you think the death of these characters, and in Kobus' case, the death of Grace does to the sector? Who gains that political power? Cass, you don't have to change anything at all, but...And this is not a private decision, we can talk all of this out. Also, I'm really proud that exactly the right amount of people made the sacrifice.

DRE: I'm almost tempted to say, and maybe this is just too easy, but like, Sigilia goes to the Demarchy, and Vox and Slate go to the Vanguard. Vox and Slate, as being like, the more industrial and just lots of people type of planets, I could see like... And especially with Slate, being the more industrial kind of police state, I could see the message of the Vanguard really resonating with those people. Um...

AUSTIN: So Grace is just like...the era of Grace is broken.

DRE: I wanna say that maybe Service is on Slate, and just gets dismantled. By just a, just a crowd, just a huge crowd of people.

AUSTIN: Right. So as the remaining person with a divine, Aria, or I guess Orth sort of does also...but as the remaining person with ties to the Diaspora, what are divines in this new world? Are they something... does Aria change her name? Or does Aria remain Aria Joie, and Righteousness a thing she uses?

ALI: Oh, she definitely keeps her name. She's...

KEITH: How you gonna stay on those charts?

ALI: Yeah, she's...I mean...

DRE: Gotta catch those royalty checks.

ALI: Fuck, God. No, but like that's, but also, Aria is like...

[2:00:00]

ALI: OriCon through and through.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: She grew up a tiny OriCon girl. And like, it's not that she wants, it's weird because it's not like she wants to take political advantage of this, but it's also like, time for the entire sector to see, like, Divines were a bad idea.

AUSTIN: Yup. It's interesting - I'm curious to see how this reflects down to Oricon - the Diaspora, proper, one day. And Cass, it seems like the Demarchy is getting Sigilia, which gives it another point.

KEITH: So who's...who's...I guess, who's the next person to take hold of...

AUSTIN: It's a lottery. If it goes like this, it's a lottery. Who knows?

KEITH: Right, yeah.

AUSTIN: It's supposed to be...it's a lottery that pulls from a set of qualified, a pool of qualified applicants. People who have been vetted by a system, vetted by the other five - other four representatives, but that pool is still big. And those pools go down to smaller levels. It's a radical and strange way to run an entire nation. It's probably the chance that over the next century, the Demarchy will move out of the Demarchy and into a republic or something, if only by force or personality. That's if Cass keeps the points they are.

ART: Yeah, I really don't know. I could do so much.

AUSTIN: Here's what I'll say. As written, there are four outcomes for each faction, in the same way there were four outcomes for Rigour. It's a pretty easy split. Zero point, one point, two points, three points. There is the matter of OriCon, which has three points, but two of them are coming from Ambition. If somehow Oricon got more, it would give Jack the power to narrate a lot about what OriCon does. I'm not saying do that, but.

KEITH: My - my - I'll say this, and this is the one thing I'll say. On my list here, it says "Rivals: Everyone, depending on the day. Enemies: Also everyone. Friends: The Golden Demarchy." And that's all I got.

AUSTIN: Sure.

KEITH: That's all I got.

AUSTIN: Sure. I, yes. Again, I will say, that category is zero - failure. One - partial failure. Two - partial success. Three - total success.

ART: But I'm really being asked to chose right now is if I want to give up these points to...

AUSTIN: Somebody else, or continue the Demarchy.

ART: No, I...

AUSTIN: And this is just narrative power, this isn't Cass, this is me asking, you Art, you have narrative power.

ART: Yeah, that's much harder. I know what Cass wants, I don't know what I want. I'll keep them.

AUSTIN: Okay. Final total is Cass, two political points, Mako, two, Orth, three, Jill, two, Aria, three. Let's go back over to the map here. I think let's start in the Free States. After Jill's sacrifice, and after like, through the skin of the teeth survival, the encounter with Rigour convinces the people there that they do need to organize and unify. Jill was right.

