

COUNTER/Weight 44: Live Post-Mortem

Transcriber: the dread biter#0090

[MUSIC - "THE LONG WAY AROUND"]

AUSTIN: Hey, everyone. Welcome to Friends at the Table, an actual play podcast focused on critical worldbuilding, smart characterization, and fun interaction between good friends. I am Austin Walker, your host and GM. Joining me today, Art Tebbel.

ART: Hey!

AUSTIN: Where can people find you, Art?

ART: You can find me on Twitter @atebbel, and other places, but just start there.

AUSTIN: Andrew Lee Swan.

DRE: Hey. You can find me on Twitter @swandre3000.

AUSTIN: Ali Acampora.

ALI: Hi! You can find me @Ali_West on Twitter.

AUSTIN: Jack de Quidt.

JACK: Hey, there. I'm notquitereal on Twitter.

AUSTIN: And Keith Carberry.

KEITH: Hi. Keithjcarberry on Twitter and also youtube.com/runbutton.

AUSTIN: And Sylvia¹ Clare.

SYLVIA: Best for last, huh?

AUSTIN: Always.

SYLVIA: You can find me at twitter.com/captaintrash but I'm kinda on hiatus from that right now. You can still follow it.

AUSTIN: Yo, fuck Twitter.

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

[Laughter]

SYLVIA: Yeah. For real tho.

AUSTIN: All right. So we are going to do our second post mortem for Friends at the Table. We finished our second season, the COUNTER/Weight game.

SYLVIA: Whoo!

AUSTIN: After a *year* of playing. Our “summer season” turned into something else completely.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: And we’re here to answer some questions that our fans sent in. That seems true, right? I haven’t fucked that up, right?

SYLVIA: [amused] Yeah, no, that seems [unintelligible]!

JACK: That sounds what we’re supposed to do today.

KEITH: [mock-serious] So far Austin has not lied to you.

ART: Totally true.

SYLVIA: Been planning this for weeks, so I hope that’s right.

AUSTIN: Okay. Phew. So, god, where do we wanna start? God—you know, I’m gonna jump down the list, because I think there’s actually a question that I wanna ask everybody else here to kick things off. Which is—which is, for all of you, what was your favorite moment for your character this season? And then also for someone else’s character. And that comes in from Jay. [Long pause] Not all at once.

[Laughter]

KEITH: There’s a—listen, there’s a lot of things that happened.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: [encouraging] Yeah!

ALI: And then like someone else...I could probably...

AUSTIN: Yeah, Ali.

[ALI laughs]

Go.

ALI: Um. Hm. I think...there's a lot of moments, I don't know. When I hooked up with Jacqui, that was great.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: That was pretty good.

ALI: That was pretty good, that was a good roll.

AUSTIN: But like—yes. Yes.

ALI: Um. That was a really good roll.

AUSTIN: So you mean specifically the like the bit where she almost murdered you and then you were like “Nah, tho.”

ALI: Uh-huh. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Not the—okay..

ALI: Right. Oh, yes. Yes. [laughs] I mean, that time like where she was dying and was like “Hey.”

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: “Don’t hurt me.” And that could have went another way real easily.

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah, super easily.

ALI: Like. Yeah...um. There's that one, and then like I think my actual favorite moment is during the finale, when Aria's like “Hey, what are we gonna do about this like crisis?” and AuDy's like “We're going to lose.” and Aria's like “Oh, we're not doing that.”

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: That's pretty—

ART: Do we mean like our favorite moment like our favorite on-screen moment or our favorite playing moment?

AUSTIN: You can do either.

ART: My favorite playing moment was definitely the finale, which was giving Aria a chance to kill me.

[ALI laughs evilly]

AUSTIN: Yeah that was pretty good. I thought she might!

ART: I loved that.

JACK: Yeah, that was great.

ART: I loved how that felt, I loved that uncertainty, like I loved that that game allowed me to do that.

AUSTIN: I loved that be—

ART: That was my like...

AUSTIN: I loved that because it re-enforced what we do in a really cool way, of like—or underlined, right, of just like oh yeah like she could do that. And we'd roll with it. We'd figure out something else to go with there, right. Like you'd step into a different character role, the whole game would shift and it would be amazing and like that notion of dynamism and potential is just so good.

ART: Yeah. And then in the same vein, my favorite moment as a player that someone else was driving was Keith buying all those robots.

AUSTIN: Yep!

[Laughter]

ART: I loved being exasperated at him.

AUSTIN: Yes. Yep. That is, I think—

JACK: Yeah.

KEITH: It—listen. It all worked out!

AUSTIN: Uh huh. It did. It did! What about you, Keith?

KEITH: It did! Um. Man, the robots, breaking—I guess—not the buying of the robots, but pretending to be that character was really fun.

AUSTIN: Yeah. To like be someone who was that careless, but also that considered at being that careless?

KEITH: Right, yeah. Like to—for that to have worked, um. For, I guess. The reason that that isn't my favorite is just because I think that that's sort of a thing I did with Mako a lot. Which is do a thing that's crazy and then everyone's exasperated that it's crazy and then it works, kind of. It like at least 80% works. I do that a lot. So I think the thing that I wanna pick instead is I liked getting to punch Ibex in the face.

AUSTIN: That's a good one.

JACK: That was good.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That for me is—

KEITH: Before we all decided that maybe Ibex is kind of okay.

AUSTIN: Well. I think that that was like really important because it gave a physicality to like Team Fuck Ibex, like there was definitely—

KEITH: Right, yeah.

AUSTIN: As things were moving towards Team Ibex, it was definitely important for me to like try to push one of you to try to take literal physical action against him because—you know, the Sprawl is really clear. You can't beat a corporation forever. But that doesn't mean you can't like bash the CEO's face in. And it was really important for me to like let that happen and show that like you know. Like. One-on-one fight, like, listen...[weighing] Mm. Eh! You never know.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: So what about you... Sylvia and Dre. It's interesting because it's like—

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Y'all were on. You *had* a billion characters. You know.

[DRE laughs]

SYLVIA: Uh. Yeah. That sounds about right. It's, uh. Might be low balling it a little.

[AUSTIN laughs]

Um yeah, that's what I'm kind of struggling to come up with a thing that's like specific I guess.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVIA: Um. In general I think I'm really proud of the whole Grace arc that we did.

AUSTIN: Yeah, totally.

SYLVIA: To be specific, I really like the big Rapid Evening reveal when they attacked Grace. Was just one of those scenes I really liked doing. And it was just a cool scene...

AUSTIN: Yeah, that was one of those great scenes in that set of—in the faction game that helped illustrate the strength of the faction game as a concept for me, because like on paper, we'd set it up to be like, "oh, this will interfere with the ground game and it will—there will be some like interaction between those two games." And we did get there. But that was a moment I realized I was selling the faction game short as being valuable for a place for drama on its own. That they didn't need to interact to be rad, and to help flesh out the world. It made me realize like "oh, actually what we're doing is we're doing the worldbuilding session every few weeks. We get to keep building this world." And that was really fantastic.

SYLVIA: Yeah. Um. And I think for the second half of the question, I think it was in the tower game. It was one of the interlude scenes, It was the one between Aria and Jacqui.

AUSTIN: Mm.

SYLVIA: I just remember that being like a really nice scene, a really good character moment that I really enjoyed.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that was fun. That was good.

ALI: Thanks!

SYLVIA: You're welcome!

AUSTIN: Dre.

DRE: Uh...I mean like my favorite individual moment is that final turn in the fight between Kobus and Grace.

AUSTIN: Oh, sure.

DRE: Where you're just like, roll a d2. And it was just like, well, okay.

AUSTIN: [sighs emotionally] Fuck.

DRE: It all comes down to a 1 or a 2 on this dice roll. [laughs]

AUSTIN: [amused] Yeah, it's like 50-50. Like flip a fucking coin.

DRE: Um. I also feel like that moment that moment that Sylvia talked about, that moment with the Rapid Evening really stuck out to me. And then for me personally, the moment when I was just like "yeah, no, Natalya's Rigour's new..."

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: "--new candidate." Like that was just the first time to me where it's like I started thinking about that game beyond like just like the mechanics part of it.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: And thinking about what I could do in a turn that wasn't just "I'm gonna buy this," or "I'm gonna ship this thing there, or make this move."

AUSTIN: Well, again, those decisions, for me, Dre, ended up being like the thing that you ended up contributing so much to this season, were those like "oh, actually this is a really good dramatic like wrench thrown in the like direction the narrative is going, let's complicate this in a new way." And I think you did that with Natalya, you did that with moving Rigour to September, you did that with Rigour expanding to EarthHome to begin with.

DRE: Mm.

AUSTIN: It was a lot of like—oh okay. And obviously in the finale in a big way.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: The Kobus-Grace stuff. But it's like "oh. I didn't plan for one of these factions to not be here at the end." Like I just didn't have that on paper as a thing.

DRE: Whoops!

AUSTIN: Um, and so like that ended up being, again, one of those things that justified the work that you and Sylvia were doing like so easily. To me was just like “Oh right, this is such a way to prevent this game to fall into a narrative rut, is just give it more writers at this higher level, so they can push the world in more interesting ways.”

[DRE laughs]

Um. Awesome. And Jack.

DRE: Um. Oh, I was gonna say, I think my favorite like part for everyone else was, I think, the mission when they had to go in and—when the Chime went in to rescue Cene. Um. ‘Cause I feel like that was when I felt like as a listener, to the ground game, when everybody kind of like really got into their character.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

DRE: I mean, I feel like there’s a lot of iconic moments there. I mean, AuDy ripping off a door and then also just like taking off someone’s leg with his² arm shotgun?

AUSTIN: Yep. Yep.

[ALI laughs]

DRE: Aria, you know, shooting her gun in the air and saying, you know, “The bells are ringing,” before just like getting shredded with a machine gun.

[Laughter]

ALI: That happened.

DRE: Keith making Mako be very Mako. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Yep!

DRE: And then I think Cass just like [sighs] “Shit. We had a plan.”

[Laughter]

DRE: “We had a plan, what the fuck are all you doing, we had a plan! It was a good plan!”

² AuDy uses they/them pronouns.

AUSTIN: Yes. Yeah, that episode for me—I mean, like one, it's the first Rigour episode. So of course it's good, right?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like of course it's the A-plot episode no one understands yet is an A-plot episode. But it also had that feeling of the first full episode of like Cowboy Bebop, where all the crew is there and you could see what the dynamic of that group was. I really walked away from—I walked away from that episode like you know. Obviously trying to figure out what we could do better, but also feeling like, "Oh! Yep! We're onto a thing. We're onto a thing that has legs. Cool." Awesome. Jack.

JACK: Um. So, when we played Tower, it was the first time we'd played the game together for a really long time.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: We'd done the game a couple of times in testing, but we'd only played it together sort of three or four times. And I was a bit worried that it wouldn't do what it had done when we were making it. But it super did. And it was really great fun to play that game specifically just like hang out with Austin as well, and the thing—

AUSTIN: It was nice to like do that in person.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That's the first time we've ever done a Friends at the Table thing face to face.

JACK: Yeah. Totally.

AUSTIN: And that was really intense. Um. Because.

JACK: And I think it comes through in the episode as well.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think so. I think there are moments where like you can really hear the space of that room, and that's really cool.

JACK: Um. Yeah. S—but there's a bit towards the end of that episode where [laughs] where I draw the second Joker card.

AUSTIN: [appreciatively] Mm-hm.

[ALI laughs]

JACK: And the whole game kind of just unravels spectacularly. And that's the at which Liberty & Discovery, who's being played at that point by Austin, kind of just sort of gives up. And it was a really great moment of the system's behaving in a way that was predictable, but only limitedly predictable. And sort of looking at each other and realizing exactly the mess—the brilliant mess we'd just managed to create was really cool.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Definitely. It was also a moment for me of—I definite—you know, obviously there's a bit of pride of like, oh man, Jack and I built this game and it turns out it works.

[ALI and DRE laugh]

But there was also just like there was a feeling of being reminded that we can do amazing things when we commit to being willing to like go all the way? And make sure it works out in the end. Like it reminds me of the first season Holiday Special, where we were like, "Here, lemme try this, and like, if it works, it works. and if we have to retcon stuff, we'll retcon stuff, like we'll figure this out." And so like in that case, it was like oh I'm characterizing Liberty & Discovery in this way that isn't really in line with how AuDy is, will this work? And then it totally did.

JACK: Yeah. Um. And I think in terms of also just that episode was really hard to record, practically. I think we had a microphone sort of suspended between us?

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: Which led to --

AUSTIN: A single one. And like we had to

[JACK laughs]

jerry-rig it together.

[15:00]

JACK: Which lent it a really strange sort of...almost like broadcast television air? In that we were trying to focus so hard on the game, and the cards that were on the table, but there was just this weird mechanical armature kind of like hanging over the table next to us.

[ALI laughs]

In terms of other people's moments that I really liked, I'm a big fan of any time that Art picks up a telephone in the entire season.

AUSTIN: [musing] Yeah. Yeah. [emphatic noise]

JACK: Because a lot of what I think works so well about Cass is that...so little of what is going on is presented to the listener or to the other players very often.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: But it's all being sort of calculated. And when Cass eventually picks up a phone, we always ended up with this amazing distillation—

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: —of their actions in the previous episodes and in the episode that we were in. That recontextualized a lot of their decisions.

AUSTIN: “I’ve been an only child for a decade” is just an—

JACK: I know! It’s just—

AUSTIN: Fuck, man! [amazed noise]

JACK: It’s fantastic. It’s really great playing.

ALI: [laughs] Art is really good.

AUSTIN: Art is *really* good.

ART: I’ve been an only child for thirty-one years, and that’s like [unintelligible]...

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Art, no one’s an only child in New York.

JACK: Aw.

ART: Also, I just got my own age wrong. I don’t know what just happened.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Um. So, building on that, Jack, is there any chance we’ll get to see a release of The Tower? There’s actually been a lot of people who wrote in—uh, Dan, Steven, space doobie, multiple people were like “hey, what’s—when are we getting more Tower?”

JACK: I think the answer to that's yes, right?

AUSTIN: Yeah, at some point. Right?

JACK: When I'm in New York.

AUSTIN: We had a conversation about it recently when we presented, like "ooh, here's a new mechanic idea that we need to work out."

JACK: Also, the weird thing is that like we made the Tower like about thirty-six years ago.

AUSTIN: Yes. We were both babies.

JACK: We were both—negative babies.

AUSTIN: Yes.

JACK: Um. And uh we made it over like three weeks—

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: —really intensively, and we just have this google document that's—a horror nightmare. It's just a hell nightmare—

AUSTIN: It's so bad.

JACK: —nobody should look at.

AUSTIN: It's so bad! [laughs]

JACK: [laughs] And so, when I was in New York last, Austin said, "Jack, I've got an idea for a new mechanic," and my immediate reaction was just like this, "Oh my god, no. Inside this box is just screaming skulls," idea.

AUSTIN: Let's add more on top of it.

JACK: Uh, let's add more screaming skulls. But Austin explained the mechanic and I was like, actually, man, that's really great. Let's open the document and just stare at it hollow-eyed for years.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: So I think once we put that in and then work out a way that it can be read by people who aren't called Jack and Austin.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Yeah, it might be fun to release it someday.

AUSTIN: It'll get there.

[JACK makes a positive noise]

I have some time off coming up, so.

[ALI laughs]

JACK: Nice.

AUSTIN: Um. Uh, someone else asks, multiple people again, Ryan and Adam both ask if I would be willing to share my notes. And the answer is no, because like the Tower document, they are a ridiculous mess. But also it's just like, ask me again when I'm dead, right.

[JACK laughs]

Like, sure. I'll put them in a document that's like "Oh yeah here, here's my notes on some stuff I worked on." But they're not—

ART: Got dark.

AUSTIN: I don't know that they're especially useful. I don't know! Like I think that there's long term value, right, like I get the interest in it. But I also don't know that the value is there, necessarily. Like I don't do anything special. It's like—I guess it's—this is like my like, 'it's not the tools' thing. Like it's a bunch of Google docs with some numbers in it. And like, oh yeah, Apokine is the name of that thing. [laughs]

[ALI laughs]

But like it's n—there really isn't any—there's nothing in the notes that I think brings together what the rest of the cast did and like makes the magic that we all together put on the recordings, you know?

ART: No, I dig that. Like there's not some like secret in the notes that is more important than the stuff we got to—

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: —and it also isn't—you can't take those notes and just turn it into a setting book, right, it's not—

AUSTIN: N—right totally. they're not—they're nowhere near clean enough. And in some ways, it would always, always, always be incomplete, because some of the best moments of prep for that game happened on Skype calls or over like a hamburger together. Like there's—there is no perfect archive of Friends at the Table. There's only the final product. ANd then this. And I think that's pretty good.

ALI: [laughs] Yeah. It's all right.

AUSTIN: Someone asked, if there was a Nacre moment this season, where the entire plot pivoted in a different direction that the original plot had due to the actions of the players or an offhand remark—to remind people who maybe didn't watch—or listen to the first season, there's a moment in the boat party where the players had a choice to either continue on their mission or follow some skeleton pirates—some undead pirates to their home base to rescue someone. And that latter option was not in my prep even a little, even at all.

[ALI laughs]

And it ended up doing good things! And I—September was that this season for me, of like oh, Dre sent Rigour to September, that's a game now. Like that's where we're going. But it wasn't like it was going to be—not as big of a change I think as Nacre. Like I had more—I had a much better understanding this season of all of—what the parts were, and that was like, okay, how are they gonna be put together in different ways? Whereas in season one, like [surprised] I didn't know that ghost pirate town existed! What the fuck was that?

[Laughter]

JACK: What's interesting was that like, as players, the moment that September was presented to us was a sort of real coup de théâtre of planning?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: In that I don't know if we released it, but when we opened up Roll20—which is what we used to play the game for—for September, [laughs] we saw a tiny corner of a map that had been redacted, and Austin was like “It's a map.” And in the top left there was like a tiny square, about the size of like a fingernail or something. And then at a certain point, during that mission, Austin was just like, “I think you've got enough, I think I can show you the map.” And he removed it. And it was like a ridiculous feat of cartography in which the only tools you have are drawing very small squares. [laughs]

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: I wonder if we can find that, 'cause it's a pretty good...slash bad...yeah, I got it, I got it. I'll pull it up.

JACK: There's something that I think says a lot about the show, in that Austin just admitted that September wasn't initially on the planning sheet, but by the time it arrived for us, it was literally—like individual buildings were mapped.

AUSTIN: All right, I'm gonna pull this up.

JACK: Oh, cool. Great, it's in the chat.

DRE: Ooh.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: I wanna look at this map again.

AUSTIN: There it is.

JACK: Ah, these fuckin' trees, man.

DRE: Aw, yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, there's a lot of trees. So like, that northwestern point is like where the Liberty & Discovery like secret base was, where you landed. And then there's the big Bacchus Biotech pink dome, in the middle. And there's all of the September Institute—and this isn't even the final version, 'cause the final version is—in the final version, a lot of those September Institute buildings have names and stuff on them. And now that I look at it—

JACK: Oh yeah.

ALI: Oh.

AUSTIN: —now that I look at it...

ALI: The worst thing about this map is—

JACK: I know what you're gonna say.

ALI: —that [laughs] if you look in the bottom left corner.

AUSTIN: Oh yes.

ALI: There's a mess of triangles, and then there's just a square.

AUSTIN: And that square is where Maryl—and if you look really close, there's a little pale off-white line that leads from the road to...

ALI: Oh my god, you fucking jackass.

AUSTIN: ...to Maryland's house, yeah.

SYLVIA: Holy shit.

ART: You didn't see the road before? Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, there's straight up a road there. So like I gave them the map at a certain point and was just like, all right. Maybe they'll see this! I don't know! But like I'm not gonna not include it.

JACK: [somerly] We didn't.

SYLVIA: It's so good!

AUSTIN: Um...yeah. But like—

ART: It's weird that we never went to that giant set of hexagons, right? Like...

AUSTIN: Wait, which ones? Oh, yeah, totally.

ART: The Slate Mineral—

AUSTIN: I had again—there's again a moment of like oh yeah the prep was prepared for this whole other thing about the different laborers in this town who hated each other, and there was like a whole—there were whole gangs of different groups like set up for—for September. So like it—there's one. Right. Is that I expected you all to go to September and then like. Chill out, a little bit.

[ALI laughs]

KEITH: Here's the thing about Friends at the Table, is that uh, when we start every episode of season two, Austin says, "make the big things bigger and the small things smaller," but a lot of times we make the big things bigger and the small things *even* bigger—

AUSTIN: Yes. [cackles]

KEITH: —and then forget, like. Like we just for --like we just—‘cause I remember the beginning of season two, we were just gonna be like kind of local like mercenary cops.

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: Yup.

JACK: Oh, yeah.

KEITH: And it just immediately blew up into a way bigger thing because we can't let—[amused] we can't let enough be enough—

AUSTIN: But that's like—that's totally fine—

JACK: We were like gonna...

ALI: Yeah!

