

"This is all just a setup,"

says Pauley Perrette, walking into the NCIS writers' room north of Los Angeles. Michael Weatherly fatalistically adds: "This is where we all..." Brian Dietzen finishes the thought: "...meet our end."

Not bloody likely. Sure, the series did off a couple major characters in the first five seasons (RIP, Lauren Holly's Jenny), and some significant recurring characters have met their makers in the five years since (Mike Franks, we hardly knew ye!). But the chances of any of these eight diehards going down anytime before the show ends its run are about the same as the odds of Gibbs cracking a sustained smile.

Speaking of which: When we gathered all eight regular cast members of TV's No. 1 drama for a historic summit, their fearless leader, Mark Harmon, was largely the quiet man out. When his colleagues finally called him on his reticence, he swore he was having too good a time listening to everyone else's banter. As you read this unprecedented full-cast gabfest, you'll know exactly what he means.

"THE HARDER YOU WORK, THE LUCKIER YOU GET. THAT'S WHAT'S HAPPENING AROUND HERE." —DAVID McCALLUM

How often are all eight of you in the same room?

DAVID McCALLUM: Table reads, every 10 days.

Have there been any scenes in which you've all been together at once?

McCALLUM: When Ziva became a U.S. citizen.

PAULEY PERRETTE: Everybody wasn't there. Michael wasn't. But for Jenny's funeral, we were.

McCALLUM: And that was the last episode of...

MICHAEL WEATHERLY: Season 5.

McCALLUM: How do you *know* that?

WEATHERLY: Because when she died at the end of Season 5, that's when we got the Rocket Man. *[Points to Rocky Carroll.]*

There have been no major cast changes lately—unless we count Brian Dietzen finally getting bumped up to the main credits after 10 years. [The group applauds.]

DIETZEN: I've gotten congratulated so often in the last few weeks, and it's a great recognition. But I've never been made to feel like anything

but a full cast member for the last decade.

PERRETTE: It's a lot easier on the rest of us, too, because people are hollering at me, "Why isn't he in the opening credits?" "I don't have anything to do with that—I don't know!"

DIETZEN: When I first did the show, I was supposed to do one day. So I thought, "I'll wear glasses, hunch over and stammer a bit. I don't have anything like that on my reel, so that'd be cool!"

MARK HARMON: I remember early on, maybe on the second day, David saying to you, "You come with me downtown to autopsy," and you going, "All right, I'm there!" I remember right then thinking, "Okay, this is gonna work."

DIETZEN: I spent a lot of that time staring at my shoes and concentrating on not throwing up.

Do you prefer the stand-alone episodes or the ones that get into a lot of mythology and long-term storytelling?

PERRETTE, WEATHERLY and DIETZEN: *[Almost in unison]* Stand-alone.

SEAN MURRAY: Yeah, me too.

COTE DE PABLO: Long-term storytelling! You get invested and you want to see the next one, and they get into a lot of character stuff and complex conflict.

PERRETTE: I sit around and watch the marathons on USA all the time, of course. So if [the multipart episodes] are not in the order of how they first aired, then I'm afraid it's gonna confuse people.

WEATHERLY: That's a very network-executive thing to say. Maybe I'm just incredibly conventional and conservative, but I get very lost in the two-parters. I'm like, where are we? What the hell is going on? Why do I feel like crying? *[Laughs]*

PERRETTE: No matter if it's a one-parter or multi-parter, the arc of the show is these characters.

McCALLUM: The scary part of that is, I find that Ducky and David have combined... *[Everyone laughs]* No, I'm serious about this. Has it happened to you guys, that your characters influence your own life?

DE PABLO: Absolutely. I was saying goodbye to one of my best friends today, and she said, "Give me a hug," and I gave her a hug like this. *[Mimes a half-hearted back pat.]* She was like, "No, I need a real hug!" And I gave her a huge hug. I've been playing this character that's not [touchy-feely], and I find myself catching little things that are not me.

WEATHERLY: The distance between how I feel when I'm in that squad room and when I go home is so different now that I am keenly

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