KEITH: Too little, too late, fuckos!

[laughter]

AUSTIN: She, and Hudson Thorn, and all the rest on Kalliope, with their strange genetics, and their high fashion, and their simultaneous crust punk fashion, this weird mix of avant garde and garbage.

SYLVIA: Avant garbage!

AUSTIN: Exactly, avant garbage. My new experimental band. But they are not going to be the leaders of the Free Kalliopean States. There is not free Kalliopean anything. There are the Free States of Gemm.

SYLVIA [grumbled]: Yeah, of course there are.

AUSTIN: And it's beautiful. It offers an alternative to those in the Sector who want to live somewhere a little different. There's a value in being able to go to Kalliope, because what you want is like, designer drugs, or Ionias, where *finally* you're payed a living wage to do hard labour, but you're payed a living wage, and can live a good life, and can provide for the people you care about. Or you could go to Gemm, which in the south of the sector, grows to be a lot like Counterweight. Finally. After twenty, twenty five, thirty years of struggling, finally, its skies are clean and its atmosphere slowly repaired. People live here again. Full lives. I think we need to just pour one out for Grace, and the Hands of Grace. Those places are folded in, and there is a bit of broken faith. I don't - Art, you and I have talked about what it would be like to live under an emperor who, who's divinity is then like, denied. This is this whole other thing of like, a couple of your gods still walk around, and are still physically powerful. And even still live on the planet with you. But they aren't gods anymore. They still do the work they used to do, in the case of Service, who organizes, with new oversight, all of the labour on Slate. But my biggest question is what to do with Sigilia, what the Demarchy does with it. But that might be one of those questions we're not fit to answer. What's a place like the Demarchy do with a planet that can help you see into other people's minds? Hm? Huh? Cass, the Demarchy continues. Your sibling's dream is cemented, at least for now. But, in fifty years time, maybe less, there's this one footnote that's frustrating. In memory, Cass is, of course, remembered as a hero, but a controversial one. Children are taught that they tried to claim more power, roll back some of the reforms that their sibling did. Cass is remembered as something of a contradiction. Yes, a hero. Twice, thrice over. But also, someone who's aspirations were greater than their loyalty to their people. And those who know Cass know how wrong that is.

ART sighs.

AUSTIN: Orth, it's like, remarkable that you did it. And that's like, what they tell you in like, the virtual meeting room.

AUSTIN (as OriCon Official): We really thought you weren't going to turn this sector around, Godlove. We were certain that we were gonna have to cut off supplies, but between the way you dealt with those Stiegers, and the whole Rigour situation up there, and it's great that you've been able to negotiate a good dealing with the Free States down in the south, it's really proud to keep OriCon strong in the Golden Branch.

AUSTIN: And they mean it. And Orth doesn't get to stay as Emergency Executive Godlove, but gets to have a great deal of influence in the way that OriCon operates in the sector for the rest of his life. Is there anything like, special, that Orth... like, what's his life look like, Jack?

JACK: Quiet. I think he likes visiting other planets. People keep saying, "let's do it in a video conference, we've got this cool, we've got this great software, we've got this, we got this great software!" And Orth's like "give me like, three days, and I'll be there."

AUSTIN: And he's powerful enough for them to have to say yes.

JACK: And he's visited enough planets that even if the people don't know what exactly to do when an ambassador arrives, Orth somehow knows a bar, or a restaurant, and they go "Oh, hey. Hey, this place is alright. This is okay." But I think immediately, immediately, he stops taking the pills, and he starts sleeping again.

AUSTIN: Mako. So I've got good news and bad news.

DRE: Oh.

AUSTIN: And then some news that's tricky. Which news do you want first?

KEITH: I don't know if Mako can take one more second of bad news. [Pause] I'll take the bad news.

Jack laughs.

AUSTIN: Okay. So, enough of that Rigour tech was secured or shut down, the destruction of that factory, that OriCon factory, was valuable in the end, because it sent a signal to other companies. Hey. Hey, hey, hey. Be careful. We'll get you.