KEITH: —we just have to like follow everything up to like insane proportions.

JACK: We were gonna—we were like, oh we're gonna work for like a like a low level governmental bureaucrat.

AUSTIN: Yep! [quiet siren sound from outside]

JACK: Oh, surprise, he's a fighter ace.

AUSTIN: Yep. [continued quiet siren]

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: [over siren] To be fair, he was always a fighter ace, right like I—and he—and. Like—sorry, there's a—there's a siren. There wouldn't—this wouldn't be Friends at the Table without that, right?

[DRE laughs]

ALI: Mhm. Mhm!

AUSTIN: [siren fades] Uh. Oh god, is there a Keith? There is, there's a Keith—there's a real sad Keith message in Roll20 right now.

KEITH: Wait, what did I do?

AUSTIN: Which is, in the statue, one Mako's giving another Mako bunny ears. Which is really good!

KEITH: [laughing] Aw...

AUSTIN: Um. So. Sorry, someone in the chat named a game we're gonna use shortly, which is interesting. So yeah, I just didn't expect them to—I expected when they got to September, to like chill out and do investigation? Like I wanted th—I wanted them to do legwork, like the way the game does, and I expected it to be like a slow month on September.

[Someone makes quiet amused sounds]

Of them figuring out what the different relationships were? And like slowly hunting down these two mysteries, which is where is—"Where is Maryland September?" and "What happened to Maritime Lapel?"

Like those were the two plotlines I was going to introduce. And instead of like doing that slowly, it was like, oh we're just gonna go fuckin—we're going. Let's go to the ins—let's go to the university, right now. Like let's move from the legwork clock to the mission clock. Immediately.

ART: Well, we were failing a lot of rolls, if you remember, 'cause...

ALI: Yeah, also you were mad at us.

AUSTIN: [confused] I wasn't mad at you. What?

[DRE and ALI laugh]

No. Like there are moments that I'm mad at you, but those moments are like "Get off the boat." I'm not mad when you're not—

ART: It felt like we were in a boat!

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: [sympathetically] No. I wished you'd been on the boat. You like...

[DRE giggles]

I was trying to make a naval game and y'all were swimmin' for the beaches!

ALI: [muffled, amused] We did. We...sorry.

AUSTIN: In that—in that instance. Okay. Um.

JACK: You need a secret code word.

ART: [argumentatively] No one's ever picked being on a boat when a beach was available, that's like literally never happened.

[ALI laughs]

JACK: Sailors!

AUSTIN: Yeah, see. Sailors lo—like, yeah! Sai—

ART: That's why docks are never near beaches. Don't look that up.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Um. Trying to see if there's anything else that's—fits that bill, but then again, that was asked basically by a bunch of people, Dan, Luke, David, Samantha, Cody. A bunch of people. Also I think it's Samantha's birthday, is it Samantha's birthday today? Is that true? I think that's—I think it's true.

ALI: One of the Sams.

AUSTIN: One of the Samanthas, it's your birthday, happy birthday.

ALI: Also, you listened to this today?

ART: And if you're another Samantha and you listen to this on your birthday later, happy birthday then.

AUSTIN: Hap—yeah.

KEITH: [slyly] It's almost my birthday.

JACK: You know what I was gonna say.

AUSTIN: Keith, happy birthday.

JACK: Happy birthday to all the Samanthas.

KEITH: Thank you.

AUSTIN: Happy birthday to everybody. Everybody everywhere.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Um.

SYLVIA: Happy birthday, Samantha. Jack got you a horse.

AUSTIN: Oh, god.

[ALI laughs]

KEITH: Oh, god.

AUSTIN: Do not infect us with this horse.

KEITH: Ohhhhh, god.

ART: Pick it up at Keith's house.

KEITH: [outraged] Jack, how could you get everyone but me a horse?

AUSTIN: God damn it.

[DRE laughs]

We're lost now. Th—d—

JACK: Austin, quick, ask me a question. I'm sorry.

AUSTIN: Thank you for being here, Friends at the Table, postmortem.

ALI: The whole cast is gone...

KEITH: No, it's okay. There'll be an episode of "How Are You Today?" coming out soon that'll put the whole thing to bed.

AUSTIN: [amused noise] Okay.

ART: Austin, I have a question. It's from Keith C, asking "Where's my—" oh.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Oh, boy.

KEITH: I wasn't sure that would make it in.

AUSTIN: Um. God. So, uh, another question here from Sarah, Michael, Author X, which is a good name, probably cousins to Racer X. "How far in advance did Austin plan things like: AuDy being Liberty & Discovery, Mako being cl—" Spoilers. By the way. If you're listening to this. Lots of spoilers here.

KEITH: Oh, don't do that.

AUSTIN: Uh.

SYLVIA: Don't li—don't listen to this one first.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that'd be bad. "How far in advance did Austin plan things like AuDy being Liberty & Discovery and Mako being a clone? Did you know that from the beginning or did you realize / decide them during the game? Jack, when did you know that AuDy was a Divine?" Um.

So the Mako thing I knew way more in advance than the AuDy thing. The Mako thing I'd figured out very early, when we first started talking about his life at the September Institute, and when I started getting information naturally from Art and Ali about Cass and Aria, which was I could talk to you for days about Cass's family. I could tell you what Aria's secret birth name was. I didn't know anything about Mako's family. And that made me start going, huh. Okay. Like what is the September Institute on about? Why all the sudden are there more people like Jace Rethal who are like these psychic people who can hack stuff? Like what happened there?

And then like also Gundam's—the Gundam equivalent of our show, Zeta Gundam, does like all sorts of stuff in its season about like—cyber newtypes. About like mass-produced psychics, basically. And that ended up being interesting to me because our core question was still about the relationship between people and technology, and so like what happens when people are technology has to come up. A little bit. Um.

And so that was—that was my—I knew early for Mako. I did not know anywhere near as early f—as AuDy. I knew AuDy like—a week and a half before? And taunted the Skype chat in a real shitty way?

[Laughter]

KEITH: I remember that, yea.

JACK: So I think that's the thing.

KEITH: I remember the moment for the...the Mako clone stuff was when I got the arm upgrade, the rocket punch.

AUSTIN: That was when I like decided that I was okay with that, 'cause I'd remembered that I was going to have that.

KEITH: Ohhh, okay. Okay, sure.

AUSTIN: God. I'm trying to find—

JACK: So here's the thing.

AUSTIN: —this thing I said in chat, but I don't—I think it's too far ago.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: Sometimes, Austin will send us messages. And often, they will use the upper case. Sometimes they say things like, "Oh No."

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Sometimes they say things like, "I'm sorry, that's a really bad life."

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: I'm so sorry.

KEITH: Oh, another good one is "I thought of the worst thing. You're gonna hate me, I thought of the worst thing."

JACK: Sometimes you get things like, and these ones are just like extremely specific and you have to be careful, like "I Know What To Do With AuDy." Which—

[Laughter]

JACK: —that's a big one. Sometimes these messages come at very late hours, or very early hours.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: [quietly] I don't recall that...

JACK: And sometimes they come in succession with each other. Uh. So I didn't know about AuDy being a Divine until I was. But I did know that something—

[30:00]

I knew that there was a swamp that I was about to step into, but I didn't know exactly where it was.

AUSTIN: There was—that was definitely a complete surprise for you. Right, like that was...

JACK: Mhm!

AUSTIN: That was an important th—I think Ali may? I think I told Ali the thing, right?

ALI: Yeah. [laughs]

AUSTIN: 'Cause I had to tell someone. 'Cause I'd figured it out after—

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It had been bothering me a lot, about what Liberty & Discovery were. Like, so like—Ibex was in control of Liberty & Discovery Automaticorp. Like that was his role, that's where he was. And so it had bothered me from the jump about what Liberty & Discovery were—because—we didn't talk about that in world generation, and I'm glad we didn't, because like, y'know. Draw maps, leave blank spaces.

Um. But like I'd been fighting over it for a long time. And there had been a moment in an episode—the episode...an episode or two or two before it was revealed that AuDy was Liberty & Discovery. That I realized like, oh, he's³—there's something else going on with AuDy here. Like—I started wondering like why would any—why would this happen? Like why would AuDy put—

JACK: Mhm.

AUSTIN: —itself into—into this body? Like why would that—happen, naturally? And you'd run an op against Liberty & Discovery. During your like—there was a love letter, where you were able to run an operation against Liberty & Discovery?

³ AuDy uses they/them pronouns.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And that's where it all like started to gel for me. I like to keep those secrets. I like—I guess a peek behind the curtain, I want general—generally, I want real reactions from my players when big surprises about their character happen? Or when like really intense moments happen. Like I think going into the Calhoun episode last season, Ali knew that that was going somewhere? But did not—she—I don't think she knew where it ended up going.

[ALI laughs]

JACK: Yeah.

ALI: Nope!

AUSTIN: Like, I think that that—

JACK: And it's always this—it's always a really weird tension in terms of production, right? In that like sometimes we'll definitely find ourselves knowings things going into them. And then it's just a case of trying to find—trying to—trying to find the thing, as players, that is going to power the scene, if it's not the surprise? Y'know, like --

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: If we're no longer working with the surprise's power, how is th—how is that scene going to have legs, in terms of the performance of it?

AUSTIN: Totally.

JACK: But being surprised by things. Is just a great feeling when you're playing. And those surprises can be something like finding out you're a Divine—at which point, I just kind of—I think I finished that recording, and went like [tsks] Oh, how am I going to play this game? Um.

[AUSTIN and ALI laugh]

AUSTIN: Right. Totally.

JACK: Right down to just seeing the map, and seeing that the tiny thing in the bottom square of the map.

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: There are really good surprises.

AUSTIN: Um. Yeah, those moments are really nice. Someone—Autumn and Jimmy—and Mike have all asked about the Divine that was—that Mako stole and then it went from being—

KEITH: —an egg.

AUSTIN: Zeal to Ambition, when Orth took it. And they wanted to know what the other virtues were going to be, so I'll go down those. Uh, the Vanguard, if Aria had gotten it, it would have been Hope. Um. If the Demarchy had gotten it, if it had gone to Cass, it would've been Aspiration. If the Free States would've gotten it, it would've been Desire. Um. If Grace had gotten it, it would've been Faith. And if Kesh had received—I guess, yeah—we saw Zeal. Right. Yes.

All very similar things, right, like all about wanting something else, or believing that you were capable of achieving something else? And all just kind of variations on that, *because* it's none of those things—right, like just—I think like that was another question we got down the road here somewhere is basically like, about.

Not the truth of that stuff, but like—there's nothing, and I think one of the intros kind of addresses this—there *is* nothing in Righteousness that is actually about a platonic, ideal version of righteousness. There's nothing in Rigour that is actually about rigorousness. It does things that we then codify as rigorous. It demands a thing that the only words that we can find for it is rigour. But it's all more blurry than that, and all limited by our own language. Um. But language is pretty powerful, so. Um.

KEITH: I wanna real quick jump in that one of my favorite moments of the whole finale.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Yes.

KEITH: The whole twenty-five hours of the finale, was Austin's reaction to me giving—

AUSTIN: Oh, I love it so much. Keith.

KEITH: --giving Orth the thing.

AUSTIN: I love that you thought I was mad at you. That was like the fucking best, because. I'd built a puzzle, right. And.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: This is like how game designers must feel when they see emergent gameplay that they didn't pre—like, when they see—like if you make a competitive game and someone finds a strategy that you didn't plan for, and like crushes it with it? Like—so that puzzle, in a sense, was

like, “Hey, here is this thing. Here is a—here is a blank slate of power, right. Here is a MacGuffin that is worth power. Its only value—its value is going to be individual. Whoever has it will benefit from it.”

And narratively speaking, whenever anybody took it, away, from anybody else, it would start to disbelieve the side that it was on. Which is why I gave you that negative, right. Like if it was stolen away from you, Keith, it would have—kind of incorporated whoever had stolen it from you—their belief that you shouldn’t have it, with the way it would operate. And like Righteousness, it’s just this sort of like “Oh yeah, just gonna make everything better.” It’s just like a baseline performance boost in—in—for the faction that it’s part of.

And so like you figuring out like—“Oh, if I give it away, that gets around this notion of it being stolen,” is both real good rules lawyering but also narratively hits the lesson, so to speak, that that MacGuffin was like trying to communicate about overcoming—about kind of forming coalitions despite having different interests. I love it so much. Like it was—that moment was really, really high up on my list of like best *plays*. Play of the Game.

[ALI giggles]

Mako giving—giving Zeal away.

Um. There was another moment like that in that game that I can’t quite remember but I—I just, I really do love it when—when. Or like for me, it reminds me of the word-eater confrontation with Fantasma, in the first season. Where it’s like “Oh, I didn’t write this into the notes at all, but here it is, and that’s awesome, let’s go for it.” There are a couple questions—there are a lot of questions that are like, “What happens next?” like, “What happens with Voice,” or like, “What happens with Ted’s very successful business ventures?” Which is really sad. Um.

[ALI laughs]

KEITH: God, I fuckin’ love Ted so much.

AUSTIN: Me too.

[DRE laughs]

Someone did ask like how early—

SYLVIA: [menacingly] *Loved*.

AUSTIN: —how far in advance did we prep Ted? Like, nah. Like, nothing at all.

KEITH: Literally, zero seconds.

ALI: God.

AUSTIN: Literally—

KEITH: Austin said, “What is this guy’s name?” and I s—I was just, [frantically] “Ahh! Lazer Ted!” That’s—

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: And I was like, shit, what would someone named Lazer Ted be like? Oh, Riff Raff. It’s Riff Raff. [laughing] Okay.

[DRE laughs]

ALI: [exasperated] God...I think that was like my actual favorite moment of the whole season.

AUSTIN: [softly, amazed] Oh, god.

ALI: Because if I remember like we had all sort of had a bad week.

KEITH: That was hysterical.

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: Yeah. We had all had...

AUSTIN: We were all in a fucking *place* coming into that game.

ALI: Yeah. And we like played that game, and then just for like thirty minutes were like, “We’re just gonna laugh about Riff Raff.”

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: And also it was coming right off of—it was coming off of...an episode where—I think it’d come off—was that the first episode after the punch? Punching Ibex, just like super—

KEITH: Yeah, it was.

ALI: yeah.

AUSTIN: —high tension, really tough episodes. There were moments in the middle of that season—or I guess like the final third, where...you all can speak to this, like, I was in the Skype chat like “Should we just end? Is this it? Is this it? Is this wh—”

ALI: Mhm.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: “—We’re done, right, like we should just stop,” after *An Animal Out of Context* or after—the one after th—I think—I think *Animal Out of Context*, which is the Tower game, is the one where I was like, “I think we should just stop here. And come back in another season.” And the reasoning there wasn’t ...good. Like, it wasn’t, “oh, this is a nice structural place to stop”—I think it would have been fine. Like, peop—a lot of people have written in to say like “Oh, why didn’t the show go longer?” or Why didn’t you devote the entire—an entire ‘nother season to September and Rigour and all of that?” But like for me, the reason I had that impulse was like, “I don’t know that we can—keep doing this. I don’t know that we can keep doing good stuff. Like this is—” This felt so high.

Like, the first time I listened to the end of that episode with Jack’s music, I legitimately cried. Because I don’t think I’ve ever been part of a thing that was that beautiful before. Um. And so like...To think about doing it again, and to do it better, or to like reach that bar again, it was like—really shook my faith in my ability as a GM, but like, all of you were just like, “No. Like, trust yourself and the process. Like your gut wants, we’re gonna crush it, like, let’s keep going.” So I think that there was definitely moments in there where.. I wanted to like call it quits, but I’m glad I didn’t?

But, to get back to the starting thing there, which is just like, wh—I don’t. I have real weird feelings about like answering “what happens next” questions. Like what happened to Voice. Um. I think I have an answer for what that is, but like. I don’t know that I ever wanna answer that. Or I don’t know that I want to answer whatever happened to Ted’s businesses, or like what happened to Mako ten years later.

Um. Because—and maybe I’m alone on this—but like, I don’t wanna know what happened at Spike’s funeral, in *Cowboy Bebop*. I don’t necessarily want to know like...What happens next is wh—or rather, if I do wanna know, what I actually want is another season. Right, like I actually want those characters to be on a screen, I don’t want the director to show up and just like, “Oh yeah, yeah. The funeral’s okay. Fay brought flowers.” Like.

[DRE laughs]

“Julia was there, that was weird, huh?”

KEITH: Mako went on to blah blah blah, and then there’s...

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: All got—all graduated.

AUSTIN: Totally. Totally. And like so I get the impulse to want to know what comes next. I'm way more interested in fans either running with it on their own, or being inspired to make their own stuff, than I am answering any of those questions, because it will—y'know. A poor substitute for what I think people really want, which is just more time with those actual characters, more Actual Roleplay, y'know. Um. That's me, anyway.

JACK: There's another sort of motivation to this, for me at least, which I think Austin shares, which is that...ending something completely is an amazing feeling.

AUSTIN: Yeah. It feels so good.

JACK: We knew we were going to end the sh—we went into the finales knowing that, y'know, we're gonna finish these recordings and then we're gonna be done. Um. And we finished our last recording at about three o'clock in the morning?

AUSTIN: Yep.

[ALI giggles]

JACK: On the east coast. And, going into it, I'd been thinking, oh, I'm gonna have a nice celebration [laughing] when I'm done.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: Gonna go out and get a drink or whatever. But we just went and sat in a diner at three o'clock in the morning, and had mozzarella sticks.

[AUSTIN snorts]

And felt like we'd closed a door on a—on a universe?

AUSTIN: Right.

JACK: And that's a really wonderful feeling. Just going like [clicks tongue] it's all over there now.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And it's not our thing anymore, we're done. It's—we closed the door. Um. And I like that a lot.

AUSTIN: Well, and it's so different than the first season, where everyone on this call—except for Sylvia—has open questions about their own characters from the first season. Right. Like.

SYLVIA: Mhm. Yeeaahh...

AUSTIN: That's a cool feeling too. I like that feeling. I'm excited to go back to Hieron. But like it's so rare that you get to finish a thing under your own terms. Because the alternative isn't another—isn't necessarily another big season, right? Like so I got this job at VICE and we keep getting to do Friends at the Table. But like imagine I'd gotten this job at VICE, and they told us—they told me like oh well the condition is you either—we own this now. And you don't get to do it. Anymore. [laughs weakly] Or like if you keep doing it, everybody's owned by us. I'd have been like oh well that sucks, I guess we're done with Friends at the Table, and now that story didn't get to end.

And so like. That sort of stuff happens. Or like someone gets married, and has less time, and they have kids! Or like they moved to a place with shitty internet, and can't contribute anymore, or they—people have fallings out. Like as—you know. That just happens. Like life happens in a way we're like, you lose the ability to con—to clearly control a thing. *And*, if we were a big TV show, that just means recasting and people deal with it, but like we're not a big TV show, we're this very small, intimate thing, and I want to...[motorcycle engine sounds] yell at the motorcyclist outside my window. Uh.

[Laughter]

And I want—I wanna like capitalize on that, to make sure that when we get the opportunity to wrap something up together, in a way that's meaningful for all of us. Like—that was—you know—I—we finished that episode, it came out a week ago. It came out the week before I went to E3 to see my—my friends and coworkers at the west coast, and before I announced that I was leaving that job, and...I'm about to start like an incredible new opportunity, but finishing Counterweight was like almost definitely gonna end up being the highlight of my year. Um. So.

ALI: Nice.

AUSTIN: That is ...I don't know. There's nothing else like it. So. Um. Anyway!

ALI: Hey!

AUSTIN: moving on—

ALI: Oh, good.

AUSTIN: I'll give you one more question, which is—and I'll get to be mean again. "I assume this probably wasn't possible without Righteousness, but could the Ibex that was killed by mini-Rigour actually have been one of the Ibex robots?" No.

[JACK laughs]

Ibex is—is really and truly dead.

JACK: Oh.

AUSTIN: Ibex stopped using those robots. Um. Like that—I kind of gestured towards that at one point in an outro where I talk about his beating heart. Um. He had a bunch of those robots, and then stopped using them, because—he realized that they let Righteousness have too much control. Um. And instead just kind of went into his cave. And that was the way he lived most of the rest of his life.

[sniffs] ...Um. All right. This one is from Justin—and no, sorry, there's two of them here. There's two of them here, there's one from Matthias, there's one from Justin. But they kind of intertwine, I think. Matthias says, "I'm interested in your takes on engaging the systems of the games you used for Counterweight. While the characters and world you created were amazing, I thought at times some players struggled with engaging the mechanics to take advantage of what they were trying to achieve with or for their characters. Is system mastery something you folks reflected on and/or talked about between yourselves? Were there specific times you remember where you tried to game the system? How did it work out? How do you all feel in general about getting better slash more comfortable with engaging the rules for your individual play in the future?"

And then Justin, in a different question, but again I think kind of related: "How did changing game systems change how you viewed your—the characters, both yours, other players', NPCs, the setting, and the game itself?" So. Who has strong feelings about game systems?

[Laughter]

KEITH: Um, I'll say just up front 'cause this is I think sort of a passing sort of side deal off of the question, which is that um. I think for the most part everybody was a lot more comfortable in a—specifically in a recording session—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: —moving from Mechnoir to the Sprawl. Except for the fact that I think, more than anybody else's character, my...

[45:00]

The things that I could do and the way that my stuff worked dramatically changed from how I built—like it was very weird building a character for a specific game and specific systems and having—those kind of not really translate to the s—the Sprawl perfectly?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Like because—

KEITH: Like it seemed like it did for most everyone else?

AUSTIN: In Technoir it was always going to be as simple as, Roll Hack. Roll Hack to do a thing. Whereas the Sprawl has this whole --

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: —complicated system of, you know, in the long tradition of Shadowrun and Cyberpunk 2020, of having data servers and having systems that have like architecture to them. And I did my best to simplify that stuff, and to use it as a way to be illustrative of something, to like give some physical space to stuff.

KEITH: Yeah—and a lot of that, a lot of that ended up working really well narratively.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: But just the way that my character was built and the way that my stats sort of reflected who I thought the character was couldn't translate perfectly to the Sprawl in a way that i think was frustrating for me but not a thing that anyone else had to deal with probably?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Just cause of the way that most everyone's class kind of translated over pretty well.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: I could be wrong. Other people could have been feeling the same thing, but.

ART: I felt it a little. The switch really really flipped on me what—who Cass was. Not like as a character but practically—

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: Like I was really struggling to be doctor slash mech pilot in Mech Noir.

AUSTIN: Right.

ART: And then Sprawl comes along and then just like, Soldier. Boom. I -

[ALI giggles]

AUSTIN: Right. Soldier with some medical experience.

ART: I have all these new toys that do all these things, and it like pushes me in a direction in a stronger way, and I like that, although it did kind of like—I wanted Cass to be like a different character than he⁴ ended up being, but that's fine, that's always true, right, no one ended where they wanted—where they thought they were gonna go at the start, right?

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, let's come back to that in a second. 'Cause there is a question about that, but.

KEITH: Nah, I saw the whole thing!

ALI: [laughs] Um. I can say, I really loved switching to the Sprawl, but I think it was a little weird for me, cause with Aria's class she was supposed to like—it's a class about like forming a group and recruiting people,

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And like all of that stuff, but I um. For as often as I do it, I still get kind of anxious about like just putting the spotlight on me for a little bit?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

ALI: So all of Aria's like activism and like going to rallies was like stuff that I was always thinking was happening off screen? But that class was like designed to have it happen in the game.

AUSTIN: In the game, actually, yeah. In the moments where it happened it was good, but.

ALI: And I don't think I ever—yeah. I don't think I ever quite got there. I like—I feel bad 'cause it's not like—I could have used that system a lot better, 'cause it's a really cool system, but um. Yeah. That was my one thing.

AUSTIN: What about Sylvia and Dre, what did you think of the system stuff there? Because we were doing weird experimental—like obviously we're up to doing weird experimental stuff all the

⁴ Cass uses they/them pronouns.

time, and we'll keep doing it in the future, but like what did you think of the way we tried to mesh those different systems together?

DRE: I—

SYLVIA: To be honest—

DRE: Yeah, go ahead, Sylvia.

SYLVIA: Okay. At the beginning, I actually had a lot of difficulty.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

DRE: Same.

SYLVIA: Getting my head around the systems, just because it was so new.

DRE: Absolutely.

SYLVIA: To any roleplaying I had done in the past.

AUSTIN: Totally.

SYLVIA: We also were a little too ambitious with the amount of factions we had?

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: We were very silly. Like, what a goofy, stupid thing we did.

SYLVIA: Just—tiny bit. But I feel like as it went on, it ended up being a really g—'cause I feel like if it was just Microscope, we would have had—at least this is with me, I get. When I can do anything I don't do—I don't do anything, basically.

AUSTIN: Totally.

DRE: Mhm.

SYLVIA: Having the options um from Stars Without Number for example, psychic assassins, that caused the whole Grace thing.

AUSTIN: Totally.

SYLVIA: For example. Like just p - yeah, what if they have psychic assassins there. Oh! What if this planet's an alien? What if this planet is a psychic assassin? Which is a great sentence I just said.

AUSTIN: Yeah. That's because—that ended up being true—also we should, so we definitely got some questions about like, “Wait, what was the true alien?” It was, it's the planet Sigilia. It's the thing that gave Grace the extra telepathy powers.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That was the true alien. [Distant horn blating] But yeah, I'm totally with you that like, it ended up driving stuff in a way—like, remember, Ibex is a Seductress. On paper. Um.

SYLVIA: Yeah!

AUSTIN: It's the unit type Ibex was in Stars Without Number. It was me going, “Oh shit, how do I make a move for this faction this turn? [dazed voice] Huh. Okay, what if there's this cool guy and he goes—what if he goes to this fishing—what if he goes and he says I'm a fisher of men? It's me. I'm Jesus. I'm Space Jesus.”

[SYLVIA laughs]

“Lemme - I'm Space Communist Jesus.”

[DRE and SYLVIA laugh]

Um. And like, that ended up being a major character, it turns out! I think if we reduced the faction number—so like I wanna be cl—like I should go back. This was a thing that I figured out forever ago, or like tried to figure out forever ago, was how the fuck do we do a faction game. Like if you go back to my twitter from last—like. not this past winter, the winter before that. Winter of like January 2015. You'll find me tweeting like “Does anyone know any systems that do multilevel games where you can zoom out to the faction level?”

And eventually I figured out that Stars Without Number has a faction turn system, and it's meant to be done off screen, so to speak, the players aren't supposed to know it. It's a single player thing. I figured out we could steal it and use it. And if I'd been a little bit more—I think we'd been a little bit more focused on the number of factions, that would've really helped. Though I liked having all of those factions in the world. I'm glad it was Liberty & Discovery Automaticorp and not just the Righteous Vanguard from the jump. You know.

SYLVIA: Yeah—what that led to is, I really—one of my favorite episodes was the one where we combined a lot of those factions.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

SYLVIA: So I like— in hindsight, having so many led to what i thought was a pretty good just flavor episode for building that universe.

AUSTIN: Totally. Totally. Trying to find this—there was another question about like...whether your characters...felt...like the things that they were aspiring to be, but I can't seem to find it. Ali, do you remember that question I was.

ALI: Um.

AUSTIN: Do you know the one I'm talking about? Or am I just imagining this?

ALI: No...

AUSTIN: I might just be imagining this. Let's move on.

ALI: I don't...

AUSTIN: And if I come across it we can jump back to it, how's that sound?

ALI: I can go through and delete what we've already answered.

AUSTIN: Oh, that's a good idea. That would help a lot.

ALI: [laughing] Okay.

AUSTIN: Um. [singing under breath] Doot doot doot...

JACK: Oh, mean, I guess both—

AUSTIN: Oh, go ahead.

JACK: Oh, sorry. Um. Audy is a Pilot. In Mechnoir.

AUSTIN: Right!

JACK: And I guess...thinking about that, I don't know if I played that mechanically. As the book intended.

AUSTIN: In Mechnoir.

JACK: Yeah. Or carried that spirit through. But in terms of just sort of like overarching themes, a lot of what interested me about Orth and Audy and their relationship with each other and with their colleagues, was what it means to be the pilot of a thing? Specifically to be the pilot of a spaceship. Or of an operation, or you know. And I think a lot of the tension between Orth and AuDy themselves was you know around what it is to be a copilot or what it is to be a pilot or a captain.

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: Or to have this responsibility. And if that's one thing that I got out of that Pilot book, I'm pretty happy with that.

AUSTIN: [thoughtfully] Yeah. I think that that ended up working out in your favor for sure. Um. [sighs] I just had another one, and I've since lost it again. I think—where—you might've deleted it? Oh, there it is. "What part of—what part was really hard to play for you emotionally, where the characters—where the character was doing something that you the player really wished they didn't do?" And that's from Gary. So like was there any moments where it was like, "Oh, I wish I didn't have to do this, but this is the only true way to play the character."

DRE: That --

JACK: I did that the entire Kingdom game.

AUSTIN: Yeah!

DRE: Yeah. Hoo! Yeah.

[ALI laughs]

I didn't want to kill Kobus. I hated doing that, but it felt like the only like—honest thing to do with that character.

AUSTIN: Fair. Fair.

KEITH: Ah, the closest I got was. The closest I got to that was not killing Mako?

DRE: Yeah.

KEITH: Like 'cause at the same time—that the same time—and I think the messages I was sending Austin during that are proof of that I really couldn't decide what to do. And at the end of it, I was just like, I really wish I could...like say, "Yes, I'm going to keep fighting," but also I—

AUSTIN: Right, be the great sacrificial hero.

KEITH: Yeah. It—uh. But I was just like, but I can't have Ted *and* all the Makos *and* Larry *and* Mako all die in the same episode. Like I couldn't do it.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Luckily, uh, Cass did it instead. So.

AUSTIN: Sure did!

[Laughter]

Anybody else found that disconnect? Ali?

ALI: I, uh. no, I—

KEITH: By the way, no one else had as many friends die as Mako. I just wanna put that out there.

AUSTIN: Ah, Mako.

KEITH: Mako had like way more s—

ALI: Well, you had—Eight of those were just you.

KEITH: And—yeah. People in the chat are saying, “And Tower,” but Tower died like ep—like the week before that, in a different recording.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: So I was just like in that ten minute span, all those people died.

AUSTIN: Yes. Yes.

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: Ah, Mako killed Tower—

ALI: I, um.

AUSTIN: —anyway, by not saving him, anyway.

[ALI makes a sad noise]

KEITH: Ali killed Tower by needing two partners on the same ship.

AUSTIN: True.

ALI: No...

SYLVIA: I mean, I shot him.

[ALI snorts]

JACK: Mako killed Offset.

ALI: I...

SYLVIA: Let's be honest, I shot him.

AUSTIN: Mako did kill Offset.

ALI: That was...

AUSTIN: Yeah, there was a lot of blood.

SYLVIA: And I don't regret it.

AUSTIN: There was lots of blood on lots of hands.

SYLVIA: I love to kill, and I love to hurt, and I never regretted anything I ever did.

[ALI cackles]

AUSTIN: I love you, Sylvia.

JACK: Towards the end of the last...towards the end of season one, maybe actually in the postmortem of season one, somebody brought up how a thing they enjoy—I don't think it was one of us, I think it was somebody in the chat—brought up a thing they enjoy about tabletop gaming is learning to make the right mistakes? And I kept that in my head—

AUSTIN: Huh.

JACK: —for this whole season, ‘cause it was the most amazing concept that I’d heard for what we were doing. And so all of the Kingdom Game was just an exercise in—I think once Austin and I both unspokenly worked out what we wanted to do to Orth—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —in that episode, it was just like—it was like playing *golf* with each other, we were just...[laughing] And that just—that had a great deal of fun to it, past a certain point. But there’s stuff like the—stuff like “You’re a really good dog.”

AUSTIN: Yep.

ALI: OH my god.

JACK: Was definitely a scene where I was playing it and feeling really upset, just as I was also like sliding lines into place around Austin’s.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Lots of like you setting them up so I could spike ‘em. Um.

[ALI and JACK laugh]

But like that kind of thing’s super important—

JACK: Right into Orth’s face.

AUSTIN: Yeah. [laughs] There’s like Orth is—I think I saw someone on a forum or on Twitter make this joke recently, which is like, “Orth is the secret protagonist of COUNTER/Weight.”

[JACK laughs sympathetically]

In that like we’ve seen 20 years of Orth’s life! right, like? We know the most about Orth’s entire life. And we end on Orth, right, like we end Shakespeareanly like on Orth figuring out—I guess we ended with the flashback, but like we end the pre-flashback bit on Orth looking forward. The most—the furthest forward we see in the world of Counterweight is Orth. And the furthest back we see is Orth!

ART: Ugh, I hate—ugh.

AUSTIN: [seriously] What?

[JACK laughs]

ART: I hate—I hate Orth’s arc. I feel like...

ALI: [surprised] Whoo!

ART: I don't like what Orth ended up being.

AUSTIN: Why?

ART: Because like. I feel like Orth sacrificed so much...and never like got it back, I feel like Orth is the flower child who in the Reagan 80s just decided he would be a businessman.

AUSTIN: I see, I don't think he is the 80s. 'Cause he could have been that. I think we got that as the middle chapter. He was the Reagan businessman—

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: —when he worked for C...Consolidated—Counterweight Consolidated Technocracy. Right, like he was just pushing papers around and like living with it. And then, like.... he's the guy who did that until the financial crisis, and then became a government—and like went to work for FICA or whatever. Right, like.

JACK: Mm.

AUSTIN: Decided to like fix things up. And then—but then did retire. Did get out of public life, in a real way.

ART: Yeah, but like he never...I don't know. Maybe I'm like understating finale Orth, but I feel—I feel like he never really got back to his idealistic roots, he just sort of. He went into the private sector, and then...

JACK: Hey, none of us are ever going to end up exactly where we want to.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think like. The best he gets is telling off the Steiger siblings. Right, like going into the boardroom—I—Orth is. [thoughtfully] For me, one of the central themes and struggles of the last game, was like, "Where do you fall on the spectrum of radicalism?" Every major character in this game wants some major revolutionary change, in the end. And like, people decided to be different elements of establishment, to get those things. Um. Surprisingly so! Right?

KEITH: I. Yes. Um...

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: I was waiting to see what you were going to add.

KEITH: Oh, I was going to add that I think that, for me, the proof that that Orth kind of having reclaimed his beliefs comes from me ha—I mean, I spent a long time—I knew that I wanted to give Zeal away before I figured out who to give it to?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

KEITH: And like—I don't know, for me it was just like, Orth is clearly the person who has their finger on the pulse of actually fixing things?

AUSTIN: Right.

[SYLVIA laughs]

Right, like Orth is the guy who is—who's like, "Oh, the only way to fix things is from inside the establishment." And Mako is the guy who's like, "No, burn it all down? But what if we burned it all down."

[ALI giggles]

ART: Right.

AUSTIN: And both end up somewhere not exactly—neither of them end up at the far ends of those spectrums, necessarily. What's interesting to me, is that like, Cass—

[1:00:00]

—who is the one who ends up being *the most* establishment character in *placement* by the end, where he's⁵ like both the elected representative of a new democratic group, and also has ties to the old order, ends up being the one who does the most radical act of self destruction in order to form their ideal world. Um. And Aria folds the other way, who's like outwardly the most radical person, ends up folding back towards like, "I want to live a life? I wanna live a life." Um. And that was really fascinating, for me.

KEITH: Um. Ooh, I had a thing. It slipped away. Ah, whatever. Oh! Right!

[AUSTIN and ALI laugh]

Okay, so the thing I was gonna say was Orth—I think Orth being the person who fixes things from the inside is like, it's sort of a special situation where like the inside seems to be giving him full permission to fix things—

⁵ Cass uses they/them pronouns.

AUSTIN: Yes. Totally.

KEITH: —in a way that never happens anywhere?

AUSTIN: Well, you know, like, for every inside there's an outside. Um. And in this case, the Golden Branch system is a weird experiment, that like.

KEITH: Uh-huh.

AUSTIN: Doesn't matter at all. Like that's the thing [laughing] to constantly remember about this, is like on paper in the Diaspora and OriCon, "What? Oh, yeah, the Golden—yeah, sure, how's—yeah, okay, whatever. Who cares." Um. There are people who I think are really dialed-in back home, who are like, "No. You need to understand, if this falls into crisis, we're all [laughing] fucked!" But for the most part, it's like, a territory. It's not even—the body of those factions. Um.

KEITH: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: All right. Moving on, unless there's more here. This comes in from Edward! "This question I wanted to ask is moreso aimed at the faction game aspect. How successful do you all think it worked in tandem with the ground game? Do Dre, Sylvia, and Austin feel like there were things that they really wanted to see the Chime encounter in the ground game that were set up in the faction turns but never quite came up or aligned right? Was there ever a problem with the pacing, depth of personal storytelling against the scale of such broad lore and universe? And how might y'all tackle the faction game differently now?"

Again, that's from Edward. The obvious one, again, is just like, less factions? Like more—just as many factions on paper in terms of what the people in the world are, but less factions to control.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: What about—anything else there about like, things you wished would have made it into the ground game?

DRE: Uh.

SYLVIA: Um.

DRE: Think it would've been cool if the—maybe I'm misremembering. I don't know if the Chime ever went to like a Diasporan-controlled place.

AUSTIN: Never. We get that a lot in—there's another question that's like, "What are some of the other vision of the Diaspora's like kind of—what their ideology is?" So I'll talk about that in a second.

KEITH: [dryly] To be fair though, we *don't* really go to many pla—we go to two planets.

DRE: Yeah.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Well, the—even in the faction game though we didn't really go. To many—

JACK: Right.

AUSTIN: —traditional Diasporan planets. We never went to Vox. Right?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Which I think was like the only real stand in for what I think a functionally—a functioning Diasporan...world looks like? That wasn't like—

KEITH: Wait, wasn't Vox terrible?

AUSTIN: No, Vox was fine. Vox was—I mean, it's terrible because that's where September was slowly taking over the Divine there? But it was like—that's where Ibex is from—like that's where he grew up, it's like.

KEITH: Oh! no, I'm sorry, I'm thinking of who's—I'm thinking of..

SYLVIA: Sage?

KEITH: Who's Or—no. Who's the one where he's just like the dickhead Divine that's everybody's boss?

AUSTIN: Oh, that's...

ALI: Service.

AUSTIN: Service. Service is bad.

KEITH: Service.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Okay. And where's he from?

AUSTIN: Ser—uh.

KEITH: He was...

AUSTIN: What is the name of that planet?

ALI: Slate?

AUSTIN: Weight? No—

KEITH: Slate? It wa—no.

AUSTIN: —Slate. Slate! Slate.

SYLVIA: Oh.

ALI: Yeah.

KEITH: Okay. Okay.

AUSTIN: Because someone pointed out that I named a planet Vox and another one Slate. And like [laughs] wanted to know if that was a sly media...

[Laughter]

SYLVIA: [loudly] *Jesus!*

AUSTIN: ...critique. Because like both of them were just—'cause like I'd written up Vox specifically as being this like super-bougie middle-class liberal, like really like, nose up at the working class, a little bit? And it was not intentional. At all.

[SYLVIA laughs]

Because you—again, you have to remember, this was like really before the rise of Vox as a political website. When we first designed these planets.

SYLVIA: Hm.

AUSTIN: And Slate just sounds like a mineral thing, to me.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And I wanted to do that. So. Not intentional.

[ALI laughs]

SYLVIA: I think for like what I wanted to happen with...the faction game and the ground game meeting.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

SYLVIA: Um, if I'm interpreting the question properly? I kinda always wanted to have the Chime run into the Hands of Grace?

AUSTIN: Totally.

SYLVIA: Um. Specifically, I wanted the Chime to meet Vicuna, in a lot of ways? 'Cause, one, I just love Vicuna a lot.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: And two, I feel like she would have pissed them off a lot and that would have been fun?

AUSTIN: Totally. Who—

SYLVIA: I don't know, like I always like seeing you guys respond to people who have—a lot of power and that you can't kind of fuck over.

AUSTIN: One of the things that ended up being weird [stretching out words] forrrr meee was that like, the vision I originally had for the game was gonna be like way more, "Oh, they're fighting a Divine now. And they have to take down this Divine by being clever." And some of that still made it into the game. Like Detachment, the fight against Detachment. The stuff with Peace and Order. Rigour, obviously. I expected it to be...[sighs] a little bit of like going down the hit list, originally. And we did something I think way better than that? But like. That would have led to that opportunity.

In the end, I think it was better that we didn't go down that route. That like—that—isn't how things line up. You know? This is...to use like wrestling terminology, dream matches don't happen. Or to use like weird history buff language, like the like [nerd voice] "Oh, what would have happened if this general had fought that general? What would have happened if samurais fight knights?" Like. You lose a lot if samurai end up fighting knights. Because like, someone wins? And then you get to just—"Oh yeah, no, yeah, duh. Knights have good armor." Like, okay. Or whatever it is. Right, like, "Oh, the samurai have guns." [car noises from outside] It turns

those groups are actually working in completely different generations. [laughs] And so like. It's a really weird...thing, but I like it, I like that Vicuna never. Interacted with the Chime at all.

To go back to the Diaspora stuff, um. Someone wanted to know where the vision of the Diaspora's kind of ideology came from. Um. And I think it was like a mix of like the Geth and a very specific sort of Marxism called accelerationism? Which is like this notion—or it's not even Marxist necessarily, it's just radical philosophy, that's like—*political* philosophy, that's like, oh, like, the thing that comes after capitalism's gonna be dope.

So what we need to do—and these philosophers, who we believe, say that eventually capitalism will be extended to such a ridiculous state that everyone sees the terrible contradictions therein, and the technology's advanced such that people can kind of co-opt it to push society into its next, more utopian form, so let's just push. Let's just believe whole-heart in capitalism and go as far into it as we can. Like, let's just be weird techno-utopians, why not?