KEITH: Nice. I'm, listen, I'm glad that worked out.

AUSTIN: Well. Sort of. This is still the bad news part, remember. The thing they decided is that we should be extra careful with our Rigour tech.

KEITH sighs.

AUSTIN: And they are. Rigour's not gonna come back because some company somewhere has used part of its eyelash to develop slightly faster pizza making software.

KEITH cackles.

AUSTIN: But here's a weird thing. They're gonna sell way more pizzas. And let me tell you about the sorts of people who are want to take a chance with Rigour tech, those aren't the sorts of companies you want to have any advantage.

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: So I think that Mako probably spends some of the rest of his life being a weird corporate Batman.

KEITH: Yeah, totally.

AUSTIN: Anti-corporate Batman.

KEITH: Is that the good news? Cause that sounds like good news. Except that Batman is playing, like...

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's the good news. Well, who would you rather be?

KEITH: I guess a weird corporate Batman is good, it's a version of Batman that takes down corporations, instead of like, riff raff.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Not Lazer Ted Riff Raff,

AUSTIN: Wait, wait, wait!

KEITH: like, oooh, trouble makers.

AUSTIN: You want the weird news?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Or do you want to skip it? You don't need the weird news.

KEITH: I'll take the - I'll take the - I'll get all the - give me all the news you've got.

AUSTIN: Well, the good news is again, you did it, that you stopped there from being...let me tell you how bad things would have gone if you failed this but they still beat Rigour. They not would have been beaten...they would not have beaten Rigour, because Rigour would still be everywhere. It would have been in their cars, it would have been the low hum it always was, just everywhere.

KEITH: Which is terrifying.

AUSTIN: There is a low hum, though, Mako. And it's in you.

KEITH hums.

AUSTIN: That connection you felt. I mean, the good news is it lets you - that it draws you closer to Rigour tech, it lets you know, when you walk into a room, if there's bit of that left. And it lets you know, even if there's sort of the culture of that left, you walk into a room where people are like, working crunch, you know.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You can tell immediately. But you also hear it at night, sometimes. I don't know that you start taking those pills to not have to sleep, but sleeping is hard.

KEITH: No, he just listens to ASMR.

AUSTIN: He does. He definitely listens to ASMR. It doesn't work. Those words transform now and then. And there's a lot that comes to Mako's mind, I think, throughout the rest of his life. I think he thinks about Tower, and Maryland, and Maritime, and all of those people on September. And then he thinks about Lazer Ted,

KEITH: the other Makos...

AUSTIN: The other Makos, Larry, Paisley. But more than anything, I think he thinks a lot about working. He devotes himself in a way that only the most rigorous, only those who've maybe been one with Rigour once, can devote themselves. He's still a goofball, but he just doesn't have free time to meet up anymore. It's like, one of those things where people invite him over, like 'oh, it's the big game, come over, we have dip,' and Mako has some stuff to do, y'know? Like, 'Oh man, I'd really like to take you out for a nice dinner, I know this really great place,' and you're like, 'yeah, totally!', and you even go, and then you get this weird nibbling sensation that, aw, something, 'I've gotta go, there's something I've gotta take care of nearby. I'll be right back, I'll be right back. I'll be right back!' And you can't ever work that bit out. And so, he devotes himself to making the lives of people way better, and he succeeds at that. But there's always a cost. And I'm gonna be clear, Rigour is dead, you beat Rigour, Rigour is *dead*. Rigour is not going to come back in the form of Mako, if anyone's gonna run a fangame, Mako doesn't get to be the candidate of Rigour, Rigour is dead. Aria Joie.

ALI: Hey.