Um. And so it was a combination of those two things, of just like. Hey, robots are really cool. Robots that think for themselves are really neat. Constant voting is really neat. But also this notion of like that being a utopian ideal. And then also, the “End of History”—thesis. By...Fukuyama, which I ended up quoting in one of the intros. Or on one of the text things. Look that up.

Uh. Let's go light here. “Mako's first romantic kiss. Who was it with?”

[SYLVIA laughs]

“And when was it? Where was it? How was it?”

JACK: [faux-antagonistically] *Yeah*, Keith! Oh, man.

AUSTIN: “If that's too personal, are there any anime conventions in the Golden Branch sector? If yes, how many has Orth been to? Does Orth cosplay? Thanks, Cody.”

[Laughter]

SYLVIA: Oh, that was a good question!

KEITH: I mean, seeing how Mako was birthed from a vat.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

KEITH: With a bunch of false memories, uh, I think it would be very difficult to answer who his first kiss was with.

AUSTIN: Sure. Yeah, which was his first kiss.

KEITH: Um. I don't—it's really hard to like—Tower—was a very interesting part of the finale for me just because I had literally never considered Mako to e—like—have.... even being capable of kissing someone.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Like it just wasn't something that was on the table. So. I don't think I can answer that in a way that's satisfying at all.

AUSTIN: I love that though because like for me that underscores the...the end for Mako? Of being like, "No, I'm just busy all the time. Like, I'm working on this other shit I have going on! I'm not—" which was always the truth for Mako. Like.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: He was a goofball who didn't have many deep personal relationships. I think he—it seemed to me like he had a good relationship with Cass. Because they ended up on missions together a lot? Um.

KEITH: Yeah!

AUSTIN: But then Cass died, so.

ART: Yeah.

KEITH: Yeah, I had way more...like...points with Cass than anybody else I think by double.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Totally. Orth?

KEITH: Um.

AUSTIN: Orth, how often do you go to anime conventions, and do you cosplay?

JACK: I think anime conventions definitely exist, right?

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah.

JACK: But they're like the size of like cities?

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah. Definitely. Like pop-up cities. Like.

[ART laughs]

JACK: Mmm.

KEITH: Oh my god, that's cr—that's like the fucking funniest shit.

JACK: Yeah, like a crater on a moon. Just. Just.

AUSTIN: Yeah. EarthHome buys like—

JACK: No, wait for it—they cap like—EarthHome buys a moon. And they drag it—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —into orbit around the planet that they're—[laughs] There's *one* convention. And it just tours.

AUSTIN: And like one side of the moon has been laser cut and painted to be the face of an anime character?

[ALI and JACK laugh]

And so it just comes into orbit and the sun hits it and there's like. You know. There's...Card Captor Sakura, right there. [laughs] On the moon.

JACK: It's definitely EarthHome. It's def—[laughs]

AUSTIN: And then it rotates, and the other side is just a big like...you know, amusement park slash anime convention.

JACK: And then, coastal resorts flood all over—[laughs]

[AUSTIN and ALI laugh]

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah. Exactly.

KEITH: Can't wait for that private screening of the next season of...Cowboy Bloop...Bee. Cow Bee Boop Boy.

AUSTIN: Bloop bee. Cowboy Bloop Boy.

KEITH: Cowboy Bloop Boy. It's gonna be good.

SYLVIA: Cowboy Beep Boop!

KEITH: You guys gonna go to the pri—you guys gonna go, watch the first fifteen minutes of the next season? It's gonna be in that city, that they're making.

AUSTIN: [laughing] Right. Exactly.

[Laughter]

JACK: Wait, wait. Which city? *Everything goes dark.*

AUSTIN: You mean you're not about to—

JACK: *This one!*

KEITH: [laughs] They're turning that weird moon in to a city, so that we can all go watch CowBleep Boy B—Boy?

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: You're not allowed to film the moon.

JACK: And yeah, I think he does cosplay.

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: You can't film it. No filming on this planet for the next *week*.

KEITH: No filming on the moon...

AUSTIN: Because there's spoilers on the moon. Turn in all of your cameras.

[ALI laughs]

KEITH: Yeah...

ART: [amused] Huh!

KEITH: Please remove your ocular implants. There's surgeons at every...

AUSTIN: [laughs] Oh...Um. "How do you guys decide"—this is from Chris—"How do you guys decide what questions to leave unanswered and which ones to fully explore in your game? There are moments I noticed when Austin would often ask the group things like, 'What does that

look like?’ or ‘What are you wearing?’ And I guess I’m trying to see if there are ever areas of the characters you thought were best left in the dark.”

KEITH: Well, obviously not Mako’s clothing. That is always...

[SYLVIA and ALI laugh loudly]

something to shine a light on.

AUSTIN: Absolutely. Um. Yeah...I think certain things...So all the games that we play include like specific instruction to the GM to like [breathily] ask them questions all the fucking time! Like that’s the way you do this, is just have them describe the world!

[normally] And that is important for two reasons. One, it means like I don’t always have to over-prep everything, and that prep doesn’t get wasted. And also just like—it’s a game about critical worldbuilding. We all will—I want us all to build the world *constantly*. As a GM, I don’t really go out of my way to be like, “Let’s never answer that question.” More often than not, I say, “This isn’t the time to answer that question.” I think.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I know that happened in the faction game a couple of times, where we would straight up record a thing and then we’d stop, and I’d be like, “Cut that out. Cut that out. We have to go back and cut that out—”

[ALI and DRE laugh]

“—because that wasn’t—that was bad, like that wasn’t the way to give—”

ALI: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Like there was a moment where we were just like, “Oh yeah, Natalya found a text file on what Rigour is.” Like, *no!* Why would I ever think—

SYLVIA: There’s an audio log!

AUSTIN: —yeah, why would I ever think that was a good idea? [laughs] That was really bad.

ALI: [whispers] Yeah.

AUSTIN: But yeah, I don’t think there was any real—moment. There was nothing that was like, “Oh, this is off the table.” It’s just like making sure you put your attention where you want it.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: This is for everybody. “Do you find yourselves gravitating to a specific character type when you roleplay? For instance, Art has [laughs] played a disciplined, military—”

KEITH: [shouts in the distance] Yes!

AUSTIN: “—straight man and Keith a loveable goofball in both seasons. I loved Ali g—Ali going out of her comfort zone playing Hella. Any chance we’ll see you mix it up more in the future?” And that’s from Dan.

[Pause]

KEITH: Uh, no. Sorry.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: No? You’re gonna be a loveable goofball for the rest of your life, huh?

KEITH: Well, here’s the thing, is that, this is like. So...the easiest way for me to.... encounter any situation is to try and be a goofball about it, for two reasons, is because I guess it like...I don’t know, I like that our show can be like super serious and then immediately everybody’s laughing, like with the Lazer Ted stuff?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: Like we were just talking about that? And. Like. So, I think that’s something that’s really appealing to me is the ability for it to not feel out of place to take something serious and make it a little bit lighter?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

KEITH: And also because in that same way that I can’t like play a Dark Side character in any video game because it makes me feel really, really bad—

[SYLVIA and ALI laugh]

—I also can’t be. A bad guy in a fu—tabletop game, ‘cause it makes me feel *really, really bad*. So. I’m kind of—I kind of just have pigeon holed myself into being sort of a goofy do-gooder.

[AUSTIN laughs]

I guess I could be like a sort of goofy, like mildly ne'er-do-well that doesn't understand right from wrong, but that also doesn't sound fun.

AUSTIN: Mm.

KEITH: For me.

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Like I could d—like I could probably do that without feeling guilty, like oh, i'm an assassin, I just don't con—I like—it just—I never actually have to kill anybody, everybody just knows that I'm that.

AUSTIN: But like of course you're playing in a game run by me, which means like by episode three, you would need to have to confront that, or else...

KEITH: Yeah.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: ...be. A shitty roleplayer. Right?

[1:15:00]

KEITH: Right. Yeah. But I could do it, it would just have to come at like a weird disconnect of like "Okay, well, he's just an assassin that doesn't understand right from wrong," and that's boring and I hate that, so.

AUSTIN: Right. Right. I think it's funny that this question...thinks of Cass and Hadrian as being cut from the same cloth, because their arcs to me are really inverted? which is that Cass starts as a—person of like intense doubt? They were the second son—the second child, rather. They were...you know. Cast out after—slash just left. Lots of like, "what is my place in the world, now that the one thing that I had a connection to—the one thing that helped identify me isn't there anymore." Lots of like looking for figures to hang their—you know, kind of raise their banner alongside, looking for a he—someone—not a hero, but like looking for a leader. And then realized, "Oh, no. It's me. I'm the one who's the leader. Of course. Of course." And then like leaning into that.

Whereas Hadrian moves immediately with like. The most assuredness about—not immediately, once they get off the boat—with the most assuredness.

[ART laughs dryly]

And like belief that he is the true. Do-gooder. He is the one who is doing justice. And doubt—

JACK: Yeah, like.

AUSTIN: —creeps in eventually. But—and that's where we left Hadrian. But like that was not the starting position.

ART: And my mission statement for season three is getting right back to no doubt!

JACK: Cass—[laughs]

[ALI laughs]

ART: Put those doubts out. We'll get those done in the first couple of episodes.

JACK: Listen.

AUSTIN: Tragic Kingdom. Got it.

JACK: That's the weird thing, like, Cass at full speed is nowhere near as specifically frightening as Hadrian at full speed.

AUSTIN: Mm.

JACK: For me at least, in that like a fully powered-up Hadrian is fairly terrifying.

KEITH: I mean, Hadrian murders an innocent person—

JACK: Oh.

KEITH: —in like literally the first hour of us playing a game.

ALI: Yeah, you guys.

JACK: And then that sets the tone. Um.

KEITH: Yeah, it did.

[DRE laughs]

JACK: I don't know, when I did Lem, it was—a lot of...Lem misguidedly believed that the best thing he could do was talk his way out of problems?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And I decided after playing season one, from the off, that I wanted to do a character that talked as little as possible, and when they did talk, it was almost always a mistake. [Laughs] It turns out, that's really hard.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: So it was—I deliberately set out to do, I wanna do the opposite thing, or I wanna do something completely different. Which meant that heading towards the very first time we saw Orth, who was a lot closer to Lem, was nice. That was a nice break. But then I wanted to try and get Orth somewhere else, as well? I don't know.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: It's more fun trying to do something different, right?

AUSTIN: Totally.

JACK: For me at least.

ALI: Yeah, I—Hella was a weird thing for me, 'cause she was born out of me being really anxious and being like, "I have to play a game with all of these people that I really respect and think are better writers than I am, so everything that I have to do has to be the most interesting thing and has to be the thing that I don't wanna do." And I mean she ended up kind of in the middle there, but I still ended that season being like, "I don't have to do that for a couple weeks. And I'm gonna enjoy this as much as possible." [laughs]

[JACK huffs in amusement]

So that's why Aria was just like. "We're going to space. I have a robot. She's gonna kiss a girl at least once—"

[Laughter]

"—I don't care."

AUSTIN: Yeah!

ALI: Um. But I originally wanted to swing the complete opposite way with Aria, and I was like—and I even like...she was supposed to be like completely non-combat and like when I made her in Mechnoir she was like even sort of a healer, a little bit?

AUSTIN: Yeah, she had Treat, which could be used to like reduce people's—not just their physical harm, but like their emotional harm.

ALI: Right.

JACK: Oh, wow.

ALI: Yeah. And I kinda regret not ever being able to use that, but I think the way that I used the Pusher move still kinda helped...

AUSTIN: You did use it at least once in Mech noir. I think you did it for Cass, before Cass then had to physically treat somebody else. I'm pretty sure that that's true.

ALI: Oh, I think so, yeah. There's one moment during MechNoir where I wanted to use it against Sister Rust?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm. Ooh!

ALI: To be like, "Hey, oh god, sorry, no, no, no, I'm sorry that we shot you, just calm down?"

[JACK and AUSTIN laugh]

And then I think you were just like "She's zealous. That's not gonna work."

AUSTIN: No, it's not. it wasn't.

ALI: Which [laughing] I appreciate...um. But yeah.

AUSTIN: Sylvia and Dre definitely like—so part of my motivation—so originally it was supposed to be Dre and Nick in that role, then Nick had to move, in the middle of the beginning of the season, and so we were like, "Oh, let's just bring Sylvia in. Like I love Sylvia, I'd love to get Sylvia involved." So—but part of the motivation for me with Nick and Dre was like, "I want people who can play like as many different characters as possible, because I want them, when they go back into those characters, to—" so like for me on paper, this was like going back to season one stuff.

The stuff with Throndir is like, "Oh, it's snow elf stuff." And then we like did a bunch of the snow elf stuff. And so it was like, "Oh shit, i want to make sure that if we move off of the snow elf stuff, that Throndir doesn't start to feel like a one-note character?"

DRE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: And so I was like, “what if I just like have Dre play seventy different characters? just in case.”

[DRE laughs]

Like just in case he needs to roll a new character, or just in case—just to like help work those muscles, so that when it’s time for Thrandir to get back into action, he’ll be ready to do that.

And the other thing was actually like, both Thrandir and Fantasma were both like. Very good at not causing trouble when like—disappearing from conflict, or from trying to avoid conflict, and I wanted to like explicitly make you guys cause conflict. As a way of like encouraging you to do that with your Dungeon World characters. And then. I think you *did* that really well! So.

DRE: [laughing] Yeah!

AUSTIN: Fuckin’, mission accomplished on my part, I guess. But like what was it like for both of you to have to—like switch characters so often? Sometimes even playing—a c—there were a couple of times when you each played a character the other had already played once.

SYLVIA: Yeah. Or even sometimes I think characters that you had played, too.

AUSTIN: Sure.

SYLVIA: Yeah. That was—so, specifically playing a character that someone else had already played was kinda nerve-wracking.

AUSTIN: Mm.

SYLVIA: Because it was like, okay, I have to—I wanna—for me, I wanna both make this part of my performance my own thing, and then at the same time I wanna stay true to that character?

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: So there’s a lot of just like—there’s a balancing act there, right? To still get your take on that character through, but also not to have them be like. Out of character. You know?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

SYLVIA: On the other hand, just playing so many characters, at a point, like. There was a point where—and i still have this on my phone—I was literally just like coming up with character ideas.

AUSTIN: That’s awesome.

SYLVIA: Like I just had a note on my phone—and I still have a couple there—but I was like okay, if I need a character—it was mostly for my own faction, ‘cause I was like “With the other ones it’s easy to spitball, but this thing is my responsibility.”

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: “So I need to write down characters that work for it.” So I’ve just got like a few like un—I’ve got a word doc on my laptop too, where it’s just either a couple sentences or one line character concepts that i could flesh out into something bigger. Though—ah, no. I don’t want to talk about any of them. There’s a couple that I really like, but...

AUSTIN: Save them, because you never know where those concepts can develop—

SYLVIA: We might do sci-fi again.

AUSTIN: Right, we might do sci-fi again, or whatever. The heart of those characters might not just be sci-fi stuff, right?

SYLVIA: Exactly. Well—there’s one specifically that only works in sci-fi that I’m thinking of right now.

AUSTIN: [amused] Okay. Well, we’ll talk about it later.

KEITH: If, uh. If I could real quick—

SYLVIA: But yeah...

[DRE laughs]

KEITH: Oh, Sylvia, did you have more?

SYLVIA: I just wanted to say also, I totally did have a type of character that I ended up playing like thirty percent of the time.

[ALI cackles]

AUSTIN: [faux-challenging] Oh yeah? What was that, Sylvia? What was it?

SYLVIA: I was the mean girl!

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: [pretending to be surprised] Oh, yeah?

SYLVIA: And I was — I fucking loved it.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: God.

KEITH: If I can go back real quick to like types of characters that we're comfortable playing, there—literally in the first—I think. In the first episode, or at least the first recording session of season one, there was—remember when Art murdered the skeleton, the innocent skeleton?

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah, I totally remember that!

JACK: [brightly sarcastic] Did Art do that?

KEITH: And there was the part where before we were all like, "Oh, Art just destroyed this thing in less than one attack," um. Where Mako trans—not Mako—Fero transforms into a bear.

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: And then the aftermath of that recording session, in between that and the next episode was sort of like, I kind of—it was me thinking about like ah, "Why does Fero need to be someone who's ready to throw down—"

AUSTIN: Mm.

KEITH: "Just 'cause someone else that I'm with is throwing down?"

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: And we talked about it I think only a little bit in the episode, but I think that that was really I guess the starting point of me going like, "I don't...I don't need to be a hyper-aggressive player if I'm picking battles—"

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: —"That are actually worthwhile."

AUSTIN: And like that also just speaks to the way we wanna play these games, which is like, "Oh, like just because you're in the party doesn't mean every conflict is your conflict."

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: It *isn't* Kotor 2, right? Like.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: It *isn't* like, "Oh, I'm in the party so I have to take my weapon out and do it." Like that's just not—the way we need to play it.

ART: We're all clear that there's no such thing as less than one attack, right, that that was just nonsense on Keith's part?

AUSTIN: Unbelievable how you killed that skel—

ART: One is the lowest number of attacks.

AUSTIN: —that beautiful skeleton man.

KEITH: I, here's—

AUSTIN: In negative two attacks.

KEITH: Here's the thing. You *whipped out your sword*, the skeleton crumbled from the *wind* of the sword being pulled out—

ART: That's not true.

[DRE laughs]

KEITH: —and then you struck *dust* in the air.

AUSTIN: If only—it's a shame that nobody was recording, huh?

ART: That literally is not what happened.

AUSTIN: It's so—it's a shame.

JACK: This was *after* they told us about his son.

ALI: There's hours of footage of us having this argument.

[Laughter]

ART: The skeleton man attacked me first. I was defending myself! He did damage!

KEITH: You broke into his house!

ALI: Season one -- this is a great commercial for season one, if no one's gone back. You should.

AUSTIN: God.

SYLVIA: Wait, no. Art needs to switch back to his on-board microphone if we're gonna do a commercial for season one.

[AUSTIN laughs deeply]

ALI: Jesus *Christ*. [starts laughing]

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: [fake-offended] Sylvia, stop playing the Mean Girl!

[Laughter]

DRE: Fuck!

SYLVIA: I gue—yeah, yeah. It's hard. It's hard to switch it off.

AUSTIN: God!

ART: What if I just yelled? What if I just made it—

[Laughter]

—pop out?

[Dre laughs]

AUSTIN: I'm gonna hit some quickies here, so we can just move through. We're not done with the longer ones, but I just wanna make sure I get these little ones out the way. Someone wanted to know if the riggers with the rook-like heads were the same ones that Mako blew up? No, they were not. Someone wanted to know if I knew that Apokine was down on September? I knew that there was an old—or I didn't know—I knew there was something there. I knew that Maryland and Ibex had worked on something there besides just like weird Stratus stuff. And then—did this get cut, Ali? Did the bit where Art..?

ALI: [musing] It miiight have? I don't think that it did. But—

AUSTIN: All right, so there's a bit where Cass is like—where Art's like “Oh can my...” He had that move called I Love It When A Plan Comes Together, or was it the other one? *What* was the other one?

ART: It was—I Love It When A Plan Comes Together was the move.

AUSTIN: Okay. Which is like you can spend a hold to just get a thing. You were like, is it too ridiculous to say that since this place has old Apokine—or old Apostolosian ruins on it, that maybe there was some sort of weird old super-Apostolosian mech? And I was like ah, that seems like a little far fetched—and then I immediately remembered, oh—or the thing I knew that they'd worked on was Voice. I knew that they were there working on Voice. Like, that was in my prep. But I didn't know...and I knew that they were drawing on something else—something complicated there, but I didn't know exactly what the complication was.

And then like you saying that made me immediately connect to like, “Oh, they were like appropriating old Apostolosian cultural technology. Like, that's really fascinating and interesting, because it ends up tying up with like Joypark being ex-Apostolosian ruins—or former Apostolosian ruins, like it ties up to so much of this other stuff that it—I can't not do that.” So I don't know if that ended up being cut or if that was still in but it was really good. So that's when I knew about Apokine.

Um. 'Kay, I'm just gonna run through these and just get some quick ones out of the way really quick. Uh. Here's something for you all to think about for a second while I look at these quick ones. This is from Luke. “What Divine would choose you—the player, not the character—as their candidate?” Think about that while I take some more quickies here. Um.

[JACK sighs]

This is a nice light question here. You know? Uh...“As a friend of AuDy and also a Diasporan, what was Cene Sixheart's reaction to learning about AuDY becoming Liberty & Discovery? Did anyone ever tell them what really happened?”

Cene alwa—it's from Gemma—Cene always knew. That AuDy was Liberty & Discovery. That's why Cene—that's why AuDy had to go to Cene for—mechanical repairs all the time. Cene worked for Liberty & Discovery Automaticorp, like on paper, that's where Cene—Cene was a quote unquote “former” Liberty & Discovery...employee.