AUSTIN: It's one of those things that I don't know...I wonder how...when did Aria realize she won? Was it like, was it like the next morning like, 'oh shit, we all woke up.' And you're in bed



with Jacqui, and it's just like, 'oh, we're still here, this is really good.' Or is it like, six months later when the first people land on... the first civilians land on Weight? Or is it two years after that when bits of Counterweight have been rejuvenated? And you can sit on the beach with your friends, outside of what used to be Seabed City, and dip your toes in the sea?

ALI: Oh. I don't think it's the next morning, because there's still so much stuff to be done. And like, when you fight really hard to create a new world, but then you have to wake up in it. And like, figure out what to do.

AUSTIN: Right. Where's the food come from? How do you pay the electric bill?

ALI: Yeah. How do we clean this up? What do we do with all these people, like, it's sort of like when she had to take over the Vanguard for the first time. It was like, 'I did the thing I wanted to do, how do I do this?'

AUSTIN: Does she stay on as leader as the Vanguard? And for how long? Consider now, it runs Glimmer, Coral, Reef, Vox, Slate, and in time, Weight and Counterweight, too. Other factions still keep presence there, but this victory is massive for the Vanguard.

ALI: She has to see it through long enough to make sure things are stable. And that's probably...that's probably four or five years or something.

AUSTIN: And then let someone else become...

ALI: She eventually becomes Executive uh...

AUSTIN: Is she Executive Joie? Is she just like...

ALI: Yeah, she's Executive Joie.

AUSTIN: Mm. Just like, being the problem solver that comes to help out, but like, not in any permanent capacity, not in any like like, 'she is the head of this group.'

ALI: It's tough because I think that's...it comes to a point where she doesn't need to be?

AUSTIN: Right, that is the hope.

ALI: We were talking before, she's Representative but she also just has the power of a queen, but at a certain point...

AUSTIN: That's not what you're fighting for.

ALI: Right, she didn't wanna keep doing that. She wanted to go to places and like, make sure they were stable, and put the right people in power, and if things went wrong, they could ask her questions.

AUSTIN: Does the Vanguard, over a long enough timeline, stay a distinct power from the other powers here? I mean, at some point I'm sure it changes its name from The Righteous Vanguard to something else.

ALI: I think in like, uh, pulling down the Divines it just goes by the Vanguard? It loses ...

AUSTIN: The Righteous.

ALI: Yeah. And I think there's a part of Aria that would meet with Cass once a month and they would be so frustrated by how hard it was to deal with the Diaspora and Oricon, and she would think to herself, 'We're both so new, but those feel like they could be outdated. The sector can keep growing without them, because it's done so much damage to it.' So it definitely doesn't get folded into OriCon, or it doesn't become a new Diaspora, it stays as its own sort of unique thing.

AUSTIN: I think it does, I think it stays like that. I think that's the vision of the sector, September is gone. I think maybe there is one...there is a statue of Cass. There is a statue of Cass, that does not have any negative associations with it. It's probably statues of the whole Chime, on Apotone, in a place where...I think we maybe get the shot of them tearing Joy Park down, literally tearing down an Aria, an old Aria Joie like, concert hall, as like, the Demarchy puts up more monuments. And we get Cass, and Aria, and AuDy, and Mako, and at least two other Makos, and Jacqui, and Orth would not let them make a statue of him.

AUSTIN (con't): And so, that's it. There were enough bodies, enough sacrifices. In a small twist of irony, there was enough hard work to defeat Rigour itself. And, overtime, the stories from around the Sector start to float up. It becomes clear that it wasn't only the Chime that fought hard that day. She'd probably hate it if she knew it, but it was when Cass, who killed her father, it was when Cass broke Voice from Rigour that Territory Jazz Jr. regained hold on herself. With Defiance back under her control, she turned against Rigour's forces with surprising force and energy. She'd wear a smirk when Aria Joie gave her a medal, and then gladly join the Vanguard's rank as a hero. Survival is fine, she thought, but proving you're the best is better.