Yeah, they moved to Counterweight, so that they could keep an eye on AuDy, under Liberty & Discovery's request. And that's why they also gave AuDy that...black goo, that black Soma goo, to keep them like, under check, basically. Um. Does anyone have a candidate-Divine answer yet?

[SYLVIA laughs]

JACK and DRE: Eh...

AUSTIN: All right, keep thinking. “The precious gift that is”—this is from Hermann—“the precious gift that is Lazer Ted, was he improvised on the spot or had you talked about him before?” He takes form very fast in that episode, and I’ve just written next to it, he’s just Riff Raff. He’s only Riff Raff. If you like Lazer Ted, please go find Riff Raff. Pink panther—*Peach* Panther, in stores in three days.

[ALI snorts]

[DRE laughs]

ART: But like maybe think about whether or not Riff Raff is something you actually want to exist in the real world—

[ALI laughs]

ART: —as opposed to [laughing] a cyber pod...world?

AUSTIN: Yes.

ART: He’s not the greatest human.

AUSTIN: No! No, he’s not the greatest human. Neither is Lazer Ted, but. Um.

KEITH: Uh, it’s hard to...

[1:30:00]

[slowly] it’s hard to pick a Diviine that would choose youuu, because they’re all kinda shitbags.

AUSTIN: Yeah! [laughs] Yeah...yep.

KEITH: So it’s like which of these shitbags do—most identifies with my character.

AUSTIN: Or what if you could even invent one. No one gets to say Hustle, Loyalty, Respect.

SYLVIA: Oh, so then I’m—the Divine of anxiety.

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah, good.

[ALI and DRE laugh]

SYLVIA: Would that one work? Does that work?

AUSTIN: Yeah, anxiety is absolute—

SYLVIA: It just shakes all the time.

AUSTIN: Anxiety is *absolutely* one of the virtues of democracy.

SYLVIA: Yeah! [laughs]

JACK: [laughs] That's a Hamilton lyric.

[AUSTIN laughs loudly]

SYLVIA: God.

[DRE laughs]

JACK: I don't know, we spend a lot of time on this show when we should be asleep—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —so, like, Rigour?

AUSTIN: Yeah. Mm-hm! No—

ALI: Oh, god, yeah. Uh-huh.

AUSTIN: Oh, yeah, it's—like that's the thing about this shows is that like there are definitely moments where it's like “Oh, we're just playing about this.” Like.

[ALI laughs]

“We're just—this is just *this*. This is the thing we're talking about, is just this.” Like we're all talking about our own...workaholism, and our own anxieties about relationships, and our anxieties about politics, and just like, it's all out there, in this show, I think.

Someone specifically asked when Rigour was first conceived of as a villain, “When did that happen? And were there any other characters or factions in the running to take that spot if things had played differently?” And that's from Dave.

It would have been very tough—for Rigour not to be, the Big Bad in this season? One, because just like, Rigour is a really interesting and cool villain. ...Two, because...like when you look at the world, Rigour is why the world is the way it is. And I knew that from fairly early on. Like I'd written Rigour's name down. You have to remember, this game comes out of a Titanfall joke.

KEITH: Yes. It does.

AUSTIN: Where, in the middle of playing Titanfall—

ALI: [laughing] God!

AUSTIN: —we—god, I can't ever remember the exact exchange.

KEITH: Here's what—here's what happened.

AUSTIN: We looked this up recently. Go ahead, Keith.

KEITH: Jack was going aw—Jack was like away from the game for a second, and then came back and said something, and I thought that he said—

AUSTIN: Oh! Right, go ahead.

KEITH: I misheard him, and then was like, "Here's what I thought you said. I thought you said, uh..." Oh, shit. Now I can't remember.

AUSTIN: We just looked this up. It's something in a Divine.

ALI: There's...I'm about to retweet the video on the official...

AUSTIN: Alright, good. Retweeting it.

KEITH: Oh! Oh! He said—oh, it was Art! Art said, "Jack, when you came back, you should have said, 'Mind if I drop in?'" and I misheard it as, "My Divine drop-in?"

AUSTIN: [laughs] My Divine dropped in.

KEITH: And, ah.... my Divine drop-in.

AUSTIN: And then—I think we'd already made s—

KEITH: And so we created a weird metafiction for Titanfall where one faction's robots were called riggers, and one faction's titans were called Divines.

AUSTIN: Absolutely.

KEITH: And that is literally the basis for...

AUSTIN: Literally. Absolutely.

ART: And then two years later, we were like, "let's do a hundred hours of content about this."

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Um, and then like as soon as I realized what Divines—like literally as soon as I realized what Divines were, before we recorded the worldbuilding episode, I'd written Rigour down as like "Oh, right. Duh." Rigger, rigour, ha ha, funny, jokes. Capitalism. And like yeah. Like that...Rigour would have been a major force at the end of this series no matter what. It wouldn't have necessarily been...the *only* one. Stuff with Ibex could have gone a different way. Stuff with the Rapid Evening could have gone a different way.

SYLVIA: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Um. Stuff with Grace could have definitely gone a different way. So. Someone also asks, "Was Marx's analysis of capital as dead labor an inspiration for Rigour?"

[JACK laughs] And I've written here, "It's fundamental." Yes.

[Laughter]

Uh...All right, let's go back to a longer question here. Um. I have to find one. "How do you feel as you've grown as a player over the course of the podcast?" And that's from Awkward Isotope. Let's start with Ali there, who I think has probably grown the most as a player over the course of the two seasons? No offense to—

ALI: Umm? Yeah...

AUSTIN: —I'm not saying that as like a diss to other people. But like...Ali, you had never done tabletop roleplaying before, right?

ALI: I had not. No. I'd done—I had done like chat rp, for like ever?

AUSTIN: Sure.

ALI: But only with like one person.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: Who was like my best friend. And we had like this Star Wars thing going for ten years, it was a lot.

[SYLVIA laughs]

That's why like being able to finish this is really great! [Laughing] 'Cause, I've been writing the same Star Wars people for ten years.

Um. Anyway. I think—and I touched on it before, where like, Friends at the Table initially was something that was terrifying. Like Austin invited me to and it and I was like, "Sure." And then I wrote like—like maybe two or three days before we were gonna start recording, and I like typed out this email while sobbing that was like "I can't do this. I just can't." And I never sent it.

AUSTIN: Aw.

ALI: [laughs] Yeah. And then um. Like season one was kinda weird. Like I loved it. I had a really good time with it, but I think it took me a little while to like...get to where I was going with Hella?

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And then like to be able to also tell Austin like "Hey, you know, you do a really good job as a GM, but like there was this specific like boat moment with Calhoun where I had to decide whether or not to save him or not in that moment or not?"

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ALI: That conversation. Was like kind of intense for me. [laughs] So like later on I had to be like, "Yeah, that was like. I get what you were saying, but I don't know if that was the right way to say it?"

AUSTIN: Um. No, that was totally like the weirdest, harshest like...

[ALI laughs]

[sighs] That was a really good moment for I think both of us to try to work out what that character was, but also...was a harsh way to go about it? Um.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And I think in the long run, the conversation we had about that helped me a lot as a GM to like...want to see the best of my characters—One. It made me confident that we could talk off-stream about the game.

Like I don't think that the wild stuff we've done this season would have happened if we didn't feel comfortable talking, in Skype, all of us, about our characters and about like what our character motivations were, and what sort of structural things we wanted to do. And that was like the first time we'd done that in a way that was more than just like, "Oh, here's an idea we have." So that was really useful.

And then like second, it was also a way for me to try to get better at pulling the best out of my players, instead of trying to push them into...the direction I wanted them to go. If that makes sense.

ALI: Yeah. Um. But yeah, I feel like, I don't know, it's...like. It's really scary to do this with like a bunch of people, and I've like avoided doing tabletop forever 'cause it seemed really intense, and like I didn't want to have to do a voice, and like...[laughs]

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

[DRE laughs]

ALI: [laughing] Have to like sit on a table and pretend to be a person, um. But like I don't know. It was really scary but I also just like trust all of you more than I trust anyone?

JACK: Aw.

ALI: And like, we get to have these cool conversations now, and like do this thing that we're really proud of? So like I think—I don't know, I've definitely grown a ton, but I think if anyone's like, just starting this, or is at the same place, where they're like, "Oh I listen to this podcast and it's really cool, but like I don't feel comfortable doing this with my friends." Like. If they're friends that you're close enough with, like just go for it, 'cause...

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: You know. Your pals are gonna help you out.

AUSTIN: And like totally be willing to have that open conversation about what you like and don't like about any given session. Like.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: That is so important. So, so, so important. Um. And like have that conversation before you start, like—a thing I don't think—that a lot of people didn't hear, because there was a worldbuilding episode for this season that wasn't in the feed, you can only get to it by following a link on episode zero?

But we started with a set of vetoes. Of like, "What's some stuff we don't want in this game? What's some stuff we do want in this game?" And that was a really important thing, because that's a space where you can say like... "Oh, I really want to explore questions about technology." Or like, "Oh I really—it would be cool if there was a pharmaceutical company in this game."

But you could also say like, "Eh, what if we just didn't deal with slavery? Like I get it that that's a topic that we could do, if we had the time and the resources, but like I'm not convinced we could do that right right now, or like, for whatever personal reason that's totally viable and reasonable, like I just don't wanna—that's not how I want to spend my free time right now."

Those moments are—like those are tools that should be at your disposal, when you're playing a tabletop game. Like have those conversations openly, because that's the way to like end up getting a really healthy roleplaying space. At least in my experience it has been. I should note also, that whole thing also just helped me figure out how—what *version* of mean I wanted to be?

[ALI and DRE laugh]

Someone definitely wrote in and was like, "Why are you so mean as a GM, Austin?"

[DRE laughs, ALI and others follow]

And their argument, in this specific—

KEITH: That's someone who's never played with a really mean GM.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Right?

ALI: Uh-huh.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: One: *right*?

KEITH: Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah.

[AUSTIN laughs]

ALI: Yeah, that's the other thing, like every GM, when they talk about being a GM is like, "You're your players' enemy." Like.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Yeah...

ALI: "You have to...set up all these traps for them, and laugh while they fuckin' don't know what to do."

AUSTIN: Fuck. That.

ALI: And then Austin just here like, "Hi. What do you wanna do?"

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah, like—

ALI: "That sounds cool, let's just do it!"

AUSTIN: Mako—what vehicle do you want? You want that thing from Tailspin? All right, let's do that!

[DRE laughs]

Like it'll take you two episodes. But so the specific example that the person who wrote in gave—this is from Mikhail—was like. "In order to achieve the highest tier in the fight against Rigour, at least two of the players would have had to sacrifice themselves at the end, no matter what happened in the previous rounds."

I don't think that that math—I think the math actually goes the other way, which is that three players had to [laughing] sacrifice themselves? But that math reflected—and this is what I learned, was like—give them enough rope. Like the thing that's—the way to be mean is to like make them make the choice.

And so the way the math worked in that finale was, you're going to have to figure out how you want to balance preparing for Rigour versus preparing for your own political crisis, your own personal interest. And there was a way if there had been more focus on the crisis, no one would have had to be sacrificed at the end. Like. Literally no one. Now, the rest of the sector would have gone to shit, because you know, the—would have been no one focusing on their internal issues, at all. But like Rigour would have been really, truly defeated.

And so like for me that's way more interesting than the boss who is just like, [shitty nerd voice] "No, you can't kill it. You can't, it's impossible to kill him. He's real strong and tough, and he's my favorite." [normally] Like I've been...in games with those GMs. Where it's just like no matter what you do their pet characters are just going to live forever? Whereas like.

KEITH: Even if they're in an oxygen-deprived bubble.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Fuckin'—I swear to Christ. I swear to Christ. I'm *so mad about that stupid game!*

JACK: Oh my god.

AUSTIN: Fuck! Ah!

ART: That's what I was gonna say for the how do you think you've grown as a...character, or as a roleplayer. Question, was like.

AUSTIN: Mm.

ART: If you had recordings of games you and I played in college. And like made us listen to it. One, I think we'd just kill—we'd do it for like ten minutes and then be driven into an embarrassed rage.

AUSTIN: Yes. [laughs]

[ALI laughs]

ART: But like that's the real...arc, I think.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: You know, we've changed a lot in that time, and I think the biggest thing is like, to just be less precious, right? Like.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ART: Whatever idea you came in with is okay, but your next idea is just as good. Like, who cares what you thought before. Now. Do what makes sense now.

AUSTIN: Yeah. We were really precious in college about our ideas, and like our characters, and—both on the GM and roleplaying side, like on the playing—PC side. We were just deeply like invested in the story we wanted to tell, and not the story that was happening? And thankfully

like a lot of the games we play now give us the tools to do that latter thing, and encourage us to do it. And that's huge for me. Does anybody else feel like they grewed—they grewed. Jesus Christ.

[DRE laughs]

They *grew* this season.

SYLVIA: [whispers] Jesus.

AUSTIN: Vice.com Editor in Chief—or vice.com *Gaming* Editor in Chief, Austin Walker. Growed.

[ALI laughs]

SYLVIA: I think I just—

KEITH: Uh. Oh no, I was going—because no one was talking, I was going to move on to a different thing. I do not think I grew.

[Laughter]

SYLVIA: Okay. Um. Aw! I just think think I got less nervous over time.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's definitely true.

SYLVIA: Like, getting comfortable with the group, and like—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: —what I was doing.

AUSTIN: Mhm. And we'll see more of you in the future, Sylvia.

SYLVIA: Hell yeah you will. Not getting rid of me that easy.

DRE: Yeah. I think I grew a lot more confident in season two as well. Just because I came in part-way through season one.

AUSTIN: [hushed voice] Yeah, that's true.

DRE: I'd have a lot of anxiety in the back of my head like "Aw man, there's already this group—"

SYLVIA: Yep!

DRE: “—and I just have like a random character that’s here, and uhhhhhh!”

AUSTIN: Yep.

ART: Wasn’t that literally episode three? It wasn’t like it was...

AUSTIN: Yeah, but it was still—it felt like so difficult.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Because, I remember that from the outside it still felt weird. And I could tell that you were really nervous about it. Um...All right. Jack!

JACK: Hello.

AUSTIN: “What was your music production schedule like for Counterweight?” This is from [unintelligible] [1:43:33]

JACK: Panicky.

ALI: [laughs] Sorry—that I’m laughing, but.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. “Did you compose for specific moments, as in ‘Oh, this moment could totally use a song?’” Samantha and Cody add, “Jack, which song did you enjoy putting together the most?”

JACK: Ah, there’s two ways. There’s two ways...I made music for the show.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: And the first was that we had a plan—

[ALI laughs]

—and that I’d sit down [laughs] with—a very specific plan in mind.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

JACK: Usually like up to three weeks or a month in advance, sometimes Austin would give me nice bits about what was gonna happen, and I’d write notes about what I wanted. And record demos. The other one was that I’d [laughs] I’d go to bed at ten.

AUSTIN: And.

JACK: And then I'd get a note, and I'd get up at ten thirty. And [laughing] write a song for three hours...

[DRE and ALI laugh]

And then just ship it? I was—all of the music from pretty much the episode before the finale onwards, I wrote on the spare bed in Austin's house.

AUSTIN: That's true.

JACK: On a keyboard I'd bought in New York, to compose with?

AUSTIN: Mhm.

JACK: Which is about an octave in size. Which is not the amount of keys—

AUSTIN: How many keys is that?

JACK: That's like twenty keys.

AUSTIN: [sarcastically] Oh, yeah, good, a little twenty-key—it's smaller—

JACK: A piano has eighty-eight.

AUSTIN: It's smaller than a computer keyboard.

[ALI laughs]

JACK: Right.

[ART laughs]

But in just in terms of sort of like a practical process, I tried to establish really quickly—

[1:45:00]

—or as quickly as I could—what individual characters sounded like.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And what individual themes sounded like. I spent a really long time panicking about how [breathes] we were going to try to evoke sci-fi in a way that still carried forward the sort of tonality of season one?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: This very sparse, as sparse as I could—'cause sci-fi soundtracks. Trend more towards more electronic sounds?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: A lot of the time.

AUSTIN: There was an electronic sound in at least one of the songs. You did. Jack.

JACK: [laughs] Also, here's the thing, was, the Rigour sound, which became this big powerhouse towards the back half of the soundtrack, was something that I put into Long Way Around really early on.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: As a concession to synthesizers. [laughs] And didn't realize what we had until the last time we talked about—

AUSTIN: Well, there's another thing that was—yeah, there was two sounds in that song that are synth—or I guess one of them isn't synthesized, it's this other thing that was really tough to figure out if we wanted to leave in, which is... There was a trailer for this season that came out.

JACK: Mm-hm...

AUSTIN: That Keith cut together from your intro theme and then our worldbuilding episode.

KEITH: Yeah. I'm still really proud of that trailer.

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: It's a great trailer.

AUSTIN: That trailer is fantastic. It's so good.

KEITH: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And it ends with these sounds that NASA found—that NASA—

JACK: [ruefully] Oh.

AUSTIN: —on NASA's website.

KEITH: Yeah, the sound—I remember all the—'cause I found a NASA library of sounds?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

KEITH: I remember all the different ones. I think the one that you're talking about is the—they were radio...

AUSTIN: Yes.

KEITH: It was radio waves of bouncing off of the atmosphere, is what the sounds were.

AUSTIN: That's exactly what—yeah, it's like the...It almost—

KEITH: Like crickets. They almost sound like space crickets.

AUSTIN: It does sound like space crickets, or space frogs, at the very end of Long Way Around, the title track. And like—

KEITH: Right.

AUSTIN: —we went back and forth on that into whether or not to include that.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Because it sounded a little synthier than what we intended.

KEITH: And...do we also—we still also used at the beginning, the...

AUSTIN: The takeoff. Yeah.

KEITH: The [makes takeoff sound] rrRRRR—that thing?

ALI: Yeah.

KEITH: Yeah, that's a...

AUSTIN: I mean—

KEITH: That was like a piece of a satellite falling into the ocean that I reversed and slowed down?

AUSTIN: Right. It's so good. And like. So the thing that ends up being—so one, the thing that's amazing about that is neither one of those are actually synth sounds. Right, those are both physical things, being recorded.

JACK: Right.

AUSTIN: Which is amazing.

KEITH: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Two, the moment in An Animal Out of Context when...or like in the recording process of that, Jack? Where you realized...

[JACK laughs]

Like so we'd done the Rigour Was There All Along bit. In that episode. Right?

JACK: Mmhm.

AUSTIN: And that like oh, Rigour is the hum of your...refrigerator. And like the realization...that like "Oh, Rigour's been in the theme song this whole time."

[Soft laughter]

Like right away. Like so early in the theme song. And then seeing you compose that—

JACK: Oh. Sorry.

AUSTIN: In like three days or something. Was just like—and then hearing the final thing. When I say like I actually came to tears over An Animal Out of Context...like, between the bit where it's me and Art talking about "What's it like for these people to see a zoo?"

JACK: Mm.

AUSTIN: And then the final moments of that episode. Those two moments are just like, oh...Jack made this music that has transformed this thing from being...already something great, which is like me and my friends being fun and sad together. To this other thing that like elevates it so well.

JACK: Oh, thank you...

AUSTIN: And like. Add Ali there for like helping us figure out where the placement goes and having amazing ideas and producing the thing this season, like, absolute huge thanks to you, Ali.

JACK: Hearing it all come together.

AUSTIN: But that to me was just like—so good.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, hearing it all come together...is just like this like, “Oh. it’s—” All right, so like, we had a lot of problems with this one thing. Someone wrote in about this too. Which is, there’s this rule in all of the powered by the apocalypse games which is “To do it, do it?” Which is like, you don’t do the move, you don’t do like, “oh I’m doing Hack and Slash.” You swing your sword at an orc, and when you do that, the result is the move Hack and Slash. To do it, you do it.

And in a lot of ways for me that is the moral of Counterweight, or that is part of what I wanted to get at, which was like, to change the world, what you do is you do it. That’s—you do it. There is no—you don’t win that fight in ideological circles. You win that fight in the trenches, and in the workplace, and with your hands, as much as with your voice. And like you need the voice stuff there too. And so...For me, it’s so cool to see us, as a group of people who don’t have any like official training in this stuff, to *do it*.

DRE: Oh, I don’t know. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Right, like, oh. We’re just a bunch of yokels.

[ALI laughs]

Like we’re just some folks with microphones, and we did this thing, and it came together to sound like this? Like, it amazes me, because it’s an illustration of not like us being dope, but like the ability for people to create things.

JACK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And so like that episode, for me, was just like, “Oh fuck, like, yeah, you know what, *fuck* Rigour.”

[JACK laughs]

Like, we got this, as a people!

JACK: Yeah!

AUSTIN: We got this. It's just gonna take some time, and we gotta do it.

JACK: Somebody in the chat asked us—

AUSTIN: So yeah...

JACK: —how many vocal takes Sister Rust was. And it's "every phrase."

AUSTIN: Oh, man.

JACK: [laughing] Every phrase is a different...

[ALI laughs]

It's a different vocal—

AUSTIN: Is it really?

JACK: Yeah, it's all equalized and stitched together.

DRE: Oh, wow!

AUSTIN: I still—so there's something—I don't know if I ever told you this, Jack, but there's a bit in the...there's a bit in the demo that I wish was in the final. Version.

JACK: Oh yeah?

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. You make a little sigh noise that is the best.

[JACK laughs]

Oh, wait, no, it's not the sigh noise. It's not the sigh noise. It's "...and that's fine."

JACK: Ohhh. Yeah.

AUSTIN: You just say "...and that's fine."

JACK: I don't know why I didn't do that in the end.

AUSTIN: It's fine. It's good. The final version is still fantastic. And the music's good...

JACK: But yeah, that's about, that's what I guess maybe like seventy, seventy tracks stitched together? [laughing] To make that song?

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: Oh, god.

ALI: [sighing] God...

AUSTIN: But like Ali, you were in the same place by the end, with just the fuckin' *show*.

ALI: Yeah...

AUSTIN: How many tracks was the finale?

ALI: [laughs] A lot.

AUSTIN: Because like—

ALI: So many!

AUSTIN: —you have all of the tracks from each of us. So that's eight.

ALI: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: By itself.

ALI: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: You have pickups from me, from when the mic was broken, 'cause fuck Skype.

ALI: [laughs] Yeah, there's like six of those.

AUSTIN: We're on Discord. By the way. We're on Discord right now.

DRE: Yo.

ART: Shoutout to Discord.

AUSTIN: Shoutout to—you know. Shoutout to—I complained very vocally, and got help about Skype. They were like, "Oh, you do an update. I think that's fixed now." But still. Don't—doesn't go back. Um. I said "fuck Rigour," not "you don't fuck Rigour." Uh. But like—so it was just like this thing of...I'm totally distracted now. I was thinking about. Rigour. Sorry.

JACK: [scolding] Austin!

[ALI and DRE laugh]

KEITH: Don't fuck Rigour!

AUSTIN: Don't fuck Rigour. Rule number two. No, rule number one, don't print a printer. Rule number two.

DRE: Yeah. [laughs] Don't...

AUSTIN: Don't fuck Rigour.

SYLVIA: [dreamily] What if, though?

ALI: Jesus. Christ.

AUSTIN: Rigour is not daddy.

SYLVIA: Like, what if, though?

AUSTIN: Mm.

ALI: Um.

DRE: No. Uh-uh.

SYLVIA: But what if.

AUSTIN: [negatively] Mm. Mm-mm.

DRE: Nope!

AUSTIN: Um.

SYLVIA: I'm just saying. Could be fun.

AUSTIN: One more quick one, when did Larry first get introduced? Larry getting introduced—Larry got introduced when...Keith—when Mako convinced that AI routine that it was—that they were the same person.

[KEITH laughs evilly]

And that's the other way I let myself be mean, which is like when I see a player being cl—a little *too* clever. I'm goin' ayeah. How can I fuckin' turn this around on you. Just wait until you fail a roll. And that's also why I made Fantasma invisible that time. Was like, all right, y'know, fucking turn invisible. Awright, we'll go down this road.

[ALI laughs]

Yeah, you'll be invisible all right. Lotta things will be invisible. [laughs] I mean that's Larry. [car honks outside] Is like a response to that.

Um. Someone wants to know if we'd like to continue telling stories of this kind in the Counterweight universe, and I think we kind of addressed this before. This is coming from Harry and also from Ryan. And a lot of people!

Which we kind of addressed before, but like, I don't *think* so, at least not in this time frame. Not in Counterweight. Not near the Golden Branch. Like maybe we come back one day. But like not here or now. To this place and time. I'm like vaguely curious about what the world looks like a thousand years from now? But. I'd like these characters to have their happy endings. Y'know?

ART: [huffs] Speak for yourself.

[ALI laughs]

SYLVIA: Wow!

AUSTIN: I think Cass's ending is successful. [laughs]

ART: You didn't say successful ending. [laughs]

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Yeah. Fair.

ART: I've been here the whole time.

[Laughter]

AUSTIN: Um. James says, "Why did it seem so short? It almost felt like an anime that was only ten episodes long that rushed to the big finale. Would've loved to see what other adventures the Chime crew could've messed up." It was like *ninety hours long*.

KEITH: I would like to—yeah, yeah. Ten episodes of an anime would be. Five hours.

ALI: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I just—I did the math, and it's like eight twenty-six-episode anime seasons long.

ALI: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Which is also kind of staggering, like, that I made you all suffer through that. Um. [ALI laughs] But the real answer for that was like, there was definitely a point in the season where we found momentum. There's definitely—I mean, there's a couple points, right. When I look at the list of episodes, it's like...we switched to the Sprawl. It was—that's actually not true. It's the first faction game.

And I think we kind of all realized like—or at least Sylvia, Dre, and I like—"Ooh! This stuff is actually really cool! Like this stuff works! Like it isn't just—this game isn't just the fun ground game. The stuff that we're doing up at this level is also really fascinating and fun." And that's also...where we first get Ibex, right. Is I think the very first faction game.

SYLVIA: Either the first or second. It was early.

AUSTIN: It was definitely early. I think it was. This Month of Ours. Yeah, it was definitely This Month of Ours.

SYLVIA: That's the second one, then.

AUSTIN: Yeah, maybe that was the second one.

SYLVIA: That first one was A Ship of Seeds. I believe.

AUSTIN: You're right. You're totally right. Which like, by the way, like go back and listen to the intro of that, because it's—you know, I'm just gonna—I'm gonna play it for the chat really quick.

[SYLVIA laughs slowly]

Because like.

ALI: Aw, Austin.

AUSTIN: It's not because I think it's good, but because like it's like—oh, all of this stuff turned into something. All right, I'm gonna play it real quick.

[\[episode / transcript\]](#)

AUSTIN: An excerpt from the journal of Addax Dawn, former Candidate of Peace and current agent of the Rapid Evening:

Sometime, deep in the future, after all of this is over, far away from the here and now, whoever's left will look back and write about this month we've had.

(Music begins - "The Long Way Around")

They'll tell stories about how thousands gathered in the overgrown statuary of an abandoned world and waited to be judged by a once absent god. They'll write about the day a little fleet of mischief and wrath became a state unto itself, unanchored and hungry. They'll sing about the moment that the freelancer became a fisher of planets.

But I wonder if anyone will be left who remembers, or if anyone outside even noticed that day, when halfway across the sector, flakes of snow drifted down into the massive crater bored into the side of the planet Ionias, as something very old and very cruel felt the light of the stars for the first time in ages.

(Music cuts off)

AUSTIN: I'm guessing the rest of the cast is still listening to that on the stream.

DRE: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: But like, oh yeah. The whole season is there. Like. It's. Everything from the Odamas Fleet to Ibex, where I just didn't get it at all. Like at the time I was like [oblivious voice] "Oh yeah, that's a good intro. These are the things that seem important in this episode." [huffs a laugh]

[JACK laughs]

But actually there's the whole fucking season...um. And then I think we gained momentum, to go back to what I was saying, when we switched to the Sprawl, which is the next episode after that. And then it isn't too much longer that you advanced the clock for Liberty & Discovery really high. And I was like, "Oh, I guess Ibex is mad at them now."

[ALI laughs]

"I have to figure out who that character is before like that tech dude's face. Like that's all I know about him is like. He's really charismatic and he looks like Tristan Walker."

And like. Getting to have him be an important character ended up giving this—the game so much more direction. So we then did the Kingdom game, where we got to like dig into that a lot,

and left that with a lot of momentum. And then...I think that the moment is like, when you're fleeing, I still thought the game might be going for a long time. When you flee Counterweight.

And then...when it becomes that—when the faction game, when Dre says, “Oh, Rigour’s going to September,” is when I knew we were going to the end. Like, “Oh. We’re in the finale now. Like the rest of this game is like the final stretch.” And I just like got the fuckin’ bug in me. I was like “Okay, we gotta finish this right now.”

And then it was while you were all on September that I had the idea for a jump, like a time jump forward? Because I realized like that’s just—not...winning on September, and then oh! That called it a day! Doesn’t answer a lot of the big hanging questions about what’s happening in Counterweight. And the notion of like defeating Rigour in weird indefinite way, losing AuDy, and then like going to just week by week Chime stuff, didn’t feel like true to the pace that we’d established. I guess.

Um. Wealthy Aardvark shares the picture of Tristan Walker, which is good. I’ll say too, one of my favorite things about [Ee-bex] Ibex is I like refuse to say [Eye-bex] Ibex, even though that’s how you pronounce that word. But that’s ‘cause the thing—the conversation Art had with me, which was like, what do these people even know about these animals? Like how the fuck do they know what—how to pronounce [Ee-bex] Ibex, or [Eye-bex] Ibex? He just likes the word [Ee-bex] Ibex more.

KEITH: I go back and forth all the time.

AUSTIN: Everybody did. Which is fine.

SYLVIA: Yeah, same.

AUSTIN: Because like—

KEITH: Well, ‘cause if his name’s [Eye-bex] Ibex, then you can call him Lie-bex.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: [snorts] [mutters] Never liked you...

DRE: Fuck.

SYLVIA: Gettin’ political campaign ad, man.

AUSTIN: Yeah, “more like Lie-bex.” Got it. Yep. Good.

ALI: Mm-hm!

[AUSTIN makes a disbelieving noise]

SYLVIA: [sinister voice] Ibex wants you to believe he's the best for the Golden Branch.

ALI: [cackles] Fuck off.

KEITH: Ibex, do a slogan for why you're. The number one choice for...

AUSTIN: Weed Lord Vegeta asks, "It would be extremely off-brand for me not to ask a question about Ibex. I guess this is a series of smaller questions, though. What was it like for all of you to watch people slowly, or very quickly, turn around on Ibex? Was he ever meant to be sympathetic early on? Art can sit that part of the question out. [laughs] Obviously he was created by committee, but did Austin—"

[2:00:00]

"—have any plans for a character like Ibex early on?" I did not have any plans for a character like Ibex early on.

JACK: Uh, past a certain point—

ART: Yo, fuck Ibex!

JACK: Mm—[laughs]

ART: Sorry. Didn't mean to cut you off, yeah.

KEITH: Yeah! Well, I'm also sympathetic towards Ibex, but only because of like the last like three recording sessions. Everything else leading up to that, fuck that guy.

[AUSTIN laughs quietly]

Fuck him for the entirety of—

[SYLVIA laughs]

—the flashback, with Orth and Sokrates and everyone else. Everything—up until the dance, let's say. With...

ART: Keith, follow the money. They were just trying to get you to like Ibex.

KEITH: Dre, were you the one that danced with Ibex?

ART: It's all Austin's weird scam.

[DRE and ALI laugh]

JACK: Past a certain point, I was contractually [laughing] obliged to be on Team Ibex.

[AUSTIN laughs]

ALI: God [laughs]

JACK: Ah, and I'm not sure we're at a forum on that. AuDy did not...

KEITH: Un—'cause fuck him, he sucks.

JACK: AuDy was not—tremendously pro-Ibex initially. AuDy was definitely on Team um—as far as like the globe—the initial golden globe and those sort of early dalliances—AuDy was not necessarily pro. But then I couldn't—I *couldn't* play Liberty & Discovery...like anti-Ibex!

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

JACK: Them as old colleagues was much more interesting to me.

KEITH: [whiny voice] "Eh, my name's Ibex..."

AUSTIN: Right. Them as like—

KEITH: "It's so hard for me to control Righteousness! Mwehh!"

[Laughter]

ALI: It's not..

[Laughter]

ART: A great impression, Keith. That's exactly what...

AUSTIN: Yeah, that was good. Just—yeah. That's how he sounds.

[DRE laughs]

ALI: [laughs] Ibex was really interesting for me 'cause...I edited that faction game episode, I was like this is the coolest concept.

AUSTIN and JACK: Mm.

ALI: This is—‘cause...um, he started as a seductress, like we said before, and I was like that’s—I’m really glad that Austin like turned this around on that game in that way? And then there was the Kingdom episode recording, when everyone hated him, and the entire time—

AUSTIN: Which I had to do, ‘cause no one hated each other. Like that’s the thing about Kingdom, was.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like so from the behind the scenes thing, there was like “I’m watching this Kingdom game going, and no one is causing conflict with each other. Because no one wants to throw the first stone. And everyone just wants it to play well?” And it was like “Well, I have to start playing. Like I...we’re already playing Kingdom with too many players.” And Kingdom also explicitly says don’t have a GM, because—it doesn’t really go into why, but the answer is, ‘cause everyone will look to the GM to give them conflict. When in fact it’s supposed to emerge naturally from play. But the second you have a GM, like that’s—the GM—if someone’s like—

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: “Oh, I’m just gonna help run things,” like the players will look to that player for the conflict. And so I stepped in as the worst meanest shittiest version of Ibex, ‘cause you needed that then.

[ALI laughs]

And also ‘cause young people are shitty. Is a thing. Um.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: But yeah.

ALI: I loved him the whole time. The entire time I was just in chat like “I love him! He’s the best.” And then me and Austin had conversations that were like, “You can’t kiss him. Don’t be something Ibex cares about.”

[SYLVIA laughs]

“You cannot.”

AUSTIN: I forgot about that. God.

SYLVIA: Ohhh my god!

AUSTIN: I'd totally forgotten about that.

[ALI laughs]

SYLVIA: How short is the list of people you *didn't* wanna make out with?! [laughs]

[AUSTIN and DRE laugh]

ALI: I can't even single out anyone. [Laughter] Then. There was, um. The moment when Ibex does the exact thing that Aria wanted to do?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

ALI: And that was my like—my vision of Aria where it was like the end scene for her is either that she takes down those...the Blue Skies or she ends up on Weight.

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And then—like god. I was like, "I don't know how to play Aria anymore. Like, I don't know if she should be jealous or mad?" And then like somewhere during the...September recordings, I was like, "Okay, so if we're having an episode after this, the first thing Aria does is calls him and asks him for a job?" [AUSTIN makes an amused noise] Um. And that's where all the finale stuff came from.

AUSTIN: Right. Was like, me figuring out like—well 'cause like the thing that was great was like, "Oh, Ibex still has it *out* for you. Because...you have maxed out Liberty & Discovery's—slash the Righteous Vanguard's—clock!" Like. So much of the—shoutouts to Hamish Cameron for the Sprawl and for giving us an early access to it, because like so much of the game was driven by the ways those clocks work.

And yeah, I think that that was definitely—for me like seeing the turnaround on Ibex was really great. Because...[sighs] it was—it wasn't the turnaround was great, necessarily. But it was like, yeah. It's Ibex. Like that's the thing he does. Like just talk—

To Art and Keith's point, like, I had a lot of problems playing him in the Kingdom game, because I was playing him only as like. A shithead. And—I never *showed* why people liked him. I only *said* people liked him. And so when listeners started liking him, it was like, "Oh, okay, good. I'm actually playing—him the way I should be." Which is that like, you wanna say, "Oh, he was just doin' what was necessary. He's just doin' the thing that is good in the end." And like yeah, that's

him working on you. Um. It's not wrong, necessarily, either. But like. That is how he wants you to think of him, also.

KEITH: Fuck. That guy sucks.

SYLVIA: *Damn.*

[DRE laughs]

He really is more like Lie-bex!

[AUSTIN sighs]

[DRE laughs harder]

KEITH: Yeah!

AUSTIN: Yeah.

SYLVIA: I'm never letting that go! 'Cause it's so stupid.

AUSTIN: So good...It's so good. Ugh. Um.

SYLVIA: I love it.

AUSTIN: Also, real quick, someone in the chat was like, "Are you telling me Jace and Ibex almost kissed?"

[ALI laughs]

DRE: Maybe!

ALI: No.

AUSTIN: No, I think it was just Aria and Ibex.

ALI: That was like—that was deep in us talking about like how the Chime was gonna take down Ibex, even though that was like so impossible and not how that system—

ART: We took down Rigour.

ALI : —even like sort of let us—[laughs]

AUSTIN: You could take down Ibex. You couldn't take down Liberty & Discovery. Right?

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like that's the difference. The company, not the...But you coulda killed Ibex!

ALI: Yeah. And I was just mostly like—

AUSTIN: That's where I thought the game—in retrospect, that's totally where I thought the game was gonna go, because I started plotting out what—

SYLVIA and KEITH: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: —Ibex's home base looked like! It's why robot Ibex showed up, was like, "Oh, I wanna signal—I wanna show you this barrel, that like oh there are these Ibex robots out there. Just in case where you end up wanting to go—" this is before Rigour wound up on September, was when I figured this out, was like, "Oh, I want—I know what the planet where Liberty & D—the weird abandoned jungle planet where Liberty & Discovery is at." The company, again, not the robot. Not the Divine.

Um. Should look at some more questions, but we should start wrapping up soon, I'm guessing. It's very late where Jack is.

DRE: Mm.

KEITH: That's true.

ART: It's too bad we don't some like super cool trailer for season three to bust out at the end of this.

AUSTIN: Yeah, we don't. We sadly don't have that, because we haven't recorded...[amused] any of it, yet. I haven't had time. Um.

ALI: We can talk a little bit about it.

AUSTIN: We—yeah. Okay.

ART: Wait, Jack. Quick, start beatboxing a theme song.

[JACK and DRE laugh]

AUSTIN: We have music, but I wouldn't play it without...it being finished.

JACK: What Austin means is—

AUSTIN: It's very good.

JACK: —we have eight seconds of music.

AUSTIN: [genuine] Oh, it's so good!

ALI: It's so good though!

KEITH: It is good. It is a good eight seconds.

AUSTIN: This is an interesting question. This is from *Flesh Haver*, and this is a tough one, and it's one we thought about a lot, and it's one I think we fucked up a bit, but like, still we're trying to keep—

KEITH: Do you know if this person has any skin or not?

AUSTIN: They, uh—

[ALI snorts]

—I don't know if they have skin! I don't know that they have skin. They have flesh. They're a flesh haver. "Counterweight had a really cool attention to having a diverse cast and I appreciate that a lot. What does that look like in-universe, though? What does being queer or trans look like in the *Golden Branch*?"

And we spoke to this in the world creation episode a little bit. In that like I think there's absolutely value in having worlds in which we can imagine a version of life where equality across those lines has been...achieved is a shitty word. Has...where those sorts of oppressions have been dealt with in a way that they are not currently, that there practices in place and processes in place and the culture has shifted around issues of sexual and gender identity. But I also didn't want to have a world where that was just an open and shut case, and all of these various cultures had exactly the same opinion on them!

And so. We did establish that the Diaspora had functionally moved away from Earth-style gender roles. But still kept gender as a way of identifying. And so there was still gender. There were still—like you know, Cene was genderqueer, but like there were still male and female, masculine and feminine Diasporan characters. Who identified that way.

SYLVIA: Yeah. I think another example is Kobus. I made like a really—

AUSTIN: Yeah, Kobus. Totally.

SYLVIA: —like strong push to make sure it was clear that Kobus was non-binary.

AUSTIN: Absolutely, and I definitely fucked that up with pronouns, and like tried to—

DRE: Me too.

AUSTIN—fix that as best I could.

SYLVIA: I think even I did, at one point.

AUSTIN: [laughs] Which—yeah. Great. [laughs] It happens!

SYLVIA: Because like, I'm the non-binary person here, so it's like...

AUSTIN: And so like. Yeah, I think we all fucked up and tried our best to improve it. And then the Diaspora—sorry, OriCon, I was like, “Uh, you know. There are definitely non-binary and trans characters here too, because non-binary and trans people exist and have always existed, but also...but also this place is a little more regressive than the Diaspora.” It is tied to—capital has a hard time letting go. Of things that sell. And so I think the gender roles were maybe not...Gender was not necessarily as oppressive a category of identity as it is now, but it still remained a...category of identity that was supported.

And then obviously the stuff with Apostolos was just like, “Oh, they do pronouns just completely differently.” We never really wanted to like say those pronouns were equivalent to gender. Thanks to—Art's wonderful fiancée, Jess, for like giving us some real professional advice with regards to that stuff. We ran a lot—by her in the early days, of like trying to figure out how to treat that well. Jess is a...gender studies PhD. So thanks to her.

And then—but there's this other thing that I just wanna touch on, which is that like, none of those answers actually answer this question, which is, “What is it like to *be*...queer in Counterweight?” Like that answers what it's like to be the thing we currently call queer in Counterweight. It's not answering what it is—what would queerness look like in Counterweight, in the sense that like what does the thing that doesn't fit into a status quo based on identity look like? And the closest we got is the Odamas Fleet. And the stuff on Kalliope.

In the finale, I think I went out of my way to talk about how they're this group of subaltern people, who are the people who are like experimented on, the like—poorer than poor. The like below-poverty to the degree that like they aren't considered people. That class exists...and the Righteous Vanguard does not necessarily...doesn't appeal to them. Because they're in this whole other, different space where their identities as being animal people, or you know, being people who had—who are not considered human, but were still obviously people...For me, that is the closest thing to what we currently have in terms of issues of queer representation and

oppression, in that world. I think. I think that we tried to do that. Sylvia, was any of that in your head when you were building them up?