AUSTIN (cont'd): On Tooru, meanwhile, the world controlled equally by the Demarchy and the Principality of Kesh, Jace Rethal and Addax Dawn fought with ferocity. But it was Maxine Ming who was the real surprise. She showed that all that training on September wasn't just for show, tapping into power she'd never put to work in public before, and fighting with single determination. The allegiance between Kesh and the Demarchy - between her and Cass - it couldn't come undone. Nothing, she thought, not even Rigour, would ruin this. It was a week later, when she finally found out that Cass had died. And not long after that, the vilification of Cass, of her Apokine, she thought, began. She couldn't build a statue of Cass, either. Not with

the things people were saying. So, she named the new city, on Tooru, the symbol of friendship between Kesh and the Demarchy, Whitestar, after the house she remembered sharing with Cass so clearly on September. A monument to a half-real, but all true, history of trust.

AUSTIN (cont'd): In the end, Divines are just machines. Yet, there are things that machines can do that people cannot. And so, in a moment of desperation, as the Kingdom Come found impact on the pavement, Discovery, its vastness, its network of inputs and outputs, a broad web of electronic neurons spread across the the sector, a decentralized selfhood, it seized inwards, clutched at the last computational cycles of the Automated Dynamics unit that had housed it and Liberty for the last six years. No, Discovery realized. Not just Automated Dynamics. AuDy. That being, that unique life, after all that they'd been through, all that they'd seen? No. Not like this. Nurture saplings, Discovery reminded itself. And so they lived for countless years together, in a scale that humans don't comprehend. But not as AuDy, or the Divine Discovery, as something else. A malleable something, a fickle but good natured ghost. Sometimes they played the role that Benny Babs once did, freelance information broker to the few that found them. Other times, they would disperse themselves through buildings and cities. One night, in a hospital, they picked up a late-night shift, covering for an absentee medic. They spent one year together as the free wireless network in a park. They never took the form of AuDy again, though. Never spoke to the Chime directly or walked through the streets. But, whenever he found himself lost in a strange city, or stranded after mass transit had stopped, Orth Godlove always knew he'd have a ride home. He could count on that.

AUSTIN (cont'd): And eventually, after spending so much of his life traveling from one place to another on someone else's order, Orth Godlove finally found somewhere he could call home. A humble, but refined apartment on Centralia, on Counterweight. He also found, however, that he had too much damn time on his hands. And so, on a recommendation from a friend, he decided to write his life's story. A challenge, but he thought, he'd had one hell of a life, after all. His memoir sold poorly. But while writing, he'd remembered a promise he'd made to a rival, once. That when it was all over, he'd build his one time enemy a nice grave, with the right name on it. And so, in lieu of that broken promise, he decided to write a second book. *A Righteous Man, The Life And Death Of Attar Rose*. It was an overnight best seller. It was easy to imagine, Orth thought, Ibex laughing at getting one more over on him. But when he walked out onto his apartment's balcony and looked around, he didn't mind so much if the old dog had one more little win. After all, Ibex was dead, and Orth was alive at the most incredible time. Things weren't perfect. OriCon was still built on the backs of unpaid interns. The Vanguard had traded away the religiosity of the Divines for the most secular sort of politicking. The Demarchy's lottery driven democracy never quite fell apart, but it never felt truly stable either. The Free States were a little too comfortable skirmishing for more territory, and Kesh...well, Kesh was still a bit of a mystery, and Orth knew mysteries were dangerous. But still, Orth was born to a Counterweight under glass. One of the first children here when OriCon stole away Counterweight from Apostolos decades ago. And now the domes were gone. Aria's leadership, his own regulatory actions, support from the Demarchy, Kesh, the Free States. Sure, Tooru and Gemm were growing rapidly, but Counterweight...