SYLVIA: Yeah, no, totally. It's actually just reminded me that one of the things I regret not being able to explore more was exploring the more social stuff...that was caused by...the people of the Odamas fleet being modified and like that identity stuff.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

SYLVIA: We just never really...because of the way the goal for my people—like my faction worked, I never got a chance to really explore that too much.

AUSTIN: Right.

SYLVIA: Unfortunately. But I feel like what we did touch on worked?

AUSTIN: Right. Yeah, I think—if we had more—that's one of those scenes where if we had more time with them on Kalliope...Um.

SYLVIA: Exactly.

AUSTIN: We would have seen more of that? I think. And I wish we'd gotten a little bit more of like Jacq and Jill as...experiments from the Rapid Evening, who were just like this group of people who like...so badly want to undo what we think of as human, or like push it to another level, [wryly] that they completely step all over actual humans. And do terrible experiments and shit...I had something else to add here. But I've since k—oh!

Someone noted in the chat that none of the members of the Chime were both cis or hetero, or cis and hetero at the same time. And I think that that's true? Like...that was not an intentional thing where we were like, "Let's make sure there are [laughing] no cis people on this ship!" [DRE laughs] "Cis and hetero people on this ship—" but like even Orth was ace, and like that doesn't ever come up, but like it's a absolute true fact. Someone recently said it was their headcanon, and I had to be like, "No, actually that's canon canon." Like, I decided that a *while* ago.

And that's like a thing that you can do, and it's cool. Like and it's not—it turns out you can still have a game that's filled with like romance and like...without falling into the trap of needing a leading man. A leading hetero cis dude. You know? Um.

Here's a question I wanted way earlier for everybody, which was, "Did you start the game plan—did you start the game with a plan in mind for your character? Did you stick to it or deviate from it?" And that's from Jay.

ART: Yeah, I had like an idea of Cass as a more nurturing character, and it didn't quite work out, and. We got what we got and we're at where we're at. Uh.

KEITH: Uh...

AUSTIN: That's a very Cass response.

ART: Yeah.

KEITH: [laughs] I had. [outside wind noise] I had an idea for Mako that Mako. Mako's dumb bullshit was going to come off as charming in a way that it didn't for Fero? Not that it wasn't—like—

AUSTIN: Mm.

KEITH: Like it wasn't in the fiction. Like no one bought into anything that Fero was saying or doing ever? Uh. So my idea for Mako was to be able to do that and have it actually work instead of having it blow up. And I think that it did work, despite, like I mentioned earlier, that switching from Mechnoir to the Sprawl and having to re-order stats, and having different things pull from different areas.

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

KEITH: Made it a lot harder. Like I went from having the second-highest possible level of Charm or whatever they called it in Mechnoir.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: To being like barely above average until I like levelled it up?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: But I think, overall, I did what I wanted to do. I always feel like I have a problem getting—

[2:15:00]

—as serious as I wanna get, but. Not—it's not so much of a problem that I'm upset about it.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Um! People who have this document open, is there anything else that's like...that you wanna. Answer. Ali?

ALI: [dog barking in background] Um, I'm looking! [laughs] Um.

KEITH: Who's got a dog?

ALI: There's—

AUSTIN: That's someone outside I think?

JACK: It doesn't sound like a very big dog.

SYLVIA: [unintelligible]

ALI: [unintelligible]—so many dogs outside!

AUSTIN: It sounds like a little dog.

KEITH: It sounds like a very small, very loud dog.

DRE: It definitely sounds—[unintelligible]

ALI: It's a very small dog. It's my neighbor's small dog.

SYLVIA: [low and close to the mic] The big dog's right here.

[Laughter]

ALI: Fuck!

AUSTIN: Oh! Here's one we got a lot. Like so—actually, real quick, so someone earlier was like, “Is Titanfall 2 just going to be based on Friends at the Table?”

[DRE laughs]

Which is why I had this image of this robot on screen, who is just AuDy! It's just *an* AuDy, it's not *the* AuDy, necessarily. But it's AuDy! Look at that AuDy.

KEITH: It's a really big AuDy.

AUSTIN: It's a pretty big AuDy. I mean, but that's just like a regular soldier. Character. Who is just a robot!

JACK: Oh my god!

AUSTIN: Yeah!

SYLVIA: That—oh—

JACK: I can play as my terrible—

KEITH: Jack, have you not seen that?

JACK: I didn't realize that that was a regular soldier! I can play as my terrible robot, in Titanfall!

AUSTIN: You can play as your terrible robot friend.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: There they are...It's them!

KEITH: This has more of a head, but its head is so big that it kind of looks like it doesn't have one still?

AUSTIN: Exactly.

ALI: Right.

AUSTIN: I wish it was a little bit—

ALI: Also—

AUSTIN: If you take off that scarf, it's just more metal.

JACK: Face? No face.

AUSTIN: It's not a head at all.

KEITH: Underneath the scarf is a pair of sunglasses.

[JACK laughs]

AUSTIN: [muttering] That's the wrong one...

[DRE laughs]

ALI: Oh my god...

AUSTIN: Good.

ALI: We have the best show.

AUSTIN: Yep.

ALI: [sighs] God.

AUSTIN: We have a pretty good show. Uh, the other thing is we definitely got people who are like, "So, Overwatch!" And.

SYLVIA: Oof. Yeah.

AUSTIN: [with suspicion] Hm. Waitin' on those checks.

KEITH: I love feet.

ART: Yeah. Come on, Blizzard.

KEITH: Feet!

AUSTIN: Waitin' on those checks, any day now.

ALI: Mm-hm. Yeah!

ART: You know you did it.

AUSTIN: God.

ALI: Yeah, we know!

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: You know. You know!

ALI: Yeah.

JACK: [scolding] Bunji!

AUSTIN: Fuckin' Weed Lord—

ALI: I'm great, I understand that I'm great. Like. But @ me though.

AUSTIN: Weed Lord Vegeta in the chat is still on. On their...Ibex push. They're actually saying push Ibex, basically. They said, "Ibex isn't a good guy. [laughing] He's not a bad guy. He's *the* guy." And I want to scream.

[ALI makes an uncomfortable noise]

SYLVIA: Yeah, and he's on a thirty-day suspension, but he's also dead.

AUSTIN: [laughs] For real.

SYLVIA: That was kinda relevant. I don't know, maybe just clumsy.

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: It's fine. It's fine.

ALI: God. You tried. It's fine.

SYLVIA: Eh.

AUSTIN: Um. I had typed up—

KEITH: I got it, and that's a fac—that's worth something.

[SYLVIA laughs]

AUSTIN: Yeah, it is something. Ali, again, are you taking any of these questions? There's so many questions. Thanks to everybody who sent in.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: People sent in a *billion* questions. Um.

ALI: We got more than a hundred questions, and we did not have a hundred questions' worth of time.

AUSTIN: No. People—someone did wanna know where the inspiration for names like Territory Jazz, Maritime Lapel, et cetera came from. "I genuinely forget if you did a random noun generator or if you just jammed those, but is there a specific reason humans from these far flung future have weird object names, or is it just a case of 'this is goofy and kind of cool'?" It's a little bit "this is goofy and kind of cool." Most of those names were Diasporan names? I like—most OriCon people had still maybe like a weird name, like Kevin Vacation, or Jorne.

ART: Yeah! [laughs]

AUSTIN: But like those were basically real names.

JACK: Jorne is a great low-key weird name.

KEITH: God. Man—

AUSTIN: Yes.

[ALI laughs]

But—

KEITH: People really hung onto Territory Jazz, but Kevin Vacation has my heart.

SYLVIA: Kevin Vacation is the best.

AUSTIN: Kevin Vacation is pretty—I like Territory Jazz and Territory Jazz Junior a whole bunch?

KEITH: I love those too.

[DRE laughs]

ALI: Oh I love—oh god. When you were just like “Yeah, that’s her name.” And then the rest of you were like, “Let’s figure out Territory Jazz Junior, right now. Let me finish this meeting and then we’ll talk about it.”

AUSTIN: Yep. Uh, spoilers, if you go to giantbomb.com, today, you can find a Quick Look for Gundam Breaker 3 where I play as Territory Jazz’s mech for the majority of it.

[DRE laughs]

SYLVIA: Oh! That’s sick!

ALI: Good. Good. Your goodbye...

AUSTIN: I’m good. Like.

ART: I’m glad you’re spending your last week here just slipping in plugs for your new stuff.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Oh, you have no fuckin' idea. The other place...

ART: You got a—Quick Look coming out tomorrow where you're playing as VICE Gaming...

AUSTIN: [laughs] The other place—

[KEITH laughs]

—I got inspiration was just Tomino, who is one of the main people behind Gundam? There's a Twitter account called Tomino Names, and Tomino's names are just the most complete bullshit. Like Meme Midgard. Is a name. That Tomino used once. Lots of just like...goofy Word Word things, and like that's where I realized, "Oh, this is the best way I can...shoutout Gundam, is to just use. Names of that style." October Saran. Is another one.

JACK: Kitchman. [laughs]

AUSTIN: 'M looking at all—Yep! Yep. It's all the best.

JACK: Oh, these names are great.

AUSTIN: Sorry, I was just scrolling down it. They're all great names.

JACK: Oy Nyng is one of the names.

AUSTIN: Yeah. Todd Guinness. Yep. Good. Good.

[JACK laughs]

Karas Karas. That—no. My low-key favorite name is only in our...the one that's just me doing short fiction for twenty minutes? And it's the ones like, K—so Tomino has names like Karas Karas, and Totta Toda? And there's a character in that short fiction episode that's Center Centra?

[JACK laughs]

And like. Yup! Good. Good, good.

SYLVIA: [sighing] Jesus...

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: I'm such an asshole!

ALI: Good job.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh. Um.

ALI: I, um. I know the question that we should end on, so I don't know if you...

AUSTIN: Let me do this last one, and then we'll do the one that you wanna end on, which is "Do you have any advice for people who wanna play a game where you entirely and dynamically create a world like Hieron or the Orion Branch? It seems like it can be very rewarding to play, but requires a lot from each player." That's from Steven. It *definitely* requires a lot from each player.

JACK: I think part of the answer is just like, "Work. Lots of work."

ALI: Mm-hm.

AUSTIN: Right, like this is the terrible double-bind of Rigour. Is like. The answer is t—you have to work at it. Right? Like to be amazing and to find something cool is like, you do have to commit yourself to doing—to lots of late nights and lots of spending your weekends on a side project. Um. To do it, do it. And like...that means reading a lot, and researching, and talking to your other players, about the things that they're interested in, out of character, but with the same passion that you would if you were in character. Like we're in pre-prep for...or I guess we're in prep-prep at this point.

JACK: Oh god.

[SYLVIA makes an unpleasant noise]

AUSTIN: For what we're doing next. So the next thing we're doing is an interlude game that'll be—I aim. Fuckin', I hope! Like nine to eleven episodes. Right?

[DRE laughs]

Probably a little bit more.

KEITH: Oh, I had no idea it was gonna be that long.

SYLVIA: [joking] See you in a year.

AUSTIN: See you in a year! Um. And the hope there is that it's—I wanna do a game that's like, when people say like "Oh, what's Friends at the Table?" I can point to it, and be like, "Critical worldbuilding. Smart characterization. Fun interactions between good friends. Here's a sampler.

Listen to—" Like, you can't just listen to a sampler—like a MBMBaM style sampler of our show, with just like funny bits. Like you could, but you're not gonna get the thing that makes it work. And so...we're gonna do a special worldbuilding game with A Quiet Year. And then we're gonna do Blades in the Dark. And we're doing that in set in Hieron, in a different time. And place. Than where the main game is. And then we're gonna go back to Hieron—Dungeon World for season three. And Sylvia will be there, and we're also gonna get a new cast member. So that Sylvia and Nick can both be there.

ART: Are we gonna announce that?

AUSTIN: I don't...[stutters] I don't know.

[SYLVIA laughs]

I feel like that's not fair to do. Without setting it up.

SYLVIA: Kevin Bacon.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Kevin Bacon, joining us.

JACK: Kevin Bacon.

SYLVIA: Kevin Bac-ation.

[DRE laughs]

It's Kevin Bacon playing Kevin Vacation.

ALI: God.

AUSTIN: God damn it.

ART: Oh, not like Kevin Bae-cation, like we're not just...

SYLVIA: And, uh.

ART: We're...Counterweight saying...

ALI: Oh my god...

SYLVIA: Yes.

AUSTIN: B-a-e.

ART: Yeah, b-a-e...

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I got it, bae.

ALI: Right, yeah.

KEITH: Um. Real quick—

ALI: No, I have to play Hella again, so that won't work. [laughs]

KEITH: Real quick about the amount of work that stuff takes. I just wanted to share. The first time that I played a tabletop game, it was me and a bunch of friends, and—from high school, I think I was like sixteen? And this guy—I guess more of an acquaintance. Was our DM. We were playing D&D 3.5.

AUSTIN: Yup.

DRE: Mm...

KEITH: And he brought in his notes—his prep was, on Day One, a huge—a huge fucking like Five Star notebook filled to the brim with the entire world? And. Like. That's the sort of work that doesn't pay off, when you're doing a...

AUSTIN: Yep.

KEITH: ...tabletop game. It's just like.

ALI: Mm-hm.

KEITH: Why did you just write an RPG—like that's not.

AUSTIN: Right, what you wanna do was a book. You wanted to write a book. [laughs]

KEITH: Yeah. It's exactly what it was. This was a book's worth of information that like—and that's what leads GMs to like pigeonhole people into going sh—and railroad people into certain directions.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

KEITH: And like I don't have a thing for this area, and I'm not prepared enough for that, so we can't do it. And like when you have like I guess more—not bare-bones notes, but like when you don't have fucking an entire notebook filled with the entire world, and instead you have a bunch of people that are all willing to like put forward their ideas and be constructive and be able to talk about it whi—when we're not actively recording?

AUSTIN: Mm-hm.

KEITH: You get something that is like a way more rewarding and cooperative experience than like.

ALI: Yeah.

KEITH: Lit—like someone was like, “Ah, I wrote the Witcher.”

[AUSTIN and ALI laugh]

Like, yeah, I like the Witcher, but I don't wanna play it with you, *Greg!* Like I just wanna—

[AUSTIN and ALI laugh harder]

JACK: *Greg!*

AUSTIN: Thanks, *Greg!*

ART: Do we think—

SYLVIA: Guys, stop mentioning Greg. He's the next member of the cast.

[KEITH and AUSTIN laugh]

DRE: Trumpet Greg.

ALI: I—god.

SYLVIA: And he's here to talk about Gwent—

[AUSTIN laughs]

—and he's really excited.

ALI: God...

AUSTIN: Oh my—

ART: How many gaming groups do you think are at this time playing some kind of elaborate Witcher RPG hack?

JACK: Oh. Greg's definitely in one.

SYLVIA: So many...

KEITH: Unfortunately, like almost all of them, I think.

DRE: A lot.

ALI: All of them.

AUSTIN: Ooh. We did have a Greg in this game. Trumpet Greg.

DRE: Trumpet Greg! From down the road!

AUSTIN: From down the road.

SYLVIA: [shouting] Yes, we did!

AUSTIN: [amused] Yeah...he lives down the road...

SYLVIA: Trumpet is his first name. Greg is his last name. Don't know if we ever clarified that.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: Oh, sorry, apologies. He must be from the Diaspora, then.

SYLVIA: Yeah. It's a Diasporan planet!

AUSTIN: Yeah—That's true. That is true.

KEITH: By the way, just to tag on that. The...I was so disa—I loved playing Dungeons & Dragons so much, but I hated the way that we had to play it. That one time like—and if you're in a similar situation, the thing I did was just, after that campaign was over, I was the GM. From that point f—like that's just what—like I was just like, "Okay. Well, this is bullshit. I wanna not do things this way"?

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: And if that's what your situation is—[amused] and if you're playing Dungeons & Dragons, it probably is...Just 'cause that's how—that's how people know how to do. Stuff?

AUSTIN: Right.

KEITH: Like, if you're not having fun, but you think that you could be, or you hear this, and you're like "That's fun, why can't my thing be more like that?" Like. Sorry, you gotta be the GM now.

DRE: [laughs] Yeah.

ALI: No. I, no.

AUSTIN: Or, I mean, just have that conversation—Ali, go ahead.

ALI: Yeah.

KEITH: Okay. Yeah, or have the conve—you're right.

ALI: 'Cause the other thing that we do, and that like Austin does a ton, where he's like, "Oh, this like one system has this cool thing that it says in its GM guide, and I'm gonna apply this just to everything."

AUSTIN: Right.

ALI: And I think...like even if you're playing D&D or like any game that you're playing with your friends, like one of the main Dungeon World—like the first thing that Dungeon World tells you to do is like. "Draw a map, leave blank spaces."

AUSTIN: Yep.

ALI: That's the first thing that we did on this podcast. Like that's the first thing that you do. And just like have that space where like. There's a section of the map no one knows what's there. And like anyone can say.

AUSTIN: Yeah, like that's one of the reasons I'm so excited to go back to Dungeon World, because it—there's so much of that map we have left open. And like that's obviously a metaphor for the characters, the backstories, and like the metaphysics of the world, like I don't want answers to those questions to just be on a piece of paper when we start the fucking game! Like that's not.

KEITH: Right. And it's so boring to not have—the ideas that we come up with while we're playing *not* be reflected in the rest of the world?

AUSTIN: Totally.

ALI: Yeah.

KEITH: Like to have a world that was created before we started it? That would be crazy.

AUSTIN: Did I ever tell you—about the time that I saw pattern magic happen in real life?

JACK: Yes!

AUSTIN: Kinda like that is the inspiration for—did we say that on a podcast? Was it this last year?

JACK: I think so.

AUSTIN: It may have been.

JACK: With the coffee cup, right?

SYLVIA: I think it might have been.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: Yeah.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Well, the coffee cup. And just like, “Oh, this thing exploded, basically. Weird. ‘Cause I added sugar to it. That’s not—weird.” Um, and like. I like having that open space, because we basically knew what pattern magic was, but once I saw it [amused] in real life! [serious] It was like, “Oh, I know how to depict this now.” When we started this game, I didn’t know that the Righteous Vanguard would be a thing, and if I did, it would be so flat and dry and like, ugh.

And so like I think that a lot of it is those rules—read lots of RPG books that are interested in conversational play? Again, like Ali said, the Dungeon World stuff is like. “Make the world fantastic. Fill the characters’ lives with adventure. Play to find out what happens. Like. Be a fan of the players. Look through a crosshair at your own characters.” Those have nothing to—like they obviously—the system was built around those...that agenda, but like it isn’t—limited to that.

And that's the other thing is like, if you're playing a game that you think is bad, consider switching to a different game! Or not bad. But not the thing you want.

Like so let's see, another thing I actually get a lot is people who think that we dislike...D&D style -- or we think D&D style combat games or whatever are bad? I think that those games are really fun, and I've played games like and had a good time, but they're not what we wanna do with the show. Like we don't want combat encounters to be the bulk of the show. We like characterization and worldbuilding, and like, you have to find a game that fits for that. Like. I like the Sprawl a lot, but if you want combat encounters to be the driving force of your game. It's not built for that in the way that other systems are. You know, there's no tiles or whatever.

ART: But we're still doing old World of Darkness for season four, right? We're all gonna do Changeling?

AUSTIN: Absolutely. We're gonna go back to World—uh. I'm so excited for season four, actually, for what it actually is—

JACK: Oh no.

ALI: Oh. Yeah.

AUSTIN: It's—I'm like embarrassed by it.

ART: Me too.

AUSTIN: I have—I fuckin' hate that we can't just—we *could* just do it now.

[ALI laughs]

But I don't wanna just do it.

ALI: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Like we just announced what the actual Season Three is.

[ALI laughs]

I miss—I miss Hieron a lot!

SYLVIA: Do it.

AUSTIN: But I love Bruce Springsteen [laughing] so much!

[JACK laughs]

ALI: [laughing] Austin!

SYLVIA: [laughs] Whaaat?

ART: Don't give it away, Austin! We're getting too close!

ALI: [laughing] God!

AUSTIN: I'm gettin' too close.

SYLVIA: I didn't even—[laughing] what?

AUSTIN: I'm gettin' too close. I'm gettin' too close.

ALI: Yeah, just, everyone—

AUSTIN: Just don't worry about it. Don't—

ALI: Should I edit this out? [laughing] Should this be like—

AUSTIN: Yeah, edit that out! Just do long beep.

ALI: This is isn't—this is gonna be live stream exclusive.

AUSTIN: Or, no. Just drop Born to Run in here. Just do—[humming] bmm bmm bm bm bm!

ALI: God. Jesus Christ.

AUSTIN: [seriously] Okay. Um.

ALI: Fuck.

AUSTIN: [sighs] So yeah, I guess—keep—

ALI: Yes. Keep listening to the show, by the way.

AUSTIN: The answer...to.