[Music: [\*The Long Way Around\*](#) begins - 2:24:48]

AUSTIN (cont'd): Counterweight was the heart of the Golden Branch. History hadn't ended, it spun on. Here, in this city. No one was turned away, he thought. Everyone had a small part of this place. A part that was theirs, and theirs alone. Some corner that they'd found and shared with no one else, or something they'd shared with everyone, something that tied them together. The whirring greeting of a J-M unit in the SpacePort. The smell of street food that you cannot name but reminds you of that one day you spent in the park together. The bass beat and treble strum of a distant song that went from summer jam to classic when you weren't paying attention, and hearing it again lifts a load from your shoulders, and you realize you know all the words, and so you find yourself singing along, everyone, even Orth, on his balcony, under his breath, to the sound of Counterweight.

[Music: [\*The Long Way Around\*](#) ends]

AUSTIN: Orth, a much younger Orth, but not as young as he was in the Kingdom Game, is just sitting in the pilot chair of the Kingdom Come, for what at the time he thinks will be the final time, when he finally hears everyone come in. AuDy, are you there, already?

JACK: I think so. I think I've come along with Orth to look at the ship.

AUSTIN: Right. And I think he gets up, and kind of dusts it off.

JACK: Has he...well, has he told us that this was his ship?

AUSTIN: No...

JACK: [overlapping Austin] Well, what has he told us?

AUSTIN: [overlapping Jack] I think you know that. I think that you probably have intuited that, because you had access to Orth that a way other people haven't, maybe.

JACK: Right. But I don't think AuDy knows that it's...

AUSTIN: He might not know the history. He's told you that, given the assignment he's about to send you all on, it needs a ship. And this thing has been beaten around, and it'll be a loan, or a debt that you owe him, and you'll have to pay him back, but it's just...y'know, it's a ship that somehow found its way off the records. And then he comes back out, through the hallway and into the main hall. Who is the first one to show up after AuDy? At this point, I think you've all done a mission for Orth before, or two or three, and there's like some rapport there, but no relationship. No...no close friendship, or anything like that.

ART: [overlapping Ali] I think Cass is next?

ALI: [overlapping Art] I think Aria?

ART: Oh, I, Aria was my, was someone I thought - [overlapping Austin]

AUSTIN: [overlapping Art] Cass and Aria show up, I think they show up at the same time then? That seems... like, to the degree of... maybe they're both outside the hanger bay, like, is this - are you?

ART: Yeah, the like, kind of nervous...y'know, neither of them have been criminals for very long?

[laughter]

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: And then you go inside. What's the first thing you notice about the Kingdom Come, both of you?

ART: It's so...it's so beat up? I think Cass touches the table, and like half-flinches, and then catches himself<sup>6</sup> flinching, and then sets his hand down on that center table, and tries to be cool about it.

ALI: I think that Aria recognizes it, right? Because she spent so long idolizing Jace...

AUSTIN: Yeah...maybe.

ALI: That she has to know that it's like, *the* ship?

AUSTIN: Yeah, but she's never seen it. If Cass thinks it's beat up, what must she think it is? Because the version she's seen has been whitewashed, and like - like actually, literally whitewashed, is like, painted white and gold and like,

[Ali laughing]

AUSTIN: this beautiful ship that it was never actually that.

ALI: She's probably doing that thing where you don't want someone to see how disappointed you are.

AUSTIN: Oh, boy. And Orth probably has no idea that she knows, so I don't think that he even...

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<sup>6</sup> Cass uses they/them pronouns.

ALI: Even picks up on it, sort of.

AUSTIN: I think he picks up on the general disappointment from Cass, and says like,

AUSTIN (as Orth): Yeah, it's an old ship. It'll get you there and back. Just don't ask to go to space in it, it's not going back there anytime soon.

AUSTIN: Mako, I think you probably show up last.

KEITH (as Mako): Hey guys! Sorry I'm early.

AUSTIN: Oh lord.

AUSTIN (as Orth): I'm surprised you came at all.

AUSTIN: What's the first thing you notice about the Kingdom Come, Mako?

KEITH: Is anyone sitting in the captain's seat now?

JACK: I don't think so, right?

AUSTIN: No.