[SYLVIA laughs]

The answer to how to have a game where you do this is a lot of prep, in a real non-serious way. Like not in the way where you write it all out. In the way where you talk about what you're interested in. Um.

SYLVIA: Um, if I could make a quick suggestion—

[2:30:00]

—too, just for people trying to get into something collaborative?

AUSTIN: Please.

SYLVIA: I'd recommend a game like Fiasco or Microscope, because it's a GMless type game—

AUSTIN: Totally.

SYLVIA: —and you can see if those are the type of people that are into the same kind of worldbuilding as you are. Also, Fiasco's great. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Fiasco's really good. Fiasco is the best.

SYLVIA: But yeah I like—that sort of thing, just any sort of like game that doesn't put one player with more power than the others. And you can see if that group gels properly for that sort of thing.

AUSTIN: Totally. And like that's the other thing, is like if you're in a space where there are lots of people to play with, if you're at a university or a college, if you're at a game store. Like, it can be awkward, but don't be afraid—be a little afraid. [SYLVIA laughs] Like be prepared for it to be awkward, but like.

DRE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: You have to have that conversation with yourself sometimes, and then figure out the way to change the group that you're playing with. I think about college, where Art and I [laughs] tried so hard to include everyone and the partners of everyone, even when we didn't necessarily like them very much. Or even when they just weren't the sort of player that you wanted to play with. Right, like again—there's a lot of people who I got along with really well, but who were just interested in something other than what we were interested in.

And that's a really noble intention, to try to find the overlap there, but sometimes you're just not interested—like sometimes you wanna play chess and they wanna play poker, and both of those games are totally, but like they're not the same—you're not both gonna walk away happy. And so that's like not—and sometimes they wanna play checkers, and checkers is fine too, but.

[knowingly] Sometimes they want to play checkers. Like a lot. And they wanna play with thirty people. And that's too many people to play checkers, Jesus Christ,

[DRE laughs]

Frank, cut some people out of this *fucking* game!

[ALI laughs]

JACK: Frank.

ART: And sometimes they wanna play checkers where everyone just like goes in their own little room and plays checkers, for like a really long time, and gets like super mad—

AUSTIN: I'm *sorry!*

ART: —if you're like, "Can't we all play checkers? There's like four boards."

AUSTIN: [smacks the desk and laughs] You—

KEITH: This is getting really specific?

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: [sighs] Fuck. College is weird, y'all.

DRE: mm-hm.

AUSTIN: So Ali. What do you think the last question should be?

ALI: Oh, so I—just because I really like spam, and Ulysses sent out this really cute question. It's, "The stream is taking place on my birthday! How do you all think the characters slash major NPCs celebrate their birthdays?"

AUSTIN: That's a good question.

ALI: Yeah, it's fun and cute. I like it. Um.

AUSTIN: Who wants to go first?

JACK: It's gotta be Mako.

ALI: Yeah.

KEITH: Mako watches sad movies.

AUSTIN: [pitying and amused] Mako watches sad movies?

KEITH: Yeah.

ALI: Aw.

AUSTIN: What sorta sad movies?

KEITH: Uh. Like o—like “dog dies” movies.

ART: *Woah!*

ALI: [laughs] Oh my god.

KEITH: Or. Yeah. Like Old Yeller. Like don’t—it’s not—

AUSTIN: Okay.

KEITH: —that’s not a crazy thing to say.

ART: Not like pet snuff films or —

AUSTIN: Ah — mm. [unintelligible]

SYLVIA: Like Air Bud?

KEITH: No, yeah, y—

SYLVIA: I don’t think Air Bud dies, but everyone’s sad. People cry at Air Bud.

KEITH: Air Bud doesn’t die, but he goes away. Like, imagine Air Bud where like when he—

AUSTIN: Woah woah woah. Does Air Bud—spoilers. Does Air Bud go away?

KEITH: Yeah—in the first Air Bud movie, he’s like, “Go away, I don’t wanna—I don’t like you anymore.”

JACK: And then he scores the goal.

ALI: Oh...

KEITH: And then Air Bud comes back.

AUSTIN: Are you fucking kidding me? That dog can *dunk!* How do you get rid of that dog?

[ALI laughs]

KEITH: Yeah, that dog—

SYLVIA: [disagreeing] No, that dog—

KEITH: Well, he was someone else's dog! He belonged to the clown!

SYLVIA: That dog can free throw. That dog never—I don't think that dog ever dunked.

AUSTIN: That dog has to dunk. What—are you fucking kidding me?

SYLVIA: I'm pretty sure that dog is just like the Steph Curry of dogs.

AUSTIN: It—hmm.

DRE: Austin, are you thinking of MVP: Most Valuable Primate as a dunking animal?

AUSTIN: ...Maybe...No!

SYLVIA: Are you th—

AUSTIN: I am searched for "air bud dunk"—

SYLVIA: Does Air Bud dunk?!

AUSTIN: —and the first picture is Air Bud dunking.

[JACK laughs]

ALI: Oh god...

KEITH: Anyway. Uh.

SYLVIA: Sh—That's the cover!

AUSTIN: Right when he's—are you—so it's lie—its advertising, it's lying? It's lying?

SYLVIA: Yeah, that dog was like all about fucking two-pointer, like—

[Laughter]

—jump shots! Like. Like not dunks!

DRE: Long twos.

AUSTIN: I'm so mad.

ALI: I'm so...

AUSTIN: I'm so mad.

SYLVIA: Yeah!

KEITH: Listen, if it's on the cover, it's on the cover. I'm sorry, Sylvia, I'm with Austin on this one.

AUSTIN: Appreciated. Air Bud is a sandwich.

KEITH: Like not everything that happens happens on screen.

AUSTIN: Right. All right. [laughing] P—p...

SYLVIA: So bad...

KEITH: Um. Anyway—listen, sometimes Mako's gotta not be not be a goofball, he's gotta let some shit out.

AUSTIN: Pope Daz in the chat says, "Does Mako even have a birthday?"

[Everyone groans]

KEITH: He thinks he has a birthday.

ALI: Oh...

AUSTIN: He thinks he has a birthday, and that's all that matters.

[ALI laughs]

KEITH: And he thinks it's June 25th, that's in four days, everybody get hyped.

ALI: Um. That's part of my answer, 'cause I don't think Jacqui has a birthday?

AUSTIN: No, Jacqui doesn't have a birthday.

ALI: [laughing] She's like...[seriously] She's like lived and died a million times. Well, not a million. But like a bunch.

AUSTIN: I feel like—yeah. I feel like she probably has a day she and Jill used to celebrate.

ALI: Ah...

AUSTIN: That was not their birthday, but was some other yearly anniversary. Like they basically definitely got drunk once and were like—"This is it. We're doing it today. Today's the day."

[ALI laughs]

Like. "July 12th. Every year we're going to get drunk together, and like, go dancing, and we're gonna dress up as best as we can."

ALI: I think that Aria also gives Jacqui a present on Aria's birthday?

AUSTIN: Aw. Aw.

ALI: Just to be like, "Hey. Here you go."

AUSTIN: That's really good. Cass?

ART: Oh, boy.

AUSTIN: I guess like what period of Cass's life?

ART: Yeah, I think there's a period of Cass's life where his⁶ birthday was a holiday. Um...

AUSTIN: Yeah. [amused] Yeah! People got off of school. Like.

ART: Yeah. No one went to school or work on Cass's birthday. So I think that when he was in exile, I think he had very low-key birthdays. He might have like.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

⁶ Cass uses they/them pronouns.

ART: Gone out to a restaurant, or. Brought a bottle of wine to Koda's house and...they told stories and shit.

AUSTIN: Do you think AuDy...slash Liberty & Discovery...conceives of any special days, in their year?

JACK: I think it's kind of the opposite in that they conceive of so many special days, past a certain point now, that their calendar is just a...You ever found that page on Facebook which tells you when all your friends' birthdays are?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: And it's just like looking into a calendar—

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JACK: —that's just composed of names and holidays and events and dates. And I think that after e—

AUSTIN: And it like bleeds together at a certain point, like, “Was that—was that high school? was that—”

JACK: After eighty thousand years... Yeah.

AUSTIN: “Jim Kramer, I—” right.

JACK: I think...

KEITH: Wait, you're friends with—you went to high school with the Mad Money guy?

AUSTIN: [vaguely] Yeah, me and the Mad Money guy go back real far...

JACK: I think Liberty & Discovery sometimes—

AUSTIN: Let me tell you. Bad parties.

JACK: They're sometimes like, [clicks] “Ah, that's the snow festival on this planet—ah, no, that planet doesn't exist anymore.”

[AUSTIN laughs softly]

[laughs] That's not a planet anymore.

AUSTIN: You don't think they celebrate *the snow festival*, though? That's too—

JACK: I think they know that the snow festival was celebrated once.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: On a planet that they had something to do with, once, and they might not remember what it was. Um.

AUSTIN: Huh.

JACK: And I think Orth calls the Chime!

AUSTIN: Aw.

ALI: Aw.

AUSTIN: Ibex has two birthdays.

[Pause]

KEITH: What? Fuck that guy!

AUSTIN: He has the birthday he was born at.

KEITH: He's always gotta one-up everybody!

AUSTIN: He has the birthday where he became Ibex and not Quentin—Attar.

ART: Oh my god. I hate this guy so much.

AUSTIN: Not Quentin Attar, Attar Rose.

ALI: Attar Rose...

[SYLVIA sighs]

AUSTIN: And.

KEITH: I know.

ALI: He's the best. What are you guys *talking* about? [laughs]

KEITH: God.

AUSTIN: On the day that—

ALI: That's *incredible*.

KEITH: Art, I'm so glad that I have anyone else that hates this motherfucker.

AUSTIN: On the day that it's his birthday, he lets himself think about Quentin.

[JACK laughs]

And then gets scolded by Righteousness for it. And does like—"Deal—Yeah, I don't care. Whatever. Fuck off."

ART: Oh, boo hoo, poor Ibex, two birthdays.

[DRE, SYLVIA and ALI laugh]

AUSTIN: The best thing about Ibex is how he can make—

KEITH: "Daddy won't let me think about old me!" [blows a raspberry]

AUSTIN: Is that he can make other people around him look like villains *very* easily.

[JACK laughs]

I think that's it.

JACK: I think we're done!

[Pause]

ALI: We did it.

AUSTIN: We did it.

ART: All right.

JACK: [sighs] Jesus...

AUSTIN: A hundred hours.

ALI: God.

JACK: Well done, everybody.

ALI: Fuck us. What are we doing?

JACK: Oh god...

AUSTIN: Three—

KEITH: Was this longer than season one?

JACK: Oh, dude.

KEITH: It was, right?

ART: By a lot.

AUSTIN: Are you fucking kidding me?

ALI: By so much.

AUSTIN: [amused] By like an infinite amount.

KEITH: I don't know, listen. Time literally means nothing to me.

JACK: Oh no.

AUSTIN: Yes, this season was ninety hours. Like just about ninety hours, all said. Um. Which is a lot, and it was forty...four episodes if you count this?

JACK: God.

AUSTIN: Plus...episode zero is forty-five, plus episode negative one is forty-six. Um.

[A dog barks]

There's a dog. There's a puppy.

DRE: Yeah.

SYLVIA: It's Air Bud!

DRE: That's my dog.

SYLVIA: Air Bud's here!

AUSTIN: Ah, finally, Air Bud can answer the question. There were twenty-nine episodes—thirty episodes of Dungeon World. Thirty-two, if you count the special episodes. Um. Which you should. Um. So! I think that's...that's that. Uh, thank you for listening. Thank you for being on the show, everyone here. I am like really...I just got a notification from Windows that my computer's restarting—

[Soft laughter]

In fourteen minutes and fifty-three seconds. So, lemme make this quick.

I'm—I am like really thankful that we got to do this this year. It was a year of like a lot of change in my life personally, and I think...a lot of people in the game had lots of very stressful things happening. And it was a source of like...some constant control of a world in which we had some narrative power to explore ideas that often were terrifying us in real life, because we all have jobs, and we all have families, and people get sick, and...there's—you know, everyone is...broke, and trying to put together a life, all the time. And like being able to explore a lot of that stuff, and also giant robots and the ideas around those that I love, was just like a constant pleasure and joy for me.

So I really really really appreciate being able to do this. It is unlike—it's—when I think about the times when we used to play games together with—me and Art, in college, and like, when I think about the conversations that I've had with everybody here—that were not about this stuff. I—it all feels like it was a foundation for something really special. So I really appreciate it from everybody.

I really appreciate all the work that the fans go into, and I think like for me the big takeaway...has to be about like. I want other people to go do *this*. For themselves. To go play games, and write stories, and if you wanna do it in our universe, that's fine. Like that's, I—it's really flattering that you love the Chime and that you love Counterweight and that you love the Golden Branch, and Vicuna, and Kobus, and all these characters. Like I totally love that that's inspiring for people.

But I also really want people to have the opportunity to build something from the ground up with people that they love, to—really build a world that represents their interests and their...the themes and ideas that they're struggling with. Because there's like nothing else like it. And it is all-too-rare that we get to use play as a way to work through that stuff.

So go an' play games. With each other.

One more time around the table. Ali Acampora, where can people find you?

ALI: You can find me @Ali_West on Twitter.

AUSTIN: Keith Carberry. Where can people find you?

KEITH: You can find me @KeithJCarberry on Twitter, you can find me at youtube.com/RunButton, or contentburger.biz. You can find me celebrating my birthday in four days! Happy birthday, me!

[DRE laughs]

AUSTIN: Go to fuckdads.com and. And—

ALI: Happy birthday!

SYLVIA: On a horse.

KEITH: Go to fu—yeah. Go to fuckdads.com, that's a fun one. I've got a new website comin' out. That'll be fun—

AUSTIN: [laughing] You've been a really good dad! I'm the meanest person in Earth—on Earth!

ALI: I can't believe you fucking did that.

KEITH: I know. I know.

[AUSTIN laughs]

I heard you—I caught a #FuckDads on your Sony thing. The...through the Sony press conference.

AUSTIN: Oh, thank you. That was for you.

KEITH: Thank you.

AUSTIN: I almost said fuckdads.com. I like came very close, but I didn't want someone from HR to be like, "You can't promote other people's brands."

[KEITH and DRE laugh]

KEITH: Ugh! That's an annoying concern to have.

ALI: You were quitting that job in two days, wait! [laughs]

AUSTIN: U—[sighs] You get into a certain mode of like making sure you don't do—you don't fuck up, when you have a job, that like—anyway. Anyway. Anyway. Jack de Quidt.

JACK: Ah, my name's Jack de Quidt. You can find me on Twitter @notquitereal and you can find the complete soundtrack of this season at notquitereal.bandcamp.com, where you can download it for free.

AUSTIN: Please!

JACK: Or pay money.

AUSTIN: Pay money to Jack.

[SYLVIA laughs]

Pay money for it.

DRE: Yeah. Pay money to Jack.

AUSTIN: Jack put in so much work. Sylvia Cl—

JACK: If we're doing Bruce Springsteen, I need to get a new guitar.

AUSTIN: [with finality] You're gonna need a new guitar for when you do Bruce Springsteen.

ALI: [laughing] Jesus Christ...

AUSTIN: Sylvia Clare.

SYLVIA: You can find me on Twitter @captaintrash. That's it.

AUSTIN: Uh.... Did I do Andrew Lee Swan yet?

DRE: Hey! Yeah, you can find me on Twitter @swandre3000.

AUSTIN: And Art Tebbel.

ART: Hey, you can find me on Twitter @atebbel, and on Discord, talking to Jack about the Springsteen covers I want him to start working on.

[JACK laughs]

Just so he's loose, you know, ready.

AUSTIN: ...Get ready. Get ready.

ALI: God, we have a whole other season to do, guys, please.

AUSTIN: We have another—like that's a real thing is we have a year until we get to Springsteen game.

KEITH: Listen. A lot of the...

ALI: [whispering] Oh my god!

KEITH: The Friends at the Table chat happens while I'm at work and can't look at my phone, so I'm only kind—I'm *almost* as lost as the chat is here.

AUSTIN: Good.

KEITH: Like eighty percent.

ART: It's weird that you think someone can just go from—

ALI: Whereas I already know the *shoes* that my character wears.

AUSTIN: You know the shoe—what type of shoes does your character wear?

ALI: Yeah. [laughs]

AUSTIN: Will that give it away?

ALI: I think that—I think it does a little bit.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: [in a dessicated voice] Oh...

SYLVIA: I'm still kinda lost too.

AUSTIN: I think you've forgotten the Bruce Springsteen part, but you probably remember the rest.

SYLVIA: Oh! *Oh!*

[ALI cackles]

SYLVIA: *Oh!*

ALI: Please continue listening to our show. We're so good. Yeah.

AUSTIN: We're really good. You can find me on—

SYLVIA: [shouting] *Yeah!*

ART: Season three's gonna be good too. Even though we're excited about four.

[ALI laughs]

We're gonna bring it for three.

KEITH: I'm not excited about four, I'm excited about three, so there you go.

AUSTIN: Good.

SYLVIA: I'm excited about three, too. I hope...

DRE: Yeah.

SYLVIA: ...people like what I do.

KEITH: I don't know—like the Bruce Springsteen thing, you guys, is really throwing me off. I'm—

AUSTIN: Okay.

KEITH: And th—whatever happened to Sylvia where now they remember, I still don't remember.

[ALI laughs]

AUSTIN: I'm Austin Walker. You can find me on Twitter @Austin_Walker. For the next three days, you can find me at giantbomb.com and then I'm gonna disappear for a week, and when I come back, I'll be at vice.com/games. Where over the next couple of months, I'll be building a new game site. On VICE.

ART: Wait, are you completely disappearing?

AUSTIN: On vice.com.games et al. [correcting] It's vice.com/gaming. For right now.

KEITH: It's gonna be—yeah, it's gonna be a real Nick situation. In terms of being—he's just stuck on invisible.

AUSTIN: I'm just invisible, all the time. That's it. [pauses] All right! [sighs] I think—time.is? No one's stopped recording yet.

JACK: Time.is? Okay. Time dot is...

[ALI laughs softly]

It's a real website.

AUSTIN: Um...Okay. [types] Let's see here.

[MUSIC - "THE LONG WAY AROUND"]

ALI: Twenty?

AUSTIN: Yeah, let's do it at—no, twenty's too soon. Twenty's too soon.

ART: Woah.

ALI: Thirty?

AUSTIN: Let's do it at thirty.

JACK: Wait—I just—I just lost my internet for a second, hang on.

AUSTIN: Okay, let's not do it at thirty. Thirty is impossible.

[2:45:00]

JACK: No, I can make thirty! I can make thirty!

AUSTIN: You can make thirt—well, mine's skipping.

JACK: I can, I can.

AUSTIN: Okay.

JACK: Oh, no.

AUSTIN: Thirty?

[Several off-beat claps]

[JACK laughs]

KEITH: That was so bad.

ALI: Wait. Wait. Yeah, also...

SYLVIA: Should we do another one?

ALI: ...yeah, okay—

AUSTIN: We have to do another one.

ALI: I didn't clap the first time and I also didn't clap that time, so we need to do another one.

AUSTIN: You didn't clap either time?

ALI: No...[laughs]

[DRE laughs]

KEITH: Okay, let's go at...

ALI: But I edit the show, it'll be fine.

KEITH: Turn of the minute, you guys. We have a full twelve seconds.

AUSTIN: All right, so we're doing at fifty-seven. Nine fifty-seven. Or whatever fifty-seven you have.

KEITH: Yeah, fifty-seven.

ALI: Okay.

[Clap]

Yeah, I—

KEITH: No, not the second!

[Clap]

Oh—

SYLVIA: Oh.

[More claps]

[ALI laughs]

[yelling] *I fucked up!*

AUSTIN: How did you think we were gonna do the second fifty-seven? We were gonna do it at minute fifty-seven!

[SYLVIA laughs deeply]

[Another clap]

ALI: You can't miss by so much!

SYLVIA: [laughing] I don't know! I freaked out!

KEITH: I said—I said turn of the minute!

SYLVIA: [laughing] I'm sorry!

AUSTIN: All right, one more time. One more time. We're gonna do it—at—

KEITH: Thirty.

SYLVIA: I zoned out!

AUSTIN: We're gonna do it—we're gonna do it at thirty seconds.

[Laughter]

KEITH: Thirty seconds. Thirty minutes. In...

[Laughter]

In thirty-three minutes, we're gonna come back, we're gonna do it in thirty minutes.

ALI: Keith, stop. Keith!

AUSTIN: Thirty.

[Unison clap]

KEITH: That was pretty good.

AUSTIN: That was maybe the best clap we've ever done.

[Laughter]

JACK: [laughing] Good night.

AUSTIN: I love you all. Have a good night.

JACK: All the love...

SYLVIA: [yawning] Love you guys...

KEITH: Are we still streaming? Wait, hold on, are we still streaming? Can someone explain Bruce Springsteen to me?

AUSTIN: I'm gonna hang up this fucking call.

[MUSIC plays out to end]