KEITH: Alright, the first thing I notice is there's no one sitting in the captain's seat, and I go,

KEITH (as Mako): Dibs on captain!

AUSTIN: Orth raises two hands to his face and like, clutches his eyes.

AUSTIN (as Orth): You don't need too many people to make this thing work. There's uh...a pretty dedicated autopilot system, and good connection to the mesh, there's room for a couple riggers, uh, Cass, you can set your doctor stuff up over there. You guys have any questions?

KEITH (as Mako): What's doctor stuff?

ART (as Cass): I was a medic in the war.

KEITH (as Mako): So, like one of the arm pump things? Or like, thermometer? Like, what, what is it?

ART (as Cass): What's a... what's a doctor? I don't understand.

[Laughter]

KEITH (as Mako): No but like, what's so, what's all the equipment? Like, what do you *have*?

ART (as Cass): No, he said the ship has it. What are you even asking me?

JACK: As Mako's talking...

KEITH (as Mako): He said you could set up your doctor stuff! I wanna know what kind of doctor stuff you have.

JACK: As Mako's talking, AuDy has just walked into the cockpit and pushed him very slowly out of the captain's seat, and sat down, without saying anything.

AUSTIN: [sighs] Where does Aria go to set up shop? Is the Brilliance already here, did she move the Brilliance here?

ALI: No, I don't think she moved it in yet, but I think that she like... I think she like...oh, what if she like, finds something?

AUSTIN: Yeah, what if she's down...like we get the shot of her down in the rigger hold, and like, the... there's like burned-in on the screen, of where it use to house, the um, the Panther.

AL: Yeah...

AUSTIN: And you can just barely see it.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I like that. [Overlapping Ali] What's her like -

ALI: [Overlapping Austin] I think she like -

AUSTIN: Yeah, go ahead.

ALI: I think she puts her hand on it, and does that like, thing that I do all the time, where's she like, [squees] because she's really excited.

AUSTIN: I think she touches it, and the screen does the degaussing, and it goes BWANG, and the image slowly dissipates. AuDy, the thing you notice at this point, is that it notices that a robot sat down, and is looking for a way to wirelessly interface with you.

JACK: Are ships of this class spec'd for robot pirates?

[laughter]

AUSTIN: That's a different thing.

KEITH: If only.

AUSTIN: I'm not sure. You...No, I don't - I don't know that they're spec'd for that - they're not spec'd only for that, or exclusively for that, but it does know what you are. And it reaches out to you.

JACK: I think at this point, AuDy's response is far more visceral than calculated, and they...Oh, I know what they do! They just turn the ship off. So all the lights in the crew bay go out.

AUSTIN: All the lights throughout the whole place - the whole - all the lights throughout ship go out.

JACK: Yeah, and then there's the emergency generator sound, and the emergency generator kicks back on.

[Music: [Old Songs Now](#) begins - 2:33:27]

AUSTIN: And then the emergency lights come back on, and we get a shot of each character's face, and then the emergency chime sounds.

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

ART (as Cass): And so you see, this is a... this is a med pack.

[Laughter]

ART (as Cass): It just has some basic stuff in it. It's more of triage mechanism. Kid, do I really have to explain all of this to you?

[Voices begin fading away]

KEITH (as Mako): You don't, I just wanted to know, do you have surgery tables? Are you cutting people open? Do you have just like, a tourniquet -

ART (as Cass): [overlapping Mako] You wanted to know if I brought my own surgery table?



KEITH (as Mako): [overlapping Cass] Or do you have one of those things you stab in your leg and you just get all drugged out -

ART (as Cass): [overlapping Mako] How big-

KEITH (as Mako): [overlapping Cass] I just wanted to know, I was curious -

ART (as Cass): [overlapping Mako] You seen me, you saw me come in -

KEITH (as Mako): I saw - Yea, I saw you come in, but you had it in a little bag and, like it's not, I just wanted to know, like what level, is this a full on doctor, is this a medic guy...